



Bashō's Ghost

Sam Hamill

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The moon and sun are travelers through eternity.
Even the years wander on. Whether drifting
through life on a boat or climbing toward old age
leading a horse, each day is a journey, and the
journey itself is home.

—Bashō (1644–1694), *Oku no hosomichi*

Bashō rose long before dawn, but even at such an early hour, he knew the day would grow rosy bright. It was spring, 1689. In Ueno and Yanaka, cherry trees were in full blossom, and hundreds of families would soon be strolling under their branches, lovers walking and speaking softly or not at all. But it wasn't cherry blossoms that occupied his mind. He had long dreamed of crossing the Shirakawa Barrier into the heart of northern Honshu, the country called Oku lying immediately to the north of the city of Sendai. He had patched his old cotton trousers and repaired his straw hat. He placed his old thatched-roof hut in another's care and moved several hundred feet down the road to the home of his disciple-patron, Mr. Sampu, making final preparations before embarkation.

On the morning of May 16, dawn rose through a shimmering mist, Fujiyama faintly visible on the horizon. It was the beginning of the Genroku period, a time of relative peace under the Tokugawa shogunate. But travel is always

dangerous. A devotee as well as a traveling companion, Bashō's friend, Sora, would shave his head and don the robes of a Zen monk, a tactic which often proved helpful at well-guarded checkpoints. Bashō had done so himself on previous journeys. Because of poor health, Bashō carried extra nightwear in his pack along with his cotton robe, or *yukata*, a raincoat, calligraphy supplies, and of course *hanamuke*, departure gifts from well-wishers, gifts he found impossible to leave behind.

Bashō himself would leave behind a number of gifts upon his death some five years later, among them a journal composed after this journey, his health again in decline, a journal made up in part of fiction or fancy. But during the spring and summer of 1689, he walked and watched. And from early 1690 into 1694, Bashō wrote and revised his "travel diary," *Oku no hosomichi*, which is not a diary at all. *Oku* means "within" and "farthest" or "dead-end" place; *hosomichi* means "path" or "narrow road." The *no* indicates a possessive. *Oku no hosomichi*: the narrow road within; the narrow way through the interior. Bashō draws *Oku* from the place of that name located between Miyagino and Matsushima, but it is a name which inspires plurisignation.

This is not simply a travel journal. Its form, *haibun*, combines short prose passages with *haiku*. But the heart and soul of this little book, its *kokoro*, cannot be found simply by defining form. Bashō completely redefined haiku, he transformed haibun. But these accomplishments grew out of arduous studies in poetry, Buddhism, history, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and some very important Zen training.

Bashō was a student of Saigyō, a Buddhist monk/poet who lived five hundred years earlier (1118–1190); Saigyō is the most prominent poet of the imperial anthology *Shinkokinshū*. Like Saigyō before him, Bashō believed in co-dependent origination, a Buddhist idea holding that all

things are fully interdependent, even at point of origin; that no thing is or can be completely self-originating. Bashō said of Saigyō, "He was obedient to and at one with nature and the four seasons." The *Samantabhadra-bodhisattva-sutra* says, "Of one thing it is said, 'This is good,' and of another it is said, 'This is bad,' but there is nothing inherent in either to make them 'good' or 'bad.' The 'self' is empty of independent existence."

Bashō, dreaming of the full moon as it rises over boats at Shiogama Beach, is not looking outside himself; rather he is seeking that which is most clearly meaningful within, and locating the "meaning" within the context of juxtaposed images, images which are interpenetrating and interdependent. The images arise naturally out of the *kokoro* or *shin*—the heart/soul/mind.

Two hundred years before Bashō, Komparu Zenchiku wrote, "The Wheel of Emptiness is the highest level of art of the Noh—the performance is *mushin*." The art of artlessness, the act of composition achieved without "sensitivity" or style—this directness of emotion expressed without ornament set the standards of the day.

