

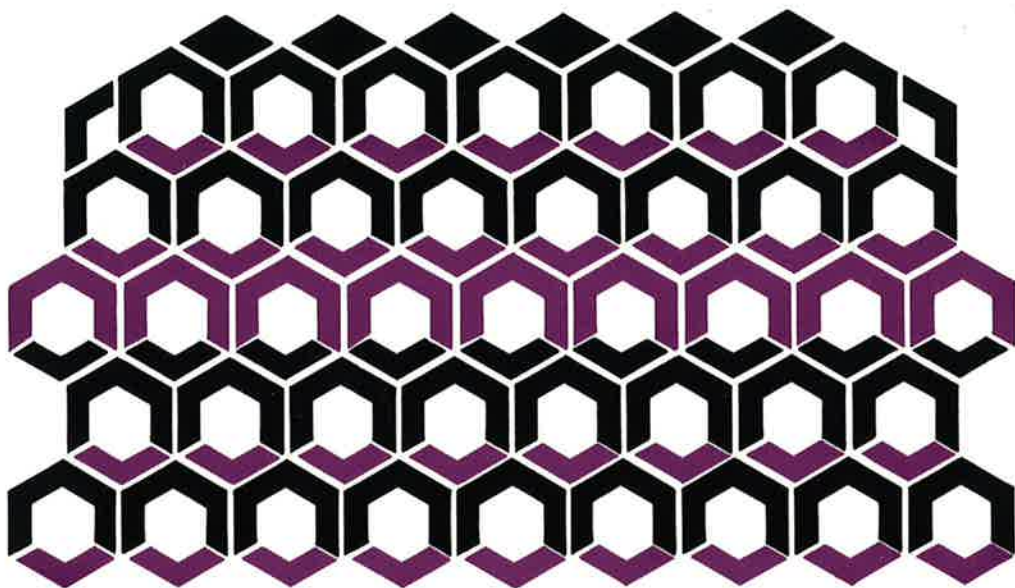


INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES
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CENTER FOR JAPANESE STUDIES

Okinawa: Two Postwar Novellas

by Ōshiro Tatsuhiko and Higashi Mineo

Translated with an introduction and afterword by
STEVE RABSON





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Child of Okinawa (Higashi Mineo's *Okinawa no shōnen*) translated with author's permission.

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For Yoko and Kenji

Contents

Prefaceix

Introduction.....1

Cocktail Party31

Child of Okinawa79

Afterword119

About the Authors133

Bibliography135

Preface

Half a century after the clash of Japanese and American forces devastated Okinawa in the spring of 1945, wide areas of Japan's southernmost prefecture remain an armed bastion. U.S. military rule in Okinawa, which lasted twenty years longer than the occupation of mainland Japan, finally ended in 1972 when this largest island in the Ryūkyū chain reverted to Japanese sovereignty. But airfields, artillery ranges, ammunition depots, infantry training grounds, and other installations still occupy 85 square miles on this island 67 miles long and an average 6¾ miles wide. Stationed here are some 30,000 American and 6,000 Japanese military personnel who live in varying degrees of isolation from Okinawa's one million residents.

On an island of such spectacular natural beauty, the effects of this massive presence have startled many first-time visitors. The landscape varies from lively business centers of stores and office buildings in the prefectural capital of Naha to quiet farming and fishing villages nestled among steep, forested hills in the countryside. Semitropical in climate, Okinawa is famous for miles of serene beaches where undersea coral formations color the warm waters in deep blues and greens. Low clouds of puffy mists hover over the ocean as in a Japanese ink-brush painting. But emerald seas and soft clouds become an incongruous backdrop for long convoys of olive-drab trucks moving through villages along the coast. Lines of fighter planes thunder into the sky from an air force base that covers much of the island's central plain. In rice fields just beyond its runways, green shoots rustle and irrigation pools shudder as passing schoolchildren press their palms over their ears. To the north, rolling sugarcane fields are barely separated by narrow dirt roads from the close-cropped lawns and flat barracks of infantry training bases. While farmers in straw sun hats tend their crops, squads of marines in full battle gear march by on the roads in loose formation toward the sounds of

small arms and mortar fire coming from nearby practice ranges. To the west, the peaks of dark green hills show bald patches dotted with blinking aeriels, revolving radar dishes, and high circular fences enclosing towers of antennae. And in certain towns near the larger bases, blocks of bookshops, pharmacies, and grocery stores face streets lined with bars bearing English names in neon: "Lone Star," "Nashville," and "Funky Broadway."

