Homily

Outside an all-night diner, as neon
glyphs cursive bare white windows,
I see his shadow cross-section mine, two
figures scrawled in black grist, gray relief of
his body, the newspapers he used for blankets
spooked origami bats, the street folding into
flight then falling, crumbled sounds.
What to say to him & why?
Lamppost-lighted, shadows dirty his face, he seems
just a scab of a man, wounded by brick and light.
Simply: an olive drab sack, bare ankles screwed to mud-crusted boots,
jack-knifed against the wall, waiting perhaps
to be opened, to unfold like heat to the furnace
embrace of a warm mother ghost, the distance between
this man and who he once was with her—a phantom
family portrait hanging on the nail in his mind—and
who he is now—an imaginary sliver wedged in my skin.
We bleed silence.
I’d like to help him somehow—put him on a bus
and send him to Vegas. He might enjoy the show,
probably used to people consumed with little things:
erupting volcanoes, spilling pockets of change for
people who make a living looking like someone else.
He doesn’t look like anyone I’d know so
why do I care? Should I want to help this man
because I can? I can’t
loose the silver-thin crack between us—a two-way mirror
through which I observe, thinking of ways to help him
help himself, cleaved from him by my obvious
dime store morality

as neon behind us sells food, drink,
a phone call. I sound far away
as I mutter some excuse to myself.
Above us, a congregation of brown pigeons
bunched on telephone wire, waiting for the next jolt.