

such an empty state also appear in nature. Young tender shoots **pushing** up from beneath the snow herald the arrival of spring. They come forth gradually, a few blades at a time. Their effortlessness is interpreted in the poem as a very basic principle. Although there are many aspects of the way of poetry, I record these insights into these two poems as transmitted from Rikyū and Jōō. The Way of Tea is both profound and multiple in its facets; it is impossible for one such as me to attain. Rikyū is a singular devotee worthy of our respect: his articulation of the Way of Tea corresponds to the manifestation of the way by the Buddhas and patriarchs. This is something which must be respected.

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HŌHIRON

[On Farting (1771)]¹

by Fūrai Sanjin (Hiraga Gennai-1728-1780)

Translated by William F. Sibley

There are fools who do not neglect to gulp down their daily dose of ginseng **just** as they are about to wring their own necks, but then there are those who devour blowfish stew and **live** to a ripe old age. If some serving girls get themselves bastards from a single **fling**, there are lackeys who keep **their** noses intact through countless bouts **with** the cheapest whores. However *extreme men's* fates may turn out to be, **it** is all predetermined by Heaven. And so it is with the fads and fashions in society: it all depends on whether the time is ripe or not and, to be sure, on the level of the prevailing taste. Take for example the elaborate costumes of Danjuro, the gestures of Tomijuro (**Keishi**), the finesse of Nakazo, the feminine allure of Kinsaku, the macho style of Hiroji, the presence of Sangoro - all are well tailored to the popular taste of today. There are of course differences between the two great cities: Kikugoro holds sway in Osaka while Tomozo conquers Edo. And **within** the Edo orbit, each entertainment and pastime has its own niche: Kawaguchi for the quiet pilgrimages, Asakusa for mob scenes, Fukagawa for sumo matches, Yoshiwara for impromptu skits: Sashu's *katō* ballads take root in Kobiki-chō, Sumidayu's *gidayū* in Fukiya-chō; elsewhere one can see marionettes, plays performed by children, charades, vocal Impressions of well-known actors, street-corner sermons, and so on. But even given the countless and varied popular attractions of long prosperous Edo, the feats of the fart expert who had recently appeared in the vicinity of Ryōgoku, so I heard, were creating an unusual and controversial notoriety.

To consider this phenomenon with all due attention, we may first **observe** that within the microcosm of the individual human body, farts correspond to the thunder of the macrocosm. Being like thunder, the sound of yin and yang in contention, sometimes farts explode, sometimes they silently escape - this is their nature. Now this expert, so I heard, had somehow managed to master not only such classics as the "farting scale" and the

¹In: *Nihon no meicho*, vol. 22 (Tokyo: Ch ūō Kbronsha, 1971)

“rosary routine,” but any number of novel numbers as well, for example, the fulling block, the Yoshlwara fanfare, the Kabuki curtain-raiser drum pattern, the No drum duet. various styles of koto accompaniment. and the Gion percussion rhythm. In addition. the dog’s bark and the cock’s crow. fireworks such as lo rival the display at Ryōgoku itself, a water-mill (very like the one on the Yodogawa). and the simulation of all sorts of ballad styles, including nagauta (“Dōjōji and “Kikujidō,” in particular). Iseondō, Bungo-bushi, handayū katō even the protracted phrases of *gidayu* ballads and, on request. the tours de force of “Chūshingura” and “Yaguchiwatashi.”²

Although at one point I had heard of this unprecedented prodigy, without having seen him for myself I could scarcely address this subject: and so I said to a couple of friends. “come. I wish to attend this spectacle.” and we made our way from Yokoyama-cho over the main approach to the bridge of Ryōgoku then turned to the right rather than crossing over the bridge. Above a milling crowd composed of priests and laymen, men and women. a waving banner boldly proclaimed: Celebrated Teller of Old Tales - Guaranteed to Make Your Hearts Bloom With Delight. Next to it, a placard was set up with a picture of a funny little man, buttocks thrust forward, surrounded by such legends as the aforementioned “Dōjōji,” “Kabuki Curtain-raiser.” etc. which projected from the same point in the drawing, all depicted with gray shading in the manner of illustrations of dreams. so that, as I muttered to my friends, some unsuspecting bumpkin might conclude that this man dreamed with his behind. I entered by a little wicker gate and saw this fart expert, flanked by his accompanists, seated on a slightly raised platform above which a red and white curtain was stretched.

