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A Japanese Proletarian Mystery in New York: Maedakō Hiroichirō's "The Death of the Laborer Joe O' Brien"

RICHARD WILLIAM LECKIE*

1. Introduction

The Japanese literary world of the 1920s can be characterized by the emergence of three major literary forces: proletarian literature, modernist literature, and popular literature, including historical fiction and the new genre of mystery novels. For the most part, relations between these three camps cannot exactly be described as amicable. Proletarian writers crtiticized modernist works as wordplays lacking in social value, while modernist writers crticized proletarian works as ideological statements lacking in literary value. Popular literature was widely viewed to have neither literary nor social merit, and many literary crtics would not deign to write about it. Even today, when the line between fine and popular literature has blurred almost to non-existence, many researchers continue to rigidly adhere to these distinctions when looking at 1920s literature. Authors are still classified without question as "proletarian writers," "modernist writers," and "popular writers," and these classifications are used as the basis for examining their works.

Truth be told, however, these distinctions were never absolute. A number of modernist writers crossed over to proletarian literature and vice versa. Modernist authors experimented with social and ideological elements, while proletarian writers incorporated modernist-style metaphors into their texts. While it was undeniably difficult for popular writers to make the jump to fine literature, many establishment, proletarian, and modernist writers tried their hand at writing mysteries. The spirit in which these crossover works were written has much in common with the category-averse mindset of writers and artists today, yet these works continue to be largely forgotten and ignored by researchers.

This study examines one such crossover work: "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" ("The Death of the Laborer Joe O'Brien"),[1] a foray into the mystery genre by the early proletarian writer

* Osaka University, Graduate Student; e-mail: cysmg470@yahoo.co.jp

[1] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi" 労働者ジョウ・オ・ブラインの死, *Shinseinen* 新青年, December 1931 issue.

Maedakō Hiroichirō published in the popular youth magazine *Shinseinen* in 1931. The work presents an alternate version of events leading up to the Wall Street bombing of 1920, making it an interesting fusion not only of the proletarian and mystery genres, but also of East and West.

2. Maedakō Hiroichirō: A Brief History

Maedakō Hiroichirō was born in 1888 in Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture. He was an unwanted child, and his father tried to kill him by throwing him into a river when he was just three days old. He was saved by his grandmother and raised by his uncle, a childless doctor who hoped that Hiroichirō would one day take over his practice. However, Hiroichirō's grades were not good enough to make his uncle's dream a reality, and when he failed his final school exams at the age of 17, Hiroichirō decided to drop out and move to Tokyo.

After staying with an aquaintance for a month, Maedakō Hiroichirō visited the author Tokutomi Roka's house and asked for help to become a writer. Roka is best known for his novel *Hototogisu* (*The Cuckoo*), a tragic love story published from 1898 to 1899 which became a huge bestseller. However, Maedakō was a fan of *Kokuchō* (*Black Tide*), an unfinished social novel by Roka which criticized the Meiji era government. Roka took an interest in Maedakō and helped him get a job at the socialist magazine *Shinkigen*. Maedakō's work there consisted mainly of odd jobs and uncredited writing work. Maedakō soon lost this job, and he did not manage to get much work of his own published. Nor does Roka seem to have taken much of a role in shaping Maedakō's writing style. However, Maedakō was extremely devoted to Roka, and the two remained close until Roka's death in 1927.

It was Roka who suggested that Maedakō go to the United States to acquire life experiences and grow as a writer. As can be seen from Shimazaki Tōson's 1906 novel *Hakai* (*The Broken Commandment*), in which the main character departs for Texas at the end of the story, the United States was viewed as something of a promised land by intellectuals of the time. With money from Roka and his uncle, Maedakō travelled to the United States by ship, arriving there in May of 1907.

Maedakō's first home in the USA was Chicago, where he lived from 1907 to 1915. Unlike the wealthy Japanese who visited the USA and other Western countries in the Meiji era for study and travel, Maedakō, who received no financial assistance beyond his ship ticket, struggled to survive. He worked as a houseworker, a coffee salesman, and a portrait salesman and did various types of menial labour, experiencing poverty and discrimination and thinking of suicide several

times.

At the same time, Maedakō managed to publish several English short stories thanks to his acquaintance with the Japanese socialist Kaneko Kiichi and his wife Josephine Conger-Kaneko, who edited the socialist women's magazine *The Progressive Woman*. Shocked by news of the 1911 execution of the radical journalist Kōtoku Shūsui for treason in Japan, Maedakō wrote the short story "The Hangman," which was published in *The Coming Nation* the following year. Maedakō's other English short stories include "The Unity of Asia" and "The Mikado's Crane Room," both published in *The Progressive Woman* in 1912, "The Monument," published in *The Coming Nation* in 1913, "A New Year Street in Yeddo," published in *The Progressive Woman* in the same year, and "The Twentieth Century," published in *The International* around the same time.

