CHAPTER TWO

BUSON AND HIS AUDIENCE:
ANXIETY AND TRANSCENDENCE

Yosa Buson’s role as a leader of the Revival movement makes him a good subject for a study of the processes that fostered it. Buson found the Revival movement both a source of support and unease, one that he both depended on and resisted. I will start my investigation of Buson’s position within the movement with a brief overview of the events of his life, and then turn to an exploration of his relationship with his audience. I conclude this discussion with an examination of an document that gives insight into the ways that Buson managed his anxiety about this relationship: the preface to the *Shundei verse anthology*, a text that shows the close linkages between Chinese poetic theory and the Revival movement.

Buson was born in 1716 in Kema, now a suburb of Osaka. Around 1735, when he was 20 years old, he moved to Edo. In Edo, he first took up the study of haikai with Edo-school poet Uchida Senzan 内田沾山 (d. 1758) and soon afterward joining the school of Hayano Hajin 早野巴人 (1676–1742), a follower of Bashō disciples Takarai Kikaku and Hattori Ransetsu. Hajin called his school Yahantei. After Hajin died in 1742, Buson spent the next decade or so traveling around northeastern Japan. His base was the home of Yahantei disciple Isaoka Gantō 砂岡雁宕 (d. 1773) in Shimōsa Province, modern Ibaraki Prefecture, but he also made visits to other poets and art collectors all around the northeast. He once undertook a longer trip to retrace the route of Bashō’s 1689 journey that was the basis for the haikai travel journal *Narrow road to the interior* (Oku no hosomichi 奥の細道). He also made occasional visits to Edo and probably attended lectures on Chinese poetry at the school of Ogyū Sorai disciple Hattori Nankaku. The main focus of his activities during this period was to teach himself painting and sell what work he could, and Hajin’s disciples provided him with a ready-made set of contacts on whom he could rely.1

1 The information in this section comes from several sources: Tanaka Yoshinobu, *Yosa Buson* (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1996); Yamashita Kazumi, *Giyū no haijin Yosa Buson*; (Shintensha, 1986); Fujita Shinichi, *Buson*; and Shimizu Takayuki, *Buson no geijutsu*. 
Buson left Shimōsa around 1751, and returned to western Japan. He spent several years in Kyoto trying to establish his painting business. Hajin had spent time in Kyoto and had many disciples there also, so Buson was not without friends. He first took up with senior Yahantei disciple Mochizuki Sōoku 望月宗屋 (1688–1766), a Kyoto poet who counted among his other students Miyake Shōzan and Chōmu, both of whom were to later play an important role in the Bashō Revival movement. However, Buson was not able to find a secure foothold in Kyoto immediately, and in 1754 he moved to Miyazu in Tango Province (modern Hyōgo Prefecture) in search of more amenable client prospects. He met with success as a painter here, but did not compose much haikai.

From 1757 onward Buson lived in Kyoto except for a three-year trip to Sanuki, Shikoku (1766–1769). His painting business grew steadily and he was very active as a haikai poet as well. He married a woman named Tomo; as he took the surname Yosa around this time, scholars have speculated that it may have been hers. Commissions began to grow in number, and several patrons even clubbed together to help him secure the materials to folding screens. (byōbu-e 屏風絵) for each of them. In 1766 Buson and several of his acquaintances—including painting clients from this folding-screen club and friends such as Tan Taigi and Kuroyanagi Shōha—formed Sankasha, a haikai study group whose purpose was to explore poetic topics that had fallen out of use in that time. Partly because of the success of Sankasha, Buson reopened the Yahantei school in 1770, formalizing his succession to his teacher Hajin’s title. The most prominent member of Yahantei was Takai Kitō, and together the two poets cooperated at various levels to make this group one of the most important centers of haikai activity in the Kamigata area.

Buson’s leadership of Yahantei was reluctant at best; he delayed its opening until he was fifty-five years old, and even then he was never particularly aggressive in promoting it. The Yahantei collections that he edited tended to be small and limited to the circle of his own acquaint- ance. The best example is Blossoms and birds collection (Kachō ben 花鳥篇, 1782) that includes not only the verses of Yahantei school members but also kabuki actors and courtesans. Buson left to Kitō the work of compiling the group’s major anthologies: Light of the snow (Sono yuki kage 其雪影, 1772), Dawn crow (Akegarasu あけ烏, 1773) and Sequel to dawn crow (Zoku akegarasu 続明烏, 1776). In contrast to Buson’s, Kitō’s Yahantei collections were large, comprehensive affairs that included works by large numbers of poets both inside and outside of Yahantei,