

Shame Game

When I was younger, I was ashamed of my family for not having enough and now I'm ashamed of having too much. Too many books and too many throw pillows. When I was younger, I wanted to go to Europe and when I was older, I did, only to find I was ashamed of the ugly Americans around me. Ashamed of my own ugliness. Ashamed of my government. Ashamed of the ongoing wars. Ashamed of the way we kill each other in our own country. Ashamed of my profession as an American poet in a nation where twenty percent of adult citizens are functionally illiterate. Ashamed I once thought my poetry could change the world though only twenty percent of the world speaks or reads English. Ashamed of my ambitions, ashamed of my failures. Ashamed when I forget someone's name. Ashamed when I remember my shameful past. Ashamed of being white. Ashamed of not always "getting it." Ashamed of not speaking up, then ashamed of saying the wrong thing. Ashamed I haven't done enough to help others. Ashamed of overstepping when it's none of my business. Ashamed of my passion—romance and anger. Ashamed of my logical mind, how I sometimes use it to avoid my emotions. Ashamed of my crooked teeth. Ashamed of being too straightlaced and judgmental. As a teen, I was ashamed of my grandmother's mental illness. And now I'm ashamed that I was ashamed of her. Ashamed of my old, beat up Honda. Ashamed of eating too much. Ashamed of wasting food I can't quite finish. And now that I'm old, ashamed of my wrinkles, ashamed I think of them at all.