Maedakō moved to New York City at the end of 1915. He collaborated with Floyd Dell, editor of the left-wing magazine *The Masses*, on "The Cherry Blossom," a short story about the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters of Edo. Maedakō, who had never even been to Yoshiwara, researched about it in old books, and Dell wrote the story based on what he was told. The story was published in *Pearson's Magazine* in October 1916, and later reprinted in Dell's 1926 short story collection *Love in Greenwich Village* under the name "Green Houses." However, Maedakō soon tired of being asked to write exoticized tales of Japan. He complained that all Americans were interested in were exotic and feudalistic images of Japan and caricatures of Japanese people which emphasized their Buddhism and their passivity.[2] Finally, he decided to abandon his English writing career and begin writing in Japanese.

Maedakō devoted himself to researching Japanese language and literary technique, and began publishing the literary pamphlet *Kyōson* with his friends in the summer of 1917. The first issue included Maedakō's short story "*Gama no Kawa*" ("Toad Skin"). From December 1918, Maedakō began to work at the *Japanese-American Commercial Weekly*. Named *Nichibei Shūhō* and later *Nichibei Jihō* in Japanese, it was New York's first long-running Japanese language newspaper. Maedakō wrote both novels and articles for the newspaper for a salary of ten dollars a week, under the condition that the magazine would pay his entire ship fare back to Japan one year later. In February 1920, Maedakō returned to Japan after 13 years of living abroad.

Upon his return to Japan, Maedakō began working at *Chūgai*, a magazine run by Naitō Tamiji which was best known for publishing Sakai Toshihiko's Japanese translation of Jack London's *The*

[2] Nakada Sachiko 中田幸子, *Maedakō Hiroichirō ni okeru "Amerika"* 前田河広一郎における「アメリカ」, Kokusho Kankōkai 国書刊行会, 2000, p. 57.

Call of the Wild in 1917. It was in *Chūgai* magazine that Maedakō published "*Santō Senkyaku*" ("Third-Class Passengers")[3] in August 1921. Based on Maedakō's own trip back to Japan, "*Santō Senkyaku*" tells the story of a group of impoverished Japanese expatriates returning to Japan from the USA and their communal living experience in a filthy steerage deck. The first novel Maedakō wrote upon returning to Japan, it was praised for its original subject matter, global scale and "un-Japanese" style.[4] It is considered his representative work today. It is also considered a seminal work of Japanese proletarian literature, though it is almost completely lacking in the overt ideology that marks later proletarian works. "*Santō Senkyaku*" treats its characters as a collective whole and has no main hero or heroine, a style which some say Kobayashi Takiji imitated in his 1929 work *Kanikōsen* (*The Crab Cannery Ship*).[5]

In spring of 1922, Maedakō became a member of *Tane Maku Hito*, Japan's first major proletarian literature magazine, joining members like Komaki Ōmi, Kaneko Yōbun, Imano Kenzō, Sasaki Takamaru, Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, and Aono Suekichi. 1923 and 1924 were Maedakō's most productive years as a novelist. During this period, he wrote a large number of works set in the United States. Many of these dealt with racial discrimination, not only against the Japanese but also African-Americans. In his 1923 work "*Sōon Jigoku*" ("Noise Hell"),[6] he writes about an African-American man who flees the South after narrowly escaping a lynching, only to become an amusement park attraction in Chicago where white customers throw baseballs at a platform he is standing on and try to knock him into a pool of water. *Tane Maku Hito* ended in October 1923, and a new proletarian literature magazine, *Bungei Sensen*, was started with more or less the same membership in June 1924.

In 1925 and 1926, Maedakō was more active as a translator than as a novelist. He translated Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* in 1925 and *Jimmie Higgins* in 1926. Though these translations were well received, a change can be perceived in Maedakō's status around this time. Whereas readers and critics had praised Maedakō for his "American" and "cosmopolitan" style and even called him the "Japanese Jack London" or "Japanese Upton Sinclair"[7] up to that time, attention now began to shift to younger *Bungei Sensen* writers like Hayama Yoshiki and Hayashi Fusao, who were

[3] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Santō Senkyaku" 三等船客, *Chūgai* 中外, August 1921 issue.
[4] Nakada op. cit., p. 99.
[5] Sasaki Kiichi 佐々木基一, "Kaisetsu" 解説, *Gendai Nihon Bungaku Zenshū 77* 現代日本文学全集 77, Chikuma Shobō 筑摩書房, 1957, p. 414.
[6] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Sōon Jigoku" 騒音地獄, *Bungaku Sekai* 文学世界, February 1923 issue.
[7] Nakada op. cit., pp. 21–22.

arguably more sophisticated than Maedakō in both their literary style and ideology. Though he remained highly respected in the proletarian literature community and continued to have moderate success with his novels, stage plays, and translations throughout the 1920s, his popularity began to wane from this time.

