INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth's childhood, so goes the story, must have been unhappy. She disappointed her father (Henry VIII) by not being born a boy, was bereaved when her mother (Anne Boleyn) was beheaded for sibling incest, was declared a bastard by her father, who eventually exiled her from the court, and had four stepmothers (Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, and Catherine Parr). After her father died, the orphaned Elizabeth's ten-year-old half-sibling (Edward, son of Jane Seymour) became king. Her onetime stepuncle (Thomas Seymour) became her stepfather by marrying, in indecent haste, one of her stepmothers (Catherine Parr). This uncle-father, for his subsequent seduction of Elizabeth, or for an attempt to marry her, was executed by his own brother (Edward Seymour, "Protector of England"). Elizabeth had seen a good deal of sin and suffering by the time her manuscript entitled "The Glass of the Sinful Soul" (1544) was published in Germany as A Godly Medytacyon of the Christen Sowie (1548). Elizabeth was then fourteen years old. She had completed the manuscript when she was eleven.

In the next few years, the Protestant monarch Edward died. Elizabeth's other half-sibling (Mary Tudor) became the Catholic monarch and arranged for the eighteen-year-old Elizabeth to be sent to prison at the Tower of London and then to custody at Woodstock. Written with a diamond on her window at Woodstock some
time in the mid-1550s are the lines: "Much suspected by me, / Nothing proved can be, / Quoth Elizabeth prisoner." And yet, despite the insecurity of this existence, in 1558 at the age of twenty-five, Elizabeth became Queen of England; although her legitimacy was never legally established, she became, so goes the historical account, one of the most powerful and influential rulers that Europe would ever see.

This brave tale of triumph over adversity is well known. (The unseemly incestuous details are usually omitted from the elementary school texts, however, along with any mention of the "Glass.") Do not book reviewers in the United States, mired in the Horatio Alger tradition, still praise those books about "Good Queen Bess" which their publishers patronizingly target for the "eleven year old marketplace" precisely because such books provide their readers—or their readers' parents—with a moral role model for "juveniles" growing up in unsettled circumstances?

The comforting explanation of the accomplishments of Elizabeth's mature years in terms of the precariousness of her early years is not, of course, without some scholarly justification. And that explanation has informed books about Elizabeth targeted for adult scholars. Here the aesthetic requirements of biographical and historical narrative seem to have encouraged authors to emphasize, often in vacuo, the tension between adversity and triumph in order to clarify, or seem to clarify, the connection, crucial to the analysis of national politics in Britain, between Elizabeth's personal life and her public presence.

In this context there arises, as we shall see, a need for a reexamination of the family of the brilliantly educated and precociously intelligent preadolescent Elizabeth in relationship to the subsequent politics of nationhood in the Elizabethan era. But how, exactly, are the circumstances of the young Elizabeth's private "adversity" linked to her later public "triumph"? This is no easy matter to discern. We are not father confessors or psychoanalysts—at least not Elizabeth's—who look into the souls of our subjects.

But even so, we can still consider the speculum of the sinful soul that Elizabeth herself provided during these formative years. For Elizabeth's work, understood in historical context, mirrors how, for that monarch, ordinary kinship, which is the precondition for what she calls "fornication" and incest, might be transcended by one or another kind of extraordinary spiritual or political kinship.

Elizabeth had known ordinary kinship, or its legal figurations, in situations where one person is both sibling and lover/spouse (as Anne Boleyn was to George Boleyn or Catherine of Aragon to Henry VIII) or both parent and lover-spouse (as Thomas Seymour to Elizabeth herself). She would know extraordinary kinship and its apparent transcendence of the incest taboo from its Christian formulations. These formulations, which she expresses in her speculum, would include the doctrine of universal siblinghood, according to which, as I have described it, all human beings are siblings so that every act of sexual intercourse is incestuous; and it would also include the doctrine of the quadruply affined sponsa Christi, according to
which—as Elizabeth suggests in the letter to her stepmother Catherine Parr that she attached to the 1544 manuscript—one human being is at once the parent, sibling, child, and lover-spouse of another being. Elizabeth would also know—and perhaps, as we shall see, foreknow—extraordinary kinship in the developing British and generally European doctrine of nationhood. The interconnection of Christian kinship and nationhood, as well as Elizabeth’s own life and work, constitutes the subject of this chapter.

THE GLASS OF THE SINFUL SOUL

*If your first spring and author*
*God you view*
*No man bastard be,*
*Unles with vice the worst he fede*
*And leveth so his birthe.*

—Elizabeth’s translation from Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*

In 1531 and 1533, Marguerite d’ Angoulême, queen of Navarre, devout and free-thinking sister to King Francis of France, published a remarkable religious meditation of some seventeen hundred lines entitled *Le Miroir de l’âme pécheresse.* Marguerite had been an acquaintance of Anne Boleyn since 1516. And in 1534–35, after Anne, Henry VIII’s mistress since 1527, married the English king in 1533 and gave birth in the same year to Elizabeth Tudor, Marguerite renewed her association with the well-educated and reform-minded English queen. At about this time, it seems likely, Marguerite sent Anne a copy of her book. Anne was beheaded in 1536. But in 1544, her daughter Elizabeth, then eleven years old, made an English translation of Marguerite’s *Miroir,* most likely from a 1533 edition of that work that she found in her mother’s collection. Elizabeth called her translation “The Glass of the Sinful Soul.”

Elizabeth sent the manuscript together with a covering letter and an elaborate needlework cover she had embroidered to her stepmother, Queen Catherine Parr, as a New Year’s gift for 1545. Catherine, an author of religious meditations like *Lamentation of a Sinner* (1547) and *Prayers, or Meditations* (1546), may have amended the manuscript, as Elizabeth had asked her to do in her covering letter, and probably added some new material of her own. Catherine then sent the manuscript and revisions to John Bale, her friend—and Elizabeth’s. In his capacity as nationalist scholar and theologian, Bale “mended” some of Elizabeth’s “Glass of the Sinful Soul,” adding to it a long “Epistle Dedicatory” and “Conclusion,” and prudently retitling the work *A Godly Medytacyon of the Christen Sowle.* It was published in 1548, just a few months after the death of Henry VIII. In his edition, Bale included a few multilingual biblical translations by the princess and a woodcut depicting her kneeling before Christ.

Queen Elizabeth wrote a fair number of literary works. Most have been published, some in good scholarly editions. Yet remarkably there was no readily avail-
able edition of the “Glass” until 1993.\textsuperscript{13} Scholars of previous generations could have learned much from the “Glass.” Published several times during Elizabeth’s lifetime, it had considerable literary and political influence, and its study sheds light on historiographical matters such as handwriting, the education of women, and devotional and translational literature by and for women in the Elizabethan era.\textsuperscript{14} The occasional efforts to explain the dearth of attention paid to the work by stressing that Marguerite’s original is a “poor” poem and Elizabeth’s translation “inaccurate,” that works by “mere” eleven year olds are not worth studying, and so forth, have not been convincing. Much more convincing as an explanation is the expression in Elizabeth’s work of an ideology both important and discomforting in its personal and historical aspects.

The “Glass”’s treatment of bastardy and incest, for example, has potentially disconcerting ramifications for ideas of liberty and politics generally, likewise illuminating the historical rise of the English nation and the biographical role of Elizabeth herself. For the most profound themes of the “Glass” involve the reworking and expansion in nationalist and secular terms of such medieval theological notions concerning kinship as universal siblinghood, where all men and women are equally akin, and dormition, where the Virgin Mary plays at once the role of mother and daughter as well as wife.\textsuperscript{15} Above all the “Glass,” whose French original had the subtitle \textit{Discord étant en l’homme par contrariété de l’esprit et de la chair}, concerns the transmutation of the desire for, or fear of, physical incest into the desire for, or fear of, spiritual incest. It thus reflects, as we shall see, the beginnings of a new ideal and real political organization which—partly out of the concerns of England’s great monarch with incest and bastardy and partly out of political exigencies of the time—were introduced by her as a kind of “national siblinghood” to which she was simultaneously the mother and the wife.

The “Glass” is a reflection of Elizabeth herself. (She wrote to Catherine Parr that “the part that I wrought in it [was as] well spiritual as manual.”)\textsuperscript{16} Interpretation and contextualization of that glass helps to elucidate—in terms both of individual psychology and of national politics—not only how a preadolescent young woman of 1544 formed her spirit but also how that spirit informed the political identity of the English nation (as Bale predicted it would) and participated in producing the modern nation.

\textbf{INCEST, BASTARDY, AND THE BIRTH OF A NATION}

\textit{Celnum Patria} (“Heaven [is my] Fatherland”)

—embroidered by Elizabeth on the cover of a New Testament bible

In 1544, the year she wrote the “Glass,” the eleven-year-old Princess Elizabeth had a fourth stepmother, Queen Catherine Parr. Her first stepmother, Queen Jane Seymour, had died giving birth to Elizabeth’s half brother, later King Edward VI. The marriage of her second stepmother, Anne of Cleves, had been declared null
and void. Her third stepmother, Queen Catherine Howard, had been executed on the charge of adultery. "Mother, mother, mother," says Shakespeare's Hamlet—and also Melville's Pierre.

Anne Boleyn had risen to the place of queen thanks to Henry VIII's memorable charge that Queen Catherine and King Henry VIII were living in adultery and incest, and that their marriage therefore ought to be declared null. The charge, which recalls the complexities of the liaison between King Claudius and his sister-in-law Gertrude, in Hamlet, was momentous in the English Reformation. Catherine was the widow of Henry VIII's brother Arthur; she was Henry's sister-in-law. Should Henry have married? Legally, could he? On the one side of this debate stands the law of the Levirate, according to which a man must marry the childless widow of a deceased brother. On the other side stands the doctrine of carnal contagion, according to which it is incest to have sexual intercourse with one's sister-in-law. Henry VIII himself took the view that sexual intercourse with Catherine was incest. Thus began a series of specifically English charges of incest in the royal family. Such charges are germane to the foundation of the English Reformation, and, like Thomas More's Romish claim that such Brothers or ex-Brothers as Martin Luther—as well as Elizabeth's tutors and mentors John Bale and Bernardino Ochino—commit incest when they marry, they are part of a general Renaissance revaluation of profane and sacred sexual liaisons.

Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, not only rose to power by means of a charge of incest (against Catherine); she also fell from power partly as a result of one. We can gain a fuller grasp of the ramifications of the charge by examining how it affected Elizabeth's legal status and hence, of course, the English people's natural concern with problems of succession. For the people had reason to wonder whether a princess conceived in adultery or incest was legitimate. Elizabeth was deemed a bastard on several counts, five of which are worth pursuing in the present context. First, Elizabeth's pater, Henry VIII, had claimed publicly that she was a bastard and that her uncle Lord Rochford, her mother's brother, was her consanguineous genitor. Just as Anne was accused of having had sexual intercourse with her brother Lord Rochford, Elizabeth was declared a bastard by a 1536 act of Parliament. Second, Sir Thomas More argued that the union between Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon was not incestuous, hence that both the divorce of Catherine and the marriage to Anne Boleyn were null. It follows from this that, whether Henry or Rochford was Elizabeth's genitor, she was in any event a bastard.

Third, Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn were married barely nine months before Elizabeth's birthday, in suspiciously speedy and secret circumstances. Even if the marriage to Anne were legitimate (which More said it was not) and Henry were the genitor (which Henry himself said he was not), Elizabeth might seem to have been at least conceived out of wedlock.

