USE OF THESES

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Patterns of Shame in Some Australian Autobiographies, 1960 to 1995

Rosamund Dalziell

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University

May 1996
I, Rosamund Jane Dalziell, declare that this thesis has never before been submitted, either in part or in whole, to this or any other university for the purpose of a higher degree. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis is an original piece of research and, except where otherwise acknowledged, all conclusions are my own.

(Signed) R. J. Dalziell
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Abstract

Patterns of Shame in Some Australian Autobiographies, 1960 to 1995

This thesis argues that an understanding of the emotion of shame can contribute substantially to the literary interpretation of a broad range of Australian autobiographies published between 1960 and 1995. From a detailed analysis of more than a dozen autobiographical texts, I conclude that shame is also a powerful force within Australian culture, although its presence has been largely unrecognised.

The introduction to this thesis explains why an understanding of shame is useful in interpreting autobiographical texts, and discusses the relevance of shame to contemporary Australian autobiographies. Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical foundations for a study of shame in Australian autobiography, drawing on historical and contemporary critical approaches to shame in a variety of academic disciplines. Chapters 2 to 5 analyse a number of Australian autobiographical texts, under the headings of shame and Australian cultural identity, shame and illegitimacy, shame and race, and shame and the Jewish immigrant experience. Chapter 2 discusses the shaming of Australian culture by the myth of British superiority as represented in Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiography, Solid Bluestone Foundations: and Other Memories of a Melbourne Girlhood 1908-1928, with reference also to works by Martin Boyd. Chapter 3 considers three autobiographies concerned with shame and illegitimacy, The Boy Adeodatus: Portrait of a Lucky Young Bastard by Bernard Smith, A Mother’s Disgrace by Robert Dessaix, and Daddy We Hardly Knew You by Germaine Greer. The autobiographies by Aboriginal writers in chapter 4 provide the basis for a close examination of the relationship between shame and racism in Australia. The writers discussed in detail are Ruby Langford Ginibi, Sally Morgan, Charles Perkins, Ella Simon, Margaret Tucker and Glenyse Ward. In chapter 5, autobiographies by three Australians of European Jewish descent, Morris Lurie, Amirah Inglis and Andrew Riemer, illustrate the operation of shame in the immigrant experience, with particular insights into the relationship between shame, anti-Semitism and Holocaust survival.
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Appendix: A Note on Cross-Cultural Understandings of Shame in Aboriginal autobiographies

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that an understanding of the emotion of shame can contribute substantially to the interpretation of a broad range of Australian autobiographies published between 1960 and 1995. It is my assertion that distinctive patterns of shame can be identified in contemporary Australian autobiographies. The presence of these patterns leads me to conclude that shame is also a powerful force within Australian culture, although its presence remains largely unrecognised. This dissertation is the first study of the importance of shame in Australian culture as well as the first book-length analysis of shame in autobiography.

The characteristics of shame

Shame is an unpleasant and painful emotion. An experience of being ashamed is generally one to be avoided at best or at worst forgotten in the hope that the witnesses to this event will have short memories. Bernard Williams offers a useful working definition of shame: 'The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition' (Williams 1993, p. 78). The possibility that others have not forgotten our shame may lead us to dread family gatherings, boycott school reunions or move away from our home town. Secrecy and concealment are the by-products of shame and those who know of the shame that we still carry retain some kind of power over us.

Nevertheless, an experience of being ashamed may lead to an amendment of life intended to prevent the possibility of a similar shaming event recurring. We may become more adept at avoiding social faux pas or unacceptable transgressions. In more extreme circumstances we may change our milieu to one where we are not shamed for our characteristics or practices. One of the most effective ways to divest oneself of shame is simply to reach maturity, as being ashamed is an integral part of the experience of being a child. Shaming, as part of the armoury of the socially powerful to ensure conformity, is deployed in the upbringing and education of children.

The contribution of shaming practices to social cohesion may be oppressive, shoring up the power imbalances of discriminatory communities, but on the other hand, may also have a positive function in ensuring the maintenance of social bonds. As Retzinger points out, the concept of shame is more complex than the feeling of being ashamed: 'One can be in a state of shame without being ashamed; having a sense of shame is different from being ashamed or being in a state of shame' (forthcoming, p. 14). Retzinger argues that 'having a
sense of shame is to be a moral person’ and that ‘Having a sense of shame is crucial in the ability to regulate social distance’, that is, in striking a balance between isolation and engulfment in relationship to others (p. 15).

Being in a shame state is different again. An individual in a shame state may not actually feel ashamed, as the shame experience may be disguised in many different ways. The disguised or low-visibility variant of shame is identified in the research of H. B. Lewis (1971) as by-passed shame.

The hiddenness of shame

Given that shame is associated with secrecy, concealment and forgetting, the recurrent representation of experiences of shame in autobiographies must give rise to the question as to why autobiographical narratives so frequently include episodes of self disclosure in which the self is shamed in some way. From Rousseau’s theft of the ribbon (in his *Confessions* 1781) to Hal Porter’s failure to return Miss Hart’s money (in *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* 1963), woven into the fabric of most autobiographies are accounts of personal errors and failures, of deception and lying, of humiliating punishments by parents or schoolteachers, of other children’s mockery and scorn for some perceived difference, of embarrassing sexual experiences in adolescence, or shame about parents, self, status, race or ethnicity, class or gender. Episodes of this kind are so common that the textual representation of shame appears to be fundamental to the autobiographical process.

The emotion of shame is related to ‘unspeakability’, a recurrent term in contemporary literary criticism concerned with the recovery of suppressed discourses related to issues of class, race and gender. However, because shame is itself typically difficult to speak about, it has been seldom specifically discussed in this context. A kind of circularity is involved in discourse about shame, because talking or writing about shame can be embarrassing, and embarrassment is one of the family of affects related to shame. Even in psychotherapeutic discourse, shame may be avoided because of the discomfort experienced by therapists in encountering shame in a client: close analysis of the avoidance techniques of therapists led H. B. Lewis to introduce the term ‘by-passed shame’ referred to above (1971, p. 493). Freud makes comparatively few references to shame, which may be partly why it has become characterised as ‘the neglected emotion’. In the index to the standard edition of Freud’s complete works, 36 entries occur under the heading ‘shame’, compared with 129 under the related heading ‘guilt’ (1957-74, vol. 24, pp. 292 & 378). From Erikson in 1950 to Kaufman and Raphael in 1991, shame has been described as insufficiently studied, long ignored and misunderstood. Anthropology has also
drawn distinctions between shame cultures and guilt cultures (Benedict 1946) with the suggestion that shame is somehow 'pre-modern' and 'anachronistic', as Moore points out (1993, p. 8).

Nevertheless, the unspeakable emotion of shame is increasingly being spoken about, reflected in a rapid growth in the number of studies of shame published mainly in the last five years, in disciplines other than literature. Lasch (1995) expresses some impatience with the view that shame is a neglected field of study, describing it as 'the latest site of intensive excavation by theorists and clinicians' (p. 198). The recent turn to the study of the emotions has contributed to an increased interest in shame. Bernard Williams' important study, *Shame and Necessity* (1993), drew on Gabriele Taylor's earlier study in moral philosophy (1985). In psychology the works of Potter-Efron (1989), Kaufman and Raphael (1991), Michael Lewis (1992) and Nathanson (1992) have enlarged the understanding of shame within that discipline. Social scientist John Braithwaite's model of re-integrative and dis-integrative shaming is having an ever widening impact on reforms to the criminal justice system (Braithwaite 1989), supported by the work of Moore (1993). The work of Thomas Scheff in sociology (e.g. 1988, 1994) and Suzanne Retzinger (1991, forthcoming) in psychology, together with their work as joint authors (1991), has contributed significantly to raising academic awareness of shame. In theology, shame has received attention from Clark (1990), Fowler (1993) and Capps (1993). The popular influence of John Bradshaw (1988) and the 'recovery movement' should not be underestimated. James Fowler writes of 'a flood of recent literature on shame' (1993, p. 816). A forthcoming publication, *Shame and the Modern Self*, a collection of interdisciplinary essays (eds D. Parker, R. J. Dalziell & I. Wright), reflects a growing interest in the academic study of shame in Australia.

**Shame and autobiography**

Autobiography inevitably involves elements of self-concealment which frequently indicate the presence of shame. An 'Australian Pioneer', Robert Barton, acknowledging that autobiographical texts include both exposure and concealment of the self, introduces his *Reminiscences* (1917, p. vii) with the following apposite if undistinguished verses by one Will Carleton:

For people's lives,
full well we know,
Two sets of things recall,
The one of which we always tell,
The other not at all.
In this way, Barton admits his intention to withhold what he chooses from his autobiographical text. Conventions about what may appropriately be mentioned in an autobiography as opposed to what is too shameful are shaped by wider social forces. The historical transformations in European social conceptions of shame have been charted in Norbert Elias's innovative study, *The Civilising Process* (1978). In Australian autobiographies of the past three decades, similar transformations can be observed. For example, sexual development in puberty, once taboo, is *de rigueur* in post-Freudian autobiographies. Similarly, an abortion, once illegal as well as a source of shame, may now be mentioned: examples may be found in the autobiographical *Wild Card*, by Dorothy Hewett (1990) and *Searching for Charmian*, by Suzanne Chick (1994). Divorce, illegitimacy, contraception, menstruation, homosexuality, and frank accounts of heterosexual encounters are acceptable. But boundaries still exist. An admission of lying in public life in Graham Richardson's *Whatever it Takes*, proved to be less acceptable to the reading public than the autobiographer had anticipated (Richardson 1994). Jack Waterford describes Richardson as 'shameless' (Waterford 1996, p. 48). Anti-Semitism remains a literary issue of extreme sensitivity. Revelations by Mary Lord (1993) about Hal Porter's paedophilia have the potential to undermine the canonical status of *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* (1963).

What is omitted from an autobiographical text may also reflect an alternative aspect of shame, that which safeguards the privacy of living family members or associates, or observes (a mainly male) convention of omitting any reference to spouse or family in a vocationally oriented text. Examples of this practice include A. R. Chisholm's *Men Were My Milestones* (1958) and to some extent, W. K. Hancock's *Country and Calling* (1954) and Bernard Smith's *The Boy Adeodatus* (1984).

Shame may be indicated in an autobiography by narrative 'cracks and fissures' such as a conspicuous omission from the text of what a reader of autobiography might reasonably expect to be included, for example, the absence from the narrative of a detailed representation of one parent, or of a significant stage in life. Where an autobiographical text represents a childhood in a haze of idyllic nostalgia, the critic must be tempted to apply Ricoeur's 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. An autobiographer may deflect or avoid confronting shame by attempting to erase traces of shaming experience from the textual construction of the self. A significant 'aporia' or gap in the narrative is often an indication of shame, traces of which are generally present in the text despite the omission. To follow such traces may lead to valuable insights into the text as a whole.
Unlike the shaming experiences of life, which by their very nature cannot be controlled, the act of writing is self-directing, even when recording apparently shameful experiences or material. Writing can record, confess, conceal, deflect, correct, or misrepresent. An autobiography may also be a means of fighting back, either by shaming the shamer, by setting the record straight or by getting in first in order to deflect potentially public shaming. As Charmian Clift puts it, 'the pot-pourri of memory is spiced with resentment as well as regret' (1995, p. 22). A writer may choose to shame a shamer out of revenge: Patrick White's representation of his mother in Flaws in the Glass (1981) is one such example. Alternatively, an autobiographer may attempt to understand and forgive the shamer, as Manning Clark attempts in the portrayal of his parents (Clark 1989, 1991). Furthermore, an autobiographer may attempt to forgive him- or herself, by a sympathetic re-telling of 'shameful' experiences which are viewed from the benign standpoint of a mature narrating self.

Cringing and strutting

The now clichéd term 'cultural cringe' has made shame central to Australian identity. The term which originated in A. A. Phillips' Meanjin essay of 1950 (Phillips 1958) was reaffirmed as recently as 1994 in Australian Civilisation, a collection of essays edited by Richard Nile, who includes essays entitled 'Cringers', by Elaine Thompson, and 'Strutters' by Chris Wallace-Crabbe. Thompson's conventional discussion of the extent and effect of the 'cultural cringe' as identified by A. A. Phillips, notes 'a deep-seated perversity', a 'self-hatred that defies reason', in the critical practice of artists and writers who assessed Australian cultural achievements against an artificially constructed 'overseas' standard deriving from Britain and Europe (Nile 1994, p. 187). Wallace-Crabbe takes the debate further by suggesting that the 'cringe', in moving from 'explanatory term' to cliché, has become 'a blunt tool'. Wallace-Crabbe chooses to focus on what shame theorists such as Kohut term 'grandiosity', the 'overemphasis and skiting' which are ways of 'staking ... a bold claim for our belated culture in the teeth of great powers - both living powers and the heavy legions of the dead' (Wallace-Crabbe in Nile 1994, p. 207). Wallace-Crabbe identifies an 'anxiety in the psyche' that leads to a 'compulsion to overstate the case, to make too large a claim, to swagger, to strut' (p. 208). 'Strutting' is consistent with Kohut's psychotherapeutic explanation of a link between grandiosity and shame within an individual (1978), a theory discussed in more detail in chapter 1.

Self-depreciation and grandiosity are both effects of shame. The first effect evaluates the self as less than it is, the second overvalues it. Both these aspects
of shame are evident in many autobiographies. A published autobiography presents 'the self on show', to borrow from Peter Steele's subtitle to *The Autobiographical Passion* (1989). In order to capture the reader's interest, the autobiographical self must be represented as larger and more interesting than life. On the other hand, to prevent the reader being repelled by the blatant egotism of the autobiographer's self-display, the self may also be represented as inadequate, ashamed and in some respects a failure. The representation of shaming experiences can be a narrative strategy for disarming critics who might seek to cut down to size those who have the audacity to write an autobiography. The autobiographer thus arranges for the narrated self to be perceived by the reader as an 'ordinary person' who shares the common human experiences of fallibility, uncertainty and the fear, or even the recollection, of appearing ridiculous.

**Shame and self-evaluation**

Shame was first designated by Charles Darwin as an emotion of self-attention (Darwin 1979). Gabriele Taylor (1985) extends this definition, suggesting that shame should be understood as an emotion of self-assessment. Based on Taylor's understanding of shame, it can then be argued that an autobiography in which shaming experiences are represented may constitute a text of self-assessment. Although the autobiographical act is commonly regarded as supremely egotistical, self-depreciation in autobiographical narratives, modifying the dynamics of self-display, is also consistent with the confessional origins of the genre. An awareness of shame, captured in the text, can be helpful in assisting an autobiographer to assess strengths and weaknesses, and in avoiding a tyrannical narcissism.

But the pervasiveness of shame in the self complicates the matter further. Egotism may penetrate a confessional autobiography, but in the process of self-evaluation shame may also get out of hand.

Michael Walzer's discussion of the process of 'self-castigation' sheds light on the tendency for shame to surface in self-evaluation. In *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (1994), Walzer concludes that a self that is capable of understanding the two kinds of moral argument with which he is concerned, maximalist and local (thick) or minimalist and universal (thin), must be a 'divided self', capable of self-criticism, a process of 'internal reflection and debate' among the various roles and identities of which the self is composed (p. 86). Walzer notes that:
self-criticism is commonly thought an exemplary activity: we approve of this activity both in others and in ourselves: 'I look at myself critically, and then I look approvingly at myself looking at myself critically. Perhaps my criticism deflates me; but then the spectacle of myself as critic puffs me up again' (p. 87).

Walzer is writing about the intersections between moral and political philosophy, but his remarks have a bearing on the self-exposure commonly found in autobiography.

In the course of his discussion of self-criticism, Walzer lights upon the phenomenon of shame, although he does not identify it as such. In reflecting on the self-approbation that often stems from the process of self-criticism, he continues:

If this is right, why is self-criticism so often painful? A certain amount of pain is necessary ... to justify the approval: if criticism didn’t hurt, it wouldn’t be exemplary. But self-criticism sometimes produces what we might think of as surplus pain - not merely embarrassment, chagrin, regret, or remorse, but a paralyzing sense of inadequacy, endless guilt and self-loathing, which reach far beyond the requirements of the critical enterprise (p. 87).

Walzer makes the point that this reaction of self-loathing is generally out of all proportion to the shortcomings identified. He continues:

The average self probably 'needs' only limited criticism, finite pain. But perhaps the enterprise, once launched, has a momentum of its own. The harder I look, the worse I appear. Social critics get tired, burned out, choked by their own anger, but self-critics simply improve with practice. Or perhaps the self-critic is taken unawares. Slowly he strips away his protective clothing, thinking all the while that what lies underneath isn’t half bad, and then finds himself staring in horror at his own hideous nakedness. The pain comes from the surprise (p. 88).

Walzer suggests that the cure for this hyper-critical condition may reside in psychoanalysis, where analysis is thought of as 'a kind of metacritique, requiring an extended criticism of the critical “I” and a partial vindication of the castigated self' (p. 88). Walzer attributes this experience to the ‘superego’s judgemental fury’ (p. 88), and although suggesting that therapeutic intervention may be helpful, also notes that:

the superego, even if we reject its most far-reaching claims, is still the internal representative of moral value (and of the demands of role and identity) and I cannot live in civilized society, I cannot live in the company of others, without its ministrations (pp. 88-9).

Walzer’s discussion has a bearing on patterns of shame in autobiography. Autobiography, perhaps at first a tentative process of self-examination in a narrative, may unleash the shaming power of the superego in all its ferocity leading to intense self-castigation, or it may let slip glimpses of the self’s experience of this emotion in the recalled past. Autobiography also explores the links between the individual and society, and the historical and social processes
by which these links were formed. Like psychoanalysis, autobiography can also become a kind of metacritique to reassess the claims of the superego, and to reject those claims that are considered by the mature narrating self to be excessive or no longer valid.

**Shame and literary criticism**

Now that shame is beginning to claim the attention of moral philosophers such as Gabriele Taylor, Michael Walzer, Bernard Williams and John Kekes, this so-called neglected emotion could also be expected to interest literary critics because it requires as a necessary condition the gaze of the other, comparable to the complex relationships between author and narrative, author and reader. The critical and shaming gaze, which is external to the self when first experienced in early childhood (Erikson 1950), may be transformed in maturity into an internalised reflexive self-scrutiny, which operates as a dynamic in these textual relationships. Autobiography as a genre is particularly well suited to a critical enterprise seeking to foreground the emotion of shame because of the distinctive relationship between author and narrating subject.

Nevertheless, shame has received scant attention either from literary critics generally or specifically in autobiographical criticism. John Barbour devotes one chapter of *The Conscience of the Autobiographer* (1992) to a discussion of shame in the writings of Mary McCarthy, and Donald Capps (1993) examines questions of shame and guilt in an article on St Augustine’s *Confessions*. Most contemporary critical discussion of shame in literature has been concerned with Salman Rushdie’s novel *Shame* (e.g. Suleri 1992).

**Shame and individual development**

Shame is of particular interest to the critic of autobiography because a focus of most autobiographical texts is childhood, and as already noted, shame is an integral part of the experience of being a child. Although much of the literature on shame has designated this emotion as negative and appropriate to shed or discard, recent thinkers have suggested that an individual who does not develop a sense of shame lacks the necessary self-awareness and capacity for self-restraint that living in society with others requires (e.g. Kekes 1993, Braithwaite 1989). Retzinger describes the function of ‘healthy shame’ as maintaining the social bond between individuals and among groups (forthcoming, p. 1).

As mentioned above, Darwin designates shame an emotion of self-attention, and Erikson and others have argued that the development of a sense of shame
is associated with the dawn of self-consciousness in the personality, preceding the development of moral consciousness. Although this emotion helps to set limits to behaviour, where shame-based reactions to others are excessive, shame can cripple or even dissolve a confident sense of self so that the individual’s theory of how he or she is or should be regarded by others is likely to be unrealistically negative, as Michael Lewis (1992) has demonstrated. On the other hand, successful negotiation of the developmental stages of the maturing self will minimise the inhibiting or destructive effects of residual shame in adult life (Freud 1962; Erikson 1950; Kohut 1978).

Shame and power

The study of shame in autobiography is also of interest in its relationship to the exercise of power as represented in the shaping of the narrated self. The autobiographies selected for study illustrate ways in which those who are confident of the appropriate limits to behaviour and who have the power to enforce them may use techniques of shaming to ensure that others conform. This kind of power relationship, exemplified by Foucault’s concept of surveillance in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), may occur wherever power is exercised, whether within the family, the institution or the state. Where the structures and exercise of power are manifestly unjust, the process of shaming is likely to produce destructive effects on less powerful individuals and groups (see for example, Braithwaite 1989; Miller 1987). Sexism, racism, colonialism and other forms of political and social oppression are examples of destructive shaming, where the very embodied being of the less powerful is shamed.

In resisting destructive shaming where the practice has become integrated into social or institutional structures, autobiographies have an important role to play. Rorty’s discussion of human rights from an anti-foundationalist position accords a prominent role to story-telling in eroding human rights abuse by foregrounding the common humanity of ‘the other’. According to Rorty, in his contribution to the 1993 Oxford Amnesty Lectures, ‘Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality’: ‘We pragmatists argue from the fact that the emergence of the human rights culture seems to owe nothing to increased moral knowledge, and everything to hearing sad and sentimental stories’ (Shute & Hurley 1993, pp. 118-9). Rorty argues that change in the way a dominant group regards an oppressed minority is more likely to occur in response to a story that illustrates the common humanity of the oppressed than in response to moral understanding. In Rorty’s view, those who commit atrocities ‘do not think of themselves as violating human rights’ because they do not think of those they abuse as fellow human beings but as ‘pseudohumans’ (p. 112). Rorty illustrates
this state of mind as follows: ‘We and those like us are paradigm cases of humanity, but those too different from us in behaviour or custom are, at best, borderline cases’ (p. 113). If abuse of human rights is possible because one group does not acknowledge that the group they oppress consists of other humans, autobiographies in which the humanity and suffering of the oppressed is powerfully communicated must fall indisputably into Rorty’s category of story, although the adjectives ‘sad and sentimental’ appear to trivialise either the stories or the moral superficiality of the audience. Shame operates as a mechanism for impeding the telling of such stories, but where the stories are in fact told, patterns of shame will be evident in the narratives.

**Challenging modernity**

A hermeneutics of shame in criticism of autobiography offers a challenge to modernity, the latter characterised by Terry Eagleton (drawing on Nietzsche’s *Thoughts Out of Season*) as ‘a Nietzschean “active forgetting” of history: the healthy spontaneous amnesia of the animal who has willfully repressed its own sordid determinations and so is free’ (Eagleton, in Lodge 1988, p. 389). According to Nietzsche, ‘the animal lives unhistorically: it hides nothing and coincides at all moments with that which it is’ (in Lodge 1988, p. 389n). The emotion of shame is related to concealment and to the secrets and pain of the past. It arises from a disjunction, a lack of coincidence between what the self assumes or wishes itself to be and what another, either external or internalised, perceives it to be. With an understanding of the operation of shame comes the realisation that it is impossible to live unhistorically. The eruption of shame in the self, with its roots in a personal past, may take the individual by surprise, as Walzer puts it, and a Nietzschean ‘willed amnesia’ that is never disrupted by shame, is neither ‘healthy’, spontaneous nor even possible for most individuals.

To this conception of modernity, Eagleton opposes:

*Walter Benjamin’s “revolutionary nostalgia”: the power of active remembrance as a ritual summoning and invocation of the traditions of the oppressed in violent constellation with the political present* (Lodge 1988, p. 389).

Autobiographies containing representations of shame that derive from oppression challenge the ahistoricising processes of modernity by speaking the unspeakable, confronting shame, breaking shame-enforced silence about oppression. Eagleton also finds in Benjamin’s ‘tradition’ a challenge to postmodernism, describing Lyotard as ‘deeply opposed to any such historical consciousness, with his reactionary celebrations of narrative as an eternal present rather than a revolutionary recollection of the unjustly quelled’ (Eagleton, in Lodge 1988, p. 389).
From shame to testimony

This thesis pursues Benjamin’s concept of ‘revolutionary nostalgia’ by developing and applying a literary theory of testimony to certain autobiographies, arguing that it is more appropriate to construe an autobiographer’s articulation of experiences of shame deriving from political and social oppression as testimony than as simply fictive, that is, nothing more than a linguistic performance of a multivalent self. This is not to advocate an ingenuous acceptance of autobiographical texts that proclaim themselves to be true, simply because they do so. A critical sensitivity to the shaping influence of genre, intertextuality and cultural influences, the deceptions and falterings of memory, the impulses and evasions of the psyche and the complexities of language itself, are all of the utmost importance in the interpretation of an autobiographical text, as Eakin’s *Fictions in Autobiography* (1985) has demonstrated. Time and memory play tricks with truth, as Charmian Clift also observed in her essay ‘The Time of Your Life’:

> Time has a particular trick, and a very clever one, of threshing and winnowing experience. As years pass the inconclusiveness of actual formulation is husked off and blown away like chaff on the wind. All that memory retains is a hoard of separate grain (Clift 1995, p. 22).

Clift also notes: ‘Memory sifts out the facts according to individual requirements’ (p. 22). Whether the sifting is highly self-conscious or partially unconscious, an awareness of the prevailing social and personal circumstances of the autobiographer at the time of writing may provide critical insights into the winnowing process. The critic is not called upon to adopt distinctively different approaches for autobiographical texts that proclaim themselves true, such as Sally Morgan’s *My Place* (1987) and Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* (1988), as opposed to self-consciously postmodern texts which give clues to narrative deceptions, such as Robert Dessaix’s *A Mother’s Disgrace* (1994), because the winnowing process occurs in all autobiographical writing. Nevertheless, to regard all autobiographical texts as elaborate linguistic fictions or lies is, I suggest, to do them a great injustice.

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Laub explores some of these issues. He discusses a woman’s eye-witness account of the uprising at Auschwitz where, historians agreed, one chimney was blown up (chapter 2, Felman & Laub 1992). The woman described a scene in which not one but four chimneys went up in flames, and as Laub explains, the historians present were inclined to discount this testimony as inaccurate, in order to avoid
being discredited by revisionist historians. Laub however, listening to this testimony as a psychoanalyst, believed that:

> it was through my listening to her that I in turn came to understand not merely her subjective truth, but the very historicity of the event, in an entirely new dimension. She was testifying not simply to empirical historical facts, but to the very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination ... And she came to testify to the unbelievability, precisely, of what she had eye-witnessed – this bursting open of the very frame of Auschwitz (p. 62).

The psychoanalyst notes the transformation in the woman’s narrative style from ‘self-effacing, almost talking in whispers’ to one with ‘a sudden intensity, passion and colour’ as she recounts the uprising (p. 59). He acknowledges and responds to the subjective truth of her testimony, in which an historical event is embedded, although appreciating that the woman’s recall of that event is coloured by her own imperfect knowledge of what had occurred.

It may be equally misguided for a reader to dismiss the autobiographical testimony of an Aboriginal writer to a massacre for which no European records exist, either in terms of its subjective truth or its potential historicity.

Felman, Laub’s co-author, postulates a link between the giving of testimony and healing, asking: ‘Is the testimony ... a simple medium of historical transmission, or is it, in obscure ways, the unsuspected medium of a healing?’ (1992, p. 9). By healing, I understand Felman to mean not only a restoration of the damaged self but a contribution to the recovery of a community disrupted by the consequences of past oppression on some of its members.

In testimony, narrative and reader response are related. In the formulation of a theory of testimony in autobiography, Camus’ novel *La Chute* (1956) is an influential text. In this work, the reader is drawn into the narrative by the narrating protagonist’s use of the second person throughout the text. The narrator relates his failure to respond to the suicide of an unknown woman who jumped from a bridge as he was passing by. In his account of this event, he simply moved on, neither going to her aid nor even becoming a witness to her death. Like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, he now tells and retells this story, so that each fictional interlocutor, and through this interlocutor, the reader, becomes a witness both to his failure and to the original event of the woman’s suicide. Felman identifies in Camus’ novels *La Peste* and *La Chute* textual references to the Holocaust and to the failure of European intellectuals to respond to this event, a failure she terms ‘methodical deafness’. An autobiography may, to a lesser or greater extent, constitute a testimony to various kinds of suffering, and the reader is thereby placed in the situation of
Camus' interlocutor, shamed into becoming a potential witness. The predicament for the failed witness, the historical passerby, is that his or her 'own life also loses its continuity, its ground and its balance' (Felman & Laub 1992, p. 199).

In the same work Felman quotes Elie Wiesel's claim: 'If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle and the Renaissance the sonnet ... our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony' (1992, pp. 5-6). Felman proceeds to inquire as to what 'has brought the discourse of testimony to the fore of the contemporary cultural narrative, way beyond the implications of its limited, restricted usage in the legal context?' (p. 6).

Yet testimony is still far from being a widely recognised literary genre. Although the term was extensively used in Quaker women's autobiographical writing of the seventeenth century (see Foxton 1994), it is increasingly being used by oral historians but seldom discussed by literary critics. An exception is Beverley's paper in Sidonie Smith's De/Colonising the Subject (1992), which will be discussed in chapter 4, with brief reference also to Foxton's work Hear the Word of the Lord: Quaker Women's Writing 1650-1700 (1994). In Testimony: A Philosophical Study, Coady describes testimony as 'a prominent and unexplored epistemological landscape' (1992, p. vii). White, drawing on Langer (1991) employs the term testimony for both oral and written autobiographical accounts by survivors of the Holocaust (White, forthcoming).

Shame is related to silence and the suppression of narratives of suffering: testimony involves the discovery of a voice in the production of a testimonial narrative. Felman and Laub developed their conception of testimony in the crucible of Holocaust studies. In the foreword to Testimony: Crises in Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History they write:

On the basis of a close analysis of concrete examples of historical and autobiographical accounts, the process of testimony indeed sheds new light, both on the psychoanalytical relation between speech and survival, and on the historical processes of the Holocaust itself, whose uniquely devastating aspect is here interpreted for the first time as a radical historical crisis of witnessing (1992, p. xvii).

In this thesis I draw upon a literary understanding of the process of testimony to interpret contemporary autobiographical narratives, particularly those by Aboriginal writers. To analyse these texts in accordance with a literary theory that was most interested in tracing fictions of the self in autobiography not only seemed unilluminating but also to exemplify Felman's 'methodical deafness' by turning a deaf critical ear to narrative and narrator. Other autobiographical texts, including those written by autobiographers of illegitimate birth or of immigrant background, also seemed impoverished by this approach.
The testifying autobiographer in breaking a ‘shameful’ silence may cast the reader as an empathic ‘other’, whose benign regard or understanding dissipates shame. Laub writes:

The absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognise their realness, annihilates the story (Felman & Laub 1992, p. 68).

**Autobiography as confession: healing the shamed self**

The contemporary Australian autobiographies selected for this study trace some of the distinctive movements of shame that shape the autobiographical self, while frequently exploring the intersection of personal and social issues. The retreats and expansions of the self, the clashes of ‘the expansive Promethean and the conservative reactionary’ are related to patterns of shame (Den Hartog 1987, pp. 3-7). Unbridled shame may be expressed in the form of the grandiose swagger, but on the other hand, an excess of shame may not only inhibit an expansion of the self but may even lead to anomie, a psychic disintegration of the self. Complex autobiographical patterns of shame may include the expression of shame-based rage and invective, but the confrontation of shame may also create textual space for healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, acceptance or even celebration of difference. In so doing, autobiographies may contribute to breaking down barriers of shame between individuals and groups in the context of a reading community.

American autobiographer Jill Johnson links contemporary autobiography, somewhat rhetorically, to the international political climate of concern for human rights in the second half of the twentieth century. Johnson writes:

Change is at the heart of the new autobiography ... As we write ourselves into existence, the class, race and sexual political structures of society inevitably change. The notion of who has rights, whose voice can be heard, whose individuality is worthy, comes under revision. Ideally, all will be heard and respected. The shame of difference will evaporate (J. Johnson 1993, p. 33).

The political import of autobiographies is also affirmed by contributors to Smith’s *De/Colonising the Subject*, including Carol Boyce Davies who writes: ‘If we agree with Gloria Anzaldua that boundaries are sites of contestations, then life stories are boundary-breaking texts’ (Smith & Watson 1992, p. 17).

For ‘the shame of difference to evaporate’, as Johnson predicts, a ‘new autobiography’ is likely to be constructed as a ‘confession’ of shame generated by experiences of oppression based on perceived difference. ‘Confession’ in this context would be construed as a ‘declaration of faith’, even of martyrdom, rather than in the sense of ‘acknowledgement of offence’ (or transgression).
Like the martyr to a cause, the ‘new autobiographer’ directs attention to the marks of shame upon self and story that derive from unjust oppression and suffering. In this form of autobiography, confession constitutes a form of testimony.

Foucault on the other hand construes confession as simply ‘a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship’ (1990, pp. 61-62), and his critique is addressed in some detail in chapter 1.

However important the social implications of an autobiographical act may be, an autobiography may nevertheless primarily constitute an attempt to resolve the painful effects of residual shame within the self, rather than society. This resolution may be orchestrated by means of a complex intra-psychic dialogue conducted under the regard of an anticipated readership. Shame is a powerful and painful emotion which is seldom recollected in tranquillity and for autobiographers concerned with ‘the puzzles of childhood’, complex experiences of shame are involved. An autobiographer may cast the reader as the benign and accepting gaze that heals shame, while employing a variety of strategies to avoid breaking the sympathetic bond and disrupting this gaze.

**Autobiography as performance**

The performative dimension of the autobiographical act also requires reassessment in the context of a theory of testimony. A popular interpretation is that an autobiography is a textual act of self-display, an act of narcissism that the reader accepts, provided that it is entertaining. This is most evident in autobiographies by entertainers such as Barry Humphries in *More Please* (1992), Oriel Gray in *Exit Left* (1985) and in the autobiographies of Clive James. It is also evident in the coda to Lurie’s *Whole Life* (1987) in which he places himself in fantasy upon a stage in front of his parents, as well as in amateur theatricals within narratives as divergent as those of Kathleen Fitzpatrick (1983) and Hal Porter (1963). Within a framework of shame theory performative autobiography may be interpreted as a form of self-expansion, a becoming visible, redressing the balance of the shamed self who desires invisibility. Where self-display is out of touch with what is acceptable to the reader, it becomes grandiosity, an excessive self-display indicating an inappropriate self-evaluation and an insensitivity to the tolerance of one’s audience.

However, the self on show may not necessarily constitute a performing self seeking admiration but rather ‘a self on trial’. The evaluation of the self by others involves, not simply the possibility of an artistic failure, a theatrical flop, but a negative judgement of the self by others, introducing the possibility of
shame. This is the nature of the autobiographical risk. Some autobiographers risk more than others. For example, Fitzpatrick (1983) and Boyd (1965) risk very little in their elliptical discussions of sexual experience, whereas White (1981) and Dessai (1994) risk prejudice and censure in revealing their homosexuality. Testimony is 'a performative speech act' (Felman, p. 5), but more is at stake than audience approval. The self that is judged is not only an individual, albeit narratively constructed, but also the representative of a suffering or shamed community.

**Shame, suffering and survival**

This study examines autobiographies in which shame is related both to hidden suffering and masked oppression, and is shown to be operating at both the individual level and in society so as to maintain the status quo. The destructive function of shame at the individual level is illustrated by Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957), in which the narrated self suffers in secret from the shaming treatment meted out to her by her deranged uncle and aunt, and accepts their negative assessment of her character. Institutional factors shore up the position of the oppressors: the adults' legal status as guardians guarantees their power over the child as a minor. The child has no alternative resources available. The shamed self is deprived of the opportunity to develop the healthy self-regard that would provide her with the strength to resist her oppressive circumstances, either psychically or practically. Similarly, minority groups within a society may be controlled by shaming treatment from a politically dominant group. This form of abuse of power has been addressed by contemporary critical concerns with class, race and gender, but the relationship of shame to oppression as refracted in literary texts has not been systematically studied hitherto. Moreover, a critical focus on shame extends the debate beyond these three categories.

A number of Australian autobiographers foreground the actuality of their survival as selves in their texts. Aboriginal autobiographers frequently refer to the achievement of survival as a race. Less obvious is the consciousness of survival in autobiographies by those born out of wedlock, the illegitimate autobiographers included in this study, for whom abortion and contraception are important preoccupations. Testimony is a form of resistance to those political or social forces that militate against the survival of the self by harnessing the power of shame. According to Felman: 'one must survive in order to bear witness, and one must bear witness in order to affirm one's survival, one's own crossing of the line of death'. In quoting from Terrence Des
Près, Felman draws out this interrelationship: ‘Survival and bearing witness become reciprocal acts’ (Felman & Laub 1992, p. 117).

Scope of this study

The theoretical foundations for a study of shame in Australian autobiography are established in chapter 1, which discusses critical approaches to shame in a number of academic disciplines. Conceptions of shame and guilt are addressed and the importance of shame in Australian culture is broadly indicated, setting the direction for the argument of the following chapters in which a range of Australian autobiographical texts is analysed. These texts form the basis for an examination of shame and Australian cultural identity, shame and illegitimacy, shame and race, and shame and the Jewish immigrant experience. Chapter 2, the study of autobiographies representing the shaming of Australian culture by the myth of British superiority, identifies shame as an important dynamic in Australian society, contesting the received wisdom that Australia, like other western countries, is a guilt culture rather than a shame culture. Illegitimacy is an area that touches on class, gender and race issues, but has broader ramifications for identity and social transformation, as illustrated by the ‘illegitimate’ autobiographies discussed in chapter 3. The autobiographies by Aboriginal writers in chapter 4 provide the basis for a close examination of the relationship between shame and racism in Australia. I suggest that there is a connection between the legal fictions of filius nullius and terra nullius, both of which reflect ideologies of nothingness which mask the operations of power and oppression. In the final chapter, three autobiographies by Australian autobiographers of European Jewish descent offer a distinctive perspective on the operation of shame in the immigrant experience, with particular insights into the relationship between shame, anti-Semitism and Holocaust survival.
Chapter 1
Theorising Shame

1. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss what is meant by shame, how it has been theorised and what an understanding of shame may contribute to the interpretation of autobiography. As shame has received little attention in contemporary literary criticism, I shall draw on studies undertaken in other disciplines, notably linguistics, psychology, sociology and moral philosophy. My exposition will include examples of literary representations of shame and will refer to the small body of criticism concerned with shame and literature. Aspects of the critical writing of Sartre, Foucault and de Man will be discussed in relation to shame.

Definitions of shame

The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines shame as ‘the painful feeling arising from the consciousness of something dishonourable, improper, ridiculous, etc., done by oneself or another’ (1987).

Shame is an emotional response to an awareness that one has fallen short of another’s expectations or one’s own. The discomfiture of shame gives rise to a negative self-evaluation and leads to a desire for concealment. Shame may arise from a perception that in the eyes of others one has transgressed either moral laws or social conventions. A shameless individual may commit a serious moral transgression or flout social convention and feel no shame, whereas an individual with a strong sense of shame may experience intense discomfort at some minor social infelicity.

Although shame is triggered by the disapproving regard of another, this condemnatory gaze may be internalised, so that shame may be experienced when an individual is alone. Those who have been subject to severe and persistent shaming, particularly in childhood, may be in a more or less continuous state of shame. Feelings of shame may vary in intensity as synonyms for shame indicate, ranging from the comparatively mild feeling of embarrassment to the strong emotions of mortification, humiliation, disgrace and degradation.

Complexities in the usage of the word *shame* in current English are discussed in a linguistic study by Jean Harkins, who remarks on ‘some evidence of a fairly steady decline in the use of the word over a couple of generations, along with
an increase in the use of guilt’ (Harkins, forthcoming, p. 1). On the other hand, Harkins notes an increase in the use of shame in relation to forms of abuse and addiction, and includes some discussion of the term toxic shame used by Bradshaw (1988) and Nathanson (1992).

Harkins’ study demonstrates that concepts of shame or shame-like feelings, do differ across languages and cultures but also recognises a commonality in the shame-like concepts expressed in the languages with which she is concerned (principally Aboriginal English, non-Aboriginal English and Maori). Harkins’ study of differences between the meanings of shame in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal English is discussed in an appendix to chapter 4.

Shame in ancient texts

A cluster of works on shame in ancient Greek culture, discussing literary texts as well as history and philosophy, appeared in the 1990s. N. R. E. Fisher’s work of 1992, Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece, defines his key term hybris as: ‘the serious assault on the honour of another, which is likely to cause shame, and lead to anger and attempts at revenge’ (Fisher 1992, p. 1). Douglas L. Cairns chooses a different Greek word as the focus for his study of shame, entitled AIDOS: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature, published in 1993. The same year also saw the publication of moral philosopher Bernard Williams’ Shame and Necessity (1993), a work substantially based on Homeric and other classical literary texts.

2. Shame theorists: Darwin, Freud and Erikson

Although the idea of shame in the west has its roots in classical antiquity and the Old Testament, for a systematic analysis of this emotion one must turn to the work of Charles Darwin. An historical survey of studies of shame would also be incomplete without reference to the works of Sigmund Freud, who is nevertheless not greatly concerned with this emotion, and it is in the thought of Erik Erikson that the role of shame in personality development is more comprehensively analysed. The following section will discuss in turn the contribution of Darwin, Freud and Erikson to the study of shame, followed by a brief discussion of key aspects with a particular bearing on the study of autobiography.

Charles Darwin’s ‘emotions of self-attention’

Charles Darwin, in his 1872 study, The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals, classifies shame as an ‘emotion of self-attention’, consequent on an
experience whereby an individual was unwillingly exposed to the critical gaze and assessment of another (Darwin 1979, p. 310). His main interest is in the relationship between the mind and the involuntary phenomenon of blushing, which constitutes physiological evidence of the group of emotions of self-attention, in which he includes shame, shyness and modesty:

we cannot cause a blush ... by any physical means, that is by any action on the body. It is the mind which must be affected. Blushing is not only involuntary; but the wish to restrain it, by leading to self-attention, actually increases the tendency (Darwin 1979, p. 310).

Darwin attempts to identify the approximate age when blushing begins, suggesting between two and three years of age, and observes: ‘Children at a very early age do not blush; nor do they show those other signs of self-consciousness which generally accompany blushing; and it is one of their chief charms that they think nothing about what others think of them’ (1979, p. 328).

Darwin’s analysis of ‘The Nature of the Mental States which induce Blushing’ (p. 326) leads him to conclude that, although the ‘exciting cause’ of the emotions of self-attention may be attributed to ‘self-attention directed to personal appearance, in relation to the opinion of others’ or to ‘self-attention in relation to moral conduct’, this is not sufficient: there has to be an awareness of being observed by others. ‘It is not the simple act of reflecting on our own appearance, but the thinking what others think of us, which excites a blush’ (pp. 326-7). Blame and disapprobation may act as triggers, but praise may also have this effect: the key element is self-attention in relation to others. Darwin attempts to distinguish between shame relative to personal appearance and shame related to moral failing, by recapitulating the conclusions of his racial study to support an argument for ‘moral delinquency’ as being a trigger for a shamed response. This is hardly convincing as Darwin’s cross-cultural examples of shame, collected by informers who were either colonisers or tourists, provide no evidence that the shamed individual was responding to the sense of moral failing that the blame, criticism, scrutiny or ridicule was intended to convey (Darwin 1979, pp. 321-9). The majority of Darwin’s examples are accounts of physiological manifestations of shame in individuals in subservient positions in a colonial context, where the observer was in a position of power.

Although Darwin attempts to make a case for moral delinquency as a trigger for shame, he nevertheless argues that it is not conscience but the opinion of others that leads to a shamed response (pp. 333-4). Other triggers identified in this study are breaches of etiquette (‘even though such laws have no necessary connection with the moral sense and are often meaningless’ (p. 334)); excessive
and unwanted attention and scrutiny; and modesty, in the sense of sensitivity to ‘acts of indelicacy’, generally related to the opposite sex (p. 335).

**Freud’s understanding of shame**

Freud, although more interested in guilt than shame, described the emotion of shame as one form of the ‘affect of self-reproach’, with the source of self-reproach being sexual experience in childhood (Freud 1957-74, vol. 1, pp. 221-4). In a paper of 1896 on the ‘Neuro-Psychoses of Defence’, Freud wrote:

> The affect of self-reproach can, by means of some mental addition, be transformed into any other affect.

Thus *self-reproach* (for having carried out the sexual act in childhood) can easily turn into *shame* (in case someone else should find out about it), into *hypochondriacal anxiety* (fear of the physical injuries resulting from the act involving the self-reproach), into *social anxiety* (fear of being punished by society for the misdeed), into *religious anxiety*, into *delusions of being noticed* (fear of betraying the act to other people), or into *fear of temptation* (a justified mistrust of one’s own moral powers of resistance), and so on’ (vol. 3, p. 171).

Here Freud links shame with fear of being found out, of exposure to the censure of others. At this stage of his thinking, Freud understands this shame to derive from the trauma of sexual assaults on small children, which he considers to be a common occurrence (vol. 3, pp. 164-5). He classifies shame as one of the ‘primary symptoms of defence’, together with conscientiousness and self­­­­distrust (vol. 3, p. 169).

Like Darwin, Freud associated shame particularly with the unwilling or unwitting exposure of physical nakedness. Shame is discussed in some detail in only one of Freud’s major works, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1957-74, vols 4 & 5), but it is significant that he illustrates his exposition with reference to narrative, describing the kind of dream that is the basis for Hans Anderson’s fairy tale, ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, ‘dreams of being naked in which one feels shame and embarrassment and tries to escape or hide’ (vol. 4, p. 242). Freud identifies the origins of such a dream in childhood experience: ‘It is only in our childhood that we are seen in inadequate clothing both by members of our family and by strangers ... and it is only then that we feel no shame at our nakedness’ (vol. 4, p. 244). Freud continues this explanation with his longest discussion of shame, relating it to the Genesis account of creation:

> When we look back at this unashamed period of childhood it seems to us a Paradise; and Paradise itself is no more than a group phantasy of the childhood of the individual. That is why mankind were naked in Paradise and were without shame in another’s presence; till a moment arrived when shame and anxiety awoke, expulsion followed, and sexual life and the tasks of cultural activity began. But we can regain this paradise every night in our dreams (vol. 4, p. 245).
Freud did not associate shame with any moral issue, although he listed shame as one of the ‘repressive forces’, together with disgust and morality, which are built up during the period of sexual latency and ‘which are later to impede the course of the sexual instinct and, like dams, restrict its flow’ (vol. 6, pp. 176-7). The essential characteristics of a shaming experience were exposure to another and powerlessness.

**Shame and autonomy: Erikson’s ‘eight ages of man’**

Erik Erikson’s understanding of human development from infancy to maturity, conceptualised as the ‘eight ages of man’, gives a prominence to the affect of shame that is not found in Freud. Erikson’s theory identifies shame as a formative emotion in early childhood, associated with the growth of self-awareness and preceding the development of a moral sense. In *Childhood and Society* (1950), Erikson sets out his theory of the ‘eight ages’ of development of human personality from infancy to maturity, correlating each age with Freudian stages of development. Shame is associated with the second stage. According to Erikson, a child who failed to negotiate the second stage of development successfully, would have an inhibited confidence in his/her individual autonomy and would be prone to shame. The ‘eight ages’ are set out below. Each ‘age’ is represented as a pair of opposite personality characteristics, the first representing successful passage through the developmental stage, the second, the consequence of less successful development:

1. Basic trust vs mistrust
2. Autonomy vs shame and doubt
3. Initiative vs guilt
4. Industry vs inferiority
5. Identity vs role confusion
6. Intimacy vs isolation
7. Generativity vs stagnation

Erikson argues for a social dimension to each developmental stage:

Each successive stage and crisis has a special relation to one of the basic elements of society, and this for the simple reason that the human life cycle and man’s institutions have evolved together (p. 250).

**The first stage – trust vs mistrust.** In this first stage of development, which precedes the development of a capacity for shame, an infant develops what Erikson calls ‘social trust’ when his/her basic needs for food, physical care and comfort are met reliably. Erikson explains: ‘The firm establishment of enduring patterns for the solution of the nuclear conflict of basic trust versus basic mistrust in mere existence is the first task of the ego’ (1950, p. 249). Success in
this task is attributed to the quality of the maternal relationship. But Erikson also observes that:

Even under the most favourable circumstances, this stage seems to introduce into psychic life ... a sense of inner division and universal nostalgia for a paradise forfeited. It is against this powerful combination of a sense of having been deprived, of having been divided, and of having been abandoned - that basic trust must maintain itself throughout life (p. 250).

Subsequent writers including Michael Lewis (1992) relate this sense of the divided and abandoned self to the development of a sense of shame.

The second stage - autonomy vs shame and doubt. In this stage, according to Erikson’s model, the child can develop autonomy provided that there is a balance between opportunities to develop free choice and self-control and reassuring parental control. Toilet training and the child’s ability to make choices and to need discipline are involved at this point of development. The child is beginning to develop self-awareness and thus becomes vulnerable to being shamed. Shaming of the child can occur both through inappropriate discipline and insensitive toilet training.

In discussing this stage, Erikson examines in some detail the emotion of shame:

Shame is an emotion insufficiently studied, because in our civilisation it is so early and easily absorbed by guilt. Shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at, in one word, self-conscious. One is visible and not ready to be visible (p. 252).

Erikson briefly relates shame to the Freudian concept of being exposed, in a state of undress, then proceeds to describe the way shame is expressed: ‘Shame is early expressed in an impulse to bury one’s face, or to sink ... into the ground’. He believes that shame is ‘rage turned against the self’, and that:

He who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him, not to notice his exposure. He would like to destroy the eyes of the world. Instead he must wish for his own invisibility (pp. 252-3).

The consequences of too much shaming are described by Erikson as follows: ‘Too much shaming does not lead to genuine propriety but to a secret determination to try and get away with things, unseen – if, indeed, it does not result in defiant shamelessness’ (p. 253). He continues:

Many a small child, shamed beyond endurance, may be in a chronic mood ... to express defiance ... there is a limit to a child’s and an adult’s endurance in the face of demands to consider himself, his body, and his wishes as evil and dirty, and to his belief in the infallibility of those who pass such judgement: his chance will come when they are gone, or when he will go from them (p. 253).
For some who have been shamed in this way as children, the autobiographical act provides the opportunity to confront shame and re-evaluate his or her own worth.

**The third stage – initiative vs guilt.** For the purposes of this study it is also useful to understand the third stage in Erikson’s model, which places guilt at a later point of development to shame. Erikson’s concept of initiative is: ‘the quality of undertaking, planning and “attacking” a task for the sake of being active and on the move, where before self-will, more often than not, inspired acts of defiance or ... protested independence’ (p. 255).

The ‘oppositional’ quality of guilt is less clearly delineated. Guilt appears to arise from the need to regulate one’s own initiative where it encroaches on the autonomy of others. It is related to the development of the superego and the process of acquisition of moral responsibility. Erikson sees this stage as marking the beginning of a divided self:

> For here the child becomes forever divided in himself. The instinct fragments which before had enhanced the growth of his infantile body and mind now become divided into an infantile set which perpetuates the exuberance of growth potentials, and a parental set which supports and increases self-observation, self-guidance, and self-punishment (p. 256).

What is important for this discussion is that Erikson allocates the emergence of shame in human personality to an earlier phase of development than guilt, prior to the development of a moral sense.

From the work of Darwin, Freud and Erikson on shame, some important insights can be gained in relation to the study of shame in autobiography. Darwin’s observation of the connection between shame and mental activity has a bearing on the intellectual process of self-attention involved in the autobiographical act. Darwin noted the development of the capacity for shame in young children, a process that is relevant to the autobiographical representation of childhood. He also observed that triggers for shame could be diverse, ranging from an awareness of infringing minor social conventions to a consciousness of moral failing in the eyes of others, a diversity that is reflected in the multiplicity of shaming experiences represented in autobiography. Darwin’s cross-cultural examples of shame indicate, albeit without analysis, that a relationship exists between shame and the exercise of power.

Freud’s discussion of the connection between shame and nakedness suggests questions about the nature and motivation for autobiographical self-exposure. His interpretation of the biblical account of the Fall is relevant to recurrent autobiographical representations of childhood in terms of the myth of Eden.
Freud’s use of story and myth to illustrate aspects of shame is an indication of how shame is deeply imbedded in the European narrative tradition. Finally, Freud’s observations on the way in which self-reproach may become transformed into a diversity of other affects is an early insight into the ways in which the emotion of shame may be hidden from others and from the self.

Erikson’s theorising of shame authoritatively locates this emotion at a key stage in child development as well as arguing for a separation between a sense of shame and a moral sense. Erikson’s model offers the critic a sound basis for the study of shame in autobiographical texts which represent both childhood and the mature self. Although subsequent shame theorists, in particular Retzinger (forthcoming), argue that shame is associated with moral awareness, Erikson’s distinction is useful as a precedent for suggesting that shame may not necessarily be associated with moral transgression, but may be provoked by the oppressive attitude of a dominant other. Racism is a clear example of the shaming of one group by another where the oppressed group is shamed for characteristics that are quite unrelated to morality.

3. Some contemporary views of shame

Subsequent to Erikson’s work in Childhood and Society, Helen Lynd’s study On Shame and the Search for Identity (1958) draws on Erikson’s model of human development, using an interdisciplinary approach from psychology and philosophy and illustrating her discussion from a wide range of literary texts. Lynd’s work on confronting shame contributes to an understanding of how the autobiographical act may involve a specific confrontation with shame. Kohut’s psychological analysis of shame and narcissism has a bearing on autobiography as a narcissistic act. John Braithwaite, acknowledging the work of Lynd, has developed a theory of shame as either reintegrative or disintegrative, which proposes a positive as well as a negative function for shame in the self, and emphasises the relationship between individual shame and society. Alice Miller, in For your own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence (1987), foregrounds the destructive influence of shaming educational practices on the developing personality of a child, practices which are also represented in autobiographical accounts of childhood. Finally, Michael Lewis in Shame: The Exposed Self (1992) explores and explains the operation of shame in the self in a comprehensive study that informs much of my ensuing discussion of shame in autobiography.
Lynd: shame and identity

Lynd, influenced by Erikson, uses the latter’s model to argue that shame was a common preoccupation of Victorian literature but was neglected in subsequent literary activity. In On Shame and the Search for Identity (1958), Lynd illustrates her theme with examples from Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Ibsen and the Bible as well as Victorian writers, particularly George Eliot.

Lynd suggests a relationship between individual experience and the social importance of shame in the quest for identity:

Such search for significance [ie of one’s place in the world] ... involves ... efforts to expose the repressions and contradictions of present society, to find seeds of wider values in them and to engage in active efforts to change society in the direction of fuller realisation ...

(p. 255).

Lynd considers that the confronting of shame contributes to this process of exposing repressive aspects of society, enabling both an expansion of the self, and of the society in which the self was placed:

Living in terms of guilt and righteousness is living in terms of the sanctions and taboos of one’s immediate culture. To some extent such living is necessary for everyone. Living in terms of the confronting of shame - and allowing shame to become a revelation of oneself and of one’s society - makes way for living beyond the conventions of a particular culture. It makes possible the discovery of an integrity that is peculiarly one’s own and of those characteristically human qualities that are at the same time most individualising and most universal (p. 257).

Lynd relates the lack of attention to shame to problems of language which have become exacerbated in the years that have passed since her ground-breaking study:

The present theoretical and pragmatic acceptance of aggression, prestige, and power as central springs of action puts still other barriers in the way of experiencing and communicating shame, joy, love, wonder, curiosity, sense of honour, and desire for significance beyond recognised achievement. Lack of a language contributes to the sense of estrangement. If, however, one can sufficiently risk uncovering oneself and sufficiently trust another person, to seek means of communicating shame, the risking of exposure can be in itself an experience of release, expansion, self-revelation, a coming forward of belief in oneself, and entering into the mind and feeling of another person (p. 249).

I suggest that the autobiographical act may constitute an attempt to renew the possibilities for the linguistic expression of shame and thereby contribute to the experience of release that Lynd identifies.
Kohut: shame and narcissism

Heinz Kohut’s therapeutic interest in adult narcissistic disorders suggests some interesting lines of inquiry, as the autobiographical act may be construed as a pre-eminently narcissistic act. Unlike Freud, Kohut distinguishes a healthy form of childhood narcissism. In ‘Forms and Transformations of Narcissism’ (Kohut 1978), Kohut emphasises the young child’s need for healthy exhibitionism mirrored by the mother as an important developmental phase:

After psychological separation has taken place, the child needs the gleam in the mother’s eye in order to maintain the narcissistic libidinal suffusion that now concerns, in their sequence, the leading functions and activities of the various maturational phases (Kohut 1978, p. 439).

If a child lacks the loving support required for passing through this stage, experiencing instead rejection, or unpredictable responses of overindulgence alternating with rejection, a child may be unable to negotiate the transition from narcissistic exhibitionism to goal-directed activities: ‘instead of a pleasurable confirmation of the value, beauty and lovelableness of the self, there is painful shame’ (p. 439). Kohut’s understanding of the relationship between the ‘grandiose fantasy’ of early childhood and the structure of adult personality led him to link childhood experience with ambition in adulthood. If all goes well, ‘Our ambitions ... although derived from a system of infantile grandiose fantasies may become optimally restrained, merge with the structure of the ego’s goals, and achieve autonomy’ (pp. 437-8). But if the exhibitionist phase of early childhood is not successfully realised, ambition becomes problematic in adulthood: ‘If we cannot realise [our ambitions], narcissistic exhibitionist tendencies remain undischarged, become dammed up, and the emotion of disappointment that the ego experiences, always contains an admixture of shame’ (p. 439).

Kohut continues:

And if the grandiosity of the narcissistic self has been insufficiently modified because traumatic onslaughts on the child’s self-esteem have driven the grandiose fantasies into repression, then the adult ego will tend to vacillate between an irrational overestimation of the self and feelings of inferiority (p. 438).

One can hypothesise that the autobiographical genre is ideally suited to the discharge in adulthood of residual narcissistic exhibitionist tendencies and the exploration of grandiose fantasies, and that consistent with Kohut’s theory, traces of shame in the narrative could be anticipated.
Michael Lewis: shame – a specific injury to self

If shame is an exposure of the self, as Michael Lewis suggests in *Shame: The Exposed Self* (1992), and if that self is a vulnerable, often a child self, exposed by the cruelty and insensitivity of others, an autobiography may constitute a deliberate public presentation of the self by the adult self, seeking to redress the balance.

Lewis explains:

What is an exposed self and to whom is it exposed? The self is exposed to itself, that is, we are capable of viewing ourselves ... The subjective and objective selves are differentiated ... The objective self can reflect on and reject any solution generated by the subjective process. The objective self uses metaphors; the subjective self operates with a simple sign system. The objective self allows us to stand back from our own processing and thereby increases the possibility of generating new solutions (p. 36).

Lewis defines a phenomenology of shame characterised by:

1. the desire to hide or to disappear
2. intense pain, discomfort and anger
3. the feeling that one is no good, inadequate, unworthy

and most significantly for autobiographical study

4. a fusion of subject and object:

In shame, we become the subject as well as the object of shame. The self system is caught in a bind in which the ability to act or to continue acting becomes extremely difficult. Shame disrupts ongoing activity as the self focuses completely on itself, and the result is confusion: inability to think clearly, inability to talk, and inability to act (p. 34).

Lewis recognises the difficulty in identifying the presence of the emotion of shame: 'Shame is like a subatomic particle. One’s knowledge of shame is often limited to the trace it leaves' (p. 34).

Lewis differentiates between shame and guilt. Guilt is described as an emotion where the self is the subject but with the object of guilt being external to the self. In guilt the 'focus of the self is upon the behaviour that caused the interruption, namely the inadequacy to meet certain standards, and upon the object who suffers from that failure' (p. 34). Shame, in contrast, is 'the complete closure of the subject-object circle'. The internal command triggered by the emotion of guilt is: 'Stop. Pay attention to what you did and alter your behaviour.' The internal command triggered by shame is 'Stop. You are no good' (p. 35).

Commentaries on shame by other psychologists quoted by Michael Lewis also shed light on this complex emotion. Tompkins describes shame as a ‘blocking
of desire' (in Michael Lewis 1992, p. 31). According to Izard, shame is 'contempt for self', where 'The self is seen as small, frozen, helpless, emotionally hurt' and H. B. Lewis describes shame as 'a state of self devaluation' (in Michael Lewis 1992, p. 32).

Michael Lewis's analysis of shame versus guilt is particularly relevant to an understanding of the links between shame and narrative. In autobiography, recorded injuries to the self caused by shaming are likely to include humiliating punishment or ill-treatment of the child by parents or school teachers, sexual abuse, scorn or mockery by peers or significant adults, public exposure of private bodily functions or sexual activity, disapproval by a significant other as exemplified by absence of parental warmth and acceptance of the self that one is, particularly as regards physical characteristics that the individual cannot change, such as gender, race, health, sexual orientation. Autobiographies may constitute narratives in which a child is shamed in a family where parental standards are unrealistic, leading to chronic shame in later life. Similarly autobiographies may illustrate how individuals whose physical needs were not cared for effectively as children experience shame in relation to their bodies as adults. This latter form of shame has nothing to do with the violation of internalised rules.

**Braithwaite: reintegrative and disintegrative shame**

John Braithwaite's study of shame from a criminological perspective, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*, argues that shaming may have a positive function in society, in which case it is 'reintegrative', but if extreme to the point of stigmatisation of the offender, shaming becomes 'disintegrative' (Braithwaite 1989, pp. 4-9). According to Braithwaite, reintegrative shaming is the 'vital element missing in criminological theory', suggesting that 'potent shaming directed at offenders is the essential necessary condition for low crime rates' (p. 4) and that 'Low crime societies are societies where people do not mind their own business, where tolerance of deviance has definite limits' (p. 8).

Braithwaite defines the positive value of shaming as follows:

> Moralising social control restricts our autonomy by inviting us to see that we cannot be whole moral persons through considering only our own interests in the choices we make. We are shamed if we exercise our own autonomy in a way that tramples on the autonomy of others (p. 11).
Braithwaite continues:

Shaming which eschews stigmatisation, which shames within a continuum of human respect, maximises prospects that behaviour which is not harmful to others will be tolerated (p. 11).

Braithwaite describes counterproductive, disintegrative shaming as being ‘open-ended, outcasting, and person- rather than offence-centred’, creating a stigma that has ‘crime-producing consequences’ (p. 4). He argues that ‘the effectiveness of shaming depends on continued social integration in a relationship sustained by social approval’ (p. 57). Stigmatisation he sees as disintegrative, not only to the individual, but to society, as ‘Stigmatisation is the most important of those life circumstances that increase the attraction of individuals to criminal subcultures’ (p. 67).

But Braithwaite has a reservation about the usefulness of reintegrative shaming which is highly significant for a study of autobiography, as changing social values create a dislocation between the ‘administering’ of shame and the ‘reception’ of shame:

The theory of reintegrative shaming is not a satisfactory general theory of deviance because its explanatory power declines as dissensus increases over whether the conduct should be viewed as deviant (p. 14).

