

Field Nocturne 23

Here Hear

Not too many readers or thinkers in the present culture - are you among them? - are in the mood to say “here here” to my twists and turns around the topic of hearing, or indeed round the topic of these 41 essays: properly reading the paragraph from chapter 15 of *Insight* that I have called **study**. Yet **you** are still with me, you **are** still with me might I not repeat this thus five times, ending with a stressed **me**?

Or, not ending but beginning again, with the stressed you and the stressed me? “Try again. Fail better”. I would have you stress you further, but in the simple sense of you putting a stress on finding you freshly in the **flesh**,¹ and that your word² be made flesh and fresh. I seem to wish to write us into further obscurity, but I see more clearly as I move along in these essays that that is the way to invisible light, “that the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh,”³ that the “seeing, hearing, touching, smelling tasting”⁴ so easily writ and read in *Method in Theology* needs to be stressed and redressed⁵ in you and me and Grace if we are to be seriously saved from

¹I put this word in boldface. It is, in a sense, the central word of these next eight *Field Nocturnes*. There is the flesh of animals and the flesh of pulpy fruits, but human flesh is a leap in being to the ineffable. What is that leap? Yes. **What** is that leap: and might *flesh* not be a name for the here of what?

²I think here of both inner and outer words, and in *Field Nocturne 30*, “Onwords”, there is to emerge a new context in which we might share St. Augustine’s partial discover of the inner word, a strange emergence in outer non-space. On Augustine’s discovery, see Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, University of Toronto Press, 1997, 6-7.

³Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible (followed by working notes)*, Edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern University Press, 1968, 127. I shall refer to this work in the rest of these essays as **The Visible and the Invisible**.

⁴*Method in Theology*, 4.

⁵I think first here of Seamus Heaney’s pointing to *The Redress of Poetry* in his book of that title. See the final note below.

the “dry well”⁶ of the longer cycle of decline.

Where am I to turn, to what am I to turn you, if the **here-what** that is **you-there** is to become **fresh-flesh**, a four-named bold-faced identity of **mud’s-desire**? In *Field Nocturnes* 26, 29 and 30 we shall rise with Helen Keller on her famous day of April 7th 1884, an unhearing little girl needing, no doubt, to make, for the last time, un-named water. A too-concrete scandalous twist for **you’re here-what?**⁷ I have to hand the story of that scandalous searcher, Colette, written by that strange woman, Julia Kristeva. It is Volume Three of a search for the meaning of human meaning, titled *Words*, with its so suitable subtitle, *Colette or the world’s flesh*.⁸ And suitable too, herenow, the title of

⁶Recall the first two lines of *Field Nocturne 16*: “Saving Grace”: “My wife, Sally, has a delightful picture hanging in her Church office. The little girl Grace is trapped at the bottom of a dry well: you get the picture?”. I suspect that brooding on notes 7-9, that follow here, will shake up your reading of “the little girl”, and of history’s problem of saving the little girl so that she graces the third stage of meaning.

⁷I note here that these next 8 Nocturnes pivot on Merleau-Ponty’s scribbled reflections of May 1960, and point towards a functional consideration of those scribbles later in this century. But the Nocturnes could have gone in another direction, taking, instead of those May reflections, the reflections of Julia Kristeva in her concluding chapter of **Colette** (see the next footnote here), titled “Is there a Feminine Genius?” The chapter leads to the same massive functional challenge, and you might get a taste of that challenge by brooding within that chapter: noting, e.g., the repeated attention to “the little girl”. “The child who allows herself to be seduced and who seduces with her skin and her five senses, opens herself up, in fact, via her orifices: the mouth, anus, and vagina for the little girl”(Colette, 410). Taking that other direction would have moved the strategy-related reflections of *Field Nocturnes 30*, “Onwords”, from grammatology to sexology. The stragic methodological reflections on language are more fundamental in our struggle, but the beginning from the evident in language e.g. the manifest difference between the embodiment of **is?** and **what?** - a strategic piece of methodology - has its parallel in such sexual obviousnesses as the hiddenness of the female peehole as compared to the penishole. Eventually there is to be a powerful merging of the two directions of struggle mentioned here. See below notes 9, 10, 20, 24, and note 23 of *Field Nocturne 28*.