As if this were not enough to cause the English people to doubt Elizabeth's legi-
Fig. 4. Illuminated Book of Hours showing the Annunciation. The couplet is in Anne Boleyn's handwriting: "Be daly prove you shalle me fynde/to be to you bothe lovying and kynde."

(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Library)
imacy, there was a fourth allegation—that Elizabeth's mother was also her sister, or, put otherwise, that Anne Boleyn was not only Henry's loving wife but also his kind daughter.27 (Below an illumination of the Annunciation—the angel Gabriel's intimation to Mary of the divine incarnation in her womb—in a Book of Hours that Anne Boleyn gave Henry, she inscribed the couplet: "Be daly prove you shalle me fynde / to be to you bothe lovyng and kynde"; see fig. 4.)28 Though this allegation of incest is false, we ought not to dismiss it as altogether frivolous. For in the context of the Christian religion, children of incestuous unions—including the announced god (Jesus) and several saints (Gregory the Great among them, as we have seen)—come to assume powerful places in both profane and sacred institutions.

Finally, there was a fifth claim concerning Elizabeth's illegitimacy. Elizabeth's consanguineous aunt, Mary Cary (née Boleyn), had been her father's mistress either before Anne or at about the same time (probably 1527–28). Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and Elizabeth's godfather, relied on the doctrine of carnal contagion and the parallel 1536 act of Parliament. According to the doctrine and the act it was nominated incest to sleep with the sister of one's mistress ("flesh of my flesh"). Cranmer declared both that the marriage between Henry and Anne was incestuous and that Elizabeth was a bastard.29

As we shall see, the doctrine of carnal contagion, and the charges of incest and bastardy that go along with it, affected Elizabeth's sense of identity, and it helps to give us some access to what one biographer has called her spiritual "girlhood." Its implementation in law during the 1530s and 1540s affected the very foundations of the new England. Its redefinition of the taboo on incest in the most generalizable terms helps to define the origin of the English nation state and its new Anglican institutions.

**CARNAL CONTAGION**

*He that comforts my wife is the cherisher of my flesh and blood.*

—Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, 1.3.46–47

English men and women used the Doctrine of Carnal Contagion to claim that Henry VIII's marriages to his sister-in-law Catherine of Aragon and to Anne Boleyn were incestuous. If the king's brother (Arthur) had slept with a woman (Catherine of Aragon), it was argued, then she was the king's kin and his marriage to her was null and void. (Any offspring such as Mary Tudor, later Queen Mary I, would be illegitimate.)30 By the same token, if the king had slept with a woman (Mary Boleyn) then that woman's sister (Anne Boleyn) was the queen's sister and there stood between them a diriment impediment to marriage. (Any such offspring as Elizabeth Tudor, later Queen Elizabeth I, would be illegitimate.) The argument that the siblings of a sexual mate become one's own siblings tended to make Elizabeth both legitimate, as it would nullify Catherine's marriage with Henry, and illegitimate, as it would nullify Anne's marriage with Henry.
The doctrine of carnal contagion involves the spread of blood kinship, as if it were a disease. As J. H. Fowler summarizes the medieval theologian Rabanus Maurus, "there is something like a communicable disease metaphor involved in early medieval notions of sexuality. If one sleeps with a woman who sleeps with another man who sleeps with another woman who sleeps with me, then whether I will it or not my flesh is inextricably bound up with the flesh of that first man's. A term which continually shows up in these canons and letters to describe fornication is *contagio carnalis*-carnal contagion." Thus the English Jacob's Well states that "whan a man hath medlyd wyth a womman, or a womman wyth a man, neyther may be wedded to othere kyn, into the fyfte degre, ne medle wyth hem; for if thei don, it is incest." Fornication not only leads to venereal disease and to incest through illegitimacy, it also leads to incest through the secret spread of kinship by contagion of the flesh. This contagion, which involves a general teleology of all sexual activities, leads to views such as Jonas of Orleans' strident argument that "all illicit carnal relations are incestuous." Promiscuity gives rise to incest insofar as one becomes kinsperson to all the kinspersons of one's marital or extramarital partner and record-keeping becomes all but impossible.

During Elizabeth's time, potentially universalist "figurative" kinship structures of this sort were replacing "literal" physical ones. It would seem, especially to one in a position like Elizabeth's, that all sexual liaisons were, or were likely to be, incestuous. This appearance, which seems to inform Elizabethan "sexual nausea," was a fulfillment of earlier Church history. For example, the archaic doctrine that cousinship even to the seventh degree makes a sexual liaison incestuous—indeed cousinship to any known and verifiable degree even so far back as Adam—means that most all sexual liaisons in a small town are incestuous, and in a large town without perfectly accurate genealogical record-keeping it makes all liaisons potentially incestuous.

In carnal contagion cases, moreover, the diriment impediment to marriage involves keeping the books not only on sexual unions within wedlock but also those without. According to the "great mystery"—or quasi-philosophical dialectic—of Pauline Christianity, a man "shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." The Church, taking marriage to be the essential telos of all sexual intercourse, easily extended the marital union to also include the conjunction of fornicator and fornicatrix. "Know ye not," asks Paul, "that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh." Thus sexual intercourse, whether marital or extramarital, spreads kinship by bringing the relatives of each party into the kindred of the other.

The Christian notion of the growth of kinship relations without as well as within marriage casts doubt on the old, or the Old Testament, distinction between legal and illegal sexual relations, between marital and extramarital relations, and between sexual relations between people who are related "in-law" and those who are not. It puts into question the crucial distinctions between incest and endogamy (whether one marries or not is now essentially immaterial) and between endogamy and exogamy.
By conflating extramarital with marital sexual intercourse, the doctrine of carnal contagion undermines and transcends the ordinary notion of kinship, which looks to marriage, as to incest, as a definitive institution. As we shall see, the conflation seems also to allow for the transformation of the Catholic sponsa Christi, queenpin of Christian kinship systems (she is linked to God in a chaste and incestuous relationship that is at once marital and extramarital) into a Virgin Queen such as Princess Elizabeth, already in her eleventh year, seems to comprehend. John Bale, in introducing us to Princess Elizabeth’s translation, writes of this first public accomplishment of the young princess that “such noble beginnings are neither to be reckoned childish nor babyish, though she were a babe in years that hath here given them.” The child is mother to the woman; a full and accomplished childhood can tell much about a life.

**SPECULATION ON PRINCESS ELIZABETH**

*Edidpus [Oedipus] busy serche did wrap him in most harmes; for whan of him selfe he axed as he no Corinthe wez, but Guest, he met with Laius, who after kild he had, and mother his owne in mareige tok, with whom he got kingdom, with dowary hers, whan than happy he thought he was, Againe he questioned who he was, whiche whan his wife wold Let more earnest he, the old man as gilty he wer rebuld; Omitting no good menes to make bewrayd al that was hid. Than whan suspect herof his mynd had moche distract And old man had skrigd out, “O worthi me whom nide to spike constrains;” yeat kindeled and vexed with Curiositis stinge made answer, “Compelde to heare, yeat heare I must.”*

—Elizabeth, translation from Plutarch, *De Curiositate*

The eleven-year-old Princess Elizabeth was in the position of Sophocles’ Antigone. She was caught between horror at sexual transgression and pious duty to a family constituted by such transgression. A brilliant and brilliantly educated young woman, blessed or cursed with the knowledge of her origin, what might she have felt about herself and about her consanguineous and national families? Did a perhaps too curious young Elizabeth feel that she herself had, as in some Oedipal drama, “the seed of incest” for which her aunt-mother Anne and uncle-father Lord Rochford had been executed, and of which her father Henry VIII himself stood accused?

Many biographers aver that for her aunt-mother, Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth never displayed any posthumous affection. That would be understandable enough in the circumstances. But what about the adage “like mother, like daughter”? Did Elizabeth see, or fear to see, her mother in herself, as in a glass? Is that why Elizabeth adopted as her own the badge of the sinful Anne Boleyn with its inscription *Semper Eadem* (“Always the Same”)?

Elizabeth’s own familial liaisons were tinged by incest. Elizabeth’s uncle-father
Thomas Seymour seduced the thirteen-year-old, or tried to. Thomas was Elizabeth's uncle because Thomas's sister, Jane Seymour, who had been Lady in Waiting to Queens Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, had married Henry VIII in 1546 only one day after the execution of Elizabeth's mother. And he was her stepfather because in 1547 he married, "in indecent haste" (the funeral of Henry VIII was barely done with, much as Old Hamlet's when Gertrude married Claudius), the queen dowager Queen Catherine Parr, Elizabeth's fourth stepmother. Catherine Parr followed the triad of stepmothers Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and the beheaded Catherine Howard: "mother, mother, mother.") Some time after Catherine Parr died, Thomas Seymour tried to marry Elizabeth herself. (In a letter to Edward Seymour of January 28, 1549, Elizabeth writes "Master Tyrwhitt and others have told me that there are going rumors abroad, which be greatly both against my honor and honesty (which above all other things I esteem) which be these; that I am in the tower; and with child by my Lord Admiral. My Lord, these are shameful slanders.") Was it a childhood memory about Thomas Seymour that somehow effected the aged Elizabeth's infatuation half a century later with the young Robert Devereux (Second Earl of Essex)? He whose maternal great-grandmother, Mary Boleyn, was Anne Boleyn's sister? When in 1598, fifty years after John Bale published her "Glass of the Sinful Soul," Elizabeth translated Plutarch's warning against an Oedipal curiosity about familial origins, did she reflect upon the publicly acknowledged inascertainability of her own paternity and the never entirely suppressed charge, often leveled by recusant Catholics, that she was conceived in sinful incest? ('Compelled to hear, yet hear I must.')

We might speculate that the young Princess Elizabeth was attempting to deal with problems involving both paternity and incest. Of Elizabeth's interest in incest we may be sure. She chose to translate a book about incest, Le Miroir de l’âme pécheresse, probably from her supposedly incestuous mother's copy—a book written by and probably given to her mother by Marguerite of Navarre, an author known for her spiritual libertinism and love for her brother. Marguerite of Navarre was also known to the Princess as one of her potential "mothers" and "aunts": Henry VIII had once entertained the idea of marrying Marguerite, which would have made her one of Elizabeth's stepmothers, and he had also tried to arrange a marriage between the thirteen-month-old Princess Elizabeth and Marguerite's nephew, the young Duke of Angoulême, third son of Francis I, which would have made her one of Elizabeth's "aunts.

Moreover, the young Elizabeth did not fail to remark in the "Glass" how the general theme of Marguerite's work involves sensuality and incest. Marguerite's Miroir depicts, as Elizabeth puts it, a young woman "bound by her concupiscence," having "a body ready and prompt to do all evil" and subject to "my enemy, my sensuality (I being in my beastly sleep)." Elizabeth, in the New Year's letter to Catherine Parr that accompanied her translation, notes that the "Glass" concerns how a "naughty" woman, for whom it was once a sin to be related to a being as both his daughter and wife, can become affined guiltlessly to another being as
"mother, daughter, sister, and wife."

In the "Glass," Elizabeth discovers and explores a way to rise above the taboo on ordinary incest, deriving partly from the freethinking and spiritual libertine French tradition for which there is a kinship by alliance that supersedes kinship by blood (where some people are brothers and some are others) and looks to universalist standards of kinship (where all people are equally brothers and others). Such universalist standards make all sexual intercourse equally chaste or unchaste, literally incestuous. They eventually even require the conflation of a libertine whore with the virginal mother. (Shakespeare's Cranmer reminds us of Elizabeth's reputation for virginity when, in *Henry VIII* [5.4.60-61], he predicts that his godchild Elizabeth, daughter of the whorish libertine Anne, will die "yet a virgin,/ A most spotted lily.")

