

**Selected Translations**  
**from the *Hyakunin Isshu***  
**(*One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets*)**  
**Compiled by Teika Fujiwara**

by *Linda M. Reinfeld\**  
and  
*Toshi Ishihara*

The *Hyakunin Isshu* (*One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets*) were compiled by Sadaie Fujiwara in 1235 and include poems written over the course of five and a half centuries. Sadaie (1162–1241), under the influence of his father, Shunzei, wrote poems and books on the theory of verse, and was an important literary figure at the court. The collection starts with the works by Tenchi Tenno (626–671), the 34th emperor, and Jito Tenno (654–671), the 41st emperor, and ends with those by Gotobano-in (1180–1239), the 82nd emperor, and Juntoku-in (1197–1242), the 84th emperor. The other verses are arranged in approximately chronological order. The writers included here are emperors, princes, officers, priests, women in aristocratic families, servant-maids at court, and ordinary people — that is to say, writers from various social classes over a long period of time.

Each verse is in the form of a Tanka, that is, a five line syllabic form of 31 syllables, 5–7–5, 7–7. Verses about love make up almost half of the collection (43); seasonal songs come next in number (autumn, 16; spring, 6; winter, 6; summer, 4), and four songs deal

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Pictures were taken by Toshi Ishihara.

with travelling. Parting is a common theme. It is perhaps worth noting that this collection was done at the request of Utsunomiya Nyudo Yoritsuna, a distant relative of Sadaie, for the purpose of decorating the screens at his retreat. Thus, from the beginning, the collection was designed to exist within a rich visual dimension. In the seventeenth century, the poems developed into a popular card game. This game, with the rules virtually unchanged, continues to be widely played today. The poems, along with their traditional interpretations, are taught in schools, and there is even a national competition.

In the game, we have two sets of cards. The cards of one set are for the orator, or reader, and have one verse in whole (5-7-5, 7-7 syllables), and they usually come with pictures of the authors in the costumes of their own classes. The cards of the other set are for players (usually two, sometimes more) and only the latter half of a verse is printed (7-7). The players spread the cards of the second set on the floor. When two players compete, each keeps fifty cards placed neatly in front of him/her. The orator reads his/her card, and the players look for a card which matches the orator's. So if the player memorizes the whole verse, he/she can start looking for the right card without waiting until the orator comes to the last half of the verse, which is written on the players' cards. The better memory the player has, the greater the chance of winning. When all the cards are taken, the game is over. The person who has taken more cards wins the game.

The collection has of course been translated into English before. Most widely available in Japan is *A Hundred Verses from Old Japan, Being a Translation of the Hyaku-nin-Isshiu* by William N. Porter, published in 1909.\*\* His reading is meaning-oriented (though his reading is not always accurate) and gives a good approximation of the verse. Porter's free use of connectives and adjectives is also necessary to accommodate the unusual meter of the original, 5-7-5-7-7, to the English-sounding 8-6-7-6-6 meter, with the second, fourth, and the fifth lines rhyming. In our version we tried to restore the compactness and conciseness of the original which is totally lost in Porter's.

Japanese poetry often does not depend on a logical sequence; it permits the co-presence of phenomena without explicitly determining the relation between any two or more events. Perhaps an emphasis on a certain degree of "a-logicality" or "strangeness" in the poems engages the reader's willingness to participate more fully in the act of

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\*\* Porter, William N., *A Hundred Verses from Old Japan, Being a Translation of the Hyak-nin-Isshiu*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1909)

reading.

We have also taken a pragmatic approach to rendering the rhythms of the verse in English. Rather than convert the five-line, 31 syllable Japanese form into a similarly divided English one, we thought it more important to evoke poetic rhythm as it emerges aurally in the context of reading. As mentioned above, this verse collection is most familiar as part of the card game which involves the reading aloud of the poems. Each verse is divided into two parts — *kami-no-ku*, upper part, and *shimo-no-ku*, lower part — and there is a clear caesura between the two parts when the poem is read aloud. Thus we chose a two-line, rather than a five-line, form for our translation.

