She stood up. Her word was Adam. And A was dough. Emmy Lou went slowly to get it right. "Dough-d-dough-m, Adam," said Emmy Lou.

They laughed.[a]

Norbert Wiener describes the bewilderment of a child when trusted interpretations of his world fail him:

> Christmas of 1901 was hard for me. I was just seven. It was then that I first discovered that Santa Claus was a conventional invention of the grownups. At that time I was already reading scientific books of more than slight difficulty, and it seemed to my parents that a child who was doing this should have no difficulty in discarding what to them was obviously a sentimental fiction. What they did not realize was the fragmentariness of the child's world. The child does not wander far from home, and what may be only a few blocks away is to him an unknown territory in which every fancy is permissible.
>
> What is true concerning the physical map is also true concerning the chart of his ideas. He has not yet had the opportunity to explore very far from the few central notions that are his by experience. In the intermediate regions, anything may be true; and what for his elders is at least an emotional contradiction is for him a blank which may be filled in any one of several ways.[b]

The discovery that our parents are not all-wise and all-good and that we must face the uncertainties of our own judgment and our own interpretations of the world is a lonely experience. It becomes still more lonely and poignant, and in a real sense shameful, when it is followed by the realization that, instead of our elders being our interpreters of the world, our protectors, we must, instead, protect them from their own fallibilities and shortcomings, and from the shameful knowledge that we are aware of them.

This painful transformation of roles appears in Rilke's account of the metamorphosis of birthdays.

> . . . on [one's birthday] one arose with a right to joy which was not to be doubted. . . .
>
> But suddenly come those remarkable birthdays when . . . you see others becoming uncertain. . . . You are hardly awake when someone shouts . . . that the cake hasn't arrived yet; . . . or somebody comes in and leaves the door open, and you see everything before you should have seen it. That is the moment when something like an operation is performed on you: a brief but atrociously painful incision. . . . You have scarce got over it when you no longer think about yourself; you must rescue the birthday, watch the others, anticipate their mistakes, and confirm them in the illusion that they are managing everything admirably. . . . They want to surprise you and . . . [they] open the lowest layer of a toy-box which contains nothing more, only cotton-wool; then you have to relieve their embarrassment.[a]

To some extent everyone experiences a loss of early trust,[b] which may leave a nostalgia for familiar images unmarred by change. But the extent to which some form of early trust continues for a person, and the way in which it is transmuted into more mature and understanding confidence, determine in important ways his future sense of identity.

Involvement of the Whole Self

Shame is an experience that affects and is affected by the whole self. This whole-self involvement is one of its distinguishing characteristics and one that makes it a clue to identity.

Separate, discrete acts or incidents, including those seemingly most trivial, have importance because in this moment of *self*-consciousness, the self stands revealed. Coming suddenly upon us, experiences of shame throw a flooding light on what and who we are and what the world we live in is.

This gives at least a partial answer to the question as to whether shame is something that one voluntarily brings on oneself or something that comes upon one from without. It is both. One does not, as in guilt, choose to engage in a specific act, a sin. Guilt frequently involves a sort of haggling anxiety, a weighing of pros and cons prolonged over a period of time. The shameful situation frequently takes one by surprise. But one is overtaken by shame because one's whole life has been a preparation for putting one in this situation. One finds oneself in a situation in which hopes and purposes are invested and in

which anxiety about one's own adequacy may also be felt. In shame the inadequacy becomes manifest; the anxiety is realized. It is because of this whole-life involvement that one can speak of an over-all ashamedness. Jean-Paul Sartre makes basic in shame the way one appears in the eyes of others (others as audience), rather than in one's own eyes. But he recognizes that what is exposed in shame is oneself. I am ashamed of what I am.[a]

Because of this over-all character, an experience of shame can be altered or transcended only in so far as there is some change in the whole self.[b] No single, specific thing we can do can rectify or mitigate such an experience. Unlike guilt it is—in specific terms—irreversible. "In shame there is no comfort, but to be beyond all bounds of shame." It is too small to refer to; but it pervades everything. There it is. An experience that arouses guilt, from a slight misdemeanor to a crime, can be followed by appropriate mitigating or nullifying sequences—confession, repentance, punishment, atonement, condemnation, restoration. "Even the misery of guilt doth attain to the bliss of pardon." At least in our culture, guilt is a culturally defined wrong act, a part of oneself that is separable, segmented, and redeemable.

