DOMESTIC DIALOGUE:
THE LANGUAGE AND POLITICS OF ADOPTION
IN THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

by

Erin Lee Ellerbeck

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Graduate Department of English
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of adoption in early modern English drama in order to analyze the language of social and familial relations in early modern culture. I propose that although these plays often ultimately support the traditional idea of a birth family, adoption challenges conventional notions of the family by making artificial, non-consanguine relations appear natural, thereby exposing the family unit as a social construction. I suggest further that adopted characters complicate notions of biological inheritance through their negotiations of language, place, and power. My dissertation thus explores the connections between historical language use and social status in early modern England; it couples early modern rhetorical theories and treatises with modern linguistic theory, drawing upon recent sociolinguistic scholarship. The result is to show that understanding how language demarcates social position is essential to illuminating the cultural intricacies of the plays of the period.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I investigate the social and economic repercussions of adoption. Chapter 1 discusses the previously overlooked cultural importance of
horticultural metaphors of adoption in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *All’s Well That Ends Well*. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which early modern culture explained adoption by depicting it in a particular kind of figurative language. Chapter 2 focuses on the economic consequences of, and motivations for, adoption in Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. In my final two chapters, I scrutinize the relations between the early modern family and linguistic practice. Chapter 3 explores the connections between genetics, physical likeness, and language in Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* and Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors*. Finally, in Chapter 4 I investigate familial relation as a source of linguistic and social power. Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*, I argue, suggests that kinship exists within language and grants particular speakers linguistic and social authority.
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I dedicate this thesis to Cara Leanne Knowles (1980-2005) who was both a friend and an adoptive family member. Our late-night phone call in December, 2003 inspired me to write about adoption and she has been an integral part of this project.
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Introduction

In “A Gratulatory to Master Ben Johnson, for His Adopting of Him to be His Son” (c. 1630), Thomas Randolph thanks the famous poet and playwright for taking him in as a child of his own. Randolph, a writer in his own right, had allegedly been adopted by Jonson and deemed one of the “sons” of the Tribe of Ben, the group of poets and dramatists considered akin to Jonson because of their poetic talents and similar styles.¹ The adoption, according to Randolph, established him as heir to Jonson’s poetic skill:²

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¹The Sons of Ben were later also known as the Cavalier poets. Joe Lee Davis lists eleven poets and playwrights in this group: Richard Brome, Thomas Nabbes, Henry Glapthorne, Thomas Killigrew, Sir William Davenant, William Cartwright, Shackerley Marmion, Jasper Mayne, Peter Hausted, Thomas Randolph, and William Cavendish. For more on the Sons of Ben, see Davis, *The Sons of Ben* and Summers and Pebworth, eds., *Classic and Cavalier*. C.H. Cooper also notes several examples of Jonson’s referring to the poets of his group as his adopted sons (588-89).

²W. Carew Hazlitt cites the following tale of Randoph’s adoption by Jonson: “Randolph, who was then a student in Cambridge, having stayed in London so long that he might truly be said to have had a parley with his empty purse, was resolved to see Ben Jonson with his associates who, as he heard, at a set time kept a club together at the Devil Tavern, near Temple Bar. Accordingly he went thither at the specified time; but, being unknown to them, and wanting money, which to a spirit like Tom’s, was the most daunting thing in the world, he peeped into the room where they were, and was espied by Ben Jonson, who, seeing him in a scholar’s threadbare habit, cried out, ‘John Bo-peep, come in!’ which accordingly he did. They immediately began to rhyme upon
I WAS not born to Helicon, nor dare
Presume to think myself a Muse’s heir.
I have no title to Parnassus Hill
Nor any acre of it by the will
Of a dead ancestor, nor could I be
Ought but a tenant unto poetry.
But thy adoption quits me of all fear,
And makes me challenge a child’s portion there.
I am akin to heroes, being thine,
And part of my alliance is divine,

the meanness of his clothes, asking him if he could not make a verse, and withal to call for his quart of sack. There being but four of them, he immediately replied—

‘I John Bo-peep,
To you four sheep,
Which each one his good fleece;
If that you are willing,
To give me five shilling,
’Tis fifteen pence a-piece.’

‘Why,’ exclaimed Ben Jonson, ‘I believe this is my son Randolph; which being made known to them, he was kindly entertained in their company, and Ben Jonson ever after called him son” (qtd. from an unidentified source in Hazlitt xi).
Orpheus, Musæus, Homer too, beside
Thy brothers by the Roman mother’s side;
As Ovid, Virgil, and the Latin lyre,
That is so like thee, Horace; the whole quire
Of poets are, by thy adoption, all
My uncles; thou hast given me power to call
Phoebus himself my grandsire; by this grant
Each sister of the Nine is made my aunt. (ll.1-18)

Through his newly established relation to Jonson, Randolph becomes part of a literary
genealogy that can be traced to antiquity. The poetic inheritance that he receives is not
passed down to him through blood connection, but rather through affect and influence;
Randolph “challenge[s] a child’s portion,” or the share of a familial estate that might be
allocated to a biological child.

While Randolph is clear that his adoption is figurative and literary—he is not an
orphaned or abandoned child in need of a home or family—his poem also points to
several facets of the practice of adoption more generally. He notes, for instance, that he
is the “son of [Jonson’s] adoption, not his lust” (l.30), referring to an aspect of adoption
esteemed by classical authors. Adopted children are evidently the products of physical
reproduction, as any child is, but they are not born to their adoptive parents. They are
instead often the result of careful selection and are therefore dissociated from the
perceived obscenity of human sexual practice. Seneca, for example, declares in his
Controversiae (c. 35AD) that adoption is “the cure for chance” because adopted children are not arbitrary products of biology (2.1.17). Jonson’s adoption of Randolph alters the young man’s identity, providing him with a new lineage and a new set of professional circumstances. Randolph’s assertion that he could not have been “ought but a tenant unto poetry” without Jonson’s taking him in also draws attention to the politics and economics of adoption (1.6). Through the figurative modification of his family line, Randolph becomes heir to property—that is, to poetry—that he previously could only have hoped to rent. His lineal and financial conditions are metaphorically changed with his adoption, while his status as an author is quite literally transformed.

Randolph’s linking of the practices of writing and adoption invokes a metaphor that recurs throughout early modern literature. Jonson, as adoptive father, is the origin of Randolph’s poetry: Randolph “steal[s] flames” (l.48) of inspiration and “a sprig or two” (l.46) of influence from his mentor to create his own work. The older poet endows his adoptive son with access to language, to a literary past, and to poetic skill. Apart from this kind of literary adoption, in which one author is influenced by another or makes a particular source text his own, early modern literature frequently associates adoption with linguistic and literary practice. Patrons, for instance, were often portrayed as surrogate parents to literary works. The etymological root of patron, the Latin pater, or father, bestows upon the patron an adoptive parental right to the author’s creations. That is, what the author produces becomes the possession, or, in a sense, the offspring, of his patron. Such thinking is often evident in the dedicatory prefaces of early modern
works. Thomas Dekker, for example, presents his *News From Hell* (1606) to “Mr. John Sturman, Gentleman” and describes the tract as a child in need of a parent:

Sir, the begetting of Bookes, is as common as the begetting of Children; onely herein they differ, that Bookes speake so soone as they come into the world, and giue the best wordes they can to al men, yet are they driuen to seek abroad for a father. That hard fortune follwes al & falls into, vpon THIS of mine. It gladly comes to you vpon that errand, and if you vouch safe to receiue it louingly, I shall account my self and It very happie. (sig. A3)

John Heminge and Henry Condell, the editors of the 1623 folio of Shakespeare’s works, similarly note in their “Epistle Dedicatorie” that patrons are the custodians of works of literature: “We have but collected them, and done an office to the dead, to procure his Orphanes, Guardians” (Sig. A2). Shakespeare’s plays, figured as his offspring and described as his “remaines,” will find adoptive parents, his editors imply, in the patrons who will oversee their care (Sig. A2).

The connections between adoption and literature that Shakespeare’s editors suggest involve several mutually constituting relations. My dissertation links adoption with language, demonstrating heretofore unrecognized connections among familial relation, metaphor, and linguistic practice. Engaging the interface of sociology, cultural studies, feminist theory, historicism, and discourse analysis, I propose that adopted
characters in early modern drama complicate notions of biological inheritance through their negotiations of place, language, and power. I suggest further that although plays that portray adoption often ultimately support the traditional idea of a birth family, adoption challenges conventional notions of the family by making artificial, non-blood-based relations appear natural, thereby exposing the family unit as a social construction.

The role of the family in early modern literature has often been the focus of scholarship, but there is, remarkably, no existing study of the links between language and familial relationships. A large body of scholarship addresses early modern parent-child relations, changelings, foundlings, and bastards, but no studies directly examine adoption or its connection to language and metaphor.

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3 See in particular Montrose, “Place” 28-54; McBride, ed., Domestic Arrangements in Early Modern England; Ng, Literature and the Politics of the Family in Seventeenth-Century England; Wynne-Davies, Women Writers and Familial Discourse in the English Renaissance. For an analysis of domestic violence in early modern literature, see Dolan, Dangerous Familiars; for changes in the cultural perceptions of marriage and the family in literature and art between the medieval and Renaissance periods, see Belsey, Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden; for an analysis of dramatizations of domestic, everyday life and their relation to national identity, see Wall, Staging Domesticity.

4 See, for example, Estrin, The Raven and the Lark. Barbara Estrin makes several important observations about adoption. She notes, for instance, that lost-child plots typically “predicate that the biological parents are superior to the adoptive ones” (14). See also Dubrow, Shakespeare and Domestic Loss; Pollock, Forgotten Children; and Findlay, Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama.
Providing an account of adoption in early modern drama allows me to use several critical approaches. While feminist criticism has traditionally seen the domestic as a sphere of patriarchal oppression and confinement, I endeavour to demonstrate the transgressive potential of adoptive domestic relationships. Building on Wendy Wall’s efforts to “rescue domesticity from being the sordid spot of retrograde values that feminists sometimes take it to be” (*Staging* 9), I show that adoption plots in early modern drama often figure the domestic as a site of innovative possibility. Adoption’s ability to alter bloodlines and to change the course of inheritance threatened a patriarchal order based in biological reproduction. My dissertation focuses not only on familial relationships, but also on the economic and linguistic repercussions of their alteration. I draw on early modern scientific and medical treatises, rhetorical handbooks, and literary works in order to propose cultural, social, scientific, and linguistic approaches toward adoption and familial relation. My dissertation examines the representation of adoption in early modern English drama so as to analyze the politics and language of social and familial relations in early modern culture. It also highlights the process by which adopted subjects construct identity through discourse and speech acts. The result is to demonstrate that understanding how language demarcates and defines social and familial position in early modern England is essential to understanding the cultural intricacies of the plays of this period.  

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5 Lynne Magnusson has investigated the verbal manipulation of social relations in *Shakespeare and*
While Randolph reveres the practice of adoption and the classical literary
genealogy that he gains access to as a result of Jonson’s taking him in as his own,
attitudes toward adoption in the early modern period were not uniformly positive. My
dissertation attempts to separate contradictory ways of viewing adoption to make
visible the opposing and incongruous understandings of the family presented to early
modern audiences. On one hand, adoption could be viewed as a debased and corrupt
form of familial relation, or as a disruption of what Marianne Novy terms “a mythology
of the blood” (“Multiple Parenting in Shakespeare’s Romances” 189). Adoption’s
potential to incorporate a child into a family to which it did not belong biologically
associated the practice with the artificial, the fictional, the unnatural. On the other hand,
adoption was relatively common, was reinforced by several social institutions, and
formed, at least metaphorically, a part of the Christian tradition. I bring to light such
inconsistencies in order to demonstrate that adoption was represented dramatically as a
practice through which identity was imagined and negotiated. As a project in literary
and cultural history, my dissertation insists that adoption assumes a vital role in the
formation of families in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Early modern
plays were deeply involved in the construction and revision of a sense of family. They
exposed inherently contradictory definitions of relation and inheritance. I thus try to

Social Dialogue.
account for the tensions in early modern texts between biological and adoptive—or synthetic—familial relation.

My dissertation engages the social history of everyday practices by examining the role of adoption in early modern family life. As such, I subscribe to Patricia Fumerton’s theory of “new new historicism,” or an emergent new historicism that focuses primarily on the common, but the common in both a class and cultural sense: the low (common people), the ordinary (common speech, common wares, common sense), the familial (commonly known), the customary or typical or taken-for-granted (common law, commonplace, communal), etc. (3)

Everyday life, Fumerton explains, “expands to include not only familiar things but also collective meanings, values, representations, and practices” (5). As I will argue, adoption was widely practiced in early modern culture and played a central, everyday role in familial formation, despite its unofficial status. It was not an isolated custom, but instead manifested itself in a multitude of ways and took on a wide array of representations. Adoption provided what Michel de Certeau called an everyday “tactic” that could restructure social and economic ties (xiii).

Early modern plays do not present analytical portraits of historical adoptions, but rather represent cultural attitudes toward the practice; they suggest ways in which
adoption was defined and functioned. I understand literary texts to depict ways of addressing familial experiences that expose historical, social, cultural, and political concerns. I follow Catherine Belsey’s recent definition of cultural history as a record of meaning and values that is concerned “not so much with what individuals actually did, but more what people wanted to do, wished they had done, what they cared about and deplored” (6). “Where practices feature in cultural history,” she notes, “they do so primarily in terms of their meanings—as customs or habits, for example, which demonstrate the values a culture subscribes to” (6). Dramatic representations of adoption, I maintain, depict possible familial structures that early modern people both knew and imagined to exist.

My approach merges the methods and theoretical frameworks of several different fields. I investigate the cultural, social, historical, and legal aspects of adoption; I also explore its subjective and phenomenological dimensions. I focus in particular on the ways in which adoption can grant the adopter or adoptee agency: the practice exposes its participants to multiple available constructions of subjectivity. I follow Joan Scott’s observation that

Subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings possible for the concepts they deploy. And subjects do have agency. They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather
subjects whose agency is created through situations and
statuses conferred on them. (793)

Adoption in the early modern period influenced and transformed subjectivities.

Building also on recent scholarship of early modern English identity and subjectivity—such as that of Bradin Cormack, who tracks “subjective encounters with the law” (23)—I investigate the development of subjectivity in relation to social, cultural, and legal societal structures. Subjectivity in the period, I suggest, emerges from cultural institutions, whether medical, legal, religious, or familial. I situate the experience of adoption as represented in drama in particular social relations and configurations that generated the identities and aspirations of people in early modern England.

Little direct attention has been paid to representations of the practice and experience of adoption in early modern literature. Marianne Novy’s work on adoption and multiple-parent families in Shakespeare’s romance plays is the exception; her scholarship constitutes the most significant contribution to the field. From Novy, I have gained insight into Shakespeare’s romances’ depictions of adoptive parent-child relations

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As Cormack notes, “jurisprudential encounters…are also subjective encounters with the law, cases legible, in Lauren Berlant’s terms, as epistemological events in law, marking the place where subjectivity and impersonality are indistinguishable” (23).

For Novy’s work on Shakespeare’s romances see “Adopted Children,” “Multiple Parenting in Pericles,” and “Multiple Parenting in Shakespeare’s Romances.”
and the ways in which birth families in these plays are frequently privileged. However, no sustained study exists of adoption in early modern literature more generally. My dissertation branches off from Novy’s work in its examination of the cultural and literary impact of the trope and practice of adoption more broadly. Scholars have largely overlooked adoption in early modern literature because the practice was not, as I will demonstrate, legally sanctioned. To an extent, however, early modern adoption has been explored in studies of the apprentice, the foundling, and the changeling. Whereas the emphasis in studies of such children is frequently placed on their birth families, or on the families from which they are separated, I focus primarily on the taking in of children by non-biological parents. I investigate, that is, the process of incorporating a child into a new family that is not based on blood ties.

While adoption is not always readily apparent in early modern English literature, the practice figures prominently in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and American literature; most scholarship on the subject therefore covers these periods. Novy is also a leading scholar of English-language adoption literature from these centuries: her *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama*, for instance, examines adoption in literature from Sophocles to Barbara Kingsolver. In *Reading Adoption*, Novy concentrates not only on the narrative and cultural value of adoption plots, but also on the experiences of non-fictional adoptees. She interweaves her own experiences as an adopted child with her literary criticism and presents “literary examples as equipment for thinking about adoptive family construction and adoptee identity in a way that could be useful to
people considering any kind of family construction or identity” (3). Her book, she argues, can “help adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents to understand their lives” (3).

Several other scholars of contemporary literature likewise suggest that adoption narratives might prove beneficial to adopted children. Children’s literature has therefore become a primary site of exploration for thinking about adoption.⁸ Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture, an earlier collection edited by Novy, also brings together several outstanding essays on modern adoption plots. Other scholars have recently begun to theorize the adoption trope in modern literature. Margaret Homans, for instance, analyzes recent adoption novels and surmises that an “increased attentiveness to the subject of adoption might complicate narrative theory” (4). Scholarship on adoption in twentieth- and twenty-first century American literature has also developed a sub-focus on transracial and international adoptions.⁹

⁸ Claudia Nelson has explored the links between adoption and staging in Noel Streatfield’s children’s fiction. Streatfield, she argues, depicts children who perform—they act, dance, skate, etc.—and are thus moved from “domestic confinement into a more liberating public sphere” (188). The nineteenth-century trope of the performing orphan undergoes “changes that cast performance as a way to get beyond domesticity rather than as a way to achieve it” (189). The connection that Nelson notes between adoption and performance has also been treated by Jill R. Deans, who investigates the practice as part of a larger social performance in the plays of Edward Albee.

⁹ See, for example, Grice, “Transracial Adoption Narratives”; Jerng, “Recognizing the Transracial Adoptee”; Cheng, “The Thrills of Motherhood”; and Kim Park Nelson, “Loss is more than
Classical and Christian Adoption

An overview of the history of adoption demonstrates the practice’s longstanding influence on familial formation in the Western world. Adoption was a familiar and well-established practice in Greco-Roman antiquity. Roman adoption could be achieved by two distinct legal procedures: adrogatio and adoptio. Adrogatio involved the adoption of a person who was already legally independent, or sui iuris. The adoptee voluntarily submitted to the patria potestas, the paternal power, of another man, who became his non-biological father. Adrogatio terminated the adoptee’s relation to his natal family. Such an adoption was deemed public because it necessitated “the authority of the people” in order to be enacted (Gardner 126-30). The legal procedure required an inquiry, conducted by the college of pontiffs, into the admissibility of the adoption. The pontifex maximus of the curate assembly then passed a law if the adoption was deemed permissible. The proposal that was given to the people for the enactment of the law...
indicated that the adoptee was to be considered the equivalent of a *filius familias*, or a son under paternal power, conceived in a lawful marriage.\(^{12}\) “Private” adoption, or *adoptio*, conversely, was conducted before a magistrate and involved the adoption of a person who was still *in potestate parentis*, or under the authority and legal control of the parent. The child was given in *adoptio* by the *pater familias*, the highest ranking male family member, and was taken up as a *filius familias* by his or her new, adoptive family.\(^{13}\)

As Jane F. Gardner notes, the initial purpose of Roman adoption appears to have been to allow people without *sui herdes*, heirs of their own, to acquire someone to inherit their patrimonies (202). There are few instances of female adoption, she observes, because of this interest in using the practice to perpetuate family lines. While citizens with biological children were not forbidden to adopt, the majority of adoptions seem to

\(^{12}\)Gardner provides an example of the formula of the *rogatio*, or the measure proposed to the legislative body, given in such instances:

May it be your will and command that L. Valerius may be to L. Titius in right and in law his son, just as if he were born from his

*as pater* and from his *materfamilia*, and that he (Titus) may have

in relation to him (Valerius) the power of life and death, as there

is to a father in the case of a son. (qtd. in Gardner 127)

\(^{13}\)For more on the legal intricacies of Roman adoption, see Crook 113-22; Watson, *The Law of Persons in the Later Roman Republic* and *The Law of Succession in the Later Roman Republic*; Boswell 66; Bannon, *The Brothers of Romulus*; and Jack Goody, “Adoption” 331-45.
have been undertaken to ensure familial continuity (202). Julius Caesar, for instance, adopted Octavius into the Julian family as an heir. John Boswell notes that “social critics from Isaeus (fourth century B.C.) to Seneca commented on the fact that the rich could not lack heirs, since they could buy them if they failed to beget any” (115). Boswell also observes that adoption was “extremely common” in the Roman empire. Satirical literature, he notes, suggests that the childless wealthy were sought out by fortune-hunters who hoped to gain wealth via their adoptions into these affluent families. Others aimed to communicate political loyalty or to express personal affection by becoming part of another family (115).

Given the apparent prevalence of adoption in Roman society and its established place in the Roman legal system, it might be expected that adoption would appear among the legal practices of early modern England, since the English legal system is often thought to be closely related to the Roman. Adoption, however, was absent from English laws from the medieval period onward, as well as from the legal codes of other

14 Boswell is also careful to state, however, that “the extent to which abandoned children were formally adopted is difficult to determine, especially since some of the words for adoption in Latin, as in English, might be used loosely to mean ‘took under one’s care’” (115).

Western European countries (Goody *Development* 72).\(^{16}\) No longer the recognized legal custom that it was in classical times, it apparently ceased to be practiced. While evidence of informal early modern adoption contracts exists for many continental countries—Kristen Elizabeth Gager, for example, finds that such contracts were drawn up for inheritance purposes in France (*Blood Ties* 1-35)—there is no comparable record of such events in England.\(^{17}\) Adoption was not included officially in the English legal system, in fact, until 1926.

The concept of adoption survived in the early modern period, however, in part through its place in the Christian tradition. The term is used in the Bible to refer to spiritual adoption, or the taking in of believers by God. Christianity’s focus on universal siblinghood notionally diminishes the emphasis placed on earthly blood relations and

\(^{16}\) Goody notes its “virtual disappearance from the early legislative codes of the German, Celtic and Romanised peoples in the West. Despite their heavy debt to Rome, there is no mention of adoption in the Visigothic Codes of Spain” (*Development* 72). He observes that “Only the Irish tracts give any substantial evidence of [adoption’s] continuance, at least in the pre-Norman period” (73).

\(^{17}\) Goody notes that “There is no entry for adoption in the whole thirteen volumes of Sir William Holdsworth’s *The History of English Law* (1909 etc.)” (*Development* 73). To the best of my knowledge, no scholar has been able to find evidence of formal, legal adoption in early modern England.
instead shifts familial relation to the spiritual realm. The Book of Romans, for instance, asserts mankind’s eternal adoptive relation to God:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (8.14-17)

The “Spirit of adoption” ties mankind to God, creating a filial relationship. Such a bond replicates the “natural” bond that God shares with his son Christ. In the Book of Galatians, Christ is figured as an agent of adoption sent to men in order to bring them into a familial relationship with God:

18 For more on the Christian concept of universal siblinghood, see Shell, esp. xi-xii, 10-20, and 184-99.

19 All Biblical citations are taken from The Bible: Authorized King James Version, ed. Carroll and Prickett.
But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law

To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (4.4-7)

Mankind is made “heir” through adoption, inheriting the same share of God’s love as Christ.

Early modern writers often described their relationships with God in these terms. Montaigne, for instance, observes that God “honour[s] us with this joy-bringing fatherly adoption” (172). Noting that “God adopteth vnto himselfe his elect,” John Merbecke, in his popular Book of Notes and Common Places (1582), declares that God adopted mankind not because he “had not an other sonne (for he had his onlie begotten sonne Christ in whom he was well pleased),” but because he did not have any human children: “for

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20 Montaigne also referred to Mademoiselle Marie de Gournay, a young admirer of his work and eventually a trusted correspondent, as his “fille d’alliance,” a term which endowed her with a “quasi-legal status as a virtually adopted daughter” (Screech xxiv).
through Adam we were all made strangers vnto him” (15). According to Merbecke, God sent “his naturall and legitimate sonne” into the world so that he could “adopt vnto himselfe, manie children out of our kinde” (15). Pamphlets such as Thomas Granger’s A Looking-Glasse for Christians; or, The Comfortable Doctrine of Adoption Wherein Every True Beleeuer May Behold his Blessed Estate in the Kingdom of Grace (1620) emphasize the naturalness of man’s adoption by God. Granger states that spiritual adoption is far superior to the worldly adoption of classical times. Unlike classical adoption, in which, he claims, “the Adopter cannot giue the spirit of a naturall sonne to the adopted,” God gives his followers “the spirit of sonnes, by whom we call him (abba) Father, euен as naturall sonnes doe their parents” (sig. B4). With spiritual adoption “the servant or bondman adopted, liueth no longer to his former Masters, but to his Adopter, not in seruitude, but in freedome, not in slauish, but in son-like feare, \textit{viz.} awfull reuerence and loue” (sig. B2). Queen Elizabeth—well-known for casting herself as adoptive mother of her subjects—also used the Christian rhetoric of adoption to describe her relation to God. In one of her prayers, she emphasizes her nearness to God by asserting herself as his adopted child:

\begin{quote}
O Lord, my God and my Father, I render undying thanks unto Thy divine Majesty with my mouth, with my heart, and with all that I am, for the infinite mercies which Thou hast used toward me—that not only hast made me Thy creature, made me by Thy hands to be formed in Thy
image and similitude; and hast by the death and passion of
Thy only Son Jesus Christ reconciled me with Thee,
adopted me, and made me Thy daughter, sister of Jesus
Christ Thy firstborn and of all those who believe in Thee.

(Marcus 156-57)

Underscoring her physical proximity and similarity to God, she positions herself as a
child who is nearly as natural as a biological child.

Despite this Christian rhetoric, the actual practice of adoption was discouraged
by the church. Jack Goody has argued in The Development of the Family and Marriage in
Europe that a connection exists between the disappearance of legally sanctioned
adoption and the practice's relation to Christianity. The medieval Church, he suggests,
disallowed the adoption of heirs for primarily economic reasons. Goody observes that in
the fourth century the Church began a massive effort to increase donations and bequests
from its members. In an attempt to build the Church's monetary and property holdings,
the faithful were encouraged to leave their land and their finances to the Church rather
than to their children. It was not solely by denying children their inheritances that the
Church began to acquire land and wealth as rapidly as it did, however: heirlessness was
also actively promoted (99). Whereas in Greco-Roman times adoption and other
strategies of heirship had been practiced regularly, the Church ushered in a culture of
biological bequeathal (100). By discouraging procedures such as adoption that led to the
non-biological provision of heirs for childless couples, the Church ensured that it could
ultimately receive the possessions of its childless members. For financial purposes, Goody contends, the Church communicated a view of the family as a strictly biological unit based on “‘natural’ kinship, on ‘blood’ relationships, on ‘consanguinity,’” and one “created by the union (copulatio) of men and women, that is, by a physical act” (101). If wealth was to be circulated between kin, it had to be kept within the elementary family; “heirs who were not ‘of the body,’” were disallowed (101). Genealogy, therefore, was expected by the Church to be straightforward and biological: adoption was deemed an unacceptable strategy for the transmission of wealth.

The maligned view of adoption promoted by the medieval Church haunted Western Europe throughout the early modern period. In England, adoption was frequently viewed as a weak imitation of nature, one that upset the natural order and could not therefore produce the true equivalent of a biological heir. William Clerke, for instance, maintained in The Triall of Bastardie (1594) that adopted children could not be considered legitimate because they were unnatural:

But legitmat issue, let no man vnderstand legitimate only, that is to say, such as be adopted children, for there is in such but a bare immition of nature, neither haue we vse (in this land) of adoption nor arrogation, but naturall and legitimat, that is the legitimate issue we speake of here, viz. Naturall and Legitimate both. (39)
An adopted child’s position was thus the same as that of a bastard: although it might have been considered to be a valid heir by those who raised it, it was not in fact legitimate.

From the Church’s point of view, Goody notes, the use of adoption as an approach to heirship also placed too great an emphasis on familial rather than spiritual concerns. Such strategies were denounced as ways of “circumventing the wishes of God, of neglecting the possibility of saving one’s soul, and of encouraging the ‘avarice’ of members of one’s family” (Development 101). Not only did the practice of adoption deny the Church bequests of property and wealth, it also focused attention on the family rather than on God’s salvation of man. As a result, Goody observes, a “shift in the concept of adoption to a spiritual plane” took place, and Christian theology began to use the metaphor of adoption to refer to baptism. He suggests that godparenthood and spiritual kinship were preferred to non-consanguineous kinship—and indeed to the wider, more extended ties of blood-based kinship itself—and that these metaphorical forms of adoption replaced the actual practice of adoption in England (75). Goody contends that the metaphor of adoption “takes over the core meaning” and “becomes the dominant reality” (196). He suggests, in other words, that spiritual adoption negates the actual practice of adoption, replacing it entirely. Goody also observes, however, that “the stated policy of the Church met with resistance and underwent modification” and that “the restricted bonds of consanguinity were supplemented by other ties” (102). These conflicting contentions invite the question of whether adoption disappeared
entirely as an heirship strategy in the early modern period or if it merely became somewhat invisible. Could familial adoption continue to exist alongside spiritual adoption, when it was approved neither by Church nor by law? What is encouraged in theory by the Church and by formal social and legal structures might assume an entirely different form in everyday practice or the literary imagination. Gager hypothesizes that in France “the Christian theology of ‘adoption through baptism’ might very well have aided in sustaining adoption traditions for families interested in having a non-natal child to stand as their heir” (69). Early modern people were presented with the Christian example of adoption by God and could thus potentially imitate the practice despite its formal, legal absence in everyday life.

Practical emulation of the Christian spiritual notion of adoption, however, was enigmatic. John Boswell observes that “as a theological idea [adoption] remained an important element of Western religious thought—in the importance of the adoption of the Gentiles, for example, or the adoption of all newly baptized Christians by their ‘spiritual parents’—but almost no one in medieval Europe idealized it as a social reality. Neither parent nor child wished to acknowledge that a family relationship was not biological” (431). He also maintains, however, that this negative view of adoption “did not prevent families from rearing abandoned children, but they almost invariably pretended the child was a biological heir. … Such deceptions doubtless improved the lot of individuals, but ultimately
undermined the status of foundlings as a group by implicitly denying the ancient idea that adoptive parent-child relations were not only as good as, but in some ways better than their biological counterparts.” (431)

I will suggest that adoption was indeed practiced in England in the early modern period, albeit not necessarily in unambiguous ways. Although adoption was in many ways reviled, it survived in metaphor even beyond a religious context. As I have demonstrated, adoption could be used as metaphor in several circumstances; many things, including literary works, could be considered adopted. Numerous early modern practices, moreover, also allowed for a variety of pseudo-adoptions to take place. Whether Christian adoption presented a model for such practices is arguable, since they were often condemned by the Church, but the “spirit of adoption” that was promoted by Christian faith could be found beyond the confines of religion. Adoption as imagined on the stage occupied a multitude of forms that reflected and interpreted current cultural practices.

**Forms of Adoption in Early Modern England**

Several early modern institutions mimicked the practice of adoption by necessitating an exchange of children between households. The most obvious examples are the traditions of service and “fostering out,” which involved sending a child into another home in a
position of service or as an apprentice. Children were often put into service in the households of kin, but were also placed with non-related families of similar social status. In such a practice, the servant-child became a part of its new family, however temporarily. Fostering out was, in a sense, part of the invisible framework of familial relation and was fundamental to its structure. Because it did not involve a formal, legal act, it thrived as adoption did not. Wardship was also a well-established tradition. Royal abuse of the practice, which involved the sons and daughters of deceased noblemen becoming wards of the reigning monarch, who could then control their finances and arrange their marriages at will, was a concern for the nobility throughout the period.

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21 Lawrence Stone calls the practice of fostering out “peculiar to England” and notes that children “left home between ten and seventeen to begin work as domestic servants, labourers or apprentices, but in all cases living in their masters’ houses rather than at home or in lodgings”: “What one sees at these middle- and lower middle-class levels is a vast system of exchange by which parents sent their own children away from home—usually not very far—and the richer families took in the children of others as servants and labourers. As a result of this custom, some very fragmentary census data suggests that from just before puberty until they married some ten years later, about two out of every three boys and three out of every four girls were living away from home. Nearly one half of all husbandman households and nearly one quarter of craftsman and tradesman households contained living-in servants or apprentices” (Family 84). For further discussion of the practice of apprenticeship and fostering, see Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World from the Black Death to the Industrial Age; Ben-Amos, Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England; and Griffith, Youth and Authority.
Queen Elizabeth’s reign saw the systematization of wardship in England, but, as Joel Hurstfield observes, “the wards were the queen’s wards and she alone could dispose of them at her will and pleasure” (90). An early modern nobleman would have known that if, at the time of his death, his heir was underage, “the control of his marriage might well pass out of the family and be bought and sold like merchandise” (134). King James, an advocate of wardship, was petitioned about the practice, but allowed it to continue.22 As Hurstfield remarks, “There can have been few noble or gentle families whose genealogy does [sic] not bear the inescapable marks of one or more feudal wardships” (145).

In a less permanent sense, the practice of wet-nursing similarly required that children be removed from their family homes. Despite warnings from many doctors who opposed the practice on the grounds of the babies’ health, wealthy women sent their children out to the homes of poor hired nurses in order to relieve themselves of the burden of breast-feeding. Raised for a time by these “milk mothers,” children were, in effect, adopted into a new, socially inferior domestic group. While wet-nursing, like service and wardship, involved no real change in kinship, it did underscore the apparent fluidity of the early modern family and the ease with which children might be circulated among households.23

22 For further details on James’s involvement with wardship, see Notestein 85-96. An overview of the practice of wardship is presented in Hurstfield, The Queen’s Wards.

23 Goody notes that wetnursing was widespread in Anglo-Saxon culture, despite the objections of the Church (Development 68). He also observes that “Although the practice [wet-nursing] was ...
Early modern family life in England thus repeatedly enacted informal adoption. As Novy observes, children were often raised by multiple sets of parents, whether because of the death of one or both parents, remarriage, or involvement with institutions outside the family home such as wet nursing or apprenticeship (“Multiple” 188). As a result, households rarely consisted solely of a biologically related group of people. According to Lawrence Stone, “family relationships were characterized by interchangeability, so that substitution of another wife or another child was easy, and by conformity to external rules of conduct” (88). Inconstancy, in other words, was a defining characteristic of the family.

There are no known records of early modern English adoptions like those that Gager has unearthed in France, but there are some notable historical examples of informal adoption. Sir Thomas More is perhaps the most famous adoptive father of the time, having taken in an orphaned girl named Margaret Giggs, whom he then treated as his own child. In letters quoted by Thomas Stapleton, his 1588 biographer, More, writing in the third person, addresses his correspondence “to his dearest children and to Margaret Giggs, whom he numbers amongst his own” (98), and “to Margaret, Elizabeth, condemned by the Church, it continued for very much longer, in England until the end of the nineteenth century when it retreated before the spread of feeding bottles and baby formulae. At roughly the same time adoption, after a gap of some fifteen hundred years, was reintroduced into Western society” (40).
Cecily his dearest daughters, and to Margaret Giggs as dear as though she were a daughter” (100). As I have already noted, Jonson also adopted sons, although he did not so much take in orphaned children as he did literary ones.

The Affective Family

While adoption could be used as a tactic for heirship, it also complicated questions about the emotional bonds between family members. Debate in early modern family studies has long centered on the matter of parent-child affection. Following Philippe Ariès, who argued in *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962) that high rates of infant and child mortality encouraged parents to become emotionally unattached to their offspring, Lawrence Stone asserted in *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (1977) that high child mortality “made it folly to invest too much emotional capital in such ephemeral beings” (82). While scholars such as Alan Macfarlane, Linda Pollock, and Steven Ozment have since argued against Ariès’s and Stone’s assertions, the affect debate continues to influence early modern family studies.24 This is, in part,

24 See in particular Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, a Seventeenth-Century Clergyman* and *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840*; Pollock, *Forgotten Children*; and Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*. Ralph Houlbrooke has also concluded that the nuclear family was a dominant familial model well before the early modern period in England. He establishes
because of the impossibility of measuring affection, a fleeting and uncertain quality. As Stone himself observes, “any discussion of emotional relationships in general is inevitably a most hazardous undertaking, since the evidence is so scanty, ambiguous and divergent that the stock historical methodology of demonstration by example is even less convincing than usual” (76-77). I would suggest that examining the early modern family through the lens of adoption can shed new light on the affect debate, since adoption is a familial bond often based solely on sentiment. The adopted child is welcomed by its adoptive family because it is chosen; it is not an accident of nature. Merbecke makes it clear that the adoptive bond was one of pure feeling: “Men do call children adopted, those which be not naturall children to them which doe choose & accept them for their children: but they are it onelie by the loue & fauour of him which taketh them for his children, & giueth them such right, as he might giue to his naturall children” (15). Adopted children were raised by parents who accepted them as their own but who did not have legal or biological ties to them: their familial bonds were instead established by “loue & fauour.” Adopted characters in drama are frequently incorporated into families as though they are naturally part of them and are attached to these families by deep emotional ties. An assessment of adopted characters therefore

that there were “no well-defined groups of kinsmen larger than the elementary to which most individuals owed loyalty” (19).
provides singular insight into representations of familial affect in English drama of the period.

This is not to say, however, that all, or even most, representations of adoptive relationships depict adoption as a loving practice undertaken out of pure affection: adoption could also be performed as a financial or political transaction. As Gager has noted, early modern French adoptions were often carried out in order to ensure that a childless couple acquired an heir (32). While evidence of such activity in early modern England is scant, practices such as royal wardship frequently presented an unfavourable and economically motivated view of adoptive relationships.

The Range of Chapters

My dissertation establishes an expansive discursive context for adoption and explores early modern plays that represent adoption in an array of forms. I focus particularly on the plays of Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton because they repeatedly portray separated or divided families and unusual familial groupings. Such circumstances often occasion the need for various kinds of adoption. While the Shakespearean examples that I discuss depict in a reasonably straightforward manner the incorporation of an abandoned, kidnapped, or orphaned child, Middleton’s representations of adoption are not always so uncomplicated. His adoptions are based instead in cuckoldry and
bastardy, or in fictional genealogies; they therefore embody the less visible aspects of early modern adoption.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I investigate the social and economic repercussions of adoption in early modern England. Chapter 1 discusses the previously overlooked cultural importance of horticultural metaphors of adoption; it explores the ways in which early modern culture explained adoption by depicting it in a particular kind of figurative language. In three of Shakespeare’s plays—*The Winter’s Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *All’s Well That Ends Well*—grafting appears as a metaphor for adoption. Such metaphorical thinking about adoption conveys the concept of adoptive familial combination in recognizable terms, but it also carries the many cultural stigmas attached to grafting and to the manipulation of nature. My examination of familial metaphors allows me to scrutinize the ways in which adoption and attachment were conceived. In Shakespeare’s romances, adoption is as much a matter of narrative form as cultural experience. Children are separated from their biological families and then reunited with them, prompting a comparison between the temporary, adoptive families into which they are provisionally grafted and those into which they are born. *All’s Well*, a comedy, employs the more permanent combination of slip and stock—the Countess imagines adoption as an alternative, innovative way of generating a family, just as grafting was a then-novel method of propagating plants. *All’s Well* uses the horticultural metaphor of grafting to illuminate adoption’s potential to endow women with the unique power to alter reproductive and patriarchal norms.
Chapter 2 focuses on the economic consequences of and motivations for adoption. Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* depicts several adopted children, including a baby who is underhandedly given to two unsuspecting, unrelated surrogate fathers and two bastard children who are raised by a man who realizes that they are his wife’s children but possibly not his own. In each case of adoption, the adoptive parents view children as financial commodities. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, I suggest, underscores the early modern family’s dependence on children for familial and financial continuity. It also implies, however, that a less obvious consequence of this dependence on economics and heirship is that early modern families were often rearranged in ways that were imperceptible to those outside—and sometimes even within—the family unit in order to facilitate inheritance and financial prosperity. Adoption, in other words, provides an everyday tactic for negotiating the social world. The play ultimately proposes that paternity can be divorced from biology in the interest of economic constancy. As a result, Middleton exposes potential ruptures in the family and undermines the stability and permanence of genealogy.

