

## MATSUO BASHŌ

1644–1694

Until the seventeenth century, Japanese literature was privileged property. Court aristocrats and provincial warlords (and the occasional member of the Buddhist clergy) had exclusive access to “books”: a narrow supply of manuscript copies. Even when the first printed books began to appear at the beginning of the seventeenth century, they were still luxury items. Connoisseurs underwrote lavishly illustrated printings of the Japanese classics available in limited editions, usually of no more than one hundred copies and intended not for sale but for presentation. Like the manuscripts they replaced, the first printed books were an indulgence. But when printing and publishing became commercial endeavors around the second decade of the new century, books changed from being rare works of art, whose mysteries were known only to the chosen few, into tools and pastimes for the multitude.

The diffusion of literacy, and thus education, was both a cause and an effect of the diffusion of the printed word. Print not only provided new channels of communication, a new medium for artists, and new commercial opportunities, it created for the first time in Japan the conditions necessary for that peculiarly modern phenomenon, celebrity.

The *haiku* poet Matsuo Bashō was an odd candidate for the new renown. Born in 1644 as the second son of a low-ranking provincial *samurai* who cobbled a living by teaching calligraphy, he had little in his background or early years that augured celebrity. Adult life commenced in the most ordinary way, when Bashō entered the service of a cadet branch of the local ruling military house. But he became close to his employer, the young heir, who was a devotee of linked verse, and Bashō too developed a taste for the popular poetry. Together they studied with Kitamura Kigin, one of the leading poets of the day, and they shared the excitement of seeing their compositions—two by Bashō and one by his patron—published in a poetry anthology in 1664. The easygoing days of poetastering and unchallenging service must have been very pleasant for Bashō and must have seemed the shape his days would take for the rest of his life.

But everything changed suddenly with the premature death in 1666 of his master. Bashō lost not only a friend and poetry companion but the protector who would have guaranteed him security and advancement in the ranks of the *samurai*. In 1672 Bashō left for Edo (now Tokyo), the expanding military capital of the shogun’s new government, where he decided to make his career as a professional poet. To do so he had to build a following. With some thirty of his verses now in anthologies and his first book recently published, the twenty-eight-year-old Bashō must have conjectured that he had a better chance of establishing himself in a new city, where the competition for income as a teacher and corrector of poetry (an expert paid to correct other people’s poetry) would be less intense than in the old capital of Kyoto or the seasoned commercial town of Osaka. This departure for the east was in its own quiet way daring. By leaving his home district and the employ of the local clan, he was forfeiting his status as a *samurai*, a member (however lowly) of the elite ruling class. In relocating to the boomtown of Edo, with a population already over six hundred thousand and growing, Bashō was in fact courting fame.

Not surprisingly, the first years in Edo were not easy. “Sometimes,” he would later recall, “I grew weary of poetry and thought I would abandon it. Other times, I vowed to establish my name as the foremost poet. The two alternatives battled

within, making me utterly restless.” For a while, Bashō was forced to supplement his income with a post in the city’s department of waterworks.

But ultimately he succeeded. Linked-verse anthologies sold well in the late seventeenth century, and Bashō’s poems appeared in them with increasing frequency. Within eight years he had made a name for himself. He was asked to judge linked-verse competitions, and his published commentaries on these contests found a ready audience. Over time, he had gathered a stable of students large enough by 1680 for him to publish their best poems in an anthology. And Bashō’s followers were so devoted that in the same year the more prosperous ones built a cottage for him in a quiet, still rural part of the city.

In front of this cottage, his students planted a banana tree. Its rare flowers were so small as to be unobtrusive, and the large, delicate leaves were easily torn when the wind blew in from the sea. The whole thing looked somehow lonesome. In a climate too cool for it to bear fruit, the tree was deprived of its purpose. Alone inside his hut, Bashō professed an affinity for his banana tree:

Banana tree in autumn winds:  
a night passed hearing  
raindrops in a basin.

His persona was now complete: the lonely wayfarer who had traveled far from home, the man of simple tastes who had consecrated his life to poetry, the delicate sensibility as fragile as the leaves of a banana tree. It was only fitting that he took the word *banana*—Bashō—for his pen name.

One might well smile at Bashō’s canniness. In the choice of his personal metaphor, he managed to join self-image and apparent, actual attributes with a public stance edited seamlessly into his literary product: like an actor so indistinguishable from his interchangeable roles that we think we know the “real” person. Bashō cast himself as a pilgrim, but the purpose of his frequent travels was a poetic devotion to nature—the beauty and truth it alone could reveal—not religious piety. Like a Zen monk, he shaved his head and donned the dark, drab garb of a cleric, setting off, as in *The Narrow Road of the Interior*, on paths by no means always certain, into wilderness not entirely safe. Whether home alone in his rustic cottage or enduring the arduous of the open road, Bashō sought an austere existence, as though he had taken a vow of poverty. *Economy* could have been his watchword.

In person and in art, he was the antithesis of Ihara Saikaku, a prosperous chronicler of rich, material life, and in fact Bashō appears to have disdained Saikaku’s prolific literary output. To him, it was vulgar and excessive. (Not surprisingly, Bashō—the-perfectionist’s entire oeuvre, about 1,000 *haiku*, is an afternoon’s work for Saikaku, whose most frenzied single sitting of solo linked-verse composition yielded 23,500 poems in twenty-four hours!) Perhaps Saikaku in turn disdained Bashō’s fastidiousness, endlessly revising a mere seventeen syllables. In the world of poetry, however, the tortoise won the race. Bashō’s lapidary style perfected a kind of epigram that indeed seems to capture the universe in a grain of sand. His sympathy with nature, and particularly with its frailest elements, which speak of the transience and vulnerability of living things, was permanently accepted as the essence of Japanese poetic feeling.

The *haiku* was the perfect form for Bashō’s art: a flash of lyric verse as fleeting as the momentary impression it encapsulates—a scene from nature or a natural object that evokes a truth larger than itself—expressed in cryptic, unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables:

Upon a bare branch  
a crow has descended—  
autumn in evening.

It is a form of poetry that looks effortless. Anyone can string together seventeen syllables and make them sound ponderous or picturesque, which is probably why *haiku* have become so popular (though syntactic differences between Japanese and English can sometimes defeat translation attempts that hold to the exact syllable count). Only a true poet can work within the slender margins of this constricted form and create something beyond aphorism. It was Bashō's gift to fuse the transitory and the eternal, both the moment observed and its greater significance. The crow landing on the branch of a withered tree is the "now" of the poem; time's passing and loneliness are the universals.

Actually, *haiku* began as part of linked verse, and in this respect too its apparent simplicity is deceptive. In the composition of linked poetry, resulting normally in sequences of thirty-six or one hundred verses (although they could stretch into one thousand verses or more), several poets worked in tandem. They took turns composing alternating links, or verses, in three lines with syllable counts of five, seven, and five (identical in form to *haiku*) and in two lines with syllable counts of seven each. Eventually, anthologies of linked poetry began to appear, excerpting the opening verses from various sequences. Thus these short poems in three lines of seventeen syllables, originally intended as the base to which subsequent lines of verse would be added, came to stand on their own. Poets began to write *haiku* as self-contained lyrics. But however independent they became, for a long time *haiku* retained a vestigial sense that they were somehow part of a larger matrix, or ought to be. This is one reason that poems in *The Narrow Road of the Interior* are embedded in a travel narrative, the prose equivalent of a linked sequence. By subtly following some of the structural principles of linked verse, Bashō's narrative achieves a kind of covert unity. And by including an occasional poem by his traveling companion, Sora, it retains something of the feel of linked verse. Once again poets were collaborating.

*The Narrow Road of the Interior* was written, or begun, in 1689, when Bashō embarked on his most ambitious journey. It would cover fifteen hundred miles of hinterland and take Bashō and Sora to the far corners of northern Japan. Although he is first thought of as a *haiku* poet, many of Bashō's best poems originally appeared in the five travel memoirs that he wrote in the final decade of his life. *The Narrow Road* is the last of these travel diaries, the longest, and the most esteemed. It also represents the climax of a venerable tradition in Japan, where the travel diary as poetic memoir enjoyed a distinguished eight-hundred-year history.

This fact too is an indication that Bashō's poetry involves more than meets the eye. The journey depicted in *The Narrow Road* is another pilgrimage through nature, but it is also a very conscious emulation of the conventions of the past. "Bewitched by the god of restlessness" Bashō describes himself as the trip gets under way. "Seduced by the call of history" would be just as accurate. Bashō, or his literary persona, sets off as the hero on a quest. His goal is to seek inspiration from remote places made famous by literature and history. Reputation, celebrity, tradition intertwine.

In 1943, some 250 years later, a second diary was published. This was Sora's account of their trip together, and it came like a thunderclap. The man who represented himself as a frail pilgrim at the mercy of nature and fate, and who was later deified by the Shinto religion, is described by Sora as a much more practical and wily figure, who altered the facts of his trip, abridged, and deleted to maintain the ascetic tone appropriate for a poetic saint, a man who saw himself as the successor to all poet-travelers of the past and was not about to reveal that among the motives for his trip were cultivating patrons and recruiting new students.

But *The Narrow Road of the Interior* is a literary creation. Its spare, supple prose anchors wise poetic insights. Its *haiku* transcend entertainment. The material has been shaped only by taking great pains, and that is the nature of artistry.

