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## ***Shizu no odamaki* or “*The Thread from the Spool*”: Male Same-Sex Love and the Warrior Ethos in a Nineteenth-Century Historical Tale**

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### **Introduction**

*Shizu no odamaki* 賤のおだまき (The thread from the spool), a work of fiction composed presumably in the first half of the nineteenth century by an anonymous author, tells the novelized account of the lives and love story of two historical Japanese *bushi* 武士 or “warriors,” respectively named Yoshida Ōkura Kiyoe 吉田大蔵清家 (c. 1575–1599) and Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu 平田三五郎宗次 (c. 1585–1599). The two fighters lived in the Warring States period (*Sengoku jidai* 戦国時代, 1467–1600) and died in combat during the Shōnai Rebellion (*Shōnai no ran* 庄内の乱, 1599–1600), one of the many conflicts that took place in this age of constant bloodshed. In presenting their fictionalized biography, *Shizu no odamaki* operates on two intertwining levels: one romantic, providing an idealized narration of the relationship uniting the protagonists based on the so-called “way of the youth” (*wakashudō* 若衆道), the relationship between an adult man and an adolescent male, and one ethical, depicting the characters’ feelings as a powerful catalyzer that assists them in their pursuit of the “way of the warrior” (*bushidō* 武士道). The two ways, of male same-sex love and combat, thereby support each other in a virtuous circle. In proving the connection between Kiyoe and Sangorō’s sentiments and their commendable behavior as soldiers, the text pursues a didactic end by indicating their amorous and martial deeds as an authoritative example for the contemporaneous reader to emulate.

During the early Meiji era (1868–1912), the shifting configurations of male sexuality and sociability, brought about by the influence of Western sexology and medicine, compelled a radical reappraisal of the narrative. In fact, the title stood at the center of a cultural war that on one hand opposed reformists who aligned themselves with the ongoing



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Westernization of the country, and on the other hand, conservatives who advocated the worth of the native culture from the previous centuries. In the literary field, the former included the novelist Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862–1922) who rejected *Shizu no odamaki*'s view of male-male desire in an effort to advance sexology conceptions, recently imported from the West, that interpreted this form of affection as a psychological pathology. The latter included personalities such as Yamada Bimyō 山田美妙 (1868–1910) who endorsed the original message of the book.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, this second faction revolved around a student subculture that submitted the volume for newspaper serialization and commercially printed editions in order to distribute the tale among like-minded readers. In this way, *Shizu no odamaki* received different interpretations and valuations which engaged in dialogue with broader discourses about the nature of a modern nation and society.

As a result, *Shizu no odamaki* occupies a very peculiar position within the history of male same-sex love in Japan, given its liminal position across the Edo or Tokugawa period (1600–1868) and the Meiji period. On the one hand, the work fully supports the traditional view, emblematic of the culture of the Tokugawa period, on affection between men as a force that spurs the *bushi* to fight in the name of the way of the warrior. On the other hand, during the Meiji era the narration's merit was reassessed in view of the purportedly civilized values of the now Westernized country. Consequently, *Shizu no odamaki* mirrors the socio-cultural tensions caused by the abrupt acceptance of Western ideologies while offering, at the same time, a sum of Tokugawa Japan's ideals and practices concerning male-male desire.

In the following, I provide an annotated translation of *Shizu no odamaki*. To prepare readers for the text, I offer in the next sections an overview of the lives of the historical Sangorō and Kiyōie as well as information about the records from which the narrative draws inspiration. Next, I present an analysis of the main coeval notions and social practices that the title invokes to conceptualize and portray the romantic relationship between the two characters. Finally, I insert an outline of the diverging, and often conflicting, ways the narration was received and reinterpreted in the first decades of the Meiji era.

*Shizu no odamaki* remains a relatively obscure text. Scholarship on the title is mainly in Japanese and uses the work as a primary source for studies on male same-sex love in the closing phase of the Edo period and the early Meiji era.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, the book does provide material especially fit for

inquiries in sexuality studies and the history of emotions, as it contains keen insights on how the warriors articulated their concepts of eroticism, romance, and intimacy between men.<sup>3</sup> If subjected to a careful reading, however, the tale also provides data on other socio-cultural phenomena that may pique the interest of a larger number of experts. For example, the specialist in military history could appreciate the numerous descriptions that delineate the martial life and the system of values commonly shared by the *bushi* class. The literary and linguistic scholar might peruse the narrative for its sophisticated mix of writing and genre styles, which will be analyzed in more detail below. Historians of modern Japan may observe how advocates of Westernization in Japan utilized the work as a counterpoint, in order to promote newly imported ideals of a healthy society, while reactionary students mobilized the text's rhetoric to reject modernization policies. In addition to the experts in Japanese studies, the researchers in sexuality studies and the history of emotions specializing in different geographical areas and/or periods may also profit from familiarity with this title. In other words, *Shizu no odamaki* proves itself to be, at a close analysis, a complex tale that might be examined under a variety of research perspectives. Thus, authors from several areas could benefit from a more thorough knowledge of the text. It is in this spirit that I present this translation, which I will now introduce more comprehensively.

