ON "BORROWING LANDSCAPES" AND "SHARED CONSCIOUSNESS": ALEC FINLAY AND KEN COCKBURN'S COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS WRITING THROUGH MATSUO BASHŌ'S *OKU NO HOSOMICHI*

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Abstract: The article explores multimodal references to Matsuo Bashō's philosophy of writing in Alec Finlay's collaborative projects. In my discussion of Bashō-inspired texts, I focus on two forms of shared writing as exemplified in Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn's *the road north* book of poetry and a blog, both based on a journey through Scotland guided by Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi* that took place between 15 May 2010 and 15 May 2011. The theme of "borrowed landscape," a term used in classical Japanese gardening, will be introduced in a comparative reading of *the road north* and Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*. As will be argued, by "translating" Bashō's and his companion Sora's journey to Scotland (the Scottish North), Finlay and Cockburn attempt to draw up a new (mental) cartography.

Keywords: Matsuo Bashō, Alec Finlay, Ken Cockburn, Zhuangzi, shared writing, borrowed landscapes, travel writing, road north, Scotland, Japan

> clearing the mind and sliding in
> to that created space
>
> Gary Snyder[1]

> open the gate,
> borrow the landscape –
> it's all yours!
>
> Alan Spence[2]

1 Gary Snyder, "Endless Streams and Mountains," *Mountains and Rivers without End* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1996) 5.

2 Alan Spence, *Edinburgh Come All Ye* (Edinburgh: Scotland Street Press, 2022) 7.

> There is no strategy in borrowing, it is simply following what touches you emotionally.
>
> Ji Cheng[3]

Introduction

The article offers a comparative reading of Matsuo Bashō's[4] travel diary *Oku no Hosomichi* (*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*) (1702) and Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn's *the road north* (2014), a journey through Scotland guided by Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*.[5] By *The Road North* I mean two collaborative projects, namely the book of poetry published in 2014, based on a journey that took place between 15 May 2010 and 15 May 2011, and also Finlay and Cockburn's blog which in a way forms a separate project and which, in terms of its prosimetric form, approximates Bashō's travel diary. While Bashō's *haibun* consists of prosaic descriptions of a journey accompanied with haiku poems, Finlay and Cockburn's travel-blog features not only haiku, but also longer poems, photographs of visited places, and audio-visual material. *The Road North* projects are, to use Marjorie

[3] Ji Cheng, *Yuanye*, trans. Wybe Kuitert, in "Borrowing Scenery and the Landscape That Lends – The Final Chapter of Yuanye," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 10, no. 2 (2015): 39, DOI: 10.1080/18626033.2015.1058570.

[4] Bashō (1644-1694) was the most famous poet of the Edo period in Japan. He was a master of haiku, *haibun* (travel diary) and *renga* (collaborative linked verse poetry). His *Oku no Hosomichi* has become the classic work of Japanese nature and travel writing. Bashō's poetry is internationally renowned. He has influenced whole generations of writers and travel-writers not only in Japan but also in the West. In recent Scottish literature, Bashō's philosophy of writing has been openly affirmed and celebrated in Kenneth White's poetry, prose, and essays, and in Alan Spence's haiku poetry. See Monika Kocot, "Geopoetics and the Poetry of Consciousness: A Transmodern Perspective," in *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, ed. Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa (London: Routledge, 2019) 178-203; Monika Kocot, "Kenneth White's North Road Travelling," in *W drodze / On the Road – Perspektywy badawcze*, ed. Anna Suwalska-Kołecka and Jakub Ligor (Płock: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Mazowieckiej Uczelni Publicznej w Płocku, 2019) 107-25; Monika Kocot, "Writing the Road: On Drifting and Travelling-Seeing in Kenneth White's Geopoetics," *ANGLICA. An International Journal of English Studies* 29, no. 3 (2020): 45-62.

[5] In their reading of Bashō's travel diary, Finlay and Cockburn rely exclusively on translated texts, in particular *Back Roads to Far Towns, Basho's Travel Journal* (translated by Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu). Similarly, my knowledge and understanding of Bashō's *Oku no Hosomichi*, and other travel diaries, is exclusively through translated texts and academic articles written in or translated into English.

Perloff's term, "written-through" experiments which attempt to draw up a new (mental) cartography, as Finlay and Cockburn "translate" Bashō and his companion Sora's Japanese journey to Scotland (the Scottish North). But more importantly, they are extraordinary examples of "shared consciousness" where the term "shared" is understood as a collaborative writing (and reading) experience but also as a creative dialogue with tradition and past voices. One could argue that by initiating an intertextual game with Bashō's travel diary, a genuinely inspiring example of "shared writing," Finlay and Cockburn enter the realm of a truly multidimensional and multimodal "sharing."

Bashō's travelogue is divided into fifty-three stations, each referring to a particular place on the road North. In this article, I discuss Station 13 (Crossing the Shirakawa Barrier) and 14 (Visiting Tōkyū at Sukagawa) and show how they are creatively rewritten by Finlay and Cockburn in their blog and *the road north* book. One of my aims is to show that in the process of re-writing Bashō's *haibun*, Finlay and Cockburn practice the technique of "borrowing landscapes"; one can see that particularly in the photographs taken at each station and featured on the blog, but metaphorically speaking the theme of "borrowing landscapes" permeates the book and the blog in their entirety.

