

## BOOKS

# Toronto's Poet Laureate A.F. Moritz marks a year of the pandemic in a poem: 'Exactly Here the Marvel Spoke.' Read it here

By **A.F. Moritz** Special to the Star

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## JOIN THE CONVERSATION

You staggered from death to death.  
You dragged yourself from the silent window  
where an old face looked out and knocked  
with twig-like fingers at children trying to shout  
in through the crystal silence. "Grandma"—  
babushka, aljida, babcia, nani, dadi,  
abuelita, nana, bobbe, bà, nagymama,  
nona, pãt̃ti, giagiá, avó...the cries broke  
on all the walls and forbidden doors  
of well-meant homes of rest. How you longed  
to go in, to sit by them, hold them, each,  
in their dying! How you longed for death to be  
again as it should be: the dying one among us.  
And exactly here the marvel spoke: your eyes  
grew clear: you were holding them. In your shattered  
longing you grasped them. The dividing plague  
could not divide. We remained one. We still died  
with the dying, they still lived with us. In yearning,  
in dreams, in truth, we hugged the fallen silent head.

And then, worn out, scarred, from the crushing labor,  
the sweet duty of companioning our dead,  
we go back to daily things, our daily bread. And later,  
working, aching, we notice through our pain  
we're slowly happy again. Broken, we find  
a silent bearing of the dead inside us,  
like a child newly conceived, like an immense  
and beneficent idea, gift of refreshment to the world.  
We just begin to glimpse it, a new health—  
we can't yet trace it clearly, but the work  
inhabits us with passion at lonely desks,  
or in companionable walks, in living rooms  
and discussion halls, laboratories, councils, factories.  
We work, we see another world. Our dead  
are with us now more wholly. With them within us  
we're going to know them face to face again  
as we did before on the poor beloved earth.  
So we go forward through our home—Toronto!  
meeting place—and every tree and corner,  
every shop window that our grandmother knew,  
every neighbour who once loved  
to talk with her, who always stops us to recall  
the same tender story, is a star now:  
a star of soft radiant memory. A star of light  
from the past for today,  
of light from the dead  
for life.  
I wish I could put my arm around your shoulders,  
be beside you. Soon! For now, though, plague  
still stares between us. And yet  
we don't have far to go to reach the utmost sobs  
of the splintering universe  
and with our hug  
bring them all back together, assemble them here  
for a parliament of loves. What's beauty in sorrow for,  
what's poetry for, if not to bring us near  
while we're alone until  
our lips and hands touch? I can gather all  
because I listen. I can hear  
you,  
speak with

you,  
hold  
you  
in my heart. You are more  
than the helpless universe. We reach and bring  
everything that has burst, broken, died,  
left us, fled from us, everything  
frozen in the space of death  
back into the loving quiet  
of a brook returning in late winter  
to the young life of purling water. It's March!—winter  
kisses spring. We don't have far to go—only from dusk  
to morning—to gather the fragments of disaster  
in music and tears. I see, hear, love  
the men and women all around me,  
I'm with them—here I am—I hug them  
in the body of my song.

*This is the poem A.F. Moritz, Toronto's Poet Laureate, read to City Council on March 10, 2021, in observance of a year of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

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