Faculty Lectures on Campus

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My “Last” Lecture (at invitation of student body): “Why I’ve Never Liked Philosophy”

Kathryn J. “Kate” Norlock, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

February 21, 2007

A little background is in order. I was invited by students in the Nitze Scholars Program to give a public lecture as though it may be the last one I ever gave, on the assumption, perhaps, that the pearls of my accumulated wisdom would issue forth. I responded slowly, and noted that I hadn’t accumulated much wisdom, but the student organizer insisted, “You can do whatever you want. It’s your lecture!” Seeing that the sky was the limit, I decided to have some fun explaining why I have a conflicted relationship with my profession, and thought some visual aids might help. My PowerPoint presentation started with the awful truth:

Philosophy can be terribly, terribly boring.

- **Did you know that when you close the door to a room, the world outside the door persists?**
- **Did you know that an oar, in the water, can look bent …EVEN THOUGH IT’S NOT?!**
- **Did you know that to get the Ph.D., you must calmly discuss the importance of these perceptions, at great length?**

The above examples stem from my experience with entering graduate school, at the age of twenty-five, with very little prior experience in philosophy. I was lured by the possibility of working out questions of life and death, good and evil, and was brought up short by the required courses in the history of philosophy. I had entered the program in the hopes of arriving at concrete answers to ethical problems, and had never before witnessed such detailed attention to questions of epistemology, i.e., how we know that we know what we know. Although such investigations have become one of my chief delights, my first introduction to them seemed bizarrely focused on examples that presumed a deceptive and hostile external world.

I was similarly unfamiliar with the prioritization of logic as the pinnacle of pure analytic thinking. I prided myself on being a logical thinker, but this was something else:

Philosophy can be extremely abstract.

- **Let P represent “I ought to φ”, where φ is in turn the name for some action. Let Q represent “I can φ.” According to the Kantian maxim, P entails Q; (P◊Q). But then by Modus Tollens (Q◊P) – i.e., if it is not the case that I can φ then it is not the case that I ought to.**
- **…I think I agree?…**

Believe it or not, the above expresses one of the most important principles in ethical thinking. Simply put (!), it says that we can't require that which no human can do. More commonly, we say, "Ought implies can." This works for me, but the expression of it in logical and technical terms, above, strikes me as alienating and devoid of all intuitive appeal even as its author strains to be as precise and correct as possible. As a student new to philosophy, I developed the suspicion that the language of pure philosophy was self-serving and exclusive, and that those who did it well were subtly patting each other on the back.

And sometimes it wasn't subtle at all. In long, three-hour seminars, I watched with dull eyes as quick-minded young men (I was usually the only woman in any class) successively topped each other's arguments in the philosophical equivalent of tennis; worse, all too often it was only one student enjoying a conversation with himself, moving me to note:

Philosophy can be self-absorbed navel-gazing.

- **I am very, very proud that my single greatest contribution to philosophy, during my graduate school career, was to refer to doing this in an ongoing monologue in the class as**

Masturbating Out Loud

Using this phrase was a guilty pleasure when applied to my own classmates, with whom I developed collegial and friendly relationships, but the more I read of the great philosophers, the more often I realized how true it was of the men whose words I was supposed to be attending to the most. This seemed stunningly true of my favorite philosophers:

Philosophy can be spectacularly wrong…

- **Women are suited to being the nurses and teachers of our earliest childhood precisely because they themselves are childish, silly and short-sighted, in a word big children, their whole lives long: a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the man, who is the actual human being, 'man.' Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Women"**

…really wrong…

- **A child that comes into the world apart from marriage is born outside the law …and therefore outside the protection of the law. It has, as it were, stolen into the commonwealth (like contraband merchandise), so that the commonwealth can ignore its existence (since it was not right that it should have come to exist this way), and can therefore also ignore its annihilation. Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals***

…and I mean really, really wrong…

In masturbation, man sets aside his person and degrades himself below the level of animals.

Kant, again, "Duties Toward the Body with respect to Sexual Impulse"

Such examples make my students laugh, but when I first encountered them, I felt at sea. Most of my professors and fellow students insisted that what the philosophers thought, at times like these, "didn't matter," but I found it impossible either to read the canon selectively or to rationalize such positions, moving me to wonder:

What am I doing here?

- **Ironically, I entered philosophy to determine the answer to this question, only to find myself muttering it in class daily.**
- **The good news: Philosophy provides answers.**

So, am I a philosopher?

