Introduction

In the Company of Men is a strategic re-reading of Meiji-period (1868–1912) literary history, one that addresses the place of male-male sexuality, and by extension assumptions about masculinity, in the ongoing project of constructing a new literary category, which we now know as modern Japanese literature. It argues that the production of modern Japanese literature over the course of the Meiji period involved an extended process of negotiation with the literary and cultural practices of the Edo period (1600–1868), an era noteworthy for its acceptance of certain formulations of male-male sexual activity and the extensive literary tradition that treated this sexual culture. The project of overcoming this legacy and replacing it with a literary formula that focused single-mindedly on the experiences of the heterosexual male was conducted in conversation with contemporaneous ideological currents, many of which assumed same-sex sexuality to be detrimental to the well-being of modern society. This ideological barrage led many to conclude that male-male sexuality had no place in modern Japanese literature. Of course, male-male sexuality was never excluded completely from the realm of Meiji literary production. But the fervent pursuit of this goal reveals the extent to which an ideological bias against male-male sexuality determined the boundaries of Japanese literary modernity in its most conventional formulation.

This study thus illuminates the relevance of shifting attitudes toward sexuality and gender to the production of modern Japanese literature. In particular, it considers the ways that different Meiji texts, in dialogue with a variety of political, economic, technological, social, and cultural signifying systems, employed the topic of male-male sexuality to position themselves in relation to

contemporaneous formulations of Meiji modernity. By Meiji modernity, I mean the ever-shifting constellation of cultural practices that aligned themselves with the larger project of political, economic, and technological progress while simultaneously differentiating themselves from customs of the past that were deemed backward. To highlight the oppositional relationship of male-male sexuality to Japanese modernity, I have structured my alternative history of Meiji literature around the historical trope of *nanshoku*.

Nanshoku in Pre-Meiji Literature

Nanshoku refers to male-male sexual desire. Typically it is rendered into English as male love. Originating in the Muromachi period (1392–1568), the term achieved a higher degree of cultural currency in the beginning of the Edo era, when it began to appear regularly in commercial literature and other forms of popular discourse. Indeed, for a period of about 150 years, from 1600 to 1750, *nanshoku* constituted one of the more popular topics for printed material.[1]

Pre-Meiji representations of *nanshoku* were remarkably consistent. They usually involved a pattern of unequal, often exploitative, power relations. These narratives typically limited the possible variations of male-male sexual relationships to a single formulation, the pairing of an adult partner with a preadult partner, usually in his teens. It was assumed that the relationship was temporary, since it could not continue after the junior partner became an adult male, and therefore theoretically lost his status as an object of desire for other males. Premodern representations of male-male sexuality also largely confined the scope of possible sexual activities to one practice, anal intercourse. Moreover, the narratives assigned each partner a specific, and unchanging, sexual role: the adult was designated as the inserter and the youth as the insertee.

During the Muromachi period, literary representations of *nanshoku* tended to focus on the relations between Buddhist priests and young acolytes.[2] But in the Edo period, Paul Schalow explains, the primary locale for *nanshoku* literature shifted to two new cultural settings: the world of the samurai and the world of the kabuki theater.[3] Treatments of male-male sexuality in a samurai context depicted relationships between adult warriors and younger members of the same class. The principal virtue attributed to samurai *nanshoku* was its pedagogical component, with the adult partner edifying his young lover in the lit-

erary and martial arts, as well as instilling in him the samurai virtues of honor and pride. In this context, male-male sexuality was often linked with the cult of hard (*kō*) masculinity, which embraced a stern moral code and forsook material pleasure and sensuous experience. Representations of male-male sexuality set in a kabuki context, on the other hand, were organized around commercial transactions involving kabuki actor/prostitutes and their *chōnin* (urban commoner) patrons. Literary texts often attempted to romanticize this form of male prostitution by focusing on the elegance of the youths and the sophistication of their patrons. In contrast to samurai youths, these young kabuki actor/prostitutes were typically equated with female prostitutes, and consequently seen to embody a more feminine gender identity.

The most influential purveyor of premodern *nanshoku* literature was Ihara Saikaku (1642–93).[4] From his first tale Saikaku regularly incorporated the topic of male-male sexuality into his popular works. This practice reached a crescendo with *Nanshoku ōkagami* (The Great Mirror of Male Love, 1687), a text consisting of forty short prose narratives, all of which dealt with some aspect of male-male sexuality. Through this sizable body of *nanshoku* publications, Saikaku played a major role in codifying Edo literary conventions for representing the practice. So great was Saikaku's influence that for at least fifty years after his death *nanshoku* remained a popular literary topic, as subsequent writers attempted to reproduce the successful Saikaku formula.