The question of ordinary paternal legitimacy, which dogged Elizabeth throughout her life, is transcendible through a Roman or Hellenist "cosmopolitan" or Christian "universalist" view. This view would make every human being equally a child of the earth or of God, say, or essentially an "orphelyn of fadyr and modyr" (Chaucer's Boethius). In her translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, where Christianity prescribes Jesus as the divine Father of everyone—in much the same way that Rome prescribed Caesar—Elizabeth might be consoled by the idea that she was no more or less bastard than anyone else:

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All humain kind on erthe
From like begininge Comes:
One father is of all,
One Only al doth gide.

What Crake you of your stock
Or forfathers Old?
If your first spring and Auther
God you view,
No man bastard be,
Vnles with vice the worst he fede
And Leueth so his birthe.
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In the words of the Elizabethan poem called *The Lord's Prayer*, "Our Father, which in heaven art, / . . . hast [made] us all one brotherhood." When Adam delved and Eve span there was no gentleman—or, at least, everyone was equally a gentleman and nongentleman. All are essentially children of the same genitor. The Boethean appeal to universally equal kinship suggests that the distinction between illegitimacy and legitimacy is transcendible or irrelevant.

At first blush such a sentiment might seem able to console one such as Elizabeth, whom many people called bastard. No one should call Elizabeth a bastard any more because in God's eyes there are not bastards and legitimate children but only children of God, say, or of the Earth. But, on second thought, the sentiment for universal kinship must also have been unsettling to Elizabeth, and to Bale. If it is not our particular family's blood that distinguishes one person from another, one
might ask by what right does any British monarch rule? (Elizabeth and Bale think of Elizabeth as potential monarch.) England was not, after all, an elective or constitutional monarchy (like Hamlet's Denmark) or an empire where adopted or adrogated sons inherit the throne (like Caesar's Rome). In England, for good or ill, the right to the throne had to be defended in terms of blood. Thus Elizabeth's supporters needed to establish not merely that legitimate British princesses could inherit the throne (a task that Bale, countering the proponents of the Salic Law, sets for himself in his fine catalog of women rulers of Britain) but also that Elizabeth was legitimate in terms of blood (a nearly impossible task). Or Elizabeth's supporters needed to take a polarly opposite tack, replacing familial blood as the standard for kinship and for political inheritance with some such quality as "nobility of spirit" (a task that Bale seeks to accomplish in his Epistle Dedicatory).

Replacement of blood with nobility of spirit would itself be dangerous to any would-be ruler. It would bring into disrepute the familial reverence ordinarily due to earthly parents. ("Honor thy father and thy mother" says the Old Testament.) And hence, by common analogy, rejection of blood as the standard for kinship would destroy the political reverence due to the king. ("The king is the father of his people" says the old adage.) Transcendence of consanguinity as the standard for kinship would tend to transform the very idea of family and nation, as Bale suggests in his ancillary essays.

**THE SPONSA CHRISTI**

*Then is God in us, and all we are in Him, and He in all men. If we have Him through faith, then have we a greater treasure than any man can tell.*

—Elizabeth, "Glass of the Sinful Soul"

In the case of physical incest, two people who are consanguineously related to each other act as though they are not. A consanguineous sister, for example, acts as a spouse, and that is called bad, even absolutely profane. In the Holy Family, however, the Virgin Mary is at once the spouse, sibling, child, and mother of God the Father and/or Son, but her obviously incestuous sexual intercourse with Him (or Them) is called "good," even absolutely sacred. The term taboo means both "sacred" and "dangerous, forbidden." And the term sponsa Christi [spouse of Christ], which defines Mary's relation to God, emphasizes a woman's marriage with Christ in a union at once extramarital (Mary is married to Joseph) and incestuous. Mary is the human female parent of God as Son (she parented the Son); she is the spouse of God; she is the sibling of God (the Son and she are children of the same Father); and she is the child of God (the Father's child). There is no denying that Mary's relationship to God, which is the model for perfection in Roman Christian life, amounts to incest of a kind. ("Is't not a kind of incest, to take life / From thine own sister's shame?" Shakespeare's Isabella demands of Claudio. Isabella, the would-be Sister, is sister to Claudio, and her name, which means something like
"consecrated to God," is cognate with Elizabeth.) As such the Virgin Mary is the archetypal sponsa Christi; and her mysterious puzzle has occupied many a church father and pope from the earliest to the latest periods of Christian theology.

Incest, the centerpiece of political controversy during Elizabeth's girlhood, has long been associated with puzzles, as in the case of the riddle of the Delphic oracle, or the Theban sphinx whose terms Oedipus cannot solve but is compelled to enact. Consider the riddling of this late medieval epigraph inscribed in the exact middle of the collegial church of Écouis, in the cross aisle:

Here lies the child, here lies the father,
Here lies the sister, here lies the brother,
Here lie the wife and the husband,
Yet there are but two bodies here.

The solution to this riddle involves a local story: "The tradition is that a son of Madame d'Écouis had by his mother, without knowing her or being recognized by her, a daughter named Cecilia, whom he afterward married in Lorraine, she then being in the service of the Duchess of Bar. Thus Cecilia was at one and the same time her husband's daughter, sister, and wife. They were interred together in the same grave at Écouis in 1512." The woman here has a relationship to her man like that of Mary to God and of any nun who, as sponsa Christi, is similarly related to Christ. Similar epigraphs appear in other churches in Europe:

Here lies the son, here lies the mother,
Here lies the daughter with the father,
Here lies the sister, here lies the brother,
Here lies the wife with the husband;
And there are only three bodies here.

Shakespeare begins Pericles, Prince of Tyre with an equally familiar riddle about a kind of incestuous self-consumption:

I am no viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh which did me breed.
I sought a husband, in which labour
I found that kindness in a father.
He's father, son, and husband mild;
I mother, wife, and yet his child:
How they may be, and yet in two,
As you will live, resolve it you.

And nearly identical puzzles inform such writers as Gower and Twine as well as the sixteenth-century Navarre-born Spanish poet Julian Medrano. The free-thinker Rabelais, in his Gargantua and Pantagruel, which were published in the 1530s, writes of people on the Island of Ennasin that "they were so related and intermarried with one another that we found none of them who was a mother, or a father, an uncle, or an aunt, a cousin or a nephew, a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law, a god-father or a god-mother, to any other; except indeed for one tall noseless
man whom I heard calling a little girl of three or four, Father, while the little girl
called him Daughter.”

What else is Elizabeth’s “Glass,” in this context, except a kinship riddle? Eliz-
abeth herself teases out the matter thus: “I am sister unto Thee, but so naughty a
sister, that better it is for me to hide such a name.” Certainly Elizabeth had incest
on the mind when she wrote these words. Her father Henry VIII had committed
incest with Catherine of Aragon, and her deceased stepmother Catherine Howard
had committed adultery with Catherine’s cousin Thomas Culpepper. Elizabeth’s
genetrix Anne Boleyn had been accused of being sexually “handled” by Elizabeth’s
uncle (Rochford) and by Elizabeth’s father (Henry VIII). Elizabeth’s uncle-father
(Thomas Seymour) was soon to be accused of “handling” Elizabeth herself. To
father or Father, to brother or Brother, to son or Son, Elizabeth’s narrator calls out
in the “Glass,” “O my father, what paternity! O my brother, what fraternity! O my
child, what delectation! O my husband, O what conjunction!”

Lest we miss the extraordinary quality of the poet’s love, the speaker asks of
her unnamed fourfold kin, “Is there any love that may be compared unto this, but
it hath some evil condition?” (see fig. 5). For it is ultimately Father, and not father,
who handles the young girl. And so, to Jesus, she cries out: "Thou dost handle my soul (if so I durst say) as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife... Alas, yea, for Thou hast broken the kindred of my old father, calling me daughter of adoption." In the end the narrator comes to recognize that on one's own, one can do nothing to overcome the sinful desire for physical incest. Only through the grace of God can profane incest be converted to sacred. The soul must look into herself as into a

Fig. 6. Mosaic depicting the Virgin's Dormition, with Christ holding the childlike soul of His Mother. La Martorana, Palmero, Sicily, A.D. 1143. (Alinari-Art Resource, New York)
mirror, and "(beholding and contemplating what she is) doth perceive how of herself and of her own strength she can do nothing that good is, or prevaileth for her salvation, unless it be through the grace of God, whose mother, daughter, sister, and wife by the scriptures she proveth herself to be."\(^7\)

The "Glass" is about the conversion of a soul from sensual or physical sin to a kind of spiritual incest, or about that logical or psychological-spiritual metamorphosis in which such opposites as incest and chastity become each other. (By the same token the "Glass" is about a conversion from betrayal, defined in terms of fourfold kinship, to a union in faith.)\(^7\) Bale, in consideration of such conversion, writes in his Conclusion: "And though the facts be as the purple, yet shall they appear as white as the wool." From this viewpoint, the "Glass" is a "spiritual exercise of her [Princess Elizabeth's] inward soul with God"\(^7\) and the figure of fourfold kinship, far from being a mere "oddity" in the poem, is central to it.\(^7\) For in this exercise it is not Elizabeth, or her immediate family members, who occupy center stage as "sexually abused persons" or as "sexual abusers." It is God who is "familiarly commonden with."\(^7\) God is treated as though he were a human being (which Jesus partly was) and a family member (which Jesus is to the sponsa Christi) (see fig. 6). God is kind and kin.

**QUEEN MARGUERITE OF NAVARRE**

Elizabeth's life was a continuation and fulfillment of the promise of Margaret's.

—Percy W. Ames

The full title of Marguerite's poem states that its central theme is the place of God as spouse—*Le Miroir de lame pecheresse, auquel elle reconnoist ses fautes et pechez, aussi les graces et benefices a elle faictz par Jesu-christ son espoux* [The mirror of the sinful soul, where the soul recognizes its faults and sins, as well as the graces and benefices made to her by Jesus Christ her spouse; 1531, 1533]. And, indeed, the central issue of the *Miroir* is the transmutation by the sinner of her profane desire for, or fear of, ordinary physical incest into a sacred desire for, and love of, that extraordinary incest which informs the Holy Family.

The same issue is present in some other works of Marguerite.\(^7\) The central story in the *Heptaméron* (1559), for example, concerns a young man who unknowingly has sexual intercourse with his mother and then marries the offspring of this union—his sister, daughter, and spouse. His mother had chosen for this young son "a schoolmaster, a man of holy life"; but "Nature, who is a very secret schoolmaster taught him a very different lesson to any he had learned from his tutor."\(^7\) Neither the son nor the daughter ever learns of their blood kinship, and for them (if not for their knowingly incestuous mother) the tale ends happily: "And they [the son and daughter] loved each other so much that never were there husband and wife more loving, nor yet more resembling each other; for she was his daughter, his sister and
his wife, while he was her father, her brother and her husband.”78 In Le Miroir de l’âme pécheresse, the same sin of earthly incest reappears as the blessing of heavenly incest.79 The work as a whole is informed almost entirely by the topos that a woman mystically in love with God is involved with him in a fourfold incestuous relationship and that this relationship, by virtue of its being spiritual, is not only bereft of its horrid and profane quality but actually made sacred. The Miroir and the Heptameron are thus polar opposites, containing both thematic parallels (the former focusing on spiritual incest, the latter on physical incest) and verbal parallels (“mother, sister, daughter, and wife”).

