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Heresy, Orthodoxy, and the Politics of Religious Discourse: The Case of the English Family of Love

THE FAMILY OF LOVE was an important radical spiritualist movement of sixteenth-century Europe and England.¹ Jan van Dorsten calls the Family of Love the “most controversial and probably the most influential” of the “unofficial churches” of London.² The movement’s publication history suggests its vitality: Christopher Vittels, “an Elizabethan mechanick preacher,” generated a sufficient audience to justify his translating twelve of Hendrick Niclaes’s works into English and smuggling them into England from Cologne.³ We know from records of the 1580 persecution of the sect that an efficient network coordinated members in Elizabeth’s court, with a strong sect in Wisbech, and perhaps with the many other conventicles in south and eastern England.⁴ A twenty-year gap in the evidence begins in 1580, but Alastair Hamilton suggests that the 1603 Familist Petition to James I, responding indignantly to his attack on the sect in *Basilikon Doron*, implies the Family’s silence rather than its demise in the last two decades of Elizabeth’s reign.⁵ That petition does lament the sect’s dwindling size and wealth, though, and Familist sects do not reappear during the Commonwealth. The English Family of Love probably died out, as an organized group, sometime during the early seventeenth century.

Familist influence remains a thing to reckon with during that period, however. As Hamilton argues, the fact that Niclaes’s works were available in print in English and in numerous manuscript translations “alone entitles Niclaes to a place of exceptional importance in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, for he was one of the very few *spiritualisten* whose works existed in translation” before the 1640s;⁶ his books were republished by Giles Calvert and George Wittington later in the decade. The Family of Love looms large again in the ideological conflicts that preceded and attended the English Civil Wars: attacks on “Familism”—most often a blanket term for spiritualist or “inner” religion—abound in the seventeenth-century literature on heresy and elsewhere.⁷ Hamilton argues that Niclaes’s ideas became “absorbed” in “a broad spiritual current” that included Robert Gell, John Everard, and the English Anabaptists.⁸ Likewise, Gerrard Winstanley read and was influenced by Familist mortalism and utopian visions,⁹ and John Milton openly defended Familists in *The Reason of Church Government*

*Urg'd.*¹⁰ Perhaps the most specific and enduring influence, however, was on the development of Quaker thought, though Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Hugh Barbour sense that specific texts or encounters may be less responsible than Familist ideas “in the air.”¹¹ As late as 1687, John Evelyn records that a “Familist” from the Isle of Ely testified before the king that his group, numbering at least sixty members, was “a sort of refined quakers.”¹²

Still, the Family of Love, despite the wealth of evidence that it was both practically and ideologically important from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries, eludes historical description—for reasons intrinsic both to its social and textual behavior and even to its doctrine.¹³ This is an historical as well as an historiographical problem that has interesting implications for criticism of the religious literature of early modern England. It suggests that we should be less interested in establishing fixed definitions of religious identity than in constructing a model of literary discourse dynamic enough to accommodate a problematic of identity and group definition.

The Family of Love was outlawed as heretical wherever it appeared, and it is fair to suppose that members would have tried hard to leave a fragmented documentary record. But even when we *do* have textual remains—and we have quite a few¹⁴—they defy scholarly efforts to induce a definition of Familism and Familists or to establish a distinct position for it in a taxonomy of sixteenth-century religion. A confession deposed in 1561 to Sir William More, justice of the peace in Guilford, in which Thomas Chaundler and Robert Sterte publicly abjure membership in the Surrey Family of Love, suggests that the signifying practices and the social definition of the group are contradictory in a way that creates this interesting historiographical problem. The confession tells us, on the one hand, that the Surrey Family “holde, that none ought to receiue the sacraments before he receiue their whole ordinaunces: as first, he mvst be admitted with a kisse, then his feete mvst be washed, then handes laide on him: and so receiued.” But on the other hand, “They holde, the Popes seruice, & this seruice now vsed in the Church, to be naught, & yet to be by them vsed as free in the Lorde, to whome nothing is vncline.”¹⁵ The first article affirms the marriage of ritual and meaning; the second divorces them, assessing official rituals not as false but as meaningless. The first defines the Surrey Family as a sect; the second, as an invisible group of silent dissenters within the national church. The first, alone, would make them quite easy to define, but the second raises some hard questions: if known members of a Familist sect can participate in prayer-book service, how can we be sure that other apparent Church of England members aren’t Familists too? If Family members are so hard to distinguish, how will we detect sympathizers? And if Familists are willing, when at church, to say what they believe is not, what else might they say without believing it? Perhaps this very confession was, to those who made it, “naught.”

Familists' Nicodemism—their readiness to simulate doctrinal and ritual conformity when called upon to do so¹⁶—thwarts efforts to ascertain the religious identity of individuals and to limn the boundaries of the group. This tendency is not an opportunistic modification of an originally hard-nosed sectarianism: the Family's founder, the Dutch merchant-prophet Hendrick Niclaes, derived his Nicodemism from Sebastian Franck's conception of an invisible church whose harmony transcends the irrelevant, divisive rituals and laws of the visible churches and nations. Niclaes's insistence that his followers simultaneously conform to the local creed and obey, as a sect of the pure, his own rigid hierarchy of elders, sacramental regimes, and social and economic laws instituted social and signifying practices that belong to the history of doctrine as well as to the history of church government. The difficulties of defining the Family of Love, then, are not extrinsic products of our historical method, only to be transcended or explained away: they shape the movement's complex relations to official detection and interdiction and are intrinsic to Familism as a social, linguistic, and even doctrinal configuration.

The problems of fixing Familist identity, for groups and for individuals, bear on a recent development in the criticism of early modern literature in English, the special study of "Protestant poetics." Most book-length examinations of Protestant poetics begin with the problem of defining Protestantism without relying on meanings (of *Calvinist*, *Puritan*, *Protestant*) and even words (*Anglican*) that came into being only in the course of the historical period they examine.¹⁷ Following Barbara Lewalski, critics in this school concur that the solution to the problem lies in limiting the definition of Protestantism to a core of doctrine, a "fundamental direction" or "broad Protestant consensus in regard to doctrine and the spiritual life":¹⁸ questions of church order and discipline are omitted. The results are that an essential Protestantism, understood to transcend ecclesiastical conflicts, identifies the individuals, groups, and texts from which it was abstracted, and that this identity can be assigned to all English believers except recusants.

The appropriateness of this approach to the very complex interactions of mutually infiltrating groups—particularly Puritans and "church papists"—is open to question. Surely, the doctrinal consistency and institutional legibility of Catholicism and mainstream Puritanism tempt us to see their relations to the English Church in terms of the clash of concrete identities. But, as Patrick Collinson and John Bossy have shown in their studies of these two groups, religious identity *in practice* was a very complex matter.¹⁹ The Family of Love may have taken the process of infiltration to its practical limit, making it not merely a necessity imposed from without but a doctrine chosen from within. Studying this group may shift our focus from the essentializing concepts of identity that prevail in the "Protestant poetics" movement to ones more attuned to the delicately diacritical interactions of interpenetrating religious discourses and social practices.