In my final two chapters, I pay particular attention to the relations between the early modern family and linguistic practice. By focusing on adoption, I examine the ties among family, identity, language, and power. Chapter 3 explores a fascination with familial resemblance and posits that linguistic likeness is imagined as a critical feature in the identification of adopted, estranged family members. I analyze the connections between genetics, physical likeness, and language in John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* and
Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors*. In early modern England, I suggest, language was considered a trait that children inherited from their parents. Both plays emphasize the biological similarity of relatives and reflect a cultural uncertainty about whether the organic nature of the family can survive physical separation. Because family members in the plays are lost or separated and then cared for by a non-biological family, familial likeness becomes a way for the playwrights to regroup those characters who are related by blood. As I will show, this likeness is often made manifest in language. I examine the speech of relatives within the context of early modern medical and scientific treatises—which contend that language is heritable—and linguistic theory. This chapter thus links the concept of familial relation to an analysis of the discourse that expresses and defines this relation.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I investigate familial relation as a source of linguistic power. In Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*, a fictional story of adoption is used as a means of confusing familial ties. The play emphasizes the role of family in establishing identity and depicts the consequences of the sudden alteration of perceived familial relation. Drawing on the sociological and sociolinguistic work of Pierre Bourdieu, I analyze the symbolic capital associated with familial relationships and the importance of the conditions of production for linguistic exchange. Familial names such as *niece*, *daughter*, *uncle*, and *father* in *Women Beware Women* are endowed with the ability both to cement and to transform a character’s identity. Erasmus’ comments in “On the Writing of Letters” (*De Conscribendis Epistolis*) on “adoptive names”—familial names assigned to
unrelated friends and associates out of politeness—lend historical context to my
interpretation of the play. Strategies of naming and renaming offer the female
characters, in particular, the opportunity to transcend their perceived familial roles.
They also, however, permit an incestuous union between two characters who initially
believe themselves related. The play therefore emphasizes kinship’s linguistic
constitution and its ability to grant particular speakers linguistic authority. It also posits
the destruction of idealized, biological kinship as an act of power.

My dissertation thus explores the connections between historical language use
and social status in early modern England. In doing so, it elucidates the ways in which
adoption and familial relation were defined, described, and communicated. By
considering these plays in terms of adoptive relationships, I provide a critical
reinterpretation of literary instances of social and familial connection that extend beyond
the bounds of biology.
“Howe to plant and graffe all sortes of trees”: Shakespeare’s Adopted Children and the Language of Horticulture

Children in their mother’s womb are like tender plants rooting in a garden… They are forced to draw their nourishment from the sap that comes to them there.

– Jacques Duval, 1612

In Shakespeare’s All’s Well That Ends Well, the Countess, having taken Helena into her care after her father’s death, announces her connection to her newly adopted ward. Blurring the boundaries of biological and adoptive parent-child relations, the Countess informs Helena that she is her mother, although the audience knows that she is not her biological parent: the Countess places the girl “in the catalogue of those / That were enwombed mine,” or those who were contained in her womb, thus identifying Helena as the equivalent of a birth child (1.3.138-39). But as she attempts to describe their attachment further, the Countess begins to speak in the language of horticulture instead of the language of the womb. In trying to convince Helena that she can be her daughter, the Countess states that “’Tis often seen / Adoption strives with nature, and choice

25 All’s Well That Ends Well, ed. G.K. Hunter. All further citations from the play are taken from this edition, unless otherwise noted.
breeds / A native slip to us from foreign seeds” (139-40). She uses a botanical metaphor to express to Helena the artificial familial bond that she understands to exist between them. By creating a mixed family that blends together seamlessly, adoption, the Countess suggests, works in much the same way as the horticulturalist’s art of grafting. Just as a gardener grafts a slip, or a scion, to a stock that is not its own, adoption joins a child to a new family. In her remark to Helena, the Countess also emphasizes the power of choice in adoption, insisting that foster parents choose their adopted children rather than give birth to them naturally. In fact, by selecting Helena, the Countess competes with nature and proposes alternate ways of understanding relations between parents and children.

It is these artificial familial bonds and the horticultural lexicon with which Shakespeare describes them that I wish to examine here. As an example of the ways in which early modern gardeners manipulated the natural world, the practice of grafting collapses any rigid distinction perceived to exist between nature and culture. It serves in The Winter’s Tale, Cymbeline, and All’s Well That Ends Well as a metaphor for the splicing of families, in which a child belonging genetically to one family is adopted by another. I demonstrate that the plays therefore align the creation of families of mixed biological origin with a then-novel modification of nature. The grafting metaphor suggests within the context of the plays that legitimate families might be synthetically produced, or based on non-biological ties. The established early modern lexicon of grafting provides a
ready-made framework within which Shakespeare explores issues of belonging and biological inheritance.

Shakespeare refers to grafting in several of his plays. For instance, the vexed Queen in *Richard II* prays that the gardener’s grafted plants will never grow (3.4.101); King Henry in *I Henry IV* imagines young Hal as grafted to the “rude society” with which he associates (3.2.11-17); and Buckingham in *Richard III* envisions a polluted England’s “royal stock graft with ignoble plants” (3.7.126). In these examples, all drawn from history plays, grafting is a metaphor for social decay and political corruption; grafting clearly suggests harm to the nation. The gardening technique receives its most detailed and constructive treatment, in contrast, in romances and comedies that involve adopted children. In *The Winter’s Tale*, Perdita is thus aligned ironically with the grafted gillyvors that she so despises by the fact that she is herself a “grafted” child: she is fostered by the shepherd after she is abandoned and is therefore attached to a familial stock that is not biologically her own (4.4.79-108). Similarly, *Cymbeline* uses as its principal metaphor the re-grafting of missing, adopted children—described on the tablet that Jupiter leaves for Posthumus as “lopped branches”—onto their biological “old

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26 Shakespeare’s romances, in particular, involve children who are removed from their families and sent to live with non-biological parents, as do some of his comedies. For an analysis of characters in the romances who have both birth parents and adoptive parents, see Novy, “Multiple Parenting in Shakespeare’s Romances” 188-208, and “Adoption and Shakespearean Families” 56-86.
“stock” (5.3.204-05). However, Shakespeare’s use of the grafting metaphor for adoption in

*All’s Well* is a distinct case. The play does not involve a lost, stolen, or abandoned child
of mistaken identity who is cultivated by a family poorer than its own, but instead
concerns an orphaned young woman who is openly adopted by someone of higher
station. The Countess describes herself as a horticulturalist or grafter in order to express
her desire to create a blended family. The play consequently invites its audience to
consider whether Helena’s figurative graft will be successful. In so doing, it questions
early modern assumptions about the formation of families.

The homological thinking that structures Shakespeare’s rhetoric of adoption
compares human life to plant life. The particular comparison of human and botanical
reproduction is not unique to Shakespeare, but rather has its origins in classical
literature and the Bible, in which horticultural metaphors often describe human
propagation. As I will demonstrate, Shakespeare’s own understanding of grafting likely
derives from these antecedents, as well as from the abundance of horticultural
pamphlets published in the early modern period. By using the metaphor of grafting to
describe unconventional familial formation, Shakespeare both casts adoption in
recognizable terms and imbues it with the sense of possibility, advancement, and
experimentation that surrounded the horticultural practice; the grafting metaphor
connects a child to the novelty and possibility that the grafting of plants connotes. An
adopted, grafted child straddles two worlds—that of nature and that of artifice—and its
identity is not clearly fixed but mutable. Shakespeare’s use of adoption depends on its
ties to grafting, which allow it to appear innovative and new. His use of these metaphors introduces into a shifting cultural and social milieu the prospect of new modes of generative possibility, modes that enhance, and perhaps also potentially destabilize, the biological order. Grafting was an augmentation of nature that mimicked natural creation in ways that threatened the integrity of the natural order. At once full of ambitious promise and dangerously subversive, this horticultural technique allows us to understand how alternative practices of human reproduction were simultaneously necessary and profoundly threatening.

I will first examine early modern attitudes toward grafting, noting what horticulturalists held to be its principal tenets and exploring common perceptions of the practice. I will then consider the classical origins of grafting, the eventual extension of the practice into metaphoric use, and the potential that it represents to forge bonds between people. Shakespeare’s use of the grafting metaphor for adoption, I contend, is parallel to a long tradition of describing the family in arboreal terms. The Winter’s Tale, Cymbeline, and All’s Well envision the possible additions and substitutions that adoption might make to a family tree. Each play differs in its evaluation of the success of an adoptive bond or of an alteration to a family tree. While the two romances—which each feature children who have both living adoptive and biological sets of parents to contend with—do not conclude whether adoption fails or succeeds, All’s Well, a comedy, depicts the successful grafting of an orphaned child into a new family. It is perhaps, then, the very nature of the romance genre—the convention of birth families lost and then
rediscovered—that prevents Shakespeare from portraying the definitive grafting of a child onto an adoptive stock in *The Winter’s Tale* and *Cymbeline*.

Grafting signifies a type of generation that exists apart from “natural” proliferation. I will demonstrate that Shakespeare uses grafting to displace and interrogate forms of biological reproduction. Adoption, described through the metaphor of grafting, negates the need to create genealogical children. As a substitute for biological reproduction, the plays employ instead a kind of procreative writing: children are incorporated into their adopted families by being grafted, or written, into them. While *The Winter’s Tale* and *Cymbeline* depict fathers as grafters, *All’s Well* presents women as horticulturalists. By linking botanical propagation to human familial formation and female gardeners, the play ultimately excludes men from generation and rejects heteronormative models of procreation. Both the Countess and Helena employ the grafting metaphor, placing the power of alternative familial propagation in female hands. Helena is not only an adopted daughter but also eventually a wife who joins herself to a new familial stock; the horticultural image of the graft illuminates both her marital and adoptive attachments. Emotional, adoptive attachment in *All’s Well* ultimately acts as a substitute for blood. Children in the play are not forced, as my epigraph suggests, “to draw their nourishment from the sap that comes to them” in their mother’s wombs; instead, they might draw their sustenance from elsewhere.
“Diverse colours, and diverse savours”: Early Modern Grafting

The comparison of adoption to grafting hinges on the fact that both practices mimic biological creativity. That is, they both imitate and intervene in what is seen to be a natural process. Grafting, in its most basic form, involves the insertion of a scion from one plant into the stock, or stem, of another. In order to graft scion to stock, the base of the scion must be trimmed to a quill-like point and a slit must be created for it in the receptive plant. The insertion of the scion into the stock allows for the circulation of fluid and nutrients between the two plants and ensures that the scion is fed by its host. Connected by the gardener’s skill and through the use of a ligature, or tie, the two plants gradually merge and grow together. Grafting is an asexual form of reproduction, meaning that the part of the plant that grows as a result of the graft is not a cross between the scion and the stock, but is rather the scion itself, kept alive by its new base. The created plant is an amalgamation wherein elements of two distinct plants consist in a new, singular form. In order for a successful graft to take place, two closely related plants must be joined. A slip from a citrus tree cannot, for instance, be joined to the stock of a chestnut tree, but slips from a variety of citrus fruits might be grafted onto the stock of a lemon tree.

Leonard Mascall complains in A Book of the Arte and Manner How to Plant and Graffe All Sorts of Trees (1572) that the English were slow to take up the horticultural arts already flourishing in France, Holland, and Italy (Mascall, “The Epistle,” [n.p.]). Medieval continental Europeans showed great enthusiasm for the grafting of intricate
and unlikely trees. Although gardeners were often aware that the joining of disparate types of trees might not always result in successful grafts, they attempted these horticultural feats nonetheless. Petrus de Crescentiis, an Italian agriculturalist writing around 1305, noted, for instance, that it is “a great beauty and pleasure to have in one’s garden trees variously and marvelously grafted, and many different fruit growing on a single tree” (qtd. in Thacker 85). Horticultural guides such as the French Ménagerier de Paris (1394) taught readers how to graft their own marvels, allowing them to create “grapes without pips,” for example, by slitting a stock in the moonlight (qtd. in Thacker 85). Although grafting in England can be dated to the medieval period, the practice did not become popular until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when there was new interest in the cultivation of fruit trees (Henry 55). As England became increasingly affluent, high-quality dessert fruit—as seen in trade with horticulturally advanced countries on the continent—came into demand (Webber 29). Apples and pears had long been grown in England for the production of cider and perry, but gustatory fruit—the varieties of sweet, flavourful apples and pears that we recognize today—was not widely available. Rather than import fruit from the continent at great expense, the aristocracy introduced foreign, high-quality grafts to existing trees (Webber 29). Henry VIII later encouraged the commercial production of fine fruit and hired Richard Harris, a fruitier, to collect grafts from abroad. Although he was particularly interested in pippins, a type of apple, Harris also cultivated cherry and pear grafts, making New Garden, the king’s

27 See Braekman 19-39.
orchard at Teynham in Kent, the epicentre of large-scale fruit growing in England. Grafts from New Garden were sent for from all over the country (Webber 31-33).

As horticultural innovation became increasingly common in England, mastery of grafting became essential for English horticulturalists. Writing a tract to husbandmen in 1530, John Fitzherbert declares that

it is necessary / proftable / and also a pleasure to a
husbande to haue peeres / wardeynes / and apples of
dyuers sortes. And also cheryes / fylberdes / bulleys /
dampsons / plummes / walnuttes / and suche other. And therfore it is co-uenyent to lerne how thou shalt graffe.

(xlv)

The list of expected results from grafting was ever-expanding, and the combination of different types grew more ambitious. Rebecca Bushnell notes that early modern English gardening manuals

28 Shakespeare’s 2 Henry IV notably features Justice Shallow remarking to Falstaff “Nay, you shall see my orchard, where, in an arbour, we will eat last year’s pippin of mine own grafting” (5.3.1-3).

29 For an account of the increasing importance of grafting in early modern horticulture, see Henry 55-56.
show us men (and some women) not content with the status quo, jostling each other in the markets, experimenting, grafting and pruning, envisioning new designs—and, of course, writing and printing books …

These books not only disseminated the changing practices of gardening in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; they helped to shape that practice and the image of the English man and woman’s garden as a place of dreams.

(47-48)

These gardening manuals demonstrate that readers were led to believe that grafting was not a simple practice, but rather one that could offer complex and surprising outcomes. Giambattista Della Porta’s *Natural Magick* (1658), translated anonymously from the Italian *Magia naturalis* (1558), held that “not only every tree can be engrafted into every tree, but one tree may be adulterated with them all” (58), and felt that man could and should create anything. The anonymous English author of *The Crafte of Graffyng & Planting of Trees*, for example, asserted that an elm branch grafted onto an apple tree will bear apples (10). Similarly, Thomas Hill promises in *The Profitable Arte of Gardening* (1574) that it is possible to make one tree stock put forth fruits “of diverse colours, and diverse savours,” and he provides his readers with the instructions to do so (319). Following this work, Hill published *Natural and Artificial Conclusions* in 1581 and gave his readers information that would allow them to make “an hearb to growe, which shall
have many savors and taste” (38). Many early modern botanical writers adopted this optimistic stance on grafting, ensuring that their works conveyed a sense of the innovative manipulation that they believed horticulture made possible. Mascall, writing in 1572, even supplies directions for altering the shapes of fruit: “To make an Apple growe within a glasse, take a glasse what fashion ye list, and put your Apple therein when he is but small, and bind him fast to the Glass, and the Glass also to the tree, and let him growe, thus ye may have Apples of divers proportion, according to the fashion of your glasse” (77). The experimental spirit that pervades these horticultural works indicates a focus on change and manipulation, and on the celebration of artifice.

Francis Bacon, suggesting that various, seemingly incompatible fruit trees might be made to grow together, and explaining that plants and fruit can, with assistance, take on new forms, hailed horticulture’s potential for change and combination.30 He notes that “the artificial does not differ from the natural in form or essence, but only in the efficient; in that man has no power over nature except that of motion; he can put natural bodies together, and he can separate them; and therefore that whatever the case admits of uniting or disuniting of natural bodies…man can do everything” (4:254-255). For 30 Bacon claims that “it is reported, that in the Low Countries they will graft an apple-scion upon the stock of a colewort, and it will bear a great flaggy apple, the kernel of which, if it be set, will be a colewort, and not an apple.” He continues, “It were good to try whether an apple-scion will prosper if it be grafted upon a sallow, or upon a poplar,” and notes that he has “heard that it hath been tried upon an elm, and succeeded” (487).
those, like Bacon, who believed that man’s manipulation of nature held endless opportunities, horticulture was a means of initiating new kinds of creation. Even when horticultural literature—such as the anonymous The Orchard, and the garden containing certaine necessarie, secret, and ordinarie knowledges in grafting and gardening (1602)—advocated a cautious approach to grafting, the hope that something innovative might be created was always present. The Orchard suggests initially that the fanciful trees imagined by Hill, Bacon, and others are not possible:

You must have still regard that you imp kind upon kind, as apples upon apples, peares upon peares: for he that graffeth strange upon strange; as peares upon apples, and apples on peares, and such like, although it be done often for pleasures sake, yet will it not last: for the naturall nourishment is so that it will hardlie nourish a strange kind of fruit. (9)

Elaborate grafts are pleasurable, according to the author, but have no hope of survival. Implicit in this set of instructions is the idea of compatibility: as grafting literature advanced, there was an ever-increasing interest in ensuring that the uniformity of type was upheld and that grafting experiments did not become uncontrollable. And yet, toward the end of The Orchard, the author asserts that although grafting kind with kind is important, the truly persistent and experimental gardener might have luck in mixing “contrarie kinds” and could end up creating “manie wonders” (20). Although the author
recognizes that imping “strange upon strange” will not create a lasting and healthy tree, he or she holds out hope that the “secret” knowledge of grafting might yet produce something entirely new.

The belief that something novel might come from grafting fuelled debates about the technique’s legitimacy, prompting some authors of horticultural treatises to defend grafting and horticulture as arts sanctioned by God. Mara Miller observes that gardens have always held “an ambiguous status in a number of different respects—between poles of ‘art’ and / or the ‘artificial’ on the one hand and ‘Nature’ on the other, between art and craft, and between fine and applied art” (72). Horticulture pits man’s skill against God’s or Nature’s creations; early modern horticulturalists often believed that whatever combination they could envision might take literal shape through grafting. In effect, they positioned themselves as nature’s masters. Della Porta, for instance, states that “Art, being as it were Natures Ape, even in her imitation of Nature, effecteth greater matter then Nature doth” (73). He describes how, through grafting, fruit can be produced at a new pace and can be grown to resemble anything its creator chooses. The horticulturalist, or “magician,” as Della Porta terms him, “takes his sundry advantages of Natures instruments, and thereby either hastens or hinders her work, making things


32 See Andrew Marvell’s “The Mower against Gardens” for a literary example of the anxiety associated with horticulture in the period.
ripe before or after their natural season, and so indeed makes Nature to be his instrument” (74). Horticulturalists were thought capable of harnessing nature, producing grafts that represented seemingly endless opportunity.

Dissatisfied with what the natural world had to offer, the horticulturalist could improve upon nature through grafting in much the same way as a poet, as Sir Philip Sidney asserts in his *Defense of Poesy* (1595), in verse “doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature” (23-24). Art in early modern England was often linked to horticulture. In *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham compares poetry to horticulture, championing both as practices through which man can alter the natural world. Puttenham notes that “we say arte is an ayde and coadiutor to nature ... as the good gardiner seasons his soyle by sundrie sorts of compost,” claiming that the gardener and poet both assist nature. Puttenham, like Sidney, also believes that poetic and horticultural art can even surpass nature:

The gardiner by his arte ... will embellish the same in citue, shape, odour, and taste, that nature her selfe woulde never have done, as to make the single gillifloure, or marigold, or daisie, double, and the white rose redde, yellow, or carnation, a bitter mellon sweete; a sweet apple soure; a plumme or cherrie without a stone; a pear without core or kernel, a goord or coucumber like to a horne or any
other figure he will; any of which things nature could not
doe without mans helpe and arte. (305)

Puttenham thus envisions the gardener and the poet as comparable creators.
Horticultural art makes it possible to fashion that which did not exist previously with
skill and invention, just as the poet makes fictional improvements to the world. In
creating “a plumme or cherrie without a stone,” or changing the taste of a “sweet apple
soure” — both results attributed to grafting — the gardener-poet generates something
new and fantastic, modifying that which is “natural” to suit his or her creative vision.

“The adopted stock”: Classical Sources and Familial Metaphors

Those who wanted to learn the secrets of grafting looked to ancient texts for
information. Hill, for example, acknowledges “the authors out of which this worke of
Gardening is gathered” and lists Pliny, Cato, Theophrastus, and Aristotle, “among
sundrie others,” as sources for his text (Profitable A.i.). While none of these classical
authors accounts for the origin of grafting, their opinions of the technique together laid
the foundation for the ways in which early modern horticulturalists understood plant
propagation and the interaction between stock and scion. Some classical authors
esteemed the interdependent nature of grafting — a scion relies upon its host stock for
survival — while they simultaneously emphasized the mystery and peculiarity of the art.
Virgil, for instance, describes in *Georgics* (c.29 B.C.E.) the joining of two species of trees into one:

… nec longum tempus, et ingens

exit ad caelum ramis felicibus arbos,

miratastque novas fronds et non sua poma

… it isn't long before

A new great tree is towering toward the sky,

Exulting in its boughs, and full of wonder

At its foliage and its fruit, so unfamiliar. (53)

Observing that a grafted tree becomes a visual hybrid wherein two distinct species can be identified, and imagining the tree’s own admiration for its synthetic duality, Virgil celebrates one tree’s cultivation and support of another. The personified stock is awestruck that something foreign grows as a part of itself. In his *Natural History* (c.77 C.E.), Pliny the Elder likewise describes grafting in terms of support and influence. He notes the sense of combination and interrelation involved:

Peculiaris inpudentia est nucibus insitorum quae faciem parentis

sucumque adoptionis exhibent, appellate ab utroque nucipruna.
Plums grafted on a nut-tree show a remarkable effrontery,
displaying the appearance of the parent tree and the juice of the
adopted stock; they take their name from each, being called nut-
plums. (316-17)

The nut-plum is a combination of both species, according to Pliny. Although it looks like its “mother” graft, it is flavored by its adoptive stock, and so exists as something between the two. Fostering is inherent in grafting, as Pliny makes clear, because the stock, supporting its newly grafted scion, must nurture something alien.

In his observation of nut-plums, Pliny assigns maternal and adoptive characteristics to their old and new stocks. He also notably uses the language of the family to describe horticulture. Pliny thus renders grafting, a complex practice, in recognizable terms by associating it with familial relation and adoption. Ancient authors frequently envisioned human, plant, and animal life as analogous. Aristotle, for example, refers to plants as “rooted animals,” just as Anaxagoras before him describes them as a kind of animal secured in the soil.\footnote{For a detailed account of Anaxagoras’ views on the connections between plant and animal life and Aristotle’s adoption of these views, see Morton 24. Morton also offers a general account of the history of botany that describes the links the ancients imagined to exist between plants and other living things (19-57).} Perhaps the most fascinating account of
the similarities between human and plant development is Hippocrates’ “On the Nature of the Child” (c.400 B.C.E.), part of a group of the Greek physician’s embryological treatises, which examine generation and heredity. Although the treatise describes the conception and development of human embryos, a discussion of arboreal reproduction in the middle of the text eventually overshadows human concerns: Hippocrates moves from an account of a mother’s nourishment of her child in the womb to an explanation of how trees and plants receive sustenance from the soil. A series of similes connects the two processes. Describing the development of embryos, for instance, Hippocrates explains that “in due course the bones at their extremities branch out just as in a tree it is the tips of the branches which are last to shoot forth twigs” (331). He thus draws a parallel between the growth of tree branches and the way in which a “child’s fingers and toes become differentiated” (331). In an abrupt transition, Hippocrates then offers an explanation for how a graft can be attached successfully to the stock of another tree. He observes that just as an embryo depends upon its mother’s womb for its nutrition, plants growing in the earth receive their nutrients from their surroundings (334). Concluding that grafted slips, like non-grafted trees, draw their nutrients from the ground rather than from the stock of the tree onto which they are grafted, Hippocrates asserts that grafts maintain their natural characteristics. He argues, that is, that the grafted fruit is fashioned by the conditions of the soil out of which it grows, not the stock onto which it is transplanted. “The process of growth in plants and in humans is exactly the same” (340), he concludes, and the graft depends upon the soil just as a child depends upon its mother.
Although the connection forged between embryological development and artificial plant propagation strikes the modern reader as somewhat unusual, Hippocrates asserts that he “could hardly avoid giving a complete account of the subject” of “trees and their fruit” in his embryological treatise (340). The comparison of human breeding and horticultural development, I suggest, is purposeful: in relating the two kinds of generation, Hippocrates aligns artificial proliferation and natural reproduction. He thus questions the extent to which a plant’s or a person’s characteristics are inherited or influenced by biological and environmental factors. The inclusion of a description of the technique of grafting in a treatise on embryonic development complicates the consideration of simple environmental factors; it forces a deliberation of what might happen when plants are displaced from their native soil or are combined with different stocks.

I am less concerned here with why exactly Hippocrates compares embryos and trees, however, than I am with what this analogy means to those who inherit it in the early modern period. The metaphor linking the human and the horticultural is passed down to early modern authors and allows for an investigation of the ways in which metaphorical language is used to formulate and understand the world.  

I am indebted to Elizabeth D. Harvey for allowing me to read her forthcoming chapter on metaphor and generation in the early modern period entitled “Seeds of Time: Organs of Conception in Helkiah Crooke’s *Mikrocosmographia* and Spenser’s *Faerie Queene.*” In her work on medical metaphors, Harvey posits that botanical analogies and metaphors are used to shed light
times, metaphor was recognized as useful for naming things that were newly conceived, or yet to be understood. “In naming something that does not have a proper name of its own, metaphor should be used,” Aristotle counsels, establishing the rhetorical device as a tool for identification (3.2.12). As Henry Peacham observes in the early modern period, metaphors “give pleasant light to darke things, thereby removing unprofitable and odious obscurite” (13). Puttenham also notes under his “causes” of metaphor that the device is used out of “necessitie or want of a better word” (149). Rendering the unfamiliar familiar, metaphor explains a foreign concept in common terms. Writing in the twentieth century, Paul Ricoeur views metaphor as invigorating. “Metaphor is that strategy of discourse,” he notes, “by which language divests itself of the function of direct description in order to reach the mythic level where its function of discovery is set free” (247). Allocating to one idea the sign of another, more well-established idea, metaphor forges new logical boundaries. In Ricoeur’s model of metaphor, poetic language has a re-descriptive, rather than a simply descriptive, function. Metaphor enables people to describe reality indirectly, he suggests, and to remake it how they choose. Pliny’s familial metaphor re-describes grafting, creating an alternate way in which to explain and envision the practice. He produces a conceptual connection between familial relation and the practice of horticulture.

on the hidden qualities of the reproductive system. Harvey’s conception of metaphor as a tool for explaining that which is occluded from human understanding has influenced my own work.
Whereas Pliny uses a familial metaphor to render horticultural practices intelligible, horticultural metaphor in the early modern period elucidates the complexities of familial relation. The early modern family tree, for instance, is a metaphorical expression of genealogical connection, demonstrating lineage by specifying a person’s ancestors through the recognizable referent of the tree. Consanguineous relations are identified as they branch out from a common stock. The exact origins of the family tree are unknown, but the image dates at least to the twelfth century, when Jesse-trees, artistic representations of the genealogy of Christ, became popular. Styled after the metaphorical account of Christ’s descent from Jesse in Isaiah, which states that “a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots” (11:1), the trees map the family in arboreal terms. In these images, a stock typically grows from the prostrate Jesse’s abdomen. Christ’s relatives are shown as branches of this stock; Mary and her son are located at the top of the tree.

A somewhat similar chart possibly predates the Jesse-tree: the arbor iuris, another antecedent of the typical European family tree, was devised in the sixth or seventh century and used in medieval law. Created to give lawyers a map of those family members who were closely related, the document was used to solve matters of inheritance in civil law (Wilkins 62-63).35 A series of columns joins relatives by extending

35 Wilkins discusses M. Conrat’s study of the arbor iuris in relation to Book IV of the Sententiae of Julius Paulus. Conrat, Wilkins notes, suggests that the diagram may have been developed to
above, below, and to each side of a person named at a central point in the diagram. The term *arbor* is used only figuratively to suggest the connections made by a tree’s branches; there is no arboreal decoration.\(^\text{36}\) Later, canonists adopted a model of relation similar to the *arbor iuris* and used it to illustrate permissible marriages between relatives (Wilkins 63). Boccaccio’s *De Genealogia deorum gentilium* (1360) is the first known secular representation of familial relation that in fact uses the image of a tree. The text, illustrated by thirteen trees that show the lineage of the classical gods, contains, as Ernest H. Wilkins notes, “the first non-biblical genealogical charts in which stems, branches, and leaves appear” (61).\(^\text{37}\) After Boccaccio, and in keeping with the imagery of the Jesse-tree, European family records were often documented using tree structures. Employing a botanical model to assemble, display, and verify relatedness, the family illustrate the eleventh chapter of the book, in which consanguinity is discussed in relation to inheritance. The diagram appeared in several treatises on civil law (Wilkins 63).

\(^{36}\) The term *arbor iuris* was used as early as 874 C.E. See Wilkins 63.

\(^{37}\) Wilkins observes that the *arbor iuris* and the Jesse tree are apparently unrelated. His article explores the ways in which Boccaccio’s genealogical trees, however, are derived from both templates. Wilkins also notes Boccaccio’s familiarity with legal knowledge. Roman *stenma*—collections of shrines or paintings representing deceased family members as connected by lines—preceded European genealogical charts, according to Wilkins, but appear to be distinct from them (62).
tree explicates relation by rendering it visually. The influence of the family tree permeates early modern familial discourse: the terms *stock* and *root* are commonly used to indicate the source of a line of descent; a *branch* refers to the portion of a family derived from a particular ancestor; and *scions* and *slips* are descendants.

Shakespeare’s use of the grafting metaphor participates in and perpetuates the horticultural discourse of the period, and likely derives in part from the metaphor of the family tree. He envisions adoption through the grafting metaphor because “natural,” or biological, families are already imagined through the metaphor of the tree. To describe adoption in terms of grafting presents the opportunity to extend the metaphor of the family tree; to substitute, insert, or make improvements to the image where necessary; and to change the outline of a familial structure by altering who might be included in it. Grafting represents a different method of familial production and conveys the possibility that people who are not related by blood or marriage might become part of the same family tree. By deploying a set of natural and genealogical associations in service of human adoption, Shakespeare’s horticultural metaphor explains the practice of adoption while allowing audiences to see the potential for unusual familial formation that lies within a mixed family.
The Winter’s Tale: Horticultural Manipulation and the Art of Survival

There has to date been a rich critical discussion about art, class, bastardy, and marriage in relation to grafting in The Winter’s Tale, but Perdita’s specific status as an adopted child has not yet been scrutinized in light of the play’s horticultural concerns. Critics have typically overlooked the relevance of the grafting debate between Perdita and Polixenes to Perdita’s position as an adopted child. Perdita is a kind of “grafted” girl, brought up by one family but belonging biologically to another. Her negative opinion of the combination of two stocks of flowers is therefore ironic, given that, in Bohemia, she is herself figuratively attached to a familial stock that is not naturally her own.

Shakespeare uses grafting in The Winter’s Tale to draw attention not only to the amalgamation of people from different classes, but also to the competing roles of nature and influence in the development of an adopted child. Perdita’s encounter with Polixenes at the sheep-shearing festival presents her adoption in horticultural terms,

38 See in particular Harold S. Wilson 114-20; Knight 105.; and Egan 56-89. For a consideration of Perdita as an adopted child, see Novy, “Multiple,” esp. 191-93 and 195-97 and Novy, Reading 67-86.

39 Novy notes that the defense that Polixenes “uses of the grafting that created these flowers [the gillyvors] is a defense that can also be made of adoption as itself natural” (Reading 83), but she stops short of identifying Perdita, as I do, as herself a “grafted” child who survives because of her attachment to a stronger, safer stock. Novy does not analyze the play’s horticultural focus or the analogous terms in which grafting and adoption are conceived in the period.
urging the audience to compare her rearing to the careful cultivation of a hybrid plant. At issue is not only whether Perdita’s biological characteristics dominate those that she might acquire from her adoptive parents, but also whether she is more attached to her birth family or to her adoptive family once her biological identity is revealed. The play’s horticultural argument, then, alludes to Perdita’s familial circumstances and forces the audience to evaluate them: we are asked whether Perdita’s adoptive graft is successful.

Robert Greene’s Pandosto (1595), the source text for The Winter’s Tale, does not mention grafting, but it devotes a significant portion of its narrative to tracing the effects of adoption on both children and parents. Although Mopsa, the wife of Porrus, a shepherd, is at first jealous of the child whom her husband brings home and believes that the girl is his illegitimate offspring, she reveals eventually that she hopes that God, “seeing they could get no children, [has] sent them this little babe to be their heir” (201). Unable to produce offspring of their own, Porrus and Mopsa adopt the girl in order to expand their family. The couple “[begin] both of them to be very fond of [the baby]” (201), and they raise her in ignorance of her status as an adopted child. Fawnia, the child, calls her adoptive parents “Dad” and “Mam,” and is so skilled at rural life that the sheep prosper under her care (201). Possessing a child’s devoted love for her parents, she “honour[s] and obey[s] them with such reverence” (201) that all of their neighbours note her exemplary behavior. Fawnia’s affinity for country life, however, gives way to her biologically determined characteristics at the age of sixteen and “her natural disposition [does] bewray that she [is] born of some high parentage” (202). The question
of how well an adopted child might be amalgamated with an adoptive family, then, is present in the foundational material for Shakespeare’s play.

Grafting is present from the beginning of *The Winter’s Tale* and is used to express a sense of idyllic connection and community. When Leontes and Polixenes are reunited, it is said that, “trained together in their childhoods,” the kings of Sicilia and Bohemia, “rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now” (1.1.22-25). The two men, it is implied, formed an attachment early in life and combined their figurative roots. As a result, they developed as one, singular individual and their affection now “branches,” or expands and grows, like the limbs of a tree that has been grafted successfully. Leontes and Polixenes refer to one another as “brother” and were raised, as Polixenes reminisces, “as twinn’d lambs that did frisk i’ th’ sun, / And bleat the one at th’ other” (1.2.67-68). From the opening scenes, a grafting metaphor creates a sense of artificial, non-biological, pseudo-familial attachment—in this case through friendship that is described in pastoral terms.40

The play’s focus on the idealism of the natural world and on its potential to foster a kind of brotherhood between those who are not actually related suggests that a natural environment prompts friendship and attachment. As the bond between Leontes and Polixenes breaks down, however, so too does this vision of the natural world as

40 For an excellent analysis of the play’s treatment of the friendship between the two kings, see Shannon 199-222.
protector and joiner. Convinced that his friend is the father of the child that his wife, Hermione, carries, Leontes discounts his wife’s baby as a bastard and orders Antigonus to bear the child to “some remote and desert place” (2.3.75) outside his kingdom where she will be left “(Without more mercy) to [her] own protection / And favour of the climate” (2.3.177-78). While Leontes and Polixenes were “rooted,” or attached each to the other in childhood, the young Perdita is left without any kind of support.

Although she is deserted and must rely on “favour,” or chance, Perdita survives because she is cared for by the shepherd. She forms with him what appears to be an enduring familial bond: the shepherd treats her as his daughter and Perdita lives unaware of her biological origins. Although the shepherd thinks that “some scape” (3.3.71) or indiscretion can be read on the baby’s face when he finds her, and seems to believe that some illicit “behind-door-work” (3.3.74-75) was involved in her generation, he accepts her and is thereby presented in direct contrast to Leontes, who has just rejected her because of her supposed illegitimacy. To the shepherd, Perdita is not as warm as those who begot her (3.3.75-76), recalling Leontes’ remark that Hermione and Polixenes’ actions are “too hot” (1.2.108) and implying that he does not saddle the child with what he assumes are its parents’ sexual transgressions (Leggatt 153). Accepting her as a kind of blessing, a “[thing] new-born” (3.3.113), he decides to take her in before he ever discovers the gold that is bundled with her. He is thus unlike his counterpart in Greene’s Pandosto, as Novy observes, who takes up the abandoned baby only after
discovering that she comes with financial benefits (Novy Reading 68). The shepherd’s willingness to incorporate a foreign child into his family underscores the play’s fascination with familial hybridity. An examination of how well attached Perdita becomes to her new relations occupies much of the play’s later action, and is most apparent in the famous argument that takes place at the sheep-shearing festival.

The dramatic irony of the garden debate between Polixenes and Perdita, the supposed shepherdess, occurs, as critics often note, because although the king disapproves of the relationship between his son and a low-born woman, he approves of the horticultural practice of marrying “a gentler scion to the wildest stock” in the cross-breeding of plants (4.4.93). Polixenes, of course, takes the side of the debate in favour of combination in order to provoke Perdita: he has come to observe his son at the sheep-shearing festival precisely to stop the combination of a base stock (Perdita) and a noble scion (Florizel). And while Perdita herself is prepared to change ranks by marrying Prince Florizel, someone of a higher station (to the best of her knowledge), she condemns the mixing of plants that Polixenes endorses. Perdita appears to believe, as Montaigne does in his essay “Of the Caniballes,” that man has, by his inventions, “surcharged the beauties and riches of [Nature’s] works” and has “over-choaked hir” (101-02).

41 In Pandosto, Porrus debates whether he can afford to raise an abandoned child. He eventually discovers, however, that the baby girl comes with a purse of gold and that he can then justify fostering her “with the sum to relieve his want” (Greene 200).
Laurie Shannon argues that Perdita’s exchange with Polixenes provides metaphors “by which notions of both friendship practice and the counselor’s craft may be further specified” (215). Polixenes, she maintains, “essentially theorizes the process that results in friendship’s ‘artificial body’ — two bodies are literally incorporated by being grafted into one” (216). While grafting is used initially to describe friendship, the argument between Perdita and Polixenes, I propose, is far more suggestive of a familial analogue. Such an interpretation can be illuminated by examining horticultural metaphors of the family. In an effort to prove the shepherdess hypocritical in her detestation of grafting and her willingness to marry his son, Polixenes argues that grafting can “mend nature” (4.4.96) and that “the art itself is nature” (4.4.97). He insists that the combination of low and high can make a “bark of baser kind” conceive a “bud of nobler race” (4.4.94-95). Not only do Polixenes’ comments allude to social standing — they also incite a comparison of Perdita’s two fathers. “Bark of baser kind,” in this context, refers to the stock of a tree. As I have noted previously, however, the term stock was also used frequently figuratively in the period to indicate the source of a line of descent (OED, “stock” n.1. 3.). Typically, then, the stock, or the tree itself, referred to the family patriarch. The notion presented by Polixenes that a base stock can foster a noble bud therefore draws attention to the possibility that the care that the noble Perdita has received from the base shepherd has fostered her growth in a way that her royal, biological father could not.42 Raised by a loving shepherd who has ensured that she

42 It should be noted that Hermione is, of course, a fit parent, and could likely have raised the
thrives, Perdita fares far better in rural Bohemia than she would have in the dangerous
court of Sicilia, although she is unaware of it. A “bud of nobler race,” it seems, does
indeed have a better chance of survival in the play if it is grafted to a wild, hearty stock.

The idea that a delicate scion could be better cultivated by a robust stock was a
well-known tenet of grafting since the time of Theophrastus. Shakespeare capitalizes on
the implications of this principle here. Theophrastus, often considered the father of
horticulture, urges the amalgamation of fine scions with base stocks in order to produce
enhanced fruit. Transferred from a superior tree, but likely one that is delicate, such
scions are permitted to succeed because they take nourishment from something rougher
and healthier than they are. As Theophrastus observes, “the scion is better fed because
the stock is strong” and its transplantation therefore allows it to thrive (68). The Winter’s
Tale applies theories of grafting to familial formation, suggesting that Perdita’s
upbringing in Bohemia is as a graft that strengthens her development. Art is then indeed
promoted as something that can “mend nature,” just as adoption—itself an artificial or
synthetic process of familial formation—is shown to repair the potential damage that the

child well. Leontes, however, is clearly branded as a dangerous father at the play’s start.