⁸Julia Kristeva, *Colette*, translated by Jane Marie Todd, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004. To be referred to below as **Colette**. I note immediately Kristeva’s frontispiece quotation from **The Visible and the Invisible** centering on “that innate anonymity of Myself that we call flesh Flesh is an element of Being”.

Kristeva's first chapter, "Why Colette? She Invented an Alphabet."⁹ We are in need, in this millennium, of inventing a new alphabet, one that includes but goes beyond the legitimate reachings of Colette and Kristeva,¹⁰ a new "riverrun past Eve and Adam"¹¹ of words that press flesh.

The press of flesh has to have the poetic rhythmic vigour that Colette and Heaney and Kristeva and Pound demand, but in the Tower of Able those rhythms have to live in and off the beauty of complete explanation.¹² We may come later, at the end of these eight *Field Nocturnes*, to sense the rapture of flesh into this world invisible, or at least to sniff a distant goal of another stage of meaning. But it seems to me that some impossible brief and foolishly clear expression of that reach and its present problems could help us along now, even help your patience with my ravings and cravings.

I return, then, to a previous essay, where I tackled the heart of the problem: confidence in rich description. I tackled it as best I could at the young age of 72, in *Cantower 23, "Redoubt Description"*. The problem remained with me through the writing of the sequel to *Method in Theology: Revisions and implementations*. The sequel, titled *Loneragan's Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry*, was a small reach of fantasy

⁹See also **Colette**, 422: "This woman exercised the art of word not as a rhetoric, as a pure form, even less as a message of ideas. If she thought while writing, it was because the written thought was immediately a new life that procured her, beyond a new ego and a new body, a true osmosis with Being. Her sensual, gustatory, sonorous, fragrant, and tactile writing is a thought become flesh: **Colette** did not invent a literary form, she constructed an alphabet of the sensory world by embroidering the fabric, by eating the tissue of the French language."

¹⁰I am indebted here to the doctorate work of Christine Jamieson, who kindly made available to me her doctorate thesis from St. Paul's University, Ottawa, *The Significance of the Body in Ethical Discourse: Julia Kristeva's Contribution*. Kristeva offers directions that can be related to Heaney's reachings in *The Redress of Poetry*, but with a powerful feminist rhythm and a subtle psychology of early anxiety that could well mesh with and transform Harry Stack Sullivan's work on anxiety.

¹¹The first words of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

¹²We return that issue of the beauty of complete explanation in *Field Nocturne 30*.

into the future, the Tower-possession and operation of the Standard Model in the year 2111. In that sequel, the problem still haunted me as the need for deeper noisings abroad of history's groaning in each of us for an objectification of flesh's loneliness, noisings that were not so pale: limp kisses, curses, caresses, calls. But the best I could do was to repeat, in this new context, as an underflowing context of different chapters, sections of *Cantower 23*'s puzzling about description.

Now I find myself in *Field Nocturne 23*, climbing another ladder of flesh-search towards the coincidence of these essays with the *Cantower* series. The two series merge at number 41, where the *Cantower* series halted, and they carry on the search to the planned ending of 117 *Field Nocturnes CanTower*. But now I carry forward with fresh and startling light on description's flaws. Is such light communicable? If *flesh* is the core word of these eight coming *Nocturnes*, then light's unavailability is the core idea.

Lights' unavailability was a topic in the first lecture I heard from Lonergan, Easter 1961: it had to do with the incommunicability of serious physics.¹³ For me, mathematical physics has always remained the prime analogue of the reality of communication. My students in first year had no illusions about their attending my graduate class. Yet present culture has such illusions: is not general bias alive and well in the goings-on of human studies? And, too close to home here, Lonergan studies: is general bias not alive and well there? A companion to *Cantower 23* is *Cantower11* "Lonergan: Interpretation and History", where I let humour hold sway: we really need to laugh at our silly over-reachings.¹⁴ More solemnly, in editing the volumes of the Florida Conference of Easter 1970, the single point of the Introduction to the second volume, *Language, Truth and Meaning*, was the point of comparison of the serious

¹³He told the story of the person who asked Einstein for a simple speedy non-equation understanding of relativity theory.

¹⁴I recall a lecture of Professor Charles Hefling Jn in which he rightly compared *Insight* to a cello tutorial book. One can displace a wondrous flow of eloquence talking about playing the cello.

empirical and theoretic study of animal thirst with the shabby ramblings of so-called theory around the longings of human psycho-thirst, neuroflesh.

