

Lidia Vianu

The Wall



C O N T E M P O R A R Y
L I T E R A T U R E P R E S S

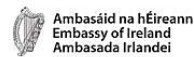


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I. *I*

II. *We*

III. *The Train*

IV. *The Wall*

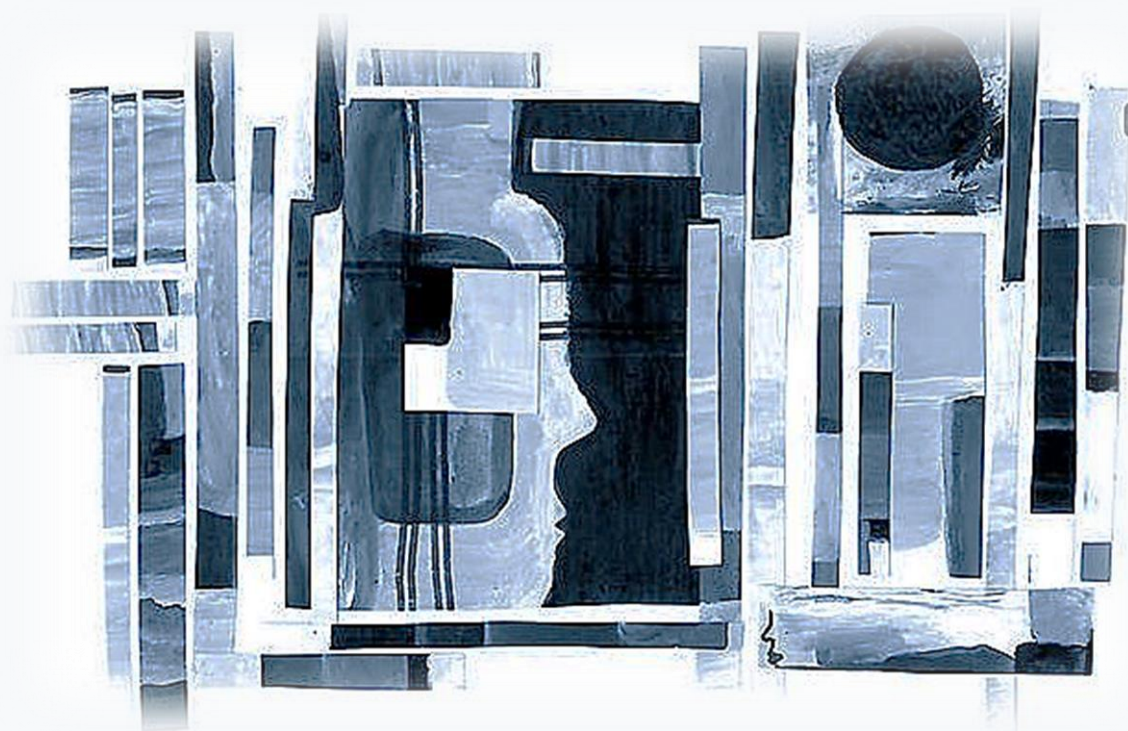
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His ancestors' house had been built in 1177, on the place of a well gone dry. A hidden descent into darkness. Centuries later, the communists confiscated the house. Years after that, here he is, climbing to the attic.

Broken windows, ghostly walls, birds' nests – pigeons fly out with fast beating wings.

One bird stays behind unafraid. Grey feathers, a white halo, eyes in his. Its feet are resting on some papers written in green ink. Faded.

He holds out his hand and slowly pulls the papers towards him. The bird breathes deeply. Both of them on this side of the wall.

No touch.

Just the sign.

