So, then, an elongated Siamese ligature united us. Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother; nor could I any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond entailed.

—Melville, "The Monkey-Rope," in Moby-Dick, or, The Whale

KNOWING WHO'S WHO

Do you know who your parents are?

—Sophocles, Oedipus the King

The commonplace view is that consanguineous kinship is real, or literal, kinship. Anthropologists and sociologists usually lump together all other kinds as pseudo-kinship (or kinship by extension), which they then divide into subcategories such as figural, fictive, and ritual. However, the fundamental distinction between "real" kinship and "pseudo"-kinship—or between literal and figural structure—is the topic of a still-unresolved debate about whether kinship is essentially a matter of biology or sociology. For the substance or quality that makes people akin varies from culture to culture, as the skeptical Montaigne insists, and it is ambiguous even within a culture. For example, which is more fundamental, my likeness to my supposed genitor or my likeness to God, who created me in his image? Which of the following is fundamental—the genes I share with my genitor, the love between my adoptive parent and myself, the milk I sucked from my mother, the blood I com-
mingled with my blood brother, the wafer and wine I shared at a communal feast, or the dust from which all things (including myself) are made?

The literalist view, even as it belittles the figural as merely fictive, itself involves a key fiction, namely, that we can really know who are our consanguineous kin. For any particular consanguineous link is always deniable, if not always denied. Who can deny that her children or parents might not be her children or parents? Bastardy, the stuff of fears and also hopes, is always possible. And who can know for sure that any given child is not a changeling? Mothers and fathers can always find grounds to doubt or deny their children, and children can always find grounds to deny mothers and fathers. Likewise, that my lover may be my consanguineous kinsperson is a logical reality, and this merges with the oneirological nightmare that my lover is my consanguineous kinsperson. The particular family dissolves in the republic of dreams. The literal disappears in the figural.

This disappearance is the subject of jokes, but it is itself no joke. For belief in the difference between literal and figural kinship—in the possibility of knowing for sure who’s who in the kinship system—is necessary to society if, as psychoanalysts and structural anthropologists generally aver, obeisance to the taboo on incest is a precondition for the continuation of society, or of society as we know it. This need to believe in the possibility of absolute knowledge of kin may be one reason so many people believe in it. Many thinkers assert, for example, that while the father-child bond is unknowable in an absolute sense, the mother-child bond is knowable. Some even project onto a male god the certainty about kinship relations wrongly attributed, usually, solely to female human beings—sometimes going so far as to deny to women any essential role whatever in reproduction. The desire to know who’s who in the kinship system may also help to explain the attraction for literalists of figural standards of kinship that are more dependent on witnessed political rites than on biology, standards that at the same time include an incest taboo (as do some kinships by collaction). Thus the fiction of knowledge of who one’s literal parents are is matched by the actual knowledge of who one’s figural parents are.

It makes as much or as little sense, in this view, to call “brother” the young man my sociological father thinks of as a “son” as to call anyone else “brother.” King Claudius’ command to young Hamlet—“Thin of us as of a father”—makes Claudius, to all intents and purposes, Hamlet’s biological genitor no less than Old Hamlet is Young Hamlet’s father. For it is, finally, no more or less fictive to say with the family literalist that “only my consanguineous parent’s sons are my siblings” than to say with the universalist Christian that “all human beings are siblings”—or with the particular nationalist that “all Frenchmen are siblings of the fatherland [enfants de la patrie].” The traditional distinction between literal and figural family, or between real and nominal kinship, erodes as family is conflated with nation—or with species.

It is partly the free-floating conditionality of kinship terminology that allows for the nationalist and universalist ideology according to which every person stands,
or stands potentially, in relationship to any other person as a kinsperson. We are all siblings in this logic not because we are children of the same earth—though perhaps we are—but because consanguinity is ultimately unknowable and hence fictive. Put otherwise, if we are not all bastards or changelings, we may as well be: we are no more siblings than we are not siblings. In all cases (but one) our universal or national siblinghood can be counted on more than our particular familialhood.

SIAMESE TWINS AND CHANGELINGS

Friends, we would not have it known for the world, and I must beg you to keep it strictly to yourselves, but the truth is, we are no more twins than you are.

—Mark Twain, Pudd’nhead Wilson

The notion that we can know who are our kin is one of the great comforts of literary culture and religious cult. The Greek story of Oedipus, for example, proposes that kinship is ascertainable and depends, for its effective balance of fear and pity, on belief in that ascertainability. The spectator at Sophocles’ version of the story, though discomfited by Oedipus’s horror at learning who Oedipus is, is comforted by the idea that, since it was possible for Oedipus eventually to know who he was, it is at least possible for the spectator himself to know who he is and hence to avoid the incestuous fate of Oedipus. However, we have no absolute warrant to believe that Oedipus was actually the infant once consanguineously attached to Jocasta by the umbilical cord—except the Oracle’s word. And as the wise Heraclitus says, the Delphic Oracle at the umbilical center (omphalos) of the Earth “neither speaks nor conceals, but [only] gives signs.” Similarly the Old Testament’s tale of the Judgment of Solomon suggests that wise kings cannot know for sure who’s who even when it is politically important to determine the “umbilical ancestress,” as it is for the matrilineal Hebrew tribes. The sword-wielding Solomon does not figure out which of the two claimants is the literal mother, only which wants the child to live. Some commentators say that, after the Judgment, a heavenly voice announced that Solomon had, in fact, chosen the consanguineous mother; but most rabbis know well enough that such voices are to be distrusted, and the great rabbi Judah bar Ilai said that “had he been present [in Solomon’s court], he would have put a rope around Solomon’s neck.”