But an experience of shame of the sort I am attempting to describe cannot be modified by addition, or wiped out by subtraction, or exorcised by expiation.[c] It is not an isolated act that can be detached from the self. It carries the weight of "I cannot have done this. But I have done it and I cannot undo it, because this is I." It is pervasive as anxiety is pervasive;[d] its focus is not a separate act, but revelation of the whole self. The thing that has been exposed is what I am.

To describe these experiences as loss of face or acting in an unsuitable role is inadequate, because these formulations are relatively external. The German language, as noted earlier, reflects the direction of the quality of shame, inseparable from the depths of the self, in contrast to guilt, as it reflects the similar distinction between anxiety and fear: *Ich schäme mich,* but *Ich bin schuldig; Ich ängste mich,* but *Ich fürchte etwas.* Guilt can be expiated. Shame, short of a transformation of the self, is retained. This transformation means, in Plato's words, a turning of the whole soul toward the light.

Piers' distinction between shame and guilt, quoted above, is rooted in the shattering of one's sense of self in shame, in the failure to reach one's ideal:*

> Whereas guilt is generated whenever a boundary . . . is touched or transgressed, shame occurs when a goal . . . is not being reached. It thus indicates a real "short-coming." Guilt anxiety accompanies transgression; shame, failure.
> . . . the Ego-Ideal is in continuous dynamic interfunction with the unconscious and conscious *awareness of the Ego's potentialities.*
> Shame . . . occurs whenever goals and images presented by the Ego-Ideal are not reached.[a]

With all the emphasis on codified guilt that is part of our Western heritage, there is abundant evidence in our literature of recognition of the distinction between specific acts that are, in a sense, detachable from the self because they may be punished or expiated and those acts and feelings that reveal the whole person. Alcibiades says of his feeling in the presence of Socrates:

> When I hear him my heart leaps in me more than that of the Corybantes; my tears flow at his words. . . . And with this man alone I have an experience which no one would believe was possible for me—the sense of shame. . . . Often I would be glad if I should not see him again in this world, but if this should happen I know very well that I should be more miserable than ever. . . .[b]

Othello makes clear the difference between shame in the Freud-Benedict sense of reaction to the ridicule of others,

> . . . to make me
> A fixed figure for the time of scorn
> To point his slow unmoving finger at![c]

and the far deeper, more unbearable wound which cuts to the center of the self,

* See pp. 166-71 for discussion of the relation between the self or ego, the self-image, and the ego ideal.

> . . . there where I have garner'd up my heart,
> Where either I must live or bear no life,
> The fountain from the which my current runs
> Or else dries up. . . .[a]

This cry of Othello's also points again to the relation between being overtaken by a situation of shame and a voluntary act of choice. The circumstances of Desdemona's supposed betrayal came upon Othello; the situation was not the result of an immediate act of choice. But he was in this situation because he was the kind of person he was, a person who had chosen Desdemona and chosen Iago.

This feeling of a crumpling or failure of the whole self appears in Dmitri Furmanov's description of his hero Klychkov, who has experienced cowardice in his first hours under fire.

> Oh! Shame, unspeakable, unutterable shame! It was bitter to realize that his heart had failed him in the first battle, that he had fallen short of his own expectations. Where had been the boldness, the heroism of which he had dreamed so much when he was still far from the front line?[b]

A similar sense of shame at failure to be what one thought one was, although no one else was aware of the incident, appears in a recent American volume of science fiction. The seventeen-year-old hero sees a Negro boy pursued by a man on horseback with the clear intent of riding him down. He did not hold on to the rein and delay the hunter:

> I had been immobilized by the fear of asserting my sympathies, my presumptions, against events.
>
> . . . Walking slowly down the road I experienced deep shame. I might, I could have saved someone from hurt; I had perhaps had the power for a brief instant to change the course of a whole life.
>
> . . . I couldn't excuse my failure on the grounds that action would have been considered outrageous. It would not have been considered outrageous by me.[c]