"Shared Consciousness" and "Borrowed Scenery"

Alec Finlay describes the area of his creative process as "shared consciousness."[6] As Stewart Smith aptly notices, this sharing "incorporates both Finlay's collaborative and generative practice and his creative dialogue with tradition and past voices."[7] In his article, Smith mentions two of these voices. One is the voice of the poet and "avant-gardener" Ian Hamilton Finlay, and the second belongs to the poet, songwriter, and folklorist Hamish Henderson. From Ian Hamilton Finlay, Finlay the son "gets a grounding in interdisciplinary practice and avant-garde poetics,"[8] but also his "commitment to wonder";[9] from Henderson, he gets

[6] "Interview with Alec Finlay on Navigations," *Animate Projects*, January 2013, https://animateprojectsarchive.org/interviews/alec_finlay.

[7] Stewart Smith, "Basho Borne on the Carrying Stream: The Word-Mapping of Scotland and the Ecopoetics of Wind Power in Alec Finlay's *The Road North* and *Skying*," in *Environmental and Ecological Readings: Nature, Human and Posthuman Dimensions in Scottish Literature and Arts (XVIII-XXI c.)*, ed. Philippe Laplace (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comte, 2015) 217, DOI: 10.4000/books.pufc.9183.

[8] Smith, "Basho Borne" 217.

[9] Robert Creeley, "Foreword," in Ian Hamilton Finlay, *The Dancers Inherit the Party* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996) 10.

"the idea of a social art and an open-minded vision of Scottish culture."[10] In his review of Alec Finlay's *Question Your Teaspoons: Stonypathian Memories*, Calum Rodger notes that Finlay's poetry "establishes a dialogue with the past, augmenting old voices with phenomenological reflections from the imagistic [...] to the corporeal [...], breathing life into both by means of quiet reverence and unadorned formal exactitude."[11] We could easily apply this observation to *the road north*. Alec Finlay himself admits that he is "drawn to a tradition that equates poetic forms with natural elements,"[12] therefore it is not surprising that he decided to enter into an artistic dialogue with Matsuo Bashō's travel diary, which in itself is an extraordinary example of nature writing and shared writing (Bashō's creative dialogue with the tradition and past voices of Japanese and Chinese literature). In *the road north*, Finlay and Cockburn trace Bashō's journey (all fifty-three stations) and lay it over Scotland, in order to "make connections and open up new lines of thought."[13] As far as the blog is concerned, they even come up with a name for their practice of composing short poems *in situ*; they call it "Bashoing," "writing *in* places";[14] as Finlay puts it, they are poems written "in the space between Bashō's text and our locations":[15]

> When we were out Bashoing, our mode was *sitting* and *scribbling*, writing verses within a small rectangular frame rubber-stamped on a parcel-label. The method was clear by the time we arrived in Perthshire for our first week, searching for the "Shirakawa Barrier," the threshold – literally a gateway – to the Highlands, where Basho heard peasant women singing rice-planting songs and recognized that he was about to enter an ancient culture.[16]

This practice brings a heightened sense of play between poetic forms and natural elements – copies of the poems are left *in situ*, and they become part of the landscape.

10 Smith, "Basho Borne" 217.

11 Calum Rodger, "Poems of the Infra-Ordinary: Alec Finlay's *Question Your Teaspoons*," *Glasgow Review of Books*, 28 May 2013, http://glasgowreviewofbooks.com/2013/05/28/poems-of-the-infra-extraordinary/.

12 Alec Finlay, "Overview: còmhlan bheanntan | A Company of Mountains," *Company of Mountains*, http://www.company-of-mountains.com/p/overview.html.

13 Smith, "Basho Borne" 220.

14 Finlay, "Overview."

15 Alec Finlay, "Twin Peaks," *Alec Finlay*, 12 March 2013, http://alecfinlayblog.blogspot.com/2013/03/a-company-of-mountains.html.

16 Finlay, "Twin Peaks."

More importantly, however, both writing and reading these haiku-like compositions requires "borrowing landscapes," and that provides room for interpretation for the reader. I would argue that as a rule Finlay and Cockburn's poems and passages in prose give the readers a chance to respond in their own way. This is connected with the fact that, similarly to Bashō, they find rich potential in "empty space" (*yohaku*). As Hori Nobuo points out, Bashō "was very well-aware that there are limits to the power that words have to express truth and perceptions of the world."[17] He provides a definition of empty space by Tosa Mitsuoki, a painter of Bashō's era:

> Do not fill up the whole picture with lines; also apply colors with a light touch. Some imperfection in design is desirable. You should not fill in more than a third of the background. Just as you would if you were writing poetry, take care to hold something back. The viewer, too, must bring something to it. If one includes some empty space along with an image, then the mind will fill it in.[18]

This empty space, which makes the mind of the reader (free to) complete the image, is important for another reason. In the twenty-first century, when the emphasis is placed more and more on ecological living and ecocritical reading, Finlay's poetic language makes it possible, as Morgan suggests, to fulfil its potential as "the brilliant, vibrating interface between the human and the non-human."[19] His work constitutes what Louisa Gairn calls "an ecological 'line of defence,' providing a space in which the reader and author can examine their relationship to the world around them."[20] The most important aspect of the process seems to be the act of "sharing consciousness," seen not only as the co-creation of poems, but also as being together, being one with people met on the road, and as the joyful affirmation of nature. This is how Finlay writes about Bashō and Sora:

> The practice that Bashō and Sora followed, combined religious observation, folk custom and the everyday civility of sharing poetry and tea with friends

[17] Hori Nobuo, "Bashō at the Center of Creation," trans. Cheryl Crowley, in *Matsuo Bashō's Poetic Spaces. Exploring Haikai Intersections*, ed. Eleanor Kerkham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 28.

