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Christopher Laing Hill, *Figures of the World: The Naturalist Novel and Transnational Form* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020). 280 pp., ISBN 978081042145, hardback \$99.95, paperback \$34.95.

Christopher Laing Hill's *Figures of the World* contributes to thriving research on literary naturalism as an international phenomenon and addresses the challenge of theoretical models that study genres and periods of world literature. Laing Hill's work tracks the multiple paths of the naturalist novel in nineteenth-century Europe, Asia, North and South America. The worldwide diffusion of naturalism beyond Émile Zola and the French context has long formed a key issue in the study of the movement since Yves Chevrel's landmark study, *Le naturalisme. Étude d'un mouvement littéraire international* (1982), yet Laing Hill goes far beyond the conventional European story and extends the study of naturalism to such little-known areas as Japanese literature, providing completely new insights into forms that the naturalist novel took on a global level.

In addition to charting the multi-stranded history of worldwide naturalism, *Figures of the World* contributes to studying literature in a transnational scheme, which is interesting because the complex question of 'world literature' has provoked theoretical debates in recent criticism. Methodologically, Laing Hill's study builds on an interesting combination of close and distant reading of a vast corpus of texts. Besides close readings of naturalist novels written in languages that Laing Hill studies—French, English and Japanese—the author maps the poetics of the naturalist novel in several other linguistic areas from South to North by relying on other researchers' work. This meta-analysis is most welcome and offers an alternative to the challenges of studying comparative literature, which after the postcolonial turn has raised discussion on the Eurocentric tradition of the discipline; some have even called it a crisis. Moreover, Laing Hill's skilful synthesis pays tribute to the research of worldwide naturalism, especially the studies available in *Excavatio* and *Les Cahiers Naturalistes*. Articles published in these two journals, which have long accepted contributions on naturalism's multiple lives in the margins, are frequently mentioned in *Figures of the World*.

In mapping the transformations of the naturalist novel, Laing Hill identifies three central topoi of representation common in naturalism or 'figures' that played rhetorical, structural and analytical roles in the naturalist novel: the Nana figure, the body figure and the social figure.

Beginning with such key texts as the Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) and Émile Zola's *L'Assommoir* (*The Dram Shop*) (1877), he moves towards Franck Norris's *McTeague* (1899) and Shimazaki Tōson's *Haru* (*Spring*) (1908). Laing Hill first analyses naturalism's gravitations towards the body, which is usually presented as decaying or in a pathological light. The rhetoric of the laboratory permeating naturalist aesthetics effaced the external narrator and provided a fruitful terrain for a detailed description (of which naturalism is notorious in literary history, especially due to Georg Lukács' attacks in the 1930s). Laing Hill demonstrates that naturalist mimesis counterintuitively resorts largely to figurative language, operating through metonymies and synecdoches characteristic of a naturalistic description of the body.

Another kind of mobility is revealed in Laing Hill's reading of the 'Nana figures' in the naturalistic corpus, Zola's *Nana* (1880), Kosugi Tengai's *Hatsu sugata* (*New Year's Finery*) (1900) and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) as principal examples. The history of Nana figures unveils a cluster of recurring qualities, performances, contagion and mutability that staged social contradictions *through* self-liberated female characters.

Finally, the social figure then illuminates the way in which naturalist narration benefits from creation of fictional spaces to model social relations. Zola's *Germinal* (1885), Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) and Tayama Katai's *Inaka kyōshi* (*The Country Teacher*) (1909) serve as examples of how naturalist novels interrelate social space and such narrative techniques as focalization.

While the questions of the body and figurative language have previously been discussed in many studies of naturalism, the detail of Laing Hill's deep comparative readings raises the analysis of the naturalist body politics to a new level in comparison with the previous French-centred approaches. Although Laing Hill challenges the traditional Eurocentric view of naturalism, classic texts by Zola and of French naturalism still occupy an important role in his study. The author argues that there is no way to avoid the singular importance of Zola as a promoter and his works as models. This approach has its benefits: in so doing, the book also serves as an excellent study guide for a reader who is less familiar with the history of naturalism. However, from a theoretical perspective, the question of how literary genres develop and travel is complex. We may speak of a hybrid process of configuration and re-configuration of general aesthetic models and representative practices and resources of specific cultural and linguistic communities. Although

Zola labelled and popularized the naturalist method, the global rise of the naturalist novel explains itself not only by a genetic model, as in many cases the Zola influences were intermediate. The global change in sociohistorical conditions provided an essential stimulus for developing a novel form of social documentation. The breakthrough of modernity and a worldview deriving from the natural sciences compelled authors everywhere to reconsider the entire package of social life from gender to religion. The naturalist method, as Laing Hill demonstrates, offered a channel to transform this new world view into an aesthetic form.

Laing Hill distances himself from traditional structuralist poetics that have impacted many classic studies on Zola and naturalism yet his detailed charting of figures and tropes is also reminiscent of this tradition. Questions of experientiality, ethics and emotions – all central issues in recent narrative theory – are less discussed and provide fruitful questions for future research on naturalist fiction. Values inscribed in points of view, strategies of empathy and narrative tones often illuminate the differences among the various strains of naturalist novels. For instance, female naturalist authors, such as Minna Canth (1844–1897) in Finland, who played a central role in Nordic naturalism, employed the naturalist method and its body repertoire of hysteria and sickness in a slightly different way than Zola and his companions. In their work the Decadent tropes of women as degenerate and primitive were often transformed into a critical discussion of the female condition. The pathological narratives and effects of disgust were balanced by the serious and tragic representation and often intended to stimulate in readers a moral disgust for the upper classes.

All in all, Laing Hill's book is an inspiring and impressive study in both its conceptual modelling and its analysis of a plethora of naturalisms. By showing how the study of the naturalist novel relates to topical and complex questions of studying comparative literature, *Figures of the World* revives the naturalist novel as a key component of literary history and offers an illuminating example of the challenges of studying literature on a transnational level.

RIIKKA ROSSI

University of Marmara

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