

The Failure of Shame in Shakespeare's Sonnets

This essay seeks to expand our understanding of shame in Shakespeare's Sonnets. Re-examining the Aristotelian definition upon which Shakespeare and his contemporaries relied, we find a richer and more ambivalent legacy than has usually been assumed. Of particular fascination to early modern culture were the extremes of shame: shamelessness and extreme shamefastness or 'naughty bashfulness'. These extremes inform the dialectic of the Sonnets, in which the moral inefficacy of shame is attributed both to the addressee's invulnerability to shame, and the speaker's unwillingness to expose him to it. The second part of the essay argues that George Eliot was particularly sensitive to the theorisation of shame in Shakespeare's Sonnets, which she read immediately before composing *Middlemarch*. Eliot's characterisation of Rosamond and Fred Vincy as respectively shameless and shamefast derives partly from Shakespeare. However, she develops an implicit critique of the Sonnets by enabling her characters to break through their solipsism and experience a redemptive shame.

In his study of shame in Shakespeare, Ewan Fernie observes its potential to 'purif[y] our bad consciousness, offering salvation from the tyranny and prison of the self'.¹ The Sonnets, however, prove a notable exception: 'The *tyranny of shame* in *The Sonnets* goes beyond anything else we have come across in early modern literature':

[the speaker] contrives to avoid shame by identifying instead with the image of the loved one. But he has acquired his lover as a second and better self only by amorous hyperbole and, as the rest of the sequence indicates, life is continually bringing him face to face with his real and (in his view) shameful self. Moreover, love gives no security against shame, for, since he feels so degraded and unattractive as to be entirely unlovable, he has no confidence in it ... The Sonnets unmask the pretending love of the sonneteer as selfish desire to escape from the *tyranny of shame*. (italics mine, 95, 91, 94)

Whilst this repeated phrase usefully exposes shame as a central theme in the Sonnets, it exerts its own coercive force, directing our attention to the speaker's humiliation and disgrace.

Arguably more urgent, however, is his attempt to provoke these feelings in the addressee.

Part of the subdued drama of the 1609 Quarto sequence is this attempted shaming of the young man,² sometimes subtle and ironic, at other times sarcastic and aggressive, producing only maddening implacability, except for one occasion when the addressee weeps. But if there is an affective drama being played out here, there is also an ethical one, as the speaker addresses the question of *why* his attempt to shame the beloved does not work. Is his rhetoric at fault, or is he the wrong person to bear witness to shame? Rather than tyranny, is it the demotic nature of shame, the fact that ‘All men make faults’ (35.5),³ which is to blame? What does shame have to do with love or intimacy? The following reading of the Sonnets extends an argument I have made elsewhere, that Shakespeare was more sceptical about the ethical efficacy of shame than critics have allowed, and that this is partly a response to a richer and more ambivalent literature of shame than he is usually thought to have known.⁴ Specifically, I will argue that the Sonnets invite interpretation through the two extremes of shame—shamelessness and excessive shamefastness—which exerted a particular fascination on early modern culture, and which are subtly performed by the speaker and addressee. The second part of the essay looks ahead to the Sonnets’ reception in the nineteenth century, a period ‘richer in shame than any since the Renaissance’ (Ferne, 232), to argue that George Eliot was particularly sensitive to this affect. Critics have only recently begun to explore the importance of shame in Eliot’s fiction, and this perspective has not yet extended to her interpretation of the Sonnets.⁵ But as I will show, Eliot expressed contempt for Shakespeare’s ‘abject’ lover in her Notebooks, and in *Middlemarch* (1871-2)—the novel she began immediately after reading the Sonnets—quotations from Sonnets 34 and 93 act as a foil to Eliot’s own ethical response to shame.

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Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* has often been blamed for inhibiting the serious discussion of shame in European culture until well into the sixteenth century. Werner L. Gundersheimer notes that

Aristotle's succinct or even perfunctory treatment of shame belittles its importance, placing it as a part of a relatively minor subset among the affects. Had shame been "foregrounded" there, its subsequent position in the intellectual history of the emotions would doubtless have been more prominent. The philosopher's decision to deny to shame the status of a virtue contributed further to its marginal role in the history of the emotions. Finally, Aristotle's view of shame as a simple matter, admitting of no problems, loose ends, or unresolved ambiguities, discouraged inquiry.⁶

Whilst Aristotle's refusal to define shame as a virtue certainly had far reaching effects, it is not true to say that his view of shame was 'simple' or without 'unresolved ambiguities', as recent analyses of the philosopher's work have shown.⁷ This misapprehension is partly based on our restricting ourselves to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, rather than examining the *Rhetoric* or the *Eudemian Ethics* which importantly expand Aristotle's thinking on shame. But even if we limit ourselves to this one text we find considerably more ambiguity than critics of early modern shame have acknowledged.⁸

In Book 4, section 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle denies shame ('*aidōs*') the status of a virtue. Not only is it a response to external opinion, specifically the 'fear of disrepute', it manifests its physiological origin through blushing, and is therefore a 'passion' ('*pathos*') rather than a 'state' ('*hexis*').⁹ As such, it ought never to be experienced by the mature man who should never perform a disgraceful action. Nevertheless, Aristotle also

argues for the moral and pedagogical function of shame. The young, who ‘live by passion’, may be taught through the prospective experience of shame to avoid wrongdoing. More intriguingly, in the case of the mature man, ‘Shame may be said to be conditionally a good thing; *if* a good man did such actions, he would feel disgraced’ (1781). We expect the virtuous man to possess the capacity for shame, even though he should never need to exercise it. Further endorsement that shame is not a virtue seems to be provided by its exclusion from the doctrine of the mean, according to which excellence lies between the deficiency and the excess of a particular quality. And yet, earlier in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle does include shame within this tripartite system:

There are also means in the passions and concerned with the passions; since shame is not an excellence, and yet praise is extended to the modest man. For even in these matters one man is said to be intermediate, and another to exceed, as for instance the bashful man who is ashamed of everything; while he who falls short or is not ashamed of anything at all is shameless, and the intermediate person is modest. (2.1750)

Aristotle uses the same word ‘*aidōs*’ for the shame that should never be felt by the mature man, and the modesty that will garner him praise.¹⁰

A further complexity emerges from the *Rhetoric*’s discussion of the normal circumstances in which we might feel shame. Although Aristotle has elsewhere condemned shamelessness (‘*anaischuntia*’) as unconditionally blameworthy (*NE* 1748), he now acknowledges that this too might be something experienced by the virtuous man:

... generally we feel no shame before those upon whose opinions we look down as untrustworthy (no one feels shame before small children or animals); nor are we

ashamed of the same things before intimates as before strangers, but before the former of what seem genuine faults, before the latter of what seem conventional ones.

(2.2206)

This distinction between true and conventional shame could be taken to imply that the latter is the performance expected by others, and therefore less genuine. It also opens up a potential gap between the political function of shame and its private, ethical meaning, as Marlene K. Sokolon observes:

On the one hand, conventional shame can be used as an emotional injunction that promotes culturally acceptable actions and civil obedience; on the other hand, since friendship can transcend conventional shame, it provides what we might call in contemporary language a 'space' where individuals can be honest in their judgements and challenge customary opinions of the shameful. (455)

Not only does intimacy affect the experience of shame, to feel true shame is an acknowledgement of intimacy, in ways that will be particularly suggestive for Shakespeare's Sonnets.