[18] Nobuo, "Bashō at the Center of Creation" 28.

[19] Edwin Morgan, "Roof of Fireflies," in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. W.N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2000) 192.

[20] Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 156.

> and strangers. They also spread Bashō's school of *renga* – linked verse poetry – and composed *tanzaku* [poems written on a narrow strip of paper] with ink & brush, left as gifts along the way.[21]

In a similar fashion, Finlay and Cockburn are often joined on their travels by other artists and writers, but also folk singers, musicians, and ecologists. I will come back to this issue in the context of Station 14. Bashō's travel-accounts are extremely inspiring for Finlay and Cockburn not only in terms of the prosimetric form, but first and foremost because of the philosophy of living that informs his writing. As Cid Corman notes in the introduction to his translation of *Oku no Hosomichi*,

> [m]ost of his [Bashō's] poetry (and this is within the tradition which he himself was shaping) evokes context and wants one. The poems are not isolated instances of lyricism, but cries of their occasions, of someone intently passing through a world, often arrested by the momentary nature of things within an unfathomable "order."[22]

In *the road north*, the "commitment to wonder" that Finlay takes from his father is intuitively joined with what Bashō called "the ah! of things."[23] It is interesting to note that while, as Smith puts it, Finlay and Cockburn "are literally deterritorializing Bashō from Japan,"[24] their creative practice can in fact be viewed as quite Japanese in terms of aesthetics. Apart from the mindful way of being with(in) nature and with others which characterizes Finlay and Cockburn's projects, one can notice another parallel. Everywhere Bashō goes, Corman writes, "one feels a sounding made, the ground hallowed, hard won, endeared to him, and so to us, through what others had made of it, had reached, discovered."[25] Finlay and Cockburn share a similar need to connect with the past voices, to engage with "what others had made" of these places. For instance, the blogs for

[21] Alec Finlay, "Twin Peaks."

[22] Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu, "Introduction," in Matsuo Basho, *Back Roads to Far Towns, Basho's Travel Journal*, trans. Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumo (Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 2004).

[23] *Mono no aware*, the "ah!ness of things," is a feeling for natural loveliness tinged with sadness at its transience; it is "sadness tinged by joy, joy tinged by sadness." Robert E. Carter, *Becoming Bamboo: Western and Eastern Explorations of the Meaning of Life* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992) 92. See also Kenneth Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku. Its Essential Nature and History* (Boston, MA: Tuttle Publishing, 2011) 38, 39-40, 43, 80.

[24] Smith, "Basho Borne" 220.

[25] Corman and Susumu, "Introduction," *Back Roads* 10.

Station 15 and "Ken's Dunira" from the cycle of poems on Shirakawa in the book show their creative dialogue with both Bashō and Ian Hamilton Finlay (and his Little Sparta).

By activating and re-affirming the poetic legacy of the famous "avant-gardener," Finlay and Cockburn make their project more and more Japanese (and Chinese) in terms of the aesthetics of "borrowed landscape," so often practiced by Finlay the elder (especially in Little Sparta)."Borrowed landscape" or "borrowed scenery"[26] (*shakkei* in Japanese and *jiejing* in Chinese) is the ancient technique of incorporating a distant landscape into a garden setting so that the faraway view becomes a seamless part of the design. *Shakkei* was practiced in Japanese gardens as early as the Heian period (794-1185 AD), and it played a key role in Japanese garden design during the time of Bashō – the Edo period (1603-1868). Gordon Cullen notes the framing aspect of verticals as "netting": "the device of framing brings the distant scene forward into the ambience of our own environment," and he adds that "this serves to link the near with the remote."[27]

In his haiku poem on *shakkei*, Alan Spence writes:

open the gate,
borrow the landscape –
it's all yours![28]

But is it really as simple as Spence suggests? Specialists agree that applying *shakkei* successfully to one's garden involves more than simply framing a view: it requires a careful analysis of the landscape to create a multidimensional composition that integrates the "borrowed scenery" in a poetic way. In his highly informative article on Ji Cheng's *Yuanye*, the oldest extant – and, it should be emphasized, Chinese – text on "borrowed scenery," Wybe Kuitert notes that scenery, or *jing*, "must also point to another, most important ingredient of garden making: our own receptive perception of scenery where perception is not limited to the visual only."[29] Kuitert

[26] Teiji Itoh, *Space & Illusion: In the Japanese Garden*, (New York: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1981) 15.

