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Al Moritz's Anti-Extractivist Style: Non-Instrumental Instrumentalism and the Poetics of Materiality

Al Moritz was born in Niles, Ohio, in 1947; he moved in 1974 to Canada, where he has lived ever since. After almost twenty-five years of publishing, he was shortlisted for a Governor General's award in 1999 for *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*. From there, his work has appeared on Canadian prize lists with regularity, and yet his work has never been the subject of scholarly analysis,[1] though it has been very well covered by peer critics writing the first draft of history in the form of book reviews. After critically revisiting what is meant by the term *visionary*, a descriptor often applied to Moritz in these reviews, I will rely upon the poet's peers in order to construct what I deem Moritz's anti-extractivist style. In particular, I focus upon *Mahoning* (1994), his fourth book, as it pertains to extractivism. I am particularly interested in its formal—or, more specifically, *stylistic*—elements that, in combination with a theme of environmental destruction, demonstrate to critics how poetry can resist the extractivist ethic in wider society. By introducing the concept of *non-instrumental instrumentalism* as it pertains to poetics, I will show one way how an early mode of ecocriticism, the anti-extractivist visionary poetic of the Romantics, can be applied in contemporary energy humanities discussions.

Visionary Polysemy

Paralleling a discussion of the term *extractivism* later in this article, the word *visionary* has developed a polysemous use in contemporary poetry discourse, becoming an oft-applied label to a wide range of contemporary poets at the risk of losing its meaning. Hyatt H. Waggoner points out in "Visionary Poetry: Learning to See" that "Blake, Wordsworth, Yeats,

Emerson, Whitman, Stevens, and a host of lesser figures are all praised as visionaries, without its becoming clear what they have in common" (228). Confusion about such canonically sanctioned visionaries is one thing, the confusion meeting the huge range of contemporary poets is another, for as Waggoner maintains, a "good many of the best-known contemporary poets produce verse that is quasi-religious in tone and reminiscent of myth in vocabulary, and we like to honour their work too by calling it visionary, though it may express only nostalgia or despair and have little or no reference to any reality outside the poet's mind" (228-29). The definitional crisis Waggoner identifies can be resolved by returning to the religious origins of the term. Quoting Gershom Scholem, Kinereth Meyer offers a heuristic: "'visionary poetry' refers to poems in which the subject seeks, through the poem, to merge with a oneness (variously called God, Nature, the Soul), and to achieve a knowledge which is neither discursive nor logical but related . . . 'to a sphere where speech and expression are excluded'" (4). Meyer offers a definition that could apply to "modern poems," explaining that such works are "nourished by a longing for wordless unity, and, at the same time, for a dwelling in the multiplicity of language" (3). It is exactly this multiplicity—relying as it does in Moritz's case on a meaning-amplifying syntax that yet maintains the end effect of the poem as an entire experience—that will become the core component of what I will soon develop as Moritz's anti-extractivist style.

Moritz's work can be summarized in terms of poetic influences and schools. Surrealism and symbolism are oft-identified progenitors, but for the purposes of analysis here, I focus on English Romanticism. In review after review, his poetry has been linked to, in George Fetherling's observation, the "radical Romantics" (16), especially Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake (Greene, "A Hidden Treasure" 16; Greene, "A Journey" 23; Bartlett 109; Hancock 769; Cameron, Introduction 2; Lanthier 73; Jennings, "Riddle's Raw" 37; Miller 112; McKay 14). Moritz himself says that it is Wordsworth to whom he is "poetically always very close" (Neilson 32). A small snippet from *Mahoning* suggests the linkage:

> Very far now between two cities
> wandering, a boy along the slate-grey
> waters of the road, driftwood and crushed brown iron.
> Ahead in the mirage on asphalt

> his childhood tree appears once more
> as on the day when it was cut, and trembles, cries, prays
> to grow tender green again and shelter. (25)

Here, Moritz channels Wordsworth through his intense and visionary depiction of childhood and childishness from the point of view of an observer who either witnesses a child or who is a child. The visionary element is further freighted by the "childhood tree," which has a rebirth, in a sense, in the child's imagination; this tree then has its own consciousness created through actions like crying and desiring to "grow tender green again." The fusion of child and tree creates a unity of these consciousnesses. Another resonance comes with the conceit that the speaker is composing the poem as they walk along a polluted riverbed and ruins. The speaker walks between "two cities" in terrain mediated by prior human action, with a hopeful dream that the despoiled site of these previous actions can be reclaimed. As with Wordsworth's, Moritz's work suggests that cultivating a harmonious relationship with nature corresponds with healthy social relationships in the human world.

