SHAME IN SHAKESPEARE

Ewan Fernie

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical study of the theme of shame in Shakespeare. The first chapter defines the senses in which shame is used. Chapter Two analyses the workings of shame in pre-renaissance literature. The argument sets aside the increasingly discredited shame-culture *versus* guilt-culture antithesis still often applied to classical and Christian Europe; then classical and Christian shame are compared. Chapter Three focuses on shame in the English Renaissance, with illustrations from Spenser, Marlowe, Jonson, and Milton. Attention is also paid to the cultural context, for instance, to the shaming sanctions employed by the church courts. It is argued that, paradoxically, the humanist aspirations of this period made men and women more vulnerable to shame: more aware of falling short of ideals and open to disappointment and the reproach of self and others. The fourth chapter is an introductory account of Shakespearean shame; examples are drawn from the plays and poems preceding the period of the major tragedies, circa. 1602-9. This lays the groundwork, both conceptually and in terms of Shakespeare's development, for the main part of the thesis, Part Two, which offers detailed readings of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. In each case, a consideration of the theme of shame illuminates the text in question in new ways. For example, an exploration of shame in *Hamlet* uncovers a neglected spiritual dimension; and it is argued that, despite critical tradition, shame, rather than jealousy, is the key to *Othello*, and that *Antony and Cleopatra* establishes the attraction and limitation of shamelessness. The last chapter describes Shakespeare's distinctive and ultimately Christian vision of shame. In a tail-piece it is suggested that this account of Shakespearean shame casts an intriguing light on a little-known interpretation of Shakespeare's last days by the historian E. R. C. Brinkworth.

Declarations

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(1) I, Ewan Fernie, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 85, 000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date: 31. 8. 1998 **Signature of candidate:**

(2) I was admitted as a research student in October 1994 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in October 1994; but, as after a year I changed the topic of my research, the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1995 and 1998.

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Contents

Part One

1 What is Shame?
2 Shame before Shakespeare
3 Shame in the Renaissance
4 An Introduction to Shakespearean Shame

Part Two

5 Hamlet
6 Othello
7 King Lear
8 Antony and Cleopatra
9 Coriolanus
10 Conclusion
11 Bibliography

1

What is Shame?

This thesis has two main objectives. The first is to demonstrate Shakespeare's substantial but hitherto little acknowledged preoccupation with shame.[1] The second to trace the scope of his richly particular conception of it. These objectives necessitate certain preliminaries. Since shame is a slippery thing often misunderstood, and especially since a mistaken anthropological notion of shame is in wide circulation, I offer a working definition below. Since literary shame is by and large a critical *terra incognita,* and it is difficult or impossible to say what is distinctive about Shakespearean shame without background, I then briefly discuss the motif as it appears in previous literature and define the immediate context of shame in renaissance life and books.

shame

Shame is the recognition and experience of a degradation or corruption of identity: a loss of being. Families, nations, races may suffer collective shame, but the subject of shame is centrally the individual human person as he exists in society and in his conscience. The most intense, and painful, case is when he is ashamed of himself (in this period the protagonist is typically a man). Normally, shame takes the form of falling short of a specific standard derived socially or by religious revelation: for example, 'a soldier never runs away, but I have done so: I am no true soldier'. This negative self-apprehension is experienced as debasement, defilement, or disfigurement; in the worst case, spiritual death. It alienates self from self, hence the immediate physiological effects of blushing, fluster, and loss of agency; it brings a strong sense of nakedness and exposure, producing an urgent desire to be concealed and hidden. It generates the wish not to be what one is or has become, which in extreme cases may lead to suicide, but may also motivate reformation and rebirth. Sense of shame is knowledge of what is shame-producing; it operates as a form of restraint and forbearance.

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[1] There is no major book on literary shame. Christopher Ricks' *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) is not about shame. Over the years there has been a trickle of work on shame in Shakespeare: Robert Hapgood, 'The Life of Shame: Parolles and *All's Well*', *Essays in Criticism* 15 (1965), 269-78; William F. Zak, *Sovereign Shame: A Study of King Lear* (Lewisburg: Associated University Presses, 1984); Nancy A. Cluck, 'Shakespearean Studies in Shame', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 (1985), 141-51; Burton Hatlen, 'The "Noble Thing" and the "Boy of Tears": *Coriolanus* and the Embarrassments of Identity', *English Literary Renaissance* 27 (1997), 393-420. In the nineties, there has been a surge of feminist / Foucauldian interest in the subject represented by Lynda E. Boose, 'Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991), 179-213; Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Laura Lunger Knoppers, '(En)gendering Shame: *Measure for Measure* and the Spectacles of Power', *English Literary Renaissance* 23 (1993), 450-71. There has not, before now, been a full-length general study.

The immediate source of shame may be personal judgement or the judgement of others. In the second case, the subject may accept the censure of others or feel it shameful to be seen in a bad light irrespective of self-assessment. In literature as in life, many are susceptible to public disgrace but less concerned with what it is that is disgraceful; mortified by exposure but unrepentant. As the inventors of the stocks and the pillory well knew, the actual presence, the gaze, of a hostile or accusing audience is a strong stimulus to shame; public scorn is known as shaming. Depending on whether the subject discounts the reproach of inferiors or feels all the more degraded by it, he may or may not feel ashamed before an unworthy audience.

Besides the distinctions between private and public shame, there are other distinctions to be made. The subject of shame may be ashamed of himself directly or because of others upon whom his honour depends: the closer the connection the greater the shame here; the disgrace of parent, spouse, child, is especially grievous. There is also a gender difference: masculine shame traditionally derives from weakness or lack of power, feminine shame from unchastity or other intemperance. And shames may be distinguished morally: amoral shame is loss of personal power or prestige, moral shame the loss of virtue as goodness; the former typically leading to renewed, sometimes violent, self-assertion, the latter to repentance.

It is worth noting that traditionally feminine shame is more ethical than its masculine counterpart. I shall suggest later that Christianity, with its radical programme of meekness, humility, and love, seeks to abolish or redirect manly disgrace and shame and reconceives low status and lack of power as positive, as a blessed state. For the Christian, only wickedness and impiety are shameful. Another word for both the feminine and the Christian sense of shame is modesty: I will argue later that it is this kind of shame which Shakespeare seems most to value.

shame, embarrassment, and guilt

Having offered a first definition of shame, it is now necessary to distinguish it from the related phenomena of embarrassment and guilt. Embarrassment is a weak and transient form of shame: shame is absolute failure, embarrassment failure in a given situation. Personal embarrassment arises when the subject feels degraded in a way which does not implicate what he essentially is. An embarrassing situation typically presents a difficult demand: a table laid with unfamiliar cutlery, a question imperfectly understood, being discovered in a physically private situation. The crucial distinction is between shame and guilt. According to philosopher Gabriele Taylor, 'Guilt, unlike shame, is a legal concept';[2] it is responsibility for offence. Whereas shame is focused inward, on the damaged self, guilt focuses outward, on the subject's transgression or the violated victim or law or other authority.

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[2] Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 85. What I have said about embarrassment also derives from this book. Taylor writes well about the tension and confusion typically associated with the emotion (p. 69).

Conscience is a sense of guilt; a clear conscience is an awareness of freedom from guilt. Much shame has nothing in common with guilt, because it is not to do with wronging another or breaking a law; although it can operate in that context, and then the two things come together. They may still be conceptually distinguished. Guilt is other-directed, shame comes from within. Bernard Williams supplies a helpful example: 'In a moment of cowardice, we let someone down; we feel guilty because we have let them down, ashamed because we have contemptibly fallen short of what we might have hoped of ourselves'.[3] The two emotions are also distinguishable by their effects. Shame requires renegotiation of the subject's relationship with himself; guilt negotiation with the party offended, usually by accepting punishment from them or offering some other compensation. Guilt is the oppressive consciousness of a duty still to be discharged, a debt yet to be paid; that is why it is often imaged as a burden. It is a function of doing and interacting; shame is a function of being.[4]

Because of the overlap of guilt and conscience with shame, the cases of moral shame discussed below usually involve some element of guilt: I try to distinguish shame and guilt as above, but it is important to bear in mind that what is experienced and what is represented is a mixed state.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare uses the telling phrase 'sovereign shame'.[5] Today the overmastering power of shame seems a remote idea. In an unashamed age, we tend to think of shame as less serious than guilt. Yet it is possible to argue that it can be morally more effective. Williams points out that whereas guilt can direct a person to his victims and demand from him reparation in the name of what has happened to them, only shame can help him to understand his relationship to his own guilty deeds and thus enable him to rebuild the self that committed them. In other words, 'The structures of shame contain the possibility of controlling and learning from guilt, because they give a conception of one's ethical identity, in relation to which guilt can make sense. Shame can understand guilt, but guilt cannot understand itself'.[6] Moreover, the territory of shame is far wider, covering the province of guilt and much besides; it can extend into most areas of personal life.

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[3] *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 91.

[4] On this point see H. M. Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York: Science Editions, 1958), pp. 49-56.

[5] The Oxford quarto text of *King Lear* (*The History of King Lear*) in the compact edition of *The Complete Works*, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17.43.

If integrity is the condition of selfhood, shame is an alarm bell for spiritual danger, as bodily pain is for physical threat: a warning that the subject's identity is in peril. It is not always reliable; the subject may later find that he has accepted under pressure a standard not really his own. Alternatively, he may decide that his sense of self is unrealistic or impossible and so revise it: here shame penetrates illusion, and is a form of self-discovery. But if the subject has truly fallen short, shame is the signal to make amends; and if he is irrevocably debased and broken, it is shame which asks the hard question whether to go on living on such terms.[7] Sense of shame is the knowledge, the faculty for perception, of what would be unbecoming or impossible for the person he takes himself for: to be shame*less*, regarding nothing as shameful, is to be without self-respect. Thus reasonable shame is like an immune system maintaining identity in a perilous world. It is the emotion of self-loss, but, in Taylor's phrase, it is also 'the emotion of self-protection'.

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[6] Williams, p. 93.

[7] It is not just heroes of ancient Greece who in certain circumstances must answer this. Bruno Bettleheim, in an essay about life in a concentration camp quoted by Taylor on page 125, writes 'To survive as a man, not as a walking corpse, as a debased and degraded but still human being, one had first and foremost to remain informed and aware of what made up one's personal point of no return beyond which one would never, under any circumstances, give in to the oppressor, even if it meant risking and losing one's life. It meant being aware that if one survived at the cost of overreaching this point one would be holding on to a life that had lost all meaning'.

shame in literature

Given this importance and felt intensity, it would be surprising if shame had escaped representation in literature; and indeed it has not done so. A tradition of literary shame may be traced through such classical works as Homer's *Iliad*, Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Oedipus Rex*, Euripides' *Heracles*, and Seneca's *Phaedra*; such Old Testament stories as the Fall, Noah's drunkenness and nakedness, Tamar and Amnon, and, from the apocrypha, Susannah and the Elders; such medieval texts as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; such renaissance works as Marlowe's *Edward II*, Jonson's comedies, Milton's *Samson Agonistes,* Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*; and such eighteenth-century novels as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, right up to *The Scarlet Letter*, and Henry James, and in our own century Salman Rushdie's *Shame*. Part of the assertion here will be that shame has an important place at the centre of the Western tradition, in Shakespeare, as well as before him and after him.

As a subject, shame affords the writer compelling material: the immediate physical detail of blushing and gestures of concealment and covering up; scenes and scenarios of hiding and exposure, violence against the self and suicide, repentance and redemption. As a partly external social or religious experience, partly physical as well as intensely inward, and also as a vicarious spectacle, it is especially right for and germane to drama, the most physical, primitive, social, and ritualistic of all the forms of literature; partly because drama involves symbolic action and not just words; partly because it involves agonists and an audience. It is also an emotion which acts upon the audience's capacities for pity and fear. In particular, the tragic hero, as heightened representative, enacts and suffers an experience of shame which is imaginable to, and significant for, the society represented collectively and personally in the theatre. A crucial element of tragic catharsis is the purging of latent shame. This is explicit in the *Ajax* of Sophocles when the goddess Athena reveals the luridly shameful prospect of the protagonist's insane self-glorification amid slaughtered sheep and oxen. His enemy Odysseus speaks not just for himself, but also to and for the audience that shares his vision: 'This touches / My state as well as his. Are we not all, / All living things, mere phantoms, shadows of nothing?'.[8]

a note on shame-cultures and guilt-cultures

I wish the reader to set aside altogether while reading this thesis the still traditional distinction between 'shame-cultures' and 'guilt-cultures' first essayed by Margaret Mead,[9] fully formulated by Ruth Benedict,[10] and influentially applied to classical Greece by E. R. Dodds.[11] It is very much in use, but increasingly rejected by scholars who have given the matter close attention as both inaccurate and oversimple.[12] According to Benedict's formulation, 'True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behaviour, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin'.[13] This denies the intrinsic relation between the individual and his culture, and misconceives both shame and guilt. Benedict says of shame, 'A man is shamed either by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasying to himself that he has been made ridiculous';[14] but that defines one case, that of public shame, only - and not very well, because such shame may be induced by disgust or horror as well as by ridicule. A man may equally be self-shamed simply because he feels he has let himself down. Further, even Benedict's man, as she omits to say, is ashamed because *he himself* regards reputation as integral to his being. This confirms that a feeling of shame is never purely external; as Cairns puts it, 'in every case [it] is a matter of the self's judging the self in terms of some ideal that is one's own'.[15] Guilt is no less external than shame: clearly not every prisoner pronounced guilty actually feels so. Where felt, guilt is no more often 'an internalised conviction of sin' than a sense of having offended arbitrary or conventional social mores, as in, for example, a parking offence. In fact, as suggested above, shame points at the self, whereas guilt points to the other, the non-self. The shame-culture / guilt-culture antithesis is really a poor expression of a different contrast between cultures which operate by internal sanctions and cultures where sanctions are external. This is not to consign the relevant work of anthropologists entirely to the dustbin; they have convincingly shown that societies such as Japan and ancient Greece depend heavily on the sanction of social shame. And it may be that the redundant antithesis can be salvaged to distinguish (shame-)cultures where morality centres on the self in the world and (guilt-)cultures where morality centres rather on the relations of the self with others and the law. But, as it stands, Benedict's formulation has fostered a crudely mistaken notion of shame as simply public, which is both inadequate to the experience and to its representation in literature.[16]

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[8] 126-8, in *Electra and other plays*, trans. E. F. Watling (London: Penguin, 1967).

[9] *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937).

[10] *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1947).

[11] *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

[12] See, for instance, Hugh Lloyd-Jones, 'Ehre and Schande in der griechischen Kultur', trans. H. G. Nesselrath, *Antike und Abendland* 33 (1987), 1-28; Werner Gundersheimer, 'Renaissance Concepts of Shame and Pocaterra's *Dialoghi Della Vergogna*', *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994), 34-56; the introduction to J. G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers (ed.), *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 6-8; and, for a fuller discussion, Douglas L. Cairns, *Aidos: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 27-47.

[13] p. 233.

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[14] p. 233.

[15] p. 16.

[16] An example of specifically critical problems caused is Albert S. Gérard's study of shame and guilt in successive revisions of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, *The Phaedra Syndrome* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), seriously flawed by his reverent adherence to Benedict.

2

Shame before Shakespeare

Up till now I have left history out of this account, but of course shame has a history like everything else; and also an anthropological prehistory. Shame in history is a variable constant. It has been part of experience for as long as we have had a concept of identity and individuals have had selves, however far those are conceived and felt according to family and communal norms. But periods which place a premium on selfhood are more susceptible to shame.[1] And as the cultural configuration of the self changes, shame alters too, so what is shameful in one epoch is not always so in the next. The historical notions of shame described in this chapter, classical and medieval, combine in the Renaissance, and were elements of the intellectual atmosphere which Shakespeare breathed, and Part Two of the thesis addresses their interrelationship. The following generalisations are offered in humble awareness that 'classical' and 'medieval' each characterise periods lasting for a millennium.

classical shame

The roots of literary shame reach back as far as the Western literary tradition itself, to the literature of antiquity and the Bible. Shakespeare took the shamelessness of Titus Andronicus and the shameful stories of Lucretia's rape by Tarquin and of Antony's infatuated decline directly from Roman history; and also educed the classical concept of shame from Seneca and others. The importance of shame in the classical period had been recognised long before 1951 when, applying Benedict's theory, E. R. Dodds designated ancient Greek civilisation a 'shame-culture'.[2] More recently, there have been two books on the subject: Bernard Williams' *Shame and Necessity* and Douglas L. Cairns' Aidos (the Greek word the many senses of which include shame), both published in 1993.

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[1] A high shame threshold is found in cultures with a debased view of the self.

Greek and Roman thinkers, with the possible exception of the pre-Socratic Democritus, gave no extended attention to shame - perhaps they took it for granted - but nonetheless produced considerable insights. The Greek poet Hesiod distinguishes between good shame, which derives from modesty, and bad shame, which derives from poverty.[3] Democritus makes an important distinction, and one which has eluded or been overlooked by many later thinkers, including Dodds, when he urges, 'Do not say or do what is base, even when you are alone. Learn to feel shame in your own eyes much more than before others'.[4] Shame is a prominent subject in the fragments which are all that is left of his corpus; his high regard for it follows from his perception that 'Repentance for shameful deeds is salvation in life'.[5] In Plato's *Phaedrus*, it is shame which reins in the bad horse of concupiscence - 'drenching his jaws and railing tongue with blood' -[6] guiding the chariot of the soul away from crude, corporeal beauty to the more resplendent ideal kind: the most memorable vindication of sexual shame in literature, and alluded to by Shakespeare in *Venus and Adonis* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.[7] For Aristotle, who particularly influenced shame-thinking in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, shame is, expectedly, a more prosaic affair: a feeling, not a virtue, defined as fear of ill-repute, which attends ill-action; praiseworthy in a younger man, but culpable in his elder, yet only because he should never give himself occasion to feel it.[8] For Cicero, a prescribed author for Elizabethans, shame is 'the sense of... decency which secures observance and firm authority for what is honourable'.[9]

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[2] pp. 17-18.

[3] Gundersheimer, 34.

[4] *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Katherine Freeman (ed.), (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), p. 113.

[5] Freeman (ed.), p. 99.

[6] 254, trans. J. Wright, in *'Ion' and Four other Dialogues by Plato* (1910; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1936), p. 242.

[7] See the Arden edition of *The Poems*, F. T, Prince (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1985), 259-324; and the Arden *Antony and Cleopatra*, John Wilders (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.5.49-52.

The imaginative literature of the period presents a living picture of classical shame. Shame is the motive force of *The Iliad*, and Odysseus is shamed when he returns home dressed in rags. In Book One, Achilles withdraws to his tents and refuses to fight because Agamemnon has publicly dishonoured him by robbing him of his captive, Briseis.[10] And when he learns that his friend Patroclus has been killed in battle by Hector, in the eighteenth book, he is seized by a greater shame; he feels he has 'proved a broken reed to Patroclus' and all the other Greek casualties, 'an idle burden on the earth' (p. 339). In a fit of despairing self-contempt, he abuses himself:

> He picked up the dark dust in both his hands and poured it on his head. He soiled his comely face with it, and filthy ashes settled on his scented tunic. He cast himself down on the earth and lay there like a fallen giant, fouling his hair and tearing it out with his own hands. (p. 337)

This gives way to a burning desire to eradicate shame.[11] Achilles takes to the field furiously, securing victory for the Greeks; he pays back shame with shame by not only slaying Hector, but stripping him, affixing his heels to his chariot, and dragging his corpse through the dust. Shakespeare's Troilus says of his brother, 'He's dead and at the murderer's horse's tail / In beastly sort dragg'd through the shameful field' (5.10.4-5).[12]

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[8] *Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (1953; London: Penguin, 1988), pp. 169-70.

[9] *De inventione*, trans. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1949), p. 331.

[10] trans. E. V. Rieu (1950; London: Penguin, 1988), p. 32.

[11] He says to Agamemnon, 'Our friends who fell to Hector in his hour of triumph are lying mangled on the plain - and you and Odysseus choose this moment to announce a meal! My way is different. I should make the men fight now, fasting and hungry, and give them a square meal at sunset, when we have wiped out our shame' (19, Rieu, p. 359). Martin Hammond's translation has 'disgrace' ((London: Penguin, 1987), p. 328).

And yet, not surprisingly, since, as I proposed in the last chapter, drama is the best vehicle for shame, the outstanding portraits of the phenomenon are found in Greek tragedy. Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Euripides' *Heracles*, revised by Seneca as *Hercules Furens*, are plays of shame equalled only by Shakespeare, and perhaps Racine. In *Ajax*, the chorus announces, ''Tis a powerful tale... and its offspring is shame / On all of us' (171-2); the hero is revealed covered in gore, exulting over the carcasses of dead animals he supposes to be those of his enemies: I have already noted that even his worst enemy, Odysseus, is smitten with shame at this prospect of human frailty. Thereafter, 'slowly, painfully' (309), Ajax regains his senses. We see him sitting among the slaughtered beasts weeping like a child, as he has never done before; then passing into a trance, refusing meat or drink. When at last he is able to speak, he tells his wife, Tecmassa, and the chorus of Salamian sailors, who vainly attempt to soothe him, that he wants to be hidden; he wants to die. He is tormented by the thought of facing his father; his pain ends only when he hurls himself on his sword.

In the better known *Oedipus Tyrannus*, it dawns on the hapless protagonist that he has killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta; and that thus it is he who has brought pestilence on his kingdom. His shame is a feeling of horrible nakedness: 'Alas! All out! All known, no more concealment! / O light ! May I never look on you again, / Revealed as I am' (1188-91).[13] He savages his eyeballs in an attempt to blind himself to his disgrace, so as not to see others looking at him: a concrete realisation of shame as the internal reflex of social judgement, a form especially prevalent under the strong honour code of antiquity. This is his pathetic exchange with Jocasta's brother Creon:

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[12] The Arden *Troilus and Cressida*, Kenneth Palmer (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1982).

[13] in *The Theban Plays*, trans. E. F. Watling (London: Penguin, 1968).

OEDIPUS: I only ask one thing, my gentle friend,
  Whose gentleness to such a one as I am
  Was more than could be hoped for. One thing only -
  For God's love - for your good, not mine -
CREON: What thing,
  So humbly begged?
OEDIPUS: Cast me away this instant
  Out of this land, out of the sight of man. (1428-35)

The shame-theme in *Heracles* recollects that of *Ajax*. Just as Athena drives Ajax into madness and shameful behaviour, so in Euripides' play Hera drives Heracles into the unwitting murder of his wife and children. Coming to consciousness and finding himself surrounded by their dead bodies, Heracles asks his aged father Amphityron who has killed them, only to be told that he has done it himself. He is overcome with sublime shame; and when, suddenly, Theseus, whom he once rescued from the underworld, enters, we witness some extraordinary theatre. Before our eyes, the great hero of legend curls up in a ball. His father tells Theseus what has passed. Theseus goes over to Heracles; Heracles waves him back. Theseus tries to persuade his friend from shame. Heracles, still huddled up, says he considers himself an abomination, deformed and branded; wherever he went he would be pointed at and cursed, even the 'earth [would] find a voice forbidding [him] to touch her' (1295-6).[14] He is alienated from himself; he hates his very arms that did the deed. When Theseus bids him rise, he finds he is paralysed with shame, and has to be led away like a cripple; or 'a wreck in tow' (1424). Seneca's *Hercules Furens* is less dramatic but poetically richer. The flavour of the climax anticipates *Othello*; it may also have given Shakespeare the conceit for guilt and shame of a permanently blood-stained hand which he deploys in *Macbeth*.[15]

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[14] in *Euripides*, trans. Arthur S. Way, vol. 3, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1912), 1295-6.

[15] This is Jasper Heywood's 1561 translation in fourteener couplets: 'What Tanais, or what Nilus els, / or with his persyan waue / What Tigris violent of streame, / or what fierce Rhenus flood, / Or Tagus troublesome that flowes / with Jbers treasures good / May my right hand now wash from gylt? / although Maeotis collde / The waues of all the Northen seae / on me shed out now wollde, / And al the water thereof shoolde / now passe by my two handes, / Yet will the mischiefe deepe remayne' (*Jasper Heywood and his Translations of Seneca's Troas, Thyestes, and Hercules Furens*, H de

These instances are among the most powerful realisations of shame in all literature. Greeks and Romans are particularly susceptible to worldly shame because they live in a relatively man-centred epoch, rather than the God-centred Middle Ages: issues of personal dignity and integrity, ignominy and self-loss are their chief concern. Heroic classical genres emphasise the warrior code, and regard most gravely any who fall short; but in medieval times this is softened by Christianity. It is noteworthy that there is no real distinction between public and private shame here: the protagonist's sense of shame in his own eyes and of shame in the eyes of others are one and the same. Nor is there any difference between amoral and moral shame: Ajax's dishonour - it would be more morally shameful had he fulfilled his intent - seems substantially the same as the shame which Oedipus and Heracles incur for incest and shedding the blood of their relatives. Where guilt occurs - as the agony of Oedipus over the body of Jocasta, and of Heracles over the corpses of his children - shame swamps it, and to that extent we may think of these texts as manifesting 'shame culture'. Another feature here is that shame is entirely circumstantial: no one is, or has reason to be, inherently ashamed of himself; with the advent of Christianity, the very condition of being human will become shameful. In the tragedies discussed, shame is pure accident; there is no sense of motive or *mens rea*: we are dealing with something close to ritual humiliation. Paradoxically, because the protagonist is not responsible, his shame is more absolute; he cannot release himself via repentance: death is his only exit. It could be argued that such plays represent the power of unconscious evil in man, but that could not be said of the Lucretia of Livy or Ovid, who takes her own life though she has clearly done nothing wrong, an action questioned by Shakespeare's Brutus in 'The Rape of

Lucrece'.[16] In despite of the refinements and didactic intentions of the philosophers, classical writers are most interested in the physical experience, the shattering effect of shame; how it wrecks otherwise exemplary lives. Shame here is severed from reformation and redemption. Tragic shame, which does not derive from character or deliberate action, and in *Ajax* and *Heracles* is explicitly associated with the supernatural, is a mysterious, possibly metaphysical power which strikes at random to reveal the brittle insecurity of human being.

Although the shame-theme is at its most intense and distinctive in such works as *Oedipus*, *Ajax*, and *Heracles*, it is diffused throughout classical literature. Euripides' *Hippolytus* introduces into the drama distinctions between private and public, moral and amoral, shame. Hippolytus rejects the improper advances of his step-mother out of independent ethical shame, but Phaedra is more susceptible to the shame of public disgrace. Terrified of scandal and exposure, she commits suicide, leaving a note stating that her step-son tried to rape her, which ultimately leads to his death. Seneca's Phaedra is at first more shameless than the Phaedra of Euripides, but finally more virtuous, killing herself in a passion of repentant shame after the death of Hippolytus. Shame is also an important theme in the Roman comedy which would eventually influence Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The standard Terentian plot involves the sexual misbehaviour of young men and the shame it brings on their fathers; this is the pattern in *Andria* (*The Andrian*), *Heautontimorumenos* (*The Self-Tormentor*), *Phormio*, and *Adelphoe* (*The Brothers*). One shameful episode in *Phormio* is morally problematic: the patriarch Chremes is exposed in front of his wife as a bigamist with another wife and daughter. In *Hecyra* (*The Mother-in-Law*), Pamphilus's shame over his new bride's pregnancy is happily

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Vocht (ed.), (Louvain: Auystpruyst, 1913), 2532-44). On the correspondence with Macbeth see Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 113.

[16] He says to Collatine, 'Thy wretched wife mistook the matter so, / To slay herself that should have slain her foe' (Prince (ed.), 1826-7).

dissipated when he discovers that he himself unwittingly raped her before their marriage; but this revealed villainy seems, from a Christian perspective, more shameful than raising another's child. Plautus introduces the stock story of the shaming of the *miles gloriosus* (swaggering soldier). The tricky slave in these plays is an attractively shameless type, the ancestor of Parolles and Falstaff.

Shame is also found in the fourth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas forsakes Dido: she is ashamed of being jilted and made of no account, to her own dishonour and the dishonour of her country; and, worse, by a pauper and castaway to whom she gave all. The incident presents an interesting example of shame breeding shame, for it is only when Aeneas goes that Dido is struck for the first time by the guilt and shame of having broken her vow of chastity to her deceased husband Sichaeus. This shame is powerfully conveyed by Virgil: Dido hears Sichaeus's voice accusing her; when she makes her votive offering, she sees the holy water turning black and the wine she is pouring turn to blood. Utterly disordered and unhappy, she casts herself into her own funeral pyre - the symbolic suggestion being that she is consumed in a fire of shame.[17] The shame-driven feats of arms achieved by Achilles before Troy may partly recommend the emotion, and it would have been better for Hippolytus and herself had Phaedra been guided by it, but classical literature for the most part reveals shame's destructive face.

biblical shame

A more positive portrait of shame is found in the Bible. Biblical shame has received scant scholarly attention, partly because Christianity was identified as a 'guilt culture' by Meads and Benedict; but shame is a salient feature of the sacred text -

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[17] It may be that shame is mixed with grief in Aeneas's reaction to the bleeding ghost of 'Phoenician Dido' whom he encounters in his descent into the underworld in Book Six (See *The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. C. Day Lewis (London: The Hogarth Press, 1954), 451 ff.).

and the influence of the Bible on Shakespeare may be taken for granted. Perhaps the most crucial episode of biblical shame is that which succeeds the Fall:

> And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou *wast* naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded that thou shouldest not eat? (Genesis 3.7-11)[18]

It is a gnomic text requiring some elucidation. Before they fell, Adam and Eve were unclothed but not naked, for they were perfectly innocent and pure and had nothing to conceal; but now polluted with sin and disobedience they are horribly exposed. This is shame which does not derive from the body but nevertheless is felt there. It is archetypal because shame often involves a sense of nakedness; the subject sees himself for the first time, and sees that he is, in some way, to some degree, obscene: Hamlet's consciousness of his 'too too sullied flesh' is relevant here.[19]

Later spiritual writers associated the Fall with the shame of sex.[20] Scriptural shame is consistently linked with being unclothed in a way which reveals a particular distrust of bodiliness and sensuality. Ham discovers his father Noah lying drunk and uncovered in his tent,[21] and there are such explicitly sex-hating passages as this one where God berates the Jews:

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[18] All biblical references are to the Authorised Version, chosen for familiarity and because the royal commissioners were instructed to follow the 'Bishop's Bible', one of the versions, another being the Geneva Bible, used by Shakespeare.

[19] See the Arden *Hamlet*, Harold Jenkins (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1982), 1.2.129 ff.

[20] For example, Augustine glosses Genesis thus, 'the first human beings had not been created blind, as the ignorant multitude think, since Adam saw the animals upon which he bestowed names, and of Eve we read: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight for the eyes to behold". Accordingly, their eyes were not closed, but they were not open, that is, attentive so as to recognise what a boon the cloak of grace afforded them, in that their bodily members did not know how to oppose their will. When this grace was lost and punishment in kind for their disobedience was inflicted, there came to be in the action of the body a certain shameless novelty, and thereafter nudity was indecent. It drew their attention and made them embarrassed' (*City of God*, Bk. 14, trans. Philip Levine, vol. 5, The Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1966), p. 357). In Milton, consumption of the forbidden fruit leads immediately to lustful fornication which leads to shame (*Paradise Lost*, Christopher Ricks (ed.), (London: Penguin, 1989), 9. 1034 ff.

> Therefore will I discover thy skirts upon thy face, that thy shame may appear. I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom, *and* thy abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? (Jeremiah 13.26-7)[22]

But sexual shame is essentially an Old not a New Testament theme; Christ does not insist on the shame of the woman taken in adultery, but tells her 'Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more' (John 8.11). In the Judaeo-Christian scheme, we are always naked to God - one of the reasons why, contrary to popular belief, shame plays as substantial a part in Western religion as guilt. The shame of nakedness in the Bible is associated with the day of doom when the soul will stand naked before the sovereign judge.

The Bible brings guilt and shame together. In the story of the Fall, shame derives from guilt, from transgressing the law of God; Milton calls it 'guilty shame' (*Paradise Lost*, 9.1058), which would be a good designation for biblical shame generally. What is peculiar to Genesis is that the shame of Adam and Eve is universally hereditary. According to the myth, the clothes we wear now are reminders of their transgression; the human race is tainted at its source: as the Epistle to the Romans puts it, 'Thou art inexcusable, O man' (2.1). The Bible makes shame basic, collective, and unavoidable. As Shakespeare says, 'As we are ourselves, what things are we! Merely our own traitors' (*All's Well that Ends Well*, 4.3.18-20).[23]

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[21] Genesis 9.20-27.

[22] The 'neighings' suggest the obscenities Iago utters to Brabantio to a very different end.

[23] The Arden *All's Well that Ends Well*, G. K. Hunter (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1967).

In classical literature, to be brought to shame is a great misfortune and calamity, but in the Bible, where being human is intrinsically shameful, to feel shame is virtuous and a condition of grace. Where transgression is added to original sin, guilt and shame are especially the dues of God; and repentant shame is often evoked. This is Ezra's vivid account:

> Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonied until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I arose from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God. And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. (9.4-6)

Another memorable instance of collective guilt and shame is when God rebukes the Jews for 'whoredoms' and 'iniquities' in Jeremiah. 'A voice was heard upon the high places' (3.21), the voice of a nation's shame; these are the words it speaks: 'We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day' (3.25). A more personal case is the shame that brings the immaturely sinful Ephraim home to God; he recalls, 'Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth' (Jeremiah 13.19). Religious shame is always such a *metanoia*, a turning back to the self as well as to God, because God is the source of being. It is enough to be saved and made new. The Psalmist writes, 'The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise' (51.17). Christ says, 'he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal' (John 12.25). When the prodigal returns shamefacedly to his father, his father kills the fatted calf for him. Here is shame as religious fulfilment.

Julia in *Measure for Measure* cries, 'I do repent me as it is an evil, / And take the shame with joy' (2.3.35-6).[24]

If shame is a virtue and a good in scripture, then, correspondingly, shamelessness is a wicked vice. In a memorable phrase, God tells the indifferently sinful people of Judah, 'thou hast a whore's forehead, thou refusest to be ashamed' (Jeremiah 3.3). Shamelessness is often equated with whoredom; the infamous Whore of Babylon is its terrible exemplar. Whereas shame saves, shamelessness brings damnation and death. God says of the unrepentant Jews, 'Were they not ashamed when they committed abomination? nay they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down' (Jeremiah 6.15).

Judaeo-Christian shame is less social, more personal: it takes place at the interface between the soul and God, whereas classical shame takes place at the interface between the individual and society. The marked gender distinction in secular culture between masculine shame, which derives from low power or status, and feminine shame, deriving from loss of chastity or temperance, is not found in Christianity. Christian shame is closer to female shame, Christian honour to female honour; the anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers writes, 'Grace, not honor, is the ideal enjoined by the Beatitudes. Indeed the contradiction is spectacular, the lesson clear: one must renounce one's claim to honour as precedence if one is to attain the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, or more precisely one must invert it, adopt the counter-principle represented by the honor of women, whose sex excludes them in theory from the agonistic sphere'.[25] The New Testament recommendation of meekness and humility neutralises or reverses the masculine and secular kind of disgrace. It is hard to think of a more conventionally shameful figure than Lazarus - who eats the scraps from other men's tables, whose exposed sores are licked by dogs

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[24] The Arden *Measure for Measure*, J. W. Lever (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1971).

[25] Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers (ed.), p. 242.

- but he is glorified in heaven. Luke writes, 'every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted' (18.14).[26] The Christian must accustom himself to, and even invite, shame and suffering in this life, which is of no account in the perspective of the ultimate. Proverbs puts it succinctly: '*When* pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom' (11.2). We read that the apostles 'departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for his name' (Acts 5.41). Paul says, 'Being reviled we bless; being persecuted we suffer it: being defamed we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and *are* the offscouring of all things unto this day' (1 Corinthians 4.12-14).

Christ is the great exemplar of patient acceptance of shame from the world. He says in Isaiah, 'I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed' (50.6-7). On Calvary, he is subjected to the most hideous indignities: stripped, crowned with thorns, mocked as the King of the Jews, and crucified between two thieves. Yet, as Hebrews says, he 'endures the cross, despising the shame' (12.2). If Adam and Eve brought shame into the world, then it is possible to say that Christ lovingly takes upon himself the shame of the world dating back to their Fall in order to save the world from prostration and shame. In literary-historical terms, his meek superiority to secular shame provides an absolute contrast to the extreme susceptibility of classical heroes. Christianity makes shame part of the pain and suffering of the postlapsarian state. It diminishes secular, manly shame; but emphasises spiritual shame as proof that we are not wholly fallen and enough to be redeemed by grace through Christ who bears our shames upon the cross.

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[26] 14.11 is very similar.

medieval shame

Shakespeare's inherited attitudes drew much on medieval English literary culture.[27] With the establishment of Christendom, a blend of secular and Christian culture, knighthood and chivalry after 1100 became religious in aspiration, and developed a horror of villainy, moral and social. Medieval shame is thus predominantly Christian, but with an admixture of secular shame derived from enduring honour codes. As in classical times, abstract thinkers of the period tend to stress its moral and ideal aspect. In Book Fourteen of *De civitate Dei,* St. Augustine isolates the sexual shame which is a consequence of the Fall; 'As things now stand, the soul is ashamed of the body's opposition to it'.[28] In *Summa Theologiæ*, St. Thomas Aquinas gives his otherwise Aristotelian account a strong Christian colouring: 'Only the feeble in virtue are ashamed for the unpopularity they suffer on account of virtue. The more virtuous he is the more a man scorns mere externals, pleasant or the reverse: so it is written in Isaiah, "Fear ye not the reproach of men"'.[29] Aquinas quotes Ambrose's approving and beautiful description of sense of shame as 'the companion and familiar of the mind at rest, which flees wantonness, is a stranger to any excess, loves sobriety, supports what is honourable and seeks what is beautiful'.[30]

T. N. Tentler has shown that shame played an important part in the theory of the confessional.[31] Canonical penance, which lasted from the middle of the second century to the middle of the seventh, prescribed public confession and penitence. As a substitute, ecclesiastical authorities of the later Middle Ages, especially after the

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[27] As with classical shame, a comprehensive account would involve a great deal that is excluded here, notably Langland and a description of the development of interiority in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

[28] p. 381.

[29] vol. 43, Thomas Gilby and Thomas C. O' Brien (ed.), (London: Blackfriars, 1963), p. 63.

[30] p. 57.

[31] See his *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 128-30.

Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, offered the shame of the penitent before the priest. Tentler suggests that in confessional literature 'we see the affirmation, even the exaltation, of a personal sense of shame'. Early in this tradition, the manual of Alain de Lille explains that confession is meant to provoke shame; Guido de Monte Rocherii contends that shame is a great punishment, but a salutary one, and that whoever is ashamed for the sake of Christ is worthy of pardon. It was held that the sinner could not avoid shame; for if he did not disclose his sins, they would be disclosed to all - saints, angels, the whole created universe - at the last judgement. According to Joel 3.11 and 12, this is to take place in the Valley of Jehosaphat. As may be inferred from the etymology 'Yahweh shall judge', or from Joel 3.14 where the same site is called 'valley of decision', it is a symbolic place; but most medieval exegetes also interpreted it literally, identifying it with the Valley of the Kidron. It is difficult to see how they envisioned any earthly setting accommodating the assembled universe, but such literalism makes the thought of shame and nakedness at the day of doom almost unbearable.

In a tradition going back to Hesiod, shame is often personified, giving literary shame the clarity and substance of a local habitation and a name. There are two memorable personifications of the medieval period. In the second battle of Prudentius's *Psychomachia* - a study of strife within the soul, which invented a new literary form that, I shall argue later, Shakespeare made use of - *Pudicitia* or sexual shame defeats *Libido*, and then, in a nice detail, washes her sword in the Jordan river. This makes shame an active, heroic virtue.[32] *The Romaunt of the Rose* presents a beguiling creation myth for Christian shame different from the Fall: Shame is conceived when her mother Resoun catches sight of her hideously ugly father Trespas. She is immediately appointed 'keper of the roser' (3059) -[33] guardian of virginity - by Chastity: a more usual defensive role. She is pictured as a fastidious, feminine spirit who sports 'a vayle in stide of wymple / As nonnys don in her abbey' (3865).

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[32] The British Museum has two illustrated manuscripts of Prudentius showing Pudicitia fighting Libido. The scene is reproduced in Kenneth R. Haworth, *Deified Virtues, Demonic Vices and Descriptive Allegory in Prudentius' Psychomachia* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1980), pp. 125-6.

A central medieval text of shame, though unknown to Shakespeare, is the anonymous *Gawain and the Green Knight*; it dramatises the uneasy relations between religious honour and shame and profane alternatives, and bears close examination. The poem begins with King Arthur and his court seated at a New Year's feast in Camelot. With the aim of testing the honour and renown of the Round Table, a green knight enters and challenges anyone present to strike his bare neck with an axe and be treated likewise a year hence; when this is greeted with silence, he scorns Arthur's knights. Arthur blushes violently: 'The blod schot for scham into his schyre face' (317);[34] but Gawain steps up to take the challenge. The collective honour of the Round Table is now invested in his person. He strikes off the green knight's head, but that mysterious figure picks it up and exits. A year later Gawain sets out to keep the other side of the bargain. To this point we are concerned with secular ideals of knightly honour and courage.

In the course of his journey, Gawain comes across a beautiful castle, where he is graciously received. His host persuades Gawain to stay and rest awhile; he himself hunts in the day, and he makes a humorous agreement with his guest to exchange anything he obtains in the chase with whatever Gawain may get while relaxing indoors. This brings in different, but still secular values of hospitality and courtesy. Each of the three days he spends there, Gawain is amorously approached by the beautiful lady of the house, but a fine sense of shame restrains him. This reversal of the comedy of seduction introduces a morally serious, potentially religious note; and begins a shift from the secular shame of impugned honour and renown to the potential spiritual shame of culpable wickedness. Each evening, Gawain tenders the kisses he has received for the quarry his host has slain in the hunt. But on the final night he withholds the lifesaving girdle his hostess has given him, which he hopes may protect him in his imminent meeting with the green knight, thus breaking the pact and his own truth.

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[33] in *The Riverside Chaucer*, Larry D. Benson (ed.), 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). All future reference to Chaucer to this edition.

[34] in J. J. Anderson (ed.), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanliness, Patience* (London: J. M. Dent, 1986).

He departs the next day, arriving later at the green knight's strange 'chapel', which signals a move from worldly to sacred considerations. He kneels to receive his blow; the green knight feints twice, then taps him with the blade, making a small incision in his neck. He explains he is the knight of the castle in different form, and that he feinted because of Gawain's faultless behaviour during two days as his guest, and cut him because of his infidelity in concealing the girdle. This has an implication of the day of doom, of spiritual nakedness and divine judgement. Gawain is powerfully afflicted with 'schame': he is temporarily paralysed; his heart is in uproar; 'Alle the blode of his brest blende in his face' (2372); he shrinks in horror from his accuser's words. When he regains his self-possession, he admits and repents his fault; whereupon the knight pronounces him as clean and sinless as a new-born babe. He is given back his life by grace. And the green knight also returns the emerald girdle to him, which he takes in humility to remind him of 'The faut and the fayntyse of the flesche crabbed, / How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylthe' (2435-6).

'The intensity of Gawain's shame is a dominating fact in the poem from this point on', according to J. A. Burrow, 'It is as if, in being delayed, it has accumulated at compound interest'.[35] On returning to Arthur's court, Gawain shamefacedly exhibits his scar, 'the bende of this blame I bere on my nek' (2506), 'the token of untrawthe that I am tan inne' (2509), and explicates the significance of his girdle: but king and court comfort him, agreeing to adopt his emerald sash as the badge of the Round Table. It is a brief and ambiguous ending. By fulfilling the green knight's challenge, Gawain has sustained and vindicated the secular honour of King Arthur's knights; and it may be that the court is simply indifferent to his spiritual shame. This would preserve the contrast between secular and sacred honour and shame which is the major theme of the poem. However, perhaps the court recognise that Gawain's shame, the shame of a good man who has erred, the shame that, in the Christian perspective, being constitutionally wayward and sinful creatures, all of us should feel, is singularly laudable. That, by a fine paradox, would make repentant shame Gawain's greatest glory and the mark of all true knights.[36]

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[35] 'Honour and Shame in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in *Essays on Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 126-7. Surprisingly, Burrow is the first writer to have isolated the theme of honour and shame in the poem and his essay is finely perceptive; but, since he follows the anthropologists, his interest is in codes of honour and shame: he does not draw out the Christian implications of the work, or discriminate secular from spiritual shame.

'The Noble Tale of the Sangrail' in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* presents a similar yet subtly different case of medieval Christian shame: it is a powerful text which brings us closer to the phenomenon. Whereas Gawain is ashamed of a specific sin, Lancelot suffers the shame of mortality, of the fallen creature coming into the presence of his creator: he is old Adam unredeemed by grace, his shame only loosely associated with his adultery with Guinevere. Like *Gawain*, this text, too, establishes the priority of Christian over secular shame. Lancelot is twice beset by shame before the grail. On the first occasion, he is

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[36] A secular variation on the theme of repentant shame which bears comparison with *Gawain and the Green Knight* is found in *The Knight of the Cart* by Chrétien de Troyes, who influenced subsequent Arthurian literature. Here the competition between everyday and higher ideas of shame is more explicit. Lancelot is obliged to get in a cart driven by a nasty dwarf in his search for the kidnapped Guinevere: being 'carted' was a familiar shaming ritual in both the medieval and early modern periods; Shakespeare alludes to the practice in *The Taming of the Shrew* (see Boose, 186). Lancelot is thus publicly scorned; and when he liberates Guinevere and even she treats him coolly, he bitterly surmises that this is because of the shame he has suffered for her sake. In fact Guinevere snubs Lancelot because he hesitated to enter the cart, thus offending against the perfection of love. Learning this, Lancelot, like Gawain, is ashamed and sorry; one of the lessons of both poems is that it is right to be ashamed of what, to our corrupt sense, may appear to be the smallest spiritual faults. Guinevere now forgives Lancelot; it is the Christian narrative of shame and redemption transposed into the key of sexual love.

'overtaken with sin' (p. 330),[37] paralysed and unconscious. When he awakes, a dreadful voice addresses him: 'Sir Lancelot, more harder than is the stone, and more bitter than is the wood, and more naked and barer than is the leaf of the fig tree! Therefore go thou from hence, and withdraw thee from these holy places' (p. 331). In his ensuing lamentations, Lancelot accuses himself, 'My sin and my wickedness have brought me unto great dishonour. For when I sought worldly adventures for worldly desires, I ever achieved them and had the better in every place, and never was I discomfited in no quarrel, were it right, were it wrong. And now I take upon me the adventures to seek of holy things, now I see and understand that my old sin hindereth me and shameth me, that I had no power to stir nor speak when the holy blood appeared before me' (p. 331). This shame is a spiritual boon, a painful renaissance of the soul, a reorientation to heaven. He resorts to an anchorite who shrives him. Reformed, he is granted another glimpse of the sacred vessel; but approaching it, he is once again struck with shame:

> Right so entered he into the chamber, and came toward the table of silver; and when he came nigh it, he felt a breath that him thought it was intermeddled with fire, which smote him so sore in the visage that him thought it burnt his visage; and therewith he fell to the earth and had no power to arise, as he that had lost the power of his body and his hearing and sight. Then he felt many hands which took him up and bore him out of the chamber door, and left him there seeming dead to all people. (p. 391)

Here are the familiar effects of shame exponentially increased: a burning face literally like being on fire; paralysis and dislocation from the self that is like death; shrinking and withdrawal experienced as a forced removal. Lancelot lies unconscious for twenty-four days and nights, which he perceives as punishment for so many years of adultery. In its different way this is as powerful as anything in classical literature. The theology is grimmer here than in *Gawain*: despite penance, Lancelot is still too sinful and unworthy to approach God. His shame is an experience of great distance from the creator; only his son, the Christ figure Galahad, is sufficiently pure to achieve the grail.

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[37] Helen Cooper (ed.), (Oxford University Press, 1998), p.470.

Knights and ladies can and do feel shame outside the context of Christian repentance. We have seen that Gawain and Lancelot have to learn the priority of Christian shame and at first are more susceptible to its secular counterpart, and that Arthur blushes when the green knight scorns the Round Table. In 'The Death of Arthur', the last book of Malory's epic romance, Lancelot and Guinevere are ashamed not of adultery, but only of exposure and lost reputation. The classic secular form of medieval shame is loss in combat: when, in 'The Death of Arthur', Lancelot fights Gawain and feels that warrior's supernaturally augmented might, 'Sir Lancelot wondered and dreaded him sore to be shamed' (p. 502). A more ancient instance is the shame of the 'battle-shirkers' who desert Beowulf in his time of need; they bear their shields 'ashamedly', and are reproached by Wiglaf who tells them that they will henceforth be wanderers and vagabonds upon the face of the earth (*Beowulf*, 2835 ff.).[38] In Chrétien de Troyes' *The Story of the Grail*, Greoreas recalls how Gawain forced him against his will to eat for a month with the hounds, his hands tied behind his back (p. 468).[39]

And yet, shame is often surprisingly minimised or reduced in medieval literature. This is partly because of the culture of Christian morality and meekness. St. Francis wrote that when he 'and his companions were called of God and elect to bear in their hearts and in their deeds and preach with their tongues the cross of Christ, they seemed and were men crucified... and because they desired rather to bear shames and insults for the love of Christ than the honours of the world and the respect and praise of men: yea, being reviled they rejoiced, and at honours they were afflicted'.[40] A similar reversal of shame is found in Chaucer's 'The Clerk's Tale'. Here the feudal lord Walter marries Griselda, daughter of Janicula, the poorest man in the village. Later, he takes her children from her and casts her off, to test her constancy. She shows no shame, requesting only to retain the smock she stands in, so as not to return to her father's house naked 'lyk a worm' (880). Adding insult to injury, Walter then asks her to come back and prepare his house for his new bride; even this she does without demur. In consequence, he restores her to her place at his side. The theme of 'The Clerk's Tale' is the shame that the Christian must patiently suffer in this world; it promises he or she will ultimately be relieved of such suffering. In two morality plays of the turn of the sixteenth century, Pity and Charity themselves were thrown in the stocks.[41] In the archetypal stories of the abasement of a proud king, shame is not a pain but a gift, teaching proper humility before God.[42]

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[38] trans. Michael Alexander (London: Penguin, 1973).

