Hill, Christopher L. "American Naturalism's Worldly History."
CR: The New Centennial Review 20: 3 (Winter 2020): 1-22.

American Naturalism's Worldly History

Christopher L. Hill

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

THE NATURALIST FICTION THAT BEGAN TO APPEAR IN THE UNITED STATES in the 1890s was part of a transnational phenomenon that saw this amalgam of meticulous description, ideas from the emerging social sciences, dystopian plots, and rejection of common literary mores spread from France, where it took shape in the 1860s, to many parts of the world. By the 1920s, varieties of naturalist fiction had appeared in countries across Europe, North and South America, and East Asia. The connections of American literary naturalism to the far-flung phenomenon, and in particular to the French version associated with Émile Zola, once were readily acknowledged by critics and literary historians. For several decades, however, the productive emphasis on the immediate social, economic, and political context in which writers work has drawn attention away from American naturalism's transnational ties. Yet the circulation of naturalist

CR: The New Centennial Review, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2020, pp. 1–22. ISSN 1532-687X.

works and techniques around the world was as much a context for the rise of naturalism in the United States as were the growth of American cities, the rise of cultures of consumption, panic over the immigrant proletariat, and the many other factors that scholars have observed shaping naturalist texts. How can we incorporate the impact of other naturalisms on the variety that appeared in the United States, and American naturalism's place in what I will call the transnational naturalist literary field, into our understanding of the history of the form without losing the insights that the exploration of "local" contexts has given? The challenge, I want to show, is to work on multiple scales, from the local to the transnational, to reveal the constant process of adaptation and revision that characterized naturalism wherever it appeared, the United States included.

At one time, it was common to acknowledge the connections of naturalist writers in the United States to naturalist writers elsewhere—primarily but not exclusively to French ones—and to discuss the qualities of American naturalism in relation to the broader phenomenon. In 1943, Albert Salvan painstakingly detailed the introduction and impact of the work of Zola in the United States (153–83). In 1947, Malcolm Cowley wrote about the impact of Zola and the Goncourt brothers on writers such as Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser, illustrated by the "magnification of forces and minification of persons" in Norris's work (414). A year later, William Frierson and Herbert Edwards argued that the "torrent of abuse" heaped on Zola by American critics in the 1880s, which Henry James and William Dean Howells were forced to counter, actually cleared the way for Stephen Crane, Norris, and other American naturalists (1009–10). Lars Åhnebrink, in 1950, expanded the genealogy of influence to include Ibsen, Turgenev, and other European writers (34–48). In 1966, the dean of scholarship on American naturalism and realism, Donald Pizer, observed the impact of Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877) and *La Bête humaine* (*The Human Beast*, 1890) on Norris's 1899 novel *McTeague* (1966a, 53–56). For such critics, acknowledging the entanglement of American naturalism in transnational trends went hand in hand with discerning the specific way that it developed. Cowley presented American writers in the context of "the naturalists as a group" but also foregrounded particular influences on them,

such as social conditions in the late nineteenth-century United States and the background of many American naturalists in journalism (425). Salvan argued that Zola might best be seen as a "liberating agent" for Dreiser, freeing him from conventions that he chafed against (153). Pizer found Norris working out his own concept of naturalism through his engagement with Zola, including the perceptive view that Zola was an essentially romantic writer (1966b, 33–35).

In keeping with the historicist turn in literary scholarship, however, in recent decades students of American naturalism have tended to emphasize local contexts and sources. Scholarship in this vein has been rich. Cathy and Arnold Davidson found sources for the protagonist of *Sister Carrie* in the popular romances of Dreiser's day; Alan Trachtenberg traced out the myriad voices to be found in its narrative (Davidson and Davidson 1977; Trachtenberg 1991). June Howard uncovered how the form—not just content—of naturalist fiction struggled to make sense of the social questions of its time, including an obsessive fear of the proletarianization of the upper classes (Howard 1985). Mark Seltzer argued that one response to such anxieties was a thermodynamics of "the brute" to be found in Norris's early work (Seltzer 1992). Priscilla Wald showed that Dreiser shared concerns with sociologists about the danger to society posed by unmarried, wage-earning young women (Wald 2004). Gina Rossetti traced naturalist fiction's inversion of earlier positive representations of the primitive and followed the new aesthetic forward into American modernist literature (Rossetti 2006). One might say such scholarship does not simply contextualize American naturalism but also *localizes* it, by emphasizing sources and social conditions in the United States. Acknowledging that I owe a great deal intellectually to such scholarship (and personally, to some of the scholars I have mentioned), I want to observe that from the perspective of this article and this issue of *CR: The New Centennial Review*, the "localizing" trend in scholarship on naturalism in the United States has tended to neglect the connection of American writers to the broader history of naturalist fiction and their place in the transnational field. When students of American naturalism do acknowledge the connection—that Norris read Zola, for example—the tendency in recent decades is to minimize or deny

an impact. Often the arguments rely on misleading comparisons of fiction by American writers to the programmatic essays in Zola's *Le Roman experimental* (*The Experimental Novel*, 1880) rather than his literary works, which generally did not follow his abstract dictates.[1] One challenge for scholarship on American naturalism now is to explore American writers' productive engagement with naturalist writers from elsewhere without losing what has been gained through attention to sources and conditions in the United States.

