

reconciliation performed in local realities, bringing the past into the present. It certainly produces interest that overwhelms the possibility of remaining in ignorance. Shame thus can be used to initiate what Sedgwick calls “a fight not against ordinary ignorance, nor for ordinary ignorance, but against the killing presence that a culture does not know what it does.”⁶⁶

The Reconciliation events produced shame that posed a challenge to *learn*, and not to *know*. To return to Wendy Brown’s question cited at the beginning of this chapter, it’s clear that while feminism has been good at moral reproach, we need a broader and more affecting way of engaging in politics—one that is emotionally interested in people. One of the critiques I would level at some feminist uses of shame is that in wielding emotional power, we forget to be interested in those we see as our enemy. For all its normative nature, Braithwaite’s use of shaming reminds us that respect is crucial. The lack of respect in so many areas of politics makes it evident that feminism is not alone in this regard. But that doesn’t lessen the shameful ways in which feminism seems at times to lack interest in those who are considered outsiders, outside the cause. We need to remember that any politics not interested in those who are placed beyond its ken will continue to be a politics of shaming: a bastion of moral reproach. And that is shameful.

Ancestral Shame

IN THIS CHAPTER, I take up the idea of ancestral shame to consider how we are related to shame in the past. The term is from Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s psychoanalytic work, which locates shame as “buried alive” in one’s ego.⁷¹ I use it beyond its psychoanalytic frame to explore the effects of shame over generations. Ancestral shame reminds us of how we are forged in many different relations—those of kin but also those of geography and history. These different proximities produce very particular emotional responses and affective identities, which are transgenerational as well as intercultural.

“It crosses my mind that many of us are far away from our origins, but we exist in a place that transcends geography, we exist in a place of blood and other bonds,” states Australian artist William Yang. He makes this comment in the context of a piece called “Blood Links,” in which he explores his family’s intercultural experiences. Being gay, of Chinese ancestry, and an Australian of several generations gives Yang a particular sensitivity to shame. Focusing on same-sex relationships and interracial friendships, his work uses shame to narrate a generational sense of history. His art is informed by a particular experience of living as “different” in the proximities imposed by small communities. In his recent performance piece *Shadows*, Yang portrays two seemingly incomparable stories: one about an extended Aboriginal family in rural New South Wales

South Australia. Both tell of exclusion from mainstream white Australian society. The German families came to Australia before World War I and, as happened elsewhere, were ostracized during World War II. They were blamed for what their relations were doing in the homeland and made to feel ashamed of being German, although any direct connection had been severed generations earlier.

Yang has developed an artistic style that mixes photography and oral stories. He describes how there is "a natural tendency to explain while showing slides as in the living room slide shows." He also acknowledges that in artistic circles, this style has "a terrible reputation," presumably because it seems so amateur. But equally, the arrangement of visual material and stories makes for a genre that embraces "large social issues, yet [is] quite intimate."²

Yang's work continually crosses social issues and intimate histories. Sometimes, as in *Shadow*, the issue is clearly public—the challenge of effecting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. Sometimes, as in the recounting of the history of gay and lesbian Sydney (*Friends of Dorothy*), Yang explicitly "exposes" himself. He admits it's a hard and potentially shameful experience ("I'm not an extroverted person") but argues that "it is the role of artists to expose themselves."³

Whether recounting the stories of Aboriginal families, those of his own family's assimilation, or the stories of AIDS and death in Sydney, Yang sees his mission as giving "sub-cultural tribes . . . kindred spirits voice."⁴ The emphasis is on crossing different histories and putting himself into the stories of different "tribes." This way of making sometimes shameful stories and narratives of shame finds an echo in literary/academic work on what is called transethnic relations.

The term is from Édouard Glissant, who explores the experience of being métis (hybrid), of mixed Caribbean and

as relative and as relating, or narrating. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant uses relation to investigate errant movement and exile within colonial and postcolonial situations. Like Yang, the point is to make stories of exile more intimate, to make them matter to the present. Glissant uses Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome. Basically, rhizomes are plants that do not have taproots; they send off roots laterally. Conceptually, the rhizome prompts alternative ideas about connection.