The ambiguous interference of Greek Oracle and Jewish God in these questions of matrilineal descent suggests that the brief period of ocular certainty about matrilineal kinship afforded to human beings by the visibility of the omphalos is not entirely forgotten after the umbilical scission (Entzweiung). (It is this brief period that distinguishes the epistemological situation of recently parturient mothers and their observers from that of most other adults and children.) Umbilicular certainty is erased only to be raised (aufgehobene) to the ideological plane of religious cults and legal or literary fictions. For example, Christianity has its sect of Quietists devoted to navel-gazing (omphalopsyche), and it venerates umbilicular certainty
in its cult of the Holy Umbilical Cord. This corporeal relic, the shrivelled remnant of the umbilical cord that once consanguineously linked the earthly body of the Virgin Mary to the partly divine body of Christ Jesus, is a major focus for the Christian debate about whether Jesus was of the same essential substance as Mary or was merely the divine seed that God planted in her as in a prosthetic receptacle. "In his immortal and diviner part," writes Thomas Browne in a Christian tradition that applies to the Holy Family the ancient Greek notion that the woman has no essential role in procreation, "hee seemed to hold a nearer coherence, and an umbilicality even with God himself."13 "The [Christian] deity," writes Bryant with a nod toward Delphi, "was worshipped under the form of a navel."14

What the idea of the Holy Umbilical Cord is to Christianity—an indubitable long-term sign of consanguineous affinity—the fact of Siamese twins is to secular Christendom. The Siamese twin is the only person who knows for sure who his or her kinsperson is, and American sideshows thus prominently displayed Siamese twins under banners like "Believe Your Eyes" and "Marvel of Marvels." (This quasi-cult role of the Siamese twin in secular Christendom was already foreshadowed in the Siamese twin–like aspect of the Holy Mother and Child. Mary is not only Jesus’ umbilically attached mother, but also Jesus’ conjoined sister, since Jesus and she are both children of God.15 (According to the doctrine of the dormition, they are sometimes even of precisely the same age.)16 The Siamese twin, the only real blood kin, is the letter in the figure of consanguineous kinship—the incarnation, as it were, of the true spirit of kinship. The argument that we cannot know for sure who our literal kin are—hence, that the fiction of assigning literal kinship matches the fiction in figural kinship—has to make exception of this person, who, by virtue of a literal attachment to her sibling, knows who her kinsperson is.

Mark Twain’s America, with its interest in civil war and national unity, displayed Siamese twins in resorts of family “recreation.” For example, an advertisement for Barnum’s new Wood’s Museum and Metropolitan Theatre (1868) read, “The long wants of a Family Resort now most satisfactorily supplied.”17 The theater announced the presence of “The Two,” namely, Chang and Eng,18 the twins from Siam whose freakish challenge to “normal” family bonds and boundaries “recreated” the family by defining it. During the Civil War (“brother against brother”), “The Two’s” one body literalized the figure of consanguinity for the American nuclear and national families: the same blood ran through the veins of both brothers.19 Barring fanciful surgery or imposture, the Siamese twins showed the public the one case where consanguineous kinship relations were ascertainable. (For them as for the Siamese felines in the Disney talkies, “We are Siamese if you please. / We are Siamese if you don’t please.”) The very fact of their existence opposed the otherwise universal indeterminability of kinship that threatens the ideological security of the consanguineous and national family. The Siamese twins’ monstrosity, to which Americans resorted, helped to create the “normalcy” of the American family and nation.
"Two me's in one"—a motto of the Moliones, Siamese twins of Greek mythology—was a conundrum of the nineteenth century. Along with Chang and Eng, who continued to show themselves at freak shows in post-Civil War America, were Eliza and Mary Chalkhurst, the Kentish Siamese twins earlier memorialized in redware at the start of the Industrial Revolution, and the Italian twins Giacomo and Giovanni Tocci, the subject of Scientific American essays written in the 1890s. From the 1860s onward, Mark Twain focused on this conundrumed world of ordinary Siamese and conglomerate twins, in his little tale Those Extraordinary Twins together with variations he worked on intermittently. The tale goes some way toward summing up and explaining his century's remarkable concern with Siamese beings (see fig. 1). And Twain really completed Those Extraordinary Twins only in such forms as The Prince and the Pauper, with its exchange of identities, The Mysterious Stranger, with its co-natal "duplicates," and The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson, with its changelings and identical twins.

In Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) the "original" Siamese twins of Those Extraordinary Twins are recast farcically. They are cast first as identical twins who cannot be told apart for purposes of distinguishing an appropriate (i.e., nonincestuous) sexual mate from an inappropriate one, or a criminal from an innocent man; and they are cast also as interracial changelings who cannot be told apart for purposes of distinguishing a "black" from a "white" person. Taken together, the Siamese twins in Those Extraordinary Twins and the identical twins and changelings in Pudd'nhead Wilson explore the philosophical and grammatical—and eventually also biological and racial—complexities of a binary dialectic involving species kind and familial kin. To mark the one in twain is the game in Twain—as it is in Platonic mathematical dialectic, where "both are two but each is one," or in musical duets. But Siamese twins, as Twain knows, are physically united or conjoined not as in some such figure as Pauline marriage, where "the two shall be one flesh," but by their naturally conjoined blood-bearing tissues.

By presenting the rare case where consanguineous kinship is ascertainable, Siamese twinning emphasizes the general inascertainability of consanguineous kinship that arises from the always possible existence of changelings and foundlings. Changelings and foundlings were not so rare as Siamese twins, however, either in American history or in America's fearful or hopeful popular mythologies. We find changelings and concern with changelings all the more frequently among the European aristocratic and American slave-owning classes dependent on nurseries and wet nurses. In these conditions—which we might call "coo coo"—many a nurse mother from the lower classes seeks to have her son raised, like a new Moses, as the son of some Egyptian pharaoh's daughter. Or slave masters, like those in imperial Rome, fear that nurse mothers will seek such a substitution. In these conditions, the number of real and imagined changelings and unwitting stepparents overshadows, at least in the popular imagination, the number of bastards and foundlings.

