

The Voyage of Basho

Film project by Richard Dindo

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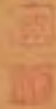
Synopsis

The film traces the last ten years of the life of the 17th century Japanese poet, Matsuo Basho, during his pilgrimages throughout Japan. Considered to be the “spiritual father” of Haiku, Basho is idolized by his fellow countrymen almost like a saint. During his wanderings, Basho records where he goes, whom he meets and what happens to him in his “Journals”, which are read in voice-over like a unifying thread throughout the film. His journals are a rare testimony and one of the first literary diaries in the history of literature. The film follows Basho in his travels over the four seasons. A monk will play the role of the poet, an “old wise man”, in the film. We see him meditating in monasteries and pagodas and writing, nearly everywhere he goes, in his journal, and his haikus, which he will sometimes read out loud. In both he speaks of himself and of the people he meets, of animals, flowers, rivers, the sea, the moon, the sun, of rain and snow, of time passing and of approaching death. Twice in his travels he is accompanied by disciples, because Basho was already well known in Japan as a poet during his lifetime and had followers, admirers and poets who regarded him as their master. The film will be poetical and philosophical, a profound reflection on Japan, on its culture, ceremonies and landscapes, on Zen Buddhist meditation, on the fragility and fugacity of life, on introspection and on nature not yet destroyed by industrialization. The film will be serene and contemplative, with images reflecting the phrases of Basho’s journals and his haikus, which dream of an ancient harmony and a lost paradise.



巴蘇翁未牙

卯鏡子立翁竹年十月三圖



Basho's Biography

Basho was born at Iga-Ueno, near Kyoto, in 1644; he died on 28 November 1694 in Osaka. His real name was Matsuo Kinsaku; Basho is a pseudonym and means "banana tree".

His father was a samurai. He died when his son was 12.

Basho started writing his first poems when he was around twenty.

Basho gave haiku its literary dimension; he transformed this three-line form of poetry drawn with a brush into a personal expression, into a description of the world. It was he who made of the fleeting, sometimes melancholy moments of life an essential element of Japanese art and culture.

When he was around forty, Basho started studying Zen meditation. His haikus and Zen philosophy come together and merge. With him, haiku becomes the poetical facet of the Zen experience.

Zen is the branch of Buddhism in which one's profound and unique identity is awakened when one understands that basically there is nothing, no meaning, no explanation to be given, and that in this nothing resides the poetic magic of the world.

According to Basho, an accomplished poem should impart the fleeting, the unchanging and the eternal at the same time. A haiku is an instant poem, a spark that flies from the present to eternity.

Basho published several collections of poetry in 1682.

His mother, to whom he was very attached, died in June 1683.

The idea then came to him that by traveling on foot or on horseback around the country he would be able to discover his true nature and poetical identity. Before starting his pilgrimages he first of all visits his mother's tomb to pay his respects and collect his thoughts.

He then leaves on the first of his four famous travels and wanderings across the Japanese countryside. He wears a monk's robe. He walks with a cane and wears a bamboo hat on his head and straw sandals on his feet.



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During his voyages, which lasted ten years and which he continued until his death, Basho wrote his travel journals, which have become a classic of Japanese literature.

He spends the night in inns or in the homes of individuals, but also in abandoned and dilapidated huts, and often simply on the ground beneath the open sky. Basho has no income; his disciples and admirers support him materially. He is their master, their teacher, their “spiritual father”.

Basho is often ill during his travels. Once he speaks of a “certain illness” that seems to have considerably weakened him.

Exhausted, with his health diminished by hunger and solitude, worn out by the physical effort of his long journeys across the country, which have prematurely aged him, he falls definitively ill and feels that his days are numbered.

Given shelter by his disciple Shayo, a merchant in Osaka, he must stay in bed. Feeling that the end is near, he stops eating, washes himself one last time and burns incense.

He writes a letter of goodbye to his older brother and composes a haiku.

Basho dies on 28 November 1694, at the age of only fifty.

In compliance with his last wishes, Basho is buried at the Gichu-Ji monastery, located south of Lake Biwa.

Basho was already famous during his lifetime. Today he is read in all the schools in the country and venerated as the greatest Japanese poet. Each year, many Japanese and foreign tourists visit the places where he lived. Haiku poetry has also greatly influenced many western poets, writers and painters of the 19th and 20th centuries.

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芭蕉句

玉波書



Introduction

Because Basho has been dead for centuries, as well as any eye witnesses, obviously, actors will play the roles, not professional actors, but monks for the most part and persons who have never been filmed. I make fictionalized documentary films. As for my preceding film, "Homo Faber" adapted from the novel by Max Frisch, my work will consist of making a fictionalized documentary. I intend to go even further in the process of narrowing down to the essential with this subject, which is more philosophical in nature and which touches upon the essential and simple questions of human life.

The monk-actor will travel by foot and sometimes on horseback on his wanderings throughout Japan. He will visit the places where Basho went and describes in his travel journals and in his haikus. At two different times he will be accompanied in his travels, once by his disciple Chiri, and once by his disciple Soro.

The film will show Basho in contemplation, with a great deal of attention, patience and introspection, of nature and of his surroundings. The task will be to reproduce, with the film's images, the contemplative dimension of Zen Buddhism through our monk. To show how he observes a cherry tree, a Buddha, clouds that roll by, the moon, the waves of the sea, etc.

Since our tale takes place in the 17th century, in the pristine countryside of the pre-industrial era, the film will effect a "return to nature" in Rousseau's terms. Like Rousseau, Basho has left the sound and the fury of the city to retreat into the empty, silent countryside where he finds himself alone most of the time in a meditative and dreamy solitude, facing nature, with which he somehow becomes one.

The point is to try to understand what a poet is, what brings someone to the act of writing, to feel the process engaged in bridging the gap from reality to writing. The relationship between the texts of the poet and the film's images is the essential premise of the film.

One might say that the film's images are contained in the poet's writings. We possess Basho's journals and his haikus, and based on these texts we will look for images that embody the poet's words and phrases. Alongside what Basho expresses in his writings as a poet, his texts will also recount, in a certain manner, the film's images and will give them their meaning, their necessity and their poetic logic.

The Script

Basho and his disciple Chiri are packing their bags and preparing the departure for their travels. They are in a region located northeast of Edo (today Tokyo), standing next to a small wood cabin near the Sudima River. In voice-over we hear Basho reading from his journal:

IN THE FIRST YEAR OF JOKY, 1684, IN AUTUMN, THE EIGHTH MOON, I LEFT MY HUMBLE HERMITAGE ON THE RIVERBANK. I SET OUT ON A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND LEAGUES, PACKING NO PROVISIONS. I LEFT MY RAMSHACKLE HUT BY THE RIVER. THE SOUND OF THE WIND FILLED THE COLD AIR.

The two men walk along the Sumida River. The disciple walks obsequiously behind his master. At a given moment, Basho stops to write a haiku in his yellow notebook, which the wind nearly carries off.

DETERMINED TO EXPOSE MYSELF
TO THE ELEMENTS
THE WIND PIERCES MY BODY

I DON'T HAVE A SWORD AT MY BELT, BUT A SMALL BAG ON MY SHOULDER AND I HOLD A STRING OF EIGHTEEN PRAYER BEADS IN MY HAND. I LOOK LIKE A MONK, BUT I AM A LAYMAN. BUT LIKE A MONK, MY HEAD IS SHAVEN.

The two pilgrims stop to rest. They are sitting side-by-side in silence. Never in the film do we hear the protagonists speak to each other. All is recounted via Basho's journals and haikus.

MY FAITHFUL TRAVELING COMPANION, CHIRI, INSPIRES CONFIDENCE AND MAKES SURE THAT EVERYTHING IS AS COMFORTABLE AS POSSIBLE. MY CONFIDANT FOR A VERY LONG TIME, HE INCARNATES THE CONFUCIAN IDEAL OF "ONE WHOSE WORDS AND THOUGHTS ARE SINCERE."

We are now months later. Basho and Chiri have traveled far and are now in southeast Japan, near Mount Fuji, Japan's famous, enigmatic volcano and pilgrimage site.



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FASCINATING
MOUNT FUJI
INVISIBLE IN THE MIST

The two travelers are still headed south, towards the region where Basho was born.

ROAD TO SURAGA
THE BLOSSOMS OF WILD ORANGE TREES
ALSO SMELL LIKE GREEN TEA

Here they are in another region. We see Basho taking notes. He wants to describe everything he sees. He writes for the pleasure, because he loves poetry, but also to not forget, to bear testimony, to remember the world.

ALL ALONG THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO NAGOYA, I WRITE POEMS.

The two pilgrims have taken a detour to see the South Sea; we find them walking along the bay of Isewan. They cross dunes and sands and draw nearer to the surf. Evening is nigh.

AS EVENING APPROACHES, ON THE BEACH.

THIS IS THE SOUTHERNMOST POINT. WALKING TOWARDS THE SEA, I HEARD SOMEONE SAY THAT IT IS HERE THAT MIGRATING EAGLES MAKE THEIR FIRST STOP.

The two men effectively see an eagle flying above them.

CATCHING SIGHT OF AN EAGLE
FILLS ME WITH JOY
AT CAPE IRAGO

Basho and Chiri stay a long time facing the surf. They contemplate its movement waiting for night to fall. They delight in the eternal movement of the waves, whose white caps scintillate in the growing darkness of the approaching evening. We see a flock of wild ducks flying overhead.

THE SEA DARKENS
THE CRIES OF WILD DUCKS
VAGUELY WHITE

THE SEA SINKS INTO THE NIGHT
THE CRIES OF DUCKS
VAGUELY WHITE

A few days later, at Ise-Yamada, on the other side of Cap Irago. the two men are going to visit the shrine where the great poet Saigyō lived in the 12th century. Bashō admires him greatly. Saigyō was his master and teacher of poetry. The two pilgrims especially want to find the remains of Saigyō's hermitage. Bashō writes in his journal:

IN ISE-YAMADA. THE REMAINS OF THE HERMITAGE OF THE VENERABLE SAIGYO ARE A HUNDRED METERS TO THE RIGHT OF THE INNER CHAPEL. WE TAKE A PATH BARELY VISIBLE MADE BY LUMBERJACKS TO GET THERE. THE WATER OF THE CLEAR SPRING THAT FELL DROP-BY-DROP BEFORE DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE CHANGED. THE WATER STILL FALLS ONE DROP AT A TIME TODAY.

Bashō in front of this spring that runs down a rock. We see the water run into his hands, which he drinks. Then again to wash his face. He says:

OH, IF ONLY I COULD
WITH THESE DROPS OF WATER
WASH AWAY THE DUST OF THIS WORLD

The two men approach an abandoned, half-destroyed hut.

THE HERMITAGE OF SAIGYO
PROBABLY HERE
IN THIS FLOWERING GARDEN

Bashō leads Chiri to the temple where they drink water from a fountain and briefly wash their hands to purify themselves, like all Buddhists do before entering a shrine.

AT NIGHTFALL I GO TO THE OUTER SHRINE TO SAY MY DEVOTIONS. IN THE UNCERTAIN SHADOW OF THE FIRST GATE, THE SACRED LANTERNS GLIMMER IN THE BACKGROUND. PIERCED BY THE ROARING WIND IN THE TOP OF THE PINES, I SUDDENLY FEEL DEEPLY MOVED.

