

Spring 6-2-2017

Not Just Child's Play: Neo-Romantic Humanism in Ogawa Mimei's Stories

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Dissertations and Theses. Paper 4005.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.5889>

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Not Just Child's Play:
Neo-Romantic Humanism in Ogawa Mimei's Stories

by
Nobuko Horikawa

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Japanese

Thesis Committee:
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Portland State University
2017

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Abstract

During the early twentieth century, Japan was modernizing in all areas of science and art, including children's literature. Ogawa Mimei (1882-1961) was a prolific writer who advanced various literary forms such as short stories, poems, essays, children's stories, and children's songs. As a writer, he was most active during the late Meiji (1868-1912) to Taishō (1912-1926) periods when he was a socialist. During that time, he penned many socialist short stories and children's stories that were filtered through his humanistic, anarchistic, and romanticist ideals. In this thesis, I analyze Mimei's socialist short stories and children's stories written in the 1910s and 1920s. I identify both the characteristics of his writing style and the themes so we can probe Mimei's ideological and aesthetic ideas, which have been discounted by contemporary critics. His socialist short stories challenged the dogmatic literary approach of Japanese proletarian literature during its golden age of the late 1920s and early 1930s. His socialist children's stories also deviated from the standard of Japanese children's literature in the 1950s and 1960s. In this thesis, I break away from the narrow views that confined Mimei to certain literary standards. This thesis is a reevaluation of Mimei's literature on his own terms from a holistic perspective.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude toward my advisor, Professor Jon Holt, for his guidance and insight. I must also thank Professor Laurence Kominz and Professor Suwako Watanabe for kindly being a part of my thesis committee. I would also like to thank Benjamin Burton for his encouragement and unwavering moral support.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, colleagues, and the Department of World Languages and Literatures for their support during my time at PSU.

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Introduction

Japanese short story and children's story writer, Ogawa Mimei (1882-1961), was one of the most influential socialist writers during the emergence of the Japanese proletarian literature movement. He dealt with social problems in his short stories and children's stories that show Mimei's inclination toward anarchistic socialism, his own understanding of communism, and his literary disposition as a romantic writer. These literary dispositions in Mimei's stories maintain a fine balance with each other, and they embody Mimei's unique sense of the beauty of the world. I examine Mimei's short stories and children's stories written in the 1910s and 1920s to identify and explore Mimei's literary approach to social problems in these two different literary forms. In his socialist stories, Mimei brings a perspective on such issues as the meaning of art for humanity, the relationship between political ideology and literature, the relationship between the child and the adult, and the agency of writers and readers in twentieth-century Japan. His perspective is quite unlike the more dogmatic socialist writers of his time.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the writing career of Mimei along with the explanation of the literary trends of his time. Mimei wrote stories bestriding various literary genres: naturalist literature, socialist literature, proletarian literature, and children's literature. Also, he employed various literary styles such as realism, neo-romanticism, and the child's-heart school (*dōshin-shugi*). His oeuvre embodies various aspects of Mimei's ideological and aesthetic ideas including socialism, populism, anarchism, communism, humanism, romanticism, and transcendentalism. This chapter serves as a preparatory chapter for the subsequent chapters that closely investigate Mimei's

individual stories and essays. Here, I also position Mimei in modern Japanese literature with a brief explanation of the theoretical points behind Mimei's literary stance.

Chapter 2 moves onto the analysis of Mimei's socialist short stories. This chapter analyzes two of Mimei's socialist short stories to describe what Mimei's writing style is like. I examine Mimei's socialist and communist ideas in those stories. Although Mimei was deeply involved in the early proletarian literature which invited all anti-capitalist writers, when the proletarian literary circles became dominated by Marxist writers and critics, Mimei opposed the self-assertive nature of their literary approach and broke away from the movement. This chapter introduces Kurahara Korehito (1902-1999), a Marxist critic, who finally and fully provided the theoretical basis for Japanese Marxist proletarian literature. Chapter 2 discusses Kurahara's theory of "proletarian realism" and analyzes how and where Mimei's socialist short stories deviate from Kurahara's proletarian realism theory.

Chapter 3 is also about Mimei's socialist short stories. The previous chapter argued that although Mimei depicted the ills of society, he did not clearly offer solutions to them in his socialist short stories. This chapter is written around the question as to why Mimei did not offer solutions and I try to find the answer in his political and aesthetic ideas. The aim of this chapter is to reveal that although the subject matter of his socialist short stories was the ills of society, what was professed in those stories was actually Mimei's humanistic romantic worldview.

In Chapter 4, the focus will be on Mimei's children's stories. Mimei introduced the new concept of the child in Japanese literature that differentiates the child as a type of

person different than an adult. Mimei conceptualized the child in his essays in order to illustrate his intention behind his children's stories. Looking at Mimei's most famous children's story, "Red Candles and the Mermaid" (1921), I next discuss Mimei's poetic writing style and socialist themes which later critics felt made his stories too dark. Following my analysis of this story, I consider why postwar writers and critics like Furuta in Japanese children's literature attacked and then later ignored Mimei's literary approach. Through this analysis, I attempt to reevaluate Mimei's "dark" (kurai),¹ poetic children's stories on his own terms.

In Chapter 5, I will conclude the essay by understanding Mimei's larger place in Japanese literature: Mimei was a writer who had a sense of duty to convey the social injustice and suffering of vulnerable people in society. Mimei wrote literary works crossing over various literary genres—neo-romanticist stories, socialist stories, children's stories, and so on—but fundamentally, his humanistic and romantic literary approach did not change over time. A Japanese literary critic, Karatani Kōjin (1941-), referred to Mimei's concept of "the child" in his analysis of the origins of various concept of "the child" in history. From a structuralist perspective that overlooks the full picture of modern Japanese literature, Karatani took account of various factors and narratives both inside and outside of the literary world in his analysis. A holistic and structuralist approach that does not confine the scale of analysis into certain literary categories from certain points in time—such as of Karatani's—is what needed to reveal a coherent full view of Mimei's literature.

¹ Furuta, Taruhi's 1959 essay, "Sayonara Mimei," p.16. (Cited in Yokoyama 1978).

Chapter 1: Mimei's Biography and Literary Background

Ogawa Mimei (1882-1961) was an extremely prolific writer, penning volumes of stories over five decades from the late Meiji period (1868-1912) to the middle of the Shōwa period (1926-1989). He wrote over a thousand children's stories, hundreds of short stories, many insightful essays, and several poems. As was common with the writers who started their writing careers in the Meiji period, Mimei came from a prestigious family. He was born as an only child to a lower-class samurai family and received a higher education. He graduated from the Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō (the former name of the Waseda University) with a degree in English literature. He started his career as a short story writer when he was in college with his debut story "Nemu no hana" ("Silk-Tree Flowers") published in the magazine *Sukecchi* (*Sketch*) in 1903.² "Silk-Tree Flowers" embodies the kind of themes and writing style Mimei would employ throughout his early works.

"Silk-Tree Flowers" is written in the form of a short story, but its writing is somewhere between prose and verse. It is more like a poetic sketch of imagined landscape than a story with a progressive plot based on reality. The story starts with the line:

The great poetic countryside where the blue mountains are craggy and the water is clear!

青山峨々として、溪に流るゝ水清き詩仙郷！³

The story is staged in a peaceful rural area where a young husband and wife live with the husband's old mother. One beautiful summer day, the young husband comes home from the mountain having fetched some wood, and his young wife tells him that his old mother

² Ogawa, "Ogawa Mimei nenpu" ("The Chronological Record of Ogawa Mimei"), 420.

³ Ogawa, "Silk-Tree Flowers," 214. All translations from the Japanese unless otherwise stated are my own.

is ill. Shortly thereafter, the old mother quietly passes away. The young man sits on the verandah, where his old mother always turned her spinning wheel, and he gazes blankly at the silk-tree flowers above his head. Then, the story ends with the line:

Oh, the evening mist that's vanished forever, the sound of the small wheel that's stopped.

あゝ長へに消えし夕霞、止みし小車の響。⁴

The story is colored with sentimental sceneries of an idealized countryside. The description here is almost too cliché. The young couple and the old mother are abstracted to the point where they are simply the ideal roles in Mimei's dreamy world. They neither have names nor possess individuality. Although this story deals with the death of an immediate family member, it is entirely rendered in a dreamy, beautiful mood with the soothing scent and floating flowers of the silk-tree. The writing is a mixture of modern-spoken Japanese (hyōjungo) and classical-written Japanese (bungo/kogo), which gives rhythm to the story with an archaic and elegant flavor although it may have made it rather difficult for younger readers to read. Sentences often end with nouns or noun phrases (taigen-dome), which is an established rhetoric in Japanese poetry to be used to emphasize the images and prolong their feelings. The above two quoted lines are both written using this poetic technique. The phrases in the opening line are hackneyed phrases and their imagery is typical of old Chinese poetry. Mimei's propensity for poetry is clearly seen in this story. Mimei was very familiar with poetry and he loved poetry. Thus, his debut story was highly romantic, imagistic, and poetic.

⁴ *Ibid.* 216.

Returning to Mimei's biography, after he graduated from the Waseda University, he stayed in Tokyo and got married. He worked at publishing houses such as Waseda Bungaku-sha and the Yomiuri Newspaper. In 1909, at the age of twenty-seven, he decided to quit being a magazine writer and make a living instead solely by writing his own stories.

When Mimei started his creative writing career in the 1900s, the literary world in Japan was witnessing the vogue of naturalism. Japanese naturalist novels of the time were written with the aim of revealing the reality of human life in a succinct and unreserved manner through objective and realistic writing. It was a reactionary movement against pseudo-classicism and romanticism in Japan's literary scene from the 1890s. Pseudo-classicism took themes from Edo-period masterpieces and often employed a decorative and elegant pseudo-classical writing style. Romanticism, on the other hand, put emphasis on sensibility, subjectivity, free spirit, sense of self, and ideals. Japanese naturalists based their literary bona fides on the European naturalist writers' works such as those of Emile Zola's (1840-1902) and they adopted realism as their writing style.

Mimei went against this literary trend and declared himself a writer of shin-romanshugi (neo-romanticism) and organized a literary group Seichōkai (The Blue Bird Party) to study neo-romanticism in 1908. A Japanese scholar in modern and contemporary Japanese literature, Takahashi Kōhei, summarizes the meaning of neo-romanticism based on two studies of Japanese literature written in the 1910s.⁵ He defines neo-romanticism as a movement that doubted scientism and naturalism and its adherents tried to touch "the

⁵ The two reference works are Kuriyagawa Hakuson's (1880-1923) *Kindai bungaku jukkō* (1912, published by Dainihon tosho) and Ikuta Chōkō's (1882-1936) "Shin-romanshugi kōwa" in *Shin bungaku hyakka seikō* (1915, published by Shichōsha and edited by Satō Yoshisuke).

unknowable” or “something” that is beyond the reality. Their beliefs differed from “old” romanticism in that they explored fundamental truths that went beyond facts through individual intuition and they often used symbolic expressions.⁶ In other words, while old romanticism was at odds with realism in that it put more emphasis on visionary thoughts and imagination than actuality, neo-romanticist novelists strove for both a firm grasp of reality as the basis of their search for something transcendental or mystical. Put another way, Japanese naturalists naively took visible “reality” as true. Neo-romanticists did not agree with such simplistic realism and they instead advocated phenomenological view on “reality,” rooted more in subjectivity.

Mimei’s essay, “Yoru no yorokobi” (“The Joy of the Night,” 1912), contains elements of the above definition of neo-romanticism. The essay starts with the line that reads, “I praise the night, and I fear the night.”⁷ Then, Mimei inserts a scene where a woman in his neighborhood lies sick in bed and is about to die:

There is a light by the window [of the sick woman’s house]. The moonlight drifts over the leaves of thickly grown short vegetables planted in the rice field and looms up over the roof of Oshige-san’s [the sick woman] house in gray.

窓に点つてゐる燈火が見える。月の光りは、圃に植ゑられてゐる、繁つた、丈の低い野菜の葉の上に流れて、お繁さんの屋根が灰色にぼうつとなつて浮き出てゐた。⁸

This contains a realistic depiction of the scenery, but, it is more than that; it is a metaphorical and symbolic depiction of death from Mimei’s imaginary vision. The small light by the window is the life of Oshige-san that is feeble and flares weakly. The roof of

⁶ Takahashi, “Ogawa Mimei to shōchō-shugi,” 33-39.

⁷ Ogawa, “Yoru no yorokobi,” 154.

⁸ *Ibid.* 157.

her house dimly shines in gray under the moonlight as if the spirit of Oshige-san is invited by the moon and she is about to leave her body to go up there. Mimei does not directly describe the physical condition of Oshige-san; instead, he depicts the scenery to suggest the resonance between human and nature in the theme of death. Mimei ends this essay with the line:

Night, death, darkness, and the pale face of the moon; embracing them as my friends, I would like to write romantic art that transforms such fear [of death] into joy.

夜と死と暗黒と青白い月とを友としてそんな恐れを喜びにしたロマンチックの芸術を書きたいと思ふ。⁹

Mimei wanted to see through objective facts, objects, and events in order to touch the other world and to find pleasure from it. Thus, Mimei's neo-romanticist fiction aimed to envisage ideas, images, and thoughts that are beyond the visible and phenomenal aspects of human life and he employed such literary techniques as symbolism, imagination, and lyricism rather than striving for the immediate transparency of the signified of the text.

By the late 1900s, Japanese naturalism established its unique and somewhat notorious form of *shi-shōsetsu* (I-novel) which is a confessional self-recording of an author's life events and his psyche. Such writers found this was the most truthful writing of reality—a reality of what can be seen with only the naked eyes. A Japanese literary critic, Nakamura Mitsuo (1911-1988), is known for his severe criticism of Japanese I-novels. He explains that the Japanese I-novelists were focusing too “objectively” and they reproduced the flow of consciousness of the author himself, unquestioningly believing that this kind

⁹ *Ibid.* 160.

of self-recording is the most reliable depiction of “real,” and, while this literary trend made them deepen the technique of self-reporting of one’s psyche, their works came to lose a greater social perspective.¹⁰ On the other hand, the Taishō period (1912-1926) was the time that witnessed the rise of the socialist movement. Starting from the Meiji period, Japan adopted imperialistic policies to strengthen its economic power in order to compete with the Great Powers of the capitalist world. Behind the achievement of economic success, Japan’s laborers were forced to work and live in severely harsh and inhumane situations.

While naturalist writers (especially I-novelists) came to be criticized for their lack of social consciousness in their novels, Mimei rose as one of the most influential figures in the left-wing literature in the 1910s through the early 1920s. He exerted himself to form a united front of anti-capitalist writers and theorists by organizing and joining political and literary groups.¹¹ Mimei’s aforementioned neo-romanticist literary group, The Blue Bird Party, was the foundation of one of the earliest left-wing literary magazines, *Kokuetsu* (*Black Smoke*: 1918-1920), which served as a forerunner of the first proletarian literary magazine, *Tane maku hito* (*The Sower*: 1921-1923).

