



BUNICHI KAGAWA

Collected Poems

HIDDEN FLAME AND RECOVERED PERIODICAL VERSE

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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CRITICAL READER'S EDITION

This edition gathers every English poem by Bunichi Kagawa that could be recovered from accessible original periodical pages and the four poems from *Hidden Flame* reprinted in *Quiet Fire*. The complete 1930 book is documented but remains unavailable for full inspection. Lineation, stanza divisions, punctuation, italics, and intentional indents have been checked against the surviving pages; no missing text has been invented.

Bunichi Kagawa

November 4, 1904, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan – December 19, 1981, Los Angeles, California

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

Research and edition prepared 2026. Historical texts are reproduced for scholarly and educational use.

CONTENTS

Documentary Images	4
Introduction	7
Poems from Hidden Flame, 1930	11
<i>One Sun</i>	12
<i>Hunger</i>	13
<i>Silent Intimacy</i>	14
<i>Hidden Flame</i>	15
Periodical Poems, 1930–1936	16
<i>July</i>	17
<i>Soaring Hour</i>	18
<i>To a Man and His Heritage</i>	19
<i>The Village Spring</i>	20
<i>The Rumor</i>	21
<i>Identity</i>	22
<i>Night</i>	23
Editorial Note	25
Bibliography	26
Colophon	28

DOCUMENTARY IMAGES

Kagawa, his family, and the Los Altos years

The two nonrepeating images that follow place Kagawa within the family and literary worlds from which his English poetry emerged.



Bunichi Kagawa. Courtesy of Sharon Imura Honda and 50 Objects; reproduced in Densho's "Iron Fences and Pepper Pods."



The Kagawa family at the Shoup house in Los Altos, 1927. From left: Yoneko, Natsuyo holding Tadashi, Shoichi holding Isamu, Fumiko, and Masoko; Bunichi, the eldest son, is not pictured. Los Altos History Museum.

INTRODUCTION

Bunichi Kagawa, 1904–1981

Bunichi Kagawa moved between languages and literary communities with extraordinary resolve. Born in Yamaguchi Prefecture in 1904, he joined his family in California as a teenager, worked in domestic service around Stanford, and educated himself in English and poetry. Yvor Winters and Janet Lewis encouraged him; Ruth Mantz’s Half Moon Press issued *Hidden Flame* in 1930, a finely printed book of two hundred copies. Kagawa’s English poems appeared in *Poetry* and Japanese American newspapers, while his Japanese writing and organizing helped create *Shūkaku* before the war and *Tessaku* inside Tule Lake. This edition gathers every English poem that could be recovered from accessible original pages, including four poems from the unavailable book, and restores their lineation and stanza structure from periodical or anthology witnesses.

Stage I | Yamaguchi, Los Altos, and an English apprenticeship, 1904–1930

Bunichi Kagawa was born on November 4, 1904, in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan, the eldest son of Shoichi and Natsuyo Kagawa. Shoichi had emigrated to the United States in 1903 and, after a succession of jobs in San Francisco and on the Peninsula, settled around 1913 in Los Altos as caretaker of the Paul and Rose Shoup estate. Natsuyo and the younger children joined him in 1918. A 1927 photograph identifies Bunichi’s siblings as Yoneko, Tadashi, Isamu, Fumiko, and Masoko, but notes that the eldest son was absent from the picture. Passenger records place Bunichi’s arrival at San Francisco aboard the *Nippon Maru* on August 3, 1919. Later accounts often round the migration to 1918 or describe him simply as arriving at fourteen; the passenger list gives the more exact date.

Kagawa’s education in California was largely self-directed. Census schedules place him in domestic service at Stanford in 1920 and again in 1930,

not as an enrolled university student. He worked as a servant, cook, gardener, and houseboy while studying English and poetry. The Stanford poet and critic Yvor Winters encountered Kagawa's poems in newspapers and befriended him; Winters's wife, the poet and novelist Janet Lewis, was also part of the Los Altos circle that supported his writing. That friendship joined Kagawa to a small but consequential network of West Coast modernists, printers, and little magazines without erasing the economic and racial limits under which he wrote.