We cannot account for the English Family of Love without recognizing that

the official communion was penetrated by dissenting and even heretical groups and individuals, who brought their beliefs with them. This group makes it very difficult to imagine that an essential Protestantism, made up of doctrines distilled from their setting in the conflicts over church government, describes the religious experience of non-Catholic English believers. But recognizing the heretics' importance *to the development of orthodoxy itself* cannot consist in a methodological interest in establishing fixed definitions of group and individual religious identity. Rather, the hermeneutic problem posed to orthodox contemporaries by Familist Nicodemism suggests that the extreme difficulty of defining religious identity, far from being an impediment to the historian's obligation to describe objectively, is an important part of the historical experience we need to analyze.²⁰

Familist Nicodemism also suggests that, in the relations between heresy and orthodoxy, the conditions of meaning themselves are a terrain of political struggle. At issue among the Surrey Familists and the Church of England was the heretics' ability to infiltrate silently the established ritual and assign to it illicit meanings—or to deny it meaning altogether. It would be tempting to invoke a Derridean explanation for this conflict, for it seems likely that textuality subverts ideology here. That is, if dominant ideology in the Western tradition has posited “metaphysics”—essentialist thought or a philosophy of presence that founds a stable hierarchy of signs and meanings and forces transparency on words by fiercely controlling and limiting their meanings—official control of the interpretation of ritual could be regarded as ideological. On the other hand, if “textuality,” as the sheer uncontrolled activity of language, proliferates meanings and thus demonstrates how ideology is always being deconstructed by the multivalence, redundancy, and opacity of its own language, Familist Nicodemism could be said to be subversive in the ways that textuality is subversive. But a model according to which ideology and textuality are incommensurate and opposed ill suits the relations between the Church of England and its Familist members: it seems more likely that the two groups defined themselves and each other in the context of one another and of their shared conflict.

Orthodoxy, like heresy, occurred in a process of separating itself from and incorporating its opposition. Terry Eagleton suggests that dominant and oppressed ideologies exist and are mutually constitutive—a notion that is useful for English religious discourse. According to him, the dominant ideology “incorporates within itself (not without ceaseless struggle) the codes and forms whereby subordinate classes ‘practice’ their relations to the social formation as a whole.”²¹ And the strategies of textuality are available to both. The analogy tying ideology to *langue* or the fixed structure of language and textuality to *parole* or the unfixed, arbitrary speech act is thus broken down: we are free to observe the reciprocal relations that occur between these elements in specific ideological “conjunctures.” Eagleton argues that “conjunctural meaning”—meaning *in situ*, whether in dominant or subordinate ideologies—“constantly is trying to captivate *langue*-meaning and

constantly is being captivated by it." As a result, there remains at every conjuncture the theoretical possibility that polysemy "in place" will become trapped and fixed and that closure "in place" will be opened and dispersed.²² Like the identity of groups and individuals, meaning is shaped by the relation, at once antagonistic and diacritical, between heresy and orthodoxy. These propositions, if sound, will allow us to observe the role of Familist heresy in shaping orthodox doctrine and convictions about the possibility of signification, attribution, and interpretive authority. I will attempt to fulfill part of that agenda in this essay, with an eye to analyzing the discursive construction of the self in the context of religious politics.²³

I

Both in the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, readers have castigated the English translations of Niclaes's books and, by implication, Niclaes's own prose style. Julia Ebel notes that "Familist prose is characteristically laden with extravagant and confused metaphors,"²⁴ while Joan Deitz Moss attributes the wide range of differing doctrinal stances among Niclaes's English followers to his "ambiguous rhetoric": "Niclaes' language becomes rhapsodic and replete with poetic figures. His prose conveys many shades of meaning and thus can be interpreted in various ways."²⁵

These comments are not new, however; they were first made in Elizabethan anti-Familist propaganda. In 1578 John Rogers complains that Niclaes's prose "doeth not deale so plainely, as one being ledde by the spirite of GOD . . . but verie subtilly and darkely," that it presents not an argument but "a riddle, or darke speeche," and that its "tearmes and phrases are geyson and unwonted . . . [to] dasell the simple . . . not expressing his minde in plaine termes and speeche." He finishes by drawing a correspondence between Niclaes's "barbarous stile, and his ignoraunce."²⁶ In her 1580 proclamation against the Familists, Queen Elizabeth charges that they use "a monstrous new kinde of speech . . . by which they do move ignorant and simple people at the first rather to marvel at them than to understand them"; on these grounds, she prohibits Familist "preachers and professors" and Familist books.²⁷ Modern analyses that condemn or dismiss Familist language as muddled, confusing, opaque, and parabolic fail to recognize that these attacks were first made in the setting of a political struggle, a struggle in which orthodox power sought above all to extinguish Familist discourse. Scholarship repeats these charges at the cost of engaging as an unconfessedly interested party in a political conflict. If the question "What clear meaning do Niclaes's difficult texts obscure?" is partisan, perhaps we may ask instead, "How is this obscurity strategic?"

Niclaes's texts are obscure on the basic issues of his ontology. Students of his doctrine have been unable to assign to him a single doctrine, for instance, on such ontologically important questions as "What, and when, are heaven and hell?"

In his 1580 confession, Leonard Romsey simultaneously renounces the contradictory propositions that eternity is present in this life (since heaven and hell are mental states) and that the mind shall be resurrected into immortality.²⁸ In an analysis of Niclaes's *Evangelium Regni*,²⁹ Moss shows that Romsey repeats Niclaes's own "strangely contradictory" teaching about the immortality of the body and soul: Niclaes "speaks of the kingdom of God coming upon the earth and believes that Familists have already become part of it"; he endorses both mortalism—the doctrine that the spirit alone is immortal—and the more orthodox view that the body shall rise in the last day.³⁰ Other passages in *Evangelium Regni* support a third view, argued by Norman T. Burns, that Niclaes was an annihilationist, believing that heaven and hell are neither imminent in a temporal future nor local in space but fully present as the blessedness or wretchedness of living people.³¹ Apparently, none of these is the "true" Familist doctrine hidden in a smokescreen created by the others; instead, these texts create a range of possible loci for reality—from one devoid of history and matter to another entirely constrained by them, with plenty of possibilities in between.

It's no wonder that we might be "daselled" by the following prophetic passage, from *Proverbia HN* (i.e., of Hendrick Niclaes). Coming after a narration of the seven "Thorowe-breaking[s] of [God's] light"—that is, of providential history through the incarnation of Christ—it announces the eighth and final epiphany, HN himself:

Through which gracious Woord and HN, God reuealed the Appearing of the Comming of his *Christ*, and the New Daye of his righteous Judgment, as also the flowing-fourth of his holie Spirit of Loue, to the Awaking and Rysing-vpp of all his holyons, out-of the Sleape, to their Glorious-lordlynes with *Jesus Christ*, and to an euerlasting fast-standing kingdom of the godlie Maiestie, vpon the Earth, according to his Promises.

Euen-thus hath God declared with *HN*, the Eight Thorowe-breaking of his true Light, vpon the Earth, wherin the Lorde, the God of heauen, restored the former kingdom with his garnishing together with all that which God hath spoken from the Beginning of the Worlde, through the Mouth of his holie Propheates, and of the Euangelistes of his *Christ*: and the-same Eight Thorowe-breaking of the true Light of God vpon the Earth, is the New Daye, to the Renewing of the Life, which God hath to-fore appointed, to reueale thesame in the last Time, for to iudge in thesame, the vniuersall Earth with Righteousnes . . . and also for to declare euenso vpon the Earth, in the same true Light of the New or Eight Daye, the Mysteries of God and *Christ*, euen from the Beginning of the Worlde, to-vnto the Ende.³²

In the opening words here Niclaes blurs the difference between himself and the "Woord," so that his own ontological situation is at issue when that of God's revelation changes. As the passage draws to its revelatory close, its persistently squinting pronouns dismantle a relatively stable distinction between the Eight Thorowe-breaking (agent) and the New Day (the context of action): finally, the former is to declare something in—itself; but itself augmented, replenished, transformed, a stage of itself in which it fully *is* what it has come to declare. The

triple identity of the prophesied reality, the prophetic statement, and the prophet himself would advance the text to a status of perfect, complete reality. The burden of proof lies on Niclaes's text—or on Niclaes himself: it, or he, must constitute the truth of its, or his, own declaration. This prophesy of apocalypse now raises severe problems of referentiality that are grounded in problems of textual and personal authority: either history is desubstantiated, into an allegory for spiritual reality, or the person of HN actually *is* the New Jerusalem. I've been unable to discover a Familist text that rules out one of these readings.

