

“There Will Not Always Be Teachers Like This”: For G.B.M.

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The Buddha said, “Because there will not always be teachers like this . . . make a painting in the gate-house of a five-part wheel of cyclical existence, around the circumference of which are the twelve dependent-arising in both forward and reverse progressions.” The wheel of existence was then drawn. (Tsong-kha-pa, 2000, p. 325)

It’s a funny thing, when one of your teachers dies, especially at a distance of days and lives and circumstances. I remember in 2002, preparing to give a talk to some gathering of the Nursing Faculty at the University of Calgary when I found out that H.G. Gadamer had died, cut off in his prime at 102 years. It had the effect of stilling and suspending what then followed, a talk that has since fallen from memory except for that suspense. The death of a teacher casts the teaching up into the air. A painting in the gate-house will not quite suffice. Pictures can be deceptive, perhaps especially ones drawn from memory.

Now, early afternoon, Saturday, January 16, 2016, another old teacher whom I haven’t seen in decades has died: Dr. G. B. Madison, most recently Professor Emeritus from the Department of Philosophy at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. He was my MA thesis supervisor and teacher and, for a brief while, friend.

Our paths separated years ago under circumstances best only hinted at. I can only attest to old memories of grad school and to the paths and prospects that opened up in front of me because of him, sometimes in spite of him, eventually without him. Gary was my first example of a living philosopher, full-bodied, teasing, angry, insecure, grinning, playful, sharp, so sharp. Eye-glint. Pipe. Beret. Cane. The detail that he demanded and allowed in my tortuous parsing of the work of Edmund Husserl has held me in good stead ever since. He was the teacher I needed then, who

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let me do what was good for me then and still: settling down and teasing every word. Good practice. Gary's love of language and his example of how it teases us as much as, perhaps more than, vice versa – well, this repeated freshening fitted my musical ear. The play of language. Studied melodies. It's still how I write, how I think, how I think the world exists.

My thesis (Jardine, 1976) ended up 181 double-spaced pages, typed on a grey Remington Upright with carbon paper and a second sheet behind. 321 footnotes. I had a silly contest going with Mark Franklin, a fellow grad student, regarding who could have the most footnotes in the shortest amount of text. His thesis was on analogical language and the names of God (a great, indirect influence on my work still to come [Jardine, Morgan, & Franklin, 1986; Jardine & Morgan, 1987a, 1987b; and far beyond this]) while mine had the ominous title of *The Question of Phenomenological Immanence*. It sure is great to be in your early twenties. Four twenty-page papers a term for years in a row. And the still rattling of lineages of work, delves, deep delves. Grad school. Feeling like I was on to something, in on some secret. Hush, now. It's one I still keep.

For me, back then, it was a sort of late-60s dream come oddly, kind-of, true, sort of -- a gathering of all those old conversations, night after night in the shade of 1967, 1968. Reading Alan Watts. Waiting. Then philosophy and religious studies as an undergraduate. Then a philosophy MA. Phenomenology. Great greased underlines of Eugen Fink's (1970) spectacular 75-page book chapter, "The phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl and contemporary criticism." Loving to read it precisely because it was so difficult and just the thing I needed. Writing was still in its infancy, but it seemed an honoured and honourable practice, worth enduring being bad at, worth getting better. This, too, was part of Gary's orbit, a light I needed, cast in just the right direction and angle.

Some years later, it was Gary who invited me to talk at the inaugural meeting of the *Canadian Society for Hermeneutics and Postmodern Thought* (created by Gary as a sub-division of the *Canadian Philosophical Society*) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, summer of 1986, as part of what was then called Learned Societies Conference. "You'd be just the guy to talk about hermeneutics and pedagogy." Well, okay, but not really. It was a *terrible* talk, frankly. I had been unemployed for just over a year and was facing, in the audience, not only my MA supervisor, but my Ph.D. supervisor as well (Dr. Dieter Misgeld, then of O.I.S.E.), as well as, gulp, the hiring committee that I was to have later met from the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Education. That meeting, I expect partly because of this talk, never took place.

All this was agonizingly slowly to shift, because it was also in Winnipeg in 1986 that I first met Dr. David G. Smith, where we recognized in each other a long-lost brother. Misplaced glasses of wine with Gary and John King (later of the University of Calgary Press) and David and others lost to memory in a lounge overlooking rising clouds of mosquitos on the river.

Happenstance. Memory. McMaster University, long evenings at The Phoenix graduate student lounge learning to think as if our lives depended on it.

And then summer picnics with Gary and other students (including my dear Gail –we've just celebrated our 42nd last December 28th), blistering hot Southern Ontario heat and cicada whines

(I recall it being 106 degrees Fahrenheit one time) and drifting in small creeks, Gary giggling at the sight of leeches, and, of course more mosquito-y air. Grad school.

It's not that we've kept "in touch" at all over several decades now passed. This "in touch" in its colloquial usage isn't all that is in effect with a teacher, not necessarily, anyway. Memory lingers, and voice, and examples, and half-heard sentences or line traces through lineages, citations, underlinings. Teachings, and manners of speaking, cadences of words, examples, unvoiced expectations and so on. I've always said to prospective teachers that we stand in front of our students, not just as purveyors of teachings, but as an example of how life might turn out.

