

Homeless mother used chisel in vicious assault

A HOMELESS mother of five was staying in a hotel with her children when she assaulted another female resident with a chisel.

Lisa Blake, 38, went into Michelle Lowry's room screaming 'you're a rat' before attacking her in front of the victim's children.

Ms Lowry's four-year-old daughter screamed and her teenage son ran out to get help. The victim was left with relatively minor injuries including a small scar to her nose.

Blake, formerly of The Regency Hotel, Drumcondra, Dublin, pleaded guilty at Dublin Circuit Criminal Court to assault causing harm to Ms Lowry at the hotel on July 30, 2013.

Garda James Woods told the court that Blake went into the victim's room and hit and kicked

By Declan Brennan

Ms Lowry while repeatedly screaming 'you're a rat' at her.

Blake pulled the woman by the hair and was holding her down when she pulled out a chisel.

The victim told gardai that Blake started trying to stab at her.

The scuffle moved into the hotel corridor where it was broken up by other residents.

Lawyers for Blake said that up to ten years ago she had been living in her own home and was living a very respectable life. She said as a result of the economic downturn and becoming addicted to heroin she lost her home.

Fiona Murphy BL, defending, said her client had mistakenly believed that the victim had something to do with Blake being

asked to leave the accommodation.

Judge Elma Sheahan said she would adjourn the sentence to October to allow Blake to engage with the Probation Service.

Blake had no previous convictions and was disgusted and ashamed of her actions, Ms Murphy said.

In a victim-impact report, Ms Lowry said she felt sorry for Blake as she understood the pressure and stress she was living under at the time.

Blake had been drinking earlier that day at a family gathering and the alcohol had reacted very badly to medication she had been prescribed.

Counsel said Blake had no memory of bringing the chisel to the altercation.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

A philosopher knight pays Ireland a visit

ON Sunday, I will head to Bloomfield House Hotel in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, to give a series of talks at the Edmund Burke International Summer School. This week-long event was already gearing up to be something quite unique.

Then, last Saturday, it was announced that one of the speakers, English philosopher Roger Scruton, is to be knighted by Queen Elizabeth II to mark her 90th birthday.

As it happens, I have just published a book of conversations with Scruton. It is my third book on a man who many regard as the world's greatest philosopher. For me, he is someone who has always lived out his convictions with courage, grace and commitment. Born to a working-class household, and subject to the fiery temper of a socialist father, Scruton has spent his life defending those things which we destroy at our peril. In more than 50 books, he has written beautifully in praise of music, art, literature, religion, law and the land.

Unlike so many intellectuals of his generation, Sir Roger practises every word of what he preaches. In 1995, he abandoned his academic career to become a farmer – someone who husbands the land that he loves. As he tells me in our book: 'I have tried to inject into our life here the element of stewardship without which the things that we love won't endure.'

That element of stewardship extends to horses, which is another common link that we share. For generations, my family has been involved with horses, and it was thanks to hunting that Scruton overcame what he describes as a 'wretched' life. For both of us, it is through horses that you rediscover your roots to the natural world, to community and to our common home. That sense of home, of belonging to something enduring, is what lies at the heart of his writing. Armed with the conviction that we cannot move forward if we don't conserve the past, he confronted the communists when it was neither popular or prudent to do so. For him, the communist regimes of Eastern Europe robbed people of their home and heritage, replacing them with nothing but a dehumanising dystopia.

Without any weapons except his ideas, Scruton went behind the Iron Curtain in the early 1980s. He gave 'underground' seminars to dissidents, many of whom would eventually emerge from the catacombs to become leaders of their countries after 1989. It was, he tells me, like 'finding yourself in a dark place where you are the only free person. You are the only person who has the right to walk out the door... People turned towards you... faces full of suffering, longing to trust but never sure that they can'.

Eventually, the Czech communists had had enough of Roger Scruton. One evening, the Secret Police

arrested him. He was taken away and interrogated, driven to the border where he was expelled. It didn't matter, he says, because 'we had built up a fairly impregnable network by then'.

In 1998, one of the many dissidents in debt to Scruton, awarded him the Czech Republic's Medal of Merit for his services to the Czech people. That person was the playwright, President Václav Havel. While Sir Roger was glad to receive the award, he found that 'making life difficult for communists... was a great pleasure in itself'.

Back in England, there were no such accolades. When I first encountered Scruton in the early Nineties, he was very often treated as a pariah in a country that was, by then, 'undergoing the full socialist experiment'.

Although a serious scholar who wrote philosophy, fiction and composed opera, he had taken on the socialist establishment while writing a controversial column for *The Times*. 'It was regarded,' he says, 'as an act of betrayal for a university teacher to be writing a regular column' supporting the conservative cause. Despite all the hostility which he incurred as a result of his journalism, Scruton continued to publish books on topics as diverse as architecture, sex, wine, the Middle East, hunting and farming.

WHEN I began writing on him ten years ago, the tide was just beginning to turn in his favour.

People were finally waking up to the fact that this individual was not an ideological extremist, but someone who simply urges his readers 'to hold on to what you know and love'. For if you don't hold on to what you know and love, 'you will lose it anyway'.

It is not a sin to love your country, its culture, heritage and history. It is not a sin to praise western civilisation and to show what we stand to lose should we reject the cultural riches it contains. Neither is it a crime to defend your way of life against those who would destroy it. Almost alone among the intellectuals, Roger Scruton defended those precious things in the face of often virulent opposition. Now, however, 'the atmosphere is changing'. We are, he says, beginning to understand 'the fact that nothing – or nothing acceptable – is coming to replace the civilisation that we have been so eager to repudiate'.

That this is so is thanks in no small part to the writings of a man who has consistently lived up to his ideals. From humble beginnings to a Knight of the Realm, Roger Scruton's life testifies to the value of holding fast to the things in which you believe.

Such is the message he shall bring to Mullingar next week, and lucky are those who are there to hear it.

■ Mark Dooley's book *Conversations With Roger Scruton* is published by Bloomsbury. For more on the Edmund Burke International Summer School, see drmarkdooley.com

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