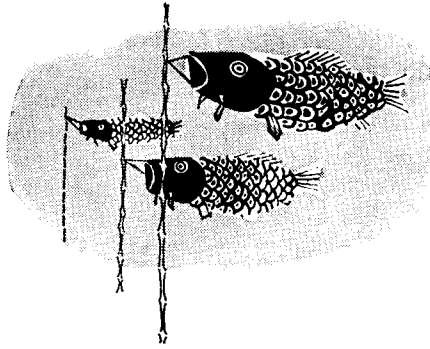


VIEWS & REVIEWS



Japan Joins The Hipster International

HERBERT PASSIN

IN TOKYO during November, 1963, a twenty-four-year-old student of Russian literature, seedy and unkempt, was picked up for shoplifting. Taken to the police station, he demanded, "What's wrong with shoplifting?" The police, wise in the ways of students and perhaps even a little sympathetic, took this in stride. But when they opened his soiled silk-wrapped parcel and came upon ten pornographic volumes, they took a more serious view. The student promptly revealed that he and two friends were the authors of *The Red Steamship*, or *The Night of the She-Wolf*, a sumptuous job of 128 pages with thirty-two illustrations selling for a thousand yen (\$1.60). Its production fell under a more serious charge than shoplifting—violation of the pornography laws. The student neither denied his responsibility nor showed any sign of guilt. Disdaining the usual defense that this was art, not pornography, he raised a more fundamental challenge: "We simply cannot comprehend this idea that pornography is bad." He was, it turned out, a member of the League of Criminals, which had staged a concerted series of "uprisings" the previous month.

"Our movement," the League's alleged leader later explained, "combines sex and politics. To liberate ourselves sexually, we must have a political revolution. Political activity means nothing unless it brings

about sexual freedom. Ours is a sexual politics. Our aim? A sexual-political revolution."

Interviewed by magazine reporters, two League members elaborated their position:

REPORTER: "Are you Communists?"

MEMBER A: "Yes."

REPORTER: "How so?"

MEMBER A: "First, the ultimate remaining capital is consciousness. Therefore we must get rid of consciousness and create a world of non-consciousness. Second, we must carry out black-magical experiments based on homosexuality. Third, the most decisive thing is to be relaxed and indifferent. Fourth, we must be ultra, we must go to any lengths to satisfy our desires."

REPORTER: "What is the proper course for your kind of Communist?"

MEMBER A: "Play and eat."

MEMBER B: "Make the capitalists support us."

REPORTER: "What complaints do you have right now?"

BOTH MEMBERS: "Communist society is a society intoxicated by drugs. It is a society of harmony. For our part, we are preparing for the post-Communist Revolution, a revolution to create a disharmonious society. Therefore we are ready to go to any lengths."

"WOULD YOU LIKE to meet a League member?" a young sociologist friend asked me. The

next day, a Sunday, we took a taxi to one of the new suburban developments on the northwestern outskirts of Tokyo. As we walked into a narrow alleyway lined with new jerry-built two-story houses, my guide said, "Just the right place for a criminal."

There was nothing criminal or sinister that I could see. Except for its rawness, it looked no different from the usual run-down lower-middle-class quarters one can see in Ueno or any of the other older districts of Tokyo. An ankylotic old woman was drawing water from a pump; a little girl ran screaming out of one row of houses and as abruptly disappeared into the other; a tired housewife dragged out bright red bedding to air; and a messenger boy forced us off the path with his bicycle. My guide led the way up a massive outer staircase of freshly laid though already mangy concrete. It led abruptly into the second floor of a rickety wooden building that shuddered as we set foot inside.

A trim and pretty housewife looked up from her portable ironing board. In a single fluid motion she set aside her iron, brushed back a stray wisp of hair, briefly checked the two-year-old behind her, patted her neat dress straight, and bowed us in. We removed our shoes and exchanged the usual phrases, all in the most proper fashion. At her almost invisible beckoning we pushed past the huge enameled refrigerator and the gas stove that blocked the tiny entryway three paces inside the door, and turned left through the sliding paper doors into the study.

"Come in, come in!" Hayashi (as I shall call him) shouted baronially. One half expected him to lift a tankard of ale to greet the travelers from afar. Hayashi, who had been described to me as the head of the League of Criminals, was squatting over his low desk set on the *tatami* floor, unshaven, uncombed, bright-eyed—the very caricature of the radical Japanese student. (He is, in fact, thirty years old, a tireless editor and writer for a serious academic magazine, who has to work hard to make a living.) "I'm not really the head of the League," he said. "I'm just a kind of protector. You might call me the chairman of the PTA." He laughed. (Since the American occu-

pation, the PTA is as common in Japan as in the United States).

