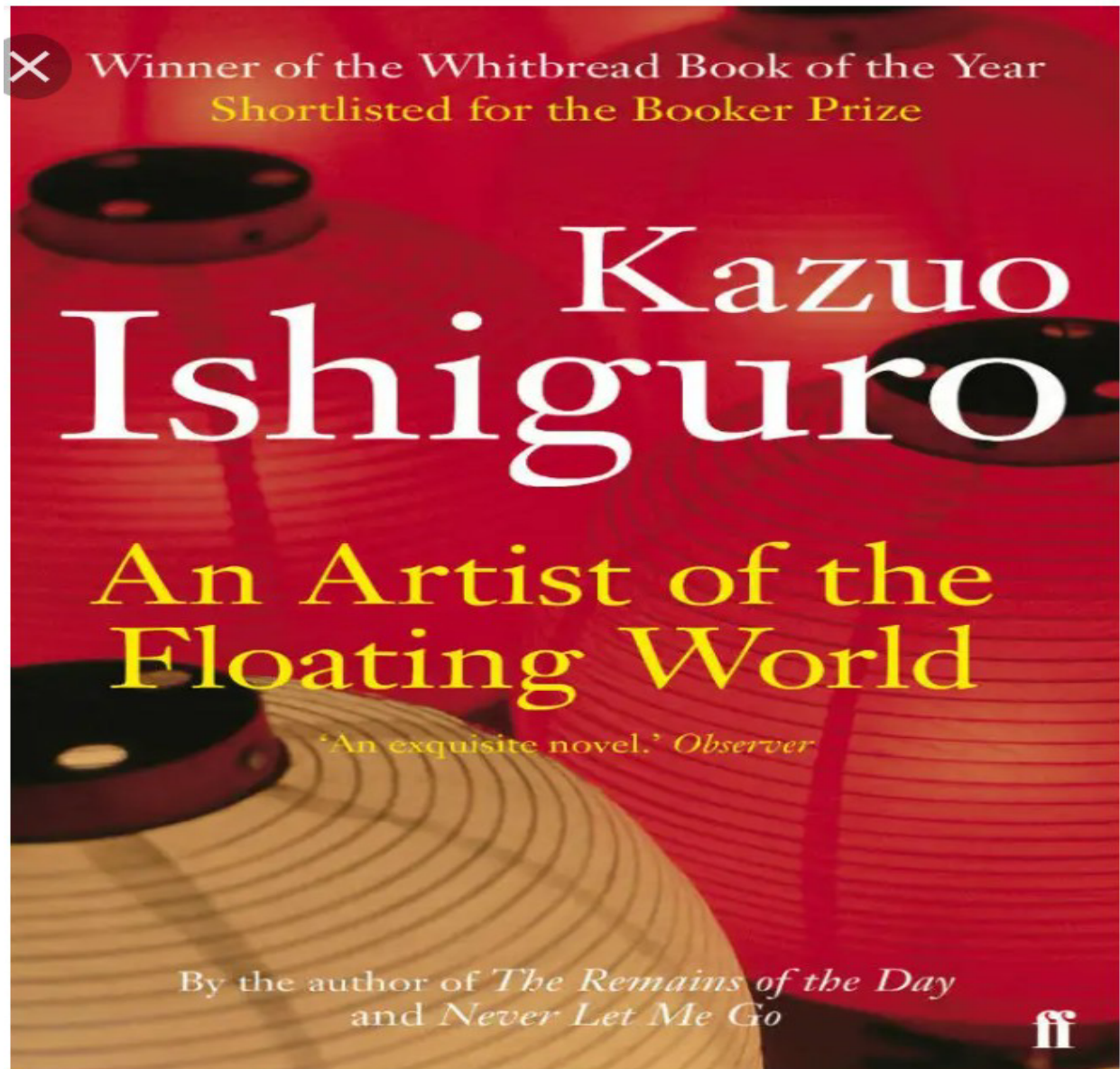


**A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY GUIDE TO
AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD
BY KAZUO ISHIGURO**



BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KAZUO ISHIGURO

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan in 1954. He moved with his parents to Guildford in Southern England in 1960 when his father was recruited to work as a marine biologist for the British National Institute of Oceanography. Ishiguro did not visit Japan again until he was in his thirties. Ishiguro was educated at a boys' school in Surrey, and attended the University of Kent. As a teen, he hoped to become a rock musician. Ishiguro received a masters at the University of East Anglia, where Angela Carter became an early mentor and he studied with Malcolm Bradbury. Ishiguro enjoyed critical acclaim starting early in his career, and won the Whitbread award for his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*. He has been nominated for Great Britain's most prestigious literary prize, the Booker, four times, and won it in 1989 for *The Remains of the Day*. In 2017, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The committee justified the decision to award the prize to Ishiguro by saying: "in novels of great emotional force, [Ishiguro] has uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world." Ishiguro is married and has one daughter.

Historical Context of *An Artist of the Floating World*

Although the destruction and defeat of Japan during World War II give the novel its immediate context, the novel is more broadly concerned with transformations in Japanese society occurring throughout the first fifty years of the twentieth century. In the first two decades of the century, the economy boomed as a result of modernization, industrialization, and the 1868 opening of the country's economy to international trade. In the 1920s, the economy saw a crash, and poverty became a thorny problem, especially among peasants and industrial workers. Nationalist sentiment began to rise, with many in Japan advocating for a Japanese empire in Asia that would rival the empires of Europe. In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria in a quest for greater resources. The war there was renewed again in 1937. Following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japan's territorial possession expanded to encompass Hong Kong, the Phillipines, and other parts of Asia. Japan then began to lose the war, but refused to surrender until long after it had become clear that the war could not be won. Nationalist propaganda advocated that ordinary Japanese citizens and soldiers make enormous sacrifices in the name of country and emperor. The war ended with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, although these events are never referred to in the novel. After the surrender, many Japanese were eager to move on from the devastation they had suffered. They were extremely interested in the ideas of democracy and capitalism preached by the Americans, who occupied the country from the war's end until 1952. In the periods during which Ono is writing his narrative, the American occupiers focused intensively on building up the Japanese economy, a historical process reflected in the changing cityscape that Ono records.

Other Books Related to *An Artist of the Floating World*

The *Noriko* trilogy is a set of three films made by the director Yasujiro Ozu in 1949, 1951 and 1953. Ishiguro makes clear his debt to the three films by naming his protagonists after actors and characters in the films. For instance, the films feature a character named *Noriko*, who is

played by the actress Setsuko Hara. The play also features a supporting actress named Haruko Sugimora, a name which recalls Ishiguro's character Akira Sugimora. Each of the three films revolves around the question of whether its protagonist, Noriko, will marry, but in each film Noriko's life and circumstances are radically different. In the realm of literary fiction, *An Artist of the Floating World* shows deep similarities—in its themes, structure, and even characters—to his later novel, *The Remains of the Day*, which centers on the reflections of a British butler living in the years after World War II and attempting to come to terms with his employment by Nazi collaborators. Ishiguro's work also shares its thematic concern with memory and guilt with works by his contemporary, Ian McEwan.

Summary of An Artist Of The Floating World

The novel begins in an unnamed city in Japan in October 1948. The narrator is Masuji Ono, a retired artist who lost both his son and wife during the war which also caused serious damage to his beautiful house. Ono recalls the previous month's visit of his older daughter Setsuko and her son Ichiro who live in a different town. The whole family is concerned about the marriage prospects of Ono's younger daughter Noriko, because, a year before, Noriko had been in marriage talks with a man named Jiro Miyake when his family withdrew from negotiations under mysterious circumstances. Noriko is currently at the start of new marriage talks with a man named Taro Saito, but at nearly twenty-six, she is considered old to be unmarried. Ono is annoyed because he feels his daughters believe he knows the real reason why the marriage negotiations broke off and is hiding it from them.

Ichiro is fascinated by a poster for a monster movie that he saw at the train station. Ono decides to take Ichiro to the movie the next day, but his daughter Noriko says she has made plans. Setsuko says that she will stay with her father the next day, and Ono and Ichiro can go see the monster movie the following day. The next day, Setsuko says to her father that it may be wise to take precautions to prevent certain facts about his past from coming into the hands of the Saito family when they investigate the Ono family background. The day after that, Ichiro and Ono go to the monster movie. On the way there, they run into Taro Saito's father, who tells Ono that he has discovered they have a mutual acquaintance: Mr. Kuroda.

Ono intersperses reflections about the past and present into his account of Setsuko's visit. He describes the time he spends at Mrs. Kawakami's place, the last bar standing in an area that had been a pleasure district with a number of bars and restaurants in the years before the war. There, he and his former pupil Shintaro reminisce with Mrs. Kawakami about the old days. Ono also recounts his role in bringing the pleasure district into existence. As a prominent artist, he had written to the authorities and gotten them to place their support behind a bar. The bar, called the Migi-Hidari, became a place where Ono and his students often drank and talked about the role of their art in building a great new future for Japan. Ono also recalls an incident from his own childhood when his father told him he would disgrace the family if he became an artist and then burned Ono's paintings. Ono also recollects several run-ins with the younger generation. He remembers running into Jiro Miyake and hearing from him that he is glad that the president of his company committed suicide to atone for the company's behavior during the war. He also

recalls a conversation with Setsuko's husband Suichi at the reception after his son Kenji's funeral, where Suichi expresses anger over the many members of his generation that were killed during the war and the many leaders who have been too cowardly to take responsibility for their role during the war. Finally, Ono describes his first visit to an old colleague to make sure nothing from his past gets in the way of Noriko's marriage. He visits his old colleague Matsuda, who has been ill, in the Arakawa district. Matsuda tells him that he will be sure to say only kind things about Ono, but advises that he seek out his former pupil Kuroda, if he is concerned about the investigation.

The second set of recollections are recorded in April 1949 and center around Noriko's *miai*, a formal meeting between two families who are considering marrying their children. Ono first describes how he has a falling-out with Shintaro, who asks him to write to a potential employer and tell them that Shintaro disagreed with Ono about work they did together during the war. Ono says that it may seem that he was harsh with Shintaro, but explains that Shintaro's visit occurred only a few days after the *miai*.

Ono describes Noriko's bad mood and incivility to him in the weeks leading up to the *miai*, and says that Noriko does not know all that he is doing to make sure her wedding goes ahead. For instance, Ono goes to visit Kuroda. He is let into Kuroda's apartment by Kuroda's protégé, Enchi, who mistakes Ono for someone else. When Enchi realizes Ono's true identity, he asks Ono to leave, saying that he is sure Kuroda would not want to see the man who is responsible for his having been beaten and injured in prison and labeled a traitor.

At the *miai*, Ono drinks quickly and is made uncomfortable by the stilted conversation. Eventually, he interrupts the flow of conversation to make a declaration that he can admit that he made mistakes with some of the work he did and may have been a bad influence in the country. He thinks that Taro's father, an art expert named Dr. Saito, approves of his statement. After that, the conversation loosens up and it seems clear that Noriko and Taro like one another.

The third set of Ono's recollections is recorded in November 1949 and centers around another visit Setsuko and Ichiro pay to the family some months after Noriko is married to Taro Saito. During a walk in Kawabe Park, Setsuko says to Ono that she was concerned to hear that he has compared himself to a composer who wrote highly influential nationalist songs during the war and recently committed suicide to atone for his role encouraging the bloodshed. Ono tries to reassure his daughter that he is not considering suicide, but she says other things that he finds upsetting. Setsuko says that he did beautiful work, but it was not at all responsible for influencing anything during the war. Ono points out that, the previous year, she had seemed to think his career a great liability in Noriko's marriage negotiations. Setsuko says she does not remember any such conversation. Ono is shocked and points out that he made a statement during the *miai* as a result of her comment. Setsuko says that Noriko and the Saitos all found his declaration very puzzling. Ono defends his statement as appropriate, explaining that Dr. Saito was familiar with his wartime work and seemed to appreciate hearing that his position had changed. Setsuko says that she believes that Dr. Saito was not even aware that Ono was an

artist.

Later that day, Ono takes his grandson Ichiro on an outing and promises that he will get Ichiro a taste of sake that night at dinner. That night at the home of newlyweds Noriko and Taro, Ono tries to convince Setsuko to allow Ichiro to taste some sake, but Setsuko refuses. During the dinner, the younger generation discusses how happy they are with the new American-style leadership at the corporations where they work. After Ichiro goes to bed, Ono says to Taro that it is a shame that Dr. Saito and he were not better acquainted sooner, since they both worked in the art world and knew one another's reputations. Taro agrees with this and Ono looks to see how Setsuko is responding, but she does not seem to register this at all.

Ono intersperses a variety of reflections about his past in his account of this conversation with Setsuko and his reactions to it. He recalls the moment sixteen years before when he moved into his home and, he says, Dr. Saito approached him and said how glad he was to have an artist of his stature in the neighborhood.

He also looks back further into his past, recalling his relationship with a fellow artist nicknamed the Tortoise, who worked with him at Master Takeda's firm in 1913 or 1914, producing Japanese paintings for export to foreigners. When Ono gets an offer to go to live and study at the villa of the prestigious artist Mori-san, the Tortoise comes with him. Over the next seven years, Ono adopts Mori-san's style of painting and becomes Mori-san's prize pupil. But in the early 1920s, Ono gets to know Matsuda, a nationalist art appreciator, who convinces him to take a different direction in his art. The Tortoise is horrified at Ono's disloyalty to Mori-san's methods, and Mori-san tells Ono that he must leave the villa. Ono reflects how gratifying it was that, in later years, his own career took off, and Mori-san's declined.

The final set of recollections is set in June 1950. Ono reveals that he has learned of Matsuda's death and recounts the visit he paid to Matsuda the month before. On this visit, he tells Matsuda that both Noriko and Setsuko are now pregnant and that it will soon be five years since his wife Michiko's death. Matsuda says that they were two ordinary men who made a marginal contribution, but Ono says that he believes Matsuda actually feels proud of his life's work. Ono compares himself and Matsuda to the Tortoise to Shintaro, saying that he and Matsuda can be proud to have boldly tried to do something ambitious that they believed in, while the Tortoise and Shintaro have never tried to rise above mediocrity.

Ono also describes how the area that used to be the pleasure district is now full of office buildings. He sits in a bench outside one of these buildings and looks at the enthusiastic young office workers, whom he wishes well.

OCTOBER 1948

Summary

The narrator, Masuji Ono, describes his home and how he acquired it. Ono is not, nor has he ever been, rich, and he acquires his large and elegant house in an unusual way. Akira Sugimura, a respected and influential man in the city, built it. After his death, his family decides to sell his home to a buyer whom they feel will do the home justice. Ono is approached by Sugimura's two middle-aged daughters, who present him with a low price for the house and tell him they will investigate his background to see if he is worthy of it. The sisters add that their father was an art appreciator and knew Ono's work as an artist.

Ono's wife Michiko is offended by the Sugimuras' "high-handedness," but Ono reminds her that they will be investigated in a similar way in the coming years when their children start the process of finding spouses. Part of the reason the family wants to buy the Sugimura house is to bolster the family reputation and improve the children's marriage prospects. Ono himself finds the idea of an "auction of prestige" appealing. He thinks that more things should be awarded to people this way, instead of to the highest bidder. Still, he feels that the Sugimuras are rather rude to him: when they encounter him they often ask only about the state of the house, instead of making polite inquiries about his family.

While Ono feels flattered by the Sugimura family's attention, his wife finds the Sugimuras' investigation into the Ono families' reputation to be intrusive and somewhat insulting. Still, realizing that owning such a house will raise the family's stature, she is convinced that this investigation by the Sugimuras will ease later investigations into the family when her children are preparing to marry.

Years later, Ono reflects that after the "surrender" the younger of the two Sugimura sisters came to visit the house. Miss Sugimura hardly paid attention to Ono's news that Michiko and their son Kenji had been killed. She only seemed to care about the state of the house. Ono was annoyed at this, but, upon learning that she had lost most of her family during the war and was overcome by emotion, forgave her rudeness and showed her around.

Ono is referring to the surrender of Japan at the end of World War II. For Miss Sugimura, the damaged house is a reminder of all that she has lost during the war. Ono can understand her expressing her grief by focusing intensely on the house, which she sees as a physical legacy of her family's prominence.

The house was damaged during the war, especially the very beautiful corridor running alongside the garden to the eastern wing. Miss Sugimura was near tears at the sight, but Ono reassured her that he would repair it. However, supplies remained scarce for a long time after the surrender, and Ono had to dedicate all available supplies to repairing damage to the main house. With only himself and his daughter Noriko living there, he felt less urgency to open the eastern wing. Today, Ono reports, the corridor is covered by sheets of tarpaulin and full of dust and cobwebs. Ono has, however, repaired the damage to the veranda, where his family had often spent time chatting before the war.

Ono recalls his married daughter Setsuko's visit the previous month. On the morning after Setsuko's arrival, Ono and his two daughters sit on the veranda, chatting as they used to before

the war. Noriko tells her sister that their father has become much gentler and less tyrannical but needs a lot of looking after, because he spends his days moping around the house. Ono contradicts Noriko but does so with a laugh to communicate that he knows the jabs are in good humor. Noriko adds that she won't come back to look after him after she marries. Setsuko appears to grow uneasy during her sister's remarks and shoots Ono an inquiring glance. Eager to change the subject, she scolds her son Ichiro, who is rowdily running back and forth on the veranda. Setsuko calls to Ichiro to come sit down, but he ignores her.

Because Ono gives very little insight into his family life before the war, Noriko's comment that Ono used to act like a tyrant gives a rare glimpse into how Ono is viewed by his family. It suggests that, since the war, Ono sees himself as having lost in an intergenerational conflict and no longer tries to strictly control his children. It also suggests that Ono is an unreliable narrator, because he never describes aggressive aspects of his personality like this "tyrannical" attitude Noriko refers to.

