

A MARXIST READING OF KUROSHIMA DENJI

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A MARXIST READING OF KUROSHIMA DENJI

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## ABSTRACT

### A Marxist Reading of Kuroshima Denji

Although there exist many critical studies discussing Japanese proletarian literature, Kuroshima Denji, an anti-war proletarian writer and his works, unfortunately, still have not drawn much interest from academic circles. Moreover, Kuroshima Denji has been defined more as an anti-war writer rather than a proletarian author since most proletarian authors tend to write about the relationship between workers and the capitalist class. Nonetheless, knowing about Kuroshima Denji's works will clarify and contribute to the understanding of the conditions that gave birth to the proletarian literature in Taishō or even in Meiji Japan. This thesis discusses Kuroshima Denji's stories within the scope of a Marxist literary critique, and it details a deeper understanding of his sociopolitical viewpoint mentioned in his novels.

## ÖZET

### Kuroshima Denji'nin Marksist Eleştirisi

Japon Proleter edebiyatı üzerine yazılmış çok sayıda eleştirel çalışmalar olmasına rağmen, savaş karşıtı proleter bir yazar olan Kuroshima Denji ve eserleri akademik çevrelerden pek dikkat çekmemiştir. Bunun ötesinde, Kuroshima Denji, işçi ve kapitalist sınıf arasındaki ilişkiyi yazmaya meyilli çoğu proleter yazarın aksine, daha çok savaş konusuna eğilimli olduğu için hep savaş karşıtı bir yazar olarak düşünülmüştür. Ancak, Kuroshima Denji'nin eserlerinin anlaşılması, Taishō hatta Meiji Japonyasında bu edebiyat türünün doğmasına neden olan koşulları anlamamıza yardımcı olacaktır. Bu tezde, Kuroshima eserlerinin Marksist edebiyat eleştirisi kapsamında analizi yapıp, Kuroshima'nın sosyopolitik görüşünün ortaya çıkarılması amaçlanmaktadır.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 2005, I was eligible to attend the Anatolian Teacher Training High School in Kars province, but I did not go. My grandfather did not grant me his consent to study at a school which he thought was modelled on “The Village Institutes”, a group of teacher training rural schools founded in the 1940s. He feared that I might become a communist there. Consequently, I had to choose a different school. Nevertheless, it was from this denial and fear from my grandfather that I started wondering about communism, and why communists had made such an impression on people and society. In the following years, I read various literary and scientific works dealing with socialism, the working class, and peasant life.

The Turkish left emerged at the end of the First World War. In December 1921, the People's Communist Party became legalized. This provided an opportunity for the TKP to work publicly and freely. The People's Communist Party held its first congress in August, though the TKP considered it as its second congress. The People's Communist Party was banned the next month. The Left movement in Turkey suffered from several waves of crackdowns until the 1960's and 70's, which saw a lessening of conservative control.

Nazım Hikmet, a dedicated revolutionary poet, spent many years in the Turkish prison system. The major focus of his written works laments the social injustice of Turkey, cries about the oppression of the masses, and yearns for a true revolutionary change. In the mid-1950s a brave new genre emerged in Turkish literature called the 'Village Novel'. Led by Mahmut Makal, a “Village Institute” graduate-novelist, the “Village Novel” movement reached its apogee with Yasar

Kemal's *Ince Memed* (the English title is *Memed, My Hawk*; this novel has been translated into 25 languages).

In the 1970s, the "Socialist Reality", working class movement, government coups, state pressures and student demonstrations were among the most studied and analyzed topics in Turkish literature. *High Tension* (1974) by Adalet Ağaoğlu is one of the best examples reflecting the atmosphere of this period. The September 12, 1980 military coup was a turning point in Turkish socialist literature. State repression, the end of the cold war and the withdrawal of real socialism and the painful memories associated with all these events drove authors away from these issues. Later came the generation of authors such as Latife Tekin, Nazlı Eray, Orhan Pamuk who sided more with the post-modernist side.

Entering university, I began studying Japanese Language and Literature. While reading the book of *The History of the Japanese literature* by Kato Shuichi (translated into Turkish by Oğuz Baykara), I discovered that the Japanese writers who also advocated for communism in the 1930s were pressured too to give up this ideology and belief of a classless society. Some were even excommunicated from Japanese society for their belief in communism. Thus, from this discovery, I chose to research Japanese proletarian literature.

Although the place of Marxism in today's world order is debatable, economic crises and political instability in the world still remind people about the proletarian works. In recent years, Japanese proletarian literature has begun gaining the attention of Japanese and foreign academics. According to Devrim Çetin Güven, the translator-scholar of *Kanikosen (Crab Factory Ship)*, the 2008 global, financial crisis left many Japanese jobless and homeless, creating a mass of people called the "Lost Generation". With this financial crisis, Kobayashi Takiji's *The Crab Factory Ship*

(*Kanikosen*) became a bestseller in Japan approximately 80 years after its first publication. This tendency of Japanese society makes it worth reviewing once again Japanese proletarian Literature. Kuroshima Denji is one of the world-renowned proletarian writers whose works have been translated into English and other languages.

Kuroshima Denji best represents the Japanese proletarian literature author. Kuroshima mostly wrote about peasant life and anti-war messages in many of his stories. However, the topics covered in some of his stories are more universal that can go beyond the borders of his country. For example, in the short story *Militarized Streets* people who are not from the same nation but belong to the same class align themselves together and gain class awareness. Unlike many Japanese, Kuroshima Denji is one of the earliest intellectuals who understood Japan's Asian policy in the 1930s. This policy pursued a colonialist goal equal to Western colonial ambitions. Censorship of some of Kuroshima's stories continued even after the American invasion of Japan in 1945.

It was not until the 21st-century that important works such as *Radiant Carnage: Japanese writers on the war against China* by Cipris Zeljko and *W(h)ither the Nation in Japanese Proletarian Literature? Imagining an International Proletariat* by Heather Bowen-Struyk have been carried out, detailing and highlight the Japanese proletarian literature scene. Kuroshima Denji's stories were translated into English by Zeljko Cipris, *A Flock of Swirling Crows: And Other Proletarian Writings*, in 2005. However, the fact that Kuroshima's works have not been analyzed according to the Marxist theory creates a gap in this field. If Kuroshima stories were to be analyzed with Marxist literary theory, the messages that Kuroshima sought to deliver to his own society and the world can now be fully understood. Here, by

choosing Marxist literary theory, I tried to shed light on how a Japanese author adopted and advocated Marxism, and where his works reflect this stance.

As an antimilitarist writer, Kuroshima reveals the defects and destruction of Capitalism and its militarist agenda. He scrutinizes Capitalism's political and sociological influence on people in different societies. To elaborate, I have decided to analyze his *Militarized Streets* (武装せる市街-Shikiseru Shigai) published in 1930; banned for its empathetic portrayal of Japan's enemy, the story depicts the sufferings of civilians in China after the Japanese invasion. This story reveals not only the ordeal of Chinese civilians but also the exploitation of Japanese peasants and working class who were sent to China to safeguard the financial concerns of the Japanese bourgeoisie. He deplores the attitude of Japanese petit bourgeois who tried to exploit China financially and criticizes the relationship between the exploiters and the exploited class. This depiction makes the story worthy for a Marxist analysis.

The other story that will be discussed is *The Sleigh* (橇-Sori), published in 1927. The story based mostly on the personal experiences of Kuroshima describes the dilemma of Japanese soldiers who are forced by their cruel commanders to needlessly kill Russian civilians. While these Japanese soldiers are busy fighting with the Russians, their heroic efforts are rewarded with only a handful of rice; whereas, their cruel commander indulges himself with meat and safety. This story, in terms of Marxist literary critique, reveals several realities concerning the Japanese military and their imperialist ambitions, highlighting the pressure the miserable Japanese soldiers were meant to bore and the injustice on why they were forced to participate in a war they knew nothing of.

The third work that will be analyzed is *A Flock of Circling Crows* (渦負ける鳥の群れ-Uzumakeru Tori no Mure) published in 1928. This story especially

merits attention in terms of the portrayals of empathy between the Japanese soldiers and Russian civilians. Japanese soldier Matsuki develops a deep sympathy with the starving Russian children distraught and abandon. His love for a little Russian girl depicts a sad picture of the Japanese soldiers deserted in a remote Russian village. Kushoshima's strong antimilitarism is clearly shown between the relationships and connections in this story.

The last work to be analyzed in this thesis is titled, *The Everlasting Need for Antiwar Literature*. It advocates the importance of "antiwar literature" for the proletarian class. According to Kuroshima, the antiwar literature is necessary not just during warfare and strife but also and most importantly during peace. Kuroshima argues that unless Capitalism is eradicated, humans will always be in a new arms race to prepare for the next war. This essay is worth analyzing from a Marxist perspective because it reveals the nature of Capitalism, and its close affinity with military powers.

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter will be the introduction. The second chapter discusses Marxist literary theory and its ongoing discussions among the Marxist literary critics. Several issues of form and content as well as the author as a producer of Marxist artistic production will be widely argued and scrutinized in this chapter. The next chapter will provide a descriptive history of proletarian literature in Japan. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with Japanese anarchism that emerged with the expansion of the labor movement before the Taisho period. The second part recounts the period from the first issuance of *Bungei Sensen (The Literary Front)* until the organization of NAPF (Nippona Proleta Artista Federacio) established in 1928, around the founding of the *Senki* (Battle Flag). The fourth chapter relates the Marxist critique of the literary

stories discussed above. Finally, the last chapter will conclude Kuroshimo and his importance to Japanese proletarian Literature.

## CHAPTER 2

### MARXIST LITERARY THEORY

#### 2.1 Introduction

Marxist literary criticism is rooted in the theoretical body of Marxism and the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The Marxist approach analyzes literature through the interpretation and focus of the literature's historical context within which it was published.<sup>1</sup> The Marxist approach relates literary texts to its society as well as the cultural and political context in which they exist. It considers the literary text, the writer, as well as the writer's influences.<sup>2</sup> Marxist ideologies subsequently play a significant role in 20<sup>th</sup> century literary criticism. There is hardly a topic in Marxist criticism that does not make a shadowy appearance in the works of the founders of historical materialism. They cover the material basis of cultural practices, relations between aesthetic super-structures and material history, problems associated with historical and transhistorical status of aesthetic value, relations between textual and authorial ideology, and the question of commitment in art.<sup>3</sup> Even though Karl Marx commented on some significant general statements about culture in the 1850s, it is correct to think of Marxist criticism as a twentieth-century phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

The current chapter explores the historical development of Marxist Literary Theory as well as capturing Marx and Engels' thoughts on art and literature, Marx's conception of form and content in literature, and the discussion between Marxist literature theory of art as production and the author as a producer.

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<sup>1</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Panda, "Marxist Approach to Literature: An introduction."

<sup>3</sup> Eagleton, *Marxist Literary Criticism*, 85.

<sup>4</sup> Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 82.

## 2.2 History of marxist literary theory

Marxism comes from the thinking of Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), a nineteenth century German philosopher and economist. Two of the most basic tenets of Marxism, which provide a sufficient point of departure are, firstly, it is not the consciousness of men, but their social being that determines their consciousness, and, secondly, philosophers have only interpreted the world, but the point is to change it.<sup>5</sup> The first announcement of his non-traditional way of seeing things appeared in *The German Ideology* in 1845. In this book, Marx introduced his infamous dialectical materialism, arguing that the means of production control a society's institutions and beliefs. It is through labor that the material provided by nature changes into goods for human use. Marx believed that changing the ways in which this occurs provide the guiding thread to history.<sup>6</sup> Marx then stated that history would progress towards the eventual triumph of communism.<sup>7</sup>

Marx later collaborated with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) to explain the principles of communism later defined as Marxism. After discovering they shared similar viewpoints, they expounded these points in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. In it they identified that the primary theory of the communists is the abolition of private property.<sup>8</sup> Marx and Engels believed that class struggles significantly impacted historical development. These struggles would empower workers to overcome capitalists, take control over economic production, and abolish private property by turning it over to the government for fair redistribution. The above events would eventually lead to the dissolution of class distinctions and equal

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<sup>5</sup> Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 82.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur, *Marx and Engels, The German Ideology*, 149–167.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>8</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 21.



community. The primary goal of communism was satisfaction of all the members', which saw the division of society into different, mutually hostile classes as unnecessary and intolerable.<sup>9</sup> Of the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie, the proletariat alone would be the revolutionary class. While the other classes would decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry, the proletariat would be its unique and essential product.<sup>10</sup> Marx made similar arguments regarding the importance of economic conditions to history in *Das Kapital* (1867), urging an end to the private ownership of public utilities, transportation, and means of production.<sup>11</sup>

There have been numerous variations and additions to Marx's writings in the century following. Nevertheless, Marx's ideologies still hold a firm base for the theory of economics, sociology, history, politics, and religious belief called Marxism. Although literary analysis was not Marxism's original purpose or thought, its underlying principles were applied to literature later. There are many reasons for this close interplay between Marxism and literature, including Marxism's preoccupation with the question of alienation (Mesazros 1970:190), and literature as being a suitable area for the 'ideological clarification' preceding a 'great crisis in social relations' (Lukács 1872:107).<sup>12</sup> In Russia, literature served as a means for productive critical dialogue (though often seen as a threat for not aligning with the ruling party's ideology), and Russian literature heavily relied on the philosophical principles of Marx and Engels. Notable Marxists such as Plekhanov systematized the

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<sup>9</sup> Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (共產黨宣言), 51.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>11</sup> Marx, *Capital, Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy*, 106

<sup>12</sup> Birchall, *Marxism and Literature*, 92.

Marxist approach to literature.<sup>13</sup> However, the most crucial development was the emergence of Bolshevism in Russia, which led to the seizure of power in 1917.<sup>14</sup> The first major Marxist critic appeared outside of Russia. His name was George Lukács (1885-1971). He was responsible for what has become known as the Reflectionism theory, also known as vulgar Marxism. Reflectionism theory determines the nature of a given society, finds an in-depth insight into reality, establishing the full process of life. It has a deep-seated tendency in Marxist criticism of combatting formalist theory of literature which locked literature in the written works' own sealed space, isolating it from the context of its history.<sup>15</sup> It was in the essay collection *History and Class Consciousness* that Lukács raised the issue of totality as a central theme. He urged that we attain a point of view of totality, coupling this point of view with a particular class position, claiming that, "the unity of theory and practice is reverse that of the social and historical position of the proletariat."<sup>16</sup> The basic premise behind the Reflectionism theory is close reading advocated by formalists but now practiced for discovering how characters, and how their relationships typify and reveal class conflict, the socioeconomic system, or the politics of time and place. Lukács' totality of meaning reflects his commitment to realism. In a society torn apart by the alienations of Capitalism, Lukács attempts to draw the various differentiating tenets dialectically together into a complex totality.<sup>17</sup> His approach is formalist due to its academic and unhistorical basis, draws from the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>15</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Nir, "Lukács Today: Totality, Labor, and Fantasies of Revenge. Rethinking Marxism," 154–170.

<sup>17</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 25.

literary realm alone, and is unresponsive to the changing conditions that produce literature.<sup>18</sup>

Another key figure in the development of Marxist criticism was Louis Althusser (1918-1990), an Algerian-born French philosopher. Althusser's views were not entirely consonant with those of Lukács. Lukács viewed literature as a reflection of a society's consciousness, while Althusser asserted the opposite of Lukács that art and literature affected society and could even create a revolution and break within in society. Althusser referred to history as being a process without a subject.<sup>19</sup> Althusser agreed with the interpellation process. This process states that it is possible to manipulate the working class to accept the dominant class's ideology through various means, one means is art. One of the ways that capitalism maintains control over the working class is propaganda through the arts. Yet, not all is lost since other types of art exist apart from those of just the privileged.<sup>20</sup> Within the social formation, Althusser argues that there is a specific theoretical level of activity concerned with the production of knowledge, and this shares the general characteristics of all practices.<sup>21</sup> Hence, there is a possibility that the working class can develop their own culture and arts; thus, this proletarian culture will lead to a revolt and establish a new hegemony or power base.

Taking the writings of Marx and Engel as a whole, the analysis of literature falls into three main categories. The first category is literature as an ideology that forms an essential component of a society's superstructure and reflects significant aspects regarding the economic, social, and political structure. The second category

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>19</sup> Nir, "Lukács Today: Totality, Labor, and Fantasies of Revenge. Rethinking Marxism," 154–170.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly, *Louis Althusser and Marxist Theory*, 189–203.

<sup>21</sup> Kelly, *Louis Althusser and Marxist Theory*, 190.

is the discussions of literary realism, where there needs to be a foundation for critical judgment to occur. Finally, the last category is writing that grasp literature as a historical and creative activity requiring genetic and dialectic analysis. Some of the principles of Marxism and the approach to literary criticism it has generated include economic power, materialism versus spirituality, class conflict, art, literature, and ideologies, as mentioned in the brief historical review. The next section discusses the most critical ideas about artistic work from Marx and Engels.

