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# Here To See It

Benjamin Chase  
benjamin.j.chase@gmail.com

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WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

HERE TO SEE IT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN CREATIVE & PROFESSIONAL WRITING  
DEPARTMENT OF WRITING, LINGUISTICS, AND CREATIVE PROCESS

BY

BENJAMIN J. CHASE

DANBURY, CT

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For Mom and Dad

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Grateful acknowledgment to these journals, which published the following poems, sometimes in slightly different form:

*Pen Works*: “Morning Wanderlust,” “Edward Hopper’s *Early Sunday Morning*,” “The Young Man and Hemingway,” and “I Hear the Midwest”

*Fresh Ink*: “Sonnet to My ‘98 Honda Shadow,” “Here To See It,” and “Talks with Nana”

*Freshwater*: “Childhood Reflections” and “The Time” (previously entitled “The Time of Thinking”)

*Connecticut River Review*: “Conference”

*Christianity and Literature*: “A Rogue Goodness”

*Second Nature*: “my age of information”

*Windhover*: “Sins of Commission”

*The Aurorean*: “A Goodbye, of Sorts” (previously entitled “That Bitter Night”)

*The Helix*: “Don’t Get Old” and “never-ending nights (to nyc)”

## ABSTRACT

Benjamin J. Chase's *Here To See It* is a collection of contemporary poetry plotted across the hours of a day and the respective stages of life. A mix of lyrical and narrative musings, the book houses a wide variety of poetic forms (including a translation, sonnets, ekphrastic meditations, and free-verse experiments) on an even wider variety of subjects. A diverse collection, *Here To See It* is a series of reflections on the formal and informal moments that make up a lifetime.



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## PROSPECTUS/INTRODUCTION

### I.

Responding to my first batch of poems in the Western Connecticut State University MFA program, Dr. Oscar De Los Santos wrote, “You warned [me] there was no specific theme or link between these submissions and I think you’re right; however, something that does thread most of the poems together is a first-person speaker who is there to observe, react, and at times participate in the goings on you describe. Another link between them is obviously their writer’s firm commitment to his craft.”

Indeed, I had warned Dr. De Los Santos that my poems were often wildly different from one another in terms of subjects, approaches, and lengths. I wondered if my professors and peers would find any commonalities among them or if each would read like the work of a different poet. I wondered if these far-flung musings would ever grow into a more sustained collection.

Not only did Dr. De Los Santos’s generous commentary on those first poems reassure me of my abilities at that early juncture, but it also helped me identify one continuity in my poetry—a probing, playful, and rather proactive first-person speaker. In this case, it took a careful outside reader to help me see this feature, and a few other tonal qualities, as mainstays of my work. As I read and reflected on that initial response to my work, I had a sense, even then, that Dr. De Los Santos’s observations would prove important to my thesis work.

### II.

Leading off that first submission was a rather understated poem called “Here To See It.” The title is simple—a mixture of common, monosyllabic words—but it also begs an immediate question: “What is ‘it’?” In this sense, the phrase—a mere sentence fragment—straddles the line

between a declaration and a question. The title also mentions only one of the five senses—sight—because the poem is primarily visual.

Thoroughly Wordsworthian, “Here To See It” is a little ode I wrote during an evening walk through the woods a few years ago. Like many of my other poems, it is a meditative, first-person lyric that is brief, minimalistic, and essentially celebratory. Finally published in *Fresh Ink* in the spring of 2017, the poem reads as follows:

I walk the end  
of evening  
on the edge  
of a deep woods,  
simply glad  
the woods is here,  
and I am here  
to see it.

On my way,  
I watch and smile  
as a water strider skims  
the teeming surface  
of his stream,  
barely breaking it.

In the poem, the “it” of the title is a “deep woods” and whatever else the speaker discovers there. The speaker is bluntly grateful for life and receptive to its range of experiences. Each line and stanza strives for a simple pace and balance, as the poem implies a comparison between the speaker’s relationship with the woods and the water strider’s relationship with “his” stream. Maintaining the poem’s spirit of gratitude and charity is my aspiration in both life and writing. I hope my life and my poems possess depth and possibility but without much in the way of pretensions.