Can recent theories of "world literature" help us in this task? Two paradigmatic examples illustrate some of the pitfalls. Franco Moretti's much-discussed "Conjectures on World Literature" sets out a theory of the diffusion of the Western European novel around the world beginning in the eighteenth century, the larger process that allowed naturalist fiction to flourish transnationally. In Moretti's well-known formulation, when writers in other parts of the world tried to write long-form fiction in the manner of a novel, they were forced into "compromises" to reconcile foreign plots, local characters, and local narrative voices. Even in the most successful examples, the irreconcilability of a Western European form and the social materials and literary styles available to writers elsewhere can be traced as a "faultline" between story and discourse (Moretti 2000, 65). That is, for Moretti, attempts to write novels outside Western Europe always failed to some degree. Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*, in contrast, finds writers everywhere successfully imitating Western European examples but defeating themselves in the process. In Casanova's view, writers and critics in Paris set the standard for what was new in literature for some four centuries up to the 1970s. Looking to Paris for their models, writers on the edges of the system of prestige that Casanova calls "world literary space" could only produce out-of-date facsimiles. Their efforts to show they had caught up to Paris only demonstrated their subordination. The history of naturalist fiction is one of Casanova's favored examples (2004, 87–88, 93–94, 100–101). In both Moretti's and Casanova's theories, the farther one gets from Western Europe, the more difficult it is for a writer to do something original. One can fault Moretti and Casanova for parochially privileging Western European literature, but the way their theories dismiss activity

on the literary "periphery" illustrates a common problem in world literature scholarship, a methodological inability to address both what was happening globally and what was happening locally in a transnational literary movement such as naturalism. It seems as if one is faced with a choice between scales that either localize—as much recent work on American naturalism does—or globalize—as theorists like Moretti and Casanova would have us do. I would like to briefly illustrate, however, how one might write a history of naturalist fiction in the United States that operates on multiple scales.[2]

Shortly after the naturalist approach to realist fiction emerged in France in the 1860s, through a convergence of broader currents in Western European literature and thought, it began to appear in works elsewhere. Novels by French writers served as crucial examples of a kind of fiction that could "objectively" describe, analyze, and indict individual behavior and social institutions, from early works such as Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *Germinie Lacerteux* (1864) to the 20-volume Rougon-Macquart series by Zola, whose novels *L'Assommoir*, *Nana* (1880), and *Germinal* (1885) became essential points of reference for aspiring naturalists. The history of the circulation of naturalist works and the local schools that appeared in their wake belies, however, any expectation of linear radiation from France to the world. Within Europe, naturalist techniques were eagerly adopted by writers of fiction in some areas, such as Portugal (José Maria Eça de Queirós) and Spain (Emilia Pardo Bazán, Leopoldo Alas [aka Clarín]). Here, naturalism often was identified with realism per se. In places where another version of realism already was well accepted, notably Britain and Russia, writers and critics resisted. In South America, schools appeared in Brazil (Aluísio Azevedo, Julio Ribeiro) and Argentina (Eugenio Cambaceres, Juan Antonio Argerich) in the 1880s, concurrently with naturalism's heyday in Europe and earlier than some places nearer France such as Greece, where naturalism began to appear in the 1890s (Andréas Karkavitsas, Alexandre Papadiamantis). Brazilian and Argentine writers encountered naturalism through works not only from France but also the former colonial metropoles, Portugal and Spain. In Japan, writers such as Kosugi Tengai and Tayama Katai also encountered French naturalism in

mediated form, in this case English translations that they read in the 1890s. A distinct variety of naturalism that developed in Japan over the next decade, focused on dissecting the mental lives of protagonists who frequently resembled their authors, was adopted by writers in Korea (Kim Tong-in, Yŏm Sang-sŏp) and China (Yu Dafu, Guo Moruo).[3] In addition to the variety that arrived from Japan, Korean and Chinese writers also read French naturalism in English and Japanese translations. Some critics in China, such as Mao Dun, advocated the method they found in Zola in opposition to the one that evolved in Japan under Zola's inspiration. Circulating together with works of fiction was a cluster of manifestos and programmatic essays, particularly those collected in *The Experimental Novel*. They were joined by new essays defending naturalism that frequently appeared where schools were emerging. It also was common practice for writers to signal their naturalist affiliations through prefaces, dedications, and references to scenes or characters from Zola's novels and stories. In many parts of the world, "Zolaism" was a synonym for naturalism.[4]

A number of adjacent discourses about individual and social behavior were on the move at the time naturalist methods spread around the world. The most important of such fellow travelers was a collection of theories about inherited behavioral pathologies associated with Bénédict Auguste Morel, a physician and author of *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* (*Treatise on the Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Degeneracies of the Human Species*, 1857); Cesare Lombroso, whose *L'Uomo deliquente* (*Criminal Man*, 1876) helped found the field of criminology; and Max Nordau, a physician and cultural critic best known for *Entartung* (*Degeneration*, 1892), which argued that the work of "degenerate" artists such as Zola, Richard Wagner, and Walt Whitman could create inheritable pathologies in their fans. Other examples are works on public hygiene and prostitution, race "science," and the urban poor. These cognate genres of the social contributed ideas to naturalism, to the point that some notions, such as hereditary degeneration, became embedded in literary form. They often had a mutually supportive relationship with naturalist fiction, illustrated by the fact that Zola and Lombroso cited each other (Gibson 2002, 29). The circulation of one such fellow traveler

thus aided the circulation of others. Like Zola's novels and stories, some became shared points of reference for naturalist writers.

