Okinawa's Fictional Landscapes: A Reading of Medoruma Shun's "Suiteki" (Droplets)

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Introduction

Since winning the Akutagawa Award for "Suiteki" (Droplets) in 1997, Okinawan novelist Medoruma Shun 目取真俊 (b.1960) has received much critical acclaim in and outside of Japan. Medoruma's literary worlds typically explore weighty issues related to Okinawa's past and present, including Japan's annexation of Okinawa in 1879, the 1945 Battle of Okinawa,[1] and colonial influences on indigenous Okinawan culture and lifestyle. These themes are not necessarily new to Okinawan literature. Rather, it is Medoruma's fresh and innovative treatment of such issues and his remarkable craftsmanship that have brought him much acclaim and placed his works at the forefront of Okinawan fiction. This paper proposes to examine some of the approaches taken, and some key literary strategies employed by Medoruma to explore these themes via a close reading of the award winning work "Suiteki".

"Suiteki"

"Suiteki" (Droplets) opens with the main protagonist, Tokushō, waking from an afternoon nap to find he has been struck down by a mysterious illness: his lower right leg has "swelled to the size of an average gourd melon and turned pale green"[2] and although "alert and clearheaded" he has been rendered immobile and mute so that he appears comatose to onlookers. A clear, odorless liquid drips from a split at the tip of Tokushō's big toe which was rent when his wife, who puts his illness down to "gambling and carousing with women," curses the "lazy bum" for "get(ting) some weird ailment durin' the busy season" and gives his swollen foot a swift, sharp slap. From that evening, Tokushō is tormented by ghostly apparitions that appear night after night at his bedside to drink the water dripping from his toe.

Praised by critics at the time of its publication for its 'bizarre opening, its imaginative conception, and depth,'[3] this blending of the fantastic with realism in "Suiteki" is a hallmark of Medoruma's writing. It makes for a gripping and humorous story but what, if anything, might these strange and mysterious happenings convey to readers about Okinawa, past and present?

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[1] The Battle of Okinawa began in earnest with the landing of 20,000 American troops on Okinawa's main island on April 1, 1945 and lasted nearly three months. Arguably the deadliest battle of the Pacific War, it claimed approximately 230,000 lives in total with 147,000 Okinawans, or one quarter of the entire pre-war Okinawan population, dying as a direct result of the fighting.

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, all excerpts in English from "Suiteki" are quoted from Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson's translation, "Droplets" (*Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson, University of Hawai'i Press, 2000).

[3] Shiraishi Ichirō 白石一郎, "Dai-nijūnana-kai Kyūshū geijutu-sai bungakushō happyō 第二十七回九州芸術祭文学賞発表, *Bungakukai* 文学界, April 1997, 160.

It is mid-June when Tokushō is struck down by illness, the time of year when Okinawans commemorate those who died in the Battle of Okinawa.[4] Additionally, it turns out that Tokushō is a former 'soldier' of the *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai*, or 'Blood & Iron Imperial Service Corps,' and that the ghostly soldiers who appear at his bedside night after night, are fellow members of his unit. This, and other subtler signs in the work such as the image of the gourd melon and the faint taste of lime in the water dripping from Tokushō's toe all point to the illness' connection to Tokushō's experiences in, and memories of, the Battle of Okinawa.[5] Typically, Tokushō would be visiting primary and junior high schools around this time of the year to relate his war experiences as a *kataribe* or 'storyteller' whose role it is to convey communal stories of the past to the next generation. Indeed, Tokushō has become somewhat a celebrity, visited by newspaper reporters, university research teams and occasionally interviewed on television. However, he has been tailoring his stories to "what his audience wanted to hear" even developing a knack in order "not to appear too glib." "You start fibbin' and makin' up sorry tales to profit off the war and you'll get your fair punishment in the end," his wife, Ushi, warns.

