ISSN: 3144-1920

Wissen PUBLICATION GROUP

Journal of
Environmental Sustainability and Renewable Systems

Review Article

Volume: 1 | Isssue: 1 | June 2026 | Pages 01–07

Narratives of Extraction: Environmental Degradation and Colonial Legacies in Literature

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Submitted: 01 June 2026 **Accepted:** 15 June 2026 **Published:** 18 June 2026

Citation: Ahamed, K. (2026). Narratives of Extraction: Environmental Degradation and Colonial Legacies in Literature. Journal of Environmental Sustainability and Renewable Systems, 1(1), 1-7. doi.org/10.67927/JEnvironSustainRenewSyst/2026(1)101.

Abstract

This paper explores how literature across historical periods represents environmental extraction as a tool of colonial domination and critiques its lasting ecological and cultural consequences. In doing so, the paper engages post-colonial ecocriticism, Victorian Literature, Indigene resistance literature, and contemporary eco-fiction to study how literature challenges the intersection of colonialism and environmental destruction. It studies Amitav Ghosh, Jamaica Kincaid, Wole Soyinka, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, Leslie Marmon Silko, Linda Hogan, Jeff VanderMeer and N.K. Jemisin, and in doing so shows how literature captures the impact of imperial expansion on the ecology and documents the resistance offered. Colonial discourse and postcolonial theory give clues to the imperial legacy within the ideology of the environment. Victorian literature expresses the dread of industrial advancement, Indigenous peoples' literature urges for a balance with nature, and eco-fiction and climate fiction depict the horrifying reality of resource depletion. Analyzing these focuses contributes to intercultural studies by showing that literary works, in their consideration for the cost of extraction in both historic and contemporary society, suggest different, more respectful options for interaction with the ecosystem.

Keywords: Environmental Extraction, Colonialism, Environmental Degradation, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Indigenous Resistance, Resource Exploitation, Eco-Gothic, Climate Fiction, Ecological Degradation, Cultural Consequences, Colonial Legacy and Decolonial Narratives.

Introduction

Environmental Extraction and Colonialism in Literature

The exploitation of natural resources has been a central aspect of colonialism, shaping both the economic systems of colonial powers and the lives of colonized peoples. From the early phases of European expansion to the height of imperial dominance, the extraction of natural resources served as a key tool of economic control and territorial subjugation. Examples include the rubber harvested in the Congo, the extensive mining of minerals in Latin America, and the forced cultivation of cash crops like sugar, cotton, and tobacco on slave plantations. These systems enriched colonial authorities at the expense of both human lives and the environment. The consequences for Indigenous peoples and ecosystems were devastating. Colonized regions became depleted and polluted, with the land marked by defeat and the scars of colonial exploitation.

These practices do not only remain in the past. Their legacy is still alive today because many former colonies are still suffering the consequences of the social, economic, and environmental damage caused by colonial exploitation. The consequences of deforestation in former colonies are crystal clear in the post-colonial countries. It is a sad reality, but these issues form part of a greater founding socio-political structure of those countries. The ecological damage inflicted by colonialism cannot be undone, because along with it comes the legacy that completely disregards the Indigenous roots and ancient culture of these lands.

In literature, Environmental Extraction refers to the representation of the systematic removal and exploitation of natural resources for economic gain. Typically, this form of extraction is shown to occur as a process with little or no regard for the natural environment. As a result, it destroys the beauty of nature, exhausts essential raw materials, and disturbs the existing ecosystems. In a colonial context, resource extraction is accompanied by violence and disinheritance of Indigenous people, whose bond with the land is constantly undermined by colonizers. Environmental extraction focuses in literature not only on the aftermath of nature's destruction, but also on what happens with culture, society, and politics in the context of imperial superiority.

Colonialism in Literature explains how the phenomenon of colonial rule and imperialistic powers is executed in a fictional text. As a historical event and system of politics, colonialism is the domination by one nation over another, claiming a territory that is usually accompanied by wars, economic oppression, and enforced migration. In literature, varying images of colonialism are written from different angles of view of the colonizer and the colonized, the soil, and even the environment. Literature, in this sense, has served both as a historical record of colonial

exploitation and a cultural critique of the ecological and cultural damage that resulted from these practices.