Throughout this transnational history, one finds writers adapting naturalist techniques and motifs as they confronted a social reality different from the one in which the method was originally devised. Describing the degenerate body became a favored way of illuminating social pathologies. Where Zola's *L'Assommoir* used the body of an alcoholic laundress to describe the supposedly closed circuits of working-class society, however, the Japanese novelist Shimazaki Tōson's *Haru* (*Spring*, 1908) used the body of a neurasthenic poet to indict the "civilizing" projects of Japan's Meiji period. Novels and stories featuring another common figure, a self-liberated female protagonist connected in varying degrees to Zola's *Nana*, appeared in Finland (Ina Lange's *"Sämre folk"* or *"The Worst Sort of People,"* 1885), Croatia (Eugen Kumičić's *Olga i Lina* or *Olga and Lina*, 1882), Mexico (Federico Gamboa's *Santa*, 1903), and many other places. The plots propelled by these characters' unruly lives addressed issues well beyond the hypocrisy of sexual mores, from contradictions in the social treatment of female labor to the corruption of political classes. In another favored technique, many writers created bounded social milieus to explore the structure of social relations and their possibility for change, from the Sicilian village in Giovanni Verga's *I Malavoglia* (*The Malavoglias*, 1881) to the Puerto Rican plantation in Manuel Zeno Gandía's *La Charca* (*The Pond*, 1894) and Japanese-ruled Korea as a whole in Yŏm Sang-sŏp's *Manse chŏn* (*On the Eve of the Uprising*, 1924). Such techniques and motifs became hallmarks of naturalist fiction through repeated adaptation. In this sense, the transnational history of naturalist fiction is a history of techniques as much as works and of pirating and pillaging more than imitation.[5]

The circulation of novels and stories in the original languages and translation, and the appearance of new works in more and more parts of the world, contributed to the formation of what can fairly be called a transnational naturalist literary field.[6] Its geography could be defined at any given time through the announcements of affiliation—especially references to Zola—that were a characteristic aspect of naturalism where it emerged. The shape of the field progressively changed as writers and schools

appeared in new parts of the world while other parts dropped out. Thus, while France no longer was a source of new writers by the end of the 1880s, the transnational field continued to develop as self-described naturalists elsewhere adapted existing techniques and devised new ones. Zola's fiction and essays played a role in the field that was both structuring and legitimating, in that writers could gain advantage in their local literary scenes by invoking his work. That the field grew through adaptation and revision shows that the model offered by Zola was not simply prescriptive. The reality that most references in the field were unidirectional, however, shows that the naturalist field was not "level" or a free space of circulation in which all works had equal status. In this sense, it reflected the asymmetries of political and economic relations in the world.[7] Whereas adaptation was a source of innovation, moreover, differences in both the conditions to which writers responded and the histories of written expression that they inherited necessarily led to discrepant, sometimes irreconcilable results. The "egocentric" naturalism that developed in Japan, for example, little resembled the working-class fiction of James T. Farrell. One might say that the transnational field disappeared not when naturalism went out of style in one place or another but when writers in one part of the world would no longer have been able to recognize works from another part as naturalism.[8]

Viewed from a transnational perspective, the emergence of literary naturalism in the United States beginning in the 1890s was a further development in the naturalist literary field that changed the character of the field as a whole, as every evolution of it did. As is well known, the convergence of currents that formed American naturalism was complex. The immediate predecessor and antagonist of American naturalist writers was the realism classically associated with William Dean Howells, Henry James, and Mark Twain, itself descended from earlier work committed to documentary observation and overturning the conventions and attitudes of sentimental romances, a project one might find in the work of Rebecca Harding Davis on the one hand and John William De Forest on the other. Norris dismissed Howells's realism as "the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block," but as noted earlier, when Howells and James were forced to defend their work in the 1880s, they ended up changing critics' views of

Zola from outright rejection to wary respect (Norris 1997b, 278; Frierson and Edwards 1948, 1011–16). Their fiction and essays, then, helped open the way for naturalism. Another important element was the midwestern realism associated with Hamlin Garland, which depicted the impersonal forces grinding down farmers and townspeople. Crane described Garland and Howells as his "literary fathers" (quoted in Åhnebrink 1961, 61). Scholars now also see American naturalists drawing on mid-nineteenth-century romantic writers such as Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne, particularly in the penchant of a naturalist like Norris to create plots and characters that he described as "twisted from the ordinary" (Norris 1997c, 274; Den Tandt 1998, 42; Link 2004, 64–65). Against all the pretensions of naturalist writers to see themselves as unsentimental observers, literary historians also find elements of the popular romances of their day in naturalist monuments such as Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) (Davidson and Davidson 1977, 395).