The image of the rhizome, prompt[s] the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in the relation . . . because the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as related.⁵

Glissant does not disavow rootedness or people's desires for roots: "The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root." Against "intolerant roots," "the poetics of relation" illuminates how "each and every identity is extended with the Other."⁶ Glissant does not hide from the violence of colonial uprootings of people. The emphasis, however, is on how different affective experiences of being uprooted forge new forms of relations:

For though this experience made you, original victim floating toward the sea's abysses, an exception, it became something shared and made us, the descendants, one people among others. Peoples do not live on exception. Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge.⁷

Glissant's use of relation foregrounds the interrelatedness of peoples, histories, and the places in which they all collide. Relation speaks to how we, in the present, are related intimately to histories: quite literally we are relatives, we are the descendants, says Glissant. Some of us experience the past in

relation to the original oppressors. But this is not a taproot genealogy of familial connection.

Equally, reexperiencing the shame of the past does not have to be through blood: modes of relating to history can produce intimate connections, not unlike those of kith. Our relating to past emotions and affects moves rhizomatically; traveling along familial lines, it sparks off new shoots.

Yang's image of "blood and other bonds" places shame within the twisted geographies of the familial and historical stories of migration and within the desire and interest to relate to those histories in different ways. Of course, some families do not or will not talk of their shameful relations. There may be families without skeletons in their closet—families that never moved, never knew of anything unlike themselves. In societies like Canada and Australia, however, such radical hermeticism is nigh on impossible. These are nations forged in transethnic bonds, however much that has been denied. Contact, violent or not, is the rule and the premise of their individual and national histories.

Gershen Kaufman, a noted psychoanalyst, argues that "the examination of various intergroup dynamics from the perspective of affect . . . will yield a new theory of ethnic, racial, religious, gender, and sexual identity development." Kaufman states that "all experience becomes amplified by affect or emotion," which he says takes specific and discrete forms.⁸ Analysis must attend to the various ways of relating that highlight how, at different times, different people come together through the force of collective and individual history. Those histories take on detail and color when we think about them in terms of emotion. Exploring affective relations, we can perhaps move closer to Paul Rabinow's vision of "an ethos of micro-interdependencies, with an acute consciousness of the inescapabilities and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories and fates."⁹ In what follows, I'll use an

the stories are public and personal. Focusing on a historical moment, I'll try to relate the different aspects of that shame: to echo Benjamin, shame is social and personal.

ONLY RELATE

Stories begin at different points, and I'll start this one in the middle. The scene is set in my bedroom. A new lover and I are in bed talking. We've since broken up, which may or may not be integral to my continuing desire to tell this story. (Well, yes, it is . . .) There we are, talking about family and about whiteness. We lie across its dividing line. She is Aboriginal and also relates to her Irish working-class background. I'm white and have a mongrel-class background.

She calls me blue (that Australian term for fair-haired), and I, surprised, say at least she's got a real white girl—that freckled and blue whiteness of redheads. It's not a shade of whiteness I like. But she doesn't seem to mind. She laughs at something I say and tells me, "You're talking Koori now." I reddened and admit to putting on accents as easily as clothing. I am after all a mid-Atlantic bastard living in Australia, and my tongue loves long *âs*: *ma-a-a-te*. She teaches me the meaning of shame in Aboriginal English: the shame of calling attention to the self (a lesson seemingly discarded in this project). I learn new phrases. "True, eh": such a comforting phrase that I want to lick it into my own vocabulary. She tells me stories; she asks me to tell mine. The stories that come easily seem inconsequential.

The story I itch to tell shames me. It's not a story from my father's side, although there are many to be told about famous forebears and their services to the British Empire. From my father I carry a surname that still signifies colonialism in parts of the world I have never visited. People occasionally come up to me at conferences and ask if I know about Probyn's Horse, a British cavalry regiment now located in Pakistan. I do, but it's not a story I identify with. The story I want to tell my lover

my mother's socialist father and socially concerned mother. I finally blurt to her, as she looks at me with calm waiting eyes, "My grandmother was a wannabe Indian." My grandmother's poem in which she masquerades as a Native Canadian woman—a squaw, in her words—rattles in my memory. I'm silent before the chasm this opens. All she says is, "That's interesting, go on."

So began my interest in relating to my grandmother and to her sense of shame, which I have reignited as my own. As a poet, my grandmother found inspiration in those around her. She had no problem relating to them and saw no obstacle to relating their stories. Her acts of representation seemingly had no guile or, to our present eyes, concern with the ethics of representation. There were a lot of "ethnics" in her neck of the woods, the northern interior of British Columbia, which was one of the last Canadian frontiers. Indigenous Canadians, Japanese, Chinese, and Doukhobor mixed with Scots, Welsh, and some English. Going native for her seemed second nature. In my family, jokes were told of her desire. We suspected that a Chinese scroll given to her and proudly displayed on the kitchen wall said, "Bugger off, white woman." When I first came upon her poems, I blushed at their intent. Now, on the other side of the Pacific, I wonder at her shame and shamelessness, which seem to shadow mine as surely as our shared first names and red hair—a ready combination for bright blushes.

