

Field Nocturne 28

A Touching of Touching: Getting on Your Nerves.

“The third stage of global meaning, with its mutual mediation of an academic presence, is a distant probability, needing painfilled solitary reaching towards a hearing of hearing,¹ a touching of touching, “in the far ear”,² “sanscreed”,³ a new audicity, a new hapticity, to which we must aspire.⁴

You have recognized, I assume, this quotation with which I ended *Field Nocturne* 25. Might we re-cognize it further by you and I getting on your nerves **herenow, what, what?** The bold-faced printing is to remind you of the reality of our situation, our situation as patterned chemicals. Remind you? Perhaps rather, startle you again, puzzle you, but not really just remind you, as if you have the habit and only occasionally slip into the **ordinary**, whatever you assume, existentially, that that is. Recall the end of *Field Nocturne* 23.⁵

The previous *Field Nocturne* battled against that ordinary, and it may have got on your nerves in various ways, ranging from annoyed discontent to a contented suspicion that there are leads here to **whathere** finding **what, here**. I wish, hero here, us to return to Merleau-Ponty, who seeks to lift us forward in self-possession by way of “a touching

¹“Merced Mulde!”, “Yesel that the limmat?” (*Finnegans Wake*, p. 212, line 26; p. 199, line 13).

²See John Bishop, *Joyce’s Book of the Dark: Finnegans Wake*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986, 343-46.

³*Finnegans Wake*, p. 519.

⁴*Process: Introducing Themselves to Young (Christian) Minders*, Written 1988-89, and available on the usual Website.

⁵The fuller issue is dealt with in the conclusion of chapter 2 of *Lack in the Beingstalk*.

of touching". But first, let us ramble either in elementary fashion or in **whathere, freshflesh**, fashion, through what our text tells us about touching. So, here, there are three short sections touching on your touching climb, Merleau-Pont's sad and touching climb, and humanity's need of a touch of the untouchable.

1. Your Touching Climb

Here I must rely on your commitment to climb, or at a minimum your noticing that the commitment is just not there, or perhaps just postponed: you have a learned thesis or work to write, and so no time for genuine seriousness. That can be O.K. : then by the end here, when we are lifted to some sense of the patient genuine seriousness of Merleau-Ponty, you may be motivated to take an operative stand on a later genuine seriousness, Tower seriousness. But here the issue is the minor seriousness of pausing to read **Neuroscience's** - or an equivalent text's - treatment of your sense of touch.⁶ And it is **your** sense of touch that is written about: that is a first step in our reading. But now I must take that reading for granted, and move to issues of **you-there-what-now**.

Muse first over your touching experiences, facing rain or footing it up-hill, goose-pimples or orgasms, silk or stone, a hug or a yoga stretch. So, gently, you get yourself together, the self that read the text on touching, got together but oddly absent from the reading. Or partly present.

What does the reading add to your got-togetherness?

The reading has been a reading and thinking about touch, or, normatively, about **touch, about touch, whatouch**. Yes, the boldfaced reminder is there, rewinding you to your situation. But you found, I suspect, that your reading was not normative in my

⁶The relevant pages of **Neuroscience** are pages 397- 434. There is a discomfoting challenge here of stepping out of a culture that invites you to read on and skip these pages and their exercises. It is the same culture that carries one through a reading of the book *Insight*: deadly doctrinal reading that generates general bias. Are you going along with it?

I would note that such discomfort becomes an internal structure within the operation of dialectic as it is normalized by page 250 of *Method*.

It is against this culture, of course, that this entire series is directed.

sense, but normal in the culture's sense. The normal varies with your status in life: are you a student needing to pass a course, are you a professor of philosophy crazy enough to do this experiment with me, or some such? Whatever your status, you recognize the normal: you are finding out about touch to meet your needs. That last phrase is a massively deep issue, and I must postpone getting into that depth till we breeze through it in section 3 below, passing the question on to *Field Nocturne 30*, "Onwords". So, take that question now as elementarily factual, about you here-now. But let us both push it a bit: for me, as I have found in the past 24 hours, a most illuminating push.

