Bunichi Kagawa

Selected Poems

Bunichi Kagawa

November 4, 1904 [Yamaguchi, Japan] –
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[Originally born in Japan in 1904, Kagawaimmigrated to the United States in 1918 and livedwith his father in Los Altos, California. He studiedat nearby Stanford University, where he met poetand literary scholar Yvor Winters. Winters took theyoung Kagawa under his wing and jump startedhis career by co-authoring with Kagawa the poetryvolume Hidden Flame in 1930. Soon after, Kagawabegan sending his verses to various publications,and his poems appeared in the pages of PoetryMagazine and Stanford's Carillon Magazine.Kagawa's fame spread within the JapaneseAmerican community; he helped form a poetry circle among Japanese Americansin northern California, and several community newspapers such as the RafuShimpo and Kashu Mainichi published his poems. In the wake of Pearl Harbor, Kagawa joined several other writers and artists,including Isamu Noguchi and Ayako Ishigaki, to form an anti-fascist circle tosupport the American war effort. Soon after Executive Order 9066, Kagawa wasincarcerated at Tule Lake concentration camp. Following the segregation programin 1943, Kagawa and several Kibei writers—Masao Yamashiro, Jyozi Nozawa,and Kazuo Kawai —began a literary magazine in camp. Titled Tessaku, or "irongate," the magazine incorporated a variety of poems, short stories, and essays.While Kagawa could not serve as an editor because he was an Issei, hiscontributions to Tessaku reflected his influence on the publication.]

Hidden Flame. Stanford, Half Moon Press, 1930.

Under The Skyscrapers

Hunger

The coal and glass and green leaves
Come from beneath the dark earth,
Crystallized, breathing, blazing,
In the flare of July sun.

Wonder at them; they will burn you whole
In your wonderment.
Speak to them; you shall be silenced
By their sharp secret.

Yet, here is a smell of sudden-civilization
In the smell of coal burning;
Here is a stark blow of soaring cubes compact
In glass and stone;
The sharp hunger of men shot into space,
And etched against the sheen of time,
Blazing—

July

With a push of unseen breath in me,
I peep into dust
Accumulated on the veins of green leaves.

The blaze of July sun
Strikes me, rooted upon the clean-cut heat
Of pavement, sharply absolute;

And I hunger for a sharper hunger,
Actual part of dreamless flare
In my eyes.

Soaring Hour

I shall dig deep with my brain
Toward the strength and ways of glittering glass
And soaring cubes of granite.

Their naked crushing leap of clean motionlessness
That out-hushes the stillness of a rose,
The dream of a rose-it shall be my blood.

With dust that breeds violets still on my lips,
I shall breathe them,
I shall know them,
I shall be a new life—

Out of the dust that breeds violets
I hope to shape a new life,
Cool and sudden and undreaming.

News

The Village Spring

The goats yawn in the warm drunk air.
In the spring the tulips and Wednesdays
And creaking cart on the afternoon road
Wake the gold atmosphere of centuries
Settled deep in the village peace.
And in the spring where the gold of sunlight
Is numbered by hummingbirds and bees,
The man attends to his earthly joy, hated
Year in and year out by his identity
Which no other proof can reduce.

The man is not a meaning but he is I,
I who came and could not quite arrive,
Postponed as an earthly dream.
But O spring! out of your contentment
Do not praise me overmuch for my humility,
For humility is deeper than death,
And death at its best is but a deepest lie.

The Rumor

The mole pushed its small head and nose
Out of the earth;
Then crawled backward into the hole again.
The wide October humor, mistaken
Somewhat for the great calm of the year,
Hurled me down to its feet; and there,
As I held the broken laughter back
With my broken teeth,
I was shaken by the mortal clay.

The mole never appeared again, nor I;
And the crazy weeds have made up their mind
To make no comment on the passing events.

Yet it was not a dream;
For no life-time will be quite enough
To destroy the bliss I know.
Deny it; but you are not there—
For you are indeed dead with me
Who but breathed the same air you breathed.

Silent Intimacy

The lovely ease of flowering
And fruiting of the trees
Dreams through the old years,
That we may read therein
The civility of Nature's career.

Though in Nature there is no pity,
No answer and no memory,
One imperial afternoon is enough
To hold the remembered light
Of our years, now lost and dim.