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Université Paul-Valéry - Montpellier 3
Site Saint-Charles, salle des colloques 2

Conférence d'Erin Ellerbeck (Université de Victoria)

Adoptive Strategies in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*



As many critics have noted, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, in its treatment of the Romans and the Goths, repeatedly foregrounds the dissolution of boundaries between civility and barbarism. Its myriad references to the vicious, animal-like behaviour of its characters also suggest analogous affinities between the ferocious tendencies of humans and of animals. The play indicates, however, that animals might also serve as models of appropriate behaviour for their human counterparts. Lavinia claims, for instance, that birds may care for young creatures—nestlings and human children alike—that are not their own offspring. This talk will examine Lavinia's avian model of parenthood and the role of adoption in the play's depiction of kinship—a theme of central importance in a play that concerns two warring families. Shakespeare portrays adoption as a strategy by which advantageous alliances may be established between people who are not connected by blood. Adoption is also depicted as a model of citizenship: throughout *Titus Andronicus*, the practice of adoption is shown to be fundamental to the founding and governance of Rome. An analysis of the play

reveals that the capacity to think and to act adoptively—that is, to treat an unrelated person as a blood relative—is a mark of successful civic conduct and of virtuous parenthood.

Erin Ellerbeck is an assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Victoria. She has published articles and chapters in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, *Renaissance and Reformation*, *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature* (Palgrave), and *Enfants perdus, enfants trouvés* (Classiques Garnier). She is currently writing a book about the representation of adoption in the drama of the English Renaissance.