

Two Poems

Reply to a Hysterical Logician

“All sex is rape”?
What ? All men ape
Civility,
Take brutally
In absence of
Reason, hope, love?
And women? Mere
Victims, or queer
Accessories –
Aiming to please –
Or rapists, too?
No love, none true?

But I relent.
For discontent
And primal fears
Have stopped your ears,
To reason's doom.
So why presume?
With purposed force,
You choose a course
Of strange delight
In guile and spite,
Each step, each breath
Inspired by Death.

Yet to conclude,
My logic rude,
Likely to vex:
All rape is sex,
A dagger thrust
To love and trust.
Counseling treason,
You twist from reason,
In wild perversion
Seize crude conversion
And have your way –
If I may say.

In Memory of C. Q. Drummond (1932-2001)

*For his students,
and with gratitude to John Fraser*

He taught that we might be
“Not always to be taught.”
Through talk, he helped us see
Where error in a thought
Might lurk, or slouch, or writhe
Inward, from mind to mind,
And how in faith to strive
To understand our kind,
To cherish knowledge, proof,
Reason, the mastered art
Of poetry, and truth
That wins the steadfast heart.

Should cynics mock such ends,
Investing in absurd
Or solipsistic trends,
Scorning the very word,
Let us recall his voice
And clear, quick eye, that mind
That clarified the choice
Still granted to the blind:
To see the truth in dear,
Tried values of the past,
To crush the cynic's fear
With courage at the last.

Let us recall the keen
Listener, whose intense
Convictions, fixed between
A humble recompense
For life and our desire
To know, called him to teach
Of brute earth and of fire
Beyond the stars, to reach
In us such waxing light
As chases off the dark,
Or, with souls lost in night,
To strike the wondrous spark.
And so he listened well,
Our mutual gain the end,
His gift our gift to tell
To stranger and to friend:
Wherein real beauty dwelt
And how the artist's hand

WORDS IN EDGEWAYS - 15

Not only knew and felt,
But bids us understand.

Let us recall that lithe
Socratic talk that drew
Us so, his face alive
With wonder found in few
And born of love and awe.
And thus what scrutiny
Of texts and minds we saw—
Our minds not least!—as he
Engaged, asked questions, drove
Off posturings that won
High praise from some who throve,
Like reptiles in the sun,
Within the hallowed halls
Of academe, their lyres'
Harsh tones in tune with calls
Designed to topple spires
Of temples and of schools,
That prejudice might make
A paradise where fools
Dissent for discord's sake.

But, frank and free of pride,
His curiosity
Drew many to his side,
To hear of harmony
So just it lets dissent
Be heard, and yet inheres,
Forever resonant,
Like music of the spheres.

Easy to miss, neglect,
Much harder than it sounds,
Such teaching took respect
Formed upon surest grounds:
Manifold proofs that life,
Being itself, demanded
A conscious, moral strife,
All talents so commanded,
All words made so concise,
Their ends so unconcealed,
Judgement becomes precise,
The spirit stands revealed.

Such was the great pursuit.
Yet humour formed a part—
Tactful beyond dispute—
Of his didactic art.

WORDS IN EDGEWAYS - 15

Pretentious fools were vexed
As joy compounded wit.
Great master of the text,
He lived to teach, to sit
Communing with the great
And good, but all of those
Who wished to “get it straight,”
Like him, or, less sure, chose
Some vaguer valid end,
Or held no end in view,
Or looked for all to bend
To process and pursue
Some senseless cant, some bore,
No end, no right, no wrong,
No best—all these and more
Found welcome. Freedom's song
Was his, a form that he
Saw ruled by law, the word,
Voiced in antiquity
Or, perhaps, not yet heard:
Absolute truth, which, sought,
Not always will be caught.

A polished plainness, pure
And constant, marked his style,
Definitive and sure,
The antithesis of guile,
Whose agents deal in dust.
And if he could not please
Or follow them, how just
To think of Socrates.
Rare power of mind, rare vigour,
Acute in argument,
Replete with sense and rigour,
Purging false sentiment,
The glib, the pat, the trite,
With memory to serve
The noblest cause, to fight
For all good things, with verve
Testing both man and text
(Great Milton in one breath,
Merle Haggard in the next)
For proof, confronting Death
And Ignorance with all
The civil world, to find
Redemption in the Fall,
Engaging mind with mind.

Exemplar of the great
Heart of the academy.

WORDS IN EDGEWAYS - 15

A mark to emulate
Of what this life should be,
He won to love, by force
Of his refined completeness,
By faith in wisdom's course,
By logic and by sweetness.

Now, days, weeks, months slip past.
Grief ebbs, as though pursued
By light that he had cast,
While Death, insensate, crude,
Cannot take twice what lives,
And the essential man,
That guiding soul, still gives—
Learn from him those who can,
That thus our profit be
Death's loss, his victory.

Tiree Macgregor