

Field Nocturne 38

At the Threshold of the Halfway House

I borrow the title of a magnificent book¹ which I finished today, in a manner of speaking. Only in a manner of speaking because there is a sense in which it points me, and all of us, to fresh beginnings, if we are interested. It deals with a key piece of Lonergan's biography. There are seeds there for a subtle lift of our perspective, however refined it has grown.

The word *it* that occurred in the previous paragraph did not, I expect, disturb you, referring twice to Mark Morelli and once to either you or me. But *it* hides a disturbing business, the business of **Encounter** that is in Morelli's title. When read properly - and that is a disturbing leap in our time - the book is a story of, and an invitation to, share the meetings of two strange men, meeting at the threshold of their psychic skin, "biography meeting biography in history".² It was a one-sided meeting, but there is the fact that an author, like Stewart, assumes that meetings are to occur. Morelli makes a solid case that the meeting was a significant lift in the life of Lonergan. You might meet Morelli: or, as my suggestion of a hidden disturbing business could lead you to surmise, you may not, and certainly a meeting on the threshold of the psychic skin is very unlikely to be on the average reader's mindskin in any luminous molecular sense.

In the previous essay I wrote of a possible encounter, to which I must return in

¹Mark D. Morelli, *At the Threshold of the Halfway House. A Study of Bernard Lonergan's Encounter with John Alexander Stewart*, The Lonergan Institute at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass, 2007.

²This is the centre of the central essay, chapter four, of *The Redress of Poise*, a website book. It is, symbolically, the centre of the book, at footnote 23 of 45 footnotes that are symmetrical around it: notes (1 + x) and (45 - x) correspond, so that each note is two notes, except note 23. Go figure! Chapter four is titled "Turners: Strategists of Survival", dealing with fundamental issues of encounter..

the following essay: the encounter of Renard Barbaras with Lochlainn O’Raifeartaigh.³ An unlikely story , a contrafactual oddity. Here I am writing of encounters involving four men, but all sorts of encounters have been an issue from the beginning of the Cantower project. *Cantower 1* begins with the wonderful life-changing encounter of Quincey Jones with Nadia Boulanger, and recent essays here talk about the encounter of Julia Kisteva with Colette,⁴ and of you and I with Colette. And you, lady or gent, are risking encounter with Morelli and me.

But encounter can be lifted into “an abstract relation field”⁵ that parallels, oddly, the primary relativities of General Relativity. Then there emerges the terribly disturbing problem - and I have witnessed it, lived with such lectures in physics, witness it in present confusions both in popular physics and in pretentious frontline work - of a control of meaning which is light-weight, skimpily explanatory, skimpily data-based. Secondary determinations are dodged or similarly skimmed over. So, one may be honest in admitting that the single-body problem in general relativity is already too much,⁶ yet still head off gaily into the many-body problems of galactic dynamics.

That the parallel is a seed of possible light on our present cultural problems was a smoky topic of the previous essay. But I would note that Morelli himself has raised

³Their relevant works are listed in note 1 of the previous essay. A later sophisticated culture of cyclic collaboration will have their meaning sloping up towards a dialectic convergence. See Cantower 8, “Slopes: An Encounter”.

⁴Julia Kristeva, *Colette and the world’s flesh*, translated by Jane Marie Todd, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004.

⁵*Insight*, 494[517].

⁶The single body problem is, of course, a two-body problem: think of the classic “Schwarzschild solution to the problem of the gravitational field of a spherical body. In my usual contemporary general reference, Ian d. Lawrie, *A Unified Grand Tour of Theoretical Physics* , Institute of Physics Publishing Bristol and Philadelphia, 1998, it is available on 79-86. Here we have a nice twist of encounter. Theoretical conversion is, at minimum, a two body problem, grounding, especially in the present concrete, discomfort and embarrassment. “Doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company” (*Method in Theology*, 299).

the issue in a way that does not burden you with my odd parallel. “Obstacles to the Implementation of Lonergan’s Solution to the Contemporary Crisis of Meaning”⁷ is first cousin to my present pointing. There is no way to summarize his reflections: indeed the problem is to bring his pointings into the disturbing business of a deep cultural shift. “The challenge is to be met by a revivification of an existing language of interiority that makes more effectively evocative of the interior experience it was invented to objectify.”⁸ He has many other suggestions, as do I, most of them in our writings pointing to contexts of “self-disclosure”.⁹

