An episodic festschrift for Howard Hibbett

translated by H. Mack Horton

Laughs to Banish Sleep
by Anrakuan Sakuden
LAUGHS TO BANISH SLEEP

Selections from Seisuishō (1623)
by Anrakuan Sakuden

Introduced and Translated by
H. MACK HORTON
INTRODUCTION

Translator's note: the following introduction was vouchsafed in a dream (musō) by a man in white coat—a Shinto deity one hopes—after which I awoke, laughing.

Late one night in my study, weary of lucubration, my eyelids at length grew so heavy that I cast about for an entertaining volume to divert the mind and refresh the imagination.
Running my finger along the spines of one after another quaint and curious bunkobon gathering dust on the shelves, I came upon two substantial books bearing the promising title Seisuishō, “Laughs To Banish Sleep.” Indeed, fatigue left me as I leafed at random through one diverting anecdote after another that brought a world centuries old once again to life. Ever ready to subordinate entertainment to didacticism, I turned from the stories themselves to the learned preface and then to certain other weighty reference works, which noted that Seisuishō is regarded as a progenitor of the genre of “humorous stories” (hanashibon) and remains the largest of such collections, containing more than one thousand anecdotes unevenly divided into eight parts and forty-two chapters. It was compiled by the Kyoto abbot and tea connoisseur Anrakuan Sakuden (1554-1642), whose longevity demonstrates the healing power of laughter. The preface and postscript by the good monk relate that he undertook the compilation at the suggestion of the shogunal deputy in the capital, who was evidently not as pompous a bureaucrat as his office might suggest. The collection was completed in 1623 and presented in 1628.

Seisuishō continues the received wisdom, is a kanazoshi, and as such it occupies a middle ground between medieval tales, which often gave a bitter evangelical pill a sugar coating of entertainment, and later Edo-period ukiyozōshi, which were composed primarily to give enjoyment and were disseminated not by monks with an eye to salvation but by publishers focusing on flush townsfolk and the Bottom Line. Sakuden’s work was meant for elites, like his friends the warrior-architect Kobori Enshū and the haikai poet Matsunaga Teitoku, and both its subject matter and rhetorical style anticipated readers who were involved in the traditional arts themselves and were familiar with the literary and historical figures that populate the book’s pages. Many of its stories rely on puns, often embedded in humorous poetry, for their slightly donnish comic effect. Even so, the book was written to entertain, and it succeeded brilliantly, eventually generating abridged editions. But as time went
on, the growing townsman audience clamored for tales about its own society told in snappier and more trenchant language. By the latter half of the Edo period, the collection that had banished sleep for thousands now brought yawns to all but scholars and antiquarians, who were intent on reconstructing its vanished late medieval world of monks and warriors, catamites and linked-verse poets, or who were fascinated by the book's now old-fashioned and occasionally obscure literary style, rich in early seventeenth-century dialogue redolent of even older storytelling traditions.

I have translated here twenty-eight tales (the same pious number as the books of The Lotus Sutra). All of them deal with the arts, most notably poetry, but also nō, kōwakamai, Heike biwa, and tea. But surely you, too, good reader, are by now stifling yawns yourself; let us turn to the Reverend Sakuden's laughter forthwith.

Selections from
LAUGHS TO BANISH SLEEP
Strained Etymologies (1.1.33)

At a monthly linked-verse session, the master composed a verse using the word “daybreak” which won the admiration of all. Hearing their praise, a beginner seated in the rear felt he could do just as well and began a verse with “eveningbreak.”

“Very odd,” said the master.

“Well then, what about ‘noonbreak’,” offered the beginner.

“That’s even worse.”

Disgruntled, the man thereupon composed this:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ware wa shite} & \quad \text{Why should you} \\
\text{hito no borake ya} & \quad \text{get a break yourself} \\
\text{kirauran} & \quad \text{while giving none to others?}
\end{align*}
\]

Strained Etymologies (1.1.5)

One evening when Sōgi and his disciple Sōchō were walking on the beach, they came upon a fisherman hauling in nets covered with seaweed.²

“What do you call that?” they asked.

The fisherman replied, “Some say me, some say mo.”