At the time of the *Man'yōshū*, the first imperial anthology, compiled in the late eighth century, the Japanese critical vocabulary emphasized two aspects of the poem: *kokoro*, which included sincerity, conviction, or "heart"; and "craft" in a most particular way. The *Man'yōshū* poets were admired for their "masculinity," that is, for uncluttered, direct, and often severe expression of emotion. Their sincerity (*makoto*) was a quality to be revered. The poets of the *Man'yōshū* are the foundation upon which all Japanese poetry has been built.

Among the first *karon*, or literary criticism, in Japanese is that of Fujiwara Hamanari (733–799), author of *Kakyo-hyoshiki*, an essay listing seven "diseases of poetry," such as having the first and second lines end on the same syllable,

or having the last syllable of the third and last lines differ. There were various dissertations on "poem-diseases," all largely modeled on the original Chinese of Shen Yo (441–513). The idea of studying craft in poetry must have caught on quickly because by 885 the first *uta-awase*, or poetry-writing contests, were being held.

At the time of the compilation of the *Man'yōshū*, very little poetry was being written in Chinese; Hitomaro and Yakamochi, the great eighth-century poets of the *Man'yōshū*, wrote without many allusions to Confucian and Buddhist classics, their poems drawing inspiration from the landscape and experience which is uniquely Japanese. Another court anthology contemporary with the *Man'yōshū*, the *Kaifuso*, represents the introduction of poetry written in Chinese, despite a few samples in the *Man'yōshū*. Through the influence of the monk Kukai, also called Kobo Daishi (774–835), the study of Chinese became the norm for what amounted to a Buddhist aristocracy. As founder of the Shingon, or "True Word," sect in Japan, Kukai followed a tradition of secret oral teachings passed on from Master to Disciple and had himself spent two years studying in China under Hui Kuo (764–805). The later influence of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) established Chinese as the language of scholarly poets, so much so that upon his death, Michizane was enshrined as a god of literature and calligraphy. His followers found Japanese forms too restrictive for their multilayered poetry. Every good poet was a teacher of poetry in one way or another, many taking on disciples. Michizane's influence was profound. He advocated both rigorous scholarship and genuine sincerity in composition, his own verses substantially influenced by the T'ang poet Po Chu-i. The form was *shih*, lyric verse composed in five- or seven-character lines written in Chinese, but unlike the poems of most earlier Japanese poets, Michizane's poems were deceptively simple, and like the poetry of Po Chu-i,

strengthened by a combination of poignancy and conviction. Poetry written in Chinese was called *kanshi*, and Michizane established it as a major force.

In his *kana* (phonetic alphabet) preface to the *Kokinshū* in the tenth century, Ki no Tsurayuki, author of the famous *Tosa Diary*, lists "six types" (*rikugi*) of poetry:

1. *soe-uta*: suggestive or indirect expression of feeling
2. *kazoe-uta*: clear, direct expression of feeling
3. *nazurae-uta*: parabolic expression
4. *tatoe-uta*: expression which conceals powerful emotion
5. *tadagoto-uta*: refinement of a traditional expression
6. *iwai-uta*: expression of congratulations or praise

Tsurayuki's list owes something to Lu Chi's "catalogue of genres" in his third-century Chinese *Art of Writing* (*Wen Fu*), which is itself indebted to various treatises on the classic Confucian poetry anthology, *Shih Ching*, or *Classic of Poetry*. Much of the penchant for cataloguing and classifying types of poetry is the result of the Confucian classic, *Ta Hsueh*, or *Great Learning*, in which Master Kung (Confucius) says "All wisdom is rooted in learning to call things by the right name," and that when "things are properly identified, they fall into natural categories, and understanding [and, consequently, *action*] becomes orderly." Lu Chi, the dedicated student of Confucius, reminds us that the art of letters has saved governments from certain ruin. He finds within the study of writing itself a way to set his own life in order. Studying Chinese, the Japanese literati picked up Lu Chi's habit of discussing poetry in terms of form and content. And from the fifth-century Chinese scholar, Liu Hsieh, drew the term *amari no kokoro*, a translation of Liu's original *yu wei*, or "after-taste." As a critical term, it would be used and reshaped, and used again, still a part of literary evaluation in the late twentieth century. Narihira says of a poem in the *Kokinshū*, "*Kokoro amarite—kotoba tarazu*," or

"Plenty of heart; not enough words." Kuronushi says, "*Kokoro okashikute, sama iyashi*," or "Interesting *kokoro*, but a rather common form." The poet strives for a quality called *amari no kokoro*, meaning that the heart/soul of the poem must reach far beyond the words themselves.

