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The Body in Naturalist Literature and Modern Social Imaginaries

Christopher Hill
(Yale University)

In 1877 a group of young writers convened a dinner in Paris to salute their literary heroes: Edmond de Goncourt, Emile Zola, and Gustave Flaubert. The three guests of honor—along with Edmond's late brother Jules—had written novels that became the foundation of a school called naturalism, whose first manifesto was Zola's 1868 preface to *Thérèse Raquin*. This young group, comprised of Guy de Maupassant, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Henry Céard, Léon Hennique, and Paul Alexis, had recently defended the creed against critics of *L'Assommoir*, Zola's chronicle of poverty and alcoholism. Naturalism—a mix of social observation, psychological theories, and conjectures about the causes of criminality and degeneration—was the way to discover the truth of society and show it to those who would rather not look. The five joined Zola again in 1880 in *Evenings in Médan* (*Les Soirées de Médan*), a volume of stories notable mostly, however, for the fact of being published together. With the exception of Alexis, the younger generation was already moving in new directions. In 1887 a different group of five, all writers of little fame, publicly denounced Zola for failing to support aspiring members of the school. Although Zola went on to write some of his greatest novels, the "Manifesto of Five" is conventionally thought to mark the end of naturalism as a vital movement in France.

Yet in 1893, the year that Zola concluded his twenty-volume epic of the Rougon-Macquart clan with the publication of *Doctor Pascal* (*Le Docteur Pascal*), a novella of slum life with clear debts to *L'Assommoir* appeared in New York—Stephen Crane's *Maggie*—and a college student named Frank Norris began intensive study of Zola in California. The following year Norris began the sketches for what became *McTeague* and *Vandover and the Brute*, both

completed in 1899. In 1900, now working as an editor, Norris championed a manuscript called *Sister Carrie* and persuaded his scandal-wary employer Doubleday, Page to honor the contract it had signed with the author, Theodore Dreiser. Always controversial, naturalism held a prominent place in American literature until mid-century. In another part of the world in 1896, the young poet and critic Ueda Bin found a collection of English translations of stories by Maupassant, Zola's most illustrious protégé, in a Tokyo bookstore and shared it with a group of friends, among them the aspiring writers Tayama Katai, Kunikida Doppo, and Masamune Hakuchō. [1] The stories became the impetus of pieces such as Katai's "The End of Jūemon" ("Jūemon no saigo," 1902) and Hakuchō's "Dust" ("Jin'ai," 1907) that sought to lay bare the truth of human desire and degradation. By the 1910s the pursuit of scandal led these self-proclaimed naturalists to a genre of confessional literature that continues to influence Japanese fiction today. Similar stories could be recounted for many countries. Naturalist schools appeared all over Europe in the 1880s, and could be found in South American countries such as Argentina and Brazil beginning in that decade. The movement arrived in China and Korea via Japan, reached South and Southeast Asia and Africa on the coattails of European imperialism, and also found a home in Esperanto. Seven decades after the founding texts of Zola, Flaubert, and the Goncourt brothers appeared in France, naturalism could be found on every inhabited continent.

The travel of naturalism is an important example of the way that cultural relations changed in the era of rapid communication that began in the nineteenth century, but it was not a literary phenomenon alone. Naturalism moved around the world along with several other genres. Examples include the emerging discipline of criminology, known especially through Cesare Lombroso's 1876 study *Criminal Man* (*L'uomo delinquente*), which was so much a part of Norris' intellectual milieu that he named an 1897 story "A Case for Lombroso". Social Darwinism likewise roamed the world through the work of Herbert Spencer and his adherents, and was an important factor in Hakuchō's pessimistic view of class divisions in modern Japan, while Jack London embraced the doctrine

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[1] Japanese names appear with the family name first. Following custom for writers employing pseudonyms, I use the pseudonym alone after first reference.

enthusiastically in the United States. A third genre on the move was the slum exposé, of which some of Zola's novels appeared to be merely fictional variations. The title of Matsubara Iwagorō's 1893 book of reportage *Darkest Tokyo* (*Saiankoku no Tōkyō*), based on a year living rough in the city, expressed his debt to William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, a widely read reformist tract that appeared in 1890. The observations of Charles Brace, an urban missionary who published *The Dangerous Classes of New York* in 1872, found their way into Crane's *Maggie* by way of Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives*, an innovative documentary study from 1890 combining reportage and photography.

