

## Quodlibet 5

A Simple Reading of *Method in Theology*, Page 250.

April 24th 2004

Or let the new gas twist the crooked wick  
 Wiping we know the places where the scab is  
 Wanly it lights up an immortal pubis  
 Whose flight sleeps out by streetlamps in the dark<sup>1</sup>

What to do? Perhaps I shall diary my way for a few days to what I might do? I could move straight away to key pointings in the project that Lonergan envisaged. I should presume a numbering of the lines on the page. Some, no doubt, will fuss about ruining the book: then a photocopy of the page with the addition of numbers. At least, then, a first linguistic-feedback impression of taking the page seriously.

But with life-seriousness?

My own life-seriousness; my presenting to myself and others over decades?

The previous 8 Sofdawares and Cantowers on the topic?

Best a fresh effort.

Start on line 17: investigators, within different horizons. Who they are to be eventually, a difficult topic, but .... a start by thinking of any ten people who want to express a view on progress and its basis. Really thinking ( that's the reading challenge

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<sup>1</sup>Stephane Mallarme, from "The Tomb of Charles Baudelaire", *Mallarme, The Poems*, translated and introduced by Keith Bosley, Penguin books, first published 1977, 175. But I should not bother with footnotes in this preliminary struggle. And I must remember to apologize for lack of French accents throughout. Some folks are touchy about that. So, Mallarme with no bump on the end. Why don't I just refer to the book simply as Mallarme?. And for the French readers there is the text of the original French included in the book.

all along: how to twist it into the psyche, the chemicals, of 'non-readers'?..... with a pause for a listing (another feedback). Good to call them *assemblers*, obviously at least a vague reference to the fact that they have to gather up some materials in order to express their view in writing, which is what is to be concretely envisaging here. Is to be? How to make a reader, the one-reading, you-read-thing, be with my typing stand in their, your, stand? To notice that this is a stand.

The assemblers **tell us** what they think are the foundations of progress. WHO they think are the foundations of progress. Who? You, me? Where - and as - we stand ... or with an improved stand, a converted stand? At least a stand about being serious about - converted to? - page 250 of *Method*?

Best to twist away from Lonergan's word's here: drop the converted bit. Yes, avoid the word *conversion*. Not a vital issue, but still worth doing, with a comment.

Take three great assemblers, Toynbee and Simmel and Nadia Boulanger. Toynbee would say "withdrawal" is a key foundation; Simmel talks of "the displacement to system" (using Lonergan's translation). Boulanger speaks of commitment to seriousness, which demands withdrawal, displacement. Boulanger not well known. Still, she has been "in there" since I wrote *Process*, in there from the very first Cantower. A great crazy lady.

The word *displacement* seems to me to be a happier choice than Lonergan's word *conversion*. In the first place, the word *displacement* avoids the overtones of religion which could make some assemblers uncomfortable; in the second place, the word *displacement* allows for a larger collections of attitudes; reversion, perversion, etc. But let there be no fuss here. The main problem lies elsewhere. It is, that the assemblers are "being asked by ...." to be up-front about their view in what for many is a discomfoting way. "Indicating the view that would result from developing what he [or she] regarded as positions" (lines 27-8). The discomfoting question is "where do you stand?" or worse, "where do you live?". That gets close to the real trouble: should I follow it up? Indeed, pushed further it becomes "and how do you die?". Another follow

up point.

The **stand** question, at any rate, lurks in the word *regard* that Lonergan uses. The section on humour in *Insight* is always a relief context.... get a smile going about how he talks, and “one” takes in or dodges, his point about a “crucial experiment”, an “occasion to ask themselves some basic questions ... even about themselves” (*Method in Theology*, 253). In that context there is his saying “it will make conversion a topic”, and there is the mix of humor and terror in that suggestion of being **displaced**. But only if one does not read on.