Ono calls to Ichiro to come sit with him so that they can discuss "men's things." Ichiro obeys and asks his grandfather whether "the monster is prehistoric." Ono has no idea what Ichiro is talking about, but Setsuko explains that Ichiro saw a movie poster with a monster on it that sparked his curiosity. Ono tells Ichiro they would need to see the movie to find out if the monster is prehistoric, but that he isn't sure the movie will be appropriate for a young child like Ichiro. Ichiro becomes insulted at this remark and shouts, "how dare you!" Noriko diverts Ichiro's attention, saying she will not be able to lift the heavy table without his help.

Seven-year-old Ichiro is impatient with anyone who treats him like the child that he is. He is endeared to anyone who treats him like a strong, powerful man, and instantly enraged at being treated like a little boy. By taking Ichiro's interest in the monster movie seriously, Ono can bond with his grandson. Ono's suggestion that Ichiro will be scared by the movie, however, outrages his grandson.

Left alone with her father, Setsuko asks if Noriko's marriage is imminent. Ono tells her it is not and recounts how Noriko has spoken indiscreetly in the same way about her marriage in front of strangers. Setsuko falls into thought, and Ono looks at her face. He thinks that she has gotten better looking as she has gotten older, just as her mother predicted she would. When Setsuko was young, Noriko had teased her and called her "boy." Setsuko says that she imagines it was a terrible blow for Noriko when, the year before, the Miyake family had cut off marriage talks at the last minute. Setsuko asks her father if he ever heard anything about why the proposal fell through, explaining that her husband Suichi believes there must be some secret reason behind it. Coldly, Ono tells her he would have told her the reason if he knew it.

In the present, Ono explains that it may seem like he was short with Setsuko, but this was not the first time she had questioned him about the Miyakes' withdrawal and he was frustrated by the suspicion that he was keeping something from her. Ono provides his own analysis of the Miyakes' withdrawal from marriage talks, saying that the Miyakes likely pulled out at the last minute because they felt that their social status was inferior to the Ono family's. Perhaps they waited until the last minute because they were confused about the right thing to do. Jiro and

Noriko claimed that it was a love match, but in the end, they decided it wouldn't be right to marry above their station. Digressing further, Ono says he gives little thought to status and is often surprised at how highly he is esteemed. For instance, on a recent evening, he was drinking in Mrs. Kawakami's place (a bar), when Shintaro advised Mrs. Kawakami that Ono could help her relative get a job. Ono realizes that Shintaro is remembering a time in 1935 or 1936 when he had given Shintaro's younger brother Yoshio a recommendation. The two brothers had come to his home to thank him, promising him their eternal gratitude. Ono says this visit showed him how far his status had been elevated through all his hard work, something he never would have noticed otherwise because he is unconscious of status. Ono tells Shintaro and Mrs. Kawakami that he now has fewer connections, but he wonders if perhaps he does in fact still have influence that he himself is unaware of.

Even this early in the novel, Ono's claim that he does not notice his own status seems suspicious in light of his desire to describe winning the "auction of prestige" for his house. Instead, Ono seems to be deceiving himself into believing that he often underestimates his own status, because he hopes that he is actually mistaken about how much his status has been diminished in the years since the war. In the mid-1930s, Ono believes his work as an artist had earned him influence among decisionmakers and gratitude from those who looked to him for help.

Ono says that, even if Shintaro seems naïve, it is nice to spend time with someone who is not bitter like most people these days. It is pleasant to visit Mrs. Kawakami's and find Shintaro at the same bar he has been visiting for the last seventeen years. Shintaro, who was once Ono's pupil, still treats him with great respect and asks him questions about technique, even though he no longer works as a real artist.

Mrs. Kawakami often teases the gullible Shintaro, tricking him into thinking she is serious when she is kidding. Shintaro also sometimes believes people are joking when they are serious. For instance, once Shintaro wondered aloud what had become of a general who had recently been executed as a war criminal. Other customers in the bar disapproved of Shintaro's admiring attitude towards the general, but when Mrs. Kawakami told him the general's fate, Shintaro thought that she was joking around.

Mrs. Kawakami has been aged by the war, and she has very little business at her bar. The pleasure district where her bar is located used to be full of many bars and people strolling, but now all the other businesses are gone. In the old days, many artists and writers spent their time talking and drinking late into the night.

Ono's favorite haunt in the area was called Migi-Hidari. He helped the bar become the most prominent one in the neighborhood and had been provided with his own table, where his best students would sit and talk to him.

Ono recounts how he once told his students assembled at the Migi-Hidari about the incident with Shintaro and his brother Yoshio. Shintaro had not been one of the top students. Ono's protégé Kuroda had mocked Shintaro for his extreme gratitude at Ono's intercession to help his

brother get a “mere white-collar job.” Ono said he was surprised to see, based on his ability to get Yoshio a job, how far his stature had grown. Kuroda replied that Ono was extremely modest and had no idea how respected he was by the public and his students. This kind of praise was common when his students became drunk, and Kuroda was often the one to give these speeches. Ono says he usually ignored these outpourings but found Kuroda’s praise very gratifying on this occasion.

In the present day, the atmosphere in Mrs. Kawakami’s place feels to Ono like it has never changed, but the rest of the pleasure district is unrecognizable. Right after the war, many of the buildings were still standing, and Ono hoped there would be repairs and activity would return to the district. Instead, bulldozers came and tore down the buildings. There has been nothing but rubble in the area surrounding Mrs. Kawakami’s place for the last three years. Ono recalls recently looking back at the pleasure district from the Bridge of Hesitation, which leads from it to his house, seeing smoke rising from the rubble, and feeling melancholy.

Ono returns to his account of Setsuko’s visit of the month before. Leaving his daughters talking on the veranda, Ono goes to find Ichiro, who is impersonating a man on horseback, yelling, “hi yo silver!” and other words Ono cannot understand. Ono asks Ichiro if he is pretending to be a samurai or a ninja, but Ichiro replies that he is pretending to be Lone Ranger. Ono tries to explain to Ichiro why it would be more interesting to pretend to be a Japanese hero, but Ichiro ignores his grandfather. Ono becomes frustrated, but then gives up on trying to explain to Ichiro and instead apologizes to him.

Ono picks up a sketchpad that he gave to Ichiro as a gift the night before. Ichiro does not want his grandfather to see his sketches, but Ono holds the sketchpad out of Ichiro’s reach. He sees that Ichiro has made several unfinished sketches of trams.

Ono offers to help Ichiro make his drawings better, which interests Ichiro. He asks his grandfather if he used to be a famous artist, and if it’s true that he had to retire because Japan lost the war. Ono tells Ichiro that everyone retires once they get old like him and want a rest. Ichiro says that he wants to see one of his grandfather’s paintings, but Ono diverts his grandson’s attention. He tells Ichiro to draw something he saw the day before. Ichiro begins to draw the skyline of a city with a large reptile standing on top of a building and tiny people fleeing in fear on the streets below. Ono says the drawing is good and asks Ichiro questions about it.

Ono tells Ichiro that, as a reward for his good work on the drawing, he will take him to see the monster movie. Ichiro says his grandfather may be scared, but Ono says that Ichiro’s aunt and mother are more likely to be scared. Ichiro laughs uproariously at this. Ono encourages Ichiro to continue with his drawing, but Ichiro excitedly scribbles on the drawing before running off to find Noriko, yelling “hi yo Silver!” Ono sits for some minutes, thinking about nothing in particular, as he often does.

Eventually Ono goes out to the veranda and finds Setsuko sitting there. Noriko and Ichiro are in the garden below. Ono sits with Setsuko and tells her about Ichiro’s game. Setsuko explains that Ichiro was playing cowboy and pretending to speak English. Ono reflects that Ichiro would never

have been allowed to see a cowboy movie only a few years before, and Setsuko replies that her husband, Suichi, thinks that American heroes are a good influence on their son. Ono tells Setsuko that he promised Ichiro to take him to the movies and hopes they can all go together the next day. Setsuko says that this is kind of him, but she thinks Noriko may have other plans for the next day. Ono says that he knows nothing of Noriko's plans and he is sure Ichiro will have his heart set on seeing the movie.

After supper that evening, Ono tells Noriko about his plan to take Ichiro to the monster movie. Noriko says they already have plans to go to the deer park the next day. Ono counters that the deer park can wait, but Noriko says they also plan to visit Mrs. Watanabe. Setsuko thanks her father for his generosity towards Ichiro and suggests that they go to the cinema the following day. Ono asks Ichiro if he wants to go to the deer park or to the movies, but Ichiro won't reply. Ono persists in asking him what he wants, and Ichiro runs from the room. Ono tells Noriko that she has upset Ichiro. Noriko says that Ono is being ridiculous: they already have plans and, besides, Ichiro won't enjoy such a scary movie. Ono goes looking for Ichiro, but when he finds him, Ichiro does not respond to Ono's words of consolation.

Ono rejoins his daughters. Setsuko asks him gently if he will accompany them the next day, but Ono replies that he has things he must do. Annoyed, Noriko says to her sister that their father has nothing to do but mope around the house. Setsuko says that she will stay at home the next day with her father to catch up. Noriko says that Setsuko should not let Ono spoil her trip, but Setsuko says that it will be very pleasant for her to spend time with her father, and Ichiro will enjoy spending time alone with Noriko. Ono is glad about this outcome, because he looks forward to speaking to Setsuko. It does not occur to him that she has something in particular she wishes to discuss with him.

The next day, Setsuko enters the reception room to find Ono standing there lost in thought. Ono explains that this would have been unusual for him before his retirement, because he had made a practice of only entering the reception room on special occasions. In his own father's home, he had not been allowed to enter the reception room until he was twelve. He believes that some of his talent for capturing a scene after only a brief glimpse of it comes from the days of his childhood when he would try to reconstruct what the reception room looked like based on only a brief glance.

The narrative jumps back to Ono's childhood, in Tsuruoka Village. Ono is twelve when his father begins to summon him to the reception room once a week to discuss business. Ono's father shows him his ledgers and talks to him for a long time about his profession. Ono does not understand the things his father tells him but is afraid to let on about his ignorance. Looking back on these "business meetings," Ono is still unsure why his father put him through this experience. Perhaps it was to show him that he was expected to take over the family business, or perhaps it was to make a show of involving him, so that Ono could not later complain that his father had mishandled the business without his knowledge.

The narrative skips ahead to a moment in Ono's adolescence. One night when Ono is fifteen, his father calls him into the reception room. Ono is struck by the presence of a large ashpot, usually

reserved for use by guests, which sits in front of his father. Ono's father had asked him to bring all his paintings to the room, but now he questions whether Ono really brought every one. Ono admits that there may have been a few paintings he left out, and Ono's father says he imagines these are Ono's favorites of his paintings. Ono's father tells him that his mother is under the impression that Ono would like to become a painter. Ono's father says that Ono's mother must have been mistaken about this, and, when prompted to reply, Ono concurs that his mother must be mistaken.

Ono's father says he hears his wife in the hallway, but Ono hears nothing. Ono's father commands Ono to ask her to step into the room, and to fetch his remaining paintings. Ono goes out into the hallway, which is empty, as he expected it would be. When Ono returns to the room with his mother, he thinks he smells burning, although the ashpot looks untouched.

Ono's father tells Ono that when he was only a baby, the family was visited by a wandering priest who claimed to have insight into Ono's character. Ono's mother says in a whisper that it is best not to take to heart what such men say. But Ono's father continues, recounting how this wandering priest told them that Ono would tend toward slothfulness and deceit. Ono's mother counters that the priest also said many good things about Ono. Ono's father concedes this point but says that he has also observed Ono's laziness and weak will as he has grown up.

Ono's father picks up his paintings and again asks his son if his mother is wrong in her belief that he wants to be an artist. Ono is silent. His mother tells his father that Ono is young and will outgrow the idea of becoming an artist. Ignoring this, Ono's father tells Ono that artists live in a depraved, impoverished world. Ono's mother says that some artists surely rise above this fate, and Ono's father admits that some artists do. But, he says, Ono is unlikely to be the exception to the rule. He says that his duty as a parent is to protect Ono from growing up into someone who will shame the family. Ono's father says he wants to speak to Ono's mother and tells Ono to leave.

Later that night, Ono is walking through the darkened hallway when he runs into his mother. He says that he smells burning, but she says he must be imagining this. He asks his mother what his father is doing, and she says he is working on something in the reception room. Then Ono tells his mother that he does not care what his father is doing and that "the only thing Father's succeeded in kindling is my ambition." Ono's mother expresses her approval, but Ono says she has misunderstood him. His ambition is not to be a businessman like his father, but to rise above a petty interest in money. Ono's mother tells him that when he is older his priorities will change. Ono tells his mother that his business meetings with his father disgust him. His mother says nothing, and Ono repeats that his father has kindled his ambition.

In the present, Ono says that he sees he has digressed. He returns the narrative to the second day of Setsuko's visit, when she found him in the reception room. Setsuko is arranging flowers in front of a Buddhist altar. Speaking very indirectly, Setsuko says Ono may want to take certain precautionary steps to ensure Noriko's marriage negotiations progress as planned. Ono says he doesn't know what she means. She says that she is concerned about the families' investigations into one another's pasts. Ono says that they will hire the same detective they

hired last time. Setsuko replies that she is concerned about the other side's investigation of their family. Ono says he doesn't think they have anything to hide.

Setsuko laughs nervously and apologizes for being so bad at expressing herself. She says Suichi would be much better at expressing her meaning and that they do not want any misunderstandings to arise about the past, since Noriko is almost twenty-six and they cannot afford another failed marriage negotiation. She says that she is sure that her concern is unwarranted and that her father has already taken all the necessary steps to ensure Noriko's marriage goes through. Looking at her floral arrangement, she says that she has little skill at these things. Ono says the flowers look splendid. Setsuko laughs self-consciously.

The narrative shifts to the present, and Ono describes how, reflecting on this conversation he had with Setsuko, he feels irritated. He realizes that his irritation is not directed at Setsuko so much as it is at Suichi, her husband. Ono knows how much Suichi suffered in Manchuria and tries to show tolerance when Suichi shows signs of bitterness towards members of Ono's generation. But Ono feels resentful all the same that Setsuko seems to share Suichi's perspective and that this perspective has spread to Noriko. During Setsuko's visit, he noticed that the two sisters would sometimes break off their conversation when he approached.

Ono recalls how, a few days before, Noriko told him about running into Jiro Miyake. She told Ono that she had asked Jiro if he was going to be married. Ono was shocked at Noriko's indiscretion. She reported that Jiro had been embarrassed but had admitted that he was going to be married soon. Noriko said she almost asked Jiro why he and his family pulled out of the marriage negotiations the year before, and Ono replied that it is good she did not ask, saying that the Miyakes had explained at the time that they felt Jiro was too inferior in status to marry Noriko. Noriko said that that was just a formality, and she never learned the true reason that the courtship had ended. When Noriko said that perhaps she wasn't pretty enough, Ono replied that it had nothing to do with her. Pointedly, Noriko said that she wonders why the Miyakes pulled out if not for any reason having to do with her.

Ono says that this exchange with Noriko reminded him of the time he ran into Jiro outside of his workplace. Jiro had looked shabby in his work clothes and had acted awkwardly as he and Ono walked to the tram and then waited for their respective trams. A week later, the Miyakes had withdrawn from marriage talks. Ono tries to analyze his encounter with Jiro for signs that it had something to do with the Miyakes' decision to withdraw from talks. He wonders aloud to Setsuko, who is visiting again, if Jiro seemed awkward because he already knew that his family would be ending the marriage negotiations. Setsuko asks if Jiro said anything that hinted at this, but Ono cannot remember.

Ono says even a week after the conversation, he could hardly remember it. He explains that he had been preoccupied with trying to put Jiro at ease and had not paid much attention to what was said. Ono suggests to Setsuko that perhaps Jiro was self-conscious about his workplace in front of Ono and this was why he ultimately decided his status was too low to marry Noriko. Setsuko treats this theory skeptically.

Setsuko seems to have new theories, instilled in her by Suichi, for why Noriko's marriage fell through. Since her recent visit, Ono has been thinking over his encounter with Jiro again, even though he could hardly remember it as little as a week after it occurred.

Ono recalls part of his conversation with Jiro that he hadn't previously seen as significant. While waiting for their respective trams, Jiro told Ono that the president of his company had died. After Ono expressed his condolences, Jiro explained that the President had killed himself as an apology for the company's activities during the war. Ono argued that such a suicide is a shame and a waste of life, and that people shouldn't be blamed for supporting their country during a war. Jiro said that there was relief in the company and a feeling that the President's suicide would allow the company to move on. He said many men who were responsible for the mistakes of the war were cowards compared to the President. He continued that some of the men who made the most consequential mistakes had failed to admit to their mistakes, and that this was "the greatest cowardice of all."

As Ono reflects on that conversation now, he wonders whether Jiro really said those words. They sound much more to him like something Suichi would say and, indeed, he reflects, since he considered Jiro to be his future son-in-law at that time, he might have confused his words with something his actual son-in-law, Suichi, had said. As he reconsiders this, he becomes sure that it was Suichi who used the phrase "the greatest cowardice of all" on the evening after the ceremony for the burial of Kenji's ashes.

The narrative turns to the day of the ceremony for the burial of Ono's son Kenji's ashes. The ashes do not arrive until a year after Kenji's death and are mixed together with the ashes of other soldiers who were killed charging across a minefield in Manchuria. During the ceremony at the cemetery, Ono sees Suichi walk away looking angry. After the ceremony, Setsuko explains to Ono that Suichi has been to many similar ceremonies, and they make him angry. Ono is puzzled about why the ceremonies would do so.