This literary difficulty emerges again elsewhere as an equally marvelous political contradiction. Niclaes inherited the mystical doctrines of the German spiritualists and thus started with a thoroughly individualist and noninstitutional form of devotion. He drew from sources like the *Imitatio Christi* and the *Theologia Germanica* an emphasis on the resignation of the individual will to God and thus on an inner experience that replaces external forms of worship.³³ And he shared with Sebastian Franck the convictions that the Spirit, not Scripture, conveys divine truth and that an indivisible church would unify divided Christianity.³⁴ As Ernst Troeltsch points out, these basically mystical convictions place no stress on relations between individuals. They exhibit a “positive sociological character” only in that they look forward to a unity of all souls in their creator: thus they are indifferent to present ecclesiastical affiliations and unlikely to stimulate separation from a local church.³⁵ So Niclaes deeply contradicted this mystical and noninstitutional tendency of his spiritualism when he strove to embody it in a rigidly structured sect that, though nonseparating, would recognize him as its absolutely authoritative patriarch.

This contradiction corresponds with that underlying the Eight Thorowebreaking passage: in both, the spiritualist's transcendence of the material world into a realm of neoplatonic unity collides with an assertion that the divine order is materially embodied on this earth. And in neither can we be sure whether these states of perfection belong to the present epoch or must be awaited. This pattern repeats the Surrey Familists' contradictory management of their Nicodemism, their simultaneous denial and affirmation of ritual meaning. The difficulty is to know what analytic stories we can tell about this correspondence. We might conclude that the contradictory referentiality of Niclaes's texts generated contradictions in Familist belief and practice. Certainly it authorized them. But we might also be able to say that it *managed* them (or attempted to), in a political situation in which Familism was unable to establish itself as an autonomous spiritual and social world.

Some of these contradictory patterns very clearly support the group's efforts to function in a hostile world. Chaundler and Sterte assert that the Surrey sect required new members to relinquish their possessions to common ownership, while elders were able to accumulate large fortunes and members with means were to aid the less well off with alms.³⁶ This simultaneous maintenance and

abolition of personal property is authorized, in turn, by Niclaes's *Ordo Sacerdotis*, the sect's "Rule" (never printed presumably because its use was restricted to elders), and by his utopian prophesy, *Terra Pacis*. In the former, Niclaes prescribes an elaborate priestly hierarchy. Priests at each of seven ranks below Niclaes himself would consecrate and train those just below them. They would relinquish all personal property and be supported by the people's tithes, while financial exchange within families and between members would be so strictly subject to priestly approval that the whole organization takes on the appearance of a mercantile alliance regulated by a priestly elite.³⁷ *Terra Pacis*, on the other hand, repudiates both social hierarchy and private property, describing a communist Jerusalem that, because it inhabits the same highly ambiguous temporal scheme that the *Proverbia* creates for HN himself, cannot be dismissed as belonging to the future.³⁸ In the relationship of text with practice, the referential ambiguity of Niclaes's language allows his followers to function as a community of the pure that nonetheless imitates, and traffics with, the corrupt world around it.

The recurrent scandal of Familist sexual liberty provides an insight into the ways in which Niclaes's ambiguity might manage the group's internal relations. Moss's survey of this difficult terrain shows that, while the sect's name may have attracted members who wished to locate their sexual activity in a hospitable theology, rumors of Niclaes's bigamy were false, and his doctrine in fact did not support profligacy of any kind. The probable basis for the charge, she argues, is a disapproval of his doctrine of perfection amplified into propaganda.³⁹ But we should observe how easily one can distort Niclaes's doctrine of perfection into an endorsement of sexual liberty: one need only simplify the referential difficulty of his language, omitting several of its elements and thus relieving its contradictory tensions. Oddly enough, errant Familists and orthodox attackers, whether Presbyterian clerics or popular satirists, are united in making this mistake: they amputate elements from Niclaes's oscillating paradoxes of time and matter, making them unproblematic and hence scandalous. The same error in reading strategy produces the opposite result when William C. Johnson cites passages in which Niclaes inveighs against carnal liberty and asserts the necessity of obedience, concluding that "there is absolutely nothing in Niclaes' writings to substantiate any of the defamatory charges of moral licentiousness."⁴⁰ In fact, passages he cites, and many others like them, argue strongly that some continental Familists *did* express their spiritual perfection sexually, and that they regarded Niclaes's texts as their justification in doing so. The prophet's protests are efforts to restore the tentative balance of his paradoxical doctrine, to reverse a misprision they actually invite. At the same time, they command his followers to submit themselves to the authority of his mysterious writing.

The difficulty of Familist texts cannot be explained away, then, by an appeal to their mystical effort to express the inexpressible. Even those moments of a Familist text that appear most entirely to transcend or ignore its political situation

are in fact political: when they make a point about evading politics, they are actually arguing against *cuius regio eius religio*, against national conflicts arising from religious differences, for liberty from legal restraint of worship, and for a Europe at peace. Within the movement, the language of these books is directly involved in mediating relationships between the heresiarch and his followers. In a spiritualist context—that is, within a theology that recognizes as absolutely authoritative only personal experiences of the Spirit—they work to extend HN's liberty and authority and to circumscribe and define the liberty and authority of others. Inside the Family of Love, textuality functions to dominate.

How? It would appear, at first assessment, that textuality within the group subverts the heresiarch's authority. Central to Familist mysticism is Niclaes's assertion that the identity of the "begodded man" is no longer his own but God's: human identity becomes perfect when it is replaced. In the social context mediated by Familist texts, the veracity of the texts depends on their speaker's prophetic identity, but that identity can be demonstrated only by its own absence. If such a demonstration were possible—and Niclaes's many formal efforts to remove himself from the text are probably efforts to accomplish one—it would itself rely on the speaker's full presence to authorize it. Spiritual experience, as a source of authority, cannot be contained in writing. One solution Niclaes envisions is the equation of self and language suggested in the Eight Thorowe-breaking revelation. In *Terra Pacis*, for instance, the perfect inhabitants of the City of Peace are strangers to images and similitudes because they "are One with God, and God is One with them . . . Whose Name likewise they vse not in vayne. For all what they speak of the Godhead, to the laude of his holie Name, thatsame hath a lieuing Foorme in them."⁴¹ Niclaes would absorb the intransigent *otherness* of language into the one indistinguishing person of a multitude of speakers merged into God; again, speaker, speech, and referent would be the same. Niclaes makes the claim in more personal terms in the *Prophetie [sic]*: "I gauē-fourthe the Sounde of the Voyce of the gracious Woorde of the Lorde. . . . And euenso, out of the Loue of my God and Christ, *became* the gracious Woorde of the Lorde."⁴²

These envisioned solutions fail to provide a means for the written text to demonstrate Niclaes's authority, because the transformation of the person into the word and the incorporation of the word as a person devalue writing. Not even Scripture is safe from this antilinguistic prophesy: Niclaes describes the spiritually reborn true believer as "the *true* Newe Testament" (emphasis mine),⁴³ implying that the written Scripture is, by comparison, false. If indeed the authority of Niclaes's spiritual experience relies on the authority of the text that represents him, his ideal of the perfect text as the experience of the begodded individual threatens the very texts that proclaim that ideal and assert its truth.