### 2.3 Mark and Engels' opinion on literature and art

Marxism views aesthetical works as the products of historical forces, that scholars can analyze by examining the material conditions in which these works developed. This theory generally focuses on the conflict between the dominant and repressed classes in any given period. In other words, a person must understand the assumption that literature only relates to historical and social reality in a given society.<sup>22</sup> The foundation of this Marxists' outlook is the economic system on which the superstructure rests, while cultural activities such as philosophy and literature only belong to the superstructure. Since this foundation determines the superstructure, Marx believes that it inevitably supports the ideologies of the base.<sup>23</sup>

#### 2.3.1 Literature and ideology

In the preface of his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx argued that philosophical, juridical, religious, and artistic activities by human beings reflect their social processes and specific material interests. Consequently, literature

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<sup>22</sup> Hamadi, *The Concept of Ideology in Marxist Literary Criticism*, 155.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

represents the direct expression of class interests and class struggle. The purpose of conducting a literary analysis is to unmask what the Plekhanov called the class equivalent in literature itself. According to Georgi Plekhanov, “the organization of any given society depends on the state of its productive forces,” and that “technical progress constitutes the basis of the entire development of humankind.”<sup>24</sup> In the same vein, Karl Marx argues that “... the totality of these relations of production is what constitutes the economic structure of society, which forms the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which corresponds definite forms of social consciousness.”<sup>25</sup> Marx goes on to say that it is the mode of production of material life that shapes the social, political, and intellectual life processes. Consequently, it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but the society imposes on them its ordered existence.<sup>26</sup>

In this formulation, literature becomes ideology itself, and Marx analyzed various texts using this perspective. Examples include his discussion of the French petty-bourgeois poets of 1848, whose art defended private property and the capitalist state, together with his trenchant remarks on Eugene Sue’s *Les Mysteres de Paris*.<sup>27</sup> These examples exemplify Marx’s belief that literature embodies and thus reflects class interests and ideology. Literature constitutes a representational by-product which is only useful as a document of that specific time period. While the 1859 formulation might suggest a mechanical, causal nexus of literature and society, Marx’s many other writings postulate the necessity for artistic activity to be partially autonomous. Should a writer directly transpose class interests into literature? And if so, would they transform it into ideology, thus creating bad art? Marx argued that

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<sup>24</sup> Selwyn, *Karl Marx, Class Struggle and Labor-centred Development*, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In *Marx Today*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Swingewood, *Marxist Approaches to the Study of Literature*, 131.

writers should transcend their immediate class position to promote a truthful depiction of society and man's historical, living relation.<sup>28</sup> Hence, a creative writer is one that criticizes society precisely because art opposes ideology as a form of free activity.

Writers striving after realism and authentic aesthetic values will eventually find themselves becoming critics of a bourgeois society. Yet, even if on a political level, such writers are in no way revolutionary.<sup>29</sup> For example, take into account the paradox of Balzac, which Engels drew attention to in his letter to Ms. Harkness; Balzac was a political conservative who opposed the values espoused by the French Revolution. Thus, he was in support of disrupting the social system. Nonetheless, he became a valuable ally of the revolutionary cause through his realistic depictions of French society, against his intentions for the opposite.<sup>30</sup> The Balzac paradox is a crucial component of the Marxist theory of literature, which emphasizes the transcendence of the original, narrow ideological standpoint of the authors. Nevertheless, there is a danger, shown in the example of a work of Lukács who gives the transcendence a central position. Marx and Engels agreed that one did not need to be a socialist to be a good writer. It was possible to develop literature consciously in order to wed the written work into the revolutionary practice of the proletariat.<sup>31</sup> According to Marx, it was possible for working men and women to develop their own labor culture. Marx and Engel state that "the new literature in prose and poetry coming from the lower classes in England France would prove to them that the lower

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Birchall, *Marxism and Literature*, 98.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 98.

classes of people are quite capable of rising spiritually without the blessing of the *Holy Spirit of critical criticism*.”<sup>32</sup>

### 2.3.2 On literature, and art

Marx and Engels ‘significant achievement was revealing art and literature’s social aspect, and how class contradictions, politics, and ideologies of particular classes helped influence their developments. Both Marx and Engels provided a materialist explanation concerning the origin of the aesthetic imagination. According to them, the artistic capability of human beings arises from the continued development of human society and the product of man’s labor. Marx pointed out that labor played a significant role in the development of man’s capacity to perceive beauty, and it reproduced it per the laws of beauty.’<sup>33</sup> Engels later developed this origin of the aesthetics idea in his *Dialectics of Nature*, where he notes that the effort of toil has allowed humans a high degree of perfection required to materialize art into existence.<sup>34</sup> Hence, both Marx and Engels emphasized that human beings do not have an innate sense of aesthetics. On the contrary, the concept of beauty and the creation of beauty are a socially acquired quality. They extended their view on the nature of human thought to the analysis of creativity in art. Marx and Engels noted that the content and forms of art developed and changed according to definite laws along the development of the material world and human society. Each historical period has an inherent aesthetic ideal and produces works of art specifically to that period’s characteristics and are unrepeatable under any other different conditions.<sup>35</sup> Marx noted that the content of an artist’s work, as well as the prevalence of a

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>33</sup> Marx and Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Vol 01: Marx: 1835-1843*, 277.

<sup>34</sup> Engels and Marx, *Anti-Duhring; Dialectics of Nature*, 128.

<sup>35</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 108.

particular literary or artistic genre, relied heavily on the society's level of development connection with its social structure. This reliance was the reason why art from different periods could not repeat itself.<sup>36</sup>

Marx and Engels viewed any social formation as a complex and dynamic system of interacting elements, each influencing one another. The various forms of social consciousness, including artistic creation, actively influenced the social reality from which works of art emerged. However, this social consciousness does not suggest that the uniqueness of these social structures lose their significance once they disappear as human history progresses. It is what gives art the distinctive feature of seemingly relative independence. Marx uses Greek art and epic poetry to illustrate this point. He explains these forms of art still provide aesthetic pleasure, and are in certain aspects, regarded as the Western standard and unattainable ideal.<sup>37</sup> Hence, it leads the reader to perceive that artwork and epic poetry created within the social-material condition transcend the given social-material existence of its time period. Thus, art can cross-culturally communicate and influence human life within different times and places.<sup>38</sup> As much as art reflects the particular social conditions and relationships in a social sphere at a given time and place. With this understanding, it is imperative to discern the exact features which make an artwork last and persistent in value.

Both Marx and Engels believed that literature should develop genetically. According to them, literature is a social and collective product that bears a dialectical, contradictory relationship with the individual author, ideology, and social

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<sup>36</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German ideology*, 150.

<sup>37</sup> Chung, *Church and Ethical Responsibility in the Midst of World Economy: Greed, Dominion, and Justice*, 113.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.



structure.<sup>39</sup> When writing of ancient Greek society, Marx posed the question of how an economically backward society could produce such impeccable art. Marx argued that art reflected the widely accepted Greek superstructure of myth. The Greeks used their religious system to influence their art, which reflected their economic and social structure.<sup>40</sup> Art bears no direct relationship with the general development of society nor with the material base or the skeleton structure of its organization. The idea that Marx wishes to highlight here is that society is comprised of a totality of different levels: economic, political, cultural, and others which develop unevenly, thus generating contradiction both between themselves and society as a whole.<sup>41</sup> Writers, artists, and creators enjoy and involve themselves most deeply in the cultural level of society. Hence, the relation of literature to society must be dialectical, and authors, in Marx's view, should pose it as such.

Another feature of art was its periods of revival and progress do not automatically correspond to progress and upsurge in other fields, including material production, in turn, illustrating the complexity of real relations. In Marx's 1859 formulation, he observed a distinction between analyzing the economic conditions of production, determinable through the precision of natural science, and the analysis of ideological forms for which methods were less precise.<sup>42</sup> In 1857, he noted "... as [it] regards [to] art, it is well known that some of its peaks by no means correspond to the general development of society, nor do they, therefore, to the material substructure, the skeleton as it were of its organization."<sup>43</sup> Engels possessed a similar opinion of this lack of correspondence; where he shows that the "economic basis" of

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<sup>39</sup> Swingewood, *Marxist Approaches to the Study of Literature*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Swingewood, *A. Marxist Approaches to the Study of Literature*, 133.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>42</sup> Dirks, Eley and Ortner, *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, 588.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 588.

a political struggle could be dulled into unconsciousness or altogether lost sight of. Furthermore, how a legal system could be projected independently from its economic content, during professional development.<sup>44</sup> As a result, the imbalance between the development of art and society depends not only on the level of development of material production but also on the character of social relations peculiar to that period. Factors such as the specific character of social relations, the degree of development of class antagonisms, and the existence of specific conditions for the development of man's individuality all influence the nature and development of that historical period's art.

The imbalance in a capitalist society is capitalism's fundamental contradiction, which is the one between the social nature of production and the private form of appropriation. There is an often-cited passage in *Theories of Surplus Value*, where Marx asserts that capitalist production is hostile to some forms of spiritual production, such as art and poetry. Spiritual production, in this case, refers to the 'spirit' of the times where material production leads to a specific structure of society and a specific relation of men towards nature.<sup>45</sup> It is worth noting that Marx's assertions does not imply that capitalist/material production are antithetical to each other. Instead, they are closely linked to each other, and that capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of artistic production like art and poetry.<sup>46</sup> The point that Marx wishes to assert is that even though art is possible within a capitalist system, the exploitation that exists within it hinders and restricts the humanist ideal, ideals that inspire authors and artists. Most conscious artists are of the contradiction between these ideals and their capitalist reality, often protesting against the

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<sup>44</sup> Dirks, Eley and Ortner, *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, 595

<sup>45</sup> Kristensen, *Marx at the Movies: Revisiting History, Theory and Practice*, 209.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

inhumanity of the capitalist system. Marx and Engels depict the capitalist reality as one filled with tragic collisions. In the same way the raising social productivity of labor happens at the cost of the individual, so does the capitalist reality, which becomes a means of domination and exploitation of artists.<sup>47</sup> The above scenario constitutes the dialectical feature of art development.

Marx and Engels believed art was critical to their vision of the ideological class struggle. Art contained the power to reinforce or undermine the power of the exploiters. It could serve to defend class oppression or contribute to the education and development of the consciousness of the working class, in turn bringing them closer to victory over their oppressors. As noted earlier, Marx observed a distinction between material transformation of the economic conditions of production and the ideological forms consisting of the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophical aspects of society.<sup>48</sup> These ideological forms facilitate human beings to become conscious of the conflict between the classes struggles and may help them overcome the strife.<sup>49</sup> Hence, Marx and Engels called for a clear distinction between progressive and reactionary phenomena in the feudal and bourgeois culture. They put forward the principle of the Party approach to art, evaluating the artwork from a revolutionary class perspective. Marx and Engels contended that artistic creations are one way to reflect reality and, at the same time, perceive and apprehend it. Additionally, art is one of the strongest levers influencing spiritual development for humanity. Their approach to art forms the basis of the materialist understanding of its social importance and role in societal progression.

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<sup>47</sup> Gray, *The Tragedy of Marx and Justice: A Critique of Marx's Failed Attempt to Dispense with Principles of Justice*, 124.

<sup>48</sup> Dirks, Eley, and Ortner, *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, 588.

<sup>49</sup> Birchall, *Marxism and Literature*, 94.

When examining literature, Marx and Engels' concentration was mainly on the problem of realism. They both considered realism, as a literature movement and a method of artistic creation, to be a significant milestone in the world of art.

According to Engels, realism implies the accurate reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.<sup>50</sup> Not only should writers and artists employ dramatized situations, but they should also create and select typical characters. The typicality of situations is Engels definition of realistic writing.<sup>51</sup> Typicality, in this case, refers to the artist penetrating the very essence of the phenomenon, which makes it possible to disclose typical traits of a historical age. Karl Marx also emphasizes typicality as much as Engels but warns against the tendency to treat characters as the embodiment of history without a personality of their own.<sup>52</sup> This aspect is what Marx and Engels valued in the works of great realist writers such as Cervantes, Goethe, Balzac, Pushkin, Shakespeare, etc. These writers, in Marx and Engels' view, had succeeded in exemplifying the most characteristic marks of a past historical period. Additionally, they tried to find, above all, the literary reflection of social reality (content discussed later in the chapter). All of this explains their attitude towards realism as a method in which phenomenon and essence express the dialectical unity of object and subject.<sup>53</sup>

Marx and Engels discussed "typicality" in their Marxist literary criticism. In a letter to Lassalle, Engels remarked that a true character must exhibit both typicality and individuality. Both Engels and Marx agreed that this was a successfully achieved by authors like Shakespeare and Balzac.<sup>54</sup> Typical, or representative, characters

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<sup>50</sup> Chen and Ji, *Marxism and 20th-Century English-Canadian Novels: A New Approach to Social Realism*, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>53</sup> Köpeczi, *A Marxist View of Form in Literature*, 356.

<sup>54</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 27.

incarnate historical forces without ceasing to be richly individualized.<sup>55</sup> Relative to the argument regarding characters having their own life, Karl Marx criticized F. Lassalle's verse-drama "Franz von Sickingen" because he thought that it lacked a Shakespearean realism that would have prevented the drama's characters from being "mere mouthpieces of the spirit of the times."<sup>56</sup> The Marxist concept underscores the qualitative aspect (progressive or rising, emergent) of characters and circumstances as well as their intimate interrelations. The requirements of the artist include a truthful depiction, concrete historical approach to the events described, and characters that have individual traits that reflect typical aspects of the personas and psychology milieu in which they belong. The author of accurate realistic depiction uses their expressiveness to communicate through vivid imagery to impact the reader's consciousness and feelings. Marx and Engels believed that progressive literature had to reflect the deep-seated, vital process of the day truthfully, promulgate progressive ideas, and defend the interest of the progressive forces in society.

#### 2.4 Karl Marx: Form and content in literature

Marx and Engels strove to analyze and undercover the economic structure underlying society, but not only the economic structure but also, Marx repeatedly focused on the arts and culture, directly or indirectly. While working on *Capital*, Marx, "was interested in categories and forms bordering on the aesthetic because of their analogy to the contradictory vicissitudes of the categories of the capitalist

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 16.

economy.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Marx’s history of forms contains a logic of development that parallels that of aesthetic forms. Jameson emphasizes that:

[...] [W]hat is most striking about the distinction between form and content is that despite the enormous range of phenomena to which it applies, the concept is primarily aesthetic in origin, for it was evolved from Hegel’s studies in theology and the history of philosophy, not to speak of art itself, or in other words from materials which belong to the superstructure.<sup>58</sup>

Form and content continued to be two of the most critical topics in Marxism literary and art criticism. The Marxist concept of form is by and primarily based on man’s relationship to his society as well as his society’s history.<sup>59</sup> When speaking of dualities, such as the one between form and content, within a Marxist context one must remember that the grounds for Marx’s materialistic dialectics is in historical reality, together with its contradictions and contrasts.<sup>60</sup> Hence, the first thing to consider is perhaps discussing the categories of form and content is there being a dialectical unity rather than regarding them as being two isolated extremes. Marxist criticism altogether opposes all kinds of literary formalism.<sup>61</sup> Marx believed that literature should reveal a unity of form and content while being suspicious of overly formalistic and technical writing. The reason for this requirement was that mere stylistic observances pervert content, which finally imprints vulgarity of the literary forms.<sup>62</sup> Marx shows a dialectical grasp of the relations between form and content. Form is an offshoot of content, but the relationship between the two is a double-edged one. His early comment in *Rheinische Zeitung* about oppressively formalistic law is that form is of no value unless it is the form of its content could equally apply to his aesthetic views. Marx and Engels derived their aesthetic views from Hegel’s

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<sup>57</sup> Lifshits, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, 96.

<sup>58</sup> Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, 328.

<sup>59</sup> Mishra, *A Study of Form and Content*, 159.

<sup>60</sup> Lifshits, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, 74.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>62</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 27.

*Aesthetics*. It was Engels that directed the neo-Kantian Konrad Schmidt to this work through the following words, “If you want to relax your mind, read the ‘Aesthetics.’ You will be staggered if you get to the bottom of it.”<sup>63</sup> Though this comment does not naturally mean that Marx and Engels thoroughly approved of the idealistic principles of Hegel’s aesthetic conception.

While Marx was working on the first volume of *Capital*, there was a request asking him to write a one-page article concerning aesthetics for the *New American Encyclopedia*. Marx did not end up writing the article because he found the one-page limit “ludicrous,” but submitted several comprehensive quotations from various authors on aesthetics. One of his quotes was from Vischer, who had quoted Schiller. The quote is relevant in terms of Marx’s view on the distinction between subjective and objective. Many of the excerpts from Vischer deal with the problem of the interrelation between the nature of things and their aesthetic significance.<sup>64</sup> The latter is by no means the quality inherent in things. In substance, there does not exist the concept of beauty as people know it. As Marx would have it, “the beautiful exists only for consciousness.”<sup>65</sup> Beauty is only necessary to help the spectator or audience merge with it. Hence, it is a property of man even though it seems to be a property of things. However, it does not mean that the “aesthetic” is purely subjective. According to Vischer, “Beauty is simultaneously an object and a subjective state. It is at once form, when we judge it, and life when we feel it. It is at once our state of being and our creation.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Köpeczi, *A Marxist View of Form in Literature*, 355.

<sup>64</sup> Lifshits, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, 96.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 96.

In the quoted text below, *life* is a member of the set composed of the synonym of the term “content.” Marx’s observation on the nature of art and aesthetic experience, according to Morawski, was that he:

[...] [R]egarded both the subject and the object constituting an aesthetic field as somehow complete and harmonious structures; at the moment of the experiencing of artistic values, each evinces a relative autonomy in respect to other human functions and the larger setting; so that subject and object together momentarily constitute a "rival world" to that in which we live.<sup>67</sup>

As to the form and content of the “object,” Marx holds that form is “the ensemble of artistic means or the requisite harmonious organization of elements within a total aesthetic structure.”<sup>68</sup> A letter from Engels to Mehring states that one had to lay the main emphasis on content.<sup>69</sup>

Marx had always been faithful to the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, who wrote that every certain content determined a form suitable to it in his *Philosophy of Fine Art* published in 1835.<sup>70</sup> He maintains that defective form arises from the defectiveness of content. Hegel believed that it was possible to write about the history of art from the varying relations between form and content. This can be done because art manifests itself in different stages in the development of the ‘World-Spirit,’ the ‘Idea’ or the ‘Absolute’; this is the content of art, which strives to embody itself in an artistic form.<sup>71</sup> During the early stages of development, the ‘World-Spirit’ can find no adequate, concrete realization. For instance, ancient sculptures reveal obstruction and overwhelming of the ‘Spirit’ by an excess of sensual material, which it is unable to mold to its purposes. On the other hand, Greek classical art achieves a harmonious unity between form and content, the spiritual and

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<sup>67</sup> Morawski, *The Aesthetic Views of Marx and Engels*, 306.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>70</sup> Mishra, *A Study of Form and Content*, 159.