The protagonist in the Miroir is a woman who compares herself with the Virgin Mary—the mother and sister of God the Son, and the daughter and spouse of God the Father. She acknowledges that her wicked desire for physical sex, even incest, can be overcome only by a liberating, graceful raising of the physical into the spiritual. Without God, according to the Miroir, fleshly desire will turn to naughty action. Marguerite of Navarre’s Heptameron says of the woman who knowingly slept with her son that “she must have been some self-sufficient fool, who, in her friar-like dreaming, deemed herself so saintly as to be incapable of sin, just as many of the Friars would have us believe that we can become, merely by our own efforts, which is an exceedingly great error.”80 The woman’s presumption was trusting to her individual power to overcome lust “instead of humbling herself and recognizing the powerlessness of our flesh, without God’s assistance, to work anything but sin.”81 It is for Marguerite of Navarre as it is in Shakespeare’s Navarre, in Love’s Labour’s Lost, where the members of the “little academe” are unsuccessful in their attempt to live a life like that of celibacy because “every man with his affects is born, / Not by might master’d, but by special grace.”82 The Heptameron suggests that it is the manner of men to commit incest; incest of one kind or another is inevitable, because without grace repression of incestuous desire is bound to be unsuccessful.83

Marguerite’s reformist and spiritualist work involved her in conflicts with the traditional Catholic and Protestant movements. That the Miroir itself contains no mention of male or female saints, merits, or any purgatory other than the blood of Jesus, was noted as a dangerous theoretical tendency, and students of the College of Navarre acted a comedy in which Marguerite was represented as a Fury of Hell.84 Marguerite’s biblical commentaries, moreover, were condemned by the censors at the Sorbonne, who ordered her books to be burned. (They were saved by express order of King Francis, her beloved brother.)85 Marguerite’s apparent support of the antinomian and pantheistic “Spiritual Libertines” was attacked by Calvin in his strident pamphlet Against the . . . Libertines (1545).86 Many Libertines believed that everything is a manifestation of the spirit of God. For them, this meant undoing the distinction between “good” and “evil” acts, since nothing could be truly outside God. And they laid out almost in anthropological terms how both a spiritual libertine and a traditional nun, in imitating the Virgin Mary, ought to make of God a father, husband, brother, and son.
SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF UNIVERSALIST ORDERS

We see, then, that these savages have an unusually great horror of incest or are sensitive on the subject to an unusual degree, and that they combine this with a peculiarity which remains obscure to us of replacing real blood-relationship by totem kinship. This latter contrast must not, however, be too much exaggerated, and we must remember that the totem prohibitions include that against real incest as a special case.

—Freud, Totem and Taboo

Totemic tribes that enjoin exogamy (marriage outside the tribe) and allow for the existence of other totemic tribes can thereby avoid incest. But a tribe that believes its totem to be universal and all other human beings to be part of itself—or, teleologically speaking, potential converts to its universalist doctrine—makes exogamy impossible and all intercourse incestuous. Christianity calls for the establishment of such a tribe in its motif of the universal brotherhood of man (“All ye are brethren”) and, in its proselytizing character, it claims to think of and treat as brothers even those who believe themselves to be non-Christians.

“All ye are brethren”—the question may arise here as to whether Jesus really meant what he said. For the implication of being faced with a choice between universal incest and universal annihilation—either to love one another equally or to die out—is a heavy burden. Some theologians, therefore, claim that Jesus did not really mean what he said—or did not really mean it for everyone. They fall off from the words of the New Testament and claim that not all people were meant to become “perfect.” To be celibate, they say, is merely a “counsel”—which is “one of the advisory declarations of Christ and the apostles, in medieval theology reckoned as twelve, which are considered not to be universally binding, but to be given as a means of attaining greater moral perfection.”

Thus Thomas Vautrollier, in his *Luther's Commentarie ypon the epistle to the Galatians* (1575), following out the tendency of ideas about “perfection” such as those of Bale in his “Epistle Dedicatory” and “Conclusion” to Elizabeth’s *Godly Medytacyon of the Christen Sowie* (1548), dismissed the controversy as to whether all people should treat all others as siblings: “the Papists divide the gospel into precepts and counsels. To the precepts men are bound (say they) but not the counsels.” A few English Renaissance thinkers, however, take Jesus to mean what he says in the New Testament, and argue that *Perfection*, which refers to “the austerity of monastic life, monastic discipline,” was the only nondegenerative form of life: Archbishop John Hamilton, in his *Cathecism* (1552), writes that “matrimonye was degenerat fra the first perfection.”

Whether or not Jesus meant people to be perfect, the Christian monachal and libertine sects are microcosms of a perfect and potentially cosmic universal Siblinghood in which everyone is a Brother or Sister in Christ. Freud remarks that terms like “Sisters in Christ” have analogues in societies where kinship terms “do not necessarily indicate any consanguinity, as ours would do: they represent social rather than physical relationships.” But the monachal use of such terms, we shall see, assumes more than this replacement of “physical” relationships by social
ones: it assumes the conflation of all social and theological relationships with biological relationships where a Sister or nun who violates the taboo on incest by marrying the Son of her Father is both sacred and taboo.91

The Old Way: siblings Becoming Siblings

The rule of the Old Testament is that a man or woman must leave his mother and father and marry in order to fulfill the ancient commandment to be fruitful and multiply. The New says, on the contrary, that a man or woman must give up entirely his or her old kinship ties—even hate his mother and father—in order to replace those ties, not with new human ones (to replace a father with a husband), but with divine ones (to replace an entire family with Christ).92 These divine ties would make every human being a child of adoption to God. Who then are my family? "Ceux qui feront le vouloir de mon Père, / Mes frères sont, et ma soeur, et ma mère" (They who do the will of my Father, they are my brothers, and my sister, and my mother).93 For such a child of adoption to God, all physical sexuality is as incestuous as it would be incestuous for consanguineous brothers and sisters to sleep together. Thus Sisters (nuns) and Brothers (friars and monks) are barred from having sexual intercourse with any human being by rules not only against fornication, but also against incest.94

In theory, the love of blood relatives might combine with the fear of earthly incest and make for an individual's decision to join a monastic order or even to found one. Courtly love may be a similar way to love one's sibling in extremis without violating the taboo against physical incest. Indeed, "in the middle ages a sister was not infrequently the object of courtly love, partly, it appears, because the presence of the incest barrier served to reinforce the knight errant's resolution to adhere to the ideal of chastity."95 Historically, earthly sibling love and heavenly Sibling love have often been joined in the same persons. In the sororal families or nunneries of Europe, women gave up all consanguineous ties (for them, he who had been a consanguineous brother was now essentially the same as any other man) and modeled their new family on Mary's relations with God (who was alike to her as brother, husband, son, and father). For women who adopted this sacred fourfold relationship to God, it was an act of absolutely profane incestuous sexual intercourse to have sexual intercourse with any person at all. Because they were no longer consanguineous sisters to any person and forever Sisters to all persons equally, sexual intercourse with a man who had been a consanguineous brother was now no better or worse than sexual intercourse with any other man.

Sigmund Freud, in his discussion of how some people "find happiness . . . along the path of love . . . by directing their love, not to single objects, but to all men alike," calls Saint Francis of Assisi the man who "went furthest in exploiting love for the benefit of an inner feeling of happiness." Franciscan "readiness for universal love of mankind," says Freud, is, "according to one ethical view, . . . the highest standpoint which men can achieve."96 Yet Francis's love for every being
universally seems inextricably linked with love for his Sister in particular, as his remarkable poem “Brother Sun and Sister Moon” suggests. What Francis and Clare could never permit in physical relations becomes a blessing in spiritual relations. (In The Soul’s Journey into God, the great Franciscan thinker Bonaventure likewise put the balance of all the soul’s relationships into its one, supposedly whole, relationship with God as Christ—a spiritually incestuous relationship, since the soul becomes the daughter, spouse, and sister of God.)

In Christian hagiography generally, a saintly person’s intense earthly sibling love is often followed by an extraordinary Sibling love of all human beings, just as if each and every human being had become a Brother or Sister. The Acts of the Saints (Acta sanctorum) includes more than 150 men and women who were brother and sister as well as Brother and Sister. Sibling celibates appear from the very beginning of Christian monachism: Saint Anthony, traditionally the first Christian monk, placed his sister in a nunnery when he left the world for the ascetic life. More strikingly, brother-sister liaisons played an important role in the historical beginnings of the Christian orders, for the sister of each of the three great cenobitical founders (Saint Pachomius, Saint Basil, and Saint Benedict) helped to preside over a community of nuns that followed an adaptation of her brother’s rules for monks.

A few examples of earthly sibling and Christian Sibling love in the lives of great saints with doctrines influential in pre-Dissolution England might be useful. Saint Benedict, founder of the order in which Thomas More was educated, visited his sister, Saint Scholastica, once a year. On the last of these visits, according to Saint Gregory the Great’s biography, Scholastica entreated Benedict to stay the night. When he adamantly refused, she fell to prayer until a sudden storm arose, so that she had her way. The consummation of that night, spent all in spiritual conversation, could be seen as the incorporation and transcendence of any earthly attraction, physical or otherwise, that might have existed between the brother and sister.

Legends about Gregory the Great’s own life involve incest and its atonement. As Hartmann von Aue tells the story, Gregory was the child of a brother-sister union and unknowingly married his own mother. When he became Pope he forgave his mother’s incest and his own, restored Benedictine discipline, and enforced the rule of celibacy for the clergy. This Christian solution—repentance and atonement—to the oedipal situation suggests that the Catholic orders made possible an atonement for the desire for incest or unchastity, even when the actual act was not in question. The Holy Family atones for the earthly one by making all even.

Some brother and sister saints voiced explicit concern for their siblings’ sexuality in terms that border on identification and possessiveness. In his Book on the Institute of Virgins and on the Contempt of the World, Saint Leander exhorts his sister Florentina as Sister to marry the Son and enter the religious life. “Ah, well-beloved sister, understand the ardent desire which inspires the heart of thy brother to see thee with Christ. . . . Thou art the better part of myself. Woe to me if another take
thy crown.'

And he identifies the virginity of his sister as Sister with the goal of the entire Church: "Christ is already thy spouse, thy father, thine inheritance, thy ransom, thy Lord, thy God." Florentina's earthly crown will be Leander's as much as any man's. In an epitaph composed for the tombstone of his sister Saint Irene, Saint Damasus expressed a similar proprietary interest: "A witness of our love (our mother) / Upon leaving the world, / Had given thee, my blood sister, to me as a pure pledge." Nor was such concern with a sibling's chastity confined to men, as in the case of Saint Lioba and her cousin Saint Boniface.

Bernard of Clairvaux provides us with yet another example. After he left home with his brother Andrew to enter the austere monastery of Citeaux, his sister Humblerlina came, richly dressed, to visit them. Andrew greeted her, "Why so much solicitude to embellish a body destined for worms and rottenness, while the soul, that now animates it, is burning in everlasting flames?" Humblerlina answered, "If my brother Bernard, who is the servant of God, despises my body, let him at least have pity on my soul. Let him come, let him command; and whatsoever he thinks proper to enjoin I am prepared to carry out." Some time thereafter she entered a convent. In Bernard's famous sermons On the Song of Songs, in which some theorists say Bernard demonstrates the ultimate "liberation of the soul," sisterly virginity and the theme "my sister as my wife" (soror mea sponsa) are sexualized, in a manner familiar from other sibling saints.

