105 POEMS ABOUT WALLS

fences
borders
edges
limits
facades
boundaries
Outwitted
by Edwin Markham

He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!

Come to the Edge
by Christopher Logue

Come to the edge.
We might fall.
Come to the edge.
It’s too high!
COME TO THE EDGE!
And they came,
and he pushed,
and they flew.

To Althea, From Prison
(last stanza)
by Richard Lovelace

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage;
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone that soar above
Enjoy such liberty.
The Mark on the Wall
by Henia Karmel

Praxia Dymitruk, Praxia, Praxia
why did you write your name all over the walls?
Is this pain written down
or resistance to life’s passing?
Were you, too, afraid to disappear?
Without a sound? No one to miss you
because you belonged to no one?
Is your name all you owned, Praxia?
I understand you, little Russian one.
Such a sweet stem of a name.
For a girl so familiar though never known.
Praxia Dymitruk, Praxia, Praxia.

At the Wailing Wall
by Jacqueline Osherow

I figure I have to come here with my kids,
though I’m always ill at ease in holy places—
the wars, for one thing—and it’s the substanceless
that sets me going: the holy words....
Though I do write a note—my girls’ sound future
(there’s an evil eye out there; you never know)—
and then pick up a broken-backed siddur,
the first of many motions to go through.
Let’s get them over with. I hate this women’s section
almost as much as that one full of men...

Atmosphere
by Robert Frost

Inscription for a Garden Wall

Winds blow the open grassy places bleak;
But where this old wall burns a sunny cheek,
They eddy over it too toppling weak
To blow the earth or anything self-clear;
Moisture and color and odor thicken here.
The hours of daylight gather atmosphere.
Cross That Line  
by Naomi Shihab Nye

Paul Robeson stood  
on the northern border of the USA  
and sang into Canada  
where a vast audience  
sat on folding chairs  
waiting to hear him.

He sang into Canada.  
His voice left the USA  
when his body was not allowed  
to cross that line.

Remind us again, brave friend!  
What countries may we sing into?  
What lines should we all be crossing?  
What songs travel toward us  
from far away  
to deepen our days?

A Fence  
by Carl Sandburg

Now the stone house on the lake front is finished  
and the workmen are beginning the fence.

The palings are made of iron bars with steel points  
that can stab the life out of any man who falls on them.

As a fence, it is a masterpiece, and will shut off the rabble  
and all vagabonds and hungry men  
and all wandering children looking for a place to play.

Passing through the bars and over the steel points  
will go nothing except Death and the Rain and  
Tomorrow.
Flower in the Crannied Wall
by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

Over the Fence
by Emily Dickinson

Over the fence —
Strawberries — grow —
Over the fence —
I could climb — if I tried, I know —
Berries are nice!

But — if I stained my Apron —
God would certainly scold!
Oh, dear, — I guess if He were a Boy —
He’d — climb — if He could!

Sonnet 8
by John Milton

Captain or Colonel, or Knight in Arms,
Whose chance on these defenceless dores may sease,
If ever deed of honour did thee please,
Guard them, and him within protect from harms,
He can requite thee, for he knows the charms [ 5 ]
That call Fame on such gentle acts as these,
And he can spred thy Name o’re Lands and Seas,
What ever clime the Suns bright circle warms.
Lift not thy spear against the Muses’ Bowre,
The great Emathian Conqueror bid spare [ 10 ]
The house of Pindarus, when Temple and Towre
Went to the ground: and the repeated air
Of sad Electra’s Poet had the power
To save th’ Athenian Walls from ruine bare.
Mending Wall
by Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
‘Stay where you are until our backs are turned!’
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
‘Why do they make good neighbors? Isn’t it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I’d ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That wants it down.’ I could say ‘Elves’ to him,
But it’s not elves exactly, and I’d rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father’s saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’
Retaining Wall
by Henry Hughes

Will it hold-
the terrace wall and willows-
when the planet melts
just in time
for our retirement?

Is it enough to back-fill
with crossword puzzles,
contract bridge and Chinese for Beginners?

If the sky blackens and pours,
and the hill slides
mud, toys and matted pets,
lawn furniture, garbage cans,
and that neat shed
where I keep the mower and a few ideas,

can we hang on? Anti-oxidants, fish oil, yoga.
Is it enough? Sentences tangling
such a soft mound of mind.

What will it take, my dear, to stay off the slope
where nobody remembers? That spotted yellow bed
and washed-out gully
where we always see the bones
of something smaller.
The Wall Between
by Katherine Tynan

The wall between is grown so thin
   That whoso peers may see
A flutter of rose, a living green
   Like new leaves on a tree.

The wall’s now gotten many a chink
   Where whoso leans may hear
The feet of them who pass to drink
   All at a well clear.

The people go, the people flow
   T’other side o’ the wall
With silken rustle and laughter low
   As to a festival.

Come mother and wife and piteous bride,
   The wall’s nigh broken through;
And there be some the other side
   That peep and pry for you.

So thin has grown, like a precious stone,
   The wall no eye might pass,
You may have vision of your own
   As through a crystal glass.

And if that sight should you delight
   Your tears will all be dried,
For souls so bright that walk in white
   Dear bliss on the other side.
Träumerei
by Phillip Larkin

In this dream that dogs me I am part
Of a silent crowd walking under a wall,
Leaving a football match, perhaps, or a pit,
All moving the same way. After a while
A second wall closes on our right,
Pressing us tighter. We are now shut in
Like pigs down a concrete passage. When I lift
My head, I see the walls have killed the sun,
And light is cold. Now a giant whitewashed D
Comes on the second wall, but much too high
For them to recognise: I await the E,
Watch it approach and pass. By now
We have ceased walking and travel
Like water through sewers, steeply, despite
The tread that goes on ringing like an anvil
Under the striding A. I crook
My arm to shield my face, for we must pass
Beneath the huge, decapitated cross,
White on the wall, the T, and I cannot halt
The tread, the beat of it, it is my own heart,
The walls of my room rise, it is still night,
I have woken again before the word was spelt.

Dungeon
by Rabindranath Tagore

He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon.
I am ever busy building this wall all around; and as this wall goes
up into
the sky day by day I lose sight of my true being in its dark
shadow.

I take pride in this great wall, and I plaster it with dust and
sand
lest a least hole should be left in this name;
and for all the care I take I lose sight of my true being.
The Whitewashed Wall
by Thomas Hardy

Why does she turn in that shy soft way
Whenever she stirs the fire,
And kiss to the chimney-corner wall,
As if entranced to admire
Its whitewashed bareness more than the sight
Of a rose in richest green?
I have known her long, but this raptured rite
I never before have seen.

- Well, once when her son cast his shadow there,
A friend took a pencil and drew him
Upon that flame-lit wall. And the lines
Had a lifelike semblance to him.
And there long stayed his familiar look;
But one day, ere she knew,
The whitener came to cleanse the nook,
And covered the face from view.

“Yes,” he said: “My brush goes on with a rush,
And the draught is buried under;
When you have to whiten old cots and brighten,
What else can you do, I wonder?”
But she knows he’s there. And when she yearns
For him, deep in the labouring night,
She sees him as close at hand, and turns
To him under his sheet of white.
At the Edge of Town
by Don Welch

Hard to know which is more gnarled, the posts he hammers staples into or the blue hummocks which run across his hands like molehills.

Work has reduced his wrists to bones, cut out of him the easy flesh and brought him down to this, the crowbar’s teeth caught just behind a barb.

Again this morning the crowbar’s neck will make its blue slip into wood,

there will be that moment when too much strength will cause the wire to break. But even at 70, he says,

he has to have it right, and more than right. This morning, in the pewter light, he has the scars to prove it.
As I Grew Older
by Langston Hughes

It was a long time ago.  
I have almost forgotten my dream.  
But it was there then,  
In front of me,  
Bright like a sun--  
My dream.  
And then the wall rose,  
Rose slowly,  
Slowly,  
Between me and my dream.  
Rose until it touched the sky--  
The wall.  
Shadow.  
I am black.  
I lie down in the shadow.  
No longer the light of my dream before me,  
Above me.  
Only the thick wall.  
Only the shadow.  
My hands!  
My dark hands!  
Break through the wall!  
Find my dream!  
Help me to shatter this darkness,  
To smash this night,  
To break this shadow  
Into a thousand lights of sun,  
Into a thousand whirling dreams  
Of sun!
Great Wall
by Adam Sass

On this side, ruled lines,
Rivers bridged, terraced fields,
Lintels and windows,
Roads leading to other roads
And those to highways
That led to the capital.

On the other, shifting dunes,
Tracks of horses,
Wild game slain by wilder men:
Ibex, pheasant, hare.
Mounted riders glimpsed on distant ridges,
Watching, wheeling, gone.

A land whose maps dwelt only in memory
But for those rare nights when,
Sketched by firelight in sand or cinders,
They took earthly form,
Revealed their contours to new eyes,
And scattered with morning’s wind.

Now one who stood atop the wall wondered
Had it all been this way before its building -
The two landscapes growing
Ever more strange to each other,
Like brothers raised in separate houses,
Or had the coming of the wall made it so?

And who alive could even
Recall the answer,
Resurrect it from its
Tomb of time?
Surely none he knew,
Or would ever know.

Such questions were not worth the asking,
He concluded, stretching himself for slumber
In the high guardhouse that sat astride the wall,
The two lands recumbent on either side.
But still he found the question circled him warily,
A gaunt stray skulking at camp’s edge.

When he finally slept, he dreamt of wild horses.
The Garden Wall
by Denise Levertov

Bricks of the wall,
so much older than the house —
taken I think from a farm pulled down
when the street was built --
narrow bricks of another century.