<sup>71</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 20.



the material. For the latter, 'content' briefly finds its entirely appropriate embodiment.<sup>72</sup> In the modern world, however, most typically in Romanticism, the spiritual absorbs the sensual, and content overwhelms the form. Material forms give way before the highest development of spirit, which outstrips the limited classical molds that previously contained them, just like Marx's productive forces.<sup>73</sup>

Hegelian reality is the manifestation of the world-spirit; therefore, the connection between content and form arises within an objective, idealistic system.<sup>74</sup> According to Eagleton, it would be a mistake to think that Marx adopted Hegel's aesthetic value system completely. Hegel's aesthetic is idealistic and oversimplified as well as dialectical limited causing Marx to disagree with him over several aesthetic issues.<sup>75</sup> Marx and Engels considered the subject as a reflexive of objective reality and existing independent of our consciousness. As a result, they stressed the inevitable primacy of content against form while insisting on the dialectical unity between the two.<sup>76</sup> Both Marx and Hegel agreed that form is no mere coincidence on the part of the individual artist. Forms historically result from the kinds of content they must embody. Form tends to change, transform, and break down with time-to-time changes in the 'content.'<sup>77</sup> Content, in this sense, occurs before the form. Relative to the Marxism perspective, changes in a society's material content. Thus, its mode of production, will determine the forms of its superstructure. Historical changes will occur not because of the ideological superstructure of society but from the material realities of life or human lives.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>74</sup> Köpeczi, *A Marxist View of Form in Literature*, 356.

<sup>75</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Köpeczi, *A Marxist View of Form in Literature*, 357.

<sup>77</sup> Mishra, *A Study of Form and Content*, 159.

<sup>78</sup> Panda, *Marxist Approach to Literature: An Introduction*, 2.

Examples of formalist debates in Marxism are present in *Aesthetics and Politics*, a compilation of discussions on expressionism between Marxist thinkers after World War II. These thinkers included George Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Bloch, Theodor Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. In Brecht's intervention titled "Against George Lukács," Brecht focuses "On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism." Lukács had criticized the expressionists for being too limited in their thinking. However, Brecht denounces that criticism for being hypocritical. In his claims, Brecht states that Lukács realism is not only "... exclusively based on the form of a few bourgeois novels of the previous century ... but also exclusively on the particular genre of the novel."<sup>79</sup> According to Brecht, this is a form of formalism. If realism requires being loyal to the reality of social relations, then its definition should not assume the form used by the realist artist. Rather it should assume the content of their works. Since the artist is continuously occupied with formal matters, and continuously forms, it is imperative that one defines what they mean by formalism. Otherwise, one conveys nothing to the artist. According to Adorno et al:

If one wants to call everything that makes works of art unrealistic formalism, then –if there is to be any mutual understanding –one must not construct the concept of formalism purely aesthetic terms. On the one side is formalism, while content is on the other.<sup>80</sup>

Lifshitz also provided an explanation the connection between Marx's aesthetic and economic interests, especially within the context of the 'sublime' in what he refers to as the 'dialects of measure.' The connection between Marx's aesthetics and economic interests is apparent in the passages where he speaks of the sublime. He notes that "...those things which indicate its quantitative character (in the sublime, too, the qualitative becomes quantitative): the tendency toward endless movement,

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<sup>79</sup> Adorno, T., Benjamin, W., Bloch, E., Brecht, B., & Lukács, G. *Aesthetics and Politics*, 70.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 71.

the pursuits of the grandiose, the transcendence of all boundaries and all measure.”<sup>81</sup>  
He would also dwell on how the quantity of money became more and more the sole essential trait by human beings. It reduces everything to an abstraction – a quantitative thing. The real measure becomes “measure lessness” and “immeasurability,” or “excess and intemperance.”<sup>82</sup>

## 2.5 The author as the producer; Art as production

As much as literature may be an artefact, a product of social consciousness and a world vision, it is also an industry. Books are not just objects holding intangible meaning. Producers publish and sell books as commodities for profit.<sup>83</sup> In a capitalist society, the various components involved in art production all serve different purposes. For instance, drama is not just a collection of written pages. It is a capitalist business that employs various stakeholders such as authors, directors, actors, and stagehands to help with the production of a commodity consumed by an audience for profit. The job of literary critic is not to merely analyze texts. They are academics hired to prepare students ideologically for their functions within a capitalist society. Similarly, writers do not just transpose trans-individual mental structures. They are workers hired by various publishing houses to produce commodities that will sell.<sup>84</sup>

According to Marx, an artist is a productive laborer, depending on the economic relationship. He defines a writer in *Theories of Surplus Value* as “a productive laborer not insofar as he produces ideas, but insofar as he enriches the

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<sup>81</sup> Lifshits, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, 96.

<sup>82</sup> Lifshits, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, 97.

<sup>83</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 55.

<sup>84</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and literary criticism*, 55-56.

publisher who publishes his works, or if he is a wage-laborer for a capitalist.”<sup>85</sup>

Engels, on the other hand, held that art might be the most highly mediated of social products relative to an economic base. Nevertheless, it is also part of that economic base, as an economic practice or a type of commodity production, among many.<sup>86</sup> Several Marxist critics grasped the concept of art being a social production, a fact that closely determines the nature of art itself.

Walter Benjamin, a German Marxist critic, posed that art depends upon certain techniques of production as any other form of production. Benjamin’s main concern was what was literary works’ position within the relations of production of its time. Consequently, techniques involved in the modes of painting, publishing, theatrical presentation, among others, classify as productive forces of art, which set the stage for the development of artistic productions. They also involve a set of social relations between the artistic producer and his/her audience.<sup>87</sup> Benjamin details the association between art and production in *The Artist as a Producer*. By extending Marxist vocabulary in understanding how art relates to the world of production as well as how it informs production, Benjamin demystifies art by demonstrating the skills and practices that constitute the work of the artist.<sup>88</sup>

The development of a mode of production from a Marxist perspective will involve certain social relations. An established stage for development will occur when there is a contradiction between a productive force and the underlying productive relations.<sup>89</sup> For example, the social relations of feudalism hindered capitalism’s development. The social relations of capitalism, in turn, impeded the full

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<sup>85</sup> Draper, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution*, 491.

<sup>86</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 56.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>88</sup> McRobbie, *The Passagenwerk and the Place of Walter Benjamin in Cultural Studies: Benjamin, Cultural Studies, Marxist Theories of Art*, 151.

<sup>89</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 56.

development and proper distribution of the industrial society's wealth, which came under threat from socialism.<sup>90</sup> Benjamin asserted that the revolutionary artist must not blindly accept the existing forces of artistic production, but should instead develop and revolutionize those forces; thus, a new creation of social relations between the artist and their audience will emerge and overcome the contradiction that limits artistic forces to the private property of a few.<sup>91</sup> Such revolutionary artists are not concerned with just the art-object alone but also the means of how it is produced. Production must also have the character of a model, in that it can instruct other writers in their production and also be able to place an improved apparatus at their disposal.<sup>92</sup> The better the apparatus is, the more consumers (readers or spectators) it will attract.

Another influential figure in the Marxist literary criticism, a close friend of Benjamin, is Bertolt Brecht. Brecht is behind the creation of the experimental theatre (epic theatre) based on "illusionism." The purpose and intention of the 'epic' theatre, according to Martin Esslin, is that "the audience is to be confronted with a body of evidence from which is to derive conclusions in a critical, highly lucid state of mind. The emotions are to be involved only at a further remove."<sup>93</sup> The critical analysis of social facts, he continues, "... present[ed] in the concrete form of living pictures produces, socially useful emotions such as hatred of oppressors, active desire for the overthrow of the existing social order, or indignation at injustice."<sup>94</sup>

According to Brecht:

Telling the truth seems increasingly urgent. The Sufferings are greater, and the number of sufferers has grown. Compared with the vast sufferings of the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht (New Edition)*, 98.

<sup>93</sup> Shukla and Purohit, *Purpose and Function of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre*, 47.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 47.

masses, it seems trivial and even despicable to worry about petty difficulties and the difficulties of a small group.<sup>95</sup>

He adds that it is in the interest of the people – the broad working masses, that literature should give them truthful representations of life.<sup>96</sup>

According to Benjamin, the theatre that Brecht created was not merely to change the political content of art, but it's very productive apparatus.<sup>97</sup> Benjamin mentions Brecht's theatre in his *Understanding Brecht*, stating that his model apparatus was an excellent example of how artists can better use their artistic models to instruct and improve on the current production processes.<sup>98</sup> Brecht went back to the basic elements of theatre, confining his plays to only a podium and a platform. He dismantled the traditional naturalistic theatre and did away with plots that required a great deal of space. In doing so, Brecht managed to alter the functional relationship between stage and audience, text and production, producer and actor.<sup>99</sup> The primary objective of the epic theatre was to draw the audience's empathy to the performance using the illusion of reality. The target audience of the bourgeois theatre were mostly passive consumers of a finished, unchangeable art-object offered to them as 'real.'<sup>100</sup> The plays involved do not stimulate constructive thinking of how the artist presents characters and events or how they might have been different. The dramatic illusion is a seamless whole that conceals from the audience that it is constructed and prevents critical reflection on the mode of presentation and actions represented.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>96</sup> Willett, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, 107.

<sup>97</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 59.

<sup>98</sup> Benjamin, W. *Understanding Brecht (New Edition)*, 98.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>100</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 60.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 60.

Brecht argues that the view of reality is a changing, discontinuous process, produced by men, thus transformable by them. The purpose of the theatre is not to reflect a fixed reality, but to demonstrate the historical production of characters and actions, and illustrating how they could have been or could be different.<sup>102</sup> Based on the literature analysis by Eagleton, the play then becomes a model for the production process, which is art. It is less a reflection of than a reflection on social reality.

Eagleton states that:

The play itself is far from forming an organic unity, carrying the audience hypnotically through from beginning to end, formally uneven, interrupted, discontinuous, juxtaposing its scenes in ways that disrupt conventional expectations, and force the audience into critical speculation on the dialectical relations between the episodes. The use of different art-forms such as film, back-projection, song, choreography, also disrupts organic unity. This way, the play constrains the audience into an increased awareness of several conflicting modes of representation. These alienation effects help to alienate the audience from the performance, to prevent it from emotionally identifying with the play in a way which paralyzes its powers of critical judgment.<sup>103</sup>

Benjamin and Brecht's conceptualization of art raise an interesting issue in which both works interrelate relative to the Marxist literary theory. This issue concerns the redefinition of the author. The arguments by Benjamin and Brecht assert that the author or artist is primarily a producer. The artist and author are parallel to any other producer of a social product. These findings oppose the Romantic notion that authors are creators with a more divine purpose. The author cannot simply be a producer in the transformation of the materials already existing in the society because, as Eagleton puts it, "every writer is individually placed in society, responding to a general history from his particular standpoint, making sense of it in his concrete terms."<sup>104</sup> The author, as a subject, has his or her ideology that may be in

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<sup>102</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 61.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 7.

contradistinction to that of the society to which they belong. Marx and Engels support this idea that artists are producers in their comments on Eugène Sue in *The Holy Family*. They observed that to separate the literary work from the author as a "living historical human subject" is to "enthuse over the miracle-working power of the pen"<sup>105</sup> Although structuralists denied the text as an expression of individuality, Poststructuralism proposed that the text was the product of the author, but that his or her language was the very form of their subjectivity, structured in language, and revealed by the text used.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>106</sup> Page, *The Death of the Playwright?: Modern British Drama and Literary Theory*, 19.



## CHAPTER 3

### JAPANESE PROLETARIAN LITERATURE HISTORY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will now detail the Japanese proletarian literary history. In the book *Working-class Literature (s): Historical and International Perspectives*, John Lennon and Magnus Nilsson discuss that there has been apparent neglect of working-class (proletarian) literature in contemporary academia.<sup>107</sup> The authors note that both literary and cultural scholars now place gender and race before class in any academic discussion. Class it seems has become and is still becoming marginalized.<sup>108</sup> The neglect of class in contemporary academia is alarming since this moment in history features a growing disparity in class. Nonetheless, this marginalization of class brings forth a comparative analysis of working-class literature. However, Lennon and Nilsson do submit that although the literature lacks relevance in today's context, classical working-class literature still has value in developing knowledge and understanding regarding the literature which developed during that time.<sup>109</sup>

As a result, studying the literature of Kuroshima Denji has value in understanding the context of Japanese society during the period when the author lived and wrote. Kuroshima Denji is one of Japan's best regarded proletarian writers, remembered for his antiwar stories and fictionalized accounts of the hardscrabble lives of farmers in prewar Japan, which increases the value of a Marxist analysis of

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<sup>107</sup> Lennon and Nilsson, *Working-class Literature (s): Historical and International Perspectives*, 10

<sup>108</sup> Markels, J. *How to Stop Paying Lip-service to Class—and Why It Won't Happen*. 108.

<sup>109</sup> Lennon and Nilsson, *Working-class Literature (s): Historical and International Perspectives*, 11

his literature.<sup>110</sup> A critical analysis of Kuroshima Denji's literature takes place in the next chapter. This chapter will cover proletarian literature in general, a history of Japanese proletarian literature and the protagonist's life as a proletarian author to understand the perspective or point of view of the literature he produced.

### 3.2 Background of proletarian literature

Proletarian literature refers to literature created by, about, or for members of the working class, covering the issues faced by working-class individuals and usually conveying an anti-capitalist, pro-socialist message.<sup>111</sup> The term became popular in the 1920s and 1930s during the heyday of the proletarian arts movement, an international politico-arts movement.<sup>112</sup> Just like most modernist movements, the primary objective of the proletarian movement was redefining society's understanding of form and function by using literature and art. Additionally, the movement held that capitalism was fundamentally changing relations between people and the world. They considered class struggle as integral and necessary since they saw capitalism advocating the minority to control the majority.<sup>113</sup> Proletarian literature developed into an active participant in the development of society and the unfolding of history, thus changing the role of literature as was conceived initially.<sup>114</sup>

As a genre, proletarian literature form and solidified during the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Proletarian literature movement emerged as the cultural arm of the Bolshevik Revolution. Then, an intense debate emerged over the different

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<sup>110</sup> Rogers, "Siberia Under Snow by Kuroshima Denji: Translation and Introduction by Lawrence Rogers," 309-319

<sup>111</sup> Libretti, *Proletarian Literature: The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, 1230.

<sup>112</sup> Bowen-Struyk, "Introduction: Proletarian Arts in East Asia," 251-278

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 252.

aspects of a worker's culture under socialism.<sup>115</sup> Note well that Russia was not the only place which held a worker's organization. There were self-proclaimed proletarian organizations throughout the world during the first part of the twentieth century. However, as Michael Dennis notes, "the turning point for proletarian literature was the period between 1917-1921."<sup>116</sup> During this time, several nations contained anti-empire organizations, sentiment and, most importantly, action. These proletarian actions included revolutions (Czarist Russia and Mexico), short-lived socialist republics (Germany, Hungary, and Persia), uprisings against colonialism (Ireland, India, and China), and massive strike waves and factory occupations (Japan, Italy, Spain, Chile, Brazil, and the United States).<sup>117</sup> The "imaginative proximity of social revolution" electrified a variety of revolutionary and proletarian writers' groups."<sup>118</sup>

Three initiatives were particularly influential during this period.

- The first was the formation of Clarté in 1919 by Henri Barbusse. The goal of Clarté, as declared in the May edition of *L'Humanité* newspaper, was to form an "Internationale de la Pensée", a group of the brightest intellectuals from a variety of European nations. Some prominent pre-war writers such as Gorky, Sinclair, and Tagore were members of the Clarté. The group, termed as the first international writers' association,<sup>119</sup> would work together and combat prejudice, errors, and ignorance that separated and isolated human beings.

Their goal was a unified humanity.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Mullen, *Proletarian Literature Reconsidered*. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*.

<sup>116</sup> Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 57.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>119</sup> Bowen-Struyk, "Introduction: Proletarian Arts in East Asia," 251-278

<sup>120</sup> Arkenstone, *The Clarté Movement in Japan and Korea, 1919-1925*, 2

- The emergence of the Proletkult in Russia – a proletarian culture movement that was comprised of a loose federation of clubs, education societies, and workers’ theatres.<sup>121</sup> The Proletkult was among the first organization to theorize culture as a place of essential struggle for the proletariat. They labeled culture as the “third front” and argued that it should hold the same weight as politics and economics.<sup>122</sup> The Proletkult propagated the creation of an international proletarian culture independent of the state as a replacement to the inherited bourgeois one.<sup>123</sup> It reached its peak in the early 1920s, spawning workshops, journals, and rival groups. The idea of this group spread across the world, leading to unions of proletarian writers in the United States, China, Japan, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Korea by 1930.<sup>124</sup>
- The Baku Conference of 1920 saw the communist inheritors of European socialism shift their attention to the anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa.<sup>125</sup> The Baku Conference’s was the first entreaty to the oppressed and exploited individuals living in colonial and semi-colonial countries, significantly bolstering the communist movement. The objective was to spread the revolutionary struggle under the Marxism banner, with the help of Russian workers and the advanced countries in the world.<sup>126</sup> Stephen White says that the Baku Conference constituted a significant point in the development of the Communist International.<sup>127</sup> Understandably, the

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<sup>121</sup> Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 57

<sup>122</sup> Mally, *Culture of the Future: the Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia (Vol. 9)*, 18.

<sup>123</sup> Arkenstone, *The Clarté Movement in Japan and Korea, 1919-1925*, 175.

<sup>124</sup> Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 57.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>126</sup> Pearce, *Congress of the Peoples of the East*, 9.

<sup>127</sup> White, *Communism and the East: the Baku Congress, 1920*, 492.

proletarian literature movement had more profound impact on the national literature for colonized countries than it would in Western Europe.<sup>128</sup>

Concerning the East, there was a close relationship between class struggles in East Asia and imperialism. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, England, Germany, and the United States imperialized many parts of East Asia.<sup>129</sup> Japan's move to join the Western imperial powers posed a threat to both East Asia and Western nations. The rapid modernization and military successes by Japan partly explained why Japan had become a threat to its neighbors and the world. Moreover, Japanese imperialism disrupted the political balance between East Asian. East Asia become a place for Japan to further their imperial ambitions not a place for Asian brotherhood. Of course, resistance to Japanese imperialism did occur in Korea, Taiwan, and China. These nations received organized proletarian support from within and without. Proletarian supports from the Soviet Union and Japan assisted with the communist cause.<sup>130</sup> Antiwar and anti-imperialist projects were thus fundamental to the proletarian arts movement in East Asia. In 1921, the Clarté movement reached East Asia through the 1921 *Tane Maku Hito* (Sower) journal publication that served as the main organ in Japan for the next several years.<sup>131</sup>

### 3.3 Marxism and Japanese literature

Japanese Marxists translated and commented on foreign writing, and, they would employ Marxist methods to analyze, describe, and express the realities of Japan's past and present.<sup>132</sup> This analysis was conducted in two ways. The first, writing an

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<sup>128</sup> Denning, *Culture in The Age of Three Worlds*, 58.