If critics of early modern literature have tended to underestimate the complexity of shame in Aristotle's work, this is not a mistake that Renaissance commentators made. Whilst shame is mentioned as a useful pedagogical tool for the young, it is also acknowledged as a divinely-instantiated form of conscience for the virtuous man. In the first Renaissance treatise on this topic, *Due Dialogi della Vergogna (Two Dialogues on Shame)* (Ferrara, 1592), Annibale Pocaterra begins with the Aristotelian assumption that 'shame is nothing more than fear of infamy'.¹¹ But although it lacks the ability to produce action and therefore cannot be a

virtue, shame acts ‘as a bridle, to pull us back from a dishonest act, or as a spur, to reawaken our sleeping habits so that we can be moved to action’ (51). Similarly, in his translation of Pierre de la Primaudaye’s *The French Academie* (1586, 1594), Thomas Bowes acknowledges the writer’s classical debt, suggesting that his intention ‘was the same that Aristotle had in writing his *Ethicks* or booke of Manners: namely, the practise of virtue in life, and not the bare knowledge and contemplation thereof in braine’.¹² In defending shame as a bodily affect, de la Primaudaye argues that ‘God hath placed this affection of shame in the nature of men, to the end it should be unto them as a bridle to stay them from committing vile things, and as a Iudge and Revenger to punish them after they have done such things’ (327).

Early modern writers also frequently incorporated shame into the doctrine of the mean. In Francesco Piccolomini’s treatise, the *Universa Philosophia de moribus* [*Universal philosophy concerning moral customs*] (Venice, 1583), shame, pity and indignation are defined as affections of the soul, dependent upon interaction with others and therefore not worthy the name of virtue. Nevertheless, under the headings ‘Defectio’, ‘Medium’ and Exuperantia’ we find the following:

<i>anaischuntos</i>	<i>aidos</i>	<i>hos kataplex aidoumenos</i>
Impudens	Verecundia	Tanquam obstupefactus, qui omni in re verecundatur
Impudentia	Pudor	Paviditas
		Obstupefactio ¹³

Piccolomini’s treatise had still not been translated into English by 1606, when Lodowick Bryskett laments that he must read this commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics* in the original.¹⁴ If,

like Bryskett, we translate these terms for ourselves, using Thomas Thomas's *Dictionarium linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (London, 1589), we find the mean producing a range of virtues, and unfolding the ambiguity of Aristotelian shame which is both fear of disgrace and modesty. 'Verecundia' means 'Shamefullnesse, bashfullnesse, demurenesse, modestie',¹⁵ whilst 'pudor' is even more expansive:

Moderation, letting the minde to doe anything wantonly or dishonestly, shamefastnes to say or doe dishonestlie, shame, bashfulness, chastity, virginitie; also a shamfull and dishonest act, uncleane, dishonest, dishonoured.

'Pudor' reminds us of the doubleness at the heart of 'shame', for both words contain their opposites: the quality designed to prohibit ill-doing i.e. shamefastness or modesty, the suffering incurred by disgrace, and the misdemeanour or vice for which that disgrace was incurred. But what seems to have been particularly concerning to early modern commentators were those extremes which sit on either side of shame, namely 'Impudentia', the quality of 'unshamefastnesse, saucinesse, shamelesnesse', and 'Obstupefactio', 'to be abashed, astonied or dismaid'. Aristotle had paid almost no attention to these extremes. In the *Rhetoric*, if shame is 'pain or disturbance in regard to bad things, whether present, past or future, which seem likely to involve us in discredit ... shamelessness [is] contempt or indifference in regard to these same bad things' (2204). The definition of extreme shamefastness is equally vague: 'he who thinks of everyone's [opinion] alike is shy' (*EE* 1954), 'the bashful man ... is ashamed of everything' (*NE* 1750). Rather than working from the centre to the periphery as Aristotle does, however, early modern treatises on shame tend to focus on the extremes.

In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Robert Burton identifies shamelessness as a particular problem of the age:

I know there be many base, impudent, brazen-faced roagues, that will ... be mooved with nothing, take no infamy or disgrace to heart, laugh at all: let them be proved perjured, stigmatized, convict roagues, theeves, traitors, loose their eares, be whipped, branded, carted, pointed at, hissed, reviled and derided ... what care they.¹⁶

This perception of shamelessness was partly blamed on the influence of Niccolò Machiavelli. In *The Second Parte of The French Academie*, de la Primaudaye observes that ‘the students of *Machiauel*’ are in the front ranks of atheism:

This bad fellowe whose works are no lesse accounted of among his followers, then were *Apollos* Oracles among the Heathen, nay then the sacred Scriptures are among sound Christians, blusheth not to belch out these horrible blasphemies against pure religion.¹⁷

His influence on the early modern stage is particularly evident in the work of Christopher Marlowe, whose shameless protagonists, Fernie argues, indirectly prompt Hamlet’s despairing cry, ‘O shame, where is thy blush?’, and Vindice’s prayer to Impudence in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*: ‘Strike thou my forehead into dauntless marble,/ Mine eyes to steady sapphires; turn my visage,/ And if I must needs glow, let me blush inward’.¹⁸ As the latter suggests, shamelessness was an important aspect of early modern physiognomy. In *The Second Parte*, de la Primaudaye avers that a man’s character can be read in his face: ‘if the heart bee proude, unchaste, loose, impudent, and lascivious, the looke and countenance of the

eyes will openly bewray the same' (129-30). The troubling exception to this rule is the shameless or impudent man whose sin should express itself in the cheeks or forehead which is the seat of shame, but does not.

At the other end of the spectrum is excessive shamefastness. Having been conventionally associated with female chastity, shamefastness was increasingly proscribed for elite men competing for honour and office in the Renaissance court. As Tiffany Hoffman argues in her study of early modern shyness,

Fears of shame and social dishonour were becoming engrained in the emotional and social life of the courtier as a disciplinary method used to control corporeal and psychic unruliness, maintain public reputation, and prevent social disgrace. However, as the frequent allusions to the metaphoric bridle of shame suggest, such fears appear to have been escalating to the point that shamefastness—itsself a prominent mode of emotional governance and ethical restraint—became excessive and unruly. (68-9)¹⁹

This danger is hinted at by Guyon's encounter with Shamefastness in Book 2, Canto 9 of *The Faerie Queene*. When Guyon addresses the blushing damsel at the Castle of Alma, he causes her further distress:

She answerd nought, but more abasht for shame,
Held downe her head, the whiles her louely face,
The flashing blood with blushing did inflame,
And the strong passion mard her modest grace,
That *Guyon* meruayld at her vncouth cace; (43.1-5)²⁰

As the knight of Temperance, it is not surprising that Guyon should encounter Shamefastness, since this is a passion which Thomas Aquinas had identified as crucial to preserving that virtue.²¹ However, the excessive bashfulness displayed by the lady is socially inhibiting, and ‘mar[s]’ her ‘modest grace’. Moreover, Guyon’s response on being told that she represents the ‘fountaine of your modestee’ (43.8), which is to blush and turn away, implies that he too might be in danger of falling into excess.

Social inhibition apart, the main danger of shamefastness was susceptibility to another’s will. In the essay ‘De Vitiosa Verecundia’ (*Moralia* Bk 7), translated by Philemon Holland in 1603 as ‘Of Unseemely and Naughty Bashfulness’, Plutarch defines ‘dysōpia’ as ‘a foolish and rusticall shamefastnes; no evill signe in it selfe, howbeit the cause and occasion of evill and naughtinesse’.²² In their dread of chastisement, bashful men submit to the importunity of others and commit shameless deeds, but they also fail in their duty to their friend, and by extension to their magistrate or prince, ‘clos[ing] up their mouths, that in counsels and consultations should deliver their opinion frankly’ (191). In this respect, the bashful man is likened to the flatterer, and his amendment begins with ceasing to give excessive praise or blandishment, for ‘how can you reprove [your friend] when he shall commit some grosse fault in greater matters ... [as] in his carriage in wedlocke, or in politicke government?’ (166). Plutarch’s essay would influence the work of many early modern writers on shame, including Michel de Montaigne,²³ and Pierre de la Primaudaye—the latter’s essay ‘Of Shame, Shamefastnes, & Dishonour’ spends more time analysing naughty bashfulness than virtuous shame. Shakespeare was familiar with the work of all three writers, and I would argue that the Sonnets are intriguingly implicated in this post-Aristotelian debate, which assumes the polarity between shamelessness and extreme shamefastness, only to collapse the difference.

