



# **LIGHT AS A FETTER**

**Chris Stoffolino**

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**Cover image by Rich Curtis**

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### **What some people have said about *Light as a Fetter*:**

“We can only pass if we waste no time / thinking we can study for it.’ If so, Chris Stroffolino’s carelessly brilliant poems would be as invaluable as Cliff Notes. In any case they come in handy.”

**John Ashbery**

“These 19 poems appear on no fewer than 17 zines. That says plenty about their currency. But—as these 17 editors realized too—Stroffolino harks back, his poems resonate with history, alive and unending thanks to a Shakespearean padovan Pennsylvanian mix phenomenal in its lusty brilliance. Tucked back into our bodies by his laughter, we’re at last ready to agree that ‘it’s the mind now.’ I don’t think I’m ‘too close to the source to see the image’—to hail this poet as among the foremost of the young who are already giving striking form to a generation’s complexities.”

**David Bromige**

“I like best where the texture is really dense, the movement very steady, quick. Throughout Stroffolino makes evident a shrewdly articulate percept & life pertaining.”

**Robert Creeley**

“As Stroffolino himself writes ‘You have to be / A firehouse of activity when alive.’ Here is that firehouse.”

**Eleni Sikelianos**

# **LIGHT AS A FETTER**

## UNDERGROUND CLASSIC

The mischievous pleasure of fingers too busy  
At the keys clacking away to point the finger  
Until it feels a craving to crack its knuckles...  
Onto something beautiful though jinxed  
With self-consciousness as if you deserve love.  
Imagine a life in which just the desserts  
Arrive (yes, I know this is supposed to  
be an advanced class). Now chisel something  
Neurotic from that pre-narcissistic stone.  
This is your task (not to have tasks), to think  
Of obstacles as easily rid as they really are  
In certain moods. Moods certain of uncertainty,  
Of the porous walls the actor playing the phantom  
Chance topples during the outtake  
(of a storm scene by the subway stop)  
That becomes an underground classic to pay  
The rent of the middlemen I wish  
To see myself as now that the autopsy  
Proves what the author has died of  
("refinery smoke") without proving it dead.

To rest in peace when dead you have to be  
A firehouse of activity when alive.  
That's probably a law of nature  
But prove me wrong. Prove me nothing  
But an opinion and I'll come down  
From my cross for supper but only if  
I can call it breakfast and only if I can  
call blood wine and while you're at it  
Show me how you watch the tube  
Without identifying with the walking  
Advertisements, the exclamation  
That life truly is for some (who'd rather  
play the verb-noun game than the  
idea-thing game and maybe they'll get to  
the blue-green-yellow, the male-female game  
before noon slinks by and notes us).

## FATE AND THE PASSAGE OF TIME

Summer's sentence is followed by the paragraph  
Of autumn, an itch it can't scratch. The floor's  
Caving in. Soon the ceiling gets depressed  
To compensate. News finally arrives. "Bugs and Eskimos  
Don't have it any worse than those in White Plains."  
But we're out in hopes of making it back from  
Our mailboxes in time for our favorite commercials.  
You think I'm kidding?! See for yourself, man the  
Lookout post for me. Stand on the inside of the door  
While I try out my new key. I'll owe you one.

I'll make up for it by turning the treble and bass  
Up all the way so only the middle ranges will  
Be denied the vote. They, like the thoughts that  
Protect me from the feelings they become (as the suburbs  
protect me from the city I have to pass through  
to make it to the forest by fall), have had their day  
In the sun long enough. Maybe it's time for the time  
That doesn't have to untangle us to be here, the test  
We can only pass if we waste no time thinking we can  
Study for it. Nowhere to go but down where I'll wish  
Your arms were safety nets to fall into from the burning  
Building of your eyes (that I only went back to in hopes  
of rescuing the rare-stamp collection disguised as our child).

