

Japanese Poetry and Nature in Borson's Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida

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**Shoshannah Ganz,**

**"Japanese Poetry and Nature in Borson's *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida*"**

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**Abstract:** In her article "Japanese Poetry and Nature in Borson's *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida*" Shoshannah Ganz shows how the limited focus of research on Roo Borson oversimplifies the poetry and ignores the tradition that Borson is aligning her work with both in form and content: classical Chinese and Japanese poetry and their perspectives on nature. Further, Ganz explores the ways in which Borson's poetry overcomes intuitively the binaries of East/West, human/non-human, and the further binaries within the human/non-human created through representational language. Ganz contextualizes Borson's work within the master/disciple lineage of Chinese and Japanese tradition and explores how Borson incorporates the resonances of Japanese place names and talismanic uses of nature and seasonal words into an Anglophone North American context to show similarly Japanese perspectives on impermanence and the place of humans as product and producer of nature.

## Shoshannah GANZ

### Japanese Poetry and Nature in Borson's *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida*

Roo (Ruth Elizabeth) Borson's tenth poetry collection, *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida* published in 2004, won two of the highest honors in Canadian literature—the Governor General's Award in 2005 and the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2006. Mike Quinn discusses Borson's poetry as characterized by the "elegiac" and "nostalgic" and Borson likewise describes herself as living through seven years of mourning with the deaths of her father and mother. Eric Ormsby, in a more dismissive vein, calls her "pre-eminently a poet of the present instant" (123) and Nick Giese takes issue with "Borson find[ing] a possibility of consciousness without human reflection" (293). All of these critiques take a specialized and specific look at aspects of Borson's work, but none of them take any notice of the Asian and, specifically, Japanese ecocritical influence and resonances in her work. The *Canadian Encyclopedia* concludes its entry on Borson by noting that in 2000 Borson co-published a book of what she called "free variations" on Classical Chinese poetry, *Introduction to the Introduction of Wang Wei* (Pain Not Bread) and that her *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida* "is similarly influenced by her interest in Asian poetry and nature" ("Roo Borson" <<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ruth-elizabeth-borson/>>). However, in spite of the clear influences of Chinese Classical poetry and the Japanese poetic tradition and views on nature via Bashō on *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida*, critics, to date, explored Borson's work exclusively through the Western critical tradition, critiqued her work through the lens of Christian scholarship, and discussed Borson's poetic relationship to nature as part of California and Canada connections and influences.

In the study at hand I discuss how this focus oversimplifies Borson's poetry and ignores the tradition with which Borson is aligning her work—in both form and content—with Classical Chinese and Japanese poetry and the perspectives on nature which govern these bodies of poetry. This neglect has led to significant misreadings of Borson's work and to a general lack of critical rigor in the scant criticism that does exist for this important poet. I am particularly interested in looking at ways in which Borson overcomes intuitively the binaries of East/West, human/non-human, and the further binaries within the human/non-human created through representational language. Thus I contextualize Borson's work within the master/disciple lineage of Chinese and Japanese tradition and then show how Borson follows the literary and spiritual path espoused by Bashō as the "the way of poetry." I also explore the importance of Bashō's example and teachings about the "the road as home" pilgrimage path. Further, I inquire into how Borson incorporates Japanese place names and seasonal words into a North American (U.S. and Canada) context. This approach emphasizes the Japanese perspectives on place and season by showing that human beings are both participants in forming nature and are themselves a part of nature. This also reveals the impermanence of the natural world and human's place as part of this realm. Borson investigates the seasons and seasonal words in Canadian gardens and cities and attempts to overcome the limits of language in ways articulated by David Abram when he writes that "as nonhuman animals, plants, and even 'animate' rivers once spoke to our tribal ancestors, so the 'inert' letters on the page now speak to us! This is a form of animism that we take for granted, but it is animism nonetheless—as mysterious—as a talking stone" (*The Spell* 131). Borson says of her own experience of the natural world and language in an interview with Graham Barron that "the physical senses present their evidence before any words arise: most experience is, for me, non-verbal, apart from the experience of words themselves" (Borson qtd. in Barron 237). As Borson says in *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida*, "To learn from an old master might be better— / but there's only the brimming grass, / the young river" (31).

