

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Awakening to the High/Returning to the Low: The Pilgrim's Ideal in Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*

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INTRODUCTION

THERE is a tremendous disparity among scholars concerning the relationship between Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644–1694) and Buddhism. Many discussions in this debate revolve especially around the nature and extent of Bashō's involvement in Zen.¹ On the one hand, R.H. Blyth and Heinrich Dumoulin point out Bashō's "deep interest in Zen"² or "Zen lifestyle";³ the Japanese literary scholar Yagi Kametarō describes Bashō's *oeuvre* as "permeated with the mind of Zen";⁴ and

¹ William LaFleur notes this situation in an article entitled "Japanese Religious Poetry" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* when he states: "Scholarly opinion differs about the Zen involvement of the principal haiku poet, Matsuo Bashō." William LaFleur, "Japanese Religious Poetry" in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 11 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 381.

² Reginald Horace Blyth, *Haiku* vol. 1 (Tokyo: Hokuseidō Press, 1949), 27. Blyth not only notes the "flavour of Zen" in some of Bashō's poems, but even states that haiku are "a form of Zen" which "are to be understood from the Zen point of view" (i.e., from "that state of mind in which we are not separated from other things, and yet retain our own individuality and personal peculiarities"). See Blyth, 26–27; iii–iv.

³ From Heinrich Dumoulin's article "Zen" in Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15, 566.

⁴ Kametarō Yagi, *Haiku: Messages from Matsuyama* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 33. Cf. Stephen Schuhmacher and Gert Woerner, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), 173: "[Bashō's] best

Kenneth Yasuda points out that Bashō's best haiku "demonstrate the profundity of the doctrine of Zen."⁵ On the other hand, scholars such as Katō Shūichi, Satō Hiroaki, and Satō Madoka opine that Bashō was "unconcerned with the other-worldly doctrines of Buddhism,"⁶ pointing out, for instance, Bashō's "great wariness of enlightenment"⁷ or the incompatibility between the "wordlessness" of Zen and the verbal medium of literature.⁸ Why does there appear to be such disagreement among scholars in this area? In this paper I would like to address this issue, central among scholars of Bashō's work. My method of engaging these issues will be through a close reading of Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* 奥の細道, addressing both some principal themes in the text as well as Bashō's manner of weaving these themes into the underlying fabric of his travel diary. I will then consider the reli-

haiku . . . are permeated with the mind of Zen and express the nondualistic experience of Zen."

⁵ Kenneth Yasuda, *The Japanese Haiku* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1957), 179.

⁶ Shūichi Katō, *A History of Japanese Literature*, translated and edited by Don Sanderson (Surrey: Japan Library of Curzon Press, 1997), 159.

⁷ Hiroaki Satō, *One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku to English* (New York: Weatherhill, 1983), 131.

⁸ See Madoka Satō, *From Bashō to Zen* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1973). This view of M. Satō's may be found in H. Satō, *op. cit.*, 131. Ironically it is just this "wordlessness" or "silence of haiku" which has led other scholars such as Ueda Makoto and Robert Hass to situate the roots of Bashō's haiku *more* deeply in the Zen Buddhist culture of Japan. (See, for example, Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō* [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970], 130; and *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Bashō, Buson, and Issa*, edited and with verse translations by Robert Hass [Hopewell, NJ: The Ecco Press, 1994], xiv–xv.) Despite individual opinion concerning the compatibility of literary endeavors with Zen, Burton Watson tells us that an historical account of the tradition demonstrates that by the time of the writing of the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Liu-tsu t'an ching*) in the eighth or early ninth century, "it was the practice in the Zen school to use verses to express doctrinal ideas and levels of enlightenment," and that the Way of Zen and the Way of Poetry so coalesced in medieval Japan that the discipline of poetic expression was considered by some as integral to Zen practice as *zazen*. Watson goes on to state that by the time Bashō studied literature and practiced Zen in the Tokugawa period, two salient features had become deeply engrained in Zen poetry: 1) "the tendency to brush aside elaborated doctrinal theories and to urge students to concentrate directly upon the basic enlightenment experience" (leading to the replacing of religious and philosophical terminology with images suggestive of silence, clearness, and coldness in order to convey the quiet meditative life of the writer and his inner state of enlightenment); and 2) "the demand that the student view enlightenment and its implications in terms of his immediate situation," reflecting the Zen belief that "one has not fully grasped the significance of enlightenment until one can manifest it in the language of daily life." As we shall see in our study of Bashō, both of these traits are evident in *Oku no Hosomichi*. For the references to Watson, see Burton Watson, "Zen Poetry" in Kenneth Kraft, ed., *Zen: Tradition and Transition* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 105–07, 111, 115–17.

gious nature of these themes, paying particular attention to their relation to the basic Buddhist metaphysics, the Zen ideal, and the Mahāyāna notion of the interpenetration of the worlds of *nirvāṇa* and *samsāra*. My intention is not only a better understanding of the religio-aesthetic nature of Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*, but also a deeper appreciation of the underlying episteme of Bashō's world. Ultimately, it is not only Bashō's world which we intend to experience more fully, but our own: Bashō's *haibun*, therefore, becomes a literary midwife—a Zen garden gate, if you will—inviting us on our own pilgrimage into “the Interior” where “each day is a journey, and the journey itself home” (*OnH* #1).⁹

Four Key Themes of Oku no Hosomichi

The opening passage of Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* may be seen as a microcosm foreshadowing the whole work, and an entire tome could be written on it alone. This particular study, however, will be limited to four key themes introduced in the initial *haibun*, followed by a consideration of Bashō's development of these themes throughout the text as a whole.

Bashō begins his journal in traditional fashion, placing himself within the context not only of the “ancients” and wandering poet-priests of the past, but with all those who have longed to be “at one” with the ever-changing way of nature:

Moon and sun are passing figures of countless generations, and years coming and going wanderers too. Drifting life away on a boat or meeting age leading a horse by the mouth, each day is a journey and the journey itself home. (*OnH* #1)

In this opening passage, Bashō introduces the first two themes of our study. The initial lines present the first principal theme: the ephemeral, ever-changing way of nature (line 1), and the transiency of all life (line 2). Bashō then develops the latter part of this theme by placing both the ancients and himself within the way of nature, introducing the second theme we shall explore in this study: life as a journey or spiritual pilgrimage. Throughout the remainder of the opening passage, Bashō speaks of traveling daydreams, yearning to cross the Shirakawa Barrier into the Northern Interior, and visions of a bright moon over Matsushima. These images reflect the “ideal” of Bashō's unique pilgrimage (what I refer to as “awakening to the high”), and present us with the third theme for exploration. Finally, in the first *hokku* we have both a continuation of our initial theme of transiency as well as a certain haikai-esque twist of this theme (due to the second and third themes):

⁹ Journal entries in Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* will be referred to throughout this work with the abbreviation *OnH* followed by the entry number as found in Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu trans., *Back Roads to Far Towns: Bashō's Oku no Hosomichi* (Hopewell, NJ: The Ecco Press, 1996).

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<i>kusa no to mo</i>	The grass door too
<i>sumi kawaru yo zo</i>	turning into
<i>hina no ie</i>	a doll's house.

Here we see that dwellings—normally associated with stability and permanency—also are temporary lodgings in the journey of life, and even the “grass door” and hut of the recluse may be transformed into a home for family life. With this transformation, Bashō’s pilgrimage comes full circle, introducing us to the final theme of our study: Bashō’s return to the world and language of everyday life (or “returning to the low”). Our four themes then are: 1) *Mujō* 無常 or impermanency, the ever-changing way of nature, and the transiency of all life; 2) Spiritual pilgrimage or the notion of life as a type of journey; 3) Bashō’s ideal or “awakening to the high”; and 4) The transformation of everyday life or “returning to the low.” Now let us see how Bashō develops these themes throughout his work.

Mujō, Impermanency, and the Ever-Changing Way of Nature

The theme of transiency in *Oku no Hosomichi* continues a centuries-old Japanese fascination with the idea of *mujō*, that is, the ephemeral and impermanent nature of this world. Though this notion may be detected in both poets (e.g., Sarumaru Dayu, Semimaru) and priests (e.g., Priest Kisen, Henjō and Sosei) as early as the ninth century, it was not fully developed until the end of Heian Japan in the twelfth century when an unusual concentration of natural disasters, epidemics, famines, civil warfare and general social unrest led to its literary embodiment in the writings, for example, of Kamo no Chōmei and the poet-priest Saigyō.¹⁰ During this period the notion of *mujō* carried the connotations of imbalance and disease, reflecting an unusual pessimism in Japanese cultural history. However, despite the obvious influence of Chōmei and Saigyō on Bashō, the notion of *mujō* receives different nuances in *Oku no Hosomichi*. For Chōmei and Saigyō, for example, the notion of *mujō* was primarily associated with the ephemeral nature of human affairs and social life, and consequently “the aesthete-recluses drew a distinct line between themselves and the secular world”¹¹ (leading for Chōmei to the taking of tonsure and the Buddhist path [referred to as *hijiri intonsha*, or *tonseisha*], and for Saigyō to a devotion to nature and the way of poetry).¹² Though this anthropocentric aspect of *mujō* is presented in

¹⁰ For a discussion of the development of this idea in Medieval Japan see Mezaki Tokue, “Aesthete-Recluses During the Transition from Ancient to Medieval Japan,” in Earl Miner ed., *Principles of Classical Japanese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 151–80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 178–79.

