

## ALEXIS QUINLAN

### Paris Hilton and the Death of the Ethical

*In most cases the cause of the horror is the fact that the boarder refuses to make rational choices as a consumer.  
Instead of choosing selectively, she chooses everything.*

15.

(Still I am against the wrought hollow that against-ness pushes against.)

Having been raised by nuns I suffer no vanity.  
In one-third of the books on our shelves, overhead  
fans churn and whirr, worrying the same spot.  
Not in this book. These were belief's  
stalwarts: effortless achievement and beauty  
unmentioned. Then a grade school friend arrives  
with her fat family and awful politics  
and it's hell not to tell tell tell.

20.

Upstairs a husband sorts heirlooms  
with his sister, assigning chests and  
headboards, silver teapots, dusty photographs  
to daughters not mine. To observers,  
it appears that I take what I want when  
*instant gratification* that lady often shouted,  
who was not a nun but perhaps should have  
*you always want what you want when you want it.*  
Had to agree. When else? Hoarding is only  
a problem in the parable where the gal  
who buries her gift to save it for the day  
she'll know for sure is most wicked of all.  
Oh, yes, she is chastened. Severely.

2.

If a nation's consumer debt has revved up  
personal recklessness would it belong  
in a poem? The garage overshot by a yard.  
*Use credit* said the Yalie at the LA rave. *Show*  
*faith in your future.* I am also ironic, often,  
yet something else persists, something dead  
that I dance The Refrigerator around

while it does not morph, stubborn, until  
the most beautiful person at the bar joins me  
and we like music together which gratifies  
or makes me furious, depending.  
Inside I am a homunculus, married to it.  
*Consummatum est.*

## The Goddess Abandons Helen

(in response to Cavafy's "The Gods Abandon Antony")

What world she'd massed melted in the soap  
opera that swelled like the Aegean  
on that brilliant crossing with the enchanter.  
Alit, still blurry from sex, she met a city  
mangling plowshares and raising lookouts.  
Even the lanky, crackle-voiced boys surging  
with spring's sticky ichor, raring to testify  
of the deep thrusting that made them,  
they too were signing up.

Once she was a twin at home. She chased  
a neighbor with a limp who watched  
her father's sheep for market money until  
the kidnapping. The red red. Her brothers  
rescued her and found her a king, rounding  
her up and handing her off, little lamb.  
There was no slaughter, simply a girl  
spun out like wool and knitted to the new place.  
The husband sang and teased into the night  
with his inland drawl. Finally she laughed.

Then this latest, backed by a she-god.  
History would call it kidnap again: how he  
grunted with effort to raise her to the horse,  
and later, on the boat. Now his eyes are strange  
as the boys wringing death from the world-cloth.  
She naps in a walled garden  
on these wilting afternoons and waits.  
She is no longer the most beautiful.

As the sky tilts to pink, a dream of  
the shepherd on home's slope: how he gulped  
the cool water she'd carried, how a silver thread  
along his flushed jaw mingled with his sweat,  
how easy it was to quench the thirst of one  
who knew what he'd done and why.

## Housekeeping

What about the mother's clutter.  
History preserved like letters handwritten  
and tacky teaspoons showing brass and wee  
scapulars dusty in the wee ridged edges.  
Crumbling ticket from Bennington Horse Races.  
And each least reason she saved it all.  
You have always known the particular  
power of the far places where they told her she was  
beautiful, inviolate, better than this ugly.  
Magnificent absence long before she was.

Yes you should chuck it  
not only because all that haunted her  
has claws raring to scratch their way into this day  
but because each snipped wisp of lace  
is an iron anchor in the strongbox tucked  
into the wood chest at the base of the bed  
and your husband wonders what is this crap.

But he's got his own mother who shielded  
her netsuke heart now in a neat row  
atop his dresser that you should not touch.

***Non serviam***

In those days we knew to never submit,  
to always keep ourselves firm against new

warmth, remembering the father  
we'd soon be, the only one we could have

come from. Sky rager. In those days we locked  
the key in the box with the gun, the accident

report, the barrel of rhyme and a dead god's recipe  
for fool's gold. Back then we'd grown freaky spare limbs

for shoveling the grainy past into the full-foamed  
ocean named here and no one notion held up

for long so we sparked off new dream schemes  
made mile-high pillars special-smelted melting

into sea's salt daily and we adamant-refused to admit how  
everything's related and that gives pleasure.

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**Alexis Quinlan** is a poet, occasional travel writer and teacher (lately at Fordham) living in New York City. Her work has appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Drunken Boat* and others, over many years, is, forthcoming in *Rhino* and *Human Journal*, and she once won the Spoon River Poetry Prize. Her 2013 chapbook, *an admission, as a warning against the value of our conclusions*, via Exit Strata: Print!, is from a ever-growing series of interventions on and responses to Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia."

Her Shih-Tzu, Arthur Rimbaud, is as obstreperous as his namesake.