[39] in Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London: Penguin, 1991).

In addition to the diminished shame in medieval literature, there is also outright shamelessness. This appears in its most benign form in the Wife of Bath. Hers is a shameless worldliness: she does not deny the sanctity of virginity, but says, 'I nam nat precius' ('The Wife of Bath's Prologue', 148). She is wholly free of the constrictions of feminine modesty; she has had five husbands already and 'Welcome the sixte' (45)! It does her heart good to think that she has had her world in her time. Chaucer's Pardoner is more disturbingly shameless. His sexual ambiguity is an indicator of unwholesomeness and perversion. He is an itinerant cozener who operates under 'hew of hoolynesse' ('The Pardoner's Prologue', 422); he carries glass cases with him - 'my longe cristal stones' (347) - full of bones and rags which he presents to the credulous as sacred relics. He preaches against cupidity only to maintain his own: 'I rekke nevere when that they been beryed, / Though that hir soules goon a blackberyed!' (405-6). His most shameless moment is when, for a small fee, he offers to absolve the very pilgrims to whom he has just exposed himself; he will start with Harry Bailly, the 'most envoluped in sin' (942). To repay outrage with outrage, and express his sense of the Pardoner's obscenity, Bailly threatens to rip off his testicles and enshrine them 'in an hogges toord' (955). Daring and subversive but morally and spiritually disgusting, this shameless figure anticipates Marlowe's Jew of Malta, Jonson's Volpone, and Shakespeare's Richard III and Edmond.

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[40] *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi*, 5, trans. W. Heywood (London: Methuen, 1906), p. 10.
[41] See Maynard Mack, *King Lear in our Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 57.
[42] See Mack, pp. 49-51.

But beyond meekness and shamelessness there is still a lack of medieval literary shame. For instance, the tales of the Miller and the Reeve are so brisk and action-packed that the shame which their protagonists may or may not be suffering is irrelevant, although the Reeve takes the Miller's tale as a personal slight and frames his own in response. When Januarie is vouchsafed the disgraceful sight of his much younger wife making crude love to his squire in a pear tree at the end of 'The Merchant's Tale', he allows himself to be persuaded that it never happened. In 'The Death of Arthur', Arthur overlooks the adultery of Lancelot and his queen: 'the King had a deeming of it; but he would not hear thereof, for Sir Lancelot had done so much for him and for the Queen so many times that, wit you well, the King loved him passingly well' (p. 470). Even when the shameful affair is published to the world by the malicious Agravain and Mordred, Arthur takes up the cause of his offended honour with extreme reluctance; 'the tears burst out of his eyes, thinking of the great courtesy that was in Sir Lancelot more than in any other man' (p. 488). Such generous indifference to shame is inconceivable in a nobleman of the Renaissance: Othello murders his wife at the mere suggestion of adultery. Another example of diminished shame is Chaucer's Criseyde. She is not wholly insensitive to the disgrace of her betrayal of Troilus:

'Allas, for now is clene ago
My name of trouthe in love, for evermo!
For I have been falsed oon the gentileste
That evere was, and oon the worthieste!

'Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
Thorughout the world my belle shal be ronge!
And wommen most wol haten me of alle.
Alas, that swich a cas me sholde falle!

'Thei wol seyn, in as much as in me is,
I have hem don deshonour, welaway!
Al be I nat the first that dide amys,
What helpeth that to don my blame awey?
But syn I see there is no better way,
And that to late is now for me to rewe,
To Diomede algate I wol be trewe. (*Troilus and Criseyde*, 5.1053-71)

But her sense of fault here is at first subordinate to, and then entirely overtaken by, her fear of infamy; she sees herself as the unlucky victim of arbitrary scandal; and shame is put briskly aside at the end. Chaucer's Troilus, for his part, shows regret and sorrow but no sense of shame or humiliation when Criseyde gives him up for Diomede. Shakespeare, in contrast, provides a luridly shameful *coup de theâtre* where Troilus actually beholds the brazen Cressida breaking faith with him, and his agony obtains the proportions of spiritual crisis.[43]

This absence, diminution, dullness of shame in medieval literature may perhaps be accounted for, first, by the transcendental faith of an age which looks not to this world but the next; secular shame is often just not very meaningful to the persons of the Middle Ages. Thus when he is killed by Achilles, at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the rejected Troilus's 'lighte goost' travels 'ful blisfully... Up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere' (1087-8), where it looks down in contempt on earthly vanity. Second, the extreme pessimism of the prevailing view of man tends to deaden shame's impact, making it natural and expected: that is why Robert Henryson, in *The Testament of Cresseid*, is able to ascribe Cresseid's whoredom to fate and largely excuse her. In this epoch, shame is as often a condition, an atmosphere, as a disaster or tragedy. We shall see in the next chapter that in the Renaissance the case is wholly altered.

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[43] Rather than accept the truth of what he sees, Shakespeare's Troilus undergoes strange epistemological convulsions: 'This is, and is not, Cressid. / Within my soul there doth conduce a fight / Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate / Divides more wider than the sky and earth; / And yet the spacious breadth of this division / Admits no orifex for a point as subtle / As Ariachne's broken woof to enter' (5.2.145-51).

The tales in which Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims tell of life in the world contain little evidence of shame, but 'The Parson's Tale' - more of a sermon - redresses the balance. Though neglected by modern readers, it completes *The Canterbury Tales*, and is a crucial component in Chaucer's vision of life as an earthly peregrination to God. The Parson insists that 'A man sholde eek thynke that God seeth and woot alle his thoghtes and alle his werkes, to hym may no thyng been hyd ne covered. Men sholden eek remembren hem of the shame that is to come at the day of doom to hem that been nat penitent and shryen in this present lyf. For alle the creatures in hevene, in erthe, and in helle shullen seen apertly al that they hyden in this world' (1061-3). He enjoins a sincerely shamefast confession:

> confessioun moste be shamefast, nat for to covere ne hyden his synne, for he hath agilt his God and defouled his soule. And herof seith Seint Augustyn, 'The herte travailleth for shame of his synne'; and for he hath greet shamefastnesse, he is digne to have greet mercy of God. Swich was the confessioun of the publican that wolde nat heven up his eyen to hevene, for he hadde offended God of hevene; for which shamefastnesse he hadde anon the mercy of God. And therof seith Seint Augustyn that swich shamefast folk been next foryevenesse and remissioun. (983-6)

In *Cleanness*, the author of *Gawain* reflects on the immaculate resplendency of Christ in heaven, and asks how sinful man may join him there; his answer is through shrift, by the discipline of repentant shame:

> Yis, that master is mercyable, thagh thou be man fenny,
> And al tomarred in myre whl thou on molde lyvyes;
> Thou may schyne thurgh schryfte, thagh thou haf schome served,
> And pure the with penaunce tyl thou a perle worthe. (1113-16)

In the allegorical drama *Everyman*, the protagonist suffers shame in the extremity of death,[44] enabling him, in his last moments, to recognise his worldly ignorance and vanity, repent, reform, and be saved. All this returns us to the case of spiritual shame and in the last analysis it is the experience of constant exposure to God and the anticipation of unavoidable nakedness before Him and His creation that stirs the medieval imagination, and represents its most defining experience of shame; this which inspires and animates the most memorable representations of shame in the literature of the period.

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[44] 'O, to whom shall I make my moan / For to go with me in that heavy journey? / First Fellowship said he would with me gone; / His words were very pleasant and gay, / But afterward he left me alone. / Then spake I to my kinsmen, all in despair, / And also they gave me words fair; / They lacked no fair speaking, / But all forsook me in the ending. / Then went I to my goods, that I loved best, / In hope to have comfort, but there had I least; / For my goods sharply did me tell / That he bringeth many to hell. / Then of myself I was ashamed, / And so am I worthy to be blamed; / Thus may I well myself hate' (in *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, A. C. Cawley (ed.), rev. ed. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1981), 463-78).

3

Shame in the Renaissance

This chapter will give the contemporary context for Shakespearean shame. If there is less shame in medieval literature, there is more shame in the literature of the Renaissance, as in classical times. Shame has a role in most works of the period, and, as I shall show, a leading role in some. 'Shame heaped on shame!', Supervacuo's comment on *The Revenger's Tragedy* (4.3.15),[1] would be an appropriate epigraph here. Webster's phrase 'Only the deep sense of some deathless shame' points to the age's susceptibility.[2] And there are many more remarkable expressions of shame in the renaissance canon. Antonio, in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, raises his father's ghost with these words:

> O, in what orb thy mighty spirit soars,
> Stoop and beat downe this rising fog of shame,
> That striues to blur thy blood, and girt defame
> About my innocent and spotless browes. (3.1.27-30)[3]

Francis Quarles has an affecting poem on the subject.[4] And Margaret Cavendish imagines 'The House of Shame wherein Dishonour Lives', where 'Mouths are the Taps, whence Spue for Drink doth flow', there are 'Kitchens of Slander, where Good Names are Burn'd', and 'The Matrimonial Bands Dishonour link / With Infamy, which is as Black as Ink'.[5]

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[1] Cyril Tourneur, Brian Gibbons (ed.), rev. ed. (Ernest Benn Ltd.: London, 1974).

[2] *The White Devil*, John Russell Brown (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1968), 2.1.390.

[3] John Russell Brown (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1968).

[4] 'Qvotidian fevers of reproach, and shame, / Have chill'd our Honor, and renowned Name; / We are become the by-word, and the scorne / Of Heaven and Earth; of heaven and earth forlorne; / Our captiv'd souls are compast round about, / Within, with troops of feares; of foes, without; / Without, within, distrest; and, in conclusion, / We are the haplesse children of confusion; / Oh, how mine eyes, the rivers of mine eyes / O'erflow these barren lips, that can devise / No dialect, that can expresse or borrow / Sufficient Metaphors, to shew my sorrow!' (*Divine Poems* (London: Printed by M. F. for I. Marriot (etc.), 1632), p. 468).

[5] in *Poems and Phancies* (London: Printed by William Wilson, 1664), p. 205.

One indicator of shame's almost palpable presence in renaissance literature is its markedly frequent and vivid personification. The malevolent figure of Worldly Shame - as opposed, presumably, to spiritually beneficial religious shame - appears on the early modern stage in the 1550s interlude *Nice Wanton* to tell Xantippe that her daughter has died of pox and her son has been hanged because she has failed as a mother, failed in bringing them up. He insists that people will blame and scorn her; Xantippe faints, and, reviving, considers suicide: Worldly Shame retires, so as not to be blamed for her death.[6] Shame, 'unseemly shame', manifests, too, in Thomas Preston's *Cambises,* equipped with a black trumpet to proclaim the protagonist's 'shameless deeds';[7] a similar image of infamy as a blemished or befouled figure blowing a clarion features in the well-known frontispiece of Sir Walter Ralegh's *The History of the World*. In the anonymous *Emblemata*, there is an image of shame: 'In pudoris statuam'.[8] Spenser has Shame hiding his ugly face from living eye at Pluto's gate (*The Faerie Queene*, 2.7.22-9); and 'most ill fauourd, bestiall, and blind', flourishing burning 'brond-yrons' in the Mask of Cupid (3.12.24.5 and 8).[9] Yet he lovingly depicts Shamefastnesse, or modest sense of shame: 'Straunge was her tyre, and all her garment blew, / Close round about her tuckt with many a plight: / Vpon her fist, the bird which shonneth vew, / And keeps in couerts close from liuing wight / Did sit, as yet ashamd, how rude *Pan* did her dight' (2.9.40.5-9); 'Vnto the ground she cast her modest eye, / And euer and anone with rosie red / The bashfull bloud her snowy cheekes did dye, / That her became, as polisht yuory, / Wich cunning Craftesmans hand hath ouerlayd / With faire vermilion or pure Castory' (2.9.41.2-7). We are a long way here from the more broadly painted *Pudicitia*. It is worth noting that whereas outright shame is usually embodied male, sense of shame is female. At the end of *The Faerie Queene*, the Blatant Beast - a spirit of slander with a thousand tongues derived from Virgil and cousin to Shakespeare's Rumour from 2 *Henry IV*- breaks loose after being captured and seemingly tamed by Calidore; 'So now he raungeth through the world againe, / And rageth sore in each degree and state' (6.2.40.1-2).

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[6] My source for this is Gundersheimer, 42, n. 22.

[7] in *Minor Elizabethan Tragedies*, T. W. Craik (ed.), (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1974), 341 ff.

[8] See Gundersheimer 43, n. 23.

[9] in *Spenser: Poetical Works,* J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (1912; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

This last suggests epidemic infamy in the world outside the poem, and other contemporary sources hint at the power of shame in life. Philemon Holland, for instance, in his 1603 translation of Plutarch's *Moralia*, calls the emotion 'one of the greatest shaking cracks that our soul can receive in her tranquillity'.[10] Nor is this mere rhetoric. As Naunton recounts, the scorn Queen Elizabeth showed Lord Perrot 'brake in pieces the cords of his magnanimity'.[11] And when accused by Cobham of having betrayed his country to the Spanish, Walter Ralegh wrote to his wife:

> Oh intollerable infamie, Oh God I cannot resiste theis thoughts, I cannot live to thinke how I am derided, to thinke of the expectation of my enemies, the scornes I shall receive, the crewell words of lawyers, the infamous taunts and dispights, to be made a wonder and a spectacle. O death hasten thee unto me, that thow maiste destroye... my memorie which is my Tormentor, my thoughts and my life cannot dwell in one body.[12]

Ralegh's syntax disappears here under pressure of his passion. Robert Ashley's *Of Honour* (1596) portrays a world gone mad with fear of shame and humiliation: 'One boy will fight another to death that he may not be compted a coward amongst his companions: Learned men do even kyll themselves with studie that they not be overgone in knowledge and understanding of things'.[13]

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[10] (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1911), p. 187.

[11] Quoted in Curtis Brown Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 72.

[12] Quoted in Watson, p. 180.

[13] Virgil B. Heltzel (ed.), (The Huntington Library: San Marino, California, 1947), p. 50.

Why this increase of shame? Paradoxically, the first reason is the humanist tenor of the age. I suggested in the last chapter that in the Middle Ages human beings tend to measure themselves by an absolute, divine standard so that human unworthiness is a fact, a given; shame is an atmosphere, not a particular pain. It is not typically felt in ordinary life, but only when the individual comes before God, to repent or be judged. By contrast, the Renaissance introduces a very high human standard, as, for example, in the heroic figures of Michelangelo. Ficino writes in his commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, 'it is clear that in loving God we have loved ourselves';[14] this puts it at its most extreme, but some sense of human potential and worthiness is axiomatic in renaissance art and thought, and the original position from which Shakespeare's tragedy develops. And while shame is fundamental to medieval concepts of personality, it is incompatible with this proud view; the thought 'What piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable...' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.303-5) makes any discovery of corruption or imperfection in the species or the self intolerable. 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds' ('Sonnet 94', 14).[15] Shame in the Renaissance becomes a great fear and pain, a kind of death. Errors and blemishes may no longer be referred back to our fallen condition in the way that Henryson excused Cresseid.

The increase of shame in the Renaissance is also a consequence of the enhanced self-awareness which is the second salient feature of the age. Montaigne is the classic example of the new self-awareness, but one could equally cite the Donne of *Devotions* and 'Death's Duel' or Sir Thomas Browne. In an age of great but not always attainable expectations, the self-conscious person will naturally be prone to shame, which is the emotion of negative self-assessment, of disappointment in the self; again, we need only think of Hamlet. A more everyday example is Ben Jonson's comic poem:

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[14] in *Renaissance Views of Man*, Stevie Davis (ed.), Literature in Context (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), p. 56.

[15] *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, John Kerrigan (ed.), (London: Penguin, 1986).

> I now think love is rather deaf than blind,
> For else it could not be
> That she
> Whom I adore so much should so slight me,
> And cast my love behind;
> I'm sure my language to her was as sweet
> And every close did meet
> In sentence of as subtle feet,
> As hath the youngest he
> That sits in shadow of Apollo's tree.
>
> Oh, but my conscious fears
> That fly my thoughts between,
> Tell me that she hath seen
> My hundred of grey hairs,
> Told seven-and-forty years,
> Read so much waste, as she cannot embrace
> My mountain belly, and my rocky face;
> And all these through her eyes have stopped her ears.[16]

As the stilted and strained first stanza gives way to the fluency of the second, the shame of a cultivated older man rejected in love overwhelms his resistance; and he recognises himself as grey, fat, and decayed. Jonson self-accusingly reverts to the topic of his weight, again in the context of dealings with women, in his 'Epistle to My Lady Covell': 'So you have gained a servant and a muse: / The first of which I fear, you will refuse; / And you may justly, being a tardy, cold, / Unprofitable chattel, fat and old, / Laden with belly, and doth hardly approach / His friends, but to break chairs or crack a coach. / His weight is twenty stone, within two pound, / And that's made up as doth the purse abound' (5-12).[17] In Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 110', there is what Orwell calls 'a half ashamed allusion to his career as an actor;[18] and in the next poem in the sequence the poet is shamed by his ink-stained hand, the mark of a low-born scribbler. Moreover, Jonathan Bate ingeniously suggests that we read the opening of 'Sonnet 112' as a response to Robert Greene's gibe against Shakespeare, 'there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tigers heart wrapped in a Player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute *Johannes fac totum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country'.[19] Here is the first quatrain of Shakespeare's poem:

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[16] Ben Jonson, 'On my picture left in Scotland', *The Underwood* 9, in *Ben Jonson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, Ian Donaldson (ed.), The Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 324.

[17] *Underwood* 56, Donaldson (ed.), pp. 384-5.

[18] 'Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there, / And made myself a motley to the view' (1-2). Motley is the technical term for the dress of the Stage Fool. I quote Orwell from 'Lear, Tolstoy, and The Fool', in Frank Kermode (ed.), *Shakespeare: King Lear, A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 159.

> Your love and pity doth th'impression fill
> Which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow
> For what care I who calls me fair or ill,
> So you o'er green my bad, my good allow.

Bate notes that the original text reads 'ore greene'.[20] Shame in Spenser extends to erotic dreams; in the first canto of *The Faerie Queene*, the Redcrosse Knight is shocked and shamed when he awakes from reveries of unwonted lust, particularly as he is faced with the 'uncouth' apparition of a seductive Una (48-55).

Besides high standards and self-consciousness, there are many other reasons for the increase of shame in the period. Reformed religion, both protestant and catholic, enjoined muscular and vigilant habits of self-scrutiny and shame. 'Examine thy life by a diligent and daily inquisition'; 'Place all thy transgressions before thy eyes: place thyself before thy selfe, as it were before another and so bewaile thyselfe' are typical *sententiae*.[21] The text Herbert took for his first sermon at Bemerton was 'Keep thy heart with all diligence';[22] and Donne approaches God in his *Divine Poems* by tackling and taking shame for his own sinfulness. The fragmentation of truth in the period - which results from the breakdown of the

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[19] Quoted in Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 15.
[20] p. 19.
[21] Quoted by Louis L. Martz in *The Poetry of Meditation*, rev. ed. (New Haven, Conneticut: The Yale University Press, 1962), p. 119.
[22] Martz, p. 121.

consensus fidelium, the new level of interest in antiquity, the pressure of Islam, the discovery of human society in the new world, and the growth of reading - creates new possibilities for intellectual embarrassment. It makes the individual more responsible for his thought and outlook, but he might be wrong: and in matters of religion his soul is at stake, as in Donne's 'Satire 3'. New social mobility, evidenced in the rise of Spenser, Marlowe, and Jonson, combines with the pluralism of values to produce the conditions for what Stephen Greenblatt calls 'renaissance self-fashioning'. But insofar as faith in a creating and lovingly sustaining God has failed, human identity is just so much stuff to disintegrate and come apart. If there is existential freedom, there is also a loss of essence. Self-image, the product of self-fashioning, is often fragile illusion; and when it breaks, the defaced subject is left desolate and ashamed, as Richard II finds out and expresses by dashing a looking-glass in 'an hundred pieces' at his feet (4.1.290).[23]

Moreover, the general fading of religious sense in spite of the Reformation makes an apparently autonomous human society much more vividly present and important, to the effect - and this is a crucial reason for shame's new power - that the individual in society feels newly exposed. The Renaissance is a great age of display and spectacle, of desire to cut a figure before the world; as epitomised, for instance, by the sumptuous meeting on French soil in 1520 between Henry VIII and Francis I dubbed 'The Field of Cloth of Gold'. The theatrical metaphor from contemporary literature - 'all the world's a stage' -[24] should be seen in this context. 'We Princes', said Elizabeth, 'are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed'.[25] She lived up to it. Her subjects were putting on a show as well; indeed, such was their sartorial extravagance, it had to be regulated by sumptuary laws. In a world with less regard for heaven, the ultimate end of such role-playing is to win a good name which will survive the grave: at the beginning of *Love's Labour's Lost*, Navarre *et al* project achievements which will 'grace us in the disgrace of death' (1.1.3).[26] But there is great fear of turning out a poor player, who struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more; and is remembered, if at all, with contempt. As we have seen already from the examples of Perrot and Ralegh, the pains of dishonour and ill repute in the Renaissance could be lacerating. Having procured the extreme disfavour of the Queen, the renegade Earl of Essex writes, '[I] saw my reputation not suffered to die with me, but buried and I alive'; he feels 'as if I were thrown into a corner like a dead carcase, I am gnawed on and torn by the basest creatures on earth. The prating tavern haunter speaks of me what he lists; they print me and make me speak to the world, and shortly they will play me on the stage'.[27] Infamy here is not only analogous to but seemingly will culminate in exposure on the satirical stage; it will actually end in theatrical exposure on the scaffold. It is not surprising that it is a main theme in the drama. Occasionally Shakespeare's characters compare it to being in a play. This is the (as he thinks) cuckolded Leontes: 'Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I / Play too; but so disgrac'd a part whose issue / Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour / Will be my knell' (*The Winter's Tale*, 1.2.187-90).[28]

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[23] The Arden *Richard II*, Peter Ure (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1974).

[24] The Arden *As You Like It*, Agnes Latham (ed.), (London: Macmillan, 1975), 2.7.139.

[25] Quoted in J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1584-1601*, vol. 2 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 119.

This anxiety of playing a part before the world is fuelled by the new emphasis on manners in the Renaissance, which creates a range of often bodily embarrassments, as well as novel forms of sophistication; this is Gail Kern Paster's theme in *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (1993).[29] Though there were courtesy books in the Middle Ages, the *locus*

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[26] The Arden *Love's Labour's Lost*, Richard David (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1968).

[27] Quoted in Watson, p. 157. When, in his final conflict with Elizabeth, the Queen boxed his ears, according to Harrington, Essex became a person 'devoid of good reason as of right mind' (See Watson, p. 157).

[28] The Arden *The Winter's Tale*, J. H. P. Pafford (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1972).

[29] According to the influential theorist Norbert Elias cited by Paster, 'the civilising process', the 'advance of the threshold of shame', is a control mechanism instituted by the emergent centralised

classicus of manners is Erasmus's slight treatise of 1530, *De civilitate morum puerilium* (*Manners for Children*). It was the publishing sensation of its day; there were at least eighty editions and fourteen translations, and by 1600 several tens of thousands of copies had been printed and distributed. As late as 1833, the Guizot Commission discovered that it remained a basic text in French schools. Based on the traditional wisdom that physical behaviour expresses the inner disposition of the soul, it discusses public demeanour and how to behave in church, in meetings, while gambling, and in going to bed. Erasmus reminds his reader that he is never alone: God is always watching. His book spawned a vast literature of civility which became increasingly intrusive and prescriptive. For instance, thirty years after Erasmus, Calviac writes, 'It is most decent in a young child not to handle his shameful parts even when necessity requires it and he is alone, except with shame and reluctance, for this indicates great modesty and decency'.[30] As here, so generally with this courtesy literature: the reader is encouraged to regard all his acts as though they were public; he learns what is civil, and therefore good, and what is uncivil, and thus unfit to be seen, even by himself. Part of the self, part of the body, is to be hidden away in 'silent shame'.[31].

Fear of being seen, of being caught at a disadvantage, is a theme of the age. Jonson told Drummond that Sir Philip Sidney's mother 'after she had the little pox never show[ed] herself in court but masked'.[32] Absolom in 'The Miller's Tale' provides a medieval example of male vanity and fastidiousness, but Margaret Pelling finds the enormous population in early modern London of barber-surgeons, who provided a full range of personal services - cosmetic, quasi-medical, and even sexual - to nearly all ranks of men in the social order, evidence of acute anxiety

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and controlling state; see *The History of Manners*, vol. 1 of *The Civilising Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

[30] Quoted by Jacques Revel in 'The Uses of Civility', in *Passions of the Renaissance*, vol. 3 of *A History of Private Life*, Roger Chartier (ed.), (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 168.

[31] The phrase is Revel's (p. 182).

[32] 'Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden', in Donaldson (ed.), p. 602.

about bodily appearance.[33] Pelling also notes that 'Elizabethan and Jacobean clothing, although strong in outline and attractive in surface, played an important role in concealing the body from public view. Very little of the surface of the body was allowed to appear. Beggars offended by baring their limbs and sores in public'.[34] And the creation of an autonomous sphere of private life fostered a similar dread of exposure. After changing slowly over the centuries, houses change considerably from the late medieval period, with rooms getting smaller; with private stairways, halls, corridors, and vestibules being added to allow them to be entered without the need to pass through other rooms.[35] But privacy is a tentative and insecure affair, vulnerable to all kinds of accidental and deliberate intrusion; one thinks of the Titian painting in the Scottish National Gallery of Acteon surprising the naked Diana, and in *Cymbeline* of Iachimo in the bedchamber of the sleeping Imogen. In September 1599, the Earl of Essex returned in disgrace from Ireland and embarrassed the Queen by bursting in while she had her hair about her face.[36]

Renaissance authorities played upon and maximised all this susceptibility to shame by employing a wide range of shaming punishments. The stocks, the pillory, and the whipping post played an important and conspicuous part in English town life; in a solitary Lancashire case, a Bolton wench received five strokes on her bare back on market-day, then was set in the stocks with a paper on her head reading, 'This person punished for fornication'.[37] Offenders had since Chaucer's day been carted and mounted backward on asses and paraded through the streets and pelted with rubbish. Scolds, by definition female, were publicly muzzled with a horrid and painful iron contraption called a 'brank', or dunked in the river in a 'cucking stool'.[38] A Barking man and a West Ham woman charged with incontinence in 1565 were assigned penance in Romford market on a November day 'stripped out of their clothes for an hour and a half';[39] but the church courts normally required transgressors to stand before the congregation on the following Sunday in a white sheet holding a wand: thousands of Elizabethans underwent this humiliation in Essex alone.[40] In 1616, Shakespeare's son in law, Thomas Quiney, was tried for fathering an illegitimate child and ordered to perform penance in a white sheet during service time on three successive Sundays.[41] The most serious crimes were punished by mutilation and disfigurement; the ears of convicted criminals were cropped, their noses slit, their foreheads or cheeks branded. Edward Kelly, the sinister assistant of Doctor John Dee, lost his ears in Lancaster around 1580;[42] and in 1598 Jonson was indicted for killing Gabriel Spencer in a duel on the notorious Mile End Road: he pleaded guilty, was convicted of manslaughter, read his neck verse, and was branded on the thumb by a hot iron with the letter popularly known as the 'Tyburn T'.[43] Jonson, moreover, nearly lost both his ears and his nose for the libellous references in *Eastward Ho!*[44] Public beheadings and hangings were a familiar London attraction. In the worst cases, felons were sentenced to be 'hanged by the neck, and being cut down, and your privy members to be cut off, and your bowels to be taken out of your belly and there burned, you being alive'.[45]

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[33] 'Appearance and Reality: Barber Surgeons, the Body, and Disease', in *London 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis*, Al Beier and Roger Finlay (ed.), (London: Longman, 1986), pp. 82-112.

[34] Pelling, p. 92.

[35] Philippe Ariès, 'Introduction', in Chartier (ed.), pp. 6-7.

[36] Bate, pp. 218-19.

[37] F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Disorder* (Chelmsford: Essex County Council, 1970), p. 201.

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[38] See Boose.

[39] F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Morals and the Church Courts* (Chelmsford: Essex County Council, 1973), p. 286.

[40] See Emmison, *Morals and the Church Courts*, p. 281.

[41] See E. R. C. Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford* (London and Chichester: Phillimore, 1972), p. 81.

[42] Charles Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 20.

[43] Emmison, *Disorder*, p. 64.

[44] 'Conversations', in Donaldson (ed.), p. 601.

[45] Stephen Greenblatt, 'General Introduction' to *The Norton Shakespeare* (London: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 34.

Christian shame and shamelessness

Owing to religious doubt and the subordination of church to state, there is more tension between worldly and Christian shame in the Renaissance than in the Middle Ages. And worldly shame is most importunate: Jonson, for instance, reports that 'Raleigh esteemed more of fame than conscience'.[46] Where personal slight motivates revenge, the two shames come into stark opposition: after killing the man who had bereft him of an eye, Lord Sanquire remarked, 'I must confess I ever kept a grudge in my soul against him, but had no purpose to take so high a revenge: yet in the course of my revenge, I considered not my wrongs upon terms of Christianity... but being trained up in the courts of princes and in arms, I stood upon the terms of honour'.[47] A solitary instance of the victory of ethical shame is provided by an anecdote of the Essex trial. During the trial, Essex saw fit to mention that Cecil's grandfather had kept an inn: Cecil replied, 'My Lord of Essex... the difference between you and me is great. For wit I give you preeminence you have it abundantly; for nobility also I give you the place - I am not noble, yet a gentleman; I am no swordsman - there also you have the odds; but I have innocence, conscience, truth, and honesty to defend me against slanderous tongues, and in this court I stand as an upright man, and your Lordship a delinquent'.[48] Of course, Cecil, who was no ethical paragon, is claiming ethical superiority to win a case, but the serious premise on which his case rests is that the shame of low birth is a meaningless trifle when compared to the shame of culpable criminality. Friction between secular and Christian shame is a theme of *The Faerie Queene*; the pride of The Red Crosse

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[46] in Donaldson (ed.), p. 599.

[47] Quoted in Watson, p. 133.

[48] Quoted in Watson, p. 179.

Knight is hurt by Archimago's illusions of Una's infidelity and he therefore abandons her and falls into sin. I shall demonstrate later that the contradictions of worldly and Christian shame is a preoccupation of Shakespeare.

The erosion of religious certainty in the Renaissance allows for the development of an ideology of moral and spiritual shamelessness so that a theme of shamelessness balances the theme of shame. Here Machiavelli is the crucial figure. In developing the first autonomous politics, he contends that the prince must 'learn how not to be virtuous';[49] 'act in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, of religion... know how to do evil':[50] he formulates the doctrine of 'cruelty used well'.[51] Pierre de la Primaudaye writes, 'This bad fellowe... blusheth not';[52] Louis Le Roy says he is 'without conscience, and without religion';[53] Roger Ascham fulminates against those who 'confirmed with Machiavelles doctrine... thincke, say and do what soever may serve best for profit and pleasure'.[54] But such responses evince fascination as well as disgust. In his famous *Groatsworth of Wit*, Robert Greene's dying miser Gorinius has this advice for his elder son Luciano:

> stand not on conscience... what though they tell you of conscience (as a number will talke) looke but into the dealinges of the world, and thou shalt see it is but idle words... where is conscience, and why art thou bound to use it more than other men? Seest thou not daylie forgeries, perjuries, oppressions, rackinges of the poor, raisinges of rents, inhauncing of duties even by them that should be all conscience, if they ment as they speake: but Luciano if thou read well this booke (and with that hee reacht him Machiavels workes at large) thou shalt se what tis to be so foole-holy to make scruple of conscience where profit presents it selfe[55]

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[49] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1961), p.48.

[50] Machiavelli, p. 56

[51] Machiavelli, p.29.

[52] Edward Meyer, *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama* (Weimar: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1897), p. 77.

[53] N. W. Bawcutt, 'Machiavelli and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*', *Renaissance Drama* 3 (1970), p.19.

[54] Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 33.

[55] Meyer, p. 67.

The wickedly shameless Machiavelli of the popular imagination and the renaissance stage used to be thought a gross caricature, but that the real Machiavelli had a demonstrable taste for violence and outrage emerges powerfully from Sebastian de Grazia's recent biography, *Machiavelli in Hell.* De Grazia shows how, in the *Florentine Histories*, for example, his subject details with relish the horrors committed by the authorities on the dead body of Messer Jacopo, leader of the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478;[56] and in the same spirit portrays an even more grisly scene where a mob tear apart two government officials in the square and 'having heard first their cries, seen their wounds, touched their torn flesh... wanted still to savor the taste, so that when all the outside parts [of their senses] were satiated with it, those of the inside they satiated too'.[57] Then there is that famous moment in *The Prince* when 'one morning, Remirro's body was found cut in two pieces on the piazza at Cesena, with a block of wood and a bloody knife beside it'.[58] Gundersheimer points to Machiavelli's narration in *The Discourses* of how Caterina Sforza surrendered her sons to those besieging her citadel, but then lifted her skirts and exhibited herself, showing she had the means to make more sons and outraging her attackers, who fled in embarrassment and horror.[59] However, accurate reflection or unfair distortion, the popular Machiavelli is a representative figure, a cynosure for the fear that the human race generally is becoming wickedly shameless. One of William Drummond's poems begins, 'All good hath left this age, all trackes of shame';[60] and in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* Robert Burton writes, 'I know there be many base, impudent, brazen-faced rogues, that will... be moved with nothing, take no infamy or disgrace to heart, laugh at all; let them be prov'd perjur'd stigmatized, convict rogues, theeves, traitors, loose their ears, be whipped, branded, carted, pointed, hissed at derided... they rejoice at it, what care they? We have too many such in our times'.[61]

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[56] (Picador: London, 1992), pp. 11-13.

[57] pp. 84-5.

[58] p. 24.

[59] 39-41.

[60] *The Poetical Works of William Drummond*, L. E. Kastner (ed.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913), p. 174.

renaissance theory of shame and Annibale Pocaterra

During the Renaissance shame first becomes an intellectual subject. There had, as I have shown, been significant insights before; but in the course of the sixteenth century something like a literature of shame develops. In *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), Castiglione's Cesare speaks in defence of shame as a characteristic of women: 'I consider that this very shame - which when all is said and done is simply fear of disgrace - is a most rare virtue and practised by very few men'.[62] Juan Luis Vives' *De anima et vita* (1538) features a brief chapter on shame. Like Castiglione, Vives adopts Aristotle's formulation, whereby shame is simply fear of infamy, but he goes on to make some stimulating and unusual remarks. He is interested, for instance, in the relations between shame and love: 'When love is associated with a belief in the greatness of the beloved, it calls forth a feeling of embarrassment; otherwise, it prevents it, as in the love among equals'; 'A strong desire of something makes impossible any feeling of embarrassment, as happens among lovers in dangerous situations'.[63] But Vives' main point is that 'The feeling of shame was given to man as a tutor'; that it 'is extremely necessary to all those who want to live in the communion of society'.[64] In 1540, Antonio Luiz's essay 'De Pudore' appeared in Lisbon, a compilation of classical references to sexual shame and shaming in ancient military situations, and part of his *De occultis proprietatibus*.[65] Luiz, like Vives, asserts that shame preserves social order.

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[61] T. C. Faulkner, N. K. Kiessling, and R. L. Blair (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 261-3. Also quoted in Gundersheimer, 35.

[62] trans. George Bull, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 244.

[63] *The Passions of the Soul,* the third book of *De anima et vita*, trans. Carlos G. Noreña (The Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston, New York, 1990), pp. 114, 115.

[64] p. 115.

More importantly, Pierre de la Primaudaye's *The French Academy*, which was translated into English in 1586, and almost certainly used by Shakespeare,[66] features an essay entitled 'Of Shame, Shamefastnesse, and Dishonour'. This is particularly concerned with the inner discipline and moral benefit of shame:

> there is no better way than deeply to imprint in our soules the feare of perpetuall shame and infamie, which are the inseperable companions of all wickedness and corrupt dealings. And as often as we committ any fault through frailtie, we must togither with repentance imprint in our memorie a long remembrance thereof: yea we must lay it often before our eies as also the shame and dishonor that might have endued thereof unto us[67]

We are close here to the injunctions of reformation theologians, with fear of disgrace doing the work of conscience and self-censure. Thomas Wright in *The Passions of the Minde* (1601) concurs that 'The passion of shamefastnesse bridleth us of many loose affections, which would otherwise be ranging abroad'.[68] For Primaudaye, 'Shame is the keeper of all the virtues'; unblushing brows 'giveth a great argument of a very blockish and senceless nature, which is ashamed of nothing, by reason of his long custome and confirmation in doing of evill'.[69] He separates 'foolish' or excessive shame, which is as harmful to the subject as shamelessness, and also the theme of Philemon Holland's translation of Plutarch's 'Of Unseemly and Naughty Bashfulness' from the *Moralia*, from 'honest' or deserved shame.

The growth of theoretical interest and expertise in shame will already be apparent, and I have not yet mentioned that in 1592 the first book-length study, *Due*

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[65] See Gundersheimer, 43.

[66] According to Anne Lake Prescott at a recent conference in St Andrews.

[67] trans. T. B[owes], (London: Edmund Bollifant, 1586), p. 258.

[68] (London: Printed by V. S. for W. B., 1601), pp. 31-2.

[69] pp. 256 and 258.

dialogi della vergogna, was published in Ferrara. Its author, Annibale Pocaterra, a brilliant young physician, courtier, and poet of that city,[70] died in the year of publication; his book was never reprinted and only recently translated, by Werner Gundersheimer.[71] Gundersheimer rates the *Two Dialogues* very highly; they are the focus of his pioneering article on renaissance shame alluded to already. He stresses their vitality and richness and it is true that after the distant theorising of previous works they bring us suddenly very close to shame. What they lack in philosophical rigour, they make up for in empirical detail, vivid metaphor, and energetic speculation; and the Socratic setting of conversation between intellectual friends, touched with a special *cinquecento* graciousness, lends them charm and atmosphere. Although they can have little influenced the course of European culture, they are the culmination of the burgeoning renaissance literature of shame, and fascinatingly evoke a flavour of the phenomenon as it occurred and was experienced during the period in Italy.

Pocaterra, too, recycles the Aristotelian dictum, 'shame is nothing more than the fear of infamy' (p. 17), but the dialogue form allows him to explore beyond its confines. Several times he introduces and commends that private shame which has nothing to do with infamy or public disgrace:

> Leaving aside God, who has excellent knowledge not just of human actions but also of human thoughts, don't we always have ourselves with us? Who could know our defects better than we ourselves? And knowing them, condemn them? And condemning them, amend them? If only we could arrive at this truth with our understanding, how attentively we would stalk ourselves; how much more studiously we would observe our customs, more so, even, than our enemies do. And it is true that no one is as good a friend to himself as one who can be his own good enemy. (pp. 69-70).

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[70] Agostino Superbi remembers him as a person 'of very beautiful intellect and a most handsome face, a physician, an excellent philosopher, accomplished in his knowledge of literature, a not unpromising poet and a very promising youth' (quoted in Gundersheimer, 44).

[71] Professor Gundersheimer has kindly permitted me to use his at the time of writing unpublished translation for the purpose of this thesis. I have given the page numbers of his word-processed manuscript.

Moreover, the *Two Dialogues* advance what Pocaterra calls a 'natural' definition to complete the merely dialectical Aristotelian one: 'shame is a rush of blood and spirits from the heart mainly to the face, caused by nature in response to a sudden fear of infamy' (p. 71). Throughout the book is enlivened by an empirical sense of its subject. Pocaterra associates the sensations of shame with anguish; but also with anger, in the case of shame turned in upon the self. He notes that infants feel ashamed 'even in their swaddles or cradles' (p. 82). He explains the role of reason with a helpful hydraulic metaphor: 'reason stirs and awakens shame, but she also governs its flow so it is neither too scarce or too abundant' (p. 43). He contends that it is possible to die of shame and that thus 'died Homer - simply for the shame of being unable to solve an enigma that some fishermen had proposed to him' (p. 80): in the course of this thesis, we will come across other such extraordinary deaths.

The level of Pocaterra's imaginative engagement with his subject is unprecedented in previous non-fiction; it anticipates Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, a novel with features of a systematic study. There are strong images in abundance. Pocaterra compares sense of shame to 'a shipwrecked sailor who, with every care, steers his vessel away from the rocks where he accidentally wrecked his ship' (p. 50). Shame itself is 'like those wild weeds which, though not good of their own nature, give expert farmers an infallible sign that the untilled fields are rich and fertile' (p. 50). It is the seed of virtue; 'a lightning bolt in the darkness of the night' (p. 94); 'a fire in whose flames the gold of our conscience is refined and purged' (p. 96). An unexpectedly lovely moment is when Pocaterra's spokesman Horatio Ariosto says, 'Believe me, Signor Castello, the dawn preceding the sunrise does not grow so beautiful or so crimson as the shame which precedes virtue' (p. 51). It is no wonder that the youthful and impressionable Castello falls in love with shame, giving this purple but nevertheless extraordinary oration:

> O most noble citizen of the heavens, holy shame, I know well that you only choose to inhabit candid and sincere minds, avoiding filthy souls, but if ever you listen to the prayers of the faithful, I pray you as humbly as I can: come to rest in this soul of mine - no, not mine, for nothing belongs to you more than what belongs to me. Come, then, to sit in my breast, which I open and dedicate to you as your eternal temple. Though until now it has been the temple of impure affects, I have no doubt that, if my proposal met with your divine favour, it would cleanse itself so as to become a house worthy of you. Come, o beautiful dawn, come for I languish, wounded by love. Already my heart, lit with a most chaste fire, waits for you filled with desire and with the strong hope that your dawn will illuminate all that is dark there and fill it with light. See, I do not ask you for gold, or silver, or beauty, or honor, or contentment or happiness - but gathering all these things in one request, I ask only for yourself. (pp. 98-9)

With avuncular good humour, Ariosto rebukes Castello for this, telling him that he should covet shame more coolly, as a mistress not a wife, discarding her when he achieves maturity and no longer does anything shameful.

One weakness of the *Two Dialogues* anticipated by Ariosto's lapse into libertine wit is that Pocaterra has only the crudest understanding of female shame, which he regards as absolutely imperative and purely sexual; he misses all the spiritual nuances. But the fine discussion of shame after death, which looks back to the preoccupations of the Middle Ages, somewhat makes up for this. Ariosto says, 'on the great day of universal judgement of the world, as I understand it, all sins, hidden though they may be, will be sculpted on the forehead of the damned' (p. 130); and it is pointed out that though purgatorial shame is finite and leads to salvation, infernal shame is infinite pain.

Spenser

Having sketched out the place of shame in renaissance consciousness, I will now offer a brief reading of the theme as it appears in Spenser, Marlowe, Jonson, and Milton. Here a grotesque quality is in evidence, indicating the new corrosiveness of the emotion. Each writer uses shame differently, and has a different economy of shame spiritual and secular, moral and amoral, revealing the affective and intellectual breadth of the renaissance shame-theme.

There is a wide range of shames in *The Faerie Queene*. The exposure of Braggadochio in Book Five is a reprise of the classical theme of the shaming of the *miles gloriosus*. The decay and self-neglect of Belphoebe's gentle squire after his mistress has reproached and abandoned him is a sensitive exploration of the shame of the loss of love, and one which looks forward to the shame of Edgar in *King Lear*. The Redcrosse Knight, after verging on suicidal despair, takes upon himself the spiritual guilt and shame of his dereliction of Una, and is thus redeemed from sin and granted a vision of the New Jerusalem. I have already remarked Spenser's several personifications of shame and shamefastnesse, and his image of infamy and ill repute as a rampaging wild beast; his investigation of the tension between secular and Christian in Book One; the extraordinary inwardness of his depiction of the shame of erotic dreams; and his lyrical description of the blushes of Shamefastnesse. Evocations of women blushing are a feature of his work. Consider, for instance: 'And euer and anone the rosy red, / Flasht through her face, as it had been a flake / Of lightning, through bright heaven fulmined' (3.2.5.6-8); 'The doubtful Mayde, seeing her selfe descryde, / Was all abasht, and her pure yuory / Into a cleare Carnation suddeine dyde' (3.3.20.1-2); 'With that she turn'd her head, as halfe abashed, / To hide the blush that in her visage rose, / And through her cheeks like sudden lightning flashed, / Decking her cheeke with a vermillion rose' (5.5.30.1-4).[72] This, like Pocaterra, brings us close to the physical facts of the emotion, although it also fancifully heightens them. But little in Spenser is insignificant, and it indicates a deep, physically felt love of feminine modesty, that instinctive confusion and recoil in the face of unseemliness and evil which is a sure sign of purity and refinement. We will see later that Shakespeare shares this feeling.

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[72] Like Spenser, Milton understood the poetry of blushing, although it is a less persistent and baroque effect in his work. In this respect the poet of shame has the advantage over the dramatist: we may be told a character in a play has flushed red but there has probably never been an actor who could blush to order - that did not, however, stop Shakespeare from making much of blushing, as we shall see. Milton's angel Raphael smiles a smile 'that glow'd / Celestial rosy red' (8.618-9). And Adam - famously - leads Eve to their nuptial bower 'blushing like the Morn' (8.511): both indications of a fine modesty.

The most vivid and conspicuous instances of Spenserian shame have a distinctly caustic flavour. The disrobing of the seemingly lovely Duessa, 'daughter of Deceipt and Shame' (1.5.26.9) and personification of falsehood, for example, is an extremely nasty affair:

> Her craftie head was altogether bald,
> And as in hate of honorable eld,
> Was ouergrowne with scurfe and filthy scald;
> Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,
> And her sowre breath abhominably smeld;
> Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind,
> Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;
> Her wrizled skin as rough, as maple rind,
> So scabby was, that would haue loathd all womankind.
>
> Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind,
> My chaster Muse for shame doth blush to write;
> But at her rompe she growing had behind
> A foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight;
> And eke her feet most monstrous were in sight;
> For one of them was like an Eagles claw;
> With griping talaunts armed to greedy fight,
> The other like a Beares uneuen paw:
> More vgly shape yet neuer liuing creature saw. (1.8.47-8)

This is exposure indeed, an intense projection of the fear of nakedness prevalent in early modern culture: all Duessa's foulness and deformity, all her blemishes, including what Spenser's poetic 'shamefastnesse' forbids him to describe, are revealed here as if in a blaze of light. Spiritual nakedness and deformity is realised acutely physically: Duessa is literally as ugly as sin. As soon as she can, she takes to her heels 'her open shame to hide' (1.8.50.4). She is discovered by Archimago, 'Where she did wander in waste wildernesse, / Lurking in rockes and caues farre underground, / And with greene mosse cou'ring her nakednesse, /To hide her shame and loathly filthinesse' (2.1.22.1-5). She symbolises in particular the Roman Catholic church, but she is also wicked shamelessness. Spenser is exploiting the novel susceptibility of his readership to worldly shame in order to teach a moral lesson.

The same is true of his depiction of the bestial shame of the denizens of the Bowre of blisse. Of the shameless Grill who elects to remain a pig, the Palmer says, 'The donghill kind / Delights in filth and foule incontinence: / Let *Grill* be *Grill*, and haue his hoggish mind' (2.12.87.6-8). The story of Malbecco, Jealousy, is another episode of secular shame and disgrace merited by a moral fault. It also is perhaps the most grotesque incidence of shame in Spenser. The ageing miser is bereft of his unsuitably youthful wife Hellenore by Paridell, who rapes her and casts her off; she is found and becomes the common mistress of a woodland community of satyrs. At last locating his wife, Malbecco spends a shameful night in the bushes watching one particular satyr make oft-repeated love to her. The next day he contrives to talk to her in secret; but, though he pleads with her, promising to disregard what has passed, she refuses to return to him, and the satyrs butt him with their horns and trample him under hoof. Spenser writes, 'He himselfe himselfe loath'd so forlorne, / So shamefully forlorne of womankind; / That as a snake, still lurked in his wounded mind' (3.10.55.7-9): a memorable expression of the pain of disgrace, which reminds us of his personification of shame as sadistic punisher. In this case the evocation of shame is so strong that the allegorical point is dangerously obscured; sensing this, Spenser turns Malbecco into Jealousy itself to make it clear . For a moment Spenserian shame derails the poem.

Marlowe

Shame in Marlowe, Shakespeare's most important predecessor in the drama, is more corrosive than in Spenser. The dignity of Ajax, Oedipus, Heracles, is ruined, but still in some degree intact; but shame in the Renaissance is often a complete explosion of being - and with Marlowe there is an extra injection of cruelty. As we move on from *The Faerie Queene*, we should bear in mind that, first, Marlowe is realistic and not allegorical and, second, drama creates shame physically and before an audience.

