Chapter One

SHAME AS FORM

IN A GLOBAL CONJUNCTURE in which the very expression of ethical solidarity displays and enacts unprecedented disparities of power, writers of literature are in an ethical and aesthetic quandary: How to write without thereby contributing to the material inscription of inequality? Even to pose such a question can appear as romanticizing, or worse, of the position of the "subaltern" or "Third World" subject, who seems thereby reduced to the status of an object that is merely written about. This quandary is inextricable from literary criticism and from the production of literature whenever the problematic of those formations is articulated in ethical terms. Neil Lazarus has written of Gayatri Spivak's work—too often emblematized, perhaps, by the title of her most famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"—as implicated in "an austere construction of the subaltern as a discursive figure that is by definition incapable of self-representation."[1] In a certain strain of postcolonial scholarship informed by Spivak's conceptualization of the subaltern—and one can imagine the same charge being leveled at the notion of a constitutive and unresolvable shame underlying the practice of postcolonial literature—the real histories of national liberation in Third World countries disappear into an abyss of epistemological *méconnaissance*, while political interventions in the West on behalf of such struggles are discountable as so many attempts to ventriloquize the other. For Spivak, in Lazarus's words, "the actual contents of the social practice of 'the people' are always, indeed definitionally, inaccessible to members of the elite classes" (114), a formulation that, for Lazarus, also implies its obverse: a permanently disempowered and silenced subaltern class. Spivak's conceptualization of the subaltern itself, Lazarus suggests further, comes close to "fetishizing difference under the rubric of incommensurability" (115).

Nicholas Brown has referred in the same vein to "the paradoxically Eurocentric refusal of Eurocentrism."[2] This phrase, describing a perceived tendency among metropolitan postcolonial critics to disparage the movements towards liberation in Africa on the grounds of their residual empiricism, exhibits the problem at hand. According to Brown and Lazarus, for Western writers and critics to reject narratives of self-determination and nationalism on the grounds of their Western origin, or

to turn the relations between West and non-West into a gulf of mutual incomprehensibility, is to remain tied to a "Manichean" division between East and West that has lost any explanatory power it may once have had (Brown 6–7). For both thinkers, the problem seems to be that such critics confuse dialectical relations of struggle with ontological—and dualistic—relations of selfhood and otherness. For Brown, whose work analyzes the formative "rift" between British modernism in the interwar period and African writing during the struggles for independence, any simple equation between capitalist modernity and the West risks introducing a moral viewpoint to a situation that is "essentially systemic" (7): risks, that is, allowing sentiments (such as shame) to take the place of a more robust political understanding.

The complexity of that "systemic" situation means that questions predicated upon the cultural origins of non-Western literary texts need to be replaced by a more reflective set of questions about the terms we are using and the specific contexts in which we are expecting those terms to function. Not "Can the subaltern speak?" but What does it mean to "speak" in a literary form such as fiction? What ethical and aesthetic assumptions are involved in talking about the possibility or the impossibility of literature as such? What would a literature adequate to the ethical entanglements of modernity look like, in an age in which language has come to be thought of as constitutively untrustworthy? What ethical expectations can be attached to a form such as the novel, once it has been defined, as in Georg Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel*, by "absolute sinfulness," or in Benjamin's "The Storyteller," as a form that the reader turns to in "the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about"?[3] Is there, perhaps, a sense in which only a subaltern could speak in such a form?

Nicholas Brown has his own list of such questions: Is "non-Western literature" a contradiction in terms? What do we mean when we use words such as "literature" and "West"? What agendas do such words conceal? (*Utopian Generations* 6) My contention is that an uncertainty as to how to ask such questions, let alone how to address them, is a complex arising out of the inherent shamefulness not only of the colonial enterprise, but also, and inseparably, of the literary one. The question that seems most clearly invited, indeed suggested, by the work of Lazarus and of Brown is one that neither addresses explicitly, nor, in fact, has the question yet been posed in the context of postcolonial literature: To what extent is the very acknowledgment of shame at the history of colonialism a shameful act, destined further to expand the circuit of shame? And if shame itself is ensnared in implication, what possibilities exist for a literary form that might be adequate to the ethical complexity of the postcolonial world?

In an interview in 1990, the South African novelist J. M. Coetzee, one of the most challenging explorers of these questions, made the following "entirely parenthetical" remark, a confession of a feeling of ethical inadequacy regarding the literary works he had produced: "Let me add … that I, as a person, as a personality, am overwhelmed, that my thinking is thrown into confusion and helplessness, by the fact of suffering in the world, and not only human suffering. These fictional constructions of mine are paltry, ludicrous defenses against that being-overwhelmed, and, to me, transparently so."[4]

The statement is of a kind that is rare in Coetzee's work, not only because it addresses the question of the motivations and intentions behind his own writing—something Coetzee has almost always avoided talking about when invited to do so—but also because it is a self-evidently autobiographical utterance, spoken in the first person, although framed ("I, as a person, as a personality") in such a way as to make plain Coetzee's doubts about any privileged status accorded to that discourse. Such autobiographical sentiments relating to the creation of the work, it would seem, have for Coetzee only an incidental bearing upon the significance of the work itself. By implication, the same must be true of attempts to paraphrase or explain the work from outside—for example, in a literary-critical register. In the same interview, Coetzee describes the limitations of criticism and theory as having to do precisely with a normative referential quality that they retain, however much they may strive for precision and specificity: "When I write criticism … I am always aware of a responsibility toward a goal that has been set for me not only by the argument, not only by the whole philosophical tradition … but also by the rather tight discourse of criticism itself" (246). This normative or ethical quality, he implies (although these are not Coetzee's terms), is absent from works of fiction; or at least, if such works feel a responsibility, it is "toward something that has not yet emerged, that lies somewhere at the end of the road." Indeed, Coetzee's recent work, which includes several unconventional volumes of autobiography, has been characterized by the use of fictional form to reframe—and thereby liberate into "irresponsibility"—what might otherwise appear to be an atypically tendentious, directly referential mode of writing.[5]

How would it be possible to write about shame, this affective structure that seems to be located in the very interstice between experience and representation? Coetzee's fictional works deal frequently and explicitly with feelings of shame, but the question should be asked: To what extent can such works really be said to be about an experience identifiable as "shame," the precise contours of which we can feel confident about? Furthermore, in a writer such as Coetzee (and I shall consider him in more detail in chapter 5), is it truly possible to speak of a shame that precedes

the work, a shame that the work takes for its subject, a shame that the work seems to be attempting to process? Is it not the case that shame—if it exists—is incommensurable with its conceptualization as such? In another interview, Coetzee, commenting on the influence of Franz Kafka on his work, suggests that Kafka's distinction is that he "hints that it is possible, for snatches, however brief, to think outside one's own language, perhaps to report back on what it is like to think outside language itself" (*Doubling the Point* 198). Kafka is another writer in whom shame is frequently held to be a dominant, self-identical feeling, attributable in the first instance to the individual who precedes, and is responsible for, the work. According to Milan Kundera (in an analysis that is antithetical to my own understanding), it is perfectly possible to separate Kafka's shame, an "elementary" emotion that is both comprehensible and self-evident, from his activity as a writer.[6] The personal shame that made Kafka request of Max Brod, his friend and literary executor, that his letters and papers be destroyed after his death, for example, is for Kundera "not that of a writer but that of an ordinary individual," the shame "of being turned into an object" (263). In Kundera's account, this feeling has nothing to do with writing, and everything to do with the public exposure of what is intimate and interior. Thus Brod, in going against Kafka's wishes, is guilty of "betraying" his friend, of acting "against the sense of shame he knew in the man" (264).[7]

For Walter Benjamin, far more interestingly, shame is Kafka's "strongest gesture," an "intimate human reaction" that, at the same time—and paradoxically—is "no more personal than the life and thought which govern it."[8] This is what is meant by the last words of *The Trial*, following the final utterance of Josef K, "Like a dog!": "it was as if the shame would outlive him."[9] In the works of such writers, shame seems to be a placeholder for a quality or a modality of thought that cannot adequately be accounted for by language, or reduced to what is expressible in language. What we are ashamed of is the fact of there being such a modality of thought. Shame, then, survives *even our experience of it.*

Criticism of works of literature that have to do with shame, which is also to say, criticism that organizes itself around the thematic of shame, runs the risk of installing a limit or reference point that interrupts what sociologists have called the "shame spiral"[10]—thus, of providing an explanation that does not explain. How can shame in literature be made comprehensible without thereby removing it entirely from our comprehension? More than his fictional works, perhaps, Coetzee's nonfictional writings (if we can designate his texts *Boyhood* and *Youth* as such) are repeatedly caught in such spirals of shame, which threaten to open up interminably and become abyssal: "He would rather be bad than boring, has no respect for a person who would rather be bad than boring, and no

respect either for the cleverness of being able to put his dilemma neatly into words."[11] Of the narrator's justification of his own youthful actions in terms of a notion of artistic experience, he writes:

> It … does not for a moment convince him. It is sophistry, that is all, contemptible sophistry. And … the sophistry will only become more contemptible. There is nothing to be said for it; nor, to be ruthlessly honest, is there anything to be said for its having nothing to be said for it. As for ruthless honesty, ruthless honesty is not a hard trick to learn. On the contrary, it is the easiest thing in the world. (164)

In dealing with shame in literature, criticism will have to develop formal strategies for getting at the paradox of shame: that the notion of shame is inadequate to the experience, which itself *is* one of inadequacy, or incommensurability. Criticism must find a way of interpreting without interpreting; a way of acknowledging its own shameful deficiency, without seeking to absolve itself. Shame is an event of writing, which means that it is never contained or exhausted by interpretation, nor even by its representation in the work. One of the hopes of the present study is to take a first step towards such a criticism.

Form and Disjunction: A Recent History

"The shame of being a man—is there any better reason to write?"[12] Implicit in Deleuze's question, although by no means obviously so, is the emblematic status of "man" as the species, and the gender, that writes. Man, writes Deleuze in the same essay, "presents himself as a dominant form of expression that claims to impose itself on all matter, whereas woman, animal, or molecule always has a component of flight *that escapes its own formalization*" (1, my emphasis). This idea, one of the more contentious in Deleuze's work, is associated with the notion that writing is always engaged in becoming: "In writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable, becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible."

Given this real and symbolic link between man and writing, it seems possible to rephrase Deleuze's initial question to reveal its tautological quality: The shame of being able to write—is there any better reason to write? And yet, the question with which I would like to begin is an inversion of Deleuze's original question, an articulation that repeats Deleuze's tautology and that, in doing so, frames both the problem this book will attempt to address and, in a sense, its solution: *The ability to write—is there any better reason to feel ashamed?*

One of the propositions to be put forward here is that, in the twentieth century, a new occasion for the production of writing emerges into

consciousness: its own lack of ethical substance. This proposition is a historical one, and it suggests a new inseparability of shame and writing, or rather—to be faithful to the way the thesis of this book will unfold—of shame and form. To give the temporal and geographical dimensions of this thesis as much precision as possible, we can say that this consciousness of the inseparability of shame and form appears in the first or second decade of the century in Europe, but it becomes the object of a more generalized awareness in the years after the Second World War and takes on further nuances at different moments, and in different locations, through the rest of the century.