People in Okinawa Prefecture continue to protest the shortages of land, daily disruptions, and not infrequent dangers associated with this vast military presence that was mostly unaffected by U.S. force reductions elsewhere since the late 1980s. In mainland Japan the considerable attention of reporters and politicians shifted away from Okinawa for a time after its reversion to Japanese sovereignty and the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, staged in large part from bases on the island. But in recent years the effect of bases in Okinawa and other prefectures on the lives of local residents is provoking renewed concern throughout Japan.

In contrast, aside from anniversaries of the 1945 battle, Americans hear about Okinawa nowadays, if at all, only at such times as when a helicopter crash killed seventeen U.S. servicemen in 1985 or when a force of U.S. Marines was deployed from there to the Persian Gulf in 1990. The case in which two marines and one sailor were convicted in the 1995 kidnap and rape of a 12-year-old elementary school girl sparked mass demonstrations against the U.S. military presence and was widely covered in the American press. Still, few people in other countries know much about conditions in Okinawa today or the occupation that lasted an extra twenty years because U.S. policymakers considered unilateral control of the island essential to the U.S. military mission in Asia.

In a century when people in many places have lived under military occupation or martial law, U.S. rule in Okinawa seems relatively benevolent by comparison. Aside from the enforced confinement of civilians to refugee camps after the battle in 1945, there were no massive detentions. Some opposition leaders were arrested later for political activities, but people were not subjected to physical torture, firing squads, or other horrors often associated with military regimes. Although the appropriation of land for bases displaced thousands of people, the U.S. government eventually adopted a policy of rental payments and contributed annual subsidies to the troubled Okinawan economy during the occupation. And finally, after years of bilateral meetings in Tokyo and Washington, the United States agreed to reversion in 1969 when

growing discontent on the island over a variety of issues threatened the utility of U.S. bases. Although this was achieved under some duress, Okinawa has now been restored to Japanese sovereignty while Russia refuses to negotiate the status of Japan's northern islands occupied by Soviet forces at the end of World War II.

Nevertheless, twenty-seven years of U.S. military rule in Okinawa profoundly affected the material, social, and psychological life of local residents. Besides seizing large tracts of cultivated farmland, the U.S. command controlled sources of power and water, managed transportation, regulated travel to and from the mainland, and imposed restrictions in spheres ranging from labor organization and capital investment to children's education and display of the Japanese flag. The spin-off economic benefits that accrued early from U.S. government projects and purchases were soon heavily outweighed by the stifling effects of a military-service economy. And although elections of local officials and a representative assembly were gradually permitted, the American generals commanding the occupation maintained and, on occasion, used their powers to revoke the assembly's legislation, overrule local government policies, and remove elected officials from office. Furthermore, the U.S. military's retention of ultimate civil and criminal jurisdiction over everyone on the island—soldiers and civilians alike—resulted in horrendous miscarriages of justice involving crimes committed by U.S. military personnel against Okinawa residents.

At a time of heightened controversy among Japanese and American scholars looking back on the occupation of Japan, this book grew out of a conviction that works of literature often provide the best means for understanding how people live in unusual circumstances. To be sure, the press in Japan produced countless words and pictures about "the Okinawa issue" during the years it was a cause célèbre. Articles, films, and television reports appeared often. And although many tended toward the superficial or sensational, they helped to stimulate awareness on the mainland of what people in Okinawa went through during and after the war, a subject barely mentioned in public school textbooks. The campaign for reversion also inspired political and philosophical writings across a wide spectrum of opinion. Some authors called for the restoration of national territory; others focused on American rule in Okinawa to protest U.S. military policies and the Japanese government's cooperation in them. The

