

From The Glass Essay

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Well there are many ways of being held prisoner,
I am thinking as I stride over the moor. 160
As a rule after lunch mother has a nap

and I go out to walk.
The bare blue trees and bleached wooden sky of April
carve into me with knives of light.

Something inside it reminds me of childhood— 165
it is the light of the stalled time after lunch
when clocks tick

and hearts shut
and fathers leave to go back to work
and mothers stand at the kitchen sink pondering 170

something they never tell.
You remember too much,
my mother said to me recently.

Why hold onto all that? And I said,
Where can I put it down? 175
She shifted to a question about airports.

Crops of ice are changing to mud all around me
as I push on across the moor
warmed by drifts from the pale blue sun.

On the edge of the moor our pines 180
dip and coast in breezes
from somewhere else.

Perhaps the hardest thing about losing a lover is
to watch the year repeat its days.
It is as if I could dip my hand down 185

into time and scoop up
blue and green lozenges¹ of April heat
a year ago in another country.

I can feel that other day running underneath this one
like an old videotape—here we go fast around the last corner 190
up the hill to his house, shadows

of limes and roses blowing in the car window
and music spraying from the radio and him
singing and touching my left hand to his lips.

Law² lived in a high blue room from which he could see the sea. 195
Time in its transparent loops as it passes beneath me now
still carries the sound of the telephone in that room

and traffic far off and doves under the window
chuckling coolly and his voice saying,
You beauty. I can feel that beauty's 200

heart beating inside mine as she presses into his arms in the high blue
room—

No, I say aloud. I force my arms down
through air which is suddenly cold and heavy as water

and the videotape jerks to a halt
like a glass slide under a drop of blood. 205
I stop and turn and stand into the wind,

which now plunges towards me over the moor.
When Law left I felt so bad I thought I would die.
This is not uncommon.

I took up the practice of meditation. 210
Each morning I sat on the floor in front of my sofa
and chanted bits of old Latin prayers.

*De profundis clamavi ad te Domine.*³
Each morning a vision came to me.
Gradually I understood that these were naked glimpses of my soul. 215

I called them Nudes.
Nude #1. Woman alone on a hill.
She stands into the wind.

It is a hard wind slanting from the north.
Long flaps and shreds of flesh rip off the woman's body and lift 220
and blow away on the wind, leaving

an exposed column of nerve and blood and muscle
calling mutely through lipless mouth.
It pains me to record this,

I am not a melodramatic person. 225
But soul is "hewn in a wild workshop"
as Charlotte Brontë says of *Wuthering Heights*.⁴

Charlotte's preface to *Wuthering Heights* is a publicist's masterpiece.
Like someone carefully not looking at a scorpion
crouched on the arm of the sofa Charlotte 230

talks firmly and calmly
about the other furniture of Emily's workshop—about
the inexorable spirit ("stronger than a man, simpler than a child"),
the cruel illness ("pain no words can render"),
the autonomous end ("she sank rapidly, she made haste to leave us") 235
and about Emily's total subjection

to a creative project she could neither understand nor control,
and for which she deserves no more praise nor blame
than if she had opened her mouth

"to breathe lightning." The scorpion is inching down 240
the arm of the sofa while Charlotte
continues to speak helpfully about lightning

3. Psalm 130: Out of the depths I have called unto thee, O Lord (Latin).

4. Novel by English writer Emily Brontë (1818–1848). Her sister Charlotte (1816–1855) wrote an introduction for the 1850 edition, attempting to

explain how a novel of such extreme passion, imagination, and apparent "coarseness" could have been produced by a woman with such a reserved life. Throughout "The Glass Essay," the poet compares her own life with Emily Brontë's.

and other weather we may expect to experience
 when we enter Emily's electrical atmosphere.
 It is "a horror of great darkness" that awaits us there 245

but Emily is not responsible. Emily was in the grip.
 "Having formed these beings she did not know what she had done,"
 says Charlotte (of Heathcliff and Earnshaw and Catherine).⁵

Well there are many ways of being held prisoner.
 The scorpion takes a light spring and lands on our left knee 250
 as Charlotte concludes, "On herself she had no pity."