Another point to make: although the poems are very brief, they are extraordinarily rich in word-play and puns which double and sometimes even triple the meaning. We have tried to keep the word-play as much as possible, although of course there is no question of literally duplicating the Japanese. On the other hand, we decided to keep all the place names and proper nouns unchanged, simply transliterated into Romaji, so that the writing would retain its important local and historical specificity. It is ironic that much of the aura, or perceived strangeness (exoticism?) of these poems — as they are read in English — is probably a direct result of the most literal aspect of our translation.

I live at the high world's border: dragon, snake, and deer  
About me, on Uiyama — sadly, or so some think.



Waga iho wa  
Miyako no tatsumi  
Shika zo sumu  
Yo wo Uji yama to  
Hito wa iu nari.

8 . KIZEN HOSHI

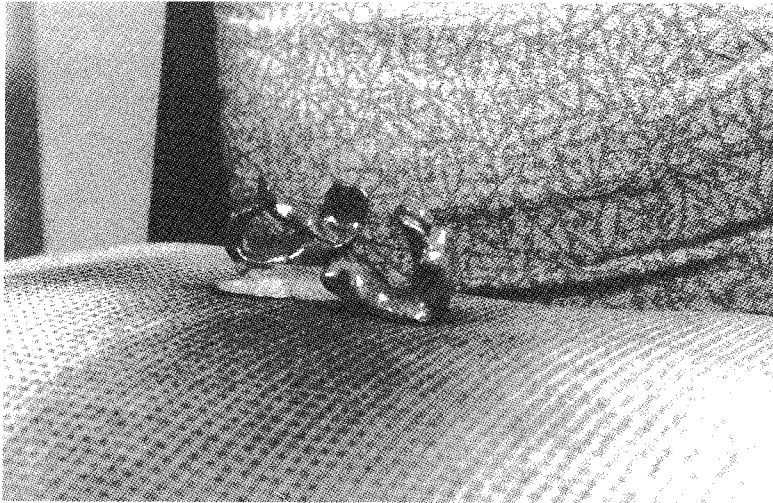


Awaji Island — and always, birds flying over the strait:  
Nightly their cries keep the Suma Pass guard from sleep.

Awaji shima  
Kayou chidori no  
Naku koe ni  
Ikuyo nezamenu  
Suma no seki-mori.

78. MINAMOTO NO KANEMASA

Crickets singing, frosty night, chilly mist and mat  
Am I going to sleep alone on my spread kimono?