Miller: ‘poisonous pedagogy’

Pointing out the power imbalance between adult and child, Alice Miller uses the term ‘poisonous pedagogy’ to describe widely accepted European child-rearing practices which provide a child with ‘absolutely no possibility of reacting appropriately to hurt, humiliation, and coercion’ (Miller 1987, p. 7). Miller’s analysis of two centuries of child-rearing texts (from the mid 18th century on) illustrates her conviction that adults have controlled children for their own purposes under the guise of the good of the child, by methods such as ‘laying traps, lying, duplicity, subterfuge, manipulation, “scare” tactics, withdrawal of love, isolation, distrust, humiliating and disgracing the child, scorn, ridicule, and coercion even to the point of torture’ (p. 59). Miller identifies a relation between such culturally entrenched beliefs about child-rearing and autobiographical and other texts of leading figures of the Third Reich, discovering connections between their childhood experience and anti-Semitic formulations. She observes an increase in autobiographical writing by a ‘younger generation of writers ... less and less inclined to idealise their parents’ and welcomes the way in which writers are ‘unmasking the devastating consequences of the way power is secretly exercised under the disguise of child-rearing’ (p. 279).
4. Literary representations of shame: some critical problems

As Lynd's study illustrates, literary representations of shame may be identified in many canonical literary texts, which makes the dearth of critical studies of shame in literature all the more puzzling. John Bunyan represents shame allegorically in some detail in his *Pilgrim's Progress* of 1678, in an episode that recalls biblical concepts of shame as well as anticipating later theorists. The initial response of Bunyan's character Faithful to an encounter with 'Shame' is consistent with Darwin's observations of the physiology of shame. Faithful is tongue-tied and blushes: 'Say! I could not tell what to say at the first. Yea, he put me so to it, that my blood came up in my face, even this Shame fetched it up, and had almost beat me quite off' (1965, p. 108). But Bunyan's analysis of shame is essentially theological: it is religious belief that is being undermined. 'Shame' attempts to convince Faithful that religion is 'a pitiful, low, sneaking business' and that 'a tender conscience was an unmanly thing' (p. 107). Faithful rallies by thinking of God and is able to repel Shame by reaffirming his own spiritual convictions. Like some of the autobiographers to be discussed, in particular the Aboriginal writers, Faithful reverses the values which Shame advocates by telling Shame that 'those things that he disdained, in those did I see most glory' (p. 109).

The nineteenth century essayist William Hazlitt links shame and literary practice, writing of the relationship between the shaming power of the look and the power of the man of letters to fight back with the pen:

I care little what anyone says of me, particularly behind my back, and in the way of criticism and analytical discussion: it is looks of dislike and scorn that I answer with the worst venom of my pen. The expression of the face wounds me more than the expression of the tongue (Hazlitt 1826, in Gross 1992, p. 118).


Sartre conveys his understanding of the power of the remorseless shaming gaze emanating from an indifferent or hostile 'other' with the image of 'an internal haemorrhage' (Sartre 1957). In the play *Huis Clos*, he represents a concept of hell as continual shame. The character Garcin affirms that 'l'enfer, c'est les Autres'. In *Huis Clos*, hell is an environment with no night, no sleep, nor even any blinking, so that each character is always before the unremitting, condemning gaze of another. 'Tu me verras toujours?' asks Garcin. 'Toujours', replies Inès, the character who perceives him to be a coward (Sartre 1947, p. 92). In Sartre's works, being exposed to the gaze of another is always unpleasant, never affirming.
Nathanson, like many other psychologists and social scientists writing on shame, draws on a literary source to introduce his theme. In *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self* (1992) he quotes the following passage from George Bernard Shaw’s *Man and Superman* (1903):

... we live in an atmosphere of shame. We are ashamed of everything that is real about us; ashamed of ourselves, our relatives, of our incomes, of our accents, of our opinions, of our experience, just as we are ashamed of our naked skins (Nathanson 1992, p. 16).

The sources of shame identified by Shaw are also represented in the autobiographies discussed in this study.

Despite literary explorations of shame such as those cited above, few critical studies since Lynd’s work have analysed shame in literary texts. In the 1980s, two mainly linguistic book-length studies of shame in medieval Arthurian literature appeared. Yvonne Robreau’s study of honour and shame (French ‘honte’) in French prose romances, *L’Honneur et la Honte: Leur Expression dans les Romans en Prose du Lancelot-Graal (XIIe-XIIIe siècles)*, was published in 1981 and Ann Martin’s study of medieval German literature, *Shame and Disgrace at King Arthur’s Court: A Study of the Meaning of Ignominy in German Arthurian Literature to 1300*, appeared in 1984. *Sovereign Shame: A Study of King Lear*, by W. F. Zak was also published in 1984. Basing his analysis substantially on Carl Schneider’s *Shame, Exposure and Privacy* (1977), Zak interprets the tragedy in *King Lear* as ‘a flight from shame that keeps man from a participation in human community’ (p. 13).


For the present, the critic of contemporary literature must turn to other disciplines, anthropology, psychology and sociology, as well as moral philosophy. Yet most writers in these fields also agree that shame has been an emotion that until recently has been relatively neglected in academic study.

A methodological problem arises when a study such as this, using the techniques of literary criticism, seeks to explore the ways in which autobiographical writers represent shame. Contemporary criticism has been shaped by European intellectuals whose work is distinguished by a distrust of emotion, including Sartre, Foucault, and Paul de Man, as well as Barthes and Derrida. This study will comment on the denigration of emotion in Sartre’s text,
Sartre

Sartre's *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1962) argues that emotion is a behaviour of escape (p. 66), 'an abandonment of responsibility, by means of a magical exaggeration of the difficulty of the world' (p. 70). All emotions are 'reducible to the constitution of a magic world, the making use of our bodies as instruments of incantation' (p. 73): 'emotion is a condition of captivity for consciousness' (p. 81). Sartre views emotion as inauthentic, dishonest behaviour, which is hard to reconcile with his emphasis on the bodily disturbance and spontaneity involved in emotion (pp. 78-9). This contradiction is contained in the following assertion: 'the origin of emotion is a spontaneous debasement lived by the consciousness in face of the world' (p. 79). To describe emotion as debased suggests that for Sartre the affect of shame may be attached to the experience of any emotion whatsoever. Emotion is to be avoided because it involves loss of consciousness: 'Emotion may be called a sudden fall of consciousness into magic' (p. 90), 'magic' being a negative term in Sartrean vocabulary, indicating bad faith. Consciousness needs to be freed from emotion: 'Liberation can come only from a purifying reflection or from the total disappearance of the emotional situation' (p. 93). If 'purification' is required, the implication is that emotion renders consciousness unclean, again indicative of a shame-based response to emotion, the shame being effectively bypassed by intellectualisation. A psychoanalytic interpretation of Sartre's autobiographical *Les Mots* [Words] (1964) and other biographical evidence might offer further indications as to the childhood sources of by-passed shame in Sartre's works, but at this point it is sufficient to suggest that the evidence of shame in relation to the emotions in a theoretical work about the emotions must cast suspicion on the adequacy of the theory. Even without this hermeneutic of suspicion, Sartre's theory of the emotions seems inadequate and limited. Sartre's work, *Being and Nothingness* (L'Etre et le Neant 1943), in particular his writing on 'le regard', attends only to the hostile and unpleasant regard, and ignores the possibility of an accepting and respectful favourable gaze such as Kohut's 'gleam in the mother's eye'.

Foucault

Foucault's study of the history of the prison system in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) becomes the occasion for the unfolding of his concept of surveillance as a vehicle for the operation of power. Although the relationship between watcher and watched is a 'classic' example of the process of shaming, whereby one
individual is forced to submit to the unwanted and unwavering gaze of a more powerful ‘other’, Foucault does not discuss the affect of shame. In his focus on bodies as opposed to souls, he takes little account of the human body as capable of feeling emotion as well as physical pain. This is consistent with his negation of individual agency. In his discussion of physical punishment, he alludes to bodily pain, occasionally to horror, or to sympathy, but only as observable crowd reactions. Individual emotion is not discussed. It is a significant omission.

Foucault also interprets confession in terms of the exercise of power by one individual over another, leaving no possibility for the confessing subject to become free of shame in the way that Michael Lewis suggests. Foucault argues that:

The confession is ... a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile (1990, pp. 61-62).

In Foucault’s terms, the autobiographical confession cannot contribute to discourses of freedom, as Rorty and Jill Johnson seem to suggest, if confession forms part of a power relationship in which the one who confesses is subordinate. Foucault continues: ‘the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing’ (p. 62).

In addressing the problems that Foucault raises, it might be noted first that Foucault’s discussion of confession does not mention shame, despite the role of shame in ‘regulating social distance’ (according to Retzinger) and resisting surveillance in order to safeguard individual privacy, although privacy (together with pleasure) appears to be the value underlying Foucault’s argument. Foucault is primarily concerned with the way in which talk about sex has moved from the domain of the personal to become a public discourse in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, pedagogy and religion, which function on the basis of strong authority structures. According to Foucault, confession erodes privacy and contributes to surveillance. Foucault argues that individuals are constrained to confess their sexual practices and that these are codified according to various discourses of knowledge that are not related to pleasure and are elaborated by the powerful. Freedom does not reside in the act of confession because the interlocutor is powerful and intrusive.
In the light of Foucault’s arguments, is it possible to sustain Jill Johnson’s view of autobiography as a confessional genre which overcomes shame and celebrates difference? Charles Taylor’s critical essay, ‘Foucault on Freedom and Truth’, is helpful in pointing out that although Foucault’s work involves unmasking or revealing evils resulting from the operation of hidden power systems, nevertheless Foucault ‘wants to distance himself from the suggestion which would seem inescapably to follow, that the negation or overcoming of these evils promotes a good’ (in Hoy 1986, p. 69). Taylor argues that Foucault’s ‘combination of relativism between forms and monolithism of forms ... blocks out – the possibility of a change of life-form which can be understood as a move towards a greater acceptance of truth – and hence also, under certain conditions, a move towards greater freedom’ (Hoy 1986, p. 96). Taylor himself affirms the possibility of liberation, both personal and political, on the basis of shared concepts of freedom and humanitarianism derived from the ethical heritage of Western Europe, which ‘have helped to define a political identity we share’ (Hoy 1986, p. 96). Contemporary autobiography as described by Johnson is consistent with this common heritage of notions of freedom emphasised by Taylor, involving the possibility of transformation.

Foucault’s idea of the disappearance of the subject sits uncomfortably with his work of unmasking the operation of hidden power systems. The autobiographical subjects in texts such as those discussed by Jill Johnson locate themselves in particularity: these texts are constructed so that the individual subject is revealed with greater clarity when hidden power systems are contested. In a sense, autobiographies may be reservoirs of what Foucault terms ‘subjugated knowledges’, ‘the experiences of groups subordinated to power that have never advanced to the status of official knowledge, that have never been sufficiently articulated’ and pertaining to those ‘who are the first to experience a technology of power with their own bodies’ (Habermas 1987, p. 280). Yet what Foucault as genealogical historiographer does not do, as Habermas explains, is to ‘try to make comprehensible what actors are doing and thinking out of a context of tradition interwoven with the self-understanding of the actors (Habermas 1987, p. 277).

Taylor casts doubt on Foucault’s idea of ‘power without a subject’, observing that Foucault appears to situate himself as a ‘neutral’ observer located ‘nowhere’. Johnson’s rhetoric is expressive of an optimism that has its origins in the Enlightenment project, in contrast with the Foucauldian concept of history, according to Habermas, ‘as meaningless kaleidoscopic changes in shape in discourse totalities that have nothing in common apart from the single characteristic of being protuberances of power in general’ (Habermas 1987,
p. 277). Jill Johnson’s view is also continuous with Romantic notions of a self as having imagination, feeling and ‘depth’ as Taylor suggests in Sources of the Self (1989).

Furthermore, it is not characteristic of Foucault’s analyses to acknowledge the possibility of social bonds characterised more by mutuality and reciprocity than by the exercise of power. Habermas points out that Foucault ‘shift[s] the meaning of this specific will to knowledge and to truth that is constitutive for the modern form of knowledge ... by generalising this will to knowing self-mastery into a will to power per se and to postulate that all discourses ... can be shown to have the character of hidden power and derive from practices of power’ (Habermas 1987, p. 265). The practices of consoling or reconciling are concerned with restoring social bonds characterised by mutuality and reciprocity, and are therefore practices in a very different relationship to the exercise of power to those of judging and punishing, although Foucault conflates them as pertaining to the agency of the interlocutor of one who confesses. Reconciliation, a practice excluded from Foucault’s thought, implies mutuality rather than an imbalance of power between participants. Foucault’s critique of confession pertains more to ‘the archetype of the closed institution’ such as the asylum, as well as ‘the factory, the prison, the barracks, the school, and the military academy’ (Habermas 1987, p. 245). As Habermas suggests, in these ‘total institutions’ is ‘the gaze of the rational subject who has lost all merely intuitive bonds with his environment and torn down all the bridges built up of intersubjective agreement, and for whom in his monological isolation, other subjects are only accessible as the objects of nonparticipant observation’ (Habermas 1987, p. 245). This is the shaming gaze par excellence, where the surveyed subject is disempowered.

**Paul de Man: Shame and De-Facement**

The theory of Paul de Man is also relevant to this debate. Paul de Man’s article, ‘Autobiography as De-Facement’ (1984) disparages autobiography as a genre with somewhat shaming language, describing the form as ‘slightly disreputable and self-indulgent in a way that may be symptomatic of its incompatibility with the monumental dignity of aesthetic values’ [my emphasis]. De Man questions whether autobiography even exists, but adopts a neutral position by arguing that in some ways all texts are autobiographical, and in other ways none of them are. He proceeds to address the question as to whether or not autobiographical discourse may be considered ‘a discourse of restoration’, with reference to Wordsworth.
By means of a complex argument based on an understanding of autobiography as a rhetorical figure, a ‘prosopopoeia’ or personification of ‘the voice beyond the grave’, de Man asserts that ‘the restoration of mortality by autobiography ... deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores’. He concludes: ‘Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause.’ De Man also asserts that ‘death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament’, a statement which suggests an inflated view of rhetoric, unless the critical viewpoint can be assumed to be ironic. Nevertheless, only a limited view of the genre and its potential for restoration can be derived from an argument based solely on the exegesis of a rhetorical device. Curtius, in his scholarly study of rhetoric, calls the use of grammatical and technical rhetorical terms as metaphors a ‘stylistic curiosity that was the height of fashion at the end of the twelfth century’ (1953, pp. 414-5). Curtius also notes that ‘the word prosopopeya (sic) ... underwent an interesting change of meaning in Spanish: it also signifies “afectacion de gravedad y pompa” ’ (p. 416). In modern Spanish the word means ‘airs and pomposity’, a meaning rather close to ‘grandiosity’, a term associated with shame (e.g. Kohut 1978).

Evidence that de Man himself led a life that included what appear to be radically unethical breaks with his own past (e.g. Lehman 1992) casts a long shadow over ‘Autobiography as de-facement’. If the relevance of the ‘sitz-im-leben’ of both writer and reader is accepted, should that of the critic also be deconstructed?

The problem of reference

The sophistication of late twentieth century literary theory, with the focus on the complexity of the act of writing, offers multiple possibilities for evading the ethical issues raised in autobiographical texts, including suffering in childhood. Analysis of a text as a linguistic entity which has no reference to non-linguistic reality may defuse or deflate the communicative passion of an autobiographer. The critic may hover round the margins of a text, detecting aporias, identifying competing discourses and ideological inconsistencies, while ignoring the text’s ethical imperative. Now that the intellectual is no longer subject to a master narrative, a prophetic word may be construed as nothing but a linguistic construct. Sidonie Smith’s concept of the ‘autobiographical manifesto’ attempts to bridge the gulf between text as closed linguistic entity and text in ethical relation with the world, echoing earlier attempts by surrealist writers to break out of the closed circle of symbolist poetry.

G. A. Wilkes, in reviewing Re-Thinking Theory, by Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller (1992) accepts that the principal value of recent critical theory
'may have been to argue that no text, and no criticism of it, is ideologically innocent' (Wilkes 1993, p. 94). Nevertheless, Wilkes also addresses the problematic relationship between literary texts and 'real life', questioning the assumption he finds in much contemporary theory, that 'literature does not ever represent life' and that 'it offers only constructions of it', and 'reality always escapes the language that is supposed to render it' (Wilkes 1993, p. 94).

Shame and rage are the characteristic emotional responses to abuse, although rage is typically repressed. Adults’ abuse of their power over children comes to light as the child, like the empire, writes back, in autobiographical works which may express shame or less frequently, rage. Literary criticism that approaches a text as a closed circle, looking at linguistic resolutions of the construction of the self, ignoring the social and political context of the work, fails to attend to the relationship of literary practices to other social practices. One example is the way in which the phrase ‘inscribed on the body’ may be deflected. An injury to a human body described in words on a page is not the same as the actual injury, but a relationship exists between the two, the more so when an ‘autobiographical contract’ is in place and the narrator testifies that the injury was to his/her own body. Critical responses to the ‘classical’ autobiographies provide ample examples of evasion.

The connection between the making public of an individual account of shaming and a shift in social values is complex. Changing political and social conditions create a climate whereby particular autobiographies are written, and published. Autobiographies in turn contribute to shaping political conditions and social attitudes. This study is based on the presupposition that although the relationship between a text and non-textual reality is problematic, such a connection does exist, a critical problem that has been addressed in detail by Eakin in Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography (1992).

5. Shame and autobiography

To restate the initial argument of this thesis, the emotion of shame constitutes a driving force in many autobiographical texts, including Australian autobiographies of the period under study, 1960-1995. In summary, ‘Shame is the most crippling of emotions. Guilt tells us that we have done wrong. Shame tells us that we are wrong, that our entire being is defective, that there is no health in us’ (Dalziell 1993, p. 40). Shame is an inevitable part of the experience of being a child, however nurturing the family and educational environment may be, although successful negotiation of the developmental stages of the maturing self will minimise the inhibiting or destructive effects of residual shame in adult life (Freud 1962; Erikson 1950; Kohut 1978; Michael Lewis 1992).
Shame is closely related to a sense of identity. In autobiographical criticism, the phrase ‘to construct an identity’ is often used, but as philosopher J. J. C. Smart has pointed out, one cannot ‘construct an identity’, but can only construct a theory of how one is regarded by others (Smart, personal communication, 20/4/94). Shame, as an emotion of self-attention, plays a part in the construction of such a theory. Where shame-based reactions to others are too strong, the theory of how one is regarded by others is likely to be unrealistically negative. Where shame-based reactions to others are too weak, as in the case of Salman Rushdie’s character Omar Khayyam Shakil, an individual is unlikely to care enough about how he or she is regarded by others to develop a theory at all (in *Shame* 1983). An autobiography may provide an opportunity for an individual to present his or her theory of how he or she is now regarded by others or how he or she was so regarded in the past, in a way that is designed to convince the reader of the autobiography to adopt this view.

The chapters that follow will examine strategies by which a number of Australian autobiographical writers represent shame in the literary shaping of a self. The analysis will also consider how an autobiographer may deflect or avoid confronting shame within the self, including attempts to erase traces of shaming experience from the narrated self. The study will identify ways in which the autobiographical act attempts to heal the shamed self, as well as instances when shame appears to be ‘by-passed’, or buried.

Shame, a form of emotional suffering, is an ‘attestation’ of the reality of the self, in the sense of Paul Ricoeur’s conviction that: ‘attestation is fundamentally attestation of self ... attestation can be defined as the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering’ (Ricoeur 1992, p. 22). That shame as suffering should constitute attestation is paradoxical in that shame also restricts the activity of the self as agent, so that the self becomes reactive, rather than active, withdrawn rather than expansive.

The autobiographical act is an exercise in self-attention intended for the gaze of others. Unlike the shaming experiences of life, which by their very nature cannot be controlled, the act of writing is self-directing, even when recording apparently shameful experiences or material. Writing can record, confess, conceal, deflect, correct, or misrepresent. The writer can forgive the shamer, understand, or shame the shamer, or shame others out of revenge (e.g. M. Clark, 1989, 1991; P. White 1981). The autobiographer may seek to outwit those who would publicly shame him or her, by getting in first.
Shame and the narrating self

J. J. Rousseau was shamelessly disingenuous in his heartfelt commitment to autobiographical sincerity in the *Confessions* (1781) ‘l’examen sévère et sincère que j’appelai jadis mes *Confessions*’ (Rousseau 1965, p. 35), admitting that the work was written with the intention of winning the sympathy of future generations, having lost that of his own:

J’écrivais mes premières *Confessions* ... dans un souci continu sur les moyens de le dérober aux mains rapaces de mes persécuteurs, pour les transmettre, s’il était possible, à d’autres générations’ (Rousseau 1965, p. 37).

Clive James’s witty aphorism in his *Unreliable Memoirs* acknowledges what Rousseau does not:

I am ... well aware that all attempts to put oneself in a bad light are doomed to be frustrated. The ego arranges the bad light to its own satisfaction (James 1981, p. 9).

Autobiography, as an act of controlled self-exposure, involving a usually mature narrating self representing earlier experience of childhood and youth, often recounts episodes in which the developing self experienced embarrassment, humiliation and shame. Episodes of which the narrating self is ashamed at the time of writing, if not at the time of occurrence, also form part of many autobiographical narratives, particularly childhood theft, lying, cruelty, insensitivity, selfishness, and adherence to social and moral values subsequently discarded. The nature of the autobiographical material that is either ‘always’ or ‘never’ told, changes significantly over time. Childhood sexual experiences that were never told in pre-Freudian autobiographies have become the writer’s quasi-sacred duty to reveal, as Hartman argues in his exposition of Freudian ‘kakangelism’ (‘bad news about the psyche’) (Hartman 1985, p.416). Individual experiences of racial and sexual discrimination could only be told as political and social conditions began to change, and such autobiographies in turn contributed to these transformations. ‘Forbidden’ topics associated with shame gradually emerge in Australian autobiographies from 1960 to the 1990s. Men write about the pain of not conforming to national stereotypes of masculinity as in *My Brother Jack* (1964); of homosexuality in *The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony* and *Flaws in the Glass*; of post-traumatic stress syndrome deriving from war experience in *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1968); women write of gender discrimination, sexual abuse, first periods, early sexual experience, incest. Both female and male autobiographers write about problematic relationships with parents, including alcoholic parents (Sally Morgan; Manning Clark), abandonment by a parent (Albert Facey; Ruby Langford Ginibi), premature death of a parent (Barbara Hanrahan; Jill Ker
Conway), illegitimacy (Bernard Smith; David Parker; Charles Perkins; Robert Dessiaix). Class issues are also explored in Australian autobiographies of the period. Porter and Johnston depict lower middle class childhoods; Hanrahan, Smith and Parker, working class childhoods. Aboriginal autobiographies convey the experience of urban and rural poverty related to racism, while Albert Facey's story, *A Fortunate Life*, depicts a non-indigenous man's struggle against poverty. Immigrant autobiographies also explore issues of poverty, class and discrimination (for example, Waten, Liverani and Riemer).

6. The social importance of shame

The representation of previously ‘forbidden’ topics in Australian autobiography illustrates that shame has a social as well as individual import. Shaming is a form of social control, a use of power. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) has demonstrated the punitive power of surveillance by the state, the annihilating force of ‘le regard’, that is, the shaming gaze. Autobiography may play a social role in resisting oppressive shaming. John Colmer suggests that Australian autobiography is distinguished from ‘old-world forms’ by its ‘critical social role’. Although Colmer has entitled his critical study of Australian autobiography ‘The Personal Quest’, he emphasises the concern of the majority of writers studied ‘with creating and redefining images of national identity’ (Colmer 1989, pp. 153-4). Colmer observes the ideological commitment of a number of Australian autobiographers and relates this to the fact that ‘most autobiographers are in some sense outsiders, [and] the fact that one belongs to a minority group provides an additional justification for adopting this role and developing a radical criticism of established society’. Colmer also makes a connection between social criticism in autobiography and recent interest among historians in history ‘from below’ (1989, pp. 156-7). This present study develops the relationship identified by Colmer between individual quest and social commentary ‘from below’, by exploring the social dynamics of shame.

Shame and social change

In times of rapid political, cultural and social change, wide divergence may exist either between generations or between various social groups as to what constitutes shameful deviance. When inter-generational differences occur, shaming has complex repercussions, as shame reactions are largely formed in childhood (Erikson 1950; Kohut 1978). An adult may shame a child on the basis of values inculcated into his or her psyche in his/her own childhood (anterior to the development of conscience), which no longer prevail in contemporary society, and which the adult may not even consciously hold any longer. Lack of awareness of shame in themselves may lead individuals to shame another, less
powerful individual or group, on the basis of their own repressed (or 'by­passed') shame. Children are particularly vulnerable to this process. Thus shame may be a troublesome, or inhibiting force in the actions of individuals, even when their moral values have changed and their conscience is not troubled, or when they are no longer in the situation of powerlessness which was shaming to them.

Post-colonial issues facing Anglo- and Irish Australians are addressed in a number of Australian autobiographies. Difficulties experienced by both women and men in adjusting to and acting upon changed beliefs in gender roles are also illustrated by autobiographical texts. Emotion may be at variance with will and women and men may experience ‘the backlash’ of shame (Fitzpatrick 1983; Ker Conway 1990; Hewett 1990). Similarly, adults treated with physical harshness as children may commit themselves to bringing up their own children differently, but under stress may find themselves repeating family patterns. This family process is mirrored in the education system. Alcoholism within a family, which always involves a shame component (Potter-Efron 1989; Black 1982), may create complex inter-generational problems where emotion-driven action is at variance with what is believed and willed. Many Australian autobiographers, both European and Aboriginal, confront this, as alcoholism has been deeply imbedded in Australian culture since European settlement. Shame-driven reactions may also be problematic for those autobiographers who record childhood sexual abuse or homosexual experience.

The problems of residual or repressed shame may also create conflict in times of rapid social mobility, as patterns of shame vary between classes and ethnic groups. Similarly, in times of large scale movements of peoples as immigrants and refugees (as in the period under study), distinctive minority groups encounter an established, dominant culture and shame-driven conflict may occur. Immigrant autobiographies explore these conflicts (e.g. Liverani 1975; Riemer 1992). Efforts by a society to address deeply rooted racial discrimination are also fraught with shame-driven conflicts. Most Aboriginal autobiographers attest to these.

Shame and difference

Children may face shaming within the family where parents or carers are themselves shame-driven, where the family is under pressure, due to unemployment, poverty, rural hardship, marriage failure, alcoholism, parental illness or mental instability, prolonged absence or early death of a parent, or readjustment after war. Problems of repressed shame may occur wherever difference is encountered. A child’s own difference may also lead to shame,
whether the difference is poor health (e.g. asthma for Patrick White), extreme shyness (Hanrahan) or sensitivity (Manning Clark), oddity in appearance, lack of sporting ability where this is valued, an unusual personality or unusual intelligence or abilities, or on the other hand, a sense of not being gifted, or of differing from some social norm while wishing to conform.

Public and private

Autobiographical texts often appear in the guise of private words addressed to a reading public. T. S. Eliot ended a poem entitled ‘A Dedication to my Wife’ with the line: ‘These are private words addressed to you in public’, an acknowledgment that however private the content of a published text may appear to be, the ‘privacy’ of the meaning is inevitably a fiction, where publication is intended (Eliot 1969, p. 206). Poets and writers of fiction frequently use devices to create a bridge between their text and their reader. Charlotte Bronte’s ‘dear reader’ and Charles Baudelaire’s ‘hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère’, are but two examples. Autobiographers may be skilful practitioners of this art. The great precursor of autobiographers, St Augustine, purports to draw his reader into the confessional; Montaigne, in his autobiographical Essays (1580) seats his reader in his study, in the comfortable metaphorical armchair vacated by his intimate friend, Etienne de la Boëtie. J. J. Rousseau exposes his inner feelings, doubts, failures and weaknesses in his Confessions (1781), a text intended to win the sympathy of an unknown indulgent reader. Post-Freudian autobiographers such as André Gide (1954) share intimate details about sexual experience in early childhood.

Autobiography is a genre where a reader may expect to read of the intimate, the personal, of failure and particularly of shame. There are of course other styles of autobiography, including those intended to enhance the success of a person in public life, the retired politician’s memoir, the reminiscences of an ageing film star or discredited business executive, the sports achiever’s success story. But these too may shade into the other form.

A published autobiography is a public document, a text that may profess to be an intimate confession but that has been made available to a substantially unknown public for a complex knot of reasons, conscious and unconscious, political, economic, social, professional or psychological. Sidonie Smith has identified the publicity-conscious character of texts which she describes as ‘autobiographical manifestos’: ‘Autobiographical writing is always a gesture toward publicity, displaying before an impersonal public an individual’s interpretation of experience’ (Smith 1993, p. 159). But Smith warns against a too simple conception of the binary oppositions, public/private and
political/personal: 'The very impetus for contemporary autobiographical manifests, however, lies in the recognition of a vexed relationship between what too easily becomes the binary opposition of the political and the personal'. Smith argues that this distinction between the personal and the political has been challenged by more recent theorists of ‘multiple differences’, of ‘class, caste, race, gender, sexuality, nationality’ (Smith, 1993, p. 159). She quotes Aida Hurtado, who suggests that:

the political consciousness of women of Color stems from an awareness that the public is personally political ... There is no such thing as a private sphere for people of Color except that which they manage to create and protect in an otherwise hostile environment (Smith 1993, p. 159).

The quotation recalls Foucault’s discussion of the ‘Panopticon’, where the personal and private do not exist for those under surveillance (Foucault 1977).

An autobiographer anticipates that he/she will have a readership, that is, a group of people who are literate in the language in which it is written, who will buy or borrow, read, lend, review, criticise or even imitate it. A particular ‘interpretive community’, to use Stanley Fish’s term, may be targeted, by author or editor, although the readership of a commercially successful autobiography may be much wider than that anticipated. Interpretation is communal, as Fish explains:

meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretive communities that are responsible both for the shape of the reader’s activities and for the texts those activities produce (Fish, quoted by Freund 1987, p.107).

Weinsheimer extends Fish’s concept to include critics and readers of criticism, arguing that criticism is essentially communal and public (1992, p. 259). Sidonie Smith (1992) also considers the role of the editor in the construction of life stories. The presentation, reception and interpretation of an autobiography is a complex, public, social process.

**Shame and the abuse of power**

If shame is a response on the part of the powerless to unavoidable humiliation and abuse, then it could be anticipated that a shamed individual or group would only embark on autobiographical writing when in a less powerless situation. Public recognition may contribute to the conditions for personal shame to be brought to light in published autobiographies. Edmund Gosse (1907) records a childhood of humiliation by adults neurotically preoccupied with sin when he himself has become a successful man of letters. John Stuart Mill’s childhood development, blighted by the rigid, self-serving pedagogical
methods of his father, is made public after Mill has had public recognition (1873). St Augustine writes as a bishop of his childhood terror of physical punishment at school.

A similar tendency is observable in Australian autobiographical writing. Barbara Hanrahan was a well-known artist and printmaker before she began writing about her working class background and troubled childhood in *The Scent of Eucalyptus* (1973). Bernard Smith wrote of his illegitimacy in *The Boy Adeodatus* after a distinguished career as an art historian and critic. Patrick White wrote of his homosexuality in *Flaws in the Glass* after receiving many honours as a novelist, including the Nobel prize for literature.

Australian autobiographies reflect a pattern of changing power relations. Autobiographies by male academics such as W. K. Hancock (1954) and A. R. Chisholm (1958) appeared before autobiographies by lower middle class urban Australian male writers, such as Hal Porter and George Johnston, a new phenomenon in the early 1960s. Autobiographies by female writers have received less prominence than those written by men, as Joy Hooton has convincingly argued (1990). Few autobiographies by Aboriginal writers appeared before the 1970s (after the 1967 referendum). The publication of Sally Morgan’s *My Place* in 1987, the year before the bicentenary of European settlement, stimulated the market for Aboriginal autobiographies, particularly by women. The last fifteen years have seen an increase in Australian autobiographies by migrants, by homosexuals, by survivors of violent families, and by writers with mental disabilities such as autism and schizophrenia, reflecting a more inclusive political climate and a market shaped by an increasing interest in diversity and difference.

7. Shame, healing and autobiography

Shame and healing

Michael Lewis, writing in *Shame: The Exposed Self* (1992) offers four methods for ‘getting rid of’ shame, all of which have a bearing on autobiography:

1. to ‘own’ shame and allow it to dissipate with time, involving removal of oneself from the shaming situation

2. denial/forgetting

3. laughter

4. confession
Even denial may show forth in a narrative as a significant *aporia*. Confession is the most obviously relevant, as autobiography is a confessional genre. Lewis writes:

confession like laughter and forgetting, is an attempt to deal with acknowledged shame once it occurs. In confession, we go to others and tell them about an event that has shamed us. This public acknowledgment of the transgression and the shame that accompanies it appears to be a successful way of dealing with shame (1992, p. 131).

Lewis argues that the success of this method is illustrated by the use of confessions in certain religious communities for centuries. But he asserts that the confessional process does not require the agency of a religious leader, and that ‘secular confessions’ may be equally effective. Lewis explains how this works:

The degree to which people confess their transgressions to others is the degree to which they join with the others in observing themselves. This allows the self to move from the self, that is, from the source of the shame, to the other. This, in turn, allows the self as ‘confessee’ to look upon the self as the object rather than the subject (p. 132).

He further explains: ‘Confession ... is a re enactment of the original source of shame. Through it, we are able to dissipate our shame and restore our intrapsychic life to balance’ (1992, p. 132). Although Lewis’s use of the term ‘transgression’ is inappropriate given that the shamed individual may well be transgressed against rather than a transgressor, his description of the narrative process is useful. When the shamed person ‘confesses’, what may happen is a transfer both of feelings of shame and of moral responsibility from the shamed individual to those who did the shaming. In the confessional or therapeutic discourse, motives can be explored, feelings acknowledged and responsibility allocated.

But where this distance does not occur, the narrative may simply be an occasion for recycling the shameful incident, as Rousseau appears to do with several episodes in the *Confessions*. Furthermore, the experience of shame may be so deeply embedded in the psyche that it penetrates version after version of the shameful incident. Mary McCarthy’s short story ‘CYE’ is an example of this; Eakin analyses the various transformations of this narrative by McCarthy, but does not identify the motivating element of shame, and remains puzzled by the author’s behaviour (Eakin 1985, pp. 27-35).

Lewis’s third therapeutic factor, laughter, is also represented in Australian autobiographical narratives as an antidote to shame. The following example occurs in Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* (1988). After her daughter’s death, she describes herself as drinking heavily and picking up men. On one occasion she and her friend, when drinking at a hotel, are invited by a
man to go to the dog races. They turn down the offer, telling the rebuffed individual – ‘Look mate, we’ve been going to the dogs for years’ (1988, p. 151). By means of a joke, Langford Ginibi acknowledges her sense of personal degradation: laughing at it with her friend helps to dissipate the shame.

**Autobiography and healing**

The connection between autobiography and healing has been observed by a small number of critics. John Berger writes: ‘Autobiography begins with a sense of being alone. It is an orphan form’. Berger links autobiography to solitude and grief in an article written six weeks after the death of his mother, entitled ‘Her Secrets’ (in Lesser 1993). He suggests that if he were to write an autobiography, given that his parents are no longer alive: ‘the book, when finished, would be there, a little like a parent’ (p. 295).

Autobiography often has its genesis in a sense of solitude deriving from an experience of abandonment in childhood. The child who is abandoned by a parent, whether through death or some other cause, characteristically feels a sense of personal unworthiness and shame as well as grief. Current thinking in the psychology of grief suggests that experiences of loss in adult life, particularly through the death of a parent or the end of a marriage, involve a form of separation anxiety akin to that of the young child. Grief in adult life can trigger the emotion and associated memories of abandonment and shame from earlier life as well as the grief of the immediate loss (Raphael 1984). Grieving customarily also involves a process of revisiting, reviewing and evaluating the past, and of reinterpreting memories. This latter aspect of grieving closely resembles the autobiographical process, and the two tend to be connected. The autobiographical act often originates in or revisits an experience of loss, and consequently bears the traces of the shame of abandonment.

Joy Hooton writes of women’s autobiography:

> Since autobiography is generally more emphatically a consoling, therapeutic act than fiction, a form of self-salvation and self-discovery, and since the female self is invariably perceived in relation, writing the self is also to experience the self as ‘one’s own cared-for child and as one’s own caring mother.’ Imagining the self being read, is to speak to other women who are also mothers and daughters (Hooton 1990, p. 99).

The metaphor of the narrating self writing as nurturing parent of the narrated self could also be usefully applied to some male autobiographies, where shaming experiences are explored. It could be argued for example, that Hal Porter in *Watcher on the Cast Iron Balcony* (1963) recreates or constructs in his text a nurturing mother who is other than the suffering, wasted body of his last
memories: in so doing, he attempts to assuage the grief and shame associated with her death by re-experiencing himself as a cared-for child. Bernard Smith originally considered entitling his autobiography ‘The two mothers’, the one his natural mother, the other his foster mother (Smith 1984). The caring ‘other’ constructed in the text may not necessarily be a mother. In The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea (1965) Stow’s two protagonists, Rob and Rick, are presented in a nurturing relationship, switching roles in mid-text before the relationship finally breaks down.

Similarly, the genesis of Barbara Hanrahan’s autobiographical The Scent of Eucalyptus (1973) was the death of her grandmother, Iris Pearl Goodridge, to whom the book is dedicated (Carroll 1986, p. 104). This death impelled Hanrahan to start writing down her childhood memories in a diary. As she explained in an interview given in 1980: ‘The habit of writing was comforting, like praying. If I lost the diary, I’d be without a friend’ (Mott 1983, p. 38). For Hanrahan, as for Berger, the autobiographical act eased the pain of separation: ‘My grandmother, whom I’d grown up with in Adelaide (I was terribly close to her), died in 1968 and, writing in the diary, I found that a page could be a refuge, a way of recreating the old life’ (Mott 1983, p. 38). In My Place (1987) Sally Morgan’s representation of her grandmother’s hidden life concludes with an account of her death.

A striking number of Australian autobiographies record an absent parent. Sally Morgan’s father dies when she is still a child, as does Jill Ker Conway’s (The Road to Coorain, 1989). Barbara Hanrahan’s father dies when she is a year old. Ruby Langford Ginibi’s mother left the family when her daughter was six. Albert Facey’s mother in A Fortunate Life (1981) also abandoned the family. Illegitimacy is an issue for Charles Perkins (1975), Bernard Smith (1990) and David Parker (1988). Germaine Greer entitles her autobiography, Daddy, We Hardly Knew You (1989). Fathers returning from the war are problematic in a number of autobiographies, including those of Manning Clark (1989) and George Johnston (1964). Abandonment of children to boarding school is an issue for Kathleen Fitzpatrick (1983), Manning Clark (1989) and Patrick White (1981).

But whereas the shame of abandonment leads the self to withdraw and conceal its vulnerability from the public gaze in an experience of psychic separation from the rest of humanity, the autobiographical act can reconnect the self with the human race. When the process of confronting shame and loss and of reviewing a life is represented in a text intended for the gaze of a postulated benign reader, the autobiographer’s narrating self is no longer isolated, having
aligned him/herself, with the other in regarding the shamed and abandoned narrated self.

Hartman postulates a connection between mourning and writing, based on discussion of a text from Wordsworth’s ‘Lucy’ poems and on the line ‘thoughts that do lie too deep for tears’ in ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’. According to Hartman:

The work of writing seems to have replaced the work of mourning. Is there a link, then, between writing and grieving, such that writing can be shown to assist those Herculean labours Freud described for us, whose aim is to detach us from the lost object and reattach us to the world? (Hartman, in Lodge 1988, p. 423)

Reattachment to the world is the goal both of mourning and of healing shame, and autobiography may have a role to play in this process. Morris Lurie changed the title of his autobiography from Damaged Child to Whole Life to reflect the psychic healing he experienced in the process of writing (Lurie 1986). John Wiltshire in ‘The Patient’s Story’ (1993), has defined a new autobiographical sub-genre, the ‘pathography’, in which a writer describes an experience of illness and its impact on the self. Wiltshire is referring to contemporary texts such as John Hull’s Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness (1990) although J. S. Mill’s Autobiography (1873) is in some respects a precursor of this form, with its description of emotional breakdown and recovery.

For an autobiography to be therapeutic, a particular kind of reader must be postulated, an understanding individual who will join with the narrator in contemplating the autobiographical text representing the narrated self. Such a reader is consistent with the autobiographical tradition in which the reader is a confessor (Augustine), a friend (Montaigne) or a sympathetic stranger (Rousseau). An autobiographer anticipates a benign look, not the Sartrean look to be feared, but a reader befriending the self. Perhaps the response most to be hoped for is a ‘gleam in the reader’s eye’ akin to that of the mother as described by Kohut above. The realisation of the grandiose fantasy of an achieved autobiography resolves difficulties related to ambition and self-esteem where reader response to the narrating self’s ‘performance’ is positive.

Shame, secrecy and plot

John Berger also links writing, including autobiography, to secrecy, explaining that his mother’s hopes for him to become a writer were fulfilled because in his house:
there was so much that was unsaid, so much that I had to discover the existence of on my own at an early age: death, poverty, pain (in others), sexuality ... My mother never spoke of these things. She didn’t hide the fact that she was aware of them. For her, however, they were wrapped secrets, to be lived with, but never to be mentioned or opened. Superficially this was a question of gentility, but profoundly, of a respect, a secret loyalty to the enigmatic (in Lesser 1993, pp. 296-7).

Diane Johnson also highlights the importance of secrets in a text, in an essay on the importance of plot (also in Lesser 1993). Johnson asks: ‘Did not many of us feel that our Victorian grandparents had something hidden in the attic? At any rate, the secret accompanied by action was a feature in Victorian life. People didn’t confess, they concealed’ (p. 17). In a discussion of secrets in the plots of several Victorian novels, Johnson explains:

and the secret is a metaphor for the mysteries of life - the particular inner thing each of us holds away from others, as Forster saw, but also the secret which destiny refuses to reveal, the secret of our fate. So productive of anxiety in real life, fictional secrets can be unwound, revealed; life can unroll before the characters like a safe road. And this, I think, is the satisfaction of the plot which contains a mysterious secret: it can be solved (p. 17).

In life, shame is the emotional mechanism that enables us to hold our secret away from others. In autobiography, the function of the secret is more complex than in the novel. The autobiographer, in seeking to explore, in public, aspects of his or her own destiny, must decide which secrets to reveal and which to conceal, and perhaps also, which secrets to allow the reader merely to glimpse.

Freud was interested in the role of secrets in mental illness, particularly those associated with sexual experience, believing that the uncovering of these was the key to health. No autobiography written since Freud can escape the influence of the assumptions of Freudian psychoanalysis about shame and self-revelation. Foucault complicates the question of sex and secrecy still further in his History of Sexuality (1990). He argues that sex has not been repressed but transformed into discourse. From being an aspect of human experience that was taken for granted it has become a secret that is talked about:

What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret (1990, p. 35).

Foucault discusses power and transgression in relation to sex, but not shame. Sex is but one of the secrets revealed or veiled in autobiography.

Johnson draws a distinction between the novel of the secret and the novel of quest. I suggest that the interest of an autobiography also resides in the way in which these two elements are combined in the account of a life. The quest may be for identity, or vocation, or love, but the secrets are many and varied. In the
texts selected for this study, the secrets include: illegitimacy, homosexuality, marital failure, Aboriginality, the inner life of parents, the Holocaust, convict ancestry, concealed identity, the identity of natural parents. For the secret to be revealed in an autobiography, the narrative quest must involve a confrontation with shame.

**Emotional bridges**

If the assumption is that the autobiographer aims to enlist the sympathy of the reader for the narrated, shamed self, the writer is likely to include accounts of childhood or adult experiences associated with emotions that will connect with similar emotions in the reader including that of shame. The death of parents is a major motif in autobiography, corresponding to a reader’s experience of this event in her/his own life, or fear of the anticipated event. Loss of both parents is a sympathy-gaining motif of such common appearance in literature of the 19th and early 20th century that it has often been parodied, for example by Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Ernest*, and by W. S. Gilbert in *The Pirates of Penzance*. This event must therefore be represented without a too heavy-handed pathos or the reader’s sympathy will be lost, either by distancing herself to avoid emotional pain, or by responding negatively to a suspicion that her emotions are being manipulated. Since Camus’ *L’Etranger* (1942) the nature of filial grief has been called into question in contemporary writing, and literary explorations of grief-related shame and rage are acceptable to an anticipated readership.

The hurtful care-giver is another recurrent autobiographical motif related to shame. Few children travel through childhood without the experience of being cared for at some time by an inadequate adult who wounds them in some way, whether relative, child-minder, servant, teacher, matron or some other. Morris Lurie for example can anticipate that most readers would identify in some degree with the narrated self’s childhood suffering in the care of his harsh grandparent, as recounted in his autobiography *Whole Life*. Other recurrent motifs include the onset of puberty, trouble at school, physical injury or illness, experiences of injustice, failure and disappointment, and the familiar childhood emotions of fear, frustration and loneliness, all of which may be associated with shame.

All children would have been shamed in some way by parents as a means of socialisation. In a loving environment, affection would outweigh the painful emotion of shame, but the emotion would ‘feel’ the same, enabling a reader to respond to the representation of such an experience in a text. In a stressed or dysfunctional family, shame might well outweigh affection, which could gain a
reader's sympathy for the vulnerable child self in a narrative. But should a reader's own shame threshold be overstepped by the narrative, this sympathy may be lost. Here a reader's own sensitivities come into play, together with the social norms accepted by an interpretative community. An autobiographer must strike a delicate balance when telling shameful stories about the self.
Chapter 2

The Myth of British Superiority and the Shaming of Australian Culture

1. Introduction

'All that is solid melts into air' is the title of Marshall Berman's critical work on modernism (Berman 1988). Kathleen Fitzpatrick's autobiography, Solid Bluestone Foundations and Other Memories of a Melbourne Girlhood, 1908-1928 (published in 1983) is a text in which the dissolution of the self and its perceived past, a modernist fear, is resisted by an architectonically structured narrative valuing classical form. The primary threat to a coherent self in this autobiographical text is shame.

In the epilogue to her biography of Sir John Franklin, Kathleen Fitzpatrick writes with sympathetic understanding of the effects that shame may have on a personality:

> Those who have suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune know that with them there always comes a deeper but invisible wound to the self-confidence, so that the sufferer asks himself: Are they not right, after all, who loosed these blows upon me? So there arises a longing for reassurance, which some objective mark of success can give (Fitzpatrick 1949, p. 373).

Yet Solid Bluestone Foundations provides evidence that a successful career and public recognition were not sufficiently reassuring to heal Kathleen Fitzpatrick's wounded self-confidence. In this text Kathleen Fitzpatrick is often self-deprecatory about her intellectual ability and concludes with a 'resigned' acceptance that she is not a 'real' scholar. Her autobiography does not mention her successful academic career as an historian at Melbourne University, where she attained the rank of Associate Professor. Her experience of shame was threefold. Firstly, the myth of British superiority struck at the roots of her identity as a colonial, socially and intellectually. Secondly, her convent education taught bodily shame and intellectual passivity, as well as attempting to 'break the will'. Thirdly, the shame associated with her unsuccessful marriage to Brian Fitzpatrick, significantly accorded a single brief mention in Solid Bluestone Foundations, contributed to shaping her autobiographical purpose, leading her to play down the extent of her youthful political activism in a self-portrayal of conformist respectability.

In this chapter I consider aspects of shame as a key to appreciating this carefully constructed autobiographical text. I discuss Kathleen Fitzpatrick's autobiographical self-assessment, which, I shall argue, is an unrealistically
negative self-construal by most criteria, examining some of the indications within the text as to how shame is operating to undermine the self, and what the sources of shame might be. The principal source, I suggest, is the shaming of Australian culture by the myth of British superiority, of which *Solid Bluestone Foundations* is only a partial critique. Fitzpatrick's representation of Irish-Australian influence on the formation of her identity gives evidence of painful and shaming conflicts within the self. I shall discuss the influence of some of Martin Boyd's writings on Fitzpatrick's treatment of Anglo-Australian themes. My discussion also addresses a conspicuous aporia in the narrative, the allocation of half a sentence only to her unsuccessful marriage. Finally I analyse Fitzpatrick's representation of Italy as a textual locus of healing and consolation. Brief reference is also made to gender-based shame and to the shaming of non-Anglo-Celtic cultures, placed at the margins of her narrative.

*Solid Bluestone Foundations* covers the earliest childhood period of the autobiographies under discussion. Joy Hooton notes that the work successfully unites 'the achieved self and the communal past' (Hooton 1990, p. 104). Hooton also notes that the work has received little critical attention despite sympathetic reviews (pp. 4, 83). Published in 1983, when the author was seventy-eight, Kathleen Fitzpatrick reflects on her early years in and around her maternal grandparents' home in Middle Park, her education at school and at Melbourne University. She concludes with an account of going 'Home' to England, two years of study at Oxford as a young woman and her return to Australia in 1928 to a temporary academic appointment at Sydney University.

As well as representing one of the earliest childhoods in this study, *Solid Bluestone Foundations* is a useful text to start with because the text explores and contests the shaming of Australian culture by the myth of British superiority, including the myth of England as 'Home'. In exploring the foundations of her identity, the author traces the origins of this myth in the practices of her English-born maternal grandfather, examines its impact on academic practice at Melbourne University and finally interprets her experience of living and studying in England. Although Kathleen Fitzpatrick challenges and resists the myth of Britain as 'Home', her autobiography provides evidence that she internalised aspects of her experience of shame at Cambridge and Oxford.

### 2. Disputing the myth of British superiority

Kathleen Fitzpatrick's autobiography explores issues of Australian cultural identity which have been a continuing subject of vigorous debate in Australia, with participation from resident Australians, expatriate Australians and English nationals resident in Australia. The debate, which intensified during
the 1890s and subsided after Federation, only to gain a new impetus in the 1930s, has been influential both in setting the agenda for political, social and aesthetic criticism, and in shaping Australian literary activity. For decades, the debate was characterized by recurrent comparisons with British political institutions, education system, artistic achievement, manners, landscape and climate. Shame was identified and discussed as an Australian response to British cultural imperialism long before A. A. Phillips coined the now clichéd expression, the ‘cultural cringe’, in the mid 1940s.

In a key text in the development of Australian cultural self-understanding, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936), P. R. Stephensen writes:

> The Culture of a country is the essence of nationality, the permanent element in a nation. A nation is nothing but the extension of the individuals comprising it, generation after generation of them. When I am proud of my nationality, I am proud of myself (1986, p. 25).

For those Australians who internalised the myth of British superiority, the converse was true: not being proud of being Australian, they were prone to shame. For Stephensen, the ANZAC tradition alone was not a sufficient basis for national pride. He argued that: ‘Until we have a culture, a quiet strength of intellectual achievement, we have really nothing but our soldiers to be proud of’ (p. 26). Shame as a response to British cultural imperialism was gradually dissipated by the growing confidence of those who participated in articulating the characteristics of a distinctively Australian culture. Stephensen pinpointed the cultural tension between an imperial power that attempted to ‘universalise’ its own culture and a nation seeking to discover its distinctive identity. Cultural identity required a readjustment of power relationships and values so that difference from the ‘mother country’ became a source of pride rather than shame. *The Foundations of Culture* was itself an indignant response to an article belittling Australian culture, written by an English academic, G. H. Cowling, who was professor of English at Melbourne University.

Academic participation in the continuing debate about Australian culture involved not only the publication of critical studies but also of memoirs which reflected on the careers and experience of a scholarly circle of Australians. As Stephensen remarks, national cultural identity is but an extension of individual identity. *Solid Bluestone Foundations*, together with other autobiographical writing including works by A. R. Chisholm, W. K. Hancock and Martin Boyd, embraces those decades during which Australian cultural self-understanding was most strongly influenced by comparison with ‘the mother country’, Britain. Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiography criticises, challenges but in a number of respects also internalises the myth of British superiority. Although published in
the early 1980s, the autobiographer’s reach extends back to the three decades before Federation and to the early post-Federation era through her memories of her grandparents, her retention of family lore, and her highly developed historical skills. She chooses to limit her autobiography to the period of her childhood and early adulthood, from the ages of three to twenty-three, but her writing is informed by a lifetime’s career as an Australian historian. Her autobiography also has a carefully constructed form and literary style that makes it stand out among the memoirs and reminiscences published by other scholars associated with Melbourne University in that period.

In the 1930s, the academic community of Melbourne University to which Kathleen Fitzpatrick belonged included active participants in debates about Australian cultural identity. A. R. Chisholm, head of the school of French at Melbourne University from 1921 to 1956, describes the controversy relating to Stephensen’s *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* in his own memoirs, *Men Were My Milestones: Australian Portraits and Sketches*, published by Melbourne University Press in 1958. Although Stephensen’s book received responses ‘little short of ecstatic’ in Australia (Munro 1986, p. xxiii), it was strongly attacked from London by expatriate Australian intellectual Randolph Hughes, ‘damning Australia in general and such critics as P. R. Stephensen in particular’ (Chisholm 1958, p. 63). Chisholm does not question Hughes’s bona fides as a participant in the debate even though he has been resident in Britain for the previous twenty years:

Randolph Hughes was different from myself and our cronies in that the rest of us took our Australianness for granted, whereas he looked on Australia as a place of exile ... After he left these shores, at the end of 1915, he never returned; and he constantly urged me in his letters to leave Australia at any price. Yet he was not without a secret nostalgia, I am sure; and he was always keenly interested in what was going on out here (Chisholm 1958, p. 59).

Chisholm expresses pride in this expatriate Australian’s intellectual achievement, which he compares with that of Christopher Brennan:

Randolph Hughes was a scholar in that true, creative sense of the word ... He and Brennan have provided the most brilliant examples of scholarly fruitfulness that it has been my good fortune to know at first hand. It is extraordinarily stimulating to remember that both these great scholars and creators were reared in Australia (Chisholm 1958, p. 70).

The implication is that success in Britain is the gauge of Australian intellectual quality. Even Stephensen spent eight years in Britain, first as a Queensland Rhodes Scholar and then as a participant in London literary circles. Chisholm himself did not adopt a self-consciously Australian scholarly identity, having acquired an international reputation as the scholar who introduced the poetry of Mallarmé to the English-speaking world. He travelled to Europe on
numerous occasions. As he also maintained a lively interest in Australian poetry, and in particular the work of Brennan and of John Shaw Neilson, he would not have been placed by Stephensen in the same category as Cowling. Chisholm’s combination of European and Australian academic interests and contacts contributed to shaping arts faculty policy at Melbourne University for more than three decades. His memoir of 1958 was read with interest within that academic community, which included Kathleen Fitzpatrick, a student in the mid 1920s and for most of her subsequent career a faculty member.

The debate about Australian cultural identity continued into the 1940s and 1950s. In 1958 A. A. Phillips published a collection of his writings of the decade 1945–55 with the title *The Australian Tradition: Studies in a Colonial Culture*. By the time of the revised edition, in 1966, the title of one of these essays, ‘The Cultural Cringe’, was already becoming a cliché in discussions of Australian identity and the myth of British superiority. In the preface to the revised edition the author apologises for the ‘datedness’ of this essay, commenting that ‘When it was first published, it appeared to meet an urgent need – judging by the eagerness with which its title was seized and repeated by other commentators’ (Phillips 1958, p. vi) but he still believes that ‘we are not yet safe from a recrudescence of the Cringe’ (1958, p. vii). Phillips also notes that Russel Ward had chosen the same title, ‘The Australian Tradition’, for his own book, subsequently published as *The Australian Legend* (1958), commenting: ‘That coincidence was symptomatic of a developing trend of thought among those interested in Australian culture’ (Phillips 1958, p. viii).

Phillips also comments on the Australian phenomenon of the cultural cringe in reverse, grandiose responses to the weight of Anglo-Saxon culture:

> Above our writers – and other artists – looms the intimidating mass of Anglo-Saxon achievement. Such a situation almost inevitably produces the characteristic Australian Cultural Cringe – appearing either as the Cringe Direct, or as the Cringe Inverted, in the attitude of the Blatant Blatherskite, the God’s-Own-country-and I’m-a-better-man-than-you-are Australian Bore (Phillips 1958, p. 112).

It was not only the Anglo-Saxon achievement that induced feelings of inferiority, but also the existence of a group of Australian scholars who had left Australia and distinguished themselves. Gilbert Murray’s *An Unfinished Autobiography*, published posthumously in 1960, reminded Australian scholars of the outstanding achievement of one who was born and brought up in Australia until the age of eleven. The remainder of Murray’s education and career was in Britain, although he maintained links with Australia. Murray became Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford in 1909 and was a leading figure in the founding of the League of Nations. As well as Gilbert Murray and W. K.
Hancock at Oxford, Australian scholars appointed to chairs at Cambridge in Kathleen Fitzpatrick's lifetime included Harold Bailey, professor of Sanskrit (1936–67) and L. J. Austin, professor of French (1976–80). Both Hancock and Austin were Melbourne University graduates. V. Gordon Childe, a Sydney University graduate, also had a distinguished career in Britain, as professor of archeology at the University of Edinburgh (1927–46) and the University of London (1946–57). For those Australian scholars who did not have the opportunity or the inclination for an expatriate career, this aspect of the cultural cringe was a central issue. Were they inferior to those with distinguished British appointments? Chisholm seemed unusually self-confident for an Australian-based scholar.

Hancock's memoir, Country and Calling, appeared in 1954. Hancock enjoyed outstanding academic success at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar from Victoria. His history, Australia (1930), was a significant text in the debate about Australian culture and identity. Apart from early appointments at the Universities of Western Australia and Adelaide, he spent most of his career as an expatriate. Hancock's memoir, in representing the sense of exile and disappointment that the expatriate scholar experienced when his plans to return to Australia initially failed, at least contributed a picture of the underside of this kind of success. He wrote his memoir following his failure to be appointed to the new national university being planned in Canberra. Had he been appointed, he concluded in his autobiography, his country and his calling would have come together at last.

The wider debate sought to determine whether an Australian culture either existed or was emerging that was neither British, nor an inferior version of the British, but distinctive and to be valued and respected in its own right. Educational standards, political institutions, artistic achievement, the Australian landscape, the Australian accent, all came under scrutiny. The basis of the debate was comparison with Britain: as Phillips points out, 'The Cringe mainly appears in a tendency to make needless comparisons' (1958, p. 113). The debate also simplified issues by assuming that there was one Australian culture rather than a diversity. Later writing provides a critique of the myth of 'one Australia'.

Phillips' term 'cringe' became widely used because he identified the element of shame in the Australian version of the myth of British superiority, thereby making resistance possible.
3. Influence of Martin Boyd

Kathleen Fitzpatrick's careful study of Boyd's writings helped to clarify her own self-understanding in relation to her experience of England and English values. Martin Boyd's second autobiography, *Day of My Delight* (1965), is subtitled 'An Anglo-Australian Memoir', representing an expansion and continuation of his earlier autobiographical work, *A Single Flame* (1939). The literary association between Boyd and Fitzpatrick, that of author and critic, was an uncomfortable one for Boyd at least, but one that resulted in a significant inter-relationship in their autobiographical writings with bearing on Anglo-Australian themes. The self of *Solid Bluestone Foundations* occupies firm middle ground between Boyd's *Day of My Delight* and the 'radical life' of Brian Fitzpatrick. Kathleen Fitzpatrick resists the shame of being neither British nor Australian that she identifies in Boyd's writings, as well as the defiant radicalism of her former husband.

In 1963, Kathleen Fitzpatrick's monograph, *Martin Boyd*, was published in Melbourne by Lansdowne Press in the series 'Australian Writers and their Work', edited by Geoffrey Dutton. Boyd responded to Fitzpatrick's criticism with an article in his own defence, 'Dubious Cartography' in *Meanjin Quarterly* 1964 (pp. 6-13). A commentary by Kathleen Fitzpatrick was published in the same issue (pp. 14-17). The following year, Boyd's autobiographical work, *Day of My Delight*, was published, also by Lansdowne Press. Twice in the course of this discursive, anecdotal narrative, Boyd responds to specific criticism of his work. The first example clearly refers to Kathleen Fitzpatrick: although he does not name her, Boyd quotes her actual words. In her work on Boyd, Kathleen Fitzpatrick wrote: 'His social range is limited and so is his knowledge of Australia' (Fitzpatrick 1963, p. 28).

Boyd responded:

My three years in Australia were spent almost entirely at the Grange, with short visits to Melbourne, where I stayed either at the Melbourne Club or the Windsor Hotel. I also frequently went down for the day. A critic wrote that I had little knowledge of Australia, and that my social range was limited. Though grotesquely untrue of my life in general, it was true of these three years, so it is difficult for me to write as much as I should of what I regard as my own country during this time (Boyd 1965, p. 231).

A few pages later, Boyd refers to a similar criticism:

A few years ago a young woman, in the peevish and censorious tones of modern criticism, wrote an article on my 'double alienation'. I am not conscious of this myself as regards England and Australia, which are both Anglo-Saxon countries. My problem as regards them is no more psychological than that of, say an eighteenth century relative in County Mayo, who would have liked to spend part of the year in London, but was deterred by the expense and discomfort of the journey (Boyd 1965, p. 239).
The querulous tone of Boyd's defence and his omission of his critics' names indicate that he is offended and hurt. The issue of identity and belonging is a difficult one for Boyd, as indicated by passages in *Day of My Delight* which undermine his constructed identity as the merely inconvenienced eighteenth century relative. During his three-year stay in Victoria (1948-51) referred to above, Boyd writes movingly of his visit to Yarra Glen, where he grew up:

> From Kincraig, on a promontory of the hills, I could see two miles away on the river bank the home of my schooldays ... I did not know the present owners, so did not call there, but sat on the Kincraig veranda looking down like Moses at the promised land in which I might not dwell (Boyd 1965, pp. 243-4).

The sense of exile that Boyd expresses is not congruent with the urbanity of the fictitious Irish relative who has a preference for being at home in two worlds. Boyd develops his identification with Moses in a passionate affirmation that is consistent with Kathleen Fitzpatrick's insights:

> When I was first told this story of Jehovah's vindictiveness, I repudiated it with every fibre of my being. This may not have been due only to my hatred of injustice, but because my essential self knew that it was an omen of the pattern of my life (Boyd 1965, p. 244).

Boyd continues to repudiate his 'double alienation' by rejecting his critic’s insights into his exiled condition, although he is conscious of his own restlessness. As he approaches Yarra Glen on the visit referred to above, Boyd writes of his sense of belonging, and his doubts about its reality:

> I felt as if I were returning to the true home of my spirit, though I knew that I could never live in it again. It was perhaps the one place where I had felt absolutely at home in the world, and this sense of belonging lasted for the two days I was there. Whether it would have remained if I had settled in our own home, instead of at the Grange, I do not know (Boyd 1965, p. 243).

