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Shame, Darwin, and Other Victorian Writers

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SHAME, DARWIN, AND OTHER VICTORIAN WRITERS

by

AARON KHAI HAN HO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Aaron K. H. Ho

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Shame, Darwin, and Other Victorian Writers

by

Aaron K. H. Ho

Advisor: Talia Schaffer

The dissertation explores shame and how shame shapes identities in the nineteenth century. While many scholars examine Darwin in terms of narrativity, how he attempts to counter the theological language in Victorian evolutionary discourses, and the influences he has on his contemporary writers, I argue that his writing on shame, which is part of his long argument on evolution, secularizes the concept of shame, opposing the notions of many Victorians that shame is God-given. Both God-given shame and secular shame are rooted in sexuality, as this dissertation will show, and thus shame, sexuality, and identity are interconnected. Using Darwin as a springboard, I examine other aspects of shame such as nationalist shame, bodily shame, shame in an industrialized city, shame of minorities, and sexual shame via the books of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Elizabeth Gaskell, John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis. They were prolific in the beginning, middle, and end of the century respectively, giving account of how shame evolved through the long Victorian period and how Darwin’s concept of secular shame influenced their narratives. The writers, including Darwin, express their identities in relation to shame differently through their different writing styles, and those who embraced shame even as they were hiding it, produced what we would now call queer writing.
To Melissa and William, with love.
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Introduction: The Origin of Shame, Identity, and Darwin

In Plato’s *Protagoras*, the eponymous narrator relates a myth about the origin of shame during the creation of human beings. Epimetheus, the twin of Prometheus, was given the responsibility to distribute traits to newly created animals. When it came to humans, he, lacking in foresight (his name means “afterthought”), had nothing left to give. Prometheus presented humanity the gifts of civilizing arts and fire, stolen from Zeus. However, these gifts only enabled humans to stay alive, without the wisdom of staying together; political knowledge (*politiκē technē*) was kept with Zeus. Humans lived in isolation and could make fire, but they could not band together to protect themselves from wild beasts. Although humans did try to live as a community, they would eventually disperse and be destroyed, lacking in *politiκē technē*. Afraid that the entire of humanity would be annihilated, Zeus sent Hermes to bestow justice and shame on all humans so that there would be order and bonds of friendship to create cities. Justice metes out fair punishments to offenders while shame prevents people from committing crimes. Against conventional thinking that shame is negative, the parable informs us that shame has its uses to keep a society functioning, and maintain bonds of relationships. Putting it in another way, studying the shame of a society illustrates the machinery behind it.

Victorian society is one that involved much shame. “For shame!” is a familiar refrain that runs through the gamut of different genres in Victorian literature from *Bleak House* to *Vanity Fair* to *Jane Eyre* to *Mary Barton* to *Wuthering Heights*. Shame itself is a recurring and significant theme in many major nineteenth-century novels, often in the guise of secrets: Pip’s benefactor is revealed to be a fugitive from the law he has helped when he was a boy; Maggie Tulliver lives as a pariah after her disgraceful near-elopement; Lady Audley’s shameful bigamous secret is uncovered at great cost. Following Eve Sedgwick’s exposition of Silvan Tomkins on shame, critics such as Joseph Adamson, Katherine Hallemeier, and Andrew Miller have applied a reading of shame to George Eliot, Anne Bronte, Charles Dickens respectively.
Ashly Bennett’s article, “Shameful Signification: Narrative and Feeling in Jane Eyre,” is particularly interesting because she is developing a new way of reading Victorian novels as performative scenes of shame and readers as spectators.

In this dissertation, however, I am invested in shame at a specific cultural and historical moment. In 1859, Charles Darwin published The Origin of Species which, if it did not change the minds of Victorians regarding the creation of humans, affected the path of Victorian literature, as Gillian Beer and George Levine have argued convincingly. Much of the discussion on Darwin is centered on his influence on the narratology of Victorian literature, but not on the emotive change in Victorian characters. Many people saw The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals, published in 1872, as a continuation of Darwin’s argument for evolution in Origin and The Descent of Man which was published only a year earlier. But in Emotions, while Darwin points out many similarities between humans and animals, a major phenomenal difference, one of which Darwin devotes the penultimate chapter, is that humans can blush and blushing is a sign of shame. While Beer and Levine explore how Darwin influenced the narrativity of Victorian novels, I propose to view the influence of Darwin in terms of shame.

The Origin of Shame

There are two contradictory theories on the origin of shame, one religious and one psychological, and both are helpful in the analysis of shame in the nineteenth century. In St. Augustine’s The City of God, he argues that the origin of shame coincides with the fall of man:

   It is right, therefore, to be ashamed of this lust, and it is right that the members which it moves or fails to move by its own right, so to speak, and not in complete conformity to our decision, should be called pudenda (“parts of shame”), which they were not called before man’s sin; for, as Scripture tells us, “they were naked,
and yet they felt no embarrassment.” This was not because they had not yet noticed their nakedness, but because nakedness was not yet disgraceful, because lust did not yet arouse those members independently of their decision. The flesh did not yet, in a fashion, give proof of man’s disobedience by a disobedience of its own… their obedience was chastized by a corresponding punishment, there appeared in the movements of their body a certain indecent novelty, which made nakedness shameful. It made them self-conscious and ashamed. (130-2)

Although, as Robert Metcalf rightly concludes, St Augustine’s inductive reasoning to substantiate his hobbyhorse of the conflict between the will and the insubordinate body is merely a “wish-fulfilment” that harkens to his wish to return to a prelapsarian world and may hold no water,¹ it is worth examining St Augustine’s notion of shame in relation to a Victorian society that was largely religious. For St Augustine, shame is the punishment of the bodily transgression and a reminder of the original sin. Thus the shame in Victorian novels is often sexual in nature. Jane Austen’s heroines are often shamed before finally choosing the right husband. Pip’s downfall is his desire to be compatible for Estella who is brought up to be cruel and heartless by the jilted Miss Havisham. Some novels, such as Wilkie Collins’s Woman in White and many Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s works, involve the kidnapping of a young woman who is forced to marry the villain. Victorian novels that revolve around shame are often informed by the theology of St Augustine.

St Augustine also suggests that the tumescent or flaccid genitals are beyond one’s control, signifying that shame in humanity’s fallen nature is involuntary; delinquent behavior does not lead to shame—one can commit a crime without being ashamed—but shame is innate, always present as an appendage aroused at random, making us vulnerable. This aspect of shame

¹ Among myriad interpretations of the Biblical scene, Augustine picked the one that suits his narrative. For other interpretations, see Pagel.
can be applied to a range of behaviors in Victorian novels from maidens blushing suddenly in front of their suitors to hiding a painting in the attic while shamelessly committing (often sexual) atrocities.

St Augustine’s understanding of shame can only take us so far and does not aid in understanding the raison d'être behind the writing of the novels. What drives the shame in Victorian characters? Robert Metcalf in “Unrequited Narcissism” argues via Freud that shame originates as a form of self-preservation to mitigate humans’ experience of trauma. To avoid losing the love of the parents when one outgrows the primary narcissism of early childhood, one strives to the ego-ideal which is approximately “the common ideal of a family, class or nation” (Freud 562). When the fear of a castrating father during the Oedipal stage is introjected into the child and the superego is formed, it (or the conscience) keeps the ego-ideal in check, and hence the initial anxiety of losing the love of parents is transmuted into an anxiety of the conscience. Although as one grows older, the ego strengthens, and one loses the “old determinants of anxiety… as the situations of danger corresponding to them have lost their importance…[,] anxiety with respect to the superego should normally never cease, since, as the anxiety of conscience, it is indispensable in social relations, and only in the rarest cases can someone become independent of human society” (Freud 779). The myth of Protagoras—that shame is necessary for bonds between people—seems to be incorporated into Freud’s explanation as the ego adopts shame to protect itself against anxiety. While it is easy to see how a Freudian reading of shame fits into many Victorian novels—Charles Dickens, for one, creates humor from his characters’ social faux pas, and readers laugh at their shame of not knowing social etiquette—and while shame is a universal affect, it is important not to assume shame affects people similarly across time and space.
**Shameful Sexuality**

While St Augustine argues that shame comes with the will, and Freud contends that shame comes before the will, what is common between the two thinkers is that both readings involve sexuality. Is shame necessarily always sexual? Sally Munt claims that shame “in the nineteenth century, became a code word for homosexuality and queerness” (86). Michael Warner argues, “Shame is an experience of exposure, in which I become suddenly an object through the eyes of another; it thus resonates powerfully in situations of erotic objectification, visuality, and display” (290). Consider John Locke’s use of shame for children, for example: “If by these means you can come once to shame [children] out of their faults (for besides that, I would willingly have no punishment) and make them in love with the pleasure of being well thought on, you may turn them as you please, and they will be in love with all the ways of virtue” (58). Shame to Locke is associated with “pleasure” and “love,” which is mentioned twice in a sentence. It seems that shame, to many theorists, involves sexuality.

The shaming of a child is Locke’s ambiguous way of mentioning corporeal punishment and it is worth looking at two scenes in popular Victorian novels that link shame and corporeality. Tom Brown receives many floggings in school but one particular flogging stands out because it is one of the few long and humorous descriptions of his scrape before a flogging. He borrows a fishing rod from his good friend, East, and trespasses on an estate. When he is hiding in a tree from the underkeeper, he shifts the rod to “get the rod hidden” but unfortunately the underkeeper catches “sight of the rod” (203, 205). Still he is “working away at the rod, which he takes to pieces” and remains in the tree “with lifted rod” (205). As he is afraid that the underkeeper may climb the tree, he “shorten[s] the rod in his hand…preparing for battle” (205). When eventually the underkeeper brings Tom to the headmaster, the underkeeper wants to confiscate the rod but Tom pleads for it. The phallic symbol of hiding, working, lifting, and shortening of a rod links the flogging incident to sexuality. Another flogging incident: In *David* [...
Copperfield, Mr Murdstone, young David’s step-father, applies the cane when David stumbles on his lesson:

“David,” [Murdstone] said, making his lips thin, by pressing them together, “if I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do?”

“I don’t know.”

“I beat him.”

I had answered in a kind of breathless whisper, but I felt, in my silence, that my breath was shorter now.

“I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, ‘I’ll conquer that fellow’” (57)

To mention these two scenes is not to trivialize the trauma of corporeal punishment the characters undergo, but rather the scenes exemplify how in the Victorian literary imagination shame is required to ward off the anxiety of trauma (Freud’s point) and shame is sexualized and embodied. Throughout this dissertation using varied examples such as the innocuous Cranford reputed to be charming and inoffensive to Victorians and the nationalist novels of Bulwer-Lytton’s, I argue that shame is closely related with sexuality and in particular a queer sexuality, in which queer is defined as “‘the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (Sedgwick, Tendencies 8).

Shame and Identity

The following three illustrations, though separated by time and space, bolster the theoretical arguments underlying this dissertation. The first is an eighteen-century treatise on sympathy; the second, a late twentieth-century confession regarding the streets of California; and the last,
an early twentieth-first-century thought experiment. Together, the three passages present a repeated narrative about shame and identity.²

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Through our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our sense will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations… By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him. (Smith 11-12)

Several times a week I must negotiate my way past the crowds of homeless people on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. Every time I do so, I am overcome with irrational panic… Then, one day, I realized that I always studiously avoided looking at the homeless people, whom, with ruthless arbitrariness, I either help or don’t help. And I began to understand that my panic on these occasions is not just economic but specular. What I feel myself being asked to do, and what I resist with every fiber of my being, is to locate myself within bodies which would, quite simply, be ruinous of my middle-class self—within bodies that are calloused from sleeping on the pavement, chapped from their exposure to sun and rain, and grimy from weeks without access to a shower, and which can consequently make no claim to what, within our culture, passes for “ideality.” (Silverman 26)

² It should be noted that Ashly Bennett uses the same Smith and Sedgwick examples in her article although I have presented the examples in my drafts prior to reading Bennett’s article. Smith’s and Sedgwick’s anecdotes are commonly cited. Furthermore, while her point is to associate shame with spectatorship and performativity, mine is about shame and identity.
I used to ask listeners to join in a thought experiment, visualizing an unwashed, half-insane man who would wander into the lecture hall mumbling loudly, his speech increasingly accusatory and disjointed, and publicly urinate in front of the room, then wander out again. I pictured the excruciation of everyone else in the room: each looking down, wishing to be anywhere else yet conscious of the inexorable fate of being exactly there, inside the individual skin of which each was burningly aware; at the same time, though, unable to staunch the haemorrhage of painful identification with the misbehaving man. (Sedgwick, Touching 37)

The three passages from Adam Smith’s The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Kaja Silverman’s The Threshold of the Visible World, and Eve Sedgwick’s Touching Feeling are similar in that they link shame and identification. They show communication between an abject person and a subject, and shame, as a way of transmission, instils in the subject an image of the abject, introjecting the abject into the self, essentially changing the identity of the self. Smith’s account of shame differs from Silverman’s and Sedgwick’s in that the homeless in California and the half-insane man may not feel shame, although witnesses to the scene feel shame. In Smith’s exposition, the audience’s shame corresponds to the shame of the man on the rack, presuming that the felon feels ashamed. The spectators identify “with his shame, not with his sorrow. Those who pity him, blush and hang down their heads for him. He droops in the same manner, and feels himself irrecoverably degraded by the punishment, though not by the crime” (Smith 71). The Victorian reader, when faced with scenes of shame in novels, are forced into the position of introspection; the reader is taught what is shameful, and their identities are transformed by what they read.

Be it blushing or caning, not unlike the Victorian experience of Augustine’s somatic shame, all three passages above deal with the corporeality of shame; subjects are invited to inhabit in their imagination the suffering bodies, dirty bodies, homeless bodies of the object.
As a result, it is also a contemplation of the self; as Adam Smith put it, “As [subjects] are constantly considering what they themselves would feel, if they actually were the sufferers, so he is constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation” (22). The subject has taken the place of the object viewing the subject. Shame breaks down and blurs lines across identities and it is this disintegration caused by shame, creating a change, that I discuss in this book.

While Smith’s subject may feel sympathy for the abject, Silverman’s and Sedgwick’s illustrations cause panic and anxiety in the subject’s identity. Silverman is overcome with an “irrational panic” when she imagines taking the place of the homeless; Sedgwick’s audience’s skin “was burningly aware… unable to staunch the hemorrhage of painful identification with the misbehaving man.” The sight of the object is imagined to encroach on the self and a threat to the subject’s identity as Silverman claims she cannot be herself were she to occupy the abject’s position³ (26). Diana Fuss would have said that the violent identification would cause “killing off the other in fantasy in order to usurp the other’s place, the place where the subject desires to be” (9); however, shame protects the self from the anxiety of trauma, as Freud has argued previously, and shame destroys boundaries between the self and other; there can be no “killing off the other” without destabilizing the subject.

It should be pointed out that the three accounts come from a position of power; a position of power of the innocent, the “middle-class self,” and the educated respectively. In Rhetoric, Aristotle encapsulates this aspect of shame when he writes that individuals feel shame because they are above the other in station (1385a). However, we know from Freud and Victorian novels that shame can emanate from any object. Shame is, for Freud, a way of losing the love of one’s parents who is in a position of power; by having shame, children can anticipate

³ The object should not be confused with the abject. However, in the three examples, the object also occupies the place of the abject.
parents’ judgment of them and avoid parents’ dislikes. Victorian novels also demonstrate that
the object can come from a powerless position. Readers of *Great Expectations*, regardless if
one is an aristocrat or a worker, can surely be ashamed of and with Pip’s dissolute squandering
of his fortune. A blushing Victorian maiden, as Richard Kaye demonstrates, holds the power
even as she is ashamed for her sexuality. Therefore, this dissertation will not pursue this
pointless line of dichotomous thinking; instead I seek to break down barriers, showing a
continuum and an intersection in identities.

Shame is so powerful in breaking down identities that all three accounts show that there
is no difference if you gaze at the disgraced spectacle or not. Smith’s audience “hang down
their heads for him”; Silverman “studiously avoided looking at the homeless people”; and
Sedgwick’s listeners are “each looking down.” Yet the interrupted visual contact makes no
difference to the imagination of the subject where they feel shame. Laura Mulvey’s influential
essay argues that the gaze interpellates the observed as the object because it occupies a passive
and feminine position. But here, in shame, since there is no prolonged gaze past the initial
cursory glance, boundaries between the subject and object are dissolved. Even if one feels
shame for the other, the other may not be ashamed for themselves. Unlike other emotions like
pity or anger, shame does not produce subject and object.

Regarding the blurring of subject and object, Sedgwick writes about “the double
movement shame makes: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality”
(*Touching* 37). Shame is individualizing because each person feels shame differently; although
shame is embodied, the introjection of the abject figure in the imagination differs and the shame
may reflect on the subject more than the objective situation. Shame is relational not only
because the subject requires an object but also because, as Smith’s and Sedgwick’s accounts

4 For the purpose of clarity and lack of lexicon, I shall use “subject” and “object” although in
shame such distinctions are unclear.
illustrate, spectators share the same experience of shame, which bonds the group together. This aspect of shame, both individualizing and bonding, raises questions about the framework and interdependence of identities in the Victorian society; and the circulation of shame within Victorian literature may provide the answer.

**Darwin, Shame, and Identity**

It would be helpful to understand Darwin’s work on emotions, which influenced the Victorians, by using what we have discussed thus far, that shame intersects with sexuality, corporeality, and identity. While Darwin might not have anticipated Silvan Tomkins’s work on shame, Darwin and Tomkins appear to coincide on many points, and so, using Tomkins as a theoretical framework would give us a deeper understanding of Darwin’s work. Although there were theories of evolution before *Origin*, no one had caused an impact as monumental as Darwin. And with the paradigm shift from the divine creation of humans to evolution of people from animals, the Victorians’ identities were called into question. While Darwin did not directly tackle the question of identity, he compared the differences between animals and humans in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, and the only difference is humans’ ability to blush: “Under a keen sense of shame there is a strong desire for concealment. We turn away the whole body, more especially the face, which we endeavor in some manner to hide. An ashamed person can hardly endure to meet the gaze of those present, so that he almost invariably casts down his eyes or looks askant” (295-6). Darwin’s secular description of shame is uncannily apt for the much celebrated and much plagiarized fresco, Italian Renaissance artist Masaccio’s *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, in which Adam and Eve display shame in their hunched poses, bowed heads, and avoidance of gaze. Eve covers her genitals, associating her shame with sexuality. Ewan Fernie argues convincingly that Christianity is predicated on shame. Nothing could be more shameful, he claims, than to be stripped, dragged through the
crowds, degraded, spat upon, mocked with a crown of thorns and crucified between two thieves. Fernie reads the fall of Adam and Eve as the “passage from innocence to guilty knowledge,” and because they gain the knowledge that they are not one, they become ashamed and self-conscious of their bodies “as things,” and their bodily desires as “gross and foreign” (emphasis original, 32). Hence it can be said that the moment Adam and Eve acquire shame from God, they become separate entities and form their identities.

Fernie’s argument is thus similar to St Augustin’s reading of shame in that it is in the moment of expulsion from Eden, of gaining the knowledge of sexuality and the ability to feel shame, that Adam’s and Eve’s identities are formed. Although Darwin in his scientific study of emotions secularized shame, I shall argue that his work on secular shame similarly forms identities. Darwin is infamous for deconsecrating biblical concepts in oblique ways. In Darwin’s Plots, Gillian Beer suggests that one of the difficulties that Darwin faced when writing his theory is that the language of natural history was still entangled with theological language. Philip Adams in Darwin’s Worms takes Beer’s idea a step further by claiming that Darwin, like an earthworm, which is the subject of his last book, chipped away the influence of the Church. In a letter Darwin wrote to his son who wanted to inveigh against Christianity, he advised, “direct attacks on Christianity… produce little permanent effect” and “good seems only to follow from slow and silent side attacks” (qtd. in Adams 53). Darwin’s sentiments were reiterated in a letter he wrote to E. B. Aveling: “Though I am a strong advocate for free thought on all subjects, yet it appears to me (rightly or wrongly) that direct arguments against Christianity and theism produce hardly any effect on the public; and freedom of thought is best promoted from the advance of science” (Letter 12757). It seems that what Darwin was trying to achieve is to replace a theological language with a scientific and laicized one. Indeed, Adams examines Darwin’s writing on worms and claims that “It is as though the earth is reborn again and again, passing through the bodies of worms. Darwin has replaced a creation myth with a
secular maintenance myth” (58). Similarly, George Levine argues in *Darwin Loves You* that the scientist disenchants the world of its biblical myths only to re-enchant us with narratives of nature. Darwin’s oblique attack is then one that substitutes a religious version for a secular one, or in our case, a religious shame for a secular shame.

*Origin,* “a very long argument,” is but an “extract” as Darwin tells us (459). As readers, we are to read *Origin, The Descent of Men and Emotions* as a trilogy. Darwin avoided talking about humans in *Origin,* which states the law of natural selection, to make ideas of evolution more palatable to the public. In an oblique attack, Darwin thought it was best not to deal with human beings in his first book on evolutionary theory. He explained his strategic and deliberate avoidance in a private letter to Alfred Russel Wallace, “I think I shall avoid the whole subject… so surrounded with prejudices; though I fully admit it is the highest and most interesting problem for the naturalist” (Letter 2192). The purpose of *Origin* is to state natural laws and set the parameters for his very long argument based on the concrete empiricism he had gathered over the years. Between the twelve years of publications of *Origin* and *Descent,* Adrian Desmond and James Moore, biographers of Darwin, write, “Everyone had spoken on the rise or fall of man but [Darwin]” (572); sermons were preached, lectures were read and books such as Karl Vogt’s continental work, *Lectures on Man* (1864), Ernst Haeckel’s *Generelle Morphologie* (1866), Thomas Huxley’s *Man’s Place in Nature* (1863), and the Duke of Argyll’s *Primeval Man* (1869) were published. This abeyance is deliberate on Darwin’s part: to allow the dust to settle before applying the evolutionary theory stated in *Origin* to examples in *Descent* and *Emotions.* What Darwin did not say in his long argument in *Origin,* he continued in *Descent* by including sexual selection. *Emotions* was meant to be a chapter in *Descent* but Darwin’s notes were far too extensive and required a separate book. If the three books form a long argument, then they are Darwin’s meditation on not only what a human is but also how to be human.
In general, the clear structure in each chapter of Darwin’s books is to state the natural laws, provide examples, deal with counterarguments and end with concluding paragraphs. This micro-structure is replicated in the larger structure of the book: the first few chapters usually state the laws, the following chapters apply the laws, and last few chapters look at counterarguments with a concluding chapter. If the books form a long argument and we follow closely Darwin’s structuring of an argument, then it seems that emotions appear to be the counterargument to evolution: why would animals evolve to have emotions? And specifically, why would shame evolve in animals? It could be argued that some emotions aid in survival: altruism, love and sympathy help the continuation of a species, and fear pumps the adrenalin in a fight or flight situation but what use is shame?

If emotions are the counterargument to evolution, then explaining what shame, found in the penultimate chapter of *Emotions*, is would be tantamount to explaining what being human means. For most parts of *Emotions*, Darwin insists that there is no difference between human and animal emotions. Dogs (a favorite subject of Darwin’s), for instance, show signs of happiness, fear and contrition. The only difference between humans and animals, stated in the penultimate chapter of the book, is blushing: “Blushing is the most peculiar and the most human of all expressions… it would require an overwhelming amount of evidence to make us believe that any animal could blush” (286). Blushing for Darwin is an empirical manifestation of what one feels within. He associates blushing with what he calls “self-attention” or calling attention to the self and splits self-attention into three categories, shame, shyness and modesty. But in actual fact, shyness and modesty are forms of shame. Janet Browne echoes my view that blushing is synonymous with shame for Darwin in her authoritative biography of him: “Blushing—and shame generally—was almost always understood as a specifically human quality” (383). Furthermore, Darwin defines shyness as “shamefacedness” and “false shame” in *Emotions* (302). In Notebook M, he notes that shyness is “shame of ridicule” (149). Modesty
is also another form of shame and presented as being ashamed of one’s gauche self: “He who is modest, and blushes easily at acts of [indelicacy], does so because they are breaches of a firmly and wisely established etiquette” (Emotions 307). “Why is modesty, mixed with triumphant feeling so similar to shame;” he ruminated in Notebook N (25). Furthermore, Darwin’s overarching description of blushing is, after all, when “the small vessels of the face become filled with blood, from the emotion of shame” (Emotions 291). As early as 1838, in his Notebook M on “metaphysics on morals and speculations on expression,” he asked himself, “What is the Philosophy of Shame & Blushing?” (Notebook M, 144). By the time Emotions was published more than three decades later, Darwin would have thought through his own question. “Shame,” he wrote, “is accompanied by blushing” (Old & useless notes 55v). When Darwin equates blushing to shame, this is not to say that experiences of shyness, modesty, and shame are the same. Clearly they are not; they differ in intensity, in objects of cathexis and in consequences, which in turn, shape one’s response and identity. But as Tomkins argues, “The failure to grasp the underlying biological identity of the various phenotypes of shame has retarded our understanding of these consequences as well as of the magnitude and nature of the general role of shame in human functioning” (134). To paraphrase Tomkins, the basic affect underlying shyness and modesty is shame and we need to make sense of the simplest building block “in human functioning” first before understanding other composite emotions that shame can educe. Thus, in Darwin’s usual roundabout way, while on the surface he wrote on blushing, the empirical expression is a metonym of the shame it conveys.

Although Darwin is not explicit on what blushing represents, he notes that the blind, the “insane” (Darwin’s word), men, women, blacks, whites, Asians all blush except for children of a very young age. Common sense would prescribe blushing to a development of emotions but Darwin counter-intuitively argues that one must acquire mental facilities for “self-consciousness” before one can blush (Emotions 301). In philosophical and psychological terms,
self-consciousness is the knowledge of one’s own existence and being. During moments of blushing and shame, one is most aware of the self and comes the closest to knowing the self objectively and in these moments, the knowledge of self may influence one’s development of identity. As Tomkins states, “Shame is an experience of the self by the self” (136). Like no other emotions, shame forces us to examine our own selves.

But these formative moments are not solitary. Whichever forms of shame that cause blushing, Darwin concludes that the principle is the same: “a sensitive regard for the opinion” of others, what we might today identify as a Hegelian notion of identity (Emotions 309). To Darwin, identity is formed when someone stands as a witness to recognize, misrecognize, or unrecognize one’s self, and blushing is a physical indicator of shame of bringing the self to being. The self-consciousness that causes blushing requires shame, a distressing feeling, when one is being watched. Quoting Maria and R. L. Edgeworth, Darwin wrote in the chapter on blushing:

> Nothing hurts young people more than to be watched continually about their feelings, to have their countenances scrutinized, and the degrees of their sensibility measured by the surveying eye of the unmerciful spectator. Under the constraint of such examinations they can think of nothing but that they are looked at, and feel nothing but shame or apprehension. (305)

Much has been said of the observer in contemporary theories. For instance, the male gaze puts the spectator in a masculine position (Laura Mulvey) or the spectator watches because s/he knows an open secret, waiting for a scandal to be exposed (D. A. Miller). But what Darwin proposes is to examine from the position of the person who blushes, the one being policed and shamed. Only when one realizes he or she is being watched can s/he blush and have self-consciousness of an identity. In other words, there is nothing inherently negative about shame; shame is communicative, as with other expressions in Darwin’s book on emotions, and when
one is ashamed by another, shame breaks down one’s certainty about one’s self but, at the same time, forms an identity under surveillance.

But this notion of identity built by shame gets complicated in several ways. Firstly, Darwin cites an example: “A physician told me that a young man, a wealthy duke, with whom he had travelled as medical attendant, blushed like a girl, when he paid him his fee; yet this young man probably would not have blushed and been shy, had he been paying a bill to a tradesman” (303). Why did the wealthy duke blush at paying the physician and not a tradesman? Darwin proposes that “we are much more apt to be shy in the presence of acquaintances, whose judgment we in some degree value, than in that of strangers” (303). Darwin suggests that to be shameful, one has to be interested in or at least care for the opinions of the observer. In being ashamed to one who has initiated one’s interest, one is defamiliarized to the self (therefore treating the self as objectively as possible) and to the observer: the physician couldn’t understand why the duke blushed. The observer also becomes defamiliarized and estranged to the shamed: after traveling with the physician, the duke ought to be well acquainted with him yet at this moment of a mundane task, the physician was seen in a new light with new eyes. In this way, identity is complicated and constantly in flux because one behaves and is ashamed in different degrees to different people at different times under different circumstances.

Identity gets more complicated as illustrated in one of Darwin’s examples. A Maori requested a four-year rent from a missionary, Mr. Stack, to buy himself a gig. The Maori “was old, clumsy, poor and ragged, and the idea of his driving himself about in his carriage for display amused Mr. Stack so much that he could not help bursting out into a laugh: and then ‘the man blushed up to the roots of his hair’” (292). Darwin believed the example “is worth giving” when we consider from the point of view of the observed. Since the Maori could not have known the reason of Stack’s laughter—was Stack mocking, snickering or laughing out of plain good old harmless humor?—it was the Maori’s imagined version of Stack that fomented
his shame or to put it more generally, one’s sense of shame is not real because it is one’s own imagination of putting oneself in the shoes of the observer. During moments of shame when one is most “objective” and introspective, one stands in the imagined position of the other and constructs one’s identity.

But more than just isolation in one’s imagination, one’s shame is individualizing and at the same time affecting as Darwin notes, “So strong... is the power of sympathy that a sensitive person, as a lady has assured me, will sometimes blush at a flagrant breach of etiquette by a perfect stranger, though the act may in no way concern her” (306-7). Shame can be experienced vicariously, as Smith, Silverman, and Sedgwick have previously admitted. The shamed is then not the only one experiencing the affect. Put in a position of shame, the observer shares a similar experience with the shamed, looking at the self through the eyes of what she imagines the partner to think of her, becoming aware of the self, getting closest to being objective at looking at one’s own identity and, at this point, the observer is capable of forming a new identity. Not only are the boundaries between the subject and object broken down, their identities form a mise en abyme, each reflecting the other, changing at any one time, infinitely regressing to the point that there is no real identity.

But Darwin also mentions that the observer doesn’t have to be physically present to excite a blush: “one or two of my informants believe that they have blushed from shame at acts in no way relating to others” (308). Since blushing is performative and identity is inherently Hegelian, there must be someone who recalls the blush. And if Darwin believed his informants, then that someone must either be the self or God. Dr Burgess, as Darwin quoted him dismissively, suggests that perhaps God created blushing in “order that the soul might have sovereign power of displaying in the cheeks the various internal emotions of the moral feeling” (309). Of course, to Darwin, it was bosh and he could hardly be stirred to argue against the statement. “The belief that blushing was specially designed by the Creator is opposed to the
general theory of evolution, which is now so largely accepted,” is the one-liner that rejects Dr Burgess’s assertion. Just a few pages before explaining how blushing evolves, Darwin illustrates that “A man may be convinced that God witnesses all his actions, and he may feel deeply conscious of some fault and pray for forgiveness; but this will not, as a lady who is a great blusher believes, ever excite a blush” (305-6). In Darwin’s usual careful phrasing, there is no mention of shame in relation to religion: he prays because he is “deeply conscious” of his fault but not because he is shamed. Since blushing is not a God-given mark, being shameful is not being ashamed at sinning in the scriptural sense. This is not to say that one doesn’t feel shame in religion, but Darwin was careful to associate shame with secularity and not Christianity. In Darwin’s universe, shame is exaugurated and has become merely a fluid emotion without any moral judgment. Since it cannot be God in the absence of an observer when one blushes, it is the unconscious self that causes the shame: it is self-shaming and self-loathing. But since we establish that the observer-shamed relationship changes each other and forms a *mise en abyme*, and the observer and shamed are within the same person, then shame is a powerful affect that effects changes within the identity of the self. No one needs to shame you for you to be ashamed, so there is nothing shameful about shame except in one’s self-consciousness.

An example that Darwin implies of the unconscious shame in the self—he was familiar with the concept of the unconscious via Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poems⁵—is blushing can be seen as a parapraxis: unlike other expressions, blushing cannot be induced by any physical “action on the body. It is the mind which must be affected. Blushing is not only involuntary; but the wish to restrain it… actually increases the tendency” (286). According to Darwin, blushing is a performance that cannot be performed on volition. Consider the actions accompanying the performance as Darwin describes them: “As there generally exists at the

⁵ See Loren Eiseley’s “Darwin, Coleridge, and the Theory of Unconscious Creation.”
same time a strong wish to avoid the appearance of shame, a vain attempt is made to look direct at the person who causes this feeling” (296). Since blushing, an indicator of shame, reveals what one is thinking, the performance is a revelation and a concealment of one’s identity. The more one wishes to conceal, the more obvious the disclosure of one’s self.

But the identity that one shows through blushing and shame is one that is fluid and unstable, not as direct as one might imagine, because shame discombobulates one’s mental powers. Despite parapraxes like stammering, tics and grimaces that accompany shame, the mind may be so disturbed that one constructs another reality. The example that Darwin provides:

A small dinner-party was given in honour of an extremely shy man, who, when he rose to return thanks, rehearsed the speech, which he had evidently learnt by heart, in absolute silence, and did not utter a single word; but he acted as if he were speaking with much emphasis. His friends, perceiving how the case stood, loudly applauded the imaginary bursts of eloquence, whenever his gestures indicated a pause, and the man never discovered that he had remained the whole time completely silent. On the contrary, he afterwards remarked to my friend, with much satisfaction, that he thought he had succeeded uncommonly well (297).

For fear that he might humiliate and shame himself in front of people who wanted to honor him, his imagined shame clouded his mind and conjured a reality where he wouldn’t be shamed. Under extreme distress, a shamed person is one who may present a “false” sense of identity but, in a way, this “false” sense of identity is also a “true” one. The man rehearsed the scene in his imagination and believed he had presented himself well. His friends collaborated with, supported, and understood his actions. Reflecting the man’s “false” identity, the friends presented a “false” reality, but in the man’s mind, his friends’ reactions were genuine and to his friends, they were cognizant of the man’s “reality.” When the man’s shame from his
imagination of failure of his speech surfaced, causing him to falter, the scenario became reality in that he had both failed and succeeded in his oration. And his friends had both recognized his identity as a failed speaker and supported him as if he were a successful one. Hence, not only does shame reveal one’s identity the more one tries to veil it, the identity that one divulges/hides is one that has degrees of truth and mendacity.

One other interesting observation that Darwin made about shame is that shame precedes the development of morality. According to Darwin, the movements accompanying blushing, caused by shame—the desire to avert eye contact yet defiantly maintaining it, to bow the head yet awkwardly holding it up high, and to turn the body away yet facing the observer—are developed merely because the shamed is being observed and judged. Before the “primeval man… had acquired much moral sensitiveness [he] would have been highly sensitive about this personal appearance, at least in reference to the other sex, and he would consequently have felt distress at any depreciatory remarks about his appearance; and this is one form of shame” (302). He reiterates his point a few pages later: “It is not the conscience which raises a blush” although “many a person has blushed intensely when accused of some crime, though completely innocent of it” (305; 306). It may seem preposterous that a primeval man blushed because of his appearance but the more important point to note here is, to Darwin, shame develops before morality and blushing out of shame is not indicative of one’s guilt, that is, shame is independent of morality. Darwin believes that, unlike morality which is relative and learnt evident from the way some tribes shocked the European value system, shame is innate.6

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6 The notion that shame is developed before an infant has any concept of prohibition is supported by psychologist Tomkins who found expressions of shame in a child as young as seven months. In reading Tomkins, Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank explicate, “Many developmental psychologists, responding to this finding [of shame developing before superego], now consider shame the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop” (qtd. in Tomkins, 6).
Here, Darwin uses shame to chisel away at religious guilt and provides an alternative idea of a self that involves secular shame to replace morality.

For Tomkins, shame is one of the few basic building blocks of affects, closely connected to drives. Affects switch drives on and off but while drives are digital—at after I eat, I am no longer hungry—affects are analog and can never be fully extinguished or satiated. That is how shame is interlinked with desire: one must first be interested and ignite sparks of interest in the other, in order to be shamed. Though not knowing Tomkins’s psychological terms, Darwin seemed to grapple with an understanding of the affiliation of shame and desire. The opening pages of the chapter on blushing contain many scandalous examples that join shame with desire, in the guise of scientific terms. Take a random one: “The moment [Dr Browne] approached [her bed], she blushed deeply over her cheeks and temples; and the blush spread quickly to her ear. She was much agitated and tremulous. He unfastened the collar of her chemise in order to examine the state of her lungs; and then a brilliant blush rushed over her chest, in an arched line over the upper third of each breast, and extended downwards between the breasts nearly to the ensiform cartilage of the sternum” (314). Put in a novel, this passage would have been pornographic. One recalls Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh subpoenaing Darwin to be a witness in favor for their defence in the (in)famous obscenity trial for publishing Charles Knowlton’s book on birth-control. They withdrew the subpoena when the appalled Darwin informed them that he would denounce them. Dr Browne’s patient blushed because she was aware of the sexual impropriety of his examination. Therefore, it is difficult to separate sexuality and shame: shame can be titillating (such as sadomasochistic role-playing) and so can shamelessness, a challenge to authority (exhibitionism or pole-dancing for instances). That is why, as Darwin notes, when ashamed, one wishes to look away but attempts to look at the other because in the first place, there is interest in the other and at any moment, shame may change back to interest.
In fact, Darwin was well-aware of the connection between shame and desire. The description Darwin wrote on blushing can be used to describe a tumescence: blushing and erection are both “due to the relaxation of the muscular coats of the small arteries, by which the capillaries become filled with blood; and this depends on the proper vaso-motor centre being affected. No doubt if there be at the same time much mental agitation, the general circulation will be affected; but it is not due to the action of the heart that the network of minute vessels covering the face becomes under a sense of shame *gorged* with blood…It is the mind which must be affected [to cause blushing]. Blushing is not only involuntary; but the wish to restrain it, by leading to self-attention, actually increases the tendency” (my emphasis, 286).

This is Darwin’s double entendre: As someone who had studied medicine, the similarities between blushing and the phallus must be striking to him. They both involve a complex play of psychological, neural and vascular elements. Blushing “must be sexual, because it intensifies when men and women interact,” write Desmond and Moore, commenting on Darwin’s memorandum on blushing. Indeed, Darwin wrote in his notebook that blushing occurs because thinking about one’s appearance drives “blood to surface exposed, face of man… bosom in woman: like erection” (*Notebook N*, 51-2). Darwin encodes sexual desire in the expression of blushing.

Blushing’s sexual connotations have been in the Western literary tradition for some time. In *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, Georgia Brown, reading Francis Bacon whom Darwin had read, informs us:

The redness of blushing implies that the head is hot, and suggests a potential association between shame and creativity, given that mental activity is supposed to produce heat in sixteenth-century physiology. The richly allusive somatic language of blushing also points to sexual transgression, not only because sexual misdemeanors provoke blushes, but more specifically because a cuckold’s horns were also supposed to produce a
burning sensation in the head, and burning produces redness. Furthermore, the blush’s instability as a sign is exacerbated by the fact that excessive activity of blood was thought to stimulate passion, so redness becomes both the sign, and in a sense the cause, of sexual arousal. Consequently, not only is the blush, as a sign of modesty, easily confused with the flush, as a sign of activated sexuality, but modesty itself, the propensity to blush, may actually cause lechery, as it activates the blood which arouses passions. (167)

Darwin, great devourer of books, who read Shakespeare and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* incessantly, one of the few books he could bring on-board the *Beagle* due to space constraints, might (or might not) have inherited notions of blushing from his literary predecessors although there are some strong similarities in the Renaissance’s and his ideas on blushing. For instance, “The young blush much more freely than the old” is something the Elizabethans believed (*Emotions* 286). Or following the Renaissance idea that blushing signals both desire and modesty, Darwin writes, “A pretty girl blushes when a man gazes intently at her, though she may know perfectly well that he is not depreciating her (300). When a “pretty” girl blushes, is it because she is showing her desire, understanding the passion she arouses in the other, or is it out of modesty? This obfuscation may likely be deliberate as Tim Birkhead’s “Promiscuity” argues that Darwin was aware of his female readers and did not want to offend them while Gowan Dawson claims that Darwin wished to avoid charges of obscenity and make his evolution theory more palatable to both conservative and liberal Victorian publics. Whichever the case, Darwin is clearly associating shame and desire in his writings.

For Darwin, the shamed party is always feminized because he uncritically associates blushing with femininity. “Women blush much more than men,” claims Darwin (*Emotions* 287). It is easy to infer that if men blush in front of women, then the men are feminized, under the power of women. Although blushing could not have evolved “as a sexual ornament,”
Darwin opines, “a slight blush adds to the beauty of a maiden’s face; and the Circassian woman who are capable of blushing, invariably fetch a higher price in the seraglio of the Sultan than less susceptible women” (309-10). In *Descent*, Darwin introduces a second element to evolution, other than natural selection. Sexual selection is dependent on female choice as Levine states: “In discussing sexual selection, Darwin expresses precisely the same consternation and disbelief that anyone could deny the intention at work in the participating animals. The difference is that Darwin’s designer is not God but female animals” (198).

Although Darwin eventually claims that female choice occurs among animals but not humans—men are still the selectors—he confesses in his autobiography of his weakness for happy endings and pretty heroines in novels. Levine argues that a “higher culture and a higher level of evolutionary development shifted the power of choice to men, but in the *Autobiography* Darwin sadly concedes his own fall from that higher culture” (*Darwin Loves You* 193). To Darwin, when a man blushes, he loses power and is feminized but when a woman blushes, she becomes doubly feminine and more beautiful and radiant; she gains power over men through expressing her femininity by her modesty. Not merely does she defeat men by simply blushing, she defeats men by her superior knowledge. Shame is a form of anagnorsis, blushing marks the transition from innocence to cognition. When a woman blushes, she knows something, yet men tend to overlook her knowledge and attribute the blushing uncritically to her beauty.

