

## ☞ Conclusion

In this book I have demonstrated how efforts to impose the condition of compulsory and exclusive male heterosexuality were as key to the production of Meiji literary modernity as the exploration of new literary languages, new approaches toward characterization and plot, new modes of circulation, and new techniques in book printing, binding, and illustration. Like these other hallmarks of Japanese literary modernity, the eradication of so-called nonnormative sexualities from the realm of respectable literary representation was not achieved naturally, but rather resulted from an extended and painstaking campaign to produce a model of literature that corresponded to narrow, and often highly artificial, visions of civilization and progress. Ultimately, this goal proved to be highly elusive. Even at the conclusion of the Meiji period, when all the elements of Japanese literary modernity seemed to be in place and the alienated, but reassuringly heterosexual, male anti-hero had become an almost ubiquitous feature of the modern Japanese novel, one can still find an occasional reference to sexuality that deviates from this standard.

Enabling this enduring resistance to the orthodoxy of compulsory heterosexuality was the indelible memory of the Edo sexual practice of *nanshoku* (male love). Because of its comparative prominence in Edo culture and literature, *nanshoku* provided one of the few cultural narratives that offered a viable, fully articulated alternative to the vision of sexuality promoted by the state through its various official and unofficial agencies. A rallying point for readers and writers vexed with the demonization of male-male sexuality and a thorn in the side for proponents of a more civilized sexual culture, references to *nanshoku* functioned for both sides of this extended ideological debate as a counteragent to modern hegemonic definitions of appropriate male sexuality and gender.

One of my central contentions in this study has been that Meiji references to *nanshoku* invariably involved a dialectical relation between the dominant conditions of an imagined present and an alternative construction of an imagined past. The imagined present in this equation adhered to an orthodox view of Meiji modernity in which the rule of compulsory heterosexuality reigned unchallenged. In opposition stood an alternative vision of the past, which presumed the existence of an earlier era that could accommodate sexual practices that deviated from the norm of heterosexuality. As the period progressed, the power differential between these two positions became increasingly lopsided, with invocations of *nanshoku* exerting less and less of a challenge to orthodox iterations of sexuality.

The interplay between these two positions was at its most dynamic in the first decades of the Meiji era, when cultural assumptions from the Edo past still wielded enormous influence over the popular consciousness, whereas the constituent elements of Meiji modernity were as yet in their incipient stages. Not coincidentally, given the still tenuous status of modern constructions of civilized sexuality, this period also marked the most draconian phase of the Meiji legal campaign to suppress male-male sexual activity; from 1873 to 1882 the act of anal intercourse, consensual or otherwise, was a criminal offense under Article 266 of the Reformed Legal Code.

Out of this protean mix arose the *Shizu no odamaki* phenomenon, in which a sizable population of men embraced the late-Edo tale about samurai *nanshoku* as a veritable bible of authentic Japanese masculinity and sexuality. Fans consciously promoted the tale as an alternative to dominant formulations of early-Meiji modernity, which they perceived to be emasculating and therefore damaging to Japan's national interests. To promote their cause, *Shizu no odamaki* enthusiasts appropriated various modern signifying mechanisms, such as newspaper serialization and new techniques in printing and bookbinding, to produce a text that could compete on comparatively equal footing with tracts endorsing official views of productive masculinity and civilized sexuality.

At roughly the same time, the popular writer Okamoto Kisen brandished the trope of kabuki *nanshoku* to launch a different kind of attack on the cultural policies advocated by the Meiji state. His fictionalized biography of Sawamura Tanosuke III contained a number of veiled criticisms of Civilization and Enlightenment, which the text presented as hypocritical, prudish, and down-

right unappealing. Like *Shizu no odamaki*, Kisen's text invoked *nanshoku* as a signifier of the Edo past, while simultaneously updating the topic through the mediation of Meiji signifying systems, such as the narrative arcs associated with the poisonous-woman tale and the Success and Advancement formula. In this manner, the text transgressed state-endorsed moral doctrines by demonstrating that *nanshoku* still had a place in the early-Meiji cultural imagination.

