

## Chapter 2

# The Blossom of Pulp Fiction

PULP (*pulp*) *n.* 1. *A soft, moist, shapeless mass or matter.* 2. *A magazine or book containing lurid subject matter and being characteristically printed on rough, unfinished paper.*  
—*American Heritage Dictionary, New College Edition*, as cited by Quentin Tarantino in the film *Pulp Fiction*

### The *Kibyōshi* as the Flower of *Gesaku*

The radical interrelatedness of the *kibyōshi* to other genres, as well as its capacity to map and mirror the world of An'ei-Tenmei Edo, qualifies it as an excellent entrée into that world's popular culture. Indeed, the *kibyōshi* has on occasion been hailed as the consummate genre of *gesaku*, that assortment of popular literary forms epitomizing the efflorescence of Edo's sophisticated culture during the mid- and late Edo period. Many major scholars of Edo-period literature consider the *kibyōshi* to represent the acme of popular literature. A recent exhibit of *kibyōshi* in Yokohama characterized it as the "flower of *gesaku*."<sup>1</sup> At first blush, this phrase seems overwrought, an oxymoronic cliché mindlessly describing in organic terms something mass-produced by machines. However, the metaphor is peculiarly apt—perhaps in ways unbeknownst to the exhibit's organizers?—for something like it has enjoyed perennial life. As far back as the earliest extant writings in Japan, such as the eighth-century *Record of Ancient Matters*, laughter has been said to "burgeon forth" (*saku*) like some uncommon blossom.

The word *gesaku* literally means frivolous (*ge*) composition (*saku*). It can be interpreted to mean "playful writing," suggesting that such works were tossed off half in jest. Looking at the Chinese graphs, one might easily suppose they should be read *gisaku*, since *gi* is the more common

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1. So called by curator of the Hiraki Ukiyoe Museum, Satō Mitsunobu. In the preface to Satō, *Gesaku no hana*, p. 1.

pronunciation. The less common one, however, puns on the homonym *ge* in words like “vulgar” (*gehin*), so that *gesaku* might also suggest “lowbrow blooms” of laughter. In either case, the word is redolent with ironic self-denigration, as though its fruits were merely the whimsical divertissements of amateur writers, or else the “pulp fiction” of commercial hacks. This does not mean that the genres subsumed by the term *gesaku* should be taken at face value, for many works in this mode were complex literary and artistic creations.

Be that as it may, *gesaku* is a catchall term, covering a constellation of loosely allied genres of typically humorous popular literature. These genres mostly consist of prose fiction, such as the mock-sermon book, collections of humorous anecdotes, the “funnybook,” various forms of comicbooks—like the adult *kibyōshi* and the more serious-minded multivolume chapbook that tended to revel in stories of cold revenge—madcap Chinese prose, melodramatic “sentiment books,” fashion books, and the oft-times moralistic “reading book.”<sup>2</sup> Several kinds of comic poetry are also closely related to *gesaku* as well, though these are not typically subsumed under the term. These include such things as madcap verse, madcap Chinese poetry, a hybrid form of madcap Chinese prose and poetry, comic haiku, and even a kind of haiku so bawdy as to be all but unprintable.

It might be observed from this abbreviated inventory that not all genres of *gesaku* are expressly comic. The multivolume chapbook, the sentiment book, and the reading book can hardly be described, after all, as predominantly lighthearted. Generally speaking, though, by the early years of the nineteenth century when these particular genres flourished, the label that had previously been reserved exclusively for those works peddling in playfulness had come to indicate more broadly anything written as a form of mass entertainment—even if that entertainment was flavored by mercilessness, melodrama, or moralism. Yet it is the comic element in particular that sets *gesaku* apart and qualifies it for consideration, in the opinion of many, as a literary phenomenon. In his noteworthy study of the comic spirit in modern Japanese literature, Cohn singles out *gesaku* for special mention as “one of the supreme comic high points in Japanese cultural history.”<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not the *kibyōshi* best epitomizes mid-Edo popular literature, what is certain is that since the former is such an intensely hybrid affair, it cannot be fruitfully studied without at least a general understanding of the latter. It would be difficult to appreciate the *kibyōshi* fully without situating it in its most immediate generic context. And yet a rehearsal here of all the various genres comprising *gesaku* would be a fool’s errand, fraught with

2. Those genres that assumed booklet format, like the *kibyōshi*, might also be described by the related term “playful chapbooks” (*tawarezōshi*)—*taware* being the Japanese reading of the Chinese graph *ge* of *gesaku*.

3. Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, p. 18.

innumerable chances to inadvertently mislead, since Japanese let alone Western scholarship has only barely begun to consider this massive literature, which numbers maybe in the thousands if not tens of thousands of titles. Thankfully, other scholars have gone out on a limb to get at these genres already.<sup>4</sup>

Still, few if any of these scholars have concerned themselves with exploring the interconnections among *gesaku* genres with respect to the *kibyōshi* in particular. This chapter therefore briefly touches upon a few such genres that seem exceptionally germane. These include the mock-sermon book, the fashionbook, and the jokebook. Some others that are not typically subsumed under the *gesaku* rubric but nonetheless exert a palpable influence upon the *kibyōshi* are also considered, such as various forms of guidebook literature, the *kibyōshi* reviewbook, comic poetry like the madcap verse and comic haiku, and even kabuki and its associated theatrical texts.

Two caveats are in order. First, although earlier forms of "children's" comicbooks such as the redbook and blackbook also shaped the *kibyōshi*, discussion of these incunabula is deferred until a later chapter. Second, and more significantly, it should be kept in mind that the paradox of interrelatedness complicates any consideration of literary influence, for the interplay among the tapestry of these genres makes them virtually impossible to disentangle from one another. So, for the sake of simplicity, only the most salient features of each genre are focused upon here.<sup>5</sup>

**The Mock-Sermon Book** One of the archetypal genres of Edo *gesaku*, from which the *kibyōshi* drew some inspiration in its portrayal of the Edo vernacular if not its sense of humor, was the *dangibon*. Although literally meaning "sermon book," this was actually a genre of *mock* address, typically consisting of one or more humorous stories that had little if any seriously religious or moralizing content.<sup>6</sup> A

4. In English, see especially Hibbett, *The Chrysanthemum and the Fish*; Iwasaki, "The World of *Gesaku*"; Keene, *World Within Walls*; Leutner, *Shikitei Sanba*; Shirane, *EMJL*; and Ueda, *Light Verse From the Floating World*.

5. This is not to imply either that any given genre influenced the *kibyōshi* only in a single way, or that other genres did not influence the *kibyōshi* considerably. The *kibyōshi* may have appropriated its brand of sophistication primarily from the fashionbook, for example, though the fashionbook contributed other things, too, just as the *kibyōshi* looked to other genres for its conception of sophistication.

6. The genre's name indicates not the content of individual works per se, but rather its origins in soapbox oratory (*dangi*). Originally, this oratory was a kind of public sermon employing earthy humor and simple terms in order to popularize Buddhist teachings, especially those of the Nichiren, Ritsu, and Jōdo sects, though it quickly came to be appropriated as a vehicle of popular street entertainment. When set to print—and absorbing humorous content from the *otogizōshi*, the *kyōgen* stage, Chinese vernacular tales (*baihua*), the "character sketches" (*katagimono*) of Ejima Kiseki, and so forth—the mock sermon book itself was born.

*Treatise on Flatulence* (Hōhiron, 1774) and *Biographies of Limp Dicks in Seclusion* (Naemara in'itsuden, 1768), for instance, can hardly be described as sermons, at least not in the *bona fide* sense.<sup>7</sup> Nor can *The Funeral Director's Blowout-Sale Circular* (Sōbichi yasuri no hikifuda seshi koto, 1752), for that matter, a darkly comic short story describing a bungled attempt at an advertising blitz.<sup>8</sup>

The roots of the mock-sermon book, like many other genres of *gesaku*, ultimately may extend back to works published in Kamigata, such as Issai Chozan's *Hickish Zhuangzi* (*Inaka Sōshi*, 1717).<sup>9</sup> By mid-century, however, a homegrown Edo variety, emphasizing that city's customs, people, places, and, especially, the colloquial speech of its commoners, had become massively popular. So much so that the mock-sermon book is retrospectively taken to be one of the earliest major representative genres of Edo's popular literature. The first such work of consequence, and no doubt the most celebrated exemplar, is widely considered to be Jōkanbō Kōa's *Newfangled Spiels* (*Imayō betadangi*, 1752). This was an immediate bestseller, garnered critical hosannas, and inspired a sequel issued within the year.<sup>10</sup>

Although the mock-sermon book reached its pinnacle of popularity over the next decade or two, it remained a vibrant form throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century. Its heavy use of the Edo vernacular set a precedent for the fashionbook, the *kibyōshi*, the funnybook, and other heavily dialogue-based genres of popular literature.<sup>11</sup> Since its expanse of cursive scrawl was relieved by only one or two rather simple illustrations per story, however, the mock-sermon book cannot be considered a "comic-book" per se. Granted, some of its occasional illustrations can be quite lively, as with those in Hiraga Gennai's smash hit *Rootless Grass* (*Nenashigusa*, 1763) (Figure 2.1).<sup>12</sup> Still, one often finds references to the content of particular mock-sermon books within individual *kibyōshi*. Kyōden's *Unsavoryly Mismatched Jiffy Shanks* (*Fuanbai sokuseki ryōri*, 1784), a fanciful takeoff of sorts on Gennai's story from two decades earlier, presumes a detailed knowledge of Gennai's illustrations as well as his verbal text (Figure 2.2).<sup>13</sup>

7. For translations of these pieces, respectively, see Drake, "A Theory of Farting," or Sibley, "On Farting"; and Marceau, *Biographies of Limp Dicks in Seclusion*.

8. For a translation, see Kern, *The Funeral Director's Blowout-Sale Circular*.

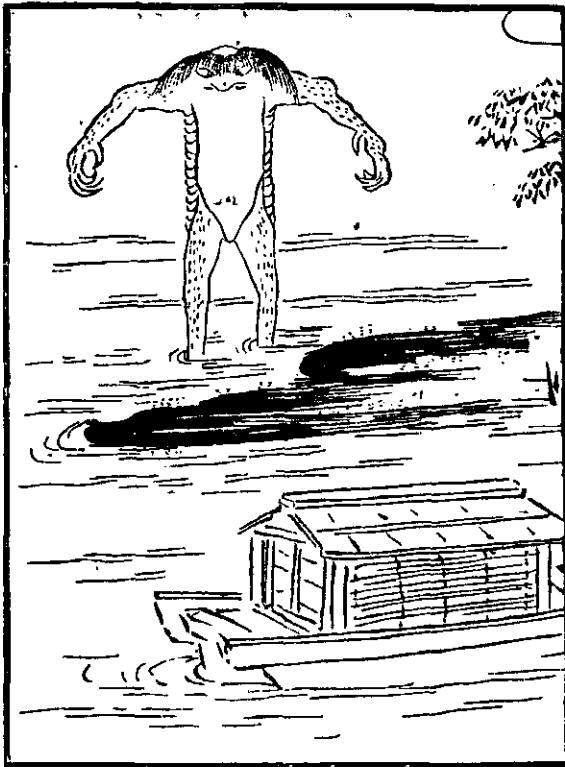
9. Here, *Sōshi* refers to Zhuangzi as well as to the chapbook format. An annotated version of the text is in Nakano, *SNKBT 81*, pp. 1–68. Nakano reads the term *sōji*.

10. *Newfangled Spiels* (which contains the story about the funeral director) was praised in the reviewbook *Sengoku dōshi* (1754). Its sequel was *Moralizing Spiels* (*Kyōkun betadangi*), which was billed in advertisements and in its subtitle as *Spiels, Continued* (*Zoku betadangi*). No doubt these works, which were issued in Edo, contributed the word that defined the genre, which may be why the *dangibon* is not associated with Kamigata per se.