In August 1930 *Poetry* published the three-poem sequence "Under the Skyscrapers": "Hunger," "July," and "Soaring Hour." The poems combine industrial surfaces—coal, glass, pavement, granite—with leaves, violets, bodily hunger, and a desire for a new, unsentimental life. That year Ruth Elvish Mantz printed Kagawa's first English collection, *Hidden Flame*, at the Half Moon Press in Stanford, with a foreword by Winters. The thirty-five-page book was issued in two hundred copies bound in Japanese parchment. Contemporary notices recognized the rarity of an Issei poet publishing English verse, and a Palo Alto literary society elected Kagawa an honorary member. Contrary to a later biographical shorthand, Winters did not co-author the volume; he contributed its foreword.

Stage II | Bilingual publication and literary organizing, 1930–1941

Kagawa continued to publish in both English and Japanese. *The Japanese American News* printed "To a Man and His Heritage" in May 1931, "Identity" in February 1935, and "Night" that October. *Poetry* printed "The Village Spring" and "The Rumor" in January 1934 and "Silent Intimacy" in January 1936. Other notices associate him with Stanford's *Carillon* and its successor *Roon*, and his poems circulated in the *Rafu Shimpo*, *Kashu Mainichi*, and other Japanese American newspapers. English was only one part of his literary life: he also wrote poems, essays, and criticism in Japanese and became an advocate for a distinctly Japanese American literature rather than a provincial extension of literary culture in Japan.

On September 12, 1936, Kagawa helped organize the North American Poets Association in Southern California. Its journal *Shūkaku* ("Harvest") began publication in Los Angeles that December. Kagawa supplied the opening

statement and played a central role in the first issue, which brought together Issei and Kibei writers and included an English-language section. The magazine became the organ of a broader literary federation from its second issue and continued through six issues in 1939. Kagawa withdrew after the first issue amid personal and organizational tensions, but scholarship credits him as a formative influence on Kibei literature and on younger bilingual writers whose work would continue in wartime camps.

Stage III | Manzanar, Tule Lake, and Tessaku, 1942–1945

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Kagawa joined artists and writers including Isamu Noguchi and Ayako Ishigaki in an anti-fascist organization supporting the American war effort. Executive Order 9066 nevertheless uprooted him. Government records place him at Manzanar from June 1, 1942, until October 9, 1943, and then at the Tule Lake Segregation Center. His registration documents describe a man five feet three inches tall who had worked as a cook, janitor, domestic, and gardener. He was married by 1942; later scholarship identifies his wife as Shizu Kiritani, also known as Shizu Aida.

At Tule Lake, Kagawa's barrack became a gathering place for the Kibei writers Masao Yamashiro, Jyoji Nozawa, and Kazuo Kawai. Their meetings in late 1943 led to *Tessaku* ("Iron Fence"), a mimeographed Japanese-language literary magazine. Because Kagawa was an Issei barred from citizenship, he could not hold the official editorial position, but contributors recognized him as the group's mentor. He published throughout the magazine's run, including the essays "Potted Dandelion" and "Geta"; the latter meditates on a carved pair of Mickey Mouse wooden sandals and survives in translation. *Tessaku* made literary community inside a segregation center marked by armed guards, political conflict, and coercive loyalty procedures. Kagawa's role links the prewar *Shūkaku* circle directly to camp literature.

Stage IV | Los Angeles and the postwar legacy, 1946–1981

After the war Kagawa settled in the Los Angeles area and continued writing in Japanese. He became a United States citizen on July 19, 1954, after the McCarran–Walter Act removed the racial bar that had prevented Issei naturalization. His later career remains more visible in Japanese-language bibliographies than in English-language literary histories. *Kagawa Bun'ichi shishū*, a collection of poems, appeared in 1982, and the essay collection *Zuimitsushū okidokei* followed in 1983. A later Japanese selection renewed attention to poems written at Manzanar and Tule Lake.

Kagawa died in Los Angeles on December 19, 1981, and was buried at Evergreen Cemetery. A poem remembered as “The Sea Shines,” translated into English by Masayuki Arai, was installed as a public memorial in Little Tokyo; its image of the sea shining against poverty, bitterness, exile, and attachment gives his bilingual career an apt postwar afterlife. Later anthologies restored a small group of his English poems to view, and scholars of Japanese American incarceration have increasingly recognized the larger importance of his organizing and mentorship. The surviving English poems are few but distinctive: compressed, materially exact, and continually alert to the unstable border between inward identity and the world that names it.