Within this mix, the impact of Zola and French naturalism is clear. Observing the connection does not reduce American naturalism to the influence of Zola but rather shows that naturalism in the United States was part of—and contributed to—the transnational phenomenon. In the essays quoted earlier, "Zola as a Romantic Writer" (1896) and "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (1901), Norris discussed the French writer's work extensively. One also finds frequent references to Zola in Norris's fiction. A character in Norris's story "His Sister" (1896) is named for the protagonist of *L'Assommoir*, Gervaise Coupeau (Åhnebrink 1961, 112). In another gesture to Gervaise and *L'Assommoir*, the woman who cooks for the couple at the center of *McTeague* (1899) is described as a "decayed French laundress" (Norris 1997a, 111). *The Octopus* (1901) contrasts a lavish dinner party thrown by a railroad executive with an impoverished mother and daughter walking the roads of the San Joaquin Valley, in an echo of *Germinal* (Åhnebrink 1961, 295–98). Although he was less ready to acknowledge it, Crane's work reveals traces of Zola as well. He described the protagonist of *Nana* as "a real streetwalker," "honest" because she recognizes her place in a Parisian society unwilling to admit that it made her (quoted in Åhnebrink 1961, 96). One might say that the narrator of *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets*

(1893), if not Maggie herself, has such a view of the world of the Bowery. Elements of *La Débâcle* (*The Debacle*, 1892), Zola's novel about the Franco-Prussian War, can be found in Crane's Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (Åhnebrink 1961, 96, 105).

One also finds American writers commonly considered to be naturalists drawing on the constellation of ideas that accompanied naturalism on its travels. Norris titled an 1897 story in which racial degeneration dooms an Anglo-Hispanic romance "A Case for Lombroso," after the father of criminology. On his clipping of the story, he penciled in a subtitle: "A Subject for Max Nordau" (Pizer 1966a, 58). Jack London relied on popularized theories of the survival of the fittest in *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and other novels and stories. He did the same with "scientific" theories of racial hierarchy in *The Sea-Wolf* (1904).[9] Urban reportage, a journalistic genre that gained international prestige with William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), contributed to Crane's sketches of the Bowery, Dreiser's descriptions of posh and poor crowds in *Sister Carrie*, and London's narrative of living rough in impoverished London in *The People of the Abyss* (1903). The mutually supportive relationship between naturalism and its fellow travelers is famously evident in the friendship between Crane and Jacob Riis, author-photographer of *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) (Gandal 1997).

If, as I have said, many literary and intellectual currents converged in the emergence of naturalist fiction in the United States, the currents and their convergence were not identical to the combinations that contributed to the rise of naturalism elsewhere. The already-existing realisms found in the work of Howells, Garland, and other writers gave aspiring American writers such as Norris and Crane a different antagonist than those faced by Kosugi Tengai in Japan, for example, who took aim at a Confucian moral didacticism, or Azevedo in Brazil, whose obstacle was pastoral romance. While naturalist writers in the United States shared some elements of their intellectual orientation with writers in other parts of the world, moreover, they did not share them all. Like Dreiser in *The Genius* (1915), the Japanese novelist Tōson exploited the imaginative possibilities of the new medical diagnosis of neurasthenia in *Spring*; like London in *The Sea-Wolf*, the

Argentine writer Cambaceres used the discourse of race to identify supposed threats to the social order in *Sin rumbo* (*Without Direction*, 1885) and *En la sangre* (*In the Blood*, 1887) (Lutz 1991, 51–55; Hill 2020, 90; Foster 1990, 139–41). Yet contradictions in the idea of "civilization," which were at the center of Tōson's novel, were irrelevant to Dreiser. Although London sometimes shared Cambaceres's alarm over allegedly inferior immigrant races, he was not concerned with the decadence of landed classes, as Cambaceres was. Naturalist fiction in the United States contributed to the geographical extension and formal development of the naturalist literary field, but its history was not identical to the history of other parts of the field, highlighting the way the field as a whole was composed of overlapping and intersecting but distinct developments. In the history of naturalist fiction, the whole did not define the parts; rather, the parts collectively defined the whole. Yet the continuing evolution of the field, which facilitated the circulation of naturalist works and critical writing about them, clearly was a large-scale context for the rise of "local" schools.

If, as this argument implies, there was not one naturalism but there were rather many interrelated naturalisms that made up the far-flung and diverse movement, the reason is that writers both adopted and adapted naturalist methods as they confronted social conditions different from those that writers elsewhere faced. As the examples just given show, the naturalisms that emerged in different parts of the world beginning in the 1860s always were locally inflected. Writing about the work of Azevedo, the literary historian Antônio Cândido argued that in novels such as *O Cortiço* (*The Slum*, 1890), attention to conditions specific to Brazil "interfered" with literary influence from Zola. *The Slum* treats aspects of society that Zola spread across several novels of the Rougon-Macquart series and puts them in a new relationship reflecting the pattern of social differentiation in late nineteenth-century Brazil, not France. In *The Slum* one thus finds both filiation of texts and fidelity to social contexts (Cândido 1993, 124–27). One can similarly find multiple vectors of belonging in American naturalist fiction if one is willing to work on multiple scales: transnationally, to account for the circulation of texts and the evolution of the naturalist literary field, and locally, to trace responses to social, economic, and political conditions. In such an approach, the

adaptation of techniques and motifs that were in circulation was a generative process that contributed to and changed the field.

