

ISSN 1043-3325



Parting Gifts

Volume 3, Number 2

Winter 1990-91

\$3.00

Copyright © 1990 March Street Press
3006 Stonecutter Terrace
Greensboro, NC 27405

ISSN 1043-3325

Parting Gifts is edited and published
by Robert Bixby

All rights return to the authors upon publication

For Zeno of Citium

No tanning salon
would use as its slogan,
Take on the color of the dead.

But dead grass is brown,
and blood before it is black,
and apple slices, and in the

cadaver room the lighter
patches on the dark gray
skin and exposed muscles

are brown. Brown in a
child's color wheel
is at the Center, a

color of death. 0
Oracle, I am no
one, bless me,

I will lie in the sun.

Raeburn Miller

Old Mystic Bridge,
Chelsea, 1936

Day after day
the Japanese ships
left with scrap metal
bulging like frog's eyes
over the gunwales.

My brother Jim
came to know
their tanks
on Kwajalein
like old Fords
or Chevies
or Frigidaires.

What if one man
took better care of his car
perhaps a marine
or a sailor.

Tom Sheehan

New Landscape

Bukowski was never here
the woods too green
flowers too sober
he might have brushed by
an oak or pine tree occasionally
stumbling through the park
on his way to another bar

but he never saw this as a destination
just a slower traffic
a wider street
between home and language

John Grey

Sources

As in those places visited
by revelation,
water springs suddenly
where none was known before,

so in those final places
where water cannot rise,
neither rises vision
ubiquity is full of

holes, nowhere is
everywhere. And water
glides at its own sweet will.
The sun at last

in difficult splendor
keeps a predictable course,
as God's eyes sleep,
as a tear falls

on a place where truth
might also fall and
dries to salt. From the deep earth
springs life.

Raeburn Miller

Mulier Cantat

transfixed
by a light slight motion
by the hiss of ocean she
can't see
kneeling
amid snows that will
not melt
warming
at a flame that gives
no heat

Our Lady of the Huddled Doorway

she
raises arms
transfixes
sky in blood-eyed glare
grasps
god
in dirty hands
seeks to
pull down heaven to
her
transfix its
image in the moonlit
puddle at her
knees

Virgin of the Subway Grate

sweet supplicant
denied
sings
in a tongue of her own
devising
sleeps
with world in her
mouth
transfixed

Holy Mother of the Unmarked Grave

Andrew Gettler

Dying Dreams

She whispers "baby."
Forming the sounds with her mouth
of that which nature and fate
have forbidden her to form with her womb.

She whispers because
her soul stares red-eyed at the moon
and howls the true language of her pain.
Her pain when spoken in words
reaps only naive advice
and sentimental hoping.

She whispers because
the sounds of the word 'baby'
cut through the moon-lit night
and settle in her heart
and the sounds understand.

Alone as she is
she knows that somewhere
someone else has sat under this same moon
and called to her own children too,
and begged forgiveness
for letting die her dreams of them.

Terrilynn Meece

Remembering Butchering

The Savage Stevens Fox comes up—it seems
Too small and slim, too daintily designed
To have a thing to do with death. There is
A crack no louder than a screen door's slam;
the bull goes down upon his knees, begins
to fold upon himself, then topples, falls.

Now that I see his blue-black eyes gone dry,
His heavy tongue lolled in the dirt, I think,
He was no friend, but still was one of us.
My God, I'm glad it is not men we kill.

Jack Hart

Mudbones

Keith Bruce grew up in Baltimore
where Mudbones played the streets.

ain't complex
listen
school is now in session

everything you thought was simple
broken down
put it together
in a mix ain't been heard

the legend prevails

baltimore

is hard cold stone
stolen from the earth boy
neon heat under pressure
the beat is there
can you hear it

school is now in session
focus
dig the plaid pants boy
the silk shirt
smooth

M. S. Leavitt

Fish Stories

Then, stories came easy,
the patient language waves slapping
the wooden belly, fishheads
bobbing a trail like breadcrumbs
Our bodies grew heavy with salt,
fish-stink, the tug and wait.

It was summer, a virtue
We worked at a South Yarmouth restaurant
where our hands took on a smell
We couldn't wash off.

You painted shingles to sell
from the trunk of your Falcon.
One evening we watched flames Shoot
above the Bass River

Fishmarket
as firemen cupped hands to yell
to the far side of the wet truck.

I remember the first fish
I ever caught, a channel cat
hooked on an unwatched drop line
My father cut it open
to show the parts still working,
as if the blade hadn't reached
past the Wound. I felt a weight
in my hands, as if
they had become the fish.

Now when you tell me
your love's blood went crazy,
the white cells like snow,
I study my hands and begin
with fish stories, how one
took the bait and hook and ran,
another we let go.
the way it felt.