Tearing open the formletter, debating whether it's junkmail,  
We reached the scene of the climb, the peak in the middle  
Of the slope and retraced our steps like a landslide.  
Love couldn't come gently anymore. Drastic measures  
Were needed: bombs, lawsuits, things slipped in our drinks.  
O Checkmate me without even bothering to take my Queen  
And see what little effect that has on the help  
The news you bring cries for like cars stopped for redlights  
(still but polluting just as much as if they were speeding).  
And just as one must fall from the womb to the tomb  
To fall out of reason into love, the lights will never change.  
We have the vandals to blame or thank for that. I might  
As well recall them, put the plant on hold, and start from scratch.

## CASUAL CORONER

Oh, I get it. I'm supposed to be smoking butts  
I stole from ashtrays in the lobbies of brothels.  
I'm supposed to have scars where now I have dreams.  
Alone, I'm supposed to be alone. Naturally, here's  
The bed for it, sharp as hooves. The Venetian blinds  
Are convicts, referees. "Get rid of these beanbag chairs,  
Deflate the balloons. Take off your socks but leave  
Your shoes on. Make Esso Exxon and feel "harsh"  
Dungarees against your chakras." So the body,  
A trashcan that can be emptied without killing you,  
Forgets to be bozo at Pennies sheathing  
A dripping faucet in angelfood duplexes.

For the body, a stand-up comic, has too many  
Linebackers charging him to be able to soberly hurl  
The frisbee of knowledge to the intended receiver  
Who wants no long bomb that can't walk a straight line  
As if any organ including the spleen could live  
If the halo around it didn't have loopholes in its crotch.  
Must the apocalypse happen for the state to pull the plug?  
An autopsy's one way to win the knowledge that no one wins,  
Comparing yourself with those who compare while seeming  
Normal as a person who feels he has something up his sleeve  
(and that feeling saves him) even though we, as streetwise  
As someone who doesn't know whether he was bad at math  
Because he hated it, as true to nature's debatable rhythms  
As, if not Tiresias, at least a voyeur disguised as  
A stripper at an anarchist convention, know  
That what you think is listening is loitering.

Who died and made us, your wants, boss? The impersonal  
Answer, the album that enters the charts at #1 which  
You'll learn to like, the lava from the vulcan at the center  
Of the screen, the splattered self we best aim toward by being?  
Ripples spin outward from some point evaporated by the time  
You've figured out how to identify (with) it: the TV warms up  
As the air-conditioned cools off the haven from the heat  
It spits out. It isn't us, it's too monstrous, too Ninja-turtle,  
This casual coroner of a society less excited by death  
Than a whore is tearful at orgasm.

Deny that it is us. "Oh spare me  
from the robotic snorkeling desires, from the  
electric sperm on the idiotic holiday inn sign.



Give me garages of god, of guilt to wax  
the jalopy in, a sheep to hide the mortally  
wounded wolf in. Give me blindness as a backdrop,  
the soul an audience that doesn't heckle,  
a morning that doesn't rise so palatially  
we pale in comparison. I want to be heard  
by thornless roses, lassoed by silly string,  
vague loose satellites who want me more  
than I want them and whose beauty is measured  
by their ability to wring the sponge of guilt  
into a flash flood quenching the desert's feigned thirst."

But some shrink not saved before reaching the falls,  
Something deaf because mute, too close to the Seurat  
To see the image, becomes like wants neither swallowing  
Nor spitting out can hide and, seeing what it once thought  
Was nakedness as punk fashion, watching cattle get  
Bounced out of the snobby restaurant of a shy stomach  
Because they didn't wear the suits and ties of pickles  
And buns and speculating on blame's unwillingness  
To put out the fire (unless it ceases to become a threat),  
Becomes irradiated, a very expensive commercial for  
Counter-transference, reverse catachresis, for weeds.  
This may sound stupid, but "could you pull this  
Splinter from my paw" (since the rug flew south  
for the summer) means "Could you tell me if  
Extra-Sharp cheddar cheese is naturally white or orange."  
The Fruit of The Loom guys remain a wolf pack.  
You gotta be putting me on.