The Japanese proletarian literature is said to have begun in 1921 when *The Sower* was published and ended in 1934 when the Nihon Proletaria Sakka Dōmei (The Japan Proletarian Writers’ Association: NALP: 1929-1934) was disbanded. Although the term, proletarian (*puroretaria*), gives the impression that all writers in proletarian literature were

¹⁰ Nakamura, *Fūzoku shōsetsuron*, 582-584.

¹¹ To name a few of his socialist activities, Mimei was one of the organizers of Nihon Shakai-shugi Dōmei (1920), was praised for his hard works in leading and promoting left-wing literature at the San’in-no-kai (1923), joined Nihon Fabian Kyōkai (1924), and joined Japan Proletarian Literary Arts League (JPLAL) in 1925. (From “Ogawa Mimei nenpu,” 421-423).

Marxists or communists, at the beginning of the movement, it included all kinds of anti-capitalist writers such as liberalists, syndicalists, anarchists (like Mimei), Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and so on. This literary camp went through numerous theoretical conflicts within itself and constantly broke up and merged with other groups. Over time, Marxist ideals came to grow stronger in this literary camp as first developed by proletarian writers/critics such as Aono Suekichi (1890-1961), Nakano Shigeharu (1902-1979), and Kaji Wataru (1903-1982), and then, later, fully realized by Kurahara Korehito (1902-1999). In 1926, the Japan Proletarian Literary Arts League (JPLAL) was reorganized into an exclusively Marxist literary group, Nihon Proletarian Geijutsu Renmei. In this 1926 reorganization, Mimei and other non-Marxist writers were dismissed from the membership. In the same year, Mimei declared that he would stop writing short stories, and would only write children's stories from then on,¹² and, in the subsequent year, he organized an anarchist literary group.¹³ According to a researcher of comparative literature, Noriko Mizuta Lippit (1937-), during the period between 1928 and 1934 Japanese proletarian literature became exclusively Marxist literature, and Kurahara was the most representative theoretical leader of this period with his theory of "proletarian realism."¹⁴

Besides short stories, Mimei was writing children's stories from the early 1900s. It is a general consensus among scholars of Japanese literature that Mimei's most important contribution to modern Japanese literature was within the genre of children's stories in the Taishō period (1912-1926). Mimei contributed to the modernization of children's literature

¹² Ogawa, "Ogawa Mimei nenpu," 423.

¹³ Shea, *Leftwing Literature in Japan*, 142.

¹⁴ Lippit, *Reality and Fiction in Modern Japanese Literature*, 165.

by ushering in a new concept of the child who has a different interiority than adults have. This trend in children's literature in the Taishō period, which assumed a child pure and innocent unlike adults, is called *dōshin-shugi* (the child's-heart movement). Mimei published a collection of children's stories, *Akai Fune (Red Ship)*, in 1910, which was immediately embraced and later recognized as his pioneering work in the artistic child's-heart movement. Lagging behind Mimei and *Red Ship* for about ten years, Suzuki Miekichi (1882-1936) published *Akai Tori (Red Bird: 1918-1936)*, which was the magazine that successfully popularized the modern, artistic children's literary movement. Mimei became one of the main writers of this magazine with Tsubota Jōji (1890-1982), Toyoshima Yoshio (1890-1955), and Niimi Nankichi (1913-1943). The modernization of children's literature and the new concept of a child were inseparable from the Taishō democracy movement which was an enlightenment movement in politics and education. Even canonical writers such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927), Arishima Takeo (1878-1923), Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965), Kikuchi Kan (1888-1948), Satō Haruo (1892-1964), and Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943) contributed their works to *Red Bird*.

Mimei wrote over a thousand children's stories in his life; however, almost all of his representative works were written during the 1910s and 1920s. In 1925, Mimei, Tsubota, and Hamada Hirotsugu (1893-1973) made the *Sōdai Dōwa Kai* at Waseda University, a group that studied children's literature and taught younger children's stories writers. This *Sōdai Dōwa Kai* produced many children's stories writers, critics, and scholars such as Torigoe Shin (1929-2013), Furuta Taruhi (1927-2014), Okamoto Yoshio (1913-1963), Jingū Teruo (1932-), and Yamanaka Hisashi (1931-). During the proletarian literature

period, Mimei helped to organize a proletarian children's literature group,¹⁵ but it was soon taken over by Marxist writers such as Makimoto Kusrō (1898-1956). Then, once again, Mimei broke away from this Marxist group and organized an anarchistic children's writer's association.¹⁶

During the Taishō period, Mimei took an anti-war stance. The children's story, "Nobara" ("Wild Rose," 1920), is considered to be his reaction to World War I (1914-1918). This story is recognized as one of Mimei's most representative children's stories.¹⁷ However, during World War II, Mimei wrote stories that affirmed the war. After the war, when a democratic association of children's writers¹⁸ was established, Mimei became the first chairman of the association (1949-1959) without being accused of writing propagandistic stories during the war. In 1953, Torigoe and Furuta, children's writers from the Sōdai Dōwa Kai, published the article, "Shōnen bungaku no hata no moto ni!" ("Under the Flag of the Children's Literature!"), and criticized the "old" children's literature represented by Mimei and Hamada. Then, again, Mimei was criticized by a series of articles written by Furuta in the 1950s and 1960s, and, again, by Inui Tomiko (1924-2002) in her article "Ogawa Mimei" in a collection of essays of children's literary critics, *Kodomo to bungaku (Children and Literature, 1960)*. These critical articles in the 1950s and 1960s demolished Mimei's children's stories and his legacy.

¹⁵ The name of the group is Shinkō Dōwa Sakka Renmei (1928-1929).

¹⁶ The name of the group is Jiyū Geijutsuka Renmei (1929-unknown).

¹⁷ Ono (2012) counted how many times each of Mimei's children's stories were included in his collections of children's stories. According to his research, "Tsukiyo to megane" (1922) was the top being included in collections 29 times, then "Akai rōsoku to ningyo" (1921) 26 times, "Minato ni tsuita kuronbo" (1921) 23 times, and then "Nobara" (1920) is in the fourth place being included in collections 21 times. (p. 6).

¹⁸ The name of the group is Jidō Bungaku-sha Kyōkai (1946-present).

Mimei was pushed away from the central place in the children's literature from then on, and he spent his later days publishing book series of his complete works. When he died in 1961, the literary critique magazine, *Bungaku (Literature: 1933-2016)*, published an issue specialized for Mimei. And in 1992, a children's literature award, Ogawa Mimei Bungaku-shō (Ogawa Mimei Literary Award: 1992-present), was established to commemorate the thirty years after Mimei's death. At least until 1989, the last year of the Shōwa period (1926-1989), Mimei's children's stories, such as "Akai rōsoku to ningyo" ("Red Candles and the Mermaid," 1921), "Tsukiyo to megane" ("The Moon Night and Eyeglasses," 1922), "Tonosama no chawan" ("The Lord and Rice Bowl," 1921), "Nido to to'oranai tabibito" ("The Traveler Who Never Passes," 1926), and the aforementioned "Wild Rose" appeared in elementary school Japanese textbooks.¹⁹ Most recently, in October of 2016, Waseda University held a display and series of lectures dedicated to Mimei's works to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Ogawa Mimei Literary Award.²⁰ Nowadays, Mimei's children's stories receive both favorable and negative criticisms from Japanese children's literary critics. They are not dismissive of Mimei as their predecessors were in the 1950s and 1960s and they now reevaluate and acknowledge Mimei's children's stories for their artistic and socialistic aspects. Although Mimei does not have successors for his kind of children's stories today and he is more of a historical figure in the lineage of modern Japanese literature, Mimei is not a forgotten writer. Even in the present day, he is remembered as the father of modern children's literature in Japan.

¹⁹ Mitsumura tosho archives: http://www.mitsumura-tosho.co.jp/kyokasho/s_kokugo/index.html.

²⁰ Waseda University News: <https://www.waseda.jp/top/news/45651>.

Chapter 2: Mimei's Socialist Short Stories

Mimei debuted in the literary world with the romantic short story, “Silk-Tree Flower,” in 1903, and, within 10 years after its debut, he came to be recognized as a leading advocate of neo-romanticist literary style. In 1912, one of the leading literary magazines of the naturalist camp, *Waseda Bungaku* (*Waseda Literature*: 1891-present), praised Mimei for his neo-romanticist short stories in its opening article, “Suisan no ji” (“The Words of Praise and Recommendation”).²¹ Around this time, Mimei began to take on socialist tendencies in his stories. This chapter will examine the socialist tendencies in two of Mimei's socialist short stories: “Echigo no fuyu” (“The Winter in Echigo,” 1910) and “Kūchū no geitō” (“The Handstand,” 1920). The former is analyzed for its socialist consciousness and the latter for its communist consciousness specifically. This chapter aims to introduce the writing style of Mimei's through a close reading of these two short stories. I also examine here how his literary stance deviates from the standard of proletarian literature prescribed by the proletarian critic, Kurahara Korehito.

“The Winter in Echigo” is one of Mimei's earliest short stories. His socialist tendency is expressed in this story through the misery of a poor farmer family. The story first appeared in a literary magazine, *Shinshōsetsu* (*New Novels*) in 1910. 1910 was the year when Mimei published *Red Ship* and was rising both as a neo-romanticist writer and a children's writer. This story is set in a northwestern snowy region of Japan, Echigo, which is around Niigata and Toyama prefectures. This is the region where Mimei was born and grew up. Mimei spent his childhood having close contact with its nature. The scenery of

²¹ Ogawa, “Ogawa Mimei nenpu,” 421.

this northern province was deeply engraved in Mimei's mind.²² The image of vulnerable human beings placed in front of the roaring, rough winter sea, the Sea of Japan, is one of the images that appears frequently in Mimei's works. The plot of "The Winter in Echigo" goes like this. One evening, on an icy-cold winter day, a boy is alone at a mountain hut waiting for his mother to come home. As she is very late, he starts feeling very lonely and worried about her, so he goes outside to look for her. Eventually, it starts snowing heavily, and he finds himself completely lost in the terrible storm without being able to hear anything but the sound of snow falling inside of his ears. In the end, he gets hit by a train and dies. The story opens with the depiction of the mountain hut where the boy and his family live.

The hut was up in the mountain; since it was exposed to the rain for many years, the wooden plates of the walls have holes, the windows are broken, the red building materials appear on the surface of the walls, the roof's plates are rotten and gray, and, here and there, the roof is covered by straw mats with stones on them.

小舎は山の上にあつた、幾年か雨風に打たれたので、壁板には穴が明き、窓は壊れて、赤い壁の地膚が露はれて、家根は灰色に板が朽ちて處々藁を掩せて、其上に石が載せられてあつた。²³

This depiction is very realistic compared to the scenery depicted in the opening line of "Silk-Tree Flowers." Instead of using a cliché image modified with one adjective such as "seizan" (blue mountains) and "mizu kiyoki" (clear water) as in "Silk-Tree Flowers," Mimei uses elaborate and realistic descriptions of the particular mountain hut in this first line of "The Winter in Echigo." While "Silk-Tree Flowers" employs highly abstract images, creating a distance from the reader, "The Winter in Echigo" uses concrete images and

²² Ogawa, "Dōwa o tsukutte gojūnen," 31-32.

²³ Ogawa, "Echigo no fuyu," 215.

conveys the pathetic condition of life of the boy and his family so the reader can have a clear, detailed image and feel sympathetic to the characters.

The story employs this realistic writing style as it reveals the misery of the poor boy. The following scene is where the boy, taking a break from the long walk, goes into a public cemetery in which people with no surviving relatives are buried.

Things like the fragments of a broken white sake bottle and the head of a stone statue of Jizō [a Buddhist saint] are scattered here on the ground. He sits on a stone for a while. The ocean is seen clearly from this point. The ocean is all black. The sky is dark. The color of the sea is darker than the color of the sky. The thought flashes across his mind that frightening crocodiles and sharks are living in this black sea.

白い徳利の欠けや、石地蔵の頭なども落ちてゐる。暫らく、石の上に腰を下してゐた。此處からよく海が見える。海は眞黒だ。空は暗い。空の暗いのよりも海の色が黒い。彼は偶然此の黒い海の中に怖ろしい鱷や、鱻鮫が棲んでゐるのだと思つた。²⁴

This scene at the cemetery is bleak as if it reflects the loneliness and helplessness of the boy. The fragments of a broken white sake bottle may represent his troubled situation. They also imply that someone brought the bottle as a sad offering for the people who died and were buried there with no relatives to care for their graves. Also, the head of a stone statue of Jizō may indicate the miserable living situation of this boy is beyond even the reach of this merciful Buddhist saint's help and imply the sad fate of this boy. The sea in this scene is also unwelcoming and dark, which makes the boy think about scary predators, who might be far away at sea but can still haunt him on shore.

In this story, there is no depiction of people who mistreat this boy; however, it is the capitalist system that put him and his family in such misery. Although there is no rich

²⁴ *Ibid.* 227.

character in this story, the unbalanced monetary distribution sets up the unfair gap in the life conditions between the rich and the poor. The boy and his family are poor farmers and live in a shabby mountain hut. The boy's father has gone to the town looking for a job as they cannot grow vegetables during the winter. His ill mother still needs to go out to work until late. In this story, the lower-class farmers are suffering from poverty and tragedy happens to them even though they have not committed any particular wrongdoings.

Although "The Winter in Echigo" may seem to be covered all in gloom and dreariness, Mimei inserts scenes of warmth and brightness as well in the story. There are scenes where the beauty of the world transcends its darkness. He juxtaposes the scenes of the darkness and that of the light in the story in a unique, noticeable way, which conveys Mimei's romantic gaze to the transcendental law beyond reality. The scene below is the depiction of a town, Naoetsu, into which the boy wanders in, looking for his mother.

The setting sun was illuminating the seaside town. The dry wind was blowing strongly, and the yellow sand flew up high in the air. It always is the case that the air gets dry before it snows. There even were cracks on the roads because of the dryness. Red flags are flying and sparkling in the wind at the point of the tall poles of the shipping agent house on the hillock. Also, the glass windows of the three-storied inn were shining in golden color.

町へ入ったのは日暮方であつた。入日が海邊の町に當つてゐた。空つ風が強くて、黄色な砂塵が揚つてゐた。雪が來る前には乾くものだ。道は乾き切つて割れてゐる處さへあつた。小高い丘の船問屋の高い竿の尖に赤い旗が翻々と閃めいてゐる。また町の三階造の宿屋の窓硝子がぎらぎらと黄金色に輝いてゐた。²⁵

The scenery of the seaside town is beautifully warm and shining in the sunset. The sentence, "It is always the case that the air gets dry before it snows," foretells the coming of the snow

²⁵ *Ibid.* 225-226.

that is going to erase away the brightness and warmth with freezing cold colorlessness. This shows how closely the light and darkness mix with each other and how quickly they alternate in their influence over the lives of the people. After Mimei depicts this bright scenery of the town, in the next scene is where the boy wanders in the graveyard. As quoted previously, at this graveyard, he has the horrifying impression as he looks at the dark and dangerous sea. Mimei thus skillfully juxtaposes the light and darkness in these consecutive scenes, which breaks the monotony, brings in modulation, and gives depth to the story.

The effect of the juxtaposition increases when the light and darkness appear simultaneously. The scene below is where the boy (Takichi) leaves Naoetsu heading to another town Takada.