Samuel Stouffer describing the common experience of fear in battle—often known only to oneself—makes it clear that this failure to live up to one's expectations of oneself is related

not to one particular aspect of personality but to a whole cluster of ideals.*

> Conceptions of masculinity vary among different American groups, but there is a core which is common to most: courage, endurance and toughness, lack of squeamishness . . . avoidance of display of weakness in general, reticence about emotional or idealistic matters, and sexual competency. . . .
>
> A code as universal as "being a man" is very likely to have been deeply internalized. So the fear of failure in the role, as by showing cowardice in battle, could bring not only fear of social censure on this point as such, but also more central and strongly established fears related to sex-typing:
>
> . . . behavior in combat was recognized as a test of being a man . . . a man once in combat had to fight in order to keep his own self-respect: "Hell, I'm a soldier."[a]

In "The New Dress" Virginia Woolf shows how one incident takes on an unbearably wounding character because this single occasion partakes of and reveals what one's whole life has been and is. It was not only that Mabel's new yellow dress, so carefully contrived with the little dressmaker, stood out at Mrs. Dalloway's party as conspicuous, ridiculous, "not *right*." Since it was not right, it made Mabel question her feeling for Miss Milan, who had made it, and her own earlier happiness in the making of it; it made her question her "safe" marriage to Hubert, her "fretful, weak, unsatisfactory" motherhood, her "wobbly" feeling as a wife; her own appalling inadequacy; her cowardice; her "mean, water-sprinkled blood."[b]

Because of the pervasive and specifically unalterable character of experiences of shame, shame for one's parents can pierce deeper than shame for oneself, and sense of continuity with one's parents is correspondingly important. No matter how dis-

* Grinker and Spiegel say that men who leave combat because of overpowering anxiety are haunted by depression over failure to live up to their own and the group's standards of courageous performance. The effect of military service is, not only to create resentment of discipline and of curtailment of personal interest, but even more to lead to the incorporation of military demands into the personality of the soldier. (Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel, *Men Under Stress*, Blakiston, 1945, pp. 40, 114, 279.)

gusted I am with myself, in some respects I can perhaps change. But the fact that these are my parents, that I am the fruit of their loins, is unchangeable. "Shame in a kindred cannot be avoided," says a seventeenth-century proverb.

Myth and literature recognize the special character of shame felt by children for their parents. Noah's sons felt this shame when

> Noah . . . drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. . . . And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.[a]

Albany, upbraiding Goneril for her treatment of her father, says

> That nature which contemns its origin
> Cannot be bordered certain in itself.
> She that herself will sliver and disbranch
> From her material sap, perforce must wither
> And come to deadly use.[b]

Pierre's whole life and self were uprooted when he discovered that he had all his life been cherishing a false image of the integrity of his father.

> He looked up, and found himself fronted by the no longer wholly enigmatical, but still ambiguously smiling picture of his father . . . endure the smiling portrait he could not; and obeying an irresistible nameless impulse, he rose, and without unhanging it, reversed the picture on the wall.[c]

The Brothers Karamazov is a delineation of the varieties of shame that bound each son to his father. Elsewhere Dostoevski explores the same theme.

> Velchaninov . . . guessed that [Liza] was ashamed before *him,* that she was ashamed of her father's having so easily let her go with him, of his having, as it were, flung her into his keeping.[d]

Flora de Barral felt such shame for her father:

> The girl was like a creature struggling under a net. "But how can I forget she called my father a cheat and a swindler? It can't be true. How can it be true?"

> . . . Flora . . . who *felt the shame but did not believe in the guilt* of her father, retorted fiercely: "Nevertheless, I am as honourable as you are."[a] (Italics mine.)

