An Appreciation

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Terence M. Ryan died in June 2003. Terry was one of the most promising members of the nouvelle vague of young Irish economists who studied at the University of Essex in the late 1960s and early 1970s. All had graduated in economics in University College Dublin and went to the campus at Essex to capture the excitement of a younger generation of economists lecturing at graduate level in this renowned new university. Alongside Paddy Geary, Colm McCarthy and Sean Murray he studied under such renowned economists as Chris Archibald, Robert Clower, David Laidler, Richard Lipsey, Michio Morishima and Michael Parkin. The ‘Essex four’ returned to Ireland and all stamped their mark on the development of economic teaching, research and economic policy in Ireland.

Terry’s academic output in his first five years in Trinity College was rewarded by his election to fellowship in 1977. His erudition and scholarship were vast. There were few areas of economics in which he could not lecture and his computer programming skills, which he developed side by side with his wife June, were much sought after. He had the ability to ask the most simple questions, to cut through cant and mediocrity and force people to reflect on the foundations of the theory that they were trying to elaborate. One of his favourite lines was to ask “what exactly are you trying to say?” Behind this probing intellect there was a genuine humanistic affection towards the world of real scholarship.

In the 1990s, shortly after he had retired from Trinity, Terry suffered an undiagnosed attack which left him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He laconically accepted this new situation stating that he had never been much good on his feet. He was very much a man of the cerebrus. During his retirement he showed his trenchant wit through his regular letters to the Irish Times. Earlier, in one of his first letters to the Irish Times, during the depressing days of the 1970s, he proposed that taxpayers should be able to adopt a civil servant analogously to the way he had been able to buy “black babies” when at school in Synge Street. In this Kafkaesque reversion, once he had adopted his civil servant, he would be able to phone him/her to find out how things were in the bureaucratic corridors of power. The civil service was not amused.

Terry was a very warm and engaging person. He was always prepared to share his knowledge and wisdom. He helped inspire some of the brightest students in Trinity in the 1970s and 1980s and through them his scholarship will continue to be spread. He will be greatly missed by his friends.