The Narrow Road to the Deep North
Matsuo Basho
MATSUO BASHO
OKU NO HOSOMICHI
THE NARROW ROAD TO
THE DEEP NORTH
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[In the translation, the term indicates further explanation or discussion of a particular crux. Click on the term for an immediate transfer to that discussion, and then on RETURN to come back to the translation].
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月日は百代の過客にして行かふ年も又旅人也。舟の上に生涯をうかべ、馬の口とらえて老をむかふる物は日々旅にして旅を栖とす。古人も多く旅に死せるあり。予もいつれの年よりか片雲の風にさそはれて、漂白の思ひやまず、海濱にさすらへ、去年の秋江上の破屋に蜘の古巣をはらひてやゝ年も暮、春立る霞の空に白川の関こえんと、そゝろ神の物につきて心をくるはせ、道祖神のまねきにあひて、取もの手につかず。もゝ引の破をつゞり、笠の緒付かえて、三里に灸すゆるより、松嶋の月先心にかゝりて、住る方は人に譲り、杉風が別墅に移るに、草の戸も住替る代ぞひの家面八句を庵の柱に懸置。\n
The days and months are travelers of eternity, just like the years that come and go. For those who pass their lives afloat on boats, or face old age leading horses tight by the bridle, their journeying is life, their journeying is home. And many are the men of old who met their end upon the road.

How long ago, I wonder, did I see a drift of cloud borne away upon the wind, and ceaseless dreams of wandering become aroused? Only last year, I had been wandering along the coasts and bays; and in the autumn, I swept away the cobwebs from my tumbledown hut on the banks of the Sumida and soon afterwards saw the old year out. But when the spring mists rose up into the sky, the gods of desire possessed me, and burned my mind with the longing to go beyond the barrier at Shirakawa. The spirits of the road beckoned me, and I could not concentrate on anything. So I patched up my trousers, put new cords in my straw hat, and strengthened my knees with moxa. A vision of the moon at Matsushima was already in my mind. I sold my hut and wrote this just before moving to a cottage owned by Sampū:

even this grass hut could for the new owner be a festive house of dolls!

This was the first of an eight verse sequence, which I left hanging on a post inside the hut.
弥生も末の七日、明ぼのゝ空朧々として、月は在明にて光おさまれる物から不二の峯幽にみえて、上野谷中の花の梢又いつかはと心ぼそし。むつまじきかぎりは宵よりつどひて舟に乗て送る。千じゆと云所にて船をあがれば、前途三千里のおもひ胸にふさがりて幻のちまたに離別の泪をそゝく。

It was the twenty-seventh day of the Third Month [16 May]. There was a wan, thinning moon, and in the first pale light of dawn, the summit of Mount Fuji could be dimly seen. I wondered if I should ever see the cherry trees of Ueno and Yanaka again. My closest friends, who had gathered together the night before, got on the boat to see me off. We disembarked at Senju, and my heart was overwhelmed by the prospect of the vast journey ahead. Ephemeral though I know the world to be, when I stood at the crossroads of parting, I wept goodbye.

I wrote this verse to begin my travel diary, and then we started off, though it was hard to proceed. Behind, my friends were standing in a row, as if to watch till we were lost to sight.
ことし元禄二とせにや、奥羽長途の行脚、只かりそに思ひたちて呉天に白髪の恨を重ぬといへ共耳にふれていまだめに見ぬさかひ若生て帰らばと定なき頼の末をかけ、其日漸早加と云宿にたどり着けり。

We barely managed to reach the post-town of Sōka by nightfall. My greatest burden was the pack I carried on my thin, bony shoulders. I had planned to set out travelling light, but had ended up taking a paper coat to keep out the cold at night, a cotton dressing gown, rainwear, and ink and brushes, as well as various farewell presents that I could not refuse and that had to be accepted as burdens on the way.
室の八嶋に詣す。同行曾良が曰、「此神は木の花さくや姫の神と申て富士一脈也。無戸室に入て焼給ふちかひのみ中に、火々出見のみこと生れ給ひしより室の八嶋と申。又煙を読習し侍もこの謂也」。将このしろといふ魚を禁ず。縁記の旨世に傳ふ事も侍し。

We went to see the shrine of Muro-no-yashima [The Oven-like Chamber]. Sora, my travelling companion, told me its story: 'The shrine is dedicated to Konohana Sakuya Hime [Princess of Flowering Blossoms], the goddess worshipped at Mount Fuji. The name Muro-no-yashima refers to the chamber that the goddess entered and set on fire, to prove that her pregnancy was legitimate. The son she bore there was called Hohodemi [Born of the Flames]. This is why poems about the place often mention smoke.' This must also be the reason why a fish called konoshiro is never eaten here. When grilled, it smells like burning human flesh.
仏五左衛門
卅日、日光山の麓に泊る。あるじの云けるやう、「我名を仏五左
衛門と云。萬正直を旨とする故に人かくは申侍まゝ、一夜の草の
枕も扱解て休み給へ」と云。いかなる仏の濁世塵土に示現して、
かゝる桑門の乞食順礼ごときの人をたすけ給ふにやとあるじのな
す事に心をとめてみるに、唯無智無分別にして正直偏固の者也
。剛毅木訥の仁に近きたぐひ気禀の清質尤尊ぶべし。

On the last night of the third month [19 May], we found lodgings at the foot of Mount Nikkō. The innkeeper introduced himself as Gozaemon the Buddha. 'I'm known as that because I put honesty first and foremost in everything I do. You can sleep here safe tonight with your minds at ease.' We wondered what kind of Buddha it was that had taken on human form in this troubled, filthy world to help two beggar pilgrims. I observed him carefully, and saw that, however ignorant or clumsy he might have seemed, he was indeed a man of stubborn honesty. He was a man close to the Confucian ideal of Perfection: strong, simple, straightforward. I found his purity of heart most admirable.
On the first day of the fourth month [20 May], we went to worship at the mountain shrine. In ancient times, the name of the mountain was written Ni-kō [the Mountain of Two Storms]; but when the great teacher Kūkai built a temple here, he changed the name to Nik-ko [Sunlight]. He must have had the power to see a thousand years beyond, for the radiance of the shrine now shines throughout the heavens. Its blessings flow over the land to the farthest corners, and all the people live in security and peace. I was awestruck, barely able to tell it in words:

how holy a place …
green leaves, young leaves, and through them
the sunlight now bursts

Mount Kurokami [Mount Raven Hair], though veiled in mist, was still white with snow. Sora composed a poem:

I shaved off my hair
and now at Kurokami
I change to new clothes

Sora is his pen name. His real name is Kawai Sōgorō. He built a house beside the lower leaves of my bashō tree, and used to help me with the chores of chopping firewood and drawing water. He was delighted at the thought of seeing Matsushima and Kisagata, and came to keep me company and share the hardships of the road. The morning we left, he shaved his head, changed into a priest's black robes, and took the name of Sōgo [the Enlightened One]. That is why he wrote the Mount Kurokami poem. The words 'I change to new clothes' I find particularly effective.

A mile or so up the mountain was a waterfall. The water leaps forth from a hollow in the ridge and tumbles down a hundred feet into a dark green pool strewn with a thousand stones. You can squeeze between the rocks and the cascade, and see the waterfall from behind. Hence its name Urami-no-taki [Rear View Falls].

alone behind the
waterfall a little while –
now summer retreat
那須の黒はねと云所に知人あれば是より野越にかゝりて直道をゆ
かんとす。遥に一村を見かけて行に、雨降日暮る。農夫の家に一
夜をかりて、明れば又野中を行。そこに野飼の馬あり。草刈おの
こになげきよれば、野夫といへどもさすがに情しらぬには非ず「
いかゝすべきや、されども此野は縦横にわかれてうゐ／敷旅人
の道ふみたがえん、あやしう侍れば、此馬のとまる所にて馬を
返し給へ」とかし侍ぬ。ちいさき者ふたり馬の跡したひてはしる
。独は小姫にて名を「かさね」と云。聞なれぬ名のやさしかりけ
れば、
かさねとは八重撫子の名成べし曾良
頓て人里に至れば、あたひを鞍つぼに結付て馬を返しぬ。

I had an acquaintance who lived in Kurobane in Nasu, so we decided to take the shortest route, straight across the plain. We took a bearing from a village in the distance, but as we walked, the rain began to fall and the darkness closed in. We took lodgings for the night at a farmhouse, and next morning started off again across the plain.

We came upon a horse grazing and a farmer cutting grass. We asked him the way. Although a simple, rustic man, he was full of sympathy. He pondered a while, then said, 'What would be the best thing to do? The trails here criss-cross all over the place, and strangers like you could easily get lost. That worries me. I'll let you have the horse. When he won't go any further, just send him back.' And with that, he leant us his horse.

Two small children followed us, running behind the horse. One of them, a little girl, was called Kasane [Double]. It was such an unusual and charming name that Sora wrote about it:

Kasane must be
the name given the wild pink
with double petals

Before long, we reached a village and turned the horse back home, with some money tied to the saddle.
<黒羽>
黒羽の館代浄坊寺何がしの方に音信る。思ひがけぬあるじの悦び
日夜語つけて、其弟桃翠など云が朝夕勤とぶらひ、自の家にも
伴ひて、親属の方にもまねかれ日をふるまゝに、ひとひ郊外に
逍遥して、犬追物の跡を一見し、那須の篠原わかって玉藻の前の古
墳をとふ。それより八幡宮に詣。

We called on Jōbōji, the senior pro-governor of Kurobane. He was delighted to see us so
unexpectedly, and kept us chatting away days and nights together. His younger brother, Tōsui,
seized every chance to talk with us, and invited us to his own home, as well as introducing us to
his relatives and friends. And so the time passed by.

One day, we took a stroll to the outskirts of the town, and saw the remains of the old dog-
shooting grounds.*

We pressed further out on to the plains to pay our respects at the tomb of Lady Tamamo, and
then at the shrine of Hachiman. We were especially moved when we heard that it was to this god
that Yoichi had cried, as he aimed his arrow at the fan.**

As darkness fell, we returned to Tōsui’s house. Nearby, there was a mountain-cult temple called
Kōmyōji. We were invited there, and worshipped in the Hall of the Ascetic:

in summer mountains
we say prayers before the shoes …
journey now begins

*dog-shooting grounds a reference to a game in which horse-riders competed to shoot a dog with blunted
arrowheads.

**as he aimed his arrow at the fan a celebrated challenge recorded in earlier history and literature. Nasu no
Yoichi was commanded to shoot at a fan held up by a woman on a swaying boat some two hundred and fifty yards
away. He prays to Hachiman, the guardian deity of the samurai, for success, declaring that he will kill himself
should the arrow miss. But he hits his target.
<雲岸寺>
当国雲岸寺のおくに佛頂和尚山居跡あり。
竪横の五尺にたらぬ草の庵　むすぶもくやし雨なかりせば
と松の炭して岩に書付侍りと，いつぞや聞え給ふ。 其跡みんな雲岸寺に杖を曳ば，人々すゝんで共にいざなひ，若き人おほく道のほど打さはぎて，おぼえず彼梺に到る。

山はおくあるけしきにて谷道遥に，松杉黒く苔したどりて，卯月の天今猶寒し。十景尽る所，橋をわたつて山門に入。さてかの跡はいづくのほどにやと後の山によぢのぼれば，

石上の小庵岩窟にむすびかけたり。妙禅師の死関，法雲法師の石室をみるがごとし。

木啄も庵はやぶらず夏木立と，とりあへぬ一句を柱に残侍し。

Behind Unganji temple in this province, up in the mountains, was a hermitage where the priest Butchō used to live. Butchō once told me that he had inscribed the following poem on a rock, in charcoal made from pine:

Oh how much I loathe
building a shelter at all,
even a grass-thatched
hut not five feet long or wide –
if only it never rained …

I wanted to see what remained of the hut, and so, walking-staff in hand, I set out. A group of young people accompanied me on the way, chattering away happily, and before I knew it we had reached the foot of the mountain. It seemed so deep. A valley path stretched far into the distance, lined by darkly clustering pines and cedars. Dew dripped from the moss, and even though it was the Fourth Month [early summer], the air still felt cold. When we had passed all the Ten Sights,*

we crossed a bridge and the temple gate.