Novy observes that the Shepherd’s “pastoral world seems, emotionally, a better environment
for child-rearing that the cold and suspicious world of the court” (Reading 68).
natural, or birth, family might cause a child. The shepherd grafts Perdita to his family
tree, allowing her to survive.

Perdita is not, however, shown to append seamlessly to her adoptive family; her
blood-based nobility is evident despite her humble upbringing. Rather than carry out
her job as hostess at the sheep-shearing festival, for instance, Perdita instinctively acts as
though she should be treated like a guest, and the shepherd scorns her for dereliction of
duty (4.4.55-69). His “old wife,” he claims, was “both pantler, butler, cook, / Both dame
and servant” at once, taking every opportunity she could to make her guests
comfortable (4.4.56-57). Expecting his adopted daughter to behave like her deceased
adoptive mother, the shepherd has not anticipated that Perdita might act in a different
style from that to which she was raised. Other characters also comment on her unusually
noble qualities. Polixenes declares that “nothing she does or seems / But smacks of
something greater than herself, / Too noble for this place” (4.4.157-59) and Florizel
observes that “she is as forward of her breeding as / She is i’ th’ rear’ [of his] birth”
(4.4.581-82). Her graft to the shepherd’s family has perhaps been formed, but it has not
fundamentally changed her high-born, presumably biologically inherited characteristics.
As Susan Baker notes, however, the shepherd can likely ascertain Perdita’s noble birth
because of her fine clothes and gold and, as a result, he may raise her with different
standards in mind, thereby influencing her behaviour (312). Ralph Austen admired the

44 For a detailed description of the “influence of heredity” in the play, see Novy, Reading 69-72.
The fact that “Grafts, and Buds should retaine their own natures, and not be altered into the nature of the Stock whereon they grow, but have power to digest, change, and assimilate this harsh and sower sap, into their own sweet and pleasant natures, and bring forth fruits accordingly” (54). Perdita’s biological nature, sheltered by the shepherd’s family and allowed to survive because of it, is not fundamentally altered by her environment. The extent to which the play finally endorses the concept of a blended, adoptive family is therefore left somewhat ambiguous, as Perdita does not always seem to merge with her adopted surroundings. Although she is raised in rural Bohemia, the Sicilian court shines through in all that she does.

The reintroduction of Perdita’s birth family into The Winter’s Tale further complicates the question of to which family the girl ultimately belongs. Once it is established that Perdita is the daughter of Leontes and Hermione, the girl suddenly finds herself with two distinct families, one biological and one adoptive. Shakespeare at first appears to imply that the two families might be united to form one mixed family unit. The shepherd’s son suggests that Perdita’s birth and surrogate families are now indistinct from one another when he reports that, upon their meeting, Leontes and Polixenes call his father “brother.” He also states that Florizel calls him “brother” and his father “father” (5.2.140-45). As Novy observes, this brief dialogue suggests the “utopian possibilities of an extended cross-class family of biological and adoptive parents” (“Multiple” 193). The three families—those of the shepherd, of Leontes, and of Polixenes—at first seem to be one. It is then reasonable to expect, given the shepherd’s
son’s report, that all of Perdita’s family members would be present at the play’s recognition scene and family reunion. Perdita’s adoptive family is absent, however, when Paulina unveils Hermione. The princess is, therefore, ultimately left with her biological relatives. While Leontes and Polixenes are reunited and are described again as though they form a singular person—it is reported that “There was casting up of eyes, holding up of hands, with countenance of such distraction, that they were to be known by garment, not by favour” (5.2.47-50)—the audience is left unconvinced that the shepherd’s family will join them. The shepherd’s story of a restructured, blended family that includes both biological and simulated familial relation is potentially progressive, but it is only reported and is never staged. Excluded from the play’s final scene, the shepherds fade from view.

Although she once appeared to accept the shepherd as her father, the degree to which Perdita considers herself attached to the man and his son remains unspoken at the play’s close. Before she discovers that the shepherd is not her biological parent, Perdita cries out “O my poor father!” when she thinks that he might be condemned to death by Polixenes (5.1.201). Such concern for the shepherd, however, disappears after her reunion with Leontes and Hermione; Perdita is silent on the subject of her adoptive family in the final moments of the play. The shepherd and his son are also guilty, however, of this apparent willingness to forgo adoptive ties. Earlier in the play, for instance, they are eager to report Perdita’s adopted status to Polixenes in order to avoid any connection to her and her crime of aspiring to marry a prince (4.4.820-22). The men
believe that if they can disassociate themselves from Perdita biologically and prove that she is, as the shepherd’s son states, “none of / Your daughter nor my sister” (4.4.821-22), they can avoid being punished for her transgressions.45 The play, then, at once demonstrates the potential for successful non-biological familial relation and undermines it. The possibility for familial combination exists, but it never fully materializes; the action concludes with a reunion of biologically related characters from which the adoptive family is excluded.

The addition of grafting imagery to The Winter’s Tale ensures that the concept of familial combination present in its source text, Pandosto, is used to full advantage, bringing into greater relief the problems and possibilities of non-biological family ties. Grafting represents the ultimate pastoral agricultural form. An analogue to animal husbandry, the practice of breeding livestock, grafting converts nature into something orchestrated by human design. It turns nature, that is, into a garden where plants hold within them innovative and transformative possibilities. Through the use of horticultural metaphor, The Winter’s Tale expresses the novel potential of an unusual familial combination: Perdita is allowed to survive because she is a grafted child. But the connections formed in the play between plants and humans also force the audience to

45 Novy observes, however, that this disturbing, “fear-motivated virtual disowning brings about the happy ending, as Polixenes recognizes Perdita as Leonte’s lost daughter and sends word to him” (“Multiple” 193).
ask whether certain grafts might fail to take and if the combination of non-biological family members is perhaps impossible.

_Cymbeline: Re-grafting and the Preservation of Stock_

Any alteration of the supposedly natural states of either plants or humans in _Cymbeline_ is shown to be dangerous or temporary. The play ultimately uses a metaphorical reversal of horticultural practices to signal the restoration of familial and social harmony. Like _The Winter's Tale_, _Cymbeline_ envisions familial combination through grafting, but the play instead uses re-grafting—the reparative grafting of displaced scions onto their original stocks—as its principal metaphor. Kidnapped by Belarius in their infancies and raised as his children, Cymbeline’s sons are brought up outside the royal court into which they are born. Whereas in _The Winter's Tale_ grafting imagery emphasizes Perdita’s possible attachment to the shepherd’s family, her position between her two families, in _Cymbeline_ it implies that Guiderius and Arviragus must be reunited with their birth “stock” in order to bring strength and resolution to the troubled royal family. Visiting Posthumus, the king’s son-in-law, in a dream, the god Jupiter indicates the requirements for the resolution of the young man’s various predicaments. Peace will be brought to the royal family, Jupiter tells Posthumus, when the “lopped branches” of a “stately cedar” that have been “dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow” (5.3.204-05). By the play’s close, it is clear that Cymbeline is the cedar tree and that his missing sons are the branches that have been “dead,” or have
been taken from him. The “jointing,” or grafting, of the branches/princes back onto their biological stock, Jupiter claims, will ensure that they are revitalized. Grafting imagery is thus employed to express the re-formation of the blood family, not the splicing and combination of various non-related family units. In thus imagining grafting, the play demonstrates that the reconstruction of Cymbeline’s family tree involves the restoration of a type of tree that is unadulterated, or “old stock,” rather than envisioning a newly blended, grafted family tree. Cymbeline, therefore, endorses a view of adoption that holds that children will fare best with their biological families. Like The Winter’s Tale, however, the play does, for a time, present a compelling image of the adoptive family.

The play conceptualizes in botanical terms children who form familial bonds with those to whom they are not biologically related. Posthumus, who has been Cymbeline’s ward since infancy, for instance, is imagined as being cultivated by the king. The first gentleman describes how Cymbeline “breeds [his ward], and makes him of his Bedchamber” (1.1.42). The care and education that the king awards Posthumus, the gentleman notes, “in’s spring became a harvest” (1.1.46). That is, the successful “breeding” of Posthumus yields a crop, or is fruitful. This metaphor for the ward’s edification and development is repeated later in the play in reference to the two kidnapped princes. Belarius observes that the “valor that wildly grows in them [the princes], but yields a crop / As if it had been sow’d” (4.2.179-81). This second use of the metaphor produces the opposite effect from the first. Whereas Cymbeline’s cultivation of Posthumus’s talents results in the boy’s improvement, Belarius does not need to
cultivate the princes at all. They are left to grow in the wild, but instead mature as though they were carefully tended. “Sowing” here is not viewed as a manipulation of the prince’s natures, but is rather a manifestation of what is “naturally” theirs by birth. Guiderius and Arviragus are thus resistant to the environment in which they find themselves and instead develop as though they were still attached to their biological family. Belarius’ influence as their adoptive father might, of course, shape them more than he admits. The princes hold within them some combination of the untamed and the refined, as Belarius observes: they are at once “wild” and “sow’d.” They are, by their very positions as royal children adopted into a pastoral family, like hybrid plants that combine two species into one.

In addition to its focus on describing the development of children in botanical terms, Cymbeline exhibits, from its beginning, a fascination with the interdependence and interconnectivity of blood relatives. Such a focus establishes the “naturalness” of biological relation and asserts that biological relatives ultimately belong together. Blood relations in the play—particularly parents and children—are shown to be almost symbiotic, as though family members are physically and emotionally reliant on one another, each living or languishing depending on the condition of their relations. Before

Belarius comments several times on the innate princely behaviour that he also observes in the boys: “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).
the audience members are introduced to Posthumus, they are told about his lineage and family history. Unable to delve him “to the root” (1.1.42), or to trace his genealogy to its origin, the First Gentleman in Act 1, Scene 1 attempts to give an account of Posthumus’s ancestry. He focuses in particular on the military accomplishments of Posthumus’s father, Sicilius. It is soon revealed, however, that Sicilius is dead, having “quit being” (1.1.38) after the battlefield deaths of Posthumus’s two brothers. Posthumus was, at the time of his father’s death, still in the womb. “Old and fond of issue” (1.1.37), Sicilius doted on his children; when they died, he could not live without them. The play thus introduces the notion that what physically affects a child will eventually also physically affect that child’s parents. Although Posthumus has never known his father, his attachment to him is inscribed in his identity: the name Posthumus Leonatus describes the fact that the boy was born after his father’s death.  

Later in the same scene, Cymbeline, expressing his anger at his daughter, Imogen, echoes Sicilius’s physical reliance on his children. Believing that his daughter “shouldst repair [his] youth,” or bring his youth back to him, but that she instead “heap’st / A year’s age on [him]” (1.1.133-34) because of her disobedience in marrying Posthumus, Cymbeline implies that Imogen shortens his life span. Her defiant actions affect him physically, causing him to age. Relatives are established to possess a kind of innate physical attachment.

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47 Posthumus also shares an attachment to his father, mother, and two brothers beyond the grave as they appear in a dream vision to call to the god Jupiter for help (5.3).
Just as parents are shown to be physically dependent on their children, siblings in *Cymbeline* are endowed with an intrinsic ability to recognize one another and to sense relation. Raised in a cave in the hard pastoral of the British woods, Guiderius and Arviragus, *Cymbeline’s* sons, believe that they are the biological children of Belarius, their kidnapper. The boys treat Belarius as their father and venerate the memory of Euriphile, the nurse whom they believed was their mother (3.3.103-05). Despite their ignorance of their blood origins, however, the princes are able to sense that they are biologically related to Imogen, their sister. But they do not know how to articulate what it is that they sense. Upon first meeting Imogen disguised as the male page Fidele, Guiderius announces that he would woo the boy if he were a woman, expressing a confused romantic interest in his own sibling (3.6.66-67). Arviragus, however, correctly identifies the connection that he feels toward the page as one of sibling love—albeit confused in gender—by declaring that he’ll “love him as [his] brother” (3.6.69). Each prince establishes an instantaneous bond with the supposed stranger who wanders into their cave. The brothers even go so far as to privilege Fidele’s life over the life of the man whom they think is their biological father. Although he does not know why it is that he loves Fidele, Arviragus is sure that if he had to choose between allowing Fidele or Belarius to die, he would single out “[his] father, not this youth” for death (4.2.24). While this decision appears initially to be counterintuitive—because Arviragus would rather

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48 Novy notes that such episodes provide examples of “mysterious affinity stemming from ‘blood’” (“Multiple” 201).
sacrifice the man whom he knows as his blood relative than one to whom he thinks he is unrelated—it is clear to the audience and to Belarius that the boy intuitively senses that Belarius is not his biological father. Belarius praises his adopted son’s choice in an aside, acknowledging that Arviragus’s instinctual rejection of someone unrelated to him is confirmation of his “breed of greatness,” his royal status (4.2.25). Cymbeline’s exclamation of “O rare instinct!” (5.4.381) when he learns that Guiderius and Arviragus “at first meeting loved” Imogen (5.4.379) although they did not know her as their sister epitomizes the play’s position on familial relation: those who are related by blood are aware of it intrinsically and act in each other’s best interest. Depictions of the interconnectivity of blood relatives anticipate the reunion of biological family members in the final scene and the metaphor of a reassembled family as a re-grafted tree that will “freshly grow” (5.3.205).

Negative examples of gardening and growing permeate Cymbeline, aligning natural, organic growth with the restoration of biological families. References to gardening and horticulture indicate the potential danger of these practices and suggest that any attempt to interfere with nature, or to use nature to an inappropriate end, can be hazardous. The Queen’s gardening practices, for example, testify to the evils associated with manipulation of the natural world. Although she has been taught by the physician Cornelius “to make perfumes.” to “distil,” and to “preserve” flowers for medicinal purposes (1.5.13), the Queen instead uses her knowledge of plant life to ill effect: she gathers flowers in order to extract their poisonous essences. Bushnell observes
that the early modern housewife often collected plants in order to prepare cosmetics and medicine for her household. It is therefore “odd,” Bushnell surmises, “that in this play this housewifely function … evokes a sense of danger” (120). The Queen’s gardening is made dangerous in order offset the more acceptable, “good” gardening that takes place at the play’s conclusion. Whereas the Queen uses nature to terrible ends, the horticultural metaphor of re-grafting that is associated with the play’s resolution constitutes an ostensibly positive form of gardening. Re-grafting is depicted favourably precisely because it is a reversal of artificial practices. It represents, in this particular case, a restoration of the natural, biological family. Cymbeline’s metaphorical re-grafting of his children is an affirming example of man’s manipulation of nature because it is not a manipulation at all; blood is reunited with blood as Cymbeline’s family is recombined.

As Robin Moffet observes, Shakespeare alludes to the Book of Ezekiel when he refers to the princes as the detached branches of a tree (216). In Ezekiel, the branches of a great cedar are dying. In an effort to repair them, God breaks them from the tree and transplants them to a mountaintop where they will thrive.49 Shakespeare’s use of the biblical tale differs from his source, however, in that Guiderius and Arviragus are

49 “Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent:/ In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell” (Ezekiel 17:22-23).
ensured their survival by being placed back onto their original, figurative tree, not by being removed from it. The riddle of the grafted tree in Shakespeare’s play also makes reference to both the Jesse-tree and to the Book of Romans, chapter 11. Moffet notes

50 In Romans, Paul expresses man’s dependence on his maker in agricultural terms. Explaining the detachment and reattachment of man to God’s ‘tree,’ he envisions the Jews as currently grafted out of God’s chosen people, but sees the possibility for their return, or their re-grafting, at the same time as he wishes that the Gentile Romans would appreciate their own attachment to God:

For if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; /Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. /Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be graffed in. /Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: /For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. /Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

/And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again. /For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive tree?
that Cymbeline’s tree is “constructed so that it will recall familiar biblical ideas and images without suggesting any one obvious line of interpretation” (217). By presenting Cymbeline’s family reunion as a re-grafting with biblical overtones, the play makes it an event of almost religious revelation.

Just how seamless the rejoining of the princes to Cymbeline’s family tree is, however, is questionable. As does Perdita, Guiderius and Arviragus display affection toward their adoptive father before they learn that they are in fact biologically related to another man. Assuring Belarius that they share in the risk that he takes as he speaks to Cymbeline in the final scene, the princes assert their bond with their supposed father (5.4.314-15). Although the boys grow up longing to live in the court and resent living in their “cell of ignorance” in the woods (3.3.33), they respect Belarius as the only parent they have ever known. As it is revealed in the final scene that Guiderius and Arviragus are in fact the biological sons of Cymbeline, the adoptive family is somewhat disbanded. But is not destroyed. Belarius is forgiven for kidnapping the boys and is called “brother” by Cymbeline (5.4.399) in much the same way that shepherd’s son in The Winter’s Tale reports that he and his father are accepted into the royal family. Belarius is allowed back

Just as the scion relies upon the stock for support, so does man depend upon God to sustain him. As Paul notes, the branches do not bear the root, but the root bears and cares for them. God is as able to lop off those “natural branches,” or people, to whom he is connected as easily as he is able to graft in new dependents.
into the court without punishment for his actions and appears, at least momentarily, to become part of a new, blended family.

It is clear, however, that such a hybrid family cannot ultimately exist: Cymbeline will be the boys’ father from now on as he claims that he is “the mother to the birth of all three” of his children when he discovers them (5.4.369), including the newly returned Imogen. Envisioning his lost children being reborn through him and therefore reinstituted into their birth family, Cymbeline ensures that they are all biologically his once again.\textsuperscript{51} Guiderius and Arviragus’ silence in this final scene, however, is telling: they never acknowledge Cymbeline as their father and they speak only to state that they know Imogen. Although the princes report to Cymbeline that they “at first meeting loved” (5.4.379) their sister, they do not verbally express the same sentiment for him. Arviragus does, however, acknowledge Posthumus, telling Cymbeline that Posthumus helped the princes in battle “as [he] did mean indeed to be [their] brother” (5.4.423) and they that are overjoyed that he is in fact their brother (in-law). Similarly, Imogen tells Belarius, who also acted as her adoptive parent in the woods for a time, that he is “her father too, and did relieve [her]/ to see this gracious season” (5.4.400-01). The princes’ silence toward Cymbeline amid the acknowledgement of pseudo-familial relation and expression of goodwill is striking. Although the final scene could be staged to show the

\[\text{Examining images of bith, pregnancy, and conception in } \textit{Pericles} \text{ and } \textit{Cymbeline}, \text{ Novy notes that such imagery is “often used metaphorically, and sometimes the point of the metaphor is to make the reunion of parents and children into a rebirth or a reconception” (Reading 74).}\]
princes’ excitement to be reunited with Cymbeline, the raw material for this sentiment is not present in the dialogue itself. While the play metaphorically re-grafts the boys to their biological father and family tree, therefore, the degree to which they wish to form a familial union with Cymbeline remains uncertain.

While Cymbeline goes to great lengths to establish blood relatives as interconnected and as belonging together, its conclusion leaves biological relation on somewhat unstable ground. Purity of stock is restored as the princes return to their blood family, but such a return is perhaps not entirely desired or favoured over their adoptive familial situation. Relatives are not as easily interchanged, Shakespeare might suggest, as scions are grafted, or re-grafted, onto a stock. Cymbeline, therefore, promotes adoptive familial bonds to a greater degree than does The Winter’s Tale, although it stops short of a endorsing them fully, and ultimately favours the biological family. It also, like The Winter’s Tale, features fathers as the horticulturalists, or architects, of their families. The shepherd, Belarius, and Cymbeline graft and create—or re-create, in the case of Cymbeline—their relations as they see fit. They are thus presented in contrast to the female horticulturalists in All’s Well That Ends Well.

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52 Novy cites George Bernard Shaw’s rewriting of the play’s last act to convey a similar point: “We three are fullgrown men and perfect strangers. / Can I change fathers as I’d change my shirt?” (“Multiple” 203). She observes that there is “little 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” (203).
**All’s Well That Ends Well: Female Agency and the Grafted Family**

Female power in *All’s Well* has been of longstanding critical concern. In particular, feminist critics of the play have often noted Helena’s significant agency. In an important discussion of the play’s use of the bed trick, for instance, Julia Briggs observes that Helena’s desire for Bertram “drives the play’s action forward” and demonstrates “trangressive overtones” (302). Similarly, Barbara Traister suggests that Helena’s skill as a physician lends her an authority that is remarkable for a female character (333-47).

Recent scholarship on *All’s Well*, however, has emphasized the ways in which Helena’s trangressive powers are mitigated by the play’s generic conventions. Jean Howard argues that all of Helena’s actions take place “safely within the ideology of wifely obedience” (50) and that she is embedded in a plot of “patriarchal ruin and repair” (44). Kathryn Schwarz likewise contends that Helena’s constancy toward Bertram reinforces patriarchal values. However, Schwarz also insists that Helena’s actions emphasize the extent to which the preservation of patriarchal ideology relies on the active and willing participation of women. Helena’s “constant will,” she maintains, works “primarily and indispensably to secure heterosocial relations” (206), but her deliberate and sustained reinscription of the norms upon which both marriage and comedy insist is “too audible”

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53 For a similar line of argument, see Asp 175-92.

54 See also Field, “‘Sweet Practicer, thy Physic I will try’” and Reilly, “‘Doctor She.’”
and thus underscores the workings of patriarchal ideology (221). Schwarz concludes that while Helena ultimately restores patriarchal hierarchy through her willing acquiescence to Bertram’s demands, “any victory of normative relations is always, at least potentially, pyrrhic” (227). Schwarz’s analysis is especially convincing in relation to the links that I will establish between grafting and female power.

Following Schwarz’s contention that Helena’s failure to invert patriarchal norms does not negate her ability to draw attention to the workings of patriarchal ideology, I suggest that although Helena finally metaphorically grafts herself into the role of the obedient wife and mother, figures of grafting in the play assert female agency and the possibility of circumventing typical methods of familial formation. The Countess’s own agency in her adoption of Helena is frequently overlooked in criticism. Carolyn Asp, for instance, acknowledges the Countess’s significant role in the play and describes her as “a kind and caring woman, a validator of Helena’s desire,” but ultimately determines that her effectiveness is limited and that she “accepts her position of dependence within the patriarchal order” (182). I maintain, however, that the Countess challenges the patriarchal order through her adoption of Helena and her use of horticultural metaphor. All’s Well features female grafters and excludes men, to a degree, from familial generation and formation, thereby moderating heteronormative and biological methods of procreation. Both the Countess and Helena use the grafting metaphor to emphasize their agency and their power over alternative methods of generation.
William Painter’s *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566)—a translation of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (ninth story, third day) and the most likely English source text for *All’s Well*—concerns Gilleta, “a Phisitions daughter of Narbon” who has lost her father and who loves Beltramo, Counte of Rossiglione (145). Shakespeare leaves out some of the details of Painter’s text from his play—Helena does not, for instance, bear Bertram twin sons who are presented at the play’s conclusion—but he also makes some additions, the most notable of which is the character of the Countess of Rossillion. The Countess not only provides Helena with a family by adopting her after her father’s death, but also acts as a foil for the King who takes her son Bertram as his ward. She is a creator and indicator of synthetic familial bonds; Shakespeare’s addition of the Countess to the narrative is crucial to the concept of familial relation in the play.

*All’s Well* has a distinctly generational focus. As many critics have observed, the Countess introduces birth as a notable theme in the play’s opening line: “In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband” (1.1.1). By combining an image of childbirth with a description of her husband’s death and her son’s departure, the Countess accentuates her role as mother. Over the course of the play, however, she modifies the standard, biological definition of the term “mother” and explores

55 Painter’s text was reprinted in 1569 and 1575 and was very popular.

56 On the play’s emphasis on childbirth see Osherow, “She is in the Right.” David M. Bergeron notes a hint of incest in the Countess’s first lines that confuses the boundary between father and son (176). See also Patricia Parker, “*All’s Well.*”
alternative forms of generation. As I have noted, the Countess creates an adoptive bond with Helena, emphasizing the organic nature of her feelings with the metaphor of a slip, grown from “foreign” seeds, becoming “native” to its new stock. Throughout the play, she insists on the success of this amalgamation and on the familial ties that it produces. Her understanding of familial relation assumes that wards and adoptive children are the social and familial equivalents of biological children; it imagines the adopted child growing into and becoming a part of its adoptive family.

Shakespeare calls attention to biological reproduction at several points in the play, exploring the role of gender in propagation and setting the Countess apart as an innovative, nonsexual genitor. The Clown, for instance, wants to marry and asks the Countess for her permission, insisting upon the importance of having biological children. He believes that he will “never have the blessing of God till/ [he] have issue a’ [his] body” (1.3.22-23) and that “barnes are blessings” (1.3.23-24). Desperately anxious to reproduce, he is the play’s comical example of natural generation. Paroles, whose argument with Helena over the uses of virginity constitutes another comedic moment in the play, also emphasizes the naturalness of biological reproduction. A woman should not preserve her virginity, he states, because no virgin was ever conceived by a virgin: “to speak on the part of virginity is to accuse your mothers” (1.1.134-35). The Clown and Paroles accentuate the male role in propagation, drawing attention to the physicality of reproduction. The Countess, however, imagines adoption as an unconventional, social way of becoming a mother to Helena, circumventing the need for the male role in
procreation. Helena, of course, had a biological father, as the play makes clear, but the Countess gains a daughter through nonsexual means. Although she never gave “a mother’s groan” (1.3.142), or felt labor pains, for her ward because she did not give birth to her, the Countess claims Helena as her own grafted child (1.3.139-41), a child gained without male involvement. Grafting thus provides the Countess with a metaphor for propagation that excludes sex.

In the first interview between the Countess and Helena, the women struggle to define the terms of their relationship. Upon her ward’s entrance, the Countess announces “I am mother to you” (1.3.133). But Helena, unwilling to accept this term, responds by calling her guardian “mine honourable mistress” (1.3.134). Replacing the language of relation with that of social deference, she excuses herself from being considered part of the Countess’s family. The Countess, however, insists on eliminating any reference to class and maintains that she is not a mistress, but a mother (1.3.134). Helena’s reaction to the term “mother” is violent—the Countess notes that she looks as though she has seen a serpent (1.3.136)—and the Countess answers by describing their bond with the grafting metaphor, thus assuring her ward that she can become a part of the Rossillion family through adoption. Despite the Countess’s efforts, however, Helena returns to insisting on social position and states that Bertram cannot be her brother because she is “from humble, he from honoured name” (1.3.151). It soon becomes clear, though, that Helena is not only concerned about class but that she is also afraid to accept the Countess as mother because she worries that their adoptive bond might doom her
relationship with Bertram, with whom she is in love, to be sisterly: “He must not be my brother” (1.3.155). If Helena were to become the Countess’s daughter, her social position would be the same as that of Bertram but she would then also be his family member. This concern with the incestuous implications of becoming Bertram’s sister through adoption is particularly notable: Helena treats the adoptive bond seriously enough to fear that a union with Bertram might be improper once she has been deemed “daughter” by his mother. That is, she worries about her social separation from Bertram at the same time as she fears that they might become too closely allied.

The Countess, it is important to note, knows of Helena’s desire to marry Bertram because she has been informed of it by the Steward (1.1.101-16). With Helena’s aspiration in mind, the Countess makes it clear that she wants Helena to be both her adopted daughter and her daughter by marriage. She concludes their interview by assuring Helena that she might be her daughter—without being Bertram’s sister—by becoming her daughter-in-law (1.3.162). The similarity between the terms “daughter” and “daughter-in-law,” designations which were often interchangeable in the early

57 Helena has no legal or religious reason to fear that sharing an adoptive bond with Bertram would mark as incestuous any future sexual relationship that they might have. The Church of England’s “Table of Kindred and Affinity” (1560), a document identifying which relations a person was prohibited from marrying, did not specify that adopted siblings were unable to marry. The table was amended in 1986 to forbid adopted children from marrying their adoptive parents, but there is still no rule in place that disallows marriage between adopted siblings.
modern period, informs much of the dialogue between the women. Helena, for instance, tells the Countess that she weeps because she is not her daughter. The audience is aware, however, that Helena implies that she weeps because she is not yet married to Bertram and is therefore not the Countess’s daughter-in-law (1.3.148-49). Although she appears to share a close bond with the Countess, Helena does not at first see herself grafted into the Countess’s family as an adopted daughter; instead, she imagines herself outside it as a potential daughter through marriage. Throughout the play, however, the Countess considers Helena her natural child, rather than her daughter-in-law.

Proving that a child who is chosen, as Helena is, can make as strong a claim to the maternal bond as one born into it, the Countess views her adopted daughter as the equivalent of a blood relative. She emphasizes the affective bond that she feels for her ward and even distances herself from her biological son as a result. When she learns that Bertram has abandoned his new wife and has run off to war, the Countess stresses her attachment to Helena; she is adamant that Helena share her grief at the loss of her husband with her surrogate mother. “If thou engrossest all the griefs are thine,” the Countess states, “Thou robb’st me of a moiety” (3.2.65-66): she emphasizes equality and the sharing of emotion. Helena’s neglect to share her sorrow deprives the Countess of an equal part of that feeling. Insisting that her adopted daughter means as much to her as her birth son, the Countess renounces Bertram on the grounds that he has wronged

58 For a discussion of how the term “daughter” could imply relation by marriage or birth in the early modern period, see Patricia Parker, *All’s Well* 365-6.
Helena: “He was my son, / But I do wash his name out of my blood / And thou art all my child” (3.2.66-68). The exclusivity of this statement, the assertion that Helena is now “all” the Countess’s child, or her only child, reveals the mother’s deep attachment to her adoptive daughter. “All” might also suggest that the Countess considers Helena to be entirely her child, or a biological child. Although Helena and Bertram are married, the Countess does not think of Helena as only her son’s wife and does not disown her alongside her son, but instead views her as a separate, distinct child of her own. Later, as she prepares to coax Bertram home, the Countess restores the balance between her two children, no longer privileging her ward over her son, but instead weighing them evenly as she claims that she does not have “skill in sense / To make distinction” between the two (3.4.39-40). Reluctant to distinguish one from the other, she oscillates between her adopted and biological children.

While the Countess insists upon Helena’s ability to be grafted to her family as though she belongs to it biologically, the King views his ward in very different horticultural terms and asserts his power to deal with Bertram as he pleases. Although he welcomes Bertram to the court by stating “My son’s no dearer” (1.2.76), marking him as the equivalent of a family member, the King does not demonstrate the same affection for his ward as the Countess does for hers. He tells Helena that he has “both sovereign power and father’s voice” (2.3.54) over his wards at court, establishing his authority to allow her to choose whichever ward she might like for a husband. When Bertram first refuses Helena, the King assures Bertram of his absolute control over him in
horticultural language: “We, poising us in her defective scale, / Shall weigh thee to the beam; that wilt not know / It is in us to plant thine honour where / We please to have it grow” (2.3.154-56). Although Bertram is unworthy of Helena and under the King’s power—and should therefore obey his command—the cruelty inherent in this guardian-ward relationship is evident. The King’s use of a controlling horticultural metaphor in relation to his ward invites comparison to the Countess’s kinder botanical treatment of Helena, where “choice breeds” the adopted child into the family and she is cared for lovingly (1.3.140). Unlike the Countess’s vision of Helena as a grafted slip, the King views Bertram as a seedling that he can plant at will, one that he does not need to graft to himself but that can instead be forced to take root wherever he sees fit. This crucial contrast between planting and grafting echoes a similar distinction made earlier in the play. The King, remembering Bertram’s father’s effective style of speaking, tells Bertram that the Count’s words were “scatter’d not in ears” but were instead “grafted” to them “to grow there and bear” (1.2.54-55). G.K. Hunter notes in his edition of the play that Shakespeare frequently puns on “ears” as both organs of hearing and seed-boxes or containers (19, n.54). These lines imply that the planting of seeds in seed-boxes is an

Several critics have noted the connection between Shakespeare’s King’s treatment of his ward and the abuse of the Elizabethan ward system. See in particular Cole 95-100 and Reilly, “All’s Well.” Margaret Loftus Ranald argues that although the King is allowed to “arrange a suitable marriage for his ward in terms of age, rank, and wealth,” he is unable to force Bertram to marry someone of lower social status (79-80).
unskilled, standard horticultural technique, unlike grafting, which is innovative and requires the gardener to use care. The King’s statement that he will merely “plant” Bertram’s honour therefore conveys a sense of negligence. There is no prospect of combination between the King and his ward, only the possibility of forced, regular growth. It is therefore the Countess’s interconnective relationship with Helena that the play endorse as a model for parent-child relations.

Helena, like her adoptive mother, is a horticulturalist of sorts: she attaches herself to Bertram’s family tree through marriage. Although she initially resists the graft that the Countess wants to form with her, when she chooses a husband at court she uses the image of a grafted family tree to express her wishes to the King. Acknowledging the difference between herself and members of the royal family, Helena notes that she will not select a husband of royal status from amongst the King’s wards: “Exempted be from me the arrogance / To choose from forth the royal blood of France / My low and humble name to propagate / With any branch or image of thy state” (2.1.194-97). Envisioning her marriage as a graft with which she might attach herself to the branch or stock of another family, Helena absorbs the Countess’s horticultural view of familial formation. The play thus blurs two different uses of grafting: that of the Countess for adoption and that of Helena for marriage. Helena’s use of the grafting metaphor produces a typical familial bond; that is, her language echoes the fact that women, when they marry, are grafted
onto their husbands’ family trees. In this case, however, Helena is the grafter and not the graft: she propagates her own name to the Rossillion family tree despite Bertram’s objections. Helena extends the Rossillion line, finally fastening herself to the family not only as the Countess’s ward and adopted daughter, but also as Bertram’s wife. Choosing where she will attach herself rather than being chosen, she uses the grafting metaphor to assert her own agency. Both the Countess and Helena, then, expand the Rossillion family tree, broadening familial relation in the play beyond its initial parameters.

Like the Countess, Helena is also involved in a form of female-exclusive breeding. Although Helena ultimately becomes pregnant because of Bertram, it appears that the female characters control reproduction. By plotting with the Widow and Diana to arrange that Bertram be sent to her bed unknowingly, Helena manages to fulfill her

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60 In her 1665 diary, Katherine Austen provides an historical account of thinking of a woman’s marriage as a kind of graft. Austen, a widow who was free to marry, rejected a suitor and never remarried because of her lasting love for her husband and “the respect she owed the ‘name and Kindred’ into which she had been ‘grafted’” (qtd. in Todd 76-7).

61 Patricia Parker emphasizes Bertram’s family’s grafting of Helena. She observes that “The plot is, finally, the story...of the opening of an aristocratic family to a more expansive exogamy, an expansion that links it with the famous images of grafting from The Winter’s Tale. Despite his best efforts to prevent it, Bertram’s noble family expands just enough to graft onto itself a slip of lesser stock, an image used several times in this play for the ‘breeding’ that enables such ‘increase’” (All’s Well 388).
husband’s order that she show him “a child begotten of thy body that I am father to” (3.2.57-58). In doing so, she all but physically removes Bertram from the reproductive equation. Erotic love and procreation in the play are embedded within what Carolyn Asp terms “the larger sphere of female affectivity” (188). Helena employs motherhood to regain her husband; she controls her pregnancy and uses it to her own end. As Gary Waller notes, All’s Well is remarkable for its affirmation of the heart of women to embody literally that continuity and ‘right’ ordering of life (“From the Unfortunate” 48).

In creating an adoptive mother-daughter bond, the Countess excludes the paternal factor in reproduction just as Helena does at the end of the play, leaving the power of generation to the female characters.

In the play’s final scene, Helena is reunited with Bertram, but her affective bond with the Countess overshadows her relationship with her husband. Helena’s final line perhaps suggests, as Sheldon Zitner observes, that she comes to see the Countess as a fusion of a birth mother and an adoptive mother (137). Asking “O my dear mother, do I see you living?” (5.3.313), she turns her attention from Bertram to her surrogate parent.

62 See Osherow 57-62 for a detailed account of Bertram’s passive role in Helena’s pregnancy.

63 Zitner also notes that the line can be thrown away, but that “taken advantage of, it can stunningly qualify the import of the reconciliatiion. This is no warrant to cobble together a deep-analytical revision of the play in which Helena is seen as really searching for her female parent. Yet it does force a backward look, a recognition that the affectional centre of the play is the interview between Helena and the Countess in Act 1” (137).
Helena has no reason to think the Countess dead and the line thus appears with “unexpected suddenness” (Zitner 137). John V. Robinson argues that the first half of the line—“O my dear mother”—is spoken to the Countess by Helena and fulfils “the Countess’s desire to be called ‘mother’” (426). The second half of the line, he suggests, should be ascribed to the Countess and spoken to Helena. It is the Countess who believes Helena dead, Robinson maintains, and who would therefore express surprise at seeing her alive (426). The line could, however, be spoken entirely by Helena and interpreted as her final acknowledgment of the Countess as a “living” mother, or one whom she views as truly being naturally her own.

In many of Shakespeare’s romances the identities of the heroes or heroines are masked by ties to the temporary adoptive families to which they belong. Helena, however, knows exactly who she is: a physician’s daughter. She is not, like Cymbeline’s Guiderius and Arviragus, the long lost child of a king raised without knowledge of her royal lineage, nor is she, like Pericles’ Marina, only temporarily separated from the royal parents that she knows to be hers. The romances dramatize reunions of lost children with their noble or royal birth families; All’s Well, a comedy, depicts a base child being united, not re-united, with a family and incorporated into it. It demonstrates the adoption of someone of lower birth into a family of higher standing. When the Countess accepts her, Helena gains a new familial context: a bond is created not just by Helena’s marriage to Bertram, but also by the Countess’s emotional and maternal attachment to her. Like an experimental horticulturalist interested in the formation of new, mixed
trees, the Countess tests the concept of relation, creating family ties that are not based on bloodlines. The play’s horticultural rhetoric of lineage compels its audience to consider Helena’s adoption as a novel form of familial formation; at the same time, it asserts that Helena is the grafter of her own desires.

The grafting metaphor in *All’s Well* is ultimately and fundamentally an expression of female power. The play’s female characters act as figurative horticulturalists, joining themselves to others and creating unconventional familial combinations. Shakespeare’s use of the metaphor suggests that the actions of Helena and the Countess are socially progressive: each character adds to the image of the family tree where she sees fit. The grafting metaphor also indicates that the concept of family is a cultural and social construction: Helena reminds audiences, for instance, that wives are grafted into their husbands’ family trees. While the play concludes with a recuperative patriarchy whereby Helena finally becomes an obedient wife and mother, the grafting metaphor asserts the ability of women to work within and outside patriarchal norms of familial formation. Both women are portrayed as creators as they form their own bonds of relation. The association of Helena and the Countess with grafting not only establishes them as the play’s most powerful genitors, but also aligns them with the playwright, marking them as surrogate dramatists. Shakespeare often puns on the etymological link between writing and grafting. As I mentioned earlier, the sharp point that the end of a graft must be shaped into in order to be inserted into a stock links it visually with a quill. “Graft” is derived from the Greek *graphion*, meaning a stylus or
writing instrument; the Greek word for writing is *graphesis*. In Sonnet 15, the speaker emphasizes both writing and grafting as techniques of creation and envisions his words as capable of revitalizing his addressee: “And, all in war with Time for love of you / As he takes from you, I engraft you new” (l.13-14). The poet’s words are joined to their subject, giving new life. Like writers, horticulturalists possess agency because they are able to produce what they wish. The grafting metaphor in *All’s Well* signals the Countess’s and Helena’s power to fashion and refashion their own destinies within patriarchal hierarchies—that is, their capacity, like that of the dramatist, to shape worlds.
“Or else we prove ungrateful multipliers”: The Economics of Reproduction in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*

“The world must be peopled.”

