Everything is Paris

By

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A Thesis Submitted to the Honors College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelor's degree
with Honors in
Creative Writing
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
May 2010

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Abstract

I began formulating the subject matter for this thesis last semester while I was reading works of Classical Greek literature, everything from Homer to Aeschylus, and studying the myth and culture that surrounded them. I am already obsessed with media and popular culture and, while writing an early set of poems, Paris Hilton got injected into a poem about Clytemnestra. From there, I began to work on blending the classical with the contemporary to explore the nature of self-identity in such a media ravaged culture, where what you project successfully is the only image of you that people accept. I began writing in forms and then in solid prose paragraphs. I wanted to work to accomplish a melding of the prose we see in every magazine with traditional poetic lines and think that this successfully lends itself to making each stand out immediately based upon which it is in. The collection plays off the same themes and each poem bounces off of other poems, building up to a question, really, about how much of a single being we can pull ourselves into. In doing so, the collection stands on its own and possesses direction, not to mention some wonderful poetry.
The Beauty, of Troy

Did I ever feel myself giving in to Aphrodite's game? Of course. You can't imagine all the chocolate I was given, all the sonnets I was read. Whenever I was in my bedroom, I was knee deep in Neruda, so familiar was he to me on my departure, I may as well have written it all myself. Sometimes, when I spoke to Paris, to muse over a certain line to dwell on a particular vein in his hand, he would startle me by staring at me, eyes wide as a lamb's, as though I was someone else. “You're speaking in Spanish,” he said. “Que?” I wondered. And everyday there were new poems, one for each of his eyes, one for his eyebrow, one for his lovely colon. Each time the same eye-widening and he would venture, “I'm sure I've heard these before. Are they Neruda?” I would laugh at him until he gave up, off to polish his armor. It wasn't until I returned to Greece that I discovered; they all were.
Daedalus' Son

I slept in a blanket made of pie-bald gecko skins, chafing my already blistered skin to teach me a lesson about accessibility, about celsius, about degrees, about ground.

When I was young my father told me, For everything, a purpose. For everything, a sacrifice.”
Once, I asked him what he meant, scratching a welt I received from his tinkerings, and he replied, “It means that everything is possibility. It means that no injury is a waste.”

He bent forward, clasping my forearm and placed a nude band-aid on my welt, smoothing it down and turned back to his work, affixing feathers to bone, testing its lift.
I remember being told not to go too near the sun. I remember being told that I had a good father.
Hate Mail to Pythian Apollo

I hold a bundle of letters in my arms,
trailing fallen extras dropping from me like debris
blown off comets by the sun.
How much are envelopes nowadays?
And who would take the time to buy them?
You rarely see anyone buying them in bulk.
Except maybe secretaries, gathering them for work.
These people, then, had to go to the store and pay
a paltry little amount of money to buy
an individual envelope.
They had to fold their paper, create precise creases,
you can see the uneven, faint first attempts,
to place the letters in, the folds misjudged
by shaky emotional hands: old lovers,
one-night stands, men and women I took to dinner
and left for friends, those jealous of my beauty.
A beauty that has long outdone Helen,
that sad, solitary hag growing old in Menelaus' prison.
You can see her daughter skipping to school,
preposterous under that crown of fake hair
so damaged and fried that it rests like a bird's nest.
Another letter flies into my face, catches for a moment
long enough for me to see the return address.
And that's another thing; postage.
These letters, they come from so far away
and where do they find stamps?
No one goes to the post office anymore.
Again excepting the secretaries on business.
I come out out of my house onto the patio,
continue on to the edge of the pool,
pristine in the summer sun,
glinting almost as spritely as my skin.
I shoulder the letters up
to a slightly more secure position
in the cradle of my arms and then I dump them,
al in a bundle, into the water.
Some loose and blow to the sides,
skidding on the ground and reaching the lawn
or falling in with the others, now drenching.
The letters themselves swell within their cases,
the fuck yous and how could yous growing exaggerated
before they dissolve. All of the place names disappear,
the faces on the stamps warp, and the pool begins to murk.
All of the ink, the blacks, the reds, the blues, the errant pink
of a love letter shuffled into the wrong pile, rises to the surface,
churns in the jets, ragged paper catching in the pool cleaner.
I stand at the surface until each letter of each word is gone,
a deliberateness to the positioning of my body,
casting shadow onto the patch that the main pile went into.
And I think to myself, I wonder into the margarita brought out to me,
if this is what mortality feels like; ink in dissolution.
The Beauty, Of Paris

