

GREAT WORKS
SEMINARS

POEMS TO MAP A CRISIS

MATSUO BASHŌ'S JAPANESE HAIKU CLASSIC
NARROW ROAD TO THE INTERIOR
(*OKU NO HOSOMICHI*) IN AN ERA
OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

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APRIL 8, 15, 22, 29, 2024 | 6 PM

Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) is the most famous writer of haiku, the short-form poem that has become one of Japan's best-known literary exports. Bashō's *Narrow Road to the Interior* (*Oku no hosomichi*) combines haiku verse and prose to describe his 1689 journey through the rural areas in Japan's northeast. An account of chance encounters, dangerous roads, and visits to famous historical sites, *Narrow Road to the Interior* is admired for its exploration of the potential of poetry in navigating human relationships with the natural world. For centuries it has inspired countless writers—both inside and outside Japan—to compose similar works.

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PARTICIPANTS ARE EXPECTED TO ATTEND ALL FOUR SESSIONS.

We are grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for its support of this program. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in these seminars do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

However, *Narrow Road to the Interior* reads differently in the 21st century. Bashō's haiku foreground nature's changes precisely because those changes were predictable. How then, as seasonal cycles destabilize, do we read haiku? How do we imagine Bashō's "interior" when the aftereffects of the 2011 earthquake in Tōhoku (the *oku* or "interior" of the work's title) have rendered parts of it uninhabitable?

Using *Narrow Road to the Interior* as a point of departure, we will reflect on the potential of this text—and literature more broadly—to help us explore climate change. We will read and discuss the text itself, consider its role in Japanese and global literary history, and discuss the genre of haiku past and present.



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