

2004

Anonymity

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Recommended Citation

Bond, Bruce. "Anonymity." *The Iowa Review* 34.3 (2004): 107-109. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.S905>

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BRUCE BOND

Anonymity

*The Nothing too is knowledge, being the reverse of the All,
as the air is the reverse of the wing. —Edmond Jabès*

Last night belonged to my father's memory
buried beneath a mound of broken glass.

When I woke, it mended like so much water.
If I was weeping, it was nothing, I tell you.

It's like trying to catch the rain in your teeth.

I want to say words are never lifeless.
To speak is to stir the air beneath the wing.

Some trees flap with all the futility
of a dreaming child. It strips them clean.

The day he fell the heavy flood of the skylight
drenched our limbs, our shoulders, blurred our eyes.

For a while we were all of us strangers.
Now and then voices, an autumn of hands.

The vigilant machines of the ICU
dissected the silence with their soft clicks.

If you are wondering whether he heard us
as we hovered, you are not alone.

I am told the island of the moment,
unremembering, without a future

to whiten the still lip of the shore, is
our lightest happiness. Or painfully near.

When the man emerged from months of sleep,
the world burned with the black of where he'd been.

Last night so many bodies walked in and out
of my dream, I, we, kept losing count.

I say this believing, as I once read,
we live forward, we know in reverse.

And so the awe of our tearing apart.
When he finally opened his eyes again,

the slow accumulation of ghosts returned:
the ache of a curve that refused to close.

How I thought his demise would make mine
less somehow, give it a father, a face.

How I thought it would get easier, to think
he had blazed that thicket that was his

final year, his breath a rope he cast out
to pull us all to the next needful thing.

So dire, this work, raising the drowsy lid
of the mind to let the daylight in.

Outside, the small mercies of the lemon,
the fig, the prayer bead of a single wasp.

Fork, he said, sluggishly, without pride,
the silver of the one clear word grazing his tongue.

The day he died his name rested a little
deeper in us, chiseled in its bed of stone.

Last night I swore it was no trick to know
the worst and be a home for the knowledge,

a spacious place with a fire in the center,
burning books. Only mortal, we say, only

the skull and folly we were born into
to drag up the middle of our life and down.

Only mourning hunger, this troubled midnight
and its cast of characters fading into the wings.

There are times I write when the whiteness
of the page is the shadow of death.

A cat follows me from room to room.
Everywhere the quiet violence of the new.

Father, what are these strangers to me now?

It could be a woman I passed in a hall once,
and suddenly she is walking right through me,

down the center of my namelessness where, look,
there's nothing to erase, just the smooth

path like the punished floor of a river,
the flagstones gazing up at the sun, alive,

unknowing, doused in the cold and restless shine.