Although Darwin only considered blushing in terms of heterosexual or male homosocial unions (women blushing in front of men or men blushing in front of other men), every human being is capable of blushing and this show of shame is subversive. Shame breaks down our ideas of our own identities, makes us strange to ourselves and others, and makes others strange to us. Since shame can confuse us and befuddles our sense of reality, it reveals our selves and not-selves and both selves are equally true and false and make us vulnerable to attacks. However, in a sense, shame is imaginary because we imagine what the others are
thinking of us; they may in fact not be shaming us. When one is shamed, the other in an act of empathy feels shame too. Hence, shame exists in a *mise en abyme*: the identities of two parties are ever-changing until shame gradually subsides but is never completely annihilated. As shame emanates from our own imagination, shame comes from the self, as psychoanalysts discover that we know shame before we know prohibitions. Shame, thus, as Darwin sees it, is amoral and nothing shameful, that is, one can commit a crime and not feel ashamed and conversely, one can feel ashamed without committing any peccadillo.

Thus Darwin forms the basis of this dissertation on understanding shame in the nineteenth century. The second, third, and fourth chapters revolve around the early, mid-, and late Victorian works represented by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Elizabeth Gaskell, and John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis respectively, showing how Darwin’s notions of shame have affected their writings.

The chapter on Bulwer-Lytton demonstrates the usage of nationalistic shame in the nineteenth century before Darwinian evolutionary theory. Even though Bulwer-Lytton and Darwin share many common notions about shame, Bulwer-Lytton’s inflexible religious structures of shame contrast greatly with Darwin’s secular shame and, as a result, Darwin’s narratives proliferate and vary whereas Bulwer-Lytton’s early novels are similar to one another. In his novels, homosocial bonds between men are valued over heterosexual relationships but since homosociality is sterile, hindering the heterosexual procreation required for England to maintain its supremacy over the colonies, the author uses shame to manipulate the workings of nationalism. Therefore, unlike Darwin’s concept of shame which creates a fluidity in identities, in Bulwer-Lytton’s notion of shame, honor, and pride exists in a fixed stasis in order to create the English identity and its dominance over the colonies.

The chapter on Gaskell, Darwin’s contemporary, focuses on the shame of women’s bodies in the age of industrialization and we could already see Darwin’s influence on her
writing in terms of shame. Gaskell’s life and works demonstrate a complicated entanglement with private shame. When the production of her body for a child has failed her—her infant son died—her husband persuaded her to write, or in other words, Gaskell directed the shame of non-productivity of her body to produce literary works. Compounded to her bodily shame is the shame of publishing. Her books are exposed to be shamed and spoken about. In order to face the shame of being seen, the minister’s wife imagined herself to be a man, St Sebastian, whose suffering has a godly purpose. This transgendering of sexes is often depicted in her novels where men behave like women and women like men. Hence, Gaskell utilizes the affect of shame to interrogate and destabilize the self and identity.

The second chapter talks about nationalistic shame prior to the publication of Origins; the third chapter revolves around women’s’ bodies in an industrial age of mechanical production, which coincided with the fierce debates regarding the veracity and duplicity of Darwin’s theory; and the last chapter discusses the shame of sexuality following the influence of Darwin, exemplified by the autobiographies by sexologists Symonds and Ellis. The men led rather different lives. The homosexual Symonds came from a well-to-do family, excelled academically, and was on the way to a brilliant academic career until scandals ruined it, inducing him to live an itinerant life, paying for boys on the Continent. Although his Renaissance in Italy, which came out in seven volumes, made him a leading man of letters, his reputation suffered greatly later in his life as he had come to be known to be insane among the English literati. The heterosexual Ellis, on the hand, came from a poor family and achieved mediocre results in school. He was not a good doctor and had almost flunked medical school. However, his inaugural work on human sexuality put him as the forerunner of the British sexologists. Clearly, they suffered shame differently in life and this difference is, I argue, reflected in their writing in their autobiographies. Symonds’s writing is meandering, almost proving his critics right that he was mad, while Ellis has a straightforward style. However,
using a Foucauldian lens to analyze the autobiographies demonstrates that Ellis remains trapped in the superstructure of panopticon whereas Symonds’s shame, implied through his indirect style and his treatment of his memoirs, places him outside of the Foucauldian power, effects changes for the study of sexuality, and perhaps gives progress to the equality of homosexuals.

Although each chapter in the dissertation is fairly independent, they are linked by Darwin, identity, shame, and how shame affects their narrative styles. While one usually hides in shame, these Victorian writers and thinkers studied here demonstrate different ways of circumnavigating through shame via their public writings in such a way that they used shame to manipulate social expectations and/or to anticipate the repercussions of their writings. Darwin explored secular shame as a meditation on what is it to be human; Bulwer-Lytton for a nationalist propaganda to build an English identity; Gaskell to ruminate on gender identity in an industrial state where humans are replaceable easily by machines; and Symonds and Ellis wrote on sexuality, which they suggest is a building block for their identities. All were traumatized by shame, most avoided it, and those who embraced it could channel it into their writing as a form of cathexis. Their struggles with shame manifested in their narrative styles as will be apparent in the chapters. By investigating popular Victorian writers in respect to shame and identity, this dissertation hopes to illustrate that while shame is a universal affect, it is also historical and cultural and can change with time: shame had changed from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end, from a stiff notion of morality and gender to a resistance against conformity and a celebration of diversity.
Chapter One: Darwin Ashamed and Why He Wrote

The introduction of the dissertation has explicated Darwin’s concept of shame to Tomkins’s theory and how the concept would influence contemporary writers such as Gaskell and the sexologists in the late nineteenth century. Following the introductory chapter, this chapter illustrates the ways Darwin had been through shame and how the affect seeped into his writings. Shame begins, Darwin argues, when one is “highly sensitive about this personal appearance” (Emotions 302). Darwin himself had always been embarrassed by his nose. Someone had cruelly said it was “like a farmer,” and he bore the smart for the rest of his life (qtd. in Voyaging 10). His later jokes reveal “a shaky self-image and a lack of confidence”: his nose, Darwin joked, was “as big as [a] fist” (qtd. in Voyaging 10). It was because of this nose that Captain Robert Fitzroy of HMS Beagle almost rejected Darwin for the voyage. He felt himself so ugly that he almost did not propose to his wife, Emma. Even at an old age, when his bust was sculptured and portrait painted, he would put the bust inconspicuously at a corner of a room and “scorn” it and describe his portrait as one of an “old dog” (Power of Place 423; 424). The association and myth\textsuperscript{1} of nose and penis could not escape readers and according to Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain, the myth has its roots in Aristotle’s Masterpiece and is often the source of double entendres in Tristram Shandy, which Darwin had read. Darwin’s nose symbolizes the intersections of sexuality, shame, identity, and the corporeality that this chapter focuses on. After showing the ways Darwin was ashamed, I argue that Darwin’s struggle with shame seeped into his writings and the affect is transferred to the reader. Reading shame as the basis of Darwin’s work and reading his work as stemming from shame open up new ways of understanding his work in its formation, motivation, and reception.

In addition to his appearance, Darwin was also ashamed of his background. His infamous grandfather, Erasmus, was a philandering libertine who had too much of “wine,\textsuperscript{1} The myth establishes a correlation in size between the nose and the penis.
women, [and] warmth” (Desmond and Moore 7). Erasmus’s wife was an alcoholic and died inebriate, leaving him five children. He then married his rich patient, an illegitimate earl’s daughter, who had a child with her first husband. Together with his two bastards (with a governess), the ten of them lived in the earl’s daughter’s country mansion. The backlash of the riots of 1791 put an end to this modish libertinism: Erasmus’s “erotic botany was denounced as titillating trash; his ‘atheism’ lambasted as the sort of demoralizing philosophy” (Desmond and Moore 11). The backlash “ushered in a period of respectability and evangelical rectitude, which was to mark the younger generations of Darwin-Wedgwoods” (Desmond and Moore 11). What was tolerated in Erasmus’s time was censured, denounced and chastised in Darwin’s years. Darwin’s grandfather’s behavior had to be kept hush-hush. At the time of writing Descent, another illegitimate offspring of Erasmus’s was discovered. Evolution was itself an affront to the Church and if Darwin’s family background was made known widely, it would make evolution harder to swallow. When Darwin wrote Erasmus’s biography and let his daughter, Henrietta, proof-read, she, armed with a bright red pencil, censored him. All the talk about sex, illegitimacy, and unorthodox Christianity was struck off. Although Browne argues that there is little evidence that Darwin used Henrietta as a “convenient feminine censor, or as a ready-made moral vigilante… to identify… any hint of nineteenth-century impropriety,” he did let her use her sensibility to censor and eradicate the passages that she thought were inappropriate and he let her corrections stand (Power of Place 347). His own daughter’s disapprobation of her father’s origin sent a clear signal to Darwin, and his readiness for his daughter to red pencil his writing demonstrates how he wished to avoid shaming himself and his family to the public eyes.

Another related shame is the shame of inferiority when compared to his brother, Eras, in the era of the right of primogeniture. While Michael Lewis does not agree with Tomkins and Darwin that shame is innate, he argues that shame is a self-conscious emotion that occurs when
one is pitted against another. Indeed, the idea of a comparison is for one party to put the other party to shame. Seen as intellectually inferior to his brother, Darwin made a constant effort to match his brother (Voyaging 10). Many—Thomas Carlyle for example—who had met the siblings thought Eras the cleverer of the two. “A great deal of Charles Darwin’s later dogged persistence can be attributed to the struggle of a younger brother to match what he believed were the natural gifts of the older,” wrote Browne (11). In addition, his comparison with his brother also brought about comparisons with his dissipated uncles and there was a fear that Darwin might turn out to be like them (Desmond and Moore 20).

Perhaps the reason why Darwin was shamed by his brother was because he did not do as well in school. In his education, “he was too ordinary for a Darwin, perhaps even deficient” (Desmond and Moore 20). Reverend Samuel Butler, grandfather of the novelist with same name, shamed him in front of his schoolmates by calling him “very unjustly a ‘poco curante,’ and as I did not understand what he meant it seemed to me a fearful reproach” (Autobiography 40). When Darwin left the school, “I was considered by all my masters and by my Father as a very ordinary boy, rather below the common standard in intellect” (Autobiography 27). It seemed as if the shame followed him through his schooling days: “During the three years which I spent at Cambridge my time was wasted, as far as the academical [sic] studies were concerned, as completely as at Edinburgh and at school… I attempted mathematics…but I got on very slowly” (Autobiography 50). Although eventually he did score well upon graduation, shame had long marred his education as he did not live up to the Darwin name but his brother did.

In the same paragraph in which Darwin wrote that he was of below-average intellect, he commented, “To my deep mortification my father once said to me, “You care for nothing but shooting, dogs, and rat-catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and all your family” (Autobiography 27). Darwin’s father’s view was reiterated by Adam Sedgwick, his mentor and father figure at Cambridge. Sedgwick wrote to Butler that “there was some risk of [Darwin]
turning out an idle man,” a line which Susan, Darwin’s sister, came to know of and conveyed to Darwin (Letter 6418). Darwin’s own father, Sedgwick, and Rev’d Butler, all paternal figures, had at one time or another shamed him.

The shame of failing or the fear of failing his paternal figures intensified at the University of Edinburgh, where he was sent to study to become a doctor. Darwin came from a family of doctors. His grandfather was one of the most celebrated doctors in the eighteenth century. His father was equally skilled and economically shrewd, running one of the largest medical practices out of London. His uncle, whom he was named after and who passed away, was an intelligent medical student at Edinburgh. His brother, whom Darwin had always looked on as a role model, studied medicine at Edinburgh and Cambridge. At Edinburgh, Darwin discovered he could not stomach the sight of blood and couldn’t fulfill the patrilineal legacy. When the school break came and he returned home, he did what most gentlemen his age did in an avoidance of shaming: he trekked and tried not to remain in the same house as his father, too ashamed to face him (Voyaging 64).

Shame is the fear of loss of love. Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer argue that shame occurs when one fails to reach the ego-ideal: “Behind the feeling of shame stands not the fear of hatred but the fear of contempt… of abandonment, the death of emotional starvation” (emphasis original, 28-9). Shame then is the failure of some kind which gives rise to the fear of being disowned. While Darwin feared the loss of paternal love, he had already lost a maternal one literally. Thus perhaps the most significant childhood and young adulthood event that caused him the most shame is the death of his mother.\(^2\) Many biographers, psychoanalysts, and critics have written on the subject of his mother’s death. Desmond and Moore remark that the death’s “impact on Charles, difficult to assess, was certainly profound” (14). Death is

\(^2\) Gaskell too suffered from the shame of loss and death, as I will argue in the third chapter. The psychology of shame and death will be explicated in detail then.
shameful, as John Bowlby argues that premature separation of infant and mother brings about feelings of shame as the child fails to find the missing object and every loss that we suffer in adulthood returns us to the first loss, along with its feelings of shame. But Julia Kristeva notes that the separation of infant and mother is the moment of abjection where an identity is formed and the self and the (m)other are distinguished. The abject thus refers to the perceived threat of loss of meaning by the eradication of boundaries between the self and other. Kristeva associates the abject with the Real, particularly with Death: “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection” (4). Anything that is linked with death—such as blood, which Darwin was sickened by later in his adult life—recalls to mind the trauma of being mortal and our eventual death. Shame “is the greater part of the experience of abjection” (Pajaczkowska and Ward 3). Like Kristeva, Tomkins agrees that boundaries are eradicated when shamed and elegantly puts it in one short sentence: “Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object of shame is lost” (136). Tomkins’s statement is similar to the mise en abyme example we have discussed in the introduction of the dissertation because reflections of self and other are infinite until the difference between them is disappeared. In short, separation between child and mother, regardless if it is premature, helps us maintain a stable identity, but when we come across a death, the death recalls us to a time before the separation and threatens the collapse of self and other, exposing us to the anxiety beneath, making us susceptible to abjection and shame. Shame washes over us when abjection sets in; when words fail us, our ability to differentiate the self and the other collapses, demolishing boundaries of masculine/feminine, good/bad, etc. To avoid dissolution of boundaries (and hence psychosis), Donald Campbell suggests that a “shame shield,” a barrier before the self and the shaming other, is erected for self-preservation.

Darwin seemed to have constructed a shame shield with regards to his mother. He was not allowed to see his mother for the last two weeks of her life and to Darwin as a child, her
death was shrouded in secrets and shame. “My mother died in July 1817, when I was a little over eight years old, and it is odd that I can remember hardly anything about her… I believe my forgetfulness is partly due to my sisters [and Darwin’s father], owing to their great grief, never being able to speak about her or mention her name” (*Autobiography* 21). Caroline, Darwin’s younger sister, could recollect details of the death but not Darwin. On the day of her death, the children were summoned into her room to view the corpse. When reminiscing about the scene at her deathbed, he could only recall “her black velvet gown, and her curiously constructed work-table,” without any mention of the deceased body (*Autobiography* 21). “More than once he wrote that ‘my memory here is an obscure picture” (*Voyaging* 20). The unspeakability of his mother’s death made the death shameful and apparently affected the shame-prone Darwin more than his sister. It seems that Kristeva’s theory of abjection applies in Darwin’s case: in order for the young Darwin to establish his own budding identity, he had to kill the Mother in him but as he was doing so, his real mother died and he could have associated the shame of two deaths—one psychological, one real—as one. The deathbed scene with his mother is a direct confrontation of his identity: the ejected abject, as a visual warning of his impending death, lay physically in front of him, recalling him traumatically and shamefully to the time before the separation of self and other as the binary of life and death was blurred. Shame of death thus works on two levels with Darwin: a guilt-shame (“I have done something wrong, I killed or could not protect my mother”) and the shame from the experience of the abject. To maintain his own identity, the shame shield that his family taught him was avoidance and silence. His mother’s death caused him so much trauma and shame that he shunned all funerals of significant importance to him. He did not attend his father’s, nor his most beloved child, Annie’s funeral. The funerals of his mentors and father figures, Charles Lyell and John Henslow, he avoided. On all occasions, he pleaded ill health, which, as we shall see, was itself a manifestation of shame.
My analysis of the shame Darwin felt in face of his mother’s death is rather different from Carolyn Dever’s in *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud*. She uses a Freudian psychoanalytic lens, that is a “vexed desire for a mother who is dead, and [an] intense rivalry with a father who is all too present,” but reading Darwin in such light is to ignore many pieces of evidence that go against such a Freudian reading (179). Leaving aside the general flaws and problems of a Freudian reading, Darwin loved his father. Darwin wrote that his father was “a remarkable man” and had “powers of observation and his sympathy, neither of which have I ever seen exceeded or even equaled” (*Autobiography* 27). He trusted his father who was the “best judge of character” to the point that it “seemed almost supernatural” (41-2; 30). In a rare display of his affections, Darwin confided in a letter to Joseph Hooker, his closest friend, “I do not think any one could love a father much more than I did mine, and I do not believe three or four days ever pass without my still thinking of him” (qtd. in *Power of Place* 426). A Freudian reading thus is flawed because it brings about with it the problems of Freudian theory and focuses too narrowly on rivalry when Darwin lived in a homosocial society where the men supported one another’s theories. Shame, to me, seems to explain the death of Darwin’s mother in more complete and encompassing terms.

It is commonly acknowledged that the repression of the memory of his mother’s death “manifested itself in peculiar ways” (Desmond and Moore 14). For one, both Browne and psychologist Bowlby in his biography of Darwin agree that Darwin learnt from the incident to push aside all unhappy and unpleasant things by sweeping them under the carpet and diverting attention to other things. For instance, at around the same time of his mother’s death, a funeral of a dragoon-soldier occurred near his school and he could remember it distinctly (*Autobiography* 24). Darwin was projecting his grief and shame of the death of his mother to an unknown stranger who was given a soldier’s funeral and presumably died an honorable death. The projection enabled Darwin to distance himself from the abject and shame by
displacing his grief to a complete stranger, and his shame of death was transformed to pride in the honorable soldier. The silence and shame revolving his mother’s death also signal to him how he should behave, that is to say, he should not talk about his feelings, he should ignore them and not be introspective (Power of Place 398). Although Pat Jalland is examining how Victorian agnostics dealt with mourning, what she mentions about Darwin is equally true due to his trauma and shame: “the Darwins did not talk about the meaning of death in theological, philosophical or any other terms, nor try to discern any purpose in Annie’s death” (347). The Darwins simply did not talk about deaths because of the shame involved.

It was the desire to shy away from shame compounded from his appearance, family background, his inferiority to his brother, his below-average intellect unbefitting the Darwin name, fear of loss of paternal love, and death of his mother, that made Darwin a “stickler for etiquette” (Voyaging 282). Besides, shame is the need to avoid pain, a lesson learnt from his mother’s death, and by being respectable, Darwin could avoid the pain of being a social outcast. Since shame requires the other, Darwin’s need to avoid shame was so extreme that he placed a mirror outside his study window like Alfred Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” so that he could see who was approaching his room. Shame occurs, Darwin noted, when one breaches a social rule. He was so aghast at his manservant for having long hair that he gave him a “public and sarcastic dressing down, and he was horrified when his maid forwent her bonnet” (Voyaging 282). Since Darwin wanted to avoid shame, an affect which calls attention to the self, a breach of the gentleman’s code, “a compelling need for quiet respectability dominated Darwin’s life” (Desmond and Moore 203). Indeed, right at the start of Darwin’s career in 1831, Henslow once observed to him in a letter: “One of your foibles is to take offence at rudeness of manners & anything bordering upon ungentlemanlike behavior” (Letter 150). In Woman in White, Wilkie Collins noticed the Victorian gentleman’s protocol, “Never mind about his genius, Mr Pesca. We don’t want genius in this country, unless it is accompanied by
respectability” (13-4). It was not respectable to Darwin that he figured out the workings of evolution, a theory that would shake the Christian foundations of Victorian society, a lesson he learnt early when in 1829 radicals Richard Carlile and Revd Robert Taylor came to Cambridge to lampoon the Anglican liturgy. They had both been in prison for blasphemy and there in Cambridge, they were social outcasts. The proctors made sure they had no housing. In Darwin’s later years, he would remember them, “fearing that he himself might be similarly reviled, an outcast of respectable society, a terror to the innocent, an infidel in disguise” (Desmond and Moore 73). In 1844, he completed the manuscript on evolution but did not publish it. His fear of shame made him delay his publication because the theory “was still associated with riot and revolution” (Desmond and Moore 315). Instead, he wrote a strange letter to his wife, Emma, to publish “in case of my sudden death” (Letter 761). Similar to how E. M. Forster left instructions to publish Maurice only after his death, they were both ashamed of the secret lives they led. Brown asserts that Darwin “would prefer to be dead rather than suffer the controversy which he knew would break over his head. He would prefer to be dead rather than deliberately hurt Emma’s feelings, or even worse, be the cause of her social ostracism” (Voyaging 447). Fearing social outcast, the men Darwin chose to be his allies did not always agree with him but they must be respected in society (Voyaging 448). Behind the veil of respectability, Darwin had hidden his shame at all cost.

Right from the start, Darwin had associated science with shame. In Edinburgh, he, sixteen, joined the Plinian Society, an indictable, seditious group of “fiery, freethinking democrats who demanded that science be based on physical causes, not supernatural causes” (Desmond and Moore 31). The meetings were held at an underground room, signifying its secrecy and shame. Robert Grant, his surrogate brother for five months in Edinburgh and his first mentor who encouraged him to present a paper at the Plinian Society on polyps in 1827, was homosexual, a fact that Darwin might possibly know but turn a blind eye to. Both
blasphemy and sex with men could put them in prison, bringing shame, and hence in Darwin’s mind, the connection between science and illegality and shame was sealed.

If general science was shameful to a young Darwin, transmutation was downright ignominious. Not only was it easy to dismiss and scoff at evolutionists—John Ruskin, for instance, termed Darwin’s “deep & tender interest about the brightly coloured hinder half of certain monkey” as “pernicious nonsense” (qtd. in *Power of Place* 477)—transmutation was seen as a direct challenge to the Church because to claim that species can change over time is to gainsay that God created each being as perfect. When Darwin was unwittingly researching a transmutation problem for Grant, “he could see that it was far from respectable” (Desmond and Moore 40). At around the same time when Darwin was in Edinburgh, a timber merchant claimed that “inherited privilege ran counter to nature’s law of progress through competition. An aristocracy was debilitating, it bucked evolution. If society did not change, he warned, Nature would ‘avenge’ herself; she would plunge the British race into decrepitude, push it into a bywater of history” (Desmond and Moore 40-1). Science here was linked with politics. The merchant was arguing for the elimination of class system that England had depended on for hundreds of years. According to Desmond and Moore, this was Darwin’s first taste of the cataclysm that transmutation could do to shatter the foundations of Victorian society through social, political, economic, and religious repercussions.

Darwin was not the only one who considered against publishing on transmutation for the shame and disrepute it brought. When a future son-in-law asked Robert Chambers why he did not admit to writing his “greatest work,” *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), a massive bestseller published anonymously, he pointed to his eleven children and replied, “I have eleven reasons” (qtd. in Desmond and Moore 323). Everyone was guessing who wrote *Vestiges*, and some fingers pointed to Darwin. As a homophobic person in shame harbors same-sex desires and is always the first to decry homosexuality in someone else, Darwin quickly
denounced the book to Lyell and distanced himself from it for fear the stain of shame would fall on him (Desmond and Moore 348).

The shame connecting to transmutation deepened on his return to England after the voyage of the Beagle. He furtively worked on this theory of transmutation, ashamed of its disrespectability, telling no one except Eras, “for fear he be branded irresponsible, irreligious or worse” (Desmond and Moore 233). In 1838, he was secretary to the Geological Society of London: “his identity was split,” Desmond and Moore write, because he wrote in his transmutation notebooks at night and in the day was ashamed to face Lyell, Richard Owen, Sedgwick, William Whewell, all of whom except Owen were father figures to Darwin (236). If they knew, he would be dishonored as a “traitor. His respectability would be compromised. Not only would his science be impugned, he himself would be accused of reckless abandon” (Desmond and Moore 239). Darwin, still as secretary, witnessed the disgrace of his erstwhile mentor Grant’s summary justice regarding a fossil heresy. Another warning came in William Lawrence’s fall from grace. His “scientific rhetoric achieved a pyrotechnical brilliance” but “he had been forced to resign his post at the College of Surgeons and recant his [materialist views of man and mind] after a vicious attack in the Tory Quarterly Review… The Court of Chancery ruled his Lectures on Man blasphemous” (Desmond and Moore 253). Darwin had a copy of Lawrence’s book, a constant reminder of the shame and obloquy that would follow if he published the transmutation notebooks.

Besides the shame of disappointing his paternal figures, destroying the Church and societal hierarchy and bringing social ostracism and infamy on himself and his family, transmutation also presents a very deep and personal shame for the Darwin-Wedgwoods. A pivotal aspect of transmutation is hereditary because, for change to occur, the children must be able to inherit traits of their parents. A peahen may choose a peacock with just a slight shimmer in his feathers and their male children will acquire this shimmer. As peahens favor peacocks
with more shimmer, the trait will be enlarged, passed down with every generation. But while positive traits are amplified, so are deleterious ones. Darwins and Wedgwoods had a history of intermarriages. Darwin’s maternal grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood, married his cousin, Sarah Wedgwood. Darwin’s father married their daughter, Susannah Wedgwood, Darwin’s mother. His mother’s early death and the severe spinal curvature of Elizabeth his sister made him suspicious of the ills of inbreeding. Darwin himself married Emma, his cousin. He blamed his and his children’s weak constitution on his ancestry: Annie, his daughter, “inherits, I fear with grief, my wretched digestion,” he wrote to his cousin, William Fox (Letter 1396). Out of ten children, two died in their infancy—one of whom was severely mentally challenged—Annie, Darwin’s favorite child, died at ten in 1851 and the rest were often ominously ill. “George was sick and home from school, Etty languished in bed every morning, [and] Lizzy still behaved strangely” (Desmond and Moore 447). The shame of transmutation is such that for a theory of the survival of the fittest, a theory that he worked on day and night, his own children could not be qualified as strong in the race of natural selection.

Yet as Darwin was shamed, he was motivated by shame. Tomkins hints that shame is so basic an affect that it enables or disables a project: shame “operates only after interest or enjoyment has been activated, and inhibits one or the other or both. The innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy” (134). What this means is science, considered to be shameful to Darwin, had sparked his interest and he refused to give up his interest because at any one point, the shame might turn to enjoyment. Gabriele Taylor takes Tomkins’s suggestion a step further by asserting that shame drives our actions because it reveals to us our real values and identities and inspires us to live up to those values, that is to say, shame shapes and unveils and forces us to fulfill our ever-shifting identities. Shame gives us our self-esteem and self-respect. Thus although transmutation presented a personal shame about his progenies, he (perversely?) explored the theme of inbreeding, his shame, in his
writings. In The Effects of Cross and Self Fertilisation, he calls cross- and self-fertilization of ordinary plants “legitimate” and “illegitimate” marriages. “Legitimate” marriages would, to a Victorian reader, be analogous to a heterosexual union, the norm. Self-fertilization or “illegitimate” marriages would conjure images of onanism, same-sex desire, and inbreeding. While by and large Darwin agreed that inbreeding would weaken the offspring, he used the terms “legitimate” and “illegitimate” that are defined in legalese and not “natural” or “unnatural” because, to Darwin, all forms of sexuality that could happen in nature are “natural.” He wrote, “But as no instance was known with animals of any evil appearing in a single generation from the closest possible interbreeding, that is between brothers and sisters, I thought the same rule would hold good with plants” (8). He deflected his shame by distancing the experiment from his own consanguineous marriage, as if he was objectively conducting a scientific experiment, but in doing so, he made the experiment more scandalous, between “brothers and sisters.” In the sixth generation of the experiment, a self-fertilized plant, or a plant from an “illegitimate” union, for the first time grew taller and stronger than cross-fertilized ones. Darwin proudly named the underdog “Hero.” If deviant sexuality is shameful, and if transmutation is shameful in the eyes of his father figures, then his writing, the daring act of pronouncing a monstrous object born between siblings as heroic, demonstrates that he turned the shame to pride.

As he was scribbling in his notebooks on transmutation that led up to the publication of Origins in 1859, his health broke. For someone who had travelled throughout the world and “performed mental and manual feats” without any obvious ill effects, his shame about his work and “living a double life with double standards” must have been colossal to take a toll on him (Desmond and Moore 233). As Freud shows that criticism from parental figures is equivalent to the shame of loss of love, Darwin’s childhood and young adulthood experiences of shame made him fear criticism. He was so sensitive to criticism that even as he read a damning review
of Auguste Comte’s *Positive Philosophy* which states that true knowledge comes from “positive” facts and not theology, a stance that Darwin adopted, “he developed a headache from the stress” (Desmond and Moore 260). Darwin felt shame through the empathy of feeling what Comte might have felt. Even as late as 1868, almost ten years after the runaway success of *Origin*, when he published *Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, he claimed that “if I try to read a few pages I feel fairly nauseated” (qtd. in Desmond and Moore 550). “The sight of book sickened him; his old insecurities resurfaced, his fear of rejection and loss of status” (Desmond and Moore 550). Shame had never left Darwin. He learnt from his mother’s death that the best way to deal with shame and criticism was to avoid them. When he escaped from London to Down, “he breathed an enormous sigh of relief. Here he was at a safe distance from society. No more worry about what people might say; the rustics would respect him for the gentleman he was, not judge him by what he thought or wrote. He would see everyone on his own terms, when and as he pleased” (Desmond and Moore 302). Darwin’s description of the motions accompanying blushing in *Emotions* states a strong desire to avoid being seen. Shame, to Darwin who prided his reputation, was so excruciating and private that he literally shunned being seen.

His escape to Down was one of his methods of evasion of the direct shaming and criticisms he had to face from his paternal figures, the other method, his illness. His illness is both an evasion and manifestation of shame. Most of Darwin’s critics agree that “he had a tendency to become psychically and/or psychophysiologically ill when confronted with unpleasant events” (Colp 5). In 1858, James Copeland stated that in *A Dictionary of Practical Medicine* stomach problems might be due to “nervous and hypochondrial temperaments” and this diagnosis appeared to fit Darwin’s illnesses (1044). Brown, in several instances in her biographies of Darwin, wrote: “Darwin’s illnesses were… something of an inconvenience in the way they came and went according to his social schedule” (*Voyaging* 405); “Darwin may
have sometimes used these illnesses as a way of restricting unwanted social commitments” (Power of Place 227); his illnesses were “escape mechanisms” (Power of Place 384). For instance, in the early years with Emma when he still went to church, the dampness of the church made him unwell but he miraculously recovered in time to dine and go for a play (Voyaging 405). In a book-length study, Colp tracks the history of Darwin’s illnesses, attempts to give a diagnosis and dismisses all of them including gout, dyspepsia, catarrhal dyspepsia, chronic indigestion, pyorrhoea, auto-poisoning, chronic neurasthenia, cardiac arrythemia, Chagas’ disease, appendicitis, duodenal ulcer, chronic cholecystitis, diaphragmatic hernia, diabetogenic hyperinsulinism, porphyria, arsenic poisoning, anorexia, pleurisy, and severe allergy. Colp also looks into psychiatric illnesses but finds them unsatisfactory too. Perhaps Colp could not find a single psychiatric illness because Darwin was pinned by shame. When Darwin took breaks from writing, from shaming, his health improved but when he faced shame, he was sickened. Even the slightest private “cautions on the species-question” from his confidants, Hooker and Gray “overwhelm me in confusion & shame; it does make me feel deuced uncomfortable” (Letter 1562). When Roman Catholic biologist St George Mivart, one-time protégé of Darwin’s, attacked his work, his illness exacerbated, his inexplicable symptoms aggravated.

The paradox of Darwin’s illness is that, despite its chronicity, he was so prolific in his biological and literary offspring. This is not to say that Darwin was so disingenuous as to feign illness. His illnesses were very physical and real but feelings of shame often triggered them. Many critics argue that shame must be purged. Although Campbell is writing on sexual shame, it is apparent that the shame could still be applicable to Darwin: shame is expelled by changing from the position of helpless passivity to active agency. Similarly, as Friedrich Nietzsche suggests, one needs to get rid of shame so that one can reach one’s potential but shame is necessary for protection of the self in face of situations that are not wholly comprehensible. Writing, then, is what Darwin used to alleviate his sense of shame, to turn his shame into pride.
and to become the person he wanted to become but at the same time, the more he wrote, the
eventually he was sick, the more he damaged a bodily part of him. He needed the shame, never
fully extirpated, to drive him to write, to give him self-worth but, by writing, he was exposing
himself to the ridicule of the world.

   Darwin at seventy years old confided in Francis Galton, “I have never tried looking into
my own mind” (*Life and Letters* 3:238). If he had looked into his mind, he would find that it
was shame that was enervating and, at the same time, rejuvenating. In 1838, when he was
mulling over the problem of how blushing and shame could have evolved if transmutation was
true—why should we develop shame? How does it aid in our survival?—he had a dream. He
jocularly wrote, “Thought that a person was hung & came to life, & then made many jokes
about not having run away &c., having faced death like a hero, & then I had some confused
idea of showing scar behind (instead of in front, having changed hanging into his head cut off)
as kind of witty, showing he had honourable wounds” (*Notebook M* 143-4). The person in the
dream was obviously Darwin himself. When he came out of the closet and told Hooker about
his theory of transmutation, Darwin remarked, “It was like confessing a murder” (Letter 729).
He clearly saw himself as a criminal in a time when transmutation was associated with anarchy
and social unrest. Hung for his “murder,” he was a person redivivus like a secular Jesus or
Lazarus. Shame caused Darwin to hide and withdraw from society and to be someone he was
not, but shame also forced him to be the ideal person that he wanted to be, to tell the truth, and
to live again. Just as he projected the shame of his mother’s death onto the pride of a righteous
soldier, his writing turned his shame into “honorable wounds.”

One of the themes of Darwin’s writing that turns shame to pride is the slavery and
treatment of “savages” he witnessed on his voyage. Those against transmutation were against
the idea that an ape ancestry bestialized Europeans and ranked them the same as slaves and
savages. If slaves and savages came from the same stock, then they were neither higher nor
lower in order than the Europeans and there would be no excuse to subjugate and exploit them, a complete annihilation of social hierarchy. How shameful it would be to be on the same standing with them. Slaves and savages by the nature of their race and state of “civilization” were already in a shamed state. But as Darwin travelled the world, he witnessed the physical degradation of the slaves and savages. Slaves were whipped and abused, families were torn apart, sold to different estates. Soldiers killed savages in the name of God and to colonize lands. Indubitably in his mind, he could not bridge the gap of vast differences between a savage and an European, but still, he firmly believed that all humans were from the same stock. To lay hands on another being just because one is in a position of power is to shame and degrade oneself. Thus, Darwin’s shame is two-fold: his shame is the shame of betraying the European intelligentsia and his paternal figures due to his transmutation theory and it is also the emphatic shame of what Darwin saw was the subordinate other. Once, Darwin recounted an incident in which he waved his hand to signal where he wanted a slave to ferry him but the slave misinterpreted his intentions: “Instantly, with a frightened look and half-shut eyes, he dropped his hands. I shall never forget my feelings of surprise, disgust and shame, at seeing a great powerful man afraid even to ward off a blow, directed as he taught at his face. This man had been trained to a degradation lower than slavery of the most helpless animal” (qtd. in Voyaging 214). The shame of the slave—because of his status, race, and actions—was transmitted and reproduced in Darwin. Darwin was both ashamed of and for the slave.

But yet if slaves and savages are shameful to opponents of transmutation, then all humans are equally shamed, as Darwin noted, “It is absurd to talk of one animal being higher than another” (Notebook B 74). Or rather, since Darwin saw no shame in humans being animals, then all humans are equally shameless: in Descent wrote he, “He who has seen a savage in his

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3 For a detailed discussion on Darwin and slavery, see Adrian Desmond and James Moore’s Darwin’s Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins.
native land will not feel shame, if forced to acknowledge that blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins” (619). This interplay from shame to pride on slaves and savages is demonstrated early in Darwin’s writings in *Voyage of the Beagle*. Darwin came across a group of runaway slaves who were “seized with the exception of one old woman, who sooner than again be led into slavery, dashed herself to pieces from the summit of the mountain. In a Roman matron this would have been called the noble love of freedom: in a poor negress it is mere brutal obstinacy” (59). Not only exposing the double standards of the Victorians, Darwin rewrote suicide, a sin and a shame in Christian theology, into something regal and virtuous by harking back to a Western and respectable mythology. She was described simply as “old,” signifying experienced, long-suffering, venerable, worthy of respect. His almost-theatrical description—“dashed herself to pieces from the summit of the mountain”—elevates the status of the shamed slave to the numerous Roman women who committed suicide. What others saw as shameful in slaves, Darwin rewrote into pride.

Shame forces us to renounce the object but Darwin’s unwillingness to renounce writing about transmutation heightened his self-consciousness, which is why writing, like blushing, is a proprioceptive activity. And like blushing as an expression of shame, Darwin’s writing is shame cathected. “We work ideas through our bodies; we write through our bodies, hoping to get into the bodies of our readers,” expounds Elspeth Probyn in “Writing Shame” (141). She narrates how writing has taken a toll on her body and, on reflection, discovers that it is the shame of her contents that causes her ailments. Although she begins the chapter with her sympathy for Darwin and how writing made him sick, she does not take a step further to uncover the reason behind his illnesses. Gilles Deleuze argues that the body is not unified and not bounded by its physicality; it is made up of many elements in constant movement and interaction with other bodies, forming multiple connections, or what Darwin would called “an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes,
with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth… these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner” (Origin 489). A dip in the population of herbivores causes a dip of carnivores, but in a more metaphorical sense, bodies affect other bodies through affects. Supported by scientific ideas on propriocentrism, Brian Massumi explicates, “feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold in action, often unpredictably” (1). Deleuze’s and Massumi’s views are echoed in other studies. Building on Tomkins, clinical psychologist Gershen Kaufman explains that interminable shaming can accumulate to become a dominant trait in a person. This state of shame eventually is embedded in the body, relationships, or competence. In short, writing affects the body that writes and the bodies that read the writings.

Unconsciously, Darwin’s writings demonstrate the two Deleuzian notions of the multiplicities of the selves, affecting one another. Firstly, Darwin saw his writings as extensions of himself. He often called his books his children, his published travel journal was “my first literary child” (Autobiography 96) and pangenesis, a theory of his, was his “beloved child” (qtd. in Desmond and Moore 551). All his books were “offspring of his fertile imagination” (Desmond and Moore 551). Like his biological progenies whom he was proud of for their achievements and slightly ashamed of their inbreeding ancestry, his literary babies gave him both pride and shame. Pride stemmed from the praise he received especially from his father figures and the book sales. All 1, 250 copies of Origin were sold out on the first day. Emotions sold 7, 000 copies quickly and his “small book of little moment” on worms sold the best (Desmond and Moore 650). But his books also humiliated him. He often associated his work with shame: “Talking of shame!, I have sent a copy of my Journal with [a] very humble note to Agassiz” (emphasis original, Letter 595). He obsessively kept cuttings of more than
200 reviews of *Origin*, tracking the compliments and insults. His book was “*shamefully imposed*” on the public (emphasis original, letter 2814). If his geological theory on the mechanical origin of cleavage and foliation should “ever be proved, I shall not look back with utter shame at my work” (letter 1633). His books then worried and excited him as extensions of his selves, like his children. His books were part of him but had lives beyond him.

As Deleuze states that bodies affect bodies through emotions, even as Darwin’s books were part of his selves, his affects transmit through them to the readers. Beer evinces in her eminent book, *Darwin’s Plots*, that he was a master storyteller. But a good narration isn’t merely about techniques, it is about the ability to affect and influence the reader. Style is important to Darwin, as his son Francis notes in *Life and Letters*. Levine hints that in disenchanting the world of its Biblical myths and reenchanting it with nature, part of the credit goes to Darwin’s affective prose. His children often teased him on his effusive enthusiasm in describing nature. A larval barnacle isn’t a larval barnacle but has “six pairs of beautifully constructed natatory legs, a pair of magnificent compound eyes, and extremely complex antennae” (*Charles Darwin* 99). The descriptions, “beautiful,” “magnificent,” and “complex,” are vague but their purpose is to stir in the reader’s imagination a sense of awe and wonder, corresponding to Darwin’s. In the same way, shame could seep into his writings, consciously or unconsciously, and be transmitted to readers through his body of works.