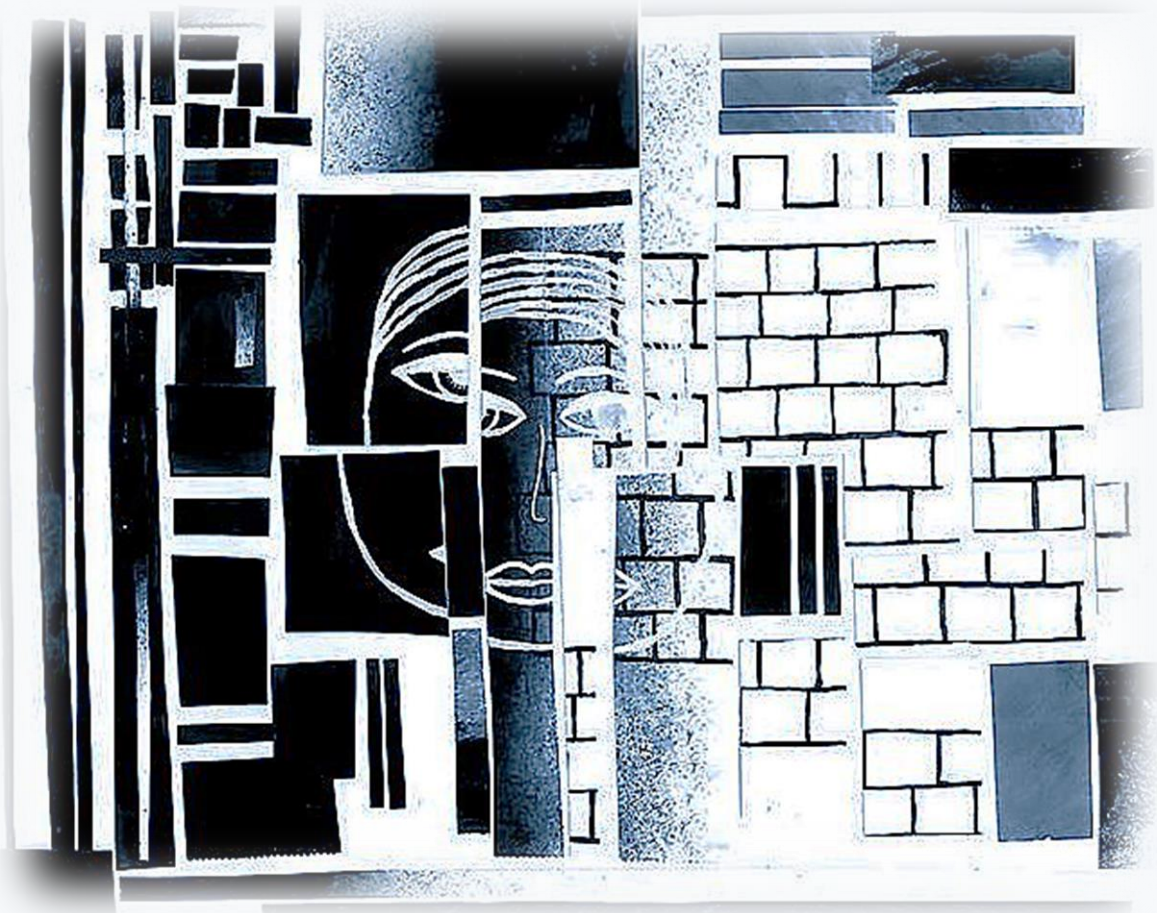
Here it was and is no more.

A seagull.



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11 February 1233

I.

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I. 1.

Luck tried me three times in my life.

The first time round, I dimly felt it: couldn't see, couldn't hear, couldn't touch. Just knew.

The second time round, it was both too late and too early. I was not ready.

This third time, having left the future behind, I am free. I was waiting for it.

I. 2.

I could not start on my journey towards you until I had learnt how to write in the first person as if the first person did not exist.

When thou hast done, thou hast not done—

I. 3.

Every day is another mood. You cannot be with me, but you can make me think with you. So that when this journey ends we can understand each other. At last.

Today you smile. Your seen-by-no-one-but-me sensibility.

There is not a single minute of your life that does not play that chord of my heart which nobody hears but you.

I. 4.

You are. You are that part of me without which I am not.

You make everything certain while uncertainties rage. Within. Without.

You make everything uncertain every second of every minute of every day of every month of every year, again and again.

You break my heart with a word.

You stroke my soul with a silence.

With you I am speechless.

These many words are a sign that I am not with you yet.

I. 5.

7 July 1247

If you lived in a frozen cave at the bottom of all worlds, that would be the only place I would want to be.

If you surfaced at a time of wars and death, I would want to share it with you.

If you left on a crusade against the chosen people, I would follow you even if I were a Jew myself.