issue also stimulated interest throughout Japan in the island's history and culture to an extent that, ironically, might not have developed had Okinawa been spared invasion during the war and remained a Japanese prefecture afterward. Scholars from Okinawa and the mainland published numerous studies of traditional poetry, dance, music, religious practices, and regional dialects all of which carry certain distinctions from those in other parts of Japan. Still, by far the most sensitive and enduring portrayals of what people in Okinawa have experienced since World War II came from writers of fiction and poetry. Prominent mainland novelists with such divergent political inclinations as Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) and Ōe Kenzaburō (b. 1935) visited the island and reported their observations. Ōe's *Okinawa nōto* (Notes on Okinawa, 1970) is a particularly incisive account of the author's personal involvement in the reversion movement and the tensions that developed between activists from Okinawa and the mainland even as they worked for a common cause. Among writers from Okinawa, poet Yamanokuchi Baku (1903–63) wrote late in his career of the prolonged American occupation and military presence in poetry and prose that brought his work to the attention of many readers on the mainland. Influential critics and editors in Tokyo also began to take notice, though somewhat belatedly, of contemporary fiction and poetry by writers from Okinawa. Perhaps the most conspicuous result of their discovery was the granting of the nation's highly coveted literary award, the Akutagawa Prize for fiction, to Ōshiro Tatsuhiro (b. 1925) for *Kakuteru pāti* (*Cocktail Party*) in 1967 and to Higashi Mineo (b. 1938) for *Okinawa no shōnen* (*Child of Okinawa*) in 1972, the year of reversion. Both works have been reissued a number of times, and the 1983 Japanese film *Okinawan Boys*, based in part on characters and episodes from Higashi's work, has played to large audiences.

Although these novellas differ sharply in tone and form, both are first-person narratives of individual protagonists whose lives are profoundly affected by the U.S. occupation and military presence. And both are distinguished for their ingenious rendering of Okinawa's lush, semitropical landscape as an often ironic backdrop to the disturbing human dramas they portray. Set in the early 1960s, *Cocktail Party* is the story of a man whose daughter is raped by an American soldier. It tells of the father's growing frustration as he struggles with the inequities of occupation law and feels the crushing impact of political realities in Okinawa on his personal relationships. *Child of Okinawa* is told through the eyes

of a young adolescent growing up a decade earlier in a bar/brothel that his parents run in a town near one of the largest bases. The boy is alternately revolted and aroused by what he sees going on around him as he experiences his own confused sexual awakening. Though not without flaws, both works make for compelling reading and give considerable insight into what life is like for people whose circumstances are, far more than for most of us, beyond their ability to control. In telling the stories of their protagonists, Ōshiro and Higashi extract such experiences from the mesmerizing context of newspaper headlines and television "sound bites," bringing them to an intensely personal level that is the special realm of literature. Drawn into these individual ordeals, the reader can appreciate why it is sometimes said that fiction is truer than fact.

The two novellas are presented here in translation together with an introduction providing historical background and a concluding essay that compares and evaluates these works. The introduction is intended to supply information that will help the reader understand specific points in the stories. It concentrates on how people in Okinawa have been affected by historical events and government policies. Although motivations for Japanese and U.S. policies toward Okinawa are briefly discussed, the introduction does not seek to analyze the island's geopolitical role in international affairs. For both essays I have drawn on Japanese and English-language sources including materials collected in Okinawa during eight months of a 1967–68 overseas tour in the United States Army and on subsequent visits to the island.

Financial support for work on this project was provided by grants from the Japan Foundation, the Association for Asian Studies, and Brown University. Several people have contributed valuable advice and criticism during the preparation of the manuscript. For their assistance with the translations, I am grateful to Jo Nobuko Martin, Yuriko Saito, Etsuko Takushi, and Kikuko Yamashita for patiently answering my questions and to Gayle K. Fujita, Howard S. Hibbett, and Thomas E. Swann for their invaluable critiques of completed drafts. Special thanks go to Edward J. Drea for his expert advice and comments on the introduction and for arranging access to the archives at the United States Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, where he was assistant director. The introduction also benefited from the suggestions of Akiko Hibbett. I am grateful to Ann Berent-Johannsen for her meticulous and perceptive

editing of both the translations and the essays. Furthermore, I wish to thank Kathryn A. Spicer for entering the manuscript into the appropriate computer and Joanne Sandstrom for her astute final editing. I am, of course, fully responsible for any mistakes or shortcomings that remain.

Introduction

Were half the power that fills the world with terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need for arsenals and forts.

“The Arsenal at Springfield”
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1845

For many Japanese and Americans, Okinawa still brings to mind the last and worst battle of the Pacific War. The eighty-two days of bitter fighting with massive casualties on both sides, the kamikaze airplane attacks on American ships offshore, and the ritual suicides of Japanese senior commanders just before U.S. forces occupied the last stretch of ground on the island’s southern tip in late June of 1945 are all horrifying memories of the war’s final phase. In Japan, historical accounts and dramatic portrayals of these events appear regularly in print and on film. Although the Battle of Okinawa receives less attention in the United States, high school textbooks recount it at some length, and veterans who survived it are still interviewed by newspaper and television reporters at each anniversary of this murderous confrontation.¹

Fewer Americans and Japanese outside Okinawa Prefecture remember that of the more than 230,000 who died in the fighting, over 147,000 were local residents, about one-third of the prefecture’s wartime population.² Okinawa conscripts served and

¹ Members of American veterans’ groups opposed the 1969 reversion agreement because they felt the United States should retain territory that was acquired at the cost of such enormous casualties.