<sup>129</sup> Bowen-Struyk, "Introduction: Proletarian Arts in East Asia," 252-258

<sup>130</sup> Bowen-Struyk, "Introduction: Proletarian Arts in East Asia," 252-258

<sup>131</sup> Arkenstone, *The Clarté Movement in Japan and Korea*, 3.

<sup>132</sup> Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature*, 229.

historical account of modern Japanese history as an account of the capitalistic development in Japan. The other was through self-expression by writers who had adopted the Marxist stance.<sup>133</sup>

Noro Eitaro (1900-1934) produced the first significant innovation in historiographical methods in his *History of Development of Japanese Capitalism*. Noro's methodological approach was new in three ways. Firstly, he used synchronic socio-historical concepts (mode of production, means of production, ownership, and technology) in a diachronic description of the structural changes in society.<sup>134</sup> Secondly, it introduced the possibility of comparative historical thought and allowed historians to write a specifically Japanese phenomena in a universally understandable language. Thirdly, Noro's account of Japanese history did not emphasize the great, heroic men, but instead focused on the masses and ordinary people. He examined it, "... not as the fortuitousness of history but its inevitability."<sup>135</sup> Historians observed a similar approach in Hattori Shiso's works (1950-1956), and these historians also saw *Meiji Ishinshi* (A History of the Meiji Restoration, 1928), the book *Seisan Ishinshi Kenkyu* (A Study of the History of the Restoration: A Final Reckoning, 1928) by Hani Goro, and the series of treatises by the two men *Nihon Shihonshugi Hattatsushi Koza* (A Course on the History of the Development on Japanese Capitalism) holding similar ideas.<sup>136</sup>

Noro became a Communist Party member in 1930 but got involved in illegal activity, which led to his torture and death four years later. Nevertheless, the methodological issues that he, Hattori and Hani raised became a central concern of later Marxist scholars. The comprehensiveness of the Marxist historiography, or at

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 231.

least their claim to be comprehensive, allowed the Japanese people to be more aware of the relationship between literature and their socio-historical background.

According to Akutagawa Ryunosuke, "... we cannot transcend the age in which we live, nor yet can we transcend our class."<sup>137</sup> Aono Sukechi (1890-1961), a literary theorist, urged fellow writers and artists of the intelligentsia to join the "all-class movement of the proletariat" with their creative work. A prerequisite to join was the necessity of being aware of the aim of the proletarian struggle.

Another operation of Marxist historiography was to remove literature from the writing of history. Two reasons can explain why. According to Kato,

Firstly, the Marxist history contained almost nothing of human personalities and emotions - these contributed to the element of 'fortuitousness,' which it denied. Second, it was full of imperfectly absorbed abstract terms that produced a stiff and awkward style. There were of course, exceptions – Hani Goro and Yamakawa Hitoshi sometimes wrote well – but the tediousness of much Japanese Marxist writing stands in sharp contrast to Marx's mastery of German-style. In a sense, these Marxists both historicized literature and removed literature from historiography.<sup>138</sup>

The primary contribution of Marxism to Japanese literature between the world wars must be encouraging a widening in the subjects that literature treated.<sup>139</sup>

### 3.4 Japanese proletarian literature

The failure of the Taisho democracy contributed directly to the rise of right-wing mass movements and the emergence of Japanese Marxism as a coherent movement during the 1920s. The Taisho period was already ten years old, and the popular movement for universal suffrage had suffered at least three legislative defeats before founding the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) in 1922. The young Japanese socialist

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>138</sup> Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature*, 229.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 232.

movement suffered a severe blow after the execution of its leader, the anarchist Kotoku Shusui.<sup>140</sup> The incident brought forth the so-called winter period *Fuyu no Jidai* of the left-wing party. This execution and then winter period led to state repression, in turn, effectively deterring socialists from creating or engaging in political activism. The movement then virtually disappeared from the political state for the remainder of the decade.<sup>141</sup> The revival of socialism in a Marxist-Leninist model, and its crystallization in the form of the JCP occurred after World War I from the substantial moral and financial support from the Soviet Union.<sup>142</sup>

During the Bolshevik Revolution intellectuals from developing countries across the world looked to Russia as a solution to their capitalistic problems within their borders. Noted in the early discussion of this section, the Japanese transition to an industrialized capitalist nation with the help of Western imperials threatened East Asia.<sup>143</sup> The Japanese, themselves, also experienced difficulties of transitioning and rapid change of their country for many reasons. First, the development of capitalism was uneven. The industrial sector expeditiously grew while the agrarian sector remained stagnant. The periodic boom in the industrial economy skyrocketed prices causing farmers to be unable to afford the rice they grew and harvested. This imbalanced context that led to the Rice Riots in 1918.<sup>144</sup> The increase in prices and the standard of living resulted in the breakdown of traditional families. Migrant workers fled to the cities to acquire a supplementary source of income. Situations negatively worsened that these workers even had their daughters work at brothels or spinning mills to earn extra money until they were able to marry.

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<sup>140</sup> Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan*, 19.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>143</sup> Bowen-Struyk, "Introduction: Proletarian Arts in East Asia," 252-258

<sup>144</sup> Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan*, 7.



As these laborers inundated cities searching for work, they identified with and joined the marginalized masses, all begging and looking for the same type of jobs. This competition for jobs unfortunately ensured that wages would not increase proportionately with inflation rates. As the “zaibatsu” (financial cliques) accumulated significant capital at the expense of these rural laborers, social problems such as the rise of riots, protests, strikes, labor unions, and general labor-capital antagonism signaled general social unrest. Like the cartels and industrial combines of Hilferding’s Germany, the zaibatsu was a dominant feature of Japan’s capitalist economy in the Taisho period.<sup>145</sup> The most prominent employers’ association, the Japan Industrial Club (Nihon Kogyo Kurabu), firmly opposed any legislation that would grant labor unions existence or recognition.<sup>146</sup> While the majority of industrialists, especially in zaibatsu firms, consistently refused to accept unions as bargaining partners to help preserve social stability, insisting they were capable of handling labor issues without external influence, there was a prominent minority of employer’s associations and employees who did support the liberal version of imperial democracy.<sup>147</sup>

With this historical background discussed, we can look at the history of the movement of proletarian literature in Japan which is divided into three periods.

- The first is the relatively long preparatory period of the Taisho era just before the Great Kantō earthquake. In 1921, there was the anarchist movement in cooperation or contending with the Bolsheviks, which took concrete shape in the upsurge of the general labor movement.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>146</sup> Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan*, 44.

<sup>147</sup> Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*, 141.

<sup>148</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 29.

- The second period is from the first issuance of *Bungei Sensen* (The Literary Front) to the organization of NAPF (Nippona Proleta Artista Federacio) in 1928, and around the founding of *Senki* (Battle Flag).<sup>149</sup> During this period, proletarian literature underwent consolidation, becoming quite popular. The period's distinctive characteristics include theory readjustment, the inclusion of more capable writers. Consequently, proletarian literature transformed into a powerful tool that could sweep through the world of literary circles. Nevertheless, proletarian literature dealt with shortcomings like the rise of internal dissension and government pressure becoming more vehement.<sup>150</sup>
- The third period was proletarian literature's golden age and subsequently followed by its deadlock and ebb tide. First, NAPF reorganized to KOPF (Nihon Proletaria Bunka Remmei) around the time of the Manchurian incident in 1931. This lasted until the disbandment of *Sakka Domei* (The League of the Writers).<sup>151</sup> At the time, proletarian literature was still influenced literary circles, serving as the mainstream for contemporary literature.

However, the League of Writers, like other left-wing cultural associations, became highly regarded as having the character of a front organization for the Communist Party. With the political activity becoming a requirement from writers and police oppression towards the League growing stronger, the League experienced internal disruption that led most writers leaving the Party.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 29.

### 3.4.1 *Tane Maku Hito* (The Sowers)

The Taisho Era (1912-1926) was a period of economic development for Japan. Yet, it had its problems too. Civil dissonance and revolts thrived during this period.<sup>153</sup>

The driving force mainly stemmed from the middle class. The disliked capitalists aided this driving force during the first half of this period, while the second half by the working and tenant farmer classes.<sup>154</sup> It was probably the only period where participation in political movements were spontaneous, erupting from the spirit of the people. With the spread of revolutionary Russian and German ideologies after World War I, labor disputes increased and the possibility of a labor class' rights gradually attracted people's interest.<sup>155</sup> Although, labor activism had existed before during the Meiji period (1868-1912) and parts of the Taisho period, it peaked in 1897 through 1907.<sup>156</sup> The surge of Japanese intellectual life also coincided with the Taisho period. The Japanese society saw a new kind of educated elite emerge. Young intellectuals in Taisho Japan held an appreciation for the Western European liberal arts education, acknowledging these subjects valuable for individual cultivation.<sup>157</sup> The increase popularity of Western European liberal arts education was an essential development for the proletarian movement. The movement contained mostly young people mainly in their twenties, with younger writers and critics joining the movement towards its end.<sup>158</sup>

Proletarian literature in Japan, like other nations, criticized the poor working conditions of the laboring class. The message they wanted to convey was clear and

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<sup>153</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction*, 30.

<sup>154</sup> Takayoshi, "THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN JAPAN—Taishō Democracy: Its Flowering and Breakdown," 613-637.

<sup>155</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 29.

<sup>156</sup> Sorte, "Social and Political Criticism in Japanese Literature: Hayama Yoshiki's Proletarian Literature and Kenzaburo Oe's View of the Young Postwar Generation," 33-62.

<sup>157</sup> Matsumoto, *From Marxism to Japanism: A Study of Kamei Katsuichirō (1907-1967)*.

<sup>158</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 30.

exacting. This vision was enacted by inclining towards realistic narrative modes and writing stories that were both objective and straightforward.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, the beginning of proletarian literature movement is foggy. The current agreed upon opinion is that proletarian literature started with *The Sower*. This magazine was established in February 1921. Some scholars, however, trace back the experimentation of socialism with literature before the Russian Revolution. They place the origins in the first appearance of *The Modern Ideas* (Kindai Shiso) periodical by anarchist writers Sakae Osugi and Kanson Arahata in 1912.<sup>160</sup> However, Yoshinobu Hakutani does note that proletarian literature had to have proper, prepared soil for it to take root. Hence, the movements before *Tane-Maku Hito* were prototypal and cannot be defined strictly as proletarian literary movements. A prerequisite to categorize a literary work as proletarian literature was that it showed a close and obvious connection to a conscious revolutionary movement.<sup>161</sup> In that case, most scholars agree that Japanese proletarian literature truly started after the Russian Revolution.

Unlike the foggy beginnings of proletarian literature, it is easy to fix the beginnings of the self-referential intellectual discourse in 1922. It was this year that Arishima Takeo published *Sengen Hitotsu* (One Manifesto). Here, in this article, he denied the possibility that the bourgeois intelligentsia could write on behalf of the proletarian class or spur on their own class struggle.<sup>162</sup> The controversial article triggered a debate on the relationship between intellectuals and the proletariat, as

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<sup>159</sup> Sorte, "Social and Political Criticism in Japanese Literature: Hayama Yoshiki's Proletarian Literature and Kenzaburo Oe's View of the Young Postwar Generation," 33-62.

<sup>160</sup> Hakutani, *Modernity in East-West Literary Criticism: New Readings*, 196

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>162</sup> Müller, "The Debate on the Literature of Action" and Its Legacy: Ideological Struggles in 1930s Japan and the Rebirth of the Intellectual," 9-44.

well as the role of writers, creating a divide between humanists and Marxists.<sup>163</sup> In the publication, Arishima states that what attracts attention most in Japan is that the movement for “solving problems has left the hands of the so-called scholars or thinkers, and [placed it] into the hands of laborers.”<sup>164</sup> A plausible explanation for this shift in thinking was that laborers slowly began to understand that change required actions rooted in the realities of daily life. The intelligentsia, though helped to improve the life of laborers, could not contribute to it anymore.<sup>165</sup> They could not have “... lived the life of laborers, thought, or worked as laborers.”<sup>166</sup> This belief held a strong persuasive power in the literary circles during the Taisho Era, where the “I” novel-like idea was dominant.

Arishima’s entire argument attempted to apply the integrity of the Taisho manner to the emerging situation. Consequently, the problems imposed on the intellectual writers of the Showa Era were potentially present. The primary desire of the intelligentsia who participated in the proletarian literature movement was to overcome the existence of a *petit-bourgeois* and to live like a true laborer.<sup>167</sup> Nakamura continues by saying that *Sengen Hitotsu* was, in a way, a declaration of self-denial made by the intellectual class. Denial, in this case, is the reverse of the rationalization of Arishima’s existence.<sup>168</sup> When it retrocedes and undergoes thorough investigation, it reduces to the last works of Akutagawa Ryunosuke.<sup>169</sup> Akutagawa possessed many rivals in literature, and one rival were the proletarian writers who emerged into prominence in 1921 with their magazine *Tane Maku Hito*

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>164</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 31.

<sup>165</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*, 481.

<sup>166</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 31.

<sup>167</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 33.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 33.

or in English *The Sower*.<sup>170</sup> Proletarian literature developed in a “spontaneous” exclaim of emancipation, highlighting the liberalism that prevailed during the Taisho era.

The contents of *The Sower* dealt with mostly political topics. Among the original articles penned for the first issue, also considered the most notable, coming to the attention even in the Third International (Communist International),<sup>171</sup> was Komaki’s *On Shirazu no Kojiki* (Ungrateful beggars).<sup>172</sup> One of the unique features of the magazine was that it was internationally conscious. It contained several foreign authors, but also discussed international, communist issues such as<sup>173</sup> the Russian famine relief, the dispute between Gorkii and Radek concerning the execution of the Social Revolution Party in Russia, the significance of the Red Proletktuk International, or the dispute between Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse.<sup>174</sup> The magazine desired to base itself on the international feature of the proletarian movement itself and not just the personal interests of Komaki Omi. He wanted a broader perspective for the magazine.<sup>175</sup> For instance, *On Shirazu no Kojiki*, authored by Komaki Omi, was not only meant to introduce the Third International but also serve as a surrogate that introduced the Clarté movement to Japan.<sup>176</sup>

Unlike the idealistic humanism depicted during the Showa era, *Tane Maku Hito* hints of idealistic humanism.<sup>177</sup> The cover of the Tsuchizaki version of the magazine features the text, “*cahier idealistes des jeunes* (A Magazine of the Idealism

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<sup>170</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*, 576.

<sup>171</sup> Ramirez, *World Revolution vs. Socialism in One Country*.

<sup>172</sup> Arkenstone, Q. B. (2017). *The Clarté Movement in Japan and Korea, 1919-1925*, 87.

<sup>173</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*.

<sup>174</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 34.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>176</sup> Arkenstone, *The Clarté Movement in Japan and Korea, 1919-1925*, 88.

<sup>177</sup> Nakamura, M. *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 34.

of the Young People), which illustrates the ideology of the magazine. This magazine clarifies the movement led by *Take Maku Hito* and was the precursor to Japanese proletarian literature. A pioneering movement of thought for its time, the magazine was produced by a small number of members concentrating their meager abilities and efforts to a worthy cause. Its merit was the presentation of problems rather than solutions. Understandably, the literary quality was just sub-par. According to Nakamura, “Regarding the appearance of the magazine, the printing of the covers and the table of contents was always fresh and attracted the interest of the young readers, but at the same time, they regretted that the content was not always what they intended them to be.”<sup>178</sup> In addition to being a movement that introduced foreign arts and artists, it also actively attacked the bourgeois literary circles.

*Tane Maku Hito*’s disbanded after a run of only two years. With the inclusion of Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, Aono Suekichi, and Nakanishi Inosuke an ideological rigidity occurred that focused on advocating Marxism.<sup>179</sup> This inclusion of the three members signaled the end of the journal’s ideological diversity. *Tane Maku Hito*’s connection with various anarchist organizations remained strained after the Rolland-Barbusse debate. Furthermore, with the founding of the Japanese Communist Party in 1922 an influx of committed communists to the journal’s board accompanied a corresponding exodus of anarchists, and anarchist contributions to the journal made it disappear entirely in the year 1923.<sup>180</sup> The Communist Party’s establishment had exposed the fragility of the journal’s ideological unity; this would begin a process that would purify it of non-Marxist elements.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>179</sup> Arkenstone, *The Clarté Movement in Japan and Korea, 1919-1925*, 129.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

At the time of Arishima's suicide in 1923, *Tane Maku Hito* had increase division within its staff. This division focused on whether to focus on an ideological or political practice, basically idea versus action. The journal had initially prided itself on its concern for both, but the latter was becoming increasingly difficult. Many provisional vendors had threatened to stop selling it because of police harassment. The journal itself was also experiencing difficulties since its parent company, Tanemakisha,<sup>182</sup> was not only unable to create enough income due to many factors but also delay its progressive to a disaster. The journal had just opened printing office and was soon to be releasing a long-planned issue for Korea when the Great Kanto earthquake hit and destroyed the office.

National authorities like military personnel and police saw the revolutionary movement and the labor movement as a threat. Hence, they used the excuse that Koreans might take advantage of the earthquake to cause disturbance to slaughter leaders of the labor movement and the ideological movement such as Hirasawa Keishichi and Osugi Sake.<sup>183</sup> The Great Kanto earthquake and the conservative propaganda behind it put an end to liberalism's limelight in the Taisho era. It was a symbolic conclusion that *Tane Maku Hito* discontinued after publishing their new number, *Tanemaki-Zakki* (Miscellaneous Thoughts of the Sowing),<sup>184</sup> in which proletarian writers protested the slaughters executed by the police, the gendarmerie in Kameido, and other places after the Great Kantō earthquake. The magazine bridged the Taisho and Showa Eras and simultaneously disappeared at the end of the Taisho Era.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 36.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 36.