### Genesis of the Work

The protagonists of *Shizu no odamaki* are two historical warriors, a boy named Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu and an adult man named Yoshida Ōkura Kiyoe. They both came from Satsuma province in Kyūshū, celebrated for the extraordinary bravery of its fighters and the exceptional strictness of its military training and mentality. As befits two soldiers from Satsuma, Kiyoe and Sangorō heroically died in 1599 during the Shōnai Rebellion. The war started when Shimazu Tadatsune 島津忠恒 (1576–1638), Satsuma's governor, executed his chief retainer, Ijūin Tadamune 伊集院忠棟 (1541–1599), because he discovered that the other had secretly concluded agreements with his rival clans. Tadamune's son, Ijūin Tadazane 伊集院忠真 (1576–1602), decided to avenge the death of his father by sparking a rebellion from his headquarters in Shōnai castle. Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1543–1616), at the time a member of the "Council of Five Elders" (Gotairō 五大老), showed leniency towards Tadatsune and commanded the lords of the other provinces in Kyūshū to

join Tadatsune in suppressing Tadazane's uprising. Sangorō and Kiyoi were enlisted in the Shimazu army and met their doom in the "battle of Takarabe" (*Takarabe kassen* 財部合戦, 1599).<sup>4</sup>

Two regional histories attest to their tragic demise. According to *Hyūshū Shōnai gunki* 日州庄内軍記 (The war chronicle of Shōnai district in Hyūga region, 1676), Sangorō valiantly fought in the Takarabe battle and killed four or five enemies, but after being taken prisoner, he passed away because of his many wounds. Kiyoi followed a similar path: he took part in the same conflict, was gravely injured, and then perished on the battlefield. In a second correlated passage, the source states that Kiyoi was an attendant for the Hirata clan and Sangorō, but it does not specify the nature of the bond tying Kiyoi and Sangorō.<sup>5</sup> A later document, titled *Shōnai gunki* 庄内軍記 (The war chronicle of Shōnai district, late seventeenth century), adds more details. The text celebrates Sangorō's youthful beauty idolizing him as a boy whose unequaled handsomeness is more elegant than the atmosphere created when the autumn moon is visible through the clouds. It also conveys Sangorō and Kiyoi's closeness by saying that, after they had departed from Satsuma, they constantly stood by each other's side. Finally, it acknowledges that such feelings functioned as a stimulant for the courage both of them displayed in combat.<sup>6</sup>

Sangorō and Kiyoi's story is further enhanced in *Katami no sakura* 形見の桜 (A memento of cherry blossoms, date of composition and author unknown), a piece from the performance tradition of the *Satsuma biwa* 薩摩琵琶, lyrical ballads chanted to the musical accompaniment of a *biwa*.<sup>7</sup> *Katami no sakura* enriches Sangorō and Kiyoi's biography in two ways. Firstly, it relates the events with additional elements and a greater pathos, and secondly, it inserts new sections that narrate the story from the very beginning, starting with background information about the Hirata clan genealogy, and finishing with the characters' deaths.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, *Katami no sakura* rearranges what is by now known as the Sangorō and Kiyoi legend into a narrative structure, transforming the scattered information the previous documents reported into a story with a plot and a precise development.

*Shizu no odamaki* represents the climax of this process of textual stratification, as the Sangorō and Kiyoi cycle here finds its most extended and sophisticated form. Taking the example set by *Katami no sakura*, the anonymous writer of *Shizu no odamaki* expands on Kiyoi and Sangorō's biography by inserting many other episodes that more fully characterize the protagonists and their military feats. In this way, the author follows a

linear structure that includes: a foreword presenting the heroes and their ultimate sacrifice on the battleground; the description of their first, fated meeting; Kiyoi's courtship of Sangorō; the pact they sign regulating their conduct toward one another; Kiyoi's enlistment in the second campaign for the conquest of the Korean peninsula; lastly, their passing in Takarabe battle. As a result, the writer provides an overview of the protagonists' lives, their romantic bond, and untimely deaths.

It is important to note, however, that while the author does take inspiration from historical happenings, those facts are altered to conform to the writer's aesthetics and worldview. Furthermore, the author inserts sections that might be literary inventions. For example, according to *Hyūshū Shōnai gunki*, Sangorō is reported to have been taken captive, but *Shizu no odamaki* does not mention his imprisonment; on the contrary, the narration states that Sangorō rushes against the enemy after he sees Kiyoi's corpse. Therefore, the writer of *Shizu no odamaki* changes the deeds reported in the historical source, most likely to highlight Sangorō's devotion to Kiyoi and his heroic stature, which the captivity might have diminished. In a similar vein, in *Shizu no odamaki* Kiyoi is said to have taken part in the military campaign of 1598 on the Korean peninsula, but the extant historical records do not report his enrollment in the war. While his enlistment is plausible, it is also possible that the author created this episode to insert the war theme as foreshadowing for the tragic Shōnai conflict.

The fictional nature of other parts is even more probable. For instance, the title dedicates ample space to the incidents that some antagonists provoke to conquer Sangorō or to break his tie with Kiyoi. As these segments serve to enhance by contrast the morality of the protagonists' behavior and Sangorō's desirability, it is reasonable to assume they might be literary inventions. To conclude, it is more accurate to consider *Shizu no odamaki* not as a historical document, but rather as the novelization of selected historical figures and accidents.

