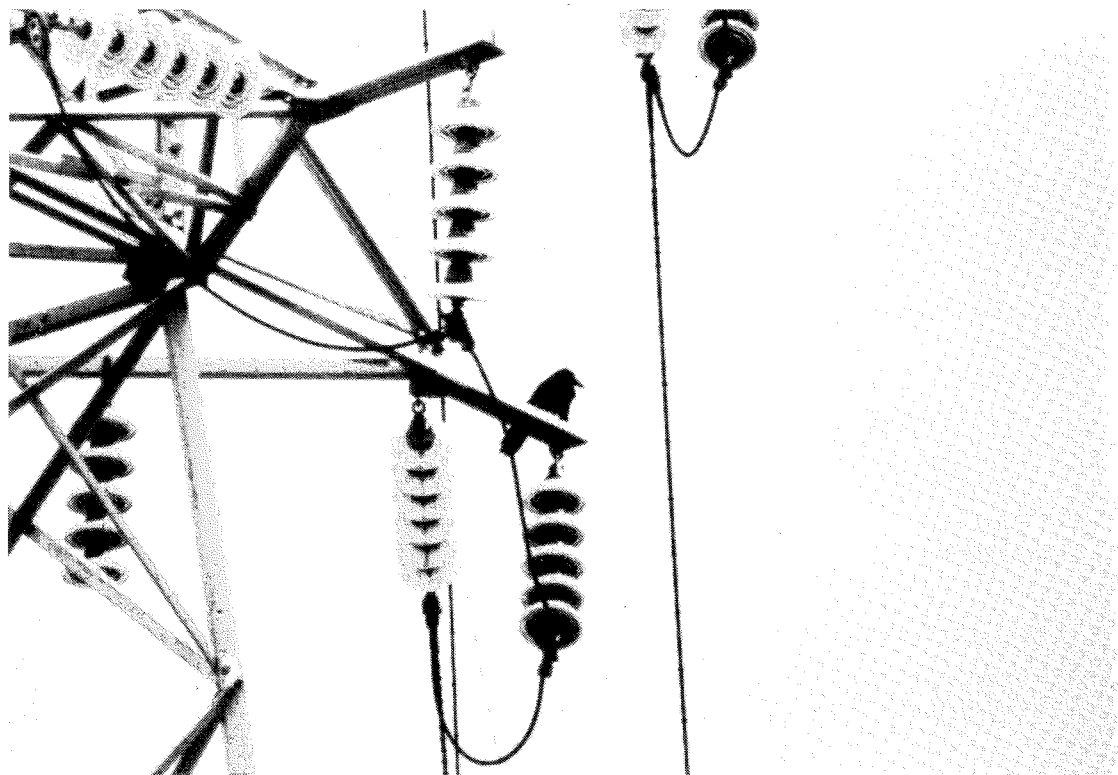


a  
interface  
t  
s



---

a literary forum for Japan

---

*poetry*

*fiction*

*reviews*

*features*

*events*

*networking*

e  
d  
a  
e

---

SPRING 1989

---

*this issue*

<i>poetry</i>	1	Charles Aschmann	<i>The Embarkation</i> <i>Shanhua Temple</i>
	2	Itsuko Ishikawa	<i>Sorrow</i> <i>Moon</i> <i>Walking</i>
	4	Kenneth Anderson Sheila Tombe	<i>Hikarigaoka</i> <i>Progression</i>
	5	Robert Boates	<i>Late September</i> <i>Youngest of Three</i>
	6	Michael Kleindl	<i>In an Ornamental Garden</i>
<i>fiction</i>	7	John Boyd	<i>The Ritual</i>
<i>cynosure</i>	10	Renku in English	<i>A Jet Lag</i> <i>Sounds of Horses</i> <i>Linking Eras</i>
<i>special</i>	15	Dylana Lembitz	<i>Western and Eastern Lights in Zen-land:</i> <i>Allen Ginsberg Visits Japan</i>
<i>feature</i>	17	David Kubiak	<i>Ginsberg on Poetry, Politics, and Japan:</i> <i>Excerpts from an Interview in Kyoto</i>
<i>images</i>	19	Takeo	<i>Visions from Rimbaud's "The Drunken Boat"</i>
<i>review</i>	21	Denis Doyle	<i>Anthony Thwaite's Letter from Tokyo</i>
<i>artwork</i>	7	Takeo	<i>Illustration for "The Ritual"</i>
	10	Kris Kondo	<i>Illustrations for "Renku in English"</i>
<i>info</i>	6		<i>Poetry Contest Winners Announced</i>
	23		<i>Marginalia</i> <i>NetWorks</i>
	24		<i>Happenings</i> <i>EDGE Fiction Contest</i>

*inside back cover*

**edge**

Editor: Richard Evanoff      Poetry Editor: Sherry Reniker  
Fiction Editor: Michael O'Rourke      Art Editor: Hiro Kanagawa

Special thanks to: D. M. Stroud of Saru Press, Photogatherer Ane Materazzi, Kyoto Correspondent Bill Shively, Networking Researcher David Silverstein, Technoconsultant Leverett Reed, and U.S. Stringer Catherine Lombard

Copyright © 1989 by EDGE. All rights remain with the individual authors. No part of this publication may be reprinted without the permission of the respective contributor. EDGE is published quarterly. Subscriptions: ¥2,000—overseas ¥3,000 (\$24). Individual copies: ¥500 (\$6). Advertising rates and contributors' guidelines are available upon request. Submissions of original poetry, short fiction, essays, reviews, etc. should include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (international reply coupons for overseas submissions). News items and announcements of a literary nature will be published free-of-charge at the editor's discretion; payment is only accepted for commercial ads. EDGE is organized as an independent non-profit cooperative and is funded mainly through readers' subscriptions, with all proceeds being reinvested in the publication. All editorial positions are filled on a nonpaying volunteer basis.

EDGE, 1933-8 Hazama-cho, Hachioji-shi, Tokyo 193 Japan  
Phone: 0426-66-3481

Charles Aschmann

**The Embarkation**

In our last spring  
we listen  
to nightingales who have not  
learned to sing, luxuriously  
missing notes  
their elders would catch  
and fling in perfect song,  
the proper call  
all accept as theirs.  
We crush the petals  
fallen from cherries  
into the soft earth that holds still  
the imprint we leave behind.  
We eat angelica sprouts.  
We must be blind  
enough to let this go  
like notes into air into our past  
and turn at last to face  
the thrill of trying  
a tune we haven't learned.

**Shanhua Temple**

A thousand years have passed  
this temple by  
and still it stands  
still among the overgrown grass,  
a home for swallows  
that skitter in and out  
great doors to roost  
among high rafters, protected  
by the dense red walls. They sing  
the only sutra  
these Buddhas will ever hear again.

*Charles Aschmann has been in and out of Japan for the last ten years, mostly in the Tohoku Region, and is now teaching at Hirosaki Gakuin College. He has been widely published abroad (poetry, translations, reviews, criticism, and other odds and ends) and has new work coming out in Kansas Quarterly, Poetry Australia, and Cicada.*

### Sorrow

1  
 When I rolled sorrow  
 like a cabbage  
 putting it secretly into the dark,  
 white flowers were born.

Flowers thickly white  
 and horses with chests throbbing  
 are awake forever.

2  
 Greenery is flaming.  
 Why does sorrow  
 fill buckets and stations?

China asters' blossoms are swaying.  
 Why do people push others away  
 and run off?

Water in puddles is clear.  
 Why is a reflecting house  
 obstinately crooked?

Night is kind.  
 Trees are standing, sleeping.  
 Boys are smashed,  
 their motorbikes striking stars.

Fetuses weeping in Ogawa Hospital  
 say, We don't want to be born.

Greenery is flaming.  
 Girls in gray are starting off  
 idly to funerals.

Weather-beaten vending machines.  
 Flutes sounding only in shadows.

China asters' blossoms are swaying  
 and the sky and electric lines are gently swaying.

*Itsuko Ishikawa, a Japanese poet born in Tokyo in 1933, is a high school teacher and an ecological-peace activist. Her collected poems in Japanese have just been published by Doyo Bijutsu-sha in the Japan Modern Poetry Series. None of her six previous books of poetry have yet been translated. The poems presented here are from A Horse Who Swims, published by Kashinsha in 1984.*

*Keiko Matsui Gibson teaches part-time at Chukyo University while working on a dissertation on Hiroshi Noma's fiction, poetry, and essays for a Ph.D. in comparative literature at Indiana University. Stir Up the Precipitable World, her poetry in Japanese and English, was a sell-out publication for White Pine Press.*

### Moon

living looking about  
 living with stealthy steps  
 living dark nights with whispers  
 repeating such limited  
 life life  
 it is terrible  
 we've had enough  
 a refreshing voice came out  
 want a life at least like an evening primrose  
 get mad when we have to  
 not pay attention to footsteps  
 never mind suffering hardships in such life  
 agree  
 the moon was smiling  
 at the tiny tiny  
 story of human beings



### Walking

Now  
 what am I eating  
 —by any chance  
 are they chunks of dead men?

I have the feeling  
 I killed  
 at least one of them

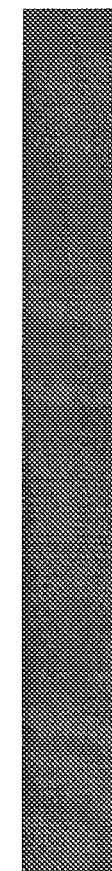
Is it the wisdom of routine life  
 not to remember any  
 details of the tragedy?