In a fuller essay and in the context of foundational heuristic fantasy the problems of language-revivification and of self-disclosure might be lifted forward optimistically, but it seems as well to head for simplicity here. The simplicity relates to data-sensitivity in two seemingly distinct ways. There is, first, the data-sensitivity that is the focus of Morelli’s attention but here I may risk being more simply blunt. I see the possibility of a large interested readership of Morelli’s work that are comfortable with the language of *idea, concept, judgment, feeling* - even transcendental feeling, that powerfully suggestive bent in Stewart and Lonergan - yet are just not even surfing their own psychic skin. Morelli writes very accurately about a double alienation, but I push - as you have noted, but now note perhaps freshly, for **youherenew**, in the elementary strategy of boldfacing, to advert to the print layering your cranial molecularity. Are there probabilities, situation-structurings, “that makes more effectively evocative” skinwithin encounters? Within a full evolutionary theory, recurrence schemes are the key.

⁷Pages 22 - 48 of *The Importance of Insight. Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin*, edited by John J.Liptay and David S.Liptay, University of Toronto Press, 2007.

⁸Morelli, *op. cit.* in the previous note, 45.

⁹Ibid., 41. A note there in his text is to David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge University Press, 1997). This, indeed, is to be major factor in what I wrote of as The Tower Community, but my own present emphasis is on the strategic self-disclosure that is intrinsic to a future global cyclic collaboration: the last lines of *Method in Theology*, 250 point in this direction.

So there is the larger data-sensitivity that tunes us effectively into long-term evolution. In between the extremes of the first seconds' emergence of particle-schemes that lift dispersedness to the infolds of chemistry and the large-scale later and on-going emergence of galactic schemes, there are the shaky conglomerates of loose-formed scheme-seeds that, say, link Lonergan with Stewart, link Quincy Jones with Nadia Boulanger.¹⁰

If you are, were, at all with me in that last paragraph, then your fantasy is, has, is to be, stretched. Effectively, and by you and your friends within a Lonergan community? Were you, might you be, with Morelli, swirled into the loose luck of the encounters of Stewart with Loetze, Taylor, Natorp, James, Stout, Bergson, into the luck of Lonergan in his turning to and returning to Stewart? And might that swirl swirl you into the eye of the storm which is you in your solitary thresholding homeliness or homelessness?

But I am back at making the case that I made at the beginning of the Cantowers, the case for a Vorticism that sublates that of Wyndam Lewis and Pound, but forward now into a concrete evolutionary perspective. And that concreteness is the stuff of Joyce's last work, *Finnegan's Wake*. Did he see and seize it coming, an orgasmic birth? "Oxen of the Sun" swirls round a birth in Holles St. Hospital, and, tandemwise, round the previous lifts of the English language. It begins with an incantation: "Deshil Holles Eamus" There is a challenge of linguistic shifting, there is the challenge of cycling and recycling. **Deshil** is the Gaelic for 'turn to the right'. **Holles**, the name of the hospital, echos the German **all**. Eamus is the Latin for "let us go". Let us go: it is an aim, an invitation, a turnabout in a turnabout. "The pedagogical aim, it seems to me, must be to promote in the doubly alienated subject a double *periagoge*, a double 'turning

¹⁰The meeting of Quincy Jones and Nadia Boulanger was a topic in *Cantower 1*, "Function and History".

around’.”¹¹ Might I symbolize the pointer of Morelli’s next statement in a simple shift of the eye. The statement is “First, it is necessary to promote a turn ‘inward’, a reillumination by the luminous infrastructure of operative attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility”. One can and may read this and nod, or one can and may find the double twist that leads you to you, Tamara, Ricardo or Mary, not alone but in the cosmic whirling. So, Deshil Holles Eamus, becomes Deshil HollesEamus, an instruction to Seamus, or Mary, or Tamara, to find themselves in the concrete old cosmos of 13.7 million years, with a few billion more to go, find themselves in the early twists of the recurrence-schemes of a later humanity. “Twist everything round right James” or Mary.¹²

And we are the threshold of a twisting in history beyond Hegel yet with Hegel? “As the labour of introspection proceeds, one stumbles upon Hegel’s insight that the full objectification of the human spirit is the history of the human race. It is in the sum of the products of common sense and common nonsense, of the sciences and philosophies, of moralities and religions, of social orders and cultural achievements, that there is mediated, set before us in a mirror in which we behold, the originating principle of human aspiration and human attainment and failure. Still, if that vast panorama is to be explored methodically, there is the prior need for method.”¹³

¹¹Morelli, “Obstacles to Lonergan’s Solution to the Crisis of Meaning”, 43. I am tempted to quote the rest of that powerful paragraph, but must rely on your seriousness about all this turning stuff to turn to the original article.