The sun has set completely. Takichi came trudging along the old Imamachi Kaidō (the road from Naoetsu to Takada) dragging his tired feet. Because the north wind was strong, the clouds are blown away and the stars appeared. The light of stars was freezing and clear. It looked as if gold, silver, crystals, and agate cracked and scattered over the sky.

日が全く暮れてしまった。太吉は疲れた足を引摺りながら、とぼとぼと昔の今町街道（直江津から高田へ行く道）を歩いて来た。北風が強いので、雲が拂ひ去られて星が出た。空は海のやうに青かった。星の光りは凍るやうに冴えた。宛然金銀、水晶、瑪瑙を砕いたやうであつた。²⁶

On the ground, there is the suffering of the boy. The sun has set, and the boy trudges along, dragging his tired feet in the black of night on the desolate road outside of town. To make matters worse, as predicted in the previous scene at Naoetsu, there soon will be heavy snowfall. On the other hand, up in the sky, the nature is as beautiful as it can be. This simultaneous juxtaposition of the boy's suffering and the serenity of the sky implies that

²⁶ *Ibid.* 227.

there is only a fine line between the light and darkness. As a neo-romanticist, Mimei looks for something unknown that both embodies and transcends the darkness and light in life.

“The Winter in Echigo” is a story that shows Mimei’s socialist consciousness, his technique of realistic writing, and his neo-romanticist gaze. The story conveys Mimei’s anger and his sympathy for the people who are underprivileged through highly realistic writing. In the Meiji period, while the naturalist I-novelists focused on depicting and reconstructing the flow of their consciousnesses and thus grew more and more detached from the others and society, Mimei consciously scrutinized the life situations of common people. Thus, Mimei was a writer who expressed a broadly socialist perspective as early as the 1910s.

“The Winter in Echigo” focused on the misery of the poor, but it was not necessarily written with a communist idea. On the other hand, Mimei clearly wrote the short story, “The Handstand,” with an awareness of communist ideology. It focuses on the life and misery of a proletariat, or *musansha*—wage-earners who do not own the means of production and make their living by selling their labor. “The Handstand” was published in a literary magazine *Taiyō (The Sun)* in 1920. Its original name in Japanese means “feat in mid-air.” It was translated into English in 1962,²⁷ and, recently, in 2010, it was introduced in a Japanese proletarian literature guide book²⁸ with other famous proletarian stories, such as Kobayashi Takiji’s (1903-1933) *Kanikōsen (The Crab Cannery Ship, 1929)*. “The Handstand” is not very famous, but neither is it unrecognized or forgotten. In 1920, the

²⁷ “The Handstand.” Translated by Morris, Ivan. In *Modern Japanese Stories: An Anthology*, 185-203. Vermont & Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1962.

²⁸ Kurumisawa, Ken. *Dakara proletaria bungaku*. Tokyo: Bensei shuppan, 2010.

year when Mimei wrote this story, he organized the Socialist League with other activists.²⁹

“The Handstand” is a story about manual laborers in an obscure, rundown district of an industrialized city. The narrator is a poor painter who makes a living by painting store signs. He hangs out with manual laborers in his neighborhood; among them are Chō-san, a tinner, and Kichikō, a workman. Chō-san is a plump, middle-aged man who is good at doing handstands. One evening, on a hot summer day, the three decide to climb up to the top of the 250-foot-high chimney of a cotton mill. Kichikō then challenges Chō-san to do a handstand on the thin rim of the chimney top, and, if he succeeds, he and the narrator will pay him a full day’s wage. Chō-san accepts the wager and he successfully performs his handstand. But, after the handstand, as he gets to his feet, none of them dares to say a word. Chō-san stares into space with his eyes wide open without blinking; then, gradually, a cold, self-mocking smile comes to his pale face. The story concludes without full closure. The following is the ending passage.

Then I [the narrator] noticed a black bird skimming past directly over the chimney and silhouetted strangely against the dark sky. Kichikō was the first to go down and I followed him. Glancing back, I saw Chō still standing there on the platform. His face was that of a dead man. He seemed sunk in thought.³⁰

次の瞬間に、私は、夕空を掠めて、飛んで行く鳥の黒い影を空に見ました。吉公が先に立つて降り、私が其の後につづいた。振向くと、長さんは、死んだもののやうにまだ茫然として考へ込んで立つてみたのです。³¹

“The Handstand” is a story about wage-laborers and their community and it depicts an understanding of communist ideas; however, it deviates from the prescribed form and

²⁹ Shea, *Leftwing Literature in Japan*, 118.

³⁰ Ogawa, “The Handstand.” Translated by Morris. 203.

³¹ Ogawa, “Kūchū no geitō,” 266.

content of proletarian literature espoused by the proletarian critics and writers from the late 1920s to early 1930s. The aforementioned Japanese proletarian critic, Kurahara, advocated “proletarian realism” as the one and only legitimate form and content of the proletarian literature. He argued that proletarian writers should express proletarian class consciousness and write their stories in a realistic way so that each story properly functions to promote the proletarian revolution. In the following, “The Handstand” is analyzed from Kurahara’s theory of proletarian realism, which reveals the individual theme and writing style of Mimei’s fiction.

In “Puroretaria rearizumu e no michi” (“The Path to Proletarian Realism,” 1928), Kurahara argues that proletarian realism is, “To sum up, first, we need to ‘use the eyes’ of the proletarian vanguard, then, secondly, we need to describe what we see with the attitude of a strict realist—this is the sole path to proletarian realism.”³² Kurahara emphasizes that a proletarian writer should have a class consciousness and take the perspective of “sentōteki proletariāto”³³ (militant proletariat).³⁴

Now one question that arises here is whether Mimei expresses proletarian class consciousness in “The Handstand” and thus meets Kurahara’s standard of proletarian realism. Chō-san is a tinner; he works hard, sweating in the heat of a hot summer day, soldering tin cans. Seeing this, the narrator suggests that maybe they can go to Asakusa to take a break. Then Chō-san replies,

“It’s all right, if you’ve got money. Then you can go to the mountains for the summer. But when am I going to have time to go to Asakusa? I suppose that’s what

³² Kurahara, “The Path to the Proletarian Realism.” Translated by Brian Bergstrom. 179.

³³ *Ibid.* 164.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 178.

they mean by no leisure for the poor.”³⁵

「金持は避暑になんか出かけるが、俺等は浅草へ行つて見る暇がない。貧乏暇なしつて全くこのことだ。」³⁶

Thus, he laments that his hard work is only enough for survival but not more than that. Manual laborers spend their time and energy for labor, like a cog in the machine rather than as a person. Also, the value Chō-san creates through his work is not even his; it belongs to capitalists. Chō-san is dissociated from his product and labor. This misery matches with Marx’s theory of alienation. Furthermore, one of the characters in the story is a communist propagandist who disseminates communist ideas. At the end of the story, Chō-san sinks into deep thought as he realizes that he has measured his own life by monetary value and that he is that tainted by the ideology of capitalism. In a capitalist society, one’s value becomes impersonal and measured by its monetary value. Thus, “The Handstand” is written with an understanding of communism, and Mimei depicts in various ways how the proletariat are being destroyed not only physically but also mentally in a capitalist society. However, according to Kurahara, such a story is not enough to be properly called a work of proletarian literature.

Kurahara defines the subject matter of a proletarian literary work as in the following way:

The perspective of the militant proletariat should thus determine the themes of the works written by the proletarian writer. He must present the parts of reality most necessary and indispensable for the liberation of the proletariat, discarding those that are useless or incidental. Just as the bourgeois realist’s chief subject matter was people’s biological urges, and the petty bourgeois realist’s was social justice and philanthropy, the proletarian writer’s is the class struggle of the of the proletariat.³⁷

³⁵ Ogawa, “The Handstand.” Translated by Morris. 195.

³⁶ Ogawa, “Kūchū no geitō,” 283.

³⁷ Kurahara, “The Path to the Proletarian Realism.” Translated by Brian Bergstrom. 178-179.

According to Kurahara, the subject matter of a proletarian literary piece is the class struggle of the proletariat and ultimately the liberation of the proletariat. “The Handstand” may or may not meet this requirement, because the story ends without a full-closure and leaves room for other possible interpretations. One way to interpret this ending is that Chō-san sinks in thought because he has realized that, having been worn in the daily monetary exchanges of his physical labor, he has lost his dignity and pride as a human being so much to sell his own life for a petty monetary reward. In this reading, the focus of the story is on the misery of a man, not particularly a proletarian. So the story is not promoting any specific measure to take (such as proletarian revolution) to change the situation. This is one way to interpret the ending. Another way to interpret the ending is that Chō-san sinks in thought because he has seen the world upside-down when he did the handstand on top of the chimney and realized the idea of overthrowing the world order. When he did his child-like feat, he literally switched his perspective, then he saw the capitalist world beneath him and he was above it. Maybe the meaning of Chō-san’s pondering in the ending scene is that at that moment he had a sudden realization of the possibility of overthrowing the rule of capitalists and flipping the world upside-down; it is thus necessary to have the proper perspective of capitalist oppressive reality. In this second interpretation, Chō-san manifests the class consciousness of the proletariat and the story meets the standard of the subject matter of Kurahara’s proletarian realism. But, between these two interpretations, the first interpretation seems more plausible than the second, because of Mimei’s insertion of lyrical scenery.

In the ending passage, behind Chō-san and his friends is a beautiful orange-colored

sky; the black shadow of a bird sharply cuts through the serenity and warmth of the sky, a metaphor for how the wrongness in human society stains the beauty of nature. This insertion of the scenery suggests that Mimei saw a bigger picture where a human act is placed in the frame of the vast world of nature rather than Mimei writing for a specific political goal, like the liberation of the proletariat. If this reading is the case, “The Handstand” does not necessarily confine its context only to the proletariat. It seems likely that Mimei was envisioning the liberation of humanity overall, and Chō-san is one oppressed person among others.

On the other hand, the most representative Japanese proletarian novel, Kobayashi’s *The Crab Cannery Ship*, explicitly focuses on the proletariat. His novel is about the inhumane working condition of the laborers on a crab-cannery ship, and the story ends with a successful strike by the laborers. There is no doubt about what the theme of *The Crab Cannery Ship* is. It is the class struggle and liberation of the proletariat. Compared to this clarity of the theme of *The Crab Cannery Ship*, the theme of “The Handstand” is ambiguous and unfocused on the proletariat, far from Kurahara’s proletarian realism. As in the aforementioned quote, Kurahara categorizes the subject matter of his contemporary literature into three groups: proletarian writers’ theme is the liberation of the proletariat, bourgeois writers’ is the biological appetite—for example, as in Tayama Katai’s *Futon* (*The Quilt*, 1907)—and petty bourgeois writers’ themes of social justice and humanism—for example, as in Shimazaki Tōson’s *Hakai* (*The Broken Commandment*, 1906) and Emile Zola’s *Germinal* (1885).³⁸ “The Handstand” falls into the third group in Kurahara’s

³⁸ Kurahara, “Puroretaria rearizumu e no michi,” 162-164.

categorization. Kurahara explains that petty bourgeois writers do have a social consciousness unlike bourgeois writers but interpret social problems from their own subjective perspective but not from the objective, historical, and dialectical perspective.³⁹

Kurahara also wrote that a proletarian writer should get rid of factors that are unnecessary and incidental for the liberation of the proletariat from their works. A writer should create his story employing only the necessary and inevitable factors for this theme. “The Handstand” has characters and factors seemingly unnecessary and incidental for the advertisement and execution of proletarian revolution. The narrator of this story is a poor painter—a failed artist who ended up a sign painter. It is unclear why the narrator is a painter-artist, not a factory worker if the story was written for the propaganda of class struggle. As to what characters are suitable for a proletarian fiction, Kurahara gives the following instructions.

However, it is not the case that it is fine for a proletarian writer as long as he writes all types of people distinctly who exist in actuality. He needs to pick up the types who have more or less active meaning from the perspective of historical development and leave the rest of the types in the shadows. For us, those various types such as workers, farmers, soldiers, communists, social democrats, and fascists are necessary. However, types of people like geisha, cafe waitresses, modern girls, modern boys, beggars, tramps, and these sundry categories, are not that necessary at least by themselves.

しかしプロレタリア作家は現実に存在するすべてのタイプを差別的に書いていけばよいのではない。彼は時代の発展という見地から多少とも積極的な意義を持っているタイプだけを表面に取り出して、あとは陰に置いといてよいのである。我々にとっては労働者や、農民や、兵卒や、共産主義者や、社会民主主義者や、ファシストの様々なタイプは必要である。しかし芸者や、女給、モガや、モボや、乞食や、ルンペンやの細々とした分類やら、そのタイプらはそれだけではさして必要でない。⁴⁰

³⁹ *Ibid.* 164.

⁴⁰ Kurahara, “Geijutsuteki hōhō ni tsuite no kansō,” 234.

Kurahara was considering how to create “geijutsuteki taipu” (types from the artistic perspective).⁴¹ By “geijutsuteki taipu,” Kurahara means the archetypes of people that a proletarian writer needs to induce and categorize based on their meanings and functions in the dialectical and historical development of society. Some archetypes have more to do with the capitalist class structure and class struggle, functionally, economically, and systematically, than other archetypes whose essence as a social group have not much to do with the Marxist dialectical view of history. In the case of the poor painter in “The Handstand,” he is apparently not any of Kurahara’s inevitably relevant archetypes to the class struggle. It is unclear whether a poor artist can truly be categorized as a proletarian. An artist’s means of production is his artistic skill, which is, in a sense, inherent within himself and it cannot be taken away. Also, an artist’s product is his artistic work. Although an artist can get caught up in the monetary exchanges of values, the way an artist gets alienated from his products would not be the same as the case of the laborers such as crab-cannery ship laborers. If the painter was using his artistic skills and drew propaganda posters in order to agitate his comrades, he could at least contribute to the class struggle. But, in “The Handstand,” Mimei’s painter is merely a poor painter who would not even participate himself to communist activities. When a communist propagandist came to the town and gave a long speech, the painter’s reaction was simply: “‘A socialist,’ I thought to myself and wondered whether all the others realized it.”⁴² Clearly, there is a gap between these two men.

Another feature of “The Handstand” that deviates from Kurahara’s criteria of the

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 233.

⁴² Ogawa, “The Handstand.” Translated by Morris. 192.

subject matter of proletarian literature is Mimei's focus on an individual over a group. Instead of practical group actions such as strikes or revolution, Mimei chose one man's handstand, a child-like feat, as the climax of the story. If one applies Kurahara's criteria, an individual worker's hobby interest like Chō-san's handstand is "useless or incidental" "for the liberation of the proletariat."⁴³ Because it neither is the necessary component for the achievement of the class consciousness of the proletariat nor contributes to the realization of the liberation of the proletariat. Chō-san explains that he started practicing handstands because once he saw a beautiful girl skillfully do a handstand at a circus and he fell in love with the girl, whom he never saw again. This small episode of love is seemingly unrelated to and incidental for a narrative of class struggle and revolution. In this too, "The Handstand" falls short of Kurahara's standard.