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The Sonnets' struggle with shame does not fully emerge until the middle of the sequence, as reproduced in the 1609 Quarto. At one extreme is the heterogeneous collection we still refer to as the 'Dark Lady' sonnets. These lyrics express the speaker's self-disgust, but an awareness of 'Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame' does nothing to inhibit desire for that action. As far as shaming the female addressee is concerned, her foulness and blackness are described as unalterable facts,²⁴ producing shame in the speaker who perceives this and yet continues to love her. Nor would there be any benefit to the speaker in her redemption, which would only interfere with her ability to satisfy his lust. At the other end of the spectrum lie the 'procreation sonnets', which assume the pedagogical value of shame for the young, warning that to waste beauty will bring one to a shameful reckoning:

Then being asked where all thy beauty lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
To say, within thine own deep-sunken eyes,
Were an all-eating shame and thriftless praise. (2.5-8)

If to be 'contracted to thine own bright eyes' and to 'feed ... thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel' (1.5, 6) are forms of self-consumption, then the experience of 'all-eating shame' reinforces the point. It might even gesture towards the somatic experience of shame in which, according to Pocaterra, 'the heart contracts and calls the spirits back to itself', potentially suffocating the heart.²⁵ Yet shame as conceived by these lyrics is unlikely to prove fatal. Although he is asked to feel ashamed of his offences against 'the world', the young man is mainly upbraided for not loving himself more. Although he is encouraged to

perceive the worm i'th'bud, the allusions to his future decay are not freighted with the despair of later sonnets.²⁶ If they invoke the particular shame associated with mortality in this period, they also imply that if the addressee makes copies of his beauty he can avoid the experience of shame (and of death).²⁷ In this respect, the addressee's ego is engaged, but little of his moral sense. And yet, the impression of a shameless or impudent addressee begins to be hinted at here. Sonnet 9 ends with the rebuke 'No love toward others in that bosom sits/ That on himself such murd'rous shame commits', a theme which is repeated at the start of Sonnet 10: 'For shame, deny that thou bear'st love to any/ Who for thyself art so unprovident ...' The expostulation 'For shame' suggests not only 'Shame on you if you don't' but also 'Your sense of shame should impel you';²⁸ it both assumes that the addressee has a conscience which can be activated by the speaker's words, and allows that this might not be the case.

The expectation that the addressee will feel shame is explored in two subsequent sonnet clusters, 33-36 and 93-96. The first begins with the notion that the addressee has been stained and incurs disgrace, which affects (and potentially stains) the speaker. But it concludes with the speaker actively taking on himself the young man's 'blots', so as to preserve his public reputation: 'I love thee in such sort,/ As thou being mine, mine is thy good report' (13-4). The second group begins with the suspicion of corruption ('If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show'), moving to frank avowal of the addressee's 'shame'. Although his beauty and rank allow him to outface disgrace, he may extend this privilege too far and ruin both their reputations: 'As thou being mine, mine is thy good report'. Whatever the reason for this repeated couplet,²⁹ it reinforces the repetitive action of these two sequences: the speaker bears witness to the addressee's sins and the emotional suffering they cause him, before acknowledging his own complicity in the perpetuation of those sins and in the preservation of the subject's reputation. The fact that the process repeats itself exemplifies how shame has failed. Whilst both sequences repay further discussion in terms of the

paradigms of shamelessness and naughty bashfulness, 93-96 is particularly perceptive on the problems with shame that create and transcend those categories.

Early modern faces were supposed to convey their subject's emotions, acting as 'the image, messenger, and witness of all the affections of the heart, insomuch that it is very hard for him, do what he can, to cover and conceale them' (*The Second Parte*, 130). In Sonnet 93, Shakespeare's speaker confronts a face he cannot read:

So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
Like a deceived husband; so love's face
May still seem love to me, though altered new,
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place;
For there can live no hatred in thine eye,
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change.
In many's looks, the false heart's history
Is writ in moods, and frowns, and wrinkles strange.
But heaven in thy creation did decree
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;
Whate'er thy thoughts, or thy heart's workings be,
Thy looks should nothing thence, but sweetness tell.

How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,
If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show.

This sonnet develops an argument for the incompatibility of beauty and shame. If 'disgrace' could mean 'disfigurement, loss of (dis-) beauty (grace), blemish',³⁰ extreme beauty allows the accused to out-brave blots or stains that would disfigure anyone else. The beloved's

unruffled surface thus becomes a further witness of his uniqueness, denying the ravages of Time that will be wreaked on that face elsewhere in the sequence. At the same time, his condition is morally troubling, for it contradicts another truism, that ‘as beautie causeth vertue to appeare more faire, when it is joined therewith, so contrariwise, it maketh vice more ugly and loathesome to looke upon’ (*The Second Parte*, 280). The only kind of person whose face would not respond to the immorality of their actions is ‘such as haue lost all shame’, for example, the harlot and the murderer (130).

Rather than simply blame the shameless addressee, however, Sonnet 93 does something more interesting. One feature of shame which seems to have remained consistent across the centuries is that its ‘essence ... lies in the look, in the disparaging or reproving regard’.³¹ Silvan S. Tomkins observes the victim’s body language:

By dropping his eyes, his eyelids, his head and sometimes the whole upper part of his body, the individual calls a halt to looking at another person, particularly the other person’s face, and to the other person’s looking at him, particularly at his face.³²

In Sonnet 93, it is the speaker who averts his gaze. This is partly an effect of the poem’s circumstances, which suggest a detached meditation on the beloved’s face, rather than immediate physical proximity. Some sonnets seem to have been written at a distance,³³ representing an obvious disadvantage to the act of shaming which presumes an eye of scorn. Although it might be argued that one can as easily feel shame in the perusal of a private letter as in the discovery of one’s disgrace in public, it may take something more to make this reader feel shame. That this something more cannot be produced by the speaker is partly attributable to his own extreme shamefastness. David Schalkwyk has explored the class tension which underpins the Sonnets, and their struggle ‘to move from ... the reciprocal but

unequal engagement of master and servants as an intimate or affective relation to the ethical equivalence of lovers as friends'.³⁴ To some extent, the limitations on Shakespeare's speaker as servant and lover overlap here, as Heather Dubrow puts it, 'The practical demands of the patronage system (one does not directly criticize one's benefactor) accord to the psychological demands of love (one does not express or perhaps even acknowledge too many flaws in the beloved)'.³⁵ However, in the context of a discussion of shame and shamelessness, Shakespeare may well have been reminded of Plutarch's warning that the bashful man's over-praise of his friend or superior will inhibit his ability to reprove him, and thence his capacity to produce shame. With his extreme susceptibility to reproach, compounded by fear of amorous rejection, the speaker averts his gaze. He refuses to see the truth in the beloved's face, preferring generalisations about what that face can and cannot show. Perhaps inadvertently, the dropped gaze suggests the speaker's shame at the shamefastness which inhibits him from speaking the truth.

