

Five for Sixfold

On a Napkin

Imagine the table-bards
of yore, filling the scraps
with blotty elegies
and kennings bleeding down
the unfolding wheelbarrow-thoughts
beside the white chickenings-out. I pine
for the lost scop world of envelope
backs, menus, telephone pole fliers
and stub pencils borrowed
from fat salesmen on trains
and crushed index cards
with jam stains retrieved from deli trash.

But now I'm back in front
of a bright screen, touching my eyes
and fingers to what can never
also be used to clean
that dollop of cream cheese
off your beautiful, hungry lip.

In the Street Without My Glasses

Blur sips at morning's
blue bowl. The heart,

young mole, noses forward.
Something of steel, maybe of stone.

Without a lens the filth is gone.
Men and women regress

toward a trembling mean,
awnings and marquees dumb

in the warble of sky
and even nameless cars

gleam like starlings,
their promised manslaughters

passing under bus faces
smeared to leaf.

Here's what may be a woman, a tremolo
of arm, a shudder of blond or gray

blent to one age as light
as her shadow fluttering

off the asphalt like desert distance,
the true flicker we may be.

Now I can love whoever
it is. The world before the uncorrected eye

is marbled, brimming, quivers
over its boundaries, wells.

I Argue with Neruda Over You

Dressed, in fact, you are vertical as twenty fugues,
sundry, contrapuntal, upright.
You have smoke plains, oyster beds:
dressed in blue, you are the night sea that stretches to Gibraltar.

Dressed in white, you are tan as dawn's buck,
savannahs and sunrises along your wrists;
with a scarf, you are burnished and pied,
three seasons the largest cathedral can't contain.

Fully dressed, you are as far as the purplest field,
straight, fast-twitch, Rembrandt-black when evening dies
and you emerge in the elbow of night.

Up from the quick heat of your leisure
a fresh darkness flames, disrobes--floods into stem--
and faces the body's first idea, trussed only in words.

Looking in Vain for Airport Recycling during a Long Layover,
You Catch a Glimpse of the News

Outside the sky staggers hugely by, clouds
piled up over the rubble of history
in more destinations than your credit card
is valid. You add to the trash,
all the rot we move toward, tie the knot
in the plastic and play catch
with the absorbent earth, pitching
what's left onto the future's clean ground,
virgin beeswax of an unneeded plate.
But there's another frank face
of the world, the steppes
where your crushed cup at last
arrives and where it's always
the same troops, the same shrieking
women in sandals, and every penny
that flies from your pocket
for a Coke drops on the head
of the child you could have been
from a height you can't ever get a grip on.

Bone

So patient: a buried conch, soundless shell
worn in and rung like bole that trees tick,
my stoniest idiom, the stuff of skull,
frame that moves me forward and ties me back,

structure inside everything but organ and brain,
architecture lumpy and patched, almost improvised
(cf. *toes*), imperfect psalm sung against
the maggot that skeleton alone can stymie.

This marrow of the spheres is what lurks
behind your parents' grin and your lover's—see it?—
this trellis we're hung on. Light enough in birds
to fly, it fits us to the ground, ball and socket,

prison of ribs that patiently assert themselves,
openings and passages gapped like spark plugs.
While we live joints wear out, then survive
us, pocked, pitted, cleaned in the teeth of the gods.

Blood is born in bone's tunnel, not the heart's,
feeds what breaks before it bends.
I am my own under skin's sheet--
only the little wait in these bones.