Given these features, *Shizu no odamaki* is generally included in the literary genre of "the tales composed in the style of authentic historical records" (*jitsurokumono* 実録物 or *jitsurokutai shōsetsu* 実録体小説), popular in the late Tokugawa period, which offers fictionally augmented accounts of historical occurrences, such as wars among provinces, succession intrigues within *bushi* clans, acts of revenge, and so forth. Often, as in the case of *Shizu no odamaki*, these texts extend the original

material by inserting novelized parts and new themes to embellish the story.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, no detailed information is available about the writer of *Shizu no odamaki* and the circumstances of its composition. No original remains, but only later manuscripts dating from the last years of the Edo period and chiefly recovered in Satsuma. The existence of copies which are privately owned and contain illustrations of the central scenes of the story, suggests that during this period the work circulated only within Satsuma in handwritten form.<sup>10</sup> The identity of the author is cloaked in darkness as well. Only the preface of a print edition, dated March 1884, mentions a female writer who supposedly lived in western Satsuma and composed the tale to pass the time. However, the attribution is unsubstantiated.<sup>11</sup> Dating the text is also difficult. A late Tokugawa copy suggests that the narrative may have been created during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> This hypothesis apparently finds confirmation in the various references to *Shizu no odamaki* present in a work entitled *Yukiori take* 雪折り竹 (The snow-covered bamboo), whose only extant manuscript dates back to 1849.<sup>13</sup>

### Content of the Work

*Shizu no odamaki* primarily focuses on a panegyric of male same-sex love, a concept that the tale indicates by the term *nanshoku* 男色 or “male love.”<sup>14</sup> A loan word from the Chinese reading of the same characters as *nanse*, which dates to the first century, *nanshoku* literally translates as “male color,” where the cultural connotation of “color” (*iro* or *shoku/shiki* 色) derived from Buddhist philosophy refers to the world of visually perceptible forms toward which sentient beings experience sentimental and sensual desire. For its part, “male” (*otoko* or *nan* 男) signifies that the object of such fascination is a man. Differently put, male color denoted a physical and emotional attraction felt toward a man by an implicit man, as the Edo period erotic discourse was commonly predicated on an androcentric base.<sup>15</sup>

Other than *nanshoku*, the relationship between a boy and an adult man, such as Sangorō and Kiyoié’s, was usually understood at the time under a second notion, that of the “way of the youth” (*wakashudō*). The character for “way” (*michi* or *dō* 道) indicated a discipline of mind and body, a set of practices and knowledge expected to bring both spiritual and physical rewards to those who partook in it.<sup>16</sup> *Wakashu* 若衆 denoted in vernacular Japanese an “adolescent male,” whereas his older partner was typically

called *nenja* 念者, or “the person who thinks of/has feelings” for a specific youth.<sup>17</sup>

To describe the protagonists’ bond, *Shizu no odamaki*, mirroring a habit of the Sengoku and Edo periods, employs the kinship metaphor of “brotherhood” (*gikyōdaibun* 義兄弟分), which casts the boy in the role of “younger brother” (*otōtobun* 弟分) and the *nenja* in the role of “older brother” (*anibun* 兄分) in a performative fraternal tie (the suffix *bun* 分 found in these words means “akin to”).<sup>18</sup> During the Warring States and Tokugawa periods, such brotherhood ties furnished a device for cementing relationships between men unrelated by blood. As the senior sibling, the *nenja* gave the youth physical and social protection, a role model, and material aid, while the latter reciprocated through obedience, respect, and intimate access to his person.<sup>19</sup>

The attachment as male lovers and brothers not only held a personal and emotional benefit for the *bushi*, but also pursued a broader social function. In fact, such relations allowed transmission of the values and skills essential in the way of the warrior from the senior to the junior party, thereby serving a pedagogical purpose. In other words, the adult took on a mentorship role and instructed the adolescent in the “military arts” (*budō* 武道). At the same time, *nanshoku* motivated the cultivation of dignity on the part of the *nenja* by encouraging him to strive in order to prove himself worthy of his companion, in this sense, male-male romance was believed to exert a mutually ennobling effect.<sup>20</sup> A contemporary witness named Kōdera Masanobu 小寺信正 (1682–1754), lord of Shōnai province, explains as follows:

In Japan, male love (*nanshoku*) is widely practiced. Partners swear written oaths despite the danger of divine punishment [for liars], they vow the sincerity of their sentiments before the gods, they pledge to be siblings and to live and die together and thus, behaving like sages, they conduct themselves according to our customs. [...] I believe that, since ancient times, the men who undertake the way of male love (*nanshoku no michi*), established by the deities of this country, burnish their martial spirit.<sup>21</sup>

*Shizu no odamaki* illustrates this link between the sentimental sphere and the military ethos through the concept of “loyalty” (*gi atsusa* 義暑さ, literally “warm duty”).<sup>22</sup> “Duty” (*gi* or *giri* 義理) indicated the complex of obligations that the contemporaneous Japanese and especially the *bushi*, typically considered the most righteous person in the social landscape of the time, was morally expected to fulfill. This cultural code formed a pair



with the “feelings” (*ninjō* 人情), the personal and particularistic emotions that the single individual held. Frequently, the link between *giri* and *ninjō* was dichotomous, in that the selfish satisfaction of one’s sentiments could wreak havoc on the order that the rational and selfless pursuit of duty sought to preserve. In the case of *gi atsusa*, however, obligations and emotions did not annihilate one another, but instead were synchronous because *ninjō* prompted and strengthened the accomplishment of *giri*.<sup>23</sup> In *Shizu no odamaki*, *nanshoku* carries out such a role.

The tale also performs a didactic function, because it aims to inspire the coeval reader to emulate the example set by the main characters. This magisterial intention emerges especially in the ending poem, where the narrator uses the analogy of the “mirror” (*kagami* 鏡).<sup>24</sup> The mirror metaphor works on a triangular logic, in that the volume, precisely like a mirror, offers up the subject of the publication in a condensed form and encourages the reader to observe their own image reflected on its surface and to mold their behavior accordingly.<sup>25</sup> By this means, the text aims at providing the interested reader with both entertainment and edification.

