In Defense of Shame



I come here not to bury shame, but to praise it. Sort of.

There has been a surge in the media about the damaging impact of shame on our individual psyches. In general, these are pretty much outstanding discussions about how we internalize shame and allow it to debilitate our lives in ways subtle and not-so. In particular, I recommend this talk by Dr Brene Brown:

Dr Brown's talk, and her fine book *Daring Greatly*, have been very useful in my recent evolution into whatever it is that I am about to be becoming. I'm not a big fan of the self-help genre, but I am glad I read this one. She's funny and she has some humane advice for people who are susceptible to shame.<fn>Most of us, really. Just not the ones who should be. See below.</fn>

Right along these lines we've seen a recent TedTalk from Monica Lewinsky, and while it is not as essential as Brown's talk, it is a pretty gutsy appearance from a woman who was put into the stocks in the public square on a scale that is still hard to understand.<fn>That she was not crushed to dust by that horrific ordeal is really hard to believe. Respect!</fn> In *So You've Been Publicly Shamed,* writer Jon Ronson relates episode after episode of gang-shaming to illustrate the ways public shaming via social- and traditional-media has become a slithering beast that titillates and thrills the pitchforked mob as it consumes and spirits away everything in its path.



what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

And I am in pretty solid agreement with these folks. Shame and shaming are powerful weapons, especially when turned on the basically powerless – children and teens, especially, but human beings generally. And as Lewinsky notes, it has devolved into a sort of blood sport that treats its targets as disposable widgets that exist outside of a human frame. It is random, cruel, and serves no real purpose, unless one considers the development of smug superiority a purpose.

But I have to admit to longing for a time when *shame* was a useful check on more egregious human behaviors. Now surely, I do not accept that a young man exploring his sexuality in the privacy of his dorm room is a worthy target, any more than is the careless Tweeter who is so-to-say *exhibiting his/her ass* through imbecilic tweets deserving ruination for what amounts to minor stupidity. Nor does a child deserve to be humiliated to ensure a change in behavior, an all too prevalent mode of adulting, one that is probably just as damaging as being quick with the belt.<fn>My first day of school in a new town, we arrived 3 days after classes began. One teacher, when I handed her my forms, snarled, “Class started 3 days ago and

you're late. *Aren't you ashamed?*" I literally could not look at that beast for the entire school year. You bet I was ashamed, but I had no idea why. The shame should have belonged to her.</fn>

So true, a lot of the instances of shaming and humiliation amount to nothing better than blood sport, a distillation of the *paparazzi*-hounding that celebrities must endure. And it is a favorite tool of deflection among those who feel shame but wish it to belong to someone else.<fn>Let us consider the careers of the modern-day *Savonarolas like* Swaggart and Haggard and Westwood Baptist.</fn> Surely, we would be better off as a society if we could all just leave each other the fuck alone, or at least mind our own damned business. Most of what we are induced to pay attention to has absolutely nothing to do with us. Look away, fercryinoutloud.

But as rampant as this kind of shaming has become, we have lost shaming as a tool in the realm where it could really make a difference.

Some years back, a pal and I were philosophizing about the havoc St Ronaldus Maximus had wreaked upon our land. At one point, we came upon this damning formulation:

Reagan erased shame from our public vocabulary.

Rick Perlstein's book *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* presented this idea in a different form:

> *…all that turbulence in the 1960s and 70s had given the nation a chance to finally reflect critically on its power, to shed its arrogance, to become a more humble and better citizen of the world – to grow up – but Reagn's rise nipped that imperative in the bud…Then along came Ronald Reagan, encouraging citizens to think like children…"*

This was amply demonstrated in the reaction to the movie *Wall Street*; when Gordon Gekko declares that “Greed is good!”, too many viewers mistook his character as the hero of the morality play, with Bud Fox seen as the schmuko loser for having some shred of human decency.<fn>A similar mis-reading came with the more recent *Wolf of Wall Street*, wherein the lunatic behavior of the main characters was received as some kind of model for emulation.</fn> Up until the Reagan raj, greed and excessive consumption were generally agreed to be shameful, poor behavior. No more: *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* should have set the tumbrels rolling and the pitchforks aloft. Its impact was the opposite – the repugnant people wallowing in their tacky excess became heroes. Did they deserve shaming for being rich? Hell no. But their tasteless and thoughtless exhibitionism certainly earned them the kind of revulsion one might feel for public masturbators or pet-torturers. Instead, what we saw was the elimination of shame as a response to shame-worthy behavior. Even those rapacious bastards Rockefeller, Carnegie, &c. had the wit to recognize that they had to offer philanthropic gestures to counterbalance their shameful behavior.