Tokushō's ailment would indeed appear to be the "comeuppance" Ushi warns of. Symptoms such as loss of movement and speech, however, suggest that his condition is rather a physical manifestation of his own subconscious resistance to the *kataribe* role and a sign of trauma or 'post-traumatic stress disorder' (PTSD). Thus, instead of going on the annual school visits to tell more of his embellished war stories, Tokushō is confined to bed where to all appearances he is in a deep sleep. Inwardly however, he is experiencing flashbacks and hallucinations related to his war-time experiences that literally bring him face-to-face with the ghosts of his past:

> Now the soldiers began to appear nightly . . . they would emerge, one after another, from the wall to Tokusho's left. . .The next soldier kneeled down and frantically began sucking on Tokusho's toe. A fly zoomed off the wound on the man's dented skull, buzzing around his head for a while before landing on the bed and disappearing. This soldier had also grabbed Tokusho in the cave that day, begging for water. The tall soldier standing behind him, and the Okinawan soldier hidden behind him, and the one-eyed soldier who just now appeared out of the wall—all had been in the cave, extending their arms as they pleaded for water. Tokusho felt as if he was being dragged back into the cave's shadows once again.[6]

The appearance of the phantom soldiers revives Tokushō's deeply repressed memories of the war. It is no coincidence that they come in search of water as this is something that Tokushō failed to provide his former comrades as they lay wounded and dying. Worse still, Tokushō appears to have 'robbed' his closest comrade, Ishimine, of water and left him to die when he flees to safer ground. In one of

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[4] June the 23rd or *Irei no hi* (lit. 'day to console the dead') officially marks the end of the Battle of Okinawa as the day that the top general Ushijima and his team are said to have committed suicide.

[5] Gourd melons grew prolifically in Okinawa in the aftermath of the war nourished, it is said, by the bodies of the dead. See Medoruma's comments in "Jushō no kotoba: Medoruma Shun-shi ni kiku: Okinawa no sōtai o saraitai" 受賞の言葉：目取真俊氏に聞く：沖縄の総体をさらいたい (*Bungei shunjū*, September 1997, 424). Lime is likewise a subtle allusion to the limestone caves in which Okinawan civilians, like Tokushō and his comrades, took refuge during the war.

[6] "Droplets," op. cit., 263, 273.

the novel's most dramatic scenes, Tokushō is confronted by Ishimine's ghost and seeks forgiveness. Ishimine's ghost gives a small nod of acknowledgment and departs with the words, "Thank you. At last my thirst is quenched."[7] After that, the ghosts vanish for good and Tokushō's mysterious illness is likewise cured.

Much of the discussion of "Suiteki" by critics and literary scholars has centered on several aspects of this story. Firstly, Tokusho's actions during the war, his supposed 'betrayal' of his comrades, 'cowardice' and 'egoism' or 'self-serving wartime (in)action.'[8] These are taken as evidence of Medoruma having posited Tokusho as 'an aggressor' in this story 'rather than another in the cast of battle victims.'[9] Another focus has been on Tokushō's 'self-deception,' his 'dispensing of lies to school children through his artfully constructed stories of war heroism,'[10] and the question as to whether or not he has 'reformed' in the end. On the face of it, it would appear that both Ishimine and Tokushō have been 'healed' and everything resolved at the close of the story. Certainly, one scholar concludes that Tokushō 'is saved as a result of his punishment (illness) from the suffering over not meeting his obligations with regard to water during the war.'[11] On the other hand, others have reached the opposite conclusion. Novelist, Hino Keizō for example, makes the following comment:

> This is not one of those happy endings where the hero becomes conscious of crimes long buried in his subconscious, repents and is saved. Even after he fully recovers from his strange illness, Tokushō is still anxious and after once more indulging in drinking and gambling is found asleep on the ground outside the gate at home.[12]