“That would make a good renga link.” Sōgi remarked, and he composed this:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{me to mo iu nari} & \quad \text{Some say me,} \\
\text{mo to mo iu nari} & \quad \text{Some say mo.}
\end{align*}
\]

He then asked Sōcho to provide a rejoinder. Sōcho composed the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hikitsurete} & \quad \text{Leading home} \\
\text{nogai no ushi no} & \quad \text{oxen that were} \\
\text{kaerusa ni} & \quad \text{out to pasture.}
\end{align*}
\]
Female oxen make the sound unme when they low, and male oxen, unmo. Sōgi was impressed.

Then Sochō asked the master for a verse in return. Sōgi composed this:

- yomu iroha  Look beside the finger
- oshi yuru yubi no that points to those syllables
- shita o miyo in the iroha.

Me comes after the yu of yubi [finger] in the iroha syllabary, and mo comes after the bi.³

**Fools for Flattery (1.3.10)**

Someone at a renga session presented his verse with an air of great self-satisfaction. His neighbor humored him, exclaiming “The God of Literature himself, in the flesh!” and pounding his knee. The author responded in all seriousness, “Try not to praise me quite so much—the shrine might start to shake.”⁴
Dense Clerics (1.4.27)

Someone hired a scribe to copy The Tales of Ise. When he received the finished work he found that the first line, "Once there was a man," was incomplete and read "Once there was a ma." He angrily demanded to know how the scribe could make such a mistake in the very first line. The scribe replied, "I figured an extra letter or two would creep in as I went along, so I left some out at the beginning to make up for them."

Bestowing Names (2.1.14)

A man with no poetic talent but great self esteem paid a visit to a priest and requested an artistic sobriquet ending with sai [studio]. "Have you achieved proficiency in an art?" the priest asked.

"Certainly," the man answered. "I haven't quite reached the level of Tōba or Sankoku, but I flatter myself that I have attained no little skill in Chinese poetry and Japanese linked verse." The reply must have disgusted the priest, for he declared, "Splendid! We shall combine the ha of Tōba and the koku of Sankoku and refer to you as "The Hakoku Studio" [hakokusai, "stinks of shit"]."
Absent-Mindedness (2.3.11)

Konparu Zenpō never failed to perform his morning sutra recitation. One morning he faced northeast, put his hands together and rubbed his rosary beads, but could only repeat “Whatchamacallit. Whatchamacallit.”

“You mean the God of Kasuga?” asked someone nearby.

“That’s it, that’s it! Kasuga! Kasuga!” cried Zenpō.

This is called “absent-mindedness,” which may afflict even those of great intellect. Though it causes no great harm, from time to time those who suffer from it seem somewhat vague, so it is cited here.9

Literary Pretensions (3.1.9)

Once when Sōgi was practicing religious austerities in the east, he came upon a beautiful temple hall four bays wide by two deep. When he went up to it and sat down, the watchman approached and asked, “Are you from the capital?”

“I am,” Sōgi replied.

“Well then, be so good as to provide a link to this hokku of mine:10

atarashiku A Jizō hall
tsukuritate A hall on which work
jizōdo kana has just been finished!!

Sōgi proposed this link:

mono maeno Down to its fittings
kimekinikeri It glitters brilliantly.

The watchman protested that Sōgi’s link was too short, whereupon the Master answered, “Then just move the surplus kana from your own verse to mine!”12
Fair Criticism (4.1.2)

Once when Lord Sanjōnishi Sanetaka was taking the waters at Arima hotsprings, a man presented some poems of his own for judgment.13 There wasn’t a good one in the lot, so Sanetaka composed this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mukashi yori</th>
<th>Arima’s hot springs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kidoku arima no</td>
<td>have performed miracles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yu to kikedo</td>
<td>since ages past, they say,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koshioreuta wa</td>
<td>but your fractured verses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naorazakiri</td>
<td>are beyond remedy!14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hasty Conclusions (4.3.8)