3. Maedakō and Mysteries: An Uneasy Alliance

Maedakō also established himself early on as a literary critic and essayist. From 1922 to 1924, he engaged in a heated debate with Kikuchi Kan about the role of class, ideology and compromise in art and modern life, and he debated the merits of mystery novels with Edogawa Ranpo from 1924 to 1925.[8]

In April 1923, Edogawa had published "*Nisen Dōka*" ("The Two-Sen Copper Coin"), known as Japan's first true mystery novel, in the popular youth magazine *Shinseinen*. The work caused a sensation, and soon other writers were publishing their own mysteries in *Shinseinen*. Maedakō's fellow *Tane Maku Hito* member Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke was an avid *Shinseinen* reader and even published an essay on mystery novels in the magazine's August 1924 issue. Hirabayashi went on to publish a large number of essays and mystery novels in *Shinseinen*, becoming a sort of bridge between the proletarian literature and mystery communities.

Maedakō was not similarly impressed. In the December 1924 issue of *Shinchō* magazine, he lamented that his colleagues Hirabayashi and Komaki Ōmi had become mystery fans and attacked the mystery genre, stating that "the authority of law, used by the ruling class to suppress the ruled, forms the foundation of every mystery novel."[9] In March 1925, he asked, "Do the mystery writers of the world lack the courage and insight to write mysteries not for the ruling class, but to safeguard the lives of the masses?"[10] By his final article on the subject in June 1925, however, he had relaxed his stance somewhat, praising Ranpo's work and even acknowledging that "at present, there is no reason why proletarian literature should reject the mystery genre outright."[11]

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[8] The word used over the course of this debate is *tantei shōsetsu* 探偵小説, literally meaning "detective novel." However, the word is used here to denote mystery and suspense stories in general, not only detective stories. In the 1920s, the mystery genre was not clearly defined in Japan and included works which would now be considered horror or even science fiction.

[9] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Bundan Arijigoku" 文壇蟻地獄, *Shinchō* 新潮, December 1924 issue.

[10] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Hakuganroku" 白眼録, *Shinchō* 新潮, March 1925 issue.

[11] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Tanteimono no Shisō Keitō" 探偵物の思想系統, *Shinseinen* 新

Three months later, the *Tantei Shumi no Kai* (Detective Hobbyists' Society), a group comprised of Ranpo and other mystery writers and fans, published the first issue of its coterie magazine, *Tantei Shumi*. As one feature, over twenty writers, most of whom were active in the mystery genre, replied to a questionnaire which began with the question "Are mysteries art?" and invited respondents to reveal their predictions and preferences regarding the genre. Rather unexpectedly, Maedakō was also asked to respond to this questionnaire.[12] He answers the first question more or less in the affirmative, stating that "mysteries may be classified as one literary category." However, he refrains from praising Japanese mystery authors and instead declares his admiration for Russian writers, including the revolutionary author Boris Savinkov, who Maedakō refers to by his pseudonym Ropshin.

Until June 1926, Maedakō maintained a connection of sorts with *Tantei Shumi*, not only responding to questionnaires but also penning the occasional article. Nevertheless, his view of mysteries remained ambivalent. In January 1926, he admits that mysteries are good to read before going to bed, but also declares his "contempt" for mysteries because that is all they are good for.[13] He ends by admonishing mystery writers to produce works with greater social significance. In June of the same year, he defends his former *Tane Maku Hito* colleague Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, who had met with criticism and derision from the literary community for trying his hand at writing a mystery novel.[14] Nevertheless, Maedakō did not warm to the genre completely. In December 1926, Maedakō was one of 30 writers asked by *Shinseinen* magazinge to name the best mysteries of the past year.[15] Again, he avoids any mention of Japanese mystery novels and instead praises a short story by L. Ivn, the pseudonym of Vsevolod Pavlovich Ivanov, a Russian writer who was active in the Soviet Esperantist Union and wrote in Esperanto. Sasaki Takamaru's translation of this work had appeared in the June 1926 issue of *Bungei Sensen* under the title "*Tekkyō*" ("The Iron Bridge"). He closes by saying that L. Ivn's sense of reality is vastly superior to any "armchair fantasy," a thinly veiled jab at Japanese mystery writers' disregard for realism and social awareness.

