

Five Tay Sonnets

1. OSPREYS

You'll be wondering why you bothered: beating
up from Senegal, just to hit a teuchit storm –
late March blizzards and raw winds – before the tilt

across the A9, to arrive, mere
hours apart, at the self-same riverside

Scots pine, and possess again the sticks and fishbones
of last year's nest: still here, pretty much
like the rest of us – gale-battered, winter-worn,
half toppled away ...

So redd up your cradle, on the tree-top,
claim your teind from the shining
estates of the firth, or the trout-stocked loch.
What do you care? Either way,
there'll be a few glad whispers round town today:
that's them, baith o' them, they're in.

2. SPRINGS

Full March moon and gale-force easters, the pair of them
sucking and shoving the river
back into its closet in the hills, or trying to. Naturally

the dykes failed, the town's last fishing boat
raved at the pier-head, then went down; diesel-
corrupted water cascaded into front-yards, coal-holes, garages,

and *there's naethin ye can dae*,
said the old boys, the sages, which may be true; but river –
what have you left us? Evidence of an inner life, secrets
of your estuarine soul hawked halfway

up Shore Street, up East and Mid Shore, and arrayed
in swags all through the swing-park: plastic trash and broken reeds,
driftwood, bust TVs ...

and a salmon,
dead, flung beneath the see-saw, the crows are onto at once.

3. MAY

Again the wild blossom
powering down at dusk, the gean trees
a lather at the hillfoot

 and a blackbird, telling us
what he thinks to it, telling us
 what he thinks ...

How can we bear it? A fire-streaked sky, a firth
decked in gold, the grey clouds passing
like peasant-folk

 lured away by a prophecy.

 What can we say

the blackbird's failed
to iterate already? Night calls:
the windows of next-door's glass house
crimson, then go mute

4. EXCAVATION & RECOVERY

Then specialists arrived, in hi-viz jackets and hardhats
who floundered out every low tide
to the log-boat, lodged
in the mud since the Bronze Age. Eventually

it was floated to the slipway, swung high
in front of our eyes: black, dripping, aboriginal
– an axe-hewn hollowed-out oak
sent to the city on a truck.

What were you to them, river, who hollered
'Shipping water!' or 'Ca' canny lads!' in some now
long-forgotten tongue?

an estuary with a discharge of 160 cubic metres of water per second
as per the experts' report?
or Tay/Toi/Taum – a goddess;
the Flowing(?), the Silent One(?).

5. 'DOING AWAY'

Nowhere to go, nowhere I'd rather be
than here, fulfilling my daily rituals.

Why would one want
to absent oneself, when one's commute

is a lonely hillside by-way, high
above the river? Specially when the tide's
way out, leaving the firth
like a lovers' bed with the sheets stripped back

baring its sandbanks, its streamy rivulets,
– the whole thing shining
like an Elfland, and all a mere two fields'
stumbling walk away ...

Someday I'll pull into a passing-place
a mile from home, and leave the car,

when they find it
engine thrumming quietly