- **Possibility #1: Does asking the question make me one? (If so, then does asking yourself make YOU a philosopher?)**
- **Possibility #2: I have a Ph.D. in philosophy. (This doesn't seem sufficient.)**

Possibility #3

- **I am boring, overly abstract, self-absorbed, and spectacularly wrong.**
- **But this can't be.**

I should note that the last line is borrowed almost directly from Aristotle. When he encountered a possibility that didn't fit his perceptions, namely, the possibility that some slaves may have some noble qualities and some women may have some manly ones, he simply asserted, "But this is absurd." I'm delighted to employ similar rejection of an inconvenient alternative.

An argument by analogy

- **I am, among other things, a feminist.**
- **Why am I so comfortable calling myself a feminist, and not a philosopher? Are they relevantly similar?**
- **Let's find out!**

A riddle: How is a feminist like a philosopher?

- **Can feminists be boring?**
- **Can feminists be extremely abstract?**
- **Can feminists be self-absorbed navel-gazers?**
- **Can feminists be spectacularly wrong? (Depends on the feminist)**

In case you honestly wonder the answer to these questions, the answers are all yes, sometimes; read academic research by feminist theorists who use every technical term at their disposal, carry on one-sided conversations, or occasionally float claims impossible to demonstrate.

- **…and yet…**

Feminists have priorities.

- **We notice that there are women.**

I should note, at this point, that most everyone notices gender, and women. However, if one's response is, "I notice gender and it doesn't matter anyway," then I suggest one really isn't looking very attentively.

- **We notice that gender is a fundamental organizing category.**

- **We actually notice other things, too: endangered whales, men's problems, the change in television schedules and who won an Oscar, but they're not necessarily what we're working on.**

The last explanatory comment, I felt obliged to add, because through the decades, whenever I mention my feminism, resistant listeners respond that men have problems, too. This has always struck me as baffling, as though noticing women's historic inequality equates to a denial of any problems on the part of any men. Indeed, feminists have

been among the most articulate detectors of men's problems as well as women's, because we are so attentive to the constraints and consequences of the enforcement of gender.

What are the priorities of philosophy?

- **Understanding**
- **Not just any understanding, but often, understanding of how we go about the project of understanding. (I could blindly submit to beliefs, but knowing why I believe is more interesting!)**
- **This is why philosophy is called, literally, the love of wisdom.**

(A quick note about that last sentence: It embarrasses me. I try to play down that literal meaning of philosophy, since it's always struck me as self-aggrandizing, implying that other sorts of thinkers don't love wisdom as we do, or that we love it more than most. But I wanted non-philosophers to understand where philosophers are coming from.)

Things I find it important to understand:

- **Is the president lying about justification for the war?**
- **i.e., How do I know when I'm being lied to?**
- **i.e., How can things appear so differently to different people, and would understanding this help me understand my perceived 'liar'?**
- **i.e., this is a question of perception.**
- **Conclusion: I care about oars in water.**

Believe it or not, I ended up teaching a class, myself, in which I urged students to consider what it means when an oar in the water looks bent, despite my early ridicule of interest in such a perception. I came to love the view that it's important to reflect on how we know when our perceptions do not reflect the truth of the matter. More importantly, I, too, came to care deeply about how we know when our eyes deceive us, and when they don't. How do we know oars in the water remain straight? The answer tells us something about how we each think about the truth. Do you know the oar is straight because you can reach in and feel it? Because an authority assured you it's straight? Or because you know certain principles which explain away what you're seeing? Most compellingly, how we think about the truth tells us how we can determine the truth again on other occasions. This tells us who, when, and whether to trust, a basic necessity in human life.

Another thing I care about understanding:

- **I care about telling the truth, calling them like I see them, seeing things as they are.**
- **i.e., I care about facts.**
- **i.e., I care about reality.**
- **i.e., I care about what I can know, what I can rely on even when I'm not observing it, myself.**
- **Conclusion: Okay, maybe I also, then, care about whether I can close a door and the external world persists…**

Once again, I own up to teaching my students about solipsism, the view that if you don't perceive something, then it doesn't exist. As it turns out, most of the philosophers who wrote quite a lot about solipsism were not, themselves, so skeptical (though some were). Instead, they engaged with solipsism as a thought experiment, a way to work out the intuition that the world is real, that it does persist when you're not looking, and that it is reliable. Doing this reveals a lot about how one sees one's place in the world. It can even be humbling, putting in perspective the realization that the world does not depend on us, rather quite the opposite.

I care about living well and rightly with others.