Such "exchanges of infants in the cradle" as allow an American boy "with negro taint in his blood [to] substitute . . . for the legitimate white heir" inform
the plot of Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. In this chronicle of an antebellum town, Twain combines the particular American fiction of racially pure blood with the general political fiction of the ascertainability of consanguinity. For the American rule of "descent" or of "statutory homogenization," according to which a man was either black or he was not, relied not only on the fiction that one can know paternity, or at least maternity, but also on the fiction that a specific generation makes a hugely consequential racial difference. In America, what made a man black might be a single drop of black blood.37 (The notion that one drop of black blood turns an otherwise totally white person into a totally black person has roots in fifteenth-
century Spanish Catholic anti-Semitism and has counterparts in twentieth-century German Nazism. Thus Twain writes of the changeling in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* that the "black" nursemaid Roxana's son "was 31 parts white and he too [like Roxana] was a slave and by a *fiction of law* and custom a Negro . . . [with] blue eyes and flaxen curls like his white comrade." Any proof of race in America depends on the ascertainability of consanguinity. Yet we cannot tell for sure whether a man is my kin or even my kind—my family or even my race—either by examining his looks according to the Aristotelean adage "Like father, like son" or by scrutinizing easily faked or mistaken birth papers. Kinship is all the more unknowable in an America filled with bastardizing white slave owners having sexual intercourse (incestuously) with their own black slave-daughters. In Twain's antebellum South, in fact, the "white [people] were enslaving themselves, as it were, in the form of their children and their children's children." The result of white slave-owners breeding with black slave women was that the "mixed" population increased rapidly. In 1795, one French visitor had already noticed that American people who were visibly "white" were nevertheless called "black" and on that account were enslaved. A fictive biology lorded it over sociology.

It is no wonder in this racialist context that the desperate fiction that matrilineal descent is detectable (if not always detected) became near dogma. The Judgment of Solomon, with its supposed changeling, was a favorite text for slave-owning lawyers and moralists. Few white Southern moralists noticed, however, that the loving *mater* who won her case in the Book of Kings might well not have been the biological *genetrix*. The plot of Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* centers on the Solomonic-like trope of black and white changelings, born on the same day and one "as handsome as the other." Their exchange is undetected by the white slave master, who "knows" his son only by the clothes he wears. By the substitution of her child for her mistress's, the black slave Roxana thinks she has become, "by the fiction created by herself," her own son's slave. And most readers of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* think so too—her knowledge is, as it were, the unquestioned proof in Twain's pudding. But can mother Roxana be certain that her biological son is now really her master? How could she know whether some other substitution did not occur some time before or after the exchange she herself managed?

Roxana thinks she knows which child is her biological child. She exclaims: "Oh. I kin tell 'em 'part." Oedipus in Sophocles' punning play similarly thought he knew who were his kin and who weren't. But Oedipus the know-it-all turned out to be a know-nothing. And Oedipus' mother Jocasta did not recognize Oedipus as her own son despite his unusually marked feet. (The foot printing carried out by obstetricians in modern hospitals is not more foolproof.) Kin mother Roxana know her kin any better than Oedipus and Jocasta? It's a wise woman who knows her own child. This is the case especially in certain demographic conditions, including American race slavery. The puns of Roxana's dialect suggest the limits
of maternal knowledge: "Dog my cats if it ain't all 1 kin do to tell t'other frum which." Twain's puns tell of bestiality and miscegenation: dogs turn into cats just as white babies turn into black ones.

Roxana, Twain writes, is "the dupe of her own deceptions" insofar as she has become through habit her son's slave. But is she the slave of her black son? Most readers, accepting the sociologically needful and theologically sanctioned view that it is possible to know who's who, believe this is the case. (Christian belief in the Virgin Mary's servitude to her masterful Son is an apt comparison.) Since there may have been substitutions in the cradle beyond Roxana's ken, however, Roxana may be the dupe insofar as she believes that it is her kin that is master.

There remains the possibility that there is, in any case, no essential filial or racial difference between "t'other" and "which." In some traditions, after all, kinship by consanguinity and kinship by collactation amount to the same thing. "The milk of human kindness" that a black nurse mother would give to her white foster child thus would not only wholly "blacken" the previously white child—as some racialists averred—but also would make incestuous any sexual relations between that child and his nurse mother's consanguineous kin. Perhaps this incestuous quality in sexual relations between a foster son and his black nurse mother's kin is one reason that Southern white males sometimes thought of sexual relations with black women as extraordinarily exciting or disgusting. Perhaps, too, a fear of this ambiguously incestuous quality in interracial sexual relations encouraged "aristocratic" white racialists to come to believe, as many did, that blacks were not really human: being nursed by an animal and having sexual intercourse with an animal would seem morally preferable to sexual intercourse with a human mother or her kindred.

Just as the generational and hence racial "identities" of the changelings in Pudd'nhead Wilson can never be known with certainty, so that book's "identical" twins seem indistinguishable or interchangeable. Pudd'nhead Wilson poses this merger of identities as a juridical matter: the "identity [of the criminal twin] is so merged in his brother's that we have not been able to tell which was him. We cannot convict both because only one is guilty. We cannot acquit both because one is innocent. Our verdict is that justice has been defeated by the dispensation of God." Since one cannot hang a literally identical twin without also hanging his sibling, Pudd'nhead Wilson requires a dialectical scission of the one identity into two. This is similar to James Joyce's discussion of the death of Siamese twins, where Joyce refers to a "heated argument ... regarding the juridical and theological dilemma in the event of one Siamese twin predeceasing the other. ..." The Midrash likewise interprets the Judgment of Solomon in the Book of Kings in relation to his separate determination of whether a two-headed human being has one legal identity or two.

The "anatomical" separation of identical twins in Pudd'nhead Wilson is the job of the detective Wilson, known in the town as the man who once said that he wished he owned half a dog. "The idiot," remark the townspeople of this detective.
What did he reckon would become of the other half if he killed his half. Do you reckon he thought it would live?" Wilson eventually discovers who's who, or so it seems, by relying on the comforting hypothesis, born of Galton's ideas about fingerprinting, that "one twin's patterns are never the same as his fellow twin's patterns. . . . There was never a twin born into this world that did not carry from birth to death a sure identifier in this mysterious and marvelous natal autograph." This rationalist thesis, which would mark the uniqueness of each "identical" twin, provides Pudd'head Wilson with its comedic conclusion.

In the end, though, only "in-womb genetic markers" could determine absolutely who's who in changeling cases of the sort that occur in Pudd'head Wilson, with its interracial aspect, or cases of child abandonment of the sort that occur in Oedipus the King, with its incestuous aspect. The universal potential for changelings implies "no possible return to any point of origin." So far as we now know, absolutely reliable in-womb genetic markers, long heralded in science fiction and in legal fictions, are in the early 1990s still "just around the corner" in the biological sciences. Except in the case of genuine Siamese twins, only omniscient judges—the Oracle at Delphi, say, or God in the Judgment of Solomon—can testify adequately about the detection of kin and kind. Otherwise all people are changelings, or may as well be. They are interconnected both figuratively and literally as conglomerate children of the earth.

