

Martin Robertson

Sur le Pont d'Avignon

Timbers driven deep through summer-slack
water, through mud; winter's boisterous flow
broken by stone piers, its attack
turned, its wild movement mastered—so
there, not there, the trained current shall go.
And so it went, gentle, reflective, blue
or swelling black boiling to white, through
its vaulted ways. Suddenly the firm stance
falters, joined banks are sundered anew.
But dance, dance on the jutting stump, dance.

Along the paved and parapeted track
forgetful of the tamed wildness below
once-separated worlds long wandered, back
and forth. The trader found his markets grow.
Friendship joined hands there. And the singular glow
of lovers' meeting was a thing it knew.
On days of merrymaking they would strew
flowers in the road. Who gave fear a glance?
All this now in its turn forgotten, few
but dance, dance on the jutting stump, dance.

“Why do you paint the past so rosy? Wrack
and doom along that same roadway would blow.
Wheatfields fired, a pleasant city's sack
—these in the other scale-pan you must throw.
Record, since you're recording, all you know,
and then admit that to an honest view
it seems (as surely it must seem to you)
that all smooth ways are ways for hate's advance.
The road's gone now. Rejoice with us then, who
but dance, dance on the jutting stump, dance.”

Prince of Lies, no. The dark aspect is true,
yet we must pledge our lifeblood to renew
the link, when choice can muster strength and chance.
Yet, while the arch is down, what should we do
but dance, dance on the jutting stump, dance?