In addition to the ethical side of their bond, *Shizu no odamaki* devotes ample space to the aesthetics of Kiyoe’s courtship and of Sangorō’s youthful charm. Firstly, Sangorō’s beauty is portrayed through various comparisons with natural elements, notably the plum (*ume* 梅). This tree and its flower had been associated with the allure characteristic of young age ever since the poetics of the *Man’yōshū* 万葉集 (A collection of ten thousand leaves, c. 759). One example can be found in a poem (number 786) composed by Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 (c. 718–785), one of the *Man’yōshū*’s compilers. The poem, which follows, is dedicated to Fujiwara no Kusumaro 藤原久須麻呂 (?–764) to congratulate his beauty:

<i>Haru no ame wa</i>	春の雨は	The spring rains
<i>iya shiki furu ni</i>	いや頻降るに	gather incessant force,
<i>ume no hana</i>	梅の花	but your <i>plum tree</i> ( <i>ume</i> )
<i>imada sakanaku</i>	いまだ咲かなく	has yet to blossom
<i>ito wakami ka mo</i>	いと若みかも. <sup>26</sup>	because of its terrible <i>youth</i> ( <i>wakami</i> 若み)?

Broadly speaking, the plum was linked to youth because it is the first plant to bloom in spring, the first season of the year in the lunar calendar and thus an allusion to youth. In this composition, Yakamochi further strengthens the correlation between the flower and the attractiveness typical of youth by saying that the flower, here a metaphor for the boy



Kusumaro, is so young that it has yet to bloom by the season of adolescence par excellence.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, Kiyoié's overtures incorporate some of the tropes found in the literary genre known as the "court narrative" (*ōchō monogatari* 王朝物語), the exalted corpus produced at the Imperial court during the Heian period (784–1185). For example, Kiyoié and his comrades debate on whom might be the finest boy of their times, a scene that is strongly reminiscent of the "discussion on a rainy night" (*amayo no shinasadame* 雨夜の品定め) from *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (The tale of Genji, c. 1008), where the eponymous hero and his friends talk about the woman of their dreams.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, when Kiyoié first goes to Sangorō's mansion, he sees the latter through a gap in the fence, a recurrent scenario in classical Japanese literature formally referred to as *kaimami* 垣間見, "peeping through a crack in a partition," a gesture that commonly preludes to the character falling in love.<sup>29</sup>

Thirdly, *Shizu no odamaki* includes several historical precedents, especially that set by Chinese Emperor Ai 哀 (Japanese: Ai, 27–1 BCE, reign 7–1 BCE) and his favorite Dong Xian 董賢 (Japanese: Tō Ken, c. 23 BCE–1 CE) in a famous extract from *Han shu* 漢書 (Japanese: *Kansho*, trans. The history of the Former Han, completed in 111):

[Dong Xian] often retired and rose with the emperor. Once while they were sleeping during the day his head was inconveniently resting across the emperor's sleeve. The emperor needed to rise but Dong Xian had still not woken. Not wanting to disturb him the emperor cut off his sleeve and rose from bed. This shows the extent of the emperor's love.<sup>30</sup>

This passage describes sovereign Ai cutting the sleeve off his robe as a proof of his sentiments for Dong Xian because, in the complex sartorial code meticulously observed at the Chinese court, the royal clothes possessed a high value both materially and symbolically, since they indicated the august rank of the person who wore them. By nonchalantly cutting his garment so that he would not disturb his favorite in such a mundane activity as napping, the monarch attests to the depth of his feelings. This tender image was so powerful that the "cut sleeve" (Chinese: *duan xiu* 斷袖, Japanese: *danshū*) became an idiomatic expression that signified a male-male relationship both in China and Japan.<sup>31</sup> *Shizu no odamaki* situates itself in this tradition and directly quotes from the source to allude to Kiyoié and Sangorō's lovemaking. By employing such analogies, tropes, and historical antecedents, the anonymous writer creates

the perfect atmosphere for romance.

The title *Shizu no odamaki* artfully hints at the sentimental and edifying content of the narrative. Originally, the image of the thread and the spool dates as far back as the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Records of ancient matters, 712). Under the rule of Emperor Sujin 崇神 (according to traditional dating, 148–30 BCE, reign 97–30 BCE), the document reports that Princess Ikutamayori 活玉依 married a mysterious man who visited her exclusively by night. Her parents, curious to discover the identity of their elusive son-in-law, instructed her to sew to the hem of his robe the string of a “spool” (*o 苧*, the first character of *odamaki* 苧環). On the next day, the princess followed the yarn until she eventually reached Mount Miwa, the place where the god Ōmononushi 大物主 resided. She thus found out that she had been wedded to the deity and now she was officially recognized as his wife.<sup>32</sup> In this legend, the thread serves as a way to bring the lovers and the two different realms they inhabit, respectively the human and the divine, together.<sup>33</sup>

This image is further developed in *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語 (The tales of Ise, late ninth century). In chapter thirty-two, titled *Shizu no odamaki*, the protagonist sends a poem to a woman who was once his lover:

<i>Inishie no</i>	いにしへの	As in times gone by
<i>shizu no odamaki</i>	しづのをだまき	the weaver of <i>hempen cloth</i>
<i>kurikaeshi</i>	くりかへし	( <i>shizu no odamaki</i> )
<i>mukashi o ima ni</i>	昔を今に	<i>unwound</i> ( <i>kurikaeshi</i> くりか
<i>nasu yoshi mo gana</i>	なすよしもがな. <sup>34</sup>	へし) her hand skein,
		ah, that we might find a way
		to turn those days back to
		now!

