

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Of Bashō and Buddhisms

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THE importance of Buddhism in the writings of the poet Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) is widely recognized.¹ Many studies stress the significance of Zen Buddhism in his works, while others explore his connection to Buddhism as a general tradition. We can see more fully the complexity of Bashō's relationship to Buddhism, however, if we begin with an affirmation of the multiplicity of the Buddhist tradition, with various sects, movements, and sub-traditions. Such an approach shifts our inquiry from *whether* Bashō was Buddhist or Zen to *which forms* of Buddhism (if any) are relevant to our interpretation. Such a shift, I think, enables our inquiry to recognize more clearly both the complexity both of the Buddhist tradition and of the relationship between Bashō and Buddhism. To say Bashō was Buddhist is not specific enough; to say he was a Zen Buddhist is too limiting.

In examining which Buddhisms are relevant to a study of Bashō, we should not confine ourselves to questions of belief and experience. Studies of Bashō and Buddhism usually center on whether his worldview conforms

¹ However, there are exceptions. James Foard dismisses Buddhism's significance for Bashō in a footnote: "There is no evidence that Bashō had more than a very general popular understanding of Buddhism," "The Loneliness of Matsuo Bashō," in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1976), 390, n. 52. And Haruo Shirane's study of Bashō's "cultural memory" ignores Buddhism. See his *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory and the Poetry of Bashō* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

to traditional Buddhist beliefs or whether he experienced enlightenment. We need to consider the possibility that the notion of Buddhism may be useful in clarifying the *structure* of Bashō's religious thought and way of life as well as their content. In terms of both possible historical influence and comparative philosophic analysis, the religiosity of Bashō reflects Buddhist *modes* of thinking and living as much as specific Buddhist beliefs or states of mind.

To be more specific, I will argue here that the persona Bashō of the diaries and *haibun*² is Buddhist in at least three ways: he presents himself as living a *hijiri* way of life, he exhibits non-dualistic thinking in a Buddhist way, and in his thought has important affinities to Pure Land Buddhism. I do not want to argue that the religiosity of Bashō is "devoid of Zen." Indeed, there are important, close relationships between Bashō and Zen. However, I do want to suggest that we arrive at a fuller understanding of the religiosity portrayed in his prose writings by highlighting two additional, more popular forms of Buddhism.

The Multiplicity of Buddhism

In emphasizing the multiplicity of the Buddhist tradition, I am referring to several different kinds of distinctions. The first is the traditional schools or sects of Buddhism, such as Zen. I hope to show that we need to "broaden our epistemological horizons"³ beyond Zen to include Pure Land Buddhism. Key aspects of the structure of his thought reflect Pure Land more than Zen, although we will see that Bashō also departs in an important way from a typical Pure Land approach. Placing Bashō in the context of Pure Land Buddhism helps us to recognize important aspects of his religiosity.

A second distinction that we must keep in mind involves cross-sectarian

² By speaking of the persona Bashō I am distinguishing between the character Bashō presented in his literary prose and the biographical Bashō who lived in the seventeenth century. The two are, of course, related, but we should not assume that they are the same. A detailed comparison between these two Bashos has yet to be done.

³ This phrase is taken from Hermann Ooms. He has argued persuasively that in the study of Tokugawa ideology we need to consider not only Neo-Confucianism but Buddhism and Shinto as well. See his article "Neo-Confucianism and the Formation of Early Tokugawa Ideology: Contours of a Problem," in *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*, ed. Peter Nosco (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) and his book *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs, 1570–1680* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

movements. Buddhism includes various sub-traditions that do not fit easily into sectarian categories or even within the boundaries of Buddhism. The *hijiri* tradition, for instance, was heavily influenced by Buddhism (in particular the Pure Land and esoteric forms), Shinto, Taoism, and that amorphous but important phenomenon, “folk religion.” The *hijiri* tradition is a cross-sectarian and inter-religious movement that is too often ignored when we think of Buddhism merely in terms of the predominant schools of Zen, Pure Land, Nichiren, etc.⁴ In studying the relationship between Buddhism and Bashō we need to consider this eclectic form of religiosity. Indeed, as we will see, the *hijiri* tradition is an integral part of Bashō’s self-portrait in his travel diaries.

A third distinction we can make among Buddhisms is even less visible as a defined tradition than that of the *hijiri*. I refer here to general tendencies within the overall religious system, different movements that involve fundamentally distinct and possibly competing sets of assumptions about the basic character of Buddhism. We could distinguish various such “traditions,” but for the purposes of this paper I will focus on what William R. LaFleur has called the conventional and the dialectical forms of Buddhism. LaFleur analyzes “the existence in medieval Japan of at least two very different, often conflicting, ways of viewing the world,” and he states that “it is the tension and exchange between these two that is important.”⁵

The first tradition he terms “Buddhism as cosmology.” Based on concepts such as transmigration through the six levels of the *rokudō* (six possible types of sentient life, of which human life is but one) and the necessity of right practice in order to attain final release from suffering, passion, and other imperfections, this form of Buddhism is characterized by distinctions and hierarchy. In the second tradition, which LaFleur calls “dialectical Buddhism,” common sense and even conventional Buddhist dichotomies and hierarchies tend to be rejected.

It is worthwhile here to note a few of the different forms this nondualistic Buddhism has taken, since we will come across them later when discussing Bashō. Some nondualistic doctrines concern metaphysics, evidenced by the

⁴ James Foard makes a similar claim in his examination of Ippen and Kamakura Buddhism. See his “In Search of a Lost Reformation: A Reconsideration of Kamakura Buddhism,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 7 (1980), 261–291.

⁵ William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), ix–x.

famous statement from the Heart Sutra, “form is emptiness and emptiness form.” Such a view underlies the tradition in Mahayana Buddhism to claim that the phenomenal world is itself the Absolute. Buddhism has developed epistemology in nondualistic ways as well. LaFleur discusses at length the Buddhist notion of symbolization in which the distinction between symbol and its meaning is dissolved. More pertinent to our study here is the dichotomy between dream and reality. It has been common in Buddhism to describe the deluded state as being like a dream while the goal is to awaken to a true view of reality.⁶ But the nondualistic tradition has undercut that distinction as well, seen in the following statement by the Japanese Zen master Keizan (1268–1325): “There is no separation of the Buddhas, no distinction of sentient beings. . . . When you reach here, everything conditioned and unconditioned is all ended and is like a dream, an illusion.”⁷ The fact that the dichotomy is dissolved by making all a dream is striking and will be discussed later in terms of Bashō.

Soteriology, too, has been developed in nondualistic terms. Conventional Buddhism is based on the distinction between enlightenment and ignorance; indeed the very existence of Buddhism would seem to depend on it. But even that dichotomy has been undermined. Such phrases as *mōjin soku butsu*, “the deluded mind is itself Buddha,” indicate that Buddhism has questioned the essential difference between the problematic state and the ideal. This line of thinking leads to the doctrine of original nature (*hongaku*), in which all beings are seen to be Buddhas. Those who suffer simply do not realize their own enlightenment.

This soteriological attitude involves a similar view toward praxis. If the problem and the goal are in some sense the same, then the distinction between practice and realization, means and ends would seem to require radical critique. It was the Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253), perhaps more than any other, who articulated this view.⁸

It is important to note that the two traditions of conventional “Buddhism as cosmology” and dialectical “nondualistic Buddhism” weave through the

⁶ See, for example, Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 321–325.

⁷ Thomas Cleary, *Transmission of Light: Zen in the Art of Enlightenment By Zen Master Keizan* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 92–93.

⁸ See, e.g., Abe Masao, “The Oneness of Practice and Attainment: Implications for the Relation Between Means and Ends,” in *Dōgen Studies*, ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

tradition and can be found in various schools. We must not, for instance, equate dialectical Buddhism with Zen and conventional Buddhism with Pure Land. Pure Land has developed a variety of nondualistic doctrines while conventional Buddhist ideas can be found throughout Zen writings. It is worth noting that the conventional and dialectical traditions can co-exist within the writings of one thinker. Part of the difficulty of understanding Zen texts, I think, is their tendency to jump back and forth between conventional and nondualistic thinking.

Bashō as Suki no Hijiri

Bashō's journals are not simply a record of a nature poet exploring his relationship with the natural world. They are also, more importantly, an articulation of someone traveling in and through his own traditions. He makes this clear in the famous opening of *Oku no hosomichi*, "The Narrow Road to the Deep North."