Only  
 I have a memory  
 with the smell of blood  
 mixed slightly in this salad

Even after leaving the table  
 and brushing teeth carefully  
 the smell would not go away

That's O.K.  
 I will take it for granted  
 that this is my own smell

In three days  
 I am convinced  
 with clean face  
 gallantly walking in the morning sun shining  
 on the town



## Kenneth Anderson

### Hikarigaoka

The concrete dominoes wait  
For a quake to end the game.  
The hour is getting late,  
but each pathway seems the same.  
I cycle through a park  
Where all the trees are bare.  
There's no rest from the stark  
Stone tokens everywhere.

A tower dominates  
The hill, but its small light  
Can barely palliate  
The gathering gloom of night.  
At last I find a plaque  
Which guides one through the place.  
Someone has scrawled in black  
Graffiti on its face:

"No feeling—never mind."  
The stonescape melts behind.

*Kenneth Anderson is the same age as Rick Blaine was when he met Ilsa Lund in Casablanca. He hails from San Francisco, lives in Tokyo, and his main interests are reading, cycling, and cinema.*

## Sheila Tombe

*Sheila Tombe lives in Hamamatsu and describes herself as "a Northern Irish life-long student of Spanish whose main interest is drama." She is also an organizer of the Four Seasons Writers Workshops (see the announcement in the Events column of this issue of EDGE). As a note to her poem she writes that every 12th of July all over Northern Ireland, Protestants of the "Orange Order" celebrate their dominion over the Catholic population and hold a large Belfast parade.*

### Progression

#### To James Dickey

The procession passed by, and I wondered  
Why they marched and beat those big Lambeg drums  
In time to a fluted dirge. Happiness  
Dared to float in the July air over  
The crowd who lined the street; they smiled and waved  
At friends in bowler hat and orange sash  
(The like of which my father never wore).  
I felt no kinship; no bright mystery  
Was there; nor could I understand their joy.

Carolina summer wooded hillside.  
The air hums with the heat, the crickets buzz.  
In the distance a train blares its warning  
As the tracks near the road. Down below me,  
On the screened porch of an old wooden house,  
A dog pants in time to the train's old song.  
Kindship, mystery are here: a new joy.

## Robert Boates

### Late September

Driving north to Athabasca  
through seasons fighting  
for conquest of an afternoon.  
A crack across the windshield  
suggests lightning;  
a bolt sealed in a paperweight  
like a scorpion,  
its tail poised to strike.

The day is full of potential slaughter.  
Sleet-covered cattle and buffalo  
wait to be bred for market.  
Deer evade searching eyes.  
Our eyes.  
Smaller animals remain concealed  
for death wears wings  
and is owl-swift.

We are small beneath this sky,  
travelling toward the horizon.  
That rainbow in the distance,  
a scythe, a promise.

### Youngest of Three

Smiling, our daughter relates  
how we will be buried  
in her garden;  
how she will first remove  
our wedding bands  
for keepsakes,  
cutting off fingers  
if need be.  
Her children will ogle  
the thin gold rings  
laughing at points in her story  
straining to imagine  
their mother a little girl,  
their grandparents beneath  
the snapdragons.

*Robert Boates has been a waiter, janitor, ditch-digger, drama teacher, daycare worker, nanny, homemaker, and currently is writer-in-residence at St. Thomas Aquinas Centre for the Arts in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. He is married and has three daughters.*

## In an Ornamental Garden

As if arranged by the gardener  
as carefully as this pond was  
snow gathers with precision  
in pine, on bark, wets the backs  
of squat black stones placed to step  
around the edge and falls  
and falls like stars

into the black rippled water  
embraced extinguished by each  
individual reflection rising up  
to itself returned.

Below the quiet receipt  
a blaze of ember red fish arc  
like comets on their rounds.  
As if arranged I stand here  
planted on his stones  
filled with his found silence  
as flake by flake form is lost  
form is found.

*Michael Kleindl has been writing since he was 16 years old, which amounts to more than half his life, and has published several poems in various small presses. He's very interested in detective fiction—and teaches a course in it at International Christian University. In his spare time he's a professional magician (when he can get hired). He's also trying to study Zen.*

## Poetry Contest Winners Announced

A total of 227 poems were received for this year's poetry contest, the first to be sponsored by the *Kyoto Journal* and organized by EDGE. The contest was a continuation of the contests which had been conducted by the Tokyo English Literature Society in years past. The top five poems, to be published in the Spring 1989 issue of the *Kyoto Journal*, are:

- First Prize (¥10,000): Earl Cooper, "Snowfall"
- Second Prize (¥5,000): Wendy Gutenkauf, "First Child"
- Honorable mentions: Chris Mosdell, "The Golden Blowpipe"
- Bob Lucky, "Early Autumn Along the Toyohira River"
- Bill Shively, "Ryoanji"

Other poems receiving special mention from the judges were Bill Shively's "Hungry Feet," Hiro Kanagawa's "The Hayloft," M. Zoboski's "Invitation," and Michael Kleindl's "In an Ornamental Garden." The latter poem appears above; Robert Boates' "Late September," also submitted to the contest, appears on page 5 of this issue. Other poems meriting publication will appear in future issues of EDGE.

Judges for the contest were Robert Brady, a writer of poetry, short fiction, and journalistic pieces whose latest publication is *Further on this Floating Bridge of Dreams: Poems from Kyoto*; Jean McGovern, a teacher of poetry living in Kyoto, who is currently working on a book about teaching poetry as foreign literature, and John Evans, an Oxford-educated former Anglican monk who's been involved with teaching yoga, studying Buddhism and martial arts, and writing poetry in Tokyo.

## The Ritual

by John Boyd

He went to the entrance and peered up at the sun overhead, its heat barely penetrating through the chilled air. Yet even while its strength waned, it still gave of itself generously, its light and warmth nurturing and renewing.

He lowered his eyes in gratitude.

His reverie was interrupted by a movement down along the path that led to the beach. He tensed, hoping, and gazed keenly past the trees and undergrowth swaying under the cold touch of the wind. Was it her?

It had to be. Even though she was still too far off for him to see clearly, he was suddenly as sure as if she were already standing before him in all her loveliness.

Her first appearance not long after dawn could have been by chance, and he might have felt the same about her second visit, except for a brief glance she'd cast his way when passing. But now, again? Coincidence? Just a new routine that happened to bring her his way? No! It was none of these. She was curious.

And so was he. He still remembered her extraordinary eyes when she had looked over at him: they were the deepest amber, as deep as the ocean that stretched out before him, and just as mysterious. And their shape! The way they curved back and up resembled the dark gold leaves still clinging to the trees around him. Never before had he encountered such magnificent eyes.

Her color too was remarkable. Not merely black, but ebony black, as rich and smooth as a new born night that had yet to know a moon and stars.

She was closer now, and indeed it was her. He moved back inside the entrance so as to be partly concealed, for the ritual had to be followed. He half closed his eyes and relaxed while continuing to

watch her approach; he had to leave no doubt he admired her beauty and welcomed her.

As she drew level with the entrance, she stopped and looked over again, curious; her eyes were two deep burning suns, the blackness of her body beautifully splendid under the larger sun above. This time there was a hesitation, as if she might be ready to come to him now, and he held his breath willing her to do so. But she broke her gaze to look up as a gust of wind tore some leaves away, sending them spiraling down to their death. She turned away quickly and hurried along the path to eventually disappear from his view.

Now was not the time; the ritual had to be played out in full; their moment had not yet come. But next time?

A familiar sense of anticipation swept over him: just as he knew the sun above him would die and rise again and give of itself, so he now was certain she also would return.

But an inner sense sprang up to caution him. He would have to be utterly fastidious; his invitation

would need to be unblemished. He looked around with a critical eye, seeing it was past time to clean and make new. Had he become slothful? Forgetful? Or was he. . . He paused. Was he what? As he looked out, beyond the entrance more leaves spiraled down, and he shuddered as a vague premonition of something dark swept over him. Then unexpectedly an image of her eyes burst through, flooding his mind; it was as though she were there somehow, right before him, overpowering him, mastering his strength with her beauty.

He fought the image, struggling to regain control and did so only

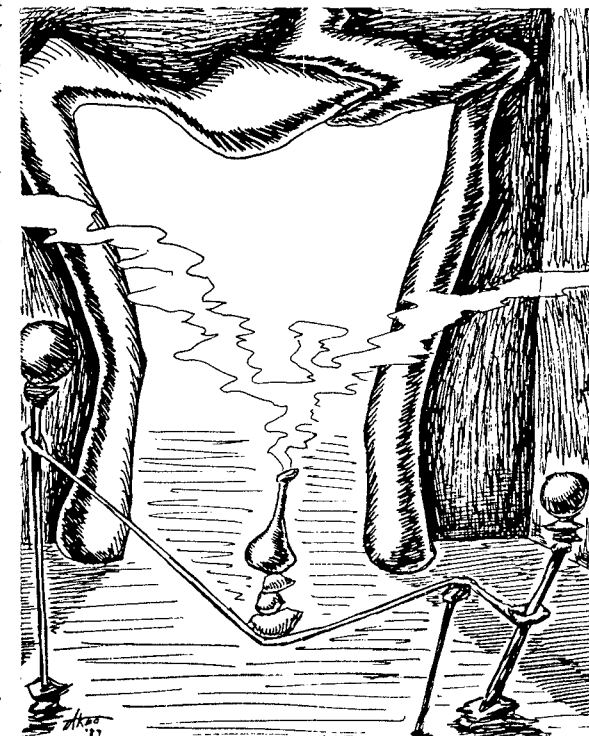


Illustration by Takeo

with great effort. He looked about himself uneasily. Moving quickly to the entrance, he stared at the path, but nothing moved except the distant swell of the ocean, the grass around him and more leaves surrendering to the grip of the wind suddenly sweeping in from across the water; when the chill of the air touched him he felt his body stiffen in response. How desolate this place had become.