Modestly, though laid with panels and parapets,
a wall behind the flowers -
roses and hollyhocks, the silver
pods of lupine, sweet-tasting
phlox, gray
lavender —
unnoticed —
but I discovered
the colors in the wall that woke
when spray from the hose
played on its pocks and warts -

a hazy red, a
grain gold, a mauve
of small shadows, sprung
from the quiet dry brown —
archetype
of the world always a step
beyond the world, that can’t
be looked for, only
as the eye wanders,
found.
Fence
by Douglas Alexander Stewart

Fence must be looked at; fence is too much neglected;
Most ancient indeed is fence; but it is not merely
White ants’ and weather’s ravage must be inspected,
The broken paling where we can see too clearly
The neighbours at their affairs, that larger hole
Where Hogan’s terrier ate it, or very nearly;
But fence most quintessential, fence in its soul.

For fence is defensa, Latin; fence is old Roman
And heaven knows what wild tribes, rude and unknown,
It sprang from first, when man took shelter with his woman;
Fence is no simple screen where Hogan may prune
His roses decently hidden by paling or lattice
Or sporting together some sunny afternoon
Be noticed with Mrs Hogan at nymphs and satyrs;

But fence is earthwork, defensa; connected no doubt
With fossa, a moat; straight from the verb to defend;
Therefore ward off, repel, stand guard on the moat;
None climbs this fence but cat or Hogan’s friend.
Fence is of spears and brambles; fence is defiance
To sabre-toothed tigers, to all the world in the end,
And there behind it the Hogans stand like lions.

It is not wise to meet the Hogans in quarrel,
They have a lawyer and he will issue writs;
Thieves and trespassers enter at deadly peril,
The brave dog bites the postman where he sits.
Just as they turn the hose against the summer’s
Glare on the garden, so in far fiercer jets
Here they unleash the Hogans against all comers.

True it is not very often the need arises
And they are peaceable people behind their barrier;
But something is here that must be saved in a crisis,
They know it well and so does the sharp-toothed terrier.
They bring him bones, he worships them deeply and dankly,
He thinks Mrs Hogan a queen and Hogan a warrior,
Most excellent people, and they agree with him, frankly.

The world, they feel, needs Hogans; they can contribute
To its dull pattern all their rich singularity;
And if, as is true, it pays them no proper tribute,
Hogans from Hogans at least shall not lack charity.
Shielded by fences are they not free to cherish
Each bud, each shoot, each fine particularity
Which in the Hogans burgeons and must not perish?

It is not just that their mighty motor mower
Roars loudest for miles and chops up the insolent grass,
Nor that the Iceland poppies are dancing in flower,
Nor the new car all shiny with chromium and glass,
Nor the fridge and T.V., nor that, the bloom of their totem,
Their freckled children always come first in the class
Or sometimes at least, and never are seen at the bottom;

It is all this and so much more beside
Of Hogans down the ages in their proud carriage
And Hogan young and Mrs Hogan a bride
And napkins washed and babies fumbling their porridge,
Things which no prying stranger can know or feel —
All locked in the strange intimacy of marriage,
Which by all means let decent fences conceal.

So let us to work, good neighbour, this Saturday morning,
Nail up the paling so Hogans are free to be Hogans
And Stewarts be Stewarts and no one shall watch us scorning
And no one break in with bullets and bombs and slogans
Or we will stand guard at the fence and fight as we can.
World is against us, but world has had its warning;
Deep out of time is fence and deep is man.
Fence on the Border
by Sheryl Luna

It is in the bending and the pain,
the way old paint scrapes off old wood,
the way elders light our way through time
on their way to a smaller frailty.

A halo about the painted head of Jesus
on the yellow wall of Our Lady of the Valley
Church fades where teachers make a pittance,
richly among brown-faced children.

A burlap robe on a dark pilgrim walking
up Mout Cristo Rey with sandals as sunset
blurs a perfect pink, like the palm of God pressing
down on the bent heads of the broken,

who learn prayers amidst a harshness
I have yet to know. The barrio full of narrow
streets, adobe homes, and sweet yucca flowers
bud in the air like a rainy night.

There’s a way the sand clings to the wind
and the sands brown the sky in a sadness
that sings some kind of endless echo of the border,
where the chain-link fence stretches for miles

and miles and the torn shirts of men flap
from the steel like trapped birds.
The river is narrow and appears slow.
The cardboard shanties of Colonias unveiled

among the vast open desert like ants.
The faces of the poor smiling and singing
as if sunset were a gift; the desert blooms
red and white flowers on the thinnest sparsest cacti,
groundhogs breathe coolly in the earth.
And here, on Cinco de Mayo the cornea of god
glints faintly in a thin rainbow;
the hands of god rest over the blue hills,
the song of god in the throats of sparrows,

Bless You.
Bless You.
This is the way the border transfigures greed,
shapes it into something holy;

and paisanos stand alert; even pigeons soar
with something akin to the music of the spheres,
and Spanish flutters through the smoke
that burns through our small lives.

**Apprehensions**
by Sylvia Plath

There is this white wall, above which the sky creates itself—
Infinite, green, utterly untouchable.
Angels swim in it, and the stars, in indifference also.
They are my medium.
The sun dissolves on this wall, bleeding its lights.

A grey wall now, clawed and bloody.
Is there no way out of the mind?
Steps at my back spiral into a well.
There are no trees or birds in this world,
There is only sourness.

This red wall winces continually:
A red fist, opening and closing,
Two grey, papery bags—
This is what I am made of, this, and a terror
Of being wheeled off under crosses and rain of pieties.

On a black wall, unidentifiable birds
Swivel their heads and cry.
There is no talk of immorality among these!
Cold blanks approach us:
They move in a hurry.
Weep Holes
by Naseer Ahmed Nasir

Don’t take us for the wall itself
For when the earthen plank behind the wall
Gets soaked through
We’ll let the sorrow of burdensome wetness
Flow through us

The soil sucks the trees’ roots till now
Till now the sorrow of waters
hasn’t reached the earthen plank behind the walls
Earth has not seen the woebegone face of the sky
The wall hasn’t learnt to shed tears

Wind even now expects to blow the leaves away
Empty polythene bags sputter on roads
That never had trees planted on sides
People drink blood of their own climes
And grow like germs
Bonfire conflagrations ignite every where
Smoke has turned the flowers black
Butterflies’ wings look ashen
The dream’s face will bend under pressure
And break into smithereens
Let the moisture come!
Let the clouds of pains burst!
Let the sky’s sorrow descend to the earth!

Don’t consider us the wall itself
Don’t think we’re but worthless
For when the earthen plank behind the retaining wall
Gets soaked
We’ll be there to let the sorrow
Of burdensome wetness
flow through us
Look! Our eyes do not have tears
But the mud of our dreams.
Salvage
by Carl Sandburg

Guns on the battle lines have pounded now a year
between Brussels and Paris.
And, William Morris, when I read your old chapter on
the great arches and naves and little whimsical
corners of the Churches of Northern France—Brr-rr!
I’m glad you’re a dead man, William Morris, I’m glad
you’re down in the damp and mouldy, only a memory
instead of a living man—I’m glad you’re gone.
You never lied to us, William Morris, you loved the
shape of those stones piled and carved for you to
dream over and wonder because workmen got joy
of life into them,
Workmen in aprons singing while they hammered, and
praying, and putting their songs and prayers into
the walls and roofs, the bastions and cornerstones
and gargoyles—all their children and kisses of
women and wheat and roses growing.
I say, William Morris, I’m glad you’re gone, I’m glad
you’re a dead man.
Guns on the battle lines have pounded a year now between

A.E.F.
by Carl Sandburg

There will be a rusty gun on the wall, sweetheart,
The rifle grooves curling with flakes of rust.
A spider will make a silver string nest in the
darkest, warmest corner of it.
The trigger and the range-finder, they too will be rusty.
And no hands will polish the gun, and it will hang on the wall.
Forefingers and thumbs will point casually toward it.
It will be spoken among half-forgotten, whished-to-be-forgotten
things.
They will tell the spider: Go on, you’re doing good work.
And They Obey
by Carl Sandburg

Smash down the cities.
Knock the walls to pieces.
Break the factories and cathedrals, warehouses and homes
Into loose piles of stone and lumber and black burnt wood:
You are the soldiers and we command you.
Build up the cities.
Set up the walls again.
Put together once more the factories and cathedrals, warehouses and homes
Into buildings for life and labor:
You are workmen and citizens all: We command you.

Noon Hour
by Carl Sandburg

She sits in the dust at the walls
And makes cigars,
Bending at the bench
With fingers wage-anxious,
Changing her sweat for the day’s pay.

Now the noon hour has come,
And she leans with her bare arms
On the window-sill over the river,
Leans and feels at her throat
Cool-moving things out of the free open ways:

At her throat and eyes and nostrils
The touch and the blowing cool
Of great free ways beyond the walls.
They Will Say
by Carl Sandburg

Of my city the worst that men will ever say is this:
You took little children away from the sun and the dew,
And the glimmers that played in the grass under the great sky,
And the reckless rain; you put them between walls
To work, broken and smothered, for bread and wages,
To eat dust in their throats and die empty-hearted
For a little handful of pay on a few Saturday nights

The Harbor
by Carl Sandburg

Passing through huddled and ugly walls
By doorways where women
Looked from their hunger-deep eyes,
Haunted with shadows of hunger-hands,
Out from the huddled and ugly walls,
I came sudden, at the city’s edge,
On a blue burst of lake,
Long lake waves breaking under the sun
On a spray-flung curve of shore;
And a fluttering storm of gulls,
Masses of great gray wings
And flying white bellies
Veering and wheeling free in the open.

Prayers of Steel
by Carl Sandburg

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar.
Let me pry loose old walls.
Let me lift and loosen old foundations.

Lay me on an anvil, O God.
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike.
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together.
Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders.
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into white stars.
The Garden Wall
by David Morton

THE ROMAN wall was not more grave than this,
That has no league at all with great affairs,
That knows no ruder hands than clematis,
No louder blasts than blowing April airs.
Yet, with a gray solemnity it broods,
Above the walk where simple folk go past,
And in its crannies keeps their transient moods,
Holding their careless words unto the last.

The rains of summer, and the creeping vine
That season after season clings in trust,
And shivered poppies red as Roman wine,—
These things at last will haunt its crumbled dust—
Not dreams of empires shattered where they lie,
But children’s laughter, birds, and bits of sky.