In the first part of *Tamburlaine the Great*, Tamburlaine, by birth a shepherd, keeps Bazajeth, the defeated Emperor of the Turks, in a cage; he brings him out to use as a footstool, stepping on his back while Bazajeth hisses, 'as I look down to the damned fiends, / Fiends, look on me! And thou, dread god of hell, / With ebon sceptre strike this hateful earth, / And make it swallow both of us at once!' (4.2.26-9).[73] When Bazajeth's queen Zabina complains to Tamburlaine that a man more used to 'roofs of gold and sun-bright palaces' (4.2.61-2), 'Whose feet the kings of Africa have kiss'd' (4.2.65) should be treated thus, Anippe threatens to have her 'whipt stark naked' (4.2.74); and Tamburlaine decrees that she will henceforth feed her husband with scraps from his table. In a private moment with his wife, Bazajeth complains through his bars of the shame, hunger, and horror that is 'griping' his 'bowels with retorqued thoughts' (5.2.173-4). Ultimately, he brains himself on the cage; Zabina follows suit. In Act Four, scene three of the second part of *Tamburlaine*, Tamburlaine enters 'drawn in his chariot by the KINGS OF TREBIZON and SORIA, with bits in their mouths, reins in his left hand, and in his right hand a whip with which he scourgeth them'. 'Holloa, ye pamper'd jades of Asia!', he cries. It is an even more humiliating image than Bazajeth in his cage. An intense theatrical experience in our own day, it is difficult to imagine the effect it must have had on Elizabethan audiences with their ingrained respect for hierarchy and degree. And if I am right about contemporary susceptibility to shame, it would also have struck them as a terrible revelation of their own fears. Both examples betray in Marlowe not just fascination with shame, but sadistic enjoyment of its humiliation.

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[73] All references to Marlowe are to *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, J. B. Steane (ed.), (London: Penguin, 1986).

There is a minor, and relatively uninteresting, incident of comic shame in *Doctor Faustus*. Benvolio, who has insulted the Doctor, and his friends, Frederick and Martino, are disgraced with horns and driven across dirty and rough terrain by devils until they are bloody and defiled; they decide to repair to an obscure castle and live reclusive lives in order to hide their shames. Significantly, Faustus himself feels no shame for his devilry, but only fear of hell and damnation: there is no moral shame in Marlowe. (I suggest in the last section of this chapter that his art is spiritually shameless.) *Edward II* is a much more shameful play. Edward scandalises his realm of England by fawning on an ambitious peasant, Gaveston. Warwick describes the sleek and pampered favourite leaning on Edward's shoulder, nodding and smiling in scorn at his high-born betters. Young Mortimer tells the King his court is 'naked' (2.2.173); that libels are cast against him in the street; that ballads and rhymes are made of his overthrow. He goes on:

> When wert thou in the field with banner spread?
> But once, and then thy soldiers march'd like players,
> With garish robes, not armour; and thyself,
> Bedaub'd with gold, rode laughing at the rest,
> Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest,
> Where women's favours hung like labels down. (2.2.182-7)

This is a luridly disturbing image of Edward's perversion of masculinity, soldiership, and the crown; that Marlowe makes it so curiously attractive indicates the threat Edward poses to such normative standards. But the shame, fear, and outrage Edward has caused is amply repayed in the manner of his usurpation. He is washed in puddle-water and his beard is shaved away; he is kept in the dungeon of Berkeley castle, knee-deep in sewage: finally, he is murdered by means of anal penetration with a red-hot poker, perhaps the most violently shameful moment in all drama.

Jonson

As satiric playwright, Jonson's end is shame. His surrogate in *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Asper, 'the presenter' of the play, declares his intention to 'unmask public vice' (22); 'strip the ragged follies of the time / Naked, as at their birth' (17-18); 'to these courteous eyes oppose a mirror, / As large as is the stage whereon we act: / Where they shall see the time's deformity / Anatomized in every nerve and sinew' (18-21).[74] It is his audience, and the wider society they represent, whom Jonson seeks to shame into reform: his characters are static and incorrigible.[75] By creating spectacles of shame, he would induce a proper sense of shame, based in his case more on classical values of reasonable citizenship than on Christianity. This is nearer to Spenser than Marlowe, who is interested in the comedy, the horror, and the sensation of shame for its own sake. The last words of *The Devil is an Ass* more or less explain how Jonson wished his humiliating plays to be received:

> It is not manly to take joy, or pride
> In human errors (we do all ill things,
> They do 'em worst that love 'em, and dwell there,
> Till the plague comes). The few that have the seeds

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[74] in *The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, G. A. Wilkes (ed.), vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[75] See Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson / Jonson and Shakespeare* (The Harvester Press: Brighton, 1988), p. 12.

Of goodness left will sooner make their way
To a true life, by shame, than punishment. (5.8.168-74)[76]

But as didactic art Jonson's comedies have serious weaknesses. By publicly scorning and ridiculing vice, they propagate fear of exposure rather than moral reformation; dread of punishment and laughter rather than knowledge of 'a true life' and of good and of evil. Also, the trouble for the didactic dramatist, more than for didactic poets like Spenser, is the great interest and amusement of his spectacles of shame, which detracts from the moral lesson.

Jonson's comedies often incorporate shaming sanctions resembling those of Elizabethan law and order. In the original 1601 quarto of *Every Man in his Humour*, Justice Clement sentences the *miles gloriosus* Bobadilla and the plagiarist and poor poet Matheo to spend the night in jail, be bound the whole next day in ridiculous costumes, and write and sing a ballad of repentance. Fittingly for comedy, Jonsonian shame tends to be coolly humiliating and laughable; nonetheless, it is usually more corrosive than this soft mockery. In *Volpone*, for instance, it is exposed that the previously jealous husband Corvino in a fit of avarice offered his virtuous wife to the deceitful protagonist from whom he hoped to inherit and supposed near death; he is to be 'straight embarked from thine own house, and rowed / Round about Venice through the Grand Canal, / Wearing a cap with fair, long ass's ears, / Instead of horns; and, so to mount, a paper / Pinned on thy breast, to the *berlino* -' (5.13.4-9).[77] In *Epicoene,* Morose, a man who hates noise, and in effect anything independent of his own will, is more thoroughly shamed. In order to disinherit his nephew Dauphine, he has married (as he thinks) a silent woman; but immediately after the ceremony, she turns out to be strident and loquacious. In order to escape this horror, Morose goes so far as to publicly proclaim himself impotent and accept the testimony of two fools who claim intimacy with his bride. When this fails, Dauphine offers to deliver him from the marriage in return for being made his heir; Morose eagerly signs the papers: Dauphine then reveals that, according to his own scheme, his uncle has married a disguised boy. The humiliation of Morose is absolute; nothing in classical comedy compares with this.

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[76] Wilkes (ed.), vol. 4.
[77] in Donaldson (ed.).

Morose and Corvino reintroduce the renaissance motif of grotesque shame. In *The Alchemist*, many are debased and humiliated; none more so than Able Dapper, who remains perfectly and hilariously oblivious. Thinking he is about to be interviewed by the Fairy Queen, he is blindfolded, bound, pinched, robbed, gagged with a piece of gingerbread, and locked in a privy for two hours, where he is almost stifled. He gets a brief visit from a whore and wriggles on his knees before her as instructed and kisses her 'departing part' (5.4.57):[78] he then emerges in a state of beatifaction. Here in particular Jonsonian gulling and humiliation becomes a sport and an end in itself, reminding us of the cruel strain in Marlowe. That a puritan loses a debate with a puppet is the outstandingly shameful incident in *Bartholomew Fair*, but less important than the shaming of Justice Adam Overdo, whose name indicates his fault of excessive meddling in the affairs of others. He has come to the fair in disguise in order to discover its 'enormities' and has already spent some time in the stocks when he dramatically throws off his disguise and threatens the others with the law, only for Quarlous to reveal how stupid he has been, and for Overdo himself to recognise a drunk woman in the attire of a strumpet as his wife. Here, as also with Morose, shame functions effectively as a direct curb to pride. As well as the stocks, the whipping post (4.5.71-2), the cucking stool (2.5.103-5), and the cart (4.5.73-4) are mentioned.[79]

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[78] in Donaldson (ed.).

[79] See Wilkes (ed.), vol. 4.

Milton

The intensity, whether tragic or comic, of all these examples should clinch the case for the power of renaissance shame. The prevalence of specifically sexual shame - a husband watching his wife making love with a monster; a homosexual king murdered as is Edward; a man unwittingly married to a boy - confirms its visceral inwardness. Although Jonson intends to educate his audience, his shamed figures, like Spenser's and Marlowe's, are frozen in postures of humiliation. Spenser's Red Crosse Knight is redeemed by shame, but it is largely left to Shakespeare to paint the positive side of the experience.

After Shakespeare's death, however, Milton offers an account of the rightful shame of the Fall. He much enlarges on the shame that appears in Genesis, making it the climax of the ninth and most crucial book of his Christian epic, another piece of evidence for the rise of shame in early modern literature. After consuming the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Milton's Adam and Eve engage in lusty copulation. (Milton stresses the purity of sexual love before the Fall.) Waking from a distempered sleep, they find 'their eyes how op'n'd, and their minds / How dark'n'd; innocence, that as a veil / Had shadow'd them from knowing ill, was gone, / Just confidence, and native righteousness, / And honour from about them, naked left / To guilty shame' (9.1053-8). Like Ajax, for a period they simply sit 'as strucken mute' (1064). Throughout the episode the influence of antique writers is blended with the scriptural narrative, and Christian shame is infused with a classical intensity. Adam's speech bears comparison with speeches of shame in Sophocles and Euripides, with Milton's astonishing fluency lending added urgency and power. He laments the loss of honour, innocence, faith, purity; he finds himself and his wife defiled and branded: 'Our wonted ornaments now soil'd and stain'd, / And in our Faces evident the signs / Of foul concupiscence' (1076-8). He can no more imagine facing God or angel, for 'those heavenly shapes / Will dazzle now this earthly, with their blaze / Insufferably bright' (9.1082-4). In his desire not to be seen, he gives this great cry of shame:

> O might I here
> In solitude live savage, in some glade
> Obscur'd, where highest Woods impenetrable
> To Star or Sunlight, spread their umbrage broad,
> And brown as Evening: Cover me ye Pines,
> Ye Cedars, with innumerable boughs
> Hide me (9.1084-90)

But heroically gathering his spirits, he breaks off with a sad and sensible suggestion which inaugurates the fallen future of constant shame and self-concealment:

> But let us now, as in bad plight, devise
> What best may for the present serve to hide
> The Parts of each from other, that seem most
> To shame obnoxious, and unseemliest seen,
> Some Tree whose broad smooth leaves together sew'd,
> And girded on our loins, may cover round
> Those middle parts, that this newcomer, Shame,
> There sit not, and reproach us as unclean. (9.1091-8)

This may remind us of renaissance susceptibility to nakedness. In Book Ten, Adam and Eve hide from God the Son; but He in pity clothes them, and not just outwardly, but also with a robe of righteousness to hide their sinfulness from His father's sight.

Milton distinguishes good from wicked shame in that whereas Adam and Eve suffer shame for their religious disobedience, the shamelessly sinful Satan is ashamed only of the loss of power that results from his. He is laid on his chariot 'Gnashing for anguish and despite and shame' when he is hurt by Michael (6.340); and though apparently insensible of the moral degradation of his spiteful strike against God's newborn innocents, he moans as he enters the sleeping serpent, 'O foul descent! that I who erst contended / With Gods to sit the highest, am now constrain'd / Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime, / This essence to incarnate and imbrute, / That to the height of Deity aspir'd' (9.163-7). In an appalling episode, God intervenes to turn Satan's 'triumph' in bringing about the Fall of Man to 'shame' (10.545). Returned to his infernal seat of Pandemonium, aureoled in splendour, from his high throne Satan relates his success to a full assembly of devils; he breaks off to receive applause, but is regaled instead with 'A dismal universal hiss, the sound / Of public scorn' (10.508-9). He wonders bemusedly 'but not long / Had leisure, wond'ring at himself now more; / His Visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare, / His Arms clung to his Ribs, his Legs entwining / Each other, till supplanted down he fell / A monstrous Serpent on his Belly prone' (10.509-14): he tries to speak, but his forked tongue splits his words. Late arrivals enter Pandemonium in a spirit of celebration and festivity to find the throneroom crawling with intertwining serpents; and instantly feel themselves changing. A grove of forbidden trees spring up. Afflicted with inexorable thirst and hunger, the deformed devils hurl themselves at the fruit, and chew on dust and ashes. They are to undergo this dreadful humiliation, which brilliantly realises the degradation and fruitlessness of Satan's success, annually on 'certain number'd days' (10.576). It combines a renaissance fear of grotesque debasement and experience of shaming punishment with a sense of Christian shame at its most powerful which recollects the Valley of Jehosophat and Lancelot before the grail. The American poet Robert Lowell's more intimate recreation of the scene in the latter part of this century is evidence of its undiminished charge:

> Your market-basket rolls
> With all its baking apples in the lake.
> You watch the whorish slither of a snake
> That chokes a duckling. When we try to kiss,
> Our eyes are slits and cringing, and we hiss.
> Scales glitter on our bodies as we fall. ('Adam and Eve', 26-31)[80]

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[80] A section of 'Between the Porch and the Altar', in *Selected Poems* (Faber and Faber: London, 1965), p. 16.

Milton's point is that wickedness is most humiliating. It is better made than in Spenser where we as readers have to be vigilantly allegorical and convert secular humiliation into spiritual shame.

An important theme in *Paradise Lost*, shame is the central subject of *Samson Agonistes*. Milton's closet drama clearly bears the stamp of Sophocles, especially of *Ajax*, and reconciles classical and religious shame, since it deals with the shame of a holy warrior fallen. At the beginning of the tragedy, the shorn Samson, 'blind, dishearten'd, sham'd, dishonour'd, quell'd' (563),[81] betrayed by Dalila to the Philistines, 'lies at random, carelessly diffus'd, / With languish't head unpropt, / As one past hope, abandon'd, / And by himself given over; / In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds / O'er worn and soil'd' (118-23): the picture of shame and depression. He describes his experience in a mode of painful interiority unique in the literature of shame, telling how his thoughts mangle his 'apprehensive tenderest parts, / Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise / Dire inflammation which no cooling herb / Or med'cinal liquor can assuage, / Nor breath of Vernal air from snowy Alp' (623-8). Samson redeems himself by pulling down the pillars of the building where he is expected to perform feats of strength to amuse his captors, killing himself as well as the entire throng. 'Samson hath quit himself / Like Samson' (1709-10). His story comes from the Old Testament book of Judges. I will show later that Shakespeare typically represents a New Testament opposition between secular and spiritual shame.

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[81] in *Samson Agonistes and the Shorter Poems of Milton*, Isabel Gamble MacCaffery (ed.), (New York: The New American Library, 1966).

shamelessness in renaissance literature

The themes of shame and shamelessness in renaissance literature cross over. Shame is a motive for shamelessness; shamelessness is shameful and outrageous to the modest temperament; deliberate shamelessness practises on modest susceptibility. The influence of Machiavelli on contemporary drama is well known. Machevill inducts *The Jew of Malta* in person, the pun indicating that it is the spiritual threat which the Florentine thinker represents that excites Marlowe most. Marlowe's joke is that Machevill finds only shame shameful: 'Birds of the air will tell of murders past / I am asham'd to hear such fooleries!' (prologue, 17-18). Marlowe's protagonists are violators: Tamburlaine violates all feeling for hierarchy; Faustus offends against heaven; Edward outrages noble pride and sexual convention. The Jew of Malta is Machevill's protégé; he remarks, 'Haply some hapless man hath conscience' (1.1.121). His life is a continual performance of shamelessness, his favourite pastime to 'walk abroad a-nights / And kill sick people groaning under walls'(2.3.179-80). He has been a physician who slew his patients; an engineer who 'under the pretence of helping Charles the Fifth, / Slew friend and enemy with my stratagems'; an usurer who 'fill'd the gaols with bankrupts in a year, / And with young orphans planted hospitals / And every moon made some or other mad, / And now or then one hang himself for grief, / Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll / How I with interest tormented him' (2.3. 186-203). By making him a Jew in a Christian society, Marlowe proposes that shamelessness is particularly tempting for the stigmatised. As Webster later puts it, 'there's in shame no comfort, / But to be past all bounds and sense of shame' (*The Duchess of Malfi,* 3.2.81-2).[82] Barrabas is the forerunner of Richard III and Shylock. A spirit of Marlovian shamelessness can be detected in most of Shakespeare's villains, especially Edmond.

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[82] Elizabeth Brennan (ed.), rev. ed. (Ernest Benn: London and Tonbridge, 1974).

If Marlowe typically sets a shameless hero against a vulnerable world, then, in contrast, the early revenge plays set an outraged avenger against a shameless world. Hamlet asks, 'O shame, where is thy blush?' (3.4.81); in Martson's *The Malcontent,* Altofronto opposes a society grown 'blushless' (2.3.46, 3.2.31, 4.3.35)[83] and degenerate. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice says with bitter irony:

> Let blushes dwell i' the country. Impudence,
> Thou goddess of the palace, mistress of mistresses,
> To whom the costly-perfumed people pray,
> Strike thou my forehead into dauntless marble,
> Mine eyes to steady sapphires; turn my visage
> And if I must needs glow let me blush inward
> That this immodest season may not spy
> That scholar in my cheeks, fool bashfulness,
> That maid in the old time whose flush of grace
> Would never suffer her to get good clothes.
> Our maids are wiser now and less ashamed -
> Save Grace the bawd I seldom hear grace named! (1.3.4-16)

But after Shakespeare drama once more stresses the vitality and freedom of the shameless; examples of this include Webster's *The White Devil* (1612), Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622), and Ford's tragedy of incest *'Tis Pity She's A Whore* (1633).

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[83] George K. Hunter (ed.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975). Mendoza quotes the tag '*Fortune still dotes on those who cannot blush*' (2.1.29).

4

An Introduction to Shakespearean Shame

We have now seen that shame is a key theme in the Renaissance generally. It is particularly central to Shakespeare's art. Proof of this will emerge in the remainder of this thesis, but a solitary piece of bald lexical evidence is that Shakespeare uses the word 'shame' three hundred and forty four times. He uses the word 'guilt' only thirty three times.[1] Jonson uses 'shame' fifty two times.[2] This chapter offers a preliminary account of Shakespearean shame, with examples taken from early, pre-tragic Shakespeare; it lays the groundwork, both conceptually and in terms of Shakespeare's development, for Part Two, where I give new readings of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*.

shaming as dramatic motif

Like Marlowe and Jonson, Shakespeare capitalises on the dramatic potential of external shaming. Many memorable Shakespearean scenes present a shaming spectacle, though there is space for only a few select instances here. Perhaps the earliest is the shaming of Eleanor Cobham, the treasonous Duchess of Gloucester. It is one of only a few scenes to come fully to life in the rather inert first Henriad. Eleanor's husband, who discouraged her treason, moans in sympathy as he waits for her to be paraded through the common highway:

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[1] See Marvin Spevack, *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968).

[2] This figure is derived from the Chadwyck Healey English Poetry Full-Text Database and from the same company's Verse Drama Database.

Sweet Nell, ill can thy noble mind abrook
The abject people gazing on thy face
With envious looks, laughing at thy shame,
That erst did follow thy proud chariot wheels
When thou didst ride in triumph through the streets. (2.4.10-14)[3]

The stage direction reads, '*Enter the Duchess of* GLOUCESTER, *barefoot in a white sheet, and a taper burning in her hand; with Sir* JOHN STANLEY, *the Sheriff, and Officers*': this, as we have seen, was the common sanction of the church courts of Shakespeare's England. The following exchange ensues between wife and husband:

Duch. Come you, my lord, to see my open shame?
Now thou dost penance too. Look how they gaze!
See how the giddy multitude do point,
And nod their heads and throw their eyes on thee!
Ah! Gloucester, hide thee from their hateful looks,
And, in thy closet pent up, rue my shame,
And ban thine enemies, both mine and thine.
Glou. Be patient, gentle Nell; forget this grief.
Duch. Ah! Gloucester, teach me to forget myself;
For whilst I think I am thy married wife,
And thou a prince, Protector of this land,
Methinks I should not thus be led along,
Mail'd up in shame, with papers on my back,
And follow'd with a rabble that rejoice
To see my tears and hear my deep-fet groans.
The ruthless flint doth cut my tender feet,
And when I start, the envious people laugh,
And bid me be advised how I tread.
Ah! Humphrey, can I bear this shameful yoke?
Trowest thou that e'er I'll look upon the world,
Or count them happy that enjoys the sun?
No; dark shall be my light, and night my day;
To think upon my pomp shall be my hell. (2.4.19-41)

Though they seem superficial when compared with expressions of shame from the tragedies, these lines capably evoke a consciousness of exposure and scorn. Shakespearean shaming is characteristically more inward and sympathetic than shaming in Marlowe and Jonson. Eleanor realises that what is at stake is her very self. Having being seen thus, treated thus, endangers, if it does not utterly destroy, the aristocratic image by which she knows herself and is known to the world: that is why she wishes to be out of sight, immured in darkness. It is suggestive that her husband and his party are clad in mourning garments, as if she had actually died. Already, even in so early and so crude a production of his pen, we sense Shakespeare's richly intuitive comprehension of shame as an emotion.

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[3] The Arden *2 Henry VI*, Andrew S. Cairncross (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1957).

The degradation of the Duchess is a miserable affair; but Shakespeare is alert to the comic possibilities of shaming, as is evident from the Mozartian sequence of hiding and exposure in *Love's Labour's Lost.* The four callow protagonists have sworn ascetic dedication to scholarship, only to fall in love with the first women they see. Berowne enters trailing a love-sonnet and expatiates on his shame and turmoil; he steps aside and looks on when Navarre appears sighing and carrying his own amorous verses. Navarre conceals himself when Longaville enters with an epistle of love to his preferred lady. Finally, '*Enter* DUMAIN *with a paper*': Berowne hoots in astonishment (inaudibly to the rest) 'four woodcocks in a dish!' (4.3.79). It is superlative theatre. With the exception of Berowne, each of the protagonists has in turn unwittingly exposed himself before an increasing number of peers. The theatrical metaphor - Berowne says, 'All hid, all hid; an old infant play. / Like a demi-god here sit I in the sky, / And wretched fools' secrets heedfully o'er eye' (4.3.75-7) - encourages us to reflect that they are all, including Berowne, additionally exposed before ourselves, the off-stage audience. With the exception of Dumain, each is also forced to confront the image of his shame, in Berowne's case three times; which provides the solace of 'sweet fellowship in shame' (4.3.36) but painfully increases consciousness of being likewise at fault. The scene unwinds when Longaville emerges from his hiding place and accuses Dumain with these words, 'I would blush, I know / To be o'erheard and taken napping so' (4.3.126-7); on cue, the King steps out, 'Come, sir, you blush; as your case is such; / You chide at him offending twice as much' (4.3.128-9). Berowne then strides triumphantly forth and mocks the three of them. The pattern is fulfilled when Costard enters with Jaquenetta and mistakenly delivers Berowne's earlier love letter to the King; all four are now shamed before a representative female.

Shakespeare goes beyond his contemporaries here in his witty manipulation of shame. 'The brilliantly effective dramaturgy... derives from a discrepancy between the illusory privacy and independence of action that each successive character believes he possesses and the highly formalised and predictable pattern of action they collectively present to the audience on behalf of the dramatist.'[4] The scene gives form to, provides an image for, the shame of young men in love, who hopelessly attempt to conceal their common and transparent infatuations which they think of as unique and private. Shakespeare took it from Lyly's *Gallathea*; but, as Bate notes, 'Where Lyly drops three characters into the trap, Shakespeare goes one better with four. And there is no equivalent in Lyly for the *timing* of embarrassment upon embarrassment, culminating in the master-stroke of Jaquenetta's arrival. Nor does Lyly self-consciously explore the relationship between the dramatic narrative and the theatrical experience; it is Shakespeare... who introduces the extra layer of the audience's overhearing of the action'.[5]

In *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare blends the comic and pathetic affects of shaming to create a more richly ambiguous experience than any shaming spectacle found in Marlowe or in Jonson. Portia's demolition of Shylock at his moment of bloodthirsty triumph is simultaneously funny and pitiable. We remain detached and Shylock's shaming is a relief and an amusement insofar as he is the Vice inherited from medieval drama, his name *Shy-lock* perhaps indicating that he is a type of covetousness; insofar as he is a deliberate alien who refuses to eat with Christians; and insofar as he represents the Old Law which is rejected, the law of vengeance. But to the extent that he is a genuinely excluded and persecuted Jew asserting himself against the power that oppresses him, his defeat and degradation is terrible and sad. A lesser case is when the yellow-stockinged and cross-gartered Malvolio is 'made the most notorious geck and gull / That e'er invention play'd on' (5.1.343-4).[6] Like Shylock, he, too, is a vice figure deserving exposure and punishment, his name, *Mal-volio*, suggesting ill will. But, beyond the Jonsonian moral design, he also appeals for sympathy. Pronounced lunatic, bound and imprisoned in 'hideous darkness' (4.2.31), he moans, 'never was man thus wronged' (4.2.29); 'there never was man so notoriously abused' (4.2.90): when Sir Michael Hordern played the role at the Old Vic in 1954, his hands reaching out of the pit suggested to one critic 'the damned in the inferno'.[7]

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[4] Louis A. Montrose, 'Sport by Sport O'erthrown: *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Politics of Play', in *Shakespeare's Comedies*, Gary Waller (ed.), (Harlow: Longman, 1993), p. 63.

[5] p. 140.

the Shakespearean concept of shame

As well as an exemplary understanding of the theatrical possibilities and affects of shaming, the younger Shakespeare also had a lucid conception of what shame is. We have seen that in *Henry VI* shame is opposite to identity and a kind of death. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, it is realised as physical deformity. This metaphoric notion is more serious than the popular assumptions of renaissance physiognomy, in which, for instance, a third nipple is a sign of devilishness; for selfhood truly can be deformed and marred. Tarquin says Lucrece's rape will 'live engraven in his face' (203);[8] that her husband Collatine will be marked with 'The blemish that will never be forgot, / Worse than a slavish wipe or birth-hour's blot' (523-4); and that her children will be 'blurred with nameless bastardy' (496). This concretely expresses a sense of horrible difference from the ideal patterns of respectively humane, husbandly, and filial identity. And when the rapist comes before Lucrece and that bewildered victim cannot at first recognise him as Tarquin but only as some monster who has stolen his likeness, the threat which shame poses to selfhood is particularly clear:

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[6] The Arden *Twelfth Night*, J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1975).

[7] Noted by John Russell Brown, 'Directions for *Twelfth Night or What You Will*', in Laurence Lerner (ed.), *Shakespeare's Comedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 277.

[8] in *The Poems*, F. T. Prince (ed.).

> 'In Tarquin's likeness I did entertain thee:
> Hast thou put on his shape to do me shame?
> To all the host of heaven I complain me,
> Thou wrong'st his honour, wound'st his princely name;
> Thou art not what thou seem'st, and if the same,
> Thou seem'st not what thou art (596-601)

The outstanding image of shame in early Shakespeare comes in the deposition scene of *Richard II* (4.1) already cited. Usurped, degraded, exposed, and hence utterly altered, Richard grows curious to see 'the very book indeed / Where all my sins are writ, and that's myself' (4.1.274-5). He demands a mirror, 'if my word be sterling yet in England' (4.1.264-7). He expects to meet a different, disfigured self in the glass, to see the face of 'unking'd Richard': but he detects no physical change. 'Thou dost beguile me', he berates the glass (4.1.281); and saying, 'A brittle glory shineth in this face; / As brittle as the glory is the face' (4.1.287-8), dashes it on the ground. It is a theatrical representation of the shattering of his self-image. Richard's ill-tempered action symbolises the shame he feels, his bitter repudiation of his broken, fragmented self. His image 'crack'd in an hundred shivers' (4.1.287-90) signifies the shame of what has happened to him and his accustomed majesty: he is now a man without a face, a no-one. This Shakespearean concept of shame as not being one's ideal self and of simply not being will be explored and developed in the tragedies.

moral and religious shame

It is also in the tragedies that Shakespeare's special interest in moral and Christian shame fully emerges, but it too is visible in the previous work. In early Shakespeare, there is a motif of morally significant blushing. There is the baroque, Spenserian description of the modest Lucrece's blushes when she first hospitably receives the malevolent Tarquin, 'This silent war of lilies and of roses' (71); this culminates in a pagan moral myth for the genesis of the blush, 'which virtue gave the golden age to gild / Their silver cheeks, and call'd it then their shield; / Teaching them thus to use it in the fight, / When shame assail'd, the red should fence the white' (60-3). Blushing is also an important moral indicator in *Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare insists, with Senecan distastefulness, that his mutilated rape-victim Lavinia blushes even when she is losing so much blood from three wounds as to resemble some macabre fountain;[9] and he makes much of the fact that his villainous Moor Aaron is too black to blush.[10] In *Much Ado*, Claudio falsely contends that Hero's blush is 'guiltiness, not modesty' (4.1.41);[11] but Friar Francis, after long, silent perusal of her face, correctly concludes that the 'thousand blushing apparitions' (4.1.159) there are the flickering flames of a chaste fire of innocent shame and outrage.

Though it remains firmly subordinate to plot, and seems crude and superficial when compared to the tragedies, spiritually redeeming shame is first dramatised by Shakespeare in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Valentine catches Proteus attempting to rape his fiancé Silvia - shaming at its most sensational - but Proteus responds:

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[9] 'notwithstanding all this loss of blood, / As from a conduit with three issuing spouts, / Yet do thy cheeks look red as Titan's face, / Blushing to be encountered with a cloud' (The Arden *Titus Andronicus*, Jonathan Bate (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1995), 2.3.29-32).

[10] When he confesses his villainy to his captors, one of them asks Aaron, 'What, canst thou say all this and never blush?' (5.1.120); he answers, 'Ay, like a black dog, as the saying is' (5.1.121), glorying in his shamelessness.

[11] The Arden *Much Ado About Nothing*, A. R. Humphreys (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1981).

> My shame and guilt confounds me.
> Forgive me, Valentine: if hearty sorrow
> Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
> I tender't here; I do as truly suffer,
> As e'er I did commit. (5.4.73-7)[12]

Valentine answers, 'Then I am paid; / And once again I do receive thee honest'(5.4.7-8). Though far too curt and absolute for modern audiences and readers with a predilection for psychological realism, this is informed by Christian notions of penitence and grace; and gives us shame as reformation and the price of redemption. Through most of the play Proteus, as his name indicates, has had no fixed self; that is why he is able to betray his friend and his faithful lover Julia. But by means of repentant shame he has now discovered the grounds of positive and assured being in goodness. This separates him from his earlier degenerate self, and he gets Julia back and is included in the happy ending. The same process of finding a good and true identity in deserved moral shame is a feature of *As You Like It*, where Oliver repents his jealous attempt on his brother Orlando's life and feels born again. Looking back on his earlier, unregenerate self he comments beautifully, ''Twas I. But 'tis not I. I do not shame / To tell you what I was, since my conversion / So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am' (4.3.135-7).

A more developed and intimate representation of spiritual shame is found in *Richard III*. Here the wicked protagonist is powerfully assailed by unforseen shame and guilt on the eve of Bosworth Field:

> Have mercy, Jesu! - Soft! I did but dream.
> O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
> The light turns blue. It is now dead midnight.
> Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
> What do I fear? myself? there's none else by:
> Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
> Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.
> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason: why?
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?

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[12] The Arden *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Clifford Leech (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1972).

> Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? for any good
> That I myself have done unto myself?
> O, no! alas, I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself.
> I am a villain: yet I lie, I am not.
> Fool of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter.
> My conscience hath a several thousand tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain.
> Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree;
> Murder, stern murder, in the dir'st degree;
> All several sins all us'd in each degree,
> Throng to the bar, crying all, 'Guilty! guilty!'
> I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
> And, if I die, no soul will pity me:
> Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
> Find in myself no pity to myself?
> Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
> Came to my tent, and every one did threat
> To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard. (5.3.178-207)[13]

With its fragmented syntax, irregular metre, and rapid shifts of setting - from the imagined battlefield, to 'now dead midnight', to the theatre of conscience, to the bar of judgement, to the after-life, 'to my tent', to 'to-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard' - this strongly evokes spiritual crisis. 'The light turns blue'; 'cold fearful drops stand on [Richard's] trembling flesh'. Two selves are speaking,[14] as is evident in the use of both first and third person, question and answer, disagreement. This represents an important insight, for shame always involves some such opposition between the judging self and the self judged to be inadequate - we may recall Richard II's repudiation of his mirror-image here: in contrast, pride, the more positive emotion of self-assessment, marries satisfied self with the self judged satisfactory. We can still make out the familiar voice of the shameless Richard: 'O coward conscience', 'Richard loves Richard', 'Alack, I love myself', 'Fool of thyself speak well'. But now a sternly conscientious voice, the voice of moral shame sinfully suppressed, is audible too: 'I... hate myself, / For hateful deeds committed by myself', 'I am a villain'. With its 'several thousand tongues', this voice necessarily drowns out shamelessness. Richard is afraid that his usurping moral self will wreak revenge on his previously dominant shameless self, which betrayed it to evil: afraid, that is, that he will kill himself. His conscience is informing against him; his sins rising up to accuse him. Shocked out of his villainy, he relapses into a pathetic complaint of lack of love; and his sense of being unlovable is based not now on a helpless and pitiable consciousness of physical deformity, but on a belated recognition of the spiritual ugliness for which he is entirely responsible, having deformed his soul. There is no refuge in self-pity for him, for he knows that condemnation and punishment are his just deserts; he is on the verge of siding with the enemy, against himself. In the end he chooses to persevere in wickedness, defying shame like Macbeth. But it is a pyrrhic victory; for he is therefore not redeemed, and we must suppose that he goes to hell.

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[13] The Arden *Richard III*, A. Hamilton Thomson (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1932).

[14] Gabriele Taylor recognises this fragmentation of Richard's selfhood (p. 96n.). She compares it with the experience of Dickens's Jonas Chuzzlewit, who, having murdered a blackmailer, becomes afraid of his own righteous self, whom he deposed by means of that murder (pp. 95-6).

Of all Shakespeare's earlier plays, *Measure for Measure* exhibits the most specifically Christian sense of shame. The strict deputy Angelo, who 'scarce confesses / That his blood flows; or that his appetite / Is more to bread than stone' (1.3.51-3), falls into sexual sin when, just as he has revived draconian laws to reform a depraved Vienna, his repressed desire fastens on another ascetic, the novice Isabella, who has come before him to plead for the life of her brother Claudio. Angelo recognises his identity is at stake: 'what dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?' (2.2.173). Yet he succumbs to temptation nonetheless, offering to spare Claudio if Isabella will yield to him; ultimately pleasuring himself on what he thinks her body. In this he is utterly shameless: 'I have begun, / And now I give my sensual race the rein' (2.4.158-9). He tells Isabella to 'lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes' (2.4.161). She threatens to expose him: 'Sign me a present pardon for my brother, / Or with outstretch'd throat I'll tell the world aloud / What man thou art' (2.4.150-3). But he is not afraid: such is the wide fame of his reputation for purity, no mud will stick; and when he supposes he has bedded her, he presumes 'her tender shame / Will not proclaim against her maiden loss' (4.4.19-20). He is himself oppressed by a sense of self-loss, acknowledging 'this deed unshapes me quite' (4.4.18); but he compounds his villainy by perjuring himself, declining to spare Claudio even though Isabella has (as he thinks) fulfilled her part of the bargain. But he does not get away with it. Earlier in the play Isabella has an important speech expressing the shameful exposure of men before God:

> But man, proud man,
> Dressed in a little brief authority,
> Most ignorant of what he is most assured -
> His glassy essence - like an angry ape
> Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
> As make the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
> Would all laugh themselves mortal. (2.2.118-24)

Angelo is naked to God and to His angels; and also to God's representative on earth, his worldly lord, Vincentio, who has remained in Vienna and observed his transgressions. In the last scene, this disguised Duke reveals himself, drawing from Angelo the following speech:

> O my dread lord,
> I should be guiltier than my guiltiness
> To think I can be undiscernible,
> When I perceive your Grace, like power divine,
> Hath looked upon my passes. Then, good prince,
> No longer session hold upon my shame,
> But let my trial be mine own confession.
> Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death
> Is all the grace I beg. (5.1.364-72)

This was probably about as close as an English renaissance dramatist could get to a supernatural scene without incurring the censor's wrath.[15] Angelo feels naked like the soul at judgement; his references to his 'dread lord', 'power divine', 'good', 'grace' bespeak a new spiritual awareness. He does not feel for himself and his loss of face, as we might expect; but rather that he has betrayed his 'good prince', who is Christ as well as Vicentio, by his wicked 'passes'. He wants to die; and yet, this is perhaps the most positive moment in the play. Richard P. Wheeler senses 'a strong feeling of release and a curiously compelling dignity in Angelo... [who] finds in the shaming presence of the Duke... the strength to snap even the durable thread of self-preservation that has led him to compound his corruption'.[16] Angelo's shame is a terrible feeling of infernal defilement, but also a first remorseful turning back to God and goodness: since he is allowed to live, it may presage a more joyous spiritual renewal.

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[15] See Janet Clare, *'Art made tongue-tied by authority'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). Dramatic censorship began with the suppression of the sacred drama of the Mystery plays. 'The fundamentals of early Elizabethan censorship are contained in a proclamation issued in the first year of the reign, "Prohibiting Unlicensed Interludes and Plays, Especially on Religion or Policy".... Local officials were instructed not to permit any play "wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonweal shall be handled or treated"' (pp. 4-5). English

shame and love

An important theme in the tragedies, shame and love is also a concern of *The Sonnets*. 'Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action', the famous first clause of 'Sonnet 129', plays on the rich ambiguity of the word 'shame', simultaneously suggesting that lust is a shameful waste of the human spirit; that it wastes or despoils our sense of shame; and that it is a waste of the painful deterrent of shame since we are all incorrigibly lusty. As John Kerrigan points out, by clever punning it also describes the concrete process of copulation: th'expense of spirit in a *waist* of shame.[17] The overall vision of the poem is of mankind as an unteachable breed of Pavlov's dogs, who cannot resist the bait of sex despite knowing a shock of shame will inevitably succeed it.

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renaissance drama does not contain supernatural material, although *Doctor Faustus* is one obvious exception.

[16] *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 98.

[17] p. 357.

But the connection between shame and lust is less interesting and plural than that between shame and love proper, which Shakespeare explores in his sonnets to the fair youth. The ignoble writer-persona of those poems, referred to hereafter as the sonneteer, is ashamed of his coarse manners and ink-stained hand, the results of having had to earn his living in the world ('Sonnet 111'). 'Sonnet 29' presents love as the antidote to such shame:

> When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet, in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
> Like to the lark at the break of day arising
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
> For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

The octave here evokes a mood of miserable shame and self-reproach. Social exclusion and ill-repute present the writer with an unfavourable self-image, causing him feelings of self-disgust; these tip over into jealousy. Unhappy with himself, he imagines a better favoured and more promising man, the embodiment of the standard to which he compares himself adversely; and he wishes he resembled this man in all respects. He envies anyone else's advantages - this man's art, that man's scope - but takes no pleasure in his own self; perversely, his blessings especially discontent and irk him. Yet, with the turn at the beginning of the sestet, the remembrance of love lifts him out of this slough of shame and despond; he experiences it as a sudden transfusion of worth and value.

It is a happy ending but 29 presents a self-centred experience of love as merely that which redeems the sonneteer's faltering pride. Such love is a form of dependency and it is given a distasteful cast in 'Sonnet 37'. There the sonneteer describes himself as lame, poor, and despised; but he does not despair, for, having enumerated his lover's excellences, he admits, 'I make my love engrafted to this store' (8); 'I in thy abundance am sufficed / And by a part of all thy glory live' (11-12). This is sheer parasitism. The sonneteer has not enough confidence in himself to achieve a true relationship; shame poisons love and prevents its full expression.

Nor does love truly cure his shame, for it does not teach him to love himself. 'Sonnet 62' tells how when he looks in the mirror he finds himself 'Beated and chopped with tanned antiquity' (10) but contrives to avoid shame by identifying instead with the image of his beloved. This defers self-disgust, but does not defeat it; for he has acquired his lover as a second and better self only metaphorically; and, as the rest of the sequence indicates, life is continually bringing him face to face with his real and (in his view) shameful self. Moreover, love gives him no security against shame, because, since he feels unlovable, he has no confidence in it; as he puts it himself, 'to leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws, / Since why to love I can allege no cause' (49, 13-14). He is haunted by the prospect of abandonment, becoming obsessed with the thought that his beloved will eventually 'place my merit in the eye of scorn' (88, 1-2). This shame-generated fantasy of humiliation is developed in 49, 88, and 89. In his desperation to preserve his shame-deferring identification with the beloved, but also out of sheer self-hate, the sonneteer promises that he will accuse and degrade himself when his beloved is disposed to shame him, boasting at one point, 'Thou canst not, love, disgrace me half so ill, / To set a form upon desired change / As I'll myself disgrace, knowing thy will' (89, 5-7). He never achieves a tolerable relation with himself, or the fair youth. And it is not surprising when, in 'Sonnet 72', we find him looking forward to death and oblivion: 'My name be buried where my body is / And live no more to shame nor me nor you' (72, 11-12).

The failure of the love in *The Sonnets* suggests that love in the romantic sense cannot accommodate shame; that shame disables love. The vision of love here is of a confident relation of confident selves. This is also the case, as I argue below, in *Much Ado About Nothing*; and it is the reason why Shakespeare's comic women remove their disguises before marriage.

shame and the disguise theme

At this point I wish to introduce the new idea that sexual disguise in Shakespeare is concerned with shame. In recent years, much influential work has been published on the disguise motif; but there has not been a debate so much as a gathering consensus, and opinion has hardened into a new orthodoxy. The orthodox view is that sexual disguise in Shakespeare represents the constructedness of gender and the possibility of freedom therefrom. Catherine Belsey perceived Shakespeare's comedy 'as disrupting sexual difference, calling into question that set of relations between masculine and feminine, men and women'.[18] This sufficiently plausible and interesting suggestion has been taken up by almost everyone else: Phyllis Rackin, Jean E. Howard, Maurice Shapiro, Stephen Orgel, not to mention creative writers like Angela Carter.[19] The critic who more than any other has made transvestism her theme is the Shakespearean turned cultural commentator, Marjorie Garber. She makes an extraordinary claim for transvestism: 'there can be no culture without the transvestite'.[20] This is because 'Transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture',[21] the inevitable, and potentially liberating, consequence of our creation of categories; and not only categories of gender, but of race, class, whatever - Garber interestingly notes the prevalence of transvestites in black American fiction. The transvestite is a significant and threatening figure because he / she proves the contingency of our cultural norms. 'Transvestite theater recognises that *all* of the figures onstage are impersonators', just as we, in Garber's view, are impersonators in real life, impersonators of our own selves, impersonators of the culturally constructed concepts which we think of as our own selves. 'In other words, there is no ground of Shakespeare that is not already cross-dressed'.[22]

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[18] 'Disrupting sexual difference: meaning and gender in the comedies', in John Drakakis (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 167.

[19] Phyllis Rackin, 'Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 102 (1987), 29-41; Jean E. Howard, 'Cross Dressing, the Theatre and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 (1988), 418-40; Maurice Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994); Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). An exception is Stephen Greenblatt, who offers an ingeniously different new historicist interpretation ('Fiction and Friction', in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)).

It is not part of my intention to argue that the epicene figures of Shakespeare's comedy do not call into question the fixed categories of gender: that clearly is part of their suggestiveness. But there is every reason to believe that Shakespeare, unlike Garber and the other critics I have mentioned, did not feel that identity was a wholly arbitrary affair determined merely by the individual and by human culture, but felt rather - like the rest of his contemporaries - that it was fundamentally natural and God-given.[23] Thus when Shakespeare's heroines take off their disguises at the end of their plays, they are not giving up a postmodern odyssey for sterile conformity, which would destroy the comedy; they are returning to, or achieving, their true and natural selves. Sexual disguise in Shakespeare is less *dressing-up*, a phrase with the buoyant, creative implications of transvestism as in Garber *et al*, than *covering-up*; less positive transvestism, than negative *dis-guise*: self-effacement. It is an important Shakespearean symbol of shame.

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[20] *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 34.

[21] p. 17.

[22] p. 40.

[23] There was 'renaissance self-fashioning', but what was still an ultimately theological world-view limited its scope. The idea that our identities are entirely self-created was as yet a doubt, a fear, not a liberation to be joyfully embraced.

Shakespeare's comedy is concerned with sexual development, with growing-up, with that phase of life between childhood and adulthood, adolescence or puberty; in the words of *As You Like It*, 'moonish youth' (3.2.398). As Christopher Ricks notes in his seminal *Keats and Embarrassment*, adolescents are especially prone to embarrassment and shame. It is not hard to see why. In adolescence each individual must undergo his own sexual revolution; the sexually innocent child is overthrown by the sexually mature adult. During the transition, 'in standing water, between boy and man' (*Twelfth Night*, 1.5.161), ignorant of himself, and especially of his developing sexual attributes and appetites, he is unsure of his role and inadequate to and embarrassed in public situations: he frequently wishes he was alone, elsewhere, concealed, or covered up. This is even more the case with women whose hormones are in revolt in a context where particular modesty is or was expected of their sex. I have already shown that *Love's Labour's Lost* is concerned with the embarrassments of young men in love. Here my contention is that Shakespearean comedy uses the motif of sexual disguise to represent the sexual shame and anxiety of adolescent females, which is cast off in sexual maturity in readiness for marriage. This fits in with the seasonal movement of these plays towards fruition and harvest. It also seems intuitively right: 'ripeness *is* all' (*The Tragedy of King Lear*, 5.2.11)[24] in matters of sex and marriage. A disguised figure is an apt representation for embarrassment and shame, drawing on archetypal associations: Adam and Eve cover themselves with leaves and branches; and as etymological root for 'shame' most scholars assume a pre-teutonic 'skem' variant of 'kem' to cover (O.E.D.). And there are definite textual indicators that Shakespeare considers disguise a sign of shame. The maliciously gleeful Princess of France in *Love's Labour's Lost* expects her shamed suitors will 'hang themselves tonight / Or ever, but in visors, show their faces' (5.2.270-1); and *Cymbeline* confirms that faces can be 'cas'd' for shame

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[24] in the compact edition of *The Complete Works*, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

(5.3.21-2).[25] In the quarto text of *King Lear,* Albany calls Goneril 'thou changed, and self-covered thing for shame'.[26]

The theme of Shakespearean sexual disguise appears first in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: Julia's male garb becomes increasingly resonant of the sexual shame and embarrassment she suffers from discovering that Proteus has rejected her and is chasing another woman. The witty and sportive Rosalind in *As You Like It* is not inherently bashful, but sudden enamourment with Orlando steals her composure, making her melancholy and confused. Banished from Duke Frederick's court, she and her companion Celia, like Julia, are forced to conceal their sexual attributes to forestall attack on the road; but since she is oppressed by her emerging sexuality, this presents Rosalind with the perfect opportunity for relief. Her decision to conceal her femininity altogether and adopt a male persona puts an end to her embarrassment and restores her good spirits:

> Were it not better,
> Because that I am more than common tall,
> That I did suit me all points like a man?
> A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,
> A boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart,
> Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will,
> We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
> As many other mannish cowards have
> That do outface it with their semblances. (1.3.110-18)

Celia, who provides a diminished reflection of Rosalind, effaces her attractions by dirtying and degrading herself - 'I'll put myself in poor and mean attire, / And with a kind of umber smirch my face' (1.3.107-108) - which carries a darker hint of shame. Her choice of the name Aliena expresses hers and Rosalind's alienation from themselves. That something more than sensible self-protection is going on is also suggested by the fact that Rosalind and Celia are not, like Julia, travelling alone, but under the escort of Touchstone; and confirmed when they fail to take off their disguises on arriving in Arden where Rosalind's father is.

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[25] The Arden *Cymbeline*, J. M. Nosworthy (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1972).

[26] *M. William Shak-speare: his True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three daughters*, (London: Printed for Nathaniel Butler [etc.], 1608), from the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, 2039. The Oxford text has 'self covered-thing, for shame / ...' (16.61) but the line ending preserves the same sense.

It is not that they will not take them off; they cannot: they are ashamed of their naked selves. Like Portia in *The Merchant,* whose disguise is unconnected to shame, Rosalind, who has a good deal of the actor in her, is in some ways genuinely liberated by her new identity, playing her part with fluency and gusto; but that will not justify the ecstasies of Camille Paglia who calls her 'My Mercurius, first conceived by Shakespeare... the androgynous spirit of impersonation, the living embodiment of multiplicity of persona'.[27] This removes Rosalind entirely from her position as a character in a play, which, though perhaps interesting and fruitful, will not do as criticism. Rosalind's role-playing is an evasion rather than an extension of her being; less a form of true freedom, than a temporary self-denial. The fundamental fact about her, and all of Shakespeare's sexually disguised women, is that she is in love with a heterosexual man: thus her sexual disguise is fundamentally frustrating. Though also partly jokey, the specifically misogynist and anti-romantic postures she adopts hint at self-abuse and confused self-punishment, motivated by fear and incomprehension of her developing sexual nature. Celia says to her in irritation, 'You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate. We must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what that bird hath done to her own nest' (4.1.191-4). Unhappy shame is also evident in Rosalind's undertaking to cure Orlando of loving her; but if she cannot approach her lover or live with her love, she cannot withdraw either, and her 'cure' involves her in a comically homosexual courtship where in her role of Ganymede she is wooed as if she were Rosalind.