Curtius remarks that it is not far from "the mystical love of the Madonna" of Bernard, who "spiritualized love into a divine love," to such cynical descriptions of erotic orgies at convents as the Latin poem The Council of Love at Remiremont (ca. 1150).

Almost an exact contemporary of Elizabeth, Saint Teresa of Avila ran away from home with one of her nine brothers, Rodrigo, at the age of seven, and with another, Antonio, at the age of twenty, to a Carmelite convent (1534). Originally Teresa had wanted Antonio to become a Brother and herself a Sister. But in her Life she seems to forget Antonio as brother from the moment she enters the Sisterhood. In her Meditations on the Song of Songs (1566), Teresa seeks to replace the fraternal love she once had for Antonio by a "spiritual marriage" and rebirth into a Family where earthly kinship distinctions do not exist. Just such a transcendence of consanguinity was Teresa's essential goal for the Discalced Carmelite Order that she helped to found. Teresa writes, "For the love of the Lord refrain from making individual friendships, however holy, for even among brothers and sisters such things are apt to be poisonous." Reminding her Sisters in her Exclamations of Soul to God to "think of the brotherhood which you share with this great God" as "children of this God," she exhorts them, and all Christians, "to make our actions conform to our words—in short, to be like children of such a Father and the brethren of such a Brother. Saint John of the Cross, an ideological mainstay of Teresa's order, wrote in his Precautions, "You should have an equal love for or an equal forgetfulness of all persons, whether relatives or not, and withdraw your heart from relatives as much as from others." In precisely this way, Teresa erased and raised herself above differences between family and nonfamily. The saintly Teresa, who
verges in *The Book of her Life* on confessing to spiritual incest—a biographer, pressing too hard, might conclude that she made love with a certain Dominican Brother—came to accept the ordinary taboo on sexual intercourse with a brother only when she accepted the extraordinary taboo on sexual intercourse with any human being.¹¹⁶

The monachal attempt to transform sibling love into Sibling love was therefore widespread—as was the attempt to test that transformation. A few Catholic orders allowed close physical communication between siblings or Siblings in “double cloisters”—monasteries and nunneries standing side by side. Among the Faremoutiers, who developed double cloisters in the seventh century, Saint Cagnoald ruled the monks in one wing and his sister, Saint Burgundofara, ruled the nuns in the other.¹¹⁷ The Order of Fontevrault encouraged nuns and monks to sleep together in the same bed,¹¹⁸ for the “mortification of the flesh” — the basis of one of Marguerite of Navarre’s tales.¹¹⁹ The Brigittines adopted the same organization. The only major order founded in England, the Order of Saint Gilbert of Sempringham, was a double cloister of cohabiting Brothers and Sisters.¹²⁰

In all these examples, we see that the attempt to flee from the family to the Sisterhood or Brotherhood, from mother and father to Mother Superior and Pope, relocates the problem of incest from the consanguineous family to the Christian Family. Consanguineous siblings (brothers or sisters) who become religious Siblings (Brothers or Sisters) avoid incest either because they thereby adopt chasteness or because the distinction between chastity and incest is thereby erased.

*The New Way: Siblings Becoming spouses*

*We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

—Rom. 8:23

The orders and the sibling/Siblings considered thus far tried to transcend the desire for incest through chastity; they solved the problem of the desire for incest by getting over it, rising above earthly sex by lifting it from earth to heaven. But there were other orders, ultimately more influential in shaping our present world’s emphasis on fraternité and liberté, that tried to solve the problem in the obverse way. They adapted to earth the universalist love that the traditional orders had reserved only for heaven. For them there is a corporeal redemption that does not so much spiritualize the body for the “perfect” as liberate it even for the “imperfect.”

Just as at the origin of Catholicism there are siblings who become Siblings, that is, brothers and sisters who become Brothers and Sisters, so at the origin of Protestantism there are Catholic Siblings who become spouses, that is, Brothers and Sisters who become husbands and wives. In the context of the English Reformation, this incestuous marriage psychologically constitutes the decisive character-
istic in the life of Elizabeth and sociologically constitutes the decisive moment in the history of Renaissance sexuality.

Among Brothers who became husbands were monks who directly influenced the education of Princess Elizabeth. One was Bernardino Ochino, whom Elizabeth knew and whose *Sermo de Christo* she translated for her half-brother Edward in 1547. (Ochino was driven from England during the Catholic Mary Tudor’s accession to the throne in 1553.) Another was John Bale who, having argued for the impossibility of absolute temperance, forsook his monastic habit and got married almost as an act of religion. (In Bale’s play, *The Three Laws of Nature* [1538, 1562], the allegorical figure “Sodomy” appears dressed as a monk.) In the material he attached to Elizabeth’s *A Godly Medytacyon of the Christen Sowle*, Bale attacks the false doctrine of kinship that inheres in Catholicism; and in *The Image of Both Churches* he insists that neither popish orders nor gossipry (god-parenting) bring with them any diriment impediment to marriage: “No more shall that free state of living be bound under the yoke of thy damnable dreams, either for vows unadvised, nor for popish orders, nor yet for any gossipry, but be at full liberty.”

There are other precedents for Sibling marriage—for example, Leo Judae, a disciple of Zwingli who married a Beguine in 1523, and the Franciscan monk François Lambert, who proposed in 1528 that his monastery might become a school of marriage! (Consider also the remarkable papal legitimation of Brother Rabelais’ bastard children.) None of these Sister-Brother marriages, however, is as important as Brother Martin Luther’s 1525 marriage to the Cistercian Sister Catherine von Bora. Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith instead of by acts and corresponding view of the relationship between intent and act sparked the Reformation. An Augustinian eremite who thought that his unfulfilled desires made him prey for the devil, Luther argued that few if any men were “perfect” enough to be celibate. Thus he denounced both monastic vows and distinctive dress for the clergy.

Any Catholic in England knew that such marriage as Luther’s to Catherine was incestuous. Friars and monks—spiritual or “ghostly” fathers, Bale calls them—were regarded just as biological fathers. Thus we read in the thirteenth century, “Incest, thet is, bituue sibbe, fleschliche oder gasteliche”; and in the fifteenth century, “Inceste . . . is bitwene sibbe fleshli or gasteli.” The *Treatise on the Ten Commandments* includes the rule that “incestus is he that delith with nonne, with kosyn, or with a maydon, the wich is called defloraci.” And in Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* it is written that “incestus is . . . trespassyng with kyn or with blood, Or froward medlyng with hir that is a nunne.” Similarly, it was considered incest for anyone to have sexual relations with a godparent. (Chaucer too had written, “For right so as he that engendreth a child is his fleshly fader, right so is his godfader his fader espirituel. For which a womman may in no lasse synne assemblen with hire godsib than with hire owene fleshly brother.”) In this tradition Sir Thomas More, author of the great *Utopia* (1516)—which exhibits a stoic cosmopolitanism and propertal communism that reflects aspects of the Benedictine order—accused
Martin Luther in 1528 of committing incest when he married Sister Catherine. Concerning Luther he argues that any human being who becomes a nun or friar commits incest when she or he has sexual intercourse with anyone, whether with a consanguineous kinsperson or not. For Thomas More, therefore, clerical marriage "defileth the priest more than double or treble whoredom" and in his Confutacyon with Tindale, More accused Luther and his wife, "the frere and the nunne," of incest:

Let not therefore Tyndall (good reder) wyth his gay gloryouse wordes carye you so fast & so far away, but that ye remembre to pull hym bakke by the sleue a lytle, and aske hym whyther his owne hyghe spirytuall doctour Martyne Luther hym selle, beyngle specially borne agayne & new created of the spyryte, whom god in many places of holy scrypture hath commaunded to kepe his vowe made of chastyte when he then so far contrayre there vnto toke out of relygyon a spouse of Cryste, wedder her hym selle in reproche of wedloke, called her his wyfe, and made her his harlot, and in doble despyte of maryage and relygyon both, lyueth wyth her openly and lyeth wyth her nyghtly, in shamefull inceste and abominable ly~herye."

Incest of a kind was the charge not only against such secular notables as Anne Bo-leyn, Elizabeth's earthly mother, but also against such religious notables as Bernardino Ochino and John Bale, Elizabeth's spiritual fathers.

**LIBERTINISM AND LIBERTY**

_Thou'rt my Mother from the Womb,  
Wife, Sister, Daughter, to the Tomb._

—Blake, "The Gates of Paradise"

If sex is what most men and women want, whether they know it or not, and if "All ye are brethren," as Jesus says they are, then all men and women want incest. If, in this context, grace means doing what one wants guiltlessly, then Christian liberty allows for—and even mandates—a libertinism of the body. Liberty, or libertinism, amounts to universal incest enacted without guilt.

The idea that guiltless incest is a sign of grace appears even at the historical origin of Christianity. For example, the Corinthian sect's acts of incest, which Paul calls "such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife," were not "deed[s] done secretly out of weakness but . . . ideological act[s] done openly with the approval of at least an influential sector of the community." In fact, the sect had actually taken Paul's own words about freedom from the law—"All things are lawful for me"—to indicate, among other things, freedom from such Old Testament rules as those concerning incest. ("The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover." The sect of the Essenes offers potentially much the same endorsement of incest, as Rabelais' parody of it suggests.

In the medieval period, the endorsement of guiltless incest was crucial to the
From Dormition to Nation

lay order called the Brethren of the Free Spirit. (It had, throughout Europe, perhaps hundreds of thousands of adherents between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries.) For the Brethren, the spiritually incestuous relations of the Virgin Mary to God were to be reproduced in the Edenic or paradisiacal state of grace. Their motto was the Pauline rule *Ubi spiritus, ibi libertas*. When the spirit of the Lord is in one, then the law is erased and one is raised above the law.

The similarity between the so-called heretical libertine sect of the Brethren and traditional Christian orders, for whom incest is anathema, should not be overlooked. Similar motivations and appeals to grace are involved (1) when a religious celibate in the traditional orders overcomes sexual desire and loves everyone equally as universal siblings and (2) when a religious libertine in the Brethren of the Free Spirit overcomes the restrictions of law or conscience and loves everyone equally, including siblings. Both the celibate of the traditional orders and the libertine of the Brethren hypothesize a universal siblinghood in which sleeping with a brother is no worse than sleeping with any other man. The religious celibate seeks liberty from physical desire; the libertine seeks liberty from rules that restrict physical intercourse. But for both, in the words of Saint Paul, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (From this viewpoint, the old way up and the new way down—the "ascent" from sibling incest to Sibling chastity and the "descent" from Sibling chastity to sibling incest—are one and the same.)

The key spokesperson for the sect, Marguerite Porete, though she was burned at the stake by the official church, remains our most trustworthy source about the early Brethren: most all other sources are obviously hostile. Her remarkable *Mirror of the Simple Souls* stands as an important document in the history of Christian thought, with links to the "libertine" Marguerite of Navarre's *Miroir de l'âme pêcheresse* (which Calvin attacked as antinomian in *Against the Fantastic Sect of the Libertines*) and to the doctrine of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" of the French Revolution.

The *Mirror* of Marguerite Porete was influential in England. In the sixteenth century, several Middle English translations circulated, just when John Champneys was arguing that God condones for his chosen people such "bodily necessities" as "fornication, adultery . . . or any other sin." The Free Spirit affected directly the doctrines of the Elizabethan "Family of Love" and their communal sexual practices. And it later influenced the seventeenth-century Ranters and Levelers, who attempted to transcend ordinary norms of "right" and "wrong," or chasteness and incestuousness, eventually involving both the doctrine of liberty and fraternity of the French Revolution and the quasi-medieval ideologies of other nineteenth-century utopian projects, including John Noyes' incest-practicing Perfectionists in Oneida, New York, who looked to the Diggers and Levelers of Commonwealth times as well as to the Brethren as their precursors. The American hippie movement of the sixties, especially the San Francisco Diggers, seems similarly influenced by the Free Spirit.