¹² See Haruo Shirane, *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashō* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 316, 326–27; also William LaFleur, “Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature,” in *History of Religions* vol 13, no 1 (August 1973), 93–128, 227–48.

dramatic fashion in *Oku no Hosomichi* #30, where we find the magnificence of the Fujiwara clan “gone as though a dream” and the valor of the faithful elite “reduced to ordinary grass,”¹³ the notion of *mujō* in Bashō is not limited to human affairs but includes the whole of nature itself.¹⁴ Because of this close connection of *mujō* with the natural world, the idea loses much of its “negative” connotations and becomes associated with the inescapable way of nature and fate of the whole world.

This view placing the fate of human life within the larger context of an impermanent, ever-changing nature relates to another principal aspect of Bashō’s *Oku no Hosomichi*: the prominence of the idea of death. Though this connotation of *mujō* certainly existed in writers before Bashō, it receives unique importance in *Oku no Hosomichi*. The first hint of Bashō’s awareness of impending death occurs in the opening *haibun*, for the selling of his hut could very well indicate Bashō did not expect to return from this journey (a sentiment reemerging in the following entry where we encounter tears in the faces of separating friends perhaps never to see each other again [*OnH* #2], and made explicit in entry #3 where the traveler mentions that the “likelihood of returning (is) not so bright”). Ironically, in *Oku no Hosomichi* Bashō’s mentioning of hut and home—things normally designating stability and permanency—become symbols of change, warnings against a false sense of security, and reminders of the transiency of all life. Perhaps this was due to an incident several years earlier which indelibly marked the then thirty-eight year old man:

In the winter of 1682, my grass hut in Fukagawa became enveloped in a sudden fire. I somehow managed to live on by soaking myself in the tidal water, a stick on my shoulder, and surrounded by smoke. That was the beginning of my understanding of the mutability of human life. It was in that incident of a burning home that I understood how we are governed by change, and that my inclination [*kokoro*] for displaced life began.¹⁵

Bashō had experienced psychological displacement other times, with the death of

¹³ From Bashō’s *Narrow Road to the Interior*, trans. by Sam Hamill (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), 50.

¹⁴ We see this through the identification of sun and moon as eternal travelers in the opening line (*OnH* #1), with the “bereavement” and sad isolatedness of Kisakata (*OnH* #39), and with Bashō’s depiction of time itself (*OnH* #1) and even the seasons as transient participants in the ever-changing procession of nature (cf. “spring going” [*OnH* #2] and “passing autumn” [*OnH* #53]).

¹⁵ From Kuriyama, *Haikaishi*, 113, as quoted in Earl Miner, *Japanese Linked Poetry: An Account with Translations of Renga and Haikai Sequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 114. One is reminded here of how the great fire of the Heian capital (1177) and the recognition of the ephemerality of one’s place of dwelling also opened Kamo no Chōmei’s eyes to “the nature of things.” See Kamo no Chōmei, “An Account of My Hermitage,” in *Classical Japanese Prose: An Anthology*, compiled and edited by Helen Craig McCullough (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 379–82.

his father, the unexpected, premature death of his mentor and lord's son Toshitada (better known by his haikai name, Sengin), and the sight of the tuft of hair of his deceased mother shown him by his brother,¹⁶ but the burning hut was perhaps Bashō's first real encounter with *his own* mortality. Ever since this narrow escape, "thoughts of life and death" accompanied Bashō on all his journeys.¹⁷ Tombs of heroic warriors (*OnH* #30), young widows dressed in the armor of fallen sons (*OnH* #18), and lovers joined with vows of "wing and wing, branch and branch" brought tears of sadness to the eyes of an ill, aging traveler constantly reminded to let the momentary world go; his destiny too may be "to die on the road" and join these fellow "travelers" underground in this cold and barren country (*OnH* #19).¹⁸ The lonely sound of the evening bell at Shiogama beach echoes the sadness of our fate (*OnH* #24), and at Kanazawa the autumn wind carries Bashō's cry over a tomb trembling with a young poet's corpse (*OnH* #43).

Of all the passages depicting ephemerality, impermanency and the mood of *sabi*,¹⁹ none is more poignant than the next to last entry in Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* (#52). As dusk enveloped a quiet beach bedraggled only with a few fishermen's shacks and a tiny Hokki Temple, "the pervading sense of isolatedness" overcame Bashō. The weary traveler took up his brush and wrote:

¹⁶ This was the occasion of what to me is perhaps the most touching of all Bashō's poetry: "White hair in my hands/the tears pour out to vanishing/like hot autumn frost (*te ni toraba kien/namida zo atsuki/aki no shimo*)." Quoted in Miner, *Japanese Linked Poetry*, 114.

¹⁷ This new mood is especially evident, for example, in the first *hokku* of *Skeleton in the Fields* (*Nozarashi kikō*): "The bones on the moor/the wind blows on them through the heart/piercing my flesh (*nozarashi wo/kokoro ni kaze no/shimu mi kana*)." Quoted in Miner, *Japanese Linked Poetry*, 115.

¹⁸ This feeling of immanent death was not a passing sentiment for Bashō. In a letter written in the beginning of 1689 to Kubota Ensui, a well-to-do merchant in Iga, Bashō states: "If my dewy life manages to last long enough, I'd like to see you again, if only by stopping by and standing around." (From Matsuo Bashō, *Bashō's Narrow Road*, translated with annotations by Hiroaki Satō [Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996], 134.) Ueda Makoto tells us that this should not be interpreted as a "death-wish" for "we should remember that Bashō was of a delicate constitution and suffered from several chronic diseases, and that travel in seventeenth-century Japan was immensely more hazardous than it is today." (Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, 25–26.) Perhaps, however, this sentiment reflected not only Bashō's age or delicate constitution, but also his life-long embrace of *mujō*. This was particularly evident on Bashō's deathbed, for example, for when asked by his pupils for his death poem, he replied that any of his poems could be seen as his death poem. "And indeed," as Yoel Hoffmann notices, "in all of Bashō's best poems, a resonance can be heard that seems to come from and return to the void." From *Japanese Death Poems*, compiled by Yoel Hoffmann (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1986).

¹⁹ Rather than defining *sabi* as "sadness" or "loneliness"—which it certainly may be—I prefer to let the text itself present its own definition of this term. Here (*OnH* #52) it contains an emotional richness inadequately portrayed by these narrow definitions.

<i>sabishisa ya</i>	Loneliness
<i>Suma ni kachitaru</i>	more overwhelming than Suma
<i>hama no aki</i>	a beach in autumn
<i>nami no ma ya</i>	Between the waves
<i>kogai ni majiru</i>	mixed with tiny shells
<i>hagi no chiri</i>	petals of bush clover. ²⁰

Not even the banishment of the eponymous hero of *The Tale of Genji* or the heart-rending exile of the poet Yukihiro can match the quiet autumnal loneliness of an obscure beach on the back side of Japan as wave upon unending wave at dusk washes away the color of today's flowers with the broken remnants of yesterday's dreams.

Bashō's acute awareness of *mujō* provided him not with a problem to be solved, however, but with the key to the solution of human unease with the transiency of life. Once one realizes that impermanency and death are neither aberrations of nature nor unfortunate mistakes in life, but rather essential characteristics in the very fabric of worldly existence, one no longer attempts to avoid loneliness, heart-ache, or the suffering concomitant with human mortality and instead willfully roots oneself in the impermanent nature of the universe. *Oku no Hosomichi* suggests that Bashō's self-conscious "rooting" of himself with ever-changing nature took place through travel. Let us turn our attention now to how Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* develops the idea of life as a journey or spiritual pilgrimage upon the changing roads of time and nature.

Life as a Journey or Spiritual Pilgrimage

Bashō presents the image of himself as a wandering pilgrim in the opening passage: "Still I have always been drawn by windblown clouds into dreams of a lifetime of wandering" (*OnH* #1). Whether or not Bashō here self-consciously identifies with his predecessors such as Saigyō, Chuang Tzu or Dōgen—who also identified themselves with similar images²¹—he clearly places himself within the tradition of the

²⁰ Cf. The following poem attributed to Saigyō: "The cherry blossoms/of Kisagata are buried/in the waves (*Kisagata no/sakura wa nami ni/uzumorete*)." Quoted from Shirane, *Traces of Dreams*, 222. I am indebted to Shirane for more than a few references in this paper. Indeed, some of the passages in my work may be seen as commentary and amplification of information and interpretations presented in *Traces of Dreams*.

²¹ Dōgen, for instance, laments the distractions of the world and exclaims: "How we go like clouds drifting through births and deaths." (From Douglas Kenning, *The Romanticism of 17th Century Japanese Poetry* [Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998], 45.) For the roots of Bashō's own self image as *fūrabō* in Chuang Tzu and Saigyō see Richard Pilgrim, "The Religio-Aesthetic of Matsuo Bashō," *Eastern Buddhist* vol. 10, no. 1 (May, 1977), 40–45; also Burton Watson, *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 31–34, 65, 138.

aesthete-recluse or “man of *wabi*” who positively and willfully participates in an unending pilgrimage into the ever-changing ways of nature.²² Just like the outset of *Oi-no Kobumi* where Bashō compares his own ephemeral existence to thin and tattered clothes offering no resistance to the elements,²³ at the beginning of *Oku no Hosomichi* Bashō continues his self-image as “the wind-driven gossamer” reflecting the “journey” of all nature.²⁴ Though this journey may take one through many “unknown paths” (*OnH* #29) including hardships (*OnH* #31) and heart-aches (*OnH* #46), ultimately it leads to the center of all nature, placing the traveler in harmony with his world. The whole of *Oku no Hosomichi* may be interpreted, therefore, as a spiritual pilgrimage where the “back roads to far towns” represent the author’s journey into the deep, untrodden interior of his own being.