Then he remembered her hesitation; there had been something there to suggest she might return soon. It was time to busy himself! He felt a sudden surge of exhilaration: Life was good! Life was meant to be drunk to the full. Death could come calling at any time. These were the inviolable truths. But the greatest truth was hazard: all life was hazard.

**H**e gazed around at his work in the dim light. Now all that was left to do was wait and will her to come. He thought about those who needed to search and hunt. That was not his way. Yet there had been a time, long ago. . . . He strained to recall vague images of the others like himself, and he wondered about them with neither fondness nor regret. All had left. Just as he had, eager to get away and be on his own, driven by some inner urge to sail off into the sun, not knowing where he would end up. Hazard.

**T**he light was beginning to change and he felt a familiar dread come creeping over him. Again he went to the entrance to look up. The sun was deepening in color, turning a rich orange as it began its descent. The world of shadows and darkness would soon begin to extend its domain, warning of the struggle and death to come: before long the sun would turn blood-red, then sink over the horizon to enter into the ocean's dark green depths and extinguish itself in the mystery there. And when that happened, the land would darken rapidly and he would retire and leave the world to the creatures of the night. Then, after an eternity, the sun would ignite once more and rise gloriously, creating the world anew, and he too would live again to continue the ritual of life and death.

Again his eyes searched over the path, almost buried now in leaves, but there was no sign of her. Could he be mistaken? The thought chilled him and unwisely reminded him that indeed he had erred of late. How had he forgotten that so completely? What was happening? Then he stiffened, sensing all was not as it should be. He looked around, distress welling up. There was something missing. . . something he had neglected to do.

The fragrance! He'd spread it about before her first appearance, but it had all but disappeared now, dried by the wind. How could he have failed to notice?

As if in answer a dark cloud moved across the horizon stealing away the light and warmth; he trembled involuntarily in the cold shadow, and for

the first time doubted if he would continue to fulfill the ritual. He became acutely afraid, yet could not understand why. But then the thief moved on, giving back something of the light, and his fear eased away.

Life demanded to be lived each moment! The past was over and the future might never come, but this must not be allowed to rob him of the continuing moment of life.

He moved about, carefully depositing more of the fragrance: not too much, not too little. If not perfect, she would become suspicious and repelled by his invitation, rather than attracted and seduced.

He set to waiting again, noting the changing light, his eyes sweeping down the path and on out to the ocean and to the edge of the world. The sun was indeed an orb of crimson blood now, not far above the ocean that was turning into shimmering gold, preparing to receive its gift.

So it was not to be today, after all. She would not risk coming now in the waning light. Yet he had been certain she would. With renewed acceptance of the moment, he relaxed his vigil, honoring the hazard of it all. Uncertainty: life's only certainty. Even death came *after* life, not during it.

As he turned to go inside, a movement, something different from the pull of the wind, stopped him. He stared out again, holding his breath, searching the farthest end of the path.

Surely it was her! Approaching from the beach, as on the other occasions, but this time coming to him for succor in the fading light. As he stared, he noticed something odd about her movement, an unevenness he hadn't seen before. Could she be hurt? Was that why she had left it until almost too late? He watched carefully, wondering if his anticipation had not tricked his eyes. She came along the path more slowly than before, as if burdened down with the weight of life. But come she did, for it was her, and he stepped back inside to prepare himself.

She eventually drew near. As if remembering a long forgotten intention, she hesitated as she had done the previous time and looked over at him waiting for her inside the entrance, her eyes an even richer amber in the fading light. She turned and gazed at the sun, then stared back at him. After a timeless moment, she moved his way slowly, limping.

His satisfaction was immense; his confidence renewed a hundred-fold. He would live forever and he felt supremely prepared: his eyes again half closed, his body relaxed and positioned attractively as before. He knew he tantalized her, was luring her, even while he was being lured. In this very act of capturing her, he himself was surrendering, a prisoner to her beauty. He held his breath, concentrating his mind on willing her forward.

Close now, she hesitated once more; her lovely eyes so full of life, looked on him from the entrance.

Still he didn't move, didn't breathe, just watched her, admiring her loveliness, letting her know he recognized her beauty, extending his invitation as the ritual demanded.

She entered. One step, so lightly. Wary. Her black body trembling in ambivalence, ready to flee, yet only wanting to advance, desiring to understand what was before her. Another step, her eyes, so near, so beautiful now, never leaving his.

He rose up before her, and she made to leap back, but her feet were already stuck fast in his trap of fragrance.

He reached out wanting to touch her, staring intently into the depths of her eyes, made deeper and more beautiful by her terror. As he gazed, fascinated, he saw himself reflected there and for a moment intuited the horror he was for her. Again he reached out to touch her trembling body, to caress her quivering form, wanting her to understand the ritual would be fulfilled quickly if she would not resist.

But struggle she did. Wildly, furiously, twisting her trapped body to evade his touch and his mouth, his magnificent, hideous mouth.

He gripped her tightly, and raised himself over her, pushing her down beneath him to hamper her struggle. She twisted the more, her eyes opening and closing rapidly, sending silent screams for help that would never be answered. Surprised at her strength, he pushed her down fiercely, crushing her under him, holding her there until eventually she weakened and finally lay quiet, gazing up at him.

In that moment of still surrender, he looked again into her eyes, and in their depths he saw the source of the ritual. As he stared, utterly fascinated, her eyes engulfed him, enclosed his very being. He could only marvel at their beauty and power and felt ready to enter into their depths, just as the changing light told him the sun out beyond the entrance was now descending into the mystery of the ocean. At that moment he caught the danger, and only the surge of terror that welled up gave him the strength to break free. He pulled back, shaken and fighting to regain control.

She reared up, renewing her struggle with a frenzy, driven by the rage and fear of the damned, threatening to destroy everything around her.

He seized her body and tore her from the trap, ripping away her legs. Moving out to the entrance, he raised her up above himself, and when she was positioned, he drove his mouth upwards and deep into the soft torn wetness beneath her abdomen, piercing the ebony skin, and sucked her life into himself—just as the ocean out before him was now consuming the bloody sun out on the horizon.

And with her quieted body still raised up before him, he turned to the dying sun and once again lowered his eyes in gratitude.

*John Boyd is a freelance writer specializing in computers and related technology. He is the Japan Correspondent for INFORMATIONWEEK, a U.S. weekly for computer managers, and his columns "Computer Corner" and "Bookends" appear weekly in the JAPAN TIMES.*

## THE BEST READ ON JAPAN

# KYOTO

JOURNAL

**IN PAST ISSUES:** KI — THE VITAL FORCE • PACKAGED CULTURE • QUESTIONING MODERN JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE • THE FANTASTIC WORLD OF WRITER INAGAKI TARUHO • GEOMANCY • HAIKU GOES WEST • WOMEN OF THE WATER TRADE TALK ABOUT THEIR LIVES • SHIRAHU CORAL: WORLD HERITAGE OR EXPENDABLE ASSET • NOH MASKS • BUTOH & BALLET • THE JAPANESE ART OF MINDBINDING • SPACE TUNNELS • HOW TO OLD JAPAN HAND • THE EMPEROR VISITS McDONALD'S • SOCIOLOGIST UENO CHIZUKO • CINEMATOGRAPHER MIYAGAWA KAZUO • ANTI-NUKE ACTIVIST HIROSE TAKASHI • TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY'S YOSHIFUKU SHINICHI • POETS KUSANO SHIMPEI, EDITH SHIFFERT, MARLENE MOUNTAIN, SAKAKI NANAO



**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** (¥2000/JAPAN; ¥2500/N. AMERICA) KYOTO JOURNAL 35, MINAMIGOSHO-MACHI, OKAZAKI, SAKYO-KU, KYOTO 606

## Renku in English

### Renku: a thumbnail history

1423. The first renku in the *kasen* form, consisting of 36 links, was written. The 36 links correspond to the 36 representative poets of the *Manyoshu* chosen by Fujiwara no Kinto.

1680's. Basho opened the range of subject matter with his *haikai* style, using the language of ordinary people rather than the language of the court. He combined themes from everyday life with traditional aesthetics, a revolutionary welding together of two separate streams of Japanese poetry.

A decade ago. Serious renku begins to be written in English. Though still in the early stages of development, interest in the form continues to expand.

### A very short lesson in how to read (and write) renku

Renku is a chain of relational meanings. Each link consists of 2 or 3 short lines which, when read together with the preceding link, forms a complete poem. Ideally each link can also stand independently.

### Linked people

Renku is a group activity. Individual poets take turns writing links, responding to what the person before them has written. The three renku presented here were produced by a group of poets associated with renku teachers Kris and Tadashi Kondo, who are also well-known figures in the haiku in English movement.

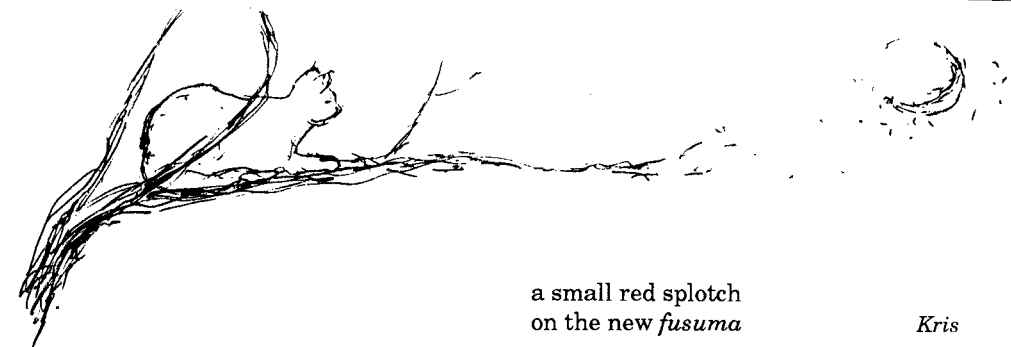
Four poets completed "A Jet Lag" in a single night at a write-till-dawn renku party. "Sounds of Horses" was composed by a large number of people, some of them writing renku for the first time, over a long period of time. "Linking Eras" was started by mail and completed over the telephone—of the three, it's the most contemporaneous, in places giving an almost journalistic account of recent events.