Eager to discover the site of the hermitage, I scrambled up the hill behind the temple to a tiny hut built upon a rock, leaning against a cave. It was like coming upon the Death Gate of the monk Miao, or the stone chamber of the monk Fayun. I left an impromptu verse on a post in the hut:

even woodpeckers
leave the hermitage untouched
in the summer trees

*all the Ten Sights according to Bashō’s companion, Sora, these sights were mainly prominent rocks, buildings, and clumps of plum and bamboo, within the temple precincts.
<殺生岩・蘆野>
是より殺生石に行。館代より馬にて送らる。此口付のおのこ、短冊得させよと乞。やさしき事を望侍るものかなと、野を横に馬牽むけよほとゝぎす
殺生石は温泉の出る山陰にあり。石の毒気いまだほろびず。蜂蝶のたぐひ真砂の色の見えぬほどかさなり死す。
又、清水ながるゝの柳は蘆野の里にありて田の畔に残る。此所の郡守戸部某の此柳みせばやなど、折々の絵ひ聞え給ふを、いづくのほどにやと思ひしを、今日此柳のかげにこそ立より侍つれ。
田一枚植て立去る柳かな

From Kurobane, I headed towards the Killing Stone on a horse lent to us by Jōbōji. The man leading the horse asked if I would write a poem for him. Pleasantly surprised that he had such artistic interests, I gave him this:

turn the horse's head
towards the plain; pull there now!
a cuckoo's calling …

The Killing Stone stands in dark mountain shadow near a hot spring. The gases emanating from the rock were full of poison still. So many bees and butterflies and other insects lay dead in heaps around it, you couldn't tell the colour of the sand.

At Ashino, the weeping willow that Saigyō celebrated, 'where pure and crystal water flows', stands on the bank between two rice-fields. A local official there, a man called Kohō, had often said how much he would like to show me the tree, and I'd often wondered exactly where it stood. Now, I rested in its shade:

one whole field of rice
had all been sown – before I
left the willow-tree
Day after day had passed in vague uneasiness; but now we approached the Barrier at Shirakawa, and, for the first time, I felt that our journey had truly begun. I could understand why the poet* had felt at this spot that he wanted to send word to the people in the capital that he had crossed the Barrier.

As one of the Three Barriers to the north, Shirakawa has always appealed to poets and writers. Yet even as I delighted in the green leaves of the trees, an autumn wind seemed to sound in my ears, and crimson leaves danced in my mind's eye. The whiteness of deutzia, the white rambling roses, made us feel as if we were crossing the Barrier in snow. According to Kiyosuke,** people of long ago straightened their hats as they crossed, and changed their clothes. Sora wrote:

sprigs of deutzia
adorn our hats – formal dress
for the barrier

*why the poet an allusion to a poem by Taira no Kanemori (d. 990), in which he expresses the wish to tell the people in the capital that he had crossed the Barrier. For him, as for Bashō, the Shirakawa Barrier clearly represented an emotional and psychological crossing-point, as well as a simple geographical frontier.

**Kiyosuke a writer (1104-77), whose book on poetics records the tradition of changing clothes upon crossing the Shirakawa Barrier.
＜須賀川＞
とかくして越行まゝにあぶくま川を渡る。左に会津根高く、右に
岩城相馬三春の庄、常陸下野の地をさかひて山つらなる。 かげ沼
と云所を行に、今日は空曇て物影うつらず。かがわの駅に等窮といふものを尋て、四五日
とゝめる。 先白河の関いかにこえつるやと問。 長途のくろしみ身心つかれ、且は風
景に魂うばゝれ、懐旧に腸を断てはか%/う思ひめぐらさず。
風流の初やおのの田植うた
無下にこえんもささがにと語れば、脳第三つつつけて、三巻とな
しぬ。此宿の傍に、大なる栗の木陰をたのみて、世をいとふ僧有。 橡ひろふ太山も
かくやとしづかに覚られてものに書付侍る。 其詞、
栗といふ文字は西の木と書て西方浄土に便ありと、行基菩薩の一生杖
にも柱にも此木を用給ふとかや。 世の人の見付ぬ花や軒の栗

We passed the Barrier and crossed the Abukuma River. On our left, the peak of Aizu soared up high; on our right, the districts of Iwaki, Sōma and Miharu stretched out; behind us, the range of hills that separated the provinces of Hitachi and Shimotsuke. We passed Kagenuma [Shadow Pond], but the sky was overcast that day, and so there were no reflections.

At the post town of Sukagawa, we visited a poet called Tōkyū, who put us up for four or five days. The first thing he asked was, 'How did you feel as you crossed the Barrier at Shirakawa?' I replied that the hardships of our long journey had exhausted me in body and spirit.

Enchanted by the beauty of the landscape, and so much moved by the memories of the past that it awakened, I had not been able to compose a decent poem. Yet it would be a shame to let the crossing go unrecorded. So I wrote:

imagination's
birth! a song for planting rice
in the deep far north

From this opening, we added a second verse and then a third, until we had completed three sequences. On the outskirts of the town, in the shade of a huge chestnut tree, there lived a monk who had turned his back upon the world. The lonely quietness of his hermitage reminded me of another place deep in the mountains, where horse chestnuts had been gathered. I jotted down a few words:

The character for 'chestnut' means 'west tree', indicating its connection with the Paradise to the West. It's said that the priest Gyōgi used the wood all his life for his walking-sticks and the pillars of his house:

people in the world
hardly notice these blossoms –
chestnuts by the eaves
等窮が宅を出て、五里計桧皮の宿を離れてあさか山有。路より近し。此あたり沼多し。かつみ刈もやゝ近うならば、いつれの草を花かつみとは云ずと人々に尋侍えども、更知人なし。沼を尋、人にとひ、かつみ／と尋ありきて日は山の端にかゝりぬ。二本松より右にきて、黒塚の岩屋一見し、福嶋に宿る。

Some twelve miles or so from Tōkyū's house, just beyond Hiwada, is Mount Asaka. It rises up close to the road, and there are many marshes round about. It was almost the season for picking katsumi iris. We kept on asking, 'Which plant is the flowering katsumi?' But no-one knew. We wandered about the marshes, asking everyone the same question, till the sun sank behind the rim of the hills.

We turned off to the right at Nihonmatsu, paid a hasty visit to the cave at Kurozuka, and stopped for the night at Fukushima.
 akuれば、しのぶもぢ摺の石を尋て忍ぶのさとに行。 遥山陰の小
里に石半土に埋てあり。 里の童部の来りて教ける。 昔は此山の上
に侍しを往来の人の麦草をあらして此石を試侍をにくみて此谷に
つき落せば、石の面下ざまにふしたりと云。 さもあるべき事にや
。
早苗とる手もとや昔しのぶ摺

The following morning, we set off to Shinobu in search of the Fern-print Rock. We found it half
buried in the soil of a remote hamlet over- shadowed by a mountain. Some village children came
up and told us that, in the old days, the stone had stood on top of the mountain. But the people
who went up there to rub the cloth on the stone with ferns had torn off leaves of barley too. The
farmers had become so annoyed, they had pushed the stone down into the valley – which was
why it was now lying upside down. The story was not impossible:

hands planting seedlings
were hands once rubbing patterns
with ferns, long ago
We crossed the river by the ferry at Tsukinowa [Moon Halo] and arrived at a post-town called Senoue [Rapid's Head]. The ruined mansion where Satō Shōji had once lived was about four miles away on the left, close to the mountains. We were told it was at Sabano, in the village of Iizuka.

We asked directions as we went along, until we came to a place called Maruyama. This was where the warrior's house had stood. They told us that the Great Gate had been down at the foot of the mountain, and my eyes glazed with tears. Still standing at an old temple nearby were the tombstones of the family. The most moving were the memorials to the two young wives.*

Women though they were, they left behind them such a name for courage. My sleeve was wet with tears. You do not have to go so very far away to find a tombstone that makes you weep. **

We went inside the temple to ask for tea, and saw that, among its treasures, were the sword of Yoshitsune and the satchel-basket that Benkei carried:

both sword and satchel shown for Boys' Festive Day, when paper banners fly

It was the first day of the fifth month [18 June].

*the two young wives a reference to the widows of two warrior brothers, Satō Tsugunobu (1158-85) and Tadanobu (1161-86). After their deaths, to console their mother, the two widows are said to have donned soldiers' armour to pretend they were her sons returning in triumph.

**a tombstone that makes you weep the tombstone in question was built by local people in honour of Yang-hu (221-78), an especially respected governor. All who saw it could not help weeping there.
飯塚
其夜飯塚にとまる。温泉あれば湯に入て宿をかるに、土坐に筵を敷てあやしき貧家也。灯もなければゐろりの火かげに寝室をまうけて臥す。夜に入て雷鳴、雨しきりに降て、臥る上よりもり、蚤蚊にせゝられて眠らず。持病さへおこりて消入計になん。短夜の空もやう／明れば、又旅立ぬ。猶夜の余波心すゝまず、馬かりて桑折の駅に出る。遥なる行末をかゝえて、斯る病覚束なしといへど、羁旅地辺の行脚、捨身無常の観念、道路にしながら、是天の命なりと気強りとり直し路縦横に踏で伊達の大木戸をこす。

We stayed the night at Iizuka. We bathed in the hot springs there, and then rented a room. The inn turned out to be a wretched hovel, with straw mats spread over the dirt floor. There wasn't even a lamp, so we made up our beds in the light from a hearth fire and lay down. Throughout the night, the thunder rumbled, and the rain poured down in torrents. What with the roof leaking down on us just where we lay, and the fleas and mosquitoes biting, I couldn't sleep at all. To make matters worse, my old complaint flared up again, causing such pain I almost fainted. The short summer night came to an end at last, and we set off again. I hired a horse to the post-station of Kōri, still feeling the after-effects of the night before. I was worried about my sickness, when such a great distance still remained ahead. But I told myself that, when I'd started on this journey to the remotest regions, I'd been aware of giving up all worldly things and facing life's transience. If I should die on the road, that would be Heaven's will. Such thoughts helped restore my spirits a little, and I passed through the Great Gate of Date with some boldness in my step.
笠嶋

鎌摺白石の城を過、笠嶋の郡に入れば、藤中将実方の塚はいつくのほどならんと人にとへば、是より遥右に見ゆる山際の里をみのわ笠嶋と云。道祖神の社、かた見の薄今にありと教ゆ。此比の五月雨に道いとあしく、身つかれ侍れば、よそながら眺みて過るに、蓑輪笠嶋も五月雨の折にふれたりと、笠嶋はいづこさ月のぬかり道岩沼に宿る。

Passing by Abumizuri and Shiroishi castles, we arrived at the district of Kasajima, and inquired about the grave of the governor Sanekata, of the Fujiwara family. A man told us, 'Those villages you can see at the foot of the mountain way off to the right are Minowa and Kasajima. The shrine to the spirits of the road and the memorial of pampas-grass are still there.'

After the heavy rains of previous days, the road was in an awful state, and I was so tired that we contented ourselves with simply looking that way as we trudged on. The names Minowa [Raincoat] and Kasajima [Umbrella] were so well suited to the rainy season that I wrote this verse:

so whereabouts is
Rain-Hat isle? how far along
muddy roads of June

We stayed the night at Iwanuma.
武隈の松にこそめ覚る心地はすれ。根は土際より二木にわかれて、昔の姿うしなはずとしらる。先能因法師思ひ出、往昔むつのかみにて下りし人、此木を伐て、名取川の橋杭にせられたる事などあればにや。松は此たび跡もなしとは詠たり。代々あれば伐、あるひは植雑などせしと聞に、今将千歳のかたちとゝのひて、めでたき松のけしきになん侍し。
武隈の松みせ申せ遅桜と挙白と云ものを餞別したりければ、桜より松は二木を三月越シ

The Pine of Takekuma is truly an amazing sight. The trunk forks into two just above the ground, confirming that this is just how the old tree must have looked. I thought immediately of the priest Nōin. Long ago, a nobleman, newly appointed to serve as Governor of Mutsu, had felled the tree and used the wood as pilings for a bridge over the Natori River. Nōin wrote in a poem, ‘No trace is left now of the pine’. I was told that, generation after generation, the pine had been felled, yet a new one replanted. After perhaps a thousand years, the present pine is still quite perfect in shape.