Months and days are the wayfarers of a hundred generations, the years too, going and coming, are wanderers. For those who drift life away on a boat, for those who meet age leading a horse by the mouth, each day is a journey, the journey itself home. Among ancients, too, many died on a journey. And so I too—for how many years—drawn by a cloud wisp wind, have been unable to stop thoughts of rambling. (NKBT 46:70)⁹

Bashō is placing himself in an all-inclusive setting: all of time and all people. The word *mo* ("also" or "too") is used three times in this short passage, emphasizing the tie between these elements of his existence. Bashō clearly presents himself against the background of time, humanity in general, and the ancients in particular. But who are the ancients?

The ancients are the central part of his tradition, which he defines by his own writing. It is generally assumed that the term "ancients" refers to writers and artists, especially those who were influenced by Buddhism and lived at least as semi-recluses or wayfarers (the *suki no tonseisha*, "aesthete

⁹ The texts used in this article are found in Ōtani Tokuzō and Nakamura Shunjō, *Bashō kushū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1959) (*Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei*, vol. 45) and Sugiwarara Shoichiro, et al., *Bashō bunshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1959) (*Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei*, volume 46), abbreviated here as NKBT followed by the volume and page number.

recluse”). But if we come to Bashō’s texts with expanded epistemological horizons, another type of “ancient” becomes visible, even prominent: the *hijiri* (“holy man”). In fact, I would argue that his journals manifest a distinctive fusion of two traditions: *suki no tonseisha* and *hijiri*.¹⁰

Bashō’s relation to the *suki no tonseisha* tradition is widely recognized. I do not want to analyze that here except to note that this tradition involved people so deeply involved (*suki* suggests passionate involvement) in the arts that they have cut their ties with normal secular life (*tonseisha* literally means “a person who escapes from the world”). Near the opening of *Oi no kobumi*, “Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel,” Bashō gives what Mezaki Tokue has called “the most concisely expressed account of the *suki no tonseisha*”¹¹: “In Saigyō’s waka, Sōgi’s renga, Sesshū’s painting, Rikyū’s tea ceremony—one thread runs through the artistic Ways. And this artistic spirit is to follow creation, to be companion to the turning of the four seasons” (NKBT 46:52). Bashō locates himself within this tradition of aesthete recluses.

But he also places himself within another tradition, and we cannot achieve a complete understanding of Bashō without an analysis of the other “ancients,” the *hijiri*, and his relation to them. His journals, in fact, are filled with references to the *hijiri* tradition, from the “founder” En-no-Gyōja to the *shugendō* sect.¹² But because Bashō scholarship has tended to confine

¹⁰ For an analysis of the *suki no tonseisha* tradition, see Mezaki Tokue, *Shukke Tonsei* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1976), and “Aesthetic Recluses During the Transition from Ancient to Medieval Japan,” in *Principles of Classical Japanese Literature*, ed. Earl Miner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). I do not want to imply that these two traditions were wholly separate. However, one of the distinctive features of Bashō is what seems to be a merging of the *suki no tonseisha*, both in his own self-portrait and in his interpretation of the past. This fusion is apparent when comparing his travel journals with those of the *suki no tonseisha* that preceded him, for example, by Sōgi (1421–1502). For translations of his journals, see Eileen Kato, “Pilgrimage to Dazaifu: Sōgi’s *Tsukushi no Michi no Ki*,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 34 (1979), 333–367 and Steven Carter, “Sōgi in the East Country: *Shirakawa Kikō*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 42 (1987), 167–210.

¹¹ Mezaki, “Aesthetic Recluses,” 180.

¹² For a study of the legend of En-no-Gyōja, see Linda Keenan, “En no Gyōja: The Legend of a Holy Man in Twelve Centuries of Japanese Literature” (unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1989). For an examination of *shugendō*, see Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1975) and H. Byron Earhart, *A Religious Study of the Mount Haguro Sect of Shugendō* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970). For a translation of a *hijiri* text, *Ichigon Hōdan*, that shows the strong influence of Pure Land Buddhism, see Dennis Hirota, tr., *Plain Words on the Pure Land Way: Saying of the Wander-*

itself to one Buddhism, Zen, this aspect of the texts has been largely “invisible.”¹³ Herman Ooms, recounting and adding to a view stated by Royall Tyler, has made a similar argument about a near contemporary of Bashō, the Zen Buddhist Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655).

Shōsan’s radical anti-intellectualism clearly fits the Zen mold. Royall Tyler, however, has argued perceptively that Shōsan is best understood as a *gyōja* (wandering ascetic), a religious figure marginal to the religious establishment. Indeed, in Shōsan one finds an active obsession with the flesh and death; strenuous efforts to overcome both by “practicing death”; special psychic powers, including the gift of healing; and an independence from institutions expressed in a wandering, hermetic existence. (He lived as a mountain *gyōja* for a long time and almost died of his ascetic regime.) Shōsan, however, was a *gyōja* with a social and political consciousness who aimed his teachings at the whole society, hoping that one day they would receive official bakufu sanction.¹⁴

As Ooms notes, the tradition of the *gyōja* or *hijiri* is characterized by an eclectic religiosity independent of religious institutions, an asceticism which involved practicing death, and the achievement of special powers that were used to serve others. These three qualities are applicable to the Bashō portrayed in the travel journals and *haibun*.

Bashō presents his independence from religious institutions most clearly in two passages. The first, found in the opening of *Kashima kikō* (“A Visit to Kashima Shrine”), suggests his liminal status as neither a lay person nor a Buddhist monk.

Cherishing the memory of a follower of the poetic spirit, I
resolved to see the moon over the mountains of Kashima Shrine

ing Monks of Medieval Japan (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1989). For an analysis of the *hijiri* tradition, see Hori Ichiro, *Folk Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

¹³ A few studies have analyzed this aspect of Bashō’s religiosity, in particular Takeshita Kazuma, “*Shi to Saisei*” no Bungaku: Bashō “*Oku no Hosomichi*” no Himitsu (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1979). Gary Ebersole’s unpublished dissertation on the Japanese literary tradition is the only substantial discussion in English of Bashō’s connection with the *hijiri* tradition. See his “Matsuo Bashō and the Way of Poetry” (University of Chicago, 1981).

¹⁴ Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology*, 128; Tyler, “Reply to Winston L. King,” *Japanese Religions Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 1 (October, 1980), appendix.

this autumn. I was accompanied by two men, a masterless samurai and a monk. The monk was dressed in robes black as a crow, with a bundle of sacred stoles around his neck and an image of the Buddha descending the mountain placed reverently in a portable shrine on his back. Off he strutted, thumping his staff, alone in the universe, no barriers between him and the Gateless Gate. I, however, am neither a monk nor a man of the world. I could be called a bat—in between a bird and a mouse. (NKBT 46:46)¹⁵

Bashō presents his liminal status in relation to both Buddhism and Shinto in another passage, this one in *Nozarashi kikō*, “The Record of a Travel-Worn Skeleton.”

I wear no sword on my hips but dangle an alms wallet from my neck and hold a rosary of eighteen beads in my hand. I resemble a priest, but the dust of the world is on me; I resemble a lay person, but my head is shaven. Although I am no priest, here those with shaven heads are considered to be Buddhist friars, and I was not allowed to go before the shrine. (NKBT 46:39)

Such independence from religious institutions also marked the *suki no tonseisha* tradition. But a characteristic more clearly distinctive of the *hijiri* tradition is ascetic discipline. Bashō emphasizes his participation in religious asceticism in the opening lines of his first travel journal, *Nozarashi kikō*.

I set out on a journey of a thousand leagues, packing no provisions. I leaned on the staff of an ancient who, it is said, entered into nothingness under the midnight moon. It was the first year of Jokyo, autumn, the eighth moon. As I left my ramshackle hut by the river, the sound of the wind was strangely cold.

<i>Nozarashi o</i>	Bleached bones
<i>kokoro ni kaze no</i>	on my mind, the wind pierces
<i>shimu mi kana</i>	my body to the heart
(NKBT 46:36)	

¹⁵ For an interpretation of this passage and the anti-structural aspect of Bashō’s thought, see my “Bashō as Bat: Wayfaring and Anti-Structure in the Journals of Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694),” *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 49 (1990), 274–290. The follower of the poetic spirit is Yasuhara Teishitsu (1610–1673).