Pitiless too are the Heights, which Emily called Wuthering
 because of their "bracing ventilation"
 and "a north wind over the edge."

Whaching⁶ a north wind grind the moor 255
 that surrounded her father's house on every side,
 formed of a kind of rock called millstone grit,

taught Emily all she knew about love and its necessities—
 an angry education that shapes the way her characters
 use one another. "My love for Heathcliff," says Catherine, 260

"resembles the eternal rocks beneath—
 a source of little visible delight, but necessary."
 Necessary? I notice the sun has dimmed

and the afternoon air sharpening.
 I turn and start to recross the moor towards home. 265
 What are the imperatives

that hold people like Catherine and Heathcliff
 together and apart, like pores blown into hot rock
 and then stranded out of reach

of one another when it hardens? What kind of necessity is that? 270
 The last time I saw Law was a black night in September.
 Autumn had begun,

my knees were cold inside my clothes.
 A chill fragment of moon rose.
 He stood in my living room and spoke 275

without looking at me. Not enough spin on it,
 he said of our five years of love.
 Inside my chest I felt my heart snap into two pieces

5. Three characters from the novel.

6. Earlier in the poem, Carson explains that
whacher is Brontë's idiosyncratic spelling of

watcher. This excerpt is from the poem's fourth
 section, "Whacher."

which floated apart. By now I was so cold
it was like burning. I put out my hand
to touch his. He moved back. 280

I don't want to be sexual with you, he said. Everything gets crazy.
But now he was looking at me.
Yes, I said as I began to remove my clothes.

Everything gets crazy. When nude
I turned my back because he likes the back.
He moved onto me. 285

Everything I know about love and its necessities
I learned in that one moment
when I found myself 290

thrusting my little burning red backside like a baboon
at a man who no longer cherished me.
There was no area of my mind

not appalled by this action, no part of my body
that could have done otherwise. 295
But to talk of mind and body begs the question.

Soul is the place,
stretched like a surface of millstone grit between body and mind,
where such necessity grinds itself out.

Soul is what I kept watch on all that night. 300
Law stayed with me.
We lay on top of the covers as if it weren't really a night of sleep and time,

caressing and singing to one another in our made-up language
like the children we used to be.
That was a night that centred Heaven and Hell, 305

as Emily would say. We tried to fuck
but he remained limp, although happy. I came
again and again, each time accumulating lucidity,

until at last I was floating high up near the ceiling looking down
on the two souls clasped there on the bed 310
with their mortal boundaries

visible around them like lines on a map.
I saw the lines harden.
He left in the morning.

It is very cold 315
walking into the long scraped April wind.
At this time of year there is no sunset
just some movements inside the light and then a sinking away.

From TV Men

XI

TV is presocial, like Man.

On the last day of the Death Valley shoot
driving through huge slow brown streaks of mountain
towards the light-hole,

Hektor⁷ feels his pits go dry.

5

Clouds drop their lines down the faces of the rock
as if marking out a hunting ground.
Hektor, whose heart

walked ahead of him always,

ran ahead like a drunk creature
to lick salt particles off the low bushes
as if they were butter or silver honey,
whose heart Homer compared to a lion

10

turning in a net of dogs and men and
whichever way the lion lunges the men and dogs give way
yet the net keeps contracting—

15

Hektor trembles.

The human way includes two kinds of knowledge.
Fire and Night. Hektor has been to the Fire
in conditions of experimental purity.

20

It is 6:53 A.M. when his Night unhoods itself.

Hektor sees that he is living at the centre of a vast metal disc.
A dawn clot of moon dangles oddly above
and this realization comes coldly through him:

the disc is tilting.

25

Very slowly the disc attains an angle of thirty degrees.
Dark blue signal is flowing steadily
from the centre to the edge

as Hektor starts to slide.

It takes but an instant to realize you are mortal.
Troy reared up on its hind legs
and a darkness of life flowed through the town

30

7. In Homer's *Iliad*, the chief warrior of the Trojan army.

from purple cup to purple cup.