Perhaps this dilemma can explain why Niclaes privileges silence as the perfect mode of expression in books thick with repetitions of his claims to authority. And perhaps the proliferating laws in the *Ordo Sacerdotis* are there to confirm the

liberty of their maker. Certainly, despite his lifelong claim that he was a loyal Roman Catholic, Nicolaes introduced into spiritualism a familiar problem of the Protestant movement—that of simultaneously validating and containing personal authority. Nicolaes met this problem *en face* when two of his followers, Hui- bert Duifuis and Cornelis Jansen, refused to accept his divinity and charged him with vitiating spiritual life by developing a religion of externals and ceremonies. The full social implications are even clearer, though, in the defection of Hendrik Jansen van Barrefelt, a Family elder. Barrefelt's separation was precipitated by his experiencing a vision of his own. In the books he later published under the pseudonym Hiel (the "Life of God"), he rejected Nicolaes's claims to be an exclusively authorized mediator, styled himself instead a mere example and witness of divine illumination, and taught his followers how to read the signs of divine life within them.⁴⁴ If Nicolaes could ground his authority to speak for God on private spiritual experience, so could someone else; so in fact could everyone else. On the very authority with which he demanded his followers' silence, they could claim their speech; once his liberty became a model for theirs, their authority could supplant his.

This is the context in which Nicolaes's language exercises its social strategies. Like many Protestant reformers, the heresiarch decries preachers who would teach Christ before they have experienced him.⁴⁵ And just as the preacher must wait patiently for God-given understanding before he can rightly teach, so must his disciples wait before they can understand. Nicolaes frankly recognizes that his own explanations are irrelevant to this process of illumination:

And if yow cannot acknowledge this for the truth, yet look well alwayes hereto, that ye do not blaspheme the same which ye know not. And I likewise shal not blame yow, although that yow cannot comprehend the same. For the godly gifts cannot be brought to any one by violence or compulsion, for they are the gifts of God.⁴⁶

But Nicolaes never atomizes his community of knowers and learners. Communication between the illuminated is perfect but silent; it participates in the oneness of ideal signification by a process of mutual recognition. The spiritual man can "be seene with all Eyes of the Spirit and . . . be hearde with all Eares of the Spirit," though he is "inuisible before all Eyes of the fleash / and also unhearable with all Eares of the fleash."⁴⁷ God's first message to his chosen is therefore "that he ought to keepe-silence / and becom vtterlie dombe in himself"—precisely so that he can "harken vnto the vpright serviceable Woord of the holie Vnderstanding,"⁴⁸ that is, to the speech of initiates and particularly to Nicolaes's own texts. The fact that this passage appears early in Nicolaes's *Prophetie*, a lengthy diatribe against disobedience in the Family, suggests that the demand is not for assent to the content of Nicolaes's utterances but rather for submission to their undemonstrable authority.⁴⁹

Furthermore, Nicolaes assigns to language the task of identifying true believ-

ers. Though he cannot make language signify, he can rarefy it as a way of articulating and enforcing his group's hierarchical order. The higher one's status in the Family of Love, the more talking one is allowed to do. Niclaes prescribes that elders shall "talk freele" only with young men of thirty, who then "haue the Libertie, for to vtter-fourth, in all Boldness, the Heauenlie Reuelations of the Kingdom of God"; only after an examination of their "right Knowledge" do they simultaneously obtain the rights to evangelize and to marry.⁵⁰ Among the Surrey Familists, "the Elder must not speak, the Bishop being present: nor the Deacon in the presence of any of them."⁵¹ Loquacity is a privilege and a mark of rank, and therefore a mark of spiritual aptitude. These social practices mirror the contradiction between Niclaes's ideal of silent discourse and his own sesquipedalian style.

So the *illuminati* encounter God and each other—or God in each other—in silence, and discipline their subordinates by enjoining their silence in a torrent of words. Niclaes's *books* serve a related function in this project of demonstrating spiritual identity: if understanding, like meaning, is independent of the text, and if a perfect knowledge of meaning is arrived at without the text's work, then one can exploit textual opacity as a way of distinguishing not between meanings but between audiences.⁵²

The *Proverbia HN* will exemplify this strategy. The English translation was probably made by Christopher Vittels under Niclaes's supervision and was printed about 1574–75.⁵³ So we know that it is subsequent to the prophet's 1567 vision, in which God repeatedly instructed him to make his writings "more plain to the understanding . . . [to] write them again more distinctly."⁵⁴ Niclaes responded by asserting the simultaneous clarity and obscurity of his works. The *Proverbia* declares on its title page that "I will open my mouth in Prouerbes and Similitudes," and that

to the Children of Loue and the vpright Disciples of Iesu Christ, it is geeuen to vnderstand the Mysterie of the heauenlie Kingdom: But to Such as are ther-without, it is not geeuen. For-that-cause, all things chaunce vnto them in Similitudes and Prouerbes.

The problem of distinguishing the "Children of Loue" from "such as are ther-without" is not only the volume's subject: it is its assigned function as well. Declaring later that where "ther is no vpright Difference observed" between elders and disciples, "theare can it not go-well with any Soule,"⁵⁵ the *Proverbia* goes on to stipulate that the distinction between these critical categories is a difference in interpretive capacity. In a ritual derived from the Book of Revelation, a Familist's initiation as elder can be verified by his ability to read the unique and secret name inscribed on a white stone: "And that is the Difference betwixt the true Beeing, which is remaining with the Elders / and the Images or Figures, which are administered vnto the Disciples, to an introduction for them vnto the true Beeing."⁵⁶ Elders and disciples, looking at the same sign, see two different things. True

believers read “the true Beeing” in the sign; that is, they see it as a perfectly transparent indicator, or rather the very substance of the truth. The stone is able to distinguish between readers, however, because of its simultaneous illegibility. It has a second structure as an image or figure, a signifier remote from its significance. The same could be said of the “Prouerbes and Similitudes” promised on the title page of the *Proverbia* and, indeed, of the *Proverbia* itself. Seen from within the Family of Love, Niclaes’s “riddle[s], or darke speeche” function not to “dasell the simple” but to identify true members.

Niclaes’s response to his dream may explain why he seems persistently to promise clarity but never to deliver it: clarity is an aspect of the speaker’s and his listeners’ illuminated consciousness, not of a new construction of the signifier. So in *Terra Pacis* he warns:

Wherfor, because that thesame now which is to come [i.e., the Kingdom], mought appeere, so do we not speake couerdly as in secret-maner, in priuie Places or Corners, but naked and apparent in the Daye.

But if now our Testimonyes be couered vnto anyone, or be witnessed or spoken in hidden or secret maner, before anyone, then are they couered, secret, or hidden, before those that perish.⁵⁷

In the *Proverbia*, Niclaes assures us that “the Wisdom speake[s]-fourth her Prouerbes, to her Children, and the Love vttereth her Vnderstanding, to her Lovers / to thende that they shoulde heare and vnderstand thesame in secreat / and then tell it fourth againe openlie.”⁵⁸ But we may surmise by now that this open expression will appear to us no different from the secret, veiled proverbs. If we don’t understand these utterances—and it seems only honest to admit that we don’t—we’re forced to concede that we’re “ther-without.”

II

As a social strategy for identifying Family members to each other, Familist Nicodemism and the textual ambiguity implicit in it do more than consolidate the authority of the heresiarch. Precisely the same strategies function—again problematically—to manage the group’s relations to official interdiction and surveillance.