The three assemblers that I am thinking of know what it is to be thus displaced, having a life in some other space-time. They could spell it out in *regard* to their own living, as indeed did. Boulanger’s death-bed talk to “cher Lenny” Bernstein ... this picks up on my “dying” angle: should I follow it up?

But can there be, at this stage of Lonergan’s or my presentation, any doubt about the not-at-all-subtle strategy that Lonergan has built into method here: a very discomforting issue of “self-scrutiny”? Of course, there can: witness the range of reader’s who somehow manage to view the page like a televised game, the number of apparently serious scholars who ignore this fresh grim meaning of dialectic and bluff along in shrunken *comparison*! Yet this is clearly his methodological way round the cultural disease of *voraussetzunglos* that he identified in *Insight*. How do I get my average reader, trained to axial non-reading, to read the non-read self?

Perhaps get them to see the beam in the eyes of the ten assemblers? Suggest this way of self-scrutiny concretely for and in or absent from the ten assemblers. Build that into the portrait of their efforts to write their ten books. How could they dodge the massive self-revelation of the final chapters? But this certainly would need spelling out, indeed comic spelling out. I have always enjoyed the scalpel-twisting that is the final sentence of page 250: the assemblers have to read the ten books, and come up with a revised version of their own and their own final chapters. What a drama here, here hear, for a dramatist’s chisel, an Oscar’s Wilde?

So, because we, me, “one”, is slipped out of the picture, the assemblers in their own communal discomfort may make comfortable inroads on the edge of the consciousness of the standard non-reader?

Perhaps spell out how, say, one of the ten at least pushes: that is all that is needed for discomfort. The one reads the ten books and so the other nine selves in their cover stories; learning something, of course, about their own “deeper cover”. Certainly, “it will not be automatically efficacious” (Method, 253) but it edges nicely towards brutal if not linguistic feed-back.

But my average reader can back off to non-involvement, like someone watching Wimbledon. The assemblers, the performers, are of some substance, like the three I listed. Nadia Boulanger would seem to be the narrowest, yet in her own area she was reputed to know all of music and “know it cold”, from pre-Bach to the mid-twentieth century. (Check quotations and book-references in *Process*.) Nor do the others miss out on music. The distracting point here is that between ten serious people there will be mention, for example, of all the art forms and all the forms of human inquiry. So, the question of displacement and its role in promoting progress comes up with regard to all such drives: Lonergan’s methodological suggestion lifts his own suggestion beyond the three displacements that he mentions in the page: the displacements of religion, morality, and radical intellectual turn-about [this latter of course missing and misunderstood in the larger % of Lonergan scholarship .... but I shouldn’t go there in this minimalist push].

O.K. but I lost in that diversion the ordinary reader, who really cannot take **taking a stand** seriously. “Serious self-scrutiny is not for little me”. Need to brood more about this in a new dawn’s dark.

April 25<sup>th</sup> 2004

Slipping into your life  
 Is like a scared hero  
 Touching with a naked toe  
 Some grass he must keep off  
 (Mallarme, 189. First verse of an untitled poem)

Suppose I do take three 'Greats' as representative of assemblers, and ask the reader to add seven more that are familiar to them from their own area: will my non-reader read non-readingly on? Miss the little edge of self-involvement? Even a first-year student of some subject can do a listing. But then what? Getting a reader, much less the standard non-reader, to tackle the list like an eleventh member: not too realistic. Might I suggest a pause in order to at least muse over, envisage, the doing of a personal exercise round the last sentence of page 250 on such lists, allowing for the cheating of not writing the eleventh book?

Not a bad strategy. But. But. The clue to a neater strategy, sitting there in SOFDAWARE 4: the twist towards self-assembly!

