

Matsuo Basho

**THE FIRST SOFT
SNOW**

Basho, Matsuo. (1644-1694).

The name Basho (banana tree) is a sobriquet he adopted around 1681 after moving into a hut with a banana tree alongside. He was called Kinsaku in childhood and Matsuo Munefusa in his later days.

Basho's father was a low-ranking samurai from the Iga Province. To be a samurai, Basho serviced for the local lord Todo Yoshitada (Sengin). Since Yoshitada was fond of writing haikai, Basho began writing poetry under the name Sobo.

During the years, Basho made many travels through Japan, and one of the most famous went to the north, where he wrote *Oku No Hosomichi* (1694). On his last trip, he died in Osaka, and his last haiku indicates that he was still


thinking of traveling and writing poetry
as he lay dying:

*Fallen sick on a journey,
In dreams I run wildly
Over a withered moor.*

At the time of his death, Basho had
more than 2000 students.

An old pond!
A frog jumps in -
The sound of water.

The first soft snow!
Enough to bend the leaves
Of the jonquil low.



In the cicada's cry
No sign can foretell
How soon it must die.

No one travels
Along this way but I,
This autumn evening.

In all the rains of May
there is one thing not hidden -
the bridge at Seta Bay.

The years first day
thoughts and loneliness;
the autumn dusk is here.

Clouds appear
and bring to men a chance to rest
from looking at the moon.

Harvest moon:
around the pond I wander
and the night is gone.

Poverty's child -
he starts to grind the rice,
and gazes at the moon.

No blossoms and no moon,
and he is drinking sake
all alone!

Won't you come and see
loneliness? Just one leaf
from the kiri tree.

Temple bells die out.
The fragrant blossoms remain.
A perfect evening!

