THREE WATERFRONT SONNETS

IPSWICH, WINTER 2025/26

BY ARUNA STANNARD

i. AFTER THE BREAKUP, ADONIS IN A SKIP

First, I was the river: silt-mouthed slow curve,
separate from source. Then, a boarded-up front:
rust blooming, ferrous bruises on shocked beams
and as the sun cut in, sideways and low, cold
skim like a priest's unwanted blessing,
I saw him, rising from an orange warning.
Unmistakable, the arch angulation,
marble hip cocked in contrapposto, carving
like dawn through the greased nocturnal thump,
turning me to syllables in his dust.
Until he turns, called down to from an
unglazed window, hazmat Romeo
in dust-streaked overalls guts a warehouse,
as I move on, take my rubble with me.

ii. TWO OWL STATUES, OUTSIDE THE HOTEL

Two cormorants rest wings on the Orwell;
fierce, reptilian, sunning full throats and
sending up bat-signals
                and here you stand,
gazing on two pink myths, when you're the one
who breathes the living breath of winter, curling
smoke around the stonework?
                Question: how long
will you stay welded to your watch?
                Warning:
once we held the river in our faces,
        chased full moons in our reflections.
Doesn't it all fade
                eventually?
Isn't dust
                the bones of everything?
Aren't ink and diamonds
                dialects of soot?
If we could give you feathers for your pen,
we three sisters, and you the one with wings.

iii. HOLD

Regenerated waterfront, old port.
Illuminated letters from the psalter
mark the way, where hound and harpist guard
the faithful patience of the automatic
doors. It wants to be a port still, and though
the yellow metal speaks ‘container’,
something more meets us in the seasickness
of our searching. Windows the colour of
psalms, a bird’s nest cable-tied to future,
legacies written home and bound in the
meaning of it, *hold*: from Old English
healdan, from Old Saxon *haldan*, the
Germanic, strong verb, with the senses, to
keep watch on, to look after, as in pasture.