So, another angle .... perhaps even a new beginning .... back with my reader to the beginning of the page in order to do something both more elementary and more discomfoting. The turn of the page **poises**, as I described it in SOFDAWARE 4, tries for the reader's self-attention as part of the assembled, "*Assembly includes*" is the turning of the page and the topic towards the turner. But this seems quite remote from ordinary non-reading. Small chance of poisoning the usual learned reader in the question of self-assembly, the slow struggle towards private self-assembly. Hard to imagine, fantasize about, a "normal" reader holding the page 249-250 up, holding up the reading, waving the page and the self back and forth between the end and the beginning words, "*assembly >>> includes*", making a terrifying discovery about "ordinary reading". Joyce perhaps could write an essay on that turning and returning .... or Edgar Poe, ..."The Pit

of the Pendulum Page” .

Still, it seems to me that that is a neat way of getting into the problem of reading those first fourteen tricky lines of the page. I skipped them as I puzzled about presenting the page when I wrote the SOFDAWARES, but this gives a strategy of top-down reading. No: the strategy is better with the bottom-read context. Whatever works!

The strategic element is that we get rid of the “greats” while Trying To Figure Out - and In - those six italicized names for the steps in the strategy.... focus on the self-assembled, if only slightly assembled, if only slightly focused. Anyone semi-decently educated should be able to muddle through If, if, if [huge cultural ifs] they have got that far in enlightened self-interest. A sort of Progoff thing, but getting deeper into the basic Why and I etc, Jung, Freud, Horney, Maslow, Progoff, Pert, whoever, do not get into those last two chapters of page 250.

I diary along: but the culture is dead against a cultivation of diarists reaching in and around the personal dynamics of molecules of self-possession and possession. Page 250 is the page of a diary: in many ways like an end page, like that last powerful chapter of *Finnegans Wake*. Might I make some few pause, startled, anastomatically boggled over “assembly includes”?!

Reading it seriously means a reading it with a powerful tutored energy of fantasy, something that does not characterize out axial times. Such a tutored consciousness will be a feature of post-axial historical consciousness. It is to be mediated especially by the influence of an emergent group of foundations persons with a life-long commitment to an adult growth that seeks a heuristics of “their destiny” (*Method in Theology*, 292 I think). There is little sign of that emergence at present. So, the issue comes back to my old slogan of the 1970s, “if a thing is worth doing it is worth doing badly”.

But can we be creatively cunning in recurrence-scheming the emergence, in shifting the emergent probabilities? There comes again to mind a death-strategy cousin to that of my witty namesake, St. Philip Neri, who liked to trick people into envisaging

their own death-bed scene. Surely a high point in self-assembly and in imitating the Joycean-Mallarmean strategy of “reading the book of himself”! Away altogether from Beckett’s hearing himself rot: though close enough! Of the many benefits of such a twisted perspective, however, I am inclined to point to one, which lifts this problem of page 250 into a fuller cosmic context. I think of various learned Christian authors writing about the “hereafter”. Their writings - and I should avoid naming names here, an unnecessary discomfort - reveal the pathetic state of present explanatory heuristics of that turn in each our stories, the turn in our all-story towards eschatological cosmos, indeed throwing dark discomfoting light on the pathetic state of the entire enterprise of explanatory heuristics.

But I am distracted again by the strange realm of obituaries, self-epitaphing, and it could add a “stirring” component to the reflective effort. Especially when there are two birds in this stone. Both bring in the effort demanded in spending time with another great assembler in a single written piece of his assembly. Best leave the second stone unturned till the end of my ramblings here, tomorrow, at nightfall.

The assembler is Herbert Butterfield in his poor shot at page 250 in *The Origins of Modern Science 1300-1800*. Near the end of his book he writes:

“If we were grading forms of historical evidence, most of us would be inclined to put funeral orations into the lowest and least trustworthy class of all. But it often happens in the case of any class of document that a witness is most important in the things he was not intending to give away, and the historian is in the position of being a detective - there is not anything in the world which may not provide him with a clue. Fontenelle, in fact, was an extremely subtle and diplomatic narrator, and even in what was supposed to be a eulogy he could manage without offence to draw attention to the weaknesses of this scientist or that....”

