

Samantha Donelly

Defences

Where are you going?
Woolloomooloo – the pleasure of writing this.
The nowhere, now here-ness of this siting.
Pane of glass, pain of glass (*glass cuts/ we never saw it before...*)
Standing always on the outside, looking inwards,
reflected, a reflection,
pressed against the building, hands grip the bars.
Fingerprints on glass,
breathing close, wind howling around the edge of the
Bay, over the shards
on the footpath.

The space stifles a laugh, a nervous laugh, a cutting
laugh. Here is
vulnerability. A body pressed against the brickwork, at the
edge of the land
looking at something suspended, defenceless, is
there safety in
numbers? (*Now it is here among us/ it is sacred to the
strangers...*) Like a man without his gun. Strung up by

glass
glaze
slipperiness
smoothness (water)
(glassy)
glide
brittleness
fragibility
fracture
splinter
mirror
speculum
looking glass
GLARE
reflection
refraction
dazzle
sheen
lustre
stare
rubberneck
glower
fume
bear malice
expose
vitriolic
vitreous
transparency
limpidity
lens
pane
vitrify
harden
intractability
resistance
obdurate
taut
sclerotic

As Aborigines of Australia have no history as a people and no written languages to record what they know of themselves or of each other, there is no positive or authentic testimony to substantiate the proper meaning of the word.

the balls. Quivering in the between, caught behind the pane of exposure. Masculine fragility, don't joke about being well hung.

An edge condition, with only surface tension to define the limits. Yet, a condition with no protection, nakedness, dealing with gravity, the way bodies deal with gravity – by succumbing. (It's hard not to write dirty.) Releasing. Letting go. Melt down. Did I not murder a man?

Behind glass (*Glass cuts/ glass cuts kangaroo/ glass cuts bandicoot...*) the smooth liquid sheet of crystal, refracting my vision, shattering it into a thousand nervous glances. A double focus, a distancing, no tolerance of intimacy.

Does this skin guard against disease or procreation? (I'm rubbing this out as I go, rubbing over and over the words, rubbing till it bleeds...) This already yellowed and wrinkled skin, old skin, wrinkled like land forms way down below me. Something already dirtied, something already disposed of, this skin speaks in layers, paring back, revealing the inner structure of the flesh, peeling away the mere surface, which exists in tension.

And now exposed, there is release. An inward melting, dissolving of strength to paralysis. The condition of hanging. (Suffering of an open body that cannot clothe itself... Voluptuousness without knowing it.) And I remember the magic of the glass blowers in Venice, the their long bulbous wands, molten, dripping. In my hand – a teardrop of glass, a Prince Rupert drop, able to withstand the blow of a hammer, yet powerless when caught by the tail between the teeth.

The place is stifling a laugh. Playback – sexual and racial payback. My glare is in your direction, to deflect the macho violence, pointing a gun in my direction. Now you are unarmed and behind bars, left with nothing but thin skin and impending fear of attack. Fear of impotence. Pointing the gun, pointing the finger, pointing the bone. Bones of con-tension.

Cook saw an Aboriginal handling a strange looking animal and sent his boatswain to purchase it with a few baubles or trinkets. The boatswain carried out the order and when the animal was brought to Cook it was found to be nondescript. Cook sent the boatswain back to the native to learn the animal's name. When the boatswain interrogated the Aboriginal with the query, "What do you call this 'ere animal?" the Aboriginal began shaking his head and at last shouted out "Kangaroo", which, in Aboriginal parlance means, "I do not understand you."...

The name has stuck ever since.

woolloomooloo = where are you going?

wal-la-lah-mulla = home of the young black male kangaroo, wallaby

mulla = man, male sex

Here (in this place) the water is never glassy, always loaded with the grey bodies of ships. Defence ships, hard and metallic. Rubbing against the wound of the Bay. Reconstituted land. This open wound which has become just another vision of health.

How quickly does the caress turn to violation? Rape? This heaviness incites touch, contact, return. A dwelling of limits, for a moment, existing only at the edges. And I stretch out my fingers, like the Wharf stretches into the Bay. Proximity denied by an invisible barricade. Protection. How can I violate if not with a gun? How can my interiority mortally wound the flesh? How quickly can a prisoner become a dweller? (*Glass cuts the trees and the grasses/ Hurry on strangers...*)

What is it that is protected, the liquid inside – infected water of the Bay, spring water, kerosene, toxic waste, rose oil, sperm? What is it, to be kept so precious, so out of reach, foundering in some abyss? Hairline vessels, perfect sperm, unruptured, disembowelled, still carnal.

The insanity the comes along with holding a gun. Did I not murder a man? Is this about protection, defence? Protect me, cover me, caress me. I am disarmed and arm pressed against a building.

Helen Pynor in Glare April 15-May 13 1996

References

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vulnerable
defenceless
impotence
sterility
failure
powerlessness
bereft
weaponless
disarmed
exposed
susceptible
endangered
nakedness
Achilles' heel
DEFENCE
guard
ward against
protect
resist
wall
barricade
screen
refuge
stronghold
munition
manipulation
TOUCH
palpability
finger (wharf)
thin skinned
trigger happy
congress
CONTACT
collision
closure
skin
skim
tactile
bruise
tamper
dwell
be near