[27] Gordon Cullen, *Townscape* (New York: Reinhold, 1961) 39. See also Bob Scarfo's comment in *Landscape Architecture As Storytelling: Learning Design Through Analogy* (New York: Routledge, 2023), Chapter 5: "Netting is experienced more to your right or left providing momentary glimpses as you move along a narrative progression."

[28] Spence, *Edinburgh Come All Ye* 7.

[29] Wybe Kuitert, "Borrowing Scenery and the Landscape That Lends – The Final Chapter of *Yuanye*," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 10, no. 2 (2015): 32, DOI: 10.1080/18626033.2015.1058570. Further references to this article are given in parentheses in the text.

proposes *jing* as "landscape," understood "as a topographic and conceptual plenitude of abiotic, biotic, and anthropogenic processes, including human perceptions of it" (32). He also suggests that the translation "borrowed scenery" does "not seem quite right" (33), as *jie* should be understood as "describing an activity, such as 'borrowing' rather than 'borrowed'" (33). But there is one more aspect usually ignored by Westerners due to their dualist worldview: "*Jie* is about recognizing the world out there with its man-made and natural phenomena as an agent or even as an actor, enticing man, the garden designer." (33) Therefore, Kuitert continues, *jie* "is not only borrowing, but also lending" (33). When one thinks about Finlay and Cockburn's photographs of the landscape and of the poems left *in situ* (and how they become one "body"), Kuitert's argument does make sense, and it actually provides a new way of looking at Scottish poetic interaction with landscape, as what Kuitert would call "landscape in interaction" (33). I will explore how this dynamic operates in my analysis of Stations 13 and 14. But if, as Kuitert proposes, borrowing from the landscape goes together with the landscape that lends, then "both the garden maker and the landscape are interchangeably either the object or the subject" (33). Kuitert notes that it is only poetically-minded people who understand the idea of the landscape "that actively communicates its spectacle as something inspirational" (33). In Cheng's last chapter of his *Yuanye*, devoted solely to *jiejing*, one finds passages like this one, "roll up the blinds to invite the swallows that will shear the light breeze now and then," or one which activates a parallel between the landscape and entering a painting: "the mood matches the pure and the remote, the hills and valleys convey such feelings […]. Thoughts beyond the vulgar world suddenly arise, as if one enters a painting to travel inside it."[30] So to come back to my question concerning Spence's poem, it might be that for some artists "borrowing scenery" is quite easy. What seems crucial is, to use Cheng's words, "simply following what touches you emotionally."[31] Interestingly, Kuitert notes that borrowing and lending is not only about space (distant landscape, neighbouring landscape, upward landscape, downward landscape) but also about "catching an ephemeral and dynamic beauty at the right moment – in its full process of daily or seasonal change" (39). Bashō was certainly a master of "borrowing scenery" into his poems, and Finlay and Cockburn follow in his footsteps. In my opinion, Finlay's collaborative projects offer room for us as readers to experience what it means to borrow a landscape both physically and metaphorically, or even both at the same time, because Finlay and Cockburn tend to initiate the game of non-duality.

30 Cheng, *Yuanye*, qtd. in Kuitert, "Borrowing Scenery" 36.

31 Cheng, *Yuanye*, qtd. in Kuitert, "Borrowing Scenery" 36.

Bashō, Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu) and *the road north*

It would be difficult to discuss Matsuo Bashō's writing without making references to Daoism and Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu). And it would be equally difficult to discuss the idea of sharing and reinventing the landscape in Scottish travel accounts by Finlay and Cockburn without at least mentioning certain aesthetic features present in the Scottish travelogues but having their origins in the *Zhuangzi*. We cannot forget that Bashō was a revolutionary mind, and many scholars agree that he used "the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* to reinvent the poetic significance of landscape in his travel journals."[32] As Peipei Qiu puts it,

> Bashō's geographical imagination is shaped not simply by the material qualities of space, but more importantly by conceptions based on broader cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical frameworks, particularly the aesthetic of *shōyōyu* (Chinese *xiaoyaoyou*, carefree wandering), which is highlighted by the *Zhuangzi* and reiterated in Chinese poetic tradition. Bashō's adaptation of the *shōyōyu* spirit to the recluse/traveler theme of his kikōbun: the spirit of carefree wandering and its association with Chinese recluse/travel literature provide a new meaning, giving context to his travel poems and journals.[33]

In *the road north*, the landscape is also perceived through the eyes of a traveller in the *shōyōyu* spirit, and one could even say that Finlay and Cockburn's poetic vision is tinted with Daoist colour. But the aesthetic of *shōyōyu* is not the only one in operation. When discussing their experiments, one needs to remember that they enter the territory of Japanese literature but at the same time move within the realm of Daoist aesthetics of *zōka* (Chinese *zaohua*) in the spirit of Bashō. *Zōka* means to create and transform; in the *Zhuangzi*, it means "both the working of the *Dao* – the natural way in which all phenomena come into being and transform – and the accomplishment of the *Dao* (the existence of all things and beings)."[34] The notion is used in Chinese literary theory to "imply the natural and spontaneous creative process or the unsullied outcome of such process."[35] In *Oi no kobumi* Bashō writes:

32 Peipei Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape: The *Zhuangzi* and the Geographical Imagination of Bashō," in *Matsuo Bashō's Poetic Spaces. Exploring Haikai Intersections*, ed. Eleanor Kerkham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 61.

