1992

The Bassoonist

Robin Behn

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview
Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.4132

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.
THE BASSOONIST

His was a life that ached for form early on
It needed something outside
to rhyme with what it was
something it could leave behind later

And so he played bassoon
because bassoon, like life, was hard
No one, hardly, played it
so he was in great demand

The sound it made (we knew this)
was really just his body
honking against the twilight
it already belonged to

— a winged thing getting
not quite off the ground
   calling to the other flying things
to wait

The face the double reed disappeared into
was pocked    well
   cratered       really
For its red and purple hues there is no word but angry

He read the notes   barely
through a curtain of stringy hair
   But our quintet couldn’t be
a quintet without him

   which gave to his life
a certain necessity    lasting
   through a very long series of rehearsals
made even longer because his   ideas about
rhythm were rather original
and he had to be convinced
by the band director singing right into his ear
how his part went

I don't remember now
how I first found out that his ugliness
was guaranteed
to kill him before he turned thirty

Thirty today, that field of volcanoes
then the knubby lips then the
chewed straw of the double reed
appear to me again

The face is still that pool
a small boy has fired fistfuls of pebbles into
—He is that boy
That pond is his own face

What self can do to self
scares me still
But now I also wonder why a shame so deep
it burrows inward through the face

and sucks at you from underneath
for the brief time forever is
fell to this boy
to be our first example of

When the band took to the field
in our neat red blazers
we felt him among us, out of step
like a bad cell
A bassoon is too delicate isn’t it
  to march with in the rain
        So for a pretty price all of us
      cut him off and didn’t miss him

    Not when we reshuffled into a quartet
  and couldn’t find music
       for just
  flute  clarinet  oboe  horn

    Not when we saw him propped in the bleachers
gazing on our formations with a scrambled contempt
          Not even when we saw the returned bassoon
dismembered  snug in its velvet casket