The "brimming grass" of the quotation above serves as a natural starting point for any discussion of Borson with the subtle and slightly adapted allusion to Bashō's central image of "grass" and the corresponding motif of the transience of human life. Bashō writes that "Summer grasses— / after great soldier's / imperial dreams" (Bashō qtd. in Hamill, *Bashō's Ghost* 13) and according to Sam Hamill "Bashō's 'summer grasses' haiku carried within it the sort of resonance he sought. The grasses with their plethora of associations, the ghosts of Hidehira, Yoritomo, and Yoshitsuen, an allusion drawn from a famous noh drama—Bashō framed his verse with rich and complex historical, literary, and philosophical associations. The poem implies that the grasses are all that remains, a Buddhist parallel to the Bible's 'dust to dust,' the accompanying prose drawing the reader into a vast network of allusion" (Hamill, *Bashō's Ghost* 13). That the grass is "brimming" in Borson's poem seems to suggest, along with the "young river," a newness to life and potentiality, rather than the historical and Bashōian association with the passing quality of life in the "complex historical, literary, and philosophical[ly]" rich image of the "grass" (Hamill, *Bashō's Ghost* 13). Moreover, while Borson acknowledges that "an

old master might be better" and, thus, takes note of the historical importance of the "master/disciple lineage structure" (Shirane, *Traces* 31), Borson also invokes new life in the "brimming grass" of nature as her teacher for this work.

Just as the poets of Japanese antiquity and Bashō sought models for poetry in the works of Chinese poets, I begin by outlining the influence of the Chinese poetry. During the medieval Japanese period, Heian monks travelled to China and brought back with them the teachings of Buddhism and the Chinese poetry that would be both adopted and adapted to form the uniquely Japanese versions of Buddhism and poetry. The educated poets of the Heian period wrote in Chinese and it was not until Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* in the early eleventh century that Japanese was accepted as a language of literature and not merely dismissed as the unlettered language of women. As such, from its very origin Japanese poetry was connected with the Chinese language and the spiritual teachings of Buddhism from India by way of China. Japanese poetry was, therefore, based on the models of Chinese masters (see Morris 11-30). Borson, like Bashō and the Japanese poets before him, studies the Chinese poets and pays tribute to them in her collaborative work with Kim Maltman and Andy Patton. Pain Not Bread's *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei* is the resulting poetic collaboration based on loose associations and translations of the work of Wang Wei, Li Bai, Du Fu, and other Late Tang Chinese poets. It is more than merely incidental that this book of Chinese tribute comes before her work paying homage to Bashō. Like Bashō, Borson looks to the Chinese and their poetry, language, and style of writing before turning to Bashō as master poet/teacher. Borson does not, however, forget her place as foreign to the lineage of Chinese and Japanese poetry and clearly gives the Chinese perspective on Westerners as an epigraph to the work: "'They dress in grass, eat turnips, and despise their kings': written on the back of an eighteenth-century Chinese ink screen depicting westerners" (epigraph to *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei* [Pain Not Bread]). The reference to grass in this context—rather than simply connecting Borson to Bashō's system of poetic allusion—sets the Westerner apart by invoking the manner in which historical Chinese writing posits differences between the Easterner and Westerner.

Notably, each of the four sections of the book has a title page with only Chinese characters running vertically down the page. There is no translation on these pages, although the table of contents gives the English translation in quotation marks. The *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei* defines the project and explains how the poetry is influenced by and in homage to the Chinese masters. Borson and her collaborators do not note the author of each poem but, rather, allow the collective to speak as one voice. This is interesting, given the stereotype of Western individualism and ego that is often contrasted with the understanding that Asian identity and ethos are collective. Significantly, too, Borson and her company of writers define their project along traditional Chinese poetic lines in their introduction: "the use and reuse of traditional Chinese poetry, with its deep-rooted doctrine of allusion. That writers created versions of classical texts, less in a process of imitation than of rewriting. Conceived as a means of honoring the masters, it was achieved through appropriation and allusion—although what appropriation and allusion there are is not necessarily, in the eyes of the critic, originality" (Pain Not Bread 15).

