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Forks to the Forehead

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Forks to the Forehead

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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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.

CONTENTS

- 4 Odd, The Repetition

- 5 The Earth and Sky (universal forks)

- 15 Gospels (inconvenient forks)

- 23 Transformations (existential forks)

- 37 Experimental Theatre (abstract forks)

- 47 Translations (German forks)

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

Kein 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