In reply to Dr. De Los Santos, I mentioned an intuitive sense I had about “Here To See

It”: “I...think this poem may work as the opener to a collection, since it concerns itself with big-picture themes such as existence, consciousness, and gratitude.” Now, three years later, I’ve decided against using the poem as an opener, although I’ve included it in my manuscript and appropriated it as the name of my collection. More than any other image, phrase, or title among my poems, “Here To See It” captures my roving speaker and vision for this thesis collection. It strikes the right balance between simplicity and nuance while also emphasizing the lively and largely visual nature of my poems.

### III.

As I warned Dr. De Los Santos in that first submission—and every subsequent instructor in my MFA experience—my poems span the gamut. My tendency is to absorb and imitate whatever I’m enjoying most in my reading life at any given time, and I read widely in my genre—from Shakespeare to Edson, Dickinson to Chernoff, Qoheleth to Cummings. I’ve written poems that range from short to long, traditional verse to prose poetry, formal to euphemistic language, rational discourse to free association. A quick sampling of titles from my collection showcases some of the variety there: “The Hymn of Caedmon,” “unrequited cyber love,” “Sonnet to My ‘98 Honda Shadow,” and “Talks with Nana.”

I’ve always loved the idea of a poetry collection organized around one main event or theme—like Hart Crane’s *The Bridge* or Matt Rasmussen’s *Black Aperture*. Unfortunately, I haven’t found a way to marry that kind of long-term vision with enough day-to-day inspiration. Many aspects of my life are a matter of careful planning and execution, but my poems have only died under that regime.

Knowing these things about my process, I resolved to read and write as much as I could

during my MFA, to experiment as much as possible, and to resign myself to a less-unified thesis collection at the end of the program. I didn't love that compromise when I made it, but I knew it would yield better poems and, hopefully, a better collection. After all, I'd never really believed in "planning" out poems but in simply following them out. I figured the same principles and surprises would most likely accompany the arranging of a whole collection. Indeed, *Here To See It* is an after-the-fact compilation not a concept album—more Pink Floyd's *Echoes* than *Dark Side of the Moon*.

After talking with several professors, mentors, and fellow poets, I've sincerely begun to regard the retrospectively arranged collection as its own kind of triumph. I'm proud of the fact that I've written every poem in the program on its own terms first and only then considered it for publication or thesis purposes. That's not to say every poem was great, or even good, but each had permission to speak freely—no poems were written as mere placeholders.

Throughout the MFA program, I've composed sonnets, villanelles, sestinas, pantoums, free-verse poems, ekphrastic poems, and prose poems, and I've always left one stipulation in my syllabi: "There is no prescribed writing process for this course." Some of these experiments have felt natural and become part of my repertoire; others were honest attempts but nothing more. Everything has proven enriching one way or the other.

#### IV.

So after all this talk about the variety among my poems, what *can* a reader expect? What *will* they find in *Here To See It*?

They'll find a collection bound by an exploratory, first-person lyricism. They'll find a range of tones from slapstick humor to solemnity. They'll find some newer riffs on long-running

conversations about history, religion, literature, and civilization. They'll find everything from traditional sonnets to free-form poems, all sequenced in one diurnal cycle from morning to evening.

The poems in *Here To See It* don't cure cancer, govern nations, or grant salvation, but they do reimagine language and experience through language, as I believe poetry must. No subject is too sacred or simple if I can find in it a spark and tend that ember into a flame. When I draft a poem, I don't know where it begins or ends until I'm finished. The process was the same with *Here To See It*—this collection was somehow present at the start of my MFA, and I found it by the end.

## **Morning Wanderlust**

Like Ulysses strung to the mast  
or his men with wax in their ears,  
I cannot leave my rest  
for sunlight or sweet songs of morning.

Sheets wound around me,  
I'm held in the ship  
of my bed, at the mercy  
of its drifting.

I wander headlong  
through destinies of sleep—  
like a lotus-eater or one bewitched—  
resisting the tides and shores of waking.

**Edward Hopper's *Early Sunday Morning***

We are red procession  
arched and vaulted.  
We are theme and variation,  
though mostly theme.

If not for a barber's pole  
and a firm fire hydrant,  
we might not know ourselves  
apart, sleeping at the same angles

in the same blueprints  
behind yellow shades  
above window shops  
on a Sunday morning.