Why, asks the frustrated reader, is this worthy of 1000+ words at this particular moment in time? What spurs this unhinged diatribe?

Two words: Judith Fucking Miller.<fn>One of those words is a bonus.</fn>

Of late, this war cheerleader and proven fabricator has been making the rounds to promote her book, and is being treated on the electric picture radio machine as a reputable person who deserves respect. Yet she offers no apology for her part in the fraudulent sale of a war that claimed over 100,000 lives.

She has no shame. She should. She should wear sack-cloth and crawl on her knees cleaning bedpans at Walter Reed until her last breath. Instead, she is collecting checks.

Is Bill Kristol (to name yet another keyboard kommando) ashamed of being absolutely wrong on every major question while cheerleading other people's children to war? This mendacious hack isn't even worthy to clean the bedpans.

Are any of the architects of war ashamed? Are the Masters of the Universe, those geniuses of financial innovation who drove the economy into a ditch, ashamed?

Does Henry Kissinger feel shame?

Rumsfeld? Cheney?

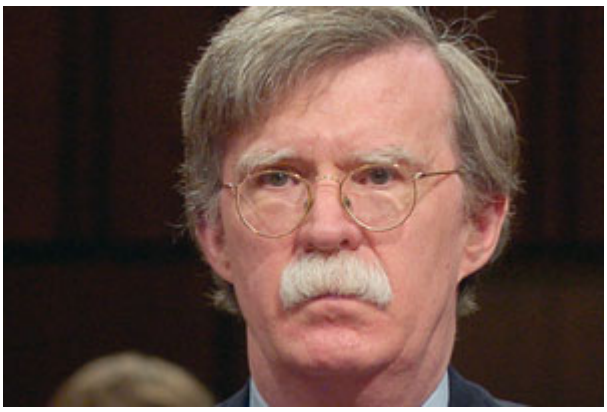
Not so much. No matter how wrong or damaging these people have been, they never seem to have to pay for their track record. I mean, Jesus H Christ bearing false witness, what does it take for someone like that to be shunned, to be told firmly to please shut up and go away? I'm not asking for ritual seppaku – though I would not be opposed – but some sense of decency and remorse would be a good start.

Is the inability to feel shame a perfect definition of sociopathy?

OK, wise guy pointy headed liberal writer – who decides whether something or someone is shame-worthy?

Ah, the judgement call. And aye, there's the rub. And it may be that any usefulness that shame once had is now gone, frittered away on our reflexive addiction to piling on whenever a Kardashian or a sportscaster or an athlete acts the public (or semi-private) tool. And our cultural tendency to focus on the trivial<fn>e.g., Jameis Winston's asinine public performance of "fuck her right in the pussy", which remains the only act that has earned him any disciplinary action</fn> renders shame that much less useful in cases where it is called for. Because if the tool we use to shame Kelly Clarkson for having the gall-durned nerve to appear in public before losing her baby weight is also the best we can do when a

monster like John Bolton<fn>Yeah, this miserable fuckwit.



</fn> can’t shut his goddam piehole no matter how many times he’s proved wrong, well, I’m not sure that opprobrium has any heft anymore.

I’ll give this much to Nixon – I believe he knew that his misdeeds were shameful, and knew it so well that it drove him to even more misdeeds to hide the first ones. Reagan and his gang were just the opposite: they replied with a wink and a nod, letting us all know that *shame* was no longer a reasonable response. You take what you want, do what you want, and never, never apologize.

I mean, really…some people just have no shame.



A vicious monster alongside a noble beast that inspires awe, even in death.