青年, June 1925 issue.

[12] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Tantei Mondō" 探偵問答, *Tantei Shumi* 探偵趣味, September 1925 issue.

[13] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Tantei Shōsetsu no Tantei" 探偵小説の探偵, *Tantei Shumi* 探偵趣味, January 1926 issue.

[14] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Hirabayashi no Tantei Shōsetsu" 平林の「探偵小説」, *Tantei Shumi* 探偵趣味, June 1926 issue.

[15] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Tantei Shōsetsudan no Sōkessan" 探偵小説壇の総決算, *Shinseinen* 新青年, December 1926 issue.

From the standpoint of proletarian literature, it is not difficult to understand Maedakō's ambivalence toward the mystery genre. Since many of their works involve the exploitation of the proletariat and the oppression of labor and leftist activists, including arrest, torture, and imprisonment for both real and fabricated offenses, it was natural for proletarian authors to take an interest in crime. These works could indeed be said to comprise a subclass of crime literature. In the proletarian crime novel, however, police are the villain and the authority of law is a tool of oppression. One can easily imagine Maedakō's distaste for mystery stories which simplistically depicted "good" police officers and detectives catching "bad" criminals with no loftier purpose than to entertain readers. In contrast, L. Ivn's *"Tekkyō"* is set in pre-1917 Russia and depicts a plot by revolutionaries to blow up a bridge just as a military train is passing over it. Though the plot ends in failure, the subsequent revolution makes it clear that the activists' efforts were not in vain. "*Tekkyō*" is a political work first and a suspense story second, which is doubtless the reason why Maedakō admired it.

Rather than attempting to write this sort of "proletarian mystery," however, Maedakō took a different approach. In *Akkan to Fūkei* (Villains and Landscapes),[16] a collection of essays mainly written in 1927 and 1928, Maedakō writes non-fictional accounts of a number of crimes committed mostly in the USA and Britain, ranging from fraud to jailbreak and murder. As his sources for these accounts, Maedakō sometimes cites specific works such as Joseph Fulling Fishman's *Crucibles of Crime*, Albert Rhys Williams' *The Russian Land*, and Henry Lauren Clinton's *Extraordinary Cases*, while at other times he vaguely mentions foreign newspapers. While some accounts appear to be straightforward translations or summaries of the original source, others include Maedakō's own theories and speculation. In the work "*Kinsei Taitō Nyotōden*" ("Pre-Modern Tales of Ruffians and Lady Thieves"),[17] for example, Maedakō introduces the 1880 theft of the Scottish ship SS *Ferret*, the early 19th century "body snatcher" murders by Burke and Hare and the London Burkers, and female fraudsters Cassie Chadwick and Thérèse Humbert. In the opening of "*Kinsei Taitō Nyotōden*," Maedakō is careful to distance himself from the mystery genre, writing, "I have always taken an amateur interest in crime. This is not to further the study of criminal law, to collect information for a mystery novel, or indeed for any particular practical purpose." Despite referring to himself as an amateur, it is clear that, with his English proficiency and experience of living

[16] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, *Akkan to Fūkei* 悪漢と風景, Kaizōsha 改造社, 1929.

[17] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Kinsei Taitō Nyotōden" 近世大盗女盗伝. Original date and place of publication unknown. Included in *Akkan to Fūkei*.

abroad, Maedakō fancied himself to be something of an authority on overseas crime and hoped to carve out a niche for himself as a sort of true crime writer. In 1931, he published "*Sekai Taitō Nyotōden*" ("World Tales of Ruffians and Lady Thieves"),[18] a sequel of sorts to "*Kinsei Taitō Nyotōden*" which includes accounts of serial killers Belle Gunness and H. H. Holmes.

4. Maedakō and the Red Scare

Maedakō showed a great interest in the First Red Scare, which began in the United States around the time of the 1917 Russian Revolution and continued until around 1920. The scare reached its peak in 1919 when the country was rocked by a series of bombings believed to be the work of anarchists. As fear and hatred of "reds," including communists, anarchists, and labor activists, reached a boiling point, thousands were arrested and hundreds deported, many of them innocent victims of anti-red hysteria or anti-immigrant prejudice.

The first Red Scare incident to appear in Maedakō's work is the San Francisco Preparedness Day bombing of 1916. In July of that year, a bomb went off during a parade celebrating the USA's anticipated entry into World War I, killing 10 and injuring 40. Tom Mooney, labor leader and publisher of the socialist magazine *The Revolt*, was arrested with fellow labor leader Warren Billings. Mooney had been suspected but never convicted of involvement in other bombing incidents. Mooney and Billings were found guilty and sentenced to death on the basis of very little evidence, causing international outrage. As a result, the case was re-examined and the men's sentences commuted to life in prison. They were eventually pardoned and released from prison in 1939.