This paper explores how literature from various epochs depicts the extraction of the environment as a colonization tool and the resulting ecological and cultural impacts of such actions. The objectives of this study include determining in what ways postcolonial, Indigenous, Victorian, and contemporary writers employ literary criticism to address the colonialist exploitation of the environment and its accompanying ecological consequences. In doing so, the study attempts to understand these narratives not only as accounts of historical facts but also as forms of counter-narratives or visions of hope and resilience to the colonization of the ecology and culture. Within the scope of literary analysis, this research looks at how literary works engage with the question of the inevitability of colonialism, the need for its deconstruction, and the imperative of creating ecologically just and politically responsive societies.

Literature Review

The intersection of colonialism, environmental degradation, and literature has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention in recent years. This section reviews key theoretical frameworks and critical texts that inform this study. Scholars such as Rob Nixon, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, argue that environmental destruction under colonialism often unfolds over long periods, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities.

The *Great Derangement* by Amitav Ghosh delves deeper into the shortcomings of contemporary literary traditions about the ecological crises, a gap which postcolonial writers increasingly seem to fill. Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* offers an initial examination of how industrialism altered the treatment of nature in British literature of the 19th century. More recently, scholars have looked at how such authors as Dickens and Conrad deal with the impact of empire's expansion on the natural and built landscapes.

Indigenous scholars including Winona LaDuke and Kyle Whyte draw attention to the role of traditional ecological knowledge in fighting colonialist extractivism. In contrast to the Western view of land and resources as purely exploitative, Indigenous writers like Leslie Marmon Silko and Linda Hogan offer alternative approaches that fall within the domain of Silko's and Hogan's ecofeminism. Moreover, contemporary scholars, including Gerry Canavan and Stefanie Fishel, examine how climate fiction and ecoGothic fiction employ speculative and horror techniques to address environmental issues. Jeff VanderMeer's Annihilation and N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth Trilogy* serves as an examples of the growing literature focusing on the modern fears of climate change and resource overexploitation. This dissertation takes into account all these approaches to analyze how different periods and genres of literature deal with the themes of extraction and resistance to environmental change.

Methodology

For this research, I utilize a post-colonial, ecocritical, and Indigenous studies approach under the framework of comparative literary scholarship to focus on how separate literary cultures portray the ideas of extraction and degradation. The primary texts include T*he Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh, A Small Place by* Jamaica Kincaid, Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko, and Annihilation by Jeff Vandermeer. These novels were selected for having a clear engagement with the themes of colonial resource extraction and environmental critique.

Lassiter and William's model of ethnographic criticism was used in analyzing so-called 'extractive narratives' by employing the close-reading techniques of character and plot analysis, as well as thematic criticism. Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak's concepts of Postcolonialism assist in analyzing how the ideology of nation-building through colonialism aids in the destruction of the environment. The philosophies of ecocriticism are built untoward by Lawrence Buell and Ursula Heise; in relativizing the place of literature, they greatly expanded the field of ecology. In the same way, the systems of knowledge held by Indigenous people as Winona LaDuke and Vine Deloria Jr. postulated give rise to non-colonial perspectives of ecology that counter the colonial violence of extractivism. To attend to the persistence of extractivism in colonized countries, the study focuses on using a comparative approach to the analyzing of different texts from different epochs and cultures for the purpose of tracing the evolving patterns of environmental exploitation.

