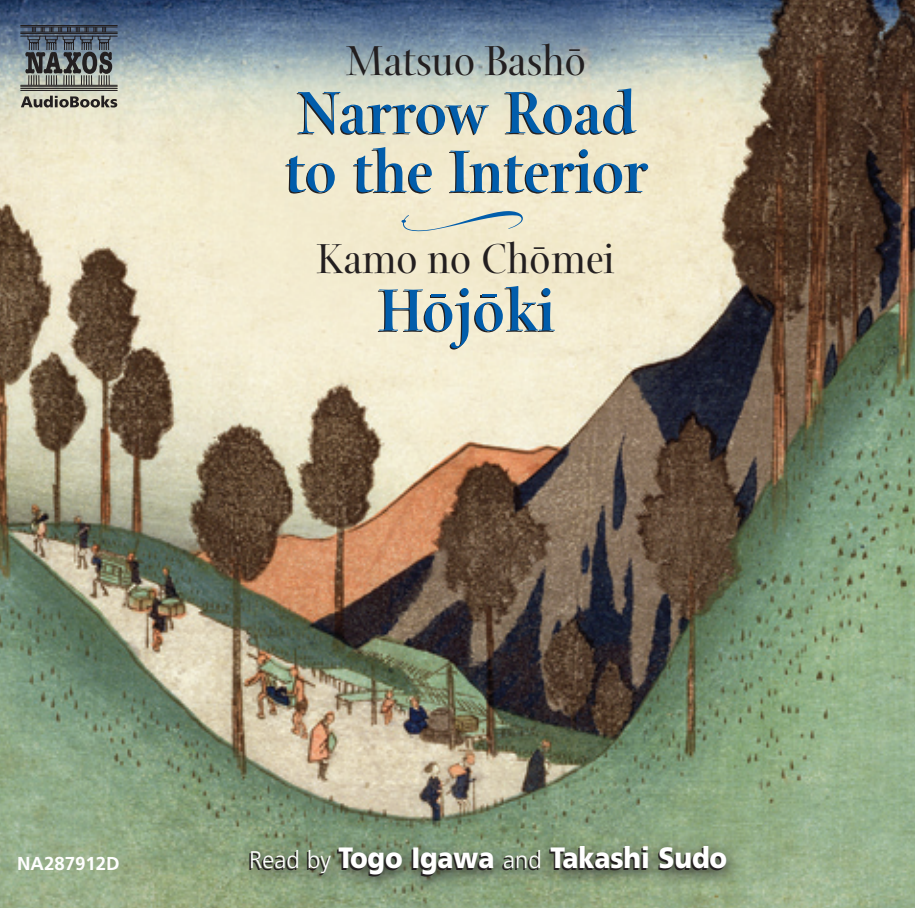


Matsuo Bashō
**Narrow Road
to the Interior**

Kamo no Chōmei
Hōjōki



NA287912D

Read by **Togo Igawa** and **Takashi Sudo**

1	Hōjōki by Kamo no Chōmei	7:08
2	And then, in the sixth month...	5:17
3	Later, was it in the Yowa era?	5:35
4	Soon after, I wonder now, when was it?	3:05
5	So as we see our life is hard in this world.	2:40
6	As for me, I came into property...	1:50
7	Then, well into my sixth decade...	8:28
8	When I moved here...	6:24
9	The morning is quiet...	1:50
10	Narrow Road to the Interior by Matsuo Bashō	2:32
11	On the twenty-seventh of the third month...	1:18
12	This year, the second year of <i>genroku</i> ...	1:08
13	We paid our respects to <i>muro no yashima</i> ...	0:45
14	On the thirtieth we stayed at the foot of Mount Nikko...	1:01
15	On the first day of the fourth month...	1:01
16	Mount Dark Hair had haze around it...	2:03
17	Because we had an acquaintance	1:47
18	We visited <i>joboji</i> so and so...	1:40
19	In this province, far inside Ungan Temple...	2:00
20	From there we went to the killing rock...	1:30
21	After days passed with us feeling uncertain...	1:14
22	In time, we passed the barrier...	2:37

