Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the East Asian Studies Distinguished Major:

Okinawan Trauma Culture:
Depictions of Trauma in Translated Works of Okinawan Literature and English-Language Literature about Okinawa

Presented to the Department of East Asian Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the

University of Virginia.

EAST 4999

Apr 30, 2025

Marisa (Mooge) Guerrero

fgt6ss@virginia.edu

Table of Contents

Intro

On a Friday afternoon in late June 2024, I arrived at Naha International Airport, stepping foot on Okinawan soil for the first time since I was 3 years old. I was born at Kadena Air Base, one of the many US military bases littering the island. Growing up, I'd jokingly be referred to by my parents as their "Japanese Baby," receiving many gifts throughout my childhood related to Japan—whether it be Origami paper, or a card game that was supposed to teach the player how to speak Japanese. I started formally learning Japanese in middle school, dreaming of the day I'd be able to return to where I was born, and now, here I was. I walked towards the arrivals area, and the second I stepped through the automatic sliding glass doors, and into the outside world, it was so hot and humid outside, my glasses fogged up. This continued to happen throughout my stay in Okinawa, every time I left an air-conditioned building. I ended up switching to disposable contacts for the rest of my trip.

My Japanese teacher just so happened to have close friends with children my age living in Okinawa, and she put me in contact with them. They drove me to various places around southern Okinawa—a convenience store, a tempura place run by an old Okinawan woman, a conveyor belt sushi restaurant, the sea wall. In particular, on the way to the sea wall, I noticed something strange on the road. On a billboard just past a stoplight were the words, in large bold lettering, "Himeyuri Steak: 980 Yen."

Okinawa is generally most well known for two things by outsiders–if known for anything at all, frankly–its beauty, and its war memorials. Okinawa is a beautiful tropical island with exotic fruits, like pineapple, papaya, and *goya* bittermelon, with a depressing memory of all those who died during the Battle of Okinawa, one notoriously brutal battle at the end of World War II. This battle was so notorious in Okinawa, that it is often referred to as just "the war" by Okinawans, without any need to specify. It is sometimes posited that the beauty of Okinawa, its flourishing flora and fauna, is a direct result of all the bodies that were left to decay into the soil during the war. There are countless war memorials throughout Okinawa, such as the Former Underground Japanese Navy Headquarters, the Peace Memorial, and the Himeyuri Monument.

The Himeyuri Monument is a museum dedicated to telling the stories of girls from Okinawa First Girls High School and Okinawa Shihan Women's School for girls who were made to work as nurses during the battle of Okinawa. Students from the two schools were colloquially referred to as *Otohime* (乙姫; meaning 'pure girls') and *Shirayuri* (白百合; meaning white lilies, a symbol of purity) respectively, so the two terms were combined together as *Himeyuri* (姫百合) to refer to these girls.[1] They underwent horrible conditions, risking their lives to get food for

[1] VELTRA 余暇プランナー. "ひめゆりの塔とは？沖縄地上戦の歴史を学べる観光スポット | 海外旅行、日本国内旅行のおすすめ情報 | ベルトラYOKKA | VELTRA." Veltra, 28 June 2020, https://www.veltra.com/jp/yokka/article/himeyuri-monument/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

soldiers from out of the caves, sleeping on the sides of walls to remain alert whenever they may be needed, tending to soldiers infested with maggots and with other ailments even when their efforts seemed fruitless, all with little to no food or rest. Towards the end of the battle, many of these girls were ousted from the caves by the Japanese army, forced to fend for themselves. Over half of these girls died, whether from enemy bombings, or through suicide, fearing the Americans would rape and mutilate them if they let themselves be captured. What girls did survive suffered from survivors' guilt for years, refusing to tell their stories to anyone, until just a few decades ago, when the museum was built.[2]

All this history flashed before my eyes as I looked at the billboard sign again: Himeyuri Steak: 980 yen. My first thought was shock, and I expressed this to my driver, saying, “Himeyuri, doesn’t that usually refer to the monument? Isn’t that a bit…off?” To me, it was like if we had a place near the 9/11 Memorial that said “9/11 Burger: A taste you’ll never forget!”

My second thought was, just how different is my perception of Okinawa from those of the people of Okinawa itself? I came into this trip having done lots of research on Okinawa, on the war, the military occupation, and the current US military presence there now. I’d read countless translations of Okinawan literature on the war and occupation period, about the pain Okinawans suffered at the hands of mainland Japan and the US Military–pain they still suffer today. I didn’t want to come in looking like a stupid *Amerika-jin,* especially since I was born on a military base that I knew the Okinawans didn’t want to be there; local people have been protesting against the US bases since the end of the war. But now, I feared I had overcorrected. I felt like a Vietnam Vet apologizing to random Asian people in public.

I came to a realization in analyzing Okinawan literature–literature from Okinawa that has been translated into English, and English-language literature written about Okinawa–that there seems to be a heavy focus on the war, on racial and gender discrimination, on military subjugation, on ethnic identity–in essence, on pain. This cannot be the only literature that Okinawans write about themselves, so why do we focus on these themes so much in the west? Why are we so obsessed with ethnic pain? And I realized in my research that, indeed, these are not the only topics Okinawans write about. Much of the newer, untranslated literature I’ve read covers a variety of topics.

This phenomenon is not exclusive to Okinawa. In fact, it's practically everywhere. Think about the wealth of movies we have in the US about racial discrimination against black people: *The Help* (2011), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), or *Green Book* (2018). Look at any minority group–ethnic,

---

[2] “Himeyuri no tō–” ひめゆりの塔・ひめゆり平和祈念資料館. “ひめゆり学徒隊の沖縄戦.” ひめゆり平和祈念資料館, https://www.himeyuri.or.jp/himeyuri/study_war/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

gender, sexual, or otherwise–and the most famous story about them more often than not is a painful one, a traumatic one.

This is not to say that these works have no value. While many Americans know of slavery and its brutality, and know of the Jim Crow era, we are often unaware of to just what extent their legacies have infiltrated and ingrained itself into our history. Not only do these movies shed light on the less talked about aspects of these eras, but they also force audiences to in essence witness and experience the discrimination first hand, rather than merely hear about it.

But, does watching these movies mean you understand what it means to be black in America? No, because the black experience is about so much more than pain. Does watching them make you understand what it means to be black better than you did before? Perhaps. But when those are the only works you consume about black people–the only works that most people consume about black people–would that not skew your perception of them? Would that not give you the impression that to be black is to be in pain? That to be black is to be pitied? How would that perception skew real life interactions with other black people?

This is not to deny that there is a wealth of media created by black people that don't focus on these themes–most Americans just choose not to watch them. Not many white Americans have seen *Cinderella* (1997) –often colloquially referred to as *Brandy's Cinderella*–, *Boyz in the Hood* (1991), or *Undercover Brother* (2002). Not many white Americans watched *Atlanta* (2016) or *Everybody Hates Chris* (2005) while they were on air. Even fewer have seen a movie by Tyler Perry. Mind you, watching any or all of these doesn't make you understand what it means to be black in America either, but one certainly gains a broader and more contemporary understanding than from just watching movies centered around black trauma.

The same can be said about Okinawan people. Most Americans do not know anything about Okinawa. Those who do know about Okinawa, and want to learn more about Okinawa, turn to popular media depictions of Okinawa. Currently, the most easily accessible form of information about Okinawa in the west is through published translations of Okinawan literature, like the compilations *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa* (2000)[3] and *Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa* (2016)[4], or standalone novel translations like *In the Woods of Memory* (published 2009, translated 2017)[5] –the same works I had read before my trip to Okinawa. Such English-language works about Okinawa either focus entirely on

[3] Molasky, Michael, and Steve Rabson, editors. Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa. University of Hawaii Press, 2000.

[4] Bhowmik, Davinder L., and Steve Rabson, editors. Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa. University of Hawaii Press, 2016.

[5] Medoruma, Shun, et al. In the Woods of Memory. Translated by Paul Sminkey, Stone Bridge Press, 2017.

the war, or on the sexual exploitation of Okinawan women at the hands of American G.I.s. While there are other Okinawan works that have been translated and published in English outside of these anthologies, they are often locked behind academic paywalls, making them prohibitively expensive for the average consumer. While American readers don't really have much of a choice of what to read, translators do have a choice in what to translate, and I argue that what they have chosen to translate paints a troublingly narrow view of Okinawa–as a people defined by trauma and pity.

But, I have come to see that Okinawan literature contains more than just pain and suffering from their wartime and prewar pasts. Like authors everywhere else, Okinawan authors write about so many more things that span all aspects of their lives. They write about so many different topics, both ethnic and more generally humanistic, yet we focus on nothing but the ethnic and the painful.

In this paper I hope to effectively argue that the state of Okinawan literature–defined here as both Japanese-language literature from Okinawa translated into English, and English-language literature written about Okinawa–in the west focuses on Okinawan pain and trauma. I intend to mainly outline this argument through close readings of selected works of Okinawan literature–translated works and English-language works about Okinawa. I then present analyses of my preliminary forays into the literature that Okinawan writers are producing for their own domestic communities; I examine literary works written in Japanese by contemporary, lesser-known Okinawan writers that have not yet been translated into English. It is my hope that, through this paper, Okinawan literature can be respected as the genre that it is, expanding discussion of the genre to a level of prestige similar to that accorded to mainland Japanese literature and other world literatures, rather than marginalized into a minority literature defined by pain and trauma.

Theory Frameworks

Trauma culture

An important aspect in understanding why westerners often read Okinawan literature–and in particular, literature covering the traumatic experiences of Okinawans–is understanding why we read traumatic literature period, and what impacts reading traumatic literature can have on our society.

Anne Rothe defines the term "Trauma Culture" in her book, *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media*, largely through the lens of popular depictions of the Holocaust.[6] She outlines how the Holocaust has been defined in popular culture particularly by personal testimony rather than "analytical and self-critical discourse of professional historians" (34). This narrative has led to a public image of the Holocaust as an "ahistorical myth, rather than a historically specific event" (11). The Holocaust becomes the end-all-be-all of evil, the victims become infallible, and nothing can be done to prevent these issues from ever happening in the future. This view of the Holocaust as almost mythical has had many consequences on our collective consciousness.

Firstly, it has lead to widespread historical misconceptions about the Holocaust, such as the belief that only Jews were the ones subject to genocide, or the belief that the Jews did not resist their Nazi oppressors,[7] shown through a general lack of knowledge on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.[8] Secondly, many Americans came to believe that reading personal accounts of the Holocaust (and traumatic experiences in general) "constitutes a search for mystical revelations and uplifting self-help messages," (3) rather than informing readers about the complex histories behind the Holocaust and other tragedies. Rothe outlines the trend of "trauma-and-recovery narratives" resembling the "Christian suffering-and-redemption trope of spiritual purification through physical mortification" (2) as a reason why Americans may have begun viewing trauma narratives in this way. Books, movies, and TV shows about the Holocaust became incredibly

---

[6] Rothe, Anne. Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media. Rutgers University Press, 2011.

[7] Centre for Holocaust Education. "What are the common myths and misconceptions about the Holocaust?" Centre for Holocaust Education, University College London Faculty of Education and Society, https://holocausteducation.org.uk/teacher-resources/subject-knowledge/myths-misconceptions/. Accessed 13 April 2025.

[8] A series of uprisings conducted by Jewish inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto against their Nazi German oppressors, prior to the advent of concentration camps.
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising | Holocaust Encyclopedia." Holocaust Encyclopedia, 17 April 2023, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/warsaw-ghetto-uprising. Accessed 12 April 2025.

popular–even with their historical inaccuracies, such as in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (by John Boyne, 2006), which is often used in American classrooms when teaching about the Holocaust.[9] The collection of these forms of media about trauma, especially the perpetuation of particularly grotesque and detailed accounts of traumatic events, are defined under the umbrella of Popular Trauma Culture.

Popular Trauma Culture has infiltrated itself into many spaces outside the context of the Holocaust. It has been noted that Hollywood movies about the Holocaust are particularly more likely to win an Academy Award (Rothe 11), but so are other movies about historical or collective trauma, such as *The Help* (2011), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), *The Color Purple* (1985), *Green Book* (2018), and even *Forrest Gump* (1994). You might notice a common theme between these films: racial trauma. The Holocaust has been largely dominated by the narrative of collective traumatic identity around Jewish people specifically. This has led to the "Jew as Victim" trope (15) as well as the "dubious notion of hereditary or vicarious victimhood" (7). Jewish identity has thus been reduced to perpetual victimization, and the same is true for many other racial and ethnic groups in the west. Black people especially, as seen in the popularity of stories about black pain among white people, are then treated with "sentimental and inherently condescending pity," never truly understood. Many of the works I will be analyzing later on utilize similarly "sentimental and inherently condescending" depictions, tropes, and historical misconceptions to perpetuate this narrative of Okinawans as inherently peace-loving people who are subject to eternal victimhood.

There is a common justification for these stories about trauma, especially when it impacts one group of people in particular, and that is that it is bringing awareness to their struggles. And that is undoubtedly true. Video footage of police brutality, or the bombings of Gaza, spread through social media, have both led to more active popularity in their respective #BlackLivesMatter and #FreePalestine movements. Social media has been a great vessel for political activism, as now more than ever, people can see the struggles going on around the world, without an official news source cherry picking and censoring parts of that information to push a certain narrative. But it is also true that when these narratives of victimization are the only stories that are seen, they can and do perpetuate preexisting harmful stereotypes about the groups impacted.