Dialectic reflection is a more complex detecting than history; we are hunting for clues about it and in it; Fontenelle suggests a lead that touches on Mallarme’s tombing poems. What about sketching briefly, doctrinally, a following of it? But that would go

off in quite another direction. Yet another strange essay. Still?

Another distraction about Lonergan's cultural context, and axial reading. His own push in the Epilogue of *Verbum* about real reading. We read and think, when we are not in the displacement of serious physics, in a culture that has been massively encouraged by Fontenelle into sophisticated cycles of general bias. "On the one hand" sez Butterfield, "he is in a sense the first of the French *philosophes*; while on the other hand he invented and exploited a whole technique of popularization". Lives of great ones, and of little people like ourselves, can be and are, in this culture, reduced to size, to sighs, to petty dreams. Lonergan, like Martin Luther King, had a dream. Page 250 of *Method in Theology* is a massive and almost-final component in that dream. The dream was already utterly remote from this culture when in shocking solitude he wrote *Insight* with its simpler focus on dialectic in chapter seventeen. (This really needs an essay .... showing a new road from the middle of that chapter to a larger ending .... perhaps *Quodlibet* 7 or 8 ...?).

A Roman pilgrimage, an exile of a dozen years, threatened that dream but it winged forth in February 1965, a tower of cyclic subtlety.

**April 26<sup>th</sup> 2004.**

When with fate's law the dark was threatening  
 One old Dream, wish and woe of my spine's column,  
 Stricken with perishing where roofs are solemn  
 It folded in me its undoubting wing.  
 (Mallarme, 167: the first stanza of *Plusieurs Sonnets*)

Is a turn to a more direct approach better?

"See", he says, in that first footnote to chapter 7: but did he not mean, "be seized"? "See my own discussion of the truth of interpretation in *Insight*, pp. 562-594, and observe how ideas presented there recur in quite different functional specialties. For instance, what there is termed a universal viewpoint, here is realized by advocating

a distinct functional specialty named dialectic”.

Realized? Advocating? The scientific revolution continues in small pocketed cultures of displacement, but its heuristics, and the heuristics of everything, are in the pocket of the tradition of Fontenelle’s *haute vulgarization*. How might I help some readers to a break forward? By homing in on the analogy with some seriously successful pocket of scientific endeavor? Am I not back, then, pushing for a serious reading of the first page of *Method in Theology*?

There are at present some few serious physicists searching - though in a muddled fashion - for Grand Unification Theories, GUTs. The confusion and searching has been going on most evidently since the mid- nineteenth century and, while there is some progress, muddles abound as we move forward in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is the state of the most elementary of human inquiry of physics: might we not pick up a lesson in the far-more-difficult search for a viewpoint that could cover their struggle and illuminate our own? [ A neat image here which I’ll have to put in before the end ... a mediaeval Butterfield page!]

The ten or so serious assemblers in physics of the twentieth century battled with each other in sometimes bitter and nasty biographic *completions*, *expletions*. What is emerging in this decade is a intimation of the massive incompleteness of present physics: the suspicion of the incompleteness is emerging not from any one assembler, indeed - back on track! - its emergence pivots on the reachings of the assembler who wrote our page 250. But I seem also to be back at the hopeless problem of getting readers to read.

The ten or so serious assemblers that are to putter poorly through the tasks of that page towards the parallel to GUTs: BUVs, (Budding UVs) have to meet that single assembler who is an unavoidable part of the assembled. Nor is there any doubt about the terrible beauty they have to meet. Bernard Lonergan wrote his own lines 26-27 of page 250 in brutal bluntness: the poet’s naked sword cuts through centuries of pettiness as he enters the lists of pages 286-7. Neither the twentieth century nor the twenty-first

were prepared for that lister or listed, ploughing and planting in a lonely furrow. Our invitation in the final analysis, the “final objectification of horizon” - whether we are gifted or little - is to self-assemble as Ven Buddies, writing our minimal-list, perhaps diaries and obituaries and eulogies of ceding repentance and seeding hope.