— *Much Ado About Nothing* (2.3.197)

In the defining scene of Thomas Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613), a baby is substituted for a piece of meat. A country wench, anxious to divest herself of her bastard infant, devises a plan to offload the child by tricking two city promoters into believing that it is mutton that they are confiscating for Lent. Pleased to have caught yet another citizen with contraband that they can keep for themselves, the corrupt promoters celebrate their luck and tally the results of their economic windfall. They celebrate—until they discover the baby hidden beneath the cuts of flesh. The Wench’s financial burden of a bastard child becomes that of the promoters as they realize that the cost of caring for the infant—whom they are effectively forced to adopt—will exceed any profit that they might derive from the meat. By substituting a child for mutton in the play, Middleton equates children with commodities: they have particular value and can be, like any other product in the market, gifted, traded, bought, or sold. He also underscores the play’s emphasis on familial substitution, or on the changeability of the composition of the family. Burdened with the baby, their “unlucky breakfast,” the promoters become
The preceding chapter argued that Shakespeare often conceives of adopted children in horticultural terms, which has the effect, I suggested, of elucidating both the novelty of their artificial attachments and the success of these new bonds. In doing so, he stages the negotiation of both familial relation, and, in the case of All’s Well That Ends Well, female agency. I turn now from Shakespeare’s metaphors for familial attachment to Middleton’s consideration of bastardy and the economics of adoptive relationships in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside. Middleton’s envisioning of adopted children in monetary terms illuminates the ways in which adoption was used as an everyday strategy for navigating the social realities of early modern England, when the inheritance of material wealth was of paramount importance; monetary legacy and the financial viability of the family ensured the continued existence of its members. Heirs were an economic necessity. They formed part of a financial system that saw both money and property inherited through blood relation. The future economic circumstances of families therefore appeared to depend upon the biological reproduction of successors to carry on family names and finances. One of the less apparent results of this familial dependence on economics and birthright, however, was that families were often restructured in invisible ways in order to facilitate inheritance and financial prosperity. In this chapter, I

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64 The child’s sex is unknown to the audience.
will examine the economics of familial formation by focusing on adoption. I will thus demonstrate that the economic and social difficulties of natural, biological reproduction in the period could be circumvented by adoption.

As many critics have noted, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* deals with the issue of fertility. Arthur F. Marotti, for instance, observes the play’s fusion of fecundity and the conventions of comedy (134). More recently, critics have attended to the play’s treatment of economics, focusing in particular on its portrayal of women as commodities. Criticism that prioritizes economic issues in the play, however, has thus far typically been divorced from criticism that scrutinizes procreation. My analysis of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* will combine these two modes of inquiry to examine the play’s depiction of unconventional family structures that exist for financial reasons. Claire M. Busse has recently examined the profitability of children in early modern English drama, concluding that “children were, in short, economically essential to…society” (215) and that although the family occasionally served as “a fictional construct in which parental

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65 See, for instance, Hotz-Davies, "A Chaste Maid in Cheapside and Women Beware Women."

66 A notable exception is Shanon Miller’s “Consuming Mothers/Consuming Merchants: The Carnivalesque Economy of Jacobean City Comedy.” Miller argues that the play invokes “images of the female body and strategies for controlling it as a mechanism for understanding, and assuaging anxiety about, a transitional economy” (74). Although Miller examines the economics of procreation tangentially, however, her primary focus is on the commodification of women rather than their offspring.
control of children could be imagined to regulate the disruptive nature of commodities,” such regulation was, in reality, “unimaginable” (243). I extend Busse’s argument to reveal that in Middleton’s play and in early modern England more generally, the economic value of children could in fact restructure social and familial ties, altering them in surprising ways.

*A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* envisions a world in which economic necessity prompts the acquirement of children by non-biological means. While the Wench abandons her child, other families in the play obtain children who are not related to them by blood for fiscal and social purposes. I suggest that family in the play is understood to be a socioeconomic, rather than a biological, entity, and that familial relation is not determined by blood alone, but also by financial need. With the exceptions of the Yellowhammers—a dysfunctional and corrupt family—and the Touchwood Sr.’s—a family that suffers from its own particular reproductive problems—families that consist entirely of blood relatives do not exist in the play. Instead, I contend, Middleton abandons the notion of the biological family and exposes the degree to which economic circumstances—born out of greed, laziness, or the inability to reproduce—remodel social and familial relations. As a result, a kind of adoption takes place whereby families incorporate as members people who are not blood relations. Adoption and surrogate parenthood are not viewed as strange or unfamiliar in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, but are instead presented as underlying, and often secret, factors in the financial workings of the family and society. Reproduction does not necessarily lead
to the creation of a typical familial structure; “parenthood” is shown to be a socially constructed concept that exists separately from procreation. Middleton repeatedly demonstrates that although the early modern cultural imaginary would like to think of familial relation as a standardized, controllable concept, many familial substitutions might be made that change the biological makeup of the family but still allow it to appear “natural.” Familial relation is thus denaturalized and distanced from the biological family.

I begin this chapter by examining early modern attitudes toward adoption and familial inheritance. I then link the adoptee’s disturbance of the genealogical family line to the position of the bastard child. Bastards are, in some ways, “adopted” by their cuckolded fathers, as Middleton makes clear. They also represent the danger that families might be formed in imperceptible, non-patrilineal ways. After establishing the place of children, both legitimate and illegitimate, within the early modern economic system of inheritance, I turn to an analysis of the various family units in Middleton’s play, identifying the ways in which they are formed in non-biological and financially motivated ways. The Wench, the promoters, the Allwits, the Touchwoods, and the Kixes all structure their families around socioeconomic concerns. Middleton foregrounds adoptive relationships, in which a parent—either knowingly or unknowingly—cares for a child who is not biologically his or her own. I demonstrate that A Chaste Maid in Cheapside explores the links between procreation, economic need, and familial relation, focusing in particular on the adoptive nature of the bastard child. The adoption of
bastard children by surrogate parents is shown to be an economic strategy, the solution to financial difficulty. Middleton thus suggests that familial and economic ties can never be entirely separated; the economics of reproductive success or failure shape the play’s concept of familial relation.

Wendy Wall asks in Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama (2002) whether domesticity was “already ‘estranged’ in the early modern imagination” (2). If dramatic depictions of domesticity “simply foregrounded what everyone already, at some level, knew [—] that ordinary experience could be bizarre and disquieting,” she wonders, “might drama then implicitly unsettle ideologies resting on an ordered domesticity merely by revealing the disorienting nature of everyday practice?” (2). A Chaste Maid in Cheapside’s peculiar family units reveal the irregular features of everyday practice, showing family to be disordered, not a linear, self-contained unit, but instead an unwieldy and changeable construction. By portraying non-normative family units, A Chaste Maid in Cheapside renders the early modern reality of blended families visible and disrupts the ideology of the biological family. The play depicts the invisibility of the working of genetics, unveiling the chaotic and tangled webs of relation that can exist within a seemingly ordinary and natural family.

A Chaste Maid in Cheapside thus combines a narrative preoccupation with substitution with an apparently intentional positioning of its audience. Yet little consideration has been given to its possible effects on its viewers. Early modern theatregoers were privy to the inner workings of the play’s families; they were made
aware that its families are not always biologically related, although they often appear that way to those both inside and outside them. The audience was therefore encouraged to discount the anxiety typically associated with substitution and with the adoption of illegitimate children and was instead urged to favour the sometimes surprising ways in which the complications of biological reproduction are overcome. Rather than merely making that which is familiar strange, the play’s glimpses into unusual familial arrangements unearth seemingly strange aspects of customary household practices, thus revealing the incongruity between ideal domestic standards and unruly, everyday life. By allowing the audience to observe the disorderly practice that lies beneath the veneer of the model family, the play suggests the absurdity of the notion that family members cannot form the same attachment with an adopted child as they might with a biological one. While these families are structured in non-biological ways for economic reasons, they also express affective connections. The play thus satirizes the idea that familial bonds—emotional or otherwise—are only formed within a natural family; it provides its audience with the means to scrutinize what is biologically imperceptible.

**Birthright, Bastardy, and the Practice of Adoption**

Married men and women in the early modern period were expected to reproduce. Christian tradition emphasized the importance of reproduction within marriage and viewed the birth of a healthy child as an indication of divine blessing. Unfruitfulness signaled a failure to find favour with God and detachment from the community. In
Deuteronomy, for example, Moses explains to the Israelites that if God’s commandments, statutes, and judgments are upheld, fertility will follow: “Thou shalt be blesse aboue all people: there shall be neither male nor female barren among you, nor among your cattell” (7:14). Those who wished to avoid having children were thought to defy the will of God. In The Child-birth or Woman’s Lecture (1590), Christopher Hooke observes that some men and women think “Children to be a charge; and therefore if they might have their choice, had rather be without them than have them” (Sig. C3). The willfully childless come to this conclusion, Hooke believes, “by reason of their ignorant hearts, which never were instructed in Gods schools” (Sig. C3). Children were not, however, a sign of God’s will alone: they also represented the promise of familial continuity, both physical and financial. As many scholars have noted, primogeniture acted as an organizing concept for the family: it preserved and protected its economic and social interests. For the wealthy, children ensured that the family fortune and name would remain intact; for the middle and lower classes, offspring guaranteed the same stability, as well as perhaps the more immediate promise that they might provide for their families financially through their work as labourers or apprentices. Male children in particular guaranteed that finances and property would not have to be disbanded or taken out of the immediate family; they therefore embodied a type of economic value and a financial opportunity to carry wealth to the next generation.

Although the ideal model of inheritance saw wealth and title pass to a family’s eldest son, in practice such an outline for familial succession might not always have been feasible. Infertility, a condition not uncommon in early modern England, for instance, could prevent a couple from producing biological heirs. High infant and child mortality rates may also have made it possible for parents to outlive their children. What then, would happen to an inheritance if there were no biological heirs to claim it? As several scholars have noted, various forms of adoption took place in the early modern period for financial purposes. Lloyd Bonfield observes, for instance, that “lurking behind the scenes” of supposedly straightforward biological inheritance were “demographic variables, in particular limited life expectancy and childlessness, that might require the adaptation of customary rules of inheritance” (158). Such rules frequently underwent changes in order to allow an outsider to the immediate family, or someone who was not related to the family by blood, to inherit. Property was not always left to the Church in the event that a couple failed to reproduce, as Church officials might have expected, but was on occasion kept within a family through a restructuring of that family’s biological composition. Familial and financial pressure to leave an inheritance to a relative often forced childless couples to forge bonds with those with whom they had little or no biological connection. As Barbara Hanawalt notes, “childless

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68 Chris Wilson observes that “in any population of reasonable size at least a small proportion of couples are unable to bear any children because of physiological impairments to either or both spouses” (209).
couples do appear among those leaving wills, but they compensated for their lack of immediate family by forming closer bonds with siblings and their children, godchildren, and friends” (252). Economic necessity, in other words, required that the limits of familial relation be stretched. Adoption was not, as I have noted, an established legal process in the early modern period, but it was practiced nonetheless. Hanawalt observes, for instance, that occasionally retirement contracts were drawn up that allowed a childless person to “adopt” an heir in return for that heir’s promise to support and care for him or her in their old age (252). This type of adoption did not always have to be made with a formal legal contract, but it endowed the adoptee with the rights of familial inheritance (252).  

Adoption modified processes of inheritance because it disrupted blood-based lineage, inserting into a family line an heir who was not genealogically entitled to succeed and thus positioning him or her as a valuable means of ensuring familial and financial continuity. The interruption of patrilineal inheritance linked the adoptee, in many ways, to the bastard. A bastard, like an adopted child, was disconnected from a legitimate, biological sequence. Because bastards that were born to a married woman

69 Elizabeth Gager details the existence of the same practice in early modern France (1-35).

70 Novy suggests that modern adoptees reading early modern drama might identify in particular with bastard characters such as Edmund in King Lear. “Illegitimacy is handled differently in Lear than in modern adoption,” she notes, “but there is enough continuity in the issues for an adoptee to find Edmund’s words and situation resonant” (Reading 79). Novy points to the discrimination
as the result of an extramarital affair were only absolutely identifiable as their mothers’ children and not as their fathers’, they posed a challenge to patriarchal order and to the social fiction of the genuine, matrimonially sanctioned genealogical line. While a wife could give birth to a child that was clearly her own because she carried it to term, that child might not be her husband’s. A covert illegitimate child—or one who was not known by his or her father or by society generally to be a bastard—enacted a kind of biological counterfeiting whereby a “true,” biologically pure heir was displaced by a sullied substitute. Michael Neill observes that a bastard is “an ‘out of joint’ member of a hybrid genus, he is defined as neither one thing or the other... [his] mixed nature is expressed in an idiom that systematically subverts the ‘natural’ decorum of kind” (129-30). The bastard child, in other words, upsets familial classification that is based on bloodlines. As many historians have noted, in the medieval period a gradual distinction was drawn between the “placeless” or illegitimate child and the legitimate children produced within a marriage. By the twelfth century, bastard children were designated filius nullius, but they were not so much the children of nobody as the heirs of nobody.

that Edmund speaks out against in the play 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” (81).
The designation of “bastard” within the system of primogeniture served to separate those who were able to inherit from those who were not (Neill 130).  

The child of a married woman, however, was presumed to be the legitimate child of her husband under common law; legal paternity was, in essence, distinct from genetic fatherhood. Biological truth, then, could be deemed secondary to illusory legitimacy in the interest of alleviating concerns about the diffusion of property and wealth. As early as the time of Henry Bracton, the English jurist who wrote *De legibus et consuetudinibus Angliae* (*On the Laws and Customs of England*) (c. 1220), for instance, lawyers argued that if a child was recognized as a legitimate heir by both husband and wife, then it must be considered as such, no matter the uncertainty of its origins (Bracton 3.311). The only exception to this principle was if “the husband’s avowal and admission cannot be reconciled with nature, that is, if he has been absent for a year or two” or “has been castrated or is so infirm that he cannot beget” (3.311). Such a legal opinion was endorsed well into the early modern period. Under common law, a father could be responsible for, and could transmit his property to, a child who was not biologically his own.

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71 See also Macfarlane, “Illegitimate” 75-6 and Given-Wilson and Curtis 51-3.

72 Bracton states, for instance, that “if he [the husband] has avowed it, and there is some presumption that the child could be his, though in truth it is not, as where husband and wife have been together, he will then be adjudged heir though he is not” (3.311).

73 Bradin Cormack, for instance, cites the 1617 case of *Done and Egerton v. Hinton and Starkey* where the judges ruled that only “if the wife of a man who had been beyond the sea for such
This legal position held the potential to make bastards, in a sense, adoptees. It allowed husbands and wives to “adopt” — to claim as their own — each other’s bastard children. A bastard — whether that of the husband or the wife — could be positioned as heir, for instance, in the event that no legitimate children were produced within a time, before the birth of the issue which the wife had in his absence, that the issue could not be his, it is a bastard” (296). In other words, unless the husband was at sea when his wife conceived the child, he is to be regarded as its legitimate father.

Webster, Heywood, and Rowley’s A Cure for a Cuckold (1624) dramatizes a problem of succession similar to that of the Kixes in A Chaste Maid in Cheapside. Franckford, a wealthy but childless merchant, fathers a bastard child who he wants to claim as his own for financial reasons. Urse, the woman who bears Franckford his bastard, does so to provide the wealthy and infertile couple with an heir. Compass, Urse’s husband who has been absent for years, however, also wants to lay claim to the child, because it is born to his wife. Bradin Cormack argues that A Cure for a Cuckold reflects “a relevant historical, legal, and cultural context” in the attention that it pays to the different jurisdictional orders involved in determining who is the lawful father of a child (293). Cormack asserts that “The play tests Compass’s claim — his attempt to legitimate the child — in terms of competing legal and discursive orders: pitting the mother’s rights against the biological father’s, for example, but also natural law against human law, central law against local and municipal law, English common law against the Roman civil and canonical orders that together constituted the ius commune” (292). For a detailed account of biological versus legal fatherhood in the period, see Cormack 291-329.
marriage. As Jack Goody observes, “If artificial creation of heirs by adoption was ruled out, recognition of bastards was another possible way of augmenting heirs” (Family 302). Bracton himself notes that “illegitimates born of unlawful intercourse, of persons between whom there could be no marriage, are completely excluded from every benefit,” but that they are also “sometimes legitimized, by a sort of adoption” (2.186).

He clarifies:

as where a wife has had a child by someone other than her husband, and where, though this is in fact true, the husband has taken the child into his house, avowed him and raised him as his son, or if he has not avowed him expressly has not turned him away; he will be adjudged legitimate and his father's heir, whether the husband does not know that the child is not his or knows or is in doubt, because he is born of the wife, [that is], provided it can be presumed that he could have fathered him. The same may be said of a supposititious child, and thus common opinion sometimes is preferred to truth. (2.186)

A bastard child could thus circumvent the rules of patrilineal inheritance and, like an adopted child, could be placed deliberately in a family line. As Bracton observes, however, such an event could occur with or without the husband’s permission. Bastards were capable of enacting an invisible genealogical shift in a family: if a child was not
known to be illegitimate, then he or she secretly introduced another man’s lineage into
his or her supposed father’s familial line. Once accepted as a member of a family, a
known or unknown bastard child became a child of adoption.

This link between illegitimacy and adoption can also be witnessed in the early
modern discourse used to describe marital unfaithfulness. Cuckold, the English term for
a husband whose wife has been adulterous, derives from the adoptive habits of the
cuckoo bird, whose practice of abandoning its young has been recognized since ancient
times. Aristotle, for instance, claimed that the cuckoo substituted its offspring in the
nests of other birds (Historia animalium 11.29). In leaving its young with another bird,
the cuckoo furtively transforms that bird into a surrogate parent. As Edward Topsell
observes in The Fowles of Heauen; or History of Birdes (1613-1614), “The Cuckoe preserueth

75 “The origin of the sense is supposed to be found in the cuckoo’s habit of laying its egg in
another bird’s nest” (OED, “cuckold,” n. etymology).

76 Aristotle’s estimation of the cuckoo’s practices have been confirmed by modern science. Joel
Welty observes the tendency of the cuckoo to transfer its young to the care of others:

This characteristic, a nasty and subversive one by human

standards, but perfectly natural and biologically ‘moral’ by avian

standards, is practiced by representatives of five families… Birds

of various genera among these families lay their eggs in nests of

other species and abandon them to the care of their foster

parents. (323)
her race in other birds neasts without so much as thanks for all their labour and paynes.

Vnto this part also belongeth their singular ingratitude to their fosterers or Nurses” (243). Topsell also points to the specious reasoning of naming the wronged husband after the cuckoo bird and attributes the notion that “a Cuckold cometh of a Cuckoe” (237) to the grammarian Acron. While country peasants “call them Cuckolds which father the adulterous brats of their wyves,” Topsell notes, “daily experience teacheth the contrary. For not Cuckoes but other birds doe hatche Cuckoes and straingers to their kinde” (238). Although he finds it illogical to associate the jilted husband with the cuckoo, Topsell nevertheless explains the bird’s childrearing habits in relation to bastardy. Citing Alciatus, he observes that the bird “leaues her younge in neasts of forreyne breede / Like a false spouse defiled with strangers seede” (243).

The ornithological analogue between the wronged husband and the cuckoo bird affected the early modern popular imagination and influenced the way in which illegitimacy was conceived. The cuckoo, as Shakespeare notes in Antony and Cleopatra, “builds not for himself,” or does not form its own biologically based home or nest (2.6.28). In placing its eggs in the care of another bird, it overrides natural order and forces the formation of new avian families. The final song in Love’s Labours Lost thus notes that “a cuckoo then on every tree / Mocks married men” (5.2.891-2); husbands who

77 Topsell suggests that the term cuckold is not derived from the cuckoo bird, but comes instead from the curruca bird: “Soe that a Cuckolde is not derived of the Cuckoe but of Curruca, a hedge-sparrowe that fostereth the Cuckoes breede in steede of his oune” (238).
find themselves saddled with bastard children are linked to and taunted by the bird who abandons its offspring to an unsuspecting substitute. The avian origins of the term cuckold thus signaled the foster care that a cuckolded father often provided for his wife’s bastard child. Bastards produced by a wife were left in her husband’s charge; they were raised and provided for by a man who was not related to them by blood. The concept of the cuckolded husband thus presumed, to some degree, the possible adoption of illegitimate children by a wronged husband.

As the term cuckold makes clear, a family’s future might be assumed to depend upon the physical reproduction of biologically pure heirs, but such purity was occasionally circumvented. Early modern families were not always as biologically straightforward as they might at first appear to be. As Jonathan Goldberg observes, a critic or historian cannot write “a history of the ideology of the family as if it were simply a reflection of social realities. The ideology of the family does not mirror the actuality of family life. Reproduction as trope is not reproduction in fact” (James 18). A Chaste Maid in Cheapside undercuts the ideology of the family; it demonstrates the disparity between principle and reality. Middleton shows his audience that the notion that children are necessarily the biological products of their parents is illusory. He not only depicts a kind of adoption whereby children who do not belong to a family biologically are accepted into that family regardless; he also underscores the fact that genetics are not transparent and cannot be readily perceived. That is, he makes apparent the fact that parenthood is not always tied to biology and procreation. The play then
underscores the impossibility of regulating genealogy and demonstrates the ways in which the biological structure of the family can be manipulated to financial and social advantage.

A Chaste Maid in Cheapside and the Oeconomie of Bastardy

Critics often observe A Chaste Maid in Cheapside’s focus on material and social advancement. As a city comedy, the play is associated with the commercial growth of London as well as with the development of the middle class; its upwardly mobile characters possess distinct social ambitions. As Janelle Day Jenstad notes, the play highlights the obsessions of its various characters with social “differences even between people who are virtually indistinguishable, such as grocers and apothecaries” (394). Yet despite the play’s attention to mercantile activity, considerable time is also devoted to the portrayal of family life: the domestic situations of the Yellowhammers, the Allwits, and the Kixes are presented in great detail. Samuel Schoenbaum suggests that by focusing simultaneously on marriage, family, and commercial activity in the play, Middleton “conveys, perhaps more adequately than any of his contemporaries, the breakdown or corruption of traditional values in the wake of the new materialistic order” (293). I will demonstrate, however, that by examining the family alongside commercial concerns, Middleton does not so much mourn the destruction of customary

78 For more on city comedy and the development of the middle class, see L.C. Knights 36-54.
family values as he envisions the existence of a distinct kind of family, one not necessarily based on biological ties but formed instead through economic necessity. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* posits bastards as adoptees; it imagines both the conscious and unconscious acceptance of bastards into families. Middleton thus inverts the idea of the natural, biological family and instead demonstrates the often socially constructed nature of the family unit. Brian Gibbons observes that in Middleton’s plays, “orthodox righteousness seems to take little account of the actual texture of experience as the main body of the dramatic action has exhibited it” (89). Much in the plays, in other words, does not conform to conventional moral standards. Rather than present a moral critique of the various familial situations in the play, Middleton exposes these situations as normal or not entirely extraordinary. His characters’ approaches to familial formation often conflict with Christian tradition and morality, but he does not necessarily denounce their modifications of the biological family. Rather, Middleton reflects on the various ways in which the family unit might be manipulated and broadened. He demonstrates repeatedly that the accepted moral assumptions about the biological family are naïve and rigid.

Children in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, and bastard children in particular, are continually assigned a market rate. The promoters calculate that the child left to them will cost them half their profits (2.2.199); Sir Oliver and Lady Kix are willing to pay four hundred pounds to conceive a child (3.3.147-49); Touchwood Sr. and his wife determine that additional children will ruin them financially (2.1.7-14); and Allwit manages to earn
his living by keeping the children of another man (1.2.15-57). In allocating children these various rates, Middleton ensures that his audience conceptualizes them in financial terms. In each of the play’s families, offspring represent an essential part of the “oeconomie,” or of the financial management of the household. Children are thus the play’s primary form of currency; they are circulated within its economy. By treating children as a kind of currency, Middleton suggests that they become property that can be traded within the play; they are not necessarily biologically exclusive. There exists

Although the term *economics* now refers to the “production, distribution, consumption, and transfer of wealth” (*OED*, “economics,” 2.), it is derived from the Greek *oikos*, or “household.” The study of *oikonomikē* was the study of “the science or art of household management” (*OED*, “economics,” 1.a.). In the early modern period, economics, or oeconomics, did not refer to the modern sense of “economics” alone: the two meanings of the term were often conflated and early modern oeconomics were firmly tied to matters of the family and the household. The term frequently referred to the creation and expenditure of wealth within the practice of household administration. Thinking about economic matters relied heavily on the microcosmic model of the household to demonstrate the fundamental nature of the macrocosmic order. As a result, the model of household management was representative of larger financial matters; concepts of monetary and familial organization in the period were thus often necessarily intertwined. Early modern economic theorists turned to the works of Aristotle and other classical writers to establish a model for household economy. For classical and humanist discussions of *oikonomikē* translated into English, see Aristotle, *Politiques* esp. chs. 3, 5, 7-8; Xenophon, *Treatise of House-hold*; and Bodin, *Six Bookes of a Common-weale* I, ch. 2.
within the play both an economy of procreators and an economy of progeny: those who can produce children are for hire, while children are brought into or removed from particular familial situations because of their financial significance. Economic necessity—born out of greed, laziness, or the inability to reproduce—is shown to dictate the composition of the family.

In what follows, I examine each of the play’s families from a socio-economic perspective and investigate the different facets of parent-child relations that they display. As Gibbons observes, Middleton’s satire focuses “on those characters for whom all human relationships are conceived of in terms of financial contract” (129). The playwright underscores not only financially-based relationships, however, but also non-normative family units. He presents, in other words, various ways of forming families. Official social structures are shown to be ineffectual in Middleton’s Cheapside; the “religious wholesome laws” (2.1.112) of Lent, for instance, are obviously corrupt. Such social structures also prove to be inadequate for controlling and standardizing biological succession. Instead, various substitutions continuously disrupt lineage.

The Yellowhammers

Although the Yellowhammers are the play’s only family that is not formed, at least in part, by a surrogate parent or child, I introduce them here as its primary example of the use of children as financial tools that are easily substitutable. Placed at the start of the
action, they establish the concept of thinking of children as currency that permeates the rest of the play. Moll, the daughter of the Yellowhammers, is of marriageable age and her parents conspire to make her a financially and socially advantageous match.

Although Moll is clearly not inclined to marry Sir Walter Whorehound, a wealthy gentleman, her parents are charmed by the prospect of having an influential son-in-law. As they fuss over Sir Walter’s arrival, the Yellowhammers subordinate Moll’s personal interests to those of the family; they privilege a socially and economically valuable marriage over their daughter’s happiness. Maudeline, Moll’s mother, insists that Moll act politely to Sir Walter (1.1.41-42). She informs Moll that she must behave and move in a particular way in order to attract the knight’s attention, teaching her to “instruct her hand thus” (1.1.43) in an effort to charm him. Maudeline schools her daughter in the art of seduction in order to see her married for monetary and social gain.

The discontent that Moll expresses at the prospect of her marriage to Sir Walter, coupled with her evident loathing of him (e.g., 1.1.113), convinces the audience that the match is inappropriate. Moll’s obvious love for Touchwood Jr. ensures that their union is the play’s happiest and most desirable. Because the audience is compelled to side with Moll and to see that her parents force her to marry for material reasons, the exploitation of children for purposes of social and financial advancement becomes readily apparent. This exploitation is again emphasized with Tim’s marriage. Not content with arranging the profitable union of their daughter, the Yellowhammers wish to see their son married to similar financial advantage. Believing that the Welsh gentlewoman who is offered to
Tim is the “heir to some nineteen mountains” (1.1.130), the Yellowhammers are eager to see this second marriage also result in wealth.

Early modern linguistic practice reveals much about the ways in which the process of procreation was often conceptualized in terms of the contemporary financial system and was therefore linked to economics. As Elizabeth Sacks observes, certain metaphors occur with greater frequency during different literary periods: the English Renaissance was “a particularly auspicious time for the metaphor of generation” (4). Henry VIII’s trouble producing a male heir and Elizabeth’s childless reign brought matters of succession and inheritance to the forefront of political thought (4). Metaphors for breeding were thus frequently economic, equating reproduction with financial dealings. Children, for example, were often said to be “coined,” “stamped,” and “minted” by their parents. To stamp, or to “strike an impression” on something (OED, “stamp,” III.4) indicated that item’s genuineness. Shakespeare’s use of “stamp” in relation to birth appears to be the term’s first figurative usage: “And that most venerable man, which I / Did call my Father was I know not where / When I was stamped. Some coiner with his tools / Made me a counterfeit” (Cymbeline 2.5. 3-6) (OED, “stamp,” III.4).

The same image can be found in Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy:

Severus the Emperor in his time made laws for the restraint of this vice: and as Dion Cassius relates in his life,

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80 See Sandra K. Fisher’s catalogues of economic metaphors for procreation in Econolingua 18-20.
tri millia moechorum, three-thousand cuckold-makers, or
naturae monetam adulterantes, as Philo calls them, false
coiners and clippers of nature’s mony, were summoned
into the court at once.

Both Burton and Shakespeare suggest that illegitimacy interferes with the process of
coining and stamping. Adultery forges a false child in the way that a coin might be
bogus, or unapproved by a country’s mint or monarch. To be falsely coined or
counterfeited—in other words, to be a bastard—signaled a lack of authenticity and
value.

Such monetary metaphors conveyed the parents’ sense of ownership: when they
produced their children, parents marked them as their own and “stamped” them, or
asserted their children’s origins, presumably through familial likeness. Children were
created in their parents’ images, these financial metaphors imply, just as currency was
often created in the likeness of the reigning monarch. Coins and stamps, like seals, stood
in for the monarch; their power consisted in a symbolic value far greater than the worth
of the raw material of which they were made. Economic metaphors of reproduction also
emphasized the fact that children had genitors: the royal mint produced currency on
royal authority, just as parents produced children. To state that children had been
“stamped” or “coined” implied that they had become a type of currency belonging to
their genitors. This equation of children with currency, however, suggested that children
did not belong exclusively to their genitors; framing children in monetary terms and
aligning them with a system of exchange created the possibility that they might be
 circulated, replaced, or substituted. Parallels between children and economics, then,
 pointed both to a sense of ownership of children by their biological genitors and to the
 prospect that such ownership might, in theory, be transferable.

Just as procreation was described in financial terms, economics were understood
 in relation to procreation in the period; the two concepts were thus to some degree
 interdependent. The perceived connection between human relationships and the
 dealings of the market was evident in the use of procreation as a metaphor for financial
 transactions. Money was said to be “bred” as it accumulated, as though it were
 replicated and birthed. Usury, for instance, was commonly thought of as a kind of
 reproduction; the accrual of interest was envisioned in terms of propagation. Money that
 was lent was believed to proliferate, in a sense, because it multiplied itself as it collected
 interest.81 The use of reciprocal language for economics and procreation—whereby one
 was used as a metaphor for the other—ensured that the two concepts were always in
 competition. Financial profit was equated with the physical results of actual procreation.

81 See, for instance, Marc Shell, *The End of Kinship* 28-32. Shell states that “…the product of
 monetary generation, or use, and the product of sexual generation, or a child, have been
 compared. (The Greek word *tokos*, “offspring,” referred to both.)” (30).
As Moll eventually lies on the brink of apparent death, she is described by her brother in monetary terms. Asked how his sister looks and whether she has changed as a result of her illness, Tim replies: “Changed? Gold into white money was never so changed, / As is my sister’s colour into paleness” (5.2.20-21). The use of this economic simile suggests the financial value assigned to Moll by her parents; her looks, as she dies, are devalued as from gold to silver. In death, she is worthless to her family: she can no longer supply the wealth and status that an advantageous marriage produces. Tim’s simile is particularly notable when placed in opposition to a metaphor that Sir Walter uses earlier in the play. In claiming that he will raise the value of the Welsh gentlewoman, who is in fact nothing more than his whore, by marrying her to an unsuspecting citizen, Sir Walter states that he will “bring [her] up to turn [her] into gold…and make [her] fortune shine” (1.1.98-99). As the Welsh gentlewoman’s monetary and social value rises, she is imagined to be transformed to gold; as Moll’s value falls, she becomes associated with a less precious metal. Moll is as much a financial resource to her parents—and, by extension, to her brother—as gold itself. Although the Yellowhammers claim to “spare no cost” (5.2.30) for her care and provide her with a drink made of “dissolved pearl and amber” in her sickness (5.2.28), it is clear that they only invest in Moll in the hope that they will gain a return when she recovers and is subsequently married.

Children in the play are frequently deemed interchangeable: one child can be substituted for another and they are often assigned similar values. The Yellowhammers,
for instance, think of their son and daughter as equivalent financial opportunities. Upon learning of Moll’s supposed death, Yellowhammer immediately embarks upon another financial scheme that involves a substitution of one of his children for the other: if he cannot see his daughter married to Sir Walter, he will see his son, Tim, gainfully matched with the supposed Welsh gentlewoman. This new marriage is scheduled to take place even before the Yellowhammers bury Moll (5.3.107-112); they mourn less for her death than for the loss of the fortune that she represented. Tim then becomes as much a marketable commodity in his parents’ eyes as Moll has been. Maudeline reacts to her husband’s plan to marry Tim to the Welsh gentlewoman by celebrating the fact that they will not, in the end, forfeit the financial opportunity afforded by their children: “Mass, a match! / We’ll not lose all at once, somewhat we’ll catch” (5.3.112-115).

The Yellowhammers are not unique in the drama of the early modern period; many plays, as Chapter 3 will show, feature parents who scheme to see their children profitably married. The Yellowhammer family stands as A Chaste Maid in Cheapside’s example of the typical, almost clichéd depiction of children as social and economic tools; the Yellowhammers illustrate the archetypal equation of children with financial wealth through marriage. Mr. and Mrs. Yellowhammer seek to alter the social and economic status of their children by the most available means—in a class-based society, new ties forged through marriage could alter a person’s social status significantly.

82 For a detailed description of how children were depicted in economic terms in the drama of the early modern period, see Busse 209-43.
The Country Wench and the Promoters

Although the Yellowhammers attempt to change social, financial, and familial bonds in relatively straightforward ways, what follows in the play are far more distinct instances of the equation of children with currency, in which the boundaries of social and familial relation are changed and structured around financial need. Adoption facilitates this familial restructuring. The most obvious instance of adoption in the play involves the aforementioned Country Wench, her concealed bastard, and the promoters who seize her basket. The Wench, or the birth mother, surreptitiously leaves her child in the care of two strangers who unwittingly adopt it as their own. Because they are given a baby, the promoters form between them a reluctant, atypical family; it is a family in which parenthood is understood as a role that one might be tricked into, or might arrive at by non-biological means.

The Wench appears to know the precise economic value of bastard children. Upon her entrance, she is in clear financial need, having given birth to a child outside of wedlock. She confronts Touchwood Sr., the father of her child, shows him the baby, which she considers his “workmanship” (2.1.65), and threatens to spread the truth of its parentage “through the street” (2.1.67). Her warning gives her baby immediate worth: she uses the possibility of Touchwood’s public embarrassment as leverage to gain financial support from him. Although he attempts to deny that he is the father and asks to be “excused” from parenting it by claiming that it lacks fingernails (meaning that it is
the offspring of a syphilitic man, and not him), Touchwood is assured that the baby is in fact his own (2.1.82-85). In order to compensate the Wench and to provide for the child’s rearing, Touchwood gives her everything he has, “purse and all” (2.1.98). As the scene progresses, however, it becomes clear that the Wench is well-practiced in the business of producing children for economic gain. Although she claims that she was “a maid before” her encounter with Touchwood and that she can prove her virginity with a certificate from both of the churchwardens (2.1.70), the Wench reveals that she is far more experienced than she lets on. Once alone, she informs the audience in an aside that the child she has produced with Touchwood is her fifth bastard: she has duped many unsuspecting men into believing that she is a virgin (2.1.104). Procreation for the Wench is thereby revealed to be a business venture through which she can collect money from the fathers of her bastard children. The baby is both an economic burden to her, because she is saddled with the costs associated with it, and an economic windfall, because it earns her money from Touchwood.

Not only does the Wench collect financial support for her bastard child, but she also proves capable of disposing of the baby and keeping for herself the money earned by its birth. As she approaches the promoters who patrol the streets during Lent, the

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83 Middleton’s depiction of the Wench’s fruitfulness echoes his observation in The Witch (c. 1609-1616) that “bastards come upon poor venturing gentlewomen ten to one faster than your legitimate children” (2.1.43). Promiscuous women, that is, are said to conceive at a greater rate than those who are virtuous.
Wench informs the audience that she “hath wit” to “shift anywhere” (2.2.148). She establishes her intelligence by uncovering a piece of mutton in her basket in order to attract the attention of the men who are supposed to confiscate meat during this period of religious fasting. Pretending that the mutton is intended for her mistress, who is ill and is therefore exempt from the restrictions of Lent, the Wench insists that the promoters swear to keep her basket until she can return with her master to prove her innocence; they thus agree to an arrangement for which they do not know the full terms (2.2.157-172). She therefore rids herself of her baby while maintaining the sum given to her by Touchwood. Although there is no evidence in the play to suggest that the Wench has given any of her four previous children away in the same manner, her behavior indicates that she is not new at disposing of her bastards for financial gain. Because she never mentions her need to support her other children and because she is known by Touchwood, and therefore presumably the general public, to be a childless maid, it seems likely that the Wench has similarly disposed of each of her four previous babies, leaving them to the care of unsuspecting strangers. She thus creates her own child-based economy: she gives birth to a baby, secures its financial support, and has it adopted covertly. The Wench relies upon reproduction and the subsequent adoption of her children in order to make her way in the world.

Once they are left with the baby, who the Wench has “made [them] swear to keep” (2.3.194), the promoters are charged with its care; had they not made this promise, they state, they “might leave it else” (2.3.195). Although they are willing to uphold their
guarantee to the Wench by keeping the contents of her basket and thus inadvertently adopting her baby, the promoters become adoptive parents only in the sense that they are forced to care for a child who is not their own. They have not sought to adopt a baby, nor are they happy with their acquisition. The bond that the two men form with the child is financial and not emotional.

When they realize that they are accountable for a baby and not merely a piece of mutton, the promoters evaluate the economics of its upbringing. Because they are effectively responsible for the child’s rearing, the costs associated with the newborn become a part of their new family budget. Angry that they have been tricked when they are “but poor promoters/ That watch hard for a living” (2.3.198), the men tally the cost of raising the child: “Half our getting must run in sugar-sops / And nurses’ wages now, besides many a pound of soap, / And tallow; we have need to get loins of mutton still, / To save suet to change for candles” (2.2.199-202). Abandoned for both economic and social reasons by its single mother, the baby is left to men who are also aware of its effect on their economic circumstances. The emphasis here is on the child’s negative value: the baby does not earn the promoters money, but instead costs them their profits. Whereas the baby is both a financial burden and a financial benefit to its mother, it symbolizes a loss of capital for the promoters. In emphasizing the economics of childrearing in relation to an abandoned and adopted baby, the play makes apparent its interest in the exchange and circulation of children. The Wench’s child becomes that of the promoters
through the transfer of goods. Reproduction and parenthood are thus continually shown to be not only functions of nature, but also of economy.

The play envisions the speed and ease with which parent-child ties might be broken and reformulated; the promoters become new fathers through their forced adoption of the baby as quickly as the Wench relinquishes her connection to the child. The men accept their roles as the baby’s adoptive fathers with relative ease: they immediately resign themselves to their new duties and plan to work through the rest of Lent to “get it up” (2.2.206), or to make up for the money that they have lost in acquiring a dependent. Although they plan to send the baby to Branford, a suburb of London where children were frequently put out to nurse, and thus do not intend to raise it themselves in the immediate future, the promoters appear at least to be concerned for its long-term care. While it is never clear if they mean to abandon the baby at Branford or if they will have it nursed and will then continue to raise it themselves, forming a life-long parental attachment to it, the promoters nevertheless show that they are aware of the resources necessary for the child’s care. What is most remarkable about their behaviour is their sense of accountability; as new, adoptive parents, they ensure that the child is provided for financially. Because they have made a promise to the Wench, they honour their responsibilities.