The inner, “spiritual” nature of Bashō’s journey is foreshadowed in the passage on Kurokamiyama (*OnH* #7) describing Sora’s decision to shave his head, assume pilgrim garb, and take on a Buddhist name:

<i>sorisutete</i>	Head shaven
<i>kurokamiyama ni</i>	at Mt. Kurokami
<i>koromogae</i>	changing apparel.

Bashō echoes Sora’s sentiment in the following *hokku* depicting ritual purification, and his poem conjures images of Buddhist practitioners commencing summer austerities (*OnH* #7):

<i>shibaraku wa</i>	Secluded for a while
<i>taki ni komoru ya</i>	in a waterfall
<i>ge no hajime</i>	start of summer.

Bashō continues developing the idea of the trip as a spiritual pilgrimage in the *hokku* describing his and Sora’s entry into the *gyōjadō* of the Shūgen-kōmyōji Temple (*OnH* #9):

<i>natsuyama ni</i>	Summer mountains
<i>ashida o ogamu</i>	praying to the tall clogs
<i>kadode kana</i>	at journey’s start.

The “prayer before the high clogs” refers to a practice of a mountain priest sect

²² For an excellent study of Bashō as “the man of *wabi*” see Toshihiko Izutsu and Toyo Izutsu, “Far Eastern Existentialism: *Haiku* and the Man of *Wabi*,” in Joseph P. Strelka, *The Personality of the Critic* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973), 40–69.

²³ See *Bashō Bunshū*, Iwanami Series of Classical Japanese Literature XLVI (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1959), 52.

²⁴ The translated phrase “wind-driven gossamer” is from Izutsu, “Far Eastern Existentialism,” 43.

(Shugendō) where pilgrims petitioned spiritual adepts for grace and strength for rigorous mountain climbing. As such mountain journeys were considered symbols of spiritual pilgrimages, Bashō's reference to this practice implies that he and Sora envisioned this trip within the barren and sparsely populated area of northeastern Honshū as a journey along narrow roads (*hosomichi*) to the interior (*oku*) of nature and being itself.

Bashō's colorful description of the chestnut tree (*OnH* #15) provides us with another image conveying the spiritual nature of this journey. Here the allusions to the Buddhist tradition are ostensible, from the references to Śākyamuni's enlightenment under the bodhi tree,²⁵ the image of a monk taking "refuge" from the world, and the allusion to the Western Paradise of Amida Buddha as the destination of Buddhist pilgrims. But principal in our study is the reference to the chestnut as a walking-stick of the Bodhisattva Gyōki,²⁶ for this further situates Bashō and Sora within the tradition of famous spiritual pilgrims.

This emphasis of Bashō's journey as a pilgrimage does not imply, however, that his destination lay ever in the future yet to be attained. On the contrary, as the opening passage clearly states, "Every day is a journey, and *the journey itself home*" (italics added) (*OnH* #1). The interplay and mutuality of journey and home is seen both in the reference to the chestnut mentioned above (for the chestnut was used both as Gyōki's walking-stick *and* as posts for his home [*OnH* #15]), and in Bashō's *hokku* on *Tango no sekku* (Boy's Festival or Iris Festival) at Miyagi field (*OnH* #22):

<i>ayamegusa</i>	Ah to have blue flags
<i>ashi ni musuban</i>	bound to one's feet
<i>waraji no o</i>	straw sandal cords.

During the Iris Festival, *ayame* were placed on the eaves of one's house ensuring health, safety and protection from misfortune while at home. Tying the blue flags (which symbolize irises) to his sandal thongs represents not only Bashō's prayer for safety along the road, but also the identification of his journey with his dwelling. Once again we see Bashō's idea of life as a continual pilgrimage and the journey as reflecting the ever-changing, moving ways of nature.

"Awakening to the High"

If Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* may be seen as a journey which is simultaneously a

²⁵ LaFleur astutely observes here that "(n)o Buddhist would miss (this) allusion." See William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts of Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 152.

²⁶ According to Sam Hamill, Gyōki (668–749), high priest during the Nara period, was considered a bodhisattva by many. See Hamill, *Narrow Road*, 101.

deep rooting within the way of nature, a spiritual pilgrimage into the inner regions of being, and an unfolding discovery of an ever-present destination, then the attainment of these ideals should be found in those passages where the barriers between Bashō and his environment become most permeable and the interpenetration of all things appears. Such situations reflect a certain depth that paradoxically reveals a glimpse of the unchanging amidst a continually changing nature. Though there are numerous passages suggesting such a state in the traveling poet, I find the following occasions particularly noteworthy: 1) The arrival at Butchō-oshō's mountain hermitage (*OnH* #10); 2) Crossing the Shirakawa Barrier (*OnH* #14); 3) The moon over Matsushima (*OnH* # 26); 4) Silence at Ryūshaku Temple (*OnH* #34); and 5) Ascending the Three Holy Mountains (*OnH* #37).

The first sign that Bashō may experience anything beyond "this floating world"²⁷ occurs immediately after praying to En-no-Gyōja (the "man of austerities") for blessings upon his long journey through the summer mountains (*OnH* #9). In the very next passage (*OnH* #10) we follow Bashō to Ugan Temple:

Through a long valley, under dense cedar, pine and dripping moss, below a cold spring sky—through the viewing gardens, we crossed a bridge and entered the temple gate.

Pilgrimages to temples, shrines, sacred places and *utamakura* (poetic places) formed an integral part of the travel tradition of Bashō's day, and nearly one-fourth of *Oku no Hosomichi* includes such accounts.²⁸ But this pilgrimage of Bashō to a five-foot thatched hut near Ugan Temple deep in the mountains carried special significance, for it was the hermitage of his *dharma* master Butchō.²⁹ Along the trajec-

²⁷ The phrase is from Bashō's *Nozarashi kikō* [*Skeleton in the Fields*, also translated *The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton*], and may be found in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (NKBT) 46:36.

²⁸ According to Joseph Kitagawa, pilgrimages to temples and shrines, sacred mountains, and places hallowed by the presence of holy men were the three major types of pilgrimages in early Japan. Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* includes them all. See Joseph Kitagawa, "Three Types of Pilgrimage in Japan," in his *On Understanding Japanese Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 127–36.

²⁹ Unfortunately, we know very little about Bashō's Zen training. However, though we do not know the duration or extent of Bashō's formal practice of Zen meditation under Priest Butchō (which probably occurred between the winter of 1680 and sometime in 1682), Bashō's biographer Ueda Makoto tells us that "he must have been zealous and resolute in this attempt, for he was later to recall: '...and at another time I was anxious to confine myself within the walls of a monastery.'" (Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, 25.) Perhaps Bashō's desire for the confinement of the monastery was due to his practicing Zen meditation while still living at home (Butchō was living near Bashō's home during this time), and at this point in his life he experienced strong tension between his practice and the anxieties of everyday life. (As we have seen, during the winter of 1682, Bashō's hut was destroyed by fire, and a few months

tory of Myōzenji's "Entrance to Death" and Hōun-Hōshi's "Stone Chamber," Butchō's "Thatched Hut" continued the tradition of simple dwellings for Zen (Ch'an) masters famed for their asceticism, and though of small structure it stood tall as a monument not only for Zen but for the depth of the unchanging amidst an ever-changing world:

<i>kitsutsuki mo</i>	Even woodpeckers
<i>io wa yaburazu</i>	can't break down this hut
<i>natsukodachi</i>	in a summer grove.

Bashō continues his pilgrimage, and in the *honkadori* of *Oku no Hosomichi* #12 we find him pausing for rest in the shade of "that very willow" beside the crystal stream which Saigyō once praised. Each day, Bashō tells us, his mind grew calmer, clearer for continuing in anticipation of Shirakawa Barrier (*OnH* #13). After the crossing, an interesting haikai-esque twist takes place that intimates further changes in which the poet-traveler both continues in and breaks away from the tradition of his literary predecessors. The Shirakawa Barrier, which represents one of the major *utamakura* in Michinoku, was filled with a web of classical associations from the likes of Saigyō, Torimasa, Nōin and Kanemori, who cast their gaze from Shirakawa back to the capital.³⁰ Bashō, on the other hand, finds "*fūryū*'s beginning" not in the popular poetic images depicting the traveler's longing for the capital, but rather in the plain rice-planting songs (*taue uta*) of the laborers in the fields of the Interior (*Oku*):

<i>fūryū no</i>	Beginnings of poetry
<i>hajime ya oku no</i>	rice planting songs
<i>taueuta</i>	of the Interior.

If Bashō's pursuit is the direct communion with nature as the source of *fūryū*³¹— an

later he received news from his family that his mother had died. "Since his father had died already in 1656," Ueda tells us, "[Bashō] was now not only without a home but without a parent to return to" [*Ibid.*]. As we shall see, the uncomfortable tension between Zen practice and everyday life which Bashō experienced at this early stage of his development attenuated with his maturing practice. (We know that Bashō continued his practice for, for example, his well-known passage concerning the ineffable beauty of the harvest moon in *A Visit to the Kashima Shrine* [1687] followed the attainment of "serenity of mind" during meditation [*Ibid.* 130], and his famous frog poem [see notes 52 & 53 below] was composed following Bashō's "deep immersion in meditation"). By 1689, the tension that Bashō experienced earlier in the decade had practically disappeared, as evidenced in the maturing, integral awareness which we find in *Oku no Hosomichi*. Such integration of the meditative mind amidst everyday life was explicitly extolled years later by Hakuin Ekaku, who was a young boy when Bashō wrote *Oku no Hosomichi*. (See Philip Yampolsky, "The Development of Japanese Zen," in Kraft, *Zen*, 155.)