CONTACT ZONES

I'll come to her story and her poems in a moment. Of my own experience of relating her story, I won't say much more, except that it represents what I call an encounter within the contact zone. The contact zone seems like an abstract idea, but it is continually reenacted in everyday life: bedrooms can be contact zones, as can streets, libraries, shops and pubs, classrooms, and workplaces. They are the spaces where different people

into proximity. Of course, throughout history those encounters have often been painful and marked by unequal relations of power. But, as my girlfriend also made me acknowledge in her relatedness to her Irish and Aboriginal blood, sometimes the contact has been gentle and even romantic. Sex can re-make the contact zone in pleasure, just as it can allow history and violence to penetrate.

In her definition of the contact zone, Mary Louise Pratt describes it as the space "where subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture."¹⁰ Pratt's wonderful book *Imperial Eyes* uses travel writing to analyze how the contact zone produces embodied ways of being in relation to particular geographical and historical contexts. She takes the idea of contact from linguistic studies of how languages are improvised when different peoples need to communicate in order to trade. The need to communicate makes humans very inventive. People talk to each other even when they don't like or have reason to fear the other. Contact, while often forced, has "interactive and improvisational dimensions." As a concept, the contact zone questions what happens when people "were previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures, and [their] trajectories now intersect."¹¹ Pratt elaborates:

A "contact" perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and "travelees," not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.¹²

In this way, the contact zone focuses on the material conditions and the types of formal and informal interaction produced through them. It asks what types of relations between

they are reworked as the basis for transethnic interrelations. The contact zone goes against any idea of an authentic, purely indigenous or local subjectivity. It highlights the actual configurations of contact: where, when, how, and with what effects it was initiated. Contact is always both originary and ongoing. It opens discussion of how bodies within the contact zone are continually reworked in relation to specific times, histories, places, and other bodies. Dwelling on these zones of interaction rather than on conflict lends a more humane touch. This is not to seek absolution for the deeds our forebears may or may not have committed, may or may not have suffered. But it is to insist on the intimate human relations that we, the offspring of contact, continue to share.

The emphasis on relatedness and the act of relating contained within notions of transethnic relation and the contact zone is important to this task of understanding how we are related to one another. This perspective questions again, with some urgency, what it means to be human—that tricky admixture of the universal and the particular. As Clifford Geertz put it years ago, cultural analysis too easily loses “touch with the hard surfaces of life—with the political, economic, stratifactory realities within which men are everywhere contained—and with the biological and physical necessities on which those surfaces rest.”¹³

For me, the emotion and affect of shame necessarily connect the hard surfaces of life and its biological and physical necessities. Too often accusations and denials of shame construct two subsets of history, that of the oppressor and the oppressed, in such a way that they cannot meet up. In other words, instead of focusing on the necessarily intertwined and intersubjective production of shame, an abstract use of the term—as in “the shameful past”—poses two solitudes, placed within the transhistorical and undifferentiated space of the shamed and the ashamed. If shame highlights what it means

that make our history more humane: stories of individual and collective aspiration, fragility, and humiliation.

RELATIONS RELATING

My grandmother's story is one instance of relating within the contact zone. I call it her story, but it is also mine. My shame has brought us together in strange ways. I use our relation partly to explore how one relates to emotional expressions removed from their temporal and physical space. Here is a poem written by Elspeth Honeyman Clarke.

I have lost her, my daughter, and never
As long as this body may love
Shall I see her again. In this body
She grew, and I bore her with gladness
And fed her with pride. I was young then,
And death had not taken my husband,
But death is a blow one can bear.
If my life has been hard since her coming,
No one knew, least of all my Elaine;
And all that the Sisters had taught me,
And all I could gather from reading,
Late at night, tho' I slept as I read,
I taught her, and sweetly she grew.
I brushed her soft hair with a rapture
Too keen for delight; it was fair
Like her father's and shone in the sunlight,
And she wore but the finest of muslins,
With lace that the Sisters had made me
At the neck and the hem. So time passed
And I saw her one day as a maiden,
Slender, dark-eyed and proud as a queen.
Then she left me to go to the city
And train as a nurse; it seemed best.

