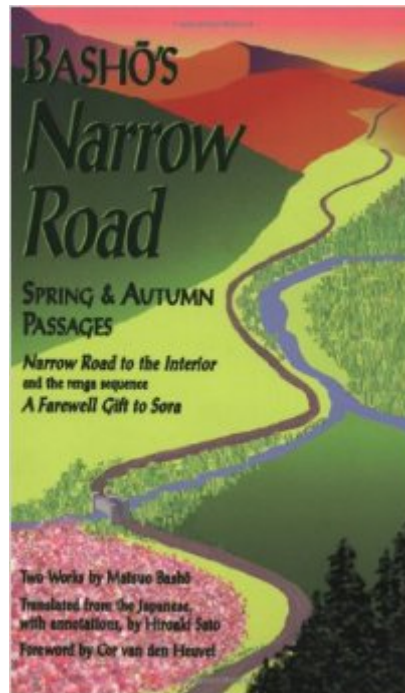


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Basho's Narrow Road: Spring And Autumn Passages (Rock Spring Collection Of Japanese Literature)



Synopsis

Matsuo Basho (1644-94) is considered Japan's greatest haiku poet. *Narrow Road to the Interior* (*Oku no Hosomichi*) is his masterpiece. Ostensibly a chronological account of the poet's five-month journey in 1689 into the deep country north and west of the old capital, Edo, the work is in fact artful and carefully sculpted, rich in literary and Zen allusion and filled with great insights and vital rhythms. In *Basho's Narrow Road: Spring and Autumn Passages*, poet and translator Hiroaki Sato presents the complete work in English and examines the threads of history, geography, philosophy, and literature that are woven into Basho's exposition. He details in particular the extent to which Basho relied on the community of writers with whom he traveled and joined in linked verse (*renga*) poetry sessions, an example of which, *A Farewell Gift to Sora*, is included in this volume. In explaining how and why Basho made the literary choices he did, Sato shows how the poet was able to transform his passing observations into words that resonate across time and culture.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reviewed by Paige Lovitt for Reader Views (9/06) Matsuo Basho (1644-94) was a famous Japanese haiku poet. In 1689, he took a 1,233 mile journey across Japan. His travels lasted five months. He was joined by his friend Kawai Sora. Basho wrote about this trip. He titled it, "Oku No Hosomichi," which translates to "Narrow Road to the Interior." This story is considered to be a masterpiece of Japanese literature. He took four years to write it and revise it. Basho started this trip when his

house burned down. He had two goals. One goal was spiritual; it involved "poetic truth." The other goal was a practical one in which he would use his travels to become well known as a poet. Sora developed stomach problems and had to end his travels with Basho. Basho wrote a short piece for him. In the second part of this book, there is a translation of "A Farewell Gift to Sora." Basho funded his travels with donations from wealthy friends and students. He felt that there were three types of poets. The first type is confused noisemakers. The second type is wealthy people who desire to write instead of gossip. The third type is poets who work hard at writing true poetry. These poets write to "soothe their heart." Basho was the third type of poet. Hiroaki Sato includes annotations to go along with the writings. This adds richness to the story and helps explain more about the culture and what was happening at the time. I read the story first with the annotations to gain understanding of what I was reading; then I went back and reread the story by itself so that I could feel how it flowed. Without the annotations, I would have enjoyed Basho's story, but I would not have understood much of what was written. Sato also includes pages of notes and commentaries.

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