



SHAME

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by  
Ben Kritikos

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING WRONG

Anything can happen to anybody.

Any moment.

Some moments are thicker than others.

Hours pass into the starved light of days,

and I become the kind of man

who eats the whole apple.

When did we first touch feet in bed?

Desire upon desire.

We fell in love in a world scandalized by its own beauty,  
where nothing laughs so hard that it can't stop crying.

I hate the whole world until I weep for everyone in it.

It's easy to fall in love

and then tell everybody about it

until the telling and the loving

fall out of fashion together--

love means SHIT FOR BRAINS.

Love means stalking in the shadows of my past,

possessed by the uniqueness of a fiery heart,

full of feeling...

But I believe in the importance of being wrong.

It takes moments as thick as funeral flowers--

knotty as apple cores at the bottom of the bin

(sometimes sleeping or laughing)

and I remember why I loved you.

Nov 2011-Dec 2014

For my sins.

POTENTIAL TITLES FOR MY FORTHCOMING MEMOIR

Ben Kritikos: The Journey

Ben Kritikos: A Journey

Being Ben Kritikos

The Unbearable Whiteness of Being Ben Kritikos

Long Walk To Freedom: The Autobiography of Ben Kritikos

Ben Kritikos: Living History

Dreams From My Step-Father: The Ben Kritikos Autobiography

Ben Kritikos: An American Life

Reading Sexus In Connecticut, by Ben Kritikos

Tropic of Cancer, by Ben Kritikos

Leaves of Grass, by Ben Kritikos

Ulysses, by Ben Kritikos

The Catcher In The Rye Sourdough: The Very Best of Ben Kritikos

I Know Why The Caged Bird Lays Eggs

Failing At Life: The Ben Kritikos Story

The Sad Life of Ben Romanello, by Ben Kritikos

I think about you when I masturbate--  
not because I love you  
(I do)

but because even the idea of you  
and me  
fucking until we come together--  
my mouth on your mouth,  
my humble dick in your  
magnificent pussy,  
your fingers and hands all over me--  
is more real  
than internet clips of actual people  
having actual sex.  
In my fantasies  
you're as happy as I am.

The result of this experience  
is semen--  
a salty logistical nightmare,  
hot then cold, a strange consistency,  
like insides fallen out--  
and the naked facts:  
such as, it's time to put my clothes back on  
or  
I need to pay the council tax  
or  
the next time I see you, I'll be accompanied by a ghost  
who looks just like you  
but nude  
and smiling and sweating  
in a permanent orgasm  
and--thank God--you won't notice each other.

THE GUYS IN THE PUB THOUGHT IT WAS A GOOD IDEA

Midas sat staring  
into the crowd,  
searching their faces:

Every sideways glance,  
every flickering tongue  
close to the ear

Sounded like secrecy--  
the coiling belly-crawl  
of some horrible truth

Escaping his pocket,  
curling through the common air--

A sickening new normality:  
Midas has ass's ears.

11 Nov '12  
Thought I had herpes

You are right  
I am a fool  
for letting dramatic expectations  
run off with the ribbons and condoms  
of my unspent adolescence

Here, take this  
it's the entire catalogue  
of what I don't know yet  
You can keep it next to  
your well-thumbed copy  
among the unedited manuscripts  
dazzling northern lights  
everybody has travelled so far to see

When you link arms with the heroic dead  
send my excuses  
I'm sure you'll fit right in  
as the curtains peel away  
for an elegant lady with a glass hand  
undressing behind a fan of peacock feathers  
wafting perfume up to the booth where you sit  
surrounded by a bunch of hungry beggars  
who speak a language you don't understand

You are right  
I am a fool  
and I will always be poor  
the hero of my class  
and your dustbin's boon companion  
humming an air from the turning of the wheel  
crushed like apples  
under so many other apples  
in the fruit bowl  
at the cafe  
where you wait  
to be invited  
into the smoke and gold  
of regular people  
I am not prolier than thou  
You are right  
and I am a fool

## RAINER

Rainer, I turn over in the night, wake to dull gloaming of dawn--inside a duck egg where I lay with a numb arm (they say it's fallen asleep). A light glows from outside, throwing pale blue around the room, while pins and needles carve up my limbs, and the mournful seagulls moan like dinosaurs outside. Rainer, I'm inside the egg. What about you? Is that you holding a light to the surface of the shell, casting shadows on the morning? You who put the lumps in my bed? You who put the sound of airless laughter in the voice of birds? Is it you who made the radio silent, pondering the six o'clock news and whether it's important enough to turn on and tell me? Is it important enough?

I get out of bed, Rainer, and notice the grumbling of cars and lorries, early-rising people on their way to whatever it is they do. One morning is no different than another. But for each person shifting hours in this pool of half-light, the morning is broken into pieces--and to each their own.

To each their own. Did you understand that all too well? Did you find yourself with a shard of morning, sharp and broken, a little protest, glinting in the half-light in your palms? Maybe that did it. Maybe the jagged edge cut you--maybe your hands formed a network of scars. Telephone wires zig-zagging, a map showing the way from one morning to the next. A network of duck eggs, isolate, electric, like a soft fleshy thing cocooned in a bedroom at dawn, its face lit by a sickly glowing pool that reflects what happens outside.

And outside, all the while, was the morning: pale but unbroken, where flying dinosaurs screech with the ecstasy of flight, and lorry-drivers whistle between deliveries, and children sleep, dreaming of the internet, and the blood comes flooding back into my arms like a riot of pins and needles, an unbearable reminder of how long one part of myself lay buried under the unconscious rest of me--cut off, then suddenly awake. Pins and needles, Rainer, that make moving and keeping still equally unbearable. An absence that is painfully present.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF,  
I have affixed my hand.