Behind the Walls
by Charletta Erb

Love immersing the river
A door opens for me to enter
To hug, to sit, to smile
A hand to hold
Courage to shout through walls
Digo la verdad! (I tell the truth)
Prayers shake out our anger

Outside, voices rise
Heat in the air
In their voices
O Dios mio, no! (Oh my God, no!)
Yet we come not to judge
But to decide to protect
Mandarin to cool

She opens the door to stand
Aquí yo estoy para frente (Here I am out front, up front)
Si, digo la verdad!
My community
Will support me, protect me
She breathes heavy, but poised
Out from behind the walls.
To a Persian Manuscript
by Ida O’Neil

BEHIND the high white wall
There is always a garden—
A lawn, close-clipped and pale,
Studded with flowers;
There they have placed a chair
For the happy guest,
And slim high-bosomed maidens
Bring flesh and figs and wine
In bowls of peacock blue.

Beyond the minaretted gate
Go elephants in caravan,
And horsemen ride through forest tracery
Of gold and flowers
To cities
Arched and white against the sky.

These are windows
Opening on a golden world—
Blooming-islands on a sea
Of dim, dust colored vellum,
While the ripples—
Painted rhythms,
Sable characters—
Bear challenge to the wit
More potent still
Than half-guessed imagery
Of illumined page.

And as the traveller without the wall
Divines with thirsty heart
The hidden flash of fountains,
So to me, among these silent books,
Is borne the cadence of a desert tongue,
And beauty blossoms here
Upon my knees.
City Without Walls
by W.H. Auden

Those fantastic forms, fang-sharp,
Bone-bare, that in Byzantine painting
Were shorthand for the Unbounded
Beyond the Pale, unpoliced spaces
Where dragons dwelt and demons roamed,

Colonized only by ex-worldlings,
Penitent sophists, and sodomites,
Are visual facts in the foreground now,
Real structures of steel and glass:
Hermits, perforce, are all today,
With numbered caves in enormous jails,
Hotels designed to deteriorate
Their glum already corrupted guests,
Factories in which the functional
Hobbesian Man is mass-produced.

A key to the street each convict has,
But the Alphalt Lanes are lawless marches
Where gangs clash and cops turn
Robber barrons: reckless he
Who walks after dark in that wilderness.

But electric lamps allow nightly
Cell meetings where subcultures
May hold palaver, like-minded,
Their tongues tattooed by the tribal jargon
Of the vice or business that brothers them:

And mean cafés to remain open
Where, in bad air, belly-talkers,
Weedy-looking, work-shy
May spout unreason, some ruthless creed
To a dozen dupes till dawn break.

Every workday Eve fares
Forth to the stores her food to pluck,
While Adam hunts an easy dollar:
Unperspiring at eventide
Both eat their bread in boredom of spirit.

The weekend comes that once was holy,
Free still but a feast no longer,
Just time out, idiorrhymic,
When no one cares what his neighbor does:
Now newsprint and network are needed most.

What they view may be vulgar rubbish,
What they listen to witless noise,
But it gives shelter, shields them from
Sunday’s Bane, the basilisking
Glare of Nothing, our pernicious foe.

For what to Nothing shall nobodies answer?
Still super-physiques are there,
Frequently photographed, feel at home,
But ordinary flesh is unwanted:
Engines do better what biceps did.

And soon computers may expel from the world
All but the top intelligent few,
The egos they leisure be left to dig
Value, virtue, from an invisible realm
Of hobbies, sex, consumption, vague

Tussles with ghosts. Against Whom
Shall the Sons band to rebel there,
Where Troll-Father, Tusked-Mother
Are dream-monsters like dinosaurs
With a built-in obsolescence?

A Gadgeted Age, yet as unworldly
As when faintly the light filtered down
On the first men in Mirkwood,
Waiting their turn at the water hole
With the magic beasts who made the paths.

Small marvel, then, if many adopt
Cancer as the only offered career
Worth-while, if wards are full of
Gents who believe they are Jesus Christ
Or guilty of the Unforgivable Sin:

If arcadian lawns where classic shoulders,
Baroque bottoms make beaux gestes
Is too tame a dream for the dislocated,
If their lewd fancies are of flesh debased
By damage, indignities, dirty words:

If few now applaud a play that ends
With warmth and pardon the word to all
As, blessed, unbamboozled, the bridal pairs,
Rustic and oppidan, in a ring-dance
Image the stars at their stately branses:
If all has gone phut in the future we paint,
Where, vast and vacant, venomous areas
Surround the small sporadic patches
Of fen and forest that give food and shelter,
Such home as they have, to a human remnant,

Stunted in stature, strangely deformed,
Numbering by fives, with no zero,
Worshiping a juju General Mo
In groups ruled by grandmothers,
Hirsute witches who, on winter nights,

Fable them stories of fair-haired elves
Whose magic made the mountain dam,
Of dwarves, cunning in craft, who smithied
The treasure hoards of tin cans
They flatten out for their hut roofs . . . .

Still moneyed, immune, stands Megalopolis:
Happy he who hopes for better,
What awaits Her may well be worse.

Thus, I was thinking at three A.M.
In mid-Manhattan till interrupted,
Cut short by a sharp voice:

“What fun and games you find it to play
Jeremiah -cum-Juvenal.
Shame on you for your Schadenfreude!”

“My!” I blustered. “How moral we’re getting!
A pococurante? Suppose I were,
So what, if my words are true.”

Thereupon, bored, a third voice:
Go to sleep now for God’s sake!
You both will feel better by breakfast time.”
The Garden
by Ezra Pound

En robe de parade. Samain

LIKE a skein of loose silk blown against a wall
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens,
And she is dying piece-meal
    of a sort of emotional anemia.

And round about there is a rabble
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor.
They shall inherit the earth.
In her is the end of breeding.
Her boredom is exquisite and excessive.

She would like some one to speak to her,
And is almost afraid that I
    will commit that indiscretion.

From ‘Paracelsus’
by Robert Browning

TRUTH is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate’er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception—which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and, to KNOW,
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.
A Fence or an Ambulance
by Joseph Malins (1895)

‘Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,
Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;
But over its terrible edge there had slipped
A duke and full many a peasant.
So the people said something would have to be done,
But their projects did not at all tally;
Some said, “Put a fence ‘round the edge of the cliff,”
Some, “An ambulance down in the valley.”

But the cry for the ambulance carried the day,
For it spread through the neighboring city;
A fence may be useful or not, it is true,
But each heart became full of pity
For those who slipped over the dangerous cliff;
And the dwellers in highway and alley
Gave pounds and gave pence, not to put up a fence,
But an ambulance down in the valley.

“For the cliff is all right, if your careful,” they said,
“And, if folks even slip and are dropping,
It isn’t the slipping that hurts them so much
As the shock down below when they’re stopping.”
So day after day, as these mishaps occurred,
Quick forth would those rescuers sally
To pick up the victims who fell off the cliff,
With their ambulance down in the valley.

Then an old sage remarked: “It’s a marvel to me
That people give far more attention
To repairing results than to stopping the cause,
When they’d much better aim at prevention.
Let us stop at its source all this mischief,” cried he,
“Come, neighbors and friends, let us rally;
If the cliff we will fence, we might almost dispense
With the ambulance down in the valley.”

“Oh he’s a fanatic,” the others rejoined,
“Dispense with the ambulance? Never!
He’d dispense with all charities, too, if he could;
No! No! We’ll support them forever.
Aren’t we picking up folks just as fast as they fall?
And shall this man dictate to us? Shall he?
Why should people of sense stop to put up a fence,
While the ambulance works in the valley?”
But the sensible few, who are practical too,
Will not bear with such nonsense much longer;
They believe that prevention is better than cure,
And their party will soon be the stronger.
Encourage them then, with your purse, voice, and pen,
And while other philanthropists dally,
They will scorn all pretense, and put up a stout fence
On the cliff that hangs over the valley.

Better guide well the young than reclaim them when old,
For the voice of true wisdom is calling.
“To rescue the fallen is good, but ’tis best
To prevent other people from falling.”
Better close up the source of temptation and crime
Than deliver from dungeon or galley;
Better put a strong fence ‘round the top of the cliff
Than an ambulance down in the valley.

**Baby Bye**
by Theodore Tilton

Baby bye
Here’s a fly,
Let us watch him, you and I,
How he crawls
Up the walls
Yet he never falls
Wall
by Norman Nicholson

The wall walks the fell —
Grey millipede on slow
Stone hooves;
Its slack black hollowed
At gulleys and grooves,
Or shouldering over
Old Boulders
Too big to be rolled away.
Fallen fragments
Of the high crags
Crawl in the walk of the wall.

A dry-stone wall
is a wall and a wall,
Leaning together
(Cumberland-and-Westmorland
Champion wrestlers),
Greening and weathering,
Flank by flank,
With filling of ribble
Between the two —
A double-rank
Stone dyke:
Flags and through —
Facing It
by Yuseg Komunyakaa

My black face fades,
hiding inside the black granite.
I said I wouldn’t,
dammit: No tears.
I’m stone. I’m flesh.
My clouded reflection eyes me
like a bird of prey, the profile of night
slanted against morning. I turn
this way - the stone lets me go.
I turn that way - I’m inside
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
again, depending on the light
to make a difference.
I go down the 58,022 names,
half-expecting to find
my own letters like smoke.
I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
I see the booby trap’s white flash.
Names shimmer on a woman’s blouse
but when she walks away
the names stay on the wall.
Brushstrokes flash, a red bird’s
wings cutting across my stare.
The sky. A plane in the sky.
A white vet’s image floats
closer to me, then his pale eyes
look through mine. I am a window.
He’s lost his right arm
inside the stone. In the black mirror
a woman’s trying to erase names:
No, she’s brushing a boy’s hair.
Scrubbing the Furious Walls of Mikuyu
by Jack Mapanje

Is this where they dump those rebels,
These haggard cells stinking of bucket
Shit and vomit and the acrid urine of
Yesteryears? Who would have thought I
Would be gazing at these dusty, cobweb
Ceilings of Mikuyu Prison, scrubbing
Briny walls and riddling out impetuous
Scratches of another dung-beetle locked
Up before me here? Violent human palms
Wounded these blood-bloated mosquitoes
And bugs (to survive), leaving these vicious
Red marks. Monstrous cockroaches
Crashed here. Up there the cobwebs trapped
Dead bumblebees. Where did black wasps
Get clay to build nests in this corner?