I keep going past the coming together of Paris and Paris, their breakup, their reunion, their fights in front of clubs, inside of clubs, before going to clubs, after coming from clubs. I thought about my time in Troy, the pages that my husband made me tear out before I could come home, burn before I could hold my daughter. I see Paris.
Paris to Paris, On the Occasion of Flipping Through People

I am not the same woman that you are.
We are of different worlds, you and I,
yours pharmaceutical, mine metaphorical.
We write different papers, read different Latins,
love different men.
Costume parties are the life you live
to forget that, other than whore, all you can be
is frumpy, in Nikes and sweats.
It doesn't make you athletic, darling,
it makes you notably unfuckable.
We always forget that you have a pussy
until you show it to us, once more.

This is you, in snapshot:
Your lifted Halloween skirt, all coquettish gesture
and shameful reveal. Its lilted edges beg,
“Please love me because I am a sexual being,
as evidenced by my sexy milkmaid skirt, and I,
I will love you, until I am sober and I,
I will hold you as high as this red cup.
A ghoul of blonde pubic hair nestles
in your pinked thighs, growing thicker
picture by picture.

Because there will always be two of us
there will always be a heaving, Amazonian
need for me to kill you,
but you've long since only lived
in old love texts, in magazine photos
and VH1 interviews,
voice grating as a chihuahua yap
and unreachable.
I smudge your name out of the caption.
A Fight Breaks Out at Olympus (The Good Father)

There is Daedalus.  
Here to show off  
his new wings,  
wax and bone,  
wrapped in purple  
tissue paper, folded precise  
as origami cranes:  
a lucky shield  
to keep them.  
Apollo there,  
laughing at them,  
taking them brusquely  
and testing them,  
declaring them flimsy.  
Daedalus watching the feathers  
as they bounce off the ground,  
soak in the puddles,  
the wax dislodging  
under Apollo's jostling,  
the wax falling in clumps  
and molding to the tiles.

In the hallway, Hephaestus  
finds him sobbing, sticking globs  
back onto the frame and cursing daylight.  
Hephaestus places a hand on his back,  
hands him some stray wax.  
“Maybe that crazy son  
will try it for you,” cackles Apollo.  
Daedalus wraps the pieces back  
in the paper swaddling,  
clutches them tight,  
“For everything,” he mutters,  
“For everything, a sacrifice.”
Sometimes I find myself in doorways, by fences, and I don't remember who I am. I open my mail, sift through love letters and grocery ads, each addressed to a different person, “Dear Delian Apollo,” “Fuck you, Pythian Apollo”, Apollo this, Apollo that, even some misplaced letters to that adorable athlete Apolo, the one with all the accolade who does that thing on ice, going in circles...or something.

After awhile it all becomes so predictable, like horoscopes or fortune cookies being made funny by inserting in some sexual innuendo, and I have to begin hiring people just to read them. After a few months they all get bored, as well, and need to be replaced. There was the one girl with the tragically droll dirty blonde hair, though, that said she had to leave because she could no longer stand me, “the way I greeted the staff by kissing them (men and women alike), the way I would sit by them while they read and shake my hands to see if any of the jewels on my rings would shake loose, revealing shoddy craftsmanship, the way I would take a few sips of a drink, just until the ice began to melt and it would start to carry that slight taint of water, and then request that she make a new one, the fact that despite how many times she explained it to me I never fully grasped the necessity of convenience stores.”

The funny thing is, I don't remember doing any of that.
I am Ashes

I was a young woman who wanted to be famous.
I have always hated my thin hair, my bony hips.
The boys seemed to love them.
I was scared of heights and deep bodies of water.
I used to make Father's Day cards and hide them in my closet.
I used to wish for Helen's fairness, her large breasts.
I hide hyacinths in the folds of my dresses,
get chided when they stain them,
I cried when I was left alone.
I wrote poems to my imagined lovers,
snuck oranges and ate them while studying,
the dogs sniffing the skins at my feet.
When I practiced my signature for future autographs
it sang, “Iphigenia, Iphigenia, Iphigenia.”
The Gilded Man