Lonergan conveyed with verbal vigour his view of theoretic competence when, in a Boston Workshop of the 1970s which emphasized “Theology as Public Discourse”, he took his stand against that notion, talking of the theologian needing to be sufficiently cultured to read Lindsay and Margenau’s *Foundations of Physics*, a monstrous demand at the time.¹⁵ My own more tolerant view of the present situation is that, without some serious effort at the world of theoretic thinking in the simpler sciences of physics and chemistry - or something equivalent in mathematics¹⁶ - a philosopher, theologian, biologist or human scientist can quite easily settle for initial descriptions, especially when it is densified by rich details of research correlations and statistical analyses.

I could go on, all too briefly, where brevity emerges as a central problem of axial talk.¹⁷

¹⁵In a forthcoming biography of Lonergan, Pierre Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas*, I devote a chapter to **Lindsay and Margenau** and the lift its gave to his perspective.

¹⁶I have given various illustrations over the years. The most obvious is that given in *Cantower 27*, where I spell out the Archimedean thing using Archimedes’ extraordinary work, *On Floating Bodies*. [I note in passing that *Cantowers 27-31* parallel *Insight* chapters 1-5, aiming to give the reading of *Insight* a lift.] My favorite exercise for non-mathematicians is the one I give in “Undermining Macrodynamic Reading”, *Journal of Macrdynamic Analysis* 1 (2001), 77-100, available at <http://www.mun.caljmda> . It is an exercise that does not require more than grade12 mathematics. Here is the question: “How many ways can n married couples be seated about a round table in such a way that there is always one man between two women and none of the men is ever sitting next to his own wife?” What is the goal of the exercise? To be able to teach the answer effectively without relying on notes. I cannot see anyone really having a grasp of either theoretic thinking or of the control of meaning that it gives without giving this exercise - or some equivalent - at least a month’s devotion.

¹⁷I touched on this, but only in a brief descriptive way, on page 147 of “Systematics, Communications, Actual Contexts”, *Lonergan Workshop*, 7(1987), when writing of summary accounts of economics. However, the problem of communicating Lonergan’s economics illustrates well the problem of summary or ineffective doctrinal talk.. The issue is principally the issue of *haute vulgarization*. See *Lack in the Beingstalk*, chapter 3, “*Haute Vulgarization*”.

Talk about, (about)³, axial talk, placing human fleshspeak in its proper context of the cosmos' 14 billion year bubbling towards spirits energy-infolding, can certainly help, but it is best left till we come to *Field Nocturne 30*, "Onwords". But the problem, to be solved in this millennium's heuristic searchings, haunts my present prose and warps your present reading of what should, is, in the third stage of meaning, to be, luminous doctrinal pointing and reading.

Still, might I add here some prose, laced with metagrams, that could at least help the mood? I might have us pause over the two metagrams, W1 and W2, that deal with fleshspeak, but they belong to and long for the full context of ongoing metagrams.¹⁸ But surely a curious pause over a piece of all that symbolism might help?

So I bring us back to the single symbol, the semi-colon, ; . What did I, do I, might you, mean by this simple sign? It recurs so quietly in W1, a harmless choice, preferred to, say, any other punctuation mark. So we might have had there " $z_1 \cdot u_m$ ", or " $z_1 : u_m$ " or " z_1, u_m " instead of my " $z_1 ; u_m$ ". What might I mean by these?. Well, we can give names to the views that can be - not terribly conveniently I might add - associated with them: *epiphenomenalism*, *dualism*, *reductionism*, *aggreformism*.

There is little point in pausing over interpretations that might go with the first three names. But what, we ask once more, is aggreformism?¹⁹ Might I claim that it has something to do with Merleau-Ponty's struggle with *flesh* and *wild being*? And with a

¹⁸The Metagrams are given in *Prehumous 1*, on the website.