33 Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 61, 63.

34 Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 67.

35 Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 67.

> In the *waka* of Saigyō, the *renga* of Sōgi, the paintings of Sesshu and the tea ceremony of Rikyu, one fundamental principle runs through all arts: those who pursue art follow *zōka* and have the four seasons as their companion. Everything they see is like a flower and everything they imagine is like the moon. If one sees no flower, he is the same as a barbarian; if one has no moon in mind, he is no different from the birds and the beasts. Go beyond the barbarians and depart from animals; follow *zōka* and return to *zōka*.[36]

Qiu notes that *zōka* is seen here as a precondition of artistic perception but also the ultimate creative attainment.[37] In *Oku no hosomichi*, Bashō's most celebrated travel diary, salutation to the landscape is important, but "exploration of the wonder of *zōka* is a keynote."[38]

It should be noted here that the emphasis placed on *zōka* and *shōyōyu* are not the only revolutionary changes Bashō came up with. Critics agree that travel journals before Bashō looked completely different from the ones he authored. Earlier works "usually consisted of prosaic descriptions of a journey interspersed with unrelated poems."[39] Beginning with *Nozarashi Kikō* (*The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton*), Bashō's prose is as concise as poetry and the transition between the two is fluid.[40] Other innovative shifts are connected with the fact that the Japanese travel diary as a literary genre is inseparable from poetry.[41] Qiu elucidates some generic limitations in the following way:

> when centering on classical poetic diction, the geographical imagination of the travel journal often was defined by conceptions and conventions that had been molded by classical poetry. In classical Japanese poetry, each poetic toponym (*utamakura* or *meisho*), or seasonal word (*kigo*), has its established essence (*hon'i*), which determines not only what but also how landscape should be portrayed. In addition, the canonical literary travel journals bear a predominately melancholy tone inherited from the classical poetry. For example, in the works of the famous travel poets, such as the *waka* (Japanese song) poet Saigyō […] and the *renga* (linked verse) master

[36] Qtd. in Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 68. There are many translations of Bashō's *Oi no kobumi* (*The Records of a Travel-worn Satchel*, *The Knapsack Book*, *Knapsack Notebook*), but only Qiu uses the term *zōka*.

[37] Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 68.

[38] Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 69.

[39] Donald Keene, "Bashō's Journey of 1684," *Asia Major* 7 (November 1959): 132.

[40] Keene, "Bashō's Journey" 133.

[41] Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 62.

> Sōgi […], the lament over the passing of seasons, the impermanence of life, and the chaos of the age are recurrent themes.[42]

Bashō aspired to develop a new type of travel diary in haikai style, not constricted by the established standards of writing/composition. He placed emphasis on the "fresh" perspective of seeing the landscape, and on breaking free from the limitation of writing poetry at famous sites in classical poetry (*utamakura*or *meisho*).[43] His tone is transcendental but often humorous and, as I have previously noted, the predominant mood is that of wonder.[44] In a *haibun* ("Viewing the Lovely Scenery of our Host, Shua") composed by Bashō in 1688 on his *Oku no hosomichi* journey, the following passage is found:

> The singular peaks and grotesque mountains vie with each other in their shapes, forming a hair-like dark line and a glimpse of faint green as in a painting. The sounds of the water, the singing of birds and the green of pines and cedars are extremely exquisite—the beautiful scene demonstrates the perfection of artistry. How could one not feel joyous for the great accomplishment of *zōka*![45]

This joyful spirit is clearly associated with the *Zhuangzi* and the aesthetic attitude of seeing beauty in ordinary things, of discovering profound meaning in down-to-earth motifs. Zhuangzi's unrestrained imagination and deliberate reversal of conventional meaning must have been truly inspirational for Bashō as well.[46] Combining all these characteristics with the vernacular language of the haikai was how Bashō's innovative style was born. In *Oi no kobumi*, Bashō clearly speaks of a new way of approaching and writing about the landscape in a travel journal. The last sentence is an implicit reference to the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* and shows Bashō's iconoclastic attitude towards the classical diction and melancholy tone of earlier travel diaries:[47]

> views of the landscape at different places remained in my mind, and the touching impression of places, such as a house in the mountains, or an inn

[42] Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 62.
[43] Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 69.
[44] Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 64.
[45] Qtd. in Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 68.
[46] Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 63.
[47] Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 67.

> at a remote province, provided the seeds of words. I decided to jot down randomly the unforgettable places, with a hope that they might record traces of messages from the winds and clouds. My words are like the reckless words (*mōgo*) of the intoxicated, and therefore the audience should take them as no more than the rambling talk of the dreaming and should listen to them recklessly (*bōchō*).[48]

When reading Finlay and Cockburn's *The Road North*, both the book and the blog, one might notice that our Scottish Bashō and Sora are fully aware of the interplay of the Japanese and Chinese elements in Bashō's writing, and they playfully offer their reflections on Bashō's philosophy of writing and living. They often do that in a subtle, nondescriptive, poetic mode; and if their messages are at times somewhat hidden from the eyes of the reader/viewer, the adventure of unveiling or unfolding the mysteries and poetic riddles in *The Road North* makes it even more fascinating. At the same time, their texts (even photographs taken at each station) speak for themselves, just as in Bashō's *haibun*. The poetic complexity and numerous intertextual games are combined with the heart-opening simplicity which characterizes Bashō's style.

