

AUDACIOUS
WOMEN
FESTIVAL

AUDACIART WEEKLY

The Wall

22 May 2020

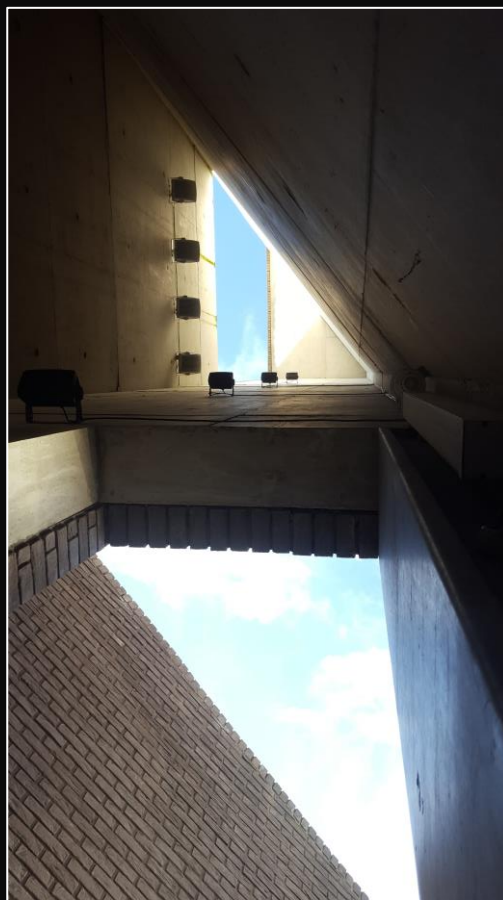


Photo: The Wall © Sally Wainwright

An Audacious Women Publication



AudaciArt – The Wall

This week's theme, *The Wall*, is a bit of a cheat! Instead of being suggested by a quote, it comes from an entire book, **The Memoirs of A Survivor** by Doris Lessing.

It's a dystopian novel set in a near future Britain after an unspecified disaster known as 'The Crisis'. (Not too different from where we are today some might say!) As the narrator charts the disintegration of society she periodically meditates on a wall in her flat, enabling her to traverse time and space. Whilst one reviewer labelled the book a failure, Marleen S Barr* argues feminist science fiction novels such as this provide an alternate viewpoint that "dissolve walls that imprison women within a sexist reality."

Thanks to Emma Gibbons for the idea, and her reflections on the book.

We'd welcome your suggestions of inspirational quotes by/about women – just email them to info@audaciouswomen.scot

AudaciArt

Hallo Everybody

Here we are with the 7th AudaciArt publication: a weekly collection of words and pictures inspired by a quotation (or in this case a book) by an audacious woman. Women are invited to create and submit any type of work inspired by the theme. Details are on [our website](#).

If you'd like to see our earlier editions you can [read and download them](#) here.

Many thanks to all our contributors and to the Audacious Women Collective Members and volunteers who helped to make this possible.

The theme for Friday 29th May @ noon is: How Wild it Was

And for the following Friday 5th June @ noon:

Physical Distance – Not Social

Remember, during this period of physical distancing Audacious Women is running a series of [online events](#) to help build women's community, and to keep in touch with each other and our audacious natures.

* Marleen S. Barr (2005). "[Feminist Fabulation](#)". In David Seed (ed.). *A Companion to Science Fiction*. Wiley-Blackwell.



Contents

Cover: The Wall	Sally Wainwright
P4: Reflections on The Memoirs of A Survivor	Emma Gibbons
P5: Leaving Piraeus	Sally Wainwright
P9: The Door Opening Ceremony	Jo Cameron Duguid
P11: Berlin!!	Anne Conrad
P12: The Teeter-Totter Wall Project	Hilery Williams



Reflections on The Memoirs of A Survivor

Emma Gibbons

In a previous email I mentioned that The Wall could be a theme for one week's Audaciart. This is inspired by my favourite all time book (not read for decades but rereading now) Doris Lessing's Memoirs of a Survivor that has a similar situation to what we are going through now, eg. *Looking back I can say definitely that the growth of that other life or form of being behind that wall had been at the back of my mind for a long time before I realised what it was I had been listening for. But I can't set down a date or time. Certainly this inner preoccupation predated the other public concern to which I've given - I hope it is not thought frivolously - the word 'it'.* The book is set in a time of great change in society that is similar to the current civil measures going on.