When I had started my journey, Kyohaku had given me a poem as a farewell present:

late cherry blossoms …
let my master see the pine
at Takekuma

I now wrote in reply:

since the cherries bloomed
I've longed to see the twin pine …
three long long months have passed
We crossed the river Natori and went into Sendai. It was the day when people hang blue irises beneath the eaves. We found an inn where we stayed for four or five days. In the town, there was a painter called Kaemon. I had heard he was a man of truly artistic taste, and I got to know him. He told me he had spent several years tracing places mentioned in poetry that had become hard to locate; and one day, he took us to see some of them. The fields of Miyagino were thick with bush clover, and I could imagine the sight in autumn. It was the season when the pieris flowered around Tamada, Yokono and Tsutsuji-ga-oka. We walked through a pine forest so thick that sunlight could not penetrate at all, and were told its name, Konoshita [Under-the-Trees]. The dripping dew must have been heavy there even in ancient times, for in one poem, a servant is asked to tell his lord to take an straw hat. We offered prayers at Yakushidō Shrine and the Shrine at Tenjin before the day drew to a close.

As parting gifts, Kaemon presented us with sketches of Matsushima and Shiogama and various other local places. He also gave us two pairs of straw sandals, with straps deep iris-blue. These presents showed how much a man of cultivated taste he was:

I will bind iris blossoms round about my feet –
straps for my sandals
壺の碑
かの画図にまかせてたどり行ば、おくの細道の山際に
十符の菅有。今も年々十符の菅菰を調て国守に献ずと云り。
壺碑
市川村多賀城に有
つぼの石ぶみは高サ六尺餘横三尺計歟。 苔を穿て文字幽也。 四維
国界之数里をしるす。 此城、神亀元年、按察使鎮守府将軍大野朝
臣東人之所置也。 天平宝字六年、參議東海東山節度使、同将軍恵
美朝臣獲修造而十二月朔日と有。 聖武皇帝の御時に当れり。
むかしよりよみ置る哥枕、おほく語傳ふといへども、山崩川落て
、跡あたため、石は埋して土にかくれ、木は老て若木にかはれば
、時移り代変じて、其跡たしかならぬ事のみを、愛に至って疑な
き千歳の記念、今眼前に古人の心を閲す。 行脚の一徳、存命の悦
び、羁旅の勞をわすれて泪も落るばかり也。

Following the drawings that Kaemon had provided, we came to the tofu sedge, growing at the
foot of the mountains where the Narrow Road to the Deep North runs. The local people
apparently still make ten-stranded matting each year for presentation to the provincial Governor.
We found the Tsubo stone monument at Tagajō in the village of Ichikawa. The stone is a little
over six feet high and about three feet wide.

Once the moss covering the stone had been scraped away, letters could be faintly seen beneath,
recording the distances to all four corners of the country. There was an inscription also:

This castle was built in the first year of Jinki [724] by Ōno-no-Azumabito, Inspector and
Governor General. It was repaired in the sixth year of Tempyō-hōji [762] by Emi-no-asomi-
Asakari, Councillor, Governor of the Eastern Sea and Eastern Mountain districts, and Governor
General. First day of the twelfth month

So the founding took place during the reign of the Emperor Shōmu. Of all the many places
celebrated in poetry since ancient times, most have vanished. Mountains have crumbled, rivers
taken new courses, and roads new routes. Stones have been buried and hidden in the earth, and
old trees have given way to saplings. Time passes and the world changes. But here, before my
eyes, was a monument that had endured a thousand years. I felt that I could understand the
feelings of the people of the past. 'This,' I thought, 'is the traveller's reward. This is the joy of
having lived so long.' I forgot the hardships of the road, and was moved to tears.
We stopped along the Tama River at Noda and at Oki-no-ishi [the Great Stone in the Lake], both made famous in poetry. On Sue-no-matsuyama [the Endless Pines], a temple with the same name, Masshōzan,* had been built. Everywhere among the pine trees, graves were spread. They filled me with a great sadness, reminding me that all the vows to be ‘a single pair of wings or intertwining branches’ ** came in the end to this. As we came to Shiogama Bay, the evening bell was tolling.

The sky had cleared a little after steady rain. Under the faint rays of the evening moon, the island of Magaki could be seen not far from shore. A line of small fishing boats came rowing in. I could hear the voices of the fishermen as they divided up their catch. And I understood now what the poet meant who wrote, ‘It catches the heart – a fishing boat pulled to shore’. That night, I listened to a blind singer reciting a north-country ballad to the accompaniment of his lute. It was not like the stories of Heike, or traditional dancing songs. He was performing close to my bed, and I found the rustic tones of his voice very noisy. But then I realized how admirable it was that such fine old customs were still preserved in this distant land.

*Masshōzan the Sinified reading of Sue-no-matsuyama.
**a single pair of wings or intertwining branches’ a quotation from a celebrated poem by Po Chü-i, ‘Song of Everlasting Regret’. The images are clearly metaphors for everlasting love.
Early the next morning, we visited the Shrine at Shiogama, which had been restored by the governor of the province. Its pillars stood huge and majestic, brightly painted rafters sparkled, and stone steps rose up flight after flight. The crimson fencing was dazzling in the morning sunlight. How wonderful it was, I thought, that in this land of ours, the divine powers of the gods should show themselves even in so remote a place as this.

In front of the sanctuary, there was an old lantern with an inscription on its iron door, ‘Presented by Izumi-no-Saburō in the third year of Bunji [1187]’. It was strange how these words brought back things unchanged for over five hundred years. Izumi-no-Saburō had been a brave and honourable soldier, a loyal and loving son. His fame has lasted to the present day, and there is no one now who does not honour him. How true it is that, if men strive to walk in the way of truth and uphold righteousness, fame will follow of its own.

It was nearly noon. We hired a boat and crossed to Matsushima. After five miles on the water, we landed on the beach of the island of Ōjima.
No matter how often it has been said, Matsushima is the most beautiful place in all Japan, and
can easily hold its own against T'ung-ting or the Western Lake in China. The sea surges in from
the southeast into a bay seven miles across, its waters brimming full like the Zhejiang River in
China. There are more islands than anyone could count. Some rise up steeply, as through
thrusting towards the skies; some are flat, and seem to crawl on their stomachs into the waves.
Some seem piled double, or even three layers high. To the left, they appear separate; to the right,
joined together. Some look as if they carried others on their backs, and some as if they held them
in their arms, like a parent caring for a little child or grandchild. The pines are of the deepest
green, and their branches, constantly buffeted by the winds from the sea, seem to have acquired a
twisted shape quite naturally. The scene suggests the serene charm of a lovely woman's face.
Matsushima truly might have been created by Ōyamazumi [God of the Mountains] in the Great
Age of the Gods. What painter or what writer could ever capture fully the wonder of this
masterpiece of nature?

The Island of Ojima [Male Island] juts out from the mainland into the sea. Here are the remains
of the priest Ungo's retreat, and the rock on which he used to meditate. I glimpsed a few other
recluses among the pines as well. We saw smoke rising from a fire of twigs and pine cones at
one quiet, thatched hut. We did not know what kind of man the occupant might be, and yet we
felt drawn towards the spot. As we approached, the moon shone down upon the water,
transforming the scene from how it had appeared by day.

We returned to the shore and found lodgings, a second-storey room with open windows that
looked out over the bay. As we lay there in the midst of breeze and cloud, I felt a marvellous
exhilaration. Sora wrote:

Matsushima, oh …
you will need cranes' wings to fly
little cuckoo bird

I was silent. I tried to sleep but could not. When I had left my old cottage, I had been presented
by Sodō with a poem in Chinese about Matsushima, and a tanka by Hara Anteki about Matsu-ga-
urashima [Bay Isle of Pines].

I took them out of my bag as my companions for the night. I had some hokku too, composed by
Sanpū and Jokushi.
十一日、瑞岩寺に詣。当寺三十二世の昔、真壁の平四郎出家して
、入唐帰朝の後開山す。其後に雲居禅師の徳化に依て、七堂甍改
りて、金壁莊厳光を輝、仏土成就の大伽藍とはなれりける。彼見
仏聖の寺はいつくにやとしたはる。

On the eleventh, we visited the temple at Zuigan. Long, long ago – thirty- two generations before
the present – Makabe no Heishirō had entered Buddhist orders, gone to China to study, and then
returned to found the temple. Later, under the goodly influence of the monk Ungo, its seven halls
had been rebuilt. Now the temple was a great centre of worship, with dazzling golden walls – a
true paradise on earth. Yet still I wondered where the holy man Kenbutsu's temple might have
been.
十二日、平和泉と心ざし、あねはの松緒だえの橋など聞傳て、人跡稀に雉兎蒭ぜうの往かふ道、そこともわずず、終に路ふみたがえて石の巻といふ湊に出。こがね花咲とよみて奉たる金花山海上に見わたし、数百の廻船入江につどひ、人家地をあらそひて、竃の煙立つげけたり。思ひがけず斯る所にも来れる哉と、宿かられど、更に宿かす人なし。漸まどしき小家に一夜をあかして、明れば又しらぬ道まよひ行。袖のわたり尾ぶちの牧まのゝ萱らなどよそめにみて、遥なる堤を行。心細き長沼にそふて、戸伊摩と云所に一宿して、平泉に到る。其間廿余里ほどゝおぼゆ。

On the twelfth, we set out for Hiraisumi, choosing a little-travelled track used only by hunters, grass-cutters and woodchoppers. We had intended to go by way of the famous Pine of Anewa and the Bridge of Odae, but blundering along, we lost our way and ended up at the port town of Ishinomaki. Far off across the water, we could see Kinkazan, the mountain where a poem had evoked 'the flowers of gold in bloom'.

Hundreds of merchant ships clustered in the bay, houses jostled against each other, and smoke rose up everywhere from cooking fires. Astonished to have stumbled on such a place, we looked for lodgings, but no-one had a room to spare, so we spent the night in a wretched little hut.

Early next morning, we again set out on an uncertain journey on unfamiliar roads. As we followed an embankment that stretched on and on interminably, we could see in the distance Sode-no-watari [Sleeve Crossing], Obuchi-no-maki [Horse Pastures], and Mano-no-kayahara [Vine Fields of Mano], all celebrated in verse. We skirted round a long, depressing marsh to a place called Toima, where we spent the night. Then we went on to Hiraizumi. We must have covered over fifty miles.
The glory of three generations of the Fujiwara passed as if in a dream. Their Great Gate lies in ruins, two miles this side of the castle. The land where Hidehira's mansion stood has now returned to paddy fields. Only Mount Kinkeizan [Gold Cockrel Mountain] looks the same as in the past. We climbed up Takadachi [Palace on the Heights] first. From there, we could see the Kitakami, a mighty river that flows down from Nanbu, and also the Koromo, a river that circles round Izumi Castle before it empties into the big river below Takadachi. Yasuhira's castle stands beyond the Koromo Barrier, seemingly to protect the Nanbu gateway from invasion by the Ainu. There at Takadachi, Yoshitsune and a chosen band of loyal men tried to entrench themselves – but their heroic actions turned in the twinkling of an eye to nothing more than clumps of grass:

The country is destroyed; yet mountains and rivers remain. Spring comes to the castle; the grass is green again.