Martin Gilens found in "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media," that black people comprise "62 percent of the poor people pictured" in publishings by Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, and Times, "over twice their true

[9] There are many historical impossibilities throughout the book, and it is often taught in classrooms as if it were nonfiction or based on a true story. Read more:
Randall, Hannah. "The Problem with 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas.'" Holocaust Centre North, 17 September 2019, https://holocaustcentrenorth.org.uk/blog/the-problem-with-the-boy-in-the-striped-pyjamas/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

proportion of 29 percent" (520).[10] What results from this overrepresentation is the reinforcement of negative stereotypes, Bridgette Baldwin argues in "Black, White, and Blue: Bias, Profiling, and Policing in the Age of Black Lives Matter."[11] When white people already believe that black men are inherently violent and defiant, seeing black men be killed by police over and over can reinforce their belief that they are indeed violent, and that shooting them is justified: "While thousands saw Eric Garner get choked to death, many responded that it was his poor health that killed him. When Cleveland police rolled up on a twelve-year-old Tamir Rice and opened fire without asking a question, many responded that his parents should have taught him to take better care of a toy gun" (441). We might conclude that where some see stories and news of black trauma and deprivation, others see in such narratives evidence proving their preexisting assumption that black people are violent or prone to poor social outcomes. The same could be true about popular depictions of Okinawan pain; Where many may see a people unjustly subjugated by American and Mainland Japanese oppressors, just as many may see a docile people who are unable to or unwilling to advocate for themselves.

Rape Culture in Okinawa

Another important aspect in understanding why westerners read Okinawan literature is tied to gender roles. Women not only from Okinawa but from nearby Southeast Asian countries are often implicitly tied to the identity of a sexually abused woman due to the proliferation of sex tourism in these areas.[12] This phenomena is so common, there is a term for it– "Passport Bros." These are men who marry women from these countries, often in seek of a meek, docile woman "not yet tainted by the west" who will obey to their every request in accordance with orientalist assumptions about Asian women.[13] While the power imbalances and abuse involved in many of these relationships are important to discuss, like with the discussion of systemic discrimination against people of color in the United States, when these become the only popular narratives surrounding Southeast Asian women, they have impacts in the real world.

---

[10] Gilens, Martin. "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misconceptions and the American News Media." Public Opinion Quarterly, vol. 60, 1996, pp. 515-545. Stanford University, https://web.stanford.edu/class/comm1a/readings/gilens-race-poverty.pdf. Accessed 8 April 2025.

[11] Baldwin, Bridgette. "Black, White, and Blue: Bias, Profiling, and Policing in the Age of Black Lives Matter." Western New England University School of Law, vol. 40, no. 3, 2018, pp. 431-446. Digital Commons @ Western New England University, https://digitalcommons.law.wne.edu/lawreview/vol40/iss3/4/. Accessed 8 April 2025.

[12] Lim, Lin Lean, editor. The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia. International Labour Office, 1998.

[13] Lane, Lexi. "What's A Passport Bro? 'Losers Back Home' On White Lotus, Explained." Men's Health, 6 April 2025, https://www.menshealth.com/sex-women/a64387699/what-is-a-passport-bro/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Before deconstructing the discourses surrounding the "Raped Southeast Asian Woman," it's important to deconstruct our own narratives around raped women period. Sharon Marcus, in her essay, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention,"[14] argues that rape is seen as an inevitable in our society, and thus it is believed that there is nothing that can really be done to prevent it, similar to Rothe's argument that the Holocaust is seen as proof that evil will always exist in the world, and so nothing can be done to prevent something similar from happening again. In reality, of course, there are ways we can prevent rape from happening. Firstly, there is an assumption in society that women are the primary target of violence, and so they must always be prepared to face violence, when statistics show that men are more likely to be the victims of violent crime than women.[15] Marcus points out that it is also believed that women are inherently weaker than men, and therefore when a woman faces violence, it is useless to struggle, and may even make the aggressor angrier and the altercation more violent than before. Marcus argues that, because of these societal assumptions, "The rapist does not simply have the power to rape; the social script and the extent to which that script succeeds in soliciting its target's participation help to create the rapist's power" (391).

When rape is assumed to be inevitable, due to the weakness of women, the power to prevent rape is given to men, which has its own issues. Lorenne Clark and Debra Lewis, argue in "Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality"[16] that the perpetuators of rape culture view female sexuality as something only men can own, and thus rape is merely transfer of a female's sexuality from one man to another. Preventing rape for men is thus merely preventing the abuse of one's own property, precisely the reason Marcus outlines men who are afraid for the safety of "their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters" (394). These are women these men can control, "which usually takes the form of restricting their mobility by means of warning these women not to go out alone or at nights" (394). This form of rape prevention further limits the agency of women.

When this power of rape prevention is given to men, it also gives them a sense of vicarious victimhood: When their mothers, sisters, or daughters are raped, so are they too. Expanding this to national or ethnic borders, when one woman is raped, everyone is raped. For example, when a white girl in Germany is gang-raped by middle-eastern immigrants, all of Germany is being raped by all of the Middle East, according to the inflammatory rhetoric surrounding the case of

---

[14] Marcus, Sharon. "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention." Feminists Theorize the Political, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013, pp. 385-403, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/femlit/sharon_marcus_-_fighting_bodies__fighting_words.pdf. Accessed 8 April 2025.

[15] Tjaden, Patricia Godeke, and Nancy Thoennes. "Full report of the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women." National Institute of Justice, 2000. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/21948. Accessed 12 April 2025.

[16] Clark, Lorenne M. G., and Debra J. Lewis. Rape : the price of coercive sexuality. Women's Press, 1977.

the alleged rape of a German-Russian girl in 2016.[17] Such views have impacts on policy; The aforementioned case led to anti-migrant protests in Germany and stoked fears about migrants in the European Union as a whole. Donald Trump famously called Mexican immigrants “rapists and murderers” as a justification for building the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Mexico is raping our country, and we must stop them, the thinking goes.[18] This belief does nothing to address the issues that the individual survivors of rape experience, does nothing to comfort or care for them, merely objectifying them for a political cause. Linda Isako Angst points this out in her essay, “The Rape of a Schoolgirl,”[19] in regards to the infamous 1995 Okinawan Rape incident. Through this rape, Okinawa was defined as not only a raped Okinawan woman, but also an emasculated Okinawan man in popular discourse (145). These two images were used then as political fuel to further political activism against the proliferation of the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa.

Angst points out how this 1995 Okinawan Rape Incident in particular was chosen as fuel to the political fire because of the innocence of the victim involved, and the particularly brutal nature of the attack: a 12-year-old schoolgirl on her way home after buying a notebook for school, kidnapped by three large American men in a van off the street, eyes and mouth duct-taped shut, hands bound, brutally beaten, vaginally and anally raped multiple times, dropped off on the beach, and left to die. This was a case so grotesque, so brutal, against such an innocent girl, that there was no way any reasonable person could blame the victim. The political energy gathered from the media storm around this case, however, did little to advance measures or protections against rape for women in Okinawa, instead being directed towards other political measures such as economic and infrastructural development (151).

Rapes of this nature do not often occur in Okinawa. Sure, they occur more often than in places that aren’t occupied by the U.S. Military Bases; this is unfortunately to be expected, because of endemic interactions between sexual violence and military imperialism. Regardless, the majority of sexual violence in Okinawa is the same as anywhere else: against sex workers, and against women the perpetrator personally knows.

---

[17] McGuinness, Damien. “Russia steps into Berlin 'rape' storm claiming German cover-up.” BBC, 27 January 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-35413134. Accessed 27 April 2025.

[18] Phillips, Amber. “They're Rapists--President Trump's Campaign Launch Speech Two Years Later Annotated.” Washington Post, 16 June 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/16/theyre-rapists-presidents-trump-campaign-launch-speech-two-years-later-annotated/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

[19] Angst, Linda Isako. “The Rape of a Schoolgirl: Discourses of Power and Gendered National Identity in Okinawa.” Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power, edited by Laura Elizabeth Hein and Mark Selden, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 135-157.

Sydney J. Selman, in her essay, "Not That Bad: Lessons Women Learn in a Rape Culture,"[20] discusses the ways women downplay their own sexual assaults as a result of narratives surrounding perfect victims. Selman underlines the different ways we define rape, with categories such as "gray rape" and "date rape," and how that redefinition creates an "unspoken system of categorizing certain acts as more acceptable, understandable, and excusable than others," with a "pyramid that places 'real rape' at the top and everything else beneath it" (5). Selman also analyzes the questions commonly asked to rape victims in court, designed to discredit the victim by asking questions like what they were wearing, whether they were drinking alcohol, whether they have had sex with their accused rapist in the past, etc (21-22). These questions are supposed to not only discredit the victim, but also make the incident seem not that bad in comparison to other possibilities. The ways that we frame rape, as not as dire as other incidents, ultimately cause less victims to come forward, especially the socially vulnerable ones, such as a sex workers. The only ones left, then, are the undeniably atrocious cases, like the 1995 Okinawa Rape Incident. This is reflected in Okinawan literature, which tend to portray rape in a similarly outrageous and grotesque way. Even then, news of these rapes often do little to affect the systems in place.

Conclusion

To recap, Rothe asserts that we choose to read first-person accounts of historically traumatic incidents because it encourages us not to take any real systemic action against the injustices in question. Baldwin and Gilens assert that frequent depictions of black people as disenfranchised, poor, and discriminated against can confirm the preexisting racist narratives of black people as lazy and violent, ultimately upholding white supremacy. Marcus asserts that our socially constructed assumptions about women as weak and frail are what ultimately uphold rape culture. Clark and Lewis assert that under rape culture men feel a sense of ownership over female sexuality and therefore the rape of women close to them, and Angst asserts that Okinawan men feel an emasculation through this vicarious rape victimization. Finally, Selman outlines how the ways in which we categorize rape cause only certain narratives around rape to be shown, and only certain types of rape victims to come forward.

Combining these assertions, I argue that depictions of Okinawan Trauma–especially stories emphasizing the ethnic or gendered aspects of the victims–are popular because reading them reaffirms existent biases about populations who were colonized under the imperial world order–and especially about the women in these population–with no need to take any real action. In the worst cases, reading this type of Trauma Culture literature can actually make our

[20] Selman, Sydney J. "Not That Bad: Lessons Women Learn in a Rape Culture." Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at The University of Tennessee, vol. 11, no. 1, 2022. University of Tennessee Knoxville, https://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol11/iss1/4/. Accessed 8 April 2025.

understanding of Okinawans less nuanced, and lead to worse outcomes for Okinawans. In the following sections, I will examine how much US literature written about Okinawa, as well as the selections of Okinawan literary works that have been translated thus far, show problematic assumptions about Okinawan culture that run counter to the more complex and diverse realities depicted in more recent Okinawan literary works.

Okinawan Literature in Translation

Okinawan literature in translation has quite a diverse roster, even when accounting for only the works that are easily accessible by the general public. There are translated works spanning the beginning of the 20th century to the present 21st century, written by authors of various ages and genders, covering many different topics among many different mediums. The most easily accessible and popular anthologies of Okinawan literature in English are *Southern Exposure* (2000) and *Islands of Protest* (2016), and because I am primarily discussing western perceptions of Okinawan literature, I will analyze these anthologies in particular. I will also be analyzing *In the Woods of Memory* (published 2009, translated 2017), as it is the only standalone Okinawan novel translated and published in English, and is just as easily accessible. Even with this limited scope of analysis, the themes presented are quite diverse, but oftentimes the themes highlighted by the translators and compilers are less so.

Okinawan Stories are Male

One of the first things that became apparent to me was how many of these translated authors are men, and how many of them focus on the stories of women. Medoruma Shun in particular, objectively the most famous Japanese author hailing from Okinawa, writes many stories not just about the war, but how the war affected women. This comes across as odd and an intentional choice, as he is not a woman, and likewise has not experienced the same gendered sexual violence his characters face at the hands of the Mainland Japanese and Americans alike. What becomes clear on closer examination is that a lot of these stories are about Okinawan men (failing to) save Okinawan women from their oppressors.

Tree of Butterflies (2000)[21] takes place in both the present and the past, going back and forth between the two timelines, though the meat of the story takes place in the past, during the Battle of Okinawa. The main character in the present is a man named Yoshiaki who is researching collective accounts in his village about the war. The main character in the past is an Okinawan prostitute named Gozei. She faces sexual violence at the hands of the Japanese military, and ostracization at the hands of her Okinawan peers. Her only salvation is a man named Shosei, a similarly ostracized Okinawan man, who disables himself in an effort to avoid the draft. They share a secret romantic relationship, until he is killed by Japanese soldiers on suspicion of espionage. In the present, Gozei is the village freak, first appearing in a scene where she strips naked on stage during the village festival, experiencing an episode of some sort, as she yells to

[21] Medoruma, Shun. "Tree of Butterflies (2000)." Translated by Aimée Mizuno. Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa, edited by Davinder L. Bhowmik and Steve Rabson, University of Hawaii Press, 2016, pp. 71-112.

everyone that “the soldiers are coming” (83). Her visual descriptions seem intentionally detailed and grotesque.

> Every time she shook the stick, her long breasts shook, and her pubic hair, the only youthful black hair on her, shone in the spotlight. (83)

She is described similarly grotesquely later on, in a flashback of Gozei helping a lost Yoshiaki return to his parents as a child.

> When [Yoshiaki] turned towards her, Gozei’s face had become almost black. She showed her rotting teeth in a broad smile. The dirty washcloth hung around her neck, and sweat glistened on her face so black that you couldn’t make out her features. (99)

These detailed and grotesque descriptions of Gozei’s old and almost decaying body are perhaps written this way deliberately to visually highlight the damage that her trauma has had on her.