The internal strategy I have been outlining works not to hide a single clear, heretical meaning, and not only to regulate the group’s hierarchy: it also works to prevent hostile infiltration by identifying members of the group to one another. But how can readers of the stone—or of the *Proverbia*—indicate their successful readings to the community? What gesture signifies that an authoritative interpretation has taken place? Here all Familists become enmeshed in the problems of self-representation, of proof and testimony, that plague the group’s founder.

If speech and interpretation are inadequate to their assigned tasks of demonstrating spiritual authority, true membership cannot be ascertained.

The safety of any forbidden group depends on its ability to identify its members, but it appears that the textual politics of the Family of Love would make it highly permeable to infiltration. This difficulty is compounded by the ambivalence Nicolaes and his followers express about whether the Family of Love is a sect at all: they claim it is both a sect outside of and opposed to a dominant cult, and a mystical association of true believers within it. It seems that the Church of England and the English Family of Love could infiltrate each other. When Chaundler and Sterte report that Familists in Surrey “hold yt they ought to kepe silence amongst them selues, that the liberty they haue in the Lorde, may not be espied out of others,”⁵⁹ they efface any boundary between internal and external political relations, and suggest that the sect’s heretical and outlawed status shapes all Familist discourse. This would mean that the relations between Familist identity and Familist language are always relations between forbidden identity and forbidden language. And if this is so of a heretical group that can disappear into the national church, then Familist problems of referentiality and identity will help to shape orthodox discourse, from within. Textual practice in this context becomes, in itself, an arena of political struggle, as each of the antagonists, Familism and a nascent “Anglican” identity, moves toward self-definition by responding to the presence of the other within it.

To Elizabeth and James I, the central heresy of Familism was its doctrine of the individual perfection of the true believer, who attains perfect liberty in a moment of mental congruence with the divine, of being “Godded with God.” James clearly saw the political threat in this doctrine while he was still on the Scottish throne. In *Basilikon Doron*, he argues that Familists epitomize Puritanism “because they thinke them selues onely pure, and . . . without sinne, the onely true church,” a claim implicitly rebellious. Specifically, James deplors

their humours . . . not onely [in] agreeing with the generall rule of all Anabaptistes, in the contempt of the ciuill Magistrate, and in leaning to their owne dreames and reuelations: but particularly with this sect, in accounting all men prophane that swears [*sic*] not to all their fantasies; in making for euery particulare question of the policie of the church, as great commotion, as if the article of the Trinitie were called in controuersie; in making the scriptures to be ruled by their conscience, & not their conscience by the Scriptures; and he that denyes the least iote of their groundes, *sit tibi quam ethnicus & publicanus*; not worthie to enjoy the benefite of breathing, much less to participate with them of the Sacraments: and before that any of their groundes be impugned, let King, people, law & all be tred [*sic*] vnder foote.⁶⁰

The Familists’ 1606 supplication disavows disloyal intentions,⁶¹ but the (unofficial) anonymous response continues James’s argument by jointly charging Familists and Presbyterians with aspiring to overthrow the magistrate and to install themselves in his seat.⁶²

So both Elizabeth and James sternly repressed the sect and obliged its adherents to operate in rigid secrecy. The tone of the resulting relationship is evident in a report to Sir William More, which J. W. Martin associates with the Chaundler-Sterte confession and other records of More's anti-Familist efforts. The report struggles to pin down evidence on some putative Anabaptists:

We are very doughtfull (yf yt may please you) of a certen heresy of Annabaptistry which we very much feare that some of oure neighbors do holde. Not that we are able to accuse them particularly of any article touching the same secte. But by cause some of them hathe bin suspected thereof along tyme, and also by cause some other suspected in lyke case dothe frequent and use one anothers company styll.⁶³

Lacking any positive confessional evidence, the authors of this report describe themselves as doubtful, fearful, and suspicious. And rightly so: they are obliged to collate suspicions held "along tyme," based primarily on memories of certain parishioners' daily movements and hospitality, with recent and equally circumstantial details of meetings and friendships.

Surveillance could be frustrated of its needed proof by any sectary's readiness to say, with the suspect John Warner, "What I thinke of the magistrate I will kepe to my selfe."⁶⁴ An autonomous, self-authorizing and silent self, above all a self whose identity cannot be fixed, appears to the state as the source of rebellion. Hence the authorities' interest in developing a counterdiscourse, one in which individuals and groups can be assigned a definitive identity. Michel Foucault suggests that the literary category "the author" originated in such a moment as this: "Texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors (other than mythical, 'sacralized' and 'sacralizing' figures) to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive."⁶⁵ The historical origin of the concept "the author" is open to question. But clearly "the author" as Foucault characterizes it could provide a mechanism of attribution peculiarly suited to censorship. In the encounter of orthodoxy with Familism, moreover, this "author-function" can operate only when the discursive rules allow that a text, once attributed, be interpretable as the clear reproduction of its author's thoughts.

The confessions made by Familists unlucky enough to attract official attention display the problems encountered by the state as it enforced this discursive program. Though these documents may include much verified information about Familist doctrine and practice, they remain highly compromised speech acts. In a confession, the accused must shift from one personal identity and discursive group to another, and divest him- or herself of the heretical beliefs the confession purports to describe. But these tasks can only be accomplished when the confession reproduces, not the heretical beliefs themselves, but their formulation in the dominant discourse. However at a disadvantage as an isolated individual in an

Elizabethan prison, the confessor retains considerable power to render both authorial identity and the clarity of language problematic.

Leonard Romsey's confession interprets Niclaes's ambiguous prophesies of the Last Day as a call to rebellion only with difficulty: "The next way is [in?] my iugement sent vnto rebellion. . . . And that this their rebellion is to be looked for er it be longe this moueth me to think so because. . . ."66 The hesitant, doubtful gestures point to Romsey himself, the cooperative (unrebellious) interpreter, reflecting an attempt to cooperate with the state's demand for an author. But whose self is it that confesses? The full program of a confession contradicts the very end of attribution—to lasso the rebellious self—by requiring that the speaker merge his or her speech with the official utterances of the Elizabethan church and state. The 1575 confession of Robert Sharpe, printed as a broadside with a "joint" confession by four other men,⁶⁷ provides an example. Sharpe relates his fall into heresy and his rescue by orthodoxy as a series of relations with advisors, authorities, and texts: "Whereas I Robert Sharpe, haue hertofore vnausedly, conceyued good opinion of certayne bookes of an aucthour" whom he identifies as Niclaes, now things are different. The "turn" or conversion occurs "now vppon conference wyth the Godly learned, (whereof some are in auctoritie)," whose instruction he substitutes for Niclaes's books. He repeatedly abjures Familism by repudiating first the author and books, and only secondarily the doctrines and the sect. And so he proceeds to renounce

all other Errours and Heresies whatsoever contrarie to the Common, Nicene, and Athanasius Creedes, or to the holy Scriptures conteyned in the Bookes of the olde and the newe Testament. And [I] doe also forsake whatsoever is repugnant to the Doctrine nowe taught and puplicly [*sic*] set forth in the Church of England, which Doctrine I acknowledge and confesse, to be the true and Catholicke Doctrine, agreeable to the Canonickall Scriptures.

As these dual abjurations and affirmations leave behind specific matter to confirm disbelief and belief along an indefinite range of doctrine, the possibility of Sharpe's cognitive consent is lost. Unlike John Warner's, the "self" of Robert Sharpe is effaced and merges with authoritative discourse. The appended confession of John Allen, John Lydye, John Sharpe, and William Burwell makes the gesture even more decisively: they collectively swear, "I detest all the errors and heresies before by hym detested. I do faythfully promise here before God & you whatsoever he hath promised."

