

Colossus

for Alan Turing

*“(1912–54), computer genius. Developed concept (1936)
of Turing machine. Deeply unhappy personal life.”*

entry in Pears Cyclopaedia

You ran for your life and fell for palely loitering.
No bigwigs, no veterans wear poppies
in your memory. And no bloody birds sing.

I see a lean, unearthly figure concealing
his bewilderment at humdrum arguments
who would have smiled at his laconic epitaph.

Muttering nutter, irked by the whiff of women,
you lived and died inside your head.
The rest saw only a crust of genius

and hid their ignorance with sniggers.
Politics and war use men like ciphers,
ministering to boundaries and pursuit of power.

A martial, celluloid century forgot
the origin of search and replace. No-one
spotted perpetuity in your sinewy frame.

At Bletchley Park, your doodling shielded
mankind from monsters while mankind kept stumm.
You were the ultimate official secret.

And your unofficial secret tore at your gut.
There was a man with a cigar and little gift
for sentiment at others' weaknesses.

A scrawl upon a dotted line decreed
that your achievements should be hid away
lest chaos after victory be made worse

by sharing forbidden fruit. Jackasses felled
the tree of knowledge for expediency.
Now from your genesis menace and trivia dribble.

It is, perhaps, a blessing you were spared
from our queer world. From its crass mishandling
of the idea become reality you bequeathed.

WORDS IN EDGEWAYS - 5

This enigma is a swap for all you gave:
“virtual happiness”. Reductio ad absurdum. Poor sod.
I text you my tears for they are all I have.

Christopher Morgan * St Leonards / Wem * August to October
2003

Sources

Alan Turing by John M. Kowalik

Ask Jeeves, internet:

“After World War II Turing found he needed a way to relieve the stress he had been experiencing and took up long distance running. Much like everything else he enjoyed, he discovered he was quite good at it. ... Typical of his logical nature, he sometimes used his athletic ability to run between locations for his lectures.”

Encyclopaedia Britannica:

“He apparently committed suicide, probably because of the depressing medical treatment that he had been forced to undergo (in lieu of prison) to ‘cure’ him of his homosexuality.”

Further reading

Ted Gottfried, *Alan Turing: The Architect of the Computer Age*, 1996, “... a short biography for the general reader”