Later, with the guests gathered in the reception room, Ono approaches Suichi, who is standing alone, to ask him why the ceremony made him angry. Suichi says that he is angry at the waste of life. Ono counters that Kenji died bravely. Suichi stares at him in silence, which unnerves Ono. Then Suichi says that half of his high school class died a similarly courageous death for a stupid cause. He says the people responsible for all those deaths are still alive now, enjoying great success and getting along with the American occupiers.

Looking back, Ono thinks that it was at this moment that Suichi used the phrase, saying that those who have not admitted responsibility show "the greatest cowardice of all." Ono thinks that it was because he was drained by the ceremony that he did not try to challenge Suichi. Instead, he talks to him about his work and Ichiro. He only came to realize later that Suichi's mood that evening was typical of him and that he no longer behaved as he had when he married Setsuko, two years before the war. Ono agrees with Suichi that too many members of his generation died in the war and understands that his experiences in Manchuria were terrible. Still, he finds it worrying that he feels such bitterness and even maliciousness towards members of the older generation.

Ono sees something of the same bitterness in the fact that the Hirayama boy has recently been beaten up for singing old military songs and chanting slogans. The Hirayama boy is actually a fifty-year-old man with developmental disabilities. He used to wander the old pleasure district during its heyday, singing patriotic songs and receiving food or money as a reward. The Hirayama boy doesn't understand that these songs are no longer popular in the post-war period and still sings them. Ono thinks that the current climate of bitterness in the country lead people to beat the Hirayama boy. Reflecting on this, he thinks that perhaps Jiro really did make the comment about "the greatest cowardice of all." Perhaps, he thinks, Jiro was and is just as embittered as everyone else in his generation.

Ono turns his narrative to the trip he took the day before on the tram to the Arakawa district. With its residential atmosphere Arakawa hardly felt like part of the city, and was only connected to the city in 1931, when the current tramlines were laid down.

Digressing again, Ono explains that the introduction of these tramlines stretching all the way to Arakawa gave those living in the crowded city center a way to get some space and fresh air. The expansion of the tram also led to the blossoming of the area he calls "our old pleasure district."

Ono had been coming to the bars in the Furukawa area for twenty years before the expansion of the tramlines brought many more people to the neighborhood. In 1933 or 1934, when the authorities were in the process of shutting down decadent establishments, Ono wrote to them advocating for the transformation of a bar owned by an old veteran named Yamagata into a patriotic bar where artists and writers who supported the government could gather. The authorities responded to Ono's idea enthusiastically, and Yamagata renovated and expanded his bar. Soon after opening the bar, which he called the Migi-Hidari, Yamagata told Ono to pick a table to be reserved for his sole use.

Ono explains that, in 1933, he had been coming to Yamagata's place for twenty years already, starting in 1913 when he arrived in the city. In 1913, the Furukawa district was ugly, full of abandoned warehouses and shabby homes. Ono lived in an attic room where he hardly had enough space to stand up as he painted at night, causing him to splash the walls and tatami. Still, Ono was so thrilled to be making a living as an artist that he didn't mind the squalor. During the days he worked with fifteen others in a long room above a restaurant. Master Takeda, the owner of the art firm Ono was accepted by, pressed his employees to quickly produce large numbers of paintings on a deadline. Often, they worked on two or three hours of sleep.

A year after Ono started working for Master Takeda, an artist named Yasunari Nakahara joined the firm. Nakahara never gained any reputation but went on to teach at a high school. It is a position he still holds today, because the authorities did not see any reason to replace him. Ono remembers Yasunari by his nickname, "the Tortoise." He still has a self-portrait the Tortoise painted. The painting honestly depicts the Tortoise's timidity and earnestness, but also gives an inflated sense of his intellect. Ono says that he has never had a colleague who could paint an absolutely honest self-portrait, since it is impossible to see oneself as others do.

The Tortoise got his nickname because he painted very slowly. In the rushed climate of the

Takeda firm, the other workers became frustrated with the Tortoise's low productivity. One day, two men began to accuse him of laziness. The Tortoise asked for their patience, but they continued to insult him. At this point, Ono stepped in and defended the Tortoise, saying he had more artistic integrity than the others because he did not rush in his work.

Looking back, Ono cannot be sure that he defended the Tortoise exactly as he has said he did. He says it may seem like he is giving himself too much credit for making an obvious point. He explains that the work produced at the Takeda Firm was meant for foreigners who wanted things that looked Japanese but who would be unlikely to notice lapses in style. Most of the employees cared only about speed, so he thinks he is not taking too much credit when he says that standing up for the Tortoise showed that he was able to think independently even if it meant going against those around him.

The narrative jumps to a couple of months after Ono intervened on the Tortoise's behalf. Ono and the Tortoise run into one another on the grounds of the Tamagawa temple, and the Tortoise tells Ono how grateful he is for his support. Ono tells the Tortoise that he has been thinking of leaving Master Takeda's for some time. He tells the Tortoise that he has been invited to become a pupil of the painter and printer Seiji Moriyama, who is a true artist. Ono tells the Tortoise to show his own work to Moriyama in the hopes of being accepted as a pupil.

The Tortoise is uncomfortable at Ono's suggestion that he leave Master Takeda's firm. He says that he got the job because of the influence of a friend of his father's, and he could not be so disloyal. Then, realizing he has implied that Ono is being disloyal, the Tortoise becomes embarrassed. Ono says Takeda has not earned their loyalty, and he does not want to live his life blindly following others in the name of loyalty.

Reflecting on this in the present moment, Ono says he is not sure that he expressed his thoughts on loyalty to the Tortoise exactly as he says he did. He has often repeated the story of his decision to leave Takeda's firm and his memory of the occasion may have changed over the years.

Ono says he often told the story of leaving the Takeda firm to his pupils gathered at his table at the Migi-Hidari. Ono's brilliant pupils would get drunk around the table but always turn towards him when they thought he might impart some wisdom. On one occasion, Kuroda asked what Ono had learned from the experience at the Takeda firm, and Ono replied that he had learned the importance of questioning authority. He said he has encouraged his students to "rise above the sway of things" and evade the "undesirable and decadent influences" that have weakened the country in recent years. He said that those around the table have a right to be proud of spearheading a new "more manly" national spirit.

Ono reflects that the Migi-Hidari became a patriotic hub, where people got drunk and were merry, but with dignity. He still has a painting of Kuroda's entitled "The Patriotic Spirit" that depicts a night of drinking at the Migi-Hidari. The painting challenges the expectation that the patriotic spirit is represented by soldiers, suggesting that there is patriotism in the way people live their daily lives. Back then, Ono reflects, Kuroda believed in such things.

These days, Ono and Shintaro often reminisce about old times as they sit drinking at Mrs. Kawakami's place. One night, Mrs. Kawakami tells Ono he should encourage people to bring the old pleasure district back to its former glory. Ono enthusiastically supports the idea, hopeful that he can bring people back to start drinking in the area again. He hopes that perhaps Mrs. Kawakami's place can expand and begin to serve the same function that the Migi-Hidari once served. He says that he will give this serious thought once Noriko's future is settled.

Ono says that he has only seen his former protégé Kuroda once since the end of the war. It was in the first year of the occupation, before the pleasure district had been torn down. Ono was walking through the remains of the district in the rain, when he saw Kuroda. Kuroda's face looked aged. He did not bow to Ono, but turned and walked away.

Ono says he would not be giving Kuroda any thought if his name had not come up when he ran into Dr. Saito last month when he took Ichiro to the monster movie. On that day, Noriko and Setsuko do not accompany them to the movie, and Ichiro says that it is because they are too scared. Ono is puzzled when Ichiro insists on bringing a rain coat with him to the theater, even though it is unlikely to rain, but he concludes that it is another of Ichiro's ways of pretending to be an American pop culture hero. On the walk to the tram, Ichiro says to his grandfather that he has asked Noriko to show him Ono's art, but she has refused. Ono says that the paintings are tidied away. Ichiro says that Aunt Noriko is disobedient.

On the tram, Ono and Ichiro run into Dr. Saito, the father of Taro, the man with whom Noriko is in marriage negotiations. Ono gives a little information about the Saitos: unlike the Miyakes, the Saitos are a family of stature. Ono says that he and Dr. Saito have been slightly acquainted for many years, because they both knew one another's reputations in the art world. When they run into each other on the train, both Dr. Saito and Ono praise Mr. Kyo, who is serving as the go-between for the two families. Dr. Saito asks Ichiro questions in a friendly manner and praises him to Ono.

A little before his tram stop, Dr. Saito tells Ono that they have a mutual acquaintance: a Mr. Kuroda. Dr. Saito says that Kuroda mentioned Ono's name. Ono says he has not seen Kuroda since before the war and asks how he is. Dr. Saito reports that Kuroda has been appointed to teach art at the new Uemachi College. He says that he himself advised the college on the appointment. He has not talked to Kuroda at length but says he will tell him that he saw Ono when they next meet. After exchanging a few more pleasantries, Dr. Saito exits the tram.

At the theater, Ono and Ichiro see the poster Ichiro copied in his drawing. Ichiro laughs and says that it is clear the monster is made up and it isn't scary. During the film, however, Ichiro buries his head beneath his raincoat, telling Ono that the film is boring and to alert him if anything interesting happens. Ono now understands that Ichiro brought the raincoat to hide under it. But at dinner with Noriko and Setsuko that night, Ichiro says it was the best movie he has ever seen. He says that his Aunt Noriko would have been terrified. Ono mentions that they ran into Dr. Saito and that Dr. Saito had met Kuroda. He notices his daughters exchange a glance and has the sense that they have been discussing him behind his back.

After dinner, Ichiro is having trouble going to sleep. Noriko blames her father's poor judgment in taking Ichiro to the monster movie, then goes to sit with her nephew, leaving Setsuko and Ono alone together. Setsuko says how good Noriko is with children and how sad it is that she is still unmarried. Ono agrees that the war has interrupted the normal course of Noriko's life. Setsuko brings up Dr. Saito, and then Dr. Saito's acquaintance with Kuroda. She says she remembers when Kuroda used to visit them and spend long hours in the reception room with her father. Then she suggests that Ono may want to visit Kuroda and certain other acquaintances from his past before the Saito's detective does, to prevent any misunderstandings. After this, Ono and Setsuko do not discuss the matter for the rest of her visit.

The narrative again shifts to Ono's recent tram ride to Arakawa. Ono noticed many changes to the neighborhoods he passed on the way, where new apartment blocks were being built and old factories are being abandoned. The suburb of Arakawa, however, looked the same as before the war. When he arrived at Chishu Matsuda's house, a woman of forty answered the bell and showed him into the reception room.

Ono tells the story of the first time he met Matsuda. At the time, he had been living at Seiji Moriyama's villa for six years. On the morning that Matsuda came to the villa and asked for him, Ono and some of the others who lived at Mori-san's villa were drinking and playing cards. Even though they would have defended their lifestyle if they had been questioned on it, the sudden arrival of a stranger made them feel guilty about their drinking, sleeping late, and general lack of routine.

That day, Matsuda arrived at the villa and asked to speak to Ono. He told Ono that he represented the Okada-Shingen Society, which Ono explains was an organization that put on exhibitions for artists in the city. (After the war, the Society was shut down by the Americans.) Matsuda had written to Ono to invite him to participate in an exhibition, and, after consulting with his teacher, Ono had written back to decline. When he arrived at the villa, Matsuda said that they should forget the exhibition. He had not come to represent the Okada-Shingen Society, but as a true lover of art. He told Ono that he wished to discuss ideas that may benefit Ono's development as an artist and then left Ono his card.

The narrative shifts back to the present, thirty years since that first meeting. Matsuda is helped into the reception room by the woman who answered the door. He is very ill and weak. He expresses his surprise to see Ono, saying they didn't part on the easiest terms. Ono says he didn't think they had quarreled. Matsuda says of course they had not quarreled, but it has been three years since they last saw one another. Ono says he has been meaning to come to visit for some time.

Matsuda apologizes for having missed Michiko's funeral and begins to reminisce about when Michiko and Ono first came together. Ono says that Matsuda facilitated their match, since his uncle was too awkward to do it, and that Michiko was always grateful to him for it. Matsuda says how cruel it was for Michiko to be killed right at the war's end, then says he must be making Ono sad with these reflections. Ono says it is nice to remember her with Matsuda, because it brings him back to the old days.

The woman who answered the door comes in with tea, and Matsuda introduces her as Miss Suzuki. He tells her that he and Ono were close colleagues once and tells Ono that Miss Suzuki is his nurse and housekeeper. She exits the room, and for a few moments after she leaves, Ono and Matsuda sit in silence. Ono has an urge to go look at Matsuda's garden, which he remembers as beautiful, but realizes that Matsuda is too ill to accompany him and stays seated. Matsuda breaks the silence, saying he truly owes Miss Suzuki his life.

Matsuda says he has been lucky not to have lost his savings and assets in the war, although he has lost his health. He says he would share with an old colleague in need, especially since he has no heirs. Ono laughs and says this is not why he has come. Matsuda tells the story of a colleague of his who is now reduced to begging from old friends.

Ono tells Matsuda the reason he has come: his daughter Noriko is in marriage talks and someone may approach Matsuda to ask about the family. He asks Matsuda if anyone approached him last year, and Matsuda says he was very ill and wasn't seeing anyone, but he would only have had nice things to say then, and only has nice things to say about Ono now. Still, he says, he is glad that this concern of Ono's brought them back together. Matsuda says that Ono still looks uneasy.

Matsuda tells Ono that he has already assured him that he will only say good things. Ono repeats how delicate the marriage talks may be. After a pause, Matsuda sighs and says that he understands that there are some people these days who would condemn what they had tried to do, but he believes that they have much to be proud of. Still, he says, he will exercise delicacy in discussing the past.

Matsuda asks who else Ono has visited. Ono tells him he is the first person he has come to see, because he doesn't know where the rest of their old colleagues are. Matsuda says that, if Ono is concerned about the past, he should probably seek out Kuroda, even if it will be painful for them to meet again. Ono says he has no idea where Kuroda is. Matsuda replies that he hopes the detective is equally unable to find him. Then he says that Ono looks quite pale. Ono says that he is just worried about his daughter's marriage. Matsuda says that he wonders if he made a mistake in never marrying and having children, but children seem to bring mostly stress. Ono agrees. Soon after, Miss Suzuki comes in to tell Matsuda it is time to rest. Waiting for the tram from Arakawa after this visit, Ono is comforted that Matsuda will speak positively about him. He feels it was worthwhile to reestablish contact with his old colleague.

APRIL 1949

Summary

Often Ono walks from his house to the Bridge of Hesitation that leads to the pleasure district to survey the construction going on all around him. The Bridge of Hesitation is so named because men would sometimes stand there deciding whether to go home to their wives or go out for a night of drinking. Now, Ono stands there looking at how new apartment blocks are going up in the place where the pleasure district used to be. All over the city, ruins from the bombing are

being cleared away and new buildings are being constructed. Outside Mrs. Kawakami's, a concrete road and the foundations for large office buildings are being built. Mrs. Kawakami has received an offer to sell her property, and she is considering it, especially since Shintaro no longer comes to her bar, making Ono her only customer.

Over the winter, Shintaro told Ono that he was applying for jobs teaching art at high schools. Although Ono has not been Shintaro's teacher for many years, he was surprised that Shintaro had not consulted him about his job applications. Then, a little after New Year, Shintaro comes to Ono's house. Ono shows him into the reception room, where Shintaro thanks Ono for all he has done for him over the years. He tells Ono that his application at the high school is progressing well, but the committee is not satisfied about a couple points in Shintaro's past. Shintaro says that he would like Ono to write to the committee to confirm something he told them: that the two had had a disagreement while producing the posters for the China crisis.

Ono says he does not recall this disagreement. Shintaro says he was drunk at an engagement party and rudely told Ono that he disagreed with him about the China crisis posters. Ono stands up and goes to look out onto his garden. He asks Shintaro if he is trying to disassociate himself from Ono's influence. Shintaro denies this. Ono says that Shintaro should face the past: Shintaro got credit for the poster campaign at the time and should not lie about it now. Shintaro says that he respects Ono, but he is in the middle of his career and has different considerations than a retiree like Ono. Without replying, Ono silently watches snow falling in the garden. Shintaro tells Ono that he will leave the name and address of the committee, and he hopes Ono will write. Ono does not reply, and Shintaro eventually excuse himself and leaves.

Looking back on this conversation from the present moment, Ono says that it may seem that he treated Shintaro harshly, but what had been going on in his own life sheds light on why he felt no sympathy for those trying to evade responsibility. In fact, Shintaro's visit was only a few days after Noriko's miai, the formal meeting between two families arranging their children's marriages.

Mr. Kyo arranges the miai for a day in November at the Kasuga Park Hotel. Ono is unhappy with the choice of location but gives his agreement when he hears the Saitos like the food there. Mr. Kyo tells Ono that he should feel free to invite a relative or close friend, because the miai will be weighted towards the groom's side with Taro Saito's mother, father, and brother all there. Setsuko is far away, and there is no one else to invite, so only Noriko and Ono plan to go to the miai.

Instead of describing the pain of not having Noriko's mother Michiko present at this important moment in their daughter's life, Ono focuses on the question of whether the hotel is an ideal spot. Ono escapes considering painful family loss by focusing on the physical surroundings of the miai.

The weeks leading up to the miai are tense ones for Ono and Noriko. Ono does not tell Noriko about all his efforts to make sure things go smoothly, and she criticizes him for laziness and moping around doing nothing. Later, Ono wonders whether Noriko would have had her more

confidence if he had shared what he was doing with her.