Furthermore, Kurahara says a proletarian writer should take realism as his writing style which is defined as "kyakkan-teki taido" (objective attitude),⁴⁴ which is "an attitude that strives to describe reality as reality, free of subjective bias or embellishment."⁴⁵ Kurahara attacks bourgeois and petty bourgeois writers' subjectivity in their works as inappropriate, but he tries to legitimize the proletarian-class subjectivity. Kurahara declares this is the only true path:

What is most important to us is not to distort or embellish reality with our subjective viewpoint, but to discover within reality those things that correspond to the class-conscious subjectivity of the proletariat.⁴⁶

Kurahara argues that a proletarian writer should see reality without distorting or

⁴³ Kurahara, "The Path to the Proletarian Realism." Translated by Brian Bergstrom. 178-179.

⁴⁴ Kurahara, "Puroretaria rearizumu e no michi," 165.

⁴⁵ Kurahara, "The Path to the Proletarian Realism." Translated by Brian Bergstrom. 179.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 179.

embellishing it with his proletarian subjectivity. He describes this process as “to discover.” It seems that Kurahara assumes that things one sees within reality exist on their own and are waiting for humans to “discover.” However, from a phenomenological standpoint, there is no such reality that exists on its own. One’s reality is unconsciously but necessarily distorted and embellished with his subjective viewpoint because his reality is configured by his recognition. It is more natural to assume that a proletarian realist writer distorts and embellishes reality with his subjective viewpoint just as much as a bourgeois realist writer does with his subjective viewpoint. Anyhow, Kurahara emphasized the importance of depicting reality in an objective and undecorated way based on the worldview of dialectical materialism.⁴⁷ In “The Handstand,” Mimei used a realistic style in depicting the social situation; however, he did not employ dialectical materialism to interpret the world. As previously discussed, Mimei did not necessarily classify people based on their role and function from the dialectical perspective of class structure, class struggle, and economic stage of the society. By using lyricism, symbolism, and metaphor, he rather actively created a gap between the signifier and the signified. Furthermore, Mimei ended his stories without offering a full closure in order to encourage his reader to have subjective response to his stories and interpret them in his/her own way.

“The Winter in Echigo” and “The Handstand” depict the ills of society that keep the weak down and put them through hardship. Although the settings are different, both stories are similar in that, first, they are written in a realistic writing style; and, second, they do not suggest any particular solution to the wrongness of the society. In “The Winter in

⁴⁷ Kurahara, “Geijutsuteki hōhō ni tsuite no kansō,” 226.

Echigo,” the boy dies and the story ends with the scene where the boy’s mom desperately holds the boy’s corpse tightly in her arms the next morning. Mimei frustrates the reader, making her witness this horrible tragedy of son and mother and still makes the reader wonder about the meaning of the story. “The Handstand” also leaves the reader deep in thought as Chō-san also is—unable to move on top of the 250-foot-high iron chimney in the bright sunset glow. Now, the question arises why Mimei does not offer solutions in his socialist short stories. The next chapter tackles this question.

Chapter 3: Romantic Anarchist Artist Mimei

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mimei does not offer solutions to the ills of society in “The Winter in Echigo” and “The Handstand.” This chapter suggests two interpretations about Mimei’s approach to social justice. The first interpretation seeks an answer in Mimei’s political thought and the second interpretation in Mimei’s aesthetic thought. In explaining these two interpretations, Mimei’s ideological and aesthetic thoughts will be interrogated by introducing the political theories that Mimei expressed his sympathy with and by examining Mimei’s essays that express his political, ideological, and aesthetic ideas.

Mimei’s political thought was a mixture of socialism, anarchism, and populism. Since his college days, Mimei had been attracted by the Narodniks’ idea.⁴⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary defines the Narodnik in the following way:

A supporter of a type of socialism originating amongst the Russian intelligentsia in the late 19th cent. and which looked on the peasants and intellectuals as revolutionary forces; a Russian populist. In extended use: a person who tries to politicize a community of rural or urban poor while sharing their living conditions.⁴⁹

In the 1860s and 1870s, young intelligentsia in Russia led the Narodniks’ movement, with the slogan of “V naród!” (To the people; be the people)⁵⁰ and went to rural areas to live among peasants, help them, and educate them.⁵¹ Mimei has a personal background that might have had something in common with the sentiment of the Narodniks. Mimei was

⁴⁸ Ogawa, “Ogawa Mimei nenpu,” 420.

⁴⁹ Oxford English Dictionary Online: <http://www.oed.com/>.

⁵⁰ Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 198.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 166-167 and 198-199.

born as an only heir to a samurai family in a rural area in Japan. In his essay,⁵² he recollects that, even as a small child, Mimei felt the unfair gap between poor peasants and the privileged classes. Mimei tells an episode about his youth. As a boy, Mimei went back to his village for the summer vacation from school, he saw peasant boys who were tanned black under the sun working in the fields. The peasant boys, after noticing Mimei and his classmates, put aside their plows and stared at Mimei and his classmates as if they were looking at something bizarre. Young Mimei thought those peasant boys who seemed around the same age as him would never have the opportunities Mimei had, and he also thought that it was only by sheer luck that Mimei was born to a prestigious family and they were not.⁵³ Mimei does not offer the details of why and how he was attracted by the Narodniks' idea. But, he at least had a sensibility that shared the Narodniks' populist aim to enlighten peasants and form a revolutionary force. Later, Mimei came to know Ōsugi Sakae (1885-1923), the leading anarchist/syndicalist of the Meiji and early Taishō-periods, who read Mimei's short stories and visited his house.⁵⁴ Under Ōsugi's influence, Mimei read the works of the Russian anarcho-communist theorist, Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921).⁵⁵ In his autobiographical essay, "Dōwa o tsukutte gojū-nen" ("Fifty Years of Writing Children's Stories," 1951), Mimei says that he felt deeply sympathetic to the humanism found in Kropotkin's theory, because Mimei thought it was close to his idea that "[To cope with social problems,] it is better to respect people's personalities and try to understand

⁵² Mimei, "Ningen'ai to geijutsu to shakai-shugi," 66-77.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 66-67.

⁵⁴ Ogawa, "Dōwa o tsukutte gojūnen," 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 45.

them than to improve the society by reforming its social structures.”⁵⁶ A guidebook of political theories, *Political Theories for Student*,⁵⁷ explains Kropotkin’s ideal society as in the following:

He [Kropotkin] feared the power of the centralized state, and so he believed that small communities should control their economics.⁵⁸

Kropotkin believed in a harmony among people:

He saw cooperation as a fundamental aspect of human nature, and expected that any process of self-realization would lead an individual not to isolation, but to greater harmony and solidarity with others.⁵⁹

And, the innate goodness of man:

Kropotkin believed that cooperation, mutual aid, and social interaction formed just as strong an impulse in the human animal. He counted on this cooperative drive, in fact, to motivate people to produce once all property belonged to the commons and material incentives for work disappeared.⁶⁰

Mimei does not explain much about how and what part of Kropotkin’s ideas influenced his political thought. But Mimei was sympathetic to the Narodniks’ populism and Kropotkin’s anarcho-communism. Therefore, it would be safe to assume that Mimei’s ideal society is free from centralized power and it is closer to something like harmonious, self-sufficient communities based on both mutual help and respect among the members who are free from social stratification.

Having an anarchistic conviction, Mimei could not submit to the approach of his contemporary proletarian writers and critics. In his essay, “Shin romanchishizumu no tenkō”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 45.

⁵⁷ Miskelly, Matthew and Noce, Jaime. “Anarchism.” In *Political Theories for Students 1st edition*. Gale A Cengage Company, 2002. <http://www.gale.com>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

(“Conversion of Neo-Romanticism,” 1930), he writes:

Right now, our life is oppressed by capitalist coercion. [...] However, if we are merely replacing one plenary power by another plenary power, then the people will never be genuinely freed. If there is no liberation, there would never be peace or justice.

たゞ吾等の生活は、現在、資本主義的強制の下に置かれつゝある。[...]しかるに、強権に換ふるに強権をもつてするのであつては、いつの日に、民衆は真に解放さるゝか期し難い。解放なきところに、決して、平和も、公正もないのである。⁶¹

In this quote, the first plenary power refers to capitalism and the second Marxism. Mimei wanted to free people genuinely from the structural violence of a centralized administrative power. Mimei said “genuinely” (*makoto ni*) because, in his ideal society, people should be free from monetary, economic, and all the other manipulation of a state power. He did not think the kind of Marxism that his contemporary proletarian writers and critics advocated would be able to bring genuine liberation. In the quote below, Mimei suggests the reformation of mindset before the structural reformation of a society:

We have to recognize that the spirit of neo-romanticism has things in common with the impulse of syndicalists and the purity of the heart of anarchists, and it truly is human conscience. This society will not be improved by the reformation of external organizations or systems but it has to be brought through the people’s own reflection and consciousness.

ネオロマンチシズムの精神は、実に、サンヂカリズムの衝動に、また、純粹アナーキズムの純情に通ずる、人間的の良心であることを知らなくてはならぬ。この社会が、外的の組織や制度の変革によつて、決して改善されるものでなく、人間自からの意識と反省に待たなければならぬものであり、⁶²

In this quote, Mimei argues that even if a proletarian revolution changes the social and

⁶¹ Ogawa, “Shin romanchishizumu no tenkō,” 161.

⁶² *Ibid.* 161.

economic system, humanity cannot be saved at its core level, because the fundamental problem is not an unjust monetary distribution or who is ruling the society. Mimei thought that both social injustice and misery are fundamentally inherent in contemporary society because they are rooted in the people's way of thinking. It is not that Mimei denies the necessity of the reformation of systems. What he argues here is that should the reformation start from the inside of people, then it will naturally bring the reformation of the system of society, but not the other way around. In another essay, "Jindō-shugi o omofu" ("I Think of Humanism," 1930), Mimei elaborates his view.

Feelings as behavior should be regulated by reason, but any social science that does not base itself in feelings is equal to being empty. Those people who believe that order in society will be achieved by directly conducting theoretical class struggle and by resorting to coercive authoritarianism, without seeking the peace in the people's understanding and sympathy, will remain impassive even if they see a small child begging on the street putting his forehead on the paving stone.

行為としての感情は、理性によつて、統制されなくてはならないけれど、感情に立脚しない社会科学は、また空虚に等しいと言ふことができる。人生の平和を、理解と同情に求めずして、直に、理論的階級闘争に導き、強権主義によつて、秩序を可能たらしむると信ずる者の如きは、舗石に額付く、幼児を見ても、平然としてゐられるでありませう。⁶³

In this quote, Mimei expresses his disbelief in the materialist view of society. Marxist materialism assumes that the productive and economic system is the base of society and that this system shapes the superstructure—ideological, cultural, and other aspects and systems of society. In other words, a Marxist assumes that the reformation of the productive and economic system can alter the way of thinking and behavior of people. The proletarian revolution is the means to achieve such reformation. Mimei does agree that the way people

⁶³ Ogawa, "Jindō-shugi o omofu," 10.

think and act are influenced by their environment,⁶⁴ but he thinks the fundamental forces that determines people's thinking and behavior will be inside them, not outside them. In the next quote, Mimei warns the possible harm of focusing too much on the theoretical social reformation and neglecting the necessity of enlightening the people.

“What's the use of cheap humanism? Unless we make ourselves join the war of class struggle, we will never be able to create a better society,” saying this, they affirm their cold-hearted attitude. They talk like this as much as to think that the weak who cannot survive by themselves cannot complain even when they are abandoned to die.

「安価な人道主義が何にならう。階級戦にまで進出しなければ、決して、より善い社会を造ることができない」かう言つて、冷淡なる態度を肯定する。そして自から生きることのできない弱者は所詮、見殺しにされても仕方がないと言わぬばかりであります。⁶⁵

In this quote, Mimei impeaches the self-righteousness of a narrow-minded ideologist who believes in the rightness of his/her ideology and becomes indifferent to people who do not meet his/her standard. The same accusation is applicable to a society at large. A self-assertive unifying ideology will inevitably create a social mentality of “us” and “not one of us”—that is, the mentality of othering. In “I Think of Humanism,” Mimei also says, “Nevertheless we are all humans, there are people who are being exploited and forced to work hard through their life, just because they are in a different environment. It is a fact that there are people who live like horses and cows.”⁶⁶ In the case of a capitalist society, the weak are the have-nots. The ideology of capitalism justifies a stratification of people based on their ranks in the capitalist money game. For the haves, the have-nots are the other,

⁶⁴ Ogawa, “Shin romanchishizumu no tenkō,” 152.

⁶⁵ Ogawa, “Jindō-shugi o omofu,” 6-7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 9-10.

because their environment is different, so, they are distant mentally, socially, and culturally. They become indifferent to the life of the have-nots and even do not question their indifferent attitude because the ideology of capitalism promotes the mentality of othering based on a person's ability to produce exchange values. Because they are the other, capitalists would not hesitate to work the have-nots as horses and cows; their hardships are distant. Social ideology that admits class structure—no matter if it is feudalism, capitalism, and so on—gives a justification to systematic othering in society. In “I Think of Humanism” and “Conversion of Neo-Romanticism,” Mimei is questioning how different Marxism can be from capitalism if it makes people conform to an ideological mold, promotes othering, and grinds down the misfits. This is, I think, the meaning of the aforementioned quote from Mimei, “if we are merely replacing one plenary power by another plenary power, then people will never be genuinely freed.”

Thus, Mimei opposed the Marxists' approach to social reformation which focused on structural changes of society and downplayed the importance of nurturing the conscience of the people. Also, he idealized a society that is built upon a sense of equality and mutual respect among the people unlike the contemporary society that institutionalizes social stratification. Mimei's social ideas conform to Kropotkin's beliefs in the innate sense of cooperation and mutual aid among people and also his ideal form of society that is class-free, harmonious, self-sufficient small communities.

Mimei ended “The Winter in Echigo” and “The Handstand” without offering closure. This can be interpreted as Mimei wanting his readers to think about the lives of the weak depicted in these stories and realize the social mechanisms that caused their

misery. By making his readers to go through this process, Mimei may have hoped that his readers will remember a sense of compassion and cooperation—a sense that the contemporary society has lost. If Mimei shared Kropotkin’s beliefs in the innate sense of cooperation and mutual aid of humans, Mimei would have expected that if people retrieve those forgotten feelings, they will inevitably move towards creating a better society, even if Mimei does not offer an image of an ideal society. As quoted in the above, Mimei thought “it [the reformation of external organizations or systems] has to be brought through the people’s own reflection and consciousness,”⁶⁷ and this can mean that Mimei aimed to enlighten his readers by inviting them to self-reflection through his socialist short stories rather than offering an image of an ideal society hoping that his readers would conform to it. In this sense, Mimei’s socialist short stories without solutions could be interpreted as his attempt to enlighten the idea of a harmonious society where everyone is respected as a member of society and no one is left behind or abandoned. This is the first interpretation of Mimei’s ending his short stories without explicitly offering solutions to social problems.

The second interpretation seeks an answer in Mimei’s aesthetic thought. Some proletarian writers considered art as their weapon and wrote their stories to propagate and promote the idea of proletarian revolution. Conversely, in his essays, Mimei expressed his discomfort about using art for political propaganda. Mimei refused to reduce his characters in his stories into nameless ones in the class system.