There is nothing you could tell me that I would not want to make mine.

I. 6.

Whose soul is this——bathing in you, struggling in me so hard to get there, to be there, to lose itself into where and who you are?

The eyes of your dead parents have found me, taught me, pushed me on my way.

The eyes of my dead father——have they ever rested on you.

The rhyme of the Ancient Mariner——you.

Me——the white horse of fairy-tales——eating embers and killing age. Carrying you across Mediterraneanus.

I. 7.

We are not alone, there are so many around us, you say.

We *are* alone.

Are we.

Wherever my body is, my soul is some place else.

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II.

We

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II. 1.

The words you touched, the places you lived in
haunt me.

The one and only.

This, our time, running out.

II. 2.

What one sees out of the windows of this train is what one no longer sees with the eye. Pictor Romano, Hala Traian, Pitar Moș, Snagov, Grădina Icoanei, they can all be there—but one wouldn't know one knows them.

Bus 33 brings you back on that August evening, hand in mine, arm around my shoulders, half away, knowing the future while I was meeting mine blindly.

Don't I wish I had seen then what I see now, out of the window of this slow train, with my bodilessness.

II. 3.

Four years old. Long days in a crowded kindergarten. I longed to be alone. I stole the teacher's book and read to myself.

The only person who ever read to me——Nils Holgersson——was my father. He also taught me how to read, although he was unaware of it. He just answered my questions. What is this? D. And this? E. And this? N.

DEN. A smile.

Real smile is something that visits us rarely. While the train moves, I find myself smiling——physically. It's like a glass of water: when it has filled, it will overflow. I never knew my lips could betray me so.

When we are on the same side of the wall at last, the first thing I will do will be to wait. For you to remember this. And, even though I've never told you, I know you will.



II. 4.

“You are so patient with me.”

When this patience finds you, it overflows, it's endless, the heat becomes scorching, and the train races.

You played the contrabass at parties at the girl highschool. In your teens. Later on I went to that school. I know the room. The huge entrance hall paved with marbles. My graduation party took place there. You were no longer in your teens by then.

I might have run into you as a child: we grew up in the same streets, we bought copybooks at the same stationery, we passed the same buildings day in day out.

If it were not for the wall between us, this train would not exist.

II. 5.

“The only time I wrote a love letter.”

And I did not see it till you opened my mind.

“I always do that. Take by surprise.”

Whenever one of us gets closer, there’s the wall.

I could have had that summer with you. I thought we had time. I was waiting for the future. For you to spell it out.

“I called you today because I had the feeling that, if I didn’t, I would never see you again.”

You didn’t. I didn’t. Until that painfully brief moment when you shut me out again on the other side of the wall.

II. 6.

The train has stopped at a station which is called 9691 *Enuj* 81—*Tsugua* 32. I get off. I take a few steps. It is so unfamiliar. Never been here before.

I stare hard all around. You whisper in my ear: “Now you know.”

First 81. Now I must count back to 32.

“There is a church on the other side. Lie down in the grass with me and you will hear its bells.”

Yes.

Your warm coat on my shoulders in this chilly time. I will fall asleep right here, right now, and there will never be any wall.

II. 7.

This train, like everything that connects my existence to yours, is a whirlpool which sucks me in. An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

I have often tried to attach a name to you. None fits. That made me utterly unable to talk about you.

You were given to me as a better place for myself. When I was born.

II. 8.

While living my life, I gathered a number of fixed points. Those have been my away from you.

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II. 9.

The train halted. I have halted. I am in a changed world.

If I sleep, we may never wake up. Think of me. Keep me awake. Be here.

Thinking never stops. We must be grateful for the mind. This endless fuel of heres and theres and beyond.

I am fuelling this slow train to where you think.

When I am not your waiting, I am not.

A young body colonizes. An old body releases. My thoughts are free.

I feed the train with myself and there is always more me rushing to meet you, to help, to comfort——whom.

You struggle with age today. Slipping away with every second.



II. 10.

I keep writing down the thoughts that you formulate in my mind.

I swallow your words, your voice, the quicksilver of all of you. I have lost them again and again. Had you taught me English when I was eleven —

II. 11.

We work together. We manage to get the train started after a long night in an unknown, unmapped station. In spite of the loneliness between us, we manage to get the wheels moving——by simply working together.