Michael Cameron claims that Moritz's poems "remain both philosophically and verbally true to their vision. They take the insufficient materials of the physical world and literally remake them into something numinous" (7). "Bonded firmly to earth," James Garrett adds, Moritz's work "becomes a kind of theology mediating between malleable human fashion and an objective state beyond the immediate physical world" (11). The evidence supporting both critics' observations in *Mahoning* is vast. For example, the book starts in the visionary fashion of Wordsworth, self-reflective and concerned with childhood: "I wake up. And it seems to me I am / in childhood's place again—or still" (11). Another step is taken by representing the natural world:

> Now again as at first: I am in an upstairs bedroom,
> skin suffering and hearing blessed
> in the humid dark, and surrounding heads of maple trees
> that bring the river-like voice I seem to know
> screen me away from my river. (11)

This voice is the visionary one Moritz's work channels. In this excerpt, we have a simple scene in which the speaker is in his bedroom in a seemingly timeless unity of self ("now again as at first"), yet while in this

"humid dark" he is somehow connected to the Mahoning River through the intermediary of nature itself, the "surrounding heads of maple trees." As Cameron points out, this physical world—"humid dark," "skin suffering," and "river"—rendered by the poet in plain language, suggests the "somehow insufficient" that will soon be made numinous by Moritz:

> It's as if the wall
> that the world is were a graceful labyrinth
> of leaves and branches, inviting
> endless transgression: openings, entrances
> everywhere, and numberless winding ways
> leading to forkings into other ways, the same.
> It's as if a voice gave me the key, saying,
> "Walk through the wall," and I went . . . (11)

Part of Moritz's anti-extractivist style, this recursivity—the passage begins with a wall and ends with this image too, and "winding ways" lead to "other ways" that are "the same"—is organized around a childlike speaker who seeks to transcend current conditions by more profoundly recognizing them.

Extractivism and Poetry

Prominent energy humanities scholars Imre Szeman and Jennifer Wenzel offer a powerful summary of their field to date in a recent extractivism-themed issue of *Textual Practice*. Szeman and Wenzel generate several provocations, one of which concerns the perceived impotence of the field itself: "But just how can literary criticism have an impact on the environment?" (515). The urgency of achieving climate justice and stopping extractivist practices is embodied in the example of Canadian poets like Rita Wong, "sentenced to twenty-eight days in prison" for participating in a pipeline protest (Wong 258), and Stephen Collis, sued by Kinder Morgan for obstructing work on the construction of its Trans Mountain Pipeline (Nilson 82-83). But what about poetry itself? Can anti-extractivist poems or literary criticism concerning such poems do anything? Poets might answer Szeman and Wenzel that poetry's task is not necessarily to be of a crudely instrumental use in the world, but rather to offer an alternative mode for being in the world, to provide the imaginative means of remediation and redress, if not its action plan. I term this function *non-instrumental instrumentalism*.

Nevertheless, many critics have suggested that Moritz offers concrete solutions. For example, David Silverberg writes that Moritz's work "offers a remedy to self-destruction. We have a beautiful planet, Moritz is telling us, but we must hold close the sacred and act, not just react" (27). Though his identification of the "sacred" is apt, I am not so sure that Moritz is offering solutions in poetry that are equivalent to action. Instead, Moritz offers righteous non-solutions of the kind that poetry provides. In *Mahoning*, these non-solutions occur less as actionable items and more so within the visionary poetic I have introduced. Moritz suggests how people might effectively discourage and dismantle extractivist practices through the cultivation of a positive ethic toward the environment. His work also invites energy humanities scholars to reconceive their deployments of poetry.

Before I can isolate Moritz's particular contribution to the field, I will sketch previous work in extractivist poetics. Following Wenzel and Szeman, Max Liboiron, and Adam Dickinson, I argue that there is another way to consider how poetry makes use of materiality, and that this other way is contained in the work of Moritz. Using the lens of visionary poetics, there need be no *a priori* misgivings about perceived real-world inefficacy. Within the epistemology of visionary poetry, what is "real" is what is brought into material being through poetic work—the crystallization of vision into and through words. For the visionary poet, the relationship between self, imagination, and world achieves a unity that doesn't erect rigid separation between these categories.

