

SEQUENCE by A. F. Moritz

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Review by Patrick M. Pilarski



Sequence by A. F. Moritz exists between the driven and the drawn, in a progression from “sand, heat, and panicking light” to “the quiet click of the curtain hooks in the / light wind.” Moritz fills this gap with a percussion of leaving and arriving—a shifting space that can be readily shared and inhabited by the reader. The resulting sense of an inhabitable, inevitable journey is one great strength of Moritz’s polished and well-crafted book.

The opening image of the collection, and one that recurs throughout, is that of human motion through a desert. By bringing broad views on this landscape into sharp focus, Moritz interprets the distance between two unreachable points. A cascade of untitled, unbroken poetic segments collapses that distance into a single, resonant image that unfolds and refolds throughout the work:

motion of a journey that reached
a rest it earned or seized,
or in a night without stars or wind
has died. The motion
of a journey that has turned to rest,
and continues in the form of rest.

The result is a long poem that at different times appears modern and ancient, common and rare, solitary and communal. The effect works beautifully. What makes it so engaging? The answer seems to rest in a series of risky stylistic choices made by the author.

First, Moritz has chosen to draw on a number of voices, viewpoints, and tenses, changing these dramatically from section-to-section, even page-to-page. These shifts could have the effect of drawing a reader out of the flow of the work. However, in *Sequence* the transitions fall nicely into the rhythm of the poems, and Moritz’s use of the second person viewpoint is

especially engaging early on in the collection (e.g. “Whenever you stop or slow, restlessness stoops / and drives you”). His specific, precisely placed use of the first- and second-person present tense helps the reader connect and remain connected with the work in the absence of poem titles or explicit contextual shifts. The only place where the change in viewpoint may be jarring to the reader is in the shift to the first-person narrative of the book’s third section, but by the end of the section the new voice has settled and comes back like a pleasant echo throughout the rest of the collection.

A second crucial stylistic choice is Moritz’s pronounced use of repetition and iteration of both words and phrases. These repetitions occur within and between poetic frames and include “belovèd,” “rest,” “dark,” and “light.” Like a skipping stone, or a “walk slowly into a vast land / uninhabited and maybe never to be inhabited / that begins to flower or will never flower,” things that are spoken repeat throughout the reader’s and poet’s collective journey. Each time these repetitions are more welcome. In a lesser collection, or in the hands of a lesser poet, readers might find the repetitions off-putting. In *Sequence*, they don’t become stale or predictable, instead growing in depth with each iteration. This is a challenging effect to pull off well, and Moritz does so masterfully.

Today will be the same. First a course set in darkness.
Then in the bleaching day a wandering from it.”

[...]

The wanderer prefers to know he is lost
to the other way of seeing:
that it’s the earth that wanders lost in him.

It is also important to note the collection's contact with our shared literature. Resonance is created by Moritz's skillful use of allusion to other works (as noted in the book's well-detailed after matter). Most allusions are subtle, emphasizing the shared journey of the book, the feeling that it gives the reader of being both alone and not alone in the motion from one place to another.

The macro-rhythm that is created by the arrangement of poems in *Sequence* makes it a rare and well-executed book. Paired with Moritz's use of changing times, places, voices, and allusions, the overall effect of *Sequence* as a union of restlessness and "a search / through the place to be found" makes it a collection not to miss. The reader will have ample room to leave, to wander, and to return.