In the short introductory paragraph to Pain Not Bread's *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei*, Borson's collective gives a brief definition of the tenets of Chinese poetry, which is adopted by the Japanese and, thus, also extends to the model employed for Japanese poetry and for Borson's collection *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida*. Borson uses allusion and forestalls the Western critics' insistence on originality by underlining the reason for the rewriting as the Chinese means of honoring the master poets before them. She adds to this explanation by noting how this type of writing is done via "A paysage made new by the specific" (Pain Not Bread 15). Borson continues that "While the poetic project is personalized by use, the system derives / from the forest and hills," (15) that is, from nature. The final note on poetic process includes "From willed activity: bafflement, a human voice" (15). Although *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei* will not be the central focus of this article, it is worthwhile, nonetheless, to read a couple of the poems closely and to take note of a few of the significant motifs of this collection, including discussions of nature and Buddhism that are central to this text. I limit my discussion to the first of the four sub-sections of this book translated from the Chinese as "blue river quickly night flows" (Contents 7 [unnumbered]).

The first poem of the collection, "Cooling Off (An Introduction to Wang Wei)," begins with four italicized lines emphasizing that these are an English translation of lines from a similar poem by Wang Wei. The four lines read, "Clear waters drift through a huge mouth, / through the immensity of a tall wind. / White fish swimming in a void. / I look only in front of me" (16). Following a space, the poem continues with "The first line begins" (16), and what follows is a detailed narration of the movement of nature. Line twelve refers directly again to the poem, "In this poem" and, then, to the reader of the

poem, "we should be able to read the sign" (16). In Chinese poetry, the reader takes an active role in filling in all the details that the poet has left unsaid. However, in this case, the poet(s) is/are filling in the narration for the reader and obviously speaking to the Western reader who may not be familiar with this expectation of active readership. Then the poets give their analysis of the poem in relation to nature: "Nature is active. / The prince, however, in those mountains, / is still. What can he do" (16)? The first poem, therefore, calls attention immediately to the nature/human paradox, but the action of the poem is from nature. The human element has no agency, and the poem questions the reader in relation to the prince's stillness and lack of agency: "What can he do" (16)? The next two lines discuss the poems of Wang Wei more generally—"In some poems / Wang Wei addresses the world" (16)—and the lines that follow are a seven-line italicized example of this type of poetry. What is interesting here is not just the poets' explanation of how to read Chinese poetry but also the poets' insertion of critique and discussion of the poem and poems more generally.

The second poem of the collection, "Uneventful Life (An Introduction to Wang Wei)," refers directly to the life of Wang Wei as it has been "often written" (17). The first line of the poem describes Wang Wei's life as "uneventful"; however, the importance of his life is connected to his role as "a catalyst for emotions in the vein," presumably here of the reader or perhaps of those he had contact with, and as a mirror for his times, "that he was one thing in which the world shone— / all those tempting mirrors" (17). The poets next invoke a Buddhist-influenced discussion of the passage of time and the movement or agency of time; they also insert time into and beyond "the last line." Thus they make poetry and language subject to time, writing "In the passage of time beyond the last line, / he continues his own exile" (17). Poetry in the West triumphs the poet's attempt to gain immortality and to live on, in fact, beyond the passage of time. However, what continues "beyond the last line" here is, instead, exile; tellingly, too, the sextet ends with "paralysis to the dead city." The alternating actions, images, and concepts that precede "the dead city" are "laughter and crying" and "rope and freedom" (17). However, while these opposites negate the significance of the polarities (regardless of what occurs in the interlude, whether it be bondage or freedom, joy or sorrow), the poem, the time, and the sextet end with paralysis, and, thus, lack of agency, and death. The stanza that follows suggests a rebirth but through a kind of Buddhist awakening from the demands and constructs of time: "Now is the moment in which / the past of the future is awakening" (17). However, what follows is, again, the equalizing effect of the same outcome, regardless of the temporal and temporary state. Here, "Knowledge leads to illumination or freedom or grief," and the finite universe has completed its journey where nature, by its own agency, has reached its "destinations" pictured in the following sentiment: "The sun, the stars have all gone / to their destinations" (17). The line "The sun, the stars have all gone" seems to predict the end of the universe and all life and the burning out or supernova of the sun that gives the planet earth life, and, thus, a final and finite end is here invoked. The destination is not given, but all that remains is time: "Only time goes on" (17). Here it is time itself that is the observer and thinker and that is, therefore, sentient, "contemplating bodies to their meaningful end" (17): thus, it is all objects composed of matter that are subject to the passage of time and, finally, finitude. In the natural setting, it is again nature that has agency and people and nature-made-art that are immersed and immobilized by time and the passage of time symbolized by "Autumn." Within the Japanese tradition and in Borson's Japanese-inspired collection, autumn comes to symbolize the ephemerality of life and how quickly life passes. The poet in this poem is also immersed in and subject to witnessing nature's movements. Nature, too, is immersed in the passage of time like the poet, but, unlike the poet, nature is not immobilized by the "knowledge" and "uncertainty" invoked in the final quatrain before the Wang Wei translation. The poet observes "the moon waver" and "the firmament ripple," and the poet is therefore "alone" in his incapacity for action: "I am alone and can do everything, / yet I am not willing. / I too am immersed" (17).