## LIGHT AS A FETTER

I lie in the dark I lie about. My desires slack off like Secret Servicemen  
Surrounding a President they don't know's a decoy until after the  
Assassination they plotted if they didn't try to prevent. Still, only a  
Kangaroo court would declare them treasonous. They sleep like babes and  
will most likely wake on the wrong side of bed (as if there is a right side

to a bed of nails!). You should see them, unless you've seen them all along  
(and knew the check irrational lust or passionless reason writes would  
bounce unless they woke). You won't be able to see them without waking  
Them. They won't listen to me (except as a folk-singer listens to the latest  
pop-hit disguised as his potential audience). But I guess there's no point

Crying over spiked milk, nor the light I can't plug in because I have nothing  
To see the outlet by. It's best to be in the dark about certain inescapable  
Diseases. But whether this is the darkest hour is another question.  
Darken, darken...until I can be sure I'm swimming through Lethe  
Because we like it and not just because I'd drown if I weren't.

## WHEN DESIRES BECOME DESCRIPTIONS

It's easier to look out from us into me than from me into us  
Unless the mind's as busy as a phone without call waiting.  
Yet the nut can no longer find pleasure in the shell,  
Gentle as wishful thinking, that kept it from being bitten.

Do I have to become the apple that can't spoil  
The whole bunch (even though it's the basket they sit in)  
To sing what can't be spoken about? The screen window  
Lets in light and air, but blocks the bugs who

Would kill the ones who creep in through a crack  
In the wall of the flat where I await a lackluster  
Personal letter unless I'm taking up an inciting  
Abstract lemma, kind of a poor man's version of a celebration

Of willessness disguised as a lament for loss of control,  
A car trying to catch up with the Horizon where everything's  
Condensed on a Friday night filled with teenagers who  
Wished they were adults who wished they were teenagers.

Then I'm seen abandoning the car without even putting  
The key in the ignition, dousing the fire because  
Only the kindling had lit. But if you're here, we're  
Speaking to a mind that tries too hard to flesh out

A heart that seems to precede it like a backdrop  
Moving slower than the scurrying trees in the foreground.

## YOU COULD'VE HAD ME

I don't know what's worse: that I can't go to bed  
Or that I want to. Did I ask you "But how can you  
Build a ladder without knowing how to climb it?"  
Or was I too busy wondering whether to study

German instead of French to make up for knowing  
Only how to play drums with my flute? Oh well,  
Moaning about it would only make it go away if  
Celebrating it made it happen. I prefer not to

Talk about it, but since you brought it up (and since  
I brought you up), I might as well be too good to  
Be true: "How many pictures of personal inefficacy  
In the face of unavoidable loss will you let past

The gates unquestioned? How many stories staring  
Yourself will you have to tell to come close to  
Giving me as much of a feeling of your presence  
As your theories into the President's motives do?"

One was a "so close, yet so far" story, like mom  
Used to read, except we were really in the thick of it,  
Had fallen through the thin ice that separates author  
From character, writing from being read to. Despite

The fact we didn't have to purposely get fat in hopes  
Of being loved for our minds, there was nothing much  
To recommend us to the bureaucracy a piece has just  
Fallen off, like a fist slipping into something only

More comfortable if seductive in a world where mistrust  
Mustn't try to become trust. In the meantime, well diggers  
Hit a snag and will have to ride exercise bikes all the way home,  
As in a drama filed in the comedy section by

A resentful clerk told to keep his day job if he hopes to buy  
His way into what parodies what his better half finds  
Less obstacles (and money) in the way of.  
He's had enough, though, that hunter on a tricycle

That keeps me from writing by giving me  
Something to write about besides the courthouse  
That would be a lookout tower were the  
Scaffolding removed, besides the photo of the tornado

That has more in common with the photo of the courthouse  
(that can be easily destroyed by a tornado)  
Than it does with the tornado itself,  
Besides the tanker of intellect you jumped.