For another, more colloquial rendering of *The Narrow Road of the Interior*, translated by the poet Cid Corman in collaboration with Kamaike Susumu, see *Back Roads to Far Towns* (1986). All five of Bashō's travel journals are found in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches* (1966), translated by Nobuyuki Yuasa, whose re-creation of *haiku* as four-line poems seems less successful. For additional *haiku* by Bashō see Lucien Stryk, trans., *On Love and Barley* (1985). For examples of Bashō's linked poetry see Earl Miner and Hiroko Odagiri, trans., *The Monkey's Straw Raincoat* (1981). For more poems by Bashō and his followers see Steven D. Carter, *Traditional Japanese Poetry: An Anthology* (1991). Two excellent book-length introductions to Bashō, both by Makoto Ueda, are *Matsuo Bashō* (1982) and *Bashō and His Interpreters* (1991). Shorter introductions are found in two literary histories by Donald Keene: *World within Walls* (1976) and *Travelers of a Hundred Ages* (1989). For a general study of *haiku* see Kenneth Yasuda, *The Japanese Haiku* (1957), and for an anthology of *haiku* from Bashō to modern times see Harold G. Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku* (1958).

## PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

The following list uses common English syllables to provide rough equivalents of selected words whose pronunciation may be unfamiliar to the general reader.

Atsumi: <i>ah-tsoo-mee</i>	konoshiro: <i>koh-noh-shee-roh</i>
Benkei: <i>ben-kay</i>	koromogae: <i>koh-roh-moh-gah-e</i>
Butchō: <i>boot-choh</i>	Kūkai: <i>koo-kai</i>
Date: <i>dah-tay</i>	Kurokamiyama: <i>koo-roh-kah-mee-yah-mah</i>
Echigo: <i>e-chee-goh</i>	Kyohaku: <i>kyoh-hah-koo</i>
Edo: <i>e-doh</i>	Matsuo Bashō: <i>mah-tsoo-oh bah-shoh</i>
Fukuura: <i>foo-koo-oo-rah</i>	Minamidani: <i>mee-nah-mee-dah-nee</i>
Genji: <i>gen-jee</i>	Nikkō: <i>neek-koh</i>
Genroku: <i>gen-roh-koo</i>	Nōin: <i>noh-een</i>
haikai: <i>hai-kai</i>	Satō Shōji: <i>sah-toh shoh-jee</i>
Heike: <i>hay-ke</i>	Shinto: <i>sheen-toh</i>
hototogisu: <i>hoh-toh-toh-gee-soo</i>	Shiogoshi: <i>shee-oh-goh-shee</i>
Ihara Saikaku: <i>ee-hah-rah sai-kah-koo</i>	Shirakawa: <i>shee-rah-kah-wah</i>
lizuka: <i>ee-ee-zoo-kah</i>	Sōgorō: <i>soh-goh-roh</i>
Ji: <i>jee</i>	Tsuruga: <i>tsoo-roo-gah</i>
Kanemori: <i>kah-ne-moh-ree</i>	Yasuhira: <i>yah-soo-hee-rah</i>
Kawai: <i>kah-wai</i>	Yoichi: <i>yoh-ee-chee</i>
Kisakata: <i>kee-sah-kah-tah</i>	Yudono: <i>yoo-doh-noh</i>
Kokinshū: <i>koh-keen-shoo</i>	

The Narrow Road of the Interior<sup>1</sup>

The sun and the moon are eternal voyagers; the years that come and go are travelers too. For those whose lives float away on boats, for those who greet old age with hands clasping the lead ropes of horses, travel is life, travel is home. And many are the men of old who have perished as they journeyed.

I myself fell prey to wanderlust some years ago, desiring nothing better than to be a vagrant cloud scudding before the wind. Only last autumn, after having drifted along the seashore for a time, had I swept away the old cobwebs from my dilapidated riverside hermitage. But the year ended before I knew it, and I found myself looking at hazy spring skies and thinking of crossing Shirakawa Barrier.<sup>2</sup> Bewitched by the god of restlessness, I lost my peace of mind; summoned by the spirits of the road, I felt unable to settle down to anything. By the time I had mended my torn trousers, put a new cord on my hat, and cauterized my legs with moxa,<sup>3</sup> I was thinking only of the moon at Matsushima. I turned over my dwelling to others, moved to a house belonging to Sanpū,<sup>4</sup> and affixed the initial page of a linked-verse sequence to one of the pillars at my cottage.

Even my grass-thatched hut  
will have new occupants now:  
a display of dolls.<sup>5</sup>

It was the Twenty-seventh Day, almost the end of the Third Month. The wan morning moon retained little of its brilliance, but the silhouette of Mount Fuji was dimly visible in the first pale light of dawn. With a twinge of sadness, I wondered when I might see the flowering branches at Ueno and Yanaka again. My intimate friends, who had all assembled the night before, got on the boat to see me off.

We disembarked at Senju.<sup>6</sup> Transitory though I know this world to be, I shed tears when I came to the parting of the ways, overwhelmed by the prospect of the long journey ahead.

Departing springtime:  
birds lament and fishes too  
have tears in their eyes.

With that as the initial entry in my journal, we started off, hard though it was to stride out in earnest. The others lined up part way along the road, apparently wanting to watch us out of sight.

That year was, I believe, the second of the Genroku<sup>7</sup> era [1689]. I had

1. Translated by Helen Craig McCullough and Steven D. Carter, with notes adapted from McCullough. 2. An old official checkpoint where travelers entered Mutsu Province. 3. A combustible substance used in traditional East Asian medicine. Moxa cones, made from pulverized plant leaves, were burned at specific therapeutic points on the skin, depending on the symptoms. The resulting heat was thought to adjust physical disorders by releasing energy obstructed at a crucial point and returning it to smooth circulation. 4. A disciple and patron. 5. It is the time of the Doll Festival, in the Third Month, when dolls representing the emperor, the empress, and their attendants are displayed in every household. 6. Near Edo (Tokyo). The path of Bashō's journey is traced on the map on p. 2102. 7. The era name. For information on the Japanese calendar, see the introduction "The Rise of Popular Arts in Premodern Japan" (p. 2105).

taken a sudden fancy to make the long pilgrimage on foot to Mutsu and Dewa<sup>8</sup>—to view places I had heard about but never seen, even at the cost of hardships severe enough to "whiten a man's hair under the skies of Wu."<sup>9</sup> The outlook was not reassuring, but I resolved to hope for the best and be content merely to return alive.

We barely managed to reach Sōka Post Station that night. My greatest trial was the pack I bore on my thin, bony shoulders. I had planned to set out with no baggage at all, but had ended by taking along a paper coat for cold nights, a cotton bath garment, rain gear, and ink and brushes, as well as certain farewell presents, impossible to discard, which simply had to be accepted as burdens on the way.

We went to pay our respects at Muro-no-yashima. Sora, my fellow pilgrim, said, "This shrine honors Ko-no-hana-sakuya-hime, the goddess worshipped at Mount Fuji. The name Muro-no-yashima is an allusion to the birth of Hohodemi-no-mikoto inside the sealed chamber the goddess entered and set ablaze in fulfillment of her vow. It is because of that same incident that poems about the shrine usually mention smoke. The passage in the shrine history telling of the prohibition against *konoshiro* fish<sup>1</sup> is also well known."

On the Thirtieth, we lodged at the foot of the Nikkō Mountains. "I am called Buddha Gozaemon," the master of the house informed us. "People have given me that title because I make it a point to be honest in all my dealings. You may rest here tonight with your minds at ease."

"What kind of Buddha is it who has manifested himself in this impure world to help humble travelers like us—mendicant monks, as it were, on a pious pilgrimage?" I wondered. By paying close attention to his behavior, I satisfied myself that he was indeed a man of stubborn integrity, devoid of shrewdness and calculation. He was one of those, "firm, resolute, simple, and modest, who are near virtue,"<sup>2</sup> and I found his honorable, unassuming nature wholly admirable.

On the First of the Fourth Month, we went to worship at the shrine. In antiquity, the name of that holy mountain was written Nikōsan [Two-Storm Mountain], but the Great Teacher Kūkai changed it to Nikkō [Sunlight] when he founded the temple. It is almost as though the Great Teacher had been able to see 1,000 years into the future, for today the shrine's radiance extends throughout the realm, its beneficence overflows in the eight directions, and the four classes<sup>3</sup> of people dwell in security and peace. This is an awesome subject of which I shall write no more.

Ah, awesome sight!  
on summer leaves and spring leaves,  
the radiance of the sun!

Kurokamiyama was veiled in haze, dotted with lingering patches of white snow. Sora composed this poem:

8. Two northern provinces. 9. An allusion to a Chinese poem written by someone seeing off a monk on his travels: "Your hat will be heavy with the snows of Wu; / Your boots will be fragrant with the fallen blossoms of Chu." Snow on a traveler's hat was associated with hardships and with whitening hair. 1. Gizzard shad. It was taboo to eat the fish because, when broiled, it gave off a smell like flesh burning. 2. From Confucius's *Analects*. 3. Samurai, farmer, artisan, and merchant. The shrine held the mausoleum of the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate.

Black hair shaved off,  
at Kurokamiyama<sup>4</sup>  
I change to new robes.

Sora is of the Kawai family; he was formerly called Sōgorō. He lived in a house adjoining mine, almost under the leaves of the banana plant, and used to help me with the chores of hauling wood and drawing water. Delighted by the thought of seeing Matsushima and Kisakata with me on this trip, and eager also to spare me some of the hardships of the road, he shaved his head at dawn on the day of our departure, put on a monk's black robe, and changed his name to Sōgo. That is why he composed the Kurokamiyama poem. The word *koromogae* ["I change to new robes"]<sup>5</sup> was most effective.