In their key article, Szeman and Wenzel warn that the "term 'extractivism' has quickly become the name for every process and practice through which value is generated for capitalism," further stating that the term has a "conceptual ubiquity" that compromises useful "analytic function" (505). The authors offer their own definition of extractivism as an "ideology and cultural logic that permeates social imaginaries as well as literary and other discourse" and advocate for a focus "on the materiality of relations and processes dubbed 'extractive'" to reclaim extractivism from the fate of becoming an empty signifier (505). This is a worthy concern, for all powerful ideas—including the visionary—and their terminology risk such slippage. Szeman and Wenzel further crystallize their definition as follows:

"More simply and crudely . . . we might say that *extractivism* names a human instrumentalization of nonhuman nature: the use of nature only as a means toward human ends—or, to be slightly less crudely universalist, a means toward the ends of some subset of humans" (511). In contrast, Max Liboiron in *Pollution Is Colonialism* conceptualizes extractive practices as being part of "different types of colonialism." Liboiron writes that "[c]olonialism is a way to describe relationships characterized by conquest and genocide" (9). By putting extractivist practices in the frame of colonialism, relations to land and the many commitments thereby entailed are given a primacy over an unfocused environmentalism that leads to the generality of what Szeman and Wenzel deliberately signal as a generic "exploitative badness" (510). Liboiron's formulation inherently resists this genericity. As they write,

> [t]o change colonial land relations and enact other types of Land relations requires specificity. This is so we don't accidentally think that the opposite of colonialism is environmentalism or, similarly, that we don't conflate colonialism with other forms of extraction, such as capitalism. Colonialism and capitalism might be happy bedfellows and indeed longtime lovers, but they are not the same thing. (13)

The concerns of Szeman and Wenzel and Liboiron converge (and become interesting from the point of view of poetics) when they, using Szeman and Wenzel's words, advocate against "conceptual creep, metaphorical inflation, [and] synonomical restatement" (505). All of these listed items—concepts, metaphors, synonyms, repetition—are poetry's material. The tension created between a non-metaphorical argument for "reality" and reality's inevitable, unavoidable expression in metaphor is the key idea in this section of my article. I aim to "breathe new life into what may have become dead metaphors" (506)—Szeman and Wenzel's stated goal—by looking at what extractivism is or might be within poetics while acknowledging that critiques of capitalism and colonialism lie beyond the scope of this article.[2]

The nature and fate of poetic language are to make connection through the exploration of similarities and differences. Szeman and Wenzel argue for a more exclusive use of the term, but there is a peril

to keep in mind: inherent to any definition is an attempt to make sense of one thing in terms of another. This is the essence of metaphor. The problem with the dilution of extractivism's meaning, then, is not that connections are made by scholars, but that literary studies can recline in easy and imprecise metaphors without seeking purchase beyond the experience of the text in terms of descriptive efficacy and power. The kind of instrumentalism the term might find in literary studies is to create an urgency to counter, arrest, and resist environmental destruction of the sort it denotes through imaginative use of the term itself. A less desirable kind might involve a tendency to use the metaphor of extraction as a poetic tool in which text is marked off as terrain for predetermined meaning claims, in which certain content triggers rote critique. As I will show, it is in the latter sense that Moritz's work particularly resists such instrumentalism.

In his own analysis of ethics, metaphor, and ecocriticism, Adam Dickinson points out that "[m]ore oblique approaches to environmental issues in works that attempt to call language and reference into question are often charged . . . with being overly-theoretical or anthropocentrically self-indulgent" (35). He adds that a prevailing "emphasis on a realist aesthetic is . . . a view of poetry that is opposed to interests in metaphor" and he advocates for "lyrical approaches to the natural world that provide an alternative way of thinking ethics, a way that points to a potential political activism, but not in the terms of any systematic methodology" (35-36). Though Szeman and Wenzel are hardly arguing against the study of poetry in their article, their argument does embody the problem Dickinson identifies—one that has a long history in the field—a hastening toward direct action, a preference for a more material materiality that comes from direct representation.

To what extent, when thinking in terms of poetics, is there an absolute or true incommensurability of material and language? Notwithstanding the validity of warning against conceiving of physical processes in the world as abstractions only, is it too postmodern to point out that politics is constituted of words (abstractions, signifiers) and vice versa? What distinctions can be made between "material realities that attend resource extraction" and the substitution of "words for politics" (Szeman and Wenzel 519, 520)? Is environmental studies divesting itself of too much of

its poetic capital here? If the world we want is yet to be, then how do we arrive at such a world by restricting materiality to matter only?

Instrumentalize the Aesthetic?