If not for the grade of sky  
and the angle of shadow  
and the edge of another building,  
we might be anyone.

## **Commuter**

Today I watched a beetle  
make the morning commute  
in his sleek black suit,  
hell-bent on the big city  
of brush beyond the yard.

His antennas pointed forward,  
and his limbs revolved  
like little oars  
on a slave ship.

I knew his locomotion  
would lead somewhere,  
but for now it seemed  
like he'd never stop.

## **Childhood Reflections**

I first found infinity  
in the aisles of Kmart.

Mom was busy shopping,  
and I was multiplying  
in parallel mirrors  
by the fitting rooms.

Suddenly, the edges  
of my expressions  
notated no end,  
though I couldn't see much  
beyond the first figure.

My mind faltered,  
but mom was unfazed  
when she called my body  
from its reflections with a jolt.

### **The Hymn of Caedmon**

(A personal translation of “The Hymn of Caedmon” from Venerable Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*)

Now we worship the keeper of the kingdom,  
the might of the maker and his measurements,  
the thoughts of that thinker, as he for his works,  
the timeless one, set for them a time.

He placed first for people of the world  
the sky as a roof, the architect,  
then things between, holy builder,  
the matchless one, made finally  
the surface of earth, the steadfast Lord.

## The Pony Ball

“I’m doing their hair  
for the *pony ball*,”  
Julz insists, pursing  
her grinning lips,  
averting her blue eyes.

Indeed, a wild herd  
of multicolor ponies  
had aimlessly assembled  
on the hardwood floor,  
their rainbow manes tangled  
from previous festivities.

“Do they bring dates... I mean,  
do they dance with boy ponies  
at the ball?” I inquire.

“*No*,” Julz replies,  
“They *just dance*.”

She tames each mane  
with a thimble-sized comb,  
then displays each pony  
from a different battlement  
of her brother’s castle.

And finally, I see  
how the oversized eyes,  
batting lashes,  
and pony curves  
can be a ball  
all to themselves.

## **A Poette**

Abby is eight.

She storms second grade  
with her slight frame  
and wavy black hair  
and brow always ready  
to furrow in disapproval.

“I’m a *poette*,”  
she says, finding  
her own angle  
of emphasis.

## **The Trouble with Poems**

Poems are like teenage daughters  
who come and go  
as they please.

They break the lines  
you set for them.

They suggest  
more or less  
than you mean.

They go silent.

Yes, poems are temperamental—  
if you don't give them time and space to speak,  
you'll never really hear them.

**an echo and narcissus of early dating**

you sought the sound  
of your own voice

and i listened  
and sent it back to you

so i could catch  
in the light of your gleaming eyes

the sight  
of my own reflection

## **unrequited cyber love**

someday i'll make a video

(me)

for the video

(you)

and perhaps

our encrypted lives

will virtually meet

in someone else's browser

as mine plays after yours ends

or yours plays after mine ends

because our tags and titles

were so very close

that only short ads

ran between us

## **the roots of words**

let us return

to the unfallen  
garden

where sounds  
sprung into words

before inhabiting the ark  
of our centuries

and carving canyons  
in the deluge

of speech

## **A Life of Ordinary Words**

I could settle  
for ordinary words  
like a modest mortgage  
on a quiet cul-de-sac.

I could work  
retail in clichés  
and probably make  
a decent living.

I could retire  
by late middle age  
speaking only sentences  
I've already heard.

I could die  
and people would say  
all those nice things  
they say at funerals.

**Love for Emily D.**

Flight is a kind of falling  
birds feather through the air—  
like Love—a kind of falling—  
catching us, unaware.

## hearing the poem

when first I read the poem  
fixed on its little page  
it was a small ship settled  
upon a still white sea

but hearing the poem later  
firm from the throat  
of the poet  
and let loose upon the air  
it was a vessel  
somehow inseparable  
from the squall  
breaking across it

## **Interpretation**

When you were young,  
a word had one meaning.

You learned the meaning,  
and it fit the sentence,  
and the sentence was the sum  
of the words it contained.

But later, you discovered  
that a word was a history—  
waters, wars, lands,  
lost languages away  
from its roots.

