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Figures of the World: The Naturalist Novel and Transnational Form, by Christopher Laing Hill. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020. Cloth, $99.95; Paper, $34.94; Ebook $34.95.

PATTI LUEDECKE

While scholars of American literary naturalism acknowledge the precedent of French naturalists, especially Émile Zola, they also differentiate American naturalists from their French forebears. Christopher Laing Hill contributes to this distancing work in his comparative literature study of naturalism, *Figures of the World*, by arguing that literary "genealogy does not equal servility" (xx). Hill's study uncouples naturalism from Zola as it expands the field by suggesting that the transnational history of naturalism is one of proliferation into naturalism*s* in the many parts of the world that adapted it, instead of adopting it wholesale after its inception in 1860s France.

Hill's first chapter charts the transnational "travels" of naturalism—a metaphor that Hill creates to avoid the concept of French naturalism hav-

ing a one-way impact or influence (13). Hill shows that naturalism as a method or a set of techniques, rather than a fixed form, lent itself to divergent ends across the planet: from anti-capitalism in the U.S. and Peru, to anti-colonialism in Korea. Hill rejects world literature criticism that would portray naturalism as radiating from a central French "'Literary Mean Time'" with peripheral provinces lagging chronologically (15). Rather, Hill argues that what may appear to be false starts at naturalism in different parts of the world are, instead, proofs that writers retooled naturalism to suit literary conditions on the ground.

For example, Hill demonstrates how naturalism in Brazil and Argentina mixed with both romanticism and realism, suggesting that these "seemingly strange hybrids of romantic naturalism and naturalistic modernism were not temporal aberrations, . . . but a common consequence of the travel of forms" (24). There was no direct route from romantic to realist, from naturalist to modernist texts, he says (27). Hill resists such an "evolutionary teleolog[y]" of genres by constructing an image of naturalism as a geographical field (48). Hill's image of naturalism as a field is productively capacious. It allows us to imagine naturalism as thicker where thematic and formal trends were most utilized and as thinner where the plurality of naturalisms generated outlier elements no less integral to the field, if localized. Because Hill's transnational definition of naturalism embraces amalgams and aberrations, I believe that it has the potential to provide scholars with new insights into naturalism's defining contradictions: its simultaneous biological determinism and social reformism, its equal interest in untamed and urban environments, its elision of political economy with both nature and the monstrously unnatural, and its juxtaposition of meticulous documentary details with outsized metaphors.

To attend to naturalism's multifariousness, Hill advocates a method that foregrounds close reading (xv). While Hill developed this "inductive approach" (xvii) in response to the reductive methods of world literature criticism, it nonetheless mirrors Donald Pizer's advice. Pizer urges readers of naturalism to attempt, not "to find a universal element in significantly different works but to read each work for what it expresses and then to build synthetic constructions" (Pizer 225). Hill coins three such synthetic constructions: the "body figure," the "Nana figure," and the "social figure" (xv). Hill's attentive close readings trace how each of these figures was forged by Zola and formed by nineteenth-century French culture but recast by American and Japanese naturalist authors. By suggesting that these authors remolded these figures to critique their respective culture's politi-

cal and literary authorities, Hill distances their works from both Zola and determinism.

Hill examines how Zola created the "body figure" as a naturalist technique by employing contemporary medical models of the nerve as a housing for both physiological and psychological processes. The nerve's mind-body bridge created a spillover that enabled "body figures" of all kinds to represent physical, behavioral, and, ultimately, social phenomena. For example, Hill reads Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877) as a competition between bodily synecdoches, with Gervaise's arm symbolizing her hard-working behavior, which prevails for a time, and her limping leg (which was purportedly malformed during conception because of her father's alcoholism) symbolizing her insurmountable physiologically determined sluggishness. For Hill, Zola's equation of his characters' entrapment by their bodily malfunctions with the "inescapable quality of working-class society" ultimately renders the novel "politically inert" (74, 75). Hill's conclusion prompts readers to consider whether, by merely depicting determinism, naturalism suggests we resign ourselves to it.