Later in the work, Boyd contradicts himself again in trying to capture his sense of identity in terms of nationality:

> Although I think of myself as Australian (and apart from the perhaps significant accident of my birth, that is what I was through my happiest and most hopeful years) I have spent most of my adult life in England, and so am more sensitive to the condition of that country, which I more easily understand (Boyd 1965, p. 282).

These passages indicate that Kathleen Fitzpatrick, whose monograph on Boyd predated *Day of My Delight*, was correct in her judgement of Boyd’s rootlessness:

> Martin à Beckett Boyd was born in 1893 in Switzerland, thus from his first moment fulfilling his destiny of never quite belonging to his environment. His parents ... were then making a continental tour with their children, but they returned to Australia soon afterwards, and Martin Boyd grew up feeling that he had missed something and dreaming of a return to Europe (Fitzpatrick 1963, p. 5).
Martin Boyd spent his last years in Rome, where he wrote *Day of My Delight*. A lifelong restlessness motivates his autobiographical project, and is cast in spiritual terms in his introduction to the work:

Since, in my life-long search for the non-existent city I have come to live in Rome, all my previous life seems remote, as it is unrelated to my present environment (Boyd 1965, p. x).

The biblical reference is almost certainly to Hebrews 13:14: ‘For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come’. A similar quotation from the same passage in Hebrews occurs in *The Cardboard Crown*:

There was always too, in our ever depaysés family, the nostalgia for the other home, ten thousand miles away. In the Northern or the Southern hemisphere there was no abiding city (Boyd 1974, p. 165).

Kathleen Fitzpatrick is a sympathetic critic, for all Boyd’s objections. In defending him against ‘charges’ of not being a real Australian writer, she participates in the debate about ‘the cultural cringe’:

In Australia, Martin Boyd is looked on with suspicion as an expatriate, but he had to go to England to discover his own country. His best work has been the deciphering, reconsideration and representation of the deep impressions made on him by his early life in Victoria (Fitzpatrick 1963, p. 10).

In *Solid Bluestone Foundations*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick describes an experience she had in common with Boyd, that of going to England to discover her own country. She anchors that experience firmly in the Australian literary tradition by her use in Chapter V of a quotation from Horace, part of which appears as the epigraph for ‘The Way Home’, Book II of Henry Handel Richardson’s *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930):

‘Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt [They change their skies but not their souls who run across the sea]’ (Horace, Epistles, I. xi. 27).

Kathleen Fitzpatrick concludes her study of Martin Boyd with an appreciative summing up of the qualities which make him an Australian novelist:

Australians should value him as the regional novelist of Melbourne and its environment, as the witness and historian of an Australian leisure-class and its way of life which was once significant but has now vanished, as the Australian novelist who has best expressed the predicament of having one’s physical home in one hemisphere and one’s cultural traditions in another, and for the benison of his unfailing wit and style (Fitzpatrick 1963, p. 29).

That Kathleen Fitzpatrick was influenced by Martin Boyd’s autobiographical writing is clear from her commentary on Boyd’s first autobiographical work, *A Single Flame* (1939):
His autobiography, *A Single Flame* (1939), is a stocktaking of the repertory of convictions with which he started life, for the purpose of discovering which of them were still serviceable and which ought to be thrown out (Fitzpatrick 1963, p. 15).

Kathleen Fitzpatrick writes in similar terms in *Solid Bluestone Foundations* of her own autobiographical enterprise:

I had already learnt that wherever one travels one must carry, strapped to one’s back, the knapsack of the self, a ragbag stuffed with genes and habits, pride and prejudice, a little knowledge and a great deal of ignorance, a heavy burden which limits freedom of movement and capacity for development. Still, is there not some possibility of modifying the contents of the knapsack by jettisoning some of the prejudices, cutting down the ignorance and increasing the knowledge? (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 196).

Remarkable similarities exist between Martin Boyd’s and Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s depictions of their parental establishments and the role played in their lives by grandparents. Kathleen Fitzpatrick writes of Boyd, that he did not enjoy his parents’ “picnicking, bohemian way of living” but “adored his à Beckett grandfather’s opulent establishment” (Fitzpatrick 1963, p. 7). For Kathleen Fitzpatrick, a similar security is provided by her maternal grandparents’ home, ‘Hughenden’, as opposed to what she calls ‘the parental tent’, and it is only as she matures that she recognises the shame of not entirely belonging to the establishment according to her grandfather’s criteria. In *Day of My Delight*, Boyd’s description of his pleasure in visiting his grandparents is echoed in much of the early chapters of *Solid Bluestone Foundations*. Boyd writes:

It was not only the large houses, the several servants and richer food that made me so eager to visit my grandparents. I felt it an excursion into an altogether more secure world. Sandringham was arid and exposed. There were no trees but the stunted tea-tree, and few stretches of grass broke the waste of the sandy scrub. Roses bloomed with difficulty in our garden. The greener lawns, the fatter buds, the damper, darker soil, of the gardens in St Kilda and Brighton satisfied in me some nostalgia for a fertile terrain (Boyd 1965, p. 5).

In *Solid Bluestone Foundations*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s representation of the spaciousness, security and good food of her grandparents’ home is similar, although the garden at Hughenden battles against windswept aridity, apart from the shrubbery, the ‘controlled wilderness’ that appeals to Kathleen. Moreover, the comfortable and ordered life is made possible largely by Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s grandmother and unmarried aunts rather than by servants as in Boyd’s family.

Boyd’s less frequent visits to his widowed paternal grandmother introduce him to a rich European cultural heritage:

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1 Boyd’s childhood home, where he lived for eight years, to the age of thirteen.
I felt that I had penetrated further into that civilisation of which we were on the outer fringe in Sandringham. It seemed to me to have more old-world dignity than most houses, and I know that there were some fine paintings and pieces of inherited eighteenth century furniture (Boyd 1965, p. 5).

Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s grandparents’ home also conveys to her the presence of the past in the form of an English rather than Australian heritage, characterised by solidity rather than dignity, comfort rather than culture, nineteenth rather than eighteenth century values.

Despite the differences in family background, Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiography explores similar territory to the work of Boyd, which gave her an Australian literary model for addressing issues of shame related to Australian identity.

4. Shame and self-assessment

In the concluding chapter of her autobiography, Kathleen Fitzpatrick summarises her academic achievement in this way:

Real scholars, I believe, are born as well as made and what was given, in my case, did not add up to the potential of a real scholar. There was, however, enough of this strange creature in me to enable me to recognise and appreciate the real thing and later to give all the furtherance in my power to those of my own students in whom I detected the rare gifts that make a true scholar (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 201).

Despite a life devoted to scholarship and teaching, an impressive career by any standards, and exceptional for a female academic, her self assessment is that she is not a ‘real’ scholar. Instead, she interprets her career as one of nurturing the scholarship of others. Yet throughout her life she received the recognition accorded to ‘real scholars’ – academic appointments, publication of her books and articles, fellowships, academic honours. As well as being a member of the Department of History at the University of Melbourne from 1930-62, becoming associate professor in 1948, Fitzpatrick was a Foundation Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and a Fellow of the Australian College of Education. She was also a Carnegie Scholar in the United States. Her publications include Sir John Franklin in Tasmania 1837-1843 (1949); Australian Explorers (1958), one of the first Australian anthologies of explorers’ writings; a monograph, Martin Boyd (1963); a history of the Presbyterian Ladies College, Melbourne (1975), as well as entries for the Australian Dictionary of Biography, articles, book reviews and public lectures, and a study of Henry James, never published.
The myth of British superiority within the family

The narrative itself offers a source for this negative self-assessment in the critique of the myth of British superiority. For the autobiographical subject, it originates within the mansion with the ‘solid bluestone foundations’, Hughenden (named after the residence of British Prime Minister Disraeli), home of Fitzpatrick’s maternal grandfather, John Buxton, who is represented as an Anglo-Australian myth-maker for the colonial family which he founded and in which he, as self-appointed patriarch was the dominant figure, demanding from all loyalty to Britain and disparaging the Irish background of his Australian-born wife Mary.

Hughenden was built for Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s grandfather about thirty years before the period covered by the autobiography. Her grandfather, John Robert Buxton, was born in England, but ‘came out’ to Australia at the age of seventeen, never to set foot in his homeland again. His wealth was based on the success of ‘The Firm’, a family real estate agency founded by his uncle in South Park in 1861. Hughenden provides the stable centre of Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s childhood existence. Her parents, Henry and Gertrude Pitt, move frequently and her mother dislikes housekeeping and entertaining. Hughenden is a perpetual holiday for young children, a place of fun and celebration, of lavish Christmases, of surprises like going to the theatre and a refuge after an argument with parents. The child Kathleen experiences it as child-centred and not strong on discipline. It is characterised by hospitality and abundance, of food, attention and possibilities for play. Yet the joyful childhood experience of Hughenden rests on an orderly domestic routine, maintained by the hard physical work of the female family members, a routine to be both insisted upon and disrupted by Grandpa. It also works better for younger children and boys. As the grandchildren grow older, Grandpa is less interested in them, and the older girls are given tasks which they find onerous.

The sociability of Hughenden is contrasted with the isolation Kathleen experiences in her own home environment due to her parents’ itinerant way of life, their lack of sociability, their frugality, hard work and emphasis on education, and their chilly marital relationship. Kathleen Fitzpatrick the autobiographer presents Hughenden as solid and monolithic, illustrated by a photograph of a huge, imposing if ugly edifice in a classical architectural style. But she refers to a time when she realised that Hughenden was in fact a ‘complicated artefact’, and her text explores Grandpa’s fiction of Britishness and the superiority of British culture.

[64]
Grandpa’s identity is founded on his assurance of being British:

Although he had left England when he was seventeen and never went back, even for a visit, Grandpa never ceased to think of himself as an Englishman who happened, for his own convenience, to be living in the colonies (p. 32).

The phrase ‘for his own convenience’ echoes Martin Boyd’s fictitious relative from County Mayo.

Grandpa the coloniser founds a colonial family in which he is the dominant figure:

As for his wife and children and grandchildren, they were of course colonials and it was their duty to love, honour and obey the Mother Country which knew what was for their good (p. 32).

Grandpa is a patriarchal figure, preserving the traditions he has brought with him from the Ur-country, but also founding a new dynasty:

To the family at Hughenden, South Melbourne did not represent the trackless wilds but the cradle of their race (p. 25).

Once settled, Grandpa is joined by other members of his family, parents, two sisters and a brother, who ‘came out ... to join him as colonists’ (p. 26). The race is founded on the fertility of Grandma, the domestic work of all the women and on the business acumen and economic success of the men:

The solid bluestone foundations of Hughenden rested on a still deeper foundation, the Firm, whose headquarters were in Clarendon Street, South Melbourne (p. 25).

Like the other female relatives, the author does not display much interest in the actual activity of the firm, apart from noting its problems in the 1890s, and its continuation to the time of writing as a family business.

Grandpa as patriarch seeks to determine the identity and political allegiance of his clan, reinforcing his position with symbol and ritual:

At the front gate there was a flagstaff from which, on patriotic occasions, Grandpa flew the Union Jack, never our own Australian flag because he thought it disloyal of us to have a different flag from the mother country. He was not too keen on our new Commonwealth either, and was still apt to refer to Victoria as ‘the colony’. It was considered a mark of Grandpa’s Englishness and his view that his home was his castle that the front gate at ‘Hughenden’ had to be locked at night, a distrustful procedure unknown to real Australians (p. 3).

Kathleen Fitzpatrick as autobiographer undermines Grandpa’s practice with a counter-shaming mockery, using the words ‘our own’ and ‘us’ to present the alternative allegiance of the colonised family to which she belongs, resisting the identity imposed by Grandpa by suggesting that he himself is inauthentic by her criteria because of his lack of trust. The text also illustrates the dissent or at
least the discontent of a wealthy British-born businessman concerning Federation.

As patriarch, Grandpa fashions his myth to embrace both past and future: ‘Hughenden stretched back into the past to the “Old Country”, to England itself, and specifically to Kent, where Grandpa had lived as a boy’ (p. 10). Hughenden also represented the new, based on economic prosperity and embrace of modern technology: ‘But despite its backward reach, Hughenden also represented for us the very frontiers of modern progress’ (p. 11). Early in the writer’s memory, Hughenden was equipped with electricity, telephone, running hot water, a gramophone, with a Wolseley car for Grandpa and motorcycles for the elder sons.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick as writer presents Grandpa as larger than life, a source of childhood stability, but systematically undermines him with gentle and sometimes not so gentle irony, a perspective which may derive in part from Grandma. The child’s eye has observed and the adult self interprets how his relatives wait on him hand and foot, how he retired at fifty, how he and the other male relatives read the papers for hours while the women of the house work hard to maintain the domestic routine.

Her explanation of the origin of the name ‘Hughenden’ is that the mansion was named after Disraeli’s home. Disraeli was Grandpa’s hero, but Kathleen Fitzpatrick the mature self and professional historian disputes Grandpa’s assumptions: ‘I am sure Grandpa would have detested Disraeli had he known him; he would have found him too clever by half, not English enough in appearance nor manly enough in dress’ (p. 33). Grandpa is represented as still physically alien in the Australian environment, ill-adjusted to the climate, and this is reflected by the inappropriate aspect of his house: ‘Grandpa was an Englishman, who did not mind the cold but dreaded the hard colonial light and the arid heat of the few hot days of summer’ (p. 2). Hughenden is a fortress against the physical reality of a land he experiences as alien, even though he has bought and sold it for profit. There are limits to the extent to which British values can be imposed on the landscape. In his street, Beaconsfield Parade, English trees, ‘the only ones then considered suitable for streets’ (p. 3), cannot survive because of the wind. Grandpa’s gardening efforts are inadequate for similar reasons, but the shrubbery at Hughenden is ‘a controlled wilderness full of sweet-smelling flowers, such as violets, jonquils, primroses and daphne’ where the grandchildren love to play (p. 16). Kathleen Fitzpatrick later recognises Classicism rather than Romanticism as central to her identity, the
order of Hughenden and Britishness leading her to reject the uncontrolled, the wild, the theatrical, which are also part of her potential self.

She finally punctures Grandpa’s grandiose fictional identity with a sharp sentence: ‘Grandpa was, in short, like a stage version of an Englishman in a play written by a foreigner’ (p. 33).

The shaming of the Irish

Colonial and family politics are enmeshed at Hughenden, with vilification of the Irish used by Grandpa to express hostility towards his wife Mary:

His politics were conservative, not to say reactionary. England was top nation and foreigners should thank Heaven fasting if England conquered them and gave them decent government, and that went specially for the ungrateful Irish, a devious, shiftless lot, a perfect nuisance and quite incapable of looking after themselves (p. 32).

Here the writer captures Grandpa’s stock phrases, including the anti-Irish formulae he habitually used. Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s grandmother was an Irish-Australian, and as his daughter Gertrude, Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s mother, had also married an Irish-Australian, Henry Pitt, Grandpa’s anti-Irish tirade not only demonstrates a problematic marriage, but also erodes Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s acceptability according to the patriarchal definition of identity. Grandpa’s patriarchal enterprise was undermined by his marriage to a Canaanite instead of a woman of Israel. Mary Buxton, Australian-born and Catholic, resists her husband’s tyranny but avoids open conflict. Maintaining the stability of home and family by diplomacy, hard work and self-control, she represents a different tradition and does not worship his gods. Similarly, Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s own father is anything but shiftless, being represented as a model of dogged hard work. Kathleen Fitzpatrick herself married an Irish Australian, Brian Fitzpatrick, and the failure of the marriage appears to have modified the vigour of her critique of the myth of British superiority. Solid Bluestone Foundations provides some evidence of attempts to cover the tracks of the more radical politics of her early adulthood. After a marriage to an Irishman of the more ‘feckless’ sort (as defined by Grandpa), the solidity of Hughenden and what it stood for invited a psychic return.

The myth in the second generation

Kathleen Fitzpatrick depicts with some asperity her mother’s acceptance of the myth of ‘Home’, which she visits for the first time in 1914, accompanying her husband on a Victorian Treasury appointment to London:
Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s interpretation of her mother’s assumptions echoes the view attributed by Martin Boyd to his narrator Guy Langton in *The Cardboard Crown* (the novel of Boyd’s that she most admired):

> It may sound callous to go off to the other side of the world, leaving one’s children for so long, but it was a thing Australian women had to do if they were not to cut themselves off entirely from the country they called ‘home’ (Boyd 1974, p. 65).

Her mother’s blind enjoyment of this year in England motivates her second trip in 1926, with her son and daughters, which is to prove so disillusioning for Kathleen.

Furthermore, in their parents’ absence in 1914, the Pitt children spent a largely bleak and emotionally deprived year in the care of the nuns at Portland Convent where they experienced the shame of abandonment, segregated from each other and from their cousin according to gender lines, and discouraged by the nuns from making ‘particular friendships’. They also suffered the accidental death of their two-year-old brother Kevin through negligent supervision by the nuns. In recording this loss, Kathleen Fitzpatrick expresses the most intense emotion of her narrative. The consequences of the parental trip to England were tragic for the third generation left behind, and would cast a long shadow over Kathleen’s own stay in England. A close reading shows that the lack of warm relationships in Oxford, the restricted institutional life, the humiliating British superiority, and the ‘loss’ of her sister Lorna (who married and remained in Europe) led to a surfacing of the memories of shame and loss experienced in Portland.

The regulation of English society is also reminiscent of convent life, as is the Pitt family’s lack of status as individuals deserving respect:

> In England we were not exactly foreigners but decidedly we were not English either but colonials, people of an inferior race. And in England we were always at a disadvantage because there seemed to be innumerable rules, but no one ever told us what they were until we broke one, when the point was made abundantly clear (p. 194).

In 1926, when Gertrude Pitt visits Europe with her children, she continues to experience England as myth, despite the visual evidence that contradicts her perceptions. Horrified by the poverty and human misery of Liverpool, the children are told by their mother that ‘ports are always grimy, ugly places – the real ‘Home’ still lay ahead’ (pp. 185-6). Gertrude Pitt’s own sense of inferiority is indicated by her attempts to justify her cousin John’s tyrannical and insensitive hospitality, preferring to frustrate her children rather than negotiate...
or explore alternatives, even on minor issues such as insisting that her children endure carsickness to avoid asking Cousin John for permission to wind down a window. The fact that Kathleen Fitzpatrick records this detail in her seventies is evidence that it was not a minor issue for her. The priorities of 'Home' are accepted by 'Mother' as prevailing over her children's personal concerns. Cousin John's fussy and ingrained habits must be respected at the expense of her children's desire for a full and enriching introduction to Europe.

Kathleen experiences regret at questioning her mother's myth:

\[
\text{It must have been a terrible disappointment for Mother to see us all so downcast on the day when, by landing her little flock on the sacred soil of 'Home', she had at last achieved the goal she had set herself for so many years; a goal which had taken so much sacrifice and contrivance to reach (p. 185).}
\]

Kathleen's consciousness diverges from her mother's during this trip, a divergence that causes her pain, and which she tries to assuage by heroic attempts to appreciate or at least understand her mother's point of view: 'Poor Mother's grand design for our Europeanisation had miscarried' (p. 208). The three Pitt children compare notes about the contradictions with fellow young colonials in their London hotel, and conscious of the subversive nature of their observations, speak in whispers.

But a second model for self available for Kathleen in early adulthood, enabling her to partially resist the shame of colonial status, is that of her father, who did not accompany the rest of the family to England in 1926: 'This was no hardship for him because, having no English blood, he did not venerate 'Home' and was quite satisfied with Australia' (p. 179).

Once established at Oxford, doing a lower level course than she had planned and without a scholarship, smarting from a humiliating scholarship interview at Cambridge, she chooses her father's solution, 'dogged hard work', just as her father survived the disappointment of his curtailed education and applied himself to work in the Public Service. This solution is not successful in her terms, because she fails to get the First Class Honours Degree she had been encouraged to hope for, and feels that she has 'failed to justify the family's investment in me' (p. 208), her fees having been paid, not from the wealth of Hughenden but by her father.

The British myth does not serve Kathleen Fitzpatrick nearly as well as it served her grandfather. Her trip home with her mother, sister and brother in 1926 is a turning point: the experience is disillusioning socially and culturally, and her 'esprit critique' serves a protective function. Nevertheless she internalises the myth of British intellectual superiority despite overwhelming evidence of its
weakness and shaky foundations, and adjudges her own scholarship deficient in comparison.

Theatricality and grandiosity

Kathleen Fitzpatrick satirises and undermines her grandfather, but he is nevertheless a formative influence in shaping her identity. She appreciates his theatrical self-projection but disapproves of his tyrannical behaviour. She also perceives that Grandpa’s grandiosity serves as a defence against his sense of shame in the face of his wife Mary’s moral superiority (p. 42).

Grandpa is represented as an actor in his own family circle but he also introduces his grandchildren to live theatre. Kathleen Fitzpatrick herself has a flair for acting, as evidenced by her success in two Melbourne University productions, as a ‘merry widow’ and as ‘the worldly Gwendolyn’ in The Importance of Being Earnest. But she recounts her shame when fellow students respond to her as if she is as sexually available as the lustful widow character she plays, and does not develop her acting talent further, except in the safety of her later role as a university lecturer. Although her narrative makes it clear that at university she knows nothing of the ‘dashing doings in cars’ (drinking and sexual activity), she nevertheless enjoys dressing up as a vamp, an indication that as a young adult she has overcome some of the shame derived from convent life which led the Pitt children to feel ashamed of Aunt Dot’s cherry red dress (p. 99). As a child, she refers to her liking for the limelight (p. 71), and attributes her survival of a humiliating interview at Cambridge to her ‘histrionic ability’. She is delighted by the theatricality of history professor Ernest Scott. But she rejects grandiosity in her own behaviour and is satirical about her extreme grief on the return journey from England after her ‘failure’ at Oxford. Models to avoid are the spectre of talented, unfulfilled Aunt Dot whose aptitude for the theatre was recognised but her practice short-lived, as well as the ‘black sheep’, Uncle Dick the ‘poseur’ with whom she feels some affinity, but not at the cost of becoming a black sheep herself.

Grandpa maintained his sense of self and self-importance by acting a part, that of the patriotic Englishman, the benevolent grandfather, or the tyrannical husband. Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s identification with the tyrannised, the non-British, the colonised, the women, the shamed, leads her to reject the theatricality in her own personality that Grandpa represents. She portrays her justifiable depression and disappointment on the return voyage to Australia as a histrionic pose: ‘her second daughter had taken up the stance of a figure on a funeral monument, weeping over her wilted academic laurels’ (p. 208).
Kathleen Fitzpatrick consistently rejects any tendency in herself to a narcissistic self-focus, using an ironic discourse to restrain any tendency towards self-pity. Yet theatricality was an observable component of her personality, as Geoffrey Blainey explains in his obituary:

She had a rare mastery of the spoken and written word. While she did not reach during the course of a whole year an audience as large as that reached almost every week by such prime ministers as Sir Robert Menzies and E. G. Whitlam she was probably their equal in speech and prose, in timing and sense of theatre (Blainey 1991, p. 49).

5. Shame and scholarship

Melbourne

Kathleen Fitzpatrick, a successful academic with an impressive career, sees through Grandpa’s posturing ‘British is best’, but is influenced nevertheless by attitudes prevailing at Melbourne University in the 1920s, questioning some but not others. She is convinced that the standard of education offered at Melbourne University is lower than that in Britain, British higher education being represented in her discourse only by Oxford and Cambridge:

It was generally believed (and probably rightly) that the Australian matriculant was a year behind the English one and had not caught up by the end of his course, for which reason Arts graduates who went abroad for further studies were advised to take an undergraduate course and not to attempt a higher degree (p. 177).

She accepts the arguments in favour of extending the Honours Arts course at Melbourne University from three to four years: ‘If our degrees were to become comparable with those of Oxford or Cambridge it was necessary to make up the deficiency at the university stage’ (p. 177).

She also accepts without question British colonisation of the English literature curriculum, which involved a substantial component of Old English as was required at Oxford. Her reluctance to embark on this form of study she attributes to her own lack of ability:

English literature was the subject that really interested me and I should have loved to devote myself to it, but a fairly solid study of Old English was required in the pure English school and as this was said to be difficult and I was vividly aware of my intellectual limitations, it seemed wiser to do a course combined with history (p. 154).

Nevertheless her ambivalence is such that she expresses regret when an Oxford graduate is appointed to the chair of English at Melbourne in preference to Walter Murdoch, clearly identifying the ill-founded ‘cultural cringe’:

It was also very likely that the selection committee felt that a professor with an Oxford degree would add more lustre to the chair than one of its own graduates, which Murdoch was (p. 156).
Familiar with Murdoch’s subsequent outstanding reputation, she contrasts it with the poor teaching ability, and poor human relations skills of the Oxford appointee, yet still partially justifies his behaviour in completely ignoring her and other honours students. This habit of mind persists when she embarks on further study in England. She repeatedly justifies the unjustifiable in the face of documented examples of ignorance, prejudice, poor teaching, rudeness, humiliating behaviour, careless administration, lack of pastoral care for students and inexcusable arrogance. Yet she accepts a second-class degree from Oxford as ultimate proof that she is second-rate.

**Oxford and Cambridge**

Kathleen Fitzpatrick does not record her results at Melbourne University but according to Ernest Scott, she gained first class honours in all subjects (Macintyre 1994, p. 111). When she arrives in England in 1926 she goes to Cambridge to be interviewed for a research scholarship for which she has been short-listed, at one of the women’s colleges, which she chooses not to name. The experience is one of disillusionment and crushing humiliation.

Her initial attitude is positive as she and her family set out for Cambridge:

> So we all went to Cambridge ... and found the ‘Home’ of our dreams in the peerless little city with its string of colleges, each a jewel, laid out like a magnificent necklace on the green velvet of the ‘backs’ (p. 187).

But the interview itself is traumatic. She is interviewed by a female don whose severe appearance and manner remind her of all the Reverend Mothers she had known. The don asks her of which university she is a graduate:

> I replied ‘The University of Melbourne’. There was a silence and then, in that tone of ineffable upper-class British superiority I was to come to know so well, the don observed: ‘Here in Cambridge, you know, we don’t think much of the degrees of these American universities’ (p. 188).

Given the power imbalance, the don is not shamed by her crass ignorance, but Kathleen Fitzpatrick is shamed because in the don’s understanding, Melbourne University, the institution cherished by her and central to her identity, does not exist.

The remainder of the interview is equally traumatic: ‘The don’s questions were resumed and it became abundantly clear, from their hostile tenor, that for some unknown reason she wished to humiliate and hurt me’ (p. 188). Kathleen Fitzpatrick decides against proceeding with this application as success would involve supervision by this same don, but in withdrawing she forgoes her opportunity for a research scholarship. Backed by her family, she perseveres in
her aim of studying in England and applies to Oxford where her reception is less frosty and she is accepted as a student at Somerville College. But the damage has been done. She does not enrol for a research degree:

I had had time to reflect that, unpleasant as she had been, the Cambridge don might have been right in her evident view that I was not fit for post-graduate work. If the degrees of English universities were the only ones that really counted, then the right strategy seemed to be to equip myself with one of these but not, please God, at Cambridge (pp. 188-9).

Her academic training at the University of Melbourne, a profound life experience which transformed her sense of self, is rated as worthless at Oxford, and she is demoted to the rank of undergraduate again, a loss of status that she accepts. Although Australian Rhodes Scholars also generally read for a second undergraduate degree at Oxford, they were accorded the high status that accompanied the scholarship as well as access to excellent tuition and to the community of Rhodes House as well as their own college. Rhodes Scholarships were also only available to men. Kathleen Fitzpatrick makes one mention of the privileges of Rhodes Scholars. Her experience is in remarkable contrast to the vigorous enjoyment and brilliant success described by Hancock in an almost exclusively male Oxford environment (Hancock 1954), which highlights the extent of institutionalised sexual inequality.

The process of internalising the values of the shaming culture continues at Oxford. Kathleen Fitzpatrick describes her Australian accent self-consciously as her ‘native woodnote wild’, and is impressed by the accent of the Principal of Somerville: ‘How magical was the sound of Miss Penrose’s beautiful diction’ (p. 189). Unlike Hancock, who vigorously defends the Australian accent in Country and Calling, Kathleen Fitzpatrick apparently changed her accent to resemble that of the admired Miss Penrose. Blainey commented in his obituary of Kathleen Fitzpatrick on her style of speech:

Everything about her appeared to be carefully chosen but not least the words and the fastidious, measured pronunciation of every word. Her voice was closer to an educated English than Australian voice: the kind of voice that was often associated in Australia with the taking of airs (Blainey 1991, p. 51).

Yet Blainey affirms:

She claimed no superiority over her audience, and indeed in all her speaking and writing during more than half a century of public life she did not sing her own praises. She did not boast: she had no need to boast (p. 51).

Her account of her Oxford experience is a blend of criticism and justification. At Somerville she is lonely and homesick. For her first ten days no one speaks to her, but she excuses this behaviour with a range of arguments, including the
colonial cliché that some English people ‘feel you may have as little wish to know them as they have to know you’ (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 199).

She experiences poor teaching but blames herself for not profiting more from the excellence of the system:

There is probably no better system of university tuition than that practised in Oxford in my day ... but its efficacy depended on the quality of the participants. I was, once again, dogged by that absence of good teaching which I was not intellectually strong enough to overcome (pp. 206-7).

Her ‘once again’ refers back to her patchy convent education which her experience at Oxford, apogee of English-speaking intellectual life, reiterates. One aspect she does not justify is the dreadful food served at Somerville, yet another echo of her convent experience, the counting of the body for naught. She also battles gender shame in both specific instances and in the institutionalisation of disadvantage. Poor health, unhappiness and excessive work sap her intellectual and physical energy with the result that the first class honours degree she hoped for eludes her and a second class degree represents failure in her terms.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s strategies for surviving her situation of shaming oppression as an Australian undergraduate at Oxford included the development of political consciousness as a framework for interpreting the shaming assaults on the self deriving from the oppressive social structure. Hard work was a strategy she had learnt from her father’s example. Appreciation of Oxford’s architectural beauty and that of the English countryside offered a consolation to a person of her aesthetic sensibility, shaped by her mother’s interests and by her childhood delight in the English garden shrubbery of Hughenden.

No mention is made of her continuing friendship with Brian Fitzpatrick. The dispirited, disappointed Oxford undergraduate portrayed gives no indication of having any resource of love or encouragement, apart from one named friend, Isobel Addison, described as a socialist, and the American friend who introduced her to the work of Henry James (‘as a moralist he has been to me a life-long teacher and support’ [Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 201]). Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s development of political consciousness at Oxford enabled her to gain some objectivity in interpreting her difficult experience. Kathleen Pitt and Brian Fitzpatrick would have had much in common at that time, with their Labor Club background and first encounter with stratified British society. But Kathleen Fitzpatrick accepts responsibility for her own critical observations, and does not attribute her views to the influence of friends, as she does in
relation to the University of Melbourne Labor Club (1983, p. 172). Moreover, as Watson’s biography makes clear, Brian Fitzpatrick and his male contemporaries received much support from women in radical politics, but never accorded them significant leadership roles. Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s most deeply felt experiences of injustice at Oxford were related to gender inequities, to which Brian Fitzpatrick was unlikely to be sensitive.

But her strategies for overcoming the shaming experience of two years in Britain had limited success, as she describes her sense of guilt about her failure to develop a ‘tender regard’ for Oxford (p. 206):

And yet, in later years, I was to listen almost with envy to male colleagues who, like me, had taken their first degrees in Australia and their second in Oxford and who looked back with evident nostalgia, which I could not share, to their blissful days in the Paradise Lost of Oxford. I too had been in Arcadia but I did not long to return and felt guilty of my failure to respond appropriately to a great opportunity by being in fact rather unhappy while there (p. 203).

Her justification of British behaviour and practices as exemplified above and her willingness to accept in her late seventies the judgement of ‘second-rate’ that she considered her Oxford degree to be when awarded in her early twenties, is evidence that the marks of colonial shame, combined with gender shame, were never entirely erased from her self-perception.

6. Shame, love and politics

A Dionysian ‘aporia’: air-brushing Brian Fitzpatrick

One of the signifiers of shame is denial or forgetting (Michael Lewis 1992, pp. 128-9), which may show forth in a text as a significant *aporia*. Underlying the shaming experience of the voyage to Britain construed as ‘home’ and of academic study at Oxford, is Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s conspicuous omission from her autobiography of any discussion of her relationship with her former husband, Brian Fitzpatrick, the man whose surname she continued to use as her own. The effacement of Brian Fitzpatrick suggests a powerful desire to suppress a life experience too painful to explore in the narrative. Brian Fitzpatrick, described by Stuart Macintyre as a ‘civil libertarian and freelance radical historian’ (Macintyre 1992) is mentioned only once in the autobiography, as follows:

I found time to contribute to the *Melbourne University Magazine* and the student newspaper *Farrago*, which first appeared while I was a student, having been founded by Bob Fraser and Brian Fitzpatrick, to whom I was later to be briefly and unhappily married (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 176).
Why did Kathleen Fitzpatrick, well into her retirement, valuing her privacy, publish an autobiography in 1983, when she was in her late seventies, rather than in mid-career, when the debate about the cultural cringe was at its height? Autobiographies by other Australian academics associated with Melbourne University had appeared in previous decades, Hancock’s Country and Calling in 1954, Chisholm’s Men Were My Milestones in 1958, and Graham McInnes’s The Road to Gundagai in 1965. Vincent Buckley’s Cutting Green Hay was published in 1983, the same year as Solid Bluestone Foundations and Kathleen Fitzpatrick may have been aware of her colleague’s work in progress.

Fewer models existed in women’s writing. Given the evidence of Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s knowledge of Henry Handel Richardson, the influence of The Getting of Wisdom (1910) and Myself When Young (1948) can be assumed (Fitzpatrick 1983, pp. 195-6). Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiography, like Myself When Young, covers only the years of her girlhood and early adult life before marriage and career. Kathleen Fitzpatrick may also have been familiar with Mary Gilmore’s Old Days, Old Ways: a Book of Recollections (1934), Melbourne-born Joan Lindsay’s Time Without Clocks (1962) and the writings of Miles Franklin, including Childhood at Brindabella, published posthumously in 1963.

A significant stimulus for Solid Bluestone Foundations may have been the publication by Don Watson in 1979 of a biography of Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s former husband Brian Fitzpatrick. Brian Fitzpatrick had died in 1965. In the biography, entitled Brian Fitzpatrick: A Radical Life?, Watson acknowledges the help he received from Kathleen Fitzpatrick:

Mrs Kathleen Fitzpatrick, formerly Associate Professor of History at the University of Melbourne, was good enough to correspond with me on certain aspects (Watson 1979, p. xiv).

But the biographical information Kathleen Fitzpatrick provided to Watson was strictly limited. With reference to Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s marriage to Brian, Watson provides the following footnote:

It has not been possible to treat this period in F’s [Brian Fitzpatrick’s] life fully. No records survive, and, for the best of personal reasons, Professor Fitzpatrick cannot substantially assist in overcoming their loss. My account of F’s first marriage is therefore skeletal and my interpretation of it somewhat impressionistic. It is based entirely on discussions with people who knew F. I have attempted to deal with only those facets of the marriage which seem to have a direct bearing on his career (Watson 1979, footnote 35, p. 319).

It is fairly certain that Kathleen Fitzpatrick would have read Watson’s biography attentively, not only out of personal interest but to check the accuracy of his ‘skeletal’ and ‘impressionistic’ account. But what is most striking in the biography is a likely source for the actual title of Kathleen
Fitzpatrick’s autobiography. A passage from an unpublished novel by Brian Fitzpatrick, ‘The Colonials’, written as Watson assumes, in 1929-30, in the period of Kathleen and Brian’s friendship, describes his parents’ home, ‘Number Fourteen’, as ‘built solidly on firm foundations’. The preceding commentary from Watson on the passage is as follows:

For the most part the Fitzpatrick’s [sic] cultivated their tastes within their home in Moonee Ponds. Brian held the large but unimposing weatherboard house in great affection and in his novel described its various rooms and Victorian in fond detail. But is[sic] also served to place this family in their epoch and class – and symbolises the sources of his own rebellion (Watson 1979, p. 4).

It can be argued that in Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiography, her grandfather’s Melbourne mansion, Hughenden, fulfils a similar role in the construction of the self. It is useful therefore to reproduce the extract from ‘The Colonials’ in full:

The regard in which Number Fourteen was locally held was not, indeed, comparable with that which the Kempseys and Raymonds contemptuously exacted, but still it raised Number Fourteen’s tenants to a special platform in a fluid community whose industrious units paused a while in Grosvenor Street [Milverton Street] en route to the integrity of Malvern, the abundance of Brighton, perhaps, or even the dignity of Toorak.

Surely Number Fourteen was, by an irony not wholly understood by its present inmates, their perfect choice of abode. The struggling solicitor in Number Twelve might have a future beyond Grosvenor Street, beyond the suburb. The estate agency manager in Number Sixteen might contemplate his stay in a rented house as but a moment in his progress. But the Collines [Fitzpatricks] would always live in a Number Fourteen, until the family broke up, scattered, became great or little in its component parts, burst through its protective illusions, its precarious unity, at a never-spoken-of seeding time. For them the death of the family would be the beginning of the future.

In the meantime, Number Fourteen, built strongly on firm foundations by a forgotten speculator who had deliberately made his neighbourhood of gimcrack, was as if built to be a schoolmaster’s citadel, for it was neither here nor there (quoted in Watson 1979, p. 4).

The references to the estate agency manager and the forgotten speculator have relevance to Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s own family background, as the solid bluestone foundations of her grandfather’s mansion Hughenden were attributed to the success of the ‘Firm’, the family-owned real estate agency J. R. Buxton & Sons. There was nothing ‘gimcrack’ about Hughenden. Nevertheless Kathleen Fitzpatrick as an individual was a disinherited member of the Buxton clan along gender lines. She was the daughter of a Buxton daughter and received little more from the clan than abundant hospitality and affection, and certainly no financial or educational support or career opportunities. There was room for rebellion here too, and in Solid Bluestone Foundations the discourse of revolt competes with the discourse of conformity.
Watson's commentary on 'The Colonials' suggests other parallels with *Solid Bluestone Foundations*. The problem of national identity is raised in relation to the character whom Watson assumes to be based on Peter Fitzpatrick, Brian's father. Watson's interpretation is reminiscent of the way in which Kathleen Fitzpatrick represents her Buxton grandfather: the characters differ but the preoccupations are similar. Watson comments: 'Peter Fitzpatrick was Irish, but he thought of himself as British and was loyal to the throne, Billy Hughes, and conscription in Britain's wars' (Watson 1979, p. 5).

Another parallel in Watson's biography is an allusion to Peter Fitzpatrick being 'cast in the mould of Richard Mahony' (Watson 1979, p. 5). Reference is also made in *Solid Bluestone Foundations* to *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, specifically in relation to the problem of defining identity in relation to Britain (Fitzpatrick 1983, pp. 195-6). This is far from suggesting that *Solid Bluestone Foundations* is simply a secondary work inspired, provoked by or simply a derivative of Brian Fitzpatrick's unpublished novel. Nevertheless it is clear that a commonality of ideas exists between *Solid Bluestone Foundations* and 'The Colonials'.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick's conspicuous omission from her autobiography of any discussion of a significant relationship with the man with whom her thinking had much in common and whose surname she still used indicates a powerful desire to disassociate herself from Brian Fitzpatrick as an individual. In *Solid Bluestone Foundations*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick constructs a self that is distanced from Brian Fitzpatrick, his lack of respectability and his radical politics. Kathleen Fitzpatrick's autobiography plays down her early radicalism and journalistic abilities, to present a more 'middle of the road', establishment, although not altogether privileged self. In *Solid Blue Foundations* she constructs a 'respectable' self, who is neither 'fast', nor a drinker, nor a frequenter of 'low' society. It is as if she wishes to eliminate any possibility that in her early years her reputation may have been tarnished by assumptions that she had any of these characteristics in common with Brian Fitzpatrick. Watson presents Brian Fitzpatrick as a heavy drinker with a penchant for 'low life':

> He drank as regularly as his finances allowed, not only in the traditional University venues or such intellectual havens as the Café Latin, but also in the haunts of old soldiers, criminals and prostitutes. And now, as he always did later, he kept his two lives and various friends apart (Watson 1979, p. 24).

Watson also presents a more well-behaved Brian Fitzpatrick during the period of his first marriage: 'The genteel influence of the Pitt family may have been reflected in Fitzpatrick's behaviour at the time of his marriage and for a year or
two afterwards’ (Watson 1979, p. 45). The source of this biographical impression may have been Kathleen Fitzpatrick herself.

A reading of Watson’s biography suggests that Kathleen Fitzpatrick had a greater involvement in Labor student politics than Solid Bluestone Foundations indicates and that she has deliberately played down her youthful political activism as well as almost entirely omitting Brian Fitzpatrick from her autobiographical record. Her political activism is emmeshed in her relationship with Brian Fitzpatrick.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick mentions briefly that she found time to contribute articles to the radical student newspaper *Farrago*, whereas Watson’s biography implies that her role was significant, including a photograph of Kathleen at the centre of a small group of contributors among whom is Brian Fitzpatrick. Kathleen is holding the first issue. Watson also names her as one of the four founding women members of the newly formed Labor Club at Melbourne University, commenting:

> The Labor Club women were a formidable quartet although, of course, as was the custom of the times, it was the men who generally occupied the stage (Watson 1979, pp. 16-17).

Kathleen’s autobiography on the other hand, states:

> I was a constant attender at the Literature Club, the Historical Society and the Public Questions Society and an occasional one at the newly founded Labor Club, chiefly because some of my friends were interested in it: I had not yet become politically conscious (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 172).

She later explains that her political awakening happened at Oxford. The contrast between Watson’s account and Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s in her autobiography suggests that the latter was concerned to give an alternative version which minimised her involvement with *Farrago* and the Labor Club, without, however, referring to Watson’s biography.

Similarly, underlying the shaming experience of ‘home’ and academic study in England is the obliterated presence of Brian Fitzpatrick, who sailed for England only three months after Kathleen and whose companionship could have been valuable as she confronted shaming colonialist attitudes and practices. Her experience of oppression at Oxford may also have contributed to shaping Brian Fitzpatrick’s radical rejection of the myth of British superiority. Yet Kathleen Fitzpatrick makes no mention of Brian’s presence in England, although Watson states: ‘The two had been friends since their undergraduate days. They had been in constant contact in England, where she was at Oxford’ (Watson 1979, p. 45).
Her narrative indicates that her choice of marriage partner was a source of shame that divorce could not obliterate. Brian Fitzpatrick, as a radical, had a public life that was well known in Melbourne, and also had anti-academic views according to Watson, who suggests that Brian Fitzpatrick's career may have been adversely affected by the breakdown of his marriage, and that acrimony may have fuelled his later views. Russel Ward, whose own autobiography is entitled *A Radical Life* (1988), describes Brian Fitzpatrick as 'Australian guru of the left', with a prodigious drinking capacity (pp. 214-5). Interpreting Brian Fitzpatrick's relationship with academia, Ward comments:

> Among academic historians he lived to become a legend in his own lifetime, not so much as a great historian and orator but as a great human being who, though superabundantly qualified for an academic teaching position earned his daily bread as a mail sorter in the Melbourne GPO. Legions of friends proclaimed he was blackballed from academia because of his uncompromising radical Marxist writing. Respectable enemies within the cloisters argued, rather lamely, that he drank too much (Ward 1988, p. 215).

Although Kathleen Fitzpatrick had been humiliated by English academics, she found purpose and stability on the academic staff at Melbourne University. Her autobiography represents a subtle alignment with the solid bluestone academic establishment, and is carefully shaped to eliminate any trace of the Dionysian, represented by Brian Fitzpatrick. Additional comment on her marriage is contained in her autobiographical reflection in 'A Cloistered Life', in which she writes of her appointment as a history lecturer at Melbourne University, ending the decade of struggle:

> I had now realised my heart’s desire, an ideal occupation and independence, for four hundred a year, my new salary, was affluence for a single woman, which I was resolved to remain (Fitzpatrick 1982, p. 130).

**The limits of inclusion**

Kathleen Fitzpatrick's narrative explores some of the contradictions inherent in the colonial myth of British superiority, examining alternative perspectives, those of the Australian-born, Irish, Catholic and female. But other perspectives are virtually absent, including those of Aborigines, non Anglo-Celtic Europeans and Asians. Kathleen Fitzpatrick's ultimate 'home' in Australia is more inclusive than that of Stephensen, as she includes Irish Australians, but her critique of internalised colonialism does not extend beyond Stephensen's 'ideal of white Australia' (Stephensen 1986, p. 190).

The principal reference to Aborigines in the narrative is difficult to interpret. Australian-born Grandma is said to have 'represented another tradition, that of life in the bush in the olden days when there were blacks, even in Victoria' (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 11). From the tone of the text, the narrative voice may be an
ironic reproduction of phrases from family story-telling, but one cannot be sure. The one story included is that of Grandma’s mother’s ingenuity in preventing an anticipated attack by Aborigines on the lonely homestead during her husband’s absence. Whether an attack had been likely or not, Grandma is described as having acquired a fear of the bush in her childhood (p. 35).

Asians put in few appearances in the narrative. The fruit and vegetable stalls at the South Melbourne market are described as: ‘all kept by slant-eyed Orientals, each and every one of whom seemed to have, or anyway to be addressed by, the same name, which was “John”’ (p. 24). Asians are accorded no individual identity, no distinctive nationality or name, and are characterised by one physical feature that differentiates them from Europeans. When Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s eccentric Uncle Dick moves to Melbourne from Sri Lanka, he brings with him ‘a black boy’ as groom. The family assumes that the servant is African but the narrator reflects that he was probably ‘a native of Ceylon’ (1983, p. 29). Skin colour is perceived as his only distinguishing feature: no name is attributed to him and his nationality is uncertain. The European ice-cream vendor, ‘Joe the Liar’ fares only slightly better. He is the only vendor her grandmother considers reliable from the health point of view, and the discrepancy between his nickname and supposed integrity is noted:

I suppose the poor man was an exiled Neapolitan and that his name was a corruption of some Italian name considered unpronounceable in the days when Britannia really ruled the waves and it was not thought necessary even to try to give foreigners their names (p. 24).

The narrator’s sister Lorna marries an Italian engineer (p. 208), whose name, Maneschi, does not appear in the narrative, except as Lorna’s surname in the acknowledgements.

These examples suggest that non Anglo-Celts do not feature prominently in the family-based communal identity of the middle class in Melbourne of that period. In autobiographical accounts referring to later periods than that covered by Solid Bluestone Foundations Europeans, non-Europeans and Aborigines often receive more sympathetic attention.

7. The consolation of Italy: an alternative to Anglo-Australian culture

In the apparently definitive conclusion of Solid Bluestone Foundations, the narrator declares her acceptance of Australia rather than Britain as home. As the ship bringing her back from Britain approaches Fremantle, the autobiography concludes with the sentence: ‘I had been “Home” and now was
coming home’ (1983, p. 210). Nevertheless an understated affection for Italy competes with this apparent resolution of shame in the self. In the complex intertextuality of the narrative the reader must follow the trail left by Henry James. A lecture given by Kathleen Fitzpatrick in 1967 to The Australian Humanities Research Council, entitled ‘Henry James and the Influence of Italy’ celebrates the enriching effect of that country on this novelist, but also indicates that the influence of Italy in Solid Bluestone Foundations may be more significant than at first appears. The influence of Italy on Kathleen Fitzpatrick may be comparable to the influence of Italy as she defines it in the work of Henry James:

The influence of Italy on Henry James was real and important, but diffused and general. It was not the kind of influence that changes a man but rather the kind that feeds vital elements already present within him, that rests and refreshes and reassures him, and encourages him to be himself. It is as hard to define and as impossible to pin down but as important as the influence of the vaporous light in creating the beauty of Venice. It simply enriched and harmonised his life and work (Fitzpatrick 1967, p. 55).

Such an influence operates as an antidote to shame, which as Michael Lewis points out, ‘disrupts ongoing activity’ as the self turns inwards and evaluates itself as ‘no good, inadequate, unworthy’ (Michael Lewis 1992, p. 34).

The influence of Italy on Henry James is also comparable to the influence of Henry James on Kathleen Fitzpatrick, his work providing a refuge for the troubled self. In Solid Bluestone Foundations she writes:

I have never ceased to delight in him as an artist and as a moralist he has been to me a life-long teacher and support: many have been the occasions ... when the problems of the conduct of life were too difficult for me to solve unaided and I have never failed to find in his wisdom a guide and in his example an injection of courage (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 201).

Although the influence of Henry James is not specified until the final chapter of Solid Bluestone Foundations, his influence is pervasive. In describing her own family life with its constant moves, Kathleen Fitzpatrick borrows a phrase from James. ‘The parental tent’ is Henry James’ term for the many homes of his childhood and once lodged in my mind no other term could displace it to convey the transitional character of home as understood in my family’ (p. 101).

Her identification with James runs deep.

The central architectural image of Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiography, the ‘solid bluestone foundations’ of her maternal grandfather’s Italianate mansion, ‘Hughenden’, owes much to the Jamesian style as she interprets it. In the same lecture she asserts that:
Henry James was the most architectonic novelist who has ever written in English and he loved solid structures in the material world as much as in his own world of words. He preferred Roman, Romanesque and Renaissance architecture to Gothic, which is one reason why Italy made a stronger aesthetic appeal to him than France (Fitzpatrick 1967, p. 52).

As previously stated, Kathleen Fitzpatrick structures her autobiography architectonically, illustrated by the opening sentence: ‘The house where my mother’s parents lived, called “Hughenden”, was the most solid and permanent fact ever to be known to me. It was my rock of ages’ (1983, p. 1). Hughenden, ‘Built in the Italianate style much favoured in Melbourne in the eighties of the last century’ (p. 2), represented her family’s past, and anchored it in history. Just as Hughenden is described as Italianate, and reminiscent of Renaissance architecture, Kathleen Fitzpatrick links other buildings that matter to her with Italy. The dome of the Victorian State Public Library is linked with the great domes of Italy (as well as Sancta Sophia) and the Shot Tower, visible from the Library steps, with Florence (p. 175). Her experience of Italy survives her romantic fantasies in a way that her experience in Britain does not. But it is only from the para-text, the dust-jacket of Solid Bluestone Foundations, not from the text, that the reader is informed that Kathleen Fitzpatrick ‘has paid many visits to Italy, her favourite country outside Australia’.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s European epiphany is set in a cafe in Rome on her twenty-first birthday, immediately before the account of her disillusionment at Oxford. The social realism of her initial impressions of Britain and the snobbishness of British people she met, prior to her European tour, was in such sharp contrast to her earlier romantic vision, strongly influenced by her mother, that she described herself as far more comfortable in Europe, where difference was not associated with shame (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 194). The revelation she recounts represents the kind of expansion of the self which can only take place when the self is not shamed but at ease. Enjoying ‘a peaceful, hushed hour of solitude and reverie’ she depicts herself as reflecting on the aforementioned line from Horace, ‘Coelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt’ [They change their skies but not their souls who run across the sea] (pp. 195-6). The classical quotation situates Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s conflict between British and Australian values within classical Latin discourse, thus endowing her experience with a stability deriving from the antiquity of the debate. Yet as previously discussed, the quotation also anchors her experience firmly in the Australian literary tradition.
Kathleen Fitzpatrick reformulates the quotation as two questions:

Was the proposition that when we cross the seas we change only our skies, not our selves false or true? ... I had crossed more sea and changed my skies more completely than any ancient Roman, but was my *animum*, as the sage asserted, immutable? (Fitzpatrick 1983, pp. 195-6).

The response that follows is the narrative’s central reflection on the nature of the self, and the Italian setting is an indicator of the self at peace, inner conflicts reconciled, for a time. Kathleen Fitzpatrick concludes that her *animum* is immutable ‘up to a point’:

I had already learnt that wherever one travels one must carry, strapped to one’s back, the knapsack of the self, a ragbag stuffed with genes and habits, pride and prejudice, a little knowledge and a great deal of ignorance, a heavy burden which limits freedom of movement and the capacity for development (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 196).

But tentatively, phrasing her hope as a question, she suggests the possibility of some change, ‘by jettisoning some of the prejudices, cutting down on the ignorance and increasing the knowledge?’ This is the hope of an educationalist, an enlightenment view in which knowledge is related to morality. Yet the knowledge that leads to change is not acquired from books but from experience, and specifically, the experience of ‘changing skies’. Although intelligence shapes choice, change is impelled by an increase in self-knowledge (p. 196). The meditation then proceeds to relate the aesthetic education she acquires on her European, and specifically Italian tour, to an architectonic conception of her self, in which she psychically and imaginatively incorporates the new architectural structures that have become imbedded in her consciousness with the old:

Seated as I was within a stone’s throw of the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, in which Michelangelo incorporated the esedra of the Baths of Diocletian, the example that naturally came to mind of an increase in self knowledge was architectural (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 196).

Like Michelangelo as architect, Kathleen Fitzpatrick as autobiographer incorporates the structure of Hughenden into the psychic experiences of later life.

As the meditation unfolds, her uncertainty as to her own identity surfaces as she admits that, prior to this moment, in her inexperience she simply did not know what she liked. Her tour of the rich pictorial heritage and architectural monuments of Europe, which she describes as ‘an intense sensuous education’, (p. 197), leads to self-discovery: ‘The answer came loud and clear in the Piazza dell’Esedra; it was my own private little revelation, my adventure on the road to Damascus’ (p. 197). This is a significant statement, despite being diminished
by the adjective ‘little’. But her revelation is to the reader initially disconcerting, and even mundane: it consists of her discovery of a profound attraction to ‘classical form’. Although the autobiographical account she gives of this architectural preference offers an insight into her self-construal, it is illuminated by her earlier discussion of the architec
tonic art of Henry James. The buildings to which she responds most warmly, echoing the tastes she attributes to Henry James, ‘Roman, Romanesque and early Renaissance’, and in particular the Pantheon of Rome, are described as earth-bound rather than pointing to heaven, with solid foundations:

The Pantheon expresses stability, not aspiration, and offers shelter to men rather than a ladder to heaven. But why should I prefer to be earth-bound rather than sky-borne? Could one trace it all back to those solid bluestone foundations of my childhood which had seemed to offer some promise of permanence in a world of flux?’ (p. 197).

Fitzpatrick’s conception of classical form is more than purely aesthetic. The moral and ethical life of the inhabitants of Hughenden matter to her, just as art and morality are united in the aesthetics of Henry James. Hers is not a self formed by romanticism or by the destabilising Dionysian forces represented by Brian Fitzpatrick, but a quintessentially European Renaissance humanism:

I can admire waste and solitary places, high mountains and deep, rugged gorges strike awe into my soul, but I cannot love them and am only happy in scenes made to the measure of man and humanised by his long habitation and labour in them (Fitzpatrick 1983, p. 197).

In her lecture on Henry James she describes his sensibility almost identically: ‘he loved to find himself in places where many generations of men had lived, and to feel the continuity between their times and his’. She herself then observes: ‘In no European country, I think, is the sense of the past so strongly felt as in Italy’ (Fitzpatrick 1967, p. 52).

Parts of Melbourne may be acceptable in this definition of a humanised landscape, but not the Australian bush. For Kathleen Fitzpatrick the exploration of Australia is confined to the intellectual and historical: her sensitivity to landscape is European and Italy is the point of repose in her narrative where the shamed self finds consolation.

8. Conclusion

Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiography presents the shaming impact of the myth of British superiority on an individual personality with an insight that is absent from comparable academic memoirs such as those by A. R. Chisholm and W. K. Hancock. Her autobiography resolves issues of Australian identity with more assurance than the writer with whom she has much in common, Martin Boyd.
Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s mature identity is anchored in time and place, whereas Boyd chooses a transcendental solution to resolve his sense of displacement. Evidence of shame deriving from the myth nevertheless persists in Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiography, in her self-deprecatory evaluation of her academic career and her lack of appreciation of the Australian accent to the extent of changing her own speech. Her critique of the myth and her strategies to overcome the related experience of shame are complicated by the desire to construct an autobiographical identity that is disentangled from her relationship with Brian Fitzpatrick, where other issues of shame apply. For Kathleen Fitzpatrick, the personal appears to have modified the political.

The myth of British superiority within her family and Alma Mater, together with her grandfather’s prejudice against the Irish struck at the roots of her identity as a so-called ‘colonial’, socially and intellectually, rendering her more vulnerable to the inequities of her Oxford experience, particularly those related to gender. Her unsuccessful marriage to Brian Fitzpatrick led her to modify retrospectively her political activism and to seek refuge in the psychic structures of Hughenden, or at least those aspects she could still accept, rebuilding it in her autobiography. The consolatory dimensions of Hughenden are conjoined with her affection for Italy to create within the text a shame-free zone.
Chapter 3
Original Shame: Autobiographies of Illegitimacy

1. Introduction

The refuge of respectability is not readily accessible to an autobiographical self shamed by illegitimate birth. One of the bastions against shame in *Solid Bluestone Foundations* is Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s autobiographical reconstruction of the solid bluestone foundations of a respectable middle class family background, her legitimate place within it reinforced by a detailed genealogy. In autobiographies concerned with illegitimacy, the origins of the self, as constituted by the circumstances of birth, parentage and ancestry, represent a source of shame rather than a refuge from it. There is a sense in which the three works selected for analysis in this chapter, Bernard Smith’s *The Boy Adeodatus: Portrait of a Lucky Young Bastard* (1984), Germaine Greer’s *Daddy We Hardly Knew You* (1989), and Robert Dessaix’s *A Mother’s Disgrace* (1994), each of which explores the impact of illegitimacy on the self, confront shame in a way that *Solid Bluestone Foundations* does not. The respectable self in Fitzpatrick’s autobiography resiles from the implications of academic disappointment at Oxford, the choice of a brilliant but disreputable marriage partner, gender disadvantage in her family and her own youthful radicalism. The wounds of shame still rankle in the narrative. In the three ‘illegitimate’ autobiographies, the confrontation with shameful aspects of the self involves a greater revelation of individual and family secrets and less apparent evasion and reticence. It can be anticipated that the potential for the healing of shame within these narratives is therefore greater.

Each of the selected texts may be construed as a set of literary strategies to legitimate the self. Smith and Dessaix represent their own experience of being illegitimate, whereas Greer’s work traces the discovery of her father’s illegitimacy. Brief reference will be made to Suzanne Chick’s recent autobiography concerned with illegitimacy, *Searching for Charmian: The Daughter Charmian Clift Gave Away Discoveres the Mother She Never Knew* (1994) and to David Parker’s novel, *Building on Sand* (1988). Aboriginal autobiographies emphasising illegitimacy, including Charles Perkins’ autobiography, *A Bastard Like Me* (1975) and Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* (1988) will be discussed in chapter 4.
The critical framework

The critical framework for this chapter draws upon P. J. Eakin’s current project, which examines the representation of the self as relational, in autobiographies by both male and female writers. Eakin writes: ‘the myth of autonomy dies hard, and autobiographical criticism has not yet fully addressed the extent to which the self is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relations with others’ (Eakin unpub.).

Shame is an effective focus for an analysis of autobiographical representations of the relational self as the experience of this emotion requires the presence of an ‘other’, actual or internalised. The formation of an internalised shaming ‘other’ takes place initially within the family of origin, where the fundamental shaping of the self begins in relationship to other family members. If one posits an unexceptional individual in a supportive family structure located within a stable society, that individual’s sense of shame is likely to function as a useful guide to the restraint and modification of behaviour requisite for peaceful coexistence with others. In other words, shame operating within the self will be ‘reintegrative’ rather than ‘disintegrative’ according to Braithwaite’s terminology (1989, pp. 4-9). However, for individuals whose birth is designated ‘illegitimate’, the family of origin has departed from prevailing social norms and the child’s developing sense of shame is consequently shaped by the systematic shaming of a particular social group that constitutes ‘stigma’. In this instance of disintegrative societal shaming, the shame of the mother becomes that of the child, as aptly illustrated by the title of Dessaix’s autobiography, ‘A Mother’s Disgrace’. Steedman, quoted by Eakin in his discussion of ‘relational lives’, writes: ‘Children are always episodes in someone else’s narrative’ (Eakin unpub.). This applies to all children but is strikingly evident in the lives of illegitimate children.

Autobiographies by individuals of illegitimate birth may be constructed as legitimating narratives, in which the self is situated textually in a reinterpreted place within the family of origin, the adoptive or foster family, and society. Such a reinterpretation tends to challenge social norms, but may also rely on changes that are already occurring. Changes in the legal and social status of individuals designated ‘illegitimate’, illustrated by the replacement of the term ‘illegitimate’ by ‘ex-nuptial’ in recent legislation and bureaucratic usage, reflects a profound change in social attitudes in Australia.

Also relevant to Australian autobiographies concerned with illegitimacy is Hodge and Mishra’s analysis of the ‘bastard complex’ in Australian literature,
as discussed in *Dark Side of the Dream* (1991) from a postcolonial perspective, and Teichman's philosophical discussion of illegitimacy (1982). The significance of the family history movement in the three selected autobiographical texts will be noted. Brief mention will be made of the theme of illegitimacy in narrative fiction.

**The 'bastard complex' in Australian literature**

B. Hodge and V. Mishra in *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (1991) identify an aspect of Australian identity which they call 'the bastard complex'. This concern is not, surprisingly, associated with illegitimate birth so much as with the legitimacy of the Australian nation state originating in 'the foundation event' of European settlement. The authors specify 'an acute anxiety at the core of the national self-image' at the time of the Australian bicentenary celebrations, which they relate to 'an obsession with the issue of legitimacy' (1991, p. x). They are interested in 'the roles that Australian literature has played in this unceasing and doomed quest for symbolic forms of legitimacy' (1991, p. x). The authors argue that this quest for legitimacy, related to the basis of the Australian nation state, is bound to fail as long as European settlement is not acknowledged as an act of invasion and dispossession of the Aboriginal people, noting that the derivation of the term chosen to describe them, *ab origine* [from the origins], reflects a 'tacit recognition' of legitimate Aboriginal land ownership (1991, p. 25). The dual meanings of the word 'bastard' in 'Australian male colloquial speech', as either a term of abuse or an expression of solidarity between men, are related to the broader question of Australian legitimacy:

> only the true Australian can call his 'mate' a 'bastard'. This quirk of the language foregrounds the issue of legitimacy as crucial in the Australian definition of identity. And paradoxically the basis of identity that it constructs is a sense of shared illegitimacy: a sense that can only be acknowledged however among (male) friends (1991, p. 23).

The argument continues: 'This colloquial usage does not point directly to the source of this anxiety about legitimacy in the national psyche. On the contrary it affirms illegitimacy in order to evade an anxiety about origins' (1991, p. 23).

