

The High Window

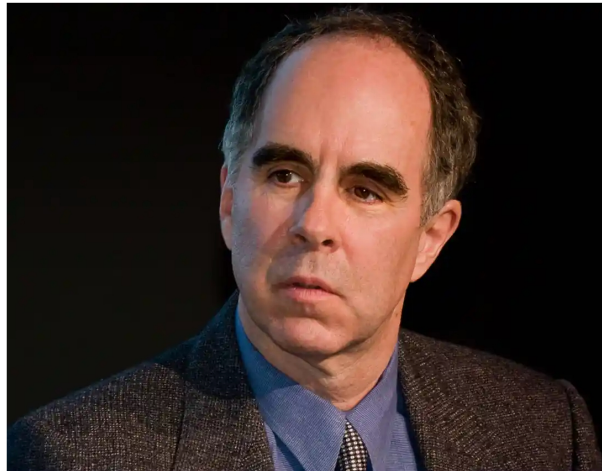
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A.F. Moritz: Seven poems from 'The Wren'

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A. F. Moritz's most recent books from House of Anansi Press are *Great Silent Ballad* (2024; winner of the Al and Eurithe Purdy Poetry Prize), *As Far As You Know* (2020; finalist for the Trillium Award), and *The Sparrow: Selected Poems* (2018). Among his other Anansi books, *The Sentinel* (2008) won the Griffin Poetry Prize, and *Night Street Repairs* (2004) and *The New Measures* (2012) received the Re-Lit Award and the Raymond Souster Award, respectively. Three of his books have been finalists for the Governor General's Award. His work has received the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Award in Literature of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, selection to the Princeton Series of Contemporary Poets (for *The Tradition*, 1986, 2nd ed., 2015), the Beth Hokin Award of *Poetry* magazine, and other recognitions. Moritz was Poet Laureate of Toronto from 2019 to 2023.

Introduction

In *The Wren*, A. F. Moritz arranges eighty-four short poems in a sort of galaxy: an apparent scatter, not of stars but of poems, of feeling-thoughts. In his, his twenty-third book, the poems originated with an impulse, beginning in April 2019, to write a series of continuous poems. The first goal was to keep them short. The second was to make them separate, in the process reflecting the whole of human life, stable in moments and

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the process reflecting the whole of human life, stable in moments and bodies. In What is the unity of these active “states” of ours, given that they do not simply follow, or hook onto, or neighbour, or echo one another in a chain of resemblance that seems to have gaps and missing links that reappear later, healed?

The title was chosen partly to speak to Moritz’s *The Sparrow: Selected Poems* (2018), but also because, among the many short poems of this collection, one of them asked to be central: a poem about a small bird that hops from within a thicket of stems to peer out at the poet for a second and then disappears back inside. This tiny story of a tiny fellow creature is the narrative, the “novel,” of this book: a little story that is nonetheless one of the great and ever-retold stories.

A.F. Moritz: Seven Poems from *The Wren*

SO LATE

Why do I talk to you so late
except that in the darkness words
are drawn out
of the mud: speech—which was created
by there being you
to talk with. And as then, as at first, the words
are still taking a form—still are
given and take a form, so that one more thing
can appear on earth, another
flower, even so late.

WHAT AM I DOING

What am I doing? Nothing.
Only what I have to: sleeping,
eating, cleaning, keeping
my books in order, going out,
walking, hearing, looking,
picking up things
to see them closer, touching,
feeling things, like a clump of earth
or a push of the wind. At night
tasting the night, wandering more,
listening, hearing plinks,
whirrs, whimpers, rustles, many
sounds and their setting,
silence. Then coming back in.
Sleeping. Dreaming. I’m doing it
well. Nothing is left to chance.

CHILDHOOD

Thank you
children
we can live

struggling
to let be
for you
the illusion

guarding the garden
we who know

the things we know
are illusions

having escaped
none
but the happy one

Yes for the
illusion you
children
we can live

NOTICINGS

Why should anyone pay attention
to you? Attention: wise people call it the origin,
essence, and end of wisdom. They say
its nature is that it's owing
to each thing. Even you. But don't imagine
that the wise people can hold this or that dandelion
steadily in their hearts forever. They walk on, go on
to their successive
oblivions, their next attentions.

A DREAM

The ship had just sunk. I was one,
maybe the only one, left, thrown in the sea,
and I rode the one piece of jetsam I could see,
a wooden ladder. It was my world. I loved it.
It went from here to there, from origin
to eternity. It was ten flimsy feet
of slats and rungs. On it, I was as lost
as it was, floating on the sea. How long could I live
in that paradise? If I let go—my strength
was failing me—would I drown or only
drown in a sweet sea?—you, she, the
unutterably profound, my early
love...help...come back to me!

COME LIVE WITH ME

(After Saigyō and Marlowe and Breton)

Here I become
aware of the song of my heart,
“again, again, again...” Here I touch
the gold in the air, I hear
that it is what “a
gain” means. Now what I have

to tell you, you who want to
see the flowers, see
with actual sight, throw away
the world, you call it, and come, live
with me in the mountains...

A LEXICON

Weight officiates
at the marriage rite of ground and water—
the carving of the channel
is done by their heavy spate of desire to be
this stream. Experience is that they have

an idea but no idea
where it will go. Light lives in the white
and light green veil, the ripple
of haunches, this worldly, other worldly,
the sperm, the lonesome
child playing, along the banks. The word
for this living-in that light does
is “sparkles”—the same way that the word for
the house by the stream is “splendour”.

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