The historical factors that contribute to this awareness might be said to include, in roughly chronological order, the crisis in national consciousness that affected Europeans around the time of the First World War; the spectacular quality of the ideological posturing that took place on an international scale between the wars (in particular, between Germany and the Soviet Union); the revelations, after the Second World War and later, of the inhumane obscenities that had occurred in the name of those ideologies; the movements towards decolonization of the formerly colonized countries, particularly in the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa; the mass migrations across continents in the wake of those movements and the forced intimacy between different "cultures" that developed as a result; the increasing domination of images over the thought processes of men and women with the spread of a commodity culture; and the polarization that took place between "entertainment" and "art" as a result.

Anyone familiar with Gilles Deleuze's works on cinema will notice that these events are among those named by Deleuze as informing the transition from a cinema dominated by tight image/narrative configurations (what he calls, after Henri Bergson, the "sensory-motor schema"), in which movement and temporality are closely regulated by plot considerations, to one in which pure "optical" and "sound situations" effect a rupture in those configurations.[13] And indeed, the thesis I am advancing here, of a literature that begins to constitute itself formally out of a sense of its own inadequacy, owes something to Deleuze's account of a rupture between time and movement (which is also a rupture between form and narrative) in postwar cinema. However, in ways that will be crucial for the argument of this book, literature experiences this discrepancy rather differently from cinema. Towards the end of this chapter I will suggest that cinema contains an explanation for, and an answer to, the problem of shame and form—or the shame *of* form—that has been a defining preoccupation of European literature in the twentieth century.

A number of questions arise. What is meant here by "form"? Why, given that the material under consideration is predominantly literary, emphasize its quality as form rather than as, say, language or writing? One answer would be to see literature's discomfort with its own formal qual-

ity as emblematic of a general disintegration of form, or forms, including ideas of national and cultural identity, territorial borders, ideological doctrines (which look increasingly fallible and fragile), and notions of "civilization" and "civility" (which, in the light of certain social developments and shifts during the twentieth century, begin to seem like alibis of imperialism, class privilege, and racism). To emphasize the historical dimensions of this disintegration is not (*pace* Fredric Jameson)[14] to insist upon its "necessity"; nor is the proposition dependent on an epistemic break in the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. "History" implies simply that the discomfort with form is not a merely theoretical proposition—although, of course, literary and cultural theory is one field in which that discomfort appears, and in which it is responded to. When, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, a robustly empiricist work, Hannah Arendt talks about the 1914–18 war in Europe as an event that "is almost impossible to describe,"[15] she is both narrating and participating in this discomfort with form. Even her own image of an "explosion" to describe the epochal shift that took place over the period of the outbreak of war and its aftermath is, she writes, a figure of speech that is "as inaccurate as are all the others":

> The first World War exploded the European comity of nations beyond repair, something which no other war had ever done. Inflation destroyed the whole class of small property owners beyond hope for recovery or new formation, something which no monetary crisis had ever done so radically before. Unemployment … reached fabulous proportions, was no longer restricted to the working class but seized with insignificant exceptions whole nations. Civil wars … were not only bloodier and more cruel than all their predecessors; they were followed by migrations of groups who, unlike their happier predecessors in the religious wars, were welcomed nowhere and could be assimilated nowhere…. The explosion of 1914 and its severe consequences of instability … sufficiently shattered the façade of Europe's political system to lay bare its hidden frame. Such visible exposures were the sufferings of more and more groups of people to whom suddenly the rules of the world around them had ceased to apply. It was precisely the seeming stability of the surrounding world that made each group forced out of its protective boundaries look like an unfortunate exception to an otherwise sane and normal rule, and which filled with equal cynicism victims and observers of an apparently unjust and abnormal fate. Both mistook this cynicism for growing wisdom in the ways of the world, while actually they were more baffled and therefore became more stupid than they ever had been before. (267–28)

For Arendt, the repercussions of the war are so immense as to exceed even the image of "catastrophe," because "the quiet of sorrow which settles down after a catastrophe has never come to pass" (267). Rather, she writes, the events of the summer of 1914 (which began with the as-

sassination of the Archduke Ferdinand on June 28 and continued with the Austrian-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia and subsequent declarations of war by Germany on France and Belgium, and by Britain on Germany), "[seem] to have touched off a chain reaction in which we have been caught ever since and which nobody seems to be able to stop." In her preface to the book (dated "Summer, 1950"), Arendt describes a widespread anxiety regarding the imminent dissolution of the forms of human existence: "On the level of historical insight and political thought there prevails an ill-defined, general agreement that the essential structure of all civilizations is at the breaking point" (vii). Her understanding of totalitarianism, indeed, is as a systematic destruction of belief in the forms of civilization, a "cynical 'realism'" which draws upon and reiterates a "spurious" doctrine of historical inevitability. The obligation of thought, for Arendt, is to discover the "hidden mechanics" whereby the "traditional elements of our political and spiritual world" were dissolved into "a conglomeration where everything seems to have lost specific value, and has become unrecognizable for human comprehension, unusable for human purpose" (vii–viii). One of the effects of the 1914 "explosion" was to make way for the emergence of this totalitarian realism, in which any distinction between the actuality of events and their significance is erased: "Every event had the finality of a last judgment, a judgment that was passed neither by God nor by the devil, but looked rather like the expression of some unredeemably stupid fatality" (267). Events, in other words, become detached from the apparatus of meaning and appear in their immediacy: formless, self-evident, and entirely exhausted merely by their having taken place.

The discomfort with form, then, is a historical proposition. However, its temporal parameters may not be so precise as Arendt's compelling, pessimistic narrative would suggest. It is certain, for example, that elements of this discomfort appeared well before the turn of the twentieth century. It is even possible that—to quote Jacques Derrida in another context—the progressive disenchantment with form is "a process that is … as old as man, as old as what he calls his world, his knowledge, his history and his technology."[16] Something like a notion of inadequacy, successively attaching to the forms of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry, prose, and eventually (presumably) philosophy, is what drives the movement of Hegel's "spirit" through a linear history characterized by different stages of complexity: symbolic, ideal, romantic, abstract, imaginative, intelligible, and conceptual. For Hegel, poetry, for example, appears at the point at which the very conflict between the pure exteriority of the visual arts and the pure interiority of music requires a concrete shape that can unite the two extremes—when spirit has outgrown those earlier forms—and it undergoes a transformation in turn when the demand for

"literal accuracy" of the mundane, practical consciousness sets off the prosaic world from the figurative, metaphorical one.[17]

But the notion of inadequacy does not need a linear or cyclical narrative of obsolescence and innovation to sustain it. As far back as Dante, we find poets appealing to the divine to grant them the power to render in words that which by definition exceeds the verbal; thus, aesthetic or ethical failure has long been a hazard of literary creativity.[18] One might say further that the category of art in the modern age is founded on the tension between failure and success—and on its irresolvability. Aesthetic beauty, according to Kant, requires a mode of judgment that, by definition, cannot be objectively verified. Kant's formulation for the judgment of beauty, "subjective universal validity," designates a mode of evaluation that *ascribes* or *imputes* a quality of aesthetic value to the object, but is unable to demonstrate or prove it.[19] That the work might be failing, even as we read or contemplate it, is in the Kantian schema a condition of possibility for its success. In the modern world, that is to say, the measure of success of an artwork may at any moment, or with nothing more than a slight shift in perspective, become precisely the measure of its failure, or vice versa. Even more explicitly, Kant's notion of the sublime is an experience (both pleasurable and painful) of the "inadequacy" of the imagination in grasping an order of natural might, or magnitude. The "agitation" it produces is a kind of "vibration," a rapid fluctuation between attraction and repulsion, caused by the fact that the thing in question is "excessive for the imagination," an "abyss" in which "the imagination is afraid to lose itself" (114–15, §27).

However, in the twentieth century it becomes possible to see the worthlessness or inadequacy of writing no longer as an interruption of, or a detraction from, literary creativity, nor as a potentially reversible matter of aesthetic judgment, but as precisely constitutive of its worth. Inadequacy itself, we might say, develops a certain truth value; it becomes a quality that it is almost possible to assess positively, rather than being, as for Hegel, simply the mark of a historically decadent form. When Jean-François Lyotard elaborates Kant's sublime as a "postmodern" mode, the inadequacy of the faculty of "presenting" with respect to the faculty of "conceiving" becomes the very occasion of the work: a making visible of the fact "that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible."[20] Failure is in some sense a measure of the work's success; or rather, the aesthetic tension between failure and success at the level of the perceiving subject is destroyed by a catastrophic and decisive irruption of the ethical. Not the ethical as a *new content* for literature, however, or a replacement of aesthetic concerns with ethical ones; rather, in the twentieth century, the ethical appears as a permanent *rendering inadequate* of form.

PRIMO LEVI'S *THE DROWNED AND THE SAVED*

The historical event that is most often held to signal this irruption is the one designated—inadequately—by the single word "Auschwitz"; that is, the project of the Nazis systematically to eradicate the Jewish people. Indeed, the writers that we generally think of in connection with an aesthetic of failure, or of silence, are also those associated with the impossible project of a post-Auschwitz literature: Marguerite Duras, Paul Celan, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Samuel Beckett. Theodor Adorno's reflection on the "barbarity" of writing poetry after Auschwitz is a common theoretical reference point for this aesthetic—or anti-aesthetic—project;[21] yet, as Adorno was aware, "Auschwitz" is itself an image, a thought-form, and as such, an attempt to preserve exactly the kind of historical knowledge that Auschwitz itself signals the crisis of. "After Auschwitz," writes Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*, "our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, *however bleached*, out of the victims' fate."[22]

One of the most illuminating texts on the relation between shame and literary form is found not in the body of literature that explores the theoretical paradox of a post-Auschwitz aesthetic, but in the final work of a writer who survived the experience of imprisonment in Auschwitz and wrote about it, in all its difficulty. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi looks back on the books he had already published about his time in the camp (such as *Se questo è un uomo* and *La Tregua*, translated into English as *If This Is a Man* and *The Truce* respectively)[23] as well as on the experience itself. For Levi, in a chapter entitled "Shame," the figure of the Auschwitz survivor dramatizes the absolute disconnection of form and content—or we might also say, the rupture between ethics and aesthetics—in the twentieth century. The survivor of Auschwitz is caught in a paradox: *either* he has suffered, in which case his suffering has stripped him of the tools for speaking—that is, he survives in the condition of the *Muselmänner*, a figure the immensity of whose experience has wrecked his ability to talk about it—*or* he retains the ability to speak, in which case his very eloquence testifies to the fact that he has not experienced the full horror. Levi recalls having observed the public execution in Auschwitz of a man who had resisted, who had taken part in a successful plan to blow up one of the crematoria, and of being tormented afterwards by the thought: "You too could have, you certainly should have."[24] After such an experience, one's very survival is testament to the fact that there was more that one could have done to resist; a person's life, his

or her very existence, is a cause of shame. Returning to their hut after watching the hanging, Levi and his friend Alberto divide up their food: "we satisfied the daily ragings of hunger," he writes in *If This Is a Man* (1958), "and now we are oppressed by shame" (156).

