

52. My Montreal Experience (1995)

"How shall I recount thee?
How shall I say the thing that matters?
How shall I be fair to thee,
O fairest of cities, and yet relieve my heart,
speaking of life's rough handling?
(Which of course you didn't begin
and certainly did not end
but I only thought you might).

I remain faithful to some
painful and ambiguous sense of honour.
I hardly know whether this hairshirt suits me.
It seems to contradict so badly wanting to be
one of fortune's favourites. Yet –
there was a time I thought I might
win her love by taking this stonier path.
I dreamt that she might surprise me
on the way and offer herself –
amorously, passionately, admiringly.
And now, it seems, I have but this path
underfoot (sorry fool that I've made of myself)
and no fair greeting, no fairest of greetings
to exalt me.
I have travelled this path so long
that I take it less and less to be
a worthy companion. Yet I know no other."

– After you've stopped crying, I'll get down on my old knees and, like Lear, ask pardon of you. I'm just a might-have-been actor turned professor who's never played a heroic part in his life.

*"You have seen
Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears
Were like a better way: those happy smiles,
That played on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence,
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief,
Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved,
If all could so become it."*

Perhaps it is time to get back on track. I have tried to bring in a more thorough testimony of my bias as a truth-teller. Also I might add – and with

the idea of not letting a mote of it out of my sight* – of my grandeur as one. After all, a certain self-inflation goes along with what I'm doing and even becomes it as much as the opposite tendency.

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* But the mote I'm trying to see is also in my eye where it can't help but be a blind spot and, even as such, focus of my attention. It is really what remains *out of focus* (out of sight) such that, with all the care and attention I devote to it, it is where I end up thinking a good deal of myself for thinking *less* of myself. For thinking what is common enough (as both generally admired trait and secret form of self-aggrandizement) even when thinking what is not so common.