¹⁹This has been a topic already in these *Field Nocturnes*, and will be again in a fuller and subtler sense in the last 12 *Field Nocturnes*. I have treated it in what may be called normal fashion in previous writings: *Randomness, Statistics and Emergence* (Gill, McMillan and Notre Dame, 1971), chapter 9, "Randomness and Emergence"; *The Shaping of the Foundations*, chapter 1, "Image and Emergence: Towards an Adequate Weltanschauung"; *Cantower 29*, "Physics and Other Sciences", in the conclusion (where, I recall, I introduced the semi-colon notation).

surge towards femaleness in the third stage of meaning?²⁰ But for me, now, what it has to do with is a basic shift of scientific bent perhaps more simply captured in my question to Sunflowers, “Sunflowers, Speak to Us of Growing.”²¹

“How does the sunflower work?”, we may ask, but do we ask it properly in our ‘study of the organism’? Do we break from the falsity of the *bavardage quotidien*? “What then is needed in me is a qualitative change in me, a shift in the centre of my existing from the concerns manifested in the *bavardage quotidien* towards the participated yet never in this life completely established eternity that is tasted in aesthetic apprehension.”²² That break - and here is the core of my pointing - needs an incarnate know-ledgeant, fleshed wild being, of the reality of explanation so brutally falsified in our chauvinist axial daze. It screams for cool poetry but it calls for warm ice. That warm ice includes flesh’s explaining-claim that explanation is of you and me and flowers as layered thing-workings, botanical and chemical doings within a resonant cosmic zeal. We are to move, in these next millennia, beyond the scarred slim-

²⁰*Femaleness?* A manufactured word, like its sister *Epilodge* as the title of *Cantower 21*, (which parallels the Epilogue of *Insight*). What might it mean? The context cannot be some simple view of gender or sex, but one at home in the 14 billion years that has given us *The Sexual Spectrum* (I am recalling a book by Olive Skene Johnson, the full title of which is *The Sexual Spectrum: Exploring Human Diversity*, Raincoat Books, Vancouver, 2004). It is the massively important topic that is raised by the final chapter of **Colette** (see Field Nocturne 23, notes 6-10). “Might the rhythm of the new beginning be a counterweight to the phallic temporality of the desire-to-death, finding its foundations in female fertility and in woman’s psychic plasticity? Perhaps: but it is the incomparable version Arendt gives in politics, Klein through her projective interpretations, and Colette in her cult of plant blossoming and of writing that make their writings works of genius(es).” (**Colette**, 426).

²¹The title of *Cantower 2*.

²²B.Lonergan, in a review by him of Jules Chaise-Ruy, *Les dimensions de l’être et du temps*, *Gregorianum* 36 (1956), 138. Reprinted in Lonergan’s *Collected Works*, vol. 20, *Shorter Papers*, University of Toronto Press, 2007, 209. It is as well, I think, to draw your attention to another review in that volume from 1959, (Vol. 20, pp.222-3), where Lonergan discusses books searching for the meaning of a Christian philosophy. I can steal his concluding words there to tell you what I am on about here: “It is, I fear, in Vico’s phrase, a *scienza nuova*”.

understanding of the simplest things, to a seeding of a slim but wholeblood grip on the ecstasy of our human workings and our human utterances. Perhaps I should let Seamus Heaney have the last word here, **whathere**, till we furrow further in the “Onwords” of *Field Nocturne* 30. Perhaps, in sharing **whathere** my concluding rhapsodizing, you **whathere** and **myselfhere**, are “surprised at how far it has carried them on the lip of its rhetorical wave. It leaves them like unwary surfers hung over a great emptiness, transported further into the void than they might expect to go. It arrives at a place where, in Yeats’s words, ‘cold winds blow across our hands, upon our faces, the thermometer falls.’

Yeats, however, considered these things to be symptoms not of absence but of the ecstatic presence of the supernatural. Writing near the end of his life in ‘A General Introduction for My Work’, Yeats told of his aspiration to a form of utterance in which imagination would be ‘carried beyond feeling into the aboriginal ice’. Which ice, needless to say, was the antithesis of the stuff to be found under the mortuary slabs. It represented not so much a frigid exhaustion as an ultimate attainment. It was an analogue of that cold heaven where it ‘seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice’; an analogue also of Yeats’s rejection of the body heat of the pathetic and subjective in art, for his embrace of the dramatic and the heroic, his determination to establish the crystalline standards of poetic imagination as normative for the level at which people should live.”²³

²³Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1995, 156-57. I would have you recall the notes 6-10 above. Yeats speaks here, and Heaney and I. What of the woman, Grace, grown old and wise, reading and writing in the next millennium about “the study of the organism”? Perhaps this helps to answer a lurking question, What has all this stuff about the feminine got to do with reading the paragraph of *Insight* named **study**? The third stage of meaning is to witness the word being made fresh flesh. Recall note 20 above, with its image of plant blossoming. Recall the imagery of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Molly **Bloom**’s longings and aspirations.