

McDougal as Teacher, Mentor, and Friend

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Myres McDougal was an inspired teacher whose deeply original ideas have irrevocably altered the way we think about international law. No international lawyer of the last fifty years has been so much written about by others. His pugnacious style on matters legal was matched by Southern courtesy on matters personal. He was adored by his students and liked and respected even by those who profoundly disagreed with him.

Beyond any question at all, Myres McDougal has been the greatest teacher of international law in the postwar world. This is not to denigrate other fine teachers, of whom, happily, there are many. I, like most of us, developed under and benefited from several exceptional teachers, each with his or her particular skills.

But there is no denying that Mac was in a class of his own when it came to teaching. His revolutionary ideas, combined with the power of his oversize personality, left none of his students untouched. Today we speak of the “charisma” of certain leaders. But it is the wrong word to describe Mac, because the image is of someone whose deeply attractive personality moves an audience to follow where he leads. That was not at all the process with Mac. What we felt, rather, was that upon arrival at Yale we were simply blown down by a hurricane whose nature we did not yet comprehend, left for a period to dust ourselves down, and then invited to continue a journey together.

I came to Yale in 1959, after taking two degrees in law at Cambridge. For the first few weeks I was, quite simply, shell-shocked. I thought I knew a lot of international law and probably, for a student, I did. But I had no idea whatever about what it was all *for*, nor that legal judgments were not necessarily “givens,” but could be intellectually challenged by scholars—and indeed even by students. The language of the McDougal-Lasswell policy science approach was, quite simply, incomprehensible. Sir Robert Jennings, my Cambridge teacher and later British Judge at the International Court, has reminded me on more than one occasion that I wrote to him asking how he could have let me choose Yale over Harvard as the place to

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pursue my studies. I had totally lost my bearings, because the inadequacy of what I came equipped with was being demonstrated to me in ruthless fashion, before I really understood what the proffered alternative was.

Mac's pedagogical technique, then, was to throw you in the deep end and, if you survived at all, to show you how to make waves. The Socratic teaching method (which also was quite unfamiliar to me, as I had been taught by lectures coupled with gentle, private, tutorial discussion) ensured that you made the journey yourself. That journey was to an international law that was not rules but process, and was not neutral but dedicated to the achievement of specified social ends. The journey was tumultuous, but for those of us who made it with Mac, the inner and intellectual rewards have been great. Those two great themes—process and social purpose—remain my lodestars today. And this is true of countless others around the world.

He was also a role model to generations of students. Today that phrase, "role model," has come to be associated with persons whose gender, race, or religion is not that of the power structures in the society in question. Their achievements, often in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, are thus the more impressive and inspirational for young people of the same sexual, religious, or racial identity. They see from the role model what they, too, can do.

Myres McDougal was white, male, and from a Southern Methodist background—hardly a minority icon and certainly not an endangered species. But he was undeniably a role model. He was a role model in the sense that the way he did things was imprinted on the students at Yale who were to be the next generation of teachers. A role model shows by example. Mac showed that you don't have to choose between being an outstanding scholar and a caring teacher. All too often great scholars treat teaching as a chore to be endured, as an intrusion on what they really want to do. But those of us who were at Yale during the era of Myres McDougal learned by osmosis the deep truth that the absorption of knowledge, the creation of ideas, and their imparting to the next generation are a seamless unity. These are not alternatives to be selected among at will. There is a duty—a pleasing, fulfilling duty—to wear the mantles of scholar and teacher simultaneously.

And so it was that, during those very decades when Mac was at his most productive, writing path-breaking volumes of great importance, he was nonetheless always available to his students. Knocking on the door of his office at Yale Law School one would hear the shouted command "Come!" (*never* "Come in"). When one had entered the room, an imposing figure wearing a green eye visor could eventually be discerned among the thousands of books that filled all available space. No student ever felt rushed. Indeed, the lucky ones might be invited to the Graduate Club to continue the discussion over dinner.

Our theses were properly supervised—every word had been read, our teacher expected detailed discussion and apparently relished it. He gave of his time willingly, with an “open door” policy even at the height of his scholarly activity and legal consulting.

Mac’s significance as a role model in international law lay not just in his intellectual ideas but in the realm of teaching. The fact that today, all over the world, there are former students of Mac’s, now caring for *their* students, listening to their concerns, encouraging their endeavours, is part of his inheritance to the international community.

Myres McDougal was our mentor, as well as our teacher. What is meant by this well-trying phrase? It means that the teacher not only imparts his knowledge and ideas, but tries to assist his students in their careers, to take an interest in their development. In this sense, most good teachers are also mentors to their students. But—as with so much of his life—this element too was writ large so far as McDougal was concerned. By some magical process, you could over twelve or more months have metamorphosed from a baffled newcomer to someone thought by McDougal to have promise. And then his support as mentor knew no bounds. It mattered not—as I have good reason to know—that you might by now be three thousand or six thousand miles away. You had become part of the invisible reality of the Yale policy science school, which did not depend upon physical geography. Mac would write references more generous than one could hope for, pen supportive letters on one’s behalf, go to extraordinary trouble to advance one’s cause. All of this often went on unseen and unsolicited. We had moved, without fanfare, from student to friend, and we now benefited from a friendship of the most intense warmth and generosity and loyalty.

There was another element that so many of us here today can attest to. Mac was zealous and active in supporting his students for this job or that honor. All of his formidable energies went into this. The addressee of his proposals was metaphorically backed against the wall and seized by the lapels. Mac did not hesitate to play the Southern power-politician in support of his young colleagues, his former students.

His “former students” is, of course, an inept phrase altogether. He remained our teacher all of his life, even though we might have become professors, attorneys, government lawyers, judges. Of course, in the later years he inevitably became less familiar with the substance of the contemporary legal issues with which we might be exercised. He no longer followed, blow by blow, the ratification process of this or that treaty, the separate opinion of this or that judge, the text of this or that U.N. resolution. But his clarity of vision about what I will term “the McDougal-Lasswell” system remained undimmed, as did his ability to explain and expound and to relate it to legal problems that one might share with him. Above all, he

never lost sight of the underlying value system. Notwithstanding age and increasing infirmity, he remained the very best person—as teacher, mentor, and friend—to whom to turn in the face of any deep problem of principle or ethics.

We shall miss him dreadfully. Myres McDougal has left us with his ideas, our personal memories, and the strong bonds of mutual support felt by all those who think of themselves as belonging to the Yale policy science school. This is indeed a legacy to celebrate.