

Tell Me, What Is the Soul

There is a prison room,
the floor, cement,
in the middle of the room
a black pool full of black water.
It leads to an invisible canal.
Plunder is the pool. Plunder is the canal.

By the wall,
by a fire,
Mandelstam was reciting,
in his yellow leather coat,
the criminals were listening,
they offered him
bread and the canned stuff,
which he took...

—Jean Valentine