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[27] *Sexual Personae* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 199.

Rosalind's problems are the familiar travails of adolescence. Invaded by sexual longings but embarrassed by them, drawn to but also shy of her man, she is completely unable to be herself simply; and be direct with him. For this reason, it may be that the vitality of her acting is in part nervous or hysterical, its energy generated by the falsity and stress of her predicament. Underneath a powerful and poignant desire for a more open encounter can be detected: 'call me Rosalind and come every day to my cote and woo me' (3.3.414-15); 'Nay, you must call me Rosalind' (3.3.422); 'What would you say to me now, and I were your very very Rosalind?' (4.1.66-8); 'Am I not your Rosalind?'(4.1.84). When at last she discards her disguise and puts on the destined livery of woman, she has passed into maturity and sexual ripeness: the fact that it is specifically Hymen who helps her reinforces the point.

Viola's assuming the role of Cesario in *Twelfth Night* is also in part a portrayal of sexual shame. In the dialogue leading up to it, we find her, in the way of youth, comically curious about sex; immediately and without cause bringing up Orsino's marital status, and eager for knowledge of his love interest. But in spite of this preoccupation, Viola is embarrassed and confused by her own sexual nature, sighing at the discovery that Olivia 'hath abjur'd the company and sight of men' (1.2.40-1):

> O that I serv'd that lady,
> And might not be deliver'd to the world,
> Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,
> What my estate is. (1.2.41-4)

She is captivated by the thought of entering Olivia's sexual cloister until she has fully ripened into womanhood: informed that it would be impossible, she decides to 'conceal me what I am' (1.2.53) and serve Orsino as 'an eunuch' (1.2.56): the next best thing.

Viola's thoughts run on bachelors, but constrained by shame and embarrassment she is not yet ready to appear in the brave new world of Illyria as a marriageable young woman. In light of this it is worth reconsidering her names - both her given name, Viola, and the name she chooses for her male alter-ego, Cesario. Besides its romantic musical inflection, Viola suggests both the sense of violation her still childish self feels at her emerging sexuality; and the violation she commits on it by temporarily neutering herself. Stephen Orgel has already drawn attention to her choice of the name Cesario:

> Cesario is the Italian form of the Latin *Cesarius,* 'belonging to Caesar' (and hence untouchable - in Wyatt's words, '*Noli me tangere*, for Caesar's I am'), but we can also find in it what etymologists from Varro onward found in the name Caesar itself, the past participle of *caedo, caesus,* 'cut', alluding in Caesar's case to his Caesarian birth.[28]

Thus Viola's new name hints at social or sexual severance and castration.

She is hardly a feminist heroine. She is utterly repressed, cut off both from her own self and the world. Strangely anticipating Iago, she says, 'I am not what I am' (3.1.143). She is a 'poor monster' (2.2.33), not a liberated transsexual. She tells Olivia, 'What I am, and what I would, are as secret as maidenhead' (1.5.218-19). Worst of all, she is cut off from Orsino, whom she loves and is so agonisingly physically close to as his trusty servant and confidant. Her experience is of amorous frustration and suffering. In her most potent and celebrated speech, she speaks to Orsino of her real self as though of Cesario's sister:

> *Duke.* And what's her history?
> Viola. A blank, my lord: she never told her love,
> But let concealment like a worm i' th' bud
> Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought,
> And with a green and yellow melancholy

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[28] pp. 53-4.

> She sat like Patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief. (2.4.110-114)

This describes a condition of disease, corruption, and morbid stagnation. When Orsino asks Cesario, 'But died thy sister of her love, my boy?', Viola answers, 'I am all the daughters of my father's house and all the brothers too: and yet I know not' (2.4.120-22): she has lost all sense of her life and self. Also, insofar as she is still speaking in character as Cesario of another Viola, her alter ego, she is confronting the thought that she might never put shame aside and tell her love: she might die first. Here is the nightmare of sexual shame and bashfulness: perpetual virginity.

The end of *Twelfth Night*, 'this most happy wreck' Orsino calls it (5.1.264), is famously strained: both marriages are extremely precipitous - Olivia and Sebastian have only just met; and it is the first time Orsino has met Viola *in propria persona*, and he still calls her Cesario. That Viola remains in male clothing confirms the atmosphere of unreadiness. That even after her identity is exposed and she is about to marry Orsino we do not see her restored to her 'woman's weeds' (5.1.271) feels unsatisfactory and introduces a sexually nervous note. On the other hand, perhaps we are meant to think that Viola will reveal herself as woman when she undresses for Orsino in a touching intensification of the intimacy and surprise of ordinary sexual coupling. Seeing Shakespeare's disguised women as sexually bashful brings them close as touching and humanly complex figures. In Chapter Seven I shall argue that disguise also signifies shame in *King Lear*.

shame and gender

Shame is strongly gendered in Shakespeare. Specifically masculine shame is loss of power or authority, position or self-command. Henry VI soliloquising on a molehill while his wife fights the Battle of Towton for him presents a lurid scene of masculine shame. In Shakespeare's first narrative poem, Venus scoops up a petulant Adonis and carries him under her arm; and also pinions him to the ground, covering him in unwanted kisses. Richard II's feeble capitulation to Bolingbroke is more gravely shameful. Male shame can be worse than death itself: informed that his son has died fighting in *Macbeth*, Siward asks whether his wounds were on the front of his body; told that they were, he dismisses further mourning. Female shame is unchastity, or reputation for unchastity. It is as powerful as male shame. Diana in *All's Well* comments, 'My chastity's the jewel of our house, / Bequeathed down from many ancestors, / Which were the greatest obloquy i'th'world / In me to lose' (4.2.46-9). And feminine modesty or sense of shame protects spiritual chastity as well as the sexual purity of self and family which Diana stresses: Helena asks an uncharacteristically violent Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 'Have you no modesty, no maiden shame, / No touch of bashfulness?' (3.2.285);[29] Isabella claims in *Measure for Measure*, 'I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit' (3.1.205-7).

This gendered economy of shame is centrally important in Shakespeare's tragedies, but is first extensively developed in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Shakespeare's men, particularly Leontes, are so prone to the shame and dishonour of cuckoldry that their suspicions scarcely need confirmation from the world; because of such excessive susceptibility, Claudio plans to retaliate to Hero's murmured infidelity even before he tries to obtain proof, resolving to cast her off on the day of their marriage. This makes for an extraordinary scene of shame. As Schlegel puts it, 'The mode in which the innocent Hero before the altar at the moment of her wedding, and in the presence of her family and many witnesses, is put to shame by a most degrading charge, false indeed, yet clothed with every appearance of truth, is a grand piece of theatrical effect in the true and justifiable sense'.[30] These are the words with which Claudio returns his bride to her father:

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[29] The Arden *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Harold F. Brooks (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1989).

> There, Leonato, take her back again.
> Give not this rotten orange to your friend;
> She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.
> Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
> O, what authority and show of truth
> Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
> Comes not that blood as modest evidence
> To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,
> All you that see her, that she were a maid,
> By these exterior shows? But she is none:
> She knows the heat of a luxurious bed:
> Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty. (4.1.29-41)

He does not so much accuse Hero here as attempt to shame Leonato. For him, honour and shame is fundamentally a male affair; and a bride is part of a man's honour. Whereas the woman exchanged between father and groom should be ripe and wholesome, Leonato's daughter is a 'rotten orange', a corrupt thing dishonouring to its possessor. This summons Leonato's patriarchal fears to the surface - 'Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?' (4.1.66) - and he, too, is quickly overwhelmed with shame. Hero is innocent, but it is as if some virus of masculine shame has been produced by the mere idea of a contaminated woman.

When Claudio takes leave of Hero, Leonato's anguish turns suicidal and he howls, 'Hath no man's dagger here a point for me?' (4.1.109). Hero swoons; her cousin Beatrice pronounces her 'dead, I think' (4.1.113). Leonato screams:

> O Fate, take not away thy heavy hand!
> Death is the fairest cover for her shame
> That may be wish'd for. (4.4. 115-17)

This tremendous scene of a slandered maiden dead amid the disarray of her aborted nuptials is a dramatic revelation of the power of shame. We suddenly have a tragedy on our hands, in which a pure bride has died of the shame of being accused of infidelity by her bridegroom. That her distracted father is pleased with her death confirms the frenzy. Hero is not really dead of course; but when she revives, Leonato says chillingly, 'Hero, do not ope thine eyes; / For did I think thou wouldst not quickly die, / Thought I thy spirits were stronger than thy shames, / Myself would on the rearward of reproaches / Strike at thy life' (4.1.121-5). He laments:

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[30] See Jonathan Bate (ed.), *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 473.

> O, she is fall'n
> Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea
> Hath drops too few to wash her clean again,
> And salt too little which may season give
> To her foul-tainted flesh! (4.1.118-43)

This tragic language bespeaks dreadful suffering, but its excessiveness and violence, not to mention its insane baselessness, indicates that Leonato's shame, like Claudio's, is sinful. It is striking that although it is Hero who is silently all but expiring from shame, the emphasis is all on the unnecessary shame suffered by her bridegroom and father. She is perfectly shamefast, but her men are so disproportionately concerned with their own honour and dignity that they readily believe she is shameless and are shamed by association, treating her with shameful hate. Female sense of shame is a deterrent against bad behaviour; male shame is excessive regard for honour, which may culminate in awful violence.

The rest of the play exonerates Hero, and teaches Claudio the superiority of moral, feminine shame. Her family prudently decide to maintain that Hero has died in order to keep her out of 'the eye of scorn'. When her innocence comes to light, Leonato requires Claudio to make amends by advertising it, composing an epitaph for his daughter, and singing it to her bones. The penultimate scene of the play is Claudio's rite of repentant shame for Hero's supposed death. As well as an epitaph, he has written a penitent hymn to Diana, which is sung by Balthazar:

> *Pardon, goddess of the night,*
> *Those that slew thy virgin knight;*
> *For the which, with songs of woe,*
> *Round about her tomb they go.*
> *Midnight, assist our moan,*
> *Help us to sigh and groan,*
> *Heavily, heavily:*
> *Graves yawn and yield your dead,*
> *Till death be uttered,*
> *Heavily, heavily.* (5.3.12-21)

Guilty shame here replaces and purges purely personal, masculine shame. Now that the slur on Hero's virginity has been removed, and Claudio has suffered and hence expiated the shame of his ill treatment of her, there can be new life. Leonato's second demand is that Claudio wed his niece, 'And since you could not be my son-in-law, / Be yet my nephew' (5.1.281-2); but after the wedding, and with a gesture perfectly expressive of renewed confidence and self-possession, the masked bride reveals she is Hero:

> *Hero.* [*Unmasking.*] And when I liv'd, I was your other wife;
> And when you lov'd, you were my other husband.
> *Claud.* Another Hero!
> *Hero .* Nothing certainer:
> One Hero died defil'd, but I do live,
> And surely as I live, I am a maid.
> *D. Pedro.* The former Hero! Hero that is dead!
> *Leon.* She died, my lord, but whiles her slander liv'd. (5.4.62-6)

In the dramatic intensity of its shame theme, in its recommendation of repentant shame, and in its assertion of the incompatibility of shame and love, as well as in its exploration of the issues of shame and gender, *Much Ado* in particular looks forward to the tragedies.

shamelessness

Shakespeare probably derived the theme of shamelessness from Marlowe. An early scene of Shakespearean shamelessness occurs in *3 Henry VI*, where Queen Margaret makes a spectacle of her own shamelessness in her shaming of York at Wakefield. This 'mutilates the idols of Knighthood, Kingship, Womanhood, and Fatherhood';[31] and is one of the most powerful scenes in Shakespeare earliest plays.[32] Margaret informs the rebel of the murder of his youngest son, Rutland, then offers him a handkerchief to wipe away his tears which she has steeped in the boy's blood. She crowns him with paper and mocks him, which glances at the shaming of Christ.[33] York howls:

> She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France,
> Whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth!
> How ill-beseeming it is in thy sex
> To triumph like an Amazonian trull
> Upon their woes whom fortune captivates!
> But that thy face is vizard-like, unchanging,
> Made impudent with use of evil deeds,
> I would assay, proud queen, to make thee blush.
> To tell whence thou cam'st, of whom deriv'd,
> Were shame enough to shame thee, wert not shameless.(1.4.111-20)[34]

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[31] J. P. Brockbank, 'The Frame of Disorder - *Henry VI*', in William A. Armstrong (ed.), *Shakespeare's Histories: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 43.

[32] It is an episode which seems to have enjoyed some contemporary celebrity. 'Against the general trend of the play the printer of the pirated version of 1595 called it the *True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*, plainly wishing to advertise his book through a famous scene' (E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 192).

[33] Brockbank notes that this is explicit in Holinshed 'who tells how the Lancastrians made obeisance and cried, "Haile, King without rule... as the Jewes did unto Christ"' (p.116). And Donald G. Watson observes that 'the scene suggests the buffeting, interrogation, and scourging of Christ from the Wakefield Master's mystery cycle, though any number of medieval Passion plays include such elements of torture and physical suffering surrounding the crucifixion' (*Shakespeare's Early History Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 91).

[34] The Arden *3 Henry VI*, Andrew S. Cairncross (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1964).

Margaret's brazenness particularly shocks and revolts York because it is an offence not just against him, but against her own female nature. He sees her unblushing face as a grotesque mask incapable of humane inflection. But he wrongly conflates two kinds of shamelessness in the last lines of this speech. Margaret is spiritually shameless, but she is extremely sensitive about her dignity, status, power: no doubt she would blush to be reminded of her impoverished origins.

Whereas Margaret's shamelessness is a form of hideous and deadly insensibility, Richard III's shamelessness is given a more positive cast. Here, as later with Shylock and Edmond, Shakespeare develops Marlowe's linking of stigma and shamelessness in *The Jew of Malta*. Richard allegorises his monstrous birth thus:

> The midwife wonder'd, and the women cried
> 'O Jesu bless us, he is born with teeth!'
> And so I was, which plainly signified
> That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog.
> Then, since the heavens have shap'd my body so,
> Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it. (*3 Henry VI*, 5.6.74-9)

He looks vicious, so he will be vicious; he is physically warped and bent, so he rejects straightness and makes 'deformity license depravity'.[35] By adopting crookedness as his rule, he makes the shame disappear, and puts an end to his estrangement from himself and his body, achieving a perverse integrity. By committing himself to a life of deviancy, he embarks on a career which will be a continual enactment of his freedom from all shame. It is in many ways a brilliant manoeuvre; shame would cripple the hunchback's life, but shamelessness offers him freedom.

Falstaff is Shakespeare's most attractive personification of the shameless, with the possible exception of Antony. He has every reason to be ashamed. He is singularly obese - when the Lord Chief Justice tells him, 'Well, the truth is, Sir John, you live in great infamy', he admits that 'he that buckles himself in my belt cannot live in less' (*2 Henry IV*, 1.2.177-8);[36] he is alcoholic; his name implies sexual impotence.[37] He is unprincipled, if not immoral. He is a thief and a parasite. Among his worst actions are pressing into the King's service only those men from whom he is unable to extort bribes and then sending them into the thick of the Battle of Shrewsbury so he can claim their pay; and stabbing the noble Hotspur's corpse. But, as Shakespeare makes clear, Falstaff is 'shame-proof' (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.2.508). When Hal asks him, 'Art thou not ashamed?', he responds, 'Dost thou hear, Hal? Thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell, and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty' (*1 Henry IV*, 3.3.164-8),[38] which is to make a jest of the gravest of all shames, that of the Fall and mortal sinfulness. There is also, of course, his celebrated materialist demolition of honour, 'Can honour set a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No...' (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.131-41).[39] Bradley observes that he refuses to recognise 'old father antic the law, and the categorical imperative, and our station and its duties, and conscience, and reputation, and other people's opinions, and all sorts of nuisances', concluding brilliantly, 'They are to him absurd; and to reduce a thing *ad absurdum* is to reduce it to nothing and to walk about free and rejoicing'.[40] Falstaff is a fantasy of invulnerable selfhood; that is why he is so satisfying, almost heroic. In him shamelessness is revealed as the fulness and facility of uninhibited being, what Greenblatt calls 'a dream of superabundance'.[41]

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[35] Brockbank, p.115.

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[36] The exemplar of shamelessness in Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (London: Picador, 1984), one Omar Khayam Shakil, is also very fat. 'What a shameless type he must be,' Rani Harrapa says of him to her husband, 'to carry all that tummy about and all' (p.80).

[37] F. Scott Fitzgerald's Dick Diver, from *Tender is the Night*, is in this respect his counterpart in the literature of this century.

[38] The Arden *1 Henry IV*, A. R. Humhreys (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1970).

[39] Maurice Morgann acknowledges Falstaff's shamelessness when his behaviour at Gadshill is exposed: 'the detection is immediate; and after some accompanying mirth and laughter, the shame of that detection ends; it has no duration, as in other cases; and, for the rest of the play, the character stands just where it did before, without any punishment or degradation' ('An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff', in G. K. Hunter (ed.), *Shakespeare: King Henry IV Parts 1 and 2, A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 46).

[40] A .C. Bradley, 'The Rejection of Falstaff', in Hunter (ed.), p.69.

If in Margaret shamelessness is detestable, in Richard it is comprehensible, and in Falstaff it is fascinating, even loveable; but in the ambiguous figure of Parolles it is all of these. His story represents Shakespeare's most searching and balanced critique of shamelessness before *Antony and Cleopatra*. Parolles is threatened with shame throughout *All's Well that Ends Well*, chiefly by Lord Lafew. As his name indicates, he is form without content, surface without depth, mere meaningless words. Lafew realises 'the soul of this man is his clothes' (2.5.44); and tells him, 'So, my good window of lattice, fare thee well; thy casement I need not open, for I look through thee' (2.3.212-14). Parolles is generally exposed when he is blindfolded and captured by his own comrades at arms posing as a Muscovite regiment and unstintingly betrays and slanders them to that supposed enemy in order to save his skin. When unmasked, he finds he is facing the very men he has just informed against. The fiction of his selfhood, of his honour, is exploded. But the sting in the tail of this shaming is that Parolles is not ashamed. Although there never was such a low, flimsy fellow, we sympathise with his fall, only to discover he feels nothing himself:

> Yet am I thankful. If my heart were great
> 'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more,
> But I will eat and drink and sleep as soft
> As captain shall. Simply the thing I am
> Shall make me live. Who knows himself a braggart,
> Let him fear this; for it will come to pass
> That every braggart shall be found an ass.
> Rust, sword; cool, blushes; and Parolles live
> Safest in shame; being fool'd, by fool'ry thrive.
> There's place and means for every man alive.
> I'll after them. (4.3.319-29)

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[41] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets', in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p.41.

This shamelessness proves Lafew right: Parolles is a light nut; his soul is indeed his clothes. He is able to dismiss his humiliation because he has no core identity; he never has had, and he is pleased to be relieved of the pretence. He need no longer fear exposure; he is free to opt for the merest subsistence. In fact, he opts to make a living out of his disgrace, becoming a professional fool. It is very funny of course, and in the theatre Parolles can impress as an attractive pragmatist with strong survival instincts. But it is shocking to anyone who believes in the fundamental dignity of human beings. When we next see him, Parolles is in effect covered in excrement: 'I am now, sir, muddied in Fortune's mood, and smell somewhat strong of her strong displeasure' (5.2.4-5). The clown stops his nose, crying in response to his request that he deliver a petition to Lord Lafew, 'A paper from Fortune's close-stool, to give to a nobleman!' (5.2. 4-5;16-17). H. B. Charlton calls Parolles 'that shapeless lump of cloacine excrement'. T. S. Eliot finds him more disturbing and frightening than Richard III and perhaps Iago.[42] Here the degradation and attraction of the shameless come together.

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[42] Both critics quoted in Hapgood, 274.

Part Two

5

Hamlet

Hamlet is traditionally supposed to be a mystery. To Byron it is 'a colossal enigma';[1] to Schlegel it 'resembles those irrational equations in which a fraction of unknown magnitude remains'.[2] William Empson suggests 'the agile bard' satisfied popular taste but at the same time prevented sophisticated ridicule by turning a hoary old revenge play into something thrillingly, profoundly obscure;[3] Jan Kott says simply, 'It is the strangest play ever written'.[4] T. McAlindon writes:

> of all the tragedies, it is... the one which most persistently challenges the structural and semantic patterns we elicit from it. Textual problems compound the difficulty of the interpreter, but must not be seen as one of their primary causes. It is necessary to bear in mind that questions about meaning... echo continually throughout the play itself. It is also useful to recall that in *Julius Caesar*, which is clearly echoed at two points in *Hamlet*, the elusiveness of meaning, and the problem of interpretation, had been presented as natural concomitants to the experience of tragic chaos and confounding contrariety.... In *Hamlet*, however, as in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the problem of meaning and interpretation is greatly intensified by the pervasive conception of life as a play - extemporally plotted, generically confused, and with characters miscast and acting strangely. All the *dramatis personae* are spectators as well as performers in the unfolding drama of their lives, and they are at one with us in the endeavour to determine the shape and significance of what is seen and heard.[5]

We are not going to crack this one, then: indeterminacy is of its essence. But we may fitfully disturb its darkness, illuminating it from a certain point of view, before our candles - again - go out.

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[1] Bate (ed.), *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 337.

[2] Bate (ed.), *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 308.

[3] '*Hamlet* When New', *Sewanee Review* 61 (1953), 15-42 and 185-205.

[4] *Shakespeare our Contemporary,* trans. Boleslaw Taborski (1965; London: Methuen, 1983), p. 52.

[5] *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.102.

An exploration of the shame-theme in *Hamlet* reveals a spiritual dimension too often neglected by the dominant tradition of psychological and psychoanalytic criticism of the play. Curtis Brown Watson, Alice Shalvi, and Martin Dodsworth have usefully traced the workings of honour in *Hamlet*,[6] but Shalvi's and Watson's accounts tend to lapse into a rather inert historicism, and Dodsworth's, though consistently original and revealing, does not finally convince that honour is crucial: shame, the opposite of honour, contributes more to this tragedy. Hamlet suffers shame from two sources, the first his mother's indecently rapid, and probably by renaissance standards incestuous,[7] second marriage. This discloses her degraded sensuality to him. Since he derives half of his being from her, it makes him despise his own body. And it is an offence to his father's memory. Furthermore, and most profoundly, it strikes him as an exposé of general corruption, a personal revelation of the Fall of Man, so that he feels ashamed of the world. The disclosure by Old Hamlet's ghost that Gertrude's new husband is his murderer compounds these shames. But, try as he might, Hamlet is not able to take revenge against Claudius, as the Ghost bids him; and this shames him also. He is trapped between two senses of shame here: from a Christian perspective, he feels that revenge is perverse and shameful; but from the more worldly standpoint advocated by the Ghost, he feels it is shameful not to vindicate his father and the family honour. He languishes painfully, periodically tries to rouse himself, considers he has failed as a son and a prince, and feels reproached by, and envious of, every unscrupulous man of action. He is liberated from shame only at the end of the play when, firstly, he accepts his own and the world's fallen nature and, secondly, he puts himself and his revenge in the hands of God.

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[6] I have already referred to Watson's book, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour*. Shalvi's is called *The Relationship of Renaissance Concepts of Honour to Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1972); Dodsworth's book-length investigation of honour in *Hamlet* is *Hamlet Closely Observed* (London: The Athlone Press, 1985).

[7] Incest then included the union of a woman with her husband's brother. The biblical basis for this is Leviticus 18.16 and 20.21. It was the grounds of Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, of course.

Hamlet is imbued with imagery of shame. In the first scene, the ghost starts 'like a guilty thing' and 'hie[s]' to his 'confine' as the cock crows to herald first light (152-161); and Marcellus recalls the folklore that in the 'hallow'd' and 'gracious' season of Christmas 'This bird of dawning singeth all night long' so 'no spirit dare stir abroad' (162-9): stirring images of the fear of exposure. The famous figure of a man crouched behind the arras, though equally a token for the cloak and dagger atmosphere of the play, is another emblem of what Hamlet calls 'occulted guilt' (3.2.80). Because of Hamlet's profound sense of the corruption of 'this mortal coil' (3.1.67), a central symbol here is a grotesquely deformed body, which recollects the imagery of disfigurement and loss of purity and integrity in *The Rape of Lucrece*: We hear of the 'unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth / Blasted' (3.1.161-2); of an 'o'ergrowth of some complexion' (1.4.27); of 'eyes purging thick amber and plum tree gum' (2.2.198-9); of a diseased cheek concealed under thick make-up (3.1.149); of 'a mildewed ear' (3.4.64); of a 'bosom black as death' (3.3.67). There are also horrible images of posthumous decay: Polonius's worm-eaten body;[8] 'pocky corses... that will scarce hold the laying in' (5.1.160-1); 'the noble dust of Alexander... stopping a bung hole' (5.1.196-8). And there is Old Hamlet's memorable description of what happened to him when he was poisoned while napping in his orchard:

> a most instant tetter bark'd about,
> Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
> All my smooth body. (1.5.71-3)

The crackle of alliterating consonants (extended by postponement of the object) overwhelms the long sonorous vowels of the last line to create a vivid portrait in sound of the distortion of his kingly beauty. Dodsworth writes, 'The play's many images of sickness and disease have a special painfulness when they are thought of in relation to the ideal untainted body of the man of honour - that body for which the Ghost yearns and which was disfigured by the poison administered by Claudius'.[9] Another potent image of shame is Hamlet's picture of himself lying 'worse than the mutines in the bilboes' (5.2.6), those being iron shackles used on ship to confine prisoners by the ankles: nautical stocks.

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[8] Hamlet says in reply to an enquiry from the King that he is 'Not where he eats, but where a is eaten' (4.3.19).

Hamlet's shame

Hamlet's sophisticated sense of shame is part princely superiority - 'It offends [him] to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow... split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise' (3.2.8-12); part Roman stoicism - he deplores a man who is 'passion's slave' (3.2.72) and the plaything of fortune; and part Christian humility - hence his distaste for violence and the strong Christian overtone of his 'special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature' (3.2.181-9). This sense of shame has been thoroughly lacerated by his mother's remarriage. His first soliloquy (1.2.129-58) is thus full of sighing and lamentation: 'O God! O God!', 'Fie on't, ah fie', 'Heavens and earth', 'O God', 'break, my heart'. The conjunction of repetition and tautology[10] with oblique syntax[11] betrays a reluctance to address the subject directly; when finally he does so, he deviates uncontrollably into parenthetical expressions of horror. By remarrying with her eyes still red and swollen from tears shed for Old Hamlet's death, Gertrude has shown fickleness; by marrying the inferior Claudius, want of discrimination. She is revealed as a creature of the moment, of low bodily appetite; selfish but not self-respecting; without integrity. The shock to her sensitive son is as profound as that of his father's death; 'for the Elizabethan and Jacobean, shameful behaviour on the part of members of one's own family was just as reprehensible as offences which one commits oneself'.[12] Vives writes, 'We are ashamed not only of our own defects but also of the defects of those who are extremely close to us... The infamy of our parents is by far the worst, as the Greek saying goes: "Nobody is so excellent and self-confident that he could not be destroyed by a parental disgrace"'.[13] In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes says of Mamillius:

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[9] p. 69.

[10] 'too too sullied'; 'melt, thaw and resolve'; ' weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable'; 'within a month... A little month... she... married', 'Within a month... She married'.

[11] He broaches the subject after eight lines, 'That it should come to this!', but then defers naming 'this' for a further fourteen lines: 'Must I remember?', 'Let me not think on 't'.

> To see his nobleness,
> Conceiving the dishonour of his mother!
> He straight declin'd, droop'd, took it deeply,
> Fasten'd and fix'd the shame on't in himself,
> Threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep,
> And downright languish'd. (2.3.12-17)

Curiously, these words also apply to Hamlet.[14] That the dishonour of Mamilius's mother is only a projection of his father's diseased mind makes his pains, and eventual death, wantonly cruel, but does not invalidate the principle here that susceptibility to external shame implies rare 'nobleness' and sensibility in a corrupt world.[15] It is one of the reasons why we value Hamlet.

If Hamlet is ashamed of his mother, he is also ashamed *for* his father; for the offence his wife has done to his memory. This shame is sympathetic and generous, born of an ability to identify with others. There is sufficient reason for it: whereas

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[12] Watson, p. 373.

[13] p. 111. 'The supposed dishonour to her kinsmen which follows when a widow remarries is a central concern of *The Duchess of Malfi* ' (Dodsworth, p. 47).

[14] See Watson, p. 412.

[15] Ariosto's Grifon shows similar sensibility in a martial context after Martano's display of cowardice in *Orlando Furioso*: 'Grifon stood firm, but he felt himself spattered and besmirched by his comrade's shame. He would sooner have stood in the midst of fire than right where he was. His heart burned, his face burned as if the shame had been all his own' (17.92-3, trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 188).

'medieval philosophy had never given the idea... serious consideration, holding nothing more evanescent than human opinion and praise',[16] renaissance men and women set new store by posthumous reputation, as the classical world had; the humanist and moralist Etienne Dolet even advances the heretical view that there is 'no immortality except glory or renown, a lasting name, such as Cicero's or Caesar's'.[17] By forsaking Old Hamlet, Gertrude has deprived him of a crucial portion of his afterlife on earth in the hearts and minds of those left behind him; if his wife has so soon forgotten him, what hope is there? By replacing him so swiftly with his inferior brother, she has equalised 'Hyperion' with 'a satyr' (1.2.140), making his death no loss and his life meaningless. It is a form of spiritual murder.

And Hamlet is ashamed of himself. Continuing from the passage quoted already, Vives observes, 'The vices of our parents seem to be transferred to us by natural resemblance, as if they were hereditary': Hamlet feels contaminated by his mother's unclean flesh. His first words in soliloquy express this:

> O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew (1.2.29-30)

He is polluted: his body is dirty and frozen - 'perhaps the image is that of smutched snow or ice'.[18] The use of three verbs where one would do intimates a sensuously imagined dissolution. Hamlet also wants to leave Elsinore; his 'nighted colour' (1.2.68) is the colour of disguise as well as of mourning; and he insists he is unknowable:[19] all partly because he is reluctant to reveal a self felt to be tainted and untrustworthy. That he is preoccupied with his own supposed sensual fault is clear in his speech contemplating the drinking bouts customary in Denmark (1.4.17-38).

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[16] Watson, p. 69.

[17] Quoted in Buckley, p. 14. See also the discussion of Cassio's assertion that reputation is 'the immortal part of himself' in the next chapter.

[18] William Kerrigan, *Hamlet's Perfection* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 44.

[19] 'I have that within which passes show... ' (1.2.85 ff.).

He loses contact with the subject, distracted by his own peculiar shame. He says that just as sottishness soils Denmark's good name, so it is with 'particular men' that 'one defect' is enough to bereave them of their reputation, 'be they [otherwise] as pure as grace'; and goes on to speak of 'some vicious mole of nature in them, / As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty / (Since nature cannot choose his origin)'. He fears that, like his mother, he will be unexpectedly overwhelmed by sensuality, imagining 'the o'ergrowth of some complexion, / Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason'. In psychological terms, this transfer of shame must seem grievously mistaken. But we should pause a minute, for there is another possibility: a renaissance audience would surely have seen in Hamlet's discovery of a hereditary taint within himself an experience of original sin.

This is the larger dimension of Hamlet's shame. Merely psychological criticism leaves much of the play's vast meaning and power unacknowledged, if not unfelt. When perhaps the best psychoanalytic commentator of the day judges the nub of *Hamlet* to be the 'ordinary psychological crisis in which the son discovers the sexuality of his parents, but with the blame handily shifted from father',[20] the limitations of such an approach are shockingly revealed. Whatever its effects on him as her son, Hamlet experiences Gertrude's unfaithfulness as evil. The disgust he feels for her unscrupulous sexuality, and in consequence for his own body, results in a general hatred of the physical:[21]

> What piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals - and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? (2.2.295-308)

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[20] Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.20.

[21] T. S. Eliot famously says Hamlet's disgust 'envelops and exceeds' its cause in his mother's fall ('Hamlet and His Problems', in David Bevington (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hamlet* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 25), but this does not make the play unsatisfactory or implausible, as Eliot would have it; for Hamlet, Gertrude's fall is a revelation of the corruption of all human nature.

This sentence articulates the essential self-experience of fallen man: a sense of divinity squandered. The first soliloquy laments the present state of nature in terms strongly redolent of the Fall:

> O God! O God!
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. (1.2.132-7)

Later, in the Closet Scene, Hamlet asks in anguish, 'O shame, where is thy blush?' (3.4.81). But it is he and he only who blushes for the world. That he does so is an essential, although so far as I know hitherto unappreciated, component of his noble stature.

And yet, Hamlet's sense of the corruption of sublunary nature - 'it is not, nor it cannot come to good' (1.2.158) - is excessive, close to the sin of despair. His refusal to accept human taintedness is a form of vanity which paralyses his soul, alienating him from the world and from God. He sees human being as absolutely shameful, a slavery of grunting and sweating under the burden of undesirable existence,[22] and this is a form of resentment against God. Fortune is 'outrageous' (3.1.58); time 'whips and scorns' us (3.1.70); social life is a series of unjust insults:

> Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of th'unworthy takes (3.1.71-4)

Hamlet's shame is a spiritual distinction, a sign that the spark of Godhead is still alive within him, but its violence is an indicator of sinful pride. 'Hamlet's soul is sick';[23] he suffers from impotent rage and bitterness; he cannot accept his own fallen condition in a spirit of due contrition and humility.

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[22] See also A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns* (1961; London: Longman, 1989), p. 176.
[23] G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (1930; London: Methuen, 1972), p. 23.

Hamlet and the shame of nakedness

Further light may be cast on Hamlet's shame by considering a snatch of his dialogue with Ophelia:

> *Oph.* Will a tell us what this show meant?
> *Ham.* Ay, or any show that you will show him. Be not you
> ashamed to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means. (3.2.139-141)

That their subject is the meaning of a play is sufficient warning to pay special attention. They are watching the dumb-show which introduces *The Murder of Gonzago*. Both represent the regicide and wifely infidelity which have precipitated *Hamlet*;[24] that dirty business, Hamlet's bawdy reply suggests, was analogous to exposure of the *pudendum*.[25] The current replays are fresh exposure, designed to catch the conscience of the king and trick him into betraying his guilt; and no doubt also to arouse feelings of shame in the Queen's breast. Hamlet's trauma, we may now say, is to have seen the nakedness of man - and especially, and most painfully, of his own mother. Gertrude's fervently quick remarriage has filled his head with unwanted images of her; that is the origin of any Freudian symptoms he may show. It has also left him with a preoccupation with sex and death: his 'gorge rises at it' (5.1.182). Hence the imagery of bodily corruption and of concealment. Hamlet utters his misogynistic cruelties to Ophelia because he cannot see a woman without also seeing horrible nakedness. Behind the play are biblical stories such as that of Noah's nakedness;[26] and especially 1 Samuel 20 where Saul tells his son Jonathan that his excessive (romantic?) attachment to David has uncovered and disgraced *his* mother's nakedness. From a Christian point of view, to sense our human nakedness is essentially to relive the shame of the Fall, when Adam and Eve first knew that they were naked.

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[24] Philip Fisher has recently argued that the 'tragedy of *Hamlet* is the first of two great aftermath plays, *The Tempest* being the other' ('Thinking About Killing: *Hamlet* and the Paths Among the Passions', in *The Best American Essays 1992*, Susan Sontag (ed.), (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1992), p.90): I am suggesting here that the aftermath is of shameful deeds and is portrayed in terms of shame and shamelessness.

[25] The Arden editor notes, 'The obvious indecency... may be heightened by a pun on *shoe*, referring to the woman's sexual part'.

[26] Genesis 9.20.

Hamlet and the Ghost

In the third scene of Act One, and the first scene of Act Two, the family affairs of Polonius punctuate the action. Polonius's thoroughly conventional concern for the reputation of his son Laertes and his daughter Ophelia's virginity is compared with Hamlet's spiritual shame. Hamlet's shame is shame in his own eyes, instinctive recognition of what is degraded or obscene, Polonius's is shame in the eyes of others, calculation of what will damage his social standing. Hamlet's generous sense of shame encompasses his mother, his father, and the whole of the human race, Polonius's is narrowly focused on self. He is not really concerned with others, only with the way they reflect on him; thus he says to his daughter, with a revealing pun which turns affection into finance, 'Tender yourself more dearly... or you'll tender me a fool' (1.3.103-9). As we shall see later, Laertes inherits this low and external sense of shame. It is the worldly measure of Hamlet's fineness.

In the midst of his spiritual crisis, Hamlet is visited by Old Hamlet's ghost (1.4 and 5). The revelation that the man whom his mother is sleeping with is his father's murderer horribly intensifies his shock and shame. Hamlet agrees to revenge, but betrays a fundamental antipathy for the task even as he does so. And not without reason; 'To all previous religious laws, the Gospel substitutes a single command: "give up retaliation and revenge in any form"'.[27] Hamlet's father stands for primitive honour: he slew the 'ambitious Norway' (1.1.64) in ceremonious single combat. His references to purgatorial suffering testify to the God who condemns revenge. Claudius himself realises that he resembles Cain: 'O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven; / It hath the primal eldest curse upon't / A brother's murder' (3.3.36-8); and God decreed that Cain should not be killed: 'whosoever slayeth Cain; vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold'.[28] As a student in Luther's Wittenberg, Hamlet would also know the text, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord':[29] his eventual submission of revenge to God (5.2.215-18) confirms that he does. Among authorities of Shakespeare's day, Cleaver says a revenger strips himself of grace, Bishop Hall that he will die a double death of body and soul;[30] and Charron, Du Vair, and La Primaudaye all deem patient suffering of injury the badge of virtue.[31] We have seen that Hamlet's mind is on the ultimate, his mood of *contemptus mundi*; revenge partakes of the fallen nature that repels him. When the Ghost first mentions murder, he responds:

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[27] René Girard, *A Theater of Envy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 282-3.

> Haste me to know 't, that I with wings as swift
> As meditation or the thoughts of love
> May sweep to my revenge. (1.5.29-31)

But his expression belies him: the separation of subject and verb suggests hesitancy;[32] and meditation and thoughts of love are not wings with which to sweep to revenge, but checks to hold one back.[33] Further, all of Hamlet's briefer comments during the dialogue - 'Alas, poor ghost' (1.5.4), 'O God!' (1.5.25), 'Murder!' (1.5.26), 'O my prophetic soul!' (1.5.41) - evoke a Christian consciousness passionately averse to violence. And when the Ghost leaves him, although first he asserts that revenge is heavenly, a tactic he repeats later and one intended to release him from the Christian prohibition, he is seized with the dread of a soul in peril: 'And shall I couple hell? O fie!' (1.5.93). Far from being ready to kill, his body is fainting: 'Hold, hold, my heart, / And you, my sinews, grow not instant old' (1.5.93-4). He makes an effort to rally, promising the departed ghost, 'thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain, / Unmixed with baser matter' (1.5.102-4). But this scholarly metaphor of books and editing is not a promising one in a would-be avenger; and when he actually plucks out his note-book and indites 'that one may smile and smile and be a villain / - At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark' (108-9), he looks woefully, almost comically inadequate to the task. His subsequent ridicule of the Ghost to Horatio and the watch stems partly from resentment of the unwelcome duty he has acquired from him.

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[28] Genesis 4.15.
[29] Romans 12.19.
[30] Watson, p. 130.
[31] Shalvi, p. 82.
[32] See Dodsworth, p. 61.
[33] See Fisher, p. 89.

Here is a man divided: the son of a beloved father murdered who is dreadfully enjoined to kill in revenge, but shrinks from doing so. Guilt clearly plays a part, a sense of the wickedness of the deed; but as the play progresses Hamlet shows more evidence of shame, an instinctive recoil from becoming a gross and sinful revenger, from deforming his soul and losing integrity, from losing himself.

the deed undone

Hamlet's dilemma is a considerable one: outraged filial love and respect for himself as a man of honour prompt him to revenge; deeper moral feelings forbid it. Either way will entail shame: he will be a murderer or an unfeeling son and a coward. It is clear that he chooses to kill: Shakespeare's achievement is to dramatise the subversion of that conscious intention by the spiritual shame he suppresses. His failure to revenge leaves him prone to self-reproaches of filial insensibility and impotence.

After the exceedingly dramatic first act, the pace of Act Two slows considerably. This 'contrast... has a point: the call to honour is followed by a reaction into distress and self-doubt'.[34] It is also a send-up of the crude melodrama of revenge tradition, which makes Hamlet's doubts intelligible. Towards the end of Act Two, Hamlet asks one of the players to recite a purple passage of revenge-poetry. It is already unpromisingly intellectual of him to look to art for help; and his chosen piece with its grotesque revenger, 'rugged Pyrrhus', 'hellish Pyrrhus', 'horridly trick'd / With blood of fathers mothers, daughters, sons, / Bak'd and impasted with the parching streets', 'Roasted in wrath and fire', 'o'ersiz'd with coagulate gore' (448-459), seems hardly likely to justify vengeance to a man of his civilised temper, especially as it ends with a poignant evocation of the suffering victim. Nor is the ensuing soliloquy much use as provocation to revenge. Hamlet calls himself 'a rogue and peasant slave' (2.2.544) because the player can weep for a fiction while he can 'say nothing' for a murdered king, but he needs action not pity or words. 'Is it not monstrous that this player here, / But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, / Could force his soul so to his own conceit' (2.2.545-7) reads first as a disgusted condemnation of the kind of synthetic ecstasy he requires to propel him into action. And the shocking exhibition he says the player would give 'had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have' (2.2.555-6) - drowning the stage with tears, cleaving the general ear with horrid speech - is just the sort of over-acting that he tells us in the next scene most revolts him. In short, his attempt to persuade himself to act deconstructs in the expression.

His quandary is as follows. By contemplating Pyhrrhus and the player he is deliberately soliciting shame and envy: their crude effectiveness makes him look impotent and he hopes this will spur him on; he wants to shame himself into removing 'the shame that makes him inferior even to a player'.[35] But he cannot help seeing both character and actor as horribly violent, which deters him from revenge.[36]

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[34] Dodsworth, p. 82.

[35] Dodsworth, p. 90.

[36] See McAlindon, p. 112.

At the same time, he cannot permit himself to acknowledge this revulsion from the task which is his sworn duty to his father and which he is bent on fulfilling. He asks, 'Am I a coward?' (2.2.566); and is suddenly overwhelmed by pathological humiliation:

> Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
> Plucks my beard and blows it in my face,
> Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i' th' throat
> As deep as to the lungs - who does me this? (2.2.567-70)

The answer to this question here is his own self, or, more precisely, one of his selves: the would-be avenger who is disgusted by the dishonourable apathy of the conscientious ditherer. As I have said before, all shame involves such division and friction between the judging self and the self being judged; we saw that Shakespeare first exploited this schizophrenic effect in *Richard III*. But this physical sensation of self-assault is more immediate, extreme, and painful than the shame and self-fragmentation in that earlier play. Hamlet's psychological position is now reversed: the revenger has superseded the anti-revenger, the shame of impotence surmounted the shame of violence. There is perhaps a discernible wilfulness; it does not seem entirely unforced. Yet, for a moment, he simply regrets his inertia:

> 'Swounds I should take it: for it cannot be
> But I am pigeon liver'd and lack gall
> To make oppression bitter, or ere this
> I should ha' fatted all the region's kites
> With this slave's offal (2.2.572-5)

This self-accusation of cowardice might have been the first step in successfully goading himself to kill, but in the horrid and hyperbolic description of vengeance - feeding the local carrion birds with the murderer's fat - a resurgence of nausea and recoil from revenge is discernible. In response to this, Hamlet desperately enlists his hatred of Claudius, 'Bloody, bawdy villain / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!' (2.2.576-7); but the 'facile alliteration and jingle underline the words' superficial quality'.[37] No ire arises in Hamlet's breast: his instinctive knowledge of the shame of revenge defeats his attempt to shame himself into killing. This irrepressible moral shame is a credit to his essential goodness; but he feels only that he has failed and relapses into now involuntary brooding and hopeless shame and contempt for his useless talk. He feels he has stripped himself not just of caste, but also of masculinity; as well as a 'peasant slave', he is a whore, 'a very drab, / A scullion' (2.2.582-3). And this on top of the spiritual shame and prostration he is already suffering because of his mother's remarriage. 'There is a continual process of self-murder at work in Hamlet's mind.'[38]

From now on every step he takes forward is really a step back: he advances, dagger drawn, away from revenge. Such shirking makes him feel ever more impotent and cowardly. To provoke a sense of momentum, he devises a plan; but it is not a hopeful one: it suggests a weakening rather than a strengthening of purpose. He has already asked the players to do 'The Murther of Gonzago' and proposed to insert extra material; what is new is that this should be a test of what has not before been doubted: Claudius's guilt.[39]

Just before this test, we find his mind elsewhere. In 'To be, or not to be' (3.1.56-90), he is thinking about several things at once - suicide, death, revenge - and in a profoundly generalised fashion, which is why this most famous of all speeches has attracted such diverse interpretations. I agree with Wilson Knight that his deeper question is: what is it really to be, rather than merely to subsist, which is not to be?[40] It is an urgent question for him because the shame he is constantly afflicted with is a sense of not being: firstly of not being pure; and now also of not being a proper man, not being his father's son. His answer is to be is to be noble.

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[37] Wilson Knight, p. 302.
[38] Wilson Knight, p. 26.
[39] Dodsworth, p. 94.
[40] See Wilson Knight, p. 308.

But what is nobility? - Stoicism, suffering the slings and arrows of fortune in the mind? Or action, taking arms against a sea of troubles? Hamlet is not free to choose the former, which obviously would be more amenable to him, and for which he admires Horatio: he has a filial duty to enact. He says that merely opposing the sea of troubles will end it, but that can only be so because it will be inevitably to drown: revenge will somehow entail his death. Given his *weltschmerz*, death is not unattractive to him. But he does not therefore make a firm decision to act. As usual, he cannot - not because he is afraid to die, but because revenge would be spiritual suicide, would be to drown his soul in the deed; would be absolutely not to be. His deepest, his religious sense of shame and self restrains him from that course. Actual suicide, which subject he opens with grateful intellectual zeal for the distraction, would solve his dilemma, but he might awake in hell for his sin against creation: such is the most obvious bad 'dream' which may visit the self-murderer in his 'sleep of death'. Conscience thus bereaves him of the freedom to end his misery. Consciousness, thought, has estranged him even from debating his revenge.

Hamlet's hysterical cruelty to Ophelia, whom he once courted, and who therefore reminds him of his sex nausea, indicates that he has fallen shamefully himself. It is a paradox of shame that it can generate shameful behaviour; the fastidious person violated may respond with unlimited violence. Under the stress of shame generated by his mother's remarriage and his own failure to avenge his father's death, Hamlet has become his own opposite.[41] As Ophelia puts it:

> O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
> The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> The observ'd of all observers, quite, quite down! (3.1.152-6)

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[41] On this as a pervasive theme of Shakespearean tragedy see McAlindon, p. 2.

Hamlet is given his main chance after Claudius's guilt has been securely established by 'The Mousetrap': a moment alone with his prey; an easy opportunity to skewer him while he is facing in the other direction, kneeling in prayer. But he puts up his sword, blustering in extravagant language that it would be no revenge to kill a penitent uncle and send him to heaven. The proposal instead to slay him in a moment of sin is an excuse, a palpable play for time.

The longer this goes on, the more Hamlet desires revenge but fails to commit it, the more painful and degrading the play becomes; the more incapable he looks. He tries again to shame himself into action in his soliloquy contemplating the army of Fortinbras, 'How all occasions do inform against me' (4.4.32-66). That this is so obviously parallel to the 'O what a rogue and peasant slave' speech of more than two acts previously emphasises that he has got nowhere. Like that earlier speech, this one is also difficult and confused because his heart is not in it. First, he accuses himself of being insufficiently thoughtful, which, of course, is nonsense, being too thoughtful has disabled his revenge; it is Fortinbras, who is now leading twenty thousand men to their graves 'for a fantasy and a trick of fame' (4.4.61), who does not think enough. Hamlet admits a couple lines of lines later that 'thinking too precisely on th'event' (4.4.41) may instead be his problem; but again he cannot bring himself truly to admire violence. As with the player, his shaming comparison with a more effective man self-destructs. That 'examples gross as earth exhort [him]' (4.4.46) to act is at best ambiguous; and 'Exposing what is mortal and unsure ... Even for an eggshell' (4.4.51-3) and finding 'quarrel in a straw' (4.4.55) must be outrageously stupid and unseemly to the advocate of proportion in everything, 'Suit the action to the word, the word to the action...' (3.2.17 ff.). It does genuinely disturb and shame Hamlet that Fortinbras is prepared to spend thousands of lives for nothing when he cannot himself dispatch the man who murdered his father, but that he can barely restrain his contempt for this thuggish Norwegian whose very name -

forte braccio: strong arm - exemplifies brute strength, renders worse than useless his effort to employ him as a stalking horse. In spite of himself, he shrinks from being Fortinbras, just as he shrank from Pyrrhus and the wild actor. Though he tries to see them as ideal images of himself, he actually sees them as horrible anti-selves which irresistibly repel him even while they embarrass him with their effectiveness. He wants them to shame him and they do, but he cannot help feeling that they are more shameful. He is left hopelessly mired in shame. He ends this soliloquy crowing 'O, from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth' (4.4.65-6): thoughts not deeds - he is still no nearer to revenge.