### 3.4.2 *Bungei Sensen* (The Literary Front)

In June of 1924, proletarian writers began contributing to *Bungei Sensen*, which was a sequel to the first crucial proletarian journal, *Tane Maku Hito*<sup>185</sup>. The primary objective of *Bungei Sensen* was to keep the light of the proletarian literature glowing despite the blow which socialism received from the Great Kantō earthquake. The members of the staff of *Tane Maku Hito* were the central figures of the sequel.<sup>186</sup> The journal's name, *Bungei*, indicated the main directions the journal would take, the direction of literary arts. Nonetheless, by divesting itself of any interest in or conduct of the political activity, the Clarté movement and *Tane Maku Hito* mantra of *hihan to kōdō* (criticism to action) dropped *kodo* and focused on *hihan* only. As a result, the new journal was essentially just another *Warera*, which the *Tane Maku Hito* had earlier criticized for lacking direct action.<sup>187</sup>

According to Nakamura,

[...] [T]he journal's passive attitude could have been beneficial, but, unfortunately, it lacked vitality. The journal suspended its publication temporarily after the January issue in 1925, later republishing in June of the same year. It had prepared itself for the development of the new period with the criticism of Aono Suekichi.<sup>188</sup> Despite severing all ties to the Communist Party to devote himself to literary criticism, Aono did not cease to be a communist. Aono's criticism played a critical role in the direction that Japanese proletarian literature took in connection with communism.<sup>189</sup>

Aono's criticism of *Geijutsu de Nai Geijutsu* (Inartistic Art), carried in the reissue of *Bungei Sensen*, urged the necessity of introducing the social view of literature. He argued that the existing introvert criticism that just analyzes the contents of given works could no longer meet the demand of his age, urging the necessity of extravert

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<sup>185</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*, 597.

<sup>186</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 36.

<sup>187</sup> Arkenstone, *The Clarté Movement in Japan and Korea, 1919-1925*, 133.

<sup>188</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 36.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

criticism. In this sense, Aono referred to the kind of criticism that decides the social significance of the phenomenon and existence by the regarding the given work of art as a social phenomenon and the artist as a social existence.<sup>190</sup> The term ‘society’ in this case, refers to the artist's way of thinking, the place class strife existed, and a proper life was to contribute to the emancipation of the laboring class. Aono believed that this was the only way that the literature could have worth.<sup>191</sup> The argument logically assisted in the development of the much-celebrated “theory of purpose consciousness.

Literary quality came to be the defining aspect of Japanese proletarian literature movement in terms of the work published by Aono and other intellectuals. They hoped that authentic literature written by workers with the object of implanting socialism would soon emerge. They held that even the most impeccable political philosophy could not serve as a substitute for artistic excellence.<sup>192</sup> Aono urged intelligentsia writers and artists to join the all-class movement of the proletariat through their creative work; they only had to recognize the object of the proletarian struggle.<sup>193</sup> The duty of the creator was defined directly in terms of literature’s historical role; literature finally became a part of history.<sup>194</sup>

Aono wrote:

A work of literature must appeal to the sense and emotions of human beings—the proletariat. This necessity transcends time or space in the same way that people must eat in order to live. I have indeed asked of proletarian writers that they bear ultimate goals in mind, but I am sure that I have never said that they should ignore literary principles. If I had said such a thing it would no longer be a request in the domain of literature.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>192</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*, 597.

<sup>193</sup> Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature: The Modern Years*, 231.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 599.

The debate over the consciousness of purpose (*Mokuteki Ishiki Ronso*) in 1926 was one of the debates that exhibited the conflict between Marxist factions, leading to the split between the Rogei and Purogei factions. Yamakawa critics such as Aono stood in opposition to Fukumotosits such as Nakano Shigeharu and Kaji Wataru.<sup>196</sup> In the article titled *Shizen Seicho to Mokuteki Ishiki* (Natural growth and purposeful consciousness), Aono advocated for a socialist class consciousness as a precondition for the proletarian literature movement, proposing literature that transforms art to an actor of the class struggle.<sup>197</sup> *Shizen Seicho to Mokuteki Ishiki* was brief but exerted a seminal influence by combining the proletarian literature with Marxism and establishing its leadership.

Aono distinguished between proletarian literature and the movement of proletarian literature. He argued that the former is what develops spontaneously but not quite a movement yet. It becomes the movement of proletarian literature because there is a purpose consciousness on top of its natural development. Without the presence of a purpose consciousness, then the movement cannot be possible.<sup>198</sup> Therefore, from 1925, through the following year, the “natural growth” of proletarian literature in a way attained its flowering time. During this time, some of the most excellent works of history as proletarian movement were produced. Hayama Yoshiki, Maedako Hiroichiro, Kaneko Yobun, Kuroshima Denji, Satomura Kinzo, and Hayashi Fusao, among others, were other authors who equaled Aono in the field of literary criticism, producing their individual works. This thesis focuses on Kuroshima Denji. The following section discusses the life of Kuroshima Denji as a proletarian author.

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<sup>196</sup> Müller, “The Debate on the Literature of Action and Its Legacy: Ideological Struggles in 1930s Japan and the Rebirth of the Intellectual,” 9-44.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>198</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 36.

### 3.5 Kuroshima Denji's life as a proletarian writer

Kuroshima Denji (1898-1943) took an active part in the proletarian literature movement by contributing stories and essays to proletarian magazines and had personal relationships with the principal figures in the movement. Kuroshima's birthplace was Shodo Island in the Inland Sea.<sup>199</sup> According to his own account of the village life, individuals interested in literature, especially anyone reading or writing novels, were considered a traitor. Coincidentally, the literature-hating village produced two of the greatest writers of the period. Aside from Kuroshima Denji, the other was a poet by the name Tsuboi Shigeji (1898-1975). The two were friends. Tsuboi met a girl from the neighboring village in 1917, whom he married. After her marriage to Tsuboi, she enjoyed a reputation as a novelist and a writer of Children's stories under the name Tsuboi Sakae (1900-1967).<sup>200</sup> Kuroshima Denji's *Boku no Bungakuteki Keireki*, states the following about his village:

My village was the kind of village where anyone interested in literature, especially anyone who read or write novels, was ostracized as a traitor ... The respected people were military men, officials, doctors, and successful merchants ... Poor people without money were scornfully treated and made fun of. The whole village was permeated with this atmosphere... I had not the least ambition of devoting myself to literature, but I liked it, and I read magazines on the sly, keeping this from my father.<sup>201</sup>

Unlike most other proletarian writers, Kuroshima was not a university graduate and throughout his childhood, had experienced the harsher side of life firsthand. He was the eldest of five siblings in his poor fish-farming family from Shodo Island.

Kuroshima had worked as a laborer in a soy sauce factory during his mid-teens.<sup>202</sup>

Kuroshima went to Tokyo, where he worked for a construction company, edited a

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<sup>199</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 602.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 603.

<sup>201</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 602.

<sup>202</sup> Rogers, "Siberia Under Snow," 309-319.

poultry journal and studied French. He accidentally ran into Tsuboi Shigeji, who was studying literature at Waseda University at the time, in hopes of becoming a writer.<sup>203</sup> Tsuboi persuaded Kuroshima to take the Waseda entrance examinations, even though his academic preparation was inadequate. A bright young man from another faculty took Kuroshima's place in his name and easily passed the entrance exams. However, his delight at joining the university was short-lived after receiving an order to report for the army's physical examination. In December 1919, Kuroshima was appointed as a stretcher bearer to the 10. (Himeji) Infantry Regiment.<sup>204</sup> The regiment was sent off to Siberia in 1921 as part of Japan's – and the West's military intervention against the Bolsheviks in the civil war that followed the revolution. Kuroshima returned to Japan the following year and discharged. His Siberian Duty had worsened his tuberculosis of the lungs, but his one-year experience in Siberia would have him write short antiwar stories and essays and about the villages he had known since childhood.<sup>205</sup> While recuperating from his illness at his home in Shodo Island, Kuroshima wrote several realistically grim short stories about the hardworking but little rewarded poor Japanese soldiers.<sup>206</sup>

After regaining his strength, he left for Tokyo in 1925, where for the next eight years he would establish his reputation as an essential writer of the left, taking an active part in the proletarian literature movement.<sup>207</sup> He took with him several manuscripts from home. In Tokyo, Kuroshima stayed with Tsuboi, who was instrumental in getting Kuroshima's story 'Dempo' (*The Telegram*) published in a little magazine belonging to Tsuboi and his friends.<sup>208</sup> The *Telegram* is a story that

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<sup>203</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 603.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 603.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 603

<sup>206</sup> Rogers, "Siberia under snow," 309-319

<sup>207</sup> Rogers, "Siberia under snow."

<sup>208</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 603.

effectively conveys the story of an old-fashioned village where farmers need to know their place in society. It features a farmer and his bright young boy who passes the entrance examination for middle school. However, the villagers subject the farmer to intense pressure to prevent him from sending his son to middle school. They threaten to raise his taxes, among other things, which leads him to send a telegram to his son requesting him to come home. Although the story is light, the authentic conveyance of the village's social climate is what makes the story of interest today.<sup>209</sup>

Kuroshima's next story was "Doka Nisen" (*Two Sen in Coppers*, 1926).<sup>210</sup>

The story originally appeared in the January 1926 issue of *Bungei Sensen* (Literary Front), which was an important proletarian movement journal.<sup>211</sup> The story features a little boy by the name Toji. Toji wants a top just like the one of his friends have, but he can only have a battered one, which formerly belonged to his brother. The boy reluctantly accepts it, even though he had hoped for a new one. Toji still needs a cord, and his mother gets him a short one that costs two sen less than a cord of ordinary length. The fact that Toji has a short cord humiliates him and tries desperately to stretch it while watching over an ox working a treadmill. Failing to appear for supper that night, his mother searches for the boy only to find him lying in the shed, his neck broken, and his head streaked with blood. Toji was so intent on stretching the cord, he had tied it to a post in the middle of the shed, then he stepped in the ox's path, where he got trampled on. The mother bewailed the false economy of saving the two sen that cost his son's life.<sup>212</sup> The Two-sen Copper Coin depicts a tragic incident that befalls a poor farming family.

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<sup>209</sup> Rogers, "Siberia under snow."

<sup>210</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 604

<sup>211</sup> Bourdaghs and Denji, "The Two-Sen Copper Coin."

<sup>212</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 604.

The tone and content used in the depiction evidence Kuroshima's love of Chekhov – the author Kuroshima most admired.<sup>213</sup> Also, Kuroshima describes the accidental death of a child of a destitute peasant in such a way to make the readers clearly and vividly feel the tragedy caused by poverty. In the process, he displays a technique of writing short stories like that of Kunikida Doppo.<sup>214</sup> Kunikida Doppo was among the would-be writers of the generation of the 1870s who were born in the provinces and educated at private universities in Tokyo. The style that Kunikida used was known as naturalism.<sup>215</sup> The so-called naturalist novels believed themselves to be depicting human life and character as they are – describing a “human reality.”<sup>216</sup> According to Kato,

A novel, then, was to consist of the 'truth' of 'human life' written in an 'uncomplicated' style, and from this, the young novelists evolved the new idea that the 'truth' should be a record of their daily lives. Thus, it began an age when anybody could be a novelist.<sup>217</sup>

Kuroshima attracted attention in 1927 when he published the short story *Tongun* (The Pig Herd, 1927). The story takes a satirical look at pig farmers and an exploitative landowner. Nonetheless, Kuroshima does not seem to have received the same attention that other proletarian literature authors such as Kobayashi Takiji or Tokunaga Sunao received. According to the literary historian Donald Keene, Kuroshima is a far superior writer than Tokunaga and more effective than Kobayashi in depicting rural life.<sup>218</sup> It is quite a significant assertion since Donald Keene does not find much to admire about proletarian literature. Kuroshima's personality may have worked against the exposure of his work. He once described

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<sup>213</sup> Bourdaghs and Denji, “The Two-Sen Copper Coin.”

<sup>214</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 41.

<sup>215</sup> Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature*, 158.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>217</sup> Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature*, 161.

<sup>218</sup> Rogers, “Siberia under Snow,” 309-319.

himself as “a very prickly sort,” taciturn, moody, disagreeable melancholic “with the smell of the piggery and the earth clinging to me.”<sup>219</sup>

Kuroshima Denji’s fiction focuses mostly on rural poverty and the evils of militarism. He sets his later work in Siberia during the concerted military intervention against the Bolsheviks. He wrote for the journals *Bungei Sensen* (Literary Font) and *Senki* (Battle Flag) but also took an active part in organizing the literary left. He helped establish the *Rono Geijutsuka Renmei* (The Worker-Farmer Artists League) in 1927.<sup>220</sup> Several years later, Kuroshima became a member of the central committee of the *Nihon Puroretaria Sakka Domei* (The Japan Proletarian Writers League).<sup>221</sup> Eventually, he was at the center of frequent organizational breakups and coalescing that affected the left in Japan, which also included writers. The government’s suppression of dissent, which began in the early thirties in the wake of the Manchurian Incident, signaled the beginning of the end for the organized opposition from the left.<sup>222</sup> The impact also reflected in the literary arena, as writers had to conform or remain silent. Writers on the left would receive jail time for what they wrote, or if they expressed sympathy – either real or assumed.

Kuroshima’s fortunes also declined. Kuroshima’s literary activity diminished rather abruptly after 1932. A story he had published in February of that year – *Zensho* (Forward Outpost), came under sharp criticism by Miyamoto Kenji.<sup>223</sup> The grounds for criticism were doctrinal by the young but influential Communist Party leader and self-appointed literary critic.<sup>224</sup> Miyamoto Kenji published the attack on “outdated” works of proletarian literature, singling out Kuroshima’s story for special

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Keene, “Japanese Literature and Politics in the 1930s.”

<sup>223</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 610,

<sup>224</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*.



blame.<sup>225</sup> That the attack should come from within the proletarian movement and not from the authorities was symptomatic of the internal dissensions afflicting the leftist circles – a factor that would make it easier for the government to crush them.<sup>226</sup> Although the criticism struck Kuroshima hard, he would not have withdrawn from the literary world had his health not taken a sudden turn for the worse. In 1933, Kuroshima relapsed from his tuberculosis and immediately returned home on Shodo Island. It was here that he spent his life, ill and impoverished, and was unable to continue writing in any significant way.<sup>227</sup>

Most of Kuroshima's fiction takes the form of short stories. Although, he wrote one long narrative called *Buso Seru Shigai* (Guns in the Streets), about the exploitation of China by Japan and the Western powers. The governments, however, banned it soon after publication. Publication resumed after World War II following Kuroshima's death.<sup>228</sup> The stories fall into two groups. The first describe the people in the farming communities, while the second relate his experiences in Siberia.<sup>229</sup> Using an example of *Tongun* (Herd of Pigs), the stratagem adopted by the pig farmers to evade the levy imposed by a landowner has an agreeably humorous quality. However, Kuroshima later revealed that the inspiration behind the story was Aono's essay *Shizen Seicho to Motuketi Ishiki* (Natural Growth and Awareness of Purpose), published two months earlier. It is not clear how exactly the short essay by Aono influenced Kuroshima, but since it mainly concerned the distinction between proletarian literature and the proletarian literature movement, Deene believes that it

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<sup>225</sup> Rogers, "Siberia under snow," 310.

<sup>226</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*, 7.

<sup>227</sup> Rogers, "Siberia under snow," 310.

<sup>228</sup> Rogers, "Siberia Under Snow," 310,

<sup>229</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 605,

served mainly to convince Kuroshima that he was a member of the movement and not working in isolation.<sup>230</sup>

Kuroshima's Siberian works are properly antiwar literature. He began throwing the misery experienced in real life as a social rebellion into the world of literature.<sup>231</sup> He used the element of human reality experienced during wartime to rebel against the Japanese militarism by advocating for the proletarian cultural movement. In Japan, antimilitarism gradually gained support during, and after World War I. There was also open opposition to Japan's Siberian expedition to intervene in the Russian Revolution. As the proletarian literature movement spread in the 1920s, works with an explicit class perspective presented antiwar ideas and unflattering descriptions of the military.<sup>232</sup> Kuroshima was among the contributing authors, especially with the *Buso Seru Shigai* (guns in the street). There were other similar works he wrote, revealing the hardship and suffering of soldiers in the Siberian expedition. These include *Hansen Bungaku Ron* (On Antiwar Literature, 1929), *Yuki no Shiberia* (Siberia in the Snow, 1927), *Sori* (The Sleigh, 1927), and *Uzumakeru Karasu no Mure* (A Flock of Circling Crows, 1928).

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 41,

<sup>232</sup> Ienaga, *Japan's Last War: World War II and the Japanese, 1931-1945*, 17.

## CHAPTER 4

### MARXIST ANALYSIS OF KUROSHIMA DENJI'S STORIES

#### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter two discussed Marxist aesthetical criticism. Overall, Marxism has had a significant impact on social institutions through its analyze on how some classes hegemonize the working class and control everything. The Marxist school followed a logical process of thinking defined as Material Dialectic. This ideology maintains that historical change(s) results from the material realities of the economic base of society and not from the ideological superstructure of politics, law, philosophy, or art built on that economic base.<sup>233</sup> Using a Marxist approach to analyze a society's socio-political dimensions has, in the past, helped literary critics understand both cultural and ideological influences in society. Marxist theory of literature weighs the interdependent characteristics of society as they collectively function to make the current environment's reality higher than any other factor.<sup>234</sup> This body of critical literary theory categorizes literature and art as only the manifested superstructures of a society, whose existence relies on an economic base.

According to Marxist literary analysis, Capitalism splits humanity into two primary classes comprising of the minority who owns and controls a lot of society's productive resources, and the dispossessed majority compelled to sell themselves daily for survival. Although Capitalism tends to be more dynamic and infinitely more productive than feudalism, from which it evolved, the endless quest to accumulate more wealth and expand both economically and militarily is intrinsically

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<sup>233</sup> Panda, "Marxist approach to literature: An introduction," 2.