Instrumentalization, as Szeman and Wenzel point out, isn't inherently bad, though the kinds of instrumentalism used in the environmental and energy humanities contexts can reinforce that which they seek to oppose. In *Bad Environmentalism*, Nicole Seymour questions "ecocritics' tendency to . . . judge artworks primarily by their functionality: their capacity to educate the public or spark measurable change" (7). Seymour argues for "a less strictly instrumentalist approach [that] allows us to imagine additional, or different, capacities for environmental art" (7). Seymour explicitly advocates for a turn away from straightforward, monovalent, sanctimonious activism toward a more ironical kind whose "power actually lies in challenging binaries" (5). If there was a form that possessed the greatest possible range of freedom with respect to meaning, it is poetry. Poetry can do the work Seymour calls for, resisting the didactic and the instrumental while also somehow contributing to the cause.

In the case of the climate crisis, tools are urgently needed. But what kind? In another context, Wenzel explains that there is a "great paradox of fossil fuel imaginaries: in literature as in life, oil in particular is at once everywhere and nowhere, indispensable yet largely unapprehended, not so much invisible as unseen" (11). Such is true of the metropole, whereas in pertinent metaphorical peripheries, evidence of fossil fuel extraction—such as Alberta's tar sands—can be front and centre. But as Justin Parks explains, "for most of us residing in the global north, imbricated within postindustrial consumer economies, we seldom *see* our extreme dependence upon extractive processes *as such*" ("The Poetics" 355). Hence we need tools to rematerialize the invisible petroeconomy. Speaking instrumentally for a moment, a useful tool in poetics is a consideration of form. In "The Poetics of Extractivism and the Politics of Visibility," Parks advocates for "rendering visible the methods and materialities of extractivism as forces that exercise a shaping effect on literary form" (357). He asks, "What does attention to extractivism in its textual encoding render visible (and legible)? What does our attention to literary

representations of extractivism enable us to perceive about our social ontologies as currently configured?" (357). We need to see extractivism at the level of form in literary texts in order to recognize extractivism better in the real world. If we neglect this task, how would we know our "social ontologies" as we see them in physical form if we have inadequate knowledge to bring to bear to apprehend their materiality? This said, have the tools used thus far been—another irony—too instrumental?

On one hand, the answer is no. Poetry has been considered in many different ways by Canadian scholars who work in the environmental humanities. For example, in "Rig Talk and Disidentification in Peter Christensen's *Rig Talk* and Matthew Henderson's *The Lease*," Melanie Dennis Unrau unpacks how depicted oil workers' vernacular reflects their ambivalent status in the petroeconomy. It is this ambivalence—Unrau shows how the workers' vernacular makes them "complicit, dependent, resistant, and in solidarity" (15)—that is in parallel with my own concept of what poetry can do, affiliating and strangely sliding away from a uniformity of meaning. Another scholar, Jenny Kerber, engages with an archeological metaphor in three prairie poets (Tim Lilburn, Louise Halfe, and Madeline Coopsammy) in the fourth chapter of *Writing in Dust: Reading the Prairie Environmentally* and, like Unrau, also engages with "vernacular language and expression" in poetry (118). Although her aims are broader, one objective of Kerber's study is to reflect on the "kinds of narratives of prairie environment these poets' works confirm and . . . contest" (119). This kind of inquiry understands the polysemy of poetry, as does Kerber's later 2018 article "Romantic Ramblings, Revisited: Eco-logics of Mobility in Sina Queyras's *Expressway*." In this paper, Kerber recalls "a number of early ecocritical texts" that "proposed that Romantic writers like Wordsworth, Shelley, and Coleridge present helpful alternatives to dualistic modes of thinking that promote instrumental economic rationality and short-term solutions to environmental problems" (346). Resisting dualistic modes of thinking—eluding instrumentalization due to its semantic slipperiness, its "multiplicity" (355, 358)—is poetry's singular strength. Kerber summarizes ecocritical Romantic scholarship further by problematizing the offering of a "non-utilitarian" Romantic vision of nature as solution to capitalism (346), and the remainder of her paper

engages with Queyras' "creative response to Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals*" (347).

On the other hand, and especially recently, another kind of investigation of poetic form in the environmental humanities tends toward covering poetry in more concrete ways with less ambiguous affects. For example, Christine Okoth has argued that the elliptical form of Dionne Brand's *Inventory* enacts the disjunctures created by extractivism; Max Karpinski identifies a "poetics of appropriation" in the work of Jordan Abel ("Split" 71), Lesley Battler's *Endangered Hydrocarbons* ("Making Poetry"), and Rita Wong ("Unsettled Solutions"). The motif's basis lies in the poet under consideration's dual use of extractivist subject matter *and* formal deployment of the same, by which—to use Karpinski's analysis of Battler as an example—they "incorporate, reproduce, or manipulate source texts" ("Making Poetry"). A related, metaphorical formulation comes in Dickinson's coinage of *metabolic poetics*, a practice that he defines as "acts of reading and writing, derived from or responding to the expression of energy and energy politics in biological mediums, especially in the context of homeostatic states and homeorhetic trajectories" ("Energy Humanities" 19). Such writing can involve "compositional methods" that "reflect the constraints and procedures" that he experiences "as a being composed of other beings and . . . materials" (20). Though Dickinson's term is slightly different, the overlap with the appropriation motif described earlier is obvious: in his criticism, Dickinson identifies volatile substances and chemicals (such as polychlorinated biphenyls [PCBs]) that both go into his writing and are contained in his body. In other words, his criticism instrumentalizes his poetry as his poetry instrumentalizes itself. Instruments are even used to obtain data that is then fed back into the poetry that uses the instruments and the information they provided.