Bhowmik likewise considers Tokushō to be 'fundamentally unchanged' and 'unwilling to reform.' She further submits that the ending of "Suiteki" could be read as 'an open rebuke of Tokushō's habits and perhaps even of Okinawans themselves, who, content in escapist pleasures such as playing the samisen and dancing the kachāshī, share his apathy.'[13] While these issues are certainly worthy of debate and I am tempted to add a few of my own thoughts to the discussion, in overly focusing our attention on Tokushō and his actions in the war, we are in danger of measuring him by the very same yardstick that "Suiteki" clearly sets out to critique and in once more condemning him to 'silence.' Instead, this paper aims to demonstrate that Medoruma's concerns lie not so much in exposing Tokushō as a 'coward,' 'egoist,' or 'aggressor,'—indeed, I would say this is not his intention—nor in whether or not he is 'reformed' in the end, but rather in highlighting the issue of how we memorialize the war and,

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[7] The writer's translation.

[8] See for example, Bhowmik's discussion of Tokushō in *Writing Okinawa* (New York: Routledge, 2008) and Hino Keizō's 日野啓三 comments in "Akutagawa-shō senpyō" 芥川賞選評 (*Bungei shunjū* 文藝春秋, September 1997, 426–27).

[9] See for example, Tatematsu Wahei's 立松和平 comments in "Dai-nijūnana-kai Kyūshū geijutu-sai bungakushō happyō" (op. cit., 163), and Bhowmik (*Writing Okinawa*, 147).

[10] See for example, Bhowmik (*Writing Okinawa*, 146), Hino ("Akutagawa-shō senpyō"), Kōguchi Satoshi 高口智史 ("Medoruma Shun, Okinawa-sen kara shōsha sareru 'genzai': 'Fūon' kara 'Suiteki' e" 目取真俊・沖縄戦から照射される〈現在〉:「風音」から「水滴」へ, *Shakai bungaku* 社会文学 , vol. 31 (2010), 61).

[11] "Akutagawa-shō senpyō," 429.

[12] Ibid., 427.

[13] Bhowmik, *Writing Okinawa*, 147–48

via Tokushō and others, in deconstructing our collective memories of the Battle of Okinawa, or the so-called 'war myths.' Additionally, I hope to reveal that though steeped in Battle of Okinawa-related issues, this novel goes beyond the Battle of Okinawa and indeed beyond the subject of war to allude to other matters relating to Okinawa's past and present.

'War Myths' and 'Yasukuni Ideology'

Tokushō's inability to assimilate his war experiences arises partly from the painful nature of those experiences and, I would argue, difficulties in reconciling them with Japan's collective war memories surrounding the Battle of Okinawa. According to Okinawan historian, Ōshiro Masayasu, the Okinawan people's contribution to the war effort is represented by the *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai* ('Blood & Iron Imperial Corps') and the *Himeyuri-tai* ('Princess Lily Corps'),[14] military divisions comprising young high school boys and girls sent to the battlefield to fight or, in the latter case, to serve as nurses.[15] The *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai* and *Himeyuri-tai* have been memorialized through books and films and, together with the *kamikaze* pilots from mainland Japan, have come to embody the Battle of Okinawa. As Ōshiro points out however, war tales that focus on the *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai* and *Himeyuri-tai*, and indeed the *kamikaze* pilots, tend to valorize war and the notion of self-sacrifice for the emperor and state, or what some refer to as 'Yasukuni ideology,'[16] thereby obscuring the reality of war and state responsibility.[17]

Tokushō's experiences as a member of the *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai* present a very different picture from the stock war tales described by Ōshiro. Depictions of soldiers "drenched in urine and excrement" and Tokushō powerless to do anything other than passively watch his fellow soldiers die, or of Tokushō gulping down to the last drop the water intended for his friend Ishimine and leaving him to die after he is fatally injured are a far cry from the standard image of the young 'Blood and Iron Imperial Service Corps' soldiers typically portrayed as having fought courageously against the enemy and sacrificed their lives for their country.

