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# Forks to the Forehead

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Forks to the Forehead

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## Abstract

Forks to the Forehead is a collection of poems that explore how truth heralds awareness and vice versa. In this collection I attempt to move towards the difficult and nebulous possibility of describing truths through the use of abstract art, translation, testimony, introspection, and cosmology to spark the brain's neuroplasticity by activating left and right brain connectivity in effort to redefine personal reality and achieve clarity, though not always pleasant.

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## **Odd, The Repetition**

Mirrors. Planetary revolutions.  
Flight patterns. Folded days.  
Birds with no wings. Saturn exploding  
(only twice, right?). Your voice,  
lending sight, then dissolving  
in fog like atomized glass  
into grey velvet.

## **THE EARTH AND SKY (universal forks)**

## **What I Found in the Center of Orion**

Blind rats. Floating in gelatinous red.  
They open their eyes only long enough  
to become the contrived nuance  
in this poem. They don't notice me,  
just the commotion I make as I try  
to swim by. Quietly. They can still bite.

## **Waking on Europa**

Lunar light. You see  
when I cannot. Here.  
Here where clouds  
break into earth  
I don't wonder why  
we touch ice and fog.



## **A hill of stones**

I climb to seduce  
(charm)(invite)(lure)  
the clear light of Venus

behind sickened clouds  
filtered sun offers only  
the retinal counterfeit.

## **Babies**

dream inside dusty cradles  
of unrequited nebulas. Wriggling.  
Sighing. Saying their prayers. Wishing  
upon themselves. Wanting  
to be born. It's hardly fair  
they have to wait  
billions of years.

## **Buttons on the Beach**

Shells. Broken sand dollars. Glass. This  
and migrant birds. Fowl. Not buttons  
escaped from eyeholes drift south  
from loose mooring. The Earth  
split from above, opens herself to sun. Our bodies  
become heavy against the rise of sea.

## **Cerulean Light Mass**

*Nachtlicht ist immer flüssig.*

We pause bare feet  
on fallow field riddled  
with pigweed and ash.

Beneath charcoaled sky  
and stars  
the naked eye  
fills to drowning.

## Sawtooth

The slow upward calculation

of the barometer starts the ascent. A Millennium  
has been marked by this waveform. Cold nourishment

in an age of troughs when finely penciled articulation  
can't even come close to how it feels. Surrounded

back, buttocks, and thighs swelter. Skin  
accommodates temperature

of graveled mud and opened sunlight. Perpendicular to warming rays

rectangular divots within ground space nearly

cradle spindled nerves, their songs rise

in unison

to reach a jettison

down sharp angles.

## **Dark Matter**

Walrus eyes.  
A second nature.  
Field mice cleave  
to infected corn.

If you record my scream  
will it still ripen  
within our time  
constraint?

## **Stolen Ground**

*For Arno: Our father.*

Without you we fell  
like hollowed trees,  
our landing muted  
by splintering wood. From Jupiter  
I wondered if you could see  
our repose. Here, on Earth  
innumerable eyes watched  
above shuttered mouths.

Floating in and out of being  
she chose release and I  
startled by the absence  
held on to your air, to your space  
which long ago  
gave our bodies mass.

## **GOSPELS** (inconvenient forks)



## **Molecular Weight**

*“Creation and destruction are one and the same” Anselm Kiefer*

When does mass become relevant?  
When hands and feet can push  
against bone and flesh? Only then  
did you wake to me.

When my fetal body was measured,  
from rump to skull, I became real. Unreal,  
I was born to you, in your eyes—  
the eyes of those who measured you.

## **Conjured Space**

Scattered among broken silence  
your words still echo as if  
plowed fields have walls.

Arms stretched wide like sails  
I stand inside our makeshift heaven  
hoping to catch all that was spoken.

## **Just Meat and Bone**

My hand degloved  
by subtlety, yours  
so ornate amid  
a tirade, hung  
like crown molding  
in a slaughter house.