The presence of such "fellow travelers" suggests that the travel of naturalism was one aspect of the spread of a broader social imaginary. (Following what Charles Taylor has done with the work of Cornelius Castoriadus, by social imaginary I mean a set of ways that people imagine their social existence that includes both factual and normative aspects, i.e. a sense both of how things are and how they ought to be.)[1] The understanding of society to which naturalist literature contributed found its expression in the observation of social others, the "scientific" analysis of their instincts and drives, and the creation of narratives that presented such individuals as both aberrant (because of the extreme circumstances of their existence) and exemplary (because science showed that their basest desires were universally human). Given the preoccupation of this imaginary with urban and rural dislocation, extremes of poverty and wealth, and biological and social decay, we can conjecture that beyond the new ease of communication—which sped the movement of texts—the embrace of naturalism in disparate parts of the world was driven by significant changes in the social and economic fabric of the countries where it flourished. Although the genesis of naturalism was in France, we therefore should not view the proliferation of naturalist schools as a question of Westernization in the simple sense of cultural influence. Rather, the travel of naturalism was a symptom of rapid and fundamental changes in how "society" (a relatively new concept itself) was apprehended and represented, prompted by social and economic transformations whose relevant substrata are the world market and the international state system,

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1 Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002), p.106.

rather than cultural imperialism. As an effort to understand such change and bring it into the realm of representation, the travel of naturalism was part of the emergence of a transnational discourse of modernity.

The worldly travels of naturalist fiction can be traced positivistically, through author-oriented studies of sources and influences. [1] Social imaginaries, however, are never expressed in a single text. The genres that contribute to them, moreover, might best be described as overlapping and entangled rather than coherently and systematically articulated. The place of naturalism in the social imaginary in question, then, perhaps is most effectively studied by examining *topoi* of representation with which a range of local naturalist schools and fellow-traveling genres concerned themselves. I want to examine one such *topos* here, the degenerate body, in Japanese naturalist fiction.

The body was a common topic in naturalist literature from its beginnings. Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, a founding text that appeared in 1867, examines the psychological degeneration of the young woman of the title and her lover Laurent, who conspire together to murder Thérèse's husband and then, when their relationship sours under the strain of the secret, plot to murder each other. They commit suicide together upon discovering their mutual intentions. Their psychological degeneration, we learn, is caused by congenital imbalances in their nervous systems that predispose the pair to crimes of passion. The preface that Zola wrote in his defense for the second edition explains that the novel carries out the same kind of anatomical investigation on Thérèse and Laurent that a surgeon performs on a corpse. [2] The idea that physiological imbalances lead to criminal behavior drives the novel's plot, but the preface shows that Zola conceived of his methods of representation too as operations on the body.

We can find numerous examples of such a concern with the body in Japanese naturalism. The central characters in Shimazaki Tōson's *The Broken Commandment* (*Hakai*, 1906) are members of the oppressed minority known as

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1 This kind of research has been a mainstay of studies of naturalism. See for example Yves Chevrel, *Le Naturalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982); Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), and Iwanaga Yutaka, *Shizen shugi no seiritsu to tenkai* (Tokyo: Shinbisha, 1972).

2 Emile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1970), p.60.

burakumin. [1] Much of the work of the narrative concerns itself with whether their status is physiological or social in nature and thus with whether prejudice against them is justified by biology or the fault of society as a whole. Tayama Katai's story "A Soldier" ("Ippeisotsu," 1908) is about the last days of a soldier in the Russo-Japanese War who is dying of beri-beri. His painstakingly rendered physical deterioration is an index for his disillusionment with the war and with the patriotism that told him it would be heroic. A third example is Oshima, the "rowdy subject" of Tokuda Shū sei's *Rough Living* (*Arakure,* 1915), who suffers from an unspecified gynecological condition that contributes to the unwillingness to settle into an assigned social role that is the major topic of the novel. [2] As these examples suggest, there is a strong connection in Japanese naturalism between representation of the physical body on the one hand and representation of society and the individual's place in society on the other. Specifically, it was the deformed, deteriorating, or otherwise abnormal body that drew the attention of Japanese naturalists as it drew that of their counterparts elsewhere. If we examine more closely a story by Katai that I mentioned earlier—"The End of Jūemon" —we can see that the degenerate body seems to form an anchor for the mimesis of society in Japanese naturalism, and at same time is a means for applying standards of abnormality and normality to human behavior. That is, the degenerate body plays an important role in both the factual and normative aspects of the social imaginary of which naturalism is a part.