Three examples that illustrate such a process of generative adaptation in American naturalist fiction are writers' use of figurative language related to the body, self-liberated female characters, and bounded social milieus. In the broader history of naturalist fiction, many writers used metonymies and synecdoches referring to body parts or a character's body as a whole to make arguments about the relationship between individual behavior and large social forces. Detailed descriptions of the body can be found in early works of French naturalism, such as the Goncourt brothers' *Germinie Lacerteux*. Description of pathological bodies became a structuring feature of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, which was organized by a Lamarckian genealogy of inherited characteristics. In *L'Assommoir*, metonymies and synecdoches that mass around the protagonist's malformed leg, a congenital defect figuratively associated with letting oneself go, combine into an evocation of the supposedly inescapable pathologies of working-class society. As naturalist fiction circulated around the world, writers began to use the language of the body for different purposes. In the Brazilian novelist Azevedo's *O Mulato* (*The Mulatto*, 1881), the eyes of the mixed-race protagonist—large and blue, surrounded by long black lashes—become a figure for his rational view of the world and antagonistic relationship with the racist, custom-bound town of his birth. The eyes also stand in for the novel's critical perspective on Brazilian society. In the Japanese novelist Tōson's *Spring*, mentioned earlier, the decaying nerves of a poet suffering neurasthenia—considered a "disease of civilization"—become a vehicle for critique of a government and civil-society reformers intent on transforming social relations while suppressing dissent. Such new uses of the language of the body were prompted by and addressed to conditions in the societies where these writers worked. Race and racism were undeniable social realities in Brazil, to which an abolitionist positivist like Azevedo had to respond; the nerve, a new organ because nervous tissue had no role in the system of Chinese medicine dominant in Japan until the 1870s, was indissociable from the "civilizing" projects that were the target of Tōson's novel (Mérian 2013, 260, 278; Kawamura 1990, 102–5; Hill 2020, 88–96).

In *McTeague*, Norris too adapted figurative language associated with the body to examine issues in his contemporary society. The novel begins in a seemingly deterministic mode, in which the dentist McTeague's "salient" jaw, "like that of the carnivora," and his wife Trina's "adorable little chin" signal inborn proclivities. The Irish McTeague is prone to criminality and expense from impulses going back to the "third, fourth, and five hundredth generation" of his ancestors. The Swiss Trina tends toward orderliness and parsimony passed on through her "peasant blood" (Norris 1997a, 6, 20, 22, 78-–9; Dawson 1987, 35–38). Their bodies seem to prefigure the life of hoarding that Trina begins after she wins the lottery and the fatal beating that McTeague delivers when she withholds her treasure. Yet McTeague is also characterized by "mallet-like" hands formed through a childhood in a California gold-mining camp, and Trina by an unruly "tiara" of hair whose "feminine perfume" awakens the beast inside her husband (Norris 1997a, 17, 150). The hands figure the role of labor in production of money's physical signifier; the hair, the role of desire in its psychological attraction. As the couple's behavior becomes increasingly aberrant, the weight of Trina's hair tips her head back and pushes her chin forward into the "atavistic" position of McTeague's jaw. She eventually converts her windfall to gold coins she can cherish because a promissory note is too intangible. Chance disrupts the balance between labor and desire and ultimately reveals the contingent relationship between money and value as signifier and signified. The "innate" proclivities of husband and wife manifest themselves in pathologies that are very much of their here and now. Put another way, Norris introduced history, including the social construction of money, into the deterministic logic of Zola, the writer whom he so admired (Hill 2020, 80–88).

A second example of generative adaptation in American naturalism is the self-liberated female protagonist that became common in naturalist fiction after the publication of Zola's *Nana*. Nana, a prostitute and would-be actress who rises in French society, infatuates and destroys men in a world to which she is perfectly suited. A theater critic describes her as a "golden fly" spreading disease, but she may be only the vector rather than the source of the infection (Zola 2002, 224). Examined together, the "Nana

figures" that appeared after *Nana* have three consistent qualities: performance, mobility, and moral contagion. Together they formed a flexible social diagnostic that writers used to identify what they considered pathologies in their societies. In Croatia, Kumičić's *Olga and Lina*, about a half-Hungarian prostitute modeled on Nana who captivates an aristocrat, eventually killing his wife to take her place, raised the alarm about a Germanized aristocracy ready to betray the people (Gacoin-Marks 2003, 243, 247–48). In Japan, Tengai's *Hatsu sugata* (*New Year's Finery*, 1900) used the story of a young singer—also fashioned after Nana—to deflate newly invented moral traditions about marriage, labor, and sexuality (Hill 2020, 112–18). The range of issues authors addressed through Nana figures suggests that Zola's novel was an enabling rather than prescriptive example.