Brief mention is made of the exploitation of Aboriginal women by white men, but discussion is limited to the issue of legitimate and illegitimate land ownership, with no mention of those to whom the term 'bastard' has been 'legitimately' applied, namely, individuals of illegitimate birth, not even those of Aboriginal descent (1991, p. 33). This gap in the text is striking, especially in view of data quoted by Teichman: 'we find His Majesty's Select Committee on
Transportation complaining in 1812: ‘Two-thirds of the children born each year in the colony of New South Wales are illegitimate’ (Teichman 1982, p. 58).

Teichman argues that the distinction between licit and illicit birth, which is important in most societies, ‘comes closest to breaking down when substantial numbers of individuals of both sexes are propertyless and living in slavery or servitude as convicts, “internal exiles”, slaves or other long-term prisoners’ (p. 58). Teichman does not explain, however, that these Australian statistics were influenced by the number of Catholics choosing to live in de facto unions because few Catholic priests were available to conduct marriage ceremonies.

Law, identity and shame

Hodge and Mishra’s discussion of the Australian ‘bastard complex’ would have been strengthened by an exploration of the relationship between the legal fiction of ‘terra nullius’, overturned by the High Court of Australia 1992 Mabo decision, and the ‘filius nullius’ rule, discussed in some detail by Teichman:

According to canon law and the common law of England, a bastard child was filius nullius (no one’s child). He could make no claims on his parents for support – no one was obliged in law to care for him ... the ‘fatherless poor’ relied on the charity of the monastic institutions and the municipalities (p. 60).

Teichman charts social and legal changes in the care and status of such children, concluding with a legal opinion from Lord Hailsham, published in 1971, that ‘The filius nullius rule is now obsolete’ (Teichman 1982, p. 75).

A secure identity in a modern nation state involves an accurate knowledge of one’s date and place of birth, the names and identity of each parent, as well as being acknowledged by both as their child, and receiving a name. It is a legal requirement that these essentials be recorded by the state. Inscribed in international law, in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is the right of every child to a name and a nationality, and, if possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents (Alston & Brennan 1991, p. 112).

Incorrect or incomplete knowledge of these identifiers has been commonly associated with shame and stigma, in particular the absence of the father’s name from one’s birth certificate, indicative of illegitimate birth. Following British practice, births were required to be registered by law in the Australian colonies from the 1850s (Vine Hall 1985, pp. 21, 131). Illegitimacy constituted a legal status, recorded on a child’s birth certificate. Australian children born out of wedlock were subject to various forms of legal discrimination, particularly
with regard to inheritance, until the mid 1970s, when legislation was enacted in each State and Territory to eliminate all distinction in law between children born within and outside marriage (Bates 1987).

The principle of legitimacy

Hartley points out that the existence of illegitimacy was dependent on wide social acceptance of Malinowski’s ‘principle of legitimacy’ in the social organisation of reproduction (Hartley 1975, pp. 2-3). The following passage from Malinowski’s ‘Parenthood, the basis of social structure’, cited by Hartley, indicates the patriarchal assumptions contained in the principle of legitimacy of birth:

... the most important moral and legal rule concerning the physiological side of kinship is that no child should be brought into the world without a man – and one man at that – assuming the role of sociological father, that is, guardian and protector, the male link between the child and the rest of the community ... The form which the principle of legitimacy assumes varies according to the laxity or stringency which obtains regarding prenuptial intercourse; according to the value set upon virginity or the contempt for it; according to the ideas held by the natives as to the mechanism of procreation; above all, according to whether the child is a burden or an asset to its parents ... Broadly speaking, an unmarried mother is under a ban, a fatherless child is a bastard. This is by no means only a European or Christian prejudice; it is the attitude found amongst the most barbarous and savage peoples as well [sic] (Hartley 1975, p. 3).

The social impulse to shame those whose reproductive practices depart from the prescribed social norm originates in the need to ensure adequate care for children and the consequent survival of the species. Malinowski’s view does not emphasise the purpose of the ban on illegitimacy in ensuring that children could be supported in societies where men were the principal material providers. The force of the ban has been weakened in societies with extensive social security, although tax-payer resentment of support for unmarried mothers and their children persists.

Teichman argues that the reasons why human beings control the reproductive activities of their species include, as well as control of numbers, ‘the organisation of people into families, kin-groups and tribes; the support of children; and the preservation of a real or imagined racial or religious group identity’ (1982, p. 5).

Until the abolition of illegitimacy as a legal status, illegitimate births in Australia as elsewhere were often concealed as a response to shame on the part of the mother, mother’s family, the child, and possibly the father and his family. Individuals born out of wedlock generally tried to conceal the fact. From the turn of the century until the mid 1960s unmarried mothers in Australia who were unable or unwilling to marry the father of their child were generally
expected to relinquish their babies for adoption, and thereafter were prevented by law from any further contact with the child. Reforms to adoption legislation in most states and territories since 1984 have resulted in a more open adoption system and have also facilitated contact between adult adopted children and their natural parents (Boss 1992).

The British National Children’s Bureau report of 1971, *Born Illegitimate*, includes the following interpretation for illegitimacy as a legal status:

> Originally, this legally defined status served to protect marriage and all that follows from it, by leaving those born outside wedlock devoid of legal rights in relation to property and inheritance. Some of these legal disadvantages have since been removed. Others remain and function as a social sanction against minority behaviour. The social attitudes surrounding it are likely to die only slowly (Crellin et al. 1971, p. 32).

The social attitudes to which this report refers were shaped and reinforced by an interpretation of Christian doctrine according to which illegitimacy was related to original sin. This doctrine originates from Augustinian theology which conflates sin with sexuality: Augustine’s understanding of sin was influenced by the inner conflicts he experienced concerning his own non-marital sexual relationships and his illegitimate child Adeodatus. The ‘fallen woman’ has been the object both of shaming and Christian charitable care. The social sciences have consistently associated illegitimacy with social, economic, educational and psychological disadvantage, leading to stigma. The director of the British National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child, Margaret Bramall, writing in the foreword to the above-mentioned report, comments that the findings of the study: ‘are a salutary reminder that despite a present tendency to assume that illegitimacy is no longer a stigma or disadvantage to the children concerned, children born out of wedlock are still seriously at risk, both emotionally and socially’. The report attributes feelings of shame to unmarried pregnant women: ‘one would expect that carrying an illegitimate baby is likely to be a period of great strain for many women beset by feelings of guilt, shame, ambivalence and confusion’ (p. 32).

**Illegitimate birth narratives**

Autobiography is one of the few sites where the illegitimate child speaks. The autobiographical narrative of a writer of illegitimate birth is a testimony to physical and psychic survival. Teichman argues that ‘the existence of a system of [reproductive] regulation and control must of necessity generate the concept of “a child which ought not to have been born”’ (1982, p. 7). Much of the social sciences’ discourse about illegitimacy relates to methods by which illegitimate births might be prevented, as Gail Reekie has pointed out (Reekie 1993).
concern poses a serious threat to the psychic and social identity of an illegitimate child as it promotes the belief that his or her birth, and therefore existence, should have been prevented. The autobiography of the child that should not have been is a deeply problematic narrative in the formation of individual identity.

The means of prevention, abortion and contraception, are issues for the ‘illegitimate’ autobiographer. The very survival of the illegitimate child from conception to birth is precarious, the child’s existence indicating that the mother has been either unable or unwilling to resort to a common method of prevention, abortion. Bernard Smith discusses both abortion and contraception in his narrative. Suzanne Chick contrasts her own experience of having an abortion with her mother’s decision to continue with the unwanted pregnancy that made her own existence possible. Another ‘preventative’ measure featured in social science discourses is sex education: Robert Dessaix relates his mother’s lack of knowledge to his conception and Ruby Langford Ginibi attributes her ignorance of the facts of reproduction to her first pregnancy, when she was unmarried.

Naming is also an issue in ‘illegitimate’ autobiographies as in earlier representations of illegitimacy in narrative fiction. The child of Tess of the D’Urbervilles has no name until on the verge of death. Tess then baptises him ‘Sorrow’, and the narrator’s bitter observation on his death is an ironic comment on the projection of social attitudes and the mother’s shame onto the illegitimate child: ‘So passed away Sorrow the Undesired – that intrusive creature, that bastard gift of shameless Nature who respects not the social law’ (Hardy 1963, pp. 120-1).

Fictional representations of illegitimacy attest to the precariousness of existence for an illegitimate child. In Eliza Fenwick’s Secresy (1795), Sibella, the mother of an illegitimate child, addresses her dead infant in the following terms: ‘What art thou? nothing! ... Babe, thou art gone for ever! None laments for thee’ (p. 353). The mother herself soon dies (p. 356). In Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891), the illegitimate child does not survive and the mother’s life is fatally blighted by the stigma. Hardy represents the physical risk to the illegitimate child in recounting the decline of Tess’s child ‘Some such collapse had been probable, so tender and puny was its frame’ (Hardy 1963, p. 116).

Literary representations of infanticide, either from deliberate self-interest, by neglect or as a consequence of severe post-natal depression, indicate another illegal although not infrequent practice that threatened the survival of
illegitimate children. Fictional accounts of the killing of illegitimate children by their mothers include Goethe's *Faust* (1808/1832) and George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1858). Hardy's Tess, despite her ambivalence towards her child, tries to prevent its death, although the narrative ironically hints that she is acting against her own interests (p. 116). Teichman writes:

Folklore and fiction both reinforce the reasonable supposition that over the centuries very large numbers of illegitimate babies have been done to death by their mothers, by other relatives or by midwives. Such deeds still occur from time to time, even in modern industrial societies with permissive attitudes towards sexuality and illegitimacy (1982, p. 107).

In addition to a sense that they 'should not have been', illegitimate children who do not have adoptive parents generally have to develop a sense of self in relation to an unknown or absent father and an ambivalent mother shamed by the child's existence. Hardy's representation of Tess's attitude to her child illustrates such maternal ambivalence:

the young mother sat it upright in her lap, and looking into the far distance dandled it with a gloomy indifference that was almost dislike, then all of a sudden she fell to violently kissing it some dozens of times, as if she could never leave off, the child crying at the vehemence of an onset which strangely combined passionateness with contempt (1963, pp. 113-4).

**Stigmatised mothers**

In autobiographies shaped by a conception of the self as relational, stigmatisation of the mother is significant in self-construal. The mother, like her child, is rendered vulnerable by the discourse of prevention of illegitimacy (Reekie 1993). After conception, an illegitimate birth may be obviated, if not by abortion, then by the marriage of the prospective parents to each other, or the marriage of the woman before giving birth to another man who is prepared to accept the child as his. Although these are the apparently 'easy' options, with the minimum of stigma, conflict-ridden familial relationships may result. In the ancient world, prevention could amount to killing the pregnant woman, although Teichman suggests that extreme forms of punishment were unusual. In a polygamous society, a man could simply marry any unmarried woman carrying his child (Teichman 1982, p. 53).

Although severe sanctions against 'unchastity' have not been legal practice in the West for many centuries, the stigma has persisted in many societies, leaving the woman and her child physically, sexually and socially vulnerable. Fictional and autobiographical narratives of illegitimacy represent stigmatising of this kind. Although Hardy's Tess is not expelled from her family or her village and is not separated from her child, she is shamed by her parents and cruelly...
repudiated by Angel Clare. In David Parker’s novel, *Building on Sand*, the protagonist Jude is told by his mother that her husband never forgave her for her one ‘mistake’ (the encounter that led to his conception), even though she bore him six children of his own, and that he bashed her when he was drunk (1988, p. 261). Bernard Smith’s mother, Rose-Anne Tierney, continues to work for as long as possible during her pregnancy, attempting to conceal her situation from her employers. She supports herself and her child with difficulty and makes an unsatisfactory marriage. Neither of these mothers are able to have their children living with them, nor can Rhoda King, the servant-girl mother of Germaine Greer’s father.

Reekie writes in 1993 that ‘the longstanding perception of single motherhood as aberrant and destructive persists to this day’ (1993, p. 2) and that ‘Single motherhood is persistently linked to social disintegration, burgeoning government welfare expenditure, crime and poverty’ (1993, p. 3). Reekie analyses the use of language by ‘conservative critics and government bureaucrats’ to create a ‘discourse of the single mother’ that has a political utility (1993, p. 6). The autobiographer’s narrative represents the way in which he or she both learnt and resisted this discourse in the process of acquiring self-regard instead of shame. This process is represented as not being conducted in isolation, but in reconstructing ‘inter-personal bridges’, not least of which is the narrative itself.

**Autobiography and the family history movement in Australia**

Australian genealogist, Errol Lea-Scarlett writes that: ‘The very fact that the individual is valued means that he [sic] is documented in his arrival in society, his career as a member of it and his final departure from it’. But Lea-Scarlett regrets that the state is concerned with keeping records of individuals, not families, and that the recording of family history is a private rather than a public concern:

> Because ancient associations of the individual with clan or tribe have been progressively erased till almost nothing now remains of them, officialdom deals with individuals rather than families, leaving the keeping of family records to private interest, or – more likely – to oblivion (1979, p. 7).

Australian autobiographers, like genealogists, are often concerned with descent and autobiographies published in the 1980s and 1990s are likely to be influenced by the ‘family history movement’. This is true of both Greer’s and Smith’s autobiographies, with respect to sources, techniques and emphases. It may be possible to argue that descent is most important when the
autobiographer is childless or when the family history has become fragmented, obscured or lost or when the autobiographer is illegitimate. The autobiographical act may be an attempt to situate the self within the clan, particularly for one who has no descendants. Or it may be an attempt to build or rebuild a tradition to pass on to one's descendants. Where family history has been lost or obscured as a result of concealment of 'shameful' elements, the autobiographer in uncovering the facts will also attempt to recast or represent them as not shameful, by a fuller, broader view and a deeper understanding. This may require the construction of a wider stage, such as an exploration of social history, or the adoption of a feminist perspective. In this respect, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal autobiographers have much in common.

The extent of recent Australian interest in familial origins is documented by Nick Vine Hall, previously Director of the Australian Society of Genealogists, who writes:

The question is often asked whether Australians are more interested in tracing their forebears than people living in other countries. This indeed does appear to be the case... At the time of writing [1982], there were thirty-seven regional genealogical societies throughout Australia with a combined membership exceeding 25,000... Government libraries and archives across the country are experiencing unprecedented pressure from genealogists for access to their books and records. Up to 85 per cent of users of some historical public libraries in Australia are now genealogists.

New members are joining Australian societies at the rate of some 7000 a year (1985, p. 4).

As Australia's bicentennial year of 1988 approaches, the ever-increasing community interest is evident in the historical movement across the country, and there is growing pride in being an Australian (1985, p. 5).

This interest in 'pedigree', legitimate or otherwise, is reflected in contemporary Australian autobiographical writing. 'Legitimate' pedigrees are conspicuous in the autobiographies and fiction of Martin Boyd, and are maintained by Aunt Kay, the keeper of family history in Randolph Stow's *Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965).

**Narrative identity**

To the basic birth data, an individual's identity within the clan may be amplified on the basis of 'birth legends', the family stories narrated about the circumstances of the birth, the reception of the child into the family, stories which may extend backwards in time to tell of the parents' courtship and marriage, and the history of the two families. Although such stories may be sources of shame for the individual (as in Manning Clark's *The Puzzles of Childhood*), the absence or deficit of such stories may be experienced as a deeper
source of shame. The dilemma of Jack Worthing, as Oscar Wilde represents it in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is that in the eyes of Lady Bracknell neither wealth nor privileged upbringing can compensate for ignorance of one’s parentage nor for the social unacceptability of a carpet-bag in the sparse narrative of one’s provenance. (This example is cited by Hamilton-Edwards 1966, p. 9; also Teichman 1982, pp. 123 & ff.). At a deeper level, the tragedy and shame of Oedipus, setting aside for the time being the Freudian interpretation, is a consequence of a child’s not knowing his origins, which in turn resulted from the most severe form of abuse, attempted infanticide.

**Status, record, name and continuity**

Hamilton-Edwards, quoting Sir Anthony Wagner’s *English Ancestry*, identifies ‘four main factors which govern the tracing of pedigree, namely, status, record, name and continuity’ (1966, p. 12). These four factors will be shown to provide a means of analysing the elements of shame in autobiographies of illegitimacy. Each of these four factors is undermined by illegitimacy of birth, and as this study proceeds, it will become apparent that each factor is redefined by the autobiographical narratives of illegitimacy under consideration here.

Status is defined as ‘the position in the social structure’ (p. 12), with the observation that ‘it is easier to trace a prominent family than a more humble one’ (although this fails to take account of criminality, as court records are a valuable genealogical source). Records are valued as the main source of information, the loss or destruction of which is a serious obstacle. Name ‘has great bearing on traceability’ (p. 16). The fourth factor, continuity, which ‘relates to the continuity of a family for some generations either in one place or in one occupation or trade’, makes it easier to trace ‘[e]ven quite an obscure family’ (p. 18).

**Forgetfulness and stigma: the Australian situation**

In some Australian families, a tradition of concealing or not remembering family history has grown up as a result of a concern with respectability and a fear of the continuing stigma of convict origins or possible illegitimacy in an earlier generation. This is the reverse of most societies in which the careful preservation of the pedigrees of at least the aristocracy or wealthier families is a guarantee of respectability. Only in the late twentieth century, the period of this study, has this process of the neglect or deliberate obscuring of origins undergone a dramatic reversal. Janet Reakes introduces her genealogical manual, *How to Trace Your Convict Ancestors: Their Lives, Times, and Records*
(1987), with a quotation from a Sydney newspaper, the *Sunday Sun*, in 1947 in which the writer observed:

... a distinct lack of interest in genealogy on the part of certain Australians who suspect that the history of that ancestor who was reputed to have come to this country in the First Fleet might not bear too much investigation (*Sunday Sun*, 19 January 1947, Reakes 1987, p. 7).

Reakes’ manual is written on the premise that ‘many people have now discarded the stigma of convict ancestry’ and that ‘[i]n the 1980s it is ... fashionable to have convicts in the family tree’.

Nevertheless, Australia continues the policy dating back to 1828 of destroying census forms after statistical data has been extracted on the grounds of safeguarding individual privacy. This contrasts with census retention policies in comparable countries such as Canada, Britain, the United States of America and New Zealand, as Australian lobbyists against the practice point out. These include genealogists, historians and archivists (Vine Hall 1995, pp. 178-9).

**The three works**

I now turn to the three selected autobiographies concerned with shame and illegitimacy. Bernard Smith’s *The Boy Adeodatus* (1984) and Germaine Greer’s *Daddy We Hardly Knew You* (1989) have a number of features in common. Both autobiographers have a public profile as Australian authors of ‘non-literary’ works, Smith as an art critic, Greer as a feminist and social commentator with a diverse range of publications, none so widely read as *The Female Eunuch* (1970). Both Smith and Greer have an academic training in English literature. Smith majored in English as a mature age student at the Australian National University. Greer’s doctoral thesis at Cambridge was on Shakespeare’s early comedies. Robert Dessaix, with an academic background in Russian, also had an established reputation as a literary commentator with a regular ABC radio program, ‘Books and Writing’ when his autobiography, *A Mother’s Disgrace*, was published in 1994. All three autobiographies were published when the authors were far from marginalised but were well known, with an assured readership. Thus firmly anchored within an interested public gaze, the autobiographers reveal a socially ‘suspect’ family background.

The original naming of each writer, the name on the front cover of each book, is revealed in each case to be surrounded by uncertainty. Smith gives an account of his illegitimacy and Greer of her father’s false identity. The reader is led to discover that Germaine Greer, whose name is a household word, is not a Greer at all. Robert Dessaix was brought up as Robert Jones, assuming his natural
mother’s maiden name later in life. All three autobiographers recast their socially suspect origins by emphasising an unexpected plenitude of female care counteracting or at least mitigating the shame. Smith celebrates his ‘two mothers’, his natural mother Rose Anne Tierney and his foster mother Tottie Keen; Greer dedicates her work to her ‘three grandmothers’. Dessaix represents his relationship with his adoptive mother and his search for his natural mother. Both Smith and Greer situate the shame of illegitimacy in a broader social framework, considering the sexual vulnerability of young women in domestic service, which led to the conception of Smith, and of Greer’s father. Both commend the nurturing care of foster mothers, and in Smith’s case particularly, acknowledge the ‘saving grace’ of the fostering scheme, the introduction of which preserved many children from destitution. Both autobiographies are consistent with the modern interest in ‘history from below’ (Colmer 1989, p. 157) and what Charles Taylor calls ‘the affirmation of ordinary life’ (Taylor 1989, p. 23). Dessaix examines the restrictions and inadequacies of middle-class respectability in which his natural mother was confined and which contributed to her shame as an unmarried mother.

The critical reception of The Boy Adeodatus was highly favourable. The book won the National Book Council Award for Australian Literature (1984), the Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards, Nettie Palmer Prize for Non-Fiction (1985) and the 3M Talking Book of the Year Award (1985). Reviews were highly commendatory. Dessaix’s autobiography was also well received and has sold well. Greer’s book on the other hand had a mixed reception, and anecdotal evidence suggests that it has not been widely read or appreciated. Daddy We Hardly Knew You is postmodern, in that the rough edges of the narrative, the seams, fraying and holes, the false leads, errors, and irrelevancies, are incorporated into the work. In an interview with Greer, John Macgregor commented that the work read like a rough draft (1989, p. 16). Process is valued and the narrative seems unpolished, although it includes patches of ‘fine writing’ comparable to Smith’s first chapter, ‘The enclosed garden’. Greer records her bodily experience of the autobiographical process, an unpleasant head injury, nausea, ‘touchy tummy’.

Greer records her visits to archives, public record offices, graveyards, all the nuts and bolts of the contemporary Australian practices of genealogy. Smith on the other hand has clearly covered similar ground in genealogical research, but weaves much of his information into an apparently seamless narrative, apart from the inclusion of letters within the text. Greer tells the reader when the tape recorder is turned on whereas Smith does not. Dessaix’s narrative falls
somewhere in between. Highly polished, it is also self-consciously postmodern, offering alternative endings and reminding the reader periodically of the artifice of his narrative.

Both Greer’s and Dessaix’s narratives are comparable in some respects to Sally Morgan’s story of the quest for origins in *My Place*, showing the influence of detective fiction and the two processes involved – the search and the narrative presentation of the search. The recording of the quest is influenced by the fact that the quest is over at the time the narrative is completed. Yet the completion of the narrative is part of the quest itself, because recording involves interpretation.

2. Bernard Smith: *The Boy Adeodatus*

Bernard Smith’s autobiography was first published in 1984 when the writer was aged sixty-eight, a distinguished Australian art historian with an impressive publications record. His autobiography gives an account of his illegitimate birth, his childhood as a state ward in a working-class foster home, and his early adulthood, concluding with his decision to give up painting in favour of art criticism, marking the beginning of his successful career. Smith’s narrative explores the complexities of his relationship with his ‘two mothers’, his foster family and his step family. The autobiography’s dedication to his family, to his wife Kate, and his children and grandchildren contrasts in its conventionality with his complex antecedents and emphasises continuity, just as his public reputation at the time of publication contrasts with the precariousness of his early life. My intention in this analysis is to identify some of the ways in which elements of shame and stigma are represented in Smith’s narrative, and to draw some conclusions about the way in which Smith as autobiographer traced his textual path from ‘shameful’ origins to the threshold of public renown.

A useful starting point may be found in Smith’s *Imagining the Pacific* (1992), where Smith quotes from a eulogy to James Cook by Michelangelo Gianetti, published in 1785:

> Cook is the self-made man. While hidden among the obscurity of the vulgar, he contemplated the stars and raised himself above his station in life by assiduous application to his studies (Gianetti, in Smith 1992, p. 228).

This view of Cook could equally well describe the young Bernard as represented in *The Boy Adeodatus*. Smith, as protagonist, takes pride in his own achievement as a self-made man from humble origins who owed much of his success to his diligent studies, contrasting his own aspirations with the career of
his foster parents’ son Bert, who worked all his life at Clarke’s department store: in that sense, Smith contemplated the stars. But his autobiography also values those among whom he was brought up, raising them up to public view, while gently and sometimes ruefully acknowledging their limitations. Smith also makes distinctions between his own efforts and what he owed to ‘luck’, such as the success of his fostering placement, the care and affection of the foster family, his foster mother Tottie Keen’s rare abilities, the gentleness of her husband George Keen and their daughter Bertha’s affection. He also acknowledges the favouritism he enjoyed, and in regretting the disadvantages experienced by his foster sister Val, shows traces of the shame designated by Primo Levi and Naomi Rosh White as ‘survivor shame’ (Smith 1984, p. 156; Levi 1988; White 1991).

Shame, Smith and Augustine

The stigma of illegitimacy is at once contained in and counteracted by the title of Bernard Smith’s autobiography. The first part of the title, ‘The Boy Adeodatus’, elevates the status of the autobiographical subject by associating him with the precursor of European autobiographers, St Augustine of Hippo, whose *Confessions* (written in 397-8) have become a spiritual classic. By assuming the name of Augustine’s own illegitimate son Adeodatus, the writer appropriates the spiritual fatherhood of St Augustine and confers sonship on himself. The meaning of the name Adeodatus, ‘gift of God’, is also a way of associating blessing with his own advent, birth and person, rather than portraying himself as under the ‘curse’ of being an unwanted child. The title forges a link between the autobiographer and the Christian religious tradition, which Smith develops extensively in the narrative. The reference to the ‘lucky young bastard’ places Smith beside Adeodatus as one who was born out of wedlock: thus Smith gives his own illegitimacy literary and spiritual status by the association. It may also constitute an intertextual reference to the title of another Australian autobiography containing the competing discourses of luck and providence, Albert Facey’s *A Fortunate Life* (1981). In addition, the colloquial Australian phrase ‘a lucky young bastard’, situates Smith as an Australian male, and foreshadows the working out of ‘luck’, rather than the ‘providence’ one might expect, in his life, introducing a conflicting discourse. The term ‘portrait’ reminds the reader of the autobiographer’s career as an art historian, which replaced that of artist. It is a very clever title.

Smith attributes his introduction to the *Confessions* to one Father Downey, who was instructing him in the Catholic faith while he was living with his mother’s
relatives at Innisfail. His account of his initial response highlights two key themes in his autobiography, shame and ambition. On obtaining a copy of the *Confessions* he found the personal story of the saint fascinating, but the self-abasement of the prayers and the ceaseless invocations repugnant:

He knew himself what humility was – he'd had to practise it often enough in order to survive so many little situations in daily life at Burwood while growing up; but he also felt in himself that it could be the most subtle of all the forms of self-deception. If the meek are indeed to inherit the earth they must be disguising colossal ambitions (Smith 1990, p. 203).

The practice of humility as Smith describes it here is comparable to a pragmatic self-abasement which gives rise to a feeling of shame or humiliation, rather than meaning simply a modest self-assessment.

The links with Augustine forged in the text are multiple. Smith records his baptism in the Catholic church of St Augustine of Hippo, Balmain (p. 69), which happened (through luck or providence) to be the nearest Catholic church. He validates himself as ‘a gift of God’ by giving an account of his mother’s visionary dream in which she was advised to keep her child rather than have her pregnancy terminated (p. 64). Resemblances are drawn between Augustine’s mother Monica and Smith’s mother, Rose Anne Tierney, in her anxious persistence that her son should be ‘converted’ to a practising Catholic. Although Bernard was baptised a Catholic, his foster-mother Tottie Keen was a Congregationalist, her husband George Keen a devout Plymouth Brother, whereas the young Bernard faithfully attended the Burwood Salvation Army Sunday School for almost twelve years.

Quotations from St Augustine’s writings, mainly the *Confessions*, are interspersed throughout the text in much the same way that scriptural quotations are interpolated into the text of the *Confessions* themselves. In Smith’s narrative the quotations from St Augustine are inserted into the text after accounts of particularly painful and shaming episodes. They are also an occasion for the narrator to speak in the first person, although using the voice of another, whereas the rest of the narrative is in the distancing third person (discussed also by Buckley 1984).
Conversions

(i) Conversion to the flesh

The problematic relationship between sin and sexuality in Augustinian theology is incorporated into the intra-psychic dialogue of Smith’s narrative. His parent’s sexual encounter is told in a chapter entitled ‘Tropical paradise with serpent’, thus situating the event in the narrative of the biblical account of the Fall. But whereas Augustine’s conversion involved a renunciation of sexual activity and the shame associated with it, Smith describes his first sexual encounter with a young housemaid, Annie, in vivid detail, comparable to a conversion experience in which he renounces the shame associated with sexuality in favour of erotic pleasure. In this narrative exploration of sexual themes, the autobiographical subject has shifted from an identification with Adeodatus to Augustine himself, but with an outcome that reverses that of the intertextual narrative. The young woman is described as sexually experienced, frank and fearless, self-sufficient, and using contraception, unlike that more naive female servant in the narrative, Smith’s mother.

In the reflection that follows this episode, Smith concludes that Annie was as unlikely as he to have cherished long term aspirations about their relationship, which lasted three weeks:

> If she had given him the faintest thought as a future father of her children, she would surely have behaved differently. More circumspectly. The way all those other young women, from business offices and schools, had behaved (1990, p. 273).

But his sexual conversion is overshadowed by doubt: ‘Why was sexual equality the most difficult of all the equalities? He wanted to believe that, for a moment, he and Annie had achieved it’ (p. 274). Despite his reflections on the problems of sexual equality, he expresses a crude hostility towards ‘other young women’, for what he describes as deliberately enticing but ultimately denying behaviour.

He continues with a crude quasi-theological discourse in which God is described as a ‘great voyeur’ with a ‘colossal sexual obsession’ and concludes with a condemnation of priests and the Church for thinking they had all the answers (p. 274). The designation of God as voyeur indicates the presence of unresolved shame: the narrator’s interpretation of the affair traces a shame-tinged evasion of responsibility and contrasts with the remorseless self-scrutiny of Augustine’s text. It is also notable that for a communist concerned with the situation of the working classes, Smith’s lack of interest in the young woman apart from her sexuality is anomalous. The protagonist does not seem
concerned that the affair is placing Annie's job in jeopardy, nor are any details
given about her family or circumstances. Augustine's dismissal of his
concubine, the mother of Adeodatus, may have been similarly opportunistic,
but was associated with more emotional pain than Smith records at his parting
from Annie.

In addition to the almost exclusively sexual representation of Annie, the
episode is narrated in terms of some explicit parallels with the seduction of
Smith's mother, indicating that the narrator is making some Oedipal
connections between the two events. Annie, like Rose Anne, is a house maid.
Annie, unlike Rose Anne, uses contraception to avoid pregnancy, yet Rose
Anne's 'lack of experience had given him life; and he was fond of it' (p. 273).
Both encounters lead to a loss of virginity, but the gender roles are reversed.
The narrating Smith then draws other parallels, based entirely on conjecture.
Because he was ready for sexual experience, he surmises that his mother may
have been also. On the basis of his recognition of his own sensuality, he
assumes that this was also true for his mother with Charlie Smith: 'In the end,
no doubt, she had given in to herself and the long years of waiting, rather than
to him' (p. 273). Such a parallel, based only on speculation and apparent self-
deception, addresses the shame associated with his own conception. If his
parents' encounter had been as liberating for his mother as his was with Annie,
then the shame would have been mitigated. If his mother were simply asserting
her sensual self, then the encounter would not have involved the shame of a
powerless acquiescence on her part and a shameful taking of advantage on his
father's.

But Smith's own account of his mother's version of the event seems to
invalidate this reflection (p. 63). In some ways, the episode with Annie is
narrated in such a way that Bernard Smith appears to be rewriting his mother's
seduction, by seducing or being seduced by a cheerful, sensual, experienced
young housemaid of a similar age with full consent by both parties, to make up
for his mother's unwilling seduction by an ageing, experienced man.
Furthermore, by emphasising the joyful, positive quality of his affair with
Annie, he is distancing himself from the shameful thought that in his sexual
relationship with a housemaid, he is no better than his own father.

Smith's lack of attention to the broader social context, the formidable difficulties
faced by the servant class in European societies in finding opportunities for
sexual expression within an economically viable family life is surprising, given
his mother's experience and his interest in social and political history. It
certainly emerges from a reading of Freud. Augustine, although not a servant, faced similar problems, being somewhat socially displaced, as his biographer, Peter Brown, has convincingly argued in *The Body and Society* (1988).

(ii) A religious conversion aborted

It takes confidence to splice one’s own life story with that of St Augustine, but Smith was ‘lucky’ in that the risk paid off in terms of critical reaction. Nevertheless, the tight braiding of Smith’s narrative with Augustine’s *Confessions* in the early chapters becomes looser and somewhat frayed as the narrative progresses, although the twinned stories are maintained to the end. Smith’s most explicit religious experience, which occurred while watching an ecclesiastical procession in Wagga (1990, p. 218), is permeated by shame and simply dissipates, on the flimsy pretext that he cannot find a priest when he needs one (p. 219). The patriarchal structure of the Catholic church, with priests designated ‘Fathers’ as the bearers of spiritual authority, creates the conditions for the triggering of the shame of abandonment when no ‘father’ can be found. Abandonment (‘no one came to help him’) gives way to ‘petulant anger’. He feels the chill of full-blown shame (‘the garden felt like a cemetery’ ..., ‘he shivered’ ..., ‘the corridor began to feel like a tomb’), which gives way to disgust (the images of devotion are ‘tawdry’, the photos of unknown religious men ‘faded’, the smell of incense sickening). He finds himself alone and blames others for not being available, although in a rational mood he might have realised that ‘they’ would all have been participating in the procession that so deeply affected him. Shame contributes to his reinterpreting his experience negatively: ‘He had, he felt in himself, received ... a portent, and had responded helplessly to it; but it had turned, it seemed to him, in his frustrated pride and anger, into a sign of his rejection’ (pp. 219-20). He equates his interrupted religious instruction from two Catholic priests and his failure to find a priest on the occasion of the procession as rejection by God, comparable to his rejection by his human father:

> It seemed that his spiritual father, if indeed he possessed one, was teasing him; that he did not really want him. Didn’t care much what he did; hadn’t put his name on the list. He knew that he’d been born outside the law anyway (p. 220).

In this spiritual crisis he blames God for his illegitimate birth, oddly aligning himself with his unreliable human father. ‘But that old father of his flesh, the one that had taken off, disappeared (‘Your father’s gone to Bong Bong, Ben’) – he seemed at times to remain with him, almost inciting him (p. 220). What follows next is a series of memories of desire, accompanied by a variant on Augustine’s prayer: ‘O God ... keep me chaste for yet a little longer’ (p. 220).
Religious belief does not motivate his will to chastity, but he makes it clear that ambition or opportunism does. How could he make his way in the world if entangled in a relationship with a young woman from a New South Wales country town?

(iii) Professional conversion

Smith’s ‘conversion’ from painting to art criticism in 1940, although undoubtedly a turning point of great significance in terms of his individual career and his self-understanding, lacks the dramatic power of his fourth century precursor’s conversion from Manicheeism to Christianity. The comparison makes Smith’s personally significant gestures of renunciation, such as burning his smaller works of 1940 and failing to collect a painting from the framers, appear merely humdrum or at least overvalued. There are also traces of shame in Smith’s account of this transition. In 1940, he writes: ‘his paintings were ignored’, not only by his opponents, but also by his friends (p. 296). One friend, Sam Lewis, considers that, as a Marxist, Smith should have been painting in a socially realist manner, but Smith describes himself as unable to do this:

\[\text{he was not personally interested in the depiction of work, poverty, suffering or the expression of compassionate attitudes – though he recognised their value. His interest as an artist lay in the creation of a secular and political iconography that might give visual expression to a Marxist view of history (p. 296).}\]

In some respects, *The Boy Adeodatus* could be construed as an answer to Sam Lewis’s critique, as the narrative represents those neglected themes of work, poverty, suffering and compassionate attitudes.

Smith writes of the painting left at the framer’s:

\[\text{he decided not to collect his picture } \textit{Lot} \text{ from S. A. Parker’s, the framers in George Street, as he should have done. Another ritual gesture of dismissal. The painting had meant nothing to any of them. So he would abandon it too (p. 298).}\]

The language is that of shame and abandonment, with a generalised viewing other, designated by the phrase ‘any of them’. The self moves from an identification with the painting that is unfavourably regarded to a distancing of the self from the object. The self then begins a tentative alignment with the unappreciative viewers of paintings, with the qualification that such viewers have many shortcomings and need to be educated. The narrating self then shames the viewers of that time:
What Australia lacked was not artists but an informed audience for art [thus those who did not appreciate his work were uninformed]. There was a complete lack of intelligent criticism; no interest in the theory of criticism; and an abysmal ignorance of the history and development of art within Australia. A truly advanced art, a committed art, could not possibly exist in such a cultural vacuum (p. 297).

He defines a new role for himself, substituting for the messianic identity of avant-garde artist, the high priestly identity of teacher, guide and interpreter of the aesthetic mysteries: ‘He began to feel that his own role might lie not in being another artist but in helping to create an educated audience for art in Australia’ (p. 297). He then more modestly identifies himself with the ill-informed audience:

This would involve developing a critique of modernism that would expose its strengths and weaknesses, and some knowledge of the history of Australian art – about which he, like everyone else, knew little or nothing (p. 297).

The concluding sentence of this diatribe conveys the importance Smith places on knowledge of origins in aesthetics: ‘How could a serious art ever develop in Australia if its artists possessed no interest in or understanding of their own origins?’ (p. 297). The argument of this passage also indicates that for Smith an understanding of origins is essential to the overcoming of shame in the self.

That his sense of loss was severe and tapped into deeper sources of shame is illustrated by the poem that he wrote shortly after his decision to abandon painting, using the image of a ‘dead thing’, like an aborted or stillborn child to describe his loss.

The final paragraph of the autobiography is an attempt at closure, raising a series of questions about identity, but seeming to identify a spiritual vacuum in the centre of the self, which the concluding quotation from Celtic legend does not illuminate although it appears to console. Unanswered questions remain: ‘But if that was all there was to it where then was that truth which, in his infancy, old Dad had taught him to seek? Could it ever be plucked out of the heart of myth by the likes of him?’ (p. 300).

Smith’s final reflection is one of sorrow, in which he elides his spiritual emptiness with the shame of not quite belonging with those among whom he found his origins, fed by a self-awareness which was more developed than theirs: ‘At least they had taught him more than they all realised. That was the sadness of it: for they had made him one of them and yet not one of them. A stranger within their gates; a child among them taking notes’ (p. 300).
Shame and the foundling

The theme of the foundling is introduced in the form of a baby kookaburra who had fallen out of the nest, to be rescued and brought home by Mum Keen, and named by old Dad. The rescued bird is akin to state wards such as Bernard, whom Mum Keen ‘takes in’, together with the ‘dirty linen’ from wealthier households. ‘Little Bennie’ is introduced into the narrative without ceremony as a child observing the pet bird, and is referred to consistently in the distancing third person.

A number of characters are named early in the narrative, Bert, ‘Mum Keen’, Bertha and ‘old Dad’, without explanation as to their relationship to the autobiographer, a narrative device that approximates a young child’s consciousness of personages and their names in the immediate circle while unaware of the web of relationships to each other and to him. The pattern of relationships is rendered more complex by an early reference to ‘Mumma Parky’, who is no sooner introduced than she departs for Queensland. The information that she is Bernard’s natural mother and Mum Keen his foster mother is initially withheld. Not until Chapter 3 is the full account of Bernard’s birth and parentage given.

Only at the end of the first chapter is it confirmed that the ‘family’ in ‘the enclosed garden’ consists of Mum Keen and her husband, old Dad, their three children, Bert, Doodie and Bertha, and a number of state wards, of whom Bernard is one. His father appears briefly twice: then, the reader is told, ‘Ben never saw him again’ (p. 20). Bernard’s age at this time is given as about four.

Metaphors of shame

(i) Eden

Despite the narrative technique of withholding full information about Bernard’s birth and parentage, episodes and metaphors indicating early childhood experiences of shame about his origins are sketched in Chapter 1.

The first chapter, ‘The enclosed garden’, situates the subject as child in an edenic setting. The mythological reference places the episode within the narrative of European Christendom in which the mature self found aesthetic, professional and a somewhat ambivalent spiritual identity. The Genesis account of the Fall involves an element of shame associated with awareness of sexuality (his mother’s fall resulting in his conception), as well as the trope of the innocence of childhood being associated with an edenic condition. Freud
drew a parallel between the shame-free state of childhood and the Genesis myth of the Fall. The biblical image is overlaid by an epigraph to the chapter, taken from an Irish folktale, describing a fairy garden with an eternal fountain. But the metaphor of Eden is firmly anchored in a real and distinctive garden in the Sydney suburb of Burwood, where two kinds of loquats grow, where the citrus trees are watered from a chamber pot, where the house is called ‘Braeside’ and the neighbours’ names are known.

That the fantasy of the Burwood garden as Eden contains both idyllic and shaming elements for the child self is made clear in the narrating of a conversation between Mum Keen, her daughter Bertha and an insurance salesman, an exchange signposted as important by the narrator’s comment: ‘He [Ben] never forgot that day’. It is also the first full naming of the autobiographical subject in the narrative, and the first identification of his mother as Mumma Parky who has gone to Queensland. The shaming of Ben, and also of Bertha, is represented by Bertha’s blushes, and her silence. Ben’s hostile response to the shamer is indicated by his statement of childhood dislike ‘Little Bennie didn’t like him’, the unflattering description ‘a bit of a flash Jack’, and the repetition of the descriptive ‘sly’.

‘I love coming here,’ said the insurance man ... So cool and restful. You’ve made it look so beautiful. It’s like the garden of Eden. All you need is Adam and Eve.’ And gave young Bertha a sly look ...

‘What’s his name?’ the insurance man said to Bertha ...

‘Bernard William Smith,’ she said.

‘Then he’s not one of the family,’ he said.

‘No,’ she said.

‘He’s not one of yours,’ he said with a sly smile.

‘Of course not,’ she said blushing. ‘His mother’s gone to Queensland.’

‘Oh, he’s one of those,’ he said.

Bertha, still blushing, said nothing (p. 4).

Stigma is conveyed by the phrase ‘one of those’. The conversation emphasises Bernard’s lack of real belonging to the family. Bernard’s response to the conversation is expressed in terms of knowledge, again echoing the Eden myth in which to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge leads to loss of innocence. But in this case the child who acquires the knowledge and the stigma has had no part in the ‘Fall’: ‘But little Bennie knew what the man meant. He had always seemed to know; and to know was to know the world. To know everything.’ Knowing the world may be interpreted as knowing how one’s self was regarded by others, how society operated and knowing one’s place in it,
and losing the childhood fantasy of perfect safety. The shaming episode is rounded off by a quotation from St Augustine, ‘And now behold, my infancy is dead ... yet I live still.’ Such quotations appear to be placed in the narrative structure after an episode of shaming has been recounted: it can be deduced that these have a consolatory function, reuniting the shamed self with the human race, through identification with a ‘church father’ of great authority.

(ii) Serpent and devil

The element of shame contained in the metaphor of Eden is elaborated in chapter 3, ‘Tropical garden with serpent’, which gives an account of Rose Anne Tierney’s seduction by Charlie Smith, her pregnancy and Bernard’s birth. The ‘Devil’ also appears in the garden, immanent in a disturbing early memory of conflict between Mum Keen and an older foster child, Eric, and associated with the fear of being sent away for misbehaviour. On one occasion when ‘the Devil did get into Eric’, Bennie was frightened by the spectacle of Mum Keen chasing him round the garden with a broomstick:

Ben never knew what it was that the Devil made Eric do when it got into him; and could never remember whether Mum Keen ever caught Eric or gave him a hiding. But the vision of flying Eric struck a dull terror into his heart. Naughty boys went away to Mittagong or away up north to milk cows, and never came back (p. 5).

Shame for a child is not only associated with stigma but also with fear of abandonment. Exclusion from the family circle is shaming, especially when associated with misdemeanor. In this episode, the motherly, nurturing Mum Keen is represented as powerful, witch-like, and terrifying.

(iii) The loquats

The second metaphor is that of the two kinds of loquats growing in the garden, the sweet loquat deliberately planted symbolising the legitimate children of the Keen family, whereas ‘the two green-yellow loquats [which] just shot up by the back door where someone once spat out the pips’ (p. 1) are comparable to Bernard and his foster sister Val Welsh, conceived through the careless spilling of seed. Mum Keen’s compassion is represented as stronger than her reservations but there is an underlying insecurity: ‘Mum Keen said that the twin seedlings were too close to the house but she did not have the heart to pull them out, they looked so healthy’ (p. 1). In early adolescence, Val is in fact ‘weeded out’ and sent away, while Bernard remains by virtue of his ‘luck’, probably that of his gender and charm. In this instance his ‘luck’ too is a source of shame.
The absent father and the shame of not belonging

A detailed picture of Ben’s relationship with George Keen, ‘old Dad’, is built up before the story of his brief encounter with his natural father is told. The encounter, which takes place near home, at an annual carnival in Burwood Park when Ben is about four, apparently takes place purely by chance. Ben’s father emerges from the crowd, greets Mum Keen and Bertha and takes Ben in his arms. Ben’s response is emotional: ‘Overwhelmed with excitement, Bennie burst into tears’ (p. 19). This is followed by a ride on the merry-go-round with his father, a visit to Braeside by his father, bringing gifts in a Gladstone bag (an echo perhaps of *The Importance of Being Earnest*), and a visit with his father to a mansion in Strathfield where his father apparently worked as a gardener. Each encounter is carefully crafted, the first like a set for Petrouchka, the second possibly a reminiscence of Magritte (the gift of an empty pipe case recalling Magritte’s work ‘ceci n’est pas une pipe’), the third, tea in a summer house, describing patterns of light and shade resembling an impressionist painting. The three encounters conclude with the words ‘and Ben never saw him again’ (p. 20), signifying abandonment, followed by another quotation from St Augustine, consistent with the recounting of a shameful episode: ‘He withdrew himself from our eyes that we might return to our own heart and there find him’ (p. 20).

Despite many examples of warmth and loving care experienced in his foster home, exclusion occurs at the heart of home. The awareness of not legitimately belonging to the Keen family occurs most acutely when there is a death. Deeply affected by the death of Tottie Keen’s sister Lily, whom he nicknamed ‘Peanut Auntie’, he is excluded from her funeral, comparing his grief with that of the boy Adeodatus at the death of his Grandmother Monica. ‘Because for those who are born out of family the inner door of the house is closed quietly and locked securely’ (p. 151). This experience prefigures the greater grief of Tottie Keen’s death. Sent away to the country during her last illness, without realising that she is about to die, he returns to the country during her last illness, without realising that she is about to die, he returns to find her in her grave, learning that ‘the privilege and duty of mourning was not his as a right’ (p. 154).

Elsewhere he terms Tottie Keen’s foster children her ‘water babies’, extending Kingsley’s narrative so as to doubly characterise Tottie as the amiable Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby and the fierce and punitive Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid (p. 138). The possibility of failing to please and being sent away is always present. Even gentle George Keen’s millennial beliefs reinforce the necessity for him ‘to know whether he was one of God’s chosen or one of the damned’
The fate hanging over him is that of being sent away to Mittagong, ‘to the bad boys home’ (p. 15). The reference is to the Mittagong Farm Homes for Boys, a New South Wales government institution, where at that period children who had been committed there by the children’s courts were mixed with those who had committed no offence, including boys who did not get on with their foster parents (Van Krieken 1991, p. 114). Barbalet’s study of state wards in South Australia leads her to observe that: ‘Behaviour that would just have to be endured by natural parents was often the catalyst for a state child’s return from a foster-home’ (1983, p. 9).

The experience of being a state ward carried a stigma, fully documented by Barbalet’s study, which quotes from the correspondence of girls who were state wards in South Australia from 1887 to 1940. In Chapter 5 of her study, entitled ‘Bearing a Stigma’, Barbalet writes:

The original impetus of boarding-out was that children would be ‘absorbed amongst other children and go to ordinary schools and take a share in ordinary work’. Yet there is overwhelming evidence that throughout the whole period covered in this book state wards suffered a stigma in varying degrees (1983, p. 158).

Forms of stigma identified by Barbalet include insults and innuendo, unfair treatment by teachers, the sense of inferiority related to being a servant, uncertainty about the reason for being in state care, community prejudice, institutional policies and social attitudes aimed to keep state wards humble and aware of their station, unfair criticism by other members of the foster or employing household, inadequacy of Departmental clothing, being shunned by other children, speculation by others about their ancestry and related unfair assumptions about their character, excessively severe attitudes to children’s misdeeds, restricted access to natural parents, siblings or other relatives (pp. 158-186). Barbalet comments: ‘Knowing about one’s background was not just important for what it revealed about parents: it also told a girl something about herself’ (p. 171).

The problem of naming

The naming of the child Bernard is consistent with the confusion of an illegitimate birth. His naming involves lying, disagreement, compromise, and after all this, a change of mind. His father registers him as Patrick William. ‘Patrick’ is his mother’s choice, ‘William’ his father’s although his mother dislikes it, as a ‘hateful Protestant name’. They agree that his surname should be Smith, which requires his father to convince the officials at the registry that he had married Rose Anne. Charlie, to please Rose Anne, who wanted the
child’s second name to be Joseph (‘the saint who looked after destitute children’) has the name added in brackets on the baptismal certificate (pp. 68-9). This requires another lie, that he, Charlie, is Catholic. Some months later, on receiving news of the death of her brother Bernard as a result of war service in France, Rose Anne decides to call her child by that name (p. 71). An additional name used by Smith to sign his paintings, that of Joseph Tierney (the latter his mother’s maiden name), is not mentioned in the narrative.

Smith records his firm rejection, in the first letter he ever wrote, of his mother’s writing to him as Bennie Kahl, in an attempt to include him in her legitimate family by offering him the name of her husband (p. 122). The significance of his naming is reiterated in the opening question of the final paragraph, destabilising the identity supposedly established in the preceding narrative: ‘Who then was this Bernard, registered and baptised Patrick?’ (p. 300).

The shame of being lucky

The autobiography is in part an apology to his foster sister Val Welsh for the favouritism shown to him. In reflecting on his childhood reading of Kingsley’s The Heroes, Bernard comments: ‘Life was a precious gift to the heroes. It was not a vale of tears. Though it could be for the unlucky ones. “You were born under a lucky star, Ben”, Bertha would say’ (p. 138). One of the unlucky ones is Val, who like Eve in the Genesis story, is chosen as a companion for Ben, not for her own sake. Val is clothed in hand-me-downs, whereas Ben gets new clothes when he needs them. More discriminatory, Ben eats his meals with the family while Val has to eat hers on the verandah. When the foster children reach puberty, Tottie Keen sends Val away, a decision which prevents her from completing her primary education and leads to her employment as a servant, even though she had been coming top of her class. Tottie Keen’s relaxed attitude to childhood sexuality only extends to boys. Fortune, gender and the Keens favour Bernard (p. 136). The narrator judges Tottie and finds her unjust: ‘It was a cruel decision’ (p. 136). Val is not a ‘lucky young bastard’.

The narrator hints throughout the text that the favouritism he enjoyed, his winning ways, were tinged with the deliberate practice of pragmatic humility and opportunism. Haunted by Bertha’s oft repeated phrase about his lucky star, Bernard comments: ‘A lucky star indeed for him, but an insidiously malevolent star for others’ (p. 156) as he reflects on the negative impact of his existence upon his mother, upon Val, and even upon Bertha (pp. 156-7). He attributes his malign influence to his own state of innocence, which he equates with ‘the cruel mechanism of survival; the exploitation of love’. This is bitter soul-searching,
comparable to Augustine himself, in which the shamed self interprets its own ability to inspire the love and care of others as evil. As this particularly dark view of the self occurs soon after the account of Tottie Keen’s death, the primacy of shame may well be related to feelings of grief and abandonment associated with this event.

Yet Barbalet’s study of state wards puts a kinder construction on the kind of ‘good’ behaviour condemned by Smith in his childhood self, emphasising the emotional cost to such children of instability in their care, and commenting that ‘The strongest reason for good behaviour was the fear of being removed from a happy foster home’ (1983, p. 15).

3. Robert Dessaix: A Mother’s Disgrace

Robert Dessaix’s autobiography is about shame, silence and the healing of shame by breaking the silence. The title, A Mother’s Disgrace (1994) is ambiguous, referring both to the disgrace or shame experienced by and visited upon his mother, Yvonne Dessaix, at her ex-nuptial pregnancy, and to himself as the embodiment of his mother’s disgrace, being not only the ‘disgraceful’ product of the pregnancy but also homosexual. Dessaix explains the title explicitly in Chapter 4, ‘Mother’: ‘I am a disgrace, you see. In later years I disgraced myself often enough, not unexpectedly, and I disgraced my wife ... But I was born a disgrace’ (p. 107). Yvonne is quoted as saying: ‘By having you I disgraced the family name’ (p. 108).

Like Bernard Smith, Dessaix explores the shame of being illegitimate and the complexity of being brought up by adults who are not blood relations. Unlike Smith, Dessaix was adopted rather than fostered. Dessaix, like Smith, explores the complex significance of mothering in his life, but his story differs in being largely the account of his search for his natural mother, the dedicatee. Although his relationship with his adoptive mother, Jean Jones, is discussed, the pain associated with his experience of her mental and physical decline and death is not the focus of his autobiography. The book itself is accorded a role in the development of his relationship with his natural mother. At the end of the chapter entitled ‘Another disgrace’, in which he tells how he revealed his homosexuality to his mother, Dessaix addresses the reader, and indirectly his mother Yvonne:

Yvonne could not have sensed the layers of story ... behind lunch with her son and his friend ... Only when she reads these lines with you will the picture acquire some depth. Not all of it will please or comfort her. It’s not the whole truth, of course, but it’s one way of trying to tell it (p. 168).
At the end of the book, Dessaix's third and final alternative ending has Yvonne and Dessaix's readership united as common audience of his radio program, with the narrator hoping that the program content will not transgress Yvonne's shame boundaries:

Last Sunday evening ... I dialled Yvonne's number and waited for her voice to interrupt the burring. 'Oh, Robert!' she'd say any second now – she always does and I get a bolt of pleasure – 'I was just about to turn you on on the radio! (Oh dear, I always think, I hope I haven't got anyone saying ... well, 'fuck' or anything on the show tonight ... or a lesbian separatist or ...)' (pp. 194-55).

The passage suggests that Dessaix perceives his radio audience as liberal and accepting, which may be construed as the benevolent regard that heals excessive shame. For Yvonne to join this audience would be to unite with it the benevolent regard of the mother, and to heal the shame of its absence from the narrator's early life. But uncertainty and risk are conveyed by his fear of shocking his mother, and by the hypothetical presentation of three alternative endings.

A textual representation of shame: a close reading of Dessaix's chapter 1, 'Groppi's'

Shame, like grief, is as if multi-layered within the self. An experience of shame in adult life, if sufficiently intense, can trigger earlier shame-related experiences so that the current shame experience is intensified and magnified by being combined with the emotion attached to other memories of shame. Where shame is attached to the self's representation of his/her own origins, a shaming experience in adult life can release what I have designated 'original shame'. Chapter 1 of Robert Dessaix's A Mother's Disgrace is a prime example of a literary representation of this process.

The narrator represents the dramatic tale of his narrow escape from death in Cairo somewhat disingenuously as a beginning chosen 'just for purposes of seduction' (p. 194), meaning seduction of the reader. That the story has already been told and retold is information contained in the text itself. The events have scarcely begun to unfold in the text when the reader learns that the tale has been told over and over again to a police officer: 'Over sixteen hours in his tea-coloured office I told Sergeant Mustafa what happened so many times, and from so many angles, that I have come to believe this version is the true one' (p. 4). An official version, in Arabic, is signed by the narrator. Another version is told to 'P.' in Rome.
Yet the tale, polished and intriguing as it is, bears traces of a deep structure of shame. In this tale the narrating subject appears profoundly shamed by the traumatic experience of assault that in turn triggers an underlying shame at a deeper level of consciousness. The chain of events leading to the assault involves a subtle form of self-abandonment indicative of shame. The narrator first situates himself in an elegant café in Cairo, Groppi’s, where he feels safe and decides to spend the evening because ‘It seemed a shame to waste it’ (p. 1). The excitement of an encounter with two unknown young men who join his table leads him to ignore internal and external warnings, first his own thought, ‘Had I been followed in?’, and secondly, the waiter’s refusal to serve him: ‘I can’t serve you if you talk to these two men.’ A compromise by which the men sit at a neighbouring table and continue to converse prolongs the encounter. The imagery of gambling is introduced as the young men’s departure from Groppi’s is recounted: ‘They’d thrown the dice and thrown well. I didn’t even know I was playing’ (p. 2). A careful choice of words hints at the possibility of an erotic encounter. The young men are ‘exquisite’; one ‘slender, nervous and fine-boned’, the other ‘somehow softer ... with ... the merest pout’, ‘ambling gracefully’. They ask ‘Where is your wife?’

The first step in the narrating subject’s loss of self-possession occurs with the waiter’s sharp remark: ‘Nonplussed, embarrassed, I felt my savoir faire desert me instantly. I needed a pithy retort, in simple English. None came’ (p. 2). Robert as subject is disoriented by the cross-cultural encounter where the rules are not apparent and his verbal skills fail him: ‘lots of subtext, but could I read it?’ (p. 2). The words ‘awkward’ and ‘edgy’ contribute to building up a tense atmosphere. The release of narrative tension when the two men leave, followed after an interval by the narrating self’s departure alone is interrupted by their reappearance. The reader already knows from the first line of the text the danger to come, ‘three exquisite young men tried to kill me’ (p. 1). With the invitation, ‘Come for a drive’, the autobiographical subject takes the risk that amounts to self-abandonment, despite the warning signs which have been carefully placed in the text, responding ‘Why not?’ (p. 3).

The next paragraph gives a psychological motivation for this act by making a comparison between this drive through Cairo and the excitement of a similar past experience riding round Paris on the back of a motorbike with a man he barely knew. The mood-altering quality of both experiences is drawn out in the narrative, by the choice of adjectives such as ‘balmy’, ‘careered’, ‘swooping’, ‘eerily soft-lit’, ‘gliding’, ‘deliciously’, and the ‘vast, dark pleasure garden’ (p. 3). Excitement and risk, combined with the hint of erotic pleasure, appear to
outweigh any concern with physical danger. This risk-taking behaviour suggests a vulnerability and lack of self-regard that the reflections on homosexuality reinforce later in the text. A street-wise woman would be most unlikely to accept at face value an invitation ‘to come up and meet ... mother’ (p. 4). Yet this is what the narrator encourages the reader to think he believed: ‘Hassim’s mother? Why not? Lots of smiling, probably, and sticky things to eat and mint tea’ (p. 4). Once again, his previous cosmopolitan experience, of meeting Arab mothers in Morocco, creates a false sense of security, that is, if the reader believes this expectation to have been genuine, having already been told that Sergeant Mustafa subsequently did not.

As the narrative proceeds, the subject suspends both his critical sense and instinct for self-preservation. Finding no mother in the apartment (an understated foreshadowing of the narrative quest for the absent mother), he seeks no explanation, passive in the company of the young men as they drink, although declining hashish. The adventure’s shaming climax comes when he is at his most vulnerable. His privacy in the bathroom invaded, he is repeatedly violated by being fondled, robbed, threatened with a knife, locked in and hit, then ordered to strip. In his fear he loses bowel control. Each of these experiences is one of shame, invasion of privacy, physical threat, physical injury, exposure of nakedness, loss of physical control and threat to life. In summarising his feelings he expresses deep shame: ‘I thought I was going to die. I felt utterly naked, bereft even of self ... I also remember feeling deeply humiliated ... Who’d have thought ... that I’d end up naked and shit-smeared with my throat cut on a Cairo rubbish dump?’ (p. 6).

Self-reproach is recorded together with a sense of having heedlessly wasted his life, ‘throwing that life away on a whim’. At this point the reader learns the full extent of the risk. Robert had expected to meet ‘P.’ in Rome the following day to begin ‘the adventure of their lives’: the risky and fleeting encounter, erotic or otherwise, was embarked upon on the verge of a serious commitment. He writes: ‘I would never arrive. Total abandonment. The big full stop’ (p. 7). It is not clear from the syntax just who is abandoned.

In the period immediately after his escape, as he waits in his hotel for dawn, he records his reaction. Combined with fear that his attackers will come to his hotel room, is a compulsion to write the story of the events. ‘I retold myself the evening through the dead hours until dawn over and over again, until I got it right’ (p. 9). His emotional state reflects a virtual loss of a solid sense of self: ‘anonymous, disconnected, some part of me was now spiralling upwards’
The spiralling takes a verbal form, ‘On words, then phrases, sentences and whole stories’. His identity is floating, on the verge of dissolution, his words inducing the mood-changing ‘soaring’ associated with danger, which is a recurrent motif of the narrative:

Who I was – had been, would be, suddenly seemed so fluid, the self so evanescent, protean. A word, a name, and by some magic a precarious self would crystallise briefly in the void and float there, many-faceted and glinting. And then dissolve (p. 9).

In this state, he rehearses his personal history, of a lower middle-class childhood in Sydney with his adopted parents. He describes his self-representation as one of being abandoned, by his natural mother, by his adopted parents in their death, and then by his wife.

Despite the loss of self, he recognises the personal importance of this moment: ‘And although it grew out of a sense of nothingness, of being stripped bare of any self, of being brutally silenced, untongued, reduced to animality, it was also a luminous moment’. But he immediately begins to distance himself from it with the qualifier ‘in its way’. An allusion to George Steiner’s understanding of modernism distances him still further, but what follows is profound. The moment is interpreted as ‘the point at which the covenant between my lived life and the stories I’d told myself about it broke’ (p. 11). I suggest that the factor which severed the two was shame.

In the aftermath of this shaming assault he is traumatised to the extent that he allows his physical and emotional needs to be overridden by an insensitive investigating police officer with an agenda quite distinct from the best interests of a survivor of assault. Without offer of food, drink or rest, he allows himself to spend sixteen continuous hours reporting on his experience and assisting with police investigations. His lack of assertiveness is consistent with the shamed self after trauma: ‘Why hadn’t I opted out earlier, I began to wonder? I wasn’t guilty of anything, I was a free man. Why didn’t I just get up, thank them for their trouble, if not for their hospitality, and go?’ (p. 18).

The chapter concludes with the announcement of his realisation that night in Cairo after the assault that:

In all the stories I’d told myself about my life up to then I’d always circled around the question of my mother ... After Cairo I wanted to fill in this shaft of silence running up through the centre of my life, at least with words’ (p. 20).
Shame and silence

The narrative that follows this account explores the 'shaft of silence' and the shame that lies behind it. The silence relates to the circumstances of his birth, and the identity of his natural parents. Secrecy is often an indicator of shame, and the narrator recalls the alternative versions of his birth given him by his adoptive parents, variants which alert him to the deception which conceals shame. Characteristic of the secrecy provisions of adoption arrangements in the 1940s, the narrator grows up knowing nothing about his natural parents. When as an adult he succeeds in tracing his mother, he learns that the very fact of his existence has been subject to an imposed silence in his family of origin. The account of the first meeting with his natural mother Yvonne is told in terms of breaking the silence: 'We started ... with deep, generous liking and thankfulness that the silence had been broken' (p. 99). In the final chapter, entitled 'Full Circle', his mother Yvonne is described as breaking the silence about Robert's existence to her own mother, using a photograph given to her by Robert as a tool. Her mother's chief response is to insist that the silence be maintained:

One thing was made clear that morning: no word of my existence must be spoken to anyone – not to Yvonne's brothers or sisters or children or anyone else. Mother was very firm about that. As I write the ban has still not been lifted (p. 170).