In the Woods of Memory is a novel about the rape of an Okinawan girl, Sayoko, at the hands of an American soldier, and how this rape impacts the people around her and Okinawan society as a whole. Unlike *Tree of Butterflies*, Sayoko has no chapters from her perspective, with the closest views we get of her coming from the perspective of her sister Fumi, and her secret admirer Seiji. In particular, Seiji blames himself for Sayoko’s rape, and enacts a plan to take revenge by attacking two American soldiers with a harpoon, seriously injuring but not killing either one of them. Seiji, despite not being an actual witness of Sayoko’s rape, visualizes it, as a means of fueling his anger towards the Americans, as well as towards the men of the village who did nothing to enact revenge after the fact.

> As he listened, he pictured the Americans holding Sayoko down in the thicket with their brawny arms and covering her mouth with their filthy hands. Then he saw Sayoko, crying and struggling and suffering…Seiji could see that the men weren’t so much angry as emasculated by fear. (43)

All of the men of the village, and by extension all Okinawan men, are vicarious victims of the sexual violence that Okinawan women face. As a result, Okinawan men must take action to prevent rape from happening. The consequences of this lack of action are seen in the depictions of Seiji and Sayoko by the end of the book, both having gone insane as a result of the rape, and Seiji’s failure to truly enact revenge. Sayoko resides in a mental health facility, saliva dribbling “from the corners of her mouth, filled with brown teeth” (186), talking to a hallucination of the baby she had with her rapist, whom she was forced to adopt out. Seiji has gone blind, and his narration is written in a nearly indecipherable stream-of-consciousness. This is made all the more

indecipherable in the original Japanese text, which is written in *Uchināguchi,* an Okinawan dialect of Japanese generally considered unintelligible by mainland speakers of Japanese.

> やぐとぅ わんや
> だから我は.....、だからどうした.....？なにか.....？だからどうしたかと訊いてお
> たー いやーや な ー う
> るさ.....、誰やがお前は.....？小夜子はもう居らんさ、ずっと昔に島を出ていっ
> たー いやー が くとぅん くぬ ぬ くとぅん
> た.....、誰やが、お前は.....？お前のことも忘れておるし、この島のことも忘れて
> ゆくしむぬい わん わしりぬ はじ や ねん わん だまさ
> おるさ.....、嘘物言いなけー、小夜子が我のことを忘れるはずはない、我を騙そ
> ー りし ち たー いやーや
> うとして、誰やがお前は.....？(Medoruma 104)[22]
>
> That's why I…That's why what?...What do you mean?...I asked, Why what?...Who the hell are you?...She doesn't remember you, and she's forgotten the island…What're you talking about? Sayoko wouldn't forget me. You're trying to trick me. (Medoruma 104, Translated by Paul Sminkey)

In these works, Okinawan men are portrayed as ultimately the ones with not just agency but responsibility over Okinawan women's struggles. In *Tree of Butterflies* Shosei is the only connection that Gozei has to humanity, and when she loses that connection, she goes insane; this suggests how Shosei, and Okinawan men by extension, are responsible for the welfare of their community members. In *In the Woods of Memory*, Seiji feels responsibility for Sayoko's wellbeing and pride, and when his actions to protect her fail, they have devastating consequences on their mutual well being, and of the people around them as well. These stories are therefore ultimately about men, rather than women, especially in the case of *In the Woods of Memory*, considering there are no chapters written from Sayoko's perspective.

It is important to note, however, that there is a little more nuance to the depictions of these women's suffering in both stories. Primarily, these women are driven insane not by the act of the rape itself, but by the ostracization that they face from their community as a result. Gozei is already ostracized as a prostitute. She is essentially used as a human shield for the Okinawans from both Japanese and American sexual violence.

> Gozei knew right away that it was a scheme to protect the women of the village and provide an outlet for the American soldiers…She wanted to kill men like Shimabukuro and Uchima who assumed that having sold her body to the Japanese soldiers during the

[22] 目取真, 俊. 眼の奥の森. 影書房, 2017.

> war, she'd have to sell herself to the Americans now that the war was over…Why should I sleep with the soldiers to protect your wives and daughters?[23] (94)

She is ostracized as an old woman as well, when she helps return a lost boy to his parents. The parents respond in turn, by telling her not to "drag our grandson around in your rotten cart…" (100)

Sayoko, likewise, is ostracized by the people around her, their "stares and whispers–and their groping hands, stomping feet, and wagging tongues" (178), but also by the men trying to protect her–primarily, her father. When it is discovered that Sayoko is pregnant with her rapist's baby, her father flies into a rage. When she later gives birth, the baby is taken out from under her, becoming a traumatic point for her later on.

> My mother had been about to hand him to my sister, but the cries seemed to jolt her to some realization, and she pulled the baby to her chest…As if on cue, the midwife grabbed my sister from behind and dragged her back into the room. My sister no longer had the strength to resist, but we could hear her feeble cries coming from the dark room. –My baby! My baby! (177)

When Fumi reflects on this, she attempts to understand the situation from her father's point of view. "His daughter had been raped by US soldiers, yet he'd been completely powerless to do or say anything" (178).

When asked why there were no chapters written from Sayoko's perspective, Medoruma Shun reportedly commented that "Sayoko is unable to narrate her trauma," and that, "there are undoubtedly numerous war survivors who have never been able to talk about their traumatic war experiences" (208).

While all of these aspects are true, in my opinion, these stories are not about their social ostracization. These stories are primarily about their community's vicarious trauma. We rarely are told of the actual suffering the victims in question experienced, just made to imagine it from the perspective of characters around them. We read about Gozei's episode at the village festival from the Yoshiaki's perspective, we read about Sayoko's rape as Seiji imagines it, and we read about Sayoko's reaction to her baby being taken from her from her sister Fumi's perspective, but we do not read about these events from the victims–Gozei and Sayoko's–perspectives themselves. This makes the vicarious victims of these stories–primarily, men–the protagonists of these stories, rather than the victims themselves.

[23] Underlined for emphasis

To raise another example, *Hope* (1999)[24] is a short story written by Medoruma Shun about an middle-aged Okinawan who murders an American child as revenge for the 1995 Okinawa Rape Incident, before setting themself on fire. The story, in both English and Japanese, is written gender-neutrally. It is left unclear whether the protagonist is a man or woman, and there are believable arguments in either direction. Yet, in the introduction of *Islands of Protest*, the editor declaratively refers to the protagonist of *Hope* with he/him pronouns on the very first page.

> "In this story…the protagonist, an Okinawan who has just strangled to death an American boy, reflects that ***his*** is a crime both natural and inevitable for those without power…After the protagonist commits ***his*** crime, ***he*** drives to the site of the rally…There, the protagonist sets ***himself*** on fire, effectively ending both ***his*** life and the story."[25]

Despite the deliberate choice to render the gender of the protagonist ambiguously, they are assumed male by many readers, because the protagonists of Okinawan stories, in their minds, are primarily men, not women.

Okinawan Stories are American

When Okinawan stories are not the stories of the psychic pain experienced by Okinawan men, they are the stories of Okinawan individuals' encounters with Americans. Or, at least, this is what is assumed by editors of *Southern Exposure*. Each short story in *Southern Exposure* is preceded by a short introduction, outlining the author's background, and important themes of the story in question. Most, if not all of these introductions, highlight connections to the war, or to the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, even if they have little to no relevance to the story involved, often ignoring larger themes in these works.

Love Letter From L.A. (1978)[26] is the story of two Okinawan women and their troubled romantic relationships. Tomiko, the narrator, is in a relationship with Yoshida, her coworker from Tokyo, who has a wife and children in the mainland. Sueko, an acquaintance of Tomiko's from childhood, married to an American artist, suddenly reencounters her as an adult. Sueko's relationship with her husband is fraught, as when she initially moved to the U.S. with her husband, the language barrier caused her so much mental stress as to require her to move back

---

[24] Medoruma, Shun. "Hope (1999)." Translated by Steve Rabson. Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa, edited by Davinder L. Bhowmik and Steve Rabson, University of Hawaii Press, 2016, pp. 21-24.

[25] Italics, bold, and underline added for emphasis
"Introduction." Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa, edited by Davinder L. Bhowmik and Steve Rabson, University of Hawaii Press, 2016, pp. 1-17.

[26] Shimokawa, Hiroshi. "Love Letter from L.A." Translated by Ann Sherif. Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa, University of Hawaii Press, 2000, pp. 192-212.

home, and she has not been in contact with him for over a year since. As for Tomiko's story, Yoshida ultimately leaves for the mainland, ending his relationship with her. Tomiko then convinces Sueko to try to contact her husband, Tomiko translating the letter for her. Surprisingly, he writes her back, telling her to just wait for him, but Tomiko purposely mistranslates the letter, telling Sueko that he has married an American.

The apparent themes of this story, based on a cursory glance, are fraught romantic relationships and jealousy. Tomiko is jealous of Sueko's successful marriage, when hers is so fraught, and purposely sabotages it. Other themes within this story particularly play up stereotypes of Okinawan women, as Tomiko defines her comradery with Sueko on the basis of both being "abandoned women," and Sueko as an "Okinawan bride" (202). Yet, Sueko, the Okinawan bride, is the one with the ultimately successful relationship, not Tomiko. This story shows how stereotypes about Okinawan women can be weaponized by these women against each other. Yet, the introduction to this story highlights none of these things, instead saying it "received high praise from Okinawan critics for its compelling portrayal of a woman's experience of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa after reversion" (191). This story is about women, first and foremost, yet the introduction renders it to a story about American men.

Love Suicide at Kamaara (1984)[27] takes place in post-war U.S. occupied Okinawa from the perspective of Kiyo, an aging prostitute. The title including the phrase "Love Suicide" (心中 *Shinjū*) immediately stands out to anyone with basic knowledge of Japanese literature. Edo era playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon's plays *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (1703) and *Love Suicides at Amijima* (1721) are both well established in Japanese literary canon. They've both been adapted into their own respective movies, and many other established and famous works in Japan focus on this concept, such as Yasunari Kawabata's *Love Suicides* (1926). In particular, "Love Suicide" stories are known to focus on forbidden love, typically between a female prostitute and their male lover/client, due to the prevalence of such characters in Chikamatsu Monzaemon's plays. Both of these defining aspects of "Love Suicide" stories apply to *Love Suicide at Kamaara* as well. The protagonist, Kiyo, is a prostitute, and her lover is Sammy, a G.I. on the run from police after stabbing his commanding officer.

There are some aspects when it come to the story's connection to the "Love Suicide" genre that slightly differ, however. For one, in Edo era Japan, and in many of these plays likewise, many actresses were prostitutes–specifically *oiran* (花魁), a high-ranking courtesan–and these prostitutes were akin to celebrities, setting trends, and enjoying much fame and fortune.[28] They

[27] Yoshida, Sueko. "Love Suicide at Kamaara." Translated by Yukie Ohta. Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa, University of Hawaii Press, 2000, pp. 214-233.

[28] Gattuso, Reina, et al. "The Learned Courtesan in Edo Japan." Curationist, September 2022, https://www.curationist.org/editorial-features/article/the-learned-courtesan-in-edo-japan. Accessed 28 April 2025.

were sought out by their clients, and by their male love interest in turn, not the other way around. The opposite is true for Kiyo, as she has gotten older, losing her youthful beauty, and thus becoming less desirable. There are many points in the story in which, after a proposition is made to a G.I., she is harshly and rudely rejected.

> "Go with you and do what?"
> "Make love, of course."
> "With you?" He laughed loudly, dragging the other drunken soldier away. (226)

The same is true upon meeting her principal lover, Sammy. She propositions him, demanding $10, which he barters down to $5. She accepts only because of his looks, describing him as "...truly an unspoiled Adonis" (219). Sammy stays with her after, if only because he has nowhere else to go.

Another differing aspect of *Love Suicides at Kamaara* from traditional "Love Suicide" stories are the suicides themselves. In Chikamatsu Monzaemon's plays, the reason for characters committing suicide usually comes down to societal pressures. The two lovers want to be together, but cannot due to societal expectations of them, and so they commit suicide so they can be together in the afterlife, or the "Pure Land" specifically in Amida Buddhism. In *Love Suicides at Kamaara*, firstly, what is committed is more akin to a murder-suicide than a love-suicide. Once Sammy falls asleep, Kiyo turns on the gas burner, and after waiting for the gas to spread around the apartment, ignites a lighter, presumably killing the two in an explosion in the aftermath of the story. Secondly, Kiyo chooses to commit suicide not because they want to be together but can't, but rather because Sammy is leaving her. He tells her he is going back to the front gates of the base the next day, and when she tells him to run away with her, he says no.

The way *Love Suicides at Kamaara* plays with the Japanese literary trope "Love Suicides," keeping some aspects and changing others to suit the location or era, shows how Okinawan authors, too, consider themselves Japanese enough to play with literary canon. This is practically deliberately acknowledged in the final scene, where Kiyo dresses herself in a Japanese kimono and obi before ultimately committing suicide, saying, "For some reason, Kiyo suddenly felt like wearing Japanese clothes" (232).

Yet, the introduction to this story mentions none of this, focusing instead on the American military presence in Okinawa. It describes the setting of *Love Suicides at Kamaara*, how Kamaara is a district of Koza, a town outside the real life Kadena Air Base. It gives historical background for the U.S. military presence, how it served as a resting point for many G.I.s during the Vietnam War, and how the U.S. occupation led to the use of American currency in favor of the Japanese yen. It even explains how in an attempt to "shed its image as a base town," the name was changed to Okinawa City in 1974 (213). None of these facts have significant relevance

to the themes at hand in the story. The story is not about American occupation–it just so happens to take place in an area occupied by the U.S. –yet the entire intro is dedicated to explaining the occupation, painting the story to be about America rather than Okinawa.

