Making It

*And art made tongue-tied by authority. (Shakespeare, Sonnet 66)*

When self-pitying, I think of Shostakovich,

fallen out with Stalin. With drawers of unheard

music, forced to deliver speech after speech

ghost-written by hacks, he persisted, undeterred,

both music and a breakable body in time.

History had its way with him, and yet,

even while engaged in party pantomime,

his fingers tapped out melodies in secret.

No martyr, he chose to accommodate.

He neither defected nor risked the gulag.

Despite this, for me, he remains great,

a fellow soul who shook before the whispering.

Survival is a kind of heroism, I say,

the bald audaciousness of another day.

Bridge

Shostakovich frets the morning air—war,

factories—an archeology of human striving. Here

in the laze of lockdown, the music seems

out of place, a pathway back in time

to when we thought ourselves our own guinea pigs,

able to set parameters and rewind when things

got out of hand. This viral spring, leaves

unfurl as if mirrors, an anatomy of lives

doomed from birth, domed in sap and blood.

We see the web in which we’re caught and brood.

A thousand writers try a thousand Delphic

metaphors for rage, gratitude, dismay—the bank

of words drawn down as urgent voices grope

for a bridge understanding, a clarifying trope.

Even Unrecognized

*What could stand against the noise of time?*

*Only that music inside ourselves*,

mused Shostakovich—the not-yet-limned

secret fastness where we delve.

Critics might call us muddled and indulgent,

condemning us to be unread and un-played.

Astounded that we alone find it fulgent,

we scan our work at night, these things we’ve made.

Are we the gifted ones history will absolve?

Hear our bitter laughter from the grave

as the wheel of human taste revolves

lifting us from pit to pinnacle, saved.

And if not—our art still elevates:

each word, each note considered and deliberate.