The man was rather plump and pale of complexion. He sported crescent-shaped ‘plectrum” sideburns and wore a soft blue unlined robe over a red crepe undergarment. After a few introductory remarks delivered in a crisp and pleasing manner. he commenced, backed up by his little combo, with the curtain-raiser drum pattern - toh-ho-hyoro-hyoro-hitsu-hitsu-hitsu - and proceeded with a clearly articulated cock’s crow. then a water-mill - boo-boo-boo - which he performed while doing cartwheels, contriving the effect of water pushing down from one side and turning him over and over. Soon. with resounding drum

beats and calls of “next group in for the new show,” the performance was over.

I went out and rejoined my friends. My account of the fart expert’s act stirred up debate on all sides. One person claimed that the man must have taken some sort of potion to get up so much wind, another maintained the sounds were produced by some hidden gimmicks, and so on in a similar vein - total disagreement all around.

Then I spoke to the multitude, saying: “Keep silent, my friends. for I am well acquainted with such potions. Kiyomon of the Chikusaya In Osaka makes a hobby of concocting medicines with strange properties - ‘Laxatives and Flatulence-Inducers for People You Hate’ it says on his shop sign. But although I have taken the trouble to inform myself about the efficacy of these preparations. to my knowledge they only result in the general phenomenon of farting without creating any marvelous special effects. As for the suspicion that there are hidden gimmicks involved, I agree that on the face of it there would seem room for doubts - until one takes into account that the scene of this performance has not exactly been your up-to-date kabuki stage, equipped with all the latest devices, but a wide open space exposed on all sides to public view. Besides which, what sort of gimmick could possibly do the trick”? If there is one, it has to be invisible so as to go undetected by a thousand pairs of eyes . and to employ such a gimmick, if it exists, is as clever as actually producing the farts. If the rest of the world is willing to say, truly, he has far-ted. then do not cut off your nose to spite your face, take a deep breath and believe!

“In this cunning age, with all manner of deceptive craft being lavished on schemes to separate people from their money, when all these tricked-up hot new items turn out to be mere marzipan imitations, when what seems original grows outmoded overnight while the old stuff only gets mustier day by day - in such an age, for doubting Thomases like ourselves to see with our own eyes what we have only got wind of before, this prodigy of flatulence, is something wholly unprecedented in the two thousand four-hundred thirty-six years of this hoary land of Japan . . . from the beginning of Emperor Jimmu’s reign down to this third year of An’ei nothing like it can be found, neither in our written records nor our oral transmission. Not only are these accomplishments unique in Japan: never has their like been

² A play by the author.

heard of from China. Korea, India, not even from the various states of Oranda [viz., Europe]. What art! What farts!”

All who heard my praise were suitably impressed. Except for one whose voice called from the far fringe of the crowd, “The gentleman’s argument is seriously in error, I wish to respond.” The voice emanated, I quickly discovered, from a samurai barely arrived from some distant province - let us call him Crankshaw Stonington. Esquire.

“I find this all exceedingly distasteful.” old Cranky began. ‘I may remind you that those in authority have graciously permitted theatrical performances and public speeches in general only as an instrument for pacifying the people, and for elucidating the proper relations between lord and retainer, father and son, elder and younger brother, and faithful friends. For example, the character of Oboshi Yuranosuke [in “Chūshingura”] serves as a model for loyal retainers, that of Mumegae [in “Hiragana Seisūki”]. with her famous ringing of the fateful bell, as a paragon of chastity for all decent women to behold. Now whenever a spectacle departs from the portrayal of the righteous, it must do so only as a stern admonition, such as a freak who can demonstrate through his deformity how the sins of fathers are visited upon the sons (a misbegotten offspring of some wicked hunter would be an excellent example). or anything that tends to prove the general truth that we have to pay for our sins in the here and now. This is the way it should be. But nowadays these entertainments are put together with an eye to profit alone, and with no scruples about perpetrating the most outrageous displays. And this man who has the gall to give a regular concert of farts - he leaves me speechless.

“Flatulence is, after all, a personal matter and should not be aired in public. Any proper samurai would be mortified to the point of suicide if he were inadvertently to let, uh, fly in polite company. I have heard tell of a certain woman in the Shinagawa Quarter who broke wind in front of her guests, including such notable men-about-town as Ridō of Odawara-machi and Mii of Sakai-chō. The laughter that greeted her indiscretion was intolerable to her. She retreated into the next room and prepared to kill herself. And when her colleagues pleaded with her and tried to mollify her, she said to them, “Those two celebrities were right there, and you know them. Their snide remarks will soon be all over town. I absolutely can not live with that.”