Collective war memories are similarly undercut by the episode in "Suiteki" about Miyagi Setsu. Setsu is a nurse in the *Himeyuri-tai* and a wartime friend like Ishimine. One day, the cave where Tokushō and his comrades are hiding is bombed and an order is issued for the soldiers to redeploy. Tokushō stays behind to keep a watch over Ishimine who has been fatally injured. Around that time, Setsu turns up and, after giving Tokushō some bread and water, clasps his shoulder and says forcefully, "We're heading to the field hospital in Itoman, so be sure to follow us!" She is clearly concerned that he survive. Tokushō does eventually flee but never catches up with Setsu as the cave where they were to meet has been bombed by the time he arrives and her group have moved on. Years later, Tokushō discovers that Setsu and her group travelled on to Mabuni, the southern-most tip of the main Okinawan island, and used a hand grenade to commit suicide there.

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[14] Ōshiro Masayasu 大城将保, *Okinawa-sen: Minshū no me de toraeru 'sensō'* 沖縄戦: 民衆の眼でとらえる「戦争」 (Kōbunken, 2000), 203.

[15] In total 1,464 students were drafted into the *Himeyuri-tai*, *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai* and other such corps. An estimated 816 of these students were killed in the Battle.

[16] Yasukuni is a Shinto shrine founded by the Meiji Emperor, the first emperor of the modern Japanese State, for the purpose of commemorating those who died in the service of the Japanese Empire.

[17] Ōshiro, Okinawa-sen, 202–3

Tokushō is filled with sadness and then "rage" over Setsu's death. He wants to kill "those who drove Setsu to her death." Tokushō's rage, coupled with Setsu's earlier words of encouragement to Tokushō, clearly convey to the reader that suicide was not an option that Setsu would have willingly chosen. So who exactly were "those who drove Setsu to her death"? Okinawan editor and free-lance writer Miyagi Harumi highlights as key factors leading to 'mass suicides' by Okinawans during the war, the fact that education under the imperial system was oriented to producing 'imperial subjects' and that militaristic ideology taught everyone that they 'must not suffer the shame of being caught (by the enemy) alive.'[18] Research revealing that mass suicides only occurred in regions where there was a Japanese army presence supports the latter point. Additionally, Okinawan critic, Nakazato Isao made the following comments after reading Kinjō Shigeaki's testament about taking the lives of his own mother and younger sisters during the Battle of Okinawa:

> The problem is the 'camera,' the existence of a gaze. Or to be more precise, it is the existence of a relationship between the viewer and the viewed via the 'camera.' We must query the form of that relationship between the 'camera,' the 'gaze,' the 'viewer' and the 'viewed.' In his testimony, Kinjō Shigeaki declares that the thoroughness of the education to turn Okinawan's into imperial subjects and *kichiku beiei* ('savage Americans') ideology provided the context for the 'mass suicides.' If we take Kinjō's point further, we come up against the issue of 'assimilation.' In Okinawa, education aimed at assimilation (of the Okinawan's) and education to create imperial subjects were carried out together. The effect of that was, we could say, the 'mass suicides' as an extreme expression of the viewed subject's self-identity intended for the gaze behind the camera.[19]

Needless to say, the younger generation of Okinawan's who had been mobilized like Setsu and Tokushō into the *Himeyuri-tai* and *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai* military units were the most heavily influenced by the education policies to bring about assimilation and create imperial subjects. As Ōshiro points out, the younger generation had an inferiority complex about being Okinawan and feared being denounced as 'foreigners.' They were 'fired up with a sense of mission to prove themselves as being true imperial subjects by sacrificing their lives for the empire.'[20] Or perhaps closer to the truth, they felt obliged to make it appear as if they were fired up with such a sense of mission. This is what Nakazato means when he says that the 'mass suicides' were 'an extreme expression of the viewed subject's self-identity intended for the gaze behind the camera.' Although the author, Medoruma Shun, doesn't directly address these issues in "Suiteki," this episode about Miyagi Setsu clearly calls into question the depiction of those who died, like Setsu, at their own hands during the Battle of Okinawa as having done so out of devotion to the emperor and empire,[21] and raises the spectre of Japan's colonization of Okinawa and assimilation policies in the pre-war and war-time eras.