Claudius's and Gertrude's Christian shame

Anyone doubting the place of religious shame in *Hamlet* should turn to the villain's speech of anguished self-reproach (3.3.36-72) and to the Closet Scene (3.4). Claudius senses his sin, outside himself but inextricably his, smelling to heaven with the 'primal eldest curse upon't'; he wants to pray, but his guilt encourages despair. In a trope of profound Shakespearean shame more familiar from *Macbeth*, he imagines his hand 'thicker than itself with brother's blood' (3.3.44); he considers the sweet grace that would wash it clean, but he cannot forsake the fruits of sin: his crown, his Gertrude. And yet, he acknowledges quietly:

> In the corrupted currents of this world
> Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above:
> There is no shuffling, there the action lies
> In his true nature, and we ourselves compell'd
> Even to the truth and forehead of our faults
> To give in evidence. (3.3.60-4)

Unfortunately for him, this vivid and concrete knowledge of the naked guilt and shame that will come with the judgement after death is not as strong as Claudius's covetousness: he does not feel enough shame to alter his heart and invite grace.

It is clear that Hamlet is a reformer not a revenger when he passes up his opportunity to kill Claudius in order to try to save his mother's soul.[42] Much psychoanalysis has been lavished on the Closet Scene, and no doubt Hamlet is partly concerned to repair his own selfhood, jeopardised when Gertrude so quickly forsook his father;[43] but his main motive is the explicit one and it is perverse to ignore it: he loves goodness and virtue, and he loves his mother; he hates sin and depravity, and he hates it more in her. We may feel that Gertrude is guilty of nothing more vicious or cruel than a morally lazy worldliness -[44] unrestrained desires, possibly adultery, something close to incest - but if so, we are more like Polonius than Hamlet. Her son has higher, holier standards and is convinced that his mother is *en route* to perdition. He is wicked to speak to Ophelia as he does, but Gertrude needs to be shocked into reformation. He sets about teaching her to repent with a pedagogical brilliance and briskness that springs from a deep and touching concern for her soul:

> Come, come, and sit you down, you shall not budge.
> You go not till I set you up a glass
> Where you may see the inmost part of you. (3.4.17-19)

The earnest, urgent tone here is reminiscent of the devotional literature of the age. Hamlet's purpose is to make Gertrude face her own depraved spirit: its hideous ugliness will compel a change of heart. Shakespeare first used an encounter in a mirror with a grotesque anti-self as a metaphor for the interior process of shame in

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[42] 'The truth is that, though Hamlet hates his uncle and acknowledges the duty of vengeance, his whole heart is never in this feeling or this task; but his whole heart is in his horror at his mother's fall and in his longing to raise her.' (A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd edn. (1905; London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 109).

[43] See Adelman, p. 31.

[44] That, presumably, is what Bradley is getting at in his extraordinary passage comparing her with 'a sheep in the sun' (p. 135).

Richard II; and in this play we have seen that Hamlet fails to revenge because he recoils in shame from the men who mirror to him his potential revenging self. To open his mother's eyes to what she has become, he has first to defeat her shamelessness, her self-ignorance, which protects her present, sensual bliss, but augurs ill for her fate in eternity. Her heart is 'braz'd' with 'damned custom' (3.4.37) and he must pierce the hard crust that is 'proof and bulwark against sense' (3.4.38).

In an amazing rhetorical onslaught, he represents her sin in terms of its debilitating effect on universal shame. We are asked to imagine Gertrude's shamelessness as equivalent to Eve's. It 'blurs the grace and blush of modesty'; 'takes off the rose' - also a modest blush - 'From the fair forehead of an innocent love / And sets a blister there' (3.4.40-4) - a sign of the deformity of the shameless, which alludes to the branded forehead of a renaissance whore. It 'proclaim[s] no shame' (3.4.85), plucking the soul from marriage, virtue, and religion. 'Heaven's face does glow... With tristful visage, as against the doom, / Is thought-sick at the act' (3.4.48-51): God Himself blushing and ashamed at the degradation of his creature. In agony, Hamlet enunciates what are among his most significant words in the play, 'O shame, where is thy blush?' (3.4.81). This is his question both to his mother and to an insensible world in which it seems he is the sole representative of virtuous shame. His murder of Polonius disturbs his flow not at all because that bodily death means nothing besides the fate of his mother's immortal soul. The shriving must go forward: 'Leave wringing of your hands. Peace, sit you down, / And let me wring your heart' (3.4.34-5). If he can make her blush for her sin, she may yet be saved, the terrible effects of her wickedness reversed. He knows that, at last, he is getting through to her when she moans: 'O Hamlet, speak no more. / Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct' (3.4.88-91). This is his assurance that she is not spiritually dead. But there is a real danger she will evade this knowledge - the pain of it - so he warns her in a careful, measured voice:

> Mother, for love of grace,
> Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
> That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
> It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
> Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven,
> Repent what's past, avoid what is to come;
> And do not spread the compost on the weeds
> To make them ranker. (3.4.146-54)

When she complains to her son, 'O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain' (3.4.158), he tells her with brisk severity, 'O throw away the worser part of it / And live the purer with the other half' (3.4.158-60).

This profound scene invites us to consider the fate of Gertrude's soul. It is impossible to say if Hamlet succeeds and she is redeemed. During the short time she has left to live, there is no indication that she abstains from sex. There is a hint of distance from Claudius when, as agreed between them, she preserves the appearance of Hamlet's madness; and when in the last scene she shows her affection for him.

Hamlet's recovery and death

Laertes is Hamlet's alter ego; Hamlet himself says, 'by the image of my cause I see / The portraiture of his' (5.2.76-7). A father's murder for Laertes is a simple, if terrible, matter of outraged family honour. No scruple of spiritual shame deters him from revenge, 'To hell, allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil! / Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit! / I dare damnation' (4.5.131-3). He is altogether shameless, co-author with Claudius of the horrid stratagem of duelling with an unbated sword tipped with a mortal unction, and, to make trebly sure, proferring a poison chalice in the recess. In his effort to be the man of honour, he mutilates himself, as Hamlet does not; Shalvi comments aptly on 'the way in which lust for revenge totally perverts that very honour which vengeance is intended to maintain'.[45] Instead of the moral and spiritual issues, he is preoccupied with cutting the right figure. His father's unceremonious burial irks him as much as his death:

> his obscure funeral -
> No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,
> No noble rite, nor formal ostentation -
> Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth,
> That I must call't in question. (4.6.210-14)[46]

Perhaps nothing reveals Laertes, and his difference from *Hamlet*, so much as the fact that though instinctively satisfied with Hamlet's apology, 'in [his] terms of honour' he pedantically 'stand[s] aloof' and insists on referring the matter to 'some elder masters of known honour' for a 'voice and precedent of peace / To keep [his] name ungor'd' (5.2.240-6). Laertes is activated by a thoroughly social, external, and conventional sense of shame. But for his deeper, innate, religious shame, Hamlet would be Laertes - or, for that matter, Pyrrhus, or Fortinbras; it is such shame which shields and is one with his purity and singularity.[47]

It is well-known that the Hamlet of Act Five is a changed Hamlet. This is partly because of what has happened off-stage since he set sail for England: he has had a taste of action on the high-seas and is very proud of it; it proves he is not 'John a dreams' (2.2.563) and brings him closer to revenge. As well as boarding a pirate ship, he has blown Rozencrantz and Guildenstern at the moon; this was self-defence, as always with his violence, and we do not much regret their passing: yet the cool response of Horatio and the quick self-justification it elicits indicate that it is not to be overlooked either. But a more significant and profound cause of Hamlet's metamorphosis than what we merely hear about is, as we would expect, what we actually see dramatised. Act Five commences in a graveyard with Hamlet contemplating mortality. That the gravedigger has been digging graves since Hamlet was born prepares us for powerful consequences and lends the scene an aura of predestination. The spectacle of death - the dumb skull, insensible bones, the handful of dust - persuades Hamlet from his 'daintier sense' (5.1.69); since all must come to this, it is a mistake to stand on purity. Among the debris of mortality, he recognises that degradation is a necessary component of human life; we might find 'the noble dust of Alexander stopping a bung hole' (5.1.197-8). At last, Hamlet accepts his fallen nature. This liberates him from his paralysing, killing condition of shame, his dislocation from this fallen world, the reverse side of an excessive pride. Reconciliation with the corruption of human being, and therefore with himself, also makes revenge conceivable. Still, he does not set about a shameless revenge, like Laertes does. He remains committed to good, but recognises it as beyond himself. He submits his will to God: 'There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all' (5.2.215-8). He has shrugged off the burden of mere filial obligation, substituting his heavenly father for the earthly one. He will not revenge on his own behalf, but as the trusting agent of the higher power when he is called to do so. The ambivalence of the deed no longer obsesses him, for he is reconciled to the fact that he is an ambivalent creature 'crawling between earth and heaven' (3.1.128-9); he can only do his best, to think otherwise is presumption. He is now in a position to make the positive difference he achieves when he finally kills Claudius, not in premeditated revenge but in faithful obedience to the moment:

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[45] p. 133.

[46] Also see Dodsworth, p. 19.

[47] p. 180. Terry Eagleton has written, 'Hamlet has no essence of being whatsoever, no inner sanctum to be safeguarded: he is pure deferral and diffusion, a hollow void which offers nothing to be known. His 'self' consists simply in a range of gestures with which he resists available definitions, not in a radical alternative beyond their reach. It is thus wholly parasitic on the positions it refuses: like Iago he is not what he is, but whereas for Iago this means preserving a secret identity apart from public show, Hamlet's jealous sense of unique selfhood is no more than the negation of anything in particular' (*William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.72). But this, which turns Hamlet into some subversive Osric, is pure nonsense: Hamlet's negative reactions of shame and disgust, to his mother's re-marriage, revenge and violence, the shallow hypocrisy of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are spontaneous and passionate, not coldly self-fashioning, and they clearly reveal core being. As for his self-concealment and reserve, I have suggested here that it is partly a reflex of shame; but it also genuinely distinguishes him from the large number of characters in the play who are all surface: Osric, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Polonius, Laertes.

> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
> When our deep plots do pall; and that should learn us
> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we will - (5.2.8-11)

After the tremendous and constant pressure of shame, this resolution and relief expands the play immeasurably: 'a mysterious and beautiful disinterestedness dominates this truer Hamlet'.[48] But plays are not programmatic, and, as Hamlet has learnt, human beings are not perfect, and it is right and proper that his 'dying voice' (5.2.361) expresses an ordinary concern for the shame of ill reputation on earth, his 'wounded name' (5.2.349); he asks Horatio to justify him to posterity. Then he expires. Horatio says his exquisite requiem for this most Christian of tragic heroes: 'Good night, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest' (5.2.364-5).

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[48] Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989), p. 57.

6

Othello

For almost all critics, readers, and theatre-goers, *Othello* is a play about jealousy.[1] It will be part of the argument here that, though based in fact, this consensus distorts the play, preventing recognition of its full achievement. Harold Bloom says in *Ruin the Sacred Truths* that Othello's 'name in effect becomes jealousy'.[2] But let us consider Othello's jealousy for a moment. His feeling that he has lost sexual possession of his wife is intensely focused on himself, on the consequences for him. He is remarkably indifferent to the supposed seducer, Cassio; and though he thinks about Desdemona and her imagined adultery - the horror of it, the pity of it - his most recurrent and vehement feeling is that he has himself been degraded and defiled. In other words, the soul of Othello's jealousy is personal shame.

This is no mere quibble. It is but a short step from here to seeing that, despite tradition, it is shame, not jealousy, that is the signal and unifying passion of *Othello*. The sentiment of shame, a consciousness of personal inadequacy or unworthiness, a sense of falling short of standards imposed by the self or others, of differing from the ideal pattern of what one should be, spreads like a disease through this play. Iago feels shamed and slighted rather than envious that Othello has promoted Cassio over him - that is why he, too, is relatively unconcerned with the new lieutenant. His mysterious suspicion that Othello has cuckolded him, expressed later in soliloquy, causes him a similar feeling of resentful degradation; and is a shame bred from shame. The reason he persuades Othello that Desdemona has betrayed him is to pay back shame with shame. Othello credits his wife's supposed revolt because as a Moor in white Venice he is already secretly ashamed. Driven into a shameful fit, he brings moral shame on himself by killing Desdemona in revenge. Realising her innocence, he then kills himself in disgust. The nightmare, the tragic terror of the play, is that his shame has justified itself, made him exactly what he most feared to be, and felt his wife's supposed revolt revealed him as: a gross and repugnant barbarian.

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[1] Kenneth Muir says 'popularly Othello is a tragedy of jealousy' and 'any view that runs counter to the average spectator must necessarily be suspect' ('The Jealousy of Iago', *English Miscellany* 2 (1951), 66), but this popular view stems not so much from experience as from tradition.
[2] p. 66.

The important characters besides Othello and Iago are overtaken by shame as well. Brabantio is so ashamed that his daughter has eloped with and married a Moor that he dies; the main business of the second act is the dramatic shaming of Cassio; Desdemona suffers the shame of accusations of whoredom and adultery from her husband, culminating in execution at his hands. And shame prevails even in the suburbs of the action. Roderigo is ashamed of doting on Desdemona - and no doubt also of being neglected for 'the thick lips' (1.1.66)[3] by her, and rejected as unsuitable by her father; and Bianca is publicly denounced as a wicked strumpet guilty of an attempt on the life of Cassio.

Shame also provides a key to much of the play's imagery. Perhaps the central figure is that of man as beast, an image diametrically opposed to the humanist pieties of the earlier Renaissance.[4] It is established by Iago's imagery of debased animality. He pictures Othello coupling with Desdemona as '[an] old black ram /... tupping [a] white ewe' (1.1.88-9). He tells her father, 'your daughter, and the Moor, are now making the beast with two backs' (1.1.115-17) and 'you'll have your daughter cover'd with a barbary horse' (1.1.110-11); and insists that her progeny will be horses. He depicts Cassio and Desdemona *in flagrante delicto* 'as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys, / As salt as wolves in pride' (3.3.409-10). He confides to Roderigo, 'ere I would drown myself for the love of a guinea hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon' (1.3.314-16). And he is himself ultimately seen as a beast by the other characters. Roderigo calls him, 'O damn'd Iago, O inhuman dog' (5.1.62) and he is also called 'viper'

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[3] All references are to the Arden *Othello*, M. R. Ridley (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1992).

[4] Jonathan Bate notices this imagery and its Ovidian provenance in *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 181-4. Divine man can be found, for instance, in the writings of Ficino and Paracelsus.

(5.2.286); and, most memorably, 'O Spartan dog, / More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea' (5.2.362-3). In addition, Othello exclaims, 'exchange me for a goat' and 'I had rather be a toad' (3.3.274). And Cassio says, 'I ha' lost the immortal part, sir, of myself, and what remains is bestial' (2.3.254-6); 'O God... that we should transform ourselves into beasts!' (2.3.281-4); and 'to be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast!' (2.3.296-7). There is also the related imagery of the cuckold's shameful metamorphosis, here given disconcertingly concrete form: as though rubbing rudimentary horns, Othello says, 'I have a pain upon my forehead here' (3.3.288).

Bestiality and shame envelop all the action. Othello envisions an inundation of pain and shame: 'Had it pleas'd heaven' to rain 'all kinds of sores and shames on my bare head...' (4.2.48-51). There is imagery of defilement;[5] and of nakedness and exposure.[6] In a passage alluding to the Christian day of doom, Emilia imagines herself being indicted by the whole population of the cosmos: 'Let heaven, and men, and devils, let 'em all, / All, all cry shame against me' (5.2.222-3). Othello feels he has become 'A fixed figure for the times of scorn / To point his slow unmoving fingers at' (4.2.55-6); and also that if he told his wife's supposed misdeeds, he could make forges of his blushing cheeks that would burn modesty to cinders (4.2.76-8).

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[5] For Iago all human hearts are alloyed with dirt: 'Where's that place, whereinto foul things / Some times intrude not?' (4.2.143-4). Desdemona says something 'hath puddled [Othello's] clear spirit' (3.4.140); Emilia calls him 'as ignorant as dirt' (5.2.165); and he himself says, 'my name that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd and black as mine own face' (3.3.392-4). He also talks of 'the slime / That sticks on filthy deeds' (5.2.148-9) and strikingly laments that marriage to Desdemona - once the fountain of his being - has turned into a cistern 'for foul toads / To knot and gender in'(4.2.62-3).

[6] Brabantio comes out on his balcony naked or half-naked; Othello asks Montano, 'what's the matter, / that you unlace your reputation thus?' (2.3.184); Iago asks Othello when he demands proof of Desdemona's whoredom, 'would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on, / Behold her topp'd?' (3.3.401-2); and Emilia says, with reference to the 'scurvy fellow' who has lied to Othello about his wife, not yet knowing he is her husband, 'O heaven, that such companions thou'ldst unfold, / And put in every honest hand a whip, / To lash the rascals naked through the world, /Even from the east to th' west!' (4.2.143-6).

Iago

A crucial premise of this interpretation will be that Iago is the agent of shame in *Othello*. By this two things are meant: first, he is motivated by shame; and, second, he acts to cause shame, both in Othello and in others. I will suggest that *Othello* is partly a psychomachia - an allegorical portrayal of conflict in the soul - and to that extent Iago is shame.

But we must first attend to the vexed question of his motive. Coleridge proclaims his 'motiveless malignity';[7] Stanley E. Hyman has a monograph entitled *Iago: Some Approaches to the Illusion of his Motivation.*[8] And there is still a strong opinion that he has no personal reason to act as he does. A. D. Nuttall sees him as the forerunner of 'the literature of existentialism, according to which any assumption of motive by the ego is an act of unconditional, artificial choice';[9] and Stephen Greenblatt argues he is an 'improviser of power'.[10] But such critics must discount Iago's own statements.[11] Within the first forty lines of the play, he explains why he hates his general:

> three great ones of the city,
> In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
> Oft capp'd to him, and by the faith of man,
> I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.
> But he, as loving his own prides and purposes,
> Evades them, with a bombast circumstance,
> Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war:
> And in conclusion,
> Nonsuits my mediators: for 'Certes,' says he,
> 'I have already chosen my officer,'
> And what was he?
> Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
> One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,

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[7] 'Marginalia on Othello', in *Shakespeare: Othello: A Casebook*, John Wain (ed.), (London: Macmillan, 1971), p.53.

[8] New York: Athenaeum, 1970.

[9] *A New Mimesis* (London: Methuen, 1983), p.142.

[10] *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, pp. 232-52.

[11] A. C. Bradley attests to a gap between Iago's passionate motives and what he judges to be the coldness with which they are expressed (p. 183). Bernard Spivack follows Bradley's judgement in *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife,
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the devision of a battle knows,
More than a spinster, unless the bookish theoric,
Wherein the toged consuls can propose
As masterly as he: mere prattle without practice
Is all his soldiership: but he, sir, had the election,
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof,
At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds,
Christian and heathen, must be lee'd and calm'd,
By debitor and creditor, this counter-caster:
He in good time, must his lieutenant be,
And I, God bless the mark, his worship's ancient. (1.1.8-33)

If critical tradition is ignored, this has all the marks of authenticity. Shakespeare deliberately makes it convincing. It is given before we know Iago's slipperiness, and therefore have reason to doubt him - unless the production makes him an evident machiavel. It is a torrential utterance; and - in its harshness, rapidity, and concentrated energy - has the cadence of bitter outrage. This outrage is not hard to understand or credit. Iago had thought to be lieutenant, but he finds he is his 'worship's ancient' and cannot accept this diminished self.[12] And what rankles more is that he, a seasoned soldier of whom Othello's 'eyes had seen the proof', has been passed over for an aristocratic amateur, an arm-chair tactician. He is also offended because his application has - apparently - been refused without consideration, and without even the courtesy of a plain 'no'; because his failure is known by 'three great ones of the city'; and because he cannot lick his wound in private, because he 'must be lee'd and calm'd'. He is slighted and exposed, ashamed and angry: the brisk vehemence with which Shakespeare establishes this lends his opening admirable impetus.[13]

Iago does not blame Othello only, but also the system of patronage and recommendation:

'tis the curse of service,
Preferment goes by the letter and affection,

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[12] Though he still finds him unconvincing here, Bradley gets it right when he writes of Iago's 'thwarted sense of superiority' (p. 187). William Empson quotes Bradley approvingly (*The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), p. 232).

[13] Nevill Coghill also takes Iago at his word here (*Shakespeare's Professional Skills* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 146).

Not by the old gradation, where each second
Stood heir to the first (1.1.35-8)

In spite of merit, unlike the cultivated Cassio, he is outside the charmed circle. There is simply no need to impute motivelessness here. If more confirmation is needed, Vives anticipates Iago's feelings in his philosophical remarks on shame: 'Those who are aware that they are not shown the respect they think they deserve from some people in particular, or in a certain place, time, occupation, or circumstance are not only ashamed but also angry in proportion to their self-esteem and greed for honour'.[14]

And Iago has a second, separate grievance. He says to himself in soliloquy:

I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office; I know not if't be true...
Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do, as if for surety (1.3.384-8)

And later he confirms:

I do suspect the lustful Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat, the thought whereof
Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards,
And nothing can, nor shall content my soul
Till I am even with him, wife for wife. (2.1.290-4)

He believes Othello has cuckolded him. This is jealous shame, supposed loss of sexual ownership. But it is puzzling: we cannot accept that Othello has bedded Emilia. It is inconsistent with his sexual idealism and with his shocked horror when Iago later presents the social world to him as a place of rampant license in which Desdemona has betrayed him. Nor do we hear the supposed rumour from anybody else, except Emilia - and she has had it from Iago by way of accusation. Perhaps, then, Iago has dreamt it up? Emilia encourages us to think so, identifying its source as 'some such squire' as he who lied to Othello about his wife (4.2.147). She also tells us jealousy is fantasy - a 'monster, / Begot upon itself, born on itself' (3.4.159); and Iago himself admits 'oft my jealousy / Shapes faults that are not' (3.3.151-2). But if there is no external reason for his suspicion, if my contention that Iago already feels seriously slighted and shamed is accepted, there is a plausible internal cause: he feels Othello has violated him professionally and this has spawned the feeling that he has also violated his wife.[15] Thus we have not jealousy *ex nihilo*, but shame and jealousy bred from shame. Iago almost chooses to believe he has been cuckolded, though frankly he 'know[s] not if 't be true'; not, as Nuttall would have it, because he is a proto-existentialist, but because he is wholly overwhelmed with shame already . As soldiership and husbandly honour are both characteristic of healthy renaissance pride, it is not implausible that deep-felt professional shame should manifest, engender, be transposed into, sexual shame; and in the course of this chapter we shall see that the fertility of shame is a central premise of *Othello*. But the suddenness is disturbing. Here shame is proliferating within like cancer: the 'poisonous mineral' Iago says is gnawing his 'inwards' sounds like a malignant tumour.

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[14] p. 112.

To sum up - Iago's motive for attacking Othello is shame that Othello has promoted Cassio over him, which also causes him to resent the social order; and the shameful supposition to which this has given rise: that Othello has also debauched his wife.

Iago's project is to shame his shamer and pay back shame with shame, 'to serve my turn upon him' (1.1.42) and make him 'egregiously an ass'(2.1.304): he wants the general to suffer the agony he is suffering. Since he believes Othello has doubly usurped his position by promoting Cassio and bedding Emilia, his first and only pre-determined step is to create an illusion of adultery between Cassio and Othello's wife. But no doubt he has other projects, too. By defeating the war hero of Venice he topples the hierarchy that has kept him down; and since Othello is not just a hero but also, like him, an outsider, at the same time punishes himself vicariously for failing to find a position in society.

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[15] Coghill too sees it as fantasy bred from shame, but contends that Iago invents this fantasy so he can hate Othello more (p. 146). I suggest it is more uncontrolled

The hypothesis of shame also sheds light on Iago's behaviour besides his villainy. He conceals his schemes because he is a good machiavel, of course; but there is at least a hint of a more general, psychological revulsion from openness:

> when my outward action does demonstrate
> The native act, and figure of my heart
> In complement extern, 'tis not long after,
> But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve,
> For doves to peck at (1.1.61-5)

This fear of the gaze of others is the classic sign of shame. Iago's grotesque image of himself indifferently feeding his exposed heart to the birds evokes the ridicule and pain he would suffer if he were seen. He conceals himself completely - 'I am not what I am' (1.1.65). He has no relationships; the nearest he comes to intercourse with another human being is his contemptuous association with Roderigo; one need not feel degraded before clear inferiors.

I am not suggesting that this notorious villain is some wilting lily: if he has a too often unacknowledged vulnerable ego, he is also hard as flint and shameless. Bradley tells us, 'his creed... he has a definite creed - is that absolute egoism is the only rational and proper attitude, and that conscience or honour or any other kind of regard for others is an absurdity'.[16] Iago is finely tuned to the personal, dishonourable shame of hurt pride, but incapable of moral shame for his wickedness; he knows, as he says, 'how to distinguish between a benefit and an injury' (1.3.312), but has not the sensibility to recognise his own depravity. There is an interesting causal relation to note here. It is Iago's personal shame that leads him to become morally shameless. In his anxiety to shame his shamer, and re-establish self-esteem, he enters evil. Thus shame breeds shamelessness as well as further shame.

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[16] Bradley, p. 179.

The irony of Iago's career is that in his shameless effort of self-assertion he degrades himself much further, metamorphosing horribly into an 'inhuman dog' (5.1.64), a 'Spartan dog, / Fell as anguish, hunger or the sea' (5.2.362). In this he foreshadows Othello himself, who turns into an obscene wife-murderer in his later effort to defeat supposed shame.

Brabantio

I have said Iago is the agent of shame; directly he has divulged his own professional humiliation in the first scene, he forces the shame of Desdemona's elopement upon her father, Brabantio. He does so to incite anger against Othello; and also to bring another man to shame, as he feels shamed himself.

He employs basically the same technique as he will use later on Othello, one of horrible suggestion. Shouting from the dark street, he goads Brabantio out of bed, and presents him with gross images of his daughter's flight, playing on sexual and racial fears. Each of these lurid fantasies employs the second person to stigmatise Brabantio personally - 'An old black ram is tupping *your* white ewe', 'the devil will make a grandsire of *you*', and so forth; presenting him with a shameful vision of himself as a dishonoured patriarch, whose daughter - a beast, a whore, and a pervert - is subjected to an old black ram, a Moor-land horse, the devil himself, whose posterity will be a race of braying horses. Because Iago speaks his calumnies from the shadows, he is a disembodied voice for Brabantio - like a voice inside his own head. Maud Bodkin writes, 'even when a critic sets out, as A. C. Bradley does, to study Iago's character as if he were an actual living man, what seems to emerge most clearly is the dominance of the man by a certain force or spirit'.[17] It is as if he is shame itself.

Moreover, the scene is constructed as a pictorial allegory of shame - with Iago downstairs skulking in the darkness, howling slanderous monstrosities; with the sleepy Brabantio emerging naked on the balcony like an emblem of exposure, so that Iago has to say to him, 'for shame put on your gown' (1.1.86). It literally sets the stage for everything to follow.

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[17] *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p.221.

Brabantio goes in, finds Desdemona is not there, and returns in an ecstasy of shame and grief: 'It is too true an evil, gone she is / And what's to come, of my despised time / Is nought but bitterness' (1.1.160). Henceforth he is passion's slave. He hauls Othello before the Duke. The Senate is in emergency session because of the Turkish threat to Cyprus; he demands a hearing anyway. The trial is granted, but the marriage of Desdemona and Othello is vindicated. With a muttered 'Good bu'y, I ha' done' (1.3.189), Brabantio gives in. When we next hear of him, near the end of the play, we are told that 'the match was mortal to him, and pure grief / Shore his old thread atwain' (5.2.206-7): he has died of the shame of his daughter's elopement and marriage to a Moor. He is the only person in *Othello* to perish thus, but not the only one in Shakespeare: as we have seen, Hero apparently dies of the shame of being accused of strumpetry at the altar by her own bridegroom in *Much Ado*; and in *Antony*, in a wet, moonlit field Enobarbus's heart breaks from the moral shame of having betrayed a kind master.

Though Brabantio does not become actively shameless like Iago, his shame is nevertheless a moral fault of excessive self-absorption - not to mention a quirk of racism: he forgets not only 'the general care' (1.3.54) but all consideration for his own child, and dies without being reconciled to her. Alongside a portrayal and exploration of the horror of shame, a moral analysis is progressing.

Cassio

Shame provides the dramatic momentum of the first act of *Othello*, which moves from Iago's expression of shame, to Brabantio's shaming, to Brabantio's indictment of Othello. Act Two focuses on Cassio's public shaming and his reaction. This is further proof of the importance of the shame theme in the play - especially since, as H. A. Mason points out, much of it is 'not strictly required by the plot, which has to make plausible Cassio's reluctance to face Othello and his desire to appeal to Desdemona for help'.[18]

Cassio's shame is very carefully dramatised and considerably intensifies the shame-theme. Othello has given command of Cyprus to Cassio for the night, so - at last - he can enjoy his interrupted nuptials with Desdemona. He has ordained a regimental party to celebrate both his marriage and the recently reported failure of the Turkish fleet; and he has specifically charged Cassio to prevent the revelling from getting rowdy. But Iago gets Cassio drunk. Like Lepidus and Caesar in *Antony,* Cassio has a light head and rapidly makes an ass of himself:

> *Cas.* Do not think gentlemen I am drunk, this is my ancient, this is my right
> hand, and this is my left hand: I am not drunk now, I can stand well enough and speak well enough.
> *All.* Excellent well.
> *Cas.* Very well then; you must not think, that I am drunk. (2.3.106-12)

For an officer, especially one so proudly sophisticated as Cassio, such loss of self-control is serious embarrassment; and Iago stage-manages events to maximise it, presenting him to the company as an habitual drunkard:

> *Mon.* But is he often thus?
> *Iago.* 'Tis evermore the prologue to his sleep:
> He'll watch the horologue a double set,
> If drink rock not his cradle. (2.3.121-4)

Iago then sets Roderigo on to engage Cassio in a violent quarrel and rings the alarm, whispering in his victim's ear, 'you will be sham'd for ever' (2.3.154); and when the risen Othello approaches, crying out:

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[18] *Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p.94.

> Hold, hold,
> Lieutenant, - sir, - Montano, - gentlemen, -
> Have you forgot all place of sense, and duty?
> Hold, the general speaks to you; hold, hold, for shame! (2.3.156-9)

Cassio is not able to answer the general's outraged questions; so Othello has no choice but to dismiss him: 'Cassio, I love thee, / But never more be officer of mine' (2.3.239-40).

A deputy drunk in charge apprehended and sacked by his superior, this archetypal scene is the second shaming engineered by Iago in as many acts; and he has not yet begun abusing Othello's ear with dirty hints about his marriage. Iago's preference for shame means we cannot see him as a plain villain happy to do any dirty work. And once again there is a strangely impersonal suggestion; Iago has not yet spoken of turning Cassio's shame to account by persuading him to sue for Othello's forgiveness via Desdemona. His main motive is probably desire to shame the man who has painfully superseded him; but he does not say so. And given this opacity of intention, it is inviting to suppose that, as with Brabantio, he is acting as an active spirit of dishonour. Arthur Kirsch asserts that 'Iago's psychomachic role would have been unmistakable to Elizabethans'.[19]

Iago continues to prompt and promote shame by supervising Cassio's reaction. This is much more closely depicted than Brabantio's shame. As a formal and somewhat ostentatious man, what strikes Cassio first is his loss of face: it strikes him very forcibly indeed. He avers he is hurt 'past all surgery' (2.3.252); and, even more now than when intoxicated, his eloquence and composure are in pieces: 'Reputation, reputation, I ha' lost my reputation! I ha' lost the immortal part, sir, of myself, and what remains is bestial; my reputation, Iago, my reputation!' (2.3.254-7). Public honour supersedes soul here to become Cassio's priceless 'immortal part': without it, he feels he is just flesh, stuff, unredeemed earth. This extreme sentiment is not uncommon in Shakespeare.

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[19] *The Passions of Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), p. 63.

Though at least he pays lip-service to alternative, heavenly values, Mowbray anticipates it almost exactly when he tells Richard II:

> My dear dear Lord
> The purest treasure mortal times afford
> Is spotless reputation - that away
> Men are gilded loam, or painted clay. (*Richard II*, 1.1.76)

Such curiously spiritualised social shame must be seen in the overall context of late renaissance culture. In the medieval world, there is emphasis on the afterlife of the soul, and shame is felt most intensely and most often before God and in fear of His judgement; but in the more secular renaissance world there is a shift of emphasis towards the afterlife lived here on earth through lingering reputation, and shame is felt equally powerfully and frequently before men and in fear of the judgement of posterity. The unhappy consequence of this is that social shame tends to subdue all sense of inherent shame known to God and to the self, and men and women fear exposure rather than doing wrong. Thus Iago says it is the custom of Venetian wives to commit secret adulteries (3.3.206-8); and, bearing him out, his own wife, in her conversation with Desdemona about adultery, states a preference for the shameless provided it is concealed (4.3.59 ff.).

Cassio is next struck by the shame of drunkenness. This is shame intermixed with guilt as a sense of transgression; but shame predominates as consciousness of personal debasement. When Iago tells him he only has to sue to Othello to be reinstated, he responds, 'I will rather sue to be despised, than to deceive so good a commander, with so light, so drunken, and indiscreet an officer' (2.3.269-71), which flashes an image of him begging Othello to loathe him which is shockingly disjunct from that of the 'smooth disposed' (1.3.395) ladies' man we have known. He goes on:

> O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths, to steal away their brains; that we should with joy, revel, pleasure, and applause, transform ourselves to beasts (2.3.281-4)

> I will ask for my place again, he shall tell me I am a drunkard: had I as many mouths as Hydra, such an answer would stop 'em all: to be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast! (2.3.295)

This sense of brutality is the central fact of Cassio's shame: a horrid vision of himself as a beast, a monster. It goes deeper than any public shame and prepares for Othello's experience. A man is fundamentally master of himself in Shakespeare, and Cassio realises he is a man unmanned. At first his grotesque idea of drunkenness as a gleeful descent into animalism may seem excessive; it is somewhat shrill, but it emanates from a more fastidious respect for personal dignity and the sovereignty of reason than we are used to; and it is part of the wider pattern of extreme shame in the play already observed in Iago's paranoid, delusional shame and Brabantio's fatal attack.

Thirdly, Cassio grows ashamed of his outburst of violence. As with Iago, shame is breeding shame internally. Cassio explicitly reflects on this:

> one unperfectness shows me another, to make me frankly despise myself (2.3.288-9)

This formulation of the self-perpetuating power of shame is one of the major insights of the play. It presents Cassio as the passive victim of a team of his own faults, which mobilise and impress themselves upon him in sequence: shame as psychological battery. It also confirms the suggestion that Iago's sense of his professional 'unperfectness' has bred his suspicion of sexual shame.

Cassio does not die of shame, like Brabantio, but hereafter cuts a poor, disgraced figure; importuning Desdemona for her husband's favour, sneaking away from Othello himself. He is 'very ill at ease, / Unfit for mine own purpose' (3.3.32-3); before the curtain, he is even cut down by the paltry Roderigo. And though he is given command of the isle in the last scene, it does little to mitigate our general sense of diminution. His leg is maimed by Roderigo's thrust, his spirit is maimed by his shaming; he is crest-fallen, bereft of his innocent self-belief. Shame leaves on him its distinctive 'marks of weakness, marks of woe'.

As with both Iago and Brabantio, we note that Cassio, too, is more susceptible to personal indignity than any purely ethical shame; since, for all his tender self-respect, he is not too scrupulous to toy with the affections of the courtesan Bianca, who loves him. Though no doubt this is normal officer conduct, the *dramatis personae* we have met so far show a limited sense of what is improper and degrading.

Othello

By Act Three shame has grown more virulent. Ashamed himself, Iago has shamed Brabantio and Cassio; now he infects Othello. He is dispersing his own feelings of sexual and professional shame throughout the world of the play, but his main and most cherished task is the shaming of the man he believes shamed him.

As apparently the sole Moor in white Venice, we would expect Othello to be vulnerable to shame; but he seems invulnerable at first. He is confident; he is noble, good, and innocent. When we meet him, he survives an ordeal designed to shame him without a trace of shame. Iago is telling him Brabantio has spoken 'scurvy and provoking terms / against [his] honour' (1.2.7-8) and is coming to accuse and be revenged on him, but he is unmoved:

> Let him do his spite;
> My services, which I have done the signiory,
> Shall out-tongue his complaints; 'tis yet to know -
> Which, when I know that boasting is an honour,
> I shall provulgate - I fetch my life and being
> From men of royal siege, and my demerits
> May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
> As this that I have reached. (1.2.17-24)

It is a formidable attitude. The tone is level and calm. Othello is confident in his professional record and his lineage. And he is sanguine about his faults: they pay their respects to his proud fortune; they are not important in comparison. As well as modest civility, this image of unbonneted defects suggests blemishes readily admitted, reinforcing the general sense here of natural immunity to shame. This noble Moor is the opposite of our morbidly sensitive Iago, who shrouds himself in deceit and mystery to avoid being seen.

When Brabantio's gang come for him brandishing their weapons, Othello splendidly adjures them:

> Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust 'em (1.2.59)

This famous line breathes heroic authority and aristocratic disdain for a vulgar brawl. It also suggests Christian distaste for violence, recalling Christ's words to Peter when, similarly, arrested at night by an armed gang, 'Put up again thy sword into his place'; and to his assailants, 'Are you come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me?'.[20] It is a crucial point that Othello has a sense of what is unfitting for a Christian as well as what would degrade a warrior; when later he comes across Cassio and other officers rioting, he appeals directly to this 'Christian shame':

> Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that
> Which heaven has forbid the Ottomites?
> For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl (2.3.161-3)

He now meets Brabantio's hysterical charge that he has laid Desdemona under some vile African enchantment and explains to the Senate how a Venetian girl could love him naturally without blushing, or blenching, or losing his temper, with heroic dignity and Christian forbearance. Exceptionally among the male characters here, his shamefastness is complete; Juliet's lovely praise of Romeo would seem to apply to him also:

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[20] Matthew 26.52 and 26.55.

> He was not born to shame.
> Upon his brow shame is asham'd to sit,
> For 'tis a throne where honour may be crown'd
> Sole monarch of the universal earth. (*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.2.91-4)[21]

How, then, is Iago able to persuade this 'shame proof' hero that his wife has cuckolded him? This question provides much of the interest of Act Three. Part of the answer certainly lies in Iago's genius for suggestion. As with Brabantio, he employs a technique of horrid hints and intimations; but he greatly improves it, so Othello will allow a purely confected shame to fasten itself upon him. Iago presents himself in the guise of a sober, Horatio-like friend, anxious for Othello's honourable well-being but loath to conclude that he has been disgraced and extremely careful in his judgements, which avoids any appearance of villainy and increases the credit of his pretended surmise. He betrays a particle of that surmise, then hastily withdraws it, rousing Othello's suspicions. He repeatedly stops short of any simple statement, see-sawing instead between expression and reticence, persuasion and dissuasion, as though struggling with the thought himself, until he has wrought Othello to such a pitch of unresolved trepidation that he would rather accept the worst. He dwells on the horrors of lost reputation - horrors recently witnessed in Cassio's fall; and suggests, as Brabantio had earlier, that since Desdemona deceived her father, she will deceive him in turn. He also plays on Othello's social insecurity and sexual innocence; and manipulates his 'proofs' of Desdemona's sponsorship of Cassio and Cassio's possession of Desdemona's handkerchief.

And he is extremely lucky. Shakespeare arranges that everything goes his way. Desdemona is a very vehement advocate for Cassio, true to her vow that 'my lord shall never rest, / I'll watch him tame, and talk him out of patience; / His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift, / I'll intermingle every thing he does / With Cassio's suit' (3.3.22-6). And her harping on him much increases the likelihood of the proposed affair. Further, when Iago has hidden Othello to observe himself and Cassio unseen, Bianca unsolicitedly storms up and flings Desdemona's handkerchief in Cassio's face, complaining it is a keepsake from another woman. When Othello challenges Desdemona, she answers with a cliché of 'revealed whoredom':[22] 'Alas, he is betray'd, and I undone' (5.2.77).

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[21] The Arden *Romeo and Juliet*, Brian Gibbons (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1980).

But Iago's expertise and luck will not by themselves explain why Othello takes the bait. Harold Bloom rightly points out, 'He is peculiarly vulnerable to Iago precisely because Iago is his standard bearer, the protector of his colors and reputation in battle, pledged to die rather than allow the colors to be taken':[23] it is the ancient's job to guard his general from shame. A different reason is that Iago has found Othello's weak spot: he does not know Desdemona. His earlier summary of the course of their love revealed so much: 'She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd, / And I lov'd her that she did pity them' (1.3.167-8). In Manlove's phrase, 'what they share is Othello only'.[24] Othello is powerless to confute Iago's image of Desdemona because he has nothing to confute it with.

And yet even this will not tell us why Othello almost anticipates Iago's suggestion or why he barely resists at all. The matter arises between them as follows:

> *Iago*. Ha, I like not that.
> *Oth*. What dost thou say?
> *Iago*. Nothing, my lord, or if - I know not what.
> *Oth*. Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?
> *Iago*. Cassio, my lord? ... no, sure, I cannot think it,
> That he would sneak away so guilty-like,
> Seeing you coming.
> *Oth* I do believe 'twas he. (3.3.35-41)

Othello is exceedingly quick on the uptake here: 'Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?' Iago no more suggests it to him than he suggests it to himself; and he only has to push a little further for him to accept the proposed whole thing lock, stock, and barrel as 'destiny, unshunnable like death' (3.3.279). Before any more words pass between them, Othello is contemplating marital breakdown:

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[22] Colin Manlove, *The Gap in Shakespeare* (London: Vision Press, 1981), p. 70.
[23] pp. 68-9.
[24] p. 77.

'Excellent wretch, perdition catch my soul, / But I do love thee, and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again' (3.3.91-3). And hereafter he seems partly to be persuading himself, at one point giving Iago new grounds for his wife's betrayal:[25]

> *Oth.* I do not but think Desdemona's honest.
> *Iago.* Long live she so, and long live you to think so!
> *Oth.* And yet how nature erring from itself -
> *Iago.* Ay, there's the point (3.3.229-32)

Mason confirms that 'when we look over the dialogue we see that Iago is not really leading Othello, but Othello Iago. In particular we see that Othello is using Iago to give himself permission to go even lower in his suspicions, to encourage what is so rapidly expanding inside him'.[26] This prodigiously nervous Othello is not the hero of previous scenes. His confidence has collapsed. - But why?

Shame gives us two answers. One is that Othello has simply caught the disease of shame which we have seen spreading through the play. There is more than aesthetic reason for this: the shame of others truly is a prime stimulus to feel ashamed oneself. We have already seen that in Sophocles' *Ajax* the prospect of the hero's shame and degradation elicits this response from his enemy, Ulysses: 'This touches / My state as well as his. Are we not all, / All living things, mere phantoms, shadows of nothing?' Furthermore, though we have seen Othello resist shame once, that could have weakened his defences.

Another possibility is that, below his magnificent surface confidence, Othello is latently ashamed; and so expects his wife to betray him. The possibility of upheaval from the subconscious has been mooted already: Iago played on Brabantio's dream of shame; and Brabantio's image of his overbearing flood of passion (1.3.55-8) suggests the invasion of lower forces into the precincts of the ego. That Othello is unconsciously ashamed is very plausible.

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[25] René Girard recognises this in *A Theater of Envy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 292 .

[26] p. 107.

He is a minority of one in a society which regards his colour as a disfiguring blemish - we have seen it call upon him to justify in public how a white woman could love him; even his adoring wife implies mistrust of his appearance when she explains, 'I saw Othello's visage in his mind' (1.3.252). Iago has words hinting at anxiety despite prosperity: 'Poor and content is rich, and rich enough, / But riches, fineless, is as poor as winter / To him that ever fears he shall be poor' (3.3.176-8). And this thesis of unconscious shame sheds new light on Othello's reported past. He has made a vocation of opposing the infidel and heathen, we now see, partly to distinguish himself from them. What outrages him most, before Iago tells him that his Desdemona has crowned him with horns, is the prospect of his officers 'turn'd Turks', because he feels secretly that, civilisation and Christianity notwithstanding, he is still barbarian: so their degrading metamorphosis presents him with a concrete image of his fear of reversion to that state.

Latent shame also explains why Iago is able to speak to Othello so tellingly, for it means that he is speaking to him with the voice of a hitherto unacknowledged part of his own self. Earlier we saw him do something of this sort when he persuaded Brabantio that his nightmare of dishonour had come true. His dialogue with Othello has the quality of nervous thought or monologue. At one point their separate voices become indistinguishable:[27]

> *Iago*. Indeed?
> *Oth.* Indeed? Indeed: discern'st thou aught in that?
> Is he not honest?
> *Iago*. Honest, my lord?
> *Oth.* Honest? ay, honest.
> *Iago*. My lord, for aught I know.
> *Oth.* What dost thou think?
> *Iago*. Think, my lord?
> *Oth.* Think, my lord? By heaven, he echoes me (3.3.102-10)

'By heaven, he echoes me': we are clearly encouraged to identify Iago with Othello's thoughts here. F. R. Leavis writes, 'Iago's power, in fact, in the temptation scene is that he represents something in Othello... the essential traitor is within the gates'.[28] This internal traitor, I submit, is Othello's secret shame.

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[27] Girard, p.292.

Like his tragic successor Coriolanus, Othello is absolute in temperament: when reunited with Desdemona after the stormy sea-crossing to Cyprus, he declares himself so perfectly happy he would gladly die. There are no gradations of feeling for him: now persuaded he is a cuckold, he is utterly ashamed. He considers himself lower, less enviable, than a toad living off 'a vapour in a dungeon' (3.3.275). He rationalises Desdemona's supposed infidelity by finding fault with himself: there is no wonder his wife does not love him - he is black, he is uncourtly, he is old. He tries to rally himself, unsuccessfully. He supposes he has lost his reputation: 'my name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd, and black / As mine own face' (3.3.392-4). This is reminiscent of Cassio, but that Othello uses his own blackness as his standard for defilement reveals that he has accepted the Venetian prejudice that his colour is evil. His honourable generalship and Christian culture had previously redeemed and mitigated his blackness, so he enjoyed the paradoxical reputation of a good black; now, dishonoured, he is reduced to the whites' stereotype.

As earlier it consumed Iago, shame now eats Othello up as well; as with Cassio, one defect shows him another to make him frankly despise himself. And Othello's shame seems all the more cancerous and insane because it has no just cause at all. The following speech shows the full pathos of his disease:

> I had been happy if the general camp,
> Pioners, and all, had tasted her sweet body,
> So I had nothing known: O now for ever
> Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content:
> Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,
> That makes ambition virtue: O farewell,
> Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
> The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife;
> The royal banner, and all quality,
> Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!
> And ye, O ye mortal engines, whose wide throats

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[28] 'Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero', in The *Common Pursuit,* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 140-1.

> The immortal Jove's great clamour counterfeit;
> Farewell, Othello's occupation's gone! (3.3.351-63)

This is shame interlaced with jealousy and panic. Like Oedipus, who actually blinds himself, Othello would rather be blind to his shame. He says this doleful valediction to his soldiership because he has been overtaken by private passion; but also because, as a disgraced husband, he now feels unworthy of his noble calling. Whereas Iago's professional shame produced a conviction of sexual shame, Othello's sexual shame produces professional inadequacy and self-doubt. He does not so much resign as feel his occupation drop from him: the glorious show of arms recedes and fades, leaving him no more the general. His profession has been his life, 'the flinty and steel couch of war' his 'thrice driven bed of down' (1.3.230-1). He has lost the greater part of himself - his reference to himself in the third person hints as much. Like Antony after his disgrace at Alexandria, Othello finds his personality evaporating here: he, too, is 'unqualitied with very shame' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 3.11.44). All his glory is behind him now, and before him nothing but dishonour and disgrace. This farewell to arms is a eulogy for his former self. Here is shame that is very close to death.

Othello restates this absolute sense of shame much more explicitly in another important speech: 'Had it pleas'd heaven...' (4.2.48-65). Here he says first that he could have endured any quality or quantity of pain and shame from providence. He deploys mostly water imagery to present a picture of a resolute man all but drowning in unearnt misfortune, with the still visible portion of his head blistered and cut all over - an image of heroic sufferance, recalling the earlier shame-proof Othello now, sadly, vanished:

> Had it pleas'd heaven
> To try me with affliction, had he rain'd
> All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,
> Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips,
> Given to captivity me and my hopes,
> I should have found in some part of my soul
> A drop of patience

He then switches abruptly from this image - and the subjunctive, and the imagery of water - to contemplate his present shame. He imagines himself a 'fixed figure' for the 'times of scorn' to point 'his slow, unmoving fingers at': he is in the stocks being indicted - and not with a single finger extended, but with 'fingers', which is a much stranger and more horrific gesture. Is he bound on a clock face? The apparent oxymoron 'slow, unmoving' is resolved when we realise that he feels he is being pointed out *even as he speaks*. It is a most intense realisation of the pain of public shame and obloquy, and all the more remarkable because conveyed in just a couple of lines. Othello then trails into a moan, 'oh, oh'; but says he could also have borne such scorn 'well, very well'. What he cannot abide is expulsion from the barn where he has garnered up his heart; exile from the home where he must live or bear no life; severance from the pure source from which his current runs or else dries up (the water imagery again) or its colonisation and poisoning by lustful toads: i.e. rejection by Desdemona and the defilement and putrefaction of their marriage. He challenges Patience itself to outface this and declares himself utterly overcome.