“Ridō and Mii then joined in the strenuous attempts to dissuade the woman from her desperate course. ‘We won’t say a word,’ they protested. ‘I know,’ she rejoined heatedly. ‘you are kind enough to promise that at the moment. But sure as fate, later on you will talk. Rather than expose me to such humiliation, I beg of you, let me die now.’ When she showed no sign of weakening in her resolve to do herself in, they resorted to the drastic remedy of drawing up a written contract pledging everlasting silence on the subject of the unhappy incident. Only then, so they say, did she consent to preserve herself.

‘Nonsense, you may say. But it does go to show that even these women who sell their affections value their good names above life itself, and that the most conceited fops are not incapable of sensitive solicitude for the feelings of others. Is it not touching that they did not hesitate to draw up that childish contract in order to save her? And yet this man sets up shop in the midst of a public place and positively flaunts something that most normal people are deeply ashamed of. Utterly disgusting! He does, at least, have the excuse of making money at it. Those who pay to watch him gain nothing but the name of credulous fools. As for you gentlemen who are so quick to accept everything your learned friend tells you - you are beyond the pale. You should recall what the true sages have taught us in the classic texts: how the very nature of The Robbers’ Spring kept Confucius from slaking his thirst there, how Tseng Tzu likewise refused to set foot in the village known as Mothers’ Defeat. We should not so much as overhear or witness indecencies from afar, let alone commit them - that is what the true sages teach us.”

Such was the harangue that the country samurai delivered, with an irascible swelling of the veins at his temples.

I replied, “The Master’s words are entirely correct. Yet I fear that he does not comprehend the great breadth of the Way. Confucius himself did not eschew childish ditties. No more do I exclude from my discourse the matter of farts. All things that lie between heaven and earth array themselves naturally into categories of high and low, lofty and base. Among them, surely the lowest of the low, the basest of the base, are urine and excrement. In China they have various pejorative figures of speech in which things are compared to ‘ordure,’ ‘coprolith,’ etc., while in Japan we simply say of things we don’t care for that they’re ‘like shit.’ Yet this loathsome filth, we should not forget, is turned into fertilizer and thereby nourishes the millions. Farts

are different in this respect, it is true, being but the extraneous by-products of the perpetrators' quest for progressive relief from intestinal distress.

'It is written of the heavenly realms in the *Book of Songs* that they are 'without sound and without odor.' which is scarcely the case with farts. The attendant sound is not normally anything like the stirring beat of drums, nor is their odor a suitable substitute for the fragrance of aloes or musk. In fact most people think they stink, as we can see in the common phrase 'smells like garlic and farts cupped in your hands.' From the ether they proceed and unto ether they shall return. Not even fit for fertilizer, they are totally useless, if a wonderfully apt attribute to confer on corrupt scholars, as indeed Shidoken has done, with considerate originality. in his epithet 'the Conpyewcianists.'³

But to take this thing that is, beyond all else in the world, utterly useless and make of it such a great success that, aside from the main theaters. other shows have had to shut down for the lack of spectators - it is no mean feat. and ample proof of the little fellow's powers of invention in having arrived at all those intricate variations on a single theme. Now a wildly popular actor like Tomizo owes a good deal of his success to the prior patronage and tutelage of such as Kikunosuke. But where farts are concerned. needless to say, there are no tutors. no patrons, and no adoring fans, either. This sort of performance is especially demanding because of what you might call its transparency: your technique is on open display for all to see, with no room for the usual theatrical tricks. To knock the wind out of all rival sails with nothing more than what can pass through a two-inch asshole truly en-tales tremendous (if I may be allowed a pun) fartistry.

"By way of contrast. consider the current state of the various schools of vocal music. Plenty of pupils join up, equipped with proper mouths and proper vocal cords: they dutifully receive from their teachers direct transmission of the tradition: and they are certainly eager for lucrative engagements. But alas for them, a good voice can only come from birth as a gift from nature. They may cackle and caw with abandon like so many crows and herons on their nightly foray and faithfully mouth the stanzas they have

³ Shid ōken is the eccentric hero, purportedly drawn from life, of another work by Cennai.

been taught, but their renditions fail to bring a single spark of life to the old ballads. Having no real feeling for the overall dynamic flow of the pieces they attack, no control of diction and phrasing. they destroy each new *jōruri* entrusted to them. and push their schools ever closer to their ultimate collapse. This man here. however. without benefit of any mentor or any oral transmission, has had to create his art through his ingenuity alone. From that inarticulate orifice. and out of undifferentiated flatulence. he has mastered breathing, diction, and phrasing, and he has contrived to reproduce the varied effects of vocal coloring and all of the twelve classical scales. He has, then, incomparably greater talent between his buttocks than these third-rate musicians have between their lips. Strange and wonderful indeed is this founder of a new school, a true proctological pioneer.