Besides the explicit reference to an ascetic journey and the vision of death by the roadside (both his own and that of wayfarers before him), Bashō recalls one part of the legend of En-no-gyōja, who encountered his own skeleton from a previous existence.¹⁶ Early in *Oku no hosomichi*, Bashō gives a more explicit reference to the “founder” of the *hijiri* tradition. He stops at a *shugendō* temple and worships at a statue of the great ascetic. Focusing on the elevated footwear made especially for rain, Bashō writes:

<i>natsu yama ni</i>	In summer mountains
<i>ashida o ogamu</i>	praying to the clogs:
<i>kadode kana</i>	departure
(NKBT 46:74)	

By focusing on the rain clogs, Bashō emphasizes the physicality of the religious practice, both En-no-gyōja’s and his own, and he portrays himself as a follower of the famous *hijiri*.

The importance of walking gear is mentioned again later in *Oku no hosomichi*, also in relation to a departure. After visiting a Yakushi Buddha Hall and a shrine dedicated to Tenjin (Sugawara Michizane), he is given two straw sandals bound with dark blue cords as a departure gift (*hanamuke*) by a local painter.

<i>ayamegusa</i>	Blue iris
<i>ashi ni musuban</i>	bound to our feet,
<i>waraji no o</i>	cords for straw sandals
(NKBT 46:80)	

In this passage, Bashō states that the gift shows that the painter, Kaemon, was “a man of true *fūryū*.” Takeshita Kazuma has argued that Bashō considers this gift important and appropriate because of its associations with the *shugendō* tradition. *Waraji* are one of the sixteen “tools” of a mountain ascetic, and objects dyed blue were used as a charm against evil spirits and insects.¹⁷ Kaemon, then, understands the ascetic as well as the aesthetic dimension of *fūryū*.

While *fūryū* is usually associated with artistic elegance, Takeshita notes that it was also a term for a group dance spread in the rural areas in the late

¹⁶ Linka Keenan, “En no Gyoja: The Legend of a Holy Man in 12 Centuries of Japanese Literature.” Unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin.

¹⁷ Takeshita Kazuma, “*Oku no Hosomichi*” *no Himitsu*, 145–146

medieval and early Tokugawa period by *shugendō* priests.¹⁸ This view is supported by the poem Bashō wrote as he crossed the Shirakawa barrier.

<i>fūryū no</i>	The origin of art:
<i>hajime ya oku no</i>	rice planting songs
<i>taue uta</i>	of the deep north
(NKBT 46:76)	

Bashō here explicitly relates *fūryū* as artistic elegance to popular culture. In fact, I would argue that one of the central features of his journals, especially *Oku no hosomichi*, is the confluence of the “elite” tradition of religio-aesthetic refinement and “folk” traditions, religious asceticism in particular but also rural art.¹⁹

Other passages in *Oku no hosomichi* suggest this blending of the literary and the *hijiri* traditions. In the opening of the journal, as Bashō prepares for his long journey, he states that “above all the moon of Matsushima rose in my mind” (NKBT 46:70). Matsushima was a famous place in Japanese literature, with a long history of poems written by those who passed by there. In fact, Bashō spends a night at Matsushima with several sets of poems about the scenic locale as his “companion” (NKBT 46:83). But the phrase “moon of Matsushima” has another meaning.²⁰ In the very next passage Bashō refers to Kenbutsu *hijiri*, an ascetic associated with the area. Kenbutsu was known to Bashō from a story about him in the *setsuwa* collection *Senjūshō*,²¹ in which the wayfaring monk-poet Saigyō (1118–1190) seeks out the *hijiri*. In the story Kenbutsu, who comes to Matsushima every month for a ten-day fast, states that people call him the *Tsukimatsushima hijiri* (“moon waiting island holy man” or “the holy man of the moon of Matsushima”). Thus what comes to Bashō’s mind most of all in the opening of the journal is not only the scenic place made famous in poetry but an ascetic recluse famous in the *hijiri* tradition. The image “moon of Matsushima,” then, brings together both the literary and the ascetic traditions.

Bashō’s attraction to ascetic practices can be seen in another passage in *Oku no hosomichi*. Bashō explicitly relates his own practice to the ascetic

¹⁸ Ibid., 127.

¹⁹ See the concluding passage of *Sarashina kikō* for another reference to Bashō’s admiration of folk art.

²⁰ See Takeshita Kazuma, “*Oku no Hosomichi*” *no Himitsu*, 155.

²¹ Kenbutsu appears in tale 17 of the *Senjūshō*, which is a collection of tales about renunciation and asceticism popularly attributed to Saigyō. See Keenan, 160–62.

summer retreat associated in particular with *shugendō*. He climbs up to the Urami (“back view”) waterfall, which you can walk behind and look out from the back of the falls. Bashō offers this verse:

<i>shibaraku wa</i>	For a while
<i>taki ni komoru ya</i>	confined to a waterfall:
<i>ge no hajime</i>	onset of summer
(NKBT 46:73)	

Ge no hajime was a term for the beginning of summer austerities in the mountains, which included standing under waterfalls. But Bashō does this only “for a while.” While he participates in the ritual, suggesting his affinity with *shugendō* discipline, his own practice is not confinement in the mountains. It is the wandering asceticism of the *yugyō hijiri*.

Nie Tadashi has noted that “Bashō’s life is not different from that of the *yugyō* priests’ nembutsu *yugyō*—the ideology of *sutemi mujō* (casting off one’s self and transitoriness), dying by the wayside, believing this way to be the law of the heavens (*ten no ri*), a life of not living in any one place.”²² Nie’s statement brings up the aspect of “practicing death,” a particular concern of the *hijiri* tradition which helps to distinguish it from the *suki no tonsei* tradition. We have seen that at the very beginning of Bashō’s first journal he imagines his own death by the roadside. Also in that journal, the first event after crossing the initial barrier is Bashō’s famous encounter with a baby abandoned by the roadside. After noting his grief over the child’s circumstances, he questions why this has come about. He concludes “this simply is from heaven (*ten ni shite*) and you can only grieve over your fate” (NKBT 46:37).²³ Bashō applies the *sutemi mujō* perspective to the baby as well as himself, and he walks on, leaving the child behind.

Bashō’s notion of practicing death can be seen in several passages. One quotation, from *Oku no hosomichi*, will suffice here.

That night we stopped over at Iizuka. There was a hot spring there, and we bathed and rented a room. It was a crude, shabby place, with straw mats covering a dirt floor. There wasn’t even a lamp, so

²² Nie Tadashi, “Bashō to yūgyō shōnin,” *Kaishaku*, vol. 6, nos.7–8 (July, 1960), 22, as cited in Ebersole, 543.

²³ For an analysis of this passage in terms of Geertz’s notion of the problem of meaning, see my “Impermanence, Fate, and the Journey: Bashō and the Problem of Meaning,” *Religion*, vol. 16 (1986), 323–41.

we bedded down by the light of the sunken fireplace. Night came, thunder rolled, rain poured down. The roof leaked over our heads and I was harassed by fleas and mosquitoes; I could not sleep. My old illness too cropped up and I almost fainted. Finally the sky of the short summer night began to lighten, and we set off once again. But the night's afflictions stayed with me and my spirits would not rise. We borrowed a horse and headed for the post town of Koori. My distant journey remained, I was anxious about my illness, and yet this was a pilgrimage to far places, a resignation to self-abandonment and impermanence (*sutemi mujō*). Death might come by the roadside but that is heaven's will (*ten no mei*). With those thoughts my spirits recovered a bit, I began to step broadly on my way, and jauntily I crossed the Ōkido barrier at Date. (NKBT 46:78)

The notion of practicing death is not limited to particular passages. As Takeshita has argued, the entire journey depicted in *Oku no hosomichi* should be seen as a journey into death. It begins with his departure at “the crossroads of unreality” (NKBT 46:70), a term which has been used to signify the intersection of lives in the karmic cycle of rebirth. (I will have more to say about this image later.) The journal ends with friends greeting him “as if meeting someone restored to life” (NKBT 46:98). In between, there are numerous references of dying and rebirth, including *shugendō* practices such as entering a cave to experience ritual death and rebirth.