"The End of Jūemon" concerns the experiences of a man from Tokyo in a village in the Shinshu region that is plagued by a middle-aged delinquent. Jūemon, the troublemaker, was the son of parents adopted into a respected family but was indulged in childhood by his grandparents, who raised him. He also suffered from birth from a condition in which a loop of his intestine protrudes into the scrotum and causes it to swell to an unusually large size. Jūemon's story, derived from events Katai witnessed in 1894, is framed by a scene in which a man tells a group of friends that he once met someone who could have been a character

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1 The group was historically associated with occupations such as animal slaughter and leather tanning that were considered unclean according to the tenets of Buddhism.

2 I borrow the phrase "rowdy subject" from chapter seven of James Fujii's *Complicit Fictions: The Subject in the Modern Japanese Prose Narrative* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

in Turgenev's *Hunter's Sketches* (*Zapiski okhotnika*, 1852)—a series of stories based on Turgenev's observation of Russian peasants—and starts to relate the tale. [1] The first-person narrative that follows begins with his encounter with some young men from Shinshū when all were students in Tokyo. He hears stories about their village, which he imagines must be an idyllic place. The narrator eventually goes to this remote village, called Shioyama, only to discover that it is plagued by a series of fires planned by Jūemon and set by his lover, a bestial girl who was orphaned at a young age and grew up in the wild. The arson continues for several nights and the villagers decide to drown Jūemon by throwing him into a pond. The night after his murder the girl sets fire to the entire village and dies in the flames.

Intrigued by the discrepancies between his image of the village and its reality, the narrator conducts an inquiry in which he asks whether Jūemon's behavior is the consequence of innate character or Jūemon's social environment, *sententeki seishitsu* or *kyōgū*. [2] The question informs his representation of both Jūemon and the village. We can understand why by looking briefly into European and Japanese theories of criminality at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. In Europe, a debate had been underway for several decades over whether criminal behavior had biological or environmental causes. The controversy began with the publication in 1876 of Lombroso's *Criminal Man*. This work of "criminal anthropology"—Lombroso's phrase—broke with Enlightenment philosophies of crime and punishment to argue that crime was caused by biological factors that could be recognized as physical anomalies in the body of the miscreant. In this view psychological and physical character were one and the same. Physiological aberrations could be studied scientifically, yielding a system of punishment and incarceration that addressed each criminal's propensity for misbehavior rather than the social damage of his or her acts. The theory gave use the idea of the"born criminal," a phrase coined by Lombroso's disciple Enrico

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1 Readers of Turgenev will note that in addition to the allusion, the device Katai uses to begin the story resembles the opening of "Andrei Kolosov," a story from *Hunter's Sketches*. Yasuda Yasuo, "Ryōjin nikki to Tayama Katai," *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* (Jan. 1970), quoted in *Tayama Katai shū*, Nihon kindai bungaku taikei 19 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1972), p. 430, n. 2.

2 Tayama Katai, "Jūemon no saigo," *Tayama Katai shū*, Nihon kindai bungaku taikei 19 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1972), p. 88. (Abbreviated as "Jūemon.")

Ferri. [1] The Italian school of positivist criminology was almost unchallenged until the end of the 1880s when it came under attack from French scholars who stressed both the sociological causes of crime and the free will of the criminal. Biological explanations were in retreat by the turn of the century and sociological explanations ultimately won the battle, partly because their concessions toward free will were more acceptable to the legal community. [2] Afterward sociological explanations dominated for decades, although biological theories recently have been revived, most notably through the publication of Richard Herrnstein's and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* in 1996. [3] Lombroso's physiological conjectures were based on recapitulation theory, the idea that from conception to maturity the human child passes through all the stages of evolution of the species. Failure to pass through all of the stages results in atavism and a predisposition for "primitive" behavior. Positivist criminologists thought themselves able to physically identify such throwbacks through phrenology and other anthropometric sciences. That is, they read the propensity for crime on the surface of the body. Pressed to explain the many anomalies that could be found in criminals' bodies, Lombroso eventually expanded beyond atavism to include the theory of degeneration, which held that conditions in the mother's body, such as alcoholism and venereal disease, could also produce individuals who were disposed to crime because of physical malformities. The theory of degeneration included the Lamarckian position that the offspring of such individuals inherit their acquired abnormalities. [4] In such physiological explanations, we should note, the abnormal body marks the site of a social problem. Keeping in mind the normative function of systems of classification such as that of criminal anthropology, we can also see that the various negative standards of physical abnormality define the desired "normal" society. [5]

Like criminal anthropology, most sociological arguments embraced the idea

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1 Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), pp.19 - 22.