The narrator of the story imagines she travels through the wall and the description of the family through the wall and the wall itself had a great resonance with me when I read the book before, so much so that when my neighbours used to hammer on the party wall I gave her a copy of the book. But she didn't read it and nor did I at the time. And at the moment suddenly we are all having to face four walls and relate to our neighbours in a different way. In addition the technology we have makes us see through walls into people's homes.

One beautiful passage likens the wall to an egg: *Behind the fragile lime . . . the precise and accurate time it needs to get itself out of the dark prison, . . . I even found myself putting my ear to the wall, as one would to a fertile egg.*

And before this: *I was feeling more and more that my ordinary daytime life was irrelevant. Unimportant. That wall had become to me ...an obsession. ... I was beginning to believe....what went on behind the wall might be every bit as important as my ordinary life in my neat and comfortable, if shabby, flat. I would stand in the living-room - the colours were predominantly cream, yellow, white, or at least enough of these to make it seem that walking into the room was walking into sunlight - I would wait there, and look quietly at the wall. Solid. Ordinary.*

The start of the coronavirus pandemic lockdown was a big rapid alteration in the functioning of our day to day life that reminded me of the 'it' that was coming in Memoirs of a Survivor. The feeling that the streets aren't safe anymore and that people are all cooped up in their homes or perhaps making arrangements to leave and go to the country. The way we had to look inwards and connect with those around us in different and new ways. (I still haven't connected with the neighbours through the wall although they tap on it quite a bit.) I think that it was very difficult at the be start and I was concerned about my autistic son in the care home, now it seems as if we are through it but for some who have been on their own in care homes with four walls to stare at and with a loss of the usual limited freedoms it will take much longer to begin to relax and get back to normal.

I reread the book in the middle of the lockdown and it was a bit different to how I remembered it but still my favourite.



Leaving Piraeus

Sally Wainwright



Refugees passing the time on Piraeus harbour wall

I spent my last night in the refugee camp at Piraeus with two intelligent, thoughtful and engaging young men who may be dead by the time you read this. They both are learning English and I taught them the phrase Hobson's Choice. They taught me the definition of it.

"Abdul" is a 19 year old Hazara Afghan. For most of his life he'd lived illegally in Iran with his family who had fled there to escape persecution by the Taliban. The Afghans are tolerated there so long as they work as farm labourers or in other menial roles but have little chance of advancement, he told me. He wanted to study maths and physics at university but the Iranians were rounding up all the young Afghans and forcing them to join the army to fight in Syria. Abdul could return to Afghanistan and take his chances against the Taliban, fight for Iran against the Saudis, or flee. Of these Hobson's options, fleeing was the least worst.

Having finally reached Turkey, Abdul made three attempts at the dangerous sea crossing to Chios. He had never learned to swim and was frightened of the water having nearly drowned as a child. On one crossing the boat capsized and he was lucky to be rescued by the Turkish coast guard.

"Amir" is a 23 year old who obtained an economics degree before also leaving for Iran and then fleeing to Turkey. He had crossed by sea to Kos and gone north, making three attempts to cross the border into Macedonia, walking for 18 hours and spending 5 nights sleeping in what he called the jungle. Each time they were caught



at the border. Once he'd been jailed for a week. The other times he'd simply been deported to the refugee camp at Idomeni.

Abdul and Amir met and become friends in Piraeus. They have both been there several months, doing nothing – there is literally nothing to do - and have left the camp only two or three times because they are harassed by the police when they



Families lived in these tents for months on end

leave the camp and try to return. They asked me why some Greek people are afraid them. They wanted to know which European countries would be best to live in, and free from racism. I didn't know either. They asked about my daughter, who's a year younger than Abdul, is she at university? Why had she left school? What is she doing now? They were interested in

the EU referendum which was taking place the following week, and the question of Scottish independence. Amir said Afghanistan is in the same position as Scotland, not independent but ruled by another country. First the Russians, then the Americans and the British, now the Taliban.

Neither is planning on claiming asylum in Greece. If they did claim asylum here they reckon they have a 50% chance of being deported to Afghanistan as it is considered a 'safe' country. If they aren't deported, they face spending the rest of their lives struggling to survive, unable to work or study. As Abdul said, Greece is a very poor country and with the best will in the world, can't afford to look after hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Greece of course is the perfect country for the EU to have picked as its prison – surrounded largely by sea and with few land borders to patrol. Having tried the overland route already, it seemed to them that their only alternative was to travel illegally to another country by air or sea. 3,500 euros apiece would buy them a fake passport and travel by plane anywhere they chose, or they could stow away in a container. The safer option, travel by air, wasn't open to them. After months of paying smugglers and with no means of earning money, they had no way to obtain the amount of cash required. Faced with another Hobson's Choice - possible return to Afghanistan, a life of poverty and nothingness or trying to escape elsewhere, they were seriously considering the container.