Maedakō's 1924 short story "*Mokugekisha*" ("Witness")[19] was inspired by the case. In the story, an unemployed Japanese laborer living in the United States named Jōsuke overhears two men in a bar talking about a frame-up. Later, he hears the sound of an explosion shortly after seeing two other men talking outside. Jōsuke learns that the explosion was a bombing at a nearby bank, and the two men talking outside are anarchists who were arrested as the culprits. He meets the two men from the bar again, who reveal themselves to be undercover police agents. Fearing that

[18] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Sekai Taitō Nyotōden" 世界大盗女盗伝, *Bungaku Jidai* 文学時代, September 1931 issue.
[19] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Mokugekisha" 目撃者, *Sandē Mainichi* サンデー毎日, January 13 and 20, 1924 issues.

Jōsuke's overhearing of their conversation and sighting of the anarchists may interfere with their plans, they take Jōsuke down to the police station. There, he is offered various financial incentives to provide false testimony incriminating the anarchists in court. Jōsuke is happy to go along with the plan until his socialist friend berates him for his materialism and explains the police conspiracy to frame the anarchists. A chastened Jōsuke promises to tell the truth in court, no matter the consequences.

In the April 1926 issue of *Tantei Shumi*, Maedakō confirms that "*Mokugekisha*" was based on the Preparedness Day bombing incident, but expresses regret that he made his story such a heavily fictionalized account.[20] He writes that he realizes in retrospect that he should have researched the case more and depicted it more faithfully. Despite his purported regrets, Maedakō adapted "*Mokugekisha*" into the stage play "*Koshiraerareta Otoko*" ("The Made Man")[21] in 1928. Several of the elements in "*Mokugekisha*" and "*Koshiraerareta Otoko*," including bought off newspapers and explosions occurring near construction sites, would be employed by Maedakō again when he wrote "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*."

In 1928, Maedakō also published a translation of Upton Sinclair's *Boston*,[22] an account of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case. In the infamous case, Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were found guilty of a 1920 robbery and murders they almost certainly did not commit and executed in 1927. The execution was viewed as a travesty of justice prompted by anti-Italian, anti-immigrant, and anti-leftist sentiment, and inspired protests around the world.

5. The Death of the Laborer Joe O'Brien

In the aforementioned "*Kinsei Taitō Nyotōden*," Maedakō has included one contemporary incident in what is otherwise a collection of 19th century and turn-of-the-century crimes and criminals. That incident is none other than the Wall Street bombing of September 16, 1920, the worst terrorist attack on American soil in history at that time.

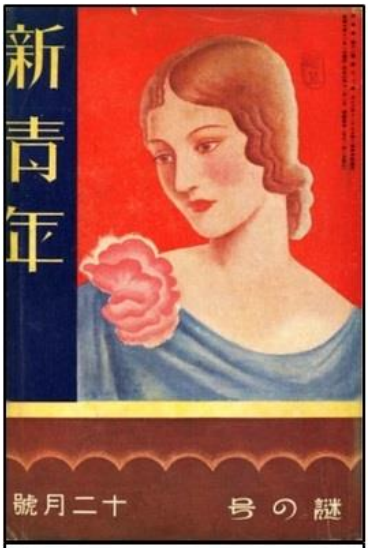
According to the generally accepted version of events, a horse-drawn wagon stopped across from the headquarters of the J.P. Morgan Bank just before lunchtime, and 100 pounds of dynamite

[20] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Supai to Tantei Shōsetsu" スパイと探偵小説, *Tantei Shumi* 探偵趣味, April 1926 issue.
[21] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Koshiraerareta Otoko" 拵えられた男, *Bungei Sensen* 文芸戦線, February 1928 issue.
[22] Published in *Bungei Sensen* 文芸戦線 from March to October 1928.

inside the wagon exploded at 12:01 p.m. 500 pounds of metal fragments which had been placed as shrapnel tore through the lunchtime crowd, destroying the inside of the J.P. Morgan Bank, knocking over cars and streetcars, and sending debris flying as high as the 34th floor. 30 people, most of them young, low-ranking Wall Street workers, were killed instantly, with 8 dying later of their wounds. Hundreds were injured, 143 of them seriously. The blast also did millions of dollars in damage and paralyzed the Manhattan financial district. Though the horse and wagon were obliterated, the wagon's driver is believed to have escaped before the explosion.