For the pretty things every girl longs for,
 To hold up her head with the rest.
 The nights were the worst, but the body
 Must sleep, if it's worn out, at last.
 I never went near her, I could not;
 But for two golden weeks every summer
 She came back as a child to our cottage,
 And seemed glad of its shelter and peace.
 I brushed her soft hair every evening,
 And watched her sleep, fresh as a flower,
 And my heart could not hold all its joy.
 Graduation,—I sent her a trinket
 And all I could spare for her flowers.
 They told me her room could not hold them,
 Later on, when I went there to ask—
 To ask, for June came, and she came not,
 Nor the next, nor any month after.
 And all my blood was burnt up with my longings.
 And fear, like a knife, stabbed my soul.
 Still she came not. At last I could stray here
 No longer. I dressed myself slowly,
 Thinking, so might she wish me to look,
 Though I knew no mere garment could alter
 The face of a squaw, such as I.
 In the hospital office they told me
 She had gone long before, and they gave
 An address. There they gave me another
 Till at last in a row of bright houses
 In a suburb, I found her. My knock
 Mocked the pounding that throbbed in my side,
 And she came. Her face froze when she saw me,
 Then she asked what I wanted. "Elaine!"
 But she answered, too loudly, "No baskets,

And I saw through the door a white table,
 And flowers, and a young man's fair head,
 Before the door closed on "No baskets,
 No thank you, no baskets today."
 She is gone. Aie—aie! I am lonely.
 There is nothing in life or in death
 For me now. God be good to her only,
 And spare her this pain, my Elaine.
 At first reading, the poem seemed very dated. Certainly no
 one would now entitle a poem "Half Breed."
 Elspeth Honeyman Clarke died when I was very young. The
 name Elspeth is reasonably unusual, and when people ask me
 about it, I proudly reply that it was my grandmother's name. It's
 a bit childish to be proud of one's name. As a child I was given a
 pretty diminutive that was, to me, much less exotic than my real
 name. I have only one photograph of my grandmother, flanked
 by her stern-looking parents. The photograph forms the basis
 of my memory of her. My mother once found a tarnished lock
 of her once-golden hair. I could see that her hair was like mine,
 but I didn't like the idea of dead hair and that someday someone
 might come across mine lying in such a box. The first thing I
 did when I moved away from home was to cut off and dispose
 of my flowing tresses of reddish-gold hair.
 When I was born my grandmother wrote a poem for me
 that I still have. It's written on now-faded blue writing paper
 and addressed "To Elspeth P from Elspeth C." It's short, the
 handwriting cramped. "Nourish her, and cherish her; Name
 her stately / —Goddess, queen, most beautiful—None so dear
 as she!" I don't think she wrote poems when my brother and
 sister were born. She didn't like the order of the names given to
 my brother—his initials spelled ASP, an ominous combination
 apparently. She gave my mother five dollars to get his name

plaint was laid at my grandmother's feet.

I'm not sure why my mother gave me a box of her mother's poems. My mother died before I published my first book, but maybe she hoped I would be a writer, like my grandmother. My mother had wanted to be a writer and to write a biography of her mother. I still have that box of poems—a battered Vyella shirt box filled with mainly undated and unreferenced pieces of writing. Some, such as "Half Breed," are typed; others are in a published form, but no one thought to mark dates on the now-yellowed paper. Several clippings are from local newspapers, which occasionally note that the poem was reprinted from the *New York Times*.

In the box, I found an unidentified newspaper article that describes my grandmother:

This thoroughly normal woman does not go about swapping soulful strophes with other poets and addressing societies.

Quite the contrary. For many years her husband's profession of a civil engineer led her into the far and wilder parts of the province, living in tents and wigwags where, with real pioneer spirit she undertook the education of her two children from matter supplied by the department of education at Victoria, and made a good job of it.