## **Fallow Space**

You keep looking as if  
the answer is splayed open  
against stained wood

beneath the kitchen window,  
and all I want is not to see  
through framed glass, ignore

the beauty of gray-brown  
fields and push towards night.  
You left a fire burning near the barn—

embers are crawling  
toward dried corn stalks  
tethered into towering splinters.

## **The Catastrophe of Fixed Truth**

Irrelevant to the meaning  
it cannot bear weight. Immobile  
as it is precisely  
a movable feast. Ask and I  
can say yes it is what I know  
and recognize from the long ago  
acquaintance pulling taut still  
making halves of us all,  
awake and slumbering in turn  
turning. Burdening the unsated  
and making rife with odor,  
not unlike sundrenched mollusks  
who were also once new  
and forgiving.

## Empty Space

Ass to the ground  
within walled air  
folded legs push  
up to greet lips over  
slight arms surrounding  
thigh muscles while  
thick breaths hover  
above dust and carpet fibers—

Once empty space has been filled  
no one should walk there anymore.

## **Rauchdünn**

*After Alchemical by Paul Celan*

I am mud and shale,  
awake in another time,  
eating the apple to its core.

Archived, I set my hands on fire.  
I want them charred  
and smoke thin.

## **TRANSFORMATIONS** (existential forks)



## **A Magpie in the Closet**

What a beautiful thing  
to keep hidden  
under a layer of coats –  
forgotten.

Once, I dreamt  
Sophocles  
held a transformative light  
over draped birds.

## Encoded Song

Massive transit  
does not render itself  
aligned with lyric  
trapped by shoe soles,  
hair and gabardine, yet

across idled heads  
your stilled lips part  
and suffuse tone  
within steel and glass.

## **Pushing against pale air**

leaves hurl themselves into light  
from dried branches.  
Your sideways glance  
begins a sorting. Strange

how eyes decry so much  
of what is given, even swarms  
of forgotten thought  
rising from a line of poetry, poetry  
and bridges holding new moons.

## **Teratoma Dream**

Hair. Eye teeth. Crescent  
of vertebrae. More hair  
expanding, blooming  
outward. Unraveled mass  
rising through incised skin. Cut

from your chest wall it rests  
on the opened palm. Unfettered  
creature, alone now  
with yourself.

## The Orchard

Lifting in low fog, your trees  
with their green bounty temper  
surrounding late summer grasses —

I am waiting for natural selection,  
contrived from one and none  
fulfilled in absentia  
waiting  
for the fruit to ripen.

## **Carved Shapes**

*After "Sorrel" by Geoffrey Hill*

As if kneeling over a pond  
to extricate floating letters,  
some caught in rain currents  
some still and drowned,  
would relieve disambiguation –

Yet, to reconstruct broken time  
with carved shapes  
in effort to fold upon the nettlebeds  
some moral order, may afford  
a short respite.

## **A Song for Mother**

Our gathering  
steeped in all that was bound  
now freed as the hand opens  
and releases in death. A requiem

amended; an explanation  
where there is none and  
your hollowed mouth still  
cannot give what it would not,  
and after eight years of rest still  
cannot give what it could not.

## **The Other Side**

*For Paul Celan*

Their eyes and smiles a remembrance  
of witnessed movement, harnessed. Now  
a blank celebration. In the corner  
shrouded in faded sun,  
kindling. You feared the worst.

If I am not he who carries within  
a ravaging leitmotif,  
then I must have certainly dreamt  
the feet before my eyes  
shuffling over embroidered soil  
disguising the rhythmic chant  
of hushed whispers. Now  
echoes above pine trees  
beyond the gate.



## We

Soft whispers of one  
catch my thoughts  
in grey days passing  
and the subtle touch  
and smile I once sensed  
through sifted pictures  
from yesterday  
seem to fade  
like wood in sun, and

days become years  
I want to stop and  
you cannot stop  
walking towards more time  
as I try to keep up  
so I do not lose  
the you and me  
and the moment passed  
as we.