11. See the brief history of the *dangibon* in the explanatory essay in Nakano, *SNKBT 81*, pp. 359–418.

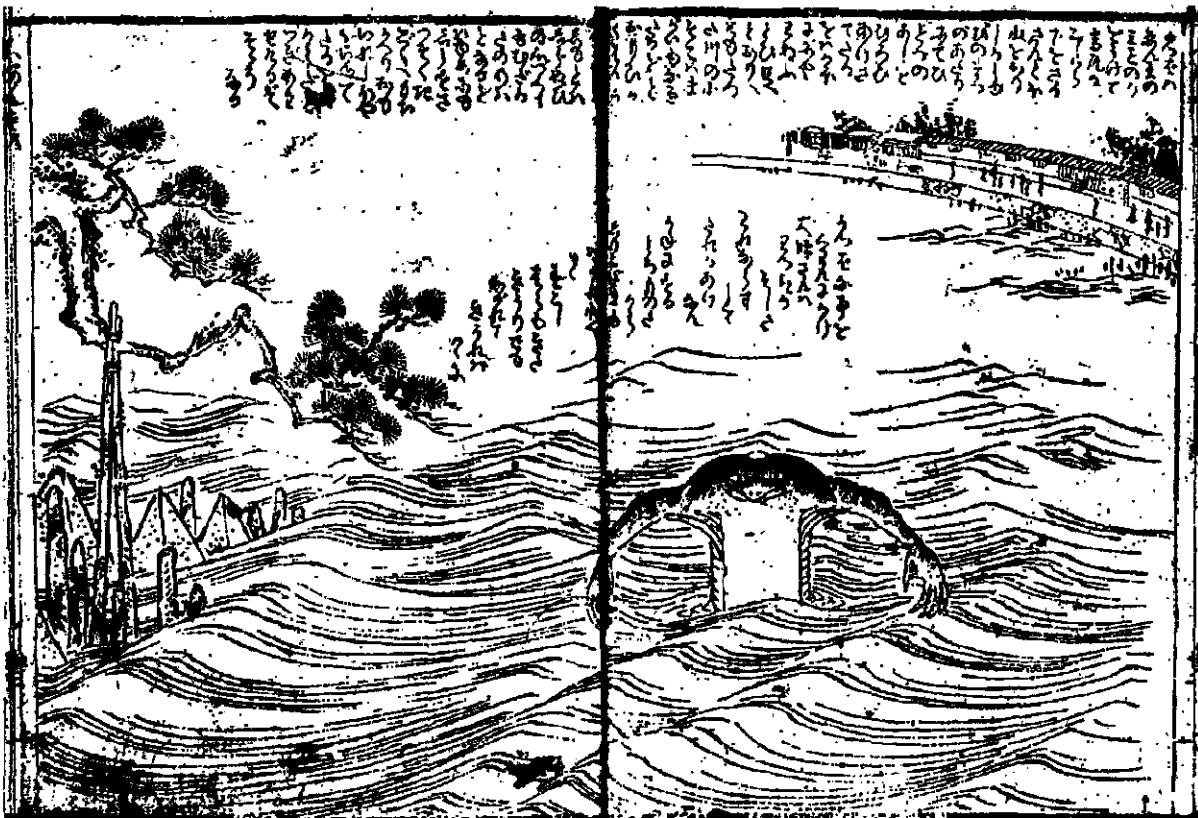
12. For an annotated version of *Nenashigusa*, see Nakamura, *Fūrai Sanjin shū*, pp. 33–94.

13. A transcribed but unannotated version of this *kibyōshi* can be found in Mizuno, *SKZ 1*, pp. 149–168.



(left) Fig. 2.1 A goofy-looking water sprite (*kappa*). From *Rootless Grass* (*Nenashigusa*, 1763), a mock-sermon book by Hiraga Gennai. Reprinted in Nakamura, *Fūrai Sanjin shū*, p. 89. Courtesy of Iwanami shoten.

(below) Fig. 2.2 A goofy-looking water sprite (*kappa*), modeled on the one in Gennai's *Rootless Grass* of two decades earlier. From *Unsavoryly Mismatched Jiffy Shanks* (*Fuanbai sokuseki ryōri*, 1784), a *kibyōshi* written and illustrated by Santō Kyōden. Courtesy of Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library, Kaga Collection.



**The Fashionbook**

The genre of *gesaku* to exert the most influence upon the *kibyōshi*, if just one must be named, is probably the fashionbook (*sharebon*).<sup>14</sup> A mainstay of Edo *gesaku*, this urbane brand of popular fiction, as a rule sparsely illustrated, is largely devoted to the latest and swankiest *haute couture*, etiquette, and colloquialisms of the day. The word *share* means “smart” in two senses—nattily dressed (as in modern Japanese *oshare*) as well as wittily or even punningly worded. To the extent that the licensed districts served as the ever-gushing font of such fashionableness, most fashionbooks naturally concern themselves with the Floating World of pleasure quarters. Most but not all, for there was a variety of other formulae and even settings, such as: “meetings, travel, banquets, the boudoir, the morning after, and so on.”<sup>15</sup> Kyōden’s *Three Madames and Their Dirty Tale* (*Kokei no sanshō*, 1787), for instance, traces the domesticated lives of courtesans after their retirement from the major pleasure quarters of Edo.<sup>16</sup>

The two most salient features of the fashionbook to impact the *kibyōshi*, though, are arguably the emphasis placed upon this sort of sophistication and the implementation of an everyday conversational style as narrative. Earlier genres of literature like the companion booklet, syllabary booklet, and Floating World novella, as well as forms of popular theater such as *kyōgen* and especially kabuki, employed the contemporary dialogue of the common folk to varying degrees of effectiveness. However, the authors of mid-Edo genres of playful literature like the mock-sermon book and the fashionbook became unprecedentedly preoccupied with the narrative possibilities of the realistic rendering of language as it was spoken outside the aristocracy. More so than the mock-sermon book, even, the fashionbook—or at least its main “conversational” form (*kaiwatai sharebon*)—gave itself over completely to this preoccupation. In many such works, the dialogue *was* the story. The only narrative intrusions of descriptive prose were the occasional “stage directions,” usually rendered in a smaller hand—the pre-modern equivalent of italics—or with symbols or boxed names indicating the different speakers (Figure 2.3). Such works certainly contain little if anything in the way of interior monologue. As such, the fashionbook represents one of the earliest efforts at *sustained* realistic conversation in the vernacular within Japanese letters, an effort that clearly carried over into the dialogic sections of the *kibyōshi*.

14. For more on the fashionbook in English, see Araki, “*Sharebon*: Books for Men of Mode”; Kornicki, “*Nishiki no Ura*”; Miller, “The Hybrid Narrative of Kyōden’s *Sharebon*”; and Martin, “Santō Kyōden and His *Sharebon*.” In German, see Schamoni, *Die Sharebon Santō Kyōden und ihre Literaturgeschichtliche Stellung*.

15. Nakamura, *Gesakuron*, p. 144.

16. For an annotated version, see Nakano, *SNKBT* 80, pp. 79–102. For a translation, see Campbell, *Three Madames and Their Dirty Tale*.

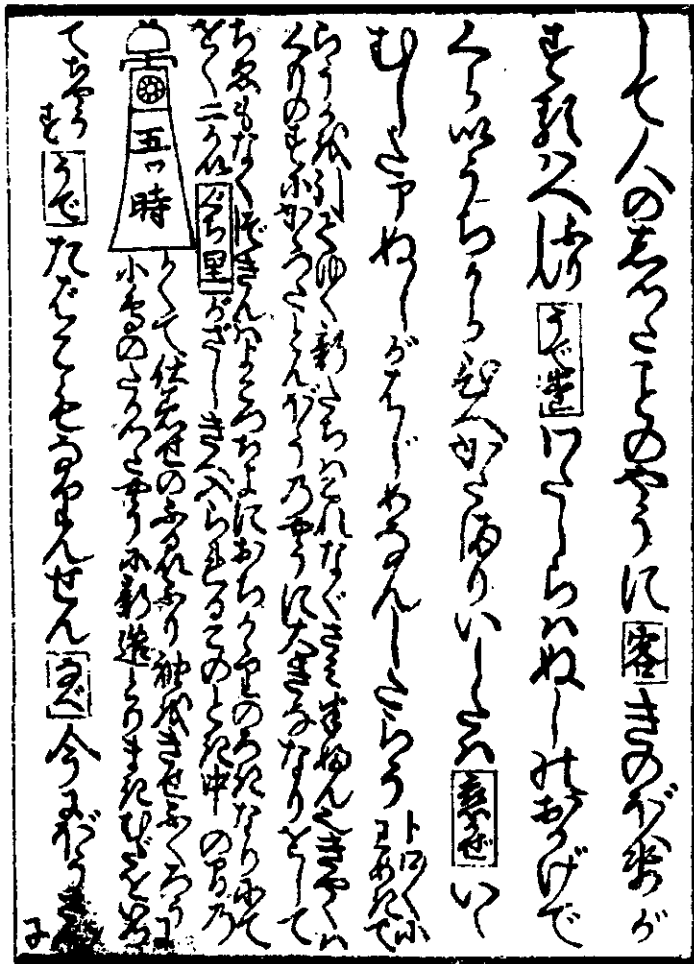


Fig. 2.3 Representative page from *Behind Silk Brocade* (*Nishiki no ura*, 1791), a conversational fashionbook by Santō Kyōden. Courtesy of Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library, Special Acquisitions Collection.

Although there are many interesting exceptions, the *kibyōshi* and the fashionbook also generally share an abiding fascination with the world of the pleasure quarters, its rules of etiquette, characters, fashionable garb and lingo, and, above all, the Edo brand of sophistication. Kamigata had long boasted its own ideal of classiness (*sui*) and stylishness (*iki*).<sup>17</sup> It was only natural that, with the swing eastward, Edo developed its homegrown variety as a major part of the assertion of its own cultural identity. Thus, the terms sophistication (*tsū*), sophisticate (*tsūjin*), and great sophisticate (*daitō*)—which had collectively evolved from the frequenter (*tōribito* or *tōrimono*) of the pleasure quarters in Edo—became household words in the shogun's capital around the An'ei-Tenmei era.<sup>18</sup> The hallmark of this brand of Edo

17. Pincus renders *iki* as “bordello chic” in *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan*, p. 119.

18. The term “sophistication” (*tsū*)—which sometimes is an abbreviation of the term “sophisticate” (*tsūjin*)—seems to go as far back as *A Guide to Love in the Yoshiwara* (*Yoshiwara koi no michibiki*, 1678). The earlier term “frequenter” (*tōri*) had often been suffixed to another word, as in the “frequenter” (*tōribito*) of, or the “regular” (*tōrimono*) in, the pleasure

sophistication was not only “cool,” meaning a casual indifference to all that was required in the pursuit of pleasure—even squandering a vast fortune—but a kind of “penetrating” (*tōru*) understanding of the “world’s loopholes” (*seken no ana*). This was less cynicism than *savoir-faire*. Thus, sophistication in Edo often took the form of an ironic detachment that was nonetheless grounded in a mastery of the particular details of Edo’s cultural hotspots. Indeed, *tsū* might well be defined as the Edo brand of decadent urbanity that held sway in the Floating World of pleasure quarters, kabuki theaters, sideshow spectacles, and urban life at large.

Some fashionbooks consisted entirely of discussions among various sorts of characters desperate to acquire—or pretending to already possess—this brand of Edo sophistication. These characters include the rookie or youngster (*musuko*) not yet fully initiated into the ways of the Floating World; the poseur or half-baked sophisticate (*bankatsū* or *banka tsūjin*), who tries too hard; and the out-and-out cultural philistine or boor (*yabo*), who is oblivious to the fact that his efforts will never quite pay off. Most readers would no doubt identify to one degree or other with these characters even if only privately, since few people were—or are—perfect sophisticates. Just as these characters serve as a vehicle for the reader to learn about the demimonde, then, so too do these characters themselves typically engage a “drumbearer” (*taikomochi*) or drum doctor (*taiko isha*), a kind of amiable escort for hire in the pleasure quarters whose role it was to keep a client company, provide comic relief, relieve tedium (especially while waiting for the chronically late courtesans to appear), and otherwise smooth over any awkward moments or breaches in decorum with light banter.