## A Jet Lag

a jet lag looking for the soba shop plastic branches in the wet street <i>Sherry Reniker</i> (9 pm, February 27, 1982)	a flickering campfire old songs echo across the lake <i>Kris</i>
cantankerous neons in a developing town <i>Tadashi Kondo</i>	first kiss at the rock quarry <i>Sherry</i>
bike basket loaded with soap newspaper salesman <i>Kris Young</i>	feeling bare feet on the dry moss <i>Tadashi</i>
coming out of a train onto an empty platform <i>Kazuyoshi Hirao</i>	beckoning crabs calling in the tides <i>Kazuyoshi</i>
feeling around for a key too many pockets <i>Sherry</i>	Mt. Fuji in the clouds <i>amazake</i> on the terrace <i>Sherry</i>
poor catch heavy fishing jacket <i>Tadashi</i>	a little red tricycle under the plum blossoms <i>Tadashi</i>



Illustrations by Kris Kondo



a new tooth breaks through the child wakes suddenly <i>Sherry</i>	a small red splotch on the new <i>fusuma</i> <i>Kris</i>
ah ha ha ha a cat disappears up the tree <i>Kris</i>	from the dark balcony the disturbed child screaming <i>Sherry</i>
jumping monkey scattered a crowd of dogs <i>Kazuyoshi</i>	ESP'd natural calamity <i>Kazuyoshi</i>
empty car in the birch forest <i>Tadashi</i>	ever-accumulating nuclear weapons "zero option" <i>Tadashi</i>
counting the rings of a fallen tree the mushroom's smell <i>Sherry</i>	newspapers whipping around skyscraper canyons <i>Kris</i>
sweat drops planing wood <i>Kazuyoshi</i>	a fingernail moon loomed before sunset <i>Sherry</i>
paper thin the corner restaurant's menu <i>Kris</i>	the global temperature steadily going down <i>Tadashi</i>
smudged by bachelors' hands <i>Tadashi</i>	dreaming of wooly mammoths he huddles deeper in the blankets <i>Kris</i>
a pile of photographs on mother's desk <i>no omiai</i> <i>Sherry</i>	feet feel a cat in the spring <i>kotatsu</i> <i>Kazuyoshi</i>
years passed absorbed in tennis <i>Kazuyoshi</i>	studying the map places to enjoy the cherry blossoms <i>Tadashi</i>
he smashes a mosquito with impeccable form <i>Tadashi</i>	halfway around the world on the Potomac <i>Sherry</i>
	a group of Japanese tourists following a flag <i>Kris</i>
	tadpoles wiggling in the sun <i>Kazuyoshi</i> (5 am, Feb. 28, 1982)





## Sounds of Horses

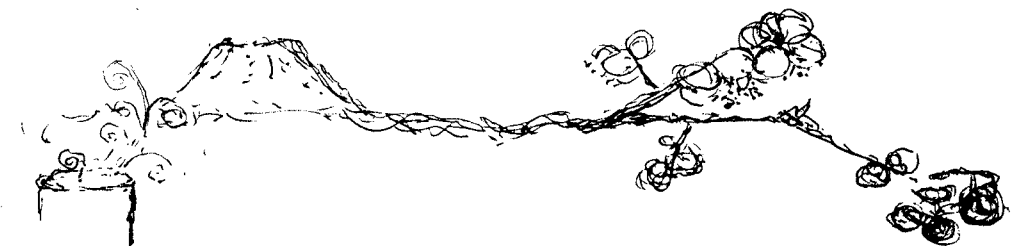
sounds of horses approaching in the morning mist	<i>Kazuyoshi Hirao, October 4, 1986</i>	<i>kotatsu</i> with crowded legs a pot of pink cosmos	<i>Nobue Abe</i>
a pebble thrown in the castle moat	<i>Kris Kondo, Oct. 11</i>	talking in sleep faces slipping away	<i>Steve Townsend</i>
coin-op telescope caught a bullet train and fishing boats	<i>Tadashi Kondo</i>	invitation to an exhibition of an almost forgotten friend	<i>Kris</i>
old men playing <i>shogi</i> in a gazebo	<i>Takahiro Tsukijima</i>	a pair of swallows repairing their nest	<i>Tadashi</i>
evening breeze a woman calls children appear	<i>Koichi Watanabe</i>	a child of three months and mother's advice on a southbound train	<i>Robert Reed</i>
permed hair and painted nails giggling	<i>Melissa Wender</i>	daddy's face reflected in big black eyes	<i>Kris</i>
munching popcorn and hurrying the soccer game	<i>Kazuyoshi</i>	playing peekaboo behind a newspaper	<i>Takahiro</i>
a big yellow bus in a tunnel of red maples	<i>Kris</i>	dog lying on a blanket soft-colored flowers	<i>Koichi</i>
rain drops on scattered petals of fragrant olive	<i>Takahiro</i>	kindergarten girls digging sweet potatoes on the hill	<i>Bruce, Nov. 8</i>
the first Sunday after the baseball season	<i>Tadashi</i>	after an expensive night in Roppongi still an empty heart	<i>Steve</i>
windows shut lamps lit and hot chocolate	<i>Koichi</i>	naked breasts of a broken manikin	<i>Tadashi, Nov. 29</i>
thawing frozen toes after iceskating	<i>Bruce Allen</i>		
festival feeling full of roast chicken	<i>Colin Wiley</i>		



police raid nets 64 illegal immigrants	<i>Kris</i>	two kids two knapsacks all packed	<i>Kris</i>
deep eyes in an Indian film	<i>Takashi Tajima</i>	poking a friend in the behind with an umbrella	<i>Bruce</i>
light breeze folds her shirt gently around the leg	<i>Bruce, June 26, 1987</i>	young mothers laugh comparing husbands' salaries and waistlines	<i>Robert</i>
pointing to the highest branches the infant raises voice	<i>Robert</i>	by George I'm the only man in a late morning train	<i>Tadashi</i>
the silhouette of a flying beetle against the evening sky	<i>Tadashi</i>	the door opens only the shadows move— plenty of time	<i>Tim</i>
tomorrow morning she's off to America	<i>Tim Knowles</i>	lay down for the next dream	<i>Kris</i>

## Linking Eras

autumn garden above drying laundry in the TV screen	<i>Kris Kondo, October 10, 1988</i>	should we say "Happy New Year" or not? ailing emperor	<i>Kris, Dec. 19</i>
strings of crowsquash rosaries	<i>Sherry Reniker, Oct. 25</i>	economic giant lost hills and rivers	<i>Tadashi Kondo, Dec. 23</i>
parents blowing up daycare balloons early Sunday morning	<i>Kris, Nov. 11</i>	piles of Siberian cedar port officer in a rabbit-fur hat	<i>Sherry</i>
nuke tests earthquaking Nova Scotia	<i>Sherry, Dec. 1</i>	caviar on toast customhouse tea break	<i>Kris</i>
newspaper rustling with each snore	<i>Kris</i>	across the thawing strait Inuit brothers reunited after twenty years	<i>Sherry, Jan. 4, 1989</i>
scent rising from the bath prickle of <i>yuzu</i>	<i>Sherry, Dec. 11</i>	baby seals nursing in the spring sun	<i>Kris</i>







great blue whale  
broad-sided by a tanker  
in L.A. Harbor

Sherry, Jan. 5

Western neighbors  
pop champagne  
barbeque party

Sherry, Jan. 7

"I didn't see it."  
little boy crying

Kris

evenly crisp, brown  
marshmallows over the fire

Kris

the fast ball  
high and inside  
strikes him out

Sherry

Girl Scouts  
coming of age  
in the Appalachians

Sherry, Jan. 9

Recruit scandal dodged  
by a minister's resignation

Tadashi

stitching her dreams  
every square of the quilt

Kris, Jan. 11

unable to utter  
a word about the blossoms  
in the museum

Kris, Jan. 6

a battalion of men lost  
in a blizzard  
AIDS

Sherry

glued to the bench  
recent widow

Sherry

a crocus bud  
on last year's grave

Kris

brother and sister  
peering into tidepools  
the long day

Kris

grandfather's porch chair  
moved  
traces of rust

Sherry

counting moons and Junes  
the bio-clock ticking

Sherry

a new emperor  
"with fellow citizens"

Tadashi, Jan. 13

Hayama Fuji  
weaving in and out  
of the years

Kris

his wife  
baking bread  
for the family

Kris, Jan. 16

Russian researcher on the roof  
sunbathing in the buff

Sherry

stoking the old stove  
with scraps of cherry wood

Sherry

the rocket  
on its way to  
the moons of Mars

Tadashi

monk and boy  
laughter echoing  
at the renga party

Kris, Jan. 17

dango piled up  
pampas grass in a saké bottle

Kris

sitting, letting go  
the moon, waning

Sherry, Jan. 20



The next issue of *EDGE* will feature an essay by Tadashi Kondo on how some of the traditional techniques of Japanese renku can be applied to the writing of renku in English.