The collective of poets, Pain Not Bread, translates the title of the first section of *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei* into English as "blue river quickly night flows" drawing attention to two of the important and seemingly contradictory or opposing motifs of this section. First, the "river" (36, 38, 40, 41) corresponds to images such as "streams" (16, 24, 25, 33), "swimming" (16), "ripples" (17), "immersed" (17), "rain" (18, 24, 25, 32, 34), "waves" (25, 34), "pool" (31) and "wash" (35) and thus creates a "water" (18, 25, 31, 35) motif. The "river" and "flows" and "quickly"—taken together—become more than simply a description of the landscape: they become a symbol for the passing quality of all life, the movement of the non-human, the lack of stasis in nature, and the passage of time. The briefness of life is emphasized by how "quickly" the river "flows." Even the night is part of the movement of nature, since it is the night that flows and/or moves quickly too and in turn emphasizes again the briefness of life. The river and the reflection in the river of the human and non-human and the events situated in time also relate the water to the repeated image of the "mirror" (17, 30, 38).

The poet becomes a mirror for the times (17), but the mirror is also related to "false appearances" and the Buddhist reflection on the passing show of life or the illusion of the world where "Everything is a backdrop" (30) or "A lost reality" (30); the mirror and what it reflects becomes a symbol of "those lost, distant signs of transcendence" (30) thus losing even the reflection of those things that once had symbolic value, such as "rings" (30).

The poem concludes with "Perhaps death illuminates all things directly" (31), but this sentiment is undercut by the final image of a painting where the "painted grapes [are] so real birds peck at them" (31). The water and mirror motifs and associated reflections on both the brevity of life and falseness of appearances are contrasted with the repetition of images that stand for longevity, permanence, and stability. The central image of the mountain (16, 27, 32, 33) and the corresponding moon (16, 18, 19) are associated with enlightenment and the autumn season. The mountain is a place of transcendence and retreat from the world for contemplation and meditation: for example, in "Cooling Off," "After the empty mountain / comes the evening, the full moon / is transparent" (16). Unlike the falseness of reflections, the moon is transparent and rises over the mountain. The moon's association with autumn links the moon to images of the passing quality of life and ephemerality, but the moon is also associated with a symbol of longevity—the "pine" (16, 18, 19)—and, according to "Water Chestnut Stems," is also paired with "the much-analyzed poem" (18). The moon and pines are similarly paired with birds, such as "egrets" (18) and "cranes" (19), and references to fire, such as "crackles" (16), "Stones burn" (16), "burn" (18), "radiating heat" (19) and "cooling bricks" (19). Thus again, the contrast to the reflection in the mirror or water is the power of the moon to "burn" against the "pines" (18) and become not only transparent but through burning to destroy and reveal the quickly extinguished and passing quality of all life. The flames can also prove false when "clouds of flames that look/ like mountains rise" (18); here, the verse is suggestive again of the passing and changing appearances of all forms and questions, even the permanence of the perception of mountains.