A word, you found,  
was like a person,  
and a sentence like a city—  
one place for the many  
who can't quite agree.

## Conference

Teacher, parent, daughter.  
We arrange our desks  
in a scalene triangle.

Millennial, immigrant, teenager.  
Our ternary talk breaks  
binary at every turn.

Good cop. Bad cop. Criminal.  
Roles may be subject to change  
in time. Please come again.

## **The Young Man and Hemingway**

Finally, he brings me his essay,  
weeks late, but buoyed by its subject,  
Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*,  
a tale short and resonant for most young men  
who see in Santiago something admirable  
and akin to their own undaunted spirits,  
even when articulation eludes them.

Though in his essay, he wrestles the book  
into thesis, pinning down that perseverant man  
who endures all-night arm-wrestling matches,  
impales sharks, and returns to shore  
with the massive marlin to vindicate his battles.

“A man can be destroyed but not defeated,”  
he quotes from the novel in his conclusion,  
which he wrote in the midst of family fights  
and new school pressures—his essay resting  
on my desk, white as a marlin carcass  
brought to harbor.

## **An Imagined Self and the Sea**

Sometimes I imagine  
bearding myself  
beyond recognition  
and assuming some  
short-voweled  
northern accent.

I imagine loading  
a little skiff  
to the shriek of gulls  
with a briny breeze  
lashing my cheeks  
and forehead.

I imagine living  
a life by the lines  
at my fingertips,  
by what yields  
or does not yield  
by the day's end.

## Spring Comes to Monroe, Connecticut

Today as I enter the salt-stained lot  
with its huddling drifts of snow,  
the sky is azure and clouds waft perfect white.  
The lawns, maples, stone walls are still gray brown,  
but the midday sun illuminates everything  
with an indiscriminate grace,  
and the air is lukewarm  
behind the cooler breeze.

As I pull around  
to the ordering station—  
unmistakably pink and orange—  
I claim the new season by faith:  
“Hello—I’ll have a medium coffee,  
*iced*, with cream and sugar.”

## **Easter Thaw**

There are tulips on the altar today  
arrayed in all their living colors.

Where were they all winter long?  
They were lost in the cold,  
stony heart of the garden,  
where you couldn't see them,  
nor could your shovel pierce  
the surface of their world.

They themselves had no dreams  
beyond their death, but awoke  
on time, at a command  
buried deeper than death itself.

And now they're open  
as any heart could be  
today.

## **A Pilgrim View**

It's easier to remember  
everything as grace  
wholly beyond  
my conceiving  
on a swath of trail  
on a side of mountain  
I've never climbed  
until now.

Dense mists rise  
from towering firs  
and tall balsamroots  
sway about my path—  
each an open blaze  
of resurrection.

## **Circumstantial**

Today, a boulder  
refused to comment  
on his glacial upbringing.

The moon was busy  
bringing in the tides,  
and her alibi held water.

The stars were too far  
for questioning, and  
the sun untouchable.

Everybody was in  
on something big,  
but nobody was talking.

## **A Rogue Goodness**

There's still a rogue goodness  
here. Weeds matriculating

through cracking asphalt  
in the parking lot of Super K,

for example. Thunderstorms,  
abrupt and bellicose, interrupting

the little league championship  
again, at the top of the seventh.

Or the forward-bent old man  
inching his cart of recyclables

toward redemption,  
speaking freely of Jesus

the way I can't.

## **A Biker Marriage**

From the back of his cycle  
she clings to him—  
their lives wed  
to his line of sight,  
his sudden leanings,  
and drags of throttle—  
these two,  
one rumbling blur,  
for better  
or for worse.

**Sonnet to My '98 Honda Shadow**  
(After Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130")

My bike's high beams are nothing like the sun.  
Midnight is deeper black than her fading paint.  
If leather lasts forever, her saddle is faux leather.  
If rust is a problem, why then she has problems.  
I've seen many cycles full chromed out,  
but much less luster see I in her cylinders;  
and in some custom pipes is more delight  
than in the stock exhaust my baby fires.  
I love to hear her idle, but I know  
most Harleys have a more sought-after sound.  
I sure don't own a fuel-injected ride;  
my Honda, when she runs, runs carbureted.  
And yet, by Bud Light, I think my girl as rare  
as any in the lot that might compare.