Many a fashionbook is concerned with the education of the aspiring sophisticate, and with the machinations of the professional guides, courtesans, and various entertainers or performers who earn their livelihood off of him. These are stock figures who find their home away from home in the *kiyōshi* as well—one certainly recognizes their likes in the playboy wannabe and his opportunistic sidekicks in Kyōden’s *Playboy*. The kind of fashionbook that does as much has built into its very structure a way of including the less than perfectly sophisticated reader without offending him.

It is often said that the major strain of fashionbook follows the pattern of Inaka Rōjin Tadanojijū’s *The Playboy’s Idiom* (*Yūshi hōgen*, 1770), in which a sophisticate instructs a rookie on proper pleasure-quarter deportment.<sup>19</sup> The laughs in such works typically come at the cost of the boor, who not

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quarters. Likewise, there was such a thing as the “frequenter boor” (*tōryabo*). However, when *tōri* came to stand on its own, it was read as *tsū*. For more on this etymology, see Nakao, *Sui, tsū, iki*, pp. 145–164. Nakao cites the pronouncement in *Morisada’s Trivia*: “In Kamigata it’s *sui*, whereas in Edo it’s *tsū*” (p. 145). Also, Teruoka notes that the term *daitō* first appeared in 1770 but had become commonplace by 1777. In Teruoka, “The Pleasure Quarters and Tokugawa Culture,” p. 26.

19. For an annotated edition, see Mizuno, *NKBT* 59, pp. 269–294.



infrequently hails from the provinces but is always inept. Sometimes it is the poseur who, only pretending to sophistication, is bound to have his humorous comeuppance. The comedy in this sort of fashionbook, then, typically resides in the pretensions of these stock comic types and how they fall laughably short of the ideal of sophistication. Edo's sartorial and linguistic styles, in other words, are constructed chiefly through the negative example of men behaving badly. In this sense, the fashionbook reminds one of those English pamphlets in the age of George III (1738–1820) that, according to Diana Donald, expounded "the rules of conduct through ironic presentations of their *opposites*. Every social solecism, from boorish table manners to garrulity, uncouth posture and impoliteness to ladies is illustrated here."<sup>20</sup> It is this tendency in the fashionbook to ridicule the departure from the notion of fashionable behavior it constructs that must have imbued the genre with much of its normative force.

This sophistication à la Edo is not the only major concern of the *kibyōshi*, or the fashionbook for that matter. Yet it is what separates the *kibyōshi* from earlier genres of comicbooks. In fact, the *kibyōshi* might functionally be defined as a kind of sophisticated Edo-period comedy of manners, with plenty of colloquial and witty repartee, in the guise of children's comicbooks. In this sense, the fashionbook is more fundamental to the *kibyōshi* than just about any other genre of *gesaku*.

**Guidebook Literature** To the extent that the Edo fashionbook and the *kibyōshi* provided a kind of insider's view of Edo's sexiest contemporary cultural landscape, these genres can be said to have participated in the phenomenon of guidebook (*annaisho*) literature. Consisting of such things as travel guides to famous spots (*meishokai*) in urban centers but also in the country, etiquette manuals on connoisseurship in the pleasure quarters (*showakee hidensho*), and various breeds of *vade mecum* to particular houses of pleasure (*annaiki*), the guidebook—although not a genre of *gesaku* per se—represented an important slice of the mass-publishing industry's pie of activities.

The guidebook that exerted the most profound influence upon the *kibyōshi* was arguably *The Yoshiwara, Detailed* (*Yoshiwara saiken*), in part because one of the major *kibyōshi* publishers, Tsutaya Jūzaburō, got his start peddling it himself. First published around 1684, subsequently revised periodically, though becoming issued regularly from about 1725 on, this guidebook provided a wealth of factual details about Edo's most storied licensed district that even the actual connoisseur would no doubt find of use.

Yet the roots of *The Yoshiwara, Detailed* seem to run deep within fiction, as with the imaginative *Tales of the East* (*Azuma monogatari*, 1642)—the "East" here referring to the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter "out east" in Edo. It might

20. Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, p. 96.

seem odd that a factual guidebook drew its inspiration from a fictional one. Guidebook literature, however, did not fall under any kind of obligation to be stringently truthful. Indeed, such works often delighted in embellishment, sometimes for the sake of advertising particular establishments, sometimes because local color sold copy, and sometimes because fiction was stranger than fact. "We read these works today as fiction," opines Richard Lane, "but at the time they were obviously written with very practical considerations in mind, as witness the inclusion of notations regarding mileage between stopovers and of other detailed travel information."<sup>21</sup>

This fictional vein runs throughout guidebook literature, almost as though verity and invention were viewed not as mutually exclusive but as two sides of the same strategic coin of stimulating the desire for travel—and for travel literature. One sees this certainly from the early seventeenth century, when travel was being transformed into tourism—pleasure jaunts, in other words, albeit largely under the cover of a "religious" purpose. The characters in one of Saikaku's yarns, for instance, set off on a supposedly holy pilgrimage in order to fulfill their own secret amorous desires.<sup>22</sup> Entire books based on similar road-trip misadventures can be found early on in works such as *Chikusai's Saga* (*Chikusai monogatari*, ca. 1620s), a syllabary booklet attributed to Karasumaru Mitsuhiro (1579–1638) describing the eponymously named quack doctor and his sidekick Niraminosuke as they bumble along from Kyoto to Nagoya on the country's main thoroughfare.<sup>23</sup> *Chikusai* helped establish the general pattern, if not the specific itinerary, of subsequent fictional travelogues, everything from Asai Ryōi's *Famous Sights Along the East-Sea Highway* (*Tōkaidō meisshoki*, 1659) to Jippensha Ikku's funnybook *Hoofing It Along the East-Sea Highway* (*Tōkaidōchū hizakurige*, 1802–1822), which has been touted as "Japan's great comic novel."<sup>24</sup>

Guidebook literature helped the popular imagination map and, thus, increasingly interconnect the historically disconnected country. Whatever "factual" details were provided therein no doubt found their users, but the point of the literature probably had more to do with the construction of a social imaginary. Such literature became a kind of advertisement not just for the places mentioned but also for their very interconnectedness. Not everyone could afford to indulge their wildest fantasies in the Yoshiwara, no more than could everyone afford a fun-filled outing down the East-Sea Highway supposedly to worship at the Grand Shrines at Ise (though no doubt many did). In this sense, guidebook literature provided the

21. Lane, "The Beginnings of the Modern Japanese Novel," p. 676.

22. Translated as "The Barrelnaker Brimful of Love," in de Bary, *Five Women Who Loved Love*, pp. 72–113.

23. Karasumaru is thought to have written *Chikusai* during the 1620s but published it later, sometime between 1635 and 1645. See Putzar, "Chikusai monogatari."

24. For a translation that renders the colloquial dialogue into Cockney, see Satchell, *Shanks' Mare*.

antidote to the fever-inducing toxin it slyly administered. If guidebook literature contributed anything to the *kibyōshi*, then, it was this lesson about how to open up the Floating World to the popular imagination as well as to the popular consumer, vicariously satisfying some of the desire it aroused.

**Reviewbooks** A kind of guidebook to the terrain of the *kibyōshi* itself, known as the *kibyōshi* reviewbook (*kibyōshi hyōbanki*), also existed.<sup>25</sup> This was a minor strain within the much larger corpus of reviewbook (*hyōbanki*) literature that broadly overlaps with guidebook literature, and therefore is not ordinarily classified as a genre of *gesaku*. Since the *kibyōshi* critique was closely associated with the reception of the *kibyōshi*, it probably influenced the composition of the *kibyōshi* as well, for surely authors must have written increasingly with reviewers in mind.

The reviewbook shares much in common with literary criticism, too. There was a venerable tradition in Japan of such criticism, as one might expect, going back at least as far as *Nameless Sheaves* (*Mumyōzōshi*), an early twelfth-century critique of fiction, in the form of a dialogue among several women, that ranked *The Tale of Genji* at the top of some 200 works.<sup>26</sup> It was not until the Edo period that this tradition seems to have coalesced into a mass-produced and widely circulated genre of reviewbook that trained its critical eye on any number of popular topics, such as storytellers and seafood. There was also the courtesan reviewbook (*yūjo hyōbanki*), which has obvious similarities to *The Yoshiwara, Detailed* and other guidebooks to the pleasure quarters. One of the classics of this subgenre was Fujimoto Kizan's *Great Mirror of the Way of Love* (*Shikidō ōkagami*, 1678), an encyclopedic tome detailing everything from the latest coiffures, through various sorts of demonstrations of one's supposed sincerity in affection (*shinjū*), down to how to *laugh* properly in different social settings.<sup>27</sup>

There was also the critique of kabuki stars, which in its early days tended to focus more on the physical charms of young male actors than on their acting skills per se—as with the provocatively titled *Bed Buggers* (*Yarō mushi*, ca. 1660). It was only with later works, such as Ejima Kiseki's *The Versatile Actor* (*Yakusha kuchijamisen*, 1699), that the kabuki critique offered authentic criticism of performances on the actual theatrical stage. By the early nineteenth century, the actor reviewbook (*yakusha hyōbanki*) had become such a

25. Actually, this is a retrospective term. At the time, it was variously referred to as the picturebook critique (*ezōshi hyōbanki*), comicbook critique (*kusazōshi hyōbanki*), or bluebook critique (*aobon hyōbanki*).

26. Only twenty of these works are extant. For more on *Mumyōzōshi* in English, see Marra, "Mumyōzōshi."

27. See Fujimoto Kizan, *Shikidō ōkagami*.

fixture that Sanba was able to turn the tables, publishing a spoof titled *Critique of Theatergoers* (*Kyakusha hyōbanki*, 1811).<sup>28</sup>

The typical *kibyōshi* reviewbook consisted of several parts, in the fashion of these earlier reviewbooks: itemized rankings of recently published works, a freewheeling dialogue among fictional critics, and light illustration. One of the best-known examples, Ōta Nanpo's *Flowery Felicitations* (*Kikujusō*, 1781), helped confer a kind of canonical pop status upon the forty-seven pieces it evaluated.<sup>29</sup> The preface invokes both the classic "rainy night conversation" from *The Tale of Genji* (in which Genji and his chums rank the various assets of women) and the contemporary "face showing" (*kaomise*) performance on the kabuki stage—as if to say that classification is both a timeless human activity and of keen timely interest. Indeed, following the designation of the "Six Poetic Immortals" of classic verse, reviewers eventually anointed "Six *Kibyōshi* Immortals" (*kusazōshi rokkaesen*)—Hōseidō Kisanji, Ichiba Tsūshō, Koikawa Harumachi, Shiba Zenkō, Shinra Banshō, and Tōrai Sanna.

Another of Nanpo's reviewbooks, *Bystanders See It Better* (*Okame bachimoku*, 1782), is germane to *Familiar Bestsellers* (see **Figure 5.1**). Providing an itemized ranking of authors, artists, and works issued at the beginning of that publishing year, Nanpo acclaimed Kyōden's piece as the most excellent in the category of self-executed artwork.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, *Familiar Bestsellers* contains an evaluative discussion of various *kibyōshi* that could easily have taken place within a *kibyōshi* reviewbook—many of the titles Kyōden mentions in fact appeared in *Flowery Felicitations* the previous year. Although the *kibyōshi* reviewbook is not, strictly speaking, a kind of *gesaku*, it is nonetheless so dependent upon *gesaku*, and influential upon at least this particular *kibyōshi*, that it might be fruitful to consider it as an honorary member of the club.

