

## INTRODUCTION

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Our third issue of *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis* is a *Festschrift* in honour of Dr. Philip McShane. The decision bubbled forth last year at the 2002 West Dublin Conference. Phil was already seventy, so we were a year late to plan for that landmark. We had already missed the occasion of his early retirement from Mount Saint Vincent University at age sixty and his official Canadian retirement (when the old age pension comes in) at sixty-five. And Phil continues to refuse to retire in any meaningful sense. He started the most ambitious project of his life – the Cantowers – on April Fool’s day of last year. He has completed twenty-three, which are available at [www.philipmcsane.com/cantowers.html](http://www.philipmcsane.com/cantowers.html). When the job is done there will be one hundred and seventeen Cantowers. If we wait for him to slow down, there will not be a *Festschrift* at all. So we drew a line in the sand and decided to mark his seventy-first. It is odd, it is advanced, and it is prime: somehow, this is appropriate.

There is no real need to justify a *Festschrift*. Both contributors and readers understand that a *Festschrift* celebrates a life’s work and honours a thinker’s achievement. I am deeply grateful to all who were willing to devote the time required to contribute. I was impressed by the number of people who agreed to do so, and I am very happy with the diversity and quality of the contributions. I thank Ian Brodie for his steady and consistent excellence as an editor, and I thank Janna Rosales for graciously helping us out with the editing.

In organising the *Festschrift* we departed somewhat from the standard approach. I asked Phil to contribute an article on

functional specialization to which contributors would respond. I expected a variety of different responses, and that is what happened. Some responded directly to the article and others adapted work they were currently doing to the task. The variety of responses is really a tribute to the range of McShane's own work. I asked Phil to supply his own response to the *Festschrift* contributions. The result is in classic McShane style: suggestive, twisting, and biographical. He is critical – would you expect anything else? But he is also appreciative, encouraging, and sympathetic. And there is the touch of a poet in his prose, a feature of his writing I have always admired. It remains for me to add my own appreciation of McShane, which affords me the opportunity to reminisce, a rare indulgence for an editor.

I first met Phil over twenty years ago in Halifax. One day, out of the blue, I received a telephone call from a fellow theology student asking that I go see a Dr. McShane at his home at 2 p.m. the next Wednesday. I had written a paper on Lonergan and Jung which had been brought to his attention. To what court was I being summoned? I arrived at the door to be greeted by a cordial Irishman who ushered me into a sparsely furnished living room. We sat facing each other, a few feet apart, and began to talk. The conversation moved around a range of topics: poetry, theology, biology, philosophy, music, the problematic aspects of school life. We both expressed admiration for Flaubert. Phil eventually and gently pointed out the deficiencies of my paper. Then we moved on to the topic of speech and he said something that really struck me – “a word starts in the larynx.” I had started out in biology and had been finding my philosophy and theology classes strangely disembodied. The sentence was a revelation to me. I knew, then, that I was in the presence of a real teacher. I had met sparse few of these in my school life – a high school history teacher comes to mind. We talked for a couple of hours without break. I eventually called a halt to the conversation because I was simply overwhelmed. It was an experience I have had the joy of repeating many times since; I am sure there are many who could tell of similar conversations with Phil.

There are many good reasons for *Festschriften*, but I think

honouring a great teacher is the best reason of all. The articles in this issue will provide evidence of his written achievements in an impressive range of fields. It is substantial and unique. I would like to dwell for a bit on his contribution to the art of teaching.

McShane has often referred both in print and conversation to his experience of teaching mathematical physics in Dublin. It seems to have substantially shaped his ideas about pedagogy and to have given him a basis for criticism of teaching in other areas, especially, philosophy and theology. The expectations were higher in mathematical physics: students knew they did not know, and they knew they had to work hard. In turn, teachers had to know their stuff: they had to be inventive at providing good examples and helpful images. All traits McShane excelled in.

It is not without some irony that McShane's longest teaching assignment – twenty years – was in philosophy to undergraduates at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax. I taught for a while at Mount St. Vincent and I can say that, while the students were certainly enjoyable to teach, they were not, with rare exception, driven by great academic ambition. Most aimed to survive the process so they could get on with life. One might think that teaching there was a waste of McShane's talent – somewhat like driving a Porsche or Ferrari in rush hour Boston traffic. I think, however, that it might have been a greater challenge to him as a teacher. It is one thing to teach the highly motivated; it is another to convince those who happen into your course in need of an elective that they should pay any real attention to what you are saying. What McShane was asking his students to do was to pay attention to themselves. He taught students that they were worthwhile. The best evidence of McShane's greatness as a teacher is really in what he accomplished with undergraduates for twenty years at the Mount.