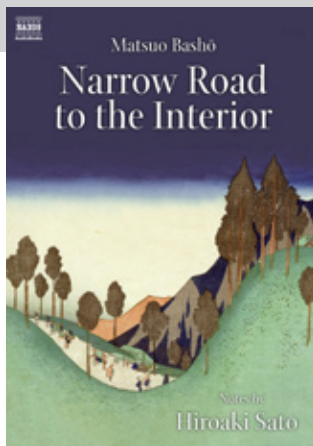
23	About five <i>li</i> from Tokyu's house...	0:49
24	The following day, we went to Shinobu village...	0:57
25	We crossed the river at Tsukinowa ferry...	1:42
26	That night we stayed in Iizuka...	1:38
27	As we passed Abumizuri and Shiroishi Castles...	1:06
28	We stayed in Iwanuma...	1:23
29	We crossed the Natori River...	2:01
30	As we walked along, relying on Kaemon's drawing...	2:25
31	From there we visited Tama River of Noda...	1:24
32	Early in the morning we paid our respects...	1:34
33	Although this has been said a number of times...	3:15
34	On the eleventh we paid our respects to Zui-Gan Temple...	0:43
35	On the twelfth we meant to go to Hiraizumi...	1:36
36	The glory of the three generations...	3:00
37	Looking at the Nambu Highway in the distance...	2:40
38	In Obanzawa we visited a man named Seifu...	1:22
39	In the domain of Yamagata...	1:26
40	Hoping to ride down the Mogami River...	1:48
41	On the third day of the sixth month...	5:41
42	After leaving Haguro...	0:57
43	Though we had seen a countless number of natural wonders...	4:17
44	As we accumulated days...	1:06

45	Today, because we had come over the most difficult spots...	2:38
46	They speak of the forty...	1:00
47	Going over Mount Deutzia Flower...	1:45
48	Here we paid our respects to Ota shrine...	0:59
49	On our way to the hot springs of Yamanaka...	1:02
50	We bathed in a hot spring...	0:56
51	Sora developed stomach trouble...	0:55
52	I stayed in a temple called Zensho-Ji...	1:37
53	On the border of Echizen...	0:43
54	I visited the resident monk of Tenryu Temple...	1:09
55	It was only three <i>li</i> to Fukui...	1:52
56	In time Shirane Peak hid itself...	0:31
57	That night the moon was particularly fine...	1:50
58	On the sixteenth day, with the sky clear...	1:20
59	Rotsu had come as far as this port...	1:23

Total time: 2:05:52

Hōjōki read by Togo Igawa
Narrow Road to the Interior read by Takashi Sudo

Bashō's *Narrow Road* is a deeply complex and intricate work. A PDF file containing detailed notes by the translator explaining the profusion of references, quotations and allusions embedded in the text included with this Naxos AudioBooks digital download.



Matsuo Bashō • Kamo no Chōmei

Narrow Road to the Interior & Hōjōki

HŌJŌKI

Yuku kawa no nagare wa taezushite
shikamo moto no mizu ni arazu
yodomi ni ukabu utakata wa
katsu kie katsu musubite
hisashiku todomaritaru tameshi nashi
yonomaka ni aru hito to sumika to
mata kaku no gotoshi

This is the prelude to *Hōjōki*, the great work of literary witness of medieval Japan by the recluse Kamo-no-Chōmei (1155–1216). These lines are, together with the portentous tolling of the Gion bell at the start of the contemporaneous *Heike Monogatari*, the most familiar opening lines in Japanese literature. Supple and melodious, they prefigure the language

and substance of the entire piece that follows.

Hōjōki was composed in 1212, when its author was in his late fifties. A mix of social chronicle and personal testimony, it is a comparatively short work organised in three main parts. The first tells of a series of calamities, personally observed by Chōmei, that overtook Kyoto in the late Heian Period. The last part is a record of Chōmei's thoughts and life in retirement from the world in the mountains southeast of the capital, a life brought about in part by disinheritance from a prominent ecclesiastical family, in part by a desire to find meaning and peace in a non-materialistic world. The two parts pivot on a central section that is a scathing commentary on the human condition.

Basil Bunting, who based his poetic 'condensation', *Chōmei at Toyama*, on an Italian prose translation of the work, wrote: 'The *Hō-Jō-Ki* is in prose, but the careful proportion and balance of the parts, the leitmotif of the House running through it, and some other indications, suggest that he intended a poem, more or less elegiac; but had not time, nor possibly energy, at his then age, to work out what would have been for Japan an entirely new form, nor to condense his material sufficiently. This I have attempted to do for him.'

However, there is nothing provisional about *Hōjōki*, and nothing tentative, beyond Chōmei's exhausted probing of the integrity of his purpose, indeed his questioning of his own sanity, toward the close of the piece. These very elements give the work an intense humanity from which it ultimately derives its timelessness.

There can be no question as to the essentially poetic intent of *Hōjōki*. From the first lines, we are clearly aware of an enhancement of language that carries its

subject in a crafted, rhythmic manner. Even someone ignorant of the Japanese language can detect in the Romanized transliteration a restless rippling, and hear the stuttering gush of water over the consonants. There are countless other examples, for instance in the quickening of pace in the description of the fire. Words fly through the air like the cinders the writer is describing, in a flurry of staccato, 'journalistic' in its best sense. This man was *there*, and eight centuries later, he is still out of breath. Again, later, in one of the most beautiful passages of the whole work he describes his companionship with a little boy, son of the warden of his mountain retreat; the language rises in visionary warmth as he describes solitary nights by the fireside, recalling his friends, hearing in the song of the copper pheasants the voices of his parents.