After Auschwitz, then (but this situation is not unique to Auschwitz, nor is Auschwitz a cause of it), writing is *defined* by its inadequacy; that is to say, by its profound ethical complicity. Levi feels his very eloquence to be shameful: an emblem of the suffering he did *not* experience, and of the inaction that ensured his survival, as against the action of the worthier man who died—worthier, in some sense, for Levi, because he died.

For Adorno, however, the real corrosiveness of Auschwitz, as a category of thought at least, is not in its having made poetry or testimony impossible, or shameful, but rather in its status as a positive, that is to say, ethical explanation for the rupture between aesthetic form and content, the situation that I have been describing as the constitutive inadequacy of writing in the twentieth century. Auschwitz thus comes to stand in for a situation of which it is only the most recognizable example. Auschwitz becomes, perversely, a way of orienting ourselves—consoling ourselves, no less— in relation to an extremely disorienting event: a break in the viability of such connections as those between form and content, experience and expression, ethics and aesthetics, metaphysics and actuality. "Our metaphysical faculty is paralyzed," writes Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*, "because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience" (362). The implication of Adorno's critique of the thought-form "Auschwitz" is that as soon as it enters the economy of ideas, it begins to act as an inhibition upon a real understanding of the impossibility of poetry. The very idea that it is Auschwitz that should have made poetry impossible—on the basis, say, of its unprecedented moral extremity—is itself an effect of the impoverishment of thought after Auschwitz.

Levi himself acknowledges that the shame of which he speaks has a wider, even universal dimension. The "shadow of a suspicion" that takes hold of the survivor, he writes, and that constitutes his shame, is that "each man is his brother's Cain"; that "each one of us"—*us*, he says, considered in "a much vaster, indeed, universal sense"—"has usurped his neighbor's place and lived in his stead" (*Drowned* 81–82). And yet it is in the very nature of shame that it leaves in ruins any such conceptual polarity as that of universal versus individual. Shame has a paradoxical structure born of the fact that, while it is intensely focused on the self, it is experienced, as Jean-Paul Sartre noted, before the "Other."[25] This most personal and solitary of emotions cements us into a social world, even as its experience is intensely isolating.

The paradoxical structure is replicated across a series of conceptual oppositions, some of which have been analyzed, with much sensitivity and insight, by the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins, whose own work on shame has had a significant impact in literary studies since its rediscovery and republication by Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank.[26] Shame takes place in the mind, but it is communicated in and by the body; indeed, shame can only be said to exist once it makes a physiological appearance. The casual, everyday use of the adjective "shameless" demonstrates the truth of this: "shamelessness" refers not to anything interior, but to something exterior that is deemed to be absent. The paradoxes of shame are further demonstrated in Tomkins's analysis. Shame seeks to hide itself, and yet it is nothing if it does not become manifest. Thus, writes Tomkins, "the very act whose aim is to reduce facial communication is in some measure self-defeating" (137). Shame is an experience simultaneously of exclusion and of inclusion; it marks us as both inside and outside the community. Whenever we experience what Tomkins calls "vicarious shame"—when, to give a couple of Tomkins's own examples, he sees a "Southern Negro" swallowing his anger when confronted by a "Southern white," or when my child "feels forced to inhibit the expression of negative affect toward me" (161)—our subjective investment in civilization is consolidated, even as it is put under strain. Vicarious shame is "at once a measure of civilization and a condition of civilization" (162); that is, it is only insofar as we are subjectively implicated in civilization that we can be ashamed by the ways in which it falls short. In contrast to that of all other affects, the object of shame coincides with the experiencing subject; shame, writes Tomkins, "is an experience *of* the self *by* the self," meaning that "the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object … is lost" (136).

Among the implications of these paradoxical relations, and of that last in particular, is that shame radically complicates the ontology of emotion and its expression. Shame is neither symptom nor pathology, or it is one only insofar as it is the other. As Tomkins points out, when one is ashamed, "one is as ashamed of being ashamed as of anything else" (137). The point to emphasize is that, as an affect, shame is peculiarly resistant to the logic of symptomatology: of cause and effect. If we translate this resistance into the register of literary interpretation, the relation that is left radically complicated by the notion of the shameful work is that of form and content. A work that affects us with shame is a work that cannot be contained in a mere reading; something else, some event is taking place that is not reducible to the personality writing, nor to the personality reading, nor to the historical circumstances in which the text was composed, nor to the events it depicts, nor to any combination of these.

Three Preliminary Theses

Here I would like to make three closely connected propositions, intended to illustrate why shame is so suggestive for talking about literature and literary form. All three are notions that I hope to substantiate in the chapters that follow. I shall state them here in the strongest terms possible, for purposes of clarity, and in the hope that some allowance will be made for their provisionally generalizing quality.

Shame Is Not a "Subjective" Emotion

Shame is not a subjective emotion, one that, for example, would precede its objectivation. Rather, shame is an entity that comes into being on the basis of a discrepancy, such as the gap between subject and object, or between available forms and the drive to expression. Shame has no positive existence or provenance; it is not expressible, nor does writing resolve or enable us to "work through" our shame. In short, shame does not preexist writing, nor is it ever encoded in the text, awaiting our interpretation to tease it out. Shame and writing are coterminous. If one is a writer, it is insofar as one writes that one experiences shame—shame, that is, at the inadequacy of writing.

  I am here taking issue with certain treatments of shame that insist upon its subjective quality, for example, in the work of writers such as Giorgio Agamben and Emmanuel Lévinas, for whom we are ashamed primarily for what or who we are. Lévinas writes in *On Escape*: "What appears in shame is … the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself.… It is therefore our intimacy, that is, our presence to ourselves, that is shameful. It reveals not our nothingness but rather the totality of our existence."[27] On the contrary: shame appears when the obligation to inhabit a subject position coexists with the void, the lack, of subjectivity itself. Shame is a figure not of the intimacy of the self to itself—or at least, if that is so, it is the very discontinuity of the self, its otherness to itself, that is emblematized in that relation. Shame, far from being a figure of self-identity, is a figure of incommensurability; or at least, it results from situations of incommensurability. It is experienced when we are treated as something or someone—a foreigner, a personality type, an ethical person, a generous spirit, a human being, an animal, an alien—that is incommensurable with our own experience. Tomkins cites the instance of a child whose "boisterous laughter" meets with parental displeasure, one of numerous occasions, according to Tomkins, when the interaction of parent and child results in shame: "Any barrier the parent may place before the passionate wish of the child to identify with and to act like the parents, whether

it be because of concern for the child's safety, indifference, hostility, or self-hatred by the parents, is a major source of shame" (*Shame* 153–54). In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir describes the shame of a young woman in adolescence, a sensation "which sometimes becomes pride but which is originally shame," and that results from her being gazed upon as a woman when she does not yet experience herself as one:

> The young girl feels that her body is getting away from her, it is no longer the straightforward expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same time she becomes for others a thing: on the street men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show her flesh.[28]

Shame, in other words, results from an experience of incommensurability, between the I as experienced by the self and the self as it appears to and is reflected in the eyes of the other.

This point is central to the present argument and to the analyses of literary works that will be undertaken in later chapters. Yet, one might reasonably ask, what about those occasions when something called "shame" is represented in the text as *pure content*, entirely removed from the form of the work as such? Surely cases exist—Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, for example, or more recently V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (discussed in a later chapter)—in which the defining claim of Lévinas, that "shame is, in the last analysis, an existence that seeks excuses," is pertinent (*On Escape* 65). Is it really the case that all shame arises out of incommensurability?

In an article entitled "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa," the South African novelist and critic Zoë Wicomb writes of several kinds of shame appearing in works that deal with relations between the "coloured" and "black" communities in South Africa, by such writers as Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Don Mattera, and Nadine Gordimer: "the shame of having had our bodies stared at"; "the shame invested in those (females) who have mated with the colonizer."[29] Wicomb's concern, in part, is with an originary shame, of which the "problem[s] of representation" presented by the coloured community are merely symptomatic, and which she characterizes as follows: "shame for our origins of slavery, shame for the miscegenation, and shame, as colonial racism became institutionalized, for being black" (100). For Wicomb here, shame seems to have a positive existence, an identifiable origin, and a corresponding literary register: silence, or ellipsis (104). This is most apparent in her discussion of Nadine Gordimer's novel *My Son's Story*, a work in which the history of a coloured antiapartheid activist, the father signaled in Gordimer's title, is narrated alternately in the first person by his son Will and by a third-person narrator. In the last few paragraphs of the

novel we learn that the "My" of the title is a fiction; that the text, including the third-person narration, much of it from the father's perspective, is a literary production of the son, whose exclusion from a life of liberation politics is what has made possible his becoming a writer: this evolution is thereby revealed as the real story of the book. The final sentence of the novel ("I am a writer and this is my first book—that I can never publish")[30] leads Wicomb to conclude that the shame of the book is the father's story of miscegenation and "concupiscence" which, should it become public, would threaten his effectiveness as a political agent: "In the space between writing and making public lies an unacknowledged shame steeped in its originary interracial sex" (104).

Wicomb is right to see a representational barrier within Gordimer's work separating the ethic of the writer from the world of politics and activism. As in Milan Kundera's reading of Kafka, Gordimer's thinking is structured by this divide. In the book's narrative architecture, the author goes to great lengths to preserve the space of Will's writing from any material or ideological implication in the struggle that defines his parents' world. Thus, the word processor with which he is writing the book was purchased, we are told, "with money saved from part-time jobs he found himself" (266). His "specialness" is established long before the revelation that the book we are reading is Will's first literary work. "Why must I be the one excepted, the one left behind?" he asks his mother Aila, furious at her refusal to let him testify in court in her defense against terrorism charges. "What's so special about me? So I'm your stake in something, I'm to be something you and he don't really want to give up? Not even for the revolution?" (254, 255). The unpublishable fact of Will's manuscript is the logical conclusion of this separation. Its effect is to claim an exceptional status for the figure of the writer, and for literature in general, an effect heightened by the periodic quotations from William Shakespeare that, towards the end of the book, serve increasingly to frame and authorize this later Will's own reflections.