2 Robert A. Nye, "Heredity or Milieu: The Foundations of Modern European Criminological Theory," *Isis* 67:238 (Sept. 1976), pp.337 - 338.

3 Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

4 Gibson, *Born to Crime*, pp.24 - 25.

5 Gibson, *Born to Crime*, p.2.

of degeneration caused by the fetal environment, although they took into account not just maternal behavior (such as promiscuity) but also maternal malnutrition, housing, and other problems of *milieu*.[1] Proponents of sociological theories of crime did not accept that criminal tendencies could be inherited, but they too thus believed in a connection between social and physical deviance. Although Lombroso's theories were disproved empirically we can say then that they retained a hold on the social imagination. It is important to observe that the division of the debate on criminality between the poles of biology and environment therefore obscured a real continuity in attitudes toward description and explanation of the body's physical condition and description and explanation of society.

The reception of these ideas in Japan and their combination with existing views of criminality were connected to the evolution of the concept of *shakai* (社会) in the Meiji period (1868 - 1912). *Shakai* was first used to translate the English word "society" and its European cognates in 1875. By the late 1880s it had prevailed over many other alternatives in circulation.[2] During this time *shakai* and its competitors were associated with progressive projects of "civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*). *Shakai* developed a different connotation in 1896 when journalist Yokoyama Gennosuke began serial publication of "The Lower-Class Society of the Provinces" ("Chihō no kasō shakai"), a path-breaking statistical survey revised and published in book form as *The Lower-Class Society of Japan* (*Nihon no kasō shakai*) in 1899. After Yokoyama's work, *shakai* was commonly associated with "social problems" (*shakai mondai*). Rather than designating the entire domain of human activity, it designated a part of that domain that was out of order. In keeping with the idealization of the rural village in late Meiji ideology, social problems and thus *shakai* itself were considered to exist almost solely in cities.[3] At the same time that *shakai* became "problematic," a class of experts emerged to address the sources of crime and other social problems. Most of these writers and reformers

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1 Nye, "Heredity or Milieu," pp. 350 - 351.

2 On the evolution of the term see chapter five of Saitō Tsuyoshi, *Meiji no kotoba-higashi kara nishi e no kakehashi* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1977).

3 Ishida Takeshi, *Nihon no shakai kagaku* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1984), pp. 46 -51. On the idealization of rural life in the Meiji period see Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 178 - 183.

resisted theories that considered biology to be the sole cause of crime and took a more eclectic approach that included social factors. [1] Nonetheless the health of the body was considered to be essential to the health of the polity (国体 [*kokutai*], literally "country's body"). Alongside programs to reform criminals, the government established programs for the hygienic discipline of the body. [2] Both were aspects of a broad effort to mobilize the populace for service to the nation.

Michael Bourdaghs recently has shown the importance of the new hygienic regimes in *The Broken Commandment*, the naturalist novel by Tōson in which *burakumin* may pose a threat to the national body. [3] The distinction I mentioned earlier that Katai's narrator makes between innate character and environment as explanations for Jūemon's arson and other antisocial behavior shows that Katai for his part is working with ideas from the criminology of the time. As the narrator learns Jūemon's history from one of his old friends in the village, we learn that the environment in question is an indulgent upbringing by his grandparents, although his mother also had a medical condition related to her womb, raising the possibility that the fetal environment was a factor. [4] As for innate character, Jūemon's "hot temperament" (*netsujō*) is imbricated with the characteristics of his body: in addition to the deformity that as a physiological abnormality may indicate a criminal temperament, we learn that an uncle on Jūemon's mother's side was a murderer, with the implication that Jūemon may have inherited a propensity for crime. [5] The narrator ponders the weight of these factors as his host tells him of Jūemon's unhappy past, which includes humiliation as a child, drinking, gambling, a lot of time in a nearby brothel, and a stint in prison for burning down his house after he mortgaged and lost it. [6]

Perhaps in keeping with the general resistance in Japan to purely biological explanations of criminality, the narrator's investigation of Jūemon's behavior

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1 David R. Ambaras, *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp.31,51.