Recent analyses of non-Canadians' texts also tend toward such metaphorically materialist analyses. For example, Justin Parks considers Muriel Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead* and Mark Nowak's *Coal Mountain Elementary* by theorizing a resource poetics metaphor. Parks focuses on the poems' "material incorporation of textual artefacts" that testify "to their ruinous effects" ("Toward a Resource" 395). With metaphorical reinvention,

what was once collage and found text poetry is now re-sourced as a new poetics. This is not a criticism, for I will soon do the same with a concept of my own, that of anti-extractivist style. A shared objective point of these analyses, national and international, is to expose the formal structures that underwrite extractivist practices. Yet they are much more clearly aligned with the kind of earnest environmentalism and instrumentalist critique Seymour identifies as not yet resulting in a polysemic complication of stance and intention, possibly as likely to contribute to resistance of climate justice as to its urgent uptake.

Perhaps it is time to return once again to the Romantic nature poetic, now that the limits of the new enviropoetics' instrumentalism have been shown. Perhaps the vision of the Romantics, in its non-utilitarian function, was a radical redress that, by its nature as poetry, was never intended to be instrumentalized, but rather non-instrumentalized, as much a useful tension in the world as the critique offered by the energy humanities. In her provocative work, Seymour considers queer and parodic artistic interventions to offer the necessary affective ambiguity required to move people to action—a kind of non-instrumental instrumentalism. In a similar spirit, I now turn to the work of Moritz and its engagement with a productive ambiguity that is the means of poetry itself as conceived within the Romantic tradition.

Moritz's Representations of Extractivism and Anti-Extractivist Style

The prominent critic John Hollander writes of Moritz's "prophetic moral vision" and of a "central visionary trope of life among ruins—of civilizations, communities, institutions, artifacts, even verbal and conceptual constructions" (17). Hollander identifies Blake as a kindred spirit, writing parenthetically that Moritz's concerns "are in the tradition of some of Blake and Goya's etchings" (17). Hollander was more right than he knew: first, like Blake, Moritz validates emotion as aesthetic experience; second, he writes against a technological revolution (for the Romantics, it was the Industrial Revolution); and third, he is focused on the natural world as a source both of experience and ecstasy. With the Romantics, Moritz shares subject matter but also their recognition of spiritual qualities in nature.

We can start establishing Moritz's credentials as ecopoet with the opinion of a peer. Tim Bowling, a decorated ecopoet himself, reviews *Mahoning* as capturing "not only the physical character of the poet's remembered world . . . but also, remarkably, the childlike wonder of it touched at the same time with an adult's poignant sense of its decay" (45). Carol Bruneau writes that *Mahoning* "pays tribute to nature's force in the face of human endeavour, the natural dialectic of flux and change that guarantees the rise and fall of civilization and nature's ability to spring up around the ruins" (32). Neither critic perceives that Moritz offers an actionable politics beyond his description of natural cycles of development, decline, and renewal amongst devastated landscapes, although some critics have pointed to Moritz's concerns about extractivism. For example, In *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature,* Geoff Hancock describes Moritz's poems as "philosophically dense meditations on visionary states in a nature increasingly threatened by the mechanical world" (769). He adds that, in particular, Moritz's *Mahoning* "seeks out the spirit of nature in a landscape blighted by the steel industry" and that both it and his three subsequent books "continue the theme of seeking a pure natural spirit in a mechanical and industrialized world" (769).