The formula of literary possibility posited in Gordimer's work is structurally similar to that of Levi's *Muselmänner*: either one acts or one writes. Yet a crucial difference between Levi and Gordimer becomes apparent as soon as one considers the location of shame in each text. In *My Son's Story*, writing is by definition exempt from shame. If there is incommensurability, it is located not in writing at all, but solely in the realm of the political. Wicomb's suggestion that behind the shame of coloured complicity with the apartheid policies of the National Party lies the story of the father's concupiscence, and of the community's origins in miscegenation, inadvertently colludes with Gordimer's logic of exception by maintaining the topography and ontology of shame as essentially private, personal, and uncommunicable. From the beginning of Gordimer's

narrative, Sonny, as the father is called, has been pursuing an adulterous relationship with a white antiapartheid sympathizer named Hannah. The passage in which he reflects on his shame makes clear that the shame arises not simply from his adultery, nor from miscegenation, but from an incommensurability, an irresolvable tension at the heart of the revolutionary struggle, and which is its very condition. The poles of this incommensurability are Sonny's two "obsessions," Hannah and the struggle; its dramatized form is his realization that the affair has irreversibly damaged his credibility in the eyes of the movement and his place in its hierarchy. "There is no place for a second obsession in the life of a revolutionary," he reflects.

> He found himself thinking—insanely—that if the law had still forbidden him Hannah, if that Nazi law for the 'purity' of the white race that disgustingly conceived it had still been in force, he would never have risked himself. For Hannah. Could not have. Because needing Hannah, taking the risk of going to prison for that white woman would have put at risk his only freedom, the only freedom of his kind, the freedom to go to prison again and again, if need be, for the struggle…. That filthy law would have saved him. (263–64)

The ethical, political, and conceptual violence described in this passage is limited by the conceit of the novel entirely to Gordimer's content and subject matter. The logic of exception prevents the novel from engaging in any reflection on the question of the ethics of literary representation, a question in which one might assume that the novel is desperately implicated. Gordimer, after all, is a white South African presuming to represent a particular minority experience. The representational barrier that *My Son's Story* erects, intradiegetically, between the worlds of Sonny and Aila, on one hand, and of Will, the future writer, on the other is thus replicated extradiegetically: between the story and the circumstances of the story's production. The existence of this barrier is not acknowledged at any moment by the text itself.

A reading of *My Son's Story* in the light of Levi's parable of the *Muselmänner* would suggest the presence of a quite different shame, one that is not narrated in the book, but that we might nevertheless locate at its center. This is not the shame of the father's concupiscence, nor even of his colouredness, but that of Will's development as a writer. What is "originary" in Gordimer's narrative of shame would be not the interracial sex that lies behind it, nor even the "space between writing and making public" identified by Wicomb, but a more fundamental gap: between the obligation to write and the impossibility of doing so, a gap that would be felt as an event of the text, a shortfall of possibility materialized by it, and

in which Gordimer's own writing would be fully implicated. This other story is one that the text as we have it forecloses by means of its elaborate framing device. In this other story, unnarrated and uninstantiated, we might locate the real shame of Gordimer's book.

Interestingly, Wicomb's own fiction demonstrates a more complex enactment of the materiality of shame than either her own critical essay or Gordimer's novel. A story in her book *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* entitled "When the Train Comes" opens as follows: "I am not the kind of girl whom boys look at. I have known this for a long time, but I still lower my head in public and peep through my lashes."[31] This is the prelude to a gradual realization that this girl's shame is one that cannot be spoken as such. Indeed, the only mention of shame in this text is an allusion to its unfathomability. In Wicomb's fiction, to be "coloured," or even to be "fat," is to be caught in a situation of incommensurability, in which language use is utterly implicated: "I hope that Pa will not speak to me loudly in English. I will avoid calling him Father for [the African boys watching] will surely snigger.… They must know that this is no ordinary day. But we all remain silent and I am inexplicably ashamed" (25). On the day in question, the girl and her father are waiting for a train that will take her to St. Mary's School, which has just been obliged to open its doors to nonwhite students. Such aspirations themselves are shameful, speaking as they do to a presumption of entitlement in its absence, to an incommensurability between a new world and the old; between, for example, the new "imitation leather suitcases" that the school seems to require of her, shining conspicuously across the station platform, and her missed "old scuffed bag" (27). Her "fatness" is shameful only when a tentative gesture of flirtation encounters an imperviousness that is incommensurable with it and exposes it as presumption. "Sarie's hand automatically flutters to her throat to button up her orlon cardigan when boys talk to her. I have tried that, have fumbled with buttons and suffered their perplexed looks or reddened at the question, 'Are you cold?' " (21).[32] In a later story entitled "Disgrace," a female servant, on an impulse, steals a silk scarf from a houseguest of her employer. The shame she feels afterwards, rising "like hot hives in her neck," is experienced not as the "unalterably binding presence of the I to itself," but as an encounter with someone quite other than herself: "She is still awake at midnight, amazed by the woman who has taken a silk scarf that does not belong to her.[33] The shame is dramatically heightened when she learns that the guest, whom she has suspected of meanness, has left her a very large tip. Shame is a negative affect. We are not ashamed of what we are; rather, shame emerges in the space between positivist rhetorics that speak with corrosive eloquence of what we are not.

Shame Is Not an "Ethical" Response

Shame should not be talked about alongside guilt, in the way that, for
example, anthropologists have talked about "shame cultures" and "guilt
cultures." The difference between guilt and shame is a difference between
the narrative viability of the individual as an ethical category, including
the possibility of its expression and/or redemption, and the apparent dis-
solution or unsustainability of those terms. Shame, as Primo Levi was
aware, has nothing to do with guilt. In Levi's experience, as he writes in
The Drowned and the Saved, it was rare for a survivor of Auschwitz to
feel guilty about having, say, robbed or beaten a companion while in the
camp. Shame, an almost universal feeling among survivors, is a feeling of
not having acted, of, for example, "having omitted to offer help," and it
is of no help whatsoever in judging the ethical worth of the person who
suffers it (78).

   For Deleuze, too, shame has almost no relation to guilt; in fact, the
usefulness of the concept can be measured precisely by its distance from
guilt.[34] "The shame of being a man," a phrase Deleuze associates with
Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* (although it doesn't actually appear
there), is a condition not of being "responsible" for the depths to which
man has shown himself capable of sinking—for Nazism, say—but of
having been "sullied" by them.[35] Whereas responsibility or guilt would
presuppose an ontology of the subject, shame is an experience of the
subject's dissolution, of the fundamental complicity that, in the modern
world, constitutes living. As in Primo Levi, we subsist only on the basis
of perpetual compromises with "the values, ideals and opinions of our
time."[36] For Deleuze, what is shameful is not just the world in which we
happen to find ourselves, but the very regime of *what exists*, the logic of
ontology and of everything that attends it: expression, identity, subjectiv-
ity, volition. This logic or set of logics is the substrate of fascism, and it
amounts to an "ignominy of the possibilities of life" (108) which, how-
ever, we cannot help but be intimately familiar with: it is the very condi-
tion of existence.[37]

   The "shame of being a man" is also, then, the shame of *being*. Shame
in Deleuze is shame for what exists, for the "shameful compromises"
with "our time" that we undergo (*What Is Philosophy?* 108), and for
the absence of any "sure way of maintaining becomings, or still more
of arousing them, even within ourselves" (*Negotiations* 172–73). Shame,
writes Deleuze, is "one of philosophy's most powerful motifs" (*What Is
Philosophy?* 108), the basis for a kind of writing and thought that could
take place in the name of the powerless. The powerless, however, are
those for whom no names exist, for whom ontology has not cleared a
space. To speak for the powerless, then—for the subaltern, the illiter-

ate, the mute—is not to speak on their behalf, or in their place, but to speak, to be responsible, *before* them (109). Shame is not an ethics predicated upon the obligation of the "self" towards the "other"; it is an occasion, rather, in which the ontological entity of the self may begin to be vacated entirely.

The most sustained reflection on shame in Deleuze's work is his essay on T. E. Lawrence, entitled "The Shame and the Glory." During the period covered by the narrative of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence was participating in what might be regarded, and not only from our "postcolonial" perspective, as a profoundly shameful enterprise: the attempt by the British military during the First World War to foment a nationalist Arab revolt against the Turks, so as to distract Turkey, a German ally, from the war in Europe. The events narrated in the book led directly to the foundation of the state of Iraq, initially as a mandate under the administrative control of the British, a situation that lasted until Iraq's independence in 1932. Perhaps Lawrence's role in this enterprise was particularly liable to cause shame in a man dominated by, in Hannah Arendt's words, "disgust with the world as well as with himself" (*Origins* 218). "I was sent to these Arabs as a stranger," Lawrence writes, "charged by duty to lead them forward and to develop to the highest any movement of theirs profitable to England in her war."[38] Shame of one sort or another is acknowledged and indeed advertised on almost every page of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: "I assured [the Arabs] that England kept her word in letter and spirit. In this comfort they performed their fine things: but, of course, instead of being proud of what we did together, I was continually and bitterly ashamed" (276).

For Arendt, Lawrence and what happened to him are indices of the shifts that took place during the century or so that preceded the outbreak of the First World War, changes that, according to Arendt, ultimately ushered in the age of totalitarianism, but which had their provenance in the "Great Game" of imperialism and the difficulty faced by the European colonial nations in governing other peoples. These involved primarily the discovery of two apparatuses of colonial rule: race and bureaucracy. Arendt attributes the former discovery—race—to the Boers, who, in South Africa, on encountering a form of humanity that "ashamed and frightened" them, unleashed one of "the most terrible massacres in recent history": the near-extermination of the "Hottentot" (Khoikhoi) peoples (*Origins* 207, 185).

The latter discovery, bureaucracy, was the solution arrived at by the British in India and Egypt, as well as by the French in Algeria; and, of course, race-thinking is also intrinsic to it. Its ethical basis was a sense of the ruled people as "hopelessly inferior" and in need of "special protection" (*Origins* 207, 209): a complex of ideas known, ever since Rudyard

Kipling's famous poem, as "the white man's burden." In order to operate successfully, writes Arendt, bureaucracy demanded a class of administrators whose sense of loyalty and patriotism were so unquestioning as to have no element of "personal ambition or vanity"; who would even be willing to renounce "the human aspiration of having their names connected with their achievements." Their greatest passion, she adds, would be "for secrecy … for a role behind the scenes; their greatest contempt would be directed at publicity and people who love it" (213).

