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Ellerbeck, Erin.
Cures for Chance: Adoptive Relations in Shakespeare and Middleton.
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Adoption is the theme of Erin Ellerbeck's intriguing book. She argues that adoption allows families to make changes and examines how early modern English theatre, with a focus here on the plays of Shakespeare and Middleton, called into question the biological family and represented alternatives in familial structure, inheritance, gender, and ideas of kinship and nature. These plays stage families, characters, and familial relations, and Ellerbeck analyzes them in relation to social, economic, political, historical, and cultural factors in the context of literary works, treatises on horticulture and natural history, and household and conduct manuals. For Ellerbeck, the plays test ideas of the family, which becomes a social construction rather than a biological imperative thereby changing nature. Speaking about adoption, Ellerbeck begins with grafting plants (3). The English garden came from deforestation. Horticultural treatises reveal much about the relation between nature and nurture. Ellerbeck says: "'Adoption' derives from the Latin *adoptio,* which refers both to the practice of incorporating a person into a family and to the practice of grafting" (4). This is the heart of the matter.

The connection between grafting and family and adoption was not widespread in Renaissance England, although Shakespeare explores it in *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*, which Ellerbeck notes, although she sees that the "success" of the link "is partly due to the strangeness of the rhetorical figure" (5). Ellerbeck maintains that genre affected the representation of adoption and that Shakespeare's romances may have the most adopted characters, the convention of families divided then reunited after the children are "incorporated into adoptive families temporarily," as in *The Winter's Tale*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest* (7). Moreover, she asserts that in comedies and tragicomedies, "heirship and financial considerations often determine how adoptive families are formed" (8). For instance, Thomas Middleton's *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* represents a wealthy child that a wet nurse exchanges for an indigent one (8). Adoption also happens to allow for a "confusion of identities," but "some characters seek urgently to take in children and to raise them as their own" (8) as in the case of the competition

between Oberon and Titania for the care of "the Indian boy" (9). Tragedies, such as *Othello* and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, stress weak adoptive ties and the misguided "desire to adopt" (9). Ellerbeck discusses cognates of adoption like "the tradition of service, or 'fostering out,' in which a child was sent into another household in a position of service or as an apprentice," as well as wardship (10) and wet-nursing, including of foundlings (11–12). She emphasizes "the agency of women in, and the transgressive potential of, adoptive relationships" (13). Furthermore, Ellerbeck draws on the insights of Marianne Novy by analyzing more widely "the cultural and literary significance of adoption as practice and trope" (13), and Ellerbeck focuses "on the taking in of children by non-biological parents—the incorporation of children into new families and the concomitant reconstitution of the family" (14). She sees Shakespeare and Middleton as depicting "the unstable family," concentrating on how humans control reproduction, familial relations, and nature (14). Whereas Shakespeare represents adoption as in the classical world, Middleton depicts adoption in terms of reproduction, bastardy, cuckoldry, and "fictional genealogies" (14). Ellerbeck discusses classical antecedents, as well as political and religious influences on adoption in the Renaissance, giving examples of adoption in England and proposing "metaphorical affinities between adoption and literary production" (14).

In chapters 1 and 2, she examines Shakespeare's depiction of adoption and the natural world. In chapter 1, she explores Shakespeare's use of the metaphor of grafting in *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale* (25f.). For instance, she says: "The grafting metaphor in *All's Well* signals the power of the Countess and Helena to fashion and refashion their own destinies within patriarchal hierarchies—that is, their capacity, like that of the poet or dramatist, for invention" (53). Chapter 2 examines the natural world and adoption in *Titus Andronicus* (54), and this play seems to imply that "the animal parenting metaphor suggests that innate adoptive tendencies in the animal world might be emulated by humans" (69). In chapter 3, Ellerbeck analyzes adopted bastards in Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (70). She sees a connection: "The disruption of patrilineal inheritance links the figures of the adoptee and the bastard" and she also discusses the cuckold (82). Concerning adoptive names, Ellerbeck, in chapter 4, says: "Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (c. 1621) suggests, for a time, the possibility that familial lineage could be changed at will, and that names and relations were not fixed determinants

of identity but instead mere verbal conventions that could be dispensed with to suit a character's ambitions" (91). Naming and being, words and identity not only affect characters but also the audience and the society in which the theatres exist.

The afterword also relates past and present, how the family and adoption were important in the Renaissance just as they are now. Ellerbeck elaborates: "Concerns about the alteration of nature in relation to the family existed well before the intervention of modern science. As I have shown, anomalous methods of familial formation have long occasioned unease about what constitutes familial relation" (113). The pairing of Shakespeare and Middleton benefits from the comparison as the reader learns more about both, and it especially helps readers and theatregoers to return to Middleton: "Shakespeare and Middleton both portray the family in terms of the modification of nature and also depict aspects of self-control and self-making in adoptive practices. Their approaches to these topics differ greatly in many respects, however, with Middleton living up to his reputation as a playwright with a bleak outlook on the world" (114). Ellerbeck's study makes a contribution to our understanding of family more generally and to "early modern concepts of familial possibility" (116).

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