

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Shame, Affect, Writing

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I

The essays in this volume all explore the role of shame as an important affect in the complex psychodynamics of literary works. The significance of shame as a central human emotion has now come to be widely recognized in the fields of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and psychology. Literary scholars, however, have been rather slow in showing interest in the way these developments may enhance our understanding of literature, largely, it would seem, because of the current dominance of Lacanian and poststructuralist versions of psychoanalysis. Fortunately, the same cannot be said of those analysts and researchers who have been exploring shame. Again and again, they have turned to literary examples in order to illustrate or expand their knowledge about this powerful emotion. In her highly regarded pioneering study of shame, Helen Merrell Lynd features a host of literary examples, while many of the psychologists and psychoanalysts who have subsequently pursued an interest in shame, such as Léon Wurmser and Silvan Tomkins, have displayed an even greater eagerness to turn to the imaginative world of literature for evidence of compelling psychological reality.¹ The implication seems to be that the world of fiction offers a wealth of metaphors and images for understanding shame and *affective* reality in general. By the same token, our knowledge of literature may be enhanced by a deepened scientific and psychoanalytic understanding of this reality.

The relevance of the literary and mythopoeic imagination to the understanding of psychological reality is hardly a new discovery. Lionel Trilling cites the story of how Freud, when greeted on the occasion of a

celebration of his seventieth birthday as the “‘discoverer of the unconscious’ . . . corrected the speaker and disclaimed the title. ‘The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious,’ he said. ‘What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied’” (32). It is a commonplace that Freud repeatedly turned to literature and myth to support the discoveries that his new science was beginning, often in a more awkward and laborious fashion, to uncover. He clearly believed that the metaphors, images, and symbols that are the language of literature offer an acute insight into inner reality, an insight difficult to attain by other means.

However, as literary scholars and humanists are all too aware, the ideology of science has for the most part tended to disregard and undervalue both the affective and the imaginative dimensions of human experience. The serious study of the imaginative realm is often dismissed as anti-objective and antirealistic. In the same way, despite increasing attention to the affects in popular psychology and New Age publications, there is a deep-rooted and ongoing tendency in our culture to deny the emotions any real significance in our understanding of the world. Perversely, this tendency has invaded the academic disciplines of the arts and social sciences as well. In recent years literary criticism has been dramatically transformed by the rise of radically new methodologies—deconstruction, New Historicism, cultural criticism, race, gender, and gay and lesbian studies—all alike in their insistence on predominantly ideological and political understandings of culture. According to these new “philosophies of suspicion,” humanistic approaches to the understanding of literature and culture are no longer tenable. The words “imagination” and “creativity” are now stigmatized terms in academic scholarship; indeed, one is *ashamed* to use them any more in speaking of literary texts. References to the complex world of affective reality and inner experience explored by literature are viewed as hopelessly naive and retrograde.

Affective life is thus viewed as derivative, secondary, and even unreal and imaginary, in relation to other, superordinate factors. However, to deny the emotional complexity and richness of human life is to ignore the variety of ways in which human beings perceive and interact with their world. Ultimately, it is to deny oneself invaluable knowledge, knowledge that is as relevant to our understanding of the social and political as it is to our understanding of the personal. Current discussions in literary criticism that focus on questions of race, class, and gender would do well to give more consideration to the affective sources and consequences of social injustice and inequalities of power. Shame affect is particularly relevant here. Whenever a person is disempowered on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, physical disability,

whenever a person is devalued and internalizes the negative judgment of an other, shame flourishes. Shame attends the process of subjection in general, as more than one essay in this volume illustrates. Brooks Bouson's essay on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* focuses on the role of shame in defining self-image in a racist society. Joseph Lichtenberg's analysis of a vignette from *Middlemarch* addresses the question of shame and gender, illustrating how shame is used coercively in a male-dominated society—by both men and women—to enforce socially approved gender roles. As Lichtenberg points out, for many young girls, like Eliot's Maggie Tulliver and Letty Garth, "a central injury is the trauma of inequality, of being valued less as a female from infancy on."

Helen Block Lewis, one of the pioneers in shame, made a point of emphasizing the link between the experience of shame and women's experience under patriarchy. Lewis suggests, indeed, that the traditional overlooking of shame affect in psychoanalytic theory and practice is due to the feminization of this affect in particular: "The neglect of shame [and the greater emphasis on guilt] in both psychiatry and in psychoanalysis reflects prevailing sexist thinking" (*Role of Shame* 4). In the predominantly "scientific atmosphere" of these institutions, drives have been emphasized over affects; even within the realm of affects, shame, associated with femininity, has been seen as a "less prestigious emotion than guilt" (11), with guilt accordingly emphasized. Francis Broucek points out that in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* Freud relates "shame not so much to a need to hide and protect the genitals but to conceal genital deficiency. Shame thus became 'a feminine characteristic par excellence'" (12).

