




BOOK REVIEW

Elizabeth Carolyn Miller. *Extraction Ecologies and the Literature of the Long Exhaustion*

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Elizabeth Carolyn Miller's book *Extraction Ecologies and the Literature of the Long Exhaustion* is an insightful and fascinating read. It is exceptionally well-researched, drawing from the work of distinguished historians, and contributes to fields in both mining history and literature. Miller's in-depth study into the literature of the 1850s to the 1930s highlights how the Industrial Revolution, fossil fuels, and the extraction of minerals and buried treasure, permeated all layers of society. I was especially impressed by the narratives Miller analyzed, where mining and extraction feature. Furthermore, I was surprised to discover subtle connections to mining in novels that appeared primarily to focus on different themes. This highlights how the "industrialisation of underground resource extraction shaped literary form and genre" in the industrial era (2). Moreover, it encourages readers to think in new ways about extractivism, while showing how vital historical interpretation is to the environmental and energy humanities.

Miller scrutinizes fifteen well-known provincial realist novels, adventure stories, and utopian and fantasy narratives published between 1854 and 1937. Her book is structured into distinct chapters that focus on three major areas concerning large-scale mining and extraction, the socio-environmental impact, and the possibility of a post-fossil fuel future. In chapter 1, "Drill, Baby, Drill: Extraction Ecologies, Futility, and the Provincial Realist Novel," Miller focuses on provincial realist novels set in areas of mineral and coal extraction; "where industrial terraforming pulverized the land, casting up at least as much waste and damage as it did treasure" (25). Miller states that her aim is to reframe discussions around extraction and to "position coal within a broader network of industrial extraction—a global infrastructure of labor, capital, and [...] buried treasure" (32). She analyzes five novels, set within the context of the "industrial extraction boom" (80): *Nostromo* (1904) by Joseph Conrad, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) by George Elliot, *Jane Rutherford: or, The Miners' Strike* (1858) by Fanny Mayne, *Hard Times* (1854) by Charles Dickens, and *Sons and Lovers* (1913) by D.H. Lawrence.

Miller draws comparisons between the "broken and infertile marriage and inheritance plots" in *Nostromo*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Sons and Lovers* and connects these with an "exhausted futurity" in mining landscapes and family life (43). This sense of inheritance is echoed in *Sons and Lovers* where children are born into mining. Mining is so intrinsically connected to their lives that it becomes "the air that they breathe, the rhythm of their lives" (74). Not only does extraction shape family life and society, it reshapes the physical landscape in these extraction zones.

Miller maintains that sites of abandoned exhaustion reinforce an association of extraction with "blight" and "ruin" (51). The abandoned quarry, the Red Deeps, in *The Mill on the Floss* is the product of ironstone (50). Miller makes a comparison to this and the red clay riverbank

in *Sons and Lovers* where Clara and Paul consummate their relationship. The iron-rich dirt stains Clara's clothes and shoes connecting extraction landscapes, exhaustion, and ruin. Miller states that "[i]n an extractive ecology, the earth mother is consumed but not replenished, drained to exhaustion" (77).

Mining landscapes carry the scars of their industry: slag heaps, abandoned mine shafts, coal and iron-stained environments and wastelands; called "sacrifice zones" (81). However, these scars are also visible on the people who live near sacrifice zones. Miller describes how "extraction ecologies leach into human marriage, growth, and reproduction," but also how they impact society through accidents, illness, and deformed bodies (81). Miller assesses mining disasters and the cost of human suffering as an unintended consequence of extraction through her analysis of *Jane Rutherford: or, The Miners' Strike*. Furthermore, she emphasizes the value of literature in mediating the impacts and calamities of mineral and coal extraction.

Additionally, Miller argues that mining, "[e]xtraction and trade are bound up with each other" (47); that "coal was the lifeblood of all manufacturing" (46). We see this in *Hard Times* with its urban setting of city spaces of "consumption and combustion" (63). This is echoed again in *Sons and Lovers* with the industrial background of urban consumption, where "the smoke [from factory chimneys] moves upward, but extraction moves downwards" (73).

In chapter 2, "Down and Out: Adventure Narrative, Extraction, and the Resource Frontier," Miller explores the spatial imagination of extraction literature and new frontiers through five treasure-hunting adventure novels set in Latin America and Africa: *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) by Mary Seacole, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), *Montezuma's Daughter* (1893) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) by H. Rider Haggard, and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). This chapter reads as a critique of imperial and capitalist greed and how the drive for mineral wealth came with a human cost. Miller examines the exploitation of native lands and peoples—the "objectification of Black bodies," and the drive for underground wealth across the imperial world (133). She scrutinizes British investment into foreign lands for the extraction of diamonds, gold, silver, and ivory. The extracted treasures are called "booty," "spoil," and "plunder" to convey feelings of theft and violation (133).

Miller's third chapter, "Worldbuilding Meets Terraforming: Energy, Extraction, and Speculative Fiction," analyzes texts set in imaginative post-extractive lands: Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), "Sultana's Dream" (1905) by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, *News from Nowhere* (1890) by William Morris, *The Time Machine* (1895) by H.G. Wells, and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937). These narratives "all dream about energy beyond extractivism ...[and]... the role of energy in shaping culture, environment, and society" (143). Miller argues that these texts showcase the "hopes and plans for renewal and change" regarding the energy crisis and how we can "transition to a post-carbon society" (142; 146).

Extraction Ecologies and the Literature of the Long Exhaustion is an excellent study of the relationship between extraction ecologies and literature from the rise of large-scale industrial mining. Miller has meticulously analyzed an exceptional collection of novels and narratives in an original manner and makes an impressive and scholarly contribution to the fields of both literature and mining history.