Back then to the question, What does the reading add to your got-togetherness? And to my got-togetherness? My effort of repeated reading of this section of **Neuroscience** has been a layered effort, focused on the field-drive of the third section here, and on the pointing of these eight *Nocturnes*, 23 to 30. Still, that should have its echo in your findings of "addition". The adding, for any of us, is an adding of understanding.⁷ But what, existentially, does it add to our got-togetherness? What does it add to **what**?

Very little, we feel. Even if there is what seems to be a serious lift in our understanding, sufficient to make us part of the community of those who care for touching in some capacity: neuropsychologist, shoe-designers, burn-nurses. But that sufficiency need be no more, and generally is no more, than a mindgrip on technical competence layered into a togetherness sufficient for personal classification as not more

⁷There is the extreme possibility of a reading with almost no understanding, like the reading of an anglicized version of a non-Indo-European language for an Indo-European. I would note the advantage of knowing just what one is after in reading. The undergraduate, highlighting, is on track for a test, so, reaching for a short-term memory control: it is good to know this. The graduate battling through comprehensives can need the same miserable push. But the miserable push may become a culture. And when low-grade media norms become academic, political and economic norms, then "the actors in the drama of living become stage-hands; the setting is magnificent; the lighting superb; the costumes gorgeous; but there is no play." (*Insight*, 237 [262]). What are we, you and I, after? Well, at least our musings can foggily reveal our missing the pointing of our cosmic throwness, our being thrown "with that order's dynamic joy and zeal" (*Insight*, 700[722])

than moderately neurotic. What we have read in **Neuroscience**, or its equivalent, what may be read even in the advanced journals of these times, is only a beginning of the long trek to a serious appreciation of our nerves. We are like gardeners trying to enthuse over a mustard seed or a sunflower seed, indeed gardeners that have never seen the tree, the face of the flower. “Thoroughly understand what it is to understand ... and you will possess a fixed base,”⁸ but only if you are a brilliant evolutionary sport in this unpredictably long axial time.⁹

Still, some of you may share my own quiet joy, of moving along in my **comeabout** climb, noting the billion years’ achievement in us of the gentle emergent infolding of energy towards the touchable untouchable, “each sensory system has evolved to be the brain’s interface with a different form of environmental energy.”¹⁰ That is a mindset, a luminous mindset of the mind setting-out, that is a heuristic skin-grip of self in cosmos, in unknown field, a dark-Knight fancy, an Annalivia reverie. It is a mindset that can only stay alive in chemical imagery of autonomic energy-bent beings. The mindset twists, and is twisted by, the psychic skin and its neural netting, into patterns of control of incarnate meaning that fleetingly anticipate, and desperately need, a Towering enAbleing collaboration that is a “psychic force that seeps living human bodies, linked in charity, to the joyful courageous, whole-hearted, yet intelligently controlled performance of the tasks set by a world order in which the

⁸*Insight*, xxviii[22].

⁹Leo Strauss, writing on the great books in education remarks on “the facile delusions which conceal from us our true situation: that we are, or can be, wiser than the wisest of the past. We are thus induced to play the part, not of attentive and docile listeners, but of impresarios or liontamers”. We need all to be pupils, pupils indeed of the greatest minds. Yet those are extremely rare. “We are not likely to meet any of them anywhere. It is a piece of good luck if there is a single one alive in one’s time” (Leo Strauss, *Liberalism, Ancient and Modern*, New York, Basic Books, 1968, 3..

¹⁰**Neuroscience**, 434. This is from the final page of the text’s treatment of touch ,.....

problem of evil is not suppressed but transcended.”¹¹

But the axial period beats many of the best of us into a truncated dark searching for the light in our touch, and allows many of the second best of us to implement answers borrowed uncomprehendingly from those few sports that are in touch with the symphony of cosmic yearning.

2. Merleau-Ponty's Last Theorem

The implicit reference of the section title is to Fermat's Last Theorem. There are various facets of the parallel, But immediately one may think of the decade that Wiles gave to solving the problem so gaily claimed solved by Fermat.¹² Is the age-old problem of subject-object something that requires a decade, or a millennium: and did Merleau-Ponty do a Wiles on it?