Thomas Scheff has addressed the neglect of shame as a widespread phenomenon of modern societies, though he does not link it specifically to sexist assumptions. Scheff has explored the crucial part played by shame in establishing and regulating social bonds. He starts with the assumption that a threat to attachment is always inherent in shame. As the positive affects of interest and enjoyment are particularly instrumental in the establishment of attachments and bonds with others, so shame, which brings about a partial reduction of precisely these two positive affects (and thus disturbs without destroying mutuality), is particularly instrumental in the regulation of social interaction. Scheff regards the absence of any attention to shame in the social sciences (until recently) as part of the general tendency in modern Western societies to deny the emotional content of communal bonds and ties, and the social relevance of the emotions:

Pride and shame serve as instinctive signals, both to self and other, to communicate the state of the bond. We react automatically to affirma-

tions of, and threats to, our bonds. However, if a culture is sufficiently insistent, it can teach us to disguise and deny these signals. If the idea of the social bond is repressed in modern societies, then we would expect that these two emotions would also be systematically repressed. (*Microsociology* 15)

Scheff notes that “pride and shame could be treated openly and directly” by scientists such as Darwin in the nineteenth century. (It is perhaps no accident that a number of the essays gathered here concern nineteenth-century writers—Nietzsche, Eliot, Hawthorne, Kierkegaard—who show a particular sensitivity to the understanding and imagery of shame.) However, in today’s discussions “these two emotions [shame and pride] have all but disappeared. . . . [O]rthodox psychoanalysis glosses over them, and they fare little better in systematic research” (15). Scheff points out that “the denial of shame is institutionalized in the adult language of modern societies” (17). Writing ten years ago, Donald Nathanson, a psychiatrist, made the same observation: “Shame seems to be an emotion little discussed in our clinical work. In the 20 years I have stayed awake at case conferences, attended lectures, professional meetings, and symposia, I have never heard a single case in which embarrassment, ridicule, humiliation, mortification, or any other of the shame family of emotions was discussed” (*Many Faces* viii). Despite this neglect, however, the sudden burst of books and writing on shame, even when they were ignored, signified to Nathanson “the sort of ferment (attended by cultural denial) that usually precedes a major shift in cultural understanding” (viii).

Broucek claims that “Freud’s attitude and the attitude of later psychoanalysts toward shame was one of disrespect. Shame was viewed as one of the major forces promoting repression and resistance to the analytic process, thus opposing insight into the sexual dynamics underlying the various neuroses” (12). Fortunately, psychoanalysis has remained open to change and transformation, and has inevitably moved away from a constraining framework based on aggressive drives and sexual conflict toward an understanding more attentive to the affects and their observable influence on the development of human personality. Over the last two decades, detailed research into the psychological development of infants by psychoanalysts and psychologists has greatly enhanced our understanding of the emotional basis of human motivation in general.² Psychoanalysts such as Joseph Lichtenberg now recommend attention to the affective experience of their patients (a refinement of Heinz Kohut’s emphasis on the significance of empathy in human relations and specifically in the analytic situation): “Actions and gestures that evoke affects, and affects themselves and their transitions, are thus the golden thread we follow to be empathically attuned with our patients” (254). The view, as Tomkins summarizes it, of “human beings as the battleground for

their imperious drives, which urge them on blindly to pleasure and violence, to be contained only by a repressive society and its representations within—the ego and the superego” (“Shame” 137), has largely been rejected by psychoanalysts and psychotherapists as a simplification based on scientific and ideological assumptions that no longer apply. Rather, what forms the human self, besides certain genetically inherited predispositions, is the nexus of human relationships in which the human individual is intensely engaged from birth (even prebirth) on.³ This engagement with others, which is the basis of the deeply social nature of human beings, is primarily of an emotional or affective nature.

Many of the early “heretics” or pioneers, such as Adler and Jung, who diverged from classical Freudian psychoanalysis, seem to have been frustrated, indeed, by Freud’s inability to adapt his model of the human psyche to the undeniable influence of other factors more crucial than the “drives” and the conflicts to which they give rise. The history of psychoanalysis has been the history of fully recognizing the implications of human relationships and emotional motivation for an understanding of the human psyche. Freud tended to view the affects—*anxiety, anger, and love*—as derivatives, as either symptoms or sublimations of libidinal or aggressive impulses and wishes ultimately conceived of in terms of the two great biological forces ruling human life, the drive to erotic union and the drive toward death. But the power that Freud lent to these impulses suggests that the instincts and drives, as he assumed them to be, include to a great extent affective elements not explicitly recognized as such. The complex emotional coloring of sexual experience and of our experience of the body’s physical life made Freud lose sight of the discrete nature of the affective system. He was thus led to confuse the role of drives—*hunger, thirst, elimination (of waste), sex, pain, the need to breathe*—with the very distinct role of affects. As Silvan Tomkins, the founder of contemporary affect theory, observes:

Thus, in the concept of orality, the hunger drive mechanism was confused with the dependency-communion complex, which from the beginning is more general than the need for food and the situation of being fed. In the concept of anality, the elimination drive mechanism has been confused with the contempt-shame humiliation complex, which not only is more general than the need to eliminate but also has earlier environmental roots than the toilet training situation. In the concept of the Oedipus complex, the sex drive mechanism, admittedly more plastic than a drive such as the need for air, was confused with the family romance, which involves the far more general wishes to *be* both parents and to *possess* both parents. (*Affect 1*: 109)

Thus the power of Eros in human life can be explained only if we accept that we are not simply talking about a drive to mate. Sexual pleasure is com-

posed primarily of affective elements of excitement and joy; these are its primary motivating elements, not the wish for sex per se. In the same way, aggression and hatred cannot be adequately explained in terms of the wish to defeat a sexual or Oedipal rival, nor can they be explained in terms of some deep instinctual force mysteriously urging human beings to destruction and death. They are, rather, a powerful emotional amalgam made up primarily of the so-called hostility triad—anger-rage, contempt (dissembl), and disgust—and often propelled as well by fear.⁴ This is not at all to deny the biological foundations of psychological experience; it is, indeed, to recognize that what primarily motivates human beings are not drives or instinctual life, narrowly conceived, but affects, which like drives and instincts are innate, but, unlike them, are highly adaptable and nonspecific.

