

MARK SANDERS

## Merry Christmas to My Children

One gift to give. Already, I've failed to give it.  
Where they are, undercover of gray, Missouri snow  
flying on flattening wind, black limbs of blacker trees—  
their tormented arms gesticulating, anxious—  
my children are happier without me.  
Each week their voices, compressed and  
strained along phone miles—who am I talking to, now?  
They don't know any more than I do.

Could I walk the distance I've come backwards,  
would they take the crab back, walk backwards, too?  
Be, as it was, as we were, those years past?  
If is larger than incomprehensible universe,  
an impossibility, a journey we would not fly.  
No one wants to go back to what they were.

This Christmas, I open the box I have sent myself  
of them, as I do each conspicuous Christmas,  
and beneath the happy paper and glow glitter,  
after I unloose the ribbon, the box,  
empty as it ever was, is still empty.

*There you are, my children, my happy happy children.*

I give them themselves, and, in the brown box  
I send to them, taped carefully and heavily,  
full of what there is of me in it, they will find  
similar emptiness: Too many years let go.  
I wanted to give them a better father.  
Because I wasn't, they were lucky not to have me.