THE WALL

The wall: mossed over, except where
sharp with old hard hand-hewn stone,
mellow with crumbling lichen’s richer flecks.

In the deep woods I found the wall
seeming to run under the moon so many
many miles, as in some Mongol night.

Beyond such walls strange to discover
forgotten childhood’s sacred wood of dreams;
but you have recalled to me how many walls I build. 1969

IF CHOPIN CAN
(for David Morley)

Is there no theme enough for rage
once more in a strew of lines across
a manuscript? In history has blood enough
flowed in massacre after massacre
where lopped heads rolled with the eyes
staring still, lips twitching soundless screams?
Or bellies laid open to spill blue-grey
guts of life’s ending in welters of blood?
Or eyes turned back in sockets in the head
of the girl-child split by a rapist’s thrust?
Yet music, terrible again can play in death-
march these terrors until ears are deafened.

Or in a turning of the page, now the notes
sound sweet and low, woo our senses
with another arpeggio? And bring further
types of tears to flow? Then can’t the poet
heat our blood as well, so that each word
moves our moods like the rising flood
of desire with its piercing pain, promising
deliverance in brief release? We have
known that fiery touch of love opening
treasuries of fiercest desire that music
may rage or soothe subsequently in flood.

But the words here, even as they take form,
bleach in intellect’s bold glare. So should
poetry try violently to resist? Turn back the tide
of reason like some IED laid across the track
and then with its fraying fuse of passion
sunder the nets of syntax, pluck apart logic’s
pacifying order, the amplitude of argument,
and negate each didact’s stultifying prose.
This world is not to be made meet and right, its disorder, bloody misrule hidden from regard and citizens kept safely calm.

Oh, I wish to walk alone in rhythm sprung and find somewhere in the hills a stone wall by the dry bank of a stream. Shelter under the arch of some weathered bridge and seek to find the buried feelings in my words once more. For we were born to rage at times, leap high for joy, or at midnight fall to weeping. Find embraces in our families to be returned with fervour; and seek out strangers to welcome freely into our fold.

Yet subversion, shunned into printed words, stuns the stillborn songs, neuters them safely on white text pages pert with intellectual sneers while we all sit primly guarding what we hide perfidiously between our thighs. Made safe and above all privates. Oh yes, improperly at ease, dismissed from parade. Yet you could do so much more had you strength and courage to set words on wing like blazing arrows singing as so many insane Chopins or Beethovens. Or even simpler tunes of shepherd’s flute, herdsman plucking a domra, sounding a dulcimer. The intricate bowing of twin strings
of an erhu plaintively in some green
bamboo grove might free those secret
markings, hieroglyphs brushed or letters
littered across page after vacant page.

LONGING JUST FOR YOU

(Beethoven’s Violin Sonata No 5 in F Major)

The taut strings’ bowed strokes of love
set my waiting heart to song again.
And these are the notes I send to you,
so far from me now that I feel
torn by the storm that blows this night
outside in the tall trees. This song
I make is of life’s sweet growth
rising in the grass blades, in stem
of the crimson rose, in green cable lengths
of the bamboo grove, in the lily’s fresh
stem that bears the purest flower.

Oh my love, so far away, don’t leave
me listening alone this raining night.