This musical 'charge' – what Pound termed *melopoei* – is coupled with a compelling visual dimension (*phanopoeia*). Again, from the opening lines we gain a clear pictorial image of the rushing water, the gathering and

dispersing of the froth on its surface, but also of a setting of hillside rocks through which this river flows. Elsewhere, we see the fire engulfing Kyoto, spreading 'like an unfolding fan', just as later we share the visions of the fishermen's braziers in a little cooking fire.

Then beyond this, most subtly, we encounter *logopoeia*, Pound's 'dance of the intellect among words,' in which words are employed not only for their plain meaning but for their cargo of nuance, irony, or association. This, in the opening lines, a man's home is *sumika*, carrying the resonance of 'abode', 'dwelling', even approaching its modern biological sense of 'habitat'. Or when describing the city of Kyoto as *tamashiki-no-miyako*, we are not to understand this as a capital glittering like a veritable jewel but more as a kind of gilded lily, 'glorious' in the direction of 'vainglorious'.

In structure, too, as Bunting noted, the intention is poetic. The three sections – the disasters, the central pivot, and the latter hermitage – are held together by the recurring image of the House. First,

we see the lofty towers – perhaps indeed jewel-encrusted – of the well-to-do. These appear almost to have a life of their own as they assert their dominance over the rooftops of lesser citizenry. But all the houses, together with their inhabitants, are buffeted and destroyed with supreme indifference by nature and by man alike. A fire that starts in an entertainers' lodging house levels a major section of the city, reducing to ash both imperial chambers and common dwellings. A whirlwind destroys fences, so that you are no longer able to differentiate between your property and that of your neighbour. A capricious imperial decree orders the removal of the capital, so the ambitious office seeker must dismantle his house, float it down the river to the new location, re-erect it, and then, upon a new decree, pull it down again. Famine and disease reduce the most distinguished households, and even chopping up your home for firewood will provide heat for no more than a day. And of course an earthquake simply brings the whole thing down around your ears. The Imperial Household is transferred to



present-day Kobe, where the new ‘palace’ has the aspect of a log cabin, comically conceded by Chōmei to be not without a certain antique charm. Through the latter part of the book, Chōmei’s own social decline is conveyed in the progressively smaller houses he builds, deeper and deeper in the mountains. He finally builds a tiny hut, which gives *Hōjōki* its name – literally ‘Writings from a Place Ten Feet Square’ – and which in a memorable image becomes so overgrown we feel it almost melting into the side of the mountain.

This sense of the little dwelling sinking into the earth is part of a further skein of symbolism, formed from the four elements of nature, that also binds the work together. The work starts with the confident rippling of water, and closes with Chōmei ‘well into my sixth decade / when the dew of life disappears.’ The violent earthquake that topples mountains in the first part of the work is mirrored in a more benevolent earth gently embracing the hermit’s last home. The gales and floods that precede the terrible pestilence stand in contrast to ‘Autumn Breezes’

and ‘Flowing Water’, the songs he later plays to himself on koto and biwa. The devastating fire of 1177, with the flames leaping whole blocks, faintly echoes in the companionship he finds in the dying embers of his own little fire in the woods. Then, each element is often interplayed with the other three with considerable deftness. A fearful wind feeds the spreading conflagration, the earthquake forces water to gush from cracked rocks, the capital itself depends upon the earth, the fruits of the surrounding countryside. Later, the snow melts to the earth in a striking image of the redemption of sin.

Clearly, Chōmei intentions go far beyond the desire to make a platitudinous point on the question of the transience of man and his property. There is a sophisticated political attitude here, as well as a conscious crafting of textured image. But his rejection of the world is also a kind of edifice to which he feels dangerously attached, and he tells us as much. While he sets out a forthright statement on the abasements of materialism, we are also made conscious of an agonized

ambivalence. We gain a suspicion that his own spiritual 'construct' is also perilously close to collapse, and that he closes not in the silence of acceptance and wisdom, but in an anguished, despairing speechlessness.

Chōmei was born in 1155, second son of Kamo-no-Nagatsugu, who held the rank of *sho-negi* at the Kamo Shrine, consisting of Kamigamo (upper Kamo) and Shimogamo (lower Kamo) shrines in northeastern Kyoto. His father's rank was that of a quite senior prelate, master of Shimogamo. The rank also carried court influence and responsibilities. At the age of six, Chōmei was accorded an official Court rank, also relatively senior.

From an early age his chief passions were music and poetry, and since succession to a position in one of the Kamo shrines appeared to be preordained, he felt able to indulge them. However, his family relations were complex, and the conduct of both secular and religious affairs of the day plagued by intrigue

and corruption. Additionally, the young Chōmei, as a precociously successful poet, cannot be said to have been the model of modesty and discretion.

