

The Shameless Full Moon, Travels in Africa

Carol Miller

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In *The Shameless Full Moon, Travels in Africa*, former journalist and longtime traveler Carol Miller describes the continent as a place of tremendous humanity and natural splendor. Although her journey there took place more than two decades ago, Miller writes vividly of the excitement—from charging buffaloes and blistering heat to the continent's majesty, Kenyan lobster dinners, blooming jasmine, and kind and curious people.

Miller supplements her accounts with twenty full-page photographs—amazing images of the author with tribal chieftains, baby crocodiles, and grand elephants—that give immediacy to her travels.

As she traverses the continent, Miller makes ample reference to Africa's portrayal in pop culture, noting the locations and subjects of films such as *Gorillas in the Mist*, *Out of Africa*, and *The Last King of Scotland*. The references illuminate common negative stereotypes that underscore Miller's desire to depict Africa as “the way [she] saw it...pure and whole and untouched, despite colonialism and economic dependence and corruption or misery, disease and death, or even tourism.”

Miller admits she “fussed over” photos of Africa in her youth, and her time there as an adult only further convinced her of the continent's unmatched “pure magic.” As she writes, “This is Eden: breathless, intact, suspended between origin and eternity.” Her language becomes rapt, even poetic, when recounting scenes of the African plains, a rich landscape of prancing gazelles and playful hyenas. It is here when Miller's prose really shines, even though it's written in a dense journal style, as if pulled directly from her notes while on the road.

Such winning passages are positioned between long sections full of historical facts that are tedious and dry in comparison to Miller's flair for narrative description. Certainly, the ten-page bibliography proves that Miller has done thorough research on this part of the world.

Ultimately, what pulls readers in is not whether Zanzibar was once a Portuguese colony, or other such details, but Miller's personal perspective. She briefly confesses in the prelude that her African adventures continue to profoundly affect her: “I yearn for Africa as I might a close friend or a beloved relative. The longing is almost painful, touched with tenderness, surely a fact, a kind of mourning.”

This tender ache is the most compelling aspect of *The Shameless Full Moon*, more enticing than any of Miller's compiled historical facts or even her rich descriptions. The book would have been better served if Miller had framed her 1989 trip within the context of how it continues to affect her psyche in the present day.

The Shameless Full Moon is a worthwhile read for those with a curiosity for the African continent or anyone who has made the journey there.

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (April 14, 2014)

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