A man went to see a no performance. He paid the admission fee of ten mon and was admitted through the small door by the main gate.15 But the play did not interest him at all, and he became so bored he went back the way he had entered and said he wished to leave. The gatekeeper, however, adamantly refused to let him out. “How much will you charge to let me leave?” the man asked and was told one hundred mon. The man finally paid, and once outside he removed his wicker hat, looked about him, shook his head a few times, and said, “What luck! He let me out for just a hundred!”
Plain Speaking (4.4.9)

When the linked-verse master Shōhaku was living in the port of Sakai, requests for hokku verses about the new year or about spring arriving before the old year was out came one after the next. Deciding he needed a rest, he told his servant, “If anyone asks for verses, I don’t care who, tell them I’m sick and turn them away.” But early on the morning of the fifth, while he was still in bed, his servant crept in and told him, “There is a request from a certain quarter for a hokku for the Day of the Rat. What is your pleasure?”

“I thought I told you to turn down all requests!” Shōhaku scolded.

“But they are willing to pay three whole kan for your trouble.”

“Well in that case, I could be persuaded,” Shōhaku answered.

Refined Tastes (5.1.42)

In Gifu, in the province of Mino, there lived a skilled linked-verse poet named Sōko. Not well off, he now and then pawned his belongings with a rich man named Horiike. Years passed and still he could not reclaim them. Finally one cold winter he decided he would like to recover his kosode robe at all costs, and he sent this poem:

kura no uchi ni What sort of river
ika naru kawa no can it be that runs
aru yaran through your storehouse?
waga oku shichi no There is nothing of mine
nagarenu wa nashi that has not flowed into it!

Moved, Horiike said, “This brings to mind the ancient Chinese story of the priest Huiyuan, who traded his poems for money to buy wine when he was living on Lushan mountain.” He then sent back the kosode as well as various other articles.
Temple-Boy Gossip (6.1.16)

Once Sōchō was visiting Kasadera temple. When he approached the monks' quarters, he saw a young lad scamper up a tree. He thereupon composed this:

saru chigo to  Faster than a monkey.
miri yori hayaku that clever-looking lad
ki ni noboru   climbs the tree.¹⁹

The boy immediately replied,
inu no yō naru When a dog of a priest
hōshi kite reba happens along.²⁰

Jumping to the Wrong Conclusion (6.6.20)

A village headman composed a votive hokku for the construction of a dike and then held a linked-verse session to complete the sequence. He sent the hundred verses to the renga master Sōyō for his judgments, and Sōyō returned them with every verse marked but the first.²¹ The headman concluded that Sōyō had approved of all the verses, and he set out to discuss them in person with the Master. When he asked Sōyō about his judgments, the Master replied, "No, those are not full marks, they are cross-outs; there was not a good verse in the lot."

"Then the hokku alone was satisfactory?"

"Actually, the hokku lacked a 'break word,' and that would usually disqualify it, but since you composed it for a dike, I let it pass."²²
Thoughts That Slip Out (7.1.17)

There was once a man whose every thought waking or sleeping, to the exclusion of all else, was of linked verse and its lexical categories. One evening he heard someone urinating beside his house, and he cried out, "Who are you to come to a 'Dwelling Thing' in the 'Nighttime Thing' and make a 'Water Thing'—are you a 'Human Thing' or an 'Animal Thing'? You should be beaten with a 'Wood Thing'!"³

From Bad to Worse (7.2.2)

Farmers say an eggplant "dances" when it withers. Once when a farmer was planting eggplants by the side of the road in Izumi Province, a clumsy-looking performer of kōwakamai happened by and spied the large bottle of sake the farmer had.²⁴ Perhaps thinking to get a drop or two for himself in exchange for an impromptu kōwakamai, he went down into the field and announced "Let the dancing begin!"

"Now you've hexed my crop!" cried the farmer, enraged. The performer finally calmed him down and, forgoing his dance, shared the farmer's sake. But when he rose to leave, he said, "How nice that our misunderstanding was shallow-rooted and has withered completely away." That gilded the lily!
Cutting Your Coat According
to Your Cloth (7.3.12)

A boy who used to be a linked-verse master's servant later moved to a merchants' district. A friend said to him, "You've probably got it much easier now, not having to get up at the crack of dawn or stay out late."