The carnage was so indiscriminate that some police investigators thought the blast was a tragic accident. However, flyers from a group called the "American Anarchist Fighters" found in a nearby mailbox the next day eliminated that possibility. The incident was then investigated as a terrorist attack, but the crime was never solved. The most likely suspect is generally said to be the Galleanists, a group of Italian anarchists led by Luigi Galleani who were responsible for a series of bombings the previous year. Those who believe this theory think that the bombing was retaliation for the deportation of Luigi Galleani in June 1919 or the arrests of Sacco and Vanzetti in April 1920.

Maedakō vigorously disputes these theories in "*Kinsei Taitō Nyotōden*" in a chapter titled "*Kyōsanshugisha Jiken*" ("A Communist Incident"). He begins with a report on the April 1923 arrest of Noah Lerner as a suspect in the Wall Street bombing. Though Lerner was actually a New Yorker who spent time in the Soviet Union as part of the Kuzbass Autonomous Industrial Colony, Maedakō refers to him as a "Russian communist youth." After explaining how American crime syndicalism laws had been used to demonize anarchists in the USA, Maedakō expresses his disdain that with the arrest of Lerner, blame for the bombing had suddenly shifted from the anarchists to the communists.



Cover of December 1931 issue of *Shinseinen*.

Maedakō then goes on to give an alternate account of the events of September 16, 1920. He points out that in fact, dynamite was being employed for construction purposes at a building site behind the J.P. Morgan Bank. In his view, the explosion was far more likely an unfortunate accident than a nefarious anarchist or communist plot. Maedakō theorizes that the horse-drawn wagon was probably used by a laborer

to transport dynamite to the construction site, and exploded when the dynamite spontaneously ignited in the midday heat. The building insurance company, knowing that it would be bankrupted by settlements and compensation for explosion victims if the true cause of the tragedy were revealed, then paid off the newspapers 10,000 dollars apiece to ensure that the true story would never come to light.

There are various problems with this theory which Maedakō may or may not have been aware of. The presence of 500 pounds of shrapnel makes it unlikely the explosion was simply an accident, and Noah Lerner was released by police after a few weeks due to lack of evidence. Maedakō also gives no sources or evidence for his newspaper payoff theory or "10,000 dollars" figure. The most interesting aspect of this theory, however, is not its inconsistencies, but the fact that Maedakō republished it, with only a few minor embellishments, in *Shinseinen* as a mystery titled "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*."

What exactly inspired Maedakō to try his hand at mystery fiction is unknown. One hint may lie in Maedakō's essay "*Tantei Shōsetsu wa Ikizumaranai*" ("Detective Novels Will Not Come to a Standstill"),[23] published together with "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" in the December 1931 issue of *Shinseinen*. In the essay, Maedakō, referring to himself as an "amateur mystery critic," addresses negative comments on Japanese mystery novels made by the anonymous critic "XYZ"[24] and names a variety of issues facing Japanese mystery writers, namely the incorporation of actual events and ideology and the overcoming of simplistic ideas of catching criminals and eradicating evil. By addressing these issues in "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*," Maedakō may have been trying to show a way forward for mystery writers.

労働者ジョウ・オ・ブラインの死

前田河廣一郎

探偵小説は、必らずしも犯人を挙げない。犯跡だけを挙げることもある。（作者）

First page of "Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi" (*Shinseinen*, 1931)

[23] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Tantei Shōsetsu wa Ikizumaranai" 探偵小説は行詰らない, *Shinseinen* 新青年, December 1931 issue.

[24] XYZ X・Y・Z, "Taishū Bundan" 大衆文壇, *Bungei Shunjū* 文藝春秋, September 1931 issue.

However, Maedakō may have had less lofty motivations for writing the work. By the end of the 1920s, Maedakō and other *Bungei Sensen* writers had been eclipsed by the rival magazine *Senki* and its writers like Kobayashi Takiji and Tokunaga Sunao, and in 1931 the proletarian literature movement itself was in a state of decline due to a combination of infighting, police oppression, and reader fatigue. These problems were further exacerbated by the Great Depression, and Maedakō himself began to suffer from financial problems from that year.[25] *Shinseinen* may have simply presented an opportunity for him to get his work published, make some money, and hopefully expand his readership.

Maedakō made two main fictional embellishments to "*Kyōsanshugisha Jiken*" when he wrote "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*." The first was giving an identity to the "nameless laborer"[26] who, in Maedakō's version of events, transported the dynamite to the construction site and perished in the accidental explosion. Interestingly, the name Maedakō chose for his protagonist, Joe O'Brien, was shared by a prominent American socialist activist. The real Joe O'Brien married Mary Heaton Vorse, the famous journalist, novelist and labor and women's rights activist, in 1912 and died in 1915. Considering Maedakō was in the USA at the time, he surely knew of Vorse and her husband and probably read about his death. However, the real Joe O'Brien bears no resemblance to the main character in "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*." The real Joe O'Brien was a journalist, not a carrier. He died of illness, not in an explosion. And Mary Heaton Vorse is nothing like the housewife Betty who is married to O'Brien in the novel.