INCEST AND BASTARDY

What he sees often, he does not wonder at, even if he does not know why it is. If something happens which he has not seen before, he thinks it is a prodigy.

—Montaigne, "Of a Monstrous Child" (concerning a case of Siamese twins)

Many Americans, Sons of Liberty and Daughters of the American Revolution, would want to hold that a national fraternity or siblinghood of some divine or political sort is "the first objective, ethically . . . of the democratic way of life." Thomas Paine's radical American assertion about the familial unity of humankind in The Rights of Man (1791), as it erases and rises above the line between consanguineous family and both nation and species, belongs to this universalist tradition that toes the line between literal and figural siblinghood:

Every history of the creation . . . agree[s] in establishing one point, the unity of man; by which I mean that men are all of one degree, and consequently that all men are born equal, and with equal natural right, in the same manner as if posterity had been continued by creation instead of generation, [generation] being the only mode by which [creation] is carried forward; and consequently every child born into the world must be considered as deriving its existence from God.

The ideal of American republican liberty involves this free association of siblings, or liberi. (The term liberty can mean both "son" and "free." But this liberty, as
it conflates family with nation, collapses the ordinary distinction between incest and chastity, or between bastardy and illegitimacy.

The collapse is thus not without its discomforting political aspect. Already in the fifth century B.C. Plato had gone so far as to argue that the people of the ideal republic should think themselves member siblings of one family. (This is the "noble lie" of national kinship, which Plato compares with the fiction of common autochthony in Oedipus's Thebes.) And if all people in the polis are essentially siblings, then every act of sexual intercourse with a fellow member of the polis must be incestuous. Thus Plato, formulating a political ideology of kinship, raises for the first time in Western political theory the consequential question of the withering of the incest taboo and its connection with nationalism.

As important to America as a Platonic concern with the incestuous implications of the idea of universal siblinghood was a similarly disconcerting Christian concern with how Jesus' injunction "All ye are brethren" might conflate family with species and hence make all sexual relations for human beings essentially incestuous. In this context all sexual relations are incestuous not only because, as in a dream, the lover figures the parent (as Freud might have it) but also because all people are really or essentially siblings. In the law of Roman Christianity it is therefore incestuous for a nun or friar—for a Sister or Brother—for a Sibling in Christ, to have sexual intercourse with anyone. (I here follow the usual custom of capitalizing kinship terms where they involve the Holy Family or the Catholic orders.) The conflation of species with family means that only acts of sex with nonhuman beings—animals, extraterrestrial creatures, and gods—can be chaste, literally "nonincestuous." Where the species is the family, human beings will die out if they are afraid to breed in.

Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods in Christ imitate the transcendence of ordinary kinship relations that is the quintessence of the Holy Family in Christian ideology. In that Family, Jesus is the parent, spouse, sibling, and child of Mary, and He retains his role as father and son of Himself and as father and brother to all (other) human beings. The New Testament, recognizing this incestuous aspect of Christ's generation from Himself, includes in Jesus' genealogy the incestuous sons of Tamar, and it notes that the first outsiders to greet the newborn Jesus were magi—priests born of incestuous unions among a nation, the Persians, supposed to practice incest without guilt. In this way, Christianity incorporates ordinary incestuous relations and raises them, as Stendhal suggests in The Cenci, to a spiritual plane where the incestuous backgrounds of such saints as Albanus, Julian, and Gregory make them all the more holy.

By the nineteenth century, the extraordinary kinship structures that the religious orders' siblinghoods had figured (before the destruction of their houses in Elizabethan England and revolutionary France) were not so much destroyed as removed to a quasi-secular plane. Both the sixteenth-century French notion of affinity by alliance, which moves toward an infinitely generalizable free friendship, and the German romantic idea of the "elective affinity" of things to each
other, not so much in the blood as in the spirit, would be ideologically important to the process of apparent secularization. The German idea likewise challenges both the primacy of kinship by consanguinity and the distinction between literal and figural kinship. The influential cult of brother-sister love in romantic Christendom includes Lord Byron’s depiction of sibling love in works such as “Cain,” Hegel’s consideration of like-unlike siblings in the Phenomenology, Vico’s elaborate theorizing about sibling love in the New Science, and Karl Marx’s premise that “in primitive times, the sister was the wife, and that was moral.” The premise figures the old idea of a perfectible siblinghood under God.

In republican America, too, the idea of a perfect siblinghood, or “liberty,” did not lose its incestuous aspect. The quintessential practical American social experiment in this regard was John Noyes’ nineteenth-century Perfectionist Society, a commercially successful society centered in Oneida, New York. Noyes takes “All ye are brethren” literally. He recognizes that a universal siblinghood requires either celibacy for the imperfect or incest for the perfect. (Noyes’ followers were to be the latter: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in Heaven is perfect.”) Noyes explains his society’s system of pantogamy—or universal marriage—by arguing that free sex without shame is possible within a holy community where “all things are lawful for me” (as Saint Paul said). And he stresses the corresponding view that free sex, including incest, is a sign of the “liberty” that grace confers. He bases his argument for universal physical love, hence incest, on the same premise of universal siblinghood that the monastic orders used when they argue against any physical love whatever and celebrate the perfect life. “Love between the children of God,” writes Noyes, “is exalted and developed by a motive similar to that which produces ordinary family affection.” John Ellis wrote in 1870 that “according to the doctrine of the Oneida Community, a man may have sexual intercourse with his grandmother, mother, daughter, sister, or with all of them, and be blameless. . . . At the Oneida Community [this] is regarded . . . as perfectly lawful and right.”