It was not only that transmutation is a theory of shame, or Darwin was shamed for his entire life, or shame drove him to write, to turn shame into a badge of honor, but also that the affect seeps into his writing unconsciously. His style of writing is a style of shame. Stemming from shame and other feelings, two of Darwin’s symptoms had to do with hands and lips (Colp 6). “My lips,” Darwin wrote to his cousin Fox, “have lately taken to be bad, which will prevent my going to Edinburgh” (Letter 56). It was indubitably quite a ludicrous statement to make: to
be unable to travel because of one’s lips. But as we have shown that Darwin’s illnesses were often psychosomatic in nature, his lips and hands are symptomatic and tell a tale of their own. Lips and hands are essential to storytelling: you narrate a story and gesticulate or you pen it down. In both oral and written traditions, Darwin had some difficulties. Darwin, like his father and grandfather, was a stammerer, having difficulty with the consonant “w.” His elders would reward him if he could pronounce “white wine” clearly. Emma or his daughters read novels to him in the afternoons, he was never the narrator. But perhaps he had spun all the yarns he wanted as a child:

I was in those days a very great story-teller [sic] for the pure pleasure of exciting attention and surprise. I stole fruit and hid it for these same motives, and injured trees by barking them for similar ends. I scarcely ever went out walking without saying I had seen a pheasant or some strange bird (natural history taste); these lies, when not detected, I presume, excited my attention, as I recollect them vividly, not connected with shame, though some I do, but as something which by having produced a great effect on my mind, gave pleasure like a tragedy. I recollect at Mr. Case’s [school] inventing a whole fabric to show how fond I was of speaking the truth! My invention is still so vivid in my mind, that I could almost fancy it was true, did not memory of former shame tell me it was false.” (emphasis original, More Letters 3-4)

Both Browne and Beer read the passage as a triumph of the imagination: analogous to Darwin’s paradox of “pleasure like a tragedy,” of lying about speaking the truth, they see that his speculations, grounded in reality, were merely an exaggeration and magnification of experiences and in a sense, “an imaginative rethinking of daily life” (Browne 14). In lying lies “a form of truth discovery” (Beer 25).

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4 In Gaskell’s Cranford, Matty’s father writes to her because her mother has broken her leg, preventing her from holding a pen.
But besides truth, lies, storytelling, pleasure, and memories, the keywords are shame and attention, both words mentioned twice in the above short excerpt. As Darwin states in *Emotions* that blushing of shame is drawing attention to the self, Darwin wanted to draw attention to himself in telling these lies. He wished to be looked at and looked upon and to be discovered. Shame requires the self and other to form identities. Darwin represented himself as a confused body of a complex matrix of shame: the lies, Darwin claimed, were not connected to shame but in some cases, they were. When were lies connected to shame and when not? It was difficult for Darwin to pinpoint a moment because shame means that the identity is in flux. But whatever the case, his lies were so convincing even in his own mind that he almost believed them to be true if not for the shame of lying. Even though the lies he told to draw attention to himself were shameful, it was also through shame that he could disbelieve the reality he created or, put in another way, shame made him honest. It is easy to see why he kept his evolutionary theory quiet for so long because he turned the shameful theory in his mind to see if he could shame himself to disbelieve it and he could not.

Darwin’s style of shameful narration is dependent on honesty. But it has been noted that Darwin found writing as onerous as speaking. His son Francis comments that Darwin “often laughed or grumbled at himself for the difficulty which he found in writing English, saying, for instance, that if a bad arrangement of a sentence was possible, he should be sure to adopt it” (*Life and Letters* 154). Similarly, his daughter Henrietta mentions that “He did not write with ease, and was apt to invert his sentences both in writing and speaking, putting the qualifying clause before it was clear what it was to qualify” (*Life and Letters* 154). Beer attributes the burden of his writing to a theologically laden language of the nineteenth century. To counterpoise the ecclesiasticism in language, Beer proposes that Darwin uses several narrative strategies, such as anthropomorphizing nature—so that the creator is Nature, not God—and using metaphors such that the famous tree diagram in *Origin* replaces the metaphor
of Tree of Life. But Beer doesn’t point out that Darwin had to resort to narrative strategies, metaphors and anthropomorphizing, precisely because language is not precise enough. Because this linguistic imprecision is not accurate, as if it is a form of prevarication, it is a cause for shame. The disconnection of the signifier and the signified is shameful because language does not represent the honesty and precision Darwin wanted, as he would have learnt from his contact with different languages in his travels. Writing lacks honesty and that is shameful, causing Darwin an impediment and to toil under language’s strain. Even at an old age, Darwin still had “as much difficulty as ever in expressing myself clearly and concisely; and this difficulty has caused me a very great loss of time; but it has had the compensating disadvantage of forcing me to think long and intently about every sentence” (Autobiography 111-2). As mentioned earlier, Kristeva sees the arduousness of writing, or more precisely the lack of words, as a sign of abjection and shame, and this abjection and shame of Darwin’s came from the nebulous nature of language.

The Darwinian linguistic paradox is thus this: narration requires honesty to get rid of the shame in transmutation but language itself is shameful because it is inexact and approximate. What Darwin might have (unwittingly?) done could be a precursor for feminist and queer writings. To undercut the phallogocentrism and heterosexism inherent in language, feminists and queers often use language in unpredictable ways, stretching the linguistic limits, using forbidden prescriptive grammar, such as run-on sentences. One’s writing may be queer without being explicitly queer: Henry James, Marcel Proust and Joseph Conrad for examples. One’s writing could be queer without being homosexual; and being homosexual doesn’t necessarily mean the writing is queer. Darwin himself was a fan of run-on sentences or grammatically incorrect sentences: he “frequently put too much matter into one sentence, so that it had to be cut into two” (Francis Darwin, qtd. in Life and Letters 154). He was “sure to adopt” “a bad arrangement of a sentence,” implying that he purposefully chose the anomalous
way. He was committed, Henrietta informed us in 1903, to “invert his sentences,” especially with regards to qualifying clauses. Surely, Darwin was capable of learning a grammatical rule and correcting himself since he made the same mistake over and over again? The term “inversion” that Henrietta chose is used to refer to same-sex desire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Henrietta, the editor of many of Darwin’s scientific books, might probably have heard of the term but also probably did not mean to apply same-sex desire to Darwin’s writing. But what she meant was that his writing was strange and defamiliarizing. In a paradoxical move, Darwin made the imprecise language vaguer, more dishonest by incorporating bad grammar that causes one to read a few times before comprehension. In short, Darwin linked shame, honesty, and queerness in his writing.

Darwin’s writing is so queer that it reflects differently on different people. On the one hand, Darwin and “at least one good judge” knew that Darwin’s writing “is not a good style” (*Life and Letters* 155). A reviewer remarked Darwin wrote in a “conceited & cock-sure style, which shame [Darwin] a little” (Letter 2537). On the other hand, “His style has been much praised… His courteous and conciliatory tone towards his reader is remarkable, and it must be partly this quality which revealed his personal sweetness of character to so many who had never seen him” (Francis Darwin, qtd. in *Life and Letters* 155). Here, Francis has cast his father in a “feminine” role (in the nineteenth century sense). Darwin sought to please and was sweet; he did not want to be “conceited & cock-sure.” Henrietta too feminizes her father as she comments on her editing: “He was always so ready to be convinced that any suggested alteration was an improvement, and so full of gratitude for the trouble taken. I do not think that he ever used to forget to tell me what improvement he thought I had made, and he used almost to excuse himself if he did not agree with any correction. I think I felt the singular modesty and graciousness of his nature through thus working for him” (qtd. in *Life and Letters* 154). In Henrietta’s eyes, Darwin was a perfect model of a nineteenth century lady: he had no qualms
in expressing his emotions, he was always first to submit and defer to her, he was gracious and modest, a form of shame Darwin has pointed out in *Emotions*. As we have discussed in the previous section that shame is queer because it feminizes men, Darwin himself is the exemplar of a feminized man, queered by shame, shown through his writing. Perhaps so accustomed was he by the lifelong shame of his writing that, towards the end of his life, he called himself an “old woman” (*Charles Darwin* 76). Darwin’s shame, experienced through his illnesses and expressed in his writings, pushed the limits of the body and language: his body broke down and changed its sex, the understanding of language was tested with bad grammar. In other words, the mind and body were in conflict and yet shame connected them both—the mind caused Darwin to be sick, the body wrote his thoughts. Hence, shame produces, in this clash, new subjectivities of the body and language. Out of shame came the theory of evolution. In this sense, shame is generative.

In writing about shame, Darwin was not trying to associate emotions with women nor was he demonstrating men’s superiority of triumph of reason over emotions, as suggested by Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Study of Emotion*. The point of Darwin’s *Emotions* is that everyone, men and women across all races and ages, has emotions. He was also not claiming that emotions have no place in a dog-eat-dog world, as argued by Patricia Jalland. On the contrary, he wished to justify the role of emotions in the competitive world. Darwin’s life was consumed by emotions and, as I emphasize, by shame. His appearance, family scandals, inferiority to his elder brother, mediocrity in school, disappointing his parental figures, dereliction of his family occupation, and especially the death of his mother, caused him great humiliation and shame. With great shame, he wanted all his life to avoid the pain of shame by being respectable and maneuvered with great expertise to achieve credibility and reputation. But even his writing is shameful. Writing on transmutation is shameful because it equates humans with animals, destroying social order and Christianity teachings. Transmutation is
shameful because the writing is based on a reading of ancestors’ inchoate forms as texts of failure.

Like Frankenstein seeking the secret of life because of the death of his mother, the shame of Darwin’s mother death drove him to research the origin of life to the point that writing made him sick. Anyone who has written before knows that writing is dependent on the body and Darwin’s body was ridden with shame. The shame in his bodies of work was transmitted to readers by his queer and shameful style of writing, which is at once honest and dishonest, rambling and clear. To produce such shameful, queer writing, his body is a combat zone where ideas and experience shaped by shame threaten to tear it apart but in the end, his body is a productive one, generating new theories about mediating our identities in relation to time and space.
Chapter Two: “We Must Inculcate the Sentiment of Shame”: Shame and Nation-Building in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s The Caxtons Trilogy

To desire to do something, not only as well as it can be done, but better than we can do it—to feel to exaggeration all our own natural deficiencies towards the doing of it—to resolve by redoubled energy and perseverance to extract from art whatever may supply those deficiencies in nature—this is the surest way to become great—this is the character of the English race—this should be the character of an English genius.

But he who thus feels, thus desires, and thus resolves, will keep free from rust those mainsprings of action—the sensibility to shame, and the yearning towards perfection.

-Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s “On Shyness”

In the epigraph, Edward Bulwer-Lytton elucidates the defining characteristic of the English. To have a sense of honor and shame is not only patriotic, it is the source for the English to excel, a “yearning for perfection”; shame drives the English, whatever their “deficiencies in nature” are, and “redoubled [their] energy and perseverance” to achieve something great, as Bulwer-Lytton writes in a chapter called “Shyness” in Caxtoniana (59). Like Darwin, Bulwer-Lytton views shyness as a gradation of shame and defines shyness as “shamefacedness” (49). To them, shame encompasses shyness: shyness “has its root in the generous sensitiveness to shame,” as Bulwer-Lytton quotes Plutarch (53). “Shyness… is a certain nervous susceptibility, a perpetual comparison between one’s own powers and some ideal standard of excellence which one can never wholly attain, but towards which one is always striving” (53). In other words, shyness is the shame of never being able to match up to one’s ideal self and identity, but it is this shame, a desire to perfection, that motivates the English.

Darwin and Bulwer-Lytton think of shyness-shame in a few similar ways: shyness-shame is dissimulating, and contagious (51-2). It is more common in the young than the elderly and, as we grow older, we become less prone to shyness-shame because the youth “aspires to
Both thinkers also agree that shame requires a second party to reflect on one’s action: “You could still blush or turn pale at the thought of a stain on your honour” because you imagine what others would think of you (59). Shame, to them, is not a negative affect: the avoidance of shame drives people to reflect on their actions, to possess a sense of morality, to “set before his imagination some ideal perfection to which he desires to attain, and of which he fears to fall short,” to inspire “courage when it feels like fear” (56; 54).

In other ways regarding shame, they disagree, as Darwin argues that all human beings—from the insane to aboriginals, from the mightiest to the lowest—feel shame but Bulwer-Lytton states that shyness-shame is a “national character,” and “The British race are shy to a proverb,” but not “Turk and Red Indian [who] do not improve” (58). Although, to Bulwer-Lytton, the English are susceptible to shame and the fear of failures, there are variations within the English race as shyness-shame is “more prevalent with the high-born than the plebeian” (52). The “eldest sons of good family are generally more shy than the younger” because, in a primogenitary society, eldest sons are more ashamed of failures. But “vigorous competition” cures the shyness-shame in “the high-born” as “high rank in England [is] so generally associated with the discharge of public duties, that if these elder sons be born to pre-eminent stations, their shyness will often wear away when their faculties are called into exercise by the very inheritance which deprives them of the stimulus of gain, but, bringing them at once before the criticism of public opinion, supplies a motive of coveting public esteem” (52-3). While Darwin and Bulwer-Lytton agree that shame is humanizing, the latter opines that there are races and classes of humans more susceptible to shame and thus more equal than others. To Bulwer-Lytton, a sense of honor and shame is not only necessary to prevent a complete revolution of government and class system, they are traits essential to Englishness for the English to excel and surpass other nations; Bulwer-Lytton encodes these traits as
“aristocratic spirit.” But while they could be found in every English citizen, only “true” male aristocrats who possess the spirit could become natural, talented, brilliant leaders.

To understand how Bulwer-Lytton uses the notion of shame in a nationalist context, this chapter examines The Caxtons trilogy (The Caxtons, My Novel, and What Will He Do with It?) alongside his non-fictional essays on class, gender, and sexuality. Although The Coming Race, a novel on a dystopia brought about by the fruition of evolution, may appear suited for a comparison between Bulwer-Lytton and Darwin, I deliberately chose early nineteenth-century novels published before Origin to demonstrate the shift in thinking about shame between Bulwer-Lytton and Darwin, and the influence of Darwin regarding shame on later writers such as Gaskell (Chapter 3) during the mid-nineteenth century, and J.A. Symonds and Havelock Ellis (Chapter 4) at the fin de siècle. As a contrast to Darwin’s understanding of shame in which he utilizes it to interrogate the subjectivity of the self in light of his agnostic beliefs, Bulwer-Lytton’s shame, underlined by his Protestant upbringing, defines his sense of selfhood in relation to England and masculinity, and because Darwin’s understanding is individualistic, that is, shame operates differently for different people under different circumstances, and Bulwer-Lytton’s notion is predetermined and prescriptive, Darwin’s narratives are multifarious whereas Bulwer-Lytton’s novels have similar trajectories. This chapter begins with an examination of Bulwer-Lytton’s intention in writing novels and essays, and of how shame affected and seeped into his writing. A combination of his intention and the shame he suffered engender the production of his brand of nationalism to be transmitted through his writings, as shown later in the chapter, before finally analyzing shame in The Caxtons trilogy.

**Bulwer-Lytton’s Intention in Writing**

In the common imagination, Bulwer-Lytton is now reputed as the man who persuaded Charles Dickens to alter the ending of Great Expectations, and the author who coined “the pen is
mightier than the sword,” and “It was a dark and stormy night,” the oft used opening in high school students’ stories. But at the height of his popularity, Bulwer-Lytton’s novels outsold even Dickens’: his were the most extensively published in Britain between 1830 and 1870 (Edward Bulwer-Lytton 136). Not only were his novels immensely popular, his political treatises were highly influential as exemplified by the pamphlet A Letter to a Late Cabinet Minister on the Present Crisis, published in the aftermath of King William IV dismissing Lord Melbourne’s ministry in 1834, which ran for twenty-one editions in six weeks and sold thirty thousand copies. The pamphlet was credited with the return of Lord Melbourne’s victory in the ensuing elections (Schor 129). Bulwer-Lytton, a lifelong friend of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, wrote on England and the English, and was elected a Minister of Parliament for St. Ives in Huntingdonshire in 1831, and for Lincoln in 1832, and sat for that city for nine years. He returned as a conservative for Hertfordshire from 1852 till 1866 when he was raised to the peerage of Baron Lytton of Knebworth. In 1858, he held the post of Secretary of State for the Colonies. Bulwer-Lytton’s novels then not only captivate and encapsulate the Victorian imagination, they are infused with his political thoughts. A writer imparts his way of seeing the world through his work and because Bulwer-Lytton’s politics entwined tightly with his personal life, an analysis of his novels demand an understanding of his politics.

One could make a case that his novels, like many early Victorian novels, are nationalistic, propagandistic, and didactic. In contradistinction to Thomas Carlyle’s materialist ethic, expressed succinctly in his memorable phrase “virtue by Profit and Loss” (76), Bulwer-Lytton argues that the novel should cultivate good values. In his non-fiction work, England and the English, the novel, as a mode of popular and powerful communication, should “inculcate a venerating enthusiasm for the true and ethereal springs of Greatness and Virtue…the noble aspirations that belong…to the diviner excitation of the soul” (379). In another non-fiction book, Caxtoniana, published 30 years after England, he reiterates, in a chapter, “On the
Moral Effect of Writers,” that art “is essentially ethical; because every true work of Art must have beauty or grandeur of some kind, and beauty and grandeur can not [sic] be comprehended by the beholder except through the moral sentiment” (115). An excellent novel, to Bulwer-Lytton, should inspire readers to “Greatness and Virtue” by moving, touching, affecting them. To lead by example, Bulwer-Lytton’s characters are often edified by books. Pisistratus Caxton, the protagonist, and his uncle Roland de Caxton in the first of The Caxtons Trilogy, The Caxtons, are humbled by the Life of the Reverend Robert Hall, which depicts a life of fullness that incites them to action and out of their heartaches from the impossibility of their one-sided infatuation. In the second of the trilogy, My Novel, or Varieties in English Life, Leonard Fairfield writes a novel so instructive that villains weep and repent after reading it. Bulwer-Lytton’s hook-and-bait writing style seduces readers with sensational and moving storylines, but, in the end, leaves readers with moral lessons by tugging at their heartstrings.

His didactic intentions did not escape attentive Victorian readers. In 1880, American diplomat Henry Wikoff writes in his autobiography that in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels, there is a “vein of philosophy that pervaded that attracted me, and aroused a habit of reflection vastly beneficial. I believe I derived more instruction in this way from Bulwer than any author I ever read” (25). John Ruskin echoes Wikoff’s sentiments: Bulwer-Lytton’s works “must always refine the mind to a great degree, and improve us in the science of metaphysics” (“Essay” 371). But the foible of didactic novels is that they run the risk of being sententious and sanctimonious, of placing oneself in the position of a teacher above the readers. Perhaps William Makepeace Thackeray had spotted Bulwer-Lytton’s sense of superiority and did not hold back on his vituperation, calling Bulwer-Lytton “Bulwig,” who was “bloated with vanity, meanness, and ostentations exaltation of self” (“Mr Yellowplush’s Ajew” 196; “High-Ways and Low-Ways” 725).
Even as Bulwer-Lytton’s writings reflect his propagandistic and moralistic agenda for the public, they are also meditations on what it means to be human in light of the scientific theories of evolution—What is human if humans are animals?—and these meditations are clearest in his essays. In “On the Spirit in Which New Theories Should Be Received,” he mocks Darwin: “out-Lamarcking Lamarck, appears Darwin!” (150). He, as a staunch Christian, goes on to discuss other scientific discoveries, such as Bichat’s, and repudiates them. “All that we think, feel, and imagine,” he writes, “[is consolidated] into one absolute unity—LIFE. Notable discovery! which, in plain words, simply means this, Life is life!” (151, emphasis original). Bulwer-Lytton would go on to write The Coming Race, a “solemn quiz on Darwin,” as he calls it in a letter to John Forster (qtd. in Darton v-xv). In the novella, he out-Darwins Darwin by creating a satire of a dystopia, which concludes with the triumph of God, and the exalted position of the human race. Bulwer-Lytton’s meditations on being human culminate in Caxtoniana which contains essays on the nation (“On the Spirit of Conservatism”), morality (“On Intellectual Conduct as Distinct from Moral,” “On Moral Effect of Writers,” etc), writing (“On Style and Diction,” “Of Essay-Writing,” etc), and emotions (“On Shyness,” “The Sanguine Temperament,” “On Self-Control,” etc). On the surface, Caxtoniana, named after the The Caxtons trilogy, appears to collect essays of disparate themes, yet a closer inspection can connect the themes to explain Bulwer-Lytton’s concerns of being human, especially an Englishman, guided by morals and emotions. In essence, to examine Bulwer-Lytton’s works, one must look at the intersections of nationhood, morality and the human condition; all these issues are enmeshed together and any analysis missing one component is an incomplete one. Although Darwin and Bulwer-Lytton set out from different paths—one was a skeptic, the other religious—both ruminated on what it means to be human, notably using shame as a first step.
“Despite the taunts of enemies who gloated over his publication failures,” Christopher Lane writes, “the collapse of his marriage to Rosina Wheeler was more damaging and humiliating” (608). In 1827, Bulwer-Lytton married Rosina Wheeler, an Irish beauty of no social standing or wealth, against his mother’s implacable opposition. His mother cut off his allowance but the parent and son reconciled three years later when his marriage was on the brink of collapse. His separation from Rosina would bring him a lifelong shame partly because of Rosina’s public altercations and partly because of his own abusive reactions. Their quarrels were made public with mutual accusations of infidelity. He was “so violent towards his wife that a servant fled the scene in terror” (Mulvey-Roberts 160). After they were legally separated—he did not want a divorce as it would hurt his political career—Rosina wrote thinly veiled romans a clef to traduce, calumniate, and shame him publicly. In Cheveley (1839), he is lampooned as the villain, Lord de Clifford, taking after the name of Bulwer-Lytton’s eponymous hero in Paul Clifford (1830). She caricatures him as Sir Liar and Sir Coward in her The Budget of the Bubble Family (1840) and The Peer’s Daughter (1849) respectively. In Rosina’s Behind the Scenes (1854), Henry Ponsonby Ferrars, who is an author and M.P. like Bulwer-Lytton, tries unsuccessfully to commit bigamy with the heroine. Ferrars’s German mistress is a ghost-writer, a barbed reference to rumors of Bulwer-Lytton publishing his German translations under his name while secretly employing his daughter’s German governess to translate his books (Mulvey-Roberts 163).

Not only did Rosina shame Bulwer-Lytton publicly in her novels, she did so in her private correspondence. In a letter to her friend, Dr Price, Rosina wrote, “If you can read novels do read ‘The Woman in White’ [sic] by Wilkie Collins. It will remind you slightly of my history. Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco are very pretty rascals as far as they go, but mere sucking doves compared to the fiends I have to deal with” (qtd. in Devey 364). Rosina even wrote to
Wilkie Collins, “The great failure of your book [The Woman in White] is the villain; Count Fosco is a very poor one, and when next you want a character of that sort I trust you will not disdain to come to me. The man is alive and constantly under my gaze. In fact he is my own husband” (qtd. in Escott 331-2). This is not to say that Bulwer-Lytton was the victim—he took their children away from her—but rather he was shamed by the airing of dirty laundry in public on what was supposed to be a private affair between two adults, and he retaliated in a public manner.

In June 1858, after multiple caricatures of Bulwer-Lytton appeared in Rosina’s books, when he stood as a parliamentary candidate for Hertfordshire, she denounced him publicly at the hustings. As a result, she, like Laura in Woman in White, was forcibly committed to a lunatic asylum by Bulwer-Lytton, and was released after three weeks with the help of her husband’s political rivals. Not satisfied to immure her, Bulwer-Lytton was so incensed and ashamed that he threatened to bring an injunction to prevent the republication of Rosina’s Very Successful! (1859) in which he was satirized as Sir Janus Allpuff. His shame was so debilitating that he wrote to his mother, “My career is blighted; my temper soured; my nerves shattered; and if I am to go on for ever [sic] in this way because she insists on continuing to force herself upon me, god knows what I shall do at last” (qtd. in Sadleir 403). As Rosina’s biographer argues, she “evolved scheme upon scheme to malign and embarrass her husband. Bulwer, the man she had loved, whose every fear was at her mercy, was an easy quarry for her wiles, and she pursued him with relentless and savage fury until his death” (Flower 20; also see Blaine).

Besides the attacks from his wife, Bulwer-Lytton had many literary detractors. One of them, Thackeray, condemned his poetry as “flimsy, mystical, namby-pamby” and called Lucretia (1846) “his most appalling and arsenical novel” (qtd. In Hollingsworth 199-200). A humiliated Bulwer-Lytton almost challenged Thackeray to a duel, which his two friends dissuaded him from doing. Bulwer-Lytton bickered with Tennyson over the latter’s pension,
resulting in a mortifying quarrel made public in *Punch* (see “Alcibiades,” “After-thought,” and “The New Timon”). Unlike Darwin whose respectability in society stemmed from his personal conduct and shame from his studies, Bulwer-Lytton’s shame arose from his public brawls.

But his shame was not debilitating; as he claims that “the sensibility to shame” fuels the “yearning towards perfection,” he as the Secretary of State for the Colonies was driven by shame to strive for political and literary honor. Honor and shame are words he frequently uses in his novels. In *My Novel*, “honor” and its derivatives occur no less than 327 times, “shame” and its derivatives, 120 times. But critics seldom discuss honor and shame in relation to Bulwer-Lytton’s works on nationhood. In not talking about shame, critics miss out on Bulwer-Lytton’s idea of the defining characteristic of and the driving force behind the English.

Joachim Mathieu’s *England and the English: Perceiving Self and Other* argues that Bulwer-Lytton sees the European Other not as an antagonist, but as someone to emulate. “It is important,” Mathieu concludes, “to see oneself through foreign eyes in order to understand oneself and to observe models from abroad in order to reform oneself” (97). But Mathieu cherry-picks his evidence and neglects to take into consideration Bulwer-Lytton’s pride for England. He ignores lines like “Courage is more universally spread through the raw material of England than it is among that of any other people” in *England and the English* (1: 90, emphasis original). In many of Bulwer-Lytton’s novels, Europe outside of England is often seen as a depraved den of sins. In *The Caxtons*, Francis Vivian, the villain, is inured to iniquity partly because of his Spanish mother’s upbringing. Effeminacy among Englishmen is often depicted as a French affliction. The threat in *My Novel* emanates from Italy. To enable a reading like Mathieu’s is to ignore evidence from Bulwer-Lytton’s oeuvre, and to ignore the pride he took in being an Englishman.

Like Mathieu, Charles W. Snyder in “Bulwer Lytton and ‘The Cult of the Colonies’” contrasts other countries with England. Snyder argues that during Bulwer-Lytton’s tenure as
the Colonial Secretary, Bulwer-Lytton attempts to counter the pessimistic opinion on the colonies, that they were too expensive to maintain, likened to “millstones around our necks” by Prime Minister and close friend, Disraeli. Bulwer-Lytton’s justification is that colonies provide a financial opportunity for the overcrowded and competitive England—many young, intelligent, hardworking, and moral men in his novels venture to the colonies and bring wealth back to the motherland—and that colonists should identify with England. But why would colonists not set up homes in colonies? Why should these young, strapping men return to England? What ties them to their home country? Snyder does not explain but, as we shall see later, it is shame that drives colonists to do their patriotic duty to return to their motherland.

Peter W. Sinnema agrees with Snyder that Bulwer-Lytton emphasizes the rapport between the home country and the colonies. However, Sinnema presents a more nuanced interrogation of intersections of nationhood, gender, and sexuality in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels. Following Nancy Armstrong’s seminal *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Sinnema evinces that Bulwer-Lytton creates a gendered division in his works: men versus women, self versus society, action versus emotion, private versus public, and home country versus colonies. In Sinnema’s reading, homosocial male-to-male tutelage must occur in *The Caxtons* trilogy for boys to mature into men useful for England. “This instruction,” Sinnema argues, “in turn, points invariably to the home as a locus of meaning in a fractious world: good, successfully tutored men always return home” (157). While it is generally true in *The Caxtons* trilogy, Sinnema, like Snyder, does not explain why men return to England and what hold England has over them.

The analyses of Sinnema, Snyder, and Mathieu have missed out an important aspect that makes their articles on Bulwer-Lytton’s notion of nationhood flawed: a discussion of emotions. After all, Bulwer-Lytton insists that *The Caxtons* trilogy is to “apeal [sic] to domestic Emotions” (qtd. in *Edward Bulwer-Lytton* 155). Both Helen Groth and Christopher Lane examine Bulwer-Lytton’s ideas of nationhood with regards to sympathy, used in the
nineteenth-century sense, i.e. “a fellow feeling,” not tinged with pity. Groth’s concern is that in a suddenly widening world which “inspires multiple affiliations and resistances across boundaries of nation and culture” (11), the sympathetic identification between Bulwer-Lytton’s characters and his readers would create a sense of Englishness and belonging. This identification, however, depends on the subjectivity of each individual reader, and not all English readers would have similar patriotic responses. Furthermore, as both Groth and Lane assert, there are limits to sympathy as it clashes with the inherent misanthropy existing in all humans according to Bulwer-Lytton. It is this tension between sympathy and misanthropy, as Lane argues, that would lead to progress in Bulwer-Lytton’s world. But “the characteristic of the English race” is to “desire to do something, not only as well as it can be done, but better than we can do it—to feel to exaggeration all our own natural deficiencies towards the doing of it—to resolve by redoubled energy and perseverance to extract from art whatever may supply those deficiencies in nature” (Caxtoniana 59). If one relies on the dialectics of sympathy-misanthropy, why would the English feel compelled to excel? Furthermore, as Lane himself notes, misanthropy cannot explain Bulwer-Lytton’s oeuvre as “the ironic misanthrope briefly vacates Bulwer’s 1840s novels” (619). What drives the English to honors, and to yearn for perfection? “The sensibility to shame,” Bulwer-Lytton replies (Caxtoniana 59).

On Englishness, Honor, and Shame

Before I move on to The Caxtons trilogy, I want to explicate Bulwer-Lytton’s notions of Englishness and tie them with shame and honor. In England and the English (1833), Bulwer-Lytton talks about the decaying state of the country in which the “disease” is embedded in its fetid class system as his book “begin[s] by ascertaining its origin” (42). The issue is that “people have no exact and fixed position—that by acquaintance alone they may rise to look down on their superiors—that while the rank gained by intellect, or by interest, is open but to
few, the rank that may be obtained by fashion seems delusively to be open to all” (29). (One can see how Darwinian evolution, in which there are no higher or lower beings, would irk Bulwer-Lytton who believes that a dissolving of ranks would lead to chaos.) Although, in theory, people could transcend their class, and although the “highest office have been open by law to any man, no matter what his pedigree or his quarterings,” Bulwer-Lytton points out that it is not true in practice; only those with the influence of the aristocracy obtain high offices (17). And thus, the responsibility of aristocracy in these revered positions should check both the king and the commons. By not creating a strict social sphere between members of differing classes in England, that is, classes are allowed to mix in social events and work, the English aristocracy could extend “their moral influence throughout the whole of society” (27).

But the checking power and the moral influence may be diluted by the “intermixture of the highest aristocracy with the more subaltern ranks of society” (1: 28), that is, instead of the aristocrats influencing the lower classes, they themselves are corrupted. “It is from the poorer classes that the evils and the dangers of a state arise; their crimes are our punishments,” he writes (1:73, emphasis original). Bulwer-Lytton gives several reasons for this attrition of morals, among which include the rise of capitalists and parvenus, who marry titles, and fortune hunters, especially young men marrying rich women; he clearly condemns men who marry above their stations in his novels. In *The Caxtons*, Pisistratus the protagonist falls in love with a highborn heiress Fanny Trevanian, and the “manly” and correct etiquette is to leave the Trevanian household in which he works as an amanuensis; he gives up his political career, gets over his heartbreak, and seeks his fortune in Australia. Pisistratus’s foil, his cousin, Francis

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1 Seven years after the publication of *England and the English* (1833), Thomas Carlyle’s “The Hero as Man of Letters” (1840) argues similarly that a man of letters (or an “aristocrat” in Bulwer-Lytton’s case) could bridge factions in society. However, the differences in the two treatises mean that it is still worth exploring Bulwer-Lytton’s notion, less known than Carlyle’s, because Bulwer-Lytton involves the class system and advocates for aristocracy, tying his argument with shame for the over-reachers.
Vivian, takes over his job, falls in love with Fanny, misconstrues her intentions, kidnapes her, almost coerces her into a Scotch wedding, and falls in shame and disgrace. Shame, for Bulwer-Lytton, is used to keep individuals in their proper places within the class system, never over-reaching.

But in Bulwer-Lytton’s real Victorian world, it was not always as neat as in his novels. He perceived the class system to be eroding, and he was afraid that England would follow the path of the French Revolution. Despite the flawed aristocracy blighted by its association with the lower classes, overthrowing the class system is, in Bulwer-Lytton’s view, not the solution. He warns his readers that “democracy had its illegal or corrupt form—in OCHLOCRACY or mob rule; for democracy did not signify the rule of the lower orders alone but of all the people—the highest as the lowest” (*Athens* 112, emphasis original). He argues that democracy by ochlocracy would never be operative and that there should be no social insurrection because aristocracy is much too entrenched in English society: “What is the influence which... proved to be the dominating influence of England; colouring the national character, pervading every grade of our social system, ruling our education, governing our religion, operating on our literature, our philosophy, our sciences, our arts? You answer at once, that it is the ARISTOCRATIC” (2:246-7, emphasis original). He reiterates the point that the aristocrats are indestructible a few pages later: “Do not fancy, as some contend, that the aristocracy would fall if the king fell. Not a whit of it. You may sweep the House of Lords if you like; you may destroy titles; you may make a bonfire of orb and ermine; and after all your pains, the aristocracy would be exactly as strong as ever” (2: 260).

The solution to a declining England then lies in a strong, efficacious, and almost draconian government, “never yielding to [the people’s] will, because always providing for their wants” (1:190, emphasis original). A good government is “a directive government. It should be in advance of the people—it should pass laws for them, not receive all law from
them” (1:240, emphasis original). For the government to carry out its work effectively and the citizens not to rebel, aristocrats must be the intercessors between the people and government because “In political quiet, the aristocracy are the natural dictators of society, and their sentiments are the most listened to” (1:180). And “it is the property of an enlightened aristocracy… to foster sentiments of honour” (1:48). This sentence is almost replicated in another chapter on ridding corporeal punishment in the military: “we must inculcate the sentiment of shame” to instill a sense of honor and discipline among soldiers (1:101). The parallelism in the sentences indicates that for Bulwer-Lytton, shame is not the opposite of honor but rather, shame and honor are different sides of the same coin. Therefore, for male aristocrats to act as mediators—for they are inevitably men according to Bulwer-Lytton—between the government and the people, they must necessarily instill and inspire a sense of shame and honor in all parties.

But hasn’t the aristocracy been eroded by money, and fashion? If so, how can aristocrats be trusted, and be honorable enough to juggle between state and people? Bulwer-Lytton replies, “For [aristocrats’] power is not in a tapestried chamber, or in a crimson woolsack, or in ribbons and stars, in coronets and titles; its power is in the aristocratic spirit and sympathy which pervade you all” (2:260). In sum, anyone who has a sensibility to shame and honor, which leads to a betterment of the nation, is an aristocrat. Herein lies the contradiction of Bulwer-Lytton’s doctrine: although any Englishman could be an aristocrat spiritually, and all Englishmen should aspire to possess the spirit, they should not wish to transcend their social class. Bulwer-Lytton despised fortune- and title-hunters. In all of his novels, aristocrats are only compatible with other aristocrats; aristocrats only marry other aristocrats, unless the person who marries someone socially superior does not know of it. For instance, Jemima in *My Novel* marries Italian aristocrat Riccabocca who lives incognito in exile in England, seemingly hopeless to retrieve his social status or fortune (besides, Riccabocca is Italian); and
Mr. Trevanion marries Lady Ellinor before she comes unexpectedly to inherit a large sum of money. While the “aristocrat” sentiment could exist in anyone, class lines should not be crossed, that is, one can aspire to achieve the spirit of aristocracy through the sensibility to shame. However, this shame should also keep middle-class Englishmen in check, and they should not plot to become aristocrats in rank; here, Bulwer-Lytton differentiates interiority of the self from the external manifestation of the class system.

Furthermore, even when a character has aristocratic, that is, honorable intentions, he may not make the best politician for England; he can strive for perfection as an Englishman to make the country proud, but he cannot be expected to govern the nation. In My Novel, for instance, Honorable Audley Egerton, with decades of political experience, is praised because he is steady, collected, and speaks his mind for what is best for England. When voters champion a misguided idea, he does not agree with them to win their votes and instead, he corrects them. He ends up in great debt because he has focused on the welfare of England, and neglects to look after his estate. But for all his years of experience, he could not be compared to Lord Harley L’Estrange, who, roused out of his lassitude, “had the rarer gift of eloquence in itself” when canvassing votes on Egerton’s behalf (2:354). “Both Leonard [Egerton’s son] and Audley spoke well, from the good sense which their speeches contained; but Harley could have talked nonsense, and made it more effective than sense” (2:354). This scenario, in which true blue aristocrats have natural inborn talents, is replicated across Bulwer-Lytton’s writing. Hence, Bulwer-Lytton believes that while every Englishman could possess a sense of aristocracy, which is a sensibility to honor and shame, only bona fide aristocrats have inherent aptitude for leadership, and can govern the nation.
The Caxtons: Shame of the Name, Homosociality of Fathers and Sons, and Englishness

First serialized anonymously in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, and when Bulwer-Lytton was assured of its success, published in three volumes in 1849, *The Caxtons* recounts the tribulations of a middle-class family. Pisistratus Caxton, son of Austin and Kitty Caxton, takes on the position of an amanuensis under Mr. Trevanion, a member of parliament, whose wife, Lady Ellinor, is the object of Austin’s affections when they are young. As fate would have it, history repeats itself as Pisistratus falls in love with Fanny, Lady Ellinor’s daughter. Knowing that there is a gap in their social class, Pisistratus resigns his post and, having little opportunity in the overpopulated England, goes to Australia for five years to seek his fortune. In the meanwhile, taking over the role of Trevanion’s amanuensis is Francis Vivian who is later revealed to be Pisistratus’s paternal half-Spanish cousin. Vivian and his father, Captain Roland Caxton, have severed ties because of the son’s dissolute ways. Vivian kidnaps Fanny with the intention to force a marriage on her, but his plan is foiled by Pisistratus and Sir Sedley Beaudesert. Although Pisistratus is now financially comfortable, his social class cannot match Fanny’s and the languid Sir Sedley marries Fanny while Pisistratus marries his cousin, Blanche, who is Vivian’s sister. Status quo is maintained.

Although the title, *The Caxtons*, announces that it revolves around the history of a family in the English empire, it is also a Sternian *bildungsroman* of Pisistratus Caxton in the first person narration. The novel begins with the birth of Pisistratus, as Mrs Primm the servant announces “SIR—sir, it’s a boy!” and Augustine (Pisistratus’ father), much puzzled, replies, “What is a boy?” (5). The passage quickly evolves into a discussion of “What is man?” and one of the possible answers, made in mockery and satire, is “Man is a tailless monkey—boy a male young tailless monkey” (5). Being a staunch Christian, Bulwer-Lytton was not receptive to the idea of evolution: the phrase “a male young tailless monkey” is used in mockery, just as Darwin is lampooned in Bulwer-Lytton’s *What Will He Do with It*. The name Pisistratus,
Bulwer-Lytton informs us, comes from a tyrant who ruled Athens “six hundred years before Christ was born” and was said to be “the disputed arranger of Homer” (14). The despot reduced the privileges of the aristocracy and empowered the lower classes. The significant, anachronistic name of The Caxtons’ protagonist connects several threads in the narrative: although Bulwer-Lytton championed the supremacy of aristocrats, he also believed that the middle classes could better their lives, and the protagonist reifies the idea that a member of the middle-class could gain success through honest hard work with the help of aristocrats, and not by working against them. Bulwer-Lytton’s moralistic tales of class conflicts are also often about the human condition. The association of Victorians with a line of descent from a revered race belittles any evolutionary theory, exalts the English and reminds them that even a proud, advanced civilization may fall if there is no constant progress, a recurring theme in Bulwer-Lytton’s historical works such as Athens: Its Rise and Fall, and The Last Days of Pompeii. Hence, in The Caxtons, Bulwer-Lytton explores the human condition through Englishness, class, and masculinity.

Rosemary George argues that Victorian “Novel after novel suggests that it is the daily construction in the home country as the location of the colonizer’s racial and moral identity and as the legitimization of the colonizer’s national subjecthood that made possible the carrying out of the work of Empire” (107). Sinnema adds to George’s argument that, in The Caxtons trilogy, male homosocial tutelage is valorized as a necessity for maturation before young men are sent out to the colonies. What Sinnema has missed out in his analysis is what gets imparted to young men: a sense of honor and shame, which is crucial in the formation of the English identity and nationhood. “A brave and honorable man [has] a brave and honorable father. Therefore, all the qualities which attention to race should perpetuate are the manly qualities traceable only from the father’s side,” writes Bulwer-Lytton (The Caxtons 63).
In Pisistratus’ life, he has several male figures who school him into masculinity of honor and shame at one time or another – his father Augustine; his paternal uncle Roland de Caxton; his maternal Uncle Jack; Mr. Squills the accoucheur/physiognomist who follows the family everywhere they go; Mr. Trevanion, a politician whom he works for; and Sir Sedley Beaudesert. Pisistratus rejects several of these figures as role models, Uncle Jack and Mr. Squills, both comic figures. In an early episode where Uncle Jack tries to convince Augustine to turn his garden into a profitable orchard and the equanimous Augustine refuses, Pisistratus reads the episode as a lesson in contentment and of knowing one’s place. His “revered parent rose in my estimation after that conference,” he confesses (41). Later, Uncle Jack disgracefully loses half of Augustine’s fortune which includes Pisistratus’ inheritance, affirming Pisistratus’ initial judgment of Uncle Jack’s inadequacy as a mentor.