As a result of their acquisition of the baby, the promoters form an unexpected family. They adopt not only the child, but also new social roles: they become parents. The two men are made fathers, however, without physically producing their child. The
promoters’ situation is therefore a satirical version of the cuckolded husband; they have not had illicit sexual relations with the Wench, but they are saddled with her bastard child. The men, however, are extreme versions of cuckolds because they are made the fathers of a bastard child without first even being part of a married couple. John Fletcher’s *The Chances* (c. 1617; pub. 1647), a play that was staged not long after *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, also explores the result of a baby’s being left surreptitiously in an unsuspecting man’s care. The similarities between the baby-as-package scenes in each play are striking, but Fletcher’s play amplifies the indignation that Middleton’s promoters feel at having been tricked into caring for a child. Don John, a Spanish gallant, accepts a package from a woman who, he assumes, is in some kind of trouble. Sure that he has obtained “some pack of worth” from her, he declares that he’ll “never refuse a fortune” (1.3). When he opens the package, however, Don John discovers a baby inside and realizes that he is now responsible for raising it. Disappointed by what he finds, he complains:

Why, it would never grieve me if I had got this Ginger-bread; never stirred me, so I had had a stroke for it: it had been justice then to have kept it; but to raise a dairy for other men’s adulteries, consume myself in candles, and scowring works, in nurses bells and babies, only for charity, for merely a thank you, a little troubles me: the
least touch for it, had but my breeches got it, had

customed me. (1.6)

Like the promoters, Don John tallies the cost of the abandoned child; for “merely a thank
you,” he notes, he must devote his time and resources to its upbringing. But more
intriguing is the debt of pleasure that he imagines going unpaid when he acquires the
baby. Had he received “a stroke for it”—had he enjoyed the sexual act by which the
child was produced—he would be equal to shouldering his new financial burden. As it
stands, however, he is now only at a financial loss because other men have chosen to
practice adultery. The Chances places an emphasis on the lack of physicality involved in
the process of Don John’s obtaining the baby. The same sense of acquiring a child
through non-biological means permeates Middleton’s play. The promoters are thrust
into the role of fathers without themselves procreating.

The promoters’ homosocial family unit challenges biological reproduction: the
promoters get a child without begetting it. As in All’s Well That Ends Well, in which the
Countess’ adoption of Helena circumvents the paternal role in familial formation, the
promoters form a family that excludes a maternal figure. The Wench has, of course,
given birth to the child, but the promoters become its surrogate co-fathers. The play thus
envisions an alternative kind of family, one not based in biology but instead formed by
financially-motivated adoption. As a result, Middleton demonstrates the potential
elasticity of social and familial relations; the play suggests that economic circumstance
can redistribute social ties. The physical act of reproduction does not necessarily lead to
natural, blood-based families; rather, it produces a child who represents an economic product that can subsequently be adopted into another family. The biological social order is therefore upset in the play and is instead replaced by a kind of social flexibility. The promoters accept their new roles as fathers and move on with their parental duties; the lack of organic domestic order in the play does not produce anxiety so much as it showcases various possible familial combinations.

The Allwits

Whereas the promoters are unwitting new fathers, Allwit willingly and knowingly accepts his wife’s bastard children as his own. For Allwit, these bastards are part of a larger financial transaction: they are the products of a business arrangement and he therefore tolerates them. Economic factors thus alter the genetic makeup of the Allwit family. As a result, children who do not belong biologically to both of the Allwits are welcomed indiscernibly into the family unit.

Allwit’s business dealings with Sir Walter Whorehound equate procreation with profit; Allwit sells Sir Walter the sexual rights to his wife and, consequently, to the production of his children. The Allwit family home is “maintained” by Sir Walter in exchange for unrestricted physical access to Mistress Allwit (1.2.16). Proud of this arrangement, Allwit notes that he profits not only financially from the bargain, but also emotionally: because he knows who is sleeping with his wife, and because he has
arranged the relationship personally, he does not need to be envious or resentful. Whereas other husbands are “eaten with jealousy to the inmost bone” (1.2.46) as they wonder whether their wives are faithful, Allwit is already privy to his wife’s affair and profits from it. As a result, he is provided for and does not need to work for his living; with the labour of running a household “all out of [his] hands” (1.2.52), Allwit is free to do as he pleases. He states that Sir Walter “not only keeps my wife, but a keeps me, / And all my family” (1.2.17-18). In raising the children of another man, Allwit ensures his own financial security. Middleton therefore portrays the Allwits’s children as commodities: they are part of a financial plan and are literally a part of the household economy. Allwit contracts out his own marriage rights in order to gain financial stability, piece of mind, and, he claims, physical reprieve from procreation.

Because Allwit sells the sexual rights to his wife, he forgoes the possibility of biological fatherhood. The children who are produced within the Allwit marriage are those of Mistress Allwit and her lover; Sir Walter “gets [Allwit] all [his] children, and pays the nurse” (1.2.19). Biological parenthood is therefore traded for financially secure parenthood. Although his children are not connected to him by blood, Allwit calls them his own and they know him as their father. As part of his financial arrangement, in other words, he adopts his wife’s bastards. Critics often note the feminization of Allwit that occurs as a result of his cuckolding. Bruce Boehrer, for instance, observes that Allwit fails “to grasp the extent to which wittolry effeminizes its subject” (*Shakespeare* 93). The price that Allwit pays for living a fantasy life in which he believes himself to co-opt Sir
Walter’s wealth and masculinity is, according to Boehrer, “the abdication of his own manhood as figured through the exercise of domestic authority in general and sexual authority in particular” (93). Allwit, however, constructs for himself a new model of parenthood whereby he acquires children through non-biological means. He allows genealogical relation to be forged—the children’s genteel biological parentage is concealed by the fact that they bear Allwit’s name—and he accepts non-biological children as his own. He is therefore the father of bastard children in the sense that Bracton outlines; he willingly and knowingly accepts and adopts children produced by his wife as his own, even if they are not related to him by blood. He might be effeminized because he does not physically produce his own offspring, but he also, as a non-sexual genitor of children, circumvents the patriarchal need to reproduce. His vision for his lineage is based in financial gain rather than genealogical truth.

Although Allwit raises Sir Walter’s sons as his own, however, it is not entirely clear whether he forms an emotional attachment to them. He certainly refers to them as his own children—Sir Walter, he says, gets “me all my children” (1.2.19, my emphasis)—and therefore identifies them as a part of his family, but his feelings for them are questionable. Wat and Nick believe that Allwit is their father and have no suspicion that they are in fact the physical results of a financial bargain. But while Allwit considers the boys to be part of his family, he also refers to them as illegitimate when in the company of Sir Walter. When the first boy enters the room during Sir Walter’s visit and refers to Allwit as “father,” for instance, Allwit implores him to stop talking (1.2.118). The second
boy who greets Allwit is also entreated to be silent and is called a “bastard” (1.2.119-120). Allwit is perhaps afraid that Sir Walter will overhear the boys and will be offended that they address Allwit as their father. It is never clear, however, whether Allwit really thinks of his sons as illegitimate or if he only worries that Sir Walter will be angry that he has formed an emotional, adoptive attachment to his bastards. In order to offset the bond with his adoptive sons and to emphasize the paternal-filial blood relationship that exists between Sir Walter, Wat, and Nat, Allwit calls the boys “whoresons” and instructs them to kneel before their biological father (1.2.124-25). Genuflection, a gesture that signals a child’s respect for his or her parents, is employed by Allwit to reassure Sir Walter of his role as both provider and patriarch. While the boys do not verbally address Sir Walter as their father because they do not know him in this context, they are made to do so physically.

Sir Walter’s attitude toward his bastard sons underscores the unique nature of Allwit’s relationship with his adopted children. Upon seeing the boys with Mistress Allwit, Sir Walter wonders how he will “dispose of these two brats” when he is married (1.2.127) and insists that they “must not mingle / Amongst my children that I get in wedlock” (1.2.128-29). He views Wat and Nat, in other words, as illegitimates who cannot be equal to children born within a marriage. In order to be rid of them, he will see them apprenticed in London: "I’ll bind Wat prentice to a goldsmith, my father

84 David Bevington asserts that kneeling expresses “contractual obligation, obedience, homage, submission, fealty, petition, hospitality, parental authority, and royal prerogative” (136).
Yellowhammer; / As fit as can be. Nick with some vintner, good goldsmith / And vintner; there will be wine in bowls, i’faith” (1.2.131-34). Although the children are his by blood, Sir Walter clearly cannot accept them as his own in social terms; he will provide them with middle-class apprenticeships rather than with genteel lives befitting their biological pedigree. Whereas Allwit is willing to incorporate his wife’s illegitimate children into his family—albeit seemingly for primarily financial purposes—Sir Walter cannot imagine integrating his bastards of lower birth into his future legitimate family.

The financial agreement between the Allwits and Sir Walter modifies the biological composition of the Allwit family. Because Allwit privileges economic value over purity of blood, he allows someone from outside his family to contribute to it financially and biologically. The play therefore renders the Allwit children’s biological origins transparent to both their supposed father and the audience; viewers of the play are allowed to see that the Allwit family is not blood-based. As the Allwits eventually emerge triumphant and plan to use the material goods that have been provided for them by Sir Walter to begin a new life as brothel owners in the Strand (5.1.168-76), their family is stable and financially successful. The play does not question the morality of their actions, but rather allows the Allwits to thrive. Although Middleton’s depiction of the Allwits’s actions is clearly ironic—Allwit is a caricature of the cuckolded husband—the playwright envisions the couple forming a functioning, flourishing, non-biological family that does not depend upon blood lineage. The biological structure of the Allwit
family also emphasizes the play’s interest in the divide between reproduction and parenthood; Allwit is, like the promoters, a father who has not had to procreate.

The Touchwoods

While adoption is not involved in the composition of the Touchwood family, Touchwood Sr.’s various bastards are presumably continually adopted out as they are born to women like the Wench. He and his wife additionally participate in a kind of family planning through which they manage their proliferation for financial purposes. Over-fertility marks the Touchwoods: they produce a child every year, “some years two” (2.1.15). This abundance is shown to affect the family’s economic circumstances; “too fruitful for [their] barren fortunes” (2.1.9), they generate more children than they can support. In order to curb this endless familial growth, the Touchwoods must “give way to need / And live awhile asunder” (2.1.7-8). As Mariotti observes, “in this play’s comic society, [Touchwood’s] fertility is initially a victim of economic ‘necessity’” (68). Just as Allwit controls reproduction in his family by selling the rights to his wife to another man, Touchwood Sr. ensures that his own family’s procreation is restricted by distancing himself from his wife. He manages reproduction within his household in order to gain financial security.

Birth control in the early modern period typically involved determining various ways of increasing the number of pregnancies a woman might have, not preventing
them (McLaren 31). As Dorothy McLaren observes, “in some cultures in which stigmas are attached to barrenness and children are highly valued in economic and cultural terms a high birth rate is sought and large families taken as a demonstration of the community’s ability to control, by promoting, births” (3). The Touchwoods’ deliberate interference with reproduction therefore stands out in a time in which people were continually reminded by the church that a marriage could be judged by the number of children that it produced. Their fictional situation, however, was not necessarily rare in early modern European life. As Jacques Gélis observes in The History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe (1991), fertility was often feared because parents worried that they might not be able to feed all of their children (xi). While it was necessary to give birth to some children in order to form a family and to ensure its continuity, the birth of too many children threatened to cause a poor or middle-class family to implode.

The Touchwoods underscore the intricate intertwining of children and finances: each is required to support the other. Touchwood Sr. remarks of his family’s situation

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85 Dorothy MacLaren notes that the amenorrhoea of lactation, or the period of infertility that occurs during breastfeeding, was the only way in which early modern women could effectively control their own fertility. While breastfeeding could reduce fertility and increase the time between pregnancies, however, women in upper-class households mostly abandoned the practice and engaged in a “reproductive pattern of ever-recurrent births” (27). For more on the amenorrhoea of lactation, see MacLaren 22-53.
that while “some only can get riches and no children, / We only can get children and no riches” (2.1.11-12). Both children and wealth are necessary for financial security; unless each is available, a family cannot be guaranteed stability and permanence. Because the Touchwoods separate in order to stop their offspring from outstripping their financial means, they emphasize the economic connections between parents and their children. Their family is not merely a biological unit, but also an intricate financial model.

Both husband and wife privilege fortune over “blood” (2.1.49), or their passion. Touchwood admires his wife for her willingness to treat their marriage as a kind of business arrangement; she agrees to separate from her husband for economic purposes and considers their separation a “necessity” that “must be obeyed” (2.1.2). He is pleased that he has not married a “sensual fool” who “would ha’ hanged / About [his] neck, and never left her hold / Till she had kissed [him] into wanton businesses” (2.1.26-29). Instead, he has chosen someone who is willing to sacrifice sensual pleasure—and further procreation—for financial benefit. As Touchwood explains, “The feast of marriage is not lust but love, / And care of the estate” (2.1.50-51, my emphasis). Touchwood’s statement is ironic, however, because while he manages to control his sexual urges for his wife and to stabilize his household economy, he acts such urges out with other women; as a result, he produces bastards. It is Touchwood’s affair with the Wench, for instance, that prompts the formation of the promoters’ adoptive family. Touchwood’s reproductive arrangement with the Kixes, however, constitutes the play’s most notable instance of non-biological familial formation that is motivated by financial planning.
The Kixes

Suffering from the inverse of the Touchwoods’ reproductive problem, the Kixes are burdened with sterility; married for seven years, they have failed to produce a child (2.1.136). As a result of their medical condition, the couple is forced to look into a variety of fertility treatments. Following their “doctor’s advice” (2.1.141) and then that of Touchwood Sr., they try desperately to become pregnant with outside assistance. Unable to reproduce naturally and on their own, they must consider a variety of alternative options to conceive a child; such options ultimately lead to the creation of a family of mixed—albeit imperceptible—biological origins.

The Kixes’ desire for children is firmly rooted in economic interest: they want to produce an heir to inherit their fortune. Their “goodly lands and livings,” they note, are “kept back,” or are not passed on to their direct descendants, because of their infertility (2.1.155-56). As wealthy members of the upper class, the Kixes are particularly concerned about the preservation of their family line; while they remain childless, Sir Walter Whorehound, their distant relative, stands to acquire their estate. The Kixes’s “dry barrenness puffs up Sir Walter” (2.1.159), so that he is the only one, according to Lady Kix, who “gets by [the Kixes’s] not-getting” (2.1.160). Her image of a pregnant Sir Walter who swells with wealth as the result of his relatives’ unfruitfulness pinpoints the play’s economic perspective: finances and fecundity are interrelated.
While the Kixes want a child to inherit their property and fortune, they also yearn for an heir for social reasons. Lady Kix demonstrates that she feels not only jealous of, but also isolated from, the women of her community because of her barrenness.

When asked by her husband if she will attend the gossiping of Mistress Allwit’s child, Lady Kix laments the fact that other women can conceive with ease: “Everyone gets before me—there’s my sister / Was married but at Bartholomew eve last, / And she can have two children at a birth; / O one of them, one of them would ha’ served my turn” (2.1.174). She thus voices what must have been a sentiment familiar to many barren early modern English women. Because women’s bodies are the vehicles for childbirth and show visual, tangible signs of fertility once they are pregnant, women were often held more responsible than their husbands if they could not conceive. Infertility was considered to mark a move away from society, a failure to participate in the community. As Patricia Crawford observes, “barren wives lacked social status and respect, and the higher their social position, the unhappier was their lot” (19). Crawford notes that when Catherine of Brayanza, the wife of Charles II, failed to bear an heir, “the whole happiness of her life was centred on this single blessing” (19). Lady Kix’s joy and social status, like Catherine’s, depends on her ability to produce a child.

As David Bevington and Kathleen McLuskie observe, “Lady Kix’s desire for a child…is comically connected to her desire to inherit Sir Walter’s ‘goodly lands and livings’…but as Mrs. Allwit’s childbirth shows, her need for children is also crucial to her sense of her social status in the city community” (18).
Early modern men also depended upon the social inclusiveness that fathering children afforded them. Sir Oliver underscores the masculine social aspect of procreation when he states that his infertility causes him “to make good deeds [his] children” (2.1.148). If he cannot participate in the community through reproduction, he surmises, he will have to contribute to the greater good through charitable work. Francis Bacon presents a similar argument for men’s benevolent actions in his essay “Of Parents and Children” when he claims that childless men can reproduce mentally rather than physically: “The perpetuity by generation is common to beasts; but memory, merit, and noble works, are proper to men. And surely a man shall see the noblest works and foundations have proceeded from childless men; which have sought to express the images of their minds, where those of their bodies have failed” (146). These childless men, Bacon infers, rise above bodily concerns and instead prove themselves honourable by producing both intellectual and charitable works. Bacon also argues in “On Marriage and the Single Life” that unmarried men can create great works because they are not tied down by the responsibilities of family (118).

Despite the dignified nature of the altruistic work that Sir Oliver proposes and that Bacon deems most noble, however, Lady Kix is quick to note that she cannot equate philanthropy with reproduction. “Give me but those good deeds,” she states, “and I’ll find children” (2.1.149).

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87 “On Marriage” maintains that men who do not marry are instead married to the public and produce great works for that public (172).
The Kixes are willing to pay for fecundity. Arguing with his wife over the price of the fertility treatments that they receive from their doctor, Sir Oliver insists that he will “be at more cost yet” to obtain a child because they “are rich enough” (2.1.133-34). He informs his wife that he would “give a thousand pound to purchase fruitfulness” (2.1.144). Fertility is eventually assigned a precise price: the Kixes buy Touchwood Sr.’s fertility potion—a “little vial of almond-milk” for which he originally paid three pence—for four hundred pounds (3.3.104; 3.3.147-49). Sir Oliver counts Touchwood’s price “a bargain” and observes that he should be paid because “as our joys grows, / We must remember still from whence it flows, / Or else we prove ungrateful multipliers” (5.3.14-16). Fertility is a commodity in the play; it is viewed as something that can be attained by outside means for a price. Angus McLaren observes that fertility in early modern England was not regarded as “natural,” but was instead viewed as a “social and cultural creation” (31). “Upon investigation,” he observes, “one finds that the birth process was not left to fate, but marked at each stage by social rituals” (31). Fecundity preoccupied early modern English women and they actively tried to avoid leaving it to chance. In so doing, they challenged the natural order by seeking to enhance their fruitfulness. For the Kixes, fertility is an unfixed entity that they can acquire; they do not depend on nature or God alone, but instead assume that they take their fertility into their own hands.

The Kixes’ infertility fuels the formation of a non-biological family. Lady Kix does not become pregnant with the use of fertility aids. Her conception involves the use of a resource outside her marriage as well as a kind of adoption. The fertility potion that
Touchwood provides for the Kixes does nothing to remedy their situation: it is merely for show. Instead, the substitution of one sexual partner for another and the resulting introduction of a different biological contributor into the Kixes’ marriage solves their reproductive dilemma. Touchwood Sr. insists that the fertility remedy that he offers Lady Kix “must be taken lying” (3.3.167). He implies, of course, that he will assist her by impregnating her himself. While Sir Oliver is sent off “a-horseback” (3.3.141) in a supposed effort to enhance the useless fertility potion that he is given, Touchwood goes about his work with Lady Kix. The child that is produced out of this extramarital union is biologically that of Lady Kix, but Sir Oliver does not contribute to it physically. It is a bastard produced by a kind of sperm donation: the baby is conceived by an ostensibly anonymous father who sells his services as reproductive therapy. Because he is unaware that Touchwood is the child’s biological father, Sir Oliver considers the child his own. Although the child is not born during the play, Sir Oliver will presumably raise it as though he had fathered it and will never know that the bastard is not his biological offspring. *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* therefore points to the divide between sexual reproduction and social parenthood. Sir Oliver does not produce the child, but he will act as its parent regardless. Touchwood stands in as genitor for Sir Oliver, but Sir Oliver will play the social role of father.

Lady Kix’s infidelity ensures that a kind of unconscious adoption takes place whereby Sir Oliver will care for the child of another man. Whereas the play’s other adoptions of bastards are deliberate or, in the case of the promoters, at least
acknowledged, Sir Oliver is unaware of the adoption. He is led to believe that he is part of the reproductive process; in reality, he has nothing to do with it. Through this unwitting adoption, the play demonstrates to its audience the possibility for social parenthood that exists in any marriage in which infidelity takes place. In the play, however, such social parenthood constitutes a kind of strategy. Bastardy is presented as the solution to the Kixes’ barrenness. The play therefore suggests the possibility that non-blood based relation exists even within an apparently normal and seemingly biological family. Adoptive familial relationships are obscured within the supposed biological confines of the family unit.

Middleton, as playwright, reveals invisible genealogical truths to his audience. While Touchwood and Lady Kix are clearly aware that her child is not Sir Oliver’s own, Sir Oliver and the wider community will remain ignorant of the biological origins of his supposed offspring. The intricacies of the Kixes’ lineage are shown to the audience, however, and the disparity between their official genealogy and the biological reality of their family line is revealed. Middleton thus undercuts the presumed correlation between biological reproduction and genealogy; Sir Oliver’s fortune will not pass through what he imagines is his carefully cultivated blood line, but will instead go to a child whose lineage is not at all attached to his own.

It is ultimately the Kixes’ economic interests that change the biological composition of their family and cause them—whether knowingly or unknowingly—to introduce a child from outside their marriage into their home. Their desperate economic
situation requires them to produce an heir in order to preserve their familial wealth. Infertility and the adoption of a bastard that accompanies it disrupt inheritance and refigure the biological and financial makeup of the family. For the Kixes, children and fortune are one: Sir Oliver is quick to note when his wife finally becomes pregnant that “the child is coming, and the land comes after” (5.3.17). Infertility threatens economic ruin for the family, but a kind of adoption or change in familial relation allows them to avoid it. Economics complicate apparently straightforward lineage in the play, causing families to extend beyond their initial blood-based boundaries.

The Kixes’ infertility is ultimately shown to lead to a blending of families, in which the Touchwoods and the Kixes live together as a sort of hybrid family unit. As Sir Oliver invites Touchwood and his wife “to live no more asunder” (5.4.80) and to instead use the “purse, and bed, and board” (5.4.81) that he can provide for them, he combines his own family with theirs. Announcing that Touchwood can once again produce children with his estranged wife and that the Kixes will pay to raise them, Sir Oliver becomes the Touchwood family’s patron. He also, however, unknowingly ensures that his wife will again become pregnant by Touchwood. The direct consequence of the amalgamation of the two families under one roof is that they will, in a sense, become a crossbreed: Touchwood will continue to stand in for Sir Oliver as the genitor of his children, although Sir Oliver will raise them. While this familial fusion is not depicted within the space of the play, it is implied that the two families will become covertly interrelated. Infertility thus finally fosters a kind of interdependence, whereby one
family relies upon another for its own fruitfulness and familial relation spreads out past biological limits. Sir Oliver will unknowingly afford Touchwood an outlet for his unmanageable sexual potency; such an outlet, Middleton makes clear, will continue to form part of the invisible fabric of genealogy. The play makes Touchwood’s role as substitute genitor obvious for the audience without condemning it.88

By emphasizing the economics of the family, Middleton presents children as non-biologically exclusive commodities that can be used to negotiate futurity; families in the play acquire children in order to ensure their financial and familial legacies. Adoption is not a foreign or exotic concept in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Instead, social relation is continually shaped and reshaped by economic circumstance, rendering adoption—whether deliberate or involuntary—an almost normal, regular part of the composition of the early modern family. Adoption constitutes a strategy whereby the social and financial world are negotiated. The play makes non-blood based genealogy visible; it thus demonstrates that the bastard child is often an adoptee who is incorporated into a new family.

88 For a discussion of the play’s ambiguous depiction of fertility, see R. B. Parker 183-5.
The Language of Familial Relation: Heritability in *Mother Bombie* and *The Comedy of Errors*

*Bon sang ne peut mentir.*

—French proverb (Leigh 261)

In the seventh book of his *Natural History*, in a chapter entitled “Examples of many that have been very like and resembled one another,” Pliny recounts the story of Antony’s taking up of young male twins. Noting that Antony receives the boys from Toranius, a merchant slave seller, Pliny explains that the triumvir was duped and that the boys are visually but not biologically identical: one was born in Asia and the other beyond the Alps. Oblivious to the fact that he obtains artificial twins—that is, two boys who look exactly alike but who were not actually conceived in the same womb—Antony at first falls for this “fraud and cousenage” (162). When Antony finally recognizes that the twins’ physical similarities do not indicate blood-based familial relation, the reader is told, it is because he notices something amiss with “the language & speech of the boyes” (162), not because he observes a difference in their appearances. Their linguistic difference—which Pliny does not describe in detail—reveals them not to be

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89 Translation: Good blood cannot lie.
Recognized as two children who happen to be indistinguishable by chance, the boys have lost their value as genuine twins. The industrious Toranius, however, convinces Antony that it is because the boys look exactly alike but are not related that they are valued so highly:

for (quoth he) it is no maruell at all that two brethren twins that lay both together in one belly do resemble one the other; but that there should be any found borne as these were in diuers countries, so like in all respects as they, he held it for a most rare and wonderfull thing. (162)

Toranius cheapens blood relation, ranking a fluke of nature above biological similarity. Although rare, the birth of twins is far more likely, he insists, than the discovery of two unrelated, but identical, people. Once convinced of the worth of his accidental twins, Antony values “those two boies as much as any thing else in all his wealth” (162). Pliny’s tale thus prizes chance likeness, but ultimately presents familial similarity as something that can be physically but not linguistically replicated. While appearance can somehow be forged or inadvertently reproduced in nature, as Antony’s twins demonstrate, language plays a principal role in the story in determining the twins’ non-relation. The boys’ divergent linguistic skills, not their bodily traits, mark them as biologically different.
I introduce Pliny’s anecdote not only to address issues of familial likeness, but also to establish the cultural fascination with physical and behavioural resemblance among family members that extended from Pliny’s time to the early modern period. This chapter will explore the ways in which John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (c.1590, pub.1594) and Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* (1594) envision the inheritance of physical, behavioural, and linguistic traits. I will demonstrate that characters in these plays conceptualize “familial relation”—or personal connections that stem from blood ties—through behavioural patterns that mirror those of their relatives. *Mother Bombie* and *The Comedy of Errors* provide intriguing examples of early modern attitudes toward heredity because they feature adopted children. I will analyze in particular the connections between genetics and language in both plays. By “genetics” I mean the transmission from one generation to the next of specific biological features. In early modern England, I will suggest, language was considered a skill that children could learn, but also a trait that they could inherit from their parents. Both plays emphasize the biological similarity of relatives and reflect a cultural uncertainty about whether the organic nature of the family could survive physical separation. In these plays, themes of identity and identification accompany questions of likeness, and children are measured against their relatives. Because family members are lost or separated in these plays, familial likeness allows both Lyly and Shakespeare to regroup those characters who are biologically related. Such similarity serves the needs of the plays’ plots, but also argues for the fundamental likeness of family members. As I will show, this likeness is often revealed through language.
Mother Bombie enacts a test of heredity in which nature is pitted against upbringing: it attempts to evaluate whether adopted children take on the traits of their adoptive families, or if they behave solely like their blood kin. The play examines, in other words, whether the biological nature of the family persists despite division. I argue that Mother Bombie urges its audience to see a kind of behavioural and linguistic affinity among siblings, even if those siblings have never known one another. Children who are raised apart from their biological families appear unable to assimilate with their foster families, and the foster families instinctively reject offspring who are not theirs by blood. Mother Bombie thus suggests that children are always like their siblings, no matter how or where they are raised. Similarly, The Comedy of Errors demonstrates that familial relation is evident not just in visible likeness, but also through conduct and styles of speech. The play depicts two sets of identical twin brothers who are separated in their infancies but who develop similar behavioural traits and speaking strategies. In having the estranged twins mirror one another’s language, Shakespeare’s comedy posits linguistic relation: those who are related are identifiable beyond physical markers and are connected even through what might otherwise be supposed to be acquired traits. The play also uses behavioural and linguistic likeness as a theatrical device to convey the fictional similarity of the actors portraying twins onstage. Language is never arbitrary in a dramatic context; instead, playwrights assign characters different linguistic modes to distinguish them from or tie them to other characters. Linguistic ability in both plays establishes familial relation; it is depicted as an inherited characteristic, as much as are physical traits. Mother Bombie and The Comedy of Errors each finally refuses social
familial ties in favour of biological ones; each promotes the power of heredity. Both plays also ultimately dismiss supernatural explanations for familial likeness or dissimilarity, and instead use heredity to elucidate what might at first seem like magic. They depict this hereditary likeness, however, through calculated dramatic language.

The bonds between siblings in the early modern period have long been a subject of debate among historians who examine the ways in which primogeniture and the inheritance of the estate influenced familial harmony. Fraternal relationships, for instance, could be extremely competitive because primogeniture often fostered sibling

90 It is important to note that “inheritance” did not refer to the “natural derivation of qualities or characters from parents or ancestry” until Charles Darwin used the term in that sense in 1859 (OED, I.2.b.). I use it in the modern sense here and throughout this chapter, whereas, in the early modern period, it would have been to used to refer to the “Hereditary succession to property, a title, office, etc.; ‘a perpetual or continuing right to an estate, invested in a person and his heirs’” (OED, I.1), or as “A coming into, or taking, possession of something, as one’s birthright; possession, ownership; right of possession.” (OED, I.2.a.). “Heredity,” however, was used in the period in the sense of something being “transmitted in a line of progeny; passing naturally from parents to offspring” and its earliest use appears to be in 1597 (OED, 2.). Similarly, the term “genetic” was not coined until 1831 (OED, A.1.a.), but I use it in this chapter in the modern sense to signify biological affinity or common origin.
resentment for a family’s eldest son (Crawford 215).91 Linda Pollock, however, points to certain more positive aspects of male sibling relations in the period ("Younger Sons" 23-29), and Catherine Belsey has subsequently explored the emotional consequences of siblinghood in early modern drama (Loss 129-74). Scholars, however, have typically neglected the issue of sibling similarity, perhaps because little evidence of early modern notions of siblinghood exists.

I will examine the speech of relatives within the context of early modern medical and scientific treatises—which contend that behavioural traits are heritable—and of early modern English linguistic theory. Although current knowledge of genetics derives largely from Gregor Mendel’s nineteenth-century findings, the central concepts of heritability circulated in rudimentary form in the writings of medical practitioners and philosophers. I will first investigate classical and early modern theories of heritability, and will chart the ways in which children were believed to inherit characteristics from their parents and in which siblings were deemed alike. I will then assess the cultural fascination with likeness and inheritance that was manifest in works on biological reproduction. Using such evidence of the period’s interest in likeness, I analyze the conclusions of Mother Bombie and The Comedy of Errors through the lens of biological similarity. Early modern theories of behavioural inheritance provide an important context for understanding dramatic scenes of reconciliation and recognition between

91 See Crawford, 209-238 for a detailed account of sibling relationships in the early modern period. Joan Thirsk also outlines the adverse effects of primogeniture (335-57).
parents and children and between siblings. While *Mother Bombie* portrays separated siblings, *The Comedy of Errors* focuses on estranged twins. Twinship, of course, predicates a closer similarity between two people than ordinary siblinghood. Whereas Lyly demonstrates the ultimate likeness of separated siblings, however, Shakespeare asserts sibling similarity but also allows that a perfect reunion between estranged twins might not be possible. An examination of the linguistic and behavioural connections established among relatives in Shakespeare’s play reveals a deeply-held concern that the reconciliation of long-separated family members is impossible, rendering the concluding restoration scene in *The Comedy of Errors* far less decisive than Shakespeare’s critics have typically maintained.

In *A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* (1611), Randle Cotgrave defines adoption as “the conferring on fremme children all advautages belonging to naturall ones” (Cotgrave “affiliation”). Both *Mother Bombie* and *The Comedy of Errors* ask their audiences to question what exactly an adoptive family might “confer” on an adopted child. These plays, in other words, depict the physical and behavioural development of children away from their biological families.

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92 Cotgrave later defines a “fremme” as a person who is “neither a dweller with, nor of kinne vnvo, vs” (“estrangier”).
“After a living model”: Classical and Early Modern Theories of Heredity

In On the Nature of the Child (c. 400 B.C.E.), Hippocrates describes the process by which a child’s physical features are formed. “Both man and woman,” he asserts, “have male and female sperm” (322), and both types of sperm contribute to an embryo’s development. If more male sperm than female sperm happens to be involved in the production of a particular child, Hippocrates contends, then that child will be born resembling its father more closely than its mother, and vice versa. Although he acknowledges the possibility that a child might resemble one parent more than the other, Hippocrates maintains that it is impossible for a child to resemble only one, or neither, of its parents: “No: it must inevitably resemble each parent in some respect, since it is from both parents that the sperm comes to form the child” (321-22). Parent-child likeness is, according to Hippocrates, an absolute necessity, proof that a child belongs biologically to both its mother and father.

Aristotle likewise attempts to explain physical familial likeness in the fourth book of Generation of Animals (c. 320 B.C.E.), a zoological and philosophical treatise. In considering the topic, he establishes a group of “facts”:

(1) Some children resemble their parents, while others do not; some being like the father and others like the mother, both in the body as a whole and in each part, male and female offspring resembling father and mother respectively rather than the other way about. (2) They
resemble their parents more than remoter ancestors, and
resemble those ancestors more than any chance individual.
(3) Some, though resembling none of their relations, yet do
at any rate resemble a human being, but others are not
even like a human being but a monstrosity. (1187)

Like Hippocrates, Aristotle notes that a child might resemble one parent more closely
than the other. He also creates a hierarchy of physical similarity among relatives, stating
that “chance individual[s]” and “remoter ancestors” should not be more like a child than
its parents. Aristotle’s third fact is, however, his most remarkable, and the one upon
which he elaborates. To qualify his assertion that children who do not resemble their
relatives appear monstrous, Aristotle states that all human progeny should look like
those who begot them; otherwise they border on the grotesque: “For even he who does
not resemble his parents is already in a certain sense a monstrosity; for in these cases
Nature has in a way departed from the type” (1187). If a child is born unlike its parents,
in other words, it must be somehow a monster. Familial likeness is posited as a
requirement of nature.

The Aristotelian principle that like produces like held sway throughout the early
modern period; a cultural fascination with familial resemblance and inheritance was
manifest in a multitude of works. “Nature,” wrote Claude de Tesserant in Histoires
prodigieuses (1567), “portrays after a living model, just as a painter would, and tries to
make children resemble their parents as much as possible” (qtd. in Huet 7). Early
modern intellectuals were preoccupied by the apparent mystery by which relatives were born with familial resemblance. In the landmark medical treatise *Mikrocosmographia* (1615), for example, Helkiah Crooke is bewildered by resemblance, noting that the cause of familial “similitude or likenesse of the forme and feature is very obscure and full of controuersie” (309). Similarly, Montaigne contemplates the source of familial likeness in “Of the Resemblance Between Children and Fathers” (1580, trans. 1603), noting that “in Natures workes, there are some qualities and conditions, which to vs are imperceptible, and whereof our sufficiencie cannot discover the meanes, nor finde out the causes” (427). As he marvels at the many traits transmitted between parents and their children, Montaigne asks how a single drop of seed might hold the promise that a child will resemble its parents: “Where dooth this droppe of water containe or lodge this infinite number of formes? And how beare they these resemblances, of so rash, and vnruly a progresse, that the childes childe shall be answerable to his grandfather, and the nephew to his vnckle?” (427). Familial likeness, he notes, is not only passed from parent to child, but also runs current throughout many generations. Montaigne then begins to scrutinize his own family’s history of heritability. He observes that although his father did not begin to suffer from bladder stones until twenty-seven years after Montaigne was conceived, Montaigne has himself developed this same ailment. How is it, he asks, that forty-five years later he has “begunne to have a feeling of [the illness]?” (428). The

93 Alain F. Corcos notes that in “Of the Resemblance Between Children and Fathers” Montaigne asks questions about heredity that were not answered for another 300 years (50).
mystery is so perplexing to Montaigne that he states that if someone can solve the riddle of heredity for him, he “will believe [that person] as many other miracles as he shall please to tell” (428).

Because it renders genetic makeup somewhat perceptible, resemblance was the most reliable way of verifying biological familial relation in the early modern period. Crooke describes many instances in which children in other cultures are proven to be part of a particular family because they resemble their parents. He reports, for instance, that “The people called Cammatae haue common wiues, and euery man chuseth his children or refuseth them as they are more or lesse like vnto himselfe” (309). Montaigne similarly recounts Aristotle’s tale of a “certaine Nation, with whome all women were common, where children were alloted their fathers, only by their resemblances” (427). He also reports that there is a race in Thebes “which from their mothers wombe, bare the forme of a burre, or yron of a launce” (427). Any members of the race who do not bear the mark are “judged as mis-begotten and deemed vnlawfull” (427). Early modern English people also depended on likeness to prove a natural, blood-based connection between parents and their children when paternity was dubious. Samuel More, for instance, used familial likeness as his defense in a paternity case in 1622. More denied that he had fathered his wife’s children because “the apparent likeness & resemblance of most of the said children in their visages and lineaments of their bodies” was closer to that of a man named Blakeway (qtd. in Crawford 122). More believed that his wife was having an affair with Blakeway, and used the absence of paternal resemblance to
absolve himself of fatherly responsibility.\textsuperscript{94} Familial likeness thus helped to alleviate concern in a patriarchal society that a woman might bear an illegitimate child without her husband’s discovering her infidelity. Likeness marks a child as a man’s own.

Emphasizing a child’s likeness to either parent, however, could be strategic. Jonathan Goldberg suggests that early modern family portraiture often insisted upon familial likeness as an ideological construct (5). He asserts, for example, that a double portrait of James I and Mary, Queen of Scots, depicts the son and mother as physically alike in order to communicate James’s right to rule. The portrait, he argues, “suggests that [James’s] power derives from re-production, literally and figuratively” (5). Goldberg points to several portraits that “proclaim that children are the images of their parents,” particularly their fathers (12). Likeness in early modern portraits acts as a powerful patriarchal and familial discourse; it asserts the continuity of biological and ideological power.

While Goldberg observes the similarities between parents and children in portraits, he does not examine sibling likeness. Familial relation and similarity were not only conceptualized in the early modern period in vertical terms, or from parent to child, but also in horizontal terms, or from sibling to sibling. Siblings—brothers in particular—were often thought to be copies of their parents and were therefore occasionally perceived as replicas of one another. In John Souch’s 1635 portrait of the

\textsuperscript{94} For a detailed account of More’s court case, see Crawford 122.
family of Sir Thomas Aston (Figure 1), for instance, both parent-child and sibling-sibling likeness is evident. While early modern portraiture often used facial types that did not distinguish individual characteristics precisely, likeness could be conveyed in other ways. Seated between his three-year-old son and his deceased wife, Sir Thomas rests his hand on a skull that lies on top of the shrouded cradle of his stillborn baby. Lady Aston is pictured dead in her childbed linen. The young Thomas is presented as his father’s best hope for continuity in the grim family scene: his hand is placed below his father’s on a wooden cross, creating a visual line of descent. Both father and son also lean to the left, in parallel with one another. The Aston males are not only associated spatially, however, but are also dressed in a very similar manner; the boy is figured as the reproduction of his genitor. Although several inscriptions warn the viewer of the fleeting nature of life—the phrase “Qui Spem carne Seminat Metet ossa” is found beneath the skull, for instance—a consoling inscription is associated with the young Thomas.95 The plaque, located to the boy’s left, reminds the viewer that he is not only his parents’ child, but also his deceased brother’s sibling. It reads: “Fratris remulus, / Matris gloria, / Solamen patris. / AEtat suae / 3es Anni & / 9em Menses,” (Treuherz 304).96 Thomas is described as “Fratris remulus,” or the remnants of his brother, and thus

95 “He who sows hope in flesh reaps bones” (trans. Treuherz 303).