Many of her poems try to capture the beauty of the land through which my grandfather was building roads. She wrote the lyrics for a song that had some success. The sheet music is part of the collection. It looks very grand, printed by Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd., of Ludgate Hill EC4. A friend comments on the intricacy of the melody and the fact that it is in B minor, an off key, which is unusual in the genre of frontier tunes for the amateur musician. Called "The Cariboo Trail," the cover drawing comes straight from an Englishman's romantic ideas of the frontier. It's land that my grandfather was efficiently paving over. Both my grandparents were socialists and atheists who

trooped up for communion. Her poems are strongly imprinted with liberal humanism and concern issues of social justice. She was known to befriend ethnic workers. There is also a now long forgotten tale of her brother marrying an Indigenous woman. I don't know if they all got on well together. For her time, she seems to have been socially aware. She was a devoted Anglophile in cultural matters, and in later years my grandparents collected great stacks of the *Manchester Guardian*.

In other poems, I catch snippets of her affective relationship to the land and a pronounced relation to loss—of land, and of love.

Cry of loons across the lake—

Should a heart that's mended, ache?

("Resolution")

The cry of the loons, the rain that bears upon the house that shuts in, keeps safe, keeps out, reproaches, reminds of impossible wishes:

Sharp needle-pointed rain

Striking the window-pane,

Breaking the silence,

Stabs heart and brain.

("Rain")

There's a constant ache that the country won't quite let her in, that existence will always be fitful; it will always coexist with layers of the dead, the disappeared:

Lady, if beneath your pillow

Men are lying dead,

They would wish you peaceful slumbers

In your narrow bed.

("Song of the Rails")

it's a blunt and direct title. When I first read the poem I was struck by a vicarious shame. "Shame can be gifted beyond generations, sometimes bypassing verbal communication."¹⁴

I became obsessed with the presence of desire in her poems—in "Half Breed"—a desire to take on, enter into, and maybe take over the body of a Native woman. Reading the poem again, I notice other expressions of emotion. From "feeding her daughter with pride," and the wish to provide "the pretty things every girl longs for / To hold up her head with the rest," to the mother's delight in her daughter's fair hair inherited from the long-dead father, and her deferral to the authority of the nuns, the poem is filled with depictions of the shaming gazes of others. The shame of class: being able to afford only "trinkets"; the shame of race: "the face of a squaw, such as I"; the shame of interracial marriage: the fair-haired, dark-eyed daughter and her "young man's fair head." All of these pale before the shaming gaze of the daughter, who disowns her mother: "No baskets, / No thank you, no baskets today." And finally the forlorn hope that her daughter be spared such pain—that Elaine's own "half breed," mixed-race child, fathered by the young man with fair hair, not abandon her.

The shame in the poem is easy to trace, as its sources are. In Martha Nussbaum's terms, the shame and the pain are represented in ways that foreground the "abourness" of the emotion. As Nussbaum puts it, "The particular depth and the potentially terrifying character of the human emotions derive from the especially complicated thoughts that humans are likely to form about their own need for objects, and about their imperfect control over them." She lists the emotions: fear, love, hope, anger, gratitude, hatred, jealousy, pity, and guilt. These all have an "intentional object: that is, it figures in the emotion as it is seen or interpreted by the person whose emotion it is." In this sense, "emotions always involve thought of an object combined with thought of the object's salience or importance."¹⁵

we recognize we cannot control the object, in which we have invested so much, and this lack of control becomes integral to the emotion. This sets the scene for the emergence of "childhood emotions that are especially dangerous to morality: in particular, shame at the limitations of the body and envy of others who control what we wish to control but don't." Drawing on object-relations theory, especially Winnicott and Klein, Nussbaum describes human infancy in terms of our unique combination of early cognitive capacity with physical incapacity. Very early on we know that we are dependent on others for our survival. This cognition of our imperfection and our neediness is central to human development. We are marked, in varying ways, by that formative (and continuing) knowledge. In this, our bodies fail our intellect. Shame for Nussbaum is mired in our childhood experiences of physical dependence. She calls this "primitive shame." "A primitive shame at one's weakness and impotence is," she writes, "probably a basic and universal feature of the emotional life."¹⁶

In my grandmother's poem, there does seem to be something like a primal shame. The concern for the daughter evoked in the descriptions of the mother's attention is seemingly unreciprocated. Mustn't such love that goes unreturned cause shame in the mother? The neediness of the mother is then amplified unbearably by her daughter's rejection. Indeed, rejection may be too tame a word to capture the obliteration the mother experiences in her daughter's presence. The rejection of the mother is clearly a shamed response on the part of the daughter. She cannot look at her mother. Shutting the door on her, the daughter is clearly ashamed. What could her mother have done to merit such shame and humiliation?