- **i.e., I care about being a good person, and I care about being a good person with other persons.**
- **This is going to involve social life, political life, sexual life, and moral life.**
- **So, okay, yes, I suppose I care when philosophers say seemingly heinous things about gender, about political rights, and about, you guessed it…**

Masturbation

- **Good thing you came to a scholar's Last Lecture. (You were wondering when I was going to come back to this, weren't you?)**
- **It turns out both philosophers and feminists tend to converge on the topics of sex and sexuality.**

Here I found my central and motivation-saving interest in philosophy. I was finally able to reconcile the mind-boggling observations that great philosophers made, seemingly off the cuff, with my interest in practical moral problems. It turns out that many of us are trying to do the same things, including working out what makes us human. Is gender part of humanity, of human identity? Some traditions in philosophy imply that it's not, but every human person, at the same time, is gendered. Even those born with ambiguous sexes still have sexed bodies, as the ancient Greeks must have known to be able to coin the term 'hermaphrodite.' Many of us are accustomed to ignoring gender in a society that strives to be fair by overcoming past gender inequities, and many are also from religious traditions which suggest we're immortal souls, not really sexed bodies. So the struggle to work out who we are, and how to treat ourselves and each other morally, includes the struggle to work out what makes us good. Now I require my students to read even those preposterous claims above which my own professors advised me to ignore.

Being just and good is hard to do without getting pretty abstract.

- **Like a lot of moral philosophers, especially feminist moral philosophers, I tend to prioritize attention to differences, context, and real (vs. hypothetical) people.**
- **But there's upwards of 6 billion humans, and I haven't even gotten to the rest of the planet…**
- **Conclusion: I find logic and extreme abstraction unbelievably useful (most of the time).**

Not surprisingly, then, I conclude that the rarefied language of logic helps me step outside myself, talk about the world, about humans, and about nature in general terms. And it turns out that I love doing it, prompting the following realization:

We're all Trekkies

- **I can learn to love being a Philosopher, as long as we understand each other:**
- **The reason to be a philosopher is the reason most of us do most anything:**

Everyone's got to have a hobby.

Is being a philosopher worth doing? Does it help others, serve any practical purpose, solve real problems? Sometimes, perhaps, the answer to all these questions is yes, but most of the time, my wandering path is not that of the purpose-driven life. Most of the time, I'm not making the world better or finding the answers to the meaning of life. If I am to persist between the times when I can actually do good, then I'll need something to keep me going during those long stretches, and this is what I've found. I like it. I would even say, I love it. And how many people get to say that about their jobs?

Acceptance of the Homer L. Dodge Award for Outstanding Service

Christopher E. Tanner, Professor of Biology
April 28, 2007

Thank you, Provost Vote and Norton Dodge. (To audience) It is my honor to address you today.

The first thing that you should know about me is that I do not like to be singled out. Particularly for something such as service that ultimately is a collaborative effort. So I thank my many colleagues and students with whom I have worked in a service capacity.

Another thing that you should know about me is that I don't view service as a burden. During my many years at St. Mary's I have often heard the refrain that the College keeps asking and the faculty keep giving, referring to committee work and other service activities. I don't see service that way. Service is just part of what I do at St. Mary's along with teaching and research.

However, I would not be active in service if I did not believe in the mission of this academic community. To understand my relationship to this institution, I need to take you back nearly 30 years ago when I first visited St. Mary's for my interview. And I can tell you that this place was a long way from home! I was a West Coast boy, growing up in Palo Alto, California, moving on to high school across the street from Stanford University, moving on to Occidental College in southern California for undergraduate studies, and then finally arriving in Vancouver, British Columbia where I worked on my graduate studies at the University of British Columbia and conducted my research in a tiny fishing village on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It was there that I met my future wife, Jean, a student in one of the undergraduate courses.

In 1977, although I was not very close to finishing my dissertation, I felt pressured (probably from my Ph.D. adviser who thought I had spent enough time at UBC) to apply for jobs, and I did so, thinking mostly about getting experience in applying and interviewing. Although I applied to several schools, St. Mary's College was the one that fit me the best and the one that invited me to come for an interview. My visit was during exam week and the mountain laurel was beginning to bloom. Although it was hot and muggy, the beauty of the place caught me immediately. However, it was the end of a period of tumultuous change. The faculty had just tried to convince the Board to fire the president, and as a result 20% of the faculty were being replaced. A year when there were 1,100 students and 65 faculty, about which the catalog states "…Young, well prepared staff (60% with Ph.D.'s) firmly committed to the instruction of undergraduates." I was hired as one of the 40% as it took me nearly two more years to complete my doctorate.

From that class, only Bob Paul and I remain, but those of you with institutional longevity will remember Henry Rosemont in Philosophy, Tom Vollman in Math, Michael Berger in Education, Rosemary Hein in Biology, Harman Haymes in Economics, and John Rushbrook in Anthropology, among others. The College today has over 1,800 students, and the catalog lists 147 full-time faculty, of which 97% have Ph.D.s or terminal degrees.