Viewed in this light, one can find Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* bringing the social diagnostic of the Nana figure to bear on the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The "naturally imitative" Carrie shares many qualities with Nana: she knows how to manage an audience for her benefit; she moves through cities and society with ease; her rise tracks inversely with the downfall of a man, the restaurant manager Hurstwood who tricks her into a bigamous marriage and brings her from Chicago to New York (Dreiser 1991, 79). Like Nana and other Nana figures, she is made of bits and pieces of discourse from her time, including the romance novels and reportage literature mentioned earlier but also sociological observations about the culture of consumption and new psychological theories that saw imitation and performance as key means of forming identity (Eby 1998, 2–9; Glenn 2000, 89–91). Particularly notable in Dreiser's presentation of Carrie are arguments by commentators and reformers about young working-class women, whom they considered a moral threat to society because the ability to support oneself through wage work made it possible to live outside the family home without getting married (Odem 1995, 1–3; Wald 2007, 90–91). Despite the narrator's association of the "cosmopolitan standard of virtue" with cities at the beginning of *Sister Carrie*, the problem is not that Carrie is moving to Chicago but that she can make a living there (Dreiser 1991, 1). That she begins accepting money from men seeking her favor and later finds prosperity as a crowd-pleasing actress—a path from

the first "soft, green ten-dollar bills" to the realization that "her look was something that represented the world's longing"—underscores the novel's identification of sexual labor with women's labor per se (Dreiser 1991, 48, 356). At the same time, however, Carrie's moral ambiguity reveals a contradiction in capitalist social relations, according to which self-interested economic activity—the ideal activity of liberal political economy—is a scandal when the actor is a woman. The issue does not surface in *Nana*, because Zola's heroine has a symbiotic relationship with the corrupt society in which she lives. Dreiser's creation of the more combative Carrie responded to conditions in American society, and in some ways reinforced the moral panic about independent women, but also introduced a more general issue into the naturalist literary field, the way that liberal political economy's treatment of labor in the abstract obscured its social manifestations, which always were embodied (Hill 2020, 118–25).

A third example of how naturalist writers in the United States adapted techniques shared by many different naturalisms shows how adaptation produced distinct contradictions that reflected the conditions to which writers responded. Naturalist writers frequently created little worlds, bounded milieus that modeled social relations in the larger society. In *Germinal*, Zola used the area around a fictional town in the coal basins of northern France to map relations between capital and labor as they were convulsed by a strike when miners broke out of the "closed horizon" of exploitation and resignation (Zola 1978, 221). In Zeno Gandía's *The Pond*, relations between a landowning family and one of laborers on a Puerto Rican coffee plantation staged relations between haves and have-nots in what the author called a "sick world."[10] Several of the characters are reminiscent of characters from *Germinal*, although unlike Zola's novel, *The Pond* offers little hope for change (Darbouze 1997, 39–40). The Japanese writer Tayama Katai's description of a rural district in *Inaka kyōshi* (*The Country Teacher*, 1909) reveals the economic and social unevenness of "modernization" in Meiji Japan. The protagonist's frustrations give the lie to the era's ideology of success through self-improvement (Hill 2020, 162–68). Many naturalist novels and stories set in such social microcosms rely on a common narrative strategy in

which a newcomer observes an unfamiliar world, his or her education becoming the reader's own.

London's *The Sea-Wolf* uses such a newcomer to describe a "little floating world"—a sealing ship called the *Ghost*—meant to expose the economic and social reality of capitalist societies. The ship presents a spatialized division of labor (sailors in the forecastle, hunters in steerage, and the captain and mate in the cabin) organized by "nothing but force" where life is only "a cipher in the arithmetic of commerce" (London 1982, 516, 523–24, 531). The first-person narrator, a coupon-clipper nicknamed Hump who was rescued at sea, says his experiences on the ship "opened up for me the world of the real," that is, laid bare the exploitation on which his comfortable life had depended. He discovers that the ship's economic hierarchy is also a racial one. Hump notes the "hereditary servility" of one member of a crew that serves the "superior breed" of the hunters, a superhuman Norwegian captain ruling all (London 1982, 492, 497, 603). The overlay of economic and racial order on the *Ghost* perhaps explains why the social space of the novel unexpectedly fractures. A steam-powered sealing ship arrives in the hunting grounds, while Hump and a female castaway—likewise a cultivated Anglo-Saxon—escape to a deserted island. The new ship bests the *Ghost*, which cannot compete with its Fordist rival (Papa 1999, 277). Meanwhile on the island, away from the clash between varieties of capitalism, Hump and his companion experience a racial rejuvenation that prepares them to lead the society to which they will return. Through the three milieus of the novel London zealously denaturalizes capitalism—in contrast to the more reified economic structures one finds in *Germinal*, for example—while naturalizing its social divisions in the language of Social Darwinism. The multiplication of social spaces allows the novel to avoid reconciling the two positions. London's adaptation of a common naturalist technique gave him an innovative way to present capitalism as a contingent form of economic life, yet reflected a societal unwillingness to acknowledge the role of race and racism in its history in the United States (Hill 2020, 159–60).

The examples of *McTeague*, *Sister Carrie*, and *The Sea-Wolf* show local conditions intruding into the form of naturalist fiction as it circulated

around the world and in the United States. In Cândido's phrasing, history interfered with influence. In the United States, such interference opened the naturalist novel to explore new issues such as the semiotics of money, the social status of female labor, and the historicity of capitalism. The idea that history intrudes and interferes may offer an alternative to the view that if the form and themes of American naturalism reflected its local context, it must have been disconnected from naturalism as it emerged in France (or the entire transnational phenomenon). Instead, we might see the particular way that naturalism developed in the United States as a result of the intrusion of social, economic, and political forces that differed from the forces shaping its development in Brazil, Japan, Finland, or other places in a process that both was generative and left its own aporias in literary form. In this perspective, the ways that the techniques that emerged in American naturalism (and the particular contradictions buried in its form) differed from the adaptations and contradictions found in naturalisms elsewhere reveal both American naturalism's connection to the transnational history and its contribution to it.