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[18] Miyagi Harumi 宮城晴美, "Guntai wa 'Josei' no teki desu: 'Shūdan jiketsu', gōkan to Okinawa no josei 軍隊は「女性」の敵です:「集団自決」·強姦と沖縄の女性, *Okinawa o yomu* 沖縄を読む, ed. Jōkyō Shuppan Henshūbu 情況出版編集部 (Jōkyō Shuppan, 1999), 147–48.

[19] Uemura Tadao 上村忠男, ed., *Okinawa no kioku / Nihon no rekishi* 沖縄の記憶／日本の歴史, (Miraisha, 2002), 180.

[20] Ōshiro, *Okinawa-sen*, 203

[21] The now widely held, but unofficial, view is that the 'mass suicides' were not a voluntary, spontaneous act but were the tragic results of coercion or guidance from the Japanese army.

Seiyū and the 'Miracle Water'

Running parallel to the story of the main protagonist, Tokushō, and his nightly visitations by the phantom soldiers, is a humorous subplot about Tokushō's cousin Seiyū. Seiyū is a "good for nothing," a gambler and drunkard who ekes out a living by working as a day labourer on the mainland and at home in Okinawa. When he hears of Tokushō's illness and drops in to pay his respects, Ushi takes him in for a time, in exchange for his tending for Tokushō while she works outside tilling the fields. It doesn't take Seiyū long to realize that the water dripping form Tokushō's toe is a powerful aphrodisiac and elixir of youth, and under the pretext of looking after Tokushō, he secretly siphons off the water that he then sells as 'miracle water' at the neigbouring village. For a short time, the 'miracle water' is in great demand and he makes a small fortune. When Tokushō recovers and the water dries up, Seiyū decides to skip town and use the money to visit "massage parlours (red-light districts)" all the way from southern Kyushu and up the coast to Tokyo. When, however, he arrives at the next village, intending to close up shop, an angry mob of people is waiting for him. The miraculous 'rejuvenating' effects of the water have worn off and it is now having the reverse effect; his customers, both men and women alike, "had lost their hair and with their splotches and moss-covered faces they all looked like eighty-year-olds." The angry crowd summarily subject Seiyū to a severe beating.

This humorous and somewhat fantastic episode may appear at first glance as unrelated to the tale about Tokushō. Indeed, many critics have taken it to be a comic diversion or simply as 'noise.' However, so-called 'noise' has the effect of overturning conventional values just as 'carnivalesque' and 'laughter,' in the words of Kuwano, drawing on Baktin's literary theories, are devices for 'touching things from all sides and directions, turning things upside down and inside out, looking at them from above and below, stripping them of their outer coats and looking inside. . . analyzing them, breaking them down and exposing them. . . '[22] In short, 'carnivalesque,' 'laughter,' and 'noise' temporarily free one from existing social structures and values and lay bare a hitherto unperceived reality. What 'reality' then does 'carnivalesque' expose in "Suiteki"?

Firstly, Seiyū's actions represent a crude parody of Tokushō's. In recent years, Tokushō has been going around schools sharing his war experiences, for which he receives an honorarium. But he has been embellishing his stories, reinforcing war myths, rather than talking about his actual experiences. In this sense, Seiyū's deception of others in order to make money from the water (= Tokushō's war memories) is like a vulgar equivalent or parody of Tokushō's actions. But Seiyū is not simply a crude imitation of Tokushō. He is like a 'trickster' or someone who 'collects old images, icons, expressions of identity that people have discarded.'[23] As such, he incorporates Tokushō within what is a much broader representation of Okinawan society. The comical portrayal of Seiyū in trying to make a fast buck by selling the water thus highlights the broader issue of how the war is memorialized and indeed appropriated by some elements of Okinawan society. Likewise, his dress, "US military surplus trousers" and a "gaudy T-shirt like those hawked to tourists at the beach," captures various other

[22] Kuwano Takashi 桑野隆, *Bafuchin: 'Taiwa' soshite 'kaihō no warai'* バフチン: 〈対話〉そして〈解放の笑い〉 (Iwanami Shoten, 1987), 190.