IN THE SHRINE
COMPLETELY UNEXPECTED
THE IMAGE OF BUDDHA

The next morning, Bashō and Chiri go their separate ways. We witness their ceremonious goodbyes, each bowing several times before the other; then each leaves in a different direction. Alone, Bashō is crossing a forest. He comes across a woman washing potatoes at a creek.

IN THE VALLEY OF SAIGYO, AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN
RUNS A CREEK
A WOMAN IS WASHING TAROS (POTATOES)

As is often the case when he takes notes in his journal, he also composes a haiku.

A WOMAN WASHING TAROS (POTATOS)
IF SAIGYO WAS HERE
HE'D COMPOSE A POEM

Basho and Chiri separate. Basho now alone finds himself in a mountainous region, renowned for its cherry trees. At a given moment he stops to listen to the sounds of a temple bell ringing nearby. He is invaded by the silence and inside this silence he hears other bells from another temple. Our poet plunges into an attitude of profound meditation, becoming, in some way, one with nature, surrounded by the trees of the mountain forest, listening to the bells of the two temples we cannot see.

ALONE I GRADUALLY PUSH FARTHER INTO YOSHINO. IN THE HEART OF THE MOUNTAINS, WHITE CLOUDS GATHER AROUND THE PEAKS, THE MIST AND RAIN BLOCK THE VALLEY. THE SOUND OF A TEMPLE BELL, THEN THAT OF ANOTHER RESONATES TO THE VERY DEPTHS OF MY HEART. LONG AGO, MEN CAME TO THESE MOUNTAINS TO FORGET THE WORLD.

Basho walks with more and more difficulty; we can see that he is very tired, at the limit of his strength. He writes in his Journal:

MY LEGS GROW WEAKER AND WEAKER; MY STRENGTHLESS BODY FEELS LIKE IT'S BEING HELD BACK FROM BEHIND. I FEEL AS IF I WERE NO LONGER ADVANCING. COUNTLESS WORRIES OVERWHELM ME.

TOO MANY BELONGINGS TAKEN ON THE JOURNEY ENCUMBER ME. I ABANDON EVERYTHING EXCEPT WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THE NIGHT, A PAPER ROBE, A KIND OF CAPE, AN INK STAND, SOME BRUSHES, PAPER, MEDICATION AND A FOOD TIN. I WRAP UP THESE OBJECTS AND PUT THEM ON MY BACK.

WANTING TO SEE THE RED LEAVES OF THE CHERRY TREES AT THIS END OF AUTUMN, I PUSH DEEPLY INTO THE MOUNTS OF YOSHINO. MY FEET HURT IN MY SANDALS OF WOVEN STRAW, I STOP TO REST AWHILE, THEN USE MY CANE TO HELP ME.

He continues on his way, entering ever deeper into the mountains, totally covered in forest. Feeling tired, he sits on a fallen tree trunk to rest. He sees a spider spinning its web. He looks upon it fondly.

AH, A SPIDER!
WITH WHAT VOICE DOES IT SING
IN THE AUTUMN WIND?

Towards evening Basho finds an abandoned cabin. He makes a fire and lights an oil lamp that he finds there. We can hear the wind. A little later, sitting at the cabin doorway, drinking a few drops of sake, he contemplates the landscape in the waning light as night falls. He starts writing a new haiku. We can see that he is thoughtful; he gives the impression of being all alone in the world, as if the act of writing was the only remaining tie linking him to humankind. He has fallen into the profound solitude of one who writes.

SLEEP WHILE TRAVELING
AND UNDERSTAND MY HAIKUS
AUTUMN WIND

The next morning we see him eating breakfast.

THIS MORNING, FACING THE IMPERMANENCE OF IT ALL, I'M A MAN
EATING COOKED RICE.

Here we will show a few images of the Yoshino countryside that reflect the three days that Basho has spent here: flowers, mountains, the sky and the moon.

BENEATH THE FLOWERS OF YOSHINO, I STAY THREE DAYS. I STUDY
THE LANDSCAPE AT DAWN, AT DUSK. THE POIGNANT SCENE OF THE
DAWN MOON FILLS MY HEART AND SWELLS MY BREAST.

In the film we always remain in the world of pure poetry, of contemplating nature, feeling what Basho feels when he sees this beauty and when he thinks about times gone by. Thinking of the past makes him want to write to express his feelings. We are trying to understand how one becomes a poet. And also, what can be said with words, and what cannot. Because of its brevity, haiku poetry is also a poetry of silence.

Basho has started to go back down the mountain. We see him stop before a patch of violets and hear him say:

DESCENDING A MOUNTAIN PATH
THE INEFFABLE GRACE
OF VIOLETS

Not far from there, he sees a few plum trees bathed in the pristine light of the sun.

ATTRACTED BY THE FRAGRANCE OF THE PLUM TREES
THE SUN EMERGES
ON THE MOUNTAIN PATH

Basho is now close to Ueno, the village of his birth. He is on high ground and can see far away. He breathes deeply, invaded by emotion, caressed by the breeze.

COMING BACK TO MY HOMELAND
A HUNDRED LEAGUES BENEATH THE CLOUDS
TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE COOLNESS

Basho is in the garden of his parents' home. He looks a little lost and we see him look around uncertainly.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE LONG MOON, BACK IN MY NATIVE LAND, I FIND THE SEDGE IN THE GARDEN OF THE NORTH WING THAT THE FROST HAS DRIED SO THOROUGHLY THERE IS NO LONGER ANY TRACE OF MY MOTHER'S TOMB. EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED.

Basho is united with his older brother and his sister. They are sitting on the floor inside their parents' home. At a given moment, Basho's brother hands him an amulet bag. Basho looks inside. He records this moving instant in his Journal:

DURING MY STAY AT OTSU, IN THE SUMMER OF 1694, MY BROTHER WROTE TO ME TO COME BACK FOR MEMORIAL DAY. IN THE BEGINNING OF SEPTEMBER I RETURNED TO MY NATIVE LAND. THE TEMPLES OF MY BROTHER AND SISTER HAVE GRAYED, AND WRINKLES HAVE FORMED BETWEEN THEIR EYEBROWS. WE COULD ONLY SAY: "BE HAPPY TO STILL BE ALIVE!" NOTHING MORE. MY OLDER BROTHER, WHO HAD OPENED AN AMULET BAG SAID TO ME: "LOOK AT OUR MOTHER'S GRAY HAIR. YOU'RE EYEBROWS ARE ALSO TURNING GRAY." AND FOR A MINUTE WE SHED A FEW TEARS.

Deeply moved, Basho contemplates the few gray hairs of his mother that are kept in the small bag his brother handed him. Tears run down his face.

DO I TAKE THEM IN MY HAND
TO MELT IN MY HOT TEARS
LIKE THE FROST OF AUTUMN?

The two brothers and sister remain sitting together for a long time in deep silence, each lost in his/her thoughts and memories. On a chest of drawers opposite them is a black urn that probably contains their mother's ashes. They light, one after the other, a stick of incense and place it next to the urn.

Basho has taken up his pilgrimages again. He crosses a forest, still profoundly moved by the return to his native land and the encounter with his brother and sister. At a given moment, surprised and amused, he sees a frightened pheasant cross the path in front of him

OF MY FATHER AND MOTHER
THE MEMORY OVERCOMES ME
AT THE PHEASANT'S CRY

Evening is coming. Basho rests at the foot of a pine tree, lost deep in his thoughts and memories.

FROM THE TRIALS OF A LONG ROUTE, BODY AND SOUL EXHAUSTED,
THE SPIRIT SWEEP AWAY BY THE BEAUTY OF THE LANDSCAPE, UTTERLY
MOVED BY MEMORIES FROM THE PAST, I HAVE A HARD TIME COLLECTING
MY THOUGHTS.

He awaits the coming night looking up into the pine branches and listening to the songs of birds in the growing darkness.

Bash is lying on the ground. It looks like he is trying to stay awake a while longer to sustain his memories. The birds and crickets are silent now, only the sound of the wind can be heard. He writes this haiku:

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT
I LISTENED TO THE AUTUMN WIND
IN THE MOUNTAIN

The next morning, on waking, he again admires the branches of the pine above his head.

PINE BRANCHES
IN A SINGLE NIGHT
THIRTY YEARS HAVE GONE BY

WINTER

A few weeks have gone by. We see a series of landscapes between the end of autumn and the beginning of winter. By showing these landscapes at the beginning of each new season, the goal is to reveal the close tie between haiku poetry and the changing seasons, to show that haiku is the very poetry of the four seasons.

We see Basho in the countryside; the wind blows around him and moves the treetops and leaves. The weather has changed. It is clearly much colder. The leaves have lost their color. The sky is covered; the clouds are heavy, almost black.

AT THIS BEGINNING OF NOVEMBER, BENEATH A FLOATING SKY, I FEEL LIKE A LEAF IN THE WIND. MY BODY IS PROMISED TO AN UNFORSEEABLE DESTINY.

It starts to rain. Basho gets up and walks a few steps, offering himself to the rain. He receives a few drops on his face with a joyful smile on his lips, as if he were trying to drink this gift from heaven. Often in his reactions to the marvels of nature is an almost childlike gaiety. For Basho, each moment, each event, is unique and unforgettable.

TRAVELER
CALL ME THUS
FIRST DOWNPOUR OF WINTER

Children in the hamlet are having fun in the rain. Beneath his umbrella, Basho watches them with a fond air, one could say with admiration. The scene must bring back memories. Like any true poet, he has never really left childhood and he never stops thinking about this “lost paradise”, which he tries to find again with each step he takes during his endless pilgrimages taking him to the four corners of his country.

COME CHILDREN,
COME AND RUN
BENEATH THE HAIL!

He has a problem with his umbrella. He hurriedly looks for a way to repair it. Because he is obviously not a very practical man, his reparation makes us smile a little.

I MYSELF REPAIR THE PAPER OF MY UMBRELLA.

The rain intensifies and is tossed about by the wind. Basho is shaken about.

BURNING HAIL
MY OLD BODY
LIKE THE OLD LEAVES OF AN OAK

Basho is taken into someone's home. The master of the house receives him with respect and friendship. While he lights the fire, Basho dries his wet garments.

BECAUSE A WINTER DOWNPOUR STARTED TO FALL, I ASKED FOR HOSPITALITY FOR THE NIGHT AT A HOUSE WHERE THE MASTER WARMLY WELCOMED ME AND MADE A FIRE. I DRIED MY WET CLOTHES BY IT AND TOOK PLEASURE IN DRINKING SOME HOT WATER. I FELT MY EXHAUSTION DISSIPATE. AFTER THE SUN WENT DOWN I GOT READY TO WRITE SOMETHING BY THE LIGHT OF A LAMP. WHEN I TOOK UP MY BRUSH, HE EAGERLY ASKED ME TO "LEAVE HIM SOMETHING AS A SOUVENIR OF OUR ENCOUNTER, WHICH WILL PROBABLY NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN."

HERE IS WHAT I WROTE:

STAYING AT YOUR HOME
I PRESENT YOU WITH MY NAME
THANKS TO THE WINTER DOWNPOUR

During the night it started to snow. Basho watches the snowflakes fall through a window. The next morning the countryside is all white, covered with snow. Basho contemplates the landscape looking thoughtful, and filled with wonder too.