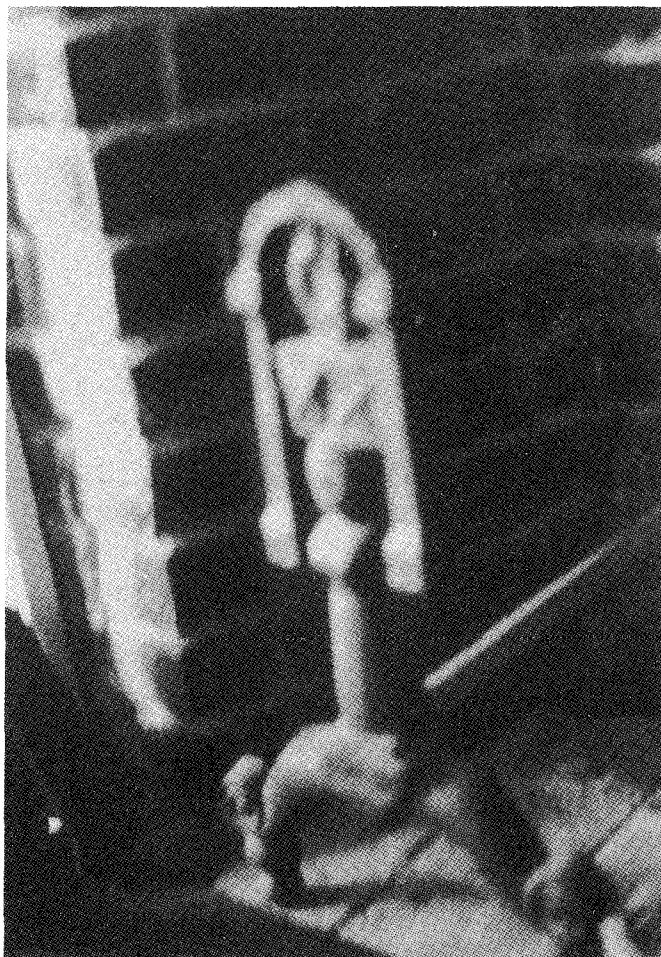


Kirigirisu  
Naku ya shimo no  
Samushiro ni  
Koromo katashiki  
Hitori kamo nen.

91. GOKYOGOKU SESSHO SAKI NO DAJODAIJIN

*Linda M. Reinfeld and Toshi Ishihara*

The wind is strong, waves beat against the rocks,  
Break into pieces. Sea spray, my heart.



Kaze wo itami  
Iwa utsu nami no  
Onore nomi  
Kudakete mono wo  
Omou koro kana.

48. NINAMOTO NO SHIGEYUKI

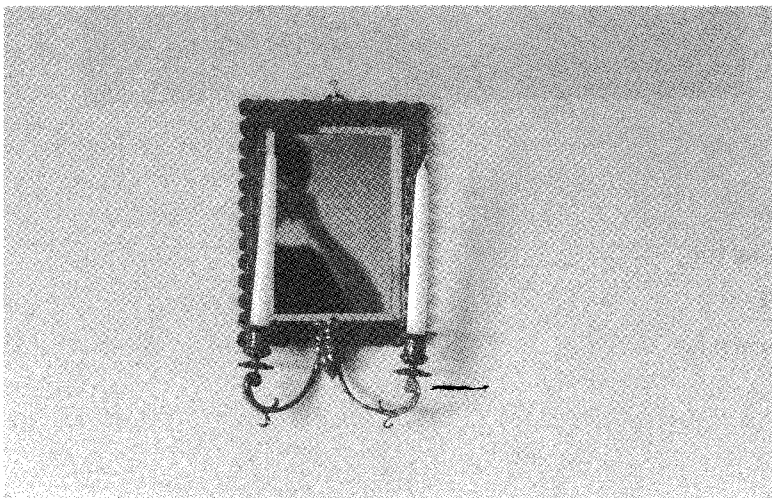
Selected Translations from the *Hyakunin Isshu*

Cherry blossoms, pale after long rain; beauty useless.  
I live in a world drained of color without you.



Hana no iro wa  
Utsuri ni keru na  
Itazurani  
Waga mi yo ni furu  
Nagame seshi ma ni.