In this anecdote, the character wishes he could unite past and present, two dimensions as separated as the divine and the human, and be with her again. The Edo period *Shizu no odamaki* quotes part of the composition in the first of two closing poems:

<i>Kurikaeshi</i>	繰返し	The <i>thread from the spool</i>
<i>kokoro o todomete</i>	心を留めて	( <i>shizu no odamaki</i> ),
<i>miru ni nao</i>	見るに尚ほ	if we <i>roll it back</i> ( <i>kurikaeshi</i> )
<i>michi no oku shiru</i>	道の奥知る	and look at it
<i>shizu no odamaki</i>	賤のおだまき. <sup>35</sup>	paying attention
		we shall learn the depth of the
		way.

The writer employs this expression to urge the reader to go back to the

beginning and reread the story so that, having its message clear, they can understand its moral better.<sup>36</sup> Through the content of the *Shizu no odamaki* poem and its allusions to *Kojiki* and *Ise monogatari*, the metaphor of the thread might indicate for the reader, who was presumably well versed with such literary allusions, both the romantic and the educational contents of the book.

### **Influence of the Work in the Early Modern Age**

At the start of the Meiji period, the ruling class undertook the major enterprise of reshaping the nation's culture and society through the importation of different ideologies and practices from the West. This brought the elite groups to reject, among many others, native concepts of *nanshoku* that had been ordinarily accepted. As a result, the reformists decided to eradicate male-male relations from Japanese society because they were aware that this form of love was stigmatized in Western countries. In the day, medicine and sexology corroborated this assumption with the newly formulated construct of "homosexuality," translated into Japanese as *dōseiai* 同性愛, "love [between members] of the same [anatomical] sex."<sup>37</sup> This medical concept explained the phenomenon as the result of a mental debility and, consequently, as the distinguishing mark of a person who was mentally ill, morally compromised, and socially marginalized. The authorities were conscious of this harsh scientific condemnation, therefore they tried to suppress male same-sex love within Japanese society. The method they chose to reach this end was through the criminalization of sexual acts between men in the Reformed Legal Code promulgated in 1873 and in the Penal Code of 1880.<sup>38</sup>

In this antagonistic environment, *Shizu no odamaki* emerged as a precious cultural heirloom within an early-Meiji subculture that involved male students of the newly established higher schools and universities.<sup>39</sup> Despite the growing persecution of male-male desire, these youth, principally descendants from families of the military class abolished in the first years of the Meiji era, still identified with the *bushi* ethos and believed male same-sex love to be an important component of their socialization as men.<sup>40</sup> Thus, they found in *Shizu no odamaki*, a narrative that unequivocally affirmed that *nanshoku* was a constructive pedagogical practice linked to the maintenance of socially valuable male identity, a message that met with their need of self-validation in the shifting terrain of a modernizing Japan. In this new context, reading *Shizu no odamaki* constituted an act of resistance against the ideology of the political and

cultural elites.<sup>41</sup>

This student subculture took off in the early 1880s, when many boys and young adults from Satsuma, the region where the text was first composed and circulated, migrated to Tokyo in the wake of the Satsuma-Chōshū alliance's rise to power in the Meiji ruling class. This migration provided devotees of the tale with an opportunity to introduce the text to a broader audience.<sup>42</sup> At first, these fans circulated the title through hand copied manuscripts brought from their hometowns. Then, as interest grew, they made new copies by hand and produced their own privately printed volumes. Finally, they promoted the serialization of the story in newspapers and its publication in commercially printed editions from 1884 to 1887. Succinctly put, the *Shizu no odamaki*'s distribution expanded from the limited sphere of hand-produced copies to the realm of mass-communication.<sup>43</sup>

In 1884, a group of anonymous supporters submitted *Shizu no odamaki* for serialization in a popular political newspaper titled *Jiyū no tomoshibi* 自由の灯火 (The torch of freedom). In a statement issued along with the first installment of the story, the *Shizu no odamaki* enthusiasts wrote they took this step to present the book to a more extensive readership.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, they included a preface where they explained the reason why they deemed this title to be so important. In the foreword, they echoed the original message of the author, emphasizing the moral purity of the traditional warrior figure and the role of *nanshoku* in cultivating a more authentic formulation of Japanese masculinity grounded on the lofty ideals of *bushi* culture.<sup>45</sup>

Their strategy to distribute the narration to a wider audience apparently worked, because after its successful run in *Jiyū no tomoshibi* many commercial publishers produced a flurry of editions: one more in late 1884, two in 1885, and two in 1887.<sup>46</sup> These versions added bibliographic innovations, namely the use of the movable type printing and of Western painting techniques such as the contrapposto stance for the new illustrations, that resulted in a subtly different text.<sup>47</sup> By proposing the narrative to the young Meiji era readership, the promoters of *Shizu no odamaki* reclaimed their right to speak up in the current discussions about sexuality, gender, and identity.<sup>48</sup>

As *Shizu no odamaki* was distributed to increasingly larger segments of the Japanese public, some writers felt compelled to revisit the tale in their own works. Among them was Yamada Bimyō, who during his high school years avidly read the tale in its new editions. Reflecting this interest,

he wrote a series of poetical compositions in 1885 that dealt with the imaginary of the handsome youth from the bygone past, which he published in 1886 as his literary debut under the title *Shōnen sugata* 少年姿 (Figures of boys). The first poem in the anthology, entitled “Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu,” consists of a retelling of Sangorō and Kiyōie’s biography. The poem is structured in two parts: in the first, the introduction, Bimyō describes in laudatory terms Sangorō’s heroic stature and the ethical component of his bond with Kiyōie, whereas, in the second, the main body of the text, the poet sings an idealized recounting of the boy’s death on the battleground.<sup>49</sup> By reiterating the original message of *Shizu no odamaki*, Bimyō aligned himself with the student subculture and, in so doing, he opened up a new phase of the Kiyōie and Sangorō’s cycle by creating an updated rewriting of their story.