The Oneida Community was the most radical and commercially successful familist experiment of the century. There were, however, less radical familist and Fourierist communities, including New Harmony in Indiana and Brook Farm as presented in Hawthorne’s Blithedale Romance. (Fourier’s “familism” included a communalist ideology based on the fraternal and sororal feeling supposed to exist between members of a more or less homogeneous family or tribe.) And there were thinkers besides Noyes who were interested in the relationship of practical politics to the ideal of universal siblinghood and incest. George Lippard’s best-seller The Quaker City, or The Monks of Monk Hall: A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery, and Crime (1844)—published in “the city of brotherly love” and dedicated to William Hill Brown’s bestseller incest-novel The Power of Sympathy; or, The Triumph of Nature (1795)—focused on a transitional family ménage à beaucoup which “seems all siblings and no parents.” In this book, with its evidently ambivalent title, Lippard describes how the Quakers’ “Society of Friends” attempts to realize on earth
the great idea of Human Brotherhood." Reciprocal friendship among the liberi was to make for liberty, just as Freundschaft in American-German idealist thought makes for Freiheit. And in a late cinematic echo of the theme, the universalist spirit of the Quakers breathes life into the very American plot of The Philadelphia Story: there is "a Quaker spirit in the house" as near-brothers and near-sisters become free husbands and wives in their pursuit of happiness in republican remarriage.

Herman Melville's Pierre; or, The Ambiguities (1852) moves from the commonplace topos of individual brother-sister incest, in terms of which it has often been considered, toward the incorporation and transcendence of incest and its taboo in a secularized universal siblinghood. At the novel's outset, Pierre and his mother, Mary, whom Pierre calls "sister" and whom Melville compares to the Virgin Mary, express "a venerable faith brought over from France." Their idyllic and class-conscious aristocratic family estate "seemed almost to realize here below the sweet dreams of those religious enthusiasts, who paint to us a Paradise to come, when etherealized from all drosses and stains, the holiest passion of men shall unite all kindreds and climes into one circle of pure and unimpairable delight." Yet the American Pierre, "a youthful Magian," falls in love at first sight with the servant Isabel, who has come to America from postrevolutionary Catholic France. The ambiguity of the possible family relationship between Pierre and Isabel constitutes the key element in the novel. Pierre fears that Isabel may be the unacknowledged bastard daughter of his revered dead father, but the novel insists throughout on the ultimate undeterminability—the ambiguity—of this quasi-orphan's parentage. In this context it is not overdetermination in relation to kinship but nondetermination—not desire for incest but its actual inevitability for the universalist—that informs Melville's novel.

Smiles are "the chosen vehicle of all ambiguities" in Pierre, and the ambiguous smiles of its fatherlike portraits—the "strange" closeted portrait that prepares Pierre to meet Isabel and the "stranger's head" portrait that hangs opposite the Cenci painting—bear on the undeterminability of parentage. The closeted portrait speaks the words "I am thy real father" to Pierre, much as the ghost in Shakespeare's Hamlet says "I am thy father's spirit." And like the ghostly spirit of Old Hamlet, the talking picture in Pierre emphasizes the question of who and what is real and nominal. It is a question especially for people who would just as soon not answer Tiresias' question to Oedipus, "Who was your father, son?" or for people who would answer that question with a slightly amended version of the Christian Pater Noster, "My Father, who art in Heaven."

Pierre and Isabel eventually divest themselves of mortal parents. "Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity," the novel tells us. Says Isabel, "I never knew a mortal mother." Now Pierre is a parentless child—like Billy Budd on the high seas in the ship called "Rights of Man." And like Moby-Dick's abandoned Ishmael, Pierre is "driven out... into the desert, with no maternal Hagar to accompany
him." In the central love scene, Pierre demands that Isabel "call me brother no more! How knowest thou I am thy brother? . . . I am Pierre, and thou Isabel, wide brother and sister in the common humanity."

The quality of the love between Pierre and his ambiguously illegitimate sister toes the line between the profane and sacred sexual relations in much the same way as bundling—sleeping together, undressed or dressed, on the same bed, without sexual relations. Apologists for bundling in the Dutch Protestant sections of New York State, where it was most common, justified the practice in terms of childlike or primitive "innocence" or in terms of "mortification of the flesh": some drew analogies with the sleeping customs of Amerindian tribes where whole families slept together and others discussed those Catholic orders where individual Brothers and Sisters sleep together. But bundling was also "the [courtship] custom of a man and woman, especially lovers"—which is how Webster defined it in 1864. And so it was frequently criticized as mere camouflage for premarital intercourse (between would-be husbands and wives) or incestuous intercourse (between brothers and sisters). American writers, countering English claims that bundling in New England was nothing more than a screen for incest, noted Julius Caesar's description of the Britons' "universal custom of promiscuous sleeping together," emphasizing Caesar's view that among the ancient Britons, "several brothers, or a father and his sons, would have but one wife among them"; and they claimed that the communalist sleeping custom of British families in the rural north was still merely the cover for incest and bestiality: "Pray, what term will you give to that promiscuous bundling of the father, mother, children, sons, and daughter-in-law, cousins, and inmates who call to tarry, and not infrequently stretch themselves in one common bed on the hovel's floor? / Nay, even, in some parts of your empire, the hogs and the cows join the group."

Instead of calling his mother "sister," Pierre now calls his Madonnalike sister "wife." With his spouse and sibling Isabel, Pierre wavers between consummating and not consummating the love that is the principal ambiguity of Pierre. His love cannot be contained within the confines of ordinary brotherly love, "the mere brotherly embrace." Rather, he loves Isabel as if she were a kind of nun, or Sister: "Isabel wholly soared out of the realms of mortalness, and for him became transfigured in the highest heaven of uncorrupted Love." It is in the commercialized "Church of the Apostles" that the brother-husband and sister-wife set up their Mettingen-like utopian household. This church, renovated as a secular business center in New York City, recalls the community of Christian Apostles: it is the new Blackfriars. Those who live at the church are "suspected to have some mysterious ulterior object, vaguely connected with the absolute overturning of Church and State, and the hasty and premature advance of some unknown great political and religious Millennium." And Pierre himself begins to formulate a plan to further "the march of universal love" with which the American Apostles are linked and which forms a keystone of their general ideology: "The great men are all bachelors, you know. Their family is the universe."
Modeling himself on the figure of God and literalizing the meaning of “Isabel,” or “Elizabeth,” as “consecrated to God,” Pierre begins to “gospelize the world anew.” He is himself the rock, the pierre, on which he plans to build a new church. (“Thou art Peter [Pierre] and upon this rock [petrus] will I build my church” [Matt. 14:17–19].) The doctrinal and practical basis of Pierre’s church is the transcendence of the distinction between vice and virtue, a transcendence that involves erasing and rising above all distinctions between kin and nonkin. For Pierre all human beings are essentially autochthonous siblings “of the clod” and universalist “child[ren] of Primeval gloom.” From the unity of humankind in a common autochthony (like the one that the French national anthem “La Marseillaise” praises), Melville figures into his novel the Platonic theme of a simultaneously spiritual and physical incest. Toward this end Pierre’s tripartite familial ménage comes to include not only his ambiguously Sisterly sister (Isabel) but also his nun-like fiancé cousin (Lucy).