³⁰ See Mezaki, "Aesthere-Recluses," 163 f; also Shirane, *Traces of Dreams*, 233.

³¹ Cf. The following quote of Bashō as found in Makoto Ueda, *Zeami, Bashō, Yeats and*

end which is at once the journey—then here at the famed gateway to the Interior one senses the immanence of his goal.

Bashō's experience at Matsushima (*OnH* #26) further illustrates how his pilgrimage may be envisioned as an impassioned pursuit of poetic truthfulness through immersion in nature takes place at Matsushima (*OnH* #26). However, it is not *yūgen* ("artistic excellence")³² which Bashō finds here but *yūen* ("ethereal beauty"), for, as the poet tells us, Matsushima may well be—along with Lake Tung-t'ing and West Lake in China—one of the most beautiful places in the world. Such *yūen* seems to become for Bashō a doorway into an unchanging reality of Beauty beyond all change, or a window into "an intense feminine beauty in a shining world."³³ As Brower and Miner describe it, "*yūen* is an ethereal dreamlike beauty 'not of this world' that serves to bridge the seeming gulf between time and timelessness and between the dreamlike character of the phenomenal world and the Real."³⁴ As Bashō journeys through nature's beauty into a deep, mysterious Reality no longer confined by the phenomenal world, his poetic inclinations are temporarily stilled: "Who with brush or speech can hope to describe the work of heaven and earth's divinity?" (*OnH* #26).

Bashō's awareness of the insufficiency of language to express the ineffable at Matsushima echoes a similar experience of his two years earlier after traveling over fifty miles from Edo to Kashima with the express purpose of seeing the harvest moon in the scenic lake country. In the climatic passage of his journal entry describing this trip Bashō writes: "There was the moonlight, there was the sound of rain—the beauty of the scene so overwhelmed my mind, I was left without a word to say."³⁵ In his comment upon this passage Ueda states: "The aesthetic aim, with which Bashō began the journey, is pushed to an extreme in this final passage. The ultimate in beauty cannot be described; it lies beyond the means of the artist."³⁶

Earl Miner feels that these experiences of Bashō represent a "stunning collapse" of his mission to merge aesthetics in his life and "make his journey into art."³⁷

Pound: A Study in Japanese Poetics (The Hague, 1965), 37: "There is one common element which permeates Saigyō's *waka*, Sōgi's *renga*, Sesshū's painting, and Rikyū's tea ceremony. It is a poetic spirit (*fūga*), through which man follows the creative energy of nature and becomes a friend of the four seasons. . . . Therefore . . . follow the creative energy and return to nature."

³² For the transformation of *yūgen* from a philosophical term indicating something "profound and unfathomable" to its literary connotation of "artistic excellence," see Nose Asaji, *Yūgenron* [*On Yūgen*] (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō, 1944).

³³ From *OnH* #26 as translated by Hamill, *Narrow Road to the Interior*, 42.

³⁴ See Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 262.

³⁵ From *A Visit to the Kashima Shrine* as quoted in Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, 130.

³⁶ Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, 130.

³⁷ Earl Miner, *Naming Properties: Nominal References in Travel Writings by Bashō and*

Douglas Kenning concurs, for as Matsushima was one of the major pilgrimage sites of Bashō's journey, this inadequacy of language at the face of his envisioned goal (cf. *OnH* #1) constituted "a terrible denial of the poet's *raison d'être*."³⁸ However, rather than defining Matsushima as a failure in Bashō's life and work, perhaps it may be seen as a watershed in the poet's own interior life, and a pinnacle of his spiritual pilgrimage. We have already noticed Bashō's glimpse of the unchanging amidst the changing phenomenal world (*OnH* #10 & #14). Perhaps Matsushima represents another such moment of insight.³⁹

The relation of such moments of insight to impermanence and travel may be seen in "Kasshi ginkō" where Bashō tells us that he set out on a journey and "leaned on the staff" of an ancient who "entered the realm of no-mind (*mushin*) under the moon at midnight."⁴⁰ Here Bashō appears to be following the tradition of the *Dō* Arts that integrated the path of inner, mental discipline with the way of cultural refinement. The great Nō master Zeami Motokiyo's observations of the *Dō* Arts are particularly relevant here:

The universe is a vessel producing the various things, each in its own season: the flowers and leaves, the snow and the moon, the mountain and seas...By making these things the essence of your artistic vision, by becoming one with the universal vessel, and by securing your vessel in the

Sora, Johnson and Boswell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 12.

³⁸ Kenning, *Romanticism of 17th Century Japanese Poetry*, 218.

³⁹ The tension between words and wordlessness in Bashō (a dilemma explicitly addressed centuries earlier by the Chinese poet/monks Po Chū-I and Chiao-jan, and running through the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* all the way back to the "silence" of the Buddha [see Watson, "Zen Poetry," 112–17]) reflects the tension mentioned earlier between Bashō's Zen practice and everyday life (see note 29). Though this quandary resurfaced in the summer of 1693 when Bashō tells us that he "tried to give up poetry and remain silent" (Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, 33), it appears that *Oku no Hosomichi*—and Matsushima in particular—represent Bashō's ability to comfortably embrace these "opposites" and, consequently, an abeyance in these struggles. Ueda writes in this regard: "His literary achievement [*OnH*] was no doubt a result of his deepening maturity as a man. He had come to perceive a mode of life by which to resolve some deep dilemmas and to gain peace of mind" (Ibid., 30). Ueda goes on to state, however, that these dilemmas continued to plague Bashō after his journey to the interior, disturbing his mind all the way to his deathbed (Ibid., 34–45). But I question the seriousness of this predicament throughout Bashō's life. In the year of his death, for instance, Bashō wrote the following in a renga sequence with Shita Yoba: "(Yoba): High above the paulownia tree the moon is clear. (Bashō): I closed the gate and went to bed, wordless, for the fun of it." (As quoted in H. Satō, *One Hundred Frogs*, 78.) Perhaps Bashō was more accepting and at peace with the tensions inherent in his life, and, as we see here, at times rather playfully *through words* "resigned" himself to "wordlessness."

⁴⁰ Bashō, "Kasshi ginkō" as translated by Donald Keene in *Landscapes and Portraits* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1971), 96.

great *mu* style of the Way of Emptiness (*kūdō*), you will attain the ineffable flowers (*myōka*) of this art.⁴¹

In this light, perhaps Bashō's awe and silent reverence at Matsushima depict not a failure in his journey, but rather a fecund moment in which the poet was "securing (his) vessel in the great...Way of Emptiness."⁴²

If Matsushima represents the "no-mind" of unchanging emptiness (*mushin*), then Ryūshaku Temple may signify the emergent "slender mind" of poetic creativity (*hosomi*) (*OnH* #34).⁴³ In both occasions we find a resounding silence which seems to penetrate the very fabric of nature and the ground of Reality. However, while the silence of Matsushima stuns the poet's tongue, at Mountain Temple (Yamadera) in Dewa (Yamagata) the tranquil silence leads to that "purity of heart" (*OnH* #34) and clarity of mind which become the wellsprings of true poetry:

<i>shizukasa ya</i>	Stillness
<i>iwa ni shimiiru</i>	sinking deep into the rocks
<i>semi no koe</i>	cries of the cicada.

The various versions of this *hokku*⁴⁴ reveal a transformation of Bashō from a spiritual pilgrim to a vessel of *wabi-sabi*⁴⁵ to a poet at one with nature,⁴⁶ leading to the

⁴¹ Richard Pilgrim's translation of a section from Zeami's "Yūgaku shūdō kempushō" in Nose Asaji, ed., *Zeami jūrokubushō hyōshaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1949), vol. 1, 575 f. as quoted in Richard Pilgrim, "The Artistic Way and the Religio-Aesthetic Tradition in Japan," *Philosophy East and West* vol. 27, no. 3 (July, 1977), 291.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Richard Pilgrim refers to *hosomi* as "that particular moment and mode of consciousness out of which true poetry is born." (Pilgrim, "Religio-Aesthetic of Matsuo Bashō," 47).

⁴⁴ The first version recorded in Sora's travel diary was "Mountain temple—sticking to the rocks, cries of the cicada (*yamadera ya/ishi ni shimitsuku/semi no koe*)," and the second version as preserved in Hatsusemi and Hokusenshū reads "Loneliness—seeping into the rocks, cries of the cicada (*sabishisa ya/iwa ni shimikomu/semi no koe*)."

⁴⁵ For a presentation—in both prose and photography—of this term see Leonard Koren, *Wabi-Sabi: For Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1994); also Pilgrim's review of *Wabi-Sabi* in *Tricycle* vol 4 (Summer 1995), 110–11. In Pilgrim's review of Koren's *Wabi-Sabi* he states "*wabi-sabi* is said to imply certain spiritual values" (110). Among these "spiritual values" are "a quiet, meditative loneliness" (Shirane, *Traces of Dreams*, 78), "tranquility" (which, Konishi tells us, was central in Bashō's development of the *sabi* ideal [Jin'ichi Konishi, *A History of Japanese Literature* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986], vol. 3, 68]), and *yūgen*, or "profound mysterious beauty" (Pilgrim, review of *Wabi-Sabi* 110). All of these qualities are evident in Bashō's experience at the Ryūshaku Temple, or Mountain Temple in Dewa.