Thus, in contrast to the traditional view of affects as a superfluous, irrational, and atavistic feature of human beings, Tomkins claims that the affective complexity of human beings is one of the most distinctive features of their success as a species. He goes so far as to ask if “anyone may fully grasp the nature of any object when that object has not been perceived, wished for, missed, and thought about in love and in hate, in excitement and in apathy, in distress and in joy. . . . Only an animal who was as capable as man could have convinced himself that the scientific mode of acquaintance is the only ‘real’ mode through which he contacts reality” (*Affect 1*: 134–35). He stresses that “the belief in the reality or irreality of affect is a derivative of the socialization process and that there has been for the past two thousand years a recurrent polarity of ideology which centers upon the reality or irreality of human affect” (135). If the perception of affect has often been ignored and left undeveloped in favor of more formal and abstract languages, one of the most important functions of literature has been to provide a privileged place of redress, a sphere of expression where emotional life can be explored and refined in ways that are discouraged elsewhere. In literature, Tomkins observes, language used “for the expression, clarification and deepening of feelings” counters “the reduction in visibility of affects, effected by language which embeds, distorts or is irrelevant to the affects and which thereby impoverishes the affective life of man” (*Affect 1*: 219). The essays presented in this volume testify precisely to this affective role of language in literature, the ways in which imaginative writers explore, clarify, and enrich our emotional life.

II

One of the great attractions of the work of Jacques Lacan for literary theorists and critics has been its emphasis on language and the signify-

ing dimension of culture. There can be no question that Lacan's contribution to certain areas of literary and cultural studies has been indispensable. His attention to the rhetorical and metaphorical language of the unconscious has led to new, nuanced readings of texts and of other cultural media such as film and television. But at the same time, this preoccupation with the signifier has tended to steer attention away from other important developments in psychoanalysis that have taken place over the last thirty years. Much of the psychoanalytic language now prevalent in literary theory and criticism, borrowed from a thinker whose own style is oracular to say the least, verges on the impenetrable and almost completely neglects the role of the affective system. As Gordon Hirsch has written, "One reason for the importance of studies of shame in contemporary psychological research is the emphasis on observed, primary affect, and on a response to this affect which is also frequently evident on an emotional level, without an inordinate reliance on abstract psychological metatheory" (65).

At the same time, certain of Lacan's concepts are clearly better understood in terms of affect. The prevalent use of the word "desire" is a good example. "*Désir*" is not a sexual concept—as Lacan himself notes—but pertains to *recognition* by the other, and therefore to the social field and to a bond that is ultimately emotional, not sexual. In Lacan's view, a profound *méconnaissance* is at the core of neurosis, and "*désir*" is, ultimately, the wish for *reconnaissance*, for mutual and reciprocal recognition in relation to the other. This is indeed the terminal point of analysis in the cure: reciprocally to recognize and be recognized, *desire* being *desire for recognition through the other*. Drawing on Hegel, Lacan says: "Le désir même de l'homme se constitue, nous dit-il, sous le signe de la médiation, il est désir de faire reconnaître son désir" (*Écrits* 181). ["Man's very desire, he tell us, is constituted under the sign of mediation, it is the desire to have one's desire recognized."] However, with the emphasis that Lacan places on the cognitive and symbolic aspect of this recognition, as intellectually fascinating as it is, the *affective* dimension is almost completely lost from view. Theoreticians such as Daniel Stern, Joseph Lichtenberg, and Jessica Benjamin have shown that such recognition is not so much a matter of cognition as a matter of "motives and affects activated in contexts of human interaction" (Lichtenberg 299). When this interaction traumatically fails and breaks down, "the dynamics of domination and submission result" (Schapiro, *Literature* 19), just as in Hegel the dialectic of master and slave disrupts the unalienated consciousness.

Certain other affective concepts, not always recognized as such, play a predominant role in Lacan's theorizing. Shame is particularly important. In his seminars, shame is central to his fascinating discussion of the

scopic drive and the complex interplay of the eye and the gaze. Lacan understands the eye as a perceptual organ, while the gaze refers to the vision of an objectively self-aware subject or self, to the double focus, in terms of the visual field, of human consciousness. Like Sartre, Lacan sees shame as the negative affect central to that defining experience of objective self-awareness, involving the alienation of self through a paralyzing self-consciousness in relation to the other. Significantly, when he makes the distinction between the eye and the gaze, he focuses on the experience of shame and cites a passage in which Sartre links desire and shame in the experience of alienation.⁵ Desire, as Lacan says, is the desire of the other, or the other's desire: "Le désir de l'homme, c'est le désir de l'Autre" (*Écrits* 900). Similarly, he says of the gaze: "The gaze I encounter is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (*Four* 84). Kilborne points out in his essay on Kierkegaard that it is not just how we appear to the other but how we *imagine* we appear to the other that is involved in shame. For Sartre and Lacan, this dependence on the other defines the negative aspects of the inescapable condition of human intersubjectivity, in which one remains inevitably alienated and estranged from oneself ("le désir de l'homme s'aliène dans le désir de l'autre" [*Écrits* 343]; ["human desire is alienated in the other's desire"]). It would be interesting to explore in more detail, as Kilborne's essay points us to, the central role of the affect shame in the elaboration of Sartre's philosophy. The same is true of the role of shame in Lacan's writings. The negative assessment by both Sartre and Lacan of human self-awareness in the social field may largely be due to the important, though hidden, role of shame in their thought.