As usual, Ono does not speak directly to those around him about what he is doing. It is unclear what Noriko would like to see her father doing to prepare for the *miai*, but she seems certain that he will somehow ruin her chances of marrying.

One afternoon, Ono sits on the veranda looking at shrubs he has pruned. Noriko has just gotten home from work, and she tells Ono that he has ruined the bamboo, just like he ruined the azaleas. She says that he meddles because he has too much time on his hands. Ono says that the pruning looks fine, and Noriko says that he must be going blind or suffering from poor taste. Ono says that Noriko never did have much taste; she and her sister took after their mother, while Kenji took after him. He says that Michiko would sometimes even criticize his paintings, but then she would laugh and say she was mistaken. Noriko asks if Ono believes he was always right about his paintings. Ono says Noriko can re-prune the shrubs if she wants to change how they look. Noriko says she is much too busy to do that because she doesn't sit around all day like he does.

It is unclear from Ono's account (the only one that the reader gets) what Noriko is referring to when she says he meddles too much. It may be a reference to an undisclosed family secret. The references to Kenji and Michiko suggest that there are family stories that are being referred to but not revealed. At the same time, the instance has some resonance with Ono's troubles as an artist. While Ono looks at the world of the city or garden, he is able to accurately depict it. But when he tries to change the garden by pruning it, or to change the culture of the city by encouraging the development of patriotic bars, he is less successful.

Looking back on this conversation from the present moment, Ono reflects that, if he were to tell Noriko how much he had been doing on her behalf, she would likely be ashamed of her behavior towards him. In fact, earlier that day, he had gone to visit Kuroda.

Ono reports that he had easily found where Kuroda lives. A professor at Uemachi College had told Ono the address and updated him on Kuroda's career. His years in prison were strong credentials, so Kuroda was given a post as an art teacher. Ono says that, although it may seem perverse, he is glad to see that Kuroda's career is progressing well, even though they became estranged.

Ono goes to Kuroda's apartment and rings the bell twice. A young man answers the door and asks if Ono is a work associate. Hearing that he is, the young man, named Enchi, asks Ono to come into the apartment to wait for Kuroda. The young man is Kuroda's protégé and lives with Kuroda, because he has been thrown out of his own apartment for splashing paint on the *tatami*. Ono praises a painting on the wall which he believes to be Kuroda's, but Enchi says it is his own. He says that Kuroda often tells him he must discover his own style. Ono tells him he has much talent and a style of his own will develop with time. Enchi thanks him for the encouragement and urges him to wait for Kuroda to come. Enchi praises Kuroda's generosity to him.

Enchi tells Ono not to hurry away, because Kuroda will want to thank him. Ono is surprised at

this. Enchi says he had assumed that Ono represents the Cordon Society. Ono says that this is not the case. Enchi asks Ono's name and, hearing it, walks away to look out the window. After a silence, Ono asks if Kuroda will be coming soon. Enchi says that Ono should not trouble himself by waiting any longer. Ono says he will wait, but Enchi says that he doesn't need to—he will tell Kuroda that Ono visited, and Kuroda may write to Ono.

Ono tells Enchi that he must have been a very young man back when Ono and Kuroda knew one another, and he shouldn't jump to conclusions about the relationship without knowing the full details. Enchi says Ono should leave and that he is shocked that Ono would dare to present himself as a friendly visitor. With a kind of strange composure, Enchi says that Ono must be the one who doesn't know the details: Kuroda was beaten in prison and accused of being a traitor. His shoulder was injured, and he was denied medical treatment. Ono gathers himself to leave, repeating to Enchi that he does not yet understand how complicated the world is. Enchi says to him that everyone knows now who the real traitors are.

From what Enchi says, it is clear that Ono is to blame for Kuroda's being jailed and treated as a traitor after Kuroda turned away from art that Ono saw as patriotic. While Ono seems to hope that he and Kuroda can come to an understanding now that time has passed, Enchi suggests that the rift between them is permanent because of how much Kuroda suffered. Ono seems to be deceiving himself when he says there are things Enchi doesn't understand that would change how he views what happened to Kuroda.

Looking back on this scene from the present moment, Ono says he did not allow Enchi's words to upset him but was disturbed that Kuroda might be so hostile to him, given how this could impact Noriko's marriage. He writes Kuroda a friendly letter saying he would like to see him, but he is disappointed to receive a cold refusal from Kuroda. Although Ono does not tell Noriko about his attempts to reach Kuroda, he imagines that his bad mood after receiving Kuroda's letter transmitted itself to her and made her anxious.

While Ono claims that he did not let Enchi's words bother him, the poor job he did pruning the plants in the garden suggests that he may have been very distraught that day. Kuroda's refusal to see him is yet another upsetting reminder to him that even if he can change his own view of his past to fit a new narrative, he cannot change the way others view it and this could have consequences for Noriko.

On the day of the miai, Noriko seems especially anxious. Ono tries to lighten her mood by joking about how long she is taking to get ready. Noriko snaps back that he has not even started to get ready and she can see that he is too proud to try to make a good impression even though it will determine her future. He asks her what she means by "too proud," but she says no more. Ono reflects on the contrast between Noriko's anxiety leading up to this miai and her casual approach to the miai with the Miyake family the previous year. He thinks she must have been quite confident that she would marry Jiro Miyake and been shocked when it fell through, but this does not excuse her rudeness towards him.

Ono describes the Kasuga Park Hotel. It used to be one of the city's best Western-style hotels,

but it is now decorated to fit the American occupiers' idea of a charmingly "Japanese" hotel.

The evening is not completely clear in Ono's memory, because the tension makes him drink more quickly than he usually does. He has a favorable impression of Taro Saito, his father, and mother. Taro's younger brother Mitsuo, however, seems to Ono to be looking at him with a hint of hostility. Mitsuo resembles Enchi somewhat. Ono begins to feel that perhaps the rest of the family also feels hostility towards him, but Mitsuo is the only one young enough to not know how to conceal it. Ono begins to look to Mitsuo as a barometer of how the evening is going.

Ono begins his account of the miai by casting some doubt on the accuracy of his memory. It seems possible that he is experiencing Mitsuo as being hostile to him merely because Mitsuo looks a bit like Kuroda's student Enchi, but in his anxiety and drunkenness, Ono reads actual hostility in Mitsuo's features and decides that Mitsuo's attitude reflects that of the entire Saito family.

For the first part of the evening, Noriko is very stiff and reserved. Although Noriko is quite bold when around people she knows, she often has difficulty striking the right tone with strangers. But Ono can see from the way the family treats Mrs. Saito that they are not looking for a demure, old-fashioned wife for Taro.

Dr. Saito is very good at creating a relaxed atmosphere. At one point, he raises the question of the large demonstrations happening in the city. He says he saw a young man who had been injured but intended to return immediately to the demonstrations and asks Ono's opinion of this. Ono thinks the whole table fixes their attention on him, waiting for his response. He says it is a shame so many have been injured. Mrs. Saito says that her husband believes the demonstrations are good for society, but she doesn't understand why. Saito says it is good that people are expressing their views openly. Taro says he thinks democracy is a good thing, but the Japanese are still learning how to handle the responsibility and should not be allowed to run riot. Dr. Saito laughs that it seems he is an odd man, more liberal than his son.

Dr. Saito asks Ono whether he sides with Mrs. Saito and Taro in believing his attitude towards the demonstrations is too liberal. Ono is drinking faster than he means to, so he cannot be sure if his impressions are right, but he thinks that the Saitos do not really seem to disagree. He repeats his earlier answer, that it is a shame people are getting hurt.

Ono is once again struck by how badly Noriko seems to be handling the tension. Taro's attempts to draw her out of her shell end in awkward silence.

Dr. Saito brings up Kuroda, explaining that his younger son Mitsuo studies at the Uemachi College. Ono asks Mitsuo if he know Kuroda well, and Mitsuo says he has no artistic talent and so he only knows Kuroda by reputation. Taro changes the subject, trying to engage Noriko on the topic of music. Then Mr. Kyo begins to tell a story.

Ono interrupts Mr. Kyo, asking Mitsuo if Kuroda has spoken to him about Ono. Mitsuo is confused, saying that he is not well-acquainted with Kuroda. Ono says that Kuroda likely does not have a high opinion of him. He continues that he is aware that some people think his career

was a negative influence, and Kuroda is likely one of these people. Ono thinks Dr. Saito is watching him carefully, as a teacher watches a pupil. Ono continues, saying that he admits he made many mistakes and that his influence was partially responsible for the nation's suffering. Dr. Saito asks if Ono means that he is unhappy with his work. Ono says that he is ready to admit that he made mistakes, because at the time he acted in good faith.

Ono has convinced himself that it is the strong ideological influence that he exerted that could be a stain on the family reputation in the eyes of the Saito family. Ono has a new perspective on his artistic past: he asserts that he may have been wrong to paint influential works that supported an ideology that has since been debunked, but that he did so in good faith. This stance both flatters his sense of his own artistic importance and sidesteps the fact that he was involved in Kuroda's being imprisoned.

Taro tells Ono that he is sure he is being too harsh with himself. Turning to Noriko, he asks if Ono is always so hard on himself. Noriko, who has been staring at her father in astonishment, replies without thinking. She says that her father is usually not hard on himself at all and sleeps through breakfast. Taro is happy to have gotten more of a response from Noriko, and, from then on, the tone changes. The *miai* goes from a stilted affair to a successful gathering. By the end of the evening, it seems clear that the two families get along and Taro and Noriko like one another.

Reflecting on the evening from the present moment, Ono says that it was not easy for him to make the declaration he did about his past, but he decided it was prudent. He cannot understand the impulse to lie about the past, because there is dignity in admitting to mistakes made in good faith. He says that Shintaro would be a happier man if he had the courage to honestly admit to his mistakes. Shintaro got the job at the school, and perhaps it was because he took Ono's advice and spoke to the committee about his past. Ono thinks it more likely, however, that Shintaro continued to lie.

Ono now believes that Shintaro has a cunning side to his nature that he had not noticed before. Ono raises the issue of Shintaro's cunning with Mrs. Kawakami, but she disagrees. She sighs sadly and says that it seems Shintaro will not return to her bar. The construction is continuing outside, and Ono is struck by how out of place the bar will soon be. He encourages her to accept the offer to buy her property. She says she has been in her bar for so long and becomes nostalgic. Ono thinks that it is true that they had all enjoyed the spirit of that time, but perhaps it is better that that world has passed away. He is tempted to say this to Mrs. Kawakami but decides it will hurt her feelings to hear that a place in which she invested so much of her life and energy is gone forever, and rightly so.

NOVEMBER 1949

SUMMARY

Ono remembers the first time he met Dr. Saito clearly. It was sixteen years ago, the day after he moved into his house. Ono was placing a sign with his name on his gatepost when Dr. Saito

approached, introduced himself, and told Ono that it is an honor to have an artist of his stature in the neighborhood. In the years after that first meeting, Dr. Saito and Ono always greeted each other politely when they would run into one another. He remembers this first meeting clearly enough that he is sure Setsuko was mistaken in some of the things she said the previous month during their walk through Kawabe Park. Ono is confident that Dr. Saito knew who Ono was before the marriage negotiations started.

Setsuko's visit this year was brief, and she stayed with Taro and Noriko at their new home, so their walk together in the park was one of the only times they had to speak. It makes sense, then, that Ono is still turning over some of the things she said in his mind a month later. At the time, he enjoyed the walk through the park with Setsuko on their way to meet Noriko and Ichiro.

Ono says that Kawabe Park is one of the city's nicest parks and holds a special interest for him because it was the site of Akira Sugimura's plans to leave his mark on the city. In 1920 or 1921, Sugimura (the builder of Ono's house) planned to build a kabuki theater, a European-style concert hall, a museum, and a pet cemetery in the park. Sugimura lost a great deal of his money, and his plans were ended, so now there are only oddly empty patches of grass where the buildings Sugimura hoped to build were supposed to stand. Ono feels that Sugimura deserves admiration for aspiring to rise above the mediocre, even though his plans ultimately failed.

Ono wants to see himself as a man who is similar to Akira Sugimura, the influential and wealthy man who built Ono's house. Just as Sugimura tried to reshape the culture of the city by funding the building of new institutions in Kawabe Park, Ono supported the establishment of the Migi-Hidari in his pleasure district. Ono wishes to see himself as someone who pursued his dreams and rose above mediocrity, even if the ideas he subscribed to are now seen as out of date.

That day, Setsuko and Ono met Noriko and Ichiro by a statue, and then Ono took Ichiro to lunch at a department store. Ichiro, then eight years old, told Ono that his favorite food was spinach and that Ono should eat as much spinach as he can, because it would give him strength. Looking at Ichiro, Ono noted the traits he inherited from his father and mother, as well as his resemblance to Kenji as a boy. He took a strange comfort in seeing this resemblance.

Ono explains that people not only take on traits as children, but also in early adulthood in imitation of teachers and mentors. Even after a student rejects much of a teacher's influence, mannerisms and gestures will be left as a trace of that influence. Ono still retains these traces of his teacher Seiji Moriyama (whom he always called "Mori-san") and he imagines some of his students still have some of his mannerisms. He hopes that even if they have reassessed some of his teachings, they are still grateful for much of them.

Ono reflects on his seven years living at Mori-san's villa, saying they were some of the happiest years of his life. Back then, the villa had already lost much of its splendor. There were collapsing roofs and holes in the floor. Only two or three rooms were in good condition. In one of these rooms, Mori-san's students looked at their teacher's new works, praising their mastery and debating Mori-san's intentions. Even though Mori-san was in the room, he did not respond to their praise or opinions. Although this may seem arrogant, Ono feels that allowing students to

debate was a better way for a very influential teacher to give instruction.

Mori-san's leading pupil was named Sasaki. If Sasaki suggested that someone's work was disloyal to Mori-san's teachings, the offender often gave up on the painting entirely. When Ono and the Tortoise first arrived at the villa, the Tortoise often had to destroy his work because it was "disloyal." The Tortoise had great difficulty grasping the principles of Mori-san's style. This style was defined by taking the world of the pleasure district as its topic, similar to the traditional work of Utamaro, but turning to European techniques like using blocks of color instead of bold outlines and using subdued tones. Mori-san sought to capture a melancholy, nocturnal atmosphere and often included lanterns in his paintings. The Tortoise thought that merely by including a lantern in his painting he was showing loyalty to Mori-san's teachings.

Ono reflects that every group of students will have a leader. The leader sets an example for other students because he has the greatest mastery of the teacher's teachings. At the same time, this pupil is the most likely to see shortcomings in a teacher's teachings and want to move in a different direction. In theory, a teacher should be ready to accept this, but, in practice, a teacher who has invested a great deal in a student may see treachery in the fact that the student takes a new direction. This is what happened to Sasaki. His fellow students refused to tell him where his paintings were or to speak to him, and he was forced to leave the villa without anywhere to go.

After Sasaki left Mori-san's villa, he was referred to as "the traitor." Often the pupils exchanged insults in a joking matter but comparing another pupil to "the traitor" eventually led the pupils to come to blows. The atmosphere Mori-san fostered was very intense, and he demanded total loyalty. Although it is easy to be critical of this in hindsight, Ono says, it should be recognized that Mori-san had ambitions to change the culture of painting in the city and dedicated a great deal of time and money to his pupils with this goal in mind.

Mori-san not only influenced his students' painting, but also their lifestyles. Because they were painting the "floating world" of the city's pleasure districts, they spent many nights out late drinking, or having parties at the villa with actors, dancers and musicians. Sometimes the parties went all night, and people would be passed out around the villa the next day.

One night Ono walks away from the revelry and sits in a storeroom where no one goes. He sits there for a long time, until Mori-san comes in and asks what is worrying him. Mori-san asks if there is something about his actor friend Gisaburo that offends him. Ono admits that he feels they have spent a great deal of time with entertainers in the last few months. Mori-san does not reply but walks to the back wall of the storeroom and pulls out some of his old wood-block prints. He says of them that he feels affection for his old works but sees now that they are fatally flawed. Ono disagrees, saying that they seem to him to be an example of how Mori-san's talent transcends the limitations of that style of art. Mori-san does not reply.

After a moment, Mori-san says that Gisaburo has had an unhappy life and is only happy in the moments late at night when a woman tells him the things he wants to hear. He continues that the finest beauty in the world is to be found in pleasure houses late at night. Then he explains

that the problem with his old work is that, as a young man, he did not value the beauty of the “floating world,” fearing that it was decadent and a waste of time. Ono says that perhaps he is struggling with something similar, and he will try to rectify the problem. Mori-san does not respond but says that he no longer doubts what he does. He feels he will look back at the end of his life and see his attempts to capture the beauty of the floating world as worthwhile.

Reflecting on this exchange from the present, Ono says that he cannot be sure that this was what Mori-san said. Indeed, it sounds like something he himself might have said while drinking at the Migi-Hidari with his students.

Ono returns to his account of his lunch with Ichiro at the department store. Ichiro pours spinach into his mouth as if it is a liquid and then sticks out his chest and punches the air. Ono asks if he is pretending to drink sake and then fight. Ichiro explains that he is being Popeye Sailorman. Then he asks Ono if sake makes you strong. Ono says it only makes you believe you are strong. Ichiro says that he drinks ten bottles of sake a night. He reports that Aunt Noriko has bought some sake for dinner that night and laughs that she might get completely drunk.

Ono tells Ichiro that he since he is eight years old now, he will see that he gets a taste of sake that night. Ichiro says nothing. Ono says that Ichiro’s Uncle Kenji tried sake for the first time when he was around his age. Ichiro says that his mother might give them trouble. Ono says he will handle Setsuko. Ichiro says women don’t understand men drinking, then laughs again at the idea that Noriko might get drunk.