I SMOOTH THE WRINKLES OF MY PAPER COAT
AND GO OUT
TO ADMIRE THE SNOW

A few days later we follow Basho crossing a snowy landscape. He is traveling to his native land, where he plans to stay for the year's end.

He reaches Ueno, where he spent his childhood. This time he finds a real inn, small in size, for his lodgings. Next to the door of the inn he sees a cuckoo perched on a tree branch.

AT THE DOOR OF THE INN
ANNOUNCING YOUR COMING
A CUCKOO

Basho knocks on the door; a woman opens and lets him in, bowing several times and saying "hai, hai". A little later, we see Basho in the common room of the inn, which resembles a sitting room. He contemplates the flowers in a vase and at the same time writes a haiku, simply describing what he sees, like a painter before his model.

LET'S STAND AROUND THE VASE
TO ADMIRE THE FLOWERS OF THE
PRUNE TREE AND THE CAMELIA

He takes one of the faded flowers in his hand and looks at it thoughtfully. It reminds him of time passing and that he is getting older.

FADED FLOWERS
THEIR GRAINS
DROPS OF SADNESS

He retires to his room.

HOW PLEASANT TO SLEEP WHEN TRAVELING
AN INN AT THIS END OF THE YEAR
AND THE EVENING MOON

THE YEAR IS ENDING
I STILL WEAR MY BAMBOO HAT
AND MY STRAW SANDALS

HERE, I UNDO THE LACES OF MY STRAW SHOES, THERE, I THROW MY WALKING STICK. THIS IS HOW THE YEAR OF MY TRAVELS ENDS.

In his room, Basho drinks a lot of saké, more than usual. He appears to be feeling a little sad and alone. He dreams and writes haikus non-stop in the light of an oil lamp. He doesn't drink to get "drunk" really, nor from despair, but because drinking is part of his culture and the desire to feel muddled, to warm his blood to better feel his body, to let go, to become one with what surrounds him, to be a part of the reality that envelopes him in the cold of winter, to feel poetic sentiment that urges him to write.

He is standing in front of the window and sees a gourd blossom. We see his face close up, his "drunken" eyes, his muddled look, his moral fatigue and his body half asleep.

NIGHT FLOWERS OF FLASKS
AT THE WINDOW
MY DRUNKEN FACE

SPENDING THE LAST NIGHT OF THE YEAR IN MY HOMETOWN IN THE MOUNTAINS.

AH, THIS HOMELAND
AT THIS END OF YEAR, I CRY FOR
MY OMBILICAL CORD

He goes outside, stands in front of the door to the inn and contemplates the moon a long time, at the year's end, which he passes absolutely alone. One has the feeling that he is the only man on earth, the only poet, the only person who writes poems looking at the moon.

SNOW ON SNOW
AH, THIS LIGHT OF DECEMBER
THAT OF THE CLEAR MOON

MOON AND SNOW
MY ONLY COMPANIONS OF THE YEAR
END OF YEAR

THE YEAR IS GOING TO END
THE YEAR IS GOING TO END
ALREADY THE END OF THE YEAR

IT'S BY REPEATING THIS THAT I GET THROUGH THE END OF THE YEAR,
BY STAYING IN THE MOUNTAINS.

He then goes to bed and tries to sleep, but doesn't succeed. He gets up again and returns to the window to look at the scene outside on this winter night under the pallid light of the moon. His face, his eyes, his pensiveness. We can see that he is muddled by the saké, which makes him both joyful and melancholic during this night spent in his native land, obviously thinking about his dead parents, about his childhood now so far away but so close in his memory. He starts drinking again and really does become drunk.

AFTER HAVING DRUNK TOO MUCH SAKÉ
IMPOSSIBLE TO SLEEP
NIGHT OF SNOW

Basho is still in bed this first morning of the new year. He drifts between waking and sleeping, then wakes and gets up.

ON THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR, EXTENDING THE GOODBYES FOR THE
YEAR THAT WAS PASSING, I DRANK A LOT UNTIL MIDNIGHT, THEN SLEPT
THROUGH THE MORNING OF THE NEW YEAR.

FIRST DAY OF THE YEAR
I THINK ABOUT THE SOLITUDE
OF AUTUMN EVENINGS

This morning, after having got out of bed, he looks at himself a long time in a broken mirror while washing his face.

WHO
DO I LOOK LIKE
THIS MORNING OF THE NEW YEAR?

His face is close up; he makes a face, mocking himself a little.

YEAR AFTER YEAR
THE MONKEY SPORTS
HIS MONKEY MASK

He eats his breakfast at a wooden table in front of the inn.

MORNING OF SNOW
ALL ALONE I CHEW ON
SOME DRIED SALMON

Our poet tries to see a cuckoo hidden in the branches of a tree laden with snow.

AWAITING THE FIRST SONG
OF THE CUCKOO
AN ETERNITY

Because Basho is close to his native village, he has visitors at this start of the new year. We see three or four men arriving who enter the small inn where Basho has been residing for the past few days. He is, for them, the “new star” of haiku, which explains the veneration surrounding him. He now has disciples, young poets who follow his example in writing Japanese poetry.

MY OLD FRIENDS, CLOSE AND LESS CLOSE, MY DISCIPLES, SOME COME CALLING TO OFFER ME A POEM, OTHERS BRING AN ENVELOPE WITH MONEY TO BUY SOME STRAW SANDALS. STILL OTHERS COME SIMPLY OUT OF FRIENDSHIP. SOME BRING ME SAKÉ TO WISH ME BON VOYAGE. THE GOODBYES ARE NEVER-ENDING. IT LOOKS LIKE THE DEPARTURE OF SOMEONE IMPORTANT.

The visitors are saying their goodbyes to the “master of haiku”. Basho is troubled, touched, but also a bit amused. He apparently finds that his visitors exaggerate a little, because he is a humble, modest man.

Alone again at present, he makes ready for his departure, sorting his affairs.

Basho rents a horse so he doesn't have to cross the snow on foot. And also because he is still tired from lack of sleep from the night before, and from drinking too much saké. The sun shines in a blue sky. We see the shadow of the horseback rider and that of his horse in the frozen snow.

WINTER SUN
ON HORSEBACK
MY FROZEN SHADOW

The horse has a hard time advancing. Basho has gotten off the horse and continues on foot, pulling the horse behind him, which makes it even harder for him and exhausts him. No living soul can be seen in the surrounding countryside. Here and there we see bare trees, a few shrubs barely sticking above the snow.

AT AMATSU-NATWATE I FOLLOW A NARROW PATH THROUGH RICE
PADDIES, A FREEZING WIND FROM THE SEA BLOWS RIGHT THROUGH ME.

WINTER DESOLATION
IN THE WORLD OF A SINGLE COLOR
THE WAILING OF THE WIND

He is standing, looking around him, absorbing the snow-covered landscape that surrounds him like a shroud. Through the trees and bushes he sees a spring of running water. He approaches the spring and starts drinking.

DRINKING IN MY HANDS
THE ICY WATER OF THE SPRING
OH! MY ROTTEN TEETH!

Close by he sees some bamboo stalks that sway in the light breeze.

THE WINTER WIND
SEEKS REFUGE IN THE BAMBOO
AND CALMS DOWN

Some time later, it is now the month of February, Basho again visits the monastery and shrine at Ise, returning to the home of the poet Saigyō, whom he greatly admires.

AROUND THE END OF THE SECOND MONTH OF THE FIFTH YEAR OF JOKY, I
RETURN TO ISE. IT'S THE FIFTH TIME THAT I WALK THE GROUND AT THE
ENTRANCE TO THE SHRINE. BECAUSE I AM ONE YEAR OLDER, I FEEL ITS
MAJESTIC LIGHT AND ITS HOLINESS WITH EVEN GREATER FORCE,
REMINING ME WITH EMOTION THAT IT WAS PRECISELY HERE THAT
SAIYGO SHED TEARS AND EXPRESSED HIS GRATEFULNESS. I LAY MY FAN
ON THE GROUND AND BEND OVER TO PLACE MY FOREHEAD ON IT.



SPRING

As with each new season, here we see a series of images of spring, of nature in all its splendor. Basho is still in the region of his native land, surrounded by wooded mountains.

IT'S SPRING
A MOUNTAIN WITHOUT A NAME
IN THE LIGHT MIST

ALREADY SPRING
A LIGHT FOG FLOATS
ON THE NAMELESS MOUNTAINS

Basho is delighted and deeply happy in the midst of nature and with the arrival of spring, which fills him with joy. He is sitting in the shade of a cherry tree, surrounded by cherry blossoms in the midst of the blossoming trees, bees and butterflies. He writes one haiku after another.

FIRST CHERRY BLOSSOMS
THE IMPRESSION ON SEEING THEM
OF BEING ABLE TO LIVE SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS

IN FULL FLOWER
PEACH, CHERRY TREES
THE FIRST BLOSSOMS

AH SPRING, SPRING
HOW GRAND IS SPRING
AND SO ON

THE ENTIRE WORLD IN BLOOM
A PSALM TO BUDDHA
I SING

I RECALL
MANY MEMORIES
CHERRY TREE BLOSSOMS

THE SPRING NIGHT FALLS
WITH THE BLOSSOMING
OF THE CHERRY TREES

Basho stops for a long time to contemplate nature, which appears at each instant as a marvel to him, like a divine revelation.



TO ADMIRE THE FLOWERS
WALK FIVE OR SIX LEAGUES
EVERY DAY

With a fond smile on his face, Basho observes a butterfly that has just landed for an instant on a poppy.

WAKE UP, WAKE UP!
I WANT TO BECOME YOUR FRIEND,
SLEEPING BUTTERFLY!

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK ME HOW TO READ AND WRITE.

We now see a flashback, like a dream: a woman in a teahouse offers a piece of white silk to Basho. He recounts:

ONE DAY I STOPPED AT A TEAHOUSE WHERE A WOMAN NAMED
“BUTTERFLY” ASKED ME TO WRITE A POEM ABOUT HER NAME, AND GAVE
ME A PIECE OF WHITE SILK, ON WHICH I WROTE:

Basho, brush in hand, is writing a haiku. The woman looks on with joy and deference. In voice-over we hear the poet reciting what he has just written:

THE FRAGRANCE OF THE ORCHID
PERFUMES THE BUTTERFLY’S WINGS
LIKE INCENSE

Basho hands the piece of silk back to the beautiful stranger. She thanks him very gracefully, bowing her head two or three times before him as is the custom in Japan, a beautiful, timid smile on her lips.

Basho makes a general comment about his poetry and why and how he writes:

WHEN IT COMES TO ART, CREATIVE NATURE SHOULD BE FOLLOWED,
MAKING THE FOUR SEASONS ONE’S COMPANIONS. TO DRIVE OUT THE
BARBARIC, TO KEEP THE BEAST AWAY, ONE MUST TURN TO CREATIVE
NATURE, ALIGN ONESELF WITH CREATIVE NATURE.

On his way again, Basho follows a path through a rice paddy. He hears the song of the peasants working in the paddy, which delights him.

THE SONG OF PEASANTS IN THE RICE PADDIES
IN TOWN
ONE RECITES POEMS

Moved and cheered by the peasants' song, Basho writes this haiku in which he mentions "utaï", the part of a Nô play that is sung.