*Method in Theology* page 250 is one of the “events” of its own second line, “movements to which they refer,” to which they are referred, an event that pinnacled Lonergan’s climb towards a pragmatic sublation of all previous pointers towards a human and humane dialectic push. And I have been caught up, like Prince Genji, so that my story-telling, my obituation, death-dances around this Dark Tower in feminist hope. “The storyteller’s own experience of men and things, whether for good or ill - not only what he has passed through himself, but even **events** which he has only witnessed or been told of - has moved him to an emotion so passionate that he can no longer keep it shut up in his heart. Again and again something in his own life or in that around him will seem to the writer so important that he cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion. There must never come a time, he feels, when men do not know about it”. (Not many will know of this, the great work by Lady Murasaki, *The Tale of Genji*, translated by Arthur Waley: I quote vol. III, vii, 501, but it is a quotation worth twisting into this petition for attention, for reading).

So, in some selection from these muddled three days of brooding, I can take my simple stand and claim that **This is the last great page of Lonergan’s life**. I would have the reader read it with “a clear assumption that a literary work is true to its author’s life and times to a degree that is very Japanese and very un-Western”.<sup>2</sup> I would have the

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<sup>2</sup>I need a footnote here to hold together the foreign mood. It may be the only piece of this that survives the rewriting, if I write at all a further essay on this page 250. My reference here is to *Japanese Poetic Diaries*, selected and translated with in Introduction by Earl Miner, University of California Press, 1976, 8. Miner’s Introduction gives a relevant perspective on the difference between the traditions of English and Japanese diary-writing, and especially on the place of poetry in the Japanese tradition (see Miner, 16-17; 47-55). There is a sense in which I would regard the effort of writing 41

reader, or surely some few readers, read it into their lives, their deaths, their diaries, their after-lives.

But should I write this, make this fresh effort? Perhaps I have already written enough, rambling through 41 Cantowers, rising to a clearer focus in 8 SOFDAWARES? Or should I just halt now, three days out in a diary of a rambling reach towards writing? Might sharing the diary add a new voice, a new tone, a new poise to the standard reader?

Or should I settle with an appeal for a strenuous reach of the reader's fantasy that occurred to me as I thought of Butterfield and his book? Suppose, I might say - but desperate that the supposition might grow into month's musing - suppose that someone seven centuries ago wrote a single page summarizing the scientific revolution. Would a mediaeval take it seriously? So, why should people in our time take page 250 seriously?

And why should you take Lonergan seriously in his other pages, if you do not take his last great page seriously?

Maybe I should just stay with my **bold-faced** claim - **This page 250 is the last great page that Lonergan wrote** - hoping for those who secretly take another view to take an outspeaking **no** stand against this one? Surely, in this centennial, we need to put our *cordes* on the table?

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Cantowers in the 25 months, January 2002-January 2004, as a diary in a Japanese mood. They were contextualized by the biographic effort of Conn O'Donovan and myself written within the same period (See *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis* 3[2003]). Indeed, the present writings continue the process of journaling, and this little three-day essay needs to be received in the mood of Botan Kuroka's three-day diary of his sickness, "The Verse Record of my Poenies" (Miner, 199-203), as the verse record of my pain. In a Japanese mood and mode, my prose is just a context for Mallarme's four verses. In the three days of its writing there lives also flights of deep sadness as my Reverend Sally and I am move through the final two-Church services before leaving Nova Scotia: but why should my diary of dis-ease trouble you with other sadnesses of shared flowers? Perhaps, though, you might read again, fresh-flowering, my diary of April 24-26, 2004?

Changed now by eternity into his true  
Self, the Poet rouses with naked sword  
His age horrified at not having heard  
How death in that strange voice was winning through!

(The first verse of "the Tomb of Edgar Poe", Mallarme 175)