Mori Atsushi (1912–1992), novelist and literary essayist, published in 1988 a lyrical study of Matsuo Bashō’s masterpiece, *Oku no hosomichi*, entitled *Ware mo mata, Oku no hosomichi* (And Me Too, Once Again, Into *Oku no hosomichi*).¹ The monograph can be seen as part of the 300th year memorial celebration of *Oku no hosomichi* described in the introduction to this volume. As Mori suggests in his opening chapter, his study represents a personal reaction to the public expectation that he, the “guest traveler” and “commentator” in a 1984 five-part NHK docudrama on the *Oku no hosomichi*, must also be an expert on the literary work and could thus be asked to perform during the many 1988–1989 *Oku no hosomichi* memorial events. Mori tells us, however, that he had had no special relationship with Bashō or with the *Oku no hosomichi*. He allows, nevertheless, that while he is not a poet and had not spent his life in travel, his method of work might be seen as a possible link with the earlier poet. When at work, it may indeed seem that he, like Bashō, was “off on a journey.” Both were creative artists and both brought into being new literary worlds—worlds, as Mori sees them, into which they might lure their readers. Mori’s readers know too that he, like Bashō, adopted special relationships to the spaces that are a part of his literary worlds, and that a crucial one of these areas for both was Gassan (Moon Mountain) and the two smaller peaks it overlooks, Mount Yudono and Mount Haguro, or the “Three Sacred Mountains” in Yamagata Prefecture. Although these “links” to Bashō may account in part for...
why Mori was chosen to host the *Oku no hosomichi* documentary, it did not necessarily follow, he tells us, that he might thus be expected to have and to publicly present his own interpretation of Bashò’s famous travel journal. The public was expecting just this, however, so Mori went back to the *Oku no hosomichi* and to his memories of time spent in key spots along its route to work out the interpretation he was supposed to have.

Mori assumed that if he set himself the task of returning to, carefully rereading, and then picking up his pen to write about the *Oku no hosomichi*, then the creative result would be the personal “understanding” that the city and prefectural officials and a popular audience were expecting. He trusted that the process of writing would reveal to him what he thought and felt, and that in the act of writing he would discover both his subject and its relationship to himself. This assumption helps explain some of the nuances in the title Mori chose for his book: *Ware mo mata, Oku no hosomichi* (And Me Too, Once Again, Into the *Oku no hosomichi*). The title identifies the work as autobiographical. A chapter, at least, of his own “story” would emerge in the act of reliving and writing about a chapter (or chapters—Bashò’s journey and his composition of the *Oku no hosomichi*) in the life of another artist. Having focused, in his well-known novel *Gassan*, on the Dewa Sanzan or sacred mountains area that represents a highlight of Bashò’s journey and of the *Oku no hosomichi*, and having lived in and written about Sakata, Fukuura, and other towns along the Japan Sea coast traversed by Bashò and Sora, when Mori set out with the NHK crew in 1984 from Tokyo’s Fukagawa or the site of the Bashò-an, he was literally going back once again—*mata*. Likewise, when he sat down with his memories of this and other personal experiences, with the *Oku no hosomichi* text, with Sora’s record of the journey, and with modern commentaries on the texts, he was returning a third, fourth, or any number of times to the *Oku no hosomichi* and to his own past. As Mori and other scholars have pointed out, Bashò’s journey and his poetic journal might also be seen as a return to those sacred spaces that had “housed” earlier travelers, the tragic warrior, Yoshitsune (1159–1189), or Bashò’s favorite poet Saigyö (1118–1190), whose death five hundred years earlier corresponded roughly with the year of Bashò’s journey.

My reasons for examining a work in Japanese that may only be available in East Asian libraries are twofold. One is to try to reveal the imaginative way in which the work, in its theory, structure, and methods of presentation, enlivens Bashò’s masterpiece and becomes part of its circular, concentric lines of respect for great wanderers/poets of the