Chōmei was a member of important poetry circles, was successful in major poetry competitions, and was published in an imperial anthology (the *Senzai-wakashū*) by the age of thirty-two. What distinguished him from his fellows, however, was a fierce sense of social compassion. This is commonly thought to have developed later as a result of his disinheritance from the family positions and adoption of the Buddhist faith. However, as a young man he clearly went out of his way to witness the 'many awful happenings' that befell the citizens of Kyoto and records them with a degree of engagement that would have been unthinkable to his literary contemporaries. The master poet Fujiwara-no-Teika (1162–1241) stated his own social attitude clearly enough: 'My ears are filled with news of uprisings and killings... I care nothing about such matters.'

The first of these, for Chōmei,

defining events was the great fire in the spring of 1177, shortly after the death of his father. The whirlwind followed in the spring of 1180. The capital was moved to Settsu (or Tsu) in the summer of that year. The famine occurred over the next two years. The earthquake took place in 1185. Moving busily among the people in such terrible circumstances, Chōmei cannot fail to have noticed the growing influence of the populist Buddhist movements led by reformist priests, particularly Hōnen, who was to die the year Chōmei completed *Hōjōki*.

However, even as these contemporary events were leaving their mark on his thinking, Chōmei was pursuing a career as an establishment poet. Eventually, some twenty-five of his poems were published in imperial anthologies, ten of them in the great *Shinkokin-wakashū*, presented to the emperor in 1205. But Chōmei was never one to ingratiate himself politically, nor unduly to endear himself to the powerful and the useful. Pursuit of the arts was surrounded by intricate etiquette, and a sometimes trivial-seeming act could

have serious political consequences. For instance, in a famous episode, Chōmei and some friends were having a music party and, carried away, Chōmei played a biwa piece known as 'Takuboku', secretly passed down from teacher to follower and not to be performed unsanctioned in public. This earned him a rebuke from the Cloistered Emperor Gotoba.

In 1201, Chōmei was selected as one of the thirteen members of the newly reconstituted Poetry Order (*Waka-dokoro*), mostly consisting of highly ranked nobles. Only Chōmei and one other were of lesser rank, and quite possibly not entitled even to sit on the same level of floor as their 'peers'.

In the course of his life as a poet, Chōmei not only contributed to imperial anthologies, but also compiled a volume of his own poetry, *Kamo-no-Chōmei-shū* (1181), a collection of about a hundred poems thought to have been written in his twenties. He also compiled a series of essays on poetry, *Mumyō-shō*, probably while working on *Hōjōki*, which set out his thoughts on the writing of poems,



with criticism and biography, as well as notes on manners appropriate to poetry meetings. Toward the very end of his life appeared *Hosshin-shu-hosshin* meaning ‘to aspire to *satori*’ – a collection of exemplary stories about Buddhist monks.

This body of work and the poetry itself reveals Chōmei to be an accomplished poet, with a graceful use of imagery and in firm control of language, also with clear concerns as to the intellectual and social context of the work. Yet as a poet he is not generally thought to share the towering distinction of many of his contemporaries, such as Teika, one of the principal compilers of the *Shinkokin-wakashū*, or Teika’s father, Fujiwara-no-Shunzei, one of the more celebrated of that collection’s poets, or the wayfarer Saigyō. It is *Hōjōki* that provides Chōmei with not only that distinction, but an undisputed place in world literature.

In 1204 Chōmei became a Buddhist monk and moved to the country at

Ohara, near Kyoto. Four years later he moved to Hino, to the southeast of the city, and that is where he built the last of his huts. Whatever finally precipitated his act of self-exile, it has been remarked that in leaving the world he discovered his sense of it, in particular a remarkable historical perspective. His own era was one of transition, a time of the final collapse of the power of the Heian court in Kyoto and the emergence of a series of military governments ruled by shōgun. The period is considered the end of *kodai* (ancient times) and the beginning of *chusei* (middle ages), a time in which people seeking the protection of the powerful were giving away their property, and more and more of this property was coming into the ownership of noble families and major temples and shrines, as well as the emerging military class. This was a time of fierce political struggle as well as major civil disorder, and eventually civil war.

Such a world, with its dislocations and general sense of discontinuity, one might be happy to leave. But for Chōmei’s

reasons for renouncing the world, we rely on two anecdotes.

The first he recounts himself in his *Mumyō-sho* and it illustrates Chōmei's lack of political tact in his family relations, particularly with his powerful relative Kamo-no-Sukekane, who had become chief *negi*, or chief administrator, of the Kamo shrines. Chōmei entered a poem containing the phrase '...ishikawayase-mi-no-ogawa' in an official poetry competition. The poem was judged to have lost, the phrase being held to refer to a non-existent river. There was a protest, and it is possible Chōmei himself spread a rumour that the judging had been unfair. Judging was then entrusted to another poet. The new judge, also unfamiliar with the phrase, decided to consult Chōmei before making a decision. Chōmei explained that the phrase was an alternative name for the Kamo River and could easily be found in histories of the shrine. This incident became a famous humiliation for Sukekane (never on the best of terms with Chōmei anyway), who was undoubtedly offended because

someone in his position was shown to be insufficiently familiar with the history of his own shrine. Making matters worse, Chōmei's poem was included in the *Shinkokin-wakashū*.