IF I HAD A BEAUTIFUL VOICE
I'D SING A UTAÏ NOW
FALL OF THE CHERRY TREE BLOSSOMS

He passes in front of an old woman sitting before her hut at the entrance to a village.

AN OLD WOMAN
HAPPY HUSKING RICE
CHRYSANTHEMUM FLOWERS

Not far from the woman are some children; she's probably their grandmother. The children are peeling melons and offer a slice to Basho, who sits down with them.

SOME CHILDREN
PEELING MELONS
THE MORNING GLORIES ARE IN FLOWER

ALL THESE BLOSSOMING FLOWERS
IN THE SPRING WIND
BURSTS OF LAUGHTER

A little later, we find Basho at the edge of a pond among the foliage. He observes a frog jumping into the water. We see him writing this haiku, which has become one of his most famous:

THE OLD POND
A LEAPING FROG
PLOP!

DAZZLING MOON
I CIRCLE THE POND
ALL NIGHT

Basho continues his solitary pilgrimage. He is now headed for the village of Nara. A strong wind is blowing. He sees a stork on the roof of a house. Filled with wonder, he watches this enigmatic bird.

ON THE ROAD TO NARA.

A STORK'S NEST
AMONG THE BLOSSOMS
DESPITE THE STRONG WIND

It's May 25th, Buddha's birthday. Our poet is in the landscaped park of the Nara temples, known for the many deer that roam about freely there. After having witnessed from afar the birth of a deer, he enters the largest wooden temple found on earth in which he finds an immense statue of Buddha; he kneels before it and prays.

IN NARA ON BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY, I SAY MY DEVOTIONS. I SEE A DOE
GIVING BIRTH, A PLEASANT THING ON THIS VERY DAY.

BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY
THE DAY A DOE
BRINGS HER LITTLE ONE INTO THE WORLD

THE SMELL OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS
IN NARA
OLD STATUES OF BUDDHA

CROSSING THE PROVINCE OF YAMATO, I SPENT THE NIGHT AT A
PEASANT'S HUT. THE OWNER OF THE LITTLE HOUSE WAS GENTLE AND
HOSPITABLE.

Either Bashô or the peasant or someone else is singing a utaï.

IN THE SHADOW OF FLOWERS
A UTAÏ
THIS DELICIOUS STAY

THE RAINY SEASON

It is now the end of May. Basho is at present at Iwanuma, in the northeast part of the country. We see a few landscapes and the countryside in heavy rain. Basho is at a hermitage where he watches the rain falling on the leaves, flowers and trees, making puddles and the paths more and more muddy.

THE VILLAGES WE CAN SEE ON OUR RIGHT, AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN, ARE CALLED MINOWA AND KASAJIMA. THE CHAPEL OF THE GODS OF THE ROAD AND "THE REED OF MEMORY" ARE STILL THERE. THAT'S WHAT I WAS TOLD.

THE ROADS WERE VERY BAD AND SINCE I WAS EXHAUSTED I CONTINUED ON MY WAY, CONTEMPLATING THESE PLACES FROM AFAR.

At the hermitage, Basho meets his neighbor, who helps the "old man" by carrying buckets of water for him and wood for his fire. One day the young man proposes to be Basho's servant and to accompany him a while on his journeys. Basho looks with a paternal eye on the young man, who later starts shaving his head and dressing like a monk to prepare for his travels with the poet.

A CERTAIN SORA STAYS NEAR MY HUT, WE VISIT EACH OTHER DAY AND NIGHT. FOR COOKING HE HELPS ME GET THE FIRE READY, CUTTING GRASSES. BY NATURE HE LIKES TO BE ALONE. LITTLE BY LITTLE, WE BECOME FRIENDS.

THE FIRST NAME OF SORA, OF THE KAWAÏ FAMILY, IS SOGORO. HE HELPS ME WITH THE WOOD AND WATER CHORES. HE IS DELIGHTED NOW, NOT ONLY AT THE THOUGHT OF CONTEMPLATING MATSUSHIMA AND KISAGATA WITH ME, BUT ALSO IN SHARING THE HARDSHIPS OF TRAVEL. AT DAWN ON THE DAY OF DEPARTURE, HE SHAVED HIS HEAD, DONNED A MONK'S FROCK THE COLOR OF INK AND SHORTENED HIS FIRST NAME TO SORA.

The two travelers embark on a rowboat on the Hitachi-Ton River. The boat glides softly through the water.



DARKNESS IS ALREADY APPROACHING WHEN WE ARRIVE AT THE BANKS OF THE TONEGAWA, AT A PLACED CALLED FUSA. BENEATH THE MOON IN A CLOUDLESS SKY, IN A BOAT, AS EVENING DRAWS NEAR, WE DESCEND TOWARDS KASHIMA.

The two travelers reach a landing stage. They fasten the boat beneath the wan light of a lantern. Soro helps his master reach the ground. They spend the night in a dilapidated hut.

The next day it rains non-stop.

THE RAIN STARTED TO FALL AT NOON WITHOUT STOPPING. IT'S NOT LIKELY THAT WE'LL BE ABLE TO SEE THE FULL MOON TONIGHT.

Late in the afternoon, when the rain has finally ceased, Basho and Soro leave to visit a monastery located not far from Kashima.

AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN, I LEARN THAT THE SENIOR MONK OF KOM-PON-JI, WHO HAS RETREATED FROM THE WORLD, HAS SETTLED HERE. I'M GOING TO ASK HIM TO TAKE US IN.

Towards evening, Basho crosses the garden of a temple that is part of the monastery. He stops before some pine trees, whose branches sway in the wind. He takes a long look around him. Everything is bathed in a sacred atmosphere of silence, of contemplation, of meditation.

THIS PLACE INFUSES ONE WITH A PROFOUND COMPREHENSION, WHISPERED THE POET. A FEELING OF PURITY INVADES MY HEART FOR SOME TIME.

Basho and Sora enter the temple and bow their heads in front of the figure of Buddha, joining their hands together in prayer. The scene is lit by candlelight.

A little later, Basho contemplates the moon for a long time. We see his face close up filled with emotion, his meditative, dreamlike look. He speaks in his "Journal" of his "true face", as if the moon defined it, as if the moon illuminated and revealed not only his personality, but also his poems. Like many other Japanese and Chinese poets, Basho is truly a "worshiper" of the moon. He sometimes watches it three nights in a row for hours on end.

SPENDING THE NIGHT IN THE TEMPLE
MY TRUE FACE
CONTEMPLATES THE MOON

THE SKY LIGHTENS A LITTLE AT DAWN. THE VENERABLE MONK RISES AND WAKES US. EVERYONE GOES OUTDOORS. THE CLEARNESS OF THE MOON, THE SOUND OF THE RAIN, THIS MOVING SCENE FILLS MY BREAST. I'M AT A LOSS FOR WORDS TO EXPRESS THIS.

THE SOLITARY FLAVOR
OF WHITE DEW
HOW TO FORGET IT?

THE SUN WAS ALREADY HIGH IN THE SKY. RENTING A BOAT, WE DRIFT TOWARDS MATSUSHIMA. AFTER A CROSSING OF A LITTLE MORE THAN TWO LEAGUES, WE LAND ON OJIMA BEACH.

MATSUSHIMA IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PLACES IN JAPAN. THE ELDERS SANG AND MY CONTEMPORARIES SING THE PRAISES OF THESE FAMOUS ISLANDS WITH COUNTLESS POEMS AND PAINTINGS. ABOUT THREE LEAGUES AROUND, THERE ARE MANY ISLANDS, WONDERS OF CREATION WHERE PINE TREES THRIVE IN ABUNDANCE. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO EXPRESS THE SPLENDOR AND MAGNIFICIENCE OF THIS PLACE.

MANY ISLANDS
BROKEN INTO A THOUSAND PIECES
AND THROWN INTO THE SUMMER SEA

The next day Basho visits a temple at Shiogama, near Matsushima.

EARLY IN THE MORNING I GO TO THE TEMPLE OF THE GOD OF SHIOGAMA. TO THE VERY END OF THE WORLD, TO THE CONFINES OF THIS SOILED EARTH, THE VIRTUE OF THE GODS IS MANIFEST; CERTAINLY IT IS PRECISELY THAT WHICH BELONGS TO OUR COUNTRY ALONE, AND IS SO WORTHY OF VENERATION. BEFORE THE SHRINE THERE IS AN ANTIQUE LANTERN. I READ THE INSCRIPTION FROM FIVE CENTURIS AGO; THE IMPRESSION IS MOVING AND STRANGE. SINCE THE ANCIENT TIMES MANY ARE THE ILLUSTRIOUS PLACES THAT HAVE INSPIRED THE POETS AND OF WHICH TRADITION SPEAKS.

Basho is walking in the temple garden. He sees a prune tree towards the back of the garden; he approaches the tree to contemplate it.



BEHIND THE HOUSE OF THE VIRGIN PRIESTESSES
ATTRACTED BY THE FLOWERS
OF THIS LONE PLUM TREE

IN THE FRAGRANCE OF PLUM FLOWERS
THE PAST
IS A DISTRESSING EXPRESSION

A few days later Basho and Soro find themselves at dusk on the seashore near Shiogama. They watch as two fishing boats return in the growing darkness by the light of the moon.

THE RAINY SKY OF THE FIFTH MOON HAS CLEARED A LITTLE. IN THE INDISTINCT CLEARNESS OF THE EVENING MOON, THE ISLAND OF MAGAKI LOOKS CLOSE BY. THE FISHERMEN'S BOATS FOLLOW ONE ANOTHER, ROWING IN UNISON, AND AT THE SOUND OF THEIR VOICES WHEN THEY SHARE THE FISH, I UNDERSTAND HOW ONE COULD HAVE WRITTEN: "THE HANDS THAT HAUL IN THE MOORING LINES, WHAT A CAPTIVATING SPECTACLE!" I AM DEEPLY MOVED.

The two travelers spend a few days in this fishing village. Basho uses the time to wash and dry his clothes. He falls ill. He appears to have a fever. Soro takes care of his master as best as he can. He is worried and full of solicitude. He gives Basho tea to drink and places a wet white towel on his forehead.

A few days later Basho is better. We see him at the shore contemplating the waves and walking on the beach. We hear him say:

RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS, WATER AND EARTH, I HAVE SEEN MANY LANDSCAPES. I HAVE FOLLOWED THE SHINGLES, TROD THE BEACHES, I GROPE ALONG IN THE DARK, TELLING MYSELF THAT AFTER ALL, THE RAIN HAS ITS CHARM TOO, THAT THE FAIR WEATHER FOLLOWING THE RAIN PROMISES DEEPER COLORS. I SLIP INTO A FISHERMAN'S HUT AND WAIT FOR THE RAIN TO STOP.

The two men have taken to the road and are traveling towards Ichikawa. We now see Basho in front of a stone stele reading the inscriptions attentively and for a long time.