Ichiro asks Ono if he knew Yukio Naguchi, and Ono says that he didn’t personally. Ono thinks that the adults must have been talking about Naguchi around Ichiro the night before. Ichiro asks if Naguchi was like Ono. Ono says that Setsuko, for one, said that there was no similarity, though Ono one compared himself to him. He explains that Naguchi composed songs that were sung all over Japan during the war, and after the war he felt he should apologize to all those who lost loved ones, so he killed himself. Ono adds that he was brave and honorable to admit to his mistakes. Ichiro is silent. Ono says that he was only making a joke when he compared himself to Naguchi, and Ichiro should tell his mother that she misinterpreted him. Ichiro stays silent.

That evening, Ono and Ichiro go to the Izumimachi area, where Noriko and Taro’s apartment is. The area is full of small, modern apartments, which seem cramped to Ono, but which Noriko finds practical and convenient.

Ono tells Setsuko and Noriko that he wants to give Ichiro a taste of diluted sake, but his daughters say that is a bad idea. Ono says he has promised Ichiro, and it will hurt Ichiro’s pride if they say he is too young.

Ono says he remembers how his wife objected when he gave Kenji his first taste of sake at around Ichiro’s age, adding that it did Kenji no harm. He regrets bringing Kenji up in such a trivial disagreement and hardly pays attention to what Setsuko says next. He cannot be sure that he remembers it correctly, but he thinks she says that Ono surely gave a great deal of thought to

Kenji's upbringing, but given what came to pass, their mother might have had better ideas about raising children. Ono cannot be sure that Setsuko really said something so unpleasant, although the things she said in Kawabe Park earlier in the day suggest she is capable of saying something like that.

At dinner, Taro describes a colleague who never meets the deadline, saying he has been given the nickname "the Tortoise." Ono excitedly tells them that he also once had a colleague nicknamed the Tortoise, but Taro says that most groups have both a leader and a "Tortoise." Ono thinks about this. He believes that Shintaro was the Tortoise of his own pupils, even though he wasn't called that. Ono reflects that the Tortoises of the world never rise above mediocrity because they are unwilling to take chances for the sake of a principle. They will never try something so grand as to transform Kawabe Park, as Sugimura attempted to do.

Ono recalls his relationship with the Tortoise, of whom he was fond, but whom he never considered an equal. Ono and Tortoise often painted together in an old kitchen in the villa. One afternoon, the Tortoise said that he could tell that what Ono was working on was very special because he was bringing an intensity to the work and had requested that no one look at it until he finished. The Tortoise said he was lucky to have worked side by side with someone of Ono's talent for almost eight years. Ono asked the Tortoise if he was happy with his work, and the Tortoise said he was. He said he was always striving to improve, because he hoped someday to exhibit alongside Ono and Mori-san. Ono let the matter drop.

A few days later when he entered the kitchen, the Tortoise looked at Ono in alarm. Gesturing towards Ono's painting, he asked if it was a joke. Ono recalls that the Tortoise had trusted him and took a risk in his career with him by leaving Takeda's, and he had hoped the same thing would happen again in this instance. However, in a whisper, the Tortoise called Ono a traitor and walked away.

The painting that the Tortoise was shocked by is called "Complacency," and it was inspired by a walk Ono took with Matsuda. Ono and Matsuda were walking along a bridge overlooking the Nishizuru district, where many shanties were wedged in between two factories. Matsuda said this was typical; people all over the country had been forced to leave their homes in the countryside and work in factories. Matsuda said you can smell the sewage even from up on the bridge, adding that politicians and businessmen, and perhaps also artists, rarely see this kind of poverty. Ono sensed a challenge in Matsuda's voice, so he suggested that they go down and look. The shantytown was hot, crowded, and smelly. While walking through, Ono and Matsuda saw three small boys bent over something that they prodded with sticks. They turned around and scowled at Ono and Matsuda, who both concluded that they were torturing an animal.

Ono didn't think about the boys much at the time, but later he made them the central image in his painting "Complacency." In the painting, two images appear set in an image of the Japanese coastline. The bottom image depicts the three boys in the shantytown, wearing rags but holding their sticks like brave samurai warriors ready to fight. Above that is an image of three fat, well-dressed, decadent-looking men. The left-hand margin says "Complacency" in bold letters, while the right-hand margin says, "but the young are ready to fight for their dignity."

Ono adapted this work in the 1930s for his painting "Eyes to the Horizon," which became famous in the city. This painting shows two contrasting images bound together by Japanese coastline. The top image shows three well-dressed men, talking anxiously, while the lower image shows soldiers ready to go west towards Asia. The right-hand margin of the painting says, "Eyes to the Horizon!" and the left-hand side says, "no time for cowardly talking. Japan must go forward."

Reflecting from the present, Ono says that he recognizes that the sentiments in the painting are outdated, but he brings it up to show how meeting Matsuda impacted his career. Although he didn't initially like Matsuda, he found his ideas appealing.

One evening not long after their visit to the slum, Ono and Matsuda sit in a bar having a dispute. Ono proposes raising money for the people in the slum by selling paintings, and Matsuda scoffs at this idea. He says Ono has a child's understanding of the world and probably doesn't even know who Karl Marx is. Ono says Marx led the Russian Revolution.

Matsuda tells Ono that weak politicians and greedy businessmen are leading Japan into a crisis. He says the Okada-Shingen society hopes to awaken artists to the country's political situation so that they can produce works of genuine value. Ono says that Matsuda is mistaken about what art can and cannot do. Matsuda says that not only artists, but people of all walks of life need to unite to fight for the country. He explains that he wants the Emperor's power to be restored and that Japan should forge an empire in Asia just as the British and French have done.

Turning away from his recollections of Matsuda's remarks, Ono looks back on the moment when the Tortoise discovered "Complacency." He thinks that the Tortoise was probably not disturbed by the political message of "Complacency" but instead noticed Ono's use of bold calligraphy and hard outlines, techniques Mori-san taught his students to reject.

Ono shifts his narrative to a conversation he has with Mori-san a week after the confrontation with the Tortoise. Ono and Mori-san go to the pavilion at Takami Gardens, which is elegantly decorated with hanging lanterns. In later years that pavilion remains a favorite spot of Ono's, until it is destroyed in the war. It is also, he says, the place where he had his last conversation with Kuroda.

On the night he visits the pavilion with Mori-san, the lanterns are unlit when they arrive, so Mori-san asks Ono to light them. Mori-san asks Ono what is troubling him. Ono says it is a small thing: he cannot find certain paintings and the other pupils will not tell him where they are. Mori-san tells Ono that he has his paintings. Ono says that he is very glad to hear that his paintings are safe, but Mori-san does not reply to this. He apologizes if it alarmed Ono that they were missing and says that Ono seems to "exploring curious avenues." (Looking back, Ono is not sure if Mori-san used that phrase, or if this is what he himself said to Kuroda years later during their last conversation.)

Like Sasaki, Ono's art has gone missing after he tries to go against Mori-san's teachings. It seems that Mori-san has confiscated the art, like Ono's father once did, and he will not promise

to return it to Ono. Throughout this scene, Ono seems to be struggling to remember things in a way that will suit his own perception of himself. He may focus on his conversation with Mori-san as a way to avoid thinking through what happened in his own interactions with Kuroda, which ultimately led to Kuroda's jailing.

Mori-san continues that it is not a bad thing for a young artist to experiment, as long as he returns to serious work. Ono says that he feels his recent work is the best work he has done. Mori-san says that perhaps there are other paintings, the ones that Ono is most proud of, that were not stored with the others. Ono says there may be. Mori-san asks him to bring them to him, but Ono says he is not certain where he left them. Mori-san asks Ono if he has plans for what he will do when he leaves the villa. Ono replies that he hopes to explain his intentions to Mori-san and continue to live at the villa. Mori-san says it will be painful for him to part with Ono. He adds that Ono is clever, so he is sure Ono will be fine. He predicts that Ono will either join a firm like Takeda's or perhaps illustrate magazines.

Mori-san's words echo Ono's father's on the night he told his son he could not become a painter. Although Ono never explicitly states what became of his relationship with his parents, it seems that he was forced into a break with them similar to the one that Mori-san is threatening. Mori-san also suggests that while Ono will not starve, he will be reduced to doing commercial art once again, which he believes to be a lowly occupation.

Looking back years later, Ono reflects that Mori-san's treatment of him may seem harsh, but it should be remembered how much Mori-san had invested in Ono. He thinks it understandable that a teacher may overreact in such a circumstance, but of course arrogance and possessiveness on a teacher's part should be regretted.

Ono reflects on visiting Kuroda's house the winter before the start of the war. Upon arriving at the house, he smells burning and knocks on the door. A uniformed police officer answers and tells him that Kuroda has been taken to headquarters for questioning. Ono can hear Kuroda's mother crying inside the house. He asks to speak to the policeman's commanding officer. The policeman brusquely tells him to leave or he will be brought in for questioning too. Ono explains that he is an artist and member of the Cultural Committee of the Interior Department and advisor to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities, adding that he is the one on whose information the police were brought to the house. He says there must be some mistake.

The uniformed officer leads Ono through the house to the back yard, where a plain clothes officer is standing by a bonfire, burning Kuroda's paintings. Ono says he thought the officers would simply give Kuroda a "talking-to" rather than arrest him. He asks if they were authorized to burn the paintings and says there were many fine works among them. The plain clothes officer says they destroy all offensive material that isn't needed as evidence. He says that the matter no longer concerns Ono and asks the uniformed policeman to show him out.

In the present, Ono says that this story is of limited relevance, because he means to recount what happened during Setsuko's visit last month: that night, Taro tells amusing stories about his work. Ono is uncomfortable to see how Ichiro watches each time the sake is poured out.

Setsuko says to Taro that even though he jokes about his work, she understands from Noriko that it is a stimulating work environment. Taro earnestly says how optimistic everyone at KNC is and how inspiring his branch director is. Setsuko says that Suichi is also very inspired by his work at Nippon Electrics.

Ono asks Taro if he thinks all the sweeping changes in Japan are entirely a good thing, suggesting there may be too much hastiness to follow the American way. Taro admits that the changes have happened quickly but says that he thinks Japan is finally on a good path. Setsuko says that Suichi feels the same way. Taro says that he went to a high school reunion the week before and all his classmates had the same sense of optimism. But, he says, perhaps they should be corrected. Ono says that he is sure the younger generation is right to believe in its splendid future.

Ichiro reaches over, taps the sake flask, and looks at Ono. To distract him, Taro asks what Ichiro would like to be when he grows up. Ichiro says he wants to be the president of Nippon Electrics, which is the best company. At the meal's end, he asks if all the sake is gone. When he hears that it is, he accepts this quietly, but Ono empathizes with Ichiro's disappointment, feeling that Setsuko should not have been so stubborn.

After dinner, Ono goes into the spare room where Ichiro is going to sleep. Ichiro asks Ono if Noriko is drunk and giggles at the idea. Ono tells Ichiro that he will soon grow up and be allowed to drink sake. Ichiro is silent for some time, then says that Ono should not worry. He explains that sometimes his father wants to do something, and his mother forbids it, so Ono shouldn't feel bad that she kept Ichiro from drinking sake. He repeats that Ono shouldn't worry and asks if he is spending the night. Ono tells him he is going back to his house, but he will come to say goodbye at the station the next day. Ono sits with Ichiro until his grandson falls asleep. Sitting there, he begins to turn over what Setsuko said to him that morning in Kawabe Park and to grow annoyed by it.

Ono goes to rejoin the adults in the main room. He says to Taro that it is a shame that he and Dr. Saito didn't get to know each other well until the marriage negotiations, since they were both connected by the art world and knew one another by reputation. Taro agrees, and Ono looks pointedly at Setsuko, but she gives no sign that she understands the significance of Taro's agreement.

Ono describes the events that passed earlier that day in Kawabe Park: walking along, Ono and Setsuko say how glad they are that Noriko's marriage worked out. Ono says that it was good that he heeded Setsuko's advice to take precautionary steps, but Setsuko responds that she doesn't know what her father is referring to. Ono says that he had made sure that his career didn't create obstacles for Noriko by speaking out during the *miai* about the mistakes he had made. Setsuko says that Noriko told her about the *miai*, but only to say she was puzzled by her father's behavior—as were the Saitos. She adds that she and Suichi were also puzzled by Noriko's account of what he had said. Ono tries to remind Setsuko about their conversation the year before, but she says again that she does not remember it.

Ono and Setsuko continue walking. Setsuko says that Taro told her that Ono brought up Yukio Naguchi, a composer who had committed suicide. She says Taro was concerned by their conversation because it seemed to him that Ono was drawing a comparison between himself and Naguchi. Ono reassures her that he is not considering suicide. Setsuko says that she understands that Naguchi's songs were very influential, so it makes some sense that he wanted to share responsibility for the direction the war went. But, she adds, although her father painted some splendid paintings that were appreciated by other painters, he should not worry that he did any harm because his work had nothing to do with larger matters. Ono says that this is very different from what Setsuko said to him last year. Setsuko says she has no idea why her father's career would have any relevance to the marriage negotiations.

Setsuko continues, saying the Saitos were puzzled by Ono's behavior at the miai. Ono says he was under the impression that Dr. Saito appreciated what he said during the miai. He says that Dr. Saito had followed his career over the years and would have been familiar with the mistakes he made, so it was appropriate for him to tell Dr. Saito his current view. Setsuko says that Taro told her that Dr. Saito was not aware that Ono was an artist, but only knew him as a neighbor. Ono says this is not true. Setsuko accepts this but insists that her father should not feel guilty for anything he did in the past. Ono stops arguing with Setsuko, but in retrospect he feels sure she is mistaken. He clearly remembers meeting Dr. Saito when he moved to the neighborhood and how Dr. Saito said that it was "a great honour to have an artist of your stature in our neighborhood."

JUNE 1950

Summary

Ono reflects on a walk he took yesterday over the Bridge of Hesitation. He has just heard of Matsuda's death and thinks that he had meant to visit Matsuda more often but had only visited once more since Noriko's marriage talks.

On that visit, Miss Suzuki answers the door and tells Ono that Matsuda is much stronger than he was eighteen months before when he last visited. Ono thanks Matsuda for writing to him during his recent illness. Matsuda says that Ono seems to have recovered. Ono says he is fine now, he just must carry a cane.

Matsuda asks after Noriko, and Ono tells him that Noriko is pregnant with her first child, and Setsuko is also expecting another child. Matsuda congratulates Ono.

Matsuda asks if Ono is painting. Ono says he has started painting flowers in watercolor to pass the time. Matsuda says he is glad to hear it and adds that Ono seemed very disillusioned the last time he visited. Ono says that may be true. Matsuda says Ono always wanted to make a grand contribution. Ono says that Matsuda had been the same way and they both had great energy and courage.

Matsuda recalls how angry Ono used to get when Matsuda teased him for his narrow artist's

perspective. He says it seems neither of them saw things broadly enough. He says they should not blame themselves, they merely turned out to be ordinary men without any special insight.

Ono looks out at the garden. He can smell something burning faintly and tells Matsuda that the smell makes him uneasy and reminds him of bombings. He adds that it will be five years next month since Michiko's death. Matsuda says the smoke is likely just from a neighbor clearing his garden.

A clock chimes and Matsuda says it is time to go feed the carps in his pond. They go outside, and Ono sees a boy of four or five peering over a fence. Matsuda greets the boy, Botchan, who then dips out of sight. Matsuda says to Ono that the boy comes to watch him every day. He says he wonders what the boy finds fascinating about an old man feeding fish.

Matsuda says that people blame the military, politicians, and businessmen for what happened to the country, but people like himself and Ono made only a marginal contribution. Despite what Matsuda says, Ono thinks that he is not disillusioned, but realizes how much he has to be proud of. He says that they took bold steps and followed their convictions, and he is sure Matsuda felt satisfied as he looked back on his life.

Ono shifts the narrative to recall a proud moment in his life: in 1938, he has just finished the New Japan campaign, which is a great success and wins the Shigeta Foundation Award. He sits in the Migi-Hidari being toasted by his pupils, but it is not until a few days later that he has a feeling of deep fulfillment and pride. He takes a train to Wakaba, intending to visit Mori-san. He is sure that Mori-san knows how much better his career turned out than he predicted, while Mori-san's prestige has declined and he is forced to illustrate popular magazines to make ends meet. Ono wonders how Mori-san will greet him and prepares himself for either a cold or warm reception. He decides he will not address Mori-san as sensei. But, when he gets to a place on the mountain looking over the villa, he sits down and eats an orange. Looking out at the villa, he has a feeling of triumph and satisfaction. He does not go further to the villa but sits in contemplation looking at it.

Most people, Ono thinks, never feel this kind of contentment. Certainly, the Tortoise or Shintaro would be incapable of it, because they never risk anything to rise above mediocrity. Ono feels that Matsuda likely experienced moments of deep pride like he did, because he acted on what he believed in.

After hearing of Matsuda's death, Ono walks across the Bridge of Hesitation to the area that used to be the pleasure district. Where Mrs. Kawakami's stood is a large office building, and where the Migi-Hidari once was, there is a front yard in front of another office building. In that yard is a bench, which Ono thinks is in approximately the same place where his old table in the bar was positioned. He sometimes sits on this bench, as he does in this moment. He watches several young office workers greet one another and notes their happy, optimistic demeanor. He recognizes the same good-hearted spirit that used to hold sway in the pleasure district among the young office workers. He thinks that, despite the nation's mistakes, the new generation is starting afresh. He wishes them well.