**The Work of Summer**  
(To Mark Chase)

Mid-June, I lock up papers and red pens  
to take up the carpenter's rules and measures.

I guide the whining saw along its line,  
ply bursts of pneumatic nail guns,  
and aim the grind of impact drivers.

I savor the careless order of the sites—  
coarse subfloors, sawdusty surfaces, old figures  
scrawled on studs and plywood panels.

But most of all, I love the balance of this trade—  
each problem weighed in the mind, righted by the hands.

## **One of a Kind**

I slump  
in a hammock  
between two ancient oaks.

It's afternoon.

A buck and doe  
graze silently  
in the meadow  
beyond the stone wall.

Two whippoorwills  
convene a conversation.

In the distance,  
a lawnmower hums,  
reckoning wild fields.

Alone, I nod,  
accepting sleep,  
aching a little  
in the ribs.

## Summer Nap

I've crept inside this afternoon  
like the middle of a clock  
where the hands move least.

Let all that rises and falls  
encircle me. I will be  
some motionless center.

**edward hopper's *rooms by the sea***

as if we might wake  
into perfect angles

the door unclosing  
sea and sky

long shadows  
climbing the afternoon

in this curious place  
we've always known

## **The Free Ride to Block Island**

The ferry surges  
at steady pitch,  
traversing the sea's  
translucent blue.

Winds split  
across the prow,  
spilling around  
the vessel's sides.

Above the top deck  
in a wisp of stream,  
a gull is gliding,  
perfectly suspended.

Somewhere between  
the sea and land and sky  
he moves without  
a single motion.

## **Arrivals and Departures**

Sometimes I spend an afternoon  
on those half-padded seats  
facing glass panels  
in the arrivals section,  
as if at the movie theater,  
to watch the droves of people  
entering my life.

It's cheating, I know,  
a way to steal  
an expectant glance  
from a stranger  
who might mistake me,  
for an instant,  
as a friend.

But I hold  
no cardboard sign  
and I incline  
toward no one.  
I just sip my coffee,  
rattle my keys, and  
after a time, I leave.

## A Future History

A few years from now  
and *wham!* New discovery—  
we don't have to die!

What initial relief we felt  
about a bad thing far off,  
now gone forever entirely.

*We are not dying!*  
we boasted to plants,  
animals, and other diers.

*Now we can really live  
and not be worried all the time!*  
But then we remembered *killers*.

*Killers* are people who kill,  
even when dying  
isn't required.

*We'll have to find killers  
and kill them before  
they can kill us*, we thought.

*Good point*, the other  
we said, which made  
us feel smart.

*After that, we'll have  
all the time  
to do all the things*.

But then we thought about things  
and weren't sure which ones  
we'd want to do.

*Blasted things!* we said.  
*We've done most of them  
already a lot of times*.

*Good point*, the other  
we said, which made  
us feel smart.

*But what about the things  
we haven't done?  
we asked.*

*Yes, it might be nice  
to try those things for a change,  
we said, hopefully.*

*Good point, the other  
we said, killing us  
for the time and things.*

## **Sniper as Concise Diplomat**

He factors the values  
of the humming earth

and the wind  
and the arc

of the burst—  
and its echoing clamor—

then severs  
the mind  
of another man

open  
as questions  
never asked.

**my age of information**

in my dream

the headline always holds  
the same devastating note

for a land i can't find  
on a map

in an article  
i meant to read

in the dream  
that has always been

my waking life

## **the photos and the negatives**

when he signed  
the statement at midday

photographers jockeyed  
to capture his lines and resolutions

their rounds of springing shutters  
clacking across the room

like muffled bursts  
of automatics

in distant lands  
in the middle of the night

## **Hitler Dreams of Hitler**

Did Hitler  
ever compare himself  
to Hitler?

Would he shudder  
at the thought  
or simply scowl  
behind his half-mustache  
and trim-cut blazer?

Did Hitler ever believe Hitler  
so utterly in his arm-flailing rhetoric,  
or did he have days  
where he felt downright small,  
and less than a spinning swastika?

Were Hitler less Hitler,  
would he hear himself,  
or would he hear nothing  
above the dull roar  
of Hitler?

