THREE POEMS FROM JAPAN

1. Akihabara

In this quadraphonic, centibel town

there is a warren of roads,

of electrified covered arcades,

Akihabara.

Tokyo's discount mart of electronic gear.

A babble and babel of brand names:

Teac, Sony, Yaesu

Panasonic, Nakimishi, JVC

Escalators couple the stores,

stacked like amplifiers in lab racks.

Speakers, shrouded, reach to the ceiling.

Litany of buttons, controls, meters,

head phones, batteries, and switches,

Hi-fi's oriental, super-occidental El Dorado:

Teac, Sony, Yaesu

Panasonic, Nakamishi, JVC

Akihabara

You are a contemptuous advertisement of our riches,

with your feed-in receptacles, grounded plugs.

Your life-blood, the wastrel, giver of shocks,

courses in braided copper wires, in plastic sheaths.

Your collapsible ears, antennae attuned to the aether.

And your eyes — you have no eyes...

You have digital meters and LED displays.

You have no eyes.

But what a mouth!

Muzzled with screens, but full of shriek.

Akihabara

Take your music which I, addicted, desire

Take your Russian and Swedish shortwave programs,

radio clandestine Zimbabwe,

your news and gray weather,

beaded in commercials, like cheap sushi

I'm going to turn you off.

2. Bunraku

Three black-hooded manipulators,

one fragile many-hued puppet.

One man moves the left hand

one moves the robe, simulating invisible feet

one does the rest, a lot.

In an alcove to the side

the chanter bawls news of war,

receives death, plots revenge.

The samisen player squats to left.

Three hooded men, one puppet.

Three move, the puppet's free

No Balinese shadow play, finger puppet or marionette.

Control's explicit, and thereby vanishes.

In the catacomb theater of my dreams

you, dear lady, are a puppet too.

You bear your father's wind-creased face

and his gall too.

Your husband's sex-ridden carapace supports you,

your teacher's goads hold your mask in place.

But, to your lovers you are more than real.

They see beauty, elegance, wit

and for the brief impassioned moment

in which they are drawn near

their eyes perceive no hooded movers.

3. Japanese Science

The only rickshaw I saw, hooded with brocade,

had a geisha in it.

And the old tattered man who pulled it

chattered incessantly.

The curtain stirred, flashing a pale painted face.

And the man's feet clapped as he dodged the cars.

To a rich man's party, no doubt.

Yes, here come the black rented limousines,

white doilies on their back seats.

A red lacquer box, Kamakura ware,

hides in its polished perfection

the place where it opens.

No hinges, just a perfect fit.

And on the black and shiny inside

field, a straw and a solitary

golden cricket, imprisoned.

The man I knew in Sendai,

master of his western equation-soaked trade,

divided space into fundamental unit cells.

He claimed, deductively, to be able to

build from them the cricket's chirp and

geisha's paint.

A powerful methodology, his.

But I think he just built more perfect boxes.