But if we are to take Bashō seriously as a type of *hijiri*, we must ask whether his asceticism and “practicing death” gave him special religious powers, a central part of the holy man tradition. While Bashō nowhere suggests that he has the power of healing so often associated with *hijiri*, he does present himself as a *seer*, someone who has achieved a sacred power to “see into the reality of things.” In a *haibun* about a disciple named Kyoroku (1656–1715), Bashō states that this power is directly related to ascetic practices.

The man returning to his native place by way of the Kiso road is named Morikawa Kyoroku. Since ancient times, those with a feeling for poetry did not mind carrying satchels on their backs, or putting straw sandals on their feet, or wearing humble hats that barely protected them from the elements. They took delight in dis-

ciplining their minds through such hardship and thereby attaining a knowledge of the true nature of things (*mono no makoto*). . . .

<i>uki hito no</i>	learn from the journey
<i>tabi ni mo narae</i>	of a sorrowing wayfarer:
<i>Kiso no hae</i>	flies of Kiso
(NKBT 46:206–7)	

William R. LaFleur has analyzed a passage from the *Oku no hosomichi* which indicates Bashō's concern with the ability to see.²⁴ The passage refers to another famous *hijiri*, Gyōgi Bosatsu (670–749), best known from stories about him in the early Heian *setsuwa* collection, *Nihon ryōiki* (“Miraculous Tales of Karmic Retribution”). After discussing *tochi*, a wild mountain chestnut whose wood Gyōgi reputedly used for his walking staff, Bashō offers this poem:

<i>yo no hito no</i>	People of the world
<i>mitsukenu hana ya</i>	do not see these blossoms:
<i>noki no kuri</i>	chestnut of the eaves
(NKBT 46:77)	

Gyōgi was known as a seer, someone whose sacred vision allowed him to interpret events in terms of ultimate reality, in his case, the reality of karma.²⁵ Though karma is not involved in Bashō's poem, he is concerned about the ability to see. LaFleur has stated that this passage suggests that “our greatest loss lies in failing to see the natural things near at hand and before our eyes. Being attached to the world leads to such an occlusion of the eye and mind.”²⁶

More fundamentally, I think, Bashō's practice of ascetic wayfaring also allows him to see fully into what he considers the ultimate fabric of existence, the impermanence of life that makes us all wayfarers. His encounter with the baby by the roadside is structured in a way that parallels many of the stories about Gyōgi in the *Nihon ryōiki*, stories which present the *hijiri* interpreting troubling situations in accordance with the law of karma. Bashō asks why the baby has been abandoned, a question that would be answered traditionally by invoking karmic theodicy. His own answer, however, is that

²⁴ William LaFleur, *Karma of Words*, 149–64.

²⁵ See chapter two of LaFleur's *Karma of Words*.

²⁶ William LaFleur, *Karma of Words*, 164.

the baby's situation comes from heaven, the implication being that the baby is a wayfarer, and like all wayfarers he will die on the road, just as Bashō will.

Bashō's vision of impermanence is both qualified and enriched by the ability to see the past. The travels depicted in his journals, particularly his three long ones (*Nozarashi kikō*, *Oi no kobumi*, and *Oku no hosomichi*), can be seen as journeys which bring the past to life. One passage that records this vision is the following from *Oku no hosomichi* which concerns a stone monument that reputedly dated back to the eighth century.

Of places made famous in the poetry since long ago, many are still handed down to us in verse. But mountains crumble, rivers change course, roadways are altered, stones are buried in the earth, trees grow old and are replaced by saplings: time goes by and the world shifts, and the traces of the past are unstable. Yet now before this monument, which certainly has stood a thousand years, I could see into the hearts of the ancients (*ima ganzen ni furubito no kokoro o kemisu*). Here is one virtue of the pilgrimage, one joy of being alive. I forgot the aches of the journey, and was left with only tears. (NKBT 46:81)

Despite the awesome, overwhelming flux of life, Bashō can “see into the heart of the ancients,” an ability he identifies with his practice of ascetic wayfaring.

Bashō is presented, then, with a special power resulting from his *hijiri*-like practice, the power of a seer. But traditionally, *hijiri* attained their powers in part to serve others. It is important, then, to ask what kind of religious function Bashō served. One function, of course, is that of the seer, seeing existence in terms of ultimate reality and communicating his vision to others. While the child in the abandoned baby episode could hardly benefit from Bashō's vision, others can. In an *Oku no hosomichi* episode similar to the encounter with the abandoned baby, Bashō meets two prostitutes who feel lost both geographically and spiritually. They lament their *karma* which has led them to their misery and they ask him to guide them on their pilgrimage to Ise. Bashō refuses to help and instead suggests that they “entrust themselves to the way others are going,” or more literally, “to the going-ness of others.” As Bashō has made clear in this journal, especially in the opening passage (see p. 174, above), the going-ness of others is the wayfaring life that all people partake of. The prostitutes' situation, like the baby's,

is not due to karma but is merely a manifestation of the condition all people share: each day is a journey and the journey itself home.²⁷

In fact, all of Bashō's journals, I would argue, should be seen as the communication of a seer, someone who, through ascetic wayfaring and practicing death, sees existence in light of his vision of the ultimate nature of reality. He can see the shared condition of impermanence and wayfaring that is the essential characteristic of human life. He can see the flowers of the chestnuts and can see into the hearts of the ancients. And his journals are themselves a monument that continues through time by which the reader can see with Bashō's sacred insight.

There is also another *hijiri*-like function implicit in Bashō's journals: the recalling, pacifying, and reinvigorating of the spirits of the dead. If we examine Bashō only in light of Zen Buddhism, such a suggestion may seem quite odd. But if we take seriously his own explicit identification of himself with the *hijiri* tradition, and if we consider the long history of magico-religious functions of literature, this idea is wholly appropriate.

Scholars have begun to detail the numerous ways Japanese literature has had ritual significance. For instance, several have argued that the *Man'yōshū* functioned in part as a *chinkon*, a pacification of the spirits of political victims and that it was recited for the purposes of exorcism and revitalization.²⁸ The *Heike monogatari* ("Tales of the Heike") also was likely offered as a pacification of the potentially evil spirits of those who died in the Gempei war.²⁹

The concluding passage of *Oi no kobumi* fits well with this idea. In that passage, Bashō recalls the destruction of the Heike ruling class at the battle of Ichi-no-tani.

The confusion of that day and the tumult of the times rose in my mind, and images gathered before my eyes: the grandmother of

²⁷ For a fuller analysis of this passage, see Barnhill, "Impermanence, Fate, and the Journey," and Christine Murasaki Millett, "Bush Clover and Moon: A Relational Reading of *Oku no Hosomichi*." *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 52 (1997), 327–56.

²⁸ See, e.g., Nishitsuino Masayoshi, *Kodai saishi to bungaku* (Tokyo: Chūokōronsha, 1966), pp. 322ff; Umehara Takeshi, "Suitei no uta," *Subaru*, vol. 12 (1973), 270–324; Gary Ebersole, "The Religio-Aesthetic Complex in Manyōshū Poetry With Special Reference to Hitomaro's *Aki no No* Sequence," *History of Religions*, vol. 23, no.1 (August, 1983); and H. E. Plutschow, *Chaos and Cosmos: Ritual and Medieval Japanese Literature* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 217 ff.

²⁹ H.E. Plutschow, *Chaos and Cosmos*, 220 ff.

the young emperor clutching him in her arms, his legs tangled in his mother's dress, all of them falling into the imperial barge; court ladies of various ranks carrying their personal articles, throwing into the boat lutes and citherns wrapped in cushions and beddings; imperial food spilling into the water, becoming bait for fish; vanity boxes overturning and looking like a fisherman's discarded kelp. The sorrow of a thousand years lingers on this beach; in the sound of the insensate, white waves is deep grief. (NKBT 46:64)

This passage has the form of a concluding section of a *nō* play in which the chaos and agony of those who have died is re-enacted and pacified, with the character dissolving into nature at the end. Unlike many *nō* plays, there is no Amidist salvation suggested here, but the terror and tragedy is relived and relieved, brought to a tranquil if sorrowful purity in the sound of the white waves.

Takeshita has argued that the passage in *Oku no hosomichi* quoted earlier in which Bashō “sees into the hearts of the ancients” is a *chinkon* for those who have lived and died at that location. He makes a similar argument about the famous passage concerning Yoshitsune's heroic stand near Mount Takadachi.