The narrator comments on the ban: 'I want to be named, looked in the eye, told "Yes, you're part of our story" – not a shameful part, just a part. It's not a matter of blood, it's a matter of storyline' (p. 170). Although he expresses much frustration at Yvonne's maintaining the silence (e.g. p. 172), he relates it to a quality in her which he defines as 'grace'. The anger is reserved for 'Mother', that is, Yvonne's mother. After his first meeting with his grandmother, the narrator comments: 'When I got into the taxi an hour and a half later, I felt sure she expected the silence to wash back quietly over me again' (p. 102). His grandfather, who died before his daughter's ex-nuptial pregnancy, is also described as an enforcer of a silence that is indicative of a repressive social conformity and intolerance of disorder.

Yet the publication of the book itself would have broken the silence where Yvonne was unwilling to do so, leaving the reader to wonder how the family responded, a speculation that is engineered by the narrator. The reader, assuming that the woman with the author in the photo on the cover is his mother, is left to wonder at the extent of her complicity, if any, in the publication of the book.
Sexuality is also subject to the silence associated with shame. His mother, Yvonne Dessaix, is represented as vulnerable because of her ignorance of sexual matters:

(Yvonne) tells me that as a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old girl from a good background, she had no sexual knowledge, or sense of lack of knowledge, at all ... Sex, she tells me, was not spoken of at home, at work or on outings. ‘You see, Robert,’ she said to me once ... ‘I was a sitting duck’ (p. 107).

Langford Ginibi, whose cultural and social background is quite different, attributes her first, ex-nuptial pregnancy similarly to her lack of knowledge (1988).

Shame and invisibility

The narrator represents both his mother’s ex-nuptial pregnancy and his own homosexuality as rendering them both in a certain sense invisible. He alludes to his own experience not only of silence but of invisibility in relation to most of the family members of his partner of twelve years, people who ‘simply see a blank space where I am standing’ (p. 108). In breaking the silence about his homosexuality to his mother, he is also confiding in his readers and becoming visible to them publicly as gay. The process of enlightening his mother is represented as painful and risky, as she is shown to be utterly impervious to his hints on the subject.

Yvonne herself had to become invisible when pregnant: ‘She went home to Mother’s and was “hidden from sight”’, as she says, being required to go to her room when visitors came, and only allowed out of the house after dark (p. 111). Robert’s father was also consigned to invisibility and silence, with his one phone call to Yvonne intercepted by her mother, who never told her daughter about it (p. 112). A short time after his birth, Robert and his mother become invisible to each other, and the silence is perpetuated: ‘One day I was not there any more. She didn’t say goodbye. I vanished and the matter was not spoken of any more’ (p. 113). Powerful institutional and social forces ensure that the ‘interpersonal bridge’ (in Kaufman’s terminology [1991]) is broken, and the narrator uses the image of ‘bridging that gap’ to describe their reunion (p. 115).

Shame and power

Shame-related silence and invisibility are associated with the exercise of power. Yvonne’s mother is represented as the enforcer of silence and concealment in the family. Confident that her own standards of behaviour are correct, she unswervingly takes the decisions that conceal her daughter’s lapse, including
her hidden pregnancy, and the arrangements for the birth and adoption. She also takes it upon herself to override the concerns of the child’s father, and to obstruct any further contact between him and Yvonne. She is secure in her own rightness, in contrast to her timid and browbeaten daughter, who ‘took it for granted that she was without a voice on the subject of her future’ (p. 113).

Yvonne, once pregnant, is dismissed from her job and becomes economically dependent on her mother. Structural and institutional factors come into play. Yvonne’s ‘shameful’ transgression is recognised as deserving dismissal. Her family is her only means of support: ‘They didn’t have single girls’ pensions or things like that in those days’, Yvonne is quoted as saying (p. 110). The hospital, home for unmarried mothers, and hospital almoner are organised to deal with such births and to arrange adoptions, without consultation with the mother herself. Yvonne’s subsequent life is represented as similarly powerless, with two unsatisfactory marriages contributing to her mother’s continued domination.

The narrator writes of ‘lines of guilt and blame so insidious, so intricate, someone of my generation can barely disentangle them’ (p. 113). Robert as narrator appears to provide Yvonne with a voice by telling her story as he says she told it to him, although as readers we are not told of her response to publication. The reader must entertain the possibility that in breaking the silence and writing himself into visibility, Robert Dessaix may have exposed his mother to further shame. Another possibility is that the narrative is a strategy with which his mother colluded in order to become visible. The narrator, who has characterised himself as a risk-taker, does not offer the reader a conclusive outcome to the autobiographical risk.

4. Germaine Greer: Daddy We Hardly Knew You

Greer’s narrative addresses her father’s shame concerning his illegitimacy and the impact of that shame on his familial relationships. The text also explores Greer’s own shame at knowing nothing of her paternal ancestry and the shaming and counter-shaming interactions that characterise her relationships with both parents.

Toxic relationships

The work falls clearly into the category of autobiography identified by Eakin as emphasising ‘the relational life’, by which he means ‘the story of a model of identity developed collaboratively with others’ (Eakin unpub.). The ‘other’ is specifically Greer’s father, the ‘Daddy’ of the title, although the scornful
representation of Greer's mother is also significant. Greer places shame at the centre of her narrative by making it integral to her father's personality, his identity being the object of her narrative quest. The shameful family secret at the core of her father's concealed identity is his illegitimacy, compounded by a mental illness consisting of a severe anxiety state, apparently a legacy of his war experience. In concluding her first chapter, entitled 'The quest', Greer demonstrates the sort of understanding that might have healed his shame, had she been able to communicate it:

The most unbearable thought of all is that shame was planted in my father's heart and, all the time he was heroically holding the fragments of his life together, he thought he was hiding from our censure (1989, p. 14).

Greer represents her child self as a shaming, censorious 'other', vis à vis her father, 'a sharp-faced skinny little girl who scrutinised him intently with his own longsighted eyes' (1989, p. 3). At the end of her concluding chapter, when the narrated self most closely resembles the mature narrating self, she still accords herself the role of the shamer: 'It was not the war that destroyed his love for me, but his charade and my censorious, scrutinising nature ... I was never his boon companion, but a full-on pain in his neck' (1989, p. 311). The horror of their relationship in her adult years is conveyed by the story of their first meeting on her return from abroad after seventeen years. After lunch together, during which her father 'conducted himself with suavity and aplomb', her father tells her on the telephone:

that when lunch was over and the tension released, and he was walking back over Princes Bridge to where he had parked the car, he suffered a mass reflex and purged upwards and downwards all over his pale silk [suit]. I was aghast, but he chuckled ruefully and made light of my consternation. When I asked when I could come and see him again, though, he begged to be excused. There was no alternative. My presence was a source of stress and he had to avoid stress as rigorously as an alcoholic has to avoid drink (1989, pp. 5-6).

Whatever alternative construction the reader might put on the elements of the story as given, Greer as narrator interprets the episode as evidence of her own toxicity in relation to her father, a deeply shamed response on her part.

Eakin suggests 'that children are as marked by what they aren't told as by what they are; they brood over withheld information' (unpubl., p. 22). Eakin refers to particular autobiographical texts as 'collaborative autobiographies', which 'are frequently set in motion by the existence of family secrets; there is a disruption, distortion, or omission in the family narrative which must be repaired' (p. 22). Such secrets may include illegitimacy, ethnic identity or repression of a death
such as suicide. In *Daddy We Hardly Knew You* Greer writes of the blank in her family history, which her narrative aim is to fill or repair:

> We children knew next to nothing at all about Daddy and we knew too that we had no right to find out. He knew that he could function adequately within strict limits and he imposed those limits on us, by what seems to me now an extraordinary exercise of will. If we had breached those limits out of idle curiosity, Pandora's box would have been opened and confusion engulfed us all (1989, pp. 4-5).

Greer maintains the limits set by her father, and does not initiate her quest for her father's identity, and her own, until after his death. As she explains: 'Now that Daddy's need to have us not know is at an end, my need to know can be satisfied' (1989, p. 5). Yet instead of an innocent if unrestrained Pandora, she represents herself as driven by the Eumenides, the avenging goddesses of Greek mythology known as the furies (1989, p. 25). Greer's identification with the furies may be traced to a review of *The Female Eunuch* where she was described as 'the reigning Fury of the women's liberation movement in Britain' (Ross Campbell, *Daily Telegraph*, 27/2/71, p. 11). The headline read: 'A Fury from Melbourne'. Greer also evokes the Oedipus myth, although her identification is neither with Electra nor Antigone but with Oedipus himself: 'who was no blinder than I' (Greer 1989, p. 25). She proceeds to frame her narrative with an Old Testament story of shame, describing herself as ignoring the passage in Genesis IX in which Noah curses his son Ham for seeing his nakedness when drunk, unlike his brothers who covered him with their eyes averted (1989, pp. 23-4). Thereafter in the narrative, Greer refers a number of times to 'the primal elder's curse' (1989, p. 24), consequent on an infringement of taboo in writing about parents (also expressed by Hal Porter [1964]).

In contrast to her concern for her father's privacy, Greer portrays herself unrepentantly as riding roughshod over her mother's shamed response to her discoveries. Unlike Dessaix, who does not record his mother's reaction to his story, Greer represents her own mother's response in direct speech: 'You're not going to write all this? About the man I married? You wouldn't. The poor old man. What a cheap journalistic trick ... I'll stop you. You can't. You won't write this stuff' (Greer 1989, p. 307).

The dialogue that follows is an explicit example of a counter-shaming strategy, in which Greer's mother accuses her daughter of exploiting her father's story for economic gain, physically shames her by accusing her of having bad breath, and finally reminds her of a book about herself which Greer hated, *Difficult Women*, by David Plante (Greer 1989, pp. 307-8). The section that follows is a disturbingly voyeuristic account of the 'gay' beach, 'Half-Moon Bay', where
the conversation takes place. Although the location was chosen by her mother, whom Greer accuses of being a 'fag-hag', the narrative backdrop of homosexual meetings and descriptions of buttocks is Greer's own choice, making her complicit in the voyeurism she attributes to her mother and in their mutual shame (1989, p. 308).

The reader is told, as if in passing, that illegitimacy was also present in the family background of Peggy Lafrank, Germaine's mother. Peggy's father, Albert Lafrank, is said to have been illegitimate and his oldest child, presumably not Peggy herself but one of her brothers, also born out of wedlock. Both these items of genealogical information are presented as secrets, but the narrator does not explain how she knows: 'Probably Albert Lafrank no more knew of his parents' adultery or the informality of their union, than his own children knew that the eldest of them was born out of wedlock' (1989, p. 119). From the lack of narrative emphasis on the concealment of illegitimacy on the maternal side of the family tree, it appears that the form it took did not suit Greer's narrative purpose as well as the paternal family history of illegitimacy. The bitter satirical portrait of her mother that is built up in the narrative is not modified by the compassion she accords to her father, and appears driven by a desire for revenge. The Freudian 'family romance' offers one interpretative framework for the contrast between Greer's representation of each parent, the daughter's love for the father being offset by jealous hostility towards the mother. An alternative is that the narrative is both a product and a working out of Greer's grief at her father's death, involving hostility towards the surviving parent and an idealising or forgiving attitude towards the one who has died.

'Daddy', the main subject of the narrative, is represented as maintaining his precarious identity and concealing his shame by an enforced silence within the family. The narrative gradually builds up a piecemeal picture of a family life that would currently be described as dysfunctional. Daddy is described as denying his young daughter any physical affection, shuddering if she attempts to hug him, and leaving her with the fear that he found her repulsive (1989, pp. 2-3). The children are forbidden to speak at the dinner table. Any opinion that the child Germaine expressed is rebuffed with the comment 'I've forgotten more than you're ever likely to know' (1989, p. 6). Her father is shown as incapable of giving a direct answer even to a child's simple request for the time, responding with the inane 'Must be, look how dark it is' (1989, p. 11). Greer refers to being struck by her mother 'with anything she could lay her hands on while her father in the next room would 'keep out of it', despite the sound of blows (1989, p. 12). When she accidentally broke a new toy: 'I was beaten and
told I was a destructive child’ (1989, p. 311). Her father had his own techniques of inflicting pain on his children, ‘including a nasty rabbit-killer chop to the nape of the neck, which caused electric tingles along your arms and legs’ (1989, p. 10). Conflict between the parents is also described, with resentment on the part of the narrator at her mother’s dominant role over her father, including shaming him by name-calling.

**Unearthing the secret**

A ‘shaft of silence’, to use Dessaix’s term, runs through ‘Daddy’s’ life and his daughter’s:

> Daddy’s whole life was an exercise in forgetting. He never referred to any kin, neither father nor mother nor sisters nor brothers nor aunts nor uncles, not even a chance anecdote. He was a man without a past (1989, p. 6).

The secret that Greer unearths and that the narrative withholds until the final chapters, is that ‘Daddy’, whom she knew as Reg Greer, was originally named Robert Hamilton King, the illegitimate child of a domestic servant named Rhoda King and probably of Robert Hamilton, who may have been her employer (pp. 279, 281). At school he was registered as Eric Greeney, bearing the surname of his foster parents, Robert and Emma Greeney. Robert Greeney, as a convict’s son, represents yet another ‘hidden history’, to use Deborah Rose’s term (Rose 1991). Eric Greeney was neither a state ward, like Bernard Smith, nor legally adopted, like Robert Dessaix and Suzanne Chick. Greer surmises that her father’s whereabouts were concealed from his natural mother to ensure that his foster parents, who were childless, could keep him. The significance of naming to identity is emphasised by Greer, who comments: ‘From the beginning my father hardly had a name to call his own’. This situated him close to one extreme on the ‘shame spectrum’, that of ‘anomie’, a ‘state of alienation resulting from the absence of social norms or values’ (*Macquarie Dictionary* 1987). Greer also explains that in discovering the name of her father’s father, she knew more than her father ever did about his own identity (1989, p. 279). Eric Greeney/Reg Greer both inherited and perpetuated the ‘shaft of silence’.

Greer guesses that her father left Launceston in mid 1921, at the age of sixteen, and, basing her narrative on information from other adopted or fostered children of Emma Greeney, states that ‘Emma never saw Eric again. He wrote once or twice and then - nothing’ (1989, p. 297). Her research shows his army record of identity to be entirely false. Although the reader learns that his identity was a fabrication, ‘a heap of cheap props’, the narrative does not
provide a clear motive for his break with his foster mother and her family, despite many suppositions (1989, p. 311).

Choosing a foremother

The idealisation of Emma Greeney in Greer's text seems a fabrication also, a product of the tendency to fantasise about identity which she records as part of her self-representation. In the chapter introducing Emma Greeney, entitled ‘The heroine of the story’, Greer writes:

> I should have been so proud to have inherited Emma Greeney’s genes. She had in abundance all the human characteristics I most prize, tenderness, energy, intelligence, resource, constancy, honesty, courage, imagination, endurance, compassion (p. 271).

There is not a great deal of evidence in the text for Greer’s attribution of all these virtues to Emma Greeney. Eric’s attachment to Emma was not deep and lasting as was Bernard Smith’s to his foster mother Tottie Keen, nor did he maintain contact with other members of the ‘extended’ foster family as Smith did. Affection for his care-givers and fellow foster children was not strong enough to counteract the shame of his origins. While this may be no reflection on the quality of care provided by the Greeneys, Reg/Eric’s inadequate parental skills, authoritarian style combined with passivity and lack of warmth, as represented by his daughter, shed doubt upon the quality of his upbringing. Her father’s evocation of the sinister ‘Father Gilhooley’ to control his children by fear is indicative of residual fear and patterns of discipline from his own childhood, as Greer herself suggests, without drawing the obvious conclusions about the Greeney’s methods: “‘Father Gilhooley’ ... was the principal of a reformatory, where the doors were perpetually open to receive us. Daddy invoked him whenever we showed some feeble sign of insubordination’ (1989, p. 10). The ‘rabbit-killer chop’ previously mentioned was a disciplinary method attributed to Father Gilhooley.

Greer’s idealised portrait of Emma Greeney reflects a point of arrival in the quest for self rather than the quest for ‘Daddy’. Greer has chosen to dedicate the book, not to her father, the apparent subject, but ‘To the memory of my three grandmothers, Alida Jensen Lafrank, Emma Wise Greeney, Rhoda Elizabeth King’. This caps Bernard Smith’s dedication to his ‘two mothers’. Although no intertextual reference suggests that this is deliberate, it would be surprising if Greer, author of a feminist study in art history, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (1979), had not read Smith’s autobiography, published five years before *Daddy We Hardly Knew You*. The identification with Emma Greeney reflects Greer’s own values, made explicit in the preface to her
collected writings in The Mad Woman’s Underclothes (1986). Here she writes that: ‘Something like a coherent set of values is beginning to emerge after my years of wandering, although I have certainly not arrived at a set of articles of faith, and never will I hope’. This set of values is specified in the context of the question as to what it means to her to be a feminist:

Everything I learn reinforces my conviction that the only corrective to social inequality, cruelty and callousness, is to be found in values which, if we cannot call them female, can be called sororal. They are the opposite of competitiveness, acquisitiveness and domination, and may be summed up by the word ‘co-operation’ ... In the world of sisterhood, all deserve care and attention, including the very old, the very young, the imbecile and the outsider ... The only perfect love to be found on earth is not sexual love, which is riddled with hostility and insecurity, but the wordless commitment of families, which takes as its model mother-love. This is not to say that fathers have no place, for father-love, with its driving for self-improvement and discipline, is also essential for survival, but that uncorrected father-love, father-love as it were practised by both parents, is a way to annihilation (Greer 1986, p. xxvi).

Greer concludes this statement of faith with the following: ‘in everything I have written I hope can be found the imprint of my love and respect, admiration indeed, of poor women, women’s women’ (1986, p. xxvii). In Emma Greeney, Greer found in her own family history an individual with whom she could identify, an admirable, maternal, poor woman who cared for outcast children. Yet the contrast between this idealised representation of generalised sororal and maternal qualities, incarnate in the virtually unknown Emma Greeney and Greer’s fury-driven representation of her own mother in Daddy We Hardly Knew You remains unresolved in this relational autobiographical text.

Injudicious self-exposure

Greer’s Daddy We Hardly Knew You is a harsh and difficult book, from which it is possible to argue that a narrative too heavily imbued with unresolved shame runs the risk of being abandoned by all but the most persistent readers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many readers do not persevere to the end of this book. The narrator drags the reader remorselessly from library to archive, from state to state and country to country in pursuit of ‘Daddy’s’ obscure identity, until she eventually reveals it as a fabrication to conceal his illegitimacy. The reader is exposed in intimate detail to the narrating self’s anxiety, fatigue, pain, nausea, upset stomachs, irritations, even the loss of reading glasses. Nor is the reader spared her boredom, frustration, and all the false leads in her genealogical quest. One reviewer, Kate Veitch, wrote: ‘Greer spends enormous amounts of time, money and energy researching – and passing on to the hapless reader – a mountain of information which is, finally, absolutely irrelevant’ (Veitch 1989, p. 87). When the end of the narrative is
reached, even textual repose is not possible. The narrator concludes: ‘In finding him [Daddy] I lost him. Sleepless nights are long’ (Greer 1989, p. 311).

This ability to bore the reader may be related to shame, which is the regulatory mechanism in social interaction which prevents an individual from sharing more personal information than an interlocutor wishes to receive. Greer’s lack of sensitivity in her narrative may be a blunting brought about by the nature of her public career as well as by residual shame in her sense of self. In Greer’s first and best-known work, *The Female Eunuch* (1970), she gave herself the task of redrawing the boundaries for female concerns that could be appropriately discussed in the public domain. Many considered her ‘shameless’, and the predictable reaction among those whose shame threshold was overstepped by her writing was anger and outrage. Many of her articles from 1968 to 1985 (in Greer 1986), are also boundary-breaking texts, with a polemical intent that transgressed prevailing standards of good taste (for example, her contributions to Richard Neville’s underground magazine Oz, one issue of which was seized for obscenity [Greer 1986, p. xxv]). In *Daddy We Hardly Knew You*, the reader is less likely to be shocked than overwhelmed by the cumulative effect of an excess of personal information, an area where an autobiographer who wishes to be read must exercise judgement. Greer’s misjudgment, a hazard of prolonged engagement with the media, is symptomatic of a trend towards ‘shamelessness’, where the details of the private life of celebrities and even of obscure talk-show participants are considered worthy of exposure in the public domain. But the basic elements of dysfunctional shame in her self-construal are represented in her exploration of her relationship with her father, and her bitter portrait of her mother.

The sources of shame in Greer’s self-construal are represented in the narrative in her ignorance of her family history on her father’s side as a result of his concealed illegitimacy; the impact of his mental illness and defective interactions with her as a child and her problematic relationship with her mother, with references to physical abuse which are spelled out in other writings. Her interactions with both parents are represented as cycles of shaming and counter-shaming. Grandiosity and narcissism characterise the narrative in her representations of both parents, and in her own self-construal. The narrative represents a struggle to view her father and his shame with compassion, but this is scarcely attempted vis à vis her mother.
Escape from identity

At some points, Germaine Greer’s narrative suggests that the author herself was tired of public scrutiny when she wrote *Daddy We Hardly Knew You*. An episode in which she records her relief that she was not recognised in a Melbourne restaurant where she had screamed at a fellow diner suggests that she was weary of her famous or notorious public persona, in which case her exploration of her father’s anonymity and his ability to construct a different identity may indicate a deep need to escape from her own. In this text she deconstructs her own identity as Germaine Greer, but it is nevertheless mainly a formal deconstruction of her legal, familial and clan identity: deeper issues of identity remain largely unexplored. For example the disparity in intellectual ability between Greer and her parents as a source of shaming and counter-shaming is only occasionally touched on, as in the passage of dialogue between the narrating self and the Eumenides, debating as to whether ‘nobody likes a clever child’ or whether this is only true of Australians.

The narrative appears to provide Greer with a brief respite from her own identity, allowing her to identify with her father’s foster mother, who like Germaine Greer herself, had no children of her own. The text only implicitly addresses the issue of childlessness. By identifying with her father’s foster-mother, Greer as it were becomes the parent of her father, an assumption of responsibility that is a characteristic of eldest children in families disturbed by the inadequacy of a parent through addiction, mental illness or other incapacity (Black 1982). The mature Germaine Greer expresses regret that, in her father’s final illness, she had no opportunity to be strong and supportive, nor was she able to embrace the father who never embraced her (1989, p. 67).

Yet although Germaine Greer demonstrates in this narrative that she is not legally a Greer at all, one strand of her narrative identity remains that of Germaine Greer the public figure, conversing confidently with Cambridge dons at high table, moving between residences in England and Tuscany, funded by her publisher to travel from England to Australia, and from India to Malta to research her current book.

Shame and grieving

Greer’s narrative study of her father shows significant parallels with a chapter from psychoanalyst Alice Miller’s study of child abuse, first published in English in 1984 as *Thou Shalt Not be Aware*. In ‘The castrating woman or the humiliated little girl’ (chapter 7), Miller discusses a case study of a highly
intelligent woman who 'almost compulsively ruined every relationship with a man by immediately looking for his weaknesses'. This woman had tried to accept the Freudian diagnosis of 'penis envy and a castrating attitude' but had been unable to change her destructive behaviour (1984, p. 64). In a second and more successful analysis, it emerged that 'her father had been an insecure and weak man who was no match for his daughter intellectually ... and was despised by his wife after he returned from the war' (p. 65). During analysis:

\[
\text{it was revealed that there had at one time been someone who did not frighten this weak, hypochondriacal and ailing man and who had not felt scorn for him, someone on whom he could take revenge for all the humiliation he had undergone during his childhood, then again as a prisoner-of-war, and finally in his marriage: this person was his oldest daughter, the patient, when she was still very little (p. 65).}
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This passage could well be a comment on the first chapter of *Daddy We Hardly Knew You* in which the shamed father shames his young daughter. The patient’s subsequent investigation of her father’s war experience in the service of the Third Reich helped her to understand his weakness and psychic wounds and her own compulsive reenactment of the drama of her childhood. Miller’s comment that for this woman, ‘A long period of mourning accompanied what she had learned’, is remarkably close to the conclusion of *Daddy We Hardly Knew You* which also records the beginning of a time of grieving: ‘Sleepless nights are long’.

Greer’s confrontation of her father’s concealed origins, and the consequences of his shame in his relationship with her, lead her to grieve over his shortcomings and her own. Shame is closely related to grief, and only when the shame of illegitimacy is exposed and the grieving completed is psychic reconciliation attainable.

5. Conclusion

The reinterpretation of illegitimacy in the autobiographies under consideration, reflecting broader social trends evidenced in the family history movement, has given Hamilton Edwards’ four factors, status, records, name and continuity, an altered significance. Status is not seen as residing in legitimate birth into a family of high social standing, but in knowing the full and accurate story of one’s family, antecedents and birth, and being able to tell that story, including the rediscovery of forgotten or concealed participants and the reconstruction of suppressed narratives. The act of rediscovery and reconstruction ensures continuity as long as the story is told. Records provide the basis for this reconstruction, but require supplementing by oral history, which often retains
what written records conceal, provided those who remember are prepared to
break the silence on those memories classified as ‘shameful’.

Finally, the name may become a matter of personal choice within the context of
an expanded family history. An individual whose surname is Jones can select
the more exotic Dessaix, with a family history to go with it. An individual
growing up as Bernard Smith can choose the alternative Joseph Tierney (his
natural mother’s maiden name) to sign his paintings, reverting to Smith when
he renounces painting in favour of art history. Greer may fantasise about
adopting the married name of her father’s foster mother by changing her name
to Frances Greeney:

I have made up for myself a private name, that seems to me to fit better than the
ridiculous name my parents gave me, of which half is a remembrance of a character in
The Countess of Rudolstadt and the other half my father’s shonky alias. ‘Germaine
Greer’ indeed (1989, p. 271).

At the same time she mocks herself for ‘simply carrying on the Reg Greer
tradition of aliases’ (p. 271). Implicit also in this passage is the recognition that
such is the renown of her public name that any name change can only be a
fantasy unless she chooses to evade her public identity.

It is significant that the careers of Smith, Greer and Dessaix have accorded them
high social status prior to the publication of autobiographies about their origins.
However problematic their original naming, their names have become well-
known in the public domain, assuring them of a wide readership. The shame of
their origins adds piquancy to their autobiographical narratives. But it also
adds stories of illegitimacy to the repertoire of stories that can be told about a
life.

Paradoxically, a story of illegitimacy may also offer opportunities for healing
other kinds of shame. The discovery of the family of origin may provide an
imaginative or exotic element missing from a disappointingly ordinary
adoptive family (as in the case of Dessaix, né Jones, and also Chick, natural
daughter of Charmian Clift). The shame accompanying the loss of a mother to
mental illness and death can be consoled by the discovery of another mother,
with whom one can build a new relationship. The shame of a conflictual
relationship with parents can be by-passed by a textual identification with a
chosen ancestor. Despite the significant obstacles that an individual of
illegitimate origin must overcome in order to survive and prosper, not least of
which is his or her own shame, the texts discussed here illustrate the multiple
opportunities that illegitimacy provides for story-telling about the self.
Chapter 4
Black Shame/White Shame: Shame and Racism in Some Aboriginal Autobiographies

1. Introduction

The myth of Australia as ‘terra nullius’ at the time of white settlement delegitimised the indigenous inhabitants in terms of European law to a far greater extent than the myth of ‘filius nullius’ delegitimised non-indigenous Australians born out of wedlock. Illegitimate individuals, although deprived until recent years of legal rights to inheritance, subject to the shame of being their ‘mother’s disgrace’ and generally economically disadvantaged, still enjoyed basic human rights under British or Australian law in common with the legitimately born.

The majority of Aboriginal autobiographies represent severe abuses of human rights to which Aboriginal people in Australia have been subjected as a result of institutional and attitudinal racism. Although illegitimate births have been one of the consequences of the shameful history of sexual contact between Aborigines and Europeans, Aboriginal people have been shamed and oppressed by European racism, whether or not their parents were legally married. Aboriginal people of mixed racial descent have been regarded historically by white culture as ‘people who should not have been born’.

The literary analysis of shame in Aboriginal autobiography also illustrates the way in which racism, which originally shames the victims, has become increasingly a source of shame for the dominant culture. Aboriginal autobiographies disclose intricate patterns of shame and counter-shame. This chapter traces some of these patterns by a literary analysis of several works published between 1975 and 1988, with brief reference to some earlier and later texts.

As a prelude to the discussion of individual texts, it is important to address the hermeneutical problem of the non-indigenous critic, who embarks on a hazardous task in which the interpretation of texts may lead to inadvertent participation in a dynamic of shaming and counter-shaming. The very term ‘Aboriginal autobiography’ is problematic. When an Aboriginal life story is produced in collaboration with members of the dominant white culture, to what extent might this process be seen as a perpetuation of the shame of

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dispossession? Under what conditions can the Aboriginal writer maintain control of his or her own life story in order to speak autonomously to a non-indigenous readership? This is the issue to be considered in section 2.

Issues of shame, autonomy and collaboration lead to the second area of investigation, which addresses Kevin Gilbert's argument that shame-based collaboration between Aboriginals and 'sympathetic whites' has led to the propagation of a 'series of myths' about Aboriginal people which are accepted because 'the human desolation that is Aboriginal Australia is not yet understood in this country' (Gilbert 1977, p. 1). Section 3 discusses the articulation of myths about Aboriginal people in selected texts.

Section 4 examines specific autobiographical texts which represent what Naipaul (1987) designates as experiences of 'shame and mortifications' deriving from a colonial past, explaining that: 'as a writer I could train myself to face them' (quoted in Suleri 1992, p. 158). The texts considered here attribute the 'shame and mortifications' to both institutionalised and attitudinal racism, and include examples both of resistance to shame and of counter-shaming. In some instances, literary analysis of specific texts includes brief discussion of the socio-historical context, as an understanding of social history has contributed substantially to shaping the interpretation of self and community presented in most contemporary Aboriginal autobiographies.

Scope of this chapter

Despite the emergence of Aboriginal autobiography in the 1970s, Kramer's *Oxford History of Australian Literature* (1981) contains no discussion of either Aboriginal autobiography or prose fiction writing. Seven years later, *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* (Hergenhan et al. 1988) included a chapter on Aboriginal literature, both oral and written, although autobiography is not discussed, receiving a brief mention in the final chapter on Australian autobiography contributed by C. Wallace-Crabbe (p. 568).

David Headon's entry in the second edition of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (1994), 'Aboriginal Writing/Testimony in English' (pp. 14-17) provides a comprehensive listing, using the two categories of 'autobiographies' and 'life histories'. Although Headon does not distinguish precisely between the two terms, the term 'life history' implies a more substantial editorial involvement. But it is a difficult distinction to make, and does not take into account the collection and publication of groups of stories or life histories as the history of a community. Even apparently single author Aboriginal autobiographies may reflect a sense of communal history, as in Morgan's *My Place*, as a history of a family, and in Langford Ginibi's *My Bundjalung People*.

The central importance of oral histories, which may be recorded, transcribed, translated or edited by either white or Aboriginal interlocutors, must also be acknowledged. Headon alludes to the thorny critical problems raised by the involvement of a sometimes concealed but influential 'other', problems which are not unique to the telling of Aboriginal lives. Newman (1992) also addresses some of those problems in relation to Aboriginal autobiography (pp. 156-165).

Adam Shoemaker, in *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988* (1989), discusses Aboriginal writing under the categories of history, the novel, poetry and drama, with no specific discussion of autobiography or life history. Morgan’s *My Place* receives only a passing mention as it was too recently published for analysis.

In this chapter, I shall restrict my substantial analysis to autobiographies in English by Aboriginal writers, while recognising the fluidity of the boundaries between autobiography and oral history. I shall refer in passing to some oral histories of the period.

The works selected for the most substantial discussion are *A Bastard Like Me* (1975) by Charles Perkins; *If Everyone Cared* (1977) by Margaret Tucker; *Through My Eyes* (1978) by Ella Simon; *Wandering Girl* (1987) by Glenyse Ward; *My Place*

Perkins’ work is one of the first published Aboriginal autobiographies, in which complex narrative representations of shaming and counter-shaming are framed by a radical political activism. The narratives by Tucker and Ward both explore experiences of shame as young women in compulsory and exploitative employment as domestic servants, following childhoods on missions. Ward’s text is also included because her use of the term ‘shame’ reflects both Standard English usage and the distinctive meaning that occurs in Aboriginal English. Simon, more than the other writers, represents complex issues of shame associated with being of mixed race.

Sally Morgan’s My Place is guaranteed consideration in any contemporary discussion of Aboriginal autobiography as the unprecedented success of this work makes it by far the most widely read book by an Aboriginal author yet published. But the narrative is particularly distinctive in the way in which patterns of shame emerge from the representation of what Rose (1991) has designated ‘hidden histories’, the suppressed experiences of Aboriginal encounters with Europeans. Morgan does not dwell on the political history of oppression, torture and massacres documented by historians such as Reynolds (1982); her focus is on the shameful history of sexual contact, and the policy of removing part-Aboriginal children from their Aboriginal families, embodied in her own maternal family history. She also represents aspects of the economic history of exploitation of Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry and in domestic service. Her narrative implicates the reader in these histories by a skilful manipulation of plot, exploiting the literary devices of the quest, the secret and the detective story.

Ruby Langford Ginibi’s narrative account of living poor and living black in both rural and urban New South Wales testifies to ‘the human desolation’ referred to by Gilbert, but also represents the resilience of post-tribal Aboriginal culture in resisting shame.

2. Shame and autonomy in Aboriginal autobiographical narratives

According to Erikson’s model of human development, described in chapter 1, the individual who is unable to achieve autonomy at the appropriate developmental stage of early childhood experiences shame that may persist into adulthood. From Erikson’s model it may be postulated that shame is most likely to be perpetuated in the adult who is denied personal autonomy in a repressive political and social environment. Mudrooroo Narogin’s 1990 study
of contemporary Aboriginal literature describes the effects of the paternalist racism of Australian society which perpetuates the shame associated with lack of autonomy:

[this] paternalist attitude ... forced the Aborigine into the attitude of a child asking for help from a benign white person. Under the gaze of the 'other', the Aborigine became as a child. Unable to help himself, he sat waiting for the kind adult to offer succour, and this was often forthcoming. But for all his assumed being of child, he was not a child, but an adult, and his act of continuing bad faith led him into a self hatred (Narogin 1990, p. 11).

Self-hatred often expresses itself as destructive shame, and Narogin links this enforced helplessness to other conditions associated with shame, confusion, passivity and alcohol abuse (p. 11), all of which are represented in some of the selected texts.

Narogin also relates this broader condition of loss of autonomy to literary collaborations where the Aboriginal story-teller is dominated by the white editorial partner’s perceptions of the white readership, which he sees as leading to further marginalisation of Aboriginal stories. He also interprets the rendering of Aboriginal narratives into Standard English as a shaming of non-standard forms of Aboriginal English, Kriol and Aboriginal languages, without however, addressing the problem that the approach he advocates may make such texts less accessible to a non-indigenous readership, thereby also contributing to marginalisation (1990, pp. 143-155).

A ‘collaborative text’ may be construed as involving either cooperation or textual dispossession, and the latter may perpetuate shame. The definitional problem of boundaries between the genres of autobiography, ‘life history’ and oral history, has a direct bearing on patterns of shame in Aboriginal autobiographical narratives. Spivak’s concerns are pertinent: ‘Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern?’ (in Williams & Chrisman 1993, p. 90). Spivak is sensitive to the problem of ‘render[ing] the place of the investigator transparent’ (p. 91), and emphasises the critical importance of questioning the position of the ‘investigator’ or apparently expert white intellectual (p. 91). As Suleri has demonstrated in The Rhetoric of English India (1992), shame is a postcolonial issue. Suleri describes Salman Rushdie’s novel Shame (1983) as providing ‘a compelling opportunity to reconsider the question of why postcolonial narrative should be so amenable to shame’ (p. 175).

An historical review of Aboriginal autobiographical writing indicates the emergence of progressively more autonomous Aboriginal voices. Since the 1960s, white recorders of Aboriginal stories (the equivalent of Spivak’s
'investigators') have been wrestling with the issue of presenting an Aboriginal life story in a form acceptable to white publishers and accessible to a white readership. Aboriginal views on the topic have not been so widely known to white readers, although Gilbert's views as stated in *Living Black*, are quoted below.

An early example of this problem is *I, the Aboriginal*, published in 1962 by white Australian journalist Douglas Lockwood. Narogin categorises this work as among the 'compromised volumes', which 'sought to image the fringe in dubious productions often termed “autobiographies”' (1990, p. 149). Narogin doubts 'that the “I” of the story had any say in its production' (p. 149) and Shoemaker (1989) is also highly critical of the text's racist attitudes. *I, the Aboriginal*, is described in Lockwood's dedication as the story of Waipuldanya of the Alawa tribe, also known by the European name of Phillip Roberts: Waipuldanya is the dedicatee of his own story, yet the story is 'owned' by Lockwood, who won the Advertiser Adelaide Festival of Arts Award 1962 for this book. An obituary of Lockwood describes the work as 'biography' (Courier-Mail 22/12/80). Although narrated in the first person, the text shows clear evidence of a strong and (according to contemporary standards) paternalistic European editorial hand.

Thirty years later, non-Aboriginal participants in the transcription of Aboriginal oral stories choose alternative approaches to those of either Lockwood or Narogin in the presentation of the texts. In the collection of oral histories, *Kaytetye Country: An Aboriginal History of the Barrow Creek Area* (1993), Grace Koch, compiler and editor, and Harold Koch, translator, published the stories in the form of parallel texts, in Aboriginal English or Aboriginal language, and 'standard' English, in order to retain the authentic voice of the story-teller, while making the narratives accessible to non-Aboriginal readers.

Kevin Gilbert specifically relates the issue of the autonomy of the story-teller to the condition of being ashamed. In *Living Black* (1977), Gilbert published a series of interviews with Aboriginal people, with the aim of 'show[ing] the actual condition of Aboriginal people in Australia through their own testimony and from this to show how they think about themselves and their background' (p. 1). Gilbert considered that the first of these aims could not be fulfilled because:

> Aboriginals have been acutely aware of their white audience for a long time now and the presence of a tape recorder and the knowledge that a book is to be written causes an automatic self-censorship which is understandable considering that the majority of Aboriginals are deeply ashamed of what they know is the truth about their people today (p. 1).
In *My Bundjalung People* (1994), Langford Ginibi shames white use of Aboriginal stories, describing the practice as theft:

I told them [some Aboriginal relatives] I thought academics and big book writers were having a field day with all our Koori history. They use our resources - our life stories - and write big books and make big bucks, but they're writing our stories and stealing our history from us and they are full of bull goonung anyhow! (p. 19).

Nevertheless, what is notable in even such Europeanised, 'colonised' or 'stolen' discourses as *I, the Aboriginal*, is that Aboriginal stories in some form are beginning to emerge in print, accessible to a wider white audience than anthropologists and missionaries, ending the silence about many shameful aspects of white racism. A gradual erosion of the white concept of the Aborigine as 'other' is indicated by the key factor in the production of these stories, the relationship between Aboriginal story-teller and white interlocutor. The preparedness of Aboriginal storytellers to talk about their own experiences of shame occasioned by white racism and of white interlocutors to receive these stories, despite the shameful implications for their own culture, suggests a sea-change in post-colonial race relations. Although postcolonial critics may be justly suspicious of the colonisation or appropriation of black stories, and Gilbert's warnings about Aboriginal reticence should not be ignored, discourses pointing to the emergence of some degree of mutual respect contributing to the production of texts should not be overlooked.

Lockwood's colonial, paternalistic vocabulary (e.g. 'piccaninny', 'paperbark couch') and appropriation of the subject's *I*, occasions Narogin's cynicism about the extent of Waipuldanya's involvement, describing Lockwood as having 'mined an Aborigine for source material' (1990, p. 149). But Lockwood's vocabulary, politically incorrect according to contemporary standards, coexists with a vocabulary of respect and cooperation. The first part of the dedication reads: 'This book is dedicated with gratitude and affection to WAILPULDANYA of the Alawa tribe of Australian Aborigines whose story it is' (1962, p. 5). Lockwood refers to Waipuldanya's commitment and patience with the project: 'He sat with me during more than one hundred hours of interviews while he patiently told me the details of his life and explained the customs and rituals of his people'. Lockwood also describes the process of reviewing the manuscript:

He then listened and criticised through many more long hours as, together, we read and checked the manuscript.

For his sake, therefore, I hope the author has been worthy of his subject (p. 5).

An alternative model of cooperation is Jimmie Barker's life story, published as *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker: The Life of an Australian Aboriginal 1900-1972* as
told to Janet Mathews (1977). In this title, the name of the autobiographical subject takes precedence over that of the transcribing editor. This autobiographical account was based on tapes recorded by Jimmie Barker with assistance from Janet Mathews, who was employed as a field researcher by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies between 1968 and 1972, the period of the recordings. Mathews also uses the discourse of mutual respect: ‘My admiration and affection for him grew during the four years we worked together, and when he died I lost a real friend’ (p. xiii). Jimmie Barker died in 1972, and Mathews subsequently prepared the text for publication based on her own principles of organisation, expressing the hope that he would have appreciated her version: ‘He knew that I was going to work on his tapes and write the story of his life and his memories of the Muruwari tribe; this gave him great pleasure, and I hope he would have approved of the result’ (p. xiii).

A number of Aboriginal autobiographies which have not been generally considered as oral history, with one author’s name on the cover, prove to have an interlocutor on closer examination. If such works are in fact constructed as dialogues, with a more or less ‘transparent’ interlocutor, this has significance for the representation of patterns of shame, for, as has been previously argued, shame may be overcome where the hostile gaze of the more powerful Other is transformed into the benign regard of an equal. For example, the second edition of Simon’s Through My Eyes shows that the text is based on tapes recorded by Simon in close collaboration with Anne Ruprecht. The tapes were typed up and edited, with research by both Simon and Ruprecht, who then checked the text together. Ruprecht explains this process in an ‘Afterword’ (Simon 1987, pp. 178-187), in which she describes the growth of a friendship with Simon and pays tribute to her. A final, unnumbered chapter by Ruprecht in the second edition, entitled ‘The end of the struggle’, recounts the circumstances of Ella Simon’s death (pp. 174-7).

Dick Roughsey’s Moon and Rainbow (1971) is described by the non-indigenous writer of the Foreword, Percy J. Trezise, as a written text:

It is a sad reflection on our treatment of our fellow Australians when it is realised that Dick Roughsey is the first full-blood Aborigine sufficiently literate and ambitious to attempt, and succeed, in writing a book about his people (p. 11).

It is apparent from the text and from the dust-jacket, that the book grew out of an association between Roughsey and Percy Trezise, called Warrenby in the text.

Dick Roughsey’s text has been rendered in Standard English by an unspecified hand, in contrast to the autobiography by Elsie Roughsey, An Aboriginal Mother.
Tell of the Old and the New (completed in 1972, but not published until 1984). In this text, two editors are named on the title page (although not the cover), Paul Memmott and Robyn Horsman. At the end of the book a 'Note on the editing process' (pp. 240-242) gives the history of the manuscript, and explains in some detail the development of an editing policy 'to retain the work's individuality and resist any directive to rewrite it in Standard English', while presenting it in a form 'acceptable for commercial publication, and accessible to the average white Australian reader' (p. 240). The editors refer to 'the problems of Elsie's presentation of the traditional oral style of story-telling, in a written form' (p. 240). They specify that Elsie Roughsey was consulted in this process, 'reviewed the editing as it progressed and approved the final manuscript' (p. 241). The location of the original handwritten manuscript and of the typescripts of the manuscript is specified (the Fryer Library of the University of Queensland) and editorial policy explained (pp. 241-2). The acknowledgements express appreciation to linguist Diana Eades 'for her valuable advice about a variety of dilemmas we faced and the ethical aspects of the editing style'. The relationship between autobiographer and editors emerges as one of professional cooperation rather than personal friendship. The outcome is one of according more autonomy and ownership of the text to the autobiographer than had previously been the case. Narogin describes this work as a 'neglected masterpiece', asserting that without it 'Black women's literature might be seen as advocating assimilation' (1990, pp. 149-50). That Elsie Roughsey was motivated to write her autobiography independent of an encouraging relationship with a white person was related to the fact that her husband Dick Roughsey had already published an autobiography (in collaboration with a friend), in which she considered there were significant gaps:

It struck my minds [sic] very much, when I helped my husband collecting materials for the Moon and Rainbow. Reading through it, there were more of my laws, customs, cultures and legends ... were not there. So I thought it would be a fine idea that I should write a book of some of the customs we had ... (1984, p. 3).

The text of Charles Perkins' A Bastard Like Me (1975) gives no indication of editorial involvement, the only other textual voice being that of the writer of the foreword, Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel, who writes:

I have frequently encouraged him [Charles Perkins] to write the full story of his life because I believe that after reading it Australian people will be in a far better position to understand what motivates the radical black leaders in this country (p. 5).

Yet according to Perkins' biographer, Peter Read, the text 'had been transcribed from tapes recorded by Ted Noffs' (1990, p. 177). This information indicates that the narrating subject of A Bastard Like Me is also addressing a specific interlocutor, under the requisite conditions for the dissolution of shame. Noffs,
as a supportive friend and fellow radical, provided the gaze of the benign Other. As an ordained, albeit radically liberal, minister of the church, he may also have provided a symbolic link to the confessional.

Sally Morgan specifies that she worked from tapes, and includes within her narrative three extensive oral histories, edited by herself, those of her great-uncle, Arthur Corunna, her mother, Gladys, and her grandmother, Daisy. Even though Morgan’s narrative ‘frames’ these oral histories, which she herself transcribed and edited, the text is designed to show that only the relationship between Morgan and the narrators made the telling possible. The fact that Morgan as listener and transcriber would have modified the narrative both by her presence at the telling and actual modification of the tale in transcription and presentation is not presented as a critical problem but as a strength. The relationship is shown as gradually overcoming shame barriers to the telling, although Daisy Corunna’s story shows a reticence comparable to that referred to by Gilbert.

Autobiographies that are not transcribed from oral accounts may nevertheless be situated within a community constituting the accepting gaze of the Other. Margaret Tucker’s *If Everyone Cared* exemplifies this, although the work was not transcribed from tapes but handwritten, in Standard English (as evidenced by her manuscript in the National Library): Tucker uses the phrase ‘as I write’ (1983, p. 199). Tucker was writing not only with an awareness of her distinctively Aboriginal story but also as an active member of the Moral Rearmament community. She acknowledges the help and encouragement of ‘wonderful friends’, including the friend who drove her to childhood places, two researchers and the friendship and support of ‘Mr and Mrs Kim Beazley’, prominent members of Moral Rearmament in Australia. The foreword was also written by Kim E. Beazley (senior).

Another model for collaboration between an Aboriginal story-teller and a non-indigenous editor is that of Ruby Langford Ginibi and Susan Hampton in the production of *Don’t Take Your Love to Town*. Hampton is described in the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* as having ‘co-scripted’ this work. Billy Marshall-Stoneking’s review of this work acknowledges both parties in commending the final text:

> In writing her autobiography, Langford was assisted by the poet Susan Hampton, who was sounding board and editor. In the opinion of this reviewer, collaboration between blacks and whites points the way towards a better understanding. The collaboration, in this case, has produced a mighty book (1988, p. 10).
The production of Langford Ginibi’s third autobiographical work, *My Bundjalung People*, involved a collaboration between Langford Ginibi and an indigenous associate, Pam Johnston, described by the narrator as her ‘adopted daughter, taxi driver and photographer, without whose care and concern (and car) this trip would not have been possible’ (in acknowledgements, p. ix). Pam Johnston, an Aboriginal artist and the author of the foreword, describes herself as Ruby’s driver, companion, sound recordist and general dogsbody’ (p. xi). But Johnston’s role is more extensive than this, as her foreword ‘frames’ Langford Ginibi’s text, interpreting the narrative as ‘a historical, political, social, and spiritual view of the Bundjalung people of the north coast of New South Wales, as told by one of their own’ (p. xi). Johnston describes it as not academic, but ‘wholistic’ Aboriginal history (p. xii). The relationship between Ruby and ‘Pammy’ as travelling companions forms part of the structural unity of the book. In the chapter entitled ‘Jengwallah: talk too much’, the text of Langford Ginibi’s lecture to the Lismore Club is included, followed by the text of Johnston’s lecture (pp. 47-51). Johnston’s relationship to narrator and narrative could not be described as ‘transparent’ in Spivak’s terminology: ‘Pammy’s’ narrative presence and voice are interwoven with those of Ruby. But here, as in Gilbert’s *Living Black*, the role of a black rather than white interlocutor avoids many, if not all, the critical problems raised above.

Johnston also addresses some of the issues of genre and language raised by Narogin (above):

> Ruby, I know, has had the experience of being questioned in relation to Aboriginal people writing in the European mould, as the Koori cultural tradition is oral. As you will note, Ruby has very much made the English language her own. Koori English is an existing language that you will meet repeatedly in these pages. We are all adaptors and survivors who must tell our histories in our own way. To be questioned in relation to language structure, or cultural ‘correctness’ seems to me to continually illegitimize the Aboriginal race as much as questioning just exactly how much Aboriginal blood courses in one’s veins (p. xiii).

From this discussion of some of the critical problems associated with the collaborative production of Aboriginal autobiographies some tentative answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this section may be suggested. The first question concerned the extent to which production of a life story in collaboration with members of the dominant culture might be interpreted as a perpetuation of the shame of dispossession. The second related question, which can be answered concurrently, concerned conditions which were required for the Aboriginal writer to maintain control of his or her own life story in order to speak autonomously. At one end of the spectrum is Lockwood’s *I, The Aboriginal*, in which the narrative’s non-indigenous ‘author’, uses the ‘I’ of the purported narrating subject, Waipuldanya (Phillip Roberts), to tell the latter’s
story in a discourse that reflects the paternalism of the dominant white culture. Critics Narogin and Shoemaker have justly drawn attention to the dimension of textual dispossession. Kevin Gilbert’s pessimism is also situated at this point. At the other end of the spectrum is a cluster of different models of autonomy. Margaret Tucker wrote her own story in her own hand, supported by a group of friends from the multiracial Moral Rearmament community. Elsie Roughsey sought professional assistance which respected and maintained her distinctive use of non-Standard English. Sally Morgan’s project in My Place involved not only the production of her own narrative but also the elicitation of the stories of family members, whose narratives were incorporated within her own. Ruby Langford Ginibi chose a young educated Aboriginal woman rather than a white collaborator for her autobiographical My Bundjalung People.

Several other points remain to be made. First, even in the more paternalistic texts, which tend to be the earlier ones, a paternalistic discourse generally coexists with one of reciprocity and respect. Relationship and affection become key factors in the production of later works such as Morgan’s My Place and Langford Ginibi’s My Bundjalung People. Between these two points are situated texts in which cooperation between Aboriginal autobiographer and white collaborator takes various forms, with the latter having a more dominant role in the earlier texts. It would appear that collaborative relationships play a significant and increasingly positive role in the emergence of autonomous Aboriginal autobiography as a written genre accessible to a non-indigenous readership, progressively eroding the racially-based shame barriers that inhibit black story-telling and white reception of black stories.

3. Shame and myth: resistance or collusion in Aboriginal autobiographical narratives

Kevin Gilbert argues in Living Black (1977) that collaboration between ‘sympathetic whites’ and blacks in the production of black autobiographical narratives has constituted a shame-based collusion, leading to the propagation of a ‘series of myths’ about Aboriginal people. According to Gilbert, whose focus in his introduction to this work is on the shame of the black victims of racism rather than the shame of members of the dominant white culture when confronted with their own racist practices, this myth-making process has its origins in shame-based self-censorship on the part of Aboriginal story-tellers. Gilbert explains the nature of these myths:

So, together with many sympathetic whites, they embrace and propagate a series of myths about themselves; that Aboriginals share freely; that they have a strong feeling of community; that they don’t care about money and lack the materialism of white society; that they care more deeply for their children than do white parents; and so on (1977, p. 1).
Gilbert suggests reasons for the acceptability of these myths to both blacks and whites:

Unbigoted whites believe them because the human desolation that is Aboriginal Australia is not yet understood in this country ... Aborigines try to believe these fallacies about themselves because they won’t face the truth. But you only have to go to any Aboriginal mission or reserve to see the truth: the lack of community spirit, the neglect and abuse of tiny children, and all the rest of it (p. 1).

Eric Michaels makes similar criticisms of Sally Morgan’s My Place, observing that Morgan:

constructs criteria for evidence, history and truth which are self-referential. Aborigines do not forget, do not lie, do not selectively interpret their memories, and so their stories are true ... beyond even the context of their presentation (i.e. neither the narrative genre nor the translation from oral to written modes influences the story) (Michaels 1988, p. 44).

Gilbert’s pessimistic critique highlights the significance of shame as concealment in the interpretation of black autobiographical narratives, but my investigations have found very little evidence in the selected autobiographical texts to support the view that shame is evaded rather than confronted. Langford Ginibi presents a forthright picture of aspects of human desolation in Don’t Take Your Love to Town (1988). Aspects of Aboriginal life which figure in her narrative are alcoholism, violence, poverty, domestic violence, imprisonment and premature death. Perkins’ polemical intent focuses on the consequences for Aboriginal communities of white racist policies and neglect. Simon gives an unromanticised view of daily living on Purfleet Mission Settlement and records her impressions of the consequences of alcohol abuse in other Aboriginal communities she visited when travelling with the United Aboriginal Mission (e.g. Simon 1987, pp. 138-9). Tucker balances positive and negative aspects of her childhood among her Aboriginal relatives. Morgan’s My Place appears to be the only autobiography to have been subject to criticism on these grounds, and these concerns will be addressed below.

I would argue that in these narratives, shame operates in distinctly different ways to those identified by Gilbert in the construction of Aboriginality. What is particularly striking is the representation in black autobiographies of white colonial myths about Aborigines. The narrating subject may provide a critique by portraying the self as actively resisting white myths. Alternatively, the subject may be shown as initially accepting but later discarding them. On occasion, the narrative may represent the self’s unconscious internalisation of shaming white myths about Aboriginal people.

In this section I shall begin by considering possible grounds for the views of Gilbert and Michaels concerning collusive myths. I shall proceed to discuss six
textual representations in black narratives of white myths about Aboriginal people in which shame is evident. These are: (i) that Aboriginal people are unclean; (ii) that they do not have the same need for physical care as whites; (iii) that white violence against Aboriginal people is justified; (iv) that Aboriginal women are available for the sexual gratification of European men; (v) that a child of mixed race is a 'child that should not have been born' (Teichman 1982) and (vi) that Aboriginal people are socially inferior to whites. The commonality of these themes in the selected texts demonstrates the relevance of shame in interpreting these autobiographies and in elucidating the relationship between the writer and the reader.

Finally, I shall examine instances of the black narrating subjects' attempts to construct new narratives to counter the self's extreme shame ensuing from the fragmentation of Aboriginal traditional cultures.

Truth and myth in black narratives: 'testimonio' and reader response

Aboriginal autobiographical narratives frequently affirm a commitment to 'truth' that is in marked contrast to the postmodernist literary culture of interpretation. The recurrent references in Morgan's My Place to the importance of writing the truth have led to criticism such as that of Michaels, quoted above. Langford Ginibi, whom critics have let off more lightly, includes in the preface to Don't Take Your Love to Town a similar affirmation of the truth of her narrative. This is an important issue in an analysis of literary representations of shame, as indicators of shame in a text in a sense authenticate what is recorded.

The European autobiographical tradition acknowledges its origins in religious confession, accepting its debt to St Augustine's Confessions, overlaid by the contemporary confessional practice of therapeutic discourse. Both forms of confession involve the revelation of shameful aspects of the self. However, critical writers on autobiography have only recently started to acknowledge the influence of another genre in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, that of testimony. John Beverley, in 'The margin at the center: on testimonio (testimonial narrative)' (in Smith & Watson 1992) has discussed 'testimonio' as a newly emerging genre in Latin American Spanish literature, concerned with the rights of the oppressed. He acknowledges its role in liberation theology-based community dialogues (p. 98). Beverley defines testimonio as:

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet ... form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience (in Smith & Watson 1992, pp. 92-3).
Although Foxton has described the 'sense of combined historicial and spiritual purpose' of seventeenth century Quaker women’s autobiographical testimonies in similar terms to Beverley’s discussion of testimonio (e.g. Foxton 1994, p. 15), Beverley does not identify connections with this tradition, arguing that 'testimonio coalesced as a new narrative genre in the 1960s and further developed in close relation to the movements for national liberation and the generalised cultural radicalism of that decade' (in Smith & Watson 1992, p. 93). Although Beverley finds historical antecedents for testimonio in specific Latin American narrative forms, the genre has much in common with forms of Aboriginal autobiographical writing which also emerged in the 1960s. The term 'testimony' is used by David Headon in relation to Aboriginal writing in English in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (Wilde 1994, pp. 14-17), although the term is not specifically defined in this reference work.

Beverley in turn quotes from Raymond Williams, who attributes the superiority of the nineteenth century British working class autobiography over other forms (such as the novel) to the fact that 'the form coming down through the religious tradition was of a witness confessing the story of his life, or there was the defence speech at a trial, when a man tells the judge who he is and what he had done' (Smith & Watson 1992, p. 92).

The broader meaning of testimony implies bearing witness for a moral purpose rather than for self-display, a commitment to justice reflected in protest at injustice, and also recalls the Old Testament tradition of complaint and lamentation. Testimony differs from the public confession which is a feature of evangelical and Moral Rearmament practice, because what is being revealed that was previously hidden is not the shame of personal sin but the shame associated with oppression and suffering, 'the shame we don’t deserve' as Smedes subtitles his book, *Shame and Grace* (1993). In 'testimonio' truth is constructed differently to the interpretative preoccupation of European postmodernism.

The works of Tucker, Ward and Simon, all of whom have a mission background, demonstrate many of the characteristics of testimony, even though they do not specifically raise the issue of truth and sincerity in autobiography.

The intentionality of the narrator is paramount in testimonio, according to Beverley:

> The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself (p. 94).
Gladys Corunna’s story, recounted in Morgan’s *My Place*, demonstrates the kind of commitment to truth that characterises the discourse of testimony, involving a willingness to reveal experiences of shame:

> It hasn’t been an easy task, baring my soul. I’d rather have kept hidden things which have now seen the light of day. But, like everything else in my life, I knew I had to do it. I find I’m embarrassed sometimes by what I have told, but I know I cannot retract what has been written, it’s no longer mine (Morgan 1987, p. 306).

Sally’s explanation to Nan that ‘when you write a book, it has to be the truth’, which accords with the assumptions of *testimonio*, may also derive from a view of literature which echoes a doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy or at least a high view of biblical authority (Morgan 1987, p. 161).

Langford Ginibi’s first autobiographical text, *Don’t Take Your Love to Town*, is framed in the acknowledgements as true, as is characteristic of ‘testimony’, located in a specific time, place and set of social circumstances, started on a specific date (23 May 1984). Ruby describes her work as: ‘a true life story of an Aboriginal woman’s struggle to raise a family of nine children in a society divided between black and white culture in Australia’. Her declared commitment to truth contrasts with Robert Dessaix’s postmodern literary games with the reader, introduced by his provocative opening quotation from Jeanette Winterson: ‘I’m telling you stories. Trust me’ (Dessaix 1994). The work is dedicated to Langford Ginibi’s nine children by name, both ‘living and deceased’. As the narrative proceeds, the deaths of three children are recounted. In memorialising the dead, the work is linked to other autobiographical texts addressing grief and loss, but also bears witness specifically to the high mortality rate among younger Aboriginal people.

Langford Ginibi’s narrative counters the shame of being the object of racism primarily by expressing pride in her survival and in that of Aboriginal people. This work may be characterised as ‘testimonio’ in that the narrator bears witness to suffering and loss. The narrative testifies to endurance and resilience, and has been described as ‘the ultimate battler’s tale’ (Marshall-Stoneking 1988, p. 10).

A consideration of Aboriginal autobiography as *testimonio*, involving revelation of shame, raises the issue of reader response. Beverley states that: ‘The position of the reader of *testimonio* is akin to that of a jury in a court room’ (Smith & Watson 1992, p. 95). But in the religious tradition from which the genre derives, courtroom scenes where testimony is given are generally narrated so that the positions of jury and accused are reversed: the testimony of the accused implicates the hearers in some form of moral deficiency.
Veronica Brady’s review of *My Place*, together with the second edition of Ella Simon’s *Through My Eyes*, entitled ‘Something that was Shameful’ (1987), offers a view of reader response that is consistent with Beverley’s definition of *testimonio*. The title of Brady’s review is a quotation from Simon’s work, in which she wrote that for her father’s white relatives: ‘I was still a secret that had to be kept from the world – something that was shameful, something whose very existence was distasteful’ (Simon 1987, p. 23). Brady, quoting Fanon’s phrase, that ‘the Aborigine is for them the ‘absolute not-self’ (Brady 1987, p. 4), suggests that both these works ‘point a way to the transition from guilt to understanding’ (p. 3). Although Brady does not attempt a precise distinction between shame and guilt, her argument implies that Simon’s and Morgan’s narrative representations of personal shame originating in racist oppression may or should convince their white readership of guilt with regard to racism. Brady expresses this view in theological terms: ‘Sooner or later the question of the past must be faced ... Ultimately, this question is ethical, existential, even, I would argue, theological. Our treatment of Aborigines is our “original sin”’ (p. 3).

For Brady, reader response to these autobiographical texts is critical. In this review, she prescribes an ethical response for readers:

problems are not solved by evading them. What is necessary is to make the transition from fallibility to fault, to acknowledge the human consequences of our action, to regard those we have damaged as human beings and to acknowledge the damage which has been done (p. 3).

Brady considers that these texts have a major part to play in a process of reconciliation between black and white in Australia: ‘How is this to be done? One way is by sympathetic re-enactment, by involving others imaginatively in another’s experience and coming by way of re-enactment to an understanding of the other, feeling with them’ (p. 3).

Beverley puts it this way:

The complicity a *testimonio* establishes with its readers involves their identification – by engaging their sense of ethics and justice – with a popular cause normally distant, not to say alien, from their immediate experience. *Testimonio* in this sense has been important in maintaining and developing the practice of international human rights and solidarity movements. It is also a way of putting on the agenda, within a given country, problems of poverty and oppression (Smith & Watson 1992, p. 99).