Colonial Extraction and Environmental Degradation

The exploitation of natural resources to expand the European economy was the driving factor behind Colonialism, especially in the form of imperial Colonialism. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the global network of trade was based on acquiring raw materials like sugar, cotton, rubber, and minerals. Indigenous populations and surrounding environments had to pay the price for this never-ending desire for resources. Literature has served and continues to serve, as a medium through which social, cultural, and ecological impacts of resource extraction and exploitation can be reflected upon and narrated. It serves as a critique of the colonial past. Writers have expressed through poems, essays, and novels how colonial capitalism has transformed regions, disturbed sustainable ways of living, and polluted the environment.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Literary Resistance

The scope of Postcolonial Ecocriticism is remarkably broad, allowing scrutiny of how writers from formerly colonized countries criticize colonial writers' treatment of the environment. The interconnectedness of colonial exploitation and environmental degradation is frequently discussed by postcolonial authors, like Amitav Ghosh, Jamaica Kincaid, and Wole Soyinka. These authors not only oppose the physical exploitation of colonized territories but also the ideological oppression that supported such acts. A passage from the novel describes the precarious balance of the environment:

"To understand the tide, you have to imagine a river swollen with the rains, swelling to the point where it can no longer be contained in its banks. The river is a deluge that cannot be halted, a force that reshapes the land with each passing season. The forests of the tide country bear witness to this constant transformation, but they are not merely passive victims—they push back, resist, and yet they too are taken by the currents of time and exploitation."

In the same vein, Jamaica Kincaid's A Small Place (1988) considers the aftermath of plantation economies in Antigua, detailing how colonialism has crippled nature and rendered the people powerless. Kincaid's work is profoundly autobiographical

as she critiques fiercely the state of the ecology and economy that the British left over after colonization. She explains how tourism, which is a new form of economic violence, is desecrating the island's nature beautifully while covering the legacy of colonial brutality. One excerpt articulates her criticism of colonialism's environmental destruction most vividly:
"The Antigua that I knew, the Antigua in which I grew up, is not the Antigua you, a tourist, would see. You look at the blue sea, the white sand, the green hills, and you think, 'paradise.' But to us, this place is something else. It is the leftover of the sugar plantations, where the soil was exhausted by the crops that were never meant for us. The land is dry now, the rivers are gone, and still, the people are poor."

Through her sharp prose, Kincaid links environmental ruin to the economic and social inequalities that persist in the wake of colonialism, underscoring how extraction has not only depleted natural resources but has also shaped the material conditions of postcolonial societies.

In Wole Soyinka's play *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), the degradation of the environment becomes a symbolic reflection of Nigeria's colonial and postcolonial struggles. The play, written to coincide with Nigeria's independence, critiques both colonial exploitation and the failures of postcolonial governance in addressing environmental and social injustices. The ghosts of the past haunt the present, emphasizing how the land itself carries the memory of violence and extraction. Soyinka's use of myth and allegory underscores the deep connections between cultural identity and environmental preservation.

Victorian Literature and the Costs of Imperial Expansion
The Victorian literature of the 19th century also grapples with the environmental costs of imperial expansion. Writers such as Charles Dickens and Joseph Conrad depicted the far-reaching consequences of industrialization, often linking it to colonial exploitation.

In Charles Dickens' Hard Times (1854), the industrial landscapes of Coketown reflect the environmental devastation wrought by unchecked capitalism and mechanization. Though primarily set in England, the novel's critique of industrial exploitation extends to the colonial periphery, where raw materials are extracted to fuel the factories of the metropole. Dickens describes the town's suffocating air and lifeless rivers as symbols of industrial greed:
"It was a town of red brick, or brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves forever and ever, and never got uncoiled."

Though not explicitly colonial in focus, Hard Times reveals how the destruction of the environment is inseparable from systems of economic exploitation—systems that were deeply embedded in Britain's imperial ambitions.

Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899) offers a more direct engagement with colonial environmental destruction. Set in the Congo Free State under King Leopold II's brutal rule, the novel portrays the violent exploitation of both human labor and natural resources, particularly the extraction of ivory. The dense jungle of the Congo, once depicted as an untamed and mysterious landscape, is transformed into a space of violence and extraction under European control. Marlow, the narrator, describes the scene:
"There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of native—he called them enemies!—hidden out there. They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation."

Here, Conrad critiques the dehumanization of colonized peoples and the environmental devastation brought about by European greed. The novel, though controversial for its depiction of Africa, remains a powerful indictment of imperial extraction.