Theorists of this "imperialist character" among Britain's colonial administrators included Rudyard Kipling, Lord Cromer (British Consul General in Egypt from 1883 to 1907), who "possessed all these qualities to a very high degree" (213), and even the great expansionist businessman, politician, and megalomaniacal personality Cecil Rhodes, active in South and Southern Africa from the 1870s until his death in 1902. In the thinking of these figures, notions of "integrity," "disinterestedness," and "self-sacrifice"—avatars, Arendt points out, of earlier myths of English noblesse such as "chivalry, nobility, and bravery"—operate in the service of a "higher purpose" (212), and with a consequent sense of unworldliness. As Arendt puts it, in the loyal devotion of the colonial administrator, the tradition of the "dragon-slayer" and gallant "protector of the weak" is transformed into an apparatus of power, the dominant affect of which, she writes, is "aloofness." For Arendt, this aloofness, the "new attitude" of Britain's colonial administrations, was perhaps the most monstrous aspect of colonial rule in India, more "dangerous" than earlier forms of oppressive government such as "Asiatic" despotism, because in it, the world of the ruler is removed more absolutely from that of the subject population. "In comparison," writes Arendt, "exploitation, oppression, or corruption look like safeguards of human dignity, because exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed, corruptor and corrupted still live in the same world, still share the same goals, fight each other for the possession of the same things; and it is this *tertium comparationis* which aloofness destroyed" (212). With this shift, observes Arendt further, colonialism turns into imperialism.

Lawrence of Arabia was an exemplar of this class: "the best man who ever turned from an adventurer … into a secret agent" (218). Yet Lawrence was "destroyed" by the very forces (of imperialism, of the transformation of "boyhood noblesse" into bureaucratic secrecy) that he served so completely. His "integrity" was such that any pretence of working with the Arabs on their behalf was succeeded by a full immersion in their cause and their world. It becomes almost impossible, therefore, to say to what extent his devotion to the Arab cause was in the service of his devotion to the British, or vice versa. For Deleuze, indeed, Lawrence's "betrayal" is universal and metaphysical; his "secrecy" is not circumscriptive, indi-

cating a withheld truth, but "infinite," a refusal of ontology (and thus of loyalty, which presupposes ontology). Betrayal is elevated to the level of a subjective principle, at which point it comes as close as possible to a vacating of subjectivity as such: "Every mine he plants also explodes within himself," writes Deleuze, "he is himself the bomb he detonates."[39] In Lawrence, this is to say, aloofness is adopted with respect to everything concrete, including himself. One of the attractions that Lawrence saw in the Arabs was their proclivity for abstraction, another form of aloofness: "They were incorrigibly children of the idea, feckless and colour-blind, to whom body and spirit were for ever and inevitably opposed" (*Seven Pillars* 42). Arendt quotes from a letter Lawrence wrote in 1918, in which he describes the appeal of the Arab world and the Arab mind: "It is the old, old civilisation, which has refined itself clear of household gods, and half the trappings which ours hastens to assume. The gospel of bareness in materials is a good one, and it involves apparently a sort of moral bareness too."[40]

Arendt's account of colonial aloofness provides a rationale for understanding how pride and shame might be regarded as versions of the same affect; or at least, how each may function as the other's precondition. Lawrence's "decency," his "integrity," are found in the quality of his aloofness, which gives him an almost otherworldly character; but we might say the same about the quality of his shame, in which his aloofness simply takes himself for its object. In Lawrence, then, these two affects coincide; his internalization of the chivalric ideal of self-sacrifice and service is so complete that he experiences it as shame—or, perhaps, shame is its basis and condition of possibility. In chapter 100 of *Seven Pillars*, the chapter that prompts Deleuze to call *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* "an almost mad book" (121), Lawrence begins an assault upon his own motivations and those of the British in Arabia that will end in the kind of spiraling shame we have seen in Coetzee. Of the notion that support for the Arab revolt was motivated by the benign goal of "redemption" for that race, he writes: "To endure for another in simplicity gave a sense of greatness. There was nothing loftier than a cross, from which to contemplate the world. The pride and exhilaration of it were beyond conceit" (551). Half a page later, after lamenting the corruption of "honest redemption" by the liberator's own "thought-riddled" nature, the shameful consciousness of "the under-motives and the after-glory of his act," Lawrence concludes: "There seemed no straight walking for us leaders in this crooked lane of conduct, ring within ring of unknown, shamefaced motives cancelling or double-charging their precedents" (551–52). The point is close to Arendt's: the dragon-slayer is *eo ipso* the conqueror of the people he "liberates," who are thereby enmeshed in a vicarious relationship to their own freedom. "Expiation" leaves the "expiated" (Lawrence's terms)

nothing but the possibility of imitating their savior. As Lawrence puts it, "Each cross, occupied, robbed the late-comers of all but the poor part of copying" (551).

What this reading brings to our understanding of the colonial relation, the imitative structure of which has been analyzed with considerable subtlety by Homi Bhabha,[41] is an awareness of its affective aspects and of the continuity between colonial aloofness, or pride, and shame. Even more important, however, is the shattering possibility that shame is precisely the place from which colonial pride arises. Shame, then, would be not an ethical response to the excesses of colonialism, but the condition of possibility of those excesses. According to this logic, shame and pride, taken together, may be seen to underpin the imperial character; both inhabit an intense discomfort with the regime of what exists. Both acknowledge the other as, in Sartre's words, "the subject through whom my being gets its object-state" (*Being and Nothingness* 290); yet both shame and pride, at least in the form of Arendt's "aloofness," refuse any accommodation with that "object-state" as the definition or the limit of the self.

Of course, the refusal is differently coded or conceptualized in each case. In shame, the incommensurability between the subject and its reification as an object is felt directly as affect. In the case of aloofness, that same incommensurability is temporarily resolved by disavowing it—and disavowing, along with it, the indispensability of the other for the very possibility of a self that might stand aloof in such a fashion. As Sartre points out, this disavowal, an "affirmation of my freedom confronting the Other-as-object," is unsustainable. Its "internal development" must cause it to disintegrate (290, 291). In the meantime, however, aloofness is capable of great injustice, under the pretence that it acts out of the noblest impulses. As Lawrence puts it, "in reality we had borne the vicarious for our own sakes, or at least because it was pointed for our benefit: and could escape from this knowledge only by a make-belief in sense as well as in motive" (*Seven Pillars* 550).

Sartre's analysis is invaluable for the insight that shame and pride resemble each other far more than, say, shame and guilt. In a letter to George Bernard Shaw in 1922, Lawrence writes that his "disgust" with his own book "is so great that I no longer believe it worth trying to improve," and that *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is "long-winded, and pretentious, and dull to the point where I can no longer bear to look at it myself." In such passages, both shame and pride are present, and inseparably. Indeed, the purpose of the letter to Shaw, whom he had only met casually once, was to ask if he would read the manuscript (*Letters* 357). Shame for Sartre, as for Primo Levi and Deleuze, has no inherent relation to guilt; its primary animus is towards ontological thinking, which it contemplates—by which it contemplates itself contemplated—with the greatest discomfort.

"Pure shame," Sartre writes, "is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object; that is, of *recognizing myself* in this degraded, fixed and dependent being which I am for the Other" (*Being and Nothingness* 288–89).

Autobiographical writing, then, is almost inevitably a shameful exercise, since in undertaking it we cast the ontologizing gaze of the other upon ourselves. The autobiographical gaze is an aloofness inhabited by the self in respect of the self; the shame is attributable to the discrepancy embedded in this relation, rather than to anything directly present in the content.[42] When Deleuze, in a late interview with Toni Negri, extends his interpretation of the "shame at being a man" into "utterly trivial situations" and speaks of shame "in the face of too great a vulgarization of thinking, in the face of TV entertainment, of a ministerial speech, of '*bon vivants*' gossiping" (*Negotiations* 172), "aloofness" seems just as valid a descriptor of the consciousness that Deleuze has in mind as "shame."

For Arendt, it should be emphasized, the significance of Lawrence is overwhelmingly historical: Lawrence was a man of his time whose very integrity, as embodied in his refusal, even after the fact, to profit personally from his role in the imperial adventure, was in reality, and without losing any of its authenticity, an intrinsic ideological element of the colonial enterprise. Lawrence, she writes, "clung fast to a morality which, however, had already lost all objective bases and consisted only of a kind of private and necessarily quixotic attitude of chivalry" (*Origins* 218). Colonialism itself is for Arendt a project that trades in anachronism.[43] Lawrence was a purely decent man who, caught in a fold of history, managed to preserve his decency only at the cost of his own contentment and psychic survival, and yet that attachment to decency, in Lawrence and a few others, is precisely what made the activities of the British in the Middle East possible.

For Deleuze, by contrast, Lawrence's shame is not a personal or psychological disposition; nor is it merely the subjective dimension of a modality of decency or integrity that is ideologically and historically implicated; nor is it an idiosyncratic extension of the self-effacement demanded of its bureaucrats by the British establishment; or if it is any of these things, it also travels far beyond them. Shame in Lawrence emerges as a multiple entity, a form that, in its various dimensions, is directed against being and towards becoming. Lawrence's shame has at least three principal aspects, according to Deleuze: the shame of betraying the Arabs (for Lawrence "never stops guaranteeing English promises that he knows perfectly well will not be kept"); the shame of command ("How is it possible to command without shame? To command is to steal souls in order to deliver them over to suffering"); and shame of the body ("the mind is ashamed *of* the body in a very special manner; in fact, it is ashamed *for*

the body").[44] In each case, shame is the shame of *being*. Against identity, Lawrence dons his "mantle of fraud" (*Seven Pillars* 503), what Deleuze conceives as a "universal betrayal." Against the "comfortable imitative obedience" of the regular army, he posits the vitality and individuality of the partisan, the guerrilla (339–40). And against the unity and organicity of the body, he posits "the molecular sludge of matter" and the "disbodied" exhilaration of vehicular movement (468).[45]

The point of departure of Deleuze's discussion is Lawrence's extraordinarily vivid landscapes and portraiture, in which Lawrence displays an intensity of perception that renders his descriptions closer to "becomings" than representations. The light, the "solar haze" of the desert, is the height of the abstraction for which this consciousness strives; for Deleuze the "pure transparency" of unperceived light is as close to freedom from conceptualization (form) and being (ontology) as one can imagine (115). Such an ideal is unattainable, of course; and yet, in its very unattainability is found its essence. Its counterpoint is the materiality of the corporeal. Shame for the body is shame for the ways in which bodily weakness imprisons one in the contingent, the here and now. "When … we did see our bodies, it was with some hostility, with a contemptuous sense that they reached their highest purpose, not as vehicles of the spirit, but when, dissolved, their elements served to manure a field" (*Seven Pillars* 468).