In “Conversion of Neo-Romanticism,” Mimei throws a doubt on interpreting and categorizing humans based on materialism. He writes:

We cannot look for one’s life consciousness apart from his real-life. And, it is also

⁶⁷ Ogawa, “Shin romanchishizumu no tenkō,” 161.

true that each individual's environment is making each person have different feelings. However, it cannot be said that everyone's mentality is regulated and altered in the same way all the time in reacting to external circumstances. Each person chooses different expressions based on their individuality. That is to say, we should acknowledge the freedom of individuality. One's freedom of individuality is the same thing as freedom of thought.

現実の生活を離れて、自己の生活意識を他に求めることはできない。個人の環境が、その人に、異なりたる喜怒哀楽を与へつつあることも事実である。しかし外的事情によって、常に同じように、どの人の精神も掣肘せられ、変動するとは言へない。各人、個性によって、表現を異にしている。すなわち、個性の自由が認められる。個性の自由は、思想の自由である。

⁶⁸

In this quote, Mimei admits that everyone's way of thinking is affected and influenced by his/her external circumstances. Here, "external circumstances" (*gaiteki jijō*) refers to the material aspects of one's life contrary to one's "mentality" (*seishin*). Mimei continues in saying that one's external circumstances cannot completely determine how one feels and thinks. Mimei argues that there must be differences in how people react to external circumstances, which is incalculable and nondeductible from principles. The differences are, Mimei insists, the "freedom of individuality" (*kosei no jiyū*) and the "freedom of thought" (*shisō no jiyū*). This Mimei's attitude is in contrast with Kurahara's objectivism that was theorized as a part of his theory of proletarian realism.

Kurahara writes, "The proletarian writers' worldview, dialectical materialism, teaches us to elucidate class discrimination among humans and see people of each class in its complexities and in a holistic manner."⁶⁹ Kurahara argues that a proletarian writer should unravel modes of humans by deciphering how the dialectical materialism is at work

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 152.

⁶⁹ Kurahara, "Geijutsuteki hōhō ni tsuite no kansō," 226.

in forming, maintaining, and altering class hierarchy in society. It is not that Kurahara denied people have individuality. It is that, for a proletarian writer to write a proper proletarian story, Kurahara thought categorizing and abstracting types of people based on dialectical materialism is crucially important, and depicting individuality among people is not necessary. Thus, while Mimei focuses on individuality, Kurahara focuses on people as a group. For example, *The Crab Cannery Ship* exemplifies Kurahara's approach; there is no main character in the novel and seemingly no character is given unique interiority that allows him to be more than a stereotypical proletarian. Mimei's approach in shaping characters in "The Handstand" is in stark contrast to Kurahara's approach.

In "The Handstand," Mimei's belief in individuality appears in Chō-san's love for handstands. Chō-san practices handstands whenever he has free time from his busy work. He once saw a beautiful young circus girl who did a handstand stunt, and he became mesmerized by her. Being in love with this girl, whom he will never see again, he practices handstands to reenact this love. When he practices handstands, he feels "shitashii kaimi" (profound pleasure) as if he has a connection with her.⁷⁰ He says to the narrator:

"It's the same as painting," [Chō-san] said, "When you see something beautiful, it gets you in some way, doesn't it, and that makes you want to paint it. You'll work away like mad trying to paint it, won't you? Well, it's the same with me. Only I can't paint so I've got to imitate what I've seen. Is that so strange?"⁷¹

「畫描だつてさうでねえかい、何か見て綺麗だと思ふから、一生懸命で描くだらう。俺は畫が描けないから、其れを眞似たんだ。何がをかしいことがあるもんか。」⁷²

⁷⁰ Ogawa, "Kūchū no geitō," 280.

⁷¹ Ogawa, "The Handstand." Translated by Morris. 190.

⁷² Ogawa, "Kūchū no geitō," 260.

In the capitalist system, Chō-san is merely a figure in the calculation of values for his physical labor. But he can affirm his individuality through his handstands. His sense of beauty, which is intertwined with his unattainable love, makes him unique as an individual with his own inviolable interiority; this is how he can escape being a faceless worker of the masses.

Mimei's unique depiction of a political character in "The Handstand" gives us another clue in understanding the author's belief in the freedom of individual agency. In "The Handstand," there is another important character aside from Kichikō, Chō-san, and the narrator: the communist propagandist. This propagandist comes to the town from somewhere and gives a speech about the misery of mineworkers and how the tyranny of capitalists is absurd and unfair. Mimei spends almost one-fifth of the story for this propagandist's speech and remarks. Though he plays a significant role like this, he is simply described as "a small, intelligent-looking man"⁷³ and he does not have a name; usually, he is referred to only as "the man." His speech is succinct in conveying the injustices of society, but his speech sounds like a report printed in communist propaganda flyers. It is as if the propagandist is merely a device Mimei uses to convey Marxist political thought; "the man" does not have interiority as a unique character. It might be possible to interpret that Mimei takes away the individuality of the propagandist because he is a faceless member of the collective. Although Chō-san is a faceless person in the proletariat, he has individuality—exemplified by his physical handstands—that allows him to transcend the socio-economical discourse, which of course is what imprisons the verbose

⁷³ Ogawa, "The Handstand." Translated by Morris. 191.

propagandist.

Thus, Mimei depicted Chō-san, who would have been buried as a faceless one in Kurahara's approach, as someone who has his own interiority as an individual. For Mimei, individuality and art are in a close, inseparable relationship. Mimei believed that the realm of art is where one's individuality vividly emerges. As a neo-romanticist, he thought that this is where the beauty of humanity resides and that this is what art should illuminate. In another essay called "Wasureraretaru kanjō" ("The Forgotten Feelings," 1926), he writes:

If a literary work can revive the sentiments—such as the feeling that you felt when you were a child but have forgotten, the feeling that filled your entire heart at a certain time when you experienced certain event, the feeling that you thought you had almost forgotten but which pops up in your head from time to time...and the sensations you felt—then you can lose yourself in those feelings for a while. This is the true pleasure that art gives us. I respect and cherish this intense pleasure more than anything else.

子どもの時分を感じたことがあつて、すでに忘れてしまつた感情や、また、ある時、ある事件に対して、刹那ながらも心の全幅を覆ふた感覚や、また、もはや、忘れられんとして時々、頭の中に顔を出してくるやうな感情や感覚が、さらに、一つ作家の作物を読むことによつて蘇生されるならば、しばらくまたその気分の中に、自らを忘れることができる。これが芸術の吾らに与える真の快感であらう。私はこの権威ある快感を何よりも尊くうれしく思ふのである。⁷⁴

In this quote, Mimei explains that he finds the ultimate value of art in its power to arouse feelings and make the readers lose themselves in such feelings. Mimei emphasizes the power of art that takes readers back to the primordial stage of individual psychology, contrary to the group psychology that governs the daily life of adults. Mimei says that this is the function of art, and art also teaches us to "respect and cherish this intense pleasure more than anything else." This tells that, for Mimei, the realm of art is like a sanctuary that

⁷⁴ Ogawa, "Wasureraretaru kanjō," 12-13.

connects a person to the person's fundamental feelings that have been hidden or forgotten inside him.

“The Winter in Echigo” exemplifies this kind of Mimei's faith in art. There is a scene where the boy is at the hut and loses himself in the happy thought of playing the flute and showing it to his mother and father.

“It is about time that my mother comes home. Where has she been?”

Thus he talks to himself and wonders tilting his head, then he takes it into his head to pick up a flute. When he looks at the flute, he cannot help but feel joy.

[...]

“When will my father come back? Until then, I will take a good care of this flute and show this to him when he comes back.”

As he thinks this to himself, he feels infinitely close to the flute; the flute grows so dear to him as much as to make him feel lost as to what to do with it. He picks up the flute and takes joy in those thoughts.

「もうお母は歸らしやる時分だ。どの邊へ來さつしやつたらう。」
と、獨りと言ひながら、考へて頭を傾げてみたが、また何と思ひ返したか、笛を取上げた。笛を見ると、彼はまた樂しみの心を禁ぜずにはみられない。 [...]

「何時頃お父さあは歸つて來さしやるだらう。其の時分までもこの笛を大事にして取つて置いて歸らしたら見せるのだ。」

かう考へると、無限に此笛が懐かしい、戀しい、何したらいゝだらうかと笛を取上げて彼は雀躍をした。⁷⁵

For a while, the boy worries about his sick mother, and, at the next moment, he randomly thinks about the pleasure of playing the flute that he is making for the diversion during the winter time and the joy in the springtime. And he thinks that he will take a good care of the flute and show it to his father when he comes back. This is the kind of joy the boy embraces. It is humble and born out of family love. On the other hand, Mimei continues to contrast this to rich peoples' ideas of joy.

⁷⁵ Ogawa, “Echigo no fuyu,” 217.

In this remote country place of snowy upper Echigo, during winter, there is no enjoyment outdoors. Those who go out for hunting are either only hunters who make their living from it or spoiled prodigal sons of the rich.

雪の多い上越後の片田舎では、冬になれば外の楽しみは全く絶えてしまふ。猟に出かけるものは之を商賣にする猟師か、若しくは金持の道楽息子の他にない。⁷⁶

Spoiled prodigal sons of the rich enjoy killing animals and indulge themselves by pursuing their own appetites and they are not thinking of sharing something with others. Their idea of enjoyment is thus egocentric and harmful. Hunting is rich peoples' pastime. It is as if Mimei is saying that for rich people, even enjoyment becomes a commodity. On the other hand, in the case of the boy and his flute, he has his own art and he can share it with other people. The boy dreams about the enjoyment of playing the flute and showing it to his parents, and, for a moment, he can even lose himself in that thought. For Mimei, this is the power of art. Art is not ready-made; it is not a commodity. It is the product of an individual's unique sensibility. Also, it is performed or created to be enjoyed by others.

Mimei explains his belief in the social aspect of art:

For romanticism, art exists within human interactions and confronts the people for total view of life. Also, art is to appeal to the purity of one's heart and to communicate with one's conscience. Its aim is the liberation of humanity, not to restrain the people. It expects everyone to show his/her individuality, and, what is more, it tries to find a tonal beauty in that.

ロマンチズムにあつては、その芸術は、人間と人間の接触である。全的として、臨むところにある。また純情に訴へ、良心への伝達である。人間を拘束するのではなく、解放せんとするのである。各人、個性を發揮し、しかも、そこに、階調の美を見出さんとするのである。⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 217.

⁷⁷ Ogawa, "Shin-romanchishizumu no tenkō," 163.

Mimei assumed that art exists within human interactions and there is a “tonal beauty” (kaichō no bi) among the manifestation of individualities. Mimei emphasized the freedom of individual agency, but, ultimately, he looked for the synthesis of people beyond individualities. Mimei’s approach resonates with the aforementioned Kropotkin’s belief: “any process of self-realization would lead an individual not to isolation, but to greater harmony and solidarity with others.”⁷⁸

Thus, Mimei defined art through romanticism. On the other hand, as a Marxist, Kurahara defined art with the dialectical materialism as its basis. In his article, “Puroretaria geijutsu no naiyō to keishiki” (“The Content and Form of Proletarian Art,” 1929), Kurahara writes,

Form in art is determined by a dialectical process. On the one hand, the labor of workers creates formal possibilities for art. On the other hand, society at large demands art and various classes arise to provide content.

芸術における形式は、生産労働過程によって予め作られたる形式的可能性と、その芸術の内容をなすところの社会的及び階級的必要との弁証法的相互作用の中に決定される。⁷⁹

Kurahara argues that the content and form of art are determined in the dynamics of dialectical materialism. Mimei acknowledges that social environment influences a person’s inner life,⁸⁰ so he would not disagree that the content and form of art are influenced by the spatiotemporality of the author; however, it is, for Mimei, a variable in art, but not the *raison d’être* of art.

As a Marxist theorist, Kurahara emphasized how the content and form of art are

⁷⁸Miskelly, Matthew and Noce, Jaime. “Anarchism.” In *Political Theories for Students 1st edition*. Gale A Cengage Company. 2002. <http://www.gale.com>.

⁷⁹ Kurahara, “Puroretaria geijutsu no naiyō to keishiki,” 184.

⁸⁰ Ogawa, “Shin-romanchishizumu no tenkō,” 152.

confined and determined by economics and the mode of production of a society at a certain time in the history of humans. On the other hand, as a romanticist artist, Mimei emphasized that art can be free from the restriction of external situations because art is essentially the representation of someone's individuality.

Mimei believed that the realm of art is like a sanctuary. It is where the most fundamental, personal, and honest feelings reside. Returning to the question of this chapter of why Mimei did not offer solutions in his socialist short stories, my second interpretation is that Mimei did not want to use his short stories as propaganda for any political ideas. Because, for Mimei, art is the realm of individual sensibilities in its purest form. He would not have wanted to trespass on it with group psychological agitation. From his humanistic sense of duty, Mimei chose the misery and sorrow of the weak in society as the theme of his socialist short stories; however, he was careful not to turn his literary art works into mere political propaganda.

Chapter 4: Mimei's Children's Stories

The previous chapters discussed the manner in which Mimei's socialist short stories deviated from the type of proletarian realism advocated by Kurahara, illuminating Mimei's own attitude towards politics and art. In this chapter, the focus will be on his children's stories. Mimei is called the father of Japanese children's literature because of his great undertaking of almost single-handedly establishing the genre of modern children's literature in the late Meiji and Taishō periods. His children's stories were groundbreaking in many aspects due to his unique concept of "The Child," his poetic and abstract writing style, the dark and pessimistic yet romantic images and moods, and the strong socialistic and humanistic messages behind his works.

Jingū Teruo (1932-), a researcher of Japanese children's literature, posits that Mimei created the form of *dōwa* (a short, creative fairy-tale) in order for the author to assume an ideal child and express his ideal, dream world.⁸¹ This was a major shift away from the pre-modern approach to children's stories and thus brought about the modernization of children's literature in Japan. From 1910, when Mimei published his (and also Japan's) first collection of children's stories, and up until after World War II, Jingū argues that children's stories in Japan were basically variations of Mimei's children's stories, meaning that children's literature had been dominated by the influence of Ogawa Mimei for as long as 35 years.⁸² Jingū argues that, after World War II, the writers and critics rejected the fairy-tale atmosphere of older *dōwa* from mainstream Japanese children's literature because the new era demanded more realistic stories with life-like

⁸¹ Jingū, *Dōwa e no shōtai*, 194-201.

⁸² *Ibid.* 194-201.

characters.⁸³ From the 1950's to 1960's, children's writers and critics sought a way to transition from the fairy-tale like *dōwa* to realistic children's stories and, as a result, Mimei's *dōwa* became the target of much opposition and criticism. Torigoe Shin (1929-2013), Furuta Taruhi (1927-2014), and Inui Tomiko (1924-2002) were the leading critics who published articles and criticized Mimei's *dōwa* as inappropriate for the time. This series of criticisms brought the glory of Mimei *dōwa* to an end. After World War II, the world of *dōwa* which Jingū refers to as “*nodokana shōsekai*” (the halcyon microcosm)⁸⁴ was lost. Instead, Japanese children's stories switched to realistic fantasies and novellas following the principles advocated by Torigoe, Furuta, and Inui.⁸⁵ As this period of harsh criticism after World War II came to an end, opinion was mixed regarding Mimei's *dōwa* as contemporary critics found aspects to both praise and criticize in Mimei's work.