In this context, the unease produced by praise in Sonnet 94 takes on an additional layer of complexity:

They that have power to hurt, and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow:
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others, but stewards of their excellence. (1-8)

Whilst this sonnet appears to blame the addressee for not living up to this ideal and/or warns him of the consequences ('Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds'), the ideal itself is compromised. It is not simply that to be 'unmoved' seems ungenerous, it also ties in with de la Primaudaye's description of the shameless man as one who 'remaineth inflexible and unmoveable' and 'giveth a great argument of a very blockish and senceles nature' (*The French Academie*, 106). This sonnet perpetuates the confusion between the beloved's appearance of beauty and virtue, and the possibility that he maintains a façade, like the shameless man whose appearance is never altered by the natural effusions of shame (106).

In Sonnet 95, the addressee's shameful condition becomes more explicit and the speaker is able to look it in the eye. And yet, the rhythm of the opening sentence, in which the word 'shame' is subdued among a row of unaccented syllables, re-stages beauty's triumph:

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!
O, in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose!
That tongue that tells the story of thy days,
Making lascivious comments on thy sport,
Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise;
Naming thy name blesses an ill report.
O, what a mansion have those vices got
Which for their habitation chose out thee,
Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot,
And all things turn to fair that eyes can see!

Take heed, dear heart, of this large privilege;
The hardest knife ill-used doth lose his edge.

Here, the speaker reveals the beloved's vices even as he offers images of concealment: 'O in what sweets does thou thy sins enclose.' Yet the revelation is predicated on the fact that shame has already failed once: the 'ill report' has had a negligible effect, as reflected in the structure of the sonnet where lines 5-8 are followed by a repetition of the sentiments (and expostulations) of the first quatrain, 'O what a mansion have those vices got ...' Having failed to move the speaker with the ethical and religious language of 'sins', 'vices' and 'lascivious ... sport', or with the threat to social reputation suggested by 'shame', 'dispraise' and 'tongue', the couplet warns that disease might curtail the addressee's pleasure. The intimacy implied by 'dear heart' is cancelled out by the final truism, which allows an escape into generalisation.

If Sonnet 95 reinforces the perception of the addressee as invulnerable to shame, it also exposes the inefficacy of the shamefast speaker, through his use of irony and the commonplace. Irony in the procreation sonnets may prevent the addressee from taking offence at a more explicit upbraiding.³⁶ However, in later sonnets which describe the speaker's emotional attachment to the addressee, it becomes more elusive, to the extent that critics have often disagreed about where to find it.³⁷ As John Klause points out, 'irony and ingenuousness coexist in a lover whose self-martyrdom is at once real and strategic, generous and self-interested, noble and tainted, variable and utterly single-minded'.³⁸ The Sonnets' concluding couplets have also come in for criticism, 'seem[ing] to fail because they offer pat solutions to difficult problems ... embody[ing] both the all-too-human desire to seek finality and certainty and the all-too-human difficulties of doing so' (Dubrow, 225). Couplets are the

space where we most frequently encounter the truism or commonplace. In *De Inventione*, Cicero recommended the use of a 'common topic' when the audience was already convinced:

That is certainly the moment when it is permissible to say something "common", when some passage peculiar to the case has been developed with great care, and the spirit of the audience is being refreshed for what is to come, or is being roused to passion now that the argument has been concluded.³⁹

Similarly, in the Sonnets the commonplace often functions as a closing-off of argument, enabled by its avoidance of the personal and particular. We should recall that just as Cicero expresses reservations about what is 'common', so the Sonnets use that term pejoratively throughout: 'that thou dost common grow' (69); 'The earth can yield me but a common grave' (81); 'And sweets grown common lose their dear delight' (102).⁴⁰

That commonplaces are partly to blame for the addressee's lack of shame is averred in Sonnet 35:

No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done:
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud,
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.
All men make faults, and even I in this,
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense,
(Thy adverse party is thy advocate)

And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence:

Such civil war is in my love and hate

That I an accessory needs must be

To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

The sonnet opens with a series of commonplaces which encourage the youth to accept his corruption as both natural and inevitable—every rose has its thorn and fountain mud—and to be consoled thereby. The echo of the early modern proverb ‘The canker soonest eats the fairest rose’ even allows for this to be taken as a compliment. The acknowledgement that ‘All men make faults’, however, recalling the truism ‘Every man has his faults’, seems to cause an epiphany in the speaker, or to signal an ironic distancing between past and present selves. As a ‘maker’ of poesy, he is reminded of his frequent exculpation of the young man: ‘and even I in this’ i.e. not only in this poem but in this observation. ‘Authorising thy trespass with compare’ looks back to those opening comparisons with roses, fountains, clouds and eclipses, with new contempt.⁴¹ Indeed, Helen Vendler argues that we should ‘mentally put in quotation marks the first four patently unconvincing arguments’ (185). Not only have these commonplaces aided in the corruption of the addressee, who has been prevented thereby from feeling a potentially redemptive shame, they have also corrupted the speaker, who has deceived himself about the nature of the youth’s sins. The fragile distinction between ‘sensual fault’ and ‘sense’, ‘adverse’ and ‘advocate’, suggests that in the process of describing their opposition the speaker finds his own language drawing them into compare. The only distinction is that where the speaker is naturally prone to shame, the addressee is not, but even this may change through the latter’s corrupting influence.

Sonnet 121 arguably brings to a culmination the problems of shamelessness, naughty bashfulness and shame in Shakespeare’s sonnets:

'Tis better to be vile, than vile esteemed,
 When not to be, receives reproach of being,
 And the just pleasure lost which is so deemed
 Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing:
 For why should others' false adulterate eyes
 Give salutation to my sportive blood?
 Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
 Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
 No;—I am that I am, and they that level
 At my abuses reckon up their own:
 I may be straight, though they themselves be bevel;
 By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown;
 Unless this general evil they maintain,
 All men are bad, and in their badness reign.

This sonnet blames the failure of shame on a degraded audience, whose 'false adulterate eyes' cannot produce the necessary 'disparaging or reproving regard'. In this respect, the sonnet echoes a passage from the *Rhetoric*, in which Aristotle argued that 'we only care what opinion is held of us because of the people who form that opinion' (2205), or, as Bernard Williams puts it, people 'need not be ashamed of being poorly viewed, if the view is that of an observer for whom they feel contempt'.⁴² But to condemn a corrupt audience is not necessarily to exonerate the speaker. John Kerrigan describes Sonnet 121 as 'a complaint about the way love can be marred by the insinuations of ignorant onlookers "and the legitimate pleasure of an honourable affection is lost because judged vile not by those who experience it but by those who look on"'.⁴³ Yet there is no suggestion that the speaker is

thinking about love: the sonnet might equally be viewed as a *carpe diem* lyric from a seducer whose tainted reputation precedes him. Shakespeare's speaker at no point declares himself to be virtuous, referring to 'my frailties', 'my abuses' and 'my deeds'—'I may be straight' is hardly a ringing endorsement of his virtue. Where Kerrigan's position is hardest to maintain is in the appropriation of God's words to Moses from Exodus: 'I am that I am', which Kerrigan describes as being 'used ruefully, as though "I'm not God, but I'm less flawed than some think"'. Asserting his integrity, the poet puts himself as far from Iago (the arch-misconstruer of others' affairs) as possible' (342). Yet one might argue that if he avoids the Iago analogy then that with Richard III is harder to escape. Not only does Richard declare 'I am myself alone ... I am I',⁴⁴ but his opening rejection of 'sportive tricks' (1.1.14) is potentially echoed in line 6's 'sportive blood'. In a recent discussion of shame in Shakespeare's plays, Richard is singled out as an exemplar of 'pathological shamelessness'.⁴⁵