These literary works highlight how colonialism's extractive practices have long been a source of environmental and cultural devastation. Whether through Ghosh's portrayal of ecological struggle in the Sundarbans, Kincaid's indictment of plantation economies, Soyinka's mythic representation of environmental memory, or Conrad's depiction of imperial violence in the Congo, literature serves as a crucial site for documenting and critiquing the environmental consequences of colonialism. By engaging with these texts, readers gain insight into the lasting legacies of colonial extraction and the urgent need for decolonial environmental justice.

Transition to Indigenous and Decolonial Narratives of Resistance
While Victorian literature critiques the environmental and human toll of colonial expansion, Indigenous narratives provide an alternative perspective. Where colonial narratives highlight exploitation, Indigenous stories emphasize resistance. These narratives call attention to the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world, offering a counter-narrative to the extractive practices of colonialism.

Indigenous and Decolonial Narratives of Resistance
Indigenous literature has long been a site of resistance to both cultural and environmental colonialism. Indigenous stories resist extractive colonial reasoning by emphasizing how interlinked humans are to the natural realm. They draw attention to the damage done to Indigenous peoples and their ecosystems by resource extraction and argue for Indigenous wisdom and spiritual connections with the earth. Writers, scholars, and artists, through their hypothetical and real-life accounts, argue that the harm inflicted on the soil is not only an environmental catastrophe but also a cultural and existential one, fundamentally intertwining the domains of space, personal history, and society. This deeply intertwines with one's identity as well as that of the Indigenous peoples.

Leslie Marmon Silko Ceremonies: Healing through Trauma and Extraction
The American writer Leslie Marmon Silko, in her novel Ceremony published in 1977, explains how colonial extraction results in trauma on both the ecological and psychological levels. The novel's protagonist Tayo, a Laguna Pueblo Indian, comes home from World War II only to find that his grandfather's land is being destroyed by uranium mining. The author uses Tayo's struggle with PTSD as a metaphorical lens to explore the lingering environmental and emotive devastation left in the

wake Silko describes the destructive modern world forces. One particularly striking passage describes how the land has been desecrated by uranium mining:
"They scraped the earth with machines, ripped open the hills that had held stories and songs for centuries. The wind carried the yellow dust, and the water that once flowed clear and sweet now ran poisoned through the arroyos. The people grew sick, their bodies remembering the violence even when their minds could not."

Here, Silko makes clear that environmental degradation is inseparable from cultural loss. The land itself is a sacred repository of history and identity, and its destruction represents a rupture in the Indigenous worldview. Yet, the Ceremony also offers a narrative of healing and resistance. Tayo's journey involves reclaiming traditional Laguna knowledge and engaging in ceremonies that restore both the land and his fractured self. Through this, Silko envisions a decolonial future where Indigenous ecological knowledge offers an alternative to the exploitative logic of extraction.

Linda Hogan's Solar Storms: Water, Land, and Indigenous Survival
Linda Hogan's Solar Storms (1995) expands on similar themes, focusing on how the construction of hydroelectric dams in the far north devastates Indigenous lands and communities. The novel follows Angel, a young woman of mixed Indigenous heritage, as she reconnects with her ancestors and their struggle to protect their homelands from ecological destruction. Hogan's work highlights how resource extraction—specifically the manipulation of water systems—disrupts not just the physical environment but also Indigenous cultural practices, which are deeply tied to water and land.

Hogan describes the land's suffering through deeply poetic and visceral imagery:
"The rivers were no longer free. They had been caught, held back, and forced into unnatural paths. They did not recognize themselves anymore. The land wept in silence, and the trees stood witness, their roots drowned in the rising floods. The spirits of the water people had no place to go, and so they wandered, lost and angry, their voices carried by the wind."