The room was tiny and overheated by two oil stoves. About five feet wide and nine feet long, the minuscule area was further encroached upon by bookcases reaching the ceiling and books and papers scattered over the matted floor in lordly disorder. I scanned the bookcase on my left and noticed such titles as *Art and Revolution*, *New Key to Japanese History* (in three volumes), *The Literature of the Imperial Court Period*, *A History of Anarchism in Japan*, *The Popular Arts*. Among foreign authors, I spotted Kropotkin, the Marquis de Sade (*120 Days of Sodom*), Jean Genêt (*The Thief's Journal*), and Trotsky, all in translation.

"We're not really an organization, you know," Hayashi told us, "with members and all that kind of thing. People accuse us of being anarchists, and I suppose we are, rather. So you can call us a gathering of like-minded people and friends. We have no organization, no regular meetings or anything like that. We meet in the back room of a bar or in someone's home and we have a party. One thing we all have in common is that we love jazz. Some of our members are terrific jazz players."

"Do you know some of the younger American writers?" I asked him, ticking off a brief list of names.

"Of course," he answered scornfully to each one. "We're all white Negroes here." (All of the authors I had mentioned, by the way, were already available in Japanese translation.)

"You know," Hayashi said reflectively, "I'm thinking of going to America next year."

"What will you do there?" I asked. Japanese radicals are usually too anti-American to think of going to the United States.

"I don't know. I want to live with Negroes. They're great, those Negroes, aren't they! Maybe I'll get a job and live there forever."

"**W**HY DO YOU call yourselves criminals?" I asked.

"Because we are," Hayashi explained. "You see, we are revolutionaries, and to be a revolutionary today is to be a criminal. You have

to be against the law. At the same time, crime is a revolutionary action. But the revolution we believe in is a permanent revolution. It has no terminal point. What we are against is respectability, and that includes Russia and China too. So we have broken with the Zengakuren and the Communist Party." The Zengakuren, the Japanese student movement that in 1960 was powerful and violent enough to effect the cancellation of President Eisenhower's visit to Japan, has now grown more sedate. Its former leaders of Hayashi's age are mostly settling down and becoming *saraviman*—salaryman, now a Japanese word.

"That's how our movement got started about two years ago," Hayashi went on, "by student leaders fed up with Zengakuren. The radical student leaders, they felt, were just a bunch of squares." He used the English word. In fact, throughout the discussion, which was held in Japanese, I found him using English for all the key words, even though he could not really speak the language.

In the words of one of the founders of the League: "The inner dynamism of revolutionary action comes from evil and chaos. The respectable leaders fail to realize this, and so it is our task to keep it alive. They start out boldly, but in no time at all they lose their inner revolutionary evil and become respectable. They are so inflated by the idea that they are the representatives of the masses that they turn into pompous bureaucrats and organization men."

"Even more basic, the square radicals do not go to the roots of the problem. We live in a world of absurdity, and the absurdity lies not only in the capitalist system but in all respectability and convention based upon restraint. Even socialism—look at China and Russia!—is still a society of restraint, respectability, and squares."

"We don't believe in any of that nonsense about the workers being the chosen instruments of history," Hayashi said. "We believe that the true path of revolution is through self-reliance and complete self-indulgence through art and sex. Every act of sexual freedom or artistic creation is a revolutionary act. The real revolution is the one that

takes place within the individual, that liberates him from all inhibitions on his full artistic and sexual expression."

THIS EMPHASIS on art as a form of revolutionary liberation is reflected in the literary and artistic aspirations of the members. Even their orgies seem rather more arty than sexy. According to one firsthand description of the "naked party" celebrating the publication of *The Red Steamship*: "A small jazz combo poured music into the candlelit cellar while people twisted as the spirit moved them. Some sat around talking, others writing articles or poetry. A couple dancing cheek to cheek might be overheard quoting poetry to each other trying to match the bongo rhythms. The nakedness seemed to signify freedom and openness, rather than sexuality."

"Do you go along with Genêt's ideas on homosexuality?" I asked.

"Not exactly," Hayashi replied. "We believe in the right to homosexuality, not necessarily that it is the best thing. Some of our boys do it as a gesture of contempt for respectability and propriety. I don't think we have any real pansies, although sometimes foreign queers show up at our parties. The enemy is respectability."

"What is the opposite of respectable?" I asked him.