Although the speaker acknowledges the pain of public shame—'the reproach of being'—his urging one to commit the vile(ness) of which one stands accused suggests that he defines shame purely in terms of reputation. If "'Tis better to be vile' than suffer the shame without the pleasure, then disgrace is disconnected from any set of moral values. This tells us something intrinsic about the speaker himself which gets to the heart of what is shocking about Sonnet 121: the speaker sounds like the young man he was attempting to shame. One might almost imagine the sonnet as having been written for him to circulate among his 'private friends'. The effect within the sequence is to endorse the argument of Sonnet 35, namely that by defending the male addressee the speaker has been corrupted by him.⁴⁶ More specifically, Sonnet 121's use of commonplaces expands on Sonnet 35's concern at having 'authorised thy trespass by compare'. In the final couplet, the speaker imagines himself being brought to task by the saying 'All men are bad', but he describes not only the condition but the statement itself as 'this general evil'. The truism is so morally enervating and so

impersonal that it closes off the redemptive possibilities of shame. Who can be bothered to improve him/herself if they are fundamentally bad, and if the audience capable of bestowing praise or blame is flawed also? For Lars Engle, this couplet does indeed raise the spectre of a world without shame. It figures 'a dismaying alternative community, one which would not be moved by the rest of the sonnet because its members lack the internalized gaze of a shaming authority and thus lack shame'.⁴⁷ The speaker of the Sonnet avoids this horror, Engle argues, because he has gained 'self-understanding through shame', developing a relationship with the 'ego ideal' which is no longer reliant on external authority (195). And yet, this nightmare of shamelessness arguably already exists—as we have seen in sonnets 95 and 35. Moreover, the final couplet condemns the speaker since he was the one who used the excuse: 'All men make faults'. By offering only partial reflections of the subject's viciousness, he has encouraged him not to feel shame, and in the process taught himself to avoid shame also. The excessively shamefast man has become shameless, in a dissolving of distinctions anticipated by Plutarch and de la Primaudaye, who warned that the excess of shame 'hindreth men from effecting all good, wholesome and honest things, insomuch that of it selfe it is able to procure unto us losse, dishonour and infamie' (*The French Academie*, 109).

This is where Shakespeare's Sonnets seem to leave shame, but the moral collapse performed here would prompt acts of re-examination and restitution by later readers. The nineteenth-century novel, for example, was 'seldom unconcerned with shame in one way or another ... The novelists of the century repeatedly explore situations conducive to shame, the defences against it available to protagonists, and the salutary effects on the community when wrongdoing coincides with shame'.⁴⁸ One novelist in particular preoccupied with this affect is George Eliot, though like Shakespeare, she was more engaged with the negative consequences of shame than with its social and moral value. Paradoxically, the more positive view of shame that emerges from her later fiction is indebted to Shakespeare's Sonnets.

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George Eliot was described in her lifetime as ‘the female Shakespeare’,⁴⁹ and an acute sensitivity to shame is one quality they may have had in common. Shakespeare’s final illness may have been hastened by the shame of his son-in-law’s prosecution for adultery, and death-by-shame recurs in his dramatic works.⁵⁰ Eliot acknowledged her own dread of rebuke, which resulted in periods of depression, and her novels also feature examples of death-by-shame.⁵¹ Moreover, whilst both Shakespeare and Eliot would likely have recognised the ‘cultures of shame’ within which the other lived and wrote,⁵² they also shared some of the same theoretical material: Eliot quotes from both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plutarch’s *Moralia* in her Notebooks.⁵³ What Shakespeare did not have the benefit of reading is Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Les Confessions* (1789). This was the book which Eliot described as having ‘first awakened her to deep reflection’,⁵⁴ and its obsessive recurrence to the writer’s shame may partly account for its appeal. In Book 2, Rousseau describes his theft of a piece of ribbon from his employer and how he shifted the blame onto another servant:

Shortly afterwards I was stricken with remorse, but the presence of so many people was stronger than my repentance. It was not that I was afraid of being punished but that I was afraid of being put to shame; and I feared shame more than death, more than crime, more than anything in the world. I would have wanted the earth to swallow me up and bury me within its depths. It was shame alone, unconquerable shame, that prevailed over everything and was the cause of all my impudence; and the more criminal I became, the more my terror of having to admit it made me bold ... The confusion that seized my whole being robbed me of any other feeling. If I had been given time to collect myself, I would unquestionably have admitted everything ... But when I needed encouragement, all I received was intimidation.⁵⁵

Like Rousseau, Eliot tended to reject the Aristotelian idea of shame as a moral and pedagogical tool, emphasizing the destructiveness of a shaming culture when it meets those susceptible to intense shamefastness. This is particularly notable in *Adam Bede* (1859), wherein Arthur Donnithorne's susceptibility to shame prevents him from confessing to Reverend Irwine, and Hetty Sorrel's terror of disgrace leads to the murder of her infant child. As Mary E. Bell observes, 'shame is the engine of repression: the secret desires that we are too ashamed to admit even to ourselves, much less confess to someone else, are what prove to be our undoing' (164). Bell focuses on Eliot's early novels, but we might extend this interrogation of shame to *Middlemarch* and, perhaps more surprisingly, Eliot's response to the Sonnets.

On 31st July 1869, Eliot 'read through all Shakspeare's Sonnets'.⁵⁶ Two days later, she began writing *Middlemarch*. The Notebooks from this period record Eliot's predominantly negative view of the Sonnets—that they were over-rated, artificial and 'wearisome'⁵⁷—but although her notes fail to mention 'shame', they suggest that this was an aspect of the Sonnets that caught her attention.⁵⁸ Singling out 56 and 57 for dispraise, Eliot comments: 'Some of the sonnets are painfully abject. [Shakespeare] adopts the language which might be taken to describe the miserable slavery of oppressed wives' (211). In the speaker's struggle not to blame, Eliot catches something of the effeminacy deplored by Plutarch: 'This excessive shamefastness ... overspreadeth and covereth them who are not manly but faint-hearted and effeminate, not suffering them once to dare, to deny, or gainsay anything' (164). However, it is in the chapter headings of *Middlemarch* which borrow from the Sonnets that we find Eliot's further interrogation of the Sonnets' shame. These quotations are not related to the main shame plot—Bulstrode's murder of his blackmailer, Raffles, and subsequent disgrace—but the minor examples of Rosamond and Fred Vincy, whose beauty

and narcissism seem to have associated them in Eliot's mind with the male beloved of Shakespeare's Sonnets.⁵⁹ Their relationship to shame seems to me a part of this association. Not only do they loosely fulfil the roles of shamelessness and excessive shamefastness, but they allow Eliot to re-examine the conditions under which shame might be a positive moral experience.

Chapter LVIII, in which Lydgate confesses to Rosamond their financial troubles, opens with an extract from Sonnet 93:

“For there can live no hatred in thine eye,
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change:
In many's looks the false heart's history
Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange;
But Heaven in thy creation did decree
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;
Whate'er thy thoughts or thy heart's workings be,
Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.”