You end up being tired. You are angry. At me, for making mistakes that you can't catch in time. At yourself, for having allowed time to get the better of us.

You hate it. You curse. I look out of the window, hoping for landscapes. All I can see is the inescapable feeling that I have failed you.

The train moves slowly. It is not us——above all the stress. It is the wall. Between us.

In an unknown dimension, you turn to me.

Do not worry. I am awake. I am not giving up. But being sorry brings you so close.



II. 12.

“They trembled for me, but they never dared ask how I felt,” you say. Your family never dared ask.

What is this train that I am making up and pushing ahead in spite of huge opposition.

You would have cursed me every morning of your life, and you would have held me at nightfall—which would have made me love you even more than the day before.

II. 13.

The first time I knew you, I was two. Alone in an orchard with dusty plums. I realized it seventeen years later. I had been two when I had known I was looking for you.

Write my name with your fountain pen on the palm of your left hand. I will be there in time to share the wet ink.

I. 14.

I keep running the train. Faster and faster. You say we are underexposed images. Full exposure is impossible at this speed. Words break inside your voice, that harmony whose law I shall never understand. I am a flame frozen in the last image of what I feel. Haunting sounds that need no meaning. Kruisinga. Zandvoort. Jespersen. The more the merrier. Facem o încercare? Make you sad. Run away sometimes.

That time of our lives when the wall went brutally up. God knows who drives the wall. All I could come up with was the train. I want to stop this train the moment we are both on the same side of the wall for ever and ever amen.

II. 15.

On certain days you actually help me move the train. You open a tunnel and it slides forward. Because of the speed I can barely hold my balance. Whatever can be seen out there becomes a swift line——nothing. On those days you fill my heart. Your heart opens and your blood flows into mine.

I am not giving up. In spite of all my fears. The fear that this body comes to you so late.

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III.

The Train

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III. 1.

You reached out for me when I was drowning in my beginning.

I did not know how to follow.

Yet, somehow, you had me think of the train.

III. 2.

Some people tug at your soul. They keep coming whenever you produce your trayful of embers.

This is how I have managed to move this train. Your embers. Our soul.

III. 3.

We have not communicated much in this life.
Closeness to you is a hard-earned privilege.

It has taken me a lifetime to insinuate myself into
your non-communication.

Fearful as God made me, this is the one time in my
timeless when I am unafraid.

III. 4.

I am giving you my intensity now, which was all I could give you when we first met.

III. 5.

My droomdose days. Our dozing days and ways. Y loved you abover all the strest. Y and You. Almost two. Almost one. Above and over. Rest and strest. Rest as all others, rest as repose. Strest sentences coming from dozing days.

It is Joyce day on my train today. All I can hear is the pleasant scratching of the pen I press against the paper as I write. Y write. You. The miracle of ink and a goose quill. The miracle of paper. These letters. The miracle of our minds deciphering them at the same time. You.

It is midnight where you are. Waiting. It is no time here. Merely progress. A soul in progress. Crossing Terra. Hoping to reach. Reading *Finnegans Wake* directly from your thoughts. You wrote it down four times. It is my turn now to write you down and the heat will push this train abover all the strest. I will keep this to myself. From You.

III. 6.

At some point, you began to look at me. A lingering, glittering gaze, half smile, half heavy silence. I may have forgotten bus numbers, prices, acquaintances, history and geography, but the moment you lost your eyes in a Mediterranean I was slowly learning I had in me—that I can never forget.

Thank God for the next to nothing he gave us in this life. Your brief impetus showed the rails to me. My buried knowledge of you waited for the future to die, and the train was born.

When we think together, it moves. I gather you like a fishing net. You do not understand this train as I do, because you have forgotten the past. Take mine. Step into me. There is a burning railroad from your soul to mine.



III. 7.

What I saw then, I was unable to grasp, busy as I was treasuring splinters of space, of future, of wishful thinking, of you.

The stranger suddenly asked: If you were to begin all over again, would you be the same and do what you have done?

All over again——No. The future was a burden I carried badly. And, besides, all over again would mean other coincidences which would lead to other choices which would build another me. With or without you.