## special feature

# Western and Eastern lights in Zen-land:

## Allen Ginsberg Visits Japan

by Dylana Lembitz

Osaka, Oct. 30, 1988. Ginsberg and Nanao Sakaki are hanging around an outdoor stage amid a crowd of mostly Japanese anti-nuke activists. Between loud segments of Japanese punk singers protesting The Establishment, the poets are laughing and talking together with a group of friends.

The crowd is affable enough, munching on hotdogs before the "Iranwa Genpatsu" demonstration: left-over hippies in ragged jackets, college kids in fringe and peace signs, a few parents with troupes of kids hanging off their shoulders. The audience is sitting on benches or on the concrete walls that surround the plaza. Ginsberg is quiet and attentive, soaking it all in.

I've followed him here from Tokyo, trying to wrangle an interview out of the guy. It's not easy. He's already made it clear that he's in Japan to talk to and be with the Japanese, not to debate poetics and the beats with the *gaijin*.

When I first spoke to Ginsberg on the phone while he was still in New York, I introduced myself and he abruptly told me that if I wanted to schedule time to talk to him in Tokyo, I'd have to call Sakaki at home in Hokkaido and set something up that way.

After Ginsberg arrived in Tokyo, I called him again, explaining that Sakaki is a devil to get ahold of.

"Who are you?" Ginsberg growled. After I introduced myself again, he said, "Oh, you're the one who called me in New York! I thought you were some Bob Dylan freak—these Dylan freaks in New York have been annoying me

lately. I'm really sorry about that."

I asked Ginsberg why there was no publicity being done on his visit: no one, it seemed, knew when or where he would be reading, and no promotion in English seemed to be available off the usual grapevines. What was going on?

Ginsberg explained that there was plenty of publicity in *Japanese*, and the *Mainichi Shimbun* had had a notice on his readings the day before. But as it turned out, non-Japanese readers lost out

he wanted to get across to his non-English speaking audience and how he was going to do that. At a standing-room-only reading at Otsuma Women's University in Tokyo, typed sheets of his poems were numbered and read in chronological order. Readings outside the academy, however, were more difficult because scripts were not provided.

"What do you think a Japanese audience is going to get out of your readings," I asked him, "if



Allen Ginsberg: speaking out in Osaka

photo by Paolino Accolla

on some dynamic poetry reading and a chance to see what's been happening to one of the fathers of the Beat Generation.

What *has* been happening is that Ginsberg is doing great. He read passionately, demonstrating his personal transition from lyricist of the lost generation to radical wise man for a generation ready to rediscover answers.

And he had clearly put a lot of forethought into what messages

they can't make out what you're saying and if there's very little direct translation?"

"That's all right," he said. "The transmission's in the tone of voice. And the glee. And the general sense of good humor. And the basic enlightened energy. It's physical, in any language, in any country.

"—And I've had a lot of experience," he continues, citing a long list of countries he has visited and

read in, "so I have some idea of what I'm doing, even in a foreign language. And when I have a very intelligent translator to work with, like Nanao, who's a companion, then we make a very funny sort of Laurel and Hardy team or a Marx brothers team, Manju and Fugen."

Translating remains a problem and the translating of poetry is one of the most difficult problems of all. Poetry is not simply feeling and enlightened energy, but demands an understanding of the language as well.

A few college students I spoke with at the readings complained that whenever Ginsberg's reading veered from whatever was actually written on the page (usually to explain the significance of specific events, names, or places included in his poetry), they just couldn't make out his meaning. Made me wonder whether, despite his efforts, Ginsberg wasn't being a bit patronizing about the language ability of his Japanese audience. (Who indeed would be satisfied with understanding only a poet's affective emotion at a reading?)

Ginsberg clearly realized that the vocal transmission of poetry wasn't enough, and he set up some alternative "conversation circles" at Watari as well as his smaller readings. These allowed groups of interested readers to ask questions on anything from drugs and writing to what he had been dreaming about in Japan.

On drugs: "Approximately one percent of my poetry has been written under the influence of drugs. But since I've learned how to meditate, writing is easier with or without drugs."

On dreams in Japan: "I forgot exactly what the dream was about but I was wandering around and around wondering where my house was."

He also repeated bits and pieces of wisdom—"First thought, best thought"—as if chanting advice for anybody who cared to take to heart his tips for writing poetry. With a translator present the messages were getting through.

Sakaki's presence was crucial. He is a well-known poet in his own right, respected in Japan and also in the States, where he has been living for several years. As Ginsberg's traveling companion and guide to Japan, the long-haired wizened poet seemed to have drawn a charmed circle around Ginsberg, the crossing over of which was far from simple.

Along with Sogyushigi Fukumura, another lively young companion, Ginsberg was privy to a

**“W**hat's happening here is also happening in America, all over the world, not just Japan. There's this mutual short-term passion, aggression and ignorance of the long-range effects of the building that's been going on.

*“But it's particularly acute here, since Japan has this history of appreciating natural beauty, preserving it, or having some respect for it.*

*“But there's also this excessive consumption. Like in these farm villages; the city dumps are full of good television sets and interesting hibachis that were being thrown away. Most of the farmers I met got most of their furniture from the city dumps.”*

Japan that many of us would love to explore: Ginsberg the meditator visited Myotsuji, Tetsuen Nakajima's Buddhist temple in Obama; Ginsberg the naturalist spent time in the countryside with counter-culture farmers; Ginsberg the poet read poetry with Keiko Yamashita from Kyoto, together with Sakaki and others; Ginsberg the political activist marched alongside the protestors of the Kansai nuclear power plant in a well-behaved march.

"I had a whole evening with Nakajima-san," he said about his visit to the anti-nuclear activist's temple. "Each person told a story, and everybody brought notes with

them on their personal preoccupations with the nuke issue.

"The funniest thing, which was used in this poem, 'Birdbrain,' was that the government in Takashima wanted a road built, so they appealed to the Kansai Power Company to build a nuke plant so they could have the road built to a reactor. And Mihama wanted a bridge built, so they were interested in a nuclear power plant so they could have a bridge. Sort of a birdbrain notion. So I learned a lot of local information."

If instant immersion was what he was after, he seemed to find it, but on his own terms. In any event, he saw the Japan he wanted to see. And although his reluctance to haggle with Western readers is understandable, the question begs to be asked—what "Japan" was Ginsberg after?

The poet addressed the possible destruction of the Shiraho Blue Coral Reef in Okinawa. At readings at the Watari Gallery and at universities in Tokyo and Kyoto he spoke out against the Ishigaki airport, which will destroy this reef, and he also included this subject in the version of "Birdbrain" which he read at the demonstration in Osaka.

"Do you think you poets are able to change things with your politically-minded poetry?" I asked Sakaki before he went on stage with Ginsberg at the rally.

"Yes, I think poets can help stop destruction," he answered. Emphatic.

The two poets confirmed that they take personal responsibility for preventing the destruction of the race and the environment. "Nature and human culture go together, and more than anything else, these must be protected," Sakaki said, making his way to the stage. "And that's all." ■

## Ginsberg on Poetry, Politics, and Japan

excerpts from an interview in Kyoto

by David Kubiak

*Of the three generations which you've been part of as an American counterculture poet—the beats, the hippies, and now the new agers—where do you feel most comfortable?*

Beat.

*Still?*

Of course. It would seem to me that the old beat generation ethos was less self-conscious. More directly visionary. The hippie was admired with aggressive politics—Maoism, Marxism, new left conceptualization. And the New Age is somewhat clouded by spiritual tripping, channeling—what [Chogyam] Trungpa calls "spiritual materialism." So in some respects the naïveté of the beat generation literary people seems more charming. And also the beat group was interested in poetics, literature, the writing. . . . So there was a literary and painting movement that is more permanent than the fads of later generations. Although contemporarily there are a lot of good poets and a lot of good painters of a kind of romantic, visionary nature. . . .

*But you've moved out of the purely cultural sphere to get more entangled in politics, like the ecological issues that you've been involved with.*

Well, I always was entangled with some kind of politics or other. Anti-Viet Nam war. Anti-nuke. Back in the late '50's the particular political crux was censorship of literature: the trial for "Howl," the Grove Press anti-censorship trials. And then there was another series of trials in the early

'60's over film. Those trials were won, so that lifted the haze off of censorship—self-censorship. From the ending of the censorship of the word and image, that meant the beginning of a political/cultural change of the kind that took place in the '60's, opening up expansion of mind, expansion of liberty of expression. And that had some political repercussions both in the east and the west. In the west it was misinterpreted as some kind of Marxist cultural revolution by the intellectuals, who were carrying pictures of Mao Tse-tung around at a time when Mao Tse-tung was killing millions of people in China and persecuting all the intellectuals, especially persecuting the bohemians and people with eyeglasses. The New Left was carrying pictures of Castro around at a time when he was persecuting homosexuals. So there was a diversion of the spiritual expansion and the libertarian aspect during the '60's. There may have been a prolongation of the Viet Nam War by the extreme aggressive New Left, because they refused to vote for Humphrey and didn't vote. Nixon squeaked in by just a half-million votes. That prolonged the war for almost seven more years. So it bankrupted the left and right. Both.

*What do you see as effective tactics for the future?*

The same. Nonaggression. That's the only tactic there is. The problem is aggression. So no tactics is the best tactics: nonaggression.

*But you've seen the ecological threat grow in your lifetime.*

The ecological threat is a by-product of more aggression. It's just pure aggression. Aggression can't be fought with aggression.

*With craft, guile, wit?*

Well, by skillful means. Humor. There are all sorts of ways: art, music, tone of voice, body-English, body-Japanese. But since the problem is violence, I don't think there's any way of dealing with it violently.