Pierre would transcend the taboo on incest. (He is like Mohammed and the other holy and profane personages that Melville culled from the Western tradition—including Paolo and Francesca, Byron, the Aspasia-like Ninon de Lenclos, Semiramis, Cain, Enceladus, and the Cenci.) Yet transcending the distinction between chastity and incest, or good and evil, means an end to being human as we know it. In secular or commercial Protestant America, Pierre’s libertine Catholic gospel is thus acted out as an individual fratricide: he kills his cousin. And his doctrine of transcendent neutrality to kinship is acted out as a suicidal neutering. Between perfect liberty and death, which the optimistic American revolutionary Patrick Henry set forth as comedic alternatives, there is, tragically, no essential difference—as probably there was not for Melville himself.

At first blush, Melville appears to harness the general fear of committing incest in the interests of conserving social-class structure. Like much American literature, his Pierre suggests that if you marry outside your class you are likely to marry inside your family. People who are apparently of different classes, like Pierre and Isabel, can rise above that difference by recognizing their common descent—from the clod, say, or from Christ—and by intermarriage. The common descent two people share can, however, rule out the possibility of chaste, or literally nonincestuous, sexual ties between them.

Marriage across class boundaries is therefore often represented in universalist literature as incestuous in the same manner as sexual liaisons with members of the Catholic orders: the offending pair who intermarry in the belief that people of all classes are brothers and sisters, in the universalist sense, turn out unwittingly to be blood relatives, in the consanguineous sense. In early American literature, masters who marry slaves and bourgeois factory owners who marry factory workers thus discover too late that their spouses are also their siblings. As in Greek tragedy, the taboo against familial endogamy bolsters social-class exogamy. Where Oedipus in Sophocles’ tragedy sees class exogamy, for example, Jocasta sees only familial endogamy. Oedipus says, “I at least shall be willing to see my ancestry, though
humble. Perhaps Jocasta is ashamed of my low birth.\textsuperscript{115} Where Pierre’s mother sees only class exogamy, as if Pierre were just another Romeo, Pierre himself sees familial endogamy transcended in a new utopian community.\textsuperscript{116}

**BROTHER AGAINST BROTHER**

*I expected to find a contest between a government and a people: I found two nations warring in the bosom of a single state.*


The political figure of “We, the people,” the voice of the American Declaration of Independence, first announces itself out of a bloody Entzweiung, or “divorce into two,”\textsuperscript{117} within a single brotherhood.\textsuperscript{118} It is a division of one group into two groups which, from its inception, has the appearance of being a struggle between two separate groups. Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration, thus emphasizes the English colonialists’ fraternal and political kinship with their English brethren in Great Britain. In a draft of the Declaration of Independence he refers to “our British brethren” and complains that “we have appealed to [the] native justice [of the British magistrates] . . . and . . . have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations.”\textsuperscript{119} Similarly, in the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms, the authors refer to their common forefathers and foremothers;\textsuperscript{120} and in the Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress, they emphasize that “Our ancestors, who first settled these colonies, were at the time of their immigration from the mother country entitled to all the rights and liberties and immunities of free and natural born subjects within the realm of England.”\textsuperscript{121} In the same vein, an early draft of the Declaration of Independence complains that now the mother country permits its magistrate “to send over . . . soldiers of our common blood . . . to invade and deluge us in blood” and “to impress our fellow citizens . . . to the high seas to bear arms against their country to become the executioners of their friends and brethren or fall themselves by their hands.”\textsuperscript{122}

Unlike the English and French in Upper and Lower Canada, to whom Canada’s founding father, Lord Durham, addressed his *Report on the Affairs of British North America* about twin nations in conflict in thebosom of one continent,\textsuperscript{123} the American colonists thus founded their one nation with an annulment of the bonds of kinship that had connected them with Britons. On “the high seas” of the mind, beyond the jurisdiction of any merely familial or national authority, Jefferson declared a new family or nation. (In a manner of speaking, Jefferson was piloting a “ship of the mind”—called “The Rights of Man”—with the foundling child Billy Budd.) “Manly spirit,” he said, “bids us to renounce forever these unfeeling brethren. We must endeavor to forget our former love for them and to hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies at war, in peace friends.”\textsuperscript{124} “You know a kingdom knows no kindred,” wrote Queen Elizabeth some two centuries earlier.\textsuperscript{125}
In the moment of divorce, as in that of marriage, a person both is and is not kin to the other party. Likewise in the moment of fraternal scission, as in that of national constitution, people both are and are not akin. In the moment of American foundation, the nation in America thus foundered between civil war, which is endogamous (brother against brother), and international war, which is exogamous (brother against other).

The rhetoric of brotherhood and otherhood that informs this moment of foundation is not empty figuration. It is no more figural, in an absolute wise, for Americans to call the British their brethren than for any individual to call another person brother. (Nor is it less figural.) What are brethren in a political context but people who we think of as brothers? Already in the Renaissance period to which Melville alludes in his Pierre, Alberico Gentili had written in his Law of War that “an agreement to be brothers, although it does not make men brothers, surely has some effect.” Gentili’s statement is true enough, so far as it goes, though it is misleading insofar as it suggests that there is something different from an “agreement to be brothers” that might “make men known to one another as brothers.” Agreement in this context is all there is. National siblinghood depends upon agreement or belief just as siblinghood in the family does. As a national family can be split apart by agreement, moreover, so can it be extended. Thus the Romans, to whom the French and American revolutionaries looked as republican models, agreed to call the Haeduans and the Batavians “brethren”; in this simple manner, Haeduan and Batavian “others” became Roman “brothers,” as Gentili says. Jeffersonian rhetoric moves from praising “the ties of our common kindred” to “renouncing forever these unfeeling brethren” as the American people is founded in the slide of the British from their status as “brothers” to that of “others.”