For Bashō, this most often meant a resonance found in nature. When he invokes the call of the little mountain bird, *kakkodori*, the name of the bird (a cuckoo) invokes its lonely cry. Things are as they are. Insight permits him to perceive a natural poignancy in the beauty of temporal things, a word identifying a bird-call—*mono no aware*. *Aware* originally meant simply emotion initiated by engagement of the senses. In its own way, this phrase is Japan's equivalent of William Carlos Williams's dictum, "No ideas but in things," equally misappropriated, misapplied, and misunderstood. In *The World of the Shining Prince*, Ivan Morris's study of *The Tale of Genji*, Morris says of *aware*, "In its widest sense it was an interjection or adjective referring to the emotional quality inherent in objects, people, nature, and art, and by extension it applied to a person's internal response to emotional aspects of the external world . . . in Murasaki's time [ca. 1000 A.D.] *aware* still retained its early catholic range, its most characteristic use in *The Tale of Genji* is to suggest the pathos inherent in the beauty of the outer world, a beauty inexorably fated to disappear together with the observer. Buddhist doctrines about the evanescence of all living things naturally influenced this particular content of the word, but the stress in *aware* was always on direct emotional experience rather than on religious understanding. *Aware* never entirely lost its simple interjectional sense of 'Ah!'"

As a more purely critical term in later centuries, *aware* identified a particular quality of elegant sadness, a poignant temporality—a quality found in abundance, for instance, in

the novels of Kawabata Yasunari. In failing health, Bashō found plenty of resonance in temporal life.

Tsurayuki, whose own diary would provide a model for Bashō seven hundred years later, would ruminate on the art of letters during his sojourn through Tosa Province in the south of Shikoku Island in 936. In his preface to the *Kokinshu*, Tsurayuki lists several sources for inspiration in poetry, all melancholy in one way or another: "Looking at falling blossoms on a spring morning; sighing over snows and waves which reflect the passing years; remembering a fall from fortune into loneliness." Tsurayuki's proclivity for melancholy perhaps explains the general tone of the *Kokinshu*. This, too, is *mono no aware*.

At the time of the *Man'yōshū*, Zen was being brought to Japan via a steady stream of Japanese scholars returning from China. Along with Zen equations and conversations, they also brought with them Chinese poetics, which included a Confucian faith in the power of the right word rightly used. The attitude is paradoxical: the Zen poet believes the real poetry lies somewhere beyond the words themselves, but, like a good Confucian, believes simultaneously that only the perfect word perfectly placed has the power to reveal the "meaning" or experience of the poem.

Ki no Tsurayuki's co-compiler of the *Kokinshu*, Mibu no Tadamine (868–965), introduced another new term to the Japanese critical canon by praising a quality in certain poems, which he called *yugen*, a word borrowed from Chinese Buddhist writing and which was used to identify "depth of meaning," a character made by combining the character for "dim" or "dark" with the character identifying a deep, reddish-black color. But Tadamine used *yugen* to mean "aesthetic feeling *not explicitly expressed*." He wanted to identify subtleties and implications by adopting the term. Over the course of the next hundred or so years, the term

would also be adopted by Zennists to define "ghostly qualities" as in ink paintings. But the term's origin lies within seventh-century Chinese Buddhist literary terminology. As an aesthetic concept it was to be esteemed throughout the medieval period. An excellent study of Buddhism and literary arts in medieval Japan, William R. LaFleur's *The Karma of Words*, devotes an entire chapter to *yugen*.