⁴⁶ Otsuji speaks of this aesthetic quality as "an enlightened, *Nirvāṇa*-like harmony" in which "the poet's nature and environment are unified," and Yasuda refers to it as a "resonance," or a state in which "man and his environment are one unified whole." See Otsuji

connectedness, interpenetration and co-arising of all things—poet, rocks, cicadas and silence—in a profound “haikai moment.”⁴⁷ In an amazing *coincidentia oppositorum* the cicada’s cries (representing the cacophony of an ephemeral, mutable nature) penetrate and sink deep into the rocks (which signify the tranquil silence of stable, unchanging nature),⁴⁸ as both silent rocks and cicada’s cries merge into a vast stillness embracing all. The poet himself “in a condition of meditation”⁴⁹ also becomes submerged in this *sabi*, perceives the delicate life of all nature as his own, and witnesses the voice of silence coming forth as nature’s poem.⁵⁰

In my opinion, there are only a couple other occasions in Bashō’s entire *oeuvre* which convey the same depth as this *hokku*—what Yasuda refers to as “the quietude of an enlightened soul”⁵¹—and those are the famous frog (*kawazu*) poem (a composition similarly following Bashō’s “deep immersion in meditation”),⁵² and Bashō’s crow haiku:

<i>furuike ya</i>	An old pond
<i>kawazu tobikomu</i>	a frog leaps in
<i>mizu no oto</i>	the sound of water. ⁵³

(Seki Osuga), *Otsuji: Hairon-shū* [*Otsuji’s Collected Essays on Haiku Theory*], edited by Yoshida Tōyō, 5th edition (Tokyo: Kaede Shobō, 1947), 4, 47; and Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku*, 24.

⁴⁷ Yagi refers to this moment as the “here and now” principle of haiku. (See Yagi Kametarō, *Haiku: Message from Matsuyama* [Rochester, MI: Katydid Books, 1991], 71.) This “*Nirvāṇa*-like sense” (Otsuji, 6) transcending ordinary time (Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku*, 24) may be compared to the timeless “present moment” (*shikin* 而今) of Dōgen. See Konishi, vol. 3, 311.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the literary precedents to this sense of “saturation” (from *Kokin Waka Shū* and Empress Eifuku mon-in on to Bashō) see Makoto Ōoka, *The Colors of Poetry: Essays in Classic Japanese Verse* (Rochester, MI: Katydid Books, 1991), 67 f.

⁴⁹ Ōoka describes Bashō’s conscious state here as “detached concentration—which is also the condition of meditation.” See his discussion in Makoto Ōoka, *The Poetry and Poetics of Ancient Japan*, translated by Thomas Fitzsimmons (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 106–07. Cf. Yasuda’s reference to the haiku moment as an “intuition” born of “aesthetic contemplation.” See Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku*, 5–6, 24.

⁵⁰ Ōoka (*Colors of Poetry*, 198) refers to Bashō’s poetry as “a vision, captured, one could say, on the shore of a vast nothingness,” and in *Japanese Death Poems*, Hoffman states that “in all of Bashō’s best poems, a resonance can be heard that seems to come from and return to the void.” Cf. The following quote in Ueda, *Zeami, Bashō, Yeats and Pound*, 38: “The Master once said: ‘Learn about pines from pines, and about bamboos from bamboos.’ . . . ‘Learn’ means to submerge oneself within an object, to perceive its delicate life and feel its feeling, *out of which a poem forms itself* (italics added).”

⁵¹ Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku*, 171.

⁵² See Nobuyuki Yuasa, trans., *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), 32.

⁵³ This famous poem was written in 1686 and appears in *Spring Days* (*Haru no hi*).

HARGISS: BASHŌ'S OKU NO HOSOMICHI

<i>kareeda ni</i>	On a withered bough
<i>karasu no tomarikeri</i>	a lone crow has settled
<i>aki no kure</i>	autumn evening. ⁵⁴

To say more would be like pointing one finger too much at the moon.

The final occasion of Bashō's "attainment" which I would like to highlight is his ascension of the Three Holy Mountains (*OnH* #36 & #37). After climbing Hagurosan, Bashō refers to the Tendai sect, stating how "the moon of Tendai insight (*shi-kan*) was clear" becoming brighter and more transparent as the "way of enlightenment."⁵⁵ This "light of *shi-kan*"⁵⁶ increased infinitely, spreading from hermitage to mountaintop and back, radiating blessings down from the mountains. "The grace revealed (*genkō*) in heart's mountains" evokes reverence, awe and compassion in everything it touches:

<i>suzushisaya</i>	Cool crescent moon
<i>hono mikazuki no</i>	high above
<i>Hagurosan</i>	Feather Black Mountain.

The unfolding state of clarity intimated by Bashō's description of Hagurosan continued in the journey up Gassan. While climbing higher and higher "as though drawn by invisible spirits into the gateway of the sky," the huge mountain-shaped clouds (*kumo no mine*) begin dissipating one after another until with the setting sun only a few scattered clouds remained, leaving the moon shining over the mountain. After the initial *tateku* we read:

<i>kumo no mine</i>	Cloud peaks
<i>ikutsu kuzurete</i>	crumbling one after another
<i>tsuki no yama</i>	moon mountain.

With the rising sun of the next day all clouds are gone, and Bashō's journey "from mental obscurity to enlightenment"⁵⁷ reaches another clear pinnacle. The poet then begins his "descent" towards Yudona (literally, Bathhouse Mountain), passing by

⁵⁴ For notes and commentary on this poem see Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters*, 57–60; also Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku*, 5–6, 41, 51, 72–74.

⁵⁵ These phrases from Bashō's prose passage are from Hamill's translation, 65.

⁵⁶ *Shikan* and *shikantaza* were considered advanced forms of meditation in both Tendai and Sōtō Zen sects. For relevant discussions of these terms see entries "attention" (1:504), "Buddhism" (2:432), "Dōgen" (4:308), and "Tendaishū" (14:398) in Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

⁵⁷ The phrase is from Shirane, *Traces of Dreams*, 229. We are reminded here of Watson's observation that by the time of Bashō, Zen poetry focused directly on the actual experience of enlightenment, and often included images suggestive of silence, clearness, and coldness, which were meant to convey the quiet meditative life of the writer and his inner state of enlightenment. This certainly appears to be the case with Bashō here. (See note 8).

the Swordsmith's Hut at Valley's edge where the "tempering of the sword" with holy water may be interpreted to signify final spiritual purification. Exhausted from the climb, the travelers stretch out on a rock to rest and discover the opening buds of a small cherry tree nearly buried in snow, as if suggesting a colorful new life arising from the austere, numbing cold of the night before. This interpretation of the three mountains as representing a rite of passage, "a kind of death and rebirth"⁵⁸ is strengthened by the *honzetsu* referring to the classical poetic image of *Yodono as Koi no yama* (the Mountain of Love), for the mountain becomes an *utamakura* associated with fertility:

<i>katararenu</i>	Forbidden to speak
<i>yudono ni nurasu</i>	wetting my sleeves
<i>tamoto kana</i>	at Bathhouse Mountain.

Here, at the holiest of the Three Dewa Mountains where the sacred "code of silence" halts Bashō's brush, feelings of reverence intermingle with erotic sentiments of love and sexuality. Taken as a whole, the Three Mountains represent at once spiritual pilgrimage, "awakening to the high," and "returning" to the world of common life. This leads us to the final theme that we will explore in this essay: "Returning to the low."

"Returning to the Low"

The movement from the enlightened clarity of Moon Mountain to the "wetting of the sleeves" at the Mountain of Love suggests not only a natural progression of "awakening to the high and returning to the low," but also the simultaneity to the one of insight of spiritual holiness with love and everyday life. Though Bashō's theme of "returning to the low" begins and ends *Oku no Hosomichi* (as seen, for example, in the "transformation" of his hut from a recluse's dwelling to a family's home [*OnH* #1], and in the reunion with his friends—"as though coming back from the dead"—and the return to the common life of the world [*OnH* #53]), it receives its most complete presentation in Bashō's encounter with the play-girls on their way to the Ise Shrines. Before examining this story, however, perhaps it may be appropriate to point out several key episodes prefiguring this event.

Along the long, lone and dangerous path to the Interior, "as far as the road goes, to the very end of dusty earth," Bashō comforts himself with faith in the unimaginable power of the gods who keep a watchful eye over the traveler, answering every need (*OnH* #25). This precious tradition, Bashō states, "is our culture's greatest gift" (*OnH* #25). The manner by which Bashō speaks of this "divine guidance" on his trip is particularly significant. An honorable merchant free of vulgarities shares his home for many days with the weary travelers (*OnH* #33), a blind minstrel lifts

⁵⁸ See Hirai Shōbin, *Oku no hosomichi nyūmon*, 107–110 as discussed in Shirane, *Traces of Dreams*, 230, 330 n. 25.

the poet's spirit with back-country ballads (*OnH* #24), a plain peasant cutting grass pauses to offer his horse as guide for the wayward (*OnH* #8), and a simple innkeeper suddenly appears to help the pilgrims along their way (*OnH* #5). "Impossible not to realize how Buddha appears upon this mean and muddled ground in just such guise to help shaman beggar pilgrims on, seeing our host's simple sincere manner, frank and down-to-earth" (*OnH* #5). Here Bashō interestingly associates simplicity and being "down-to-earth" with Buddha (or Buddhahood).⁵⁹

Such regard for the everyday common life of the provinces permeates Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*. After a local official at Ashino directed Bashō to Saigyō's willow, the poet honors his immortal model with a poem of maiden's planting rice (*OnH* #12):

<i>ta ichi mai</i>	Girl's rice-planting done
<i>uete tachisaru</i>	they depart
<i>yanagi kana</i>	I emerge from willow-shade.