So why did I come to St. Mary's, an institution that had only been a four-year college since 1967? I loved living in British Columbia and being a graduate student at UBC, and my wife certainly was not enthusiastic about living 3,300 miles from her family. I look back and wonder that we ended up here. But I have no regrets. I remember that I was attracted to the identity of St. Mary's, a small liberal arts college in the public sector that was affordable and which served a diverse student body. And the faculty, who were mostly young, dynamic and enthusiastic. And the attitude that a young instructor who had not quite finished his Ph.D. could contribute as much to changing the College as did a senior faculty member. A philosophy that continues today as can be seen by the high proportion of pre-tenure faculty that makes up our Faculty Senate. And the location here on the beautiful St. Mary's River. It was while I was paddling on Fisher's Creek at the north end of campus early last Tuesday morning that I thought about what to say today. During that paddle I saw three muskrats, one of which swam up to within a foot of my kayak. I heard two American Bitterns clucking, had a snapping turtle surface right in front of me, and I watched an otter playing along the bank not more than 10 feet away.

But back to the mission. I had gone to a fairly exclusive private liberal arts college and had embraced the liberal arts traditions. And UBC was the major public university in British Columbia that was affordable and served a diverse undergraduate audience. It was the mission of this college [St. Mary's] to combine the liberal arts traditions with the affordability and diversity found at public institutions that caught my interest. I would like to read to you a statement from the 1977 catalog. "Today, against this historical backdrop, a significant new drama is beginning to unfold as St. Mary's College of Maryland sets out to create in the public sector the sort of educational experience formerly found only in the distinctive private college.

"By remaining small, by concentrating on the undergraduate student of the liberal arts, by bringing the inquiring student into close contact with the committed teacher in a unique learning/living environment, St. Mary's College aims to nurture in students a lifelong commitment to the search for understanding of the human condition."

Mind you, this mission was still a dream in 1977, but a dream that most of us bought into. As a result of our commitment to these ideals, St. Mary's College has gradually grown into its mission. Almost, but not quite. There continues to be a tension between being a public institution and its liberal arts mission that keeps this College vibrant, forever changing and forever providing new opportunities for service. In my mind the willingness to change and the ability of individual faculty and students to make a difference is one of the primary strengths of this institution.

I have stayed and served St. Mary's for nearly 30 years and raised two sons here, both of whom have attended St. Mary's, my older son graduating with a degree in history and my younger son completing his junior year as a math major. I remain here because the College has stayed true to its mission. And because the College is still growing and maturing and has allowed me to do so as well. And also because of the sense of community among my colleagues and students. No, service has not been a burden for me; it's a fulfilling aspect of my life.

So, students in the audience today, I encourage you to find institutions or causes whose missions you sincerely believe in, and for which you personally can make an impact. If you believe in the mission, then service will become a meaningful expression of your life. Thank you.

Remarks to New Students at Opening Convocation

Jeffrey A. Hammond, Professor of English, and
The George B. and Willma Reeves Endowed Chair in the Liberal Arts

August 24, 2007

I also want to welcome all of you to St. Mary's College. Or to put it in another, more sinister way, welcome to St. Mary's Liminal Zone.

If that phrase made you think of "twilight zone," don't get creeped out – although we did ask you all to read Frankenstein. "Liminal" comes from "limen," the Latin word for "threshold." "Liminal" refers to any in-between zone – a transitional state between one condition and another. Humans mark such transitions in life by performing what anthropologists call "rites of passage." A community gathers to enact and celebrate someone's passage from one social or cultural position to another. Rites of passage are by no means limited to traditional societies. We have them, too. In fact, you're participating in one right now.

It is within liminal territory – threshold and border sites– that change happens. When you graduate, you won't be – and shouldn't be – exactly the same person that you are now. If an inner transformation has not occurred and you're still a kid when you leave here, we will have failed you – and you will have failed yourself. This is because unlike Las Vegas, what happens at St. Mary's does not stay at St. Mary's. It will keep happening – in who you become and how you live your life.

In short, big changes are in the offing – and change is always scary. What's even scarier, perhaps, is that we won't tell you what to change into. You'll have to decide that for yourself. This inconceivably big decision will happen, as such decisions always do, in a thousand smaller decisions that you'll make along the way. Granted, at times it will seem as if we are telling you what to become. Some of us professors will seem like Victor Frankensteins, forcing our particular versions of what matters onto your sensibilities. You will meet your share of mad scientists here – along with mad economists and mad historians and mad English professors. But don't be fooled: we don't want to create monsters, which I imagine would be younger versions of ourselves. What we do want is to get you successfully through this liminal zone – to give you plenty to do and think about so that you can get to the other side of this threshold knowing who you are and how you want to live.