THE STELE OF TSUBO IS AT TAKA CASTLE IN THE VILLAGE OF ICHIKAWA. ACCORDING TO THE DATE BELOW THE INSCRIPTION, THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED DURING THE REIGN OF THE EMPEROR SHOMO. SINCE THE

OLDEN TIMES MANY ARE THE ILLUSTRIOUS PLACES THAT HAVE INSPIRED THE POETS AND OF WHICH TRADITION SPEAKS. MANY NAMES OF SITES HAVE BEEN TRANSMITTED TO THE PRESENT DAY BECAUSE POETS SANG ABOUT THEM IN TIMES OF OLD. SINCE THEN, MOUNTAINS HAVE COLLAPSED, RIVERS HAVE CHANGED COURSE. HERE, IN CONTRAST, A THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD MONUMENT STANDS INDISPUTABLY BEFORE MY EYES.

Basho is still reading the inscriptions on the stele and taking notes in his journal so he won't forget. Extremely moved by this moment and this place, he is in tears. Knowledge of the past, the importance of culture as the source of memory and beauty inhabits him and fills his thoughts and his poetry.

READING IN THE HEART OF THE ELDERS IS ONE OF THE VIRTUES OF A PILGRIMAGE, DURING WHICH ONE SIMPLY FEELS JOY AT STILL BEING ALIVE. I FORGET THE RIGORS OF MY JOURNEY WHILE TEARS RUN DOWN MY FACE.

In the evening Basho hears an ancient lute, an instrument with four or five chords comparable to the mandolin. He tries to find out where the music is coming from. He finds the musician, sits opposite him and listens attentively, deeply moved.

TONIGHT A BLIND MONK PLAYED THE BIWA AND TOLD A TALE CALLED OKU-JORURI. I CANNOT BUT ADMIRE THE FACT THAT THIS OLD TRADITION HAS NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN IN SUCH A REMOTE PLACE.

The next day Basho and Sora leave for Yamagata, a small village at the foot of the mountain, where they visit a temple built high above, beneath a rocky outcrop.

IN THE TERRITORY OF YAMAGATA, THERE IS A MOUNTAIN MONASTERY CALLED RYŪSHAKU-JI. IT WAS FOUNDED BY THE GRAND MASTER JIKAKU. IT IS A PLACE MORE THAN ANY OTHER OF PROFOND SERENITY AND PEACE. AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN I REQUEST HOSPITALITY AT THE PILGRIM'S ABODE, THEN CLIMB TO THE EDIFICES ABOVE. THE MOUNTAIN IS COMPOSED OF BOULDERS PILED UPON SOLID ROCK, THE PINE AND CEDAR TREES ARE HEAVY WITH YEARS. THE EARTH AND STONE HAVE AN ANCIENT APPEARANCE, THE MOSS IS SOFT. THE DOORS OF THE BUILDING ERECTED ON THE BOULDERS WERE CLOSED AND NO SOUND COULD BE HEARD FROM WITHIN. I CIRCLED THE RIDGE AND HOISTED MYSELF ONTO

THE BOULDERS BEFORE THE SHRINES OF BUDDHA. THE LANDSCAPE WAS
SPLENDID AND I FELT TOTAL DETACHMENT INVADE MY HEART.

*The chirping of countless crickets fills the air. They inspire Basho to
write these three haikus:*

SUCH SILENCE HERE
AMONG THE STONES
THE CHIRPING OF CRICKETS

THE BELL RINGS
IN HARMONY
WITH THE LOCUSTS' SONG

THEY WILL SOON DIE
BUT SHOW NO SIGN
SONG OF LOCUSTS

*The next morning the two pilgrims leave for Iizuka, southwest of
Matsushima, located in a mountainous region in the interior of the
country. In the evening they bathe in a hot spring by torchlight. Later
they settle for the night in a dark and miserable cabin.*

TONIGHT WE'RE STAYING IN IZUKA. WE BATHED IN THE HOT SPRING,
THEN LEFT FOR THE INN, BUT FOR ACCOMMODATIONS I ONLY OBTAINED
A MISERABLE CABIN WITH A STRAW MATT THROWN ON THE BARE EARTH.
SINCE THERE WAS NO LAMP OF ANY KIND, I MADE MY BED BY THE GLOW
OF THE FIRE AND LAY DOWN.

*We see Basho fighting off mosquitos with comic gestures that make Soro
laugh. Basho tries to avoid the drops of water that fall into the space
where the two men are trying to sleep. The scene is funny, but perhaps
not voluntarily so on Basho's part. In addition Basho's recurrent illness
has returned.*

THE NIGHT FELL, THE THUNDER RUMBLED AND THE RAIN FELL IN
SQUALLS, INFILTRATING ABOVE THE SPOT WHERE I LAY. PESTERED BY
FLEAS AND MOSQUITOS,
IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO SLEEP. THEN MY OLD COMPLAINT AWAKENED AND
I THOUGHT
I WAS GOING TO FAINT.

Basho and Sora continue their route despite the rain. The countryside is deep in fog; the rain is incessant and accompanied by gusts of wind. Their bodies nearly disappear in the gray obscurity caused by the rain falling from a dark sky.

THE WIND AND RAIN RAGE FOR THREE FULL DAYS. WE REMAIN BLOCKED IN THE MOUNTAINS. WE DON'T HEAR THE CRY OF ANY BIRDS AND THE OBSCURITY IS SUCH BENEATH THE LUXURIANT TREES THAT IT FEELS LIKE WE'RE ADVANCING IN THE NIGHT. IN THE DRIZZLE, WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT WE'RE WALKING AMIDST THE CLOUDS.

Despite the difficulties caused by bad weather, the two travelers continue their route and now find themselves on the west coast, in the village of Sakata, on the seacoast. Basho has again fallen ill. His nights of torment continue; feverish, he barely sleeps, pain and weakness overcome him. A storm rages outside, we hear the thunder claps.

The two pilgrims leave the next morning. We see them walking as they leave the village of Sarkata.

REGRETING HAVING TO LEAVE SARKATA, I LINGER THERE SEVERAL DAYS MORE. WITH MY EYES I FOLLOW THE CLOUDS ON THE ROAD TO THE NORTH COUNTRY, AND FEELING SO FAR FROM HOME PIERCES MY HEART. FOR NINE DAYS, TORMENTED BY THE HEAT AND HUMIDITY, MY OLD COMPLAINT BOTHERED ME IMMEASURABLY AND I WROTE NOTHING.

The two men walk along the coast on paths and in the dunes on the seashore. The weather alternates between cloudy and a blue sky.

FAR AWAY IS THE GOAL OF MY TRAVELS AND NOW THIS ILLNESS MAKES IT RISKY. HOWEVER, HE WHO TRAVELS IN REMOTE REGIONS DEFIES LIFE AND ADMITS ITS IMPERMANENCE. IF I MUST DIE ON THE ROAD, IT'S THE WILL OF HEAVEN. THESE THOUGHTS GIVE MY SPIRIT SOME STRENGTH.

AND WITH A COURAGOUS STEP I WENT THROUGH THE BIG WOODEN GATE AT DATÉ.

Basho looks like he feels better. Our tireless travelers continue their pilgrimage. They are still following the west seacoast, headed south. Across from Sado Island they watch the powerful white-capped waves of the sea a long time in the light of the oncoming night. The weather is stormy. Basho scans the sky and the stars.

I CONTEMPLATE THE ISLAND OF SADO, AT IZUMO IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF ECHIGO.

THE RAGING SEA
REACHES SADO ISLAND
THE MILKY WAY

MY CLOTHES (KASA) ARE TORN BY THE RAIN ON OUR LONG VOYAGE. MY PAPER COAT IS TORN AND CRUMPLED BY THE WIND. I FEEL LIKE A POOR, DISPOSSESSED MAN.

The pilgrims have found a little inn. Basho looks tired, even exhausted, because he is still convalescing, after a hard day of travel.

He is lying down with his eyes open, by the light of an oil lamp. He appears to be dozing when he hears voices. Through an opening in the wall next to him he sees two young women behind some kind of blind. One is lying down, the other is sitting and opposite them, an old man is standing in the doorway.

BECAUSE I WAS EXHAUSTED, I DREW THE HEADREST TO ME AND LAY DOWN TO SLEEP WHEN I HEARD THE VOICES OF TWO YOUNG WOMEN, THE VOICE OF AN ELDERLY MAN MIXED WITH THEM. LISTENING, I UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WERE COURTESANS FROM NIGATA. THEY WERE GOING, THEY SAID, ON A PILGRIMAGE TO THE ISÉ SHRINE.

FISHERMEN'S DAUGHTERS, THEY LEAD AN UNCERTAIN LIFE. FALLEN INTO DISGRACE, SUBJECTED TO ENCOUNTERS WITH NO FUTURE, DAY AFTER DAY THEY SUFFER FROM A MISERABLE DESTINY. THEY ARE WRITING LETTERS TO THEIR FAMILIES, WHICH THE OLD MAN WILL DELIVER.

We see Basho write this haiku:

UNDER THIS SAME ROOF
COURTISANS ALSO SLEEP
BUSH CLOVER AND THE MOON

The next morning Sora has fallen ill too. He has stomach cramps. Basho gives him water to drink, and taps him on the back, trying to lift his spirits. A little later they go their separate ways. We see them at the intersection of two paths saying their goodbyes. Without words, discreetly, with modesty, in the Japanese manner. Then each continues



his route alone. Basho looks at Sora a moment or two later and waves to him until he is definitively lost from view. We feel a certain sadness in his gestures and facial expressions.

SORA, SEIZED WITH A PAIN IN HIS STOMACH, WENT BEFORE ME TO NAGASHIMA, IN THE COUNTRY OF ISÉ, A TOWN THAT IS DEAR TO HIM. SORROW OF THE ONE WHO LEAVES, REGRET OF THE ONE WHO STAYS BEHIND, LIKE TWO PLOVERS THAT SEPARATE AND ARE LOST IN THE SKY.

Basho returns to the inn where the two men had spent the night. He has decided to stay on a few days to rest, read and write. At night we see him lying on his matt, his eyes open. He's listening to the sounds outdoors.

THROUGHOUT THE DAY I LET MY DAYDREAMS LEAD ME WHERE THEY WILL AND WHEN NIGHT COMES, MY DREAMS ARE OF THE SAME KIND. IN TRUTH, I DREAMT ABOUT HIM. IT WAS WHAT ONE WOULD CALL AN OBSESSIONAL DREAM. BECAUSE THAT YOUNG MAN, WHO AVOWED DEEP AFFECTION FOR ME, FOLLOWED ME TO THE VERY VILLAGE OF MY BIRTH IN IGA. AT NIGHT HE SLEPT CLOSE BY AND SHARING THE FATIGUE OF MY TRAVELS, HE FOLLOWED ME LIKE A SHADOW FOR ONE HUNDRED DAYS. SOMETIMES CHEERFUL, SOMETIMES SAD, HIS AFFECTION PENETRATED DEEP INTO MY HEART AND THIS IS PROBABLY WHY I DREAMT OF HIM, BECAUSE I CANNOT FORGET HIM. I WOKE UP IN TEARS.

We see Basho taking notes by the light of an oil lamp:

TONIGHT I AM ALONE, AND SINCE I SLEPT DURING THE DAY, I CANNOT SLEEP. I REWORK THE NOTES THAT I JOTTED DOWN ON PAPER IN GENJUAN, AND WRITE THEM PROPERLY.

The next morning he is sitting in the courtyard of the inn; the leaves of a tree and a bush protect him from the drops of rain.