The splendor of three generations is now but a dream; the ruins of the great gate lie two miles off. All that remains of Fujiwara Hidehira's castle are fields and paddies. Only Mt. Kinkei retains its form. First we climbed up Takadachi, Yoshitsune's “high fortress,” and looking out we saw Kitakami, a large river flowing from Nambu province. The river Koromo encircles the castle of Izumi Saburo and then below Takadachi it pours into the larger river. Beyond the Koromo barrier is the ruins of the castle of Hidehira's son Yasuhira, which protected the approach from Nambu; it probably guarded against the Ezo tribesmen. Yoshitsune's retainers took this castle as their fortress; their glory, in a moment, has turned to grass. “A country torn apart, the mountains and rivers remain; in spring, in the ruined castle, the grass is green.” I laid out my bamboo hat, and I wept without sense of time.

<i>Natsugusa ya</i>	Summer grass:
<i>tsuwamonodomo ga</i>	the remains of

yume no ato warrior's dreams
(NKBT 46:85)

This passage is structured like the one concerning Ichi-no-tani, a recollection of the violent event and then a dissolving of memory into untroubled but impersonal nature.

It may be significant that in this passage Bashō states that his first act was to climb Mount Takadachi. From that vantage point he views the land in the area, naming the rivers and other features. This act is strikingly similar to *kuni-mi*, an ancient ritual “gazing on the land” usually performed from the top of a hill or tower. Plutschow, who discusses this ritual at some length, notes: “By climbing mountains or hills, a man assumes the qualities of the space he occupies. Standing on a high place, he not only represents the deities [of the area], but identifies with them ontically.”³⁰ In many cases, naming the land was a ritual performance of a takeover of control. Bashō’s concern with the names of the rivers in this passage and with place names in general may be related to the ritual identification of these early rites. Of course his function is not to control such areas, but it is, I think, to pacify the spirits of the dead.

Several scholars have noted that Bashō journeyed to the deep north at the time of Saigyō’s *gohyaku saiki*, the ritual on the five hundredth anniversary of his death.³¹ Seen in this light, various passages that refer to Saigyō, and the entire journey as a whole, are not simply literary recollections but ritual remembrance. *Oku no hosomichi* ends with a statement that Bashō is heading off on another journey, this time to Ise to witness the ritual renewal of the shrine there. The last words are a poem referring to clams, an allusion to a poem by Saigyō and to the symbolic value of clams as an image of fertility. By these images of renewal, Takeshita argues, Bashō concludes his extended bringing forth and pacifying of Saigyō’s spirit.

If we are to interpret Bashō in the context that he places himself, we need to consider the Buddhism not only of Zen monks but also of the *hijiri*. If we read him in that light, he emerges as a poet who has taken on the role of a *hijiri*. Indeed, he presents us with an image of the *suki no tonseisha* tradition

³⁰ Ibid., 108.

³¹ For example, Yamamoto Tadaichi, “Oku no hosomichi ryokō to Saigyō gohyaku saiki,” *Kaishaku*, vol. 11, no. 8 (1965), 11–13, and Takeshita Kazuma, “Oku no Hosomichi” *no Himitsu*,

and the *hijiri* tradition fused together. Because of this, I would argue, we should consider Bashō to be a *suki no hijiri*, for in his writings he presents himself as an “aesthete *hijiri*.”

Nondualism in Bashō's Thought: The Crossroads of Unreality

Another important part of Bashō's religiosity can be seen if we place him in the context of two other Buddhisms: nondualistic Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism. Nonduality marks much of his thought, and an understanding of this dialectical character of his religious vision helps us recognize more fully how he fits in with the complex history of Buddhist thought and practice. And only by placing him in the context of Pure Land Buddhism can we obtain a full picture of his particular nondualistic view.

There are several themes in Bashō's prose works that call for such an extended view of Buddhism, but here we can consider only two: the unreality of life and noncompletion. The theme of the dream-like quality of existence has largely been ignored in Bashō, in part, I think, because he has not been analyzed in the context of a clearly delineated sense of nondualistic Buddhism.

It is certainly conventional in both Buddhism and Japanese literature to claim that existence is dream-like, in large part because of the pervasive quality of impermanence (*mujō*). Bashō certainly participates in this convention, seen for instance in the passage from *Oku no hosomichi* concerning Yoshitsune and summer grass (p. 185 above). But Bashō's vision of the dream-like character of life goes beyond traditional literary perceptions of evanescence. Near the beginning of *Oku no hosomichi* Bashō sorrowfully says goodbye to his friends.

Thoughts of the three thousand leagues before me dammed up in
my heart, and at the crossroads of unreality, tears of departure
flowed.

*Yuku haru ya
tori naki uo no
me wa namida
(NKBT 46:70–71)*

Departing spring:
birds cry, in the fishes'
eyes are tears.

“Crossroads of unreality” (*maboroshi no chimata*) is an unusual and complex image, but translators have tended to avoid direct reference to it, resort-

ing to more conventional phrases concerning the dream-like evanescence of life.³² I would argue that this image has been “invisible” to translators because Bashō has been placed only in the context of both conventional notions of the Japanese literary tradition and conventional Buddhism. If, however, we place Bashō in the context of sophisticated Buddhist thought, particularly nondualistic thought, we begin to actually see this image and others related to it.

The image of the crossroads of unreality also appears in another work, *Genjūan no fu* (“Prose poem on an unreal dwelling”), which concerns Bashō’s brief stay at a hut called “The Unreal Dwelling.” Here, the translator, Donald Keene, presents a literal rendering: “This abandoned thatched hut was where the uncle of the warrior Suganuma retreated from the world. He went away some eight years ago; his dwelling remains behind at the crossroads of unreality.”³³ This passage is immediately followed by another complex and unusual image. Translated literally the passage reads “truly, enlightenment and delusion are resolved in this one word, unreality, and one must not forget even for a moment change and its swiftness.”³⁴ Keene, however, renders the passage “all the delusions of our senses are summed up in the one word *unreality*” (Keene’s emphasis). Because the notion that enlightenment and delusion are resolved in unreality does not conform to conventional Buddhism, it has become invisible to the translator. Once we place Bashō in the context of nondualistic Buddhism, however, these images are recognizable and understandable. We cannot examine fully here the

³² For example, Donald Keene translates the line “As I stood on the road that was perhaps to separate us forever in this dreamlike existence, I wept tears of farewell” (in Donald Keene, ed., *Anthology of Japanese Literature* [New York: Grove Press, 1955], 364). Nobuyuki Yuasa translates it as “the thought of three thousand miles before me suddenly filled my heart, and neither the houses of the town nor the faces of my friends could be seen by my tearful eyes except as vision” (*The Narrow Road to the Deep North And Other Travel Sketches* [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966], 98). Earl Miner translates it as “my heart was burdened by the thought of the many miles stretching ahead, and my tears fell on such a parting on the illusory path of this world” (*Japanese Poetic Diaries* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969], 158). Helen Craig McCullough has rendered it “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” (*Classical Japanese Prose: An Anthology* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990], 523).

³³ Donald Keene, *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, 374; NKBT 46:178.

³⁴ While this is my translation, I have borrowed Keene’s felicitous rendering of *mujō jin-soku*, “change and its swiftness.”

Buddhist theme of dream and unreality, but it is important for us here to point out several aspects of the nondualistic development of that theme. One aspect is soteriological, the claim that there is no difference between delusion and enlightenment. Keizan, in his *Denkōroku* (“Transmission of Light”) states that

Those who leave home mentally do not shave off their hair or wear special clothing. . . . they know that “even cutting off passions is a disease,” and realize that “aiming for true thusness is also wrong.” To them, nirvana and samsara are both illusions; they are concerned with neither enlightenment nor affliction.³⁵

In classic nondualistic fashion, Keizan is claiming that enlightenment involves the dissolution of the distinction between enlightenment and delusion.

Nondualistic Buddhism entails a similar rejection of the distinction between illusion and reality. Keizan states that “you should not understand life and death as empty illusions either, nor should you understand them as true reality. If you understand as empty falsehood or true reality, both of these understandings are wrong when you reach here.”³⁶ Put differently, as long as we maintain a distinction between illusion and reality we live in illusion.