There is a waterfall half a league or so up the mountain. The stream leaps with tremendous force over outthrust rocks at the top and descends 100 feet into a dark green pool strewn with 1,000 rocks. Visitors squeeze into the space between the rocks and the cascade to view it from the rear, which is why it is called Urami-no-take [Rearview Falls].

In brief seclusion  
at a waterfall—the start  
of a summer retreat.

I knew someone at Kurobane in Nasu, so we decided to head straight across the plain from there. It began to rain as we walked along, taking our bearings on a distant village, and the sun soon sank below the horizon. After borrowing accommodations for the night at a farmhouse, we started out across the plain again in the morning. A horse was grazing nearby. We appealed for help to a man who was cutting grass and found him by no means incapable of understanding other people's feelings, rustic though he was.

"What's the best thing to do, I wonder?" he said. "I can't leave my work. Still, inexperienced travelers are bound to get lost on this plain, what with all the trails branching off in every direction. Rather than see you go on alone, I'll let you take the horse. Send him back when he won't go any farther." With that, he lent us the animal.

Two small children came running behind the horse. One of them, a little girl, was called Kasane. Sora composed this poem:

Kasane must be  
a name for a wild pink  
with double petals!<sup>6</sup>

Before long, we arrived at a hamlet and turned the horse back with some money tied to the saddle.

We called on Jōbōji, the warden at Kurobane. Surprised and delighted to see us, he kept us in conversation day and night; and his younger brother, Tōsui, came morning and evening. We went with Tōsui to his

4. Or Mount Kurokami, homonymous with "black hair." 5. The first day of the Fourth Month was the date for changing from winter to summer clothing. 6. This poem uses wordplay. The name *Kasane* can mean "double." The word for "wild pink" (a flower) can also mean "beloved child."

own house and were also invited to the homes of various other relatives. So the time passed.

One day, we strolled into the outskirts of the town for a brief visit to the site of the old dog shoots, then pressed through the Nasu bamboo fields to Lady Tamamo's tumulus,<sup>7</sup> and went on to pay our respects at Hachiman Shrine. Someone told me that when Yoichi shot down the fan target, it was to this very shrine that he prayed, "and especially Shōhachiman, the tutelary deity of my province."<sup>8</sup> The thought of the divine response evoked deep emotion. We returned to Tōsui's house as darkness fell.

There was a mountain-cult temple, Kōmyōji, in the vicinity. We visited it by invitation and worshipped at the Ascetic's Hall.<sup>9</sup>

Toward summer mountains  
we set off after prayers  
before the master's clogs.

The site of the Venerable Butchō's<sup>1</sup> hermitage was behind Unganji Temple in that province. Butchō once told me that he had used pine charcoal to inscribe a poem on a rock there:

Ah, how I detest  
building any shelter at all,  
even a grass-thatched  
hovel less than five feet square!  
Were it not for the rainstorms . . .

Staff in hand, I prepared to set out for the temple to see what was left of the hermitage. A number of people encouraged one another to accompany me, and I acquired a group of young companions who kept up a lively chatter along the way. We reached the lower limits of the temple grounds in no time. The mountains created an impression of great depth. The valley road stretched far into the distance, pines and cryptomerias rose in dark masses, the moss dripped with moisture, and there was a bite to the air, even though it was the Fourth Month. We viewed all of the Ten Sights<sup>2</sup> and entered the main gate by way of a bridge.

Eager to locate the hermitage, I scrambled up the hill behind the temple to a tiny thatched structure on a rock, a lean-to built against a cave. It was like seeing the holy Yuanmiao's Death Gate or the monk Fayun's<sup>3</sup> rock chamber. I left an impromptu verse on a pillar:

Even woodpeckers  
seem to spare the hermitage  
in the summer grove.

7. According to legend, Lady Tamamo was a fox-woman with whom an emperor fell in love. After having been unmasked by a diviner, she fled to Nasu, where local warriors shot her down. Her vindictive spirit survived as Killer Rock, a large boulder that releases poisonous fumes, which Bashō will soon visit on his journey. *Dog shoots*: for a brief time in the 13th century dog shooting had been a sport.

8. Refers to an episode in *The Tale of the Heike*. Yoichi is a minor *samurai* in the service of the Minamoto/Genji. An expert archer, he succeeds in shooting a fan suspended off the prow of an enemy ship, put there to taunt the Genji. Hachiman Shrine was dedicated to the god of war. 9. Dedicated to a miracle-working mountain ascetic of the 8th century, whose enshrined image is believed to have shown a holy man wearing high clogs (referred to in the following poem) and clothes made from leaves, holding a staff, and leaning against a rock. 1. A Zen master with whom Bashō had studied. 2. Various rocks, peaks, buildings, etc., within the temple precincts. 3. A Chinese priest; he lived in a hut perched atop a high rock. Yuanmiao was a Chinese priest who confined himself for fifteen years to a cave he called Death's Gate.

From Kurobane, I headed toward Killer Rock astride a horse lent us by the warden. When the groom asked if I would write a poem for him, I gave him this, surprised and impressed that he should exhibit such cultivated taste:

A cuckoo<sup>4</sup> song:  
please make the horse angle off  
across the field.

Killer Rock stands in the shadow of a mountain near a hot spring. It still emits poisonous vapors: dead bees, butterflies, and other insects lie in heaps near it, hiding the color of the sand.

The willow "where fresh spring water flowed"<sup>5</sup> survives on a ridge between two ricefields in Ashino Village. The district officer there, a man called Kohō, had often expressed a desire to show me the tree, and I had wondered each time about its exact location—but on this day I rested in its shade.

Ah, the willow tree:  
a whole rice paddy planted  
before I set out.

So the days of impatient travel had accumulated, until at last I had reached Shirakawa Barrier. It was there, for the first time, that I felt truly on the way. I could understand why Kanemori had been moved to say, "Would that there were a means somehow to send people word in the capital!"<sup>6</sup>

As one of the Three Barriers, Shirakawa has always attracted the notice of poets and other writers. An autumn wind seemed to sound in my ears, colored leaves seemed to appear before my eyes—but even the leafy summer branches were delightful in their own way. Wild roses bloomed alongside the whiteness of the deutzia, making us feel as though we were crossing snow. I believe one of Kiyosuke's writings preserves a story about a man of the past who straightened his hat and adjusted his dress there.<sup>7</sup> Sora composed this poem:

With deutzia<sup>8</sup> flowers  
we adorn our hats—formal garb  
for the barrier.

We passed beyond the barrier and crossed the Abukuma River. To the left, the peak of Aizu soared; to the right, the districts of Iwaki, Sōma, and Mihara lay extended; to the rear, mountains formed boundaries with

4. In Japanese *hototogisu*; the name is an onomatopoeia derived from the bird's call: *ho-to-to*. Its song was deemed the quintessence of summer and is so beautiful that Bashō would like his horse to follow after it. 5. Refers to a verse by the famed poet-priest Saigyō (1118–1190): "On the wayside / where a clear spring flowed / in a willow's shade: / 'Just for a moment,' I thought, / but then I lingered there." Saigyō was an inveterate traveler and an important influence on Bashō. 6. Alludes to a poem by Kanemori (died 990): "Would there were means / to let them know, somehow, / the people of the capital: / 'Today I have crossed / Shirakawa Barrier.'" 7. Fujiwara Kiyosuke (1104–1177) was a court noble and a poet-scholar. The man's actions show respect to Nōin (998–1050?), a monk and early poet-traveler who established Shirakawa Barrier as a place with poetic associations. In earlier times, travelers approaching checkpoints between provinces adjusted their clothes before crossing the barrier. 8. A shrub of the saxifrage family, an ornamental bush with white or pink flowers. It blooms in the Fourth Month.

Hitachi and Shimotsuke provinces. We passed Kagenuma Pond, but the sky happened to be overcast that day, so there were no reflections.<sup>9</sup>

At the post town of Sukagawa, we visited a man called Tōkyū, who persuaded us to stay four or five days. His first act was to inquire, "How did you feel when you crossed Shirakawa Barrier?"

"What with the fatigue of the long, hard trip, the distractions of the scenery, and the stress of so many nostalgic associations, I couldn't manage to think of a decent poem," I said. "Still, it seemed a pity to cross with nothing to show for it . . .":

A start for connoisseurs  
of poetry—rice-planting song  
of Michinoku.

We added a second verse and then a third, and continued until we had completed three sequences.

Under a great chestnut tree in the corner of the town, there lived a hermit monk. It seemed to me that his cottage, with its aura of lonely tranquility, must resemble that other place deep in the mountains where someone had gathered horse chestnuts.<sup>1</sup> I set down a few words:

To form the character "chestnut," we write "tree of the west."<sup>2</sup> I have heard, I believe, that the bodhisattva Gyōgi perceived an affinity between this tree and the Western Paradise,<sup>3</sup> and that he used its wood for staffs and pillars throughout his life:

Chestnut at the eaves—  
here are blossoms unremarked  
by ordinary folk.

Asakayama is just beyond Hiwada Post Station, about five leagues from Tōkyū's house. It is close to the road, and there are numerous marshes in the vicinity. It was almost the season for reaping *katsumi*.<sup>4</sup> We kept asking, "Which plant is the flowering *katsumi*?" But nobody knew. We wandered about, scrutinizing marshes, questioning people, and seeking "*katsumi*, *katsumi*" until the sun sank to the rim of the hills.