The enormous perceptiveness of children in sensing unease or hypocrisy in their parents and their shame when they are aware that their parents are acting a part appears in *Anna Karenina:*

> The little girl well knew that there was trouble between her father and her mother, and that her mother could not be cheerful, and that her father ought to know it, and that he was dissembling when he questioned her so lightly. And she blushed for her father.[b]

Elizabeth Bennet "blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation" at her mother's improprieties at the Netherfield ball, but, because of her greater closeness to her father, felt an even deeper pang at his complacency when it seemed to her that "her family [had] made an agreement to expose themselves."[c]

For Virginia Woolf it was a terrible experience, when her father made a scene, to have to excuse him for being "so majestic and so unreasonable." "It was also belittling to his real dignity that they knew he would be sorry later on and would reproach himself bitterly and need to be comforted because he was such an unkind father."[d] Of the description of her father as Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* Virginia Woolf said, "I am more like him than [my mother] and therefore more critical."[e]

For a child of immigrant parents there is often acute conflict between the desire to look up to his parents and the shame he feels for the exposure of their different ways and their uncertainty and unseemliness in a strange land.[f] Estranged from both cultures he may manifest his own insecurity about where he belongs by overzealousness in taking on the ways of the school and the neighborhood alien to his elders, and by impatience with their foreignness and slowness of adaptation.

Less extreme than the predicament of the child of immigrant parents is the widely felt, if not widely acknowledged, shame of children who become aware that their parents are not secure

or at home in their social environment. This may occur with parents of modest financial means who are ill at ease with or accept favors from those who have more; or with parents who are gentle in a society that demands efficiency, or who place other values before achievement and success but show diffidence in doing so. Deference toward other persons on the part of parents, their not "knowing what to do" in a situation that calls for competence, their smiling acquiescence in place of strength, may arouse in their children pity or protectiveness when they want to give respect—a feeling hard to acknowledge and hard to bear.

Such feeling toward one's parents may be in varying degrees a more common human experience than we realize. The over-all quality of shame involves the whole life of a person, all that he is, including the parents who have created and nurtured that life.

Confronting of Tragedy

The import of shame for others may reach even deeper than shame for ourselves.[a] This is true not only of shame for our parents, but in very different ways of feeling shame with other persons less close to us, and, in still different ways, of feeling shame for and with our children.

Identifications with other persons in situations that make them feel ashamed lead beyond such experiences of shame as have been described to the confrontation of the human condition and the possibilities and the tragic limitations of man's lot. This confrontation may be the beginning of the realization of shame as revelation—of oneself, of one's society, and of the world—and of the transcending of shame.

Loss of trust, exposure, failure, the feeling of homelessness—these experiences of shame—become still more unbearable if they lead to the feeling that there is no home for anyone, anywhere. Paradoxically, shame, an isolating, highly personal experience is also peculiarly related to one's conception of the universe, and of one's place in it. Apprehension that one's own life may be cut off from others, empty, void of significance, is a terrifying thing; but fear that this same isolation is true for others, and that the world itself may hold no meaning is infinitely worse. Experience of shame may call into question, not only one's own adequacy and the validity of the codes of one's immediate society, but the meaning of the universe itself.

It is one thing to recognize the inevitable limitations of man's lot—that even the longest life of man is no more than a hundred years and ends in death; that death separates us from those we love; that in a single life we can realize only a few of the possibilities within us for creative work and love; that in imagination we can go backward and forward in time and space but are actually alive in only limited parts of the world and in only one age. It is a wholly different thing to say that life is nothing but tragedy, that life holds, or can discover, no meaning except that it leads toward death. We may not be able to affirm with St. Augustine that

> He who knows the Truth knows that [Unchangeable] Light; and he that knows it knoweth eternity. . . . I should more readily doubt that I live than that Truth [exists]. . . . For that truly is which remains immutably.[a]

But the demand to discover or to create significance in life asserts itself no less insistently. There are times when we feel that more than anything else in the world we should like to have—for just a few moments—the perspective of a God's-eye view of situations in which we are involved. Depending on initial premises, we can sort experiences this way or that with logic and validity. But what is the True, the Right, way to sort them? "I want to be there when every one suddenly understands what it has all been for," says Ivan Karamazov.

Feeling with others in situations of exposure, estrangement, forces us to face the questions of whether there is meaning and where truth and meaning lie. Lionel Trilling in his story "The Other Margaret" beautifully describes the way in which shame for another may lead to a questioning of meaning in life. Such