The deepest desire of Masuji Ono, protagonist of *An Artist of the Floating World*, is to be an acclaimed, significant artist. But while Ono is technically adept as a painter, his understanding of the world—and art’s role in it—is unsophisticated. Lacking a strong personal vision for his art and its message, Ono switches from one artistic movement to the next in pursuit of a style that will earn him acknowledgement as a great artist. In tracing Ono’s trajectory from commercial artist to high-brow Yōga artist to nationalist artist and propagandist, the novel shows a man who spends his life congratulating himself for his bold breaks from his teachers and for his much-needed artistic contributions. At his life’s end, however, it is clear that Ono has only followed in others’ footsteps, making uninspired and unimportant art, or art which reflects and amplifies his society’s worst impulses. In his quest for relevance and significance, Ono produced work that could not stand the test of time, but became irrelevant along with each passing fad, after the world which he painted had “floated away.” The novel suggests that the “relevant” artist, who reacts to the commercial and political currents of the time, may be acclaimed for a moment but ultimately prove insignificant outside of the time in which he or she works.

Ono has ambitions to become a great artist, but no idea what kind of art he should produce towards achieving this end. Despite Ono’s description of himself as someone who courageously follows his convictions and talent, the actual events of his life suggest a man who follows others opportunistically instead of thinking for himself. Ono’s early works as a teen are paintings of landscapes. He has an incredible facility for capturing the way a specific place looks. Throughout his later career, however, Ono’s work focuses on other subjects, suggesting that he may have abandoned his true talent, simple and familiar as it may have been in the eyes of others. Ono’s first paid work as an artist is producing stereotypically Japanese paintings that are exported to foreigners who exoticize the Japanese tradition. Ono is initially pleased that he is earning a living as an artist, defying his father’s predictions that he would live in squalor if he pursued art as a career. He is also glad to be one of his firm’s leading artists. Gradually, however, Ono comes to feel that this commercial work at Master Takeda’s firm is beneath him, and he leaves the firm. Ono spends the next six years at the villa of Seiji Moriyama, or Mori-san. There, Ono paints in the style Mori-san advocates: paintings of geishas from the “floating world”—or pleasure districts—depicted in a more Western style called Yōga. Mori-san urges his students to live among geishas, drinking late into the night and painting scenes from nightlife, but Ono struggles with doubts about whether this lifestyle is really the path to greatness. His father, after all, predicted that he would spend his life living in squalor if he pursued a career as an artist. Once again, however, Ono earns acclaim. He becomes Mori-san’s favorite student and is allowed to exhibit his paintings alongside his teacher’s. After conversations with the nationalist art-appreciator Matsuda, who teases Ono for being naïve and having a “narrow artist’s perspective,” Ono leaves Mori-san’s villa and begins to create paintings with political messages. While Ono portrays this, in hindsight, as another moment in which he took a courageous risk to follow his artistic convictions, he is once again merely exchanging one person’s doctrine for another. He eventually rises to prominence as a nationalist painter in his city. A cohort of younger artists consider him their teacher, and he wins prestigious awards.

However, after Japan's defeat in the war, the culture of militant nationalism is reviled, and prominent nationalist artists commit suicide. Ono is forced into retirement, which he takes as a sign that his work had an important—albeit now-discredited—impact on his society.

As he relates this story of moving from artistic movement to artistic movement, Ono repeatedly claims to be proud for having struck out on his own, following his convictions, even if they proved wrong in the end. He says that this is a quality an artist can be proud of, even if his work does not stand the test of time. But, in fact, the story of Ono's career shows that he opportunistically sought relevance and recognition by following other's ideas, and cannot point to any unique contributions of his own. When describing his time painting at the Takeda firm to his proteges, Ono says that what he took from his experience at the firm is the need to "rise above the sway of things." But Ono left the Takeda firm to go to another place where he was expected to closely adhere to another person's ideas, and when he ultimately left Mori's, it was to create art that would adhere to Matsuda's ideas. Based on his descriptions of his wartime work, Ono seems to have created derivative, unexceptional propaganda posters. It is work that does not seem likely to have sprung from his own original ideas, but rather from copying and adapting other people's ideas at the moment those ideas were rising to the cultural fore. When Ono sees other artists deciding to strike out on their own, he is far from supportive of their pursuit of originality. Sasaki, Mori's favorite student early on in Ono's time living at the villa, develops his own style and is treated as a traitor by the other students living at the villa. Ono records no effort on his own part to defend Sasaki. At the same time, while Ono leaves the villa with the support of Matsuda and his Okada-Shingen society, it seems that Sasaki leaves with no such support or guidance, truly as a result of his convictions. In dealing with his own student Kuroda, Ono is so offended by his student's innovations that he gives his name to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities, leading all of Kuroda's work to be burned and Kuroda himself to be jailed and beaten.

In the end, other characters' statements suggest that Ono's presentation of himself is skewed; his belief that the courage of his convictions led him to paint original, ground-breaking works that have since been discredited seems nothing more than self-aggrandizement. In his final conversation with Matsuda, Matsuda says that they "turned out to be ordinary men with no special gifts of insight" and that their "contribution turned out to be marginal." Ono rejects taking Matsuda's words at face value, saying that there was something in the Matsuda's manner that suggested he believed otherwise. In Ono's last conversation with his daughter Setsuko, she reassures her father that he does not need to feel guilty for encouraging the militarism of the war years because it was not really culturally significant.

The novel's presentation of a vain and self-deluding artist whose contributions lose their importance with the passage of time gives the title its meaning. Ono feels encouraged by a lifetime of acclaim for his work to believe that his contributions were important and will be remembered. But, in fact, he was only one of the many artists of his time who painted derivative works in styles invented by others. Although Ono leaves Mori-san's villa and ceases to paint the

geishas of the “floating world” of pleasure districts, the ultimate unimportance of his career makes him an “artist of the floating world” in a different sense. Ono finds a transitory success by shaping his work to fit the demands of specific times and places, and by copying others who have gained acclaim. But this world is neither timeless nor permanent; it is transitory, “floating.” The novel shows how the world in which Ono was an important artist is already floating away, superseded by new currents, ideas, events, and artists.

Masuji Ono, the protagonist of *An Artist of the Floating World*, is an older man looking back on his life and setting down his recollections. But Ono vacillates between a desire to honestly assess his past and a desire to avoid any feelings regret. Because these motives are incompatible with one another, Ono’s narrative itself becomes distorted by self-deception as he attempts to hide from his conflicted feelings, knowledge of his own culpability, and ultimately—what would be most terrifying of all to him—the conclusion that his life’s work has not mattered. Ono’s account gives away his unreliability as a narrator in several ways. First, his use of an unspecified second-person “you,” as though he is addressing someone who is listening, suggests that he does not want to acknowledge the doubt he feels about his own past. By addressing himself to another person, he acts as though he is explaining events that he understands well and avoids admitting that he feels a great deal of ambivalence about his past. Second, Ono avoids describing certain pivotal events in his life which he cannot force himself to face. By refusing to describe these incidents, he gives away that these are the moments in his life about which he feels most guilty. Finally, Ono often casts doubt on the accuracy of his account, reporting that others do not see events the way he does. This final strategy opens up the possibility that Ono is not only hiding from feelings of guilt, but is either mistaken or lying about his life.

Ono addresses his recollections to an unspecified other person – a “you” to whom he tells his story and whom he imagines will be sympathetic. The “you” is someone who may, or may not, be new to the city and to whom Ono explains the history and geography of the city, like a friendly guide. The tone Ono uses to address this listener suggests how he wants to be seen, or how he wants to see himself as a knowledgeable, even-keeled, friendly, and wise teacher. But because there is no indication of who the “you” might really be, the listener comes to seem like an imaginary construct created by Ono as a coping mechanism. Instead of stating directly that he has mixed feelings about an incident he has related, Ono speaks instead about what he imagines will be his listener’s reaction. In each instance, Ono says that, while a situation may seem one way to the listener, there is actually another way of looking at it. For instance, in describing his final break with his teacher, Mori-San, Ono tries to address what he assumes the listener may be thinking. He says that, while Mori-san’s actions may seem harsh, they are also understandable given Mori-san’s long investment in him and disappointment at his decision to go in another direction with his art. But Ono immediately follows this defense with its rebuttal, saying that Mori-san’s treatment of him was regrettably harsh. By addressing his recollections to this “you,” Ono disguises what he is actually doing: agonizingly rehashing the events of his life and trying to formulate sound judgments about his own conduct and the conduct of others.

While Ono describes most of his interactions in meticulous detail, there are also large gaps in

his story. These gaps represent pivotal events in Ono's life, about which he feels real grief, guilt, or anger. Ono entirely avoids describing the decision to leave his parents' home to become a painter, presumably having cut off all contact with his family afterwards. He also avoids discussing the deaths of his wife and son, mentioning their deaths only in passing, or while recounting what someone else said to him in confrontation. But the most important omissions in the novel are those that relate to Ono's relationship with his pupil Kuroda. Through a series of hints, readers learn that Ono had a break with his student Kuroda, likely because Kuroda had decided to employ an artistic technique that Ono did not approve. After parting ways with his protégé, Ono gave Kuroda's name to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities, which led to Kuroda's being jailed and tortured. But instead of revealing how this came to pass, Ono focuses his description and analysis on his relationship with his teacher Mori-san, with whom he had a similar break. Ono hopes to alleviate his own guilt by suggesting that his treatment of Kuroda is similar to Mori-san's treatment of himself. But, of course, this entirely fails to address the very different consequences the two teachers' treatments of their pupils had for those pupils. Ono avoids recounting—or atoning for—the actual harm he has done others, which reveals the lie in his frequent pronouncements about his willingness to own up to his wartime mistakes. Instead, he seems only to be feigning honesty, while actually hiding from the most difficult truths.

Finally, there are frequent suggestions that Ono may be misremembering events, mistaking who said what, or even making things up. This creates total uncertainty as to the accuracy of Ono's account. Throughout the novel, Ono often reports what someone has said, only to immediately say that this may have been something said by a different person. For instance, Ono recounts a conversation he had with Jiro Miyake a week before his daughter's engagement to Jiro fell through. He says that he recalls Jiro saying that those who pushed the nation to continue in a senseless war should be held responsible. Then, after recounting this story, he says that those words sound more like something his son-in-law Suichi would have said. If Jiro really said this, it may have been because he had already decided not to marry into the Ono family, wanting to avoid an association with a propagandist. If he did not say it, then perhaps there was some other explanation for his decision not to marry Noriko. Ono's account is all that is given, and there is no knowing whether, in giving it, he is remembering events as they occurred. The reliability of Ono's memories is also questioned by other characters. Early in the novel, Ono records a conversation with Setsuko in which she seems worried that his fame as a painter of propaganda during the war has turned into infamy because of the postwar backlash against nationalist ideas. She suggests that this reputation could hurt Noriko's marriage prospects. At the end of the novel, concerned because Ono has been discussing a famous nationalist composer who committed suicide out of guilt for encouraging the war, Setsuko tells her father that he should not feel guilty for his nationalist paintings, because they had little influence on the war effort. When Ono asks her about their earlier conversation during Noriko's courtship, Setsuko protests that she has no recollection of such a conversation and never would have suggested that her father's career could harm Noriko's marriage prospects. When Setsuko denies that she and her father discussed how his reputation might impact Noriko's marriage prospects, she throws the reliability of Ono's entire narrative into doubt. After all, this conversation with Setsuko and Ono's subsequent efforts to make sure his past would not harm

Noriko's marriage prospects form the crux of the novel's plot.

In the end, the unreliability of Ono's narration leaves open many possible interpretations of Ono's legacy. On the one hand, Ono may have been nothing but a small-time painter whose life made little impact on the lives of those around him. This raises the possibility that Ono may be preoccupied with debating his own guilt or innocence so as to avoid acknowledging what would be even more frightening to him than guilt: irrelevance. On the other hand, Ono's art may have been significant to the war effort, and Setsuko may only have been trying to give him a clear conscience when she asserted that his art had little impact—perhaps because she worries that his guilt will drive him to suicide. The novel leaves both possibilities on the table, suggesting not only that memories are often inflected and transformed by later events, but that where honest self-perception ends and dishonest self-deception begins is ultimately unknowable.

Although much of *An Artist of the Floating World* is dedicated to exploring the reputation and prestige of the artist and narrator Masuji Ono, another, equally important kind of reputation is conspicuously unexplored in Ono's narrative. Family reputation and prestige—and, on the negative side, shameful family secrets—may be much more important than Ono's individual reputation to the events that play out in the novel. Ono's failure to address the issue of his family's reputation is mysterious. Is it a reflection of his self-obsessed nature that he does not talk about those he has lost and their lives? Or, by focusing on his professional legacy is Ono avoiding addressing his grief at losing some of the most important people in his life.

Throughout the novel, Ono portrays his own reputation as being of central concern to his family as a whole. Only at the end of the narrative does it become clear how limited this perspective may be. The novel revolves around a formal process of matchmaking, in which each side of the "match" investigates the reputation of the other side's family to determine whether the two children should marry. A year before the action of the novel, a prospective match for Ono's younger daughter Noriko inexplicably withdraws from marriage negotiations. After this, the Ono family is concerned that Noriko's new suitor, Taro Saito, might also withdraw from the process because of something about the Ono family's reputation. Setsuko talks to her father about this possibility, suggesting that he make sure that certain things from the past do not harm Noriko's prospects. Ono believes that Setsuko is concerned that Ono's wartime work as a propagandist will cause the Saitos to shun the family, and the rest of the novel explores his efforts to prevent his artistic career from becoming a stain the family reputation. But, at the novel's end, when Setsuko claims she has no recollection of starting a conversation with Ono about his reputation, this opens the possibility that she was concerned about some other secret from the family past which is never revealed in the novel. A remark that Setsuko makes later in the novel is incomprehensible based on the information Ono has provided about the family but suggests that the incident from the past (which she worried could mar Noriko's chances of marrying) had nothing to do with Ono's career, but instead has to do with her brother Kenji. Setsuko says, "There is no doubt Father devoted the most careful thought to my brother's upbringing. Nevertheless, in the light of what came to pass, we can perhaps see that on one or two points at least, Mother may in fact have had the more correct ideas." Ono is surprised that Setsuko would say something so unpleasant but offers no insight into what Setsuko might be referring to. This

mysterious event in the Ono family's past may never be disclosed because it would open up the topic of Ono's relationships with those he has lost: his wife and son, topics which may be too painful to consider.

Ono's intense focus on his individual reputation as an artist, and his aversion to discussing the reputation of his family as a whole, makes sense when looked at in the context of his own upbringing. Ono's father tells a fifteen-year-old Ono that he will damage the family's reputation if he becomes an artist. Although the novel never explicitly describes Ono's break from his family, his father and mother are never mentioned after this incident, and it seems likely that Ono cut off all contact with his family once he made the decision to go to work as an artist. This rupture seems to have been similar in its finality to the loss of Kenji and Michiko in the war, and similarly is never given any attention by Ono. At the time when Ono's father burns his paintings, the fifteen-year-old Ono says that his father has "only kindled his ambition" as an artist. At this young age, Ono seems to have decided that by focusing attention on his career, he can protect himself from the painful disappointments inherent to close relationships with family.

At first glance, Ono's avoidance of discussing his family's past in favor of discussing his career makes him seem narcissistic, career-obsessed, and coldblooded. While this is possible, it seems equally possible that Ono avoids this topic because it is simply too painful. But just as Ono shows an aversion to describing the painful break between himself and his pupil Kuroda, he shows an even stronger aversion to describing the losses of his family members. To open the topic of family secrets would be to open the topic of the family as a whole, even though Ono's family has always been painfully fragmented. The gaps in the narrative where Ono's feelings about his family's past can be seen equally to suggest coldblooded neglect, or a sensitive avoidance of truly painful topics.

THEMES IN AN ARTIST OF THE FLOATING WORLD

Intergenerational Conflict

Ishiguro introduces us to four generations of Ono's family, and between each generation, complicated differences and conflicts arise. While such conflicts may be universal—suggested by the fact that they crop up in both calm and fraught historical moments—they are exacerbated here by the unusually sudden changes happening in mid-twentieth-century Japan. Ono's own father cares deeply about traditional, material definitions of success, and he expects Ono to take over the family business. He is so determined for this to happen that he cruelly tries to destroy his son's paintings and plans to be an artist. Ono has political and cultural differences with his own children, and their, spouses, as well. He feels defensive of Japan's earlier, nationalistic culture, and resents his children for embracing the American powers in Japan. While Ono never explicitly contemplates suicide, he dwells on stories of other men his age taking their own lives, which reveals that the older, less-powerful generation feels like a burden to the younger generation. In a more complex and paradoxical way, Ono both fears that he is a burden and wishes to be seen as one, since that would allow him to feel relevant and important in a changing world. Towards the end of the novel, the aging Ono seems to realize that the

younger generations are not as different as he once thought. Previously upset by his grandson's enthusiasm for American entertainment, he starts to recognize his grandson's resemblance to other family members, and to perceive him as part of a broader family history. In the novel's final scene, Ono realizes that the young people in town are similar to the friends he himself knew as a young man.

Imperialism and Sovereignty

Over the course of Ono's life, Japan goes through a great deal of political turmoil. As a young man, Ono embraces Japanese military power and comes to believe that his country should be a worldwide imperial power. It is somewhat unclear what motivates these political views. He is upset by the injustice and poverty he sees in his city, and decides that Japan can improve the lot of its citizens through nationalistic militarization, though he never explains the relationship between these things. It seems that he feels a need for action, and that military power is the most obvious route, if not the most helpful. Since Japan loses the war, it actually ends up on the receiving end of American imperialism. Ono finds this humiliating, but it also drives a wedge between the older and younger generations, since the older ones are generally unhappy about this geopolitical situation and the younger ones are used to it or even enthusiastic about it. Ishiguro focuses less on the political results of imperialism and more on the personal factors that lead to it. In this book, a desire for purpose and meaning, without a proper outlet, lead to war and violence, in a neverending cycle.