<sup>234</sup> Duran, *A Marxist reading of Mario Vargas Llosa's "La Casa Verde", Carlos Fuentes's "La Muerte de Artemio Cruz" and Manuel Puig's "Boquitas Pintadas,"* 2.

detrimental to human equality, liberty, and happiness.<sup>235</sup> Nonetheless, its supremacy is not impenetrable; there does exist an alternative where the disinherited majority fully awaken to reclaim the earth from its usurpers and work towards creating a more humane world.<sup>236</sup>

Chapter three explored Japanese proletarian literature, leading up to the discussion of the antiwar critic Kuroshima Denji. Kuroshima Denji was one of the more prominent writers in Japanese proletarian literature even though his writings never enjoyed much fame as they were mostly classified as “peasant literature” rather than proletarian literature.<sup>237</sup> Kuroshima’s works are uniquely relevant since they discussed the problems of nationalism and imperialism in Japan. Chapter three details knowledge concerning Kuroshima Denji as a proletarian literature author developed in the previous chapter to conduct a Marxist criticism of his works: *On Antiwar Literature*, 1929, *Militarized Streets*, 1930, *The Sleigh*, 1927, and *A Flock of Circling Crows*, 1928. Since all the literature mentioned above deal with specific aspects of the Japanese culture and society, a Marxist analysis will help facilitate a more detailed understanding of the history and society portrayed in each narrative.

It is not to say that just a structuralist and purely linguistic-critical approach is enough to comprehend the context within these novels. A comprehensive historic-sociological interpretation of the literature would require studying and understanding the various elements of the language used. Nonetheless, language can still be useful, serving as one of the literary resources that Kuroshima employed in the literature to help the reader understand various aspects of the social reality he depicted in his stories.

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<sup>235</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 602.

The following below are summaries of the selected works that will help illustrate Kuroshima Denji's contribution to the socialist movement.

- *Militarized Streets* (1930) highlights the sufferings of civilians in China after the Japanese invasion. This story reveals not only the sufferings of Chinese civilians but also the exploitation of Japanese peasants and working-class who were sent to China to safeguard the financial concerns of the Japanese bourgeoisie. In the story, Kuroshima deplores the attitude of Japanese petit bourgeois, who tried to exploit China financially, criticizing the relationship between the exploiters and the exploited class.
- *The Sleigh* (1927), based on the personal experiences of Kuroshima describes the dilemmas faced by Japanese soldiers warring with the Russians. The story reveals realities about the nature of Japanese militarism and imperialism, and how these two ideologies effected the lower-class Japanese soldiers sent to war to fight for their country, without being given an enough explanation as to why they were at war.
- *A Flock of Circling Crows* (1928) focuses its attention on the contact and connection between Japanese soldiers and Russian civilians. It is one of Kuroshima's works that depict his antimilitarist sentiments during the proletarian period.
- The chapter includes a discussion of *The Everlasting Need for Antiwar Literature* to supplement the antimilitarist analysis of *A Flock of Circling Crows*. *The Everlasting Need for Antiwar Literature* explains the importance of "the anti-war literature" for the proletarian class.

According to Kuroshima, anti-war literature was needed during times of both war and peace. The underlying framework bolstering Kuroshima's texts was that

Capitalism was the cause for wars erupting between nations. Capitalism created an arms race where nations prepared themselves for the next war by amassing militarized weapons. Hence, the relevance of these antiwar texts by Kuroshima will help depict the intimate relationship between Capitalism and war-time activities.

#### 4.2 Marxist analysis of *Militarized Streets*

Kuroshima's novel *Militarized Streets* published in the 1930s followed the full-scale war between Japan and China during the Spring of 1928 in Jinan, the capital of Shandong Province. During that period, Japan had a significant interest in Jinan owing to the commercial and industrial investments made in the province. Fearing the collapse of a favored warlord in the area, Japan mobilized its troops to supposedly protect the Japanese citizens from any harm. An intense standoff eventually resulted in a clash between the Japanese and Chinese units. The Japanese troops there were desperate for reinforcements. Thus, the army fraudulently blamed the Chinese troops for massacring hundreds of Japanese residents, even though the number was no more than fourteen opium smugglers.<sup>238</sup> Japanese newspapers publicized these purported deaths with outrage and demanded army intervention. In response, the Japanese prime minister sanctioned the dispatch of an additional division in the region. The troops then launched an attack against Jinan, killing and wounding thousands of Chinese civilians. Such unjustified attacks by the Japanese armed forces deepened Chinese hatred for Japanese imperialism, igniting a popular resistance that culminated into the Chinese Revolution.<sup>239</sup> Not all Japanese, however, blindly believed the story forwarded by the Japanese army. Kuroshima Denji was

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<sup>238</sup> Galleymore, "GIs Resist War-Then... and Now," 4.

<sup>239</sup> Galleymore, "GIs Resist War-Then... and Now," 4.

among the small but energetic members of the anti-interventionist movement calling an end to Japanese militarism and for solidarity between China and Japan.

Kuroshima, who was familiar with the war, travelled to China to view the war up close and personal. His experiences and research formed the basis of his novel, *Militarized Streets*.<sup>240</sup>

When Kuroshima wrote *Militarized Streets*, he could not have foreseen the various “incidents” that brought Japan and China into war with each other. However, the atmosphere of that war-torn environment presides in his work. According to Donald Keene, Kuroshima’s novel is reminiscent of Andre Malraux’s *La Condition Humaine* (1933) but failed to make as great an impression most likely from the lack of originality in the Kuroshima’s characters.<sup>241</sup> Regardless of the lack of depth and complexity, the characters are still real in *Militarized Streets*. The odious direction of the match factory is believable, which is more than what most proletarian works of literature achieved. Other villains in the novel also conveyed a vivid impression of how the Japanese must have appeared to the Chinese during those years of warfare, hunger, and death. Kuroshima, by no means idealized the Chinese.<sup>242</sup> As a result, it is clear from the novel that Kuroshima truly believed that the Chinese were the victims, oppressed and wronged not only by the Japanese but also by the various Western Powers. Condemnation of the bourgeois rulers of Japan advocating for war is explicit in the novel as well, but the unspoken censure running through the pages of *Militarized Streets* is even more effective.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*.

#### 4.2.1 Form and content from a marxist perspective

Karl Marx believed that literature should always reveal a unity of form and content since content contributes to the form. Hence, a bad form will arise out of bad content, which Hegel asserts in his *Philosophy of Fine Art*.<sup>244</sup> The reason for including a discussion of form and content into the discussion of Kuroshima's *Militarized Streets* is that Marxist critics should always strive to achieve harmonious unity of form and content. This concept directly impacted the content published in Japanese newspapers and consequently incited the public and the prime minister to dispatch an army unit in Jinan. By manipulating the content, which is what the army reported, they influenced the form in which they communicated to the masses. Moreover, believing that all products of a culture, including literature, result from either socio-economic and ideological conditions, Marxist critics must understand the subject matter, form, and historical context in which it occurred. Kuroshima was among the Proletariat writers who considered this unity and proactively pursued research concerning the antecedents to the war, as well as the material realities experienced by those who were directly involved in it.

*Militarized Streets* offers its readers a clear narration, simple wording, and excellent plot. Kuroshima is sure to include both ideological and artistic thoughts and expression. The most striking attribute for the novel was that it provided an accurate account of events as they unfolded in Jinan. According to the novel, the objective of the Japanese army was not to protect Japanese citizens but to place all banks and factories under protection. The Japanese used Japanese people as bait and seduced the Chinese to kill in order to get the government to mobilize troops from Japan to

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<sup>244</sup> Mishra, "A Study of Form and Content," 159.



China. The historical account and the description provided in the novel coincide in this aspect.<sup>245</sup> Kuroshima described Jinan from Marxism's "grand narrative" perspective, including the description of Capitalism emerging from the industrial revolution and from Capitalism to imperialism.<sup>246</sup> Kuroshima Denji analyzed and recorded what he witnessed using a proletarian literary perspective, which implies that the novel belongs to the "heterotopias" of proletarian literature.<sup>247</sup>

Michael Foucault flirts around with the utopian tradition to emphasize the contemporary era of space (simultaneity, juxtaposition, dispersion, and distribution) and against the nineteenth-century preoccupation with history and time (themes of development, suspension, crisis, and cycle). His working hypothesis was that the space in which we live in is also a heterogeneous place.<sup>248</sup> It forms the basis for the concept of heterotopias, which are different spaces and sites that define our existence. Foucault asserts that the utopian tradition emphasizes a place removed in time, a fictional place that provides normative guidance for the future. In contrast, Foucault nominates heterotopias as being representative of real spaces.<sup>249</sup> He argues that "... Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case, these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces."<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Li and Kurumisawa, "Armed Alley: An Anti-War Novel Fraught with Both Ideological and Artistic Insights," 74.

<sup>246</sup> Li and Li. "Novel of Evil Another Interpretation of Armed Alley," 258.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>248</sup> Peters and Humes, "Educational Futures: Utopias and Heterotopias," 434.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>250</sup> Bevilacqua, "Between Utopian Image and Heterotopic Reality. Thinking/Imagining Participatory Planning (and also Hospitality) Starting from Reality," 876.

The premise of proletarian literature is to deny Capitalism according to the literature-reviewed evidence. Marxism does not deny Capitalism absolutely like proletarian culture does though. Marx and Engels, in their discussion of literary criticism, had prescribed the concept of a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>251</sup> The concept refers to a situation where states do away with bourgeois dictatorship and allow the working class to hold political power. In the long run, society would maintain the traditional socialist view which considers the state to be an evil entity, a product of contradiction, and an instrument of oppression, which can have no place in a communist order of the future. In the short, the proletariat would need to set up a temporary state instrument of their own, termed as the dictatorship of the proletariat, until the complete eradication of the bourgeois society and a classless order established.<sup>252</sup> From the perspective of Kuroshima Denji's *Militarized Streets*, his description of the Jinan problem starting from denying Capitalism does not represent Marxist utopia but the heterotopia of proletarian literature.<sup>253</sup>

#### 4.2.2 A revolutionary alliance

Another element of Marxist literary criticism is that it comprehends proletarian literature as being the perspective of a revolutionary class. Althusser mentions that art and literature can affect society to the point that it can incite a revolution.<sup>254</sup> This possibility occurs from the material realities depicted within the said literature. Then a potentially new culture could develop ultimately leading to the evolution of a new hegemony or power base. As such, the use of art or literature within a given culture (proletarian) helps to not only depict its reality, but it can also help readers perceive

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<sup>251</sup> Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan*, 22.

<sup>252</sup> Sendy, *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, 12.

<sup>253</sup> Li and Li, "Novel of Evil Another Interpretation of Armed Alley," 258.

<sup>254</sup> Nir, "Lukács Today: Totality, Labor, and Fantasies of Revenge," 190.

and apprehend it. Individuals then can self-reflect on themselves and how to promote societal progress. Drawing on the discussion in the previous section, revolutionary artists must not only concern themselves with the art-object alone but also the means through which they reproduce or communicate their content.<sup>255</sup> Most scholars consider Kuroshima Denji's works to have revolutionary aims, which inspired many Japanese writers, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>256</sup>

According to Brecht, Proletarian literature should help expose capitalist contradictions between "... essence and appearance, concrete and abstract, individual, and social whole."<sup>257</sup> In effect, the work should stimulate men to act in their real life. Art should not be a self-container but be a medium to spur on action outside of itself. Literature becomes purposeful and revolutionary if it helps identify a social evil and rally support to act against this social evil. Brecht considered this to be a reactionary nostalgia.<sup>258</sup> The *Militarized Streets* novel can also categorize as revolutionary literature owing to the influence it had on readers by capturing the realities of the working class, including the mercilessly exploited Chinese laborers, radicalized Japanese soldiers, and the impoverished Japanese residents. These realities also constitute the social evils in both the literature and reality. It then rallied for self-reflection on the validity of the need for military intervention in the Jinan area.

The match factory run by Jinan Furlong Match Company takes center stage of the story. The company exploited its Chinese workers as slaves. Indentured laborers aged between 7-8 years, together with female workers at the factory, fought

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<sup>255</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 56.

<sup>256</sup> Cipris, "Against The System: Antiwar Writing of Kuroshima Denji," 4.

<sup>257</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 65.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

for their lives under miserable conditions.<sup>259</sup> Capitalists would supervise the laborers closely, who were neither allowed freedom or wages. In addition to this, cudgeling or whipping were also an acceptable form of punishment. The above issues, compounded with the fact that laborers were exposed to toxic substances at the factory, adversely impacted the workers' health.<sup>260</sup> The Japanese soldiers soon realized that their mission to Jinan was not entirely well-intentioned or entirely wanted. Seeing the miserable Chinese laborers made them question their role in the area as well as sympathize with their condition. The soldiers made attempts to curtail the violence and oppression directed towards them.<sup>261</sup> Kuroshima also witnessed similar tendencies in the wig factories in Jinan operated by Englishmen. These Westerners would profit from hair stolen from Chinese people in Jinan. They went even further to impose taxes on the Chinese to keep their plaits.<sup>262</sup> The above examples illustrate how imperial Japan heavily exploited and looted the people of Jinan with the help of Western powers.

The situation at Jinan in *Militarized Streets* shares a familiar scene with *War Against Wars – Collection of Anti-Militarism Works* by Nansong Academy.

Kuroshima Denji was a contributor to the collection, through another anti-war and anti-militarism work titled *The Sleigh* which the section will discuss later in the chapter. The novel discussed the dilemma faced by Japanese soldiers, who end up questioning who was the real enemy. In *Militarized Streets*, the Japanese army discovered that their Japanese compatriots tyrannized the local people. This led to self-reflection through questioning their role in the region. They also empathized

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<sup>259</sup> Li and Kurumisawa, "Armed Alley: An Anti-War Novel Fraught with Both Ideological and Artistic Insights," 742.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

with the workers under oppression, wondering whether they would want to experience the same in their own country. In the end and unfortunately, rebellious Japanese soldiers were murdered by their own countrymen. Their murder was then disguised as dying courageously during battle. However, Japanese citizens would misconceive the circumstances surrounding their deaths, further igniting the hatred they had for the Chinese.<sup>263</sup>

Kuroshima notes:

It is only the rich who grin while crushing China. The rich will get even richer from it. They will profit and use those profits to keep us pinned in our place. In any case, we can never win alone. Unless the Chinese do their damndest, our task at home will be tough!" ... What worried the officers far more than any outlaws or Southern troops holding out in a fort were those ninja leaflets, and the likes of Takatori, as well as the possibility of a revolutionary alliance between the workers and the soldiers. It was what they feared most. That much was for sure.<sup>264</sup>

These sentiments, backed by the literature discussed above, acknowledged that the Japanese soldiers slowly realized that their country were using them as pawns for the capitalists' gains. These sentiments check the box for the first theorized prerequisite that individuals experiencing "reactionary nostalgia" need to fulfil for Proletarian literature to categorize as revolutionary. The second crucial prerequisite was action would take place based on the information provided; like-minded individuals would rally together and abolish this social evil in real life. It is only reasonable to conclude that banning *Militarized Streets* soon after its publication was due to the risk it posed to imperial Japan and its Western counterparts by promoting a revolutionary alliance between Japanese soldiers and Chinese laborers.

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 743.

<sup>264</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*, 250.

#### 4.3 Marxist analysis of *The Sleigh*

*The Sleigh* is another Japanese proletarian literature written in 1927 by Kuroshima Denji. Some works refer to it as, *The Sledge* or *The Sled*. It was known as ‘Sori’ in 1927, and a later adaptation of the story as *The Sleigh* appeared in 1952.<sup>265</sup> The story of *The Sleigh* revolves around the experiences and thoughts of a squad of Japanese soldiers during Japan’s military intervention against the Soviet Union in 1920. It tells the story of the squad’s step by step destruction and the soldiers’ partial realization that their rulers have little concern neither over their well-being nor that of the Siberian peasantry. *The Sleigh* is one of Kuroshima Denji’s seminal works in Japanese language during the interwar period.<sup>266</sup>

The backdrop of the novel is Siberia, which served as a station of the Japanese military. The Japanese had joined hands with Americans and the European powers in 1918 to wage war against Russia upon the destruction of the Russian Revolution Administration in 1917.<sup>267</sup> More than 3,000 Japanese soldiers died in battle during the four-year intervention to Siberia. Kuroshima Denji was involved in these operations and wrote the novel based on his own experience. The novel exposes the criminal nature of the Japanese intervention, which was attempted to sunder the new Russian Revolutionary Administration. As such, it is a famous piece of proletarian literature. In Siberia, Japanese soldiers continuously looted Siberian people. They would break into poor farmers’ homes, steal livestock, grain, and anything they considered valuable. All the resources which were needed by the

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<sup>265</sup> Knight, *Traces of Magma: An Annotated Bibliography of Left Literature*, 304.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>267</sup> Li, G., & Kurumisawa, K. *Armed Alley*, 742.

Japanese soldiers to mobilize and engage in battle were obtained from robbing the local families.<sup>268</sup>

Kuroshima notes that Japanese soldiers were themselves from low-income families, which can be accepted as a reasonable explanation for the mass looting. However, Japanese soldiers realize that the tragedy associated with the looting and bullying of the local people could have easily happened to them, had the roles been reversed. Then they begin to sympathize with the locals, and their attitude towards the war starts to change. They begin questioning the whole purpose of the war, the goal, and overall consequences. Gradually, war weariness begins to set in.