[23] Yamaguchi Masao 山口昌男, *Chi no shukusai: Bunka ni okeru chūshin to shūen* 知の祝祭: 文化における中心と周縁 (Kawade Bunko, 1988), 13.

facets of Okinawa such as the use of the U.S. Military bases for financial gain and the promotion of Okinawa as a resort destination.[24]

Additionally, Seiyū's plan to visit all the "massage parlours (red-light districts)" and his fixation with his own "member" and virility, coupled with Tokushō's grotesquely swollen leg, reminiscent of bombs and the male organ when sexually aroused, point, through association, to male violence toward', and the degradation of, women and, in the context of the war, the issue of the so-called 'comfort woman' and 'comfort houses' of which there are said to have been over 100 set up in Okinawa, as well as rape and sexual violence committed by the American soldiers after the war. These issues were for a long time hidden under a heavy veil of silence in Japan. Although the 'comfort women' have become more visible in recent years, their stories continue nevertheless to be in constant danger of erasure from Japan's official (his)story and collective memory.

Needless to say, these are not simply historical issues. Seiyū's "US military surplus trousers" raise the spectre of the ongoing sex crimes committed by soldiers stationed at the American bases in Okinawa, an issue that came to the fore with the abduction and gang rape of a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl by U.S. servicemen in 1995, just two years before "Suiteki" was published. Nor do Okinawan males escape the author's critical gaze; the very fact that Seiyū is Okinawan raises the issue of Okinawan complicity with the army during wartime and their present-day treatment of women.[25]

In this way, this episode about Seiyū and the miracle water is not simply a comic diversion from the main story. Rather it serves to revive some of Japan's most contentious memories surrounding the war and expose some of the more problematic aspects of contemporary Okinawan society.

Ushi

In the light of the physical effects experienced by the people who drank the water sold by Seiyū, the 'miracle water' dripping from Tokushō's foot is clearly not the water of life and regeneration but that of degeneration and death. This, and the fact that Tokushō's swollen leg is reminiscent of a bomb, suggest that Tokushō has internalized 'Yasukuni ideology,' an ideology that valorizes the notion of dying for one's country. It is now literally a part of his physical makeup. It is precisely because Tokushō's perception of the war is coloured by this ideology that he is unable to acknowledge his own war experiences that don't sit well with such notions, or having survived, affirm his own life. His lying inert much as if he were dead is a manifestation of this. An important catalyst for change is his wife, Ushi. Ushi has received scant attention from literary critics and scholars expounding on this work. It may be that they view her as little more than 'noise,' like Seiyū. I propose however that she is essential to the story and plays a vital role in Tokushō's recovery.

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[24] In 1996, the year before "Suiteki" appeared, in an essay titled "On the Current Situation of Okinawan Culture," Medoruma was very critical of a section of the male population in Okinawa who live a lazy life indulging in drink and slot machines, as well as of Okinawa in general for showing no sign of becoming independent and instead sacrificing its people in order to acquire money from the government in the form of fees for land leased out to the U.S. Military bases.

[25] Medoruma explores the 'comfort women' issue in greater depth in "Gunchō no ki" 群蝶の木 ("Tree of Butterflies," 2000) which features a former 'comfort woman' (sex slave) who served Japanese military officers during the war and American occupation soldiers following the war.