Another larger theme in the story is aging and beauty. There are many passages in the story describing Kiyo's aging and lackluster appearance, such as the one below.

> Her face was discolored and bloated, perhaps from lack of sleep. It was a loathsome face. Her neck had become even scrawnier recently. Not only was it thinner, but it had lost its color. The yellow, wrinkled skin clinging to her neck hung down, sagging lifelessly. A trace of her youthful past remained in her thin arms, but veins floated on the backs of her hands, and her yellowed palms were pitiful. Her chest, too, was bony, having lost its glow, and her flabby belly was covered with fine wrinkles. She was acutely aware that she was no longer young, which made her feel all the more ugly. (217-8)

Kiyo ties her identity to her beauty, unfortunately necessary in her line of work. Her perceived lack of beauty is exemplified in the way that soldiers react to her appearance, especially upon propositioning them, as detailed before. Kiyo finds her own mirror image in Sammy, who "looked young enough to be in high school" (219). For Kiyo, rather than Sammy's youthful appearance lowering her confidence, it revitalizes her, especially when they have sexual intercourse.

> The erect Sammy, his youthful vitality aroused inside Kiyo's mouth, trembled…He was life itself, and when Kiyo held him in her mouth, her aged cells were restored, as if she were being rejuvenated. Injected with pure youth, she felt imbued, through her lips and her cheeks, with that young vigor. The powerful force that raged inside her mouth made her want to suck in this essence of life with all its youth and joy and make it her own. (216-7)

There are many more passages like these throughout the story, and they exemplify the notion that this is a story about an older woman seeking her lost youth in a younger man, which just so happens to take place in U.S. occupied Okinawa. Yet, the introduction does not frame this story like this. The introduction primarily sets the stage of U.S. occupied Okinawa, explaining the important landmarks, and the fact that commerce was conducted with the U.S. dollar rather than the Japanese yen. While these serve an important purpose for a first time reader who has little to no knowledge of the history of American presence in Okinawa, it also gives the impression that this story is about America, or the U.S. military, when it is really not.

Conclusion

Ultimately, when Okinawan literature is translated into English, much of the time, the work itself either is limited in scope to the stories of Okinawan trauma–lacking insight into other aspects of Okinawan living and existence–or it is framed in such a way by the editors to focus on themes of their own preference rather than what is more obviously central to each text. Medoruma Shun's *Tree of Butterflies* and *In the Woods of Memories* are both insightful works that explore the themes of collective trauma and sexual violence with empathy, but at the same time, as the most famous and easily accessible forms of Okinawan literature, can easily be misinterpreted as representative of the "reality" of life in Okinawa, when they are not. They are just particularly violent and tragic stories of individuals. *Love Letter from L.A.* and *Love Suicides at Kamaara* are both emotionally stirring stories with complex themes, as are the rest of the stories compiled in *Southern Exposure*, but in many ways, it seems the editors missed the forest for the trees. So much emphasis is placed on these stories' connections to the U.S. military, that their more specific themes like forbidden love and aging beauty, or their meta-discursive use of established tropes in Japanese literature, are left to the wayside. These stories thus stop becoming about the people directly involved, silencing their true narratives.

English-Language Literature about Okinawa

Surveying English Language Literature

I'll begin this section by surveying English-language literature about Okinawa, as for most Americans, this is the farthest they will ever go in terms of researching Okinawa. Like I assume many would do in my position when trying to research literature about Okinawa, I searched the website Goodreads for what is popular and highly rated. The following is a list of some of the most popular works of English-language literature about Okinawa, with the number of ratings on Goodreads included. These works fall into three main categories: The War, Okinawan Women, and History.

The War	Author	No. of Ratings
With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa (1981)	Eugene B. Sledge	43331 ratings
Okinawa: A Decorated Marine's Account of the Last Battle of World War II (1995)	Robert Leckie	1541 ratings
The Battle of Okinawa: The Blood and the Bomb (1992)	George Feifer	684 ratings
The Mosquito Bowl: A Game of Life and Death in World War II (2022)	Buzz Bissinger	3387 ratings
The Girl with the White Flag (1989)	Tomiko Higa	1222 ratings
82 Days on Okinawa: One American's Unforgettable Firsthand Account of the Pacific War's Greatest Battle (2020)	Art Shaw	536 ratings
Crucible of Hell: The Heroism and Tragedy of Okinawa, 1945 (2020)	Saul David	370 ratings
Bloody Okinawa: The Last Great Battle of World War II (2020)	Joseph Wheelan	214 ratings
Okinawa: The Last Battle (1948)	Roy Edgar Appleman	455 ratings
Grenade (2018)	Alan Gratz	10874 ratings

The Ultimate Battle: Okinawa 1945--The Last Epic Struggle of World War II (2007)	Bill Sloan	593 ratings
Operation Iceberg: The Invasion and Conquest of Okinawa in World War II (1995)	Gerald Astor	63 ratings

Okinawan Women	Author	No. of Ratings
Speak, Okinawa (2021)	Elizabeth Miki Brina	3,881 ratings
Women of Okinawa: Nine Voices from a Garrison Island (2000)	Ruth Ann Keyso, Masahide Ōta	66 ratings
Night In The American Village: Women in the Shadow of the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa (2019)	Akemi Johnson	233 ratings

History	Author	No. of Ratings
Okinawa: The History of an Island People (1958)	George H. Kerr	141 ratings

Something that becomes immediately obvious upon surveying what English-language literature there is out there about Okinawa, is how much of it is about the war–more specifically, World War II. In particular, many of these narratives are from the perspective of Americans who fought in the war themselves, such as *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa* (1981) or *Okinawa: A Decorated Marine's Account of the Last Battle of World War II* (1995). Some are fictionalized retellings of the war, such as *The Mosquito Bowl: A Game of Life and Death in World War II* (2022). Some are even purely fictionalized historical accounts about the war, such as *Grenade* (2018), with Okinawan perspective to boot. Regardless, the vast majority of literature written in the west about Okinawa is about the Battle of Okinawa.

The Battle of Okinawa, beginning April 1st and ending June 4th 1945, was the penultimate battle of the Pacific War. Casualties are estimated to have been around 49,000 Americans, 90,000 Japanese combatants, and 150,000 Okinawan civilians.[29] While the Americans eventually won the battle, the amount of brutality and casualties that occurred during the battle was one of the key reasons U.S. military leaders decided to drop the atomic bomb on Japan rather than conduct a full scale invasion of the mainland.

[29] "Battle of Okinawa." The National WWII Museum, 20 May 2020, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/battle-of-okinawa. Accessed 13 April 2025.

While the legacy of the Battle of Okinawa has had an incredible impact on Okinawa–and its literary canon as a result–it is not the only thing that Okinawan history of culture is made up of. The fact that so many English-language works about Okinawa are about the Battle of Okinawa can give many who decide to foray into Okinawan literature with little to no prior experience the perception that the one singular thing that defines Okinawa, and Okinawan identity therefore, is the war.

The second thing one might notice about this list is that virtually the only other topic covered is Okinawan Women. Even then, this topic does not escape the war, as both *Women of Okinawa: Nine Voices from a Garrison Island* (2000) and *Night In The American Village: Women in the Shadow of the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa* (2019) are both about the relationships Okinawan women have with American G.I.s, there as a consequence of WWII, evident in their namesakes. Lastly, there is *Speak, Okinawa*, which is a memoir from a child of an Okinawan woman and the American G.I. she met in Okinawa.

The last book, which I've left in a category all on its own, is *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (1958). This book has virtually no content covering WWII, likely due to its earlier publication date, breaking the mold in terms of English-language literature on Okinawa. Still, this book has its own issues, being criticized by many for its often orientalist, racist, and infantilizing descriptions of Okinawans. The revised edition of the book even acknowledges this in the afterword, saying that the original author, George Kerr "in his zeal to right wrongs…was sometimes less than impartial."[30] Still, many turn to this book when researching Okinawa, as it is virtually the only comprehensive book on Okinawan history written in the English language.

It seems that every single story about Okinawa written in the world of English-language literature is ultimately about the United States. This does not mean that reading these stories won't give the readers any valuable information about Okinawa, but it still means that the stories and lives of Okinawans are tinted with a heavily Americanized perspective. This can be best observed, in my opinion, in the 2021 memoir *Speak, Okinawa*.[31]

Speak, Okinawa

Speak, Okinawa is largely about the relationship the author, Elizabeth Miki Brina, has with both of her parents, an Okinawan woman and a white American G.I.

---

[30] Sakihara, Mitsugi. "Part A: Pre-Modern Okinawa." Okinawa: The History of an Island People, by George Kerr, edited by George Kerr, Tuttle Publishing, 2018.

[31] Brina, Elizabeth Miki. Speak, Okinawa: A Memoir. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2022.

As a brief historical background, following WWII, the entire country of Japan was occupied and governed by the Allies–though mostly carried about by the U.S. military–until 1952.[32] The U.S. continued to occupy the prefecture of Okinawa, however, as it was seen as a strategic location in the Pacific (Inoue 41),[33] until 1972, following decades of protest from the Okinawan people, when it was reverted to Japan. During this occupation, the primary currency was switched from the Japanese yen to the American dollar, cars drove on the right side of the road–rather than left as it is in the mainland–among other changes. Despite all this American intervention, Okinawa was considered a "stateless land," wherein its citizens were entitled to neither Japanese nor American citizenship.

As the United States entered the Vietnam War, Okinawa served as a strategic drop off point for its combatants. Lively economies developed around the U.S. military bases on the island from the patronships of G.I.s. A previously poverse and destitute Okinawa found saviorship in its American patrons, leading to many Okinawan women marrying those same American patrons in order to escape poverty, including the parents of the author herself.

Brina's parents met during the Vietnam War, while her father was stationed in U.S. occupied Okinawa prior to his deployment to Vietnam, and her mother worked as a waitress at a restaurant frequented by G.I.s. Before being deployed to Vietnam, he promised to marry her once he returned, and after he did, they married, and moved to the States together, eventually having a child together. Brina describes feeling disdain towards and shame about her mother–whether for not speaking English well, for not acting American enough, for being Asian–for most of her life, particularly growing up in Plainsboro, New Jersey, where she was often the only Asian person in her area.

The memoir is essentially meant to unpack the assumptions she has had about her parents, by exploring both of their lives before they got married, and how they met. The memoir also covers much of Brina's own life in detail, the racism she faced from white peers as virtually the only other minority in her hometown, and her issues with self-worth and sex as a teenager and young adult are some of the main themes discussed. In my opinion, the memoir is overall quite good, and has quite a few truly thought-provoking moments, but it is nearly ruined by the author's incorrect and condescending depiction of Okinawan identity throughout the work.

Several chapters in the book are written from the perspective of an Okinawan "we," its narrator describing the history of Okinawa, from prehistoric times to present day. These chapters are

---

[32] James, Clayton. "Occupation of Japan | History & Facts." Britannica, 1 April 2025, https://www.britannica.com/event/occupation-of-Japan. Accessed 13 April 2025.

[33] Inoue, Masamichi S. Okinawa and the U. S. Military: Identity Making in the Age of Globalization. Columbia University Press, 2017.

filled with inaccuracies and odd, I dare say orientalist descriptions, overall painting a rather stereotypical picture of Okinawa. Brina describes Okinawa as a nation that has been conquered virtually since its inception, providing its longstanding tributary relationship with China as evidence (5), which is a vast oversimplification of the situation. While as a tributary state to China, the Ryukyu Kingdom did have a subordinate position compared to China, they were not governed by China, the way that a term like "conquer" implies. She also says the Chinese called them "Liu Chiu" because the Okinawans immediately complied with their demands without a fight, and "Liu Chiu" means "Easy" (34). Firstly, the Okinawans–or Ryukyuans at the time–did fight back. Envoys from China came to Ryukyu during the Sui Dynasty in the early 7th century, and the local Ryukyuans were famously non-compliant.[34] Secondly, it wasn't the Chinese that called the Ryukyuans "Liu Chiu;" There is much scholarly debate over who exactly began calling the islands "Liu Chiu," but it is believed to be an exonym, as the characters for the island changed over time–from 流求 to 留仇 to 流虬 to 瑠求 to 琉球 and possibly more–but not the general pronunciation.[35] Thirdly, the characters for "Liu Chiu" have never meant anything even close to "friendly" or "easy". These chapters are littered with many more inaccuracies, which I won't waste your time detailing for the next several pages.

There are other aspects which are not quite inaccurate, but odd considering the choice to emphasize Okinawa as a distinct identity from Japan throughout the book. In one section, Brina describes the purportedly traditional roles carried out in an Okinawan village: "The oldest brother was named chief, *nebito*, and the oldest sister was named priestess, *negami*." (33). Both italicized items in this quote are the Standard Japanese readings for these roles, not the *Uchināguchi* ones. The first term, 根人, when read in standard Japanese, would be read *nebito*, but is typically read *nicchu* by Okinawans. Similarly, the second term, 根神, is read *negami* by Standard Japanese conventions, but *niigan* in *Uchināguchi*.[36]

In a later section, Brina lists out the names of her Japanese relatives, including their names roughly translated into English: Setsu means "loyal," Kikuko means "precious," Chieko means "wisdom," and so on. Once she reaches the relatives who have traditionally Okinawan names–Mega, Genko, Gensho–she says, because they are Okinawan, she "can't look up" (126) what they mean. You can; Mega is the word for "Goddess," for instance.[37] While the descriptions

---

[34] From a google translation of a Simplified Chinese translation of *The Book of Sui*, volume 81, chapter 46, where the Sui attempted to make contact with the Ryukyuans multiple times, but were attacked each time.
The Book of Sui. Beijing Guoxue Times Culture Communication Co., Ltd, 2003. Guoxue, http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/suisu/sui_081.htm. Accessed 12 April 2025.