While many of these images correspond to nature and find equivalents in the Japanese employment of these words in the haika, they also correspond to Buddhist precepts about nature and human and non-human life. The "Illusory things of the phenomenal world" (24) and the "passing of the natural world" (24) are both connected to the problems of language and the poet. In "The Rise and Fall of Human Breath," the narrator makes the following claims: "I described the landscape, but no one understood" (25); "It was my failure not to make unambiguous the real personal drama, / my self-immersion in a torn literary history" (25); and "if the poem seems transparent, / at another level it is an artifact" (25). Taking these reflections into consideration, the reader recognizes that the poet is struggling with how nature relates to not only literature and poetry but also the problem of the poem as an artifact. The poem itself seems connected to the symbol of the moon, which is "transparent" and, therefore, not simply a reflection in the river or the mirror. Thus, the poem is "a mountain range of symbols" and is loosely associated with permanence, but "all interpretation / causes life to spin endlessly on the Great Wheel" (25).

The poem continues mid-way in the next stanza with "seeing, an illusion. The transcendental is read, / the phenomena of the natural world escape" and thus it seems that poetry itself, or the act of reading poetry, is part of the illusion. Later in this section, "the artifact is a backdrop, / everything an artifact," both the "letter and the mirror" become "lost, distant signs of a transcendence vanished," and "Only objects without referents, out of context" (30). What persists is the connection between Buddhism and nature: "No sutras, no hymns, no doctrine, / but nature with its personal implications" and while Buddha "has become convention ... Nonetheless, he persists" (33). "As Buddha Did" begins with "Words fail as Buddha did" (35). The poet continues, "By now we can decode the familiar, / and separate from the human world" (35) and thus realize the essential oneness or coexistence of all things. In other words, the Buddha nature extends to language, but "What if the words Wang Wei now are only a temple?" (39) or, in the Buddhist tradition "Wang Wei is an inn" and therefore a symbol of the temporality of language and life. Both the inn and language function as way stations on a pilgrimage and thus as signs of impermanence. In this case, although "we say we are beyond language. / Words are like fishtraps" (41) and hold the human back from transcendence. In overcoming the "trap" of language "even the Buddha fails," but "persists" (33). The contradictions in this long first section are part of the struggle inherent in finding language to allow nature the agency to speak or not speak on its own terms. After all, according to the fishtrap metaphor, words are always a trap. The contradictions within the poems defy interpretation and mock the attempts to find permanence, but in the frustrating of the reader, they also gesture to the impossibility of language overcoming the problems of illusion and signify the inability of language to achieve transcendence. Nature is thus bound and trapped by the very language that attempts to set it free. This difficult meditation on language, nature, Buddhism, and time does not turn away from the contradictions and problems of language and

representation but accepts the impossibility and failure of the very act of signification through language. What persists and repeats are the religious and linguistic attempts of the Chinese poets and later Japanese poets to overcome the illusion and trap of language. Borson also grapples with the inherent contradictions of the pursuit of transcendence through language. *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei* shows the Chinese influence on Borson and highlights the similarly Chinese influence on the Japanese poets. *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei* anticipates Borson's views on nature, Buddhism, the poet/self in relation to nature, and the philosophical problems of language that she elaborates upon, or develops, in *Short Journey Upriver to Ōishida*. *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei* also anticipates the importance of the master/teacher lineage in the relationship of the poets to the master poet/teacher Wang Wei and to the late Tang dynasty poets and shows Borson's pilgrimage following Bashō in *Short Journey Upriver to Ōishida* to be an extension of this existing tradition of the master poet/teacher relationship.