The *jibokku* written at Shirakawa Barrier, one of the major *utamakura* of the entire pilgrimage, depicts peasant's rice-planting songs as a source of poetry (*OnH* #14):

<i>fūryū no</i>	Beginnings of poetry
<i>hajime ya oku no</i>	rice-planting songs
<i>taeuta</i>	of the Interior.

And Bashō's ability to find poetry in the mundane is further exemplified in the passage on Shinobu, the most famous *utamakura* in Michinoku (*OnH* #17):

<i>sanae toru</i>	Planting rice seedlings
<i>temoto ya mukashi</i>	hands—in the distant past pressing
<i>shinobuzuri</i>	the grass of longing.

The "longing grass" (*shinobugusa*) here suggest uncontrolled desire or "longing" (*shinobu*), alluding to the many classical poems transforming the area into a landscape of courtly love. This theme of desire and love resurfaces in Bashō's story of the play-girls.

⁵⁹ This sentiment reminds one of Bashō's *hokku* admiring loneliness and tranquility at Mt. Bodai: "On this mountain/sorrow...tell me about it/digger of wild yams. (*kono yama no/kanashisa tsugeyo/tokoro hori*)" Kobayashi Ichirō's commentary here is particularly relevant: "At a mountain named Bodai (Buddhahood), the poet pondered over Buddha's teachings and felt true sorrow over the ways of ordinary people indulging in the pleasures of this world. To him, the old man silently digging a wild yam deep in the forest appeared to be completely removed from the world in that sense. Thereupon he asked the man to tell the people of this world about the meaning of Buddhahood, after which the mountain had been named." (From Makoto Ueda, *Bashō and His Interpreters* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991], 183.) This reading associating a humble "digger of yams" with Buddhahood or the special aesthetic of Mt. Bodai comports with *OnH* #5.

The two young women had fallen to shame and sorrow due to their unfortunate karma. Wandering like children into every circumstance, their "fleeting pledges of love" (*sadamenaki chigiri*) represent the epitome of fleeting relationships and a life characterized by *mujō* (impermanency) and *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness). Their aspiration for the mercy and providence of the Buddha, however, had led them to this inn in Hokkoku en route to the Ise Shrines. Feeling lost, uncertain, and helpless, they recognize in Bashō's robes a *kechien* (one connected to Buddha), and appeal to him for guidance. Bashō's reply is significant: "Our way includes detours and retreats. But follow anyone on the road, and the gods will see you through." With a heart full of concern, he left them and continued on his way.

Despite Bashō's apparent callousness, the story tellingly illustrates his insight into the common life. The first thing we should notice is Bashō's refusal to criticize or condescend to these women in any way. Indeed, as David Barnhill noted in his study, "he seems to deny that the women have any problem at all."⁶⁰ The reason is that while others may feel that a life characterized by impermanency and transient relationships should be avoided, Bashō instead recognizes impermanence not as a problem to avoid but as an essential aspect of all nature. Rather than assuaging one's discomfort with *mujō* with a false sense of security, Bashō feels—as we noticed earlier in our study—that one should immerse oneself in the way of nature and accept "heaven's way." It is only through accepting change, impermanency and the way of nature that one may gain true insight into the human condition and attain to the Reality which includes but is not limited to the phenomenal world. Without leaving the common life, and while participating in the flux of the ever-changing, one may simultaneously attain the principle of the unchanging, for "the two are rooted in the same source."⁶¹

Bashō, Sora and the play-girls are all pilgrims on an endless journey characterized by impermanence: they share with each other and all sentient beings the fundamental condition of life. However, while the courtesans are trying to *escape* this condition and beseech the poet-travelers for guidance to some distant goal, Bashō embraces his condition, for the pilgrimage itself is both the journey and the goal. He accepts all things and everyone simply for what they are, and this includes love, death and the whole of life. Such insight renders suffering sufferable, and transforms the unsatisfactory condition of life into something infinitely more—even something noble and honorable. Bashō's guidance was therefore sound: "Just fol-

⁶⁰ David Barnhill, "Impermanency, Fate, and the Journey: Bashō and the Problem of Meaning" in *Religion* 16 (Oct., 1986), 332.

⁶¹ This phrase identifying the unchanging with the ever-changing is from Kyorai in a "Letter to Kikaku" ("*Zō shinshi Kikaku sho*") as found in the first part of *Haikai mondō Aonegamine* (compiled 1697–98), 101–02, and refers to Bashō's teaching concerning "the truth of poetry" (*fūga no makoto*). See Shirane, *Traces of Dreams*, 334 n. 9.

low anyone along the road going your way," for in this very moment (with whomever you may find yourself), the goal you seek, the Buddha, the life you desire are before you awaiting recognition. After "awakening to the high and returning to the low," Bashō finds his identity with everyone and all things (including the play-girls):

<i>hitotsuya ni</i>	Under one roof
<i>yūjo mo netari</i>	courtesans and monks asleep together
<i>hagi to tsuki</i>	moon and bush clover. ⁶²

The Religious Nature of the Four Themes of Oku no Hosomichi

"Attain a high degree of enlightenment and return to the world of common men."⁶³

Throughout this paper we have examined four major themes in Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*: 1) *Mujō* or impermanency and the transiency of all life; 2) Spiritual pilgrimage or travel and the journey of life; 3) "Awakening to the high" or the realization of the unchanging, beauty, and the way of poetry behind all phenomena; and 4) "Returning to the low" or re-entering with open-eyes the world of common people and everyday life. In this concluding section we will focus our attention on the religious nature of these themes, paying special attention to their relation to the Mahāyāna mode of thought in general, and Zen Buddhism in particular. Such attention to the religio-aesthetic worldview evinced in *Oku no Hosomichi* may help us better understand and appreciate how Bashō's literary legacy reflects an episteme or "root image"⁶⁴ which thoroughly perceived the world in and through Buddhist terms.

The first theme we examined concerned *mujō* or impermanency and change as the basic features of all life. The *mujō* notion of this world as conditioned by transience

⁶² This story reminds us of an exchange of *tanka* between Saigyō and the prostitute Tae: "To spurn this world may be difficult, I know, but you even refuse me temporary lodging" (Saigyō). "Having heard you've spurned this world, I only hope that you won't think of temporary lodging" (Tae). Satō comments: "Because of this enlightened response, the legend was born that Tae was in truth Fugen Bosatsu, the Bodhisattva of Universal Virtue." (From H. Satō, *Bashō's Narrow Road*, 149.) In a world in which simple innkeepers may be Buddhas and prostitutes Bodhisattvas, the true nature of things isn't always what it may appear to be. Perhaps there was another reason behind Bashō's lack of condescension and "identity" with the courtesans in this story.

⁶³ Instruction given by Bashō to his disciples at the end of his life. (NKBZ 51:546)

⁶⁴ For an essay on the relation between "root image" and epistemology, see Marcus Borg, "Root Images and the Way We See," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Fragments of Infinity* (Dorset, Great Britain: Prism, 1991), 31-43.

and mutability has a long tradition in Japanese literature and society,⁶⁵ but it is also a salient constituent of the core Buddhist metaphysic running all the way back to the *Jātakas* and the earliest teachings of Gautama in the Pāli Canon.⁶⁶ In fact, it was the recognition of transience and impermanency which led to the Buddha's first noble truth proclaiming the unsatisfactoriness of all conditioned life (*dukkham*):⁶⁷ coupled with the doctrines asserting interdependent origination (or the complete, mutually conditioned nature of all things [*pratītya-samutpāda*])⁶⁸ and the radical non-dual nature of reality, the notion of *mujō* defined normative Buddhism in Bashō's Japan.⁶⁹ Assuming what is impermanent to be enduring, we desire transient things such as wealth or fame for self-gratification, and such desiring—along with our attachments to the objects of our desires—lands us in the ocean of *samsāra*.⁷⁰

Underneath the Buddhist teachings of impermanence, conditionality and unsatisfactoriness (or suffering), lay the real "core" of Mahāyāna Buddhism: emptiness (*śūnyatā*; *kū* or *mu* in Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhism). Though these terms (*mujō/mu*) may appear contradictory, they actually reveal complementary aspects of the Buddhist worldview, and thus represent to the nondiscriminative mind of wisdom the view of the radically nondualistic nature of reality as was transmitted to Japan especially through Yogācāra thought and the T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen schools of Chinese Buddhism. Change and impermanency represent the nature of phenomena, while underneath this unsatisfactory transient world lies an unchanging reality of "emptiness" or "suchness". The teachings pointing to the mutuality and interdependence of these two aspects of reality (e.g., "form is itself emptiness, emptiness is itself form," or "*samsāra* is *nirvāṇa*") when spoken through "skillful means" (*upāya*) by a bodhisattva leads to the "two truths" of Mahāyāna Buddhism;⁷¹ direct

⁶⁵ For the history of this notion in Japanese literature see Mezaki, "Aesthete-Recluses," 151–80.

⁶⁶ See Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion* 5:402–04, 2:265 f.

⁶⁷ See entry under "Four Noble Truths" in John Bowker, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 354.

⁶⁸ For the relation of *pratītya-samutpāda* to the doctrine of impermanency in Buddhist thought, see Chatterjee Satischandra and Datta Dharendramohan, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1984), 133–36.

⁶⁹ The role of Zen in defining Japanese Buddhism in the centuries preceding Bashō is addressed in Philip Yampolsky's article "The Development of Japanese Zen," 140–56.