England of the sixteenth century was rife with Antinomian, Anabaptist, and
Wycliffite Lollard trends. Wycliffite Anabaptists in London asserted "that a man regenerate could not sin; that though the outward man sinned, the inward man sinned not" and insisted, probably in response to juridical questions about incest in the Holy Family, that Jesus did not take flesh from his mother. Bale takes up the cause of the martyred Antinomian Ann Askew in his "Conclusion" to the Godly Medytacyon. In booklets published in November 1546 and January 1547, Bale similarly defends Askew's heterodox views regarding transubstantiation. He published these, as well as Elizabeth's Godly Medytacyon (1548), in Reformation Germany, where the Anabaptists of Münster practiced a kind of polygamy that did not allow for the sort of distinction of "mother" from "aunt" on which traditional society, as well as typical Elizabethan works such as Hamlet, rely. Queen Catherine Parr, author of Lamentation of a Sinner and Elizabeth's stepmother in 1544–45, was herself suspected of being a favorer of Ann Askew. Joan Boucher, colleague of Ann Askew and a member of an English Anabaptist community in England, was martyred in 1550 for her heretical views concerning the Virgin Mary as spiritual and fleshly mother—and as the daughter, sister, and wife of God. The English Anabaptists, like their European counterparts, tried thus to erase and rise above the old distinctions between good and evil, even chastity and incest, and they asserted publicly, in the spirit of the Free Spirit, that "When the spirit of the Lord is in one, one can do no sin."

The doctrine of the Free Spirit is largely defined by this attempt to return to prelapsarian innocence and "perfect" liberty. The Second Clementine decree, promulgated at the Council of Vienne in 1311, announced of the Siblings that "those who have achieved this state of perfection and absolute freedom are no longer subject to obedience and law or obligated to follow ecclesiastical regulations, for where divine spirit rules, there is liberty." For at least one Brother of the Free Spirit, John Hartmann of Achmansteten, spiritual liberty meant "the complete cessation of remorse and the attainment of a state of sinlessness." This entailed total transcendence of the post-Edenic taboo against incest:

The free man could do as he wished, including fornicate with his sister or his mother, and anywhere he wished, including at the altar. He added that it was more natural with his sister than any other woman because of their consanguinity. His justification lay in being perfectly free and bound by no law or ecclesiastical statutes and precepts; such a man was a Free Spirit in contradistinction to the gross ones who were subject to existing authority of the church. His sister, far from losing her chastity, increased it as a result of their intercourse.

The same liberty to have intercourse with mother or sister appears in the testimony of Conrad Kannler, who said that he was "at liberty to have sexual intercourse with mother and sister, although he did not believe God would permit it for the imperfect."

In her Mirror of the Simple Souls, Marguerite Porete writes, "Friends, love and do what you want." In the state of spiritual liberty Marguerite experiences "that love [that] maketh of the innocents that thei don nothing . . . but if it please
them." In such a state, says Marguerite, "the soul taketh lieve of vertues"; the soul ... giveth to nature all that he askith withoute grucchini of conscience." It is as if one were restored to a state of Edenic or paradisical simplicity, a state where the ability to commit incest without feeling guilty is itself a sign of grace itself, as it was for certain English Ranters. When the spirit of God is in me, "I belong to the liberty of nature, and all that my nature desires I satisfy. I am a natural man." According to one adept, "the Spirit of Freedom or the Free Spirit is attained when one is wholly transformed into "Then is God in us, and all we are in Him, and He in all men," wrote Princess Elizabeth. A person's guiding principle must be "Do what you want" —the single rule of Rabelais' anti-abbey of Thélème. Not to enact what one desires to enact would be in itself a sign of disunion with God.

This appeal to freedom was Marguerite Porete's radical heresy: that perfect and free souls are fourfold kin with God. Perfect souls, she writes, have transcended regular kinship and become "daughters, sisters, and spouses of kings," and as such they attain the state of pure liberty. Marguerite of Navarre suggests much the same in the Miroir: "O what union is this since, since (through faith) I am sure of Thee. And now I may call Thee son, father, spouse, and brother. Father, brother, son, husband" (as Elizabeth puts it in her "Glass"). Marguerite Porete was heretical in other ways as well. She translated the bible into the vernacular, insisted that becoming one in Christ raises men and women above gender differences, and claimed that one could be saved by faith, without "good" works.

The Brethren's liberty was often misinterpreted as empty libertinage or mocked as pagan sexual communism. But this sort of characterization does not go to the heart of the issue. What characterizes a celibate fraternal order (such as the Franciscans) is its liberty from flesh, or its razing the desires of the flesh and raising them to heaven. What characterizes a libertine order such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit is its graceful liberty of flesh ("Now Libertines are named after the liberty of the flesh, which their doctrine seems to allow"). Although it might at first seem that between the two kinds of sexual freedom there is all the difference in the world, religious libertinism and religious celibacy are significantly linked, and both sides resonate with the larger antinomian and Manichaean debates of the sixteenth century.

SIBLING LOVE VERSUS RESPECT FOR PARENTS

To endow parents with the authority of wisdom, it is first of all necessary to look upon them as nonsexual beings, i.e., as not-possible objects of sexual desire. The prohibition against incest embodies this reverence.

—Benardete, on Thomas Aquinas

Tous de goneis tima. [Honour thy parents.]

—Bale, "Conclusion," in Elizabeth, Godly Medytacyon (1548)
Teleologically, incest dissolves the *pater* (father) in the *liber* (son) and replaces the patriarchy with a radical egalitarian liberty.\(^{178}\) Sexual liberty would restructure kinship relations by destroying the crucial distinction between generations. In 1544 Elyot and Chapman thus use the term *libertine* to mean "any man of bonde ancestry" and "an urban freeman."\(^{179}\) The tension here between the tendency towards liberty in religion and parentarchy in politics is inevitable, because the practice of incest, whether of the ordinary sort (as by libertines) or the extraordinary sort (as by religious celibates as members of the Holy Family), which true liberty would seem to entail, shows a politically consequential disrespect to one's parents and hence to parentarchal political order. The Roman *respectus parentelae*, the reverence due to near kin, is the most frequent argument against incest advanced in Western culture.

In sixteenth-century England, the Family of Love, a radical libertine religious sect, claimed that all its members were "one Being" with their leader, who was "Godded man: and so bee all named Gods and Children of the most highest."\(^{180}\) They assumed that all "are equal in degree among themselves; all Kings, and a kingdome of kings"\(^{181}\) and announced a communist society where a new brother's "goodes shal be in common amongst the rest of his berth."\(^{182}\) With this subversive aspect, the Family of Love was savagely parodied on the more politically conservative English stage.\(^{183}\)

Like libertinism, traditional monachism had a subversive aspect. Originally or ideally monachism was an essentially revolutionary "sibling" movement against more conservative "parentarchal" authority.\(^{184}\) Even before the formal establishment of eremitic communities in the early Church, ascetics joined together in single residences in familylike sibling relationships that excluded intergenerational hierarchies. The fourth-century pseudo-Clementian epistle "To Virgins," for example, refers to such ascetics as were living in "spiritual marriage" as brothers and sisters, and it emphasized Jesus' injunction (Matt. 23:19) to "call no man father."\(^{185}\) Patriarchal ecclesiastical critics like Eusebius of Emesa viewed such practices with alarm because they furthered "either radical asceticism or radical libertinism."\(^{186}\) They feared not only a communal libertinism but a corresponding radical propertal communism and even a propertyless condition. Saint Jerome writes, "Since you have been consecrated to perpetual virginity, your possessions are not your possessions [* tua non tua sunt*], because they now belong to Christ," and Saint Gregory praised his sister, Sister Macrina, because she "found delight in temperance" and at the same time "thought it affluence to own nothing."\(^{187}\) In his essay on virginity, Saint John Chrysostom says "Now is not the time for matrimony and possessions; rather it is the time for penury and for that unusual way of life that will be of value to us in the time to come."\(^{188}\) In this spirit, certain Catholic orders do not merely endorse poverty; they raze all property relations just as they raze all sexual relations. Saint John Chrysostom succinctly expresses the politically threatening aspect of this rejection of possessions by calling virginity *isangelos polite*, an extreme homogenization at once communist and incestuous.
In its essential form, then, monachal fraternity militates against any and all propertal and sexual ownership. This attitude makes monachism in and of itself a cause of political conflicts. Many Elizabethans feared the political dissolution which is implicit in the rejection of ordinary kinship structure (the parentarchy) and ordinary economic structures (property).

During the Tudor Renaissance, as throughout the history of the Christian West, a political ruler was viewed generally as a parent and her/his people as her/his children. For a child to beat his father was thus, according to the Elizabethan Nashe, tantamount to his upsetting the natural and political order: "It is no maruaille if every Alehouse vaunt the table of the world upside downe, since the child beateth his father." And they understood the link between political dissolution and that sexual liberty which would destroy "respect for the parent." Bishop Stephen Gardiner thus compares the radical libertine position "all is for the flesh, women and meat with liberty of hand and tongue" to the political "dissolution and dissipation of all estates." Moreover, few persons in Elizabethan England would overlook the connection between the monastic orders and a more specific threat of political chaos—rebellion. The orders had been prominent among the opponents of Henry VIII, and one of the reasons Henry VIII gave for his notorious Dissolution of the Monasteries was a fear that monks would incite the commons to rebel. During Elizabeth's reign, about two hundred Catholic priests were executed; and monks had figured in anti-Tudor plots such as the Northern Rebellion and the Archpriest Controversy.

By the early seventeenth century the challenge by proponents of Brotherhood and/or Sisterhood to religious and political parentarchy was growing into modern liberalism. In that century the proponents of absolute monarchy had such spokespersons as King James I of England, who in his _Trew Law_ stressed the identity between the duty of a subject and that of a child, and Robert Filmer, who in his _Patriarcha_ provided both sides of the debate (liberals and parentarchalists) with a major rallying point. John Locke, among others, came to be the political spokes-person for the proponents of liberalism. Locke criticized Filmer's conceptual reliance on a "strange kind of domineering phantom, called 'the fatherhood'" and opposed to it his own idea of all men free and equal in the state of nature. For Locke, as Norman O. Brown puts it, "liberty . . . means equality among the brothers (sons)." The _liberi_, or free sons, of the French Revolution—and to a lesser extent the English Revolution—sought "to turn the world upside down" by killing the king who heads the family.

Whether monachal resistance to the parentarchal English monarch in the sixteenth century can be explained as a speculative extension of monachal fraternalism, as well as by the specific historical circumstances surrounding the Dissolution, there is little doubt that in these times such rulers as Henry VIII himself feared a tendency toward liberty in certain religious and lay movements. They believed (as who does not?) that the public needs to believe, or they wanted the public to believe, in the "strange kind of domineering phantom" of the father. The absolutist
king and his apologist were right in one sense: the struggle between liberty and absolute monarchy did involve the breakdown of the old family order and the development of a new political one. Lawrence Stone contends, in *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries "the most remarkable change inside the family was the shift away from paternal authority" and that "it was slowly recognized that limits should be set not merely to the powers of kings . . ., but also [to] those of parents and husbands." And libertine religious groups, arguing that "where liberty is, there is the spirit of God," eventually provided the liberal revolutions of England and France with their most extreme ideologies. The Marquis de Sade was emphatic in arguing, in his proposals for the French Revolution, that France would become a real republic only when men could call their sisters Mother.