The introduction of "affect" into the development of philosophical thought is, in a very broad sense, a legacy of Romanticism, in which *feeling* becomes the only satisfactory way to know the world. "Gefühl ist alles," as Faust says to Gretchen. This radical reevaluation of emotion is shared by thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, in whose work, as Kilborne's and Wurmser's papers so clearly show, deep affective or emotional conflict drives thought, as the classical relationship between an exalted "reason" and a degraded "passion" is completely overturned and even reversed. In his study of the emotions, however, Sartre's attitude to affective life continues to be dominated by his profound Cartesianism. For him, "the origin of emotion is a spontaneous and lived degradation of consciousness in the face of the world" (77). Emotions are a form of magic, a cunning way of shirking *engagement* in the world, of escaping freedom and consciousness, the onerous but morally necessary responsibilities of humankind. There is no doubt that emotions are often utilized precisely in this fashion, as indeed the entire area of *denial* and *defenses* explored by psychoanalysis demonstrates. But the

ends to which certain affects are eventually put, precisely as a way of defending against *other affects*, cannot be a starting point for understanding the nature of the emotions. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine any social or political commitment without a very significant emotional investment in that commitment; a consciousness freed from emotion would be so utterly indifferent to the world that it would be difficult to say that it perceived anything at all. Indeed, contrary to Sartre's view of the emotions as degrading consciousness, Nathanson observes that "so much is going on in the human brain that nothing can be said to gain our *attention* unless it triggers an affect. Affect is responsible for *awareness*, for only that which gains affective amplification gets into the limited channel we call *consciousness*" (*Knowing Feeling* 12).

In his study of the emotions, Sartre does not mean the examples he uses—fear, joy, sadness, anger—to be exhaustive, as his study is not a fully developed phenomenology. Indeed, he omits any discussion of shame, which, in *Being and Nothingness* and *Saint Genet*, is the indispensable mode of the self's stolen and objectified consciousness and freedom in relation to others. In the section "The Look," part of the chapter "The Existence of Others" in *Being and Nothingness*, he defines shame as "shame of *self*; it is the *recognition* of the fact that *I am* indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a *given* object" (320). This negative experience of the other as sitting in judgment, this painful double focus on the self as seen by the other, is, indeed, one of the central features of shame as an emotion. As Helen Lewis points out:

Because the self is the focus of awareness in shame, "identity" imagery is usually evoked. At the same time that this identity imagery is registering as one's own experience, there is also vivid imagery of the self in the other's eyes. This creates a "doubleness of experience," which is characteristic of shame. . . . Shame is the vicarious experience of the other's negative evaluation. In order for shame to occur, there must be a relationship between the self and the other in which the self cares about the other's evaluation. . . . Fascination with the other and sensitivity to the other's treatment of the self render the self more vulnerable in shame. ("Shame" 107–8)

This emphasis on the other suggests, perhaps, that shame, in contrast to guilt, is an externally regulated emotion. It was according to such a conception that Ruth Benedict, in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, coined the dichotomy between shame societies and guilt societies, which she applied to Eastern and Western cultures respectively. Her ideas were later fruitfully applied by E. R. Dodds in studying the role of shame in ancient Greece. This dichotomy may be legitimate in light of the *relatively* greater emphasis placed on dishonor and disgrace, on the public

areas of shame and exposure, on “loss of face,” in Mediterranean and Eastern societies. But as Takeo Doi observes of Benedict’s argument, “it is evident that when she states that the culture of guilt places emphasis on inner standards of conduct whereas the culture of shame places emphasis on outward standards of conduct she has the feeling that the former is superior to the latter” (48). Philip Collington’s essay on Faulkner’s South as a so-called shame society shows some of the difficulties of maintaining such distinctions. Indeed, many of the most memorable characters in Western literature, such as Bronte’s Heathcliff and Melville’s Captain Ahab, are motivated by their flight from shame; their obsessive need to eradicate humiliation—whether through self-enclosure, ambition, or revenge—appears to make them immune to feelings of guilt and sympathetic concern for others. Benedict’s refusal to recognize the enormous role played by shame in the West, while displacing its importance to the East, may be one more sign of the way that the human sciences, in their analysis of society and human personality, are reluctant to accord significance to shame and to emotions in general. Moreover, shame, as much as guilt, involves inner standards of conduct, since feelings of inferiority and defectiveness clearly exist in people without the presence of a ridiculing or scornful other; by the same token, “inner” feelings of guilt must be originally derived from “outward standards of conduct” embodied in judging and condemning parental figures.

The internalization of shame through identification with the “shamer” is a crucial part of the psychology dramatized by almost every author treated in the essays in this volume. Brooks Bouson’s essay on Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, in particular, demonstrates the way in which the victims of racism are often forced to turn the other’s contempt inward. For so many of Morrison’s African-American characters, white standards of beauty and lovability form, through identification with the oppressor, part of an inner superego and create a deep conflict. There is a split in the superego between the demand that one conform to the models of the shaming other—white society—and the conflicting demand that one remain loyal to the reality of one’s self. It is this internalized shame, this deeply rooted self-contempt and self-hatred that must be overcome. Such a conflict between the fear of self-loss and the fear of being shamed and punished for not disappearing or hiding oneself has been explored by Wurmser in detail throughout his writings. Indeed, Freud’s doubling of the personality into an observed self and a critical observing agent (superego and ego ideal) that judges the self is clearly congruent with the notion of a shame internalized through identification with a judging other.

