

### **Tom Armstrong, Free Speech Backlash, 10.5.26**

There are books that pass the time, and there are books that stay with you long after the last page. *Reason In Madness* by John Drewry is very much the second kind. This fine set of five short stories is rich in wit, heart, fear, hope and sharp thought. Each tale stands well on its own, yet all five are tied by a clear thread: the strange, wild and brave ways in which people face a world that often seems close to madness. The result is a book that feels whole, deep and full of life.

What makes this work so strong is its mix of bold ideas and clear, smooth prose. JD writes with ease and skill. He does not waste words, yet every page feels full. His style is clean, warm and sharp at once. He can make you laugh in one line and stop to think in the next. There is a love of story in these pages, but there is also a keen eye for truth. The tales may deal with odd turns, dark times and strange dreams, yet the people in them always feel real.

The book's title is well chosen. There is indeed "reason in madness" here. In each story, chaos, fear or folly hide some deeper truth. JD seems to ask whether the world has gone mad, or if madness is at times the only sane reply to the age we live in. Yet this is never done in a dull or heavy way. The book is bright with wit, charm and fine craft.

The first story, *The Day the Circus Came to Town*, is both very funny and oddly close to the truth. In this wild satire, fed-up voters put clowns and fools into power as a form of protest, and soon the whole land is run by a circus-like band of rulers. The idea may sound mad, but that is part of the joy. Drewry uses humour to poke at modern life and the sad state of politics, yet he does so with style and grace rather than spite. The story has pace, clever lines and a strong sense of fun. Beneath the laughs lies a sharp look at public anger and the loss of trust in those meant to lead. It is the sort of tale that makes you grin even as you nod in grim accord.

The next tale, *Miss Christie's Final Case*, shifts the mood with skill. Here Drewry blends crime, myth and dark thought into a rich and tense mystery. The tale toys with the bold idea that Arthur Conan Doyle may have links to Jack the Ripper. This gives the story a deep air of dread from the start. Yet what makes it work so well is not just the plot, but the mood. Victorian London feels thick with fog, fear and doubt. Drewry draws the age with care and gives the tale a fine old-world charm. Fans of crime tales will love the clues and turns, while those who enjoy rich thought and moral shades will find much to enjoy. It is a clever and gripping story that never loses its human side.

The third story, *The Magical Box*, may well be the most moving of the five. Set in Nazi Germany, it tells of a stage magician and other eccentric characters held in cruel times who still cling to wonder and art. This is a tale of hope in the face of evil. Drewry handles the dark setting with care and calm skill. He does not force emotion; he earns it. The magic in the story feels both real and dream-like, a sign of the power of the mind and soul to stay free even when all else is lost. There is pain here, but there is also beauty. Few writers can blend

such grim fact with such warmth and grace. It is a story that lingers in the mind long after it ends.

Then comes *Dichotomy*, a tale that takes us into the future, yet keeps its feet in the soil of old England. This story paints a rural land far from the rush and noise of modern life. It asks what may be lost as the world races on. Drewry writes of the land with real love. Fields, lanes and quiet skies come alive on the page. Yet this is not mere praise for the past. The tale weighs both gain and loss with care. It looks at the split in the modern soul: the pull of change set against the need for roots and peace. The pace is calm, almost dream-like, and the effect is deep. It is a wise and thoughtful piece that gives the reader room to think.

The final story, *Grandfather Christmas*, ends the book on a note that is both warm and sad. In this tale, Father Christmas stands trial for his life. It is a bold idea, but Drewry makes it work with ease. The story asks whether the world still has room for faith, joy and child-like hope. As the case unfolds, we see not just a trial, but a clash between cold doubt and the need to believe in something more. The tale has charm, wit and deep feeling. It speaks to the child still hidden in most adults, the part that longs for wonder in a hard world. There is sadness in it, but also light. It is a fine close to a fine book.

One of the great strengths of *Reason In Madness* is the way each story feels fresh and new while still fitting the whole. Some books of short tales can feel mixed or thin, but not this one. Drewry gives each piece its own tone, world and voice, yet all are bound by the same broad themes of sanity, hope, fear, truth and the fight to stay human in strange times.

The book also shows rare range. Few writers can move from satire to crime, from dark history to warm myth, without losing grip. Drewry does this with ease. His work calls to mind the great British tale-tellers who knew that good fiction should both amuse and stir the mind. There are shades here of Orwell, Chesterton and even Dahl at his darkest and best, yet the voice is still very much Drewry's own.

Another joy is the sheer ease of the prose. The book is rich in thought, but never hard work. Drewry writes for the reader, not for show. The pages turn fast. The tales pull you in at once and hold you there. This makes the book ideal for both keen readers and those who may not often pick up short fiction.

In truth, *Reason In Madness* deserves a wide audience. It is smart without pride, deep without gloom and funny without cheap tricks. It reminds us that stories still matter, that fiction can still shine a light on the strange age we live in. More than that, it reminds us that even in dark times there is wit, warmth and hope to be found.

This is a book full of life, craft and rare imagination. Each story is told with skill and care. Each leaves its mark. Taken as a whole, the book is rich, brave and deeply human. John Drewry has given readers a set of tales that entertain, move and make us think. That is no small feat.

If you enjoy clever fiction, sharp satire, rich ideas and stories with heart, then Reason In Madness is a book you should not miss