Qua Szeman and Wenzel's recommendation, materiality is a focus for some reviewers. For example, in one of the first pieces of criticism published on Moritz's work in the *Montreal Writers' Forum*, Cameron writes that "[e]lemental objects recur obsessively: stone, destructive rain and moisture, a constantly glutting vegetation" (22). Quoting Moritz himself, Cameron explains that the image loading is designed to "stress how 'everything / falls backward, runs from much to less,'" and that any innocence and vernal freshness is doomed to "'the endless caucus / of the threshing floor' and final extinction" (22). When reviewing *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1999), Brian Bartlett, another noted ecopoet, writes that "over the past two decades" Moritz has studied "materiality, budding, change" (107). Accordingly, *Mahoning* documents the ruins of a former prosperity, returning to the movement of the river and the pleasures taken by observing trees, the "feathered trees unknown to science" but known in a more integrated, spiritual way by the poet via fusing selfhood with vegetation. With Moritz, observation soon shifts into ontology.

Imagery of environmental devastation recurs frequently in the book, usually linked to industrialization:

> We forged
> a bowel into you, we were the new, iron bowel
> lying within the dark of your leaves and steep ridges.
> Our sign: smoke. (14)

and

> Rust stained the roots hiding in the ground,
> the violet flower that ironweed
> held high above the dust, even the breakers
> of yarrow seething between
> a railroad right-of-way
> and a chain-fenced millyard. (26)

Along with the depictions of environmental impact above, the Earth's finitude is conveyed: "From deepest ore the last of metal was disappearing" (35). That local environmental compromise benefits centres of power circa the 1950s-1960s is not lost on Moritz either:

> We burnt you to feed
> the distant lighted skin, the head and face
> that crawled with vacant pleasures—to feed
> New York and Washington with iron. (14)

Yet the tone of Moritz's investigation is mournful and altogether self-reflective rather than resentful or angry—embodying, again, the Wordsworthian element in his work. Moritz harmonizes an appreciation of the beauty of the environmental destruction, the surviving natural life in and despite that destruction, as well as the dire economic consequences of extractivism locally via image after image of empty, decrepit buildings. The above passage continues,

> And we were happy,
> proud to be silent, proud to be no more
> than the organ New York floated upon, ashamed,
> the power in Washington's false step . . . (14)

There is some confusion in parsing who is ashamed in this excerpt, if it is the *we* or if it is New York; furthermore, the affect of shame seems to contradict the signalled pride and happiness. Part of the confusion

comes from *ashamed* being offset by commas, perhaps a formal manifestation of the "false step" signalled by the poem.

Moritz's semantic difficulty will be expanded upon in the next section. At any rate, leaving shame aside, the strange equanimity—"happy, / proud"—that the speaker represents in a historical fashion, sketching a collective experience of forty years prior to the time of writing, recurs in "Along the Rails":

> The portion, wandering,
> the cruel and useless portion,
> we took it for ourselves.
> . . . .
>
> Along the rails between glass plant, brick plant, steel plant
> and the dark banks, there grew and flowered the ideas,
> science, medicine, song: sombre gold, deep green and flowing water.
> . . . .
>
> The town crept on the earth, dripping
> a dripping fire, clouds that sink in darkness, and always
> new cars and old drove through its simple designs.
>
> Who needs another thing? We are home—
> the food plentiful, the waiting earth
> that keeps us busy, that buckles the concrete. (40)

As can be seen, Moritz doesn't indict the historical practices of extractivism in a simplistic, direct manner. Instead, he depicts the communal experience of consumers as they might have felt at the time—peaceful. He thereby creates an atmosphere of accountability, for, looking back, he uses a *we* and poetically complicates an obliviousness that must also be recognized somehow as, generally speaking, a comfort-giving, sustaining force in people's lives. That this poem occurs amid other poems that document environmental despoliation results in a productive ambivalence that resists instrumentalization. With Moritz's representations of extractivism duly substantiated, I now turn to a specific (and new) metaphorical instantiation of poetics, that of *anti-extractivist style*.

As Marcelle C. Dawson, Christopher Rosin, and Navé Wald write in their introduction to *Global Resource Scarcity*, "extractivism is often framed and legitimised through discourses of crisis and scarcity" (11).

I argue that Moritz's anti-extractivist style constitutes a formal expansion at the level of syntax and symbolist/surrealist influence that itself creates a surplus of meaning and inscrutability identified by both Moritz appreciators and detractors; anti-extractivist style in this sense signals a poetic that is semantically expansive, creating a super-multiplicity of meaning that seemingly creates a kind of cognitive waste. Such a style stands in contrast to the logic of scarcity that gainsays resource hoarding and extraction.

Don McKay, Moritz's most perceptive critic and one of Canada's foremost ecopoets, argues during a gloss on Moritz's poem "Music and Exile" that Moritz's "craft . . . involves a sure sense of the tension between the 'sentence' and the fall of the prose line and the irresistible lift of lyric, as though the experiences of exile and music . . . were struggling for control of the poem" (15). Within this balance of prose and poetry lies the anti-extractivist poetics I will attempt to forge, but note for now McKay recognizes that the balance Moritz strikes is not just a struggle to achieve, as it were, but embodies some kind of struggle in itself.