That facet of the parallel is quite a shake-up, is it not? But there may be a more startling facets, related to later layers of logic that are to include logics of questions, incompletenesses, modalities. Positional axiomatics need to be developed in such directions within a luminous logic of existential linguistic feedback.¹³

But let us move to that question from the context of Merleau-Ponty's climbing effort in those last years of his life. Then we find ourselves invited into a zone of touching experiences with every shade of metaphor allowed or even not allowed,

¹¹*Insight*, 723-4[745]

¹²Fermat's short Latin comment, that he has a solution but it won't fit on this margin, is printed at the beginning of Andrew Wiles' paper, "Modular elliptic curves and Fermat's Last Theorem, *Annals of Mathematics*, 142 (1995), 443-551. Quoted below as **Wiles**.

¹³I treat of positional axiomatics in an elementary manner in Prehumous 2. Lonergan introduces the notion of linguistic feedback in note 34 of page 88 of *Method in Theology*. It is as well to note here that his other mention of it in the manuscript was lost in printing. Lines 12-13 of page 92 of the book should read: "But these limitations recede in the measure that linguistic **feedback is achieved, that is in the measure that** explanations and statements provide the sensible presentations of the insights". The omitted phrase deserves to be **boldfaced**. Its meaning is at the heart of what we are at here.

certainly not in philosophic respectability.¹⁴ We carry forward from the sketchings of *Field Nocturne 24*, and from the pointing of the beginning of section 1 above. What I am interested in here is your glimpsing of the end-life of a genius, a glimpsing and an end-life that is to blossom into a standard presence in the Tower's Standard Model. I can do this best by sample rather than summary. In his notes of May 1960, a year before his sudden death, he is still struggling with his psychic skin's reach for ... the *field*?¹⁵ He brings to that struggling scribbling his life of **what**..... What, then, you and I may ask, does he mean when he writes?:

"To touch and to touch oneself (to touch oneself = touch-touching) They do not coincide in the body: the touching is never exactly the touched. This does not mean that they coincide 'in the mind' or at the level of 'consciousness.' Something else than the body is needed for the juncture to be made: it takes place in the *untouchable*. That of the other which I will never touch. But what I will never touch, he does not touch either, no privilege of oneself over the other here, it is therefore not the consciousness that is the untouchable - - 'The consciousness' would be something positive, and with it there would recommence, does recommence, the duality of the reflecting and the reflected, like that of the touching and the touched. The untouchable is not a touchable in fact inaccessible. The negative here is not *a positive that is elsewhere* (a transcendent) - - It is a true negative, i.e. an *Unverborgenheit* of the *Verborgenheit*, an *Urpräsentation* of the *Nichturpräsentierbar*, in other words, an original of the elsewhere, a *Selbst* that is an Other, a Hollow - - Hence no sense in saying the touch-touching junction is made of Thought or Consciousness: Thought or Consciousness is *Offenheit* of a corporeity to ... a World or Being.

The untouchable (as also the invisible: for the same analysis can be repeated for vision: what stands in the way of my seeing myself is first de facto invisible (my eyes

¹⁴I think again here of the extravagant reachings of Colette, expressed in **Colette**. See notes 7-10 of *Field Nocturne 23* and the final note of the present *Field Nocturne*.

¹⁵See note 1 of *Field Nocturne 24*.

invisible for me), but, beyond this invisible (which lacuna is filled by the other and my generality) a *de jure* invisible: I cannot see myself in movement, witness my own movement."¹⁶

And so on, in the middle of ten pages of such reflective working notes of May, 1960. Where was he going, with what heroism?

