

*Brian Swann*

## **The Cow and the Wall**

Up on former pastures cows once climbed & snorted  
at something poking out at them, large trees now fly till they  
run out of air, & the mountain itself tugs  
out its roots, shedding bits of itself like bark  
or hair caught on snags of a rough June sky.  
But on the lower slopes cows still clamber about in fields  
they keep clear with deer who lead them astray into corn-patches,  
or, like the Holstein heifer Bailey, leap  
over walls to get at fallen apples on my land,  
where I watch her nip and slurp till they go off  
in her four stomachs like timebombs quenched by pails  
of gasoline so she takes off after herself  
where she had last seen herself, trying to jump  
back over the wall backwards & logical, again & again,  
bellowing for me to put things back the way they were  
when everything worked, turn things around  
so she'll know what was where by what had been there.  
Soon she's jumping backwards, expecting to go forward,  
her rubber shoes hitting the flat stone keys,  
accompanying herself in a low moan till the northern lights  
go off in her eyes & the stones all round begin to  
call out from their ancient deeps, an echo to her grand  
confusion of mind, as if together they can solve  
how place can stay the same yet reach  
different conclusions until after a while it seems  
as if the wall is wailing & the cow  
jumping in place like a wall trying to clear itself,  
growing less convinced it is making progress, going  
from a place it no longer wants to a place  
it can no longer reach & loving the world.