

Example 1: Wiki page on *Bashō's Narrow Road*

Group 8: Pg. 89 - Pg.97

Brief Description

Basho and Sora pass by Oguro Cape, a place not often travelled and are regarded with suspicion by the local guards. Since it's not exactly a tourist location the accommodations are not very luxurious and they end up sleeping in a barn filled with fleas and the stench of horse piss. They pass through Ouyama, the mountainous part between Shitomae and Sakata. According to the guide, this path is always filled with danger but they manage to get through the forest with little to no problem. After passing Ouyama on their way to Shitomae barrier they find lodging with a man named Seifu, who raises silkworms and treats them quite well. Seifu is a wealthy man, though Basho describes him as humble in a respectful way. Basho and Sora learn of a nearby Buddhist temple and decide to pay it a visit. The section ends with Basho and Sora walking along the Mogami river on their way towards Shitomae Barrier.

Location

- Passes through Oguro Cape, Islet of Mizu, and hot spring of Naguro ending at the Shitomae Barrier
- Shitomae* is literally “in front of pissing” which is played by Basho in the following hokku.



- The Area is not known to have many passengers, as such Basho and Sora were looked at suspiciously by the barrier guard.
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- By the time they were allowed to pass, the day was nearing its end as they climbed the Big Mountain, Ouyama, which is the mountainous part between Shitomae and Sakata.



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- Took lodging in the house of a different border guard amidst wind and rain in the mountains.
- The path through Ouyama was described as “uncertain” where Basho and Sora were recommended to have a guide to pass.
- There was no sound during the travel. No sounds of nature as referred to with “not a single bird calling that we could hear, and under the overgrowing trees the darkness was such that it was like walking in the night”
- The lack of nature conveys feelings of isolation
- The path was treacherous, requiring the travelers to use bamboo as staffs to traverse streams, and laden with rocks, where Basho mentions stumbling over them.
- They eventually Made it to a man Named Seifuu, whom Basho notes was wealthy but humble, as Basho stated he did not have a “lowly heart”.
- His observation originates from the idea that men of wisdom, since ancient times, have rarely been wealthy.
- He was able to relate to Basho and Sora, as he too was a traveler, and had them stay long enough to relieve the pain and stress of their long trek, providing entertainment during that time.
- When they resumed their travels they came upon a temple known as Ryuushaku-ji, with Basho stating it to be a “particularly pure and tranquil place.”
- Basho takes care to note the age of the location and nature. He states that “the pines and cypresses were aged” and “the soil and stones old and smooth with moss”
- The place was noted as equally silent such that even “the splendid scenery was so hushed and silent that [they] could only feel [their] hearts grow clear” leading to another hokku.



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- Before traveling down the Mogami River, the two travelers stayed at Ooishida. Here Basho implies that the area is uncultured with their "rustic hearts of simple reeds and horns"
- The Mogami River is noted to have two significant uta-makura: the Goten and Hayabusa



- Goten: a formation of rocks in the river that look like the stones used in the game *Go*
 - Hayabusa: the rapids are noted to be as swift as a falcon
- The Hokku**



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Nomi shirami uma no barisuru makura moto

Fleas and Lice: a horse pisses right near my pillow

- Even though the environment was uncomfortable, he felt a sense of elegance in that situation.

Hai-ide you kaiya ga shitta no hiki no koe

crawl out, toad: your voice under the silkworm shed

- Spring represented by the toad
- Listening to toad's voice, he remembered the toad in Manyo Shu. The situation was very tasteful for him.

mayuhaki o omogake ni shite beni no hana

Recalling the image of the eyebrow brush: the safflower

- Sora
- Compliments to Seifu's hospitality as the recalling of the safflower which resembles the eyebrow



Kogai suru hitto wa kodai no sugata kana

Those raising silkworms are in ancient garb

- Old traditions are still apparent in those times, as compliment for Seifu's hospitality
- Hard work in raising silkworms has not changed in that area

Shizukasa ya iwa ni shimiiru semi no koe

Quietness: seeping into the rocks, the cicada's voice

- Isolation and silence
- Serenity in silence yet the apparent loneliness
- Cicada represents summer and his considered very loud
- Cicada's noisiness is used to contrast the silence of the surroundings and emphasize on that silence.

Samidare o atsumete hayashi Mogami-gawa

Gathering the May rains and swift, the Mogami River

- Two mountains with a river in between



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- Rain collected by the mountains and is lead to the river where the depth and speed increases.
- Used to glorify the Mogami River and its complexities
- He initially used *suzushi* (cool) to give thanks for his host but
- *Suzushi* might give off the impression that the Mogami River is calm so he used *hayashi* instead to emphasize the speed and dynamic of the river.

Historical and Cultural References

- Barrier(*seki*) : Every transportation crossroads had barrier to regulate the coming and going of people or luggage. In order to go through the barriers, people needed to show their passes or reveal their identity. In Instead of the pass, entertainer or wrestler sometimes displayed their repertoire.
- “dust were falling upon us from the tip of the clouds” : A phrase from Tu Fu’s poem. Tu Fu is was a Chinese poet. His influence on Japanese literature was big and especially, Basho loves his poems.
- *Manyo Shu* : The oldest anthology in Japan. It included more than 4500 poems.
- Kaiya, Kogai : Kaiya means "silkworm shed" and Kogai means “raising silkworms”. Silk reeling was one of the important industry for long time in Japan.

Rhythm and Tone

Basho’s tone was concerned mainly with his focus on nature, referring to the beauty (or lack thereof) inherent in the scenery. He is either at a loss for words such that he can only write about the silence while in awe of the location, or the splendor of the powers of nature, and the *uta-makura* that are derived from it. Otherwise he focuses on the state of his travels, with the discomfort of the barrier guard’s home and horse who had urinated next to him, or the hospitality of Seifuu, who had allowed him to lie in coolness amidst the riches of his host. Their locations of residence saw a drastic change in lifestyle, from the expanses of wilderness where they are able to bear witness to the forces of nature, to the comfort of the hospitality provided by the wealthy.