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When I conceptualised the theme for this issue of *FORUM* I had in mind that it ought to be relevant and engaged with the world today. The first idea that came to me was the theme of *walls*. In the wake of Donald Trump's election, it seems that walls have been the subject of nearly every discussion, that they have seized social attention with an inescapable grip, and, as a result, that it would be an apt subject for Issue 28. Indeed, the shock of Donald Trump's election and of his rhetoric – reaffirmed at every possible opportunity – has been so great that it has crossed borders and sent ripples that can still be felt years after his election. That is not to say that Donald Trump is the only champion of walls. Indeed, the subject, in its largest expression and conception, has affected and continues to affect more than North America alone. Here, in the United Kingdom, it is needless to say, Brexit dominates headlines. In Europe, Viktor Orbán and Hungary immediately come to mind. In South America, Nicolás Maduro and the situation in Venezuela may serve as examples. In Asia, we can think of the protests in Hong Kong and, more generally, of China's 'one country, two systems' principle and of its enforcement of the 'Great Firewall'. These are a few of the many examples of the walls – physical or incorporeal – that currently affect people all over the globe. What's alarming is that these few examples are only scratching the surface.

The issue of walls, however, is not a new one by any means. Indeed, it has historical precedents and dimensions. In the not-so-distant past, Berlin was literally divided by a wall. If we venture beyond recent memory, an incomplete list of historically important walls would include the likes of the remnants of Great Zimbabwe, Babylon in Iraq, the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Hadrian's Wall, the Great Wall of China, as well as the walls of Troy and of Istanbul in Turkey. Again, these few examples are only scratching the surface and the list could go on and on, but that would be missing the point. My aim is not to list a catalogue but rather to demonstrate that walls have been built all over the world as the result of political, religious, historical, cultural, or military conflicts. Yet, despite their different and various origins, geneses, benefactors, and victims, they all *symbolise*.

This is where art and literature come into play. Walls are rife with contradictions and symbolically charged: they are at once historical and contemporary, they simultaneously entrench divisions and bring or force people together, they protect and

expose, show and obscure. Thus, as a result of their centrifugal nature as symbols, they have inspired artists and writers alike to explore the possible permutations between the symbolic potential of walls and artistic expression. In some instances, artists have felt compelled to reminds us of the historical significance of walls. In other instances, they have attempted to spell out their immediate and current meaning for us because, as ostentatious as they are and perhaps directly as a result of their omnipresence, walls have become common place and are largely overlooked. More interestingly, perhaps, artists have also attempted to exploit their symbolic ambivalence in works of arts to question, underline, and critique not just the walls themselves but the contexts, systems, forces, and apparatuses from which they emerge. Walls in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," for example, come to criticize and denounce the rest cure and by extension the patriarchy. Virginia Woolf, in "A Mark on the Wall," uses them as a springboard for philosophical meditations. In *The Castle* and "The Great Wall of China," Franz Kafka uses walls to interrogate authority and the very idea of nation building. In a similar vein, Robert Frost stages complaisant habit in "Mending Wall." On a somewhat more cheerful note, James Joyce uses Tim Finnegan's and Humpty Dumpty's respective falls as the catalyst for his archetypal, cyclical, polyphonic, polysemic, dream-vision of history in *Finnegans Wake*. Elsewhere, walls have literally been transformed into artworks in the form of murals and frescoes. In Mexico, for example, the politically charged murals of *Los Tres Grandes* unified people in the aftermath of the revolution. More recently, the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University in India have used the walls of their institution as the canvas for their political and social messages. Thus, despite appearing mundane and uninspiring, walls are charged with symbolic value and potential that can reach into political, religious, cultural, historical and artistic spheres.

The aims of Issue 28, then, has been to encourage students to think about walls in their physical, psychological, and metaphorical manifestations, and to explore their many facets and connotations. The submissions we have received from students for this issue have demonstrated that literary, artistic, and cultural studies and practices are ways of drawing links between ideas and actions, of discerning patterns between the past and the present, and of bringing to light the lessons to be learned. In turn, they showcase, too, that the work lies in our ability to recognize and articulate these elements in a productive, helpful, and digestible way. With that said, we have selected articles that think critically

and creatively about the theme of walls in an effort to showcase this plurality and to continue to encourage a wide-range of students and ideas. In turn, we hope that these articles teach us something and that they inspire us to think about the walls in our own lives.

Author Biography

Dominic Richard is the current editor-in-chief of *FORUM* and is completing his Masters' in Literature and Modernity at the University of Edinburgh. His dissertation aims to explore the musical parallels between James Joyce and Dante, which is the kernel of a larger literary project. His research focuses primarily on the relationship between music and literature, and more specifically on the use of musical techniques, devices, and forms in literature, but he is also interested in questions concerning the definition of modernist and post-modernist literatures. He has written and presented at various conferences on James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov, and Knud Hamsun, and was the editor of the French section of the Canadian journal of philosophy *Pensées Canadiennes*.