It was also the compilation of the *Kokinshu* which institutionalized the *makura-kotoba*, or "pillow word," in Japanese poetics. Although such devices appear in the *Man'yōshu*, they appear with far less frequency, indicating that they were not widely understood. But by the time of the *Kokinshu*, most everyone was aware that "clouds and rain" might mean sexual congress as well as weather patterns. The *makura-kotoba* often permitted a poet to speak in double entendres or to disguise emotions; it was both "polite" and metaphoric. Along with the pillow word, the apprentice poet also learned how to make use of the *kake-kotoba*, or "pivot word," which would later become central to the composition of haiku. It is a play on different meanings of a word which links two phrases. It is virtually *never* translatable. Consequently, when we read haiku in translation, it is usually severely "dumbed down," to borrow Willis Hawley's phrase. The pivot word creates deliberate ambiguity, often implying polysignation. The pillow word and the pivot word would later become subjects to be reassessed and discussed and re-examined time and again.

As this critical vocabulary developed, poets learned new ways to discuss the *kajitsu*, or formal aspects of a poem. The *ka* is the "beautiful surface of the poem," and the *jitsu* is the "substantial core."

Studying the "beautiful surface" of the poem along with its interior structure, Fujiwara no Kinto (966-1041) composed his *Nine Steps of Waka* in order to establish standards based almost solely upon critical fashion. Certain rhymes

were taboo at a poem's closure. Certain vowel sounds should be repeated at particular intervals. Rather than a general and moral and emotional discourse such as Lu Chi's, or those of Tsurayuki and Tadamine, Kinto relies upon reasoned study of the architecture of the poem for his aesthetic. His critical vocabulary is that of the poem's structure. His anthology, *Shuishu*, has never enjoyed either the popularity or the controversy of the *Kokinshu* and *Shin-kinshu*.

Zen demolishes much of this kind of literary criticism by pointing out that, seen from the core, the surface is very deep; inasmuch as cause leads to effect, effect in turn produces cause. A poem's "depth" cannot be created by packing the poem with allusions and implications—hermetics alone. Still, "surface" and "core" may be useful terms for establishing a necessary dialectic; they provide frames for reference.

As this critical vocabulary came into use, it was balanced by a vocabulary of the emotions. A contemporary of Saigyō, Fujiwara Sadaie, also called Teika (1162-1241), attacked structural criticism as hopelessly inadequate. "Every poem," he said, "must have *kokoro*. A poem without *kokoro* is not—cannot be—a true poem; it is only an intellectual exercise." Thus, by combining a vocabulary for the apparatus of poetry with a vocabulary for the emotional states of poetry, Teika believed, a poem could then be examined and judged. His insistence upon the true poem's *kokoro* returns the experience of the poem to human dimensions.

Another term in use at the time, *kokai*, expressed a feeling of regret after a poem, a consequence of the poet having failed to think sufficiently deeply prior to its composition. It was a criticism not often applied to Bashō, nor to other poets working in the Zen tradition. Bashō sought a natural spontaneity, a poetry which would indulge no regrets of any kind. Zen discipline is built in part around the idea of truth articulated in spontaneous response. A "correct"

response to a Zen *koan*, for instance, need not be rational or logical. Bashō sought a poetry which was a natural outgrowth of being Bashō, of living in this world, of making the journey itself one's home. Two hundred years earlier, the Zen monk Ikkyū Sōjun wrote:

<i>Ame furaba fure, kaze</i>	If it rains, let it rain; if
<i>fukaba fuke.</i>	it blows, let it blow.

Bashō spent many years attempting to learn how to listen as things speak for themselves. No regrets. He refused to be anthropocentric. Seeing the beautiful islands off the coast of Matsushima, he wrote:

Matsushima ya
ah Matsushima ya
Matsushima ya

It is the sort of poem which can be done once, and once only. But it is quintessentially Bashō, both playful and inspired, yet with a bit of *mono no aware*, a trace of the pathos of beautiful mortality. Simple as it is, the poem implies co-dependent origination, physical landscape, and a breathless—almost speechless—reverence.