We turned off to the right at Nihonmatsu, took a brief look at Kurozuka Cave,<sup>5</sup> and stopped for the night at Fukushima.

On the following day, we went to Shinobu in search of the Fern-print Rock,<sup>6</sup> which proved to be half buried under the soil of a remote hamlet in the shadow of a mountain. Some village urchins came up and told us, "In the old days, the rock used to be on top of that mountain, but the farmers got upset because the people who passed would destroy the young

9. The name of the pond is literally "Shadow Swamp"; with the sun obscured, it does not fulfill its reputation. 1. Refers to Saigyō (see n. 5, p. 2116) and one of his poems: "In these remote hills, / I try to trap water / dripping onto the rocks; / I gather horse chestnuts / dropping to the ground." 2. The character for "chestnut" consists of the character for "tree" surmounted by an element resembling the character for "west." 3. One of the various "Buddha worlds" (Buddhist equivalents of Heaven); this one is located in the western sector of the universe and is presided over by Amida, the most popular Buddhist deity of the time. *Bodhisattva*: a person who attains enlightenment but compassionately refrains from entering paradise to save others, a future Buddha. Gyōgi (668–749) was a Buddhist monk known for his asceticism and charisma. 4. Wild rice. 5. Rich in folklore. A witch was said to be interred beneath Kurozuka, a hillock whose name means "black mound," and the nearby rocky cave was thought a goblins' lair. 6. Said to have been used to imprint cloth with a moss-fern design, a specialty of the area.

grain so they could test it. They shoved it off into this valley; that's why it's lying upside down." A likely story, perhaps.

Hands planting seedlings  
evoke Shinobu patterns  
of the distant past.

We crossed the river at Tsukinowa Ford and emerged at Senoue Post Station. Satō Shōji's<sup>7</sup> old home was about a league and a half away, near the mountains to the left. Told that we would find the site at Sabano in Iizuka Village, we went along, asking directions, until we came upon it at a place called Maruyama. That was where Shōji had had his house. I wept as someone explained that the front gate had been at the foot of the hill. Still standing at an old temple nearby were a number of stone monuments erected in memory of the family. It was especially moving to see the memorials to the two young wives.<sup>8</sup> "Women though they were, all the world knows of their bravery." The thought made me drench my sleeve. The Tablet of Tears<sup>9</sup> was not far to seek!

We entered the temple to ask for tea, and there we saw Yoshitsune's sword and Benkei's pannier,<sup>1</sup> preserved as treasures.

Paper carp flying!  
Display pannier and sword, too,  
in the Fifth Month.

It was the First Day of the Fifth Month.

We lodged that night at Iizuka, taking advantage of the hot springs in the town to bathe before engaging a room. The hostelry turned out to be a wretched hovel, its straw mats spread over dirt floors. In the absence of a lamp, we prepared our beds and stretched out by the light from a fire-pit. Thunder rumbled during the night, and rain fell in torrents. What with the roof leaking right over my head and the fleas and mosquitoes biting, I got no sleep at all. To make matters worse, my old complaint<sup>2</sup> flared up, causing me such agony that I almost fainted.

At long last, the short night ended and we set out again. Still feeling the effects of the night, I rode a rented horse to Kōri Post Station. It was unsettling to fall prey to an infirmity while so great a distance remained ahead. But I told myself that I had deliberately planned this long pilgrimage to remote areas, a decision that meant renouncing worldly concerns and facing the fact of life's uncertainty. If I were to die on the road—very well, that would be Heaven's decree. Such reflections helped to restore my spirits a bit, and it was with a jaunty step that I passed through the Great Gate into the Date<sup>3</sup> domain.

We entered Kasajima District by way of Abumizuri and Shiraishi Castle. I asked someone about the Fujiwara Middle Captain Sanekata's<sup>4</sup> grave

7. A brave warrior and supporter of the Genji chieftain Yoshitsune (in *The Tale of the Heike*). 8. Of Satō Shōji's two sons, who died in battle. The young widows were said to have worn their husbands' suits of armor as a way of consoling their grieving mother-in-law, who still hoped to see her sons riding home victorious. 9. A memorial erected in China in honor of a virtuous official. All who saw it were said to weep. 1. A large basket. Yoshitsune is the great hero who leads his clan to victory in the war recounted in *The Tale of the Heike*. Benkei is his faithful lieutenant. 2. Bashō was troubled with stomachaches and hemorrhoids. 3. A clan that included some of the richest and most powerful provincial barons. 4. Fujiwara Sanekata (died 998) was a court poet whose quarrel with a clansman led to his exile in the northern provinces.

and was told, "Those two villages far off to the right at the edge of the hills are Minowa and Kasajima. The Road Goddess's shrine and the 'memento miscanthus' are still there."<sup>5</sup> The road was in a dreadful state from the recent early-summer rains, and I was exhausted, so we contented ourselves with looking in that direction as we trudged on. Because the names Minowa and Kasajima suggested the rainy season,<sup>6</sup> I composed this verse.

Where is Rain Hat Isle?  
Somewhere down the muddy roads  
of the Fifth Month!

We lodged at Iwanuma. It was exciting to see the Takekuma Pine. The trunk forks a bit above the ground, and one knows instantly that this is just how the old tree must have looked. My first thought was of Nōin.<sup>7</sup> Did he compose the poem, "Not a trace this time of the pine" because a certain man, appointed long ago to serve as Governor of Mutsu, had felled the tree to get pilings for a bridge to span the Natori River? Someone told me that generations of people have been alternately cutting down the existing tree and planting a replacement. The present one is a magnificent specimen—quite capable, I should imagine, of living 1,000 years.

Kyohaku<sup>8</sup> had given me a poem as a farewell present:

Late cherry blossoms:  
please show my friend the pine tree  
at Takekuma.

Thus:

After three months:  
the twin-trunked pine awaited  
since the cherry trees bloomed.

We crossed the Natori River into Sendai on the day when people thatch their roofs with sweet-flag leaves.<sup>9</sup> We sought out a lodging and stayed four or five days.

I made the acquaintance of a local painter, Kaemon by name, who had been described to me as a man of cultivated taste. He told us he had devoted several years to locating famous old places that had become hard to identify, and took us to see some of them one day. The bush clover grew thick at Miyagino; I could imagine the sight in autumn. It was the season when the pieris<sup>1</sup> bloomed at Tamada, Yokono, and Tsutsuji-gaoka. We entered a pine grove where no sunlight penetrated—a place called Konoshita, according to Kaemon—and I thought it must have been the same kind of heavy moisture, dripping from those very trees long ago, that inspired the poem, "Suggest to your lord, attendants, that he wear his

5. Someone had planted a clump of miscanthus, a variety of ornamental grass, at Sanekata's grave in allusion to a memorial poem by Saigyō: "Only his name, / eternally unwithered, / has escaped decay: / we see, as a memento, / miscanthus on a dry plain." 6. *Mino* can mean "straw raincoat," and *kasa* can mean "rain hat." 7. See n. 7, p. 2116. 8. A disciple. 9. On Boys' Day, a holiday on the fifth day of the Fifth Month, it was the custom for families with sons to fly carp streamers, a symbol of vigor and success. On the day before, irises (*sweet-flag*), because they were thought to ward off evil, were hung from the eaves. The holiday was also known as the Iris Festival. 1. Japanese andromeda (*Pieris japonica*), a broad-leaved evergreen with drooping clusters of white flowers.

hat."<sup>2</sup> We paid our respects at the Yakushidō Hall and at Tenjin Shrine before the day ended.

Kaemon sent us off with a map on which he had drawn famous scenes of Shiogama and Matsushima. He also gave us two pairs of straw sandals, bound with dark blue cords, as a farewell present. The gifts showed him to be quite as cultivated as I had surmised.

Let us bind sweet-flags  
to our feet, making of them  
cords for straw sandals.

Continuing on our way with the help of the map, we came to the *tofu* [ten-strand] sedge, growing at the base of the mountains where the "narrow road of the interior"<sup>3</sup> runs. I am told that the local people still make ten-strand mats every year for presentation to the provincial Governor.

We saw the Courtyard Monument Stone at Tagajō in Ichikawa Village. It was a little more than six feet tall and perhaps three feet wide. Some characters, faintly visible as depressions in the moss, listed distances to the provincial boundaries in the four directions. There was also an inscription: "This castle was erected in the first year of Jinki [724] by the Inspector-Garrison Commander Ōno no Ason Azumabito. It was rebuilt in the sixth year of Tenpyō Hōji [762] by the Consultant-Garrison Commander Emi no Ason Asakari. First Day, Twelfth Month." That was in the reign of Emperor Shōmu.

Although we hear about many places celebrated in verse since antiquity, most of them have vanished with the passing of time. Mountains have crumbled, rivers have entered unaccustomed channels, roads have followed new routes, stones have been buried and hidden underground, aged trees have given way to saplings. But this monument was a genuine souvenir from 1,000 years ago, and to see it before my eyes was to feel that I could understand the sentiments of the old poets. "This is a traveler's reward," I thought. "This is the joy of having survived into old age." Moved to tears, I forgot the hardships of the road.