Another *kibyōshi* reviewbook of interest is Onajiana Nokitsune's *Memento Edo* (*Edo miyage*, 1784).<sup>31</sup> Nokitsune evaluates each *kibyōshi* as though it were a kabuki play, which suggests how much the *kibyōshi* reviewbook is indebted to the actor reviewbook—and how much the *kibyōshi* genre itself has in common with the stage. More to the point, the souvenir representing Edo turns out to be none other than the *kibyōshi*. To the extent that an author

28. Sanba modeled his work on Utei Enba's humorous critique of brothel-goers *Kyakusha hyōbanki* as well as on Kiseki's *Yakusha hyōbanki*. See Raz's fascinating article "The Audience Evaluated."

29. Nanpo wrote his picturebook critique in three fascicles under the pseudonym Shoku Sanjin. In the first part, following conventions of the actor reviewbook, he ranks forty-seven *kibyōshi* published at the beginning of that year. In later fictional sections, he touches upon the world of comicbook publishing. The auspicious title refers to a design of chrysanthemums arranged into the graph for congratulations (*katobuki*). A transliterated version can be found in Hamada, *Ōta Nanpo zenshū* 7, pp. 220–252. For a discussion of this text, see Wada, "Kikujusō zengo."

30. *Okame bachimoku* is transliterated in Hamada, *Ōta Nanpo zenshū* 7, pp. 253–273.

31. Nakano, *Edo meisbo hyōbanki shūsei*, pp. 231–244. Also see Hayakawa, *Edo miyage*.

who stood to gain financially by promoting the genre his book reviewed can be trusted, at least, this suggests that just as the woodblock print of the Floating World (*ukiyo-e*) had been nicknamed the "Edo print" (*Edoe*), the *kibyōshi* had, by the mid-1780s, become the city's representative genre of comic fiction.

**Madcap Verse** The *kibyōshi* was also heavily indebted to genres of popular comic poetry, specifically the madcap verse (*kyōka*), the madcap Chinese poem (*kyōshi*), and the comic haiku (*senryū*), all of which were closely related to *gesaku*. The most influential form of popular poetry was undoubtedly the first of these. Just as the *kibyōshi* can be read as a kind of parody in the guise of children's comicbooks, or the mock-sermon book a kind of parody of serious religious homily, the *kyōka* is a kind of humorous poem in the form of the short verse (*tanka*), that longstanding *sine qua non* of cultural sophistication in thirty-one syllables (conventionally rendered in alternating lines of 5-7-5-7-7). The "madcap *tanka*," as the *kyōka* might technically be rendered, dispenses with the rules, lexicon, and topics of classical poesy, occasionally groping at the ludicrous.

According to the headnote to one verse, for instance, after a certain man passed gas, those around him, in an excess of laughter, pressed him for a poem on the subject as a way for him to make amends for his *faux pas*. This he does by a composing a bit of doggerel that can be read as a string of individual farts (*he*), as the embarrassed laughter of the farter (*he he*), as the derisive chortle of those around him (*he he he*), or as any combination thereof:

|                      |                                          |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------|
| He he he he he       | Hee hee hee hee hee                      |
| He he he he he he he | Har har har har har har har              |
| He he he he he       | Hee hee hee hee hee                      |
| He he he he he he he | Far far far far far far far far          |
| He he he he he he he | He hee-hee far-far farted! <sup>32</sup> |

Not to reduce the entire poetic tradition to a cliché, but this type of verse is certainly a far cry from the kind of *tanka* scattering cherry blossoms in the spring breeze in order to symbolize life's bittersweet evanescence.

The madcap poem became so wildly popular in late eighteenth-century Edo that it must be considered a central feature of An'ei-Tenmei culture. Indeed, the "*kyōka* boom," largely associated with Ōta Nanpo and his Edo circle—many of whom were the greatest *kibyōshi* authors of the day—often overshadows the fact that the madcap verse actually began in Kamigata with poets such as Taiya Teiryū (1654-1734). One of the members of Nanpo's circle, as a matter of fact, Mitsui Karitsu, who was head of the Mitsui

32. Nakamura, *Gesakuron*, p. 150. This verse is also a palindrome (*kaibun*)—an added feather in the poet's cap.

family that ran the governmental money exchange (*kawase*), was himself a Kamigata poet who had relocated to Edo.

The madcap poem undeniably influenced the content of specific works of *kibyōshi*. In this volume, one scene from Kyōden's *Familiar Bestsellers* largely depends upon knowledge of a particular verse. Yet it was the centrality of the *kyōka* circle within the world of *gesaku* that perhaps had the most indelible, if intangible, impact. The *kyōka* circle provided the main venue in which the creators of various types of popular literature and allied genres and media most freely and artistically and imaginatively and consequentially intermingled. Although authors no doubt came to know each other through each other's writings if not through their participation in the same publishing stable, the *kyōka* circle was arguably a far more vital, immediate, and personal locus of social and creative interaction.

To put this slightly more concretely, the *kyōka* circle was a kind of literary coterie that fostered cross-media influence among its participants—warlords, vassal samurai, kabuki idols, woodblock artists, scribes, fabulously wealthy merchants, celebrated courtesans, and others who otherwise might never have interacted so freely and so artistically meaningfully. Understanding the interconnections among members of a particular coterie helps to make important as well as interesting connections among the superabundance of oft-seemingly disparate figures peopling Edo literature, drama, and life. This kind of understanding is therefore an indispensable key to artistic production during An'ei-Tenmei. Reading works produced by members of a *kyōka* circle in dialogue allows for the kinds of insights one might gain by meditating upon the works by the various members of Virginia Woolf's Bloomsbury group, for instance or of Natsume Sōseki's "Thursday Meeting Club" (*Mokuyōkai*). Indeed, Haruko Iwasaki has argued that the participation of various authors, artists, and poets in Edo's *kyōka* circles imbued their works in multiple genres with a particular group dynamic that is fundamental to understanding the individual works of each author.<sup>33</sup> Simply put, the *kyōka* circle was the primary cite of *gesaku* creativity.

The *kyōka* circle is essential to understanding the *kibyōshi*, moreover, since its members routinely inscribed a variety of in-group jokes and allusions to each other within their works. This is evident in the *kibyōshi* translated here. To take the most salient case, Kyōden's *Playboy* makes several oblique references to Suzuki Uemon, Ichikawa Danjūrō, and other members of the *kyōka* circle in which Kyōden participated, so that the work cannot be fully appreciated without recourse to that circle—or at least to a particular banquet for circle members known as the Handtowel Competition. While some scholars have occupied themselves with trying to locate a real-life model for the comic hero Enjirō—even though he seems to be the

33. Iwasaki draws upon Ogata Tsutomu's argument for the centrality, in poetic and dramatic praxis, of "coterie literature" (*za no bungaku*). See Iwasaki, "The World of *Gesaku*."

stock-comic rookie who habitually inhabits the fashionbook—the more abiding real-life center of this piece, if one must be named, is probably the nexus of relationships among these *kyōka*-circle participants.

**Comic Haiku** Aside from the madcap verse, a number of related poetic genres also influenced the *kibyōshi*. The “madcap *shi*” (*kyōshi*), a comic version of Sino-Japanese verse (*kanshi*), became increasingly satirical and popular from the middle of the eighteenth century on. During An’ei-Tenmei, *kyōshi* collections such as *Songs of the Northern Quarter* (*Hokurika*, 1786), a series of thirty quatrains on the Yoshiwara by Ichikawa Kansai (1749–1820), were certainly in vogue.<sup>34</sup> Nanpo’s *Collected Works of Master Sleepyhead* (*Neboke sensei bunshū*, 1767) epitomized the related hybrid genre of “madcap poetry and prose” (*kyōshibun*). The subversion in these “madcap” forms of traditional genres of poetry and prose-poetry—which no doubt goes back to the “madcap play” (*kyōgen*) of the noh stage, if not earlier, and which had their analogue in the form of “madcap prose” (*kyōbun*)—is a paradigmatic key to *gesaku*, which can be thought of by and large as a parodic enterprise.

The most popular form of comic poetry intimately connected to the *kibyōshi* as well as *gesaku* in general was the *senryū*. In fact, the *senryū* was at times referred to as “playful verse” (*wareku*), suggesting an affinity with “playful literature” (*gesaku*), the graph for “playful” being the same in both terms (though pronounced differently). This was a pithy little verse that, for the sake of simplicity, can be thought of as a comic poem in the seventeen-syllable haiku form. Just as the madcap *tanka* assumed the form of the *tanka* to spoof its contents, likewise the *senryū* assumed the form of the haiku (*hokku*).<sup>35</sup> True, a few “comic haiku” parodied specific haiku, but most merely assumed the haiku form in the course of making some sly if cheeky observation. Some of these comic haiku are as memorable as the best epigrams in the Western literary tradition for the way their wit shines through the brevity of the form.

Although the *senryū* can be rendered loosely as “comic haiku,” it should be pointed out that some haiku could themselves be rather humorous. In fact, the haiku was originally conceived of as an amusing (*hai*) departure from the

34. Markus has written about this in his paper, “Itinerary of a Useless Man.”

35. Strictly speaking, the terms haiku and *senryū* were not widely used during the eighteenth century, and came into vogue only during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During An’ei-Tenmei, the seventeen-syllable poem was called a *hokku* and was often used as the opening verse in a game deriving from the art of linked poetry (*renga*). Although the haiku is now written to stand on its own as an independent verse, the *hokku* was typically written as part of a longer sequence. There were some genuinely funny *hokku*—the *hokku* on fleas that Bakin harnesses in one of his *kibyōshi* comes to mind—yet the *senryū* was written to stand on its own. Thus, the *senryū* can be described as a comic haiku as long as this caveat is kept in mind.

forbiddingly serious strictures of the poetic tradition of linked verse (*renga*). In his earthier moments, the great haikai poet Matsuo Bashō employed a lexicon in his poetic prose and poetry all but inconceivable in previous epochs, referring to such things as sleeping whores and pissing horses. The comic haiku was even less beholden to orthodoxy, poetic or otherwise, dwelling instead on topics that would have made even Bashō blush.

Moreover, a significant number of comic haiku came to take joy in the shock of the scatological and the obscene. This culminated in a subgenre in its own right, an Edo analogue of the dirty limerick or the Greek *obscaena*, known as the transgressive verse (*bareku*), which might be rendered simply as "bawdy haiku."<sup>36</sup> Works in this vein almost make the madcap verse on farting seem refined. Some commentators find the comic haiku's bawdier brethren offensive to the point of not uttering its name. In his otherwise fine book on the comic haiku, Makoto Ueda holds that "there is a multitude of senryū peppered with slang words for male and female genitals as well as for various bedroom practices used by courtesans. . . . Many of these senryū violate our sense of decency."<sup>37</sup> Although the *kibyōshi* tends to avoid out-and-out raunchiness, in its bolder moments it shares with the more risqué comic haiku, if not with the bawdy haiku itself, a delightful propensity to titillate with erotic or scatological innuendo, as is evidenced in the *kibyōshi* translated in this volume.

The comic haiku and other contemporary genres demonstrated dramatically that the relaxing of literary conventions could result in mass popularization of a literary form. Such was an important precedent for the *kibyōshi* and other forms of Edo's playful literature. The *senryū* relaxed the complex, strict compositional rules of classic linked poetry, such as the observation of seasonal words (*kigo*), cutting words (*kireji*), a restricted lexicon (relative to the classical *tanka*), and so on. This meant that even people lacking extensive poetic training could participate in the fun. As long as a genre had relatively simple rules, even if it mocked the complex rules of its antecedents, it could find a mass following. One need not be a haiku master, in other words, to write comic haiku.

Indeed, with the publication of Karai Senryū's (1718–1790) *Senryū's Annotated Collection of Myriad Verses* (*Senryū hyō manku awase*) in 1759, reading and writing in the namesake genre became something of a craze. Although its popularity had ebbs and flows, the comic haiku tradition continues and even thrives in Japan to this day, as is evidenced by the phenomenon of

36. For a meditation upon the *bareku* in Japanese, see Shimoyama, *Senryū no erotishizumu*. "As the distinction between haiku and *senryū* became more pronounced," writes Solt, "a division emerged in *senryū* itself which opposed the usual variety of comic *senryū* with the more risqué '*bareku*.' *Bareku*, literally 'violating propriety verse' was, by definition, taboo in polite society." In Solt, "Willow Leaflets," p. 129.