² Figures cited are from Okinawa Prefectural Government, “Heiwa no ishiji” (Monument of peace) (Naha, Okinawa, 1995). (All Japanese-language sources cited herein were published in Tokyo unless otherwise indicated.)

died with the Japanese army, which fought tenaciously against advancing U.S. forces. However, thousands of civilians including children were caught in the cross fire or trapped in buildings and caves, where they were killed in machine-gun, flamethrower, and grenade attacks. Many others died when Japanese soldiers ordered mass suicides to stretch dwindling food supplies and forced civilians out of overcrowded caves into heavy enemy fire or shot them down at point-blank range.³ When the “typhoon of steel” finally ended, almost all who survived found themselves destitute or without homes or both. Later, unknown numbers died in the aftermath of battle from exposure, unattended wounds, malnutrition, or illness.⁴ If Japanese soldiers often showed little regard for the lives of local residents during the fighting, there were also reports of U.S. soldiers mistreating civilians held in refugee camps and shooting those who attempted to escape in the weeks after the Japanese defeat before American relocation and relief efforts were organized.⁵

These efforts remained makeshift and piecemeal for some time. Even after the war ended in August 1945, the scale of devastation in Okinawa and its remoteness from Supreme Allied Headquarters in Tokyo hindered the flow of relief. Nevertheless, U.S. forces made the best of what they had during the first months after the battle. They worked long hours on duty and volunteered their time off to distribute canned goods, military fatigues, medicine, cigarettes, and other supplies both as free rations and, later, to compensate for such labor as clearing war debris and driving trucks.⁶ Many relief items came from large stocks brought to the island as supplies for the assault on mainland Japan that was

³ Shinzato Keiji, Taminato Tomoaki, and Kinjō Seitoku, *Okinawa-ken no rekishi* (The history of Okinawa Prefecture) (Yamakawa, 1980), pp. 213–221; and Ienaga Saburō, *The Pacific War (Taiheiyō sensō)*, translated by Frank Baldwin (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 198–199. See Jo Nobuko Martin’s novel *A Princess Lily of the Ryukyus* (Shin Nippon Kyōiku Tosho, 1984) for an excellent firsthand account in English of the Battle of Okinawa from the perspective of a high school student conscripted as a nurse.

⁴ M. D. Morris, *Okinawa: A Tiger by the Tail* (New York: Hawthorn, 1968), p. 39; and George Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1958), p. 472. Considering Kerr’s sharply critical account of the early phase of the American occupation, I cannot share the narrator’s view in *Cocktail Party* that this book “was written to justify U.S. foreign policy” (see p. 37).

⁵ Shinzato, Taminato, and Kinjō, p. 223. Americans I interviewed in 1985 who were stationed there shortly after the battle reported incidences of rape.

⁶ Morris, pp. 55–57.

Cocktail Party

Ōshiro Tatsuhiko

Cocktail Party

Ōshiro Tatsuhiro

PRELUDE

I gave Mr. Miller's name and house number to the guard. After telephoning to make sure I was expected, he showed me the route from the guard shack to the house.

"Is it really all right for me to go in like this?" I asked.

"Yes, you won't have any trouble." The guard answered expressionlessly, as if he found nothing peculiar about my question. He seemed inured to the monotony of his routine. The road through the security gate split into two neatly paved streets which ran far back among the long rows of houses. Deep in their midst, the streets divided again and again into a labyrinth of interconnecting branches. This section of a vast American army post is known officially as Base Housing, but Okinawans call it "the family brigade."

Its maze of twisting streets had been the scene of a frightening experience for me ten years before. That afternoon had also been hot and muggy, but unlike today I had come to do an errand in the town near the base, not to visit someone I knew inside. On my way home I was seized with a sudden impulse. By chance the guard was away from his shack, though this seems now like an unfortunate coincidence. In that moment I decided to try crossing through the family brigade as a shortcut to the east. I was sure I could reach the local branch of a bank on the other side of this wide stretch of land. Exploring unfamiliar roads had fascinated me since childhood.