## **A Particularly Dry Fall is Indicative of a Renaissance**

We sit silent among the din of wind  
and branches touching glass. A shelved clock  
keeps time from wasting. It guesses  
the misnomer in our parlayed Shakespearian riddle  
even before you. Looking back I appear  
empty handed and stilled. I didn't know any more  
what belonged to me.

## **In Response to my Teenage Daughter's Question Concerning Life**

You asked me and I said, *plainly*:  
everything is movement.  
here too you ask the meaning  
and I try to give an explanation with:  
everything is change.  
You question and cannot believe  
in these words, maybe  
because they are mine, so  
I follow up with:  
everything is hope and you  
become indignant,  
putting on white robes with flair  
and wrapping yourself up, yet  
I disarm you when I speak  
that which you have always known  
forever and suddenly  
it reverberates within *us*  
that which *we* have always known:  
everything is loss.

## **Sad people don't like to blow dry their hair**

or remove the half empty coffee cup  
from their bathroom sink, until  
there are two half empty coffee cups  
to take away. Or change  
into outside clothes or put on shoes  
until they absolutely have to.  
But sad people do like  
a sock with no hole  
and how the ground feels  
more solid with shoes  
and that tomorrow  
might hold possibilities not here today  
when they finally step out of their front door  
into the quiet warmth of a late evening sun  
puddled over a cracked sidewalk.

## **Souvenir Feet**

*For Anthony*

The seamless tower  
you solicitously abate  
to touch the richness of silk  
stands across a precipice  
on which I pirouette  
with souvenir feet.

In the breadth of rising air  
our floating whispers curl  
and connect  
a momentary space where  
the ringed light  
of an eclipse surrounds  
pixels we've gathered  
like damp autumn leaves  
after storm –

**EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE** (abstract forks)

## **Each night an echolalia**

begins. I wonder  
if owl children can tunnel  
through chimney brick and mortar  
trapped above waves  
of warm air rising  
from treasure troves of dead grass  
and broken twigs,  
their locked tongues waking, waiting  
to speak. Speak until day opens  
and heralds the cyclical decline  
of claws against stone —  
our comforting cacophony of words nestled  
within these walls.

## Specimens Obtained from Mind Folds During a Vivisection

I

Tuberose flowers  
hide colors and  
impart their decadence  
onto my tongue. Shoulders  
carry a threshold of modern scents  
folded and mended,  
while masochistic lemons  
keep time  
on your evanescent face.

II

*YELLOW LETTERS*

***Field Greens***

**Vitamins**

III

I am a contortionist.  
I am a perpetrator.  
I am a warden.

IV

Muesli is rolled oats,  
fruit and nuts  
all mixed together  
in the same box even  
if they don't want to be.



## **Girl with a Sickle**

*From a painting in the Déjàvu series by Francis Alÿs*

Against a paled green and orange red  
you push forward, downcast eyes and  
ivory shoulders bearing a redundant will.  
Your grip around a wooden handle  
firmly planted inside the soft skin of your palm  
keeps the blade steady as you move quietly  
through a forgotten dream. What would it mean,  
the possibility of rage belonging to you?

In your white sheath we will never know  
if day has begun or ended or where  
you are going without so much as a moment  
of regard or backward glance to what is left behind.  
Even the space that surrounds you is humbled  
by your stride.

## Found Absence

Dark lanterns litter  
hallways. Bundled  
tree branches startle.  
Dried fingers reach  
and snap  
against sagging walls. The smell  
of rising salt air  
rinses nostrils  
heavy with wood rot.

Beyond the arched egress  
light exposes. Someone  
is harvesting  
abandoned sea turtle shells  
and eyes.

## Where Branches Meet Glass

the measured self  
takes root  
beneath a wooden rod. Outside  
filtered dusk exposes  
colossal oyster shells  
open and empty;  
all your shallow graves  
among receding energy  
and cracking dark.

Hatched shadows  
and mist transfer  
refractory movements  
through window mesh  
and air crosses a pane  
disturbing  
matted dust and warbling  
insect husks.

