

Mixtapes



SHAME & COMPASSION



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POETRY
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RACHEL'S LINER NOTES

Humans have understood how to use shame – and the fear of shame – as a method of social control for centuries. We understood how, by making people feel small and powerless and wrong, we could remove their power. Throughout history, societies and religious institutions have used public shaming to publicly punish those who have done wrong. Today, we have the internet. A false step, a mistake can quickly mean a pile-on. We don't even have to look in the eyes of the person we are shaming.

Suzannah Showler's *Too negative*, and Megan Fernandes' conversion give us a flavour – maybe even a shuddering reminder – of the lingering discomfort of feeling ashamed. These poems describe social situations that have gone wrong, where someone has acted 'out of place', is seen as unacceptably different or as a threat to the social order. Donato Mancini's *you aren't going to like what I have to say* takes it a step further, with chilling ambiguity. Is the speaker really speaking with the addressee's best intentions at heart, or offering a passive-aggressive threat couched in the language of care? These aren't comfortable poems to read, and Stevie Smith's *Not Waving But Drowning* shows how misguided these collective social judgments can be.

Tyler Pennock's *It was in a boardroom* exposes shame as a tool of oppression, particularly when it is used by a dominant social power or race to silence alternative perspectives. The poem itself becomes an act of defiance against that silencing, and turns the shame back on the powers that be.

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Similarly, Hollie McNish's magnificent *Embarrassed* fights back at societal hypocrisy over breastfeeding in public. McNish's funny, pointed, defiant poems often deal with body and gender shaming. Her poems flip shame on its head, punching back up at the institutions and societal norms that would keep her down. In *My Grandmother Washes Her Feet in the Sink of the Bathroom at Sears*, Mohja Kahf uses both sly humor and unassailable dignity to defy social pressure and a lack of generosity for diverse cultural contexts in an American bathroom.

Poetry can also be the enactment of everything that shame is not: compassion, empathy and care. Naomi Shihab Nye's *Kindness* is steeped in these qualities. Sina Queyras' *Five Postcards from Jericho* – addressed to Regret, Time, an unnamed someone – are full of observance and curiosity, of connection and care.

Shame isn't always bad. Sometimes it seems that we've gotten so afraid of the 'conscience-beast' that we don't know how to live with it, how to use it. Finally, Jillian Christmas' *Northern Light* brings these themes together, asking us to be big enough to hold all of them inside.

'There is not always a way around,
but I promise you a way through
if we can remember both the haunted
and the Hunters,
if we can be courageous enough to dig
into the depths of humane capabilities,
stretch our capacities for tolerance and love.
How strange and brave are we?'



THE POEMS

NOT WAVING BUT DROWNING
by Stevie Smith

CONVERSION
by Megan Fernandes

TOO NEGATIVE
by Suzannah Showler

YOU AREN'T GOING TO LIKE WHAT I HAVE TO SAY
by Donato Mancini

FIVE POSTCARDS FROM JERICHO
by Sina Queyras

IT WAS IN A BOARDROOM
by Tyler Pennock

NORTHERN LIGHT
by Jillian Christmas

KINDNESS
by Naomi Shihab Nye

DEAR DEATH,
by Jason Camlot

MY GRANDMOTHER WASHES HER FEET IN THE SINK OF THE BATHROOM AT SEARS
by Mohja Kahf

EMBARRASSED
by Hollie McNish