Amir had been the one to speak to the Pakistani smuggler, who had explained the container route to him. They should expect to spend about 50 hours in the container. The smuggler would break in, without knowing in advance what it contained, maybe watermelons. It was only several days later that it occurred to me that this meant it would likely be refrigerated, but this wasn't mentioned. Maybe Amir hadn't thought of



it either. (I later discovered that they had thought of it. It will be refrigerated, this means there will be oxygen and they assure me I'm not to worry about the cold, they grew up in the mountains where the temperatures could drop to -40, they're not afraid of the cold, it'll be safer than the sea was). They would get in on the dock side where the containers awaited loading. Space restrictions meant they could take water but no food. They would wait in the container for up to a day or so, until it was loaded, then travel by sea. When they arrived, the container would probably be checked by customs, but they weren't to make themselves known at that point as they might be sent straight back to Greece. They should, instead, wait a couple of hours, then start banging and hope the driver heard them.

"We know it's dangerous, we know we might die", Amir told me, "but it's better to try to have a life than dying here." I was reminded of La Pasionaria's famous statement "It's better to die on your feet than live forever on your knees". But dying in the dark, at sea, in a container full of watermelons is a terrible way to have to demonstrate it. "We haven't told any of the other volunteers. We only tell you. Please don't say anything," they added. I promised.



Waiting in the dinner queue in the midday sun

When Abdul was finally back from the interminable dinner queue, with the tasteless concoction that passed as meals, for himself and Amir, they invited me to eat with them. We sat on a military blanket, right at the edge of the harbour wall, surrounded by cruise ships. Next to us a mother and small toddler were also sitting on the edge, leaning over to see the little fishes that swam round in the harbour. It was certainly the only entertainment available, but I couldn't watch in case the child slipped in.

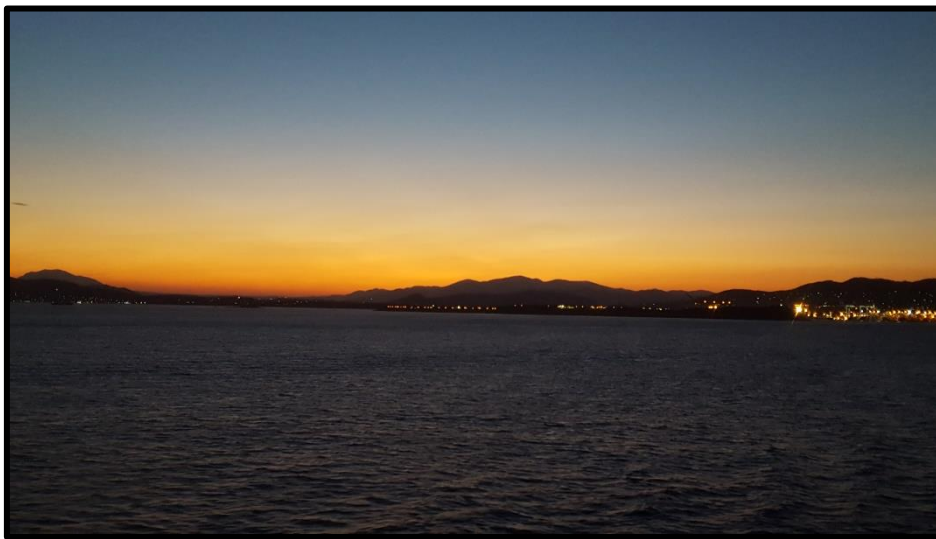
We ate with a slightly older man who Amir explained couldn't come with them since he had children here. "We're going the day after tomorrow." I had no words. Instead I shared the Greek salad I'd bought for my trip, which delighted them. "We love tomatoes but we never get them here" they explained. They insisted I had a peach and some of their small supply of cold water, which their friend had carried back from town. Cold water was a luxury. In a makeshift "camp" with no rooms, nor tents tall enough to stand in, nor beds, nor tables and chairs, nor cooking facilities, nor proper sanitation there was certainly no hope of air-con or refrigeration.



Before we could talk any more, we were joined by another young man who'd been an interpreter for the US army, and was therefore supposed to have been automatically entitled to asylum in the States. But at the last minute they'd turned down his application, deeming him instead an "economic migrant" because at his interview he'd told them honestly that he no longer had a job. (Surely this could have had nothing to do with his previous employment. Could it?)