The overall claim Othello makes in this key-speech is that he could have endured anything except the ruin and pollution of his inner self. The water imagery - of rain without and the fountain within - illustrates this concretely: he would withstand a tempest and a flood of blows, but cannot possibly withstand being cut off from or defiled at the spring and head of his identity. We spiral down from circumstantial shame, to social shame, to the worst and lowest possible shame of personal extinction; the Shakespearean view of shame as opposite to being is explicit here. Othello invested all of himself in his marriage: now it has apparently failed, he feels that he has lost all - he has no self, or only a contaminated one not worth his having. He is confronting what was only implicit in the lament for his lost occupation: in effect he is dead. And indeed his experience is worse than death: it is spiritual death in which the pain of death does not culminate with the release of death but is ongoing nullity and rottenness. Othello's experience of shame as Coleridgean death-in-life, life-in-death is grotesquely pitiable - more so when compared with his original self-confidence; and especially since we know it is the fruit of a cruel delusion.

But Othello then brings real and deserved shame on himself. He becomes passion's slave, disgracefully forsaking his heroic dignity, gibbering incoherently: 'Pish! Noses, ears and lips. Is't possible?- Confess?- Handkerchief?- O devil!' (4.1.42-3); 'Goats and Monkeys!' (4.1.259). He collapses in a fit: a physical emblem for the fall of 'the noble nature / Whom passion could not shake' (4.1.261-2).

And the second phase of his fall is graver yet, for he who, in Lodovico's phrase, was 'once so good' (5.2.292) becomes morally vicious. His sense of the personal shame of impotence or indignity and his sense of the Christian shame of sin and sinfulness now conflict: he is overcome by hurt husbandly pride and so forsakes and flouts all the constraints of religion. Like Iago, he, too, determines to wreak a terrible revenge on his supposed shamer; shame breeds shamelessness in him as well. Dedicating himself to 'black vengeance' and 'tyrannous hate' (3.3.454, 6), he enters evil; and his heavenly eloquence turns into a repugnant idiom of crazed and stupid violence: 'O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw it to' (4.1.140-1).

Othello's metamorphosis from a magnificent, good, and religious man into an abomination, a monster, is the singular horror of the play. All the imagery of bestial degeneration now comes into focus, as does the imagery of exposure and defilement. Cassio's apostrophe on his own comparatively trivial drunkenness, 'to be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast!', proves an exact prophecy of Othello's fall: first he is a dupe, now a frothing ape - and I use that word advisedly, for part of the horror of Othello's collapse is that it, not his illusory cuckoldry, confirms the worst of Venetian prejudice and his own fears. Mason argues Othello 'descends even lower and in his worst stage becomes a devil'; 'This downward progression', he goes on, is 'in the direction of greater dramatic intensity' and 'is an exploration of the unbearable'.[29] As a corrective, McAlindon rightly insists, 'the transformation of Othello is never absolute nor entirely stable; vestiges of his noble self remain, lending plausibility both to the transformation process and the recovery which takes place in the last scene':[30] this is evident in his language which alternates between the savage atrocity of his dreams of vengeance and an aching sensibility which bespeaks his not altogether extinct better nature. Nevertheless, the emphasis is certainly on the terrible debasement, which culminates in Desdemona's murder.

He poses then as the minister of divine justice; but everything else points revenge: he is just loosening the leash on his sense of Christian shame to permit himself the killing. As he advances on his sleeping wife, he speaks some fine words, 'It is the cause, it is the cause my soul...' (5.2.1. ff.), but he is a poetical monster, rolling his eyes and gnawing his nether lip. Even when looking directly down on Desdemona - though he smells and kisses her - he is completely blind to her real presence: what he sees is the figment of his own shame, which he is trying to eradicate. He kills her by covering her up, and talks of putting out the light, partly because he sees her as the exposed part of himself: the public advertisement of his cuckoldry.

The terrible irony, of course, is that in this attempt to end his non-existent shame, Othello becomes the author of his eternal moral and religious shame, turning into an abominable wife-murderer. That he botches the killing, as Antony his suicide, is an extra shameful twist.

Othello does not regain his sense of Christian shame, and feel the horror of what he has done, till he learns Desdemona is innocent; even then it only dawns on him gradually. First he has to recognise that his deed is inexcusable, that moral and religious shame outweighs that which has led him to murder: supposedly outraged honour. He has to resolve the tension which is now painfully apparent in himself between the warrior and the Christian. He suffers another pang of heroic shame when his sword is taken from him, a symbol of soldierly dishonour: 'I am not valiant neither, /But every puny whipster gets my sword' (5.2.244-5). But then he acknowledges that such dishonour is nothing to what he has done to his soul: 'But why should honour outlive honesty? / Let it go all' (5.2.246-7). It is the beginning of his recognition that he has disgraced himself far more absolutely than if Desdemona had really betrayed him, his realisation that all his former shame and suffering is minimal to what he must now suffer; but it is also the beginning of a moral recovery.

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[29] p. 112.
[30] p. 140.

But the beginning only: warrior pride still claims too much of his attention for him fully to understand his sin. He realises he has another weapon, 'a sword of Spain, the ice brook's temper' (5.2.254); and threatens to 'come forth' with it, and make a Macbeth-style last stand. But he has seen external honour is meaningless without spiritual integrity: he retracts it as a 'vain boast' (5.2.265). What follows is reminiscent of the passion of Hercules when he realises that it was he himself who butchered his family, now littered at his feet. Seneca's *Hercules Furens* was available to Shakespeare not only in Latin but also in Heywood's translation of 1561. That Othello has already been through an experience of profound shame makes this second and worse passion all the more painful: there is nothing quite like it in literature. His previous sensations of spiritual death were mistaken; but now he has killed his wife, he is forced to acknowledge that he has really ceased to be the man he was - and become something immeasurably lower than a cuckold. His question, 'where should Othello go?' (5.2.272) is tersely expressive of his desire to get out of sight (we should note he is suffering in public) and of a feeling that this world will not accommodate him now he is so contaminated. This time his sense of terminus is absolute, as his plainer language indicates: 'Here is my journey's end, here is my butt, / And very sea-mark of my utmost sail' (5.2.268-9).

He resolves to die; but, as a Christian who has sinned dreadfully, he does not expect death will bring relief from shame. In fact, he anticipates that when he comes to the bar of celestial judgement, the sight of the resurrected Desdemona will make him reel to hell without God's word of doom:

> O ill-starr'd wench,
> Pale as thy smock, when we shall meet at count,
> This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
> And fiends will snatch at it (5.2.273-6)

Continuing this prevision of his descent into the inferno, he invites diabolical tormentors to whip him, blow him about in winds, roast him in sulphur, wash him 'in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire' (5.2.278-81). A. D. Nuttall, who sees Othello as exemplifying a more primitive 'shame-culture' of honour and reputation,[31] fails to recognise this spiritual shame. Admittedly, it is a late turning in the play. Up till now all the shame we have seen - that of Brabantio, Cassio, and the late Othello who supposed himself a cuckold - has been personal shame of soldierly and sexual disgrace and lost reputation. Othello dismissed his Christian shame when he opted for vengeance; but it has now returned: he has regained his spiritual sight. It is another step towards recovery. But, of course, this is the external view only: there is no exaltation or comfort for Othello himself, only an excruciating sense of infernal corruption.

He is on the brink of mental collapse. When Lodovico enters and asks, 'Where is that rash and most unfortunate man?' (5.2.284), he answers, 'That's he that was Othello; here I am' (5.2.285): he has to labour hard to attain self-consciousness - first recognising not Othello, but the man who was Othello - only then recognising that man as himself. Suicide seems imperative: it would be worse than hell to go on living as some barely recognisable, degraded other. As he that was Othello puts it, 'in my sense it is happiness to die' (5.2.291). This final spectacle of Othello's shame elicits tongue-tied pity from Lodovico: 'O, thou Othello... /What should be said to thee?' (5.2.292-4). To which Othello answers: 'Why, anything, / An honourable murderer, if you will: / For nought did I in hate, but all in honour' (5.2.294-6). The indifferent, rather ironic tone - 'Why, anything... if you will' - indicates he is now beyond caring much for the views of others. He knows an honourable murderer is a self-contradicting, deluded, damnable creature, deserving the hell he has just wished on himself - in this he invites comparison with Brutus; he has perceived the insufficiency of the heroic. And yet, in truth, and in despite of his gain in religious awareness, his consciousness is now super-charged with all kinds of shame, secular and sacred: one moment he recognises his spiritual obscenity, the next bewails that he is Iago's gull.

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[31] pp. 140-2.

His last great speech (5.2.339-57) ends with shame. He draws himself up to his full height, pronounces judgement, and performs his own execution. When he asks that his words be remembered in 'your letters', he shows a renewed concern with reputation - but reputation justly correspondent with truth. He says he has done the state some service; and, more questionably, that he was not 'easily jealous' and he loved 'too well'. Then he acknowledges himself as the 'base Indian' who 'threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe' and breaks down in a fit of unaccustomed tears. He abruptly recounts how he came across 'a malignant and a turban'd Turk' in 'Aleppo once' who 'Beat a Venetian, and traduc'd the state', took him by the throat, and 'smote him thus'; and so saying he stabs himself. He thus admits identity with 'the circumcised dog' and words and action come together in a climax of shame. Racial and religious shame are at one here: Othello is ashamed because he has proved heathen. He recognises he is now inseparable from stereotype; he has confirmed the worst possible perception of himself - stripping off a Venetian veneer of capable generalship, magnificent composure, and Christian baptism to reveal an unreconstructed and demonic barbarian. He has himself turned Turk, which is exactly what he most feared to be. He is now literally his own worst enemy, so he kills himself in disgust. It is a terrific climax. There is little room for T. S. Eliot's still influential and cynical view that he is 'cheering himself up'.[32]

Iago

Leavis justly warns that at the end of the play we should not be thinking about Iago much;[33] yet in the aftermath of Othello's tragedy it is natural to revert to its plotter. Iago has now successfully shamed his shamer, and ensured that he has shamed and possibly damned himself. But he does not therefore exult; he withdraws into silence: 'Demand me nothing, what you know, you know / From this time forth I never will speak word' (5.2.304-5). This keeps the upper hand, frustrating justice by refusing even legal guilt, maintaining the unexplained horror of what he has done; but its weariness suggests that the fruit of victory has turned to ashes. That he conceals himself again as soon as he is visible hints at more shame - perhaps the grandeur of Othello's moral shame has taught him how to regard himself. More likely, with Othello's final blow, the spirit of shame which has possessed him throughout has departed, leaving him exhausted and used up. At last the plague of shame is over.

Desdemona

Mason suggests that Desdemona is 'an independent moral centre' from whose vantage we may see *Othello* differently.[34] I have argued that Iago represents the shame which is the tragedy's motive force; but he is personal shame only: he is morally shameless. Desdemona is the constant representative of Christian shame in the play. She has an eye 'right modest' (2.3.23); her father remembers her from her life at home as: 'A maiden never bold of spirit, / So still and quiet, that her motion / Blush'd at her self' (1.3.94-6). It is a less tentative woman than this who becomes Cassio's tireless advocate, yet one that retains so fine a shamefastness as to be scarcely able even to say 'whore'. For her, a sense of shame is not only part of essential human nature, but also a Christian ethic. Hence her response to Othello's accusations:

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[32] 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', in *Selected Essays*, 3rd Edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp. 126-40.

[33] p. 138.

[34] p. 139.

> *Oth.* Are you not a strumpet?
> *Des.* No, as I am a Christian:
> If to preserve this vessel for my lord
> From any hated foul unlawful touch,
> Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.
> *Oth.* What, not a whore?
> *Des.* No, as I shall be sav'd. (4.2.83-7)

It is an index to Othello's madness that he abuses and eventually kills such a woman as an impudent harlot. But she bears the shame and pain of this treatment from her husband: 'Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do much; / And his unkindness may defeat my life; / But never taint my love' (4.2.169-71). This recalls patient Griselda and, like Griselda, Desdemona also resembles Christ, who went to his criminal's death 'despising the shame'.[35] She is capable of such indifference because what strikes her as shameful is wickedness and impiety, not exposure and humiliation. In this she is outstanding: as we have seen, Christian shame is habitually eclipsed in *Othello* by the shame of personal dishonour. Part of the point, as in *Much Ado About Nothing*, is that feminine shame, which emphasises chastity and modesty, is more religious than masculine shame, which emphasises potency and precedence. The case of Emilia reinforces this; for though in her, partly playful, conversation with Desdemona she says she prefers the shameless, hers is the true voice of outrage when the atrocities of the play come to light. And we never see Bianca - who as a courtesan is short of womanly shame - do anything vicious. But *Othello* is a man's world: a military world. Desdemona is the embodiment of Christian, feminine shame and she is smothered to death by a husband possessed by merely personal shame. It is the tragedy of a society tilted towards masculine shamelessness.

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[35] Hebrews 12.22.

Yet, after Aristotle, tragedy is classically conceived as purgative and redemptive - the hero falls, but the world is cleansed; and it may be that some such purge is achieved at the end of *Othello*. Othello has fallen into sin, murdering Christian shame by killing his wife; but his passion of repentant shame over her corpse restores Christian shame to the world, though he may go to hell. Within a play which is substantially a nightmare of shame we therefore find a strong hint of Christian penitence, with intimations of redemption and atonement. Such is the doubleness of Shakespeare.

7

King Lear

This chapter is a new attempt to reveal *King Lear*'s vision of shame. The view that shame is central to *King Lear* is not altogether original. In his unfairly neglected *Sovereign Shame*, William F. Zak argues for it; and in 'The Avoidance of Love' Stanley Cavell is concerned with the connection the play posits between shame as exposure and relationship.[1] But neither Zak nor Cavell completely elucidates *Lear*'s shame-theme. Both miss the key role played by Edmond and Goneril and Regan as exemplars of the shameless, and fail to discriminate different kinds of shame in the play. I will introduce a crucial allegorical pattern: although the mode of the play is partly realistic, Shakespeare, as in *Othello*, is also partly working in the genre of the psychomachia. And although this great tragedy is manifoldly significant, it is partly an allegory of shame.

The play begins with Lear's abdication. Too old to rule, he is not sufficiently self-assured to forsake power and humbly prepare for death. He tries to compensate his loss by bribing his daughters to compete in flattering him with hyperbolical expressions of love. The virtuous Cordelia refuses. Shamed, Lear casts her off. But by rejecting her, at a deeper, allegorical level, he rejects the sense of shame she manifests, preferring the shamelessness of Goneril and Regan. This spiritual choice rebounds disastrously when Goneril and Regan use the power with which Lear has invested them to shame and disgrace him, to the point where his regal identity is ruined. But this shame proves to be a blessing in disguise, for it kills his worldly pride, enabling him to recognise and accept the different, moral shame of his mistreatment of Cordelia. He is thus partially reborn. But he relapses into feeble dependency: he only really sees Cordelia for herself, and fully apprehends his guilt, when she is dead in his arms. It kills him, but he dies in the truth. The same pattern is replicated in the sub-plot. Gloucester also chooses shamelessness, by believing the physically illegitimate and spiritually revolting Edmond rather than his legitimate son Edgar. That Edgar, like Cordelia, stands, in the allegory of *King Lear,* for shame is suggested by the excessively degrading disguise he adopts. Gloucester's accustomed, easy-going, worldly self is destroyed when Edmond betrays him to Regan and Cornwall, who deface and blind him. But it is at that low point of mutilation and debasement that he begins to see the shamefulness of what he has done to Edgar. His abortive suicide attempt is an effort to recoup his dignity; but afterwards he moves beyond merely selfish concerns, and is enlightened when Edgar reveals himself. This recognition of his son, which is also a recognition of the wrong he has done to him, is so fulfilling and profound that it causes his death, just as truly seeing Cordelia kills Lear. This is Shakespeare's most sublimely positive account of shame. Shame is a good in *King Lear* - both the worldly shame which kills pride and compels humility, and the moral shame which saves. It is a deeply Christian view.

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[1] in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

As with *Hamlet* and *Othello,* the poetic atmosphere of this play savours strongly of shame. Bradley brilliantly sums up the imagery of monstrous degradation:

> Goneril is a kite: her ingratitude has a serpent's tooth: she has struck her father most serpent-like upon the very heart: her visage is wolvish: she has tied sharp-toothed unkindness like a vulture on her father's breast: for her husband she is a gilded serpent: to Gloster her cruelty seems to have the fangs of a boar. She and Regan are dog-hearted: they are tigers, not daughters: each is an adder to the other: the flesh of each is covered with the fell of a beast. Oswald is a mongrel, and the son and heir of a mongrel: ducking to everyone in power, he is a wag-tail: white with fear, he is a goose. Gloster, for Reagan, is an ingrateful fox: Albany, for his wife, has a cowish spirit and is milk-liver'd: when Edgar as the Bedlam first appeared to Lear he made him think a man a worm. As we read, the souls of all the

> beasts in turn seem to have entered the bodies of these mortals; horrible in their venom, savagery, lust, deceitfulness, sloth, cruelty, filthiness; miserable in their feebleness, nakedness, defencelessness, blindness; and man, 'consider him well', is even what they are.[2]

Yet the imagery of the play is, as Winnifred M. T. Nowottny notes,[3] more pressingly dramatic than poetic. It is the concrete stage-imagery of the Fool in motley; the duke's son a dirty, exposed Bedlam beggar; his father horribly mutilated; another duke in the stocks; and, most of all, the unaccommodated, raving King, clothed in soiled robes and crowned with weeds and flowers, which makes *King Lear* a shameful spectacle.

the division of the kingdom

Lear's tragedy begins in the first scene when he steps down to begin the process of dying. This is not in itself foolish. Spiritually, the self-ignorant man needs to prepare for death. Politically, it is perhaps best that he tries to solve the problem of succession while he can.[4] He stages his division of the kingdom between his daughters as political theatre: a late affirmation of kingship; a demonstration of unlimited power even in the moment of abdication. Hence the regal cadence of his speech and his grand gestures with the map: 'Of all these bounds even from this line to this, / With shadowy forests and with champaigns riched, / With plenteous rivers and wide skirted meads, / We make thee lady' (1.1.63-6).[5] But such a performance at least hints of anxiety, and the following belies Lear's formal magnificence:

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[2] pp. 218-19.

[3] 'Some Aspects of the Style of *King Lear*', in Kenneth Muir and Stanley Wells (ed.), *Aspects of King Lear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 14.

[4] See Manlove, p. 102.

[5] All references are to the revolutionary Oxford two text *King Lear*, in the compact edition of *The Complete Works*, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 909-74. '*King Lear* first appeared in print in a quarto of 1608. A substantially different text appeared in the 1623 Folio. Until now, editors, assuming that each of these early texts imperfectly represented a single play, have conflated them. But research conducted mainly during the 1970s and 1980s

> Tell me, my daughters -
> Since now we will divest us both of rule,
> Interest of territory, cares of state -
> Which of you shall we say doth love us most (1.1.48-51)

Divested of power, he wishes immediately to clothe himself in love. He is unsure of his naked worth. His image of himself crawling unburdened towards death (1.1.41) is self-pitying. He is not ready to give up the world and make peace with himself and death.

As we saw in *The Sonnets*, where there is no confidence in the self, there can be no confidence in love; so Lear makes love the condition of his paternal bequests. But love cannot be auctioned. Trying to buy it reveals exactly what Lear is at pains to conceal in his display of power: shame, doubt that he can win affection and admiration for himself. And the attempt is morally shameful: an offence against love's free dignity. Lear gets for his bribe only the false appearance of love, an illusion of comfort and protection against shame: the hollow protestations of his elder daughters, Goneril and Regan. As for them, it is shameless to pretend and sell love to their father. Cordelia promises: 'Time shall unfold what pleated cunning hides, / Who covert faults at last with shame derides' (1.1.280-1). And the process of the play does indeed expose them: they are shamed in that external sense. But they are not good enough to feel ashamed.

That Cordelia cannot satisfy Lear's unseemly request reveals that she possesses the virtuous sense of shame which her father and sisters lack. She can say nothing to 'draw a third more opulent than her sisters' (1.1.85-6) because she loves Lear freely. It is sometimes said that she should humour him, sparing him embarrassment and pain; but this is a mistake. To sell Lear love would put her in a morally invidious position and ultimately confirm his suspicion that he does not

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confirms an earlier view that the 1608 quarto represents the play as Shakespeare originally wrote it, and the 1623 Folio as he substantially revised it' (p. 909). Unless otherwise indicated, I refer to the Folio text which the Oxford editors claim is Shakespeare's revised version. Where it is different, I do sometimes avail myself of the quarto text, specifying it as such.

merit love for himself. Flattering him might temporarily relieve his anxiety, but would not be the office of a truly good daughter; for in order to transcend it and attain true health Lear must first face his shame. Moreover, Cordelia has to say, even to emphasise, that she does not love Lear in any special and glorifying way, because as he nears death and therefore judgement, he has to accept himself as a man like any other, a particularly hard task for a king.[6] It may still seem niggardly that she says she loves him as a father, no more, no less; and that she does not love him all because she has love for others as well. But it would be sentimental to ask more of her, and this play is soberly truthful and profoundly unromantic: in the end it is modest, ordinary love for fathers and masters, love without a romantic conception of itself,[7] that proves infinite and sacred here.

But the effect on Lear of Cordelia's response is terrible. 'He loved Cordelia most and knew that she loved him best, and the supreme moment to which he looked forward was that in which she should outdo her sisters in expressions of affection... And then - so it naturally seemed to him - she put him to open shame.'[8] He is not beloved, not compensated for abdication: worse, his attempt to appear thus is unmasked as the shameless ruse of an insecure old man. In his wounded pride, he thrusts his youngest daughter from him thus:

> by the sacred radiance of the sun,
> The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
> By all the operation of the orbs
> From whom we do exist and cease to be,
> Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
> Propinquity, and property of blood,
> And as a stranger to my heart and me

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[6] 'In this play, not for the first time, Shakespeare concerns himself with the contrast between the two bodies of the king: one lives by ceremony, administers justice in a furred gown, distinguished by regalia which sets him above nature. The other is born naked, subject to disease and pain, and protected only by the artifices of ceremony from natural suffering and nakedness' (Frank Kermode, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare: King Lear, A Casebook*, Frank Kermode (ed.), (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 20). Impending death reveals the latter body to Lear and it is that which he must accept.

[7] John Holloway sees it as love not unrelated to duty (*The Story of The Night* (London: Routledge, 1965), pp. 92-4).

[8] Bradley, p. 204.

> Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,
> Or he that makes his generation messes
> To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom
> Be as well neighboured, pitied, and relieved
> As thou, my sometime daughter. (1.1.109-19)

In this hideous script we glimpse the depths of Lear's shamelessness.

Under the pressure of shame, Lear has now shamed himself, like Hamlet and Othello. Kent rebukes him. He has cut 'a cruelly ridiculous figure before the cold sanity of his unloving elder daughters',[9] who speak contemptuously of him when the scene ends and they are left alone on stage. Webster has an apposite saw: '*The great are like the base; nay, they are the same, / When they seek shameful ways to avoid shame*' (*The Duchess of Malfi*, 2.3.51-2).[10]

It is clear that this scene is more than just a tremendous domestic row. Kent says to Lear, 'I'll tell thee thou dost evil' (1.1.165); he reads Lear's behaviour as power bowing to flattery, majesty falling to folly. From our privileged external perspective, we may 'see better', to use Kent's phrase (1.1.158), seeing in the episode a crucial theme of the play. I have suggested that in their compliance with Lear's 'love-test' Goneril and Regan are brazen and shameless, and they remain thus ever after; while Cordelia in this scene is, as always, perfectly shamefast and modest. Their simplicity encourages us to go beyond the merely psychological, and it is possible to see them as embodied parts of their father's soul. Robert B. Heilman notes that the co-presence of realistic and psychomachic meaning in *Lear* is an aesthetic triumph because it combines the widespread action of a number of characters with the tightest symbolic integration.[11] With shameless daughters on one hand, and the modest one on the other, 'Lear stirs memories of a far more ancient dramatic hero, variously called Mankind, Everyman, Genus Humanum, Rex

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[9] Wilson Knight, p. 164.

[10] Elizabeth M. Brennan (ed.), (Ernest Benn Limited: London and Tonbridge, 1973).

[11] 'The Unity of *King Lear*', in Kermode (ed.), p. 174.

Vivus, Rex Humanitas, Magnificence etc.'[12] At the level of surface realism, Lear has contrived the scene, and repelled Cordelia's implied censure and Kent's direct rebukes, in order to avoid shame; at the level of allegory, he has rejected all sense of shame by rejecting Cordelia. Zak well says: 'In the shame with which she offers her "nothing" to Lear, Cordelia paradoxically presents him with the gift of an ideal image of what he could yet be, as in a mirror; for, if Lear is ever to attain, like her, to his naked manhood's possible dignity he must recognize and acknowledge in her downcast eye and voice of shame the face of his own suppressed shame hiding in fear of discovery behind the still-soliciting mask of brazenness he presents to her and the world'.[13] I suspect that Shakespeare may be remembering Guyon's encounter with Shamefastnesse in Book Two of *The Faerie Queene*:

> She answerd nought, but more abasht for shame,
> Held downe her head, the whiles her louely face
> The flashing bloud with blushing did inflame,
> And the strong passion mard her modest grace,
> That *Guyon* meruayld at her vncouth cace:
> Till Alma him bespake, why wonder yee
> Faire Sir at that, which ye so much embrace?
> She is the fountaine of your modestee;
> You shamefast are, but *Shamefastnesse* it selfe is shee. (9.43)

By preferring shamelessness, unlike Guyon, Lear has killed his spiritual physician and the fee bestowed on the foul disease (1.1.162-3). The consequences of this dire choice are illustrated not only in his horrifically shameless association of himself with one who makes his generation messes to gorge his appetite, but also in Goneril and Regan's ascendancy in his kingdom. He has turned himself and his world over to shameless perversion.

And he has publicly shamed his most loving daughter. He says, 'her price is fallen', (1.1.96) and revokes her dowry; he calls her 'a wretch whom nature is ashamed / Almost t'acknowledge hers' (1.2.211-11). She asks him to tell her suitors that she has done nothing wicked or dishonourable to be treated thus. Burgundy pragmatically rejects her; but France, his heart strangely 'kindle[d] to inflamed respect' (1.1.255), proposes anyway, with these beautiful words:

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[12] Mack, p. 57.
[13] Zak, p. 90

> Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;
> Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised:
> Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon.
> Be it lawful, I take up what's cast away. (1.1.250-3)

France's words honour shame *per se* in a world turned rapidly shameless. There is a strong hint, encouraged by the allusion to Paul,[14] of the Christian experience of exaltation in scorn, glory in degradation. This idea that shame innocently incurred is a blessed state will be fully explored in the course of *King Lear*.

Gloucester and Edmond

The parallel case of Gloucester confirms that Lear's family crisis represents a spurning of shame and choice of shamelessness. Lear's shame originates from his fear of waning power and imminent death; Gloucester's derives from a moral fault of which he says he is not ashamed: adultery, the fathering of his illegitimate son, Edmond. In his conversation with Kent which opens the play, he says that he has 'often blushed' for this but now he is 'brazed to't' (1.1.9-10): he has not faced his shame, and been motivated to reform; he has hardened and it has ceased.[15] There is wilfulness in this; for, in despite of the explicit denial, that Gloucester is ashamed of Edmond is 'shown by the fact that "he hath been out nine years, and away he shall again" (1.1.31-2), and by the fact that Gloucester has to joke about him: joking is a familiar specific for brazening out shame, calling enlarged attention to the thing you do not want naturally noticed'.[16] Gloucester's is a more deliberate and conscious attempt to go beyond shame than Lear's.[17] Like Lear, in his attempt to evade shame he brings moral shame upon himself. Just as Lear's effort to buy the love of his daughters and his aggression to Cordelia falls far short of the proper behaviour of parent to child, so too with Gloucester's blokeish jokes about and neglect of Edmond.

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[14] 2 Corinthians 6.10: 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things'.
[15] See Zak, p. 55.

It is sometimes said Edmond is motivated by shame. Given Gloucester's mistreatment of him, this is not implausible. Coleridge puts an admirable case:

> But alas! in his own presence his own father takes shame to himself for the frank avowal that he is his father... He hears his mother and the circumstances of his birth spoken of with a most degrading and licentious levity, - described as a wanton by her own paramour, and the remembrance of the animal sting, the low criminal gratifications connected with her wantonness and prostituted beauty, assigned as the reason why 'the whoreson must be acknowledged!' This, and the consciousness of its notoriety; the gnawing conviction that every shew of respect is an effort of courtesy, which recalls, while it represses, a contrary feeling; - this is the ever-trickling flow of wormwood and gall into the wounds of pride, - the corrosive *virus* which inoculates pride with a venom not its own, with envy, hatred, a lust of that power which in its blaze of radiance would hide the dark spots on his disk...[18]

But, though dazzling in its own right, as criticism this goes well beyond the evidence. Edmond, it is true, protests against the taint of illegitimacy, but with what Bradley recognised as 'a certain genuine gaiety'.[19] He is happy to be a bastard, for he is spiritually illegitimate: instinctively the champion of the outrageous and obscene. In this respect he is different from Richard III. For Richard, deformity licenses depravity, but in Edmond's case there is a perfect coincidence between shameful circumstances and shameless essence; though we expect the bastard to be ashamed, he is not. By contrast with Richard's bitter self-reflections, Edmond's great soliloquy, 'Thou, nature, art my goddess' (1.2.1-22), begins in self admiration and love. He glories in his intellectual and physical endowments. He pronounces infamy, inhibition, shame 'the plague of custom', 'the curiosity of nations'; and advocates instead the authentic shamelessness of 'nature', identifying with the 'fierce quality' and 'lusty stealth' of his own conception. He repeats the words 'base' and 'legitimate' not from hurt resentment, but with lofty irony and contempt for the ignorant multitude who use and live by them. His speech ends on a cocksure note: 'I grow, I prosper / Now gods stand up for bastards'.

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[16] Cavell, p. 277.

[17] See Taylor, p. 83.

[18] Bate (ed.), *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 386. Following Coleridge, Wilson Knight writes, 'Edmund, too, has reason to complain of injustice: the world brands him with the shame of his birth and inflames his mind' (p. 191).

[19] p. 250.

Coleridge's Edmond is too psychologised; Shakespeare's is both less and more than a fully developed person. Despite Harold Bloom's fulsome admiration,[20] he is not a subtle or individualised character. After his first soliloquy, we learn nothing new about him, until the very end, when he tries to save Lear and Cordelia; and even this, according to the quarto text, he does 'despite of mine own nature' (24.240). His motivation is consistently opaque. At first he seeks to supplant Edgar, then his father's dukedom, then the throne; but he never expresses any interest in riches or royalty. And, though he promises himself to Goneril and Regan, and they hunger for him, we have no impression of his lust for them, notwithstanding his protestations of a rough lewdness. In fact, Edmond exhibits only one true feeling: delight in his own diabolical cheek. This is his real motive for opposing his father and his brother; for seducing two jealous sisters. As with Lear's daughters, Edmond's simplicity encourages us to see him as standing for something larger. J. F. Danby writes, 'No medieval devil ever bounced on the stage with a more scandalous self-announcement',[21] and Edmond's theatrical antecedents are certainly the vices and demons of the morality tradition. Maynard Mack says, 'We need to be made aware also of the Edmond who is a force... and who in some sense seems *more* dangerous than he is because in recognizing his identity we recognize him in ourselves'.[22] Just as Goneril and Regan caricature the shamelessness of their father, Edmond represents the shamelessness of his. And the symbolism is neat: Edmond is that within Gloucester which led to his own birth; he is adultery bodied forth. Cavell asserts that Gloucester should not be ashamed of his illegitimate child;[23] but on the deeper, symbolic level where Edmond is a type of shamelessness Gloucester should be more ashamed of him than he is. That he loves him as much as the legitimate Edgar (1.1.18-20) is evidence of spiritual confusion.

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[20] See *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, pp. 77-9. In *The Western Canon* (London: Macmillan, 1995), Bloom calls Edmond 'a genius' (p. 67). Perhaps the aesthetic-psychoanalytic Bloom who formulated the anxiety of influence admires Edmond as an agonist and would-be parricide.

Edgar's disguise

If Edmond is Gloucester's Goneril and Regan and represents shamelessness, Edgar is his Cordelia and represents shame. Having swallowed Edmond's story that Edgar is planning parricide, Gloucester initiates a manhunt for his supposedly treacherous son, going so far as to say that if he is 'found, dispatch' (2.1.57). Sheltering in 'the happy hollow of a tree' (2.2.165), Edgar resolves to disguise himself. But he goes beyond expediency into an elaborate fantasy of self-abasement:

> Whiles I may scape
> I will preserve myself, and am bethought
> To take that basest and most poorest shape
> That ever penury in contempt of man
> Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth,
> Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots,
> And with presented nakedness outface
> The winds and persecutions of the sky.

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[21] *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), p. 32.
[22] p. 74.
[23] p. 276.

> The country gives me proof and precedent
> Of Bedlam beggars who with roaring voices
> Strike in their numbed and mortifièd arms
> Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary,
> And with this horrible object from low farms,
> Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes and mills
> Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers
> Enforce their charity. 'Poor Tuelygod, Poor Tom.'
> That's something yet. Edgar I nothing am. (2.2.168-84)

Edgar's disguise is a notorious critical problem. Northrop Frye writes, 'No one can study *King Lear* without wondering why Edgar puts on this Poor Tom's act'.[24] Mason finds it distasteful,[25] Mack 'implausible';[26] Nahum Tate, whose revised version held the stage for one and a half centuries, and with Doctor Johnson's endorsement, altered the plot to 'countenance' it.[27] Released from Bedlam with a license to beg, insane by definition, and, according to the prevailing conception of insanity, possessed, the Bedlam beggar, the Abram man, Poor Tom, was a type familiar to renaissance readers from the popular vagabond literature of the day,[28] and the lowest of the low. I submit that Edgar's identification with him is due to severe shame. All the symptoms are externalised in the details of his disguise: degradation and nakedness, deformity and defilement, self-mutilation. Edgar feels his identity has been devastated - 'Edgar I nothing am'; that he has metamorphosed into something appalling and alien - 'Poor Tuelygod, Poor Tom' - which is a revelation of his true self and value. His whole process of self-effacement suggests shame. The motif of disguise as metaphor for shame, which we have seen in the comedies is here requisitioned for a tragic purpose. Edgar is ashamed for the good reason that his father thinks him a murderer and is hunting him down like a dog. Andrew Dillon comes close to this when he suggests that 'Edgar performs a selfpunishing enactment on his helpless flesh of his father's hostility towards him'.[29] The removal of Gloucester's love has removed all Edgar's sense of self; hence his poignant choice of an aspect that customarily enforces charity. In the allegory of the play, Edgar presents an image of the self-demeaning shame which his father shrugs off.

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[24] *Fools of Time* (1967; University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1981), p. 106.
[25] p. 192.
[26] p. 5.
[27] 'Dedication and Prologue to his version of *King Lear*, 1681', in Kermode (ed.), p. 25.
[28] Mary Lascelles, '*King Lear* and Doomsday', in Muir and Wells (ed.), pp. 56-7.

Such an understanding of Edgar's disguise also eases the problem of why he does not reveal himself sooner to the repentant Gloucester, thus sparing his father superfluous pain. This has long troubled critics[30] and Edgar himself admits it is a 'fault' (5.3.184). Pointing to the passage in the Quarto where he proclaims that 'false opinion' will have to bow to 'just proof' of his integrity (13.105-6) before he removes his disguise, Dillon argues that 'the need to re-create and re-establish himself is stronger than pity': 'the renovation of his own shattered sense of worth is his main object'.[31] But we are not obliged to see Edgar in this selfish light. As we saw in Chapter Four, shame cannot be put off at will. In the same way that the disguised heroines of the comedies are unable to reveal their unprotected womanhood until they have overcome their sexual bashfulness, Edgar cannot reveal himself to his father until he has recovered from shame.

Edgar is not the only character to disguise himself in *King Lear*. Kent, having answered openly and squarely, does so too, and also demeans himself; his master's faith in him has foundered. Remembering also Cordelia's shaming, it is possible to say that goodness itself is ashamed in *King Lear*, because it has been spurned and slighted. But there is also a sense in which Kent and Edgar, wrongfully rejected good servant and good son, embody Lear's and Gloucester's guilt and moral shame, as Cordelia also embodies Lear's guilt, so that they cannot reveal themselves and be recognised till Lear and Gloucester are ready to accept their mistakes. Moreover, the 'self-covered' (quarto, 16.61) figures of Kent and Edgar, like Cordelia abashed, symbolise the shame which Gloucester and Lear will have to go through if they are ever to become whole; and the evasions they practise to avoid this. Finally, the prospect which *Lear* presents of goodness disregarded, cast away, debased, and persecuted is an image of the Christian life as it is described in the New Testament.

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[29] 'Edgar's Journey: Shame, Anger, and Maturity in *King Lear*', *North Dakota Quarterly* 57 (1989), 90.

[30] Bradley is the first to ask, 'why does Edgar not reveal himself to his blind father, as he truly says he ought to have done?' (p. 211), but many since have touched on it: Cavell calls it an 'outstanding lapse, or crux' (p. 282).

[31] 86 and 8.

Lear's journey

Lear's due punishment for banishing shame is that he is shamed horribly by the shameless daughters to whom he gave all. On the realistic level, the shamelessness he has shown invites such shameless cruelty from the world. In the symbolic *Lear*, where Goneril and Regan are energies in and expressions of Lear's own soul, the point is that shamelessness is itself self-mutilating and degrading. Shame motivated Lear's shameless violence to Cordelia; now shamelessness leads back to shame. Lear will escape from shame and shamelessness only when he accepts shame and rebuilds his self accordingly.

By cruel degrees Goneril and Regan mortify their father's pride: it is one of the most terrible and painful of all the shamings in literature. Goneril tells her unctuous steward Oswald to treat Lear with 'what weary negligence you please' (1.3.12) since 'Old fools are babes again, and must be used / With checks as well as flatteries' (Quarto, 3.19-20). When Lear questions him, Oswald duly vanishes; and he fails to reappear when Lear calls him back. Lear's Knight responds to his king's bewilderment, 'My lord, I know not what the matter is, but to my judgement your highness is not entertained with that ceremonious affection that you were wont' (1.4.56-7). When Oswald next glides over the stage, Lear buttonholes him angrily:

'O you, sir, you, come you hither, sir, who am I, sir?' (1.4.76). To which Oswald answers, 'My lady's father' (1.4.76-7): a calculated blow to Lear's pride. Lear hits Oswald, and Kent follows up; the spectacle of majesty brawling is a shameful one. Subsequently, Goneril complains to Lear about his 'insolent retinue' (1.4.184) and his own misgovernment, proposing 'A little to disquantity [his] train' (1.4.227); both reproach and suggested remedy, which perhaps has an overtone of castration, offend further against the royalty and magnificence, 'The name and all th' addition to a king' (1.1.136), that Lear had carefully reserved for himself in the first scene. In high dudgeon, he leaves Goneril and rides to Regan's, where he is sure he will receive a more filial and respectful welcome, sending the disguised Kent before as messenger. When Lear arrives, he finds that Regan and Cornwall have put Kent in the stocks, for quarrelling with Goneril's envoy, the offensive Oswald again. In the image of Kent in the stocks, Gloucester sees Lear 'slightly valued in his messenger' (2.2.138). Lear sees himself bestocked; he murmurs, ''Tis worse than murder, / To do upon respect such violent outrage' (2.2.199-200). Regan proposes that he return to her sister and apologise; Lear goes mockingly down on his knees to indicate the gross impropriety of her request. When Goneril enters, Regan insists to her father that he should leave with her - and half his train as requested. She adds that she will allow only 'five and twenty' (2.2.421) followers. Stunned, Lear murmurs: 'Those wicked creatures yet do look well favoured / When others are more wicked. Not being the worst / Stands in some rank of praise' (2.2.430-2). Turning to Goneril, he says, 'I'll go with thee. / Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty, / And thou art twice her love' (2.2.430-4). It is a pathetic concession, a surrender of his self-respect to their power over him and to the love by numbers of 1.1. Seizing this advantage, Goneril says, 'What need you five-and-twenty, ten or five... ?' (2.2.435); Regan asks, 'What need one?' (2.2.437); and, as Lear exits, and the great storm begins to break, she concludes the process thus: 'For his particular I'll receive him gladly, / But not one follower' (2.2.464-5). Frye writes, 'To murder Lear, and thereby get the noisy old nuisance out of the way, would show less real malice than wiping out the society he commands and letting him go on living. The latter obliterates the idea or real form of Lear, so to speak: it strikes at a deeper life than his physical one'.[32] As the Fool puts it, 'Now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art, now. I am a fool; thou art nothing' (1.4.74-6).

Lear's experience of shame is an experience of self-loss:

> Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
> Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, his discernings
> Are lethargied-ha, waking? 'Tis not so.
> Who is it that can tell me who I am? (1.4.208-13)

He asserts pathetically: 'Thou shalt find / That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think / I have cast off for ever' (1.4.288-90). He suffers a hysterical attack: 'O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!' (2.2.231); 'O me, my heart! My rising heart!' (2.2.292); 'this heart shall break into a hundred thousand flaws' (2.2.458). He tries to shame Goneril and Regan from shaming him: 'Art not ashamed to look upon this beard?' (2.2.366). When this fails, he says sadly, 'Let shame come when it will, I do not call it' (2.2.399). But he also turns monstrously violent, showing lack of shame himself, beseeching nature to sterilise Goneril or 'Create her child of spleen, that it may live / And be a thwart disnatured torment to her' (1.4.261-2); praying that 'You nimble lightnings' will 'dart your blinding flames / Into her scornful eyes' (2.2.338-9). Mason comments, 'In both cases the speeches mean more than they would in the mouths of people to-day. They expressed more than an evil wish, for they were felt as collaborations with unseen powers. Somebody was thought to be off-stage listening: the evil in man was thought to be talking to the evil outside man. We now begin to see that there are *depths* of evil in Lear's mind'.[33]

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[32] p. 108.
[33] p. 186.

We also see Goneril and Regan visible in their father, and remember that they represent the selfishness and cruelty in his own breast.

And yet, there are intimations of reform. Of Cordelia, Lear says, 'I did her wrong' (1.4.24); striking his forehead, he admonishes himself thus: 'O Lear, Lear, Lear! / Beat at this gate that let thy folly in / And thy dear judgement out' (1.4.249-51). He is on the brink of the realisation that it is he himself who has unleashed this force of shamelessness which is now destroying him:

> But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter -
> Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
> Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
> A plague-sore or embossèd carbuncle
> In my corrupted blood. (2.2.394-8)

But it is as yet a reproach to his daughters, not a self-reproach. Pride must be annihilated before, with a quiet and a contrite heart, King Lear fully recognises what he has done; and thereby can begin to start again.

And Lear's ego will not die easily. Zak rightly says of his experience on the heath, 'the miseries he endures are subtly self-glorifying, an indulgence in pain to help him avoid the acknowledgement of his own evil. The suffering that would redeem him demands more from the self'.[34] Lear progresses towards shame when confronted with Edgar disguised as Poor Tom. This scene, which brings together in a hovel that young nobleman reduced to the appearance and condition of a foul, naked, and possessed beggar, the deranged, debased king, an earl in the guise of a servant, and a Fool in motley, presents a *tableau vivant* of shame. Lear first apprehends Edgar as Tom as a vision of his own humiliation: 'Didst thou give all to thy two daughters, / And art thou come to this?' (3.2.46-7). But he then sees Tom as a revelation of essential human nature:

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[34] p. 173.

> Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha, here's three on 's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here. (3.4.95-103)

This is a crucial moment in Lear's spiritual history. He truly identifies with Tom here, and through him with the whole human race, rather than identifying Tom with himself: his attempt to undress, to be one with Tom, is his first effort to acknowledge himself not just as King, but as a common creature who is born to die. This acceptance of his fundamental nullity, of common mortal shame will ultimately enable him to be reborn as a true and loving self, just as out of his foul chrysalis the noble and loving Edgar will re-emerge. But for now Lear's eyes cloud over, and Tom again becomes a figment of his suffering pride, the image of the pass to which his daughters have brought him. Self-pity is renewed, and with it shameless vengeance: 'To have a thousand with red burning spits / Come hissing in upon 'em!' (3.6.15-16). Kent rebukes his master sadly , 'Sir, where is that patience now / That thou hast so oft boasted to retain?' (3.6.17-18).

the Fool

McAlindon notes that the prospect of fool mocking king must have struck 'Shakespeare's monarchially conditioned audience... with a discordant force we can now only guess at'.[35] The figure of the Fool crystallises Shakespeare's keen sense of the shame of tragedy; his perception that when this protagonist falls, he is essentially befooled. At the same time, the Fool represents the foolishness which Lear must accept in humility as his human condition; and insofar as he is a fool to remain loyal and true to one whose star is clearly falling, he is 'a fool for Christ's sake'[36] as well as for Lear's, one who, like Cordelia, shows that goodness must embrace worldly disgrace and infamy. In the quarto text, Goneril contemptuously calls her husband Albany 'a moral fool' (16.57), a 'Milk livered man, / That bear'st a cheek for blows' (16.49-50), unaware that she is describing the ideal Christian. Cordelia and the Fool, Kent and Edgar abide by a higher shame: as France puts it, 'thou losest here, a better where to find' (1.1.261). Shakespeare seeks to re-educate our sense of shame in *King Lear*, and in a manner profoundly religious and medieval. Implicit in all this is the Erasmian paradox of praising folly.

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[35] pp. 164-5.

Lear continually tries to avoid shame, but the Fool presents him with a parade of grotesquely degraded images of himself: 'thou madest thy daughters thy mothers... when thou gavest them the rod and puttest down thy breeches' (1.4.153-5); 'Thou hast par'd thy wit o' both sides and left nothing i'th' middle' (1.4.168-9). He is also the concrete image of Lear's folly. His great joke is that the proper, antithetical relationship between himself and the King has collapsed into identity; or even reversed. Lear's first outburst of fear of madness is perhaps brought on by a fool standing before him claiming either to be his reflection or superior:[37]

> FOOL If thou wert my fool, nuncle, I'd have thee beaten
> for being old before thy time.
> LEAR How's that?
> FOOL Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.
> LEAR
> O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
> Keep me in temper. I would not be mad. (1.5.40-6)

Lear eventually learns the wise Fool's lessons, recognising that we all are fools by heavenly compulsion: 'When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools' (4.5.178-9); and that none is exempt from the shame and debasement that belongs to mortality, 'for within the hollow crown / That rounds the mortal temples of a king / Keeps Death his court, and There the Antic sits / Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp' (*Richard II*, 3.2.160-3). When he calls himself 'the natural fool of fortune' (4.5.187), we hear acceptance in his voice. In the allegorical *Lear* which I am pursuing here, the Fool is the recalcitrant sense of shame which Lear has tried to banish, an important and inalienable part of himself. He insists on the secular shame which Lear must accept before he recognises the moral and spiritual shame that Cordelia represents.

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[36] 1 Corinthians 4.10.

[37] Empson, p. 131.

Gloucester's journey

Gloucester makes the same spiritual journey as Lear, travelling from personal shame and morally shameless pride to the moral shame of what he has done to Edgar and eventually, after despair, to renewal. As with Lear, this journey necessitates the destruction of his worldly self. Lear's pride is relentlessly assaulted, but Gloucester's is murdered briskly. He is betrayed by Edmond to Cornwall and Regan. He is pinioned 'like a thief' (3.7.22), his 'corky arms' bound fast (3.7.27); and Cornwall plucks out his eye. The extent of Cornwall's and Regan's depraved insensibility is revealed when their servant speaks up for shame, and all they hear is a reproach by a peasant; whom Cornwall subsequently kills, although not without sustaining his own death-wound - and in Gloucester's view. Barking, 'Out, vile jelly!' (3.7.81), Cornwall subsequently removes Gloucester's sight entirely. Just as Lear is shamed by the shameless daughters he preferred, Gloucester's fearful and foolish trust in his bastard son is punished. As Edgar's later words suggest, his father's blindness symbolises his adultery:

> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us.
> The dark and vicious place where thee he got
> Cost him his eyes. (5.3.161-4)

Mack glosses this, 'The punishment is exemplary like the act. The blindness is not what will follow from adultery, but what is implied in it. Darkness speaks to darkness'.[38] Gloucester now is a walking emblem of his former shamelessness - and the shamelessness of other characters, especially Lear. He is mutilated, utterly degraded. But released from the prison, from the darkness of the self and of the material world, he begins to 'see feelingly' (4.5.145). He mutters with selfless generosity even while the blood runs down his cheeks, 'O, my follies! Then Edgar was abused. / Kind Gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!' (3.7.89-90).

However, he is not wholly regenerate yet. He remains somewhat self-centred, as we see by his attempted suicide. He is led by the disguised Edgar to what he blindly supposes to be the edge of Dover cliff where he makes a rather muddled and pretentious speech: 'O you mighty gods, / This world I do renounce, and in your sights / Shake patiently my great affliction off!' (4.5.34-6). The grotesque effect of his 'fall' has long been recognised.[39] What Gloucester does with the gravest solemnity is for the audience painfully ridiculous; we should contrast it with the honourable suicide of Brutus and the intelligible suicide of Othello. No stoic recuperation of selfhood or dignity is conceivable or laudable in *King Lear*; the self is that which must be left behind, to find a truer self. The form of pride paradoxically expressed in Gloucester's attempt at self-murder is an absurdity; its spirit, described by Edgar, hideous and of hellish provenance: 'his eyes / Were two full moons. He had a thousand noses, / Horns whelked and wavèd like the enragèd sea. / It was some fiend' (4.5.69-72). A premature end cannot be a good one: 'Men must endure / Their going hence even as their going hither. / Ripeness is all' (5.2.9-11).

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[38] p. 70.

