

Someone You Know

More than the dove, more than the mulberry

It's me that autumn loves. Gives me a veil.

"Take this for dreaming, " says its stitchery.

And: "God's as nearby as the vulture's nail."

-Paul Celan from "The Lonely One"

Not the snow, the frost: veil over mouth.

Not the dust, not the barracks in moonlight.

Not the wind, the smoke, the ash on the sill:

someone you know? Not the lightheaded women

at the window listening in their heads,

waiting for what? For the angels to arrive in a hurry.

For the garments you wore in a world you once knew:

a table with candle flame, an opus in a half-lit room:

your grand piano, your husband and child, such beauty,

more than the dove, more than the mulberry.

He is the field, the flood the law breaking itself.

He is the small sack of salt, the deluge confined

to no peril, the foot of Moses on the temple door.

He is the God, after all. He is the God!

See for yourself how the world turns and the news comes

by cattle car, by helmets and cross belts and boots. Inhale

beyond what is carted off. We are ankle deep in it, digging

our graves, burying our bones where his hand begins.

Cover us, the still living, hear our wail,

It's me that autumn loves. Gives me a veil.

(stanza break)

Let me look to the icy blackness —through the evening's
dark by this window of lingering widows — to be somewhere
other than where I am, which is no country at all, that I might
sleep a painless sleep in a district drunk with stars,
ungovernable on the outskirts of a far-flung township, whose
waving flag remains in the shadows of this remote humility.
Take my panicked feet married to the barrack floor, centuries
of being summoned to a transitory patch of land.
Deliver us our fragmentary scroll. Mend our deficiency,
“Take this for dreaming,” says its stitchery.

Among the signs which spelled disaster, our family — dismantled —
in lines to the left or the right. Among the exiles at your back,
a million shoes off the feet of children, mothers tilting their heads
toward the world which is no longer their world. For you the earth
of cloistered exits is a temple. Our shoes in piles — our tomb unveiled.
Appear somehow among the waste facing the world's secret injuries.
As if we mattered, dress us in cast-off overcoats that we may leave
this life behind, though this is no life. And show yourself to some avail,
As: “God's as nearby as the vulture's nail.”