An analogy might be drawn from this very landscape. "Liminal" is not a bad word for the topography of St. Mary's, a place that straddles the threshold between land and water. When you walk along this shore, it's easy to roll back evolutionary time and imagine those first mammals crawling out of the water on stubby fins. With that first gulp of air, they confronted a fresh start with infinite possibilities. Some of those former fish headed for forests, some for grasslands, some for higher ground, some for alluvial plains. All ended up working out their own adaptation to various ecologies – and by adapting, all eventually became individual species with individual strengths.

To draw out the analogy, as convocation speakers always do, some of you will head for the arts, some for the humanities, some for the social sciences, and some for science and math. In the process, I hope that you keep your eyes and minds open and your wits about you – as any good proto-mammal would. There's plenty to eat here. You might think that you hate

tree bark – I mean, math – only to discover, to your surprise, that it is your passion. You might think that you hate insects – I mean, of course, English literature – but then discover that you can't live without them – or rather, it. A hipster might say "go with the flow" – unless, of course, hipsters don't say that anymore, only middle-aged college professors. Still, this flow will lead you toward the person who you are capable of becoming, given the proper habitat.

We faculty, administrators, and staff will provide the habitat and the resources. That's our job. Your job is to provide the open eyes and the appetite. To stick with my biological analogy, St. Mary's is the educational equivalent of a rich ecozone: a site of interconnected intellectual and creative energies, all waiting to be tapped. But even the most dynamic habitat cannot be a habitat unless it's inhabited. In other words, the College needs you – the students – for it to come to life. In this sense, it's not really us but you who are the Victor Frankensteins. You will make this place what it is and what it can be. St. Mary's will be as good, as great, or as indifferent as you are.

I know that this sounds like a lot of pressure – like a big deal. But college is a big deal. It is a congenial place for transformations, but whether they happen or not is up to you. Opportunities can be seized, or they can be missed. Things can be tried or not tried, learned or not learned. Passions can be stirred or not stirred. You can discover who you really are, for the long haul, or you can cling to a high school version of identity and not learn anything about yourself at all.

We will do our best to push you toward these self-discoveries. And we will repeatedly ask you to summon the courage to make them. We will urge you, in a thousand ways, to inhabit St. Mary's like those proto-mammals, open-eyed, sniffing the ground, alert to everything. Test those fins and crawl ashore. Feel the unfamiliar pressure of the ground, the new-found gravity of your own weight. Look around and see what's here. Then let those fins grow into paws, or claws, or feet, or hands – or whatever results from the unique and nontransferable negotiation between this place and you.

Anthropologists tell us that liminal territory can be frightening. Not only does liminality pose so many new choices, but it can sometimes feel like a twilight zone. After all, liminal zones always mark the end of something. But they also mark the beginning of something else – and that's what makes them so exciting. St. Mary's College is just this kind of place. If you let it excite you, it will work its transformation on you. And if that transformation takes place, you will become the best possible version of who you were always meant to be. Thank you – and once again, welcome.

Remarks to New Students at Opening Convocation

Larry E. Vote, Provost of the College, and Professor of Music
August 24, 2007

Good Morning.

It is a pleasure to greet you as you continue your orientation to St. Mary's College. On behalf of the faculty and staff of the Provost's Office and Dean Bayless and her staff in Student Affairs, we welcome you to your new home and to the community of St. Mary's College of Maryland.

The provost, being the chief academic officer of the college, traditionally addresses new students regarding some aspects of the academic world that they will encounter as they begin their undergraduate careers. Make no mistake about it, you have chosen to come to an academically rigorous college. The faculty will see to it that you are challenged and guided through an amazing and formative part of your life. But let me also stress that we understand that the St. Mary's experience embraces all aspects of campus life and that the central idea of a college as a learning community is imbued in all that we do.

In this regard, today I want to emphasize a word that appears very significantly in the mission statement of this college, and upon which our expectations of you are defined. That word is RESPECT. Yes, R-E-S-P-E-C-T, just like Aretha Franklin sang it in the movie,"The Blues Brothers." Our mission states that St. Mary's pursues the goal of "promoting and maintaining a community built on respect." I am here to tell you today that we as a community and you as an individual will stand or fall by how this tenet is lived out.

I call on you to honor the members of this community, intentionally, with your respect.

Respect your teachers, the faculty of this college, who have dedicated a large part of their lives to serving you. Do this by coming to class prepared, never missing class, always doing your own work, and building an appropriate mentor relationship with your teachers. Alumni of St. Mary's relate that their relationships with the faculty were the most cherished memories they have of their undergraduate years.

Respect the staff – who are here to assure your success. Seek them out when you have needs or concerns. Thank them for their help whether it is for cleaning your residence, cooking your food, setting up a lab, or helping with academic or student-life concerns.