[39] Since Wilson Knight's '*King Lear* and the Comedy of the Grotesque', in *The Wheel of Fire*.

recovery and death

In the seventeenth scene of the quarto, Kent tells us 'A sovereign shame... burning shame / Detains [Lear] from Cordelia' (43-8). Lear has begun to suffer fully for his mistreatment of his daughter. As with Gloucester, moral shame has superseded the merely personal shame of hurt pride. There is also a pharmacological resonance, as in 'sovereign remedy'. Lear is on the medicinal road to spiritual health.

The latter part of 4.5, which Kermode regards as the high point of all tragedy,[40] brings Gloucester and Lear together as if in a mirror, recalling the moment on the heath when Lear encountered Poor Tom and saw him as a reflection. It is a sublime conjunction of main and sub plot, which makes it clear to us, and to a lesser extent to the characters themselves, that they are enacting a discovery of the nothingness of selfhood which is a necessary and fundamental human experience. In the mutilated, benighted Gloucester, the mad Lear sees himself; that is why he sweeps directly into self-reflection. Gloucester envies Lear's oblivion; and Lear's disordered state instructs him not to seek death before his time. When Lear identifies Gloucester as 'Goneril with a white beard' (4.5.96), it confirms both that Gloucester's punishment for adultery is to represent in his own person the spiritual deformity and blindness of shamelessness; and perhaps also that Lear is beginning to recognise his shameless daughter in himself. But Lear then loses his mind: more or less random thoughts and passions are discharged; hence the tirades on universal lechery and corruption and on the theme that 'None does offend' (4.5.164). Much of this is demonstrably false: Cordelia is not lecherous and Kent not corrupt, while Goneril and Regan are both. Insofar as his words cancel sin, or responsibility for sin, Lear is evading his own guilt. But there are better portents in these words:

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[40] 'Introduction', in Kermode (ed.), p. 21.

> I know thee well enough: thy name is Gloucester.
> Thou must be patient. We came crying hither.
> Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
> We waul and cry. (4.5.173-6)

Here is a new capacity to sympathise with another's pain, a note of forbearance and humility. But Lear must recognise sin as well as suffering; after patience and humility, spiritual shame and contrition are needed.

The sleeping Lear produced in 4.6. is arrayed in 'fresh garments' (20) and has been at least partially reborn. When he awakes, he feels he is being taken out of the grave. His confused apprehension of Cordelia, who is anxiously standing over him, as 'a soul in bliss' to whom he looks up from his station on 'a wheel of fire, that mine own tears / Do scald like molten lead' (4.6.39-41) breathes sublime purgatorial shame; and reminds us of Othello's visions of the afterlife at the end of his play. This fiery wheel among other things is the spiritual wheel of shame, which descends into death but culminates in new life, painfully turning the errant soul back to God, towards heaven. The old Lear is dead. The frail new Lear has a confused and imperfect apprehension of the worldly collapse and shame he has suffered and only a very tentative sense of self:

> I am mightily abused. I should ev'n die with pity
> To see another thus. I know not what to say.
> I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see:
> I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured
> Of my condition. (4.6.46-50)

But, at last, his stubborn kingly pride has departed, and he can nakedly recognise his child, and the wrong he has done her. In his intense shame, he says that if she has poison for him, he will drink it. When Kent tells him he is in his own kingdom, he says, 'Do not abuse me' (4.6.71), for in the greater perspective he has now acquired he is not a king, just 'a very foolish, fond old man' (5.1.53). It is a wholly -

heartrendingly - changed Lear who says, 'You must bear with me. Pray you now, forget / And forgive. I am old and foolish'(4.6.76-7).

But Lear relapses. When, after losing the battle of Dover, he and Cordelia are despatched to prison by Edmond and Cordelia asks sternly, 'Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?', he responds:

> No, no, no, no. Come, let's away to prison.
> We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage.
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too -
> Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out,
> And take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out
> In a walled prison packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by th' moon. (5.3.7-19)

As Barbara Everett opines, this has a divine innocence, but it is also crazily evasive.[41] In Lear's refusal to see Goneril and Regan, Cavell discerns residual unwillingness to accept his sin: 'He cannot finally face the thing he has done; and this means what it always does, that he cannot bear being seen'.[42] But more than this Lear wishes to artificially prolong the bliss of redemption: hence his fantasy of repeatedly prostrating himself before his daughter. There is a resurgence of vanity and self-centredness here, and the fantasy of an exclusive relationship with Cordelia takes us back to the first scene. Lear is only too glad to be imprisoned because it is an opportunity to shut out the world and have her to himself. Also, the somewhat idiotic tone grates from a man we have just heard humbly acknowledge eternal verities.

King Lear polarises interpretation. Bradley renamed it *The Redemption of King Lear*,[43] but Mason reckons that it ends on the bedrock of the hitherto undiscovered worst.[44] Similarly, Bradley proposes that Lear dies from deluded joy that Cordelia lives,[45] but Mason dismisses this as an 'intrusive quirk of fancy'.[46] The Folio allows for the possibility that Lear dies believing that Cordelia is alive. Earlier he used a feather and a looking-glass to see if she was breathing; and his dying words, which tell us to look on her lips, may suggest a belief that she is. On the other hand, Lear's last words can be taken as a tragic cry of pain, drawing attention to the fact that, although the feather stirred, Cordelia's lips are still. I must say that for me personally, as for Mason, the idea of Lear dying in ignorance of Cordelia's death is grotesque, and an inappropriate ending for tragedy. But I have a suggestion which recognises both views: Lear for the first time fully recognises Cordelia's life in the moment of her death. He therefore dies in horrible pain but also, as Mason says, 'in the real'[47] - and exalted, having achieved true knowledge and love. Similarly, Gloucester's heart 'burst[s] smilingly' (5.3.191) when Edgar is revealed to him. We have seen that even after he has repented his ill-treatment of her, Lear is unable to acknowledge Cordelia as separate: he cannot distinguish her from his need of her, and he is still trying to fulfil himself in her daughterly love. But when he cradles her dead body in his arms, when he can ask her for nothing more, he suddenly sees her for herself. He is dignified and transfigured, a loving soul seeing, and suffering intensely for, another. As Blake has it, 'The most sublime act is to set another before you'.[48] Carrying his child, he at last becomes a father, instead of an aged dependent; and there is a deep propriety in this. Looking at Cordelia dead, he must also see his own mistakes. It is a moment of great grief and shame, but also of triumph. He has got beyond ego, and it is his unique distinction among tragic heroes that he dies pointing away from himself, at somebody else.[49]

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[41] 'The New *King Lear*', in Kermode (ed.), p. 194.
[42] p. 297.
[43] p. 235.

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[44] p. 226.
[45] p. 241.
[46] p. 226.
[47] p. 226.
[48] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Geoffrey Keynes (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Plate 7.

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[49] Derek Peat, '"And that's true too": *King Lear* and the tension of uncertainty', in Muir and Wells (ed.), p. 45.

8

Antony and Cleopatra

Although it has been described as 'almost a study in shame',[1] and as Shakespeare's 'most perceptive and unrelenting exploration of shame',[2] there has not been a full treatment of the shame-theme in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In recent chapters we have been especially concerned with Christian shame, even in the pre-Christian *Lear*, but shame in this Roman tragedy is for the most part secular and public. The question here is shame or shamelessness.[3] Antony's enthralment to Cleopatra has jeopardised his heroic masculinity and much of the play depicts his struggle against resultant notoriety and ill repute. But Shakespeare suggests that his shameful behaviour may be intimately related to his greatness. And at the end, after he has apparently lost everything in the second sea-battle, he defies degradation and defeat in an ambiguous moment of shameless triumph. *Antony and Cleopatra* gives a guarded recommendation of shamelessness because it is about a secular man in a secular world. Antony's instinctive resistance to conventions of identity and honour and shame that are merely cultural and contingent is admirable; but even here there are hints of the Christian position that the soul is sacred and eternal and shame essential to maintain or redeem its purity.

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[1] Watson, p. 429.

[2] Cluck, 143. I would reserve this description for *Othello*.

[3] This question is focused on Antony and I will have relatively little to say about Cleopatra in her own right.

Act One, scene one

The play begins crisply and powerfully. What one soldier says to another soldier about their captain is scandalous: 'This dotage of our general / O'erflows the measure...' (1.1.1-13). Antony has sold himself into sexual slavery, and to the worst kind of woman: an oriental whore, a witch. His 'goodly eyes', which have 'glowed like plated Mars' over the massed ranks of war, 'now bend, now turn / The office and devotion of their view' upon 'a tawny front': a coloured forehead, and hence face.[4] 'His captain's heart, / Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst / The buckles on his breast' - this makes us intimate with the man in body and spirit -[5] 'reneges all temper / And is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust': something between a domestic appliance and an oriental sex toy, and it doesn't work, for, of course, bellows and fans kindle and inflame fires, not the reverse. It is a signally degrading introduction to the hero of this tragedy, and one which foregrounds the theme of shame. Philo cares so much because Antony is the observed of all observers, the pattern of heroic masculinity; his fall brings Roman culture in jeopardy: it is a shame to infect all Romans.

But Philo's speech is somewhat incoherent. He invokes a concept of due limitation or self-control, but his former, idealised Antony, whose impassioned eyes glow with an unearthly light, whose heart bursts the buckles on his breast, is scarcely a type of restraint. His point is that this heroic Antony surpassed himself in a superhuman excess of being whereas the current, fallen Antony is squandering himself on an unworthy infatuation: from the Roman stand-point, there can be no upper limit on valour, which is power and autonomous self-assertion, but eros, which tends to self-loss, must be restricted. But there is a link, a continuity between Antony's excessiveness in love and war. And in other ways, too, Philo's speech hints at a less negative view. Its first words, 'Nay, but', invite us to reconstruct Demetrius's presumably more positive position.[6] The image of Antony's overflowing love, though Philo calls it 'dotage', has an abounding generosity.[7] There is a suggestion that Antony simultaneously inflames and allays the fires of Cleopatra's lust, which imputes great sexual power to him, relating to her capacity to make hungry where most she satisfies (2.2.247-8). Already the central question has been put. How are we to see Antony: do we cry shame or should we endorse his shamelessness?

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[4] See the Arden editor's note 6.

[5] Mason's point (p. 233).

Philo is interrupted by a flourish which brings on Cleopatra attended by Antony - and her ladies, and a band of fanning eunuchs. This effeminate spectacle - a pleasing bit of stage-business - seems graphic confirmation of Philo's view. 'Look', 'Take but good note', 'Behold and see', he urges (1.1.10, 11, 13); and the imperatives create a strong sense of exposure. Antony is ushered on to parade his shame not just before Philo and Demetrius, but also before the audience: 'you shall see in him / The triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet's fool' (1.1.12-13). Since Philo's hostility precludes uncritical identification with the lovers, and their first scene takes place under his contemptuous eye and a collective assessing gaze, the stage verges on a pillory here. It is the technique of Jonsonian comedy: but this is the shaming of a hero and a legend. Sophocles had exploited the shameful potential of dramatic spectacle in his *Ajax*, but not so explicitly involving the audience; it is one of the high-points of Shakespeare's theatre of shame. These are the first words the lovers exchange:

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[6] Janet Adelman also recognises this (*The Common Liar* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 26).

[7] Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1963), pp. 80-1.

> CLEOPATRA
> If it be love indeed, tell me how much.
> ANTONY
> There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned.
> CLEOPATRA
> I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.
> ANTONY
> Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth. (1.1.14-17)

This goes against Philo and the pillory; this is not the language of degeneracy: it is brief, witty, eloquent. Antony articulates Cordelia's view of love, in an erotic key; and evokes its metaphysical infinity. But the embarrassing intrusion of a messenger from Rome reminds Antony and Cleopatra and us of Antony's public self, compromising his appearance and integrity as absolute lover. It also brings home Antony's neglect of his responsibilities, threatening a different shame. Cleopatra must work against this shame to prevent Antony revolting from her. She does so by picturing his Roman life as slavish. In a similar way, Lady Macbeth trumps the shame which Macbeth feels at the prospect of killing Duncan by taunting him with cowardice. Cleopatra creates a shameful image of Antony as hen-pecked by Fulvia and bossed by 'scarce-bearded Caesar' (1.1.22). She imperiously ridicules his Roman shame: 'As I am Egypt's Queen, / Thou blushest, Antony, and that blood of thine / Is Caesar's homager; else so thy cheek pays shame / When shrill-tongued Fulvia scolds' (1.1.30-3). Antony recoils from himself thus pictured:

> Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space!
> Kingdoms are clay! Our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
> Is to do thus, when such a mutual pair
> And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
> On pain of punishment, the world to weet
> We stand up peerless. (1.1.34-41)

This is less an expression of love than a reassertion of his nobility, focused on his relation with Cleopatra. He has failed Rome and the demands of empire, and she has made fun of his Roman self, so he repudiates Rome, staking his all on her. Nor is this merely a personal movement from public to private values: he insists that the world he has just denied acknowledge his and Cleopatra's supremacy. It is megalomaniac, desperate, but it is magnificently creative language.[8] And yet, Cleopatra undercuts him: 'Excellent falsehood!' (1.1.41). It is not in her interests to provide him with security and assurance; she keeps him nervously dependent on her. With sudden jollity perhaps not unmixed with lust, Antony proposes a diversion:

> Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours,
> Let's not confound the time with conference harsh.
> There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
> Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight? (1.1.45-8)

Even this is grand, although an evasion. A cowardly avoidance of shame will be Antony's chief fault throughout, preventing him from tackling his predicament and achieving new integrity. He refuses to hear the ambassadors, proposing instead, 'Tonight we'll wander through the streets and note / The qualities of people' (1.1.54-5). With this jaunt in view, they leave the stage, trailed by their gorgeous train.

There have been hints of Antony's attractive shamelessness, but this is in the end a comic scene presenting a great hero infatuated, living with his mistress, neglecting his home and duties, averting his eyes from shame and infamy. The two of them alone again on stage, Philo mutters ruefully to Demetrius, 'Sir, sometimes, when he is not Antony, / He comes too short of that great property / Which still should go with Antony' (1.1.58-60). Demetrius says, 'I am full sorry / That he approves the common liar who / Thus speaks of him at Rome' (1.1.56-62).

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[8] 'Strictly speaking, these hyperboles are not metaphor at all. Antony's words assert his access to a hyperbolical world where such things actually happen, a world beyond the reach of metaphor. They claim, like Cleopatra's dream, to be in the realm of nature, not of fancy. His words do not give us the protection of regarding them merely as apt metaphors: they make their claim as literal action. We may choose to disbelieve their claim; but in doing so, we are rejecting a version of reality, not the validity of a metaphor' (Adelman, *The Common Liar*, p. 106).

Antony's shamelessness

As Philo's words have already made clear, honourable masculinity in Rome is defined by autonomous power and self-possession. Pompey says that whatever fortune inflicts on him, she will never take his heart (2.6.52-6). During the revels on Pompey's barge, Antony in bacchanalian, Egyptian mood tells Caesar to 'Be a child o'th' time' and drink, but Caesar returns that he would rather abstain and 'possess' the time (2.7.101-2). Enobarbus warns Antony not to give himself up 'merely to chance and hazard / From firm security' (3.7.47-8). Roman selfhood entails a firm, clear image, by which one is recognisable to oneself and to others. Thus Antony says to his new Roman wife Octavia, 'I have not kept my square, but that to come / Shall all be done by th'rule' (2.3.6-7). And Enobarbus says to himself, 'Mine honesty and I begin to square' (3.13.42). Caesar's great exhortation and lament of 1.4 shows that the former Antony, the hero who is now lost and dispersed in dotage, possessed in abundance the necessary quality of imperturbability, of remaining like himself:

> Antony,
> Leave thy lascivious wassails! When thou once
> Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st
> Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
> Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against,
> Though daintily brought up, with patience more
> Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
> The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
> Which beasts would cough at. Thy palate then did deign
> The roughest berry on the rudest hedge.
> Yea, like the stag when snow the pasture sheets,
> The bark of trees thou browsed. On the Alps,
> It is reported, thou didst eat strange flesh
> Which some did die to look on. And all this -
> It wounds thine honour that I speak it now -
> Was borne so like a soldier that thy cheek
> So much as lanked not. (1.4.56-72)

At his crisis, Antony says, 'I cannot hold this visible shape' (4.14.14). Cleopatra has unbound the lavish energy and extremity of a temperament that was tied up in heroic Roman soldiership. Caesar is now the cool incarnation of the standard of consistency and self-control which Antony has betrayed; compared to him, Antony cannot but seem impure and lacking integrity; as the soothsayer puts it, 'your lustre thickens / When his shines by' (2.3.26-7). Antony's 'high unmatchable daemon' (2.3.18-19) fails when Caesar is near, for Caesar makes him ashamed. To the Romans, Antony's loss of self-command is effeminacy. 'Hush, here comes Antony', Enobarbus says when Cleopatra enters (1.2.81).

But if Antony is a shameful failure in Roman terms, Egypt seems to offer a different way of being and judging. In Egypt, the only rule is free expression: everything is permitted. At one point, Charmian tells Cleopatra to keep herself within herself, but this must strike us as a joke; for she is constitutionally incapable of so doing, utterly unpredictable, defined only by 'Her infinite variety' (2.2.246). Enobarbus recalls an archetypal moment:

> I saw her once
> Hop forty paces through the public street
> And, having lost her breath, she spoke and panted,
> That she did make defect perfection (2.2.238-41)

Enobarbus confirms that Cleopatra's vitality transfigures all faults when he says, 'vilest things / Become themselves in her, that the holy priests / Bless her when she is riggish' (2.2.248-50). Bradley calls her 'Doll Tearsheet sublimated',[9] but, sex apart, it is in fact Falstaff, also inexhaustibly energetic, wholly unrestrained, and impossible to resist, whom she most resembles: both, other than in respect of an idiosyncratic dignity, are entirely shameless. This shamelessness strongly appeals to the natural man in Antony, and liberates him from the restrictions of Roman decorum into a life of prodigious hedonism.

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[9] 'Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', in John Russell Brown (ed.), *Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra, A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 81.

Antony's shameless life with Cleopatra is in many ways attractively presented. It has a becoming playfulness. Wilson Knight finds references to cards, cock-fighting, quails, dice, fishing, and billiards.[10] At the end, Cleopatra gives Charmian leave to 'play till doomsday'; and after the death of her royal mistress, Charmian says, 'Your crown's awry; / I'll mend it, and then play'.[11] The spirit of this playfulness is best shown by the following reminiscence of Antony:

> CHARMIAN 'Twas merry when
> You wagered on your angling; when your diver
> Did hang a salt fish on his hook, which he
> With fervency drew up.
> CLEOPATRA That time? O times!
> I laughed him out of patience, and that night
> I laughed him into patience, and next morn,
> Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed,
> Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
> I wore his sword Philippan. (2.5.15-23)

Sport, laughter, more laughter, intoxication, sex, transgression: these are the essential elements of Antony's and Cleopatra's shameless life together. Their appetite and capacity for bodily pleasure betokens their joyful at-homeness in life and the world. As is evident from the remembered transvestite episode, there is a creative quality, an element of performance, in their excesses.[12] When Maecenas questions Enobarbus about a gargantuan breakfast with one and a half roast boars per person, Enobarbus answers, 'This was but as a fly as an eagle. We had much more monstrous matter of feast, which worthily deserved noting' (2.2.192-3). The note here is humorous, but the self-dramatisation of the lovers can also reach the level of the sublime. For instance, there is the wondrous eroticism of Cleopatra's original appearance before Antony at Cydnus (2.2.201-23); here the physical is infused with a spiritual quality, and it is part of the lovers' peerlessness that they can see the spiritual face of the world as it is: 'Eternity was in our lips and eyes, / Bliss in our brows bent'(1.3.36-7). There is also the demonic effect of them sitting in 'chairs of gold' (3.6.4) in the market-place of Alexandria surrounded by their brood of bastards.

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[10] *The Imperial Theme*, 3rd edn. (1951; London: Methuen, 1979), p. 255.

[11] Also noted by Wilson Knight (p. 255).

[12] On this also see Holloway, pp. 99-120.

In the above instances, Antony's shamelessness is as much breathtaking presumption and lack of humility as it is moral indifference or impropriety; but it can be wantonly and cruelly indulgent. In the council scene of Act Two, scene two, when Caesar requires him to answer for his laziness and neglect of their alliance, his excuses are pathetically inadequate. He did not reply to Caesar's letter because he was hung over. He forgot to send him arms and aid because 'poisoned hours had bound me up / From mine own knowledge' (2.2.96-7): he was drunk. He imagines it will excuse him to say that his wronged wife Fulvia 'To have me out of Egypt, made wars here, / For which myself, the ignorant motive, do / So far ask pardon as befits mine honour / To stoop in such a case' (2.2.100-4), which is not only pompous and grudging, but completely brazen about adultery. He responds with great warmth and enthusiasm to Agrippa's proposal that he heal the breach with Caesar by marrying his sister Octavia:

> May I never,
> To this good purpose that so fairly shows,
> Dream of impediment! Let me have thy hand.
> Further this act of grace, and from this hour
> The heart of brothers govern in our loves
> And sway our great designs! (2.2.152-7)

But soon after the marriage he abuses Caesar and the innocent and admired Octavia by thoughtlessly reverting to Cleopatra. Addressing his discarded wife, Menas calls him 'th'adulterous Antony, most large / In his abominations' (3.6.95-6). This grossly shameless figure makes an appearance in North's Plutarch:

> the noblemen (as Cicero saith) did not only mislike him, but also hate him for his naughty life: for they did abhor his banquets and drunken feasts he made at unseasonable times, and his extreme wasteful expenses upon vain light huswives: and then in the day-time he would sleep or walk out his drunkenness, thinking to wear away the fume of the abundance of wine which he had taken over night. In his house they did nothing but feast, dance, and mask: and himself passed away the time in hearing of foolish plays, or in marrying these players, tumblers, jesters, and such sort of people. As for proof hereof it is reported, that at Hippias' marriage, one of the jesters, he drank wine so lustily all night, that the next morning, when he came to plead before the people assembled in council, who had sent for him, he, being queasy-stomached with his surfet he had taken, was compelled to lay all before them, and one of his friends held him his gown instead of a basin[13]

Yet it is difficult to sustain a negative view. The poetry of the play belongs so exclusively to the lovers. Antony is so much more alive than Caesar. When Lepidus asks Enobarbus to persuade his captain to be conciliatory, Enobarbus answers, 'I shall entreat him / To answer like himself. If Caesar move him, / Let Antony look over Caesar's head / And speak as loud as Mars' (2.2.11-6): and this image of a man towering above a boy stays with us. Cleopatra says of her lover, 'Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon / The other way's a Mars' (2.5.78-9); which is true, but, as here, the god supplants the Gorgon and not vice versa. Caesar himself grudgingly admits that Antony may be of such 'rare composure' (1.4.22) that tumbling on the bed of Ptolemy, giving a kingdom for a mirth, sitting and keeping the turn of tippling with a slave, reeling the streets at noon, and standing the buffet with knaves that smell of sweat (1.4.16-21) will not stain him. And a confused Lepidus reveals that it is obscurely apparent even to some in Rome that Antony is great not just in spite but also because of his faults:

> I must not think there are
> Evils enough to darken all his goodness.
> His faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven,
> More fiery by night's blackness; hereditary

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[13] *Plutarch's Lives of Coriolanus, Caesar, Brutus, and Antonius in North's Translation*, R. H. Carr (ed.), (1906; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 171.

> Rather than purchased; what he cannot change
> Than what he chooses. (1.4.10-15)

This turns Antony's imperfections into meaningless blemishes and genetic defects, but it also, and most memorably, turns them into stars.

What makes Antony's predicament a double-bind is that Cleopatra's love for him depends on the very *Romanitas* it compromises. Erstwhile mistress to Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar, she has an established predilection for the heroes of Rome; and they for her. Before her famous elegy for him, she always describes Antony as a great Roman soldier: rarely, if ever, does she show sympathy for the man beneath the role. She is less in love with him than with his greatness and the glory it reflects on her. We have seen there is a strong element of self-dramatisation in their relationship; it is unlikely she would love an Antony retired and gone to seed. Also, as Linda Charnes well says:

> Cleopatra's hold on Antony depends on the tactical opportunities provided by the difference between a Roman Antony and an Egyptian one; it depends on being able to offer in herself and Egypt a pleasurable alternative to the Roman ties that bind. Consequently, while Cleopatra tries to 'shame' Antony out of his bonds of allegiance to Rome, she must nevertheless keep him in Egypt as a Roman.[14]

Antony cannot satisfy Cleopatra unless he remains Roman, but he cannot remain Roman by staying with her. He cannot leave her because he is in love with her, and his being is bound up with her; he could not now live according to a restraining code of conduct from which she has liberated him.

Yet at least until Act Three, scene six we are teased with the possibility that in Roman terms Antony will 'redeem the time' (*1 Henry IV*, 1.2.212). Caesar's 'news from Alexandria' that he 'fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra, nor the Queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he' (1.4.4-7) is out of date: as Caesar reads it, Antony is riding post haste to Rome. Pompey's prayer that Cleopatra will 'Tie up the libertine in fields of feasts; / Keep his brain fuming' (2.1.23-4) is interrupted by the announcement that the same libertine is about to arrive in Rome to join the war-council against him. However, Antony has also sent a message back to Egypt. His messenger reports:

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[14] *Notorious Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 113.

> 'Good friend,' quoth he,
> 'Say the firm Roman to great Egypt sends
> This treasure of an oyster, at whose foot,
> To mend this petty present, I will piece
> Her opulent throne with kingdoms. All the East,
> Say thou, shall call her mistress.' So he nodded
> And soberly did mount an arm-gaunt steed
> Who neighed so high that what I would have spoke
> Was beastly dumbed by him. (1.5.44-52)

Firm Roman indeed! The image of him on the 'arm-gaunt steed' is another image of his double-nature: an image of martial splendour, but also of man overpowered by the Platonic horse of concupiscence. Antony does return to Rome, but then he returns to Egypt.

evading shame

McAlindon notes that Antony's return to Cleopatra is a complete surrender to her.[15] Maecenas says he has given up his 'potent regiment to a trull' (3.6.97): Actium bears him out. Cleopatra not only has a charge in the battle and 'appear[s] there for a man' (3.7.18); in effect she is supreme commander: it is her whim which secures the lunatic decision to fight at sea. Enobarbus reminds his captain that they are an infantry, not a navy: their ships are poor, their seamen amateurs. And an unnamed soldier makes this touching appeal to manly good sense:

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[15] p. 245.

> O noble Emperor, do not fight by sea.
> Trust not to rotten planks. Do you misdoubt
> This sword and these my wounds? Let th'Egyptians
> And the Phoenicians go a-ducking; we
> Have used to conquer standing on the earth
> And fighting foot to foot. (3.7.61-6)

Antony hardly hears them: 'By sea, by sea' (3.7.40); 'I'll fight at sea' (3.7.48); 'Well, well, away!' (3.7.66). This shocking departure from good generalship we may call infatuation, but there is more than a hint of death-wish. In returning to Egypt, Antony has given up his struggle to regain his former self and good name and this decision courting disaster and death may express a desire for complete oblivion. His betrayed troops murmur, 'our general's led and we are women's men' (3.7.69-70); in Rome they are saying that Cleopatra's maids and eunuchs make up Antony's war-council. Actium is worse for him than expected; all omens of ignominy and disgrace are fulfilled. Enobarbus rushes on stage and reports that Cleopatra and her sixty ships have fled the battle. Scarus enters with the still worse news that 'The noble ruin of her magic, Antony' (3.10.19) has flown after her 'like a doting mallard' (3.10.20). He goes on, 'I never saw an action of such shame. / Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before / Did violate so itself' (3.10.19-24). As he puts it, 'The greater cantle of the world is lost / With very ignorance. We have kissed away / Kingdoms and provinces' (3.10.6-8).

At this point Plutarch gives us Antony silent on the deck of his galley with his head clapped in his hands;[16] Shakespeare's portrayal of Antony's reaction is more detailed, intimate, ambiguous. Bradley writes that his 'overwhelming sense of shame redeems him',[17] but I cannot agree. He enters gingerly treading across the boards and saying that the land he so unwisely forsook is now ashamed to bear him. 'I am so lated in the world', he goes on, 'that I / Have lost my way for ever' (3.11.3-4): the day has moved away, leaving him in the darkness of death. He feels he has become a precedent for cowards 'To run and show their shoulders' (3.11.9). He blushes to think of Cleopatra; and, in a fine expression of the self-fragmentation and the turmoil of shame, he says that his 'very hairs do mutiny, for the white / Reprove the brown for rashness, and they them / For fear and doting' (3.11.13-15). After the madness before and during the battle, his self-reproaches are a partial restoration to himself. But as usual he is not altogether sincere. He addresses much of this to 'friends', his attendants; it is performed shame. Mixed with indulgent melancholy and self-pity and overblown magnanimity, it is a plea for sympathy and exoneration:

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[16] p. 226.
[17] p. 81.

> Friends, be gone.
> You shall have letters from me to some friends that will
> Sweep your way for you. Pray you, look not sad
> Nor make replies of loathness; take the hint
> Which my despair proclaims. Let that be left
> Which leaves itself. To the sea-side straightaway.
> I will possess you of that ship and treasure.
> Leave me, I pray, a little - pray you, now;
> Nay, do so; for indeed I have lost command;
> Therefore, I pray you. I'll see you by and by. (3.11.1-24)

A strange spirit of comedy prevails. Traversi accurately judges that Antony is merely 'conjuring his shame by giving it expression, where another man, more honest but less resilient in his reactions, would have withdrawn more simply into himself'; he is 'giving way to his emotions whilst waiting for the... external stimulus' of the love and approval of Cleopatra 'which alone can give him the illusion of self-respect'.[18]

Left alone on stage for a moment, Antony sits down: 'a literal stage image for his lowness at this point'.[19] We are closer here to shame *simpliciter*. But when Cleopatra enters, shame turns to rage, then shades into envy and hatred of Caesar:

> He [Caesar] at Philippi kept
> His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck
> The lean and wrinkled Cassius, and 'twas I

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[18] p. 140.

[19] Maurice Charney, 'The Imagery of *Antony and Cleopatra*', in Russell Brown (ed.), p. 164.

> That the mad Brutus ended. He alone
> Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practise had
> In the brave squares of war. Yet now - no matter. (3.11.35-40)

The terms of this may remind us of Iago's feelings concerning Cassio's promotion. The actor playing Antony must make the pause in the last line express a deep sense of degradation. Urging Cleopatra to 'Go to him, madam' (3.11.43), Iras says Antony is 'unqualitied with very shame' (3.11.44): so alienated from himself as to lack all agency, paralysed with the emotion; and also entirely deformed by his defeat. Eros importunes Antony to rise, pointing at Cleopatra's sudden fainting fit and danger of death. Her histrionics reintroduce the false note, and Antony's stubborn prostration begins to look theatrical; again gravity and pathos are intermixed with the absurd. Antony moans, 'I have offended reputation / A most unnoble swerving' (3.11.48-49): a reminder of the rectitude of Roman honour he has abandoned. But shame now increasingly gives way to blame. Turning to his lover and as quickly turning away again, he cries, 'O, Whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See / How I convey my shame out of thine eyes / By looking back what I have left behind / 'Stroyed in dishonour' (3.11.51-4). When she begs forgiveness and says, 'I little thought / You would have followed' (3.11.55-6), he counters, 'Egypt, thou knewst too well / My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings / And thou shouldst tow me after' (3.11.56-8). He then tries twice more to shuffle guilt onto her. It is a shocking acceptance of his emasculation. Even more shockingly, he is instantly revived by her tears and a kiss. 'If anything should follow logically from Antony's recent declaration of his shame, it is the repudiation of its external cause.'[20] He has been merely playing at shame. Eager now to 'drown consideration' (4.2.45), he calls for wine and food. And he scorns fortune - unconvincingly, for he has refused to look his fortunes in the face.

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[20] Traversi, p. 140.

The next scenes show how parlous and degraded his position now is. He who once had 'superfluous kings for messengers' is forced to send his old schoolmaster to plead his case with Caesar. Caesar has 'no ears to [Antony's] requests' (3.12.2-5); but promises Cleopatra grace, should she kill her lover or drive him from her kingdom. Antony loses his temper at this, issuing to the man into whose hands the world is about to fall a challenge to single fight. Caesar responds, 'Let the old ruffian know / I have many other ways to die; meantime / Laugh at his challenge' (4.1.4-6). Antony surrenders all dignity and composure when he finds Cleopatra flirting with Caesar's envoy, Thidias. Having failed in war, he is wholly dependent on Cleopatra's love, so the prospect of her with another man is like looking at his own death. When his servants do not immediately appear at his call, he moans, 'Authority melts from me' (3.13.94). He then asserts, 'I am / Antony yet' (3.13.97-8); but this proclaimed selfhood is in fact so frail and insecure that it can only be affirmed by hysterical, Cleopatra-like violence against Thidias: 'Take hence the jack and whip him!' (3.13.98); 'Whip him, fellows, / Till like a boy you see him cringe his face' (3.13.104-6); 'Tug him away!' (3.13.107-8); 'Is he whipped?... Cried he? And begged 'a pardon?' (3.13.136-7). Antony also turns on Cleopatra herself:

> I found you as a morsel, cold upon
> Dead Caesar's trencher - nay, you were a fragment
> Of Gnaeus Pompey's, besides what hotter hours,
> Unregistered in vulgar fame, you have
> Luxuriously picked out. For I am sure,
> Though you can guess what temperance should be,
> You know not what it is. (3.13.121-7)

Thus the wayward husband to his mistress! And he explodes in bitterness, 'O that I were / Upon the hill of Basan, to outroar / The horned herd!' (3.13.127-9). As Maecenas later says, 'When one so great begins to rage, he's hunted / Even to falling' (4.1.8-9). But Antony's collapse does bring some positive knowledge:

> when we in our viciousness grow hard -
> Oh, misery on't! - the wise gods seel our eyes,
> In our own filth drop our clear judgements, make us
> Adore our errors, laugh at's while we strut
> To our confusion. (3.13.115-20)

This is worthy of Lear, but useless, for Antony will never really open his eyes to his shame. When Thidias departs, Cleopatra asks him quietly, 'Have you done yet?' (3.13.157); and then reassures him with extravagant love rhetoric. Immediately he says, 'I am satisfied' (3.13.172); and he calls for drink and company. His spirits revive, and he declares he is ready for another fight with Caesar. Enobarbus says, 'A diminution in our captain's brain / Restores his heart' (4.1.200-1). But it is less intellectual weakness than cowardly shamelessness which prevents Antony from seeing the facts of his humiliation.

Antony's shame and his shameless death

Antony now seems very near to disaster. He gives a last supper for his followers: 'Haply you shall not see me more, or if, / A mangled shadow' (4.2.27-8). And the world is shrinking from him and his failure:[21] Alexas, Canidius, and Enobarbus have left him; and, as the music of the hautboys under the stage signifies, so too has his beloved Hercules. But this is his finest hour. The first battle of Alexandria 'shows the totality of [his] greatness held in dynamic equilibrium, harmoniously interrelated without confusion or imbalance'.[22] With no memory of the drunkenness of the night before, he arises before dawn; and it is a wonderfully confident reveille. He is fortified by and full of the energy and indomitable spirit of love; that is why he is armed by Eros and Cleopatra. He gives Cleopatra a 'soldier's kiss' (4.5.30) and leaves her 'like a man of steel' (4.5.33). With astonishing generosity, he sends the treacherous Enobarbus treasure after him. He inspires his men to fight not only victoriously, but also joyfully. Cleopatra greets his return thus: 'Lord of lords! / O infinite virtue! Com'st thou smiling from / The world's great snare uncaught?' (4.8.16-18).

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[21] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 24-5.
[22] McAlindon, p. 246.

But this elevation only makes his fall the worse, for he is utterly beaten in the second battle. He cannot now avoid 'Th'inevitable prosecution of / Disgrace and horror' (4.14.65-7). Yet he postpones it by his usual trick of denouncing Cleopatra: 'This foul Egyptian has betrayed me' (4.12.10); 'Triple-turned whore! 'Tis thou / Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart / Makes only wars on thee' (4.12.13-15). Some authentic feelings of humiliation emerge. He expects never again to greet the sunrise; imagines himself shaking hands with, taking leave of Fortune: he may be contemplating suicide or he may feel, like Othello, that in effect he is already dead. In any case, such sensations of shame and personal disaster quickly give way to more blame: 'Betrayed I am. / O this false soul of Egypt!' (4.12.26-7). When Cleopatra enters, he wishes horrible ignominy on her: 'vanish, or I shall give thee thy deserving / And blemish Caesar's triumph. Let him take thee / And hoist thee up to the shouting plebeians' (4.12.32-4). But she is obviously his scapegoat and surrogate for himself here: it is he who will be the main attraction in Caesar's victory parade. He is twisting and turning, refusing to look in 'the very heart of loss' (4.12.30).

Antony at last takes shame in Act Four, scene fourteen:

> ANTONY
> Eros, thou yet behold'st me?
> EROS Ay, noble lord.
> ANTONY
> Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
> A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
> A towered citadel, a pendent rock,
> A forked mountain, or blue promontory
> With trees upon't that nod unto the world
> And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs?
> They are black vesper's pageants.

> EROS Ay, my lord.
> ANTONY
> That which is now a horse, even with a thought
> The rack dislimns and makes it indistinct
> As water is in water.
> EROS It does, my lord.
> ANTONY
> My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
> Even such a body. Here I am Antony,
> Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave. (4.14.1-14)

This superb, breathtakingly affecting expression of self-loss is some of Shakespeare's most superlative poetry, and one of his most memorable evocations of shame. Much of the imagery of *Antony and Cleopatra* comes to a head in Antony's wistful comparison of the evanescent formations of the clouds with his own dissipated selfhood; 'The pattern in this play is one of melting, fading, dissolving, discandying, disponging, dislimning, and losing of form.'[23] Though he has tried to maintain a Roman image throughout, Antony can do so no longer. The element of dreamy, exquisite luxury in his language can be put down to the fact that the effort and self-deception involved have been such that this explosion of his identity is partly a relief.

Cleopatra's eunuch Mardian now enters and Antony says, 'O thy vile lady! / She has robbed me of my sword' (4.14.22-3); it would seem that in the eunuch standing before him he sees himself. When Mardian (falsely) reports Cleopatra dead, Antony abruptly ceases to blame her; his unarming is the physical enactment of the spiritual dissolution just experienced: 'Off! Pluck off!' - the diction recalls Lear divesting himself of his furred gown - 'Apace, Eros, apace! / No more a soldier; bruised pieces go; / You have been nobly borne' (4.14.38-44). Adelman notes that 'Othello bids farewell to his military occupation... only with intense pain, as the sign of his loss of honor and of the heroic selfhood he had invested in Desdemona; but Antony gives up his bruised pieces willingly, as though he has finally gotten what he wanted all along.'[24] This is because Antony's loss of honour and heroism is the blissful end of a long, long unsustainable illusion. In the perspective of Cleopatra's death, he also wishes to realise himself fully and completely as her lover, and, ever mindful of himself and his image, partly because this will take the sting out of his failure as a soldier:

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[23] Charney, p. 166.

> Eros! - I come, my queen. - Eros! - Stay for me.
> Where souls do couch on flowers we'll hand in hand
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.
> Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
> And all the haunt be ours. Come Eros! Eros! (4.1.51-5)[25]

But before he goes (as he thinks) to join Cleopatra in death, he must, in the spirit of their love, somehow regain his greatness. This he does according to the Senecan ethic of the good death and the popular renaissance tag *finis coronat opus*; becoming conqueror of himself, his valour on itself triumphing.[26] Or that is how he sees it. More than any Shakespearean hero, Antony is a failure, and his shamelessness even at the end, after he has accepted the humiliating truth about himself is in one aspect vanity and self-deception - and would be worse in a Christian context. On the other hand, we are prepared to overlook his failure in this play where the personal has so effortlessly eclipsed the political. And we cannot wholly deplore Antony's indomitable self-love since it is a part of the life-force that is the essence of his greatness and attractiveness. He asks Eros to fulfil the sacred vow taken on the day of his emancipation, to kill his captain on request, stressing that this will save him from being drawn in Caesar's triumph 'with pleached arms, bending down his corrigible neck, his face subdued / To penetrative shame' (4.14.74-6). Eros throws himself on his sword. Inspired by this, and by Cleopatra's supposed death, Antony determines to be 'A bridegroom in my death and run into 't / As to a lover's bed' (4.14.101-2); he, too, falls on his sword - but though he inflicts a mortal wound, he does not die: it is the woeful culmination of his impotence, but also bitterly funny. Rising, he begs the soldiers who now enter to finish him off; but they desert and fly. Learning from Diomedes that Cleopatra lives, he is borne to her by men more loyal. He chides their grief:

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[24] *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 189.

[25] Adelman points out that this reverses Virgil, where Aeneas forsakes Dido for empire and Dido cold-shoulders Aeneas in the afterlife. She sees Shakespeare's Antony as antitype to Aeneas (*The Common Liar*, pp. 68-74).

[26] Michael Neill, *Issues of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 313.

> Nay, good my fellows, do not please sharp fate
> To grace it with your sorrows. Bid that welcome
> Which comes to punish us, and we punish it,
> Seeming to bear it lightly. Take me up.
> I have led you oft; carry me now, good friends,
> And have my thanks for all. (4.14.137-42)

To the last he is ambiguous. He is at his best here, heroically superior to disaster but also kind; and yet, he is playing on their sympathies, and it is dishonest of him to present himself as the victim of chance or accident. But it is such complexity that makes him human and attractive. His elevation in death is emblematised when he is heaved aloft to Cleopatra in her monument: 'I am dying, Egypt, dying. Only / I here importune death awhile until / Of many thousand kisses the poor last / I lay upon thy lips' (4.15.19-22).

In the perspective of his failure, Cleopatra's elegy (5.2.78-91) is 'a shadowy alternative of imputed being', a mere 'flight of the imagination',[27] but it is also a triumphant statement of the alternative view of Antony that has been gaining strength throughout. From Philo's speech onward, there have been hints and intimations that from a different perspective Antony's shame will reveal itself as greatness. Certainly, he has failed to keep the square of self-conscious Roman selfhood; but the well-known imagery of deliquescence and loss of form already noted is counterpointed by other imagery of positive expansion beyond restrictive limits. We have seen that Antony's captain's heart bursts the buckles on his breast.

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[27] Mason, pp. 232, 276.

He cries when he abjures his soldiership, 'O, cleave, my sides! / Heart, once be stronger than thy continent; / Crack thy frail case!' (4.14.40-42). And Cleopatra says when he dies, 'This case of that huge spirit now is cold' (4.5.93). Even Caesar admits his boundlessness: 'The death of Antony is not a single doom; in the name lay / A moiety of the world' (5.1.14-19). Cleopatra's elegy identifies him with the whole process of the cosmos. As Middleton Murry puts it, 'In those lines, simply and strangely, Antony is made incorporate with Nature, with the riches of harvest, and the golden splendour of a stubble-field; but no less than with this quiet opulence, incorporate also with the gleam and flash and strong impetuosity of the dolphin. And all this we feel to be true. This is Antony. It is as though his essence had been made plain, his secret revealed to Cleopatra in her vision'.[28] Antony was a force of nature. He should not have been expected to adhere to convention. In Cleopatra he found the power of uninhibited existence that was always latent in himself. He was susceptible to shame because he lived in a world where the dominant paradigm of identity was of agreement with determined social mores of Roman honour - public and soldierly and based on fame and success. He was freer, more unpredictably and spontaneously alive than this. He exceeded the standard as much as he fell short: he overflowed the measure. To that extent, Shakespeare has changed him from a historical archetype of shame into a positive exemplar of the shameless.

the place of Christian shame in *Antony and Cleopatra*

It is not insignificant that Shakespeare's most serious and sustained recommendation of shamelessness is found in a Roman play. Antony partakes of the perfection of nature; Edmond, though his concept of nature is mean and narrow, realised that nature is shameless. In the secular world of this play, there is no idea higher than nature. The Roman concept of the self is socially determined, but human nature makes it look thin and inadequate; Antony is greater than Caesar. But in Shakespeare's non-Roman tragic drama the concept of self is religious. Cordelia, who has preserved her spiritual purity by instinctive observance of religious shame, Othello and Lear, insofar as they are renewed and cleansed by such shame, partake in the perfection of supernature. Shamelessness is excellently natural: shame approaches the divine.

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[28] '*Antony and Cleopatra*', in Russell Brown (ed.), p. 131.

Earlier in his career, Shakespeare used characters such as Jaques to gesture towards a form of sensibility wholly outside his framework; and in this secular tragedy of shame and shamelessness Enobarbus's death and the figure of Octavia point us to the Christian shame otherwise excluded. The death of Enobarbus is one of the most touching instances of shame in Shakespeare. Barbara C. Vincent writes, 'Enobarbus... seems to cross quietly into the Christian world in the manner of his death, he repents and prays for forgiveness'.[29] Middleton Murry asks, pointing also to Antony's last supper with his servants, 'Is it not, imagination asks, the story of Judas, told as it might have been told had a Shakespeare been there to tell it?'[30] Shortly after he has deserted Antony, Enobarbus realises: 'I have done ill / Of which I do accuse myself so sorely / That I will joy no more' (4.6.18-20). Guilt at this stage is adulterated with disappointed self-interest at the poor treatment with which he discovers Caesar rewards defectors to his faction (4.6.12-18); pure shame prevails when Enobarbus finds Antony has sent his treasure after him with 'bounty overplus':

> I alone am the villain of the earth,
> And feel I am so most. O Antony,
> Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid
> My better service, when my turpitude
> Thou dost so crown with gold! This blows my heart.

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[29] 'Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and the rise of Comedy', in John Drakakis (ed.), *Antony and Cleopatra*, New Casebooks (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 237.
[30] '*Antony and Cleopatra*', in Russell Brown (ed.), p. 124.

> If swift thought break it not, a swifter mean
> Shall outstrike thought, but thought will do't, I feel.
> I fight against thee? No, I will go seek
> Some ditch wherein to die; the foul'st best fits
> My latter part of life. (4.6.31-40)

This very dramatic verse is proof, if more were needed, of Shakespeare's special feeling for shame, and moral and religious shame in particular. At first, emotion distorts syntax and the rhythm is heavy. Then there is the arching cadence of grief and praise for Antony; and the thought of Antony's generosity gives way to wistful shame marked by light stresses and much sibilance for the contrasting meanness Enobarbus has himself shown. The unusual verb - 'This *blows* my heart' - makes this shame visceral and immediate. The special poignance of the speech is achieved partly by emphasising the heart: Enobarbus expects shame to break his heart; if it does not, he will stab it - the melancholy quietness of the expression admirably sets off this violent thought. The last lines are more brisk and deliberate; passion has produced intention. The repentant Enobarbus cannot fight his beloved captain: hence the strong stress on 'No'. He will find a dirty ditch to die in, as he feels he has defiled himself.

When we see him next, Enobarbus is preparing for death. Night has fallen, and he asks the 'blessed moon' to bear witness when he is gone and traitors are defamed that 'poor Enobarbus did / Before thy face repent' (4.9.11-12): another nod to reputation as a supreme value of the play. Unbeknownst to him, Enobarbus is watched not only by the goddess, but also by Caesar's night-patrol. There is no privacy in *Antony and Cleopatra*; it is part of its particularly shameful quality that all is exposed. Enobarbus's last speech takes the form of an ardent and pathetic prayer to Cynthia:

> O sovereign mistress of true melancholy,
> The poisonous damp of night disponge upon me,
> That life, a very rebel to my will,
> May hang no longer on me. Throw my heart

> Against the flint and hardness of my fault,
> Which, being dried with grief, will break to powder
> And finish all foul thoughts. O Antony,
> Nobler than my revolt is infamous,
> Forgive me in thine own particular,
> But let the world rank me in register
> A master-leaver and a fugitive.
> O Antony! O Antony! (4.9.15-26)

Here is another outstanding speech of shame. One notes, for instance, the patterned rhyme or half-rhyme in each of the three sentences, lending an air of ritual seriousness and playing against the metre: 'melancholy', 'disponge upon me', 'longer on me'; 'Antony', 'Antony', 'Antony'; 'heart', 'fault', 'thoughts'; 'particular', 'register', 'master-leaver'. It is a measure of his depression that Enobarbus identifies with his corpse, praying that poison dew will wash his life from him, as though it were an excrescence, an unwanted growth. The liquid imagery is abruptly replaced by the fiercely self-reproachful fantasy of his heart being hurled against his mistake and bursting into nothingness. His error is absolute: a stone wall. 'Dry sorrow drinks our blood', as Romeo explains (*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.5.59), so his heart is desiccated and parched, as well as soiled with treachery. Enobarbus's last thoughts turn outwards in suffering love for Antony. He now invites unmitigated shame, if only his captain will forgive him; and he falls dead with Antony's name on his lips. The way in which he gives up this world and invites public shame, coveting only the grace of his beloved master is suggestive of Christian shame and death. It is a counterpoint to the shame and shamelessness of Antony's end.