As that part of the ego that critically observes and passes judgment on the self, the superego induces both guilt (for moral wrongdoing) and

shame (for perceived inferiority), but the very existence of such a split in the self suggests the “doubleness of experience,” as Lewis calls it, induced by shame, in which “the self cares about the other’s evaluation.” As Lewis puts it, “[s]hame . . . involves more self-consciousness and more self-imagining than guilt. The experience of shame is directly about the self. . . . At the same time . . . there is also vivid imagery of the self in the other’s eyes” (“Shame” 107). This “doubleness of experience” particularly marks the experience of women and other devalued and disempowered groups in society. It is precisely because the self cares about significant others and is concerned about rejection and loss of their love—the ultimate threat in shame—that something like a superego can be installed within the self in the first place. In the need to defend itself against the shaming disapproval of the other, the injured self may find itself locked in a struggle between a loyalty to the self and an internalized archaic agent directing shame at the self. (The term “archaic” here, in its psychoanalytic sense, refers to the earliest period of the formation of the personality in childhood.)

Adamson shows to what extent Hawthorne’s work is pervaded by the imagery of an internalized judging other that condemns the self, as developed most dramatically in the relationship between Chillingworth and Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne’s fiction displays a particular sensitivity to the double focus in shame and to the feeling of being dangerously vulnerable to exposure. This is reflected—in his visual imagery, in his characters, and in his narrators—in an exaggerated sense of objective self-awareness and self-consciousness, in which the ego is divided between an observer and an observed, a shamer and a shamed self.

In his essay on Kierkegaard, Kilborne focuses on the importance of the concept of a discrepancy or tension between ego and ego ideal for an understanding of shame, emphasizing that the motivation in constructing a self-image is the regulation of feeling. A self, as Kilborne quotes Kierkegaard, “is what it has as a standard of measurement.” But the ego ideal (a component of the superego) may be split between competing ideals of the self. The conflict that arises in Kierkegaard pits the need for self-assertion (the need to be *who one is* in the eyes of a transcendental Other, or “God”) against the fear of exposure and shame in a social context. The situation of “despair” occurs when there is a conflict between the fear of self-loss and the fear of being rejected as flawed in some way by the other if one reveals that self. “Most men live their lives in quiet desperation,” as Thoreau puts it in *Walden*, because they sacrifice, out of shame, the genuine self that they are to a conformist ideal. This is the danger, it seems, in Kierkegaard’s view, of regarding society as a transcendental other. Only God, in his view, can serve such a role, as a gen-

uine measure and standard for the self; in this regard, shame is a particularly important affect motivating the deepest religious life of the individual. The greatest danger for Kierkegaard, as Kilborne suggests, is not to be seen at all, to be a “disappearing who.”

III

The idea that the affects form the primary motivational system of human beings is the position of Silvan Tomkins, whose fascinating theories have recently received, with the publication of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's *The Silvan Tomkins Reader*, long overdue attention in the field of literary theory and criticism. Tomkins's massive four-volume work on affect, the result of a forty-year period of research and theorization, represents the most powerful and persuasive challenge not only to a strictly drive-based psychoanalytic theory of human motivation—a theory by now long since rejected even by most analysts—but to cognitive (“appraisal”) theories and behavioral theories of human motivation as well. In Tomkins's view, the cognitive “appraisal” of a situation is not sufficient in itself to provide the urgency that is part of human motivation. This is the role of affect: affect makes certain things matter, makes them compelling, in a way that no objective assessment is capable of doing.

Psychoanalysis is an area of knowledge that, in its relatively brief history, has always had to remain sensitive to developments in psychotherapy and psychology. Rather than a threat to its essential postulates, Tomkins's work can be seen as consistent with the changes that have taken place in psychoanalysis itself over the years: precisely, the move away from many of Freud's initial assumptions toward a more extensive interest in relations, emotions, and the self. What Tomkins offers psychoanalysis is an extraordinarily precise understanding of the affects and their relation to the development of human personality.

For Tomkins, affects, like instincts and drives, are part of the innate biological apparatus of human beings and have served an essential function in the evolution of the human species. Human beings are unique in that they are *affectively* equipped, as he puts it in the simplest terms, “to want to remain alive and to resist death, to want to experience novelty and to resist boredom, to want to communicate, to be close to and in contact with others of his species, to experience sexual excitement and to resist the experience of head and face lowered in shame” (*Affect 1*: 170).

Tomkins isolates nine innate affects. There are, first of all, two positive affects. These are interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy. (The

hyphenated terms reflect the range of intensity of that particular affect, from mild to extreme.) Tomkins explains affects in terms of the density of neural firing. Interest-excitement, for example, is caused by a certain increase in neural stimulation while enjoyment-joy is triggered by a sudden decrease in stimulation; this is why interest and enjoyment are often complementary affects, as in the excitement and enjoyment-joy of sexual intercourse, or the excitement of seeking a solution to a complex intellectual problem and the joy in finding it. These positive affects are of particular importance because without them human beings would show no interest in, or attachment to the world or those around them. As these are the affects that ensure the forging of bonds between infants and their caregivers, they are the very basis of strong human attachments, and therefore of social community, as well as the foundation of the positive regard for others and for oneself, and therefore of an integrated sense of personality.