Finlay blogs quite explicitly on how Bashō's prose influences their consciousness of a given place: "Basho's terse prose modulated our awareness of each locale and, paradoxically, as we sought what was *there* and *here*, places seemed to become more themselves."[49] As if seeing the Scottish landscape through the lens of *Oku no hosomichi* opened their vision to the suchness of things. *the road north* book contains a number of poems which playfully discuss the suchness of things like glens, mountains or sea. The following poem, entitled "what is a journey?" opens Section 2 in the book where Finlay and Cockburn enter the first view of the foothills:

> a journey is the day
> it's impossible
> to stay
>
> the day *there*
> means more
> than *here*

48 Qtd. in Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 66.

49 Finlay, "Twin Peaks."

the day you
enter the view
from your window[50]

This impossibility of staying home seems to be an indirect reference to what Bashō writes about in Station 1: "I, drawn like blown cloud, couldn't stop dreaming of roaming […], yearning to go over the Shirakawa Barrier, possessed by the wanderlust."[51] Other poems, such as "what is a mountain?" in the Rocks and Peaks section, feature light-hearted but also mind-bending definitions tinged with Daoist colour in Zhuangzi's style: "a mountain is what you go a long way round to avoid / […] a mountain is what's not worth having / […] a mountain is where we realise how far short we fall of the birds."[52] "what is the sea" in the Westerly Shores section surprises with haiku-like brevity and kōan-like mystery: "if the sea knew what / it was it wouldn't / keep coming back."[53] But despite occasional kōan-like experiments of poetic form, intended to make the readers stop and spend more time with a given natural phenomenon, Finlay and Cockburn's writing seems to be very down to earth. For instance, the book features a three-page-long poem on the origin of the idea of *the north road*, and a list of things to pack: maps, blankets, miso packets, rice noodles, oatcakes, flasks and chocolate, compass, pens, pencils, hokku-labels for trees and paper wishes, a handful of CDs (Neil Young's *Jukebox*, Anne Briggs, Bob Dylan's "Highlands") and, last but not least, teas and whiskies. At the end of the book we find a list of fifty-three stations with the name of tea and whisky associated with a particular place and its mood or taste. Station 13 Shirakawa no Seki (Scottish Sma' Glen) is celebrated with Oriental Beauty–Bai Hao and ten years old Glenturret, and Station 14 Kagenuma (St Fillan's Hill) with Jasmin Hei Cha and eight years old Glenturret. The practice of drinking tea and whisky seems to be a joyful affirmation of the wonders of *zōka* in the spirit of Bashō.

Crossing the Shirakawa Barrier and Visiting Tōkyū at Sukagawa Station

In order to show how *Oku no Hosomichi* is creatively rewritten by Finlay and Cockburn in *the road north*, I decided to choose Station 13 (crossing the Shirakawa

50 Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn, *the north road* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2014) 12.

51 Matsuo Bashō, *Back Roads to Far Towns, Basho's Travel Journal*, trans. Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumo (Tokyo: Grossman Publishers, 1968) 15. For more information on how Finlay explores the motif of being drawn like a blown cloud, see his collaborative project entitled *wind blown clouds* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2005).

52 Finlay and Cockburn, *the north road* 62.

53 Finlay and Cockburn, *the north road* 80.

Barrier) and 14 (visiting Tōkyū at Sukagawa Station). Finlay and Cockburn reference one particular English translation: *Back Roads to Far Towns* by Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu (1968 and 2004[54]), which, unlike all others, is clearly divided into fifty-three stations of Bashō and Sora's journey North. The Bashō quotes that follow come from both editions. Corman and Susumu point out that Bashō's haiku-style is "terse and to the point, while being allusive to the degree of T'ang poetry," but they immediately add that they "have tried to maintain the feel of his [Bashō's] sometimes unusual syntax, the flow and economy of his language,"[55] which makes their work extraordinary. Interestingly, they provide two rather non-obvious comments regarding poems and paratextual[56] features: "the poems should help *clot* passages, so that one doesn't read too rapidly, and the brief marginal notations may also help break (brake) pace."[57]

> Station 13: Anticipation each day mounting towards the Shirakawa Barrier, but mind each day calmer clearer for continuing. Of course felt like "somehow sending word to Miyako." After all, one of the Three Barriers, and others of poetic bent left word of feeling behind. "Autumnal winds" hummed in my ears, "the maple" stood imagined, but leaf green branches haunting too. Against *unohana* white briars, as if pushing through snow. Here, according to Kiyosuke's brush, long ago a man put on the *kanmuri* and donned courtly costume.
>
> *unohana*
> adorning the head
> barrier regalia (Sora)[58]

Shirakawa Barrier is one of those famous places in classical Japanese poetry, which is why this short passage references ("borrows from") three *waka* poems: by Taira no Kanemori ("Somehow sending word…"), by a famous Heian monk-poet Nōin-Hōshi ("Autumnal winds"), and by Minamoto Yorimasa ("the maple"). The name of late Heian poet Kiyosuke refers to "Takeda Kuniyuki's donning court robes at the Barrier in deference to the poem by Nōin mentioned above."[59] All these poems

54 These are two different editions of *Back Roads to Far Towns*.

55 Bashō, *Back Roads to Far Towns* 45.

56 The 1968 edition of *Back Roads to Far Towns* also contains the illustrations by Hayakawa Ikutada, a contemporary *haiga* painter.