THE RAIN FALLS ALL MORNING LONG.

TODAY, THERE IS NO ONE TO ENTERTAIN ME. ALL DAY LONG I FIND PLEASURE IN MY SOLITUDE. I AMUSE MYSELF BY SCRAWLING THESE WORDS:

MELANCHOLY
COMFORTS MY SOLITUDE
BIRD OF SILENCES

THERE IS NOTHING MORE PLEASANT THAN LIVING ALONE.

Basho looks in a mirror. When he left for his travels, his hair was short, as they say, but now it is rather long.

SELF-PORTRAIT:

LONG HAIR
AND PALE FACE
THE RAIN OF JUNE

Basho is sprawled on his matt. He looks exhausted, perhaps his illness, about which he has never spoken clearly, continues to weaken him.

LAST EVENING'S RAIN CONTINUES TO FALL, ALL DAY AND ALL NIGHT, WITHOUT STOPPING. EXHAUSTED BY A SLEEPLESS NIGHT, I REMAIN LAYING DOWN ALL DAY. THE RAIN STOPS JUSTER AFTER NOON.

Basho participates in a tea ceremony that takes place in a pretty little wooden house with a master of ceremony and three other guests. We film the beauty of the gestures, the objects, the details of the hands, the cups, the teapots, the faces and expressions of these men to effectively reveal the unique, ceremonial aspect of this old and beautiful Chinese and Japanese tradition, from which women are excluded, strangely enough.

DURING MY STAY AT AWAZU, A MAN WHO LOVED THE TEA CEREMONY INVITED ME TO ONE AND GAVE ME CHRYSANTHEMUMS PICKED ON A NEIGHBORING BEACH.

SUMMER

Here is a new season that we introduce with a few images of the countryside, this time beneath a bright sun and a few white clouds in a blue sky, which from time to time shade the fields, rivers and the sea. At the end of these shots, we find Basho contemplating the surrounding countryside and jotting a few lines in his journal.

IN THESE BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES OF MOUNTAINS, PLAINS, THE SEA AND RIVERS, I CONTEMPLATE THE WORK OF CREATIVE NATURE. I FOLLOW THE TRACES OF MEN FREED FROM ALL ATTACHMENTS IN A QUEST FOR THE POETIC SENTIMENT THEY FEEL.

Basho is sitting in a landscape flooded with sunshine; he is surrounded by a veritable symphony of the cries, songs and whistles of all kinds of birds and crickets. He writes these haikus:

AH, PURE MARVEL!
IN THE GREENERY, THE EMERGING LEAVES
THE SUN'S LIGHT

IRIS FLOWERS
SPEAK OF TRAVELING
PLEASURE OF TRAVELING

He starts on his way again, crossing a vast field of flowers.

IT IS THIS YEAR, THE SECOND OF THE GENROKU PERIOD, THAT THE FLEETING THOUGHT CAME TO ME TO UNDERTAKE A LONG PILGRIMAGE TO THE FARAWAY PROVINCES. UNDER THESE FOREIGN SKIES, I WILL PROBABLY GROW MORE GRAY HAIR. IN THOSE FARAWAY REGIONS, WHICH MY EARS HAVE HEARD TALK OF, BUT WHICH MY EYES HAVE NOT YET SEEN, HOPING NONETHELESS TO COME BACK ALIVE, I PLACE MY TRUST IN AN UNCERTAIN DESTINY. OH! TO BE ABLE TO LEAVE WITH ONLY THE BODY FOR ONE'S GEAR!

Basho is lost in a field of tall grasses. By chance he meets a peasant who shows him the way and accompanies him for a few minutes.

HAVE ENTERED TALL GRASSES; THEY WERE SO THICK IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO GET LOST.

THE MAN CARRYING HAY ON HIS BACK
IS MY GUIDE
THE COUNTRYSIDE IN SUMMER

A little later he observes two deer at the edge of a forest.

TWO DEER
COAT AGAINST COAT
VOLUPTUOUSLY

Towards evening he comes to a little hamlet where he looks for accommodations; his only real concern every single day: finding a place to spend the night.

LOOKING FOR AN INN
TIRED
AH THESE WISTERIA FLOWERS

EXHAUSTED
I LOOK FOR AN INN
THE WISTERIA IN FLOWER

EACH DAY I ONLY WANT TWO THINGS: A GOOD PLACE TO SLEEP FOR THE NIGHT AND STRAW SANDALS THAT FIT MY FEET. THESE ARE VERY MODEST REQUESTS.

Basho is walking among a few huts and small houses, still looking for a place to spend the night. Behind the curtain of a window next to a plum tree, he sees a woman dressed in a kimono speaking with someone we cannot see. Basho hides behind the plum tree. Suddenly, the woman looks his way a little afraid, but at the same time with a marvelously mysterious air. It must be remembered that at that time, Japanese women, like all women the world over, fulfilled no social role. Their lives were largely spent between four walls, first that of their parents, then that of their husbands. We thus see this woman behind the curtain through the eyes of Basho, as if she were an unattainable stranger, an eternally absent person, a dream figure.

RED PLUM BLOSSOMS
I FEEL LOVE FOR THIS NOBLE STRANGER
BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Basho continues looking for a place to sleep. We see him at a distance speaking with a man who shakes his head no. Then with a woman who points to an abandoned, dilapidated hut. He goes to the hut and enters it.

I SET OUT TO FIND ACCOMMODATIONS, BUT NO ONE WANTED TO OFFER THEIR HOSPITALITY. IN THE END, I SPENT THE NIGHT IN A MISERABLE HUT AND AT DAWN, I TOOK UP MY WANDERINGS AGAIN, TRAVELING UNKNOWN ROADS.

He leaves again at dawn. We see him from far away, on a narrow path, as if he were lost in the countryside. It looks like he is on an eternal voyage, on a path leading nowhere.

MONTH OF JUNE
THE HEAT LIKE THE FEVER OF ONE WHO
CATCHES COLD AND HAS A STOMACH ACHE

In a rice paddy, Basho watches a peasant working for a moment or two.



MY LIFE AS A TRAVELER
THE BACK-AND-FORTH
OF A PEASANT PLOWING THE RICE PADDY

OUR STAY IN THIS WORLD
RAKING A SMALL PATCH OF EARTH
BACK AND FORTH

Basho continues his route towards the west and stops at Suma, located on the seacoast south of Kyoto. He is sitting in the shade of a tree in the courtyard of a temple where he is resting; he hears the sound of a flute.

AT THE TEMPLE OF SUMA
THE ECHO OF A FLUTE
IN THE SHADE OF THE TREES

Basho has walked to the sea and is watching the surf. He drinks a few drops of saké from his little bottle from time to time.

HARVEST MOON
THE BLUE SEA TONIGHT
TO THE FRAGRANCE OF SAKÉ

THE MOON IS THERE
BUT I'M MISSING SOMEONE
THIS SUMMER IN SUMA

Basho has arrived in Otsu, in the region of his childhood. He passes through some woods to approach Lake Biwa. He describes the waves of the lake, sparkling beneath the sun's rays.

IN OTSU.

THE TORRID HEAT OF SUMMER
WATCHING THE LAKE WATER
ROCKED BY THE WAVES

He reaches a hamlet above Lake Biwa where two of his disciples have built a hermitage for him and have planted a few banana trees.

MY DISCIPLES SAMPU AND KIFU, WITH THEIR HEARTS FULL OF AFFECTION, HAVE BUILT ME A NEW COTTAGE. ALTHOUGH THE HUT IS CONCEALED IN THE TREES AND BAMBOO, THEY HAVE PLANTED FIVE BANANA TREES TO MAKE THE SPECTACLE OF THE MOON EVEN MORE ADMIRABLE.

THE LEAVES OF THE BANANA TREES
AS IF SUSPENDED FROM THE PILLAR
MY HUT UNDER THE MOON

BACK AT MY HERMITAGE, I REST FROM THE WEARINESS OF TRAVEL.

HAVING NO PLACE IN THE WORLD TO SETTLE IN, I HAVE SPENT THE PAST TEN YEARS ON THE ROAD, SUFFERING FROM NUMEROUS ILLNESSES. NOT BEING ABLE TO FORGET THE COMPASSION OF MY DEAR FRIENDS AND DISCIPLES OVER ALL THESE LONG YEARS.

His friends have learned that the "old man" has returned. He receives mail.

MANY LETTERS FROM MY FRIENDS AND DISCIPLES ARE TRANSMITTED TO ME. SOME LETTERS CONTAIN MANY MOVING OR POIGNANT REMEMBRANCES.

Later in the growing darkness, in the pallid light of an oil lamp, Basho washes his feet in a bucket of water and then goes to bed.

FEET WASHED
I GO TO SLEEP FOR A SHORT NIGHT
FULLY DRESSED

The next morning, Basho is resting in his room. People come to speak with him and spend time with him.

THE DAYS WHEN RARE VISITORS COME ARE A DISTRACTION FOR ME. SOMETIMES THE OLD GUARDIAN, SOMETIMES MEN FROM THE VILLAGE ENTER AS THEY PASS BY.

EACH TIME THAT SOMEONE COMES, IDLE CHITCHAT FOLLOWS. EACH TIME I GO TO SEE SOMEONE, I HAVE THE UNPLEASANT FEELING THAT I'M BOTHERING HIM. SOLITUDE WILL BE MY COMPANION AND POVERTY MY WEALTH.

Basho is filling a bucket with water at a well. Then he makes a fire and heats the water.

WHEN BY CHANCE I FEEL WELL ENOUGH, I GO TO THE VALE TO DRAW
CLEAR WATER AND DO MY OWN COOKING. THE WATER THAT FALLS DROP
BY DROP DELIGHTS ME, AND IN FRONT OF MY SIMPLE HEARTH MY MOOD
IS LIGHT.

Evening comes. It so happens that today is the day for celebrating the moon. More than ever Basho contemplates the moon in a dreamlike state; he is delighted, happy, in harmony with himself and the world.

FULL MOON HARVEST FESTIVAL
TONIGHT
IMPOSSIBLE TO SLEEP

The next morning Basho is in the garden in front of the cottage. He removes his travel garments to look for lice. As always with our poet, we are privileged to a rather amusing spectacle, but we do not have the impression that he is trying to make us laugh.

THIS MORNING FACING THE MORNING GLORIES
I AM A MAN
WHO EATS COOKED RICE

FROM MY SUMMER ROBE
NEVER WILL I FINISH
REMOVING THE LICE

Basho is resting in the garden in front of his cottage. All of a sudden a grazing horse comes close to him while he dozes lying on the ground in his garden.

FLEAS AND LICE
AND A HORSE THAT PISSES
NEXT TO MY PILLOW

Later, during the day.

WITH A FAN
I DRINK SAKE IN THE SHADOW
OF FALLING CHERRY BLOSSOMS

In the evening, still tired and resting, Basho is lying on his matt in his hermitage, his head on a pillow. He gets out brush and ink from his bag to write in his journal. He appears to lack inspiration, doesn't know what to write.

THE EVENING HAS NOW COME, HAVING FOUND A HEADREST OF GRASS, I TRY TO RECALL THE LANDSCAPES THAT HAVE INSPIRED THE VERSES COMPOSED AT RANDOM THROUGHOUT THE DAY. I TAKE OUT MY BAG OF WRITING TOOLS AND BENEATH THE LAMP, STRETCHED OUT, EYES CLOSED, I HIT MY HEAD AND TORTURE MYSELF WITH IT.