**edward hopper's *blackwell's island***

some days  
life happens  
at a distance

like a little  
white motorboat  
sputtering along  
a tidal channel

or the sea's indifferent  
cerulean swirling

or faded tones  
and pallid shadows  
falling across asylums  
under thunderheads

or viewers like us  
so far removed  
we vanish

***Jaws on Rewind***

(To Reddit user sixdoublefive321)

Some stories are better backwards—  
like *Jaws* on rewind  
where that greatest white devours  
the assembling scuba tank  
before the bullet  
enters Brody's rifle  
and the skiff tips up  
into sudden seaworthiness.

Keep watching  
and our unlikely ally  
returns each swimmer,  
unscathed, to the public beach,  
then vomits one last skinny dipper  
just in time to find her lover.

## To Sarah Connor

Baby, I went back in time for you.  
I took a trial run of the time machine  
crouching in the blue energy ball  
that opened in a Los Angeles alley—  
trash and newspaper swirling  
around my unrequited asphalt origins.  
And baby, I faced that faceless,  
muscle-bound cyborg for you.

*And why?* you wonder, while we make pipe bombs.  
I'll tell you—*Love*. Yes, I've loved you  
from future through present to past,  
and I'll love you long after I'm fried  
and time—that cruelest laser rifle beam—  
melts the precious Polaroid of your face.

## **Bachelorhood**

My brother and I were once  
connoisseurs of frozen pizzas  
when we lived together  
in my corner apartment  
for a time after college.

We appraised every pie  
Stop and Shop carried  
until we landed  
on Red Baron's  
brick-oven rising crust.

Half a dozen red boxes  
lined our freezer  
in those casual months,  
and "I'm making a Baron"  
became a welcomed gesture  
at any hour.

I savored every slice  
of those terribly  
convenient snacks  
we shared.

Then my brother got married.

## **My Roommate's Wife-To-Be**

*Only one request*, he mutters  
behind his glowing laptop.

*Only one wedding request:*  
*Don't make me wear pink.*

*And?* I ask.  
*The vest is pink*, he replies.

I think of his stubborn will  
in that moment, and of her  
even more stubborn will,

and I figure it's probably fitting  
these two start married life

with a fight about pink.

## Humane Mouse Trap

For a decade now, I've been leaving  
packs of Pall Malls and lighters  
on the floor of my front hallway.

My sticky note rules:

*Do it on the back porch.*

*Don't let me see you doing it.*

*Clean up after yourselves.*

So far, so good—

no messes, fires, or sightings.

Just diminutive coughing fits  
from the pantry most nights,  
and I can live with that.

## Sins of Commission

Sometimes I tempt myself  
when Temptation's not around.  
I know he wouldn't mind.

I suppose it's like the girl  
I once knew who quit smoking.  
I found her smoking.

"It's not that I needed *this* one," she said.  
"I just couldn't stand the thought  
of never smoking again."

**From the Common Book of American Prayers**

Lord, I pray  
for a perennial lack  
of conflict.

May my narrative arc  
be as near a flat line  
as mercifully possible,  
and my character arc  
enviably plotted.

May I sympathize  
with those who suffer deeply  
from a place of truly profound  
theoretical and imaginary resources.

May I live each day  
as if it were my last  
among these little  
nagging problems  
I can't seem to shake.

## **An Addict's Journey**

One day much later  
he returned home.

They weren't there  
and the house wasn't there  
and the mailbox wasn't there.

He went to ask the others  
what had happened.  
They weren't there.

He stood by the road  
waiting to catch a ride  
and the road wasn't there.

It was okay, he told himself,  
this had all happened before.

The important thing  
was that he was still here,  
wherever here was.

**unseen point**

do we survive  
gray evening's  
stretch

sweeping  
blues  
sinking hills

from the valley

where I drive  
us now

toward some  
unseen point

## **What Remains**

They won't take the pieces back.  
Nor can I.

He's lost  
and I'm left  
to Jerusalem  
without him.

The city is too wide  
and narrow now,  
and I can't live  
to remember  
his wearied glance.

I have the length of rope.  
I'll let this tree decide  
what remains.

## **Here To See It**

I walk the end  
of evening  
on the edge  
of a deep woods,  
simply glad  
the woods is here  
and I am here  
to see it.