It is apparent that Mimei created a new concept of the child in early 20th century children's literature in resistance to a hegemonic literary world, one dominated by petty bourgeoisie mentality. I reject the harsh postwar evaluation of Torigoe, Inui and other critics who overlooked the full context of the literary currents of Mimei's time. I re-examine how Mimei's works and writings about his works, which are rooted in the context of the Meiji and Taishō periods, justify his choice to depict a dark world for children in his *dōwa*. “Red Candles and the Mermaid,” one of Mimei's most well-known and important stories, best represents the Mimei's art, which skillfully combines poetic qualities and social themes. In their postwar criticism of Mimei, Torigoe and others narrowly focused

⁸³ *Ibid.* 194.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 195.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 194-201.

on the idea of Mimei's failed realism despite the fact that Mimei did not aim to employ realistic writing in his children's stories; Mimei's achievement, I argue, was how he addressed the realistic issues of the world in the *dōwa*—his abstract poetic form. In this chapter I reassess Mimei's importance in the field of children's fiction.

In 1926, Mimei left the Marxist proletarian literary circle and published an article in the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun* declaring that he would quit writing stories for adults and focus on writing children's stories.⁸⁶ In the article, “Kongo o jidō sakka ni” (“From Now On, I Will Become a Writer for Children's Stories”), he writes,

I have adored the freedom and purity of humanity and the imaginary world of justice. I do not know since when, but, I came to be attracted by *dōwa* as an artist. [...] I would like to devote the rest of my life to this, my unique poetic form.

自由と純真な人間性と、そして空想的正義の世界にあこがれてみた自分は、いつしかその藝術の上でも童話のほうへ惹かれて行くやうになつてしまいました。[...] 餘の半生を専心わが特異な詩形のためにつくしたいと考へてゐます。⁸⁷

Mimei thus designates children's stories as his own “unique poetic form” (*waga tokui na shikei*) and explains that it is essential for him to express “the freedom and purity of humanity and the imaginary world of justice.” As discussed earlier, Mimei's literary approach did not conform to the Marxist proletarian literary movement that had dominated the *bundan* (literary circle) in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Unlike the proletarian writers who conflated both art and political activity, Mimei defined art as a human activity that is meant to instill a primitive and holistic sensibility toward the world. Furthermore, he believed that children's stories were the most suitable medium for achieving this goal. In

⁸⁶ Ogawa, “Ogawa Mimei nenpu,” 423.

⁸⁷ Ogawa, “Kongo o jidō sakka ni,” 293.

his autobiographical essay, “Dōwa o tsukutte gojūnen,” there is a part where he explains the reason behind his 1926 transition. He writes,

This is called literary art for art’s sake. When I say this, I do not mean that I prioritize beauty or gorgeousness above everything. I mean that I believe the power of literary art has much more effect than politics or various movements. I want to take this stance that believes in literary art for art’s sake.

文芸至上主義といいます。しかし私は、単なる美しいものとか、単なる華やかなものという文芸至上主義ではなくて、文芸の力が政治やあらゆる運動よりも効果があるという点において、文芸至上主義というものを採りたいと思ったのです。⁸⁸

Mimei thought that the type of political literary art that was lauded by the bundan at the time would not be able to realize the ideal world he dreamed of. He thus quit participating in any social movements and writing short stories, left the bundan (literary circle), and declared he would write dōwa only.⁸⁹ Mimei left the bundan and social movements not because he gave up on social improvement or art; on the contrary, he believed that only his dōwa were capable of bringing about an ideal world even if his bundan contemporaries disagreed. Considering Mimei’s life in the bundan up until 1926, this declaration was a monumental decision. Mimei debuted as a promising pupil of Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) in 1903. In fact, Shōyō gave him the name “mimei,”⁹⁰ and wrote a preface for Mimei’s first collection of short stories (1907) stating, “Mimei is not someone who was made into a writer; Mimei was born to be a writer.”⁹¹ In 1912, *Waseda Bungaku*, a staunchly naturalist publication, praised Mimei as a rising star in the neo-romanticist

⁸⁸ Ogawa, “Dōwa o tsukutte gojūnen,” 47.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 47.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 39. Mimei means “before dawn.”

⁹¹ Tsubouchi, Shōyō. “Jo.” In *Shūjin*, 1-5.

movement. This is all coupled with his growing reputation as the father of Japanese children's stories. In spite of all this, Mimei's decision to leave the bundan behind and focus on writing children's literature, a niche genre at the time, indicates just how seriously he undertook this task.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mimei believed that revolution should start from the consciousness of the people and only then will society improve, not the other way around. Mimei thus thought that the kind of mentality that people should regain is that of child's. In his 1923 essay, "Dōwa ni kansuru shoken," he writes:

"Adults are smarter than children." The meaning of this is that adults are corrupted as human beings. This is why we are trying to grasp the mentality of children, so we can once again summon the spirit from our dead adult minds.

大人が子供より伶俐であるというのは、人間的に墮落したのだ。私たちが童話において子供の精神を把握して、もう一度死んだ大人の頭から靈魂を呼び返さんとするのは、すなわちこれにほかならぬ。⁹²

In this passage, Mimei interprets "smart" (reiri) as a form of common sense and worldly-wisdom that he equates with "corruption" (daraku). Mimei finds that a child-like mentality is able to bring "back souls" (yobi kaesan) from corrupted adults. Mimei thus values the mentality of children over the corrupted and "dead" (shinda) mentality of adults. In other words, Mimei believes that children possess a vital mentality that is unstained by the human world; a type of innocence or purity that adults have lost. This is why Mimei thought that the key to the revolution of the consciousness of people came through invigorating and purifying the minds of adults.

This echoes with what Mimei wrote on the concept of "The Child" in a 1911 essay

⁹² Ogawa, "Dōwa ni kansuru shoken," 59.

entitled “Shōnen shujinkō no bungaku” (“Literature Where the Protagonists Are Children”).

He conceives “The Child” as someone who embraces a primitive and holistic sensibility of the primordial stage of individual psychology. He explains,

On the contrary to this [adults’ perception of the world], a child perceives everything as new. Every time he/she encounters an event, they immediately become afraid wondering if the event threatens their life; thus they rely on their senses and assume that everything has some influence on their existence. Back in the primitive age, humans felt much more doubt, insecurity, and fear about the power of nature than now in our contemporary society. [...] Just like this, children who are inexperienced in society embrace this primitive sensitivity for whatever they see. Thus, every sensible experience would appeal to their feeling of reality. Therefore, they have very high sensitivity, and everything is sensual for them.

是れに反して少年は、何を見るにしても新しい。事件に触れる毎に、直ちに自分の存在を怪しくはしまひか。と思ひ至るまでに感覚的である。全我的である。恰かも原始時代にあつては、今の文明に於けるよりも更に自然力に就いて懷疑と、不安と、恐怖とを感じた。[...] ちやうど其のやうに未だ世間に慣れない子供は何を見るにしても、此の原始的の気分を去らぬものである。故に物を見る経験のすべてが実感に訴へて来る。従つて感覚が鋭敏であり、すべてが官能的である。⁹³

Mimei argues that the child perceives everything as new with a sense of awe and fear. This is because the child is inexperienced in life and has a high sensibility to the wonders of nature. Because the child has not yet fully developed the analytic and inductive reasoning, he is unable to categorize and predict his surroundings, and, as a result, he lives in the world with a sense of awe, fear, and uncertainty. In this sense, the child perceives things in a mixed and holistic way without sorting them out. Therefore, the boundaries between the real and dreams, or, between what is possible and impossible are ambiguous. This child perceives the world as it is in all its chaotic and crude beauty because he is not yet stained by the ideology of human society and has not yet developed a pattern in his ways of

⁹³ Ogawa, “Shōnen shujinkō no bungaku,” 182-183.

perceiving things. Thus, the child is not separated from the world.⁹⁴ With his epistemological purity and freedom, the child embraces the world as a whole, where self and others are unseparated and entangled in a chaotic and primitive unification. A high sensibility to the world and the full appreciation of phenomenological freedom are the reasons why the child is “closer to the world” than adults. Mimei conceptualized the child as such and aimed to express “the freedom and purity of humanity and the imaginary world of justice”⁹⁵ through this notion of the child in his children’s stories. A good example of Mimei’s conception of “The Child” can be found in his children’s story, “Akai rōsoku to ningyo” (“Red Candles and the Mermaid,” 1921). This story is undoubtedly the most successful children’s story Mimei wrote⁹⁶ and has been the subject of a large body of scholarly research.

The “Red Candles and the Mermaid” takes place in a port town somewhere in the northern region of Japan. A couple in the port town who make candles for their living find a mermaid baby girl. They take her to their home and raise her as their child. The mermaid girl draws pictures on candles, turning them into very powerful talismans that her foster parents make a great profit from. One day, a showman comes to the town and the couple sells the mermaid girl to him as they are unable to resist the temptation of his money. The mermaid girl is put in an iron cage with other animals and loaded onto a ship headed far

⁹⁴ This metaphysical assumption of a child and their union to the world is reminiscent of the Lacanian concept of the lost union.

⁹⁵ Ogawa, “Kongo wo dōwa sakka ni,” 293.

⁹⁶ According to Ono (2012), this story was included in Mimei’s collections of children’s stories 26 times which is only second to “Tsukiyo to megane” (1922)’s 29 times (Ono, p, 6). Also, this story is among those that have appeared in elementary school Japanese textbook as the Mitsumura tosho archives (cited above) reports.

south. After the couple sells the mermaid girl, a woman whose hair is dripping wet stops by their candle shop and buys the last candles the mermaid girl painted in all red as she was hurried to leave the house and did not have time to draw pictures on them. One night later, a heavy storm hits the town, and the couple, shivering, talks about how the ship the mermaid girl is on must be far in the ocean by now and would not be able to survive the furiously storming seas. Soon after, the town gets haunted and falls to ruin.

The mermaid girl is described as a gentle, smart child who has large-pupiled eyes, beautiful hair, and fair pinkish skin.⁹⁷ She is depicted like a perfect child who never misbehaves. In fact, she is described as very filial (*oyakōkō*), doing whatever she can to help her foster parents. The figure of the mermaid girl is abstracted to the point almost as a symbol of purity and innocence. On top of being good-hearted, pure, and innocent, the mermaid girl is described as a sensitive girl who at times even sheds tears of gratitude towards her foster parents.⁹⁸ She is also rather shy and it is implied that this stems from an inferiority complex. Indeed, her gratitude towards her foster parents comes from her being conscious that she is “ningen nami de nai” (less than a human).⁹⁹ Furthermore, she does not come outside because she is “hazukashi gatte” (embarrassed)¹⁰⁰ about her unique appearance. Indeed, she is almost *too* grateful of her foster parents. For instance, her foster parents will let her draw pictures on candles for so long that her hands will start to hurt and she will keep drawing in spite of the pain. There is no description that the foster parents are forcing her to work this hard; however, there is also no indicating that they felt

⁹⁷ Ogawa, “Akai rōsoku to ningyo,” 269.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 272.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 271.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 269.

sympathy towards her either. Indeed, in one scene it is pointed out that “There was nobody who felt sorry about the girl.”¹⁰¹ With her feeble, delicate nature, sensitive heart, and no one who truly cares for her, the mermaid girl is a pitiable character. And yet, she is also exemplary of “The Child”; she is pure, innocent, good-hearted, highly sensitive, and fearful.

“Red Candles and the Mermaid” is indeed a tragic story. The kind-hearted, pure, and innocent mermaid girl ends up being sold by her foster parents who are by no means depicted as evil individuals. Rather, they are ordinary people who are simply concerned with their short-term profits. At first glance, this story can be read as simply a moral story with a message about inclusiveness, compassion, and respect. However, Mimei’s story goes beyond that of simple humanism. This can be found in the characterization of the mermaid. The mermaid is the subject of tri-faceted othering being at once an alien, female, and child. The source of her misery lie in the fact that all three positions she occupies have constantly been denied agency throughout the course of history. As an alien in a foreign land, she is not granted the same rights as normal citizens. As a woman in a fundamentally patriarchal society, she is disadvantaged. And, by being a child, she is unable to enjoy the type of agency or right of self-determination that adults may have. The mermaid girl is thus a symbol for society’s most vulnerable people, especially in a profit-driven capitalist one. Thus, this story conveys Mimei’s strong sense of humanism and socialism.

In fact, Mimei’s strong socialist consciousness is one reason why his children’s stories stood out during his time. A comparison with children’s stories by Hamada Hirotsuke (1893-1973) and Toyoshima Yoshio (1890-1955), representative children’s

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 272.

writers during the Taishō to early Shōwa periods, will make it clear just how unique Mimei was among his contemporaries in this respect.

“Red Oni Who Cried” (1933), by Hamada, is a fairy tale that is set in the past. In this story, there is a red oni (a kind of Japanese demon) who wants to befriend humans in a nearby village. However, he keeps failing in this attempt as the villagers are scared of him. One day, the red oni’s friend, a blue oni, does a fake attack on the villagers, so that the red oni can act as a hero. The plan works and the red oni becomes friends with the villagers. In the end, the blue oni quietly leaves the region, and the red oni cries, feeling sorry for him. “The Best Horse in Japan” (1924), by Toyoshima, is also staged in a rural area. In this story, a horse dealer meets an injured demon child and allows it to take a rest inside of his horse’s stomach. In return, the demon child makes the horse very powerful, which makes the horse dealer very happy.

Both of these stories involve non-human characters: an oni and a demon child. However, the way they are treated in these stories is the opposite to the case of the mermaid girl in “Red Candles and the Mermaid.” In both “Red Oni Who Cried” and “The Best Horse in Japan,” those non-human characters are accepted by humans and the stories tell the importance of being kind to and inclusive of aliens. What is more, in “The Best Horse in Japan,” the horse dealer who shows kindness to the demon child and treats it nicely even gets rewarded. Characters in these two stories, both humans and non-humans, are basically good-hearted and there are no villains in these stories. Conversely, human adults in “Red Candles and the Mermaid” sell the kind-hearted mermaid girl for money, much less accept her into their community. The villains in “Red Candles and the Mermaid” are adults: the

couple, the showman, and the people at the port town who let the transaction occur. They are average human adults who are not intentionally evil, but selfish, and vulnerable to temptation. It is as though Mimei finds adults to be the cause of societal decay. While “Red Oni Who Cried” and “The Best Horse in Japan” serve as simple moral stories that praise and encourage one’s good-heartedness, “Red Candles and the Mermaid” depicts the treacherousness, indifference, and greediness of humans to show a negative example of human morality.

The dark and pessimistic themes in Mimei’s children’s stories are an extension of Mimei’s socialist and humanist consciousness. They show his sympathy towards minorities and especially children who are vulnerable and abused by society. Mimei himself explained that he wrote children’s stories because he thought children were abused by society and felt an urgent need lay accusations against adults and speak in defense of children. In his essay, “Kodomo wa gyakutai ni mokujūsu” (“Children Acquiesce in the Abuse,” 1924), he writes,

“They have to obey unconditionally.” This has been believed to be a matter of course for children. And, even today, I cannot find people who question this fate of children. [...] This is the reason why I feel the need of the art in which I will become the voice of children, protest for them, advocate for them, and talk about everything of their world. At the same time, I assert the need for art that consoles the children of this era.

