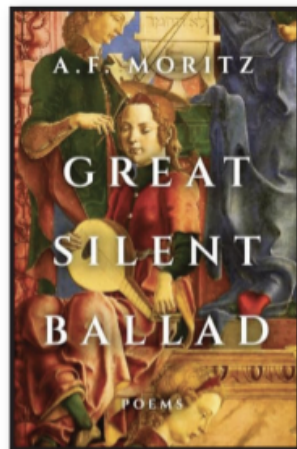


Title: *Great Silent Ballad*
Author: **A.F. Moritz**
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Reviewed by: **Gordon Phinn**

It is something of a challenge, suspended in reverence for the stunning achievement displayed by A.F. Moritz throughout *Great Silent Ballad*, not to come across as some fawning disciple, awkwardly trying to remove the modern and perhaps modish equivalent of bicycle clips. He has long since reserved his spot in the pantheon of philosophical lyricists, winning prizes, honours and fellowships. Modernism, too often shuffled off as the tired grandfather of English poetry, returns, in Moritz's hands, as some undefeated champion, eager for another round. And I, for one, am glad to see it.

The latest in a long line of sparkling collections—most recently *The Garden* and *As Far As You Know*—*Great Silent Ballad*, unfolding its pearls for the patient reader, comes as close to perfection as I have seen in many a year. To spend a month or so in relaxed contemplation of its riches is to live in the lap of rare luxury, revelling somewhat selfishly in its gifts. During the treasure hunt, one uncovers a favourite, and then follows its resplendence in repeated visits, until it seems like home. One is tempted to quote and furnish a room as gem after gem goes the distance, but lines and partial stanzas seem poor clues to the enticing opulent puzzle. The critic craves to critique, somewhere, anywhere, but is left empty-handed and grabbing at air. Analysis, it would seem, reveals only one's impatience. The whole remains indivisible, a declaration of seamless unity, an enigmatic craft constructed elsewhere, and unveiled only by your eventual embrace.



I say eventual, as one stumbles into metaphorical extensions that seem to be ponderous and at odds with the general flow, but through trust one perseveres and the threads that felt incongruous reveal themselves as construction details in a living whole. One thinks of W.S. Merwin, Ralph Gustafson, W.B. Yeats, Hart Crane, Don Coles and other giants of the meditative lyric, and one sees how we are indeed standing on their shoulders, as Eliot, Stevens, Shelley and Hardy did in their turn. Moritz belongs to that company. Am I saying this is depth perception exquisitely rendered? Yes.

One can flip through at random and uncover a neglected pearl and be amazed all over again. Case in point: “The Living Fleet Eternity Of Thought.” Another might be: “In The Motet Of Mondonville”:

“In the motet of Mondonville
where the ladies' voices rise to gloria
and tarry there, in that dwelling, so liquid and aureate,
is a poet's anguish and failure to draw out
the quickly passing word to its long hidden extent...”

There is no failure here, nor anguish, only exemplary expression of those states that surpass their apparent stasis to seed the secrets of flight.



Though American by birth, **A.F. Moritz's** long career as an award-winning poet has been spent in Toronto, teaching, editing and writing. *Great Silent Ballad* is his twenty-second title. Honours include the Governor General's, the Trillium and Griffin, fellowships from Guggenheim and the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Gordon Phinn has been widely published for decades. A memoir, *Moving Through Many Dimensions* (2023), while his essay collection *It's All About Me* collects his early criticism. A new collection, *Joy In Many Genres*, is due out in 2025. A current chapbook is *Winter, Spring and the Seduction of Eternity*.