POEMS FROM HIDDEN FLAME, 1930

Stage I | Recoverable poems from Kagawa's Half Moon Press collection

One Sun

Trees are standing
Never to lie down
To steal

A rest,

To rest their
Secret quiet.

One sun,
One song,
And one land:
My sandals burn

Absorbed

In the dreamy
Exposure of noon,

And I wander

Naively executing

My shadow-warm dream.

Publication. *Hidden Flame* (Half Moon Press, 1930); text checked in Juliana Chang, ed., *Quiet Fire* (1996), p. 40.

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

Publication. Under the collective title “Under the Skyscrapers,” *Poetry*, August 1930, pp. 246–247; later collected in *Hidden Flame* (1930).

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.

Publication. *Hidden Flame* (1930); revised or reprinted in *Poetry*, January 1936, p. 192. The *Poetry* text is used here.

Hidden Flame

A portion of decayed smile magnified
Upon the mirror...
Or perhaps other belief or quietness
Nourished of its own leaves and ends
Now withers gradually within me
Like the noiseless death of light.

Life seen through the hollow caves
Of my eyes dotted with this or that
Of doubts or somehow or a belief
Crumbles like the wall of wind spent;
I touch It and the beyond with careful
Totality of my hand, the dense structure
Of a feel complete and mute.

And gradually, the dark flame of will
Lurking behind the hands that touch,
Hands that grasp, and hands that feel,
Eats into my body left mostly alone
Like the ceaseless pillar of waterfall.

Publication. *Hidden Flame* (Half Moon Press, 1930); text checked in Juliana Chang, ed., *Quiet Fire* (1996), p. 43.

PERIODICAL POEMS, 1930–1936

Stage II | Poetry and The Japanese American News

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.

Publication. Under the collective title “Under the Skyscrapers,” *Poetry*, August 1930, pp. 246–247.

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.

Publication. Under the collective title “Under the Skyscrapers,” *Poetry*, August 1930, pp. 246–247.

To a Man and His Heritage

You are my death, and I am your double
Which I cannot move, nor fully live;
That falls like bundles of burning straw
To be piled up in the west of the world's anger
When the field-mice and fear and hate hasten the dark.

The leaves fall; our feet kick into the dust;
And I say, the autumn is a vast breath
Close to which our hot blood does plunge;
With our lips speaking of the earthly hope
That burns in the eyes for a flaming trap,
Ah, what are we, and what our cost?

Say again that in the autumn wilderness
Our eyes pile up the wealth of ruin;
That there is nor fear nor hate
But the fading sound of footsteps that burns
Into the air as we tread the way of frost-bitten earth.

Publication. *The Japanese American News*, May 26, 1931, p. 5.

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.

Publication. Under the collective title “News,” *Poetry*, January 1934, pp. 196–197.

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.

Publication. Under the collective title “News,” *Poetry*, January 1934, pp. 196–197.

Identity

When, one by one, as the leaves turn
Yellow, turn yellow and fall
Quietly, to the whisper we came after,
And cold winter twigs hold the liquid
Moon in their desolate fingers
Of memory, the toothless laughter
Of indifference that touches not you,
Nor me, combs our mind at last patient
As the aimless clatter of clay—

And there is a certain rest for you
When the stillness of wind released
From our foreseen death wraps, binds,
Thin trees and moon in its icy hair;
When the shadowy pain half awake
In your surrendered eagerness picks
Its way drifting slowly as the drifting
Sea-weed upon the pale ocean floor.

Ah, when the frost seals the bare
Winter earth, and dreams deeply
Through the crooked humor of frozen night,
We, whose heritage is tried, who are
Identified mostly by what we could not
Attain, nail our sleep utterly with what
Strict permanency we could not keep.

Publication. *The Japanese American News*, February 11, 1935, p. 1.

Night

When star after star rises slowly
Like rising mist from the dewy earth,
And still upon the point of my pointing
Bone that is clay, I am sleepless
As the shadowy unrest of a tree
That offends the darkness of night.