With. Has my life been *with* you. Could it have been what it is without you. I have boarded this train whose windows are that which one cannot see, whose wheels move forward pushed by prayer alone——I have boarded this maddeningly slow train precisely in order to find out.

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You—you can only wait. I push the train, I am creating the space it crosses, I am feeding its wheels with moments of utmost vulnerability, the seconds when one realizes, again and again, what an empty word *me* is.

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III. 8.

This journey is like swimming in very cold water. The senses are mortified and exacerbated. The movements——amazing.

Today I can hold out my hand and its expectation will stroke your forehead. You will know it is me. You will know I won't give up. And you will slowly fall asleep into waiting.

III. 9.

Had we spent our times as one, I would have learnt your days. Your nights. I would have taken your clockhands. I would have followed each of your heartbeats.

Would you have left Ithaca and become Nobody. Joyce knows.

I can only imagine. Where his heart my heart did seem. Both adrift on the miraculous stream. Where. Said a learned astrologer: the Zodiac is changed into a Sphere.

This train seems. When we leave the zodiac for the sphere, we will have left ourselves behind.

III. 10.

We spend today in the dining car. I am tired, you are impatient. The train moves. While it is heading for your place in space, you are paying me a short visit.

“Does it not matter that I am not really here?” Not in the least. I have been reaching out for you ever since I can remember. Our insignificant words got the better of us.

Looking for you is the gift of this life. The child, the young boy, the thirty-six-year-old, the fifty-year-old, the eighty-year-old. All in one. All inside me. I can see it all without seeing.

III. 11.

I have always dreamt of taking a train to Sulina. The place where the Danube and the Black Sea meet.

When the wall is gone, what shall I do with this train. The police will fine me continuously for blocking the narrow street beneath your balcony. So many carriages, so much old iron, wheels and embers. I would not want to embarrass you.

“I would never be embarrassed.”

Of course you would not. Who else but us would see a speeding train run by two minds at once.

III. 12.

I am stronger when I send you sentences in my mind.

A silence. A button turned. No more.

Not yet is such a delusion. We fool ourselves we are not yet, again and again. In fact, every this-second-me, next-second-you is a no more.

What was not but could have been is the worst no more right now. Yet, had it been, it would not have made any difference, since it would now be no more anyway.

Then why are your words, your places, that undefinable throb when you speak, so now, so much alive, so sharp.

All it takes to lose you is a mind cut.

All it took to lose you a lifetime ago was a second's expectation.

III. 13.

I look out of the window and I see you in a cage. Somebody else's skin. A Romanian fairy-tale has Prince Charming wear a pig's skin in order to disguise his youth. He takes it off at night and the princess is happy. They are both happy.

We have disguised ourselves all right. We just can't take it off. It cracks, it darkens, it has grown uncomfortable. If I had not put it on, I would be telling you so much right now. As things are, I am ashamed of every word, and you are in physical pain. Because the older this pig's skin gets, the more it hurts. And when one can't push physical pain away, the soul is another universe.

III. 14.

There is a storm ahead of the train. The wind pulls the carriages back and forth. It whirls them around. Fugit irreparabile—Panic. Not reaching you at all. Never finding you. Too late. For me. For you.

Ending the trip without having—what—the wall.

I must pick up my strength and dispel the storm. Something in you, fragile and tender, sweet and gentle like a wondering eye, is waiting.

III. 15.

It may be a station. It may be a halo. Whatever it is, you are here.

You do not speak. I do not utter a sound. That is how I know what you think. This is how you know each one of my thoughts before it is born. You are here, so I know I am.

Your hand. A channel opens into somewhere else. You slip ahead. But I can't move. I have no legs to walk, no wings to fly, no strength to follow.

I want to share your speechlessness. I had almost reached you. Hold my hand. Stay.

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IV.

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IV. 1.

Even though you are always hungry for the next movement, you have no hope and never trust the future. You choose the quick flesh, use it and lose it. No clinging. The heart is a net that must not strangle your brain with its myriad blood vessels.

The train has been standing still for an eternity.

IV. 2.

I cannot make the train move. This is the day when I can see the wall.