Ushi, like Tokushō, is a survivor of the war but an important difference is that, as her harsh criticism of 'war myths' suggests, she is untouched by 'Yasukuni ideology.' Her use of Okinawan speech and way of life deeply rooted in indigenous Okinawan culture are further evidence of her lack of assimilation. In this sense, Ushi's world and her outlook on life are antithetical and provide an alternative to the worldview that the *Himeyuri-tai* and *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai* represent. That is why she is able to draw the water (= war memories and ideology that valorizes war and death) from Tokushō's body. Ushi instinctively saw Tokushō's swollen foot as a sign of his lackadaisical attitude and way of thinking that didn't affirm their life together and instead held to a male-oriented ideology that glorifies war, and putting his illness down to "gambling and carousing with women," gave his swollen foot a swift, sharp slap.

From the next night, the phantom soldiers begin their nocturnal visits. For more than two weeks, Tokushō floats between the world of the living and that of the dead. At night, his eyes open so that he can see the soldiers and relive his war experiences. During the day, by contrast, he is 'sleeping' and forced to 'look' at the world through Ushi's eyes and 'see' things from her perspective. As he goes back and forth between these two worlds, the world of the ghosts and Ushi's world, Tokushō is gradually able to relativize and reject 'Yasukuni ideology,' thereby freeing himself from its hold. That allows him finally to accept his own personal war experiences, painful though they may be, and free himself from the bonds of the dead that have tormented him for over fifty years. The critical point at which this happens is when, after initially seeking his forgiveness, he rebuffs Ishimine with the words, "Don't you know how much I've suffered these past fifty years?" The fact that Tokushō decides, after his recovery, that he'd like to go and visit the cave where Ishimine and his other comrades died, lay flowers and look for any remaining human bones, indicates that he is now ready to literally lay his ghosts of the past to rest. That he wishes to do this with Ushi is an affirmation of their life together, and while he may appear to have returned to his old habits of drinking and gambling, the fact that he hasn't started womanizing again and his positive attitude toward working in the fields at the end likewise indicate a change in outlook.

Tokushō is thus 'reborn,' with Ushi's aid. Symbolic of his 'rebirth' is the exceptionally loud 'wail' that echoes throughout the village at dawn on the day of his recovery.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above analysis, "Suiteki" adopts a Kafkaesque-like tale to explore issues relating to the Battle of Okinawa, the effects of which are still felt today. During the course of the story, it becomes clear that the experiences of the main protagonist, Tokushō, differ greatly from, and therefore fundamentally undermine the standard image of the *Tekketsu Kinnō-tai* and *Himeyuri-tai* members as the 'pure and devoted who fell on the battlefield having sacrificed their lives for the State and their beloved homeland.' Male-oriented 'Yasukuni ideology' hidden in such war stories is exposed and subverted in this novel by the incorporation of a female 'voice' and indigenous worldview. What is also revealed with the deconstruction of these 'war myths,' are government policies in prewar and wartime Japan aimed at the assimilation of the Okinawans and creation of imperial subjects, or in other words, Japan's colonization of Okinawa.

Literary devices such as 'carnivalesque,' 'noise,' and the 'trickster' figure are combined with symbolically potent imagery and allusion to indirectly capture aspects of the war that have tended to be shrouded in silence and erased from collective memory, such as the 'comfort women' (sex slaves) and sex crimes committed by American soldiers during the U.S. occupation of Okinawa after the war.[26] Okinawa is not spared from Medoruma's critical gaze and neither is this work simply about the past. As we have seen, aspects of Okinawa's past and present interpenetrate in the figure of Seiyū the trickster and, of course, Tokushō.

In conclusion, "Suiteki" is a fine example of the remarkable skill with which Medoruma crafts his novels and some of the literary devices that he employs to do so. It highlights some of the common themes linking his works, including the Battle of Okinawa, colonial influences on indigenous Okinawan lifestyles and thought, and gender-related issues.

[26] Ōshiro, *Okinawa-sen*.