At night we see Basho writing in his journal. He summarizes his pilgrimages with a serious but serene air, joyful in his memories, tired in his body.

I RETREATED FROM THE HECTIC CITY ALMOST TEN YEARS AGO. APPROACHING FIFTY, LIKE A WORM IN A STRAW COAT HAVING LOST ITS STRAW REFUGE, LIKE A SNAIL HAVING ABANDONED ITS SHELL, I BURNED MY FACE IN THE HOT SUN OF KISAGATA, IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCES. I STRUGGLED TRYING TO WALK THROUGH THE HIGH SAND DUNES AND TORE OPEN MY HEELS ON THE COAST OF THE NORTHERN SEA SWEEPED BY THE WIND.

In the night, hearing noises in front of his hut, he awakens and goes to see what's happening. He spies a fox and is amused.

STRANGE, DARK NIGHT
A FOX SNEAKS IN TO STEAL
A BEAUTIFUL MELON

Another morning he watches the arrival of dawn.

CLAPPING MY HANDS IN ECHO
OF THE DAWNING DAY
SUMMER MOON

A little later we see him eating a melon sitting on a chair in front of his cottage. A small breeze has come up.

IN THE MORNING DEW
A MUDDY MELON
WHAT FRESHNESS!

I EAT MY BREAKFAST
IN THE COMPANY
OF THE MORNING GLORY

Since Basho now lives near some of his friends and disciples, he sometimes receives mail. Someone has brought him a package this morning. He opens it. It's a kimono. He is filled with joy.

MY DISCIPLE SANPU HAS SENT ME A SILK KIMONO AS A SUMMER PRESENT.

He puts on the kimono, feeling both proud of the gift and embarrassed by the luxury. This is no ordinary occurrence for a man like him, who is accustomed to poverty and to renouncement. He takes it with humor.

WELL!

I WEAR A GOOD KIMONO RESSEMBLING
THE WINGS OF THE LOCUST

Basho is in his bedroom, at night. The oil lamp throws its shadow on the walls. He is more engrossed in thought than ever; he is literally plunged in his memories and regrets. He would appear to be suffering from his illness again. We see him writing in his journal.

I HAVE SIMPLY BECOME A MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS WHO LIKES TO REMAIN SITTING, MY LEGS NONCHALANTLY STRETCHED OUT, CATCHING FLEAS. AT NIGHT, SITTING IN SILENCE, I WAIT FOR THE MOON AND MY SHADOW TO KEEP ME COMPANY. I MEDITATE IN THE HALF-LIGHT OF THE LAMP ON WHAT'S TRUE AND WHAT'S FALSE.

WHEN THE SUN TOUCHES THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAINS, I SIT IN NOCTURNAL SILENCE WAITING FOR THE MOON. MY LAMP PROJECTS MY SHADOW ON THE WALL AS A PALE REPLY. I'M TOTALLY ABSORBED IN MY THOUGHTS. I MEDITATE IN ITS SHADOW ON WHAT IS TRUE, WHAT IS FALSE.

He who sought to flee the world, the city, the vanity of men, who sought to live alone, to purify his soul, has become a renowned poet, a venerated person, someone who has "succeeded" beyond anything he could have possibly imagined, in contrast to all that he really wanted. Now all this seems vain to him, any effort at becoming known a mediocre goal. He feels reality like an absurdity, a floating dream. After ten years of traveling, of wandering, of looking for others, of seeking nature and beauty, he writes in his journal:

NOT FEELING VERY WELL, THE SOCIETY OF HUMANKIND WEIGHS ON ME;
IN THIS, I RESSEMBLE THOSE WHO HAVE RENOUNCED THE WORLD.
SOMETIMES I THINK ABOUT THE ERRORS I HAVE COMMITTED IN THE
PAST.

IS NOT THE WORLD JUST A PLACE OF ILLUSION?

TIRED OF THINKING ABOUT IT, I SEEK REFUGE IN SLEEP.

AUTUMN

Again we see a series of images of landscapes, in autumn this time, beneath a sky filled with dark clouds that announce hard times for Basho, his last autumn. Basho has left his hermitage on Lake Biwa and is headed for Edo in the northeast part of the country, where he lived before undertaking his travels. He has again rented a horse because the route is long and he hasn't got any younger, to the contrary, despite the fact that he is barely 50, he is already "old" and feels old. The wind is blowing and lifts his clothes and his hair.

AUTUMN HAS COME
ON MY EAR
THE WIND GREET'S ME

On horseback, Basho crosses landscapes and hamlets. On his long route back to the north, he again passes near Mount Fuji.

MOUNT FUJI
CAPPED WITH SNOW
AT ITS BASE A TALL CEDAR

FUJI IN THE SPLENDOR OF SNOW
ROSEI BUILT IT UP
LIKE A FLEETING DREAM

It is evening and Basho is sitting in the shade of a tree next to a field of wheat where he has left his horse to graze.



HOW COMFORTING
MY HORSE SPENDS THE NIGHT
NEAR SHEAVES OF WHEAT

WHAT FRESHNESS!
THE QUARTER NOON BARELY VISIBLE
ON THE MOUNT OF HAGURO

Our pilgrim drinks a few drops of saké from his little bottle. Then he simply lies down on the ground and tries to sleep.

DRUNK, I FALL ASLEEP
AMIDST FLOWERING CARNATIONS
ON A STONE

THE MOON ON THIS 20TH DAY IS VEILED AND THE MOUNTAIN TOPS
SLUMBER.
I RIDE SEVERAL MILES WITHOUT USING THE WHIP BEFORE THE CRY OF THE
COCK.

Bashô leaves again the next morning. He is sitting on the horse with his head bent down, almost touching his chest as if he were asleep. We can see that he is tired. He probably drank too much saké the night before.

DOZING ON HORSEBACK ON HORSEBACK, HALF-ASLEEP AND FAR AWAY
THE MORNING MOON DREAMING OF THE DISTANT
AND SMOKED TEA MOON AND SMOKED TEA

Still on horseback, Basho passes an old woman who is on her knees at the edge of the path. He looks at her with pity, curiosity and fright because she is crying and looking at him insistently, her eyes full of mystery. She is not a beggar, but some kind of spirit, like those we have seen in some of Mizoguchi's and Kurosawa's films. Perhaps she announces Basho's approaching death and is crying because of it. Basho describes this brief and strange encounter in his haiku:

THE IMAGE
OF AN OLD WOMAN ALONE, CRYING
FRIEND OF THE MOON

He continues his route. We see him moving away from us on his horse, which advances at a slow trot on the path. A young girl and a little boy follow this stranger and his horse for a moment or two.

That evening Basho goes to a Nô play, in which there is precisely a scene showing a man on horseback...followed by a young girl and a little boy.

Basho is preparing food; he cuts a melon. He is obviously a vegetarian, eating only fruit and vegetables.

FRESHNESS OF AUTUMN
PEEL WITH OUR HANDS
MELONS AND EGGPLANT

THIS FALL
I WILL GO TO KYOTO
TO LISTEN TO THE WILD GEESE

Finally he leaves his hermitage again, without a horse. He is on the road to Kyoto. It's the end of autumn.

TO REACH KYOTO
STILL HALF THE SKY TO COVER
SNOW CLOUDS

Basho is at the gates to Kyoto. He observes a cuckoo perched on a tree branch.

IN KYOTO
DREAMING OF KYOTO
THE CUCKOO

In the garden of a pavilion, Basho sees three young women in kimonos doing their hair. They laugh and show our stranger their youthful gaiety. He looks at them with the smile of an old wise man, touched with a certain melancholy. They have seen him and greet him by bowing their heads in his direction and by bending over, placing their hands on their knees, following the customary rites of politeness and greeting in Japan.

BRANCHES OF WEEPING WILLOW
IN THE EAST WIND
BEAUTIES ARRANGING THEIR HAIR

Basho continues his walk in Kyoto. Because it has recently rained, there are puddles of water wherever he goes. At a given moment he sees his face in a puddle. He looks at himself an instant, almost frightened.

THIS AUTUMN
WHY HAVE I GOT SO MUCH OLDER?
A BIRD IN THE CLOUDS (BIRDS IN THE CLOUDS)

Evening is nigh. Basho passes a temple where he hears a bell. He stops, looks at the temple garden and its flowers and hears the bell, which then fades. Slowly the ringing becomes fainter and fainter until it disappears completely. This is the last bell he will ever hear in his life.

THE SOUND OF THE BELL EMANATES
FROM THE FRAGRANCE OF THE FLOWERS
THE ECHO IN THE EVENING

Basho has left Kyoto and has started out for Osaka. The sky is darkening, a storm is coming. The sun pierces the clouds here and there. But it's like a final effort before the darkening night. Our poet is again alone in the world. He is making his last voyage from which he will not come back. The twilight of evening is also his.

ON THIS PATH
THAT NO ONE TAKES
THE AUTUMN TWILIGHT

Basho sees a crow perched on a tree branch. He watches it a long time. This bird, a bit lugubrious, appears to him like a messenger of death. He looks at it with a mixture of curiosity and dark foreboding. More surprised than frightened, because as a Buddhist, he is not afraid of death. He takes it like his foreseeable and natural destiny, like the logical consequence for the end of a long voyage that has lasted a lifetime, life being understood as an incessant search and the expectation of one's last instant.

A CROW PERCHED
ON A LEAFLESS BRANCH
AUTUMN EVENING

STILL ALIVE
I REACH THE END OF MY JOURNEY
THIS AUTUMN EVENING

Basho continues his route. He walks slowly in the wind and cold. It is freezing. It looks as if he has reached the "point of no return".

AUTOMNE IS LEAVING	AUTOMN IS LEAVING
FULL OF PROMISES	STILL FULL OF HOPE
THE GREEN MANDARINES	A GREEN MANDARINE

At last he finds refuge in the home of a rich disciple. We see him sitting next to a fire in the fireplace warming himself. A storm is raging outside. He feels worse and worse. He asks his host for medication.

THE OLD MAN DOESN'T FEEL GOOD AND ASKS RANBOKU-KITOSHI FOR
SOME MEDICINE.

Basho sleeps poorly that night. His illness no longer allows him any rest. The sky has cleared during the night. We can see the moon amidst the black clouds. Basho is awake, he looks outside to contemplate the moon one last time.

END OF AUTUMN
I PULL OVER MYSELF
A SMALL BLANKET

TWENTY TIMES
I AWAKE BEFORE THE MOON
AND AGAIN AT FOUR O'CLOCK

He drinks a little from the medicine bottle, then lies down again. He is getting worse and worse. He has become very weak. He sweats. From time to time he puts his hand on his head, as if this were the source of his pain.

I TAKE SOME MEDICINE
VERY ILL, I LAY MY HEAD ON THE PILLOW
IN THE FROZEN NIGHT

HEADREST OF GRASS
IS HE SAD, SOAKED BY A WINTER RAIN
A DOG HOWLS IN THE NIGHT

Basho wakes at dawn. Next to him, the little flame of his oil lamp is dying; it flickers weakly, and is about to go out.