Not only are Uncle Jack and Mr Squills relegated to the status of comic figures, their inadequacy as mentors is also implied through their bachelorhood. Mr Squills’ singlehood is mentioned twice at the start of the novel (18; 38). When in Australia, Pisistratus pointedly laments over the dearth of women: “Alas! We are three bachelors, but we are better off than bachelors often are in the bush” (410). While Sinnema mentions that masculinity requires homosocial mentoring, he neglects to mention that at the end of the schooling, the honorable young man must reject any same-sex overtures, and marry. The threat of same-sex desire hangs heavily throughout Bulwer-Lytton’s writings. Men’s pulchritude is always described in far greater detail than women’s, and almost every good-hearted man, regardless of his suitability as a mentor, is beautiful. Uncle Jack is “comely… clear-skinned and florid, had a little mouth, with good teeth” (33). Pisistratus talks of the handsome Sir Sedley Beaudesert (old enough to be his father) with great adoration even though they are rivals in love. Like a lovelorn schoolboy, Pisistratus, “leaning my elbow on the table, and my chin upon my hand, am gazing with great admiration on Sir Sedley Beaudesert… [who was] ‘the most charming man of his
day”” (121). “How loveable Sir Sedley was, that I loved him, and yet was jealous of him” (147). Again, and again, Pisistratus consults Sir Sedley, and Pisistratus “felt my heart as gratefully move towards him” (263). Though Mr. Trevanian has “a careworn, eager, yet musing countenance…it was one of those faces which take dignity and refinement from that mental cultivation which distinguishes the true aristocrat… Very handsome might that face have been in youth” (103). Pisistratus’s own father, Augustine, is said to look exceeding young and has “handsome eyes” (11). Leonard Fairfield, Lord Harley L’Estrange, Audley Egerton, Richard Avenel, Frank Hazeldean, Lionel Haughton, Guy Darrell are a few men whom Bulwer-Lytton describes as good-looking in the other two novels of the Caxtons trilogy.

To be honorable and do one’s duty to the nation is to marry and reject any extension of homosocial bonding with handsome men beyond the completion of mentorship. The bachelorhood of Uncle Jack and Mr Squills signals their refusal to enter a heterosexual relationship and, in turn, their continual indulgence in homosocial environments implies their unsuitability as mentors. In a scene where the dashing Francis Vivian, Pisistratus’ cousin, who has “large, brilliant eyes, raven hair, long and wavy, but not curling… teeth dazzling as pearls…[and] the singular beauty of the countenance,” bids valediction to him (87), “Vivian came to me hastily, flung his arms around my neck, and kissed me as a boy kisses his brother” (226). Vivian “cried in a faltering voice: ‘I did not think to love any one as you have made me love you, though sadly against the grain. If you are not my good angel, it is that nature and habit are too strong for you” (226). The phrase “as a boy kisses his brother” is almost redundant in the Victorian context: most nineteenth-century readers would have known the kisses are fraternal. The extra-cautious emphasis that prefaches the “unmanly” declaration of love and being “against the grain” makes the scene suspicuous: the more one conceals, the more one reveals. But in the end, any romantic same-sex attachments seem impossible in Bulwer-Lytton’s world. Pisistratus must disavow the triangulation of desire for Vivian his male cousin,
to borrow Eve Sedgwick’s term, and project his desire and marry his other (female) cousin, Vivian’s sister. Good men in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels move out of homoerotic ties into heterosexual marriages, a movement repeated in many Victorian novels from Dicken’s David and Steerforth to Ouida’s writing, but while other novelists were restricted by the unwritten societal law of compulsory heterosexuality of their time, Bulwer-Lytton reasoned that the necessity of the movement was due to the duty to the Empire and out of a sense of Englishness.

The sense of duty to the Empire and Englishness is exemplified by the importance of bearing sons because masculine Englishness could not be passed down through females. The effeminate bachelor Sir Sedley in his 50s, who seems set to be single for the rest of his life, marries Fanny Trevanion after unexpectedly inheriting the title of marquis. His marriage is done out of a sense of duty, as he has known Fanny for a period of time and does not make a move until he comes into his unlikely inheritance, and he has begotten two sons, ensuring heirs for both his and Mr Trevanion’s properties, a symbol for England’s longevity. Mr Trevanion’s lack of son causes some embarrassment to his wife, Lady Ellinor, and is the subject of discussion between the Caxtons: having no sons “must vex the poor, foolish, ambitious man,” comments Roland de Caxton, Pisistratus’ uncle (101; 115). The homosocial mentorship between an older man and a younger boy that teaches shame and brings honor to England involves a vigilant guard against same-sex attractions, and a marriage; this movement from homosocial ties to heterosexual marriages is why bachelors, like Mr Squills who never outgrows his homosocial stage, sticking to Augustine Caxton constantly, can never be mentors to young English men. Yet it seems that having only one son is proof enough of one’s masculinity and the repulsion of homosociality. When asked if he wants any more children, Augustine exclaims indignantly, “I am sure Mrs. Caxton will never think of such a thing, sir… She's much too good a wife to behave so” (10).
Unlike Pisistratus, who by the end of the novel, has assumed an honorable English identity, joining the ranks of “men who have won noble names, and whose word had weight on the destinies of glorious England” (192), Vivian is not so lucky to have the privilege of male-male tutelage. Despite the fact that Roland de Caxton, Vivian’s father, places honor above everything else, Vivian’s Spanish mother has raised him according to her own culture and religion, and traduced Roland to him, thus nullifying any positive influence Roland has on him. Roland is so thoroughly ashamed of Vivian’s reprobate ways that he disowns his son and prevaricates to the Caxtons, declaring him dead. Sons are important, as we have learnt, because having no son brings the shame of not continuing England’s succession of superiority, as if committing treason to one’s English identity. But for Roland’s “natural grief for a son’s loss, that proud father was consoled. For he was less himself a father than a son—son to the long dead. From every grave where a progenitor slept, he had heard a parent’s voice. He could bear to be bereaved, if the forefathers were not dishonoured” (240). That is to say, although it is detrimental not to have a son, it is even worse to have a son who shames one’s name. “What matter one foolish old man’s sorrows?” Roland says. “The name, the property of generations, is saved, thank Heaven—the name!” (240). Having sons with honors is best, but it is better to be dead than to live in shame.

With no mentors, Pisistratus takes up the burden of coaching Vivian. From the first time he meets Vivian, he is intrigued by Vivian without knowing they are cousins, “[because] I have often thought of you; because you interest me; because—pardon me—I would help you if I can—that is if you want help” (178). Although they are similar in age, differing from the usual older man-younger boy tutorship, under Pisistratus’ mentoring, Vivian “felt gradually, however, that pudor, or instinctive shame, which the contact with minds habituated to the distinctions between wrong and right unconsciously produces” (190). Bulwer-Lytton mentions pudor in the chapter “On Shyness” in Caxtoniana: “There is a certain august shamefacedness—
the Romans called it PUDOR—which, under hairs white as snow, preserves the aspects of youth to all personations of honor, of valor, of genius” (59). For Bulwer-Lytton, only mature men could possess pudor. The author implies to his readers that his characters have pudor by their youthful appearances, such as Augustine and Sir Sedley in The Caxtons, Lord Harley L’Estrange and Audley Egerton in My Novel, and Guy Darrell in What Will He Do with It? For the time being, Pisistratus could tame Vivian because his “habits of gentle birth, and that silent education which English gentlemen commonly receive from their very cradle, should have preserved his honor, at least, intact through all” (221). Even though Vivian is only half-English, Pisistratus’ nurturing of Vivian’s innate sense of honor and shame—innate because all English have this sense—gradually makes Vivian a true Englishman.

But perhaps the young Pisistratus has not acquired enough prowess to influence, or perhaps the time they spent together is not sufficient to overcome Vivian’s Spanish half, he loses the pudor he achieves, and eventually kidnaps Fanny, and forces her to marry him. Luckily, Pisistratus and Sir Sedley rescue Fanny. (The scene of the innocent virgin being seized, and coerced into marriage by a villain but saved at the last minute is repeated throughout Bulwer-Lytton’s oeuvre; a metaphor found in many early Victorian novels, symbolizing that England was nearly corrupted by foreign powers but ultimately saved by manly English men who banded together.) When Vivian is caught red-handed, he “showed how little even shame had subdued his fiercer passions” (356). Bulwer-Lytton has represented Vivian’s Spanish mother as a creature of Id, “wild and passionate” (375). Here, it is evident that Vivian’s Spanish upbringing and passions have taken control over his English sense of shame.

After the abduction and the failed attempt of a Scotch wedding, Pisistratus has several interviews with his cousin, noting that “He seemed to feel more shame at the exposure than at the guilt” (395). This observation of Vivian is strange and incongruous, given that his shame is overwhelmed by his passions at the moment of being caught. Shame is an affect that makes
a person feel s/he is a bad person intrinsically, while guilt is directed towards an action. Shame shakes up one’s belief of what a core self is, and has devastating effects on one’s identity, whereas guilt is reparable with positive actions. At this stage, the homosocial mentorship continues its domination over Vivian. When shame has pervaded Vivian and breaks down his identity as a villain, the affect causes him to be receptive to changes and to be transformed into an Englishman. Hence, shame is imperative because the affect expunges one’s core selfhood to construct another, and in this case, an English identity. Shame can break down villainy and reconstruct one as an honorable Englishman.

Pisistratus, sensing that he can improve Vivian no further, enlists the help of his father, resuming the older man-young mentee dynamics. Augustine and Vivian are locked up in a room for days on end, and at hours each time. In due course, Augustine brings Vivian to visit their ancestors’ graves, recalling the importance of family lineage, an assurance of England’s continual sovereignty. When they are outside Roland’s house, Vivian longs to enter but does not because he is ashamed. “HOME,” Bulwer-Lytton writes, “its perfect trust and truth, its simple holiness, its exquisite happiness—being to the world what conscience is to the human mind” (400, emphasis original). Augustine taunts Vivian, “it would be a brother’s duty to… shield [Blanche’s] innocence—to protect her name! A good name is something, then. Your father was not so wrong to prize it. You would like yours to be that which your sister would be proud to own!” (400). At this moment, Blanche appears, but Augustine refuses to let Vivian go to his sister, and says, “Your sister is a part of Home. If you think yourself worthy of either, go and claim both; I will not object” (400). Obviously, Vivian “could not yet return home… He is fully anxious to redeem his name—to regain his home” (400, emphasis original). He goes to Australia for a few years with Pisistratus, and then becomes a soldier in India. Instead of using “ancestral house,” Bulwer-Lytton stresses and repeats the word “home” in capitalization and in italics. Home, in this case, does not mean the architecture, or a residence with family;
if it did, Vivian would have not go leave England. He could have atoned for his shameful deeds in England. Home is a metonym for England here; his innocent sister, and by extension, women represent England as an entity that requires protection, and a place to bring honor and pride to. Driven by shame to the colonies, Vivian wants to attain honors not merely to exonerate his charges and redeem his family name, but also for the glory of his home country, as he significantly becomes a soldier. Shame, then, is not merely a personal quirk of an old man wanting his son to be honorable; shame and honor drive the English to become English. “It is only by home-truths, not refining arguments” that Augustine can rehabilitate Vivian (402); it is only the affect shame, not logic, that defines Englishness.

In the end, Vivian does and does not return “home.” The shameful stain on his family’s name is so immense that only an honorable death on the battlefield, securing a victory of England against the colonized Indians, could efface his wrongdoings. Now his name is “covered... with new honors” (455). Everyone is cheered by his honorable death. Roland is “gladden[ed]… that his son, at the last, was worthy of his line” (456). Pisistratus believes, “He died, as I knew he would have prayed to die, at the close of a day ever memorable in the annals of that marvelous empire, which valor without parallel has annexed to the Throne of the Isles” (455). Even Vivian himself knows he must die to expunge his shame. His death is “a desperation action” (455). He instructs a fellow soldier, as he dies, to give Roland his will, and his father “can take it without shame” (456). Not only does his death wipe out his ignominy, he gains honor and a place among the graves of his ancestors, with an inscription on his tablet: “HE FELL ON THE FIELD:/ HIS COUNTRY MOURNED HIM,/ AND HIS FATHER IS RESIGNED” (456). His sword, along with a military death notification letter, hangs under a portrait of his ancestor, Sir Herbert de Caxton, who fought with Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Francis Drake. “The son [Vivian] was grown an ancestor” (458). The reason his noble death is thus revered is not just because he obliterates shame from his family name. The reason is
because he uses his shame as a form of empowerment to drive him to achieve honors for the country. Pisistratus notes, “We, grumbling English, always quarrelling with each other—the world not wide enough to hold us; and yet, when in the far land some bold deed is done by a countryman, how we feel that we are brothers!” (426). In other words, the greatest deed Vivian achieves is rallying the people of England together because of his shame and honor. His death also reiterates Roland’s belief as mentioned earlier: it is better to die with honor than live in shame. The only way to atone for shame is death.

As Vivian’s foil, Pisistratus has male tutors to guide him. His first tutors are his father and uncle, Augustine and Roland. As their names suggest, both paternal figures are different, one scholarly, the other military; one “slow and mild, the other “quick and fiery”; one “reasoned,” the other “imagined;” one “was very seldom wrong,” the other “never quite in the right”; one was “sweet, polished, and rounded into a natural grace,” the other “stern, rough, and angular” (67). To develop into a brand of British masculinity, Pisistratus must absorb what is good in both of them—they are both honorable—and reject what is bad.

While Augustine is honorable and intelligent, the sort of man that the British Empire requires, he is a recluse, unwilling to stir himself from his lackadaisical comforts of home. From the beginning, Augustine, not his wife, has played a prominent role in bringing up his son. “As I grew older,” Pisistratus says, “I became more sensibly aware that a father's eye was upon me” (16). Despite Pisistratus’ declaration that “We come to men for philosophy, to women for consolation,” it has always been Augustine who is the moral compass and emotional crutch (207). As a boy, Pisistratus breaks a flower-pot his mother prizes on purpose to elicit a response from his father, and his father teaches him that “good actions mend bad actions,” a lesson that Vivian would come to learn (18). When Pisistratus is heartbroken by Fanny, it is Augustine, not his mother, who comforts him: “The next moment I was sobbing on his breast…[although] I know that it is not the custom of lovers to confide in fathers and uncles”
While it is peculiar that Augustine plays a domestic, almost feminine role in the family, Pisistratus must not set out to slay the Oedipal father. When being teased for being a daddy’s boy, he “was piqued. Why we should be ashamed of being taunted for goodness, I never could understand; but certainly I felt humbled. However, I answered sturdily: ‘If you had as good a father as I have, you would not think it so very extraordinary to do as he tells you’” (93). In other words, while Pisistratus must respect and learn from his father, he must be critical enough to see the faults of his fathers. And in Augustine’s case, Pisistratus must circumvent his father’s effeminate lassitude and domesticity; he must be a man of action to be useful to the Empire.

If Augustine is ever a man of action, it is his contribution to literature as he writes “The History of Human Error,” known (satirically?) as the “Great Book.” The title suggests that Bulwer-Lytton by proxy of Augustine is interested in the human condition, like Darwin. The irony of the “Great Book” is such that Augustine himself retreats from society, ashamed that his love is not returned by Lady Ellinor, who is—no surprise here—Fanny’s mother. (It should be noted that the parallel between two generations demonstrates that change and improvement are possible: Augustine has withdrawn into an existential defeat, but his son rises to the task and marches forward to become a man of the Empire.) He warns his son not to repeat his mistake, “Master books, but do not let them master you… my servitude (to books) must not be a hereditary bondage” (25). If books are taken to be a torpid state that Augustine recedes into because of a personal shame, Pisistratus must master his shame of unworthiness to Fanny’s social class and use that shame to spur him on; he is not his father.

But for Augustine, and his brother, Roland, servitude has indeed been a hereditary bondage, and the cause of their falling out. Augustine believes that his ancestor is William Caxton the printer, which is the reason he is consumed in a world of books. The Caxtons frequently implies that the world of books has a reality for Augustine that society lacks. For him, the library is “a city of necromancers, in which they raised the dead. Do I want to speak
to Cicero?—I invoke him. Do I want to chat in the Athenian marketplace, and hear news two
thousand years ago?—I write down my charm on a slip of paper, and a grave magician calls
me up Aristophanes. And we owe all this to our ance[ors]” (111). Even human beings are
objectified, and have become books for Augustine to be taken down “after dinner as he would
a volume of Dodwell or Pausanias” (34). It is from this deterministic servitude to hereditary
bondage that Pisistratus must escape.

Whereas Augustine retreats into his scholarly world because he is ashamed that his love
is not returned, Roland, who also fails to win Lady Ellinor’s hand, seeks another form of honor:
he becomes a soldier because he believes that his ancestor is Sir William de Caxton, who fell
at the last significant battle of the Wars of the Roses, Bosworth, fighting for Richard III.
Augustine’s fault is hebetude, Roland’s, pride. He has such a strong aversion to shame that he
overcompensates in having excessive pride. “Honor was his idol, and the sense of honor paid
him for the loss of all else” (71). Despite being in the military all his life, he does not mind
having little money because he treasures his medal, his source of pride, which he wears next to
his heart, more than money. “Honor,” he claims, “is the reward of a soldier” (52). Although
Roland has his follies, Bulwer-Lytton gives him a speech which England and the English
endorses: “Man, I say, recreates himself. How? BY THE PRINCIPLE OF HONOR” (emphasis
original 54) and “that honor is the foundation of all improvement in mankind.” As we have
discussed, man, or what Roland would have meant, English man recreates himself by having
sons to carry on the principle of honor. And with this honor, the English improve England.

However, his hamartia is that he overvalues honor to the point of pride. Pride, in
Bulwer-Lytton’s novels, cuts both ways: it is associated with honor because one is proud of
one’s achievements, but excessive pride, or avoidance of shame to a phobia, is detrimental
because one refuses help when one needs it most. Early in the novel, Roland tells a story of a
fellow-soldier who “had a son… [and] I, too, had then such a son” (71). His friend “was a
cripple, by the way, like myself—strange coincidence!” (73). His friend’s son steals from his friend and others. When the police are at the friend’s door, “shame had entered” (75). Because “he could not lift the crime from his son’s soul, nor the dishonor from his son’s memory” (76), he chooses to shoot his son, and takes his own life. (This story of a son stealing from a father and turning into a robber repeats in Bulwer-Lytton’s oeuvre.) Roland identifies with his friend, and it is apparent that Vivian has stolen from Roland, turned rogue, and brought disgrace to the family. Roland is so humiliated by Vivian that he is “ashamed of such greetings” from his fellow-soldiers (118). It is his aversion to shame that drives a wedge between his son and him. Instead of saving and correcting his son, he chooses to sever the kinship. Vivian’s desire to make his father proud and to be worthy of his martial ancestors drives him to commit a desperate and violent act to kidnap Fanny. By marrying her, Vivian believes that he would become an aristocrat, making Roland proud. Roland’s excessive pride shows that there must be a balance between pride, honor, and shame: shame can be a motivating force to achieve honors, but having excessive pride to avoid shame completely may ruin one’s life.

Unlike Augustine, Roland, and Vivian, who are trapped by their ancestry, Pisistratus rejects his heredity. He remarks early in the novel to Roland, “We can never escape the ghosts, uncle. They haunt us always. We cannot think or act, but the soul of some man, who has lived before, points the way. The dead never die” (79). But he does escape in the end. Pisistratus does not become a scholar or a soldier; he is a colonist. To Bulwer-Lytton, Pisistratus the hero reifies his concept of Englishness. One should never try to marry above one’s station, or transcend a preordained social class, but one can strive for honors because that is what English do, or should accomplish. In Bulwer-Lytton’s words, one can have aristocratic spirits, without being born an aristocrat. Although this way of thinking is deterministic (because it seems like lives are fixed based on individuals’ parentage), it is also liberating because one must keep pushing, keep attempting to be the best version of oneself.
Besides Augustine and Roland, Pisistratus also learns masculinity from Trevanion and Sir Sedley who are both aristocrats. Both Trevanion and Sir Sedley are reluctant aristocrats, as if aristocracy is a burden, a curse, and not a gift. Although Trevanion marries Lady Ellinor, who belongs to “the lower aristocracy of rank” (160), he is in a way driven to excel and to contribute to England because “Lady Ellinor was ambitious; that she had a love of fame, for fame itself; that she was proud; that she set value (and that morbidly) on the world’s opinion” (131). It seems that whoever marries Lady Ellinor, as Pisistratus’ mother tells him, “would have roused himself, been more ambitious” (59). Furthermore, after they are married, Lady Ellinor comes into an unexpected fortune, an event that Trevanion laments over, claiming that it is shameful that money comes from the wife’s family. He advises Pisistratus to “fly from the curse of owing everything to a wife! It is a reversal of all natural position, it is a blow to all the manhood within us” (206). The shame that he is over-reaching his status by marrying up in terms of rank and fiscal matters drives him to be ambitious. He becomes a patriotic, renowned politician and Pisistratus becomes his secretary for a short while. Trevanion is also the father figure who encourages Pisistratus to emigrate. From Trevanion, Pisistratus learns that it is undesirable, and even dishonorable to marry above one’s station, and to be worthy of being a father and to start a family, he must first be established in his career, or at least gain financial stability.

Sir Sedley, the other reluctant aristocrat, has, at the start of the novel, confessed that he has “lived the life of the butterfly. Summer is over, and I see my flowers withering; and my wings are chilled by the first airs of winter” (124). Although he proclaims himself to be a butterfly and although he has led an apathetic, languid life, no one is more sagacious than him in the novel. Instinctively, he sees through Pisistratus, and advises him on every count. This mysterious dominance and perspicacity seem to stem from the sole power of his aristocracy. He is described in the novel as having impeccable taste, looks young (indicative of his pudor),
and is the envy of many young boys. Sir Sedley’s trajectory is to outgrow his French-like effeminacy and homosociality and marry. Lord Castleton, a distant relative, dies, and unexpectedly, Sir Sedley inherits the title. As the new Lord Castleton, his duty is to carry on the lineage. Eventually, he has two sons by Fanny Trevanio and says to Pisistratus presciently, “I perceive a very different world rising round the next generation from that in which I first went forth and took my pleasure. I shall rear my boys accordingly. Rich noblemen must nowadays be useful men; and if they can’t leap over briers, they must scramble through them” (451). Sir Sedley’s function in the novel is not only to remind Pisistratus that he must repudiate homosocial circles and establish a family after his success, Sir Sedley is also a reminder that no matter how hardworking or intelligent or honorable Pisistratus is, he is no match for the aristocrat, simply because he is an aristocrat.

While establishing a family is the ultimate aim for the Empire—after all, scores of Englishmen were required to become colonists—a lot of shame is involved in the making of families. All three men, Augustine, Roland, and Trevanion, who fall in love with Lady Ellinor, are ashamed that they can never measure up to her social status. Pisistratus learns from their mistake, but still cannot help himself falling in love with Fanny, and he flees away from her in shame. When Fanny discovers that Pisistratus is sobbing into her miniature, he “felt as if I had committed a crime—as if dishonor clung to me” (196). The arrogant Vivian, however, has no qualms that he is a match for Fanny, but the kidnapping ends up in disgrace for him. On the other hand, marriages without love are marriages without shame, and this is the kind of marriage Bulwer-Lytton espouses in the novel. Augustine, Pisistratus, and Sir Sedley all marry people they do not love at first, and all three marriages turn out to have happily ever after endings. Pisistratus’ mother tells him that Augustine “never was in love with me; and what is more he had the frankness to tell me so!” (58) Augustine is so forthright in this union that he even confesses that he loves another, although eventually he has come to love Mrs. Caxton.
Likewise, Sir Sedley is not in love with Fanny at first and it is not clear if he has even come to love her. The late Lord Castleton is engaged to Fanny, and in inheriting Lord Castleton’s title, Sir Sedley also inherits the fiancée. For Pisistratus, he returns from Australia to marry his cousin, Blanche, Vivian’s sister, who has blossomed. Her beauty and her gentleness may be the inducements behind the marriage, but we, as readers, are never explicitly told how beautiful or gentle she is, or at least, not as explicitly as how beautiful and intelligent Vivian is.

It seems that Bulwer-Lytton has associated loving a woman with shame, and he advocates a marriage based on respect, rather than love/shame. The three happy marriages share an uncomfortable aspect: the women, much younger than their spouses, are reared from youth to have marriageable qualities. “When my old tutor died,” Augustine says, “and his young child become my ward, and somehow or other, from my ward my wife, it allowed me to resign my fellowship, and live amongst my books still as a book myself” (171). Here, Augustine, who does not love his wife at the beginning, lets slip that it is his wife’s inheritance that enables him to live a country gentleman’s life. His intention of marrying his ward seems dishonorable, as Bulwer-Lytton in *England and the English* despises fortune-hunters, and as Trevanion is ashamed to be unable to match his wife’s status. But Augustine’s dishonor is not highlighted in the novel precisely because he molds and grooms his wife to be the “angel in the house.” Likewise, Sir Sedley has to tame Fanny. He says to Pisistratus, “He who marries Fanny Trevanian should have little other object, for the first years of marriage, than to correct her failings and develop her virtues” (354). After Sir Sedley and Fanny’s marriage, only when Sir Sedley thwarts the seduction plans of a European prince for Fanny does she fall in love with him. In Pisistratus’ case, Blanche, having to live with the family, is carefully cultivated by both Pisistratus, and his paterfamilias, Augustine (282-3). As her name suggests, she is carte blanche, waiting to be written with the wishes of men. Coincidentally, if men shape women to

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become their wives, Pisistratus shapes both Blanche’s and her brother’s characters. He confesses, “I had grown to love [Vivian] so well; I had been so proud when men praised him. My love was a sort of self-love—I had looked upon him in part as the work of my own hands” (422). However, what we do know is that, as a man of the Empire, Pisistratus must reject the homosociality Vivian provides, and he marries Vivian’s sister. From their union, they have a son named after Vivian, naturally. In essence, to be a man of the Empire, homosocial male-male tutorship must occur, but for women, instead of a female-female instruction, they must fall under men’s tutelage.

Women in The Caxtons not play only supporting roles to men, they are deemed as a viable option only after the men have established their social and financial superiority over women. Bulwer-Lytton argues that, as “aristocracy have higher and more chivalrous notions, the people generally have shrewder and livelier ideas,” and as wits are inherited from mothers, and morals from fathers, “an admixture [of aristocrats] with people” must necessitate that the mother comes from a lower class (62-3). To marry a woman of a superior class is shameful even if she inspires a man to ambition as Lady Ellinor does in the men who love her. In the event that one does indeed fall in love with an aristocrat, the best thing is to give her up. Sir Sedley praises Pisistratus for his “self-sacrifice”: “All the marquisates in the world would never give me the pride I should feel, if I could see in my life one steady self-sacrifice to duty and honor, equal to that which I have witnessed in you” (363). At the peak of Pisistratus’ heartbreak, the book Augustine gives him tells “a life of remarkable fulness [sic], great study, great thought, and great action” and “how small a place those feelings, which have tyrannized over [Pisistratus], and made all else seem blank and void, hold in that life” (emphasis original 215). To excel and reach for honors is better than love; by giving up love for a woman, one gives up shame. Woman comes as an afterthought.
In *The Caxtons*, shame works in a different way from in Darwin. Darwin’s shame is private, secular, and individualizing, but in *The Caxtons*, the shame takes on a national and nationalistic sweep. At various points of Bulwer-Lytton’s writing on being English, he interchangeably claims that shame and honor must be inculcated. For him, the flipside of shame is not pride, but honor. To place honor above everything else, like Roland, would be excessive pride. *The Caxtons* shows that shame and honor are passed through the male line, which is why it is so important for characters to have sons. Even though men teach women honor and virtue in the novel, and hence tame them, it is ultimately the men who will represent England and bring honor to the country. The English women’s duty—“duty to her birthright, to the career of the noblest of England’s patriot”—is to marry the correct man (326).

**My Novel: Keeping Status Quo of Gender and Class Through Shame**

Unlike Darwin who believed that shame is individuating in a secular world, Bulwer-Lytton, who was a staunch Christian with numerous references to God in his novels, wanted to explore the emotion of shame in a religious society. For instance, like *The Caxtons*, *My Novel* begins with speculation on the origin of species: Augustine, who makes an appearance in *My Novel*, claims that “Danes, whose descendants make the chief part of our northern population, (and indeed, we must suppose all the ancient worshippers of Odin,) are of the same origin as the Etrurians” (1:1). Whether Augustine’s claim is true or not is not the point here; what is noteworthy is that Bulwer-Lytton announces the purpose of his novel, that is, to explore the human condition, where we descended from, and how we should live. His conclusion of how to live a moral life in *My Novel* is the same as in *The Caxtons*: shame works as a motivating force to build England.

As in *The Caxtons*, the young male characters are schooled about shame and honor by older men. In the beginning, Lenny Fairfield, the protagonist, is constantly shamed and bullied
because he comes from an impoverished, working-class family. As a boy, he fights with Randal Leslie, the antagonist, as Randal rests on the parish stocks, which Lenny is tasked to look after. Even though Lenny is battered badly, the town’s steward blames him completely without any investigation and locks him in the stocks because Randal is a gentleman’s son, and a relative of Squire William Hazeldean. In the stocks, Lenny feels a “smarting and envenomed [emotion] for the time—shame!” (1:106). After Lenny escapes, Hazeldean visits Mrs Fairfield to persuade Lenny to apologize to Randal. But the Fairfields have “a peasant’s pride,” and instead of apologizing, they move out of Hazeldean, and Lenny, the smartest boy in the school, drops out and works for Signor Riccabocca for very miserable wages (1:8). At this time, while Lenny has a sensitivity to shame, it appears that he has too much of it.

The shame of his lowly birth could have been misguided had not an older man pointed him in the right direction. Lenny purchases seditious, socialist books and is quite convinced by them until Riccabocca chances on him reading the books. Riccabocca warns him, “Men rarely succeed in changing the world; but a man seldom fails of success if he lets the world alone, and resolves to make the best of it. You are in the midst of the great crisis of your life; it is the struggle between new desires knowledge excites, and that sense of poverty, which those desires convert either into hope and emulation, or into envy and despair. I grant that it is an up-hill work that lies before you; but don’t you think it is always easier to climb a mountain than it is to level it?” (1:168). But the reader can rest assured that Lenny the Genius will not turn into a revolutionary because, as the narrator (Bulwer-Lytton?) states it, genius is “shamefaced, because [shame and genius are] so susceptible to glory” (1:163). In short, the encounter between Riccabocca and Lenny is the author’s didactic message that if a man—and it must necessarily be a man in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels—is hardworking and intelligent, and has a sense of shame, he will succeed in Victorian society even when the society remains unchanged.
Lenny’s next male mentor is his dashing uncle, Richard Avenel, who has recently returned from America with a fortune, and who teaches Lenny not to be ashamed of his social class. When Lenny is reunited with his maternal grandparents, he discovers that he is a “child of shame,” an illegitimate son of deceased Nora Avenel, sister to Mrs Fairfield (1:297; 2:330). While his grandmother cannot accept his “sin,” Richard takes him under his tutelage to groom him as a successor to his farms. However, Richard forbids Lenny to write to Mrs Fairfield, his foster mother. During a dance Richard throws, Mrs Fairfield suddenly appears with “such thick shoes” to look for Lenny, embarrassing Richard in front of his upper-middle class friends (1:249). Richard has contradictory emotions about her unannounced arrival: he is angry at Mrs Fairfield whom he thinks disgraces him, yet he defends her, telling the guests that they must be aware he is a self-made man who comes from a family of tradespeople. “I’m not ashamed of them,” he announces (1:252). At one point, “the whole shame was removed from Richard Avenel, and rested in full weight upon the bystanders” who mock Mrs Fairfield’s appearance (1:249). Although Richard defends his poor and uncouth sister, he locks her and Lenny in a room so that they cannot interact with his guests. Lenny jumps out of the window with Mrs Fairfield to escape from Richard. What Lenny learns from the negative example of Richard is that there is no shame belonging to a lower class so long as one is respectable and upright. The society’s jaundiced eyes on class are deplorable, but it is possible to rise above the ranks when one works hard, as long as one does not aspire to be an aristocrat.

John Burley, who shares the same first name as Lenny’s maternal grandfather, teaches Lenny the shame of failure, degeneration, and atheism. Like Lenny, Burley is a genius, comes from a destitute family, and is made fun of by his fellow undergrads because of “his thick shoes and coarse linen,” connecting Burley to Mrs Fairfield (1:307). Burley is a writer, something Lenny aspires to become. But associating with Burley has blurred Lenny’s notions of morality, which Helen Digby, an orphan Lenny feels obliged to look after, notices. “Did [Burley] pray
to God?’ asked Helen” (1:311). Later, an inebriated Burley barges into Lenny and Helen’s lodging, raising a ruckus, indecorous for a young lady to be around. Their landlady remonstrates about the impropriety. Lenny feels the shame but lacks the moral rectitude to ask Burley to leave. When Helen confronts Burley instead, the writer comes to a realization, “I am a demon… I never saw it before—but it is true—I should be this boy’s ruin” (1:332, my emphasis). While the episode puts forth a Victorian stereotype that women instinctively are custodians of Christian morality, Burley exemplifies the shame that Lenny faces should he fail in his career. The uncanny similarities between Burley and Lenny show the youth the possibility of what he might become—a godless, failed, drunken writer. While Lenny’s uncle teaches him that the recipe for success is hard work, Burley teaches him the shame of failure from profligacy and impiety.

Lenny has a complicated tutorship with his last and most important mentor, Lord Harley L’Estrange, whom Lenny picks up on a bridge. The bridge in London, according to Matt Cook, was a sexualized locale where Victorian men cruised each other (10). In Teleny, Des Grieux contemplates suicide on a bridge, meets Teleny, and starts to have sex there. In the scene where Lenny chances upon L’Estrange, L’Estrange has arranged to meet a Member of Parliament, Audley Egerton his “dearest and most intimate friend,” “inseparable” when they were undergrads, at a desolated bridge at night (1:24). (It should be noted that the intimate friends’ first names rhyme, perhaps suggesting that their relationship surpasses a normal homosocial friendship.) On the bridge, Lenny, who is later revealed to be Egerton’s son, “lifted his head and looked wistfully, eagerly into Harley’s face. Those eyes, bright, clear, yet so strangely deep and absent… met his own, and chained them. For L’Estrange halted also; the boy’s countenance was not unfamiliar to him. He returned the inquiring look fixed on his own” (1:354-5). A modern gay man would read this scene as two men cruising each other. Suspecting Lenny’s relationship to Nora, “Harley always spoke to Leonard in a soft voice, and often gazed
on him with earnest and kindly eyes” (1: 360). Later, on a sudden impulse, L’Estrange “the soldier bent down his manly head and kissed [Lenny] the poet’s brow” (2:100). Like the kiss between Vivian and Pisistratus in *The Caxtons*, homoerotic bodily contact between men is always prefaced that the affectionate displays are manly, brotherly, fraternal, to avoid the shame of scandal.\(^3\)

The homosocial desires between the three men are complicated: \(^4\) L’Estrange and Egerton, both bachelors, form the closest bonds in the novel—deeper than married couples—and the aristocrat suddenly finds himself attracted to Egerton and Nora’s son. All three bachelors are devastatingly handsome (1:61). Egerton admits that he is “proof against all feminine attractions” (1:278). It is explained later that L’Estrange is in love with Nora, and requests that Egerton pursue the suit on his behalf. However, Nora and Egerton marry in secret, and due to a marital tiff, Nora runs back to her parents’ home and dies in childbirth without having a chance to tell her parents she is married. While Nora triangulates the homosociality between the two men, their desire slips through cracks: “Lord L’Estrange leant his cheek on his hand thoughtfully. Audley Egerton sate [sic] near him, with his arms folded, and gazed on his friend’s face with a soft expression of aspect, which was very unusual to the firm outline of his handsome features” (1:222). Later, Egerton, “fixing upon his friend’s earnest face, eyes which, when softened by emotion, were strangely beautiful,” confesses to L’Estrange, “If I ever lose your love, your friendship—nothing else is left to me in the world” (2:190). The

\(^3\) Not only are affections between men explicitly masculine, the descriptions of the male characters are purposefully manly. L’Estrange, has a “beautiful countenance,” and “his complexion was delicate, though not effeminate: it was rather the delicacy of a student than of a woman” (1:222).

\(^4\) It should be noted that homoerotic tensions exist not only between L’Estrange, Egerton, and Lenny. For instance, before knowing Richard is his uncle, Lenny “stole many a glance at the acute, hardy, handsome face of his companion [Richard]” (1:209). Or consider the encounter between Lenny and Burley: “The two men felt an interest in each other, and they walked some yards in silence” (1:203).
tenderness between the two men could not be denied.\textsuperscript{5} If L’Estrange’s and Egerton’s desires are triangulated through Nora, this triangulation of desires is complicated when Lenny, a handsome lad who inherits Nora’s eyes and Egerton’s good looks, comes into the equation.

The complex web of desires between the mentor and mentee gets even more convoluted when Helen and Violante come into the picture. As with Augustine and his wife, and Pisistratus and Blanche in \textit{The Caxtons}, women in \textit{My Novel} are treated as objects, and brought up from youth to be brides for men. Both Helen and Violante are trained to be wives so that the men who marry them can avoid the shame of marrying an inept spouse. If in \textit{The Caxtons} the December-May romance between Augustine and bride, and between Sir Sedley and Fanny, is disquieting for modern readers, the romance in \textit{My Novel} is even more disturbing. Both Helen and Violante appear as preadolescent children at the beginning. A young Lenny chances upon Helen, a newly orphaned girl, mourning at a graveyard, and adopts her as his sister immediately. But the number of kisses he showers on her is disturbingly prodigious, inappropriate and paedophilic (1:269; 1:288; 1:289). As Lenny is not financially able to support Helen, he gives her up to L’Estrange. At the moment of separation, Lenny “muttered to himself, ‘Strange—strange—so mere a child;—this cannot be love!’” (1:374). At the same time, on seeing the moving scene, L’Estrange thinks, “This heart… will be worth the winning!” (1:374), although whose heart is worth winning, he doesn’t make clear. L’Estrange takes her as his ward and then molds her into a young, marriageable lady to his liking,\textsuperscript{6} whose, unlike all the handsome men in the novel, features are irregular, and who has “a cultivated taste, and a charmingly womanly mind; but… accustomed to take its colorings from another’s” (2:70). When L’Estrange gets

\textsuperscript{5} For other instances of tenderness, see 1:225, 2:432.

\textsuperscript{6} The idea that men should bring up girls and mold them so that the girls become compliant, marriageable, and to the men’s likings is repeated twice. L’Estrange posits, “If I could but find some child with sweet dispositions and fair intellect and yet formed, and train her up, according to my ideal” (1:354). Also see 1:224. As a foil to Helen and Violante, nice girls who are “trained” by men to be nice wives, Beatrice di Negra, Count di Peschiera’s sister, is portrayed as a woman whose true nature is honorable, but she is eventually corrupted and controlled by the evil Count.
Egerton to vet Helen’s suitability as L’Estrange’s wife, Egerton notes that Helen has “no vivid enthusiasm, no remark of striking originality, no flash of the self-kindling, creative faculty,” ill-suiting L’Estrange (2:70). And as a contrast to Helen’s plain, asymmetrical face, the author reminds the reader of Egerton’s “handsome features” (2:70). L’Estrange proposes to Helen anyway, without loving her, and against the advice of his most intimate friend, and his mother. Helen accepts out of childish gratitude and respect. Not knowing about their engagement, Lenny declares his love for Helen. The triangulation of the previous generation between Egerton, L’Estrange, and Nora repeats itself. Although L’Estrange loves Violante and not Helen, although he treats Helen more as a daughter than a lover, although he has broken off his engagement with Helen, although everyone notes how compatible Helen and Lenny are and L’Estrange and Violante are (2:117; 2:131; 2:137), and although he knows Lenny does not intentionally trespass on his engagement with Helen, L’Estrange strives to bring about Lenny’s downfall. His unreasonable fury, out of character with his languid, insouciant self, is because L’Estrange finds out at this moment that Egerton has betrayed him, and snatched Nora from him, and Lenny is a result of the union. L’Estrange imagines that the son of his most intimate friend seeks a repeat of history. What the reader can easily deduce is that it is Egerton and Lenny, father and son, who stir up violent emotions in L’Estrange, not Nora and Helen, women he purportedly loves. Hence, women are objects brought up from young to be suitable wives for men in different social standing. Women are objects passed from father (L’Estrange) to son (Lenny), intimate friend (L’Estrange) to friend (Egerton), and even father (Riccabocca, Violante’s father) to father (L’Estrange). L’Estrange’s rage is simply not justifiable because women are merely objects, while relationships between men are passionate, loyal, deep-rooted, and time-honored. Women then are used as subterfuge to mask the shameful homoeroticism.

Violante, like Helen, operates on two levels: besides diverting men from shameful illicit relationships with each other, she works as a conduit to bring honor to England. Her upbringing
by her father who is an exiled Italian count ensures that she is a suitable exchange to other men. (In fact, her father has inculcated in her since her youth that L’Estrange is a benefactor to their family; it is L’Estrange who saves Violante’s father from a capital punishment in Italy.) Her aristocratic bloodline, like many aristocrats in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels including L’Estrange, automatically ingrains in her superior aptitude like intelligence, grace, and originality. And as Bulwer-Lytton’s credos go, that happy marriages must be socially congruent, Violante is the perfect match for L’Estrange, despite their vast age gap, despite L’Estrange smarting each time one character or another mentions how he makes such a good “father” to her (2:131; 2:250; 2:335). But what attracts L’Estrange most to Violante is her resemblance to Nora: “her countenance… reminded him of Nora… the likeness, which had thus impressed him, come from some similarities in character between the living and the lost one—the same charming combination of lofty thought and childlike innocence—the same enthusiasm—the same rich exuberance of imagination and feeling” (2:328), all the traits that the poet Lenny possesses. In a sense, because Lenny is unavailable because of his sex and because of his lowly birth, Violante (or women in general) is a device to prevent shameful same-sex desires from expression.