The second episode appears in the diary of Minamoto-no-Ienaga, an official of the high-ranking Poetry Circle, or Waka-dokoro. A position as head of the shrine Tadasu-no-yashiro, part of the Kamo complex, became vacant. This position was customarily a stepping stone to that of *sho-negi* of Shimogamo itself, and in light of Chōmei's father's former occupancy of it, Emperor Gotoba considered Chōmei the man to fill it. Sukekane vehemently opposed the appointment. He thought that his own eldest son should get the job because, though much younger, his son had the higher rank and had worked for the shrine longer than Chōmei. On hearing of Sukekane's objections, Gotoba felt obliged to withdraw the appointment. Instead he sought to raise the status of another shrine and install Chōmei as *negi* there. However, by this time Chōmei had

lost interest, as well as all ambition. (Later, after Chōmei's own death, Sukekane's son was to meet a violent end.)

How thorough going Chōmei's retreat from the world was is far from clear. He tells of revisiting the capital unashamed of his appearance as 'a begging monk' and seems to have kept himself well informed of happenings in the city, although he had several connections with many of his previous circles. Strangely, in 1211, the year before he completed *Hōjōki*, Chōmei made the journey to Kamakura in the east, to visit the shōgun, Sanetomo, also a poet. The purpose of this journey is unknown, although it has been suggested he wished to exert some kind of literary influence upon Sanetomo. In this he was almost certainly unsuccessful.

As in so many other cases before and since, Chōmei, in retiring from the world, became the true wanderer in it. He and his work transcend not only place, but time too. Chōmei's literary

immortality resides in *Hōjōki* itself, in his unflinching determination to bear witness to his age, in defiance of the literary conventions of the day. The witness is conveyed in a remarkable range of tones, irascible, scholarly, compassionate, and self-mocking, with occasional pawky certitudes, even belligerence. But there is also an essential self-doubt in which the writer reveals not only his face, but his soul.

The impact of this work – the calamities, the witness, the lustre of the commentary, the retirement – would be extraordinary enough, and the riches of the language a full enough reward. However, at the very end of the piece, Chōmei creates a moment that is quite startling: he seems to open a door in the text and steps through, to address not us, but himself. He seems almost physically stricken by the realization that his minimal life in his hut has itself become an attachment to the world of illusion. His retreat from the world of sin and self-delusion has perhaps itself been sinful and has led to a stunning perception of

emptiness and even insanity. It is at this moment that we see the true saintliness of this great man.

And to those who wish to know how they might bear witness in their own troubling times, Chōmei says this:

To understand
the world of today,
hold it up
to the world
of long ago.

**By Yasuhiko Moriguchi
and David Jenkins**

NARROW ROAD TO THE INTERIOR

THE TEXT

Carrying a pack with his writing materials, a few pieces of clothing, and several gifts from friends who saw him off, the poet Bashō set out on a hike to the wilds of northern Honshū in the spring of 1689. With his close disciple Sora, he planned to visit places famous as wonders of nature or significant in literary, religious, or military history – and he wanted to spread to the poetry lovers he would meet in the towns and villages along the way his methods of writing renga, the communal linked verse that was his passion and greatest concern in life.

The account he wrote of that trip, and which he revised and polished for four years, is one of the masterpieces of Japanese literature. Called *Oku no Hosomichi*, this travel diary is a genre called *haibun* – a mixture of haiku-like prose and haiku. Though he had done a number of shorter works in this genre – about other travels, places he had lived, and people he had known – this was

his longest and best. He died not long after he finished it, while on still another journey.

The work is shorter than many Western novellas: a small pond compared with the vast ocean of Lady Murasaki's eleventh-century novel *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji), another major constellation in Japan's literary firmament. But it is smaller only in size. In fact, part of its greatness lies in its doing so much with so little. Like a haiku it gets its vivid immediacy and sensory power from the suggestiveness created by its terse, laconic style. It is all at once a travel journal (*kikōbun*), a haibun, a renga, and a haiku anthology. Bashō deliberately shaped it this way – changing the order of the events and even inventing some – to make it a work of art.

It follows the general form of Bashō's style of renga (known as *haikai no renga*): from the slow, low-key introduction to the varied development of the middle part to the fast close of the finale. Though it is more unified and thematic than renga, it still has many surprising renga-like juxtapositions provided by places and

events – not only those he experienced or invented, but also many he evokes from allusions to or quotations from historical, literary, and mythical sources. These elements move in and out of the prose and haiku.

One could even describe this haibun as a series of about fifty short haibun which work with each other much like the links in a renga. The haiku themselves present a varied array that also moves from subject to subject in the disjunctive manner of renga: from the hidden blossoms of a chestnut growing close to the eaves, to the ghostly dreams of dead warriors in the summer grass, to the poet trying to sleep while lying next to a pissing horse, to the rain-flooded Mogami River, a faint moon over Mount Haguro, the Milky Way over a rough ocean, and the cry of a cricket coming from under an ancient helmet in a provincial shrine.