Teaching is one of the performing arts, something Phil knows and does well. His classroom style is both discomfortably challenging and comfortably homely and relaxed. You can expect humour, including bad jokes, good stories, and great illustrations. And you have to think, which means you

will be seriously perplexed but you will also have insights. At one point he taught a course which was televised very early in the morning on a local TV channel. The Mount's televised courses are a well-regarded cure for insomnia among Nova Scotians. However, even in the two-dimensional cool medium of television, with just a blackboard and chalk for tools, Phil had his audience's attention. And it wasn't just the wild print shirts and sandals.

It was during these his twenty years at Mount St. Vincent that McShane worked out how to teach generalized empirical method. His theme was meaning: his examples were 'common.' What do you do on a Friday night when your date arrives, is three beers down, and you are dressed to the nines hoping for a good time? How do you plan a good meal? What do you do about the yearly summer trip to the cottage? He shifted his students' focus away from the page and towards themselves. He somehow managed to create a proper pace for learning, one that respected a student's struggle with meaning. He saved many students long trips up blind alleys. That is efficient teaching. His very oddness was an island of sanity in the 'emphatic normality' of academic life at the Mount. It is an oddness one normally finds in the creative.

Those who attended Phil's workshops at the Lonergan workshops in the 1980s and early 1990s, or his seminars in New York or Mexico City, experienced in a day or a week what his students at the Mount tasted two or three times a week for a semester. It is the same leisurely yet intense pace of his teaching that has guided the yearly West Dublin Conferences out of which this journal developed. His lectures at the conference have been teaching master classes. Attending these lectures for the past four years I have to appreciate that Phil is a brilliant improviser, like a great jazz musician who can sustain a simple theme in an interesting way for an hour. Phil does this for ten hours over five days. At age 71 he still teaches, and not just for the conference. Last year I called him and he asked that I call back later – he was helping a neighbour with his calculus. A few years previous I came to visit him in New Brunswick where his wife Sally had her first pastoral charge. No sooner had I arrived than Phil, with obvious glee,

was showing me a scheme he had worked out to demonstrate to the choir how to breath correctly. It was really a systematics of breath.

I take this opportunity to thank Phil for the bits of teaching wisdom he passed on to me when I first started teaching. He saved me much grief. Here are a couple.

*On lecture notes:* “If you can’t teach without notes then you can’t teach.” I think this is true. When I first started teaching I was roundly and frequently criticised for not reading lectures and for not providing good notes for students. Phil’s advice, however, bolstered my resolve to develop my own conversational style of teaching.

*On being (over) prepared:* “You have been preparing all your life for this assignment.” This was great advice and calmed me considerably. It is another way of saying, “Trust what you do know.”

*On humour in lecturing:* “If you tell a joke, then students will get at least one insight in your class.” A side effect of this is that I discovered that I like corny jokes. Also it encourages student participation. It seems everyone likes to share a joke.

There is much more of course. Phil insistence that the diagram is essential to good teaching. I plan my courses around a couple of good diagrams. Working them out is a great test of what you do know. And then there is his respect for the student. He embodies the notion that you teach people as they are, not as you wish they were.

Thinking of Brendan Behan’s play, I had thought of titling this introduction “The Quare Fellow.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the meaning of ‘quare’ as, among other things, “strange, odd, eccentric.” Some who have met McShane might find this meaning apt. And there is something odd at work, certainly in terms of the normal academic expectations. I recall a late night conversation with Phil in which he said to me; “Either I am mad or right.” A tough call? After knowing Phil for over twenty years I am myself

confident that his ‘quare nature’ is a matter of character in the sense that Aristotle meant the term in his ethics. It is something that Phil himself has stressed both in lectures and in the Cantowers. We might all be so ‘quare’ if we had the courage to let it happen. In his book *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, McShane quotes Patrick Kavanagh: “He had the knack of making men seem small as they are / which is as big as God made them.” Kavanagh could have been writing that about Philip McShane.

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