The intentionality of Perkins’ narrative is comparable to his purpose in addressing white audiences about Aboriginal issues, that is, to lead them to a conviction of their own racism. Langford Ginibi, in *My Bundjalung People*, records her impressions of white audience response at the Lismore Club after her forthright presentation of white racism: ‘We looked at their faces and oh!
They were a mournful lot! So many sad faces; they looked like stunned mullets!’ (1994, p. 52).

But reader response to Aboriginal autobiography may also take the form of shaming. Narogin’s sharp response to Morgan’s work appears to exemplify this tendency. The ‘tall poppy syndrome’ of non-indigenous Australian culture may emerge in contemporary Aboriginal writing which does not value diversity and pluralism.

Michaels, cited above, criticises what he terms Morgan’s ‘para-ethnography’ (Michaels 1988), on the grounds that she has glossed over ‘the duality of [her] cultural heritage and its consequences’, focusing only on her Aboriginal genealogy (p. 46). Michaels’ criticism loses its force however if *My Place* is read as testimony rather than an autobiography in the European tradition, in which a multi-faceted and protean self is explored. I propose a reading of the selected texts as works which demonstrate many of the characteristics of the emerging genre of *testimonio*.

**White myths in black narratives**

White constructions of Aboriginality are so extensive that it is impossible to be comprehensive here. From the Aboriginal narratives selected for this study I have chosen a number of recurrent representations of shaming behaviour by whites towards the Aboriginal subject, based on European myths of racial superiority. As we have seen, among these beliefs are that Aboriginal people are unclean; that they do not have the same need for physical care as whites; that white violence against Aboriginal people is justified; that Aboriginal women are available for the sexual gratification of European men (see for example Reynolds 1982 and Rose 1991). The belief that a child of mixed race was a source of shame to the white culture, which led to the practice of removing part-Aboriginal children from their Aboriginal families, is represented in most of the texts considered here ¹. The shaming of Aboriginal

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¹ Illegitimacy, shame and the experience of racism are closely related. As quoted from Teichman in the previous chapter: ‘Whatever means are used to control population and however complex the aim, the existence of a system of regulation and control must of necessity generate the concept of “a child which ought not to have been born”’ (1982, p. 7). Teichman argues that this concept may be related to ideology, so that ‘A racist’s idea of “a child which ought not to have been born” is a half-caste: whether the half-caste’s parents happen to be married or not is not the racist’s primary concern’ (p. 7). This belief was embodied in law in Australia post European settlement. Under the various state Aboriginal Protection Acts, part Aboriginal children were declared wards of state, forcibly removed from their families, institutionalised and trained for domestic service. According to Van Krieken, ‘between 1915 and 1940, the removal of Aboriginal children accelerated rapidly throughout Australia, with roughly 1600 children passing through the hands of the Aborigines Protection Board in New South Wales alone’ (1991, pp. 128-9). The acts applied to the part-Aboriginal children of couples who were legally married under European law (e.g. Margaret Tucker’s parents) as well as of those who were not. It had the effect of declaring all Aboriginal people except full blood Aboriginals illegitimate. Most Aboriginal autobiographies of the last three decades include episodes illustrating this policy and the suffering it caused.
people by a belief in their social inferiority, which justified economic practices of forcing them into lowly paid, menial employment in the service of whites, is also contested. All of the above beliefs and shaming practices were sustained by white self-interest, illustrating the links between shame, power and ideology: black autobiographical narratives undermine racist constructs.

Aboriginal narratives resist white myths by vivid representations of the suffering, physical and emotional, of the Aboriginal subject when compelled to submit to these practices. The emotional suffering represented includes shame and humiliation, a component of which may be the internalisation of the myth of Aboriginal inferiority. Although one of the characteristic transformations of the emotion of shame is anger, Perkins' narrative is the only one of the selected texts where this emotion predominates. Three of the strategies for overcoming shame, as outlined by Michael Lewis, are present in most of the texts in varying degrees, namely to 'own' shame and allow it to dissipate with time; laughter and confession. The fourth, denial or forgetting, is the converse of the 'testimonial' quality of most Aboriginal autobiography, although Black narratives may also involve some degree of concealment or reticence. Gilbert refers to 'unspeakability' as an element in Aboriginal histories, illustrated by 'the uneasy musings' of two interviewees in Living Black, Elsie Jones and Kate Lansborough, who allude to events in their personal histories which they are not prepared to talk about (Gilbert 1977, pp. 1-2).

(i) Stigmatising as unclean

One characteristic of the shamed individual is what Michael Lewis terms 'global attribution', a method of self-evaluation in which 'the evaluation of the self by the self is total' (1992, p. 72). Where white culture is dominant, with white racist ideology maintaining this dominance by a global evaluation of black races as unclean, an oppressed black minority may internalise this evaluation and perceive themselves in the same way, particularly where this principle is reinforced by shaming and oppressive practices.

Black autobiographical narratives represent the white myth that Aborigines are unclean in a variety of ways. In some of the examples that follow, the myth is critiqued by an emphasis on the suffering caused by specific practices and a foregrounding of the common humanity of black and white. In others the myth is internalised.

Langford Ginibi testifies to her childhood experience of living on a mission at Box Ridge near Coraki, after their mother had left the family and their father was away working. One aspect of the physical abuse and culpable neglect of
Aboriginal children by mission staff was to bathe them in used laundry water containing caustic soda that burned their skin. ‘Did she want us to go white?’ questions the narrator (Langford Ginibi 1988, pp. 8-9).

Glenyse Ward recounts her employer’s humiliating insistence that she disinfect the car seat after sitting on it, but resists this and other shaming practices by revelling in her employer’s private shower during her absence, using her fluffy towels and lavender talcum powder (Ward 1987, p. 87). Hooton has noted these examples amongst other narrated instances of Ward’s self-assertion in the face of her employer’s shaming tactics (Hooton 1990, pp. 323-4).

Ella Simon’s narrative resists this myth by differentiating between her part-Aboriginal grandmother’s superior understanding of health and hygiene and high standards of cleanliness and those of full-blood Aborigines still living tribally. Simon comments: ‘That’s probably why it used to hurt so much when people treated me as though I was one of these old tribal people’. Significantly, she explains that although her grandmother would attend to the health needs of tribal people, she would not allow them inside her house, and would serve them tea from tin mugs hanging outside the house. This practice, which occurs in other white and Aboriginal accounts of white racial discrimination, is explained by Simon as motivated by the prevalence of tuberculosis (Simon 1987, p. 4). Simon, born in 1902, is writing about the first two decades of this century, but Glenyse Ward’s account of her experience as a domestic servant in south Western Australia refers to her employer’s insistence that she use a tin mug rather than a china cup as one aspect of the discriminatory daily practices which were imposed upon her in the 1960s. By this time the prevalence of tuberculosis in the general population had receded, with routine testing and immunisation of children, which would have included institutions like Wandering Mission, relatively close to the metropolitan centre. Daisy Corunna’s story, in Morgan’s My Place, also refers to the tin mug. Her employers drank from fine china cups: ‘Some of them were so fine, they were like a seashell, you could see through them. I only ever had a tin mug’ (Morgan 1987, p. 335). The tin mug served as a token of racial inferiority in these texts.

Sally Morgan represents her childhood self as severely shamed in her early years at school in the 1950s for routine childhood mishaps such as wetting her pants in the classroom or having old food-scraps in her desk. The teacher’s insensitive reaction and punitive response, including the reproach, ‘You dirty, dirty girl’, are described as contributing to her sense of difference and inferiority to the other children: ‘They were the spick-and-span brigade, and I,
the grubby offender' (Morgan 1987, p. 26). This is an example of shaming leading to a negative global self-evaluation.

Daisy Corunna, or ‘Nan’, in My Place, describes herself as ‘Just a dirty old blackfella’ (p. 352), illustrating the degree to which she had internalised the white myth.

(ii) Aborigines’ physical needs are less important than those of whites

Aboriginal narratives include accounts of white ill-treatment, as well as neglect of their health and physical needs, in childhood, mid life and old age. In representing human suffering, the narratives contest the white myth that Aborigines are less than human.

Langford Ginibi recounts that at the Box Ridge mission, no medical attention was sought when the children had serious accidents. Ruby was burnt when, as part of her duties, she was lighting a fire with kerosene (when she was only nine, an age when this task was quite inappropriate) and her sister was badly cut on an axe. The occurrence of both accidents points to negligence and lack of supervision by adult mission staff (Langford Ginibi 1988, pp. 8-9).

Margaret Tucker relates an occasion when she injured her leg seriously: although she receives medical attention, her employer tells her that ‘the doctor said Aborigines had no feeling, we were like animals, our wounds just healed without any trouble’ (Tucker 1983, p. 119).

In My Place, Nan is shown to be shamed, as well as physically hurt, when in hospital in her old age she is exposed to a group of male hospital registrars as a subject for a practice exam: ‘Strangers, Sally! There I am with nothin’ to cover me. I felt shamed.’ Nan assumes that she has been selected because she is black (Morgan 1988, p. 314). The depth of her shame is expressed in one of her conversations with Sally during her last illness: ‘You know, Sal ... all my life, I’ve been treated rotten, real rotten. Nobody’s cared if I’ve looked pretty. I’ve been treated like a beast. Just like a beast of the field’. The narrating ‘Sally’ counters this shame by affirming her own love for Nan: ‘You’re not to talk about yourself like that ... You’re my grandmother ... The whole family loves you’ (Morgan 1988, p. 352).

Tucker’s narrative gives an account of the physical neglect of Aboriginal girls taken from their families and placed for enforced training in the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls. Tucker describes the girls as ill-fed, homesick, subject to humiliating and sometimes severe physical punishment. Shaming treatment of this kind continues in the relating of her
first placement as a domestic servant in Sydney in 1919, where her duties are represented as excessive and her ill-treatment severe, with a poor diet, inadequate clothes against the weather, hard physical work and humiliating behaviour by her ‘mistress’. Tucker writes: ‘I wondered why she disliked me so. I had got so used to her calling me a “wretched black”, not realising I was one’ (p. 117). When her parents’ efforts to free her from the situation fail, she relates that she contemplated suicide and, in her misery, ate rat poison in order to make herself sufficiently ill to be sent home (pp. 124, 125). Shame had led her to harm her own body. Tucker emphasises that this episode as not an isolated one by recounting that her sister May, whose experience in domestic service was similar to her own, had been ‘sick with humiliation’ after being struck by her employer, a police officer. She had obtained a small revolver which she carried around with her, to use against herself if her situation became unbearable (p. 141).

One of the few positive accounts of white medical care in an Aboriginal narrative is by Charles Perkins, whose life was saved by a kidney transplant (Perkins 1975, pp. 141-156). Accounts of inadequate care and negligence predominate.

(iii) White violence against blacks is justified

The linkages between shame and violence have been well established by Scheff and Retzinger (1991). Black autobiographical narratives include episodes in which active violence towards Aborigines was practised, rather than culpable neglect. Narrative accounts of violence against young Aborigines are often situated in institutions. Arthur Corunna’s story, within Morgan’s narrative, includes an episode during his early teenage years on an Anglican mission, when he and other boys were beaten until they bled by a mission employee (Morgan 1987, p. 186). Tucker relates that at the Cootamundra School, the assistant matron assaulted a young Aboriginal girl, Tucker’s friend Beatrice Buggs, with a piece of firewood, causing ‘bleeding lips and bruised cheeks’. Tucker’s testimony names the perpetrator, Miss Wood (Tucker 1977, p. 100).

As well as individual episodes, many narratives allude to Aboriginal oral traditions concerning massacres of tribal people. Simon, for example, refers to stories about whole tribes being wiped out by settlers, as well as accounts of mass poisonings at Belbowrie and Soldiers Point (Simon 1987, p. 4).
(iv) Sexual contact history

Autobiographical representations of the shameful history of sexual contact between Europeans and Aborigines are consistent with the work on sexual contact based on oral history included by Rose in *Hidden Histories* (1991). Daisy Corunna’s story, incorporated into Morgan’s *My Place*, foregrounds the shameful exploitation of Aboriginal women by white European men. She explains:

> We had no protection when we was in service. I know a lot of native servants had kids to white men because they was forced. Makes you want to cry to think how black women have been treated in this country. It’s a terrible thing. They’ll pay one day for what they’ve done (1987, p. 337).

Daisy Corunna’s genealogy is a case study in sexual contact history. She describes her father as the station owner at Corunna Downs, Howden Drake-Brockman. Her mother was a full-blood Aboriginal, who was living with her tribe when Daisy was growing up, and apparently had no status as the mother of both Daisy and her full brother Arthur. Arthur’s narrative names their mother, Annie Padewani, explaining that their father lived on the station for nine years before marrying his first wife: ‘While on the station, he shared my Aboriginal father’s two wives, Annie and Ginnie’ (Morgan 1987, p. 175). Daisy Corunna comments:

> In those days it was considered a privilege for a white man to want you, but if you had children, you weren’t allowed to keep them. You was only allowed to keep the black ones. They took the white ones off you ‘cause you weren’t considered fit to raise a child with white blood (Morgan 1987, p. 336).

Daisy Corunna’s story does not reveal the secret of the identity of her daughter’s father, but Morgan’s narrative hints at incest (e.g. Morgan 1987, p. 237). Nan, if a victim of incest, a taboo in both black and white society, would have been bound to a shame-based secrecy still related to the broader context of sexual contact history. Nan’s enigmatic reference to Gladys having a sister could be interpreted as the incest victim breaking the silence: Gladys’ sister would then be Nan herself, child of the same father. The narrative does not resolve this enigma.

Margaret Tucker represents her marriage to a white man as a mistake, based on an internalised belief in Aboriginal inferiority. Her account of her reflections on race issues in her early years illustrates the extent to which she had accepted the ‘Aboriginalism’ of white Australian knowledge about her people:

> I felt the divisions between dark and white deeply and devoured books containing views on the Aborigines. I felt we were not the lowest in intellect, but perhaps the least advanced of coloured people. I noticed that even coloured people from overseas would not mix with us. I got to feeling discontented with my people’s lot (1983, p. 156).
She attributes to these reflections her decision to marry a white man, 'so that my children would be light-skinned and have an equal opportunity to live as the white children' (p. 156). The mature narrating self comments: 'How ignorant and wrong I was!' (p. 156). Tucker describes her marriage to a white man, which upset his family, as a failure: 'I had not realised the heartache and shame an Aboriginal girl could bring to a white family in those days by marrying their son' (p. 157). After the war, she writes of her marriage: 'many drifted apart like we did'. Characteristically, she blames herself, an indication of the depth of her shame (p. 161).

Ella Simon's narrative highlights the suffering and shame of a part-Aboriginal woman born of a casual one-night stand, even though her white father acknowledged his daughter and maintained an affectionate relationship with her. The mature Simon opposed marriages between Aboriginal and white Australians. She recounts a white employer's prying questions about her background, in which praise of Simon's abilities is a shaming reminder of perceived Aboriginal inferiority: 'I just wanted to know, Ella, because you seem so different, so intelligent. Why don’t you go away to live somewhere and marry a white man?' Ella records her response:

Well, I told her what I thought of that! I told her about some of the things I'd had to face since childhood and how I didn't want to get involved in my father-type of situation again. I wanted my family to marry their own people, too (Simon 1987, p. 172).

For the narrating Glenyse Ward, writing of the time she spent in domestic service in the 1960s, 'feeling shame' is an experience often associated with the gaze of her employer's sons or husband. A subtext of sexual threat emerges from narrative episodes such as the occasion when, in the absence of her employer, she was chopping wood while one of the sons relaxed in the garden nearby: 'That morning I could feel his eyes upon me so I sort of got behind the door a little bit, as I felt shame, bending down and picking up wood in front of him'. When he proceeds to summon her to polish his shoes, she describes herself as in 'a very embarrassed state', in a posture of shame: 'I put my head down in a bashful way ... I didn’t even look at him' (1987, p. 27).

This sense of threat also emerges from her accounts of her employer's husband, Mr Bigelow: 'I dreaded having to face him. I didn’t like the way he used to just stare at me. I used to feel so embarrassed!' (p. 69). The instructions of her employer, Mrs Bigelow, after expelling her from the breakfast room where Mr Bigelow had been seated alone, are that: 'It wasn't very nice for a slave girl to be all alone in the presence of a male member of the family' (p. 50). Representing her teenage self as sexually naive, she continues: 'I had been stunned by the comment she made about being alone with her husband. I couldn’t understand
The sexual vulnerability of Ward’s narrating subject echoes other more explicit autobiographical accounts of sexual exploitation.

Tamsin Donaldson’s article, ‘Australian tales of mystery and miscegenation’ poses the question that Narogin has avoided in his criticism of Morgan: ‘How do each and all of us cope with sexual contact history?’ (1991, p. 243). Donaldson considers that ‘Sally Morgan’s work [is] a significant act of intercultural brokerage’ (p. 350). Donaldson shows how the mystery and concealment of mixed racial origins in Arthur Upfield’s *The Barrakee Mystery* (1929) contrasts with Morgan’s ‘attempting to speak of the unspeakable’ (p. 351) by uncovering the concealed Aboriginal ancestry of her mother and grandmother. Morgan’s narrative recounts that she tricked her mother into confirming the family’s Aboriginal origins, long suspected. Susan Sheridan suggests that reasons for the interest in *My Place* among non-Aboriginal readers may be:

connected with the story’s function as a revelation as well as indictment of relations between blacks and whites. There is the realization that many of us could have near or distant relatives, unknown to us, who have grown up as Aborigines. There is also the revelation (sensational by definition) that the white family implicated in this story is the well-known ruling class Drake-Brockmans (1989, p. 20).

Sheridan’s view adds another dimension to the reader response elicited by reading the Aboriginal autobiography as ‘testimony’. Readers are provoked to reassess their own genealogies in the light of Morgan’s narrative.

(v) The ‘child that should not have been born’ (Teichman)

Aboriginal people of mixed race bore a double stigma. Those who were born out of wedlock were illegitimate in terms of European law, and even those whose parents were legally married under European law were considered by European Australians as children who should not have been born. In Gilbert’s *Living Black*, Vi Stanton recounts that as an adult she was a ward of state, even though her parents were married, and her husband was white. Her husband discovered that ‘he had broken the law because he had not got the permission of the Protector of Aboriginals to marry me ... We could have been raided any time of the day or night for co-habiting with a female ward, even though we were legally married.’ This infringement could have earned Stanton’s husband a prison sentence (Gilbert 1977, pp. 9-10).

Stanton’s interpretation of this policy is that part-Aboriginal children embodied unacknowledged white shame:
The thing was, it wasn’t good to see these little parts or half-breeds running round the blacks’ camp because you didn’t know who to blame. Station manager? Storeman? Policeman? Teacher? So they came out with all these sincerest motives, you know ... to give these poor little devils a chance in life ... even though they wouldn’t admit that these kids had white fathers (Gilbert 1977, p. 7).

Such discriminatory attitudes were institutionalised by the various Aboriginal Protection Acts, under which people of mixed race were regarded as the property of the state rather than the ‘legitimate’ children of either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal parent. Accordingly, these children could be legally removed from their families, placed in state institutions and trained for domestic service.

Margaret Tucker, whose Aboriginal name was Lilardia, born in 1904, was one of the ‘stolen children’. Her autobiography, published in 1977, describes a childhood spent on the New South Wales-Victorian border, at Moonahculla, an Australian Inland Mission Settlement near Deniliquin, at Maloga and at Cummeragunga, another mission settlement. Her parents, Theresa Middleton and William Clements, were both part-Aboriginal. Although her parents were married, Tucker describes her father as ‘a roamer’: his occupation was shearing. Her mother worked mainly in domestic service at neighbouring stations, where her duties included childcare: her own children were cared for in her absence by an elderly aunt and uncle. She recounts a childhood spent in this area among the extended family, marked by fear of the police and intermittent hunger but also by traditional food-gathering and stories, close contact with her mother when she was not working, energetic outdoor games with other children and affectionate friendships with the missionaries. Her narrated experience as a child on and around missions was not marked by the shame and ill-treatment recounted by other Aboriginal writers, such as Langford Ginibi.

Tucker describes her parents as keeping the officials of the Aboriginal Protection Board at bay by delaying tactics and moving the children around, although many other part Aboriginal children had already been taken away for training as domestic servants. But eventually a police officer is described as arriving at the settlement to take Margaret, a younger sister and another girl. Despite the delaying tactics of the children’s white school teacher and the best efforts of her mother, the children are taken to Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, and do not see their mother again for years.

Glenyse Ward’s comment on her own situation and on the destinies of her peers at Wandering Mission reflects a history of oppression, including the removal of children. Not until she confides in the old Scots handyman working for her employer is her family background related: ‘I have a Mum, but I don’t
know where she is. I’ll find her one day, I suppose. My Dad I have never seen. He died when I was in the home’ (1987, p. 63). Later the narrative relates that her mother is alive and living in Geraldton. Ward is sent out at the age of sixteen to employment as a servant, to a position arranged by the staff of the mission, with no consultation as to her own wishes. This was the common pattern for young women of her background. On her first return to the Mission for a holiday, she recounts:

Some of the girls who’d been little in my time were still there, as working girls. Others had returned to their families as their Mums and Dads found out where they had gone to and came to take them back to their real homes. I knew my Dad wasn’t alive, but I still wondered how my mother must be doing, up in Geraldton. I had learnt that she lived in Geraldton. She once came down to Wandering and tried to visit but I had not been allowed to see her (1987, p. 126).

Glenyse Ward was only two years older than Sally Morgan, demonstrating that Morgan’s representation of her mother’s and grandmother’s fear of white authority, with its power to remove children, was well founded. Van Krieken provides an historical context for Ward’s experience in Children and the State (1991):

By 1936 the West Australian Commissioner for Native Affairs had become the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children up to the age of 21. The Native Administration Act empowered the state to forcibly take all Aboriginal children from their families and place them in government institutions ‘to be trained in the ways of white civilisation’ and ‘society’ (Van Krieken 1991, p. 129).

For Ward, the Mission, with all its deficiencies, represents home, and her female friends take the place of sisters. The narrative includes a sole, passing reference to an actual sister also living at the Mission (1987, p. 45).

In Charles Perkins’ autobiography entitled A Bastard Like Me (1975), the writer confronts and re-presents the shame of his origins, as an illegitimate child of Aboriginal and European descent. He counters the shame by recasting his origins in terms of pride in his Aboriginality, supplemented by a catalogue of achievements, which include not only a long record of Aboriginal activism, but also sporting success as a professional soccer player, academic success as the first Aboriginal university graduate, and the overcoming of serious illness in mid life. In relating the history of his political activism, Perkins records personal experiences of racism, but also discusses the ways in which he sought to force white Australians to confront their own shame, assertive and often abrasive methods which led some to consider him truly a ‘bastard’ in the colloquial sense of an unpleasant individual.

Born in Alice Springs in about 1936-7, Charles Perkins represents his ancestry as follows:
Grandfather Perkins was married in the bush way to my grandmother who was a full-blood Arunta. Nellie was her name. There was no civil ceremony or anything; they just came together. So my grandfather on my mother’s side was white and his wife was black (1975, p. 8).

Perkins is explicit about his mixed racial ancestry, relating that his grandmother had five children: ‘three were half-castes (one of whom was my mother) and two were full-blood. Three were by this white bloke Perkins and the other two were by tribal blokes from the Arunta tribe’ (p. 8). The relationship between his grandparents ended when Harry Perkins left for Broken Hill, where he died. ‘It seemed my grandfather Perkins just drifted off and did not come back and my grandmother did not know what had happened to him’ (p. 9).

Of his own parents he writes:

My mother kept her maiden name because it always seemed to happen that way with Aboriginal families. She did not marry my father according to Western law criteria. He was the father of a certain number of my brothers and sisters (p. 9).

He explains that his father, named Connelly, whom he scarcely knew, was descended from a full-blood tribal Aboriginal mother and an Irish father (pp. 9-10).

According to Perkins, Aboriginal attitudes to children of mixed race tended to be more accepting than those of whites. He relates that his own Arunta tribe did not regard children of mixed race as ‘other’. ‘My people of the Arunta tribe are very easy-going and the best type of people in this way. They do not disown part-Aboriginal people, especially if they are of their group’ (p. 10). Perkins’ view could be interpreted as an example of a collusive myth, particularly as Ella Simons and Margaret Tucker present alternative views. Nevertheless, Perkins qualifies his comment, acknowledging that at the time of writing, the Arunta practice was not universal among Aboriginal tribes: ‘The northern, more isolated, tribes are in many cases still exclusive, but this will not last for long. They will undergo the trauma of intermarriage with whites and they will then be in the same situation as the more earlier settled areas’ (pp. 10-11).

At this early point in his narrative, Perkins identifies issues of shame associated with mixed parentage:

I hope ... that the offspring [of mixed race relationships] will respect their black mother or father and cultivate pride in their Aboriginal ancestry. Unfortunately some part-Aborigines resent and even hate the fact of their existence. I know of many in Alice Springs alone who are ashamed of their ancestry and condemn at every opportunity tribal relatives or people. I feel sorry for them. They are lost people’ (p. 11).
Perkins' strategy for counteracting shame is to express pride in his Aboriginality, boldly presenting his illegitimacy in the title of his autobiography. This pride is an assertive response in the face of frequent, humiliating episodes of racial discrimination, even when Perkins was a public servant in the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs:

I was insulted on many, many occasions ... and they did not even know it. I had to cover it up by saying nothing and swallowing my pride. One junior officer said to me ... in a committee meeting. 'Oh, the trouble with you mixed bloods is, you’re not much good – you’re bastards. You’re the worst of both worlds' (p. 158).

In Through My Eyes, the first point made by Simon about her identity is that she is illegitimate. The first sentence of her autobiography is: ‘My parents weren’t married’ (1987, p. 1). The second point is that she is of mixed race, her father being white (from a ‘good’ white family) and her mother Aboriginal (‘or an “Australian of Aboriginal descent”, which is the latest title they give us’ (p. 1)). She describes these two points as ‘two handicaps there’s never been any escape from’ (p. 1). Both aspects of her origins are shown to have caused her deep shame and suffering, yet are given prominence by being mentioned first, resisting the psychic impulse of concealment. At the end of her narrative she writes that the shaming social climate has changed: ‘At least now you can talk openly about discrimination and how it hurts’ (pp. 172-3).

Simon’s narrative presents an alternative view to that of Perkins concerning Aboriginal attitudes to the mixed race child. Simon makes the point that survival was precarious for a part-Aboriginal child, more so in earlier generations, citing the example of her grandmother, who was abandoned in infancy by her mother’s tribe because of the lightness of her skin:

In those days, the old Aboriginal tribes wouldn’t have anything to do with half-caste children. The Old Warrior, in some tribes, would look carefully at the colour of a baby’s skin. If there was any lightness there, that baby would be killed or left to die because it was considered to be a bad omen (1987, p. 2).

Simon’s grandmother was found by a stockman, who attempted to return her to the tribe, but they refused her, ‘She was evil, they said’ (p. 2). She was brought up by ‘the station people’. As an adult she chose to return to her tribe, who welcomed her nursing skills and understanding of white practices (p. 2). Simon, like her grandmother, was rejected by darker-skinned Aboriginal people, but like her, had leadership skills. She writes of herself:

Even at school I was never accepted as Aboriginal. They could see by my lighter skin that I was different to them ... Some of them were very black and they’d try to get at me by saying I should have been over at Taree, at the white’s school (p. 39).
The shame associated with identity for Simon was complex. She did not find out her true parentage until she was almost eleven. Until then, she believed that her grandparents were her parents, and their children her brothers and sisters. The shock to her identity was severe:

When someone tells you that she’s not your real mother or he’s not your real father, you get tormented suddenly about who you really are and what you are. You just don’t know what to think. Then a kind of rebellion creeps into your heart (p. 10).

The discovery was made worse by the cruel teasing of one sister, or aunt, who would ‘introduce into childish disputes the taunt “You just shut up and remember who you are and what you are”’ (p. 11). Although the mature narrating self evaluates her grandmother’s strategy as a serious mistake, the introductory tribute shows that despite the shame, this experience did not blind Simon to her grandmother’s positive attributes.

The other shock was to discover that the white man she used to visit periodically as a child was in fact her father. The shame of illegitimacy and mixed race, although severe, was modified by her father’s sustained love and acceptance, despite his weaknesses in face of institutionalised and attitudinal racism. He did not disown her, although his relatives did. He gave her an honest account of her conception as a mistake, but made it clear that he valued her.

Simon’s narrative comments on the suffering she experienced from her mixed racial origins. ‘I still didn’t belong to either black or white’, she writes to explain her fear at having to move from Purfleet into a house in town (p. 163).

The most painful aspect of the shame of racism experienced by Simon was that of being excluded from her father’s funeral, when she alone had cared for him in his last illness. Persuaded by the undertaker and a missionary to acquiesce in the white relatives’ wish that she should stay away, she writes:

One of the greatest trials of my life was to forgive these people for that ... But then it came back to me how my grandmother drummed it into me that God made all people equal; colour is only skin deep and that the strong thing was to return forgiveness to those who hurt you ... I can truly say that, with God’s help, I have forgiven them a long time ago (p. 23).

Historian John Harris, who quotes at length from this account in One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity, cannot restrain a personal comment: ‘They did not deserve her forgiveness’ (1990, p. 603).

Narogin’s criticism of Morgan’s My Place apparently reflects a strand of continuing unease among Aboriginal writers about degrees of ‘blackness’ when he writes:
Sally Morgan's book is a milestone in Aboriginal literature in that it marks a stage when it is OK to be Aboriginal as long as you are young, gifted and not very black. It is an individualised story and the concerns of the Aboriginal community are of secondary importance (1990, p. 149).

Narogin prefers Langford Ginibi's *Don't take Your Love to Town*, as 'Koori literature and the life story at its best', approving Hampton's editorial work (p. 150). Langford Ginibi is older than Morgan, perhaps 'blacker' in Narogin's terms, with less formal education, and one whose abilities have emerged later in life as the author of three books, a political activist and lecturer. Yet Narogin's criticism seems to run counter to the following view published by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in a paper that addresses the issue as to 'Who is a real indigenous person?:

Some indigenous Australians are denied the 'indigenous' status for having cross-cultural relationships, consensual or otherwise, in their family trees. Many indigenous Australians who are fair-complexioned, for example, are not regarded by others as 'real' indigenous people (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994, p. 15).

Black autobiographical narratives, read as a corpus, represent attitudinal diversity among both blacks and whites towards those of part-Aboriginal ancestry. Read as individual narratives, the reader is invited to participate imaginatively in the shame suffered by narrating subject.

(vi) The myth of social inferiority and the shame of economic oppression

The background to black narratives is that of 'inscrutable, silent power', as Joy Hooton points out in her discussion of Ward's narrative (Hooton 1990, p. 320). Black narratives illustrate the way in which this power was maintained by white practices which reinforced the myth of Aboriginal inferiority to Europeans. Power was most effectively maintained when the myth was internalised by Aborigines themselves.

Tucker's narrative reveals the extent of her internalised shame in her account of the nine years she spent in domestic service. All her situations were arranged by the Aborigines Protection Board, without consultation. Her first experience in domestic service, in which ill-treatment led her close to suicide, has been discussed above. Although subsequent employers were more humane, on the one occasion when she organises her own placement, with a Syrian family, she comments, incredibly, that 'I felt I had let down Miss Lowe of the Aborigines Protection Board': her internalised shame led her to view herself with the eyes of the oppressor (Tucker 1977, p. 135).

In Sally Morgan's narrative, Nan is shown to be ashamed of her illiteracy when teased about it by her brother Arthur, even though she recognises that others
deprived her of the opportunity for education (Morgan 1987, p. 164). Her refusal to speak in her mother tongue in front of her grandchildren is indicative of shame about this language (e.g. p. 149).

Glenyse Ward’s narrative focuses particularly on the period in which she was employed and exploited as a domestic servant on a farm in Western Australia in the mid 1960s, forty years later than Tucker’s account. Ward’s narrative does not recount that she was either physically beaten or sexually exploited as frequently happened to young Aboriginal women in domestic service in earlier decades. However, Ward’s employer enforces a clear two-tier pattern of discrimination in daily life between her family and her ‘dark servant’, as a means of shaming the latter into ‘knowing her place’. The family’s meals are served on fine china whereas Ward is expected to use the inevitable tin mug and plate. The family have eggs and bacon for breakfast, which Ward has to cook although she herself is only allowed weeties. Her sleeping quarters are off the garage, dilapidated and smelly, in contrast to the splendid family home. She works from before dawn until night, while other family members lead a life of comparative leisure. She is denied any social interaction with the family, only one of whom even speaks to her, apart from her employer in delegating her tasks. She is expected to be invisible, being required to conceal herself when visitors come.

But Ward secretly resists these shaming practices. She revels in her employer’s shower during her absence, helps herself to forbidden foods, and entertains her friend Bill, the elderly handyman, in the dining room with the best china. Forbidden by her employer to sing, she plays the piano boisterously in her absence. Ruefully remembering her Mission training, she nevertheless develops skills of subterfuge, lying and circumventing requirements in order to make her existence more tolerable.

The shame of racist oppression is also counteracted for Ward by a sense of humour, and a spirited resilience which allow her to retain a grip on her own view of reality, most of the time. She is generally able to remind herself that her employer and family are strangely deficient in human qualities, rather than herself, despite her powerless situation. Every slight kindness shown her by others renews her emotional life, and friendship is empowering. At the end of the narrative, her friendships with Bill and with Mission friends give her the courage and opportunity to leave the farm and find alternative employment in Busselton.

Ella Simon’s narrative reviews many experiences of shaming discrimination. Although she also worked in domestic service, her main focus is on life on an
Aboriginal reserve. Simon, who spent most of her life on Purfleet Mission near Taree, comments on inadequate housing, with no stoves or bathrooms, various forms of intimidation of residents by managers, including threat of eviction or actual expulsion, paternalistic supervision of Aboriginal Endowment funds, sometimes involving mismanagement or even theft, and the enforcement of a curfew confining Aborigines to the reserve after dark. The narrative foregrounds the consequences in human suffering of these and other shaming conditions and practices, evaluating them against a strong standard of justice. Simon’s resistance includes accounts of conflict, negotiation or outwitting Reserve managers, and protest against her own lack of opportunities such as not being able to have a government job (1987, p. 75) or to become a nurse (p. 64). The final words of her autobiography are: ‘I don’t think I’ll ever stop wondering what I might have been ...’ (p. 173).

The narrative that constructs the most extensive representation of the oppressive social and economic conditions affecting many contemporary Aboriginal people is Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t take Your Love to Town* (1988). Langford Ginibi’s narrative both represents and resists the shame of dispossession and loss of identity.

Langford Ginibi attributes her decision to leave school before her Intermediate certificate to the poverty of the family and to her lack of awareness of the consequences: ‘Dad had had a lot of worry on his mind raising up us kids and I thought, what the heck, he’d been supporting me all this time and it was only fair I get a job and help out’ (p. 39). Without formal training, the opportunities available to her were those of the unskilled and poorly paid, such as employment as a domestic help and hotel chambermaid, with duties similar to those of Tucker, Simon, Ward and Daisy Corunna, although in this case apparently freely chosen.

The life of the narrated self is represented as one of downward mobility, becoming progressively tougher, and poorer as she has more children. Although on moving to Sydney she trains as a machinist, her first pregnancy at sixteen marks the end of any employment requiring formal skills. Attributing her unwed pregnancy to ignorance, her decision to leave home and stay at Coonabarabran with her partner’s mother is to avoid shaming her father: ‘I couldn’t lie to Dad but I didn’t want to bring any shame on him ... Dad was very upset and didn’t want me to go’ (p. 54). From this point in the narrative, Ruby is increasingly subject to the shaming experiences of poverty, domestic violence and repeated abandonment, although she does not articulate these feelings until comparatively late in the narrative.
Retzinger’s analysis of shame and violence in marital conflict (1991) accords with the narrated pattern of Langford Ginibi’s relationships. Ruby’s first partner Sam is described as jealous, violent, and a heavy drinker. Ruby supplements Sam’s income from a sawmill by domestic work. The relationship begins to disintegrate when Sam’s infidelity is confirmed, but when they separate for good, Ruby is pregnant again. A second relationship, with Gordon Campbell, starts well, but in describing its deterioration, the narrator refers to financial stress, Gordon’s unemployment, his absences in search of work, drinking and infidelity. The narrator becomes involved with Gordon’s friend, Peter Langford, whom she eventually marries, but after two more children, they also separate. Reflecting on her situation after the end of her relationship with her second partner, Gordon Campbell, she writes:

I felt like I was living tribal but with no tribe around me, no close-knit family. The food-gathering, the laws and songs were broken up, and my generation at this time wandered around as if we were tribal but in fact living worse than the poorest of poor whites, and in the case of women living hard because it seemed like the men loved you for a while and then more kids came along and the men drank and gambled and disappeared. One day they’d had enough and they just didn’t come back. It happened with Gordon and later it happened with Peter, and my women friends all have similar stories (p. 96).

Bearing a child virtually every year for six years from the age of sixteen, she writes of herself as parent at the age of twenty-four: ‘Sometimes I felt like a mother and other times it was like I was the kids’ big sister, still a kid myself and playing with them for the day, waiting for the real mother to come home and take charge of us all’ (p. 84).

Being ‘in love again’ (p. 111) adds a lustre to the struggle of her life, appearing to offer the benign regard that offsets the shame of poverty, but the mature narrative voice comments: ‘I had a record of attachment to men who drank or gambled, or both’ (p. 223). Describing one brief relationship, she comments: ‘I should have known his track record – he had kids but hadn’t raised any of them’. After the man gambles away money he owes her and disappears, she describes her resolve in terms of avoiding shame: ‘Never again will anyone catch me. It makes you think there’s something wrong with you. I didn’t want to feel bad about myself. But I should have known better’ (p. 223).

Despite such feelings, the narrator resists shame by representing herself as ‘motherly’, a self-approbation that overrides any shame attached to having borne all but two of her nine children outside legal wedlock. Her dedication also extends to ‘every black woman who’s battled to raise a family and kept her sense of humour’, situating herself as author in the company of women. None of her male partners, the fathers of her children, rates a mention at this point in
the text, which suggests that they do not come within her definition of ‘family’ in any enduring sense. An implied feminism reframes this version of the one-parent family as shame-free.

She depicts her younger self as a responsible and committed parent, caring for the children when ill, insisting on proper medical attention for them (compared with her own childhood experience of being denied it), working hard to support them when insufficient or no income came from her partner, trying to make unsatisfactory relationships work for the children’s sake. The narrated self makes different choices to that of her own deserting mother, who abandoned her family responsibilities. Langford Ginibi’s mothering compensates for the shame of her own abandonment first by her mother and then by successive partners. She cares for her own nine children and numbers of ‘adopted’ children, as well as keeping numerous abandoned animals as pets. Just as she represents her father’s commitment to her, despite the vicissitudes of her life, so she remains committed to her children, and particularly to her sons in gaol or reformatories, providing them with the benign, accepting gaze that counteracts shame.

Poverty and mobility create crowded living conditions which create strained relationships. On one occasion the narrator recounts that her only option appeared to be to place her children in an Anglican children’s home so that she could work. Compulsory removal of children by white authorities had given way to voluntary placement of children in white institutions because of poverty. This solution is only avoided by Peter Langford’s unexpected return to the family (pp. 102-3).

Yet the mobility is often related to family obligations, the observance or neglect of which is also related to shame. Moving to Sydney after her father’s death so as to spend time with his second wife results in her husband leaving the family: ‘We settled in but with thirteen people in a two-bedroom terrace the tempers flared and Peter didn’t like living in a mob scene’ (p. 102). On another occasion, the family is manipulated into moving by a sense of duty towards her father-in-law. Having agreed to move with Peter, Ruby is abandoned by him in the country with seven children and pregnant: she returns to Sydney, and doesn’t see him again for years. Selling her wedding ring to buy food, she comments ruefully: ‘There go the orange blossoms’ (p. 105). The narrator comments with hindsight: ‘I see from this distance now, it was another example of me being moved about by other people’s needs and I would not have minded being settled’ (p. 105). The narrated self in her child-bearing years is shown as subject to the shame of unwed pregnancies, poverty and domestic violence, having
little negotiating power with men, particularly in relation to their drinking and gambling practices. The number of children is clearly a pressure (two partners leave her when she is pregnant), but contraception is never discussed, as is often the case for women living in poverty, lacking in education and negotiating power.

Even political activism, a source of pride in Perkins’ text, is an avenue closed to Ruby while her children are young. Although she attends meetings of the Aboriginal Progressive Association in 1964, organised by Charles Perkins amongst others, she explains that she gave up this political work because her partner Lance objected, insisting that she stay home to look after her kids (pp. 115-118). Years later, on her first holiday away from the children (pp. 229-231) she relates that the work of her sister Rita on curriculum for the Queensland Department of Education stimulated her own interest in politics again. Subsequently, the encounters of her own son Nobby with the law lead her to a concern with the wider issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody.

The professional literature on alcoholism is explicit about the connections between addiction and shame (e.g. Black 1982; Potter-Efron 1989). Langford Ginibi’s narrative confronts the shame of her increasing alcohol abuse, vividly representing rather than avoiding ‘the desolation’ of Aboriginal society described by Gilbert. Her turn to heavy drinking and violence as her relationship with Lance deteriorates is described as a source of deep shame. After relating her violent response to his infidelity, a bloody fight at a hotel with the woman concerned, she explains her feelings: ‘I felt very bad. It was the first time I’d hit back at anybody in my life, I wasn’t brought up to be violent’ (p. 118). The shame of domestic violence is added to that of alcohol abuse. The relationship with Lance endures another seven years until Lance assaults her and the police are brought in (p. 144). After this, loneliness is kept at bay by evenings spent smoking, drinking and singing country and western songs at home with friends: ‘I always sang too much when I was drunk’ (p. 146).

Langford Ginibi attributes her drinking in part to a pattern of death among the younger generation, beginning with that of her daughter Pearl in an accident: ‘In my anguish over losing Pearl I started to drink heavily’ (pp. 148, 152). She describes the loss of one daughter and two sons. Other young people known to her die or are accidentally killed. During this period she represents her urban life as one of heavy drinking, with the periodic ‘blue’ (violent episode). At this point, the narrative undermines Ruby’s self construct as a ‘good mother’. Her oldest son Bill, on an invalid pension, does most of the child care. Her youngest
child is lost and temporarily abducted. Her older children are described as caretakers of their mother. After a three-week binge with two female friends, 'The kids hunted us home to get cleaned, saying “Shame, shame”' (p. 152). When drunk, she has bouts of violence which frighten others.

Her narrative represents her decision to give up drinking in terms of the gaze of an internalised ‘other’. Seeing herself through her father’s eyes, re-integrative rather than destructive shame causes her to take hold of herself again: 'All of a sudden I woke up to myself, I thought, my father didn’t raise me to be a drunken fightin foul-mouthed woman, and I gave it up' (p. 149). When her son Bill, an epileptic, drowns in the bathtub and her son David dies of a drug overdose, she does not seek comfort in drinking: 'I’d stuck to my vow to give up alcohol, so I had to take the full force of David’s death' (p. 227).

The final chapter includes anxious accounts of her son’s court case, against a background of concern about black deaths in custody. Yet it also undermines myths of urban Aboriginal community and represents an evolution in Ruby’s own self-construction as ‘motherly’. In relating her pleasure in her move to Allaway Hostel in Granville, she describes it as a place ‘for people who’d raised their families and didn’t want to become live-in baby-sitters for their kids’ (p. 266). The final sentence emphasises both struggle to resist the myth of social inferiority and the shame of poverty, and pride in survival. The narrator hopes that her book ‘might give some idea of the difficulty we have surviving between two cultures, [and] that we are here and will always be here’ (p. 269). The book itself has become a source of pride, both containing and distinct from the conflicts of her life: the mature narrating self can contemplate her life as represented in the book, thereby becoming the benevolent gaze that dissipates shame.

Concluding comments on shame and myth

In this section I have discussed the relationship between shame and myth in the selected Aboriginal autobiographies. I have examined the contention of Gilbert and Michaels that a ‘collusive myth’ has been constructed by both black and white Australians of an idyllic Aboriginality, a myth that has its roots in the shame of the reality of Aboriginal life. I conclude that the evidence does not support Gilbert’s contention with respect to the selected texts. While this view has intuitive appeal, it is not supported by the close analysis conducted of Aboriginal autobiographies in this chapter.

I also suggest that Aboriginal autobiography is better explained as a form of testimonio, and that furthermore, the testimonio offers an alternative view of the
relationship between Aboriginal autobiographer and reader to that provided by the collusive theory of Gilbert.

4. New narratives to resist shame

The fragmentation of what might be termed the 'grand narratives' or comprehensive religious and social frameworks of traditional Aboriginal societies, together with the shame of racist oppression consequent on the failure of European grand narratives of emancipation, are countered in the selected Aboriginal autobiographies by a number of alternative narrative constructions.

According to Jean-Francois Lyotard’s theorising of postmodernity, ‘the great narratives by means of which we attempt to order the multitude of events’ have been governed by ‘the idea of emancipation’. Among these narratives Lyotard includes the ‘Christian narrative’, the Enlightenment ‘narrative of emancipation from ignorance and servitude thanks to knowledge and egalitarianism’, Marxism and capitalism (Lyotard 1989, p. 315). Lyotard argues that ‘the very basis of each of the great narratives of emancipation has ... been invalidated over the last fifty years’ by events such as Auschwitz, Berlin 1953, Budapest 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1980’ (1989, p. 318). To this list of examples could have been added the legal fiction of ‘terra nullius’ and what Rowley termed ‘the destruction of Aboriginal society’ by European colonial and postcolonial practices of dispossession (Rowley 1970).

Lyotard introduces the concept of the ‘defaillancy of modernity’, which suggests in its turn another grand narrative, that of the decline of grand narratives, itself a grand narrative of ‘fin-de-siècle’ decadence (Lyotard 1989, p. 318). Testimony, on the other hand, appears to be a new, vigorous, emerging form of narrative with the capacity to respond to Lyotard’s exhortation ‘to begin to trace a line of resistance against our modern defaillancy’ (Lyotard 1989, p. 323). Testimony, which is concerned with particular occurrences involving particular individuals and groups, is not given to specious universalising. It is not in itself a grand narrative, although it derives from narrative practices in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Nevertheless, despite the particularity of the testimonial elements, the selected works construct new narratives which draw upon a number of the grand narratives identified by Lyotard as in decline. An explanation for the persistence of these latter narratives can be found in Charles Taylor’s

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2 The term ‘defaillancy’ apparently represents an English translator’s rendering of the French ‘défaillance’ which includes the following meanings: Extinction, decay (of family, race); (moral, physical) lapse; failing (as in failing strength) (Harrap’s 1967). Definitions in French include: ‘Diminution importante et momentanée des forces physiques; évanoisement, faiblesses e.g. (au moral) ‘J’ai souvent “de grandes défaillances d’aîme’” (Ste-Beuve) (Le Petit Robert -Dictionnaire [1970]).
conception of ‘the way that empowering images and stories function in our
time’ (1989, p. 95). Taylor suggests that certain stories, including those from the
Jewish and Christian traditions, remain inspiring even when there is no clear
understanding of the ‘underlying doctrine about humans, or God, or history’
(p. 96), and that the ‘secret of their strength is their capacity to confer meaning
and substance on people’s lives’ (p. 97).

The most influential alternative narrative in the Aboriginal autobiographies
discussed here is the complex construction of Aboriginality in Morgan’s My
Place, which draws on aspects of the Christian grand narrative. Other
significant narratives in these autobiographies include political radicalism and
pan-Aboriginality, the former related to Lyotard’s grand narratives of
emancipation, the latter reflecting a movement towards a greater solidarity
among the oppressed. The impact of the Christian grand narrative, introduced
to Aboriginal societies through the missions, has received less attention from
literary critics than from historians and anthropologists. Historian John Harris
(1990) refers to the narratives of Margaret Tucker, Ella Simon and Glenyse
Ward for documentation in his exhaustive study of Aboriginal encounter with
Christianity and the emergence of an indigenous Aboriginal church. Other less
developed religious narratives are Tucker’s commitment to Moral Rearmament
and Langford Ginibi’s tentative reconstructions of Aboriginal religion. Brief
discussion is also included of a narrative of reconciliation. The afore-mentioned
narratives all reflect a high seriousness, but one of the most successful literary
constructions of a new narrative is the use of country and western music to
frame Langford Ginibi’s Don’t Take Your Love to Town, also discussed below (see
p. 178).

Sally Morgan’s Aboriginality – substituting pride for shame

Sally Morgan’s narrative celebration of a revealed Aboriginal identity is a
hybrid form constructed from various grand narratives. Michaels has noted
‘something suspiciously odd ... regarding the forms of Aboriginality which
Morgan describes’, noting that: ‘there is a Christian mythology at work here,
acting almost as a kind of filter through which these stories are processed’
(Michaels 1988, p. 45).

Evangelical Protestantism, which formed part of Morgan’s cultural inheritance,
and in which the conversion experience is paramount (e.g. Richardson and
Bowden 1983, p. 191), may provide the model for Morgan’s ‘conversion’ to
Aboriginality. In evangelicalism the shame of the past can only be overcome by
a radical conversion. According to evangelical belief, an ‘essential’ identity has
been prepared for each individual by God, as one of the saved, but the
individual has to enter into this new domain of freedom by an assent of the will. As Krailsheimer (1980) explains in his study of conversion:

Implicit in the idea of conversion is that of forsaking the past unconditionally and accepting in its place a future of which the one certain fact is that it will never allow the previous pattern of life to be the same again (p. 5) ... One result of conversion seems always to be that the past, however apparently blameless before, begins to be revalued, even rewritten. The convert will see his newly found identity as real; all that previously kept him from it as shadowy, false or empty (p. 6).

Such a rewriting of the past might address the concerns of Bahktinian critic Subhash Jaireth, more concerned with discourse than ethics, who has designated *My Place* as distinctively ‘monological’ in that the Aboriginal strand of the protagonist’s narrative identity is the only one presented and that little is related concerning the implications for the subject’s identity of the belief that she was Indian (Jaireth unpubl.). The narrative strand relating to the white father and his family is silenced at an early stage, a point also noted by Michaels (1988, p. 45). The genetic inheritance of the white family on the maternal line is only discussed in relation to the suggestion of incest. Simon’s narrative has much more to say about the complexity of being of mixed race.

The narrated Sally Morgan’s search for identity is partially shaped by shaming experiences of racism which are registered in the narrative as impressed on her consciousness prior to her discovery of her ‘true’, that is, her Aboriginal identity. These experiences function as ‘proofs’ of that identity. For example, at the youth group at which the adolescent self becomes a Christian believer (Morgan 1987, p. 103) she is the object of wounding racism (although at that point unrecognised by her) on the part of a friend’s father, a deacon in the church, who asks her to stop associating with his daughter. She also represents herself as drawn to Aboriginal girls whom she meets when helping out at church camp (p. 110).

The adolescent religious fervour that worried her mother, although echoing her mother’s own religious enthusiasms (humorously described) is redirected to the pursuit of her own Aboriginal origins and the hounding of her family to reveal their stories.

Mystical or visionary religious experiences are also represented both as inherent in and as proofs of the discovered Aboriginal identity. Gladys is described as having a range of these experiences, some of which are recounted by Sally as narrator, and others included in ‘Gladys’ story’. Sally also recounts mystical dreams comparable to those of her mother. Drawing on the religious discourse of a European grand narrative, Morgan uses terms such as ‘soul’ and ‘heaven’, as in the following example: ‘The feeling I had about Lilia ran very
deep, like someone had scored my soul with a knife' (p. 227). In a dream about her Aboriginal ancestors, imagery of heaven is featured: ‘Suddenly, it was as if a window in heaven had been opened and I saw a group of Aboriginal women standing together ... A voice gently said, ‘Stop worrying, they’re with me now’ (p. 227). The vision is ‘verified’ by her report that on the following morning, her mother recounted a similar dream.

Corunna Station is represented in terms of the promised land, which echoes the Judaeo-Christian story of the Exodus, one of the narratives identified by Taylor as retaining the strength to inspire and empower. When it is time to leave, the narrating Sally comments: ‘What had begun as a tentative search for knowledge had grown into a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage. We had an Aboriginal consciousness now, and were proud of it’ (p. 233). But the conversion is not simply an individual experience according to the narrator, as it includes not only Sally, but also her mother Gladys.

The zeal of the newly converted offers a model for the intensity of Sally’s desire in wanting this conversion experience for Nan also. ‘And more than anything, we wanted her to change, to be proud of what she was ... We belonged, now. We wanted her to belong, too (p. 234). The ‘religious overtones of confession and absolution’ associated with the narrative importance of Nan’s awaited admission of Aboriginality are noted by Michaels, who suggests that the narrative importance of this admission is not made explicit (1988, p. 44). Yet Sally’s determination to invade the spiritual and emotional privacy of Nan, in order to change her for her own good, is consistent with evangelical practice.3 After an account of one of many conversations with Nan in which Sally attempts in vain to make her confirm the family’s Aboriginality, she continues:

I had accepted by now that Nan was dark, and that our heritage was not that shared by most Australians, but I hadn’t accepted that we were Aboriginal. I was too ignorant to make such a decision, and too confused. I found myself coming back to the same old question: if Nan was Aboriginal, why didn’t she just say so? (Morgan 1987, p. 105).

This passage occurs at the end of the chapter focusing on Sally’s own Christian conversion, indicating the extent to which the two identities are related (p. 103). When Nan eventually agrees to tell her story in part, the narrative includes a confession of shame:

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3 Edmund Gosse’s description of his spiritually invasive father’s evangelical views exemplifies this mode of thought:

my Father always insisted on the necessity of conversion. There must be a new birth and being, a fresh creation in God. This crisis he was accustomed to regard as manifesting itself in a sudden and definite upheaval. There might have been prolonged practical piety, deep and true contrition for sin, but these ... were not the conversion itself ... But on some day, at some hour and minute ... the way of salvation would be revealed to these persons in such an aspect that they would be enabled instantaneously to accept it. They would take it consciously, as one takes a gift from the hand that offers it. This act of taking was the process of conversion, and the person who accepted was a child of God now (Gosse 1949 [1907], p. 123).
I'm 'shamed of myself, now. I feel 'shamed for some of the things I done. I wanted to be white, you see. I'd lie in bed at night and think if God could make me white, it'd be the best thing. Then I could get on in the world, make somethin' of myself. Fancy, me thinkin' that. What was wrong with my own people? (p. 336).

But Nan’s confession functions as testimony in that her self-condemnation, bearing the marks of internalised white racism and her suffering in consequence, serves both to accuse and convict the white reader of her or his own race’s oppression. The pain and deprivation recounted in the story, related by an old woman who is only speaking because she is dying, serve to transfer the shame to the sympathetic white reader.

In this quest for 'the truth', Sally gives her narrative additional spiritual authority by recording fragments of 'dialogue with God': ‘I stretched and shouted towards the ceiling, “I’m not giving up, God. Not in a million years”’ (p. 352). When her grandmother is telling part of her story as she is dying, Sally turns to God for comfort in her distress: ‘I went straight to bed myself after that. I curled up and pretended I was in God’s womb. I felt so hurt. I wanted to contain the deep emotions that were threatening to swamp me’ (p. 353).

Sally’s sister Jill also uses biblical language. When Nan is dying she declares: ‘When this is over ... I’m going to stand up and be counted’ (p. 354). Nan’s death is associated with spiritual signs attributed to both Christian and Aboriginal sources. The family’s decision to pray with the dying Nan for ‘God to take her quickly’ is consistent with evangelical piety (p. 355-6). The call of the Aboriginal bird at Nan’s deathbed is interpreted by Nan herself as sent by God (p. 357).

The narrative’s representation of Christian belief for the family’s Aboriginal relatives up north creates a bridge for the urban family. Christian and Aboriginal identity merge in the conversation in Port Hedland between Sally, her mother and a local Aboriginal woman named Doris. Walking up to them in the street, Doris greets them:

‘You Christian people?’ she asked Mum.
‘Yes’.
‘I knew it,’ she replied excitedly, ‘I knew it in my heart. I was walking down the street when I saw you people here and I said to myself, Doris, they Christian people, they your people. Now, what Brockman mob do you come from?’ (p. 223).

The Aboriginal communities represented in Morgan’s text are a far cry from some of the desolate communities depicted by Ella Simon. Morgan’s narrative makes no reference to alcohol problems among the Aboriginal relatives she visits, although she depicts her white father’s alcoholism. In view of the explicit
evangelical Protestant commitment of her Aboriginal family, abstinence from alcohol may be a given, as it was for Simon.

Arthur Corunna’s narrative also concludes with a religious affirmation (despite his appalling treatment as a boy on an Anglican mission) which has enabled him to resist personal anomie and to accuse whites of transgressing their own standards of justice:

God is the only friend we got. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. You stick to Him, He’s the only one. Don’t listen to what others tell you about God, He’s the best mate a man could have. You don’t have Him, you don’t have no friend at all. You look away from God, you go to ruin ... Take the white people in Australia, they brought the religion here with them and the Commandment, Thou Shalt Not Steal, and yet they stole this country. They took it from the innocent. You see, they twisted the religion. That’s not the way it’s supposed to be (p. 213).

Arthur’s narrative relates that the family’s religious tradition derived from the Drake-Brockman family (he makes no mention of missionary presence), with the apparent exception of Howden.

The carefully constructed religious background of both the urban Morgan family and the rural Corunna relatives provides evidence that My Place is consistent with the genre of testimonio discussed above. Morgan’s construction of Aboriginality also draws heavily on the grand narratives of Christianity and emancipation. If My Place is read as testimonio, then the profound impact of the book’s narrative construction of Aboriginality on a wide Australian readership may be partly related to the shaping influence of a European cultural form deriving from an imperfectly recognised but nevertheless familiar tradition to white readers. This discussion also suggests that an unexpected vigour resides in some aspects of the apparently declining grand narratives, giving rise to the testimonio, a literary form that is not inconsistent with particularity nor with criticising the grand narrative in which it is embedded.

Political activism as a source of pride

Ella Simon’s narrative relates a record of community-based activism, reflecting both religious and political commitments, arguably based on grand narratives of emancipation. Simon constructs a strong and assertive narrative self in the field of community development, capable of courageous activity despite her besetting shame associated with being of mixed race. Among her achievements foregrounded in the narrative is the establishment of the Gillawarara Gift Shop at Purfleet, which also served as community centre and project funding agency. Although politically active, Simon does not represent herself as a radical, taking pride in her membership of the Country Women’s Association and involvement with the Country Party. She declares that she wants nothing to do with black
power movements (1987, p. 89). Instead she elects to identify with her part-
Aboriginal grandmother, whom she honours at the beginning of her
autobiography, praising her moral and spiritual teaching as formative. This
teaching is characterised as stemming from a ‘deep sense of faith - a Christian
in the real sense, as well as knowing what it is truly like to be Aboriginal’ (p. 1).
This faith involves ‘putting into practice the Christian teaching of forgiveness
and love instead of meeting hatred with hatred’ (p.1). It also includes rejection
of alcohol or other addictions as a means of escape, and avoidance of self-pity
and resentment. Simon’s account of her work with the United Aboriginal
Mission is consistent with her commitment to her grandmother’s teaching: in
religious discourse her activism would be categorised as ‘good works’.

Charles Perkins’ principal self-construction in *A Bastard Like Me* is that of a
political radical, placing him in direct relation to the grand narrative of
emancipation. Despite his close association with the Reverend Ted Noffs,
Perkins’ autobiography, unlike that of Simon, gives no religious motivation for
his concern for justice. Perkins acknowledges that his abrasive counter-shaming
strategies were unpleasant, but justifies it as the only effective way for a radical
to proceed:

> Unfortunately this is the only way you can do it in this country, by getting right under
> the skin of the people. You have to disorient them, destroy their stereotyped pattern of
> thinking about Aborigines in one way or another, and get them to think again. And this
> is one good thing the radicals do. They wake everybody up, stir their imagination and
> set people thinking ... Otherwise they go about their business and forget about the
> problems (1975, pp. 184-5).

Perkins relates how he would bluntly and persistently dispute the shaming
suppositions of white Australians he encountered, aiming to shatter white
complacency by discussing the harsh realities of Aboriginal life, such as
statistics on infant mortality. He quotes the kind of confronting statements he
would make when addressing community groups such as Rotary:

> [Aboriginal] babies are dying all over the place and you people are sitting here eating a
> full meal and getting your bellies bloates. You have more money than most Aborigines
> see in a lifetime. What are you going to do for my people? (p. 184).

Perkins also confronts the silence associated with shame, resisting statements
such as ‘Oh, let’s not dig up the past’ (p. 184). He writes: ‘The past happens to
be just about yesterday. The injustices did not happen hundreds and hundreds
of years ago. Also, I always believe that the past influences and guides the
future. It must be remembered’ (p. 184). This position is also consistent with
*testimonio*, which emphasises the importance of not allowing memories of
suffering and injustice to be erased.
Perkins, whose narrative is coloured by an often unreflective anger, nevertheless accepts that anger may be the white response to being shamed:

I said things to [service clubs] that I knew would upset many members. A lot of people would not talk to me afterwards. Those who did came blustering up to me and said, ‘A very stimulating speech, very stimulating’ – and then disappeared immediately. I would leave the club without any of the usual pleasantries or a handshake from the president (p. 184).

He also recognises that for white Australians to be confronted with the shame of racist practices will be painful, and in the following quotation he uses the image of the mirror held up to the self:

My attacks on white racism were most bitterly resented by church groups to whom I often spoke. The leaders became very hot under the collar about it because I dared to say that many religious people who had given half their lives to Aborigines had really wasted their time. This was a terrible thing to say to people who had devoted their life to something. What is that religious bloke going to do when he goes home that night and faces himself in the mirror (p. 185).

Perkins frames his frustrations in working within the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs in the years 1973-5 and the shame of his suspension from the Public Service as the trials of a political radical. He refers to his political outspokenness, unacceptable in a public servant, as one of the factors contributing to his de facto suspension (Read 1990, p. 177). The role of the media in this controversy comes in for attack, with Perkins using the terminology of shame, conflating his cause with himself as an individual: ‘Those hidden editors humiliated me, my family, my people and our cause. They crushed us when it was so easy to assist us. They belittled us when they could have understood us’ (1975, p. 197). Perkins complains: ‘I could not answer them back, as I had no newspaper and therefore could not place my case before the nation’ (p. 197). He describes this as a crisis in his life, a time of severe isolation ‘not only within the department, but it seemed virtually within Australian society’ (p. 197).