96 “The little branch of his brother, the glory of his mother, the consolation of his father; aged 3 years, 9 months” (trans. Treuherz 305).
symbolizes familial, and particularly sibling, continuity. Although one of the Aston sons is dead, the other is connected to him and lives on as a representative of them both.97

The close blood relationship between siblings was considered to form the basis of a particularly strong bond. As Patricia Crawford notes, however, there was no formal set of sibling obligations in early modern England: sibling duties are rarely outlined in domestic advice manuals, unlike those of spouses, parents, and children (218). There was, however, a “general Christian expectation that siblings would love and support each other in life crises, such as births, sickness and death.” Because of high mortality rates in the period, siblings were far more likely to rely upon one another throughout their lifetimes than upon their parents. Brothers and sisters therefore formed an important part of an individual’s social and familial existence. This is not to say that siblings were always necessarily raised alongside one another—children were often sent away to study, apprentice, or serve in other households from an early age—but they nonetheless formed their identities, in part, in relation to their siblings.

97 In his essay “Fatherly Authority: The Politics of Stuart Family Images,” Jonathan Goldberg includes this portrait of the Aston family but does not analyze its representation of familial continuity (21). Goldberg instead uses the portrait as an example of a visual depiction of a woman who died in childbirth. Treuherz has since noted that while the second woman seated in the portrait has often been assumed to be a depiction of Lady Aston as she was in life, “there seems to be no parallel for this type of double representation at this period” (305).
“Manners ... of the Minde”: The Inheritance of Behavioural Traits

Early modern writers who were interested in theories of heritability notably emphasized not only physical characteristics but also behavioural qualities. Montaigne is amazed, for instance, that seed, or semen, can hold in it “the impressions, not only of the corporall forme,” or of bodily likeness, “but even of the very thoughts and inclinations of our fathers” (427). Children, he assumes, are born predestined to behave like their parents. Robert Burton makes a similar claim with both medical and philosophical implications in The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) when he argues that a son “is as well inheritor of his [father’s] infirmities, as of his lands” (80). If a father’s constitution is corrupt, then his son’s will mirror it, Burton maintains, and this condition “doth not so much appeare in the composition of the Body ... but in manners and conditions of the Minde” (80). A disease of the mind, such as melancholy, can be passed on, Burton reminds his reader, although there is no physical evidence that it has been inherited.98

Burton is careful to note several other transmissible behavioural traits, further emphasizing his belief that those who are related by blood are alike in ways beyond bodily likeness. He catalogues, for instance, what he believes to be the heritable physical attributes of various national groups: Indian flat noses, Austrian lips, and Bavarian

98 In order to prove his point, Burton cites the Spanish physician Lodovicus Mercatus’s tract on hereditary diseases where pox, stones, gout, and madness are all deemed heritable (80).
chins. Burton also states that “voice, pace, gesture, lookes, [are] likewise deriued” (80). Traits that might be presumed to be learned rather than inherited—such as voice and gesture—are, according to Burton, in fact passed down genetically from parents to children. “Voice” is defined as the “sound, or the whole body of sounds, made or produced by the vocal organs of man or animals in their natural action; esp. sound formed in or emitted from the human larynx in speaking, singing, or other utterance; vocal sound as the vehicle of human utterance or expression” (OED I.1.). It is also, however, identified as a now obsolete term meaning a “word or number of words uttered or expressed in speech; a phrase, sentence, or speech; a discourse or report” (9.a.). Burton’s “voice,” then, might describe the style of speech because it takes into account the words uttered in speech, as well as the sound of those words. When coupled with “pace,” a term which delineates the speed at which something happens, as well as the movement of the leg in taking a step, “voice” takes on an even closer association with language style. Burton, then, deems speech and gesture, as well as “looks,” or physical likeness, to be hereditary rather than learned through exposure or observation.

Early modern speech was associated with subjectivity and was said to convey a person’s essential self. George Puttenham notes in The Arte of Englishe Poesie (1589) that speech is “the image of Man … for man is but his minde, and as his minde is tempered and qualified, so are his speeches and language at large, and his manner of utterance the very warpe and woofe of his conceits” (124). The “manner of utterance,” or a person’s linguistic style, expressed his or her innermost self. Similarly, Ben Jonson writes in
Timber, or Discoveries (1641) that speech “springs out of the most retired and inmost part of us, and is the image of the present of it, the mind” (46). If speech comes from the mind, as Bacon asserts, and if children, as Montaigne and Burton suggest, were believed to inherit their parents’ “thoughts and inclinations”—or, in a sense, their minds—then the speaking styles of children might reasonably be expected to be derived from those of their parents. While styles of speech mark characters as individuals, they might equally bind them to the speech, and thus to the identities, of their relatives.

Michel Foucault observes that likeness was an organizing principle in the early modern period, used to arrange knowledge. “Up to the end of the sixteenth century,” he notes, “resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture.” Foucault claims that “it was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them” (17). This reliance on similarity extended to language usage as well: early modern rhetoricians depend on models of likeness to explain rhetorical tropes. Thomas Wilson, for instance, describes metaphor as “the likeness of that thing which appeareth in another word” (196). George Puttenham refers to verbal likeness as an artistic reproduction: “when we liken an human person to another countenance, stature, speech, or other quality, it is not called bare resemblance but resemblance by imagerie or portrait alluding to the painter’s term who yieldeth to th’eye a visible representation of
the thing he describes and painteth in his table” (250). *Imitatio, mimesis,* and *exemplarity* all similarly produced likeness through language.99

The early modern period in England was, in many ways, shaped by the question of how language and knowledge were inherited. Goldberg notes the “Renaissance habit of mind to think analogically and to explain events by understanding their origins” (9). “There is a family structure in thought,” he insists, “and to seek out the causes of things is to find their genealogical principles” (9). The rediscovery and subsequent embracing of classical works during the period triggered an interest in linguistic and literary genealogy: many authors attempted to link English literature to its classical antecedents, noting the debts that they owed to Aristotle, Pliny, Cicero, and other classical writers. Language was therefore also in this sense considered transmissible and was modeled on likeness. By creating a linguistic and literary lineage from past to present, English authors sought to legitimize the contemporary practice of writing. Sir Philip Sidney, for instance, wrote *The Defense of Poesie* (1595) not only to establish the moral and social values of poetry, but also to underscore its ancient nobility and authenticate its importance. He notes poetry’s antiquity and the place of prestige that it held in the ancient world, using classical precedent to lay the foundation for his own claims: “Since the authors of most of our sciences were the Romans, and before them the Greeks, let us

99 Lorna Hutson suggests that a practice which she terms “the husbandry of exempla,” or the rhetorical mastery of examples proper to an occasion, came about as a result of humanist strategies of teaching through *copia* (48).
a little stand upon their authorities” (Sig. B3). The classical names for poets (the Greek *poietes*, meaning maker, and the Roman *vates*, meaning prophet) are cited as evidence of the antique dignity of the art (Sig. B3). Sidney therefore produces a poetic genealogy beginning with ancient works and ending with English poetry: he positions English poets as the direct descendants of classical authors. This cultural concern with linguistic and literary pedigree is one facet of the early modern belief in the biological heritability of behavioural traits. In a culture that was fascinated by origins and precedent, great consideration was given to the derivation of language. Shakespeare’s and Lyly’s attention to the linguistic similarity between their characters who are biologically related stems in part from a greater cultural concern with linguistic legacy, as well as from the early modern belief in the properties of heredity. The concept of literary and linguistic genetics, therefore, overlaps with and influences the concept of biological linguistic inheritance.

Linguistic skill was not, however, necessarily thought to be gained by inheritance alone: rhetoricians generally believed that rhetorical aptitude could be learned. Eloquence, for example, was frequently deemed a talent honed through study. Thomas Wilson held that although a child must possess a basic propensity for eloquence naturally, such ability might be improved through education: “First, needful is that which desireth to excel in this gift of oratory, and longeth to prove an eloquent man, must naturally have a wit and an aptness thereunto; then must he to his book and learn to be well stored with knowledge, that he may be able to minister matter for all causes
necessary” (48). A child’s “natural” linguistic ability could, according to Wilson, be altered and improved. Richard Mulcaster, conversely, held that “No one tung is more fine then other naturallie” (253). Instead, he insisted, “by industrie of the speaker,” and, on occasion, with the help of the government, the speaker can “endeuoreth himself to garnish it [his tongue] with eloquence, & to enrich it with learning” (253). Children were therefore believed to be at least partly malleable; they were not necessarily assumed to be ordained to take on particular behaviours by virtue of their inherited characteristics. The tension between natural ability and deliberate learning affords the opportunity to examine representations of adopted children in early modern drama and to determine whether such children are envisioned as linked behaviourally and linguistically to their biological or adoptive families. Is a child that is raised outside its biological family influenced by its surroundings, or is it biologically predetermined both to look and to behave in a particular way? Can a child, for instance, be taught a certain style of speech or behaviour through its exposure to a family that is not biologically its own? What might an insistence on familial likeness or difference suggest in a particular context?

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For a comparison of early modern teachers to gardeners who cultivated their pupils, see Bushnell, *A Culture* 73-116.
“If ravens sitte on hens’ egs”: Mother Bombie and the Preservation of Kind

Mother Bombie is Lyly’s most critically neglected play despite the claim of its 1594 title page that it was “sundrie times plaied by the Children of Powles.” Thomas Nashe referred to the play in 1596, suggesting that it was recognizable enough to warrant mention years after the closure of the theatre at Paul’s in about 1590, but scholars have not taken a strong interest in it. Written in the style of traditional Roman New Comedy, Mother Bombie pits children against their parents, with the stodgy older generation blocking the way to love. The play is more dependent on plot than is typical of Lyly’s other works. John Dover Wilson regrets that Mother Bombie is “a somewhat vulgar realistic play of rustic life” (115), while G. K. Hunter identifies it as part of “that line of comedies which domesticate the Roman comic muse among English manners” (220). As A. Harriette Andreadis notes, the play has primarily been “dismissed as farce, without redeeming moral, emotional, or intellectual content” (41).

Much of the action of Mother Bombie revolves around the discrepancies between the marital goals of parents and their children. Its critics often note its focus on the commodification of children through marriage. Claire M. Busse, for instance, has

101 Nashe: “Then we neede neuer wish the Playes at Powles vp againe, but if we were wearie with walking, and loth to goe too farre to seeke sport, into the Arches we might step, and heare him plead; which would bee a merrier Comedie than euer was old Mother Bomby” (qtd. in Scragg 210).
recently argued that children in the play “challenge the values placed upon them” by the economies of matrimony (235). What is most often overlooked, however, is the play’s apparent insistence on the changeability of familial relationships and its eventual affirmation of the power of inheritance. Familial identity that at first appears fixed is proven variable: two sets of children swap parents, a supposed brother and sister become socially sanctioned lovers, and intended lovers are proven to be siblings. While many relationships are shown to be mutable, however, the changes that take place ultimately restore a natural, biological order. *Mother Bombie’s* resolution works in favour of blood relation; the transmutations in identity that occur over the course of the play re-establish the genetic stability that is, for a time, upset.

Andreadis argues that *Mother Bombie* is Lyly’s “anatomy of marriage” and that the play’s three couples represent three different kinds of matrimony: “those of love, labor, and grief” (54). While the play can certainly be read as an expression of these different types of union, I suggest that it is concerned primarily with demonstrating the power of heredity. The first part of the action involves Memphio and Stelio, two wealthy fathers who worry that their children are not like them. In scenes that parallel one another, the audience sees each father create an inventory of the ways in which his child differs from him. Both Accius, Memphio’s son, and Silena, Stelio’s daughter, are of particularly disappointing intelligence. Each family is so ashamed of its dim-witted child that they hide him or her from public view. Accius and Silena are monsters in the Aristotelian definition; that is, they are unlike those who are assumed to be their
parents. Each father plots separately to have his child married to the other’s, and therefore to delegate his child to another family. The play’s primary conflict, then, stems from Memphio’s and Stelio’s need each to pair off his child in secret. In addition to showcasing these attempts at surreptitious marriage, Lyly also uses the first act of the play to attempt to explain why Accius and Silena are each so unlike their family members. The first act, in short, is focused on elucidating the mysteries of familial relation. The second part of the action involves the introduction of another set of dysfunctional lovers. Maestius and Serena, a poor but intelligent brother and sister who are raised by their mother Vicinia, are overwhelmingly attracted to one another despite their apparent relation. Both attempt to deny this attraction because they recognize that they are “intangled with affections beyonde nature” (3.1.923). The siblings spend most of the play trying to resist what familial relation forbids.

Characters in *Mother Bombie* are fascinated by familial likeness and they evaluate a range of popular early modern views on heredity. The action begins with Memphio’s lament for the lack of parental-filial likeness between himself and his son as he asserts that there are three things that make his life miserable: “a thredbare purse, a curst wife, and a foole to [his] heire” (1.1.2-3). His servant Dromio offers in return three “medicines” for these miseries: “a pike-staffe to take a purse on the highway, a holy wand to brush cholar from my mistres’ tong, and a young wench for my yong master; so that as your worship being wise begot a foole, so he, being a foole, may tread out a wise man” (1.1.5-10). Dromio suggests that although a wise man can father a fool, that fool
might, in turn, beget a wise man. He thus presents Memphio with a consolation for Accius’s unlikeness to his supposed genitor. A child will perhaps not always be like its father, Dromio suggests, but that child at least possesses the potential to produce another child who will then resemble its grandfather. When Memphio rejects this justification of familial dissimilarity, however, Dromio turns to increasingly complex speculations about the workings of heredity to rationalize parental-child unlikeness. He proposes, for instance, that in order to make Accius resemble his father, Memphio “had best let some wise man sit on [his] sonne, to hatch him a good wit; they saie, if ravens sitte on hens’ egs, the chickens will be black, and so forth” (1.1.18). Dromio momentarily envisions biological inheritance as changeable; that is, he suggests that an outside source can manipulate a person’s appearance and constitution. Lyly obviously intends for Dromio’s proposition to be humorous, but Memphio’s response to the joke is striking. Stating that his “sonne is out of the shell, and is growen a pretie cocke” (1.1.19-20), the father suggests that Accius’s divergent disposition is already formed and is unchangeable. Memphio claims dissimilarity from his son: “I marvel he is such an asse, he takes it not of his father” (1.1.23).

Following his assertion that children can be influenced by outside sources, Dromio employs arguments based on the power of the maternal imagination to explain the dissimilarities between Accius and Memphio. Although he at first suggests that Accius might not be Memphio’s biological son, Dromio quickly retracts this proposition when it becomes clear that his master takes it as a suggestion that his wife is “naught of
her bodie” (1.1.30), or is a whore. Adjusting his statement to be less accusatory in nature, Dromio reminds his master that women can be “fantasticall of … mind” (1.1.31). A woman might be physically chaste in marriage, the servant suggests, but her thoughts can still be unfaithful. In thinking of a man other than her husband, Dromio suggests, a pregnant woman might influence the development of a child in her womb. “It may be,” he offers, that “when this boy was begotten, shee thought of a foole, and so conceived a foole, yourselfe being verie wise, and she surpassing honest” (1.1.32-34). Memphio, recognizing Dromio’s argument, reinforces this line of thinking: “It may be; for I have heard of an Aethiopian, that thinking of a faire picture, brought forth a faire [baby], and yet no bastard” (1.1.37-39). The two men thus endow the imagination with the ability to alter resemblance.

The maternal imagination was widely believed, in the early modern period, to possess the power of modification. Medical texts often suggested that women could influence the physical appearances and personalities of their children through their own mental activity during conception or pregnancy.\(^{102}\) Offspring who were thought to be affected by the maternal imagination, then, were assumed to be shaped both physically

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\(^{102}\) For several examples of children who were thought to be influenced by their mothers’ imaginations, see Finucci 54-57. A mother’s longing for fruit while pregnant, for instance, was thought to cause a birthmark to appear on the child in the shape of the desired fruit. Clara Pinto-Correia also explores the early modern belief in a mother’s ability to alter the fetus that she carries (128-30).
and mentally by the thoughts and impulses of their mothers, rather than by the physical, heritable features that they received from both parents. This belief in the power of the imagination over embryonic development emerged from antiquity.\textsuperscript{103} Crooke notes, for

\textsuperscript{103} Early modern physicians did not receive information about the maternal imagination solely from the works of antiquity; in Genesis 30 it is said that Jacob produced sheep of different colours by the same process. The passage recounts Jacob’s agreement with Laban whereby Jacob, in return for caring for Laban’s flock, was allowed to keep “all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats” (Genesis 32). In order to ensure that many spotted animals are born into the flock, Jacob begins a kind of genetic engineering practice: he sets stripped rods in locations where the animals can see them when they are conceiving and “the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted” (Genesis 39). Jacob then ensures that the animals only gaze on other speckled animals by turning “the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked” (Genesis 40). He even begins to weed out the weak animals, not wanting them to breed speckled offspring. When strong cattle conceive, Jacob puts the rods before their eyes, but when the weak copulate he does not try to speckle them. As a result, “the feebler were Laban’s, and the stronger Jacob’s” cattle (Genesis 42). Giambatista Della Porta discusses Jacob’s genetic endeavours in \textit{Natural Magick} (1658), translated from the Italian \textit{Magia naturalis} (1558), in a section explaining how “to bring forth party-coloured sheep” (52). “Iacob was well acquainted with this force of imagination, as the Scriptures witnesse” (52), Della Porta notes. Shylock also uses the example of Jacob’s “genetic engineering” as a justification for usury in Shakespeare’s \textit{The Merchant of Venice} (1.374-87).
instance, that “Empedocles the Pythagorean referreth the cause of this likenesse only to the
Imagination, whose force is so great that as it oftentimes changeth the body of the
Imaginer” (309). Jane Sharp also observes that “some are of the opinion, that all this [the
physical appearance of the child] proceeds from the strength of the imagination, so
Empedocles, so Paracelsus determine it” (122). In the text to which both Crooke and
Sharp refer—now lost but attributed to Empedocles—it was argued that “progeny can
be modified by the statues and paintings that the mother gazed upon during her
pregnancy” (Huet 4). Galen also believed that a child would resemble whomever or
whatever its mother looked upon while pregnant. He counseled that in order to
conceive a child with desirable features, a painting depicting the preferred likeness
should be hung for the mother to look upon during pregnancy (Gélis 55). The maternal
imagination was thus often used to explain and understand the woman’s role in the
production of likeness and to account for potential dissimilarities between relatives. It
was, however, a threatening concept that, because of its ability to disrupt nature,
bordered on monstrosity. While it is unclear exactly how many early modern people
believed in the power of the maternal imagination, the idea offered the potential to undo
patriarchal authority by assigning the task of “fashioning” the child solely to the
mother.104

104 As both Finucci and Huet note, the maternal imagination was potentially transgressive, with
the power to cancel a child’s likeness to its father and replace it with whatever the mother
desired. A child who did not resemble its father did not have “the recognizable features of its
Mother Bombie, then, at first appears to suggest that heritable traits can be changed. Because of the play’s reference to the maternal imagination, familial likeness seems mutable and possibly determined by more than biological inheritance alone. An atmosphere of genetic mystery is therefore created as the many differences between parents and their children are exposed and, at first, left unexplained. The audience is encouraged, at least initially, to wonder whether a transformational force such as the maternal imagination could be responsible for parent-child dissimilarity.

legitimate genitor” and thus “proclaimed the dangerous power of the female imagination” (Huet 2). Theoretically, then, mothers were granted the power to control who their children did or did not resemble. A woman might become pregnant with a child who was not her husband’s, but she could also erase all traces of that child’s illegitimacy by imagining the child to resemble her husband. Finucci observes that “a number of medical treatises also carried information on how an adulterous woman could try to make the child engendered in an affair look like her legal husband (“Maternal” 60). Alternately, a mother might desire that her child look nothing like its father and therefore give birth to a child that did not resemble him. “The engendering of a physically similar child has suddenly been put outside the reach of fathers,” Finucci remarks, observing that, in theory, “any man would do” to impregnate a woman since she was ultimately in charge of the formation of the child’s likeness (“Maternal Imagination” 60). “The mother, by not controlling herself and letting biology rather than fantasy work, can make a seemingly normal fetus monstrous,” or unlike its parents (“Maternal Imagination” 58).
Accius and Silena are unlike their parents behaviourally as well as physically. The differences between Accius’s linguistic skills and those of his father and mother, for example, are accentuated from the play’s first scene. An “arrant scold” (1.1.56) and a “prating” woman (1.1.66), Accius’s mother, although never seen on stage, is said to possess the verbosity that her son lacks: mother and son are clearly marked as linguistically different. Dromio jokes that Memphio’s two problems—his foolish heir and his scolding wife—might be combined by transplanting the wife’s “tong in [the] son’s head, that he might bee a prating foole; or his braines in hir brainpan that she might be a foolish scold” (1.1.65-68). Dromio thus envisions an artificial procedure by which Accius and his mother can become more alike and, as a consequence, prove to be less of a burden to Memphio. Silena is also said to diverge linguistically from her supposed parents. Her father labels her as having “fond,” or stupid, speech while he clearly holds his own rhetorical skill in high regard (1.2.132). The play thus posits language as a primary indicator of familial likeness or dissimilarity.

Accius and Silena themselves share similar speech patterns, although they are apparently from different families. Both Memphio and Stelio, for instance, are afraid to have their child’s speech overheard. The fathers worry separately that language will betray the fact that their children are fools. Each man hopes to make a marriage match for his offspring by silencing his or her speech: “Never speaking one to another, they be in love one with another” (1.2.166). Silena is only capable of expressing fragmented, disconnected thoughts. As she jumps from one topic to another for no apparent reason,
her speech is littered with catch-phrases and proverbs. These scraps of conventional wisdom are, as Tydeman remarks, often misapplied. Introducing herself, for example, Silena states that she has “as fayre a face as ever trode on shoo sole, and as free a foote as ever lookt with two eyes” (2.2.701-02). She apparently attempts to make use of some kind of popular phrase here, but ultimately misses the mark. Candius, a young man who is mesmerized by Silena’s beauty (until he hears her speak), summarizes her speech style succinctly:

Now I perceive thy folly, who hath rakt together all of
odde blinde phrases that helpe them that knowe not howe
to discourse, but when they cannot aunswere wisely,
eyther with gybinh cover theyr rudenesse, or by some
newe-coyned buy-worde bewraie theyr peevishnesse.
(2.2.762-65)

Accius also puts together “odde blinde phrases,” using proverbial expressions in utterly incoherent ways. Wondering why he has been dressed in the clothes of another man when the servants plot to disguise him, Accius asks, “What meanes my father to thrust mee forth in another boye’s coate? I’le warrant ‘tis to as much purpose as a hem in the forehead.” (4.2.1450-52). Following this line, Halfepenie remarks that Accius uses “an auncient proverbe knockt in the head!”—that is, rendered incomprehensible (4.2.1453-54). Tydeman notes that the original proverb that Accius bastardizes—“As fat as a hen in the forehead”—is proverbial for “thinness, not lack of purpose” (Tydeman n. 1452).
Just as Silena must weave together a jumble of phrases in order to form her discourse, Accius interlaces misused adages in order to converse.

When Accius and Silena finally speak to one another in the fourth act, Halfepenie describes their exchange as consisting of “cobleers’ cuts” (4.2.1484), for which Bond suggests the meaning of “odds and ends.” Their illogical and fragmented dialogue is at times impenetrable, but Accius and Silena appear to understand one another perfectly. Accius’s proclamation of love for Silena is evidence of their dizzying and disjointed style:

ACC: I am taken with a fit of love: have you anye minde of marriage?
SIL: I had thought to have askt you.
ACC: Upon what acquaintance?
SIL: Who would have thought it?
ACC: Much in my gascoins, more in my round hose; all my fathers are as white as daisies, as an egge full of meate.
SIL: And all my father’s plate is made of crimosin velvet.
ACC: That’s brave with bread!

Although they are raised in separate households by distinct sets of parents, Accius and Silena speak in a disorderly and incoherent way like no other characters in the play; they are demarcated as linguistically similar. In addition to their noted foolishness, they share an undeniable linguistic bond.
In the midst of this atmosphere of supposed familial confusion, in which children are unlike their parents and intended lovers speak in similar styles, Mother Bombic’s resolution comes about through a confirmation of nature’s authority to produce offspring that are like their relatives. The play, therefore, suggests briefly that children might be dissimilar to their biological families, only to discount this possibility entirely. The disclosure of a deliberate kidnapping prompts the conclusion of the action. This revelation clarifies all of the apparent familial dissimilarity with a rational, biological explanation that confirms the ultimate power of heredity. Vicinia, a poor woman who was the wet nurse for both Accius and Silena eighteen years before, admits in the final act of the play that she also nursed a boy and a girl of her own while she was caring for the wealthy children. Because she did not have the means to raise her own children properly, Vicinia announces, she switched them with the affluent infants so that they would “be well brought up in their youth, and wisely provided for in their age” (5.3.2119). It then becomes clear that Maestius and Sirena, the play’s supposedly incestuous lovers, are the unrelated children of Memphio and Stelio, while Accius and Silena, the intended lovers, are in fact Vicinia’s offspring and are siblings. Vicinia informs Memphio and Stelio that they have therefore raised children who are biologically unlike them but “which hitherto [they] have kept tenderly as [theirs]” (5.3.2122). The fathers have indeed regarded the children as their own, convinced for eighteen years that although Accius and Silena differ from them, they are in fact theirs by blood.
Once it becomes clear who is biologically related to whom, it is apparent to the
text's audience that all four children behave in ways similar to their biological relatives.
Accius and Silena, Vincinia’s biological children, mirror one another’s speech. They are
also foolish—a theatrical convention that also identifies them as being of low birth—
despite the fact that they are raised in wealthy households. While Accius and Silena
exhibit sibling likeness, however, they do not necessarily speak or act like Vincinia, their
biological mother. As poor children raised among the wealthy, their natures are perhaps
altered enough to distance them from their biological mother but not from one another.
They display similarities that identify them as siblings even though they have lived their
entire lives apart from one another.

Maestius and Serena are the play’s best example of adopted children because
they are taken in and raised by Vincinia deliberately; she knows that she is not
biologically related to the children. Like Belarius in Cymbeline, Vincinia is, in effect, a
kidnapper, but she appears to accept the children as her own. Because they are raised
without ever knowing their divergent blood origins, Maestius and Serena should, in
theory, view one another as biological brother and sister.105 Instead, however, the
biological difference between the two children appears to affect them innately, and they
are overwhelmed by sexual attraction. The play insists, therefore, that because Maestius
and Serena are not biological siblings, they cannot regard each other in the non-amorous

105 It is possible that Vincinia treats Maestius and Serena differently because she knows that they
are not her biological children, but they appear to be raised as blood siblings in the play.
manner expected of natural siblings. Vicinia observes that as she raised them, the children behaved “at first lyke brother and sister” but were then eventually “too forward in affection” (5.3.2125-26). Their natural qualities, in other words, overpowered their upbringing as siblings. *Mother Bombie* thus suggests that social, adoptive siblinghood is not a substitute for biological familial relation; it implies that biological siblinghood should result in a natural avoidance of incestuous feeling. The play therefore proposes that in children, biological nature will always outweigh social influence.

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106 It was expected that family members should naturally be unattractive to one another. Bruce Boehrer notes that Edward Westermarck’s theory of instinctive incest aversion in *History of Human Marriage* (1921) had an early modern English precedent in Thomas Beard’s *Theatre of Gods Iudgments* (1597) (Boehrer, *Monarchy* 24). Beard writes:

> It is reported by Varro, a learned and grave writer ... of a certain horse which by no means could be brought to cover a mare that was his damme, until by hiding her heade, they beguiled his senses: but after when he perceived their guild and knew his damme being uncovered, he ran so furiously upon the keeper with his teeth, that incontinently he tore him in pieces (qtd. in Boehrer 24).

Although Beard uses animals to illustrate his point about incest aversion, Boehrer explains that his book figures human nature as “coextensive with animal instinct” (24).
Gail Kern Paster argues that Perdita’s experience as an abandoned child in *The Winter’s Tale* 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” (*Body Embarrassed* 273). Early modern wet nurses, it was feared, could pass on their own characteristics through their milk to suckling children.\(^{107}\) Paster states that the insistence on Perdita’s differences from her foster family “offers a powerful counternarrative for the specific fears and repressed anxieties of the wet-nursed child” (276). A similar strategy is at work in *Mother Bombie*. The audience is reassured that although Maetius and Serena are raised by their wet nurse, they have survived being separated from their families, their upper-class identities intact. Vicinia fails to influence the children whom she rears: she does not even succeed in raising them to regard one another as siblings.

Although the play ultimately rejects the possibility of successful non-biologically-based parenthood, it is crucial to note that Accius and Silena do show an apparent attachment to their adoptive fathers when it is revealed that they are Vicinia’s children. Upon learning that he is not Memphio’s biological son, Accius exclaims that he will “never beleive it!” (5.3.2138), prompting Vicinia to prove, through the presence and

\(^{107}\) For an account of wet-nursing in drama see Paster 197-201. For a detailed description of the ways in which wet-nurses were believed to influence the children they cared for, see Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, Bottle, and Babies*. 
absence of moles on the various children, that he was in fact switched at birth. The identities of children in the play are thus physically inscribed upon their bodies; their moles act as ineradicable marks that prove their birth identities. While Memphio and Stelio rejoice at the sight of their newly recovered, intelligent, well-spoken birth children and Maestius and Serena celebrate the fact that they can now marry because they are “neither children to poore parents, nor brother and sister by nature” (5.3.2166-67), Accius and Silena are unable to accept that they are not the children of the fathers who raised them. Accius proclaims that he’ll “not swap [his] father for all this!” (5.3.2169), while Silena asks “do you thinke I’le bee cosned of my father?” (5.3.2170).

Neither Accius or Silena mentions that he or she does not want to swap his or her status as a wealthy child for that of an impoverished one, but this economic factor is foremost in the minds of Vicinia, Memphio, and Stelio. Pardoning Vicinia for kidnapping his child, Memphio announces that he is “content to keepe Silena in the house with the new-married couple” (5.3.2200-01). Stelio similarly declares that he will “maintaine Accius in [his] house” (5.3.2202). Although Vicinia unburdens her conscience by admitting to her crime, thus ensuring that an incestuous marriage will not take place between her two biological children, she does not want to forge a relationship with her offspring. She is instead relieved to hear that they will continue to be provided for financially by the fathers who have been responsible for them for the last eighteen years.

108 It is a convention of romances to use moles, birthmarks, or material tokens to identify a lost child. See, for example, the recognition scenes of The Winter’s Tale and Cymbeline.
Amazingly, however, Memphio and Stelio exchange adoptive children: Memphio agrees to keep Silena, although he has raised Accius, and Stelio agrees to keep Accius, despite the fact that Silena has previously been known as his daughter. While both men consent to bear the financial burden of Vicinia’s children, each avoids taking in the child who has grown up in his household. It is as though each father wants to be as far removed as possible from the child whom he once erroneously believed was his own. Both men attempt to distance themselves, that is, from the children who were once inexplicably unlike them.

*Mother Bombie* concludes with all four children living with fathers. While Memphio’s wife is mentioned in the play, she never appears on stage. Nor is Stelio’s wife ever seen. Vincinia is thus the play’s lone mother figure, save Mother Bombie, who is a mother in name alone. While Vincinia sets in motion the play’s resolution by admitting to her crime, she is not viewed as a “natural” mother; the social fantasy that she enacts by placing her poor children in the homes of wealthy men goes against nature. She is, in effect, a preservationist who hopes to ensure her children’s survival. In doing so, however, she betrays both biological and class boundaries. The play thus finally divests itself of motherhood, ensuring that children are left with fathers—whether biological or adoptive—rather than mothers. Accius and Silena do not wish to return to their biological mother, but instead choose to live in the homes of adoptive fathers.
Critics often dismiss Mother Bombie, the soothsayer who is visited by many characters, as superfluous to the plot. Violet Jeffery, for instance, suggests that “Mother Bombie is entirely unessential and could well have been left out without any loss … The visits to Mother Bombie retard the action” (113-14). Mother Bombie, however, acts as a kind of biological truth teller throughout the play, hinting at biological reality and unravelling the mysteries of familial relation so as to ensure that organic order is restored at the conclusion. Blessed with a kind of biological clairvoyance, she is able to tell which characters are related by blood and to foresee the restructuring of biological families. When approached by Serena, who asks what will result from her supposedly incestuous love for her brother, Mother Bombie replies in a convoluted style that nonetheless hints that the play’s families are not currently arranged in proper biological order:

You shall be married tomorrow, hand in hand,

By the lawes of good Nature, and the land;

Your parents shall be glad, and give you their lande,

You shal each of you displace a foole,

And both together must releeve a foole:

If this be not true, call me olde foole. (3.2.129)

Although Serena is unable to decipher what Mother Bombie tells her, an astute audience understands the implication that Serena and Maestius are not blood relatives and will
therefore be able to marry. Mother Bombie thus appears to be aware of what the composition of the family should be by “nature.”

Hunter proposes that Mother Bombie’s presence in the play adds a sense of mystique to the action: “Lyly, feeling the shallowness of a plot where wit is so much in the ascendant, and characters so much in control of themselves, sought to give the dimension of mystery and misunderstanding to his play (it was a dimension he was accustomed to doing without) by means of a prophetess” (223). Andreadis, however, claims that Lyly is often fascinated by magic. *Mother Bombie*, she suggests, is the most supernatural of his plays:

Lyly evidenced interest in magic early in his career with the love potions in *Euphues*; Mother Bombie is preceded in his drama by Sybilla in *Sapho and Phao*, by alchemy and astrology in *Gallathea*, and by Dipsas, fairies, the lunary bank and the magic fountain in *Endymion*. But with *Mother Bombie* magic is at the center of a play because the title character is a white witch. (25)

Mother Bombie, however, does not in fact practice any kind of magic or witchcraft within the play, although she is reportedly a witch. The “good woman who yet never did any hurt” (3.1.952-53) insists herself that she is not a sorceress, but only “a cunning woman” (2.3.786). The adjective “cunning,” derived from the Old English “cunnan,” meaning “to know,” indicated that a person was characterized by being “full of
knowledge or learning” (OED “cunning” 1.b.). There is no evidence to suggest that Mother Bombie holds any sway over the events that she predicts.

Because Mother Bombie never practices magic in the play, I suggest that she is present in order to oppose the concept of magic or mystery in the play with a sense of natural order. Mother Bombie cannot influence the incidents that she foresees because the play’s “mysteries”—the apparent dissimilarities that exist between family members—are not created by magic, or witchcraft, but by a kidnapping that generates genetic confusion. All of Mother Bombie’s predictions, which seem at first glance to be fantastical, come true because they are based on a natural order. Maestius and Serena are able to marry not because Mother Bombie works some kind of magic on them, but because they are not consanguineous. It is thus a kind of unexplained knowledge, rather than magic, which accounts for Mother Bombie’s insights.

Memphio and Stellio’s monstrous children are shown over the course of the play to be natural, or like each other and their biological family members. Rather than allow for the possibility of difference between parents and their children, or to present the potential for an alteration of biological likeness by means of the mother’s influence through the maternal imagination, Mother Bombie explains dissimilarity between family members by rational, biological means and enforces a belief in the power of heredity. Dromio’s theory that a wise man might sit on his son to change him as a raven sits on a chicken’s egg is therefore ultimately rejected. Instead, Memphio’s estimation that a child cannot be changed once it is “out of the shell, and is growen a pretie cocke” holds true
throughout the action (1.1.19-20). Exposure to a non-biological family through adoption does not appear to influence the play’s children’s behaviour. Children, *Mother Bombie* maintains, cannot be changed by their social setting; adoptive bonds do not alter that which is inherited by blood. Language use and style are presented as a primary gauge of familial relation and likeness.

“Privy Markings”: *The Comedy of Errors* and the Reproduction of Twinship

*Mother Bombie* is often mentioned alongside *The Comedy of Errors* because Shakespeare is thought to have named his servant twins Dromio after the servant in Lyly’s play. The two comedies are also alike, I propose, because of their mutual insistence on the power of biological inheritance over the supernatural. Ephesus, the setting of *The Comedy of Errors*, had long been noted in the early modern period as a city “full of confusion” and evil spirits; this sense of black magic spills into Shakespeare’s play in the form of bewildering and supposedly transformed identities.109 As in *Mother Bombie*, however, genetic likeness is finally responsible for all of the play’s mysteries, while the similitude of siblings becomes a focal point of the action. The emphasis placed on twinship in *The

109 Plautus, Shakespeare’s primary source for the play, sets his story in Epidamnus. In changing the location to Ephesus, Shakespeare includes in his drama the city’s aura of black magic, exorcism, and evil that is implied in the New Testament accounts of Saint Paul’s efforts to convert pagans to Christians there. Book of Acts 19.
Comedy of Errors has been examined at length, but little attention has been paid to the play’s insistence on the behavioural and linguistic similarity of relatives. Although twins in the play are raised apart, they share not only seemingly magical physical similarities, but also analogous behavioural qualities. The Dromios, in particular, mirror one another linguistically, while the Antipholus twins often reflect each other’s manners and habits. Linguistic style and behavioural traits therefore appear to be heritable in Shakespeare’s play, just as they do in Lyly’s. The Comedy of Errors, like Mother Bombie, insists on the persistence of familial likeness despite familial division; it ultimately rejects social relation in favour of biological similitude. The play’s conclusion, however, is not necessarily happy: while one pair of twins expresses contentment at having found each other and persists in acting in an identical manner, the other pair remains silent.

The Comedy of Errors features two sets of twins: the Dromios, twins who are raised by Egeon and Emilia, and the Antipholi, the biological twins of Egeon and Emilia who are separated along with the Dromios and are each raised by one of their parents. The Dromios are the play’s most remarkable siblings because they are both adopted children and servants: they are sold by their “exceeding poor” biological parents to Egeon and Emilia “to attend [their] sons” (1.1.56-57). Born “that very hour, and in the selfsame inn” (1.1.53) as the Antipholi, the Dromios become, in many ways, adoptive brothers to the twins despite their subservient positions. Each Antipholus is raised with a Dromio in the same household until the age of eighteen. The servant twins record time for their masters by virtue of the fact that they are exactly the same age; they are the
“almanac[s] of ... true date” (1.2.41) for each of the Antipholi, or the astronomical tables that document for the Antipholi their dates of birth. A twin from each set (Antipholus and Dromio) is paired with one from the other when they are all separated at sea; each twin in the play is therefore raised with a kind of surrogate brother in place of his twin.

Characters in The Comedy of Errors long for the biological relatives from whom they have been estranged. Familial separation and reunion frame the plot; in this sense, The Comedy of Errors is a prototype of Shakespeare’s later romances. The hunt for a missing twin propels the action. Antipholus of Syracuse sets out to search for his twin because he becomes, at the age of eighteen, “inquisitive / after his brother” (1.1.125). His servant, Dromio of Syracuse, finds himself in the identical situation and also seeks out his twin, who has disappeared with the brother of his master. Both Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse feel compelled to find the brothers whom they have never known. Antipholus articulates the trauma of being separated from their twins as he explains that, twinless, he is “like a drop of water / That in the ocean seeks another drop” (1.2.35-36). Wanting only to find his likeness in a sea of people to whom he is unrelated, Antipholus establishes the play’s insistence on the similarity and

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110 Patricia Crawford observes that brothers in the period were often described in similar terms: “Contemporaries certainly thought that all ‘blood’ relationships were important, for blood was thicker than water, and that a natural affection flowed between siblings. A pithy popular saying alluded to the ambivalence and intensity of sibling bonds. Brothers were like two buckets in a well: ‘if one go up, the other must go down’” (Blood 209).
compatibility of twins and blood relatives. He also introduces the concern that the loss
of a twin might constitute the loss of the self. Suffering from a sense of isolation because
of his separation from his brother, Antipholus questions his own identity. Twice he
states that he will “lose” himself (1.2.30, 40), emphasizing the extent to which he feels
that, without knowledge of his twin, he is cut off even from himself. He is both
emotionally and physically incomplete while his brother is missing and he is unable to
get his “own content” (1.2.33).