On the contrary, in *Vita Sexualis* キタ・セクスアリス (1909) Mori Ōgai criticized *Shizu no odamaki* to debunk the Edo period conception of male-male eroticism. In this novel, the narrator named Kanai Shizuka 金井澁 discusses the sexual and sentimental habits of himself and classmates who attend high school with him. The story is set in 1874, the same time as *Shizu no odamaki* circulated in borrowed manuscripts. While observing his peers, Kanai gives great attention to the behavior of a group of his dorm-mates who practice male-male sexuality, whom he defines as “the hard faction” (*kōha* 硬派) after their vision of rough masculinity. He links them with *nanshoku* because of their prime reading material, *Shizu no odamaki*, which Kanai scornfully summarizes as the story of an adult and a youth whose rapport is often hindered by Sangorō’s jealous and malevolent suitors. Moreover, he records how the students passed around a hand-copied edition of the text. In so doing, Ōgai relies on cultural consumption to signal that the *kōha* favored *nanshoku*.<sup>50</sup>

However, Ōgai soon discredits the *kōha*’s view on intimacy between men by resorting to the scientific authority of Western sexology. In particular, Ōgai utilizes the methodology that sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902) established in his treatise *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), which the title of Ōgai’s narrative openly parodies. By adopting Krafft-Ebing’s approach, Kanai gives a diagnosis of the hard faction’s tendencies determining the desires to be “unnatural” (*fushizen* 不自然) as opposed to the “natural” (*shizen* 自然) impulses of Kanai, who is erotically involved only with the opposite sex. The use of this binary holds a deep meaning, because it constituted the primary notion through which Krafft-Ebing understood homosexuality.<sup>51</sup> In this manner, Ōgai refers to the *kōha*

and to *Shizu no odamaki* in order to advocate the validity of sexology and its condemnation of male-same sex love.

### Conclusion

In closing, *Shizu no odamaki* may be succinctly defined as the novelized account of the lives and love story of Yoshida Ōkura Kiyōie and Hirata Sangorō Munetsugu, two historical *bushi* who lived during the Sengoku period and prematurely died fighting in 1599. Their immolation on the battleground is recounted by a number of seventeenth century historical records that delineate the events of the war. According to *Hyūshū Shōnai gunki*, Sangorō and Kiyōie fought valiantly, but ultimately perished because of the many wounds they had sustained. While this source dryly documents their demise, a second record, entitled *Shōnai gunki*, idolizes Sangorō's beauty, his close ties with Kiyōie, and the function their attachment fulfilled as a catalyst for the courage they displayed even on the verge of death. A later piece of fiction titled *Katami no sakura* further enhances the soldiers' cycle by rearranging the material into a narrative structure. *Shizu no odamaki* represents the climax of this process of textual stratification, as the anonymous author comprehensively recounts the heroes' tale from its beginning with Sangorō and Kiyōie's first meeting and ending with their ultimate sacrifice.

In terms of content, *Shizu no odamaki* primarily focuses on a tribute to *nanshoku* or "male color," i. e. the physical and emotional attraction a man feels towards another person of the same sex. The protagonists' relationship may also be described through the concepts of the "way of the youth," *wakashudō*, the bond tying an adolescent male with an older partner, and of "brotherhood," *gikyōdaibun*, a device for cementing relations between men unrelated by blood. In the mentality of the time, these socio-cultural practices, each of which differently structured a relationship between two men, were thought of not only as sentimental and erotic links, but also as catalysts for broader social functions. In fact, such ties served a pedagogical purpose, in that the senior party took on a mentorship role and instructed the junior in the martial arts and in the ideals of the way of the warrior. Consistently with this vision of male same-sex love, *Shizu no odamaki* celebrates Sangorō and Kiyōie for the strength of their affection and its mutually ennobling effect.

In the early Meiji period, the importation of Western medicine and sexology caused a negative reevaluation of *nanshoku* as a psychological pathology. Consequently, *Shizu no odamaki* saw a process of

reinterpretation. On the one hand, the title emerged as a prized heirloom among a subculture of high school and college students who promoted the original message of the work and spread the volume through borrowed manuscripts, newspaper serializations, and commercially printed editions. Bimyō may be considered the champion of this movement, as he wrote a debut anthology that beautified Sangorō's death on the battlefield, thus adding another phase in this figure's legend. On the other hand, the political and cultural elites despised the native custom of *nanshoku* as a barbarian practice, favoring instead the Western understanding of *dōseiai* or "homosexuality." Ōgai might be considered the champion of this movement, as he wrote disparagingly of *Shizu no odamaki* as the reading material of a student faction whose inclination for male-male desire he deemed, through a scientifically founded diagnosis, as "unnatural." In this way, *Shizu no odamaki* stood at the center of a cultural war that opposed conflicting interpretations of romance between men.

In conclusion, *Shizu no odamaki* arises from this examination as a complex narrative which occupies a very peculiar place in the history of male same-sex love in Japan. Nonetheless, it is my contention that *Shizu no odamaki* contains information that might pique the interest of experts in various disciplines, such as the military historian, the literature and linguistics specialist, the scholar in Meiji history, and last but not least the researcher on sexuality studies and the history of emotions specialized in different geographical areas and/or periods. Therefore, I have translated this work into English in the hope that others may benefit from a thorough knowledge of the text.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I will discuss in more detail later the sources by Mori Ōgai and Yamada Bimyō.