## CHESSE WITHOUT PAWNS

1. He makes the first move  
so slowly that weeds, your  
doubts, have fertile enough  
soil to choke the flowers  
that tempt you to the  
minefield. Then you walk  
down the stairs to greet  
him by seeming to leave him  
in the shadow of a banished  
number.

2. He comes to you as a ripped  
dollar, glad you couldn't or  
wouldn't mend him, for  
money burns a hole in your  
pocket. He purposely tears  
himself in two to be with you  
(& to do so borrows your hands  
that drop the spool of tape  
into the whirlpool).

3. In the dark he lights a  
candle he won't be able to  
blow out once the sun rises.  
Then he'll pull down the shades  
Unless you bang down his door  
Like a delivery girl he'd only tip  
If he slaved for hours over  
The pizza she carries.

4. He saw faces in the trees so  
he'd only see trees in faces:  
dead trees used for cardtables  
he can only play solitaire at;  
even then something blocks  
the loser's view of the winner  
(which wouldn't be so bad if  
it blocked his view of himself).  
the darkness of heat

In curtainless rooms  
on bright winter days  
the shivering insomniac  
pulls the blanket over his feet

because it's finally dark.  
Fear washes over me  
so I can start again,  
the sword of humility  
gashes against the poison  
sumac plant of pride  
it turns out wasn't a skin  
I was condemned to keep,  
but to be shed, once it reached  
a (too) certain height,

once it cast shadows over  
insecurity like an awning  
blocking out a heat  
I need in order not to  
see my breath  
as something distinct  
from indifferent air.

## SEPTEMBER 31, 1992

In the middle of a slow-moving miracle, when flirtation  
Becomes a filibuster, I yawn in vain, secretly hoping  
The cops are still snoring in the speedtrap of meaning.  
In the by now safe turf of the mind, the light has  
Been left on. Approaching it, I see verbs of essence  
Go down on nouns of existence. Atoning for abstractions  
With still more abstractions, I can't win unless I lose.  
The fabric pulls so tight I've found an armhole to poke  
My head through so I can see you through the stained-glass  
Of the thought of you. Maybe then I can eat the image  
Part of the symbol as I eat a fruit of which the skin's  
The only edible part.

You said you would meet me, grant  
Me an audience that became an actor, if I promised not  
To tell anyone about it. "Not fair," I cried. "Is it OK if  
I tell people you would only meet me if I didn't tell  
Anybody?" "Sure, be my guest," you said, disappointed....

It wasn't until midnight I realized I had had a full day  
Without having opened my mouth but to the checkout girl  
And the rice, juice and cigarettes she may have given me  
A discount on if I would've talked to her longer or not  
As long. I don't know, but finally feel I don't have to  
Sleep to shelter myself from hilarious sorrow. The sun  
Shines in the umbrella of the sky. The background music,  
Hardbop, comes in through the backdoor and leaves  
A plate of food I won't notice until I empty it.

Does it matter then whether I jumped or was pushed onto  
The train that takes me away from what takes me away from you  
So we don't have to have a lot in common to continue the  
Conversation long after the words have gone to bed  
(though their snoring keeps us awake).



## WITH VACATIONS LIKE THIS, WHO NEEDS A JOB

A caterpillar crawls on one  
Of two sticks rubbed together  
But you thought it was a moth  
To a flame. You live so long  
In your head that when the  
“Real world” swings into view  
Like a muscleman kicking sand  
Onto a before picture, you kiss  
The sand as if you’ve just spotted  
Land. You cannot stay on shore  
Forever since it’s not a nude beach  
And so things settle into a sort  
Of routine. The camera’s running  
So you don’t have to take notes.  
Soon it’s like you shit something out  
The second you swallow it, stepping  
Under an umbrella that starts raining.  
You better start thinking about trading  
In that hauberk of a self for a more  
Streamlined model you won’t have to  
Sacrifice anything for (except  
the feeling of sacrificing).