Secondarily, not only to avoid shame, Violante is a tool to produce honor for England. In general, women do not need to be smart as long as they are gentle and excellent house managers. When Riccabocca confides in parson Dale that he could not find intellectual resonance in Jemima, his wife, the parson advises Riccabocca that companionship is more important that compatibility. Although the reader is told that Violante is clever, she has never shown her cleverness, much like Jemima: “There is little difference between your clever woman and your humdrum woman” (1:132). What is required of Violante and Jemima for their roles as women is to reproduce. As in The Caxtons, My Novel ends with L’Estrange’s heavy-handed advice to his “eldest son”: “My boy, you may see troubled times in England… and your
stake,— England’s honour and peace will be great… when you are tempted to believe that the gifts you may inherit from both entail no duties, or that duties are at war with true pleasure, remember how I placed you in your father’s arms, and I said, ‘Let him be as proud of you some day, as I at this hour am of him” (2:426-7). The boy “manfully” answers he will try. In spurning his homosocial attachments, L’Estrange, the only son of the wealthy Earl of Lansmere, allied by intermarriage to the most powerful English families, has done his duty for England, in marrying one of the most powerful Italian royal families and producing an heir to ensure the future of the country. When earlier, L’Estrange lets slip, “I have a great deal of the woman in me,” the feminine in him is effaced with the marital union (1:349). If L’Estrange is “an effeminate humorist,” as Randal calls him, then his effeminacy is redeemed by the birth of the son (2:79). The reader can rest assured that all signs of effeminacy are eradicated through having heirs, and L’Estrange’s boy will bring glory to England because he would be naturally gifted from his aristocratic ancestry, and that he has a male tutor in L’Estrange.

Randal is the cautionary tale L’Estrange warns his infant about. Sinnema claims that Randal is an “outright villain… the incorrigibly avaricious heir to a disorderly home and much diminished fortune” (167), but a careful reading reveals that Randal is a complex character. Right from the start, unlike Hazeldean, Egerton, and all the other handsome men in the novel who are “of tall stature, and strong, sinewy, English build” (1:61), Randal’s sallow complexion and pale lips mark him as of inferior English stock. “He has no youth left in him,” L’Estrange observes of Randal, and the lack of youth is Bulwer-Lytton’s shorthand for lack of pudor (2:110). But worse still, according to Bulwer-Lytton’s weltanschauung, Randal lacks two essential attributes to make him a proper Englishman. First, he has no positive male role models in his life. Randal’s father is a slovenly sluggard who does nothing to bring honor to the family’s name. When Egerton adopts Randal, a young adult then, to be his protégé, Randal’s personality is already determined. He hides his true self from Egerton who is too busy with the
welfare of the country to notice. Randal meets and has dealings with two older villains, Count di Peschiera, and Baron Levy, a bastard son of a long line of English peers with a Jewish opera singer, who is a money-lender. Without proper mentorship, Randal becomes a villain.

More importantly, because Randal has no suitable male teachers, he isn’t taught the value of shame: “He was without shyness,” a degree of shame (283). 7 Although he is without shame, Randal comes from an old, proud family, hence (in Bulwer-Lytton’s strand of logic), he is gifted, winning prizes in school, known for his cold intellect. His raison d’etre is to restore his family name to its previous glory; his ambition and avarice stem from his pride in his familial lineage. But that does not mean he is portrayed as a flat evil character. A childhood memory is seared into his mind as his mother refuses to let Frank Hazeldean into their house because of its decrepit state and the filthy, worn clothes of their family. He wants to be successful to provide a dowry for his sister so that she can marry well. When Egerton faces trouble, Randal is sympathetic, albeit to a limited extent (2:148). He “recoiled” when Count di Peschiera recruits him to kidnap Violante (2:153). Like the self-made man Richard Avenel, Lenny’s uncle, Randal vows in “a strange sort of haughty kindness, ‘What I may have hereafter… I shall owe to myself; and then if I rise, I will raise my family’” (1:60). Randal is not unkind, but his circumstances leave him little choice; his fault is to reduce shame into the mechanism of calculating intellect. The difference between Richard and Randal is that the former feels shame, but the latter depends on his intelligence: “my books don’t tell me that it is a good heart that gets on in the world: it is a hard hard” (1:60). Squire Hazeldean tells him, “You speak like a book” (1:369). Randal’s pride for his old family name, coupled with his cold intelligence without a sense of shame, is his downfall. Bulwer-Lytton then separates shame,

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7 Another villain who is not acquainted with shame is the Italian Count. When he is caught red-handed for kidnapping Violante and forcing her to marry him: “the Count had preserved a profound silence, showing neither repentance nor shame” (2: 276-277). Shame is necessarily a tool to avoid crimes and sins.
honor, and pride. Pride is required for honor, that is, one must feel proud of what one has achieved, but excess pride leads to a downfall because one cannot feel shame and becomes selfish and egotistical, working for one’s own glory, instead of glory for the country. Shame is an affect that necessitates and pushes one towards honor for the country. Contrasting with Randal who pursues glory for his own selfish sake, L’Estrange becomes a soldier and a politician for the sake of the country, and Lenny, who since youth “had already learned so dearly to prize the sweets of an honourable name” (1:106), writes a book so transformative to readers that miscreants who read it weep and repent (2:445). In short, shame is required for nation-building.

**Conclusion: Shame, and Nationhood**

In an essay titled “On the Moral Effect of Writers,” Bulwer-Lytton writes, “As two travellers may arrive at the same inn by different roads and in different company, so two writers can arrive at the same moral conclusion through very different paths” (Caxtoniana 118). His apothegm, however and unfortunately, does not ring true for Darwin and himself; their notions of nationhood differ. In reading a scene of Amy Dorritt roving the streets of Rome, Amanda Anderson argues that an awareness of cosmopolitanism rouse thoughts and emotions of the limits of self and nation (89). Pheng Cheah further supports Anderson’s claim in that Victorians thought of global connectivity in light of incipient nationalism and colonialism, despite the concept of globality preceding nation-states (28). Both well-travelled, Darwin and Bulwer-Lytton—one on his naturalist trails, and the other his colonial postings—express divergent attitudes of nationhood through the affect of shame.

Darwin, who read Kant, presents shame as not dissimilar to Kant’s pioneering idea of “a universal cosmopolitan existence,” recasting individuals as “citizens of a universal state of mankind” (51), for Darwin’s theory of shame unites humans. While Kant focuses on
international trade ushering in an era of common humanity, Darwin argues scientifically that all humans—men, women, whites, blacks—blush, an indication of shame, suggesting that humans across races and sexes are more similar than dissimilar, breaking down boundaries, national or scientific.

Bulwer-Lytton, however, facing the destabilizing Victorian culture of migration, colonialism, and politics, has chosen the other, narrower path: to erect more borders. Unlike James Clifford’s theory of “discrepant cosmopolitanisms” and Homi Bhabha’s hybridity which argue for the death of the nation-state with the rise of migrancy, Bulwer-Lytton despises “citizens of the world.” In his description of the evil Count di Peschiera in My Novel, “he was composed and as free from gesture as an Englishman…[though] you would have supposed him a Parisian… as if ashamed of his country and his birth, he affected to be a citizen of the world. Heaven help the world if it hold only such citizens!” (2:4). For Bulwer-Lytton, to be an Englishman is to be proud of the country, and individuals must strive to the pinnacle of their abilities to make England proud, driven by a sensibility to shame, as evident in the epigraph and elsewhere in this chapter. Having a sense of shame is often the distinguished trait of a noble Englishman in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels.

But even within Bulwer-Lytton’s England, he demarcates classes and gender. In the mouthpiece of Parson Dale in My Novel, Bulwer-Lytton writes, “It is not the character of the aristocracy of this country to keep people down. They make way amongst themselves for any man, whatever his birth, who has the talent and energy to aspire to their level. That’s the especial boast of the British constitution, sir!” (1: 184). What Bulwer-Lytton writes in his essays and what is shown in his novels are antithetical to the parson’s proselytizing. In his work, aristocrats, like Bulwer-Lytton himself, always turn out gifted, always rising to occasions merely because they are aristocrats. Even when Egerton has spent his entire life giving prepared, rehearsed political speeches, his oratorical skills are inferior to those of the talented Sir
L’Estrange. If a character tries to over-reach his class by fraud or by marrying an aristocrat, he will inevitably be shamed and end up badly. For instance, Vivian in *The Caxtons* used his life to atone for his shame. Randal’s plight is even worse: his sister could not marry Frank Hazeldean because of his disgrace, and she marries an ensign instead and dies of neglect after childbirth. Because of Randal’s scandal, his brother becomes impoverished and becomes a commoner. Randal himself plunges into the world of debauchery, gambling his life away, becoming paler and more sickly as time goes by, so ashamed of his name he takes on a pseudonym, till, one day, Riccabocca (now duke) chances upon him in a hospital bed with a severe head wound from being exposed of chicanery. Not only does Randal suffer for his misdemeanor, his family has to be punished for his shame because a proper Englishman possesses shame enough to drive him to excel but not to over-reach to a better class. Pisistratus rather quits his political job in which he has a bright future and leaves for the colony than to remain in England to be close with the aristocrat he is in love with. In the words of parson Dale’s sermon—and, in Bulwer-Lytton’s imagination, a clergyman’s sermon is directive—“inequality is necessary and essential” (*1*: 89), encapsulating and recapitulating the importance of maintaining the status quo of the English class system that—again, to Bulwer-Lytton—benefits all the English, including landed gentry, aristocrats, and the working class. Shame is Bulwer-Lytton’s weapon of choice for his spirited crusade against the American-style democracy of the encroaching world.

Like how shame is utilized to characterize the English identity, and to delineate social class, shame also facilitates the workings of gender. Bulwer-Lytton’s writings reify Ruskin’s belief in biological essentialism: “each [sex] has what the other has not, each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are nothing alike” (*Sesame* 59). To maintain a distinction of classes is to prevent marrying across social lines for both men and women. Women in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels either have innate cognizance of the shame of over-
reaching—like Nora who runs away from L’Estrange’s suit—or are docile creatures, acquiescing to their parents’ arranged marriages, such as Fanny in The Caxtons, or are portrayed, like Helen, as unworthy and unsuitable for marriage with aristocrats. Sexual stability is achieved only because the novels follow, as Nancy Armstrong has generalized in Desire and Domestic Fiction, “a set of moral norms that exalted the domestic woman” (5). The male characters, on the other hand, have no innate sense of shame and have to be taught by elder male tutors. These tutored boys feel shame when they fall in love with ladies who are of a superior position to them. In fact, shame in Bulwer-Lytton’s work drives a boy to establish his career, capable to look after his family, before he should think of marriage to a lady of an equivalent class, a lady much younger than the male so that he can control and provide guidance to her. Those without mentors evolve into villains without shame, who try to over-reach by kidnapping or resorting to skulduggery and duplicity to coerce an aristocratic lady’s hand; they are always unsuccessful, fall deeply from grace into the direst circumstances, and use their deaths to wipe out their shame. It is not difficult to observe Bulwer-Lytton’s oppressive sociopolitical eugenics and propaganda at work: using shame as an Althusserian ideological apparatus, not only are families kept within their social class, a financially stable family corresponds to a country that spends less time and money on social welfare.

While Bulwer-Lytton in his novels depicts heterosexual bonds between sexes as auxiliary to homosocial bonds between men (between the tutor and tutored), his novels also ratify heterosexual domesticity. While this contradictory state of affairs may hinder the protraction of the pride and honor of England, constant regeneration of generations of Englishmen through heterosexual procreation in the long run brings honor and glory to the

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8 It should be said here that while most female characters in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels play the role of angels in the house, there are few exceptions. For instance, Arabella in What Will He Do with It? is a determined and furtive woman who hunts and traps her first love, the reprobate of the story. But, like all villains, Arabella, who has dealings with the underworld, does not end well.
country, something the barren fruits of homosocial bonds could not achieve. The author uses shame to manipulate the feeling of manhood in his characters. Before marriage, a character—usually an aristocrat—is effete, effeminate, and languid, all traits that pointedly express that he is not masculine. (Examples: Lord L’Estrange’s and Sir Sedley Beaudessert’s effeminacy are signalled by their French-like name and extravagance.) The shame and attack on his masculinity is compounded with the shame that he is not bequeathing his superior genes to ensure the perpetuation of England’s pride; shame precipitates his marriage, demonstrating his masculinity. After marriage, he usually achieves honors for England, which coincides with the birth of an heir, associating his heir with honors. In other words, as Donald Hall claims, “a viscous, if not fluid, Victorian male subjectivity [is] inextricably bound up with his perception of, demarcation of an Other” (3), Victorian masculinity exists in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels because female characters remain one-dimensional angels. Furthermore, as Judith Butler argues convincingly, the “radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female ‘Other’ suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory” (vii), the masculinity of Bulwer-Lytton’s characters and whatever powers that come with masculine authority are but illusory. Hence, unlike Darwin’s notion of shame that constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs selfhood and identity continuously, allowing slippages, changes and possibilities, in Bulwer-Lytton’s universe, pride, honor, and shame exist in an eternal, cuneiform stasis to contribute to England’s perpetual dominance and its national identity.
Chapter Three: Elizabeth Gaskell as St Sebastian: Shame and Transgendered Identity

in *Cranford* and *Ruth*

Bulwer-Lytton’s notion of a God-given interiority of shame makes it so that he could only envision a single purpose of the affect to achieve honors for the country, and, in turn, to the patrilineal family name. As a result, his novels have a running strand of disgraced sons and the return of the prodigal sons from colonized lands with honors; his female characters are often indistinguishable. Similarly religious or perhaps even more so as the wife of a Unitarian minister, Elizabeth Gaskell, on the other hand, presents another model of shame that could encapsulate both Darwinian shame and her Broad Church leaning; unlike Bulwer-Lytton, Gaskell (and many Victorians) did not see Darwinian theory as antipodal to Christianity. Although Darwin’s writing on emotions did not appear until 1872, Elizabeth Gaskell who claimed to be a cousin of Darwin—Gaskell and Darwin shared ancestors, Thomas Wedgwood (1685-1739) and his wife Mary Stringer,—and they travelled in the same social circle—had clearly perused Darwinian evolution theory, and deduced the implications of his theory on human subjectivity, which she ruminated in her novels.

During Gaskell’s lifetime, her detractors, who insisted that her writing was “feminine,” emotional, and not serious, shamed her. Based in industrial Manchester, she was shamed by the failure of her body and extensions of her body in the age of mechanical reproduction. As a female writer whose body of works was paraded publicly, the exposure shamed her; this is, of course, the problem many Victorian women writers faced. To counter the shame, Gaskell uses the affect as a way of transforming her own gender, seeing herself in the figure of St Sebastian, someone who is shamed, martyred, and dying at once. This transgenderism with its association of shame, pride, and death is often reflected in the heroes and heroines of her novels, and often

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1 For a detailed genealogy of the Gaskells, Darwins, and Wedgewoods, see *The Wedgewood Circle 1730-1897: Four Generations of a Family and Their Friends* by Barbara and Hensleigh Wedgewood.
lacking in her villains. In this chapter, I will first note the dissonance between how her contemporaries read her novels and how she intended her novels to be read. While many critics argue that the dissonance could be explained by analyzing how sympathy operates in Gaskell’s novels, I suggest shame provides a more fundamental and thorough understanding of her work that sympathy fails to explicate. Finally, I will demonstrate the shame in Gaskell’s life using a psychological lens, before examining *Ruth* and *Cranford* in detail.

**Emotions and Truth: Criticism of Gaskell’s Writings**

At Elizabeth Gaskell’s untimely death, and with the publication of her posthumous novel, *Wives and Daughters*, Henry James wrote an unsigned review in *The Nation*, evaluating Gaskell’s oeuvre: “For Mrs. Gaskell’s genius was so very composite as a quality, it was so obviously the offspring of her affections, her feelings, her associations, and (considering that, after all, it was genius) was so little of an intellectual matter” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 464). James claims that Gaskell’s biography on Charlotte Bronte “could not possibly have [been] written” by an intellectual woman (464). The biography is “of fine qualities, of affection, of generosity, of sympathy, of imagination [but] it lacks the prime requisites of a good biography. It is written with a signal want of judgment and of critical power” (464). In James’s early review, already demonstrating his attention for an exact phrase and his search for a literary theory, he categorizes Gaskell as a writer who feels, not thinks, that her emotions are keen and sympathetic, but her intellect untrustworthy, although, he notes, genius takes on many forms and possessing warm sentiments is one of them.

James’s critique echoes previous contemporary reviewers of Gaskell’s: they characterize her writing as feminine, and emotional. John Forster, a reader for the manuscript of *Mary Barton*, knowing the identity of the then-anonymous author, surmises publicly in *The Examiner* that novel is “unquestionably” written by a woman because of the sympathetic
emotions displayed (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 68). Even though the book on industrial unrest, a theme that is decidedly “unfeminine” by traditional standards, had incensed many manufacturers, Forster declares that it is not a political novel and connects it back to emotions, “The internal passions and emotions are its materials of interest” (69). Henry Fothergill Chorley, in an unsigned review of *Cranford* published in *The Athenaeum*, states that the beauty of the novel with “inane” characters lies in the “touches of love and kindness, of simple self-sacrifice and of true womanly tenderness” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 194). In a later review upon the publication of *Ruth*, Chorley argues strongly that the feelings behind the novel are “more admirable, however, than its logic” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 204). Chorley’s opinions are parroted in *Sharpe’s London Magazine*, which states that the tenderness and emotive powers of *Ruth* have no intellectual purpose (208). George Henry Lewes in *The Leader* emphasizes that *Ruth* “cannot be read with unwet eyes, nor hearts uninfluenced” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 215). *The Guardian* calls *Ruth* a “touching story” with “profound feeling” (234). All these reviews culminate in Lord David Cecil’s 1934 study of *Early Victorian Novelists*: “a minor novelist,” Gaskell “was all a woman was expected to be; gentle, domestic, tactful, unintellectual, prone to tears, easily shocked. So far from chafing at the limits imposed on her activities, she accepted them with serene satisfaction” (198). Most contemporary reviewers valued Gaskell’s work because of its sensibility and sentiments, not its intellect, truth, logic and rationality. These early reviews of her work produce a profound aftermath of how we read Gaskell now. In a book giving an overview of Gaskell’s oeuvre, first published in 1960 for the British Council, Miriam Allot regurgitates similar thoughts to those of these reviewers: known for her “compassion” and “humanitarian principles,” her “ambitious novels, interesting in spite of all their imperfections… show that if her heart was in the right place her intellectual equipment was amateurish” (4). The reviewers have positioned Gaskell as an emotional (and feminine) writer whose work holds no logic and intellectual depth.
However, time and time again, Gaskell insists that her novels are rational, logical and truthful. Her copious private correspondence may divulge her intentions, both countering and supporting her public male detractors. On Mary Barton, she explicates to Catherine Winksworth, “I believe I wrote truth [sic]… I like you to understand it. It is a painful subject and must be painful, and I felt it all deeply myself I could hardly be light-hearted any part of the time I was writing it” (Letters 66, emphasis original). She reiterates her first novel’s veracity to Mary Ewart, “I have personal evidence… No one could feel more deeply than I how wicked it is to do anything to excite class against class… I could only repeat that no praise could compensate me for the self-reproach I shall feel if I have written unjustly” (Letters 67, emphasis original). When asked if she would write a sequel of Mary Barton from the point of view of the mill-owners, she replies, “whatever power there was in Mary Barton [sic] was caused by my feeling strongly (and as it is impossible I ever should,) on the other side, the forced effort of writing on that side would be weak failure… I believe what I have said in Mary Barton [sic] to be perfectly true” (Letters 119). While Gaskell vows that she writes the truth, her truth carries with it strong emotions, usually of suffering: “I felt it all deeply”; “no one could feel more deeply than I”; the power of Mary Barton “caused by my feeling deeply.” In a sense, her male detractors are both correct and wrong about her writings: she intends her work to be logical and truthful, despite critics’ claims, and to be emotional, in accordance with their observations. To Gaskell, logic and emotions are not opposites, but they are complementary.

Gaskell intends truth and emotions to operate in tandem to engender social change. As Angus Easson and Deirdre D’Albertis have noted on separate occasions, Gaskell, when writing, considers that emotions and truth might convert to philanthropic actions to better the dire circumstances of a discontented industrial society, as implied by the epigraph of Mary Barton, a call-to-action from Thomas Carlyle to rally fiction-writers to revitalize England. Famously
coining the phrase “Condition of England,” Carlyle charges men-of-letters² “to interpret… the
dumb deep want of the people” (“Characteristics” 168). And as if answering Carlyle’s behest,
the raison d’être of Mary Barton, Gaskell writes in the preface, is “to give some utterance to
the agony [of workers] which, from time to time convulses this dumb people” (37-8). Returning
the compliment and acknowledging what Gaskell tries to achieve, Carlyle writes to her, “the
result is a Book deserving to take its place far above the ordinary garbage of Novels” (“TC to
Elizabeth Gaskell”). Overjoyed that Carlyle recognizes the intent of her writing, Gaskell
mentions in several letters to several people that “Mr Carlyle’s letter remains my true gain”
(Letters 68).³ The advocacy and knowledge conveyed through the emotions of her books have
precipitated and translated to actions. For one, William Arnold, son of Thomas Arnold of
Rugby and brother of the poet, raised funds for the poor in Manchester (Critical Heritage 18).
Among the modern Marxist critics who argue that the affective force of Mary Barton could
reshape Victorian class struggles and dynamics, Thomas Recchio observes that the novel
requires of its readers for introspection and “self reformation,” humanizing people of lower
classes (17).

Clearly, Gaskell was not the only Victorian author to possess a sense of social
responsibility in her writing. Dickens’s novels tell the abuse of child labor and Bulwer-Lytton,
as we saw in the previous chapter, uses shame to enforce a nationalistic spirit in Englishmen.
Like Bulwer-Lytton, Gaskell employs shame to produce actions. However, her understanding
of shame stems from her own projection of the self onto the figure of St Sebastian; Gaskell
commiserated with the saint because they were both spectacles who were shamed publicly and
suffered for a worthy cause. While Bulwer-Lytton’s rigid Christian worldview means that God-
given shame is immutable, Gaskell’s Broad Church notion, which could assimilate theories of

² I deliberately use a gendered term here to illustrate the point that Gaskell was writing in a
male-dominated arena, and because Carlyle’s call-to-action was specifically addressed to men.
³ Also see Letters 65, 69, 70.
evolution and science, gives her shame a fluidity that could break down identities and boundaries between people of different classes and sexes. The breakage allows communication and mutual sympathy for each other. Scholars have sought for answers in her sympathetic portrayal of destitute characters to forward her social activism; however, sympathy is but a component of shame, which scholars tend to overlook. Shame causes immense change in the makeup of the self, and by extension, fosters changes in society.

**Shame, Sympathy, Selfhood, and Suffering in Gaskell’s Oeuvre**

Jill Matus notes that Gaskell embraces complexity and contradictions and proposes to examine emotions in her novels. Emotions, Matus states, may act as a connection between classes and at the same time a reinforcement of class stratification. While emotions may be complex and contradictory, Matus does not pinpoint the exact emotion. Gaskell herself encourages her readers to look for sympathy in her novels. In the preface of *Mary Barton*, she claims “the sympathy of the happy” could alleviate “the agony of suffering” (38). In her private letters, she writes that she wants to create in John Barton “an ignorant thoughtful man of strong power of sympathy,” that is, a man who can transmit sympathy to her readers (70). She reiterates in another letter that John is “an ignorant man full of rude, illogical thought, and full also of sympathy for suffering, which appealed to him through his senses” (74); John’s bodily suffering produces sympathy in both readers and the author as she transgresses class and sex boundaries and places herself in John’s shoes: “he was my hero, *the* person with whom all my sympathies went, with whom I tried to identified myself at the time, because I believed from personal experience that such men were not uncommon, and would well reward such sympathy and love as should throw light down upon their groping search after the causes of suffering, and the reason why suffering is sent” (74, emphasis original).
The male critics, as previously stated, had certainly assumed and noted the excess sympathy in her novels, and attributed it to her femininity. Compared to the male critics, Maria Edgeworth gives a more nuanced understanding of *Mary Barton*: “I think, or rather I feel, that not only there are too many deaths but too many living creatures in this book. The reader’s sympathy is too much divided, cannot flit as fast as called upon from one to another without being weakened. The more forcible the calls and the objects of pity, the more the feelings are harassed & in danger of being exhausted” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 92, emphasis original). Putting aside the noted numerous deaths, which John Ruskin too brought up in his letter to Gaskell, and which will be discussed later in relation to shame for mourning and mortality, Edgeworth’s exposition illustrates the pervading nature of affects in Gaskell’s novels, affecting the mind—“I think, or rather I feel”—and the body, for she uses “weakened” and “exhausted” as if sympathy is embodied.

Edgeworth’s idea that Gaskell’s sympathy is limited, quantifiable, and economical is explored in Jill Rappoport’s article, “Conservation of Sympathy in *Cranford.*” Rappoport claims pessimistically that Gaskell, inspired by the scientific theory that energy is neither created nor destroyed but is conserved, transferred, and transformed, creates a hermitic Amazonian community of closed system where “sympathy—like money—is a limited commodity in *Cranford*” (97). Rappoport’s reading, while it may be accurate for *Cranford*, opposes Gaskell’s intentions and could not be applied across her oeuvre; Gaskell’s sympathy extends to factory workers, fallen women, disabled people, and anyone who is underprivileged. Demonstrated in novel after novel, Gaskell’s sympathy has no bounds.

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4 At first, Ruskin refused to continue reading *Cranford* after the death of Captain Brown. But his mother persuaded him and he wrote to Gaskell to compliment her, even though she was “fond of killing nice people” in her novels (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 198).

5 It should be noted that George Eliot is the only critic who thought *Ruth* “does not secure one’s lasting sympathy” because of the melodrama (qtd. in *Easson* 232).
Patsy Stoneman seizes upon Gaskell’s boundless sympathy and asserts that her working-class male characters possess a traditionally “feminine” sympathetic and nurturing aspect, a radical concept for Victorians. Other feminist critics, such as Hilary Schor, Jill L. Matus, Lisa Surridge, and Laurie Buchanan, continue along this train of thought in their various publications. However, while concentrating on subversive elements of sympathy, they neglect that Gaskell’s intention is not to excite class against class. Although feminizing working class men appears to be emasculating, Gaskell’s working-class characters’ trait of being sympathetic allows readers to side with them over the middle-class factory owners, pitting class against against class, and, like scholars, many manufacturers misread Gaskell’s intention at the time of publication and were riled by the difference of portrayal between classes of men. It cannot be overemphasized that although Gaskell was sympathetic to the working class, she desired better treatment of them, and not an overthrow of the industrial system.

While the previous critics focus on the radical and feminizing aspect of sympathy, Melissa Schaub, reading against the grain, imagines sympathy flowing from Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* to working class readers, not middle-class readers, and as a result, the manipulative nature of sympathy paralyzes the working class in their self-victimization, interpellates them into a hierarchized, subservient ideology, and is utilized as a tool of discipline for the working-class. Like other critics, Schaub disregards Gaskell’s intentions of giving voice to victims, clearly stated in the preface of *Mary Barton* and in her letters. Furthermore, Gaskell, when writing, aims to publicize the pains of the working class to the middle class to bring about social change, distinctly targeting middle-class readers. From my knowledge of her private letters, she received encomium and opprobrium from literary figures, personal friends and acquaintances, factory owners, and clergymen, all middle-class or aristocrats, but there is

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6 Alisa M. Clapp’s “Texts Which Tell Another Story: Miscommunication in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*” explains the disjunction of understanding between the author and the reader.
seldom mention of letters from the working class. To be even more specific, Gaskell directs her writing for mature middle-class adults—married women and adult men—because they had the ability to effect social changes. For example, regarding Ruth, she writes in a private letter, “Of course it is a prohibited book in this, as in many other households; not a book for young people, unless read with someone older” (Letters 221, emphasis original). Her books are written with a specific mature middle-class audience in mind. This is not to say the working class did not read Gaskell, merely that Schaub has ignored Gaskell’s purpose in writing.

Schaub derives her thesis from but opposes Audrey Jaffe’s Scenes of Sympathy. Jaffe theorizes that sympathy can induce immense unease in the sympathizer as the affect reduces her or him to the position—social class, bodily suffering, identity, etc—of the victim. “The act of looking,” she argues, “fills the spectator with the anxiety of bodily contagion, the fear of inhabiting the beggar’s place” (5). Such vicarious bodily pain is viewed with anxiety by the Victorians because “to view suffering was potentially to collapse the rational boundaries between imagination and reality and to relinquish the power of self-control” (Vrettos 86). Like previous critics, Jaffe contradicts the traces of evidence Gaskell leaves behind and hints at in her œuvre and life. Many scholars have argued persuasively that Gaskell’s work and life are guided by her beliefs in Unitarianism. In 1832, Gaskell became a Unitarian minister’s wife, and “while it is possible to read her works without becoming aware of that fact… it was a fact intensely important to her personally and to her background… in that faith she found a rule of conduct, a way to the inner or ideal life that yet stressed the full play of reason, and a sympathy which sought to include all Christians and understand other creeds” (Easson, Elizabeth Gaskell 4-5). With the elimination of the “three-person’d god” in the belief of Unitarianism, that is, the death of Jesus does not wash away the sins of humanity, collapses the doctrine of salvation by

7 See Angus Easson’s Elizabeth Gaskell, pp. 4-17; Yoko Hatano’s “Evangelicism in Ruth”; Mary Elizabeth Hotz’s “ ‘Taught by Death What Life Should Be’: Elizabeth Gaskell’s Representation of Death in North and South”; and Edgar Wright’s Mrs. Gaskell.
predestination and grace alone. It follows then that within each person exists a godhead, and every person has her or his own way to God. Implicit in Unitarianism, because everyone is equal in the eyes of God, everyone is equal in spite of class and gender differences. For instance, women were encouraged to be educated so that they too could find their way to God. (Gaskell believed strongly in educating her daughters.) Jaffe’s underlying assumption that sympathy transmits from the sufferer to the sympathizer connotes an imbalance of power, privileging the latter who appears to be superior. This assumption runs counter to Gaskell’s Unitarian beliefs; to volunteer and to help, as she often did among the poor in her parish, do not suggest superiority.

A brief critique of articles on sympathy in Gaskell’s work, with the flaws inherent in the affect conflicting with her beliefs, demonstrates that perhaps sympathy may not give us best access and understanding to her world. Gaskell writes of surfaces, observes Felicia Bonaparte. Her letters reveal things and everyday details of the chores she did, the flowers she planted, and the food she cooked, but they seldom disclosed her interiority. In a letter she wrote to a budding female novelist, she advised her to describe things, and not interiority (Letters 694-5). Building on a deconstructed reading on the history of objects, Elaine Freedgood argues that the checked curtains in Mary Barton are a metonym for Victorian domestic economy and globalization. Just like ideas are hidden in things, affects can be concealed in affects.

Considering how closely related shame and sympathy are, and that sympathy is a compounded emotion while shame is a basic affect, one could easily hide under the guise of the other. Jaffe’s study on sympathy borrows an experience from queer theorist Kaja Silverman to exemplify the transference of emotions through sympathy: Silverman assiduously avoids looking at homeless people because, as Jaffe reads it, the homeless pose a threat to the middle-class observer’s identity, and the observer may suffer and occupy the place of the victim (5). That which Jaffe names as anxiety in the sympathizer is identified more accurately as shame.
in Eve Sedgwick’s thought experiment that bears great similarities to Silverman’s experience. Sedgwick conjures an unwashed, half-insane (homeless?) man who stumbles into her lecture room, mumbling accusations, urinates publicly, and leaves. “I pictured the excruciation of everyone else in the room: each looking down, wishing to be anywhere else yet conscious of the inexorable fate of being exactly there, inside the individual skin of which each was burningly aware; at the same time, thought, unable to stanch the hemorrhage of painful identification with the misbehaving man” (Sedgwick 37). The specular panic-sympathy that Jaffe reads in Silverman’s distress when she averts her gaze from the homeless transpires from shame in the possibility of being in the homeless person’s position, which moves towards individuation, and, at the same time, securing connection between the sympathizer and the abject. Silverman’s distress is the shame that arises from her middle class status. Gaskell, whose humanitarian work as a minister’s wife, put her in the same position as the middle-class Silverman and as Sedgwick facing homeless people.

The connection between sympathy and shame could further be elucidated in the early uses of “empathy,” a word coined by psychologist Edward Bradford Titchener in 1909, and defined by Vernon Lee in 1912 as “sympathetic aesthetic feeling” (qtd. in Morrell 46). Like Jaffe, Silverman, and Sedgwick who locate the gaze as the initiator of transferences of affect, Titchener locates meaning in visual images that are “oftentimes” accompanied “with kinaesthesia. Not only do I see gravity and modesty and pride and courtesy and stateliness, but I feel or act them in the mind’s muscle” (21). The interconnectedness between “sympathetic aesthetic feeling” and shame is evident when Titchener (unconsciously?) mentions variations of degree of shame or strategies to ward off shame. Like shame, gravity, modesty, pride, courtesy, and stateliness are relational affects in which the self measures its identity against

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8 The Oxford English Dictionary cites Vernon Lee as the neologist, although she attributes the term to Titchener. For an explanation of the origin of “empathy,” see Michael Morrell’s Empathy and Democracy: Feeling, Thinking and Deliberation, pp. 46-7.
others. Gravity, courtesy, and stateliness are social rules individuals recognize, abide by, and manipulate to avoid shame, whereas pride and modesty are permutations of shame. To define “sympathetic aesthetic feeling” in terms of shame, it is a form of epistemology arising not necessarily from logic and reason, but from shame-based experiences and emotions that initiate kinesthesia or actions and reactions.

For shame to be concealed in sympathy isn’t surprising for its etymology stems from “to hide.” Applying shame to Gaskell’s corpus allows a reading that treats her intentions with integrity and refines previous scholars’ imperfections. Their binary reading of gender necessitates the pitting of class against class, suggesting superiority and inferiority, a most “wicked” thing in Gaskell’s opinion. However, employing shame, since everybody—men, women, working class, factory owners—feels shame or at least possesses an ability to feel shame, the characters could be considered equals despite the class and gender differences.

At the root of sympathy, shame induces transmission of emotions from one suffering body to another body that possesses the possibility of suffering. When Gaskell’s books are interpreted accurately, or as accurately as possible, her intentions to improve society impel positive actions: “half (and the best half) are buying it to give to their work-people’s libraries” (Letters 68). But sometimes the transmission may be interrupted, misconceived, and misunderstood, causing shame-rage—“Half the masters here are bitterly angry with me” regarding Mary Barton (ibid)—and shame-indignation—two men burnt Ruth and “a third has forbidden his wife to read it” (Letters 223). Sympathy can prompt limited actions because when out of sight of the abject, the sympathizer forgets about the other’s plight, indulging in his or her life of luxury; sympathy exists in the locus of sight. Shame, on the other hand, changes the identity of the self and cannot be switched off completely. At the moment of shame, identity is shaken, torn down, and rebuilt to accommodate the other figure of sympathy, spurring and prodding actions in Victorians after reading Gaskell’s books, be it book-burning or fund-raising.
The Shame of Elizabeth Gaskell

Although Gaskell does not use the word “shame” often in her body of books and letters (because she writes little of interiority and because the definition of shame prevents disclosure of self to self and others), her proclivity to be ashamed reveals itself in her actions, especially during the births of her novels. Prior to her first novel, *Mary Barton*, she harassed the publishers for an exact publication date, and when they did not respond, she sent more letters, secretly fearing rejection (*Letters* 54-6). She intended to hide her name behind a male pseudonym “Stephen Berwick” but the novel had already gone to print (59). Anxious about the sales, she requested the publishers to get her book reviewed even though she would later claim she didn’t care about the reception (60; 115). She concealed her authorship and deliberately misled her friend into thinking that a “Mrs Wheeler” wrote *Mary Barton*, and even spun a story about Mrs Wheeler, “a clergyman’s wife, who once upon a time was a Miss Stone, and wrote a book called ‘The Cotton-Lord’” (62). What Gaskell underwent for the gestation of her first novel would be what psychologist Leon Wurmser identifies as “shame anxiety,” an anxiety from “the imminent danger of unexpected exposure, humiliation, and rejection” (49). More shame arose from the accusations that she provoked class conflicts, a most “wicked” thing in her opinion (*Letters* 67). When the “Masters” raged at the book, she was at first shame-indignant and shame-defensive [“I believe I wrote truth” (66, emphasis original)] and later shame-reconciliatory [“I have represented but one side of the question” (119, emphasis original)]. The shaming she experienced made her want to write no more: “le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle” (72), keening aware of “the enemies which [Mary Barton] has made me” (115).

“An unfit subject for fiction,”\(^9\) an oft repeated phrase when she discussed *Ruth*, indicates her ashamedness of the novel. She “dislike[d] its being published so much, I shd [sic]

not wonder if I put it off another year” (204). And when her friends “smashed into Ruth [sic] in grand style,” the shaming “frightened [her] off [her] nest again” (205). She claimed she wouldn’t give any copies away, and that “when Ruth will be published whether this year, next, or 10 years hence I don’t know. It is not written yet,” but three months after this letter, Ruth surfaced in the literary market (Letters 209, emphasis original). As shame is relational, the reason for Gaskell’s reluctance over and prevarications regarding Ruth is clear: “I hate publishing because of the talk people make, which I always feel as a great impertinence, if they address their remarks to me in any way” (ibid, emphasis original). By publishing, she allowed others to judge and shame her. She forbade people to write to her “for their expressions of disapproval” (220). Despite her avowals of seeming indifference to reception of the book, she asked Charlotte Bronte to delay the release date of Villette for fear of competition in sales (Critical Heritage 201). Despite her avowals to disregard people’s opinions (Letters 225), she learnt that the book was burnt (227), a library withdrew it from circulation (223), and not a single newspaper praised it (ibid). Despite her avowals to not care about the public, she wrote “I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it… you can’t think how ‘improper’ I feel under [the fellow churchgoers’] eyes” (ibid). Paradoxically, only two months later, she confessed, “The difference between Miss [Charlotte] Bronte and me is that she puts all her naughtiness into her books, and I put all my goodness… my books are so far better than I am that I often feel ashamed of having written them” (228). Gaskell’s shame maps a conflict of public disapproval and private misrepresentation of her self, and this shame reveals itself in the contradictory stance she had over her books, sometimes seeing her books as “an unfit subject” and sometimes seeing them as possessing “all my goodness.”

Like Darwin, whose body is wreaked with shame, Gaskell suffers bodily for her writing. Writing was difficult for her, giving her headaches and dizziness (Letters 294). She was unhappy about the deceit of lying to her friends over the authorship of Mary Barton (65). While
writing *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*, she felt the painful subjects deeply, and if she hadn’t felt pain, she claimed, she couldn’t have written the books (66, 119, 220, 225). This pain is associated with the shame she felt over the books. Sometimes her actions of writing frightened her (67, 205). She cried over nasty reviews and public opinions (352). She suffered a spinal irritation after intense responses for and against *Mary Barton*, during which doctors forbade her to write (132); a “‘Ruth’ fever” from which she believed she would never recover (222); bouts of insomnia over *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* [“I found head & health suffering” (411)]; and an unknown illness that forced her to remain supine when composing *Wives and Daughters* [“Oh dear! I am nearly killed, but the stress of every thing [sic] is nearly over” (772)]. And she passed away before finishing the novel. Her experiences mark shame onto her body.

Reading the internecine struggles between shame, bodily suffering, and writing, Gaskell’s mandate to a budding female novelist, “Get Strong” (*Letters* 694), takes on both literal and metaphorical implications: both physically strong to weather the hardship of creation and birth of writing; and emotionally strong to endure the shaming of (male) critics. Health and morbidity are discussed in Deirdre D’Albertis’s brilliant article on the two competing literary models that Gaskell and Charlotte Bronte utilized. While Bronte understands art as a traumatic tortured feminine creativity of psychic and physical suffering, renouncing “the body in order to write,” D’Albertis argues, Gaskell “renounces ego in pursuit of a communal literary ideal” by depicting others who suffer (3). Gaskell’s ideal of “Get Strong,” however, is but an unachievable dream because all bodies eventually fail and because she knew the impossibility of the mandate from experiencing the deaths of her mother, brother, and son.

Inherent in death, the failure of bodies carries the burden of shame psychologically, culturally, and historically. Psychologists agree that shame is a persuasive feature in humans’ response to death and loss; shame is inherent in mourning (Kauffman 3). From the moment of
birth, the libido matrix, that is the wish to look, to approach, to interest, requires reciprocity; the infant reaches and grabs hold of the mother. But when a child fails to find reciprocity, shame is observed; a child’s refusal to be held by a stranger is signalled by burying her head in her mother’s body, averting the gaze. Attachment, psychologist John Bowlby suggests, brings security while dissociation and absence, a failure of reciprocity linked with shame, may symbolically represent a developing awareness of death. Shame is the grieving of the self’s experience of itself. As most psychologists agree, since selfhood is based on relationships as personality and character are relational, the rupture of contact denotes a sense of rejection, disapproval, and desertion, bringing on shame. The broken bond between the self and the other caused by death devalues the self because the detachment disconnects the self from the social world. Bowlby argues that mourning could repair the shameful loss. Following Bowlby, psychologist Victor Schermer argues that the shame in deaths diminishes the self because a part of the self is felt to be left behind to die through identification with the deceased, leaving the self broken, fragmented, and disorganized. Hence, when shame occurs in mourning, the bereaved cannot heal.