From there, we went to see Noda-no-tamagawa and Oki-no-ishi. A temple, Masshōzan, had been built at Sue-no-matsuyama, and there were graves everywhere among the pine trees, saddening reminders that such must be the end of all vows to "interchange wings and link branches."<sup>4</sup> The evening bell was tolling as we entered Shiogama.

The perpetual overcast of the rainy season had lifted enough to reveal Magaki Island close at hand, faintly illuminated by the evening moon. A line of small fishing boats came rowing in. As I listened to the voices of the men dividing the catch, I felt that I understood the poet who sang, "There is deep pathos in a boat pulled by a rope," and my own emotion

2. A poem in the *Kokinshū* (Collection of ancient and modern times), the first of twenty-one imperially commissioned anthologies of classical Japanese poetry; it was completed around 905 and contains 1,111 poems. The poem referred to here is: "Suggest to your lord, / attendants, / that he wear his hat, / for beneath the trees of Miyagino / the dew comes down harder than the rain." 3. This road, the source of Bashō's title, extended from what is now northeastern Sendai to Tagajō City (see the map on p. 2102). 4. An allusion to the pledge exchanged by the Chinese emperor and his beloved in the *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* by Po Chū-i: "In heaven, may we be birds with shared wings; / On earth, may we be trees with linked branches." The places mentioned here are in the vicinity of Sendai.

deepened.<sup>5</sup> That night, a blind singer recited a Michinoku ballad<sup>6</sup> to the accompaniment of his lute. He performed not far from where I was trying to sleep, and I found his loud, countrified falsetto rather noisy—a chanting style quite different from either *Heike* recitation or the *kōwaka-mai*<sup>7</sup> ballad drama. But then I realized how admirable it was that the fine old customs were still preserved in that distant land.

Early the next day, we visited Shiogama Shrine, which had been restored by the provincial Governor. Its pillars stood firm and majestic, its painted rafters sparkled, its stone steps rose in flight after flight, and its sacred red fences gleamed in the morning sunlight. With profound reverence, I reflected that it is the way of our land for the miraculous powers of the gods to manifest themselves even in such remote, out-of-the-way places as this.

In front of the sanctuary, there was a splendid old lantern with an inscription on its iron door: "Presented as an offering by Izumi no Saburō in the third year of Bunji [1187]." It was rare, indeed, to see before one's eyes an object that had remained unchanged for 500 years. Izumi no Saburō was a brave, honorable, loyal, and filial warrior. His fame endures even today; there is no one who does not admire him. How true it is that men must strive to walk in the Way and uphold the right! "Fame will follow of itself."

Noon was already approaching when we engaged a boat for the crossing to Matsushima, a distance of a little more than two leagues. We landed at Ojima Beach.

Trite though it may seem to say so, Matsushima is the most beautiful spot in Japan, by no means inferior to Dongting Lake or West Lake.<sup>8</sup> The sea enters from the southeast into a bay extending for three leagues, its waters as ample as the flow of the Zhejiang Bore.<sup>9</sup> There are more islands than anyone could count. The tall ones rear up as though straining toward the sky; the flat ones crawl on their bellies over the waves. Some seem made of two layers, others of three folds. To the left, they appear separate; to the right, linked. Here and there, one carries another on its back or cradles it in its arms, as though caring for a beloved child or grandchild. The pines are deep green in color, and their branches, twisted by the salt gales, have assumed natural shapes so dramatic that they seem the work of human hands. The tranquil charm of the scene suggests a beautiful woman who has just completed her toilette. Truly, Matsushima might have been made by Ōyamazumi<sup>1</sup> in the ancient age of the mighty gods! What painter can reproduce, what author can describe the wonder of the creator's divine handiwork?

Ojima Island projects into the sea just offshore from the mainland. It is the site of the Venerable Ungo's<sup>2</sup> dwelling, and of the rock on which that holy man used to practice meditation. There also seemed to be a few

5. Reference to a poem in the *Kokinshū*: "However it may be elsewhere / in Michinoku, / there is deep pathos / in a boat pulled by a rope / along Shiogama shore." 6. A local ballad; Bashō is now in the province of Michinoku. 7. Dramatic ballad-dances recounting military episodes from *The Tale of the Heike* (originally performed as an oral narrative) and other warrior stories. *Kōwaka-mai* were one of the precursors of *nō* plays. 8. Chinese sites (which Bashō had never seen) famed for their beauty. 9. In China. 1. A mountain god who was son of the gods who created the Japanese islands. 2. A monk who rebuilt a temple at Matsushima. He was the teacher of Butchō, Bashō's Zen master.

recluses living among the pine trees. Upon seeing smoke rising from a fire of twigs and pine cones at one peaceful thatched hut, we could not help approaching the spot, even though we had no way of knowing what kind of man the occupant might be. Meanwhile, the moon began to shine on the water, transforming the scene from its daytime appearance.

We returned to the Matsushima shore to engage lodgings—a second-story room with a window on the sea. What marvelous exhilaration to spend the night so close to the winds and clouds! Sora recited this:

Ah, Matsushima!  
Cuckoo, you ought to borrow  
the guise of the crane.<sup>3</sup>

I remained silent, trying without success to compose myself for sleep. At the time of my departure from the old hermitage, Sodō and Hara Anteki<sup>4</sup> had given me poems about Matsushima and Matsu-ga-urashima (the one in Chinese and the other in Japanese), and I got them out of my bag now to serve as companions for the evening. I also had some *hokku*, compositions by Sanpū and Jokushi.<sup>5</sup>

On the Eleventh, we visited Zuiganji.<sup>6</sup> Thirty-two generations ago, Makabe no Heishirō entered holy orders, went to China, and returned to found that temple. Later, through the virtuous influence of the Venerable Ungo, the seven old structures were transformed into a great religious center, a veritable earthly paradise, with dazzling golden walls and resplendent furnishings. I thought with respectful admiration of the holy Kenbutsu<sup>7</sup> and wondered where his place of worship might have been.

On the Twelfth, we left for Hiraizumi, choosing a little-frequented track used by hunters, grass-cutters, and woodchoppers, which was supposed to take us past the Aneha Pine and Odae Bridge. Blundering along, we lost our way and finally emerged at the port town of Ishino-maki. Kinkazan, the mountain of which the poet wrote, "Golden flowers have blossomed," was visible across the water.<sup>8</sup> Hundreds of coastal vessels rode together in the harbor, and smoke ascended everywhere from the cooking fires of houses jostling for space. Astonished to have stumbled on such a place, we looked for lodgings, but nobody seemed to have a room for rent, and we spent the night in a wretched shack.

The next morning, we set out again on an uncertain journey over strange roads, plodding along an interminable dike from which we could see Sode-no-watari, Obuchi-no-maki, and Mano-no-kayahara<sup>9</sup> in the distance. We walked beside a long, dismal marsh to a place called Toima,

3. The gist of the poem is: "Your song is appealing, cuckoo, but the stately white crane is the bird we expect to see at Matsushima [Pine Isles]." Pines and cranes were a conventional pair, both symbols of longevity. Sora's poem alludes to an old poem of uncertain provenance and unstable wording, one version of which reads in part: "[When snow falls] does the plover borrow / the crane's [white] plumage?"  
4. Two friends of Bashō, both amateur poets. Hara was also a physician. 5. Bashō's disciples. *Hokku*: the first three lines of a linked-verse sequence, from which *haiku* evolved. 6. The temple restored by Ungo (see n. 2, p. 2121). 7. A monk who lived approximately six hundred years earlier and who confined himself to a small temple at Matsushima. 8. Refers to a poem in the *Man'yōshū* (The collection of ten thousand leaves), which was completed around 759 and is the earliest compilation of Japanese poetry, containing more than forty-five hundred poems. The poem referred to here was written when gold was discovered in the area: "For our sovereign's reign, / an auspicious augury: / among the mountains of Michinoku / in the east, / golden flowers have blossomed." 9. All are located between Ishi-no-maki and Toima and had associations with earlier poetry.

where we stopped overnight, and finally arrived in Hiraizumi. I think the distance was something over twenty leagues.

The glory of three generations<sup>1</sup> was but a dozing dream. Paddies and wild fields have claimed the land where Hidehira's mansion stood, a league beyond the site of the great gate, and only Mount Kinkeizan looks as it did in the past. My first act was to ascend to Takadachi. From there, I could see both the mighty Kitakami River, which flows down from Nanbu, and the Koromo River, which skirts Izumi Castle and empties into the larger stream below Takadachi. Yasuhira's<sup>2</sup> castle, on the near side of Koromo Barrier, seems to have guarded the Nanbu entrance against barbarian encroachments. There at Takadachi, Yoshitsune<sup>3</sup> shut himself up with a chosen band of loyal men—yet their heroic deeds lasted only a moment, and nothing remains but evanescent clumps of grass.

The nation is destroyed; the mountains and rivers remain.  
Spring comes to the castle; the grasses are green.<sup>4</sup>

Sitting on my sedge hat with those lines running through my head, I wept for a long time.

A dream of warriors,  
and after dreaming is done,  
the summer grasses.

Ah, the white hair:  
vision of Kanefusa<sup>5</sup>  
in deutzia flowers.

—Sora

The two halls of which we had heard so many impressive tales were open to visitors. The images of the three chieftains are preserved in the Sutra Hall, and in the Golden Hall there are the three coffins and the three sacred images.<sup>6</sup> In the past, the Golden Hall's seven precious substances were scattered and lost; gales ravaged the magnificent jewel-studded doors, and the golden pillars rotted in the frosts and snows. But just as it seemed that the whole building must collapse, leaving nothing but clumps of grass, new walls were put around it, and a roof was erected against the winds and rains. So it survives for a time, a memento of events that took place 1,000 years ago.