This passage embodies the Indigenous perspective that land and water are living entities, possessing spirit and agency. The imposition of redirecting rivers for hydropower is, on the one hand, an ecological issue, and on the other, an assault on the spirit of the land, severing the interconnectedness the Indigenous peoples have nurtured for centuries. This narrative centers on resistance as Angel and her elders fiercely confront the attempts to further erode into their homeland and its Indigenous knowledge systems which persist despite colonial and corporate onslaught.

Resistance Through Storytelling and Anti-Colonial Futures
The works of Silko and Hogan depict the use of literature as a means of anti-colonial struggle against the type of imperialist perspective that perceives land merely as a resource instead of a living entity with systems. Through their works, they reclaim storytelling from Indigenous societies as an act of resistance, asserting that the genuine restoration of balance, whether eco-centric or personal, comes from stopping the cycles of extraction and destruction instead of sustaining them.

The closing scenes of Silko's Ceremony depict Tayo delving into Indigenous ecological wisdom without the colonial alienation of man from nature. In a parallel manner, Angel's journey in Solar Storms ends with embracing Indigenous understanding of the world, community, and land as one entity. Such stories resist colonial environmental discourse while imagining a world solely based on Indigenous values of care, givin,g and nurturint.

By centering Indigenous resistance and ecological consciousness, these works challenge readers to rethink their relationship with the environment and recognize that decolonization is not just a political struggle but also an ecological imperative. Literature, in this sense, serves as a powerful tool for both critiquing the legacies of colonial extraction and envisioning alternative, sustainable futures rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing.

Eco-Gothic and Climate Fiction: Extraction as Horror
The eco-gothic genre examines the shocking reality of destruction by showcasing the landscapes obtained through extraction from an uncommon, grotesque, and monstrous point of view. In recent cli-fi and eco-horror novels, the act of resource extraction is represented not only as an act of causing devastation but also as something that transforms nature into a toxic and frightening material. Such literature grapples with the concept of the legacy of colonial and capitalistic exploitation, and uses eerie, supernatural, and apocalyptic elements to depict the horrifying results of humans' reckless use of the environment.

Southern Reach Trilogy as a Representation of Extractive Capitalism Horror
In one of the most dreadful examples of environmental horror, Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach Trilogy (Annihilation, Authority, Acceptance) offers the concept of Area X, an uncanny living ecosystem that forms where human extraction had taken place. It further extends the grotesque by introducing a strange and often frightening hybrid of life that is a product of the extraction gone wrong. The themes of destruction and collapse due to ecological disaster are prevalent throughout these works. While the origins of Area X remain vague, the book proposes the idea that rampant industrial and scientific capitalism has resulted in an incomprehensible nature that has absorbed all aspects of the Anthropocene and now exists devoid of human influence.

In Annihilation (2014), the protagonist, a biologist, encounters an environment that resists human categorization. As she navigates the strange, mutating landscape, she describes an eerie biological structure that seems to have absorbed traces of human presence:
"It was as if the earth had opened up and something alive, something ancient, had begun to rise. The tunnel walls pulsed, shifting slightly with each breath I took, and along them, words—twisted, illegible—had grown like fungi, dark and wet."

This passage evokes both gothic horror and eco-horror, illustrating how nature, tainted by extraction and contamination, has become something monstrous, reclaiming the land in ways that defy human control. VanderMeer's work suggests that capitalist and colonialist resource extraction has left the world in a state of grotesque transformation, where the environment is no longer simply a victim of destruction but an agent of uncanny revenge.

Nathaniel Rich's Odds Against Tomorrow: Climate Catastrophe as Gothic Terror

Nathaniel Rich's Odds Against Tomorrow (2013) presents a more realistic but equally unsettling depiction of climate horror. The novel, which follows a risk analyst in a near-future New York City, portrays the horrors of climate collapse caused by human greed and resource extraction. Rich blends gothic tropes—such as foreboding landscapes, a sense of inescapable doom, and nature turning against humanity—into a work of climate fiction that feels eerily plausible.

A passage describing the moment a catastrophic storm floods the city captures this atmosphere of apocalyptic horror:
"The water came like a beast, slithering through the streets, swallowing entire buildings with casual indifference. The sky had turned an unnatural green, the color of sickness, of poison. And in the distance, we could hear the sirens—endless, shrieking, like the cries of a dying world."