In a Lacanian reading of the Victorian culture of death and mourning, David McAllister employs a Heideggerean metaphor of a potter fashioning a vase around a hole to defer the terrifying absence of the dead. Gaskell, he argues, incorporates quotations on death as “analgesic words of comfort,” numbing the pain, but never truly healing and mourning (235). Because death is ineffable and cannot be tamed into the visual order of the Imaginary through the symbolic function, death, as the Other, as part of the Real, is unknowable, terrifying, and cannot be induced into the Law of the Father. To venture into the Real is to enter a state of neurosis, and thus Lacan argues that in order to maintain psychic health, it is necessary to create

10 See, for instance, Silvan Tomkins.
something ex nihilo; a subject’s pain for the deceased is sublimated into cultural texts and objects, acceptable to society. The subject creates continual signifiers to be distracted from the terrifying unknown, and in this case, death. Using Lacanian theory, McAllister suggests that Gaskell uses poetic fragments as quotations to “disguise and obscure the vacancy left by the loss of the dead, rather than seeking to ameliorate it” (230).

Applying the previously mentioned psychological aspect of death, shame, and mourning to Gaskell’s life could explicate McAllister’s reading of Gaskell’s prorogued mourning. While any hypothesis regarding the absence of the mother who passed away when Gaskell was one is flawed and perhaps even callous, most psychologists would agree\textsuperscript{11} that Gaskell’s infantile disconnectedness from her mother would influence her understanding of death, loss, and shame in her emergent sense of identity; many female characters in Gaskell’s body of works are motherless. Her brother’s death, presumably lost at sea or disappeared in India, might have suspended Gaskell’s healing through mourning, because the absence of a body inhibits proper mourning; there remained hope that he would return one day. During the eight years John Stevenson, her brother, was in India, he paid her much attention, wrote her many letters, urging her for news from home and encouraging her studies. The break in correspondence, the inability for reciprocation, might have caused her shame. Although she seldom referred to her brother, her fiction repeats the motif of the lost and/or returning male. As selfhood is relational, the death of her son, seen as an extension of her self, might bring her grief and shame since the demise could be construed as the failure of self by self. Her shame regarding her son is not dissimilar to Darwin’s. He questioned his consanguineous marriage to his cousin, which he believed might have caused the weak constitutions of his children. As a scientist studying the evolution and the fitness of species, he could not but feel ashamed that

\textsuperscript{11} See Schemer, p. 38.
he produced unfit offspring. In *Wives and Daughters*, the success of Roger Hamley, who is modelled after Darwin, comes partly because he is fit enough to weather the colonies. Living in this scientific milieu, both Gaskell and Darwin saw their children as extensions of their selves, and the deceased ones were unfit to survive in the world.

Besides the psychological analysis of death and shame, culture provides a teleological explanation of the association of death and shame. In the Western culture, death phenomenologically excludes the living from the inscrutable death, exemplified by the cessation of Gaskell’s brother’s letters, and exclusion creates shame between the “in” and “out” groups; she is not worthy to communicate with others. The absence of her brother’s corpse and the illness of her infant child could abstractly signal death as a shameful, diseased secret to be kept out of sight, and swept under the carpet.

As Gaskell was writing about death, the burial reform debate reached its peak in mid-19th century England. Mary Elizabeth Hotz contrasts the treatment of death by Gaskell and by Edwin Chadwick, Secretary to the New Poor Law Commission (1834-42) and the Commissioner for the Board of Health (1848-52). As Hotz points out, Chadwick argues in *The Supplementary Report* that working-class corpses are agents “of contagious diseases and a lag on economic productivity,” requiring centralized disposal of corpses. This clinical solution to dispose the dead suggests an exigency to separate the healthy from the dead quickly for sanitary reasons. Chadwick not only links death with disease and economic slack, the rapid disposal of corpses suggests a shame in death. Hotz also notes that Gaskell, unlike Chadwick who treats corpses clinically, utilizes deaths in her novels to heal the differences between the working- and middle- classes. However, Gaskell’s approach to death does not preclude shame in it. Hotz analyzes a passage in *North and South* that Margaret’s father objects to her going to a funeral because women do not generally go to funerals. Margaret retaliates by saying women of a
certain class do not attend funerals because they “are ashamed of showing” grief in public (261). While Chadwick and Gaskell have different ideologies about death and burial, they both associate death with shame.

It could be countered that ill-health and death were a normal part of everyday life for the Victorians, as Pat Jalland has argued, and as such there could be no shame in deaths. Deborah Lutz in *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* has posited that the bodily relics of a person’s death, such as hair and teeth, represent non-reproducible unique beings. The proximity of Victorians with death and death objects seems to imply that they were comfortable with death, that deaths were not shameful. But such a counterargument confuses what is commonplace with what is shameful. In the realm of the mid-19th century movement of muscular Christianity, Gaskell’s “Get Strong” mandate to a budding female writer clearly indicates her own desire to be healthy, and there is a sense of failure to her work if her body could not handle the pressure of production of writing. In her novels, as I will demonstrate later, she often conflates death and shame.

The inherent shame in death could also be accounted for at the historical moment of industrialization in Victorian times. Bruce Haley argues that society, individuals, and art are judged by capability and “the production of useful, creative labor” (21). He continues, “the concept of the healthy mind gave the Victorian critic not only a standard of evaluation but also an analytic technique” (57). The assessment of writers based on health and production should be read according to the living conditions of the writer. Living in Manchester, which saw a boom in textile manufacture in the 19th century, causing a sharp population increase, and problems in unplanned urbanization, and where the world’s first steam passenger railway sits, Gaskell depicts the conflicts between Masters and workers in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, demonstrating her awareness of the indomitable force of industrialization, brought on
by science and machinery. In an age where exacting machines could reproduce material goods precisely, in a society that values productivity and control, and in a culture that valorizes materialism, the body, like machines, is expected to produce and reproduce. But dead and sickly people are not only worthless in a time of reproduction, they consume materials that could be better used on productive people; draining resources and not contributing to the system bring shame by non-conformity to the rule of production. Psychologist Ernest Becker argues in *The Denial of Death* that the motivation to succeed comes from the fear of death, as if somehow by producing and by accomplishing, individuals could renounce the limitations of the body, and transcend the corporeal. As in Becker, Catherine Belsey’s model of cultural production argues that artistic creations are a means to defer the terror of the Real of death. Even when Gaskell was not thinking of her loss, her mind was not far away from death: she wanted to title *North and South* “Death & Variations” (*Letters* 324). Gaskell’s fear of her own mortality, that she would never recover after a bout of illness, mirrors the Victorian concern for productivity, and perhaps this shame drives her to produce, to write.

In the Victorian period of industrialization, while an individual might work to stave off the shame of death, the bereaved could not escape the idea of death in the loss of a loved one. A loved one by definition is the extension of self—in Gaskell’s case, her mother, brother, and son are literally her genetic selves—and the death of a loved one reminds an individual of the “narcissistic wound of mortality,” to borrow Darcy Harris’s term (80). The death of a loved one parallels the death of the self, reminding her of the shame of death. Furthermore, mourning fosters shame in a productive system because the process of grieving suspends work. This is not to say that mourning is shameful, but incapacitation from work due to mourning is. Aristocrats, by virtue of their social class and English tradition, are the exceptions to the rule:

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12 See *Letters* pp. 45-7 for example.
Queen Victoria mourned for her husband for 40 years and wore only black, but her status as an aristocrat, by and large, excused her from the middle-class burden of production. As Barrington Moore writes in his groundbreaking work, “Because aristocratic status was supposed to indicate a qualitatively superior form of being, whose qualities were hereditary rather than the fruit of individually acquired merits, the aristocrat was not expected to put forth too prolonged or too earnest an effort in any single direction” (488). Tennyson himself mourned without shame and publicly for his friend’s demise in his poem, “In Memoriam,” but his poem is the productive result of his mourning. However, it would be shameful to persist in the loss of self-control and to waste energy in grieving without work.

The twofold shame of industrialized England—to be productive to ward off the shame of death, and to limit grieving to reduce inefficiency—drives Gaskell’s writing, evident in the deterred and deferred mourning for the three deaths she experienced. Too young to mourn for her mother’s death, she developed a shame for dying young, and leaving her children motherless, a dereliction of her productive duty: “in case of my death, we all know the probability of widowers marrying again,” she entreated her sister-in-law, Nancy Robson, to care for her children (Letters 46). This shame is projected in Wives and Daughters where Molly Gibson’s mother dies, leaving her father to marry a flighty wife. More significantly, it is well known that Gaskell began producing her body of works at the suggestion of her husband to overcome the loss of her son. The husband’s suggestion implies that mourning is unproductive and even shameful enough to be truncated. Not only was her mourning for her son curtailed and held in abeyance, she cathexed her shame, replacing one mode of reproduction of body to another mode of production in a society that valued productivity and materialism.

So painful was the subject of Mary Barton to her that she had to write the first volume of Mary Barton lying down on the sofa (Letters 74). Her letters indicate that pain and suffering
are integral to her production. As mentioned earlier, her shame divulges itself in her bodily suffering: a spinal irritation from *Mary Barton*, a “‘Ruth’ fever,” bouts of insomnia over the *Life of Charlotte Bronte*, and an unknown illness during the production of *Wives and Daughters*. Her supine posture of lying in pain on the sofa to write symbolically embodies the acts of production and parturition.

Much shame in her production emerges from navigating in a male-dominated arena where Victorian male writers attempted to masculinize writing as a virile labor. As many scholars have noted, Carlyle charges the male intelligentsia—he calls them “men of letters”—as modern heroes to reinvigorate Victorian society, enervated by materialism and metaphysics. The problem lies in the wasting of good health in urban spaces, a symptom caused by a society looking inwards on itself. As Deidre D’Albertis notes, “to become aware of one’s genius, or to cultivate inspiration through self-examination, is to destroy its essential integrity” (21) Carlyle advocates for a “Get Strong” school of thought that describes surfaces, not interiority, a school Gaskell abides by.

To revivify English society, Carlyle in his alter-ego, Teufelsdrockh, in *Sartor Resartus*, urges, “Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a product, produce it, in God's name! … for the night cometh, wherein no man can work” (148). Working to avert the night of death, the productive hero is, as Brian John reads Carlyle, “characterized… by his silence, his denial of cant and noise, and his struggling to articulate the inarticulate” (139). Carlyle sees the superiority of the “silence practice” (John 115) of Romans, the English, and Russians over “the ever-talking, ever-gesticulating French” (*Past and Present* 158). The man of letters diverges from the “twangling, jangling, vain, acrid, scrannel-piping man” (*Past and Present* 293). Hence, in a man-of-letters as a hero, Carlyle equates silence with mental strength

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13 See Richard Salmon, or Deirdre D’Albertis, or David Riede for examples.
and poetry with “musical Thought” that is affective and inspirational. The epigraph of Mary Barton clearly signals Gaskell’s familiarity with and adherence to Carlyle’s doctrine: she calls the novel “my idea of a tragic poem” (Letters 68), working to give voice to the suffering of the abject, a quality the man of letters should possess; she produces! produces! in the face of her son’s “night”; and when she wrote Ruth, she “tried to make both the story and the writing as quiet as I could” (Letters 225). Seen in this light, Carlyle’s letter of commendation to Gaskell should not be read ironically and disparagingly as D’Albertis does: the meaning of silence at the end of his letter, ”May you live long to write good Books,—and to do silently good actions” (“TC to Elizabeth Gaskell,” emphasis original), is not, as D’Albertis implies, a silencing of Gaskell’s voice; silence here refers to that elusive, heroic Eternal Silence that affects and changes the society. Given Carlyle’s notorious contempt for the novel form and novelists, the word “silently” in the letter may be the highest praise he could dispense to any novelist, and Gaskell clearly appreciated and understood his compliment, judging from the numerous times she repeated in her missives to various people that his epistle remained her only comfort amidst the criticism for Mary Barton (see Letters 65, 68-70). Gaskell, to Carlyle, is a man of letters.

Although Carlyle acknowledged privately and implicitly in his letter that an unexpected hero/man of letters might be a woman, his public credo that a man of letters is necessarily masculine and male heavily impressed on the contemporary (male) literati. D’Albertis observes that Carlyle “worked to construct a strenuously masculine ideal of the literary profession… [and] demonized the merely commercial ‘hack’ writer of reviews and occasional essays as effeminate” (23). As the century wore on, D’Albertis notes, “Carlyle’s critique of an emasculated intelligentsia was advanced by a chorus of male critics” (23). G. H. Lewes argues that writing as a profession should not be from “the army of Xeres, swelled and encumbered by women, children, and ill-trained troops…[but] a Macedonian phalanx, chosen, compact, irresistible” (“Condition” 285). As Carol Christ notes, “The success of the lady novelists and
the pressure of the democratization all contributed to a heroizing of the male writer’s role” (30). Hence a man of letter as a hero should rid himself of any signs of effeminacy.

As a Carlylean acolyte, Gaskell herself noticed the masculinization of the literary circle and faced discrimination from the male intelligentsia. She sent the manuscript of *Mary Barton* to “all or nearly all the publishers in London” and was rejected almost immediately (Uglow). Fortunately, through a connection, John Forster read it. Forster, Charles Dickens’s biographer, largely responsible for bringing Charles Kingsley, William Thackeray, Carlyle, Robert Browning, Arthur Hugh Clough, and Anthony Trollope to print, “swinging into the office [of publishers Chapman and Hall] as though the whole place belonged to him,” recommended publication (Uglow). Even then, Edward Chapman led her to believe that the book would be released in Spring. She sent several unanswered letters to him, and eventually, the book was launched in October. Chapman would, in later years, keep her in the dark about her book sale, and forthcoming editions, and even print the first two volumes of *Ruth* without her knowledge. The delay in publication of *Mary Barton*, Chapman’s reluctance to reply to her letters, and his remiss attitude towards her indicate that he did not take her, a woman writer, seriously.

Her clash with the male intelligentsia consisted not only with her publisher, but also with Dickens (see Uglow and Schor), and with Thackeray (see Easson). Exclusion based on her gender, the impediment in entering the masculine literary coterie, caused her shame to the extent that she was ashamed to use her name and identity to publish *Mary Barton*. Like George Eliot, and Currer Bell, Gaskell wanted to use a masculine *nom de plume* because she “did not want it to seem ‘the work of a lady.’ Authority meant more to her than ‘popularity’” (Uglow). Quoting Poet Laureate Robert Southey’s admonishment to Bronte in *Life of Charlotte Bronte*—“literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life” (117)—Gaskell was clearly cognizant of
the Carlylean masculine ideal in a man of letters, and of the antagonism and condescension female writers faced; her shame grew from the exclusion.

While to realize the Carlylean ideal is to expel effemineness, the man of letters should retain certain feminine characteristics. As G. H. Lewes notes: “In poets, artists, and men of letters, par excellence, we observe this feminine trait, that their intellect habitually moves in alliance with their emotions” (“Condition” 132). Hence, Deirdre D’Albertis argues that the difficulty for a man of letters is to strike “a proper balance between masculine rigor or control and feminine responsiveness; if improperly managed, this trans-gendered combination could lead, as in the case of Bronte, to illness and morbid introspection” (23). Thus, D’Albertis reads Gaskell’s advice, “Get Strong,” following Carlyle, as expressing her authorial duty to good health to the propagation of good deeds. But D’Albertis neglects that Gaskell, like Bronte, often did fall ill, during the writing of the novels and when they were reviewed. Following D’Albertis’s strand of thought, Gaskell then had failed to incorporate successfully masculine composure and hard work with feminine sympathy.

But Gaskell did not necessarily see herself as failure, churning out book after book. The shame that Gaskell felt, from the suspension of mourning in an industrial society and from being excluded from a select fraternity, drove her to “get strong” so that she could produce and write. Shame can tear a person’s ego down but shame can also build resilience. When reviewers shamed her, she likened herself to the figure of St Sebastian “tied to a tree to be shot at with arrows,” and she “must be endured with as much quiet seeming, & as little inward pain as I can” (Letters 220-1, emphasis original). She continues and puns, “I am in a quiver of pain” (221). Her shame coalesces in a male saintly figure, transgendering her, a woman writer holding a pen amidst the male literati; like St Sebastian who is shamed and glorified, beheld as a spectacle, Gaskell parades her writing wilfully, fully knowing the scandalous nature of her
themes, in order to do good. The writing brings her shame, but like the strong, silent hero/man of letters, she endured “with as much quiet” to do good; shame has brought her strength. The arrows in her body are clearly symbolic of the phallic quills of her male counterparts, and yet, even as she suffers their abuse, her shame transforms her body into the Carlylean phallus of a quiver. The moribund figure of St Sebastian thus emblematizes Gaskell’s inward shame, death, bodily suffering, and godly philanthropy, affecting her female body to produce her body of novels, enabling her to work alongside the boys.

*Ruth: Shame, Beauty, and Death of a Son*

For in remembrance of the Past there was Remorse, — how had she forgotten Leonard these last few days! — how had she repined and been dull of heart to her blessing! And in anticipations of the Future there was one sharp point of red light in the darkness which pierced her brain with agony, and which she would not see or recognise — and saw and recognised all the more for such mad determination— which is not true shield against the bitterness of the arrows of Death. (*Ruth* 251)

Situated at the penultimate paragraph of Book II, this passage, which could be read as the climax of the novel, occurs after Bellingham recognizes Ruth, who has been living incognito as a governess for the Bradshaws, learns that he has a child, Leonard, with her, and requests a private meeting to discuss Leonard’s future. He proposes to her; she rejects him. Then she returns to the seaside vacation house where she is taking care of her wards and receives news that Leonard is gravely ill. The sequence of events must be read as interconnected. In Ruth’s mind, the shame that Bellingham brings her in this meeting is linked to Leonard’s illness. Throughout the novel, Ruth fears greatly that her iniquity will be visited on Leonard. At his birth, when she promises to serve Leonard, Faith Benson reminds her that it would be a sin to
make an idol of the infant (135-6). In the beginning, Ruth cannot help but privilege her son over God, loving Leonard more than Him, but as the novel progresses, Ruth slowly learns how to let go of Leonard and leave him in the hands of God. The conflation of religious allusion in the penultimate paragraph, “true shield against the bitterness of the arrows of Death,” from Ephesians 6:16 (shield and darts) and I Samuel 15:32 (bitterness of death), suggests that Ruth has come, or is coming to terms with the fact that the life and death of Leonard lie in the decision of God. As evident in this penultimate paragraph, Gaskell could not separate shame and death.

When *Ruth* is read as a novel of bereavement, the distress Ruth experiences for fear of losing her son hints at the grief Gaskell felt for losing her son. Leaving lives and deaths in the hands of God may be a message in the novel for Ruth and the readers as well as Gaskell’s reminder to herself. The image of death in the passage (“arrows of Death”) also recalls Gaskell’s image of St Sebastian; the over-determined image of the “sharp point of red light” may suggest the spot of blood at the point of an arrow.¹⁴ In the penultimate paragraph of Book II of *Ruth*, shame is doubly linked with death by the sequence of events and by the evocation of the figure of St Sebastian, hinting at the biographical nature of *Ruth*.¹⁵ Just before receiving news of Leonard’s mortal danger, the reunion with Bellingham stirs in Ruth a sense of shame for her past and present. After Ruth rejects Bellingham’s proposal, the scene of reunion implies that Bellingham would have been violent sexually, just as he has taken her to London against her wishes, had a local fisherman not been nearby: “Mr Donne put his hands on her arms…He looked very fierce and passionate and determined” (247). The presence of a stranger, so

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¹⁴ “The point of red light” is an overdetermined image and could represent several notions: the strong passionate affections Ruth has for Leonard, the blind terror she feels for fear of losing him, a warning of danger for not trusting in God, and, as I argue in this chapter, the shame she feels for her past and allowing herself to fear for Leonard’s life, which should be in God’s decision.

¹⁵ It is well known that *Ruth* is inspired by a street-walker in prison whom Gaskell had met.
prominent in the scene, prevents Ruth’s sexual danger and also acts as a reminder of the shame and ostracism she has once faced in Wales when she is still with Bellingham. At Wales, an infant slaps her for her shamelessness. When Bellingham threatens that he will expose her identity if she does not accept his proposal, she replies, “To save Leonard from the shame and agony of knowing my disgrace, I would lie down and die” (247). Like Gaskell’s own experiences, connecting shame and death, the spectre of shame in *Ruth* is also closely intertwined with death.

Ruth dies. Charlotte Bronte protested against the denouement: “Why are we to shut up the book weeping?” (*Critical Heritage* 200). Sara Malton claims that the pervasive sickness and deaths in *Ruth* are metaphors of the fallen woman as a figure of moral and social plague (196). But such a reading contradicts the message of *Ruth*, that fallen women may not be iniquitous; Ruth is an innocent woman, fallen because of her circumstances and lack of parental guidance. Besides, deaths and illnesses are prevalent across Gaskell’s oeuvre; even an idyllic book as *Cranford* tells of numerous deaths. In the introduction to *Ruth*, Angus Easson also argues that Ruth’s death is not a punishment for her shameful sin; her death shouldn’t be seen as redemption. Rather, her death should be read for what Ruth has proudly accomplished in her life and for what her death has caused the world. Whether Ruth’s death could be read so callously in terms of achievements, the good death connects both shame and pride, like the figure of St Sebastian. When her shameful secret comes to light, nursing is the only work available to her. A profession ennobled by Florence Nightingale, who was Gaskell’s friend, nursing deals with lives and deaths. In an epidemic where nurses and even the relations of patients are afraid to be tainted by the disease, Ruth risks her life and walks among the quarantined outcasts; just as how Ruth is shunned in Wales, disease/death is associated with shame/sin in a time of plague. Although Ruth’s shame drives her to her occupation, Gaskell discourages readers from viewing nursing patients with highly contagious and fatal illnesses
as Ruth’s penance for her sexual transgression (351); nursing is done out of Christian charity, as an old man defends Ruth, claiming her work is “for the love of God” (351). Hearing the old man’s words, Leonard’s heart swells with pride, and he comes out as her son to the mob upon which he is eavesdropping (351). Ruth’s death is further associated with shame when she catches the fatal illness while nursing Bellingham. Even in her death, her body is a carrier of both shame and pride. Her corpse is so beautiful that Bellingham is awed and that Sally cannot help lionizing her, and yet death itself is so disgusting and shameful that Bellingham recoils when he espies Sally kissing the corpse.

The trope of shame/pride associated with the corporeality occurs in Ruth’s first perilous illness. After Ruth attempts suicide for her abandonment and falls critically ill, Faith comments that she is better off dead for her shame. But upon seeing Ruth’s infirm and sickly but youthful body, Faith softens and relents. The first words Faith says of Ruth focus on her body: “how young she looks! quite a child, poor creature!” (96). After a night of nursing Ruth, Faith learns from the doctor that Ruth is pregnant, and Ruth is determined to live for the child. Shame again is associated with the body. Although close to death, the young, virile body survives because of its useful ability to reproduce. Ruth’s young body produces her offspring and, at the same time, her nursing work restores patients to their health, or in Marxist terms, her work produces more workers for more reproduction. Even Ruth’s demise extends her productivity. At the close of the novel, although her death cannot be read as redemption for her shame, it functions to reconciles the disagreement between quondam friends, Bradshaw, her most hostile opponent, and Benson, her greatest apologist; her death reproduces the friendship that once existed between the two men. For the first time in years, Bradshaw enters Benson’s house to comfort Leonard over Ruth’s death. Unlike Bulwer-Lytton’s notion that shame can only be wiped out with death (see the previous chapter), Ruth’s death in Gaskell’s imagination of an industrial
England represents shame as non-productivity and waste, while bodily shame drives an individual to reproduce.

Although it is shameful to be critical ill, bringing about a hiatus in productivity, illness often indicates growth, maturity, and emasculation in a character. Illnesses as representations of less-than-perfect reproductions of the daily functioning healthy self cause suffering, which leads to sympathy and understanding of fellow-sufferers. Like Ruth, Leonard undergoes two bouts of serious illnesses, both brushes with death associated with his shameful illegitimate birth. The first incident occurs in the penultimate paragraph in Book II, and the second when Ruth, upon discovery of her identity by the town people, confesses to Leonard about his birth before someone else can inform or taunt him. The two other bastards in the novel, both male, meant to illustrate Leonard’s plight and future, result in a suicide and a successful career as a doctor. Although one of them drowns himself when he learns of his illegitimacy, “rather than present the record of his shame” (105), and although he does not advance the plot in any way except as a by-line from Faith, Gaskell names him—Thomas Wilkins—thus according him an identity, not objectifying him even as the author links death with shame. The other bastard, a doctor who trades in life and death, informs Ruth about Bellingham’s critical condition without knowing their relationship. Ruth pleads to nurse Bellingham, and when he refuses to allow her, she confides to him about the identity of Leonard’s father. “Secret for secret” (360), the doctor confesses his own illegitimacy, and sympathizes with Leonard, wishing to take him into apprenticeship. In all three illegitimate characters of the novel, their shame is integrated with death and illnesses, and it is this shame that forms their identity and imbues in them a nature for sympathy.

For Leonard, and, to a certain extent, the doctor, their shame emasculates them, giving them the power of sympathy to understand others, and thus making them better people, or
specifically, better men. Throughout the novel, Leonard, as a newly born baby, is said to be a “badge of her shame” (100), “a cloud of shame and disgrace” (135), and “heir of shame” (279). Like the slap Ruth receives from an infant that makes her cognizant of her shame, shame for Leonard is both physical and psychological. When Ruth informs Leonard of his origin, he learns shame for the first time in his young life; he pulls away from her, finding her repugnant (282). Although G. H. Lewis claims that a child knowing the shame of his illegitimacy is improbable and unrealistic since Leonard would not have known of sexual matters (Critical Heritage 270), Gaskell’s concern is with the transmission of shame. Like an illness, shame is transmitted from body to body, from Ruth’s sexual sin to Leonard’s illegitimate birth, through the conduit of knowledge, which allows Leonard to gain an awareness of his identity, or self-consciousness. The double meaning of self-consciousness—of a reflexivity of the self, and a traumatic sense of exposure—breaks down when shame enters. According to Freud, shame is first instituted when one internalizes the death of the other (Father). The recognition of shame in self-consciousness is the shame of the “death” of the self, and when shame happens, one sickens mentally and falls into neurosis.

The weakened constitution of Leonard reflects his interiority and shame. The burden of shame and the knowledge of his identity enfeeble Leonard physically, and cause his health to be shaken (300). The shame and the autognosis transform Leonard’s sense of self-identity drastically: usually well-mannered, he utters “sad words of shame” (300) and his “temper became fitful and variable” (300). But when he accepts the “disgrace attaching to him and to the creature he loved most” (315), that is, when he accepts the shame as part of his identity, he is emasculated by his poor health but gains a sense of sympathy. It is this sense of sympathy and emasculation that bridges the conflict between Bradshaw and Benson. “My mother is dead, sir,” he cries to Bradshaw “with a wild look of agony, as if to find comfort for that great loss in human sympathy” (374). Shame allows Leonard to appear emasculated (exemplified by his
tears), bringing about the reconciliation. In Leonard, shame gives rise to a self-awareness of
his identity in relation to the outside world—part of his identity involves internalizing the
shame of his birth—and the suffering that shame brings precipitates understanding and
sympathy for others who suffer. For Gaskell, shame transgenders people. In women, shame
works to masculinize them—even though nursing was fundamentally feminized in the 19th
century, Ruth takes on an active role in volunteering and deciding her own fate, refusing to be
relegated as an outcast, and Gaskell transfigured herself as the figure of St Sebastian, seemingly
helpless tied to the stake but evangelizing the teaching of God—while shame in Gaskell’s male
characters feminizes them, and as a result, the men become kinder, more sympathetic, and more
understanding.

Like Leonard and Ruth, Bellingham suffers grave illnesses twice, but unlike them, he
does not improve much upon recovery. He remains narcissistic, and unconcerned with other
people’s lives. His failure to be transmogrified by illnesses stems from his failure to feel shame
because of his socioeconomic status. As an aristocrat, he is not affected by a hiatus from work;
he is not expected to be productive and exists outside the economy that entraps and defines the
working class. Even as Ruth is shamed from the exposure of her true identity, she seeks work
desperately, and eventually becomes a nurse because the dying working class shares the affect
of shame with Ruth. Living outside the economic necessity to work for his living, Bellingham’s
sense of entitlement involves employing the best medical care money can buy. Thus, for
Bellingham, while there is a fear of mortality, the shame that often accompanies such a fear is
lost because of his great assurance of recovery.

Although Jemima does not undergo any serious mortal threats, her great change from
being a detractor of Ruth to a defender emanates from her sense of shame, making her
sympathetic towards others. She gains a sense of self-consciousness just as Darwin argues that
shame is the affect of self-consciousness through the eyes of the other (see Chapter 1). Her sense of shame changes her identity and marks her maturation from being a girl to becoming a woman. When at first she is petulant, contradicting Farquhar for the sake of attracting his attention and defying her father’s notion of how a girl should behave (docile and agreeable), she later navigates and negotiates to an identity that allows her to have her voice and remain compliant to the social rules set by her father and Farquhar as she develops her sense of selfhood through shame. When she observes that Farquhar has diverted his affections from her to Ruth, she withdraws into herself, not talking or replying to Farquhar’s provocations. In this lovesickness, she is shamed because her feelings are not reciprocated, like a baby who turns into the mother’s body when the baby’s needs are not met. Her quiet suffering and turmoil from her shame, which she does not yet confess to anyone, cause her to become physically pallid, unattractive, and emaciated, withering away. Furthermore, the sexual jealousy that Jemima experiences turns to shame when she is the first person to discover Ruth’s true identity. Upon knowing Ruth’s status, Jemima’s “cheeks [are] flushed and red, but her lips pale and compressed, and her eyes full of a heavy, angry sorrow” (267), all of which are physical manifestations of shame. Shame is an affect but it carries with it packets of knowledge; a woman blushes at the sight of a man she is in love with because she has sexual knowledge. Just as the knowledge of Ruth’s sexual shame is transferred to Leonard, the mere knowledge of shame shames the beholder.

Even though the information gives Jemima a power over Ruth, Gaskell imbues shame in Jemima, instead of the easy solution of allowing Jemima to triumph over Ruth morally. Jemima’s shame emanates from the idea that she was ever jealous of Ruth: “She now thought that she could never more be jealous of her. In her pride of innocence, she felt almost ashamed that such a feeling could have existence” (268). In Jemima’s contemplation of the “true” identity of Ruth, whether she is a whore or an angel, Jemima’s suffering and shame enable her
to put distance between Ruth and herself, and reflect on her self-identity in comparison to Ruth’s. Shame and suffering have also given Jemima a sense of sympathy for the abject, just as she is relegated by Farquhar. She bears the suffering of sexual jealousy in the same way as her shame—quietly and secretively. Her sudden maturity may appear anomalous, but in her shame, her old identity of being a tetchy girl breaks down and metamorphoses into that of a thoughtful and intelligent woman, capable of weighing right and wrong, and behaving the “right” way. When Bradshaw finds out about Ruth and castigates her severely, Jemima defends her. This rousing defence is unlike the dissensions from her past childish self where she is deliberately being difficult and defiant and rebellious. It comes as a mature apology for Ruth, as Jemima bares her own shame, admitting that despite her sexual jealousy—a taboo, shameful subject as “her face was double-dyed with crimson blushes” (278)—she is “full of pity, and the stirrings of new-awakened love, and most true respect” for Ruth (278). As shame emasculates Gaskell’s male characters, shame gives Jemima a sense of sympathy that allows her to grow into her own identity and, at the same time, to understand others’ plights.

While shame emasculates male characters, shame in female characters appears to empower them: Ruth becomes a nurse who actively saves lives because her shame leaves her no other option, and Jemima manages to find her voice. When Jemima knows of Ruth’s shame and is, in turn, shamed, she transforms from being surveyed to a surveyor. In the beginning when Jemima withdraws into herself, Bradshaw who notes her change in temperament polices her behavior by instigating Ruth to draw her out. But when Jemima discovers Ruth’s identity, she is transformed from a passive role of being looked at to the active role of observer, carefully watching Ruth’s behavior toward Farquhar (if she encourages his advances) and toward her two younger sisters to whom Ruth is a governess. Instead of being protected from ignominy, Jemima becomes the protector of virtue because shame has reconfigured her sense of selfhood, giving her the ability to differentiate right from wrong. As she matures into her new self, she
gains a perspective that allows her to behave in a socially acceptable manner that entitles her to her own voice while not contravening male authority. For instance, instead of defying her father’s orders of not visiting Ruth, Jemima makes it clear to the intransigent Bradshaw in a reasonable, not truculent, manner that he is making a mistake but obeys him quietly without a sense of rebellion. Jemina’s sympathy, a result from shame and suffering, allows her to view matters from all points of view, including the males’. She sends a surrogate, Farquhar, who visits Benson, not Ruth, to assure Ruth obliquely that both Farquhar and Jemima support her. As a result of her ability to feel shame, and in turn, suffering and sympathy, Jemima, like Gaskell amidst the Victorian male intelligentsia, is able to manipulate patriarchal social rules, and, in the end, gains the reciprocal love and respect of Farquhar. Although shame has paralyzed Ruth and Jemima, it is only through shame that they manage to grow and change into different personalities that enable their triumphs in the end.

While Jemima and Ruth learn to live with shame to be inducted into (male?) social rules, their journeys differ. As Ruth is read as Gaskell’s novel of bereavement and mourning, and as mourning is the process of recovery from shame, Ruth’s journey of shame can be seen as analogous to Gaskell’s. Ruth starts as an ingénue, not knowing shame, or rather more accurately, knowing shame for the “wrong” reasons. She claims she is pretty without shame but is ashamed of her dress (14); what is important to her at first is her exterior, and not any inward thoughts or decent behavior. Her pulchritude represents a recurring motif, associated with desire and shame. Bellingham falls in love with her merely based on her appearance, not caring about her personality or kindness or gentleness—“Her beauty was all that Mr Bellingham cared for” (64)—and as she suffers more and becomes more beautiful, his attraction for her beauty increases to the point that he almost sexually violates her. Her allure is proportional to the shame and suffering she undergoes. While at first she is pretty, she is divine at the end. While at first she takes “a sense of satisfaction” in her beauty (24), she
discovers it is best to live without pride for her appearance. A baby slaps her; Bellingham’s mother debases her; Sally humiliates Ruth by giving her a wedding band, a boy’s haircut, and a widow’s cap, exposing the lie that she is married (121-3)—the suffering Ruth withstands gradually teaches her a sense of shame for her interiority and identity, not her looks. Like Benson who undergoes the indignity of his deformity and still remains “beautiful” (59), Ruth’s beauty comes from her shame, which transforms her self.

Of course, “beauty is deceitful,” as Sally notes when Faith comments on how handsome Ruth has become with the suffering and shame (173). Bellingham himself is extremely dashing but his good looks come from his aristocratic genes which are seemingly atavistic and bestial. Jemima scrutinizes him “with something like the curious observation which a naturalist bestows on a new species of animal” (217). To Jemima, Bellingham’s beauty is like a horse’s, an indication that he is beastly. Gaskell makes the distinction between those who possess physical beauty and those whose beauty comes from within.

All Gaskell’s characters in Ruth become beautiful after shame and suffering because the author sees shame and suffering as a form of purification of the self. Leonard symbolizes a constant reminder of Ruth’s “badge of her shame” and, at the same time, as Benson notes, her way of “purification” (100). Even as she fears that Leonard might turn out to become his father, bringing her more shame, Leonard allows her to forget the notion of suicide, and motivates her to improve herself so that she can teach him. “She prayed that, through whatever suffering, she might be purified” (235). As she lives with her shame and suffers more, she becomes more beautiful. Even though Ruth’s and Jemima’s shame are not the same, Jemima similarly endures the purification of the self that shame and suffering bring. The silent shame of her pointless sexual jealousy for Ruth, the burden of knowing Ruth’s secret and secretly policing the governess’s behavior around the children, and the indignant disclosure of her unrequited love
for Farquhar to her father—all of which belittles Jemima and gives her “some humility,” which causes the change in her identity (303); her suffering and her sympathy for others’ suffering have “purified [her character] from pride” (303). Like St Sebastian who suffers humiliation, and whose pain apotheosizes and aestheticizes him, the tribulations of shame that Jemima and Ruth withstand beautify them; the blossoming beauty of characters signals not their femininity but their inward transformation, strength, and resilience.

_Cranford: Shame of Poverty, and Death of a Brother_

_Cranford_ was conceived as a sketch, and the first two chapters appeared in the December 1851 edition of _Household Words_, a weekly journal managed by Charles Dickens. It took Gaskell some time to think of _Cranford_ as a book: chapters three to seven were published in 1852, and nine to fourteen between January and May 1853. The conception and birth of _Cranford_ coincide with _Ruth_, which appeared in January 1853, but the reception of the two books couldn’t be more different. Critics found _Ruth_ controversial—some denounced it and others defended it—whereas _Cranford_ is “charming” and “delightful.”¹⁶ On the surface the two novels are different in material and tone—one is a heartwarming, genteel comedy, revolving around an Amazonian community of aging gentlewomen, published in a serialized form, and the other a risqué tragedy of a fallen young girl in a triple decker—but the two stories share the thematic concerns of death, mourning, and shame. While several characters in _Ruth_ are only threatened by the shadow of death by plagues, drowning, illnesses, suicides, and weak constitutions, _Cranford_’s characters actually die from accidents or old age. Included in the death toll: Captain Brown, Miss Brown, Deborah Jenkyns, Thomas Holbrook, Peter Jenkyns

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¹⁶ See criticisms of _Ruth_ and _Cranford_ in _Critical Heritage_.

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(presumed dead at first), Mr and Mrs Jenkyns, Lady Glenmire’s husband, Carlo the dog, and Mrs Brown’s six children. Gaskell defies the traditional literary conventions of humorous narratives of keeping good characters alive, an indication of her preoccupation with the thought of death and the demises of her loved ones.

But unlike *Ruth* which takes place in an industrialized society, death in Cranford exists in a space where time has stood still. Cranford is a town that resists the encroaching industrialization: the ladies of Cranford “vehemently petitioned against” a neighboring railroad, signalling their hostility to industrialization (42). As death is shameful in an industrialized society because a good machine/body is a functional one that produces and reproduces, having a purpose in life, there should be no shame of death in a pre-industrial society like Cranford where the ladies are not expected to work—but there is still shame in death at Cranford. Sometimes deaths in Cranford may be satirical and metaphoric: Captain Brown is run over by a train with Dicken’s *Pickwick Papers* in his hand, demonstrating the resistance against technology, Gaskell’s friction with the Victorian male writers represented here by Dickens her editor at *Household Words* where *Cranford* was first published, and the expulsion of males in a matriarchal society. But even in Captain Brown’s metaphoric death, there is a sense of shame shrouding it. The women do not inform Miss Brown, the elder daughter, of his decease. Like a dirty little shameful secret, every senescent lady of Cranford knows of their and others’ imminent deaths but do not speak of dying.

“Death,” Mary, the narrator of *Cranford*, explicates, “was as true and as common as poverty; yet people never spoke about that, loud out in the streets. It was a word not to be mentioned to ears polite” (42). There is a deliberate obfuscation in the narration between death

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17 Many critics have argued about the metaphoric possibilities of the scene. For instance, Hilary Schor argues that the train is “a symbol of the new world racing in on” Cranford (94).
and penury; “that,” which people never speaks of, may refer to one or the other. Like death, money is an unspeakable subject in Cranford. Although the Cranford ladies are not ashamed of their “elegant economy,” any help to assist them, reminding them of their privation, is seen as disgraceful and improper. When Captain Brown carries a heavy basket home for an old lady, the Cranford society construes his action as unbecoming because a gentleman should not perform menial work and because his actions expose the old lady’s pecuniary situation that she cannot afford to have servants. Cranford does not speak “of money because the subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic” (41). In pre-industrial Cranford, where it is degrading for gentlewomen to work and be productive, the shame of death is associated with money: When faced with the deaths of men who support them monetarily, how do women live with dignity without much money?

For the youngish Jessie Brown, the daughter of Captain Brown, the solution is marriage. When Captain Brown and Miss Brown pass away one after the other, the mourning Jessie experiences gives her strength, not shame (57), because Miss Jenkyns refuses to allow Jessie to be ashamed. Mourning as a private act removes oneself from society and deprives a person of a sense of belonging within a community; shame sets in. Since Miss Jenkyns never allows Jessie to be alone, the mourning, like Gaskell’s, is suspended. But the shame is projected onto her material needs when she has no financial means for upkeep. When Jessie mentions she can live by sewing, nursing, housekeeping, or retailing, Miss Jenkyns objects “in an angry voice,” saying “some people hav[e] no idea of their rank as a captain’s daughter” (59). By marrying her old flame, Jessie escapes the ignominy of social degradation.

But for Matty, who outlives her father, mother, sister, and (presumably) brother, marriage is not an option: she is too old for a new suitor—in any case, men of her class do not
live in Cranford—and her old flame, Thomas Holbrook, dies after a trip to Paris.\footnote{Holbrook’s death and the deaths of Mrs Brown’s six children in India highlight the importance and suitability of place for survival. Just as Major Brown is ejected from Cranford, a place for aging single women, Holbrook’s and the children’s deaths indicate an expulsion from the foreign lands, hinting that forms of decadence exist in those lands that cause deaths.} Through Matty, Gaskell works out what it means to be a woman who works for her own living, negotiating the social conventions of how genteel women should not work and still maintain the dignity of her social class, like Gaskell herself who contributed to household expenses and bought a house for her family with the money she earned from writing. Like Gaskell, whose writing was seen by her critics as complementary to and separate from the male literati, Matty seeks permission from a shopkeeper before she starts a tea business in her private home, catering to a female genteel clientele, and thus avoiding the shame of working for money. Furthermore, even though Matty is in her twilight years, she is portrayed as a child—as when she buys a silk dress for the first time in her life (173), and does not understand the value of money (195)—whose innocence makes people ashamed (201). As her friends set up the tea-selling enterprise for her, Matty is free from the blame of a genteel woman having to work. Her childlike innocence and her ignorance about money free her from any shame of working for a living in an aristocratic society.

