

Reading by Daphne Wickham

I first met Michael in the summer of 1968. I was a pupil of Donald Farquharson. He shared a room with Michael in chambers at 2 Harcourt Buildings and - although as far as I could see they subsequently had little in common save for their enjoyment of Mozart and Mary Farquharson's marmalade - this arrangement had worked for many years.

Again, as some of you will remember, pupils were held or corralled some 200 yards up Middle Temple Lane in Brick Court, and I had to hoof down to see DF and read papers etc. This particular afternoon Michael had stepped out of chambers, and nobody seemed to know where he had gone, or when he would be back - I feel that this scenario may also have a familiar ring. I sat in the empty chair at the very full desk of Michael. His return was early and abrupt. His greeting to me was far from gracious. At the end of his outburst, "This is Michael" said Donald laconically. With a start like that our friendship could only improve, and it did and endured for 47 years.

Michael's love of going out, his excitement at doing new things, was ever present. He loved theatre, opera, ballet, he loved the spectacle, the designs, the productions and "ravishing scenery". But he didn't always like the productions, nor indeed some of the operas, if he felt they were unnecessarily tedious. Wagner was only "supportable" if one of the Acts could be designated as a meal break, Debussy was out of bounds as *Melisande* was "such a stupid woman". And when the unfortunate prima ballerina seemed to miss her cue and slid across the stage, Michael's sotto voce as to whether we had to come to 'Les Patineurs' rather than 'Les Sylphides' was very audible to those around us. Michael could chuckle about all this, he did have a sense of the ridiculous, and after soul searching for what tribute I could make to him, I believe that some of the following lines are ones that he would himself have wished to use in the circumstances.

From 'Ballads for Broadbrows' by A. P. Herbert

At the Theatre

To the Lady Behind Me

Dear Madam, you have seen this play;
I never saw it till today.
You know the details of the plot,
But, let me tell you, I do not.
The author seeks to keep from me
The murderer's identity.
And you are not a friend of his
If you keep shouting who it is.
The actors in their funny way
Have several funny things to say,
But they do not amuse me more
If you have said them just before;
The merit of the drama lies,
I understand, in some surprise;
But the surprise must now be small
Since you have just foretold it all.
The lady you have brought with you
Is, I infer, a half-wit too,
But I can understand the piece
Without assistance from your niece.
In short, foul woman, it would suit
Me just as well if you were mute;
In fact, to make my meaning plain,
I trust you will not speak again,
And - may I add one human touch? -
Don't breathe upon my neck so much.