

Jack Hitchcock

After the Rise

The plaintive notes of accordion-song on the waters,
The voices straining from the windows of sunken palazzi
Where mosaics are defaced with algae and refuse of ages,
Sounding over black waves of the sunset hour.

Softly the last gondolier, dipping his hands
For ablutions, kneels on the slender deck, makes oblations
Of shorn hair and candle wax, to the saint;
The ram-head of the corpse cracks a smile.

Silk sheets in the houses of ill-repute
Slip from bare skin in the sultry heat;
Memory lost in the wine-fugue, the beautiful
Give themselves to pleasure, and are alone happy.

Shadowed-masses in the depths hum through the reeds,
Winding past colonnades and the ruins of markets,
Coiling round temple pillars and bronze effigies,
Usurping the old shore with the new tide.