"You said it," answered the boy. "But I'm a little worried—my new master has gotten into the habit of staring blankly off into space now and then—I hope he doesn't turn into a linked-verse poet too!"

Momentary Lapses (7.4.1)

A no actor playing the title role in The Goblin King made his entrance wearing the mask of a court lady by mistake. As soon as he began to walk down the bridge-way he heard the spectators laughing about how funny he looked. He could not very well turn back, so he improvised, "I am the Goblin King's wife!"
Momentary Lapses (7.4.14)

A would-be poet had begun taking part in monthly practice sessions, but he could still do nothing but sit and tremble with nervousness. Feeling sorry for him, the teacher wrote out a verse on the back of a page of a calendar he happened to have at hand. He unobtrusively laid it beside the man and told him to memorize it then chant it aloud when the time came. Soon it was the man’s turn, but in his anxiety he forgot his lines, and he read the front of the calendar instead:

kanoto no hitsujii  Day of the Sheep,
Younger Brother of Metal:
kamanuru ni yoshi   Now is the time
to fix up your oven!

No Drama (7.5.19)

Bingo and Izumo are neighboring provinces. In the former is a mountain hamlet called Shakuda. An old woman living there set out for Misawa in Izumo to see a no performance for a shrine festival, which she watched from beside the bridge-way. During Takasago, the main actor looked straight at her and delivered the line, “You, old woman, are from this place; if you can enlighten us, please do so.”* Flustered, she blurted out, “No sir, I’m from Shakuda, and I’ve nothing to say at all!”
Kowakamai (7.6.10)

A kōwakamai player was traveling in the northern provinces. He stopped at a Buddhist seminary, and after sharing in their afternoon meal he performed Taishokukan.37 Halfway through the finale, the bridal scene, the abbot began to weep. "The scene isn't sad in the least," thought his attendants. "Why is he so upset?" After the piece was over, they asked him about it. He replied, "It wasn't the story that brought tears to my eyes. I wept to think that he came all this way but is so bad that he'll never attract an audience. He may starve to death!"

Kowakamai (7.6.20)

The first play was Manjū; the second, Yuriwaka Dairin; and the third, Togasegatachi.38 A man who arrived early and saw all three returned home and was asked, "What was on the bill today?" He replied, "Well, they did the one where this guy called Manjū goes to Genkaigashima island and reads out a subscription list for a temple. It was real entertaining!" How disgraceful that he should have taken the three plays as the beginning, middle, and end of a single performance!
Quick Wit (8.1.14)

When Sōchō was staying at Daitokuji, an acquaintance at Enryakuji sent a message saying, “Please send a haikai verse.” I want to present it this evening to amuse my guests.” Sōchō wrote down the following:

saru no shiri A monkey’s bottom:
kogarashi shirana crimson leaves that never wither
momiji kana in the winter wind!

As the messenger was leaving, Sōchō called him back and asked, “Will there be any temple boys in attendance?” Hearing that there would be, Sōchō changed the first part of the verse to ‘A monkey’s face.’

Quick Wit (8.1.53)

Sōgi was practicing religious austerities in the mountains. Suddenly he encountered three men, and one addressed him thus:

hitotsu aru mono A single thing
mitsu ni miekeri appeared as three.

Sōgi immediately replied:
tagui naki A matchless kosode robe
kosode no ero no with a collar
hokorobite split at the seams.

Then the next man said:
futatsu aru mono A pair of things
yotsu ni miekeri appeared as four.

Sōgi responded:
tsuki to hi to The sun and moon
irie no mizu ni casting their reflections
kage sashite on the surface of the inlet.
Then the third man said:

itsutsu aru mono  Something with five things
hitotsu ni miekeri  appeared as one.
Sōgi answered:
tsuki ni sasu   Pointing at the moon
sono yubi bakari  with only
arawashite   a forefinger.

In the wake of Sōgi's three rejoinders, the three men vanished.