¹²You are familiar by now, I hope, with this reference to the episode “Oxen of the Sun” of Ulysses. I recall that the lead in to the episode led me eventually to a general title for the Cantower Project: “Roun Doll, Home James”.

¹³I quote from page 14 of a Lonergan archival file labeled A697. It contains a typescript numbered pp. 8-23. Very plausibly it is a continuation of and from the handwritten sketch of a first chapter of *Method*, a first nine typed pages of which are part of the “Discovery File” of February 1965, labeled by me in the early seventies as *Batch V.7*. (It has some new designation now, but cannot be hard to track down). Those nine pages are important in having in them Loneergan’s consideration of three orders of consciousness, which grounds a view of

Loneragan offers the **seething , the see thing**, of a right round twist of culture that at present “renounces its one essential function, and by that renunciation, condemns practicality to ruin.”¹⁴ He lifts that essential function into a new evolutionary galactic whirl. These 41 essays have been another trail of mine towards meeting the challenge of that whirl, and in the next essay I merge the challenge with the previous 41 essays of the Cantowers under the odd integral name “Field Nocturnes CanTower”. The first essay, FNC 42, is a three-page plain-speak. Might it turn to being an encounter? It echos, but with new vision and vigor, the invitation of the first of the Cantower essays, and for some climbers, that other trail may well be one to follow: I may play Stewart to your Lonergan’ lifting you to a transcendental feeling of, with, in, the cosmic infolding whirling.

I look back now at the concluding sections of my first Cantower of April 1st, Easter Monday of 2002: as it happened, a foolsdays anniversary of the Easter Revolution of 1916 when a small group took on an Empire. At the beginning of the second last section of that essay I posed the key problem: “Can towers of hodic collaboration emerge top lift efficiently the schedules of probability of progress” . But now I see better the distant hope, the inevitable evolutionary efficiency of large numbers and long intervals of time gently controlling. Now I can read freshly and fleshly the beginning of the final section of that Cantower:1, “Function and History”. Oddly, I had associated the image of nocturnes with the cosmic whirling but now **Field Nocturnes** are for me the integral persons of the Tower sharing a Standard Model that is at the level of their times. But the words can bear that fresh meaning and the meanings of six years later. The notes here are those of the original text. The **Thend** at the end has been a preoccupation since the 1980s. It points to a needed eschatology. That need is

methodology as paralleling such a science as zoology: Methodology is to methods as zoology is to animals.

¹⁴*Insight*, 237[262].

articulated more fully, but still sketchily, in *FNC 115*, “Ontogenesis” and *FNC 116*, “Desire Undistanced 3: Phylogenesis”. The final essay in the series, promised in 2002 as being number 117, is “*Insight 17* and the Transposition to Functional Collaboration”, pointing Thend, to a fresh challenge of encounter in a world of differentiated and integrated human consciousness that fleshes forth expressions quite beyond present fantasies.

“The many-layered beginning is a Nocturne,¹⁵ invented by the Field. The nocturne is a bounded organic trill in the symphony of that field, so the boulder is unbounded. ‘To paint is to draw boundaries’¹⁶ but the boundaries of the canvas, the Joycean basket¹⁷ of delight is at once an integral now making present all then: the living little flower is rooted and tooting in the whirling cosmos, speaking of growth, of now and then, of Now and Thend.”¹⁸

¹⁵The musical form, nocturne, was invented by the Irishman John Field (1782-1837). But the fuller meaning of molecular vertical finality ‘s invention is reached by reflecting on *Field* as it is used by Lonergan in *Phenomenology and Logic*.

¹⁶A comment of the author of *Shuuo wen*, the first Chinese dictionary, around A.D. 100.

¹⁷I refer here to Joyce’s discussion of Aquinas’ definition of beauty in chapter five of *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. In my edition, Viking Press, New York, 1962, the basket appears on page 212.

¹⁸That rootedness is normatively part of the foundational perspective: the understanding of the flower is ‘part of a context, loaded with the relations that belong to it in virtue of a source which is equally the source of other concepts’, the conceptualization of understanding is, when fully developed, a system.” (Lonergan, *Verbum*, 1997, 238). The system is to include the personal relations (see *Method in Theology*, 48) that are *de facto* eschatological encounters: but we had best leave more pointers on personal relations to slices of these closing essays.