Toes to the line please, says the assistant camera man,
slapping two pieces of yellow tape
on the surface of the disc

35

just in front of Hektor's feet.

Dashing back to the camera he raises his slate.
Places everyone, calls the director as a thousand wasps
come stinging out of the arc lamp

40

and the camera is pouring its black butter,

its bitter honey,
straight into Hektor's eye.
Hektor steps to the line.

War has always interested me, he begins.

45

1995

Epitaph: Zion⁸

Murderous little world once our objects had gazes. Our lives
Were fragile, the wind
Could dash them away. Here lies the refugee breather
Who drank a bowl of elsewhere.

2000

Lazarus⁹ Standup: Shooting Script

How does a body do in the ground?

Clouds look like matted white fur.
Which are the animals? He has forgotten the difference
between near and far.
Round pink ones come at him.
From the pinks shoot fluids
some dark (from eyes) some loud (from mouth).

5

His bones are moving like a mist in him

8. In the Hebrew Bible, the eastern hill of Jerusalem. In Judaism, it came to symbolize a promised homeland; in Christianity, a heavenly or ideal city

of faith.
9. A man brought back to life by Jesus after being dead four days (John 11).

all blown to the surface then sideways.
I do not want to see, 10
he thinks in pain
as a darkish clump
cuts across his field of vision,
and some
strange 15

silver milk
is filling the space,
gets caught in the mist,
twists all his bones to the outside where they ignite in air.
The burning 20
of his bones 20

lets Lazarus know where each bone is.

And so
shifted forward into solidity—
although he pulls against it and groans to turn away— 25
Lazarus locks on
with a whistling sound behind him
as panels slide shut

and his soul congeals on his back in chrysolite¹ drops

which almost at once evaporate. 30
Lazarus
(someone is calling his name)—his name!
And at the name (which he knew)
not just a roar of darkness
the whole skeletal freight 35

of him
took pressure,
crushing him backward into the rut where he lay
like a damp
petal 40
under a pile of furniture. 40

And the second fact of his humanity began.

For the furniture shrank upon him as a bonework of
not just volume but
secret volume— 45
where fingers go probing
into drawers
and under
pried-up boxlids,

1. Pale yellow-green gemstone.

go rifling mute garments of white 50

 and memories are streaming from his mind to his heart—
 of someone standing at the door.
 Of white breath in frozen air.
 Mary, Martha.²
 Linen of the same silence. 55
Lazarus! (again the voice)
 and why not

 climb the voice

 where it goes spiralling upward
 lacing him on a glow point 60
 into the nocturnal motions of the world so that he is
 standing now
 propped on a cage of hot pushes of other people's air
 and he feels more than hears
 her voice (again) 65

 like a salt rubbed whole into raw surface—

Lazarus!
 A froth of fire is upon his mind.
 It crawls to the back of his tongue,
 struggles a bit, 70
 cracking the shell
 and pushes out a bluish cry that passes at once to the soul.
Martha!

 he cries, making a little scalded place

 on the billows of tomb that lap our faces as we watch. 75
 We know the difference now
 (life or death).
 For an instant it parts our hearts.
Someone take the linen napkin off his face,
 says the director quietly. 80
 2000

Stanzas, Sexes, Seductions ✓

It's good to be neuter.
 I want to have meaningless legs.
 There are things unbearable.
 One can evade them a long time.
 Then you die. 5

2. Sisters of Lazarus.

The oceans remind me
of your green room.
There are things unbearable.
Scorn, princes, this little size
of dying. 10

My personal poetry is a failure.
I do not want to be a person.
I want to be unbearable.
Lover to lover, the greenness of love.
Cool, cooling. 15

Earth bears no such plant.
Who does not end up
a female impersonator?
Drink all the sex there is.
Still die. 20

I tempt you.
I blush.
There are things unbearable.
Legs, alas.
Legs die. 25

Rocking themselves down,
crazy slow,
some ballet term for it—
fragment of foil, little
spin, little drunk, little do, little oh, alas. 30