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Jen Hill

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WHITE HORIZON

THE ARCTIC IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH IMAGINATION

JEN HILL



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Jen Hill : White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination (Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century) (SUNY Series, Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century

Bridging historical and literary studies, *White Horizon* explores the importance of the Arctic to British understandings of masculine identity, the nation, and the rapidly expanding British Empire in the nineteenth century. Well before Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, polar space had come to represent the limit of both empire and human experience. Using a variety of texts, from explorers' accounts to boys' adventure fiction, as well as provocative and fresh readings of the works of Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and Wilkie Collins, Jen Hill illustrates the function of Arctic space in the nineteenth-century British social imagination, arguing that the desolate north was imagined as a "pure" space, a conveniently blank page on which to write narratives of Arctic exploration that both furthered and critiqued British imperialism.

Perhaps Hill's most important contribution is her refusal to treat polar exploration as a world apart. Its practice and meanings have been influenced by historical circumstances, even as exploration itself has had important consequences for broader historical developments. In the end, Hill's commitment to maintaining an awareness of this connection reminds us of the ongoing need to treat exploration as deeply connected to its historical context and of the valuable insights that can be gained from such an awareness. Northern Hill's arguments are persuasive, marshalling much useful historical and literary information and engaging with it in a theoretically sophisticated way. *Polar Record* argues persuasively that during the 19th century the Arctic served as a blank space onto which readers could project their ideas, emotions, and beliefs concerning the British colonial project. CHOICE Hill knows both Romantic and Victorian literature well. Her argument consolidates current scholarly interests in both fields, particularly imperial science, travel narrative, gender, and nationalism. The book excels in its generic range as well, covering novels, poetry, travel narrative, biography, sensation drama, and other forms in satisfying depth. Noah Heringman, editor of *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History* "Nineteenth-century polar studies is an important and expanding field of inquiry and Hill is one of the first to study the Arctic in relation to the British Empire." -- Eric G. Wilson, author of *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science, and the Imagination* "Perhaps Hill's most important contribution is her refusal to treat polar exploration as a world apart ... Its practice and meanings have been influenced by historical circumstances, even as exploration itself has had important consequences for broader historical developments. 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