Just as Bashō learned from Ikkyū, he learned from Ikkyū's friend, Rikyu, that each tea ceremony is the only tea ceremony. Therefore, each poem is the only poem. Each moment is the only moment in which one can be fully aware. Standing on the shore, he saw dozens of tiny islands carved by tides, wind-twisted pines rising at sharp angles. *Matsu* means "pine"; *shima* is "island." *Ya* indicates subject, but also works simultaneously as an exclamation. It functions as a *kireji*, or "cutting word." The township on the mainland is itself called Matsushima. Bashō entered Matsushima by boat in June 1689, so taken by its beauty that he declared it to have been made by Oyamazumi, god of the mountains.

Bashō walked and dreamed along the beach at Ojima beneath the moon of Matsushima. From his pack, he withdrew a poem written by a friend and former teacher, Sodo, an acknowledged haiku master. The poem describes Matsushima and is written in Chinese. And another, a poem in Japanese about Matsugaura-shima composed by an Edo doctor, Hara Anteki. The poems, Bashō says, are his companions during a sleepless night.

Two days later, he visited the elegant temple Zuiganji, founded thirty-two generations earlier by Makabe no Heishiro upon his return from a decade of studies in China. Bashō would wonder whether it might be the gates of "Buddha-land." But Bashō was no flowerchild wandering in Lotus Land. His journey is a pilgrimage; it is a journey into the interior of the self as much as a travelogue; it is a vision quest which concludes in *insight*. But there is no conclusion. The journey itself is home. The means is the end just as it is the beginning.

Bashō visited temples only in part because he was himself a Zennist. Temples often provided rooms for wayfarers, and the food, if simple, was good. The conversation was of a kind only the literate enjoy. Bashō, among the most literate of his time, seems to be everywhere in the presence of history. The *Oku no hosomichi* overflows with place-names, famous scenes, literary Chinese and Buddhist allusions, echoes called *honkadori*, borrowed or quoted lines, and paraphrases. But he didn't stay at temples during his famous journey; he rarely stayed at inns; he was generally and generously entertained by local *haikai* poets and put up by wealthy families. He enjoyed his celebrity and its benefits.

His literary and spiritual lineage included Kamo no Chomei (1154–1216), *Shin-kokinshu* poet, author of the *Mumyoshō*, a kind of manual of writing, and of the *Hojoki*, an account of Chomei's years in a "ten-foot-square hut" following a series of calamities in Kyoto. Like Chomei, Bashō

was deeply versed in Chinese and Japanese literature, philosophy, and history; and like Chomei, he enjoyed talking with working people everywhere.

After "abandoning the world," Chomei moved to the mountains on the outskirts of Kyoto. But his was not the life of the Zen ascetic. He made very regular trips to town if for no other reason than to listen to the people he met there. Reading the *Hojoki*, it is easy to forget that Chomei served as a kind of journalist, a deeply compassionate witness to the incredible suffering of people during his lifetime. Chomei's world was shaken to the core when winds spread a great fire through Kyoto, leveling a third of the capital city in 1177. In 1181, a famine began which lasted two years. Those and other calamities informed Chomei's deep sense of compassion. Just as a disciple of Sakyamuni, Vimalakirti, served as a model for Chomei's retreat, Bashō found in Chomei a model for compassionate engagement with others. Chomei had written, "Trivial things spoken along the way enliven the faith of my awakened heart."

Chomei's interest in people in general was a trait Bashō shared. And unlike Saigyō, Kamo no Chomei could not separate his life from his art. Bashō enjoyed the possibility of making a living from the writing of haiku, and therefore his art and life were indeed one. He also felt a deep connection to history. He speaks as though all eternity were only yesterday, each memory vivid, the historical figures themselves almost contemporary; he speaks confidentially, expecting his reader to be versed in details so that his own brief journal may serve to call up enormous resonances, ghosts at every turn. But Bashō doesn't "pack" his lines with references. His subjects and his knowledge flow freely, almost casually, through his writing.

Chomei bears witness to countless thousands of deaths after the great fire swept Kyoto, and says, "They die in the morning and are born in the evening like bubbles

on water." Bashō walks across the plain where a great battle once raged. Only empty fields remain. The landscape reminds him of a poem by Tu Fu (712–770) in which the T'ang poet surveyed a similar scene and wrote,

The whole country devastated,
only mountains and rivers remain.
In springtime, at the ruined castle,
the grass is always green.