Yielding to my curiosity, I slipped past the guard shack and started walking. However, after about twenty minutes, I knew I had miscalculated. I thought it would take fifteen minutes to walk straight through the base, or not more than twenty if I strolled along leisurely sightseeing. But even after half an hour, I still

couldn't see anything that vaguely resembled the wire fence at the east end. All the houses looked exactly alike. Only the shapes of the shrubbery varied occasionally. But by the color and pattern of laundry hanging in the yards, I could see that I was walking in circles, around and around on the same street.

None of the foreigners or Okinawan maids I passed seemed to notice that I was a stranger. But when I realized I was lost, panic seized me. In my mind I tried desperately to cling to the notion that the housing area was, after all, inside the very same township where I lived, but it was no use. Struggling to maintain my composure, I stopped one of the maids and asked her how to get to the east end. She showed me the way impassively. Her placid, self-possessed air gave the impression she was someone who belonged here and made me feel a vast distance between us.

At last I managed to find my way to the rear exit at the east end. When I got home and told my wife what had happened, she was shocked that I had entered the base, recalling her own experience working for a laundry chain that serviced the military.

"The man in our store who had to make deliveries there was mistaken for a thief and turned over to the MPs. So, you see, it can happen even if you carry a pass."

Now, ten years later, I still couldn't enjoy walking alone as much as I had before, and felt especially wary around the base. I would be less concerned if I were still a bachelor, but my wife keeps reminding me of my family obligations. I suppose a father can never be too careful.

Before the war, people could travel easily to any remote corner of Okinawa, but those times have long passed. I wondered about the maids who worked in the housing area. Perhaps the guards, because they carried rifles, were not afraid. There were occasional newspaper reports of foreign children throwing stones or shooting BB guns at the windows of local buses. Surely those children weren't afraid walking the streets unarmed among the Okinawans. Or were they? And what about Robert Harris, the soldier who rented our rear apartment to share with his girlfriend? Though he stayed there only two or three days a week, I wondered if he ever felt apprehensive in a town inhabited entirely by Okinawans.

But today I felt good. After all, I'd been invited to Mr. Miller's party. So if I were stopped, all I'd have to do was give his name, house number, and phone number, and everything would be all right.

Child of Okinawa

Higashi Mineo

Child of Okinawa

Higashi Mineo

1.

I was asleep when Mom started shaking me. "Tsune. Tsuneyoshi, wake up!"

"Huh?"

Rubbing my eyes, I poked my head out from under the covers and looked up at her. She brought her smiling face down close and spoke coaxingly.

"Michikō and Yōko picked up a couple of soldiers, but there aren't enough beds. Won't you let them use yours, Tsuneyoshi? It will only take about fifteen minutes."

I was startled at first, then revulsion welled up inside me.

"Not *that* again!"

When Dad opened a bar for American soldiers at our place, I never thought I'd have to lend them my bed. Michikō and Yōko had made the alcove next to the bar into a bedroom. It was nearly filled with a double bed where they took turns sleeping with their customers. But if they both had customers at the same time, Mom would come into my room. This didn't happen very often, but when she woke me I was supposed to cooperate.

"Let them all use one bed together," I said, sitting up.

"Don't be silly! Now hurry or we'll lose this chance to make some money." Mom unfolded a starched sheet as she rushed me out of bed.

"This sure is a lousy business you're in."

"There's no use complaining. It's how we eat, you know."

"It's still lousy."

It made me want to cry, thinking people would probably do anything to eat. I took my school cap and satchel off my desk and pushed them under my bed out of sight.

"Excuse us," said Michikō. She came into my room leading a soldier by the hand. As she put her arm around his waist, she glanced at me with a faint smile.

2.

And now they were in my bed, doing it like a couple of dogs. If I stayed in the house, I would still hear the moans and squeaking bedsprings, so I dashed outside. Then I took off down the hill toward Koza Primary School.

"Tsuneyoshi! Where are you going at this hour?"

In my rush to get away, I had run right into Chiiko, my forehead smacking into her breasts, just as she came out of the Yamazatos' doorway.

"I'm out for some jogging."

"Your hair is an awful mess. Better get it cut tomorrow." She scolded me like a big sister as she fixed her skirt. I didn't think my hair was any of her business, and ran off without answering. But I stopped after a few steps and turned back to look at her walking along the road up the hill. In a way I was glad she had spoken kindly to me.

Above the hill I could see the whole sky, lit up by the pale glow of neon. Chiiko's skirt spread like a parachute, and her slender legs poking out under it reminded me of a hopping sparrow. Suddenly, to my surprise, a soldier standing on one side of the street stepped toward her. She grabbed his arm, and, walking together, they turned a corner out of sight.