⁷⁰ *Samsāra* denotes the stream of countless births and the futile repetition of suffering which is the lot of the unenlightened due to a life and vision of things discordant with the true nature of reality.

⁷¹ The "two truths" or "two dimensions of truth" are: 1) the "supreme truth" (*paramārtha-satya*), which transcends all words and conceptualizations, and 2) "worldly" or "covered truth" (*saṃvṛti-satya*), the verbal expression of the supreme truth. Actually, while the doctrine of the "Two Truths" distinguishes between "the Truth of Convention" and "the Truth of Emptiness," perhaps Chih-i's (538–597) doctrine of the "Three Truths," and notion of "the

insight into this reality is called enlightenment (*bodhi*), leading to a transformed awareness and life in the world. The significance of this "insight" into the nondual nature of reality and the implications of such wisdom for the process of transformation in life must be grasped if we are to understand the episteme of Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhism in Bashō's day. As Dennis Hirota points out: "The hallmark of the Mahāyāna way is that it does not teach abandonment of ordinary life in attaining authentic existence and genuine self-knowledge. The true transcendent realm also transcends any division between this world and the world of awakening, and is realized not through renouncing everyday life but through transforming it at its roots."⁷²

The insight into this "middle"⁷³ Buddhist notion of the interpenetration of *mu/mujō* (emptiness/impermanency) provided the experiential and theoretical foundation of Bashō's poetic ideal of *fueki ryūkō* 不易流行 (the unchanging and the ever-changing),⁷⁴ a notion which Bashō developed during his trip to the Interior in 1689.⁷⁵ The quest for a more complete realization of this ideal, in other words, was

Truth of the Middle" (Ch: *chung*, Jp: *chū*) were more influential in conveying the idea of the mutuality and interdependence of these two aspects of reality in Mahāyāna Buddhism. See Whalen Lai, "A Different Religious Language: The T'ien-T'ai Idea of the Triple Truth," *Ching Feng* 25, no. 2 (1982), 67-78; also Leon Hurvitz, *Chih-I: An Introduction to the Life and Ideas of a Chinese Buddhist Monk. Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, vol. 12 (Brussels: l'Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1962).

⁷² Yoshifumi Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989), 56. Though this work primarily concerns Shinran, the quote is from the second chapter entitled "The Mahāyāna Mode of Thought," and addresses the general episteme of Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhism.

⁷³ This appellation is due to the roots of this view in the Mādhyamaka (middle) philosophy of Nāgārjuna (second to third century C.E.), though Yogācāra and T'ien-T'ai thought (especially Chih-i's "Truth of the Middle") were equally important in the development of this Mahāyāna teaching. See Gadjin M. Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), xi; Richard King, "Early Yogācāra and Its Relationship to the Mādhyamaka School," *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Oct., 1994), 659-83; and Richard Pilgrim, "Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Tradition in Japan," in Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 143 ff. See also note 71 above.

⁷⁴ "Bashō's poetry has both the eternal unchanging and the momentary ever-changing. These two aspects become one at the base, which is the truth of poetic art. If one does not understand the unchanging, one cannot truly understand Bashō's haikai." (*Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* [NKBZ] 51:545-46.)

⁷⁵ See *Kyoraishū* (NKBZ 51:494); Rogan's notes in *Kikigaki nanoka gusa*; and Hokushi's discussion with Bashō in *Yamanaka mondō* (Genroku 2, 1689). Ueda tells us that it was during this journey that Bashō "began thinking about poetry in more serious, philosophical terms," and this led to some unique ideas about his art in his later years. Ueda, *Matsuo Bashō*, 31.

a chief impetus in Bashō's spiritual pilgrimage.⁷⁶ Scholars such as Miner, LaFleur, Mezaki and Pilgrim have pointed out how travel and pilgrimage provided the aesthete-recluse with the greatest opportunities for the realization of *mujō* as the basis of his art.⁷⁷ (Here we are reminded of Bashō's description of *Oku no Hosomichi* as "a pilgrimage to far places, a resignation to self-abandonment and impermanence") (*OnH* #19).⁷⁸ Also, the realization of *mujō* through travel and the renunciation required for the itinerant life provided one with the "necessary condition for experiencing Buddha-mind."⁷⁹ It was this realization of *mujō* coupled with the experience of "Buddha-mind" (or *mu*) which provided the ideal, integral foundation for the religio-aesthetic tradition in Bashō's Japan.

Konishi points out "the influence of Zen" in this cultural atmosphere, especially in the aesthetic of *wabi*,⁸⁰ and Hirota points out the connection of *wabi* to "the emptiness or wisdom that is freedom from self-attachment."⁸¹ Thus we see that the world-rejection inherent in the practice of pilgrimage served the purposes both of the Buddhist vision (through breaking the false fixity and charm of the ordinary in order to experience enlightenment), as well as the literary enterprise (through fostering the artistic expression of "emptiness-realization").⁸² Pilgrim points out how this nexus of enlightenment, aesthetics and art was "central to the nature of (the)

⁷⁶ There is evidence in Bashō's work that he held this "insight" as a high ideal. In *Kyoroku ni Okuru ben*, for example, we read: "From ancient times, those with a feeling of refinement find joy in knowing the truth and insight of things." (From Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku*, 3.) Basil Hall Chamberlain's view that Bashō's work must be understood against his deeply contemplative religious background is relevant here, for his pilgrimage may be seen as a journey towards this "insight," or a key step in Bashō's "life-long search for enlightenment" as that was understood by Zen. See B.H. Chamberlain, *Japanese Poetry* (London: John Murray, 1910), 184. Steven D. Carter disagrees with this view, and feels that the haikai professional decided "to leave his burgeoning practice as a marker in Nihonbashi and take up a more solitary and frugal life in Fukagawa . . . because he wished to test his competence in a wider arena." Steven D. Carter, "On a Bare Branch: Bashō and the Haikai Profession," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (Jan.-March, 1997), 57-69. Though Bashō's trip to the Interior may have had implications for his career, I agree with Ueda on this matter, and feel that Bashō's pursuit of insight and the Way of Poetry were more of an impetus than fame.

⁷⁷ "The basis of art [*fūga*] is change in the universe." Kuriyama, *Haikaishi*, 116 as quoted in Miner, *Japanese Linked Poetry*, 116. For the relation of travel with *mujō* and poetry see LaFleur 159-61; Pilgrim, "Religio-Aesthetic of Matsuo Bashō," 37, 43; and Mezaki, "Aesthete-Recluses," 176.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Barnhill, 338. Cf. Mezaki, *op. cit.*, 176: "For the aesthete-recluse, no opportunity promoted the poetic spirit as much as the itinerant life."

⁷⁹ Pilgrim, "Artistic Way," 299.

⁸⁰ Konishi, *History of Japanese Literature*, vol. 3, 364.

⁸¹ Dennis Hirota, *Wind in the Pines* (Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1995), 101.

⁸² Cf. Pilgrim, "Foundations for a Religio Aesthetic Tradition in Japan," 150.

highest goals" of Buddhism,⁸³ and LaFleur concurs: "In the cultural context of (Bashō's) Japan...aesthetic vision is virtually the same as religious vision."⁸⁴

Bashō's pursuit of *mu/mujō* and the corresponding development of *fueki ryūkō* during his trip to the Interior represent a watershed in the Japanese religion-aesthetic tradition. His pilgrimage may be seen as continuing a recluse or *yamazato* tradition among poets that idealized detachment from ego-self and civilization as a discipline in the art of *Dō* leading both to enlightenment and true art.⁸⁵ Hirota points out the importance of Zen practice in the Way Arts (especially *Chanoyu*) precisely because of its ability to cultivate the emptiness and dissolution of self requisite for this goal.⁸⁶ Bashō's personal recognition of the value of *mu* (emptiness) and the itinerant life in the way of poetry is clearly presented in an essay composed soon after returning from this trip to the Interior: "The noblest thing is to keep the mind absolutely void and empty. Utter ignorance and inefficiency are therefore the ultimate realization of the human mode of being. Next to this comes [the state of material non-possession:] having no permanent place to live in, possessing not even a single straw-hut as his own."⁸⁷ This notion brings us to the third and fourth themes of our study: "awakening to the high and returning to the low."

Bashō most probably was aware of the writings of Kamo no Chōmei and the priest Myōe pointing out the relation of the pursuit of *suki* (to which Bashō attributed his trip to the Interior)⁸⁸ to spiritual freedom, the realization of Buddhist truths, and the attainment of enlightenment.⁸⁹ He probably was also mindful of the

⁸³ Ibid., 151.

⁸⁴ LaFleur, *Karma of Words*, 161.

⁸⁵ See Pilgrim, "Artistic Way," 299; cf. Mezaki, "Aesthete-Recluses," 176 f.; also Izutsu, "Far Eastern Existentialism" 62–65.

⁸⁶ Hirota *Wind in the Pines*, 96–105, esp. 100–105. Theodore M. Ludwig agrees that the integrative "Zen attitude" provided a firm foundation for *chanoyu*, and points out the non-dual nature of "the way of nirvanic realization practiced by the tea masters." See Theodore M. Ludwig, "The Way of Tea: A Religio-Aesthetic Mode of Life," *History of Religions* vol. 14, no. 1 (August, 1974), 28–50; the quote is from page 43. This "nirvanic realization" was equally esteemed in the other *Dō* Arts. Compare, for instance, the following statement by Komparu Zenchiku two hundred years before Bashō: "The Wheel of Emptiness is the highest level of art of the Noh—the performance is *mushin*." As quoted in Sam Hamill, *The Essential Bashō* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), xi.