Shakespeare’s insistence on the connectedness of the Antipholi stems, in part,
from popular representations of twins in the period. Classical and early modern
physicians and philosophers debated how two children could simultaneously come to
term in one womb and how they might be born resembling one another exactly. St.
Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, for instance, attributes identical likeness in twins to both
biological and environmental influences. He focuses in particular on the innate
connection that twins often share. In a chapter entitled “Of similarity and dissimilarity
in the health of twins” in The City of God (413-26), Augustine recounts Hippocrates’
description of two supposed brothers who fell ill at the same time. Because of the timing
of their illnesses, the boys were identified by Hippocrates as twins. Augustine observes
that Posidonius the Stoic used astrology to explain the kind of simultaneous illness
between twins that Hippocrates witnessed, citing the fact that the twins were born and
conceived under the same constellation as the cause of their mutual suffering. Augustine
dismisses this astrological explanation, however, and notes that a medical justification
for their illnesses is far more appropriate. He posits physical similarity as the cause of the twins’ trouble:

For the bodily condition of the parents at the time of intercourse might so influence the earliest beginning of the children at their conception that, following their initial period of growth in their mother’s body, they would be born with the same constitution. Then, they would be nourished on the same food in the same house, where, as the art of medicine attests, the air, the location and the virtue of the water would all have great influence on the good or bad health of the body. They would also be accustomed to the same kinds of exercise; and so their bodily condition would be so similar that the same causes would indeed have the effect of bringing about the same diseases at the same time. (189)

Rather than credit similarity to the power of the stars, Augustine explains likeness by calling attention to the fact that twins are raised in similar environments, both within and outside the womb. Their “initial period of growth in their mother’s body” establishes their similar dispositions; such dispositions tie them to one another for life.
The bond formed between twins is only further strengthened by their shared surroundings after birth.\(^{111}\)

Like Augustine before him, Crooke attributes the source of likeness between twins to the environment that they share in the womb. Citing Hippocrates’ list of three causes for similitude between twins, Crooke first states that twins are similar because

\(^{111}\) Many early modern physicians believed that the womb was made up of two compartments each capable of sheltering a child. Most often only one of these compartments was used in generation, resulting in the production of a single child. On occasion, however, both compartments might be employed and twins would thus form. Pierre de La Primaudaye, for example, noted that “when it commeth to passe, that the wombe receiueth seede at two sundry passages which it hath, then are twinnes engendred either at one conception or at twaine, so that the later bee not long after the former, according to the opinion of the Philosophers, and namely of Aristotle” (391). Similarly, Crooke explains the conception of twins by noting that sperm can make its way into multiple parts of the womb:

\begin{quote}
For often times in coition all the seede is not at once eiaculated but by fittes or turnes; so saveth: neither doth the seed alwayes issue at once but it boyleth had is eiaculated or thrice. A part therefore of the soed falleth into one side of the womb, and another part into another, and so Twins are conceiued. (313)
\end{quote}

Others, like the French physician Ambroise Paré, believed that if there was too much seed in the womb then in “the best cases” twins would be formed, and “in the worst cases” this would result in a “monstrous child with too many organs” (qtd. in Finucci “Introduction” 51).
“the places wherein they receiue their augmentation are equall, whether they be conceiued in the right or in the left side of the wombe” (313). The whole body, he argues, is equally balanced. Twins are also similar, Crooke surmises, because they are conceived at the same time (313). The third and final reason that Crooke gives for likeness emphasizes a physical connection between twins, as well as between mother and child. Two children who grow together in the same womb are like one another, Crooke insists, “because they vse the same Aliments, for they sucke the same bloud and enioy the same vitall spirites which they draw from their mother by the vmbilicall arteries” (313). The sharing of vital bodily fluids connects the two fetuses. Twins, according to Crooke, are thus bound to be alike because they are each sustained and nurtured in the womb by the same maternal body.

Augustine and Crooke each posit the likeness of twins as dependent upon their common experience, whether inside or outside the womb. Such assertions, however, present the possibility that twins who are separated after birth might develop divergent characteristics because of their divided, no longer shared environments. The twins in The Comedy of Errors have not known one another since infancy. While twins in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night—who are raised together and separated later in life—are said to display “one face, one voice, one habit, and two persons” (5.1.208) and are
described as “an apple cleft in two” (5.1.216), do twins in *The Comedy of Errors* who grow up apart appear as doubles in “voice” and “habit”?\(^\text{112}\)

*The Comedy of Errors* repeatedly emphasizes the dual nature of twinship. This is achieved, in part, through naming. The audience is aware, for instance, that the Antipholus twins were each given a distinct name at the time of their births because Egeon reports that they were so alike that they “could not be distinguished but by names” (1.1.52). Yet once the boys are separated at sea, they are each referred to separately by the same name. The Dromios were presumably also each given their own names, but are both known eventually by only one. Egeon appears to rename both his own son and his adopted servant after the two boys who vanish along with his wife. By depicting men who each lose a brother but “retain[] his name” (1.1.127), Shakespeare facilitates the confusion of identity in the play; he allows twins to be mistaken each for the other even when they are addressed directly by name. The identities of the Antipholi and the Domios are then subsumed and twinned even in their linguistic identifying markers. Shakespeare perhaps borrows this use of identical naming from Plautus’ *Menaechmi*, his principal source text for the play. In the Prologue, Plautus recounts the

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\(^{112}\) Shakespeare was himself the father of twins born in 1585 and so had the opportunity to observe twinship firsthand. *Twelfth Night*, like *The Comedy of Errors*, explores the relationship between twins, although it features, like Shakespeare’s own children, male-female twins.
tale of a twin who is named after his lost brother. The name change that occurs in Shakespeare’s play amplifies the audience’s sense of the connection between the two pairs of twins; it implies that twins are two facets of the same person. Identical twins are, in essence, visual puns: they are one likeness that takes two forms. George Puttenham defined puns, or what he terms *sillepsis*, as “the double supplie” (137). Puns “conceive[e], and, as it were, comprehend[] under one, a supplie of two natures” (137). As Patricia Parker observes, punning involves “two meanings competing for the same space, blocking the way to single understanding” (61). The Dromio twins’ use of punning throughout the play—a subject to which I will return—serves to emphasize the connection between twins and puns as agents of duplicity that obscure clear meaning.

The confusion of identity in *The Comedy of Errors* is not based on naming and visual appearance alone; it is also tied to the black magic associated with Ephesus. As the twins begin to be mistaken each for the other, they doubt their own senses of perception and attribute their uncertainty about their identities to the supernatural. When it becomes clear to Antipholus of Syracuse that the man whom he thinks is his Dromio does not remember a conversation that they had, for instance, his first reaction is to blame the city and its magic for the confusion:

They say this town is full of cozenage,

As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,

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Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguisèd cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many suchlike libertines of sin. (1.2.97-102)

Antipholus is particularly afraid that his senses will be misled: when eyes are deceived,
anything might appear double when it is in fact only single. Later, when he is
confronted by Adriana, the woman who claims that she is his wife but whom he swears
he has never seen, he wonders “what error drives [his] eyes and ears amiss?” (2.2.187).
Antipholus’s senses appear to malfunction once he is in Ephesus, and such failure is
associated with both black magic and his sense of identity.

The experience of lost identity in The Comedy of Errors becomes increasingly
pronounced as the play progresses, forcing the twinned characters to question their
control over even their own bodies. Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse suspect that
they talk with “goblins, owls, and elves, and sprites” in Ephesus (2.2.193), rather than
with human beings, and believe that they have been “transformed” (2.2.198). Dromio
supposes that both his mind and his body are changed: he states that he is an ape before
Antipholus corrects him and calls him an ass (2.2.200-205). While Antipholus clearly
intends this as a joke, the Syracusian twins are each mystified by feelings of self-
alienation. Antipholus, wondering whether he is in heaven or hell, sleeping or waking,
asks how it is possible that he might be known to others, but “to myself [be] disguised”
(215). Dromio of Syracuse begins to doubt his own knowledge of his body after Luce, the
kitchen maid who mistakes him for her lover, appears to know him as well as he knows
himself. To Dromio, who asks his master “Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I
myself?” (3.2.75), Luce is “as a witch” (3.2.149) because she can map his body and tell
him where to find “the mark of [his] shoulder, the mole in [his] neck, the great wart on
[his] left arm” (3.2.147-48). The “privy markings” (3.2.146) that make up Dromio’s
physical identity are not private once Luce has identified them. Dromio believes that
magic is responsible for Luce’s insight, while the audience becomes gradually aware
that she knows where to locate Dromio’s moles because she is the wife of a man whose
body mirrors his own. Luce’s ability to report Dromio’s intimate features suggests that
twins are so physically similar that they do not possess separate bodily characteristics.

The twins share more than physical traits, however; they also behave similarly.
The Comedy of Errors suggests repeatedly that family members who are estranged, and
are therefore not exposed to one another for years, think, act, and speak alike. Family
members continually echo one another, indicating to the audience that they are related
and implying that the play’s mishaps and misunderstandings are not the result of
supernatural occurrences but of biological doubling. The first indication that family
members are not only physically but also emotionally and linguistically alike is when
Antipholus of Syracuse describes himself as a drop of water that searches for another
drop in the ocean (1.2.35-36). Antipholus repeats the sense of loss that his father
expresses to the Duke of Ephesus in the opening statement of his trial. Egeon’s account
of the “unjust divorce” (1.1.103) that he and his wife undergo at sea resounds in his son’s
watery description of the loss of his brother. Antipholus of Syracuse is, of course, raised by Egeon; this kind of resonance is therefore not an example of a child’s innate ability to think or speak like its relatives, an idea that is frequently illustrated in the play. It is, however, the first example of many that relatives are able to give new voice to each other’s thoughts and expressions.

As Kent Cartwright observes, one of the defining features of *The Comedy of Errors* is its incessant repetition of words, phrases, and actions (337). Cartwright suggests that supernatural elements are responsible for this verbal reverberation: “words and thoughts in *The Comedy of Errors* unexpectedly acquire a certain magical agency” (331), he argues, and the play demonstrates “telepathic effects” (333), where thoughts or words “spread from character to character by some psychic force” (332). While Cartwright acknowledges that the presence of recurrent words and images in works of literature is not always attributable to magic, he asserts that “in a play such as *The Comedy of Errors* … thinking about language as possessing a kind of magical agency seems more than fair” (338). He concedes that by the end of the play, it is twinship and not magic that causes all of the play’s mishaps; however, he argues that magic can never be discounted entirely because the “ending, for example, can never comprehend the uncanny workings of language and speech in the play’s structure” (348).

While I agree with Cartwright that the play features seemingly uncanny uses of language and is full of references to the supernatural and sorcery, I argue that its “telepathic effects” (333), as Cartwright terms them, have more to do with relation than
with magic. Given the early modern belief in the heritability of behavioural traits, the two sets of twins can be read as examples of biological likeness, each exhibiting their inherited traits and further proving their relation. The adopted Dromios are the play’s most fascinating example of likeness between separated relatives because they share methods of linguistic expression. Unlike the artificial twins in Pliny’s account of Antony, whose speech gives them away as being unrelated, the Dromios have similar speaking styles. Most notable of the Dromios’ twinned linguistic habits is their penchant for punning. The twins both employ the rhetorical device to resist the verbal and physical abuses that they suffer at the hands of their Antipholi masters. Each Dromio uses wordplay to defend himself verbally against his master. Punning for the Dromios becomes a means by which they can gain linguistic advantage: they pun to state their displeasure with the Antipholi to the Antipholi. Dromio of Syracuse, for instance, tends to pun when he is being beaten by his master. When Antipholus of Syracuse asks his servant if it is time to eat dinner, Dromio replies that his meat needs “basting” (2.2.57). Dromio has just been beaten by Antipholus, and his reference to basting is a pun on his own abuse. “Basting” is a term used to describe the tenderizing of meat, but “baste” is also another term for “beat” (OED, v.3). Dromio has just spoken out against Antipholus by mentioning his physical abuse a few lines earlier when he asks “Was there ever any man thus beaten out of season, / When in the why and the wherefore is neither rhyme

The Dromios also use puns in ways that do not refer to the abuse, such as at 3.2.81 and 3.2.111, but their most memorable puns seem to be those that imply that they have been wronged.
nor reason?” (2.2.46-48), but through his punning, he registers his discontent in a more subtle, and thus arguably more effective, way.

Dromio of Ephesus puns less frequently than Dromio of Syracuse, but when he does pun he uses the rhetorical device to much the same effect as his twin. Attempting to bring Antipholus of Syracuse home to dinner, for instance, Dromio of Ephesus states that he has come to his master “in post” (1.2.63), or in haste, and that, because Antipholus of Syracuse will not return home with him, Dromio will be made a “post” as a result. As Charles Whitworth explains in a footnote to his edition of the play, Dromio “likens himself to a doorpost (or any post), as in a tavern, upon which a customer’s orders were chalked up (scored) until the final tally was made” (1.2.64-65, footnote). In other words, Dromio uses a pun to imply that he will bear the brunt of the blame for his master’s failure to come home. He attempts to revolt in some small way against the master who will incriminate him. Although they have not been taught to pun together because they have not been raised together, the Dromio twins share an instinctive linguistic skill for punning. In particular, they employ puns as a defiant way to talk back to their masters.115

It is important to note, however, that theatrical convention may also contribute to the mirroring of the Dromios’ language. The servant twins share linguistic patterns

115 Eamon Grennan argues that the Dromios’ use anarchic language as a “weapon of comic revenge” against those who abuse them (159).
partly because they are servants in an early modern comedy, a genre which often features witty servants who are given to punning in the classical tradition. It is possible, however, to separate the twins’ class origins—and thus the social contexts of their speech—from their linguistic habits because they are also connected in their language usage by the ways in which they conceptualize themselves. That is, they conceptualize their own identities in similar terms and their linguistic likeness therefore extends beyond the conventional, lower-class use of punning. That they echo one another verbally signals their twinship. This echoing makes it appear as though even the Dromios’ thought processes are connected, causing them to share linguistic traits and parallel outlooks on the world and on their personal situations. Each twin, for instance, refers to himself as an ass multiple times over the course of the play. Dromio of Syracuse, unable to understand how it is that both Luciana and Adriana use his name and speak to him as though they know him, asks Antipholus of Syracuse if he is “transformèd” (2.2.198)—if he has taken on a shape that is not his own. Although Dromio thinks that he takes the form of an ape, Luciana proposes that if he has changed in form, “‘tis to an ass” (2.2.202). Beginning to feel like an ass, Dromio agrees that he must be so transformed and states, in reference to Luciana, “‘tis true: she rides me, and I long for grass. / ‘Tis so, I am an ass; else it could never be / But I should know her as well as she knows me” (2.2.203-05). In the following scene, Dromio of Ephesus, called an ass by Antipholus of Ephesus, also begins to imagine himself as an ass because of “the

116 See for example Grumio and Tranio in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*.
wrongs I suffer and the blows I bear” (3.1.15). Comparing himself to the animal, which kicks dangerously when aggravated, he tells Antipholus that he “should kick being kicked,” and warns that Antipholus “would keep from [his] heels, and beware of an ass” (3.1.16-17). Each Dromio twin takes someone else’s suggestion that he is an ass and makes the connection between his own situation and the role of an ass, that is, of an animal made to bear a burden. Although the comparison of the twins to asses only accentuates their status as low-born servants, the Dromios’ echoing of each other’s thoughts and methods of self-identification goes beyond conventional lower-class characterizations and instead signals their familial relation.

Part of the play’s “magic” for its audience, however, is also connected to theatrical illusion and the staging of twinship. Plays that feature twins often require the performance of likeness, or the creation of the illusion of likeness between unlike actors. While some productions of *The Comedy of Errors* might find actors of similar appearance to play the Antipholi or the Dromios, others might use actors who are physically entirely different.117 The play is clear that the two sets of twins are intended to be identical—the action depends, in large part, on this fact—but the audience might be asked to believe in a familial likeness that is not readily visible. The theatre calls for the suspension of disbelief and can solicit an audience that sees the obvious differences between two

117 For more on the staging of twinship in the play see Kinney, “Staging *The Comedy of Errors*”; Mercer, “Making the Twins Realistic in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*”; and Slawson, “‘Dromio, thou Dromio’: The Casting of Twins in Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*.”
actors to view them as alike. Because physical likeness does not necessarily exist on
stage, linguistic likeness acts as a way of staging similarity verbally. It is, in other words,
perhaps language rather than appearance that ultimately marks characters in
Shakespeare’s play as related. Marianne Novy observes that “heredity is mediated by
imagination on the stage” (Reading 84). It can also, however, be adjudicated by language.

While language assists in the establishment of the presence of familial relation
between the Dromios, the Antipholi are connected through their actions and anger. Both
twins, for example, beat their servants repeatedly, prompting the Dromios to object to
their abuse and to note its frequency.118 Dromio of Ephesus, for example, states that he
has served his master “from the hour of my nativity to this instant, and have nothing at
his hands for my service but blows” (4.4.21-33). While the Antipholi are both masters
and are therefore perhaps inclined to use violence toward their servants by virtue of this
power, the play’s insistence on their relentless need to punish the Dromios appears to
emphasize their similarity.

Although the play’s two sets of twins share linguistic and behavioural bonds,
and although family members are shown to be connected inherently, in the final scene

118 Maurice Hunt argues that the objection that the Dromios raise about their abuse acts as a
criticism of the actions of those Elizabethan masters who brutally beat their servants; he
compares these masters to slaveholders (39). The Antipholi beat their Dromios mercilessly
multiple times in the play (e.g., 1.2.92, 2.2.23, and 4.4.19).
the fissures in the relationships between both the Antipholus twins and their parents become apparent. When Antipholus of Ephesus is introduced to Egeon, the man who claims to be his father, he announces that he “never saw [him] in my life till now” (5.1.296). Because Egeon believes that the twin he sees before him is Antipholus of Syracuse, the son he raised himself, Egeon cannot comprehend why the twin no longer recognizes him. Blaming the mistake on the ravages of time, Egeon tells Antipholus that “grief hath changed me since you saw me last, / And careful hours with time’s deformèd hand / Have written strange defeatures in my face” (5.1.297-99). Egeon’s primary worry is that his son can no longer visually identify him as a father. Further emphasizing the play’s concern with linguistic likeness and familial recognition, however, is Egeon’s concern that his son does not even “know [Egeon’s] voice” (5.1.308). Such a statement recalls Burton’s assertion that “voice” is inherited. Antipholus of Ephesus does not recognize his estranged father or his father’s voice—not even innately. In fact, once it is established that Egeon is Antipholus of Ephesus’s parent, Antipholus does not verbalize his reaction to finding his father. He does offer his purse of ducats in exchange for Egeon’s release (5.1.391), but beyond this show of good faith for his father, the audience only hears him speak again when he asks Dromio which of his things have been loaded onto the ship. The same can be said for Antipholus of Syracuse, who tells Dromio of Syracuse to embrace his twin and “rejoice with him” when they are reunited (5.1.415), but who himself never acknowledges his happiness at having found his lost twin or his
mother. Neither Antipholus twin ever communicates to the audience the emotions that he must experience when he finds his brother.\textsuperscript{119} Because the play is a comedy, traditional criticism suggests that it comes to a successful and cheerful conclusion. The dissonance that characterizes the closing scene, however, suggests a non-comic conclusion for the Antipholi. Such dissonance, exemplified by their silence, confounds the audience’s expectations of comedy and disrupts the play’s apparently happy resolution. \textit{The Comedy of Errors} thus defies generic expectations of familial harmony by juxtaposing physical proximity with linguistic silence, and so frustrates, at least in part, the demands of comedy.

It is the Dromio twins, brothers who have been raised apart by families which are not theirs by blood, who seem to mirror one another most closely and who eventually celebrate their reunion. Dromio of Ephesus, observing his twin for the first time, tells him, “Methinks you are my glass and not my brother” (5.1.421). He emphasizes their likeness and the almost surreal nature of their resemblance. By looking at his twin, Dromio of Ephesus can see that he is himself “a sweet-faced youth” (5.1.420) and thus gains a sense of his own sense of identity from his brother. The Dromios are further underscored as being alike as they attempt to determine the politics of their twinship. Because the twins are unsure of who was born first, they do not know who should have the privilege of walking in front of the other as the eldest. In the play’s

\textsuperscript{119} The scene can, of course, be staged to convey the brothers’ happiness at finding one another, but such happiness is not found within the play’s dialogue.
closing line, Dromio of Ephesus decides that he and his brother are alike and are therefore of equivalent status: “We came into this world like brother and brother,” he observes, “And now let’s go hand in hand, not one before another” (5.1.428). Each of the twins is the “genius to the other” (5.1.333), or the identical spirit that is meant to attend them through life. As the Dromios reunite and re-establish their likeness, they leave the play as copies: neither is dissimilar from the other.120

The Comedy of Errors demonstrates the similar physical and behavioural traits of the Dromios, twins who are bred in the same womb and are then adopted and raised apart. The play thus negates environmental factors in their upbringings, choosing instead to focus on their inherited and natural likeness. While the Antipholus twins both exhibit comparable bodily and behavioural traits, and therefore also prove that blood relation maps identity, they do not appear to have as positive a reaction to their reunion. The play ultimately suggests, then, that the familial connection between the Antipholi does not necessarily withstand separation. The Dromios are the play’s example of twins who have been separated entirely from all of their biological family members, while the Antipholi are each raised with one of their parents. The discovery of a blood relative is perhaps, then, all the more important to the Dromios, who have been brought up

120 Cartwright observes that “If the Antipholi illustrate the emerging bourgeois individualism that we associate with the early modern, the Dromios claim the residual presence of qualities more anachronistic, reflective of a medieval division of experience between order and festivity” (344).
without any biological familial connections. Overwhelmed by their sudden exposure to biological relation, the Dromios cannot help but celebrate.
Figure 1. John Souch, *Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife* (1625). City of Manchester Art Galleries.
In Thomas Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*, Livia refigures her family. Aware that Hippolito, her brother, is in love with their niece, Isabella, but that Isabella is resistant to his incestuous love, Livia lies to the girl, telling her that she is in fact not biologically a part of the family and has only been raised by Fabrito, a father who is not hers by blood. Livia claims that the Marquis of Coria, a Spaniard, is Isabella’s biological father. Classifying Isabella as a “stranger,” or one who is unrelated, Livia emphasizes the biological distance that supposedly divides them:

> Know, however custom has made good,
> For reputation’s sake, the names of niece
> And aunt ‘twixt you and I, w’are nothing less…
> You are no more allied to any of us,
> Save what the courtesy of opinion casts
> Upon your mother’s memory and your name
> Than the merest stranger is, or one begot
> At Naples when the husband lies at Rome:
> There’s so much odds betwixt us. (2.1.131-140)

Isabella’s name, or her position as Fabrito’s daughter, Livia suggests, has been granted through social custom alone. The effect of Livia’s “renaming” of Isabella is to compel the
girl to enter into an allegedly non-incestuous sexual relationship with her uncle. With the ties of relation fictitiously removed, Isabella loses all aversion to Hippolito: she thinks him to be unrelated to her and therefore a potential romantic partner.

Critics of the play tend to focus primarily on its commodification of women and on its portrayal of Bianca’s rape, while Livia’s manipulation of familial relation is typically glossed over. Livia is most often mentioned for her role as bawd. She is adept at coaxing young women into illicit sexual relationships: she supplies the Duke with Bianca and Hippolito with Isabella. Isabella’s invented status as an adopted child, or as a child who is not raised by her biological parents, is often noted in passing as being merely a convenient lie, a plot device that permits Livia to procure her niece for her favorite brother. I will suggest, however, that Livia’s tale of Isabella’s fictional adoption instead emphasizes familial relation as strategy, performance, and source of linguistic power in the play. The reorientation of familial ties through the lie of Isabella’s adoption is used in order to question the very basis of what constitutes family. That is, it

underlines the social constructedness of patriarchal power and familial relation. The play ultimately suggests that it is the interpretation of lineage that forms the basis of kinship, rather than lineage itself.

Middleton’s play draws attention to the ways in which family—a complex web of births, parentage, blood lines, and marriage—establishes one’s place in the world. It also, however, depicts family as a flexible entity, one that can be encoded and altered in language. Familial names hold the power both to negotiate and transform a character’s identity. The self is determined, to some degree, in the familial names assigned to particular family members. Strategies of naming and renaming then reveal deliberate, tactical approaches to self-positioning and refashioning, particularly for female characters. A woman is usually assigned her father’s and then her husband’s family name; she is often confined by that name. Livia’s alteration of the function of naming resists the idea that a woman is contained by both name and familial position. Livia uses the lie about adoption to scramble familial ties and enact a process of renaming. Her power is involved not only with how kinship exists within language, but also with the destruction of idealized kinship that emerges as a consequence of her act. She transgresses gender and kinship norms, exposing the extent to which kinship is socially dependent.

Employing Pierre Bourdieu’s models of negotiable familial relation and speaking power and focusing on Livia’s transformation of Isabella (2.2), I will chart the complex
and changeable nature of the family in *Women Beware Women*. First, I will historicize Bourdieu’s models and examine how the fictionalization of familial relation in the early modern period was used as a strategic form of address and as a political tool. I will take as my primary historical example letters exchanged between Queen Elizabeth and King James. I will then examine the ways in which the reshaping of biological familial relation in Middleton’s play affects the relative familial and speaking positions of various family members. It is particularly productive to consider strategies of naming, which reveal the family as, in part, an entity constructed in language. Finally, I argue that adoption is used in the play in order to facilitate incest. Livia’s lie about Isabella’s adoption disrupts the idea of biological kinship as innate. Isabella can easily be told that she is unrelated to her father when she in fact is, and can therefore be made to disregard the kinship bonds that she has honoured all of her life. Middleton’s play ultimately stages the shaping and reshaping of familial relation as a jostling of identity that cannot be sustained.

**The Fictionalization of the Family**

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, his sociological work on kinship, marriage, and limits, Pierre Bourdieu examines the symbolic capital associated with familial relationships. Within boundaries of lineage, he remarks, “*distinctive* power…increases as we draw nearer the point of common origin” (38). “The more we push back the boundaries of the lineage,” or the wider a kinship network becomes, he notes, “the more the *assimilative*
power of genealogical ideology grows,” but only at the expense of distinctive power that
is created by familial proximity (38). Kinship always extends some kind of power to its
members, but closer links of kinship result in greater symbolic capital. A man’s son, for
instance, is of greater familial symbolic worth than his nephew or a more distant
relative.

Although he emphasizes the value of close kinship, however, Bourdieu also
observes that relation is unfixed and negotiable: “In all cases of genealogically
ambiguous relationship, one can always bring closer the most distant relative, or move
closer to him, by emphasizing what unites, while one can hold the closest relative at a
distance by emphasizing what separates” (41). He depicts genealogy as a strategic and
supple entity, an entity which is, to some degree, based on fiction; genealogical fact for
Bourdieu does not matter so much as its presentation. Biological, like social, distance can
be maneuvered and there is a “conduct required in order to ‘keep one’s distance’ or to
manipulate it strategically, whether symbolically or actually, to reduce it…, increase it,
or simply maintain it” (82). By emphasizing the ties that bind or separate, a person can
place himself or herself in a symbolically valuable position in a familial network.

Proximity and distance loom large in Bourdieu’s model of relational capital: the closer a
person is or manages to get himself or herself to the point of common origin, the more
valuable he or she becomes. Conversely, the greater the perceived genealogical distance
between two people, the lower their respective symbolic capital becomes. To amplify the
extent to which you are related or unrelated to someone, then, may act as a strategic platform from which to gain symbolic capital. To distance yourself from a relative might cause you to lose symbolic capital with that relative, but to gain it with someone else.

Using Bourdieu’s model of familial relation, it can be surmised that adoption is a practice which might alter familial symbolic capital. Adoption changes the capital of the adoptee in relation to the adopter by drawing them into a new familial affiliation. To be named a son or a daughter, even when no biological connection exists, increases the symbolic value of a child to their adoptive family. By increasing the degree to which someone is related to a family by naming him or her a relative and adopting them into it, familial relation and the capital associated with it are emblemsatically augmented. Conversely, the adopted child’s capital with their birth family might fall as they are distanced from their biological origins.

This assessment of fluid familial symbolic capital can also be related to Bourdieu’s notions of linguistic capital. In “The Economics of Linguistic Exchange,” he explains the importance of the conditions of production of linguistic exchanges: “To give an account of discourse, we need to know the conditions governing the constitution of the group within which it functions” (650). Bourdieu establishes a market analogy to delineate the ways in which discourse is assigned a value in a particular context. The value of an utterance and the degree to which it is received or listened to depends on the perceived worth of the person speaking it. In Bourdieu’s concept of linguistic and
symbolic capital there is a “legitimate language,” a language of authority endowed with
cOMPetence and the ability to impose reception, and competence is defined as “the
condition and sign of the right to speech, the right to power through speech” (649). The
degree to which various speakers involved in a conversation command authority, he
notes, determines the structure of linguistic production. Language becomes “an
instrument of power” and “a person speaks not only to be understood, but also to be
believed, obeyed, respected, [and] distinguished” (648).122

Within the structure of primogeniture and within kinship generally, the
emphasis placed by family members on relation can function as a model for linguistic
competence. The bond of kinship is a point from which a language of authority
disseminates, a point that can gain or lose capital for the speakers in a conversation. The
fact that one speaker is related to another might give him or her a degree of linguistic
capital, or might ensure that his or her capital goes down. The speaker’s speech may be
recognized or ignored by other family members or those outside the family based on his
or her lineage, on his or her degree of similarity to others in the family line. A
“legitimate language,” then, might truly be a language of birth legitimacy or of place in
the family hierarchy.

122 Lynne Magnusson has adapted Bourdieu’s model of linguistic exchange to Shakespearean
drama, especially in “‘Voice Potential’: Language and Symbolic Capital in Othello,” in Shakespeare
and Social Dialogue 163-82.
Bourdieu’s view of relation as an entity that might be used to establish strategic, changeable proximity to another person is prefigured by Erasmus, who insists upon the power of fictional familial naming. In “On the Writing of Letters” (De Conscribendis Epistolis), he outlines proper forms of salutation in written correspondence. He values in particular the simplicity with which the ancients greeted one another by the “mere mention of names”: “Pliny gives his Calvus greeting!,” for example, is cited as a model form of address (51). As Erasmus observes, “there is something particularly attractive in being called by one’s proper name, the hearing of which seems to please even dumb animals” (51). But he also allows that, on occasion, other forms of address might be substituted for a person’s name and used calculatingly to great effect. In a section entitled “Epithets and adoptive names,” he observes that “Sometimes it is a matter of politeness and courtesy to add honorary or adoptive names” when addressing a letter (57). As he explains, “an example of the latter is calling an old man to whom we are indebted ‘father,’ a young man who is dear to us ‘son,’ a step-mother ‘mother,’ a sister’s husband ‘brother’” (57). Familial signifiers are, for Erasmus, tools with which the writer might honour his or her addressee by deliberately amplifying the degree to which he is related to him or her. The effect is to intensify the significance or importance of the addressee to the writer, transforming him or her from mere acquaintance, friend, or relation by affinity, to a metaphorical blood-based family member. In short, Erasmus’s “adoptive names” bridge the genealogical distance between those who are not biologically related. They are therefore literally “adoptive” because they create familial
connection where none exists. Just as Bourdieu observes that familial relation can be manipulated strategically, Erasmus offers his readers advice on how to span the divide of familial relation.

Erasmus further states the social significance and usefulness of adoptive names later in his handbook. Reasserting the power of fictive terms of relation, he observes that names of adoption are effective in the same contexts, as when we call the powerful, by whose influence we are supported and by whose kindness assisted, ‘patrons,’ ‘fathers,’ and ‘instructors’; the women ‘patronesses’ and ‘mothers’; our close friends ‘brother and sisters’; our companions in the same study or professors of the same subject ‘fellow-soldiers’; young men ‘sons’; pupils ‘nurslings.’ (60)

Adoptive names, in his estimation, are socially useful because they position others in relation to the letter-writer in terms that allow for more familiarity or intimacy than perhaps truly exists. They often, as he notes, draw on names that typically describe familial relationships: the terms can indicate social superiority, inferiority, and equality based on familial hierarchy. “The powerful” are called “father” and “mother,” corresponding to positions of authority in a household; friends become “brother and sisters,” indicating a horizontal relation of parity; and young men who are inferiors both
in age and standing are referred to as “sons.” Familial signifiers, in other words, are not merely indicators of blood relation, but might instead be “adopted” to express deference, appreciation, and authority. In all of Erasmus’ examples, a close relationship is implied between the writer and the addressee. The writer is understood to address not just anyone as “brother” or “mother,” but only those with whom he wishes to establish a close, socially recognized relationship. Erasmus therefore theorizes the use of familial signifiers as strategic social tools with which social distance, hierarchy, and attachment are negotiated and conveyed. Adoptive names are used out of “politeness and courtesy” in order to situate the writer in a intentional relationship with the addressee and to ensure that a letter is well received. In effect, Erasmus positions adoptive names as creators of symbolic capital. In recommending “adoptive names” as appropriate and

123 George Puttenham also comments on epithets in a section of The Arte of English Poesie (1589) entitled “Of the figures which we call Sensable, because they alter and affect the minde by alteration of sence, and first in single words” (3.7). Puttenham notes that the Greek antonomasia, or what he terms “the Surnamer,” might be substituted for a term that is “likely to be true” (151). In the same way that the name “father” can be used to name someone who is not biologically related to you but who is in a position of power over you as a patriarch, a person’s name might be substitute for a new name that is representative of the essence of their position:

And if this manner of naming of persons or things be not by way of misnaming as before, but by a conuenient difference, and such as is true or esteemed and likely to be true, it is then called not
strategic forms of address for correspondence, Erasmus underscores kinship as an
unfixed, tactical association.

Erasmus’s representation of adoptive naming separates biological reality from
familial naming and prefigures Penelope Brown’s and Stephen C. Levinson’s model of
politeness. As Lynne Magnusson argues, “On the Writing of Letters” provides
Erasmus’s students with “strategies for ingratiation” (68) that are “all recognizable as
positive politeness strategies, which Brown and Levinson consider the building blocks of
friendship and intimacy” (69). Brown’s and Levinson’s model asserts that, from a

metonimia, but antonomasia, or the Surnamer, (not the misnamer,
which might extend to any other thing as well as to a person) as
he that would say: not king Philip of Spaine, but the Westerne
king, because his dominion lieth the furdest West of any
Christen prince: and the French king the great Vallois, because so
is the name of his house, or the Queene of England, The maiden
Queene, for that is her hiest peculiar among all the Queenes of
the world, or as we said in one of our Partheniades, the Bryton
mayde, because she is the most great and famous mayden of all
Brittayne. (151)

124 Magnusson also establishes Erasmus as a precursor to Bourdieu in “Scripting Social Relations
in Erasmus and Day,” in Shakespeare and Social Dialogue 61-90. Erasmus’s teachings on letter-
pragmatic linguistic perspective, there is often a great disparity between what is said and what is implied, and that much of this disparity can be attributed to strategies of politeness. A speaker is polite in order to mitigate his or her interactions with other speakers; politeness serves an intended social function. “There are very general social motivations for using various techniques of positive politeness and negative politeness,” Brown and Levinson note, which “operate, respectively, as a kind of social accelerator and social brake for decreasing or increasing social distance in relationships” (93). They identify the use of in-group identity markers, such as fictive kinship terms, as a positive politeness strategy by which a speaker can “implicitly claim the common ground with [the hearer or addressee] that is carried by that definition of the group” (107). Kinship terms promote in-group identification, convey intimacy, and create a social bond. They also, however, function as addressee honorifics, or “direct grammatical encodings of relative social status between participants, or between participants and persons or things referred to in the communicative event” (179). Brown and Levinson observe that

writing, Magnusson argues, offer his students the equipment to negotiate a complex social world through language. He urges his pupils to “conceive of friendships and same-sex intimacies,” she asserts, as “performative and strategic” (70). Magnusson compares these strategies to Brown’s and Levinson’s theories of positive and negative politeness (67-74). I am indebted to Magnusson’s analysis of “On the Writing of Letters” for my own application of Erasmus’s writings to familial relation.
honorifics are not “automatic reflexes or signals of predetermined social standing” but are instead “typically strategically used to soften [face-threatening actions], by indicating the absence of risk to the addressee” (182). Kinship terms encode social relation between the speaker and hearer and can be used to negotiate this relation.

The early modern use of the term cousin provides a particularly useful example of adoptive naming. Rather than indicating a specific familial relationship such as brother, mother, or uncle, the term could be employed to describe any biological link between two people; it was used to address anyone with whom one had a common ancestor. Shortened to coz it also implied familiarity. As such, it could be used by a speaker to convey both deference for and proximity to an unrelated person. In an important discussion of ingroup identity markers in Shakespeare’s As You Like It, Clara Calvo observes that Celia uses such markers in a calculated way when she addresses Rosalind as “sweet my coz” and when she uses the familiar pronoun of address thou (109). Celia and Rosalind are in fact related, but Celia’s use of coz is a tactical one: “With this strategy,” Calvo argues, “Celia is claiming the existence of some ‘common ground’ between Rosalind and herself; she is also indicating that she disregards the slight difference in social status existing between them and that she considers herself Rosalind’s equal” (109). Kinship terms, as Calvo makes clear, can be used both to solidify and establish relative power between two speakers.
King James’s letters to Queen Elizabeth provide a fascinating historical example of the tactical use of “adoptive naming” and fictitious kinship. The English Queen and Scottish King were by blood only second cousins, but they refer to one another frequently in correspondence as “brother” and “sister.” Their frequent use of horizontal terms of kinship—their desire to portray themselves as siblings—is not unusual among royalty and can be explained by their equal status as monarchs; they conceive of themselves, in other words, as siblings in monarchy. More noteworthy is James’s insistent use of vertical kinship terms—that is, those of parent and child—to address Elizabeth. He employs such terms in a strategic show of deference to the far more powerful English queen. In a cryptic letter dated 1585, Elizabeth—who had recently discovered William Parry’s plot to assassinate her, and who had therefore ensured that James’s mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, was under more watchful custody—wrote to James to establish her power to detect insincerity and to assess his mood toward his mother:

I might condemn you as unworthy of such as I mind to show myself toward you; and therefore I am well pleased to take any color to defend your honor, and hope that you will remember that who seeketh two strings to one bow, they may shoot strong but never straight. And if you suppose that princes’ causes be veiled so covertly that no
intelligence may bewray them, deceive not yourself: we
old foxes can find shifts to save ourselves by others’
malice, and come by knowledge of greatest secret,
specially if it touch our freehold…. I write not this, my
dear brother, for doubt but for remembrances. (qtd. in
Marcus 262)

After Elizabeth’s veiled threats, James begins addressing his correspondence to her not only to his “cousin” and “sister,” but also to his “mother.” His choice of adoptive name signals, as Erasmus might have it, increased reverence for Elizabeth in an effort at strategic politeness. James, as the son of Elizabeth’s enemy, must attempt to increase his capital by addressing her in deferential familial terms. His letter to Elizabeth dated 31 July, 1585, for example, is addressed “Madame and mother,” and is signed “Your most loving and devoted brother and son” (qtd. in Marcus 263). James, of course, cannot at once literally be both brother and son to Elizabeth. His simultaneous use of multiple kinship terms indicates his extreme desire to placate the queen.

James, moreover, uses what Erasmus terms “adoptive names” not only to flatter Elizabeth, but also to facilitate political adoption. In naming himself Elizabeth’s metaphorically adoptive son, he attempts to position himself as her heir. Jonathan Goldberg observes that James begins calling Elizabeth “mother” just as he abandons his biological mother, Mary (Politics 12-17). James deserts his birth mother, that is, for an
adoptive political one. Close familial relation to the powerful Elizabeth is of far higher
political value to James than close relation to the traitorous Mary. By calling Elizabeth
“mother” and referring to himself as her “son,” James tries to write himself into the
English royal family as the successor to the English throne. He makes it clear to Elizabeth
that he has adopted her as mother even if she has not yet taken him as her child. Writing
to Elizabeth on 1 August, 1588, James states that he is moved to tell Elizabeth of his “zeal
to the religion [Protestantism], and how near a kinsman and neighbor I find myself to
you and your country” (qtd. in Marcus 356). He promises that he will behave himself
“not as a stranger and foreign prince, but as your natural son and compatriot of your
country in all respects” (357, my emphasis). James strives to be counted as family by
depicting himself as Elizabeth’s close kinsman.

