



the old canal

by Finbarr Crowe

Oh! You were once the ocean of my youth
And in your harbour docked the world's great fleet
Of barges, brecauns, rowing-boats, sand cots;
My Rotterdam waterway, by Clare Street.

And in the tar-black darkness of your soul
Lay mysteries that troubled my night's dream.
A bargeman warned me once: "Tis ten miles deep";
And gravely spoke of whales that lurked downstream.

And I, believing all, would gaze in awe,
As sacks went whistling down the flour-strewn chute
Winches squeaked, and cart wheels shrieking, shrill,
Crunched coal and coke along the cobbled route.

How grand to watch that gateway yawning open,
Free flowing waters sweeping far and wide;
A chugging barge outbound on high venture
Steady on course set by time and tide.

And then, one day, to see it coasting homeward,
Stitching its tapering motif on the placid stream;
The brick-red barrels bloated with draughts of Guinness,
Some young McCormack singing of Kathleen.

But that was years ago, ere clerks computed,
All's empty now; old values fall to price.
The chutes are mute, arthritic-stiff the winches,
And time has razed the gates of paradise.

The water's gone; Atlantis of my childhood
Is but a seamy world of trash and slime,
Now septic streamlets snake about the wasteland
And I have lost this Eden that was mine.