However brief, these discussions of how common techniques in naturalist fiction were transformed in the United States suggest that understanding the history of American naturalism does not only benefit from but also requires working on multiple scales. What I have called a "large," transnational scale allows us to see the history of the methods that writers were adapting, the paths through which they reached the United States, and how American writers' revisions of them contributed to trends that spanned oceans and continents. A more "local," smaller scale of analysis draws out the social, political, and economic conditions to which writers responded, the currents of thought most immediately shaping their work, and the literary predecessors toward whom they had to most directly take a position to establish the legitimacy of their work. The approach to the history of American naturalism that I am advocating is different from a simply comparative one—comparing Norris's *McTeague* and Tōson's *Spring*, for example—although comparison is essential to it. Comparison can teach us much about how writers in the United States used techniques common to naturalist fiction, through contrasts with how writers used them elsewhere.

Similarly, examining how writers elsewhere addressed particular social conditions can also tell us much about how writers addressed similar problems in the United States. Yet I would argue that because naturalism in the United States was one manifestation of a literary trend affecting many parts of the world, it is difficult to understand its sources and innovations without accounting for its role in the properly *transnational* history of naturalist fiction. As the broader history of naturalist fiction can inform the study of how it took shape and evolved in the United States, moreover, so too can its history in the United States inform our understanding of the continual process of adaptation that characterized the entire far-flung phenomenon. There is much to be gained by reintroducing the transnational affiliations of American naturalist fiction—once commonly acknowledged—back into the contextualizing research from which scholarship on naturalism in the United States has benefited so greatly.

There is another reason, I believe, that studying American naturalism's worldly history is essential. Understanding how expressive forms circulate, how they are transformed in the process, and the uses to which they are put in places far from where they first appeared, is one of the most pressing challenges for the humanities in our time. Confined only to fine-grained contextual analyses or generalizations about "world literature," we are hard pressed to explain, for example, how the transnational circulation of naturalist fiction contributed to the popularization of Social Darwinism and racist pseudoscience in quite different parts of the world, with lasting consequences. Solely local or large scales of analysis likewise can tell us little about the capacity of naturalist writers to expose social contradictions and ideological faultlines by using motifs and techniques that were in transnational circulation in ways they had not been used before. The present moment differs economically, politically, and technologically from the moment when naturalism rose and fell, but the methods of analysis that we can create through a transnational approach to the history of naturalist fiction in the United States may help us understand, for example, the rise around the world of populist nationalism, on the one hand, and the circulation of satiric memes on the other, that is, power and critique on the scale at which they now operate. In this sense,

late nineteenth-century travels may tell us much about twenty-first-century problems.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Bell (1993, 121–22) and Link (2004, chapter 1). My point is that Zola's essays, which resemble manifestos for naturalism as a movement, are not useful proxies for his fiction or that of other French naturalist writers. Showing that the work of American naturalists does not resemble the kind of fiction that Zola called for in *The Experimental Novel* (but never actually wrote) thus does not disprove his impact. The earlier scholarship that I have cited shows on the contrary that Zola was widely read and debated in the United States.
2. On the issue of scale, see Revel (2010) and Dimock (2006, chapter 4).
3. Japanese, Chinese, and Korean names are given in the customary order of family name followed by personal name. All of the Japanese authors mentioned in this article used pseudonyms in place of their personal names. Following custom I refer to them by their pen names after the first reference.
4. For a more extensive discussion of this history, see chapter 1 of Hill (2020).
5. On the degenerate body, self-liberated woman, and bounded milieu in naturalist fiction, see chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively, of Hill (2020).
6. On the concept of literary field, see Bourdieu (1993).
7. As Bourdieu argued, the organization of a literary fields reflects the political and economic organization of the world in which it exists. See Bourdieu (1993). On unidirectional and multidirectional citation, see Modern Girl Around the World Research Group (2008).
8. On this issue of mutual recognition, see Hill (2017).
9. While much has been written about London's views on race, I have found Reesman (2009) helpful for its perspective on the entirety of London's career.
10. *Las Crónicas de un mundo enfermo* (*Chronicles of a Sick World*) is the title of a four-novel series by Zeno Gandía that began with *The Pond*.

REFERENCES

Åhnebrink, Lars. 1961. *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction: A Study of the Works of Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, and Frank Norris with Special Reference to Some European Influences, 1891–1903*. New York: Russell and Russell. (Orig. published Upsala: A-B Lundesquistska Bokhandeln, 1950.)

Bell, Michael Davitt. 1993. *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed, trans. Richard Nice. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson, 29–73. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cândido, Antônio. 1993. *O discurso e a cidade*. São Paulo, Brazil: Livraria Duas Cidades.

Casanova, Pascale. 2004. *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cowley, Malcolm. 1947. 'Not Men': A Natural History of American Naturalism. *Kenyon Review* 9, no. 3: 414–35.