## Ode to an Old Shoe

Twisted gargantuan wires hold scaffolding,  
freezing exudates of knowledge and rhyme.

Anger, always the scuttlebutt around town  
encompasses the confines of stone ruins.

Catch-as-catch-can with nets and tightrope,  
philosophical nonsense, the nature of her prose.

Whores, whores, and gladiator pirouettes  
file into realms of navigated purée and

branches, their gnarled gobbledygook  
lay rotting along the way confusing parasites;

they harbor manifolds of derision and  
filthy insights, twofold scents of slander.

Hate her, hate him, and hate the pastel self,  
dance the half truth tango, one-two-three ...

Words, words, and more words; vomited rhetoric  
your pages absorb her clotted curettage waste.

## **In a fruitless daze with hobbled hands**

she sits  
in the cardboard matrix  
of an autumn afternoon  
light and Nietzsche  
on his knees at her feet.  
His scantily clad mouth  
unfurls and extracts  
a pity so fully formed  
she cradles it; her  
hairless white fetus,  
arms and legs folded  
fingers clenched,  
its huge eyes  
dark and begging  
could burn a whole  
into shreds.

## Poetic Ephemera

Breath over vocal cords sift  
script into light and etched  
on papier-mâché partitions

avalanche, waking the dreamer  
from notating fact  
caught inside our plastic moirai

and your mouth, your mouth  
which never spoke correctly  
where the savory message was  
not but might have been.

## **Just in case the storm makes time travel impossible**

we need to stock up on outrageously rigid  
spinal columns, conjecture, confessional poetry and  
advice on how to live in the here and now  
without the comforting “pop pop pop” of antimatter  
as it confetties across the windshield  
of my time machine.

## **TRANSLATIONS (German forks)**



## *I Bukowina*

By Paul Celan

**K**ein ankerloses Tasten stört die Hand,  
und nachts verstreutes Heimweh trägt die Not  
gefalteter Gebete sitternd hin vors Rot  
im Bangen deiner Züge, Dunkeler gespannt.

Die zagen Atemzüge halten in  
den Abhang ihres Rankens dein Gesicht;  
und den besturtzten hält es leise licht-  
gesträhte Sorgfalt vor die Träume hin.

Doch diese ragen aus dem hellen Ruhn  
und oft schlägt Purpur ein Gewand um sie  
von Fahrt und Fähnris, uferlosem Tun...

Die so entfliehn der Rast, erreichst du nie,  
wo Dickicht ist und Schwärmen, steil und bunt –  
Denn du bist Ruhe, Mutter, Schimmer aus dem Grund.

## **I Bukowina**

*By Paul Celan*

Unanchored keys do not disturb the hand  
and night's scattered homesick carry the need  
in folded prayers trembling before the red  
fear within your movement, toward darker binding.

Distressed breaths hold  
in the curled slopes of your face  
and the stunned halt is a faint light-  
abandoned concern before the dream.

Yet to construct, from the bright Ruhn  
and crimson oft pushing a wall up around you  
from voyage and peril, a shoreless act ...

That which escapes rest, you will never reach,  
where the thicket and shoals lie, steep and colorful –  
For you are at peace, Mother, shimmering from the ground.

*Translation by Kerstin Parmley*

## TRÄNE

*By Paul Celan*

Blaut die Nacht.  
Ich blies alle Lichter aus.  
Ich sprang durch das Dunkel.  
Ich schwirrt' mit dem Stern in den Abgrund.  
Im Geäst verstrickt' ich mich:

Dein schweres Haar, die ferne Fessel.  
Dein weher Schritt, die blaue Welt.  
Dein dunkler Sturz, ich hielt mein Herz hin.

Nicht Flieder war es, du wollest Flieder.  
Nicht Nachtwind war es, nie wird es Nachtwind sein.  
Nicht Lieder sind es, Lieder verwandeln mich nicht.

Nicht Sehnsucht ist es, es ist der Regen.