Yet starting around 1750 one notices an appreciable shift in the approach toward depicting *nanshoku*. Male-male sexuality less frequently emerged as the central focus of late-Edo narratives, more often functioning as one component of the fictional world constructed in the text. A leading exemplar of this late-Edo approach toward *nanshoku* was Kyokutei Bakin (1767–1848), the acknowledged master of late-Edo commercial literature and the pioneer of an influential genre, the reading book (*yomihon*), which was targeted at an audience of educated, mostly male readers. Bakin never addressed the topic of male-male sexuality with the zeal of Saikaku, but as Matsuda Osamu has conclusively established, the issue played an important, if subtle, role in most of the writer's compositions.[5] Indeed, Bakin catered to the sexual preference of his largely male audience by populating his narratives with beautiful youth (*bishōnen*) characters, or pre-adult males who were depicted in terms that conspicuously evoked *nanshoku* canons of erotic taste. Bakin's acute awareness, and canny ex-

ploitation, of the appeal of beautiful youths to his target audience of male readers indicates the continued currency of *nanshoku* in the sphere of late-Edo commercial literature and popular culture.

The purpose of this study is not to defend premodern *nanshoku* as a worthy social practice or an underappreciated facet of Japanese cultural heritage. The inherent power differential embedded in the practice, manifest in the pairing of a sexually active adult with a sexually passive youth, seriously undermines any *nanshoku* apologia. Rather, this study focuses on the particular resonances of *nanshoku* in Meiji. I argue that because of its close associations with Edo literary production and cultural practices, the concept of *nanshoku* functioned in Meiji as one of the most immediately recognizable signifiers of Edo tradition, both literary and cultural. Amplifying this alterity to officially sanctioned visions of Meiji modernity was the term's inherent contradiction to the assumption of compulsory and exclusive male heterosexuality. By definition, the practice challenged the modern conviction that heterosexual desire was the sole natural expression of male sexuality. Although different Meiji incarnations of *nanshoku* carried with them distinctive meanings and agendas, often internalizing some of the more homophobic aspects of the modern Japanese mindset, they shared one important characteristic; references to *nanshoku* invoked literary and cultural legacies from the immediate past that were no longer sanctioned by Meiji orthodoxy. Such invocations of the past, even a drastically reimagined past, resonated powerfully in the Meiji context precisely because the ideal of progress was the defining cultural trope of the era. And in most cases, progress was defined, both officially and popularly, as a departure from the precedents of Edo.

Trope of Progress in Meiji

The Meiji period stands out as one of the most dynamic epochs in world history, a time of remarkable political, technological, economic, and cultural change. In a span of less than five decades Japan transformed itself from an isolated domain, at risk of falling victim to the colonial ambitions of Western nations, to the dominant military and economic power in Asia, with colonial holdings of its own. Central to this transition was a fundamental shift in the

Japanese political system. In 1867 the Japanese archipelago was broken up into over 250 semi-autonomous domains under the sway of regional feudal lords united primarily by their individual ties of fealty to the Tokugawa family. By 1912 the Japanese Empire had become a centralized state with a reinvigorated Imperial system, a constitution, an elected assembly, a conscript military, a centralized education system, and a national legal code. Political centralization occurred in conjunction with fundamental social transformations. During the Edo period the Japanese population was divided into roughly four hereditary estates: warriors, peasants, artisans, and merchants. Over the course of the Meiji period, the class system was modified and most of the population was subsumed under the single category of imperial subjects (*shinmin*), theoretically unified by their absolute loyalty to the emperor and his sovereign state.

The realm of culture was equally in flux. As one of its central policies, the Tokugawa regime endeavored to seal the Japanese archipelago off from the rest of the world. Foreign products and ideas still managed to find their way into Japan, but their access was highly regulated. During the Meiji period this trickle became a torrent, as Japan actively engaged with a wide variety of cultural products and practices from abroad. Typically, this engagement involved a process of modification in which foreign cultural products and practices were adapted to meet Japanese needs and expectations.

Nowhere is this process of active cultural negotiation and extensive transformation more striking than in the case of literature. Although it would be a gross inaccuracy to describe literature of the Edo period as stagnant or underdeveloped, general attitudes about literature underwent profound changes during the Meiji period. Exposure to new literary practices and categories, combined with the conviction that literary reform was an essential component of social (and hence political, technological, and military) modernization, elicited a creative frenzy in Japan as writers, critics, educators, as well as consumers, struggled to reinvent the category of Japanese literature. In many cases, this involved looking to Western precedents for inspiration. Given the declining fortunes of Japan's neighbor, and former cultural mentor, China, it also entailed a reevaluation of literary conventions that were perceived to be Chinese in origin. Another key element of this process was a thorough reconsideration of what came to be seen as Japan's indigenous literary heritage. The result of this mas-

sive and ongoing process was not only the emergence of new literary forms and literary languages and the abandonment of selected traditional literary forms and conventions, but also the radical reformulation of literature as a meaningful cultural category in a modern society.

