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Título: Narrow Road To The Deep North And Other Travel Sketches, The.

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Precio: \$182.00

Editorial:

Año: 1966

Tema:

Edición: 1ª

Sinopsis

ISBN: 9780140441857

In his perfectly crafted haiku poems, Basho described the natural world with great simplicity and delicacy of feeling. When he composed "The Narrow Road to the Deep North" he was a serious student of Zen Buddhism setting off on a series of travels designed to strip away the trappings of the material world and bring spiritual enlightenment. He wrote of the seasons changing, of the smell of the rain, the brightness of the moon and the beauty of the waterfall, through which he sensed the mysteries of the universe. These travel writings not only chronicle Basho's perilous journeys through Japan, but they also capture his vision of eternity in the transient world around him.

Matsuo Basho (1644-94) was the greatest of the Japanese haiku poets. The vitality and flexibility his genius gave to the strict 17-syllable form brought haiku to a level of immaculate perfection. In later life Basho turned to Zen Buddhism and the travel sketches in this volume reflect his attempts to cast off earthly attachments and reach out to spiritual fulfillment. The sketches are written in the haibun style--a linking of verse and prose. The title piece, in particular, reveals Basho striving to discover a vision of eternity in the transient world around him and is his personal evocation of the mysteries of the universe.