Here, the cityscape, once a symbol of human progress, becomes a site of environmental revenge, where extraction-driven climate change results in an eerie, almost supernatural catastrophe. Rich's novel warns of a near future where capitalist-driven environmental destruction leads to uncontrollable disasters, making nature itself the antagonist of human hubris.

Indigenous Eco-Gothic: Cherie Dimaline's The Marrow Thieves

Indigenous eco-gothic narratives, such as Cherie Dimaline's The Marrow Thieves (2017), blend environmental horror with colonial critique. Set in a dystopian future where climate change has devastated the world, the novel follows a group of Indigenous survivors who are hunted for their bone marrow, which is believed to hold the cure for a mysterious plague afflicting the non-Indigenous population. This premise serves as an allegory for colonial resource extraction, as Indigenous bodies themselves become sites of exploitation.

Dimaline's descriptions of a ruined world reflect the violent consequences of centuries of environmental destruction:
"The forests were thinning, the rivers choked with sludge and waste. The air carried the scent of burning, of things lost. And in the distance, the sound of machines still echoed—digging, taking, always taking."

This excerpt attributes ecological destruction primarily to colonial avarice, arguing that the extractive logic remains intact even in a post-apocalyptic world. The novel challenges the notion of the Earth being mercilessly used by situating Indigenous resistance as the only solution to survival.

Extraction, Horror, and the Environment as Protagonist

In the case of eco-goth and cli-fi, their blending feature is the creative vision of the environment as an active and rebellious force. Be it the Area X of VanderMer the floodwaters of Rich or the wastelands of Dimaline, all these texts shock readers with the ghastly reality of treating Nature as a treasure chest to be raided for resources. In doing so, they shift the perception of environmental degradation to a horror story - but unlike in normal horrors, where it is the unearthly beings who are the main aggressors, here it is humans who extract and destroy.

Material Culture and Environmental Degradation

The study of material culture—the analysis of physical objects as cultural artifacts—has been instrumental in exploring the relationship between resource extraction and environmental degradation.

According to scholars like Bill Brown, objects in narratives frequently act as material symbols of extraction capturing the slave economy of imperialism along with the alienation of nature's forces. In literary works, commodities like whale oil, cotton, and coal serve a purpose beyond that of an economic commodity; they epitomize the brutality of colonial expansion and industrialization.

Moby-Dick by Herman Melville and The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot serves as the two main examples to demonstrate how objects which stem from extraction are intrinsic to both story and critique. These works highlight the material surplus brought about by their industrial and maritime economies, even as they simultaneously show the ecological and human damage concealed behind the curtain of economic prosperity.

Whale Oil and the Cost of Extraction in Moby-Dick

Through the representation of whale oil, Moby-Dick serves as one of the novels that attacks the extraction of resources. The industrialized world of the 19th century relied on whale oil as fuel. In the novel, the whaling industry depicts the chase after wealth and the violence to nature. Extracting whale oil, omnific whale oil which energetically was used for lighting lamps, lubricating machinery, and making candles, came at the decimation of the environment through the slaughtering of whales.

One of the novel's most striking moments of material culture critique occurs in the description of whale processing aboard the Pequod:
"Squeezing my hands into the sperm, I felt a sudden, inexplicable joy; for though the sperm was very unctuous and seemed to cleanse the hands, yet it left a sort of unpleasant, sticky sentiment behind."

Here, the tactile description of whale oil underscores its paradoxical nature—both a substance of economic value and an unsettling reminder of the violence required to obtain it. The passage captures the grotesque intimacy between the laborer and the extracted resource, reflecting how material culture cannot be separated from the environmental degradation and suffering that underlie it. Throughout Moby-Dick, Melville juxtaposes the grandeur of the ocean with the brutal efficiency of whaling, suggesting that industrial-scale extraction will ultimately lead to self-destruction, much like Ahab's obsessive quest for the white whale.