## **TEAR**

*By Paul Celan*

The night became blue.  
I blew all the lights out.  
I sprang through the dark.  
I whirred with the star into the abyss.  
I caught myself in the boughs:

Your heavy hair, the distant ankle.  
Your painful step, the blue world.  
Your dark fall, I held out my heart.

It was not lilac, you wanted lilac.  
It was not nightwind, never will there be nightwind again.  
It was not songs, songs do not change me.

It is not sightfound, it is the rain.

*Translation by Kerstin Parmley*

## **TENEBRAE**

*By Paul Celan*

Nah sind wir , Herr,  
nahe und greifbar.

Gegriffen schon, Herr,  
ineinander verkrallt, als wär  
der Leib eines jeden von uns  
dein Leib, Herr.

Bete, Herr,  
bete zu uns,  
wir sind nah.

Windschief gingen wir hin,  
gingen wir hin, uns zu bücken  
nach Mulde und Maar.

Zur Tränke gingen wir, Herr.

Es war Blut, es war,  
was du vergossen, Herr.

Es glänzte.

Es warf uns dein Bild in die Augen, Herr.  
Augen und Mund stehn so offen und leer, Herr.  
Wir haben getrunken, Herr.  
Das Blut und das Bild, das im Blut war, Herr.

Bete, Herr.  
Wir sind nah.

## **TENEBRAE**

**By Paul Celan**

We are near, Lord,  
Near and manifest.

Already spent, Lord,  
clawed into each other as if  
Each of us, our flesh  
Were yours, Lord.

Pray, Lord  
Pray to us  
We are near.

Disheveled we went there,  
We went there to kneel  
over the trough and crater.

To quench our thirst, we went Lord.

It was blood, it was  
What you spread, Lord.

It shimmered.

It cast your image into our eyes Lord  
Eyes and mouth stood open and empty Lord.

We drank, Lord.  
The blood and the image,  
Within the blood, Lord.

Pray Lord.  
We are near.

*Translation by Kerstin Parmley*

## PSALM

*By Paul Celan*

Niemand knetet uns wieder aus Erde und Lehm,  
niemand bespricht unsern Staub.  
Niemand.

Gelobt seist du, Niemand.  
Dir zulieb wollen  
wir blühen.  
Dir  
entgegen.

Ein Nichts  
waren wir, sind wir, werden  
wir bleiben, blühend:  
die Nichts-, die  
Niemandrose.

Mit  
dem Griffel seelenhell,  
dem Staubfaden himmelswüst,  
der Krone rot  
vom Purpurwort, das wir sangen  
über, o über  
dem Dorn.

## PSALM

*By Paul Celan*

No one kneads us again out of Earth and loam,  
No one.  
No one.

Praised are you, No one.  
You for whom  
we bloom.  
Against  
You.

A nothing  
We were, we are, we become  
We remain, flowering:  
The nothing-, the  
No ones rose.

With  
The stem soulbright  
The filament heaven  
Crown red  
From purpurwort , that we sing  
Over o over  
The thorn.

*Translation by Kerstin Parmley*



## **EIS, EDEN**

*By Paul Celan*

Es ist ein Land Verloren,  
da wächst ein Mond im Ried,  
und das mit uns erfroren,  
es glüht umher und sieht.

Es sieht, denn es hat Augen,  
die helle Erden sind.  
Die Nacht, die Nacht, die Laugen.  
Es sieht, das Augenkind.

Es sieht, es sieht, wir sehen,  
ich sehe dich, du siehst.  
Das Eis wird auferstehen,  
eh sich die Stunde schließt.

## **Ice, Eden**

By Paul Celan

There is a forgotten land,  
Where a moon grows in the reeds,  
And frozen within,  
It glows throughout and sees.

It sees, for it has eyes,  
Of illuminated Earths.  
The night, the night, the lyes.  
It sees, this child of eyes.

It sees, it sees, we see,  
I see you, you see.  
The ice will rise again,  
Before the hour ends.

*Translation by Kerstin Parmley*