[35] Kodama, Masatō. 小玉, 正任. 琉球と沖縄の名称の変遷. 琉球新報社, 2007.

[36] Yokohama, Toshi. "「神人（かみんちゅ）」とは？パート2." 琉球沖縄を学びながら、いろいろ考えていきたいな～, 10 September 2024, https://totoro820.ti-da.net/e11911731.html. Accessed 12 April 2025.

[37] Many gods in Miyakojima (an island north of Okinawa Island) have the suffix *mega* attached to their names, and so many old women from Miyakojima have "god names" which contain this suffix.

in these areas are not factually inaccurate, they seem odd considering the circumstances. She emphasizes distinguishing Okinawan identity from Japanese identity, while at the same time using terms for either place interchangeably, or ignoring the ones used in Okinawa and using the Japanese terms instead.

Brina also has a bad habit of defining an ordinary Japanese word as if it is some fascinating foreign concept we don't have in the west, playing into orientalist conceptions of Japan (and in this case, Okinawa as well) as this otherworldly and alien place. In explaining the mentality of Okinawans towards the Japanese war effort, she says, "The Emperor assures us that seishin, 'the National Spirit,' will save us"(65). *Seishin* is literally just the word for mentality, or spirit. It does not have any special meaning in regard to national identity on its own. In addition, "National Spirit" is not a concept unique to Meiji Era Japan, and in fact, we in the English-speaking west have our own word for it: Patriotism. But, patriotism apparently doesn't have the same mystical Asian connotations that *Seishin,* the "National Spirit" does. In another section, Brina decides to give the literal definition of *Uchināguchi,* as "Okinawa Mouth" (29), which, while not inaccurate, has a very crude connotation. When combined with the preceding descriptions of *Uchināguchi* speech as "purely indigenous, shamed, and belittled" (29), this description gives the impression of Okinawa as a barbaric land with a barbaric language.

What makes these stereotypical descriptions of Okinawa all the worse is the way Brina attempts to fit her mother's story into this mold, both as an Okinawan and as a woman. Kyoko, Brina's mother's, story fits into the stereotype of the Okinawan woman in some ways, and also doesn't fit in other ways. Kyoko is a G.I. bride, having met her husband, and Brina's father, just before the Vietnam War, working at a restaurant near the military base that he frequently attended. Kyoko married him primarily to escape poverty in Okinawa, and while she was perhaps initially in love with him, she eventually fell out of love. This is very in-line with conventional understandings of G.I. Brides, not just in Okinawa but everywhere. What's unusual about their relationship is that Brina's father claims that he married Kyoko primarily to save her.

> "My father would clean up the mess. Fetching sprays and paper towels, ice packs and aspirin, sitting on the rim of the bathtub until she passed out, slumped over the toilet. Then he lifted her, like in the movies, and carried her to bed." (91)

> "I used to be angry at my father for letting my mother get so drunk and burst through my bedroom door late at night…I used to be angry at my father for marrying a woman who wasn't good enough for him, for marrying a woman simply because he wanted to save her." (92)

Kamo-san. かもさん. "カンヌナー(神様の名前)の話." 晴れ雲ティーダ, 5 May 2014, https://harekumo.ti-da.net/e6233755.html. Accessed 12 April 2025.

> "I know my father loves my mother, has always loved my mother…He never thought of leaving, only of letting her leave. I know my father loves my mother, has always loved my mother, but it is a complicated love, and I don't pretend to know the extent of the complication of his love for her, of anyone's love for anyone else." (99-100)

Brina's father without a doubt does not fit the stereotype of an abusive G.I. groom, and so Kyoko does not fit the stereotype of an abused G.I. bride.

Still, Brina discusses the regular sexual violence that Okinawans experience at the hands of G.I.s as if her mother has experienced it, and therefore Brina herself vicariously. In these chapters discussing the history of Okinawa, she describes the sexual exploitation that Okinawans face using the pronoun "we," as if she has personally experienced it.

> Those of us who give ourselves willingly to the Americans, those of us who get paid to give ourselves, are called pan-pan. We are called whores. Some of us are widows. Some of us are young girls who still live with our mothers. It doesn't matter what they call us, or what we call each other. At least something is being done. At least we are getting paid. After all, our island is covered in ash and dust, filled with stench and rot. There isn't anything for them—or us—to do except drink until we are numb, and fuck. Some of them would rather pay us than rape us, and for that some of us are grateful. (112)

This specific gruesome description of racialized violence against Okinawans really does not apply to Brina's mother's life, and so its relevance in a memoir is questionable.

When Brina does talk about the specific experiences of her mother, they are portrayed through her eyes, as if an omniscient narrator of her mother's early life. In one chapter, she describes the daily routine of her mother and her family in the house her mother grew up in.

> I see a room. I see four walls made of wood, sanded and scrubbed. I see four windows, a window carved into each wall and covered with nets…
> My mother sleeps on her side. Her body is frail, bone frail, but her skin is soft and new, her face is smooth. Her mouth is slightly open, but it doesn't tighten or turn down. (124)
> Gensho, Genshin, Chieko, and Yoshi wake next. They roll up their mats and lean them against the wall. They go outside and kneel in front of a metal bin beside the cinderblock fence. They splash their faces, then scrub their hands, armpits, and crevices with a rag. (128)

The way in which Brina narrates this passage gives the impression that she is personally witness to her mother's upbringing, and actively experiencing it. This style of narration is not present in

the chapters detailing her father's life, which generally focus on his experiences during the Vietnam War and his resulting PTSD. These chapters are explicitly narrated by him, as something which Brina passively witnesses but does not personally experience.

> My father tells me about ghosts.
> He tells me about guarding his camp, lying on his stomach in a trench and falling asleep, and how he heard the voice of his friend, a friend who had just died, had just been killed. His friend yelled, "Brina, look out!" My father woke up and looked out, in the direction of the voice of his friend, just as a bullet whizzed past him, grazing his left ear. (149)

While the chapters about Brina's father's experiences are written to be his personal experiences, and his only, in contrast, the chapters about her mother's experiences are presented as if they are also Brina's experiences, and also the experiences of Okinawans, and especially Okinawan women, in general. This decision actively erases the actual stories and experiences of a real Okinawan woman in exchange for a more stereotypical depiction of what the story of an Okinawan G.I. bride should be, according to our collective American consciousness.

Parts of Brina's memoir are also about her own experiences as an adult, with little connection to her parents' stories. Brina describes having had a troubled relationship with her own sexuality growing up, seeking validation from men through sex for much of her late adolescence and early adulthood. This desperate need to feel loved leads her to form a romantic relationship with a man named Kendall, who she eventually gets engaged to, before breaking up during their honeymoon. Brina reflects on this after the fact, seeming to compare her own fraught experiences of love with her mother's.

> The first year, I start to wonder about the reasons, the many reasons, why I am who I am, and that maybe a few of those reasons are greater than the sum of my actions, greater than me. I start to ask myself questions about my mother, about everything that had to happen for her to meet and marry my father, about their marriage, about being their only child, their only daughter. (249)

Within the broader context of the story, this quote gives the impression that Brina is the way she is because of her mother, and her mother is the way she is because she is Okinawan. So, in a sense, Brina's fraught romantic relationships with men and her skewed perceptions of sex are because she is Okinawan.

This idea of hereditary vicarious victimhood is described by Rothe in the context of the Holocaust, saying that many of these vicarious victims "exhibit a paradoxical longing to witness the genocide themselves" (18). The same seems to be true for Brina; in one passage, Brina describes in grotesque detail an imagined scenario of an American G.I. raping an Okinawan

teenage girl, dragging her into a field, ripping off her clothes, screaming "awful animal noises" as her mother clings to the soldier, begging him to stop, the rest of the village watching (111-112). This is an imagined scenario. It is entirely fictional, yet it is described as if it actually happened, and as if Brina witnessed it herself.

Perhaps surprisingly, *Speak, Okinawa*, when ignoring most of the parts specifically about Okinawa, in my opinion, is actually quite a nice memoir. Brina has a lot of interesting and insightful points to make about the individual experiences of her mother–the isolation that she feels as a wife in a foreign country, with no one who speaks the same language as her, who has no one to talk to except for her husband and daughter–and the individual experiences of her father–the savior complex that leads to one the join the military, and marry a woman who does not love him so he can save her, and the PTSD that he suffers from because he couldn't save everyone. But, most people go into a novel titled *Speak, Okinawa* to learn about Okinawa, and in that aspect, it is quite lackluster, showing little respect for collective Okinawan history and culture, and actively spreading misinformation as a result. As one commenter on *Goodreads* put it, "Brina asks Okinawa to speak, but it might be better if she tried to listen instead."[38]

Conclusion

The picture painted of Okinawa in English-language literature is one with a particularly limited scope, focusing almost exclusively on not just trauma, but traumas connected to either the war or to sexual exploitation. These stories are either not really about Okinawa as a whole–as is the case with the plethora of American accounts of the Battle of Okinawa, fictional and non-fictional–or is not really about Okinawan women specifically–as is the case with Brina's memoir *Speak, Okinawa*. English-language literature about Okinawa thus suffers from a very similar problem to many translated works of Okinawan literature, in that they focus on neither of the subjects at hand–Okinawa or its women. This lack of foresight ends up reinforcing stereotypes and tropes about Okinawans as peace-loving eternal victims.

[38] Kay. "Kay's Reviews > Speak, Okinawa: A Memoir." GoodReads, 21 May 2021, https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/4014017450. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Newer Okinawan Literature

Last summer–as of writing this, 2024–as I stated before, I visited Okinawa on vacation. Fascinated with what translated literature I had read on my own and in class up to that point, I had a hunger to read Okinawan literature in the original Japanese language. I went to a large commercial bookstore in downtown Naha, and went straight to the section labelled 沖縄文学 (Okinawan Literature). It was one of the few signs I could read with relative ease, the rest of the aisles filled with mixes of characters I knew and ones I had never seen in my life. I perused the section, intending to mostly buy well-known authors, like Medoruma Shun, when I came across a small section filled with literary magazines. I picked two random ones–whichever had the most interesting covers–and brought them home with me. Reading them was like discovering a gold mine; not only were the stories interesting, but their content revealed to me new revelations on the nature of contemporary Okinawan literature, which contradicted what I had expected up to this point from reading what has been translated into English.

The first is volume 39 of *Nantō Bungaku*[39] (Southern Waves Literature), released in March of 2024. It contains various short stories, essays, and poems written by a variety of authors in Okinawa. The back of the book includes pictures of the meetings of the *Nantō Bungakukai* (Southern Waves Literary Society), consisting mainly of middle aged and elderly men and women. I will be analyzing a few stories from this anthology: *Kwadisa no ki no gotoshi* (Like the Kwadisa Tree), *Baachan Gasshoudan no tabi* (The Grandma Choir's Vacation), and *Watashi no namae* (My Name).

The second is volume 4 of *Kijimuna,*[40] released in August of 2022. *Kijimuna* are traditional Okinawan spirits believed to inhabit trees. This anthology, like *Nantō Bungaku,* also contains primarily short stories, essays, and poetry. I will be analyzing only one piece of literature from this anthology: the short story *Oira wa inu sa* (I am a Dog). I've chosen to analyze only this story primarily due to time constraints, and I imagine a more thorough reading of the anthology in question would reveal similar enlightenments about Okinawan literature.

Baachan Gasshoudan no tabi **(The Grandma Choir's Vacation)**

Baachan Gasshoudan no tabi[41] is a short essay by Uema Sachiyo about her experience volunteering for an elderly female Okinawan choir group traveling throughout Japan. The work was given an honorable mention at the 19th Okinawan Literature Awards hosted by the Okinawa Arts Council. The elderly women, mostly in their 80s and 90s, primarily hail from Kohama, a

[39] Tsunami, Nobukatsu. 津波, 信雄, editor. 南涛文学. vol. 39, 南涛文学会, 2024.

[40]Harakawa, Asara. 原河, 朝良, editor. 樹児夢那. vol. 4, 日本民主主義文学会那覇支部, 2022.

[41] Uema, Sachiyo. 上間, さちよ. "ばあちゃんの合唱団の旅." 南涛文学, vol. 39, 南涛文学会, 2024, pp. 139-140.

small and remote island in the southernmost part of Okinawa. They travel throughout Japan, “as if [they] are on a school field trip” (139), performing traditional Okinawan choir music, sight-seeing, and enjoying each others’ company in their off-time. Much of the work describes the liveliness of these women, and their majestic performances. A description of one member’s dance, *Chidori* (Plover), towards the latter half of the work stands out in particular.

> 白の服装を身にまとい、和紙で模した千鳥を頭に乗せて、姿勢よく片足立ちで千鳥のように舞う姿は神々しく、見るものを引き付けた。九十二歳とは思えない舞に見惚れて従姉も私も涙ぐんだ。
>
> The image of her dressed in a white garment, a *chidori* modeled out of washi paper placed on her head, standing tall, one-legged, dancing like the *chidori*, was divine, fascinating even at a glance. Captivated by her dance, one unimaginable for a 92 year old, my cousin and I were both moved to tears. (140)

In between these performances, in their hotel rooms, the women gather to have fun, dancing, and singing amongst themselves, enjoying life.