On my way,  
I watch and smile  
as a water strider skims  
the teeming surface  
of his stream,  
barely breaking it.

## **I Hear the Midwest**

Sometimes now  
when dark clouds collide,  
crash, and strike,  
like flint on flint,  
I hear the Midwest.

I hear the tinny bells  
of the train crossing,  
and the first faint, then  
surging metallic heave  
of a freight liner.

I find myself  
on the football field again  
after dark and evening rain,  
where my whole horizon  
is a stretch of cargo cars.

The line screams  
to a halt for a moment,  
the crossing still clanging.

When it starts up again,  
the first full tug  
of locomotion  
sends its strike,  
boom, and jolt  
across every hitch—

and suddenly, I'm back  
in the stormy night  
of right now.

## **Don't Get Old**

“Don't get old, young fella,”  
he quips across the waiting room  
behind his book and reading glasses.

“I won't,” I say, smiling  
across the wide room  
which is only years.

## **Talks with Nana**

She answers her questions,  
so I can affirm her answers.

Her life lists itself away  
in little errands these days,  
and she concerns herself  
with who brought whom where,  
and whether they had enough time.

I assure her  
that who did bring whom where,  
and they did, in fact, have time.

She half smiles and stirs her tea.

She tells me she dislikes her hearing aids—  
she doesn't think they're working.

I tell her they're definitely helping.  
I tell her she's speaking more softly,  
but we can still hear her.

## **A Backward Glance**

One instant  
as I was descending  
another narrow pass  
on the parkway  
last night—

just one blur  
of evening transit  
among others—

I met  
in my mirror  
a tunneling canopy  
of bare and arching  
tree limbs  
like a great kindling  
stoking the setting blaze  
of daylight.

## **The Time**

By the time you think,  
your thought has passed

like this evening's  
last line of sunlight,

already a memory  
of its travels.

## Departure

Always, my father stands  
in the gravel driveway  
of whatever evening  
I happen to be leaving.  
Smiling, he waves.

He stands as if to say  
everything else can wait—  
he will be a father,  
even into the cold night.  
As if this were no departure.

## **A Few Practical Concerns about Death**

It's not that I'm afraid to die—  
it's just that I've never done it before.  
I've never practiced  
this level of absence.

How will I know which way to go,  
or when to start holding my breath?

How will I know  
which organ will fail me  
at the critical moment?

The hardest part, I expect,  
will be forgetting myself.

They say it's effortless, the forgetting,  
because death is the end of thought,  
but I just don't know—  
I've been thinking about myself  
for as long as I can remember.

**after purchasing “the essentials”**

last night the moon was full  
and following me  
sidestepping trees  
as I drove back  
from the superstore  
wearied of muddy people  
pre-packaged goods  
and bleeping transactions

yet utterly unready  
for the moon’s luminance  
in the blue setting sky  
which seemed to say  
*i am the beauty  
you cannot own*

## **A New England Nativity Set**

Cloudless northern night.  
Cold world stripped  
down to basics.

Stars burn beyond reach.  
Here and there hiss  
of nearby highway.

Lawn lamp turned upward.  
Light and shadow split  
the outdoor scene.

The child's hands—  
still open.

## Consider the Moon

The moon  
descends the stair

of starless night  
one seamless,

silent step  
at a time.

It ventures  
not a word—

it leaves  
the lesson

in its graceful  
falling.

## **A Goodbye, of Sorts**

That bitter night  
the air was so thin  
our breath vanished  
before our very eyes.

Sound itself  
seemed to fall  
straight to earth.  
The air wouldn't carry it.

That's why I said  
nothing to you,  
but only turned  
and walked away.

Then I heard the distant  
scraping of a snowplow  
clearing old avenues.  
And then nothing.

**never-ending nights (to nyc)**

o midnight of the railroad's rattle  
midnight of the marsh high-rises  
meteors hypodermic surprises  
interstate tailgate tollway battles

o midnight of these cattail rustles  
midnight of jet-suspending skies  
kilowatt conceits and billboard lies  
revolving doors and idling shuttles

o midnight of these lit runways  
the cited peopled evenings packed  
the grids glowings lines lights

o midnight made of nowadays  
electric tide of nothing lacked  
grant me never-ending nights

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