The mid-1880s marked the beginning of a new phase in Meiji literary development with the publication of Tsubouchi Shōyō's manifesto *Shōsetsu shinzui*. This essay galvanized writers and intellectuals to pursue a literary formula more in keeping with the values and conditions attributed to an evolved civilization. Significantly, histories of Meiji literature consistently refer to this movement as the true origin of Japanese literary modernity. Not coincidentally, this self-consciously modern moment also generated a new kind of engagement with the cultural legacy of *nanshoku* and its implicit critique of the doctrine of compulsory heterosexuality. In the case of Shōyō and his contemporary Yamada Bimyō, this process manifested itself in a meta-commentary on two literary phenomena: the continued popularity of *Shizu no odamaki* and the unwavering devotion of Meiji readers, especially educated males, to the subtly homoerotic historical tales composed by the late-Edo master Kyokutei Bakin.

Shōyō's response to these two phenomena was confrontational. He structured his commentary on the modern Japanese novel around a relentless indictment of Bakin and the literary standards he epitomized. Shōyō was especially critical of the secondary role that male-female love played in Bakin's tales. For Shōyō, male-female love was the definitive subject matter for modern fiction. Consequently, his literary effort, *Tōsei shōsei katagi*, devoted considerable effort to establishing the heterosexuality of its male characters. One prominent strategy for accomplishing this goal was to distinguish the heterosexual male characters from the barbaric Other, an outcast character who brazenly proclaimed his devotion to *nanshoku*.

Bimyō's response was more ambivalent. As a youth, he patterned his work after *Shizu no odamaki* and the historical tales of Bakin. With his transformation into a reformer, Bimyō excised from his writing all overt markers of his previous literary and erotic affiliation. Yet traces of his youthful sensibility revealed themselves in *Musashino*, a work in which Bimyō projected the conventional pattern of samurai *nanshoku* onto his portrait of a young married cou-

ple. He followed up this experimental effort with *Kochō*, a text that poured on the signifiers of heterosexuality so excessively that it caused an uproar. Taken together, these compositions suggest that, for Bimyō, producing literature that conformed to the doctrine of compulsory heterosexuality required an extended process of trial and error.

The zeal for literary reform dissipated somewhat in the 1890s when a new breed of writer came to dominate the literary establishment. Reflecting Japan's increased sense of confidence as it acquired the military, technological, and economic clout to assert its position in the international community more forcefully, writers from this period exhibited a renewed enthusiasm for certain aspects of Japan's cultural heritage. For neoclassical writers, like Kōda Rohan, this involved a process of selective reinterpretation and reconfiguration of cultural artifacts from the past to fit the specific expectations of the mid-Meiji present.

In his historical novel, *Hige otoko*, Rohan strategically restructured the icon of the medieval samurai hero so that it conformed to a new set of standards for masculinity and sexuality. Building upon developments from the late 1880s, when a group of powerful ideologues mounted a campaign to discredit militant antigovernment activists by promoting a new, more conciliatory construction of masculinity known as the *seinen* (young man), Rohan's novel projected these modern *seinen* values back onto his portrait of a medieval warrior. Central to this undertaking was a complex set of negotiations with the legacy of samurai *nanshoku*. On the one hand, the text endeavored to disengage its proto-modern warrior hero from any overt association with this uncivilized practice. On the other hand, the text subtly exploited the aesthetic and erotic elements of male love to present the issues of samurai honor and devotion as timeless emotive responses that transcend the historical and political specificity of the late medieval epoch. In this manner, *Hige otoko* subtly re-presented the medieval warrior code of honor as a precedent for modern iterations of patriotic fervor directed toward the Meiji Imperial state.