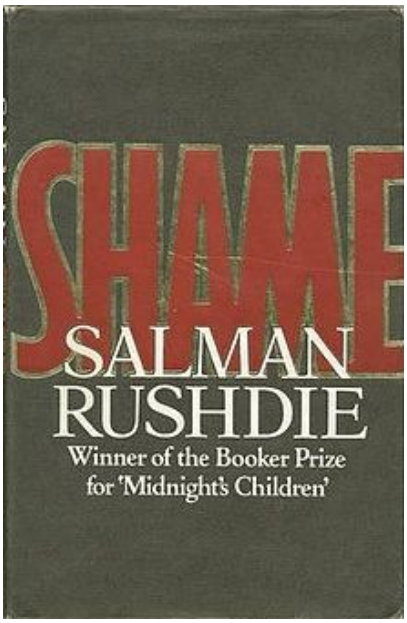
This wretched woman has been subject to a flood of online shaming. Does she deserve it? I say absolutely. Is it making any difference? Probably not. She'll be out gunning down more creatures soon, no doubt, and Ricky Gervais is racking up the hit counts.

Still, I defend the potential utility of shame. Properly recognized, it should serve us all as a guide in our personal decisions and behavior. I agree<fn>Hell, I know too well</fn> that shame can become a distorting force that can cripple a person. But still, the old adage of 'never do anything you

wouldn’t want your Mother to see you do’ certainly has shame at its core. But that’s not necessarily so wrong.<fn>If you grew up under a Mommie Dearest scenario, my apologies. But there must be someone, living or dead, whose admiration you value. Let that person/entity be your invisible observer.</fn>

Maybe shame is just for the little people now? Or maybe it’s just another form of entertainment, the precursor to and inevitable outgrowth of reality teevee. If that’s it, we’re all the lesser for it.

PS – This is a great book that explores the notion of shame far better than I do, but in a different cultural context.



Read this.

My Favorite World #21



Some of My Most Favorite Things are the moving picture shows. This week, I got to watch *North by Northwest* again for the eleventieth time.

The movie is terrific in every way, really one of Hitchcock's best. The story framework – a case of mistaken identity that draws the Cary Grant character, Roger Thornhill, into a spy vs. spy intrigue – is a classic 'wrong man' plot. It's a common plot device<fn>Hellloooo Lebowski</fn>, and one that is at the core of so many of his great movies.

The dialogue has the kind of snap and charm that makes me want to listen to Cole Porter and drink a dry martini. Or a Gibson.<fn>Grant's cocktail of choice in the film, basically a martini with a cocktail onion instead of the olive.</fn> Eva Marie Saint, playing Eve Kendall, is a classic Hollywood dame, a model of pluck and barely suppressed sexuality, a character that served as a template for dozens of femme fatales from the classic Bond girls (think Pussy Galore and Tiffany Case) to *Romancing the Stone*'s Joan Wilder.<fn>Who actually combines the *dame* persona with the hapless mistaken identity victim in one character.</fn> She is not quite as overt as some of the pre-Code dames, but in some ways that may actually turn up the heat. Film nerd fact: During filming, Eve tells Roger that, "I never make love on an empty stomach." The censors flipped and made them overdub a change: "I never *discuss* love on an empty stomach." The change makes Grant's double-take response a little less effective.



Roger hearing something the rest of us did not.

Many of the movie's structural elements – like the preposterous chase in a ridiculous setting (e.g., scampering across the face of Mt. Rushmore or the crop duster chasing Grant across the corn field) have left their stamp on a flood of later productions like the Bond movies, the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* franchises, *Bullitt*, *French Connection*, even in a Dr Who episode.<fn>Somebody could write a cool film studies dissertation on this.</fn>



The fourth Doctor waiting for a plane

But forget all that. The thing that rang my bells with this viewing was the design sense of the movie. I grew up in the 70s and 80s, and there really has been no more dismal fashion era than that. Sure, we get a little campy buzz off of polyester bell bottoms in eye-popping colors, but nobody wants to dress like that.<fn>The less said about the teased-hair, shoulder-padded 80s the better.</fn> But that suit that Grant wears pretty much the entire movie? Good god, people…that is a piece of clothing!



I want that suit. Hell, I want that dress, too.

In this scene, Thornhill believes Eve to be one of the bad guys.<fn>Which she both is and isn’t.</fn> He’s in gray, she’s in red: colors in opposition.

Here, we find Roger and Eve in cahoots. Same suit for Roger, but now Eve is dressed in a dress from the same color family: colors in concert.<fn>All credit to Tom and Lorenzo for getting me to think like this in the first place. My default mode had been “Hey, cool suit!”, if I even noticed it at all.</fn>



I still want that suit.