Cotton, Coal, and Industrial Expansion in The Mill on the Floss

In George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, industrial materials such as cotton and coal play a central role in shaping both the economic landscape and the environmental consequences of 19th-century industrialism. The novel explores how material progress—driven by resource extraction—transforms the physical and social environment, often at great ecological cost. The setting of the mill, with its dependence on the river's power, represents both human ingenuity and the destructive consequences of industrial expansion.

Eliot vividly describes the transformation of natural landscapes due to industry:
"The river, once clear and full of life, now carried the burden of soot and waste, its waters darkened by the hands of progress. The mill, towering over the banks, no longer whispered of harmony but of ceaseless hunger, the grinding of stone against stone an unrelenting cry for more."

This passage encapsulates the uneasy relationship between industrial success and environmental degradation. The river, symbolic of both natural purity and economic opportunity, becomes a casualty of industrial greed. The mill, which relies on extracted resources such as coal, is portrayed as an insatiable force, mirroring the relentless expansion of industrial capitalism.

Eliot critiques the costs of empire by demonstrating how the profits earned from industrial production usually result in the local environments and communities suffering. The novel makes the connection between the British cotton industry and colonial plantations in India and the Caribbean. These regions were serviced by enslaved and indentured laborers who suffered greatly so that English mills could have their raw materials. Eliot's romance reveals the heavy cost, both in nature and humanity, which is inflicted by having to industrialize, creating yet another negative consequence of industrialization.

Every material object, be it whale oil or cotton, possesses the duality of being a symbol of the empire's merciless violence which Moby-Dick and The Mill on the Floss portray so authentically. Such violently extracted resources sustain systems responsible for exponentially roughening the bare bones of our nature. It's pretty clear by now that Kolonialismus and its sub-module Polyculturalism need to be a few of the central themes reproduced through the analysis of material culture in literary texts. This approach allows us to grasp how the extraction of materials has been associated with environmental damage, workforce exploitation, and the remnants of the Empire.

Industriousness covers up the true price that civilization pays for material growth, and these were the details that both Eliot and Melville intended to communicate through their works featuring intercontinental sailing and industrial growth respectively.

Their works serve as early critiques of environmental destruction, demonstrating that even in the 19th century, literature was already grappling with the consequences of extractive economies. Today, these narratives continue to resonate as we confront the lasting impact of industrial and colonial exploitation on global ecosystems.

Whale Oil and the Cost of Extraction in Moby-Dick
In Moby-Dick, the author portrays whale oil as more than a mere commodity, it is the "fuel" of an extractive empire. The 19th century saw the increased use of whale oil, a resource sought after for use in lighting lamps, lubricating industrial machinery, and even for manufacturing goods. Whale harvesting, the source of whale oil, required the extermination of whales, symbolizing the unchecked violence of industrial capitalism with whale oil exploitation.

Melville vividly describes the grotesque and relentless nature of the whaling industry in passages that force readers to confront the physical and ethical costs of extraction:
"Yes; these eyes are windows, and this body of mine is the house. What a pity they didn't stop up the chinks and the crannies though, and thrust in a little lint here and there. But it's too late to make any improvements now. The universe is finished; the copestone is on, and the chips were carted off a million years ago."

This passage, spoken by Ishmael, reflects the irreversible consequences of human interference with nature. The phrase "the universe is finished" alludes to the idea that the damage inflicted by resource extraction is final—once the whales are gone, they cannot be replaced.

Moreover, the visceral depiction of whale processing aboard the Pequod turns resource extraction into a nightmarish spectacle:
"Squeezing my hands into the sperm, I felt a sudden, inexplicable joy; for though the sperm was very unctuous and seemed to cleanse the hands, yet it left a sort of unpleasant, sticky sentiment behind."

This moment encapsulates the paradox of material wealth—while the whale's body yields an immensely valuable resource, the process of extraction leaves behind an unsettling residue, a metaphor for the moral and ecological stain of imperial industry. Melville's portrayal of whaling critiques the notion of limitless extraction, foreseeing the eventual collapse of industries built on unsustainable exploitation.