For Bashō, the grass blowing in the breeze seems especially poignant, so much so that his eyes well into tears. If Tu Fu, both as a poet and as a man, is a fit model—to be emulated rather than copied—Bashō is reminded of how little we have learned from all our interminable warfare and bloodshed. The wind blows. The grasses bend. Bashō moistens his brush months later and writes, remembering,

<i>Natsugusa ya</i>	Summer grasses—
<i>tsuwamono domo ga</i>	after great soldiers'
<i>yume no ato</i>	imperial dreams.

His echo of Tu Fu underscores the profound irony. For Bashō, the journey into the interior of the way of poetry had been long and arduous. His simple "summer grasses" haiku carried within it the sort of resonance he sought. The grasses with their plethora of associations, the ghosts of Hideohira, Yoritomo, and Yoshitsune, an allusion drawn from a famous Noh drama—Bashō framed his verse with rich and complex historical, literary, and philosophical associations. The poem implies that the grasses are the only consequence of the warriors' dreams, that the grasses are all that remains, a Buddhist parallel to the Bible's "dust into dust," the accompanying prose drawing the reader into a vast network of allusion.

The haiku itself is spare, clean, swift as a boning knife. The melopoeia combines *a*, *o*, and *u* sounds: *tsu*, *gu* in line 1; *tsu* and *yu* in lines 2 and 3; the *tsu* sound is very quick,

almost to the point of silence. The *a* sound punctuates the whole poem: *na*, *sa*, *ya* among the five syllables of line 1; *wa* and *ga* among the seven syllables of line 2, the four remaining being *mono* and *domo*; and a semiconcluding *a* before *to*. Among the seventeen syllables are six *a* syllables, six *o* syllables, and four *u* syllables.

The Western reader, accustomed to being conscious of reading translation and having fallen into the slothful and unrewarding habit of reading poetry silently, often misses Bashō's ear by neglecting the *Romaji*, or "Romanized" Japanese, so frequently printed with the poems. Onomatopoeia, rhyme, and slant rhyme are Bashō's favorite tools, and he uses them like no one else in Japanese literature. He wrote from within the body; his poems are full of breath and sound as well as images and allusions.

What Bashō read, he read deeply and attentively. As a poet, he had blossomed slowly, ever-changing, constantly learning. The poetry of his twenties and thirties is competent and generally undistinguished. It is the learned poetry of received ideas composed by a good mind. It lacks breadth and depth of vision. But his interest in Chinese poetry continued to grow. He studied Tu Fu (Toho in Japanese) assiduously during his twenties and thirties, and he read Li T'ai-po (Rihaku in Japanese). Along with the Chinese poets, he traveled with a copy of *Chuang Tzu*. He seems to have struggled with Zen discipline and Chinese poetry and philosophy all during his thirties, and the result was a poetry at first clearly derivative, but later becoming more his own as he grew into his studies. Upon entering his forties, Bashō's verse changed. He learned to be comfortable with his teachers and with his own scholarship. His Zen practice had steadied his vision. Fewer aspirations stood in his way.

Born in 1644 in Ueno, Iga Province, approximately thirty miles southeast from Kyoto, the son of Matsuo Yozaemon, a low-ranking samurai, Bashō had at least one el-

der brother and four sisters. As a young man, he served in the household of a higher-ranking local samurai, Todo Shinshichiro, becoming a companion to his son, Yoshitada, whose "haiku name" was Sengin. Bashō often joined his master in composing the linked verses called *haikai*, but was still known by his samurai name, Matsuo Mune-fusa, despite having taken his first haiku name, Sobo. Bashō also had a common-law wife at this time, Jutei, who later became a nun. And although there is little verifiable information on these years, Bashō seems to have experimented a good deal. He would later say upon reflection, "I at one time coveted an official post," and "There was a time when I became fascinated with the ways of homosexual love."