Darbouze, Gilbert. 1997. *Dégénérescence et régénérescence dans l'oeuvre d'Émile Zola et celle de Manuel Zeno Gandía: étude comparée*. New York: Peter Lang.

Davidson, Cathy N; and Arnold E. Davidson. 1977. Carrie's Sisters: The Popular Prototypes of Dreiser's Heroine. *Modern Fiction Studies* 23, no. 3: 395–407.

Dawson, Hugh J. 1987. McTeague as Ethnic Stereotype. *American Literary Realism* 20, no. 1: 34–44.

Den Tandt, Christophe. 1998. *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Dimock, Wai-Chee. 2006. *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dreiser, Theodore. 1991. *Sister Carrie*, ed. Donald Pizer. 2nd ed. New York: Norton.

Eby, Clare Virginia. 1998. *Dreiser and Veblen: Saboteurs of the Status Quo*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Foster, David W. 1990. *The Argentine Generation of 1880: Ideology and Cultural Texts*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Frierson, William C; and Herbert Edwards. 1948. The Impact of French Naturalism on American Critical Opinion 1877–1892. *PMLA* 63, no. 3: 1007–16.

Gacoin-Marks, Florence. 2003. Les débuts du naturalisme en Croatie et en Slovénie. *Cahiers Naturalistes* 77: 239–52.

Gandal, Keith. 1997. *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gibson, Mary. 2002. *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Glenn, Susan A. 2000. *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hill, Christopher L. 2017. Haven't We Met? On the Scales of Connection. *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 3, no. 2: 86–9.

———. 2020. *Figures of the World: The Naturalist Novel and Transnational Form*. Evanston, Il.: Northwestern University Press.

Howard, June. 1985. *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Kawamura, Kunimitsu. 1990. *Genshi suru kindai kūkan—meishin, byōki, zashiki rō, arui wa rekishi no kioku*. Tokyo: Seikyūsha.

Link, Eric Carl. 2004. *The Vast and Terrible Drama: American Literary Naturalism in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

London, Jack. 1982. *The Sea-Wolf*. In *Novels and Stories*, 479–771. New York: Library of America.

Lutz, Tom. 1991. *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Mérian, Jean-Yves. 2013. *Aluísio Azevedo: vida e obra (1857–1913)*, trans. Claudia Poncioni. 2nd ed. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond.

Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, et al. 2008. The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device: Collaboration, Connective Comparison, Multidirectional Citation. In *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, ed. Weinbaum, Alys Eve, 1–24. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Moretti, Franco. 2000. Conjectures on World Literature. *New Left Review* 1: 54–68.

Norris, Frank. 1997a. *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, ed. Donald Pizer. 2nd ed. New York: Norton.

———. 1997b. A Plea for Romantic Fiction. In *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, ed. Pizer, Donald, 277–80. 2nd ed. New York: Norton.

———. 1997c. Zola as a Romantic Writer. In *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, ed. Pizer, Donald, 273–74. 2nd ed. New York: Norton.

Odem, Mary E. 1995. *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Papa, James A. Jr. 1999. Canvas and Steam: Historical Conflict in Jack London's Sea-Wolf. *Midwest Quarterly* 40, no. 3: 274–84.

Pizer, Donald. 1966a. *The Novels of Frank Norris*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

———. 1966b. *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Reesman, Jeanne Campbell. 2009. *Jack London's Racial Lives: A Critical Biography*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Revel, Jacques. 2010. Multiple Narratives: Scale and Discontinuity in History. In *Unsettling History: Archiving and Narrating in Historiography*, ed. Sebastian Jobs and Alf Lüdtke, 49–61. New York: Campus Verlag.

Rossetti, Gina M. 2006. *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Salvan, Albert J. 1943. *Zola aux Etats-Unis*. Brown University Studies, no. 8. Providence, RI: Brown University.

Seltzer, Mark. 1992. *Bodies and Machines*. New York: Routledge.

Trachtenberg, Alan. 1991. Who Narrates? Dreiser's Presence in Sister Carrie. In *New Essays on Sister Carrie*, ed. Donald Pizer, 87–122. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wald, Priscilla. 2004. Dreiser's Sociological Vision. In *The Cambridge Companion to Theodore Dreiser*, ed. Leonard Cassuto and Clare Virginia Eby, 177–95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

———. 2007. *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Zola, Émile. 1964. Le Roman expérimental. In *Anthologie des préfaces de romans français du XIXe siècle*, ed. Herbert S. Gershman and Kernan B. Whitworth Jr., 257–303. Paris: Julliard, 1964.

———. Zola, Émile. 1978. *Germinal*. Paris: Gallimard.

———. Zola, Émile. 2002. *Nana*. Paris: Gallimard.

○ ○ ○

Christopher L. Hill is Associate Professor of Asian Languages and Cultures and a faculty affiliate in Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan. He is the author of *National History and the World of Nations* (Duke University Press, 2008) and *Figures of the World: Naturalist Fiction and Transnational Form* (Northwestern University Press, 2020), from which his contribution to this issue of *CR: The New Centennial Review* is drawn. He is currently writing on postwar Japanese intellectuals and decolonization.