But the visual element that really tickles My Favorite World spot, even more than the fashion, are the sets. Much of the movie was filmed on location, as with this early scene in NY’s Plaza Hotel.



Just like a Holiday Inn Express

Now that, people, is what a hotel lobby should look like.

And this scene, in one of my favorite places.



Glory days of Grand Central. A recent restoration has pretty much brought it back to full gorgeousity.

Also, too…Hitchcock knew how to paint a picture. Check out this overhead shot of Grant fleeing the UN Building.



I can tell ya, the UN Building can’t look that good these days. It was already falling apart when I was a kid.

But the killer is the Vandamm House, a complete fabrication designed to look like a Frank Lloyd Wright-ish construction at the top of Mt. Rushmore.<fn>In fact, the area at the top of Rushmore is extremely restricted. Almost nobody gets to go up there, and there are definitely no cantilevered houses dangling over GW’s ear.</fn>



Nice digs.

The exterior shots are matte paintings, and the interiors are all built on a soundstage.



I would so live in this house.



I mean, come on. A McMansion or this? Even with the gun entering frame left, I'd still live there.

Another cool film nerd tidbit…look again at this still from the cafeteria.



I still want that suit.

Just to the right of Eve, there is a child extra who has his fingers in his ears. From rehearsals, he knew that 1) there was a gunshot coming and 2) that it was loud. So he pre-emptively plugged his ears before the gunshot. Nobody noticed at the time, but apparently Hitchcock was pretty miffed about it when they noticed it later on.

More substantively, Favorite World-wise: this is the first film appearance by Martin Landau. He played Leonard, Vandamm's (the awesome James Mason) assistant thug.



A couple of real creeps

Hitchcock had asked Landau to play Leonard as “gay” to help explain his animosity and mistrust for Eve. I have to admit that I did not pick up on this the first few times I watched, probably because Landau was so understated.<fn>And partly because I am a little oblivious.</fn> This was considered pretty controversial at the time, and many of Landau’s friends urged him to refuse.

The great thing about the portrayal is how he avoided cliche. The menace of Leonard is front and center; hints to his sexuality are almost entirely background, although at one point he ad-libbed the line, “Call it my woman’s intuition, if you will.” Anyway, Landau went on to an impressive career, frequently working alongside his wife, Barbara Bain. His turn as Andro in *The Outer Limits – The Man Who Was Never Born* is one of my all-time favorite episodes on the electric picture radio box.



There is nothing wrong with your electric picture radio machine.

So let’s review:

- Gripping plot
- Great dialog
- Eye popping fashion
- Gorgeous sets and scenery
- Film nerdery goldmine
- Amazing cast
- Hitchcock!
- Cary Fucking Grant!

Admit it. Cary Grant is the coolest guy ever. As he once remarked: “Everyone wants to be Cary Grant—even I want to be Cary Grant.” Well, I can’t be Cary Grant<fn>I’m barely even Archie Leach on my best day. Probably more like Archie Rice.</fn>, but I can pretend.

My Favorite World.

My Favorite World #20 point 5



Ed Note: This is a bonus, unscheduled MFW. Be happy.

That beautiful couple in the photo is my treasured Stratocaster plugged into my latest Hero Board™.<fn>Micro POG→MXR Phase 90→Jetter Tritium overdrive→ Ernie Jr. volume pedal→ Big Muff Pi→ Nano Freeze→ Ibanez Tube Screamer→ TC Ditto. Enquiring minds &c. </fn> Today this combo aired out the studio for a couple of hours, their first day in the light in six months. Say hallelujah and amen.

Both the strings and the board layout are unchanged since the 4WAKO gig in September.<fn>Coffee is for closers. New strings are for in-shape hands. Soon.</fn> I'm getting back in trim for some rehearsals this weekend in Tallahasse, this ahead of a re-embrace of public humiliation in Atlanta in a gig or two later this month with my once and future compadre. As such:

[jwplayer mediaid="721″]

Daylilies by RoboCromp, 2011

Also, too, these guys joined the fun.



Everett F-85 and Fender Deluxe

Ain’t no more favorite world than This Favorite World.