*In all your contact with the mass media and industrial*

hyper-industrialization is much more intensive and wasteful here than anywhere else that I've seen. That may be the same as in America—as was in America. But then, right after the '60's, during the '70's, there was this slight economic crash and people began worrying about jobs and making a living, which may happen later here. I don't have any idea. History doesn't repeat itself. I don't think there's much to learn except to avoid aggression. Any gesture taken in anxiety creates more anxiety. Any gesture taken in anger creates more anger. That's a basic general rule that's usable in any culture, any time. . . .

*What do you see as effective tactics for the future?*

The same. Nonaggression. That's the only tactic there is. The problem is aggression. So no tactics is the best tactics: nonaggression.

*But you've seen the ecological threat grow in your lifetime.*

The ecological threat is a by-product of more aggression. It's just pure aggression. Aggression can't be fought with aggression.

*With craft, guile, wit?*

Well, by skillful means. Humor. There are all sorts of ways: art, music, tone of voice, body-English, body-Japanese. But since the problem is violence, I don't think there's any way of dealing with it violently.

*In all your contact with the mass media and industrial*



photo by Kimberly Peirce

*society, you must have a fairly good idea of who and what are doing us in—*

I don't have any more idea than anyone else. I don't think anybody has any idea of what's going on. It's too big for everybody. The only thing you can say is that the more interrelated everything gets economically, the more the small producers get squeezed out. The more centralized the technology and the government, the more the small individualized enterprise gets squashed or dissolved. And homogenization seems to be the result, as well as the destruction of indigenous cultures. That is a big mistake, because it's sort of like the dinosaurs. One big monolith can fall very easily. There's no resourcefulness. There's no balance. Like a big greenhouse effect, or a big nuke war, or a big ozone-layer depletion. One thing can wipe out the whole scene. So decentralization and diversity seem always to have been the evolutionary direction. As Gary Snyder pointed out a long time ago, a climax forest has a maximum variety of flora and fauna, rather than a monoculture.

*Of all the people you know who are working to fight this centralization, who do you particularly admire?*

I think Nanao [Sakaki] is great. He says, don't fight. The idea of fighting for peace or fighting for decentraliza-

tion is a contradiction of terms. Really! Aggression is the problem, not the answer. . . . You just grow another direction. Avoid the authorities. Make something else. Create something. It doesn't do any good to oppose things. It's useful to create something. Opposition merely gives the monoculture your energy. Creative of alternative forms is using your own time to do something you want to do instead of fighting something you don't want to do. It's a question of breathing in pain and breathing out liberation from it. Breathing in the gas and breathing out ambrosia. Taking poison and turning it into nectar. Recognizing the anxiety, turning it around, becoming conscious of it, letting it go. Putting your breath toward pleasure and some kind of relationship that's more human—in terms of work, in terms of personal love relations or family relations, and in terms of your own amusements and play and art.

*The message is so sane and you've even got the pleasure principle working for you, but why is it so difficult to spread?*

I don't know if it's a message and I don't know if it needs to be "spread"—you can't use aggression.

*Are you equating activity with aggression?*

No, the only thing that you can do is just to address people's Buddha-nature. Address them at the highest level that they can understand, hope for the best—and expect the worst. It's a hopeless situation, so you might just as well give up hope and do what you think is best.

*Where are you on the pessimism/optimism scale?*

I don't think that pessimism or optimism have

any relationship to what's going on. I think they're just sort of fads. Have you ever heard of an optimistic dinosaur or a pessimistic dinosaur? It's ridiculous. Optimistic humans, pessimistic humans—it doesn't make any sense. It just narrows things into two choices, reduces people to the level and 5-and-10-cent-store objects.

*But it's sourcing energy, right?*

I don't think so. I think it blocks energy when you have to collect all your energy into optimism or pessimism and conceptualize the situation, which is much vaster than that. Certainly everything is hopeless. It always has been hopeless. It's the very nature of things. The sun is going to disappear. Everything is transitory. There's no permanence. There's no permanent self and there's no permanent human civilization. There's no permanent planet, no permanent sun. The sun's not eternal, that's why there's a blues. So what do you want? We got 4 or 5 billion years to figure it out.

*Then I'd expect to be having this interview with you in an cave instead of trucking around from one presentation to another on behalf of the [Shiraho] coral reef.*

Oh, it's not only on behalf of the coral reef. I'm just having fun. . . .

*There's a theory going around in Japan, called "social immunology," that certain people, whether they want to or not, feel pain at a distance when they read in the newspaper, for example, that something is being torn down they've never even seen—which causes them totally unnecessary and usually not very useful pain.*

Well, I don't know. Empathy is basic human nature. Where is there is

unobstructed clear seeing, there's unobstructed empathy. It's only when the scene becomes clouded by passion, aggression, ignorance, grasping, and greed, that awareness is obstructed—awareness of others' pain is obstructed and awareness of one's own pain is obstructed. That leads to indifference or lack of perception. But the normal condition is unobstructed clear seeing and unobstructed empathy. The unnatural condition is what we have—where people are so preoccupied with pachinko technology that they're stuck with the bright lights and the bouncing silver balls, and don't have the advantage of all their senses.

*In a world of increasing pain, doesn't anesthesia make more sense than awareness though?*

No, no. Pain is part of the taste of existence. One taste, as they say. Pleasure and pain are one taste. If you want to live, then what's the point in being born and having all this body and all this awareness if you're not going to take advantage of it and feel what's going on? Maybe if someone put a dentist drill to your teeth, you might want an anesthetic then.

[Following a discussion of alleged U.S. government collaboration in the drug problem as a means of tightening social control, the conversation turned back to recent censorship regulations restricting what radio stations can broadcast during daytime hours—raising again the problem of homogeneous cultures.]

There was a tendency of the homogenized culture to become more constrictive, after the liberations of the '60's. I think the '40's and '50's prophesied problems ahead for hypertechnology and Western civilization's methods of aggressive destruction of nature. It was sort of up in the air and people dug it, but finally push came to shove and the

shit hit the fan in the '80's: the greenhouse began altering the atmosphere, America took a fall, the stock market crashed, and the whole world's technology appears dubious. It might last 20, 50, 100 years—but after that, it's diminishing returns. Everybody knows it. Everybody's at the same crossroads: what to do with human existence. An old question. An old subject. Apparently we took the weird road of robot-life and we're all dependent on it like a bunch of junkies. It's the quality of awareness that makes the difference between falling into the continued karmic trap or having a sense of humor and finding another way to live. But it's the quality of awareness that's important. Unless you have that wisdom, you don't have anyway of relating to the problem. Sort of like an alcoholic who's just involved with denial that there is a problem and keeps drinking. Once there's that insight that there is a problem, then you can work with it.

*Do you see any American and Japanese collaboration in this problem?*

Yeah, they've both got the same problem. Hypertechnology. Conspicuous consumption. Pride. Vanity. The "American century"—what's the equivalent for "riding tall in the saddle" in Japan? What is the Japanese image of Japanese power?

*Well, there's a saying, "eight directions under one roof and the peak is Japan."*

They sure got it at the moment economically, but they're going to be sorry in awhile because it's just eating up the land and eating up the human feeling and imagination, making people more desensitized. So that's a common problem. . . .

## images: visions from Rimbaud's "The Drunken Boat" drawings by Takeo



*"I drifted on a river I could not control."*



"I've seen what men have only dreamed they saw."

Takeo is a *kenkyusei* (something like a grad student) in fine arts at Tokyo Zokei University in Hachioji.

review

## Images of Japan for the Folks Back Home

Anthony Thwaite, *Letter from Tokyo*, published by Century Hutchinson, Brookmount House, 62-65 Chandos Place, London WC2N 4NW England. Reviewed by Denis Doyle.

This is an ironical poem about happiness. I am as happy as I could ever be. The Japanese say they do not understand irony.

A friend who asked a number of foreigners whether they liked living in Tokyo said that they all answered "yes," but all sounded surprised. Doubtful affirmation—this is the tone of "Abroad Thoughts from Abroad" and several of the other poems in Anthony Thwaite's recent collection, *Letter from Tokyo*. Having been a Tokyo resident for nearly two years myself, I recognise the mood—the unexpected exhilaration which comes from moving untroubled through a world I don't understand and which probably doesn't understand me.

When I take Thwaite's book as a whole—something you can rarely do with collections of poems—I feel it represents a clear, authentic, up-to-date evocation of life in Tokyo. People who have lived here longer and plotted the curve of culture shock through all its later ups and downs may feel that the picture is incomplete, but its unity is one of the book's strongest points and ought not to be underestimated.

The person in the poems is a foreigner to Japan. He's at home in Tokyo but hasn't put down roots or learned much Japanese. It seems that he came here to work, not on a spiritual quest. This is refreshing. Japan—or more often, the idea of Japan—has been known to have a bad effect on poets. Sometimes it takes no more than a second-hand fan or a first lesson in flower arrangement to set them on a course of wasting paper and making ponderous and gnostic statements. Thwaite has no little tanka crouched at the top of his pages, no irritating omniscience about the springs of Japanese culture. He's never ecstatic; *Letter from Tokyo* could be an effective antidote after too much Lafcadio Hearn. Thwaite gives us the cicadas but he doesn't forget to add the loudspeaker

vans. When he goes to the fox shrine in Kamakura, Hearn's old stamping ground, he arrives on the wrong day, doesn't really know what to do with himself, and notices the "kitsch foxes."

More often than not, the East is not at all mysterious.

People in England send us Christmas cards With jokes about holly festooning the 'crispy noodles.' Daft. We can even buy Marmite quite easily.

