

Japan: Propaganda to Pornography

RALPH CHAPMAN

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The account Ralph Chapman gives here of literary and publishing activity in Japan is based upon observations made during two and a half years post-V-J-Day service as Tokyo correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune. This is the first of an occasional series SRL will publish on contemporary literature and literary life abroad. Reports on Germany, Poland, Sweden, and other foreign countries will follow in the near future.*

THE stamp of defeat is nowhere more evident in Japan than in the field of literary endeavor. Thousands of writers, many well-known but for the most part newcomers, have poured out millions of words in the two and a half years since the war ended, but Japanese critics are almost unanimous in labeling the output trash.

Predominant in 1946 were nostalgic stories of prewar days and tales about the crimes of the militarists, apparently written with an eye to acceptability by occupation authorities. Then followed a wave of eroticism which verged on the pornographic. It is notable that the U.S. Army censors, of whom more later, and General MacArthur's Civil Information and Education Section did nothing to stem the tide of obscene writing which at one time threatened to engulf the entire publishing field.

Critic Hideo Kuwahara, reviewing the literary scene in 1947 for the *Nippon Times*, wrote that "there were no mentionable novels written in 1947 and . . . even the best short stories were not up to par." As to non-fiction, there has not been, to this writer's knowledge, even a serious effort to produce anything of note.

Various observers hold different opinions concerning the reason for the present lost standards. One critic, laying the blame wholly on the writers themselves, said, "It is out of the question to assume good writing will depend on whether the Japanese democracy progresses rapidly or slowly. . . . No revolution in literature occurs as a necessary consequence of an historical event." An opposite view, taken by many, is that writing standards reflect the general

cultural level of the people and that Japan must become "modernized" before there can be any hope of good writing.

Actually the present barren picture is attributable to a variety of causes, all stemming from the war. Most important of these have been the activities of unscrupulous publishers, an acute paper shortage, Army censorship, the ineptness of those at MacArthur's headquarters charged with the "re-education" of the Japanese and, to a lesser degree, the thorny and highly involved problem of language reform.

When freedom of speech was restored to the Japanese by the MacArthur directive of October 4, 1945, the publishers faced this problem: the reading public was starved for books and magazines of all kinds free from the influence of the Tojo propaganda machine. On the other hand, there was (and still is) an extremely limited supply of paper, even in the black market. Right then too many publishers took the wrong turning.

Refusing to gamble paper on anything which was not sure-fire, they set their presses to turning out the same sort of lurid tripe which clutters two-thirds of the newsstand space in the United States. But there is this dif-

ference: we still have enough paper to print also the work of fine writers whose appeal is to a discriminating public; the Japanese do not. One must speculate, therefore, as to whether a considerable amount of writing with literary merit has not gone beyond the manuscript stage because Japanese publishers do not feel that they can take a chance.

It should be noted here that the appellation of "sure-fire" attaches to anything written by a foreigner. American and other newspaper correspondents in Tokyo can earn thousands of yen monthly by writing short pieces on current events for vernacular newspapers and magazines. A flimsy novel called "Tokyo Romance," written by Earnest Hoberecht, United Press correspondent, for publication only in Japanese, has sold several hundred thousand copies and is still going strong. An article by a former U. S. Army nurse (my wife, as a matter of fact) who had never written a line in her life led the second page of Tokyo's largest evening paper.

The Japanese will read anything and publishers know it.

THE dearth of new books, good or bad, is due to constantly spiraling costs. Salaries and wages have increased to many times their prewar level. Government paper allocations are insufficient to permit profitable use in books. The price of black-market paper is ten times the legal price. As a result, retail prices are fast becoming prohibitive. A dictionary which sold for ten yen in 1945 now costs one hundred and twenty.

Mrs. Yoko Matsuoka, Swarthmore graduate, writer, editor, and literary agent, told this writer one day that "there has not been a single book printed in Japan since the end of the war without the use of black-market paper."

The paper shortage is due in large measure to the fact that coal production throughout the nation is far below that of prewar years. This has



given rise to a curious sort of barter system. Large newspapers and publishing houses which have considerable coal reserves get paper in exchange for the fuel necessary to keep the paper mills going. Such transactions are illegal, of course, but extremely difficult for government officials to catch.

Book and magazine publishers complain that, because they lack political strength, their pleas for paper go unheeded while the newspapers get what they need. Since all Japanese dailies, even the largest, are limited to two pages, this complaint hardly seems justified. This does not mean, though, that politics of one sort or another does not play a part in paper allocations.

Although several factors are involved, it is circulation which governs paper allotments. Bearing in mind that there is no Japanese equivalent for the Audit Bureau of Circulations in the United States, the opportunities for skullduggery are obvious. There have been several shakeups in the Government's Paper Allocation Committee but there is still widespread dissatisfaction with its operations.

A RUMOR constantly circulated in publishing circles is that certain newspapers have inflated their circulation figures in order to obtain paper beyond their actual needs. The claim is that they then sell the excess paper in the black market. Such a charge was made by certain publishers against *Akahata* (Red Flag), organ of the Communist Party in Japan. An investigation by this writer disproved the charge completely. *Akahata* seldom draws the full allotment of paper to which it is entitled.