2 Sabine Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp.17 - 25.

3 Michael Bourdaghs, *The Dawn that Never Comes: Shimazaki Tōson and Japanese Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp.64 - 75.

4 "Jūemon," pp.90, 92.

5 "Jūemon," p.90.

6 "Jūemon," pp.91, 94, 98, 100, 101.

raises the question of the *relationship* between society and the deviant body. The question appears in particularly interesting form in an episode when Jūemon was still a young man, recounted to the narrator by his host, in which a rich man from a nearby village named Ageo urges Jūemon to leave Shioyama and remake his life in Tokyo. Ageo tells Jūemon that he too had been a troublemaker and a pariah when young. By working hard in Tokyo, however, he was able to improve his "social position" and become one of the most important people in his village upon his return. Having explained the improvement of his own position, Ageo urges Jūemon to try the same: "Really, just apply yourself because you are certain to end up succeeding." Jūemon replies, however, "There is no way I can follow your example. I mean, not with this body," and despite Ageo's continued encouragement resigns himself to a life on the social fringes.

Understanding the nuances of the exchange requires some knowledge of the characters used to write several words that play a pivotal role and which are related to the body. In the original Japanese, Ageo offers the improvement in his 身分 (*mibun*) as an example for Jūemon and urges him「本当に一つ奮発さつしやれ、屹度[きつと]それや立身するに極つてるかち」while Jūemon replies「私ア、とても貴郎 (あんた)の真似は出来ねえでごす。一体、もうこんな体格 (からだ)でごいすだで。」[1] The primary signification of the first character of the word that I have translated as "social position," 身分 (*mibun*), is the body. The character is also used, however, in a range of compounds encompassed by the English phrase "one's person." What Ageo urges Jūemon to attempt is 立身 (*risshin*), an instantly recognizable buzzword of the Meiji ideology of striving and self-improvement that uses the same character. *Risshin* could be translated literally as "raise the body" and more idiomatically as "raise one's self."[2] Like 身, the character 体 that we find twice in Jūemon's reply to Ageo primarily signifies

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[1] Ageo: "Hontō ni hitotsu funpatsu sasshare, kitto sore ya risshin suru ni kiwamatteru kara." Jūemon: "Watashi a, totemo anta no mane wa dekinee de gosu. Ittai, mō konna karada de goisu da de." The *furigana* or phonetic gloss in brackets is the editor's; the others are Katai's. Verb conjugations are in the dialect of the area. "Jūemon," 101－102.

[2] *Risshin* frequently appeared in the four-character phrase 立身出世 (*risshin shusse*), roughly "succeed and make your way in the world"; on the history of this ideology of success see Earl Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought: From Samurai to Salary Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

the body, but its secondary meanings tend toward physical appearance and shape. Jūemon's response first uses this character in the adverb 一体 (*ittai*), literally "one body," which conveys specificity. In this case its emphasis falls on 体格, a word that commonly would be read *taikaku*, "bodily condition," but which Katai glosses phonetically as *karada*, using the common reading of 体 when it appears alone.

In this exchange, then, we find a man who has successfully integrated himself into society using words figuratively related to the self to urge Jūemon to try the same, and Jūemon denying the possibility in words more narrowly restricted in connotation to the physical body. What we find in short, is Jūemon's 体格 (*karada*) in its physicality resisting ideological exhortations to improve one's身分 (*mibun*) through 立身 (*risshin*). As I said earlier, in turn-of-the-century criminological thought the malformed body marks a social problem: in this case, the problem that not all may succeed. It is open to both biological and sociological explanations: Jūemon's *karada* may incline him to crime rather than striving, or on the contrary society may offer him no *mibun* that can accommodate his *karada*. The continuity between description of the body and the social in criminological thought, however, alerts us to the possibility that the body has a role in mimesis in Katai's story that goes beyond specific biological and sociological theories of crime: the relationship of *karada* and *mibun* essentially is the relationship of individual and society. If one can describe the body one can describe the basis of all social relations.

