

Paul Celan

14 POEMS FROM *BREATHTURN*

translated by John Felstiner

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Black

like memory's wound,
the eyes grub toward you
in a Crownland bitten
bright by heart's teeth –
it remains our bed:

through this shaft you must come –
you come.

In the seed's
sense
the sea stars you out, innermost, for ever.

An end to the granting of names,
over you I cast my fate.

Landscape with urn beings,
Conversations
from smokemouth to smokemouth.

They eat:
the bedlamite truffle, a piece
of unburied poesy,
found tongue and tooth.

A tear rolls back into its eye.

The orphaned left
half of the pilgrim
shell – they gave you it,
then trussed you up –
illuminates the space and listens:

the clinker game against death
can begin.

IN PRAGUE

The half death,
suckled plump on our life,
lay ash-image-true all around us –

we too
went on drinking, soul-crossed, two daggers,
sewn onto heavenstones, wornblood-born
in the night bed,

larger and large
we grew through one another, there was
no more name for
what drove us (one of the thirty-
how many
was my living shadow
that climbed the madness stairs up to you?),

a tower
the Half built itself into Wither,
a Hradčany
out of pure goldmakers-No,

Bone Hebrew,
ground down to sperm,
ran through the hourglass
we swam through, two dreams now, tolling
counter time, in the squares.

Ash-Aureole behind
your shaken knotted
hands at the Threeways.

Pontic Once-upon-a-time: here
a drop
on
the drowned oarblade,
deep
in a petrified oath,
it bubbles up.

(On the plumblined
breath cable, back then,
higher than on high,
between two pain knots, while
the gleaming
Tatar moon climbed up to us,
I dug me into you and you.)

Ash-
aureole behind you
Threeways-
hands.

Before you, the easterly
dicethrow, frightful.

No one
bears witness for the
witness.

What's written goes hollow, what's
spoken, seagreen,
burns in the bays,

dolphins race
through
liquefied names,

here in forevered Nowhere,
in a memory of out-
crying bells in – but where?,

who
in this
shadow quadrant
is grasping, who
underneath
glimmers up, glimmers up, glimmers up?

Where?

At night in the crumbling rockmass.

In trouble's rubble and scree,
in slowest tumult,
the wisdom-pit named Never.

Water needles
stitch up the split
shadow – it fights its way
deeper down,
free.

King's rage, stone-maned, out front.

And the prayers
up in smoke –
pain-driven
stallions, the
vigilantes
untamable, servile:

psalmhooved, singing out over
o-, o-, o-
penleafed Bible mountains,
toward the clear and
clattering, the
brute buds of the sea.

SOLVE

Dis-easted, a grave-
tree split into
splintered kindling:

past the poison
palaces, past cathedrals,
floated up-
stream and down

by the tinily flaring, the
free
punctuation of sal-
vaged,
Scripture,
fled asunder to the
countlessly
nameable un-
utterable
names.

COAGULA

Also your
wound, Rosa.

And the horns' light of your
Romanian buffaloes
in place of a star above the
sand bed, in the
outspeaking red
ashpotent
alembic.

Paschal smoke, floating, with
the letter-like track
of a keel in the midst.

(Never was Heaven.
yet burning red, sea is still
sea..)

We here, we,
glad of the crossing, at the tent
where you baked wilderness bread
out of co-wandered language.

On the outmost edge of sight: a dance
of two blades above the
heartshadow's rope.

The net beneath, knotted
out of thought
ends – at what
depth?

There: eternity's
farthing bitten and
spat up to us through the mesh.

Three sand voices, three
scorpions:
the guest people, with us
in the boat.

Show-fringes, sense-fringes,

knitted from nightgall
well behind time:

who
is invisible enough
to see you?

Mantle eye, almond eye, coming
through each and every wall,
climbing
to this desk,
again scrolling open what lies there –

Ten blindman's sticks,
fiery, upright, free,
soar up from the just-
born sign,

stand
over it.

This is still us.

A rumbling: it is
Truth itself
walked among
men,
amidst the
metaphor squall.

Oozing, then
weedy stillness on the banks.

Yet one more sluice. At the
wart tower,
bathed in brackishness,
you debouch.

In front of you, among
giant rowing sporangiums,
a brightness sickles as though words
were grasping.

Once,

I heard him,
he was washing the world,
unseen, nightlong,
real.

One and infinite,
annihilated,
they I'd.

Light was. Salvat