57 Bashō, *Back Roads to Far Towns* 11.

58 Bashō, *Back Roads to Far Towns* 45.

59 Bashō, *Back Roads to Far Towns* 163.

are about the experiences of crossing the Shirakawa Barrier.[60] The haiku about the white deutzia flowers, written by Sora, "gaily alludes to all that precedes."[61] Strangely, even though his prose is full of references to his predecessors – metaphorically seen as a background, or "distant landscape" – Bashō does not compose any poem. The next station provides reasons for his silence:

> Station 14: So we went over and crossed the Abukumagawa. […] At post town of Sukagawa visited one Tōkyū and were had to stay four or five days. First thing he did was ask: "Anything come of crossing the Shirakawa Barrier?" What with the aches of so much travelling, with body and mind exhausted, apart from being entranced simply by the scene and remembering other times, there wasn't much chance for thinking words of my own through.
>
> natural grace's
> beginning found in Oku's
> rice-planting singing
>
> is all that the crossing brought, was my reply, which, emended by a *waki* and *daisan*, led to composing three sequences.[62]

It seems that Bashō's poetic silence at Shirakawa results from physical and mental fatigue, but more importantly, from the sense of wonder triggered by the beauty of the scene combined with memories of the already mentioned poetry of the past. In a similar fashion, Bashō avoids writing a haiku on Matsushima (Station 27), even though, as he puts it, "it's been said that Matsushima has the most splendid scenery in our land of beauty;"[63] the landscape draws his "heart/mind" and leaves him "wordless."[64] According to Qiu, Bashō's silence is intended to demonstrate "the inadequacy of language in comparison with the creation of *zōka*," and, more importantly, it implies an aesthetic belief – emphasized in the *Zhuangzi* – that

60 For more information on the poems and their translation, see David Landis Barnhill, *Bashō's Journey. The Literary Prose of Matsuo Bashō* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005) 158-59.

61 Bashō, *Back Roads* 163.

62 Matsuo Bashō, *Back Roads to Far Towns, Basho's Travel Journal*, trans. Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumo (Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 2004) 25.

63 Barnhill, *Bashō's Journey* 117.

64 Bashō, *Back Roads to Far Towns* (Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 2004) 36.

"overtones of silence are more powerful than insufficient language."[65] Corman and Susumu put it in simpler terms: "what Bashō doesn't say moves at least as much as what he does. One knows his silences go deeper than reasons."[66]

Having crossed the Shirakawa Barrier, Bashō composes his haiku, by opening his ears to the "landscape of the ordinary" and by discovering the extraordinary beauty in the simple rice-planting song sung by the villagers. In the first edition of the book, Corman and Susumu's translation differs from the one quoted above, and it looks as follows:

> *fūryū*'s
> beginning Oku's
> rice-planting song[67]

In the notes section, they add that *fūryū* – the untranslatable term which literally means "wind-fluent" – left in its original form is "reflective of Japanese taste for the natural and immediate and humble as well as evanescent, as graceful."[68] This mind-opening haiku praising and "borrowing from" the natural beauty of a simple song becomes the beginning of the first of three poetic sequences (*renga*) composed by Bashō, Sora, and other *renga* participants.

In *The Road North* blog post, Finlay shares the following insight: "Folded in with the *Oku*, they [places] opened to synchronicity – when Basho saw geese and we needed to see geese then there were geese, calling over the bay of ób Ghabhsabhaig."[69] As if seeing things in their suchness – triggered by the interplay of their *here* with Bashō's *there* – brought Finlay and Cockburn closer to experiencing oneness that transcends notions of time and space. As if they experienced another meaning of "landscape that lends" or "landscape in interaction." But does it mean that their version of Shirakawa is similar to that of Bashō and Sora?

65 Qiu, "Reinventing the Landscape" 69.

66 Corman and Susumu, "Introduction," *Back Roads* 8.

67 Bashō, *Back Roads* 47.

68 Bashō, *Back Roads* 163. Apart from Corman and Susumu, only Makoto Ueda uses the term *fūryū*: "the beginning / of *fūryū* – a rice-planting song / in the far north." David Landis Barnhill foregrounds the beginning of all art ("the beginning of all art – / in the deep north / a rice-planting song), while Nobuyuki Yuasa opts for the beginning of poetry ("the first poetic venture / I came across – / The rice-planting songs /of the far north").