As is the case with several of the poems, these lines

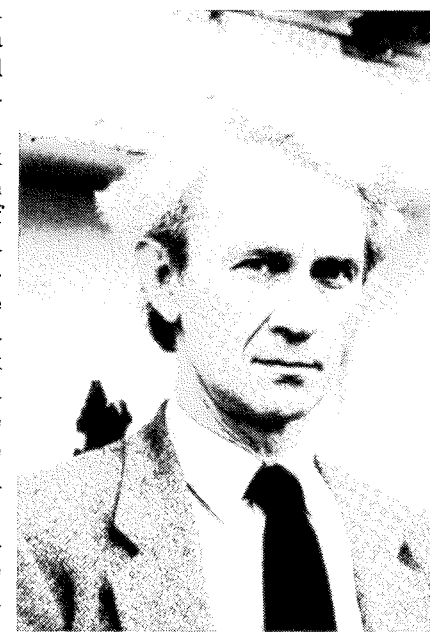
come over as almost unprocessed and almost perversely British. The weak joke on the card is so believable that it must have actually happened. A person writing from England, where there are innumerable Chinese restaurants, but where sushi bars have not as yet proliferated, would assume that Japanese food is much the same as British Chinese with its crispy noodles. How odd that this unambitious sally has found its way into a poem.

Certainly, Thwaite's determination not to strike attitudes can sometimes lead to flatness. "Kanji," for example, says little more than the following paraphrase: *I'm learning to read Japanese but it's difficult. I don't expect I'll ever reach the standard of that little boy over there. He's*

*only ten, but he can read it like anything.*

It doesn't really seem that this poem cried out to be written. However, Thwaite makes no claim to deep feelings in most of these poems. They are not "exciting" as such; his work rarely is. In an earlier book he called one of his own poems "my glum prosaic homage." But the poems in *Letter from Tokyo* are all interesting, coherent, and accessible.

Thwaite, whose poems and books have appeared regularly in Britain since the fifties, wrote most of the poems in *Letter from Tokyo* during a lengthy visit to Japan in 1985-6. He spent several academic years



Anthony Thwaite: doubtful admiration

in Japan previously and is co-editor of the *Penguin Book of Japanese Verse*. Japanese themes have appeared in his work in the past but were never handled as effectively as they are in *Letter from Tokyo*. The distracting influence of conventional Western poetics recedes almost completely and Thwaite generally gets away from the easy blank-verse rhythm he has been (too) fond of in his previous work.

This is particularly noticeable in the second section of *Letter from Tokyo*, "Voices Through Clouds," consisting of eight longer poems set in Japan's past, which seem superior to the dramatic monologues of Thwaite's *Victorian Voices*, published in 1980. They are also richer in detail and far more varied metrically. These historical poems don't detract from the book's contemporary feeling, however. They complement the foreigner's view in the first section with a set of variations on the theme of exile. "Soseki," the only poem written in London, appropriately has a London setting in which the Japanese novelist sees himself as "a lost dog slinking through a pack of wolves."

"Letters from Jakarta," an appealing mixture of prose and short bursts of poetry, draws on the story of Oharu, a half-Japanese woman exiled to Java in 1639. In other poems, Western authors visit Japan: Kipling, Hearn—and a Great Foreign Writer. The latter appears in the poem "Great Foreign Writer Visits Age-Old Temple, Greeted by Venerable Abbess: 1955." This hilarious exchange shows that Thwaite still has the humorous lightness of touch which is a feature of his earlier work. The Great Foreign Writer, a distinguished American Nobel Prize winner and also a cliché-monger of rare skill, is named by Thwaite in the notes, but only obliquely, so I'll leave his identity to those who seek out the book. Here's an excerpt from the exchange:

*Venerable Abbess:*

Have you a message  
for our youth? For the world?  
What is your impression  
of our women? Of God?  
May I ask  
what tobacco you smoke?

*Great Foreign Writer:*

To thine own self be true.  
May peace prevail.  
Very beautiful.  
The same to all but  
called by different names.  
A blend I have made up.

The poems in Part III of *Letter from Tokyo*,

which were mostly written outside of Japan in the early eighties, seem to indicate that the spell in Tokyo was good for Thwaite's writing. His professionalism and ability to write to order are evident, but these memorial tributes, contributions to pamphlets, and memories of childhood lack the sharpness of the Tokyo pieces in Parts I and II. The flatness of "Kanji" in the first part seems quite fresh and acceptable when contrasted with the flatness of the weary-sounding "Adecote (Summer 1943)" in the third part, where the technique is applied to more conventional poetic material: first love (or what sounds like it).

After that, it's hard  
To say anything about it.  
Unless I begin lying  
Or somehow, anyway, disguising  
The thing that it certainly was

And how different, once.

Honest, but lifeless. The Tokyo poems in the first two parts have much more to offer. The third part is more a rag bag and more or less redundant.

It's unusual for a book of poetry to offer more than, at best, the chance of encountering some good new poems which will probably be quite unrelated to each other. *Letter from Tokyo*, with its strong coherence of theme, reads almost like a single narrative and unites some of the qualities of guidebook, history, and autobiography. I feel it's Thwaite's best book so far, though I may be biased by having recognised, especially in the first section, so much of my own experience of Tokyo. Like him, I've noticed that no one ever seems to buy sweet potatoes from the singing van, that earth tremors often occur at daybreak, that foreigners avoid each other's eyes.

I recommend this lucid book to Tokyo residents, even those who rarely read poetry, or who feel their English is not perfect. But I think it will have special appeal to foreigners in Japan who have lived here some time and have constructed their own free-floating artificial islands on which they move about quite happily.

## Oversight

In our last issue we failed to note that the publisher of Robert Brady's *Further On This Floating Bridge of Dreams: Poems from Kyoto* is Katydid Books, 5746 Bridgeview, West Bloomfield, MI 48322 U.S.A. The "Marginalia" column on page 23 of this issue of EDGE has details on where the book can be purchased in Japan.

## Marginalia: literary notes on Japan

**Further on this Floating Bridge of Dreams: Poems from Kyoto** by Robert Brady, reviewed in the last issue of EDGE, is available at selected bookstores and from the author at 10-4 Kamitakeya-cho, Takano, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606. In Tokyo the book is on sale at the Second Story, Nakajima Bldg. 2nd Fl., 1-26-7 Umeogaoka, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo 154. Price: ¥1,000.

**"Japanese Writing Today,"** a first-of-its-kind film series on contemporary writers in Japan is currently under development. The

three-part program (poetry, fiction, and drama) will be broadcast on nationwide public television in the U.S. and subsequently distributed to schools and universities. Suggestions for funding, particularly from private foundations and public agencies in Japan and the United States, and comments, inquiries, and creative support from writers, educators, scholars, and Japan specialists can be addressed to Joseph Kleinman, 11815 Mayfield Ave., Apt. 207, Los Angeles, CA 90049 U.S.A.

EDGE Fiction Contest is now

accepting submissions of short stories, any theme, up to 5,000 words. Deadline is April 30. First prize: ¥25,000; second prize: ¥10,000. The top story will be published in the *Tokyo Weekender*; other stories meriting publication will be published in EDGE. For complete details, see the inside back cover of this issue of EDGE.

**The 2nd Kansai Time Out Writing Contest** deadline is April 31. The theme is "Travel in Japan." Non-fiction articles on specific places in Japan should be

continued on page 24

## NETWorks: a sampling of overseas publications and activities open to participation from residents of Japan

### recommended reading

*Longhouse*, Jacksonville Stage, Green River, Brattleboro, VT 05301 U.S.A.: Solid poetry with a natural flavor—nothing artificial. Published annually; copy for a donation. Also available: a rich catalogue of hard-to-find poetry books: Bronk, Cormann, Creeley, Sakaki, Snyder, Wakoski, and many others.

*Tidepool*, Hamilton Haiku Press, 4 East 23rd Street, Hamilton, Ontario L8V 2W6 Canada: Annual publication of haiku and short poetry. Eclectic look at English-language haiku in Canada.

### currently looking for material

*Ink*, c/o Creative Writing Dept., Humanities 236, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA 94132 U.S.A., is soliciting work that goes beyond traditional genre distinctions, such as prose poetry or image/text art as well as interdisciplinary essays and articles about the arts and writing.

*North Atlantic Review*, 15 Arbutus Lane, Stony Brook, NY 11790 U.S.A., is a new literary journal looking for fiction, poetry, humor, satire, essays, criticism, book reviews, artwork, and photos from new and established writers.

### anthologies

*Small Hands Poetry Anthology*, 2417 Oaken Shield, #1, Davis, CA 95616 U.S.A., wants quality poetry. Simultaneous submissions OK.

*Anthology*, 5111 Genoa Street, Oakland, CA

94608 U.S.A., welcomes poems responding to the AIDS crisis. All forms and styles, provided the emotion is genuine.

### contests

*The Chester H. Jones Foundation* will accept entries for its 1989 poetry contest until March 31, 1989. \$1,000 first prize; \$500 second prize; \$250 third prize; \$50 honorable mentions. For info send SASE to Chester H. Jones Foundation, P.O. Box 498, Chardon, OH 44024 U.S.A.

*The Plowman*, Box 414, Whitby, Ontario L1N 5S4 Canada, holds monthly poetry contests with featured poets, cash prizes, and twelve winners per issue. \$2 entry fee. "Poetry from all walks of life."

### residencies

Over 30 writers colonies, retreats, and residencies in all parts of the United States are listed in October 1988 issue of *Envoy*. Copy for an SASE and donation to Linden Staciokas, Editor, P.O. Box 2786, Fairbanks, AK 99707 U.S.A.

Hedgebrook Farm offers cottages for women looking for a peaceful place to write. Food and housing provided; all other expenses borne by writers. For an application, write to: Cottages at Hedgebrook, 2197 Millman Road, Langley, WA 98260 U.S.A.