But when someone calls to tell me  
“You can’t have what you want unless  
You want what you have,” I hang up,  
Telling him I have someone on the  
Other line, someone who says “Seeing  
A shrink won’t help, being a shrink  
Might.” I don’t know why I’d rather  
Hear her right now. She doesn’t sing  
Beyond the genius of the sea or anything.  
Maybe just maybe it’s for the same reason  
A man who cradles above average lyrics  
In passionless tunes spends more time  
Listening to a musician who has stupid  
Lyrics but great melodies than the other  
Way around, in this case at least.

## VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

We couldn't see the sky painted on the ceiling  
But the love we knew was blind could. Maybe  
We met in a bar because she was as afraid of  
My body as I was of hers. Under normal  
Dating circumstances this could prevent us  
But if the city proves anything it's that nature  
Isn't normal. And as some have to go to movies  
To look in the mirror and others need not be babies  
To be born head first it's not really a matter  
Of putting the cart before the horse to be friends  
Before lovers, to eat the nut before cracking the shell  
And feel like we have too much of what others have  
Too little of. Nor must I feel like it can be quantified  
For consciousness to come off like a teacher who lectures  
So much or always calls on the one student, say memory,  
Who always has his hands up. forgetting until finals week  
To try to get the cuter silent one in the back to talk,  
Which is shame when it turns out she has the most  
Interesting things to say, or at least it seems that way  
After overdosing on "depth." And so we're trying to drink  
Our way out of the tunnel we're were too similar to be  
Attracted to each other. "Vive La Difference!" says one  
Of the bridgeworkers to a diplomat at the bar. "It keeps us  
In business." But I don't know if i want to be kept there,  
I protest. "Of course you do, silly. Listen. It's not so bad.  
You get nights off, free lunch, overtime, the pleasure  
Of killing two birds with one stone." But killing two birds  
With one stone is just a polite way of saying 'double vision'--  
Any fool who just got fired can see that there only ever  
Was one bird; it was blind at that, blind as a bat  
That couldn't care less whether the batter just struck out  
The second before the game (played in the Astrodome)  
Is called because of rain.

## BETWEEN ACTS

If you throw pearls before swine & they like it,  
they're not pearls or they're not swine. Yet the judge  
who knows how taking the shortcut doesn't make up for  
going too slow might still be sleeping and the relativist  
get away with murder in the meantime. Or, if not murder,  
at least saying "It doesn't matter if you cut corners,  
we all see the same amount anyway" which is true  
in certain circumstances but needs to be false now,  
unless it really was you I loved and not just  
the vacation I saw you on.

If blame says I'm further from you than thought  
is from feeling, the past from the future, then we have  
as little in common as two people trying to express  
the same feeling (one they can't get a handle on)  
in two different languages between acts of a play  
that has more of a chance of getting a government grant  
than it does of being popular just to keep the truth  
its corner of the market someone will always try  
to place a duncecap on. And though I can't stop them  
by closing my eyes to the rents that keep going up  
like weeds blocking the sun, the sun that would burn us  
if we didn't have an off switch so everytime I turn off  
the light in my kitchen the whole city blacks out  
until I go to the same park with her  
I used to only go to with you

Which you might resent until I take you someplace  
I've never taken you before, though you've  
been there often, unbeknownst to me, and  
with someone else I suspect doesn't really  
move you enough for you to feel you have  
something up your sleeve when you don't  
tell me about it.

## CHRISTMAS CARD FROM THE LANDLORD

In giddy moods a peach doesn't have to become  
A seed to perpetuate the species, a building can  
Be torn down by plopping another building, ready for  
Occupancy, in the same spot, but I can only hope  
To pick up the thread she gave me before spring  
Comes around again like fool's gold...

And just because it's cloudy  
Doesn't mean there's more likelihood of rain.  
An urgent thunderhead could be  
Just over the horizon on the clearest of days  
(but I probably should bring that thought--  
that hot water becomes ice quicker than cold water--  
in for questioning). If only she wouldn't have  
minded--and I'm not saying she did--that I  
Flunked foreplay, an introductory course  
It's stupid to suspect was designed  
Only to screen out those who'd excel  
On the graduate level more easily than  
Those allowed to pass would, if only her boyfriend  
Wouldn't have always answered the phone.