<sup>2</sup> The Japanese scholarship dedicated to *Shizu no odamaki* includes the following texts: Maeda Ai, "Shizu no odamaki kō," *Seikei kokubun* 3 (1970): 44–47; Hashiguchi Shinsaku, "Hirata Sangorō monogatari no nagare," *Kagoshimaken ritsudankidaigaku kiyō* 18 (1990): 1–29; Kasama Chinami, "Seisatsu fujo kō: Shizu no odamaki kaisetsu," in *Shizu no odamaki*, ed. by Suzuki Akira (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2017), 133–199; Imuta Tsunehisa, "Shizu no odamaki kō," *Research Bulletin of the Faculty of Humanities, Shigakukan University* 38 (2017): 89–115; Imuta Tsunehisa, *Bushidō to nanshoku monogatari*—"Shizu no



odamaki” *no subete* (Tokyo: Shokeisha, 2020).

In English, a comprehensive analysis on *Shizu no odamaki* can be found in: Jim Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” in Jim Reichert, *In the Company of Men: Representations of Male-Male Sexuality in Meiji Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 17–35.

- <sup>3</sup> The history of emotions is the name of a recent field that examines how a given human society in a specific historical period understands and expresses the experience of emotions. Examples of such scholarship include: Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford, U. K.: Oxford University Press, 2017); Barbara Rosenwein, Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?* (Cambridge, U. K.: Polity, 2017); Katie Barclay, *The History of Emotions: A Student Guide to Methods and Sources* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020).
- <sup>4</sup> Kasama, “Seisatsu fujo kō: *Shizu no odamaki* kaisetsu,” 137.
- <sup>5</sup> Hashiguchi, “Hirata Sangorō monogatari no nagare,” 1–2; Kasama, “Seisatsu fujo kō: *Shizu no odamaki* kaisetsu,” 137.
- <sup>6</sup> Hashiguchi, “Hirata Sangorō monogatari no nagare,” 2–3; Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 19; Kasama, “Seisatsu fujo kō: *Shizu no odamaki* kaisetsu,” 138. For a study of supplementary historical sources about Kiyōie and Sangorō, see also: *Ibid.*, 138–139; Imuta Tsunehisa, “*Shizu no odamaki* kō,” 89–115.
- <sup>7</sup> Shimazu Tadashi, “Edo jidai no Satsuma biwa uta no kenkyū yosetsu,” *Tōyō ongaku kenkyū* 58 (1993): 39–56; Komoda Haruko, “Satsuma mōsō biwa no tanjō to tenkai: Heike biwa kara Satsuma mōsō he, soshite Satsuma biwa he,” *Ocha no suiongaku ronshū* Special issue (2006): 277–288.
- <sup>8</sup> Hashiguchi, “Hirata Sangorō monogatari no nagare,” 5–8; Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 19.
- <sup>9</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 19; Konita Seiji, “Jitsurokutaishōsetsu no seisei: Ten’ichibō wo daizai toshite,” *Kinsei bungai* 48.1 (1988a): 24; Konita Seiji, “Jitsurokutaishōsetsu no jinbutsuzō: Ten’ichibō wo chūshin ni,” *Nihon bungaku* 37.8 (1988b): 30; Konita Seiji, “Jitsurokutaishōsetsu wa shōsetsu ka: jijitsu to hyōgen he no shiron,” *Nihon bungaku* 50.12 (2001): 31.
- <sup>10</sup> Kasama, “Seisatsu fujo kō: *Shizu no odamaki* kaisetsu,” 130–131.
- <sup>11</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 20.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> Hashiguchi Shinsaku, “Honkoku *Yukiori take* (Shōnai gunki),” *Kagoshima*

*kenritsu dankidaigaku kiyō* 17 (1989): 1–2.

- <sup>14</sup> *Shizu no odamaki*, ed. by Nomura Fukutarō (Tokyo: Nishobōin, 1885), 1, 69. Available at <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/881186/1>. Accessed April 2022.
- <sup>15</sup> Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), 25.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 43.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 36, 39.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 41; Takeda Akira, *Kyōdaibun no minzoku* (Tokyo: Jinbun shoin, 1989), 14.
- <sup>19</sup> Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950*, 41.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in Ujiie Mikito, *Bushidō to eros* (Tokyo: Kōdansha gendai shinsho, 1995), 142–143; see also Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 23. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
- Shōnai was declared a province starting from 1622, after the events of *Shizu no odamaki*.
- <sup>22</sup> *Shizu no odamaki*, 70.
- <sup>23</sup> Minamoto Ryōen, *Giri to ninjō: Nihonteki shinjō no ikkōsatsu* (Tokyo: Chūkō shinsho, 1999), 26–27, 76–87; for an examination of supplementary concepts related to the way of the warrior used in the work, see also: Komori Yōichi, “Nihon kindai bungaku ni okeru nanshoku no keshiki,” *Bungaku* 6.1 (1995): 75–78.
- <sup>24</sup> *Shizu no odamaki*, 70.
- <sup>25</sup> Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950*, 53. The employment of the mirror metaphor can be found, for example, in *Shikidō ōkagami* 色道大鏡 (trans. The great mirror of the way of love, 1678) by Fujimoto Kizan 藤本基山 (1626–1704) and *Nanshoku ōkagami* 男色大鑑 (trans. The great mirror of male love, 1687) by Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴 (1642–1693); for a translation of *Nanshoku ōkagami*, see *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, trans. Paul Gordon Schalow (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990).
- <sup>26</sup> Kita Tadashi, *Shōnen'ai no Renga Haikaishi: Sugawara no Michizane kara Matsuo Bashō made* (Tokyo: Chūsekisha, 1997), 11. For the English translation of the poem, see *The Ten Thousand Leaves: A Translation of the Man'yōshū, Japan's Premier Anthology of Classical Poetry*, trans. Ian Hideo Levy

