

(At Tapton Lock)

Here

We come in a small boat,
contained in a space so narrow
we rock against the sides, sink

lower and lower into stench
of lock, where, oozing slime,
the walls reveal themselves,

and eyes accustom to the slithering
of bugs in sepia, crawling
blind from stone, moss, mud;

until there is no lower
and the wooden gates
fold open on a silent place

where graffiti zigzags concrete,
collides with barbed wire, coils catch
teasel spikes, spear blood red haws,

yet a tesco bag balloons on water,
plump white ducks skim fallen petals,
part crayola yellow beaks,

and left alone and tall,
rosebay willowherb and tansy
speak a simple, whispered language;

where moorhens highstep
sloping walls, lead lines of chicks
to practise widths in safe water,

snapdragons snake round old
umbrellas, riot over rusty wheels.
A cyclist's whistle rasps a tunnel once.

Here everything has found its twin –
mirrored on the blue rim of a red goose eye –
plastic moulding to its own reflection, smooth,

drifts whichever way the water goes,
and fruits, unpicked, unwashed,
luminous bruises without relief,

pour from high banks under birdsong,
swell peaceful, like a canal
without iron, coal, horses, men.

Cathy Grindrod © 2007