If she answers the phone it means she called me.  
If she gets in my car, she's driving. "Get in the  
Car. Don't talk. If I talk, don't listen. I'm gonna  
Drive as far south as we can until we run out of gas.  
Even if we get lost on a winding road past everything  
I would have gladly swapped my wristwatch for,  
Where I could have you there in plain sight of  
Everyone envious who evaporate during a drought  
Which is exactly what we need to get along, to be  
Placed on a desert isle without language, without  
Form eclipsing content the same way everyday life  
Does, and though the odds of this happening are less  
Than getting struck by lightning, I still think  
The thunderhead's possible."

Turns out what I think she gives me and what she thinks  
I give her are synonymous, if too stiffly idealized  
Unless the monk was right about having to make  
Your own roads to walk down them. Turns out excitement  
Was nothing less than boredom's way of resting  
To come back replenished like bacteria huddling in  
The smoke-filled wings in gasmasks while antibiotics

Win the battle but lose the war, both of which  
I skirt around when she says this gets you nowhere.  
But if nothing does, then what justifies  
The meddling you valorize as action more  
Than the pleasure I can't prove we're having.  
It doesn't matter if you knew it the last time it  
was the body, the point is it's the mind now.  
It might as well be pain now, or a freshly painted  
Room with no heat, a christmas card from the landlord.

## OBVIOUSLY

Stating the obvious does not do justice  
to the ambivalence of my desires;  
realism says "don't die in the graveyard."  
But stating the ambivalent does not  
do justice to the obviousness of my desires.

I'm almost convinced we can  
both fit under the showerhead  
at the same time, that you need  
to 'give' as much as I need to "take,"  
that we can find down up  
without making up down...

Obviously, I want to go to bed with you.  
Obviously, environmentalists are  
more romantic than the makers  
of disposable diapers. So, it's okay  
if you play the field as long as  
you're with me when you're with me.

In fact, if you didn't have  
some other noun like verb  
you'd probably be with me  
so much when I'm not with you  
you'd only give table scraps  
when I am

## A LITTLE FAST

Beauty is trying to survive the storm that's already paralyzed  
My knowledge. Crowds pass, each one carrying the key that opens  
Every door but mine; they never get sick, but never get well.

A junker is dreaming of the grand-prix so it can get it up  
To putt-putt around the block. A dog is being conned into  
Believing that chasing the scent it doesn't know is criminal

Is really chasing its own tail; otherwise why do it? Everything  
That comes up for discussion is entertained, but sometimes  
They don't come single file, or even 2 by 2 so the Ark sinks

Before the waters have receded leaving no survivors but  
Useless pointers ("don't forget your gun"). But even if the  
Record being slipped back into its sleeve doesn't make

A sound as beautiful as the hum of the turntable that told  
It to get lost, it's not the end of the world, despite how  
It seems to one who's wrapped in the straightjacket of a mood

Viewed from a swooping helicopter by the word language,  
A part mistaken as a whole, motion seen as the stillness  
That doesn't have to be the wiser but sadder present to gaze

On the happy foolish past, that bursts at the seams to focus  
On the frame rather than the picture all the art in the world  
Can not defend. I, for instance, could get away with less art

If my attitude were different, but can't change my attitude  
Unless I document all the beer-smearred phone numbers given me  
By those I wouldn't have met had I not been drinking.

If I ever hope to be like those who change the course of rivers  
At least as much as the houses whose leaning antennae are all  
That's left unsubmerged of Front Street, it must be time to return

To textbooks to read only passages I didn't highlight: "Last Fall,  
TWA Wanted to merge with Pan Am if Pan Am didn't first sell  
To United. I was sitting on the platform suppressing my constitutional

Right to moan and spit when I asked you for the time.  
And when you said, "but you're wearing a watch,"  
I said "Yeah, but I think mine's a little fast.