Such statements do not, however, imply that Buddhist teachings depict true reality. Everything that involves dualities, even Buddhist doctrine, is ultimately empty of “truth.” In case 25 of the famous koan collection *Wu-men kuan* (Jp. *Mumonkan*), master Yang-shan (Kyōzan) states that “The truth of the Mahayana is beyond the Four Propositions and transcends the Hundred Negations.” To this Wu-men adds his own verse concerning Yang-shan:

In broad daylight, under the blue sky,
he preached a dream in a dream.
Absurd! Absurd!
He deceived the entire assembly.³⁷

³⁵ Thomas Cleary, *Transmission of Light*, 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁷ Robert Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan (Mumonkan)* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 160.

Buddhism is a dream within a dream because its teachings about the emptiness of phenomena and of philosophic systems is itself ultimately empty. The notion of emptiness entails the rejection of all doctrinal systems, including a Buddhist one. Buddhism as a religious teaching, then, is an absurd deception—a dream within a dream.

In fact, in the nondualistic context the notions of dream and unreality can be used to suggest ultimate reality. All things are empty of own-being— independence and permanence—and so are not “real” in the normal meaning of the term. In this sense, “unreality” refers to the true character of existence: its emptiness (interdependence and impermanence). In this way, too, Buddhism can be considered a dream within a dream. In response to the false awareness (dream) of conventional consciousness, it articulates the true nature of existence, as empty and “unreal.”

Thus paradoxically, the Buddhist ideal has been depicted in terms of an empty dream. Keizan, describing the transmission of enlightenment from Punyayashas to his disciple Ashvaghosha, remarks that “the paths of teacher and apprentice communed, feelings of past and present were broken; in the middle of a dream he made a road, walking along in emptiness.”³⁸

Bashō presents this theme of a dream within a dream in one of his *haibun*. Makoto Ueda translates it as follows:

Unchiku, a monk living in Kyoto, once painted what appeared to be a self-portrait. It was a picture of a monk with his face turned away. Unchiku showed me the portrait and asked me to write a legend for it. I said, “You are more than sixty years of age, and I am nearing fifty. We are both in a world of dreams, and this portrait depicts a man in a dream, too.” Then I jotted down a sleeper’s talk beside the portrait:

<i>Kochira muke</i>	Will you turn toward me?
<i>ware mo sabishiki</i>	I am lonely, too
<i>aki no kure</i>	This autumn evening. ³⁹

But it is not simply that they are in a dream. Ueda fails to recognize the nondualistic image in the text. The passage literally reads “together in a dream, we portray the forms of a dream” (*tomo ni muchū ni shite yume no katachi*

³⁸ Thomas Cleary, *Transmission of Light*, 53

³⁹ Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), 117; NKBT 46:191.

o arawasu). Bashō, then, presents himself as depicting a dream within a dream.⁴⁰

If we interpret Bashō in light of the nondualistic structure of Buddhist thought, we can see several ways that life is a crossroads of unreality. First, as noted above, life is a dream within a dream, and thus a crossroads of unrealities. The dichotomy of delusion and enlightenment are resolved in the term unreality, so all roads are “unreal.” Second, Bashō as wayfarer meets and leaves numerous people, their paths crossing in the dream of life. All people are wayfarers who live in unrealities, so all of his encounters with people are a crossroads of a dream. Third, in a world characterized by *mujō*, the “unreal” moment of the present is a crossroad of past and future, both of which are themselves unreal. This idea can be seen in another *haibun*.

“Tomorrow I will become a cypress!” an old tree in a valley once said. Yesterday has passed as a dream; tomorrow has not yet come. Instead of just enjoying a cask of wine in my life, I keep saying “tomorrow, tomorrow,” securing the reproof of the sages.

<i>sabishisa ya</i>	Loneliness:
<i>hana no atari no</i>	among the blossoms
<i>asunarō</i>	an <i>asunarō</i>
(NKBT 46:154)	

I will discuss this *haibun* in more detail later concerning his notion of non-completion. For our purposes here it is important to note Bashō’s awareness of time, which both acknowledges the existence of past and future and yet declares them to be unreal. The present moment, then, is a crossroads of unrealities, as well as being itself a dream within a dream.

By placing Bashō in the context of nondualistic Buddhism, we can see more fully the character of his vision. When he says that “enlightenment and delusion are resolved in this one word, unreality,” he is rejecting the

⁴⁰ In their translation, Satō Hiroaki and Burton Watson correctly render the final verb as referring to both Bashō and Unchiku, but they translate that verb intransitively: “We are both in dreams, appearing in dream forms” (*From the Country of Eight Islands* [Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1981], 295). The text (*yume no katachi o arawasu*) indicates that Bashō portrays himself as actively depicting (rather than merely appearing in) a dream within a dream. For one instance of the theme of portraying a dream within dream in Buddhism, see the “Mutchū setsumu” (“Explaining a dream within a dream”) chapter of Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō* (Hee-Jin Kim, *Flowers of Emptiness: Selections from Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō* [Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985], 279–286).

dichotomy between illusion and reality and between the imperfect state and the ideal (a topic we will consider in more detail shortly). He is also rejecting our conventional notion that phenomena have enduring substance. Life is characterized by constant flux, and thus phenomena lack the enduringness we normally associate with reality. He concludes *Genjūan no fu* with the following words: "Now, when autumn is half over, and every morning and each evening brings changes to the scene, I wonder if that is not what is meant by dwelling in unreality. And here too I end my words."⁴¹

The Pure Land Structure of Bashō's Theme of Noncompletion

Another theme in Bashō's prose works calls for a consideration of nondualism: noncompletion. This theme has been noted by a number of scholars but its meaning and significance, I would argue, have been missed by not recognizing its nondualistic and particularly Pure Land Buddhist character.

In Bashō's literary prose, noncompletion has two primary aspects, involving two dichotomies: imperfection/perfection and means/ends. On two other occasions I have discussed in some detail these aspects, so here I will merely summarize my interpretations.⁴² The means/ends dichotomy can best be seen by examining the basic character of Bashō's religious way of life: wayfaring.⁴³ It is important to distinguish wayfaring from another more common form of religious journey, that of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is a temporary break from one's normal mode of life. It is an extended ritual within one's regular life path, be it householder or monk. A householder who goes on pilgrimage, for instance, is still a householder. She has temporarily suspended the structural requirements of that lifestyle to which she will return. Wayfaring, on the other hand, *is* one's normal mode of life. Here the journey is not a temporary break from one's way of life. Journeying is the principal and abiding state for the wayfarer.

Bashō finds this mode of life to be sacred because for him wayfaring is, in fact, the essential condition of all people and of nature as well. He depicts this vision brilliantly in the opening section of *Oku no hosomichi*, quoted earlier.

⁴¹ Donald Keene, *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, 378.

⁴² For a discussion of the means/ends dichotomy, see Barnhill, "Impermanence, Fate, and the Journey," and for an analysis of the imperfection/perfection dichotomy, see Barnhill, "Bashō as Bat."

⁴³ For an analysis of wayfaring in Bashō and how it differs from pilgrimage, see Barnhill, "Impermanence, Fate, and the Journey."

Months and days are the wayfarers of a hundred generations, the years too, going and coming, are wanderers. For those who drift life away on a boat, for those who meet age leading a horse by the mouth, each day is a journey, the journey itself home.

(NKBT 46:70)

It is important to recognize that given the vision of the inherent and inevitable wayfaring of life, the goal is neither arriving “there” nor returning “home.” There is no final destination where the physical journey ends or spiritual realization is finally attained. The ideal is to cross the next mountain barrier along a path with countless mountains yet to come. Perhaps the most vivid depiction of this ideal is in a later section of *Oku no hosomichi*.

That night we stopped over at Iizuka. There was a hot spring there, and we bathed and rented a room. It was a crude, shabby place, with straw mats covering a dirt floor. There wasn’t even a lamp, so we bedded down by the light of the sunken fireplace. Night came, thunder rolled, rain poured down. The roof leaked over our heads and I was harassed by fleas and mosquitoes; I could not sleep. My old illness too cropped up and I almost fainted. Finally the sky of the short summer night began to lighten, and we set off once again. But the night’s afflictions stayed with me and my spirits would not rise. We borrowed a horse and headed for the post town of Koori. My distant journey remained, I was anxious about my illness, and yet this was a pilgrimage to far places, a resignation to self-abandonment and impermanence. Death might come by the roadside but that is heaven’s will. With those thoughts my spirits recovered a bit, I began to step broadly on my way, and jauntily I crossed the Ōkido Barrier at Date. (NKBT 46:78)

The religious goal is to fully embrace the path, which ends only with death.

