

Fish, Black Canal

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
(Derek Dick/Foss Paterson)