—SHAKESPEARE: *Sonnets*.⁶⁰

This quotation acts as an ironic commentary on what follows,⁶¹ for Eliot forces Lydgate to discover the ugliness beneath Rosamond's beautiful surface—her self-centredness, her stubbornness, her total lack of empathy—and thereby reveals the moral cowardice of the Sonnet speaker who persists in his self-deception. Rosamond's imperturbable surface seems closely modelled on that of the Sonnets' beloved: '[she] was silent and did not smile again; but the lovely curves of her face looked good-tempered enough without smiling' (568-9). Moreover, Rosamond's pride at concealing her feelings ('[she] had no scowls and had never

raised her voice: she was quite sure that no one could justly find fault with her', 579), also recalls Sonnet 94, a lyric which Eliot included as one of her favourites in the Notebooks. Its ambivalent praise of those who are 'the lords and owners of their faces', who 'moving others are themselves as stone', resonates with Rosamond's self-praise. And yet, Eliot also denies the possibility that Rosamond is shameless or cannot be moved. When Lydgate makes this assumption, the narrator brings him up short: '[He] was too hasty in attributing insensibility to her; after her own fashion, she was sensitive enough, and took lasting impressions' (579). More specifically, Rosamond is not incapable of shame—she 'colour[s] deeply' (581) at the prospect of society knowing their financial troubles—rather, she is ashamed for the wrong reasons. After informing the reader that Rosamond's baby died after being born prematurely, the narrator relates how

This misfortune was attributed entirely to her having persisted in going out on horseback one day when her husband had desired her not to do so; *but it must not be supposed that she had shown temper on the occasion, or rudely told him that she would do as she liked.* (566-7, italics mine)

This ambiguous comment points in two directions. Either the reader would be wrong to think this, though it actually happened—Rosamond would wish us to draw a veil over such unbecoming conduct—or, one would be wrong to think this because it did not happen, echoing Rosamond's belief that she always behaves impeccably. The presence of Sonnet 93 might incline us to the latter reading, but we cannot be sure. Michal Peled Ginsburg has discussed Eliot's use of free indirect discourse in *Middlemarch*, such that 'one cannot tell which are the author's words and which are those of the character ... The text thus does not have a clear position of authority'.⁶² The Sonnets often give us a similar sensation, suggesting

a poetic voice behind the speaker, which ironizes what he says, but which is sometimes silenced by the speaker's naïve devotion. But perhaps the primary effect of the observation 'It must not be supposed that she had shown temper ...' is the ironic realisation that Rosamond's pride obscures the thing that should really give her shame. This is not her display of temper, but of coldness and lack of feeling.

By contrast, Rosamond's brother, Fred, is more susceptible to shame, but again not necessarily in the right way. Fred's response to the discovery that he cannot pay the debt for which Mr Garth acted as surety is surprisingly courageous. He immediately confesses to Mr and Mrs Garth, and then pays a visit to Mary. Indeed, the narrator feels it necessary to account for this behaviour: 'it is probable that but for Mary's existence and Fred's love for her, his conscience would have been much less active both in previously urging the debt on his thought and in impelling him not to spare himself after his usual fashion ...' (237). Nevertheless, the selfishness which emerges through Fred's shamefastness, his pain at having damaged his own reputation in the eyes of other people, does not for Eliot prove to be a morally enabling effect but rather an extension of the lack of regard for others which prompted the crime in the first place. Time and again, Fred focuses on himself: 'I am come to tell something that I am afraid will give you a bad opinion of me' (243); 'You will always think me a rascal now' (245); 'I know you will never think well of me any more ... You can never forgive me' (248), until Mary Garth expresses perhaps some of Eliot's own frustration when she bursts out:

"What does it matter whether I forgive you? ... Would that make it any better for my mother to lose the money she has been earning by lessons for four years, that she might send Alfred to Mr Hanmer's? Should you think all that pleasant enough if I forgave you?" (266)

It is at this point that the full impact of the quotation from Sonnet 34, at the head of Chapter XXIV, is felt:

“Th’offender’s sorrow brings but small relief
To him who wears the strong offence’s cross.”

—SHAKESPEARE: *Sonnets*. (236)

This extract frames what Fred begins to discover about his disgrace, and what Eliot argues about the process of shame more generally, that it is only morally beneficial if it becomes mingled with guilt i.e. with a sense of what one might have done to someone else and how that might be repaired.⁶³

Curiously enough, [Fred’s] pain in the affair beforehand had consisted almost entirely in the sense that he must seem dishonourable, and sink in the opinion of the Garths: he had not occupied himself with the inconvenience and possible injury that his breach might occasion them, for this exercise of the imagination on other people’s needs is not common with hopeful young gentlemen. Indeed we are most of us brought up in the notion that the highest motive for not doing a wrong is something irrespective of the beings who would suffer the wrong. But at this moment he suddenly saw himself as a pitiful rascal who was robbing two women of their savings.
(244)

But if the extract from Sonnet 34 reinforces this message, Eliot's refusal to quote any more of that sonnet is almost as eloquent. Sonnet 34 is a notable exception among the sonnets of shame, both in its tone of direct accusation, and its successful elicitation of remorse:

Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,
And make me travel forth without my cloak,
To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way,
Hiding thy brav'ry in their rotten smoke?
Tis not enough that through the cloud thou break,
To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face,
For no man well of such a salve can speak
That heals the wound, and cures not the disgrace;
Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief,
Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss,
Th'offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
To him that bears the strong offense's cross.

Ah, but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,
And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.

The addressee seems close to a morally-beneficial experience of shame—forced to 're-examine what [he] is and ... how [he] is related to others' (Williams, 94). Yet the shamer intervenes, dismissing the idea that there is any need for introspection, and reaffirming the beloved's inherent worth. Whilst this is partly suggestive of the affection of the speaker, who cannot bear to see the beloved weep, it might also express his extreme shamefastness, such that he is ashamed at his own unworthy capacity to elicit tears. It is not surprising that Eliot

should omit this final couplet. Its imagery of tears as pearls is inappropriate, given that the chapter explores Fred's shame at impoverishing the Garths: tears cannot 'ransom' his ill deeds because if they could then he would be able to extricate himself from his debt. But more importantly, Eliot rejects the capitulation of Shakespeare's 'abject' speaker, further suggesting where she thinks the process of shame in the Sonnets has gone awry. In the Vincy sections of *Middlemarch*, shame is defined not by general opinion, or by what a select group of peers thinks, but by a single person whose judgement mingled with pity transforms shame into a morally-redemptive state. This is obviously the case for Fred. When Mary relents towards him, his relief and the possibility of hope are described in Sonnet terms: 'Fred felt as if the clouds had parted and a gleam had come' (250). It is partly this that enables him to survive the infection he catches from the insalubrious streets of Houndsley, which we might easily read as Fred becoming sick of shame. Purified by this near-death experience, he undertakes a process of mortification by apprenticeship which, for Mary at least, proves him worthy of marriage. More surprising perhaps is the transformation of Rosamond's shamelessness when she encounters Dorothea. The chapter in which Rosamond reveals the truth about her relationship with Ladislaw was apparently one with which Eliot struggled, showing a high number of revisions.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, it stands as testament to Eliot's cautious optimism about the right kind of shame, developed through the Sonnets' wrong kind.

Dorothea's face had become animated, and as it beamed on Rosamond very close to her, she felt something like bashful timidity before a superior, in the presence of this self-forgetful ardour. She said, with blushing embarrassment, "Thank you, you are very kind." (783)

Comparison of this passage from the 1874 text with the manuscript shows that Eliot toned down the adulation afforded Dorothea, and heightened Rosamond's shame: rather than 'awe of a supernatural presence', the latter feels 'bashful timidity before a superior' (Beaty, 115). The explanation for Rosamond's uncharacteristic confession, 'The blame of what happened is entirely mine', follows thus:

Rosamond had delivered her soul under impulses which she had not known before. She had begun her confession under the subduing influence of Dorothea's emotion; and as she went on she had gathered the sense that she was repelling Will's reproaches, which were still like a knife-wound within her. (787)

What we find here is something akin to the discovery of Shakespeare's Sonnets, that shamelessness and extreme shamefastness lie very close together. Rosamond's dread of being chastised results in an acute defensiveness which comes to look like shamelessness. It is notable that the key to restoring her affection for Lydgate, such as it is, is the conjecture "Tertius did not find fault with me, then?" (787).