Can I break this? can my brown eyes
Sweep this away? I say, what height
Shall be mine when the lucid silence
Of stars above bends and wets my upturned
Face, my upturned face that is neither
[one line obscured in the surviving page]

Ah, let my vision be the tall leafy silence
Of a tree that climbs the night, and be lost
In the mid-air like a river, a river
Sleep-colored, that flows towards the sky!

Publication. *The Japanese American News*, October 7, 1935, p. 2. The surviving microfilm image obscures the close of the second stanza; a facsimile follows the reset text.

has now reverted to its original noble purposes and appears before the world today as revived and strengthened for the work which the peoples have placed in its hands.

Nobody should expect it to resort at once to extreme measures against Italy, whether economic or military. It has left the door wide open for further efforts in behalf of conciliation and peaceful settlement. Negotiations to that end do not need to be held exclusively in the hands of the League. They may be privately conducted by diplomatists in a three-Power consultation. The League would accept and approve any solution upon which they might agree. But all the while the League stands behind them or beside them and before the eyes of all men, as now the greatest instrument of peace in the whole world. It is endowed with large powers, which are not arbitrary, but flexible and controlled by the explicit provisions of the Covenant. This revival of the League in all the strength and efficiency which the Covenant was intended to confer upon it, will be as a signal of hope and fresh courage for multitude who have been living in fear that a needless and disastrous war would overwhelm the world in terror and misery.—N.Y. TIMES.

Night

By BUNICHI KAGAWA

When star after star rises slowly
Like rising mist from the dewy earth,
And stirs upon the point of my pointing
Bone that is clay, I am sleepless
As the shadowy unrest of a tree
That offends the darkness of night.

Can I break this? can my frozen eyes
Sweep this away! I say, what height
Shall be mine when the lucid silence
Of stars above bends and wets my upturned
Of stars above bends vG t
Face, my upturned face that is neither

Ah, let my vision be the tall leafy silence
Of a tree that climbs the night, and be lost
In the mid-air like a river, a river
Sleep-colored, that flows towards the sky!

Face
In

Of all
came to
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"Night" as it survives in *The Japanese American News*, October 7, 1935. Damage in the microfilm witness interrupts the final lines of the second stanza.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Copy-texts, unavailable witnesses, and damaged pages

Hidden Flame was issued by the Half Moon Press in 1930 in two hundred copies. Catalogue records and a Google Books record confirm the thirty-five-page book, but no complete scan was accessible during preparation of this edition. “One Sun,” “Hunger,” “Silent Intimacy,” and “Hidden Flame” were checked in the borrowed page images of Juliana Chang’s *Quiet Fire*, which dates each poem 1930. Where an original *Poetry* appearance survives, that periodical page is preferred to the anthology’s error-prone recognition text.

The remaining poems follow original page images from *Poetry* and *The Japanese American News*. Lineation, stanza divisions, punctuation, capitalization, and intentional inset lines are preserved. Narrow-column continuation wraps are rejoined, while source-page hanging indents are not treated as authorial indentation. Obvious recognition debris is excluded, but ambiguous diction and historical hyphenation are retained when supported by the page.

The surviving microfilm page of “Night” is physically or photographically damaged. A duplicated fragment crosses the second stanza and at least one line after “neither” cannot be read. The reset text marks the loss in brackets and is followed by a facsimile. Supplying a conjectural line would misrepresent the evidence.

Kagawa wrote extensively in Japanese and contributed to *Shūkaku* and *Tessaku*. Those poems and essays require Japanese-language transcription and translation and are documented in the introduction and bibliography rather than silently folded into this English collection. The posthumous Japanese books are likewise recorded but not translated here.

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COLOPHON

Production record

This critical reader's edition was prepared for *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. It is set in EB Garamond at six by nine inches. The cover uses unlettered skyscraper-and-violet artwork created by Brian Kim Stefans and applies the standard Green/Extremes palette and live lettering.

The edition was collated from original periodical pages, authenticated newspaper scans, and borrowed page images of *Quiet Fire*. All new source files, image crops, research, and production materials are archived with the project.