Do the Fifth-Month rains  
stay away when they fall,  
sparing that Hall of Gold?

After journeying on with the Nanbu Road visible in the distance, we spent the night at Iwade-no-sato. From there, we passed Ogurazaki and Mizu-no-ojima and arrived at Shitomae Barrier by way of Narugo Hot

1. That is, of the powerful Fujiwara family—Kiyohira, Motohira, and Hidehira—who created the so-called golden age of the north in the 12th century. 2. Son of Fujiwara Hidehira, whose fight with his brother destroyed the clan's prosperity in the region. After killing his brother, Yasuhira was in turn killed by the Minamoto/Genji chieftain Yoritomo. 3. See n. 1, p. 2118. 4. A quote from the Chinese poet Tu Fu, lamenting the devastation caused by a rebellion in 755, from which the Tang dynasty never fully recovered. 5. A loyal retainer of Yoshitsune. 6. Of Amida Buddha and his attendants Kannon and Seishi. The coffins contained the mummified remains of Hidehira, his father, and his grandfather.



Springs, intending to cross into Dewa Province. The road was so little frequented by travelers that we excited the guards' suspicions, and we barely managed to get through the checkpoint. The sun had already begun to set as we toiled upward through the mountains, so we asked for shelter when we saw a border guard's house. Then the wind howled and the rain poured for three days, trapping us in those miserable hills.

The fleas and the lice—  
and next to my pillow,  
a pissing horse.

The master of the house told us that our route into Dewa was an ill-marked trail through high mountains; we would be wise to engage a guide to help us with the crossing. I took his advice and hired a fine, stalwart young fellow, who strode ahead with a short, curved sword tucked into his belt and an oak staff in his hand. As we followed him, I felt an uncomfortable presentiment that this would be the day on which we would come face to face with danger at last. Just as our host had said, the mountains were high and thickly wooded, their silence unbroken even by the chirp of a bird. It was like traveling at night to walk in the dim light under the dense canopy. Feeling as though dust must be blowing down from the edge of the clouds,<sup>7</sup> we pushed through bamboo, forded streams, and stumbled over rocks, all the time in a cold sweat, until we finally emerged at Mogami-no-shō. Our guide took his leave in high spirits, after having informed us that the path we had followed was one on which unpleasant things were always happening, and that it had been a great stroke of luck to bring us through safely. Even though the danger was past, his words made my heart pound.

At Obanazawa, we called on Seifū, a man whose tastes were not vulgar despite his wealth. As a frequent visitor to the capital, he understood what it meant to be a traveler, and he kept us for several days, trying in many kind ways to make us forget the hardships of the long journey.

I sit at ease,  
taking this coolness  
as my lodging place.

Come on, show yourself!  
Under the silkworm nursery  
the croak of a toad.

In my mind's eye,  
a brush for someone's brows:  
the safflower blossom.

The silkworm nurses—  
figures reminiscent  
of a distant past.<sup>8</sup>

—Sora

7. To emphasize the murkiness of the atmosphere, Bashō borrows from a poem in which Tu Fu compliments a princess by implying that she lives in the sky: "When I begin to ascend the breezy stone steps, / a dust storm blows down from the edge of the clouds." 8. The silkworm tenders (nurses) dress in an old style. Here, as Bashō does elsewhere, Sora expresses nostalgia for a way of life that had disappeared from the cities to the west.

In the Yamagata domain, there is a mountain temple called Ryū-shakuji, a serene, quiet seat of religion founded by the Great Teacher Jikaku.<sup>9</sup> Urged by others to see it, we retraced our steps some seven leagues from Obanazawa. We arrived before sundown, reserved accommodations in the pilgrims' hostel at the foot of the hill, and climbed to the halls above. The mountain consists of piles of massive rocks. Its pines and other evergreens bear the marks of many long years; its moss lies like velvet on the ancient rocks and soil. Not a sound emanated from the temple buildings at the summit, which all proved to be closed, but we skirted the cliffs and clambered over the rocks to view the halls. The quiet, lonely beauty of the environs purified the heart.

Ah, tranquility!  
Penetrating the very rock,  
a cicada's voice.

At Ōishida, we awaited fair weather with a view to descending the Mogami River by boat. In that spot where the seeds of the old *haikai*<sup>1</sup> had fallen, some people still cherished the memory of the flowers. With hearts softened by poetry's civilizing touch, those onetime blowers of shrill reed flutes<sup>2</sup> had been groping for the correct way of practicing the art, so they told me, but had found it difficult to choose between the old styles and the new with no one to guide them. I felt myself under an obligation to leave them a sequence. Such was one result of this journey in pursuit of my art.

The Mogami River has its source deep in the northern mountains and its upper reaches in Yamagata. After presenting formidable hazards like Goten and Hayabusa,<sup>3</sup> it skirts Mount Itajiki on the north and finally empties into the sea at Sakata. Our boat descended amid luxuriant foliage, the mountains pressing overhead from the left and the right. It was probably similar craft, loaded with sheaves, that the old song meant when it spoke of rice boats.<sup>4</sup> Travelers can see the cascading waters of Shiraito Falls through gaps in the green leaves. The Sennindō Hall is there too, facing the bank.

The swollen waters made the journey hazardous:

Bringing together  
the summer rains in swiftness:  
Mogami River!

On the Third of the Sixth Month, we climbed Mount Haguro. We called on Zushi Sakichi<sup>5</sup> and then were received by the Holy Teacher Egaku, the Abbot's deputy, who lodged us at the Minamidani Annex and treated us with great consideration.

9. Better known as Ennin (794–864), a famous priest who helped establish Buddhism in Japan. *Yamagata domain*: from the early 17th century until 1868, Japan was divided into domains, or fiefdoms, held directly by the shogun and his family or by the feudal barons who, to one degree or another, supported him. Yamagata was in the province of Dewa. 1. Nonstandard, or eccentric, linked verse. Masters from two older *haikai* schools had spent time in the area. 2. That is, untutored country people. 3. Two treacherous spots in the river, one with rocks and the other with swift currents. 4. Refers to a folk song whose chief interest lies in its puns on the word *rice*. 5. A dyer by trade and an amateur poet.

On the Fourth, there was a *haikai* gathering at the Abbot's residence:

Ah, what a delight!  
Cooled as by snow, the south wind  
at Minamidani.

On the Fifth, we went to worship at Haguro Shrine. Nobody knows when the founder, the Great Teacher Nōjo, lived. The *Engi Canon*<sup>6</sup> mentions a shrine called "Satoyama in Dewa Province," which leads one to wonder if *sato* might be a copyist's error for *kuro*. Perhaps "Haguroyama" is a contraction of "Dewa no Kuroyama" [Kuroyama in Dewa Province]. I understand that the official gazetteer says Dewa acquired its name because the province used to present birds' feathers to the throne as tribute.<sup>7</sup>

Hagurosan, Gassan, and Yudono are known collectively as the Three Mountains. At Haguro, a subsidiary of Tōeizan Kan'eiji Temple in Edo, the moon of Tendai<sup>8</sup> enlightenment shines bright, and the lamp of the Law of perfect understanding and all-permeating vision burns high. The temple buildings stand roof to roof; the ascetics vie in the practice of rituals. We can but feel awe and trepidation before the miraculous powers of so holy a place, which may with justice be called a magnificent mountain, destined to flourish forever.

On the Eighth, we made the ascent of Gassan. Donning paper garlands, and with our heads wrapped in white turbans, we toiled upward for eight leagues, led by a porter guide through misty mountains with ice and snow underfoot. We could almost have believed ourselves to be entering the cloud barrier beyond which the sun and the moon traverse the heavens. The sun was setting and the moon had risen when we finally reached the summit, gasping for breath and numb with cold. We stretched out on beds of bamboo grass until dawn, and descended toward Yudono after the rising sun had dispersed the clouds.

Near a valley, we saw a swordsmith's cottage. The Dewa smiths, attracted by the miraculous waters, had purified themselves there before forging their famous blades, which they had identified by the carved signature, "Gassan."<sup>9</sup> I was reminded of the weapons tempered at Dragon Spring.<sup>1</sup> It also seemed to me that I could understand the dedication with which those men had striven to master their art, inspired by the ancient example of Gan Jiang and Moye.<sup>2</sup>

While seated on a rock for a brief rest, I noticed some half-opened buds on a cherry tree about three feet high. How admirable that those late blooms had remembered spring, despite the snowdrifts under which they had lain buried! They were like "plum blossoms in summer heat"<sup>3</sup> per-

6. An early collection of governmental regulations (compiled 905-927), designed to flesh out the broad administrative structure that was then being adapted from China. 7. The characters representing *sato* and *kuro* are similar in appearance, especially when written in cursive script. The *ha* of "Haguroyama" and the *wa* of "Dewa" can be written with the same phonetic symbol and were once the same sound. The connection between Dewa and birds' feathers is in the orthography: *wa* is written with the character for "feathers." 8. A Buddhist sect. 9. A famous swordsmith in the late 12th century. 1. A spring in China whose waters were used for tempering sword blades. 2. Gan Jiang was a Chinese swordsmith. He and his wife, Moye, forged two famous swords. 3. A Zen metaphor for the rare and unusual and, by extension, for passing beyond this world to enlightenment.

fuming the air. The memory of Archbishop Gyōson's touching poem<sup>4</sup> added to the little tree's charm.