Whether because of a complicated love-life or as a result of the death of his friend and master, Sengin, Bashō apparently simply wandered off sometime around 1667, leaving behind his samurai name and position. It was not unique for a man like Bashō to leave samurai society. Many who did so became monks. Some early biographies claim he went to Kyoto to study philosophy, poetry, and calligraphy. He re-emerged in 1672 as editor and commentator on a volume of *haikai*, *The Seashell Game* (*Kai Oi*). With contributions from about thirty poets, *The Seashell Game* shows Bashō to be witty, deeply knowledgeable, and rather light-hearted. It was well-enough received to encourage him to move to Edo (present-day Tokyo).

While it is not clear whether he made his living in Edo working as a haiku poet and teacher, Bashō does tell us that those first years in the growing city were not easy ones. He would later recall that he was torn between the desire to become a great poet and the desire to simply give up verse altogether. But his verse was, in many ways, his life. He continued to study and to write. And he continued to attract students, a number of whom were, like himself, drop-outs from samurai or *bushido* society who also rejected the vulgar

values of the class below the samurai, the *chonin*, or urban merchant class. Bashō believed literature provided an alternative set of values which he called *fuga no michi*, "the way of elegance." He claimed that his life was stitched together by "the single thread of art," which permitted him to follow "no religious law" and no popular customs.

Robert Aitken's study of Bashō, *A Zen Wave*, draws many parallels between Bashō's attitude and Zen poetics. But it is mistaken to think Bashō retreated into Buddhism. He admired the Zen mind; the "Buddhism" attached to Zen was, to him, almost superfluous. And he did, during his years in Edo, study Zen under the priest Butchō (1642–1715), apparently even to the point of considering the monastic life, but whether to escape from decadent culture or as a philosophical passion remains unclear. Despite his ability to attract students, he seems to have spent much of the time in a state of perpetual despondency, loneliness everywhere crowding in on him. No doubt this state of mind was compounded as a result of chronically poor health, but Bashō was also engaging true *sabishi*, a spiritual "loneliness" which served haikai culture in much the same way *mu*, or "nothingness," served Zen. Achieving true spiritual poverty, true inner emptiness, everything becomes our own. This is a path leading directly toward selflessness, toward *kensho*, or "enlightenment."

In the winter of 1680, his students built him a small hut where he could establish a permanent home. In the spring, someone planted a banana (or *bashō*) tree in the yard, giving the hut, "Bashō-an," its name, and the poet a new *nom de plume*. Bashō-an burned to the ground when a fire swept through the neighborhood in the winter of 1682. Friends and disciples built a new Bashō-an during the winter of 1683. His disciples were also beginning to earn names of their own. Bashō wrote of one, Kikaku, that his poems contained the "spiritual broth" of Tu Fu. But his followers

were also time-consuming. And there were suddenly disciples of his disciples, literally hundreds of "Bashō group" poets springing up. More and more projects were offered for his possible participation. He longed for quietude.

During 1684 and early 1685, the poet traveled to Kyoto, Nara, and his old home in Ueno, and composed *Journey of a Weather-beaten Skeleton*, the first of his travel journals and one notable for its constant pathos. His mother had died in Ueno. The trip was a long eight months, arduous and extremely dangerous. The forty-year-old poet had spent thirty years in Iga and a decade in Edo before beginning the wanderer's life for which he became so famous. Donald Keene has said this first travel journal reads as though it were translated from Chinese, allusions and parallels drawn from Ch'an (Zen) literature in nearly every line. Bashō was struggling to achieve a resonance between the fleeting moment and the eternal, between the instant of awareness and the vast endless Void of Zen.

In 1687, he traveled with his friend, Sora, and a Zen monk to Kashima Shrine, fifty miles east of Edo, where, among other things, Bashō visited his Zen master, Butchō, who had retired there. His record of this trip, *A Visit to Kashima Shrine*, is very brief, as is his *Visit to Sarashina Village*, each the result of a short "moon-viewing" journey to a rustic setting. At Kashima, they were greeted by a rainstorm, but at Sarashina, Bashō watched the moon rise through the trees, offered a toast with his companions, and was given a cup by the innkeeper, a cup which caught his attention: "The innkeeper brought us cups that were larger than usual, with crude lacquer designs. . . . I was fascinated with those cups . . . and it was because of the locale."