In a similar way to the manner in which Chinese poets embrace inherent contradictions, Japanese poets accept the co-existence of a number of religious perspectives embodied in the Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian practices. With the adoption and adaption of Buddhism in the Japanese context, and its attendant view of the passing quality of life and the ephemerality of existence, the Japanese also continued to practice the Shinto veneration and celebration of nature and the Confucian values of filial piety. To the Western mind, this is troubling. Contradictions in systems of belief that make opposing claims on an individual must be resolved. For example, to the Westerner, the co-existence of Buddhism's mandate to eschew the passing pleasures of the world and Shintoism's celebration of nature is confusing. The Western tradition of psychology, trumping all religious belief systems while at the same time incorporating a Christian ethos would state unequivocally that "a house divided cannot stand." However, the Japanese poetic tradition, with its balance of Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian values, accepts the paradoxical in the simultaneous acceptance of the demands of all three. According to Hamill's discussion of Bashō, "Confucian faith [believes] in the power of the right word rightly used." However, this very attitude is implicitly paradoxical to begin with: the Zen poet believes the real experience of poetry lies somewhere beyond the words themselves but, like a good Confucian, also understands simultaneously that only the perfect word perfectly placed has the power to reveal the authentic experience of the poem" (Hamill, "Translator's xv-xvi). Hamill's discussion of the "right word rightly used" in Bashō's work echoes the discussions of language and what lies beyond language in Borson's *Introduction to the Introduction to Wang Wei*. This discussion also anticipates the extension of Confucian values beyond the "experience of poetry" to the values of filial piety and Shinto practices of honoring ancestors. Filial piety becomes a meeting point between religious traditions as well as a point of intersection in the work of both Bashō and Borson.

As I claim previously, Borson describes herself as living through seven years of mourning with the deaths of her father and mother. The elegiac qualities of *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida* are unmistakable and are part of a longer discussion of loss that is carried through a number of her poems and collections of poetry. Her 1989 collection, *Intent, Or the Weight of the World* contains two poems about the death of her father, "Poem Beginning with a Line By Anne Michaels" (*Night Walk* 66-67) and "After A Death" (*Night Walk* 67). However, it is the death of her mother (like the death of Bashō's mother) which becomes a central motif in *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida*. Borson's mother is intimately connected to Borson's concept of home and becomes the occasion for a discussion of home and finding home and for the road. Borson's *Personal History*, a memoir on her life and poetry, explores at length the concepts of home and the road and the deep connection between her mother as an ordinary home and her poetry. These are meditations that are also well suited to the language and writing of Bashō. In fact, the idea of the "road as home" is connected to Bashō's poetic practice. Borson writes of the connections between her mother and home in an extended discussion in *Personal History*: "But for me, so far, there's no place that is truly home, though I keep collecting places I love—they ache in bad weather like phantom limbs, and I wonder if I'll ever come to it, that singular place I long for without a single image of it. My mother lies next to me, sweetly breathing, the shape of her body so like mine. *There is my first home, where I have no memories, and it is dying*" (*Personal History* 66; emphasis in the original). This discussion extends forward to *Short Journey Upriver to Ōishida* where the poet returns to the first family home because of death and grief. The poet sets out on the road and pays tribute to the poet Bashō in employing this central travel motif. Hamill states in the introduction to *Travelogue of Weather-Beaten Bones* that "the first of [Bashō's] travel journals [is] notable for its undertone of pathos. His mother had died in Ueno the previous year" (Hamill, "Translator's" xxvii). That the occasion of Bashō's mother's death becomes the catalyst for both the journey and the travel journal is noteworthy. The death of Borson's mother is, likewise, what begins both the writing and the journey of *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida*. According to Hamill, Bashō's "Jour-

ney is a pilgrimage; it is a journey into the interior of the self as much as a travelogue, a vision quest that concludes in insight. But there is no conclusion. The journey itself is home" (Hamill, "Translator's" xx).

Borson writes of home in relation to temporality and transience: "home is just a place you started out, / the only place you still know how to think from, / so that that place is mated to this, / by necessity as well as choice, / though now you have to start again from here, / and it isn't home" (*Short Journey* 3). Here Borson connects the feeling of home to something beyond the geographical and human sense of place or origins; that is, she connects this feeling to a type of knowing she refers to as "prescience." She further connects this feeling to the nonhuman animal world of a pet: "and I was wakeful, / not only with the prescience of an astute pet that knows / where home is and that we're leaving, / but something more, or it felt like more" (*Short Journey* 5). But home, in the end, seems to come to stand for temporality as much as do any of the symbols for impermanence found in nature by the Japanese. In "River," Borson writes, "wicked swans, honking and scooting, / in the haze of after-work traffic / the whole city, it seems, setting sail for home—/ home, finally, a place where we are temporarily / responsible for something" (13). Both sailing and the river are symbols for movement, and home links only "temporarily" to "something" left unnamed and unimportant. Further, the poem begins with a negation of the self and the present—"I'm never, now, not" (13). The narrator's further description of "walking by that river" provides a further pairing with movement. Surely there is a lament, too, for the swans "honking and scooting." The image of the bird in the context of cars and traffic is out of place and possibly slows the movement towards home. The poet thus deems the swans "wicked" in this context.