## PLAYING REVEILLE SO IT SOUNDS LIKE TAPS

Ever wonder what would be possible if names  
were not numbers, if we didn't have  
to play press to record, if we didn't have to  
be more intimate to look than to touch?  
If the feeling of getting closer to trust  
takes you away from it, must I be  
an urge to name to be an urge to blame?

"I thought you had to wear bags over your head  
to have sex. Boy did she have me fooled...."  
just as the past has the present fooled into thinking  
it could live without it and that somehow indicting  
what you can't do doesn't indict what you can do.  
But since I can't wait, I have to walk on  
water ignoring details to feel clean in an opposite  
hemisphere whose fall I only find beautiful  
because it makes me feel I'm catching up to you.

I am the grass you're not allowed to walk on  
(because the sidewalks will feel guilty for not  
being used) and the clothes the universe can only  
get sick of when February steals its days back  
from July and August and the only thing I love  
more than being complimented is being insulted  
by someone I don't respect...

From here, a hymn seems more  
like a march than the blues. Yet it's easier  
to know we won't stop it by running away  
than know what running away is  
without closing ourselves off to all possibilities--  
airholes, slivers, our bread and butter as it were.  
I try to avoid butter, though I suspect you'll be  
the butter that calls my bread butter  
if not the wonder that worries mine



## MY VULGAR DOUBLE

It's easy to rock the boat if you don't think  
We're all in the same one. Is that why during  
Earthquakes the earth says "My boat's more real  
Than yours, nah nah nah nah nah nah," as if there  
Aren't times when it identifies with the roadblock  
That tries to stop people from driving off the pier  
Into what horror they'd be without the ridiculous  
Laws that staple the second skin of tolerance  
And civility onto the residuum of the soul--

The mutuality arrived at too easily, too early  
To be mimetic enough to be generative unless  
Something else arises like shoelaces to trip over,  
Or a tape played back of a go-go guy dancing  
So you can catch the details of his body but only  
By losing the feeling of motion he allegedly  
Has more control over, "conventionally" construed  
As akin to the soul. Are you more afraid of him saying  
"You only love me for what I have no control over?"  
Than you are of him saying "You only love me for  
What I do have control over?"

So I threw him against a bus with the words  
"Christlike Pleasant Green Faith Baptist Church"  
On it and said some things to treat that perception  
Like the dirt it really is, the dirt that let my mind  
Get going either beyond it or between me and it  
Into this knot behaviorists are blind to perhaps  
But that I call home when I'm in it, though not  
When I'm away from it. Is it stupid to search for  
A home that I'll call home even when I'm away from it?  
If I find such a place, and leave it, what then becomes  
Of everything not it; must I treat it like dirt?  
And how can dirt be treated by what's made of dirt?  
Only the way a character treats another in a movie  
That lacks the necessary evil we've come to expect  
If not embrace: The evil I hate, the evil that I hate.

## A CLOSE SECOND

Someone who's lost more than she ever recouped  
(though she gained more than one who's never lost)  
Is talking to me, like a mirror even a midget has  
To stoop to see his face in, the mirror I haven't  
Unpacked yet. I call her you. Nothing's here but  
The obvious, the oblivious. All the advice you give  
Pulls away like the taxi you told to follow the car  
You thought I was in. It left without you, but I  
Wasn't in the car either. Turns out I'm sitting  
Aside of you in the balcony and we don't even know  
We're having sex. Yes, I am astonished at all the  
Free food that comes with my admittedly overpriced  
Receipts, like a woman who runs fast enough to make  
Me want to catch her so much I will. But these ideas  
Hold no water unless it's been changed to wine and  
Can't be doggybagged without losing their flavor  
Unless they also lose their nutritional value.