⁸⁷ Italics added for emphasis. From Imoto Nōichi et al., eds., *Matsuo Bashō Shū*, Shōgakukan Series of Japanese Classical Literature XLI (Tokyo, 1972), 535.

⁸⁸ Imoto, *Matsuo Bashō Shū*, 341–51; also Sugiura Shōichirō et al., eds., *Bashō Bunshū*, *Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei*, (Iwanami Shoten 1959), 70.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Chōmei's famous "An Account of My Hut" in Miki Sumito, ed., *Hōjōki, Hosshinshū* (Shinchōsha, 1976), esp. 278; also Kubota Jun and Yamaguchi Akio, eds., *Myōe Shōnin Ikun [The Posthumous Teachings of the Priest Myōe]* (Iwanami: Shoten, 1981), 213.

Buddhist teachings identifying nature with the Buddha-land⁹⁰ and the embodiment of this ideal in Saigyō (probably *the* most influential historic personage in Bashō's life).⁹¹ But despite these deep influences, the intention of Bashō's journey was not that of his predecessors but rather the synthesis of their ideals of enlightenment, nature and "the Way of Poetry" in a comprehensive vision of *mu/mujō* leading to an integrative goal that may be referred to as "awakening to the high and returning to the low."

The phrase "awakening to the high and returning to the low" refers to a principal poetic ideal in the Bashō school (*kōgo kizoku* 高悟帰俗).⁹² In our study "awakening to the high" has been associated with the Japanese aestheticized understanding of Buddha-mind, the Buddhist notion of *mushin* ("no-mind"), the realization of mental clarity and "suchness" (normally arrived at through contemplative practices),⁹³ the attainment of "non-dual awareness" leading to one's "merging with nature," the intense perception and appreciation of beauty, and the enlightened recognition of the simultaneity of emptiness and form. "Returning to the low" implies an extension of this "awakening" in the everyday world, leading to the recognition of the exalted nature of common life,⁹⁴ the expression of high poetic truths in the vernacular,⁹⁵ and the ideal of *hosomi* ("slender mind") as essential in following the "middle way" (a poetic ideal which, we have seen, Bashō developed along with the notion of *fueki ryūkō* during his trip to the Interior). Taken together the notion of *kōgo kizoku* reflects many of the poetic ideals of the Bashō school, such as *fūga no makoto* (truth of poetic art), *zōka zuijun* (following the creative), *butsuga ichinyo* (the merging of subject and object), *fueki ryūkō* (the unchanging and the changing), and the transformative movement indicated in the notion of *sabi/shiori*.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Cf. "The hills, streams, grasses and trees all have Buddha-nature." From the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* (*Daihatsu Nehangyō*) as quoted in Mezaki, "Aesthete-Recluses," 174.

⁹¹ In *Japanese Court Poetry*, 261, Brower and Miner state that Bashō acknowledged Saigyō as his "master."

⁹² For an extensive discussion of this term see Shirane, *Traces of Dreams*, 252–63.

⁹³ Cf. Ueda and Hirota, *Shinran*, 76.

⁹⁴ LaFleur points out, for example, "the insistence of poets like Bashō that our greatest loss lies in failing to see the natural things near at hand and before our eyes." LaFleur, *Karma of Words*, 164.

⁹⁵ "The function of haiku," Bashō once said, "is to rectify common speech." Quoted in Hass, *Essential Haiku*, xii.

⁹⁶ This notion of *kōgo kizoku* continues and develops the "twin phases of attainment and return" in the Way Arts (especially "Zen Tea") which became popular in the Muromachi period before Bashō. (See Hirota, *Wind in the Pines*, 27, 104, 117–21.) Particularly noteworthy is the relation of this notion of "attainment and return" in the art of *Dō* to the concept of *karumi* in Bashō's poetry. Hirota tells us, for example, that the practitioner's progress in the training of *Chanoyu* (which was viewed as a movement of attainment and return) actually represents "an evolution toward simplicity": "Full mastery is required before the highest

The ostensible religious nature of these ideals have led many (i.e., Pilgrim, Suzuki, Blythe, Aitken, Izutsu, Shirane, Yasuda, Brower and Miner, de Bary, etc.) to point out the profound Zen influence in Bashō's work.⁹⁷ I feel, however, that not only are we able to detect normative religio-aesthetic elements in Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*, but that developing notions such as *hosomi* (indicating the "inner profundity" and "elevated spiritual state of poetic consciousness")⁹⁸ and *karumi* (a "spiritual attitude" able to actualize the "lightness" of the ever-changing phenomenal world)⁹⁹ actually contribute truly creative ideals to both the literary culture of Japan as well as the Buddhist worldview. Together with the notions of *fueki ryūkō* and *kōgo kizoku*, these terms continue the Buddhist idea of enlightened involvement in the world,¹⁰⁰ and expand the Bodhisattva model of sharing one's spiritual insight with "bliss-bestowing hands" throughout the entire spectrum of experiences which make up human existence.¹⁰¹

A final question remains. If Bashō instructed his disciples to "attain a high degree of enlightenment and return to the world of common men" can we suppose that Bashō himself attained this ideal? The answer to this question resides chiefly in our interpretation of "enlightenment." The Japanese Zen master Dōgen once said: "To study Buddhism is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to forget even one's attachment to the goal. Doing that, one discovers self in all things, and enters actual society."¹⁰² If Bashō denounced a "lightning flash enlightenment" or an "undigested Zen,"¹⁰³ perhaps it was because they represented

ideals of simplicity and plainness can be accomplished." (Ibid., 26, 104.) And Konishi opines that Bashō's concept of *karumi* (which represents perhaps the most sublime notion in all of Bashō's teachings) "was probably not unrelated to Zeami's artistic area called *kyakuraika* ('the flower of the return'), which refers to a fresh, primitive expression of art derived through a childlike simplicity." Konishi, *History of Japanese Literature*, vol. 2, 109; cf. idem., *Nōgakuron Kenkyū* (Hanawa Shobō, 1961), 232-36.

⁹⁷ See, e.g., Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, 261 and Pilgrim, "Artistic Way", 300. While the present scholar may be unable to attain any definitive conclusions on this debated matter, I likewise feel the Zen Buddhist ideal deeply influenced Bashō and his *Oku no Hosomichi*, and I have attempted to support this position in this paper.

⁹⁸ From the dictionary *Kōjien*, Shinmura Izuru, ed. (Iwanami Shoten, 1971).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ For an article addressing the importance of this notion in Mahāyāna Buddhism see "Ascent and Descent: Two-Directional Activity in Buddhist Thought," in Nagao, *Mādhyamika and Yogācārā*, 201-07.

¹⁰¹ Cf. the following statement by Bashō: "I regard it as admirable that...the Buddhas should dim their light and mingle with the dust in order to benefit the world." (From "The Hut of the Phantom Dwelling," translated by Burton Watson in Hass, *Essential Haiku*, 55.)

¹⁰² Quoted in Pilgrim, "Artistic Way," 302.

¹⁰³ H. Satō, *Bashō's Narrow Road*, 131.

a type of Buddhism or ideal too ostentatious¹⁰⁴ and divorced from everyday life:¹⁰⁵ his path was a more organic process of one who seemed to have abandoned even the notion of enlightenment, and “entered actual society” leaving the “raft” of Buddhism behind.¹⁰⁶ In *Oku no Hosomichi* we find a humble, unpretentious pilgrim pointing out the simplicity, wonder and poetic beauty of all life; it is this world bequeathed to us by the poet Bashō that we too might see if we were simply “awake.”

¹⁰⁴ Compare this notion to that of Hōnen: “Wakening of aspiration for enlightenment is best accomplished by stealth.” From Dennis Hirota, *Plain Words on the Pure Land Way: Sayings of the Wandering Monks of Medieval Japan* (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1989), section 84, 43.

¹⁰⁵ We should keep in mind that the Sōtō school of Zen transmitted to Japan by Dōgen “focuses on gradual attainment of enlightenment [as opposed to ‘sudden’ or ‘lightning-flash enlightenment’] through the performance of everyday duties.” (Konishi, *History of Japanese Literature*, vol. 3, 311 note 25). Though in this paper I have accentuated the relation of Zen to Bashō’s view of everyday life, I acknowledge that there were certainly other formative forces at work as well, from the literary style of the Danrin school (of which Bashō was an early student), to various religious influences of Neo-Confucianism and Taoism (especially Chuang-tzu), Tendai, and Pure Land. I am especially thankful to Dennis Hirota for bringing to my attention the strong Pure Land streams concerning the transformation of everyday life that flowed through Bashō’s Japan. For this and other possible influences of Pure Land thought on Bashō see Hirota, *Plain Words*, 3–68.

¹⁰⁶ Bashō tells us that he followed “no religious law,” but rather the “Way of Elegance” (*fūga-no-michi*). As Hamill points out: “He admired the Zen mind; but the ‘Buddhism’ attached to Zen was, to him, almost superfluous.” (Hamill, *Essential Bashō*, xxv.) Again, compare this “Zen” notion to Kenshō in *Plain Words*, section 60: “When you have genuinely let go of your attachments, you show no sign of having done so.” While certain Zen Buddhists of the early Tokugawa Era resisted “intrusions” of Pure Land teachings (e.g., the Rinzai monk, Gudō Tōshoku [1579–1661]), it appears that the strains of “religionless” Buddhism at the time were generally nonsectarian. For the religio-political factors of the Tokugawa shogunate behind this attitude, see Yampolsky, “The Development of Japanese Zen,” 153–56.