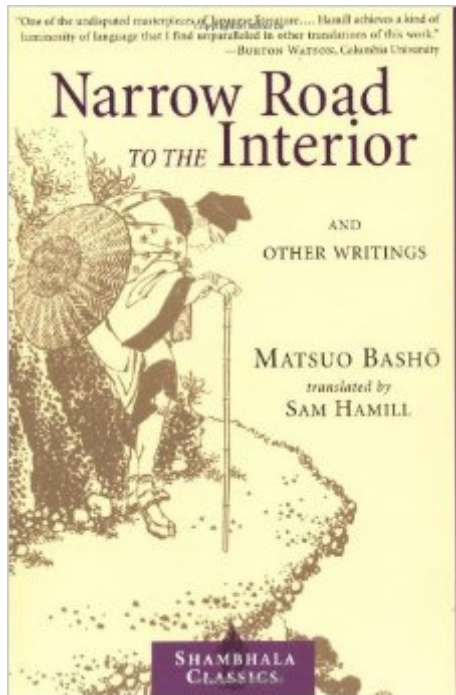


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# Narrow Road To The Interior: And Other Writings (Shambhala Classics)



## Synopsis

Here is the most complete single-volume collection of the writings of one of the great luminaries of Asian literature. Basho (1644&#150;1694)â "who elevated the haiku to an art form of utter simplicity and intense spiritual beautyâ "is best known in the West as the author of *Narrow Road to the Interior*, a travel diary of linked prose and haiku that recounts his journey through the far northern provinces of Japan. This volume includes a masterful translation of this celebrated work along with three other less well-known but important works by Basho: *Travelogue of Weather-Beaten Bones*, *The Knapsack Notebook*, and *Sarashina Travelogue*. There is also a selection of over two hundred fifty of Basho's finest haiku. In addition, the translator has provided an introduction detailing Basho's life and work and an essay on the art of haiku.

## Book Information

Series: Shambhala Classics

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Shambhala (September 26, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1570627169

ISBN-13: 978-1570627163

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (20 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #41,353 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > Asian > Japanese #7 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > Asian #200 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Essays & Correspondence > Essays

## Customer Reviews

There is only one other book where you can find these four of Basho's "travel diaries" in one volume and that is Nobuyuki Yuasa's. This compilation also includes a generous selection of Basho's hokku. These are the book's pluses. Unfortunately though, Hamill is much too intent on presenting you with Basho as a sort of haiku-zen master, an identity that Basho himself created as a voice through which to narrate. Mr Hamill would have us believe that Basho wrote poetry for the sake of zen, but the truth is that Basho studied zen for the sake of poetry. Also, Hamill's insistence upon translating in the 5-7-5 form ruins quite a few poems: you get sort of overexplanatory, prosaic

verses much of the time. It is almost as if he were translating the explanations you will find in Japanese collections of Basho's verse. For example: Hamill translates "fuyu no hi ya bajou ni kooru kageboushi" as "Crossing long fields, frozen in its saddle, my shadow creeps by though it should probably (more accurately) be rendered: winter sun... on horse's back a frozen shadow." Hamill dropped the phrase "fuyu no hi ya" entirely and replaced it with "Crossing long fields." I don't know why Hamill rids Basho of suggestion and nuance. Maybe he doesn't think the western reader can find poetry in hokku/haiku as they truly are. The verse quoted by another reviewer "Your song caresses the depths of loneliness, high mountain bird" might as well not be considered a translation at all. There is almost nothing of the original poem remaining except for the notion of loneliness and the kankodori, which is translated as "high mountain bird."

*Narrow Road to the Interior and other writings* by Matsuo Basho translated by Sam Hamill. This is the most complete collection of Basho's writings translated into English available in a single volume. Aficionados of Japanese culture keen on exploring the haiku literature would be hard-pressed to find a better book to start with. Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) lived during the Genroku period in Japan. The Tokugawa shogunate had unified the country and it was a time of relative peace, which allowed those so inclined a freedom of travel not usual in many periods of Japanese history. Basho was so inclined. At the age of forty his restless feet led him on several walking tours of Japan, and he left behind collected impressions of these journeys in both prose and haiku. Thoroughly versed in the Chinese and Japanese poetic traditions prevalent among the literati of his time, Basho was also an ardent disciple of Zen. He devoted his life to refining, clarifying, and simplifying his poetry. In the brief haiku form he found the perfect vehicle through which to realize his poetic ideals, and the poems he wrote have inspired and captivated readers and poets throughout the world with their elegance, insight, and simple brilliance. This volume collects together four travelogues (*Narrow Road to the Interior*, *Travelogue of Weather-Beaten Bones*, *The Knapsack Notebook*, and *Sarashina Travelogue*) and over 250 of Basho's haiku. The translator has provided an introductory essay and an afterward revealing many aspects of Basho's life, work, and the haiku form itself. Also included are a chronology of Basho's life, a map detailing his journeys, and a bibliography.

Matsuo Basho's "*Narrow Road to the Interior*" is translated by Sam Hamill, an accomplished poet who also translated the haiku of Issa in "*The Spring of my Life*" (ISBN # 1570621446). As B. Watson, professor at Columbia University has said, "Hamill achieves a kind of luminosity of language that I find unparalleled in other translations of the work." Basho lived from 1644-1694 and achieved

acclaim as the greatest writer of haiku and this book of his last travels is a classic in Asian literature. His stature must have made the task of translating more difficult, even intimidating. The title is of course a metaphor for traversing life to find one's spiritual center or soul. Amateur western writers who become enamored of writing haiku soon realize there are depths to which their studies may never take them. The sounds, the Zen way of thinking -- bring much more to the equation than mere playfulness (as in senryu), or a built-in sense of syllables, and fondness for epigrams. Basho set off on his long journey & early in his travels was loaned a horse because "it is easy to get lost." The horse carried the poet, then stopped, and returned home without the rider but carrying Basho's gift tied to the saddle. The route of Basho's travels is printed inside the covers -- he describes "pines shaped by salty winds, trained into sea-wind bonsai." In other centuries men walked hundreds of miles, giving & receiving haiku as gifts - many about history, and some memorials. His lodgings were often noted, probably because they were more often miserable than not. His writings often included geographical 'markers' -- these speak of much more than PLACE to Japanese readers.

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