Haiku, then known as *hokku*, were just beginning to be treated as separate poems around Bashō's time. Before that they were each simply the beginning link of a renga. Paradoxically, since they could

now exist as poems separate from the renga, they could also now be combined with prose to create haibun. There was a centuries-old precedent for this. The tanka – a poem almost twice as long as a haiku, thirty-one syllables versus seventeen – had long been combined with prose in various kinds of literary works. *Genji*, which mixes eight hundred tanka with its prose, is only one of countless examples of stories, tales, and travel diaries that combined poetry with prose before Bashō. Haibun can refer to the haiku-style prose by itself, and haiku poets sometimes write haibun without any haiku.

Bashō had been developing his haiku and his travel-journal haibun for a number of years. His earlier haibun, such as *Nozorashi Kikō*, tend to have the haiku just tacked on to the prose; the two are neither integrated nor working together. Nor is the prose as developed into a haiku style as in his later works. The combining of haiku and prose into a totally unified work of art found its culmination in the *Oku*.

By Cor van den Heuvel

THE JOURNEY

In 1689 Matsuo Bashō (1644–94), accompanied by his friend Kawai Sora (1649–1710), made a five-month-long journey. Starting out from Edo (today's Tokyo) at the end of the third month, he went north as far as Hiraizumi, in Rikuzen (Iwate), then moved to the Japan Sea and travelled southwest along the coast. When he reached Tsuruga Port, north of Kyoto, he turned southeast. His trip ended in Ōgaki, in Mino (Gifu), where he arrived on the twenty-first or the twenty-third of the eighth month.

The trek covered 1,985 kilometers or 1,233 miles – roughly the distance from the southern tip of Florida to Connecticut as the crow flies. The account known as *Oku no Hosomichi*, here translated as 'Narrow Road to the Interior', is Bashō's description of the journey. Though brief, it is among the most celebrated works of Japanese literature.

Life with No Fixed Abode

Bashō was on the road for much of his last ten years, making similar journeys to

various places. The one to the north was the most arduous and, because of the masterful account he left of it, the most famous. Why did he decide to devote himself to such travels?

The immediate impetus was apparently the great fire that struck Edo toward the end of 1682. It engulfed Bashō's house, forcing him to 'submerge himself in the tide [of the Sumida River] and cover himself with a sedge mat [to fend off the heat] in order to survive in the smoke', as Takarai Kikaku (1661–1707) put it in his tribute to the deceased master. The disaster literally made him realize the truth of the Buddhist assertion that life is like 'a house on fire', that there really is 'no fixed abode' in this world, Kikaku said. Certainly, Bashō's restless wanderings began early in the following year.

Uta-Makura and 'Poetic Truth'

But such a philosophical conclusion about life does not adequately explain Bashō's dogged visits to various places that followed. Judging from the places he selected and what he did during his



travels, Bashō aimed to achieve two goals, one spiritual, the other practical. The spiritual goal has to do with 'poetic truth'. He expressed it in *Oi no Kobumi* (Brief Epistle on the Travel Casket), an account of his six-month wandering from 1687 to 1688:

Heels torn, I am the same as Saigyō, and
I think of him at the Tenryū ferry. Renting
a horse, I conjure up in my mind the sage



who became furious. In the beautiful spectacles of the mountain, field, ocean, and coast, I see the achievements of the Creation. Or I follow the trails left by those who, completely unattached pursued the Way, or I try to fathom the truth expressed by those with poetic sensibility.

Saigyō (1118–89) was a travelling poet-priest whom Bashō greatly admired,

and the story he was recalling has to do with the priest being insulted and whipped by insolent samurai on an overcrowded ferryboat but accepting it as part of his Buddhist training. 'The Sage' refers to Shōkū, who legend says lost his temper in an accident involving a groom and, terribly embarrassed by his own unsaintly vituperation, fled the scene. For our purpose, in any case, the most important part of the paragraph is the last phrase: *fuzei no hito no makoto o ukagau*, 'fathom the truth expressed by those with poetic sensibility'.

In Japan, where the first large-scale collection of verse dates from the eighth century, a great many places were routinely described or mentioned in poetry from the outset, and many of these came to be known as *uta-makura*, 'poetic pillows'. *Uta-makura* then acquired the same significance as *kidai* or *kigo*, 'seasonal subjects' or 'topics', each representing a certain idea or sentiment or a trigger thereof. For Bashō the purpose of visiting such places was, as he said to Kikaku in a letter, *furuki uta-domo no*

makoto o kan(zu) – to 'feel the truth of old poems'. His passion in this regard was intense. Once, in 1688, he walked 160 mountainous miles in five days so that he might see the full moon at one particular 'poetic pillow' – in this instance Mount Obasute, where in the legendary past old women are said to have been abandoned to save food.