Nanshoku and Meiji Modernity

Part of the effort to transform literature involved establishing new boundaries for appropriate subject matter. Certain topics were deemed out of step with the principles of Meiji modernity. For many reformers, *nanshoku* topped the list of undesirable topics. A comparison with the Edo period is instructive. According to Iwata Jun'ichi's authoritative catalogue of *nanshoku* literature, *Nanshoku bunken shoshi* (Catalogue of *Nanshoku* Texts, 1973), 566 literary texts dealing with the topic were published over the course of the Edo period. This figure dwindled to just sixty-seven in the Meiji period, with only a fraction of this number constituting what could be defined, even loosely, as literature; most of the material on male-male sexuality published during Meiji consisted of medical studies, journalistic exposés, and scholarly commentaries on Edo history.[6]

Historians Gregory Pflugfelder and Furukawa Makoto have carefully elucidated the profound impact that new ideologies critical of male-male sexuality had on *nanshoku* culture.[7] In his introduction to the anthology, *Partings at Dawn*, Paul Schalow comments specifically on how these new ideologies affected literary production: "The Buddhist and samurai traditions of male love, and their commercial counterpart in the kabuki theater, virtually disappeared from literature in the modern era under the influences of Western legal and medical discourses introduced in the Meiji Era. Traditional *nanshoku* (male love) was gradually refigured at this time as *dōseiai* ('same-sex love' = homosexuality) and became a taboo subject."[8] As Schalow points out, the Meiji era witnessed a remarkable decline in the social value attributed to male-male sexual activity. During the Edo period, because of its association with elite sectors of society, namely the Buddhist clergy and warrior class, erotic relations between males (but not between females) carried a certain amount of cultural prestige, occasionally even interpreted as a sign of masculine rectitude or an admirably refined sensibility. In contrast, with the establishment of the paradigm

of homosexuality, sexual desire directed at another member of the same sex became the marker of a medically unsound, morally suspect social identity.

Expanding on Schalow's concise summary of these historical developments, my study argues that Meiji imaginings of male-male sexuality exhibited a remarkable multiplicity. In other words, it is not the case that medical and legal discourses of homosexuality completely eclipsed *nanshoku*, but rather that these different constructions of male-male sexuality coexisted and interacted with each other. To be sure, one cannot deny Schalow's assertion that the more negative construction of *dōseiai* gradually came to occupy an increasingly influential position in the Meiji consciousness. But even in the last years of Meiji it was still possible to invoke the cultural associations of *nanshoku* and call attention to the inconsistency in the prevailing medical/legal view of human sexuality that assumed a natural versus unnatural paradigm in which the unnatural half of the dyad was deemed unspeakable. I thus interpret *nanshoku* as a construct antithetical to the regime of compulsory male heterosexuality and, by extension, to official formulations of Meiji modernity. That is, the associations with Edo sexual culture embedded in the term *nanshoku* reasserted an alternative paradigm in which sexuality was not understood as a biological drive, but rather as a cultural choice inextricably linked to issues of class and aesthetic sensibility.

Further complicating Schalow's succinct commentary is the fact that although one can trace a stark decrease in the composition of literature about male-male sexuality, Iwata's catalogue documents the undeniable fact that references to male-male sexuality never completely disappeared from the field of Meiji literary production. To be sure, the construct became so freighted with ideological baggage that the decision to deal with it could no longer be made lightly. This, however, underscores the significance of the texts that did see the light of day, since they conspicuously diverged from the newly established convention that male-male sexuality had no place in modern Japanese literature. The mere act of acknowledging male-male sexuality, regardless of whether the treatment of the topic was negative or positive, necessarily involved serious negotiation with larger assumptions tied to the vision of Meiji modernity defined by the dominant culture.