When the pantheon gathers for a reunion over barbeque one woman slaps me, another embraces me, Aphrodite whispers that she always thinks of me while in bed with Hephaestus.
Young girls tell me that the setting sun makes them cry, that it reminds them of my departure. They light candles impressed with my name to get them through the night.
I run my finger down the bridge of their noses and lean into them, “As long as you think of me while you masturbate, then I am never gone.”
A young man glowers at me while talking to Hermes in the corner. He throws a drink in my face and yells at me that he loves me to which I reply, “I'm sure you do, sunshine. Unfortunately, I can't quite remember your name.”
I am the literal golden child, employing two men to sweep up the gold flecking off of me, two more to bottle it and sell it as a remedy for cowardice, a wonder-mixture to define your muscles. When I sit down to dinner all I need do is think “brightness” and each of them are white, tiny-faced moons reflecting light.
As I take my first sip of wine I look up at them and smile.
An Open Letter from Paris, Hilton to Paris, Ex-Lover

I have never been a woman that anyone wanted.
I was never dangerous, I was never decisive, I was never caring.
I am just what you think I am, until I'm not.
And then, I am *that* bitch, *that* whore, *that* woman,
but who am I, really, Paris?
In order for me to be everything there must be an act of assembling.
And this merging will obviously require a renaming,
but what language to use and whose point of view?
Was it ever mine, Paris? Was it ever yours? Whose?
Were *you* ever one person, Paris, and not me or a shepherd or a city?
And if a woman wearing a short skirt is a whore and everything of interest must be hot,
then aren't all places with buildings and boundaries just Paris?
Can't we all just be alike?
If you feel the need to remember, keep in mind, that since we are all in possession
of a head, some fingers and toes, and a pragmatic nature,
then we are all identical. And that, Paris, is huge.
Clytemnestra

By necessity, there are some things that can only exist in double: daughters gone, husbands away, wives present. There is always one that is here and one that is here.

To pass ten years I took to watching television. Hours and hours of luminescent young families in laugh track, hours and hours of crying women held like dainty embroidery in the arms of more women, hours and hours of the same same same, but this is how I came to know Paris Hilton.

It is a terrible thing to have a husband who can always see the woman standing behind you, beside you, before you. A terrible thing to notice that sometimes when he reaches for you he pulls away, because he had thought you were someone else. “Cassandra, please come closer,” he urges.

This bony, blonde Paris was telling a cameraman how she created a second woman to be in public. “It's crazy that people think that is the way that I have always talked. I do not talk like that.” As she spoke she got angrier and quieter.

The way that eventually all women must recede and then resurface different in the mind of a man who looked at his daughter and saw a goat, who looked at his wife and saw a mute fortune-teller, who looked at his wife and saw her sister.

The most jarring part of the show was when Paris spoke in her real woman voice. Because by now, after ten years' time, that voice is an exposure paler than naked skin. That voice is the woman struck dumb by Apollo, for refusing him. That voice is the other woman in the room.
The Male Persephone

There is a certain locution that comes with knowing that there is only underworld for you. It grips you while eating pomegranate seeds, makes you tally months on your hand. Somewhere in the background of your pomegranate martini you can hear Demeter wailing. And you hear your speech more punctuated with “colds” “Acherons” and “Cerberus' hair color”. You can feel your company pulling away. It almost makes me sad to be one of those, like a much more gifted meteorologist, who foretells exactly when winter will fall. Sad, to know that it was my own hand that drew it. To curb the guilt I tried drugs, naturally, and dated Eirene of the Hours, hoping that our common knowledge would pull us closer. She left me for someone that she described as possessing a more summery attitude. She said that it was pointless for both of us to be so fixated on the snow. I've developed a discomfort around freezers and, as such, have taken to only eating warm food. I use the frozen portion of my refrigerator for storing unpleasant items: ugly baby pictures, bad movies, past due bills and my wedding ring. Though, to be honest, I think the last one feels more comfortable in there, nestled amongst the icy and the refuse. Like a lost golden retriever who finds its owner after months of separation, it sits patiently. I open the window and feel a chill, Hades will call tomorrow, perhaps sometime next week, if he is busy. I swear I can hear the ring clinking against the sides of the freezer, it knows it's going home.
Paris to Paris, On the Occasion of Our Last Break-Up