Eventually the clock struck 10 and it was time for me to leave. Hugs all round and promises to keep in touch and I went in search of Michael, the lovely young volunteer who had the key for the container where I'd left my suitcase. He was touchingly concerned for me when he found out my erstwhile travelling companion might not meet me off the boat, in which case I'd be stranded in Rhodes with a limited supply of cash and no bank card. In the middle of a sea of hopeless desperation and real impoverishment I could only say I was sure something will work out.

Once on the ferry I dumped my bag in my cabin and went to look round the boat. Sitting on the upper deck in the dark, watching the shore line recede, I was haunted by thoughts of how different Abdul and Amir's departure would be. Then I looked down. Below me was the car deck. Crowded with container lorries.



Last view of Piraeus

Postscript:

I wrote this in July 2016. After several failed attempts to escape Greece together the men decided to try their luck separately. Abdul went north and tried to make it on foot through the Balkan route. The last time I heard from him he had been caught, arrested and taken to a closed camp in Serbia. I have no idea what happened to him. After more than a year of trying, Amir eventually made his way to France where he was granted asylum and the right to remain for 10 years.

Copyright © 2020 Sally Wainwright



The Door Opening Ceremony

Jo Cameron Duguid

When my husband and I married at the end of 2013, at the ages of 60 and 58, we bought two next door flats, with a view to turning them into one larger flat. For a few months, I lived in one flat and he lived in the other, as we each had our furniture in one of the flats. We had a small gathering to mark the completion of the work to join the two flats together. Jumping at an opportunity to make a speech, this is what I delivered:

There are a lot of ill-informed people who think that the Big Opening Ceremony this week was the one for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow! But I'm here to tell you that you lucky people had the golden tickets, the exclusive invites to the Door Opening Ceremony in Edinburgh that marks the end of the wall that separated me from my dear husband. Throughout history, there have of course been many famous walls – the walls of Jericho, the Berlin Wall, Hadrian's Wall, the Great Wall of China; as well as, of course, Walls ice-cream and Wall-E, which were my other half's helpful contributions to my brain-storming session on the subject. And here you see before you the E_____ Place Wall.

Walls serve to separate people, and often lead to tragic outcomes for people who love each other. So none is more relevant to our gathering here today than the wall that separated Pyramus and Thisbe, two young lovers in ancient Babylon who lived under the same roof but in adjoining houses. Their story is told by the poet Ovid, in his collection known as *Metamorphoses*. He writes:

“fissus erat tenui rima, quam duxerat olim,
cum fieret, paries domui communis utrique..”

Oh, OK, for those whose Latin is a bit rusty, in English translation:

“In the wall that parted the two houses there was a crack, caused by some fault in the structure. No one had remarked it before, but the lovers discovered it. What will love not discover? It afforded a passage to the voice; and tender messages used to pass backward and forward through the gap. As they stood, Pyramus on this side, Thisbe on that, their breaths would mingle. 'Cruel wall,' they said, 'why do you keep two lovers apart? But we will not be ungrateful. We owe you, we confess, the privilege of transmitting loving words to willing ears.' Such words they uttered on different sides of the wall; and when night came and they must say farewell, they pressed their lips upon the wall, she on her side, he on his, as they could come no nearer.”

So you can conjure up a picture of the life we were living when this was a solid wall, and my husband was “the boy next door”. Sadly, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe is a tragic Romeo and Juliet kind of affair, as their fathers opposed their marriage and it all ends in a bloodbath involving a lioness, a torn and bloody veil and swords



plunged despairingly into bosoms. We were more fortunate! Our fathers were both too old and infirm to prevent our somewhat impetuous marriage, and we had the means and the services of a local building firm to install a *door* in the wall to join our

two flats together just as we have joined our two lives together. We are here today to mark the official opening of that door, so I'll invite our lovely niece to cut the ribbon and ask all of us to raise our glasses in a toast to "The Joined Up Life!"

Copyright © 2020 Jo Cameron Duguid



Berlin!
Anne Conrad



Copyright © 2020 Anne Conrad



The Teeter-Totter Wall Project

Hilery Williams

Did you see the video last July: the one where children (and not a few adults) rose and fell, rose and fell, tummies lurching up and down, on 3 pink seesaws?

There was laughter and excitement, chatter and togetherness, Spanish and English. One connection defying The Wall.

Eyes met and smiles shone through the barricade, the hideous fortification that divides people in Mexico and the US.

That temporary art installation demonstrated how actions taking place on one side have a direct consequence on the other.

Just kids (and their mums and dads) having fun.

Is that too much to expect?

Copyright © 2020 Hilery William