- (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 339; emphasis mine.
- <sup>27</sup> Tan’o Yasunori, *Nanshoku no keshiki—iwaneba koso are* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2008), 183–201.
- <sup>28</sup> Hirano Miki, “Amayo no shinasadame kō: onna o kataru otoko no jijō,” *Nihon bungaku* 52.6 (2003): 11–21; Kin Sae, “Tō no Chūjō to Hikaru Genji: *Genji monogatari* amayo no shinasadame no gūisei,” *Kokubungaku kenkyū* 161 (2010): 34–38, 41–43.
- <sup>29</sup> Takamoto Masayo, “Kaimami to yukari: *Genji monogatari* no isshiten,” *Dōshisha kokubungaku* 18 (1981): 44–53; Yamamoto Tokurō, “Kaimami no haikai: sennyōdan kara *Ise monogatari* e,” *Tankashi tsubute* 249 (2007): 11–14.
- <sup>30</sup> *Homosexualism in Imperial China: a Sourcebook*, trans. Mark Stevenson and Wu Cuncun (London: Routledge, 2012), 20.
- <sup>31</sup> Hinsch Bret, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), 53.
- <sup>32</sup> *Kojiki, jōdai kayō*, ed. by Kōnosu Hayao and Ogiwara Asao (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1973), 186–187.
- <sup>33</sup> Mukasa Shun’ichi, “Miwayama no kami no toode: Miwa no ito ga katarō toshita mono,” *Jinbun ronsō* 28 (2011): 16–20, 23, 25; Arakawa Rie, “Hebigami kon’indan to odamaki no juryoku: tennaruya utakotoba kaiyaku shiron,” *Gakushūin daigaku jōdai bungaku kenkyū* 25 (2000): 1–3.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Ise Stories—Ise monogatari*, trans. Joshua S. Mostow and Royall Tyler (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), 85; *Taketori monogatari, Ise monogatari, Yamato monogatari, Heichū monogatari*, ed. by Fukui Tesuke, Katagiri Yōichi, et al. (Tokyo, Shōgakukan, 1972), 162–163; emphasis mine.
- <sup>35</sup> *Shizu no odamaki*, 70; emphasis mine.
- <sup>36</sup> For a study of other texts that use the expression *shizu no odamaki* and other connotative meanings of it, see Kasama, “Seisatsu fujo kō: *Shizu no odamaki* kaisetsu,” 134–136; Arakawa, “Hebigami kon’indan to odamaki no juryoku: tennaruya utakotoba kaiyaku shiron,” 8; Fujimoto Munetoshi, “Koi no odamaki: itomaki no ishō o meguru shiron,” *Nihon bungaku* 49.1 (2001): 69–71.
- <sup>37</sup> Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950*, 175, 248.
- <sup>38</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 14; Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950*, 158–178.
- <sup>39</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 17.

- <sup>40</sup> James H. Buck, “The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. From Kagoshima Through the Siege of Kumano Castle,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 28.4 (1973): 427–428; Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 17–18.
- <sup>41</sup> Maeda Ai, “*Shizu no odamaki kō*,” 44–47; Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 18, 26.
- <sup>42</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 17.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–27; Komori, “Nihon kindai bungaku ni okeru nanshoku no keshiki,” 73–75.
- <sup>44</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 27.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 29; Maekawa Naoya, “Meijiki ni okeru gakusei nanshoku image no hen’yō: jogakusei no tōjō ni chūmokushite,” *Kyōiku shakaigaku kenkyū* 81 (2007): 8; Maekawa Naoya, *Otoko no kizuna: Meiji no gakusei kara Boys’ Love made* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2011), 39–41.
- <sup>46</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 27–29.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–34. For an analysis of the bibliographic aspects of these editions, see also: Maeda, “*Shizu no odamaki kō*,” 44–47; Kasama, “Seisatsu fujo kō: *Shizu no odamaki* kaisetsu,” 140–145.
- <sup>48</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 19.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 73, 109–111; Ōmoto Tatsuya, “Bimyō Yamada Taketarō *Shōnen sugata* aruiwa nanshoku: Meijiki ni okeru bungaku no keisei katei wo meguru kokumin kokkaron,” *Journal of Suzuka University and Suzuka Junior College Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (2018): 3.
- <sup>50</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 215–216; Kasama, “Seisatsu fujo kō: *Shizu no odamaki* kaisetsu,” 145–147; Maekawa, “Meijiki ni okeru gakusei nanshoku image no hen’yō: jogakusei no tōjō ni chūmoku shite,” 6–9; Maekawa, *Otoko no kizuna: Meiji no gakusei kara Boys’ Love made*, 38.
- <sup>51</sup> Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 214–223; Maekawa, “Meijiki ni okeru gakusei nanshoku image no hen’yō: jogakusei no tōjō ni chūmokushite,” 10–11; Ubukata Tomoko, “*Vita Sexualis* to nanshoku no mondaikei: gender to sexuality no kessetsuten ni mukete,” *Nihon bungaku* 47 (1998): 39–44. For an examination of other literary works that debate on *Shizu no odamaki*, see also: Reichert, “*Shizu no odamaki* and Early-

Meiji Nostalgia for Samurai *Nanshoku*,” 73–81; Kasama, “Seisatsu fujo kō: *Shizu no odamaki* kaisetsu,” 148–151; Maekawa, “Meijiki ni okeru gakusei nanshoku image no hen’yō: jogakusei no tōjō ni chūmokushite,” 11.