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Two Lines from Paul Celan

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Two Lines from Paul Celan · *Mark Halperin*

At nightfall the sky was various
blues and grays moving into each other.
You drew the drapes then gathered
with the others before the wireless,
only you listening to the leaves
fill like teacups. Then the war was over

and you lived in this foreign city
where you have slipped on a raincoat
and gone for the evening paper.
Behind a warehouse, the yellow moon
rises, bearing your lost mittens
and the copybook between whose ruled veins

you had seen the sky at Gilgal
keeping light wonderfully, a drama
of finite scope, finite duration.
The next day, your parents packed
an overnight bag. Smoke
widens at the tall brick stacks

east of you. They never returned.
The boy who dashes past bends
his head, but you have seen his eyes,
blue or brown as your own. You lift
your collar and cross one of the bridges,
pass beneath the streetlamps, from light

to dark, from dark to light,
to your own door. You've forgotten
the paper, but the mittens are
recollected and, safely, the copybook too.
At your back, leaves turn over. The wind
spills them carrying a Russian song.

The sun stood still; the moon halted.
A circus? the seacoast? Out of what
other contradiction could you hope
to render such implacable grief:
things lost were not lost,
the heart was a place made fast.