It is essential to keep in mind that even though *nanshoku* functioned as a signifier of Edo cultural values, and therefore as the inverse to mainstream imag-

inings of Meiji modernity, Meiji references to this practice did not actually involve resurrecting the Edo concept so much as offering up reinterpretations of *nanshoku*. In other words, Meiji invocations of *nanshoku* were products of Meiji culture, operating within the Meiji binary of modern versus nonmodern or antimodern. *Nanshoku* functioned as a convenient sign onto which various constituencies projected different versions of the Edo past. *Nanshoku* thus served as an invented historical Other, through and against which officially sanctioned formulations of Meiji modernity defined themselves.[9] From the opposite perspective, this same assertion of difference simultaneously enabled Meiji invocations of *nanshoku* to function as an outside vantage point (although actually it amounted to an inside vantage point) from which one could comment upon orthodox formulations of Meiji modernity.

It is this tension between *nanshoku* and officially sanctioned views of modernity that animates my readings of Meiji literary representations of male-male sexuality. Aside from their obvious engagement with the issue of sexuality, these texts also, inevitably, are formulated in relation to Meiji constructions of gender, both masculinity and femininity, which were in a constant state of flux throughout the period. Moreover, the production of these texts involved negotiation with shifting Meiji assumptions about different facets of literature, including genre, language, imagery, plot, character development, medium of publication, and even the role of illustrations. My readings thus explore the wider implications of literary form and content, demonstrating that Meiji representations of male-male sexuality were not only a product of the specific set of literary elements that comprise them but also, in some cases, a commentary upon the representational boundaries determined by those literary elements. Finally, the readings in this study locate literary treatments of male-male sexuality within a wider discursive framework that consisted of ideological pronouncements, disciplines of knowledge, and cultural trends. These links among varied, and seemingly unrelated, discourses of sexuality, gender, literary production, ideology, knowledge, and culture reveal the extent to which during the Meiji period aspects of private life, such as sexual preference, literary taste, and cultural affiliation, were defined in conjunction with a larger set of public, or national, concerns. In short, the conflicted Meiji response to literary representations of *nanshoku* as a legacy of Edo is mediated through wide-ranging conversations about modern Japanese culture and national identity.

Organizational Structure of *In the Company of Men*

The master narrative of Meiji literary history largely overlooks the impact of changing notions of sexuality and masculinity on the development of modern Japanese literature. It limits its discussion to issues of literary technique and sensibility, chronicling a fitful progression culminating in the development of the modern, realistic novel. Many studies of Meiji literature divide this history into four stages.[10] The first stage coincides roughly with the initial fifteen years of the Meiji period, when Edo literary standards still reigned supreme, stifling the possibility of any real literary innovation. The second stage refers to the reform movement of the second half of the 1880s, when forward-thinking writers and critics attempted to throw off the shackles of Edo and develop a new set of literary standards. The third stage designates the neoclassical trend of the 1890s, when artists reacted against the reform movement and once again looked back to the Japanese past for literary inspiration. And the fourth stage corresponds to the beginning of the twentieth century, when what is now recognized as the modern novel emerged as the literary norm.[11]

Echoing this structure, I have divided my study into four parts. Part I, titled "*Nanshoku* and Early-Meiji Modernity," consists of two chapters, each dealing with a text that circulated during the first decades of the Meiji period. Chapter 1 focuses on *Shizu no odamaki* (The Humble Man's Bobbin, author and exact date of composition unknown), a late-Edo tale that resurfaced in the 1870s. Chapter 2 considers Okamoto Kisen's *Sawamura Tanosuke akebono zōshi* (The Rise and Fall of Sawamura Tanosuke, 1880), a popular biography that was published in the form of an illustrated bound book (*gōkan*), a style of text that originated in the last decades of the Edo period and continued to be a mainstay of the publishing industry in the first years of the Meiji era. I treat both texts as transitional works that mediated between "pure" Edo culture and Meiji interpretations of Edo culture. This applies in particular to their depictions of male-male sexuality, which largely were conceived in terms that conform to the Edo construct of *nanshoku*. Both chapters demonstrate that during the first years of the Meiji period Edo perceptions of male-male sexuality, masculinity, and literature continued to exert considerable influence over writers and readers, despite government exhortations to abandon the past and embrace the new ideology of Civilization and Enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*). Yet rather than treat

this as passive adherence to Edo customs in lieu of any viable modern alternative, I use the texts to explore the process through which writers and readers actively reconsidered the legacy of *nanshoku* from within the boundaries of early formulations of Meiji modernity.