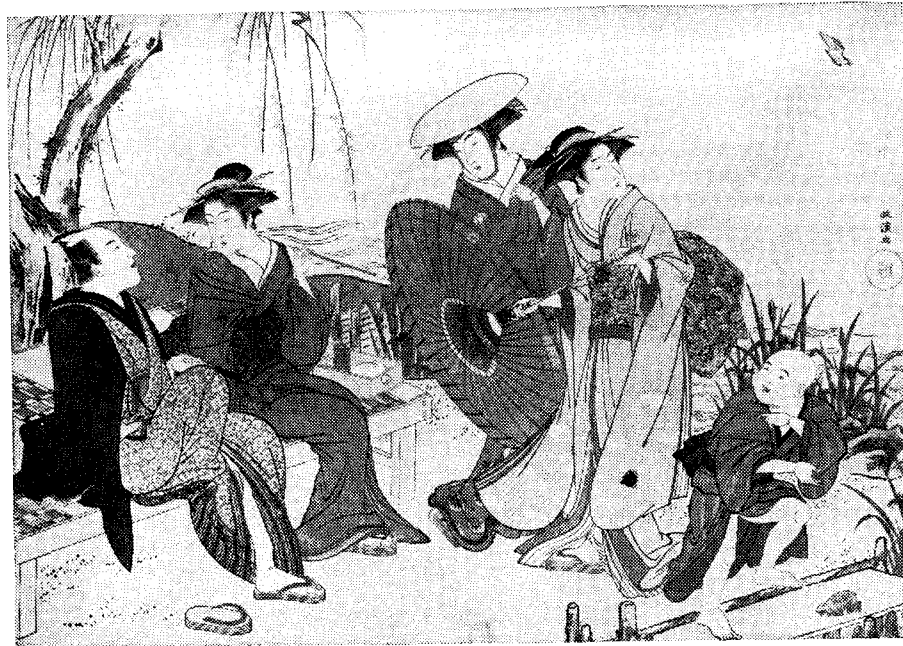
The truth is simply that all publishers want more paper than they are getting—but for different reasons. The large papers are satisfied in general with their circulation but want to go from two to four, or even eight, pages. The magazines are not especially interested in enlarging each issue but wish to print in greater numbers in order to meet the circulation demand.

Whatever may be the situation in

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 748)

FRANCIS PARKMAN:
(THE) OREGON TRAIL

By the side of each wagon in the emigrant caravan stalked the proprietor, urging on his patient oxen, who shouldered heavily along inch by inch on their interminable journey. It was easy to see that fear and dissension prevailed.



—Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

"The Call of the Cuckoo," by Kitao Masanobu.

the book-publishing field, there is certainly no dearth of magazines. No less than 3,000 were published monthly during 1947. Most critics, including Mr. Kuwahara, take a dim view of the literary content of most of these and are outspoken in declaring that the paper consumed could be put to much better use in bringing to the public the work of serious writers who now have no outlet.

That magazines are, potentially at least, big money makers in Japan there can be no doubt. A survey was made among some of the leading periodicals about six months ago to determine dealer demands as compared with actual circulation. The results were startling. Dealer demands for the five leading women's magazines totaled 2,260,000 but paper allocations permitted the printing of only 260,000—a monthly circulation loss of 2,000,000!

Certainly no publisher will quit so lucrative a field to print books whose sales are unlikely to go beyond a few thousands. It is unlikely that there will be many new books by Japanese authors until there is once more sufficient paper first to satisfy the popular demand for magazines.

Let us now examine the effects of American censorship on Japanese literature. It must be said at the outset that this requirement of the occupation authorities has been increasingly relaxed. There is only a minimum of pre-censorship and this is limited to the most influential newspapers. This writer has found evidence also of a broadening interpretation of censorship policy.

Nevertheless, censorship does exist, with its usual stultifying influence on

both author and publisher. The censors operate under an order which says that nothing shall be published which is "inimical to the objectives of the occupation." Such an order can be interpreted in just about as many ways as there are censors. The Japanese know this and make every effort to avoid interpretative writing, especially on the liberal side, for fear of running afoul of the censor's office.

Here is an example of what bewilders Japanese writers and editors: an article on the tremendous increase in the number of street-walkers was submitted to censorship. The writer pointed out that a large proportion of such girls and women picked up by the police came from middle- and upper-class homes. He drew the apparently valid conclusion from this that difficult living conditions had brought about a corresponding lowering of morals in Japan since the end of the war.

THE censors passed the story—but deleted the conclusions. It was apparently thought that these would reflect in some way upon General MacArthur's occupation program. The fact that the article as passed was completely without point either escaped the censors or did not interest them. The effect upon the author and the editor who submitted the article may be imagined.