It is a rule among ascetics not to give outsiders details about Mount Yudono, so I shall lay aside my brush and write no more.

When we returned to our lodgings, Egaku asked us to inscribe poem cards with verses suggested by our pilgrimage to the Three Mountains:

Ah, what coolness!  
Under a crescent moon,  
Mount Haguro glimpsed.

Mountain of the Moon:  
after how many cloud peaks  
had formed and crumbled?

My sleeve was drenched  
at Yudono, the mountain  
of which none may speak.

Yudonoyama:  
tears fall as I walk the path  
where feet tread on coins.<sup>5</sup>

—Sora

After our departure from Haguro, we were invited to the warrior Nagayama Shigeyuki's home, where we composed a sequence. (Sakichi accompanied us that far.) Then we boarded a river boat and traveled downstream to Sakata Harbor. We stayed with a physician, En'an Fugyoku.

Evening cool!  
A view from Mount Atsumi  
to Fukuura.

Mogami River—  
it has plunged the hot sun  
into the sea.

I had already enjoyed innumerable splendid views of rivers and mountains, ocean and land; now I set my heart on seeing Kisakata. It was a journey of ten leagues northeast from Sakata, across mountains and along sandy beaches. A wind from the sea stirred the white sand early in the afternoon, and Mount Chōkai disappeared behind misting rain. "Groping in the dark," we found "the view in the rain exceptional too."<sup>6</sup> The surroundings promised to be beautiful once the skies had cleared. We crawled into a fisherman's thatched shanty to await the end of the rain.

The next day was fine, and we launched forth onto the bay in a boat as

4. A reference to a poem that Gyōson (1055-1135), an ascetic, composed when he discovered cherries blooming out of season: "Let us sympathize / with one another, / cherry tree on the mountain: / were it not for your blossoms, / I would have no friend at all." 5. The coins have been strewn by pilgrims, but unlike the secular world, no one scrambles to pick them up. Sora sheds tears at this miraculous behavior, which he can only attribute to the power of the gods. 6. Bashō compares Kisakata to the famous West Lake in China, of which Su Tongbo (1037-1101) wrote: "The sparkling, brimming waters are beautiful in sunshine; / The view when a misty rain veils the mountains is exceptional too." "Groping in the dark": probably an allusion to a poem composed at the lake by a visiting Japanese monk, Sakugen (1501-1579): "The sun is setting beyond Yuhangmen; / All sights are indistinct, there is no view. / But I recall the poem, 'Exceptional in rain, beautiful in sunshine'; / Groping in the dark, I feel West Lake's charm."

the bright morning sun rose. First of all, we went to Nōinjima to visit the spot where Saigyō had lived in seclusion for three years. Then we disembarked on the opposite shore and saw a memento of the poet, the old cherry tree that had suggested the verse, "rowing over flowers."<sup>7</sup> Near the water's edge, we noticed a tomb that was said to be the grave of Empress Jingū,<sup>8</sup> together with a temple, Kanmanjuji. I had never heard that the Empress had gone to that place. I wonder how her grave happened to be there.

Seated in the temple's front apartment with the blinds raised, we commanded a panoramic view. To the south, Mount Chōkai propped up the sky, its image reflected in the bay; to the west, Muyamuya Barrier blocked the road; to the east, the Akita Road stretched far into the distance on an embankment; to the north, there loomed the majestic bulk of the sea, its waves entering the bay at a place called Shiogoshi.

The bay measures about a league in length and breadth. It resembles Matsushima in appearance but has a quality of its own: where Matsushima seems to smile, Kisakata droops in dejection. The lonely, melancholy scene suggests a troubled human spirit.

Xi Shi's<sup>9</sup> drooping eyelids:  
mimosa in falling rain  
at Kisakata.

At Shiogoshi  
crane legs drenched by high tide—  
and how cool the sea!

A festival:

A shrine festival:  
what foods do worshippers eat  
at Kisakata?  
—Sora

At fishers' houses,  
people lay down rain shutters,  
seeking evening cool.<sup>1</sup>  
—Teiji, a Mino merchant

Seeing an osprey nest on a rock:

Might they have vowed,  
"Never shall waves cross here"<sup>2</sup>—  
those nesting ospreys?  
—Sora

7. From a poem attributed to Saigyō: "The cherry blossoms / at Kisakata / lie buried under waves: / seafolk in their fishing boat / go rowing over flowers." 8. Legendary empress said to have ruled in the second half of the 4th century. 9. A Chinese beauty of the 5th century B.C. Originally the consort of the king of Yue, she was later forced to wed his conqueror, the king of Wu. 1. That is, they remove the rain shutters from their houses and put them on the beach, where they sit, enjoying the evening cool. 2. This phrase constitutes a vow of eternal fidelity, derived from a poem in the *Kokinshū*: "Would I be the sort / to cast you aside / and turn to someone new? / Sooner would the waves traverse / Sue-no-matsu Mountain."

After several days of reluctant farewells to friends in Sakata, we set out under the clouds of the Northern Land Road, quailing before the prospect of the long journey ahead. It was reported to be 130 leagues to the castle town of the Kaga domain. Once past Nezu Barrier, we made our way on foot through Echigo Province to Ichiburi Barrier in Etchū Province, a tiring journey of nine miserably hot, rainy days. I felt too ill to write anything.

In the Seventh Month,  
even the Sixth Day differs  
from ordinary nights.<sup>3</sup>

Tumultuous seas:  
spanning the sky to Sado Isle,  
the Milky Way.

That night I drew up a pillow and lay down to sleep, exhausted after having traversed the most difficult stretches of road in all the north country—places with names like "Children Forget Parents," "Parents Forget Children," "Dogs Go Back," and "Horses Sent Back." The voices of young women drifted in from the adjoining room in front—two of them, it appeared, talking to an elderly man, whose voice was also audible. As I listened, I realized that they were prostitutes from Niigata in Echigo, bound on a pilgrimage to the Grand Shrines of Ise. The old man was to be sent home to Niigata in the morning, after having escorted them as far as this barrier, and they seemed to be writing letters and giving him inconsequential messages to take back. Adrift on "the shore where white breakers roll in," these "fishermen's daughters" had fallen low indeed, exchanging fleeting vows with every passerby.<sup>4</sup> How wretched the karma that had doomed them to such an existence! I fell asleep with their voices in my ears.

The next morning, the same two girls spoke to us as we were about to leave. "We're feeling terribly nervous and discouraged about going off on this hard trip over strange roads. Won't you let us join your party, even if we only stay close enough to catch a glimpse of you now and then? You wear the robes of mercy: please let us share the Buddha's compassion and form a bond with the Way," they said, weeping.

"I sympathize with you, but we'll be making frequent stops. Just follow others going to the same place; I'm sure the gods will see you there safely." We walked off without waiting for an answer, but it was some time before I could stop feeling sorry for them.

Ladies of pleasure  
sleeping in the same hostel:  
bush clover and moon.<sup>5</sup>

3. Because people were preparing for the Tanabata Festival, which was held on the seventh day of the Seventh Month in honor of the stars Altair (the herd boy) and Vega (the weaver maiden). Legend held that the two lovers were separated by the Milky Way, except for this one night, when they would meet for their annual rendezvous. 4. Alludes to a classical poem: "I have no abode, / for I am but the daughter of a fisherman, / spending my life / on the shore / where white waves roll in." Prostitutes went out in small boats to greet in-coming vessels. 5. In this much-discussed poem Bashō is probably not making an invidious comparison between the prostitutes (showy, ephemeral flowers) and himself (the pure remote moon) but simply using aspects of the scene at the inn to comment in amusement on a

I recited those lines to Sora, who wrote them down.

After crossing the “forty-eight channels” of the Kurobe River and innumerable other streams, we reached the coast at Nago. Even though the season was not spring, it seemed a shame to miss the wisteria at Tako in early autumn. We asked someone how to get there, but the answer frightened us off. “Tako is five leagues along the beach from here, in the hollow of those mountains. The only houses are a few ramshackle thatched huts belonging to fishermen; you probably wouldn’t find anyone to put you up for the night.” Thus we went on into Kaga Province.

Scent of ripening ears:<sup>6</sup>  
to the right as I push through,  
surf crashing onto rocks.

We arrived at Kanazawa on the Fifteenth of the Seventh Month, after crossing Unohana Mountain and Kurikara Valley. There we met the merchant Kasho,<sup>7</sup> who had come up from Ōsaka, and joined him in his lodgings. A certain Isshō had been living in Kanazawa—a man who had gradually come to be known as a serious student of poetry, and who had gained a reputation among the general public as well. I now learned that he had died last winter, still in the prime of life. At the Buddhist service arranged by his older brother:

Stir, burial mound!  
The voice I raise in lament  
is the autumn wind.

On being invited to a thatched cottage:

The cool of autumn:  
let’s each of us peel his own  
melons and eggplant.

Composed on the way:

Despite the red blaze  
of the pitiless sun—  
an autumn breeze.

At Komatsu [Young Pines]:

An appealing name:  
The wind in Young Pines ruffles  
bush clover and miscanthus.