Perkins worked on *A Bastard Like Me* in the period of this controversy (Read 1990, p. 177), the autobiography apparently constructed as a radical’s answer to his shaming critics. Read, his biographer comments: ‘No one in the bureaucracy much cared for it’ (p. 177). Nevertheless, ‘The book was a great success, selling 18 000 copies in less than a year’ (p. 177). Read quotes Perkins’ reply to his critics, to whom he applies the term ‘embarrassment’ as a potential consequence of his breaking the silence about these events:

I’m not content to let those sort of things rest in the past and not be spoken about because those sort of things shouldn’t happen. If it causes embarrassment to somebody I couldn’t give a stuff, quite frankly (Read 1990, p. 177, quoting from Perkins 1975).
Aboriginal ‘nationhood’ as a new narrative

The concept of Aboriginal nationhood is most fully expounded in Perkins’ narrative. For Perkins, unity, pride and self-respect are the qualities required to overcome the shame associated with racism. In the final chapter, he outlines his political aims, should he ever become Secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, a position he subsequently held from 1984 to 1988 (Who’s Who in Australia 1994). His first aim, an early reference to pan-Aboriginality, was to build unity among Aboriginal people, tribal, and non-tribal, ‘a nationhood amongst Aborigines’, to create a sense of belonging, first for Aboriginal people in relation to each other, and then in relation to white people. His second aim was to assist Aboriginal people to develop self-respect and pride in their Aboriginality: ‘We must rekindle the fire within ourselves to be proud of what we are ... The Aborigine must be proud of his Aboriginality and all that it stands for spiritually’ (1975, p. 191). Although Perkins does not have much time for the black power movement (‘They can scrub all that black power symbolism from America’ (p. 190)), he agrees with Martin Luther King, quoting his saying that ‘there can be no integration without, until there is integration within’ (p. 191), thereby reinforcing his place in the grand narrative of emancipation. His third, also emancipatory, aim, expressed in shaming terms, is to address the economic, social and educational disadvantages to which Aboriginal people are subject, asserting that ‘our situation is a disgrace and every Australian should hang his head in shame – black and white’ (p. 192).

The dilemma of the urban Aboriginal, whose original tribal community has been fragmented, emerges in Langford Ginibi’s tentative textual move towards some form of pan-Aboriginality, in the account of the group tour undertaken by Ruby to Alice Springs and Uluru. The exercise is highly self-conscious as the tour is being filmed for a television documentary. The narrating self refers to her ‘Land Rights coloured hat’ (1988, p. 234), a pan-Aboriginal symbol, and records her physical reaction to her first impression of Uluru as a legitimation of the site’s spiritual significance for all Aborigines: ‘I could feel the goosebumps and the skin tightening on the back of my neck ... It made me think of our tribal beginnings and this to me was like the beginning of our time and culture’ (p. 234). This attempt to recapture the past without the particularity of Aboriginal association with a specific geographical area lacks the depth of her later work, My Bundjalung Country.

Michaels, quoted above, is critical of the ‘discourses of modern “pan-Aboriginality”’, which he describes as ‘a recent social construction which is characterised by denying the local particularity of past (and many
contemporary) societies, their languages and law' (1988, p. 50). Although Michaels argues that My Place contributes to such discourses, Morgan’s text conveys no direct concern with political action.

Country and western music as a mitigation of shame

The structure of Langford Ginibi’s narrative is based on country and western music, which serves as a new narrative construction for the story of a life lived without the support of a traditional tribal community. The title of her autobiographical narrative is that of a country and western song by Kenny Rodgers: the first verse is reproduced as an epigraph.

Narogin comments: ‘To many Aboriginal people, country and western was traditional Aboriginal music’. He explains that these songs ‘replaced Aboriginal song structures almost completely. The subject matter ... reflected the new Aboriginal lifestyles: horses and cattle, drinking, gambling, the outsider as hero, a nomadic existence, country-orientation, wronged love, fighting and the whole gamut of an itinerant life romanticised in the stockman/cowboy ideogram’ (1990, p. 63). According to Narogin, these songs were less valued by urban Aboriginals, although remaining popular among those who had migrated to the city from rural areas (p. 63).

The title of the first chapter is that of the song ‘You are my sunshine’, which is the inscription on a photograph of Langford Ginibi’s mother, discovered among her father’s possessions after her mother has abandoned the family. Langford Ginibi relates that country and western music was introduced into her childhood home by her father: ‘One day he came in with a gramophone so tall I had to stand on a chair to wind it. We played country-and-western records’ (1988, p. 4). This musical genre is closely associated with loss, the departure of her mother (abandonment by a parent constituting a classic source of shame), and also the death of her maternal Grandfather Ord.

But singing also becomes a life-affirming strategy for Ruby, inspired by a primary school teacher:

The teacher's name was Miss Pie, and she taught us to sing. When I went on messages to the other teachers I'd give my message and sing a song. One day, it had been raining for a week, I sang songs about the rain (p. 4) [possibly an implied reference to the line in ‘You are my sunshine’: ‘When you’re not near me/Skies are grey’].

The significance of the title song, ‘Ruby, don’t take your love to town’ is explained twice in the narrative as a humorous commentary on Ruby’s life, mistakes and troubles with men, the humour dissipating the shame. In a Sydney pub, she relates that she rejected a man’s advances because ‘I’d taken
my love to town too many times and I was always on the defensive’ (p. 170). On the road to Bonalbo with her sisters, on the way to a school reunion, she and her sisters sing this song. Langford Ginibi describes her light-hearted response: ‘I turned on a high black mama voice and patted my chest. ‘I took my love to town too many times!’ and burst out laughing’ (p. 242). The song has apparent reference, not only to Ruby’s succession of relationships, but also to the move from rural New South Wales to Sydney, reflecting Aboriginal cultural change brought about by increasing urbanisation.

Country and western music is also a source for naming one of her children: Ruby gives one of her daughters the second name of Linda, after the song ‘Please forgive me, Linda darling’ (p. 100).

The narrator’s concluding reflections have an urban Aboriginal setting, an evening out at a football presentation dance, with a musical backdrop of the All Blacks song played by the band Black Lace: ‘We keep the ball in motion/ Just like a rolling ocean’. In Langford Ginibi’s narrative, music, associated with ‘partying’ in the company of Aboriginal friends (and at times with excessive alcohol consumption), consoles the shamed self.

Aboriginal religion

Ruby Langford Ginibi’s and Sally Morgan’s narratives both include reflections on Aboriginal spirituality as an over-arching narrative. The final chapter of Langford Ginibi’s narrative focuses on two articles about a woman whom she describes as ‘a high priestess of Aboriginal culture’ and an Aboriginal ‘cleverwoman’, Millie Boyd in ‘Bundjalung-Githebul country’. Langford Ginibi makes a connection vital to her own identity between Boyd’s spiritual knowledge and that of her Uncle Ernie Ord, as well as that of an Aboriginal woman she once observed at Yamba, calling the porpoises. ‘The hair was standing up on the back of my neck. Here was information about a culture I thought I’d lost when I came to Sydney. Only it wasn’t lost’ (p. 261). This information about continuity with the past, acquired from the print media, a contemporary source, consoles her in her distress about her son Nobby’s court case and her low physical and mental state after surgery. This continuity is pursued in her third work, My Bundjalung People.

Langford Ginibi also relates that she was deeply moved by a traditional Aboriginal story represented in a corroboree on stage in Newtown in 1964. The dance that most deeply affected her told of a tribal family but had deep resonances with her own family story:
It was about a tribal family – man, woman and child. It told how another man came and took the woman away and left the baby to die. The father searched and hunted until he found the man and speared him. His wife threw herself over a cliff and died. The final scene showed the father burying his child, and it was the most moving part of the corroboree (1988, pp. 115-6).

The narrating Ruby describes in detail the grief displayed by the father, adding ‘I was crying by then’. Abandoned by her mother in similar circumstances, protected by her father, and subsequently abandoned by the fathers of her children, she identifies with this traditional narrative which does not idealise human relationships before white settlement but indicates that instability was sometimes a feature of relationships in traditional society also.

A few spiritual experiences in Morgan’s My Place are designated as distinctively Aboriginal. One example in Daisy Corunna’s narrative is her account of hearing Aboriginal music down in the swamp near their suburban home, explaining that what she and Gladys had heard were the spirits of Aboriginal people from the past (1987, pp. 346-7). This episode indicates mystical, intuitive and involuntary participation in an Aboriginal religious grand narrative.

Arthur Corunna’s narrative refers to corroborees at Corunna and to the powers of his Uncle Gibbya, a rainmaker, who promised that after his death he would be present in the form of a bird or a lizard to protect his nephew (p. 176). Arthur also describes his own unwillingness to enter into one aspect of his Aboriginal heritage, avoiding being ‘put through the Law’ (p. 180). His status as part Aboriginal meant that he could be exempted: ‘I didn’t want to go through the Law. I used to say, “Don’t let them do that to me, Mum”. I didn’t want to be cut this way and that’. Arthur avoids traditional marriage to the woman old enough to be his mother who had been picked out to be his wife, commenting: ‘She’s dead and gone now, probably still waiting for me in heaven’ (p. 181). For Arthur, the choice of not participating in the grand narrative of Aboriginal religion was available to him because of his mixed racial ancestry.

Moral Rearmament

For Margaret Tucker, the narrative of Moral Rearmament provides healing from shame as well as structure and meaning to her interpretation of her life. In If Everyone Cared, the central episode in which the gulf between black and white is bridged, is associated with Tucker’s introduction to Moral Rearmament. At an evening gathering of friends and overseas visitors, a woman tells the group about the movement and proceeds to declare: ‘I am glad to have the opportunity to say from my heart how sorry I am for my superiority as a white
Australian, and for our treatment, as whites, of the Australian Aboriginal race. Would you please forgive?’ (1983, p. 172). Public confession is part of Moral Rearmament practice, but whatever ideology lay behind the apologetic expression of white shame that Tucker recounts, its impact was profound and reconciling: ‘They were words I shall never forget. It was the first time I had heard such words said to us Aborigines’ (pp. 172-3). From this point in the narrative, she recounts her own growing involvement in Moral Rearmament, which addressed many of the contradictions she had been wrestling with in her efforts at self-understanding as Aboriginal. Tucker records that she was deeply impressed by the inter-racial and international membership of Moral Rearmament.

Narrative of reconciliation

In the process of reconciliation, the shame related to the experience of oppression, both that of the oppressed and the oppressor, must be confronted and addressed. By situating an individual experience of shame in a wider context, modifying the critical view of self by an understanding of oppressive and shaming socio-political factors, an autobiographical narrative can contribute to this process, a dimension of telling lives of which Aboriginal narrators are often very much aware.

The title of Margaret Tucker’s autobiography, *If Everyone Cared*, expresses a utopian aspiration for understanding and mutuality between black and white. Ella Simon’s title, *Through My Eyes*, conveys the possibility of a response to her narrative which will enable a reader to sympathetically share her perspective. In Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town*, a fourfold narrative purpose is set out in the concluding paragraph, where narrating and narrated self come together:

> I knew when I finished this book a weight would be lifted from my mind, not only because I could examine my own life from it and know who I was, but because it may help better the relationship between the Aboriginal and white people. That it might give some idea of the difficulty we have surviving between two cultures, that we are here and will always be here (1988, p. 269).

The narrator anticipates that the book will not only be a resource in understanding her own life and identity and a testimony to the survival and endurance of Aboriginal people but also a contribution to improving race relations.

The possibility of reconciliation is also present in Langford Ginibi’s accounts of occasions when hardship, suffering and shame are mitigated, when children find refuge, and relationships with others are not defined by racial issues. The
happiness and freedom from racism of Bonalbo, together with the sustained relationship with her father are shown as giving her strength. Reminiscing with her sister Rita, she writes: ‘We sank back in collective memory to Bonalbo, which we agreed was the friendliest town you could hope to be raised in, and had made us strong enough to deal with all the troubles later on’ (p. 230).

Langford Ginibi also represents the possibility of friendship between black and white, even in the context of domestic service. Unlike Ward’s harsh employer, Langford Ginibi’s first employer, Mrs Richards, allows her to use the gramophone, gives her a pair of ballet shoes and teaches her some steps. Ruby recounts: ‘I looked at my black feet in the pink shoes ... I could hardly speak. I tucked myself under her arm and hugged her ... Chiefy Pie [Mrs Richards] showed me some steps and she watched while I danced. I moved into another world and another time’ (p. 15).

Margaret Tucker recalls the efforts of local whites to prevent Aboriginal children from being taken away by the police, and the police officer who resigned over this issue. Ella Simon records the love of her white father. Small acts of kindness are recorded. Charles Perkins includes a short list of white men and women whom he admires.

Daisy Corunna’s story concludes with a hope for the respect that characterises relationships based on equality, as opposed to unequal relationships based on shame: ‘Do you think we’ll get some respect? I like to think the black man will get treated same as the white man one day’ (Morgan 1987, p. 350).

Concluding comments on new narratives

The Aboriginal autobiographies discussed in this section seek to counter the shame deriving from institutionalised and attitudinal racism by constructing narratives that offer alternative perspectives to European myths of Aboriginal inferiority. The texts variously present a narrated self committed to community service or political radicalism, to various forms of religious belief and practice or in the case of Langford Ginibi, to images of self in the narratives of country and western songs. A number of texts touch on the concept of a pan-Aboriginality to replace fragmented traditional society. Explorations of pan-Aboriginality create tensions between particularity and pluralism. Some critical writing, or even the lack of critical attention, to the texts under consideration, hints at an underlying prescriptiveness that is uncomfortable with, for example, an Aboriginal writer’s unfashionable commitment to the religious values introduced by European missionaries, to Moral Rearmament, or even to the political values represented by the Country Party. This prescriptiveness
constitutes a shaming mechanism that foregrounds particular choices of alternative narratives but silences others, thereby constituting an authoritarian and universalising stance in which diversity and difference are perceived as threatening to the monologising impulse. Critical attention to the diversity of resistances to shame in Aboriginal autobiographical narratives illustrates the degree to which the genre also resists collusive myth-making of the kind critiqued by Gilbert.
Chapter 5

Shame and the Jewish Immigrant Experience

1. Introduction

This final chapter examines three autobiographies in which shame is represented as part of the immigrant experience of displacement, but rendered more complex by the effects of twentieth-century European anti-Semitism which culminated in the Holocaust. Jewish autobiographical representations of the impact of anti-Semitic oppression on the self involve complex patterns of shame. Although racism is the source of oppression, as was the case in the Aboriginal autobiographies discussed in chapter 4, shame is confronted rather differently in the autobiographies of Morris Lurie, Amirah Inglis and Andrew Riemer, all of whom represent their European Jewish origins.

The chief distinction to be made is an obvious one, that the site of persecution and genocide for Jewish immigrants is not Australia but Europe. Although anti-Semitism in Australia is acknowledged, it is not foregrounded in these three autobiographies, in contrast to the perspectives of historians of Jewish immigration to Australia, Blakeney (1985) and more recently Bartrop (1994). Bartrop identifies elements of anti-Semitism in Australian immigration policy of the late 1930s, which, he argues, severely restricted the number of Jewish refugees permitted to enter the country (1994, p. xiv).

Colvan also comments on the ‘closed border mentality’, noting that ‘For many, the only real difficulty ... was being allowed to come here in the first place’ (1990, p. 4). Bartrop attributes Australian immigration restrictions to anti-Semitic attitudes: ‘governments during the war years did not want to admit Jews because of stereotyped notions’ (1994, p. 250). His perspective contrasts with the earlier view of Rubenstein (1986) who describes anti-Semitism as virtually ubiquitous, ‘with the exception for the most part of the English-speaking democracies like Australia’ (p. 7).

For European Jewish immigrants, residing in Australia or being admitted as refugees ensured survival, whatever unpleasant manifestation of anti-Semitism might be encountered. For Aboriginal people on the other hand, the struggle for survival began with European settlement, and contemporary Aboriginal autobiographies represent the continuing struggle to resist racism.
Nevertheless, in common with Aboriginal autobiographies, both Inglis and Riemer explore the self’s tendency to respond to racist shaming by internalising the shamer’s perspective and regarding the self negatively, particularly in relation to characteristics that cannot be changed, such as physical appearance. Lurie’s autobiography illustrates the way in which a history of severe racist persecution may produce emotionally damaged individuals who in turn damage others in the context of the family. The Aboriginal autobiographies studied in the previous chapter do not accord this consequence of an abusive history such a remorseless scrutiny.

The effects of racism in producing shaming behaviour within a group subject to racist shaming are illustrated in all three autobiographies to be discussed in this chapter, although it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish between shame deriving from racism and that deriving from the experience of immigration. Inter-generational shame is explored, and Inglis in particular confronts the shame of the mature narrating self who recalls the discriminatory attitudes of earlier Jewish immigrants towards the Jewish refugees from Europe in the late 1930s and 1940s.

2. Morris Lurie: Whole Life

Morris Lurie’s *Whole Life: An Autobiography* (1987) forges an alliance between autobiography and the therapeutic process in a narrative which represents and evaluates a childhood within a Jewish immigrant family. Patterns of shame and associated rage in this narrated childhood may be clearly identified, although critical responses to this text have not hitherto specified the presence of shame in the text, consistent with the invisibility of this emotion. The narrative appears to exclude socio-historical observations, focusing instead on the enclosed world of the family (as Colmer has noted [1989, p. 147]). Nevertheless, the immigrant experience of displacement, together with the distinctively Jewish experience of dispossession, underlies the troubled home life of the child self.

Lurie explores some of the themes developed in the autobiography in the fictional form of an earlier work, *Flying Home*, published in 1978. In this novel the impact of childhood shame dogs the protagonist, Leo Axelrod, in early adulthood, undermining his relationships with women, his artistic aspirations and his ability to cope with the routine stresses of travelling in Europe. Axelrod is haunted by three ghosts, those of his mother, father and grandfather, who travel with him in his car, meet him in restaurants and comment on his actions. *Whole Life* exposes a painful childhood closely resembling that alluded to by Axelrod, dominated by the same key family members, but, in the
autobiographical act, the mature narrating self confronts his own shame, evaluates and frequently rages at the adult behaviour to which his child self was subjected, and ends with a representation of their deaths. This literary act concludes with a release of grief and a visit to his parents' grave by the mature self enables the narrator to lay their ghosts to rest.

Colmer's study of *Whole Life* describes the work as 'manifestly a piece of personal psychotherapy, confessedly written to investigate why the author is as he is today' (1989, p. 151). Colmer observes that 'The author's rage is partly against his oblivious parents for the psychic damage they unwittingly caused' (p. 151), but does not mention shame. Clare, in his review of *Whole Life*, remains puzzled by the narrated self's emotional responses:

But where is the struggle, the conflict? What is it that has driven Lurie not merely to the 'creative madness' of the literary life but to a psychiatrist twice a week for two years? What is it that has him alternately shaken with grief and petulant with anger as he surveys the remnants of those former years and hears again his parents as they, together and separately, mould and shape the fabric of his early life? (1987, p. 11).

Clare concludes: 'I am not so sure that in *Whole Life* Morris Lurie is unravelled. But there is much of him revealed'.

Green's review notes that 'Moments of pleasure and joy are burdened by those of resentment and loss', but does not identify the dynamics of shame in the 'savage and moving allegory of his relationship with his parents' (1987, p. B5). A perceptive comment in Davies' review, although not identifying shame, detects a moral trajectory in the narrative: 'Forgiving this [childhood] neglect and betrayal is the work's largest moral feat, and it is not done lightly or easily' (1987, p. 29). Only Elisha, quoted by Colmer, draws out the implications of the narrative's emotional pain for a wider understanding of childhood. In the passage selected by Colmer, Elisha writes:

*Whole Life* is paean to the suffering of the child – every child that ever was, is and will be ... It cries out for the sorrow of all children. For the daily damage done to them. For the essential, inescapable injury they suffer simply by their continuous existence within the crushing confines of the family (Elisha 1987, p. 12).

Colmer, surprisingly, distances himself from the broader implications of Elisha's insight by the restrictive comment that: 'These confines are no doubt more crushing within Jewish migrant families than in other types of Australian families' (1989, p. 151).

My interpretation of *Whole Life* suggests that shame is the source of the childhood suffering highlighted by Elisha, and the psychic element which critics have overlooked in Lurie's narrative. The textual inscription of this
emotion can be clearly shown, and is frequently named. By confronting the
effects of shame in his childhood in an immigrant family, the narrating self
traces a path from rage to forgiveness. In an interview with Bob Brissenden
shortly before the publication of his autobiography, Lurie explained that the
title he had initially chosen was ‘Damaged Child’, but in the process of writing
he had changed it to Whole Life because he no longer felt that he was ‘damaged’.
Lurie described to Brissenden that after he had written three or four chapters he:

> finished with all those terrible things, those things that were done to me, those things that
> made me feel belittled and awful and I want to die and no-one’s listened to me and all
> that kind of whinge, whinge, whine, whine, whine (Lurie 1986, pp. 2-3).

The moment of transformation was associated with the sentence in which he
describes how his father brought home for him, from the factory, American
comics in newspapers that had been used to wrap a delivery of machine parts.
With this sentence:

> something happened. Everything became joyous. Everything was wonderful. And the
> name of the book altered. The book had been, in my mind and on paper called Damaged
> Child. And I could see, but I’m not. And then the name of the book changed and it’s now
> called Whole Life (1986, p. 3).

The confrontation of childhood shame in the autobiographical act leads to a
psychic release and access to joyful memories which shame had eclipsed. This
is the most explicit statement in the selected autobiographies of the healing that
takes place when shame is confronted in the autobiographical act (Lurie 1986,
pp. 2-3).

‘Not the real place’: the immigrant experience

The narrated self in Whole Life is not himself an immigrant, but the child of
immigrants, who met and married in the country of reception. The narrative
never names this country as Australia, nor the city where he grew up as
Melbourne. His mother’s home country is not specified as Poland: the narrative
simply relates that ‘She was born a Jewess in an anti-Semitic country’ (p. 37).
This and other biographical information must be acquired by the reader from
other sources, or simply guessed at. These exclusions increase the effects of
family isolation and displacement. In Flying Home Lurie’s protagonist Leo
explains his own sense of dislocation to his girlfriend Marianne: ‘It says on my
birth certificate I was born in Australia but that’s a lie. I wasn’t born there. I’m
not Australian ... That’s what’s wrong. I wasn’t born anywhere’ (p. 109). After
telling her something of his childhood suffering in the care of his oppressive
grandfather, Leo reiterates: ‘So that’s where I was born, that’s where I grew up,
that's where I lived. Nowhere. In a black cage’ (p. 111). In *Whole Life* Lurie represents rather than explains the impact of his parents’ and grandfather’s displacement on their personalities and behaviour on his family life as a child. He depicts a childhood caged by the crushing care of his grandfather whom he calls *zaydeh*. The chronology of the narrative closes when the narrating self is in his early twenties, framed by a narrating self in mid life still struggling to come to terms with the psychic pain he traces to his family of origin. Lurie explains to Brissenden that he began to write the book during a period of psychotherapy (Lurie 1986, p. 1).

The origins of the narrator’s father in *Whole Life* are even more sketchy than those of the mother. A visit from his father’s friend Blumenthal includes a reference to ‘the old days, when they were in Palestine together, boys, onions, milk, pioneers, young men’ (1987, p. 152). His father’s father, ‘*zaydeh*’, the ‘resident sponge’ in the household, came from Palestine, has a wife there, and returns there to die. The family genealogy is stated briefly towards the end of the narrative, as if to replicate the child self’s growing understanding:

> He [zaydeh] had three sons and one was my father and one was the uncle in Israel in his pleasant corner but the third was his favourite (as I was to be), the first born, who died of cholera when he was twenty, for whom I am named, in his remembrance, in his honour (p. 181).

The circumstances of his father’s family’s migration to Palestine are not recounted, nor anchored in time by specific dates. It is as if the particularities of the story have been lost in a dislocation that is as much psychic as geographical: the narrative ‘reconstruction’ of the family history places the greater emphasis on psychic history. The reader may deduce from this information that the father’s rage and inability to relate to his son without shaming him may derive from the preference of his own father (*zaydeh*) for the son who died, and his transference of this preference to the grandson named after his dead son. In an interview for the De Berg Oral History Collection (1978), Lurie explains that his father was unemployed in the 1930s in Palestine, and decided to come to Australia to work for a year and then return. Lurie comments:

> The unfortunate thing that happened to him is that he never got back, and he hated Australia, absolutely detested it, he had no family here at all, he didn’t like my mother’s family, and he was really a very bitter, sad man, who on the surface was laughing and joking (p. 735).

But in the autobiography, none of this is made explicit. Instead the narrator represents the father’s characteristics and behaviour as if observed by the child self who did not understand why his parents were the way they were, but
simply experienced their impact on himself and observed their impact on each other. This impact often involved shame.

In the De Berg interview, Lurie provides biographical information that is not specified in Whole Life. Both his parents came from Bialystock in Poland, although they never met there, but met in Melbourne as immigrants (1978, pp. 14 & 734). Lurie asserted to Brissenden that 'My parents didn't come voluntarily to Australia. No one came voluntarily to Australia' (Lurie 1986, pp. 25-6). His childhood was spent as part of the Jewish community in Elwood. Lurie attributes his own sense of displacement to his parents' experience of dislocation which they unthinkingly transferred to their child, leaving him stranded between his parents' country of origin and the one in which he was born, belonging to neither. His parents scorned their new country, representing it in shaming terms:

Well, what they did to me, having been driven here, is that they said that this society ... was what they called a Shrecklicheh medinneh - a shocking society, and not a real place. It was not the real place! I was ... born in what was not the real place (p. 26).

The child of immigrants is shamed by his own parents for having been born in a place that is not 'real', just as the illegitimate child is shamed for being a child that should not have been born, and the child of mixed race for being neither fully white nor fully Aboriginal. In each case shame strikes at the roots of the child's identity.

Lurie explains to Brissenden that: 'The real place was Europe, which had been destroyed. So there was nowhere ... they said, here's where you live nowhere – you can't have the other one' (1986, p. 26). The real place is rendered more remote from the child by functioning as a private fantasy shared by the parents and excluding the son: 'The other one was private to them anyhow – It was a far away look and it said, “What would you understand?” And you’d get a hint, you know, snow, forests ... Europe, you know' (1986, p. 26).

The Holocaust

The impact of the Holocaust reverberates through the text, although never mentioned by that name. In chapter 4, the complex shaming effects of severe oppression have been traced in Aboriginal autobiographies, with some discussion of the 'unspeakable' nature of suffering. Yet in many instances, the autobiographical texts constitute testimonies where suffering is recounted, oppressors named, sites of massacres located and shaming resisted. By contrast, Lurie's treatment of this theme is understated, consistent with Felman's discussion of ways in which 'the Holocaust still functions as a cultural secret, a
The Holocaust is represented in Lurie's text by brief allusions, either elliptical or chillingly matter-of-fact in tone. When violent conflict erupts between the adolescent narrating self and his sister and brother-in-law after the mother’s death, the brother-in-law is characterised briefly, directly, in one sentence: ‘He was a big man, a strong man, orphaned by Hitler, a survivor, made brute by the camps’ (Lurie 1987, p. 207). In a grim scene of violence within the family, the narrating self describes being beaten and kicked by this man, while his sister urges her husband on, screaming “Kill him, Joe, kill him!” The narrator describes himself as anaesthetized from pain by his own murderous rage towards his sister.

When the strain of his mother’s prolonged illness leads the narrator to a decision to take a break and travel for a while, his grandmother screams: ‘How can you do it? A Nazi, a Hitler! I beg you don’t go!’ (Lurie 1987, p. 193).

Lurie’s description of his mother as ‘born a Jewess in an anti-Semitic country’ is a deliberately bland understatement of the historical context: this unnamed country, Poland, becomes the site of the Auschwitz and other Nazi death camps. A brief history of his mother’s early life provides the motivation for her project as an immigrant: ‘to be the one sent to safety, to another continent, to another land, there to work and to quickly send back money to rescue and save them all’ (Lurie 1987, p. 38). He represents her success in simple statements: ‘Where millions perished, she saved her family, every single one’ (p. 39) or ‘She saved from Hitler’ (p. 194).

His maternal grandmother, a ‘hard woman in a hard time’ (p. 37), is portrayed as the tough-minded manager in the mother’s family, reading the signs of the times and responsible for the decision that her daughter should emigrate. Yet the explanatory passage in the narrative is both elliptical and circumlocutory:

So that when the times began to veer from unacceptably bad to some unmentionable worse – and you didn’t need to be a prophet to know it – when the hard mother looked about her and saw the black clouds gathering and when she sniffed the air that smell of fire and blood and murder and unspeakable crime to come filled her nose – and who could deny it? – it was only natural that this daughter should be chosen [my emphasis] (Lurie 1987, p. 38).

The narrator comments: ‘It was the classic migrant situation, the classic duty of the eldest child’ (p. 38). But in choosing to ignore the distinction between economically motivated migrants and those in a situation of political oppression which developed into full-scale genocide, Lurie attempts to
naturalise his mother’s immigrant experience as typical, partially effacing the horror, which nevertheless breaks through in his account of his mother’s drivenness and gnawing sense of economic insecurity, his grandmother’s upbraiding and his brother-in-law’s violence. The history of oppression may be also implicit in the portraits of his father and grandfather, in the aura of danger emanating from his father, in his grandfather’s ever present, sometimes externalised rage and in the persistent, inexorable shaming processes to which they subject the child. Lurie’s autobiography is not social history but psychic genealogy. The shame of the Holocaust becomes woven into the texture of everyday familial existence.

In the fictional Flying Home, the gas ovens are mentioned, whereas in Whole Life they are not. Leo Axelrod tells Marianne:

My mother was always busy. She had brought her family to Australia, ... saved them from the gas ovens. She had brought other people too. The house was always full of them. Survivors. This one had jumped off a train, that one had hidden in a cemetery for a year. My mother ran around after them, fed them, found them jobs, spoke to people (Lurie 1991, p. 112).

The passage is reminiscent of the beginning of My Brother Jack, in which the young Davy’s childhood home is full of maimed human beings, disabled veterans from World War One, cared for by his mother. Similarly, Morgan’s My Place opens with a scene in a repatriation hospital, where her own father is one of the patients permanently damaged by war. The wounds of history, whether inflicted by war, racism, colonialism, anti-Semitism, religious bigotry, economic exploitation or repressive social attitudes are a recurrent motif in contemporary Australian autobiographies.

The female experience of migration

Lurie’s mother is constructed as the family path-finder, the first immigrant, responsible, respectful to her mother, dutiful, serious, obedient. This path-finder role in immigrant families is often male, and the choice of this oldest daughter indicates an awareness in the family of her strength and obsessive sense of purpose. Her experience of the voyage of emigration is typical, unpleasant and not gender-specific: ‘She arrived with fearful diarrhoea and not a word of the language’ (Lurie 1987, p. 38). Her initial employment is, however, characteristic of that available for migrant women, a clothing factory: ‘This in a sweatshop, of course, the usual vile conditions, long hours, poor pay, darkness, dampness, black rats jumping in the gloom at her feet’ (p. 39). Despite her lack of experience in this work, she is described as observant, resourceful, quick to learn and frugal, able to send money home by the end of the first month.
Lurie’s narrative suggests that this stressful, exploitative form of employment permanently shaped his mother’s personality. He describes her as if she were a character from a fairy tale:

She worked like a demon. She was driven. She was like one possessed. She worked day and night. And whatever she earned, she sent at once ... It hurt her to keep a penny for herself. Her duty was to save them, clear and simple (p. 39).

This task accomplished, the mother is shown as never able to relax, always finding new goals to work for, new people to help. Earlier in the narrative, during the memory of the narrator, his mother is shown as doing piece work at home, sewing decorations on women’s underwear, and being upbraided by an uncle for not working fast enough (p. 27). Another income-raising activity is a clothing stall at a market, several days a week. This activity is shown to be physically arduous, with little protection from harsh weather conditions and heavy stock to pack and carry on public transport (pp. 158-9).

Once the mother’s major economic goal, the purchase of a house, is accomplished, the pattern of obsessive work continues, in order to furnish and renovate. The physical toll of this relentless activity is represented throughout the narrative like a leitmotif, her dark-circled eyes, swollen fingers, foreshadowing her death from cancer. Lurie’s representation of his mother’s employment experience as a migrant is not constructed as a case study in social history but as an integral part of the pattern of an individual life. His analysis penetrates the relationship between his mother’s personality, her life projects and the exploitative opportunities available to her as a female immigrant with no English and no formal training. The representation of his mother’s life and death is also a resentful disputation of his lackadaisical father’s careless taunt that ‘Hard work never killed anyone yet’ (p. 185).

Lurie’s portrait veers between understanding and rage. Despite his perceptive exploration of the springs of his mother’s motivations, and the constraints and pressures in her life, he is nevertheless enraged by her constant activity. His rage is that of an abandoned child, whose mother failed to give him the quantity and quality of attention he craved, and worse, not only failed to protect him from his father’s thoughtless shaming but for pragmatic reasons handed him over to a carer who deeply wounded him by systematic shaming – his grandfather, zaydeh.

**The male experience of migration**

The narrative tells nothing of the father’s arrival, his early experiences in the new country or the parents’ courtship. The marriage is listed as one of the
mother’s projects. ‘And found time to marry, too’ (p. 39). His father’s employment is also consistent with that available to non-English speaking migrants with little formal training: ‘The father worked in a factory that made carpets and blankets and rugs’ (p. 25). He is described as a ‘loomtuner, a kind of mechanic’. The narrative frequently mentions the black grease from the factory ingrained on his father’s hands and under his nails. The child self only visits the factory once and records ‘the din, an enormous place, iron, dangerous’ and in brackets ‘(My mother hated it)’ (p. 196). His father helps with the market stall on Saturdays in a desultory way, one moment an enthusiastic salesman, the next walking off in boredom, leaving the responsibility to his wife, reluctantly assisted by the son (p. 156-7).

At one point in the narrative, sympathy is expressed for his father’s limited life, describing him as ‘lumbering on to his beloved cowboys to ease him out of his dreadful day’ (p. 169). Watching westerns on television is a form of escape or consolation for the daily drudgery of factory work in a country he despises. Some similarity is implicit in his son’s enthusiasm for radio serials, American comics, and jazz.

The grandfather is also represented as an uncommitted immigrant. His residence in Australia is shown as prolonged but temporary, an escape from a difficult marriage rather than a decision to emigrate. As in many migrant families, the care of the young child is allocated to the grandparent, in order to free the mother for income-earning work. Zaydeh eventually returns to Israel, but the years of his temporary stay coincide with the first twelve years of his grandson’s life, and his negative influence is incalculable.

Shaming relationships

The child self is represented as anxious and sensitive, suffering from his father’s thoughtless shaming on the one hand, and his grandfather’s systematic shaming on the other. The shame-conditioned response of rage in the narrating self also encompasses his mother’s abandonment of his care to the pathological grandfather and her failure to shield him by restraining the father’s shaming discourse. The departure of the grandfather and his subsequent death bring nothing but relief, but the deaths of his parents, reconstructed in the autobiography, release first the rage deriving from patterns of shaming in his childhood, and second, the shame and rage associated with abandonment caused by the deaths of both his parents within a few months.
Although Lurie carefully maps out the sources of his mother’s obsessive work, in the poverty and danger of her family background which shaped the character of her own mother and in the immigrant experience which was sharpened by the need to save her family not only from poverty but from annihilation, he is also both enraged and devastated by her compulsions. As evidence additional to his own observations, he includes his aunt’s testimony of his mother, resting in bed with her new born baby (himself), in a weakened physical state after the birth, proceeding to stand up in bed to clean the dirty lightshade above her only to collapse with the effort. The aunt’s response, astonishment at his mother’s behaviour, corroborates his own adult interpretation of his childhood. This account is also corroborated by his observations on the progress of his mother’s last illness. After an operation she appears to regain strength, but he represents his hopes for her recovery as dashed by the return of her spirit of compulsion:

Except hour by hour, visit by visit I saw, I also saw, to my horror, to my grief, that she’d learnt nothing, she’d been taught nothing, she was the same, visit by visit I saw her body filling up with that old madness, that servant’s soul, the same as before, just the same (Lurie 1987, p. 189).

The narrator represents himself as emotionally neglected by his mother, always secondary to her incessant activity, sometimes an auxiliary, an unwilling helper, but never played with freely and gratuitously. Only his anxious need to go to the toilet during the night gives him his mother’s immediate care, accompanied by his own shame at disturbing her sleep through his perceived lack of physical control. Lack of physical affection from his mother is alluded to, as well as physical pain from the ministrations of zaydeh. The theme is more explicit once again in the fictional treatment of Leo Axelrod in *Flying Home*. Leo wishes he could retrieve some memory in which his parents held him close, but he never could:

I sit here in the dark and I try to remember when my mother held me, or my father, I want to feel, just once, their arms around me, their lips on my cheek, because I know that if I can remember that, just one time when they held me close, then everything will be all right, but I can’t, I can’t’ (Lurie 1978, p. 193).

In *Whole Life*, the narrating self, in attempting to recall some demonstration of physical tenderness from his mother, represents himself as a child rather than the reminiscing adult of *Flying Home*. The child self can only reiterate: ‘But I can’t feel it! I can’t feel it!’ (Lurie 1987, p. 101). Nevertheless, the care he receives from his mother, however inadequate, is life-sustaining. Of an occasion when he was sick and vomiting, he writes: ‘And my mother holds my head, her strong fingers on my brow, strong and tight, where otherwise I would fly apart’ (p. 101).
Although not emphasised by Lurie, the particularised experience can be read against the characteristic economic struggle and ambition of immigrant families, where all family members, including the children, are drawn into income-raising projects. The child self of Whole Life resents his own conscription into his mother’s market stall, and both envies and resents his father’s cavalier attitude, assisting when he feels like it and then walking off, with a freedom denied to the child. He also records the physical stress of this work for his mother, attributing it to her physical decline and premature death. Rage against his physically strong father for failing to help her is also implied.

His mother also contributes to the shaming patterns of family life by her interpretations of painful adult behaviour. Most damaging is her repeated labelling of zaydeh’s outbursts of rage as evidence of the depth of his love for his grandson (e.g. p. 47). The repressed mother also attempts to control her child’s emotions, although not to the same extent as zaydeh. One of her characteristic expressions is ‘Mi lucht tzu viel!’ The narrating self disputes the power of the adult authority figure embedded in his psyche as he translates: ‘Too much laughing? Don’t be silly! How can you laugh too much?’ (p. 114). In a stronger comment on his mother’s belief in the bad effects of laughter (‘Zit nicht gut eroiskummen! It’ll come out bad’), the narrating self expostulates:

The presumption of the woman! The arrogance! The audacity!
How can she say such things? How can she dare?
The power of the woman!
How can she know? (p. 116).

Laughter is one of the means of overcoming shame, and to suppress laughter is to perpetuate shame. Lurie uses humour frequently and effectively in his fiction, less so in Whole Life. O’Hearn, in an article entitled ‘Morris Lurie: the humour of survival’ (1982), describes Lurie’s humour as ‘particularly Jewish – built of exasperation and exaggeration running into fantasy’ (p. 25), a way of addressing pain and confusion in family relationships.

Despite her personal limitations and the limitations she imposes on her son, the mother is also the psychic bearer of a ‘magic essence or quality’ she calls ‘Leben’ (life), which she herself no longer enjoys but simply remembers. Leben has something to do with her old life and memories of Europe, although it was ‘gone forever by the time I knew my mother, never to be truly felt again’. When questioned by her son, she is unable to define it, although: ‘She made it sound like a taste, like a warmth’ (p. 37). The narrator, operating at the limits of communication, can only represent his inarticulate mother as he observed her when she was thinking about it: ‘A certain look would come into her black-
circled eyes, something of joy and sadness both together, a memory, a pleasure, a pain, a glow ... her hands for a moment would stop' (p. 37). But she excludes her son from intimacy, putting an end to his questions with 'How could you understand', and resuming her relentless activity, 'the subject closed in my face like a slammed door' (p. 38). Although the exclusion is represented in shaming terms, assigning blame to the child for a presumed incapacity to understand, the glimpse of an inner life of residual emotional richness is one of the episodes in the narrative which point to the eventual emotional renewal of the narrator and to the wholeness expressed in the title.

The first autobiographical representation of the father is of his grief at the death of his wife, described in a fairy tale-like passage as 'the miraculous servant'. The intensity of this grief illustrates the strength of his attachment, and dependence. The narrator describes his father as uncouth, commenting on how his personal appearance deteriorates rapidly after his wife's death. The father's slovenly habits are in marked contrast to the meticulousness of his zaydeh. The father's grief is said to have lasted fifty days, followed by ten days of illness and then death, which the narrator explains was due to a cerebral hemorrhage. The father is described as straining to follow his wife in death like a horse jumping a fence. The implication is that in his grief, the father had no thought for his responsibility to his children, but deliberately chose to die within a few weeks. This interpretation is consistent with the perspective of an abandoned child.

The father is shown as frequently and thoughtlessly shaming his son by generalised criticisms which strike at the roots of his being. The reader, cast in the role of psychoanalyst, may deduce that this hostility is most likely to stem from rejection by his own father in favour of the deceased older brother for whom his own son becomes a surrogate. He taunts his son for lack of aggressive behaviour: "'You're not a real boy," he said. "A real boy comes home from school with his trousers torn. A real boy comes home with a black eye. Look at you," he said. "Naah! You're not a real boy'" (p. 51).

Other taunts include: 'What are you, a cripple?' and 'You were born useless' (p. 55). The child is taunted for being a gentleman when he dresses neatly, a dauber when he paints, and is mocked as a scholar when he questions the double standard in the home about religious observance. The child self accepts his father's valuation:

I saw that thing in his eyes, that other thing.  
It was always there.  
I was not a real boy (p. 56).
But the narrating self fiercely disputes the father’s shaming, coming to the
defence of his child self and reproaching the other adult bystanders for their
lack of intervention (with his mother most obviously implicated), in a string of
interrogations of an ever-increasing violence indicating the strength of the pain
and rage remaining in the adult self: ‘And was he shushed? Was he silenced?
Was he rebuked? Was he scolded? Was he slapped? Was his tongue seized with
iron pincers etc.’ (p. 51). The passage ends with the shamer’s complete
annihilation: ‘Was his heart pierced through with a spear to stop it like a clock?
Was he made to be instantly and permanently forever dead?’ (p. 52). A reader
with an elementary grasp of Freudian theory could be expected to interpret this
wish for the death of the father in the light of the accounts of his death at the
beginning and end of the narrative, and to have some insight into the psychic
suffering of the narrator, anticipating the resurfacing of childhood guilt for
having wished for his father’s death when that death actually occurs.

The father’s string of insults routinely hurled at his son are recorded in both
Yiddish and English, including: ‘Mishuggeneh [madman]; pisher, dreck, kucker,
tipish, gornicht, idiot, nothing, shit, cripple, useless’ (pp. 55-6 et al.). Threats of
violence are also included, sometimes joking, sometimes real: “‘You want
pudoopah? (A punch, a push, a kick in the pants)” or “Villst a frusk?” His open
hand drawn back to strike, to slap’ (pp. 52-3). Once the child self is threatened
with the whip, a kunchook or Cossack version of a cat o’ nine tails which the
father has made himself. The father’s hobby is making knives during his spare
time in the factory. The child is terrified of him, never knowing whether the
threats and insults are real or a joke. The child self is ridiculed rather than
reassured when physical problems cause him fear and anxiety, when he
accidentally swallows a button (pp. 53-4), when a loose tooth causes him
discomfort (p. 54), when he is ill (pp. 106-10). The father also provokes anxiety
in the child by his unwitting clumsiness, which the narrative suggests is
repressed violence. The father constantly breaks whatever he touches, precious
toys, household appliances, with the son’s beloved radio also under threat.

The narrating self explains: ‘His sarcasm extended to every area of my life, to
what I did, to what I read, to what I listened to on the radio, to the clothes I
wore, to how I looked, to how I was’ (p. 55). No aspect of the child self was
exempt from shaming by the father. The impact of this verbal abuse is spelt out
by the narrating self: ‘The words were endless, spat out, spewed out, planned
and careless, flicked and thrown, a joke, a curse, a sound, a noise, but each one
etching deeper than acid, wounding beyond the mere marrow of my bones’
(p. 56).
At the end of the chapter in which comprehensive shaming by the father is most fully represented, the narrator describes a recurrent childhood experience of being in a trance, a form of dissociation, which closely resembles the floating experience described by Robert Dessaix as the aftermath of being assaulted in Cairo (Dessaix 1992). Lurie writes:

At night in bed, night after night, I experienced the strangest sensation. I seemed to be huge and weightless, floating out of and above my body, gently bumping the ceiling, gently bumping the four walls. I could look down on the whole room, on myself far below in bed. It was my soul, I think. I think I was trying to die (1987, p. 57).

The interpretation of this state as 'trying to die' can be read not only as an indication of the seriousness of the child self's emotional distress but also as part of a family pattern in which both zaydeh and the narrator's father are described as having willed their own deaths.

Lurie describes his adolescent self as so undermined that his lack of self-confidence almost amounts to a lack of self:

I live in the shape of I don't, I can't, I'm not able, I'm not strong enough, I never have before, I never will.
I know me.
This is how I am (p. 137).

Sexuality is an area so fraught with shame that he is too frightened to bring home from school an invitation to a Father and Son Night, and recounts that he hid it under a bush (p. 137).

The portrait of the narrator's father is largely unsympathetic, although far more positive than the representation of zaydeh. Nevertheless, the maturing self takes on some of his father's values. During his mother's prolonged final illness, he reacts to the strain by deciding to go away, despite the reproaches of his relatives, much as his father walked off from the market stall.

In his rejection of Jewish religious practices, the narrating self recalls his childhood envy of his father's freedom and defiant attitude to the observance of Yom Kippur: instead of fasting, he eats a cooked breakfast, counter to his habit on other days (pp. 145-6). Unlike his son, the father is not under zaydeh's control, yet his behaviour resembles the defiance of a child rather than the independence of maturity. Nor does the father rescue his son from the time-consuming religious observances which he dislikes, but remains detached, mocking and passive. Like the mother, the father has also abdicated his responsibility towards his son, giving him over to zaydeh.
The narrating self also finds evidence of his father's love for him, in the midst of his shaming behaviour. This love is expressed in the form of gifts, casually given, the contents of a pocket turned out on the child's bed, containing toys and a comic. One gift that has far-reaching consequences for the self's development is a pile of American newspapers salvaged from the factory, containing American comic strips which give the child a new imaginative world and as Lurie explained to Brissenden (see p. 187), became a source of psychic renewal when he was writing Whole Life. America becomes a metaphor for a location of the self that is neither the vanished old world of his parents' Europe, nor Australia, the despised place where they currently live. The comics also become a form of currency with which he can become part of a wider social environment than that of the Jewish community. Bartering comics becomes a means of involving himself with other children, despite the compulsory Hebrew School that deprives him of leisure after school.

Shame also operates in the relationship between the parents:

He goaded her.
She denied him.
That was the marriage (p. 199).

The narrator records this dynamic but declares himself unable to interpret it: 'And why he required this belittlement, why he accepted this self-portrait of lack of worth, why he ate this daily diet of pain, is not my story' (pp. 199-200). Nevertheless, the marriage was sufficiently nurturing for his father to be able to express affection for his son, if only in the form of occasional gifts.

In the representation of the grandfather, zaydeh, responsible for his care until the age of twelve, Lurie constructs a picture of persistent shaming. As discussed in chapter 1, in Erickson's model of the development of human personality, the second stage involves the emergence of a sense of autonomy, or conversely of shame and doubt. Zaydeh persists in a comprehensive denial of autonomy to the maturing child self, motivated by an inner need for total control, punctuated by pathological outbursts of rage, and exemplifying a process of surveillance recalling Foucault's analysis in Discipline and Punish. Lurie writes of his grandfather's love: 'It was like a shadow over every single day of the first twelve years of my life' (p. 48). Zaydeh is described as 'harsh and unbending, an instrument of misery and pain' (p. 49). The control operated by zaydeh is all-encompassing: 'I had to be a certain way and only he knew how it was ... It was inescapable. It was like an iron fact' (p. 48). The child is constantly under scrutiny: 'I was the focus of his days' (p. 47). His eating and drinking are
controlled by zaydeh, and a representative incident is being forced to drink cocoa on a hot day, making him vomit (p. 49).

Anything that threatens this control is subject to zaydeh’s rage. The child self’s enthusiasm for radio serials triggers the grandfather’s fury:

The grandfather hated the wireless. He loathed it. It made him wild ... It was more than a hatred ... It was a fury, a madness ... it was the black ocean that filled him inside smashing over some wall where it was insufficient for him merely to switch it off ... the grandfather had to fling himself into the room, bony legs banging against the hard furniture but beyond pain ... and ... bend down with furious fingers and from its socket in the wall tear out the plug (pp. 81-82).

This and other pathological outbursts in the narrative, including a severe beating of the child, are evidence that the mature self is representing a man who is mentally unstable, dangerous and utterly unsuited to care for a child.

Even as an older child, zaydeh continues to crush his autonomy. In an incident where zaydeh left him at the pictures [The Maltese Falcon], while transacting some business of his own in the city, the arranged rendez-vous fails. The child emerges from the picture theatre, possibly through a different exit, and after waiting for zayeh who fails to appear, makes his own way home. Although the narrator recalls his pride in this achievement (perhaps encouraged by the example of the film’s resourceful hero, Sam Spade), he recounts that zaydeh responded with anger and shouting. Although this could well be interpreted as a shame reaction on zaydeh’s part at having failed in his childcare responsibilities, Lurie simply records his mother’s interpretation, which conceals the adult’s inadequacy and baffles the child self. She explains: ‘He loves you’ (p. 48). The child does not reciprocate this so-called love: ‘I wanted him dead’. His response to intense shaming is the same as for his father, a death wish. The symbolism of the Maltese Falcon, a fabulous prize desired by many but ultimately a worthless fake, is an implied metaphor for the evaluations of others.

Zaydeh’s control over every aspect of the child corresponds to the father’s shaming of every aspect of his life. The two adults are represented as locked in a power struggle over the child, which the father has effectively lost, although he persists in systematic sniping. To use Foucault’s terminology, the child’s soul becomes a site for the power struggles of others. Both adults exercise their power through shaming of the child and sporadic violence.

When the news comes from Palestine that zaydeh has indeed died, the narrator recounts: ‘I was thirteen and I felt nothing, one way or the other’ (p. 181). But
he expresses the sense of release that first came with zaydeh’s departure for Palestine as a miracle: ‘I ran unchallenged as the wind’ (p. 181).

Zaydeh is shown as even denying the ability of the child self to know what he remembers and what he does not. In a significant passage about autobiographical memory, the narrator recounts that as a child in his pusher, he would be taken by zaydeh on the same daily route past a house where the family used to live. Zaydeh would point out this house and ask: ‘You remember the old house? ... How we used to live here?’ The child would answer truthfully ‘No’, to which ‘He would snort a pretend laugh. “Of course you do!” he said’ (p. 20).

The autobiography can thus be read as an affirmation of the autonomy of the narrating self’s memory in the face of the grandfather’s suppression. Emotional pain, including shame and rage, becomes a gauge of authenticity for the recalled past.

Lurie represents his relationship with his older sister as seriously askew, characterised by bitterness, jealousy and spite, which erupts into murderous rage after their mother’s death. The sister makes very few appearances in the narrative, all of which are unpleasant, and she is never named. Her jealousy is attributed to zaydeh’s preference for his grandson, however oppressive the attention, but is also shown to occur when he receives gifts from his father, helps his mother with her domestic work, or is allowed to listen to the radio. In the prickly home environment, solidarity between siblings is an option which the sister is represented as actively rejecting. Shame separates the siblings emotionally, comparable to the distant relationship between brother and sister in Patrick White’s Flaws in the Glass. Lurie’s sister rebuffs his efforts to communicate his enthusiasms to her during the years when they shared a bedroom: ‘The shape of her back is like a slammed door, telling me to be quiet, locking me out’. Two episodes are included in which he is accidentally hurt by his sister, whose self-justifying responses are ‘He started it’ and ‘It wasn’t my fault’. The father’s mockery of injury and illness appear to have trained her in patterns of shame so that her only concern about her brother’s injuries is fear of punishment for herself (pp. 70-1).

An account of tensions leading to violence after their mother’s death is the sister’s last appearance in the narrative and the troubled relationship is not resolved in the text. Although nothing mitigates the negative, sketchy portrait, the relational incompetence of the adults in the family is the backdrop. After the parents’ death, adult relatives demonstrate a bullying insensitivity in
imposing living arrangements which ignore the wishes of the orphaned adolescent and make conflict inevitable. The sister moves back to the parent’s home with her husband and baby: ‘to look after us, the boys, my brother and me, against my wishes, my desire, but arranged and agreed by the uncles and aunts and who was I to have an opinion?’ (p. 206). In an atmosphere of rising tension, exacerbated by the sister’s changes to the arrangement of furniture, a predictable area of sensitivity for the grieving, a fight erupts between the adolescent self and his brother-in-law, the latter egged on by his sister, in which the repressed fury from their childhood erupts in an explosion of physical violence that recalls the black rages of their grandfather (p. 207).

In contrast, the younger brother, who was born to his mother relatively late, and thus did not grow up under the divisive influence of zaydeh, is affectionately described in the narrative as ‘a handsome and strapping fellow in his thirty-eighth year ... and I send him my love as I write this’ (p. 86). Lurie’s fiction also abounds in affectionate portraits of younger brothers, as in Two Brothers Running (1990).

The chorus

Lurie’s autobiography is punctuated by explanatory comments on the narrated events, comments generally at odds with the self’s narrated experience, illustrating the extent to which the immigrant community in which the family is located reinforces the process of shaming within the family, further entrapping the child rather than offering alternative interpretations. When the child does gain insights into the lives of other neighborhood children outside the immigrant Jewish group, through his entrepreneurial swapping of comics, he discovers that their lives too involve beatings, pain, illness and other vicissitudes as well as play. In his relationship with his grandfather, he experiences his grandfather’s rage and sometimes physical violence in the course of being cared for by him, yet not only his mother but a chorus of ‘others’ tell him that it is love: ‘Yes, he loved me, and of course it was true, it was obvious, anyone could see, how he fussed, how he spoiled me, how he took care, I was his favourite’ (p. 47). Yet this chorus is oblivious of the child’s awareness of physical pain, experienced whatever his grandfather did for him. Even in adjusting his clothes: ‘he couldn’t do without pinching me, pulling me, twisting me, without causing me pain’ (p. 47). The chorus, like the parents, fails to validate the child’s awareness of the grandfather’s ill-contained rage, although some aspects would have been hard to ignore.
The chorus assumes that the child is saddened by his grandfather’s death: “‘You miss him, uh?’ his old friends asked me, old men in long overcoats, visitors to the house. “You miss your zaydeh, no?’” But once the grandfather has gone, the adolescent self disputes with the chorus, no longer permitting others to interpret his feelings for him: “‘No!’ I said. Because the question annoyed me, the way he had, the way they did’ (pp. 176-7).

The narrative gives the chorus a sinister, life-denying function in its praise of his mother’s role as the miraculous servant in the opening tale: ‘And everyone knew her, the entire community sang her praises ... In the city where she lived, her name was synonymous with virtue and goodness, with thoughtfulness and love and care’ (pp. 5-6). There is an apparent intertextual reference to the portrait of the good wife in the Book of Proverbs, a Judaeo-Christian role model that Lurie disputes in Whole Life although the narrator appears to be in ironic agreement. In reflecting on his mother’s death, the narrator explicitly disputes with the chorus again. The chorus proclaims his mother a ‘good woman’, but he contradicts them, implying both here and elsewhere in the narrative that his mother’s efforts to be a good woman, that is, to live up to and surpass the expectations of others through her ceaseless efforts, deprived him of the fullness of her love in life and led to her early death:

beware the woman who is called good, and that’s what they called her, how she was known, by everyone, the whole town, her title, her classification, her specialness, a guteh, a good one, sie given a guteh, that’s what she was, and still is, is how she was known (p. 193).

In attributing her so-called goodness to the brokenness of her personality, the narrative is deeply subversive of Jewish moral teaching. In the chapter devoted to his mother’s last illness, the voice of the chorus is transformed into headlines for each narrative episode, as if his own voice has joined that of the chorus, creating an effect of disjunction between narrator and narrative. This narrative device occurs only in this chapter, although it bears some relation to techniques used in the collection My Life as a Movie (1988). The sequence of headlines, gathering together snippets of hearsay, memory, and comment, appear to trivialise the trauma of his mother’s death, but also convey the bizarre aspects of grief, in which odd phrases and events become inscribed in the memory:

A MEMORY NOT MY OWN
AT HER OWN DAUGHTER’S ENGAGEMENT SHE COLLAPSES
WHAT IT WAS
A HORSE
ENGLISH MARIE BISCUITS IN A TIN
A NAZI A HITLER

(Lurie 1987, pp. 183-192).
This is not conventional remembrance as zaydeh and the chorus would have it but an approximation of the quirks of memory.

The healing of shame

The narrative opens with rage and ends with tears. At the conclusion of the opening ‘tale of the miraculous servant’, the narrator describes his current psychological distress, twenty years after the events of the narrative, his ‘hopeless depression’ and two years of psychiatric treatment, and expresses his rage towards his long-dead parents: ‘this son curses the servant and her husband the slob, rails against their dumbness, their blindness, their unfeeling stupidity’. In an image which transgresses all conventions of filial piety he continues: ‘in his black rage all he can think to do – and would have done, had there been the slightest point, had it been the slightest use – is to drive to the cemetery where they are buried and piss on their graves’ (p. 9). The subsequent narrative shows that this would have been an acting out of the shame of his childhood, which included being repeatedly mocked by his father as a ‘pisher’, only one of a stream of insults.

Towards the end of the narrative, grief and writing overlap as the narrated and narrating selves move closer together. The mature self records his first visit to his parents’ graves since their deaths: ‘The damn pen hardly works on the sodden page, but I make it, I force it’. He ironically questions the advice of a well-meaning relative not to ‘put in too much heart’ (p. 210). His emotional state at this point is depicted as grief, not rage, in contrast with the self’s first appearance in the narrative. Having spent his childhood shame and rage in the telling, expressing the emotions summoned up by the autobiographical act and interpreting in maturity the shaming behaviour of the adults in his original family, the mature self is able to contemplate rather than desecrate the graves of his parents. For the first time, he anchors them in a history that is not simply internal to himself, by transcribing the inscriptions on their tombstones, thus providing the reader with their full names and dates of birth and death. This is followed by a brief comment on the meaning of their names, suggestive of a more compassionate interpretation of the meaning of their lives. His explanation of his father’s name, ‘Arie ... the Hebrew name for lion’, evokes his father’s untamed ferocity, his physical strength and energy and the implied frustration associated with his ‘caged’ life. His mother’s name, Esther, ‘the beautiful Jewess who pleaded with her king and stopped the wicked minister and saved her people’ accords to her the dignity and worth of her Biblical
namesake, and honours her achievement in saving so many of her relatives and compatriots from being put to death in Europe.

In the interview with Brissenden, Lurie describes the therapeutic effect of writing the autobiography, mentioning in passing that he had been living apart from his wife, an indication of a personal crisis that may have precipitated the grief of the past (Lurie 1986, p. 147).

One additional aspect of Lurie’s autobiography should be mentioned in relation to the healing of shame, namely the importance of performance. The narrator refers to an occasion as an adolescent when he had the experience of discovering his comic, performative self among a group of other school children around a piano: ‘and suddenly I am cheeky and laughy too, I am funny, I can make jokes, I am the life of the party’. Instead of being oppressed by the scrutiny of shaming adults, he is controlling his audience, not through shame but through humour. Instead of avoiding the shaming gaze of the other, ‘I can look at anyone without turning bright red in the face, I can do anything, I am not scared’. Lurie describes this episode as foreshadowing his more liberated, adult self: ‘It was like a peep into a book I was not to read, not allowed to read, until deep into the future’ (1987, p. 137).

This episode illuminates the coda to Whole Life, a fantasy in which the narrated self performs in a jazz concert in front of his bewildered but not unreceptive parents, in a virtuoso performance on many different instruments. The performance can be read as a metaphor for Lurie’s successful career as a writer, a reading confirmed in the interview with Brissenden, in which Lurie equates his writing with his passion for jazz. The energy released in this passage, expressed as ‘Outrageous’, ‘boundless fire’, ‘speed’, ‘booming’, sweating’, ‘pounding’, ‘a tumult, a hooligan’, in shouting and ‘gorgeous ebullient breath’ (pp. 213-4) indicates a gathering up of all the elements of his childhood that counteract the suffering and shame, his father’s energy, rowdiness and anarchism, the music lessons his mother forced on him and her spasmodic attempts to appreciate his love of jazz music, his humour and ability to perform as a writer, the brashness and panache of American comics. This performative energy constitutes an excess of the magic quality hinted at by his mother, leben, and inscribes the narrator’s psychic renewal through the autobiographical act. In this imaginary audience, the shaming presence of zaydeh is nowhere to be found.
3. Amirah Inglis: Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood

The child self in Amirah Inglis’s first volume of autobiography, *Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood* (1983) experiences shame as an outsider in the Anglo dominated world of Melbourne society. Her unconscious and inadvertent non-conformity derives from her immigrant and her Jewish background. Shame is an inevitable experience for ‘the transposed European child’, in Joy Hooton’s phrase, although Amirah, unlike Lurie, is for the most part affirmed and sustained by her parents’ care and strong sense of identity. Her mother is shown as quite able to shame aspects of Australian culture, from deficient sandwiches to the women’s habit of gardening in hat and gloves (p. 46). Nevertheless the mother’s difference becomes an increasing source of shame and embarrassment for the developing child. Her father affirms his daughter’s developing identity in many ways, but shames her when she is unable to respond assertively to anti-Semitic taunts from her Australian peers.

Inglis’s stated intention in this autobiography was to explore issues of identity faced by first generation migrants after World War One. In an interview shortly after the publication of *Amirah* she explained the conflict she represents in the following terms:

> although I’m an Australian, and I feel like an Australian, I don’t feel dinkum. But I suppose that means that I think the only people who really feel dinkum are the people who really feel, for a long way back, that this is home. Whereas I feel, not very far back, that Europe is home. I think all first generation migrants must feel like that’ (Inglis 1984a, p. 24).

Hooton writes that: ‘the 1930s Carlton of Amirah Inglis’s childhood is coloured by European myths, a potent mixture of Polish nationalism, Judaism and communism’ (Hooton 1990, p. 286). Hooton contrasts this with the dominant national myth, that of the bush.

Unlike Morris Lurie, Inglis locates her narrative specifically in time and place. She records the date of her arrival with her mother at Port Melbourne (1929), the date of her father’s naturalisation (1939), and gives a careful genealogy of both her parents, including an account of their migratory movement round Europe and between Europe and Palestine prior to migrating to Australia.

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1 A second autobiographical text by Amirah Inglis was published in 1995, entitled *The Hammer & Sickle and the Washing Up: Memories of an Australian Woman Communist*, Hyland House, South Melbourne.
Despite various allusions to shaming experiences associated with the immigrant experience, *Amirah* is a narrative that exudes confidence and adjustment. As Hooton observes, ‘*Amirah* ends on a note of achieved reconciliation’ (Hooton 1990, p. 370).