John F. Danby noted that 'Octavia is one of Shakespeare's minor triumphs in the play, beautifully placed in relation to the main figures and the tenor of their meaning'.[31] He also saw *Antony and Cleopatra* as 'the deliberate construction of a world without a Cordelia, Shakespeare's symbol for a reality that transcends the political and personal and "redeems nature from the general curse / Which twain have brought it to"'.[32] But Octavia is Cordelia transposed. When Antony memorably says of her, 'Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can / Her heart inform her tongue - the swan's-down feather / That stands upon the swell at full of tide, / And neither way inclines' (3.2.48-51), we are strongly reminded of the Cordelia who in *Lear* 1.1 could not heave her heart into her mouth; both women represent that Christian sense of shame which is compatible with personal meekness and also called modesty. Like Desdemona, though Antony abuses her 'Beyond the mark of thought' (3.6.89), Octavia is not ashamed and does not blame him. This is partly the Roman *pietas* of the family, but the aura of the metaphysical with which Shakespeare endows her suggests Octavia's larger function. She is much less matronly, more mild and virginal than in Plutarch. Cleopatra talks of Octavia's 'modest eyes' (4.15.28). What Enobarbus calls, with some distaste, her 'holy, cold and still conversation' is a religious chastity of spirit. When 'most weak, most weak' (3.4.29) she goes like 'A market maid to Rome' (3.6.52) praying to God to help her to work peace between her fractious brother and husband, she clearly anticipates Christian ideals. But *Antony and Cleopatra* cannot really accommodate Octavia, just as we shall see in the next chapter that there is no real place for Virgilia in *Coriolanus*. Here the best that can be is the shameless naturalness of the lovers.

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[31] '*Antony and Cleopatra*: A Shakespearean Adjustment', in Drakakis (ed.), p. 46.

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[32] pp. 52-3.

9

Coriolanus

My final reading is of *Coriolanus*. Shame is also a main theme here, and *Coriolanus* suggests more emphatically than *Antony* the superiority of the Christian sense of shame which the Roman world of both plays excludes. Coriolanus is ashamed of an increasingly plebeian Rome. He tries to compensate for this by being perfectly noble and uncontaminated himself, which makes him partly pitiably, partly comically incapable of all but glorious feats of arms; and socially unassimilable and disruptive. Whereas Antony is not ashamed enough, Coriolanus is too susceptible to shame. The one flaw in his noble integrity is his excessive devotion to his mother. This is dishonourable in itself, and it has dishonourable ramifications. She is less scrupulous than he and in her desire for glory forces him against his inclination to stand for the consulship, requesting the votes of the people in a gown of humility in the open market-place. This he does this with such begrudging gracelessness that it causes a riot, culminating in his banishment. Shamefully bereft of his native inheritance, he goes over to the Volscian enemy; and in vengeance leads an army against Rome. He is about to sack his home city when he gives way to his mother's embassy: this exposes his weakness and according to the warrior code of honour and shame is a disgrace; but according to a higher scale of values - if he could only see it - is the one conceivable course. Ironically, the more Christian sense of shame which he needs to rescue him from shame and be reconciled with himself is quietly exemplified by his wife, Virgilia.[1]

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[1] Burton Hatlen has recently published a helpful article entitled 'The "Noble Thing" and "The Boy of Tears": *Coriolanus* and the Embarrassments of Identity', *English Literary Renaissance* 27 (1997), 393-420. But he neglects Coriolanus's political and Virgilia's Christian shame. And his currently orthodox political account of Coriolanus's great passion of shame at the end of the play is not adequate to that hero's experience.

Martius's shame

Hamlet, thinker, and Coriolanus, doer, are clearly opposites, but they also resemble each other; both are aristocratic idealists bitterly ashamed of a world which falls far short of their expectation of human dignity. But whereas *Hamlet* is a religious play, *Coriolanus* is civic and political: Hamlet is ashamed of spiritual fall, Coriolanus is outraged and ashamed at social disintegration and chaos. Pocaterra writes, 'Among all these kinds of unity, both general and particular, that exist among men, there are those that transfer guilt and shame from one to the other - in the same way that pain from a wounded hand passes to the forearm, and from the forearm to the humerus, and sometimes even further on because of the union and connection among them. Thus you see the father feel shamed by his son; the son by his father; the brother by his wife; and, even more wondrously, the citizen by his fellow citizens'.[2] *Coriolanus* begins with a plebeian revolution. We must bear in mind that this is a pre-republican play from the legendary period of the fifth century BC and we are in 1608 not 1998; Martius (as he is before the Battle of Corioles) regards the plebeians as non-persons, beasts 'calv'd i'th'porch of the Capitol' (3.1.238),[3] and the play more or less bears him out. They are thoroughly untrustworthy, 'no surer, no, / Than is the coal of fire upon the ice, / or hailstone in the sun' (1.1.169-73);[4] 'all they care for is food in peace, looting in war, flattery from their demagogues'.[5] Martius sees their revolt as a threat not just to the aristocracy, but to all human order and aspiration:

> my soul aches
> To know, when two authorities are up,
> Neither supreme, how soon confusion

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[2] p. 142.

[3] All references to the Arden *Coriolanus*, Philip Brockbank (ed.), (London: Routledge, 1990).

[4] This is a sharp allusion to the great frost of 1607 / 8 when fires were lit on the frozen Thames: see T. McAlindon, *Coriolanus*: An Essentialist Tragedy', *The Review of English Studies* 44 (1993), 505.

[5] A. C. Bradley, 'Character and the Imaginative Appeal of Tragedy in *Coriolanus*', in B. A. Brockman (ed.), *Shakespeare: Coriolanus, A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 62.

May enter 'twixt the gap of both, and take
The one by th'other. (3.1.107-11)

He is afraid it will compel more democratic government - already the people have been granted the political representation of five tribunes, and their power increases during the course of the action. Democracy is anathema to him:

This double worship,
Where one part does disdain with cause, the other
Insult without all reason: where gentry, title, wisdom,
Cannot conclude but by the yea and no
Of general ignorance, it must omit
Real necessities, and give way the while
To unstable slightness. Purpose so barr'd, it follows
Nothing is done to purpose. (3.1.141-8)

He foresees the death of ideal Rome. The patricians must rouse themselves or else have the great 'dishonour' (3.1.156) of bereaving 'the state / Of that integrity which should becom't' (3.1.157-8); they do not rouse themselves and thus they earn his disgust.[6] The play pictures the body politic as a disintegrating human body. Menenius, in his famous fable of the belly (1.1.95-145), tells of the revolt of the other members against that organ; a 'great toe' addresses an assembly of 'scabs' (1.1.154, 165); a youthful warrior's 'Amazonian chin' drives 'the bristled lips before him' (2.2.91-2); the tribunes of the people are 'the tongues o'th' common mouth' (3.1.22).[7]

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[6] The shame with which Martius regards democracy goes counter to modern notions, of course, but is by no means unprecedented in the history of culture. Plato is its first distinguished exponent. He portrays the general public as a large and powerful animal, arguing that to be ruled by it is to replace goodness with what pleases such a beast, wickedness with anything that may distress it (*The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee, 2nd edn. (1955; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), p. 288). Elsewhere in *The Republic* he portrays democracy as a ship without a captain (pp. 282-3). Contempt for the mob is an Elizabethan commonplace. Up to this point Martius's shame is laudable not contemptible, the reverse side of a noble commitment to civilised culture.

[7] See also Lawrence Danson, '*Coriolanus*', in David Wheeler (ed.), *Coriolanus: Critical Essays* (London: Garland Publishing, 1995), p. 124.

Shamed by degenerate Rome, Martius finds compensating satisfaction in his personal purity and uprightness. His creed is close to that enthusiastically advanced by Asdrubal in Marston's *Sophonisba*:

> He that's a man for men,
> Ambitious as a god, must, like a god,
> Live clear from passions; his full aimed-at end,
> Immense to others, sole self to comprehend,
> Round in's own globe; not to be clasped but holds
> Within him all, his heart being of more folds
> Than shield of Telamon, not to be pierced, though struck:
> The god of wise men is themselves, not luck. (2.3.7-14)[8]

'I am constant' (1.1.238), he says, 'I had rather be their servant in my way / Than sway with them in theirs' (2.1.200-201); 'False to my nature? Rather say I play / The man I am' (3.2.15-16); 'While I remain above ground you shall / Hear from me still, and never of me aught / But what is like me formerly' (4.1.51-3). His own ambition as well as his dearest wish for his son is to 'prove / To shame unvulnerable' (5.3.72-3). Superbly, he sets his own incorruptible and entire person against his corrupt and disintegrating city. But ultimately his integrity will fail; and he will be forced to admit, 'I melt, and am not / Of stronger earth than others' (5.3.28-9).

In his disappointment with Rome, Martius also turns towards and idolises his great enemy, the Volscian, Tullus Aufidius: 'I sin in envying his nobility; / And were I anything but what I am, / I would wish me only he' (1.1.229-31). Unaccommodated and isolated at home, he finds in this foreign champion a comforting and inspiring image of himself.[9] But Aufidius is not what Martius takes him for; it is not just that he is inferior as a soldier, he is far less noble in spirit. Like Martius, he has an aristocratic sense of shame: for example, when he is told that Corioles will be restored to the Volsces 'on condition', he exclaims, 'Condition! / I would I were a Roman, for I cannot, / Being a Volsce, be that I am. Condition!' (1.10.3-5). But his sense of shame is easily perverted. Rather than bearing his losses against Martius honourably, he determines on a crafty revenge. He makes this shameless declaration, reminiscent of the vengeful Laertes:

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[8] in *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (ed.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 288.

[9] See Una Ellis-Fermor, 'Secret Impressions: The Dramatic Definition of *Coriolanus*', in Brockman (ed.), p. 140.

> Nor sleep, nor sanctuary,
> Being naked, sick; nor fane, nor Capitol,
> The prayers of priests, nor times of sacrifice -
> Embarquements all of fury - shall lift up
> Their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst
> My hate to Martius. Where I find him, were it
> At home, upon my brother's guard, even there,
> Against the hospitable canon, would I
> Wash my fierce hand in's heart. (1.10.19-27)

'My valour's poison'd', he admits, 'With only suff'ring stain by him' (1.10.17-18). Aufidius may look like a hero, but he is really a machiavel; precedence at any cost is his final end. Martius's admiration for him poignantly bespeaks his exalted loneliness, but, again like Hamlet, he is really alone in a shameless world.

It is hinted from the first that Martius's treasured integrity is insecure, that he may not 'prove to shame unvulnerable'. The extraordinary paradox is that while on the one hand he is a man to counterpoise Rome, on the other he is a mere projection of his mother's; as she puts it herself, 'the buildings of my fancy' (2.1.198). In this context it is significant that we see her mental picture of Martius at war before seeing the real thing. She is speaking to her daughter-in-law Virgilia:

> Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum;
> See him pluck Aufidius down by th'hair,
> As children from a bear, the Volsces shunning him.
> Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus:
> 'Come on you cowards, you were got in fear
> Though you were born in Rome.' His bloody brow
> With his mail'd hand then wiping, forth he goes
> Like to a harvest man that's task'd to mow
> Or all, or lose his hire. (1.3.29-37)

This fairly precisely anticipates the eye-witness accounts of Coriolanus fighting and what we see on stage. Its hallucinatory intensity lends it an air of voodoo; Volumnia might truly say to Martius, as Leontes mistakenly says to Hermione, 'Your actions are my dreams' (*The Winter's Tale*, 3.2.83). She claims that he sucked his valiantness from her, and gives this account of his upbringing:

> When yet he was but tender-bodied, and the only son of my womb; when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way; when for a day of king's entreaties, a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding; I, considering how honour would become such a person - that it was no better than picture-like to hang by th'wall, if renown made it not stir - was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child, than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man. (1.3.5-18)

She is Lady Macbeth as mother rather than wife. She prefers Hector's wounded forehead spewing forth blood 'at Grecian sword contemning' (1.3.43) to the breasts of Hecuba when she suckled Hector - a sign of alienation from her own body - and her hapless son becomes the agent of her blood lust and frustrated manliness. The key words in this speech are 'honour', 'renown', 'fame'; she worships reputation. Martius is committed to an ideal of independent excellence and is alienated from the social world. It bodes very ill for his project of pure self-sufficiency that so much of himself derives from his mother's disturbed imaginings and that for her selfhood is social standing.

shame and resisting Volumnia

As his name indicates, Martius is an earthly Mars. He fights with the joy that comes from fulfilled idealism, from living to the pitch of his being. It is the spectacle of consummation he presents which makes other soldiers fall in love with him; and he in turn overflows with love for them, sighing, for example, to Cominius:

> Oh! Let me clip ye
> In arms as sound as when I woo'd; in heart
> As merry as when our nuptial day was done,
> And the tapers burn'd to bedward. (1.6.29-32)

Martius is able to fulfil himself in war because he never has to compromise or even really collaborate with other, lesser men. He wages his personal *blitzkrieg* and carries all before him; but in civil life he is clumsy and embarrassed. In the military ceremony which succeeds the battle of Corioles, he is unable to accept the approbation of his general, which is both an effusion of personal love, and also a more formal and important matter of fulfilling the proper relations between hero and city. He mutters gracelessly, 'Pray now, no more. My mother, / Who has a charter to extol her blood, / When she does praise me, grieves me' (1.9.13-15). 'I have some wounds upon me', he goes on, 'and they smart to hear themselves remember'd'(1.9.28-9); he is physically discomforted. He does not want the proffered reward: 'I thank you, general; / But cannot make my heart consent to take / A bribe to pay my sword' (1.9.36-8). And when the drums and trumpets strike up, he barks, 'May these same instruments, which you profane, / Never sound more!' (1.9.41-2). Cominius insists on some pomp, giving Martius his own steed and the surname 'Coriolanus' to commemorate what he did before Corioles; Coriolanus responds, 'I will go wash; / And when my face is fair, you shall perceive / Whether I blush or no' (1.9.66-8).

Part of what we are seeing here is a plain soldier flummoxed by courtesy. Also, he is driven by pure ideals of duty and valour, and this makes it hard for him to accept any reward; as Cominius says later, 'He covets less / Than misery itself would give, rewards / His deeds with doing them' (2.2.126-8). And he stands on his independence. Accepting praise would admit that he exists in the unstable realm of reputation where, in Aufidius's phrase, 'our virtues / Lie in th'interpretation of the time' (4.7.49-50): a resignation of secure being. Cominius delicately recognises this when he says he will praise him 'In sign of what you are, not to reward / What you have done' (1.9. 26-7); so does the politic Menenius back in Rome, announcing that the senate will confer on Coriolanus 'honours like himself' (2.2.48). The form of words with which Martius grudgingly accepts Cominius's gifts - 'howbeit, I thank you. / I mean to stride your steed, and at all times / To undercrest your good addition, / To th'fairness of my power' (1.9.66-71) - indicates that he intends fully and constantly to justify them in action and thus reclaim his self-sufficiency. His refusal to compromise is not unappealing, but he has such an urgent sense of self, such a vigilant sense of shame, that is barely possible for him to participate in normal social transactions. As his mother witheringly puts it, 'You might have been enough the man you are, / With striving less to be so' (3.2.19-20).

After his return from the wars, Coriolanus stands for consul. This is clearly Volumnia's doing. When they meet for the first time on stage, during his triumph, she confides, 'I have liv'd / To see inherited my very wishes, /... only / There's one thing wanting' (2.1.196-9); she is the greedily ambitious mother still unsatisfied with her excelling son. But she is addressing the war-hero of a military triumph! He treats her indulgently, straightaway taking her drift, but not sure he wants to be consul: 'Know, good mother, / I had rather be their servant in my way / Than sway with them in theirs' (2.1.220-2). As ever, his concern is integrity; his expression implies unwillingness to deviate from his accustomed rectitude. His feeling that the collaborative, political work of the Consul will pollute what he regards as 'mine own truth' (3.2.121) is an indication of his recoil from common life. He is subsequently honoured in the Capitol, but again his hatred of praise makes a mess of a grave occasion. When Cominius steps forward to recount his deeds, he immediately rises and offers to go away. A Senator says, 'Sit, Coriolanus: never shame to hear / What you have nobly done', but he returns, 'Your honour's pardon: / I had rather have my wounds to heal again / Than hear say how I got them' (2.2.67-70). He goes on, 'I had rather have one scratch my head i'th'sun / when the alarum were struck, than idly sit / To hear my nothings monster'd' (2.2.75-7). Passively listening to a report of his own performance would make him feel separate and estranged from his warlike self; the telling of his deeds would deform them until they were no longer his: that he calls them 'nothings' betokens his impatiently high standards. His admission that 'oft, / When blows have made me stay, I fled from words' (2.2.67 -72) is perhaps most revealing. Such is his sense of human untruth and infidelity that he finds words are necessarily feigning: whereas for normally sociable men praise is a gain in being, for him it is a little death. It is a curious situation: a ritual of honour has become an ordeal of shame. We have a would-be politician ashamed to be spoken of, ashamed to speak. But then he is doing all this for his mother.

In his absence, the senate agrees to promote him; but he must solicit the people's vote. Here, too, shame overpowers him - and, to be sure, the traditional requirement of standing 'i'th'market place' in 'The napless vesture of humility' showing one's wounds to the people in return for their 'voices' (2.1.231-4), with its strong though inverted suggestions of Elizabethan shaming ritual and immemorial beggary, would be hard for any self-respecting man. We do not, then, feel unsympathetic when he pleads, 'I do beseech you, / Let me overleap that custom; for I cannot... Please you / That I may pass this doing' (2.2.135-9). On the other hand, a ritual that makes a moment of humility and nakedness before the people a condition of elevation over them is clearly not without its point. Fully justified by his own lights, Coriolanus's indifference to social forms and rituals also betrays his callow arrogance. His entrance in the gown of humility in Act Two, scene three is shocking because for him it is an absolute lie; he feels no humility before the people, only contempt. He is masquerading as another, a more modest and liberal person;

he is no natural hypocrite, though, and it is a strain for him to keep the act up: John Bayley notes, 'In his hatred and fear of the natural facilities of the actor Coriolanus makes a not easy job for the man who is acting him, and that is part of the "amusement" and irony in the play'.[10] Coriolanus cannot restrain himself from responding sardonically to the plain men who approach to proffer their 'voices'; and left to himself he erupts in frustration:

> Most sweet voices!
> Better it is to die, better to starve,
> Than crave the hire which first we do deserve.
> Why in this wolvish toge should I stand here,
> To beg of Hob and Dick that does appear
> Their needless vouches? Custom calls me to't.
> What custom wills, in all things should we do't,
> The dust on antique time would lie unswept
> And mountainous error be too highly heap'd
> For truth to o'erpeer. Rather than fool it so,
> Let the high office and the honour go
> To one that would do thus. I am half through,
> The one part suffer'd, the other will I do. (2.3.111-23)

It is better to die, better to starve, than to crave the hire which first we do deserve, because the latter accepts the priority of patronage over merit, preferment and status over independent essence, which is to die as an individual; to perish spiritually: or so it seems to this extremist. Nor are his feelings unintelligible. As Rossiter asks, 'Surely any man of any dignity must feel something base in the pranks that men (apparently) must employ to gain the good opinion - and the vote - of other men'.[11] Rather than touch his forelock to Hob and Dick, rather than grovel before the dust-heap of accumulated error, Coriolanus resolves to let the high office and the honour go: and on the whole we must applaud him. But he abruptly changes his mind. He cannot disappoint Volumnia. The combination of his own strictness and his susceptibility to that misguided parent is striking and pathetic.

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[10] *Shakespeare and Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 150-1.

[11] p. 244.

He does not, as he should, show his wounds to the people; he cannot, 'As if [he] had receiv'd them for the hire / Of their breath only!' (2.2.149-50): here class shame is mixed with the shame of bodily exposure. Despite his refusal, he is granted the people's vote, whereupon he urgently desires to change his clothes, so he may know himself again. The intensity of his shame here suggests a precarious sense of selfhood, probably not unrelated to his subordination to his mother.

But, persuaded by the tribunes, the commoners withdraw their endorsement of Coriolanus on the grounds that he mocked them when he received their 'voices' and that he has always been their enemy. It is a serious insult that an authority he does not recognise and submitted to only to please Volumnia has reversed its original decision to approve him, but he regards it in its more general aspect as an instance of the anarchy of the plebeians and a disgrace to Rome. He urges the nobility to cast the power of the tribunes in the dust. The tribunes in turn call for his arrest as a traitor to the constitution; and then for his death. Coriolanus draws his sword; the patricians stand by him. Menenius intervenes. The tribunes offer to try Coriolanus instead. He is nobly inclined to martyrdom and an absolute fidelity to self:

> Let them pull all about mine ears, present me
> Death on the wheel, or at wild horses' heels,
> Or pile ten hills on the Tarpeian rock,
> That the precipitation might down stretch
> Below the beam of sight: yet will I still
> Be thus to them. (3.2.1-6)

But he is unsettled by Volumnia. When she enters, he says :

> I muse my mother
> Does not approve me further, who was wont
> To call them woollen vassals, things created
> To buy and sell with groats, to show bare heads
> In congregations, to yawn, be still, and wonder,
> When one but of my ordinance stood up
> To speak of peace or war. I talk of you.
> Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me

> False to my nature? Rather say I play
> The man I am. (3.2.7-16)

Here is the hero turned dependent child, anxious to assert his will but really unable to do so. His desire for maternal approval immediately gives Volumnia the advantage. As said, his preoccupation is integrity and intrinsic worth, hers is prestige and status: in her view he has disgraced himself in failing to achieve office, and he knows it. She remarks wearily, 'O sir, sir, sir. / I would have had you put your power well on / Before you had worn it out' (3.2.16-18). She tries to shame him into recovering the position by recommending an attitude of self-serving shamelessness. (A woman often behaves thus to her man in the plays - think of Goneril with Albany, Cleopatra with Antony, Lady Macbeth with her lord.) Volumnia claims to have heard Coriolanus recommend the mingling of honour and policy in war, but the soldier we see in battle is never crafty but recklessly bold. It is disingenuous of her to compare seducing the plebeians with taking a town with gentle words: the former is an abuse of good faith for personal advancement, the latter saves lives. But her easy ascendancy over him is evident when she reverts to precise instruction:

> I prithee now, my son,
> Go to them, with this bonnet in thy hand,
> And thus far having stretch'd it - here be with them -
> Thy knee bussing the stones - for in such business
> Action is eloquence, and the eyes of th'ignorant
> More learned than the ears - waving thy head,
> Which often, thus, correcting thy stout heart,
> Now humble as the ripest mulberry
> That will not hold the handling (3.2.72-80)

Such gross hypocrisy could not be more against the grain of Coriolanus's nature, and surely nothing could revolt him more than Volumnia's hideous image of soft-heartedness; yet he cannot resist her:

> Must I go show them my unbarb'd sconce? Must I
> With my base tongue give to my noble heart
> A lie that it must bear? Well, I will do't:
> Yet were there but this single plot to lose,
> This mould of Martius, they to dust should grind it
> And throw't against the wind. (3.2.99-104)

For himself, he would embrace death, but for his mother he will degrade himself; she is the flaw in his integrity. He reminds us of others overthrown by women: Mars, Antony, Samson. But self-serving appetite plays no part in his disgrace. Imagining himself in the prescribed role, he details a revolting metamorphosis where he is invaded by 'Some harlot's spirit', his 'throat of war' shrinks 'into a pipe / small as an eunuch's', 'the smiles of knaves' occupy his cheeks, 'schoolboy's tears' fill his eyes, and 'a beggar's tongue' thrusts through his mouth and 'make[s] motion through [his] lips' (3.2.111-18). He concludes, 'I will not do't, / Lest I cease to honour mine own truth, / And by my body's action teach my mind / A most inherent baseness' (3.2.110-123). And yet, his mother's power over him is stronger than this absolute sense of shame. She says, 'At thy choice then: / To beg of thee is my more dishonour / Than thou of them' (3.2.123-5); and immediately he gives way, reverting grotesquely to his infant voice, 'Mother, I am going to the market-place: / Chide me no more... Look, I am going' (3.2.131-4).[12]

banishment and revenge

At his trial, Coriolanus is unable to bear himself patiently; as the tribunes put it, 'Being once chaf'd, he cannot / Be rein'd again to temperance' (3.3.27-8). But his spontaneous rage restores him to his independent, uncompromising self: 'Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death, / Vagabond exile, flaying, pent to linger / But with a grain a day, I would not buy / Their mercy at the price of one fair word' (3.3.88-91). The tribunes ultimately commute his sentence to banishment, but his repudiation of Rome is stronger than Rome's of him: 'I banish you!' (3.3.123). Since he has idolised and spent his blood for the city, his exile is a great pain and cruelty; but since Rome has grievously disappointed him, there is also relief in the severance. He has struggled to live in and for a city of lower standards than his own, to his mind a shameless city, and divorce frees and legitimates his otherwise problematic resentments and hatred. But his ignominious ordeal in Rome is not over yet, for he exits trailed by mocking plebeians. At Rome gates, about to be bereft of his entire world, he makes a superb gesture of self-assertion: 'I go alone, / Like to a lonely dragon that his fen / Makes fear'd and talk'd of more than seen' (4.1.29-31).[13] And leaving the city he regards as mutable and false, he insists again on his own constancy: 'While I remain above the ground you shall / Hear from me still, and never of me aught / But what is like me formerly' (4.1.51-3). In banishing Coriolanus, Rome has banished its noblest spirit and its sense of shame: '*He* has remained constant, but his commonwealth has turned traitor to itself'.[14]

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[12] Also noted by Emmett Wilson, Jr., 'Coriolanus: The Anxious Bridegroom', in Wheeler (ed.), p. 100.

I have argued already in these pages that disguise in Shakespeare generally betokens shame. When Coriolanus enters Antium in Act Four, scene three '*in mean apparel, disguised and muffled*', we are reminded of Edgar. Edgar defaced and demeaned himself in *King Lear* because his father's love had failed; Coriolanus has been cast away by his country - and, though it is nowhere explicit, we must not underestimate the psychological cost of separation from the mother who made him what he is. It is a sad irony that he now appears in such weeds of humility as he formerly disdained; and his aspect of nameless poverty gives the lie to the brazen confidence and defiance which he showed at the city gates. Cut off from his previous life, he has lost all the identity and status he once derived from it; and on giving his name up to Tullus, he bitterly confesses, 'Only that name / remains' (4.5.74). When he informs his old enemy's servants that he dwells 'Under the canopy', 'I'th'city of kites and crows' (4.5.40, 43), there are several suggestions, but none so strong as that of a corpse on the battlefield; Coriolanus reminds us at this point of the Othello whose occupation's gone and whose life is therefore over. It is pitifully degrading that he forces his way into Aufidius's household like a beggar or a drunk, beating away the servants who attempt to turf him out. He lets Aufidius ask him his name four times after he has unmuffled himself in the hope that his rival will recognise him and thus give him back his sense of self.[15] When he finally declares 'My name is Caius Martius, who hath done / To thee particularly, and to all the Volsces, / Great hurt and mischief' (4.5.66-8), Rossiter asks, 'what is it but the equivalent of a dying speech, a summary of expiring greatness?'[16] Offering to serve Aufidius against Rome, Coriolanus tells him, 'I will fight, / Against my canker'd country with the spleen / Of all the under fiends' (4.5.91-3); but he offers an alternative: 'if so be / Thou dar'st not this, and that to prove more fortunes / Th'art tir'd, then, in a word, I also am / Longer to live most weary, and present / My throat to thee and to thy ancient malice' (4.5.93-7). He has reached the point of shame and suffering where either vengeance or death are his only possibilities.

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[13] See Traversi, p. 259.

[14] Patricia K. Mexaros, '"There is a world elsewhere": Tragedy and History in *Coriolanus*', in Wheeler (ed.), p. 151.

Aufidius's fervent response - 'O Martius, Martius! / Each word thou hast spoke hath weeded from my heart / A root of ancient envy... Let me twine / Mine arms about that body...' (4.5.102-8) - rescues Coriolanus from shame, being proof that he is both himself and of value independently of Rome. He breathes in gratitude, 'You bless me gods!' (4.5.136). In the next reference to him - Cominius's (4.6.91) - he is no more a beggar but a god himself. He leads a Volscian army against Rome with Aufidius; but since he outshines his new patron in this action, winning from him the devotion of his troops, Aufidius's envy is rekindled and he begins secretly to look for his opportunity to kill Coriolanus. Coriolanus's personal motivation in attacking Rome is publicly to reaffirm himself by triumphing over the society which has spurned and obliterated him. As Cominius reports after his peace-keeping mission has failed: '"Coriolanus" / He would not answer to; forbad all names: / He was a kind of nothing, titleless, / Till he had forg'd himself a name o'th'fire / Of burning Rome' (5.1.11-15). But the assault on his native city is about more than personal revenge; it expresses all of his frustrated idealism. Cominius says, 'He is their god' (4.6.91); and the pervasive imagery of Rome burning, first noted by Bradley,[17] suggests divine judgement. Menenius says, 'If he were putting to my house the brand / That should consume it, I have not the face / To say, "Beseech you, cease"' (4.6.116-18); 'If he could burn us all into one coal, / We have deserv'd it' (4.6.138-9). We are left with the ominous, picture of him sitting 'in gold, his eye / Red as 'twould burn Rome; and his injury / The gaoler to his pity' (5.1.63-5).

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[15] See also James L. Calderwood, '*Coriolanus*: Wordless Meanings and Meaningless Words', in Wheeler (ed.), p. 87.
[16] p. 252.

Coriolanus's shameful death

Yet Coriolanus is not divine; and, in the best scene in the play, he gives way to family feeling. He has rejected Cominius and Menenius; but when more familiar voices assail his ears, he realises that he has underestimated the strength of the old ties and of his human nature. He comments involuntarily on the entrance of his wife, mother, and son because he is straining to overmaster it; his blood is rebelling against decision: it is the return of the repressed.[18] Virgilia's 'curtsy' and 'dove's eyes' (5.3.27) are the kind of arguments against vengeance that he has foolishly discounted. J. L. Simmons notes that the response, 'I melt, and am not / Of stronger earth than others', echoes 'Here I am Antony; / Yet cannot hold this visible shape':[19] Coriolanus feels his best self, the ideal pattern of himself, his heroism shamefully dissolving. The sight of the mother from whom he has been separated brings home to him all at once the process and meaning of his birth from inside her - and also what the birth of her grandson, his and his wife Virgilia's son, whom Volumnia is leading forward by the hand means. His mother's bow to him, 'As if Olympus to a molehill should / In supplication nod' (5.3.30-1), painfully reawakens his most intimate sense of propriety and precedence; now the speechless voice of 'great nature' (5.3.33) resounds within him. Yet he is committed to his superhuman purpose of burning Rome, to fail would be a killing shame. His idealism is what gives his history, his sufferings, sense and value. But, against the swelling tide of his affections, his resolve is not strong. 'Like a dull actor now', he says, 'I have forgot my part and I am out, / Even to a full disgrace' (5.3.40-2): an admission of the artifice of heroism (if also of theatre). In spite of his obsession with 'mine own truth', he has been ignorant of his basic self. Although the play is continually presenting us with his submission and subservience to his ambiguous mother, this has not impinged upon - he has not allowed it to impinge upon - his sense of himself as purely self-sufficient. He has now found his reality; and in obedience to it, he kisses his wife, kneels to his mother. Pressing this advantage, Volumnia bids him rise, and she kneels to him in supplication. With all the force of his renewed love and reverence for her, he explodes:

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[17] p. 64.

[18] Danson, p. 134.

> What's this?
> Your knees to me? to your corrected son?
> Then let the pebbles on the hungry beach
> Fillip the stars. Then let the mutinous winds

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[19] J. L. Simmons, '*Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare's Heroic Tragedies: A Jacobean Adjustment', in Wheeler (ed.), p. 118.

> Strike the proud cedars 'gainst the fiery sun,
> Murd'ring impossibility, to make
> What cannot be, slight work! (5.3.56-62)

This outrage honours the natural law and order he would flout if he sacked Rome. In an appeal both to his patriotic feelings and his idealism, Volumnia now turns his attentions to Valeria; and he beautifully hails her as 'The noble sister of Publicola, / The moon of Rome, chaste as the icicle / That's curdied by the frost from purest snow / And hangs on Dian's temple!' (5.364-7). The offended demi-god is expiring before our eyes, the natural man with particular loyalties and affections irresistibly reviving. When his mother directs his eye to his son, he utters his great prayer to Mars for the boy.[20] His language is so passionate now, his heart so full, that his revenge looks precarious indeed. Conceding this frailty, he begs:

> Do not bid me
> Dismiss my soldiers, or capitulate
> Again with Rome's mechanics. Tell me not
> Wherein I seem unnatural. Desire not
> T'allay my rages and revenges with
> Your colder reasons. (5.3.81-6)

But Volumnia launches into a long speech. She insists on the shame of making his mother, wife, and child watch him 'tearing / His country's bowels out' (5.3.102-3). When she persuaded him to beg the people's 'voices', she found he was most sensitive to her dishonour; and now she breaks off pointedly, 'here he lets me prate like one i'th'stocks' (5.3.159-60). She urges the whole domestic embassy to 'shame him with our knees' (5.3.169); they go down and his little boy 'holds up hands for fellowship' (5.3.175). Volumnia concludes, 'Come, let us go: / This fellow had a Volscian to his mother; / His wife is in Corioles, and his child / Like him by chance'

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[20] Traversi shrewdly recognises 'a hero who is seeking, albeit obscurely, through his son some measure of compensation for his own ignominy' (p. 275) whether the ignominy of burning Rome or the ignominy of his failing purpose.

(5.3.177-80), impressing on him most forcefully the loss of natural identity which his proposed attack entails.

Volumnia succeeds. Coriolanus relinquishes his purpose to burn Rome. Yet the fact that the city has disappointed and betrayed him, his proclaimed fidelity to his truth, and the tradition of his subjection to his mother make this shameful to him. According to one of Shakespeare's most eloquent stage-directions, he '*Holds her by the hand silent*'; eventually he moans, 'O mother, mother! / What have you done?' (5.3.182-3). He sees the heavens open, and the gods look down at 'this unnatural scene' (5.3.184), which is that of his family begging him for mercy, but also the aberration of himself, the minister of ideal justice, giving way like a boy. He goes on: 'O my mother, mother! O! / You have won a happy victory to Rome; / But for your son, believe it, O, believe it, / Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd, / If not most mortal to him' (5.3.185-9); he is seeing death not so much because his mother's victory makes him traitor both to Rome and to the Volscians, and thus endangers his physical safety, as because it jeopardises his ideal conception of himself to the point of extinction. Just as Volumnia forced him to attempt the consulship at the cost of dishonouring himself, so she has forced him to spare Rome; and this time the implications are unavoidable: the aspiring god is in fact a child. The contradiction between the hero and the hen-pecked son has been apparent from the first: now it is unbearably clear to Coriolanus himself. He turns for reassurance to Aufidius, his anxiety pitifully apparent in his urgent repetition of that other soldier's name: 'Aufidius, though I cannot make true wars, / I'll frame convenient peace. Now, good Aufidius, / Were you in my stead, would you have heard /A mother less? or granted less, Aufidius?' (5.3.190-3).

The positive aspect of this is that he has learnt that the fantasy of himself as self-sufficient is unsustainable, but it is otherwise fruitless. But had the shame which stops him from burning Rome caused him to reassess his values, it would have enabled him to liberate himself from the shame of failing to fulfil that unnatural purpose; but because it does not, that failure remains. And he is not really to blame. Adopting a Christian perspective would turn his failure into a victory and offer him new life; but there is no Christian perspective available to him. There is only the ideal of heroic selfhood which he has failed, and which leaves him open to the taunts of Aufidius in the final scene. He is a pathetically redundant demi-god, not a regenerate man. That he is unable to embrace the humility and moral responsibility which his crisis brings so near, and which, for instance, Lear does embrace, is inexpressibly sad; he cannot comprehend, cannot conceptualise the lessons of shame: he is simply floored by it. When he justifies himself to the Volscians, Aufidius interrupts and calls him 'traitor' (5.6.85). He then gives the following shameful account of Coriolanus's failure of nerve:

> You lords and heads o'th'state, perfidiously
> He has betray'd your business, and given up,
> For certain drops of salt, your city Rome,
> I say 'your city', to his wife and mother;
> Breaking his oath and resolution, like
> A twist of rotten silk, never admitting
> Counsel o'th'war: but at his nurse's tears
> He whin'd and roar'd away your victory,
> That pages blush'd at him, and men of heart
> Look'd wond'ringly each at others. (5.6.91-100)

This glaring presentation of Coriolanus as a great baby takes place in the Volscian market-place; it is a hideous exposure. The protagonist thunders, 'Hear'st thou, Mars?' (5.6.100); to which Aufidius responds with his most searing insult: 'Name not the god, thou boy of tears!' (5.6.100-1). Part of the painfulness of this is that by his own lights Coriolanus must in some measure accept the charge, as he does when he invites his death: 'Cut me to pieces, Volsces, men and lads, / Stain all your edges on me' (5.6.111-12). We have seen that throughout he has insisted on his heroic wholeness, and it is powerfully evocative of his passionate shame that now, in his state of fragmentation, he wishes to be physically dismembered. But this passive shame is mixed with vestigial self-assertion: 'Boy! false hound! / If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there, / That like an eagle in a dove-cote, I / Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioles. / Alone I did it. Boy!' (5.6.112-16). They kill him; and Aufidius stands on his corpse: one of the most revolting moments in all Shakespeare's plays outside *Titus Andronicus*. It is a last insult to Coriolanus, but more shameful for Aufidius himself, whose shame and envy has led him to this empty triumph. As an attendant lord puts it, 'Thou hast done a deed whereat valour will weep' (5.6.132-3). Another says quietly, 'Tread not upon him' (5.6.133). Aufidius announces, 'My rage is gone' (5.6.146), and orders the death march; the stage direction reads, '*Exeunt, bearing the body of Martius*'.

It is the most depressing death in Shakespearean tragedy, especially as it comes after the partial triumph in the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. The contentment of Bradley,[21] the ecstasies of Wilson Knight over the victory of love are mistaken, and perhaps deliberately evasive:[22] in an entirely different way from *Lear*, *Coriolanus* can be too hard to take. The note at the end of *Coriolanus* is emphatically of failure and death. Reuben A. Brower says of Coriolanus himself, 'there is no moment when, like Achilles, he sees his anger and curses it, nothing to correspond to the scene with Priam, no vision of himself and a higher order within which his action and suffering are placed and made more comprehensible. He knows little of what Chapman calls the soul's "sovereignty in fit reflection', not to mention "subduing his earthly part for heaven"'.[23] Shakespeare has portrayed a benighted world. Even more than *Othello*, this play, whose hero is ultimately disgraced when he refrains from butchering his friends and family, is a revelation of the coarseness and restriction of a sense of shame based solely on masculine, soldierly values, on autonomy and power.

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[21] He says, '*Coriolanus* is as much a drama of reconciliation as a tragedy' (p. 66).

[22] *The Imperial Theme*, p. 196 ff.

[23] 'The Deeds of Coriolanus', in Brockman (ed.), p. 214.

Virgilia

Again, in this Roman tragedy, as with Octavia in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Christian shame which must be excluded is quietly foreshadowed in the person of Virgilia and operates as an implicit critique of the pre-Christian world. Virgilia is the 'gracious silence' (2.1.174) in a clamorous, violent play, so modest and self-effacing as to be scarcely noticeable. We should take good note of the adjective, for it associates her with grace. Not a cruel or brutal word passes her lips, still less does she do anything vicious. Her tenderness is signalled by her horror of blood and acknowledged when Valeria wishes her to put down her needlework, 'Come, I would your cambric were as sensible as your finger, that you might leave pricking it for pity' (1.3.84-6). She is to be distinguished from the other, more Roman women - from Valeria who admires masculine cruelty, from the formidable Volumnia. Her hero husband fails in his quest to be 'to shame unvulnerable' but she meekly achieves a spotless chastity of spirit. His sense of shame, based on power and personal autonomy, when pushed to the limit makes life impossible for human beings; we are not omnipotent, nor self-sufficient. Her sense of shame, based on humility and gentleness, though it is more spiritual than his, is compatible with living in the world. Hers is the secret victory of the play.

10

Conclusion

The first three chapters of this thesis uncovered a significant theme of shame prevalent throughout early Western literature. The last six have elucidated that hitherto critically obscure theme in Shakespeare. From a personal point of view, the chief problem in writing has been a threefold *embarras de richesse*. I have offered a first inadequate sketch of the scope of shame in literature: other authors, other texts, might have been chosen, and the investigation could profitably be pursued through the centuries after the Renaissance, as indicated in Chapter One. I have also had to be ruthlessly selective within Shakespeare: shame plays a part in almost all of his works. I have focused on *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus* partly because they seem to me the outstanding examples; partly because of my conviction that tragedy, with its focus on the great man fallen, is the most especially shameful genre. I left out *Macbeth* as more concerned with shamelessness. With less justification, I have had to neglect the romances, which have a strong shame-theme. I wished to preserve the maximum impact, the shock, the hieratic image of the shame and degradation of the Shakespearean hero, which is always felt in the theatre but often ignored by reflective criticism; I could not have achieved this by ending with the consolations of late Shakespeare. My third embarrassment has been the impossible-to-convey richness of shame itself. I have increasingly come to feel that there is a mystery in this business of a person surveying his own self in pain and sadness; one which brings us into contact with greater mysteries of self-consciousness and of human nature. Shakespeare has impressed this upon me and I hope that I have at least begun to show how he has done so.

I have tried to delineate Shakespeare's distinctive vision of shame. Shakespearean shame is the pain of not being one's ideal self, a sensation of spiritual death. The brilliant symbolism of Richard II's smashed looking-glass, and of Antony's comparing himself to a dissolving cloud, presents shame as respectively the shattering and the deliquescence of identity. In Othello's suicidal experience of himself as a 'malignant and a turban'd Turk', 'a circumcised dog', and in Coriolanus's dying outrage at Aufidius's 'thou boy of tears', shame is not only the death of the self, but also the terrible experience of being wholly disfigured and deformed, of recognising oneself as somebody else, and someone hideously inferior.

And yet - this dreadful passion is not, in Shakespeare, an altogether negative experience. The vain Richard, seduced by the myth of his own kingship, must learn that he is a weak man and that in the last analysis he is nothing, as must the agonised Lear. Antony must recognise that the image of his specifically Roman greatness is unsustainable. Othello has to see that he has turned into a monster. Hamlet has to accept that he has sinned and must die. Coriolanus must see he is not invulnerable or autonomous. In each case, shame is an approach to truth, a self-realisation. It is the shattering of the false self, the end of illusion and of the self-deceiving tendency to think well of ourselves, which is an inflection of brute survival instinct, and particularly evident in Antony.

Shakespearean shame is the beginning of a spiritual journey. A protagonist may get no further than this beginning. Coriolanus, in particular, is vouchsafed knowledge that his false self is incoherent and unreal and then promptly killed off. Others disdain the way of truth: by a tremendous effort of reassertion, Antony and Cleopatra salvage for Antony a new identity of shameless naturalism from the wreckage of his old, traditionally heroic self; but the wonderful Antony cannot be said to achieve integrity, for this evades the facts of his failure. Shakespeare's Romans cannot accept shame: to them, disgrace is death. In *Othello* also we see a soldier's resistance to shame taking the form of shameless violence. Shakespeare's Christian heroes, advantaged by a culture of humility and the special agency of grace, do accept shame, and travel towards reformation and self-renewal. Having acknowledged the shame of his mistreatment of Cordelia, Lear wakes up arrayed in fresh garments, and finds himself looking into the loving eyes of his angelic daughter. When, in the graveyard scene, Hamlet accepts the shame of the Fall he is rewarded with an inspiration from providence which - at last - enables him to live in and fulfil the duties of his life in the world. We cannot say that Othello receives grace, but the disgust that in the end he feels for the wicked, murderous creature he has become at least partially restores him to his better, more Christian self.

Shakespeare shows the value of the Christian sense of shame, whereby what is felt to be shameful is what is impious and sinful, rather than what is simply dishonourable and degrading. It is this sense of shame which is so tragically lacking in the protagonists in *Macbeth*, although it reasserts itself in dreams. Shakespeare connects feminine modesty and meekness with Christian shame, and his exemplars of perfect Christian shame are women: Hero, Desdemona, Cordelia. Men like Lear and Othello have to learn the supremacy of Christian shame the hard way, by experience: at first they are more susceptible to the secular shame of hurt pride. Hamlet combines feminine susceptibility with a masculine self-regard and for most of his play feels an excess of spiritual shame. Even though the culture of the shame-filled Roman tragedies is not Christian, Shakespeare includes the modest Octavia and Virgilia, Roman ideals who also indicate tacitly the shamefast Christian meekness otherwise excluded, to remind us as it were of Cordelia. Just as Cordelia is heavenly and Desdemona explicitly Christian, Octavia is holy and Virgilia is associated with grace. In his earlier work, Shakespeare experimented with the attraction of the shameless; but in *Antony and Cleopatra* he restricts that attraction to the non-Christian world. In his mature religious tragedy, though the vitality of shamelessness is still evident, especially in Edmond, he crushes it as repellent and obscene. In *King Lear*, not only is Lear prepared for death by his spiritual experience of shame, there is also a strong suggestion in Kent and Cordelia, in Edgar and Cornwall's servant and the Fool, of the radical Christian position that worldly disgrace and shame incurred in the service of goodness is the special privilege of the blessed.

In historical terms, Shakespeare's endorsement of shame is medieval; it is Marlowe, the champion of shamelessness, who looks forward to the myths and fantasies of modern culture. Perhaps shame is in essence a religious feeling, doomed to appear to the secular imagination as fundamentally a pain, an inconvenience, a disease, a disability. That is, on the whole, how it seems to Marlowe and the protagonists of the Roman plays, and why Coriolanus wishes that his little son will grow up to be 'to shame unvulnerable'. It is also how it strikes most contemporary psychotherapists. If the self and self-satisfaction are the ultimate realities and there is no higher good, loss and repudiation of the self is in itself evil. Shame is, in this perspective, worse than guilt, which weighs down the self but does not threaten to destroy it. But for Shakespeare outright shame, perhaps even more than a Christian sense of shame, is a way of fulfilling our metaphysical destiny. The anxious hero of *Othello* becomes himself most fully in an experience of terrible shame and rejection of himself. Lear's ego is painfully but in the ultimate perspective happily destroyed in an explosion of shame. To look down with sincere shame is almost to look down from heaven; and thus Hamlet has a sense of the sorrows of God over the fallen world which includes his own sinful self. France falls in love with Cordelia, she becomes more beautiful to him, when she is disinherited and cast off, when she loses her worldly position, her reputation, a large part of her identity; he sees that this earthly loss is her spiritual gain, and we recognise that humbly to accept shame from the world is to resemble Christ. Shakespeare suggests that we covet shamelessness at our souls' peril.

Shakespeare's unique appreciation of shame must ultimately account for its power and importunacy in his work, although we should not forget the inherently dramatic essence of the phenomenon, its power as spectacle. And there is the sheer range and interest of its manifestations to consider: we have seen that shame is one inspiration of the disguise motif; we have seen it rage like a contagion through *Othello*; we have felt the mingled pain and joy of Lear's 'sovereign shame'.

Finally, it may not be out of place to reconsider a neglected biographical suggestion. Shakespeare's immediate predecessors, the so-called 'University Wits', Nashe, Greene, and Marlowe, created a cult of personality; Jonson, who saw his collected works through the press, and whose editorial matter is confidently personal, had a strong sense of himself as man and author. But Shakespeare, famously, is an elusive figure. His intangible personality has been mythologised as an attribute of Olympian genius. In the words of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, the artist is 'like the God of the creation... invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails':[1] Borges conceives of Shakespeare as an existential void, 'a bit of coldness';[2] God tells him after his death, 'Neither am I anyone; I have dreamt the world as you dreamt your work, my Shakespeare, and among the forms in my dream are you, who like myself are many and no one'.[3] But we are not compelled to accept Shakespeare's divinity. A simpler explanation, though many others are possible, would be that his instinct for shame was in part personal. It seems unlikely that the preponderance of shame described in the foregoing chapters represents a merely intellectual or merely historical interest. On the title page of the 1623 First Folio, Jonson urges the reader to disregard the Droeshout engraving of a rather uncomfortable-looking man which appears above his text: Jonson knew Shakespeare and it may be that this is informed by a feeling that the dramatist from Stratford, who did not himself seek such glorious publication for his plays, and had now entered the darkness of death, would not, like his Coriolanus in the market-place, want to be gazed at by strangers. But this is surmise only. In Chapter Three, I noted the abashed references to acting and to writing in *The Sonnets* - and the general sense of debasement and prostration in those poems in the first person encourages the impression that Shakespeare was particularly sensitive to shame. I also mentioned that Shakespeare's son-in-law, Thomas Quiney, was convicted by the ecclesiastical courts for fathering an illegitimate child before his marriage to Shakespeare's second daughter, Judith. It is now time to rehearse one effect of this on the playwright in more detail. Quiney was sentenced to perform penance in a white sheet, but he gave five shillings to the poor by way of commutation. Shakespeare was ill: as it turned out, these were the last weeks of his life. The day before Quiney's trial, he changed his will, making special provision for Judith. The signatures he appended to the document are noticeably shaky. The historian E. R. C. Brinkworth concludes in *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford*:

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[1] *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1993), p. 187.

[2] *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 284.

[3] p. 285.

> It seems highly likely that the deep shame of the Quiney scandal and finally the shock of Quiney's being called to appear before the court had far more to do with Shakespeare's death than the traditional cause put forward for it - a fever brought on by a drinking bout, the story of which was first jotted down in the diary of a Stratford vicar two generations later.[4]

In the context of the present study this is extremely suggestive . We have seen that Hero is thought to have died of shame, and that Enobarbus actually perishes thus; the same could be said of Lady Macbeth. Hero suffers from deadly susceptibility to

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[44] p. 81.

sexual slander; her father is similarly afflicted, as is Desdemona's. Curiously enough, it seems that Shakespeare may have more than once anticipated some of the circumstances and the psychological dimension of his own last illness and death.

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(This includes books and articles referred to in the text and a few others which I have found useful.)

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