Respect your peers and friends – in every interaction – in the classroom, in the residence halls, on the athletic field, in your social life – and understand that respect for each other with regard to gender, ethnicity, political philosophy or spiritual beliefs is expected by all. Because we are largely a residential campus, this is the single

most important area to live out the ideals of respect. You will live in close contact with many people who will hold different views and values. There will be situations where you will be called on to defend your own beliefs or to assist another in their defense. You will be there for your friends in their moments of need and they will be there for you. An alum of St. Mary's, who works in government in Annapolis, put it so well when she was interviewed about the statewide civic involvement of our students. She said, "I enjoy arguing and there's never a shortage of people to argue with if you're a Republican at St. Mary's. Even though it is a very liberal school, you will never be condemned for arguing with anybody, so long as you can back it up. Everyone is respectful of each other's ideas. You can argue with somebody until your face turns blue and then go to a party with them that night."

An appreciation and stewardship of this place is also our responsibility. Just as we are becoming aware of how fragile the world's environment is and is in need of attention, this amazingly beautiful and historic campus requires that we all make the effort to preserve its natural beauty, maintain the facilities that have been given to us, and do nothing to harm this environment.

A community built upon respect is truly something to celebrate. It is one where all its men and women feel safe in every regard – physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Achieving this is no small undertaking, as we see by the continuing strife around the world. But we can do it here in an environment dedicated to learning. I call on you now to dedicate yourselves to this goal. I wish you well on the beginning of your undergraduate journey and look forward to that day, in four years, when you will walk across the stage to receive your degree from this college and community which will have been uplifted by your presence.

The Annual Reeves Lecture

Jeffrey A. Hammond, Professor of English, and The George B. and Willma Reeves Endowed Chair in the Liberal Arts

"Close Enough for Jazz: Fragments from a Drummer's Memory"
with Saxophonist Don Stapleson

October 12, 2007

Thank you, Maggie. Thanks to all of you for coming tonight, and especially to the Reeves family: Brad, Donna, and Steve. Their mother Willma established the George B. and Willma Reeves Chair in the Liberal Arts, which it is my honor and privilege to hold. The Chair is a wonderful legacy of Willma's commitment to the College and to excellence in higher education. We remember her tonight, with great fondness.

Tonight's Reeves Lecture is an evening of jazz in words and music. Our band is led by our own Don Stapleson on tenor sax and flute. We also have Vince McCool on trumpet, Jon Ozment on piano, Brian Litz on guitar, John Previti on bass, and Steve Larrance on drums.

Now, I named Steve last only because it's customary to list the drummer last. But as you'll see from tonight's presentation, I've got a beef with that custom. To explain what I mean, let's start things out with ....

Part 1. Once a Drummer

Once upon a time and far far away, in a kingdom not by the sea but by Lake Erie, I was a drummer. Once a drummer, always a drummer – at heart, if not in practice. And "not in practice" is the operant term. Although my "chops" are long gone, as a jazz musician would say, I still hear rhythms in my head.

There was a time when I considered making drumming my career. And why not? Drumming was saving me from high school anonymity: if it weren't for marching band, concert band, orchestra, and several rock bands, I would have been completely invisible.

Old dreams never die, not entirely. Sometimes I still fantasize about an alternative me – the drumming me – living on as if I had never discovered literature and become an English professor. I imagine that guy still out there somewhere, maybe touring with the endlessly reconstituted Count Basie band, or more likely, given his generation, with ZZTop. If his chops are weak, at least he's got the beard for that.

In the popular imagination there's something primitive about drummers, part threatening and part goofy. It's like that old joke where God created singers, musicians, and drummers – and then said, "Two out of three ain't bad." Drummers carry the baggage of buffoonery: we're expected to be the "class clowns" of whatever ensemble we're in. Ask any twenty people who the least-smart Beatle was. Then ask

them what's the easiest instrument to play, and you'll begin to understand our image problem.

Granted, a drummer hits things – a primal act not disguised in the fancy term that we sometimes use to get more respect: percussionist. But this does not mean that drumming is easy, only that it's basic – and "basic" is not the same as "simple." Draw a freehand circle. Write a perfect Haiku. Make good French toast – I mean really good French toast. These basic things are harder to pull off than you'd think.

The drummer's traditional role is to be a timekeeper, a living metronome. But this timekeeping role can be overdone. Ask jazz musicians who they listen to for the beat, and most will tell you that it's the bass, which gives both the tempo and the chord progressions. A jazz drummer who takes timekeeping too literally is apt to be heavy-footed and draggy, someone whose thump-thump-thump is too explicit, too much heard. There's a common term for the lead-footed, always-fortissimo drummer: a "monster." In the hands of a monster, and especially his feet, even Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" can sound like an underwater polka.