'This favorable comparison holds up not only with respect to musicians, but vis-a-vis any number of incompetent wretches in other fields of contemporary endeavor. The scholars buried in cast-off scraps of continental learning: the philologists who dabble in classical Chinese poetry and prose, cloaking themselves in the most threadbare shreds of Han Yü or Liu Tsung-yüan, which they mistake for the full robes; our native poets who travel nowhere in search of inspiration, preferring to sit back and wait for grains of rice to stick to the soles of their feet. Then there are the doctors, whether of the old school or of the latter-day post-Sung faction. who for all their mutual backbiting, are equally useless quacks. powerless to cure the diseases they claim to treat; who, whenever influenza strikes. can only stand by idly as all their patients die. As for the self-styled *haikai* experts, they merely suck up to the droolings of Bashō and Kikaku, while those charlatans who affect the style and substance of the tea masters only munch on the turds left behind by Rikyū and Sōtan.

'All those other arts have fallen into the same deplorable state. Those who practice them are unworthy of carrying on with the achievements of their schools' long-dead masters as they are lacking in the native talent necessary for the creation of something new. Their most fundamental defect, the source of all their other inadequacies, is their want of spirit. And spirit is something this fartist has in abundance, for how else could he have made his name known throughout the land with nothing but these ingenious ass-backwards performances. and without any masters to pave the way?

“As a young man, Ch'en Ping, having served a ceremonial feast with great even-handedness. declared. 'If I were put in charge of the realm, I would do with the affairs of state as with this flesh.' I say likewise, if a wise man could be found who would devote to the improvement of all our lives the same ingenuity as this man here has lavished on his farts, we could expect great things from him. It is spirit, spirit infusing each and every action, that makes all the difference, whatever the field of endeavor, even Carting. Oh, if only those who propose to save and transform our world, not to mention those supposedly engaged already in the humane arts - if only they would apply themselves with this kind of spirit. then there would be joyful noise all around us such as to drown out the most resounding of farts.

'I have borrowed the more modest sounds made by this fartist in the hope of rousing from their dreamy lethargy ail those dispirited, self-indulgent, unfinished men we see in our midst. - But perhaps my argument itself smells a bit suspicious to you, sir . . . You may be saying to yourself, better silent-but-deadly than this. Well, say what you will. I don't really give a shit.”

SEIYOGA DAN

[Discussion on Western Painting]¹
by Shiba Kōkan (1747-1818)

Translated by Thomas Looser

I

That which is called the West points to the territory west of China and Japan. Dividing the world longitudinally and calculating in a straight line from Japan, it is probably a distance of about 3,000 ri.² If one actually crossed by sea, the route would be over 10,000 ri. That distant territory is named Europe. It is one of the great continents of the world, and within it are thousands of countries the size of Japan. The region known as the Netherlands is made up of seven states, one of which is called Holland. The style of painting in these various western countries is common to all of them. and since Dutch ships bring these works to Japan, there are now quite a lot of them in the country. As a general term, these paintings are called Dutch paintings.

The method of painting in these various western countries is based on something called imaging reality [*shashin*]³ (reproducing the true form of things [*shin o utsusu*]), and it differs greatly from the painting methods of our country. For this reason people who paint in the Japanese or the Chinese styles think that western-style painting is very strange, and not something from which they should learn.

There are even people who, not understanding how to appreciate western painting, think it is not painting at all. but rather [just] something made by elaborate craftsmanship. This is foolish. Craftsmanship originally referred to fine, detailed technique. Even in Japanese or Chinese painting, detailed

¹ Published in 1799. This translation is based on the modern Japanese version in *Nihon no meicho* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron, 1971), vol. 22, and the original version as published in *Nihon shisō taikai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1976), vol. 64. All footnotes and notes in square brackets are the translator's,

² One ri equals 2.44 miles.

³ *Shashin* is the term now used for photography. There is no single term with which to translate this, so I am relying on the awkward idea of “imaging” to convey the sort of mimetic reproduction that Shiba is talking about here.