

Parodies and a Cartoon by Basho

Laughing with a 17th Century Comedian

FUKUOKA, JAPAN, October 30, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Translator Jeff Robbins has discovered a sense of humor in the Japanese poet Basho who scholars claim was “serious and humorless,”

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These flies sure enjoy having
an unexpected sick person.”

Basho

“at times, cold-hearted, inhuman,” and “to have spent much of his time in a state of perpetual despondency”; they obviously either know very little of Basho’s work, or have no sense of the horrible things going on in the world today, some levity from Basho may brighten our sense of humor themselves so they cannot recognize his. This poet, from

360 to 330 years ago, produced a wide variety of comic poems, prose, and even a hilarious cartoon. With all these days.

Among the funniest Basho haiku are parodies of ‘cats in heat,’ the romantic Tanabata legend, a crocodile, sea slugs frozen into one, a “mountain hick.” and the ‘goddess of poverty.’ Basho also wrote humorous tsukeku, stanzas he contributed to linked verses written by multiple poets – for instance:

These rotten / verses even a dog / will not eat.

Among his haibun, or short essays; are a parody of a produce market written in 1672 to amuse his patron, the wealthy merchant Sampo, and the altogether ridiculous Ode to a Crow. One of the funniest passages in world literature is Basho’s account of the “pious monk” he met on the road in the mountains of Nagano, a self-righteous blabbermouth who recalls Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*: “But, masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass” and furthermore Ecclesiastes 5:3: “Know a fool by his many words.” All these ludicrous and bizarre pieces and many more appear in the article [Laughing with Basho](https://www.basho4humanity.com/topic-description.php?ID=1525956879) on Jeff’s homepage Basho4Humanity; <https://www.basho4humanity.com/topic-description.php?ID=1525956879>. Read them to form a new image of Basho as a fun-loving comedian and warm affectionate man.

Possibly the funniest bit of Basho nonsense is his cartoon [DIAGRAM OF A SNORE](#) drawn in 1688 while traveling with his follower Mangiku and included in a letter to his childhood and lifelong friend Ensui. The original is held by the Basho Museum in his hometown of Iga, in Mie Prefecture, and printed on a postcard they sell. I had the postcard scanned, and digitally removed the original Japanese and replaced it, in three versions, with Japanese in modern print,

Romanized Japanese, and my English translation. To see any of these plus more commentary, see <https://www.basho4humanity.com/topic-description.php?ID=1525957380>. This truly is a “diagram”– a sketch, drawing, or plan which explains a thing by outlining its parts and workings – however the thing diagrammed is Mangiku’s snore. We see the snore start as a tiny bit of sound 1.2 inches in diameter, then bulge out to a massive 47 inches (I love the precision.) Then the snore rattles along like a kuruma naga-mochi , a heavy wooden chest on wheels kept near the door, in case of fire, used to get valuables away from the house. However wheel technology is not so advanced in 17th century Japan (no axles, no shock-absorbers, just a wooden wheel on wooden axle) so the heavily laden chest shakes about as it rolls – which is how the snore ends. It is difficult for me to study this ‘diagram of a snore’ without laughing uncontrollably.

Basho’s final words were, spoken moments before his death from dysentery in the afternoon of November 28, 1694; the day was warm and sunny, as days in early winter often are, and flies had gathered. (For a fuller description of Basho’s death see: <https://www.basho4humanity.com/topic-description.php?ID=1525957170>)

His final words, spoken with a smile, were “These flies sure enjoy having an unexpected sick person.”

Basho maintains Lightness to the very end. The flies “sure” (-rame) “enjoy” (yorokobu) “having” (yadosu) him the way you “have” or “keep” a pet. Basho is the flies’ pet, and they enjoy flying around in the smell of his infection and diarrhea. Even in his final words Basho uses lively active verbs to create humor.

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