"Crazy, fanatic," he replied unhesitatingly. "Overcoming all embarrassment, hesitation, restraint, and inhibitions. Doing what one wants to. Don't forget that these kids have grown up under the most frightful puritanical restraints, and the first step in their liberation is to try out all the things they were forbidden. Our task is to destroy respectability and to bring it into contempt." As a student at an eminently respectable women's university put it: "I just want to get rid of this wishy-washy system. Let's blacken everything. Then maybe something good will come of the whole mess. That's what we are out for. I don't feel like I'm in a vanguard or anything like that. I'm just a carefree, lying, conscientious girl; we're erotic [she too used the English word] and pornographic criminals. Ours is a resistance movement."

"With these ideas," I asked Haya-

shi, "what kind of activities can your movement conduct, aside from parties and nose-thumbing gestures?"

"Quite a lot," he answered, "in our own anarchistic way."

One such activity took place on October 31, 1963, when members of the League carried out "uprisings" in ten cities. Their objective was to bring the national elections into contempt. In Kyoto University's law and economics senior room, a black Mass was held: banana skins were spread over the floor, a chicken was slaughtered and its blood mixed with eye medicine and Coca-Cola for the participants to drink, and an orgy was held to the accompaniment of a phonograph pouring forth modern jazz. In another uprising, a group of six members, including a neo-Dada painter and one of the directors of the League's Self-Reliance School, terrified commuters on a train by a quickie theatre of the absurd. Taking over the middle of the swaying train all the way from central Tokyo to the suburbs, they forced passengers to watch a series of wild skits that made use of such ad hoc props as a helmet, an egg, face powder, a flashlight, and a long fuse. Another group set itself the mission of tying up traffic in one of Tokyo's most crowded districts by stretching out on the sidewalks at a busy hour; the pedestrian and traffic tie-up was gratifying. League members considered the uprisings a great success.

IN ADDITION TO such occasional "actions," members of the League have been preparing themselves for their serious tasks by forming special study groups. One is the Explosives or High Technique Research Society ("high technique" in English), where members engage in a "mechanism revolution" (also in English) and study the manufacture and use of dynamite, TNT, and nitroglycerine. "The time will come," one member told me, "when we shall have to blow up the national authority and power sources." "When that time comes," Hayashi said, "we don't want to be in the ridiculous position some ultra-right-wing terrorists once found themselves in before the war." As part of their plan for a take-over, they had decided to blow up a giant

power plant. Everything was perfectly organized. They broke through the barbed wire, passed the guards, and took possession of the plant. They could do anything they wanted, only they suddenly realized they didn't know how to blow it up.

Another important enterprise is the Eroticism Revolution League, whose task is to "destroy sexual mo-



nopoly." "We shall form a new type of sexual family, in which everyone will have free sexual access to everyone else," one member told me. "Then this new type of family will spread through all of society." There is already, I learned, a small colony in a remote rural district based on similar ideas, but members of the League of Criminals take a condescending attitude toward it. "They're just a bunch of utopians. We have no objection to what they're doing. It's their right. But you don't overthrow society by withdrawing from it." Members of the League add that armchair philosophizing is totally inadequate. "Modern research methods require experimentation."

The movement is supported by at least one publishing house and a journal (*White Night*) that provides an outlet for the literary work of members and sympathizers.

"When you have had your revolution," I asked Hayashi, "what kind of society will you create?"

"Frankly, we don't know," he confessed. "Perhaps the society we want cannot really exist. Perhaps it is a contradiction in terms to speak of a disharmonious society. Some of our members are studying this matter and trying to work out a sketch of our ideal society. But most of us are willing to leave that to the distant future. For the time being we have our hands full concentrating on our immediate tasks of destruction and individual liberation."

For these tasks they draw on Marx's critique of bourgeois society, on Trotsky's permanent revolution, and on de Sade's systematic violation of the rules of civil society. Their heroes are Jean Genêt's outlaw aristocrat and Norman Mailer's white Negro, and they express themselves through the same channels as do other units of the hipster international, whether in England, France, Poland, or the United States—jazz, sex, and art.

"We even have some real criminals," Hayashi boasted to me. "Several of the boys are expert pick-pockets, and they have never been caught."

"Why do they steal?" I asked.

"Because crime is a concrete revolutionary action. It is an expression of contempt for respectable society, and it is a direct blow against it. Besides, they need the money to pay their tuition and expenses."

"What about other crimes?"

"Well," he said, carefully choosing his words, "we don't have any murderers—yet. But some of the boys have made friends with real criminals—ex-convicts and all that sort of thing—and among them there are real rapists and murderers. So we are in touch."