3.

Koza Primary School is a little building crammed into a narrow valley. Beside it is a playground so small it looks more like someone's backyard. The surrounding hills are thickly overgrown with *susuki* grass, but jutting from their peaks are naked limestone rocks that seemed to pierce the night sky. Poisonous *habu* snakes thrive in those hills. The valley was so dark I could hardly make out the white lines on the hundred-meter track trampled over daily by the children. Panting and weary, I stretched out to catch my breath on the square wooden platform where the teachers led morning assembly. I seemed to be looking up at the sky from the

Afterword

A child in ecstasy embarks on the voyage of his dreams; a father in despair begins a difficult quest for justice. *Child of Okinawa* and *Cocktail Party* conclude at opposite ends of the emotional spectrum, yet they follow a strikingly similar progression of events. Each protagonist finds himself in circumstances that grow more and more intolerable until he finally sets out on a hazardous course that cuts him off from those around him. And each situation results because the occupation and vast military presence in Okinawa magnify human failings on both sides of the bifurcated society. The father seeks to confront the hypocrisy of occupation law by prosecuting Robert Harris, a decision that separates him from people who had urged, for both altruistic and selfish reasons, that he drop the charges. The boy seeks to escape the degradation of his base town environment, leaving behind all his family and friends.

In literary terms, both stories could be said to contain elements of fictional quest, with idealistic protagonists posed against quasi-villains in corrupt and oppressive surroundings.¹ The quests themselves also pass through similar stages. First, each story begins on the edge of the bifurcation with a clear sense that something is wrong. The father feels acutely out of place as he enters the base and becomes increasingly conscious of the deep divisions among the people at the cocktail party, which are only partially camouflaged by its artificial joviality. Tsuneyoshi is already aware of the corruption in his household in the opening scene when he reluctantly lends his bed to Michikō and her GI customer. Second, each protagonist experiences a dramatic awakening that reveals

¹ Fictional quest as a literary genre is described by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 186–195.

About the Authors

Ōshiro Tatsuhiro was born September 19, 1925, in Nakagusuku, Okinawa Prefecture. After completing middle school, he attended a prestigious academy in Shanghai, returning to Okinawa at the end of World War II. During the U.S. occupation he taught high school, worked in the Trade Office of the Government of the Ryukyu Islands, and later served as director of the Okinawa Institute of Historical Collections. Beginning his writing career shortly after the war, he has published numerous books and articles on Okinawa's culture and history as well as works of fiction and drama (see bibliography). *Cocktail Party* first appeared in the magazine *Shin Okinawa bungaku* (New literature of Okinawa) in February 1967. Awarded an Akutagawa Prize in September, it was included as the title work in a collection of his stories published the same year by Bungei Shunjū press and has been reissued in two subsequent collections. His fiction has been acclaimed for skillfully rendering Okinawan cultural motifs and for portraying tumultuous events during and after World War II from the historical and psychological perspective of people in Okinawa.

Higashi Mineo was born May 15, 1938, in Mindanao, The Philippines. Returning with his family to Okinawa after World War II, he attended high school in Koza City and worked for the U.S. military on nearby Kadena Air Base. In 1964 he moved to Tokyo, where he took temporary jobs to support himself while concentrating on his writing. *Child of Okinawa* first appeared in *Bungakkai* (Literary world) magazine in December 1971. Awarded an Akutagawa Prize the next year, it was published by Bungei Shunjū press as the title work for a hardback volume of his fiction in 1972 and for a paperback collection in 1980. Chūō Kōron press published *Ōki na hato no kage* (Shadow of a big dove), a collection of eleven new stories, in 1981. Two years later a Japanese film entitled (in

English) *Okinawan Boys*, directed by Shinjō Taku, was released; it draws loosely on characters and episodes from *Child of Okinawa*. Higashi's fiction, which often depicts the encounters of people from Okinawa with Americans and mainland Japanese, has been praised widely for its stylistic innovation and its lyricism.

Steve Rabson is Associate Professor in the Department of East Asian Studies at Brown University. He received a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1979. His publications include articles on the fiction of Ōe Kenzaburō and Nagai Kafū and the poetry of Kaneko Mitsuharu and Yamanokuchi Baku. His book *Righteous Cause or Tragic Folly: Changing Views of War in Modern Japanese Poetry* is forthcoming from the University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies.

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- This paperback collection includes commentary by Kitazawa Miho.