My Favorite World #20



When I was a wee sprite of 5, my parents took me to the 1964 World’s Fair. I honestly do not remember much of that day, but a couple of episodes stand out.

Leastly…

We rode the train from my grandparents’ house in Hartford into the city, with many transfers and such. <fn>In retrospect, I imagine this must have been a stressful day for my Southern born and bred parentals, having to negotiate for the first time the wilds of New York City and its bizarre underground choo-choo trains, with an easily distracted little boy in tow.</fn> On the train back from the big day in the Big City, I needed a bathroom so I was delivered to the on-train loo. When I flushed, the toilet opened and delivered my production directly onto the tracks. I was mesmerized, and flushed that damn toilet about twenty times to confirm my discovery. Satisfied, I emerged, and yelled the length of the traincar to my parents:

> *You can see the tracks!!!!!*

They cringed, everyone else laughed, and I was confused by it all.



For good damned reason.

Luckily, we were travelling at full clip, allowing my effluvia to distribute across a greater distance. An early, formative event in My Favorite (albeit somewhat nasty) World.

But more epically…

Aside from the giant globe that still stands in Queens (see it up top), the only thing that remains in memory is the Sinclair Dinoland.



What miracles await?

Way before you young whippersnappers had your hippity hoppity Jurassic Park rigmarole, we had life size dinosaur exhibits of our own. Sure, they didn't move much, and they didn't really make any sound. But we liked it that way!

The big feature of the exhibition was Sinclair's mascot dinosaur, the brontosaurus. Oh, it was big, but it was gentle

<fn>Eating only plants, not humans or Baby Jesuses or some such.</fn>, a friendly beast. Best of all, from a corporate imagistic / synergistic <fn>Anachronistic in this context, yes, but still reflective of intent.</fn> angle, the brontosaurus reminded us every step of the way of the benevolent goodness of our corporate betters who paid good money to advance *science* with no concern for their own advantage save to keep their corporate logo in our sights for an entire afternoon.

Why, I even went home with a plastic model of Bronto, molded in a machine before my very eyes!<fn>The irony of creating, and then owning, a replica of a dinosaur made out of actual dinosaur stuff went unremarked at the time.</fn>



My petro-based dinosaur friend.

It was warm to the touch for a long time after I received it, and I think I probably undermined its scientific accuracy a bit with my active little hands. My bronto pal always had a slightly crooked neck. Alas.

Oh, and how they loved them their brontosaurus. From the narration at the exhibit:

> *Sinclair uses the brontosaurus as a symbol to dramatize the age and quality of the crude oils from which Sinclair petroleum products were made, crudes which were mellowing in the earth millions of years ago when brontosaurus and other*

dinosaurs lived.

They make it sound like a fine whiskey.

http://www.immunetoboredom.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/09-Brontosaurus.mp3

Coincidentally, my maternal grandfather spent long years as a field agent (salesman) for Sinclair, driving the backroads of the South endlessly to spread the good word about Sinclair's mellow crude. The Sinclair sign was a beacon for us, a family connection even when we were far from home.



A friendly beast who did not eat children.

We would get angry at the parents if they stopped at other stations, especially those animalistic demons from Esso.



A child-eating demon.

We were less opposed to Texaco for some odd reason.



Cross-dressing petrochemical shill.

Alas, the brontosaurus was eventually decreed *not a real dinosaur* by actual scientists who get to decide these things. <fn>Just like those wankers who cut Pluto out of the planet club.</fn> And an entire generation of people like me were left bereft and crestfallen, our trust crushed and our dreams but a mere wisp.

“And so,” say the two or three readers<fn>I’m an optimist.</fn> who hung around this far to find out how in Hade’s Handbag this could exemplify My Favorite World, “how in Hade’s Handbag &c.?”

Well here’s how.

Science, and the stuck up sticky beaks who get to decide what we all are supposed to know, has changed its mind. At long last, the brontosaurus resumes its rightful place in the hall of reptilian behemoths! Excelsior!

And so today, the Unisphere is all that’s left of the World’s Fair, and Shea Stadium (you can see it in the background up top there) is gone.

But the brontosaurus is back, bitches. You can’t keep a good

beast down.

My Favorite World.<fn>Not to mention, it should give Pluto hope for redemption.</fn>