> 楽しそうに談笑していたが、突然一人のばあちゃんが歌い出した。「安里屋ぬ　くやまによー」続いて「サーユイサヌ」と他のばあちゃん達がお囃子をかけた。「あんちゅらさー生りばしよ」「サーユイサヌ」と全員で合唱が始まった。
>
> They were chattering happily, when suddenly one *baachan* burst out in song. “*Asatoya nu kuyamani yo~*” and then, the other *baachan*s acompanied her with, “*Saayuisanu*.” “*Anchurasaa namari bashi yo~.” “Saayuisanu*,” they all began singing, in choir. (139)

At the end of the essay, the author reflects on the assumed lives of these elderly women.

> 展望台でカメラのシャッターを押しながら思った。戦争を経験し、島での厳しい自然に向き合いながらの農作業や活動は決して楽ではなかっただろう。しかし、その暮らしの中にも家族の幸せを願い、島の祭りや行動、人々のお付き合いの中で、楽しみや幸せを見つけながら年を重ねてきた彼女達の笑顔は生きてきた自信に満ち溢れ、朗らかで清らかで、皺の一つ一つが美しいと心の底から思った。
>
> As I stood from the observation deck and pressed the camera shutter, a thought came to me. These women experienced war, faced the harsh island nature, with its agriculture and daily life; It couldn’t have been an easy life. And yet, they continued living, wishing for their family’s happiness, and in the middle of island festivals, events, mingling with people. The years piled on as they discovered fun and happiness. Their smiles are lively

> and filled with happiness, cheerful, innocent. I felt the beauty in each and every wrinkle from the bottom of my heart. (140)

While much of Okinawan literature that has been translated into English–and just as much literature written in the west about Okinawa–has focused on the trauma of war, and how it persists to the present day, this work asserts the opposite belief: These women have undoubtedly faced incredible trials and tribulations, yet ultimately, they have triumphed. Their trauma does not define them. While it is important to acknowledge the long lasting effects that trauma can have, it is just as important that they are here now. They are here today, singing, dancing, smiling, laughing, enjoying life.

***Watashi no namae* (My Name)**

Watashi no namae[42] is an essay by Tanahara Taeko about coming to terms with one's given name. Tanahara lists the reasons she didn't like her name growing up–it's often misspelled, hard to pronounce, and doesn't even have an interesting origin story. Yet, she comes to like her name, not only accepting, but embracing it, after discovering a deeper meaning within it. I found this work interesting, because unlike what you might expect of the "ethnic" genre of Okinawan literature, this piece has little to nothing to do with Okinawa.

Tanahara starts the essay by sharing an anecdote of asking her father why he named her "Taeko."

> 「あのな、戦時中、父ちゃんが宮崎に疎開した時ね、隣の家の奥さんが妙子だった。優しくてきれいな人だったよ。だからおまえの名前はその人にあやかって付けた。」
> 「はあ・・・」
> 私は返す言葉がなかった。まさかそのような軽い理由で私の名前は決められたのか。
>
> "Let me think…During the war, when I was evacuating to Miyazaki, the wife of the neighboring family was named Taeko. She was so kind, and beautiful. I named you after her."
> "Oh…"
> I didn't have anything to say in response. I couldn't believe my name was chosen for such a trivial reason. (146)

She shares other anecdotes about her name, including how it is frequently mispronounced…

> 祖母は、私をいつも「タイコー」と呼んだ。うちなーぐちの祖母には苦手な音の組み合わせだったのかもしれない。

[42]Tanahara, Taeko. 棚原, 妙子. "私の名前." 南涛文学, vol. 39, 南涛文学会, 2024, pp. 146-148.

> *Sobo wa, watashi wo itsumo "Taikō" to yonda. Uchinaaguchi no sobo ni wa nigate na oto no kumiawase datta no kamoshirenai*
>
> My grandmother, she always called me "Taikoh," like the drum. She, being Okinawan, probably had a hard time combining those difficult sounds together. (146)

…Or mispelled.

> 「この名前、何と読むの？ミョウコ？ショウコ？」と聞かれたりした。妙子を好子と間違って書かれたりして名前の訂正が面倒になるほどだった。
>
> "This name, how do you read it? Myoko? Shoko?"
> I'd get this question a lot. They'd write the wrong characters, 好子 instead of 妙子, and eventually I got sick of having to correcting my name all the time. (147)

At the end of the essay, Tanahara describes attending a Chinese poetry composition class, leading her to buy a Kanji dictionary. On a whim, she looks up the meaning of 妙, the first character in her name, discovering definitions like "graceful," "dextrous," "deliberate," "exquisite," and more (148).

> 辞典の文字をノートに書き写しながら、不覚にも泣きそうになった。こんなにも多くのありがたい意味を含んだ言葉だったのか。
>
> As I copied the character from the dictionary into my notebook, unknowingly, I started to cry. The fact that it was a word that contained so many gracious meanings. (148)

Accepting her name is not a metaphor for coming to accept her Okinawan identity, or anything like that. Tanahara simply finds deeper meaning in the name by looking it up in a dictionary. It's an essay that is universal at its core, aside from some linguistic quirks exclusive to Japanese. Anyone in the world could hate their name growing up, and look up its meaning later in life and come to love it. *Watashi no namae* is a story written by an Okinawan woman, compiled in a literary magazine focusing on Okinawan literature, and yet its message is universal, rather than ethnic, like so many English-translated works under the umbrella of "Okinawan Literature."

***Oira wa inu sa* (I am a Dog)**

Oira wa inu sa[43] is a short story by Matsumura Mutsuo about a stray dog who is suddenly taken in by a man in his twenties. Much of the story consists of the dog's unilateral observations of the human world, and mutual conversations with his owner about philosophy–particularly, communism. The owner reveals early on to the dog that he is a member of the Japanese Communist Party, and is referred to as "Red Master" from then on. He spends much of the novel explaining to the dog what communism and socialism are, and why their policies would be good for Japan.

Oira wa inu sa seems like a rather direct play on Natsume Soseki's *Wagahai wa neko de aru* (I am a Cat, 1906), a famous piece of modern Japanese literature. The language used in its title and throughout the work heavily resemble the writing style of *Wagahai wa neko de aru* and other modern works, and its subject matter mirrors the discussions of western philosophy present in *Wagahai wa neko de aru* as well.

There is first the construction of their titles. *Wagahai wa neko de aru* uses the first-person pronoun 吾輩 (*Wagahai*), a masculine pronoun which has a feeling of arrogance to it. Some popular characters who use this pronoun are Edgar Allen Poe in the anime *Bungo Stray Dogs*, or Severus Snape in Japanese translations of the Harry Potter series.[44] The title also includes the grammar construction, *de aru* (である), which is primarily used in professional or academic writing. The combination of these two linguistic aspects give the title *Wagahai wa neko de aru* a subtle feeling of elegance.

In contrast, the title *Oira wa inu sa* has a very low class, almost country bumpkin-esque feel to it. *Oira* (おいら) is a masculine pronoun that is more commonly used in the countryside in Japan, and consequently has negative connotations like lacking sophistication and class. Some examples of characters who use this pronoun are Eric Cartman from the cartoon *South Park*, Sans from the video game *Undertale*, and Patrick Star from the cartoon *Spongebob Squarepants*, in their Japanese translations.[45] The title also lacks a proper ending copula, grammatically incorrect in formal contexts, but common in informal, casual Japanese. The bluntness and lack of class present in the title *Oira wa inu sa* stands in complete contrast to the elegant title of *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, drawing attention to their similarities in its complete oppositeness.

---

[43] Matsumura, Mutsuo. 松村, 睦夫. "おいらはいぬさ." 樹児夢那, vol. 4, 日本民主主義文学会那覇支部, 2022, pp. 58-89.

[44] Pixiv Community Editors. "我輩 (わがはい)とは【ピクシブ百科事典】." ピクシブ百科事典, https://dic.pixiv.net/a/%E6%88%91%E8%BC%A9. Accessed 12 April 2025.

[45] Pixiv Community Editors. "オイラ (おいら)とは【ピクシブ百科事典】- 一人称." ピクシブ百科事典, https://dic.pixiv.net/a/%E3%82%AA%E3%82%A4%E3%83%A9. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Oira wa inu sa draws similarities to *Wagahai wa neko de aru* in its subject matter as well. Critical commentary on western influences in Japan and a parody of the pretentiousness of academia underline much of *Wagahai wa neko de aru*.[46] *Oira wa inu sa,* in comparison, attempts to present politics and academia as accessible to anyone, even a dog.

It's clear from the beginning of the story that the owner and the dog are meant to serve as mirror images of each other, when the owner picks up the dog, telling him, "Unfortunately I too am an unlucky man" (58). The owner and the dog are both poor from birth, and only barely surviving through their lives, something which the dog frequently comments on.

> 薄暗い6畳の間に、青いソファーと小さな卓袱台があり、戸棚に本があるだけ。アパートの真ん中の廊下側は小さな台所、そこには冷蔵庫のみだ。人間は、こんな所に住むのかと思った。おいらと、あまり違いない、おいらより雨露がしのげるだけましだが、こんな小さな部屋で、人間は生活しても良いのかと心配だ。
>
> In the middle of the gloomy 6 tatami mat floor, there is a blue sofa, a small coffee table, and a cupboard filled with nothing but books. Past the corridor directly in the middle of the apartment is a small kitchen, and in there nothing but a refrigerator. Can man really live in a place like this, I thought. To me, there was not really any difference, as I'd had to endure the elements, but a small room like this, is it really ok for man to live life like this, I worry. (59)

Yet, despite their similarities, the owner goes to great lengths to explicitly outline how they are different, how humans and dogs are different, how their lives are different. The owner says that "Education is impossible for dogs. Education is only for man" (62), and yet he discusses communist philosophy with the dog throughout the story, and by the end, the dog is able to articulate what communism is and his opinions on it. He gets mad at the dog when he attempts to comfort him after being rejected romantically, saying that dogs can't understand love, yet the dog experiences it for himself just a few moments later.

> これはなんだ。何なのだ。もしかしたら、赤の旦那が安子に持っている感情、愛の心ではないのか、犬だって持てるのだ。愛を、嬉しい。これが一目ぼれか。
>
> What is this? What in the world? Perhaps, this is the feeling Red Master has for Yasuko, love, even a dog can have it. Love, I'm happy. Is this love at first sight? (77)

[46] While this is pointed out in many online analyses of *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, here is one which mentions it, along with many other themes throughout the novel:
Ward, Katy. "Book Review: Natsume Sōseki's "I am a Cat."" Litro Magazine, 14 February 2021, https://www.litromagazine.com/editors-pick/book-review-natsume-sosekis-i-am-a-cat/. Accessed 27 April 2025.

While Matsumura's story discusses topics like economic inequality explicitly most of the time, it is also shown indirectly through the owner and dogs' relationships with their respective love interests, Yasuko, and the rich neighbor's white toy poodle. While the owner initially struggles in his relationship with Yasuko, they get together, while the dog is not so successful with his love. The owner frequently tells him that the toy poodle is out of his league, too rich for a poor dog like him.

> おいらが金持ちだったらなー、金が全てだ。地位さえ変える。そうすれば、おいらの白いトイプードルと結ばれる。しかしながら赤の旦那は貧乏人で最悪だ。これはどうも出来ない。
>
> If only I were rich. Money is everything. I'd just need to change social status. If I did that, I could tie the knot with my white toy poodle. Nevertheless, Red Master is a poor man. Just the worst. It cannot be done, no matter what. (80-1)

Like *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, *Oira wa inu sa* confronts modern human philosophy using animals. Yet, unlike *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, *Oira wa inu sa* makes explicit efforts to tie similarities between humans and animals, whereas in the former, the cat is merely a narrator, commenting on humanity from a point of detachment. This introduces a completely new theme to the original, showing the author's comfort with the reference material.

The ways in which *Oira wa inu sa* resembles and differs from *Wagahai wa neko de aru* show how the author is comfortable with playing with Japanese literary canon. In this way, *Oira wa inu sa* isn't really Okinawan literature, as much as it is simply Japanese literature, despite being written by an Okinawan, and published in a literary magazine focusing on Okinawa literature.

Kwadisa no ki no gotoshi **(Like the Kwadisa Tree)**

Kwadisa no ki no gotoshi[47] is a short story by Arakaki Kinuyo about a woman in her 60's, Hiromi, whose husband has just passed away. Her son, Naoaki, convinces her to demolish their family home, temporarily moving into the apartment below his and his wife's, so they can build a new house on the plot. Hiromi is initially reluctant, not wanting to let the past go, but she eventually relents. The rest of the story consists of Hiromi gazing at her neighbor's lush garden everyday, commenting on the changing scenery, with occasional flashbacks reflecting on Hiromi's life up until that point. Through the changing scenery, Hiromi eventually comes to accept the nature of life as ever changing and cyclical, coming to terms with the death of her husband and mother, and with the knowledge that she will die someday, too. This metaphor is displayed primarily through the changing of the leaves of the *kwadisa* tree, a tropical almond tree found in Okinawa and in parts of Southeast Asia, hence the title.

[47] Arakaki, Kinuyo. 新垣, 絹代. "クワディーサーの木の如し." 南涛文学, vol. 39, 南涛文学会, 2024, pp. 31-51.