In conclusion, if we look back at Shakespeare's Sonnets from the perspective of Eliot's 'correction', we see more clearly their failure of shame. Aristotle had implicitly condemned shame as a fear-based affect, dependent on the judgement of a privileged social group. Yet he did allow for intimacy to produce a truer form of shame. As Sokolon paraphrases: 'A sign of friendship ... is that among such close intimates we feel shame for actions we truly consider shameful, even if such actions are neither known publicly nor considered conventionally shameful' (453). George Eliot's work explores the tragic consequence of public shaming, whether explicitly performed or privately anticipated, which forces the potential sinner into concealment. Yet she finds something morally valuable in the

intimate confession which produces shame, and is met with ‘pitying fellowship rather than rebuke’ (786).⁶⁵ By contrast, the relationship between the Sonnets’ speaker and the addressee never produces a redemptive shame because it lacks both intimacy and affection. The addressee tends towards shamelessness and narcissism and so is difficult to reach; the speaker tends towards ‘naughty bashfulness’ which inhibits his ability to speak truly. But perhaps most damaging is the fact that the addressee does not love the speaker enough to care what he thinks: he does not ‘hold half [his] rectitude in [his] mind’, as Eliot puts it.⁶⁶ Hence, whilst the Sonnets are sceptical about the ethical efficacy of shame, their failure is ultimately a failure of love.

¹ *Shame in Shakespeare* (London and New York, 2002), 8.

² This is not to foreclose the possibility of multiple male and female addressees, although the sonnets on shame do tend to presuppose the same characteristics of social superiority and sexual profligacy in a male. On the likelihood of the Sonnets being addressed to multiple lovers, see Stanley Wells, “‘My Name is Will’”: Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Autobiography’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 68 (2015), 99-108.

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the Sonnets are taken from William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones (London, 1997).

⁴ See my chapter, ‘Aristotelian Shame and Christian Mortification in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*’, in Patrick Gray and John D. Cox (eds.), *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics* (Cambridge, 2014), 76-97.

⁵ Gordon Hirsch argues that shame is linked to Eliot’s ‘central thematic concerns’ in *Middlemarch*, and that she deplures women’s particular susceptibility. See ‘Ardor and Shame

in *Middlemarch*', in Joseph Adamson and Hilary Anne Clark (eds.), *Scenes of Shame: Psychoanalysis, Shame, and Writing* (Albany, 1999), 83-100, 83. Mary E. Bell also focuses on Eliot's resistance to shame as 'an inferior motivation for moral behaviour' in "'Spells that have lost their Virtue": The Mythology and Psychology of Shame in the Early Novels of George Eliot', PhD thesis, University of Arizona, 2014, 14, discussed further below. On the appropriation of Shakespeare's Sonnets in Eliot's fiction, see Marianne Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare: Responses of George Eliot and Other Women Novelists* (Athens and London, 1994), 94-116; Gail Marshall, *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* (Cambridge, 2009), 112-117; Carol Siegel, "'This thing I like my sister may not do": Shakespearean Erotics and a Clash of Wills in *Middlemarch*', *Style*, 32.1 (1998), 36-59; and Otice C. Sircy, "'The Fashion of Sentiment": Allusive Techniques and the Sonnets of *Middlemarch*', *Studies in Philology*, 84.2 (1987), 219-44. None of these critics pays attention to Eliot's response to Shakespearean shame.

⁶ 'Renaissance Concepts of Shame and Pocaterra's *Dialoghi Della Vergogna*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47.1 (1994), 34-56, 37. This is a position also adopted unquestioningly by Fernie.

⁷ See, for example, Nicholas Higgins, 'Shame on You: The Virtuous Use of Shame in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*', *Expositions*, 9.2 (2015), 1-15, and Marlene K. Sokolon, 'The Shameless Truth: Shame and Friendship in Aristotle', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 12.4 (2013), 447-465.

⁸ Two important exceptions are D. C. Andersson whose discussion of shame in Montaigne defines it as 'a more unstable category within Aristotelian ethics than many of the other virtues that fill the textbooks', "'Th'Expençe of Spirit in a Waste of Shame": Exposures of the Self in Montaigne', in Kathryn Banks and Joseph Harris (eds.), *Exposure: Revealing Bodies, Unveiling Representations, Modern French Identities*, 29 (2004), 65-80, 66-7; and Tiffany Hoffman, who argues that 'Aristotle's moral emotional concept of *aidōs* offered the

early moderns one of the most comprehensive accounts of the fear of shame, including its social, ethical and cognitive foundation, and its close relation to other affective phenomena including modesty, humility and bashfulness'. Unfortunately, she only applies this perspective to Shakespeare's plays. See 'Virtuous Passions: Shakespeare and the Culture of Shyness in Early Modern England', PhD thesis, McGill University, Montreal, August 2013, 14.

⁹ All quotations from Aristotle are taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, 1985), 2 vols, vol. 2, 1781.

¹⁰ In the *Eudemian Ethics* also Aristotle states that 'Shame is a mean between shamelessness and shyness; for the man who thinks of no one's opinion is shameless, he who thinks of everyone's alike is shy, he who thinks only of that of apparently good men is modest' (2.1954).

¹¹ *Two Dialogues on Shame*, ed. Werner Gundersheimer and Donald Nathanson (Gottingen, 2013), http://www.shamestudies.de/pdf/Gundersheimer&Nathanson_2013_Pocaterra.pdf, accessed 27 May 2017, 37.

¹² *The French Academie*, tr. Thomas Bowes (London, 1586, rep. 1594), STC 15235, A3v.

¹³ *Universa Philosophia de moribus* (Venice, 1583), Biblioteca Universitaria de Sevilla, <https://ia801506.us.archive.org/8/items/ARes25111/ARes25111.pdf>, accessed 27 May 2017, 207.

¹⁴ *A Discourse of Civill Life containing the ethike part of morall philosophie* (1606), STC 3958, 24.

¹⁵ *Dictionarium linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (London, 1589), STC 24008.5.

¹⁶ *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621), STC 4159, 135.

¹⁷ *The Second Parte of the French Academie*, tr. Thomas Bowes (London, 1594), STC 15238, B4r.

¹⁸ *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London, 2006), 3.4.79, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. MacDonald P. Jackson, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), 1.3.8-10. See also Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*, 62-3.

¹⁹ For further discussion of the advancing thresholds of shame and embarrassment at this time, with specific relation to the body, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process* (Oxford, 2000), 2nd ed., and Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and New York, 1993).

²⁰ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow and London, 2001).

²¹ For further discussion of the Aristotelian and Thomist influences on this episode, see Kerby Neill, 'Spenser's Shamefastnesse, *Faerie Queene*, II, ix, 40-44', *Modern Language Notes*, 49.6 (1934), 387-391, and Robert A. White, 'Shamefastnesse as "Verecundia" and "Pudicitia" in *The Faerie Queene*', *Studies in Philology*, 78.4 (1981), 391-408.

²² Plutarch, *Moralia*, tr. Philemon Holland as *The Philosophie, commonly called the Morals* (London, 1603), STC 20063, 163. On the Aristotelian heritage of 'dysōpia', and its translation, see Davide Stimilli, *The Face of Immortality: Physiognomy and Criticism* (Albany, 2005), 61-2.

²³ Montaigne cites the Plutarchan notion of bashfulness in the essay 'Upon some verses of Virgil', tr. John Florio (1603), in *Shakespeare's Montaigne: The Florio Translation of the Essays: A Selection*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Peter G. Platt (New York, 2014), 245.

²⁴ There is an obvious exception to this argument, Sonnet 140 ('Be wise as thou art cruel'), in which the speaker's threat to slander the mistress presupposes that she is susceptible to shame. On the speaker's misrepresentation of the mistress (or mistresses), see Ilona Bell, 'Rethinking Shakespeare's Dark Lady', in Michael Schoenfeldt (ed.), *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Oxford, 2010), 293-313.

