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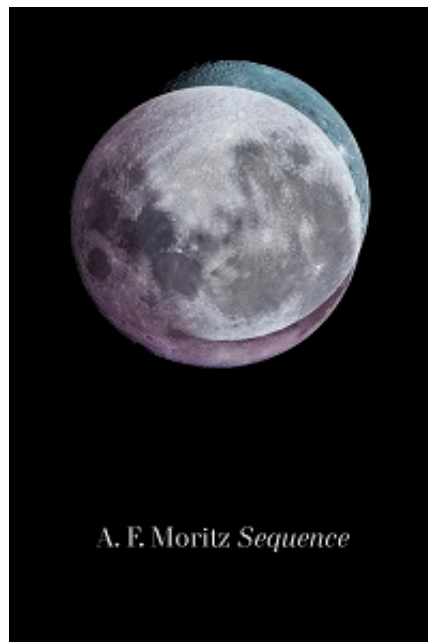
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REVIEW

A. F. Moritz's *Sequence*

ALISON GOODWIN



“It has to be living, / to learn the speech of the place...” Wallace Stevens observes in “Modern Poetry.” *Sequence* is written in the language of a desert, thirsting; its atmosphere is predominantly extreme and elemental. Words scratched in the sand are blown away in the next breath: “We set out because we were commanded / and yet of course we were told equally to stay home.” The days are hot enough to split stones “With a gunshot crack,” and nights are frigid and also terrifying:

the death man fears is only
the death of sleep he dies every night.
... You long
for hated dawn
and to be on the way again.
The other sleep.

But only at night is “attention real, godlike. Then it sees / how far it is from being god.” When water comes, it seems almost foreign, arriving in streams, waterfalls, and floods.

Moritz’s *Sequence* travels through a desert that is old, denuded, perhaps Nubian, with shades of Babylon; also, it stretches across Ontario. Crafted in the tradition of the lyric sequence, the work finds its home in a rich body of literature. Signposts mark an integrated habitat that is less a lateral landscape than a cross-section of culture cut through space and time. Events and moments slip the bonds of chronology to find connection, or sequence, through their common essence.

“The wanderer prefers to know he is lost / to the other way of seeing: / that it’s the earth that wanders lost in him.” At once burdened and enlightened by the knowledge and wisdom he possesses, the reader strikes out like an ancient explorer, accompanied by the likes of Jeremiah and Ulysses. A goal of the

journey, in a way, is to slough off old perceptions to discover worlds new and old with renewed sensitivity.

An undercurrent of trauma flows through the work, surfacing in the voices and stories of other pilgrims on the journey. These put pressure on societal constructs and language, and bring perennial questions to the surface: what forces are placed on imagination in the absence of God? And, what do we use to plot our courses, in a universe where stars are dust, kicked up by our own feet?

The space between Moritz's lines is significant, as if representing paths of labyrinths walked by contemplatives for millennia, while the lines themselves loop and twist Möbius-like, revealing another side to meaning:

I am a modern man,
... in the guise of a member of a salt-route caravan.
Or in the guise of not even a man at all,
... I am an ancient man.

Clues begin to constellate in the final third of the volume, illuminating what has gone before. Moritz's notes guide the reader on a course that reaches deeper, though the poems are complete on their own.

In the end, a gift: a new day. This is not a desert, but a drought, or perhaps even a flood—in any event, revelation. The ark lands, a covenant is intact. The reader's attention is drawn to the sound of the wind through the limbs of trees, of living things. We are left suspended, held childlike in wonder, “. . . to begin / our wandering anew.”

Alison Goodwin lives and writes on a farm near Grassy Lake, Alberta.

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