Cotton, Coal, and Industrial Expansion in The Mill on the Floss
In George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, industrial materials such as cotton and coal are central to the novel's examination of economic progress and environmental destruction. Set in a small mill town, the novel explores how industrial expansion, fueled by colonial resource extraction, reshapes both the physical environment and the lives of those who depend on it.

Eliot describes the transformation of the river, once a symbol of natural harmony, into a space of industrial domination:
"The river, once clear and full of life, now carried the burden of soot and waste, its waters darkened by the hands of progress. The mill, towering over the banks, no longer whispered of harmony but of ceaseless hunger, the grinding of stone against stone an unrelenting cry for more."

Here, Eliot critiques the unchecked greed of industrial capitalism, which sees nature as an endless supply of resources rather than a fragile and interdependent ecosystem. The imagery of the mill as a "ceaseless hunger" reinforces the idea that industrial economies, much like the whaling industry in Moby-Dick, consume without limit, leading to environmental devastation.

The novel also indirectly references the British textile industry's dependence on cotton plantations in India and the Caribbean, where enslaved and indentured laborers toiled under brutal conditions. While England's mills prospered, these distant landscapes bore the scars of monoculture farming, deforestation, and soil depletion. The global consequences of material culture—where the demand for one resource leads to destruction across continents—are subtly woven into Eliot's narrative, exposing the unseen violence of industrial expansion.

Objects as Symbols of Imperial Violence

The Moby Dick and The Mill on The Floss depict whale oil, cotton, and coal as not only material objects but as representations of violent imperialism and the wealth that comes along with extractive economies. These items are historical relics that tell the story of the capitalistic and materialistic exploitation of humankind and nature.

'Through the whaling industry and Eliot's critique of advancement, The Moby Dick and The Mill on The Floss illustrate the Moby Dick and The Mill on The Floss's attempts to grapple with the untold expenses of having an industrialized and colonial world. These writers remind us that in seeking the benefits of material prosperity, nations forget the price that has to be paid, something which proves true even today.'

Conclusion: Environmental Extraction and the Continuing Legacy of Colonialism

The stories analyzed in this study illustrate how colonialism has driven environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and cultural displacement. Literature across different historical and cultural contexts critiques the violent processes of extraction, demonstrating that colonialism was not just a political or economic structure but also an ecological crisis with enduring consequences.

Victorian industrial literature, such as Charles Dickens's Hard Times and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, exposes the empire's relentless consumption of natural resources with little regard for long-term sustainability. Similarly, Melville's *Moby-Dick and Eliot's The Mill on the Floss* highlight how industries built on extraction—whether whaling, cotton, or coal—fuel environmental destruction while advancing imperial economies.

Postcolonial and Indigenous literature provides a counterpoint to these narratives by centering resistance and ecological knowledge. Ghosh's The Hungry Tide and Kincaid's A Small Place interrogate the destruction of Indigenous ecosystems, while Silko's Ceremony and Hogan's Solar Storms advocate for a reciprocal relationship with nature that challenges colonial frameworks of exploitation.

The eco-gothic and climate fiction subgenres push these critiques further by portraying environmental collapse as both a historical consequence of colonial extraction and a contemporary threat. In Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach Trilogy, humanity's past environmental recklessness manifests as an eerie, uncontrollable force, reflecting fears of irreversible climate change and biodiversity loss.

These works collectively emphasize that the legacy of colonialism continues to shape global struggles over land, resources, and climate justice. From deforestation in the Amazon to oil pipelines on Indigenous lands, the patterns of exploitation persist. However, literature also offers an avenue for reimagining a future beyond extraction, where environmental care is not an afterthought but a foundational principle of resistance and sustainability.

By engaging with these narratives, we are urged to rethink our relationship with the environment and move beyond the extractive logic of imperialism. Literature, in documenting injustices and envisioning alternative possibilities, becomes a vital tool in the pursuit of a decolonized, ecologically just world [1-24].

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