The role of a jazz drummer is not to thump incessantly, but to add color, texture, and a subtle kick forward – an indefinable energy that lifts the other players and keeps them moving. Good drumming, especially in jazz, is more felt than heard. Good drumming is like oxygen: we notice it mostly in its absence.

[Here the band played "Take Five."]

Part 2. A Spring in the Step

Like all art, jazz mixes pattern with variation, regularity with surprise. The regularity lies in the pulse, the beat. The surprise comes from syncopation: accents that are off the beat. While the beat provides an anchor, it's syncopation that gives the lift, that kick forward.

The basic patterns of jazz drumming go back to Dixieland, which in turn go back to military drumming – to marching rhythms. Even today, beginners learn the 26 standard snare drum "rudiments," which originated in the eighteenth-century fife and drum corps. It's not such a stretch from "Yankee Doodle" to "Take the A-Train." These rudiments develop sticking techniques that allow you to move around a drum set quickly and effortlessly.

Even in the eighteenth century, drummers kept people moving. If you want to grasp the psychological impact of rhythm, imagine yourself as a soldier marching. A regular cadence buoys you up and carries you along: it takes you out of you and subsumes you into a collective entity. With the beat animating you, you won't drag your feet or slow down.

[Here Professor Hammond played a standard marching cadence on the snare drum.]

You're probably thinking, this isn't so bad. This pulse will carry me the next ten miles to camp. But that monotonous step-step-step, unrelieved by something else,

can get to feeling like the monster's thump-thump-thump. That's where syncopation comes in – that extra kick forward. Imagine the boost in energy that might come from a little irregularity, from a dash of the unexpected.

[Here Professor Hammond played a syncopated marching cadence on the snare drum.]

With pattern and variation, regularity and surprise, you'll make those ten miles in no time. If you want to visualize the rhythmic foundations of jazz, imagine a guy walking with a spring in his step. There's a touch of rebellion there, a certain looseness – an up-tick in body and spirit. People with a spring in their step are moving. In jazz terms, they swing.

[Here the band played "Take the A-Train."]

Part 3. My Left Foot

A drummer plays pattern and variation – the step and the spring – at the same time. We need two heads: one for regularity, and one for surprise. It's a good thing that we've got all four limbs at our disposal. In fact, the standard drum kit is unique among instruments in that it is played with the entire body. I think that the only comparable instrument is the organ, where the feet play a bass line.

In jazz, the notion of the drum set as a multivocal instrument owes a lot to Max Roach, who died two months ago at the age of 83. When I saw the news in the Post, it was like coming across an obituary for God. Joe Morello, Dave Brubeck's drummer, and Max Roach were the Homer and Virgil of my younger years. Homer is pretty apt for Morello, who has been legally blind for decades. I met him once, when I was fifteen, at a drum clinic that he gave in my small Ohio town. I was speechless when I shook his hand: what can you say at the foot of Mount Sinai? Virgil is an apt analogy for Max Roach, who was more the deliberate artist, the technical virtuoso. I never met Max Roach, but as a teenager I studied his records as if I were a constitutional lawyer and he was all the Philadelphia framers rolled into one.

Max Roach did more than anyone else to liberate drummers from the old thump-thump-thump. A pioneer of modern jazz drumming, especially in a movement called Be-Bop, Roach helped change the whole philosophy of playing a drum kit. In the old days, the bass drum carried the beat – and very prominently. The left hand either reinforced that beat on the snare drum, or played accents on two and four of every four-beat measure. The right hand chimed in on the high-hat cymbals. The overall sound? Boom-chick, Boom-chick, Boom-chick, Boom.

Roach shifted the basic timekeeping away from the bass drum, and the result was a lighter, brighter pulse. With the high-hat and the ride cymbal carrying the beat, the snare and the bass were freed up to play musically – to syncopate and kick things forward. The real timekeeper, cutting through with a steady two- and -four afterbeat, was the left foot on the high-hat cymbals. In terms of keeping time, this was all that anyone needed anyway.

The tradition lives on. Two years ago I had an advisee who played in the student jazz band that Don conducts. When he told me that he was a drummer, I tested him, as professors do. “In jazz,” I asked, “what’s your most important appendage?” Without hesitation he said “My left foot.” I knew right then and there that this kid was no monster. He was a disciple of Max Roach, too – though he didn’t recognize the name.

[Here the band played “Scrapple from the Apple.”]