As he learned during his travels to the north, many *uta-makura* existed in name only, and barely that. Shirakawa Barrier, mentioned at the start of his account, is a case in point. Built in the province of Iwashiro (today's Fukushima), it was originally a fort or stockade against *Emishi*, the northern 'barbarians' to those inhabiting the southern part of the land. A few centuries later it apparently fell into disuse. By the eleventh century it had become an *uta-makura* that was supposed to evoke the sense that it was where civilization and culture ended and what Joseph Conrad might have called 'the heart of darkness' began. Priest Nōin (b. 988) wrote a poem:



When I went down to Michinokuni, I
made this poem at Shirakawa Barrier:

Miyako o ba kasumi to tomo
ni tachishikado akikaze zo fuku
Shirakawa no Seki

Though I left the City with haze
rising, autumn wind blows at
Shirakawa Barrier

Selected for the travel section of the fourth imperial anthology *Go-Shūi Shū*, compiled in 1086, this tanka, or thirty-one-syllable verse, would become the most famous poem describing this utamakura, requiring later poets to recall it when they made their own on the subject. For example, *Azuma Kagami* (History of the East), put together toward the end of the thirteenth century, cites a poem that the warrior-poet Kajiwara

Kagesue (1162–1200) made in 1189 when Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–99) led an army to vanquish Fujiwara no Yasuhira (d. 1189) who had, at Yoritomo's own instigation, killed Yoritomo's brother Yoshitsune (1159–89). On the twenty-ninth of the seventh month of that year:

[Yoritomo] crossed Shirakawa Barrier.
He dedicated white silk cloth to the
barrier deity. While doing this, he
summoned Kagesue and said 'This is
early autumn. Don't you recall Priest
Nōin's old poem?' Kagesue reined in
his horse and recited a poem:

Akikaze no kusaki no tsuyu o
harawasete kimi ga koyureba sekimori
mo nashi

Making the autumn wind sweep dew
from grass and trees, you, milord,
cross, with no barrier guards

When Bashō visited the site of Shirakawa Barrier in 1688, it is doubtful that even a trace of its ruins remained. All that he and his companion Sora were able to do, it appears, was to pay their respects

to a shrine that a local inn proprietor said housed the barrier deity. Whether it was the same shrine that *Azuma Kagami* mentions is not certain, either. This may explain why in crossing the place Bashō readily remembered some of the more famous poems incorporating the poetic place name but could not describe anything like a barrier or fort.

The Sequential Poetic Form: Renga or Linked Verse

The other, and more practical, goal of Bashō's journeys was to solidify and spread his influence as a poet. Today the notion of a poet travelling to establish his influence may appear somewhat strange. In Bashō's day, when a poet could make a living as a paid teacher, doing so was accepted, at times even essential. This was particularly true in Bashō's case because he worked with the sequential poetic form of *renga*, 'linked verse', and its offshoot, the *hokku*, its opening unit.

The renga was born in the thirteenth century from the tendency of the 5–7–5–7–7-syllable tanka to split into



two parts, 5-7-5 and 7-7, and from the Japanese poets' propensity to turn poetry competition into a group game. At first the two split parts, 5-7-5 and 7-7 syllables, were composed by two persons. Then they began to be linked together alternately, indefinitely. In the end the standard length of a hundred parts was set, which was most often composed by half a dozen or more people. What we know today as haiku started out as the opening unit or line of this sequential form: hence its original name, the *hokku*, 'the opening phrase'.

Renga composition was essentially – and remains – a game with multiple participants. Consequently, rules were made, and these in time grew to be what are probably the most complex rules ever devised for any poetic form. And their complexity, along with the delight the Japanese people took in composing verse in and as a group, led to the arrangement in which a *sōshō*, 'master', or *tenja*, 'point-giver' (judge), would preside over each session as a guide and teacher. Such a master earned payment for this and also for evaluating submitted renga and hokku.

That is how most masters made a living. Indeed, one term for holding a renga session was *kōgyō*, which carries with it a suggestion of a business enterprise.

Bashō, however, began to avoid seeking payments for his pedagogic role in his late thirties, choosing to live on donations from his wealthier friends and students. Pecuniary recompense jarred his search for poetic truth. He made this most clear when he wrote to the samurai poet Sugunuma Kyokusui (d. 1717). In his letter dated the eighteenth of the second month, 1692, he divided *haikai* practitioners into three categories:

When it comes to the way of poetry there are generally three grades of people, as I see it. There are those who run around, trying day and night to make points, vying to win, with no attempt to see the Way. These may be called confused noisemakers in poetry. But because they help fill the stomach of the wives and children of the judges and replenish the money boxes of their landlords, what they do is better than doing evil things.