The importance of describing the body is reinforced by the narrator's insistence that he cannot reach a conclusion about the causes of Jūemon's behavior until he has seen the miscreant himself.[1] The encounter takes place late in the story as the culmination of an entire theme of observation that is introduced in the frame, through the promise that the story that follows is based on direct experience.[2] The theme builds during the period when the narrator becomes acquainted with the students from Shioyama in Tokyo, as he amasses fantasies about the beauty of the scenery and the simple purity of rural life.[3] During his

1 "Jūemon," p.88.

2 "Jūemon," p.54.

3 "Jūemon," pp.59－60.

journey to the village the narrator rehearses these fantasies, and after he arrives comparisons between them and what he actually sees become a recurring motif, as when the narrator exclaims,

> Arson in this beautiful village! And in a village where there had been nothing of the sort for decades! This had to mean something. There must be something unnatural about this, I thought. My fantasy-prone heart was lashed as I imagined the fierceness of the never-ending vortex of human life that could be found even here in the middle of the mountains. [1]

The dichotomy between imagination and observation of society that emerges structures the narrator's investigation into the sources of Jūemon's character. Alongside the frequent comparison of image and reality, the theme of observation includes another rather quirky motif. At certain tense moments such as the outbreak of fire, the narrator retreats from the fray to watch the villagers from a high spot. [2] He explains that as a newcomer he is unable to help, but the narrator's physical movement strengthens the idea that he is a coolly observant outsider, an "eyewitness bystander" who is present at but not part of the events.

The theme of observation comes to its peak in a sequence that begins with the narrator's first sight of Jūemon and ends with his description of Jūemon's corpse after he has been murdered. Just before this sequence begins the villagers have put out a fire at the narrator's host's house, and Jūemon has demanded some of the *sake* that, following custom, the host is pouring for those who came to his aid. True to his habit, the narrator watches the scene from behind a door. Identifying Jūemon by the villagers' angry looks, he remarks that

> This middle-aged man wore a nearly shredded white *yukata*, had shaggy hair in wild disarray, and exposed his ghastly shins for all to see—such was my first glimpse of Fujita Jūemon. Across a red face with glaring eyes was cast the shadow of truly dreadful vice and abandon. All the traces of the history of his miserable life seemed to be woven into its devious folds. [3]

When Jūemon leaves, the villagers exchange glances and several follow him out.

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1 "Jūemon," p.76; other examples can be found on pp.68, 72, 82, 105, and 115.

2 "Jūemon," pp.83, 105, 120.

3 "Jūemon," p.109.

Shortly afterward the narrator sees him in a small pond outside the house, "face down, hair streaming, drowned as a dog might have died."[1] The following day the police have the corpse pulled out and the narrator sees Jūemon's body in its final state, "face horribly bloated from being left in the pond half a day, eyes staring dreadfully, mucus trickling from nose to half-open mouth, huge scrotum dangling limply."[2]

The narrator's long-delayed but disturbingly intimate observation of Jūemon's body prompts him to reflect on whether society (*shakai*) oppresses the nature (*shizen*) of human beings. If a person unstintingly pursues his nature, he muses, it is bound to end in tragedy. History and custom produce a "second nature" in humans that renders nature itself unnatural in society's eyes. From this point of view Jūemon's delinquency resulted from his inability to pursue his nature in the narrow society of a mountain village, where the weight of history and custom are great. The villagers' response, however, may itself have been "natural" rather than unjust or immoral.[3] I agree with most critics that these pages of bad philosophy are almost impossible to make sense of. It is important to note, however, that the segue from observation of Jūemon to reflection on the nature of society suggests a connection between the deviant body and the representation of the social.

Naturalism's treatment of the body thus leads to the question of the nature of naturalist mimesis, in which mimesis of the body and of society commingle. We encountered the question first in Zola's defense of *Thérèse Raquin* as an act of anatomy. One of Katai's best known programmatic statements on mimesis sheds further light on the place of the body in representations of the social in "The End of Jūemon". Two years after the story Katai published an essay called "Bare-Boned Description" ("Rokutsu naru byōsha") in which he attacked the older generation of writers who employed rhetorical artistry (*gikō*) in their work and advocated a stripped-down narrative style. Through bare-boned description, Katai said, the writer could unify *bunshō* with *shisō*, writing with thought, as he confronted vulgar reality directly. In his view the pursuit of bare-boned

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1 "Jūemon," p.113.

2 "Jūemon," p.116.