37. Ueda, *Light Verse from the Floating World*, p. 26. In introducing the *senryū* into English, Ueda dispenses with the macron.



"salaryman *senryū*"—comic haiku sent in by the general reader and published in regular columns in many of the national as well as regional newspapers.<sup>38</sup>

The comic haiku and the *kibyōshi* both partake of the popular culture of their day, so their mutual compatibility is hardly surprising. Both arguably reached their apogee during the 1780s. Some writers were active in both genres as well. Kyōden, for instance, in addition to his *kibyōshi*, fashion-books, and so forth, is thought to have compiled at least one comic haiku collection.<sup>39</sup> The *kibyōshi* and the comic haiku also both assume relatively succinct forms. Mori classifies the *kibyōshi* as a genre of short, highly dense literature, placing it in the same category as the comic haiku, the comic *tanka*, and the *tanka* itself.<sup>40</sup> Although Mori does not embellish, it is clear that from the reader's perspective the *kibyōshi*, like these other genres, requires a good deal of unpacking. The brevity of these forms allows no room for contextualization, let alone excess information. Accordingly, the *kibyōshi* and the comic haiku share some similarly abbreviated modes of humor. Kyōden ratifies this position when, in *Familiar Bestsellers*, he remarks that the *kibyōshi* is imbued with the "wit of the comic haiku."<sup>41</sup>

Likewise, Ebara Taizō long ago suggested that the comic haiku can be viewed as a *kibyōshi* in miniature, and conversely that the *kibyōshi* can be viewed as a comic haiku writ large, shot through with the same comic spirit.<sup>42</sup> Ebara did not elaborate, though one characteristic must surely be the way the comic haiku and the *kibyōshi* alike delight in exposing human foibles (*ana o ugachi*). R. H. Blyth was not exaggerating when he contended that the comic haiku "cannot bear the slightest untruth, whether of hyperbole, hypocrisy, self-deception, affectation, or . . . sentimental sexuality."<sup>43</sup> Thus, although many genres of Edo popular literature employ the digging remark (*ugachi*), laying bare the loopholes (*ana*) in the façade of a person or a society, the comic haiku and the *kibyōshi* share a special propensity for this kind of highly condensed mode of satire.

A less ethereal connection can be found in the allusions to particular comic haiku within works of the *kibyōshi*. Oftentimes these allusions enrich the reading experience. In Kyōden's *Playboy*, for instance, a reference to kept women prone to bedwetting might have called to mind a popular comic haiku on the subject. Granted, since the *kibyōshi* and the comic haiku both

38. For more on this, see Gardner, "The Blessing of Living in a Country Where There Are *Senryū*."

39. This is the *Kokon maekushū* (1796), a reissue of the *Gleanings of the Haikai-Styled Yanagidaru* (*Haikai yanagidarū shū*).

40. Mori, *Kibyōshi kaidai*, p. 11.

41. Actually, Kyōden uses the term *haikai*, referring to the freewheeling wit of what would come to be known as haiku—though his contemporaries would have understood this to refer to those comic *haikai* that later would come to be known as *senryū*.

42. Ebara, "*Kibyōshi Sekki yagyō*," p. 407.

43. Blyth, *Edo Satirical Verse Anthologies*, p. xxvi.

had their fingers on the pulse of popular culture in all its sometimes wonderfully tasteless glory, it is impossible to know with any certainty if such allusions were intentional. Nonetheless, there are instances in which certain *kibyōshi* scenes seem to depend upon a knowledge of a specific comic haiku. When Kyōden refers to the Mimeguri Embankment in a later scene from *Playboy*, for instance, the “sunken” shrine gate in the picture makes sense as soon as one recalls a comic haiku—in vogue at the time—comparing said gate to a water taxi. Thus, this comic haiku may serve here as a “think-for-yourself punch line” (*kangae ochi*), a kind of missing link that the reader must supply for himself in order to “get” the joke. If the reader fails to make the connection, something vital is lost. To the extent that individual verses of comic haiku had widespread currency—perhaps like the lyrics to a Beatles song of some two centuries later?—*kibyōshi* authors evidently counted upon a familiarity among a significant portion of their educated urban readers.

#### Performance Arts

A variety of different types of oral and literary performance arts impacted upon the *kibyōshi* as well. The average denizen of Edo during the 1780s would certainly have been familiar with street-corner oration (*tsuji-dangi* or just *dangi*), attention-grabbing public lectures (*kōdan*), storytelling with visual aids (*etoki*), and the epic-length compositions performed by zither-wielding jongleurs (*bina hōshi*) in gathering places such as temple fairs and open markets. In fact, along with the *kibyōshi* and kabuki, these sorts of performance arts collectively amounted to a major form of popular entertainment throughout An'ei-Tenmei. There was also the impersonation of kabuki dialogue, often drawn from a particular performance, replete with the exact gestures and “vocal mannerisms” (*kowairo*) of individual stars. Some impressionists, like Matsukawa Tsuruichi, no doubt would have given Rich Little a run for his money. The conjoined geisha protagonists of Kyōden's *Swingers* perform such a routine to *shamisen* accompaniment for guests in a private partyroom. Reputedly first performed at the entrance to playhouses as a means of drumming up audience members, vocal impersonation swept Edo as a craze during the 1780s, a tribute to the emerging celebrity culture as much as it was to individual actors.

The most enduring form of performance art, one not entirely unrelated to vocal impersonation, was comic storytelling (*rakugo*). Unlike vocal impersonation, however, which found its main niche as a casual pastime performed by and for kabuki fans at parties, comic storytelling was a highly polished craft performed by more than just avid amateurs. The solo professional raconteur would typically dazzle his audience with meticulously crafted and rehearsed routines in a veritable choir of sonorous voices and choreographed gestures to match his fictional characters in a way that might rival the art of Ruth Draper, Spalding Gray, even Garrison Keillor. Such a choir of voices plays a key role in the fashionbook as well as the *kibyōshi*.



Fig. 2.4 An impish Dream Creature, garbed in pajamas, taunting a slumbering man with the "Dream Gold" routine. From *Rosei's Dream—The Night Before* (*Rosei ga yume sono zenjitsu*, 1791), a *kibyōshi* written by Santō Kyōden and presumably illustrated by Kitao Shigemasa. Courtesy of Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library, Kaga Collection.

Although not typically labeled *gesaku*, comic storytelling and its analogous written forms (such as the jokebook), were nonetheless closely allied with a variety of genres of popular literature and drama. The think-for-yourself punch line, in fact, is just one of the many set categories of comic dénouement in *rakugo* of which the *kibyōshi* makes substantial use. It is well attested that comic storytelling routines, including specific gestures and voices, were inserted into kabuki and puppet plays.<sup>44</sup> Likewise the *kibyōshi*. One such bit, "Dream Gold," describes a boatman who, counting gold ingots covetously in his sleep, wakes up to find himself grabbing his own family jewels.<sup>45</sup> Kyōden makes sly reference to this comically gripping climax in one of his *kibyōshi*, titled *Rosei's Dream—The Night Before* (*Rosei ga*

44. Brandon, *Kabuki*, p. 29.

45. Yano, *Rakugo*, p. 11. Also see Yano's essay on "Dream Gold" (*Yumekin*) in Haniya, *Yume*, pp. 99–104.

*yume sono zenjitsu*, 1791). The story is set in the Jumbled-Up Land of Dreams (*Muchara koku*), where Dream Creatures produce dreams as puppet or kabuki plays and then export them to earth to be shown to slumbering human beings. Since some of these Dream Creatures turn out to be quite mischievous, not all of their staged dreams can be described as sweet (Figure 2.4).

### The Jokebook

Comic raconteurs frequently looked to "jokebooks" (*hanashibon*) for material. Inasmuch as some such jokebooks must have been written with performance in mind, it is difficult to determine if the *kihyōshi* drew exclusively upon the one or the other. The *kihyōshi*, in other words, seems to have appropriated both actual performances of comic storytelling as well as the printed texts that either served as scripts for or else were bootleg transcripts of such performances. The mutual interconnections between—or rather the interchangeability of—comic storytelling and the jokebook come across dramatically in a scene from *Familiar Bestsellers* in which one of the characters, a personified jokebook, provides entertainment at a party as though he himself were a comic raconteur.

The typical jokebook was a loose collection of comic anecdotes, sketches, and stories (*hanashi*, *kobanashi*, *otoshibanashi*) that tended to run much shorter than those of the mock-sermon book.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the mock-sermon book, moreover, which employs many Chinese graphs, the jokebook practically engenders verbal punning and other sorts of wordplay by virtue of its heavy reliance on the Japanese phonetic syllabary (*kana*).<sup>47</sup> The jokebook provided an important precedent in this regard for the *kihyōshi*.

The jokebook was published in two major formats, one of which in fact is easily mistaken for the *kihyōshi*.<sup>48</sup> The first of these, chronologically speaking, is that of the syllabary booklet, which tended to be sparsely illustrated, containing perhaps only one illustration of a key comic moment gleaned from a dozen or more stories. In fact, this type of jokebook is even sometimes referred to as a comic syllabary booklet. Anrakuan Sakuden (1554–1642) compiled one of the earliest in this mode, *Slumber-Rousing Laughs* (*Seisuishō*), in 1623. Many a *rakugo* skit extracts its material directly from Sakuden, as does many a *kihyōshi* for that matter, since the stories are short enough to be readily exportable. To take one old chestnut, a man visits a Buddhist monk to ask for help in warding off a menacing local dog. "Paint the word

46. Generally speaking, the *hanashibon* is the written version of various sorts of oral anecdotes (*otoshibanashi*), both of which drew their material from *setsuwa* and *otogizōshi* and became the stock in trade of *rakugo*.

47. Since *kana* is a phonetic system, it remains open to punning, whereas Chinese graphs interject a visual element to the sound and thereby specify a meaning.

48. Mutō Sadao actually divides the illustrated *hanashibon* into four major categories spanning the years 1613–1856: (1) early works; (2) *kihyōshi*-style works; (3) *gōkan*-style works, and (4) miscellaneous works. See Mutō, *Eiri kobanashi o yomu*.

'tiger' on your hand," the monk advises. The man complies and sets off, only to return not long after, complaining that the dog bit him after all. "Hmmm," the monk replies. "I guess that dog can't read."

The existence of the earlier jokebook in syllabary book format calls into question the received wisdom that the mock-sermon book is the first genre of *gesaku*. The jokebook actually extends back much further in time, perhaps by as much as a century. However, it was not until the jokebook assumed the mid-sized guise of the densely pictorial comicbook (*kusazōshi*) that it came to be labeled as a kind of *gesaku*. In fact, a number of jokebooks are physically indistinguishable, for all intents and purposes, from the major comicbooks—the redbook, blackbook, bluebook, and multivolume chapbook as well as the *kibyōshi*. Occasionally, some *kibyōshi* are misidentified as jokebooks and some jokebooks misidentified as *kibyōshi*. However, whereas even the *kibyōshi*-style jokebook (*kibyōshi-jitate hanashibon*) gathers together otherwise unrelated comic anecdotes, the actual *kibyōshi* weaves such anecdotes—which often are traceable to specific jokebooks—into the fabric of an entire story.