Bashō, after flirting with dense Chinese diction, was turning toward *sabi*, an elegant simplicity tinged with the flavor of loneliness. *Sabi* comes from the more pure "loneliness" of *sabishi*. It was an idea which fit perfectly with his

notion of *fuga no michi*, "the way of elegance," together with his rejection of bourgeois society. Elegant simplicity. Visiting the rustic village of Sarashina to view the moon, the poet is given a cup by an innkeeper, and he examines it closely by moonlight and lamplight, his imagination held captive by the working hands of some villager. His idea of *sabi* has about it elements of *yugen*, *mono no aware*, and plenty of *kokoro*. His poetry, so indebted to Japanese and Chinese classics, could be simplified, he could find a poetry which would leave the reader with a sense of *sabi*. Perhaps he had followed classical Chinese rhetorical conventions a bit too closely. He wanted to make images which positively radiated with reality. He turned the sake cup in his hand, and as he did so, his mind turned.

During his years of Zen training, he had spoken of striving to achieve the "religious flavor" of the poetry of Han Shan (Kanzan in Japanese, Cold Mountain in English); he had wanted to "clothe in Japanese language" the poetry of Po Chu-i. But in *A Visit to Kashima Shrine*, he chose a far simpler syntax, writing almost exclusively in *kana*, the Japanese phonetic alphabet, rather than in *kanji*, or Chinese written characters.

In late 1687, Bashō had made another journey, visiting Ise, Nagoya, Iga, Yoshino, and Nara, traveling with a disciple who had been exiled. The writing from this journey would not be published until 1709, more than ten years after the poet's death. Scholars date completion of the *Manuscript in My Knapsack* (*Oi no kobumi*) at about 1691, the same time the poet was writing *Oku no hosomichi*. He says in the *Knapsack* manuscript that "Nobody has succeeded in making any improvement in travel diaries since Ki no Tsurayuki, Chomei, and the nun Abutsu . . . the rest have merely imitated." Clearly, he was searching for a style which could reinvigorate an ancient form. He must have felt that he had gained a powerful knowledge which only a simple style

could accommodate. He also said in the *Knapsack* manuscript, "Saigyō's waka, Sogi's renga, / Sesshu's sumi, Rikyū's tea, — / the spirit which moves them is one spirit."

Whether he had arrived at his mature style by that early morning in late March 1689, he was eager to begin his journey north to Sendai and on to Hiraizumi, where the Fujiwara clan had flourished and perished. He would then push west, cross the mountains, turn south down the west coast of Honshu, then turn east again toward Ise, the vast majority of the trip made on foot. He left behind the idiosyncrasies and frivolities of the Teitoku and Danrin schools of haikai. He left perhaps as many as sixty students of the Bashō School who, in turn, were acquiring students of their own.

When his disciple, Kikaku, overpraised a Bashō image of a cold fish on a fishmonger's shelf, saying he had attained "mystery and depth," Bashō replied that what he most valued was the poem's "ordinariness." He had come almost full circle from the densely allusive Chinese style into a truly elegant simplicity which was in no way frivolous. He had elevated the haikai from word-play into lyric poetry, from a game played by poetasters into a spiritual dimension. "Abide by rules," Bashō said, "then throw them out!— only *then* may you achieve true freedom." Bashō's freedom expressed itself by redefining haiku as a complete thing, a full lyric form capable of handling complex data and emotional depth and spiritual seriousness while still retaining some element of playfulness.

Confucius says, "Only the one who attains perfect sincerity under Heaven may discover one's 'true nature.' One who accomplishes this participates fully in the transformation of Heaven and Earth, and being fully human, becomes with them a third thing." Knowing this, Bashō tells his students, "Do not simply follow the footsteps of the Ancients; seek what they sought." In order to avoid simply

filling the ancient footsteps of his predecessors, Bashō studies them assiduously, attentively. And when he has had his fill of ancient poets and students and the infinite dialectic that is literature and art, when his heart is filled with wanderlust, he chooses a traveling companion, fills a small pack with essentials—and, of course, a few *hanamuke*—and walks off into the dawn, into history, into the geography of the soul which makes the journey home.