Jim Zola

The Burial Detail

Laying a suture across the city
to this large hump of land
like a whale's grey back
breaking the surface,
this island where
every other Thursday
the green bus carrying cons
and corpses passed concrete ruins
on its way up the hill
to Potter's Field
rancid with the remnants of skeletons,
half skulls, finger fragments,
Parched soft white like wheat
or slowly reddened from exposure
to the color of roses.

Here we stood, knee high in black
rubber boots, shoveling grey bacon
colored bodies who,
like us, had finally been caught and numbered,
pure arithmetic
the quotient of a life divisible
by grief, flesh
no longer needing to devour other
flesh, tagged
and bagged without the bugle sounding off,
a huge pile called the nameless
passing on without
glory.

Spread them out evenly
so the ground will absorb remaining fluids.
Sprinkle lime on top in
generous proportions

and lay the words
rest easy
over them as a blanket.

My work done now,
I stand up on a dusty knoll
kick the dirt
wipe the grit
and sunshine from my eyes, stare
at the other ghoul faced
cons, some of whom
spread a ribbon
of piss in the hole.

The guards treat us now.
They give us fruit.
And when I get mine
I rub it
down my palm
peel the skin with my teeth
bite down, chew
slowly, suck
blood from an orange.

Peter Spiro

the approach of winter

no longer fingering silk
nor the wrists of girls
rarely grass
tougher grow the
claws for the harp
for the branch bark
the cloak pulled around
sewn with feathers
always torn the earth
grows brighter the sun
darkens the teeth of wolves
circle ivory under the moon

ellen cooney

and takes to praying on the
Sabbath.
Piety was never her strong suit.
God help us all, she thinks.

V.

Bill Haywood spoke out against
the militancy fund
and chastised his strike happy
colleagues. Joe Hill
congratulated him.
She wakes up in a cold sweat.

VI.

At contract renewal time,
the "5" word is taboo
when discussing options.
What options?

VII.

She told them to fuck off
when they wished her well,
thinking Emma Goldman would understand.

Dana H. Steigman

Abbie Hoffman (R.I.P.)

I.

Call for the jester;
he's asleep on his throne of old
video clippings from more active days.
The court surrounds him,
graying at the edges,
complacent and satisfied
to bask in the afterglow of past glories.
The king has long since died,
or been replaced,
or run away
from the rhetoric. No one
misses him.

II.

I woke up to find the world
had died.
The world had just
wound down and died.

III.

lie woke up to see himself,
a young man,
as they were replaying his famous arrest.
The jester still told everyone
what a radical he was
(even though he'd pushed drugs)
because it pleased him.

IV.

A girl looks through the viewfinder
at pieces of history.
The Columbian Exposition,
the Haymarket riot,
the St. Valentine's Day massacre,
and The Jester.

She is surprised to see him there.

V.

He sacrificed his principles
a little at a time
until suddenly he was preaching
democracy
and advocating censorship,
as if the bill of rights could change
with the players.
The Court just followed suit.

VI.

His old friends moved on
to richer venues
while he stayed in a rented flat,
gave away all his money
and taught a new generation
how to fight the good fight.
The world just passed him by
while he was trying to save it.

Redefining the Worker's Advocate

I.

Management: the ruling echelon
of business, the inner circle of white
boys out to lunch. The reason
there are unions within unions.

II.

Underwhelmed by yuppies in the
union, she forgets for a time
they all work for a union.

III.

The new buzzword is
privitization.
"Lower wages,
fewer if any benefits,
and lack of steady employment
are the threat of the future"
says the union boss. She
dutifully takes notes.
The union hired a new man
for 20 days/option-to-renew,
no benefits, just the other day.

IV.

"Religion is the opiate
of the masses." She looks around
the hall
at all the gold and diamonds

I fall asleep on a long flat stretch
of tallgrass land; two beagles
curled in the back, my friend's eyes
Stretched beyond the next town.

(Figures in dark clothing
circle in my dream.)

As we round a corner of Marion Lake,
my head Whips back.
Water.~the first in days.
Perhaps Soon seaweed will surrender itself
as if on a California beach
and palm trees startle this flat sky.

After hours of buffalograss and blue grarn~
my friend turns to me. She finally understands
those details absent from correspondence,
the placement of Words in conversation,
and how a woman Shields her ear
from Voices in the prairie grass.

Carol V. Davis

VII.

The jester officially died in his sleep,
and his suicide was announced
Without fanfare
just before the sports report
at 10:19 p.m.
Now they're sounding trumpets
and paying tributes to him.
It's as if the king were back.

VIII.

It's only a man
who tried to do what was right.
The world hadn't died after all,
just the jester.

Daria H. Steigman

Los Angeles: 12th and Olive

From the 10th floor,
here, on the edge of the garment district,
where a street suddenly chokes with people,
as one shift replaces another;

in a city that refuses the seasons,
I watch a fire truck swing out of its lair,
siren whining.