Such a confession involves a mesh of reciprocations that can only be told by "process of speech" (*Paradise Lost* 7.178) but that are in fact simultaneously in play. The state demands the firm and stable identity of authors, and the sincerity of their utterance, at the cost of contradicting its intention of absorbing the individual self of the radical tradition. Familist Nicodemism emerges as a response to this contradictory challenge: confessing Familists say all they are required to

say and join in all the required rituals while privately believing them to be meaningless images. Official records typically join expressions of outrage at this policy with resolves to seize control of Familist texts, to forbid their publication, distribution, and ownership.⁶⁸ Elizabeth's 1580 proclamation grounds her decision to censor on this "monstrous new kinde of speech":

These sectaries hold opinion that they may (before any magistrate, ecclesiastical or temporal, or any other person not being professed to be of their sect which they term the Family of Love) by oath or otherwise deny anything for their advantage, so as though many of them are well known to be teachers and spreaders abroad of these dangerous and damnable sects, yet by their confession they cannot be condemned, whereby they are more dangerous in any Christian realm.⁶⁹

And Familists respond with repeated episodes of lying about their possession of or acquaintance with Familist books.⁷⁰

For instance, "Allen, a weaver," was imprisoned for his Familist beliefs, escaped, and then, unhappily, encountered a justice of the peace who recognized him. William Wilkinson reports that, asked "if he had about him no bookes of *H.N.*," Allen said no—and then was found to have "diuers bookes about him."⁷¹ Romsey avers that "the disciples of *H.N.* make no conscience of lyinge and dissemblinge to all them that be not of their religion," and remembers that when an official inquisition into the Wisbech sect was imminent "we had a letter from the family of loue in the court from one Doringeton and Zeale wherein we were aduertised howe to behaue our selffes befour the commissioners and charged that we should denye that we had sene any of the books of *H.N.*"⁷² The interrogator pits his authority against Familist books, and the Familist's lie—his announcement that he has not read or does not own those books—deprives language of meaning in the very process of surrendering it to his inquisitor.

Several confessions perform this gesture in the most acute way by naming and renouncing a Familist policy of lying. For example, the Chaundler-Sterte confession tells us that "if any of them be conuented for his opinion, and doeth denie the same by open recantation: he taketh that to be a glorie vnto him, as though he had suffered persecution in this doing: and yet still inwardly mainteyning these opinions."⁷³ Three guards in Elizabeth's court—one is the "Zeale" of Romsey's anecdote—confessed that the Family of Love "may lawfully deny religion of faith before any / (i)f ther be any cause of persecusion."⁷⁴ Here, the state's demand for a self-effacing recital of its own predetermined discourse is contradicted by its insistence that morally good language is the clear or sincere reflection of the speaker's thoughts. Operating within this vexed rhetorical situation, the confessor's statement that Familists may lie belongs to the required pattern of submissively retailed information, but at the same time it perversely suggests that he himself may be lying. By pointing out that it may be deliberately opaque—a mask of language that, instead of revealing, hides the speaker's mean-

ing—the confession refers to its status as a predetermined, immutable program. It belies the authoritative claim that its language *can* be clear and univocal.

In a protest against Niclaes's obscure style, John Knewstub charges that "to colour his craft withall, he keepeth him to the same words which the church useth . . . saue that he interlaceth some odde words, which cannot well be discerned, but by the[m] that are well acquainted with his bookes, under the which he conueyeth all his corrupt doctrine."⁷⁵ Knewstub believes that a secret system of typographical pointing endows commonplace terms with bizarre heretical meanings.⁷⁶ Perhaps he is right. But Familist Nicodemism also means that the heretical speaker's secret intentions can multiply the possible meanings of perfectly commonplace utterances without distorting them. We may consider two anecdotes that suggest that the Familists were as adept at equivocation as Robert Parson's missionaries. The Chaundler-Sterte deposition describes "certaine sleightes" practiced by the Surrey Familists,

as for example: if one of them be demaunded howe he beleeueth in the Trinitie, he will answere: I am to learne of you, & so prouoketh the demaundant to shew his opinion therein: which done, he will say then: I do beleeeue so: by the which wordes he meaneth, that he beleeueth the demaundant saith as he thinketh, but not that he thinketh so.

Similarly, they are reported to define catechumens up to thirty years old as "infants" so that they can publicly affirm a belief in infant baptism.⁷⁷ The speaker and the heretical community arbitrarily assign a new and private signification to words in the common culture. They then continue to use these words in their conventional contexts, and thus allow them to function separately from their new meanings. Because Familists implicitly show the relation between words and their meanings to be arbitrary, they suggest that *all* language may be conventional: they subvert not only the specific meanings attached to words by those in authority, but also their opponent's power to control language and meaning in the first place.

To draw on Eagleton's formulation, Familist ambiguity is *both* ideological—when it functions repressively to concentrate authority within the sect—and textual—when it subversively undercuts the state's efforts to fix identity and meaning. And we find an alarming recirculation of this doubleness in the group's reciprocating encounters with the state, when the heretics' subversive polysemy is appropriated into the state's repressive program for religious meaning and identity. This redoubling is most visible in a simple incident related in the Chaundler-Sterte confession: "They did prohibite bearing of weapons, but at the length, perceiuing them selues to be noted and marked for the same, they haue allowed the bearing of staues."⁷⁸

So far we have been tracing the ability of Familist discourse to deconstruct the ideals of attribution and clarity that Elizabethan authorities applied in an effort to control it. But the Family of Love was not a group of outsiders in any

clear sense: the Church of England could penetrate this heretical conclave just as thoroughly as the heretics infiltrated the national communion. And the conflict was not merely one of discourses: the authorities had more actual power. The results for the struggle we have been tracing, a struggle over the forms of signification, attribution, interpretive authority, and finally over the discursive construction of the self, are played out in the Surrey sect's apparently trivial shift in heretical strategy. The possible importance of refusing to bear weapons is suggested in Henry Ainsworth's attack on *Terra Pacis*: Ainsworth objected that Niclaes's communist and pacifist utopia placed in question the magistrate's right to the sword and, with it, all magistracy.⁷⁹ Likewise, the Surrey Familists' refusal to carry weapons would indicate that no one should, that the magistrate should not have the power of physical force over anyone. The gesture attempts to level a social hierarchy by inverting an accepted signification. But any justice of the peace could read the inverted sign, fix its meaning, and then proceed to wield his unimpaired power. Obligated to resume bearing weapons, the Familists double the possible meanings of this act—it can now mean either submission to or protest against a weaponed prince—and thus render it illegible, meaningless in the sheer surplus of possible meanings. But at the same time we must note that they had no recourse outside of the prevailing system of signs. In attempting first to reverse and then to destabilize a socially fixed signification, they continue to be captured in it, captured by force: their staves “mean” obedience. The “subversives,” to preserve themselves, have spoken their own prohibition; the heretics' subversive sign has been subverted by a textuality of the state.⁸⁰

To sum up: the state responds to the subversive, and contradictory, Familist notion of a divine human identity by generating its contradiction between legally fixed personal identity and the absorption of persons into an official credal program. Familists reciprocate by acts of cooperation that display the state's contradiction and are, to that extent, subversive. However, their cooperative gestures simultaneously specify and dissolve Familist groups and Familist persons: in a sense, identity is named in order to be abandoned, and abandoned in order to be preserved. And, while Familists specify their own separateness by silent dissent from the discursive forms they reproduce, they have nonetheless placed that very separateness within a system that proceeds to affect its definition. Finally, Familists rescue an identity whose outlines have been limned, in part, by the state's antagonistic formulation of it.