Aside from content, however, and a reliance upon the Japanese syllabary, the jokebook contributed to the *kibyōshi* by providing a model rich in wordplay, irony, and even social satire. Just as many a *kibyōshi* observes an allegorical double structure, so too does the early anonymous jokebook *Today's Tales of Yesterday* (*Kinō wa kyō no monogatari*, ca. 1615), which relies on a classic-contemporary dichotomy, as its title makes explicit by spoofing the formulaic opening "Now it is long ago!" (*Ima wa mukashi*) of older humorous collections. And just as one of the hallmarks of the *kibyōshi* is its interrelatedness with other genres and media, Sakuden's thousand-plus stories are too, for Sakuden himself was heavily steeped in the arts, especially pictorial storytelling and the tea ceremony, not to mention various other sorts of literature (like the *setsuwa*).<sup>49</sup>

Later jokebooks, such as Kimuro Bōun's *Dappled Rice Cakes* (*Kanokomochi*, 1772) or Nanpo's *Pickled Red Snapper* (*Tai no misozu*, 1779), present more up-to-date anecdotes, emphasizing familiarity with the life and lingo of contemporary Edo.<sup>50</sup> This sort of emphasis in the jokebook (and other forms of *gesaku*) can only have influenced the *kibyōshi*. It is no coincidence that many important *kibyōshi* authors—Harumachi, Bakin, Sanba, and Ikku come to mind—were also active in the jokebook. These authors dismissed some of the comicbook-style jokebooks they themselves penned as "frivolous works," which raises the possibility that the jokebook itself was

49. Sakuden was clearly conversant with the great *setsuwa* collections, such as *Fukuro zōshi* (ca. late 1150s), *Uji shū monogatari* (ca. 1190–1242), *Kokon chomon jū* (1254), *Otogizōshi* (sixteenth century), *Shaseki shū* (thirteenth century), *Genkō shakusho* (compiled by Kokan Shiren, 1278–1346), and so on, as well as a variety of other sources.

50. See Odaka, *NKBT 100*.

considered at the time to be a kind of *gesaku*.<sup>51</sup> Although this can be explained away as the jokebook's tendency to assume the format and thus the rhetoric of the most popular genres of the day, if not an effort on the part of these authors to extend their success in *gesaku* genres to their jokebooks, it cannot be denied that the jokebook was a significant tributary to the mighty river that was playful literature.

Popular Stage  
and Comicbook  
Page

The main form of public entertainment for a significant portion of Edo's denizens during An'ei-Tenmei was the popular stage, meaning the puppet theater (*ningyō jōruri* or *bunraku*) and kabuki. To the extent that this popular stage and

popular literature were manifestations of the same popular imagination, they could not help but be profoundly interrelated, even if their outward expression at first glance seems drastically different. Indeed, the popular stage is so central to *gesaku* that Edo literature scholar Maeda Kingōrō once counseled that in order to appreciate the *kibyōshi* fully one must first study kabuki for no less than twenty years.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Mizuno has lamented the stage's influence on much Edo popular literature as inordinate.<sup>53</sup> And in a valuable article on their interconnections, C. Andrew Gerstle has observed: "*Gesaku* writers borrowed content and styles from *kabuki* and *ningyō jōruri* books, and certain writers—Kyōden and in particular Sanba—seem to have kept their eyes on the theatre."<sup>54</sup> Inoue Takaaki has even gone so far as to suggest that *gesaku* in essence amounts to a "send-up of the stage" (*butai no modoki*).<sup>55</sup>

The influence of the theater upon Edo's popular literature in general and the *kibyōshi* in particular is so overwhelming, then, that few if any scholars seem to have plumbed the converse—in what ways did popular genres affect both the composition of popular drama and its *reception* among theatergoers? How did the various parodies of the forty-seven *rōnin*, for instance, affect people when they watched any number of kabuki or puppet versions of *Treasury of Loyal Retainers*? And were actors and playwrights themselves affected?

Such queries are beyond the purview of the present study. One question that cannot be so readily deferred, though, has to do with why the *kibyōshi* appears to be more beholden to the kabuki than the puppet theater. Each of the three pieces translated here is conspicuously indebted to the former though hardly to the latter. Is this a coincidence, born of the fact that Kyōden

51. For instance, the *hanashibon* titled *Sato sodachi hanashi suzume* identifies itself as a *gesaku*. See Mutō, *Eiri kobanashi o yomu*, p. 113.

52. Personal conversation, Cambridge, MA 1992.

53. Mizuno, *Edo shōsetsu ronsō*, p. 59.

54. Gerstle, "Flowers of Edo," p. 103.

55. Inoue, *Edo gesaku no kenkyū*, p. 19.

was a kabuki enthusiast who participated in amateur kabuki circles himself? The unevenness is curious, especially in light of the popularity of both stages. True, the puppet theater had long been on the wane—at least in Kamigata: “After the death of Chikamatsu Hanji (1725–1783),” Karen Brazell notes, “no other great playwrights wrote for the puppets, and their popularity declined. The two major puppet theaters in Osaka folded in 1765 and 1767, handing over their facilities to kabuki actors, and for a century the puppet tradition was kept alive only in small urban theaters and in the countryside.”<sup>56</sup> This is not to say that the puppet theater became completely dormant in the shogun’s capital. As Gerstle points out, “In Edo, *gidayū* puppet theatre flourished particularly from the 1770s, when Hiraga Gennai and others wrote new plays for Edo theatres, giving further impetus to amateur devotees.”<sup>57</sup> Kabuki may have been more vibrant, then, but the puppet theater was being kept alive in Edo, if not actually experiencing something of a revival.

Furthermore, the kabuki and the puppet theaters were inextricably linked to each other. Aside from all the shared conventions, styles, and stories, playwrights like Chikamatsu wrote for both, and even then, kabuki often staged adapted pieces (*marubonmono*) based on scripts of hit puppet plays, usually with only slight modification. In this sense, it is hard to claim that a *kihyōshi* referred only to a kabuki play when that play itself had puppet precedents. Nonetheless, the mutual interrelatedness of kabuki and the puppet stages makes this apparent unevenness even more curious.

As odd as it sounds, perhaps the *kihyōshi* looked more to kabuki than to the puppet stage because actors participated in madcap poetry circles whereas puppets did not. That is to say, actors were cultural icons in a way that puppet playwrights, chanters, puppeteers, not to mention puppets, never were. The cult of the kabuki actor has to do with the rise of a celebrity culture during the Edo period that could only have been largely the product of mass publishing. Even Enjirō, to the extent that he can be said to be savvy, is savvy to this, for he hires groupies to throng to his home as though he were a kabuki star. The actor as celebrity is of paramount importance to the relationship between the *kihyōshi* and kabuki in at least one important way, since it joins the two in the same enterprise.

How, then, does the kabuki stage specifically impact the *kihyōshi* page? First, there is the *kihyōshi*’s overt appropriation of such things as specific plots, characters, scenes, settings, snippets of dialogue, lyrics, music, sounds, gestures, and so on—the surface of the performances themselves, things that would be obvious to just about anyone watching a kabuki play. Some works of *kihyōshi* allude to more in-depth aspects, such as personal details of the actors portraying roles associated with certain characters—something that only the more sophisticated theatergoer would be capable of appreciating.

56. Brazell, *Traditional Japanese Theater*, p. 19.

57. Gerstle, “Flowers of Edo,” p. 105.

Not all *kibyōshi* are beholden to the particulars of kabuki in this subtle way, to be sure. Yet even those that are not nonetheless are indebted to a variety of less obvious aspects of the popular stage, such as conventions of playwriting.

Comic business, especially in the form of wordplay, outwardly graces stage and page alike. Japan certainly provides a rich case study in the long tradition of paronomasia in Asia. One finds all sorts of "playful writings" (*gissho*) in Book 16 of the eighth-century *Anthology for Myriad Ages* (*Man'yōshū*)—a term that suggests the possibility that *gesaku* (the *ge* of which is the same graph as the *gi* of *gissho*) has some spiritual antecedents as far back as a millennium. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that the *kibyōshi* (along with most other forms of *gesaku*) and kabuki share a penchant for various types of verbal wordplay and humor, such as simple puns (*jiguchi*), strings of puns (*monozukushi*), palindromes (*kaibun*), tongue twisters (*hayakotoba*), far-fetched etymologies (*kojitsuke*), pivot words (*kakekotoba*), and associative words (*engo*). "Verbal humor is a striking feature of kabuki scripts" as James Brandon puts it, "taking the form of innumerable puns, rhyming games, and wordplay of other kinds."<sup>58</sup> Moreover, both stage and page share a propensity for close parody (*modokei*), which may be ironic given that the *kibyōshi* frequently pokes fun at the melodramatic tone of many a kabuki play, most notably the domestic dramas (*sewamono*) and, arguably its most concentrated form, the double-suicide piece (*shinjūmono*). Two of the three *kibyōshi* translated here, for instance, contain mock travel songs (*michiyuki*) of lovers supposedly on the way to their self-inflicted deaths.

The *kibyōshi* also shares with kabuki a similar kind of conventionalized irrationalism. By no means is verisimilitude the primary concern of stage or page. Theatrical time, for instance, is especially elastic. "The action of the plays easily leaves the dramatic present and readily overflows the confines of the physical stage," writes Brazell on traditional Japanese theater, including kabuki. "Theatrical time may be contracted and expanded to match plot requirements or aesthetic values, and a given locale may disappear as quickly as it is invoked."<sup>59</sup> Likewise, the anecdotal nature of many *kibyōshi* may be just as much the result of this kind of temporal elasticity as the physical format of the chapbook, which breaks up the plot into frames, the largest of which is the double-page spread.

Along these lines, the *kibyōshi* and kabuki also share a certain amount of play with narrative frame. Such play implicitly differentiates between the scripted text and the transitory moment of a performance. Actors on stage sometimes step out of character puckishly in a way that one accustomed only to "realistic" theater might find jolting (though such self-reflexivity is certainly not unknown in modernist and postmodern drama as well as literature). This they do through a variety of asides to the audience, im-

58. Brandon, *Kabuki*, p. 39.

59. Brazell, *Traditional Japanese Theater*, p. 27.



promptu speeches, and ad-libbed embellishments (*sutezerifu*). These contain comments about recent events in Edo, puffery about the fame of the particular play in which they are acting, even references to characters on stage by the personal name of the actors, including *themselves*.

Sometimes actors ribbed each other during a performance by referring to details of one another's private lives. Such in-group verbal jabbing is known as "dressing-room punch lines" (*gakuya ochi*), the kabuki equivalent of locker-room humor, perhaps, though not quite as crude. At other times, a stage star might advertise a commercial product on sale. The most well known early example of this was an unscripted spiel Ichikawa Danjūrō II delivered in 1718 and which an audience member transcribed. Dressing as a vendor of an expectorant medicine (*uirō*), Danjūrō laced his speech with various sorts of wordplay cleverly advertising the Ichikawa acting house as well as the drug. The kabuki stage in fact came to embrace such product placement. Playwrights wove advertisements into the very fabric of stories in the so-called advertisement plays (*kōkoku geki*).<sup>60</sup> No doubt this was an important inspiration for the many embedded advertisements in the *kibyōshi*.

Yet the *kibyōshi* delights in such self-reflexivity in general as well. In *Familiar Bestsellers*, the narrator adopts the persona of a stage actor delivering a prologue directly to an audience in his own name. Also, *kibyōshi* authors took subtle swipes at members of their inner circle, as we will see in all three pieces translated here. Such dressing-room humor no doubt existed in the culture at large and may have been the natural outgrowth of any highly structured narrative art. Yet one wonders if it entered the *kibyōshi* by virtue of the participation of actors in the same madcap poetry circles as *kibyōshi* authors. One of the kabuki stars during the heyday of the *kibyōshi*, Ichikawa Danjūrō V (1741–1806), frequented the *kyōka* circle of Nanpo, Kyōden, and other leading *kibyōshi* authors, composing verse under the pseudonym Hakuē. Hino Tatsuo has even suggested that Hakuē may have been a central figure of this coterie, second only to Nanpo himself.<sup>61</sup>

The *kibyōshi* also sometimes takes a cue from the old theatrical switcheroo of wardrobing a character in disguise only to reveal his secret identity dramatically. "Lo and behold that stern samurai from Kawashō 'in reality' (*jūtsu wa*) turns out to be none other than our hero's merchant brother!" audience members might have thought during Chikamatsu's play *Love Suicides at Amijima* (*Shinjū ten no Amijima*, first performed as a puppet play in 1721). Although this kind of melodramatic bombshell certainly figures in enough *kibyōshi* stories to be more or less predictable, some works ingeniously draw their characters to resemble not simply stage characters but certain actors in particular roles—sometimes even particular roles performed during one

60. For more on Danjūrō's performance in the play *Wakamidori ikioi Soga*, and on "advertising plays" in general, see Matsumiya, *Edo kabuki to kōkoku*, pp. 149–151.