The question is so far from being simple that it is a towering business for the future, and we shall come to that business again when we reach *Field Nocturnes* 36-41. But meantime we may pause in the fantasy of paralleling Merleau-Ponty's last searchings with Fermat's last suggestions and Wiles' work. The general consensus is that Fermat just did not have the powerful context of international mathematics to rise to a meaningful communicable grip on the answer he suggested. But now there is such a context, massively remote. Wiles writes the first two sentences of a hundred pages and we are, if not competently with it, already lost: "An elliptic curve over \mathbf{Q} is said to be modular if it has a finite covering by a modular curve of the form $X_0(N)$. Any such elliptic curve has the property that its Hasse-Weil zeta function has an analytic continuation and satisfies a functional equation of the standard type."¹⁷ In a hundred years or so, backed by people like you now in the foothills or on the low slopes, an incomprehensible Tower of meaning, untouchable, invisible in its strange loose topology, will lift discourse on the desires of flesh into the wild being of a new language, one that consistently "satisfies a functional equation of the standard type" and that is to resonate with a new givenness of **what**.¹⁸

¹⁶**The Visible and the Invisible**, 254.

¹⁷**Wiles**, 443.

¹⁸This is a profound and subtle twist on the nature of finite spirit: more is to be said about it in *Field Nocturne* 30.

3. The Longer Cycle of Incline

I return here to the phrase, *finding out about touch to meet your needs*. I would have you bring out, even a smidgin, the depth that I mentioned, by you talking to you as if you were, are, aspiring to be such a Tower person, quite displaced then in our present cultural mileau, whether the cultural component be that of undergraduate highlighting, such as you can witness every day, or genuine phenomenological searching such as you can witness only if you go the slow lonely way of Merleau-Ponty, only if you add to the talk the walk.

So we come back - indeed did we ever leave it? - within the final paragraph of section 1 above. "The axial period beats many of the best of us into a truncated dark searching for the light in our touch, and allows many of the second best of us to implement answers borrowed uncomprehendingly from those few sports that are in touch with the symphony of cosmic yearning."

Loneragan has a powerful conclusion to his lecture on "Dimensions of Meaning" which is quite regularly quoted,¹⁹ in which he talks of some few pushing on seriously to enlarge meaning adequately. It can be read all too vaguely, and even very democratically so. The power of Lonergan's final fantasy is that its cyclic structure makes effective the global reach, the cosmic zeal, for a selection, within a statistics of selection, of the relevant sub-population of serious followers of evolutionary sports. There is nothing mythic about his principles of selection: it is hard nosed, and "not easy"²⁰ in a manifest biographic sense. It respects the cosmic penchant - indeed recurrence-scheming of penchant - for cyclic stabilization as seed of progress, incline.²¹

¹⁹"But what will count is a perhaps not numerous center, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new, painstaking enough to work out one by one the transitions to be made, strong enough to refuse half measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait" (*Collection*, University of Toronto Press, 1988, 245).

²⁰*Insight*, 241[266].

²¹See *Insight*, 121[144] on the shift of probability schedules due to cyclic structuring.

The penchant is to blossom in the cycles' ongoing genesis of Fourth-level Field Nocturnes,²² persons mad enough, like Merleau-Ponty, to lift the Global Ashe-game to a new serving of touch's invitation. And within that on-going genesis there will be a systematic exposure of school's of pretense. After all, the ongoing genesis of method is to generate a science, where ongoing refinements of data on touch and taste and thirst dictate with merciless poesies.

What is this on-going genesis? It may have an immediate ongoing genesis in you as I invite you to move on **herenow, heronowwhat**, to some paralleling of Merleau Ponty's struggle with *The Visible and the Invisible*, in a personal abyssian wild time with The Touchable and the Untouchable. *The Touchable and the Untouchable*: it is the title of a book crying out to be written, to seriously meet our humanity's needs, to be, in a distant time, touched lovingly, sexily.²³ Might you start it with Helen Keller, or with the untouchable call of a cello's strings, or with the outcastes of India touching their fingers into prayer?

²²See chapter four of *The Shaping of the Foundations*: "Instrumental Acts of Meaning and Fourth Level Functional Specialization", where I was raising such questions in an elementary literary manner and in continuity with the push of the first chapter there, on adequate botanical reading.

²³I recall the alternate project for these 8 *Nocturnes*, mentioned in note 7 of *Field Nocturne 23*. What, then, is *sexy* to mean in the third stage of meaning? The question bubbles out of the concluding chapter of Kristeva, much as the question, 'What, then, is *objectivity* to mean in the third stage of meaning?' The new meanings both require the global collaborative structure to make probable their public emergence.