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?

This poem is reprinted from Now and Then, the website devoted to the poetry of Martin Robertson, at http://rtnl.org.uk/now_and_then/