Eventually, some of the squad members start to stage small-scale mutinies from time to time. During battles, they point their guns to the officers who order shootings, instead of their so-called enemies. The war between Japan and Russia mutates to a war between the Japanese.<sup>269</sup>

The central figure is the commanding officer of a battalion, a self-centered monster who gorges himself with ham and bacon while his officers eat coarse grain. Rumors have it that the Russians lost the will to fight, but so did the Japanese. Japanese soldiers accidentally kill an old father and his son, an action for which they feel enormous remorse. They wonder why their country forces them to kill people whom they do not hate. Towards the end of the story, a party of Japanese soldiers is paraded at the front of a sleigh driven by a Russian. When they level the sleigh and face the endless miles of snow, some soldiers refuse to go farther, an insubordination which leads the battalion commander to order the shooting of two ringleaders. The

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<sup>268</sup> Li and Kurumisawa, "Armed Alley: An Anti-War Novel Fraught with Both Ideological and Artistic Insights," 742.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

Russian sleigh driver drives his horses away and leaves the Japanese soldiers, who then turn on against the commander.<sup>270</sup>

*The Sleigh* underscores the similarities between the Japanese and Russian peasants. The main character identifies himself with the suffering and resentment which the Russian peasants feel against the Japanese who requisition their animals and sleighs. He comments that one does not know what it means to have livestock unless he himself raised some. It also emphasizes the difference between the Japanese officers, represented in a caricaturized and piggish way, and the soldiers, who are from the peasantry.<sup>271</sup>

Based on the analysis conducted in the previous section, there are two critical elements to be singled out in literature, to determine if a text take on a Marxist perspective – form & content and evidence of a revolutionary alliance. In addition to this, determining if an author is a Marxist or not requires paying attention to economic power, class conflict, the debate regarding materialism and spirituality, and the ideology conveyed by the author's works. Several similarities appear in Kuroshima's *Militarized Streets* and *The Sledge*. They include the tyrannical treatment, looting, and bullying meted out by Japanese soldiers against the locals, in the overseas military interventions. A combination of the above factors led the Japanese soldiers to sympathizing with the local people during the war years. The only difference between the two novels was that one was the product of personal experience *The Sleigh*, and the other *Militarized Streets* was a product of concerted research by Kuroshima.

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<sup>270</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*.

<sup>271</sup> Bowen-Struyk, "W(h)ither the Nation in Japanese Proletarian Literature? Imagining an International Proletariat," 388.



#### 4.3.1 Ideology

One of the most frequent themes in Marxism is the role played by ideology. Ideology refers to the belief system which stems from the relationship between the various social classes. According to Marxists, these classes are the results of the modes of production within that society. The Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony illustrates how the state and civil society produce and maintain consent to the class hierarchies in a capitalist system.<sup>272</sup> Ideology, on the other hand, connotes closure and unidirectional flow of power. It is something real and material and contributes significantly to the constitution of society. Gramsci notes that: to the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is "psychological"; they "organize" human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc."<sup>273</sup> Gramsci sees what Althusser spelt out in a different approach, that consciousness is not independent of the social context. It must be, in part, constituted, and in part, conditioned by the social relations. As such, consciousness is always partially pre-given and acquired by the subject through ideology.

In the *Militarized Streets*, Kuroshima Denji demonstrates his prowess as an author by depicting the unfolding of events in a simple, clear, and exciting narrative. The ideology which a text inevitably carries is either within its content or in its form. In short, a text has both a subject matter and a manner of presentation that can either promote or criticize the historical circumstance to which it belongs. *The Sleigh* primarily covers a mutiny of the Japanese soldiers in the course of the Siberian intervention, who oppose their administration. This occurs when the soldiers realize

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<sup>272</sup> Stoddart, "Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse: A Critical Review of Theories of Knowledge and Power," 191-225.

<sup>273</sup> Hoare and Nowell-Smith, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*.

that their feud with Russia was more detrimental to the poor peasants. Since most of the soldiers are peasants themselves, they sympathize with the poor Siberian peasantry. They understand the challenges of property ownership and how it feels to have it taken by the privileged if roles and positions changed. Essentially, the mutiny comes out as the result of an ideological divide between the soldiers and their officers, which come from higher social classes.

#### 4.3.2 Class consciousness

Given the above discussion, one can validly claim that Kuroshima's *The Sleigh* encompasses the idea of class consciousness, which is a crucial concept of the Marxist perspective.<sup>274</sup> According to Marx's general theory of ideology, the necessary connectedness of social structure and social belief are core elements. Also, it adds that the ruling ideas generally come from the ruling class, but also that different classes produce different forms of consciousness.<sup>275</sup> Class consciousness, within the Marxist literary discussion, can serve two functions. The first is that it denotes the awareness that members of a class (generally in the working class) have of their objective class interests and aspirations. Alternatively, it operates as a sense of belonging that adopts different shapes in specific times and places.<sup>276</sup> Both perspectives are vital to the categorical analysis and debate in Marxist and academic studies. The fact that ideology can help mobilize masses towards a struggle or an objective by a given community also means that it can also help to overcome a ruling class ideology. For Lukács, it is possible to overcome reified thought through the proletariat's awakening self-awareness as both the subject and object of history.

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<sup>274</sup> Ansart, "Class Consciousness," 1931-1933.

<sup>275</sup> Milner, *Class and Class Consciousness in Marxist Theory*, 161.

<sup>276</sup> De Felipe-Redondo, "Class Consciousness."

Imputed class consciousness can become actualized in the empirical consciousness of a working-class organized and led by a revolutionary communist organization. The communist organization is "... the historical embodiment and incarnation of class consciousness – an incarnation of the ethics of the fighting proletariat."<sup>277</sup>

The discussion so far establishes that ideology and class consciousness, extrapolated from historical conditions in the society, play a critical role in Marxist literary perspectives. These appear in Kuroshima's *The Sledge*. One of the core themes in the novel underscores the similarities between the Japanese and Russian peasants. The novel demonstrates how the Japanese peasant soldiers can see so much of themselves in the Siberians' circumstances, an awakening which leads to the mutiny against their leaders and commanders. Sympathizing with the Siberian peasantry implies their recognition of these people as belonging to the same social class with themselves. What they so far did – looting and bullying the locals- was moral bankruptcy. However, ideology is not an individual affair; it must comprise a like-minded group. Hence, mobilizing soldiers to resist against such cruel practices of the Japanese military was the revolutionary alliance associated with Marxist literary criticism.

There are several instances where Kuroshima hints to the Marxist perspective of class consciousness in *The Sleigh*. The novel does indicate that most of the soldiers are peasants or low-wage earners from the lower and middle classes. Kuroshima uses the soldiers' voices to show how they slowly realize that the ongoing war between the Japanese and the Russians was "heartless killing." They were "the guys making the war; nobody else."<sup>278</sup> The war and fighting benefited

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<sup>277</sup> Milner, *Class and Class Consciousness in Marxist Theory*, 164.

<sup>278</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*, 68

nobody but their superiors who were out to get medals and recognition. The setting before this scene in the novel is the death of a father and his son caught in the crossfire. The boy, who lays face down next to his father, wears torn shoes, further highlighting the poverty of the civilians living in the Siberian warzone.<sup>279</sup> The soldiers agree that they fight against their own will, and “other people force them to do it.” Regardless, as they are the ones making the war, they determine that if they stop, so would the war.”<sup>280</sup> The phrase “Let us stop this, let us quit! Let us get out of here!” is a clear indication that the soldiers are against military expeditions which exploit their need for employment to accomplish self-centered and unjust actions by military and civil authorities.

#### 4.3.3 A revolutionary alliance

The Marxist theory provides a revolutionary way of understanding history. Also mentioned in the previous discussion of *Militarized Streets* is the fact that Marxist literary criticism needs to evidence the perspective of a revolutionary class. Proletarian literature thus needs to reflect the transformation, close interaction, and the introduction of revolutionary ideas. Even with regards to the structural causes of a revolution, it is important to emphasize that the Marxist explication of revolutions is by no means monocausal “economistic.”<sup>281</sup> The existing conflict between the proletariat and the relations of production and political power is not purely economic. In essence, it is socio-economic, involving all spheres of social relations.<sup>282</sup> Proletarian literature, from a Marxist perspective, should stimulate readers to take action against capitalist contradictions or to abolish them

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Mandel, “The Marxist Case for Revolution Today,” 162.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 162.

altogether.<sup>283</sup> The literature becomes revolutionary if it can help identify social evils, then rally support from the masses to take action against it.

The preceding discussion was about the role of class consciousness in *The Sledge* and its contribution in making the novel take on a Marxist literary perspective. One of the reasons connecting and bringing the proletariat was the shared notion that the war was meaningless and did not benefit them at all. However, Kuroshima also adds that the conditions in which the Japanese soldiers engaged in battle with their supposed enemies did not consider their well-being. In the novel, Kuroshima notes that the war "... ate up their physical and mental energy as an express train burns coal." He goes on, "What is this, even making sick men go out and kill!"<sup>284</sup> Kuroshima highlights the plight of the peasant farmers sent out to war for the benefit of military and political leaders, and at the expense of their health and general welfare. Notably, the novel states that much of the supplies needed during the Siberian war came from loot the military would steal from the local people in Siberia.

A revolutionary alliance in *The Sleigh* came about in the form of a mutiny. The mutiny is the consequence of two important reasons. The first is that the Japanese soldiers consider the military intervention to be inhumane and outright wrong; being themselves peasants back at home, they understand the class struggle by the local peasants and workers. The second reason is that they are engaged in a war during which they risk their lives for a few higher-class individuals, who so not care whether they survive or die. They figure out that it is not worth to continue

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<sup>283</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 65.

<sup>284</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*, 67.

fighting as they can't achieve in the end. An excerpt from *The Sleigh* in Kuroshima

Denji's 1928 *A Flock of Circling Crows* notes that:

A deep gloom enveloped them. The people who had dispatched them to Siberia had known all along they would die in the snow like this. Sprawled cozily at home under stove-heated quilts, they were no doubt praising the beauty of the snow. Even if they were to hear of the soldiers' deaths, they would merely say, "Is that so? Nothing More.

They struggled on through the snow. They had not lost their consciousness, though, nor their rage, resistance, or hatred. The soldiers' bayonets, as if their own accord, swung toward the chest of the man who had abused them, the agent of those who had sent them here – Major Chikamatsu. Wildly, the blades converged.<sup>285</sup>

These sentiments echo Kuroshima Denji's views in the *Militarized Streets* as well:

Japanese soldiers are pawns for capitalist leaders and higher-class individuals, who couldn't care less about what are the stakes for the Japanese soldiers, but they always mind about their self-interests. Through class consciousness, the soldiers in *The Sleigh* realize that those who sent them to war are busy living comfortable lives back in at home and enjoy the fruits of their labor – a labor which involves the inhumane treatment and bullying of people from the same socio-economic status as themselves. Over 3,000 Japanese soldiers died for a cause they were not privy to from the onset, and one which did not benefit the workers in any way. Class consciousness regarding all of these socially related challenges is what sparks the mutiny against the Japanese military and those who sanction the war against the revolution. Although it is not an exhaustive Marxist literary discussion of the *Sleigh*, it does indicate that this work by Kuroshima well fits within the classification of proletarian literature, as other authors have corroborated in the past.

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<sup>285</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*, 72.

#### 4.4 Marxist analysis of *A Flock of Circling Crows*

*A Flock of Circling Crows* (*Uzumakeru Karasu Mo Mure*) is a 1928 antiwar story by Kuroshima Denji, considered to be one of his best.<sup>286</sup> The story opens with Russian children begging for leftovers at the mess hall of a Japanese encampment in Siberia. Private First Class Matsuki sympathizes with the children and hands them over those unsavory scraps of food in the garbage can, which they eagerly devour. In return, Russians invite some of the soldiers to their homes. The soldiers gradually accept the invitation, as they yearned for the atmosphere of family life after having served in Siberia for two years. Matsuki gets attracted to a girl named Galya and takes her presents every day. However, Galya does little to encourage him. In the novel, Kuroshima writes;

Matsuki brought her bread. He brought her sugar. And he purchased various other things for her from his monthly salary of five yen sixty sen. However, he was much too poor to support her whole family. She wanted someone with a much bigger salary. It was not only the enlisted men who were starving for a woman's body. There was a certain big wig with a salary eighty-five times that of Matsuki's who also coveted her.<sup>287</sup>

The story's climax occurs when Matsuki knocks at the door of Galya's house, eager to present her the gifts he brought. However, there is no answer. When the door finally opens, Galya appears and admits that she is with a guest, the Major. As the officer makes his escape, he notices Matsuki and becomes enraged because an enlisted man dares to visit the same girl he desired. Consequently, he orders that no food, not even kitchen scraps, be given to the Russians. The Major also orders for an immediate muster of Matsuki's company and has them transferred to a remote post.

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<sup>286</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*, 607.

<sup>287</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*, 79.

The soldiers march off into the snow, dropping dead one by one as they went. During spring, flocks of crows circle over their corpses, feeding on with what remains.<sup>288</sup>

The points of interest in Kuroshima's *Flock of Circling Crows* emanate from the vignettes of the contacts between the Japanese soldiers and Russian civilians, as in *The Sleigh*. However, the story does not have any ideological message spelt out, it is basic. Matsuki gives leftovers to the children because he feels sorry for them and showers Galya with presents because he hopes to lay down with her. There is no mention of his political opinions.<sup>289</sup> Also, Russians in this story are not Communists, as most of them are refugees in Siberia who escaped from the revolution. The Japanese gloomily wonder who sent them to such a forsaken place, but Kuroshima does not give any name nor provides an answer to that question. Keene argues that it could be the reason why the story succeeds as literature and not as an exposé of the brutal system.<sup>290</sup> Although it lacks an elevated message, there is a note of authenticity in each paragraph, which makes it apparent how much Kuroshima hated both the army life and the folly of war.<sup>291</sup>

#### 4.4.1 Materialism and class conflict

*A Flock of Circling Crows* remains one of the prominent antiwar stories by Kuroshima Denji. It contributes to the proletarian literature by highlighting the evils of war, and how senseless are the activities of the intervention, for the working class. By covering themes associated with materialism and class conflict, it advocates prosocial behavior among individuals. According to Marx, realities are material and not spiritual. The material world will show to us, the audience, the reality of

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<sup>288</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*, 608.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.



things.<sup>292</sup> By examining the relationship between socioeconomic classes and analyzing the superstructure, it is possible to gain insight into ourselves and to the society. A critic who will examines the instances of class conflict or the institutions, entertainment, news media, law, and other systems within the society, will discover how the distribution of power undergirds society. Such an analysis will uncover the base, which is the economic system, and the social classes it produces. The dominant class has control over the base and aspects of the superstructure, which means that a worldview of the people within a society is false.<sup>293</sup> The critic, in this case, needs to expose the oppression and consequent alienation. The Marxist critic must not be content solely by exposing the failings of capitalism; he must also argue for the fair redistribution of goods by the government.

A Marxist literary analysis of *A Flock of Circling Crows* requires drawing into the concept of dialectical materialism relative to the debate on class conflict. Referring to the literature on Marxist criticism, one of the underlying assumptions in Marxism is that the forces of production will inevitably generate conflict between social classes. These social classes are the result of the process dictating resource utilization and who benefits from them. As pointed out in chapter one, the bourgeoisie tends to own the natural and human resources, and the proletariat supplies the labor that helps make the profit. The confrontation is what Marx referred to as dialectical materialism. The changing ways which the labor applies to transform resources into goods for human use is what guides history, and these changes would eventually progress to the triumph of communism.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and literary criticism*, 20.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Arthur, *Marx and Engels, The German Ideology*, 156.

Just like the previous two stories by Kuroshima discussed in this chapter, the timeline follows the author's experience of war. It is one of his signature approaches to literature, with the other being a focus on describing people in farming communities.<sup>295</sup> The argument in the *Flock of Circling Crows* is similar to the discussion for *Militarized Streets* and *The Sleigh*; both depict Japanese soldiers as pawns to the bourgeois and higher-class individuals within the military ranks. They are subject to the power held within the higher-class structures. The abuse of power is what agitates Kuroshima as he seeks to expose the oppression of lower ranks as a result of class conflict. Class conflict in *A Flock of Circling Crows* transpire in the figurative struggle for control over a limited resource – affection. Arguably, affection can serve as a motivating factor for the labor offered by the Japanese soldiers, hence contributing to the productivity of the military institution. Kuroshima indicates that Japanese soldiers are craving a family atmosphere, which is part of the reason why they agree to accept the Russians' invitations to visit their homes.

Scholars have historically conceptualized affection in one of two dominant ways. The first perspective has its roots in psychology and neuroscience, which tends to view affect as an elemental state.<sup>296</sup> The elemental state of affect results from an encounter between two or more bodies (*affectio*). The second perspective is typically associated with developments in philosophy and humanities and treats affection as an intensive force.<sup>297</sup> Intensive force is what bodies exert upon one another, thus increasing or decreasing their capacity to act (*affectus*). In 1991, the Marxist scholar of literature Frederic Jameson identified the “waning of affect” as one of the “constitutive features of the postmodern.” Scholars of the “affective turn” in

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<sup>295</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*, 608.

<sup>296</sup> Ott, “Affect in Critical Studies,” 1.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

humanities widely criticized the assertion who did not view it as waning, but a “magnification of affect.” Social theorist Brian Massumi argued that one of the characteristics of the human condition is a surfeit of affect.<sup>298</sup> Affection as a productive force falls within the second perspective.

#### 4.4.2 Affection as a production factor and class conflict

Given the story in *A Flock of Circling Crows*, a valid claim within its context would be that class conflict rises from ownership or assumption of power over affection as a resource. In this case, Galya acts as a figurative resource, contested by two individuals from two different social classes. The Major represents a claim from a higher-class entity, whereas Matsuki represents the lower-class individual. The disparity between the two individuals is evident from the wage contrast. While Matsuki’s wage is only enough to afford small presents for Galya, the Major’s salary, which is eighty-five times more than that of Matsuki, is enough to gift Galya and her family. The inequality in wages is typical in a capitalist society, which is what gives the story some Marxist relevance. The wage difference between the Major and Matsuki is what allows the officer to afford Galya’s interest, sparked mainly by the harsh living conditions within the Siberian settlement. However, Galya’s interest in two men for different reasons is the cause of conflict between the Major and the Matsuki’s company. Kuroshima writes, “... To Matsuki, a major was not a rival he could joke with,” evidencing the significant difference in power and influence. The author further ascertains this difference in the following passage;

[...] [T]wo enlisted men, a bottle of Masamune between them, were facing each other across a table. Galya was chatting with them, her face a little flushed. Her white teeth glistened. Lips, pungent as mint, were parted in a

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 2.

smile. His jealousy and wrath exploded within him. He had the overpowering urge to roar out in the gruffest voice he kept in reserve for commanding the battalion. The growl forced its way to the uppermost part of his throat. It took an immense effort to suppress it. Then, with greater strides than ever, he rushed back to the regiment. "Guzzling liquor at a woman's place. Unspeakable insolence!"<sup>299</sup>

The reason why the Major is angered is the fact that he, in his current position of power, lays claim, or has an interest in the same woman as an officer of lower rank.