9 . ONO NO KOMACHI



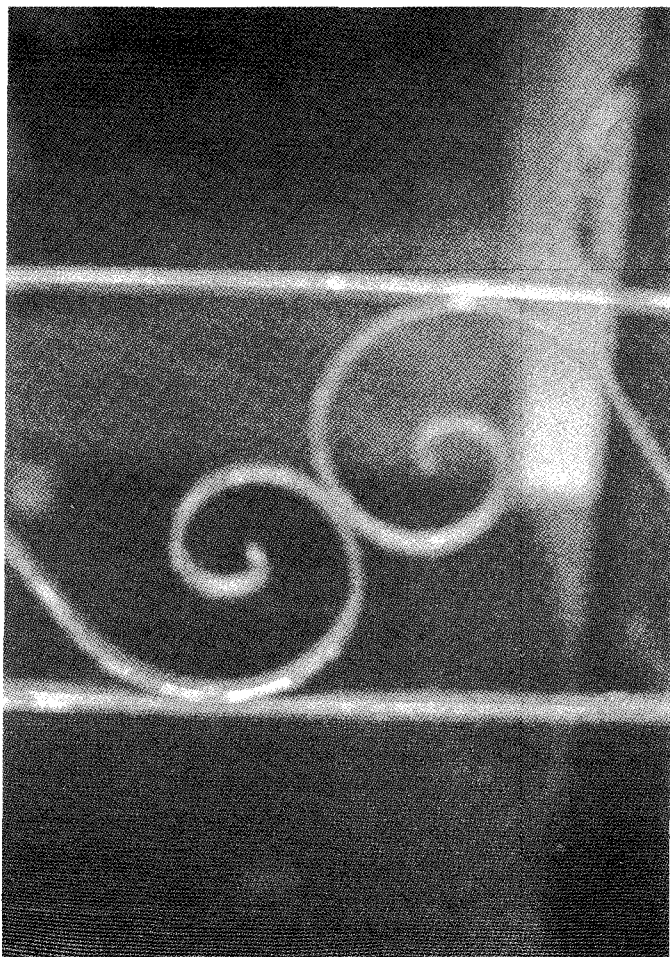


*Linda M. Reinfeld and Toshi Ishihara*

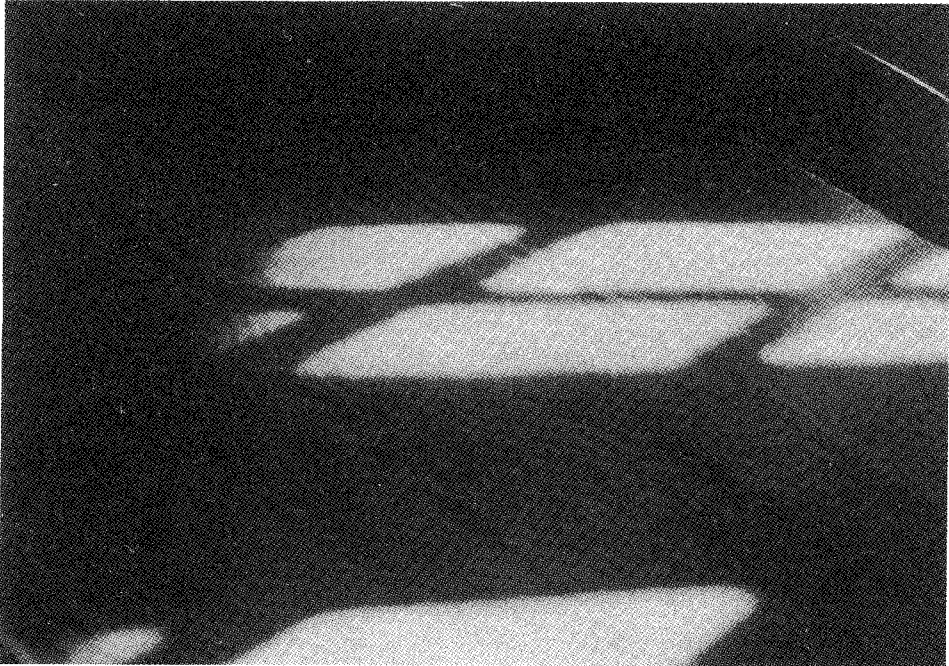
Drops left by a passing rain play on the pine needles,  
White mist is rising in the autumn dusk.

Murasame no  
Tsuyu mo mada hinu  
Maki no ha ni  
Kiri tachi-noboru  
Aki no yugure.

87. JAKUREN HOSHI



Spring's gone, and I hear that white robes hang like prayers  
On Ama-no-kagu Mountain, whiteness, a sign of summer.



Haru sugite  
Natsu ki ni kerashi  
Shirotae no  
Koromo hosu cho  
Ama-no-kagu yama.

2 . JITO TENNO

*Linda M. Reinfeld and Toshi Ishihara*

Through Ikuno and over Mount Oe it's a long road, one I don't know.  
No echoes here of my mother, no word from her home on Ama-no-Hashidate.



Oe yama  
Ikuno no michi no  
Tookereba  
Mada funi mo mizu  
Ama-no-Hashidate.