Where brothers so easily become others the dream of liberty for all American people was bound to falter. American Hegelians like Denton J. Snider and Henry C. Brokmeyer speculated with good reason that a second tempering by blood of the itinerant national spirit was inevitable, because “divorce does not a nation make.” The blood of Abel would again cry out from the earth. In the 1860s “Northerners” and “Southerners” fought a bloody and intemperate war. This conflict, like the earlier one, was an intranational or “civil” war between political brethren. (Mark Twain and others sometimes directly compared the American “Civil War” to a contest between Siamese twins, much as Montaigne had done during the French civil war of the sixteenth century.) And it was also an international war between two brotherhoods or states. By the so-called “War Between the States,” which name the Southerners naturally preferred, the South and North might have become two states under God—much as the Thirteen Colonies and England had done and as French and English Canada may still do. By “The Civil War,” which name the Northern victors preferred, the American national siblinghood emerged as one nation.

With the Emancipation Proclamation and slavery’s end, all human beings, recognized by the Declaration of Independence as self-evidently created equal, stood
undivided as one national family, one brotherhood. Well, almost undivided: if all humans are created equal, then we are compelled to regard as other than human those beings whom “We, the people” do not happen to recognize as having been created equal. Black people, for example, whom Martin Delany called a “nation within a nation,” had been unequal by policy before the Declaration of Independence. (In 1789 Clermont-Tonnerre had used the same phrase—“nation within a nation”—to vilify French Jews; the Marano Cardoso previously had called the Jews “a Republic apart.”) John C. Calhoun, among others, had argued that blacks were not included among the beings whose equal creation the Declaration certified. Calhoun’s view was opposed by Lockean theorists who looked to a theory of natural rights as opposed to civil rights. But it was, unfortunately, not always non-American to argue that blacks were not human beings. Thus Cartwright, in The Prognathous Species of Mankind, and Nott, in Types of Mankind, insisted that blacks were a separate species, and George Fitzhugh claimed in Cannibals All! “that the Negro was something less than human.” Racialists put into question whether blacks had the same humanoid blood as whites; the 1833 essay entitled “Are the Human Race All of One Blood?” thus had suggested that the blood pools of whites and blacks were separate. Melville, knowing only too well the terms of this false debate, added in small print to an inscription in his Mardi, “In-this-re-publi-can-land-all-men-are-born-free-and-equal,” the bitter words—“Except-the-tribe-of-Hamo.” Abraham Lincoln, remarking that the Declaration of Independence is meant to apply to the “the whole human family,” said that “the Republicans inculcate . . . that the negro is a man; . . . The Democrats deny his manhood.”

Remarkably, most proponents of abolition and equal rights in the United States did not oppose the racialist (and Christian) conflation of species with family. They tried instead to use the idea of the siblinghood of humankind to their own ends; they appealed to a common generation, or racial descent, for all human beings black and white. They hearkened back to the American argument, already venerable from the sixteenth century and still alive nowadays in the speeches of Martin Luther King. For universalist American abolitionists and Christian preachers, the favorite biblical passage was that God “made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.”

A few abolitionists, however, recognized that this conflation of species with consanguineous family—like the worshipful myth of the famously native American alma mater Pocahontas (“we by descent from her, become a new race, innocent of both European and all human origins—a race from earth . . . but an earth that is made of her”)—ultimately could not protect despised creatures from exclusion from the human family. They argued that what really binds people together in the American nation is not biological descent but autochthonous descent (as in Greece), religious consent (as in Christian “rebirth in Christ”), or national regeneration (as in revolutionary France). For some American abolitionists, national regeneration in America, like the spiritual régénération promised to the Jews of France by Abbé Grégoire and Napoleon, represented the hope of full
political status for everyone regardless of racial generation or nativity. The "umbilical cord" of consanguinity, with its tribal and racial divisiveness, was to be overcome by what Lincoln, believing like Hawthorne in the "electricity of human brotherhood,"\textsuperscript{139} calls the universalist "electric cord."\textsuperscript{140}

However, calling black men and women less than human or treating them as such was a factor in America's political foundation—even in its sexual history—which distinguished it from the foundation of modern France.\textsuperscript{141} Many Americans blamed the massacre of white people in Haiti on such arguments as Condorcet's well known claim that the revolutionary doctrine of "liberty, equality and fraternity" makes every black man a human brother to every white man.\textsuperscript{142} They were threatened by the gist of the cosmopolitan French and English abolitionist motto "Am I not a man and brother?"\textsuperscript{143} And they were discomforted by such potentially coalescent lyrics as those of "The Rainbow," which, in the 1849 edition of Montgomery's \textit{Songs on the Abolition of Negro Slavery}, ring out

\begin{verbatim}
Black, white, and bond, and free,
    Castes and proscriptions cease;
The Negro wakes to liberty,
    The Negro sleeps in peace;
    Read the great charter on his brow,
"I AM A MAN, A BROTHER now."
\end{verbatim}

Many white racists, sure or fearful that blacks could be no brothers of theirs, said contemptuously that the doctrines of the French and English abolitionist movement were merely "the sentiments of man and brotherism."\textsuperscript{145}

Perhaps denying to American blacks the status of brother humans had the conservative effect of maintaining, even after the 1860s, America's familial vacillation between endogamous and exogamous conflict—familiar already from the scission where one nation became two (the War of Independence) and the twinning where two nations became one (the Civil War). The role of "brother becoming other" or of "other becoming brother" in the speculative theater of American ideology—a role once played by the distant British and then by the neighboring Northerner or Southerner—could now be played out, in the tradition of Twain's \textit{Those Extraordinary Twins} and \textit{Pudd'nhead Wilson}, by the part of "blacks becoming white" or "whites becoming black."

Consider here the importance to American ideology of the legal fiction of the "statutory homogenization of the races," a fiction according to which every person is simply either white or nonwhite. (It was in the tradition of this fiction that a grand jury before the Emancipation, deliberating the expulsion of "free colored" people from South Carolina in the late 1850s, argued that "we [Americans] should have but two classes, the Master and the slave, and no intermediate class can be other than immensely mischievous to our peculiar institutions.")\textsuperscript{146} No satire, certainly not Mark Twain's \textit{Pudd'nhead Wilson}, could do better than such legal rulings and fictions. For by classifying a person of "mixed race" as a Negro, the court was
"denying that intermixture had occurred at all."