This fusing of practice and realization was not only physical but also psychological, as can be seen in the other aspect of noncompletion: imperfection. In numerous passages Bashō seems to denigrate himself. One example can be found in the opening of Bashō’s third journal, *Oi no kobumi* (“Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel”).

Among these one hundred bones and nine holes is something. For now let’s call it “gauze in the wind.” Surely we can say it’s thin, torn easily by the wind. It grew fond of mad poetry long ago and

eventually this became its life work. At times, it has wearied of the undertaking and thought of quitting; at times it has pressed forward, boasting of victories. Battling thus back and forth, it has never been at rest. For a while it yearned for worldly success, but poetry thwarted that; for a while it thought of enlightening its foolishness, but poetry broke that off. Finally, without talent or skill, it simply follows along this one line. (NKBT 46:52)

The significance of Bashō's self-criticism is a controversial issue. Do such passages merely represent public modesty, and thus can they be safely ignored? Or are they manifestations of serious self-criticism, perhaps signifying an admission of failure at achieving an ideal of tranquility?

I would suggest a more complex interpretation. Bashō's self-criticism is quite serious, but his "imperfection" is, actually, an integral part of his ideal. This "soteriological noncompletion" can perhaps best be seen in the *haibun* on the *asunarō* that was quoted previously. The *asunarō* is an unusual tree that looks like a cypress, a tree whose wood is highly prized.⁴⁴ It is not, however, what it appears to be. Literally, *asunarō* means "tomorrow I will become," and the context implies "tomorrow I will become a cypress." The *asunarō*, then, seems to be what it is not; it appears to fall short of what one might expect it to achieve. Standing among the beautiful blossoms, itself without any bright color or fruition, the *asunarō* evokes a sense of incompleteness and loneliness.

Bashō's identification with this theme of imperfection is explicit. He is presented as incomplete, just like the *asunarō*. The fact that the tree is old reinforces the idea that completion will never come, that its nature is to be unfinished. This is Bashō's nature as well.

The theme of non-completion is seen also in two of his poems.

<i>natsu kite mo</i>	Summer comes:
<i>tada hitotsu ha no</i>	just one leaf
<i>hito ha kana</i>	on the one-leaf fern
(NKBT 45:121)	

In summer, everything grows in full verdancy. Yet a plant that bears one leaf stands out, as if somehow incomplete. Bashō strongly emphasizes this dis-

⁴⁴ The *asunarō* is *Thujaopsis dolobrata*, False Hiba Cedar. The cypress, or *hinoki*, is *Chamaecyparis obtusa*.

parity with the repetition of *hito* (“one”) and the use of *tada* (“only”). The dissimilarity between the fern and the rest of the scene evokes a sense of aloneness, also emphasized by the word *hitotsu*. It is a complex theme. Compared to others, the fern does appear incomplete because of its one leaf, but that is its true nature and in its “incompleteness” it follows that nature.

The theme of incompleteness is embodied in another poem, and again a sense of loneliness is evoked.

<i>kochō ni mo</i>	Autumn comes
<i>narade aki furu</i>	without it becoming a butterfly;
<i>na mushi kana</i>	the rape worm
(NKBT 45:191)	

Autumn has come, leaves have become colorfully tinted and beautiful butterflies have emerged from their cocoons. Yet the rape worm comes to no obvious transformation. It is different and it stands alone in a scene of bright beauty. But again, this theme of noncompletion is not a temporary condition or a result of failure. It is the true nature of the worm.

This notion of soteriological noncompletion reflects the nonduality of delusion and enlightenment noted above. For the *asunarō*, the one-leaf fern, and the rape worm—and for Bashō—there is in reality no ideal state separate from the present condition. But it is important to be attentive to the particular form of nonduality concerning praxis and soteriology. And we also should examine how it relates both to other themes in his writings and to the broader context of Japanese religions.

There are, in fact, various ways that the distinction between imperfection and perfection and means and ends could be dissolved. One could, for instance, claim that all beings are inherently perfect and complete and that practice is simply the manifestation of that perfection. Such an articulation is the approach taken by Dōgen. But Bashō’s nonduality is different. In the *asunarō haibun*, for example, Bashō presents his notion of noncompletion in a complex, almost paradoxical way: the idea of an abiding condition is combined with a strongly transitional quality. Imperfection is neither a temporary state which ends in perfection nor a state marked by stasis or stagnation. The rape worm, one-leaf fern, and *asunarō* always remain as they are, incomplete compared to what is traditionally prized. But as images of perpetual transition, they also strongly suggest development.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu initially brought to my attention this *haibun* and the two fol-

I suggest that in Bashō's view this condition is not simply characteristic of a few underachievers but is the universal condition of all life. Such an interpretation is supported by the closely related notion of wayfaring. All things are wayfarers and each day is a journey. Life as a whole is a journey that is never complete but is simply stopped by death. One is always on the road: there is no climax or completion to life's journey. Bashō's self-criticism is neither mere modesty nor a simple assertion of failure. It is instead a realization that the state of noncompletion is part of the essential fabric of human life. Bashō's ideal is the continuing realization of this fact, which involves both sincere, continuing self-recrimination as well as the affirmation of his attunement to the basic character of reality.⁴⁶

This complex vision of universal noncompletion has gone unrecognized, I would argue, because of the failure to delineate distinct Buddhisms. A clear sense of nondualistic Buddhism helps our understanding, but if we only considered nondualism as it has been developed in Zen, we might still miss the particular nature of Bashō's vision. It is, I want to suggest, the Pure Land form of nondualism that best informs our understanding of this aspect of Bashō's thought.

A brief overview of Pure Land views on the dichotomies of imperfection/perfection and practice/realization helps us see Bashō's affinity with this "popular" form of Buddhism and thus to recognize more fully his cultural context.⁴⁷ A characteristic feature of much of the Pure Land tradition

lowing poems; see "Far Eastern Existentialism: *Haiku* and the Man of *Wabi*," in *The Personality of the Critic*, ed. Joseph P. Strelka (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973). However, they argue that these poems and the *haibun* suggest stagnancy, contentment, and complacency in Bashō. I suggest the opposite: perpetually incomplete transformation. If Bashō were complacent he would not keep saying "tomorrow, tomorrow" in the *haibun*.

⁴⁶ Bashō's theme of impermanence and his devotion to *haikai no renga* also suggest the idea of change that never climaxes or culminates. Gary Ebersole notes that "When one realizes that *mujō* is the natural state of things, a new world opens up. That is to say, when pushed to its logical conclusion one finds no primordial 'being' but *shizen*, nature or natural *mujō* or continuous becoming." Ebersole, "Matsuo Bashō and the Way of Poetry," 561. It is also relevant that the source of Bashō's *nom de plume*, the *Bashō* (plantain) tree, does not flower in central Japan.

⁴⁷ For an overview of Pure Land Buddhism, see Taitetsu Unno, *River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) and James C. Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1989). For a discussion of how both Zen and

is a complex view of the relationship between imperfection and perfection, the problematic state and the ideal. The Chinese Pure Land master Shantao's (613–681) explanation of the “deep mind,” the second of the three minds discussed in the *Meditation Sutra*, delineates two conflicting elements in Pure Land soteriology.

Deep mind is the deeply entrusting mind. There are two aspects. One is to realize deeply and decisively that one is in actuality a foolish being of karmic evil caught in birth-and-death, from vast kalpas ago ever sinking and ever wandering in transmigration without any condition that would lead to emancipation. The second is to realize deeply and decisively that through the Forty-eight Vows, Amida Buddha grasps sentient beings, so that being carried by the power of the Vow without any doubt, without apprehension, they decidedly attain birth.⁴⁸

There is a strong tension here, characteristic of the Pure Land tradition, between a recognition of one's imperfection and an awareness of one's salvation. For a Pure Land believer, both of these aspects of human existence must be upheld at the same time.