For Deleuze there is nothing egoistic or self-mythologizing about Lawrence's writing: quite the opposite. Instead there is a "projection machine," a desire "to project—into things, into reality, into the future, and even into the sky—an image of himself and others so intense that *it has a life of its own*" (117–18). Shame—the shame of form, of *being*—is behind this enterprise of projection: "At night we were stained by dew, and shamed into pettiness by the innumerable silences of stars," we read in the first paragraph of *Seven Pillars* (29). The propensity of Lawrence's writing is towards what Deleuze elsewhere calls the "ill-formed or the incomplete."[46] The goal of the person writing is not to become a writer, but to escape from writing. What fascinates Deleuze is the intensity with which Lawrence positions himself "neither in relation to the real or action, nor in relation to the imaginary or dreams, but solely in relation to the force through which he projects images into the real" (118). Lawrence himself conceives of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* as a history of that which, in the Arab movement, will likely be omitted from any official historiography, a historiography written by those who orchestrated and benefited from it: "Here are no lessons for the world, no disclosures to shock peoples," he writes in his introductory chapter. "It is filled with trivial things, partly that no one mistake for history the bones from which some day a man may make history" (24). Lawrence explicitly refuses the role of ventriloquist or spokesperson for the Arab cause. What attracts

him about the Arabs ("the bravest, simplest and merriest of men," 549), about the revolt, and about the desert—and his own enterprise of writing is inseparable from these—is an immunity to mediation of all kinds: to venality, calculation, representation, and substitution. "To have bought men would have put our movement on the base of interest; whereas our followers must be ready to go all the way without other mixture in their motives than human frailty" (548). The promise is of a world that can dissolve the mediation of forms. "The morning freshness of the world-to-be intoxicated us. We were wrought up with ideas inexpressible and vaporous, but to be fought for" (24).

Shame, then, operates in Lawrence as a principle of simultaneous negation of every positive perception, notion, or theory that might be attributed to the text. Lawrence feels shame when he finds himself (as he does perpetually) representing that which cannot be represented, which includes shame. He transcends his shame—which is also the shame of writing—by, precisely, writing. Thus, as well as being the sensation from which he tries to escape by writing, shame is the sensation that he produces in his writing. By means of an elaboration of shame, Lawrence enlarges both himself and his shame, turning shame into an affect: an entity that bears very little relation to the purely personal feeling, and which, for that reason, is able to free him from the "hatred and eternal questioning" of the self (548).

This is what Deleuze means when he says that in Lawrence's writing shame becomes something "glorious." The process is like the elaboration of disappointment into an "affect" in Jane Austen, or the elaboration of the sun setting into the trees into a "percept" in Flannery O'Connor;[47] or, to take examples from Deleuze and Guattari, the elaboration (Deleuze and Guattari use Bergson's term "fabulation") of the town and the moor into a "percept" in Virginia Woolf and Thomas Hardy.[48] In one of Deleuze's few autobiographical texts, from 1973, he writes:

> It's a strange business, speaking for yourself, in your own name, because it doesn't at all come with seeing yourself as an ego or a person or a subject. Individuals find a real name for themselves, rather, only through the harshest exercise in depersonalization, by opening themselves up to the multiplicities everywhere within them, to the intensities running through them…. What one says comes from the depths of one's ignorance, the depths of one's own underdevelopment. One becomes a set of liberated singularities, words, names, fingernails, things, animals, little events. ("Letter to a Harsh Critic" 6–7)

Not only is shame the impetus behind Lawrence's "exercise in depersonalization"; shame is also occasioned by it and the means by which his writing attains the quality of aesthetic thickness that Deleuze calls speak-

ing "in your own name." It would be tempting to say that there are two shames in Lawrence, except that the first has no manifest actuality—for shame cannot be peddled as an artistic motif without undergoing huge violence—and the second is simply indistinguishable from its formal existence. That is to say, the shame that Lawrence writes about perpetually, and obsessively, seems motivated as much by the process of writing as anything else. In neither case is it possible to isolate a distinct entity that we can confidently call "shame." When Lawrence *thematizes* shame, the poverty or inadequacy of his writing is frequently presented as a cause of it; yet such passages are some of his most elegant. They include sequences in which he mercilessly disparages the book we are reading: "My brain was sudden and silent as a wild cat … so meshed in nerves and hesitation, it could not be a thing to be afraid of; yet it was a real beast, and this book its mangy skin, dried, stuffed and set up squarely for men to stare at" (*Seven Pillars* 564). Is shame, then, the cause of his book, or its effect? Lawrence's shame is driven by the impossibility of writing as much as by the impossibility of not writing; it is in shame, precisely, that these impossibilities coincide.

In the final sentence of "The Shame and the Glory," Deleuze writes that *Seven Pillars* incarnates "the impossibility of identifying with the Arab (Palestinian) cause; the shame of not being able to do so; the deeper shame that comes from elsewhere, cosubstantial with being" (125). Deleuze's formulation identifies a trajectory in Lawrence's writing away from positivism of all kinds (including a positive notion of shame), and towards nothingness, abstraction, or imperceptibility. This trajectory is in place as early as the first chapter of *Seven Pillars*:

> The effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made an infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith. I had dropped one form and not taken on the other … with a resultant feeling of intense loneliness in life, and a contempt, not for other men, but for all they do. (31–32)

This passage recalls the abyssal shame that we have seen in Coetzee. It is difficult not to think also of Kafka, who in a letter to Max Brod describes his own situation as a young Jewish writer in Prague, caught between three impossibilities: "the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing German, the impossibility of writing differently."[49] Arendt's notion of aloofness, with its intimations of an otherworldly contempt for existence, implicates Lawrence's shame-ridden consciousness with ideological and historical specificity. Like pride for Sartre, shame is under-

stood as compensatory: a kind of ethical bad conscience that is oblivious, ultimately, to the degree to which it too has facilitated injustice. But the notion of an "enlarged" or multiple shame, an event inseparable from the moment of its writing, functions rather differently than this: as a negation of every possible affirmation. In Deleuze's reading of Lawrence we encounter a shame that is discontinuous with itself, an entity resistant to all historical or ideological circumscription, including that which would permit the retention of shame as an ethical response.

In recent years, the term "shame" has frequently been mobilized in the context of liberal sentiment over, for example, America's war in Iraq, or the events at Abu Ghraib prison that became public in the spring of 2004; or, in the European context, the history of colonial outrages in Africa and India; or the injustices suffered by the indigenous peoples of Australia during the period of that continent's colonization and since. It may be that, following Arendt's analysis, we should see such invoked shame not as an ethical response to such events, but as their precondition, part of the apparatus of power that makes them possible.

In an article entitled "The Shame of Abu Ghraib," John Limon has argued along these lines that the conduct of American soldiers at the Baghdad prison during 2003 and 2004 was "shameful" not merely in an ethical sense, but in a literal or "ontological" one also. Far from exploiting the "shame culture" of the Arabs, America reveals itself, by its activities in Iraq, to be a "sophisticated shame culture":

> America is engaged in the dispensation of shame, which requires at least an intuition of what it means for the United States, not only Iraq, to be a shame culture…. The shamelessness of the administration is part of the strategy, and the shame that thousands of Americans feel, even if it is not welcomed by the administration, is built into it.[50]

For Limon, shame and shamelessness are not opposites, but bound together, part of a shame system, the dimensions of which are global.

Limon attributes the idea of the inseparability of shame from shamelessness to Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame*. What Limon finds especially compelling is the structure proposed by Rushdie according to which the "unfelt shame of the world"—the shame "that should have been felt, but [was] not"—is siphoned off by "the misfortunate few, janitors of the unseen"; that is to say, the powerless, who in Rushdie's fabular tale are concentrated into the character of Sufiya Zinobia Hyder: "the very perfection of lowliness," says Limon (568).[51] Rushdie's novel offers not only a theory of shame but a theory of power, one that owes much to Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Shame, says Limon, begins with the shamelessness, that is to say, "with lying … with presidential misrepresentations and treacheries and secrets and cover-ups" (557). He who is able to disavow

his shame will wield power over he who is unable to do so. "Shame-lessness is power, [and] power is shamelessness," summarizes Limon. "More fully: power enables the throwing off of shame as shamelessness; the throwing off of shame as shamelessness enables power" (568). Thus, the lack of shame in American official discourse, as in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib, is indicative not of its absence but of its disavowal—and this disavowal always takes place vertically, in a downward direction, devolving onto those below. Shame for Limon has no ethical content; shame and shamelessness are simply a linked concept immanent to power and which, in its dual form, dramatizes its dialectic. In Rushdie, Limon writes, we learn "how to find shame not in weakness, where it is tradi-tionally sought, but in the shamelessness of power," or in other words, precisely where shame is not. Shame and shamelessness coincide, such that "the United States is a shame society of which shamelessness is the sign" (548).

A corresponding argument is found in the work of the anthropolo-gist Elizabeth Povinelli, for whom shame has become part of the "post-ideological" regime of late capitalist societies, functioning to preserve a sense of the "good intentions" of the present population in the face of its history of—and basis in—brutality. In such a regime, the confession of having been wrong, and of one's present "shame" in having been wrong, establishes a temporal logic of exception predicated upon the narrative of a progressive emergence from colonialism and ideology into a "'post-ideological' (post)colonial" moment.[52] "The articulate pain of the other," writes Povinelli, "simultaneously allows the liberal subject to feel herself or himself to have been unintentionally causing wrong and to be con-stantly moving to rectify that wrong" (162). Her study is concerned with the recent emergence of a rhetoric of shame in Australian national debates over injustices committed against native populations during colonization, and in the context of legal claims for restitution, in the form of native title and land rights, by indigenous groups based upon their own assertions of cultural distinctiveness. "By referring to the shame of 'our' law and 'our' nation and the good of recognizing 'their' laws, 'their' culture, and 'their' traditions, the court is able to cite and entrench an understanding of the nation as confronting its own discriminatory practices and facing up to and eliminating a dark stain on its history even as it reproduces the nation as Anglo-Celtic and 'ours'" (171). What Povinelli does not show is how one might refer to one's own brutal history as shaming without that reference amounting to a substitution of one's own good intentions for that history. The object of Povinelli's critique, therefore, is implicitly the order of *reference* as much as that of shame. It is a central claim of the present work that these orders are inseparable. The lesson of Povinel-li's and Limon's interventions—and, more than the interventions them-

selves, the mere possibility of their articulation, as well as that of Hannah
Arendt's reading of Lawrence—is that there is no ethical basis whatso-
ever in an instantiated or invoked shame.