I take breakfast away from the windows, where I at least don't see the round camera lenses poking in between the foliage, the men in head to toe camo, trying to blend in. When I go out it is a chorus of “Paris, Paris” but I keep my eyes fixed forward like an embarrassed Medusa, aware that to look directly at me would dissolve them. As security and paparazzi jostle me forward I think about sitting on the couch with you, ingesting delicate forkfuls of mac and cheese, telling you about my day. I think about the time that you asked me to stop speaking in that voice, the one that counts like dollar bills, rises like a tiara, the voice as pink as the belly of a chihuahua, and I felt exposed. I push my sunglasses up on the bridge of my nose. When the reporters ask me why we broke up, I grin and say, “We were two different people, me and Paris.”
The Serial King

Sometimes I feel my skin
on fire
but then I realize that
I am just
looking at someone
who has yet to notice me

I pull my breath in
wonder if I should buy
her flowers
leave them on her porch
with a note that explains
that her skin is petals
her beauty stems
that support me
her beauty wind
that bends me toward her
both of us dandelions
that should let go
and commingle

she passes me
on her way to work
her hair in a bun
frame rustling
in a black sheath dress
I want to call to her
call Leda, Leda
but someone recognizes me
I hear my name
Zeus, Zeus is that you

I conclude that flowers
are decidedly tired ways
of describing beauty
they are beneath her
and Aphrodite says
that astronomical metaphors
are much more in vogue
at the moment
maybe notes and flowers
are not the best route
I wonder how easy
her door would splinter
if kicked at persisted at
how resilient her denials could be
if they stood before my passion
yes how sturdy how resolved
could either the wood
or her protests
possibly be

I've sometimes seen
her bending
to pick up swan feathers
seen her take them home
place them in hat bands
nestled between sunflowers
in a scarlet vase
dangling from the end
of a teal dreamcatcher
stray feathers catch
in the crevices of her baseboards

I know she'd fidget
if pressed
rebuff me if asked
I push on her door
lay weight on her windowpanes
to break them
would be so crashing
the sound so violent

I should tell her
we are galaxies
meant to collide
I see her sitting
cozy on her dun couch
this window's unlocked
the pane so gracefully sliding
the sound gentle as a rustle
When I am very lonely, only then, so solitary that I feel as Neruda in exile, writing poetry that nobody
asks for and watching Il Postino all day long, do I begin to see my daughter as the pauper postman in
love with the saloon girl who will not look at him, and I am Pablo. I have to educate her in seduction,
but she has Menelaus' brown hair, so brown that when he reclaimed me from Troy the ten years of dirt
didn't tarnish it, clumps falling to the floor each time he shifted his weight. If only she had been given
my blonde, then this seduction lesson would be no problem, except that she does not have near my
level of grace, tripping on every bunched rug or uneven sidewalk break. And since none of her agility
can be helped I just spend hours each few weeks dying her hair. But on the weekdays she has school
and I am left with the servants and my weaving. All of the weaving, hours of weaving, days full of
weaving; each Christmas all we get is tapestries. I am told that they tell a story, but what story could be
more tragic than my two lives? What story could be more upsetting than my daughter's mouse hair?
What sonnet could reach me in threads and tell me that I love being a good mother?
Knitting is the New Weaving

For something so simple in conception, it has a terribly large section in art stores. It has moved off our grandmothers’ couches to wrap its frilly tendrils around the national psyche, capitalizing on a post 9-11 atmosphere and employing unique acts of terror.

It has become the symbol of aging, the impossible to ignore click-click nearly as nightmarish to children as that clown in It. As if we all understand that once we start to bed down on a yarn pillow, no matter how lovely the pattern, it is when our years begin to count down.

We fought against it, yes we did. There was a period when knitting was deeply in vogue and you could see the likes of Julia Roberts and Keira Knightley stepping out to grab their coffee with their needles protruding from their oversized Balenciaga bags; pictures snapped of Gwyneth Paltrow grinning sheepishly as she retrieved an errant ball of yarn from the playground dirt.

Ask Clytemnestra what she thinks of the new craze, “All of our old age is hidden in scarves for our boyfriends, tea cozies for our aunts, floppy hats for our children. To be sure, a knit onesie is just a jabbing reminder to a newborn of his mortality, of that dust to dust feeling that I get when each loop comes out ashen, when each needle knocking needle seems to say, “Iphigenia, Iphigenia, Iphigenia.”
The Greek King (The Good Father)