(Info for this column is gleaned from the Small Press Review, the COSMEP Newsletter, Literary Markets, Poetry Flash, and other networking resources.)

typed, double-spaced on A4-size paper and be between 1,300 and 2,000 words. Send to: *Kansai Time Out*, 1-13 Ikuta-cho 1-chome, Chuo-ku, Kobe 651.

**Deadline for the 1st ANA Wingspan Fiction Contest** is midnight April 5, 1989. Stories must be connected in some way with Japan and be between 1,500 and 3,500 words. Prizes include publication and tickets to ANA destinations. For conditions write

to: ANA Fiction Contest, Advertising Division, ANA Co., Ltd., Kasumigaseki Bldg., 3-2-5 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100.

**Japan Environment Monitor** is edited by Rick Davis and published at 18-11 Saiwai-cho, Kofu-shi, Yamanashi-ken 400. No formal subs, but donations are requested to help with publishing costs. Recent issues have included interviews with Fusako Nogami

of the Japan Green Federation and updates on environmental issues in Japan.

**Exchange magazines with EDGE.** EDGE offers to barter publications with other literary / alternative magazines anywhere in the world: a year's sub to your publication in exchange for a year's sub to EDGE. Help strengthen the small press network—write us for details on EDGE's no money / no taxes barter-exchange program.

## Happenings

### Kyoto

**Open performance** of poetry, music, storytelling, mime, dance—all talents included—at Kyoto Connection on the last Saturday of each month from 8-12 pm at Studio Varie. For more info or to schedule an event contact Ken Rodgers at 075-822-0898.

**Poetry and friends** get together at Honyarado, on Imadegawa just west of Teramachi, on the fourth Sunday of each month (the day after the Kyoto Connection) for reading and interaction. For details call Bill Shively at 075-861-6966.

### Hamamatsu

**The Four Seasons Spring Writers Workshop** is being held March 18-19 near Lake Hamana, and will be especially for writers of fiction. For information about this and future workshops, write to Tom Hayes or Sheila Tombe at Four Seasons Cultural Center, 4-32-11 Sanarudai, Hamamatsu 432 or phone 0534-48-1501.

### Kobe

**Writers of fiction and poetry** who are interested in discussing their work with other writers and poets in the Kobe area are invited to contact Alan Fisher at 078-821-6527. Tentative plans are being made to start a discussion group and possibly to publish a literary magazine.

### Tokyo

**Tokyo Writers' Workshop** meets on the second Sunday of each month at the Shinjuku Bunka Center. Poetry from 1-3 pm, fiction from 3-5. For details phone John Evans at 045-962-0050.

**Annual convention** of the Japan Contemporary Anglo-American Poetry Society, will be held May 17-21. More information can be obtained by writing to Junichiro Takachi, Editor, *Poetry Tokyo*, #10 Sakashita Coopo, 4-1361 Kogasaka, Machida-shi, Tokyo 194.

**Open poetry and fiction reading** at Richard's Books in Ogikubo, the last Saturday of each month around 9 pm, after Amnesty International meeting. For directions and details call 03-391-2164.

**Two Tongues**, an evening of poetry and song in English and Japanese featuring Kazuko Shiraishi, Tsuneko Yoshikawa, Masaya Saito, and Valiant Poachers: Sunday, March 19. Doors open 5:30. Show from 6-9 pm. Tickets: ¥2,000 advance, ¥2,500 at the door (includes a copy of the anthology, *Two Tongues*.) At Ako Studio in Harajuku. For more info phone: 03-208-6766 (day) or 03-986-7468 (evening).



**THE BOOKWORM**, Tokyo's most popular English language bookstore, has over 20,000 volumes in its constantly changing inventory. Everything from escape thrillers to philosophy can be found on its shelves. Paperback fiction averages a very reasonable ¥350. It's well worth a special trip to Nagayama Station on the Odakyu Tama Line or the Keio Shin-sen.

**THE BOOKWORM** also has a very efficient mailing service for those who cannot visit the store. There are four book lists available to which customers are encouraged to subscribe. They may order from these lists or send their own requests to be filled from stock. Send ¥240 for your introductory packet which contains three lists and more information about this fantastic service.

**DON'T DELAY--**

**CHECK IT OUT NOW!**

**THE BOOKWORM**  
550-8 Kaitori  
Tama-shi, Tokyo 〒206  
☎0423-71-2141

edge

an international literary quarterly

## 1989 Short Story Contest

**Deadline: April 30, 1989**  
**Winners announced: July 31, 1989**

### Contest Rules

- Length must not exceed 5,000 words. Manuscripts must be typed, double-spaced on A4-size paper (8 1/2 x 11).
- Include author's name, address, and telephone number on the title page only.
- Photocopies accepted. Enclose a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage if you want your manuscript returned at the end of the contest.
- Only previously unpublished stories will be accepted. All rights revert to author after publication.
- No theme, subject, or content requirements.
- No limit on the number of stories which may be entered.
- Entry fee of ¥200 in postage stamps per story.

**First Prize:** ¥25,000 (donated by *Tokyo Weekender*)  
**Second Prize:** ¥10,000 (donated by *EDGE*)

plus honorable mentions

The first prize winner will be published in the *Tokyo Weekender*. Other stories meriting publication will appear in *EDGE*, a literary quarterly dedicated to promoting creative writing in English in Japan.

Send entries to:

Michael O'Rourke, Contest Coordinator  
2-37-10 Maihama  
Urayasu-shi  
Chiba-ken 279  
Japan

(phone: 0473-55-3136)

# Letter from the Editor:

## Readers' reactions to the first issue of EDGE

Dear subscribers:

Since I have known, have met, have written to, or have talked on the phone with almost all of you personally, I thought a more or less personal letter such as this might be a good way to keep you informed about how things are progressing with our new literary publication, EDGE. The "our" here is inclusive, and we want to thank you each for your support. We also want to give our special thanks to those of you who have contributed creative work to EDGE or provided us with useful contacts, leads, or other info.

We've met a lot of new writers through our recent poetry contest and have been soliciting new poetry from a number of sources. We're continuing to expand the number of photos and graphics we use, as this issue amply illustrates. Our biggest need right now is fiction. We've got a few stories "in reserve" but we're hoping the fiction contest we've got going now (deadline: April 30) will pull in some more good material. It takes a lot of milk to make a little cream, as they say.

Given the fact that many of our subscribers are themselves knowledgeable writers with a variety of literary perspectives, we received a variety of responses to our first issue of EDGE, as well as a number of suggestions on how to improve the magazine. Since some of these *very* various suggestions are also mutually contradictory, however, we've had to realize from the very start that we won't be able to please all the readers all the time. Virtually every individual creative work in our first issue seemed to have both its enthusiastic supporters (of the "this-is-exactly-the-type-of-thing-you-should-be-publishing" variety) and its dismissive critics (of the "I-don't-think-you-should-have-published-this" variety). It's interesting that the same pieces of work quite often elicit such opposite critical responses—and even more interesting to realize how different people are in their approaches to literature (an aesthetic question I personally happen to be very much interested in).

As far as format was concerned, some people really liked the glossy paper; others thought it looked too "commercialized;" one person even wrote in that it felt "gelatinous" in his hands. Some people liked the biographical info we included about individual contributors; others thought any bio data totally unnecessary in this age of deconstructionism, where the work of art not the creator is the main thing (de[con]structing deconstructionism was seriously proposed by at least one poet-subscriber I recently had coffee with, however). Comments on the layout ran from "very attractive for a literary magazine" to "totally unsuitable for a literary magazine." Most of the criticisms simply have to be taken in stride, of course. The glossy paper, eg., is no more expensive than regular, but reproduces artwork better. And to cut costs, we printed up covers for an entire year, which means we'll continue using the present cover until the supply runs out (at which time it will probably be redesigned).

We were glad, however, that everyone we heard from seemed to find at least something in the mag they liked. Actually there are sound reasons for literary diversity (see Allen Ginsberg's criticism of "cultural homogenization" in this issue) and we're committed to an eclectic editorial approach: we want to publish the best work we receive, but we also want to provide as much variety as possible in the limited amount of page-space we have to work with. Even our editors can't always agree on what should be included and how it should be presented. The quality of what we publish also depends a lot on the quality of what people are currently writing and sending us, as well as on what we're able to solicit. Anyways, we're very open to reader participation in this entire venture and hope that people will continue to send us their best stuff—and not be too upset if space limitations make it impossible for us to publish *all* the really good work we receive (and a lot of it is quite good). In turn we'll try to keep up our end as editors by giving more response than simply shipping back rejection slips.

We needed at least 50 subscribers to get our first issue off the ground, but were fortunate in getting more than twice that number: 117. We feel we're in a strong enough financial position to be able to add 4 more pages to this issue (plus the cover). We'll add more pages as finances permit. Our initial goal is 200 regular (i.e., renewing) subscribers by the end of the year, which would make the magazine completely self-sustaining and keep the editors from having to dip into their own pockets for support. With 200 subscribers we could have a fairly solid English-language literary magazine for writers and readers in Japan, yet still be small enough to keep it personal. As far as the editors here are concerned, EDGE is something we work on in our free time instead of plopping down in front of the tube in the evenings; whatever "profits" EDGE makes will be rechanneled into the magazine or will be used to sponsor other literary activities (eg., book publishing, readings, etc.); absolutely *none* of it goes into our own pockets. Incidentally, total income for 1988 (from Nov. 1, when we began operating, through Dec. 31, 1988) was ¥134,040; total expenses were ¥87,320. The entire balance of ¥46,720 was carried over to help cover expenses for the present issue.

Let us hear from you if we haven't already. We can't always act on all the good suggestions we receive, but we listen to 100% of them and will certainly hang on to the ones we might feasibly use.

Cordial regards,  
Richard Evanoff, Editor