3 "Jūemon," pp.114-115.

description was an aspect of literary progress. [1] In its invocations of progress the essay is an act of self-legitimation vis-à-vis revered figures in the Japanese literary world such as Ozaki Kōyō, Kōda Rohan, Tsubouchi Shōyō, and Mori Ōgai, whom he names specifically. Katai's criticism of artistry in the essay, however, goes hand in hand with the critique of the fanciful imagination that we find in the theme of observation in "The End of Jūemon." Likewise the program of bare-boned description offers the promise of a transparent prose that could transmit without rhetorical impediment the acts of observation that in the story recur to the body.

The theme of observation and the use of the narrator as an eyewitness bystander in Katai's story let us see the relationship of such transparent mimesis to the body especially clearly. In "The End of Jūemon," as I said earlier, the narrative point of view actually has a physical position, the observing and describing body of the eyewitness bystander confronting the observed and described body of Jūemon. The association of the social with social problems in the late Meiji period explains why the observed body is degenerate. There are no indications in the story, however, that the observing body of the narrator is anything but perfectly normal. Just as Jūemon's deformed body marks the social problem that must be the focus of descriptions of the social, the physical normality of the narrator is a corporeal marker for the transparency of mimesis of the social to which Katai aspires. Bringing together Katai's faith in the possibility of transparent mimesis and the way that description of society in the story gravitates toward Jūemon's body, we can conclude indeed that the apparently unobstructed description and the application of criteria of normality and abnormality to human behavior in the story are inseparable: such narrative "transparency" is and must be *normative*. As a system of social mimesis, bare-boned description is predicated on the social abnormality that it finds in the degenerate body because it is through the discovery of such abnormality that it legitimates its claims to objective representation free of the impurities of rhetoric.

In the dependence of social mimesis on description of the degenerate body in "The End of Jūemon" we can see that naturalist fiction's concern with the body

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[1] Tayama Katai, "Rokotsu naru byōsha," *Tayama Katai shū*, Meiji bungaku zenshū 67 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1968), pp. 201 – 203.

emerges from practices of representing the social that are not restricted to naturalism alone and to which theories of criminality also contribute. This is why it is useful to think of the travel of naturalism in terms of the travel of a modern social imaginary that encompasses ideas of normality, deviance, objectivity in observation, mimetic writing, "society," and the body, among just a few of the features that I have been able to touch on here. Naturalist literature could not function apart from this complex of ideas. At the same time it helped to propagate these ideas and thus to reproduce the entire social imaginary.

I want to conclude with a few thoughts on the capacities and consequences of such a social imaginary. Considering the close links we find today among the social sciences and the administration of human community, we might wrongly conclude that this or any other social imaginary can achieve a hegemonic domination of our understanding of human life. Note, however, that the narrator of "The End of Jūemon" ultimately is unable to determine why Jūemon does what he does. The final passage of the story simply states that years later the narrator learned the village had been peaceful and prosperous since Jūemon's death, and the question of biological and sociological explanations for his behavior thus remains unresolved. [1] Rather than simply considering the lack of an answer to mean a failure of the narrator's theories, we should consider the possibility that the body thus construed as abnormal cannot be fully described. The grotesqueness of Jūemon's body may hinder the elaboration of a mimesis that would extend from the physiological to the psychological and then to society as a whole, in the same way that it repels the goad of ideology. If this is the case, then the social imaginary of which naturalist literature is a part can neither fully describe nor fully explain society. Such a failing would not be the consequence of any actual bodies, but of the connection within this imaginary between mimesis of the social and physical deviance, the one requiring discovery of the other in a logical imperative rather than an empirical finding. Like the deviant body, then, society would remain finally ungraspable, a kind of Kantian thing-in-itself, and this social imaginary would continually troll the depths of life in search of the object through which its mimesis could be complete.

We should also recognize, however, that the normative aspect of such

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1 "Jūemon," p.121.

explorations of the social can in fact become *transformative*. As social imaginaries emerge and take institutional root, they gain the potential to remake human life in vain efforts to compel the observed world to conform to their expectations. We should be especially aware of the transformative power of social imaginaries today, when in the United States we confront a view of the world that holds that the poor and colored indeed *are* born to crime, that cities *are* sores on the social body, that science is a source of moral decay, and that the nation is beset by religious enemies infiltrating its borders. Supposed social problems such as these, I would say, can be made reality through the certainty they exist: witness the antagonism toward the United States created by its foreign policy. The social imaginary that is on the march in the United States today is one whose travel we must resist at every step.