The negative affects are greater in number, and they function, in general, to produce a state of urgency about certain negative states the organism finds itself in: fear-terror, distress-anguish, anger-rage, shame-humiliation, dissmell, and disgust. There is, finally, the neutral, so-called "resetting affect" of surprise-startle. Tomkins explores the nature of these affects in minute detail, and shows how what we call emotions are, in fact, complex amalgams of affects or conflicts between competing affects, according to the strategies, influenced by predisposition and history, adopted by the individual. For example, what some shame analysts call humiliated fury or shame-anger—the feeling that Heinz Kohut, the founder of self psychology, labels "narcissistic rage"—Tomkins would understand as shame affect that reaches such a painful point of overload that it triggers anger, an affect distinct from but often accompanying shame. Anger is, of course, one of the most important defenses against shame. Indeed, the particular power of shame to combine with other affects—anguish, contempt, rage, fear—is one of the things that make it such a crucial element in the emotional life of human beings.

Shame, according to Tomkins, is peculiar as a negative affect in that it is triggered by any impediment to positive affect, its function being specifically to interrupt states of interest and enjoyment that have captured the organism. Tomkins postulates that "[t]he innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy. Hence any barrier to further exploration which partially reduces interest or the smile of enjoyment will activate the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure powered by enjoyment or joy" (*Affect 2*: 123). As Charles Darwin, Tomkins's precursor in the scientific exploration of the emotions, describes the same reaction: "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 endeavour 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" (340).

To use an example cited in discussions of shame, we are all probably familiar with the experience of mistaking from a distance a stranger for a close acquaintance, and hailing the person with signs of affection and mutuality. After realizing one's error, embarrassment ensues—one looks away, one feels "stupid," confused, and disoriented—and any further interaction is immediately broken off. As Nathanson points out, the reaction is not something that we can consciously control: "As soon as we have seen the face of the other person our own head droops, our eyes are cast down, and, blushing, we become briefly incapable of speech" (*Shame and Pride* 135). Shame affect has thus performed its function: it has *instantaneously* reduced interest in the object by limiting positive affect, and temporarily discouraged any further attempts at communion. Tomkins suggests that the power of shame has something to do with human physical survival, and one can think of any number of situations where undue interest or pleasure in an object would be life-threatening. "Shame affect," as Nathanson summarizes Tomkins's findings, "is a highly painful mechanism that operates to pull the organism away from whatever might interest it or make it content," and thus it is "painful in direct proportion to the degree of positive affect it limits" (*Shame and Pride* 138).

It is important to note that for Tomkins shame affect does not require the presence of another person to be activated, though it is, indeed, an affect that is absolutely crucial in its social manifestations and in the development, through the interaction with others, of a sense of self and of self-image. We can observe, for example, how a child can experience shame affect in the failure to complete a particularly difficult task; when the child's exasperation reaches a certain point, the posture of shame will be induced—head dropping down, body slumping, and eyes looking away.

In shame, the reduction of positive affect is incomplete, Tomkins emphasizes, in the sense that the subject does not utterly abandon the object, does not entirely relinquish the goal of regaining the prior state of positive feeling once shame has dissipated. As a negative emotion, shame is, in mild doses, particularly well designed to allow for an ongoing, carefully regulated positive interaction and communion with one's environment. Thus, shame is particularly instrumental as a protective mechanism regulating human beings in their eagerness for communal life, in their expressiveness, perception, and interaction with others and with their environment. Shame serves to reduce without destroying the

positive affects of interest and enjoyment that govern curiosity and communality, whenever these states are perceived as frustrated, undesirable, or dangerous.

Shame thus “binds” with drives and other affects, and these shame-binds, as Tomkins calls them, are particularly crucial in understanding the significance of shame in psychodynamics. Since Freud effectively ignored the distinct role of affects he focused exclusively on the binding of the drives with shame. The obtrusive and insistent life of the body—sex, elimination of waste, eating—are all particularly associated with complex feelings of shame. Shame and guilt about bodily life are, in classical psychoanalysis, the essential motivation behind the mechanism of repression. A conflict associated with a “drive,” however, can emerge in the first place only through an affective conflict, for instance, the binding of sexual *excitement* with fear or shame.

Gershem Kaufman, a psychotherapist whose work, like Donald Nathanson's, has been deeply influenced by Tomkins's research, has devoted much of his thinking to the importance of such affective binds.⁶ In a shame-anger bind, for example, the feeling of anger might automatically make one feel ashamed, so that bound by shame one would avoid showing anger, and thus perhaps unduly suffer from a lack of assertiveness and an inability even to express justifiable anger. In a shame-distress bind, one feels shame whenever one feels sad or distressed in some way, thus repressing and at the same time intensifying both the sadness and the shame; inasmuch as this emotional complex is mostly unconscious, the subject is left at the mercy of an unidentified but debilitating feeling-state. To take another example, fear is, through socialization, often bound by shame, especially in men, so that one may feel ashamed whenever one experiences fear, even when one is able to hide it from others or from oneself. People diagnosed with incurable diseases often deny their fear and terror, even though it would seem the most natural thing in the world at such a juncture to be afraid.

It is also the case, indeed, that the very expression of affect is itself bound by shame, the permissible extent of expression of affect varying significantly from one culture, one family, one social context to another. We all know from experience the extent to which being too emotional, or too expressive, or too loud, or too excited, or too joyous, is bound by shame. Shame, indeed, covers shame itself—it is shameful to express shame. It is here that we can see perhaps most clearly the dramatic importance of the role of art as a way of exploring the emotions; in art and literature, shame and repression are diminished, and the richness of emotional life, its stimulation and turbulence and nuance, is investigated in its complexity. As readers, we explore the excitement and joy of love,

the release and liberation of laughter after great struggle, the devastation of deep loss, the searing sting of shame and humiliation, the agony and anger born from intense conflict, and the terror of death.