60. KOSHKIBU NO NAISHI

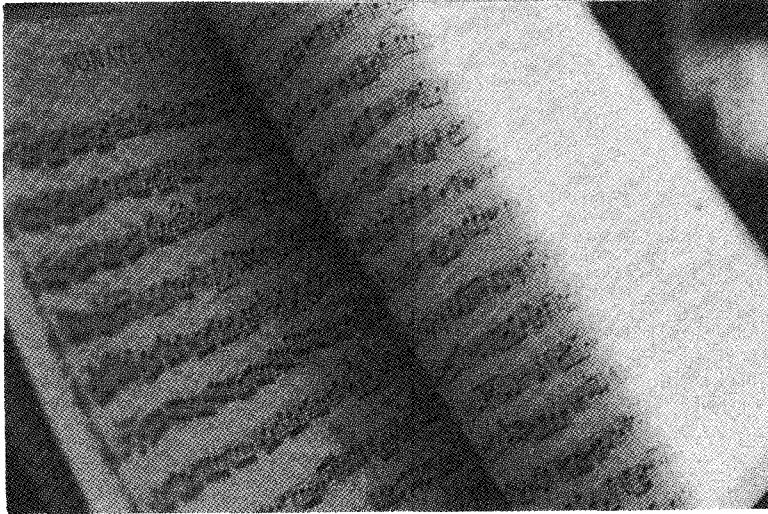


Meeting once again, again our time  
Uncertain, brief — clouds hide the midnight moon.

Meguri-aite  
Mishi ya sore tomo  
Wakanu ma ni  
Kumo gakure nishi  
Yowa no tsuki kana.

57. MURASAKI SHIKIBU

*Linda M. Reinfeld and Toshi Ishihara*



Nara's eight-petaled cherry blossoms unfold here in Kyoto.  
Now today their sweetness enlivens the nine-walled capital.

Inishie no  
Nara no Miyako no  
Yaezakura  
Kyo kokonoe ni  
Nioi nuru kana.

61. ISE NO TAIFU

Forgotten and alone now, I live on —  
I fear for you, your time grown short, your sacred oaths broken.



Wasuraruru  
Mi woba omowazu  
Chikahite-shi  
Hito no inochi no  
Oshiku mo aru kana.

38. UKON



Autumn — trees and grass weakening, blasted — wind's moment:  
“Mountain wind” they call it, fierce character of strength.

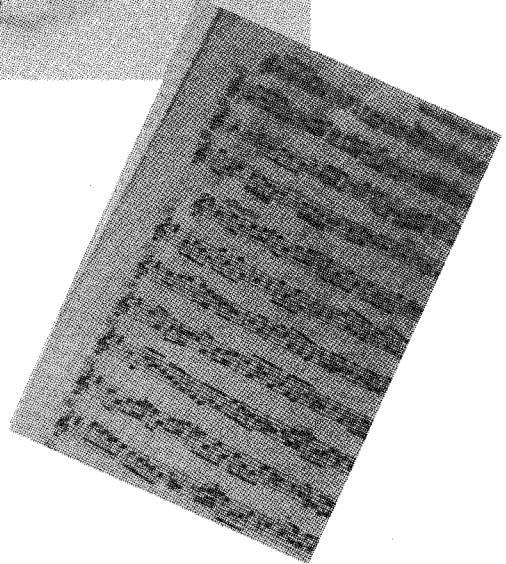
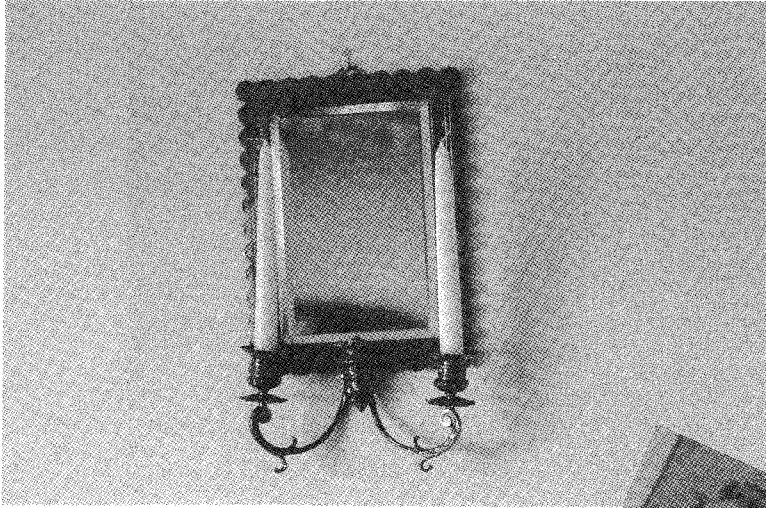
Fuku kara ni  
Aki no kusaki no  
Shiborureba  
Mube yama kaze wo  
Arashi to iuramu.

