

Short Talks (poetry by Anne Carson, used with her permission)

Short Talk On Gertrude Stein About 9:30

How curious. I had no idea! Today has ended.

Short Talk On Defloration

The actions of life are not so many. To go in, to go, to go in secret, to cross the Bridge of Sighs. And when you dishonored me, I saw that dishonor

is an action. It happened in Venice; it causes the vocal cords to swell. I went booming through Venice, under and over the bridges, but you were gone. Later that day I telephoned your brother. What's wrong with your voice? he said.

Short Talk On Ovid

I see him there on a night like this but cool, the moon blowing through black streets. He sips and walks back to his room. The radio is on the floor. Its luminous green dial blares softly. He sits down at the table; people in exile write so many letters. Now Ovid is weeping. Each night about this time he puts on sadness like a garment and goes on writing. In his spare time he is teaching himself the local language (Getic) in order to compose in it an epic poem no one will ever read.

Short Talk On Major and Minor

Major things are wind, evil, a good fighting horse, prepositions, inexhaustible love, the way people choose their king. Minor things include dirt, the names of schools of philosophy, mood and not having a mood, the correct time. There are more major things than minor things overall, yet there are more minor things than I have written here, but it is disheartening to list them. When I think of you reading this, I do not want you to be taken captive, separated by a wire mesh lined with glass from your life itself, like some Elektra.

Short Talk On Rain

It was blacker than olives the night I left. As I ran past the palaces, oddly joyful, it began to rain. What a notion it is, after all — these small shapes! I would get lost counting them. Who first thought of it? How did he describe it to the others? Out on the sea it is raining too. It beats on no one.

Short Talk On Rectification

Kafka liked to have his watch an hour and a half fast. Felice kept setting it right. Nonetheless for five years they almost married. He made a list of arguments for and against marriage, including inability to bear the assault of his own life (for) and the sight of the nightshirts laid out on his parents' beds at 10:30 (against). Hemorrhage saved him. When advised not to speak by doctors in the sanatorium, he left glass sentences all over the floor. Felice, says one of them, had too much nakedness left in her.

Short Talk On Shelter

You can write on the wall with a fish heart, it's because of the phosphorus. They eat it. There are shacks like that down along the river. I am writing this to be as wrong as possible to you. Replace the door when you leave, it says. Now you tell me how wrong that is, how long it glows. Tell me.

Short Talk On Sleep Stones

Camille Claudel lived the last thirty years of her life in an asylum, wondering why, writing letters to her brother the poet, who had signed the papers. Come visit me, she says. Remember, I am living here with madwomen; days are long. She did not smoke or stroll. She refused to sculpt. Although they gave her sleep stones — marble and granite and porphyry — she broke them, then collected the pieces and buried these outside the walls at night. Night was when her hands grew, huger and huger until in the photograph they are like two parts of someone else loaded onto her knees.