

Black Canal

Fish

They'll always find a place for you in the sidewalk cafes.
No one ventures into the streets these days,
Except strangers and those like me, looking for work.
I noticed the smell when I got off the bus,
And traced it down to a canal that ran
Right through the heart of the city,
Like an open vein full of black rotten blood.
A mirror surface, broken only by the bubbles of gas
Escaping from the stagnating mess that lay on the bottom.
Fuelled by the chemicals and effluent of the city,
Which was fed, in turn, by the barges and the ships
That followed that line and created the waves across that
Surface to the dockside, where they unloaded their holds.
The swarms of people clambering over them.
I sat down in a cafe and I was holding my own,
And minding my own business,
And a voice spoke in my ears as if it recognized
That I was questioning the source of the smell.

Have another beer boy, take it with a pinch of snuff.
And my eyes were bedazzled, by the jewels in his silken cuff.
And a voice rolled out from an ashen cloud from behind a long cigar;
Son, you'll never need to smell the black canal.

It was as if he'd read my mind, as if he expected it,
And, as the afternoon was wasted, I became aware
I was becoming wrapped up in his world.
I became aware of the smell from the bouquet in his buttonhole.

It was taking me away from the canal,
And away from my questions.
I was aware that the perfumes were all around us;
And he sold me the city, well at least he tried to with all his stories.

All the silks out of China,
And all the satins out of Spain.
All the powders for your noses
Will keep the stench at bay.

Have another beer boy, take it with a pinch of snuff.
Your eyes will be bedazzled, by the jewels in my scented cuff.
And a voice rolled out from an ashen cloud from behind a long cigar;
Son, you'll never need to smell this black canal.

And my world was spinnin', my head was awash
With this promises and his beer.
And I looked up as he reached down,
And snorted the flower in his buttonhole.
He smiled and his eyes lied.
I was staring at a suit with no soul.

No matter how you wash them,
How you scrub, and bleach, and boil,
You'll never get rid of the smell of the black canal.
Of the black canal.
Black canal.
The black canal.

The black canal.
The black canal.