IV

As the preceding discussion suggests, the excessive inhibition of emotion has damaging consequences. Thomas Scheff speaks of unacknowledged shame leading to anger or rage as the source of malignant feelings of resentment, with cataclysmic effects on individuals and societies. The inhibition of positive affect is equally injurious, since the free expression of interest and enjoyment enhances the growth of basic trust, creativity, and the capacity to form deep and lasting attachments. Among the negative emotions, shame is the emotion that functions most to discourage the expression of other affects, including itself. Thus, in light of the dangers of such inhibition, it might seem logical to advocate the adoption of a general *shamelessness* in many of the areas of human life governed by shame, and to argue that this would have a liberating and therapeutic effect on human societies.

A society without shame, however, would be a society without intimacy. One of the functions of what Carl Schneider calls "mature shame" is to protect certain sensitive areas of personal and interpersonal experience that a society considers important to keep private. What these areas are may vary dramatically among societies and cultures, and they will necessarily change and evolve in the course of history. But it is almost impossible to conceive of a society that did not protect certain aspects of human life from public invasion and exposure. If such a society existed, it would be hard to understand how it could be a healthy one.

Contemporary North American society is a case in point. Doubtless, the new openness and honesty about previously tabooed subjects, such as sex or bodily life, has significantly improved human relations. But what often passes as a refreshing frankness combating unhealthy repression may also be a symptom of what Andrew Morrison has called the "culture of shame." It could be argued that the phenomenon of shamelessness in our society is to a large degree a defense against shame, not a liberation from it. Bouson points to a perfect illustration of this, in her discussion of the behavior of Cholly in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Wurmser describes such shamelessness as a "reaction-formation against shame" (*Mask* 264); it is shame "displaced." The denial of shame, according to Nathanson, is reflected in the narcissism of contemporary society:

One may wonder about the fairly recent swing from privacy and modesty toward public nakedness and display; away from the seclusion of curtained windows toward glass walls that reveal interior rooms; from social acceptance of the privacy of personal grief and pain to the canonization of the intruding investigative reporter. Perhaps it is the devaluation of the affect shame that has allowed our culture to slip into its current “narcissistic” preoccupation with exposure. (*Shame and Pride* 5)

We need only think of the way that daytime television in the United States is dominated by a flaunting of the private areas of human experience in the personal lives of complete strangers. Andrew Morrison speaks of the way that shame is “broadly exposed through media attention to shame-infused incidents and relationships,” for example,

the role of news coverage in representing, and on occasion leading to, the suicides and homicides that reflect shame and shame-based depressions. Further media documentation of shame’s prevalence in current society comes from the themes and interviews of television talk shows like Geraldo Rivera’s and Oprah Winfrey’s. Frequent examples of spouse abuse, drug addictions, and other compulsive behaviors dominate these shows, where participants are eager to explain their various humiliations and to attain some degree of acceptance and relief. The immense popularity of these shows, and the broad demand from viewers to experience and participate in tales of degradations and self-abasement, document the prevalence of the shame culture in contemporary American society. (*Culture* 196)

The recent murder case surrounding the Jenny Jones show is an example of the possible consequences of the exploitation of such heedless exposure.⁷

In *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy*, Carl Schneider has written most eloquently about shame and the need for boundaries. Like many other theorists of shame such as Wurmser and Tomkins, Schneider argues that shame protects against violations of inner boundaries in the self and of sensitive areas of human life that should not be subjected to exposure. Jeffrey Berman’s essay on shame and writing in the classroom is particularly relevant here. One of the dangers of revealing shame in student writing is that further shame may be induced in the student. As Berman points out, certain cautions and safeguards are crucial, such as sensitivity to the feelings of the student and a respect of “boundaries between self and other.” Wurmser writes: “If one also crosses another’s inner limits, one violates his privacy, and he feels shame. The transgressor himself may now feel both guilt—for the transgression of the first boundary, for having inflicted hurt—and shame, owing to identification with the exposed object. Violation of privacy tends to evoke shame in

both subject and object" (*Mask* 62). When violations occur in chronic or traumatic form, then shame becomes the core of severe structures of defense in the traumatized individual or community, one such defense being the aforementioned aggressive shamelessness that has so invaded modern life. Shame, in itself, then, is one of the most indispensable guardians of human life. It is the dangerous "magnification" of shame, as Tomkins calls it, that has such a devastating effect on people and societies.⁸

It is interesting to correlate Tomkins's view of shame affect with the work on shame by Wurmser. The latter has insisted on the impact that shame and other negative affects can have on expression and perception, and how the frustration and distortion of wishes to communicate and to explore the world can damage the very core of an individual's self-concept. Freud linked shame almost exclusively to matters of sexual knowledge and exposure. He regarded shame, in a way not unrelated to Tomkins's understanding of its function, as an affective mechanism—a *Reaktionsbildung*—serving as a defense against inappropriate scopophilic and exhibitionistic drives or wishes, wishes to see and to know, to show and display oneself in a sexually intrusive manner. Thus, particularly intense wishes or fears, in a patient, centered on knowing or seeing would suggest a displacement of denied and repressed voyeuristic wishes that could be traced back to a specifically sexual trauma. No psychoanalyst today would be likely to draw quite this conclusion, unless somehow or other immured from the complex host of developments over the last several decades. Again, Freud tended to narrow the field of explanation to the area of drives—oral, anal, genital—whereas, along with Tomkins, Nathanson, and others, Wurmser understands shame as closely tied to perceptual and expressive wishes that are not sexually specific, though they may certainly become so in the course of development.