The Major considers it disrespectful, making him "burn with humiliation and rage."<sup>300</sup> Shortly after his outburst, he orders that the mess hall be off-limits to the Russians and strictly forbids giving them any leftovers. Presumably, this was to help increase the reliance that Galya's family had on the Japanese, which mostly would benefit him since wage-wise he is in a better position to cater to their needs compared to Matsuki. The Major also goes ahead to have Matsuki's company reassigned to a remote post.

Ideally, there are three criteria on which the traditional Marxist analysis of the class structure in a capitalist society stands. The basis for these criteria is the underlying social relations of production. They include ownership of the means of production, purchase of the labor of others, and the sale of one's labor.<sup>301</sup> These three class categories deduced from the above criteria are that capitalists own the means of production, they have the means and resources to purchase the labor power of others but do not sell theirs, and workers do not own the means of production but have to sell their labor to capitalists.<sup>302</sup> Hence, it would make sense for the bourgeois or higher-class individuals to assume greater control and influence over factors of production to their advantage. The discussion already establishes that affection can

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<sup>299</sup> Kuroshima, *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*, 85.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>301</sup> Wright and Perrone, *Marxist Class Categories and Income Inequality*, 37.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

be a determining factor of production. Hence, it would make sense that competing for ownership or control of said factor echoes the distribution of resources under an economic framework. Moreover, the Major's strategy to have total control over the factor contributes to a capitalist system of operation within the Japanese army. The result of the resolve to have Matsuki and his company reassigned to a remote post, ultimately leading to their deaths in the snow.

Ultimately, the class conflict between the army ranks leads to a self-centered decision which does result in the death of the Japanese soldiers. The actions by the Major represent an oppressive regime, whose misuse of power for self-interest are part of the folly and senseless actions associated with the Japanese military intervention in Siberia. Any unwarranted death during wartime raises the question of the morality of war. In the two other stories discussed here, Kuroshima is anti-war as he finds the war to be aimless and only beneficial to those who sent in the troops. Hence, dying for an unknown cause without a benefit at all beats the purpose of having a war in the first place. In *A Flock of Circling Crows*, Kuroshima adopts a new approach by exploring the internal systems of operation to illustrate how a capitalist mentality within the Japanese military can also cause the death of the working-class individuals.

The title *A Flock of Circling Crows* is a metaphorical warning for all members of the Japanese working class who have an eye to join the army. The message he desires to communicate is that death is a definitive outcome of the participation in the Japanese military. One of the ways of death suffered by the working class in the military, is participation in military combat. Alternatively, mismanagement and poor leadership within the ranks is also a plausible cause of death in the army. Hence, Kuroshima advocates against proletariat's participation to

the military as it is unfair to those within the lower ranks who risk their lives for others who are less concerned about their well-being. In doing so, he highlights the problems experienced within the military community in Siberia. These include the harsh life conditions and climate, poor leadership, and mismanagement of resources. Therefore, it serves as one of the primary uses of proletarian literature – identification of challenges and issues faced by working-class individuals.<sup>303</sup>

#### 4.5 Marxist analysis of *The Everlasting Need for Antiwar Literature*

Kuroshima's 1929 essay, *On Antiwar Literature* (Hansen Bungaku Ron), analyzes the varieties of antiwar literature, contrasting bourgeois pacificism with the true proletarian antiwar sentiment. In the bourgeois works, the tragedies of war relate on a personal basis or acknowledge the suffering that all humanity undergoes because of war.<sup>304</sup> However, the feeble attempt to determine the responsibility for the war renders bourgeois antiwar literature ineffectual. By contrast, proletarian antiwar literature such as *Clarté* by Barbusse or *Jimmie Higgins* by Upton Sinclair places the responsibility squarely on capitalists. The reason behind the assertion is that capitalists are the ones continually plotting wars. Kuroshima compared bourgeois wars to squabbles among thieves over the shares of loot. However, he considers the wars of national liberation and revolution as legitimate.<sup>305</sup> Kuroshima's article reveals his familiarity with the European literature dedicated to this purpose as well as his profound sympathy for the Russian Revolution. His political allegiance is not so outspoken and blatant as other proletarian authors, but there is no doubt about his

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<sup>303</sup> Libretti, "Proletarian Literature," 1230.

<sup>304</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Fiction*, 605.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

commitment.<sup>306</sup> Kuroshima notes in his essay, that “... so long as the capitalist system exists, proletarian antiwar literature must also exist and fight against it.”<sup>307</sup>

Kuroshima sharply criticizes Japanese novels on war, singling out one poem *Kimi* for mostly negative comments. He opens the piece with a summary of the Marxist view of armed conflict and then sets on to explain why he considers Japanese antiwar literature as ideological failures from the perspective of socialist realism. Kuroshima states that, unlike bourgeois pacifists and anarchists, the proletariat should not oppose all wars.<sup>308</sup> There must be a historical distinction between oppressive wars and those that promote revolutions and popular liberation. He condemns all wars fought with the purpose of perpetuating or expanding economic and political exploitation. However, he does concede that all wars can sometimes turn brutal and tragic. Kuroshima suggests retaining the war as one option in the peasants’ “struggle” against landowners for liberation from an evil class system.<sup>309</sup> Such wars are beneficial in the advancement of humanity and they will never entirely disappear until the abolishment of class societies and the victory of socialism. The problem with antiwar literature is that while it can be emotionally moving, its focus is narrow, solely on individual suffering. By being so, it ignores the broader issues revealed by the armed conflict.<sup>310</sup> In Kuroshima’s opinion, the “awakening of individualism” is nothing more than the rise of a bourgeois world view which only serves to perpetuate most of the oppression in a capitalist society

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>307</sup> Cipris, “Against the System: Antiwar Writing of Kuroshima Denji,” 4.

<sup>308</sup> Rabson, “Yosano Akiko on War: To Give One's life or Not: A Question of which War,” 45-74.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

under the guise of humanitarianism. Kuroshima and other proletarian authors condemn philosophical implications in a poem for being inadequate.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the information discussed in the previous three chapters. Chapter two discussed Marxist literary theory. It underlines the history of Marxist Literary Theory, including a discussion of Marx and Engels' opinion on art and literature, as well as Marx's conception about form and conception in the literature. Chapter three encompasses the Japanese proletarian history and a discussion of Kuroshima Denji's life as a proletarian author, which includes some of his notable work contributions. Chapter four contains the bulk of the discussion, including a Marxist analysis of Kuroshima Denji's *Militarized Streets*, *The Sleigh*, *A Flock of Circling Crows*, and *The Everlasting Need for Antiwar Literature*.

The nineteenth century saw the development of fundamental arguments by the advocates of capitalism and socialism. The twentieth-century experiences helped to further and strengthen these arguments. Capitalism refers to a system based on private ownership, market allocation, and entrepreneurship. Capitalists believe that individual interests spontaneously fall in line with the common good, and it is desirable to raise the standard of living through the virtues of competition.<sup>311</sup> Hypothetical or real socialism is economically irrational and inefficient as it destroys the institutional and spiritual bases of what they regard as the "good economy." They also claim that socialism is contrary to political liberties as well. On the other hand, socialism is a system based on social ownership and planned coordination of the

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<sup>311</sup> Chavance, "The Historical Conflict of Socialism and Capitalism, and the Post-Socialist Transformation."

economy.<sup>312</sup> Socialists' belief about capitalism is that it leads to market anarchy, which contributes to a high level of social wastefulness and suffering by triggering crises and unemployment, among other ills. It results in significant inequalities between social classes, and mostly benefits the wealthy minority. Advocates of socialism believe that socialism allows for consciously planned rational development, fosters social equality, and promotes a higher form of liberty through unity.<sup>313</sup>

The contradiction between the two perspectives is what forms the basis of this thesis. The focus is on proletarian literature, which became popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The literature review in chapter two explains proletarian literature as any form of artistic creation by, about, or for the members of the working class, which identifies and seeks to address the issues faced by working-class individuals. The primary message contained in these literary products holds themes that are anti-capitalist and pro-socialist. The emergence of proletarian literature was the result of the need to have a movement which catered to the needs of the laborers, who constitute the majority in any society. It served to protect them from injustices and exploitation by the bourgeois class. Literature served as an excellent tool for productive critical dialogue in Russia. Upon its success, proletarian movements of various other nations later adopted this approach as well.

The discussion so far helps to ascertain two critical aspects concerning literature. The first is that literature assists in recording the historical events or in preserving the knowledge of past occurrences. The other critical inference is that literature serves as a base or a point of reference from which social progress can take

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

place. Therefore, all forms of literature must sustain high accuracy levels in order for works of literature to be reliable sources of historical information or general information to influence decision-making. Chapter two finds that scholars to a consensus which advocates for the direct involvement of artists/authors or experience an event are the best suit to write about it. Hence, the association of the working-class authors/writers with proletarian literature ascribes to it a high historical reliability. It is not to say that other members of intellectual community could not contribute to proletarian literature. In addition to this, depicting and exposing the impact of material realities on the people is another literary dimension covered in the discussion.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that proletarian literature is inclined towards socialist tendencies, by rallying for action against social injustices of the class divisions. Thus, it is prudent to explore how the proletarian literature promotes socialism through a Marxist criticism of selected works from proletarian authors. Here, the samples are chosen from the Japanese literature. Japanese proletarian literature is an interesting research topic because Japan was a highly capitalist society due to the imperialist influence of Western countries. Analyzing the emergence of proletarian literature and its impact on the history of Japanese literature under the conditions of the time may help to establish the kind of influence it had on history and whether that influence was significant. The works of Kuroshima Denji have been used as a proxy for the Japanese proletarian literature because he is one of the most influential proletarian authors, and yet he is very underrepresented in scholarly discussions.

Marxist criticism advocates for a logical process of thinking called the dialectical materialism, which maintains that historical change stems from material

realities in the economic base of a society and not from the ideological superstructure of politics, law, philosophy, or art which are all built on that economic base.<sup>314</sup>

Hence, it is appropriate to use the dialectical materialist approach for a Marxist evaluation of the proletarian literature and its contribution to socialism. Before doing so, however, in chapter two, I included a discussion of the various tenets held by the Marxist literary criticism. One of these holds that the society and the environment that defines it are the products of several elements interacting with each other. In addition to the aims of the proletarian movement, Marxist literary analysis of the anti-militarist novels wishes to convey that tenet.

The literary review indicates that not only the use of proletarian literature but the existence of the whole proletarian literature movement in Japan itself, was a result of the external influence from abroad during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Nevertheless, Marxist current in Japan dates to an earlier period, to Noro Eitaro, who is responsible for innovating a historiographical method. Nevertheless, the developments in Marxism progressed to political movements and the proletariat when the government suppressed socialist movements. The literary criticism divides the proletarian literature in Japan into three critical periods. The first is the relatively long preparatory period of the Taisho era before the Great Kantō earthquake. The second is the period from the first issuance of *Bungei Sensen* (The Literary Front) to the organization of NAPF (Nippona Proleta Artista Federacio) in 1928, and around the founding of *Senki* (Battle Flag). The third period was the golden age, followed by a decline and fall. Kuroshima Denji's works emerged in the second period and he is considered to represent his era, equaling Aono in the field of criticism. Other notable

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<sup>314</sup> Panda, *Marxist approach to literature: An introduction*, 2.

authors include Maedako Hiroichiro, Kaneko Yobun, Satomura Kinzo and Hayashi Fusao.<sup>315</sup>

Kuroshima Denji was the son of a peasant family, from the Shodo Island. The author's background is crucial to the analysis since part of Marx's argument about the proletarian literature requires an individual from the proletariat to espouse his own material realities to help achieve the aesthetic experience that literature needs to aspire. In addition to this, Kuroshima's background provides insight and understanding of his borrowed naturalist approach seen in the novels which are discussed in this thesis. Much of the literature by Kuroshima has a Siberian context, as he uses his experience to rebel against the militarist intervention, or to mobilize anti-militarist ideals among the Japanese with the aim of protecting the oppressed and exploited Japanese peasants who risk their lives to help a limited number of self-centered individuals in the government. Hence, even though Kuroshima published several novels and stories, the current section focuses solely to those which are based on his personal experiences in Siberia. I contend that they constitute Kuroshima's human reality as a member of the proletariat.

## 5.2 Marxist findings of *Militarized Streets*

*Militarized Streets* (1930) is a story which highlights the suffering of civilians in China after the Japanese invasion. This story reveals not only the ordeals of Chinese civilians but also the exploitation of the Japanese peasantry and the working-class, whose members are sent to China to safeguard the financial concerns of the Japanese

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<sup>315</sup> Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese Fiction, 1926-1968*, 38.

bourgeoisie. Upon a critical analysis of Kuroshima's text in form and content and a revolutionary alliance perspective, I can arrive to these conclusions.

Form and Content: The reason for involving a discussion on form and content is because Karl Marx believed that proletarian literature needs to reveal a unity of both. As such, Marxist critics should always strive to achieve the harmonious unity of form and content. The analysis finds relevance of this aspect in the manner through which the Japanese newspapers developed the literature they published, consequently inciting the public and the prime minister to dispatch an army unit in Jinan.

Revolutionary Alliance: The second aspect, a revolutionary alliance, is premised on the fact that the purpose of the proletarian literature is to help in sparking a revolution to change the society. This argument derives from the human realities of oppression and struggle, which require a change in society's culture. Revolutionary artists must not only concern themselves with the art-object alone but also the means through which they reproduce or communicate their content. Kuroshima's literature has revolutionary aims, as it inspired many Japanese authors to speak out against the oppressive regime. The text reveals that literature becomes revolutionary if it helps identify a social evil, and assists in rallying support to take action against the social evil.<sup>316</sup> Kuroshima depicts how Japanese soldiers slowly realized their country was using them as pawns for the capitalists who continued to enrich themselves at their expense. It confirms the theorized prerequisite that individuals experiencing "reactionary nostalgia" need to fulfil for proletarian literature to categorize as revolutionary.

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<sup>316</sup> Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 65

### 5.3 Marxist findings of *The Sleigh*

*The Sleigh* (1927) is a story based on the Kuroshima's personal experiences, which describe the dilemmas faced by Japanese soldiers during the Siberian intervention against Revolutionary Russia. It reveals some realities about the nature of Japanese militarism and imperialism and the combined effect on the lower-class Japanese soldiers sent to war to fight for their country without a sufficient justification. Here is a critical analysis attempt for *The Sleigh* using three aspects – ideology, class consciousness, and revolutionary alliance.

Ideology: ideology forms one of the cornerstone discussions in Marxism. It represents the belief system which stems from the relationships between the different classes in society. Marx argued that authors should transcend their immediate class position to promote a truthful depiction of the society and man's historical, living relation.<sup>317</sup> Kuroshima depicts not only the status of his fellow men in the army, but also the condition of the peasants they met in Russia. Instead of focusing on the conditions of his class, he covers the devastating impacts of capitalism on both the Japanese and Siberian Peasants.

Class Consciousness. Class consciousness, within the Marxist literary discussion, can serve two functions. The first is that it denotes the class consciousness (usually that of the working class). Alternatively, it operates as a sense of belonging that adopts different shapes in specific times and places.<sup>318</sup> The novel shows how much the Japanese peasants under arms could see themselves in the conditions of the Siberian peasantry, which leads them to mutiny against their

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<sup>317</sup> Swingewood, *Marxist Approaches to the Study of Literature*, 131.

<sup>318</sup> De Felipe-Redondo, "Class Consciousness."

leaders and commanders. Sympathizing with the Siberians implies that they recognized them to belong to the same social class with themselves.

A Revolutionary Alliance; A revolutionary alliance in *The Sleigh* comes into being in the form of a mutiny. The mutiny was the consequence of two important reasons. First, Japanese peasant soldiers considered the military intervention to be inhumane and outright wrong as they understood the class struggles by Russian peasants and workers. The second reason was that they were engaged in a war where they had to risk their lives for a few higher-class individuals, who did not care whether they lived or died.

#### 5.4 Marxist findings of *A Flock of Circling Crows*

*A Flock of Circling Crows* (1928) focuses to the contact between Japanese soldiers and Russian civilians. It is one of Kuroshima's works which convey his antimilitarist sentiments during the proletarian period. The novel presents opportunities to discuss Marxism within the context of materialism and class conflict, and the role that affection plays in production and class conflict.

Materialism and Class Conflict: A critic who examines the instances of class conflict or the institutions, entertainment, news media, law, and other systems within the society, will discover how the distribution of power undergirds society. The critic, in this case, must expose the oppression and consequent alienation. The Marxist critic must not be content solely by exposing the failings of capitalism. He must also argue for the fair redistribution of goods by the government. Kuroshima seeks to expose the abuse of power in the military owing to class conflict over scarce resources. Class conflict in *A Flock of Circling Crows* emanates from the figurative struggle for control over a limited resource – affection.



Affection in production and class conflict: The second element discussed within the context of this novel is how affection can lead to unfair treatment of people in lower classes. The discussion already establishes that affection can be a determinant factor of production. Hence, it would make sense that competing for ownership or control of said factor echoes the distribution of resources under an economic framework. As part of exposing the oppression and consequent alienation, the section argues that the title *A Flock of Circling Crows* is a metaphorical warning for all members of the Japanese working class who aspire to join the army. The message which Kuroshima wishes to convey is that death is a definite outcome for those who take part in the Japanese military.

#### 5.5 Marxist findings of *The Everlasting Need for Antiwar Literature*

*The everlasting Need for Antiwar Literature* explains the importance of “the anti-war literature” for the proletariat. Kuroshima reviews several antiwar novels and concludes that however emotionally moving can be the Japanese, it has only a narrow focus to individual suffering and leaves out the concerns the larger masses.

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