

## MOOREFFOC: Four Transfigurations

There are moments in time sometimes when we seem to escape time. Or maybe in these moments, we are just seeing and feeling space and time in a different way – from a different perspective. At these times, we are in the world, but the world is being transformed into something meaningful. Or maybe we are being transformed into someone who sees meaning.

For me, when this happens, it's usually when I'm drinking coffee. I don't know if it's the caffeine itself or if it's the warmth of the liquid that makes my heart glow or if it's just the act of stopping.....and looking at the world instead of acting as part of it. But whatever it is, when I'm sipping coffee in a coffee shop, sometimes the world and I change. Suddenly the jokes that the Tim Horton's employees are tossing back and forth seem hilarious. Suddenly the brown snowbank outside looks like a great sculpture. Suddenly the rusty car in the parking lot makes me think of the people who built it in the factory twenty years ago. And if I sit there quietly for long enough, and if the other patrons leave, the employees accept me as part of the restaurant. They start speaking to each other in a different language, using beautiful inflections and rhythms and consonants I've never heard before.

One time Charles Dickens was sitting in a coffee shop when he was ten years old. He looked at the glass door separating the shop from the busy London street and he was shocked to see this word painted on the door: MOOREFFOC.

For just a second he thought: "What a strange world! Why is that word on the door? What does it mean? How could such a normal thing make no sense?" It was briefly disorienting and strangely thrilling. He quickly realized that he was simply reading COFFEEROOM backwards, but the experience stayed with him for his whole life.

Seeing that backwards word made the whole world come alive with wonder for just a moment. Normal old London on a dreary dark afternoon suddenly became weird and interesting. For a second, Dickens was not at home. He was a stranger in his own land. But that experience of being a

confused stranger made him see his city with fresh eyes; it all looked like a surprising fantasy land. Who could say what was going to happen next?

Our world IS really strange and wonderful, but how often do we see it that way? My daughters have taught me that if you really think of anything in nature, it's very weird, as if some little kid just came up with it in their imagination. A huge burning ball moves slowly across the sky all day, giving everything life? Really? Plants grow out of the ground on their own, then become larger than people and houses, dancing in the wind, growing new clothes every year? And animals live in these huge plants? Really? It's all so weird. It's all MOOREEFOC.

But we somehow need to open our eyes and see it that way – to see it the way the young Charles Dickens saw it. Or the way I see it when I'm on my third cup of coffee and third Al Purdy poem. And my second Canadian Maple. To see the universe in its startling reality, without assuming, or taking for granted, anything...that's what MOOREEFOC is about. The world can be beautiful and meaningful. The universe can touch us deeply. We don't have to be desensitized to everything, walking numb, with eyes almost closed.

The Irish poet, W.B. Yeats knew this. He described a perfect MOOREEFOC moment in this poem:

My fiftieth year had come and gone,  
I sat, a solitary man  
In a crowded London shop,  
An open book and empty cup  
On the marble table-top.

While on the shop and street I gazed  
My body of a sudden blazed;  
And twenty minutes more or less  
It seemed so great, my happiness,  
That I was blesséd and could bless.

And of course this brings to mind the early Matt Kydd poem, “Three O’Clock”, penned in a Kemptville, Ontario coffee shop by the overwhelmed young parish priest:

Why do I feel the way I do  
At three o’clock each afternoon?  
The town is fine, the sky is blue,  
But I can barely lift my spoon,  
‘Cuz all my strength turns into love  
When sunlight gleams between two shops  
And pigeons dive down from above  
At three o’clock when my heart stops.

In all these moments, something is happening and the world is giving up its secrets. The world is being seen in its beauty and strangeness and the seer is experiencing an unexpected delight.

This is how I think of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ, which is described in Luke 9:28-36. Peter, John, and James had been with Jesus quite a bit. They were getting used to him. But now, everything is different. As he is shining with spiritual light, they are seeing him for real, in his real beauty and strangeness. In the Transfiguration, Jesus was giving up his secret. His three Students had been gradually learning about who he was, but now – suddenly – a whole new vision was being granted to them. Now they were *really seeing* and their whole world was being re-arranged. This person – their teacher and friend – was Divine.

These three students of Christ were having a Mooreeffoc moment. They were astonished at the sight of someone whom they had already seen a lot of. They had seen him before, but they had never seen him before. They already knew him, but they did not know him at all. It was powerful and disorienting. And they didn’t want it to end.

In Yeats’s moment of vision and transfiguration, while he sat in the coffee shop, he says his “body...blazed.” I’m sure that’s how Peter, John, and James felt as their friend seemed to become divine right before their eyes.

When Yeats and Dickens were sitting in those coffee shops, they were granted a vision of the strangeness and beauty of the common world. Everything became different. For them, the whole world changed. If we can stand on that mountain with Peter, John, and James, we will be granted a vision of the strangeness and beauty of our Teacher. Everything will become different. The whole world will change.

There are moments in time sometimes when we seem to escape time.

And there are moments when we actually do.

Transfiguration comes at a great time of the year. It's the last Sunday in the Season of Epiphany which means the Season of Lent is just about to begin. Transfiguration means that the earth itself is beginning to be transfigured. It's been a long, cold, snowy winter. We haven't even seen the earth in months. Unlike most winters, there hasn't been a thaw.

Transfiguration is not the end of winter. But even in mid to late February, things are different from how they were in mid-December or mid-January. The sun is on a different angle. It rises and sets farther to the north every day. Winter isn't over at all. March can be a very wintery month. (And so can April!) But at Transfiguration, you can begin to sense the great change. On a bright sunny day, there is some warmth to the sun, even though there may be two feet of snow. You start hearing the songs of chickadees, blue jays, and cardinals more often. The days of melting start to outnumber the days of freezing.

The sap starts to run!!

I love winter. But this winter, with its bad driving and intense snow shoveling, has taken a lot out of me. For the first time in years, I'm finding myself really looking forward to spring. I'm looking forward to mud and rain! I want to feel the soft earth beneath my new rubber boots! Transfiguration is the moment when we can start to see the big change. If we take the time to look.