But the reverse is also true: as the state works to enforce an anti-Familist strategy, it undermines the coherence of identity and referentiality in orthodox discourse. In the process of insisting on clarity and sincerity, the state has effectively *required* ambiguous speech. Familism—at once highly conciliatory and sharply opposed to the state church, at once distinct from and congruent with it—can serve as an example of the broader effects of a nonseparating confession within the Church of England. It enables us to see that, in their interaction, dissent and

orthodoxy create sharp problems in the definition of identity and the firm establishment of meaning from which neither heretic nor orthodox believer can be immune.

Notes

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1. Alastair Hamilton's *The Family of Love* (Cambridge, 1981) provides primary and secondary bibliographies that supercede most earlier ones, and I am indebted throughout to his scrupulous account. Scholars particularly interested in English Familism should also consult the bibliography supplied by Joan Deitz Moss, "Variations on a Theme: The Family of Love in Renaissance England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1978): 186–87n.
 2. Jan van Dorsten, *The Radical Arts: The First Decade of an Elizabethan Renaissance* (London, 1970), 26–27.
 3. J. W. Martin, "Christopher Vitel: An Elizabethan Mechanic Preacher," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 10 (May 1979): 15–22; Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 119–20.
 4. See *ibid.*, 120–28.
 5. *Ibid.*, 131.
 6. *Ibid.*, 137.
 7. See Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 58; Julia Ebel, "The Family of Love: Sources of Its History in England," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 30 (1966–67): 336; William C. Johnson, "The Family of Love in Stuart Literature: A Chronology of Name-Crossed Lovers," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (Spring 1977): 95–112; and Joan Deitz Moss, "The Family of Love and English Critics," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 6 (April 1975): 35–52.
 8. Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 137–38; on Everard, see also Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, 51.
 9. *Ibid.*, 47–48, 55–57; George H. Sabine, ed., *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1941), 28–29.
 10. *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, 1953–82), 1:788; see Christopher Hill, "Milton the Radical," *TLS* 29 (November 1974): 1330; Johnson, "Name-Crossed Lovers," 110.
 11. Geoffrey Fillingham Nuttall, *James Nayler: A Fresh Approach* (London, 1954), 7; Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven, 1964), 27; Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 139; Ebel, "Sources," 332; George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1962), 788–89.
 12. *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. Austin Dobson, 3 vols. (London, 1906), 3:224; see Ebel, "Sources," 343.
 13. Differing definitions of Familism abound: see Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, 50–68; *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Henry Nicholas"; Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 24–39; Lynnewood F. Martin, "The Family of Love in England: Conforming Millen-

- arians," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 3 (October 1972), 102–4; and Moss, "Variations," 193–95.
14. Writing in Low German, Latin, and French, Niclaes composed and published twenty-three books. These include doctrinal tracts, prescriptions for worship and for the government of sects, utopian visions, hymn books, an allegorical play, and a primer for children. Many of these were translated into English by Vittels, probably on Niclaes's authority and under his supervision; Martin, "Christopher Vitel," 20. Since H. de la Fontaine Verwey's article, "The Family of Love," *Quaerendo* 6 (Summer 1976), 219–71, scholars have agreed that these English translations of Niclaes's works were probably printed in Cologne—not, as the *Short-Title Catalogue* records, in Amsterdam; A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640* (London, 1926; hereafter *STC*). There are at least five anonymous or pseudonymous works in English by Familists: anon., *The Power of Love* (London, 1643); Nazarenus Abia, *A Reproofe Spoken and Geeuen-Forth against all False Christians* (1575); Elidad, *A good and fruitful Exhortation unto the Familie of Love* (1574?); Tobias (Mede-holder mit H. Niclas), *Mirabilia opera Dei: Certaine wonderfull works of God, which hapned to H.N.* (London, 1575); S. W., *A newe balade or songe, of the Lambes feaste* (1574). Ebel speculates that Abia Nazarenus may be a pseudonym for Vittels; "Sources," 335.
 15. The Chaundler-Sterte confession is available complete only among Sir William More's papers in the Folger Library, Losely Ms. L.b.98. This essay depends on a slightly abbreviated version that John Rogers printed in *The Displaying of an horrible sect of grosse and wicked Heretiques* (London, 1578), sig. Ilv–H2v (the present quotation is from sig. H1r–v). This confession is also available, but again in incomplete form, in St. George Hyland's *A Century of Persecution Under Tudor and Stuart Sovereigns from Contemporary Records* (London, 1920), 103–12. Hamilton does not believe that the Surrey group was "Niclaesist" (*The Family of Love*, 117–19), but J. W. Martin argues on the basis of the original manuscript and other relevant papers in the Losely collections that it was; see his "Elizabethan Familists and Other Separatists in the Guilford Area," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 51 (1978): 90–91.
 16. See Carlo Ginzburg, *Il Nicodemismo: Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell'Europa del '500* (Turin, 1970); Moss, "English Critics," 41–43; and "Additional Light on the Family of Love," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 47 (1974): 103–5; Leon Voet, *The Golden Compasses*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1969–72), 1:29–30.
 17. For examinations of this problem, see Charles H. and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton, N.J., 1961); Basil Hall, "Puritanism: The Problem of Definition," in *Studies in Church History*, ed. G. J. Cuming, Papers read at the second winter and summer meetings of the Ecclesiastical History Society (Cambridge, 1965), 283–96; John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558–1640* (Stanford, Calif., 1964).
 18. Barbara Keifer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J., 1979), 14, ix. See also John King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1982), 6; Darryl J. Gless, "Measure for Measure," *the Law, and the Convent* (Princeton, 1979), xi–xii; Andrew D. Weiner, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Protestantism: A Study of Contexts* (Minneapolis, 1978), 5–7.
 19. See Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Berkeley, 1967), esp. 14 and part 1, chap. 1, "The Church of England and the English Church," 22–28; and "Towards a Broader Understanding of the Early Dissenting Tradition," in *The Dis-*

- senting Tradition: Essays for Leland H. Carlson, ed. C. Robert Cole and Michael E. Moody (Athens, Ohio, 1975), 3–38. *Church papist* is the contemporary term for Catholics who attended Church of England services; their activities are more complex but just as important as those of proper “recusants,” that is, Catholics who refused to “go to church.” See John Bossy, “The Character of Elizabethan Catholicism,” *Past and Present* 21 (1962): 39–59, esp. 42–43; and *The English Catholic Community, 1570–1850* (New York, 1976), 37–39, 44, 121–25.
20. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980), esp. chap. 2, “The Word of God in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” pp. 74–114, exemplifies such an inquiry.
 21. Terry Eagleton, “Text, Ideology, Realism,” in *Literature and Society*, ed. Edward W. Said, Selected Papers from the English Institute, n.s. 3 (Baltimore, 1978), 152.
 22. *Ibid.*, 157.
 23. For a consideration of the consequences for the heretics in particular, see my essay, “Heretical Discourse: The Politics of Familist Language,” in Richard C. Trexler, ed., *Persons in Groups: Social Behavior as Identity Formation in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Papers of the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies (Binghamton, N.Y., 1985).
 24. Ebel, “Sources,” 331n.
 25. Moss, “Variations,” 193.
 26. Rogers, *The Displaying*, sig. C3v–C4v. The *OED* glosses *geyson* as a variant of *geason*: “scantily produced; rare, scarce, uncommon.”
 27. Elizabeth I, proclamation 652, “Ordering the Prosecution of the Family of Love,” in *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, 3 vols. (New Haven, 1969), 2:474–75.
 28. “The confession of Leonard Romsey deliuered vnto me Thomas Barwicke minister with his owne hand,” PRO, SP 12 cxxxiii, 55; reprinted in Moss, “Variations,” 190–91. See Moss’s cogent commentary on these difficulties in *ibid.*, 191–95.
 29. [Hendrick Niclaes], *Evangelium Regni: a joyfull message from the kingdom published by the holie Spirit of the Love of Jesu Christ, and sent-fourth unto all Nations of People, which loue the Trueth in Iesu Christ. Set-fourth by HN, and by him perused a-new and more-distinctlie declared* (Cologne?, 1575?).
 30. Moss, “Variations,” 193–94.
 31. Niclaes, *Evangelium Regni*, sig. 55v, 81v–82r; Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, 58–66.
 32. [Hendrick Niclaes], *Proverbia HN. The Prouerbes of HN. Which hee in the Dayes of his Olde-Age, hath set-fourth as Similitudes and mystical Sayings* (Cologne?, 1575?), 6v–7r.
 33. Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 6–9.
 34. *Ibid.*, 10–12.
 35. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon, 2 vols. (London, 1976), 2:743–47.
 36. Rogers, *The Displaying*, sig. H2v, I5r.
 37. Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 56–59.
 38. [Hendrick Niclaes], *Terra Pacis. A true testification of the spirituall Lande of Peace, which is the spirituall Lande of Promise, and the holy Citee of Peace or the heauenly Ierusalem: and of the holy and spirituall People that dwel therin: as also of the Walking in the Spirit, which leadeth therunto. Set-fourth by H.N.: and by Him newly perused and more-playnly declared* (Cologne, 1575?), 41r–51r.
 39. Moss, “The Family of Love,” 35–51. Verwey dismantles another rumor of Niclaes’s profligacy in “The Family of Love,” 260.
 40. Johnson, “Name-Crossed Lovers,” 97.

