

CITY of DESTRUCTION

By RoberT Barry ScoTT

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...Robert Scott's poems have been published posthumously. It is fascinating and disconcerting to wonder when he wrote them. They appear as present now as they must have been then. It instructs us, I mean me, I know you all know, that Love, political strife, oppression and are desire for creative expression are timeless. Take a look... "Ruffle and crackle papers in a pile. . . . / Must keep that smile, must keep that smile. . . ." 'Let us go then, you and I, [through]' "[the] dark, littered alleys; spotted oblongs and triangles of bright / Geometries of light. . . ."*

Senior Editor CHARLES writes...*These poems did not reach us through the usual submission route. They were passed to us by the late poet's vigilantly curious about life wife (legally), soul mate (metaphysically). She asked us to take a look. Tom, Hez and I all agreed they were something special. Robert never published them during his lifetime, and though cherished by those close to him, they had been put away, unseen and unread by all but his family. Robert was a special literary personality and among the stars in his constellation is the enviable one of mentoring Canadian fiction writer Alistair McLeod whose luminous No Great Mischief is, by general consensus internationally, regarded, like Thomas Mann's Der Tod in Venedig, (Death in Venice) as a perfect novel—everyone involved knowing how risky it is to say that but holding firm nonetheless. The poems you are about to read, especially the overwhelming 'City of Destruction' project both a strong sense of integrity and tested command of craft. We feel privileged and gratified to bring them into the light. Since this is a posthumous publication, there is no author's note. (Spacing and format is poet's own.)*

CITY OF DESTRUCTION:

Afternoon

I

Dark, littered alleys; spotted oblongs and triangles of bright
Geometries of light. . . .
Dark, ruttled alleys; rotted rancids and acrids of smell,
Chemistries of hell. . . .

Tarred roofs quiver, shimmer in searing heat;
Raspy, rusted eaves cling to the bleak walls. . . .
Dry . . . parched . . . dry
A barely perceptible . . . fissure makes it way down
The wall in a zig-zag direction,
Until it becomes lost in greasy puddles.

Flapping eternally testing vents suck in air;
Fetid fumes. . . .
Sweaty bodies absorb sweaty air absorb sweaty bodies

Tick-tick-ta-tack-tack-tick-tick . . . ping. . . .

Dear Sir:
In your letter of the 14th instant. . . .

Ruffle and crackle papers in a pile. . . .
Must keep that smile, must keep that smile. . . .
Cracked lips . . . parched mouth
Oh God! It's hot . . . hey! It's nearly five o'clock.

II

Lidless eyes look out of gray, crumbling faces, jammed. . . .
Spectral, yawning faces in the grotesque crowd, crammed. . . .
(Come in under the shadow of this bleak wall)
Up a time-worn stair, down a dark littered hall. . . .

No you're it no you're it no you're it no

Johnnie! Charlie! Eddie! Get in here
Quick! It's time
For supper!

Ah, heck! It ain't even six o'clock!

Get in here this minute!

Scared feet rush into the shades;
Searing heat is crushed -- it fades.

III

Red-tinted panes paint the kitchen in eosin, bloody;
Soup bubbles slowly, like water to wash clothes in, muddy;
The greasy madre lays out food in tins;
A shabby, spotted dress -- an encasement for her sins.

A table, centered lonely in the Room, and chairs. . . .
A lonely man in shirt-sleeves puffs his pipe, and stares.
Corners forget their angularity and stray.
Food smells lose their similarity and stay.

IV

He doles out scraps to the assembled queue
Of carnivorous mouths.
One of them spits in the corner and mutters:

"Nil habet infelix paupertas durius in se
Quam quod ridiculos homines facit."

Mummers don the tallit for the Torah,
(No need now, for en-tout-cas)
The Carmagnole, red wine, and effervescence;
"There will be time for consenescence."
A mob surrounds the solitary prophet

Night
I

Millesimal droplets splatter a millenium in time,
Pelting placebo. . . .
Lone lovers, cringing from the holocaust,
Slop through the oozy earth -- figures lost --
Dart into the quiet dankness behind a door,
Slip slowly, clutching for warmth, to the floor.

"What are we doing? What are we doing?
"What doing?
"What?
There is no answer.

Tarred roofs shiver, glimmer in a cold light;
Damp, mucky eaves snake along the bleak walls. . . .
Wet . . . soaked . . . wet. . . .
The fissure rapidly widens. . .
The mighty walls rush asunder. . .
And the deep and dank slime. . .
Closes over the fragments.

II

They all stop and it is dark.
Calmness falls on wreckage, stark.
Dripping bones round out of the ditch;
Tolling midnight bell of sombre pitch
Tumbles down the shiny streets;
Moonglow breaks through misty sheets.

The Dictator:

He takes freedom
And throws it down,
Crushing it under his heel.

He cannot see
That somewhere,
In some dark deserted street.
A single flower blooms
And all the world blooms with it.

Now that April's Here:

All nature bends beneath the scornful stare
Of Winter's cold glass eye, fixed so cruelly
On Spring's modest form, it brings the sweet blood
Blushing to her cheeks. Oh, the fierce hot shame!
To stand, her naked body so revealed,
Before that bitter gaze. But even he
Is touched and with a kinder heart
He turns away and weeps a slow sad tear

Robert Barry Scott PhD (1933-2019) received his early education in Guelph. His BA from UWO, his MA from UNB and his PHD from U of T, Drama School. Over his early career, he taught English and directed plays at UNB, Saint John, studied with Robertson Davies and Marshall McLuhan. From 1970-1998 he was the head of Media Studies, School of Image Arts (Film and Photography) at Ryerson University. He wrote poetry during his graduate years of study. Most recently he wrote many papers about the media and its social impact.