Moritz's detractors have noted that struggle and formed different conclusions, arguing that control is often *not* achieved. David Solway has deemed Moritz a poet who lacks "a discernible subject" and a purveyor of "willed obscurity" (40). John Orange judges Moritz's poems "difficult" and claims they "drop into a void of obscurity" (105, 104). Even ardent appreciators of Moritz like Richard Greene admit that "Moritz is a difficult, often obscure poet, whose works can defy paraphrase" ("A Hidden Treasure" 16). This so-called difficulty arises from Moritz's style, which has been variously characterized over the years. For Greene, Moritz's stylistic obscurity is in part due to his "long-line, incantatory free verse" (16). Similarly, Eric Miller identifies the cause of difficulty as a syntax that, "like the vines he excels at describing, [is] an aptly diverging, flexible fibre to sustain the confounding amalgam" (113). Chris Jennings elaborates on Miller's point by tying syntax's purpose to Moritz's symbolist-surrealist influences: "[t]he logic of a Moritz poem is similarly provisional, and his frequently associative logic, like dream logic, tests the limits of linear syntax to dramatize thinking rather [than] reify a paraphrasable

thought" ("Riddle's Raw" 38). Jennings explains that "when his language is difficult," this difficulty comes from a "classically discursive" poetry that "challenge[s] the ability of grammar and syntax to maintain order and connectedness, sometimes over a pattern of thought characterized by neither order or connectedness . . . [c]onfusion, obscurity, are side effects of a technique that seeks to dramatize the 'act of the mind' accurately" (38). As can be seen, such accounts of Moritz's style show that even sympathizing critics feel obliged to make apologia for what detractors like Solway and Carmine Starnino identify as unintelligibility. What is important to take away from this extensive disagreement is that Moritz's difficulty is tied to the means of his expression, which for a poet is analogous to their materiality.

A consensus opinion, then, is that Moritz's poetry is not easy to understand, and it has something to do with what Ross Leckie calls the poet's "muscular syntax" (121). Jennings is the only one of two critics who have delved into the linguistic nuts and bolts of Moritz's syntax, the nature of which he repeatedly gestures at here:[3]

> some see Moritz as "willfully obscure" and overly (or falsely) intellectual while others praise him for intellectual rigour put to very humane purposes. I suspect this schism has more to do with some basic mechanics of Moritz's writing than with his poetic persona, and perhaps its central element is grammatical. Moritz often writes long sentences, and not just long sentences but long sentences with multiple restrictive elements and subordinations that do not technically require punctuation meaning that, in addition to the line breaks cutting across the semantic groupings of prosaic grammar, readers must also grapple with the poem's voice and sense without commas to provide dramatic pauses and syntactic groupings . . . ("Simplifying" 90-91)

For Jennings, Moritz is a maximalist at the level of meaning due to his peculiar grammatical tendencies. The "very humane purposes" Jennings refers to include Moritz's concern about the destruction of the environment, one of his chief subjects. Thus the depiction of the creation and uncreation of the natural world in Moritz's poetry arrives via a style that derives as many meanings as possible from its material. The goal is the creation of "a religious vision" in which "natural

processes tend towards liberation and so speak to a deeper ordering of reality" (Greene, "A City"). In other words, as Eric Trethewey has said, Moritz's "major theme is the incarnation of spiritual realities in nature and language" (85).

As Starnino has pointed out, Moritz's semantic expansion increased over the years, becoming "elastically discursive" (34). He "significantly extended and aerated his verse line," becoming "much more talkative" (35). Though *Mahoning* is not Moritz's most "elastically discursive" book—perhaps his most garrulous is *The New Measures*—it does demonstrate the quality his critics identify. The conclusion to "On a Screen"—which includes the lines "The million answerers / from a million wells are one answer from a dark / space, a depthless earth"—reads,

> You will be different, one day, if you endure.
> There's a promise of it even in your nights,
> if you consent to know them: blank pleasure,
> suffering: you lie down
> and are nothing—a television screen,
> not even a thought or a seeing, but the unseen
> images of this worldwide helpless day
> that are flowing in your body, are taking your form. (46)