In the Renaissance tug-of-war between spiritual liberty and political parentarchy, Princess Elizabeth in her "Glass" and Queen Elizabeth in her reign as Queen toed the line between spiritual libertinism's claim that consanguinity and the particular family do not count and parentarchy's claim that they do. There was, for example, the old debate about the real substance of nobility, and hence about the right to rule of a bastard child whose parents hardly deserved (full) respect. Here Bale helps Elizabeth to establish a notion of kinship that would serve her as Virgin Queen. It would enable her to develop an ideology of family and nation that would endure for centuries.

In his "Epistle Dedicatory" and "Conclusion" to Elizabeth's *Godly Medytacyon*, Bale introduces the following propositions:

1. Elizabeth is of noble blood, whether she is legitimate or illegitimate: "Nobility . . . she hath gotten of blood in the high degree, having a most victorious king to her father, and a most virtuous and learned king again to her brother."159

2. Noble blood does not confer true nobility. Nobility resides neither in "renowned birth or succession of blood" nor in "worthiness of progeny": it is by plain virtue that one becomes God's "child of adoption." "By that means becometh he the dear brother, sister and mother of Christ."200

3. Elizabeth's production and publication of the "Glass" itself proves that Elizabeth has in abundance true nobility as virtue. "Of this nobility have I no doubt (Lady most faithfully studious) but that you are, with many other noble women and maidens more in this blessed age." For evidence that Elizabeth is of noble kindred Bale points to her book as a "spiritual exercise of her inward soul with God" and to her allowing the book to be published: "By your godly fruits" you shall be known, he reminds us.201

4. Whether consanguinity counts (in which case Elizabeth has it) or doesn't count (in which case Elizabeth does not need it), Elizabeth does not hate, or even regard indifferently, her consanguineous parents. The liberal Jesus of the New Testament is sometimes interpreted as encouraging his fol-
lowers and all God’s children to hate their parents: “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters . . . he cannot be my disciple.”

5. Elizabeth, on the contrary, respects her parents, according to the rules of the Roman respectus parentelae and the Hebraic Ten Commandments. Bale draws our attention to Elizabeth’s Greek phrase tous de goneis tima to prove that Elizabeth respects parental authority. “Your . . . clause in the Greek inciteth us to the right worshipping of God in spirit and verity, Jn. 4, to honoring of our parents in the seemly offices of natural children, Eph. 6, and to the reverent using of our Christian equals in the due ministrations of love, 1 Pet.

2. Neither Benedict nor Bruno, Dominick nor Francis (which have of long years been boasted for the principal patrons of religion) ever gave to their superstitious brethren so pure precepts of sincere Christianity.”

In the old debate about whence nobility comes bastardy and incest generally play a major role, as reflected in Shakespeare’s All’s Well That Ends Well. But Bale and Elizabeth manage in the Godly Medytacyon of the Christen Sowle to walk the line between rejecting and reverencing consanguineous familial and national parent- 

THE ROMAN VESTAL AND THE BRITISH EMPRESS; OR, FROM “AVE MARIA!” TO “VIVAT ELIZA!”

The central motif of Elizabeth’s “Glass”—the spiritually incestuous relationship to one’s Lord—was important not only in the Christian devotional and monachal institutions of Roman Christianity. It was so, as well, in the political and religious institutions of the ancient Roman Empire, where Roman Christianity first took hold on the political life of Europe. Indeed, Roman Christendom seems to have incorporated both the political and the religious institutions of the Roman Empire concerning spiritual and physical “fourfold kinship.” In the political sphere, for example, the Roman Empress Livia (wife of Augustus Caesar, who vied with Jesus for the title of Lord God), stood in multifold kinship relations to Caesar. And Agrippina (wife of that Claudius who first attempted to conquer Britain in Rome’s name) stood precisely in a fourfold relationship to Rome’s God. Tacitus, the historian, remarks of the incestuous Agrippina that her kind of distinction was “traditionally reserved for priests and sacred objects” since she was remarkable as “the daughter of a great commander and the sister, wife, and mother of emperors.” And in the religious sphere, the figure of fourfold kinship informed the Roman Empire’s institutions of adrogation (adoption) and of the vestal virgins, of which institutions the nunneries of Christendom were the Roman Christian end.

The incorporation and supposed transcendence of Roman imperial institutions (the empress and vestal) by Roman Christian ones involved the eventual transfor-
mation of the vestals’ Palladia—the archaic idols symbolic of an older matriarchy, probably Trojan, to which the vestals were devoted—into the Christian Sisterhood’s spiritually incestuous Virgin Mary. The transformation meant a certain power, or at least ideal autonomy, for the Sisters. Incest, which Empress Agrippina practiced on the physical plane and the Roman vestals raised to a spiritual plane, helped provide some women of imperial Rome and Roman Christendom with a certain independence. As a violation of proper as well as sexual “norms,” incest provided a potential refuge for those who refused to traffic—or to be trafficked in. Having rejected their consanguineous families, the vestals were exempt, for instance, from the patria potestas: no human had the patria potestas over the vestal—only the divine pontifex maximus, the vestal’s “religious father” [pater]. (Thus the vestal could free any prisoner she happened to run across on the way to execution and, more important in the present context, she could dispose of her property at will.) The nunneries of Christendom, whose family ties inform texts written by reform-minded queens of almost imperial power, had much the same liberating and economic effect on its inmates. “A convent was . . . the only place where a girl could escape her father’s absolute authority.” And its ideal Mother Superior, transformed to the political world, would make for a real empress.

In preparing the stage for the supposedly illegitimate and incestuously conceived Elizabeth to assume a new political place in the English nation, the Reformist John Bale sought to define in British terms the matriarchy underlying Roman institutions. Imperial Rome’s original institutions, suggests Bale, were the Trojan matriarchal ones. Aeneas’ ancestors ruled in Britain no less than in Rome, says Bale. (Bale relies here on the old British tradition, memorialized in Geoffrey of Monmouth and elsewhere, that the British and Trojan nations are one and the same.) And, in this same vein, Bale recalls the old view that in the reign of Belinus (among the first British kings) the Trojan and British succession was by primogeniture. That British monarchs should succeed in the supposedly Trojan fashion, by simple primogeniture regardless of gender, was no small point. And central to Bale’s pro-British attack on Roman Catholicism is his myth of the British domina—an empress or regina who holds the throne in her own right of inheritance. Women who inherited the throne were not common in Christendom. Marguerite of Navarre, certainly, knew the traditional “Salic Law,” which supposedly kept women from inheriting the throne. The Salic Law, known to readers of Shakespeare’s Henry V, insisted that a royal or aristocratic woman was a kind of property that could not herself inherit property, though she might rule as coheir or regent—as did Catherine de Médicis, who became Queen of France in 1547—she could not inherit the throne. Bale, understanding how the idealization of woman in Christian institutions had disempowered her in the political sphere, wanted to prepare the way for Elizabeth to inherit the kingdom in uncommon fashion.

Among early defenses of women (Bale lists Boccaccio and Plutarch), Bale’s cat-
Alogs of famous women are unique in their praise of women for political and military as well as religious accomplishments\(^{215}\) and for their direct attack on the prevailing derogatory view of women as expressed in the retrograde *Contra doctrices mulieres*.\(^{216}\) By the same token, they are informed by anti-Roman and anti-Catholic sentiment, as when Bale endorses the struggle of Boadicea against the Roman emperor Claudius or the cause of the early Celtic church (and Wycliffe) against that of the Roman popes.\(^{217}\)

In a nationalist and matriarchal spirit, then, Bale culls from British histories and legends the names of great queens who ruled by might or right: Boadicea who fought the Romans, Helena, who inherited the throne like a man, Gwendoline, Cordelia, Marcia, and others.\(^{218}\) Among British women who ruled by reason of inheritance (*iure hereditario*) were Sexburth, who succeeded in 672 to the royal throne of the Kingdom of Wessex, and Aethelflaed, the widow of King Aethelred and the daughter of King Alfred, who ruled as *domina* from 912 to 918. And there was the famous Empress Matilda, who ruled with her husband as a kind of "imperial jointress, to this warlike state"—like Gertrude in *Hamlet*.\(^{219}\) Matilda’s political status as *domina* was controversial (as is Gertrude’s), since it was ambiguous how far the [British] empress . . . was to reign independently of her second husband, married 1128, a few months after Henry had imposed her as his heir.\(^{220}\) Edelradus in Saxo Grammaticus’ twelfth-century *Historiae Danicae*—a source for *Hamlet*—may well have said "aliquanto speciosius mares quam feminas regni usum decere nuerat."\(^{221}\)

But British women ruled and, in Elizabethan times, ruled well.

The position that women should have a hereditary right to rule independently of their husband was, in the context of the British Reformation, a Protestant and nationalist turn, by which Bale was able to steer an ideologically effective course between native British and alien Roman custom. It was a course that would help transform the cultic figure of the Roman vestal virgin or Catholic Virgin Mary—which placed women on an ideal pedestal (already manipulated to Reformist purposes in Marguerite’s *Miroir*)—not only into the image of a martyred Protestant saint (like the anti-Roman Catholic Ann Askew in the sixteenth century and the anti-Roman Imperialist Saint Blandina in the second century)\(^{222}\) but also back into the supposedly original Trojan figure of propertied, matriarchal and victorious empress who plays, in the real sphere of politics, the role of Mother Superior in a national siblinghood.

**NATIONAL SIBLINGHOOD**

*ENGLANDE*: Thes vyle popych swyne hath clene exyled my hosband.

*KING JOHAN*: Who ys thy husbond? Tel me, good gentyll Yngland.

*ENGLANDE*: For soth, God hym-selfe, the spowse of every sort

That seke hym in fayth to ther sowlys helth and comfort.

—John Bale, *King Johan*
In the intellectual development of the orphan princess and in the ideological life of the nation during the period of the English Reformation, Elizabeth’s “Glass” represents a complex and politically fruitful vacillation between physical and spiritual incest. It is a vacillation that suggests how a nation, reeling from the conjunction of English and French identities that began in 1066, would now be informed by a new ideology of siblinghood and reformed by a great queen.

Bale prepared Elizabeth and the English people for her monarchy. Even her gender, he suggests, is sufficient to make her “king.” Bale imagines that the princess will become in time a kind of Protestant spouse of Christ. “If such fruits come forward in childhood, what will follow and appear when discretion and years shall be more ripe and ancient?” But Elizabeth actually became neither an ordinary monarch nor a Protestant nun—despite some public identification by herself with Saint Elizabeth and with the heavenly Mary as Virgin Queen. She became instead the sponsa Angliae. She participated, as the mature leader of Britain, in making a nation state in ways Machiavelli did not foresee, and in providing that nation with liberty and sovereignty.