While the possibility of Matty losing her social position may not directly arouse shame in her—the readers are not privy to Matty’s interiority—the shame is transferred onto her friends. When her friends convene secretly to discuss Matty’s situation, they “cried in concert” after days of repressing their emotions as if they are mourning (192); “Even Miss Pole cried, who had said a hundred times that to betray emotion before any one was a sign of weakness and want of self-control” (192). The secret meeting of Matty’s friends resembles a wake to mourn for her loss of fortune. Matty’s friends show discretion, an act of repressing the self to refrain from hurting the other, not dissimilar to how friends of the bereaved act.
repression of their grief parallels that of Jessie’s for her father’s death. Although she longs for some time to cry over the grave of her father alone, “uninterrupted by sympathy, and unobserved by friendship” (57), Jenkyns does not allow her to be alone at the grave, causing Jessie to suppress her mourning.

In the absence of Matty, the mourning for her money brings about a sense of surreptitiousness and shamefulness in the secret “ceremony” (193). The furtiveness of the “ceremony” of writing a sum of money each friend can assist Matty on a piece of paper, the sum unknown to others, and sealing the paper “mysteriously” (192) until the narrator’s father can open them in absolute confidentiality, signals shame of Matty’s loss and their own impoverishment. Even though the “ceremony” is among friends, each woman seeks to speak to the narrator privately, just as friends seek to comfort the bereaved individually, as if the act of helping Matty is illicit. During one of the private conferences, Mrs Forrester is “trembling all the time as if it were a great crime which she was exposing to daylight, in telling me how very, very little she had to live upon; a confession which she was brought to make from a dread lest we should think that the small contribution named in her paper bore any proportion to her love and regard for Miss Matty” (193). Poverty, for Matty and the other ladies in Cranford, is an unspeakable secret shame, almost criminal, that requires confession. While death is dealt with differently from Ruth in Cranford, both novels associate shame with death. For Cranford, the problem is to avoid the shame of social disgrace while waiting for death.

Just before Matty’s failed investment that triggers her downfall, Cranford is besieged by robbers, linking money with the threat of death once again. After a call at their friend’s house, and “having braved the dangers of Darkness-lane,” the narrator and Matty divulge their individual fears to each other (147): the narrator’s apprehension lies in being policed, fearing “eyes behind me looking out of darkness”, and Matty’s in being grabbed by her ankles by a
strange man as she hops onto bed “with a great fierce face staring out at you” (148). D. A. Miller’s influential study of Victorian novels, *The Novel and the Police*, rejects Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion that the novel is subversive; Miller views the function of the novel as a societal way of policing culture, stealing into parlors to control our conceptions of sexuality and self. Miller extends his study to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope*, arguing that the camera operates as surveillance against anticipated illicit acts even as, in that anticipation, the camera already knows what the illicit acts are, like open secrets everyone tacitly knows but refuses to acknowledge openly. The rampant surveillance and its different incarnations in Gaskell’s novels—Jemima, and Bradshaw in *Ruth*, and now Matty and the narrator—not only demonstrate the author’s concerns with policing, the surveillance is often associated with shame. As in Hitchcock’s *Rope*, and as in Jemima’s monitoring Ruth, people police others because they are waiting for a chance to catch a shameful act. Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation is exemplified by a police person shouting “Hey you!” and whether the subject is guilty or not, the subject is already interpellated. The act of being policed already presupposes a criminal, shameful behavior. In *Cranford*, the fear of being watched instils in the self a sense of shame in the single women, waiting for death yet afraid of dying impecunious, and afraid of being shamed before decease. As in *Ruth*, where the transmission of shame is physical, the act of looking in *Cranford* transmits shame.

While the women in Cranford fear to be watched, Peter, Matty’s brother, creates a spectacle to be watched, to give “the old ladies in town… something to talk about” (94). But his shame is also associated with surveillance. He cross-dresses the first time in front of his father, and while he passes, he is dissatisfied with his passing, for he wants to be recognized as Matty recognizes him: “Peter was a lady then” (94). She repeats to emphasize the point: “He was the lady” (94). When Peter cross-dresses the second time, he makes sure he has an audience. He poses as Jenkyns carrying a pillow disguised as an illegitimate “baby” with his neighbors
“peeping and peeping” (96). This time, his father coming home “looked through the rails himself, and saw—I don’t know what he thought he saw, but old Clare told me his face went quite grey-white with anger, and his eyes blazed out under his frowning black brows” (96). The patriarch instructs the neighbors to stand there and continue watching while he storms in, tears off Peter’s clothes, and flogs him in front of everyone. The insistence that the crowd stay and see the flogging accentuates the shaming of Peter and his transgendered performance, just as to St Sebastian is put on display to be shamed, feminized by his helplessness, and pierced with phallic arrows. Peter’s cross-dressing is so abject and ineffable and shameful, bordering on the Real, that the Father sees something but does not understand or refuses to understand what he sees, and that Matty refuses to relate such an ignoble sighting. Such cross-dressing disturbs the distinction between Peter and Jenkyns, and self and other, disrupting the sense of self-identity. The scene of shame transmits the effect from the spectacle to the spectator; Peter’s shameful act shames his father, who in turn shames Peter.

What is shameful about Peter’s performance and what makes the father incensed is that he cross-dresses and ruins his sister’s reputation. Unlike Ruth, Jemima, and Gaskell, whose shame empowers them and provides them with a “masculine” resilience, parading their shame as pride, Peter’s transgendering emasculates him, and subjects him to the authority of the Father. Nothing could be more shameful and abject and humiliating for a transgender person than have his/her clothes ripped off in public, exposing the “wrong” sexed body. When Peter runs away from home, a servant speculates to Matty that his insurmountable shame will drive him to suicide, not dissimilar to Ruth’s attempted suicide. Although his shame does not kill him, “it was killing my mother,” Matty observes. “Yes! Killing her” (101). The ambiguity of “it”—does “it” refer to Peter’s absence or his shame?—highlights the unspeakability and ineffability of his cross-dressing, linking his shame to death and the Real. Peter, like Gaskell’s brother,
rumored to die in glory in the Great War, atoning for the shame of his crossdressing performance.

But Peter enacts as a wish fulfillment for Gaskell whose brother’s whereabouts were not known; Peter comes home. As psychologists agree that death is inherently shameful and mourning is the process of getting over the shame,¹⁹ the absence of the body of Peter/Gaskell’s brother suspends the process of bereavement, causing the griever to be in shame. Upon hearing the servant’s speculation about Peter’s suicide, Matty breaks down hysterically, demonstrating her great love for her brother. Their relationship mirrors Gaskell and her brother’s; Gaskell, like Matty, showed great affection for her brother. But while Matty is allowed a cathartic release, Gaskell couldn’t mourn for her brother because his death was rumored, not confirmed. When Peter is resurrected from the dead, he must at the same time redeem himself from shame. Unlike Bulwer-Lytton’s antagonists who regain their honor by dying in wars for the sake England’s glory, Peter’s absolution comes from money. Peter and Matty’s reunion is set in her tea-shop where he poses as a buying customer. When they eventually recognize each other, their first conversation is fraught with materialism: “what do you think I have brought for you from India? I have an Indian muslin gown and a pearl necklace for you” (207-8). His success as a soldier-turned-colonist enables him to provide Matty with a comfortable situation at Cranford till their deaths, freeing her from the shame of working in the public sphere; she is now able to live “very genteelly” (209).

His masculine return to Cranford may appear to be problematic to the feminine utopia that Rae Rosenthal has identified is upholding the beliefs of communalism, cooperation, and harmony (74-6), which clash with the cold commercialism and unfeeling technology emblematic of the masculine competitive marketplace. Unlike Ruth, which takes place in a

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¹⁹ See Jeffrey Kauffman’s “On the Primacy of Shame.”
patriarchal society where men have limited influence, Cranford, with the return of Peter and marrying of Jessie, is a society of aging and aged women saved by men. However, shame has emasculated Peter, and furthermore, he returns to Cranford at an old age when he is not eligible to marry nor does he care to, living with Matty, just as Matty used to live with Jenkyns. If Cranford seems conventional with men eventually saving the day, then the shame equalizes the sexes.

**Conclusion: Death of a Mother**

“There’s something I will never forget about the funeral,” her mother said. “It’s hard to talk about it. Coming home like that from Dublin and your father [dying] so young, and everybody looking and watching, there was a sort of shame about it. It sounds mad, doesn’t it? I know it does, but that’s what it felt like, so exposed, or maybe that isn’t the word. But it felt like shame, those days after he died when we came home.”

Colm Toibin, *The Blackwater Lightship*.

While *Ruth* depicts a dark psychological study of the maternal protagonist fearing for the death of her son, and *Cranford* presents a fantasy of the return of the dead, both texts (and other of Gaskell’s work) are connected by the absent mother figure. The lack of a maternal figure in *Ruth* may have led to Ruth’s downfall. Characterized by her avarice, Mrs Mason, who may be a maternal figure, cares only for Ruth’s beauty to represent her workhouse, and when she runs into Ruth and Bellingham, she kicks Ruth out of the employment, without giving her a chance to explain or redeem herself. (Mrs Mason and Ruth can be seen as the predecessors of the stepmother-and-daughter pair, Molly Gibson and Mrs Kirkpatrick, in *Wives and Daughters* where the stepmother cares for money and social standing, without providing any guidance for
Molly’s moral conduct.) This concern of motherless girls not only reflects on Gaskell’s own experience of losing her mother when she was a young child but also reveals her anxiety about her death and the state of her children. When Gaskell was sick for some time and couldn’t recover, she pleaded with Nancy, her sister-in-law, to look after her children “in case of my death [and] we all know the probability of widowers marrying again” (Letters 46).

Like Gaskell, the narrator in Cranford does not have a mother, and appears to mourn for Matty’s. Looking through and burning Matty’s mother’s letters provide the narrator the opportunity to examine the mother’s life, know her intimately, and give meaning to her life (and death). In the end, the narrator projects her own loss and mourning onto the Mother. In a short missive the mother writes after Peter runs away from home because of the public shaming, the word “sorry” appears twice to indicate the pathetic plight the Jenkyns suffer. Although the suffering isn’t directly linked to Peter’s shame, the suffering is a consequence of Peter’s performance to shame the family. “Your father,” the letter writer tells Peter, “cannot hold up his head for grief” (100), but this posture of head bowed is also that of shame. By going through incidents of shame, the Jenkyns gain new knowledge of their identity as a family; the word “know” crops up twice. In the short letter, Gaskell has demonstrated what this essay has argued: one gains knowledge, wisdom, and resilience through the shame of death.

The act of examination and burning of letters allows Matty to let go of her mother’s death, it also creates a chance for the narrator to mourn and get over the death of the Mother. After the missive that the mother writes, pleading for Peter to return home in spite of the shame, the narrator writes, “But Peter did not come back. That spring day was the last time he ever saw his mother’s face. The writer of the letter—the last—the only person who had ever seen what was written in it, was dead long ago—and I, a stranger, not born at the time when the occurrence took place, was the one to open it” (100). Only the mother and the narrator have
read the letter because the letter has never reached Peter who is assumed to be dead. The narration carries a wistful and elegiac tone and as the sentence ends, as the narrator burns the letter, the process of mourning is complete. Gaskell’s own creative act of writing mirrors the narrator’s act of writing to overcome grief. As Gaskell’s husband persuaded her to cathex her grief for her dead son into her writing, she encodes and sublimates her mourning into her stories.

Written records and progeny are productions from a woman's body. Gaskell’s books, as well as Matty’s mother’s letters, are cultural documents in which shame of loss of loved ones is sublimated into culturally accepted products. To write is to transcend the body that suffers from shame. The burning of Matty’s mother’s letters, and the eventual deaths of the mother’s offspring eradicate all corporeal memories of the mother, as if she has never existed. This anxiety of non-existence produces shame in a time of industrialization when the influential Carlyle extorts his contemporaries to “Produce! Produce!” to leave an impact before death. Linda Hughes and Michael Lund argue that women’s letters in Gaskell’s fiction represent her own view of her work and the recurring motif of illegitimacy—from Ruth’s child to Peter’s pillow “baby”—mirrors her own sense of “illegitimacy” among the male Victorian writers. Following Hughes and Lund’s argument, the burning of Matty’s mother’s letters—Gaskell demanded her letters to be burnt after her death—signals a desire not to be read, and not to be seen, because of the shame of being an outsider.

Gaskell’s life and works demonstrate a complicated entanglement with private shame, deliberately hidden from sight, ashamed of shame seeing the light. Shame caused by the inherent shame of suspended mourning, and shame driven to produce and be useful pushed her to write. And at the same time, women who published, like Esther in Mary Barton who walks the streets or like Ruth whose sexual transgressions are known to all or like Molly’s seeming indiscretions in Wives and Daughters, are exposed to be shamed and spoken about. Gaskell’s
pain and suffering to publish and to be known show the shame of exposure; the pervasiveness of surveillance and policing indicates Gaskell’s awareness of how she was being watched and judged in her book reviews and as a minister’s wife. To counter this shame, she imagined herself to be a man, St Sebastian, whose suffering has a godly purpose. As Terence Wright notes of Gaskell’s writings, “We constantly witness the crumbling of absolutes, the clear becoming irresolute, the iron will a vulnerable flesh” (110). Gaskell utilizes the affect of shame to interrogate and destabilize the self and identity.
Chapter Four: Autobiographies About Sex: John Addington Symonds, Havelock Ellis, and Shame

The late 19th century witnessed the birth of theories of sexuality, which still circulate in our society today. Many of the theories emanated from doctors on the continent via post-Darwinian evolutionary theory, “legitimizing” these quasi-theories as biological, medical, scientific, and objective. The theories on sexual deviance utilize the notion of degeneration, degeneration not as a return to an atavistic state, but degeneration as a bastardization of a variety of species. In a letter John Addington Symonds wrote to Robert Louis Stevenson, he confided that Jekyll and Hyde “has left such a deeply painful impression on my heart that I do not know how I am ever to turn to it again. The fact is that, viewed as an allegory, it touches one too closely… Your Dr Jekyll seems to me capable of loosening the last strands of self-control in one who should read it while wavering between his better and worse self” (Symonds, Letters 3:120). Elaine Showalter’s analysis of the fin de siècle novel suggests that the animalistic, atavistic, criminal Hyde existing in the homosocial world is an allegory of the degenerated and degenerate homosexual, a reading reflected in Symonds’s lifelong battle for control over his sexual desires; Symonds, in his memoirs, frequently called his deviant desires the “Wolf,” a ferocious, savage and untameable animal. (Coincidentally, this image coincides with Freud’s Wolf Man, linking the image with ineffable terrors.) By 1886, the time the letter was written, Symonds was living as an invert as openly as could be possible in the climate; he was living in Europe and had several long term relationships with working class men such that his relationship with a Swiss boy had “come to be recognized as beautifully, ideally natural” by the boy’s family and friends (Memoirs 269). Whether or not the letter is an oblique coming out to Stevenson, or whether Stevenson already knew of his old friend Symonds’s sexuality, the novelist replied, “Jekyll is a dreadful thing, I own; but the only thing I feel dreadful about is that damned old business of the war in the members. This time it came out; I hope it will stay in, in future” (124). Between
the letters and the novel arise issues still pertinent in the 21st century: the difficulty in disclosure of a homosexual identity to others, the disgust and refusal to accept a seemingly monstrous desire, and the association of homosexuality with criminality, perversity, and degeneration.

Symonds’ relationship woes are especially prescient: when writing about Willie Dyer a chorister, Symonds lamented, “I could not marry him; modern society provided no bond of comradeship whereby we might have been united. So my first love flowed to waste. I was unable to deal justly with him; the mortification of the anomalous position he and I were placed in did much to degrade my character” (104). This passage in Memoirs could have been a plea for same-sex marriage in our current society, that a marriage certification could sanction, sanctify, and seal the bonds between two persons, dignifying the relationship. Hence, studying what the British sexologists have to offer is not an esoteric project but it could better our understanding of the Western historical concept of sexuality and how it has affected our current clime.

The renewal of interest in English sexologists is due to several factors. Phyllis Grosskurth outed Symonds in her 1964 biography but could only publish his Memoirs in 1984 after a 50-year embargo on the autobiography had expired. With the Gay Liberation movement in the 70s, critics were able to interrogate the queer influence in 19th-century Britain. However, most criticism on the English sexologists focuses on their history of production of a body of works during the fin de siècle or/and the explicit explication of what the words and works mean, while they neglect to examine the personal impetus that brought the books into being. The scholarship on English sexology can be categorized into three areas. Firstly, many critics have usefully contextualized the sexologists’ works within larger cultural, political, literary, scientific, gender, and economic contexts. Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Week’s groundbreaking work in 1977 examines the intersection of socialism and sexual politics in Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis. In a book-length study of Ellis, Chris Nottingham brings
to the fore the political aspects in his work. Keith Nield re-assesses Carpenter’s reputation while Joseph Bristow traces the history of the collaboration between Symonds and Ellis in *Sexual Inversion*, arguing that despite the frustrated working relationship between the two, both contributed to the book, contrary to the popular opinion that Symonds played only an auxiliary role. Heike Bauer situates the sexologists apart from their continental counterparts because they are men of letters. Even Ellis admitted in his autobiography that he was not cut out to be a good doctor, and had always aspired to be a writer. Still contextualizing the sexologists’ works in a historical context: both Beverly Thiele and Margaret Jackson employ a feminist lens. Thiele’s article is a vehement obloquy against Carpenter for his uncritical assessment of women’s issues while Jackson’s is a nuanced reading of Ellis for eroticizing putatively sexless Victorian ladies yet essentializing their bodies. Joseph Cady, Christopher Craft, Ed Cohen, Oliver Buckton, Howard Booth, and John Simons examine a fleeting moment in time when the ontology of the subjectivity of the self is born out of sexuality, when the Foucauldian powers of superstructure institutionalize and produce the nascent homosexual subject, and when the homosexual subject, caught between being Victorian and becoming modern, engenders different ways of thinking about masculinity.

While the aforementioned scholars situate the sexologists’ works in a historical context, the second form of criticism that other scholars offer is an explication of the sexologists’ writings. Symonds, Carpenter, and Ellis produced a prodigious number of books, and some of the writings, especially Carpenter’s on cosmic consciousness, may be rather esoteric, while others, like Symonds’, may be obfuscated by the author’s own confusion about his sexuality. As early as 1976, Paul Robinson summarized Ellis’s tome on human sexuality. Jonathan Kemp attempts to solve the conundrum of Symonds’ public and private personas in “A Problem in Gay Heroics”; what Symonds advocated in his published books differs from his self-loathing suicidal thoughts in his autobiography. John Pemble argues that Symonds rejected the
morbidity inherent in the semiotics of homosexuality/degeneration through his love of nature. Through Symonds’s poetry, Ian Venable reads that Symonds relinquished his guilt and shame as he progressed in life and matured in his poetry. Hilary Fraser locates art as an epicenter where Symonds could work out his homosexual anxieties. Jana Funke persuades us that we have placed too much emphasis on Symonds’s Hellenic leanings since he exorted in his memoirs, “We cannot be Greeks”; clearly Symonds, while nostalgic, was also sane and pragmatic. Tariq Rahman explains Carpenter’s millennial vision of the intermediate sex.

The third group of critics focuses on the stylistic aspects of the sexologists’ works. Implicit in the analyses of the narrative strategies is how the sexologists used literary devices to deflect and pre-empt any denouncement of obscenity. As many critics have noted, the tactical sexologists discussed sexual issues freely, which were considered unfit for publication, under the aegis of medical discourses; the biological argot replaces the subjectivity of an apologist and essayist with the objective authority of a doctor. When the oppressed speaks in the same terms as the oppressor, Foucault calls it a “reverse discourse.” In a letter Symonds wrote to Carpenter, he was relieved to find someone with a medical background to co-write *Sexual Inversion*: “I need somebody of medical importance to collaborate with. Alone, I could make but little effect – the effect of an eccentric” (qtd. in Bristow 79). As Wayne Koestenbaum has explained in *Double Talk*, sexology “promised to be a forgiving branch of an implacably homophobic culture” (43). Although *Sexual Inversion* was banned as an obscene publication in what has come to be known as the Bedborough Trial, the authors were not charged. The trial was in part due to a hapless circumstance of being published by Roland de Villiers, one of the many pseudonyms of a notorious trickster wanted by the police on the continent and in Britain, and of being sold by George Bedborough, secretary of the Legitimation League, a small society dedicated to social reform, which Scotland Yard believed it to be a hotbed for anarchists, the then-terrorists of London. As suggested by Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, and Chris
Nottingham, the aim of the trial was to crush the Legitimation League. However, writing under the protection of medical discourse is not the only writing strategy of the sexologists, as critics claim. Sam Binkley observes the Romantic strand in Symonds’ work, while Oliver Buckton discusses the duality (public/private) of the lives and autobiographies of Symonds and Carpenter.

The three areas of criticism—historicization of the sexologists’ works, explication of them, and analysis of style—are not mutually exclusive. Following Gillian Beer’s *Darwin’s Plots*, Ruth Bernard Yeazell deploys all three areas by exploring the narrative plot strategies in Ellis’s scientific writing. However, what is missing in the three areas of criticism, which examine the historical and cultural pressures that the sexologists faced because of their deviant sexualities, is that few have focused on the agency of the triumvirate. The sexologists objected to and rejected the continental brand of sexology and drew their own independent conclusions when they dealt with similar, limited information on inverts. Both Symonds and Carpenter came from upper middle class backgrounds; Symonds was the son of a wealthy physician in Bristol, Carpenter son of a well-to-do gentleman in Brighton; both excelled in school, won prizes, and intended to enter the academy. Carpenter and Ellis met through the Fellowship of the New Life which branched off into a splinter group, The Fabian Society. They traveled in similar milieux but arrived at different sexual theories and their works were treated differently. Ellis’s six volumes of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* were generally well-received, but Carpenter was known to be eccentric and Symonds mad.⁴ Arthur Symons questioned “whether Symonds was altogether sane” when recalling “the morbid, disquieting, nervous, contorted, painful expressions of his face: the abnormal, almost terrible fixity of his eyes” (115). Given that they existed under the same repressive regime, how did they think outside the box? Why

were their works treated differently? As Jerome McGann writes, "Every text enters the world under determinate sociohistorical conditions, and while these conditions may and should be variously defined and imagined, they establish the horizon within which the life histories of different texts can play themselves out" (9). Merely contextualizing the sexologists’ work in historical and cultural terms does not answer the disparities in the sexologists’ interpretations and the varying treatment they received.

Hence, I propose in this chapter to examine the agency of the sexologists, particularly in terms of the incipient homosexual subjectivity amidst the antihomosexual medical discourse.¹ The driving affect, shame, which constitutes much of the sexologists’ subjectivities, explains the different methods they used to handle, manipulate, and cope with their writings and environments. In particular, this chapter examines Symonds’s and Ellis’s autobiographies and how they dealt with shame. While, this chapter argues, Symonds’s shame reconfigured his subjectivity, allowing him to push the envelope for early LGBT advocacy, Ellis failed to be transformed by his shame because he hid it using various writing strategies.

**John Addington Symonds’s Shameful Sexual Subjectivity**

Much has been said about the subjectivity of Symonds revealed in his memoirs. In 1992, Joseph Cady focused only on the positivity of Symonds’s *Memoirs*, demonstrating that a homosexual subjectivity could exist even though the notion of homosexuality was not phenomenally available to the Victorian consciousness—Symonds himself believed that he was unique before researching his situation—and the sense of selfhood bore “no essential relations” to the pathologization of homosexuality, neglecting the self-loathing evident in the autobiography. Ed Cohen’s more nuanced reading explores the sexologists’ nonheteronormative “narrative

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¹ There are studies of sodomy in the early modern period but the studies focus on the acts, which are not considered as a form of homosexual consciousness. Sexual acts do not define one’s identity; one could engage in sodomy without identifying as homosexual.
modes that encompassed non-unitary forms of male subjectivity” (88). As opposed to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s suggestion that the same-sex relationships of Symonds, unlike those of Carpenter’s, were “not structurally threatening to the class system” due to his monetary sexual exploitation of working-class men, Ed Cohen suggests that the veracity of the memoirs subverts “the prevailing (discursive) standards that constituted the unitary male subject as the quintessential political, economic, and sexual agent” (91). Cohen reasons that since literature in the 19th century, be it moral or medical, reviles same-sex sexual relationships in part or in whole, Symonds’s emotional and imaginative act displaces the literature, but for such an act to occur, it necessitates that there lies a contradiction within Symonds’s character, “simultaneously conforming with and yet deviating from the class and gender proprieties which ideologically and materially circumscribed his behaviour” (93). In other words, Symonds’s subjectivity is split between the public and private, society and self, outside and inside, and the split subjectivity could only be sutured through his memoirs.

The duality argument is extended by Oliver Buckton in his book-length study of male Victorian autobiographers; the subjectivity of each writer he explores is bifurcated, including Symonds’s and Carpenter’s. Buckton argues that Symonds had projected his transgressive desires onto Charles Vaughan, the headmaster of Harrow School, which Symonds attended. It is worth going into the history of Vaughan and Symonds to explain Buckton’s point. Symonds considered the issue and waited for some time before he exposed Vaughan’s affair with his student, Symonds’s schoolmate, Alfred Pretor, to his father. Symonds’s father, who knew about Symonds’s same-sex attraction, wrote to Vaughan, warned him to resign from his post immediately, and never advance his position in the Church again, or he would expose Vaughan’s shameful deeds. Vaughan resigned with consummate skill, stating poor health as a reason so that no one knew the truth behind his retirement. He was later offered the bishopric of Worcester, which he rejected, and the bishopric of Rochester, which he accepted. But when
Symonds’s father heard the news, he telegraphed Vaughan who again retired from the honorable role in the episcopacy. Despite Symonds’s disgust for his former headmaster, Symonds also retained a “dumb persistent sympathy” for him (Memoirs 97), likely because Symonds himself followed a similar trajectory. Symonds himself was involved with his student, “Norman.” In 1862, when he vied for the Balliol fellowship, he lost to an inferior scholar because, as Symonds implied, C. G. H. Shorting sent an incriminating document of Symonds’s private correspondence with a student to six Magdalen fellows, although, like Vaughan, Symonds eventually escaped unscathed. But his past was to haunt him. In 1877, when Symonds and Walter Pater vied for the position of professor of poetry in Oxford, R. St John Tyrwhitt attacked Symonds so vehemently for his research on Greek love that Symonds withdrew his candidature. Thus, Buckton argues that by projecting his abhorrent desires to characters like Vaughan, Symonds, through his memoirs, purged his self “of the contradictions and conflicting impulses that prevent it from achieving the status of a sexual ‘identity,’ in the sense of a coherent and consistent pattern of subjective meaning” (69).

Both Cohen and Buckton attempt to iron out the contradictions within Symonds’s memoirs and other works so that his subjectivity can appear to be coherent and whole. But their readings inevitably neglect or belabor the evidence. Take for instance, while Symonds very clearly viewed Vaughan as his predecessor and as a cautionary tale, he also wished to have been the student lover of Vaughan. Symonds wrote, “I did indeed condemn Vaughan’s taste; for I regarded Pretor as a physically and emotionally inferior being” (97); that is, Symonds considered Pretor to be inferior to himself, and he judged that Vaughan would possess better taste if he had chosen Symonds. Although Buckton notes Symonds’s jealousy of Pretor, he reads the incident as part of Symonds’s formative years, associating the sexuality with Vaughan’s pederasty. Buckton does not explore Symonds’s desire to become Pretor because the analysis would destabilize Buckton’s reading of Symonds as projecting himself onto and
purging himself of Vaughan as a scapegoating symbol of deviant sexuality. The problem with Buckton’s and Cohen’s arguments about binary subjectivity is that they presuppose subjectivity to be always an either/or situation as if the self is split into (50-50?) halves, which need to be resolved and sublated uncomfortably to form a unitary whole. I propose that Symonds’s memoirs suggest viewing subjectivity in a constant flux within a spectrum, activated by the affect of shame. In the following, I will explain how Symonds’s subjectivity is not based on his masculinity, as Cohen and Buckton claim, but largely on his shame-prone sexuality.

It is important to view that Symonds’s subjectivity stems from his sexuality because such an argument concerns our thinking about our selves. A contemporary homophobic statement that a gay person or a friend often makes is that their selves are more than their sexuality: “I think homosexuality is wrong, but you, as my friend, are more than your sexuality and I accept all other parts of you, parts bigger than your sexuality,” or “I don’t come out to everyone I meet because I am more than my sexuality, being gay is just a very small part of me.” But Symonds would have annihilated such homophobic announcements for he centered his memoirs on his sexuality, writing lewd passages page after page, interrogating what it means to be a sexual being and how his subjectivity was governed by his sexuality. Clinton Machann suggests that Symonds’s insistence on sexuality implies that “sexuality is central to the mental development of each individual, regardless of sexual orientation” (205). But here, I go one step further to claim that Symonds’s subjectivity is necessarily sexualized; his self is his sexuality and because sexuality is fluid, his subjectivity is also inconstant and difficult to be assimilated into a coherent whole.

Symonds understood that his subjectivity and others’ are not merely grounded on (human) nature alone. Although he had publicly insisted and reiterated that “persistent passion for the male sex” is “natural, instinctive, healthy” in Memoirs, Sexual Inversion, A Problem in
Greek Ethics, and A Problem in Modern Ethics, he was also aware that he was partaking in the nascent genealogical formation in which sexuality was debated fiercely in medical and cultural fields, as he wrote Memoirs in order to “supply material for the ethical psychologist and the student of mental pathology” (182). In A Problem in Greek Ethics and elsewhere, he differentiated the true invert and the cultural invert. The culture in ancient Greek societies was such that pederasty was normative and pervasive, but the true invert was moderate in desires and was beneficial to his catamite, giving the boy a head start in life, just as Symonds carried out the practice in his own life. In Greek societies, cultural forces, Symonds demonstrated, could influence sexuality and he would go on to argue in “Culture: Its Meaning and Its Uses,” collected in In the Key of Blue, his last book of essays, that culture can improve human faculty, and shouldn’t be treated with suspicion, perhaps speaking to staid Victorians against the Decadence/Aesthetic movement which championed culture and artificiality over nature. Culture shapes sexuality.

Even as Symonds argued that homosexuality is innate, he knew the import of cultural formation on the invert, as he demonstrated in A Problem in Modern Ethics, dismantling the fallacious arguments of the continental sexologists one by one. Paul Moreau, Richard von Kraft-Ebing, and Cesare Lombroso focused on the “morbidity” (or what we now call pathology) of same-sex desires, but Symonds countered that it is the society at fault:

Under the prevalent laws and hostilities of modern society, the inverted passion has to be indulged furtively, spasmodically, hysterically; that the repression of it through fear and shame frequently leads to habits of self-abuse; and that its unconquerable solicitations sometimes convert it from a healthy outlet of the sexual nature into a morbid monomania. (13)

Publicly, Symonds had clearly denounced the societal vilification of inverts. Inverts are normal, but the shame of oppression from the society, which leads to the repression of self and
expression, damages the psychology of the invert. While scholars such as Jonathan Kemp and John Pemble accurately note that Symonds views sexuality as inherent and natural, it would be more exact to point out that Symonds, presaging Foucault, resisted the totalization of nature-versus-culture. The sexologist located what Foucault calls “the modern experience of sexuality” at the interstices of “fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture” (5).

If there is any doubt in Symonds’ autobiography that subjectivity and sexuality must necessarily be imbricated with each other, his motivation for writing at the coalescence of discourse and desire clears any uncertainty. He wrote earnestly:

It was my primary object when I began these autobiographical notes to describe as accurately and candidly as I was able a type of character, which I do not at all believe to be exceptional, but which for various intelligible reasons has never yet been properly analysed. I wanted to supply material for the ethical psychologist and the student of mental pathology, by portraying a man of no mean talents, of no abnormal depravity, whose life has been perplexed from first and last by passion—natural, instinctive, healthy in his own particular case—but morbid and abominable from the point of view of the society in which he lives—persistent passion for the male sex. (182)

Throughout the memoirs, Symonds constantly avowed his veracity as in the above passage. As he assured his readers, because the memoirs would not be published in his lifetime, his insistence on truth engendered what the 19th century would call the baring of soul, or the telling of I, his subjectivity. Contemporary theory argues that the autobiography does not presuppose an existing subjectivity waiting to confess to the readers but that it “serves the author’s individual and rhetorical purposes, even as it responds to specific historical and cultural pressures” (Buckton 10). Therefore, Buckton argues that the self is produced by the autobiographical narrative. Symonds’s act of writing and self-disclosure brings forth the birth
of his subjectivity and this subjectivity overlaps with sexuality for he writes to encompass a novel taxonomy “of a type of man who has not yet been classified” (Letters 3:642). His self, produced by the act of writing, is necessarily a sexual one as he relates his passions for men; events in his memoirs were driven by his sexuality. The self-representation of his memoirs reveals Symonds to be both subject of his sexuality and object for scientific and cultural analysis, and therefore, for Symonds, his subjectivity is his sexuality.

While his subjectivity constitutes his sexuality, his sexuality develops out of shame. We have briefly seen the shame that Symonds carried as he himself noted his parallel life with Vaughan, but the shame manifests itself in the Memoirs in uglier ways. As an apologia for homosexuality, the Memoirs exhibits a schizophrenia that could have supported Arthur Symon’s judgment that Symonds was mad. In public, Symonds claimed that homosexuality is natural, healthy, and even beneficial to society. Like Carpenter, Symonds preferred working class men because he was deeply influenced by Walt Whitman’s concept of comradeship among men. After reading Calamus, his “desires grew manlier” and he “imbibed a strong democratic enthusiasm, a sense of dignity and beauty and glory of simple healthy men” (Memoirs 189). Not only does such a comradeship bring forth a more “democratic,” and hence fairer society, same-sex relationships allow wealthier and older men to share their resources with usually impecunious youths, bequeathing life experience, knowledge, wisdom, and financial securities to youths, allowing youths who otherwise could not rise above their poverty a head start in their lives, as evident in Symonds’s account of his lovers, Norman his student, Christian Buol, the Swiss man whom Symonds lent substantial amount of money, and Angelo Fusato, the gondolier under Symonds’ employ.

Yet, even as a same-sex union is beneficial to society, it is also unreliable. A “sensual enjoyment between man and man” cannot harm society because “there inheres an element of instability. No children come of the connection. There can be no marriage ceremonies, no
marriage settlements, no married life in common” (Memoirs 278). The unstable and temporary same-sex liaisons suggest Symonds’s inability to envision an enduring union between men (something which E.M. Forster did two decades later in the early 20th century with Maurice), which in turn implies that such relationships could exist only with the eventual aim of heterosexual marriages in mind. The three boys—Norman, Buol, and Fusato—whom Symonds was romantically involved with went on to be married. Seen from another perspective, same-sex union destabilizes and holds in abeyance the ultimate purpose of heterosexual marriages, disrupting the smooth machinery of society.

Furthermore, Symonds acknowledged that the boys he fell in love with appeared to be materialistic: “the responsibilities connected with this passion… tax a man’s resources. In many cases he must be prepared to support his friend with money or with influence” (278). Symonds counter-argued against naysayers by claiming that even women “come to money in the long run” (279). But the difference could not have escaped Symonds who visited both male and female prostitutes: supporting “women,” his wife and daughters, is part of familial obligation whereas paying a gondolier to be a companion is akin to prostitution. Jana Funke’s article, “‘We Cannot be Greek Now,’” demonstrates that Symonds was familiar with social anxieties about the corruption of youths in light of the Dublin Castle scandal in 1884 and the Cleveland Street Scandal in 1889, where rent boys were exploited economically and the blame was placed on the deleterious influence of older rich men. As Symonds responded to the concern about the corruption of youths in A Problem in Greek Ethics by emphasizing a consensual and age-appropriate same-sex relationship that could not have involved economic exploitation, he could not be unaware that his living arrangement with Fusato could have been construed, accurately or not, as him misguiding the youth. Therefore his facile and fallible argument that “I do not know what does not come to money in the long run” with regards to his relationship with Fusato stems from a shame in his inability to live up to the words he had
written. Implied by his weak defence of his actions, try as he might to defend his relationship with boys, Symonds could not escape the sense that he was delaying the boys’ eventual heterosexual marriages and corrupting them, just as he had accused his headmaster Charles Vaughan of seducing and corrupting his classmate.

The tension within Symonds—arguing publicly that same-sex unions are beneficial to society, yet eventually privileging the heterosexual marriage, while giving into the shame of his behavior in society—writes itself on the body. As Case VII in Sexual Inversion, Symonds claimed that once he accepted his innate homosexual instincts, his health recovered (Memoirs 287). But this is a falsehood, as he suffered ailments, phantasmagoric or real, throughout his life. As Phyllis Grosskurth, author of Symonds’s biography and editor of his Memoirs, notes that even as he insisted on the natural occurrence of homosexuality, “the frequency he uses the words ‘abnormal,’ ‘morbid,’ ‘unwholesome’ suggests a growing suspicion that he might be some kind of monster” (Memoirs 23). If he saw himself as a monster, it is because, even though he co-authored Sexual Inversion, Symonds’s personal experience with three of his boys getting married made him regard himself as an aberration. “In my personal relations to [people who slept with him],” he wrote, “I have never met with one who shared my own abnormal tastes” (267). There is shame in being the odd one out. Of course, in his extensive research on homosexuality, Symonds came across homosexuals like Michelangelo, but within his society, he believed that he was alone even though he knew other homosexuals. For Symonds, while his passion for men was permanent, he considered others’ desire as transitory, mostly because he paid for the services. While he knew other homosexuals such as Lord Ronald Gower and Marzials, he did not consider himself as part of their group since they indulged in and satisfied their desires without restraint. Grosskurth points out the double standard of Symonds who visited male and female brothels: “If he is to be exonerated from blame [of his homosexuality], why can he not extend the same tolerance to inverts like Marzials and Gower?” (22). This
hypocrisy recalls to mind the Vaughan incident where Symonds exposed the headmaster’s affair but later in his life, he himself had indiscretions with his own student.

To answer Grosskurth’s question, we may recognize Symonds’ reprehensible behavior as traits of internalized homophobia today, not unlike Republicans and pastors who condemn homosexuality publicly but purchase private sexual services from male escorts, and Symonds’s acts originated from his sense of shame. Outwardly, even as his works are apologias for homosexuality, he could not escape the sense of shame. It is this sense of shame—as shame is both collective and individualizing—that engendered his aloneness despite his extensive knowledge of existent compatriots; it is shame that propelled him to proudly announce that homosexuals have healthy constitutions, despite his own personal experience belying his public pronouncement; it is shame that impelled one of the intelligent/insane leading men-of-letters to make specious and contradictory statements. Like many GLBT schoolchildren who are shamed and bullied into suicide, prompting the “It Gets Better” campaign, Symonds’s own shame drove him to contemplate suicide (173).

It may be retorted that Symonds’s persistent usage of the word “abnormal” could mean “unusual” without any negative connotation, and not the derogatory definition of “morbid deviant.” The linguistic difficulty could be analogous to Gillian Beer’s argument that Darwin used religious expressions because of lacunae in the scientific lexicon. If we judge that this is the case, then Symonds’s identity can be viewed as unitary because he would have been consistent publicly or privately. But no evidence indicates that Symonds the wordsmith, who coined the word “homosexual,” could not find the words. To understate the frequent usage of “abnormal” is to ignore Symonds’ subjectivity and experience of shame. Like Darwin, much of Symonds’s shame comes from his sexuality. Like Darwin who, after experimenting with rudimentary genetics, blamed himself for the mortality and frail constitutions of his children because of his consanguineous marriage with his cousin, and like Havelock Ellis who refused
to have any children because of his wife Edith’s inversion, Symonds thought he should not bear children: “It had become an article in my creed of social duty that men and women convicted of hereditary disease, phthisis or insanity, ought to refrain from procreation. Acting upon this principal I separated from my wife with her approval” (260). In view of the recent medical advancement and societal changes where openly gay people can have children, it is important to explore Symonds’s argument although he did not elaborate on the hereditary disease he suffered from. It might have been from his family history where he suffered from “night terrors, extreme shyness, nervous affections, somnambulism” (*Memoirs* 64), but if it was, he was certainly not against his sister and daughters marrying and having children. What is known, as many critics have pointed out, is that Symonds insisted that some homosexuals are congenital, and therefore, natural, undeserving of societal censure and legal persecution. Hence, even when Symonds championed what we may now call gay rights, he still suffered from shame.

Unlike Ellis, who unequivocally declared that his wife and he did not want to propagate his wife’s genes for inversion and mental instability, Symonds presented a more complex thesis. In *A Problem with Modern Ethics*, he started, “We are all of us, as evolutionary science surely teaches, interested in the facts of anthropology, however repellent some of these may be to our own feelings. We cannot evade the conditions of atavism and heredity. Every family runs the risk of producing a boy or a girl whose life will be embittered by inverted sexuality, but who in all other respects will be no worse or better than normal members of the home” (4). He used the hook-and-bait method, in writing to a general audience that would be disgusted by inverts, finding such a topic improper for public discourse, and yet improper as it may be, it is still a necessary subject for the good of society. In such a way, this introduction is wrought with contradictions that are passed off as logical proclamations. He presupposed that inversion is hereditary and atavistic, but is it atavistic if an invert is not better or worse than a non-invert
except for his life being is embittered by tribulations caused by society? What is implied and consistent in the introduction is Symonds’ rudimentary understanding of evolutionary genetics that inversion is a natural seed that exists in humans for centuries. Even as Symonds argued that homosexuality has always existed in human civilization, as backed by his cultural research into the Dorian culture, Symonds’s nagging fear that inversion may somehow be atavistic, and that he should not have progeny, indicates that he could not transcend his personal shame of being an invert in the 19th century. Part of the reason he did not want to have descendants is “I carry an ugly surname” (153), a refrain occurring frequently in his memoirs. The worry of passing down his surname represents the psychological burden of shame he carried, as he did not disapprove of his sister and daughters having children.