Starting as a clear grammatical sentence in the first line, the poem slides along without a definite sense-anchor. Though the poem is stabilized in the second person and, as in all Moritz poems, the vocabulary is simple, almost plain, the sense of things shifts back and forth. We begin with "different" in the first line, which is promised in the second, but which seems to recede as chief subject in favour of "nights" in the same line. The content of these nights then becomes the primary subject, but then seemingly only to suggest a concomitant denaturing of the self ("you lie down / and are nothing") that is dropped, after a dash, in exchange for a television screen as it becomes a portal for forces outside the self as well as a strange mirror for the same forces within the body. In the final line, somehow, "different" and "nights" and the world become either reified as the body or doppelgangers of the body; it is hard to say precisely. This difficulty extends from the long line and—recalling Jennings earlier—its "multiple restrictive elements and subordinations." The same process is at work in "Visit Home":

> It seemed that Mahoning was preferring its own death,
> that I saw it struggling to forget the other
> that had been brought to it: all the muzzles
> of cattle and the human snouts
> lined up at its veins: titanic herds
> poured out of black steel barns,
> fouling the stream below the sea-green hay,
> there, where three oaks lean out from the bank. (52-53)

With the conclusion of this stanza—all one long sentence—one is left with a deceptively precise location along the river, "where three oaks lean out from the bank." To get there, the river is personified in the first line; in the second, it not only is seen to be "struggling" (first-order abstraction) but is seen to be struggling "to forget" (second-order abstraction) the "other." This effort to forget suggests it is the human and animal world which is actually personified in this poem, and not the river. The river remains itself, even under the organizing "I" subject creating the poem. The stanza could not be rendered in grammatically correct shorter sentences or ungrammatical shorter units and have the same syncretic effect, for it is the very length of the construction that maximalizes not only what it might contain, but also what it might mean. Thus anti-extractivist style in this poetic context means more than *maximalist*, for it applies to a text that depicts extractivism using simple vocabulary (e.g., base elements and ores) and yet manages, in its syntactic construction, a surplus of ambiguity. By "draw[ing] a veil across its message" (34), Starnino maintains, Moritz's work has a waste end-product that mars its reception. The deliberately imprecise syntactical constructions create a mental abundance of disconnected, beautiful images that not only resist concerted mining for meaning (the paraphrase-resisting quality mentioned earlier), they also—in the sheer multiplicity of their resultant partial meanings—offer rhetorical excess, a pluripotency of plenty, that is incompatible with scarcity logics.

Romanticism as Non-Instrumental Tool

In "The Trouble with Wilderness," a seminal paper in the environmental humanities, William Cronon points out that the relatively ineffectual "modern environmental movement is itself a grandchild of romanticism" (10). I have argued, however, that the visionary

poetic of the Romantics was less a plan for action than a testament to the development of meaningful relationships with the world. These relationships are created partly through a multiplicity of meaning that somehow instantiates a oneness with that world. This meaning-matrix creates the conditions for a "non-instrumental instrumentalism" in which poetry is not used for "stopping the digging" in a direct fashion, but instead for the renovation of relationships between selves and world. Moritz's particular contribution in this larger Romanticism context is his anti-extractivist style, which amplifies meaning to abundance, even overabundance; this quality resists the logics of scarcity upon which extractivism depends. Moritz's poetics exemplifies the curious "grandchild of romanticism" that is an anti-extractivist style—a style that could in time lead to the poetic re-visioning our extractivist age requires.

Notes

1. Moritz doesn't share his unexamined status with other male visionary ecopoets of his generation. For example, Jenny Kerber and Kirsten Alm are two of several scholars who have considered Tim Lilburn's work; Travis Mason, Alanna Bondar, and Adam Dickinson are but a few of the many scholars who have covered Don McKay; Tammy Armstrong's dissertation focuses on Don Domanski. Of the three just named, Domanski seems closest to Moritz's attention deficit, perhaps because, like Moritz, he was not based on the West Coast of Canada, where ecocriticism thrives, though Domanski did have the advantage of not being also-American. Moritz's anti-extractivist masterpiece, *Mahoning*, memorializes an American setting, which is not as appealing a substrate for Canadian critics. Perhaps the poets share another reason for the lack of attention: the overtly religious element of their work, though this aspect is admittedly more intense in Domanski's.
2. In this article, I use the term *anti-extractivist* as opposed to *post-extractivist* because, as Aia Newport explains in "Possible Mindsets for Post-Extractive Futures," post-extractivism is "rooted in decolonial frameworks that take responsibility for the harms caused through extraction. This includes treaties, land back and repatriation of stolen goods, as a start." *Mahoning* does not centre such matters.
3. Philip Marchand, in his casual book reviews column in the *Toronto Star*, encouraged readers to "[t]hink of the way John Milton used to come up with these incredibly long and complicated sentences, full of independent and dependent clauses, and fit them into his blank verse in *Paradise Lost*" (J10).

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