For years I longed for dissection,
splitting as a conduit for betrothal,
a system for dividing what was necessary from what was frivolous,
what was absolute from what was embellishment.
I wanted to use this system to tether myself to gain,
to drown my opponents with loss. Occasionally, a betrayal
would be necessary, a turning away from home.
On some nights I prayed for Demeter's power over earth,
the might to cripple Troy with twelve months of winter, but mainly
I relished the closeness of war, the dear quality of destruction to sort out men
into the absolute and the embellishment. So on the day to leave
when no wind arrived it only took a moment for the invitation,
a second of bygone birthday parties and found father's day cards.
Only an instant to know that the choice was erasure, that everything is sacrifice.
Part of me was disheartened to hear my daughter go, but part of me enjoyed
the crackling, part of me thrilled to see the ashes blown to the wind.
For four years after I was “the most beautiful woman in the world” I was “the desk girl”. I spent seven hours a day greeting people, directing phone inquiries and being hit on by an IT guy with a wife and five-year-old child who wore a Star Wars shirt to work, “I read fantasy and sci-fi mostly,” he’d quip, thrumming his fingers on the desk and eying my wrist. He never stood still, always shifted his weight from one foot to another: right to left, left to right, right to...and by then I’d resumed reading Homer. How little he’d gotten right I’d chuckle, highlighting another inaccuracy, “That old man never said that about me.”

As the morning pulled forward, the blocks of yellow sharpie grew numerous, until everything about me was error: the color of my dress to that dinner, the scent of my perfume, my words to Hector. All were not this.

I flung the book across the room, bewildered that this man could so audaciously call carnations roses, make me into the pale-lipped monster of Greece. In the fan’s ripples I could spy chunks of yellow text and I thought of all the female, broken body parts in Neruda’s sonnets, the women who would have to cut them out to piece them back together. I wished Menelaus was there to hold me.
The Lame Inventor

It always seemed like such a waste to be boring, such a sin to be unhelpful. I took to making everything piecemeal, to understand the import of each screw. My wife, the patroness of love, always says that she loves me because I make dissection out of loving her. I take time to caress each portion of her body, each limb, take time to tell her every one of her virtues. The only problem, she notes (as well as some others), is that I always trend towards leaving a few out: once I missed her straw-gold hair, once her purple-polished baby toenail, another time her regality of bearing. It has always troubled me that I feel this way. It troubled me, that though I could make every instrument perfect, I need to fragment.
Paris, the Socialite

I am bored with money.
I draw pointillist tigers
and then connect the dots.
I pick fights with matadors,
then I throw them.
I go to museums
just to alert the owners
that most of these paintings
are probably fake.
Why wouldn't someone stop me?
Even when I go to toy stores
just to open board games
and swap out the pieces,
no one says a word.
I could pay a man
to climb Mount Everest for me,
then pay him again
to write the memoir.
There is nothing stylistically different
between being a delinquent, rich,
and being a delinquent, poor.
There's just more rich “community service”
and less rich arts and crafts.
In detention, I used to make my projects
out of money, just because no matter the shape
of everyone's elephant,
mine always smelled superior.
The Other Man

I once knew a man made of sun, the original star. And though I then ran with a man built of wind I couldn't resist that each candle flicker in the night made me ache for him, each glass of water I drank made me dream of cooling him, of diving into his pool. There was definitely the lure of celebrity, tailing Apollo, and plenty of gifts, but it always seemed to fill him. He would routinely have his nails covered in Swarovski crystals, and throw parties in celebration. These parties always opened with fireworks, confetti and cold cuts and denuded into sitting beside him, staring at his nails. Somewhere behind me Aphrodite sighs about how expensive they must be, gets distracted by her new white chihuahua who has run off with the roast beef. Clytemnestra takes one look at them before crossing to the other side of the pool. Later, she puts her hair up into a bun, sliding a knitting needle in to make it stick. While all the guests chatted, boozed and touched him, he never seemed to notice, only reaaffix a lopsided crystal and laugh when no one near him had made a joke. Out of camaraderie, I always laughed, too.
The Beauty

This is a romanticizing of an early possibility, the way America holds George Washington up as if to kiss him. We cradle in our palms something necessary, a hope that we once were ideal. Once had the perfect syllables, the sweetest apples, the firmest breasts our lover ever touched. The way I once was alabaster, in the days that I spent my time covering Paris in daisies, nimbly placing each blossom on a patch of his skin. Hours, until all he was a petal-dummy, a daisy area rug, breathing, waiting to be kissed.

So there must be a rejoining, and I spend my days sifting through magazines stitching it back together.

And so the merging must be a renaming.