²⁵ *Two Dialogues on Shame*, 67.

²⁶ Anne Ferry perceives a change in Sonnet 64 ('When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced'), in which the speaker 'mocks himself for the detachment with which he felt free to "ruminate" at a privileged distance from time's destructiveness', *All in War with Time: Love Poetry of Shakespeare, Donne, Jonson, Marvell and Milton* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1975), 27.

²⁷ On the early modern obsession with 'Shameful Death', see Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford, 1997), 8-13. Kelsey Norwood points out the tacit association of procreation with immortality in 'Reproductive Fallacy in Shakespeare's (Non) Procreative Sonnets', seminar paper, World Shakespeare Congress, London 2016.

²⁸ Duncan-Jones (ed.), *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 130.

²⁹ It may be an error, originating with Shakespeare rather than the printer. Nevertheless, as John Kerrigan suggests, it also 'makes the two groups rhyme ... pointing up their relationship with a duplication entirely consistent with the intricate, echoing, repetitive mode of these late sonnets, reconsidering early concerns', *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* (London, 1986), 297. For further discussion of these groups, see Michael Cameron Andrews, 'Sincerity and Subterfuge in Three Shakespearean Sonnet Groups', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33.3 (1982), 314-327.

³⁰ Stephen Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven and London, 1977), 187.

³¹ Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge, 1984), 220.

³² *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (New York and London, 1963), 2 vols, vol. 2, 120.

³³ See also George T. Wright, 'The Silent Speech of Shakespeare's Sonnets', in James Schiffer (ed.), *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays* (New York, 2000), 135-62, 136.

³⁴ ‘The Conceptual Investigations of Shakespeare’s Sonnets’, in Jonathan F. S. Post (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare’s Poetry* (Oxford, 2013), 467-85, 471. For a more extended discussion, see his *Shakespeare, Love and Service* (Cambridge, 2008).

³⁵ *Captive Victors: Shakespeare’s Narrative Poems and Sonnets* (Ithaca and London, 1987), 202.

³⁶ David K. Weiser, ‘Shakespearean Irony: The Sonnets’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 84.4 (1983), 456-69, 464-5.

³⁷ See, for example, Helen Vendler’s defense of sonnet 71 (‘No longer mourn for me when I am dead’) against the ironic readings of Stephen Booth and John Kerrigan, in *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (1999), 327. For further discussion of who generates irony, see Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York, 1994), especially chapter 4.

³⁸ ‘Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Age in Love and the Goring of Thoughts’, *Studies in Philology*, 80.3 (1983), 300-324, 304.

³⁹ *De Inventione, De Optima Genere Oratorum, Topica*, tr. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1949), 211.

⁴⁰ The term ‘common place’ occurs in sonnet 137: ‘Why should my heart think that a several plot/ Which my heart knows the wide world’s common place?’. For further discussion of the Sonnets’ growing distrust of *copia* and the practice of commonplacing, see Catherine Nicholson, ‘Commonplace Shakespeare: Value, Vulgarly, and the Poetics of Increase in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* and *Troilus and Cressida*’ in Post (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare’s Poetry*, 185-203.

⁴¹ See Kerrigan’s persuasive account of ‘false compare’ in the Sonnets: ‘[Shakespeare] derides similitude because it belies the nature of things. He finds comparisons odious

because, when they conceal what a mistress's "eyes" might actually be, or obscure what the "sun" in itself is, they neglect particularity and being', 23.

⁴² *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1997, repr. 2008), 82.

⁴³ *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, 341.

⁴⁴ I am indebted to Duncan-Jones here, whose assumption I share that 'Shakespeare was aware of the semi-blasphemous effect of the divine self-definition appropriated by a wilful human individual', 352.

⁴⁵ See Nancy A. Cluck, 'Shakespearean Studies in Shame', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36.2 (1985), 141-151, 143.

⁴⁶ Booth notes a possible pun on 'Will I am ... I am' in lines 8-9, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven and London, 1977), 409-10.

⁴⁷ "'I am that I am": Shakespeare's Sonnets and the Economy of Shame', in Schiffer (ed.), *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 185-97, 195.

⁴⁸ Alexander Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 154.

⁴⁹ See the letter of John Fiske to his wife in 1873, quoted by Marshall, *Shakespeare and Victorian Women*, 99.

⁵⁰ This is proposed by E. R. C. Brinkworth in *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford* (1972), quoted by Fernie, 230. For further discussion of Shakespeare's susceptibility to shame, see Lars Engle, 'Shame and Reflection in Montaigne and Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Survey*, 63 (2010), 249-61.

⁵¹ Joseph Adamson applies Tomkins' definition of the 'depressive posture' to Eliot in his essay, 'Emotional Rescue: Shame and the Depressive Posture in George Eliot', *PsyArt* (2009). Possible deaths-by-shame in Eliot's novels include Thias Bede and Maggie Tulliver.

⁵² On the shaming rituals practised by both early modern and Victorian communities, see David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday, *Cultures of Shame: Exploring Crime and Morality in Britain, 1600-1900* (Houndmills and New York, 2010).

⁵³ See Dwight A. Hillier III, 'George Eliot and Aristotle: A Hypothesis', http://www.academia.edu/4223569/George_Eliot_and_Aristotle_A_Hypothesis, accessed 27 May 2017, and Lesley Gordon, 'George Eliot and Plutarch', *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies*, 28/9 (September 1995), 30-41.

⁵⁴ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford, 1968), 65.

⁵⁵ Quoted by Bell, 87-8. See Bell's further discussion of Rousseau's influence on Eliot in regard to shame, 81-92.

⁵⁶ *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge, 1998), 137.

⁵⁷ *Middlemarch Notebooks: A Transcription*, ed. John Clark Pratt and Victor Neufeldt (Berkeley, 1979), 212.

⁵⁸ For further discussion of Eliot's engagement with the Sonnets, see my forthcoming book, *The Afterlife of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, 2018), chapter 4.

⁵⁹ See also Novy, *Engaging with Shakespeare*, 99.

⁶⁰ All quotations from *Middlemarch* are taken from George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford, 1986), 566.

⁶¹ This is one of the four functions of the epigraph identified by David Leon Higden in 'George Eliot and the Art of the Epigraph', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 25.2 (1970), 127-51, 134.

⁶² 'Pseudonym, Epigraphs and the Narrative Voice: *Middlemarch* and the Problem of Authorship', *English Literary History*, 47 (1980), 543-44, 552.

⁶³ On this distinction between shame and guilt, see Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 92.

Michael Lewis observes how ‘the emotion of guilt always has associated with it a corrective action that an individual can take ... Whereas in shame we see the body hunched over itself in an attempt to hide and disappear, in guilt we see individuals moving in space as if trying to repair their action’, ‘Shame’, in Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett (eds.), *The Handbook of Emotions* (New York and London, 2010), 748.

⁶⁴ See Jerome Beaty, ‘*Middlemarch* from Notebook to Novel: A Study of George Eliot’s Creative Method’, *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, 47 (1960), 105-23.

⁶⁵ See also Hirsch’s argument that ‘Eliot presents “sympathy” or compassion as a means of defending against shame’, ‘Ardor and Shame’, 96.

⁶⁶ Eliot quotes from Antigonus the Second in Plutarch’s *Moralia*, ‘Sayings of Kings and Commanders’: ‘Even much stronger mortals than Fred Vincy hold half their rectitude in the mind of the being they love best. “The theatre of all my actions is fallen”, said an antique personage when his chief friend was dead; and they are fortunate who get a theatre where the audience demands their best’, 237.