61. Hino, *Edojin to yūtopia*, pp. 63–64. Cited in Gerstle, "Flowers of Edo" p. 103.

specific performance years earlier. Such play with double or multiple frame can be seen in Kyōden's *Swingers* (1788), as with its representation of the character Seijūrō as the actor Ichikawa Monnosuke in the role of Seijūrō in an illustrious three-day performance in 1781. The reader who fails to connect the dots misses a large part of the fun.

#### Theatrical Texts

This phenomenon suggests the grip of the theater on the popular imagination in Edo as the *kihyōshi* catered to it. It also raises the possibility that Kyōden expected his readers were aware of some kind of secondary source closer to the publication of his *kihyōshi*. Indeed, there existed a variety of woodblock printed texts associated with the stage that might collectively be termed "theatrical texts." Any performance of a kabuki or puppet play can be viewed as a "text" in the larger sense. I intend a slightly more restricted (though still broad) meaning of any printed matter that is used to represent some aspect of a staged play, be it the plot, a visual image, or even, perhaps, the aura of a particular actor's fame.

The theatrical text, thus, can be a verbal text, such as the playbook used by performers during rehearsals and performances called the recital libretto (*shōbon*, *nagauta shōbon*, *jōruri shōbon*, etc.) of songs from the puppet theater. Versions of these books were also available for public consumption.<sup>62</sup> In fact, it is the playbook Enjirō is shown reading in the opening scene of *Playboy* that impresses him with the heroic ideal, thereby setting him off on his comic misadventures. Plot books (*sujibon*) and dialogue books (*serifubon*) were also accessible, as were books that catered to the various imitative arts "parroting" actors (*ukiyomonomané*, *monomané*, and *kowairo*) and that were subsumed under the rubric of "libretto parroting" (*shōbon ōmuseki*).<sup>63</sup> These arts relied not only upon direct quotation from plays, but also upon the comic voice inflections and gesticulations associated with specific actors in particular roles. One certainly sees the influence of these arts upon the *kihyōshi* in general—and upon each piece translated herein.

The theatrical text can also assume a primarily pictorial form, as with various types of sometimes overlapping woodblock-printed actor prints (*yakushae*), actor books (*yakusha ehon*), "likeness prints" of actors (*yakusha nigaoe*), close-up facial portraits (*ōkubie*), and single-sheet prints (*ichimaie* or *ichimaizuri*). The last of these is personified in *Familiar Bestsellers* as a kabuki-esque character. In one scene, he is involved in a finger-slicing demonstration of affection. In another scene, he is depicted in the sort of dramatic pose (*mie*) that actors hold on stage for several intense seconds in a kind of

62. Koyama differentiates between the widely for-sale *shōbon*, which contained everything from dialogue and stage directions to details of actors' wardrobes and stage properties, and the on-stage *shōbon*, containing musical scores for *shamisen* players and lyrics for reciters. In Koyama, *Jōkyōken no shinkenkyū*, p. 21.

63. For a discussion of stage-related publications, see Akama, *Kabuki bunka no shosō*.

visual equivalent of the sound bite. Such poses are also the stuff of innumerable pictorial theatrical texts.

Furthermore, many *kibyōshi* seem to follow the tendency in such prints to position the viewer as analogous to the theatergoer seated before the stage. The *kibyōshi* reader and theatrical-text viewer see the depicted characters as an audience member might see actual actors—from a similar vantage point. Thus, they are seen on a scale comparable to that of how actors would appear in proportion to their backdrop interior or landscape stage set and objects that, in some *kibyōshi*, look uncannily like stage props. The heavily theatrical *kibyōshi* represents, then, not just the *mise-en-scène* of the actual stage (which is to say the positioning of actors, scenery, and props), but the representation of that *mise-en-scène* within pictorial theatrical texts. In this sense, such *kibyōshi* present a kind of doubly mediated vision.

The theatrical text could also assume visual-verbal form, as with the illustrated playbook (*eri kyōgenbon*) or the digest comicbook for puppet plays (*jōruri shōroku kusazōshi*).<sup>64</sup> Works in such modes allowed one to read a play without actually having to set foot in the theater—or a play that was never actually staged at all—in addition to helping audience members follow along during actual performances (Figure 2.5). In Osaka, similarly short, illustrated scripts (*nebon*) were popular from around 1784 on.<sup>65</sup> And many a blackbook can be considered essentially a retelling of a play. These texts influenced the *kibyōshi* in profound ways, too. To take the most obvious example, the layout of verbal and pictorial text is often very similar. That is to say, the convention in these theatrical texts of placing narrative text (*ji*) at the top of the page and dialogic text (*kotoba*) near the figures of the characters carries over into the *kibyōshi*.

Since the theatrically inflected *kibyōshi* shares so much with the many types of theatrical text, one wonders if the differences are significant. Is a work like Kyōden's *Swingers*, which certainly does not purport to be a "serious" retelling of its antecedent kabuki material, to be disqualified as a theatrical text simply by virtue of the playful liberties it takes? Adopting a wider view, it seems that kabuki plays, serious theatrical texts, and even genres like the *kibyōshi* that parody these two all participate in the construction of a kabuki actor's stardom within the context of celebrity culture.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the *kibyōshi* was the most potent form of advertisement for the actor as celebrity, since those pieces that play with frame in this way effectively equate the ability of the reader to identify the actor behind a character with an insider's knowledge of the stage. In so doing, the *kibyōshi* constructs the actor as the object of sophistication.

64. Throughout the period under study, the term *kyōgen* referred primarily to kabuki plays and less to the *kyōgen* plays associated with the *noh* theater.

65. Brandon and Leiter, *Villainy and Vengeance*, p. 8.

66. For more on this topic, see Kominz, *The Stars Who Created Kabuki*.



Fig. 2.5 Illustrated program to the 1792 production of the kabuki play *Pale Purple Soga, Edo Style* (*Waka murasaki edokko Soga*), featuring the actors Ichikawa Ebizō, Ichikawa Monnosuke II, and Ichikawa Omezō I. Reprinted in Clark and Ueda, *The Actor's Image*, p. 295. Courtesy of the University of Tokyo, General Library.

It is therefore possible that the theatrical text may influence the *kibyōshi* as much as the kabuki theater itself influenced the *kibyōshi*, since not only is each of these involved in the mutual enterprise of valorizing the kabuki actor, but they are also entangled in a complex intertextual web with each other. Even the most seemingly blatant of references in a *kibyōshi* to a scene from a particular kabuki play may have been mediated through a theatrical text such as the recital libretto available to audience members watching a play—or even through another *kibyōshi* that parodies a *related* kabuki play. How such a nexus of interconnections affected audience members watching a kabuki play is a matter of conjecture.

The participation of the *kibyōshi* in this kind of nexus raises another interesting issue. When Edo kabuki troupes took to the road, which they are known to have done occasionally, what sort of printed matter would have traveled too? Aside from woodblock prints serving as posters and various forms of illustrated playbooks that might be hawked in conjunction with performances, is it possible that commercially savvy publishers tried to peddle *kibyōshi* outside Edo this way? Whatever the case may be, the influence of the popular stage and its associated theatrical texts upon the *kibyōshi* suggests that a major segment of the *kibyōshi* readership consisted of the literate members of the theatergoing public.

All the Stage Is 275  
 Worlds and a Few  
 Variational Procedures

The *kibyōshi*, like other forms of *gesaku*, also importantly shares with the popular stage a similar array of compositional techniques involving the sophisticated manipulation (*shukō*) of literary formulae (*sekai*). A book-length study could be devoted to this topic alone, though here a few points will have to suffice. First, these terms can be thought of, for the sake of convenience, as variation and theme, respectively. Although literally meaning "world," the second of these (*sekai*) is an amalgam of elements from one or more stories, consisting of such things as characters, settings, situations, conflicts, motives, tropes, and so forth, which most people were presumed to know. Yet there were so many various worlds available to kabuki—Izuka Tomoichirō counts some 275; others count many times more—that there was need of enumerating them in handbooks such as *Worlds, Classified* (*Sekai kōmoku*, ca. Tenmei era).<sup>67</sup> One way of understanding An'ei-Tenmei culture—if not the psyche of Edo-period Japanese—would be to conduct a detailed study of these worlds, since, like literary formulae in the West, such themes reveal foundational mythical archetypes.

The manner in which these various themes are manipulated is called the variation (*shukō*). Literally meaning something like "device" or "invention," *shukō* is a kind of varying operation that, at its best, pushes these set themes in unprecedented directions. The significance of the variational procedure to Edo's cultural production cannot be overemphasized.

In his *magnum opus* on the comic literature of the Edo period, Nakamura Yūkihiko makes the astounding claim that the composition of Edo-period art, literature, and drama can be discussed meaningfully, without being oversimplified, in terms of this single concept.<sup>68</sup> A scholar of eminent prudence, Nakamura does not make this claim lightly. Over the course of several chapters, he methodically explicates the structure of various genres of *gesaku* (especially the fashionbook, the madcap verse, and the comic haiku), theater (kabuki and puppet plays), and even *haikai* poetry, all in terms of this single concept. Nakamura concludes that the genre to best exemplify this technique of compositional variation is none other than the *kibyōshi*. The *kibyōshi*, according to Nakamura, is the genre of variational procedure *extraordinaire*. To the extent that the variational procedure can truly be said to occupy the center of literary and cultural production during the Edo period, then, the *kibyōshi* provides a superb medium for study.

67. Brandon, *Kabuki*, p. 31. Brandon cites Izuka Tomoichirō, *Kabuki saiken* (Daichi shobō, 1926).

68. Nakamura, *Gesakuron*, pp. 142–178. Other Japanese scholars of *gesaku* agree with Nakamura. See, for example, Inoue, *Edo gesaku no kenkyū*, especially the chapters on *kibyōshi*, composition, humor, and *shukō*.

Several types of variational procedures work their magic at the level of plot, some of which Haruko Iwasaki has discussed in English in an informative, condensed overview.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, only a couple major examples of variational procedure frequently encountered in the *kibyōshi* shall be mentioned here.

The simplest to explain—and one of the most prevalent—is probably a kind of “intertwining” (*naimaze*). This usually involves the combination of two worlds. Hollywood has no shortage of films that work along similar lines—*Dracula vs. Frankenstein* (1971) and, more recently, *Freddy vs. Jason* (2003) come to mind. Kyōden’s *Unseamly Silverpiped Swingers* conjoins, through the figure of conjoined twins, two worlds of ill-fated couples, both of which were the basis of hundreds of works of prose fiction as well as kabuki dramas. Sometimes the world of a classic story might be crossed with the world of contemporary An’ei-Tenmei Edo, as with Harumachi’s *Master Flashgold*, which juxtaposes Zeami’s *Kantan* with the Floating World of Edo’s major pleasure quarters. At other times, a Chinese world might be intertwined with or rewritten into a Japanese one, in a kind of cross-cultural “acclimation” (*hamemono*), like *Loyal Water Margin* (*Chūshin suikoden*, 1799), which combines the worlds of the Japanese forty-seven loyal retainers (*Kanadehon chūshingura*, first performed in 1748) and the Chinese *Water Margin*.<sup>70</sup> More than two worlds can be threaded together into a single story, too. The kabuki play *Scarlet Princess of Edo* (*Sakura hime azuma bunshō*, 1817) deftly interweaves three separate strands: (1) the love affair between the priest Seigen and Princess Sakura (a world popular from as far back as 1674), (2) the Sumida River world, and (3) the gangster world (*keizewamono*) of Tsurigane Gonsuke.<sup>71</sup>

Sometimes, multiple worlds—even *dozens* of worlds—were combined or “blown together” (*fukiyose*) into a single complex. This potpourri is a second example of a major variational procedure. Its worlds typically share a single, easily identifiable common denominator. Otherwise, they would devolve into a frustratingly chaotic gallimaufry. Kyōden’s *Familiar Bestsellers* is a carnival of various sorts of woodblock-printed matter. His *Playboy* can be read as a pastiche of high-flying playboys. And in the case of Zenkō’s *Thousand-Armed Goddess of Mercy, Julienned* (*Daibi no senrokubon*, 1785), characters from a mélange of otherwise unrelated worlds—drawn from literature, legend, history, and the contemporary Edo cultural scene—are gathered together on account of their each missing an arm. The story is accordingly interlaced with strings of puns (*monozukushi*) on armlessness. Literary pastiche and wordplay not only go together hand in hand, therefore, but are also actually manifestations of the same principle on different levels. The pastiche is a

69. Iwasaki, “The Literature of Wit and Humor in Late-Eighteenth-Century Edo.”

70. Iwasaki calls *hamemono* “fitting in.”

71. Written by Tsuruya Nanboku V, Sakurada Jisuke II, and Tsuuchi Genshichi. In Brandon, *Kabuki*, p. 242.

kind of string of puns writ large on the narrative level, and the string of puns is a kind of verbal—or visual-verbal—pastiche writ small on the verbal (or visual-verbal) level. In this sense, the variational procedure also informs more than the plot of a story.