But here, scratches, insolent scratches!
I have marvelled at the rock paintings
Of Mphunzl Hills once but these grooves
And notches on the walls of Mikuyu Prison,
How furious, what barbarous squiggles!
How long did this anger languish without
Charge, without trial, without visit here, and
what justice committed? This is the moment
We dreaded: when we’d all descend into
The pit, alone, without wife or child –
Without mother, without a paper or a pencil
– without a story (just three Bibles for
Ninethy men), without charge without trial;
This is the moment I never needed to see.

Shall I scrub these brave squiggles out
Of human memory then or should I perhaps
Superimpose my own, less caustic; dare I
Overwrite this precious scrawl? Who’d
Have known I’d find another prey without
Charge, without trial (without bitterness)
In these otherwise blank walls of Mikuyu
Prison? No, I will throw my water and mop
Elsewhere. We have liquidated too many
Brave names out of the nation’s memory.
I will not rub out another, nor inscribe
My own, more ignoble, to consummate this
Moment of truth I have always feared!
**Fences**
by Pat Mora

Mouths full of laughter,  
the turistas come to the tall hotel  
with suitcases full of dollars.

Every morning my brother makes  
the cool beach new for them.  
With a wooden board he smooths  
away all footprints.

I peek through the cactus fence  
and watch the women rub oil  
sweeter than honey into their arms and legs  
hile their children jump waves  
or sip drinks from long straws,  
coconut white, mango yellow.

Once my little sister  
ran barefoot across the hot sand  
for a taste.

My mother roared like the ocean,  
“No. No. It’s their beach.  
It’s their beach.”

---

**Frogs leapest the highest fences**
by James Wakelin

Today I ventured forth  
it didn’t bring me much; a frog and a piece of string  
but  
I entered the realm of the frog and  
it taught me how to jump over fences as high  
as your nose  
It didn’t amount to much as I was quite tired and sick of the frog  
so I squashed it  
it deserved it’s death  
The piece of string had an important role though  
it measured how high the frog jumped and  
it so happened it had jumped the highest of fences  
on my property
Rural Fence
by Tom Wayman

Order against the jumbled
Cedar, birch or
Hawthorn branches

Even when a post cants
Off true, wires sag
Or horizontal boards droop

A fence maintains an utter contrast
To the scramble of leaves and twigs
Which sway and shift

While the fence offers
A braced
Stolidity

And in winter
When only the post-tops
And uppermost strands or rails

Hoist their chins above waves of snow
Heaving toward them
Or when the meadow seems boundless

Except for the low mounds where the shoreline
Once was, the persistence of fencing
 Nearly lost-

Speaks of another season, of
Fence as seed
Of mullein, daisy, bunchgrass

—Our handiwork become natural
This perimeter we
Construct and mend

To testify
Compel acquiescence
Celebrate
Fences, Neighbors, Rivers
by Ed Hausken

Good neighbor, this fence
won’t halt morning glories, wild
blackberry vines.

This world confounds perfection.
This river roils
green in winter, outlasts stone.

Let vines take the fence
or fence’s ruin. This river
shapes our border, runs gray
in blackberry time

Deer Fence
by Linda Pastan

Inside the new deer fence
wildflowers, absent for years,
cover our hill again with half-forgotten
flecks of white, like so many
ghosts of themselves
on the dark floor of the forest.
I pick a bunch: tooth wort,
and Dutchman’s-breeches,
so luminous with mystery
we must tame them with the names
of household things.
But where are the deer now?
What other woman’s flowers
fill their mouths with
the soft colors of spring?
**Sonnet XXXIII**
by Pablo Neruda

Love, we’re going home now,  
where the vines clamber over the trellis:  
even before you, the summer will arrive,  
on its honeysuckle feet, in your bedroom.

Our nomadic kisses wandered over all the world:  
Armenia, dollop of disinterred honey--:  
Ceylon, green dove--: and the Yang-Tse with its old  
old patience, dividing the day from the night.

And now, dearest, we return, across the crackling sea  
like two blind birds to their wall,  
to their nest in a distant spring:  

because love cannot always fly without resting,  
our lives return to the wall, to the rocks of the sea:  
our kisses head back home where they belong.

**The Pickety Fence**
by David McCord

The pickety fence  
The pickety fence  
Give it a lick it’s  
The pickety fence  
Give it a lick it’s  
A clickety fence  
Give it a lick it’s  
A lickety fence  
Give it a lick  
Give it a lick  
Give it a lick  
With a rickety stick  
Pickety  
Pickety  
Pickety  
Pick
The Precinct. Rochester
by Amy Lowell

The tall yellow hollyhocks stand,
Still and straight,
With their round blossoms spread open,
In the quiet sunshine.
And still is the old Roman wall,
Rough with jagged bits of flint,
And jutting stones,
Old and cragged,
Quite still in its antiquity.
The pear-trees press their branches against it,
And feeling it warm and kindly,
The little pears ripen to yellow and red.
They hang heavy, bursting with juice,
Against the wall.
So old, so still!
The sky is still.
The clouds make no sound
As they slide away
Beyond the Cathedral Tower,
To the river,
And the sea.
It is very quiet,
Very sunny.
The myrtle flowers stretch themselves in the sunshine,
But make no sound.
The roses push their little tendrils up,
And climb higher and higher.
In spots they have climbed over the wall.
But they are very still,
They do not seem to move.
And the old wall carries them
Without effort, and quietly
Ripens and shields the vines and blossoms.
A bird in a plane-tree
Sings a few notes,
Cadenced and perfect
They weave into the silence.
The Cathedral bell knocks,
One, two, three, and again,
And then again.
It is a quiet sound,
Calling to prayer,
Hardly scattering the stillness,
Only making it close in more densely.
The gardener picks ripe gooseberries
For the Dean’s supper to-night.
It is very quiet,
Very regulated and mellow.
But the wall is old,
It has known many days.
It is a Roman wall,
Left-over and forgotten.
Beyond the Cathedral Close
Yelp and mutter the discontents of people not mellow,
Not well-regulated.
People who care more for bread than for beauty,
Who would break the tombs of saints,
And give the painted windows of churches
To their children for toys.
People who say:
"They are dead, we live!
The world is for the living."
Fools! It is always the dead who breed.
Crush the ripe fruit, and cast it aside,
Yet its seeds shall fructify,
And trees rise where your huts were standing.
But the little people are ignorant,
They chaffer, and swarm.
They gnaw like rats,
And the foundations of the Cathedral are honeycombed.
The Dean is in the Chapter House;
He is reading the architect's bill
For the completed restoration of the Cathedral.
He will have ripe gooseberries for supper,
And then he will walk up and down the path
By the wall,
And admire the snapdragons and dahlias,
Thinking how quiet and peaceful
The garden is.
The old wall will watch him,
Very quietly and patiently it will watch.
For the wall is old,
It is a Roman wall.
my love is building a building
by e e cummings

my love is building a building
around you, a frail slippery
house, a strong fragile house
(beginning at the singular beginning

of your smile)a skilful uncouth
prison, a precise clumsy
prison(building that and this into Thus,
Around the reckless magic of your mouth)

my love is building a magic, a discrete
tower of magic and (as i guess)

when Farmer Death (whom fairies hate) shall

crumble the mouth-flower fleet
He’ll not my tower,
   laborious, casual

where the surrounded smile
   hangs
   breathless

Of This Wilting Wall The Colour Drub
by e e Cummings

of this wilting wall the colour drub
souring sunbeams, of a foetal fragrance
to rickety unclosed blinds inslants
peregrinate, a cigar-stub
disintegrates, above, underdrawers club
the faintly sweating air with pinkness,
one pale dog behind a slopcaked shrub
painstakingly utters a slippery mess,
a star sleepily, feebly, scratches the sore
of morning. But i am interested more
intricately in the delicate scorn
with which in a putrid window every day
almost leans a lady whose still-born
smile involves the comedy of decay
Metaphors Of A Magnifico
by Wallace Stevens

Twenty men crossing a bridge,
Into a village,
Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,
Into twenty villages,
Or one man
Crossing a single bridge into a village.

This is old song
That will not declare itself . . .

Twenty men crossing a bridge,
Into a village,
Are
Twenty men crossing a bridge
Into a village.

That will not declare itself
Yet is certain as meaning . . .

The boots of the men clump
On the boards of the bridge.
The first white wall of the village
Rises through fruit-trees.
Of what was it I was thinking?
So the meaning escapes.

The first white wall of the village...
The fruit-trees...
One, from his high bright window in a tower
by Conrad Aiken

One, from his high bright window in a tower,
Leans out, as evening falls,
And sees the advancing curtain of the shower
Splashing its silver on roofs and walls:
Sees how, swift as a shadow, it crosses the city,
And murmurs beyond far walls to the sea,
Leaving a glimmer of water in the dark canyons,
And silver falling from eave and tree.

One, from his high bright window, looking down,
Peers like a dreamer over the rain-bright town,
And thinks its towers are like a dream.
The western windows flame in the sun’s last flare,
Pale roofs begin to gleam.

Looking down from a window high in a wall
He sees us all;
Lifting our pallid faces towards the rain,
Searching the sky, and going our ways again,
Standing in doorways, waiting under the trees . . .
There, in the high bright window he dreams, and sees
What we are blind to,—we who mass and crowd
From wall to wall in the darkening of a cloud.