絶対に服従しなければならぬ。それが、子どもとしては、あたりまへであると思われてきた。そして今日、なほ子どもの運命に対して怪しむ者を見ないのである。[...] この故に、私は、子どもらの代弁者となり、ために抗議し、主張し、またその世界の一切を語らなければならぬ芸術の必要を感じず。同時に、一方この時代の少年を慰撫する芸術をも必要なりとするのである。¹⁰²

¹⁰² Ogawa, “Kodomo wa gyakutai ni mokujūsu,” 48-51.

In Mimei's children's stories, people—including children—sometimes die, go insane, get abducted, and even get sold for money. Mimei incorporated these images in his stories to depict the actuality of our imperfect world which is sometimes immoral, cruel, and absurd. Mimei was a humanist. He had a sense of mission to convey the misery of socially vulnerable people, especially children, who are at the mercy of the cruelty of society. If Mimei depicted only a perfect and beautiful world in his children's stories, it would have been a lie. He was too honest for that.

Mimei does not hesitate to depict dark, uncanny, and scary scenes in his children's stories either. The following is the passage from "Red Candles and the Mermaid" near the end when the town becomes haunted and seamen are looking at the furious sea waves.

During the night, the surface of the northern sea was exceedingly horrific. No matter which direction you look, the high waves crawled endlessly. As the waves broke on the rocks, they seethed with white bubbles. It was really an ominous and uncanny scene when the moon peeped through the clouds and illuminated the surface of those waves.

夜になると、この海の上は、なんとなくものすごうございました。はてしもなく、どちらを見まわしても、高い波がうねうねとうねっています。そして、岩に砕けては、白い泡が立ち上がっています。月が、雲間から波の面を照らしたときは、まことに気味悪うございました。¹⁰³

The sea might have swallowed the mermaid girl, killed the humans on the ship, and now looks unwelcoming and angry. This scene is scary and dreadful, exhibiting multiple layers of darkness. It was better for the mermaid girl to return to her homeland than to spend her life as a freak show curiosity. However, the depiction of the "horrific" sea well captures the broken heart of the mistreated mermaid girl, a victim of the darkness of human nature

¹⁰³ Ogawa, "Akai rōsoku to ningyo," 277.

and human society. Also, this scenery represents the seamen's fear of the furious sea—the uncontrollable aspect of nature. Because nature works outside of human logic, it is fundamentally uncontrollable and unpredictable. Here we see the uncanny abyss of darkness humans feel towards the mystery of nature. In the face of nature and all its menace, the power structures in human society would mean nothing; privileged or underprivileged, adult or child—all those distinctions lose their significance.

One of the main criticisms leveled against Mimei's children's stories is that, since the 1950s, Mimei's children's stories are too dark and pessimistic and therefore inappropriate for children readers. Yokoyama Nobuyuki wrote an article entitled, "Mimei hitei ronsō to kindai jidō bungaku-kan" ("The Disputes against Mimei and The View of Modern Children's Literature," 1978), in which he refers to Torigoe Shin's argument that attacks the darkness and negativity in Mimei's children's stories.¹⁰⁴ Yokoyama cites Torigoe's argument that Mimei children's stories' themes are all negative, and the "internal energy" (naihōsuru enerugī)¹⁰⁵ of Mimei children's stories would not be sublimated into any positive direction; Torigoe thus insists that Mimei's children's stories should be disqualified as children's literature.¹⁰⁶ In response to Torigoe's argument, Yokoyama questions why a children's story with a negative theme must be disqualified as children's literature. In other words, Yokoyama argues that Torigoe's belief that children's literature should be positive and "healthy" is nothing more than Torigoe's own preference.¹⁰⁷ While

¹⁰⁴ Torigoe, Shin. "Mimei dōwa no hyōka no tame ni." *Tokyo Shimbun*, 1961/6/1. (Cited in Yokoyama 1978: p.46).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 46.

¹⁰⁶ Yokoyama, "Mimei hitei ronsō to kindai jidō bungaku-kan," 46.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 46.

a children's story written with a positive mood surely is indeed one valid approach, there is no convincing argument as to why all children's stories should be written in that way, especially if one remembers that the worldview and theme of a literary work cannot be argued separately from its social context. A writer is always confined by this social clause—his work will be scrutinized for its legitimacy in a particular social and ideological context of his time, and, at the same time, he can always rely on this social clause—the immediate readers of his work are contemporaries, not readers in the future or in a different society. Thus, Torigoe argued that children's stories must have an optimistic character because this was an acceptable notion during the time he wrote. However, Mimei wrote during a time that was significantly different, both historically and ideologically, than that of Torigoe's.

Mimei started writing his children's stories in 1906 and published his first collection of children's stories in 1910. According to Nakamura Mitsuo, in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese society became highly skeptical of utilitarianist ideologies and the primacy of authority.¹⁰⁸ Ishii Kazuo, a researcher of Japanese literature, analyzes Mimei's children's story, "Denshinbashira to myō na otoko" ("A Telegraph Pole and a Weird Man," 1910), and finds that the sense of confinement that pervades the story has much in common with other works of the time such as Masamune Hakuchō's *Izuko e* (*Whither*, 1908), Natsume Sōseki's *Sorekara* (*And Then*, 1909), Ishikawa Takuboku's "Jidai heisoku no genjō" ("The Stagnation of Our Times," 1910), "Garasudo" ("The Glass Door," 1914), and Edogawa Rampo's "Nisen dōka" ("The Two-sen Copper Coin," 1924).

¹⁰⁸ Nakamura, *Fūzoku shōsetsuron*, 563.

Ishii argues that all of these works reflect the sense of confinement of the time and “[portrayed] young people who cannot find hope and worry about their life.”¹⁰⁹

Also, Lippit Noriko argues that, in the late Meiji period, under the influence of Western, dark-romanticist writers such as Poe, Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde, romanticist writers and poets in Japan became dissatisfied with the optimistic romanticism of Yosano Akiko (1878-1942) and Tekkan’s (1873-1935) *Myōjō* (*Morning Star*: 1900-1908). In response, they developed a trend of aesthetic, exotic, and decadent literature that was represented by the two literary groups: *Subaru* (*Pleiades*: 1909-1913) and the Pan-no-kai (The Pan Society: 1908-1913).¹¹⁰ She also analyzes that this literary trend was, “culturally speaking, [...] a fundamental skepticism toward and criticism of progress, Western civilization and capitalist economic development.”¹¹¹ Mimei was not a member of either of these two groups; however, the pessimism, skepticism, and sense of confinement in his stories accurately conveyed the general atmosphere of the time. While the critics of Mimei’s children’s stories in the 1950s and 1960s contended that children should be excluded from the darker aspects of life, for Mimei, children are also members of society, and it is possible that they share the same kind of feelings as adults; it is possible that they have agency to choose the stories to fit their feelings of darkness, despair, and anxiety.

¹⁰⁹ Ishii, “Ningyō to yamanashi—Miyazawa Kenji to Ogawa Mimei,” 46.

¹¹⁰ Lippit, *Reality and Fiction in Modern Japanese Literature*, 70-73. Lippit summarizes the characteristics of Western dark romanticism: “Unlike the earlier romantic writers (Wordsworth and Emerson, for example), who envisioned a return to the original state of harmony or recovery from alienation through a return to nature and a rational scheme of education, such later romantic writers as Poe and Baudelaire, believing that nature were irredeemably corrupt, sought to attain the original unity through destructive transcendence, through delving into the heart of their alienation in an exploration which could culminate only in self-destruction. Paradoxically, therefore, their exploration of the dark psychic realm was an endeavor for transcendence, an attempt to return to the original unity envisioned as original nothingness.” (pp.70-71).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 74.

Although a number of critics found Mimei's children's stories to be inappropriate for children, Mimei felt it was his duty to convey and expose injustice in society rather than making up a perfect but fake world in his children's stories.

Another main criticism of Mimei's children's stories is the vagueness of the characters and setting. For example, the mermaid girl in "Red Candles and the Mermaid" lacks a name and the readers are never given a glimpse into her inner psychology. The way Mimei shaped the mermaid girl is very different from how he shaped Takichi in "The Winter in Echigo." For example, at the beginning of "The Winter in Echigo," Takichi's personality and interiority are eloquently described. The story follows his psychological transitions as Takichi reacts to his environment. In one scene, Takichi is at home worrying about his sick mother who has not yet come home; in the next moment, he looks at the flute in his hand and randomly thinks of the joy of playing the flute; then he looks outside at the bleak scenery of the snowy mountain and dark sea and worries about his sick mother; next, a water mill is spinning outside, and he strains his ears to hear the sound of the water mill. To Takichi, it sounds as if it is singing, "My mother... is feeling sick... and about to die... she is... collapsing by the road side..."¹¹² Takichi's worries get the better of him and he decides to run and look for his mother; with hot tears running down his cheeks, he shouts inside his heart, "If I find her, I'll tell her how much I hate her! If I find her, I'll cry and complain a lot!"¹¹³ Takichi's mental state is portrayed in details in a realistic manner; the depiction of how he gradually became increasingly worried to the point where he abruptly runs out of the house is powerful and convincing. Through depicting the dynamic

¹¹² Ogawa, "Echigo no fuyu," 222.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 223.

psychological state of Takichi, Mimei offers readers convincing a realistic character. This type of characterization is in stark contrast with the mermaid girl from “Red Candles and the Mermaid,” written decade after “The Winter in Echigo.”

As mentioned above, the mermaid girl is not given a unique personality. Rather, she signifies the archetype of a good, pure, innocent, and cute girl:

As she grew up, she became an obedient and smart girl who has large-pupiled eyes, beautiful hair, and pale pinkish skin.

大きくなるにつれて、黒目勝ちで、美しい頭髪の、肌の色がうす紅をした、おとなしいりこうな子となりました。¹¹⁴

Mimei describes the mermaid girl exclusively in terms of these positive qualities. In fact, throughout the entirety of the story there is not a single depiction of any defect of the girl. However, Mimei never goes beyond using these simple adjectives to describe the mermaid girl, thus readers never really get a sense of her personality. For example, while she is described as “smart” (rikō na) there is no episode that shows exactly why or how. With this minimalist description, “smart kid” (rikō na ko), the reader cannot visualize a realistic image of a particular mermaid girl who has her own behavioral and psychological patterns. Also, interestingly, in this story, Mimei does not describe any specific mermaid qualities of the girl. Since she is a mermaid, her fishtail must be a prominent physical characteristic of hers; however, Mimei omits any description of her fishtails or any physical trait that is specific to a mermaid. The reader has no clue as to what her fishtail looks like or smells like or if it needs to be wet all the time or if she can move well on the ground and so on. Because Mimei describes only her human-like physical traits—her hair, eyes, and skin

¹¹⁴ Ogawa, “Akai rōsoku to ningyo,” 269.

color—the reader would have no idea that she is a mermaid if it was not determined early in the story. Furthermore, she does not behave like a mermaid, whatever behaviors that may be, and she lacks any mermaid-specific psychological traits all together. She speaks human language perfectly, communicating well with her foster parents, and follows the same social norm as humans (such as oyakōkō). Nevertheless, this is not enough to overcome the distinction of being a mermaid, and thus she does not enjoy the same rights as normal citizens.

Furthermore, the depiction of psychological state is totally absent even at pivotal moments in the story. One example is the scene where the showman comes to pick up the mermaid girl. Mimei simply writes:

Because she was hurried, she could not draw pictures on the candles she was holding in her hands, so she painted them all in red. She left those two or three red candles behind her as a memento of her sad memories.

娘は、手に持っていたろうそくに、せきたてられるので絵を描くことができずに、それをみんな赤く塗ってしまいました。娘は、赤いろろうそくを、自分の悲しい思い出の記念に、二、三本残していったのであります。¹¹⁵

Even as she is being taken away from her house, there is not much description of her mental state. The red candles the mermaid girl left behind represent her sadness; however, there is no description of what she saw, said, and felt at this critical moment, unlike the aforementioned scene in “The Winter in Echigo.”

The foster parents are depicted in a similar manner as well. When they find the mermaid girl, they decide to adopt and raise her because the girl has a kind and cute face.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 275.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 269.

They even think she could be a gift from gods because they find her at a mountain with a shrine.¹¹⁷ Despite all this, they end up selling the mermaid girl for short-term profit. Inui criticizes that these behaviors of the foster parents lack consistency, making them “unstable” (fuan'tei) as characters.¹¹⁸ The foster parents sold the mermaid girl as soon as the opportunity arose without experiencing much of moral anguish despite raising her and spending years together. However, their inconsistent behavior and lack of psychological description does serve a thematic purpose in the narrative. Much in the way the mermaid girl functions as a signifier for purity and innocence, the foster parents function as symbols of as a sort of indifferent xenophobia in that they do not feel empathy for the mermaid girl despite having adopted her. In other words, these archetypical characters with no particular interiority were devised in order to communicate Mimei's message of how cold-hearted society can be towards outsiders. In this regard, the claims that Mimei's characters are unrealistic and vague is valid, however it is clear that this type of characterization served a specific function in Mimei's children's stories.

The same argument can be applied to the criticism toward the world of Mimei's children's stories. Yokoyama refers to Inui's arguments that the characters and the world in “Red Candles and The Mermaid” are depicted in terms of the mood or atmosphere, making them difficult for readers to visualize. As a result, Mimei fails to create a coherent world with a solid structure, making the plot and characters seem unrealistic.¹¹⁹ Indeed, Mimei sets up the world of “Red Candles and the Mermaid” rather loosely. The port town

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 269.

¹¹⁸ Inui, Tomiko. “Ogawa Mimei.” In *Kodomo to bungaku*. Fukuinkan shoten, 1967. (Cited in Yokoyama 1978: p.46).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 46.

is briefly described as follows:

There was a small town on the shore. The town had various shops. Among them was a shabby shop that sells candles at the bottom of a mountain. On top of the mountain, pine trees were growing, and there was a shrine among the pine trees. The wind from the sea hits the trees and they make a roaring sound night and day.

海岸に、小さな町がありました。町には、いろいろな店がありましたが、お宮のある山の下に、貧しげなろうそくをあきなっている店がありました。山の上には、松の木が生えていました。その中にお宮がありました。海の方から吹いてくる風が松のこずえに当たって、昼も、夜も、ゴーゴーと鳴っています。¹²⁰

It is not easy to visualize the port town because it is simply described as “chi’isana” (small) and “kaigan ni” (on the shore). And thus, showing up out of nowhere are those foreigners: the mermaid, who is the mother of the mermaid girl who left the girl to the port town and later came to buy the red candles in the form of a woman whose hair is dripping wet; the mermaid girl; the showman. There is no explanation or stage set that explains their positions in this world. On the other hand, when it comes to the mood, as Inui says, the mood of the world is rather well conveyed. In the above quote, Mimei depicts that the pine trees on top of the mountain makes a loud roaring sound night and day, which only sets up somewhat frightening, bleak and cold atmosphere of the story.