In her reading of Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler notes that the social function of naming “is always to some extent an effort to stabilize a set of multiple and transient imaginary identifications” (152). She further argues that “the name, as part of a social pact and, indeed, a social system of signs, overrides the tenuousness of imaginary identification and confers on it a social durability and legitimacy. The instability of the ego is thus subsumed or stabilized by a symbolic function, designated through the name” (152-3). A patronym, in other words, facilitates the stabilizing of Imaginary gaps and lapses between genders, legitimizing the superiority of men over women, affirming the bonds of heterosexuality, and concretizing the formation of heteronormativity. While Symonds did not have the theories of Lacan and Butler as tools to examine his shame in his patronym, his instinctual shame does not originate from a subversive or rebellious nature against the status quo of Victorian society, as several critics have convincingly documented that Symonds’s sexuality did not exclude him from the privileges of patriarchy, which he revelled in. His shame arose from his betrayal of the social contract between men, or what Gayle Rubin in her seminal essay “The Traffic in Women” calls, “compulsory heterosexuality.” Publicly, he championed gay rights, but privately, he lived in
shame, unable to imagine a life with a long-term same-sex engagement, and worried that his inverted gene would be propagated in society, harming it. Clearly, Symonds was very much a man of his times; it wasn’t that he was not introspective or intelligent, but he did, in Foucauldian terms, exist within structures of power.

Foucault argues that it is impossible to transcend power, that even reverse discourses against prevalent doxa partake in superstructures of power, but Symonds presents a conundrum to the Foucauldian theory. As a thinker who indulged and enjoyed the dominant patriarchal power, Symonds’s shame emanated from his betrayal of the power, but even as his shame existed within the superstructure, the shame allowed him to escape into a space outside of power. Grosskurth reports that H. F. Brown entrusted Symonds’s biography, locked in a green cardboard box, to Edmund Gosse, who was the Chairperson of the Committee of the London Library in 1925. But before the green cardboard box, there was a black tin box. In 1869, Henry Sidgwick advised Symonds to lock his poems in a black tin box. “Having done this, Henry threw the key into the river Avon on the 23rd” (Memoirs 195). Like Forster who famously kept the manuscript of Maurice under lock and key (“Publishable but worth it?”), there was shame in writing about same-sex relationships for Symonds. Yet, the fates of the black tin box and the green cardboard box differed. The whereabouts of the black box remain unknown, but Symonds, according to Brown, was anxious to preserve the green box containing the autobiography (Memoirs 10). The shame Symonds felt throughout his life evolved through time. In the earlier incident, he sought the advice of Sidgwick, who could be seen as an Oedipal castrating father, just as Wayne Koestenbaum has argued of what Ellis did to Symonds when editing Sexual Inversion. Symonds himself admitted that, when his father died, lifting the Oedipal repression, he entered an “energetic phase” of creativity and writing (235). In the latter incident of the green box, even though he was still fettered by societal conventions, the shame, fomenting for years, had evolved introspectively, allowing Symonds to proclaim that even
though his memoirs were “useless… for I shall not publish them,” he still desired to publish them (29); someone else would publish them. Symonds represents both the perfect embodiment of and anomaly in the Foucauldian theory in that the sexologist was not able to rise above the strictures of power, indulging in reverse discourse, and unable to eclipse the nagging shame at the back of his head, imposed by society that there was something wrong with homosexuality, and, at the same time, he refused to destroy his memoirs, “useless” as they are.

If we can never transcend the prevailing power, how will things ever change? In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault wrote:

> What seems in fact to have formed the object of moral reflection for the Greeks in matters of sexual conduct was not exactly the act itself (considered in its different modalities), or desire (viewed from the standpoint of its origin or its aim), or even pleasure (evaluated according to the different objects or practices that can cause it); it was more the dynamics that joined all three in a circular fashion (the desire that leads to the act, the act that is linked to pleasure, and the pleasure that occasions desire). The ethical question that was raised was not: which desires? which acts? which pleasures? But rather: with what force is one transported “by the pleasures and desires”? The ontology to which this ethics of sexual behavior referred was not, at least not in its general form, an ontology of deficiency and desire; it was not that of a nature setting the standards for acts; it was an ontology of a force that linked together acts, pleasures, and desires.” (43)

Like Symonds, Foucault studied Greek culture to demonstrate his own point, and here, he hinted at how change can occur within power. There is “an ontology of a force” which holds the superstructure of powers together—in this particular example, he pointed out desires, sexual acts, and pleasures as the triumvirate of superstructures—but since in a chain, lapses and slippages can occur, change is possible with the reconfiguration within the superstructures.
even if the transformation still takes place in a realm of power. What is the “force” that causes this change? Foucault did not answer, but for Symonds, his motivation originated from a sense of shame, and from a need to be free from shame; Shame has been prohibitory and incendiary. Through shame and the writing of his memoirs, Symonds created a subjectivity that is both within and outside the power of societal doxa.

For Symonds, writing had always been associated with shame and the body. “My literary achievement,” Symonds confessed, “is no doubt due in part at least to a high degree of nervous sensibility” (64). This association of writing with shame may have started with the formative years of schooling. The “moral state of the school” had “filled me with disgust and loathing” (94). Pretty boys were nicknamed with female names, and known as “a public prostitute or as some bigger fellow’s ‘bitch’” (94). Here, “the talk in the dormitories and the studies was incredibly obscene” and mutual masturbation was not uncommon (94). To seal the link of writing, shame, and body, Symonds connected the headmaster Charles Vaughan’s scandal, his own bodily shame, and his studies. The order of the narrative is important: after Symonds revealed the affair between Vaughan and Pretor, he recalled an incident where he sat with the headmaster to read Greek iambics and Vaughan caressed his leg. Though the caress seemed insignificant to Symonds at the moment, he thought “it poisoned and paralysed my moral nature” when he learnt from Pretor about the affair and retroactively remembered the caress (98). At this time, Symonds also had crushes on his schoolmates, and “a very depraved” schoolmate threw “his arms around me, kissed me, and thrust his hand into my trousers” (98). As a result, his health and work suffered. Even as he “felt a terrible new sense of power… [he] grew unhealthily and perversely” (98). The shame that manifested itself as physical ill health emerged from his judgment that “my own sort of love [is] sin” (176). To be fair, Symonds had a puritanical outlook on sex, viewing excessive sex or (heterosexual) premarital sex as sins.
The complexity of shame, desire, sin, and the educational institution of power are embodied for Symonds.

Symonds himself was not unaware of the concatenation of these factors in his works: “My powers of expression were considerable, yet not of first-rate quality. Vaughan at Harrow told me the truth when he said that my besetting sin was ‘fatal facility.’ I struggled long to conquer fluency. Still I have not succeeded… I strove, however, to control the qualities I knew myself to have, to train and curb them, to improve them by attention to the details of style… Passion and imagination, in the true sense of these words, were denied me. I was not born without capacity for passion. But I had to tame it down and subdivide it” (218). Symonds’s review of his own prowess is not dissimilar to Forster, who famously proclaimed that he would be able to write better books were it not for societal prejudice. But unlike Forster, Symonds looked inward and blamed himself. He was unable to differentiate his headmaster’s assessment and his own. Did Vaughan know that his young student Symonds was homosexual? It is unlikely, but whatever the case, Symonds had introjected his “sin” of desire for men and was ashamed because of it. He struggled with writing as he struggled with his shame. As long as he could “control,” “train,” “curb,” and “tame” his passion for men, he believed that his writing would shine.

However, the repression of his desire to avoid shame is not as straightforward as it seems. It could be assumed that Symonds’s desire to strive for literary excellence implies that literature is healthy. But for Symonds, perusal of literature is not “wholesome for a man of my peculiar temperament” (239). Over his lifetime, he doubted the panacea of literature. Unlike the reading scene between Hareton and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, signalling reconciliation, Symonds recollected that his reading scene with Vaughan had “poisoned” his moral fiber (98). Apart from his personal experience in school, Symonds’s mistrust of education mirrors the tenets of muscular Christianity propagated in mid-Victorian public
schools at around the same time he was schooling. According to James Eli Adams, muscular Christianity expounded the virtues of outdoor exercise, promoting strength and courage, to safeguard against the evils of masturbation and same-sex sexual acts prevalent in schools; such acts, Adams demonstrated, were thought by the Victorians to be found in books (101-2). Books, which could be used to teach morals, could also instigate “bad” behaviors. Symonds had a sexual awakening when he read Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* but he wondered throughout his life if the reading of classics had led to the “unnatural vice” in schools (286; 295). Oscar Wilde’s Dorian’s descent into depravity is aided by “a poisonous book” (110). In Forster’s *Maurice*, Durham’s declaration of love to Maurice is prefaced with “I knew you read the *Symposium* in the vac…Then you understand—without me saying more… I love you” (56). Maurice replies in consternation that their illicit relationship is a “rotten notion,” a rotten notion taken from the Greek classic (56). Even a simple signifier such as a graffito of a penis jolted Symonds out of his marital bliss, arousing in him an inexplicable and irrepressible desire (188). There is a history of suspicion of associating deviant sexuality with literature, a suspicion not unknown to Symonds. Even as Symonds was ashamed that he could be a better writer if he could only curb his same-sex passions, he knew the ontological nature of literature could also transmit affects and emotions. For him, producing and perusing literature engender deleterious, shameful effects in the imagination. Symonds had layers of imbricated shame: the shame of not writing to his potential because of his same-sex passions even as he acknowledged that people knew him as one of the premier men of letters in his generation, which perhaps might give rise to the shame of not living up to his reputation; the shame of producing literature that might affect and encourage the homosexual, lurid behavior of schoolboys in public schools, a behavior that Symonds censured.

But if Symonds were ashamed of literature and writing, it is also shame that urged him forward.
Often I have felt myself as tired and worn with writing “as the tanned galley-slave is with his oar.” Reaction follows; and the fatigue of labour craves the distraction of amusement. Trying to evade the congenital disease of my moral nature in work, work has drained my nerves and driven me to find relief in passion. The subjects with which I have been occupied—Greek poetry, Italian culture in one of the most lawless periods of modern history, beauty in nature and the body of man—stimulate and irritate the imagination. They excite cravings which cannot be satisfied by simple pleasures. (239)

Symonds was not unaware that the burden of shame in his writing (“trying to evade the congenital disease of my moral nature in work”) took a toll on his body. Like Darwin, whose shame manifested itself psychosomatically, shame was written on Symonds’s body as he was “worn and tired,” conflating the imperfect pathological body with the diseased mind. What is surprising is that although the shame of same-sex passions had, in his own eyes, prevented him from being a first-rate writer and caused his fatigue, the same-sex desires also urged him on and soothed him; he sought relief in passions. To Symonds, while books may “stimulate” his mind, the imagination could not be satisfied without bodily release. “I judged my own sort of love to be sin,” wrote Symonds, “But when, in the stage of difference, I became careless about sinning, then, and not until then, I discovered love, the keystone of all the rest of my less tortured life” (176). When his reading and writing could not satisfy and repress his desire, he wallowed in the sinful, and hence, shameful acts of satisfying his desire, and at his extreme shame, in his extreme shame, he discovered transcendence and beauty out of his shame. The circularity of shame of same-sex desires had in Symonds’s case impeded him as a writer, causing his health to deteriorate, and, at the same time, appeasing his psyche as he indulged physically in his passions even as books ignited ideas of prurience among schoolboys, a dire state of which Symonds disapproved. In Symonds’s subjectivity, shame had coalesced in a body of literary works that gave mental pleasures with a physical body that derived pleasures
from same-sex passions, and as he was ashamed of his bodily transgressions and his body of works, he also attained satisfaction and pride from them.

The incessant struggle with shame, between what others expected of him and what he wanted for himself, was reflected in his meandering, indirect style of writing, which has come to be known as “queer,” and which led some contemporaries like Arthur Symons to question the sexologist’s sanity. Shame necessarily encompasses an anxiety about seeing the self from the other’s perspective, regardless of whether the anxiety is real or imaginary, regardless of whether the perspectives are accurate, and as a result, we are cautioned against making any faux pas in case we lose face in front of others. This characteristic of shame compels the subject to occupy introspective spaces of the self and others, splitting one’s subjectivity to accommodate others, giving rise to a multiplicity of selves; in shame, as there is an awareness of the self, there is also a breaking down of the self and others. This multiplicity is often seen in Symonds’s writing:

This is the way with all of us who, like the caddis worm, build houses around them. Men of a different stamp follow the ways of the hermit crab, and creep into solid shells which shelter them against the sea and assaults of neighbours. It comes to the same thing in the end; only the caddis worm is the pupa of that winged ephemeron the Mayfly, born to be eaten up by trout; while the shell into which the hermit crab has crept may last long after its tenant’s lonely death, until at last it perishes beneath the stress of elemental forces, pounding waves and churning sands. But these things are metaphors; and there is a want of taste and sense in straining metaphors too far. (247)

While critics often point out Symonds’s reluctance to give up his patriarchal privileges, Symonds saw himself differently as vulnerable and short-lived and brave. But the jarring contradistinction goes beyond perceptions. Stylistically, Symonds compared his openness as a homosexual to a mayfly, but meta-textually withdrew this metaphor for “a want of taste and
sense.” For whom? To him, the metaphors are clearly elegant; otherwise he wouldn’t have extended them. His proclamation followed by a retraction of the metaphors demonstrates the struggle of pleasing his self and the society. The self-referentiality of examining his own words compounds the cacophonies in the passage in spite of the melodious prose. His conflicted writing reflects the shame he faced, at once enunciating what he desired to say and policing his words for the sake of others.

While Symonds warned us/himself of “straining metaphors too far,” he was also alerting readers to pay attention to his metaphors. Although Angelo Fusato the gondolier had no voice in the memoirs, Symonds imagined what he would think: “A just instinct led [Angelo] to calculate that our friendship, originating in my illicit appetite and his compliance, could not be expected to develop a sound and vigorous growth. The time must come, he reasoned, when this sickly plant would die and be forgotten. And then there was always between us the liaison of shame” (275). Two pages later, Symonds wrote, “An element of intimacy [of sex between men] is demanded, out of which the sexual indulgence springs like a peculiar plant, which has its root in something real” (277). There was no doubt in Symonds’ mind that sex between men was illicit and shameful in the two passages. However, while the same-sex act remains constant, the extended metaphor of the plant, which springs from shame, differs; in one a moribund plant, in another a sturdy one that appears nourishing and stable. The healthy plant is rooted in “something real,” indicating vitality and longevity. Meanings of morbidity and wellness elide in a metaphor. The instability of the metaphor stems from a sense of shame for Symonds; what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.

The struggle between shame and expression of the self is manifested in the precarious metaphors as well as in the repetitive narrative; the same story is told twice or more. The pretext of separation from his wife—she did not want to have more children—is, for instance, oft repeated in various incarnations throughout the memoirs, but what is more interesting is the
story of Norman. Phyllis Grosskurth in the introduction to the memoirs implied that since Symonds used Norman’s real name, even though he wrote (and lied?) that “Norman” was a pseudonym, there was something unconscionable and disingenuous in Symonds’s character, which in turn impugned the trustworthiness of the memoirs (28). It is without a doubt inimical on Symonds’s part, a reprehensible and deplorable behavior akin to the despicable journalist Nico Hines outing young athletes whose lives may be endangered in their own conservative countries in the 2016 Olympics, but inexcusable as the behavior might be, Symonds’s shame had caused him to collapse and elide meanings in his metaphors. Norman, the only one who retained his real name, represented an anomaly to the list of liaisons Symonds provided in the memoirs because he was the first and only boy to be of the same social class as Symonds; Symonds, like Carpenter and Forster, usually preferred working-class men. Furthermore, his teacher-student entanglement with Norman recalled to his mind his exposé of the affair between his headmaster Vaughan and classmate Pretor, blighting and terminating Vaughan’s otherwise brilliant career. Eve Sedgwick’s influential theory in Between Men states that the social contract between men in a patriarchy is such that although homosocial bonding is highly encouraged, it is done at the expense of male homosexuality, and Sedgwick goes on to exemplify the theory with Charles Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend and The Mystery of Edwin Drood where male intimacy is punished with violent attacks. Symonds was the policing enforcer of the homosocial continuum when he reported Vaughan, but he was also the malfeasant, violating the social contract with his same-sex affairs. The two-fold shame from Symonds arose from his failure to abide by the homosocial contract, seducing someone from his own social class; not only did he betray his sex, he betrayed his own social class. Norman then acted as a two-fold reminder of Symonds’s failure to adhere to the social decorum of his class.
The shame manifested in the double telling of the same period of his life. In the autobiography, instead of chronicling his life in the order of occurrence, he wrote two chapters which tell a similar story. In the first telling, an entire chapter is devoted to Norman with ribald details of their relationship. In the second, in a separate chapter, he merely repeated that he accepted a lectureship for sixth form at Clifton College: “This brought me into close relations with the boys. The interest I took in them made me work with energy and enthusiasm” (234). Norman is notably absent and expunged from the second account. It is as if there are two versions of narratives that Symonds wanted to tell: the first, an explicit risqué one where Symonds contravened the homosocial contract, and the second, a cleaned-up version, adhering to social decorum, demonstrating that the homosocial connection had given him strength and vigor, and perhaps justifying the proscription of male intimacy in society. If the Norman chapter were taken out of the memoirs, which could easily be done, Symonds would appear to be another Victorian man who paid money to working-class men for sex. Shame obviously played a role in the two retellings: to avoid shame, the expunged report that Symonds wrote cohered to the societal standards of masculinity.

Shame dominated Symonds’s writing and revealed itself in his narrative style in the memoirs. Using shame to analyze Symonds’s life and works where meanings are repeated, obfuscated, and elided can explicate why his contemporaries doubted his sanity. The binary argument that Ed Cohen, Oliver Buckton, and Jonathan Kemp champion to resolve contradictions in Symonds’s works lacks the subtlety that a reading of shame can do. A close exegesis of shame in Symonds’s works also avoids the need to resolve his work neatly, as Ian Venable did. Venable treats shame negatively, and argues that as Symonds’s poetry matured, he gained a sense of pride. But shame as an affect is free from value. Although Symonds was ashamed of himself, he channelled the affect into his writing and life, enriching his works with contradictions.
“For the Perfect Man There Could Be No Shame”: Havelock Ellis’s Latent Shame and Style in My Life

The shame in Ellis’s writing is not as patently obvious as his co-writer Symonds’s partly because Ellis projected himself as a heterosexual man in adherence to the norms of Victorian society, and partly because he himself was proud to be a leading sexologist of his time. Most critics discuss the production of value and the effects of Ellis’s science but do not examine the shame in his writing. For example, like many early critics of Symonds, Paul Robinson and Sheila Rowbotham explicate Ellis’s texts, tracing the beginning of Modernism from sexology, and contrasting Freud and Ellis. Margaret Jackson discusses the tension of Ellis’s views in which he advocates that women should control their sexuality and that they should exercise their reproduction function. Carolyn Burdett writes on his discourses on eugenics, while Lucy Bland and Chris Nottingham, following Rowbotham, situate Ellis’s scientific work in political and cultural context. Two critics, Ruth Yeazell and Heike Bauer, notably depart from the scientific engagements and repercussions of Ellis’s works, and argue for the literary influences behind the sexologist.

Yeazell, in particular, positions Ellis’s notion of modesty as part of a narrative of courtship among the English middle-class. Unlike Darwin’s notion of modesty, in which the modest female possesses weaker passions than the male counterpart, modesty for Ellis is “the sign of sexual emotion…[and] an expression of feminine erotic impulse” (Studies 1: 46). A blush is an expression of modesty and sexual desires because it is similar to an erection: an erection “is a blushing of the penis,” Ellis quotes from an anonymous source (Studies 1: 73). Although Ellis based female signs of sexual desires on the penis, privileging the phallus, his interpretation of modesty provides a subversive and powerful reading for seemingly passive

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3 Ellis might be quoting from Darwin who describes blushing as “blood to surface exposes, face of man… bosom in woman: like erection” (Notebook N, 51-2).
heroines like Fanny Price, Molly Gibson, and even Esther Summerson. “Such heroines may long remain modestly unconscious of their desires,” Yeazell writes, “but the very structure of wish fulfillment on which their stories depend must first presume the reader’s knowledge of their wishes. If it is the fiction of the heroine’s modesty that enables the novelist to make her the subjective center of the narrative, to represent her as a subject is also to represent, however obliquely, her choosing and her desire” (48). Using Ellis’s worldview, what appears to be a passive subject signals her sexual desires by her modesty and her blushing, and in so doing, she eventually obtains the object of her affection.

Yeazell’s concern with Ellis is to explicate his notion of modesty in narratology, relating modesty to Victorian novels; she does not delve into the raison d’être of his text. Why did Ellis whose interest revolved about deviant sexual behaviors philosophize about the idea of modesty? Is modesty a deviant sexual behavior? The infamy of Sexual Inversion and its trial for obscenity prompted Ellis to tactically rearrange the chronology of his oeuvre by placing The Evolution of Modesty as the first volume of Studies in the Psychology of Sex and Sexual Inversion as the second volume, even thought the latter research was published first. Clearly, Ellis hoped that The Evolution of Modesty would chip away the prejudice of readers and prepare the readers to accept Sexual Inversion. How can the first volume achieve this?

Ellis defined modesty as “an almost instinctive fear prompting to concealment and usually centering around the sexual processes” (Studies 1:1), which is similar to Darwin’s description of shame in The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals: “Under a keen sense of shame there is a strong desire for concealment” (295). Ellis further quoted others to exemplify what modesty is: a modest woman’s “slightest infractions… are punished with atrocious shame… The mind is absorbed in shame instead of being occupied with desire” (Stendhal, qt’d in Ellis, Studies 1:2); “Modesty is masculine shame attributed to women… They have, in appearance at least, accepted the rule of shame imposed on them by men” (Celine
Renooz, qtd. in Ellis, *Studies* 1: 3). Hohenemser found that modesty is accompanied by shame, regarding shame as a psycho-physical phenomenon as “the state of shame consists in a certain psychic lameness or inhibition” such as the lowering of the head and the averting of looking into the other party’s eyes, actions similar to a display of modesty (qtd. in Ellis, *Studies* 1:7). By associating modesty with shame, Ellis implied that modesty is the avoidance of shame and at the same time shame engenders modesty. Modesty is the expression of shame.

Sometimes Ellis could not differentiate the behavioral trait modesty from the affect shame. Although Ellis was quick to point out that modesty arises not entirely from a purely sexual phenomenon, modesty “is the timidity of the body” and appears when sexual desire appears (*Studies* 1: 36-7). Sexual desire is often seen as shameful, Ellis explained, because sex acts are committed furtively, secretly behind closed doors. A modest lady’s “feeling of shame is made to be overcome,” Ellis quoted from Colin Scott (*Studies* 1: 39). Ellis elaborated that the overcoming of shame “correlated with its physical representative, the hymen, in the rupture of which there is, in some degree, a disruption of modesty” (*Studies* 1:39). He further cited Montaigne that the “virginal shame” increases “the desire to conquer and curb” in men (*Studies* 1:42). On the one hand, Margaret Jackson in “Eroticizing Women’s Oppression” accurately points out that Ellis’s notion of prevailing over women’s shame/modesty bears “an uncanny resemblance to the familiar patriarchal justification of rape” (4). On the other hand, Ellis’s series of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* examine aberrant nonheteronormative sexual behaviors, and not Victorian middle-class “normal” male sexuality, as Phyllis Grosskurth shrewdly notes (*Memoirs* 22). That is, shame/modesty of sex is abnormal because “for the perfect man there could be no shame, because shame rests on an inner conflict in one’s own personality” (*Studies* 1:83). In other words, Ellis implicitly argued that all sexual acts should be devoid of shame and modesty for everyone, which, in turn, infers that the modesty imposed
on women when the “conception of women as property” arose in society is inequitable and should be abolished.

Ellis rearranged the chronology of Studies by placing The Evolution of Modesty as the first volume to draw a parallel between his body of works and his life’s aspiration to be a “perfect man” without shame. The objective of the book placement is first to chip away at the prejudice that sex, or the study of sex, is illicit and shameless; what is abnormal about discourses on sex is the societal shame/modesty surrounding them. His decision to make Modesty the first book in the series is indicative of Ellis who worked hard to disassociate himself from any disrepute that adhered to the sexologists. As Chris Nottingham notes in his book-length study, Ellis gradually distanced himself from his formative mentor, James Hinton, an advocate for polygamy, who paid for part of Ellis’s medical education, when there were increasing allegations of sexual misconduct that Hinton abused his social status for sexual favors among his female admirers. Similarly for the infamous trial against Bedborough for selling “a certain lewd wicked bawdy scandalous and obscene libel in the form of a book entitled Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion,” Ellis himself was not prepared to be a witness even as his book was at the heart of the suit (My Life 363). Placing Modesty as the first book in the series, distancing himself from his mentor, and displaying an aversion to being subpoenaed as a witness in a trial on his book are Ellis’s strategies for appearing reputable and avoiding shame.

Even as Ellis expressed that sexual acts and sexuality should not be shameful, and even as he bravely wrote about his sexual fetishes in his autobiography, he could not escape the sense that there was something shameful about sex. He claimed, in the preface of his autobiography, to counter the “timidity in self-expression [which is] the outward sign of an increased literary emasculation;” he sought to risk telling the truth, “however shameful it might seem to some” (vii; viii). The act of confession, as Foucault points out, is central to the production of truth in
Western discourses. Foucault argues against the common belief that we are free through confessions because the confession is a resource for authority to access and diagnose the sins and crimes of the subject which is to be dealt with accordingly. Through confession, subjects partake in their own surveillance, deciding what is morally right and wrong. Although both Symonds and Ellis repeatedly proclaimed the veracity of their autobiographies, their motives, and eventually, their results differ. Symonds aimed to record his life as a case study for future sexologists, and delayed the publication of the memoirs out of shame; his shame reconfigured and placed him outside the superstructures of powers; his confession is, at the same time, a non-confession, as the public did not have access to the autobiography. Ellis, on the other hand, fits nicely into Foucault’s thesis that made Ellis believe he freed himself from the shackles of societal doxa but was in fact trapped in the system of power; even when he professed over and over again that he was not ashamed of his works and his life, the autobiography belied his declaration, shown in his narrative strategy. In the preface, he proclaimed that he would write the truth unabashedly, and yet at the same time, he cautioned his “intelligent readers [to read] between the lines” (vii-viii). While Ellis modelled himself to be the “perfect man” with no shame, he actively avoided shame, trapped in the panopticon of his own surveillance.

This strategy of avoidance of shame percolated into the writing of his autobiography. He wrote honestly about his fetish for “urolagnia” although he justified that it “never developed into a real perversity,” that is, he did not act on his sexual arousal from seeing people urinate (84). The “trait,” he claimed, was “inherited” from his mother when she urinated on a solitary path at the London Zoological Gardens as they were walking side by side (85). Ellis lapsed into a critical scientific third-person narrative when analyzing the experience. In the mother, there is an “impulse to heighten a pleasurable experience by blending it with the excitement of sharing with her son. There was evidently a touch of exhibitionism, the added pleasure of mixing a private and slightly improper enjoyment with the presence of a beloved male person,
for a woman is always a little in love with her first born and only son” (86). He termed such a familial intimacy “undinism.” His writing strategy allows him to scrutinize his sexuality scientifically, creating a distance between himself and his autobiographical self and inviting the reader to view him as a specimen, instead of a deviant. As a specimen, there is no shame and stigma attached in the interest of science.

When he does not dissect his sexuality scientifically, he aestheticizes it. The strategy may seem contradictory to us but as many scholars have noted, science and art were not as distinct as they are today. In a description of his body, he wrote, “I am not excessively slight or at all emaciated. Olive Schreiner said once of my nude form that it was like that of Christ in the carpenter’s shop in Holman Hunt’s ‘Shadow of the Cross.’ I am fairly well formed and proportioned” (102). In the offhand sentence without a prelude before it or an elaboration after, he disclosed that an unmarried woman had seen him naked as if there was no breach in Victorian propriety. His writing strategy to avoid shame involves Schreiner appraising and evaluating his nude body as art. Just as science turns his urolagniac fetish into a medical condition, the aestheticizing of his nudity works to objectify and desexualize his body, removing the sexual intimacy between Schreiner and him and, by extension, the shame involved in premarital relationships.

Besides his undinism and exhibitionism, Ellis also confessed his incestuous desire for his sister (178). His strategic writing has a two-fold purpose: firstly, the honesty disarms the reader, leading the reader to believe in the veracity of his autobiography. What is more important in his confession is that he had never acted on his illicit desires—like Christ even as Ellis had renounced his Christianity. His comparison of himself with Christ occurs no less than four times in his autobiography,4 because like Jesus, Ellis lived in a world of temptations and yet he had done nothing shameful; there can be purity among sinners. In his memoir and in his

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4 See pp. 102, 104, 433 and 539.
life, Ellis implied that a non-heteronormative, non-productive, and hence shameful desire should be curbed, contrary to many critics who note that Ellis wrote to normalize sexual deviancy.

However, his adumbration of his sexual deviancy and his self-control mask Ellis’s deeper subjectivity, which he might not even be aware. In Nottingham’s study, he suspects that Ellis was homosexual, given that, when Olive Schreiner paraded naked in front of the sexologist, offering herself to him, he did not act on the situation. But there is no evidence in his autobiography or in others’ to suggest that Ellis desired men. Ellis’s close friendship with Edward Carpenter secured a certainty that if Ellis was homosexual or even remotely curious about being homosexual, they would have had a chance to sleep together since the promiscuous Carpenter believed that male comradeship involves intimacy, or there would be a note by Ellis like that of E. M. Forster documenting George Merrill touching his backside, which Forster links with “a creative spring,” or at the very least, Ellis would have consulted Carpenter. A lack of desire for women does not imply that Ellis liked men.

While no substantiation could be derived from Nottingham’s claim, Ellis did record his troubled relationships with women. Onboard a ship in Australia, a female acquaintance, whom a reader may assume was sexually available, and he walked up and down the deck, and she broke the silence and said, “Ain’t the moon lovely?” (140). He was immediately repulsed by her: “Such a feeling of loathing rose up within me that, in a few moments, after briefly responding, I said it was time to go below, and wished her good night” (140). The sexologist, who wrote and spoke publicly about sex, was put off by a forward female passenger, but it is not the quality of forwardness that repelled him. A short while later, he met Miss Papillon who

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5 Even at 78 years old, Carpenter was still sexually active. Chester Arthur recorded his sexual encounter with the 78 year-old Carpenter, and gave the manuscript to Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg published it in _Gay Sunshine_ magazine in 1991. A detailed account can be found in Rowbotham’s biography of Carpenter (pp.420-2).
possessed “all the vivacity and intelligence and high spirits of her race [French Canadian],
together with a complete freedom from sex consciousness” (146). Unlike the immodest
passenger, Miss Papillon was innocent about sex, or modest enough to conceal what she did
know, and at the same time, she somehow managed to express her interest in Ellis, but he
“never put out my hand in response” (146). It is easy to understand why Nottingham thought
the tenuous attraction to women meant that Ellis was homosexual, but Ellis was simply not
sexually attracted to either men or women.

This non-attraction for men and limited attraction for women, which we would now
term asexuality, continued for the rest of his life. Ellis married Edith even though there was no
sexual attraction between them. On their wedding day, they returned to their respective
“bachelor homes” and did not consummate their marriage (294). Eventually, like Symonds and
his wife, Ellis and Edith agreed mutually to stop all marital relationships because Edith disliked
“the mechanical contraceptive preliminaries of intercourse” and Ellis felt that “relations were
incomplete and unsatisfactory, too liable to jar on one or other of the partners” (342). When
later on Edith proposed to recommence sexual relations, he rejected the offer because he found
no satisfaction in sex. In fact, even when he had a relationship with Amy with Edith’s tacit
acknowledgement, and while it is clear in Ellis’s autobiography that Edith’s female partners
fulfilled her sexual needs (310), there is no indication that he had intercourse with Amy, as
Nottingham notes; Amy acts as a companion for Ellis during Edith’s long and frequent
absences (305, 308). The death and dearth of sex between Ellis and his spouse did not cause a
rift between the couple; on the contrary, it fortified their ties, creating a passionless, spiritual,
Platonic love that allowed the free exchange of ideas as Ellis repeated throughout the rest of
the autobiography.\(^6\) His attraction to Edith, who was to his knowledge an invert, and to Miss
Papillon is based on the idea of comradeship: what he wrote of Miss Papillon appertains to the

\(^6\) See p. 343 for example.
women in his life in general, “She treated me with all the frankness and trust of a comrade and friend; it was precisely such a comrade and friend, making no appeal to sexual emotion, that I then needed” (146). Even as a young boy, regarding a girl he wanted to marry he “had no physical desires and no voluptuous emotions; I never pictured to myself any joy of bodily contact with her or cherished any sensuous dreams” (89). Instead of his mentor James Hinton’s brand of physical polyamory, Ellis’s relationship with women was characterized by spiritual comradeship, tying into his political inclination towards socialism where he first met Carpenter in a meeting at The Fellowship of the New Life.

If it seems incongruous that Ellis should not have mentioned his open marriage in his autobiography to be above blame, to be free from shame, it is because he, like Christ, is the observer and not the participant, as he duly notes: “If I had written my own ‘history,’ it would doubtless have been a surprise, to whose who could have recognised it, to find how small my experience was and how temperate my estimate of the sexual act. I am regarded as an authority on sex, a fact which has sometimes amused one or two (though not all) of my more intimate women friends. But after all, it is the spectator who sees most of the game” (224). His lack of sexual desire assisted his work, helping him to avoid the shame of being associated with sex.

One of his writing strategies to avoid shame is to reinforce the narrative of his non-desire by referencing his partner’s work. Edith’s novel, Kit’s Woman, tells a story of a married couple, Janet and Kit, who run into marital woes when Kit becomes impotent in a mining accident. He urges Janet to have an affair with an older man, and she bears his child to everyone’s satisfaction. Ellis called the novel “genuinely personal” as “the story was consciously or unconsciously inspired by her own relations with me” (348). While Ellis uses the novel to underline that an open marriage can achieve the triumph of a nonsexual love over physical attraction, it should be noted that he did not defend his manhood even as he claimed the novel was “genuinely personal.” Whether Ellis was impotent or not, he was willing to risk
the reader’s perception of his virility or lack thereof especially in light of his want of sexual desire to evade the shame of his sexual deviancy of undinism, exhibitionism, incest, and open marriage. On the surface, it appears subversive that Ellis emasculated himself in patriarchal Victorian society but the notion that he would rather be known to be effete than to be ashamed of his fetishes, fantasies, and behavior demonstrates the length he went to avoid ill repute.

The mention of *Kit’s Woman* functions as a foil to Edith and Ellis’s relationship because, as opposed to the novel, it was Edith who initiated the idea of an open marriage: “Even my strong sense of justice could scarcely have long tolerated so one-sided a sexual freedom in marriage. It might be true that I was exclusively heterosexual and she was not, and that therefore there was no demand on me to go outside marriage for love. But it is also true that the very qualities in her nature which made her largely homosexual were qualities which, fortifying as they might be to our comradeship, were inimical to the purely feminine qualities of sweetness and repose a man seeks in a woman” (310). Here, Ellis adopted another writing strategy to elude shame, a strategy to scapegoat Edith. Her scandalous novel proved that any twisted ideas originated from her. Just as it was his mother who urinated in front of him, arousing in him his undinism, it was Edith who instigated that their sexual relations should come to an end (342), it was Edith whose masculine same-sex desires were uncontrollable and who fomented the idea of an open marriage, it was Edith whose hysteria was unchecked, provoking Ellis into a divorce. Because Edith predeceased him and the publication of his autobiography, and because Ellis was the literary custodian of Edith’s works and letters, he quoted selectively from her letters and burned others. The unconscious scapegoating of Edith should not be read to impugn Ellis’s earnestness and character because, after all, he confessed his sexual peccadilloes and, besides, he appeared to genuinely care for her. The scapegoating merely demonstrates the great length Ellis underwent to avoid blame and shame by
unconsciously creating an antagonist in the person closest to him, the person he loved the most, and inculpating her in the sexual decisions he partook.

Incriminating Edith to the readers of his autobiography depends on the readers’ trust of Ellis’s veracity. It is not enough for him to maintain that he was merely following Edith’s judgment; he needed to craft a convincing narrative to present his case, and a specific example of his modus operandi will explain how readers are swayed to his perspective. Consider the way he told readers about their decision to have an open marriage. He began with an anecdote of a letter Edith wrote to him, recounting her “emotional outflow” towards Claire (309). The letter pained him as he had all “the weaknesses of a human husband,” but he “conquered [his] pain and gave no sign that [he] had even felt any” although he was only “a human” with a “suffering heart” (309). Even though he had a “purely intellectual interest in Hinton’s doctrines” of polyamory, and even though he was conscious of “a flaw in the ideal of married love [he] had so far cherished,” a small part of him still believed in the sanctity of marriage until “a secret wound of the heart, ‘not so deep as a well nor so wide as a church door’” killed the “conception of mutual devotion in marriage” (310). He continued to quote several letters between Edith and him relating to Claire and he concluded that “Edith’s love for Claire involved a diminished tenderness for [him]” (316). After Claire, “there was a succession of them” (316). Eight pages after examining their open relationship and Edith’s infidelity, he finally introduced Amy, his paramour. The narrative structure makes him impeccable. Edith fell in love with someone else without first discussing it with him, although they had hitherto been faithful to each other. However, because he wanted her to be happy, he suppressed his suffering and pain. The word “human” appears thrice in two pages, reminding readers of his humanity, and the intensity of his agony and heartache. Any idealistic notions he had regarding the mutual fidelity of marriage were now killed by “a secret wound of the heart,” not by philosophical meditation or personal conviction. Although he did not state unequivocally what the “secret wound” was, readers
should deduce it was caused by Edith’s liaison. To describe his wound, he quoted from *Romeo and Juliet*, a play about a love so intense that the lovers would rather die than live without each other, implying that he was capable of such dedication till death. Although he was an atheist, the Shakespearean quote connects the church, the sanctity of marriage vows, and him, recalling to readers the comparison Ellis made between Jesus and himself. At once, Ellis was both “human” and consecrated. Furthermore, when Edith had a series of inamoratas who robbed her love for him, was it not equitable that he received one lover whom he did not seek but met through happenstance? He was, after all, just human.

Ellis’s careful construction in scapegoating Edith to avoid the shame of his own unfaithfulness is effective because he displays great love for her throughout the autobiography. Even though they are “not a union of unrestrainable passion” but “a union of affectionate comradeship,” and even though their marriage is “an experiment which might, or might not, turn out well” (270), he has shown immense concern for Edith. In fact, the autobiography might be mistaken for Edith’s biography because from the point that he meets Edith, the book details Edith’s life and features her letters (from his point of view) as much as it does his. As the honesty displayed in his confession over his sexual fetishes compels readers to believe that he did not commit any deviant and shameful sex acts, his love for Edith endears him to readers and, hence, blinds readers to the scapegoating. A man who loves his deceased spouse so much could not possibly cast aspersions on her, and therefore what he said that Edith did must be true.

**Conclusion: Shame and Writing About Sex**

As Ellis found out in the Bedborough Trial, writing about sex in the Victorian age invites shame and ignominy even under the aegis of medical discourses. *Sexual Inversion* is not a book a middle-class Victorian family would read aloud during an evening at home. Writing about sex
entails the author’s knowledge on sex, be it first-hand experience or listening to others’ sordid
details or reading “poisonous” books; any way of knowing about sex was deplorable and not
what a respectable Victorian gentleman would do. The Victorians placed great value on
respectability, as is evident in the many Victorian novels about fallen women, from Gaskell’s
Ruth to Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss. Even men were required to stick to decorum to a lesser
extent. Both Frank Fowke and Will Holland, men who returned from India, could not find
suitable wives because of their illegitimate half-caste children (Family Secrets 13-46). Under
this repressive milieu, sexologists were under great scrutiny and a sex scandal could ruin them.

Ellis and Symonds experienced shame and dealt with it in different manners. In life,
Ellis suffered less agony than Symonds, reflected in the straightforward, open, and frank
manner of his autobiography. His confession in his memoirs meant to him that he had lived
without shame, but his writing strategy suggests that he had much shame, because he pushed
the blame onto the women in his life. In the end, while he worked in a transgressive field, he
could not transcend the shame. On the other hand, Symonds had lived with shame and pain for
a great part of his life because of his homosexuality, a nagging feeling that he did not fit in,
and his sensitive and uptight nature. He could not indulge in sexual horseplay with his
classmates and could not engage in overt sexual behavior like his contemporaries, Marzials
and Gower. The conflict between the puritanical society, and his internal shame in being
homosexual, and his desire to “out” himself via his memoirs distilled into his style of circular
and meandering writing. His shame drove him to write and to confess. The process of
struggling with his shame creates a gap in the Foucauldian superstructures of power, allowing
his memoirs to reconfigure the notions of sexuality, effecting change for a better future.
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