No refuge of trees or grass here,
but yesterday blue and green balloons
flooded the sky.
Calendar reads June, so the kids
atop the California Pediatric Center
were probably at graduation.

Last week the LAPD Swat team
like cockroaches, swarmed the block,
in black leather jackets.

We crowded round the window
as cops perched on flat roofs,
rifles poised at Baxter's Gun Shop
where, they said, someone barricaded inside
and threatened to blow the place up.

Afterwards, we crept back to our desks.
A phone rang in the next cubicle.
I stared down at the Iris Apartments
wondering who lived there.
Did she too rise at six
and drink her coffee slowly
before opening the door?

Carol V. Davis

Driving Through Kansas

Matfield Green and Newton,
towns strung along the highway
like clothes on a line,
until a field breaks the pattern.

We pass shrubs and trees
unfamiliar to my coastal eye—
buckbrush and redbud in spring bloom.

Kansas bursts the sandsage prairies
to grow corn.

My friend tells me of bluestem sod
so tough it took ten yoke of oxen
to pull the breaking plow.

A woman could stand on her porch
and see only switchgrass and bluestem
no matter how she turned her head.

(Daily I send letters
to a rented address,
make calls to the work number.)

In some spots I hear
Arkansas River's gone,
though grasses still push their roots
twenty feet deep to tap it.
Below riverbed, water table's
plunged so low, it can't recharge the stream.
(Miles of dead cottonwood and willows
line the Ark.)

In the Garden After the Rain

It has rained all night.
I know this because I can no longer sleep
like my son, who, once having given in,
stays asleep till dawn.
This morning he comes in and announces
a blue crane grows from my head.
Perhaps I wandered out to rescue it from the storm,
in my shifting from the couch to bed and back.
It's not that this baby in my belly kicks so hard,
but the flesh, selfish for room,
makes demands of its own.

Those first pinpricks of light, like a stutter of wings,
find me and won't let me go.
They say it's nature's way of preparing you.
But it seems so cruel. I was just entering
a railway station, its ceiling a filigree
of metal buds and vines tenting the sky.
Passengers in wool coats waited with suitcases
piled on the platform.
I wanted to ask their destination, who was waiting
on the other side.

Now the water drips rhythmically from the drain pipe.
I slip on my gardening shoes and thrust open the glass door.
Palm fronds lay scattered
like wands abandoned after a midnight party.
The marguerite, nurtured from one small slip,
and now three inches wide at the base, has been downed.
I tear the remaining flowers from its stem.

Carol V. Davis

Letter to Jon

Dear Jon: It's too damned hot
and the stickiness spreads over my body.
I want to pick it off like lint.
Last night I fell asleep at 7;
couldn't shake myself awake.
I'd do anything to head north to the rains
—to watch the salmon jump; to lean
at the window as clouds empty themselves.
Listen, you've got to forget that woman;
to pluck her name back from the trees;
to shake it from the photo albums.
Remember how we crossed the English Channel?
People sprawled on the linoleum and you
nibbling watercress sandwiches?
At ten, a master builder of California missions.
Remember that Irish woman who came to help out?
She scrubbed a crate of apples with soap and water.
And the trip back to the States.
You snuck us in to a forbidden movie.
The ship got rocky towards the end.
It's your birthday. Forget everything.
Go back to your favorite history book.
Find that British castle and swing open the gate.

Carol V. Davis

The Welcome

I walked into your poems, rooms
I once had lived in
or would someday visit

—studied walls of curious portraits,
albums of family groups in foreign
with nurse and dog, watched you
settings
arrange Queen Anne's Lace in a blown glass jar
hibiscus in a teacup.

—traveled with you in an air balloon
learned to dress a horse, to play
Bach's Adagio with your father.
You introduced me to
the rubbery inside of a frogskin
the skeletons of flowers.

I met the stepmother who saved everything
and begrudged you everything
whose love you could not quite escape,
—discovered how the thin flesh feels
on the hand of a dying husband.

I stand again in your hallway, now
I have practiced choosing
the details to make a life come true.

Anne Carroll Fowler

Inscription for a Sundial

before the before
Yeshe Tsogyel
(The female Buddha)
Made noon
From a lovesong

Tony D'Arpino

Dovetail of the Day

The bird was a message
It came down the chimney
Even though the doors
And windows were open

It wasn't a mockingbird
It was a tellingbird. -

Later the doves
Were speaking together
The events of the entire day
Of that month
And other years in the cycles
Dovetailed into the house

As the lines of the sunset
Moved behind Red Mesa
The lines in my hands brightened

And history: the ruts
In the driveway
Curved slowly
Disappearing in the fields

Tony D'Arpino