Hiromi begins the story unable to really accept change in her life. Her children tell her she needs to leave her house behind, and she is reluctant—demolishing it would demolish the memories she holds of living in that house with her husband and mother. When she does eventually relent, moving in with Naoaki, her descriptions of the scenery, and its potential changes, unsettle her as well.

> 形状を測量しているのは、もしかして建設工事が始まるのだろうか。おそらく、大きなアパートが建つに違いない。そう思うと妙に寂しくなった。ここの風景も変わってくるのだろう。
>
> They're surveying the land. Does that mean construction will begin soon? They'll probably build a big apartment complex here, there's no doubt about it. As this thought came to me, I became oddly lonely. The scenery here will change too, it seems. (49)

Everyday, Hiromi watches her two elderly neighbors from her balcony tending to their lush garden. Through this garden we are able to see the scenery change as the seasons do. In summer, the red *kanna* flowers blossom, staying lush well into the fall. In autumn, the *kwadisa* trees turn orange. In winter, the leaves fall off the *kwadisa* tree, and the *kanna* flowers wilt. In February, the barren tree branches bring the wide and bright blue sky into view. Come spring, and buds begin to proliferate on the *kwadisa* tree branches, indicating that life will return to the tree, and the cycle will restart.

The changing of seasons as a metaphor for the cyclical nature of life is one rather central to Japanese literary canon.[48] Buddhism and Shintoism are religions central to Japanese culture. A central theme to Buddhism is the simultaneously cyclical and fleeting nature of life, shown in concepts such as reincarnation. Shintoism, as an animist religion, believes that there is life in everything, and all things are connected through this energy. The changing seasons, both permanent and impermanent, constantly changing but changing in the same ways year after year, are a perfect combination of Shinto and Buddhist philosophy in Japan.

Kwadisa no ki no gotoshi seems to reflect this aspect of Japanese culture, suggesting it to be a part of larger Japanese literature, rather than the specifically ethnic category of Okinawan literature. The work shows at least partial awareness of this, when comparing seasonal changes in Okinawa vs. the mainland.

> 秋になり、街路樹のクワディーサーの葉が少しずつ色づいてきた。紅葉の季節感がない沖縄で、オレンジの葉っぱが秋だよと教えていた。

[48] Coman, Sonia. "Smarthistory – The four seasons in the arts of Japan." Smarthistory, 10 June 2022, https://smarthistory.org/reframing-art-history/four-seasons-arts-japan/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

> *Aki ni nari, gairoju no kwadisa no ha ga sukoshi zutsu iro dzuitekita. Kōyō no kisetsukan ga nai Okinawa de, orenji no happa ga aki da yo to oshieteita.*
>
> It is autumn, and the *kwadisa* trees on the roadside have changed in color little by little. In most places, the color of autumn is crimson, the color of autumn leaves, but the same isn't true in Okinawa, so we teach that orange is the color of Autumn. (36)

As mentioned above, in mainland Japan, the color of autumn is red, the color of Japanese maple leaves just before they fall from the trees. I've translated the above passage to be more readily understood in English, but in the original, it is "紅葉の季節感がない沖縄," or literally, "An Okinawa absent of *kōyō*'s sense of the seasons." *Kōyō* is the Japanese word for autumn leaves. It is written with the character 紅, meaning crimson, but has a subtly more Japanese feel to it, as compared to, for example, the character 赤, which also means red, but has no other nuance.[49] Yuki Nakatsugawa, in an paper studying the words for the different shades of red in Japanese and English literature, outlines this phenomena, saying, "in terms of shades of the color red in Haiku, 赤 *aka* (50) and 紅 *beni* (23) are utilized, and *beni* was a representative *kigo* (seasonal word) displaying autumn. In this way, the shades of red within Haiku are separated into *aka* and *beni*."[50] By describing Okinawa as specifically lacking *kōyō*, while retaining a "sense of the seasons," that in the color orange, Okinawa is defined as unique from the mainland superficially, but still interpreted through a Japanese lens.

Near the end of the story, Hiromi has a revelation: "With the change of the seasons, it's naturally changing appearance, I feel as if I am being taught the meaning of life" (50). Change is inevitable, death is inevitable, and it's not a bad thing. It could even be beautiful.

Hiromi seems to have fully internalized this philosophy by the end of the story. The last scene involves Hiromi taking her two grandchildren, Yoshihito and Yohito, to a nearby *kwadisa* tree to play with cicadas. While they love playing with the cicadas, they cannot take them home.

> 宜人の手を離れたセミは、しばらく木の幹にしがみついていたが、やがて青い空へと飛んでいった。宜人と陽人は、うれしそうにバイバイと手を振った。

---

[49] " '*Aka*' *to* '*Beni*—" "「赤」と「紅」の違いとは？運動会は赤組？紅組？." 日本文化研究ブログ, 15 January 2025, https://jpnculture.net/aka-beni/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

[50] Nakatsukawa, Yuki. 中津川, ゆき. "色彩語「あか」の研究." 言語文化研究 Studies in Language and Culture, vol. 30, 2021, pp. 89-116. 東京女子大学学術情報リポジトリ, https://twcu.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/26777/files/4%E4%B8%AD%E6%B4%A5%E5%B7%9D%E3%82%86%E3%81%8D__%E5%A2%A8%E6%B6%88%E3%81%97%E6%B8%88%E3%81%BF.pdf. Accessed 12 April 2025.

> The cicada separates from Yoshihito's grasp, and for a moment, clings to the tree trunk, before eventually flying towards the wide blue sky. Yoshihito and Yohito wave their hands happily. "Bye bye!" (51)

The cicada is gone from Yoshihito's grasp, is gone from their lives, and there is nothing sad about it. The loss of something or someone from your life is inevitable, as life is ever changing.

This message, that life is ever changing and cyclical, is conveyed using a concept originating from Japan–the change of the seasons. While Okinawan literature can be unique in some ways specific to Okinawa, ultimately, many Okinawan authors write their work under the umbrella of Japanese literature, not a genre wholly unique to Okinawa. This is clear in the use of the changing seasons in *Kwadisa no ki no gotoshi*.

Aging and the cyclical nature of life aren't the only themes touched upon in this story; Much of the story also centers around gendered societal expectations, marriage, and infidelity. These are first made visible on page 38, reflecting on Hiromi's husband's life towards the end. One day, Hiromi discovers her husband collapsed on the floor, unable to move. He tells her not to call the ambulance, but she does anyway. The doctor tells her he has had a stroke, but it wasn't severe enough to cause any permanent damage.

Afterwards, she asks him why he told her not to call the ambulance, to which he responds, "In the middle of the day, with the whole neighborhood, it's unsightly" (38). A few days later, he collapses again, having had a second stroke, this time leaving him paralyzed on the left side of his body. She quits her part-time job at a flower shop to take care of him full-time, and he begins to slowly isolate himself from the outside world, saying he "doesn't want to be seen like this by anyone" (39). Hiromi eventually comes to the realization that he is acting this way because of gendered societal expectations.

> 社会的な「男らしさ」にとらわれ、「弱さ」非難されることを恐れて、だんだんと依怙地になり、孤独になっていく夫を思うと、可哀そうだった。
>
> Imprisoned by the societally defined notion of "masculinity," terrified of being criticized for his "weakness," becoming more and more stubborn, moving further towards isolation: my husband. When I think of him, I feel pity. (39-40)

As a man in a society with such rigid gender roles as Japan, Hiromi's husband feels the need to keep up his image as a strong, masculine husband. While Hiromi feels pity towards her husband's affliction, she also faces gendered societal expectations as a woman in Japanese society, and strives to keep up this gendered image of herself. In particular, she feels the need to keep up appearances as a happy wife, in a happy marriage.

> 離婚に踏み切る勇気もなかった。自分の愚かさを呪いながら、忌々しいを胸にしまい込んで、我慢して仮面夫婦を演じることしかできなかった。
>
> I had no courage to make the plunge into divorce. Cursing my foolishness, I stowed away my frustrations in my chest, grinned and bore it, unable to do anything else but put on the show of the perfect marriage (43).

It's not clear exactly why Hiromi desires to keep up the image of the perfect marriage, but it becomes clear upon learning the story of her upbringing. Her father abandoned Hiromi and her mother at a young age. He only reappears in their life when she is ten years old, his sisters arriving with divorce papers, saying he has a new family in the Philippines.

The reason Hiromi chooses to continue with her marriage is further revealed with an anecdote from her early twenties. Hiromi, working at a company specializing in imports, develops a crush on her boss, a 45 year old man with a wife and children, and eventually begins an affair with him. His wife discovers the affair, confronting the two in a cafe. Her mother, upon learning about the affair, tells Hiromi she must break up with him, and begins looking for potential options for an arranged marriage. She discovers a son of her friends, a man ten years Hiromi's senior, and convinces her to get married to him, saying she does not want the same fate for Hiromi as she had.

> 「母さんの結婚は失敗だった。女ひとりで子どもを抱えて生活するのは本当に大変だった。だから、あんたには幸せになってほしい。不倫をして後指をされるより、いい家庭を作って安定した生活を送る方がどんなに幸せなことか…（略）」
>
> My marriage was a failure. Providing for a child as a single woman and living your daily life is truly difficult. I don't want the same for you; I want you to be happy. Rather than homewrecking, and getting talked about behind your back, if you could make a nice family, lead a steady life, you'd be so much happier…(47)

Hiromi meets with her boss one last time, explaining the situation. He tells her they must break up, begging her to forgive him.

> 「うちの奴はもう気づいている。そして、苦しんでいる。俺はそれでもその思いに目をつぶっている卑怯な男だ。君への責任も果たせない最低の人間だ。許してくれ」
> そう言って、深々と頭を下げた。
> （略）
> 心のどこかで、結婚を引き止めてくれるのを期待していたのに…

> "The wife, she's already figured it all out. And, she's suffering. Yet, I close my eyes, pretend not to see it. I'm a cowardly man. I can't even be responsible towards you. I'm the worst man that has ever been. Please, forgive me."
> With that, he bowed his head deeply.
> …
> Somewhere in my heart, I'd hoped he'd tell me not to get married, and yet…(47)

A common theme in these stories is the simultaneous necessity and fallibility of marriage, as well as infidelity and adultery. Everyone in Hiromi's life values the foundation of marriage, even when none of them are happy in them. Hiromi's mother's life became so much harder after her husband left them. Hiromi's boss is unhappy with his marriage, unable to divorce his wife, knowing the suffering he would be putting on her. Marriage is often unhappy, but it is necessary.

It's notable that *Kwadisa no ki no gotoshi* is not the only piece of Okinawan literature to confront these themes–in particular, infidelity, adultery, and marriage. *Love Letter from L.A* by Hiroshi Shimokawa is an example of this, along with several other works from the anthology it is featured in, *Southern Exposure*, such as *Will O' The Wisp*[51], a story by Nobuko Yamanoha about a woman in an adulterous relationship with a married man, who eventually kills her. The key point I want to emphasize in these stories is that their characters suffer at the hands of other Japanese men, not American G.I.s, despite the anthology's apparent intention to present these works as evincing the subjugation of Okinawan women by men in the US military. I believe this hints at a larger need to examine Okinawan literature specifically under the lens of Japanese patriarchy, and of patriarchy as a more cross-cultural phenomenon, rather than just sexual violence under American military oppression.

Conclusion

Examining these newly released, not yet translated pieces paints a very different picture of contemporary Okinawan literature, and Okinawa consequently, from what has been translated into English thus far. *Baachan no Gasshoudan no tabi* shows that Okinawan literature can discuss the trauma of the war without depicting Okinawans as perpetually impaired by their trauma. *Watashi no namae* shows that Okinawan writers can write about general themes about identity and coming of age, with no direct connection to Okinawa. *Oira wa inu sa* shows that Okinawan authors are comfortable enough with Japanese literature to play with it and mold it to their own whims. *Kwadisa no ki no gotoshi* shows a similar relationship to the Japanese literary canon as the previous work, as well as showing the ways in which Japanese patriarchy affects Okinawans' domestic dynamics, rather than the U.S. Military presence. These works suggest that

[51] Yamanoha, Nobuko. "Will O' The Wisp." Translated by Melissa Wender. Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa, University of Hawaii Press, 2000, pp. 235-253.

Okinawans today see themselves more in the context of their Japaneseness, rather than in terms of their wartime experiences with the US. Reading these works shows the broad scope of themes that Okinawan literature can and do encompass, something often overlooked in English-translated compilations of Okinawa literature.

Conclusion

I initially began studying Okinawan literature because I felt the need to understand Okinawa. I was born in Okinawa, on a military base that Okinawans largely wish were not there in the first place. I felt that reading literature about Okinawa would help me understand more about the Okinawan people, and in a sense absolve me of the sins I represent through my Americanness, and especially, the circumstances of my birth on a US military base in Okinawa. Reading the available literature in English, while helping me in some aspects, largely reinforced my pre-existing understanding of Okinawa: perpetually victimized by Mainland Japan and the United States, particularly sexually. That is not all what Okinawa is, however, which I discovered upon travelling there and coming across the aforementioned "Himeyuri Steak" sign. Apparently, contemporary Okinawans can dispassionately refer to the events of the past–as horrible as they were–without being consumed by their trauma.

We (and by that I mean myself, a citizen of the western world) are immersed and raised in Trauma Culture. We may believe that reading about traumatic events help us understand the world better; what they actually do is make us numb to new insights because sensationalized accounts tend to reaffirm pre-existent biases. The accounts of individual survivors are prioritized over objective historical research, leading to the spread of historical misinformation. These groups of survivors are often massed together in a racialized manner, and members of that race are stereotyped under the lens of shared trauma. This further leads to dubious notions of vicarious and hereditary trauma. This all erases the actual experiences of trauma survivors. Traumatic historical events are viewed through a lens of almost ahistorical myth, through which some lesson or moral is to be learned by contemporary audiences, rather than as something to be prevented, or something that is happening at this very moment.