ALL THROUGH our interview I had been nagged by the awareness of Hayashi's respectable-looking wife and child on the other side of the paper doors. One knows that Japanese women are extraordinarily complaisant, but I found it hard to conceive of her listening to our outrageous conversation while she quietly pursued her household tasks.

"How do you explain it?" I asked my companion after we had left. "Does Hayashi's wife agree with his ideas? Does she take part in the orgies? Or what?"

"Of course she doesn't take part in the orgies," my friend answered. "He would kill her if she did. He wants her to be a proper wife and mother. So she listens and doesn't hear. At least, he thinks she doesn't hear. But maybe she does. If Hayashi's talk is all part of his ambivalence, then her response is part of something deeper—trivalence or even quadrivalence, if there is such a word. That's the secret of Japanese women."



The Agony of the Cartoon

HORTENSE CALISHER

SOME POETS, painters, thinkers represent mankind always with the *risus sardonicus* of death and corruption on its face, whirling in a society which is a death dance. Others trace this face with a certain tenderness of perfectibility on it, and see the society too as teleological, pushing along that famous incline toward the stars. Between these two views lie all the gradations of art. In Peter Weiss's play, *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (and as performed with disciplined rage by the Royal Shakespeare Company under the wizardry of Peter Brook), the stage at the Martin Beck Theatre is a pitched one, for real and for metaphysical, angling its inmates down, and toward the audience. Musical accompaniment is fided and tympanied, or rattled from the metal sheets used so often in productions of *Godot*, by inmates placed in the boxes, while a Brechtian chorus of four more sings and mimes from the stage or from trapdoors below. Coulmier, the director of the mental home where de Sade, as an inmate after 1801, wrote some of the theatrical entertainments that were produced there as therapy, sits onstage with his wife and daughter—as indeed the fashionable Parisians who came to watch the antics at

Charenton did sit. There are incursions of actors into balcony and orchestra, wherever sit the aristocrats of the Martin Beck. For, as in Genêt's *The Blacks*, the audience is indictable. When it claps the cast at the end of the play, the inmates clap back.

The intent is "total" theatre, and in production terms—short of a possible spastic song-and-dance response from the ticketholders—the play gets it. Everyman is onstage in all the grotesques of his overt and hidden lunacy—the obsessive, the autoerotic, the weeper in her mobcap, the drooler with the thick tongue, all performing their silent rhythms, and attended by coifed male nuns and butcher-clad nurses; the mime chorus is Elizabethanly drunken or whorish; other types and professions pass behind in Molièresque charade. Directorial invention underscores the author's intent at every chance. Where the author himself, careful not to have his play "about" one thing or any actor speak for only one, specifies that the Girondist deputy be played by an erotomaniac "in the smooth, tight trousers of an 'Incroyable,'" then the Royal's customary fondness for humanizing touches of bawdry improves upon this suggestion very versatily; in a play which as much as anything is about revolution, then the blood poured from buckets at

intervals is of course red, white, or blue.

In the modern theatre, where so much device is available (and for all the complaints, so much money for it), audiences have often to quarrel over whether the play is really the thing in a new production, or whether directorial energy has made it so. When the two are so merged as here, that question may remain as unanswerable as the dialectical questions in this play itself—and like them, sets up one of the vital tensions which make theatre. For while it is evident at once that this play is not, like *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, a weak-minded pageant in which the elephant spectacle is poised on the butterfly wings of bombast, nevertheless the visual and aural confusion is at times overwhelming—too close to circus for us to get it all at one whack. This is an old Brechtian trick, but an older theatrical one. In a sense the play here is swarmed over, even attacked by the production ideas it itself invites, but not swamped. Sometimes, in one of these three-ring whirligigs, there is clear contempt for the play's words, but here the important monologues are delivered at as staid a pace as Hamlet's, underscored by the choral flow. Even in the din at the finale, when all might well be chanting "O Sophonisba! Sophonisba, O!" with all Jamie Thomsons anywhere, instead of: "Charenton Charenton/Napoleon Napoleon/Nation Nation/Revolution Revolution/Copulation Copulation"—one wishes the best wish, to come back for another performance, or to go to the text.

LONDON CRITICS have argued that the play itself derives from a number of fashionable sources; so it does, along with those I have indicated. But it is not merely an adroitly composite echo, though it is composite and does echo within itself. One brilliant idea sustains it: we *are* in the asylum; de Sade *is* producing his play; Marat (at whose actual funeral the real de Sade did deliver the oration) *is* in his bath (to which the real Marat was confined by a skin disease) before us, but in the bathhouse of the asylum, ready to be murdered by Charlotte Corday, toward which event all con-