Here To See It

Benjamin Chase
benjamin.j.chase@gmail.com

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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

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For Mom and Dad
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*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.

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,
stone 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
clicking 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 citied 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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