69 Finlay, "Twin Peaks."

As Finlay and Cockburn leave their Edo (Edinburgh), their idea is that the Shirakawa Barrier corresponds to the Lowland–Highland divide: somewhere in Perthshire. But the blog post which follows clearly suggests that the Scottish Shirakawa will have many counterparts:

> […] after looking here and there for the right pair for Shirakawa, Ken realized that the crossing into this other state of mind lay *everywhere* about us, reflected in the still Mirror Pond of Dalchonzie Power Station, sheltered under the cool ash of Invergeldie, and inscribed in the beech trees of Newton at the entrance to the Sma' Glen.[70]

The first long poem in Our Shirakawa section of *the north road* book provides even more geographical and mental affinities:

> People ask us
> the way to Shirakawa Barrier
> and we reply: take it easy,
> the Shirakawa Barrier
> is everywhere
> […]
> lovers' beeches'
> gully-carved hearts and initials
> are Shirakawa,
> an intimacy
> between settlement
> and elsewhere
> […]
> any clicked latch
> of a gate that
> makes a space
> for things to come
> is Shirakawa[71]

In this Scottish counterpart of Sora's poem, we clearly see that Shirakawa is more of a state of mind than a geographic reality. Interestingly, in the blog post version, Cockburn's poem is preceded by one of Gary Snyder's translations from *Cold*

70 Finlay, "Twin Peaks."

71 Finlay and Cockburn, *the north road* 31-32.

Mountain Poems, so we might say that apart from providing a historical reference to, or "borrowing from," one of the most renowned pieces of Daoist and Ch'an nature poetry by Han Shan, Cockburn initiates a double intertextual game on the nature of non-dualist travelling and interbeing:

> "Men ask me the way to Cold Mountain
> Cold Mountain: there's no through trail
> In summer, ice doesn't melt
> The rising sun blurs in swirling fog.
> How did I make it?
> My heart's not the same as yours.
> If your heart was like mine
> You'd get it and be right here."[72]

Cold Mountain is the poet's name (Han Shan) and a place of his meditative dwelling. His invitation to "get it and be right here" is all about transcending the notion of space and entering the space "within." In a similar fashion, Cockburn adds a comment below his poem saying that "Edo and Oku are states of mind too."[73] Instead of searching for Shirakawa signposts, Finlay and Cockburn send a very clear message that each place can be their (our) Shirakawa Barrier. Finlay's blog post features a story surrounding a photo named "14 foxgloves marking the oku," a pink "signpost" as it were: "When the winding path through the bracken opened, we each chose our way, it seemed, by a different wildflower. My oku was marked by foxgloves, nodding at the edge of the scree field. Ken's by English stonecrop (*Sedum anglicum*), a stranger – like Fillan – fitting right in to the vein of the rock."[74] Both floral scenes might be viewed as instances of "landscape that lends" or "landscape in interaction."

The theme of "borrowing landscapes" is explored much further in "Ken's Dunira" in Our Shirakawa section of the book where one finds various references to Ian Hamilton Finlay as "avant gardener." The poem provides information on the white cottage, Drum na Keil, at Dunira, where Finlay the elder lived after the war. The walk to the cottage is Ken's Shirakawa, and the images he focuses on are subtle allusions to Little Sparta and how it references this place: "I'm almost back when / a circle of tall trees / draws me into what's left / of a formal garden // fluted

72 Alec Finlay, "Saint Fillan's Hill," *The Road North*, 16 August 2010, http://the-road-north.blogspot.com/2010/08/14-saint-fillans-hill.html.

73 Finlay, "Saint Fillan's Hill."

74 Finlay, "Saint Fillan's Hill."

columns / picturesquely / toppled into deep- / ening grasses […] here there is no / canopy of sail / to break the horizon / of *Mare Nostrum*."[75] The notions of *here* and *there* become more and more ambiguous and liminal; the "feel" of a given space and the game of associative thinking/sensing is what really matters.

In a blog post, Finlay writes that their *Shirakawa* is Saint Fillan's Hill, and their *Tokyu* is Margaret Bennett, the Perthshire-based singer, storyteller, writer, and folklorist:

> As this was the hill we climbed together, Ken kindly agreed it could be our No. 1 Shirakawa. We'd already decided that, like Basho, we would mark the crossing in song […]. His moment of transition, beyond the capital, through Shirakawa and on into the hills, is our moment to hear an old Gaelic song.[76]

They ask Margaret Bennett to choose the most appropriate, and she makes a recording of "Gradh Geal Mo Chridh," "Dear love of my heart, I would plough with you and reap." In order to re-enact the experience of hearing the rice-planting song in Bashō's diary, they play Bennett's recording of the Gaelic song at the top of St Fillan's Hill. There is, as Smith notes, "a sense of circular time to this pairing of Scottish and Japanese songs,"[77] but it might also be seen as an attempt at going beyond time and space, towards the space within (our Shirakawa) where the sense of wonder makes us (writers and readers) one with nature.

Conclusion

Bashō famously said: "[D]o not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old, seek what they sought."[78] Finlay and Cockburn choose various mind-bending techniques of searching for something that attracts them in Bashō's equally innovative writing. The practice of shared writing, shared consciousness, or "Bashoing," brings insights not only to them but also to their readers, making them more and more curious about the wondrous nature of simple, ordinary things, and this is something Bashō would be very happy about. After all, by following *zōka* and returning to *zōka* we come back to the core of our being.

[75] Finlay and Cockburn, *the north road* 37-38.

[76] Finlay, "Saint Fillan's Hill."

[77] Smith, "Basho Borne" 225.

[78] Qtd. in David Schiller, *The Little Zen Companion* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1994) 107.

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