

—from *Anthology of Japanese Literature* edited by Donald Keene

From "Prose Poem on the Unreal Dwelling [*Genjûan no fu*]" by Matsuo Bashô

My body, now close to fifty years of age, has become an old tree that bears bitter peaches, a snail which has lost its shell, a bagworm separated from its bag; it drifts with the winds and clouds that know no destination. Morning and night I have eaten traveler's fare, and have held out for alms a pilgrim's wallet. On my last journey [Wallace: the one described in *Oku no hosomichi*] my face was burnt by the sun of Matsushima, and I wetted my sleeve at the holy mountain. I longed to go as far as that shore where the puffins cry and the Thousand Islands of the Ainu can be seen in the distance, but my companion drew me back, telling how dangerous so long a journey would be with my sickness. I yielded. Then I bruised my heels along the rough coast of the northern sea, where each step in the sand dunes is painful. This year I roamed by the shores of the lake in quest of a place to stay, a single stalk of reed where the floating nest of the grebe might be borne to rest by the current. This is my Unreal Dwelling [Wallace: *genjûan* 幻住庵], and it stands by the mountain called Kokubu. An ancient shrine is near, which so purifies my senses that I feel cleansed of the dust of the world. This abandoned thatched hut was where the uncle of the warrior Sukanuma retreated from the world. He went away some eight years ago; his dwelling remains behind at these crossroads of unreality. Indeed it is true that all the delusions of the senses are summed up in the one word *unreality*, and there is no way to forget even for a moment change and its swiftness.



Links (in Japanese):

<http://www.pref.shiga.jp/minwa/01/01-13.html>

<http://www.home-nagahama.org/rekishi/basho/genjyuan/genjyuan.htm>