The title of Part II is "*Nanshoku* and Literary Reform." It contains two chapters: one on Tsubouchi Shōyō and one on Yamada Bimyō, two reformers who dominated the literary scene of the late 1880s. I attribute their reformist zeal to the general anxiety among artists and intellectuals concerning Japan's place in the hierarchy of civilizations, especially vis-à-vis Western culture. There was a general perception that the legacy of Edo was to blame for the retarded pace of Japanese cultural evolution. The chapters focus specifically on Shōyō and Bimyō's different responses to Kyokutei Bakin, the writer who for many epitomized the literary standards of the Edo period and remained a popular favorite among Meiji readers, including the two reformers themselves. In particular, I examine their different strategies for reconciling the homoerotic atmosphere that pervaded Bakin's tales with a cultural environment increasingly hostile to the practice of male-male sexuality. Ultimately, I argue, both reformers bowed to the governing contingencies of the 1880s and strove to overturn the precedent of Bakin and establish the modern Japanese novel as an exclusively heterosexual literary space. My discussion pays particular attention to the impact that Social Darwinism had on their views of literature and their decision to move away from the implicit homoeroticism of Bakin's historical tales.

Part III, "*Nanshoku* and Meiji Neoclassicism," consists of a single chapter. This chapter locates Kōda Rohan's *Hige otoko* (The Bearded Man, 1896) at a critical juncture in Meiji literary and cultural history. Composed in the wake of Japan's military victory over China, the text reflected a new sense of Japanese empowerment that manifested itself in a more enthusiastic reconsideration of pre-Meiji literary and cultural models. My analysis addresses the concerns about sexuality and masculinity that came to the surface as neoclassicists like Rohan endeavored to reclaim the samurai tradition as a valuable part of Japan's cultural heritage. Specifically, I examine the complex set of strategies that Rohan employed to incorporate the legacy of samurai *nanshoku* into his programmatic construction of an imaginary cultural lineage originating with the medieval warrior and culminating in the Meiji imperial soldier. My reading of *Hige otoko* emphasizes the degree to which mid-Meiji ideological imperatives,

arising from Japan's newly achieved status as a military power, shaped the neoclassical movement and its reinterpretations of the *nanshoku* tradition.

The title of Part IV is "*Nanshoku* and the Late-Meiji Novel." The first chapter in this section examines Natsume Sōseki's *Nowaki* (Autumn Wind, 1907), and the second chapter focuses on Mori Ōgai's *Vita Sexualis* (1909). These final chapters of the study uncover traces of *nanshoku* in texts composed at the time when modern Japanese literature, epitomized by the realist novel, emerged in its mature form in the first decade of the twentieth century. My readings explore the different ways that *nanshoku* persisted within the margins of these texts, despite the availability to late-Meiji authors of new, more authoritative disciplines of knowledge for interpreting non-normative sexuality. In *Nowaki* these traces allowed the text to evince, albeit in muted tones, the limitations of literary modernity. *Vita Sexualis*, on the other hand, half-heartedly wielded *nanshoku* as a challenge to the conventions of late-Meiji prose fiction, only in the end to deny its relevance to so-called normal experience.

My study of male-male sexuality and Japanese literary modernity thus appropriates the conventional four-stage organizational structure found in many histories of Meiji literature. But it rejects the teleological assumptions of this master narrative that obscure the relevance of sexuality and gender to the production of modern Japanese literature. Most histories of Meiji literature work backward from the circumstances at the end of the period, when the modern novel came into its own, and trace the gradual emergence of the constituent elements of modern fiction, such as transparent language, psychologically based characterization, and realistic plot development. These conventional literary histories pay little attention to the array of literary practices that were thought to have inevitably and appropriately fallen to the wayside. Working under such a presumption would necessarily preclude any thoughtful discussion of the place of male-male sexuality in the history of Meiji literature, since literary treatments of the topic would either be dismissed as an anachronistic remnant of Edo, and therefore irrelevant to modern literature, or as an inappropriate reference to a pathological condition, and therefore outside the purview of modern literature, which dealt exclusively with a narrowly defined spectrum of "natural" human experiences. By elucidating the relevance of male-male sexuality to the production of modern Japanese literature, my study emphasizes that the course of Meiji literary history did not constitute an inevitable progression,

or evolution, culminating in a foreordained resolution. To the contrary, what we refer to as Meiji literary history consisted of discrete moments, in which the definition of modern literature itself was repeatedly reimagined in relation to a series of different cultural narratives, many of which revolved around issues of sexuality and gender. There is nothing natural about the chain of events through which the regime of compulsory heterosexuality and the figure of the alienated, but unquestionably heterosexual, male antihero who personified this regime emerged as hallmarks of the modern Japanese novel. These features of Meiji literary modernity were painstakingly hammered out in response to a shifting network of ideological contingencies. The process, moreover, was never complete. Even in late Meiji, *nanshoku* could still be mobilized, although with considerably less impact than in the first years of the era, to expose the artificiality of the regime of exclusive male heterosexuality and the system of literary modernity.