The extent to which liberal writing has been hampered by censorship during our occupation of Japan cannot, of course, be measured, but despite the hush-hush attitude of Army intelligence units there are certain indications. This writer, then Tokyo bureau
(Continued on page 34)

Fiction. *Writers of our post-war fiction are as depressed about the current evils that beset mankind as the Frenchmen who have invented a philosophy and a literature of despair. The profound difference in the American novelists' approach is illustrated by two novels reviewed this week, Albert Camus' "The Plague" and Irwin Stark's "The Invisible Island." The first is an ironically aloof and gruesome account of a city decimated by bubonic plague, which the author uses to illustrate the incurable follies of mankind. The second is the personal and intimate observations by one man of a specific evil, in this case racial and social hatreds in the jungle of city life. American writers seem to be incapable of Gallic emotional detachment, and Frenchmen of any zest for social causes, on the theory that mankind is lost and cannot be redeemed.*

Battle Against the Forces of Darkness

THE PLAGUE. By Albert Camus. Translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1948. 278 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by RICHARD McLAUGHLIN

THE brief dedicatory passage from Defoe that faces the title page of this challenging novel by one of France's impressive new writers was not placed there by mere coincidence. On the contrary, I would have said that before he wrote "The Plague" Albert Camus had dipped into quite a bit of Defoe's writing, particularly "A Journal of the Plague Year." For as somber, as unrelievedly grim as is the general nature of Camus' epical theme—recounting the painful and often repellent history of the visitation of bubonic plague on a modern city—the actual writing has grandeur because it is so calm and detached. Occasionally, however, this flatness may make the reader wonder why Mr. Camus went to such bother to choose an unhappy setting for his philosophical discussions. True, the battle against the forces of darkness and ignorance must go on; but it seems to me that the author takes away from the validity and bite of his philosophical argument by shocking us in advance with an unnecessarily gruesome setting. Camus' rather formal and restrained prose does not exactly lend itself to sensational tricks or the usual embellishments of psychological thrillers. He is essentially a prophet-philosopher who writes novels of ideas. He is not unlike Sartre, Bataille, and the other French Existentialist novelists we have been hearing from lately. However, Camus has made it quite clear publicly that he is not an Existentialist; so that even his message, for all its apparent gloom, may be regarded as a

special brand of despair as opposed to or separate from the Existentialists' prophecy of doom.

Camus looks down on the crazy business of humanity with an omniscient eye. He views the modern scene of moral desuetude, or sluggishness, with amused tolerance, commenting on the follies and frailties of mankind with a somewhat gentler irony than some of his countrymen writing today. Terror, love, pity, hatred, lust, are all reduced to simple equations

in the larger scheme of existence. Man has more goodness than evil in him, says Camus; it is only ignorance which unbalances the scale and creates a lonely heart, and even on occasion turns the best-intentioned people toward evil. Confronted with a city turned into a stinking charnel house over night, the loftiest as well as the lowest emotions are seen swallowed up by the monotony of pestilence-ridden days and nights where "the habit of despair is worse than despair itself."

The plague Albert Camus is writing about here serves a triple purpose, or at least his novel may be read on three different levels. First we may approach it as a harrowing fictional account of what happens to men, women, and children in a city besieged by bubonic and pneumonic plague, sparing no details of the dying, the exiled, the deprived, or of what such wholesale death, smell of corruption, and agonized cries of the sick can do to the hearts and the minds of men who witness it. Secondly, there is the fact that Camus has chosen Oran for his beleaguered city, a place well known to our expeditionary forces who landed there during the North African campaign: it is enough to induce us to read into his stirring parable any number of parallels which automatically identify

THE AUTHOR: For one buoyed by promises of more resplendent Fords and related goodies it is difficult to comprehend the sustained dolor that has apparently been the lot of Albert Camus. He was born in Mondovi, Algiers, in 1913, of working-class parents, has suffered intimately wars, depression, defeat. "Brought up in such a world, what did we believe in?" he asks. "Nothing . . . We still cannot accept any optimistic view of human existence." Distinguishing him from the Existentialists is his "atheistic humanism"—"If we believe that to be optimistic about human existence is madness, we also know that to be pessimistic about man's action among his fellow men is cowardly." His political essay "Le Mythe de Sisyphe" cued by the frustrated rock-pusher Sisyphus, about sums it up. Completed while teaching in Oran, scene for "The Plague," it passed Nazi censorship in 1942, as did the novel "L'Etranger" that year and, in 1944, the plays "Caligula" (written with his "Noces" essays at twenty-five) and "Le Malentendu." Meanwhile, although tubercular, Camus was body and pen in the Resistance. He co-founded and edited the clandestine *Combat*, now a respected overground daily. In it were his stirring "Lettres à un Ami Allemand." He impales the Right's chauvinism, the extreme Left's automatic responses; takes bows from critics of every school. Troubled students throng his Paris office as editorial director with publishers Gallimard. While studying philosophy at the University of Algiers, he had modest jobs with the weather bureau, Prefecture, an automobile accessory firm, a shipping company. With his first newspaper story, a denunciation of Kabylia conditions, he aroused the public, and officials. From 1935-38 he directed the theatrical troupe L'Equipe, produced along with other works "in which love of life mingled with despair" his translation of Aeschylus's "Prometheus," played the lead. Among his pleasures—Mediterranean bathing, sunning, simple amusements—it is to be hoped he finds some careless merriment.—R. G.