In the final years of the Meiji era, science asserted itself as one of the most authoritative epistemologies, especially among elite communities of artists, educators, and intellectuals. This devotion to science as a source of reliable knowledge and incontrovertible truth contributed to the rise of new forms of realist fiction epitomized by the Naturalist novel. Proponents claimed that the constituent elements of the modern realist novel, including transparent language,

objective commentary, and psychologically based characterization, enabled it to convey the essential truths of the human condition. In particular, the concept of sexual desire occupied a prominent position in this literary formula; it was purported to be the key to unlocking the secrets of human nature.

The tendency of most late-Meiji realist writers, especially those affiliated with the Naturalist movement, to ignore the existence of nonnormative sexualities, such as male-male sexuality, reveals an element of hypocrisy in their rhetoric. This omission suggests that the transcendent laws of nature constantly invoked by late-Meiji writers actually worked in close concert with ideologically determined cultural values. Despite its essential subordination to orthodox social norms, or perhaps because of it, the law-of-nature paradigm wielded remarkable authority over late-Meiji writers, even those who expressed discomfort with the truth claims of the realist novel.

One can even detect the inscription of this law-of-nature paradigm in the texts of the late-Meiji iconoclasts, Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai. Despite their attempts to test the boundaries of this paradigm through the invocation of *nanshoku* and other constructs of male-male intimacy, the final results of these efforts were mixed. Sōseki's *Nowaki* implicitly inveighed against the inadequacy of the modern novel as a signifying medium that was incapable of representing the complexity of male-male intimacy and male subjectivity. But ultimately, the text succumbed to the late-Meiji prohibition against depicting homoerotic desire and left the implications of its male-male relations unexplored. Ōgai's *Vita Sexualis* conspicuously departed from late-Meiji conventions and explicitly addressed the topic of *nanshoku*. These references contributed to the text's more comprehensive attack on Naturalism and the sexual-desire paradigm. Yet here again, the efficacy of *nanshoku* as a device to undermine the orthodoxy of late-Meiji modernity was limited, as evidenced by the frequency with which the narrative dismissed male-male sexuality as an unnatural condition.

Even after the Meiji period, *nanshoku* continued to resonate powerfully with certain segments of the Japanese population as a symbol of the past and as an alternative model for interpreting male-male sexuality. For example, the trope of *nanshoku* served as an organizing principle for Inagaki Taruho in the 1920s, Iwata Jun'ichi in the 1930s, and Mishima Yukio in the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> But its preeminence in the popular imagination of the general population waned dramatically post Meiji. Various factors contributed to this decline, including media

constructions of new alternative sexual identities, such as the school-girl lesbian, the mass circulation of new disciplines of knowledge, such as perverse psychology (*hentai shinri*), and the gradual disappearance from the general consciousness of any association between male-male sexuality and so-called hard masculinity.<sup>2</sup> As a result of these developments, the Edo practice of *nan-shoku* lost much of its efficacy as a device through which to counter the relentless criticism that the vast majority of cultural institutions continued to heap on same-sex sexual behavior. In its place arose a variety of new strategies to contest the master doctrine of compulsory heterosexuality: to name just a few, Yoshiya Nobuko's sentimental representations of the romantic ties between young girls in the 1910s and 1920s, Edogawa Ranpo's strategic linkage of same-sex sexuality with the consumer culture phenomenon known as Erotic-Grotesque-Nonsense in the 1930s, and more recently, in the 1990s the *yaoi* phenomenon, in which women privately circulated gay reinterpretations of well-known straight (male) characters from comics and television, and in the first decade of the twenty-first century the depiction of new sexual subcultures, targeted directly at gay consumers and produced by self-identified gay artists, such as Tagame Gengorō.<sup>3</sup> To date, nothing yet has succeeded in overthrowing the repressive regime of compulsory heterosexuality. But the struggle goes on unabated. It is my hope that this book in some small way contributes to this process.