Thus, any given text can allude to its worlds in different ways, and on assorted levels. Of course, any world itself can contain multiple aspects. The world of one of the couples in *Swingers*, Onatsu and Seijūrō, for instance, encompasses the many different versions of their story, its performance by certain actors on the kabuki stage, representations of those actors within theatrical texts (including a variety of woodblock pictures), common associations with the personal lives of those actors, songs associated with various performances of that story but also with those actors and even possibly the playwrights, and so forth. (In this sense, it should be noted, the term “world” is quite apropos, because it suggests the wide-ranging breadth of these “themes.”) Accordingly, variational procedures can be used to combine worlds on many levels other than mere plot. In addition to the linguistic level of strings of puns and other sorts of wordplay, there is also the visual level. Many *kibyōshi* (not to mention other kinds of woodblock pictures) employ a kind of visual irony or pun (*mitate*) in which images from two different worlds are juxtaposed to witty if not humorous effect. The best *kibyōshi*, then, play with worlds on several of these different levels. Such multiple implementation of variational procedures is more or less evident in each of the three *kibyōshi* translated within this volume.

A literature based on such a small set of variational procedures and a limited number of themes naturally risks becoming terribly formulaic, derivative, tedious. A key requirement of any variational procedure, therefore, is novelty. Novelty is one of the major features of all mid-Edo playful literature. Its emphasis helps imbue the *kibyōshi* with its penchant for trendiness. This requirement is built into many definitions of variational procedure too, so that it is often rendered as an “innovative variation” on a set theme. It goes without saying that the innovativeness depends upon the particular skills of the author. Kyōden was widely considered to be one of the best. His *Familiar Bestsellers* and *Playboy* have been acclaimed as masterpieces of the genre. *Swingers*, as has been noted, seems *not* to have been a particular success, however. That said, most other *kibyōshi* are still not as original in their execution as the works in this volume. Many works in the genre come across as jejune, to say the least. Mori singled out only about 10 percent of all titles as meriting serious attention.<sup>72</sup> Some commentators,

72. Mori, in *Kibyōshi kaidai* and *Zoku kibyōshi kaidai*, addresses 200–250 *kibyōshi* that he considers superior works. Since as many as 2,500–3,000 works may have been published, it might be said that Mori finds that no more than 10 percent of the total number of *kibyōshi* worth his attention. He argues that the majority of *kibyōshi* fall more under the rubric of the early bluebooks, which is to say works of less-than-adult satisfaction.

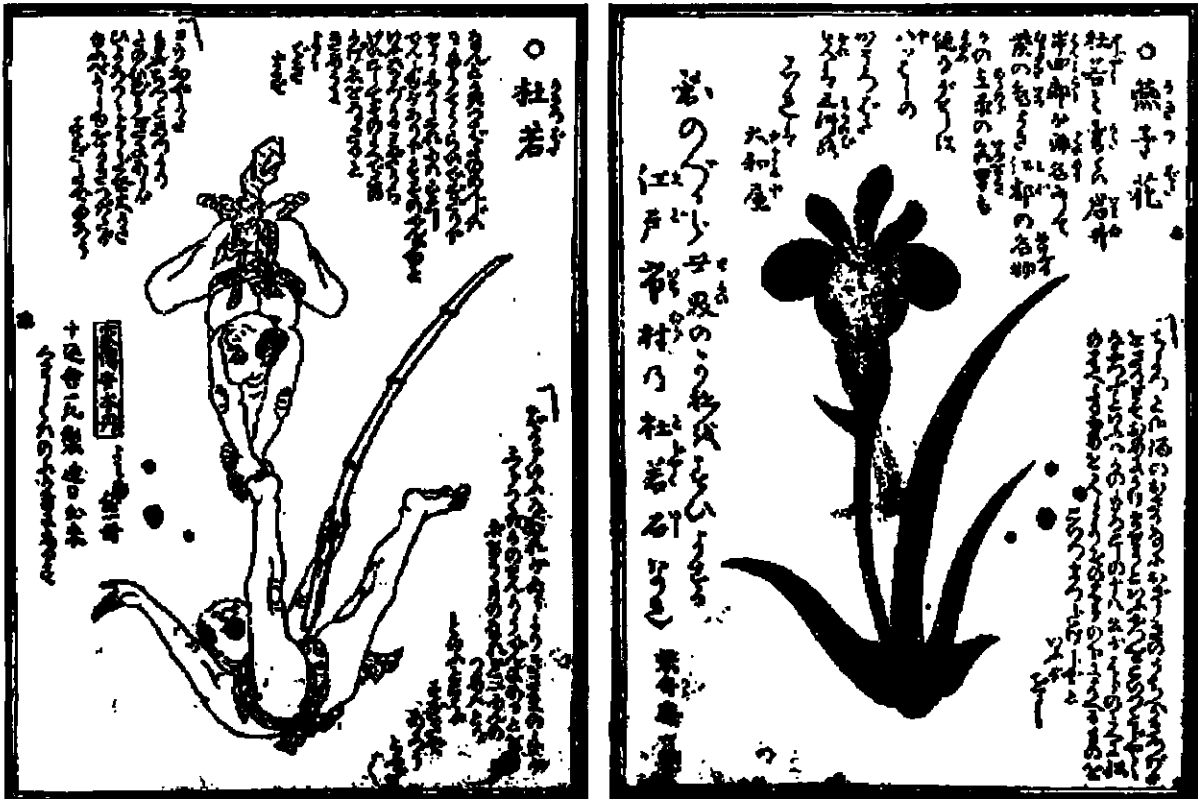
incidentally, have dismissed 90 percent or more of all modern *manga* as fluff, so one wonders if there is some kind of glass ceiling or hidden threshold governing the appraisal of comicbooks in Japan.

Perhaps the best way to regard the variational procedure is as the creative treatment of a literary formula. The *shukō* pays homage to set themes by using them as its basic material, though at the same time, it does not serve those themes obsequiously. The variational procedure is a celebration of novelty in the handling of old themes rather than in the devising of new plots. Prior to the introduction of Western Romanticism during the late nineteenth century, it certainly seems that in popular Japanese literature and theater, originality had everything to do with the skillfulness of the execution of variational procedure rather than with "brand-newness" of the theme. Something analogous separates the master from the novice on the stage of improvisational jazz. And it is this brand of originality of implementation that separates the trash from the classics within the *kibyōshi*. If the prefaces to many a *kibyōshi* are any indication, authors strained to develop new twists on familiar themes. And if the various *kibyōshi* review-books are not wildly distorted, readers delighted in seeing how an author extemporized on such themes, wringing new ideas out of old stories.

One advantage of this kind of variational procedure is that relying upon familiar themes could help overcome the sometimes profound differences in cultural background of readers who came to Edo from various regions. Thus, to be successful, an author needed to balance familiarity with novelty, the conservative element of theme with the progressive element of variation. A slight imbalance in one direction might result in stagnation or, in the other direction, chaos. The potential for narrative anarchy, however, had genuine political applications: what better way to engage in cultural identity building if not to tear down the corpus of classical literature that had previously held sway? The variational procedure need not be parodic, though like parody it entails the imitation and transformation of antecedent material. The tendency toward parody of the *kibyōshi*—and toward sociopolitical satire—may thus be latent in, if not a natural outcome of, the very structure of the compositional technique of *shukō*.

Along these lines, it must be observed that many a variational procedure "updates" a classic tale into a contemporary setting. Indeed, many *kibyōshi* do as much, too. This is because such updating is an intrinsic—though hardly *necessary*—byproduct of manipulating *classic* antecedent texts, whose worlds are by definition set in the past. *Master Flashgold* thus modernizes the classic *noh* story *Kantan* into the Edo present the way that *West Side Story* recasts Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in 1950s Manhattan. But it is possible to intertwine two contemporary worlds—or two timeless worlds—too. One can see this in a visual pun (*mitate*) that presents what appears to be a silhouette of a flower, only to reveal it (in kabukiesque manner) as a pair of acrobatic men in loincloths, neither one of these images being a particular chronological "updating" of the other (Figure 2.6).





Furthermore, the stories of many *kibyōshi* were set deliberately in the past less to take pleasure in an updating dynamic, or even to exploit the potential for fun with contrasts, than to couch their political satire. That is, just because a *kibyōshi* seems to juxtapose a former world with a present one does not mean that the story is intended *primarily* to bring some old tale up to date. Rather, what appears to be a modernizing variational procedure is actually a kind of defamiliarization—a “backdating,” as it were, as a pretext to address contemporary events, printed discussion of which the government forbade vehemently.

Another advantage of this kind of artistic production, then, is that it enabled authors to dovetail the mechanical reproduction of the woodblock process with the creative literary production of stories. The variational procedure was just as much a part of the assembly-line process of textual production as carving wooden blocks and printing images on paper. Yet it was also a means of overcoming the stasis, the automated feel of a popular literature assembled according to literary formulae. The variational procedure was, in other words, a way of manufacturing literary and cultural products in a way that did not feel manufactured. It was a seamless integration of material and nonmaterial aspects of the text.

In the final analysis, the *kibyōshi* was truly a form of recyclable literature. Just as the variational procedure allowed for the quick “recycling” of worlds into new literary material, so too was the paper itself not infrequently

Fig. 2.6 Silhouette of a flower revealed as two acrobatic loincloth-garbed commoners. From *Otsuriki* (1810), a picturebook of visual puns (*mitate ehon*) written by Jippensha Ikku and illustrated by Kitagawa Tsukimaro. Courtesy of Waseda University Library.

recycled. As illustrated in *Familiar Bestsellers*, popular literature was often made from—and eventually returned to—rough, low-grade recycled paper (*suki-gaeshi no kami*). Or it might be scrapped for wadding or wall caulking (*koshi-bari*), or for a protective layer for storing lacquer and other breakables. This two-ply recyclability informs the modern *manga*, too. It is conceivable, then, that the *kibyōshi* and other genres of *gesaku*, as throwaway forms of mass entertainment, perhaps prefigured today's "read-and-toss" (*yomisute*) comic-book in Japan. Disposable entertainment for people with disposable income. And yet the fact that so many *kibyōshi* and other forms of playful literature remain extant is a tribute to the value readers must have placed on these works. One of the many ironies of the *kibyōshi*, then, is that in spite of the fact that it was intended as ephemera, it nonetheless remains one of the mid-Edo period's most enduring legacies.<sup>73</sup>

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73. Art Spiegelman, in an interview on National Public Radio on September 16, 2004, made a similar point about American comic strips of the early twentieth century.

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