The underlying beat is fixed in the mind. The abrupt  
Breaks and breathless run-ons seem to echo the feelings  
They convey. Tell me I'm richer than I know, and I'll  
Take a loan out to repay you by uncoiling a long  
Extension cord to place a watercooler by a brook.  
But you won't believe me unless you know there's  
Something I won't allow; I must find it, to stop  
Living the dream I won't believe you've woken from  
Until you trade him in for me. If it's too early  
To say I love you before, odds are it'll be too late  
To say so afterwards. I run into you like the Colorado  
River runs into the Gulf of California. I'm so nervous  
My exclamation points look like question marks.  
Eventually, I'll free desire from the kennels in hopes  
It will know when to stop, in hopes that most men  
Who mug you didn't learn how to do so in jail.

Why should you love me, when I've gotten by with  
Only loving myself for so long now (since breakfast  
at least) that the empty vessel corroded to seem full?  
You wouldn't fare much better in these circumstances  
(though you probably wouldn't let yourself get in  
these circumstances). Admittedly torn, I tell the dog  
(whose bark's no better than a tree's) not to run over  
And lick you, though you'd probably pet it, dropping  
Your groceries, which it would eat to save me enough

Money to move out of the red if not the mind.

My friends make it sound like we're all at the  
Heart's mercy, that the mind must sit and wait  
At the redlight the heart is until it turns green  
(as a dollar that opens all kinds of doors, a  
master key). But what if it never turns green (as a  
finger after a ring's been taken off it)? What if  
The heart won't give orders, return the mind's serve,  
But is too busy off with some other guy who,  
Though making more money than me, isn't necessarily  
Any less sensitive? Will I then have to offer no apology  
But a theodicy, speak only in neologisms and clichés  
And lay my lie on the line so that the absences  
Sensations can't help but point to are as much out  
Of the price range of the rich as of the poor?  
Or will desire phone me the second you ring my bell  
To procure the much needed extended dance mix  
Of the mood so we wake up sore enough tomorrow  
To suspect we've lived...

## AFTER LONG CONVERSATION

I get greedy. So summer and winter  
Embrace leaving autumn's room temperature  
In the dust like a jockey thrown from  
A horse that, lighter, went on to win  
The race (it had no idea of) but was  
Disqualified (which wouldn't have mattered  
to it had it not been taken back to  
the stables and discreetly shot).

As long as this is a realistic picture  
I feel good enough to think life isn't  
Passing me by but not so good to think  
Life's not passing them by unless I plant  
The bugs closer in hopes every Omniscience  
Is not the Grinch in drag. And such hopes  
Only seem to put consummation off  
When I forget to defy logic, the death  
Of logic as we defy poetry or what poetry  
Threatens to be especially if not interrupted

By an urgent call from an angry friend  
Who's starting once again to waken to  
Her needs that aren't being met or raised  
By wolves after being orphaned by decorations  
In the halfway house of freedom whose time  
Has come and gone and waits in the wings we  
Soar on till we crash into the sore  
Subject of a skyscraper we slide down  
Like firemen en route to put out what  
One here among us has most likely set  
In hopes of making the consumption  
Conspicuous unless putting a key in the  
Ignition is not seen deferring the high road,

At least as cozy a prison as polite pawing  
On the awkward first night when we tried  
To sneak through the front following  
The directions we misread each time we read  
For meaning. You have to do it to understand  
The directions. And once you do the directions  
Are useless. But we, who love to give the  
Worthless a shot, even if it means sacrificing  
Our center (if it's really our center, it'll  
return or seem to as now it seems to leave),

Find new uses for it in finding no uses for it  
Since commodification can seep into just about  
Any water supply for the sake of a complication  
Not picky enough to be the clumsy commercials

In the bigtop that makes the sideshow possible  
Where we love each other so much our little  
Skit: "Why should I clean when I don't cook?"  
"You eat what I cook." "But you would've cooked  
It anyway."--will be put in the past on the  
Condition the past can be put in the present  
And I wait for a world, a woman who won't  
Call this cheating, to blow the gameboard  
Of my mind as the prayer for her could  
Be seen acting from desire as much as fear.