41. Niclaes, *Terra Pacis*, 54v–55r. The ellipsis marks a new paragraph, not an omission.
42. [Hendrick Niclaes], *The Prophetie [sic] of the Spirit of Loue Set-fourth by HN: and by him perused a-new, and more distinctlie declared* (Cologne, 1574), 4v; emphasis mine.
43. Niclaes, *Evangelium Regni*, 32v.
44. Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 83–84, 87–89.
45. See, for instance, [Hendrick Niclaes], *An Epistle sent unto two daughters of Warwick from H.N. The oldest father of the Familie of Love. With a refutation of the errors that are therein; by H.A[insworth]* (Amsterdam, 1608), 47.
46. *Ibid.*, 61.
47. Niclaes, *Proverbia*, 7v.
48. Niclaes, *Prophetie*, 13r.
49. Niclaes makes the point allegorically in *Terra Pacis*: pilgrims seeking the city “Gods vnderstanding” can mistakenly take the path “Knowledge-of-good-and-euell” and wind up in a Babylon of scholars. The intellectual pride and academic hierarchies of that alarmingly familiar destination are opposed to the virtuous renunciation of pilgrims who “stand submitted vnder the Obedience of the Love”; 29v–34v, 48r. Here, as elsewhere, Niclaes uses “the Loue” as a synonym for Familist doctrine.
50. Niclaes, *Proverbia*, 43r–v.
51. Rogers, *The Displaying*, sig. I5v.
52. Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1958), studies this strategy in depth.
53. See STC and Hamilton’s bibliography, *The Family of Love*, 170.
54. *Ibid.*, 55, quoting from Tobias, *Mirabilia opera Dei*, 91.
55. Niclaes, *Proverbia*, 32v.
56. *Ibid.*, 32r.
57. Niclaes, *Terra Pacis*, 72r.
58. Niclaes, *Proverbia*, 22v.
59. Rogers, *The Displaying*, sig. H2r.
60. *The Basilikon Doron of James VI*, ed. James Craigie (Edinburgh, 1944), 15–16.
61. *A Supplication of the Family of Loue (said to be presented in the Kings royall hands, known to be dispersed among his loyall Subiectes) for grace and fauour. Examined, and found to be derogatorie in an hie degree, vnto the glorie of God, the honour of our King, and the Religion in this Realme both soundly professed & firmly established* (Cambridge, 1606), 56.
62. “Last of all they haue Prophecies, that all Maiesties, Dominions, Powers, and governments whatsoeuer, shall, and make prayers, that they may, submit themselues vnto the seruice of the Loue (euen as the Puritanes would have kings to submit their scepters, to throw downe their crownes before the Church, yea and to licke vp the dust of the feet of the Church, and yelde obedience vnto the presbiterie, and also that themselues, as Kings, and onely Kings shall euerlastingly liue and raigne yea and do raigne vpon the earth)”; *A Supplication*, 19.
63. Folger Library, Losely Ms. L.b.99, reprinted in J. W. Martin, “Elizabethan Familists,” 92–93.
64. *Ibid.*, 93.
65. Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979), 148.
66. Moss, “Variations,” 190.
67. *The Confession and declaration of R. Sharpe, and other of that secte, tearmed the Famelie of Loue, at Pawles Crosse in London the xij of Iune. An. 1575* (London, 1575).
68. See, for example, William Wilkinson, *A Confutation of Certaine Articles Delivered by HN vnto the Familie of Love* (London, 1579), 61r–63v.
69. Elizabeth I, “Ordering the Prosecution,” 474–75.

70. Moss states that it is not possible to find actual recommendations of lying in Niclaes's works, "Additional Light," 105; see also Moss, "English Critics," 43. She cites Niclaes's *Exhortatio I* (Cologne, c. 1574), 20v–21r, to show that he actually forbids it: "Let not lies or falsehood be witnessed or spoken of you, but love the trueth and righteousness with all your heart." But it is clear that English Familists lied and encouraged each other to lie. Familist Nicodemism provides a useful gloss on this disagreement between sixteenth- and twentieth-century interpreters of Niclaes. Though he would not have called it lying, Niclaes *did* endorse a policy of simulation, of obeying the magistrate in all things, even if he or she demanded participation in an objectionable ritual or a recantation of Familism itself. This policy probably did make Familism attractive to some who lacked religious convictions of their own or who were willing to serve the tumultuous times. But Verwey, Voet, and van Dorsten have shown that Familist simulation derives from the positive spiritualist doctrine of divine harmony, according to which all churches, rites, and nations and peoples are united in God and divided only in the illusions of this world; H. de la Fontaine Verwey, "Trois hérésiarques dans les Pays-Bas du XVI^e siècle," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 16 (1954): 312–30; Voet, *Golden Compasses*, 1:25–30; van Dorsten, *Radical Arts*, passim; see also Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 67–70, 72–73, on the "politiques." Only with these complications in mind can we run the risk of repeating anti-Familist polemics by calling utterances like those described in the next paragraph "lies."
71. Wilkinson, *A Confutation*, 61v.
72. Moss, "Variations," 191.
73. Rogers, *The Displaying*, sig. H2v.
74. "The confession of sele ely and mathew / beinge of the famely of Love. . . ," British Library, Harley Ms. 537 f. 110, reprinted in James Hitchcock, "A Confession of the Family of Love, 1580," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 43 (1970): 85–86. Parenthesized material is supplied by Hitchcock.
75. John Knewstub, *A Confutation of monstrous and horrible heresies, taught by H.N. and embraced of a number, who call themselves the Familie of Loue* (London, 1597), 55v.
76. *Ibid.*, 35v. The square brackets are Knewstub's.
77. Rogers, *The Displaying*, sig. H2r.
78. *Ibid.*, sig. I6v–I7r.
79. Niclaes, *An Epistle*, 51–54 (Ainsworth's commentary); *Terra Pacis*, 14r, 41r–56.
80. For another analysis of equivocation and the political contradictions it entails, see Steven Mullaney, "Lying Like Truth: Riddle, Representation and Treason in Renaissance England," *ELH* 47 (1980): 32–47.