Did I mention that Gary, unlike so many others at the time in the Philosophy Department at McMaster, seemed young, seemed nearly but not quite one of us, or at least facing our way? John Thomas, lovely gracious man, Full Professor, dozing off mid-conversation during a meeting with him, as the late afternoon sun streamed through leaded windows in his corner office of University Hall. Ian and Dave Thomas' father. Plato scholar. Gentleman. Older. Gary was 11 years my senior.

It is important to consider slowly and well how good teachers set you free from themselves so that you can measure yourself against "the thing itself." I noticed in Gary's self-composed obituary that "a sizable portion of his estate" was given to the Brothers of the Good Shepherd, in Hamilton, Ontario. Back in the day, I asked him about his for-me-strange holding together of Catholicism and existentialism, philosophizing and what, belief? His response was just right: "the life-world is full of contradictions." That response outlives him and I've carried it with me and, like most good teachings, it is still taking years to catch up to it. It still seems in retrospect that Gary suffered this particular teaching more than I. Circumstance. Causes and conditions. Too bad, of course, that the contradictions got to be too much between teacher and student. We parted ways decades ago. 35 years+

Buddhism insists that good teachers are "pleased by practice" (Tsong-kha-pa, 2000, p. 179), so a brief recollection to end, on "the painting in the gate-house." I recall in a class whose name and date have faded from memory, that Gary drew a large rectangle on the chalkboard and asked us to populate it with every conceivable topic we could imagine from our experience of philosophical work. Subjects, objects, sense data, God, mathematics, language, ideas, will, emotion, space, time, categories, existence and essence, thought and word, Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, A.J. Ayer (who had recently given a talk in Convocation Hall), images, "the emotions," and cascades of other names and books and on and on, an ever-expanding picture of it all, in the corner of which Gary wrote "ETC." in order to capture that its continuing is part of this picture as well. He then asked about the person making the picture and we sat and roiled and roiled and still roil in this lovely spot.

Back in that class, it seemed like effort to "get myself into the picture" – the effort at a self-enclosing philosophy that aims to "complete the picture" -- is faulty because there is always an existential subjectivity who is picturing this "world picture" (Heidegger, 1987). In our class, we tried mightily to add this picturing subjectivity to the picture, but, of course, ended up with a nebulous sense of subjectivity escaping the picture all over again.

But, of course, me, at the time, charmed by Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, imagined this nebulous sense to point to a *transcendental subjectivity* that beheld the world as an array of transcendental intentionalities. Like this from that tortuous Eugen Fink chapter (1970, p. 110):

The *epoche* is not a mundane inhibiting of the ontic and the intramundane belief in the being of the world. As the persistent and radical deactivation of the belief in the world, the *epoche* is the disconnecting of the belief in the human performer of beliefs, that is, the bracketing of the world-belief's self interpretation by which it apperceives itself as being in the world. Now . . . the true subject of belief can be uncovered for the first time: the transcendental ego, for whom the world (the intramundane subject and the totality of its objects) is a universe of transcendental acceptances.

Oh I just love reading that over and over! Delicious and awful all at once, it still itches a scratch.

So in retrospect, I think I've had all this somewhat upside-down.

We don't end up with a world-less (i.e., "not in the picture") subjectivity standing in front of a picture that it is not part of. Subjectivity is a by-product of picturing the world and is therefore precisely *not* something that eludes. It is dependently co-arising, so seeking some sort of recourse in subjectivity is, indirectly, seeking recourse in the penumbra of the very picture/picturing we falsely *think* we are turning away from in turning to subjectivity.

It's all imaginary, this cycle, this circling, this painting in the gate-house. Wrought. Getting caught in this circling is itself a by-product of a sense of threat, leading to contraction, reification, hostility, protectiveness, further waves of threat, and so on. And all this, I suggest, is because of a refusal, at to accept the First Nobel Truth, the reality that all life is suffering, and the squirms to avoid it that then arise:

You must accept [suffering] when [it] arise[s] because (1) if you do not do this, in addition to the basic suffering, you have the suffering of worry that is produced by your own thoughts, and then the suffering becomes very difficult for you to bear; (2) if you accept the suffering, you let the basic suffering be and do not stop it, but you never have the suffering of worry that creates discontentment when you focus on the basic suffering; and (3) since you are using a method to bring even basic sufferings into the path, you greatly lessen your suffering, so you can bear it. Therefore, it is very crucial that you generate the patience that accepts suffering. (Tsong-kha-pa, 2004, pp. 172-173)

Gary faced something of this eventuality just now, just recently, as we all will. Picturing his dying is good practice, but beware. The picture *and* the picturing *and* the picturer: *all* are empty of self-existence, as is this half-remembered reminiscence.

I hope, still and now, that Gary would have been pleased by this meagre attempt at practice, a little gift to that grin and glinted eye I can still picture in mostly fond, distant memory. Those who know me well know full well how much I'd love to raise a glass in good cheer, but I can no longer bear it.

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