The gulls drift slowly above the city of towers,
Over the roofs to the darkening sea they fly;
Night falls swiftly on an evening of rain.
The yellow lamps wink one by one again.
The towers reach higher and blacker against the sky.
The Bridge
by Ron Rash

Barbed wire snags like briars when
fence posts rot in goldenrod,
the cows are gone, the cowpath
a thinning along the creek
to follow upstream until
water narrows, gray planks lean
over the flow like a book
open but left unfinished,
like this bridge was when the man
who started it took to his
death-bed, watched from there a son
drive the last nails, drive the truck
across so he might die less
burdened that night. The farmhouse
is razed now, the barn and shed
bare quilts of ground. All that’s left
some fallen-down four by fours,
a few rusty nails, this bridge
the quick or the dead can’t cross.

The Need of Being Versed in Country Things
by Robert Frost

The house had gone to bring again
To the midnight sky a sunset glow.
Now the chimney was all of the house that stood,
Like a pistil after the petals go.
The barn opposed across the way,
That would have joined the house in flame
Had it been the will of the wind, was left
To bear forsaken the place’s name.
No more it opened with all one end
For teams that came by the stony road
To drum on the floor with scurrying hoofs
And brush the mow with the summer load.
The birds that came to it through the air
At broken windows flew out and in,
Their murmur more like the sigh we sigh
From too much dwelling on what has been.
Yet for them the lilac renewed its leaf,
And the aged elm, though touched with fire;
And the dry pump flung up an awkward arm;
And the fence post carried a strand of wire.
For them there was really nothing sad.
But though they rejoiced in the nest they kept,
One had to be versed in country things
Not to believe the phoebes wept.
Toad Dreams
Marge Piercy

That afternoon the dream of the toads rang through the elms by Little River and affected the thoughts of men, though they were not conscious that they heard it.--Henry Thoreau

The dream of toads: we rarely credit what we consider lesser life with emotions big as ours, but we are easily distracted, abstracted. People sit nibbling before television’s flicker watching ghosts chase balls and each other while the skunk is out risking grisly death to cross the highway to mate; while the fox scales the wire fence where it knows the shotgun lurks to taste the sweet blood of a hen. Birds are greedy little bombs bursting to give voice to appetite. I had a cat who died of love. Dogs trail their masters across continents. We are far too busy to be starkly simple in passion. We will never dream the intense wet spring lust of the toads.

The Cow In Apple-Time
by Robert Frost

Something inspires the only cow of late To make no more of a wall than an open gate, And think no more of wall-builders than fools. Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit, She scorns a pasture withering to the root. She runs from tree to tree where lie and sweeten. The windfalls spiked with stubble and worm-eaten. She leaves them bitten when she has to fly. She bellows on a knoll against the sky. Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry
The Cathedral Of Rheims
by Joyce Kilmer
(From the French of Emile Verhaeren)

He who walks through the meadows of Champagne
At noon in Fall, when leaves like gold appear,
Sees it draw near
Like some great mountain set upon the plain,
From radiant dawn until the close of day,
Nearer it grows
To him who goes
Across the country. When tall towers lay
Their shadowy pall
Upon his way,
He enters, where
The solid stone is hollowed deep by all
Its centuries of beauty and of prayer.

Ancient French temple! thou whose hundred kings
Watch over thee, emblazoned on thy walls,
Tell me, within thy memory-hallowed halls
What chant of triumph, or what war-song rings?
Thou hast known Clovis and his Frankish train,
Whose mighty hand Saint Remy’s hand did keep
And in thy spacious vault perhaps may sleep
An echo of the voice of Charlemagne.
For God thou has known fear, when from His side
Men wandered, seeking alien shrines and new,
But still the sky was bountiful and blue
And thou wast crowned with France’s love and pride.
Sacred thou art, from pinnacle to base;
And in thy panes of gold and scarlet glass
The setting sun sees thousandfold his face;
Sorrow and joy, in stately silence pass
Across thy walls, the shadow and the light;
Around thy lofty pillars, tapers white
Illuminate, with delicate sharp flames,
The brows of saints with venerable names,
And in the night erect a fiery wall.
A great but silent fervour burns in all
Those simple folk who kneel, pathetic, dumb,
And know that down below, beside the Rhine—
Cannon, horses, soldiers, flags in line—
With blare of trumpets, mighty armies come.

Suddenly, each knows fear;
Swift rumours pass, that every one must hear,
The hostile banners blaze against the sky
And by the embassies mobs rage and cry.
Now war has come, and peace is at an end.
On Paris town the German troops descend.
They are turned back, and driven to Champagne.
And now, as to so many weary men,
The glorious temple gives them welcome, when
It meets them at the bottom of the plain.

At once, they set their cannon in its way.
    There is no gable now, nor wall
That does not suffer, night and day,
    As shot and shell in crushing torrents fall.
The stricken tocsin quivers through the tower;
    The triple nave, the apse, the lonely choir
Are circled, hour by hour,
    With thundering bands of fire
And Death is scattered broadcast among men.

And then
That which was splendid with baptismal grace;
The stately arches soaring into space,
The transepts, columns, windows gray and gold,
The organ, in whose tones the ocean rolled,
The crypts, of mighty shades the dwelling places,
The Virgin’s gentle hands, the Saints’ pure faces,
All, even the pardoning hands of Christ the Lord
Were struck and broken by the wanton sword
Of sacrilegious lust.

O beauty slain, O glory in the dust!
Strong walls of faith, most basely overthrown!
The crawling flames, like adders glistening
Ate the white fabric of this lovely thing.
Now from its soul arose a piteous moan,
The soul that always loved the just and fair.
Granite and marble loud their woe confessed,
The silver monstrances that Popes had blessed,
The chalices and lamps and crosiers rare
Were seared and twisted by a flaming breath;
The horror everywhere did range and swell,
The guardian Saints into this furnace fell,
Their bitter tears and screams were stilled in death.

Around the flames armed hosts are skirmishing,
The burning sun reflects the lurid scene;
The German army, fighting for its life,
Rallies its torn and terrified left wing;
    And, as they near this place
The imperial eagles see
    Before them in their flight,
Here, in the solemn night,
The old cathedral, to the years to be
    Showing, with wounded arms, their own disgrace.
Mr. And Mrs. Discobbolos - Second Part
by Edward Lear

I

Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos
   Lived on the top of the wall,
   For twenty years, a month and a day,
   Till their hair had grown all pearly gray,
   And their teeth began to fall.
They never were ill, or at all dejected,
By all admired, and by some respected,
   Till Mrs. Discobbolos said,
      'Oh! W! X! Y! Z!
      'It has just come into my head,
      'We have no more room at all—
         'Darling Mr. Discobbolos

II

'Look at our six fine boys!
   'And our six sweet girls so fair!
   'Upon this wall they have all been born,
   'And not one of the twelve has happened to fall
      'Through my maternal care!
   'Surely they should not pass their lives
   'Without any chance of husbands or wives!'
      And Mrs. Discobbolos said,
      'Oh! W! X! Y! Z!
      'Did it never come into your head
      'That our lives must be lived elsewhere,
         'Dearest Mr. Discobbolos?

III

'They have never been at a ball,
   'Nor have ever seen a bazaar!
   'Nor have heard folks say in a tone all hearty
      "What loves of girls (at a garden party)
      Those Misses Discobbolos are!"
   'Morning and night it drives me wild
   'To think of the fate of each darling child!'
      But Mr. Discobbolos said,
      'Oh! W! X! Y! Z!
      'What has come to your fiddledum head!
   'What a runcible goose you are!
      'Octopod Mrs. Discobbolos!'
Suddenly Mr. Discobbolos
    Slid from the top of the wall;
    And beneath it he dug a dreadful trench,
    And fille it with dynamite, gunpowder gench,
    And aloud he began to call—
'Let the wild bee sing,
'And the blue bird hum!
'For the end of our lives has certainly come!'
    And Mrs. Discobbolos said,
    'Oh! W! X! Y! Z!
    'We shall presently all be dead,
    'On this ancient runcible wall,
    'Terrible Mr. Discobbolos!'

Pensively, Mr. Discobbolos
    Sat with his back to the wall;
    He lighted a match, and fired the train,
    And the mortified mountain echoed again
    To the sound of an awful fall!
And all the Discobbolos family flew
In thousands of bits to the sky so blue,
    And no one was left to have said,
    'Oh! W! X! Y! Z!
    'Has it come into anyone’s head
    'That the end has happened to all
    'Of the whole of the Clan Discobbolos?'

Humpty Dumpty

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall;
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King’s horses
And all the King’s men
Couldn’t put Humpty together again!
Ruins
by Robert Service

Ruins in Rome are four a penny,
And here along the Appian Way
I see the monuments of many
Esteemed almighty in their day.
Or so he makes me understand—
My glib guide of the rubber bus,
And tells me with a gesture grand:
“Behold! the tomb of Romulus.”

Whereat I stared with eyes of awe,
And yet a whit dismayed was I,
When on its crumbling wall I saw
A washing hanging out to dry;
Yea, that relict of slow decay,
With peristyle and gnarly frieze,
Was garnished with a daft display
Of bifurcation and chemise.

But as we went our Southward way
Another ruin soon I saw;
No antique tower, gaunt and grey,
But modern manor rubbled raw;
And on its sill a maiden sat,
And told me in a tone of rue:
It was your allied bombs did that . . .
But do not think we’re blaming you.”

Thought I: Time is more kind than we
Who blot out beauty with a blow;
And truly it was sad to see
A gracious mansion levelled low . . .
While moulderings of ancient Rome
Still serve the peasants for their swine,
We do not leave a lovely home
A wall to hang a washing line.
A Wall
by Robert Browning

O the old wall here! How I could pass
Life in a long midsummer day,
My feet confined to a plot of grass,
My eyes from a wall not once away!

And lush and lithe do the creepers clothe
Yon wall I watch, with a wealth of green:
Its bald red bricks draped, nothing loath,
In lappets of tangle they laugh between.

Now, what is it makes pulsate the robe?
Why tremble the sprays? What life o’erbrims
The body,—the house no eye can probe,—
Divined, as beneath a robe, the limbs?

And there again! But my heart may guess
Who tripped behind; and she sang, perhaps:
So the old wall throbbed, and it’s life’s excess
Died out and away in the leafy wraps.