We also live in a rape culture. This rape culture is fueled by fundamental societal understandings of gender; women are weak, and men are strong. As a result of this assumption, women believe they are more prone to rape, and men believe they are empowered/entitled to rape women, while simultaneously believing they are responsible to protect the women they value from being raped. Thus, when a woman is raped, a man who values her is vicariously raped in turn; rape becomes about male ego, rather than sexual violence against the survivors involved. Like how collective trauma is racialized under Trauma Culture, rape is gendered under Rape Culture. These two aspects–of racialized and gendered trauma–combine to create the stereotypical depictions of the Okinawan woman as sexually exploited, the American man as the sexual exploiter, and the Okinawan man as emasculated for failing to prevent Okinawan women from being exploited by the American man. Even if the motivation for reading literary works that depict these dynamics may stem from noble impulses to confront American, and particularly American masculine, abuses of power, my point is that such texts can depict and reinforce a narrow and biased view of Okinawa that doesn't reflect the diversity of Okinawan realities.

While traumatic literature often perpetuates stereotypes, this is not to say that reading it has absolutely no merits. But it is often the primary narrative surrounding a traumatic event and its survivors, and thus the only one most people will read. The popularity of such media can change people's minds for the better by making them aware of past injustices with a view towards preventing their recurrence, but they can simultaneously confirm negative stereotypes. And reading traumatic literature often encourages us not to do anything because we fall under the illusion that tragic outcomes are inevitable.

To review, we have reviewed the Okinawan literature available in English through two channels: English translations of Okinawan literature, and English-language literature about Okinawa. Both are defined primarily by trauma, whether from the war, or sexual violence.

English translations of Okinawan literature are generally defined by depictions of Okinawan Trauma as either caused by the American military presence, and or the subjugation of vulnerable Okinawan women and how this makes Okinawan men feel by extension. Much Okinawan literature depicting war trauma indeed depicts the sexual traumas of women during the war, and much of that trauma is written from a male perspective. The crux of these stories is the responsibility that Okinawan men feel towards the sexual violence experienced by Okinawan women. Many translators also focus on connections between Okinawan literature and the U.S., ignoring more prevalent themes in those works. In particular, some themes present in the discourse of broader Japanese literature are ignored, possibly in an attempt to racialize Okinawa as a place separate from mainland Japan. These works and their translations then ultimately center the experience of disenfranchised Okinawan men and Americans, rather than Okinawans as a collective group, and they especially ignore Okinawan women.

English-language literature about Okinawa, as it is written primarily by Americans, focuses on the connections between the U.S. and Okinawa. Much of the literature is either written about the Battle of Okinawa or the experiences of women in Okinawa in relation to the U.S. military presence. The 2016 memoir*, Speak Okinawa*, is one of the most famous works of English-language literature about Okinawa, and is littered with many of the problems associated with media created under Trauma Culture: historical inaccuracies, the dubious notions of hereditary vicarious trauma, and the generalization of Okinawan experiences to infantilizing and orientalist stereotypes. It also attempts to fit the story of the author's mother into the stereotype of the sexually exploited Okinawan woman, and the sexually exploiting American man.

Both English translations of Okinawan literature and English-language literature about Okinawa paint an inaccurate picture of Okinawan literature and Okinawa as a whole. Reading newer and perhaps more obscure works from Okinawa could possibly give a more accurate portrayal. The works I have analyzed show how trauma and its aftermath can be written about in a way that is not grotesque, and how Okinawan literature plays with Japanese literary tropes in a way that any

other Japanese writer would. They also depict the stories of women from a woman's perspective, allowing the true stories of Okinawan women to be properly actualized, even or particularly in contexts unrelated to wartime sexual violence. These works help depict Okinawan literature and Okinawan culture with more nuance than what is currently available for mainstream consumption in English.

Translating more general works from Okinawa, such as the ones analyzed in the preceding sections of my paper, can help the broader public understand Okinawa on a deeper and truer level. Rather than understanding Okinawans to be wholly separate from Japan, and perpetually victimized by the west, Okinawa can be understood by more readers as the unique society that it is.

Works Cited

" '*Aka*' to '*Beni*—" "「赤」と「紅」の違いとは？運動会は赤組？紅組？." 日本文化研究ブログ, 15 January 2025, https://jpnculture.net/aka-beni/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Angst, Linda Isako. "The Rape of a Schoolgirl: Discourses of Power and Gendered National Identity in Okinawa." *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*, edited by Laura Elizabeth Hein and Mark Selden, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 135-157.

Arakaki, Kinuyo. 新垣, 絹代. "クワディーサーの木の如し." 南涛文学, vol. 39, 南涛文学会, 2024, pp. 31-51.

Baldwin, Bridgette. "Black, White, and Blue: Bias, Profiling, and Policing in the Age of Black Lives Matter." *Western New England University School of Law*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2018, pp. 431-446. *Digital Commons @ Western New England University*, https://digitalcommons.law.wne.edu/lawreview/vol40/iss3/4/. Accessed 8 April 2025.

"Battle of Okinawa." *The National WWII Museum*, 20 May 2020, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/battle-of-okinawa. Accessed 13 April 2025.

Bhowmik, Davinder L., and Steve Rabson, editors. *Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa*. University of Hawaii Press, 2016.

The Book of Sui. Beijing Guoxue Times Culture Communication Co., Ltd, 2003. *Guoxue*, http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/suisu/sui_081.htm. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Brina, Elizabeth Miki. *Speak, Okinawa: A Memoir*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2022.

Centre for Holocaust Education. "What are the common myths and misconceptions about the Holocaust?" *Centre for Holocaust Education*, University College London Faculty of Education and Society,

https://holocausteducation.org.uk/teacher-resources/subject-knowledge/myths-misconceptions/. Accessed 13 April 2025.

Clark, Lorenne M. G., and Debra J. Lewis. *Rape : the price of coercive sexuality*. Women's Press, 1977.

Coman, Sonia. "Smarthistory – The four seasons in the arts of Japan." *Smarthistory*, 10 June 2022, https://smarthistory.org/reframing-art-history/four-seasons-arts-japan/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Gattuso, Reina, et al. "The Learned Courtesan in Edo Japan." Curationist, September 2022, https://www.curationist.org/editorial-features/article/the-learned-courtesan-in-edo-japan. Accessed 28 April 2025.

Gilens, Martin. "Race and Poverty in America: Public Misconceptions and the American News Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 60, 1996, pp. 515-545. *Stanford University*, https://web.stanford.edu/class/comm1a/readings/gilens-race-poverty.pdf. Accessed 8 April 2025.

Harakawa, Asara. 原河, 朝良, editor. 樹児夢那. vol. 4, 日本民主主義文学会那覇支部, 2022.

"*Himeyuri no tō–"* ひめゆりの塔・ひめゆり平和祈念資料館. "ひめゆり学徒隊の沖縄戦." ひめゆり平和祈念資料館, https://www.himeyuri.or.jp/himeyuri/study_war/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Inoue, Masamichi S. *Okinawa and the U. S. Military: Identity Making in the Age of Globalization*. Columbia University Press, 2017.

"Introduction." *Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, edited by Davinder L. Bhowmik and Steve Rabson, University of Hawaii Press, 2016, pp. 1-17.

James, Clayton. “Occupation of Japan | History & Facts.” *Britannica*, 1 April 2025, https://www.britannica.com/event/occupation-of-Japan. Accessed 13 April 2025.

Kamo-san. かもさん. “カンヌナー(神様の名前)の話.” 晴れ雲ティーダ, 5 May 2014, https://harekumo.ti-da.net/e6233755.html. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Kay. “Kay's Reviews > Speak, Okinawa: A Memoir.” *GoodReads*, 21 May 2021, https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/4014017450. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Kodama, Masatō. 小玉, 正任. 琉球と沖縄の名称の変遷. 琉球新報社, 2007.

Lane, Lexi. “What's A Passport Bro? 'Losers Back Home' On White Lotus, Explained.” *Men's Health*, 6 April 2025, https://www.menshealth.com/sex-women/a64387699/what-is-a-passport-bro/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Lim, Lin Lean, editor. *The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia*. International Labour Office, 1998.

Marcus, Sharon. “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention.” *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013, pp. 385-403, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/femlit/sharon_marcus_-_fighting_bodies__fighting_words.pdf. Accessed 8 April 2025.

Matsumura, Mutsuo. 松村, 睦夫. “おいらはいぬさ.” 樹児夢那, vol. 4, 日本民主主義文学会那覇支部, 2022, pp. 58-89.

McGuinness, Damien. “Russia steps into Berlin 'rape' storm claiming German cover-up.” *BBC*, 27 January 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-35413134. Accessed 27 April 2025.

Medoruma, Shun. “Hope (1999).” Translated by Steve Rabson. *Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, edited by Davinder L. Bhowmik and Steve Rabson, University of Hawaii Press, 2016, pp. 21-24.

Medoruma, Shun. “Tree of Butterflies (2000).” Translated by Aimée Mizuno. *Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, edited by Davinder L. Bhowmik and Steve Rabson, University of Hawaii Press, 2016, pp. 71-112.

Medoruma, Shun. 目取真, 俊. 眼の奥の森. 影書房, 2017.

Medoruma, Shun, et al. *In the Woods of Memory*. Translated by Paul Sminkey, Stone Bridge Press, 2017.

Molasky, Michael, and Steve Rabson, editors. *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa*. University of Hawaii Press, 2000.

Nakatsukawa, Yuki. 中津川, ゆき. “色彩語「あか」の研究.” 言語文化研究 *Studies in Language and Culture*, vol. 30, 2021, pp. 89-116. 東京女子大学学術情報リポジトリ, https://twcu.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/26777/files/4%E4%B8%AD%E6%B4%A5%E5%B7%9D%E3%82%86%E3%81%8D__%E5%A2%A8%E6%B6%88%E3%81%97%E6%B8%88%E3%81%BF.pdf. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Phillips, Amber. “They're Rapists--President Trump's Campaign Launch Speech Two Years Later Annotated.” *Washington Post*, 16 June 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/16/theyre-rapists-presidents-trump-campaign-launch-speech-two-years-later-annotated/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Pixiv Community Editors. “我輩 (わがはい)とは【ピクシブ百科事典】.” ピクシブ百科事典, https://dic.pixiv.net/a/%E6%88%91%E8%BC%A9. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Pixiv Community Editors. “オイラ (おいら)とは【ピクシブ百科事典】- 一人称.” ピクシブ百科事典, https://dic.pixiv.net/a/%E3%82%AA%E3%82%A4%E3%83%A9. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Randall, Hannah. “The Problem with 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas.'” *Holocaust Centre North*, 17 September 2019, https://holocaustcentrenorth.org.uk/blog/the-problem-with-the-boy-in-the-striped-pyjamas/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Rothe, Anne. *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media*. Rutgers University Press, 2011.

Sakihara, Mitsugi. “Part A: Pre-Modern Okinawa.” *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*, by George Kerr, edited by George Kerr, Tuttle Publishing, 2018.

Selman, Sydney J. “Not That Bad: Lessons Women Learn in a Rape Culture.” *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at The University of Tennessee*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2022. *University of Tennessee Knoxville*, https://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol11/iss1/4/. Accessed 8 April 2025.

Shimokawa, Hiroshi. “Love Letter from L.A.” Translated by Ann Sherif. *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, University of Hawaii Press, 2000, pp. 192-212.

Tanahara, Taeko. 棚原, 妙子. “私の名前.” 南涛文学, vol. 39, 南涛文学会, 2024, pp. 146-148.

Tjaden, Patricia Godeke, and Nancy Thoennes. “Full report of the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women.” *National Institute of Justice*, 2000. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/21948. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Tsunami, Nobukatsu. 津波, 信雄, editor. 南涛文学. vol. 39, 南涛文学会, 2024.

Uema, Sachiyo. 上間, さちよ. “ばあちゃんの合唱団の旅.” 南涛文学, vol. 39, 南涛文学会, 2024, pp. 139-140.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. “Warsaw Ghetto Uprising | Holocaust Encyclopedia.” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, 17 April 2023, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/warsaw-ghetto-uprising. Accessed 12 April 2025.

VELTRA 余暇プランナー. “ひめゆりの塔とは？沖縄地上戦の歴史を学べる観光スポット | 海外旅行、日本国内旅行のおすすめ情報 | ベルトラYOKKA | VELTRA.” *Veltra*, 28 June 2020, https://www.veltra.com/jp/yokka/article/himeyuri-monument/. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Ward, Katy. “Book Review: Natsume Sōseki's "I am a Cat."” Litro Magazine, 14 February 2021, https://www.litromagazine.com/editors-pick/book-review-natsume-sosekis-i-am-a-cat/. Accessed 27 April 2025.

Yamanoha, Nobuko. “Will O' The Wisp.” Translated by Melissa Wender. *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, University of Hawaii Press, 2000, pp. 235-253.

Yokohama, Toshi. “「神人（かみんちゅ）」とは？パート2.” 琉球沖縄を学びながら、いろいろ考えていきたいな〜, 10 September 2024, https://totoro820.ti-da.net/e11911731.html. Accessed 12 April 2025.

Yoshida, Sueko. “Love Suicide at Kamaara.” Translated by Yukie Ohta. *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, University of Hawaii Press, 2000, pp. 214-233.