At Komatsu we visited Tada Shrine, which numbers among its treasures a helmet and a piece of brocade that once belonged to Sanemori.<sup>8</sup> We were told that the helmet was a gift from Lord Yoshitomo<sup>9</sup> in the old days when Sanemori served the Genji—and indeed it was no ordinary warrior’s headgear. From visor to earflaps, it was decorated with a gold-filled chry-

chance encounter between two very different types of people. It has often been suggested that he may have recorded the meeting at the barrier—or possibly invented it—as a means of including a reference to love, a standard topic in linked verse. 6. That is, of the maturing rice crop. 7. Like others Bashō calls on during his journey, Kasho is an amateur poet. 8. Saitō Sanemori (1111–1183), a samurai in the service of the Minamoto/Genji who defects to the Taira/Heike. 9. See n. 1, p. 2118

santhemum arabesque in the Chinese style, and the front was surmounted by a dragon’s head and a pair of horns. The shrine history tells in vivid language of how Kiso no Yoshinaka<sup>1</sup> presented a petition there after Sanemori’s death in battle, and of how Higuchi no Jirō served as a messenger.

A heartrending sound!  
Underneath the helmet,  
the cricket.

We could see Shirane’s peaks behind us as we trudged toward Yamanaka Hot Springs. The Kannon Hall<sup>2</sup> stood at the base of the mountains to the left. Someone said the hall was founded by Retired Emperor Kazan, who enshrined an image of the bodhisattva there and named the spot Nata after completing a pious round of the Thirty-three Places. (The name Nata was explained to us as having been coined from Nachi and Tanigumi.<sup>3</sup>) It was a beautiful, impressive site, with many unusual rocks, rows of ancient pine trees, and a small thatched chapel, built on a rock against the cliff.

Even whiter  
than the Ishiyama rocks—  
the wind of autumn.

We bathed in the hot springs, which were said to be second only to Ariake in efficacy.

At Yamanaka,  
no need to pluck chrysanthemums:<sup>4</sup>  
the scent of the springs.

The master was a youth called Kumenosuke. His father, an amateur of *haikai*, had embarrassed Teishitsu<sup>5</sup> with his knowledge when the master visited Yamanaka from the capital as a young man. Teishitsu returned to the city, joined Teitoku’s<sup>6</sup> school, and built up a reputation, but it is said that he never accepted money for reviewing the work of anyone from this village after he became famous. The story is an old one now.

Sora was suffering from a stomach complaint. Because he had relatives at Nagashima in Ise Province, he set off ahead of me. He wrote a poem as he was about to leave:

Journeying onward:  
fall prostrate though I may—  
a bush-clover field!

The sorrow of the one who departed and the unhappiness of the one who remained resembled the feelings of a lapwing wandering lost in the clouds, separated from its friend.

1. Leader of the northern Genji forces in the war against the Heike. 2. In honor of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion and an attendant of the Buddha known as Amida. 3. Two towns in different provinces; they were the beginning and ending points on an eleven-province tour of thirty-three places sacred to Kannon. 4. These flowers were associated with longevity. 5. An adept of *haikai*. 6. Matsunaga Teitoku (1571–1653), one of the leading practitioners of linked verse.

From this day forward,  
the legend will be erased:  
dewdrops on the hat.<sup>7</sup>

Still in Kaga, I lodged at Zenshōji, a temple outside the castle town of Daishōji. Sora had stayed there the night before and left this poem:

All through the night,  
listening to the autumn wind—  
the mountain in back.

One night's separation is the same as 1,000 leagues. I too listened to the autumn wind as I lay in the guest dormitory. Toward dawn, I heard clear voices chanting a sutra, and then the sound of a gong beckoned me into the dining hall. I left the hall as quickly as possible, eager to reach Echizen Province that day, but a group of young monks pursued me to the foot of the stairs with paper and inkstone. Observing that some willow leaves had scattered in the courtyard, I stood there in my sandals and dashed off these lines:

To sweep your courtyard  
of willow leaves, and then depart:  
that would be my wish!

At the Echizen border, I crossed Lake Yoshizaki by boat for a visit to the Shiogoshi pines.

Inviting the gale  
to carry the waves ashore  
all through the night,  
they drip moonlight from their boughs—  
the pines of Shiogoshi!

—Saigyō

In that single verse, the poet captures the essence of the scene at Shiozaki. For anyone to say more would be like "sprouting a useless digit."

In Maruoka, I called on the Tenryūji Abbot, an old friend.

A certain Hokushi from Kanazawa had planned to see me off a short distance, but had finally come all the way to Maruoka, reluctant to say good-bye. Always intent on conveying the effect of beautiful scenery in verse, he had produced some excellent poems from time to time. Now that we were parting, I composed this:

Hard to say good-bye—  
to tear apart the old fan  
covered with scribbles.

I journeyed about a league and a half into the mountains to worship at Eiheiji, Dōgen's<sup>8</sup> temple. I believe I have heard that Dōgen had an admirable reason for avoiding the vicinity of the capital and founding his temple in those remote mountains.

7. A reference to a common practice when people traveled in pairs. They would write on their hats the phrase "Two persons following the same path." 8. Founder of one of the main sects of Zen Buddhism.

After the evening meal, I set out for Fukui, three leagues away. It was a tedious, uncertain journey in the twilight.

A man named Tōsai had been living in Fukui as a recluse for a long time. He had come to Edo and visited me once—I was not sure just when, but certainly more than ten years earlier. I thought he must be very old and feeble by now, or perhaps even dead, but someone assured me that he was very much alive. Following my informant's directions into a quiet corner of the town, I came upon a poor cottage, its walls covered with moonflower and snake-gourd vines, and its door hidden by cockscomb and goosefoot.<sup>9</sup> That would be it, I thought. A woman of humble appearance emerged when I rapped on the gate.

"Where are you from, Reverend Sir? The master has gone to see someone in the neighborhood. Please look for him there if you have business with him." She was apparently the housewife.

I hurried off to find Tōsai, feeling as though I had strayed into an old romance, and spent two nights at his house. Then I prepared to leave, hopeful of seeing the full moon at Tsuruga Harbor on the Fifteenth of the Eighth Month. Having volunteered to keep me company, Tōsai set out in high spirits as my guide, his skirts tucked jauntily into his sash.

The peaks of Shirane disappeared as Hina-ga-take came into view. We crossed Azamuzu Bridge, saw ears<sup>1</sup> on the reeds at Taema, journeyed beyond Uguisu Barrier and Yunoo Pass, heard the first wild geese of the season at Hiuchi Stronghold and Mount Kaeru, and took lodgings in Tsuruga at dusk on the Fourteenth. The sky was clear, the moon remarkably fine. When I asked if we might hope for the same weather on the following night, the landlord offered us wine, replying, "In the northern provinces, who knows whether the next night will be cloudy or fair?"

That night, I paid a visit to Kehi Shrine, the place where Emperor Chūai<sup>2</sup> is worshipped. An atmosphere of holiness pervaded the surroundings. Moonlight filtered in between the pine trees, and the white sand in front of the sanctuary glittered like frost. "Long ago, in pursuance of a great vow, the Second Pilgrim<sup>3</sup> himself cut grass and carried dirt and rock to fill a marsh that was a trial to worshippers going back and forth. The precedent is still observed; every new Pilgrim takes sand to the area in front of the shrine. The ceremony is called 'the Pilgrim's Carrying of the Sand,' " my landlord said.

Shining on sand  
transported by pilgrims—  
pure light of the moon.

It rained on the Fifteenth, just as the landlord had warned it might.

Night of the full moon:  
no predicting the weather  
in the northern lands.

9. A plant with small greenish blossoms. *Cockscomb*: a plant with fan-shaped clusters of red or yellow blossoms. 1. The spikes on a plant that contain the seeds. 2. According to tradition, the fourteenth emperor, married to Empress Jingū (see n. 8, p. 2128). 3. Taa Shōnin (1237–1319). *Pilgrim* was a title given to the patriarch of the Ji sect of Buddhism.

The weather was fine on the Sixteenth, so we went in a boat to Ironohama Beach to gather red shells. It was seven leagues by sea. A man named Ten'ya provided us with all kinds of refreshments—compartmented lunch boxes, wine flasks, and the like—and also ordered a number of servants to go along in the boat. A fair wind delivered us to our destination in no time. The beach was deserted except for a few fishermen's shacks and a forlorn Nichiren<sup>4</sup> temple. As we drank tea and warmed wine at the temple, I struggled to control feelings evoked by the loneliness of the evening.

Ah, what loneliness!  
More desolate than Suma,<sup>5</sup>  
this beach in autumn.

Between wave and wave:  
mixed with small shells, the remains  
of bush-clover bloom.

I persuaded Tōsai to write a description of the day's outing to be left at the temple.

Rōtsu came to meet me at Tsuruga and accompanied me to Mino Province. Thus I arrived at Ōgaki, my journey eased by a horse. Sora came from Ise, Etsujin galloped in on horseback, and we all gathered at Jokō's house. Zensenji, Keikō, Keikō's sons, and other close friends called day and night, rejoicing and pampering me as though I had returned from the dead.

Despite my travel fatigue, I set out again by boat on the Sixth of the Ninth Month to witness the relocation of the Ise sanctuaries.<sup>6</sup>

Off to Futami,  
loath to part as clam from shell  
in waning autumn.

## Part V

### 1800 TO 1900

4. Buddhist monk (1222–1282) and founder of a sect that bore his name. 5. A coastal town made famous as the hero's place of exile in *The Tale of Genji*. 6. The two sanctuaries at the Grand Shrines of Ise, dedicated to the ancestral gods of the imperial family, are rebuilt every twenty years as a kind of repurification.