It is tall, grey, amorphous. No light, no sound, no gesture, and no thought. Life fails.

IV. 3.

The strange thing. You are here and I cannot see you.
You talk to me and I do not understand your words. You
find me and I cannot believe you have been looking.

IV. 4.

You say there is no train and there is no train.

You say I can't drive a train in your direction and I cannot.

You say I cannot see that other world because I do not qualify and I do not.

Now you can tell me I will never find my way to you.

Now you can tell me I am too weak to move a train.

Now you can say I deserved all the things I missed.
Deserved to miss, that is.

And then your mood can change and you can say I am sorry. Now you can be sorry for all time to come.

Inside this wall.

IV. 5.

While my thought sleeps, your mind takes huge bites out of my heart and the blood leaves trails, which become rails, which rails I follow.

I am your train today. Suddenly barriers are broken and we are flooded. I am floating. You are opening the way. I am following. My blood. Your bite.

IV. 6.

The Wall. All over.

Nearly identical. Vastly apart.

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IV. 7.

Trying so hard to swallow distance.
In the bricks of this wall.

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IV. 8.

Knowing the future is the profession of your present.
I only know after I have turned the corner.

To make things worse, you look ahead while I look
back.

Our time is an hour glass. Each second of separation
falls and adds to the time we have not. Then someone
comes and turns the hour glass—for somebody else.

I am alone in my childhood. Irretrievably born.

IV. 9.

I have sunk back into the distance I had defeated.
Losing us fast. Silence swallowed everything.

Specks of soul.

This darkness that blinds me lest I should see the
end. This wall.

IV. 10.

In the middle of nowhere, buried in the snow of
never was or ever will be.

I close my eyes. Galuppi fifth sonata first movement
played by Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli.

Sinking in frozen sleep.

IV. 11.

My skin has frozen.

My eyes are an immense heap of seen fragments.

Mirrors of you. Broken.

My shoulders arch and break.

My breath falls in icicles.

My mind is frozen into an old, stubborn memory of
a train burning towards you.

IV. 12.

Your thoughts play chess with me. I have never played chess well. I am not good at contingency plans.

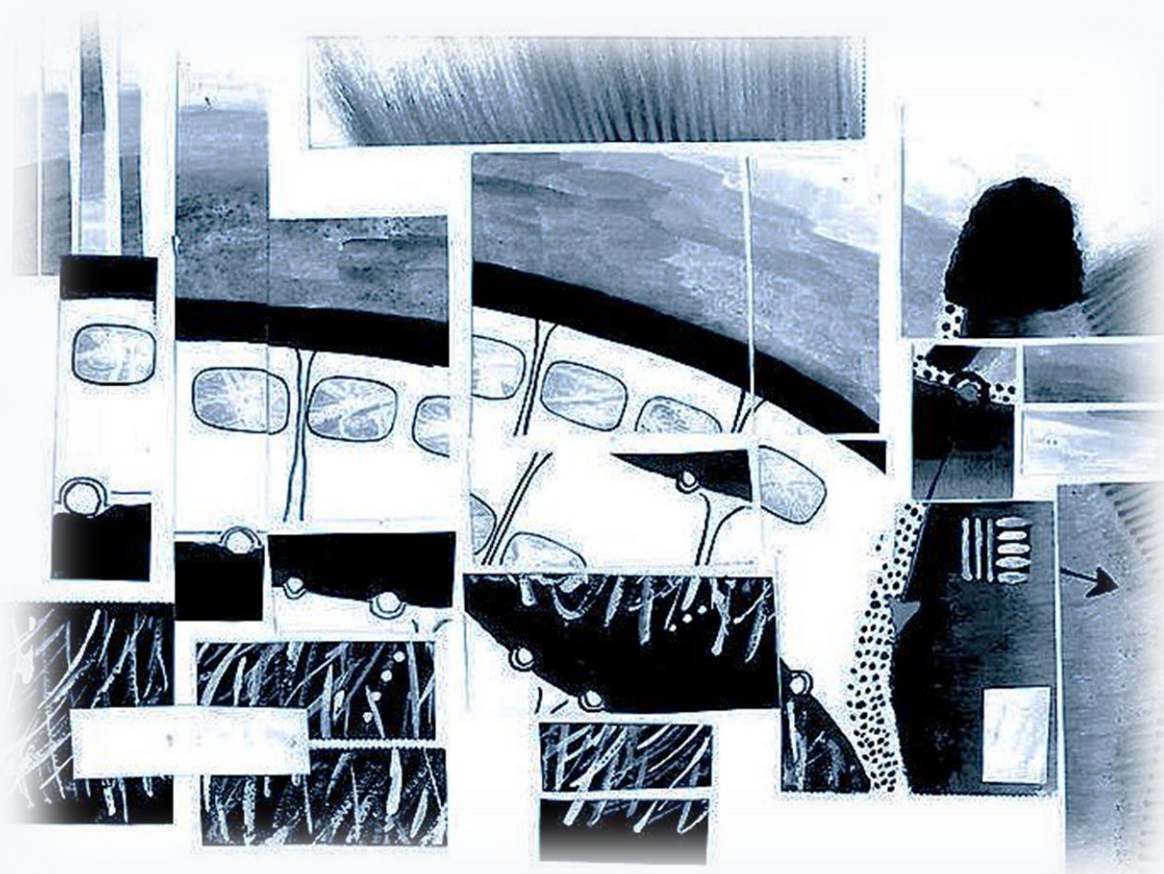
Back there, in one winter memory, you were playing with Falken-Flug-Hawk's-Flight. I was outside your window. Trying not to flap my wings.