With my hat as a seat, and these lines running through my head, I stayed there weeping till time seemed no more.

mounds of summer grass –
the place where noble soldiers
one time dreamed a dream
in deutzia flowers
Kanefusa seems to me –
oh, such white, white hair
(Sora)

The two halls we had heard so much about were both open. In the Sutra Hall stood the statues of the three generals of Hiraisumi; in the Golden Hall, their coffins and three sacred images. The Golden Hall’s seven precious things * had been scattered and lost, the gem-studded doors ravaged by the winds, the gold-fretted pillars rotted by the frosts and snow. The temple would certainly have collapsed and turned to nothing more than grass, had not new walls been built around, and a tiled roof put on against the wind and rain. A memorial of a thousand years has, for a little time, been preserved.

so the rains of spring
fall and fall, yet leave untouched
this bright Hall of Gold

*The Golden Hall's seven precious things* so designated in Buddhism, according to Hiroaki Sato. The allusions are to gold, silver, emerald, glass, giant clam, coral, and agate.
南部道遠にみやりて、岩手の里に泊る。小黒崎みづの小嶋を過て、なるこの湯より、尿前の関にかゝりて、出羽の国に越んとす。此路旅人稀なる所なれば、関守にあやしめられて、漸として関をこす。大山をのぼつて日既暮ければ、封人の家を見知って舎を求む。三日風雨あれて、よしなき山中に逗留す。蚤虱馬の尿する枕もとあるじの云、是より出羽の国に大山を隔て、道しるべの人を頼て越べきよしを申。さらばと云て人を頼侍れば、究境の若者反脇指をよとたえ、樫の杖を携て、我先に立て行。けふこそ必あやうきめにもあふべき日なれと、辛き思ひをなして後について行。あるじの云にたがはず、高山森として一鳥声きかず、木の下闇茂りあひて夜る行がごとし。雲端につちふる心地して、篠の中踏分／、水をわたり岩に蹶て、肌につめたき汗を流して、最上の庄に出づ。かの案内せしおのこの云やう此みち必不用の事有。恙なうをくりまいらせ、仕合したりとよろこびてわかれぬ。跡に聞てさへ胸とどろくのみ也。

The road to Nanbu stretched far away towards the north, so we turned back and spent the night at the village of Iwade. From there, we passed by Ogurazaki and Mizu-no-ojima, and from the hot springs at Narugo, headed for the Barrier at Shitomae, intending to cross into Dewa Province.

The road was so little used by travellers that the guards at the checkpoint examined us suspiciously, and we barely managed to get through. As we toiled upwards on the mountain, the darkness began to fall, so when we saw a house belonging to a border guard, we asked for shelter. For three whole days, the wildest storm raged on, and trapped us there, among the dreary mountains:

Fleas and lice all round – and now a horse that piddles right by my pillow

Our host told us that the road into Dewa was an ill-marked trail through high mountains; we would be wise to hire a guide to show us the way. We agreed, and hired a strapping young man, who strode ahead with a scimitar at his side and an oak staff in his hand. As we followed him, we worried that this would be the day we were sure to run into danger. Just as our host had said, the mountains were high and densely wooded.

Not a single bird-cry could be heard. It was dark beneath the canopy of trees, so dark it was like walking in the night. Feeling as if 'dust was raining from the edges of the clouds'*，we groped our way through thickets of bamboo, waded across streams, stumbled over rocks, all the while in a cold sweat of fear, until at last we reached the town of Mogami. In high spirits, our guide then told us that unpleasant things were always happening on the trail we'd followed. He'd been lucky to bring us through in safety. Even though the danger was now past, his words made our hearts still pound.

*’dust was raining from the edges of the clouds' a phrase from a poem by Tu Fu (712-770).
尾花沢にて清風と云者を尋ぬ。かれは富のものなれども、志いやしからず。都にも折々かよひてさがれに旅の情をも知たれば、日比とぞめて、長途のいたはり、さま％もてなし侍る。

At Obanazawa, we called on Seifū, a man whose wealth did not eclipse his fine taste. As a frequent visitor to the capital, he knew what it felt like to be a traveller; and he made us stay for several days, showering us with all kinds of hospitality, to make us forget the hardships of our long journey.

the lovely coolness
of this lodging – I sit here
wholly at my ease
come on, crawl out now!
beneath the silkworm nursery
croaking of a toad
so they bring to mind
a lady's small eyebrow brush –
these saffron blossoms
the silkworm nurses –
figures that bring back to mind
a time long ago
(Sora )
山形領に立石寺と云山寺あり。慈覚大師の開基にて、殊清閑の地也。一見すべきよし、人々のすゝむるに依て、尾花沢よりとつて返し、其間七里ばかり也。  Indieの宿かり置て、山上の堂にのぼる。 岩に巖を重て山とし、松柏年旧土石老て苔滑に、岩上の院々扉を閉て物の音きこえず。 岸をめぐり、岩を這て仏閣を拝し、佳景寂寞として心すみ行のみおぼゆ。 聞さや岩にしみ入蝉の声

In the province of Yamagata, there is a mountain temple called Ryūshaku-ji. Founded by the Great Teacher Jikaku, it is a wonderfully serene and tranquil place. We had been urged to go there, and so had retraced our steps from Obanazawa, a distance of some seventeen miles.

It was still daylight when we arrived. We reserved a lodging in the pilgrims' hostel at the foot of the mountain, and then climbed up to the temple on the summit. The mountain was made up of boulder upon boulder, with ancient pines and cypresses upon its slopes. Moss lay like velvet upon the soil and stones. At the summit, the temple doors were closed, and not one single sound was to be heard. But we skirted round the cliffs and scrambled over the rocks, and reached the temple precincts. The quiet and lonely beauty of the place seemed to purify our hearts:

the utter silence …
cutting through the very stone
a cicada's rasp
<最上川>

最上川のらんと、大石田と云所に日和を待。愛に古き誹諧の種こぼれて、忘れぬ花のむかしをしたひ、芦角一声の心をやはらげ、此道にさぐりあしやて、新古ふた道にふみまよふといへども、みちしるべする人しなければとわりなき一巻残しぬ。このたびの風流愛に至れり。

最上川はみちのくより出て、山形を水上とす。こてんはやぶさなど云おそろしき難所有。板敷山の北を流て、果は酒田の海に入。左右山覆ひ、茂みの中に船を下す。是に稲つみたるをやいな船といふならし。白糸の瀧は青葉の隙に落て仙人堂岸に臨て立。水みなぎつて舟あやうし。

We hoped to sail down the Mogami River, and waited for the weather to clear at a place called Ōishida. I was told that the seeds of the old haikai poetry had been scattered here, and that people still cherished the memory of those unforgotten flowers from the past. The rustic notes of simple reeds and horns could still bring music to their hearts. They had tried, they said, to grope their way towards the right path. But without a guide, they had found it difficult to choose between the old styles and the new. I could scarcely leave without composing with them a sequence of poems. The poetry-making of my journey had reached even here. The Mogami River has its source deep in the northern mountains, and its upper reaches run through Yamagata. The Goten [Go-stones] and Hayabusa [Falcon] rapids are just two of the terrifying dangers on its course. It skirts Mount Itajiki on the north and finally enters the sea at Sakata. Our boat cascaded down through thick foliage, with mountains overhanging us on either side. It was probably the same kind of boat that the old poem described as 'rice boats', though those were laden with grain. Through breaks in the green leaves, we could see the Shiraito [White Thread] Falls. The Sennindō [Mountain Wizard] Hall stands there too, right at the water's edge. The river was wollen, and our journey dangerous:

gathering the rains
of summer, how swift it is –

Mogami River.
On the third day of the sixth month [19 July], we climbed Mount Haguro. There we visited a man called Zushi Sakichi, who obtained for us an audience with the chief priest, Egaku. He put us up in the Minamidani [Southern Valley] temple, and treated us with the greatest kindness. On the fourth day, there was a haikai gathering at the high priest's residence:

oh what sweet delight …
the cool fragrances of snow
in southern valley

On the fifth day, we went to worship at Haguro shrine. It was founded by the Great Teacher Nōjo, though nobody now knows at what period he lived. The Engi Book of Ceremonies mentions a shrine called 'Satoyama in Dewa Province'. But it is possible that sato is a copyist's error for kuro. Perhaps, too, Haguroyama is an abbreviation of Ushū Kuroyama. According to the local guide-book, the name Dewa [present feathers] derives from the custom in this province of offering birds' feathers as a tribute.

Haguro, together with Gassan and Yudono mountains, make up the Three Mountains of Dewa. The temple here is affiliated with Tōeizan Kan'eiji Temple in Edo. Lit by the bright moon of Tendai concentration and insight, it holds up the lamp of perfection and enlightenment. The monks' quarters stand row upon row; and the ascetics practise their discipline with zeal. You cannot but feel both reverence and awe before the miraculous power of this holy place. It will flourish forever, this magnificent mountain.

On the eighth day, we climbed Gassan [Moon Mountain]. Wearing paper necklaces, with white turbans round our heads, we toiled upwards for twenty miles, led by a sturdy mountain guide, through clouds and mists, over ice and snow. We wondered if we would not soon share the paths followed by the sun and moon. Breathless and numb with cold, we finally reached the summit, just as the sun was setting and the moon rising. Spreading out a bed of bamboo-grass, with bamboo leaves as pillows, we lay down and waited for the dawn. As the sun rose and burned away the clouds, we started down towards Yudono.

Close to the valley, we passed what had been a smithy. The sword-smiths of the province had used the holy waters here to purify themselves and forge their celebrated swords, which finally they would engrave with the name 'Gassan' [Moon Mountain]. I remembered that swords used to be tempered, too, at the Dragon Springs in China. Inspired by the
終月山と銘を切て世に賞せらる。 彼龍泉に剣を淬とかや。 千将莫耶のむかしをしたふ。 道に堪能の執あさからぬ事しられたり。 岩に腰かけてしばしやすらふほど、三尺ばかりなる桜のつぼみ半ばひらけるあり。 ふり積雪の下に埋て、春を忘れぬ遲ざる花の心わりなし。 炎天の梅花愛にかほるがごとし。 行尊僧正の哥の哀も愛に思い出て、猶まざりて覚ゆ。 惟而此山中の微細、行者の法式として他言する事を禁ず。 仍て筆をとざして記さず。 阪に帰れば、阿闍利の需に依て、三山順礼の句々短冊に書。 涼しさやほの三か月の羽黒山雲の峯幾つ崩て月の山語られぬ湯殿にぬらす袂かな。 湯殿山銭ふむ道の泪かな。 古典的な例の薫香川の野**とthose sword-smiths had shown, I came to realise, how completely dedicated they had been to perfecting their craft. As I sat on a rock resting a while, I noticed a cherry tree, barely three feet high, with buds half-open. It was moving that, for all the snow it had been buried under, this late cherry blossom had not forgotten spring. It was like 'plum blossoms in the scorching sun'*, perfuming the air. The memory of Archbishop Gyōson's touching poem moved me even more.

It is a rule among ascetics not to reveal details about Mount Yudono to other people, so now I must lay down my brush and say no more. When we returned to our lodgings, Egaku asked me to write out on poem cards the verses inspired by our pilgrimage to the Three Mountains:

such lovely coolness...
palely now the crescent moon
on Mount Haguro
how many cloud peaks
have come tumbling down upon
the moon's own mountain
I cannot speak of Mount Yudono –
yet see how wet my sleeve is now

And Sora wrote:

Yudono Mountain –
as I walk through pilgrims' coins
tears come to my eyes

*ancient example of Kan-chiang and Mo-yeh*; a husband and wife team, who were the most famous swordsmiths in ancient China.

**'plum blossoms in the scorching sun' an allusion to two lines which compare the poetry of Ch'en Yü-I (1090-1138) to the blossoms of plum trees under a scorching sun.
酒田

羽黒を立て、鶴が岡の城下、長山氏重行と云物のふの家にむかへられて、誹諧一巻有。左吉も共に送りぬ。川舟に乗て酒田の湊に下る。渓庵不玉と云医師の許を宿とす。あつみ山や吹浦かけて夕すゞみ暑き日を海にいれたり最上川

After leaving Haguro, we went to the castle town of Tsurugaoka, where we were the guests of a samurai called Nagayama Shigeyuki. We composed a poetry sequence at his house. Sakichi came with us all the way. We boarded a river boat and went downstream to the port of Sakata. There, we stayed at the house of a physician named En'an Fugyoku:

from Hot Springs Mountain
all the way to Windy Bay –
the cool of evening
the blistering sun
is gathered in the sea by
Mogami River
We had already enjoyed so many splendid sights of rivers and mountains, sea and land; but now I could think of nothing but seeing Kisakata. We travelled northeast from the port of Sakata, climbing over hills, following the coastline, trudging through the sand – a journey of some twenty-five miles. Towards sunset, a wind from the sea began to whip up the sand, and a misty rain started to fall, blotting Mount Chōkai from view.

Groping our way in the darkness, I was sure that, if the view was quite outstanding in the rain, it would prove even more beautiful when the weather had cleared. We squeezed into a fisherman's thatched hut, and waited for the rain to stop.