Then there are those who, though

wealthy, refrain from engaging in ostentation pleasures. Looking upon *haikai* writing as better than gossiping about other people, they compose two or three sequences for winning points, day or night, but do not boast when they win, nor become angry even when they lose. Whatever may happen, they at once set out to work out a new sequence and try to come up with clever ideas during the brief space of time that an incense stick five *bu* long takes to burn. When it's finished they delight in the points given instantly, just like boys playing cards. These people nevertheless arrange food and provide adequate wine, thereby helping the poor and fattening judges. In that sense they, too, in some way contribute to the establishment of the Way.

Then there are fellows who work hard for the goal of true poetry and soothe their hearts by doing so. These do not easily take to criticising others and, with the thought that poetry writing is another vehicle for entering the True Way, explore the spirit of Fujiwara no Teika, trace the intent of Saigyō, examine the heart of Lo-

t'ien, and enter the mind of Tu Fu – all of the remote past. There are so few of these that, the ones in the capital and the ones in the countryside combined, you can readily count them with your ten fingers. You are to be one of those few. It is understandable that you should take great care and work hard at it.

Little wonder then that his letters in the last ten years of his life are sprinkled with emergency requests to 'borrow' this or that.

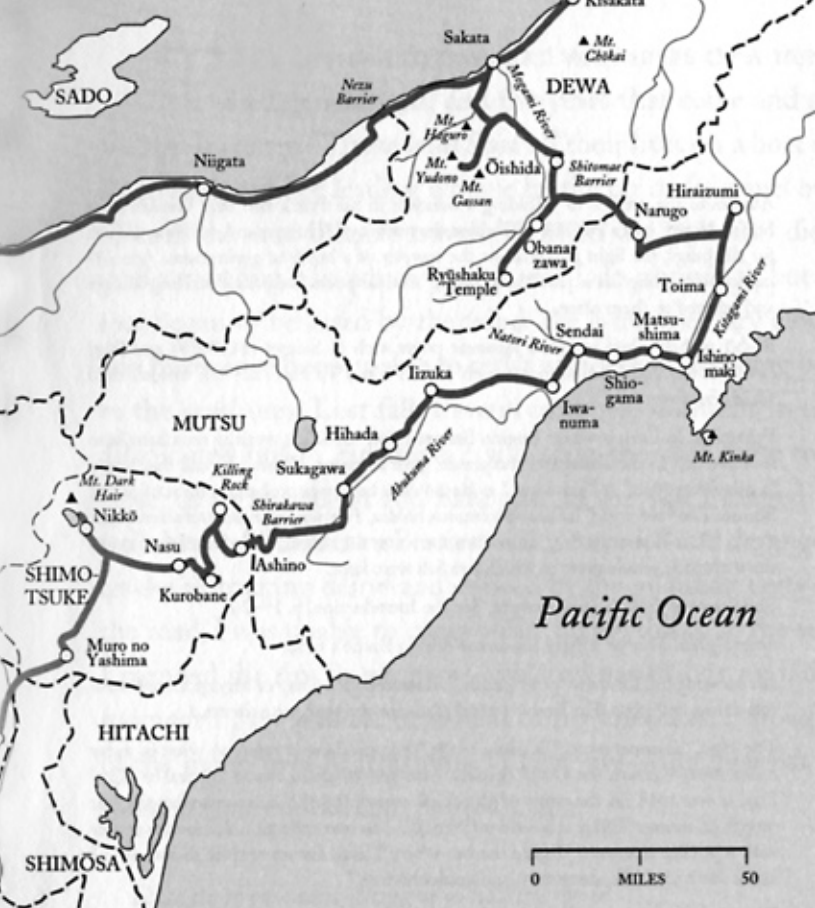
By Hiroaki Sato



Sea of Japan



BASHO'S ROUTE ACROSS JAPAN





Togo Igawa is one of the leading Japanese classical actors. After training at the Actors Theatre (Haikyûza Yôseijo) and Tôhō Gakuen Drama College, he was a founder member of the Black Tent Theatre and, more recently, of the ichiza theatre company. He has appeared in theatre, film, radio and television. Theatre work includes *Pacific Overtures* by Stephen Sondheim at the Donmar Warehouse, which won the Olivier Award for Best Musical. He has worked extensively in film including *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, *Topsy-Turvy*, *The Last Samurai* and *Revolver*.



Takashi was born in Tokyo and, in 1977, he moved to London where he worked as a designer on many prestigious commercial and domestic projects. In 1991 a friend introduced him to voiceover work and he has now become one of the principal Japanese voiceover artists in the UK. He currently works from his own production company in North London.

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Translated by Yasuhiko Moriguchi and David Jenkins

The Narrow Road:

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Recorded at Motivation Sound Studios, London

Edited by JD Evans

Translated by Hiroaki Sato

Mastered by JD Evans

Bashō's Narrow Road

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Matsuo Bashō Narrow Road to the Interior

Kamo no Chōmei Hōjōki

Read by **Togo Igawa** and **Takashi Sudo**

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