Shinran (1173–1262) intensified this tension by emphasizing that this imperfection was characteristic of all people: it is the essential fact of human life. A person must realize that he or she is imperfect and will continue to be so until death. However, such a realization is not purely negative, for this realization makes one attuned to the true nature of reality and can include salvation. Salvation does not involve the elimination of one's evil; one is saved *sono mama*, just as one is. As such, someone who is saved continues to be imperfect. Put differently, imperfection and perfection, evil and salvation, are nondual. Shinran depicted this paradoxical condition in the following verse:

The light of compassion that grasps us illumines and protects us
always;
The darkness of our ignorance is already broken through;

Pure Land Buddhism function in the religious aesthetics of *chadō* (the Way of Tea), see Dennis Hirota, *Wind in the Pines: Classic Writings of the Way of Tea as a Buddhist Path* (Fremont, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ Translated in Dennis Hirota, *No Abode: The Record of Ippen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 138

Still the clouds and mists of greed and desire, anger and hatred,
 Cover as always the sky of true and real shinjin [faith].
 But though light of the sun is veiled by clouds and mists,
 Beneath the clouds and mists there is brightness, not dark.⁴⁹

The paradoxical co-presence of evil and salvation affects the Pure Land notion of karma. According to Shinran, "'To be transformed' means that evil karma, without being nullified or eradicated, is made into the highest good, just as all waters, upon entering the great ocean, immediately become ocean water."⁵⁰ The imperfection of evil karma is not destroyed, but co-exists in a nondual way with the highest good of salvation.

The psychological effect is to affirm continuously one's evil while at the same time affirming one's ideal status as saved. After claiming that evil karma is not eradicated, Shinran states that the person with *shinjin* "realizes the diamond-like mind without any calculation on his part, and thus dwells in the stage of the truly settled."⁵¹ This dialectical assertion of being imperfect and yet in the ideal state parallels Bashō's presentation of noncompletion. Both the self-denigration and the affirmation of the ideal are serious and integral components of Shinran and Bashō.

It is worth noting, however, that Bashō's notion of imperfection differs from Shinran's in an important way. As suggested by the *haibun* on the *asunarō* and the poems on the one-leaf fern and the rape worm, Bashō has a strong transitional component not found in Shinran. Shinran's view is more absolute: one's imperfection is simply a given and so is one's salvation. Bashō's writings suggest a sense of unending process, that is, a sense not of a static imperfection but an ongoing state of being in process yet always falling short of completion.

While there is no clear indication of direct Pure Land influence in Bashō's works, there are various references that suggest he was familiar with Pure Land doctrine. An important image in the Pure Land tradition is the white path.⁵² In this image of the life of a Pure Land believer, a lone

⁴⁹ "Hymn of True Shinjin and Nembutsu," in Ueda Yoshifumi, ed., *The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way: A Translation of Shinran's Kyōgyōshinshō* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1983), 162. *The Collected Works of Shinran* (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), vol. I, p. 70. Quoted in Hirota, *No Abode*, lxxv.

⁵⁰ "Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone'," in *Collected Works of Shinran* vol. I, p. 453.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 454.

⁵² For a brief discussion of this image, see Dennis Hirota, *No Abode*, li-lii.

traveler, journeying to the west, comes across wild animals and thieves. He runs further to the west where he arrives at a river that has two currents: a violent rage of water on his left and fire on his right. Between the two currents is a narrow white path, perhaps four inches wide. Fearful but with no other choice, he attempts to cross the river along the white path. From the opposite shore Amida calls out with encouragement; from the near shore Sakyamuni shouts too.

While there is no direct reference to this image in Bashō's prose works, the very title of his last journal, *The Narrow Road (hosomichi) to the Deep North*, may be an indirect reference. The word *oku* in the title refers to the northern "back country" of Japan and also means the "interior depths" (e.g. *oku no in*, the interior temple in a monastery), and may reflect Bashō's adaptation of the notion of the narrow path to his own worldview that does not include a Western Paradise.

Such a parallel might seem purely fortuitous but for the existence of others. One section of *Oku no hosomichi* records his visit to the Shiraito Falls. *Shiraito* literally means "white thread," and Bashō notes that its location is by the Sennindō, "Wizard Hall," a temple of the *shugendō* sect, which incorporated Pure Land beliefs into its eclectic religious system. In the context of *Oku's* narrow path and *shugendō*, the image of white threads recalls the narrow white path of Pure Land Buddhism.

There is another parallel with Pure Land Buddhism in this journal. Bashō's passage on the crossroads of unreality recalls a statement made by Ippen (1239–1289).

At the crossroads of the six paths there is nowhere we do not stray; at the doorways of the four modes of arising there is no niche in which we do not take shelter. Should we call this cycle of transformation in birth-and-death dream or reality? When we think to say it exists, it rises in clouds and vanishes like [the pyre's] smoke; there is no one who keeps his shadowy form in the vacant sky. When we think to say it does not really exist, we still find, lodged within our hearts, grief at separation from one we loved that never fails to cut to the bowels and leave the soul distraught.⁵³

For Ippen the crossroads concern the six paths of the *rokudō*. Bashō nowhere suggests his own belief in this cosmology, but his passage in *Oku no*

⁵³ Dennis Hirota, *No Abode*, 33.

hosomichi, with its reference to the crossroads of unreality and the pain of departure, bears a striking resemblance to Ippen's words.⁵⁴

More references and parallels to Pure Land Buddhism in Bashō's works could be cited, but these few suffice to suggest that the relationship between Bashō and the Pure Land tradition may be far more significant than previously thought. By making this comparison, I am not suggesting that he was a Pure Land devotee. There is no manifestation in his literary prose of specific Pure Land beliefs or practices. However, the *structure* of his thought—the dialectical affirmation that imperfection was real and worthy of self-criticism yet at the same time was universal and an integral part of the ideal—parallels that of Pure Land Buddhism and becomes apparent and understandable when put in that context.⁵⁵ And the references and resemblances noted above support the appropriateness of placing him in that context.

Conclusion

The relationship between Bashō and Buddhism is enormously complex. We need to recognize the specificity and multiplicity of his associations with different forms of Buddhism. In addition to the "elite" form of Zen, the more "popular" forms of *hijiri* and Pure Land Buddhism are significant aspects of Bashō's writings. In addition, the nondualistic tradition of Buddhism is an integral part of his sophisticated religiosity. However, I do not want to suggest that in studying the religiosity of Bashō we should confine ourselves to Buddhism. Bashō's writings show the influence of Shinto, Taoism, and Confucianism as well.⁵⁶ As we work toward a more compre-

⁵⁴ Gary Ebersole, in his dissertation on Bashō, notes another strong resemblance between the words of Ippen and statements of Bashō, in this case concerning his aesthetics. See Ebersole, "Matsuo Bashō and the Way of Poetry," 543.

⁵⁵ Two other examples of this particular mode of nondualistic thought are Suzuki Shōsan and Motoori Norinaga. The fact that these two and Bashō all lived in the Tokugawa period suggests that there was a tendency toward this type of fusion of imperfection and the ideal. For an abbreviated analysis of this aspect of Shōsan and Norinaga, see my "Bashō as Bat" and "Norinaga's View of *Aware* and Moral Criticism of the *Tale of Genji*," *Annals of the Southeastern Conference of the Association for Asian Studies*, vol. 10 (1988), 72–80.

⁵⁶ I have developed Bashō's relation to the folk and Shinto traditions in "Folk Religion and Shinto in the Ecosystem of Bashō's Religious World," a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, November, 1994. For a study of his relation to Taoism, see my "*Zōka*: The Creative in Bashō's View of Nature and Art," forthcoming.

hensive view of Bashō's religiosity, we need to examine his Buddhism not only as a multiplex tradition but also as one that interrelated with other religious traditions. Herman Ooms has noted in a study of Tokugawa ideology that the partitions between the religious traditions of that era were "porous."⁵⁷ This porosity was particularly true for an eclectic poet such as Bashō. In the end, I believe, we will come to see Buddhism in a non-essentialist and Buddhist way, that is, as exhibiting nonself and emptiness. It is a tradition that is neither singular, discrete, nor unchanging. It has multiple components which do not constitute a simple whole; it interpenetrates with other religious traditions; and it is always in a state of transformation.⁵⁸ Bashō's "Buddhism" exhibits this multifarious and interwoven character, and this essay has looked at but a few aspects of it.

⁵⁷ Hermann Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology*, 49

⁵⁸ I have discussed this non-essentialist approach to the study of religion in terms of an "ecosystems" in "Folk Religion and Shinto in the Ecosystem of Bashō's Religious World" and "Gary Snyder's Cultural Ecosystem," in *Broader Horizons: Global Perspectives on Environmental Writing*, ed. Charlotte Zoe Walker, forthcoming.