Part 4. Drummers Anonymous

Hello, my name is Jeff, and I’m a drummer. I’m here to tell you that our image problem is worsened by media obsessions with rock drummers who’ve acted like our bad stereotype over the years. We know that for every Keith Moon or Dennis Wilson, there’s a smart drummer who’s not a wildman: a Charlie Watts, a Max Weinberg, a Don Henley. When Phil Collins doesn’t trash a hotel room, does that ever make the news?

We are the victims of history. If Bach had scored for strings, woodwinds, brass, and drum kit, we wouldn’t even need to have these meetings. But the drum kit wasn’t around, and as a result, drums never found a place within the iconography of high culture.

Have you ever noticed how many old paintings include violins? Every time I look at a classic still life, I find myself wishing that there had been drum kits in seventeenth-century Holland. What might Rembrandt have done with the silvery finish of a Ludwig chrome-shelled snare drum? What if Monet had painted the shimmer of a Zildian cymbal instead of those water lilies? What if Thomas Hart Benton had drawn his inspiration from bundles of Pro-Mark drumsticks instead of stalks of prairie wheat? And do you remember that Picasso painting of an old, emaciated guitar player? Why couldn’t it have been an old drummer, staring dejectedly at a blue-tinted drumhead? I mean, what kept Picasso from painting that picture?

[Here the band played “Peace.”]

Part 5. Nowhere to Look

[Here, Professor Hammond donned an artist's beret and "shades."]

If you needed a small combo for a class reunion or wedding reception in Findlay, Ohio, circa 1967, one of your few choices would have been the Halos. The Halos’ personnel included a tire-plant worker on upright bass, a TV and radio repairman on trumpet and sax, a music store owner on piano, and an extremely self-conscious high-school boy on drums.

I loved playing with the Halos, but I didn’t like being looked at while I did it. Performing felt way too public for a sideman who didn’t feel like enough of a sideman. The problem, of course, was what to do with my face. A drummer’s every limb is engaged with one part of the kit or another, but his face simply hangs there, useless and balloon-like. Horn players use their faces to play, and string players – violinists, at least – use their chins to steady their instrument. Pianists are usually following charts, or else taking refuge from all those eyes by watching their hands with an intensity that would look silly if a drummer did it. The faces of all of these musicians are occupied, engaged with something. By contrast, the shy or rabbity drummer has nowhere to look except to stare helplessly back at the audience. The vulnerability is excruciating.

I considered sunglasses, but this was a small town. The Beatnik cool of shades would not fool people who had known me all my life. Playing to the primitive-drummer stereotype by looking brutish or mean wouldn’t cut it either, because I wasn’t brutish or mean. And really, how appropriate would it be to scowl menacingly while you’re playing “Won’t You Come Home, Bill Bailey” at a wedding reception at the Knights of Columbus Hall?

In the end, my drumming face had to be my real face – a very un-jazzy face because it looked way too excited. I always tried to set up so I could watch the pianist’s hands as they went through the changes. There was nowhere else to look without wanting to disappear.

[Here the band played “Bill Bailey.”]

Part 6. Close Enough for Jazz

My fondest memory of playing with the Halos is the memory of a feeling – the one you get when you’re playing music with people and everything clicks and you don’t even have to think about it. It felt as if we were being carried along by something bigger than any of us. The sizzle of my ride cymbal and the fat tones of the bass fused into a single, walking pulse. I could anticipate the pianist’s rhythms as he comped chords. The trumpeter’s phrasings and my accents, sometimes in tandem and sometimes in counterpoint, seemed to issue from one tasteful sensibility. At times like this, I even forgot about my face.

This didn’t happen too often, but when it did, the pianist always made the same self-deprecating crack: “Close enough for jazz.” He also said this before each gig, as the bass and horns were tuning up to whatever sketchy piano confronted us at the K of C, the Armory, the Teen Center, the Fort Findlay Hotel restaurant, or the Holiday Inn lounge out by the Interstate. When it was repeated after these moments of musical transport, however, “close enough for jazz” took on deeper and even superstitious overtones. Something had just happened. Where did that come from? For small-town Midwesterners aiming at hipness in the midst of all this winter wheat, all these hogs and soybeans, such moments were to be cherished. Best not to make too much of them, lest the gods of jazz strike us down for displaying a very un-hip enthusiasm, the kind of cornball joy that you could read on the face of the kid drummer. But the joy was there – and the possibility of these episodes of bliss made every gig exciting. On any given night, we just might get close enough for jazz.

[Here the band played “Sister Sadie.”]

Once again, many thanks to Steve Larrance on drums, who naturally gets first mention here, Vince McCool on trumpet, Jon Ozment on piano, Brian Litz on guitar, John Previti on bass, and Don Stapleson on tenor sax and flute – a terrific collaborator. And once again, thank you: you’ve been a wonderful audience.