James’s use of multiple adoptive familial signifiers for Elizabeth mirrors and
perhaps builds on Elizabeth’s own strategic use of kinship in her official addresses. As
several scholars have noted, the queen was adept at using metaphoric relation as a
political tool, positioning herself as at once wife, mother, and sister to England.125
Maureen Quilligan observes that Elizabeth was not the first English queen to use the
rhetoric of marriage in relation to her kingdom: Mary Tudor often stated that she had
“married” England before she took a husband (37). Elizabeth is, however, arguably the
first to use the metaphor of the adoptive mother to great political effect. Given her

125 See in particular Montrose, “The Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture.”
failure to marry and produce an heir and the political tension that resulted from her childlessness, it is no surprise that the queen chooses to depict herself as a figurative parent of her people. In a speech made in 1599 in response to the Commons’ petition that she marry, Elizabeth states that her people “are born my subjects” (qtd. in Marcus 59)—they are figured as her natural children. She does not need to give birth to biological children, she asserts, because she is already a mother: “And reproach me so no more...that I have no children: for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children and kinsfolks, of whom, so long as I am not deprived and God shall preserve me, you cannot charge me, without offense, to be destitute” (59). Adoptive parenthood, as Elizabeth envisions it, is equivalent to biological parenthood. She invokes fictional kinship to attempt to alleviate the anxiety that surrounds her succession. Claiming that she is more of a natural parent to her subjects than any ruler who might succeed after her, she answers another petition that she marry in 1563 by establishing herself as an adoptive mother: “though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any a more natural mother than I mean to be unto you all” (qtd. in Marcus 72).\textsuperscript{126} The English people become Elizabeth’s adoptive family;

\textsuperscript{126} The MS cited in Marcus’s, Muller’s, and Rose’s edition leaves out the word “natural” and reads “more mother.” However, the editors note that “Another good MS (BL, MS Additional 33271, fol. 13r) reads ‘more natural mother.’” The editors indicate that there is no reason to assume that the version that they cite is defective, but I have chosen to include “natural” because,
she exaggerates her proximity to them, in Bourdieu’s words, in order to “emphasize what unites” (41).

Elizabeth and James both illustrate how familial relation in the early modern period was used for tactical and deliberate ends. Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists who wanted to convey the potential fluidity of early modern familial relation and its strategic possibilities depicted behavior that was in some ways similar to that of these monarchs. *Women Beware Women* appears to show the manipulation of familial relation as both liberating and dangerous: it dramatizes both the reward and the risk involved in fictionalizing the family.

**Livia and the Manipulation of Relation**

*Women Beware Women* begins with a verbal conciliation of relation through naming.

Leantio, having married without his mother’s knowledge, brings home Bianca, his new bride. Before she learns that Bianca’s is her daughter-in-law, Leantio’s mother expresses given Elizabeth’s rhetoric of adoption, the term demonstrates that the Queen attempts to underscore the degree to which she identifies herself as her people’s natural, or biological, mother. The stepdames which she places in opposition to herself are meant to be viewed as merely substitute mothers, while Elizabeth depicts herself as genuine.
her happiness at seeing her son, welcoming him “with all the affection of a mother” (1.1.2) and describing her “natural love” for him (1.1.3). She loves him inherently, she states, because she has undergone “her curse of sorrows” (1.1.5), or labour pains, for him. As Leantio introduces his mother to Bianca, however, his mother makes clear the extent to which acquiring a new relative—in this case a daughter-in-law—involves a careful negotiation of kinship terms. Although she is unhappy with her son’s choice to wed a wealthy woman, who, she believes, will not be satisfied living within their means, Leantio’s mother is careful to demonstrate to Bianca that she now considers her to be kin. She makes a show, that is, of changing her terms of address to Bianca. At first addressing the woman as “gentlewoman” and noting that “thus much is a debt of courtesy / Which fashionable strangers pay each other / At a kind meeting” (1.1.111), Mother then acknowledges that such a term cannot convey their newfound proximity. There is “more than one” (1.1.114) form of address, she notes, to describe their relationship: “Due to the knowledge I have of your nearness: / I am bold to come again, and now salute you / By th’ name of daughter, which may challenge more / Than ordinary respect” (1.1.114-117). Erasmus’s observation that, out of politeness, a person might call “a step-mother ‘mother,’ a sister’s husband ‘brother’” can provide a useful explanation for Mother’s calling Bianca “daughter” rather than “daughter-in-law.” By exaggerating the degree of their familial relation, Mother is sure to insist that she

127 Leantio’s mother is not named in the play, but is instead referred to as Mother.
welcomes Bianca by treating her as though she is a “natural” child. The use of the term “daughter” for both a biological child and a daughter-in-law was not uncommon in the period, but the way in which Mother deliberately juxtaposes the two forms of address that she might use—“gentlewoman” or “daughter”—emphasizes her deliberate and strategic welcoming of Bianca.\textsuperscript{128} Mother is, quite obviously, determined to please her son by accepting his wife. She thus assures Bianca that she has a place within their home.

Bianca, for her part, follows her mother-in-law’s example and underscores their newfound familial proximity. Addressing Mother deferentially as “kind Mother” (1.1.125) and “sweet Mother” (1.1.149), she assures the matriarch that she considers Leantio’s family her own. Bianca even insists that she will, in a sense, rewrite her own familial history in order to emphasize the extent to which she adopts her new, married life as her only life: “I’ll call this place the place of my new birth now, / And rightly too: for here my love was born, / And that’s the birth-day of a woman’s joys” (1.1.139-141). In her new life, Bianca explains, she will take Leantio’s mother as her own. She assures her mother-in-law that “The voice of her that bare me is not more pleasing” than hers (1.1.150). Bianca attempts to convey, with flattery and by equating biological and adoptive motherhood, her respect for Mother and to earn her favour. Both Bianca and

\textsuperscript{128} For a discussion of how the term “daughter” could imply relation by marriage or birth in the early modern period, see Patricia Parker, “\textit{All’s Well}” 365-6.
Mother, in short, exaggerate the degree to which they are related in order to establish a close bond and to ascertain their respective positions within the household.

The initial embellishment of relation in Women Beware Women stands in contrast to the deliberate ruination and re-creation of kinship that occurs later in the play. Whereas Bianca and Mother amplify the bonds of kinship in order each to flatter the other and to please Leantio, Livia is eventually shown, conversely, to replace familial relation with fictive relation for strategic reasons. She recognizes the effect that kinship—whether real or fictionalized—has on power between people. She does not use “adoptive names” as Bianca and Mother do; instead, she demonstrates what might happen when a familial name is replaced by another. By naming or re-naming others, Livia exploits the power that comes with the ability to assign a name.

Modern editors have consistently understood the sibling relationship between Livia and Hippolito as a one-sided incestuous attraction. Roma Gill, for instance, observes that Livia’s tenderness towards Hippolito suggests an unnatural affection for her brother (xxiii). Typical interpretations of the play also view Livia’s procurement of Isabella as a game of substitution whereby she lives vicariously through her niece. As Richard Dutton observes, “It does not take a Freudian to see, in her supposed removal of the incest impediment between uncle and niece, a displaced removal of the same

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129 This observation is also made in Dodson 379.
impediment between herself and her brother, Hippolito” (xxiv). These interpretations, however, often overlook Livia’s adept manipulation of familial relation. Just as the Tudor and Stuart monarchs chose fictionalized relations in order to gain favour and to alter political ties, Livia uses the power of fictional kinship deliberately. Rather than attempt to create a familial tie where none exists, however, Middleton has Livia falsify relation in order to invalidate it. That is, she unmakes and then refashions biological kinship. By lying about Isabella’s adoption, Livia muddles familial names, unfixing familial relation and demonstrating the influence that fictional kinship might exert to realign power structures.

Livia begins the play in a position of apparent power, although it is clear that, as a woman, she is still the victim of repressive patriarchy. A wealthy widow outside the institution of marriage, she is able to voice her opinion on several familial matters—an opinion which is sought after and valued. Bourdieu asserts that “one of the most important factors bearing on linguistic production is the anticipation of profit which is durably inscribed in the language habitus, in the form of an anticipatory adjustment (without conscious anticipation) to the objective value of one’s discourse” (“Economics” 653). Each speaker has a “language habitus,” or a context of the history and reception of his or her past speech that is not solely based on the immediate social situation in which he or she finds himself or herself. This habitus is formed within a history of the speaker’s social connections and influences, as well as by his or her previous successes or failures.
Livia begins the play as a privileged family member and speaker. Her brother Fabrito, for instance, asks “What think you, Lady sister?” (1.2.21) when he is arguing with Guardiano about whether a woman should have any reason beyond the command of her father to love a man. Fabrito’s question implies a history of Livia’s access to speech; it sketches out an account of her prior speech reception and suggests that she is often granted the privilege of speaking her opinion. She is, therefore, an esteemed member of her family and one whose judgment is valued. The self-assurance with which she delivers her answer is equally telling: “I must offend you then, if truth will do’t, / And take my niece’s part, and call’t injustice / To force her love to one she never saw. / Maids should both see and like: all little enough; / If they love truly after that, ‘tis well” (1.2.29-33). Livia does not conform to early modern stereotype of the quiet, complacent female; instead, she enters the play as an outspoken woman who asserts her right to offend others with her opinions. Although she is asked to speak and therefore does not create her own opportunity for speech, indicating that she still occupies an inferior place within the patriarchal hierarchy of the family, she nonetheless establishes herself as a nonconformist who voices her opinion about her family.

Yet Livia is often viewed by critics as a pawn of patriarchal power. As Dutton argues, “there is always a sense in which Livia’s free-thinking is contained by, and subject to, the patriarchy with which she has reached an accommodation of sorts” (xxiii). Livia speaks out on behalf of her niece, opposing both the match that Fabrito has made
between Isabella and the Ward and a woman’s being forced into a loveless marriage, but she also assists men, such as the Duke and Hippolito, in acquiring the women they want. I will argue, however, that Livia’s way of procuring Isabella for Hippolito sustains her position as a free-thinker or as usurper of patriarchal power. Livia overrides supposed genealogically determined hierarchies of power, using the lie about adoption to render genealogy a performative entity.

Livia insists upon her power as rhetorician, telling Hippolito that her words can overrule her niece’s aversion to her brother: “Sir, I could give as shrewd a lift to chastity / As any she that wears a tongue in Florence: / Sh’ad need be a good horsewoman, and sit fast, / Whom my strong argument could not fling at last” (2.1.36-39). Livia believes that she possesses outstanding verbal skills, and she understands the power of forceful speech. Her real power lies less in her verbal mastery, however, than in her understanding of how language and familial relation function in context. Rather than making a “strong argument” and persuading her niece into an incestuous union with her uncle, as she tells Hippolito she will do, Livia instead manipulates the power of familial relation, establishing a trustworthy speaking position for herself as someone who is disconnected from Isabella. She ultimately alters familial relation in order to modify linguistic and familial capital in the play.

As she prepares to lie to Isabella about her parentage, Livia asks the girl to “set by the name of niece awhile” (2.1.90). Requesting that Isabella not take offence at this
distancing of familial relation, she implies that the name can be easily removed so that the two might talk as “strangers.” Stranger in the early modern period meant not only an “unknown person” or a “foreigner,” but also a “guest or visitor, in contradistinction to the members of the household” or “a person not of one’s kin” (OED 3.a and 6 “stranger”). Speaking in a “stranger fashion” (2.2.91), Livia implies, allows for frank, honest discussion that is divorced from familial concern. As she attempts to alter Isabella’s familial orientation, Livia further distances herself, informing Isabella that “the names of niece / And aunt” (2.1.132-33) that have been used between them are names alone. Livia claims that relation can exist solely in language and through “custom,” or convention. Despite the fact that common usage of these terms implies familial relation, she insists, they are merely titles. Telling Isabella that she is “no more allied to any of us [the family], / Save what the courtesy of opinion casts” (2.1.135-36), Livia proposes that people assume children to be biologically related to their parents out of “courtesy,” or out of a kind of politeness that presupposes that the children are not bastards. Social convention takes Isabella as the child of Fabrito and his deceased wife, that is, without knowing the reproductive details of the relationship. In this sense, Livia suggests that the names that Isabella has used until now have been unconsciously “adoptive”: they implied a biological connection between people where none existed. Familial signifiers as Livia envisions them can be detached from genealogical accuracy. The family that may be named as whole and biological, Livia suggests, might be the opposite.
As she elaborates upon Isabella’s fictional lineage, giving the girl further details of what she claims is her true parentage, Livia makes clear to her niece that, although their familial signifiers now have no genealogical validity, they must be used to uphold the semblance that they are family. While Livia now refers to Isabella not as a “niece,” but as “my wenche,” a term of endearment that does not convey familial relation (2.1.163), she asserts that in public, Isabella must maintain the fiction of their relation: “I pray forget not but to call me aunt still” (2.1.167). Livia insists that the terms “niece” and “aunt” be used to disguise Isabella’s mother’s supposed indiscretion with the Marquis of Coria. In a world of social signification, Isabella believes that she must maintain the appearance of relation to Fabrito, Livia, and Hippolito.

Livia translates the symbolic capital gained or lost by close familial relation into speaking capital. She associates her removal of Isabella’s familial title with a change in Fabrito’s speaking power. Fabrito, Livia’s brother, is characterized by his incessant desire to command his daughter to obey him; his dialogue in the first act consists of little else. By insisting that Isabella marry Guardiano’s ward, Fabrito establishes his filial power over her. Isabella, he presumes, owes him obedience because she is his child—her filial duty outweighs her own desire. Fabrito thus repeatedly uses the modal verb “shall” to convey what he believes to be her absolute obligation to follow his command: “No matter, she shall love him” (1.2.2); “you shall have him./ And you shall love him” (1.2.128); “Marry him she shall, then” (1.2.137). Isabella enters the play, therefore,
trapped by her father’s authority. She cannot escape his control nor assert her reluctance to follow the future that he envisions for her: Fabrito possesses absolute dominion over her. As Livia remarks, he “may compel out of the power of father” (1.2.131); commands to his child must necessarily be obeyed. Isabella assures her aunt that, “being born with that obedience / That must submit unto a father’s will,” she “must of force consent” to her father’s wishes (2.2.86-88). She is by birth obligated to occupy a position of subservience that leaves her powerless against her father’s word and places her at a linguistic disadvantage to him.

Livia’s observation that Fabrito makes use of the “power of father” contributes directly to her approach to her niece. In order to devalue Fabrito’s commands, Livia diminishes the degree to which Isabella is related to him. As she teases Isabella and pretends to be reluctant to tell her her secret, Livia implies that Fabrito’s word does not, in fact, command a parent’s power: “That which you call your father’s command’s nothing; / Then your obedience must needs be as little. / If you can make shift here to taste your happiness” (2.1.120). By insisting that Isabella is not Fabrito’s biological daughter, Livia undoes his linguistic capital. Once Isabella has been made to think that she is not biologically related to Fabrito, Livia asserts that Isabella is now free to do and think as she likes. Isabella, she suggests, is no longer required to listen to or obey Fabrito’s orders: “How weak his commands now, whom you call father? / How vain all his enforcements, your obedience? / And what a largeness in your will and liberty, / To
take, or to reject, or to do both?” (2.1.159-161). Biological relation is tied to verbal authority: when Isabella’s relationship to Fabrito is said to be illegitimate or adoptive rather than genealogical, his commands lose their effect.

In being pronounced an adopted child by Livia, Isabella’s entire identity is changed because, in essence, her family name is changed: she is no longer Fabrito’s daughter, but that of the Marquis. Judith Butler notes in *Bodies That Matter* that the name “functions as a kind of prohibition, but also as an enabling occasion…the name is a token of a symbolic order, an order of social law” (153). Once placed outside of the symbolic order of familial relation, Isabella is given the name of “stranger” among those whom she considered kin: Livia tells her, after all, that she means nothing more to the family than does someone who is unrelated. Isabella’s new name occasions the materialization of a new self:

> Have I passed so much time in ignorance,
> And never had the means to know myself
> Till this blest hour? Thanks to her virtuous pity
> That brought it now to light. Would I had known it
> But one day sooner; he had then received
> In favours what – poor gentleman – he took
> In bitter words: a slight and harsh reward
> For one of his deserts. (2.1.181-188)
Ironically, Isabella’s epiphany is occasioned by a lie. She believes that she now knows her true, biological self when in fact she is only further distanced from her genealogical identity.

Livia’s manipulation of the effect of naming works to challenge Isabella’s identity. As many critics have concluded, the act of naming grants subjectivity. Naming composes the subject; to be named is to come into existence. Louis Althusser, for instance, states that naming plays a central role in establishing subjects through language. A subject is interpellated, or is transformed into a subject, in part through the process of naming: “the fact of calling you by your name, the fact of knowing, even if I do not know what it is, that you ‘have’ a name of your own…means that you are recognized as a unique subject” (173). For Butler, subjects are similarly manifest in language:

Thus, to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible.

One comes to “exist” by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One “exists” not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable. The terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a
social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and

violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects.

(*Excitable Speech* 5)

Social identity is, in this sense, always adoptive because it must be expressed and
recognized through language.

Naming, as Butler notes, is also an act that exerts authority. There is always
someone granting the name and someone being named; therefore the act encodes a
power structure. To perform an act of naming, according to Butler, one must be
previously named and must, as a result, possess power: “The one who names, who
works within language to find a name for another, is presumed to be already named,
positioned within language as one who is already subject to that founding or
inaugurating address” (*Excitable* 29). Livia’s re-naming of Isabella places Livia in a
position of privilege. She is able to change and grant familial names and is therefore
accomplished at interpellating others into subjectivity. As such, Livia is aligned with
Middleton himself as the creator of the text. Her lie to Isabella makes Livia the instigator
of the play’s subsequent action. Referred to throughout the play as a magician, she
clearly holds the influence of a dramatist. Hippolito notes her power to transform
Isabella: “What has she done to her, can any tell? / ’Tis beyond sorcery this, drugs, or
love-powders. / Some art that has no name, sure, strange to me / Of all the wonders I
e’er met withal / Throughout my ten years’ of travels” (2.1.231-35). By “some art,” Livia
rewrites her niece’s life, altering her very sense of self and of the life into which she is born.

In fact, by renaming and rewriting the family as she does, Livia herself usurps the role of patriarch; she, not Fabrito, assumes the role of familial compositor, generating, in a sense, a new family unit, albeit an incestuous one. In its refraction of kinship, the play dislodges biological reproduction; in its place Livia authors a kind of fictive reproduction that reshapes the family and reorients its members. She displaces genealogical family members, acting herself as creator or genitor of the family line.

Livia’s declaration forces Isabella to see herself as having unconsciously acted out a familial role her entire life: she has not, she thinks, known herself until now. Her new—or what she believes to be her “true”—self materializes as Livia addresses her not as “niece” but as “wench” or “stranger.” She comes to recognize her relation to Fabrito as a performance that she was unaware she was acting out. While Livia’s lie in fact leads her niece away from the biological reality of her parentage, Isabella believes that it shows her who she is meant truly to be. In supposing that she is the daughter of the Marquis, however, Isabella actually begins to perform relation for the first time as she puts on the unnecessary “act” of calling Livia “aunt.” Similarly, Hippolito is now a “good gentleman” to her, rather than a relative, but for the sake of appearances, she continues to address the man who she has until now only “called uncle” as “uncle” (2.1.171). The new form of Isabella’s “family” determines her place in the world.
In addition to seeming to exercise almost magical powers, Livia conceives of herself as a physician, a position that emphasizes her role in influencing her family. Although early modern English women were allowed to practice home remedies and lay medicine, they could not become licensed medical practitioners; their supposed inability to grasp theoretical learning is often cited as cause for their banishment from the profession (Pettigrew 44). Livia’s depiction of herself as a physician is remarkable because she envisions herself in a position of patriarchal authority. Drawing attention to her ability to influence and alter others, she imagines that her words are “ministered / By truth and zeal” (2.1.28-29), or with religious fervor. She also tells Hippolito that she “minister[s] all cordials” (2.1.48) to him to cure his lovesickness, playing the part of his caring physician. And just as Livia envisions herself as a doctor, tending to others and shifting their physical states, other characters also see her as a physician. Guardiano, having heard Livia assess Fabrito’s overzealous approach to fatherhood as “foolish,” praises her and states that she has “let [Fabrito’s] folly blood in the right vein” (2.2.74), or has properly diagnosed him. The reference to blood-letting indicates Livia’s ability to identify problems and administer cures, and also recalls her distancing of Isabella from her blood family. That is, Livia metaphorically “lets” or drains her family’s blood from her niece’s veins in order to shape a new social existence.

130 For more on women caring for the bodies of others, see Gowing, Common Bodies 88-96.
Middleton depicts familial relation as a performance; it can be manipulated and interpreted. Because biological relation can never truly be known, the play implies, the fictionalization of kinship is possible. Familial connection in the play is therefore highly changeable: an authoritative, skilled character might rewrite it entirely. By demonstrating how easily familial relation might be fictionalized, Livia reveals the family as social creation. Simultaneously, she shows the audience that familial relation can be influenced to advantageous ends. By altering the story of her niece’s lineage, Livia frees the girl from patriarchal rule. Not only does Isabella no longer have to obey her father’s word, but she is also free to form new attachments. Livia, therefore, serves her well, in a sense, when she lies. Although she procures her niece for her brother, and thereby acts, as critics have noted, in the name of patriarchy, Livia’s deployment of falsehood enacts a performative “truth” within which her niece is freed from her oppressive family unit. She is released so that Livia can help the brother who she loves “so well” (2.1.63), but she is released nonetheless.

Isabella is freed from her father’s authority, however, only to fall back into it. Livia’s lie and the need to conceal her supposed illegitimacy cause Isabella to decide that “this marriage shall go forward” (2.1.206) and that she will obey her father’s command to wed the Ward. Believing that she does not commit incest with her uncle but that she must act in secret, she sees the marriage as her best possible option. Isabella plans, however, to use the marriage to her own advantage, treating it as an opportunity to
conceal her relationship with Hippolito (2.1.215). She will obey her father’s command, that is, in order to subvert it. Through Livia’s lie, Isabella comes to use the institution of marriage to conduct a supposedly illicit affair.

**Adoption and Incest**

*Women Beware Women* was written not long after a time of intense debate over which relations could marry. The play dramatizes the shifting definition of close familial relation in the period. Henry VIII’s official pronouncements on incest, marriage, and succession challenged and reformulated the definition of allowable marriage. In order to divorce Catherine of Aragon, to marry Anne Boleyn, to have Anne Boleyn executed, and to marry Catherine Howard, Henry had to rewrite canon incest law. The civil law was also altered accordingly. The king used incest as both a means to facilitate and annul his marriages and to form important political alliances. As Bruce Boehrer has observed, by altering the degrees of marriage prohibition to suit his needs, Henry used incest as a

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131 See Boehrer, *Monarchy* 44 for a list of Henry’s major official pronouncements on incest, marriage, and succession.

132 See McCabe 53-54 for a detailed description of Henry’s alteration of incest laws.
political strategy (*Monarchy 3*).\(^ {133}\) In questioning what constituted incest, the king in turn questioned what constituted familial relation.

Canon and civil law regarding incest did not stabilize with the end of Henry’s reign: Mary Tudor later rescinded Henry’s statutes and Elizabeth restored some of them. The “Table of Kindred and Affinity,” a document outlining impermissible marriages, was prepared in 1560 by Archbishop Parker, under Elizabeth’s rule. It reinstated the Levitical prohibitions with which Henry’s reign had concluded.\(^ {134}\) This table was reconfirmed in the Ecclesiastical Canons of 1603 and appeared in the *Book of Common Prayer* from 1662 onward.

*Women Beware Women* stages a refashioning of the family similar to that which took place within the Tudor and Stuart monarchies and depicts this refashioning as a dangerous practice. For Middleton, the muddled, redefined nature of Livia’s version of family leads to complete familial estrangement. Kinship becomes hazardous because the characteristics of familial relation are so changeable and readily manipulated that they

\(^ {133}\) Boehrer argues that “the incest prohibition serves as a highly flexible, extremely powerful political tool—authorizing particular alliances, prohibiting others, reinforcing nationalist or internationalist sentiment as the case may require, and in the process literally remaking the identities of specific individuals” (*Monarchy 3*).

\(^ {134}\) See McCabe 54 for further details on the establishment of, and changes to, “The Table of Kindred and Affinity.”
can be used to any ends. Hence *Women Beware Women* combines a somewhat progressive vision of the family as a malleable entity with the conservative view that malleability leads to total chaos. Hippolito murders Livia’s lover, Leantio, spurring Livia to reveal Hippolito’s incestuous affair, but there is the sense that confused kinship, above all, is to blame for the play’s tragic outcome. Isabella’s reaction to her aunt’s fictionalization of her kinship—as well as the Ward’s and Guardiano’s reactions to Isabella’s incestuous affair—prompt them to mount a theatrical performance in which everyone but the Cardinal is murdered. Livia, in essence, unravels the family unit to the point where it can no longer sustain itself.

The play also examines the ties between fictional relation and incest. Livia’s destabilization of Isabella’s kinship directs Isabella to believe that she can safely enter into a sexual relationship with a man who is, in actuality, her biological uncle. Although Isabella has known Hippolito as a consanguineous relation all her life, once she is lied to and told that he is not related to her by blood, her aversion to their union disappears entirely: that he is now seen as her adoptive uncle has no bearing on their relationship. Isabella, therefore, discounts adoptive or emotional relation entirely; only blood relation stands for her as an impediment to sexual union.

Although, as Marc Shell observes, adoption was an impediment to marriage in classical and medieval times, in early modern England adoption was not viewed as a
legal obstacle to involvement in a sexual relationship. Because adoption itself had no official legal status and because adoptive relation was not founded in biological genealogy, adoptive relation existed outside of statutes prohibiting incest. The “Table of Kindred and Affinity” (1560), for instance, did not specify that adopted siblings were unable to marry. Affine relations such as brothers- and sisters-in-law were included in the table, but adoptive relations were not. Affine familial relations were considered as consanguineous relations: a couple was thought to become “one flesh” in marriage and their relatives were therefore also thought to be related by blood. Adoptive children shared no such blood-based bond with their adoptive families. Not until 1986 was the “Table of Kindred and Affinity” amended to forbid adopted children from marrying

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135 While Shell cites several classical and medieval sources who feel that “adoption has the same effect in precluding marriage as does kinship by blood,” he goes on to observe that this view of adoption as equal to consanguinity has been contested frequently since the fall of Rome (218). Shell does not cite any early modern sources who speak out against marriage between adoptive relatives and I have not been able to locate any that treat adoption as a legal barrier to a sexual relationship.

136 As Sybil Wolfram observes, “this issue is further complicated when the rationale is based on an exchange of blood between spouses during intercourse; a woman ostensibly took on a man’s blood but not vice versa; if one were following this logic rather than the belief that spouses became one flesh, a man would not be consanguineously related to his wife’s family in the same way that she would be to his” (38).
their adoptive parents; there is still no entry that disallows marriage between adopted siblings.

The excitement that Isabella feels once her aunt informs her that she is unrelated to Hippolito, then, is not necessarily alarming by the standards of the day. If Isabella were to involve herself with an adopted relative rather than a consanguineous one, she would break no civil or canon law. But because the audience knows that Isabella is not in fact biologically unrelated to Hippolito, its members cannot help but see the sudden shift that she makes from thinking of him as a forbidden to an acceptable sexual partner as somewhat startling. The socio-emotional ties that Isabella held for the people she once deemed her relatives are negated and changed by Livia through the lie of her adoption, as are those ties that are supposedly “natural” or innate.137 *Women Beware Women* therefore uses the theatre as a symbolic space in which to test the effects of actual adoption on familial relation. It examines the vulnerability of relational definition and asks whether fictional, or non-consanguineous, relation can be considered a genuine form of familial relation. Ultimately, the play does not present adoptive relation as a barrier to sexual desire. On the contrary, adoptive relation is used to legitimate a sexual pairing. In the process, the play underscores the volatility of genealogy.

137 For an explanation of the ways in which early modern people believed the aversion to incest to be natural, see Boehrer, *Monarchy* 23-24. Boehrer notes that early modern theories of instinct aversion mirror, in some respects, Edward Westermarck’s twentieth-century work on incest (24).
To examine the ways in which adoptive incest was treated in the period, it is helpful to look at another contemporary play that concerns adoption and incest. Although sex with an adoptive relative was legally permissible in the period, it was not necessarily always viewed as acceptable. John Fletcher’s *Monsieur Thomas* (pub. 1639, written 1610-1616), also known as *Father’s Own Son*, depicts Valentine, a guardian who is engaged to Cellide, his adoptive ward. 138 Although Cellide initially appears contented to

138 While guardians typically purchased wardships in order to make a profit or to provide their own sons with wives, they did, on occasion, marry their own wards. Examples of guardians undertaking such practice in the period include Sir Thomas Cheyney, who married his ward Anne Broughton (Ives 126-7). Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk is perhaps the most famous case. He married Katharine Willoughby, his own ward who he had originally intended for his son, only six weeks after the death of his wife, Mary Tudor. In a letter dated 22 July, 1558, the Emperor’s ambassador relays information about the match to his master:

> On Sunday next the Duke of Suffolk will be married to the daughter of a Spanish lady named Lady Willoughby. She was promised to the Duke’s son, but he is only ten years old, & although it is not worth writing to your Majesty, the novelty of the case made me mention it. The Duke will have done a service to the ladies who can point to his example, when they are reproached, as it is usual, with marrying again immediately after the death of their husbands. (Goff 23)
marry her guardian, it gradually becomes clear that she is distressed by the prospect of their multi-faceted relationship. Theirs is not a typical case of wardship, in which the guardian is concerned with his ward’s finances above all else, but is instead an adoptive relationship founded on great care and feeling. Valentine is, as far as the play reveals, the only father whom Cellide has ever known. Valentine’s sister observes that, as adoptive father, Valentine has managed his ward well and has “won [Cellide’s] minde,/ even from her houres of childehood” (1.1.16-17). Valentine, it is discovered, lost his wife and son at sea, and his ward is obviously intended as a replacement for both his spouse and child (1.1.30-42).

Cellide loves her adoptive father—she weeps with joy upon his return from a voyage, for instance—but she also appears to hesitate when others insist upon making the arrangements for their marriage (2.1.7-13). And while she is initially upset when Valentine decides to break off their engagement, she later chides him for having

At the time of their marriage, Suffolk was forty-nine years old and Katherine was fourteen.

Joel Hurstfield observes that guardians were granted control of their wards’s lands, but were also given power over three things: the allowance paid by the Court of Wards to the guardian while the ward was still a minor, the “custodium” of the ward, or the possession of the child, and the maritagium, or the right to marry the ward to whomever the guardian chose (89). As a result, Hurstfield argues, wardships were frequently undertaken for financial gain alone.
presented himself to her as both a parent and a potential husband: “O fond and
ingnant, / Why didst thou foster my affection / Till it grew up, to know no other father, / And then betray it?” (5.7.14-17). While Valentine is sexually attracted to a daughter who is not his by blood, therefore ignoring his adoptive fatherly ties to her, Cellide, his adoptive daughter, is mindful of his social role as her parent. Although he is her father only in name, she recognizes that this should be his sole familial connection to her. As Francis, Valentine’s supposed friend, notes, Valentine’s cancelation of their engagement causes Cellide to lose “Father, Friend, herself” (3.1.148). Valentine is at once parent and lover (“friend” here is meant in the romantic sense) and this confusion of roles causes the scrambling of Cellide’s own identity. Cellide eventually seeks refuge from this perplexing tangle of familial relation in a convent, where the Abbess includes her in a system of universal, spiritual kinship that is far clearer than the kinship offered to her in her adoptive home.

Unlike Monsieur Thomas, Women Beware Women does not demonstrate a character’s shock at being treated first as a relative and then as a lover. Instead, the play promotes the ease with which the idea of familial relation might change. Livia’s use of the lie of Isabella’s adoption intertwines the familial confusion that both adoption and incest enact. She ties the two practices together. While incest casts family members in multiple and simultaneous familial roles, thereby blurring the limits of relation and assigning new parts to a family’s various members, adoption too blurs the outline of the
family. That is, adoption brings members into the family who are not part of it by birth and ultimately alters the very definition of the family unit. The family is amended or constructed through adoption in much the same way that incest forges new definitions of relation. By using both strategies of adoptive and incestuous familial relation, Livia combines the two practices, confounding Isabella’s sense of self first through the lie about adoption and then through her incestuous union with Hippolito. Upon learning of the incest that she has committed, Isabella comments on the “confusion of life, soul, and honour” (4.2.126) that her aunt has caused. Livia’s lie leads to a total estrangement of the self first through a removal of kinship ties and then through a distortion of kinship roles.

*Women Beware Women* envisions a society in which familial names have developed into mere coinages; they are the fluid and sometimes counterfeit currency of familial relationships that hold no inherent value but may be used to advantage. Livia supersedes supposed biologically-based models of authority, using the lie about adoption and re-naming as a social tool. The play therefore depicts familial status and the boundaries of kinship as largely contingent and performative entities. The breakdown of kinship delineation is ultimately imagined to result in the collapse of purportedly natural, blood-based deterrents to incest; the lack of familial demarcation in the play, as evidenced both by Isabella’s fictional adoption and by her very real act of incest, leads to chaos.
In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Hamlet’s disgust at Claudius’s entreaty to “Think of us / As of a father” (1.2.107-08) suggests something essentialist about familial bonds. For Hamlet, a grown man who has lost his father, the idea of being adopted by another man—and by his uncle in particular—is unsettling. The rearrangement of the nuclear family through remarriage disrupts the preexisting order of Hamlet’s family and alters its biological structure; he is unwilling to redefine his parentage. Yet, Hamlet would like to be non-essentialist about his familial bond with Gertrude: “Would it were not so, you are my mother” (3.4.15). As he wishes that his blood attachment to his mother might be dissolved, he expresses a desire to modify the familial bonds to which he is so attached. Like the promoters in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, the shepherd in *The Winter’s Tale*, and Livia in *Women Beware Women*, Hamlet is capable of reimagining the definition of his family.

The representation of adoption in early modern literature suggests a profound uncertainty about what lies at the heart of familial relationships. This perplexity concerns the inability to differentiate between blood and non-blood relatives, and the possibility that emotional relations can, in some sense, be altered or substituted for blood ties. In the early modern family, adoption is variously material for romance, comedy, and tragedy. The practice is both empowering and anxiety-inducing for characters and audiences alike.
As adoption plays an increasingly acknowledged and public role in our own period, we still witness such responses.\textsuperscript{140} Scholars have recently noted the various ways in which new reproductive technologies mimic the biological divide created by adoption, and this division’s provoking of uncertainty about the meaning of familial relation. In \textit{Undoing Gender} (2004), for instance, Judith Butler suggests that one can see how quickly kinship loses its specificity in terms of the global economy … when one considers the politics of international adoption and donor insemination.

For new “families” where relations of filiation are not based on biology are sometimes conditioned by innovations in biotechnology or international commodity relations and the trade in children. And now there is the question of control over genetic resources, conceived of as a new set of property relations to be negotiated by legislation and court decisions. (126)

\textsuperscript{140} Novy observes that adoption practices have changed substantially even over the last fifty years and that adoption is no longer undertaken in as secretive a manner as it once was (\textit{Reading 3}). She also emphasizes, however, the fact that adoptive parents often still fear that their adoptive children might want to establish contact with their birth parents (\textit{Reading 3}).
The contemporary family, Butler suggests, continually faces redefinition. Its characterization, and its borders, are always in question.

The possibility for altered familial forms that Butler sees in the biotechnological innovations of the twenty-first century were imagined in a less technical form in the literature of the Renaissance. I have argued throughout this dissertation that early modern conceptions of the family were often grounded in ideas of difference and omission. Such exclusion was premised in ideas of consanguinity and likeness, and was, to some degree, institutionalized by the English legal system. There was, however, continuous popular opposition to the official discourse concerning the family; adoption was one of several alternate, less visible modes of familial formation that were extra-legal and thus continually challenged the official categorization of the family. I have contended that adoption displaces the presumption that sexual and biological relations were the sole basis of kinship. The ties of kinship that bound family members to one another in early modern England might not have been based in sexual reproduction, but instead in emotional or even financial bonds. Adoption thus generated social anxiety; it revealed the degree to which the naturalized social order could be superseded. In other words, it provided families with the means to alter nature’s forms or to construct their own, non-blood-based ties. This dissertation establishes an historical precedent for the imagining of alternate familial formations of the sort that Butler describes—whether these formations are non-procreative or non-heteronormative.
I hope that this study provides literary scholars who are interested in pregenetic notions of kinship and procreation with a valuable record of early modern notions of heritability and familial possibility. It suggests that before Linnaeus’ classifications or Mendel’s experiments with hybridization, familial likeness was used to prove relation. It also reveals that the family was a relatively flexible entity that was, at times, believed to be changeable. As such, my dissertation offers atypical ways of thinking about nature and about the role of humankind in manipulating the natural world. My analysis of grafting metaphors in The Winter’s Tale, Cymbeline, and All’s Well That Ends Well, for example, examines the boundaries between the synthetic and the natural and suggests the intertwining of the natural world and the human world. I also show that A Chaste Maid in Cheapside demonstrates the results of human intervention in ostensibly normative reproduction by depicting the often imperceptible consequences of finances on the biological family.

I have identified several ways in which familial relation is expressed and defined in order to investigate the ties among family, social identity, language, and power. Mother Bombie and The Comedy of Errors each articulates the relation between consanguinity and language, suggesting that adoptive relationships may not necessarily overrule those that are formed in blood. Women Beware Women, however, suggests that familial relation is, in part, constructed through language and can therefore be altered.
Naming establishes a social order by identifying familial position, by placing characters in relation to one another—whether or not they are, in fact, related by blood.

In a recent ruling of the Superior Court of Justice in Ontario (2008), a judge found that a Toronto-area man had to continue to pay his ex-wife child support despite a DNA test’s proof that he was not the biological father of her twin girls. The man raised the girls as his own, unaware of their biological parentage, until they were 16 years old. Madam Justice Katherine van Rensburg used an expansive definition of parenthood to reach her decision:

The respondent’s obligation to pay child support for the children would arise if he is a “parent” within the extended definition of that term under s. 2(2) of the Divorce Act. The issue is whether the respondent “stood in the place of a parent” toward them. This phrase and the extended definition of “parent” in s. 1(1) of the Family Law Act, to include “a person who has demonstrated a settled intention to treat a child as a child of his or her family,” have been interpreted by a number of court cases. (“Cornelio” Sec. 2)

While the mother’s evident infidelity and her failure to disclose to her husband the possible parentage of the twins were ruled “a moral wrong against [her ex-husband],”
the judge noted that “it is a wrong that does not afford [the ex-husband] a legal remedy
to recover child support he has already paid, and that does not permit him to stop
paying child support” (Sec. 22). The ex-husband’s assumption of the role of father—his
position as adoptive rather than birth parent—thus trumped his lack of a biological
connection to the girls.

The judge’s decision has something in common with Henry Bracton’s
characterization of fatherhood (c. 1220) as based in presumption or appearances, where
“common opinion … sometimes is preferred to truth” (2.186). Under the law as
interpreted by Justice van Rensburg, as in the early modern period, the family is not an
inert, uniform entity, but is instead unfixed. By accentuating its complexities and
incongruities, I have shown that the early modern family was fluid rather than static.
Butler recognizes the possibility inherent in the separation of procreation and familial
relation through practices such as adoption. Today, she notes, “the relations of kinship
arrive at boundaries that call into question the distinguishability of kinship from
community” (Undoing 126). The limits that defined the early modern family were
arguably just as porous.
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