I WAKE UP
THE LAMP OIL HAS BECOME SOLID
THE FLAME IS TINY

ALL NIGHT LONG
THE BAMBOO FREEZES
MORNING OF FROST

A storm is raging outside. Basho gets up with difficulty, he has no strength left, to look one last time at the trees and shrubs in the garden in the pouring rain.

We hear him say:

TO LIVE IN THE WORLD
AS SOGI SAYS
IS TO SHELTER ONESELF FROM THE WINTER DOWNPOUR

His body has aged, the strain of his illness can be seen on his face.

TODAY
EVERYONE LOOKS OLD
FIRST DOWNPOUR OF WINTER

Later, when the rain has stopped, Basho receives the visit of some of his friends and disciples who accompanying him as he dies. They sit around him on the floor, sad and compassionate. Not really knowing what to say, they remain silent. The mother and wife of the host bring them some tea.

Basho feels death approaching. He knows he only has a few hours left to live. His head still hurts him terribly and he has a fever. He no longer eats. He takes a last bath and lights a few alter candles.

He writes a letter to his brother. His gestures have become very slow. He is at peace with himself. He regrets nothing. He is ready to leave on his "last voyage", from which no one ever returns. This is what he writes to his brother:

"YOU WILL PROBABLY BE SAD TO LEARN THAT I HAVE LEFT BEFORE YOU. I HOPE YOU LIVE TO A GREAT AGE THANKS TO MATAEMON'S PROTECTION AND THAT YOUR LIFE ENDS PEACEFULLY AND QUIETLY. I HAVE NOTHING ELSE TO ADD."

On a tree branch in the garden, a cuckoo appears to be accompanying the poet in his last instants. He watches the dying man with beautiful, clear and piercing eyes.

THE CUCKOO
STRAIGHTAWAY THE MASTER OF HAIKU
TAKES LEAVE OF THE WORLD

In pain, Bash writes with great difficulty his last haiku before the eyes full of pity and fright of his friends and disciples:

ILL WHILE TRAVELING
IN MY DREAMS I ROAM
THE DESERTED COUNTRYSIDE OF WINTER

The poet dies on his matt. Next to him on the floor are his journal and notebook of haikus, ink and brush. He will write no more. It's the end; it has ended.



梅伴清風自卷云
啼向空林寄一枝
影自
同而一羽衣
梁以光美题



梁以光美



His disciples surround him with bowed heads, in mourning. We hear from the mouth of Basho, with a voice that is nearly extinguished, like an echo across time, two phrases from his journal that resume his relationship with the real, with society, his conclusion that says so much about him, about his life, the inutility and absurdity even of all social ambition, the unreality of the world that most of the time appears to him as if in a dream. In these two phrases are all that Basho has probably felt during his lifetime, what has driven him to write, what has motivated his ceaseless wanderings across so many landscapes, the source of his meditations on nature and in temples. Here are the two phrases:

THIS WORLD, IS IT NOTHING BUT A PLACE OF ILLUSIONS?

TIRED OF THINKING ABOUT IT, I SEEK REFUGE IN SLEEP.

About the film

I have taken from Basho's Travel Journals the phrases that seem to me to be the most beautiful and the most profound, that allow for understanding as best as possible the "truth" of this man and poet through his own autobiographical writings.

I have followed the same logic for the haikus, selecting from the four hundred that Basho wrote those that please me the most, that best express his thinking and his poetry and that are the easiest to understand and visualize.

With the film I will attempt to deepen my reflection on the relationship between literature and cinema, between words and images. I could say that my "philosophy" of cinema is objectively contained in the subject of this film, which will allow me to express my vision of documentary film as exceeding the documentary and overflowing towards fiction.

After forty-fives years of experience and thirty-five films, I have reached the point where not only do I feel the need, but also and increasingly so, the pleasure of working with actors, because sometimes one comes to a point where the reality of a subject cannot be shown with an approach that is purely documentary, where one must go farther, to exceed and overflow these objective limits by working with actors who represent dead persons or characters in novels.

So it is that one must follow the fascinating path of "fictionalization", a fiction to be invented phrase by phrase, image by image, filming images based on the poet's phrases without making any detours and without complacency, to only show what one believes is right, necessary and beautiful.

The film is not a "fiction", strictly speaking, like "Homo Faber" before it was not a fiction film either. There isn't any dialogue, any "action". The film will be one of pure poetry, a reflection on life and death, a film that won't be forgotten so quickly and that will remain, hopefully, in the memory of the viewers as an essential intellectual and emotional experience.

I see this film as an initiation, as a universal metaphor for travel, as a hymn to life, as a "promise of happiness", to borrow Stendhal's words.

At the center of the film will be the actor-monk who will represent Basho. He will carry the film on his shoulders and will be present in most of the film's images. He is the one who observes and writes, he is the one we hear reading in Japanese, of course, passages from Basho's journals, and his haikus, with an English translation in voice-over. My idea is to then record another voice-over for passages from the journals in French, but for the haikus, we will first hear them in Japanese, then in French.

I did not want a professional actor to play the role of Basho; someone who "plays" can be immediately reduced to his status of "actor". On the advice of a Swiss German friend, Roger Walch, a filmmaker and cameraman who has lived in Japan for many years now, I have engaged Hiroaki Kawamoto, who is 60 years of age, to play the role of Basho. He was for a long time the abbot of a monastery and Buddhist temple in Kyoto. He is a mature person, sure of himself, and at the same time a monk and intellectual, sometimes serious, sometimes funny, profoundly sympathetic and human. He wants to make this film and is very proud of being asked to represent Basho. I am convinced that I have found the right person. He will shave his beard, of course and we will put hair on his head, at times a little short, at others longer depending on the scenes in the film.

I intend to film "my" Basho in documentary fashion. Hiroaki Kawamoto is a well-known personality and will play the role of Basho in his own manner, as he sees fit. I will not be directing him, especially since I know little about Japanese rituals and even less about Zen Buddhists.

As was the case with the actresses playing in my film "Homo Faber", the monk "playing" Basho will remain in the "shadow" of Basho's texts. He will know precisely what passage from the journals and what haikus are being read in each scene. I will make what could be called a documentary about a monk "playing" Basho in the manner that Mr. Kawamoto chooses. I will observe him as he works by filming him. He will attempt to take Basho's place by trying to feel what Basho was like, by imitating him, by "finding" him and by representing him in a dignified manner in the film, while remaining, at each instant, himself.

His gestures, his approach to the poet, all that he does in the way that he does it, how he moves and breathes, how he reacts in relation to what he sees, all that will come from himself and only from himself. He will interpret Basho's phrases, he will act and contemplate the people and things around him in relation to the meditative logic of Zen Buddhism.



This will also be the approach for his two companions who travel with him at different times. Mitshuo Ikeda, a professor of sociology, will be “Chiri” in the film, and “Soro” will be played by Seigaku Higuchi, who is a monk. Both have a lot of humor and both love to laugh. They will bring gaiety to the film.

All will be centered on Basho. The film is about a man who simply observes what reality has to offer, always with wonder and often with joy. Each shot where he is not seen will be an image that he sees. The objective is to make the contemplation of nature by the actor-monk the subject of the film; it is the reason behind nearly all the images. By contemplation is meant a way of observing one’s surroundings as if in another dimension, one which is superior to just a simple observation, because what will be filmed will be shown with intensity, with the precision, patience and duration of meditation.

It is said that in Zen Buddhism, one must observe a bamboo as long as it takes to become the bamboo oneself. On the path leading to this metamorphosis, one must forget everything: oneself, the world, others, and simply exist, listen and observe, thinking of nothing. It is this view of the world around us that the images will communicate.

Everything that Basho sees and all that he records in his journals and in his poems – people, trees, flowers, animals, the sea, the moon – all appear to him like a divine emanation, like something that inspires with awe, that delights and that pushes one to write. Everything for Basho is a manifestation of beauty, of exemplarity, and also of metaphor. The task of the film is to communicate this via the images, which must be clear, clean, pure, without the slightest anecdotal reference. All is reduced to what is “essential”, like the haikus themselves lay bare the essential – a thought or feeling with just a few words, a brushstroke of black ink, like a breathe of air or an illumination. What the images will add, in contrast to the texts of the poet, is the notion of duration, of time passing; this will rhythm the film. And of course the images will communicate the beauty of the landscapes, the countryside, and Basho’s physical being: all that we can observe of a human being without really knowing him, because we only know about his inner self through his words and not via his image which, by definition, is a surface. We cannot see what this surface conceals, what is behind it, what is “inside” this being.

Concerning the music, I don't have much to say as yet. From time to time we hear a flute, a woman singing, the voices of peasants singing in the fields, the litany of monks in the temples. For the rest, I don't have any clear idea as yet. Most likely, popular Japanese music of the 17th century will be heard and perhaps a composition that I will ask of a Japanese composer. But the use of western classical music is not excluded.

The film will communicate an enormous calm, a kind of solemnity, something both restful and joyful. The film shoot will be an "exercise in patience", which is precisely what Hiroaki Kawamoto said during our initial encounter on September 9th, 2015: "all is essentially the work of patience". And he added that he is a man who is never bored. We will thus leave all the time necessary during the film shoot waiting for things to pass somehow by themselves, until our actor-monk will have found, in each scene, the right feeling, gestures, movement, intensity, listening to his inner self to allow him to enter his character in depth.

Because the countryside, the landscapes play an essential role in the film, they will always be filmed in the light and at the time of day and year very precisely described in Basho's texts; this will also require a good deal of patience and much effort.

Despite the "purist" and "radical" standpoint of my film, I think that it will find support from among spectators who wish to "return to nature", from those who are nostalgic about an "idyllic" past, a "lost paradise", who believe that we can only save our planet if humanity renews its love of nature. Basho's Zen Buddhist thinking and his poetry, which states simple and profound truths with but a few words should make this an unforgettable and essential film.

The Voyage of Basho

(Photo dossier)

Film project by Richard Dindo

During my first trip to Japan with my assistant, Natsu Kashiwamoto, in September 2015, we were able to locate the majority of the shooting locations. I took many photos in order to make a selection later, which clearly demonstrates that with my experience and a documentary film budget, it is quite possible to return to 17th century Japan. The enclosed file begins with photos of the three principal «actors». I'm fully convinced that they are the right persons for their respective roles and that I have been very lucky to have found all three. I have based all my films on the idea that the characters must first of all be people who are kind and generous, whose qualities simply as human beings allow them to move an audience. We also found a few places where Basho could have resided, as shown in the photos enclosed. Because the film will be shot over an entire year, there will be lots of time between two phases of shooting to continue looking for appropriate places, landscapes and residences.



Hiroaki Kamamoto, „Basho“











The house of the parents







The house of the tea ceremony





The house where Bashō died





Bashō's first hut at the river





Mitsuho Ikeda, „Chiri“





Seigaku Higuchi, „Soro“





The mountain of Yamagata, with it's tempels and it's crickets





The temple of Yamagata at the end of the stonestairs







The Inn at Otsu, Bashō's birthtown









Bashō's second hut near the Biwa sea









An original Japanese village of the 17th century

















An Inn







The mountains of Yoshino





Here Bashō visited an original „sacred”, little shrine in memory of the poet Saigyō, his master and example





The temple of Yoshino









Another village of the 17th century









The tempel and the bouddhas of Nara







Kyoto