In Nussbaum's account, the mother-daughter relationship is fraught with universal and primitive shame, based in the physical dependence that is our human condition. And in some ways, the poem does speak of this. However, the daughter's

basic experience. The daughter is, after all, a "half breed," the result of her mother's sexual encounter with a white man. We do not know if the sex was forced; however, the daughter's father seems to have long disappeared. If, in general, children find the idea of their parents having sexual intercourse embarrassing, in the historical context, being the result of interracial sex would produce heightened feelings of shame.

Zoë Wicomb argues that the mere evocation of interracial sex produces shame. In the context of the "new" South Africa, she discusses the case of repatriating the body of Saarte Baartman ("The Hottentot Venus"). Wicomb writes of "the shame invested in those (females) who have mated with the colonizer." As she puts it, in South Africa "we do not speak about miscegenation; it is after all the very nature of shame to stifle its discourse." Paraphrasing Salman Rushdie, she concludes that "what the Baartman case shows is how shame, cross-eyed and shy, stalks the postcolonial world broken mirror in hand, reproducing itself in puzzling distortions."¹⁷

Wicomb uses the literary trope of the chiasmus to describe the working of shame. Rhetorically, this results in "the denial of a quality 'x' to an object or place which common sense holds it to actually possess, with the compensating attribution to everything but that object or place."¹⁸ Shame, in this sense, is attributed to everyone except those who have caused the shame. In Wicomb's analysis, "shame is identified as the recognition of being the object of another's shame."¹⁹ For the products of forbidden interracial sex, one is the embodiment of another's shame, forced to wear that shame as one's own.

At the level of physical bodies, the contact zone is the space of miscegenation. It can't be forgotten that the copresence of different people has produced, through sex, whether forced or consensual, the bodies of the mixed race: the colored in South Africa or the "fair" Indigenous. These are the very embodied subjects of Glissant's "relatedness of the transethnic." They are

clearly demonstrates, they are still positioned as the objects of its continuing shame: "An unacknowledged shame steeped in its original interracial sex . . . [produces] not a lack of identity but shameful excess."²⁰

Why did my grandmother so identify with the shame of interracial sex? Was it the general conditions of the time, when liaisons between white men and Indigenous women were racially acknowledged? Was there a particular reason for her identification with interracial sex? Do I have Indigenous great aunts and cousins connected by blood if not by name? Like many, I simply do not know, and the family connections are now long dead. But from the grave and in the poem there is certainly a shameful excess of identification. We can hear in the poem the evocation of shame as a sickness of the soul. The use of the French expression *à vie* to signify pain may have been affectation, but it's as if English couldn't reach the depths of that pain, shame, and loneliness.

While one could excuse such attachment as based in good intentions, Dominick LaCapra, a specialist in Holocaust literature, is deeply critical of any easy empathetic identification with victims. He understands empathy as unsettling and unsettling: "The other is recognized and respected as other."²¹ Empathetic unsettlement cannot be passive or accepting; it is a practice, and maybe a duty. As he puts it, empathy may be something like an entitlement that one has to earn. Empathetic unsettlement entails a mode of relating that upsets easy narrative or harmonizing narration. And this mode of relating may be hard work and painful. LaCapra argues that history, should radically challenge accepted ideas. It shakes up and forces us to reevaluate who we think we are. This position does not allow for dispassionate distance or a "feel good" communal wallowing in pain in order for catharsis and absolution to occur. It requires a genre or style that "allows for the terse

tion and affective response to the voices of victims.²² While no genre or discipline owns trauma, writing, reading, or listening to affect demands "an ethics of response." Echoing the idea of shame as hauntology, LaCapra states that "the after-effects—the hauntingly possessive ghosts—of traumatic events are not fully owned by anyone." He definitively cautions against an indiscriminate generalization of trauma.²³

It's here that shame becomes much trickier, as does the reading of my grandmother's excessive identifications. In terms of postcolonial and feminist critique, we would question the way in which she takes on the voice, experience, and body of another—the white woman representing the pain of the other, who is silenced by a history in which white women collude. In bell hooks's argument, "the desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past,"²⁴ and she cautions us to be wary of this.

It's an important critique. But in this context it may be too general to catch the nuances of shame in the contact zone. I think hooks's argument also misses the important question of whether we can experience and deploy empathy in ways that do not obliterate the other. How do we represent these trans-ethnic relations in ways that neither deny accountability nor obscure difference through an overidentification?