The next day dawned clear, and as the bright morning sun rose, we took a boat out on the lagoon of Kisakata. We went first to Nōinjima, to visit the spot where Nōin had lived for three years in seclusion. On the opposite shore, where we next landed the boat, we saw the old cherry tree that stood as a memorial to Saigyō, who had written of fishing boats 'rowing above the cherry blossoms'. Near the water's edge was a tomb that was said to be Empress Jingū's, with a temple nearby called Kanmanju-ji [Ebb-and-Flow-Pearls Temple]. I had never heard before that she had come this way, and wondered if the story were true.

As we sat in a room at the front of the temple and rolled up the screens, the entire landscape unfolded before us. To the south, Mount Chōkai propped up the sky, its image reflected in the water. To the west, the Muyamuya Barrier blocked the road. To the east, the road to Akita stretched out on an embankment far into the distance. To the north was the sea, whose waves broke into the lagoon at a place called Shiogoshi [Tide-Crossing].

Kisakata, which is little more than two miles long and wide, reminded me of Matsushima; but there was a difference. Whereas Matsushima seemed to smile, Kisakata had a gloomy, bitter air. The lonely, melancholy scene evoked a troubled human soul:

Kisakata rain –
Seishi lying all asleep with
wet mimosa flowers
crossing of the tides …
a crane, its long legs splashing –
ah how cool the sea
祭礼
象潟や料理何くふ神祭 曾良 蟻の家や戸板を敷て夕涼 みのゝ国の商人低耳
岩上に雎鳩の巣をみる 波こえぬ契ありてやみさごの巢 曾良

Festival
in Kisakata –
what special food is eaten
at the festival?
(Sora)

a fisherman's hut –
boards upon the sand, they taste
the cool of evening
(Teiji, a Mino merchant)

Seeing an osprey nest upon a rock:
did they make a vow
that waves should never hit there –
those nesting ospreys?
(Sora)
越後路

酒田の余波日を重て、北陸道の雲に望、遥々のおもひ胸をいたましめて加賀の府まで百卅里と聞。鼠の関をこゆれば、越後の地に歩行を改て、越中の国一ぶりの関に到る。此間九日、暑湿の労に神をなやまし、病おこりて事をしるさず。文月や六日も常の夜には似ず荒海や佐渡によこたふ天河

I was so loath to leave Sakata that we lingered there for several days. But then we set out towards the distant clouds on the Hokuriku [Northern Land] Road. The prospect of yet another long journey ahead filled me with dread. It was said to be well over three hundred miles to Kanazawa, the capital of Kaga Province. Once past the Barrier of Nezu, we continued our journey through Echigo Province as far as the Barrier of Ichiburi in Echū. The heat and the rain during these nine days of travel wore me out completely, and I felt too ill to write anything:

so in the seventh month
the sixth day does not bring in
a usual night*

bellow-crested seas!
flowing towards Sado Isle
heaven's Milky Way

*the sixth day does not bring in / a usual night The seventh night of the seventh month was Tanabata, a festival that celebrated the meeting of two stars in the sky once a year. The anticipation of both festival and meeting, Bashō implies, means that the night before is also a special time.
Today we passed along the most dangerous stretches of road in the whole of the north country – places with names like 'Children Forget Parents', 'Parents Forget Children', 'Dogs Turn Back', 'Horse Sent Back'. I was so exhausted that, by nightfall, I pulled my pillow close to me and tried to sleep. But from one room beyond us at the front of the house, I could hear young women's voices – two of them, it seemed – talking to an old man whose voice mingled with theirs. As I listened, I gathered that they were prostitutes from Niigata in Echigo Province. They were on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Ise, and the old man had escorted them as far as this barrier. They would be sending him back to Niigata next morning, and were giving him letters and trivial messages to take back with him. Adrift 'on the shore where white waves roll in', these fishermen's daughters' had fallen low in the world, exchanging fleeting vows, committing daily sins. What awful karma had doomed them to such wretchedness? And then I fell asleep, their whispers in my ears. Next morning, as we were preparing to leave, the two women came up to us. 'We're really very anxious at starting on this hard journey on unknown roads. Will you let us follow you? We'll stay well out of sight. You're dressed like priests. Please show us the Buddha's compassion, and lead us to believe.' They were in tears. 'I'm sorry for you', I responded, 'but we'll be stopping a great many times. Just stay with others going your way. The gods will protect you and see you there safely.' We started off straightway, but it was some time before I could stop feeling sympathy for them.

beneath this same roof
prostitutes were sleeping too –
clover and the moon

I spoke these lines to Sora, who wrote them down.
黒部
くろべ四十八が瀬とかや、数しらぬ川をわたりて、那古と云浦に出。擔篋の藤浪は春ならずとも、初秋の哀とふべきものをと人に尋れば、是より五里いそ伝ひして、むかふの山陰にいり、蜑の苫ぶきかすかなれば、蘆の一夜の宿かすものあるまじといひをどされて、かゝの国に入。
わせの香や分入右は有磯海

People speak of the 'forty-eight channels' of the Kurobe River, and indeed we had to cross countless streams before we reached the bay at Nago. Although it was not spring, we were urged not to miss the wisteria at Tako in early autumn. We asked a man the way and were told, 'You'll have to follow the shore for about ten miles, and then you'll find Tako in the hollow of those mountains. There're just a few miserable thatch-covered huts there. They belong to fishermen. You won't find anyone to put you up for the night.' Frightened away by his comments, we went on into Kaga Province:

scent of early rice –
to the right, as we push through,
the Ariso Sea
After crossing Mount Unohana and Kurikara Valley, we reached Kanazawa on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. We shared lodgings with a merchant named Kasho, who had come up from Osaka. A man by the name of Isshō, who had begun to gain some reputation for his devotion to poetry, had been living in Kanazawa; but he had died young the previous winter. His brother arranged a haikai gathering in his memory:

the gravemound should move!
my crying voice is echoed
in the autumn wind

On being invited to a thatched hut:

the cool of autumn –
our hands are busy peeling
melon and eggplant

Composed on the road:

the red, blazing red,
of the pitiless sun – yet
autumn in the wind
<大田神社>
小松と云所にて しほらしき名や小松吹萩すゝき
此所太田の神社に詣。真盛が甲錦の切あり。往昔源氏に属せし時、義朝公より給はらせ
給とかや。げにも平士のものにあらず。目
より吹返しまで、菊から草のほりもの金をちりばめ龍頭に鍬形
打たり。真盛討死の後、木曾義仲願状にそへて此社にこめられ侍よし、樋口の次郎が使
せし事共、まのあたり縁記にみえたり。むざんやな甲の下のきり

At a place called Komatsu [Young Pines]:

what a lovely name!
the wind blows through young pines, bush
clover, pampas grass

In Komatsu, we went to worship at the Tada Shrine, where we saw Sanemori's helmet and a
piece of his brocade tunic. We were told that long ago, while he was serving the Monomoto clan,
the helmet had been a gift from Lord Yoshitomo. Indeed, it was no ordinary warrior's headgear.
From visor to earflaps, it was engraved with a chrysanthemum arabesque design inlaid with gold,
and the front was crowned with a dragon's head and a pair of horns. The shrine chronicles
vividly tell how Kiso no Yoshinaka, after killing Sanemori in battle, offered the helmet with a
petition to the shrine, and how Higuchi no Jirō acted as messenger.

the pity of it …
trapped underneath a helmet
a cricket chirping
山中の温泉に行ほど、白根が嶽跡にみなしてあゆむ。左の山際に観音堂あり。花山の法皇三十三所の順礼とげさせ給ひて後、大悲
悲の像を安置し給ひて那谷と名付給ふとや。那智谷組の二字を
わかり侍しとぞ。奇石さま%に古松植ならべて、萱ぶきの小堂
岩の上に造りかけて、殊勝の土地也。 石山の石より白し秋の風

As we walked towards the hot springs at Yamanaka, we could still see the peak of Shirane over our shoulders. A temple dedicated to Kannon stood to our left, at the foot of a mountain. We were told the temple had been founded by the retired Emperor Kazan. After he had completed a pilgrimage to the Thirty-Three Spiritual Places, he installed a statue here of the All-Compassionate, All-Merciful Kannon, and gave the place the name 'Nata', combining the 'na' of Nachi with the 'ta' of Tanigumi. There were many strangely shaped rocks, rows of ancient pines, and a small thatched temple atop a massive boulder. It was a place of marvelous beauty.

whiter far than all
the stones of Ishiyama –
the autumnal wind
<山中>
温泉に浴す。其功有明に次と云。 山中や菊はたおらぬ湯の匂
あるじとする物は久米之助ていまだ小童也。かれが父誹諧を好
み、洛の貞室若輩のむかし愛に来りし比、風雅に辱しめられて、
洛に帰て貞徳の門人となって世にしらる。功名の後、此一村判詞
の料を請ずと云。今更むかし語とはなりぬ。
曾良は腹を病て、伊勢の国長嶋と云所にゆかりあれば、先立て行
行てたふれ伏とも萩の原 曾良
と書置たり。行ものゝ悲しみ残ものゝうらみ隻鳧のわかれて雲に
まよふがごとし。予も又 今日よりや書付消さん笠の露

We bathed in the hot springs, which were said to be second only to
Ariake in effectiveness
at Yamanaka,
no need for chrysanthemums –
the scent of hot springs

The innkeeper, who was still a youth, was called Kumenosuke. His father had been very fond of
poetry, and had put the poet Teishitsu to shame by his superior knowledge, when the master had
come here from Kyōto as a young man. Teishitsu went back to the city, studied under Teitoku,
and later gained recognition. But even after he became famous, it is said, he would never accept
any payment for correcting verses written by anyone from this village. This is an old, old story.
Sora had developed a stomach complaint, and he went ahead to Nagashima in Ise Province,
where he had relatives. He left me this verse:

onwards I must go –
if I should fall, let it be
amidst bush clover

The sorrow of the one who went ahead, and the sadness of the one who remained behind, seemed
like two lapwings parting from each other and losing their way in the clouds. I too wrote a verse:
from this day the words inside my hat will vanish with the dew of tears*

* the words / inside my hat Travelling companions, such as Bashō and Sora, often wrote standard inscriptions, such
as 'two travellers alone in all the world', inside their hats. Bashō’s sorrow at Sora’s departure will erase those
words.
Still in Kaga Province, I stayed at Zenshōji, a temple outside the castle town of Daishōji. Sora had stayed there the night before, and had left this poem for me:

throughout the long night
listening to the autumn wind
in the hills behind

We had been only one night apart, yet it seemed like a thousand miles. That night, I too lay sleepless in the guest room, listening to the autumn wind. Towards dawn, I could clearly hear the sound of voices chanting a sutra. A gong was struck, and I went into the refectory. Eager to get to Echizen Province that day, I left the hall as soon as possible, but some young monks ran after me to the foot of the stairs, paper and inkstone in their hands. The willow in the garden had scattered some of its leaves, and so I wrote:

let's sweep the garden
then set out – in the temple
the willow leaves fall

Straw sandals on, I dashed off this impromptu verse.
越前の境、吉崎の入江を舟に棹して汐越の松を尋ぬ。終宵嵐に波をはこばせて月をたれらる汐越の松。西行
一首にて数景尽たり。もし一辧を加るものは、無用の指を立る
がごとし。丸岡天竜寺の長老古き因あれば尋ぬ。又金沢の北枝といふもの、
かりそめに見送りて、此處までしたひ来る。所々の風景過さず思ひつつけで、折節あはれなる作意など聞ゆ。今既別に望みて、
物書て扇引さく余波哉

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十丁山に入て永平寺を礼す。道元禅師の御寺也。邦機千里を避けて、かゝる山陰に跡をのこし給ふも貴きゆへ有とかや。

I crossed Lake Yoshizaki by boat, the border of Echizen province, and went to visit the Shiogoshi [Tide-Crossing] Pines.

throughout the long night
the waves are lashed by a storm
that drives them to shore –
and moonlight drips from their boughs,
the pines of Shiogoshi

In this single poem, Saigyō crystallises the essence of the scene at Shiozaki. To add even a single word would be like adding an extra useless finger to a hand.