The other embellishment Maedakō made regards how the dynamite went off. Perhaps he felt that the "spontaneous combustion" theory he espoused in "*Kyōsanshugisha Jiken*" was lacking in dramatic impact. Whatever the reason, Maedakō created an entertaining if far-fetched sequence of events leading up to the explosion which involve Joe O'Brien and his wife Betty.

The basic story is as follows. Joe O'Brien, a carrier employed at a transport company, is entrusted with the job of transporting dynamite from a construction company to a building site on Wall Street. O'Brien goes by horse-drawn wagon to pick up the dynamite and proceeds to Wall Street, getting drunk along the way. In the meantime, O'Brien's wife is furious to find that her husband has forgotten to leave a 10-dollar note for her to do the shopping and pay the gas and insurance bills. She goes to Joe's company and proceeds to Wall Street when she hears of his

[25] Nakada op. cit., appendix p. 42.
[26] "*Hitori no mumei no rōdōsha*" 一人の無名の労働者. Quote from "Kyōsanshugisha Jiken" 共産主義者事件, a chapter in "Kinsei Taitō Nyotōden" 近世大盗女盗伝.

whereabouts. Finding her drunken husband near the J.P. Morgan Bank, she angrily punches him, setting off a chain reaction of events that results in the horse rearing up and the dynamite in the wagon exploding.

Maedakō's intentions are evident in the opening scene of the novel where Betty angrily flings a newspaper across the table, revealing a headline about the "Bolshevik red conspiracy." This bit of foreshadowing puts the Red Scare into readers' minds right from the beginning of the story. In fact, Maedakō's version of events is so absurd that it works only as a farce or satire of the Red Scare. Looking back on "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" in 1935, Edogawa Ranpo wrote, "This is not a mystery. Rather, it should be viewed as social satire."[27] Indeed, Hirabayashi Taiko, Maedakō's colleague at *Bungei Sensen*, once called him "a humor writer at heart."[28] However that may be, "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" suffers from an inconsistency of tone which leaves readers guessing whether the humor is intentional or not. Nozaki Rokusuke points out a similar tonal problem in "*Saigo ni Warau Mono*" ("He Who Laughs Last"),[29] Maedakō's 1924 work about a leftist writer who narrowly escapes framing by the police in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake: "The attempt at caricature goes nowhere. In spite of the superficiality of his satire, the author basks in smug self-satisfaction."[30]

Problems aside, Ranpo does note "a certain ambition" in "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*"'s epigraph, a quote from the author himself stating, "A detective story need not necessarily reveal the criminal. It may simply show the crime." At the end of the story, Maedakō breaks the fourth wall with the reader again, saying,

> The author of this novel, which is based on actual events, now rests his pen and glances at an American newspaper from that time. The list of the dead and wounded is even longer

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[27] Edogawa Ranpo 江戸川乱歩, "Nihon no Tantei Shōsetsu" 日本の探偵小説, preface to *Nihon Tantei Shōsetsu Kessakushū* 日本探偵小説傑作集, Shun'yōdō 春陽堂, 1935.

[28] Hirabayashi Taiko 平林たい子, "Maedakō Hiroichirō-shi to Watashi" 前田河広一郎氏と私, *Jidenteki Kōyūroku, Jikkanteki Sakkaron* 自伝的交友録 実感的作家論, Bungei Shunjū Shinsha 文藝春秋新社, 1960.

[29] Maedakō Hiroichirō 前田河広一郎, "Saigo ni Warau Mono" 最後に笑う者. Original date and place of publication unknown. Included in the short story collection *Saigo ni Warau Mono* 最後に笑う者, Koshiyamadō 越山堂, 1924.

[30] Nozaki Rokusuke 野崎六助, "Yoru no Hōrōshatachi, Modan Toshi Shōsetsu ni Okeru Tantei Shōsetsu Miman Daijūnikai – Maedakō Hiroichirō Saigo ni Warau Mono" 夜の放浪者たち――モダン都市小説における探偵小説未満 第十二回＝前田河広一郎「最後に笑う者」, *Misuteri Magajin* ミステリマガジン, December 2005 issue.

> than that of a war casualty report. However, I see no need to write down each of these foreign names to give my novel the veneer of reality. Rather, if I am to settle this work in true mystery fashion, I must proceed not by writing in order to show the criminal, but rather by focusing entirely on showing the crime.