To my mind, it is more interesting to apply LaCapra's reading of affect. His model emphasizes the high costs of a conflation of very different subject positions. It also foregrounds the historical conditions in which traumatic affect is produced, inflicted, and experienced, and it demands that present-day readers place themselves in relation to that history. There are several ways of relating to shame, and there is, as Tompkins puts it, "a pluralism of shames."²⁵ Certainly, many shames are present at the heart of my grandmother's poem. Any reading must plot the relations between my grandmother as a writer and a "well-meaning white woman" and her embed-

history of colonialism. The overwhelming identification and overidentification that the poet creates with the figure of the Indigenous woman needs to be acknowledged. But equally the poem works to bring the backdrop of colonialism into the foreground. It makes us feel the relations of contact.

Certainly her vicarious shame felt on behalf of Indigenous Canadians gets written on the shamed relation between the Indigenous mother and the "half breed" daughter. But one needs to recognize that in the context of representing frontier colonialism, white shame would usually have been pushed away from public consciousness. Who knows where the impetus came from, but obviously my grandmother felt a need to speak up. Perhaps it was pride in her homeland that made her sensitive to the shame of what whites were doing to the Indigenous. She was by all accounts a proud, tough woman. She would have had to be; colonialism as a shame culture would hardly sanction lady poets to speak of interracial shame. Within the limits of this culture, the fine details become of interest. The color and texture of hair being brushed, the absence of the white father, the distance the daughter gains through education and implicitly the "white man's way," the bright houses in the suburbs, and finally the door that divides the mother from her daughter forever—these are ways in which the poet brings the shame forward. In plotting these characteristics, the shame of the poet meets and draws on someone else's shame. Nonetheless, her own shame is palpably there; and in speaking of it the poem cannot help but spread its affect and effects widely. At the very least, her poem goes against the way that ancestral shame is so often "buried alive" . . . one can be shameless in attempting to hide it.²⁶

RELATING TO RELATIVES

After a presentation I gave about my grandmother and her poem, a colleague pointed out that I not only look like my

At first I was taken aback, or rather I was interested, piqued by something akin to pride. Then in response to this, I felt abashed, if not ashamed. A visceral connection to the dead is an unnerving experience. The pride I experienced had something to do with my grandmother's having been a very striking woman, so the remark felt like a compliment that forged a bond across the generations. Also, because there is so little left of my maternal family, it made me feel close and engaged within a web of relations. She seems to stand apart from her contemporaries, who presumably would not have thought of writing about, or relating so closely to, Indigenous women. But as her granddaughter, my defense of her practices places me within the ambit of their current assessment as shameful. To feel pride in ancestral shame is a strange thing and can exacerbate that shame.

To return to my argument in chapter 2 about the habitus, I wonder if one can inherit an aptitude for feeling. Certainly in many arguments, as in Ukai's, it seems one can: "Shame can be gifted beyond generations." On one reading, ancestral shame resides in passing on the object of shame—skeletons in the family closet. In a way, this makes sense of my initial shamed reaction to my grandmother's writing of an interracial scene. Who was she to speak? That question belongs to a paradigm of criticism that cannot be applied (or at least not easily) to women of my grandmother's generation. It also misses the plurality of shame and the ways shame produces more shame, more feeling, reactions, relations, and types of relatedness.

Other relations of shame need to be explored. Could ancestral shame also refer to the manner in which we may inherit a capacity for being interested in ways that open us up to shame? Does my shame in relation to my grandmother relate to a similar structuring of shame within the familial habitus? These are tough questions that could easily slip into a pop psychology of histories. But the repetition of love lost, of compassion

chiasmus effects of shame. The narration of shame understands its effects all over the place. It connects people and places in strange ways. Shame creates tangled lines of relation. To flesh out an ethics of response to shame requires a hyperawareness of the way it moves and the connections it relates. This is what shame does: it makes our bodies horribly sensitive. In this, perhaps the shame my grandmother imparted to me is a gift.

Considering affect in the contact zone is to be returned inescapably to the space of copresence. It is to be related to history in the intimate way we are related to relatives, especially those who were part of historical moments of contact between whites and Indigenous peoples. White women, like my grandmother, may have related their shame in ways that heaped a twisted subjectivity onto the objects of shame. But equally, her relating of that moment is generative of my habitus and its capacity to feel shame—to be continually unsettled in my empathy. The task, as LaCapra puts it, is to earn the entitlement to write shame. As my interlocutor to the first telling of this story of ancestral shame put it, I've still got some things to learn.²⁷

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