22. BUNYA NO YASUHIDE



Selected Translations from the *Hyakunin Isshu*

You said you would come soon, but it's autumn now:  
I wait with the long moon in the dawning sky.



Ima kon to  
Iishi bakari ni  
Naga-tsuki no  
Ariake no tsuki wo  
Machi idetsuru kana.

21. SOSEI HOSHI



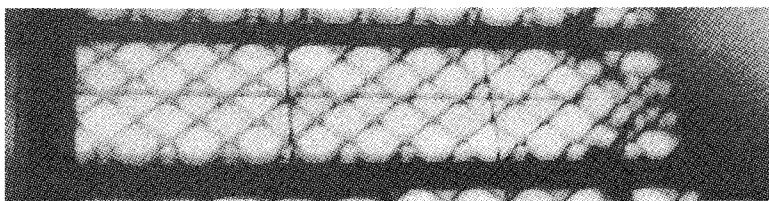
*Linda M. Reinfeld and Toshi Ishihara*

Long is the hanging tail of the mountain pheasant, and long the night.  
Again I sleep alone, and long for you.

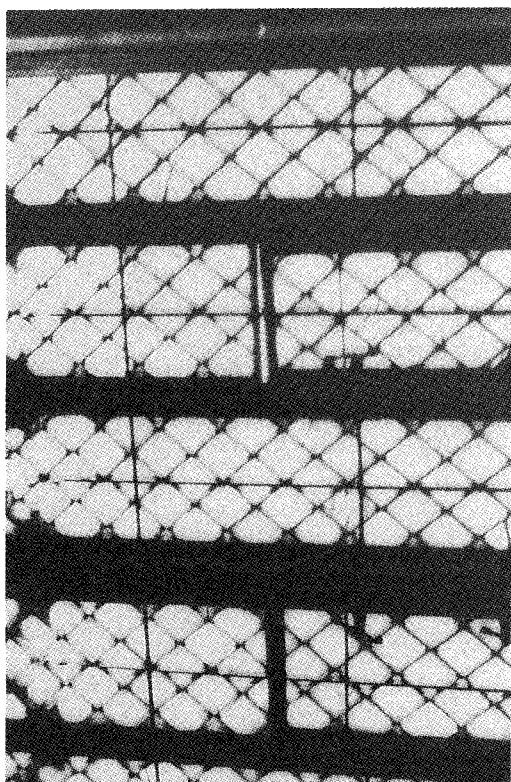
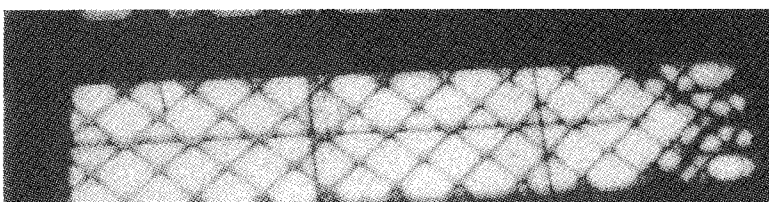


Ashibiki no  
Yamadori no o no  
Shidari o no  
Naga-nagashi yo wo  
Hitori ka mo nemu.