Maedakō then goes on to reiterate his theory from "*Kyōsanshugisha Jiken*" that the newspapers were paid off 10,000 dollars apiece to absolve the construction company of blame and report the incident as a "Bolshevik plot" and "red terror."

In Maedakō's view, the Wall Street explosion was not a crime but an accident. Rather, the "crime" alluded to in the epigraph and epilogue is not the bombing itself, but the framing and demonizing of leftists by law enforcement, corporations, and the corrupt press. In this sense, the work is indeed subversive, in that it challenges both the general view of the incident and readers' conception of crime and criminality. However, considering the work's tonal inconsistency and the fact that *Shinseinen* was not a leftist publication, it is uncertain just how many readers grasped Maedakō's intentions, much less took them seriously.

As was typical for such works, "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" received virtually no critical attention when it was released. Both establishment and proletarian critics ignored it because mysteries were viewed as having little to no literary value. There is scant evidence that the work was embraced by the mystery community, either, as Maedakō never wrote for *Shinseinen* again. "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" basically fell through the cracks and has received little attention since. It was included in a 1991 collection of Japanese short stories from the 1920s and 1930s about foreign cities,[31] but the collection's commentary does not make any mention of the 1920 Wall Street bombing or the novel's socio-historical context.

In the commentary for a 2017 proletarian literature anthology including the work,[32] Kurumisawa Ken briefly examines "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" using narrative analysis. According to Kurumisawa, the work depicts the creation of a false media and establishment narrative, with the author literally raising his voice above the din of falsehoods to tell readers the truth. While Kurumisawa's argument is certainly worthy of note, is does not address the fact that

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[31] Unno Hiroshi 海野弘 ed., *Modan Toshi Bungaku IX Ikoku Toshi Monogatari* モダン都市文学 IX 異国都市物語, Heibonsha 平凡社, 1991.

[32] Kurumisawa Ken 楜沢健 ed., *Ansorojī・Puroretaria Bungaku ④ Jiken – Yami no Oku e* アンソロジー・プロレタリア文学④ 事件──闇の奥へ, Shinwasha 森話社, 2017.

the work is based on an actual incident, and that Maedakō's narrative of true events is arguably tailored to suit his own agenda just as much as the establishment's narrative is.

The work is, ultimately, best understood when viewed together with other mysteries written by *Bungei Sensen* writers in the same year: Hayama Yoshiki's "*Yūshūsen Tanukimaru*" ("The Good Ship Tanuki"),[33] a fictionalized account of a 1930 murder at sea which casts doubt on the prevailing theory that a sailor comitted the crime, and Iwafuji Yukio's "*Hito o Kutta Kikansha*" ("The Man-Eating Locomotive"),[34] in which the murder of a train engineer is treated as a heroic act because the engineer was a spy who had infiltrated the railway workers' union. Like "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*,"these works insert social awareness into the narrative and question the myth of the "good" and infallible authorities catching the "evil" criminal.

6. Conclusion

In its attempt to simultaneously be a proletarian novel, mystery, social satire, and metafiction, "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" is more curiosity than masterpiece. It ends up showing the limitations rather than the potential of combining the proletarian and mystery genres. However, it is precisely this reckless disregard for literary, geographical, and tonal distinctions that makes the work worthy of note. Rather than rigidly adhering to the divisions Maedakō tried to break down, one can only hope that more attention will be paid to such crossover works in the future. Only by doing so can we realize a more unified and comprehensive view of Japanese and indeed world literature of the period.

Unusual though it may be, "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" is by no means unique. In future research, it will need to be examined together with forays by Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, Hayama Yoshiki, Iwafuji Yukio, Hirabayashi Taiko, Hayashi Fusao, and other Japanese proletarian writers into the mystery genre. However, as long as the larger narrative of 20th century Japanese and world literature remains unchallenged, this research is fated to be ignored or treated like an oddity just as "*Rōdōsha Jō O Burain no Shi*" was. Rather than trying to shoehorn such works into the context of the Japanese proletarian and mystery movements, the time has come to question these long-standing genre and national divisions outright. We need to foster an inclusive, global mindset which

[33] Hayama Yoshiki 葉山嘉樹, "Yūshūsen Tanukimaru" 優秀船「狸」丸, *Kaizō* 改造 April 1931 issue.
[34] Iwafuji Yukio 岩藤雪夫, "Hito o Kutta Kikansha" 人を喰った機関車, *Shinseinen* 新青年, October 1931 issue.

acknowledges that Maedakō's novel has more in common with Upton Sinclair than it does with either Kobayashi Takiji or Edogawa Ranpo. Just as Maedakō challenged the establishment narrative of the Wall Street bombing, the time has come for us to challenge the established narrative of literary scholarship.