Aging

At the end of this novel, we learn that much of the story Ono has told us isn't quite true. While Ono did once subscribe to nationalistic political views, in his old age he has begun to pretend that he was far more influential than he ever was in reality. Therefore, while the generation gap between his own politics and his childrens' remains a reality, the reader has to acknowledge the possibility that Ono is simply afraid of aging and death. He is, as a result, clinging to the idea that he made a difference during his life, even if that difference was a negative one. Ishiguro implies that one of the reasons for Ono's seemingly irrational behavior is the loss he has suffered. His son is dead, meaning that the symbolic future version of himself has been extinguished—he has nobody to carry on his legacy. Indeed, even his country is now neutered and powerless in the face of post-war power shifts. Eventually, Ono seems to recognize that his daughters and grandchildren are worthy and meaningful heirs to his legacy. Still, the war robs him of a healthy aging process, at least for a long time, and as a result, he clings to an imagined past instead of a now-lost future.

Grief

There are essentially three types of grief in this novel, all of which Ono suffers at one point or another. One type comes from the unexpected or premature loss of a loved one. The loss of his wife and son during the war destabilize Ono, causing his narration to become unreliable. He is so unable to cope with the senseless realities of their deaths that he exaggerates, avoids and fabricates in order to either justify these deaths or minimize the damage they have done to him. A second kind of grief comes from the timely loss of a loved one. Matsuda's death causes Ono to feel pensive, but he is able to deal with the loss in a healthy way, since he knows that Matsuda lived a long and satisfied life. In fact, Matsuda's natural death allows him to contextualize the unjust deaths of Kenji and Michiko. The final, and most complicated, form of loss comes not from death but from betrayal or conflict. Ono parts with Moriyama, and even more painfully, with his favorite student Kuroda, on bad terms. The grief caused by these events is particularly difficult because the loss is a continuing event. Since Kuroda remains alive, Ono continues to hope that he might repair their relationship and regain Kuroda's friendship. When he is rebuffed, he is forced to grieve all over again for this loss and to revisit the choices that led to it. The only way that he is able to cope with this kind of grief is to, eventually, acknowledge Kuroda's right to distance himself and accept it begrudgingly.

Pedagogy

The teachers in "An Artist of the Floating World" have a passionate, paradoxical relationship to their most gifted students. Ono himself acknowledges this paradoxical relationship, having been both a student and a teacher at different points in his career. The paradox is this: teachers want their favorite students to become successful, but they also want these students to remain dependent on their mentors. While he is working for Moriyama, Moriyama's top student is mysteriously dismissed, presumably because he has violated the teacher's strict aesthetic rules. This allows Ono to become the top pupil, but this new status gives him the confidence to question his teacher—and as a result he, too, rebels and is sent away. Yet, Ishiguro seems to imply, power and the micro-celebrity of being a beloved teacher can corrupt. Years later, Ono himself betrays his best student after that student acts in ways that Ono deems unsuitable. Though Ishiguro avoids moralizing, he does make a strong statement, through implication, about how difficult and yet important it is for authority figures to be flexible and open-minded.

Marriage

The central storyline of the novel, or at least of its more linear portions, revolves completely around an engagement. Noriko's arranged marriage becomes a site of tension for Ono. While Noriko's previous, broken-off engagement was a love match, this one is completely arranged in the traditional manner. As a result, the young couple are far from the only people involved in the relationship. Ono, isolated since the war, has no choice but to reengage with society and grapple with the possibility—in fact, the undeniable reality—that people are judging him. The marriage

negotiation is a perfect place for Ishiguro to expose his main character's neuroses, since it involves an explicit judgment of his status. At the same time, the somewhat depressed Ono is forced to present himself in public for his daughter's sake. Yet non-arranged marriages are just as fraught in this book. Noriko's love match was broken off, not by her fiancé, but by his parents. In this sense, no marriage in this novel can exist independently of social status, familial relationships, and politics.

STYLISTIC DEVICES

1. SYMBOLISM.

a) Bridge of Hesitation (symbol)

This bridge is the most familiar landmark in *An Artist of the Floating World*, mentioned at the beginning of the novel and regularly throughout. On one level, its symbolism is fairly clear. Ono has to cross the bridge to get home physically, while emotionally he is hesitant, torn between his memories and his future, his ego and the truth. In fact, one of the reasons that it takes so long for us to figure out what happened in his past is because Ono is so hesitant as a narrator. He shares something and then obscures something else, or insists that he cannot recall the exact event in question, revealing his entire story with painstaking slowness. The presence of a bridge with such an evocative name lets us know that Ono's crossing is as metaphorical as it is literal. The bridge's symbolism is deepened, however, when Ono shares the story of its name. Men, he tells us, hesitated before either going home or crossing the bridge to the city's pleasure district. Therefore, we understand that the bridge is both a site of Ono's own attachment to that old district, and a lost communal symbol of that district, part of the vocabulary of a now-nonexistent subculture.

b) Samurai (symbol)

Samurai were Japanese warriors in the Medieval and Early Modern ages. Here, they are symbols of Japanese sovereignty and patriotism. When Ono catches his grandson pretending to be a cowboy, he presents a list of more Japanese alternatives which he believes are more exciting. Samurai are featured on this list. To Ono, samurai recall a version of independent Japan, free of American occupation. Later, while working on his painting "Complacency," Ono portrays a group of desperately poor boys in poses evocative of samurai. His implication here seems to be that such children could be impressive, powerful, and worthy of respect, but for Japan's lack of military might and national pride. The samurai, then, are not merely symbols to the reader, but are in fact symbolic within Ono's consciousness. They arise whenever he seeks a shorthand for his vision of an ideal and venerable Japan.

c) Reception Room (symbol)

Reception rooms in *An Artist of the Floating World* are places where intimacy and formality converge in strange ways. They essentially symbolize the unknowability of people, or the

unknowable aspect of people, even one's own loved ones or oneself. Ono's first association with reception rooms comes from his father. Though he was taught to act reverently around reception rooms and to avoid entering them, his father begins to insist that they have "business meetings" in their household's reception room. It is also in this room that Ono's father burns his paintings. Their conversations in these moments are full of conflict and emotion, but they communicate with euphemistic language, unable and unwilling to say what they mean. Later, Ono has other conversations in other reception rooms with important figures in his life, such as his daughter Setsuko. This conversation, too, hints at each character's deepest concerns, but neither character states his or her meaning directly. Ono mentions at one point that some of his artistic imagination may have been rooted in the long-forbidden reception room of his childhood: its mysteriousness ignited his curiosity, prompting him to imagine the inside of the room. This idea gets at the heart of Ishiguro's project in this novel. He shows us glimpses of people, including his main character, and allows us to construct a vivid image of that person's internal and external life. Yet, all throughout, Ishiguro works through implication rather than direct information. Much of this book's satisfying tension comes from the gulf between what the narrator states and what the reader infers. Therefore, the symbol of the reception room is useful for understanding not only Ono's character, but the novel's form as a whole.

d) Sake (symbol)

Sake, a wine made from rice, crops up repeatedly in conversations between Ono and his grandson Ichiro. Ono wishes to give Ichiro sake, which he sees as a symbol of a specifically Japanese kind of adult masculinity. When Ono's daughters disagree with him over whether to serve Ichiro sake, the symbolism of the drink becomes even clearer. As he and Ichiro agree, women cannot understand or appreciate sake themselves, since it is linked to masculinity. As he often does in this novel, Ishiguro introduces this symbol via his main character only to pull back and make us question whether we, too, speak to that same symbolic language. While sake stands for one thing in Ono's eyes, his daughters clearly disagree, and even Ichiro seems to have a more literal understanding of the beverage. He seems interested in trying it out of curiosity, but when his grandfather becomes emotionally invested, Ichiro reassures him that there is no need to worry. Ichiro, it seems, recognizes that sake is an important symbol to Ono—but Ichiro himself has detached the sake from its symbolic resonance.

e) Cowboys (symbol)

Ono is upset when he discovers that his grandson likes to pretend to be the Lone Ranger. Cowboys in general symbolize the encroachment of American power, not only in the form of military occupation but in the less-obvious form of cultural hegemony. Ono, therefore, feels offended and bewildered that his grandson takes an interest in these icons of American culture, while more or less ignoring Japanese culture. Moreover, cowboys themselves are historically and symbolically linked to the American frontier. Therefore, they embody American ideals of

expansion, self-sufficiency, and attachment to land. It makes sense, then, that they are particularly fraught for Ono. At this moment in Japanese history, Japan's goals of expansion are thwarted, and Japanese people are unable to have a self-sufficient and independent government. Therefore, Ichiro's choice of cowboys as an object of fascination adds insult to injury for his grandfather.

2. MOTIF OF FIRE

Three times during this novel, a certain scene repeats itself, almost exactly. An older man, usually a father figure, discovers that his son or protégé has been making art of a variety that the older man deems disagreeable. The older man then destroys the art, or creates circumstances allowing for the destruction of that art. Such a scene occurs between Ono and his father, between Ono and Moriyama, and between Kuroda and Ono. In each of these scenes, fire is present. Ono's father burns his son's paintings, and the police burn Kuroda's on Ono's orders. Moriyama does not burn Ono's paintings, at least not in front of his student, but he insists that Ono light lanterns while making it clear that he plans on destroying the paintings. Fire, then, is a motif signaling to us that an artist's principles are becoming tyrannical. Notably, Moriyama is obsessed with the accurate portrayal of lantern-light. In his case, then, the benign-seeming portrayal of beauty edges into near-violence when it becomes a form of artistic orthodoxy. Though all three of these scenarios are different, taking place in different times and with slightly varying motives, the presence of fire in all three reminds us to focus on their similarities.

3. SIMILES AND METAPHORS

a) Ruined ceiling (simile)

While introducing the reader to his home at the start of the book, Ono notes that the dust is visible in the sunshine, "as though the ceiling had only that moment crashed down" (p 12). This image, of a home destroyed by war, contrasts jarringly with the description of a tranquil, well-designed home. It is typical of Ishiguro's understated style that the horrors of war are alluded to with such brevity and matter-of-factness, and it is also typical that this early figurative language remains very much in the realm of the real. Ono draws from his own experiences when he chooses metaphors, and in fact, his choice of metaphor is often a good way to tell what he's thinking about. Since Ono is hesitant to admit that he is still traumatized by the physical dangers of war, we can instead gather, thanks to this metaphor, that he thinks about the war often and that it does not feel very far in his past.

b) Boisterous banners (metaphor)

In an early description of his beloved pleasure district, Ono describes the "numerous cloth banners pressing at you from all sides, leaning out at you from their shop fronts, each declaring the attractions of their establishment in boisterous lettering" (p 23). This is a particular type of metaphorical language called personification, in which objects are given human attributes. The

personification is subtle and understated, but since Ishiguro doesn't use much figurative language at all, the passage stands out. The use of personification makes the scene appear infused with life, in contrast to its current state, which Ono's friend Mrs. Kawakami compares to a graveyard (p 28). This language not only makes us understand that the district used to be livelier; it also makes us understand that Ono is lively when he thinks and talks about it, and that this district was once and still is deeply important to him.

c) Tortoise (metaphor)

The "Tortoise" starts off as a nickname for one particular character in *An Artist of the Floating World*, but after learning from his son-in-law Taro that many workplaces and schools have slow, dedicated workers with the same nickname, Ono begins to apply the metaphor more broadly. In this way the metaphor is somewhat complex. The animals, tortoises, known for their diligent competence, are applied as a metaphor to Ono's colleague, who is nicknamed the Tortoise because he also bears those characteristics. Once the colleague has that nickname, though, Ono begins to use the man himself as a metaphor for a certain kind of person— a person who works hard, avoids risk, and is more earnest than talented. Therefore, both the animal tortoise and the person known as "The Tortoise" are metaphors. This distinction might seem impossibly fine and unimportant, and in fact it is often difficult to spot. However, once Ono begins to use a person as a metaphor, it becomes clear that he isn't seeing things clearly. By taking a complicated person with his own desires and reducing him to a metaphorical category (a metaphorical category, in fact, to describe a kind of person Ono feels scorn and contempt for) we know that ability to see other people in all of their complexity has been compromised.

d) Kindling (metaphor)

Fire is often used as a symbol in this book. However, one aspect of fire is used in a particularly memorable bit of figurative language as well. While his father burns his beloved paintings, Ono tells his mother that this won't destroy his love of art. In fact, he says, "The only thing that father's succeeded in kindling is my ambition" (p 47). The language and use of wordplay are much more dramatic, even melodramatic, than the kinds of statements Ono makes later in life. In this case, though, the metaphor is deeply satisfying. Ono turns the destructive fire that ruins his paintings into a fuel that prompts him to create more. Furthermore, his ability to use language cleverly and creatively shows us that he remains as much an artist as ever. While his father has the material power to create a literal fire, the young Matsuji has the creative power to metaphorically turn the fire into a force for good.

e) Floating World (metaphor)

For a long time, Ono does not explain to his readers what the "floating world" of the title refers to. In fact, we learn only about three-fourths of the way through this book that it is a nickname

for the "nighttime world of pleasure, entertainment, and drink" that Ono inhabited while working under Moriyama. The floating is, of course, metaphorical: this subculture does not literally float. The metaphor evokes a sense of fluidity, temporariness, and surreality. Like an object floating in water, this lost world is elusive and difficult to locate with any definitiveness, both because it is so far in the past by the time Ono narrates this book, and because it belonged to a small group of people separate from mainstream society. This world, Ono explains, seemed to spring into being and then disappear during mundane daylight hours, making the floating metaphor apt. Finally, the phrase "floating" works as a visual metaphor too. This world, and Moriyama's paintings of it, are characterized by soft lantern-light. The image of water works well to evoke fluid, lively lamplight. The metaphor does double-duty, telling us how this world functioned as well as how it looked.

f) Grotesque miniature cemetery (simile)

While Ono hides out one night in a storeroom at Moriyama's village, he notices that the lamplight in the room has cast shadows on the various objects within, making it look like a "grotesque miniature cemetery" (p 146). Without even looking at the simile's specific content, we can see that it's some of the more colorful, fanciful language in the book. As a whole, Ono reserves his most imaginative phrasing and powerful imagery for discussions of places and times that ignited his artistic and political imagination—that is to say, his time at Moriyama's villa and in the floating world, and, later, his political awakening with Matsuda. This is a particularly good instance of this tendency. However, the actual comparison being made foreshadows Ono's upcoming departure from the villa and his schism with Moriyama. He uses a disturbing simile, which implies that his associations with Moriyama's villa and his artistic techniques are not entirely positive at this point. The image of a graveyard, meanwhile, is a fairly explicit nod towards death—not only the eventual deaths of Kenji and Michiko, but the figurative death of Moriyama and Ono's partnership.

4. IRONY

a) Social Status (dramatic irony)

On several occasions, Ono takes care to emphasize how little he cares about his reputation and social status. "I have never at any point in my life been very aware of my own social standing," he tells us firmly. The irony lies in the amount of time he spends telling us just how little he cares what others think of him. If he truly didn't care, we can assume, he wouldn't think about the subject at all. Moreover, most of this novel revolves around Ono trying to ascertain what his own reputation is. He cares greatly about what others think of him, but is so determined to present himself as someone who doesn't care about reputation that he cannot objectively interrogate his own self-perception. Ironically, his insistence that he is unaware of his own reputation makes it harder for him to calmly understand his own social standing, which leads him down a path of paranoia and obsession.

b) Burning paintings (situational irony)

A particularly acute case of situational irony arises when the police burn Kuroda's paintings in front of Ono. The scene recalls the earlier moment when Ono's father burned his early paintings in the reception room. Ono is self-aware enough not to physically destroy Kuroda's paintings, and when he reports Kuroda to the police, he believes that his act is helpful and harmless. However, the act still leads to the same result—authority figures destroying art that they find distasteful. Since Ono causes this result without meaning to, the irony here has a tinge of fatefulness or inevitability, as if this pattern of creation and destruction is part of an unfortunate but universal cycle. Ono's muted reaction to the situation is in itself ironic, although his words in the scene are an instance of dramatic rather than situational irony. For instance, he asks the police whether they are authorized to burn Kuroda's paintings. In asking this question, he implies a belief that figures like his father and the police have a right to burn art they despise, provided they have enough power and authority. Therefore, though he says this as a challenge to the police, he ends up simply professing agreement with their worldview.

c) Ichiro and Masculinity (dramatic irony)

One way in which Ono often tries to protect his dignity and shore up support is by convincing Ichiro to side with him rather than with Noriko and Setsuko. To this end, he often evokes their shared masculinity, both because it is a useful way to make his daughters seem like outsiders and because it also invokes the memory of Kenji, Ono's late son. Ironically, Ichiro is not particularly invested in this shared masculinity, except occasionally in the context of lighthearted jokes. Often, he goes along with his grandfather in order to protect Ono's own feelings, and in doing so he infantilizes Ono even while Ono believes himself to be teaching Ichiro a mature masculinity. For instance, Ono pressures Ichiro to watch a scary movie, seeking a bonding moment with his grandson. Ichiro agrees, but seemingly only for Ono's benefit, since he brings a jacket purposely in order to cover his eyes. Each time Ono tries to make himself seem authoritative in order to impress Ichiro, Ichiro goes along largely to preserve Ono's bruised dignity.

d) Mrs. Kawakami's Nostalgia (dramatic)

It is very possible indeed that Mrs. Kawakami, the proprietor of the last bar left in the old pleasure district, feels a great deal of nostalgia for the district's glory days. But so does Ono: this is evident from the way he reminisces about the district regularly, and from the suddenly poetic language that arises when he describes his time there. Ironically, though, Ono projects his nostalgia entirely onto Mrs. Kawakami, criticizing her for feeling nostalgic while claiming that he is completely at peace with the loss of the pleasure district. Though his lack of self-awareness is somewhat ironic, it may ultimately be a helpful coping mechanism for him. By

projecting his own feelings onto a friend, he is able to critique, sympathize with, and evaluate those feelings at a distance, which helps him understand why he feels the way he does.

e) "Complacency" (visual irony)

"Complacency" is the first explicitly political work that Ono creates, and it is packed with sarcasm. Though much of the irony in this novel is dramatic irony stemming from Ono's own lack of self-awareness, in the case of the painting, Ono is an artist in complete control of his own use of irony. He portrays extremely poor boys in a way that evokes samurai. With this contrasting image, Ono challenges the viewer's expectation and cuttingly critiques the way in which poverty has robbed both individual Japanese people and the country in general of their dignity.