At Maruoka, I called upon an old friend, the abbot of the Tenryū Temple. A man called Hokushi, from Kanazawa, had intended to accompany me for a short distance, but he had finally come all the way to Maruoka, unable to say goodbye. No sight on the journey had escaped his notice, and he wrote some moving poems. Now that we were parting, I wrote:

I've scribbled words, but
how to tear the fan apart –
goodbyes are so hard*

I went three or four miles into the mountains to worship at Eiheiji, the temple of the Zen Master Dōgen. I understand that he had some profound reason for avoiding the vicinity of the capital and for building his temple in such remote mountains as these.

*how to tear the fan apart now that summer had ended, a fan was no longer needed. In spite of this, Bashō seems to have impulsively scribbled some words on a fan, which made it all the more difficult to throw it away.
福井は三里計なれば、夕飯したゝめて出るに、たそがれの路たどりし。爰に等栽と云古き隠士有。いづれの年にか江戸に来りて予を尋。遥十とせ余り也。いかに老さらぼて有にや、将死けるにやと人に尋侍れば、いまだ存命してそこゝと教ゆ。市中ひそかに引立て、あやしの小家に夕顔へちまのはえかゝりて、鶏頭は木ゝに戸ぼそをかくす。さては此うちにこそと門を扣ば、侘しげなる女の出て、いづくよりわたり給ふ道心の御坊にや。あるじは此あたり何かしと云ものゝ方に行ぬ。もし用あらば尋給へといふ。かれが妻なるべしとしらる。むかし物がたりにこそかゝる風情は侍れと、やがて尋あひて、その家に二夜とまりて、名月はつるがのみなとにとたび立。等栽も共に送らんと裾おかしうからげて、路の枝折とうかれ立。

Although Fukui was only six or seven miles away, I did not set out until after supper, and it was an uncertain journey along the twilit road. Fukui was where Tōsai had long been living as a recluse. He had come to Edo and visited me once – I was not sure exactly when, but it must have been more than ten years previously. I assumed he must be very old and feeble now, perhaps even dead. But when I asked about him, I was told that he was still alive in such-and-such a place. I found his wretched, tiny house in an out-of-the-way corner of the town. Moonflowers and bottle-gourds covered the walls, and the door was hidden beneath cockscomb and broom grass. This must be it, I thought, and rapped on the gate. A woman of humble appearance came out and asked: 'Where have you come from, your reverence? The master's gone to visit someone in the neighborhood. If you’ve got business with him, please search him out there.' I assumed she was his wife. It was just like a scene from that old novel,* I thought, as I went in search of him. I found him without trouble, and spent two nights in his house, after which I got ready to set out again, hoping to see the full moon over Tsuruga Harbour. Tōsai offered to keep me company and, with his kimono skirts tucked jauntily into his sash, set out in high spirits as my guide.

*that old novel seemingly an allusion to a sentence in Murasaki Shikibu’s eleventh-century The Tale of Genji, in which Genji muses, "'I’ve heard something like this only in an old story', Genji thought, mystified."
<敦賀>

漸白根が嶽かくれて、比那が嵩あらはる。あさむづの橋をわたりて、玉江の蘆は穂に出
にけり。鴬の関を過て湯尾峠を越れば、燧城、かへるやまに初鴈を聞て、十四日の夕ぐ
れつるがの津に宿 をもとむ。その夜、月殊晴たり。あすの夜もかくあるべきにやと
いへば、越路の習ひ、猶明夜の陰晴はかりがたしと、あるじに酒すゝめられて、けいの
明神に夜参す。仲哀天皇の御廟也。社頭神さびて、松の木の間に月のもり入たる。おま
への白砂霜を敷るが ごとし。往昔遊行二世の上人、大願発起の事ありて、みづから草
を刈、土石を荷ひ泥渟をかはかせて、参詣往来の煩なし。古例今にたえず。神前に真砂
を荷ひ絵ふ。これを遊行の砂持と申侍ると、亭主かたりける。

Shinane Mountain gradually disappeared from sight as Mount Hina came into view. We crossed
the bridge at Azamuzu, and saw the reeds at Taema in bloom. Beyond the Barrier at Uguisu
[Song Birds] and over Yunō Pass, we came to Hiuchi Castle. At Mount Kaeru, I heard the cries
of the first wild geese of autumn. Towards twilight on the fourteenth day, I found lodgings at the
port of Tsuruga. That night, the moon was particularly clear and bright. 'Will it be fine tomorrow
night for the full moon?' I asked the innkeeper. 'In these northern lands,' he replied, offering me
some wine, 'who knows from one night to the next whether it'll be cloudy or fine?'

That night, we went to the Shrine at Kehi, the place where the Emperor Chūai is worshipped. A
sense of holiness pervaded everything. In the moonlight that filtered in between the pine trees,
the white sand in front of the sanctuary glistened as if covered with frost. The innkeeper told me,
'Once, long ago, the second Pilgrim-Priest made a great vow. He himself cut grass and carried
earth and rock to dry up the surrounding marsh, so that it would be easier for worshippers to
come and go.' The practice is still observed. Every priest still carries sand to sprinkle before the
shrine – a custom called the 'sand-carrying of the Pilgrim-Priest'.

pure light of the moon
glistening on the grains of sand
brought by the pilgrims

On the fifteenth, just as the innkeeper had said it might, it rained.

night of the full moon!
the weather in the north land
so often changes
十六日、空霧たればますほの小貝ひろはんと種の濱に舟を走す。海上七里あり。天屋何某と云もの、破箋小竹筒などこまやかにしめさせ、僕あまた舟にとりのせて、追風時のみに吹着ぬ。濱はわざかな海士の小家にて侘しき法花寺あり。愛に茶を飲み酒をあためて、夕ぐれのわびしさ感に堪たり。寂しさや須磨にかちたる濱の秋波の間や小貝にまじる萩の塵其日のあらまし、等栽に筆をとらせて寺に残す。

On the sixteenth, the skies cleared, and so we went by boat to Iro-no-hama Beach to gather some little clam shells. It was about seventeen miles across the water. A man called Ten'ya had prepared all kinds of refreshments for us – lunch baskets and bamboo flasks of sake – and had ordered several of his servants to go with us in the boat. In no time at all, a tail wind blew us to the shore. On the beach, there were only a few fishermen's shacks and a forlorn Nichiren temple where we drank tea and warmed up sake. As evening began to fall, the sense of isolation was unbearable.

oh what loneliness …
more desolate than Suma
this beach in autumn
between each wave-break …
mixed with small shells, the debris
of bush-clover flowers

I asked Tōsai to write a description of what had happened that day, and left it at the temple.
路通も此みなとまで出むかひて、みのゝ国へと伴ふ。駒にたすけられて、大垣の庄に入ば、曾良も伊勢より来り合、越人も馬をとせて、如行が家に入集る。前川子荊口父子、
其外したしき人々日夜とぶらひて、蘇生のものにあふがごとく、且悦び且いたはる。

旅の物うさもいまだやまざるに、長月六日になれば、伊勢の遷
おがまんと、又舟のりて 蛤のふたみにわかれ行秋ぞ

Rotsū came to Tsuraga to welcome me back, and we travelled together to Mino Province. Our
journey was made easier by having horses to ride. When we arrived at Ōgaki, Sora joined us
from Ise. Etsujin had also galloped in on horseback, and we all gathered together at Jokō's house.
All day and night, my closest friends – Zensenji, Keikō, Keikō’s sons, and others – came to visit.
They seemed as happy and concerned as if I had just returned from the dead.

Despite my travel weariness, I set out on the sixth day of the ninth month [18 October] to witness
the rebuilding of the Great Shrine at Ise. As I stepped again into a boat, I wrote:

so, to Futami,
lake a clam ripped from its shell …
autumn’s deepening now
The Narrow Road to the Deep North

*Oku no Hosomichi* (奥の細道, originally おくのほそ道, meaning "Narrow road to/of the interior"), translated alternately as *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* and *The Narrow Road to the Interior*, is a major work by the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō considered "one of the major texts of classical Japanese literature."

The text is written in the form of a travel diary and was penned as Bashō made an epic and dangerous journey on foot through the Edo Japan of the late 17th century. While the poetic work became seminal of its own account, the poet's travels in the text have since inspired many people to follow in his footsteps and trace his journey for themselves. In one of its most memorable passages, Bashō suggests that "every day is a journey, and the journey itself home."

Of *Oku no Hosomichi*, Kenji Miyazawa once suggested, "It was as if the very soul of Japan had itself written it".

**Plot**

*Oku no Hosomichi* was written based on a journey taken by Bashō in the late spring of 1689. He and his traveling companion Kawai Sora (河合曾良) departed from Edo (modern-day Tokyo) for the northern interior region known as Oku, propelled mostly by a desire to see the places about which the old poets wrote[^6] in an effort to "renew his own art". Specifically, he was emulating Saigyō, whom Bashō praised as the greatest waka poet; Bashō made a point of visiting all the sites mentioned in Saigyō's verse. Travel in those days was very dangerous, but Bashō was committed to a kind of poetic ideal of wandering. He traveled for about 156 days altogether, covering thousands of miles mostly on foot. Of all of Bashō's works, this is the best known.

This poetic diary is in the form known as haibun, a combination of prose and haiku. It contains many references to Confucius, Saigyō, ancient Chinese poetry, and even *The Tale of the Heike*. It manages to strike a delicate balance between all the elements to produce a powerful account. It is primarily a travel account, and Bashō vividly relates the unique poetic essence of each stop in his travels. Stops on his journey include the Tokugawa shrine at Nikkō, the Shirakawa barrier, the islands of Matsushima, Hiraizumi, Sakata, Kisakata, and Etchū. He and Sora parted at Yamanaka, but at Ōgaki he briefly met up with a few of his other disciples before departing again to the Ise Shrine and closing the account.

After his journey, he spent five years working and reworking the poems and prose of *Oku no Hosomichi* before publishing it. Based on differences between draft versions of the account,
Sora's diary, and the final version, it is clear that Bashō took a number of artistic liberties in the writing. An example of this is that in the Senjūshu ("Selection of Tales") attributed to Saigyō, the narrator is passing through Eguchi when he is driven by a storm to seek shelter in the nearby cottage of a prostitute; this leads to an exchange of poems, after which he spends the night there. Bashō similarly includes in Oku no Hosomichi a tale of him having an exchange with prostitutes staying in the same inn, but Sora mentions nothing.

**Philosophy behind the text**

Nobuyuki Yuasa notes that Bashō studied Zen meditation under the guidance of the Priest Buccho, though it is uncertain whether Bashō ever attained enlightenment. The Japanese Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki has described Bashō's philosophy in writing poetry as one requiring that both "subject and object were entirely annihilated" in meditative experience. Yuasa likewise writes: "Bashō had been casting away his earthly attachments, one by one, in the years preceding the journey, and now he had nothing else to cast away but his own self which was in him as well as around him. He had to cast this self away, for otherwise he was not able to restore his true identity (what he calls the 'everlasting self which is poetry')." Thus, Yuasa notes "The Narrow Road to the Deep North is Bashō's study in eternity, and in so far as he has succeeded in this attempt, it is also a monument he has set up against the flow of time."

**Matsuo Bashō**

Matsuo Bashō (松尾 芭蕉?, 1644 – November 28, 1694), born Matsuo Kinsaku (松尾 金作?), then Matsuo Chūemon Munafusa (松尾 忠右衛門 宗房?), was the most famous poet of the Edo period in Japan. During his lifetime, Bashō was recognized for his works in the collaborative haikai no renga form; today, after centuries of commentary, he is recognized as a master of brief and clear haiku. His poetry is internationally renowned, and within Japan many of his poems are reproduced on monuments and traditional sites.

Bashō was introduced to poetry at a young age, and after integrating himself into the intellectual scene of Edo he quickly became well-known throughout Japan. He made a living as a teacher, but renounced the social, urban life of the literary circles and was inclined to wander throughout the country, heading west, east, and far into the northern wilderness to gain
inspiration for his writing. His poems were influenced by his firsthand experience of the world around him, often encapsulating the feeling of a scene in a few simple elements.