Wall upon wall are between us: life
And song should away from heart to heart!
I—prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start—

Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
That’s spirit: tho’ cloistered fast, soar free;
Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
Of the rueful neighbours, and—forth to thee!
A Wall in Naples
by Andrew Motion

I have forgotten whatever it was
I wanted to say. Also the way I wanted
to say it. Form and Music.

Perhaps it had something to do with - no,
that’s not it. More likely, I should just
look at whatever there is

and fix myself to the earth. This wall,
I mean, which faces me over the street.
Smooth as a shaven chin

but pocked with the holes that scaffolders left
and flicked with an overflow-flag. Which still
leaves pigeon-shit, rain-streaks, washing -

or maybe the whole thing’s really a board
where tiny singing meteors strike.
How can we tell what is true? I rest my case.

I rest my case and cannot imagine a hunger
greater than this. For marks.
For messages sent by hand. For signs of life.
The Western Wall
by Bernhard Frank

The spittle of kisses suckles
the moss in the stone; Samson
size blocks of mountain laid
side by side intransigent to
human passion remind of
glory & rebuke defeat.

God
oozes out of the seams in
spurts of promise; dreams
of a third temple rising gold
& alabaster level all in-
essentials since the days of Titus.

Like the fig &

olive this wall has roots,sprouts from centuries of
wailing thru the years of fire.

It is
the sun to the sunflower
the
magnet to the iron-core heart,
the black hole of all our history.

Painters
by Muriel Rukeyser

In the cave with a long-ago flare
a woman stands, her arms up. Red twig, black twig, brown twig.
A wall of leaping darkness over her.
The men are out hunting in the early light
But here in this flicker, one or two men, painting
and a woman among them.
Great living animals grow on the stone walls,
their pelts, their eyes, their sex, their hearts,
and the cave-painters touch them with life, red, brown, black,
a woman among them, painting.
The Wall
by Tadeusz Rozewicz

She turned her face to the wall
but she loves me
why did she turn away

with one motion of the head
you can turn away from the world
where sparrows chirp
and young people walk around
in loud ties

Now she’s alone

in the face of a dead wall
and that’s how things will remain

she will remain
against the overtowering wall
bent and small
fists clenched

and I sit
my legs made of stone
not stealing her away from this place
not lifting her
lighter than a sigh.
Where there’s a Wall
by Joy Kogawa

where there’s a wall
there’s a way
around, over, or through
there’s a gate
maybe a ladder
a door
a sentinel who
sometimes sleeps
there are secret passwords
you can overhear
there are methods of torture
for extracting clues
to maps of underground passageways
there are zeplins
helicopters, rockets, bombs
bettering rams
armies with trumpets
whose all at once blast
shatters the foundations

where there’s a wall
there are words
to whisper by a loose brick
wailing prayers to utter
special codes to tap
birds to carry messages
taped to their feet
there are letters to be written
novels even

on this side of the wall
I am standing staring at the top
lost in the clouds
I hear every sound you make
but cannot see you

I incline in the wrong direction
a voice cries faint as in a dream
from the belly
of the wall
All of you undisturbed cities
by Rainer Maria Rilke
(translated by Robert Bly)

All of you undisturbed cities,
haven’t you ever longed for the enemy?
I’d like to see you besieged by him
for ten endless and ground-shaking years.

Until you were desperate and mad with suffering;
finally in hunger you would feel his weight.
He lies outside the walls like a countryside.
And he knows very well how to endure
longer than the ones he comes to visit.

Climb up on your roofs and look out:
his camp is there, and his morale doesn’t falter,
and his numbers do not decrease; he will not grow weaker,
and he sends no one into the city to threaten
or promise, and no one to negotiate.

He is the one who breaks down the walls,
and when he works, he works in silence.

Ihr vielen unbestürmten Städte,
habt ihr euch nie den Feind ersehnt?
O dass er euch belagert hätte
ein langes schwankendes Jahrzehnt.

Bis ihr ihn trostlos und in Trauern,
bis dass ihr hungernd ihn ertrugt;
er liegt wie Landschaft vor den Mauern,
denn also weiß er auszudauern
um jene, die er heimgesucht.

Schaut aus vom Rande eurer Dächer
da lagert er und wird nicht matt
und wird nicht weniger und schwächer

und schickt nicht Droher und Versprecher
und Überreder in die Stadt.

Er ist der große Mauerbrecher,
der eine stumme Arbeit hat.
First Publications
by Adrian Mitchell

My poems were first published
on lavatory walls
down in the Gents
where the girl I loved could never see them
of course I didn’t use her name
or sign the poems

Sometimes people smudged my words out
with piss or shit or snot
I didn’t mind the piss so much
and the smudged poems
looked sort of streamlined and alive
when their blue letters became
soft streaks across the pockmarked yellow plaster

The Walls of a Town
by Maniucheer Saadat Noury

If you want to know the heart of a town
You better read,
What in its walls have been written down?

If the walls are blank
And deliver no message for today or tomorrow
People there are frightened and in a deep sorrow

If there is
Only a very unique slogan
The town is ruled by an atrocious demon

Take the delight of the presence in the town
And write down on a wall,
By an angel, the demon will be overthrown.
Roman Wall Blues
by W. H. Auden

Over the heather the wet wind blows,
I’ve lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose.

The rain comes pattering out of the sky,
I’m a Wall soldier, I don’t know why.

The mist creeps over the hard grey stone,
My girl’s in Tungria; I sleep alone.

Aulus goes hanging around her place,
I don’t like his manners, I don’t like his face.

Piso’s a Christian, he worships a fish;
There’d be no kissing if he had his wish.

She gave me a ring but I diced it away;
I want my girl and I want my pay.

When I’m a veteran with only one eye
I shall do nothing but look at the sky.

Geometry
by Rita Dove

I prove a theorem and the house expands:
the windows jerk free to hover near the ceiling,
the ceiling floats away with a sigh.

As the walls clear themselves of everything
but transparency, the scent of carnations
leaves with them. I am out in the open

and above the windows have hinged into butterflies,
sunlight glinting where they’ve intersected.
They are going to some point true and unproven.
The Ruin
Dafydd ap Gwilym

Nothing but a ruin now
Between moorland and meadow,
Once the owners saw in you
A comely cottage, bright, new,
Now roof, rafters, ridge-pole, all
Broken down by a broken wall.

A day of delight was once there
For me, long ago, no care
When I had a glimpse of her
Fair in an ingle-corner.
Beside each other we lay
In the delight of that day.

Her forearm, snowflake-lovely,
Softly white, pillowing me,
Proffered a pleasant pattern
For me to give in my turn,
And that was our blessing for
The new-cut lintel and door.

Now the wild wind, wailing by,
Crashes with curse and with cry
Against my stones, a tempest
Born and bred in the East,
Or south ram-batterers break
The shelter that folk forsake.

Life is illusion and grief;
A tile whirls off, as a leaf
Or a lath goes sailing, high
In the keening of kite-kill cry.
Could it be our couch once stood
Sturdily under that wood?
Pillar and post, it would seem
Now are less than a dream.
Are you that, or only the lost
Wreck of a fiddle, rune-ghost?

"Dafydd, the cross on their graves
Marks what little it saves,
Says, They did well in their lives."
A Worker Reads History
by Bertolt Brecht

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?
And Babylon, so many times destroyed.
Who built the city up each time? In which of Lima’s houses,
That city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song.
Were all her dwellings palaces? And even in Atlantis of the legend
The night the seas rushed in,
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.

Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Phillip of Spain wept as his fleet
was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?
Frederick the Greek triumphed in the Seven Years War.
Who triumphed with him?

Each page a victory
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?

So many particulars.
So many questions.
**Ground Zero**  
by William Stafford

A bomb photographed me on the stone,  
on a white wall, a burned outline where  
the bomb rays found me out in the open  
and ended me, person and shadow, never to cast  
a shadow again, but be here so light  
the sun doesn’t know. People on Main Street  
used to stand in their certain chosen places --  
I walk around them. It wouldn’t be right  
if I stood there. But all of their shadows are mine now --  
I am so white on the stone.

**In The Book**  
by William Stafford

A hand appears.  
It writes on the wall.  
Just a hand moving in the air,  
and writing on the wall.

A voice comes and says the words,  
“You have been weighed,  
you have been judged,  
and have failed.”

The hand disappears, the voice  
fades away into silence.  
And a spirit stirs and fills  
and room, all space, all things.

All this in The Book  
asks, “What have you done wrong?”  
But The Spirit says,  
“Come to me, who need comfort.”

And the hand, the wall, the voice  
are gone, but The Spirit is everywhere.  
The story ends inside the book,  
but outside, wherever you are --

It goes on
Note
by William Stafford

The sparrows are as reckless as ever.
They don’t care whether they fall.
I watch their wings this winter—
vigorous birds, but a crumbling wall.

Waking at 3 a.m.
by William Stafford

Even in the cave of the night when you
wake and are free and lonely,
neglected by others, discarded, loved only
by what doesn’t matter—even in that
big room no one can see,
you push with your eyes till forever
comes in its twisted figure eight
and lies down in your head.

You think water in the river;
you think slower than the tide in
the grain of the wood; you become
a secret storehouse that saves the country,
so open and foolish and empty.

You look over all that the darkness
ripples across. More than has ever
been found comforts you. You open your
eyes in a vault that unlocks as fast
and as far as your thought can run.
A great snug wall goes around everything,
has always been there, will always
remain. It is a good world to be
lost in. It comforts you. It is
all right. And you sleep.
The Murder of William Remington
by Howard Nemerov

It is true, that even in the best-run state
Such things will happen; it is true,
What’s done is done. The law, whereby we hate
Our hatred, sees no fire in the flue
But by the smoke, and not for thought alone
It punishes, but for the thing that’s done.