3. KAKINOMOTO NO HITOMARO

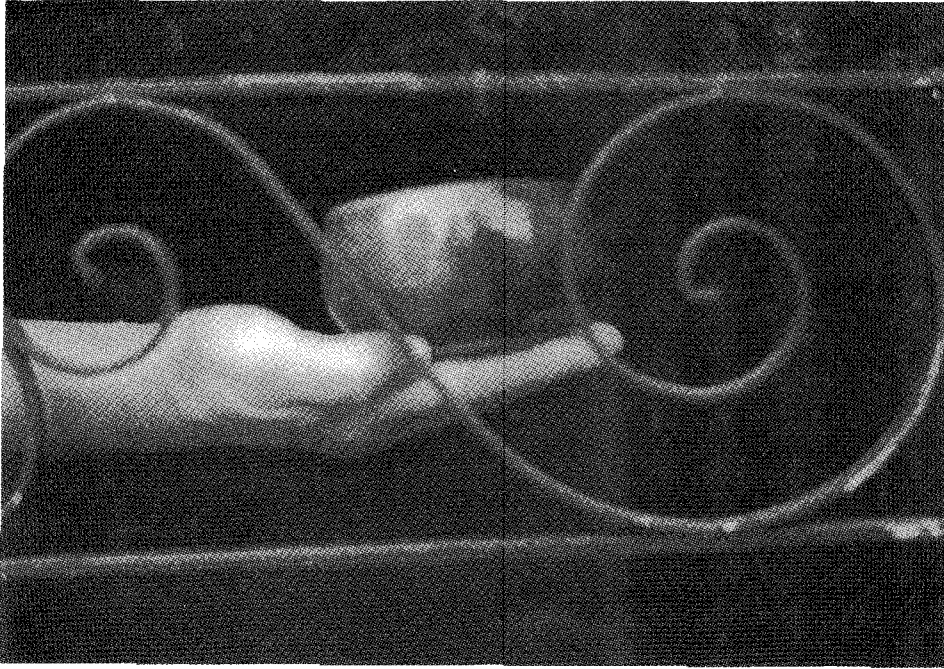


Meaningless now, the markers in Naniwa Bay —  
Driven by grief, I would wade through the waves to you.



Wabi nureba  
Ima hata onaji  
Naniwa naru  
Mi wo tsukushite mo  
Awamu to zo omou.

20. MOTOYOSHI SHINNO



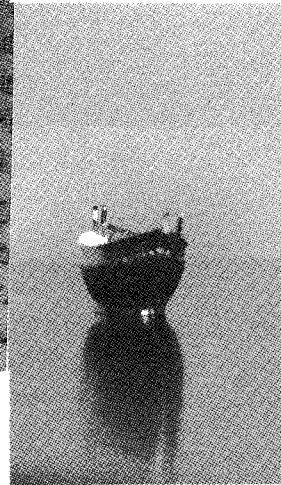
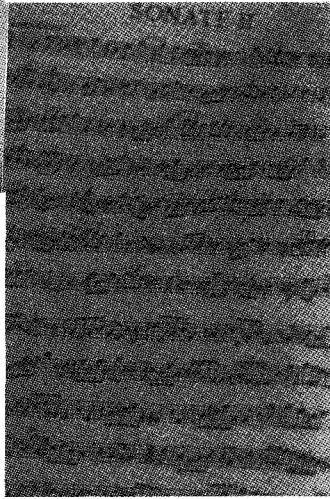
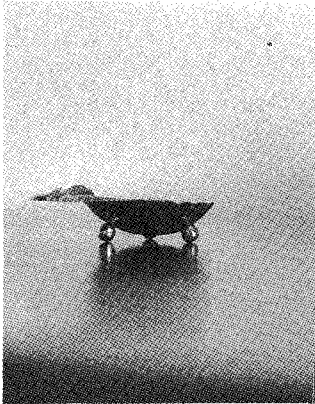
In the fall field, a shelter for the harvest —  
Dew drips through the weave of the roof, wetting my sleeve.

Aki no ta no  
Kari ho no iho no  
To ma wo arami  
Waga koromode wa  
Tsuyu ni nuretsutsu

1 . TENCHI TENNO

Brief as a broken reed in Naniwa Bay

One thoughtless night of love, and my life now nothing without you.