**Early life**

Basho was born in 1644, near Ueno, in Iga Province. His father may have been a low-ranking samurai, which would have promised Basho a career in the military, but not much chance of a notable life. It was traditionally claimed by biographers that he worked in the kitchens. However, as a child, Basho became a servant to Tōdō Yoshitada (藤堂 良忠?), who shared with Basho a love for *haikai no renga*, a form of collaborative poetry composition. The sequences were opened with a verse in 5-7-5 mora format; this verse was named a *hokku*, and would later be renamed *haiku* when presented as a stand-alone work. The *hokku* would be followed by a related 7-7 mora verse by another poet. Both Basho and Yoshitada gave themselves *haigō* (俳号?), or *haikai* pen names; Basho's was Sōbō (宗房?), which was simply the on'yomi reading of his adult name of *Matsuo Munefusa* (松尾 宗房?). In 1662 the first extant poem by Basho was published; in 1664 two of his *hokku* were printed in a compilation, and in 1665 Basho and Yoshitada composed a one-hundred-verse *renku* with some acquaintances.

Yoshitada's sudden death in 1666 brought Basho's peaceful life as a servant to an end. No records of this time remain, but it is believed that Basho gave up the possibility of samurai status and left home. Biographers have proposed various reasons and destinations, including the possibility of an affair between Basho and a Shinto *miko* named Jutei (寿貞?), which is unlikely to be true. Basho's own references to this time are vague; he recalled that "at one time I coveted an official post with a tenure of land", and that "there was a time when I was fascinated with the ways of homosexual love", but there is no indication whether he was referring to real obsessions or even fictional ones. He was uncertain whether to become a full-time poet; by his own account, "the alternatives battled in my mind and made my life restless". His indecision may have been influenced by the then still relatively low status of *renge* and *haikai no renga* as more social activities than serious artistic endeavors. In any case, his poems continued to be published in anthologies in 1667, 1669, and 1671, and he published his own compilation of work by him and other authors of the Teitoku school, *Seashell Game* (貝おほひ *Kai O?*), in 1672. In about the spring of that year he moved to Edo, to further his study of poetry.

**Rise to fame**

In the fashionable literary circles of Nihonbashi, Basho's poetry was quickly recognized for its simple and natural style. In 1674 he was inducted into the inner circle of the *haikai* profession, receiving secret teachings from Kitamura Kigin (1624–1705). He wrote this *hokku* in mock tribute to the Shogun:

```
kabitan mo / tsukubawasekeri / kimi ga haru
the Dutchmen, too, / kneel before His Lordship— / spring under His reign. [1678]
```
He gave himself the haigō of Tōsei and by 1680 he had a full-time job teaching twenty disciples, who published *The Best Poems of Tōsei’s Twenty Disciples* (桃青門弟独吟二十歌仙 Tōsei-montei Dokugin-Nijukasen?), advertising their connection to Tōsei’s talent. That winter, he took the surprising step of moving across the river to Fukagawa, out of the public eye and towards a more reclusive life. His disciples built him a rustic hut and planted a banana tree (芭蕉 bashō?) in the yard, giving Bashō a new haigō and his first permanent home. He appreciated the plant very much, and was not happy to see Fukagawa’s native miscanthus growing alongside it:

bashō uete / mazu nikumu ogi no / futaba kana
by my new banana plant / the first sign of something I loathe— / a miscanthus bud! [1680]

Despite his success, Bashō grew dissatisfied and lonely. He began to practise Zen meditation, but it seems not to have calmed his mind. In the winter of 1682 his hut burned down, and shortly afterwards, in early 1683, his mother died. He then traveled to Yamura, to stay with a friend. In the winter of 1683 his disciples gave him a second hut in Edo, but his spirits did not improve. In 1684 his disciple Takarai Kikaku published a compilation of him and other poets, *Shriveled Chestnuts* (虚栗 Minashiguri?). Later that year he left Edo on the first of four major wanderings.

Traveling in medieval Japan was immensely dangerous, and at first Bashō expected to simply die in the middle of nowhere or be killed by bandits. As the trip progressed, his mood improved and he became comfortable on the road. He met many friends and grew to enjoy the changing scenery and the seasons. His poems took on a less introspective and more striking tone as he observed the world around him:

uma wo sae / nagamuru yuki no / ashita kana
even a horse / arrests my eyes—on this / snowy morrow [1684]

The trip took him from Edo to Mount Fuji, Ueno, and Kyoto. He met several poets who called themselves his disciples and wanted his advice; he told them to disregard the contemporary Edo style and even his own *Shriveled Chestnuts*, saying it contained "many verses that are not worth discussing". He returned to Edo in the summer of 1685, taking time along the way to write more *hokku* and comment on his own life:

toshi kurenu / kasa kite waraji / hakinagara
another year is gone / a traveler's shade on my head, / straw sandals at my feet [1685]

When Bashō returned to Edo he happily resumed his job as a teacher of poetry at his bashō hut, although privately he was already making plans for another journey. The poems from his journey were published as *Account of Exposure to the Fields* (野ざらし紀行 Nozarashi kikō?). In early 1686 he composed one of his best-remembered haiku:

furu ike ya / kawazu tobikomu / mizu no oto
an ancient pond / a frog jumps in / the splash of water [1686]
Historians believe this poem became instantly famous: in April, the poets of Edo gathered at the bashō hut for a haikai no renga contest on the subject of frogs that seems to have been a tribute to Bashō’s hokku, which was placed at the top of the compilation. Bashō stayed in Edo, continuing to teach and hold contests, with an excursion in the autumn of 1687 when he traveled to the countryside for moon watching, and a longer trip in 1688 when he returned to Ueno to celebrate the Lunar New Year. At home in Edo, Bashō sometimes became reclusive: he alternated between rejecting visitors to his hut and appreciating their company. At the same time, he enjoyed his life and had a subtle sense of humor, as reflected in his hokku:

\[
\text{iza saraba / yukimi ni korobu / tokoromade} \\
\text{now then, let's go out / to enjoy the snow... until / I slip and fall! [1688]}
\]

**Oku no Hosomichi**

Bashō’s private planning for another long journey culminated on May 16, 1689 (Yayoi 27, Genroku 2), when he left Edo with his student and apprentice Kawai Sora (河合曾良) on a journey to the Northern Provinces of Honshū. Bashō and Sora headed north to Hiraizumi, which they reached on June 29. They then walked to the western side of the island, touring Kisakata on July 30, and began hiking back at a leisurely pace along the coastline. During this 150-day journey Bashō traveled a total of 600 ri (2,400 km) through the northeastern areas of Honshū, returning to Edo in late 1691.

By the time Bashō reached Ōgaki, Gifu Prefecture, he had completed the log of his journey. He edited and redacted it for three years, writing the final version in 1694 as *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (奥の細道 Oku no Hosomichi?). The first edition was published posthumously in 1702. It was an immediate commercial success and many other itinerant poets followed the path of his journey. It is often considered his finest achievement, featuring hokku such as:

\[
\text{araumi ya / Sado ni yokotau / amanogawa} \\
\text{the rough sea / stretching out towards Sado / the Milky Way [1689]}
\]

**Last years**

On his return to Edo in the winter of 1691, Bashō lived in his third bashō hut, again provided by his disciples. This time, he was not alone; he took in a nephew and his female friend, Jutei, who were both recovering from illness. He had a great many visitors.

Bashō continued to be uneasy. He wrote to a friend that “disturbed by others, I have no peace of mind”. He made a living from teaching and appearances at haikai parties until late August of 1693, when he shut the gate to his bashō hut and refused to see anybody for a month.
Finally, he relented after adopting the principle of *karumi* or "lightness", a semi-Buddhist philosophy of greeting the mundane world rather than separating himself from it. Bashō left Edo for the last time in the summer of 1694, spending time in Ueno and Kyoto before his arrival in Osaka. He became sick with a stomach illness and died peacefully, surrounded by his disciples. Although he did not compose any formal death poem on his deathbed the following, being the last poem recorded during his final illness, is generally accepted as his poem of farewell:

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tabi ni yande / yume wa kareno wo / kake meguru
falling sick on a journey / my dream goes wandering / over a field of dried grass [1694]
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**Influence and literary criticism**

Rather than sticking to the formulas of *kigo* (季語?), which remain popular in Japan even today, Bashō aspired to reflect his real environment and emotions in his *hokku*. Even during his lifetime, the effort and style of his poetry was widely appreciated; after his death, it only increased. Several of his students compiled quotations from him about his own poetry, most notably Mukai Kyorai and Hattori Dohō.

During the 18th century, appreciation of Bashō's poems grew more fervent, and commentators such as Ishiko Sekisui and Moro Nanimaru went to great length to find references in his *hokku* to historical events, medieval books, and other poems. These commentators were often lavish in their praise of Bashō's obscure references, some of which were probably literary false cognates. In 1793 Bashō was deified by the Shinto bureaucracy, and for a time criticizing his poetry was literally blasphemous.

It was not until the late 19th century that this period of unanimous passion for Bashō's poems came to an end. Masaoka Shiki, arguably Bashō's most famous critic, tore down the long-standing orthodoxy with his bold and candid objections to Bashō's style. However, Shiki was also instrumental in making Bashō's poetry accessible to leading intellectuals and the Japanese public at large. He invented the term *haiku* (replacing *hokku*) to refer to the freestanding 5-7-5 form which he considered the most artistic and desirable part of the *haikai no renga*.

Critical interpretation of Bashō's poems continued into the 20th century, with notable works by Yamamoto Kenkichi, Imoto Nōichi, and Ogata Tsutomu. The 20th century also saw translations of Bashō's poems into languages and editions around the world. His position in Western eyes as the *haiku* poet *par excellence* gave him great influence, and by virtue of Western preference for *haiku* over more traditional forms like the *tanka* or *renge*, have rendered him the archetype of Japanese poets and poetry, with some western scholars even believing that he invented haiku. The impressionistic and concise nature of his verse influenced particularly Ezra Pound and the Imagists, and later the poets of the Beat Generation. Claude-Max Lochu, on his second visit to Japan, created his own "travel painting", inspired by Bashō's use of travel as inspiration. Robbie Basho and Steffen Basho-Junghans were also influenced by him.
On the Poet’s Trail

Footsteps fall softly
Following the path
Of Japan’s haiku master.

By Howard Norman for National Geographic
Photograph by Michael Yamashita

“Each day is a journey, and the journey itself home,” the poet Matsuo Basho wrote more than 300 years ago in the first entry of his masterpiece, Oku no Hosomichi, or Narrow Road to a Far Province. The words are on my mind as I prepare to walk in the footsteps of this revered poet, along his narrow road—the 1,200-mile route he followed through Japan in 1689. I confess that even to imagine doing so is a bit daunting. My late friend Helen Tanizaki, a linguist born and raised in Kyoto, told me, “Everyone I went to school with could recite at least one of Basho’s poems by heart. He was the first writer we read in any exciting or serious way.” Today thousands of people pilgrimage to Basho’s birthplace and burial shrine and travel parts of Basho’s Trail. After three centuries his Narrow Road, in print in English and many other languages, still speaks to readers around the world.
Given the pernicious clamor and uncertainties of our own times, it’s easy for a modern reader to identify with the vague unease that Basho sometimes complained of. Whatever its source—Basho lived a turbulent life in a changing Japan—his melancholy was an intensifying element in much of his writing and an important part of what, in the end, propelled him on his journeys.

Few details are known about Basho’s early life, but he is thought to have been born in 1644 in the castle town of Ueno, southeast of Kyoto. His father, a minor samurai, may have earned his keep teaching children to write. Many of Basho’s siblings probably became farmers.

Basho, however, acquired a taste for literature, perhaps from the son of the local lord, whose service he joined. He learned the craft of poetry from Kigin, a prominent Kyoto poet, and early in his life was exposed to two lasting influences: Chinese poetry and the tenets of Taoism. After his master died, Basho began spending time in Kyoto, practicing a form called haikai, consisting of linked verses.

In Basho’s time, the first verse in haikai was evolving into a poetic idiom of its own—haiku, whose unrhymed phrases of five, seven, and five syllables are meant to capture the essence of nature. Basho published his first haiku under various names, each having some personal significance. One, Tosei, or “green peach,” was an homage to the Chinese poet Li Po (“white plum”).

In his late 20s Basho moved to Edo (now old Tokyo), a newly established city in great social flux, with a fast-growing population, robust trade, and, for Basho, literary opportunity. Within a few years he had gathered the coterie of students and patrons who formed what came to be known as the Basho School.