(Louisiana courts held in the 1970s that a person with 1/32 "black blood" was legally a "Negro."). The white racist idealist insists that there are only two terms to describe people, brothers ("whites") and others ("nonwhites"), and he bolsters his view by the legal fiction that white blood, though it can be wholly "blackened," cannot be partly diluted. In fact, in the United States, there were rarely mediating terms between white and nonwhite—terms of the sort one does find in Canada and the West Indies—just as in universalist thinking generally, there is no mediating term between brother and other. And let us here recall the view of Thomas Jefferson, who in his Notes on the State of Virginia makes the usual segregationist, though not necessarily dehumanizing, Enlightenment analogy between species and race: "Will not a lover of natural history, then, one who views the gradation in all the races of animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them?"

Who had better grounds, in such a monstrous historical context, to demand the immediate abolition of slavery in America than those people who really recognized the practical consequences of the doctrine that all men are equal brothers? Who, indeed, better than the radical Perfectionist John Noyes? Noyes claimed to understand the radical implications of such brotherhood as the American Declaration seemed to espouse. His Perfectionist experiment, as we might expect, demanded abolition along with both liberty and that guiltless incest which he and other communalists believed that libertas required. (Liberal nationalists, fearing the apparent similarity between the "nationalism" they pretend to espouse and the "racism" they pretend to hate, are always quick to attribute to pure racism the tendency toward incest—which is easy enough to do, thanks to such explicitly proincest racist ideologists as Joseph Gobineau and Richard Wagner—but they are slow to attribute to national liberalism the same tendency.)

Noyes, through his monthly paper The Perfectionist, made converts to his ideas about the universalist brotherhood of mankind and racial equality. Among the more prominent subscribers to Noyes' views on abolition were Edmund Quincy, the Quaker sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Henry C. Wright, and other abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, who writes eloquently of Noyes in his biography. In a letter to Garrison, Noyes describes his "hope of the millennium beginning . . . At The Overthrow Of This Nation." It was the overthrow of all nations, as of all families, that Noyes wanted. Instead of a world of many nations, Noyes hoped for the one family nation of humankind—what John Gower, in fourteenth-century England, had called the primal "man's nation."

**KINSHIP AND KINDNESS**

Much that is left unsaid here about the relationship between literary figures and kinship terminology, and about the political implications of the idea of national kindred, will be considered in subsequent sections of this book. But three problems
should be specified briefly at this point. The first concerns the idea, to which we will return in chapters 2 through 4, that it is a common genitor, not quite one of us, who makes us all siblings. That is, we are often able to call ourselves brothers and sisters only by assuming a common parent. "Alle Menschen Brüder werden! [All men are, or become, brothers!]," writes Schiller in the great Ode to Joy. But people become brothers only because, "Above the stormy canopy / There must dwell a loving father"—a parentarchal God, perhaps, or a national mythology of parental founding or autochthony.¹⁵⁵

The second problem, to which we will return mainly in chapters 5 through 7, is that it is only our opposition to another group of siblings, who are not quite us, that makes us siblings. Here the uncompromising conflation of species with family has made universalist nationalism a dangerous and cruel ideology. For the universalist ideology of love and kinship leads—has led—inexorably, to actions of hatred and unkindness. From the position "all men are my brothers" it comes to follow easily that "only my brothers are men, all others are animals." When only my siblings are human, all others are not human. Volk is conflated with species. In much the same way, confusing species and family becomes the basis for the institution of a particularized fraternity ("we men are brothers, they are others"), not for the institution of a universalized siblinghood ("we are all siblings"). In many languages the word for "human being" and that for "fellow tribesperson" are consequently one and the same.¹⁵⁶ The universalist confusion of species with family thus becomes an effective ideological basis for the institution of particularist siblinghoods defining one nation against another by means of specific exclusionary tactics like misogyny, racism, anti-Semitism, and, as we shall see, earthingism. Muslims and Jews in sixteenth-century Spain and African Americans in nineteenth-century America came to play out the role of the other species, for example, while in revolutionary France, the Platonic ideal of sexual and propertal communalism—of égalité—was obscured, as women were excluded conceptually and politically from the human species and that alma mater "Lady Liberty" was won, if at all, only at the expense of a Rousseauist sororal oppression.¹⁵⁷

The third problem is that deniability of kinship, taken apart from other conditions, means neither that kinship will be acknowledged nor that kinship will be denied. I can acknowledge that my child is mine, thank God, even as I know that it is deniable that my child is mine; and I can deny that my child is mine, God help me, even as I recognize that my child probably is mine. Children thus fantasize that they are the offspring of royal parents, men hope that they have unknowingly fathered children or fear they have not fathered the children that they call theirs, and mothers deny that their children are theirs. There are various demographic as well as psychological and political factors at work here—all cultured, to some extent, by a skeptical focus on the impossibility of absolute knowledge of kin. In some societies, for example, there may be an unusually high rate of sexual intercourse whose participants either know that they do not know who their partners are (as in the Amazons' anonymous matings in Greek myth)¹⁵⁸ or believe wrongly
that they know who their sexual partners are (as in the bed tricks of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama). And where bastards, foundlings, or changelings are known or believed to be widespread, there will often develop, by way of socially needful compensation, specific types of figural kinship. The large number of foundlings and oblates in medieval Europe, for example, helped to set the stage for the political fictions of premodern familial nationalism in the sixteenth century. In eighteenth-century France the foundling d'Alembert was aware that the growing number of parentless children and orphans was tending to make Frenchmen equally kin or nonkin.¹⁵⁹ revolutionaries generally were concerned with establishing a libérté in fraternité where everyone would be equally legitimate and illegitimate; and Rousseau, theorist of libérté, sent off to the foundling hospital his five illegitimate infant children partly in order that he might recognize them thereafter, not at all as particular consanguineous children of his own, but only as fellow multiple twins of the republic and equal children, or liberi, of the nation.¹⁶⁰