Shame Is Ontologically Inseparable from the Forms in Which It Appears

Shame cannot be studied *as such*, either theoretically, empirically, clini-
cally, or sociologically; shame, rather, is a dynamic that helps us to re-
think a number of conceptual relations—most notably, for the purposes
of this book, the tension between the aesthetic and the ethical claims of
the modern novel. When shame is communicated, what is communicated
has no positive referent; the substance of shame is fundamentally a gap,
an absence, an impossibility. Shame is not located primarily in the con-
tent of the work. It is, rather, a materialization of the discrepancy between
content and form, of the inadequacy of form with respect to content. To
invert one of Tomkins's formulations—the idea that shame cannot help
but violate its own desire for self-erasure—we might say that the project
of saying anything about shame as such is inherently self-defeating. What
is communicated in shame is precisely its uncommunicability. Insofar as it
has any value for interpreting artistic or literary works, shame functions
as a negative principle, alerting us to a lack, rather than to a presence.

　　Some of these qualities are visible in the work of the French writer and
ethnographer Michel Leiris, a figure best known, perhaps, for the five
volumes of autobiography that he wrote between 1939 and 1976, begin-
ning with the shame-ridden *L'Age d'homme* (translated into English as
Manhood). The relation to the self apparent in Leiris's autobiographical
writings is more intense, more annihilating, perhaps, than that of almost
any other figure in twentieth-century literature; and yet, precisely for that
reason, his attention to himself takes on an almost ethnographic quality.
The structure is an exemplary Tomkinsian one: the occasion for Leiris's
shame is impossible to differentiate from the occasion of Leiris's writing
itself. Ethical content, substance, is present in Leiris only in—and pre-
cisely as—its absence.

　　I have written in more detail elsewhere about the complex, paradoxi-
cal place of shame in Leiris's autobiographical works.[53] I would like here
briefly to examine a statement that appears in an afterword to *Manhood*,
written in 1946 for the book's second edition, in which Leiris reassesses
his own work in the light of the horrors that had taken place since its
publication, specifically, the Second World War. The afterword was writ-
ten in Le Havre, amid the ruination of the city, a scene of devastation
which, Leiris points out, offers a dramatic setting for the sense of bathos
that afflicts his project: "On this scale, the personal problems with which

Manhood is concerned are obviously insignificant: whatever might have been, in the best of cases, its strength and its sincerity, the poet's inner agony, weighed against the horrors of war, counts for no more than a toothache over which it would be graceless to groan; what is the use, in the world's excruciating uproar, of this faint moan over such narrowly limited and individual problems?"[54]

To understand the absent ethical substance of Leiris's book, we might consider Primo Levi's *Muselmänner* as a figure intimately connected to Leiris as his inversion and counteractualization—this despite the fact that *L'Age d'homme* was completed in 1935, a decade before the revelations of the full horror of the camps. In the case of the *Muselmänner*, experience so far exceeds form as to annihilate it completely; for Leiris, form surpasses experience in the same proportion. Leiris has nothing of substance to say, but an almost total command over the tools for saying it. He himself outlines the paradox, as encapsulated in the relation between his own literary talent and the silence that is its necessary inversion: "Always beneath or above concrete events, I remain a prisoner of this alternative: the world as a real object which dominates and devours me … in suffering and in fear, or else the world as a pure fantasy which dissolves in my hands, which I destroy … without ever succeeding in possessing it" (141). If for Primo Levi the mode of "bearing witness" is forever barred from the extent of the horror, for Michel Leiris the lack of anything to bear witness to is the occasion for an extraordinary literary eloquence, tormented by the fact of its substancelessness, by the fact that it risks nothing. Primo Levi's assessment—"The destruction brought to an end, the job completed, was not told by anyone, just as no one ever returned to describe his own death" (*Drowned* 84) —must then be supplemented by its inversion, from Leiris's *Manhood*: "With a bitterness I used not to suspect, I have come to realize that only a certain fervour could save me, but that this world has nothing in it for which I am capable of dying" (141). Silence, inarticulacy, is the condition of possibility of its opposite: eloquence, articulation. The truth of each is found alongside its contrary.

In an essay entitled "Shame, or the Subject," in part a discussion of Primo Levi's works on Auschwitz (in *Remnants of Auschwitz*), Giorgio Agamben ventriloquizes what he calls the "phenomenology of testimony" in a passage that describes quite concisely the relation in which Leiris and the *Muselmänner* present each other's counteractualization: "To speak, to bear witness, is … to enter into a vertiginous movement in which something sinks to the bottom, wholly desubjectified and silenced, and something subjectified speaks without truly having anything to say of its own."[55]

The primary historical reference point of the present work is not Auschwitz, however, but the similarly devastating event of colonialism.

By colonialism, I am referring to the encounter that takes place between so-called Western and non-Western societies, not only in the moment at which the latter are colonized by the former, but also in the further encounter that constitutes the moment of "decolonization"—as Leiris says, writing in 1981, "ce qu'on a nommé présomptueusement la 'décolonisation'" (that which we have presumptuously named 'decolonization').[56] As in Adorno's writing about Auschwitz, the transition between the colonial and the postcolonial worlds should not be seen as a historical development, neatly confined to a few decades in the twentieth century; nor should postcolonial be separated from other temporal and historical categories, such as modernity or postmodernity. In the present work, the word "postcolonial" will be used to designate the specifically modern situation in which the question of the ethics of the literary arises as a perpetually problematic one.

Postcolonial Shame and the Novel

In the postcolonial world, theories and narratives of shame—particularly those that emphasize its quality of intersubjectivity—have a particular resonance. The most useful account of shame in this regard is Jean-Paul Sartre's. It occurs in the course of the famous parable in *Being and Nothingness* of a man becoming aware of himself being looked at, as, "moved by a fit of jealousy, curiosity, or vice," he looks through a keyhole. "All of a sudden," says Sartre, "I am conscious of myself as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other" (260). "Shame," writes Sartre after this analysis, "is a unitary apprehension with three dimensions: '*I* am ashamed of *myself* before the *Other*.' If any one of these dimensions disappears, the shame disappears as well" (289–90).

Insofar as writing is one of the major ways in which we place ourselves before the "Other," the implication of Sartre's account is that shame is not an affect that may be communicated by writing, nor an emotion that is covered up by writing, but a complex that arises precisely with the writing itself. Shame arises from an incommensurability between my own experience and myself as reflected back to me in the eyes of an other—an incommensurability that is materialized precisely in my writing.

The great theorizations of the literary work in the twentieth century, of course, have often attempted to describe this radical rupture in the self that is put in place by writing, without necessarily conceptualizing its effects in terms of shame. "The writer never reads his work," says Blanchot:

> It is, for him, illegible, a secret. He cannot linger in its presence. It is a secret because he is separated from it. However, his inability to read the work is not a purely negative phenomenon. It is, rather, the writer's only real relation to what we call the work.[57]

This separation, to repeat a point made earlier, has nothing to do with the moment of the work's publication; it is constitutive of the work as soon as it is conceived, as soon as it begins the process of formation. And from that moment on, the writer is also implicated in the work, even as he is removed from its orbit of intimacy:

> Every writer, every artist is acquainted with the moment at which he is cast out and apparently excluded by the work in progress. The work holds him off, the circle in which he no longer has access to himself has closed, yet he is enclosed therein because the work, unfinished, will not let him go…. This is not a moment of sterility or fatigue, unless, as may well be the case, fatigue itself is simply the form this exclusion takes. (53–54)

Sartre's perspective, however, would seem to establish this relationship to the work as one not of "fatigue" but of shame. "I am unable to bring about any relation between what I am in the intimacy of the For-Itself … and this unjustifiable being-in-itself which I am for the Other," he writes (*Being and Nothingness* 222). Shame is "only the original feeling of having my being outside, engaged in another being and as such without any defense, illuminated by the absolute light which emanates from a pure subject" (288). The question that arises with Lawrence, whether his shame precipitates or ensues from his writing, is no longer askable. It is the writing itself—the ethical and aesthetic presumption involved, the awareness of the presumption, the impossibility of proceeding other than presumptuously—rather than anything revealed in the writing, or anything deducible on the basis of it, that is shameful.

Writing after colonialism, which is to say, writing that comes into existence always already aware of its reflection in the eyes of the other, is formed by this paradox. An obligation to write coexists with the impossibility of doing so innocently; neither one thing nor the other, neither the obligation nor the impossibility, is shameful, but the conjunction—historical and subjective at the same time—is intensely so. Blanchot, like Sartre and Fanon (and this list will be extended in the course of this work), is as much a postcolonial figure as a post-Auschwitz one. Shame appears in the gap between the impossibility of speaking and the impossibility of not speaking. When it comes to the question of postcolonial shame, in other words, the status of postcolonial writing as writing is as important as, and inseparable from, its historical situatedness in the aftermath of the colonial project. The shame that proliferates in the work

of writers such as J. M. Coetzee, Caryl Phillips, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, V. S. Naipaul, and Zoë Wicomb (all of whom are discussed in this book) has a structural and historical explanation that is not reducible to any merely individual or biographical factor. Shame in these writers is the experience of a situation in which the ethical (or aesthetic) obligation to write and the aesthetic (or ethical) impossibility of writing are equally irrefutable.

When Coetzee, then, describes his own works as "paltry, [transparently] ludicrous defenses against" the feeling of being overwhelmed by "suffering in the world," that description could—and should—be read as a rationalization of and apologia for a certain historical condition that twentieth-century writing has had to deal with, just as much as it is a statement of artistic failure stemming from the author's personal implication in the colonial enterprise. Coetzee's preoccupation with shame is not adequately explained in terms of a struggle of a member of the white minority in South Africa to come to terms with his ethical implication in the history of black oppression. The same could be said of such different texts within the postcolonial canon as Naipaul's *Mimic Men* or *The Enigma of Arrival*; Ngũgĩ's *The River Between* or *A Grain of Wheat*; Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*; or those of writers who have emerged more recently, such as Caryl Phillips or Zoë Wicomb. Shame in these works is about a historical transformation in the conditions of possibility of the literary work, a transformation in which the event of colonialism is just as implicated as that of Auschwitz, but which does not originate with either.

In his early work *The Theory of the Novel*, written in 1914–15, Georg Lukács writes: "Every form is the resolution of a fundamental dissonance of existence" (62). By "fundamental dissonance," what Lukács is referring to is the situation that I described at the beginning of this chapter as "incommensurability"—between aesthetics and ethics, selfhood and otherness, form and content—and that becomes manifest as a certain constitutive failure, a rendering inadequate of form by the irruption of the ethical; or, in other words, the shame *of* form as such. This incommensurability, I have suggested, lies behind other ethical reflections on aesthetic problems, such as the possibility of art after Auschwitz or after colonialism, or the question of whether the subaltern can speak. The meaning of "incommensurability" in this context may be stated quite simply: it is a historical transformation in which ontology itself is replaced by the incredulity toward ontology.

For Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel* the situation of incommensurability is that of the novel as such. The novel, according to Lukács, is defined by an inadequacy of form that is compensated for by the first appearance of the ethical—the separation of ethics from aesthetics—in literature. It is this insight that informs Lukács's understanding of the

novel as the form of the age of "absolute sinfulness" (18, 152). What Lukács means is that the novel is a form defined by its failure: by the yearning for a world of completeness, a completeness that he ascribes to the world of the epic, and that the novel is constitutionally removed from. However, this "failure" is caught up with the changing status of world-historical reality itself, and cannot, any more than capitalism itself, be unthought. What those who yearn for the world that existed prior to that of the novel are trying to escape from is "their own depth and greatness" (31). When Lukács later looked back critically at his own early work, he seemed to forget this important injunction. *The Theory of the Novel* becomes exemplary of the romantic attachment to the epic that the book itself provides such a robust argument *against*. "The problems of the novel form," he writes in a preface for the 1962 French edition, are treated in *The Theory of the Novel* as "the mirror image of a world gone out of joint." Reality, he continues, "no longer constitutes a favorable soil for art; that is why the central problem of the novel is the fact that art … has nothing more to do with any world of forms that is immanently complete in itself. And this is not for artistic but for historico-philosophical reasons" (17).

In the book itself, however, Lukács insists that "immanence" applies as much to the broken world of the novel as to the epic: the novel is "the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality" (56). *The Theory of the Novel* is thus a founding text for the new intimacy of shame and form in the twentieth century—this despite the fact that the word "shame" does not appear once in Lukács's text. The novel is constituted out of the very incommensurability—of form and content, of idea and reality, of vehicle and tenor, of ethics and aesthetics, of subject and object—that, I am arguing, is behind every experience of shame. In the novel, writes Lukács, we are condemned to abstraction, a kind of metaphysical aloofness. "Totality can be systematized only in abstract terms," he writes. What becomes visible in "the created reality of the novel" is nothing but "the distance separating the systematization from concrete life" (70).

In Lukács's statement "Every form is the resolution of a fundamental dissonance of existence," the word "dissonance" refers to a certain breakage in the constitution of the modern work; a certain duality, made up of, on one hand, that which is spoken in the work, and on the other, that which cannot be spoken. The novel form, then, is an embodiment of the respective counteractualization that I sought to establish earlier in the relation between Michel Leiris and the *Muselmänner* of Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*. To use Agamben's formulation (originally put forward in relation to Levi), the novel is comprised of that which "speaks without truly having anything to say of its own," *together with* that which

"sinks to the bottom, wholly desubjectified and silenced" (*Remnants* 120). Absolute sinfulness (or we might substitute the word "shame") is the form in which that structure becomes apparent; it is thereby as shame that the dissonance finds a resolution. Shame *is* the resolution.

But I would like briefly to mention two other conceptions of this double quality of the artwork. Both make explicit the intensely political dimension of the questions of form that have been addressed here. For what else is Walter Benjamin's seventh Thesis on the philosophy of history but the theory of a division, a rupture, at the heart of every "cultural treasure"? For Benjamin, the lesson of historical materialism is that artworks have an origin that is not immediately apparent, consisting of the fate of those forgotten figures, casualties of history, who suffer and in fact are destroyed in the process of the work's production and in its transmission "from one owner to another." For Benjamin, this lost origin determines not only the duality of the modern artwork, but that of the historical event itself. He writes:

> Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures [*Kulturgüter*], and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (*Illuminations* 256)[58]

A second formulation is provided by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. For Fanon too, no innocent, shame-free cultural production is possible after colonialism, not even after decolonization. Absolute sinfulness, what Fanon calls the "lie" of the colonial system, infects every available mode of expression:

> No colonialism draws its justification from the fact that the territories it occupies are culturally nonexistent. Colonialism will never be put to shame by exhibiting unknown cultural treasures [*trésors culturels*] under its nose. The colonized intellectual, at the very moment when he undertakes a work of art, fails to realize he is using techniques and a language borrowed from the occupier. He is content to cloak these instruments in a style that is meant to be national but which is strangely reminiscent of exoticism.[59]

Every post-Auschwitz work, every postcolonial work—but also, as Lukács tells us, every novel *tout court*—has then a double quality. The doubleness, however, is not divisible; it is not possible to make Benjamin's "anonymous toilers" known, just as it is impossible for the "colonized

intellectual" to produce an authentic cultural statement. This doubleness applies to every historical event, as inextricable from its formal dimensions as any artwork. To conceive of the true nature of the work or the event as underlying the false, or discoverable beneath it, is to fail to appreciate how irrevocable is the loss of innocence, for Benjamin, as well as for Fanon, as well as for Lukács. As I have been arguing, the shame of a work is not a symptom—an emotion felt by someone writing, or by an imaginary character in the work—but part of the event of the work: something coextensive with it, testifying to the work's non-identity with itself. Shame is a quality of writing; it cannot exist outside writing or, more accurately, outside the relations of incommensurability that writing emblematizes; nor can shame be adequately encoded or conveyed within a literary apparatus. There is no shame without form; moreover, in a world of "absolute sinfulness" there is no form without shame. Form materializes shame by its inadequacy.

Form, let us be clear, is not limited to literary form but includes ideas, habits of thought, clichés, acts of violence, and concepts in general: "fatness," "terrorism," basic racial categories such as black and white, as well as gender categories. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that the most dangerous aspect of the concept of "anti-Semitism" is that it "would absolve Jew-haters of crimes greater than anybody had ever believed possible" (8). The point should be extended to less obviously charged concepts that organize and determine our everyday thinking: "domestic violence," for example, or "hate crimes."[60] Examples from Conrad's *The Return* include the respectability of marriage, the tragic pathos of an early death, and the notion of an "abusive husband."[61] Such ideas are *forms*, thought forms,[62] into which the shame of the husband's experience—an experience of utter bewilderment, of the inadequacy of form—can be dissipated or dissolved. Forms are also generators of shame, when their inadequacy and violence are felt as such. Shame, then, is an experience of the dissolution of the consolation of forms.

Shame itself, of course, is also a form. However, what is distinctive about shame is its radical discomfort with itself as such; thus, the analysis of shame can help us understand the ways in which we are dependent on form, or forms, even as those forms restrict and limit our thought. Shame is the form in which we most directly encounter the necessity—indeed, the ethical necessity—to think in the absence of forms, which is also to *think* the absence of form. In the work of certain twentieth-century writers, of whom Kafka is perhaps the most prominent example, shame has been a way to explore the unreliability or the tyranny of form. What we have in shame, potentially, is an approach to reading that understands that the truth of the text cannot be present in it as a positive entity. The text is read, then, not as a *vehicle*—of thought, of atonement, of eth-

ics—but as an *event*, neither privileged over nor lessened in significance alongside other events. The aim of this book is to show how postcolonial literature is particularly suited to a reading of this kind; that postcolonial literature has, since its inception, been engaged in a thinking and materialization of the relation between shame and form; that the postcolonial situation is a world in which aesthetic forms are defined, as well as justified, by their representational and ethical inadequacy.

What would it mean, in the postcolonial world, to suggest that a literary form might come into being without shame? What would it mean to suggest that a work might fulfill our highest ethical expectations of literature? Lukács frames a version of this question in the final pages of *The Theory of the Novel*. In the works of Dostoevsky, he says, we find the depiction of a new world "remote from any struggle against what actually exists": a world "drawn for the first time simply as a seen reality" (152). Even if we disregard Lukács's instantiation of Dostoevsky (as Lukács does himself in the 1962 preface), we are still left with the implication that a work, or a form, free of the "inadequacy" of form might one day be found. The suggestion goes against one of the most fundamental and essential principles of Lukács's own book: the inseparability of literary form from history, and thus the inextricability of the work from the world. The lessons of Lukács's own thought would seem to be that no *depiction* of a new world "remote from any struggle against what actually exists" could take place without thereby foreclosing the possibility of its emergence. In order for any such "new world" to emerge, a form—or, better, an *understanding* of form—is needed that could do justice to the dual nature of the event; an understanding, perhaps, in which the concept of depiction or of representation would play no part at all.

For a provisional sense of what such a form would look like, we might consider the following statement made by Jean-Luc Godard in 1958, writing as a film critic in *Cahiers du Cinéma*:

> To say … "It is the most beautiful of films" is to say everything. Why? Because it just is. Only the cinema can permit this sort of childish reasoning without any pretence of modesty [*fausse honte*]. Why? Because it is the cinema. And because the cinema is sufficient unto itself…. In short, to assert its own existence as its justification, and by the same token to draw its aesthetic from its ethic, is for the cinema by no means the least of its privileges.[63]

The passage is from an article on Ingmar Bergman entitled "Bergmanorama." In the opening sentences of the piece, Godard invokes several films (F. W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Roberto Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy*, Jean Renoir's *The Golden Coach*, to which he will add Bergman's *Summer Interlude*) that render the task of the critic superfluous. The utterance "It is the most beautiful of films" is all that is necessary to say of

such works and is the highest possible praise: "Truth is their truth. They secrete it deep within themselves, and yet with each shot the screen is rent to scatter it to the winds" (*Godard on Godard* 75). Cinema is incapable of false modesty (*fausse honte*, literally "false shame") because it functions outside the economy of form and content, image and reality, virtual and actual.[64] Cinema's justification, says Godard, is nothing other than its own existence; that is to say, its aesthetic is drawn directly from its ethic. The translation of this sentiment to forms other than cinema is for Godard unimaginable: one cannot meaningfully say of a Faulkner novel, "It's literature," or of a canvas by Paul Klee, "It's painting." The shame of such forms is the futility with which they might claim to be anything other than representational or mimetic; their ethical significance must be sought in the content of the work, in a portion that is conceptually separate from its formal, visible, or aesthetic dimension. In this discrepancy, indeed, is found what Lukács calls the "problematic" character of the novel, its "normative incompleteness" (73). The novel *itself* is thereby subject to the shame that we see represented in Rousseau's *Confessions* or Gordimer's *My Son's Story*, and which is described by Lévinas as "an existence that seeks excuses." Godard's sentiment, it will be apparent, attributes to cinema the realization of Lukács's aspiration for the novel: to present a new world "remote from any struggle against what actually exists" (156). And yet the very articulation of this sentiment can take place only against the fulcrum provided by the novel as it currently exists, the form, says Lukács, of "the age of absolute sinfulness."

   I will return to cinema as the index of a possible solution to the problem of postcolonial shame in the last chapter of this book. The hopes of this work, however, will not ultimately be invested in the cinematic image; rather, the intention in the following chapters is that we might begin to find Lukács's "new world" taking shape in the very inadequacy of the modern novel. Further, by reframing the ethical quandaries of the postcolonial world in terms of the purely formal dissonance of Lukács's theory of the novel, it may be possible to find what Lukács referred to as "[our] own depth and greatness," precisely in the shame (or incommensurability) of the postcolonial novel.