Jason Wu’s Response Paper 2 on Medoruma Shun’s Droplets

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Hidden Traumas in “Droplets”

Okinawa was originally a relatively independent kingdom, the Ryukyu Kingdom, but in 1879 after the Meiji Restoration, the Meiji government forcibly incorporated it into the Japanese territory. To fully occupy Ryukyu, Japan implemented a series of policies to change the local customs, language, and culture of Ryukyu. After the war, Okinawa suffered from power and discrimination under the rule of the United States, and it did not improve until it returned to Japan in 1972. However, Okinawa, which is full of blood and tears, has long been riddled with holes. In addition, Okinawa's history, culture, dialect, and system are very different from those of Japan. Japan has always held prejudice and discrimination against the aborigines in Okinawa, bringing both mental and physical damage. From the 1960s, modern writers began to appear in Okinawa, which was covered in bruises based on this background. However, due to various historical reasons, modern Okinawan literature did not occupy a place in Japanese literature. With the unremitting efforts of Okinawan writers, Okinawan modern literature began to gain a foothold in the Japanese literary world, allowing the world to hear the voice of Okinawa (Ying). In 1997, Okinawa native writer Medoruma Shun won the Akutagawa Award, the highest honor in pure Japanese literature, for his short story " Droplets." His work has also become one of the well-deserved masterpieces of Okinawa modern literature (Meng).

As I have read, “Droplets” is not a direct depiction of the war, but it speaks to the immense harm that the war brought to the indigenous people of Okinawa. The work uses a non-realistic approach, using an empty village in Okinawa Prefecture as the stage for the story, and is a highly allegorical work.

As a survivor of the war, Tokusho was undoubtedly a lucky man. On April 1, 1945, after the U.S. army landed on Okinawa, Tokusho's unit fled into a bomb shelter after being attacked by enemies. While hiding from the enemy in the cave, his wounded friend Ishimine was dying. Still, Tokusho couldn't resist his desire to drink all the water given to him and Ishimine and left Ishimine to escape alone. Moreover, a wounded soldier once asked Tokusho for water, and Tokusho promised him and was never heard from again. Tokusho, who sees ghosts every night, can no longer bear the harshness of his conscience, and the memories of the war scenes become more and more invented. (Shun)

In this way, the author seems to tell the reader that no matter how long the war has passed, the memories of the war haunt the hearts of those who lived through it night after night like a nightmare that cannot be erased. The scars of the war, like drops of water hidden in a stalactite cave, soak through every part of the cave with time, soaking through the decades of the war experiencer and Tokusho. However, Tokusho keeps running away from the night he betrayed his friend, and not only that, Tokusho keeps creating lies about the war as one of the war experiencers.

On the other hand, the daytime scenes also show Tokushima's cousin Seiyu creating lies. As Ushi is busy with farming every day, he hires Seiyu to take care of Tokusho for 1,000 yen a day and three meals. When Seiyu discovers that the water from Tokusho's toes has a miraculous effect, he bottles the water as "miracle water." He sells it to the villagers at a high price, without even asking where the water comes from. (Shun)

His wife, Ushi, and the ignorant villagers are like the indigenous people of Okinawa, hard-working and straightforward, but they both become victims of the lies. Both Tokusho and Seiyu are the perpetrators of lies. The motive of Tokusho's actions comes from the fact that he does not dare to face the reality of the past, and to justify his faults, he commits the evil act of consuming the cruel history; Seiyu uses the water drops flowing from Tokusho's toes to deceive the ignorant villagers, not only consuming Tokusho's strange disease but also consuming the trauma of the war. And neither Tokusho’s nor Seiyu's lies will end well. The reader cannot help but read the author's irony in Tokusho’s and Seiyu's lies. Tokusho finally dares to face reality and complete his self-redemption, while Seiyu is never judged by his conscience, reflecting some of those who experienced the war.

The foot illness of Tokusho is both a mental and physical injury. Using the imagery of "water," Madoruma Shun cleverly connects Tokusho's double traumas. Indeed, Tokusho has 50 years of memories that he cannot erase and deceives himself, and these hidden spiritual wounds swell up in his physical body, turning them into physical injuries. However, by quenching the thirst of his friends and soldiers who had been abandoned by him night after night with drops of water from his toes, Tokusho could reconnect with himself, pay for his sins, and lift the cross he had been carrying in his heart.

Medoruma Shun’s "Droplets" is a fantastic and absurd story that makes the reader's memory of the war ripple-like drops of water in the bottom of his heart. Through his novel, Medoruma Shun questions the narrative of the war that circulated in Okinawa. He reveals that the social structure and political climate in post-war Okinawa and Japan itself caused many people who experienced the war to keep their true memories deep inside and fabricate lies to deceive the world. Tokusho did witness the tragic attack on Okinawa by the American forces and saw how the Japanese army massacred Okinawans. However, his account only exaggerates and even fabricates the memory of the victims. Most post-war Okinawan narratives about war memories stay in this mode. This model became the "collective memory" in the Okinawan community (Ying). Medoruma Shun’s "Droplets" breaks away from this narrative and reaches deep into the consciousness of the Okinawans and Japanese as perpetrators of the war, criticizing the Japanese society that has failed to face history correctly. After the war, Japanese society was forgiven its war dead in a "delusion" but could not take action to settle its war guilt.

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