Elizabeth participated, for example, in bringing to political fruition an ideology of spousal political economy. Two thousand years earlier, Aristotle had written in his *Politics*:

> Since there are three parts of expertise in household management \([οἰκονομία]\)—expertise in mastery, which was spoken of earlier, expertise in paternal \([τύγχανον]\), and expertise in marital \([τύγχανον]\)—[the latter two must now be taken up. These differ fundamentally from the former, since one ought] to rule a wife and children as free persons, though it is not the same mode of rule in each case, the wife being ruled in political, the children in kingly fashion.\(^{226}\)

As Thomas Aquinas underscores, the difference that Aristotle remarks between a spouse as ruler and a parent as ruler marks one distinction between a mere “monarchy” and a genuine “polis.”\(^{227}\)

In the early medieval period a prevalent notion was that the ruler was a monarchical \(pater\) or papa to his people. When the metaphor of the Christian ruler marrying the body politic did occur, it was based mainly on the way a bishop at his ordination became the spouse of his church. But by the sixteenth century, the jurist Lucas de Pennas’s influential comparison of the ruler with a spouse had been published (1544). Charles de Grassaille now called King Francis I—Marguerite of Navarre’s brother—the king \(maritus reipublicae\) (1538/45).\(^{229}\) Other French political thinkers—including François Hotman, Pierre Grégoire, and Jean Bodin—similarly chronicled and encouraged a politically crucial transformation of a bishop’s marriage with the \(corpus mysticum\) (the Church) into the monarch’s marriage with the \(corpus politicum\) or with the \(corps politique et mystique\)—as the jurist Coquille put it.\(^{230}\) In earlier times the ring that the prince received at his coronation had been interpreted as a \(signaculum fidei\), not as a mark of marriage.\(^{231}\) But now the coro-
nation ring was understood as a “marque de ceste réciproque conjonction” between royal ruler and kingdom. At the coronation of Henry II of France in 1547, the king thus married the realm itself—“le roy espousa solennellement le royaume.” And throughout the century such theorists as René Choppin were declaring that “Rex curator Reipublicae ac mysticus... ipsius coniunx” [the king is the mystical spouse of the res publica].

In England, too, jurists were interpreting the “mystical body” of the realm as a royal spouse. There, too, there was a gradual movement away from an ideology of the ruler as an intergenerational parent toward an ideology of the ruler as an intragenerational spouse in a new siblinghood.

But Queen Elizabeth went beyond insisting that the monarch was both a parent and spouse towards the end or transcendence of all kinship. Just as the young Elizabeth meditated in the “Glass” on the significance of the collapse of kinship distinctions for spiritual libertines (Marguerite of Navarre), for nuns or Sisters (those whose houses Henry VIII dissolved), and for physically incestuous persons (Anne Boleyn), so the mature Elizabeth institutionalized the collapse on a national plane that was at once secular and chaste. The “breaking of kindred,” to which the young Elizabeth first refers in the “Glass” (1544), was the first step in establishing the new (kind of) state. “You know a kingdom knows no kindred,” Elizabeth wrote to Henry Sidney in 1565, a few years after her coronation. “I love and yet am forced to seem to hate,” Elizabeth wrote about her suitor. The second step in establishing the new kind of state was Elizabeth’s institutionalizing the head of England—or its church—in multiple national roles both parentarchal and liberal. In her government speeches and private literary writings, Elizabeth thus emphasizes that all men are equal in terms of consanguinity. All are brothers and sisters, including Elizabeth herself. Spiritualizing and secularizing the idea of incest, moreover, Elizabeth as Queen established herself as the virginal Mother and Wife of the English people. In a speech before the Commons in 1558, when she had succeeded “Bloody Mary” to the throne and John Bale had returned from exile, Elizabeth put things this way:

I have long since made choice of a husband, the kingdom of England. And here is the pledge and emblem of my marriage contract, which I wonder you should so soon have forgot. [She showed them the ring at the accession.] I beseech you, gentlemen, charge me not with the want of children, forasmuch as every one of you, and every Englishman besides, are my children and relations.

In the ideology of the sixteenth century, it was not merely that Elizabeth became a kind of Virgin Mary transformed to Protestant ends, as though, in John Dowland’s phrase, an “Ave Maria!” could simply become a “Vivat Eliza!” It was mainly that Elizabeth adjusted a specific ideological commonplace—that the Virgin
Mary is at once the parent and spouse of God—to the general political require-
ments of her monarchical maturity.

Perhaps this adjustment served also a psychological requirement as well. The
fact that Elizabeth never married has puzzled her biographers for centuries.
Adduced to explain the fact are domestic political situations, religious differences
between herself and her suitors, desire to make use of courtships in international
politics, fear of childbirth, recognition of infertility, unhappy love affairs, and so
on. And truly, Elizabeth did have a real aversion to marriage; Salignac reports that
Elizabeth said to the French ambassador, “When I think of marriage it is as though
my heart were being dragged out of my vitals, so much am I opposed to marriage
by nature.”244 But aversion or no, the psychological requirements of her girlhood—
linked, no doubt, to her remarkable education in the ways of marriage and incest
in the 1530s and 1540s—, together with the political requirements of a nation
where Brothers and Sisters no longer played their old roles and the Roman Pope,
or papa, was a mere father figure, demanded that Elizabeth explore interactions
between family and politics anew. Both as traumatized princess and as brilliant
statesperson, marriage for her as secular ruler, like marriage for the clergy, was
almost completely out of the question. (Elizabeth strongly disapproved of clerical
marriage, but did not make a legal issue of it.)245 For Elizabeth, marriage—that
“earthly paradise of happiness”—seemed possible neither as an earthly wife nor
as a paradiisiacal nun but only as the royal mother/wife of England.246 The great
queen of England was so successful at establishing herself as this spiritual Mama—
in contradistinction to the Romish spiritual Papa—that Pope Sixtus V, in the late
1580s, “allowed his mind to dwell on the fantasy of a papal union with the English
crown; what a wife she would make for him, he joked, what brilliant children they
would have.”247

In relation to the monarchs of Europe, then, Elizabeth portrayed herself in mul-
tiple kinship roles reminiscent of the sponsa Christi. In letters of the 1580s to her
godson James I, King of Scotland, for example, not only does she employ the nor-
mal kinship terms used by European monarchs—thus frequently calling her royal
Scottish godson “my dear Brother and Cousin” and saying that she “mean[s] to
deal like an affectionate sister with [him]”248—, but she also extends that employ-
ment beyond the norm. In a letter of 1593, for example, Elizabeth writes ambigu-
ously to James as if she were not only godmother, cousin, and sister but also a
mother at once consanguineous and virginal: “You know, my dear Brother, that,
since you first grieved, I regarded always to conserve it as my womb it had been
you bear.”249

In domestic politics Elizabeth became, in these terms, the “commerce” of
England, ruling her people not only as mother and wife but also as godmother. Thus
Elizabeth, who would have no natural children of her own, became the controver-
sial godmother, or spiritual mother and sponsor, of more than a hundred English
subjects.250 She often said that her subjects should never have “a more natural
mother than I meant to be unto all.”251 And John Harington wrote of her as “oure
deare Queene, my royale god-mother, and this state's natural mother. John Bale, in the essays he attached to Elizabeth's *Godly Medytacyon*, forcefully criticized the institution of "gossipry" as practiced by Roman Catholics, because it entailed a diriment impediment to marriage, and Elizabeth adapted the institution to her own ends, replacing the role of the human godparent in the family with that of the divine monarch in the nation.

How Elizabeth replaced "biological" kinship with national gossipred is hinted at in Shakespeare's *Henry V* VIII. Here we learn that the possibly illegitimate babe is in some ways less akin to her pater Henry VIII than to her paternal sponsor, or godfather, Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer, without consulting Henry, names the child "Elizabeth"—which means something like sponsa Christi. In Shakespeare's *Richard III* the curse that Margaret (the widow of Henry VI) pronounces on Queen Elizabeth (the wife of Edward IV and one of Elizabeth Tudor's namesakes) depends for its effectiveness on denying to Margaret, in her relation to the rulers of England, what God had granted the Virgin Mary, in her relation to God: "Die neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen." Queen Elizabeth Tudor, the wife of no man, was the sponsa Angliae, the country's regal Mother and Wife.

Elizabeth was concerned to transform physical incest (of the sort that she had reason to fear in her childhood) and libertine spiritual incest (of the sort that she represented in the "Glass") into a kind of political incest based in the unity of the English people as a single family. If the fear of incest, or of a desire for incest, can help spur a woman to contemplate being truly elishabet—in Hebrew literally "consecrated to God," like a sponsa Christi—that fear and its concomitant political aspects also help to explain how Elizabeth defied nature's injunction to reproduce and became England's king of kings. Bale had hoped that Elizabeth would become an English Reform "nourish-Mother," like the Virgin Mary—less a Catholic "Mother Superior" such as Bale feared in Mary Stuart than a Hebraic "nursing father" like Moses. But Elizabeth became instead a secular version of the religious Mary she delineates in her "Glass." She became a national institution. In the iconography and visual representations of her reign, she is represented not so much as the Virgin Queen, which is how some modern day critics would have it, as the Sponsa Angliae.

Elizabeth's reign helped to transform the ideology of British monarchy. In forging a national siblinghood, she helped to make England a "nation" state. Later rulers followed suit. The pattern of unchastity and (over)compensation in (public) virginity, or of tension between the libertinism one fears and the celibacy one believes to inhere in the "good" monachal or national institution, informs the reigns of later monarchs. A preeminent example would be her godson King James VI of Scotland, who succeeded Elizabeth as James I of England. James' concern about the fornication and bastardizing of his ancestors makes him her counterpart; and just as Princess Elizabeth, the supposedly illegitimate daughter of the adulterous and incestuous Anne Boleyn, made a claim to chastity, so did James, the grandson of the notoriously libertine and bastardizing James V and the son of the pur-
portedly adulterous Mary (she had married her cousin, to whom she was supposedly unfaithful). Like Elizabeth, James reacted against his family's past; despite a penchant for boys, he became as famous for chastity as Elizabeth. Richard Baker writes of James that "of all the Morral vertues, he was eminent for chastity" and claims that James challenged comparison with Queen Elizabeth in this regard. Beginning in 1603 with his first address to the English Parliament, moreover, James adopted Elizabeth's rhetoric of reincarnating the Holy Family on earth in secularist guise. Bale had called Elizabeth both a spouse and a "nourish-mother"; James claims similarly that he is both the spouse of "England"—"I am the Husband, all the whole Isles my lawful Wife"—and its "loving nourish-father." Sovereigns would seem to represent in this view the middle term between a parent, who lords it over children, and a spouse, who is an equal in-law with them.

The main aspect of these ideological means of maintaining the Elizabethan regime were carried over for centuries, well beyond the purview of this chapter. Eventually, however, there exploded the contradiction between liber and mater that gives the Elizabethan slant on family and nation its full power. In France, where Marguerite Porete and Marguerite of Navarre lived, a more powerful and idealized form of reform took hold, at least for a while. Intellectual descendants of the libertines, if not of the English regicides, French revolutionaries attempted brilliantly to bring liberté, égalité, and fraternité to a nation of free children. For a while it seemed that the libertine view of the Brethren of the Free Spirit—that "Ubi spiritus, ibi libertas" (Where the Spirit is, there is Liberty)—would win out. Yet something fell short in the transition from God to Earth. In America, with its Sons of Liberty and Daughters of the Revolution, a new American patriotism appropriated for its motto James Otis' sentence, "Ubi libertas, ibi patria" (Where Liberty is, there is Fatherland); but liberty in romantic America in the nineteenth century—like liberté in France—really came to mean something like "my parents' place." We are warned in Genesis that young men and women "gotta get out of that place if it's the last thing [they] ever do." They must leave the heterogeneous family, whether nuclear or tribal, in order to become, as if we could, no more sons of a Fatherland or daughters in a Motherland but—like the sinful soul redeemed, ideally only, in Queen Elizabeth's "Glass"—siblings in the Promised Land of freedom.