Indeed, the criticisms leveled against Mimei’s characters and world are valid to a degree. However, “The Winter in Echigo” shows us that Mimei was able to write convincingly realistic characters and worlds. However, Mimei’s focus on eliciting vivid impressions and emotions from the reader through minimal description is akin to that of poetry. As mentioned above, Mimei calls children’s stories “waga tokui na shikei” (my

¹²⁰ Ogawa, “Akai rōsoku to ningyo,” 267.

unique poetic form)¹²¹ and this poetic inclination can be found in “Red Candles and the Mermaid.”

As shown above, Mimei uses minimal description and has a tendency of using one adjective word to modify a noun rather than employing detailed descriptions. The use of simple adjectives such as red (*akai*) and *kanashii* (sad) create vividly clear impressions. This kind of sensation is something close to the sensation found in poetry than in a realist story. Poetry, at least in the classical Japanese sense, is a type of art that tries to convey the target image or message with small amount of words. Also, although Inui criticizes Mimei for expressing mood rather than presenting a detailed, concrete, and coherent world, one can argue that it is Mimei’s poetic technique that skillfully invokes emotions from the reader by conveying mood and impressions rather than show everything in concrete, detailed, and realistic descriptions. It might be because the description is too scarce, “Red Candles and the Mermaid” leaves a strong impression on the reader. For example, in the above scene where the mermaid girl was taken away, it can be argued, because the mermaid girl did not resist the situation, the unfairness and cruelty of the fate befallen onto her stands out more vividly and eloquently. Mimei could have depicted a scene like this with the aim of having a poetic effect of leaving an immediate impression of the fateful state of affairs rather than a situation which can be controlled.

Mimei’s “Red Candles and the Mermaid” seems to be a sketch or immediate impression. The author here does not try to develop characters or create complicated interactions between them and their environment. Now, it makes a sense why Mimei

¹²¹ Ogawa, “Kongo o dōwa sakka ni,” 293.

considered *dōwa* a poetic form. For Mimei, poetry is evoked by broad and simple words that ask his readers to imagine for themselves what characters are feeling.

In fact, Mimei was well versed in the poetic tradition with his poetic sensibilities being nurtured since childhood. As typical of a son of a samurai family, even before he started an elementary school, he was sent to a private school¹²² where he learned the Chinese classics, Confucianism, mathematics, read *Nihon gaishi*,¹²³ and also made Chinese poems.¹²⁴ As a result, he grew attracted to the world of literature in his early teens. In middle-high school, Mimei became enthusiastic about poetry and received poetry instruction under the tutelage of Ezaka Kōdō, a Chinese classical scholar, and Kitazawa Kandō, a famed Chinese poet.¹²⁵ Mimei organized a poetry club with his friends and published a coterie magazine. He sent his *kanshi* (Chinese classical poems) and *waka* (Japanese classical poems) to literary magazines and some of them were published in magazines like *Chūgaku Sekai* (*Middle-High School World*: 1898-1930) whose chief editor was Tayama Katai (1871-1930), one of the few pillars of Naturalism.¹²⁶

Thus, from a young age he idolized poets and wanted to become one himself. In a memoir, “*Jiden*” (“*Memoir*,” 1912), Mimei recalls that although his father wanted him to succeed him in taking over the mountain shrine, he wanted to become a poet; he writes:

My father was thinking of making me to succeed his position, but I wanted to become a poet. I wanted to become a hero who fights and devotes himself to life.

¹²² According to “Ogawa Mimei nenpu” in *Sakka no jiden 103* (2000), this private school was administered by Akiyama Shigeaki whose title was Takada chūgaku kōtō shihan shoki (p.289).

¹²³ *Nihon gaishi* (1827) is a book of Japanese history written by a thinker in the Edo period, Rai San'yō (1781-1832). This book is written all in classical Chinese.

¹²⁴ Ogawa, “*Dōwa o tsukutte gojūnen*,” 35-37.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 36-38.

¹²⁶ “Ogawa Mimei nenpu” in *Sakka no jiden 103* (2000): 289.

父は、私をして、自分の跡を継がせようと思っていたが、私は詩人たらんとした。もっと人生の為に戦い、尽すようなヒーローたらんとした。¹²⁷

It is intriguing that young Mimei, a son of a samurai family, idealized the poet as a hero that fights and devotes him/herself to the lives of the many. In his essay, “Tanjun na shikei o omofu” (“I Think of the Simplistic Form of Poetry,” 1914), Mimei offers clues as to what kind of ideals he saw in a poet. In the essay, he explains that nursery songs are the most primitive form of poetry and they have been handed down from generation to generation without ever fading away. This is because nursery song’s rhythm and tone captures “ningen no genshiteki kanjō” (primitive feelings of humans).¹²⁸ Mimei explains that genuine poets are people who can express these primitive feelings in a pleasurable rhythm and tone and thus they have always fought against materialism that hinders humans from grasping those fundamental feelings.¹²⁹ Therefore, for Mimei, a poet is someone who is not only interested in expressing his aesthetic sensibilities but also he must have a social consciousness and will fight against materialism.

And, it should be noted that, as discussed previously, Mimei’s debut short story, “Silk-Tree Flowers” (1903), was more of a poetic piece rather than having a complicated plot or characters with unique personalities. Mimei wrote both stories for adults and for children. And, eventually, he became a writer of *dōwa* in which he could best express his poetic spirit. In this sense, he never lost his initial enthusiasm to become a poet who fights for the lives of the many.

¹²⁷ Ogawa, “Jiden,” 9.

¹²⁸ Ogawa, “Tanjun na shikei o omofu,” 507.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 509-511.

Thus, although the postwar critics argued that Mimei's children's stories are vague and lack realistic characters and coherent and concrete world setting, it is unfair that they criticized Mimei's poetic stories using their standard for realistic stories. Actually, one can argue that Mimei's children's stories is in a sense very realistic. Mimei addresses real societal issues in his children's stories. The fate and suffering of the minorities in a society is depicted succinctly with symbolic characters, allowing the focus to be on the ills of society. While much critique against Mimei's children stories revolved around his dark and pessimistic themes, this was necessary for Mimei to convey the humanist and socialist message behind his works and level his own critique at society during his time. Mimei chose to deal with real societal issues in children's stories as well as in his short stories for adults because he did not exclude children from his narratives of reality.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Mimei was a writer who had a sense of duty to convey the social injustice and suffering of vulnerable people in society. Mimei's literary sensibilities—built upon his humanism, anarchism, romanticism, and poetic spirit—made him rebel against the authoritative literary trends of the time. He declared himself as a neo-romanticist writer during a time when the naturalist tradition was in vogue. Mimei was opposed to the mentality of petty bourgeoisie and came to be deeply involved in burgeoning the proletarian literature movement; however, he held onto his humanist-anarchist ideals and did not join Marxist literary circles. Furthermore, at the time when stories for children were not considered true literature, Mimei paved the way for the genre to attain equal standing with literature meant for adults through his belief that children's stories should be a “first-rate, authentic literary art.”¹³⁰ To this end, Mimei experimented with different writing styles in order to find his ideal form of expression; in his short stories, Mimei employed a realistic and psychological writing style to express his neo-romanticist view regarding social issues, whereas in his *dōwa* he created a unique poetic prose form in which he dealt with realistic issues using an abstract and colorful style. However, for the proletarian writers in the 1920's and 1930's, his short stories were at once too abstract and idealistic as well as lacking in political practicality, while his *dōwa* were sparse and poetic and not optimistic and easily enough to understood for mainstream children's literature in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹³⁰ Ogawa, “*Dōwa o tsukutte gojūnen*,” 46.

Mimei's *dōwa* remained a target of criticism even into the 1970s. In a 1976 article, Inokuma Yōko (1928-), a researcher of English and Japanese children's literature, criticized Mimei's concept of "The Child," arguing that it does not represent "real children" (*shin no kodomo*).¹³¹ However, Karatani Kōjin (1941-) comes to Mimei's defense in his seminal work, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (1980). In a chapter entitled "The Discovery of the Child," Karatani argues that there was no such concept as "real children" at the time when Mimei discovered "The Child," and that the notion of "real children" is merely a product of a later time; thus, Inokuma is missing the perspective as to how "The Child" was discovered, and, fundamentally, she lacks the understanding of the twisted origins of concepts found in modern Japanese literature.¹³² Karatani's argument is significant in that he offered a broader perspective on Japanese literature as a whole and criticized Inokuma's argument from outside of children's literature. In *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Karatani explores the origins of concepts important to the field—such as the landscape—and argues that those concepts were "discovered" (*hakken*) as part of particular discourses from specific places and times.¹³³ This is how he explains the discovery of "The Child" in Japanese literature in the Taishō period. In order to show how this concept of the child was the product of a particular discourse, Karatani illustrates various kinds of "children" conceived and discovered in different discourses throughout history. In regards to literary discourse, Karatani refers to Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962)

¹³¹ Inokuma, Yōko. "Nihon jidō bungaku no tokushoku." In *Nihon jidō bungaku gairon*. Tokyo: Tokyo shoseki, 1976. (Cited in Karatani 1980: p.142).

¹³² Karatani, *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen*, 142-143.

¹³³ Karatani talks about this process of discovery in Chapter 1, "Fūkei no hakken," in the book, *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen*, 11-40.

who argued that cruel old Japanese folktales were not stories meant for children as they was written before the concept of “the child” existed.¹³⁴ Karatani also cites Higuchi Ichiyō’s (1872-1896) stories about the children’s world that did not situate children and adults as parts of a dichotomy.¹³⁵ While Inokuma analyzed Mimei’s *dōwa* only in the framework of the contemporary Japanese children’s literature, Karatani analyzed Mimei’s concept of the child from a structuralist perspective that deciphers the concept of literature itself as well as the literary currents in modern Japanese literature. This is where Karatani’s argument helps us understand Mimei’s place in modern Japanese literature.

Inokuma wrote another article titled “Ogawa Mimei” in 1973 in which she criticized Mimei’s *dōwa* by utilizing English literature as the ideal template for utopian stories. Karatani’s criticism is applicable to this article as well. In “Ogawa Mimei,” Inokuma contends that despite the fact that Mimei participated in the socialist movement and declared that all romanticists wish to realize a utopia,¹³⁶ Mimei was unable to present a concrete idea of a utopia in his *dōwa*. Inokuma writes that Mimei’s description of utopia is “makoto ni hinjaku” (lacking in substance), “hijō ni soboku” (very simple), “han bunmei-teki” (anti-civilizational), and naturalistic.¹³⁷ She compares Mimei with English novelist, Thomas More (1478-1535), whose idea of utopia is a realistic proposal of a governmental system and structure based on a political attitude.¹³⁸ Inokuma continues that Mimei’s *dōwa* were, after all, written to accuse “the reality of the malicious factors that hinder the

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 157.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 168.

¹³⁶ Ogawa, Mimei. “Shin romanchishizumu no tenkō.” (Cited in Inokuma 1973: p.77).

¹³⁷ Inokuma, “Ogawa Mimei,” 77-79.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 79.

realization of an ideal society” in order to “reflect and overcome” it, and Mimei’s *dōwa* “give the impression of hopelessly old-fashioned moralistic stories.”¹³⁹ Thus, Inokuma concludes that Mimei’s kind of utopian idea failed to be modern.¹⁴⁰ In fact it is unfair of Inokuma and others to criticize Mimei’s poor depiction of utopia because Mimei did not attempt to create utopias in his stories. The absence of utopia is one important characteristic of Mimei’s literature. Inokuma’s conclusion stems from her belief that the utopian idea of Thomas More is the template of the expression of the modern social consciousness. However, the social consciousness that appears in Mimei’s *dōwa* in the Meiji and Taishō periods is a reflection of the era and Mimei’s own attitude toward society, which was a mix of Kropotkin’s anarcho-communism, Narodniks’ populism, and Ōsugi Sakae’s syndicalism. Just because Mimei’s approach to social problems in his *dōwa* does not follow the style found in English literature does not necessarily mean that his stories are “hopelessly old-fashioned” (*kiwamete furukusai*) and not modern.¹⁴¹

Thus, Inokuma’s criticism of Mimei is questionable because she ignored the background of Mimei’s works, and analyzing them solely through arbitrary frameworks like contemporary Japanese children’s literature and English literature. This kind of

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* p.84.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.84.

¹⁴¹ It should be noted that not all contemporary critics and writers share Inokuma’s critical attitude toward Mimei. To name a few, Jingū Teruo (*Dōwa e no shōtai*, 1970), Yokotani Teru (“Jidō bungaku-shi to wa nani ka,” 1973), and Yokoyama Nobuyuki (“Mimei hitei ronsō to kindai jidō bungaku-kan,” 1978) do not judge Mimei’s child and his *dōwa* from the standard of children’s literature in contemporary Japan or foreign children’s literature. Especially, Jingū analyzes the development of children’s literature in England, Germany, and America as well as in Japan, and he warns that; one should acknowledge that each country has its own form and history of children’s literature; one should not judge one country’s children’s story from the standard of children’s stories in another country; and one should note that children’s stories do “involve” (*naihō suru*) issues of the time, which does not “conflict” (*aihan suru*) with aesthetics and poetic sensibilities. (*Dōwa e no shōtai*, 1970: 141-152).

methodological flaw in Inokuma's criticism is common with the postwar critiques of Mimei's *dōwa*. Put simply, Mimei's *dōwa* did not fit in their view of children's literature as they were trying to redefine it and legitimize it. Indeed, it seems that Mimei was constantly at odds with the major literary trends of his time and even after his time. As shown in Chapters 2 and 3, Mimei's socialist short stories deviated from the political and social framework that was popular at the time. Also, as shown in Chapter 4, Mimei's poetic socialist *dōwa* deviate from the framework of children's literature that is fundamentally written for children readers. Mimei was a writer who actively crossed over literary genres writing short stories, poems, *dōwa*, and essays, and also he dared to explore and invent his approaches to literary expression, regardless of whatever the mainstream *bundan* had been advocating at the time.

So long as Mimei's works are evaluated on the basis of whether or not they fit into certain literary categories from certain points in time, his literature will never be understood fully. However, when Mimei's works are analyzed through a holistic and structuralist approach—such as of Karatani's—that critically questions modernity itself, subjectivity itself, and literature itself and so on, only then does a coherent portrayal of Mimei's literature become visible. What we find is his romantic humanist gaze at the essence of life. That being said, in his socialist stories, his scope of criticism regarding the ills of society goes beyond ideas of capitalism and communism. Mimei's approach toward social problems may have been naive; however, he does tell his readers what oppression is and why humans fight against it. He asks questions concerning the essence of humanity. The same thing can be said about his contribution to the genre of children's literature. As

discussed above, while many children's writers and critics were trapped in a dichotomy concerning what kind of stories the author (the adult) should offer to the reader (the child), Mimei believed that children and adults share the same fundamental sensitivities. Children are closer to the world we live in than adults, but both adults and children are living in the same world and share human emotions. A work created through the sincerity of one person—Mimei—will surely resonate with another person's heart. This conviction was based on his faith in humans living beyond the boundary that divides adults and children. Mimei's works cannot be narrowly confined by categorization, time, space, and age because he embraces humanity in a universal and holistic way. Thus, Mimei's unique messages and imagery deserve a special place in the lineage of modern Japanese literature.

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