As more than one essay in this collection underscores, in traumatic or abusive situations shame, combined with other negative affects, becomes magnified and turns into a chronic experience. It then has a toxic effect on the development of healthy desires to know and discover the world and commune with others, and on the development of a confident and trusting self. "The modes of attentive, curious grasping and of expressing oneself in nonverbal as well as verbal communication are the arena where in love and hatred, in mastery and defeat our self is forged and moulded. If this interchange is blocked and warped, the core of the self-concept is severely disturbed and becomes permanently twisted and deformed" (Wurmser, "Shame" 83). One of the ways that Wurmser defines shame, then, is as "a basic protection mechanism in the areas of perception and expression, a protection in the sense of preventing overstimulation in these two areas, as well as 'drive restraint' in

the form of preventing dangerous impulses of curiosity and self-exposure" ("Shame" 80–81). These impulses or "drives" are more specifically: "(1) the urges for active, magical exhibition—the wishes to fascinate; (2) their reverse: the fear to be passively exposed and stared at; (3) the urges for active curiosity; and (4) their reverse: the fear of being fascinated and overwhelmed by the spectacles offered by others" (81). The first two drives, in other words, are exhibitionistic; the last two voyeuristic, or scopophilic. These drives may be blocked when shame as a defensive mechanism against violation fails to protect the self. Shame may then become an emotion that dangerously monopolizes the subject's relations with the world. It may lead to chronic aversive responses, in the forms of withdrawal and antagonism. Fears of being overexposed, invaded, or taken over by others may be amplified to a paralyzing extent, leading to severe states of depression. Correspondingly, compulsive forms of self-assertion and the aggressive desire for power and control over others can serve as defenses and as a means of satisfying the thwarted innate wishes to show and see.

The essays in this volume attest to the importance of these perceptual and expressive wishes and fears, and the defenses and means of gratification associated with them. The imagery of looking—both seeing and being seen—is examined in Kilborne's essay on Kierkegaard, in relation to the whole question of existence as a genuine self. Bouson's essay on *The Bluest Eye* touches on a similar conflict, illustrating the use of what Wurmser calls the "magic eye" as a defense against severe shame. A fear of being exposed as unlovable is countered by an intense and compulsive looking for the consolidating admiring gaze of the other. Thus, Pecola ends up hiding in the pathetic fantasy of her blue eyes. However, the cost of defending against the fear of exposure through a counterphobic magic eye is the disappearance and tragic loss of the self. This relation between shame and visual imagery of exposure and invasion is also the focus of Adamson's essay on Hawthorne, whose work, like that of his contemporary Melville, is traversed and haunted by the theme of a shaming "evil eye."

There would seem to be, indeed, a significant link between shame, taboos on looking, and the popular folkloric belief in the evil eye. Wurmser makes this link, and Tomkins devotes a whole section of his analysis of shame affect and looking to a discussion of this widespread belief. Tomkins regards it as a classic expression of the "universal taboo on looking," which is "most severe when two individuals . . . look directly into each other's eyes at the same time" (*Affect 2*: 157). The nature of this taboo is twofold: "it is a taboo on intimacy," which is maximized by "mutual looking," and it expresses the constraints found in all cultures on the direct expression of affects (157), the face and eyes

being the site of such expression. At the end of his discussion of the scopopic drive in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan discusses the evil eye in relation to looking and mortification (i.e., searing shame): “The evil eye is the *fascinum*, it is that which has the effect of arresting movement and, literally, of killing life. At the moment the subject stops, suspending his gesture, he is mortified. The anti-life, anti-movement function of this terminal point is the *fascinum*, and it is precisely one of the dimensions in which the power of the gaze is exercised directly” (*Four* 118). Indeed, the power of such a gaze lies in its ability both to expose and to fascinate—*oculus fascinus* was the term for the evil eye in ancient Rome, the eye being considered the privileged weapon of the fascinator (Tomkins, *Affect* 2: 162)—so that escape from it seems impossible, fight as one may to ward it off. As Hilary Clark shows in her contribution on Anne Sexton, the poet struggled against a shaming evil eye throughout her adult life, resulting at least partly from the experience, as a child, of excessive invasion of self-boundaries. For Sexton, haunted by the perception of herself as defective, damaged, unlovable, this evil eye was death itself (she committed suicide in 1974), both fearful and powerfully fascinating.

The passive modes of both the wish to be seen and the wish to see are usually expressed as fears. That is, the punishment for exhibitionism, for showing oneself, is that one will be overexposed, “stared at,” “overcome and devoured by the looks of others” (Wurmser, *Mask* 162). The punishment for looking is then that one will become fascinated by what one sees, to the point of being taken over and controlled by the object. Thus, *not looking* and *hiding*—“see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil”—are two important modes of defending against searing or chronic shame; they are indeed the perceptual and expressive basis of denial and repression.⁹

Wurmser has correlated his analysis of the perceptual-attentive “drives” to Kohut’s conception of a bipolar self, to the two archaic images—the grandiose self and the idealized selfobject—that Kohut views as defining the developmental basis of the self. Kohut’s work, with its emphasis on the need for empathic healing as a remedy for the original empathic failure on the part of caregivers (the source of narcissistic disorders), has represented a particularly significant development in moving psychoanalysis away from drive conflict and emphasizing the role of affects in psychodynamics: shame as the primary negative affect involved in “empathic failure,” as well as the positive affects of interest, excitement, and joy involved in successful empathic interactions. What Kohut calls the grandiose self corresponds to the part of the self that grows and develops as the child’s grandiosity (its feelings of power and of control over its environment) and exhibitionism (its pleasure in show-