And yet there is the horror of the fact,
Though we knew not the man. To die in jail,
To be beaten to death, to know the act
Of personal fury before the eyes can fail
And the man die against the cold last wall
Of the lonely world—and neither is that all:

There is the terror too of each man’s thought,
That knows not, but must quietly suspect
His neighbor, friend, or self of being taught
To take an attitude merely correct;
Being frightened of his own cold image in
The glass of government, and his own sin,

Frightened lest senate house and prison wall
Be quarried of one stone, lest righteous and high
Look faintly smiling down and seem to call
A crime the welcome chance of liberty,
And any man an outlaw who aggrieves
The patriotism of a pair of thieves.

from Six Significant Landscapes
by Wallace Stevens

VI
Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses --
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon --
Rationalists would wear sombreros.
Ignoring the Lines
by Daniel Quiterio

The best thing about writing by hand is the freedom you have. What the hell’s up with those red margins and blue lines anyway? They just restrict your ability to be creative. I say screw them! Write over them, under them, on top of them. Do what the hell you want and don’t write as you’ve been taught either. What’s wrong with color outside of the lines? Do your own thing. Be your own person. And don’t give a shit as to what others think. Be random and abstract. No one has to know what you’re thinking. And if they did … Who cares. Sentences always sound best when written in a random way. Break the rules and give your teachers the finger. Freedom is about blank, white paper. Writing what you want to write, where you want to write. Saying the things you would never normally say out loud. On paper, you have no friends, so why bother restricting yourself. Be a jerk. Be an asshole. It’s all about you. And what you’re thinking.
The Icosasphere
by Marianne Moore

“In Buckinghamshire hedgerows
the birds nesting in the merged green density,
weave little bits of string and moths and feathers and thistledown,
in parabolic concentric curves” and,
working for concavity, leave spherical feats of rare efficiency;
whereas through lack of integration,

avid for someone’s fortune,
three were slain and ten committed perjury,
six died, two killed themselves, and two paid fines for risks they’d run.
But then there is the icosasphere
In which at last we have steel-cutting at its summit of economy,
since twenty triangles conjoined, can wrap one

ball or double-rounded shell
with almost no waste, so geometrically
neat, it’s an icosahedron. Would the engineers making one,
or Mr. J. O. Jackson tell us
how the Egyptians could have set up seventy-eight-foot solid gran-
ite vertically?
We should like to know how that was done.

Snow Fence
by Ted Kooser

The red fence
takes the cold trail
north; no meat
on its ribs,
but neither has it
much to carry.
Ultima Ratio Regum

by Stephen Spender

The guns spell money’s ultimate reason
In letters of lead on the spring hillside.
But the boy lying dead under the olive trees
Was too young and too silly
To have been notable to their important eye.
He was a better target for a kiss.

When he lived, tall factory hooters never summoned him.
Nor did restaurant plate-glass doors revolve to wave him in.
His name never appeared in the papers.
The world maintained its traditional wall
Round the dead with their gold sunk deep as a well,
Whilst his life, intangible as a Stock Exchange rumour, drifted outside.

O too lightly he threw down his cap
One day when the breeze threw petals from the trees.
The unflowering wall sprouted with guns,
Machine-gun anger quickly scythed the grasses;
Flags and leaves fell from hands and branches;
The tweed cap rotted in the nettles.

Consider his life which was valueless
In terms of employment, hotel ledgers, news files.
Consider. One bullet in ten thousand kills a man.
Ask. Was so much expenditure justified
On the death of one so young and so silly
Lying under the olive tree, O world, O death?
Limits
by Jorge Luis Borges

Of all the streets that blur in to the sunset,
There must be one (which, I am not sure)
That I by now have walked for the last time
Without guessing it, the pawn of that Someone

Who fixes in advance omnipotent laws,
Sets up a secret and unwavering scale
for all the shadows, dreams, and forms
Woven into the texture of this life.

If there is a limit to all things and a measure
And a last time and nothing more and forgetfulness,
Who will tell us to whom in this house
We without knowing it have said farewell?

Through the dawning window night withdraws
And among the stacked books which throw
Irregular shadows on the dim table,
There must be one which I will never read.

There is in the South more than one worn gate,
With its cement urns and planted cactus,
Which is already forbidden to my entry,
Inaccessible, as in a lithograph.

There is a door you have closed forever
And some mirror is expecting you in vain;
To you the crossroads seem wide open,
Yet watching you, four-faced, is a Janus.

There is among all your memories one
Which has now been lost beyond recall.
You will not be seen going down to that fountain
Neither by white sun nor by yellow moon.

You will never recapture what the Persian
Said in his language woven with birds and roses,
When, in the sunset, before the light disperses,
You wish to give words to unforgettable things.

And the steadily flowing Rhone and the lake,
All that vast yesterday over which today I bend?
They will be as lost as Carthage,
Scourged by the Romans with fire and salt.

At dawn I seem to hear the turbulent
Murmur of crowds milling and fading away;
They are all I have been loved by, forgotten by;
Space, time, and Borges now are leaving me.
A City Without Fences
by Francine DuBois

A city without fences
smacks of the surreal,
the blind trusting
almost as incongruous
as Medea’s chariot.

I am tempted to try
cars and homes, to see
if they are locked
or if the gentle folk
can cling to the faith
that people aren’t just
inherently good, but
almost completely
uncurious. I have no
desire to steal their TV,
but I am interested
in their family Bible,
who died when of what,
and how many generations
have been protected
from reality.

I wonder if these are
a God-fearing people
since they are not
a people-fearing people.

And I pray for the
first person to erect
a fence here, for it
will the beginning
of the end for this
unimaginable city,
and he will be forced
to wear his sin,
perhaps even on his
chest. A Home Depot
will follow him,
providing lumber
and chain link to
the scared masses,
and slowly this city
will become normal.
The Wall
by Gwendolyn Brooks

A drumdrumdrum.
Humbly we come.
South of success and east of gloss and glass are
sandals;
flowercloth;
grave hoops of wood or gold, pendant
from black ears, brown ears, reddish-brown
and ivory ears;

black boy-men.
Black
boy-men on roofs fist out “Black Power!” Val,
a little black stampede
in African images of brass and flowerswirl,
fist out “Black Power!”—tightens pretty eyes,
leans back on mothercountry and is tract,
is treatise through her perfect and tight teeth.

Women in wool hair chant their poetry.
Phil Cohran gives us messages and music
made of developed bone and polished and honed
cult.
It is the Hour of tribe and of vibration,
the day-long Hour. It is the Hour
of ringing, rouse, of ferment-festival.

On Forty-third and Langley
black furnaces resent ancient
legislatures
of ploy and scruple and practical gelatin.
They keep the fever in,
fondle the fever.

All
worship the Wall.

I mount the rattling wood. Walter
says, “She is good.” Says, “She
our Sister is.” In front of me
hundreds of faces, red-brown, brown, black, ivory,
yield me hot trust, their yea and their
Announcement
that they are ready to rile the high-flung ground.
Behind me. Paint.
Heroes.
No child has defiled
the Heroes of this Wall this serious Appointment
this still Wing
this Scald this Flute this heavy Light this Hinge.

An emphasis is paroled.
The old decapitations are revised,
the dispossessions beakless.

And we sing.

**Wires**
by Phillip Larkin

The widest prairies have electric fences
For though old cattle know they must not stray
Young steers are always scenting purer water
Not here but anywhere. Beyond the wires

Leads them to blunder up against the wires
Whose muscle-shredding violence gives no quarter
Young steers become old cattle from that day
Electric limits to their widest fences

**Multifold Fences**
by Susanoo no Mikoto

The multifold fences
Where clouds cluster
Form multifold fences
Surrounding us on all sides.
Those multifold fences!
The Purse-Seine
by Robinson Jeffers

Our sardine fishermen work at night in the dark
of the moon; daylight or moonlight
They could not tell where to spread the net,
unable to see the phosphorescence of the
shoals of fish.
They work northward from Monterey, coasting
Santa Cruz; off New Year’s Point or off
Pigeon Point
The look-out man will see some lakes of milk-color
light on the sea’s night-purple; he points,
and the helmsman
Turns the dark prow, the motorboat circles the
gleaming shoal and drifts out her seine-net.
They close the circle
And purse the bottom of the net, then with great
labor haul it in.

I cannot tell you
How beautiful the scene is, and a little terrible,
then, when the crowded fish
Know they are caught, and wildly beat from one wall
to the other of their closing destiny the
phosphorescent
Water to a pool of flame, each beautiful slender body
-sheeted with flame, like a live rocket
A comet’s tail wake of clear yellow flame; while outside
the narrowing
Floats and cordage of the net great sea-lions come up
to watch, sighing in the dark; the vast walls
of night
Stand erect to the stars.

Lately I was looking from a night mountain-top
On a wide city, the colored splendor, galaxies of light:
how could I help but recall the seine-net
Gathering the luminous fish? I cannot tell you how
beautiful the city appeared, and a little terrible.
I thought, We have geared the machines and locked all together
into inter-dependence; we have built the great cities; now
There is no escape. We have gathered vast populations incapable
of free survival, insulated
From the strong earth, each person in himself helpless, on all
dependent. The circle is closed, and the net
Is being hauled in. They hardly feel the cords drawing, yet
they shine already. The inevitable mass-disasters
Will not come in our time nor in our children’s, but we
and our children
Must watch the net draw narrower, government take all
powers—or revolution, and the new government
Take more than all, add to kept bodies kept souls—or anarchy,
the mass-disasters. These things are Progress;

Do you marvel our verse is troubled or frowning, while it keeps
its reason? Or it lets go, lets the mood flow
In the manner of the recent young men into mere hysteria,
splintered gleams, crackled laughter. But they are
quite wrong.
There is no reason for amazement: surely one always knew
that cultures decay, and life’s end is death.

On Building With Stone
Robinson Jeffers

To be an ape in little of the mountain-making mother
Like swarthy Cheops, but my own hands
For only slaves, is a far sweeter toil than to cut
Passions in verse for a sick people.
I’d liefer bed one boulder in the house-wall than be the time’s
Archilochus: we name not Homer: who now
Can even imagine the fabulous dawn when bay-leaves (to a blind
Beggar) were not bitter in the teeth?