In 1680 one of his students built the poet a small house near the River Sumida, and soon after, when another presented him with a stock of basho tree (a species of banana), the poet started writing under the name that has endured: Basho. Credible accounts of his life hold that during this period he was plagued with spiritual doubt and took up the study of Zen Buddhism. His despair only deepened in 1682, when his house burned to the ground in a fire that obliterated much of Edo. He wrote:

Tired of cherry,
Tired of this whole world,
I sit facing muddy sake
And black rice.

In 1684 Basho made a months-long journey westward from Edo, which occasioned his first travel account, Journal of a Weather-Beaten Skeleton. In Basho’s day travel was by foot and lodging was primitive. But despite these rigors he set out again in 1687 and a third time in 1687-1688, journeys recounted in Kashima Journal and Manuscript in a Knapsack. Both were written in a genre that Basho profoundly refined—haibun, a mixture of haiku and prose. The poetic travel works and the strenuous sojourns that inspired them added luster to Basho’s reputation.
Yet in the autumn of 1688, in his mid-40s, Basho confided to friends that he still felt the world was too much with him. Exhausted from the incessant demands of students and of his literary celebrity, he said that he “felt the breezes from the afterlife cross his face.” He began planning a pilgrimage to sites important for their literary, religious, or military history—places he wanted to see before he died. He intended to leave that winter, but his friends, worried about his frail health, begged him to wait until spring.

Finally, in May 1689, accompanied by his friend and disciple Sora and carrying only a backpack, writing materials, and changes of clothing, Basho set out, determined yet again to become a hyohakusha—“one who moves without direction.” He walked for five months through the uplands and lowlands, villages, and mountains north of Edo and along the shores of the Sea of Japan. It was this wonderfully episodic sojourning that produced his masterwork, Narrow Road to a Far Province. “It was as if the very soul of Japan had itself written it,” said the early 20th-century Buddhist poet Miyazawa Kenji.

The book is a spiritual journey, synonymous with taking a Buddhist path, shedding all worldly belongings and casting fate to the winds. But the physical journey had a practical side: Basho made his living in part as a teacher, and as he traveled, any number of far-flung disciples were happy to host the master and receive lessons in poetry.

In 1694, the year of Basho’s death, the famed calligrapher Soryu wrote in an epilogue to the Narrow Road: “Once had my raincoat on, eager to go on a like journey, and then again content to sit imagining those rare sights. What a hoard of feelings, Kojin jewels, has his brush depicted! Such a journey! Such a man!”

In the intervening centuries, Basho has become many things to many people—bohemian sage, outsider artist, consummate wayfarer, beatific saint, and above all a poet for the ages. In his Narrow Road, Basho seamlessly plaits together self-deprecating humor, logistical detail, Buddhist compliance, painterly description, and even raunchy complaint (“Fleas and lice biting; / Awake all night / A horse pissing close to my ear”). At the same time, his book provides a kind of timeless spiritual map for the traveler. Helen Tanizaki once characterized Basho this way: “He’s like a quirky philosopher tour-guide who pretty much leaves readers alone to experience traveling in those remote places for themselves. Rather than trying to account for things, he just feels the obligation to take note of them, a vast striving for connection.”

As I put on my own raincoat and prepare to walk in Basho’s footsteps, I harbor no delusions that I am about to travel through an ancient Japan like that of the Narrow Road. As the scholar Donald Keene reported, “Each place it describes is totally transformed. Senju, the first leg of Basho’s journey, is now a bustling commercial district, and Soka, where he spent his first night on the road, contains a mammoth housing development. But the truth of The Narrow Road ... will survive such changes.”

Former poet laureate Robert Hass paraphrases Basho this way: “Avoid adjectives of scale, you will love the world more and desire it less.” Following that admonition, I have neither large nor small expectations. I do know that even today, eternal landscapes and age-old shrines can be found along Basho’s route, connecting an open-minded traveler to the past in ways no human
industry can impede. Besides, beauty is found not only in what you observe with compassionate perspicacity but also in how you come to know yourself when alone. Meandering along farmland roads on foot or riding in a car in 21st-century Japan, staying the night in a traditional inn near mount Gassan or in a business hotel in Tokyo, I will seek refuge in the indispensable idea of Basho.

Basho is said to have told a student that he often “held forth” with great Chinese and Japanese poets of the past, calling one such occasion a “conversation with ghost and ghost-to-be.” For over a year now I’ve been thinking of my journey as a kind of portable séance, an ongoing dialogue with Matsuo Basho. I will pray for decent weather (I’ll be traveling during typhoon season), good moon viewing, and quiet hours to fill notebooks. And step by step I will happily define myself as a ghost-to-be.

On the Poet's Trail
Journey along Basho's Trail with writer Howard Norman as he shares his daily observations in this travelogue.

you make the fire
and I'll show you something wonderful:
a big ball of snow!

A bee
staggers out
of the peony.

A caterpillar,
this deep in fall--
still not a butterfly.

A cicada shell;
it sang itself
utterly away.

A cold rain starting
And no hat--
So?

A cool fall night--
getting dinner, we peeled
eggplants, cucumbers.

a cuckoo cries
and through a thicket of bamboo
the late moon shines

A field of cotton--
as if the moon
had flowered.

A man, infirm
With age, slowly sucks
A fish bone.

A monk sips morning tea,
it's quiet,
the chrysanthemum's flowering.

A snowy morning--
by myself,
chewing on dried salmon.

a strange flower
for birds and butterflies
the autumn sky

A weathered skeleton
in windy fields of memory,
piercing like a knife

A wild sea-
In the distance over Sado
The Milky Way

old pond.....
a frog leaps in
water's sound

As they begin to rise again
Chrysanthemums faintly smell,
After the flooding rain

Autumn moonlight--
a worm digs silently
into the chestnut.

Awake at night--
the sound of the water jar
cracking in the cold.

Bitter–tasting ice —
Just enough to wet the throat
Of a sewer rat.

bush-clover flowers —
they sway but do not drop
their beads of dew

But for a woodpecker
tapping at a post, no sound
at all in the house
But for a woodpecker
tapping at a post, no sound
at all in the house

Clouds -
a chance to dodge
moonviewing.

Cold as it was
We felt secure sleeping together
In the same room.

Cold night: the wild duck,
sick, falls from the sky
and sleeps awhile.

Waking in the night;
the lamp is low,
the oil freezing.

Coolness of the melons
flecked with mud
in the morning dew.

Crossing long fields,
frozen in its saddle,
my shadow creeps by

Deep into autumn
and this caterpillar
still not a butterfly

Don't imitate me;
it's as boring
as the two halves of a melon.

Even that old horse
is something to see this
snow-covered morning

First day of spring--
I keep thinking about
the end of autumn.

First snow
falling
on the half-finished bridge.

First winter rain--
even the monkey
seems to want a raincoat.

Flower
under harvest sun - stranger
To bird, butterfly.

Spring:
A hill without a name
Veiled in morning mist.

The beginning of autumn:
Sea and emerald paddy
Both the same green.

The winds of autumn
Blow: yet still green
The chestnut husks.

A flash of lightning:
Into the gloom
Goes the heron's cry.

From time to time
The clouds give rest
To the moon beholders..

scent of plum blossoms
on the misty mountain path
a big rising sun

Heat waves shimmering
one or two inches
above the dead grass.

How admirable!
to see lightning and not think
life is fleeting.

How wild the sea is,
and over Sado Island,
the River of Heaven

husking rice
a child squints up
to view the moon

I like to wash,
the dust of this world
In the droplets of dew.

I'm a wanderer
so let that be my name –
the first winter rain
In this world of ours,
We eat only to cast out,
Sleep only to wake,
And what comes after all that
Is simply to die at last.

It is with awe
That I beheld
Fresh leaves, green leaves,
Bright in the sun.

Long conversations
beside blooming irises –
joys of life on the road

Midfield,
attached to nothing,
the skylark singing.

Moonlight slanting
through the bamboo grove;
a cuckoo crying.

Morning and evening
Someone waits at Matsushima!
One-sided love

None is travelling
Here along this way but I,
This autumn evening.

The first day of the year:
thoughts come - and there is loneliness;
the autumn dusk is here.

An old pond
A frog jumps in -
Splash!

Lightening -
Heron's cry
Stabs the darkness

Clouds come from time to time -
and bring to men a chance to rest
from looking at the moon.

In the cicada's cry
There's no sign that can foretell
How soon it must die.

Poverty's child -
he starts to grind the rice,
and gazes at the moon.

Won't you come and see
loneliness? Just one leaf
from the kiri tree.

Temple bells die out.
The fragrant blossoms remain.
A perfect evening!

On Buddha's deathday,
wrinkled tough old hands pray –
the prayer beads' sound

On New Year's Day
each thought a loneliness
as winter dusk descends

On the white poppy,
a butterfly's torn wing
is a keepsake

On this road
where nobody else travels
autumn nightfall

Passing through the world
Indeed this is just
Sogi's rain shelter

Petals of the mountain rose
Fall now and then,
To the sound of the waterfall?

Scarecrow in the hillock
Paddy field --
How unaware! How useful.

shaking the grave
my weeping voice
autumn wind

Sleep on horseback,
The far moon in a continuing dream,
Steam of roasting tea.

souls' festival
today also there is smoke
from the crematory
Spring rain
leaking through the roof
dripping from the wasps’ nest.

Stillness—
the cicada’s cry
drills into the rocks.

Taking a nap,
feet planted
against a cool wall.

Teeth sensitive to the sand
in salad greens--
I’m getting old.

The banana tree
blown by winds pours raindrops
into the bucket

The butterfly is perfuming
Its wings in the scent
Of the orchid.

The clouds come and go,
providing a rest for all
the moon viewers

The dragonfly
can’t quite land
on that blade of grass.

The first snow
the leaves of the daffodil
bending together

The morning glories
bloom, securing the gate
in the old fence

The morning glory also
turns out
not to be my friend.

The oak tree:
not interested
in cherry blossoms.

The passing spring
Birds mourn,
Fishes weep
With tearful eyes.
The summer grasses
All that remains
Of brave soldiers dreams

What fish feel,
birds feel, I don't know--
the year ending.

When the winter chrysanthemums go,
there's nothing to write about
but radishes.

Winter garden,
the moon thinned to a thread,
insects singing.

Winter seclusion --
sitting propped against
the same worn post

Winter solitude--
in a world of one color
the sound of wind.

With a warbler for
a soul, it sleeps peacefully,
this mountain willow

With every gust of wind,
the butterfly changes its place
on the willow.

Won't you come and see
loneliness? Just one leaf
from the kiri tree.

Wrapping dumplings in
bamboo leaves, with one finger
she tidies her hair

Year's end, all
corners of this
floating world, swept.
The old pond

Following are several translations of the 'Old Pond' poem, which may be the most famous of all haiku:

Furuike ya
kawazu tobikomu
mizu no oto
-- Basho

Literal Translation

Fu-ru (old) i-ke (pond) ya,
ka-wa-zu (frog) to-bi-ko-mu (jumping into)
i-mi-zu (water) no o-to (sound)

Translated by Fumiko Saisho

The old pond--
a frog jumps in,
sound of water.

Translated by Robert Hass

Old pond...
a frog jumps in
water's sound.

Translated by William J. Higginson
An old silent pond...
A frog jumps into the pond,
splash! Silence again.

Translated by Harry Behn

There is the old pond!
Lo, into it jumps a frog:
hark, water's music!

Translated by John Bryan

The silent old pond
a mirror of ancient calm,
a frog-leaps-in splash.

Translated by Dion O'Donnol

old pond
frog leaping
splash

Translated by Cid Corman

Antic pond--
frantic frog jumps in--
gigantic sound.

Translated by Bernard Lionel Einbond

MAFIA HIT MAN POET: NOTE FOUND PINNED TO LAPEL
OF DROWNED VICTIM’S DOUBLE-BREASTED SUIT!!!

'Dere wasa dis frogg
Gone jumpa offa da logg
Now he inna bogg.'

-- Anonymous

Translated by George M. Young, Jr.
Old pond
leap -- splash
a frog.

Translated by Lucien Stryck

The old pond,
A frog jumps in:
Plop!

Translated by Allan Watts

The old pond, yes, and
A frog is jumping into
The water, and splash.

Translated by G.S. Fraser