5. IMAGERY

a) The Pleasure District

While most of this book's imagery is minimal, visually-focused, and straightforward, Ono's descriptions of his favorite old neighborhood are vivid, packed with information from all five senses, and full of figurative language. In an early description of the old pleasure district, Ono describes the way that banners announcing various establishments leaned out into the street, using personification to bring the image to life. Later, he provides an aural and olfactory description, which stands out beside his other visual descriptions and makes us understand how vivid his memories remain. These images include "...the laughter of people congregated outside the Migi-Hidari, the smell of deep-fried food... the clicking of numerous wooden sandals on the concrete." Not only do these images bring the scene to life, they also show us particularly what Ono misses the most about it. For instance, the evocative image of wooden sandals brings to mind a distinctly Japanese type of clothing, tying the scene to a broader nostalgia and sense of lost nationalism.

b) Moriyama's Villa

Images of candlelight are prevalent in Seijo Moriyama's paintings, but, because Moriyama paints the lantern-lit floating world and seeks inspiration there, imagery of lamplight pervades descriptions of the city's lost nightlife as well. In fact, an entire period of Ono's life is essentially marked by its lighting, which is described in such a way that these scenes have an ethereal, distinct mood. Even in non-candlelit moments, Moriyama's villa has a similar mood—it feels separate from the rest of the world, connected to a timeless, decaying beauty. Ono gives us a rare image of scent to get this mood across, saying "Those roofs were forever developing new leaks and after a night of rain, the smell of damp wood and mouldering leaves would pervade every room." Imagery of leaking walls, rotting wood, and flickering lamplight all contribute to the same impression, since all of them remind us of temporariness and of how fleeting beauty can

be.

c) War and Fire

While conveying the scene where the police burn Kuroda's paintings, Ono describes the sound of Kuroda's mother crying and the harsh scent of smoke. He blends different senses together to create a feeling of sensory overload. As a general rule, Ishiguro reserves these kinds of vivid sensory images for moments that are particularly important to Ono, either because they are full of beauty or because they are traumatic. This is clearly the latter, and the combined images of the sound of crying and the scent of smoke make it a vivid moment for the reader as well. Since Ono rarely talks about the war directly, as if it is still too raw to mention, this scene also serves as a kind of substitute for a battle scene or a bombing scene. The images within it bring to mind death, violence, and destruction, allowing us to picture the war even without it being directly described

d) Poverty

While observing a poor neighborhood with Matsuda, Ono is first struck by its scent, which Matsuda attributes to sewage. To make this image more vivid, Ishiguro cleverly employs a visual image of swarming flies, which show us that the day is hot and emphasize the overwhelming nature of the neighborhood's smell. He also includes an aural image of the flies' buzzing, so that each sense emphasizes and builds on the others. By making the reader feel overwhelmed by images, Ishiguro conveys the overwhelming feeling of this crowded, uncomfortable area. Every person who reads this scene is likely to feel struck by at least one image and to remember it. Therefore, when Ono explains that the image of boys torturing an animal has remained in his mind, we understand and sympathize.

CHARACTERIZATION

An Artist of the Floating World Character List

Masuji Ono

Setsuko

a) Masuji Ono

Ono is the novel's protagonist and narrator. He is, at the time of the narration, an aging retired artist in post-war Japan. He has a somewhat mysterious past, which he reveals in small pieces, and it seems that his role in the art world once involved encouraging Japanese imperialism and nationalism during the Second World War. He expresses some nostalgia for the height of those movements and some resentment of both Japan's post-war American leadership and the younger generation's acquiescence to it. For the sake of his younger daughter's marriage prospects, though, he spends much of the novel trying to publicly make amends for or paper

over that past. As the story wears on, Ono begins to reveal slowly that the trajectory of his life has perhaps been both sadder and more ordinary than he had previously implied. Though he remains passionate about art, his primary interests and pastimes now involve home and family, especially his young grandson, Ichiro.

b) Setsuko

Setsuko is Ono's older daughter. By the time the novel begins, she is already married and living in another city with her husband and son. Setsuko is strong-willed and somewhat uptight. It is she who encourages her father to repair the damage caused by his earlier political views for the sake of her younger sister's marriage negotiations—although, later on, she and Ono disagree over the content and meaning of those conversations. Setsuko routinely irritates her father by disagreeing with him and by establishing strict rules for her son, Ichiro. However, Setsuko and Matsuji Ono tend to see one another as equals, and Ono usually listens to Setsuko, even if he outwardly professes skepticism.

c) Noriko

Noriko is Ono's younger daughter. The first half of the novel revolves largely around the process of her engagement. Noriko is more spontaneous and bold than her sister, and she often pokes fun at their morose father. She also loves children. Noriko was previously engaged to a young man in a love match, rather than as part of a traditional arranged marriage, but the man's family has broken off the engagement for mysterious reasons.

d) Ichiro

Ichiro is Setsuko's young son and Matsuji's grandson. He is more or less a typical energetic child, and he provides comic relief over the course of the novel, though he appears increasingly worried about his grandfather's mental state. Ichiro, as the youngest character, often serves as a kind of meter for other characters' concerns, neuroses, and opinions. Therefore Ono tends to identify Ichiro's resemblance to his dead son, Kenji, and becomes distressed when Ichiro is interested in American rather than Japanese heroes.

e) Chishu Matsuda

We first encounter Matsuda as an elderly man, when Ono goes to visit him over the course of Noriko's marriage negotiations. He and Ono met when they were young, and Matsuda influenced Ono's aesthetic and political beliefs. He remains openly committed to his long-held stances, which include the belief that Japan should be a leading imperial power in the world.

Matsuda is the character who seems to know the most about Ono's past, not only artistically but personally: Matsuda was instrumental in Ono's engagement to his now-late wife, Michiko.

f) Seiji Moriyama

Often referred to simply as Mori-San, Moriyama was Ono's teacher, mentor, and sponsor during the early years of his artistic career. Moriyama owned a villa in which he housed young artists and introduced them to his beliefs, techniques, and social circle. Moriyama painted works which fused Japanese and European techniques, focusing on nightlife in the city's "floating world" of drinking and partying. He believed firmly that art should aim to capture fleeting beauty. When Ono's art became explicitly political, the two parted on bad terms.

g) The Tortoise

The "tortoise" is less of a three-dimensional character and more of a symbol, meant to serve as a foil to Ono. His real name is Yasunari Nakahara, but Ono refers to him almost solely by his nickname. The two of them meet while working together at a factory-like art studio, where the Tortoise earns his nickname while being teased for his slow work. Ono defends him and brings him along when they go to Moriyama's studio, leading to a years-long power imbalance. The Tortoise is not only slow but earnest, obedient, hardworking, and somewhat obtuse. He works for years to grasp Moriyama's principles, which Ono masters easily, but feels shocked and betrayed when Ono abandons those principles voluntarily. Ono looks down on him as a symbol of meekness and caution.

h) Shintaro

Shintaro is a former student of Ono's, and the two of them remain friends. At the time of the novel's narration, they are the only two remaining customers at Mrs. Kawakami's. Shintaro is not a particularly passionate person, and when feeling unfavorably towards him Ono compares Shintaro to the Tortoise, noting his cautious and practical personality and his inability to live up to the role of the talented, driven artist. However, at other times Ono expresses regret that he did not pay more attention to Shintaro when he was a teacher. They have a falling-out during the novel, rooted in a disagreement about whether or not to disavow their shared past.

i) Suichi

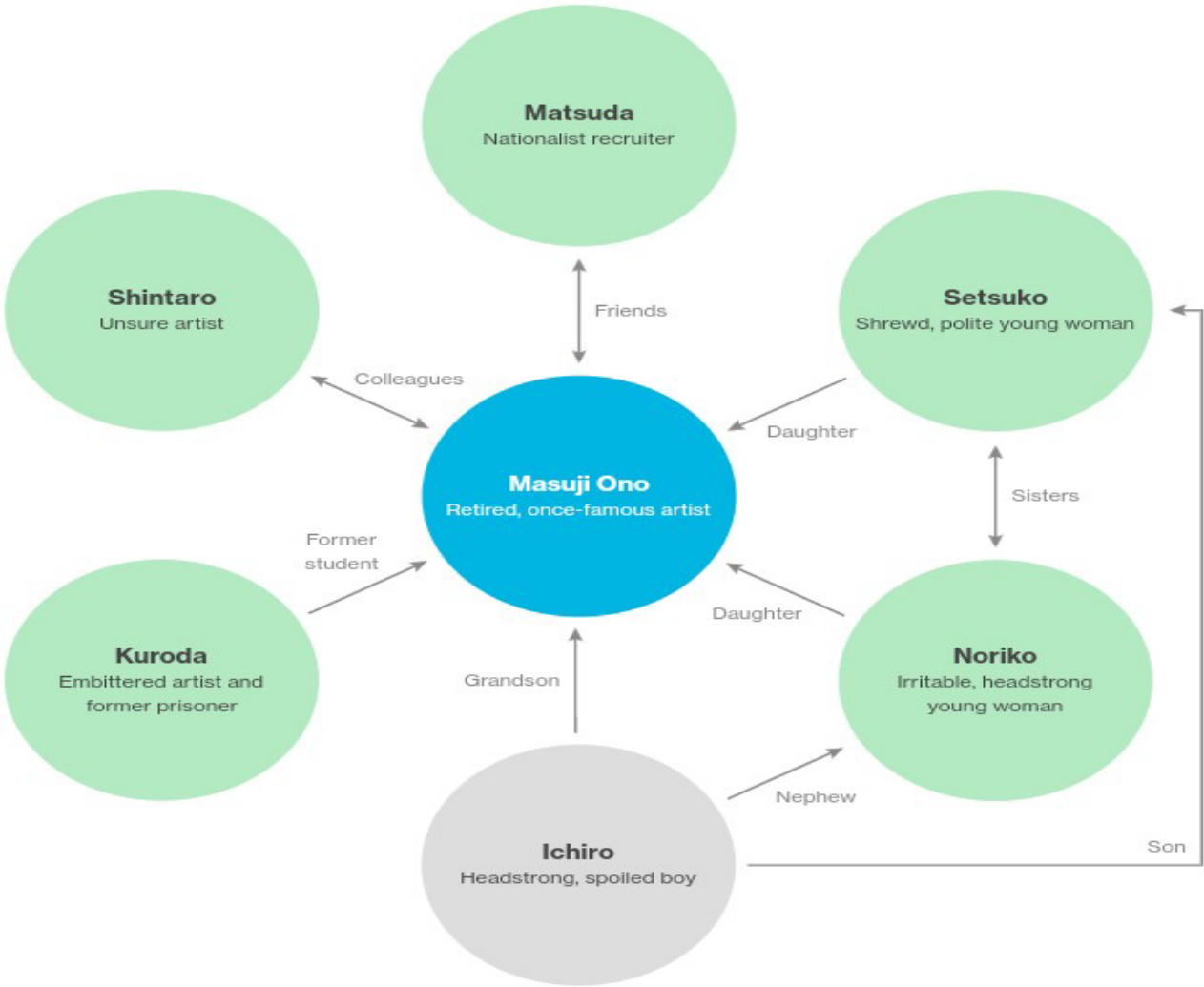
Suichi is Setsuko's husband, making him Ono's first son-in-law. Ono frequently invokes him even

though he appears rarely in the novel. He stands, in Ono's mind, for the decline and Americanization of Japan's younger generation. Suichi has strong anti-war and pro-American beliefs, and even prefers that his son, Ichiro, watch American television and movies over Japanese ones. He is a successful businessman, causing Ono to resent both his beliefs and his ability to thrive in occupied Japan. Suichi is not afraid to be open with his father-in-law about their different views, causing the two of them to get into a charged argument while burying the ashes of Ono's son, Kenii.

j) Kuroda

Ono's former favorite student, Kuroda remains a mysterious offscreen figure for most of the novel. Flashbacks tell us that he was a remarkably talented young artist who hero-worshipped his teacher. Ono fondly remembers their shared nights at the Migi-Hidari, discussing art and the "new spirit" of Japan, but it is clear that something has soured in their relationship. Kuroda's assistant unceremoniously kicks Ono out of Kuroda's house upon learning his identity, and Ono becomes anxious when he learns that they have a new mutual acquaintance, since he suspects that Kuroda has spoken unflatteringly about him. Towards the end of the novel, it is revealed that Ono leaked Kuroda's name to a committee meant to censor unpatriotic art. This act caused Kuroda and his family terribly pain during the war, and Kuroda does not forgive Ono during the novel.

Character Map



An Artist of the Floating World Essay Questions

- 1. Ono is widely considered to be an example of an unreliable narrator. What does this phrase actually mean and in what way does Ono prove that the moniker fits him?**

An unreliable narrator is a first-person narrator whose credibility is seriously compromised and whose version of the narrative is therefore highly skewed and subjective. Sometimes an unreliable narrator's unreliability is obvious immediately; in other instances, their unreliability does not reveal itself until the latter stages of the novel or movie in question. When the latter occurs, it often forces the reader or viewer to completely change their view of a character or a situation, and sometimes changes their thoughts about the events in a story entirely.

Ono is somewhat unique as an unreliable narrator because it is he who tells us at the start of the novel that he is unreliable. He tells us that he cannot remember all of the details of the events he is recounting. He even hints that his memory and cognitive abilities are slipping, describing some of his new absentminded habits. Strangely, though, this honestly causes us to trust him more in certain ways, since he appears self-aware. Later, however, we learn that Ono has exaggerated many facts of his career, trying to match his own feelings of guilt to an external narrative, as well as in an attempt to feel relevant and important as he ages. Therefore, while we understand him to be somewhat unreliable from the start, the true extent of this tendency is revealed much later.

- 2. What are the two main artistic ideologies represented in this book, and which does Ono ultimately believe is correct?**

Some characters in this novel believe that art exists to capture beauty, especially if that beauty will otherwise go unrecorded. Moriyama, for instance, subscribes to such a belief. Other characters, most notably Matsuda, believe that art should exist as part of social and political movements, and that aesthetics should influence rather than imitate life. Ono begins his career under Moriyama's tutelage and is clearly struck by his ideology of art, but Matsuda manages to eventually convert him to his own side. After the war, at the time of the novel's narration, Ono seems torn. His descriptions come alive when they focus on the floating world of Moriyama's paintings, but he also speaks about his political awakening and political art with vivid conviction. In the end, it seems, Ono believes that art is powerful enough to do both, or else—he fears—powerless enough to do both without causing any disruption or change.

- 3. Why is Ono so upset by his grandson's pretend games, and how does this conflict relate to the theme of generational divide?**

Ichiro enjoys pretending to be a cowboy, specifically the Lone Ranger. While doing so, he pretends to speak English to himself. Ono catches him playing this game, and is disturbed when he finds out that Ichiro likes to pretend to be an iconic American figure rather than a Japanese one. His seeming overreaction occurs because he feels stifled by the American military occupation in Japan, and, to an even greater extent, by the American cultural influence at play in his country. Younger people, including Ichiro's parents, are completely accepting of American influence and even see it as a positive cultural factor. Therefore, when he sees his grandson pretending to be a cowboy, Ono fears that his children's generation is corrupting his grandson's generation, reinforcing their own Westernized values and implicitly rejecting Ono's own values.

4. How does Ishiguro distinguish the atmosphere of the “floating world” from that of the regular world using imagery and figurative language?

For the most part, Ishiguro's language is fairly understated, and he avoids metaphor and simile. The “floating world” is an exception. In Ishiguro's descriptions of this world, as well as in Moriyama's paintings of it, lantern-light plays an essential role. Ishiguro describes the light with metaphors that create an ethereal, spooky mood, such as that of a “grotesque miniature graveyard.” In addition, while Ishiguro tends to use mostly visual images to describe everyday reality, he uses non-visual images to describe the “floating world” and Ono's life in that period. These images include the sound of wooden sandals on the ground and the smell of rotting wood in Moriyama's villa.

5. Discuss the use of Noriko's marriage negotiation as a means to drive this novel's plot forward while revealing Ono's past.

Noriko marries through a traditional arranged marriage, even while Japan goes through a period of rapid economic growth and westernization. The negotiations, then, are a useful way to show how Japan has remained familiar to Ono in certain ways while transforming with overwhelming speed in others. Engagements, marriages, and the subsequent starting of a household and family are a familiar and fairly linear pattern, which makes this sequence useful as the book's main linear plotline. While Ono's tumultuous past appears in bits and pieces, this marriage appears in a chronological order that will be familiar to most readers, even if they are not familiar with specifically Japanese norms and traditions surrounding marriage. At the same time, the negotiation necessitates interviews with people from Ono's past, so that even as it moves forward it helps cast the novel backward. When Ono visits Kuroda and Matsuda, the plot can seamlessly transition into conversations about and descriptions of his younger days.