Like the mother in Lurie’s *Whole Life*, Amirah’s mother Manka becomes proficient on the sewing machine, although this piece work is not interpreted as exploitation but as a skill which contributes to the establishment of a handbag business with her husband Itzak. Her parents’ work is represented as resourcefulness, a source of pride rather than shame. Although her parents’ work means that the child Amirah is cared for by live-in home ‘helps’, the narrating self interprets this also as an opportunity rather than abandonment: ‘these were the Australians I saw at closest quarters and they taught me a great deal’ (p. 47). The time she does spend with her parents involves enjoyable outings, picnics, children’s parties, shopping and occasional holidays or day trips to the beach. Her parents’ membership of the communist party gives them a circle of friends beyond the immigrant Jewish community and a stimulating intellectual life which their young daughter absorbs. Her environment is quite unlike the isolated, restricted family circle represented by Lurie.

**Naming**

One of the most painful aspects of the self’s experience as an immigrant child concerns her name: ‘Gust [her surname] was bad enough. Amirah was worse. It was odd, even for a Polish Jewish girl ... It was the first bane of my life’ (p. 3). The persistent failure of Australians, particularly teachers, to pronounce her first name correctly, arouses painful emotions which persist for the mature self. The mispronunciation by a health worker when the child Amirah is waiting at a hospital to have her tonsils out causes acute shame: ‘It was embarrassing, it was painful, and nowadays, fifty years later, it arouses an irrational fury in me when adult Australians without speech defects or malformations of the mouth mispronounce my name’ (p. 4).

The change to her surname is also linked with surgery. As Inglis puts it, the name Gust ‘had been hacked by bush surgery out of a real name’ (p. 3). Her parents’ name had been changed, from Gutstadt to Gust, as a result of her father’s acquiescence in Australians’ inability to learn his name. This passive acceptance contrasts with the deliberation of David Martin (a Jewish writer of immigrant background who migrated to Australia in 1949), described in his autobiography *My Strange Friend* (1991). Martin gives pragmatic reasons for changing his name from Ludwig Detsinyi while living in Glasgow: ‘He needed
a more easily remembered and less exotically foreign-sounding name because he was beginning to be published regularly’ (p. 161).

Inglis explains that ‘Gutstadt’, the apparently original family name, was also an acquired one, ‘during the old times when the Jews of Poland, who were all then called son-of-this or son-of-that, had to take German surnames for administrative convenience’ (p. 2).

Other aspects of naming that cause embarrassment are her lack of a middle name which she explains was not a custom for Jews, and the reference to her first name as a ‘Christian name’.

The need to conform

Two aspects of the daily life of immigrant children recur in immigrant autobiographies as predictably as the backyard ‘dunny’ appears in the autobiographies of the Australian-born (Colmer 1989, p. 9). Inglis’s autobiography is no exception in referring to the embarrassment of the un-Australian school lunch and clothes that mark the child as different. Inglis relates her success in persuading her mother to cut off the hood of her European red rain cape in order to avoid being called ‘Red Riding Hood’. She is less successful in negotiating for a school lunch that resembles other children’s sandwiches, ‘thin slices of white bread filled with dainty morsels of Kraft cheese and Marmite’. Amirah represents her mother as resisting the pressure to conform, deriding the ‘English’ sandwich and caricaturing this supposedly genteel style of eating as ‘mincing’ and ‘rabbity’ (pp. 5-6). Caught between her own desire to conform and her mother’s strong resistance: ‘an easier solution is to drop my sandwiches in the bin’ (p. 6).

She describes her childhood self in terms of others’ perceived judgements, as ‘a freak’ (p. 6), based mainly on her unusual name, but also on the absence of any relations in Australia. The detailed genealogy which she provides is a narrative resistance to the perception that she was without family or roots, although the family history acquires a retrospective poignancy when the tragic fate of her European relatives is recounted in the final chapter.

Her parents’ progress in learning English, with their more proficient young daughter’s help, is recounted initially in terms of laughter and good humour. However, despite her parents’ improving English, their accent is a source of shame: ‘I did wish very much that they could rid themselves of their accent. They obliged as best they could, speaking in much less embarrassingly
accented voices than many of their friends. Still they were evidently foreign both in accent and idiom' (p. 54).

The Holocaust

Inglis represents her childhood self as well-informed about Hitler in the 1930s, informed by her parents, a school friend from a refugee family from Germany, and by a book of her parents, *The Brown Book of Hitler Terror*, with graphic photographs of victims of Nazi beatings. She writes that 'Part of my reading diet was horror' and that the book 'roused in me a fear and hatred which I never overcame' (pp. 57-58). Her narrative is informed by first-hand accounts from her parents, who had travelled to Europe, including Poland in 1939, returning to Australia with some difficulty in November that year. In Poland they were confronted with the initial effects of the policies which culminated in the Holocaust, anti-Jewish laws and demonstrations, quotas or exclusions of Jews from professions and political parties, accounts of pogroms, separation of 'Jews' and 'Aryans' in universities, laws against Jewish religious practices. Amirah's mother 'found that she could no longer walk in the main public park of the city [Warsaw] because it had been forbidden to Jews' (p. 108).

Inglis's narrative is quite specific about the impact of the Holocaust on her relatives in Europe. Whereas Lurie uses circumlocutions, Inglis records in detail the fate of her father's family, the Gutstadts, and her mother's family, the Adlers. She also describes the period of uncertainty before the truth was known:

> As migrants began fearfully to seek their families in Europe, Polish Jews, daily more shocked as newsreels of the liberated concentration camps revealed the impossible truth, lived in an atmosphere of horror. Eventually we learnt what had happened to our family (p. 160).

Eight of her ten Gudstadt relations were killed, their lives ending in the gas ovens at Auschwitz. Two members of her mother's family, her brother Berek and his wife Dora Adler, also died there. Inglis is specific: '[they] had been moved from the Belgian camp many times until they reached Auschwitz, in the land of their birth. From there they went to the gas chamber and the oven, where they were killed and burnt' (p. 162). Inglis does not restrain her outrage, describing the events as a 'vile war, where women, children and old men were slaughtered' (p. 162).

For the mature narrating self, Europe is not a locus for nostalgic longing but the site of war and the massacre of her European family, in the outworking of the anti-Semitism that contributed to her parents' decision to leave Poland. In the
closing words of her autobiography, she is clear where her identity and her future lie: ‘By the time I made the journey back to Europe, I was the mother of several Australians. I made the journey by Qantas’ (p. 163). Her sense of assurance as an Australian far outweighs the shaming experiences associated with her immigrant background. Nevertheless, despite the differences in degree between European and Australian anti-Semitism, the young narrated self is vulnerable to shaming by anti-Semitism with an Australian accent.

**Australian anti-Semitism**

Inglis’s narrative includes a number of references to experiences of Australian prejudice, although it is clear that it is on nothing like the scale of European anti-Semitism. She expresses an awareness that Australians in the 1930s could hold anti-Semitic beliefs while maintaining friendly ‘everyday attitudes’ (p. 60). In discussing school, a generalised ‘they’ with a hostile gaze emerges, the gaze distinguishing the external differences of the Jewish ‘other’, physical appearance, speech, dress, diet, even smell:

What they *could* see and hear immediately was that my parents were foreigners, ate different foods and talked in a ‘funny’ way. What they *could* tell by looking at me was that I did not look at all like most of the other girls at Princes Hill, that I belonged to a small group who all looked different and whose parents spoke, dressed, even smelt differently (p. 59).

Up to this point, the shaming gaze could be experienced by any immigrant group, but Inglis distinguishes the characteristics of anti-Semitism:

We were all foreigners, all Jews, and I learnt early that to be a foreign Jew was to be a member of a group which was not only different from other people but despised by them. ‘Jew’ was a word that came out of other people’s mouths sounding bad. That made me uncomfortable (p. 59).

Inglis’s parents are non-religious Jews, so the child Amirah is not subject to the intensive religious training required of Lurie, shown as cutting him off from social contact with non-Jewish Australians. Her parents seem to be singularly free from some forms of shaming practice: ‘I never heard them attack any other religious group, nor did we ever in our house use the disparaging words ‘skikseh’ to describe the non-Jewish maids, or ‘goy’ meaning gentile, as many of our Jewish friends did’ (p. 64).

Nevertheless, the child Amirah experiences intense shame in trying to cope with anti-Semitic remarks by her peers. The anti-Semitism of a neighbouring family is one example. The son, Eric, her own age, ‘had that easy-going “Aussie” anti-Semitism which I feared and didn’t know how to cope with, and which got me into trouble with my father’. When she recounts to her parents
the boy’s remarks about ‘Jew-boys’ and ‘ikey’, she is subject to shaming by her father for not responding with a strong defence:

I had to admit that I’d been a coward, and said nothing. I didn’t say that I had blushed and become silent, that tears had come into my eyes, that I was full of shame; a shame composed in part of being one of those creatures that Eric jeered at and in part of not standing up to him, not defending Jews against his attacks (p. 74).

Her father’s expectation that she should counter such prejudice with a reasoned defence does not take into account a child’s vulnerability, and his anger at her incapacity suggests that her shame may act as a trigger for his own, conditioned by similar experiences.

The child self’s response to the social isolation deriving from the family’s move from Parkville to Elwood, and the shame of anti-Semitic taunts from peers who are not friends, is to retreat into a fantasy world and to converse with herself. Her anxiety is reflected in her account of how she would chatter to herself out loud in the street on the way to and from school: ‘My most trustworthy friend was myself, my easiest world a fantasy one’ (p. 75). In her final year at school, she is crushed when a reprimand from her headmistress for wagging school one afternoon with a friend (also Jewish), concludes with the statement that: ‘You are the sort of girls who give Jews a bad name’ (p. 148). As a university student, anti-Semitic remarks continue to leave her speechless. When a law student calls her a ‘bloody Jewess’ in the course of an argument in the Union, she bursts into tears (p. 155).

The self-scrutiny of the narrating self includes a confrontation with her own shame at the embarrassment experienced by her child self regarding the Jewish refugees of the late 1930s. Although she acknowledges at the time the Nazi atrocities which led them to flee to Australia, the child self perceives them not as compatriots, but the way Australians perceived them, as ‘reffos’, ‘alien looking people: they wore long overcoats and carried brief-cases; they talked in outlandish foreign languages; some waved their hands while they talked; and what was worse, they did it all on Melbourne trams’ (p. 92). The immigrant child is represented as adopting the shaming gaze of the dominant non-Jewish culture, regarding the new arrivals as her own family might have been regarded. The narrating self castigates the younger self for her embarrassment and lack of acceptance: ‘I wish I could say now that my reactions to them were quite pure, that I welcomed them with open arms and uncritically as the first victims of a policy that would end in unbelievable horror. But I can’t say that I did’ (p. 92).
Nevertheless, the mature self interprets the ambivalence of the younger self as deriving from a divided self, who, knowing that although she was ‘one of them’ [i.e. the refugees], she had also adapted to the host culture to the extent that the difference of the newly arrived Jewish immigrants was not only perceptible but also threatening to her own, now hybrid, identity. The new arrivals threaten her precarious double life: ‘at school a satisfactory Australian girl and at home a satisfactory daughter of European Jewish communists’ (p. 83). The immigrant child has learnt to avoid shame by behaving differently in contrasting social environments with different standards of behaviour and values. She describes the strongest traits of her child self as ‘anxiety to please and confusion’ (p. 149).

Shame, gender and the body

Freedom from shame is shown in her account of her parents’ belief that ‘there should be no prudishness within the family. So bathroom doors were never locked; we walked in and out of our bedrooms with no clothes on’ (p. 65). Inglis contrasts this with the shyness and embarrassment of Australian girls observed at student camps. But she also specifies the limits: ‘this freedom and lack of embarrassment stopped at adolescence and never extended to non-family males’ (p. 66).

Traditional gender differences were not reinforced within the family. Her father’s views, shared to a less dogmatic extent by her mother, were that: ‘boys and girls should be brought up in exactly the same way; that girls should learn everything that boys learn, that they must never be given dolls to play with, but should instead have Meccano sets’. The narrating self comments: ‘I never felt deprived, only different’. Her parents’ avant-garde attitudes towards gender differences contrasts with the source of the family income, the production of handbags. The narrating self notes her lack of interest in these items: ‘As I was not a “girlie” girl I never used or cared much about handbags, and can only ever remember getting one’ (pp. 94-5).

The deepest shame of the narrating self is about the ‘Jewishness’ of her personal appearance: ‘I longed, and did try, to be as much like Ailsa and my school friend Joan as it was possible for a hook-nosed, dark-eyed, olive skinned girl to be’ (p. 99). She explains that this despising of self was learned behaviour: ‘I had learnt very early at school that to be ‘swarthy’ or ‘olive-skinned’ was to be different, and, if not a disgrace, it was at least a shame’. Representing her internalisation of the Aryan stereotype, she describes her belief that ‘Proper people were “fair” with a milky complexion and blue eyes’ (p. 99). To the shamed self, her difference signifies that she is not ‘real’. The supposedly
‘English’ standard she sets for acceptable appearance includes fine straight hair rather than ‘coarse’, strong, wavy hair like her own, as well as a ‘straight, blond nose’ (p. 100). Significantly, her discontent with her appearance takes root when she is living with friends in the absence of her parents overseas.

Her self-evaluation, founded on shame, crystallises in what the mature narrating self in turn evaluates sharply as ‘a revolting refusal of self’, which includes her belief that ‘excessive emotion, passionate argument and loud voices were crude; that slender, aristocratic, blue-eyed, greyhound types were admirable, and black-eyed, more voluptuous, black-haired beauties were to be deplored’ (pp. 128-9). Her internalised Aryan stereotype of human beauty gives rise to adolescent attractions to non-Jewish boys only, apart from ‘a pair of blond twins who looked decidedly non-Jewish’ (p. 130). She describes her ambivalent feelings about Jewishness as ‘deep, secret and shameful conflicts’ (p. 130).

Despite her parents’ relaxed attitude to nudity, the menarche was associated with shame for the maturing girl. Menstruation was accompanied by anxiety and disgust for the narrated self, emotional responses which she shared with the other girls at her high school and which the mature self implicitly criticises: ‘How deeply the disgust at menstrual blood had seeped into our souls’ (p. 122). She also notes that her supposedly enlightened parents failed to explain fully to her the facts of reproduction. This task fell haphazardly to a school friend, and the information shocked and frightened her: ‘The paradox of my parents’ openness about the human body and their reticence about its uses and pleasures was something I noticed only later in life’ (p. 142).

At university, she characterises herself as ‘ignorant and nervous’ about sex, and her initial reaction to meeting Ian Turner, an older and more sophisticated returned serviceman, was embarrassment. The narrating self explains that soon after their meeting: ‘we shared our lives’ (p. 159), recounting frankly that they were interrupted in bed together to be told by a friend that the war was over (p. 160). With greater reticence, she does not mention that she subsequently married Turner.

Shame, Judaism and identity

Located in a non-religious family, the narrating self explains that her parents sought solidarity with the ‘workers of the world’ rather than with other Jews: ‘I was not taught Yiddish nor was I sent to Hebrew school, as other Jewish children were, nor did I get much in the way of a Jewish education. Only Jewish
history was presented to me as something I should know about’ (p. 64). The family did not attend any synagogue and did not keep a kosher house. The child self acquires an understanding of her religious heritage from other Jewish friends, including Miriam, whose family observed traditional Jewish rituals, ‘kosher food, the Sabbath meals with candles’. Miriam’s father speaks Yiddish at home, sings Yiddish songs and reads Yiddish literature (p. 86). Amirah is introduced to the Passover by a Belgian Jewish refugee family who invite the Gusts to a Seder. The child self responds with enthusiasm to ‘the ancient and alien ritual’, which the narrating self designates ‘a marvellous experience’, but the same family’s literalistic application of Sabbath observance is condemned by her parents and adds to her confusion as to Jewish identity (pp. 115-6).

Educated within the state system because her parents were opposed to Jews attending private, ‘church’ schools, she is exempted from the weekly religious instruction not because she is Jewish but because her parents wrote a note saying that the family did not believe in any religion. Her parents do not allow her to stay home from school on Yom Kippur like other Jewish children, but she asserts her identity nevertheless by telling the teacher that she is not allowed to write on that day (p. 91). She describes an atmosphere of religious tolerance at school: ‘I was never made to feel uncomfortable by this mark of difference. No one treated us badly for not going to religious instruction. As I remember, we were never jeered at or commented on’. She attributes this to the unpopularity of religious instruction: ‘At school, religious instruction was something everyone had to endure; perhaps we were considered lucky’ (p. 92).

Her first encounter with Christianity comes from Ruby, a young ‘home help’ with ‘solid Christian beliefs’ who joined the household when Amirah was about six. She is profoundly impressed by a Christmas spent on Ruby’s farm: ‘it was my first Christmas and it remained the greatest: the pattern against which all later celebrations were measured’ (p. 51). On this holiday she also attends the country church at Mount Cotterell, and learns the Old Testament stories from a book at her bedside (p. 51). Its deep significance is illustrated by the fact that the narrating self returns twice to this experience, once when reflecting on later encounters with Christianity, including Presbyterian worship with her friend Joan, religious broadcasts and evangelical meetings (pp. 88-9) and again when recounting encounters with Jewish religious practice (p. 116). She describes herself as ‘very interested in religion for the next few years [upper primary and high school]’, but only in Christianity, not Judaism. She comments that: ‘The religion I had really taken to was the religion of Ruby and her family’ but qualifies this by adding: ‘I suspect that it was not so much the religion as
the culture it was part of'. She proceeds to affirm: 'I was in no danger of becoming a Christian', and reiterates her father's conviction that Jews who became Christians were 'beneath contempt', explaining that 'Apostasy was still a sin to him even though he had no religion and he would never grant ... that anyone could have an honest conversion' (p. 89). As a final point, she adds that 'Joan's church was too plain, the minister's sermons too dull, to be seriously tempting' (p. 89). In other words, a conversion to Christianity would be too shameful a thing to be contemplated by the daughter of Itzhak Gust, yet her parents' rejection of the religious aspects of their heritage had destabilised the narrated self's self-understanding as Jewish. Describing her child self as lacking 'a solid base for my Judaism' (p. 99), she represents herself as more vulnerable to shame when confronted by Australian anti-Semitism.

Sources of pride

Despite the distinctively immigrant dimension to adolescent shame about parents, the narrative also expresses pride in many of her parents' qualities, their 'life-affirming' moral and political convictions, the 'robustness' of their 'cosmopolitan culture' (p. 150), their commitment to education, including self education, their strength, honesty and consistency of character, their enterprise, energy and resourcefulness in the new country. This pride far outweighs the child self's shame and embarrassment about their 'difference'. Sibling rivalry, an aspect of childhood explored in many autobiographies and often fostered by the shaming practices of adults, is absent from Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood. An only child for many years, the birth of her brother is described in terms of excitement and pleasure.

Although the mature narrating self is critical of her father's attitude that the Soviet Union could do no wrong, her parents' involvement in communism is presented as a source of rich childhood experience, and far less problematic as a cause for shaming from others than being Jewish: 'Compared to these deep, secret and shameful conflicts [about Jewish identity], the problems of my parents' communism seemed altogether more straightforward' (p. 130). Nevertheless the conflict between the ceremonies and values of the dominant culture and her parents' convictions do on occasion give rise to shame. Anzac Day is one example where a source of pride for Australians becomes a source of shame for immigrant children. She represents her childhood emotions as follows:
Admiration, envy, a twinge of shame and antagonism were the emotions that simmered in my flat chest. Admiration for the bravery, envy of those medals, shame that my father had not fought in this Great War and antagonism because he believed that the war was not great but an imperialist blood bath (p. 81).

The narrating self’s pride in her academic achievement in the Leaving Certificate examinations reflects the values she has highlighted in her parents, although she also alludes to a degree of doubt and anxiety about her abilities which she relates to her father’s ‘disapproval of praise’ (p. 151). Her success compensates for the anti-Semitism of her school headmistress: ‘I wondered ... whether our teacher thought this success gave Jews a good name’ (p. 148). In an understated critique, the mature narrating self mentions that she only saw her name on the school honour board (together with those of two other daughters of Jewish migrants) forty years later, implying she was neither congratulated nor honoured by the school at the time of her success.

‘Un-Australian’ or representative?

As Ron Elisha points out in reviewing Morris Lurie’s Whole Life, an autobiography may speak powerfully for the suffering of all children. As shame is a common source of childhood suffering, an autobiography which represents childhood shame effectively may elicit sympathetic responses from a disparate group of readers. This is illustrated by reader responses to Amirah Inglis’s autobiography. Interviewed after the publication of her autobiography, Inglis is quoted as saying:

Despite the fact that it’s dealing with the un-Australianness of my childhood, a great number of comments that I’ve had are from people who had an Australian childhood but who yet find a lot in the book to sympathise with (Inglis 1984b, p. 26).

In Inglis’s autobiography, the narrating subject’s representation of the conflict between her admiration and respect for her parents, and her shame at their difference mirrors an adolescent experience of identity formation shared by many. Similarly, her shame at being unable fulfil her father’s expectations by responding assertively to teasing is a painful and not unusual experience, although intensified by the anti-Semitic context. When the deliberate textual representation of shame in the narrative of a life elicits a sympathetic recognition by the reader of common affective experience, it becomes a means of bridging the inter-personal gap created by those aspects of the narrated life which are ‘other’.
4. Andrew Riemer: *Inside Outside* and *The Habsburg Café*

Andrew Riemer’s autobiographical exploration of shame and the immigrant experience remains unresolved in *Inside Outside* (1992), whereas the concluding chapters of the sequel, *The Habsburg Café* (1993), represent a resolution of shame and a re-integration of opposing voices within the self. Riemer’s preface to *Inside Outside* includes a disclaimer that foreshadows the reticence of the text, deflecting the reader’s attention from self to society:

> This is not an autobiography, but it is a book about the past and the present, generated by deeply personal memories and by the changes I have observed both within myself and in Australian society in the years since the end of the Second World War (1992, p. ix).

Similarly, *The Habsburg Café* is designated in the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* as a hybrid form that is not strictly autobiography but rather ‘a mixture of reminiscence, autobiography, travelogue and family history’ (Wilde et al. 1994, p. 649). Nevertheless, both works were adjudged appropriate for publication in the Angus and Robertson ‘Imprint Lives’ series. The hybridity is indicative of an autobiographical reticence associated with shame and which is overcome in *The Habsburg Café* by the representation of a public declaration of the pain of past oppression.

Only brief reference will be made in this discussion to Riemer’s most recent work, *America with Subtitles* (1995), which covers much similar ground to the earlier texts. As reviewer Evelyn Juers points out, ‘*America with Subtitles* is structured much like the earlier versions, with a great deal of repetition both within and between the texts’, noting that ‘Unkindly, some have suggested that he has now written the same book three times’ (Juers 1995, p. 10). Nevertheless, Juers has observed Riemer’s ‘fascination with the aesthetics of discomfort’ and comments that with each autobiographical venture ‘his approach varies, as if to catch the subject in a different light’ (Juers 1995, p. 10). I would argue that each text involves a closer confrontation with shame. Juers notes in her review that ‘Throughout his three autobiographical works Riemer lets loose a truly vast vocabulary of disdain against all that seems grubby, dreary, ordinary, vulgar, banal, smelly, dusty, grotesque, depressing …’ (p. 10). The discourse of disdain constitutes a form of shaming.

Reviewers have commented upon the interlocking of personal and social history in *Inside Outside*. Harris notes that the narrative is not only reminiscence but a contribution to current debate about the impact of immigration on Australian society:
More than merely a personal ghost-laying, it is a discovery of Australian society from the years of mass-migration to the end of this century when the effects of migration policies remain a troublesome debate (1992, p. 10).

However this observation could also be applied to the explicitly autobiographical *Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood*, and as with *Amirah*, the autobiographical aspect of Riemer’s text has resonances that are wider than the migrant focus. Harris also comments: ‘Whether migrants or not, we all share the disturbing perplexities of the cleavage between our past and present’ (Harris 1992, p. 10). But for Riemer as autobiographer, the ghost-laying is not completed in *Inside Outside*, but is tackled again in the return visit to Hungary related in *The Habsburg Café* and in the trip to America represented in *America with Subtitles*. Moreover, Riemer’s texts initially avoid but ultimately address a particular and deeply painful cleavage between past and present that is not shared by all Australians, namely that of being a European Jewish survivor of Nazi persecution.

Reviewers of *Inside Outside* have not emphasised issues of race in this work, choosing to discuss Riemer’s own overt focus on immigration issues. Safransky writes:

> The central theme of *Inside Outside* is probably the personal cost of assimilating into Australian society – Riemer’s life is an ‘emotional vacuum’ until he acquires the veneer to ‘suppress my European self’ and escape from xenophobic Epping (1992, p. 8).

**Self-parody and authenticity**

The ability to mimic or parody is a recurrent theme in *Inside Outside*. Reviewer Rex Davis writes that ‘Parody and mimicry are twin threads of the cord of survival running through this book’ (1992, p. 126). The narrator describes the process whereby the adolescent self attempts to create or remake himself in order to assimilate to Australian society. Imitation is a practice he adopts in order to present a self acceptable to and unlikely to be shamed by the more powerful regarding other, the Australian-born. The impulse to create a self appropriate to the receiving culture is shaped by his initial experience of school in Australia, which is one of extreme shame. He represents himself on his first day at primary school as ‘isolated in the middle of a circle of curious faces, an outsider even though I was standing in the middle of that circle’ (1992, p. 91). Dressed in inappropriate clothes and without a word of English, he describes himself as ‘a garish parrot amidst a flock of drab sparrows’ (1992, p. 90). To the child self, ‘a product of a culture which habitually employed exaggerated gestures, smiles and other facial expressions’, the staring Australian children and their teachers appear inscrutable (1992, p. 92).
In adolescence he recalls: ‘in my teens I did everything to avoid having to speak Hungarian’ (1992, p. 85). The problem of the contradictory demands placed on the adolescent’s social behaviour by his parents’ Hungarian circle and the wider Australian community in which he moved led him to embark on the ‘career of a parodist and mimic’ (1992, p. 88). As an adolescent, he represents himself as having learnt to parody so successfully as to become ‘wholly uninteresting’ (1992, p. 144). ‘My adolescence was boring, unsatisfying and obsessed with the need to become indistinguishable from people I took to be genuinely Australian. I even lacked the excitement of being unusual’ (1992, p. 143). The parrot had transformed himself successfully into a sparrow, the cost being ‘the suppression of life-sustaining emotional energies’ (1992, p. 146): ‘The lack of personality that afflicted me when the drab adolescent replaced the multi-coloured freak ... revealed the extent of my spiritual impoverishment’ (1992, p. 146).

Isaac Mayer Wise, whose autobiographical account of his first years as a German-Jewish immigrant in America were published in 1901 as Reminiscences, also uses the terms ‘parody’ with reference to assimilation as a response to ‘disgrace’. Wise attributes the tendency to parody to a loss of self consequent on ‘The century-long oppression [which] has demoralized the German and Polish Jew and robbed him of his self-respect’ (in Gross 1973, p. 10). Wise continues: ‘The Jew ... parodies and imitates, because he has lost himself’. Wise describes a Jewish immigrant community beset by shame, whose members ‘revile and traduce each other’ while ‘cringing to every Christian fashion’. His solution is assimilation:

The Jew must be Americanized, I said to myself, for every German book, every German word reminds him of the old disgrace ... We must be not only American citizens, but become Americans through and through, outside of the synagogue (Gross 1973, pp. 10-11).

Riemer describes his pursuit of a comparable policy of assimilation as a young immigrant in Australia, although for Riemer there is no synagogue, his parents being entirely secularised:

I had to unlearn or suppress - it comes to much the same thing- our old way of life in my attempt to become assimilated, that is to say, to assume the forms, rituals and habits of a very different culture ... My past had to be eradicated’ (1992, p. 88).

However in Riemer’s work, for the narrating self, despite the memory of ‘humiliations, anxieties and anguish’ (1992, p. 85) associated with the process of acquiring a new language and absorbing a new culture, there is no uncritical ‘cringing to every Christian fashion’ in the quest for identity that coincides with his adolescence. Although he explores Anglicanism, he discards it as ultimately
inconsistent with his emerging sense of self. He also evaluates and rejects aspects of Hungarian culture, rituals and conventions. For example, he expresses dislike for the way ‘Hungarians commonly fawn over children’, identifying ‘something basically shaming and demeaning in these rituals of fawning and petting, as if you were an object rather than a human being’ (1992, p. 87).

A capacity for parody does not obviate one aspect of the shame of difference for the immigrant, that of physical appearance. Riemer introduces this problem within the first few pages of *Inside Outside*, observing that being Australian ‘meant possessing the physical characteristics of people whose forbears came from the British Isles’ (1992, p. 4). As previously discussed, the shame of physical difference was also a problem for Amirah Inglis. In *Inside Outside*, the narrator refers to his first visit to Budapest after more than forty years, observing with Australian eyes ‘all those funny little people milling around me’. Then a painful realisation occurs: ‘It took more than a moment’s reflection to realise, with a mixture of shame and distress, that I am one of those funny little people’ (1992, p. 4).

**Psychic structures**

For the young immigrant, shame resides in the awareness that the self is acting a part, not quite perfectly, leading him to observe that:

> even if you have managed to assume the superficial characteristics of an alien culture, the feat always retains some elements of parody. No matter how thoroughly you have been absorbed by your adopted society, and even if you have been accepted within its structures, as I have been, your otherness cannot be expunged (1992, p. 5).

This leads him to a critique of the ‘often simple-minded and pointless controversies about multiculturalism’ (1992, p. 5), which include on the one hand the belief that full assimilation is possible, and on the other, an unrealistic desire to preserve an ‘ethnic’ identity unaltered.

For the narrator’s parents, patterns of shame are more complicated and difficult for even their highly self-conscious son to unravel. For example, he is puzzled by his parents’ choice of some friends, who are in his eyes intolerably neurotic and unpleasant. He interprets this relationship as a way of avoiding being shamed by friends who were better off and concludes that this choice of friends indicated that ‘exile ... had somehow thrown their emotional and ethical responses entirely out of balance’ (1992, pp. 124-5).
Paranoia and shame reversal

Riemer gives a powerful analysis of a non-English speaking child’s experience of immersion in an English-speaking community. Initial confusion gives way to paranoia. When the class laughs at the teacher’s joke, incomprehensible to him, he wonders: ‘was I the butt of that joke?’ (1992, p. 92). Paranoia is in turn replaced by a psychic defence system in which shame is reversed, and he reacts with disgust to the people whom he cannot understand: ‘I grew ... disgusted with the people around me ... These perfectly ordinary inhabitants filled me with loathing and a sense of anguish that became ... unbearable.’ Riemer offers his own perceptive interpretation for this emotional reaction, indicating his own self-mastery, which he contrasts with the lack of self-understanding shown by his parents’ generation. He explains:

Because my command of English was so rudimentary at the time ... my despair and isolation were particularly aggravated because I was trapped within my introspective, indeed solipsistic world. If you cannot reach out to the people among whom you are forced to live, it is fatally easy to fall into the error that the lack is in them, that somehow they belong to an inferior order of being (1992, p. 103).

Anomie and the problem of memory

For the narrating self, the immigrant experience involves ‘the anxiety of living between two worlds’ (1992, p. 5), whereas in his parents he identifies a deeper psychic disturbance, ‘an unrecognised but, I think, deeply felt wish for something which was in essence nothing other than the desire for oblivion, the annihilation of the personality’ (1992, p. 15). This state of mind, which he sees as coexisting with an admiration for Australia and gratitude for the conditions of personal freedom and safety, resembles that of ‘anomie’, an experience of shame so severe that the self dissolves, losing all sense of coherence. The narrator avoids anomie by means of his own successful construction or reconstruction of self thanks to a capacity for mimicry, which is after all an aspect of the process of growing from childhood to maturity. This is not the case for his parents, however, who are adult immigrants with a traumatic past. He observes that: ‘They wanted to be remade, knowing all along what an impossible desire that was.’ This incapacity is attributed in part to the reality that they could never become truly fluent in English, but also because ‘those old habits, the familiar comforts of a very different world, could not ultimately be suppressed’ (1992, p. 15). As if speaking for his parents, he postulates a desire on their part for their past to be erased in order to assuage their grief: ‘If only they could forget what they had lost. If only the past, the good together with
The chapter that most fully discusses his antecedents is entitled ‘Before the Flood’, an allusion to the mythological resonances of an ancestral past that has been swept away as well as to the more colloquial ‘antediluvian’ as meaning ‘utterly out-of-date’. The ‘Flood’ may also refer to the Holocaust, a terrible ‘ethnic cleansing’ survived by his parents and himself like Noah in the Ark, echoing the title of Primo Levi’s reflections on the subject, _The Drowned and the Saved_ (1988). Given that it is impossible to erase the past from the psyche, he describes his parents as ‘enter[ing] a spiritual and social no-man’s-land, citizens of no nation except by name and by the legal fiction of naturalisation - a predicament I have, to some extent, inherited from them’ (1992, p. 15).

Elsewhere he refers to this condition as ‘the ambiguous position of being neither inside nor outside, dwelling in a no-man’s land between the alien and the accepted’ (1992, p. 109). He describes his parents as adjusting to this condition by becoming subject to nostalgia, an unrealistic idealisation of the past, a temptation that he explores and resists within himself in _The Habsburg Café_, where he describes nostalgia as ‘a strong drug’ (1993, p. 41).

The Hungarian immigrant community is treated more severely than the narrator’s parents, being represented in a chapter entitled ‘The living dead’ as self-indulgent, lacking in taste and given to ostentatious displays of wealth. These frequenter of expresso-bars, whose social interactions are represented critically and satirically, are also interpreted in terms of shame and anomie: ‘They were, many of them, empty shells as they sat around tables in expresso-bars chattering, matchmaking, boasting and strutting in their finery’ (1992, p. 132). The narrator differentiates himself from this community, observing them with Australian eyes: ‘The world outside looked on them with a mixture of amazement and curiosity – it was in the early sixties that wealthy Hungarian Jews entered into the sarcastic mythologies of urban Australia’ (1992, p. 132).

Despite the temptation to ridicule, which he does not entirely resist, the narrator provides some more compassionate insights, suggesting that: ‘They were too much stunned by their wartime experiences ... to engage with life in any positive or satisfying way’ (1992, p. 131). With more detachment than might be expected from one whose parents shared similar experiences, he observes: ‘Their plight was to be pitied, though it was easy to ridicule them, because they were suffering the worst afflictions of dislocation’ (1992, p. 132). The narrator’s detachment is also associated with his parents’ poverty, which
placed them at the margins of this immigrant subculture, and may exemplify another shame reversal.

**Shaming of immigrants**

The extent of racial vilification in Australia is represented initially in *Inside Outside* as of a comparatively minor and trivial nature, compared with the 'horrors of the old world': 'If the worst that could happen to you was to have "Go home, bloody ref!" shouted at you in the street, then the worst was good enough' (1992, p. 14). Yet more sinister undertones are detected in the worst recounted experience of shaming by an Australian in *Inside Outside*. This is an occasion when a minor road accident leads to the family being abused by the other driver 'with insults about refs, filthy beards and smelly dagoes'. The narrator's father is able to point out not only that the other driver was legally at fault, but also that he was their federal member of Parliament. Although the outcome is a fulsome apology, Riemer comments: 'The benefits of citizenship for people like my parents were clearly defined by that episode. They were legal and social, not at all sentimental or emotional' (1992, p. 142). The incident acts as a reminder not only of the protection of law but also of the persistence of attitudinal racism.

**The immigrant experience of work**

Riemer explains that in the rigid and stratified society from which his parents came, upward social mobility was not possible, but the maintenance of a bourgeois economic position was important, involving business activity and property acquired through marriage (1992, pp. 35-7). Riemer's mother, like the mothers in Lurie's and Inglis's narratives, works initially in a clothing factory for a pittance (1992, p. 46). Riemer's father, a textile engineer in Hungary, loses the family's remaining capital in a failed business venture soon after their arrival, after which he finds work as a weaver in a large mill (1992, p. 98). For both, the immigrant experience is one of downward social and economic mobility. In the case of Riemer's parents, the narrator blurs the distinction between economically motivated migration and the refugee experience. Not falling precisely into either category, their expectations of Australia as receiving country are a confused blend of appreciation and disappointment.

**Escape route**

The narrator describes his escape route from the confusions of identity and from the drab 'pedestrian world' of Epping in the 1940s and 1950s as residing in 'Australia's status as a colonial culture', which he acknowledges to be 'the bête
In the nostalgic longing of many Australians for England as home, he found a parallel to his parents’ yearning for the Austro-Hungarian imperial world they had lost. In contrast to Kathleen Fitzpatrick, whose autobiography expresses her disillusion with the myth of England as ‘home’, Riemer affirms that ‘for people of my generation ... this immersion in England and things English was to put us in touch with emotional and aesthetic possibilities that were sadly lacking in our world’ (1992, p. 155). Although he acknowledges that the attitudes associated with the ‘cultural cringe’ were ‘foolish and fundamentally untenable’, he found in English literature a ‘sense of beauty’ which was able to ‘provide a counterpoise to the turmoil and confusion of [the] complex psychological and physiological changes’ of adolescence (1992, p. 156). English literature becomes the haven for the shamed self that Italy was to provide for Kathleen Fitzpatrick. Moreover, as Riemer points out, it was an alternative realm equally available to the Australian-born and the immigrant (provided that the immigrant was highly proficient in the English language). For Riemer, it is also the path to a career as ‘a distinguished member of the English Department of the University of Sydney’ (Wilde et al. 1994, p. 649). Riemer also found in English drama a transfiguration of the theatrical structures deeply imbedded in his imagination and ‘parodic’ skills (1992, p. 158).

‘People like me’: the problem of reticence

The narrative frequently implies that the narrating self is Jewish, yet never states this explicitly. The recurrent phrase ‘people like me’ appears to imply: ‘people who are Jewish as I am’ but the intended meaning is not made clear. An alternative interpretation might simply be: ‘immigrants like me’. The narrator preserves a deliberate ambiguity, as if to sidestep categorisation. Docker comments that ‘Riemer is also suspicious of a multicultural rhetoric that would lock people into ethnic enclaves in the name of preserving an often dubious cultural myth’ (1992, p. 7). In The Habsburg Café, published the year after Inside Outside, in 1993, the phrase ‘people like me’ reappears in a more explanatory context. In the following quotation, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust appear to underlie the narrator’s representation of his ambivalent feelings for Hungary, the country of his birth:

For people like me ... places are capable of possessing implications of limitless evil. We often invest the ordinary and the commonplace with diabolic intent; we see in the most mundane activities the seeds of cruelty and barbarity. For us some places have been irreversibly poisoned, like those tracts of land where radioactive material was buried long ago. We suspect that dangerous influences may still lurk under a pleasant and welcoming surface (1993, p. 7).
The narrative introduces the fictional kingdom of 'Kakania', a nickname given to the socio-geographic environment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in its final years, a world inhabited by his parents and their contemporaries. As the narrator points out, 'The name blended scatology and nostalgia' (1993, p. 10). Although the name resembled that of an ancient fiefdom, it was 'cobbled out of a familiar bureaucratic abbreviation, “k.k.”, standing for the phrase “kaiserlich und koniglich” (imperial and royal)” used to designate ‘the fiction of the dual monarchy’, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary. The two ‘k’s together sounded like ‘kaka’, the word for faeces or manure (1993, p. 10). It is a term that shames both the inhabitants and the rulers of ‘Kakania’, and consequently, also shames both the self and its origins, while maintaining an ironic stance which accords the self some residual distance.

The self is shamed still further by the narrator in a renewed reference to ‘people like me’ as ‘the detritus of Kakania’ (1993, p. 12). However, to contradict this ironic self-shaming, there is the evidence of the quality of the narrative itself, self-aware, perceptive, urbane, cultivated, evocative, deploying admirable linguistic and stylistic skills, as smooth as a creamy Viennese cake, a recurrent motif. Irony is the weapon employed to resist the power of self-deceiving nostalgia. The metaphorical Habsburg Café:

has become a distillation, a compact, fleeting yet powerful image of a world irrecoverably lost, a world compromised by hatred and brutality, a world which must be approached with the armour of irony fully in place, and yet a world of irresistible allure (1993, p. 19).

The milieu of ‘Kakania’, with its restrictions and rigidities, ‘where social mobility and indeed the expression of individuality were severely circumscribed’ (p. 12), is comparable to that from which Elias emerged to write his ground-breaking study of shame and manners, The Civilising Process (1978). Shame boundaries are drawn differently to those of Australian society. Riemer’s Hungarian relative with ‘pronounced views on propriety’, described in Inside Outside, used to insist that his status be recognised by being called ‘Excellency’, and felt free to berate the narrator’s mother for painting her nails, until relations were severed for some time because he overstepped the mark in saying she looked like a whore. Riemer comments that ‘in that world people constantly criticised each other openly and with considerable verbal violence’ (1993, p. 50), behaviour that ‘would not at that time have been tolerated in Australian society’ (1993, pp. 50-51). He describes his parents’ pre-war circle as one which ‘carried the practice of obliqueness and innuendo to the status of a high art’ (1993, p. 87).
The text of Inside Outside persistently circles around the racial identity of the narrator and his family but devotes considerable space to a discussion of Himmelfarb, the Jewish protagonist in Patrick White’s Riders in the Chariot (1992, pp. 125-7). At least one reviewer, Rex Davis, has also noted this deflection, commenting that ‘there is another world which is skated over, and I miss any substantial treatment of it. Riemer’s Jewish parents are established, but there is too little said here to feel what he feels about it. Himmelfarb becomes a kind of scapegoat for this’ (Davis 1992, p. 126). The Jewish identity of Riemer’s parents is not so much ‘established’ as indicated obliquely in the narrative in episodes such as the narrator’s childhood discovery that ‘being Catholic here [in Australia] was not all that different from being Jewish in Mitteleuropa’. In referring to the ‘brutality of the world we had left’ (1992, pp. 11 & 12) he discusses what he sees as the comparatively insignificant anti-Catholic prejudice of their Australian landlord but does not specify the nature of that brutality. Similarly, after his naturalisation ceremony together with his father he writes: ‘Our last formal ties with a world of brutality and horror had just been broken’ (1992, p. 141). He explains that for his parents, ‘Australia was paradise’, offering ‘considerable safety and very little menace’ and leading them to assume that: ‘Surely, you could never have concentration camps in a place like this’ (1992, p. 14) but he does not mention that these camps were the final destination of many of his Hungarian relatives (as explained in The Habsburg Café). His discussion of the political climate in Hungary in 1937 is elliptical: ‘This was no place for a family whose surnames told all: Riemer, Neubauer, Weiss, Schillinger – not a decent Magyar name among them’ (1992, p. 20). Riemer describes his maternal ancestors as inhabitants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, although ‘they did not belong exclusively to any one of the various groups constituting that cumbersome, polyglot realm’ (1992, p. 34). They are said to be ‘neither Magyar nor Slav, neither Galician nor Ruthenian. If anything, they saw themselves as vaguely Austrian ... For all of them German was a lingua franca’ (1992, pp. 34-5). The picture is of a cosmopolitan ancestry, somewhat rootless within the Empire, and clearly resisting any categorisation of Jews as an ethnic group.

The war years of his early childhood are represented in Inside Outside with a deliberate sketchiness. The following summary is characteristic of the narrative: ‘Persecution, war and famine are classic themes in the literature of migration. My parents and I experienced all three but we were fortunate: we survived’ (1992, p. 56). The reader is deliberately denied a full account of how the family survived, or how the narrator and his mother were reunited with his father in 1945, ‘in circumstances so extraordinary that recounting them would offend
against credibility’ (p. 64). The reader can only guess as to why the narrator chooses to suppress such potentially exciting narratives, and considers that ‘It would serve little purpose to recount the tale of our survival’ (p. 56). Davis comments that Riemer:

wisely avoids any details of the hardships of war and survival, settling instead for some vivid childhood memories; a night at the opera and the attractions of the Midget Theatre. All that is ‘outside’.

Australia is ‘inside’ (Davis 1992).

Davis does not indicate why this omission is ‘wise’, and his explanation of Riemer’s constructions of ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ is not convincing. Rather, this reticence is consistent with the form of ‘survivor shame’ characteristic of Holocaust survivors, as discussed by N. R. White (forthcoming). Riemer speculates that his parents’ reluctance to talk about their war experiences may have been partly motivated by the knowledge that ‘compared with the atrocities so many people had suffered, we had got off relatively lightly’ (1992, p. 56). America with Subtitles fills in some of the gaps in these earlier narratives, recounting a number of episodes in his family’s struggle for survival at the end of World War Two which involve elements of shame. One example is his parents’ pragmatic friendship with a woman called Bibi, whose sexual relationships with a Hungarian officer and subsequently with an American airman led to protection and material benefits for her Jewish friends. Riemer comments on his parents’ shame:

In later years my parents were vague about the beginnings of that friendship – deliberately so, it always seemed to me. They appeared to have been embarrassed by, even perhaps ashamed of, their intimacy with such undesirable people ... But those were exceptional times (1995, p. 99).

The most explicit statement about the narrator’s racial identity in Inside Outside is situated in the chapter on the Jewish Hungarian immigrant community in Sydney, entitled ‘The living dead’. Yet even here it is presented obliquely. The explanation is given about ‘The people of my parents’ circle’, rather than his parents, or himself:

The people of my parents’ circle belonged to a totally secularised society. The families of many of them had discarded their Jewishness generations earlier ... for many of them, who had thought of Judaism as a religion, the Nazi-inspired legal insistence that Jewishness was a race - something to be inherited, rather than embraced or discarded at will – came as a profoundly disturbing shock (1992, p. 133).

Nevertheless, the additional material about the family’s past that emerges in The Habsburg Café and in America with Subtitles indicates that the occlusions in the earlier work are not due to the autobiographer’s lack of knowledge. The exploration of self in The Habsburg Café suggests that Davis’s definition of what
constitutes ‘inside’ and outside’ in the earlier narrative could be reversed. The autobiographer’s journey into his European past is an inner journey, and the constructed Australian self remains an ‘outside’, a mask or shell until repossessed and affirmed after the confrontation with his past. Not until halfway through The Habsburg Cafe it is revealed that ‘[Budapest] is the city where most of my family were killed, or else where they started their journey to death’ (1993, p. 141). Progressively throughout this narrative, a journey into his own past as much as a travelogue, he fills out the cursory references of Inside Outside to his own survival with his parents. Riemer mentions weeks spent in a dark cellar and weeks ‘masquerading under an assumed name - as an eight-year-old well drilled in the deceptive tale of a false identity for which my mother had paid with her last piece of jewellery’ (1993, p. 141). In the third narrative, America with Subtitles, Riemer gives an account of the terror of allied air-raids on Budapest, rejection of his family by non-Jewish friends, the search for food and fuel, his mother’s heavy drinking during the bombing, and his parents’ ambivalence about the outcome of the war, confronted by the annihilation of their family by the Gestapo and the destruction of their city by the allies.

With an outspokenness that is in marked contrast to the reticence of Inside Outside, the narrator in The Habsburg Cafe reflects on the shaming oppression meted out to ‘people like me’ in Budapest in the war years:

> It was here that I was made to feel that people like me were pariahs, vermin to be exterminated, just because we did not share the physical and cultural characteristics of the high-cheekboned people who are now ... enjoying their city (1993, p. 141).

The autobiographical reticence deriving from survivor shame could also take the form of feeling ashamed of the behaviour of other more disturbed survivors of the Holocaust. The narrator comments that both he and his parents found ‘distasteful ... the way some people exploited the events of that time for purposes which were not far removed from emotional blackmail’ (1992, p. 57). One example is the tale of a Viennese woman who disrupted the narrator’s literature course by repeatedly screaming and displaying her concentration camp tattoo (1992, p. 57). The narrative implies that to have made Jewishness a prominent feature of the text would have simply been in poor taste. The reader as critic is implicated in this textual reticence, being led to wonder whether or not it might be indelicate to refer to the possibility that the writer is Jewish. But as America with Subtitles reveals, the process of survival for his parents in the 1940s involved humiliation and shameful compromises with their own codes of conduct.
In *The Habsburg Café*, the narrator progressively breaks the silence of *Inside Outside*, initially by showing Australian friends around Budapest and not only visiting the standard tourist attractions but also pointing out the sites of oppression, where family members and other Jewish citizens were massacred. The narrator records his fear that in expressing some of his pain to others who were not part of this experience he might simply bore them (1993, p. 142).

The Jewishness of the family is finally broached well into *The Habsburg Café*, although narrative distance is maintained by avoiding the use of the first person singular or plural in discussing race. The closest he comes is in the use of the possessive ‘my’ in the following quotation:

> In this dual citizenship, which allowed my family to look to Vienna as their cultural and social home, but also allowed them to regard themselves as fully-fledged citizens of Hungary, the question of race played an essential and yet in one way entirely insignificant part (1993, p. 53).

The sentence that follows immediately deflects the discussion from the personal by a return to sociological discourse: ‘The urban bourgeoisie of Vienna, Budapest, Prague, as well as of course of the great German cities, contained sizeable Jewish elements’. This discourse expands to describe the erosion of Jewish identity and religious practice among ‘these people’: ‘in general for these people Judaism had decayed from an all-embracing, social, cultural and personal structure into a mere religion, something to be tucked into a corner of your daily life, or even to be abandoned entirely’ (1993, p. 53). Reference is made to some members of the family who marry outside the Jewish faith, and to the narrator’s father’s enjoyment of Wagner’s operas, a taste unacceptable to many Jews, but shared by his son. Religious excess is deplored in this secularised family, but the example given is a telling one. Religious ‘mania’ is exemplified by an ‘embarrassing’ relative who was not Jewish but Roman Catholic. Yet this cousin’s excessive embrace of ‘Gentile society’, which appears to exemplify Mayer’s ‘cringing to every Christian fashion’, even though the ‘cringer’ is not an immigrant but at home, is attributed to individual eccentricity rather than to an emotional reversal deriving from a history of shameful oppression.

The following assessment of the European family’s approach to race sheds some light on the occlusions in the construction of the self in the more autobiographical *Inside Outside*. The narrator remarks:

> Many of these people suffered the inconveniences of being Jewish or, perhaps more precisely, of being deemed Jewish. But they were all adept at clever footwork, at those arts of survival which all – Jew as well as Gentile – had to practise in that world of hurdles and barriers (pp. 53-4) (my emphasis).
The side-stepping of *Inside Outside* may be interpreted as an example of this habitual clever footwork which the narrator of *The Habsburg Cafe* discards when he confronts and grieves the tragic annihilation of his family. The central confrontation with his past is related in the final chapter of *The Habsburg Cafe*, in which an invitation to make an anodyne speech at the Australian Embassy in Budapest becomes the occasion for the narrator publicly to break the silence about the racially based oppression of his European family, in what he describes as a 'ceremony of remembrance' (1993, p. 259). The occasion is in his own words 'shaming', although he also records 'satisfaction at having spoken out' (1993, p. 260). His own assessment of the start of his speech could equally be applied to *Inside Outside*, a 'meandering assemblage of family history [which] leaves out as much as it includes' (1993, p. 258). As the speech unfolds however, touching on his memories of 'those intangible, intimate relationships that existed in a large and on the whole loving family', the fate of this family is brought home to him with a devastating emotional impact:

> And it comes home to me with a particularly searing pain once again that most of these people were killed in 1944, amid God-knows-what brutality and suffering, that they were not allowed to live their allotted span, to be born and to die within the orderly rhythms of life (1993, p. 259).

At this point in the narrative, shame surfaces:

> As I speak about these things in an attempt to explain ... why I am no longer able to think of myself as Hungarian, why I can never think of this country as home, something unexpected and shaming occurs. I have thought and spoken often enough in the past about my family's fate, indistinguishable from the fate of millions of others, I have even on occasions written about it. However, I have never stood before a group of people - especially a group including many Hungarians - and remembered, publicly and ceremonially, the dead, my own dead and by implication all those who were tortured, humiliated and killed (1993, p. 259).

The shame resides in the narrator's experience of being overwhelmed by emotion in public, and he depicts himself in a characteristic posture of shame, 'turning away from his audience': 'Recalling the sufferings of people who would all be dead by now, even if they had been allowed to live their three score and ten, literally and embarrassingly brings tears to my eyes'. Unable to conceal his emotion, which disrupts his speech, if only temporarily, he describes a sense of appearing ridiculous:

> For the first and I hope the only time as a public speaker I dry up, unable to continue, only too conscious of what a ridiculous sight it must be to behold a middle-aged man with a streaming nose turning away from his audience as he is overcome by emotions (1993, p. 260).

The speech is concluded with some praise of Australia, and a 'hope that the country of my birth and I may have achieved a reconciliation', but emphasising
that ‘I must speak tonight as the Australian I think I have become’ (1993, p. 260). Shame isolates the narrator, in that he cannot interpret the reactions of his audience.

**Secularisation and loss**

The secularisation of the family is made clear in *Inside Outside*. The narrative includes no accounts of Jewish religious observance, although other religious practices are mentioned. The narrator’s mother ‘went through a Spiritualist phase in the late 1930s’, described as ‘an obsession’, which ‘returned in much grimmer form in the last months of the war’ (1992, p. 46). In Australia the narrator’s adolescent religious experience is Anglican:

> Because everyone attended Sunday school, I too went to Sunday school at St Alban’s Church of England in Epping. There I was exposed to the joyless puritanism of Low-Church Anglicans. I was even confirmed as a communicant of the Church of England – that I hadn’t been baptised seemed to worry no-one (1992, pp. 144-5).

Although this brief involvement with formalised religion was intense, it had a negative impact on the developing self, simply reinforcing his shame-based identity by a belief system that justified his lack of self-regard and played on the sexual anxieties of his adolescence: ‘Now a sense of religious inadequacy was added to my other shortcomings and failures. Even in the eyes of the Lord I was destined to be an outsider’ (1992, p. 145). Despite this inauspicious encounter with Christianity, he persevered with a systematic program of Bible reading that did not touch or transform his self-understanding at any deep level. He writes: ‘I gave religion away when I was about seventeen’ (1992, p. 145).

This negative encounter in his teenage years was apparently sufficient to close off religion as a potential dimension of identity. There is no suggestion that the mature self turned again to an exploration of the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition, despite his professional commitment to the study and teaching of English literature from which this tradition is inseparable. The self of Riemer’s *Inside Outside* has adopted ‘the stripped down secular outlook’ identified by Taylor as a response to the deficiencies of spiritual ideals in practice (1989, p. 518). The cost to the self is an escalation of the sense of rootlessness to which the immigrant is already prone. In *The Habsburg Café*, a visit to a synagogue in Budapest reinforces this sense of loss. An old man who has been described as tediously showing the narrator and some friends around, unexpectedly breaks into a liturgical chant, which leads to an epiphany for the narrator:
His voice is unsteady and cracked, yet for all its imperfections, his chant pulses with echoes of a world none of us has experienced—a world of worship, belief, a sense of community with a people in its joys as well as its sufferings, a world richer and perhaps more satisfying than our humdrum existence (1993, p. 173).

The narrator is led to reassess the spiritual aspects of his own life:

And I begin to sense that despite the shabbiness of this old man, despite his unattractive singsong accounts of vast sums of money, his life may be fuller, more worthwhile and certainly closer to God than mine (1993, p. 173).

The unimpressive man in the synagogue is postulated to lead a more fulfilling life than the artful parodist who is the narrator, who at the conclusion of Inside Outside, continues to puzzle over his daily existence which resembles a Mobius Strip, ‘the nightmare of that ingenious puzzle, a loop without an inside or an outside’ (p. 218). The ambiguous surface of the puzzle resembles the protective behaviour identified by the narrator of America with Subtitles, who explains:

Irony and cynicism are powerful protective devices: they cast a net of ambiguity over fundamental allegiances, whatever shape they might take, making it difficult to classify you... The social rituals of central Europe... were expert instruments of disguise (1995, pp. 203-4).

Enthusiasm and commitment can render the self vulnerable to being shamed, or worse, subject to extreme forms of oppression. Irony and cynicism offer some form of protection from being subject to shame, but at the cost of trust and intimacy.
Conclusion

To complete the record of this research, a few additional points remain to be made to complement the formal arguments.

First, the arguments concerning the usefulness of shame as a key to interpreting contemporary Australian autobiographies do not depend exclusively on the choice of texts discussed here. Although these texts were chosen and grouped to illustrate the range and variety of autobiographical representations of shame, it would have been possible to develop similar arguments with an alternative set of contemporary autobiographies. For example, *The Road from Coorain* (1989) by Jill Ker Conway, Manning Clark’s *The Puzzles of Childhood* (1989), *The Quest for Grace* (1991) (discussed in Dalziell 1993) and Barbara Hanrahan’s autobiographical works *The Scent of Eucalyptus* (1980) and *Kewpie Doll* (1984) represent aspects of shame in relation to gender, class, sexual abuse, disability, cultural identity, mental illness and abandonment. My point is that shame is so pervasive that many autobiographies are illuminated by this approach. The autobiographies that are least suitable for analysis using shame theory are those in which textual self-scrutiny is superficial or poorly articulated.

Second, although my aim in this thesis has been to analyse selected Australian autobiographies on the basis of a theoretical understanding of shame, I would also like to acknowledge the way in which the validity and value of this approach has been confirmed quite unexpectedly in a range of reader responses to my research. On many occasions those who have read or heard my presentations on the theme of shame in autobiography have responded by confiding with a moving frankness aspects of their own lives in which shame has been experienced and confronted. Sources of shame discussed in this context have included illegitimacy and prenuptial pregnancy, childhood poverty, career failure, parental infidelity and the discovery of unknown half-siblings, alcoholism and mental illness in the family, mixed racial background, gender-based shame and homosexuality. Among those who have expressed to me the value of this approach to interpreting their own autobiographies are two published Australian autobiographers, one of whom is discussed in this thesis, as well as a number of unpublished autobiographers. While I do not consider that reference to such anecdotal and confidential communications should strengthen my argument in any way, I would like to acknowledge these responses rather than pass over them in silence.
My final point is that although shame has a destabilising impact on the self, the confrontation with shame in an autobiographical text may lead the narrator to a more mature assessment of shaming episodes and contribute to a more stable sense of self. The reader, in participating imaginatively in the textual confrontation with shame, may be led to confront his or her own shame and potentially to resolve inner conflicts based on similar dynamics. The reader of autobiography runs a risk comparable to that taken by Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* on reading Darcy’s letter. Motivated by nothing more than ‘the strongest curiosity’, she concludes her reading with the humiliating reflection that: ‘Till this moment, I never knew myself’ (Austen 1990, pp. 175-185).

Where the autobiographical telling of shameful stories constitutes a form of testimony to suffering and injustice that transcends the experience of the individual narrator, the confrontation with shame may open up festering wounds within society, overcoming denial and facilitating healing, tolerance and reconciliation. Shame is deeply embedded in Australian culture and confronting this painful emotion is difficult, individually and socially. However if such a confrontation occurs, it can lead to a deeper self-knowledge and a greater recognition of shared humanity. Reading autobiographies is one way for this to be achieved.
A Note on Cross-cultural Understandings of ‘Shame’ in Aboriginal Autobiographies


Perkins applies the term ‘disgrace’ to the condition of being an Aborigine in Queensland, transferring the shaming practice of racism to the shamed black individual: ‘To be an Aborigine in the Queensland community is a disgrace …’ (1975, p. 187). This reflects Dessaix’s use of the term ‘disgrace’ to designate the shamed illegitimate individual.

In Glenyse Ward’s narrative the terms ‘ashamed’, ‘humiliated’, ‘embarrassed’, ‘bashful’ and ‘disgrace’ frequently occur, according to apparently Standard English usage, but Ward also uses the expression ‘to feel shame’ (e.g. ‘I would have felt very shame’ [1987, p. 84]) in a distinctive way that does not reflect Standard English usage and accords with linguistic analyses made by Harkins (1994).

Harkins explains that for Aboriginal people, the key elements of feeling shame ‘seem to include feeling as if one is near a person or a place where one shouldn’t be, fears of doing the wrong thing, of bad consequences and of other people’s bad opinions, and a desire to be out of this unpleasant situation’ (Harkins 1994, p. 158). Harkins suggests that the Aboriginal concept of shame does not appear to include the elements of wrongdoing or defect that are conveyed by the non-Aboriginal concept (p. 158). As I have argued elsewhere, the non-Aboriginal concept of shame does not necessarily involve an element of wrongdoing either, but there is usually a sense of defect.

For Aboriginal people, shame is felt in the presence of certain categories of kin, or strangers, white people and other ‘kinds of people’ rather than individuals (Harkins 1994, p. 159). Harkins describes the posture of shame for an Aboriginal speaker as follows: ‘Almost all accounts include some mention of wanting to run away; the accompanying behaviour includes avoiding eye contact, and often hiding the face or eyes with the hand’ (Harkins 1994, p. 158).
For the narrating Glenyse Ward, ‘feeling shame’ is an experience often associated with the gaze of her employer’s son. In an episode when this occurs, Ward describes herself as in ‘a very embarrassed state’, in a posture of shame: ‘I put my head down in a bashful way ... I didn’t even look at him’ (p. 27). In another incident, when he sees her fall from a bridge, she notes her response to the son’s grin: ‘I felt shame as I slipped into my room and shut the door’ (p. 144).

The other narrative episode in which ‘feeling shame’ is recorded by Ward is in the context of friendship rather than threat, and is a clear example of a misunderstanding of the Aboriginal English usage. Bill, the elderly Scots handyman who has befriended her, compliments her, telling her she looks happier, and ‘blooming’. She asks him to explain what ‘blooming’ means, so he adds ‘You look pretty and full of life’. She records her response: ‘All of a sudden, I got real shame! I buried my head in my hands’. Bill asks her ‘What’s up?’ and she responds ‘Choo, I am winyarn, big shame!’, adding, ‘That’s our way of speaking in the mission if we never had the looks, or had nothing going for us, we were winyarn, or open’ (p. 93). When Bill lectures her on self esteem and not putting herself down, she spills her tea, ‘feeling more shame’ as he tells her:

I was to hold my head up and not feel shame about myself. I was as good as anybody else, if not better.

I said, ‘Choo, that’s shame!’

As Bill laughed at my last exclamation, I guess I must have sounded quite humorous to him (p. 94).

Harkins’ discussion of emotion terms in Aboriginal English sheds light on this exchange. She explains: ‘Aboriginal speakers speak of getting shame in circumstances where non-Aboriginal speakers would not speak of being ashamed ... Aboriginal people get shame when praised for some outstanding achievement’ (Harkins 1994, p. 158).

Bill’s failure to understand the Aboriginal experience of ‘feeling shame’ does nothing to mar the quality of the friendship. The chapter containing the episode is entitled ‘Never put yourself down’ (Ward 1987, p. 98) and concludes with the narrator describing a new self-confidence in her relationship with her employer: ‘I stopped sweeping the floor and looked her straight in the face – something I had not done since beginning to work for her ... She was taken aback. I noticed her flinch a bit ...’ (p. 99).
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