The Tale of the Heike (8.2.2)

A complete illiterate went to hear a performance of The Tale of the Heike. Someone made fun of him, saying, “I don’t know why he’s going—he won’t understand a word.” When the man returned, the other asked, “How did you like the Heike?” The first replied, “Well, the lute playing was great, but every so often the musician started yelling along with it, and that sure was annoying!”
**The Tale of the Heike (8.2.5)**

When he should have chanted, "He bestowed Ikezuki on Sasaki, and Sasaki humbly replied....," the lute player chanted instead, "He bestowed Sasaki on Ikezuki, and Ikezuki humbly replied...." Immediately he was struck speechless with embarrassment.  

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**Puns (8.3.16)**

At a linked-verse session directed by Socho, a lute player obviously new to poetry had the effrontery to remark, "Shall I venture a stanza?" Socho responded, "Please do—but wait till we finish the renga sequence!"
The Tea Ceremony (8.5.15)

A man called on the retired abbot and asked, "Some people call the tea ceremony sadō and some, chadō. Which is correct?"

"Either one is acceptable," answered the old abbot. But sadō is the Tang reading and more elegant." The man then took his leave, appearing to have understood. He returned a month or two later with his eldest son, who had just come of age, and introduced him: "This is my son Matsuchiyo. Would you do us the honor of choosing an adult name for him?" The abbot thereupon chose Sako [Bodyguard of the Left] no Tarō. The father nodded in admiration, but then demurred: "No, no–sa is the Tang reading and far too elegant for the likes of us; please just name him Chako no Tarō instead."

Happy Endings (8.6.17)

The late Chancellor Tokugawa Ieyasu once sponsored a renga sequence in three hundred verses to celebrate the completion of his castle in Suruga.34 This hokku was presented by Itakura Rokuemon Nyūdō Shōsa:

namiki tada A line of trees
hana wa tsugi tsugi no with one after the next
sakari kana in full bloom!

The Chancellor was deeply moved and presently took the sequence with him to Kyoto. There, he showed it to Hosokawa Yusai, who praised it lavishly.35 True to the metaphor in the verse, the descendants of the Tokugawa House have continued to prosper. How auspicious!
NOTES


2. Sōgi (1421-1502) and Sochō (1448-1532) were two of the most famous late medieval linked-verse (renge) poets; they collaborated with Shōhaku (1443-1527; see 4.4.9 below) on such important sequences as Three Poets at Minase (1488) and Three Poets at Yuyama (1491). Renge was the most popular poetic art in Japan’s medieval period (the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries). It was usually composed by a group of poets who linked alternate seventeen- and fourteen-syllable verses into a chain of one hundred links, following a complex body of rules governing where and how often various images might appear.

3. Sōgi refers to the traditional iroha order of syllables, which goes in part a sa ki yu me mi ji we hi mo se zu; in the absence of diacritics, hi can also be read bi, hence yubi, “finger.”

4. It was believed that when a particularly good verse was composed, temples and shrines might start to shake as a sign of the deities’ favor. “The God of Literature” is Tenjin, the deified Sugawara Michizane.

5. The Tales of Ise (Ise monogatari, c. 950) is a classic collection of short poem-tales (utamonogatari), mostly about love. It was a prime source of allusion for later poets.

6. Tōba (Su Dongpo, 1036-1101) and Sankoku (Huang Shangu, 1045-1105) were two great poets of the Northern Song.
7. Again, in the absence of diacritics, ha and the ba in Töba are identical.

8. Konparu Zenpō (1454-1532?) was a major nō playwright.

9. Even a dramaturgical Homer may sometimes nod.

10. A hokku is the first verse in a linked-verse sequence. Composed of three lines of 5-7-5 syllables respectively, it is the ancestor of the modern haiku.

11. A jizō hall is dedicated to the worship of the bodhisattva Jizō (in Sanskrit, Ksitigarbha, “Womb of the Earth”), who saves those in evil realms.

12. Subtracting the last two surplus syllables from the previous verse (jizōdo kana has seven syllables) and adding them to Sōgi’s produces a standard 5-7-5 hokku and 7-7 syllable rejoinder that reads kanamono made mo (“down to the metal fittings”).

13. Sanjōnishi Sanetaka (1455-1537) was a famous court literatus.

14. “Fractured verses” translates koshioreuta. A waka poem consists of five lines of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables respectively, the middle line being called the “waist” (koshi). When the upper and lower halves of the verse do not mesh, the poem is said to be “fractured at the waist.”