Forty years later, you have opened the window.

You cannot see me because of the wall.

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IV. 13.

Of all the people in my life, only two have made me feel spoilt.

If you could make me feel spoilt one more time, I might be able to melt out of this wall.

IV. 14.

The Scandinavian god Odin was vulnerable to holly.
Christmas in the wall with you.

Be my window.

Open. I will fly out.

Like the planes you used to watch daily, thinking:
One day I will get on one and leave.

IV. 15.

My body tugging at the sleeve of your mind. My smile. My belief in you.

I long for a short prayer of my race. The shortest ever. My race, which I have denied for so long. And which denies me prayer now.

“Do not doubt me. Stop doubting me.”

How can I. I am built on doubt. I doubted you from day one. For once, I believed—and here I am. In the wall.



IV. 16.

I twice failed to reach you. In both cases, it happened
in a room with a view. A white bed-sheet with faint traces
of your sleeping on it. A sharp intensity that cut me off.

My own inability to find the way.

I created the wall.

You simply gave in.

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IV. 17.

The memory of hours when you sniffed time like marijuana. And it worked.

The train was not movement. It was an eagerness to reach.

IV. **11 + 7.**

There must be a tunnel between your soul and mine,
or I would not have survived in this wall for so long.

I go by the touch of your hand. A sign from back
then.

It hurts to know you are, and not be with you.

One is more when one is not——maybe.

IV. 19.

I keep seeing your sparkling eyes always smiling.
My smile was a precaution. And I found you out in yours.

While the train kept flying, I hoped its speed was
your expectation drawing me towards you.

“I do not live in reality.”

Who was moving and who was waiting when
movement and waiting were one.

This wall did not take me by surprise.

IV. 20.

The shrieking of wheels.

Carriages fall abruptly, lower and lower down, sliding at a speed that makes one nauseous. I keep sinking.

I had got used to immobility. There is always something worse than the worst day you have lived.

I don't even try to hold on. If I fly out of the window into inexistence, what will that be like.

This is more a rending of space than movement. Slicing the mind.

IV. 21.

There is always a slope somewhere, just as there is a wall. I can't help being afraid.

"I am seven."

"I am twenty-one."

"But I will be eight next year."

"And I will be twenty-two."

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IV. 22.

Shshsht. A seagull outside the window. Knocking on it with its red beak. One, two, three times. Wherefrom?

Scientists have discovered a tiny speck of matter that travels faster than light. The past can happen all over again. This seagull is the messenger.

We must let it enjoy the repeat.

I will be this seagull. Suspended. A confused speck of matter knocking on your window. A universe. All over again.

18 June 1969



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– *You are here*

– *I am*

– *I must go*

Train—————**Wall**

– *Not this time*

– *We are not using words*

– *Think*

– *What is it you want so much*

– *To be you*



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