Borson reflects on temporality and transience in the contemporary context in a way that mirrors Bashō's poetry, but with altered images. Likewise, the seasons and symbols associated with the seasons in Borson's poetry draw attention to the alterations in place and time from the ancient Japanese to the contemporary Canadian context. Spring is the most written about season in Japanese poetry. The symbol of that season is the blossoms of the *sakura* or cherry; however, autumn is the season Borson chooses to discuss the cherry trees. This reflects Borson's knowledge of the Japanese associations with the famous cherry trees of Yoshino because it further emphasizes their displacement as a result of the hemisphere. In the first poem of the section entitled "Autumn," Borson writes that "Yoshino / cherries:/ autumn / in the underworld ... It was March, the beginning of autumn in the southern hemisphere, and we had just seen Yoshino cherries—the famous trees, that is—for the first time. Except this wasn't Yoshino, and they weren't blossoming. Instead the leaves were a dry late-summer green" (27). Borson describes "a clear sense of being in two places at once: two continents, two ideas, each a museum and a wilderness. Yoshino and Mt. Lofty" (27). The dialectic that Borson sets up between the different symbols of each hemisphere and the inversions of place and season are important to a reading of nature in this poem. Clearly, the climate and hemisphere for viewing the famous cherry trees are different. Thus, Borson transplants and estranges the images and associations but then brings them back together in the poetry when "for a moment [her] eyes close: light of another day, / crickets singing in the long daylight grass" (27). Here again in the invocation of grass in Bashō's poetry, Borson alludes to a Japanese symbol resonant with historical memory and the transience of life. Borson then brings them back together in the poetry when "for a moment [her] eyes close: light of another day, / crickets singing in the long daylight grass" (27).

In conclusion, the subtlety with which Borson makes reference to the poetic precedent and Japanese symbolic usage of place names and nature with seasonal symbols is itself reminiscent of the writings of Bashō. While at times Borson makes direct reference to Bashō's poetry, at other times she merely suggests the influence by the attention to places, seasons, and particular incidents on the road. Bashō likewise makes reference to important literary ancestors in passing when he writes of a woman in the *Travelogue of Weather-Beaten Bones* who "looked like she'd stepped right out of *Genji*" (34). Later, in *The Knapsack Notebook*, Bashō mentions Suma Beach, which again would remind the reader of *Genji* and exile and loneliness (71) invoking, as his words do, the place name but without any direct reference to *Genji* (71). Shortly after the naming of Suma Beach, Bashō makes reference to the place name of Akashi and discusses the associated feeling of loneliness and an ancient writer (implied, but not stated is *Genji*): "An ancient writer suggested autumn as the best time to visit. I found a deep sense of solitary loneliness in the landscape" (73). The final lines of the Yoshino cherries poem invokes through memory, "light of another day / crickets sing ... in the long daylight grass" (27). The grass is a symbol of rebirth, memory, and in this poem connects the Japanese and Canadian places by allowing the co-existence of "two places at once" (27). And in *Short Journey Upriver Toward Ōishida* Borson writes in "Summer River" about "A type of banana tree / that shares Bashō's name" (61) and of a "bay tree [that] smells of my old home" (62). These symbolic pairings of trees with memories of



home become later in the same poem an incantatory wish for "another world— / one made of grass, / cicadas, / the crying in the grass" (62). "Summer River" again uses the symbol of the grass to invoke a plea for a different world, "one made of grass" and possibly reincarnation: as the narrator muses, "A bug flies past. Flies past, / and I understand / what it is to be born. / Next life" (63). Thus, the poet is taught through the associations in language and images from both Canada and Japan. Ultimately, however, it is by being "The daydream river" and being taught the eternal through nature that the poet overcomes the "moment" of doubt "when [she] thought [she] had no other life" (63).

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