

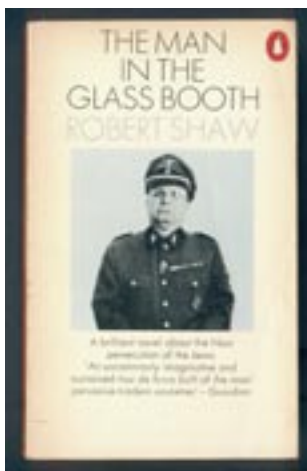
# The Glass Archive



## What is *The Glass Archive*?

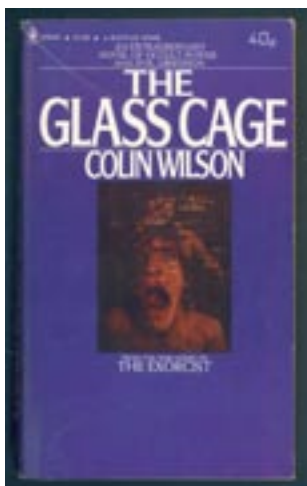
*The Glass Archive* is a collection of novels brought together because the word 'glass' features in each of their titles. Including examples such as *Through A Glass Clearly* by Isaac Asimov and *Walking on Glass* by Iain Banks, the books share the fact that their authors have employed the word 'glass' as a metaphor to explain or visualize the world contained in the book.

*The Glass Archive* demonstrates the complex and numerous ways in which this material is thought of and understood; the extent to which this material, its properties, and the assumptions made of it, are embedded in the psyche and within culture.



Despite the apparent limitation that the *Archive* contains only books that employ the word 'glass' in their titles, the wide range of different books contained in the archive helps to demonstrate the very different ways of thinking about this material that exist.

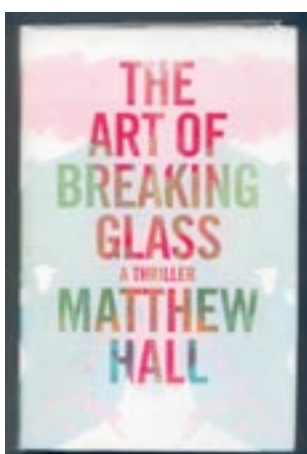
Book titles range from those whose allusions to glass can be grasped instantly, to those which use 'glass' in ways which seem tenuous and hard to decipher. However, patterns emerge across the *Archive* because of the ways in which 'glass' is repeatedly used by different authors. These patterns centre on qualities of glass such as its fragility, transparency and the potential threat it poses.



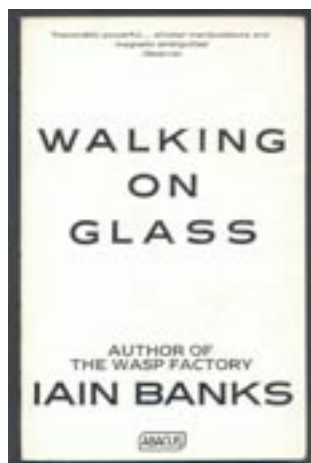
## Examples from *The Glass Archive*

### Fragility

Fragility is perhaps the most commonly perceived quality associated with glass. Everyone has handled glass in some form, usually a mass-produced wine glass or bottle, and either by intention or by accident had the experience of glass breaking. This experience is quickly followed by another, the post breakage potential of danger. Glass forms sharp jagged shards when broken. It is in this state that glass poses a danger. The intact glass object embodies this potential threat. It is because we instinctively know this that we handle glass with care and a certain reverence. This creates a distance between people and the material.



# The Glass Archive



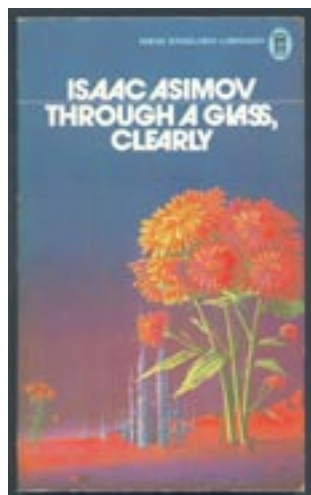
*Walking on Glass* by Iain Banks uses glass and its inherent fragility as a metaphor to illustrate a state of mind. The potential threat that glass poses sets the scene for Banks' psychological thriller. The title implies the suspense or vulnerability one might feel walking on a sheet of glass, never knowing when it might break, a precarious and potentially life threatening situation.

## The 'transparent barrier' and a 'sense of awe'

The complicated physical make up of glass is often misunderstood. In the absence of fact a number of urban myths have evolved. These myths help to illustrate the sense of wonder and mystery that glass can evoke.



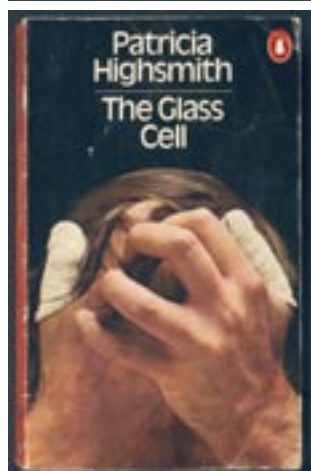
The cover of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* by Roald Dahl shows a seamless glass box high above the earth, its inhabitants floating safely within. This example conjoins two of the key themes running throughout the *Archive*. Firstly, the idea of glass as a transparent barrier offering protection from external threat while providing visual access to wonder. And secondly, that glass is mysterious, an 'unknown' material, seemingly capable of performing miracles and generating a sense of awe.



## Where has *The Glass Archive* come from?

*The Glass Archive* is a product of ideas researched and developed in my thesis, made during my time at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam.

The focus of my thesis was how the material used in a work of art, in particular glass, can impact on the works meaning. One of the central tenets of my thesis was that when the viewer encounters a work of art made of glass, they bring with them a wealth of preconceptions and associations. These include urban myths, previous experience in handling this material as well as incomprehension of the manufacturing process. I believe that these preconceived notions of material strongly effect the interpretation of the work of art made of glass.



*The Glass Archive* is an attempt to illustrate these ideas and to make visible some of the ways that we think about and understand this material.

Jerome Harrington