Naniwa e no  
Ashi no karine no  
Hitoyo yue  
Mi wo tsukushite ya  
Koi wataru beki.

88. KOHKAMON-IN NO BETTO

*Linda M. Reinfeld and Toshi Ishihara*

Naniwa Bay — the reeds so finely jointed, the joy  
Of our meeting, you say, forever postponed.



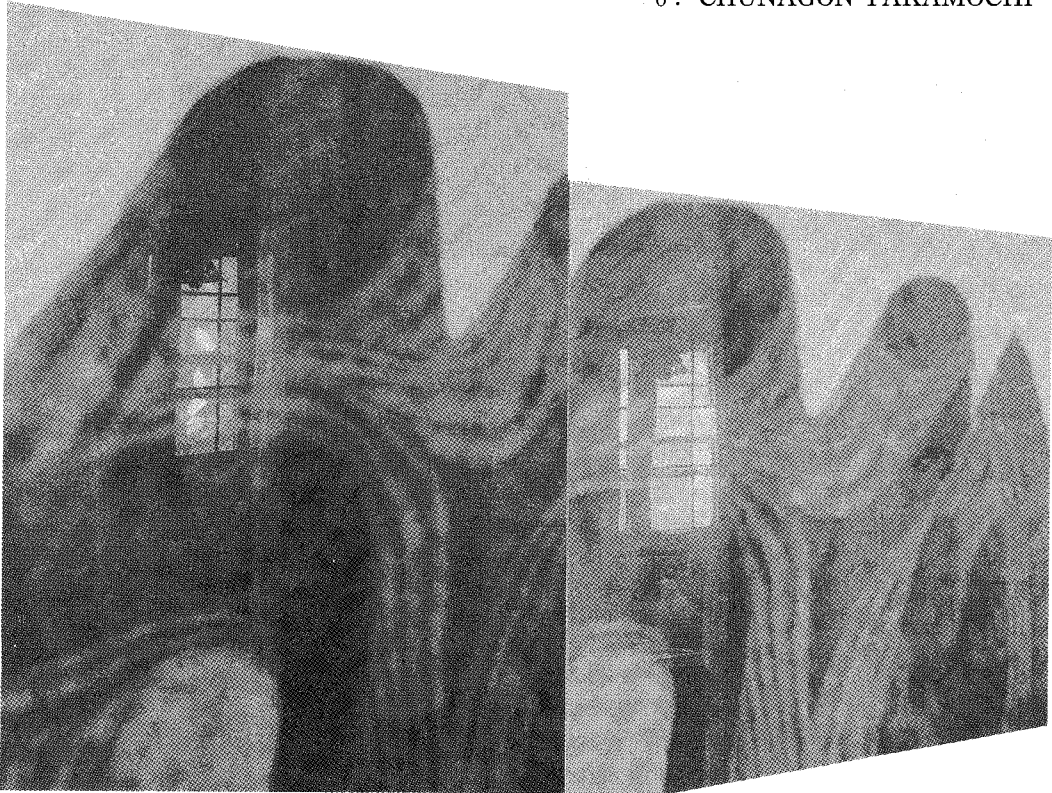
Naniwa gata  
Mijikaki ashi no  
Fushi no ma mo  
Awade kono yo wo  
Sugushite yo to ya.

19. ISE

Curving across the sky, the wings of magpie  
Marked with white, and white frost — the deep of night.

Kasasagi no  
Wataseru hashi ni  
Oku shimo no  
Shiroki wo mireba  
Yo zo fuke ni keru

6 . CHUNAGON YAKAMOCHI



*Linda M. Reinfeld and Toshi Ishihara*

Windless evening. On the shore of Matsuho-no-Ura  
They burn seaweed for salt. You're gone. I burn with longing.

Konu hito wo  
Matsu-ho no ura no  
Yunagi ni  
Yaku ya moshio no  
Mi mo kogaretsutsu.

97. GON CHUNAGON SADAIE