15. Mon were small copper coins with a square hole in the middle to allow them to be carried in strings.

16. One kan equalled one thousand mon (see previous note).

17. Huìyuan (334-416) was the founder of Chinese Pure Land teachings.

18. A kosode is a small-sleeved robe.

19. Sōchō puns on saru, meaning “monkey” and “clever.”

20. Monkeys and dogs are natural enemies.

21. Sōyō (1526-63), a major linked-verse poet, was the son of the poet Sōboku (d. 1545), a disciple of Sōchi.
22. "Break word" translates kireji, lit., "cutting word." One of the most elementary renga rules requires every hokku to contain one of the twenty or so cutting words, such as ya or kana. Sōyō let the infradiction pass because in the context of the construction of a dike, a "break word" might be considered infelicitous.

23. "Wood Thing" (uemono) is more accurately translated "plant thing," a category which includes trees.


25. The Goblin King is the no play Zegai, in which a Chinese goblin king comes to Japan and unsuccessfully pits his powers against those of Japanese Buddhist priests.

26. In the play Takasago, a traveling priest meets an old couple who later reveal themselves to be the spirits of two ancient pines.

27. Taishokukan is a piece rich in fantasy, wherein the great minister Fujiwara Kamatari recovers a precious stone sent by his daughter from China then stolen by the Dragon King, the ruler of the undersea realm.

28. Manjū is a tragic story of loyalty, in which Fujiwara Nakamitsu sacrifices his own son to save the son of his lord, Minamoto Mitsunaka (Manjū); Yurikawa Daijin, a tale having much in common with the Odyssey, portrays the victory of Minister Yurikawa over the Mongols, his being marooned on Genkaigashima island, and his final reunion with his wife; and Togasetaji, also called Togashi, concerns Benkei, the faithful retainer of the hunted Minamoto Yoshitsune, who effects their escape by convincing the local lord that they are mountain priests raising a subscription for Todaiji temple.

29. Socho is being asked here for a haikai renga verse, i.e., an unorthodox or comic verse that does not follow all the formal renga rules.

30. Appended to the anecdote is the following:
An impromptu verse composed by the priest Takuan one winter in Sakai:

saru no shiri \hspace{1em} A monkey's bottom; \hspace{1em} \textit{norasu ya shigure} \hspace{1em} is cold rain wetting \hspace{1em} \textit{matsu fuguri} \hspace{1em} the pine cones?

Takuan (1573-1645) was a famous Zen poet-priest; he was abbot of Daitokuji and served the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu.

31. The Tale of the Heike (Heike monogatari), the most famous Japanese war tale, describes the war between the Heike (Taira) and Genji (Minamoto) military houses, the final Heike defeat in 1185, and its aftermath. It was usually chanted by blind monks who accompanied themselves on lutes (biwa).

32. In “The Ikezuki Affair” in The Tale of the Heike, the leader of the Minamoto forces, Yoritomo, bestows his prize horse Ikezuki on his lieutenant Sasaki Takatsuna before the latter leaves Kamakura on his way to fight the Taira.

33. In the art of the Heike lute, each piece is referred to as a “stanza” (ikku), which is homophonous with a renga link. Sochō cleverly diverts the rude novice by affecting to think he is offering to perform a passage from The Tale of the Heike on his lute rather than to compose a renga verse.

34. Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616), the first Tokugawa shogun, was appointed chancellor (daijo daijin) in 1616. His grandson Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604-51) was named shogun in 1623, the year Sakuden completed Seisuishō. This auspicious verse ends the collection.

35. Hosokawa Yūsai (1534-1610) was a famous Momoyama-Period warrior-literatus.
This episodic festschrift celebrates the career of Howard S. Hibbett (1920- ), eminent and decorated Japanologist author, translator, editor, and professor. A number of Edo-period translations by Howard Hibbett’s former students was compiled by John Solt during the years following the professor’s retirement from teaching at Harvard University. The introductions and translations in the series preserve the letter and spirit of each of our wayward collaborators.