Interior
by Dorothy Parker

Her mind lives in a quiet room,
A narrow room, and tall,
With pretty lamps to quench the gloom
And mottoes on the wall.

There all the things are waxen neat
And set in decorous lines;
And there are posies, round and sweet,
And little, straightened vines.

Her mind lives tidily, apart
From cold and noise and pain,
And bolts the door against her heart,
Out wailing in the rain.
Breakout
by Wayne Leman

The map states the boundaries
The fence makes them firm
It’s there to protect--
Who?

We who live within the fence
Or those who live without?

Roads run through
And we can drive away at any time
But when we do we’re
scrutinized
criticized
patronized
demeaned

The outside does not belong to us
it belongs to others
those who live outside the fence

Reservation it is called inside the fence
Reserved for us
But it seems that we are the ones
who are reserved
for it,
to stay inside the fence

Prisoners of the fence
and social fences
and our own ambivalence
and crippling dependence
our souls long for deliverance
freedom
space
acceptance
breakout

Can breakout be for those of us
within the fence?

And what is breakout, anyway--
geographical
psychological
cultural
personal
spiritual?

Can we breakout by leaving on the highway
or can it happen
inside the fence?

**Unfinished Fences**

by Dennis Barton

Barbed wire feels good sliding down the throat.
Coated in frost, barbs pierce un-gloved flesh, rotting posts.
Wire dangles into snow.

**Love Poem**

by Louise Gluck

There is always something to be made of pain.
Your mother knits.
She turns out scarves in every shade of red.
They were for Christmas, and they kept you warm
while she married over and over, taking you
along. How could it work,
when all those years she stored her widowed heart
as though the dead come back.
No wonder you are the way you are,
afraid of blood, your women
like one brick wall after another.
Anger’s freeing power
by Stevie Smith

I had a dream three walls stood up wherein a raven bird
Against the walls did beat himself and was not this absurd?

For sun and rain beat in that cell that had its fourth wall free
And daily blew the summer shower and the rain came presently

And all the pretty summer time and all the winter too
That foolish bird did beat himself till he was black and blue.

Rouse up, rouse up, my raven bird, fly by the open wall
You make a prison of a place that is not one at all.

I took my raven by the hand, Oh come, I said, my Raven,
And I will take you by the hand and you shall fly to heaven.

But oh he sobbed and oh he sighed and in a fit he lay
Until two fellow ravens came and stood outside to say:

You wretched bird, conceited lump
You well deserve to pine and thump.

See now a wonder, mark it well
My bird rears up in angry spell,

Oh do I then? he says, and careless flies
O’er flattened wall at once to heaven’s skies.

And in my dream I watched him go
And I was glad, I loved him so,

Yet when I woke my eyes were wet
To think Love had not freed my pet,

Anger it was that won him hence
As only anger taught him sense.

Often my tears fall in a shower
Because of Anger’s freeing power.
Caged Bird
by Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hills
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through singing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.
Cruising these residential Sunday streets in dry August sunlight: what offends us is the sanities: the houses in pedantic rows, the planted sanitary trees, assert levelness of surface like a rebuke to the dent in our car door. No shouting here, or shatter of glass; nothing more abrupt than the rational whine of a power mower cutting a straight swath in the discouraged grass.

But though the driveways neatly sidestep hysteria by being even, the roofs all display the same slant of avoidance to the hot sky, certain things: the smell of spilled oil a faint sickness lingering in the garages, a splash of paint on brick surprising as a bruise, a plastic hose poised in a vicious coil; even the too-fixed stare of the wide windows give momentary access to the landscape behind or under the future cracks in the plaster when the houses, capsized, will slide obliquely into the clay seas, gradual as glaciers that right now nobody notices.

That is where the City Planners with the insane faces of political conspirators are scattered over unsurveyed territories, concealed from each other, each in his own private blizzard;
guessing directions, they sketch transitory lines rigid as wooden borders on a wall in the white vanishing air tracing the panic of suburb order in a bland madness of snows
The Stone Wall
by Abbie Huston Evans

Look up from the stones
When noon inks in the shadows.
Life is in these drones,
Nothing else created
Has such secret eyes;
Dim mouths set as these are
Make no cries.

Dwellers underground
Dragged up to the air
Lie out and plot together
Against alien glare,
Back to darkness sinking
At a pace too slow
For man’s eyes to mark, less
Swift than shells grow.
Inhabitants of darkness,
Dragged up to the light,
Bend their graven faces
Back to night.

Nothing from without
Can break their calm.
—The warm snout of a rock
Nuzzles my palm.
Upon Roaming the Borderlands
by Héctor Carbajal

"[We] don’t know what we are because we don’t know where we are . . . between two countries completely different from each other"  
Arturo Islas

"To survive the Borderlands / You must live sin fronteras / Be a crossroads."  
Gloria Anzaldúa

Upon roaming the Borderlands,
I step out of my body
and walk on
an herida, where blood
runs a river--the glorious Llorona’s sanctuary.

Every step I take, I turn my head--
fences, barbed wire, walls--
I don’t know where to go:
out of place, lost and forgotten.
I cry out my anger.

I pose with arms outstretched--
hung against a grey, turbulent portrait sky:
"Please forgive them Father.
They know not how
they have conquered us."

I resume my journey
through the different lenguas, speaking tongues
praising la Virgencita and Coatlicue
from humble servants growing
floresitas del corazón.

My feet are blisters and
My heels will soon wear out.
I fear falling into the abyss
of assimilation, of forgetting--
into a pocho well.

I climb mountains
in search for God-divider of lands,
waters, nights and days--instead,
at the top, I see a preacher man
from my street: “Cristo te salvará.”

Christ does not come, nor any
other celestial healer--
alone, among conquered spaces:
“Go Back to Where
You Belong.”

My hometown streets
are walls sprayed
with guns from cholos.
Solamente fotos en paredes
of children searching sanctuary.

Punished--castigados--
for being queers, la jotería dwells
in alien spaces:
“You don’t belong here.
Go back to where you came from.”

South of the Border
I see the mojaditos crossing
el Rio Bravo--just missing
life by swerving highway cars
rushing to 8-to-5 jobs.

The binocular gods watch,
ready to attack. Perros desgraciados
babosos out for a preying good time
while this little lamb watching out for them,
endangered to be sacrificed in deep waters.

In the deserts,
spirits of young girls roam--
dejadas muertas, olvidadas--
solamente caras de inocencia,
pictures of memories.

Stop.
Quiero agua bendita.
Quiera una purga, una limpia, una ceremonia,
un ritual. I want
this knife pulled out.

Ehécatl,
Coatlicue,
Malintzin,
Virgen,
Quiero ser Despojado.
The Room of My Life
by Anne Sexton

Here,
in the room of my life
the objects keep changing.
Ashtrays to cry into,
the suffering brother of the wood walls,
the forty-eight keys of the typewriter
each an eyeball that is never shut,
the books, each a contestant in a beauty contest,
the black chair, a dog coffin made of Naugahyde,
the sockets on the wall
waiting like a cave of bees,
the gold rug
a conversation of heels and toes,
the fireplace
a knife waiting for someone to pick it up,
the sofa, exhausted with the exertion of a whore,
the phone
two flowers taking root in its crotch,
the doors
opening and closing like sea clams,
the lights
poking at me,
lighting up both the soil and the laugh.
The windows,
the starving windows
that drive the trees like nails into my heart.
Each day I feed the world out there
although birds explode
right and left.
I feed the world in here too,
offering the desk puppy biscuits.
However, nothing is just what it seems to be.
My objects dream and wear new costumes,
compelled to, it seems, by all the words in my hands
and the sea that bangs in my throat.
Tea with Mouayed al-Rawi in a Turkish café in Berlin after the Wall came down
by Sargon Boulus

Our cigarette packs
close to hand (that secret fuel) . . .
The babble of immigrants
slapping dominoes on marbletops:
a noise familiar once,
out of which
a word may flare up amid the smoke --
born there, refusing
to die here.
If we don’t say it, who will?
And who are we
if we don’t?

Not about what came
to pass; how it came, and passed!
But about this spoon buried
in sugar, and this finjan.
Not that Wall whose remains
are sold as souvenirs
at check-point Charlie where
only yesterday
they exchanged spies
and traded secrets of the East
and West, but this
wall painting facing us now,
with a harem from the days
of the Sublime Porte
who recline dreamily
in pleasure boats, on a river
guzzled down, in one
gulp, by history.

Let’s say we have seen
a lot of walls, how they rise
and fall, how the dust
particles dance under the hooves
of the Mongol’s horse,
how “victory” laughs
its idiot’s laugh in the mirror
of loss, before it breaks
and its shards fill the world
where we walk, and meet,
every time.
Barbed Wire
by Henry Taylor

One summer afternoon when nothing much was happening, they were standing around a tractor beside the barn while a horse in the field poked his head between two strands of the barbed-wire fence to get at the grass along the lane, when it happened—something they passed around the wood stove late at night for years, but never could explain—someone may have dropped a wrench into the toolbox or made a sudden move, or merely thought what might happen if the horse got scared, and then he did get scared, jumped sideways and ran down the fence line, leaving chunks of his throat skin and hair on every barb for ten feet before he pulled free and ran a short way into the field, stopped and planted his hoofs wide apart like a sawhorse, hung his head down as if to watch his blood running out, almost as if he were about to speak to them, who almost thought he could regret that he no longer had the strength to stand, then shuddered to his knees, fell on his side, and gave up breathing while the dripping wire hummed like a bowstring in the splintered air.
Across The Road
by Anne Harré

The woman across the road
lives alone, directly
next to a man
who also lives alone.

Between them are twelve
maybe fourteen inches (centimetres
ineffectual, tip-toeing)
of brick, half an inch (each side)
of gib-board, a feathering of wall-paper,
a smear of paint.

The house exactly mirrors itself,
like the weather-vane couple,
wooden predictors swinging each one in
and out. She, off to work,
he, drunkenly forgetting medication,
taking an axe to her fence.
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