Hill proposes that American naturalism suggests precisely the opposite when he locates differently freighted "body figures" in Frank Norris's *McTeague* (1899). In contrast to Zola's rigidly fatalist body figures, Hill indicates that engorged figures such as McTeague's jaw and Trina's hair symbolize, not merely biological drives, but the social perversion of desire and, by extension, the "social, and pathological, nature of money" and capitalism more broadly (86). Similarly, Hill returns to the image of the nerve as a social analytic in Shimazaki Tōson's *Spring* (1908), uncovering the novel's analogy between neurasthenia and the Meiji period's (1868-1912) repressive "civilizing" prescriptions in Japan. Hill's close-reading comparisons convincingly support his thesis that, as naturalist writers detached the "body figure" from Zola through a "history of piracy and bricolage," the figure became untethered from biological determinism and gained the power to diagnose social forces and to prescribe social change (97).

Next, Hill tracks the anticipatory interest in Zola's *Nana* leading up to its release as a volume in 1880 and the fervid pace of its translation. He shows the global spread of literary and theatrical nods to the novel, parodies, and copycats (108–09). Hill reads such satellite activity to the novel as evidence that Zola's character, Nana, was merely version 1.0 of similar-but-different "Nana figures" that shortly appeared in literary works from Italy, Croatia, Spain, Finland, and Chile. Comparing, and as often contrasting, Zola's Nana with "Nana figures" in Kosugi Tengai's *New*

Year's Finery (1900) and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), Hill deftly observes that, although the Nana figure's sexuality symbolizes societal corruption, it is never clear whether she is the cause or the symptom of such corruption. As such, Nana acts as an indictment of her polluted social environment. Although the Nana figure is almost always left thwarted, doomed, or dead, for Hill her performative flexibility and ambiguous identity resist moralistic prescriptions of womanhood. Hill's Nana figure is another useful analytical approach that could readily be used in the classroom to discuss other characters such as Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt, Wharton's Lily Bart, and Larsen's Clare Kendry.

Hill's final figure, the "social figure," is less easy to grasp because he diverges from the pattern of his taxonomy in naming it. While Hill's first two figures also function to symbolize social forces, through body images and the Nana character, what Hill calls the "social figure" means something along the lines of "settings that symbolize social relations." The figure's name swaps the symbol (settings) for the referent (social relations). However, this is the one challenging abstraction in Hill's study, which is otherwise wonderfully clear and collegial toward its reader.

Following the arc of his arguments in previous chapters, Hill suggests that, while the social figure of the plain in Zola's *Germinal* (1885) represents the fixity of social relations, writers in other countries manipulated the social figure to question that fixity. For example, Hill argues that the three settings in Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf* (1904)—the ships *Ghost* and *Macedonia* and Endeavor Island—are each "social figures" (i.e., spatial symbols for social relations). To Hill, the shift from one social figure to the next represents different iterations of capitalist organization and so works to historicize and politicize capitalism instead of naturalizing it. Hill contends that such warped uses of the social figure show "that the method, not simply the content, of the naturalist social figure exemplified by *Germinal* changed as the naturalist novel traveled" (151). As with his argument that naturalists used the body figure as both a method of analyzing social relations and a metaphor for them, Hill's formulation of the social figure as a naturalist *method* or *technique* lays the groundwork for further study of metaphor as a central tool of naturalist analysis, rather than as a product of it.

Patti Luedecke completed her PhD at Western University, Canada, in 2019. Her dissertation explored how American literary naturalists suggested that money requires social cooperation, rather than natural material value, to unsettle deterministic nineteenth-century formulations about criminal culpability, race, and capitalism. She has published essays on Frank Norris, James Fenimore Cooper, and Theodore Dreiser.

WORK CITED

Pizer, Donald. "Jack London's 'To Build a Fire': How Not to Read Naturalist Fiction." *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 34, Apr. 2010, pp. 218–27.