An Artist of the Floating World

INTRODUCTION

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. Ishigura 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

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.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

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.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** An Artist of the Floating World
- **When Written:** 1980s
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1986
- **Literary Period:** Post-Postmodern Literature; Realism; New Sincerity. *An Artist of the Floating World* employs the clear, dispassionate descriptions of middle-class life that characterize realist texts, but depicts a world in which any idea of truth is undermined by the shifting nature of memory and popular understandings of history. In this way it combines the language of realism with the fractured picture of reality typical of postmodern texts. The novel does not have the cynicism often associated with Postmodern novels and for this reason, can be seen to combine elements of Postmodernism with an earnest desire to depict life as it really is, which is characteristic of realism. Texts that combine these characteristics have sometimes been grouped together under the rubric the "New Sincerity."

- **Genre:** Realist Fiction
- **Setting:** An unnamed city in Japan in the years following the end of the Second World War.
- **Climax:** At Noriko's *miai*, Ono tells the Saitos that he admits making mistakes in his career.
- **Antagonist:** Pride; Nationalism
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Reluctant Representative. Because Ishiguro left Japan at the age of five and did not live through the events he describes, he has expressed discomfort with the use of his novels as source texts for understanding post-war Japanese experience. Instead, he sees works like *An Artist of the Floating World* as works set in post-war Japan that tackle universal themes.

Dylan as Literature. Ishiguro has said he would not be a writer if he hadn't discovered the lyrics of folk singer Bob Dylan when he was a teenager. Despite being a musician, not a poet or novelist, Dylan controversially won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, one year before Ishiguro.

PLOT SUMMARY

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.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Masuji Ono – An aging artist who created propaganda for the Japanese during the Second World War and is now preoccupied after the war with assessing his legacy. Ono grew up with a father who did not support his becoming an artist, then moved to the city in which the novel takes place as a young man. He makes money by painting works for export to foreigners. His work catches the eye of an artist and patron of the arts named Mori-san, and he spends the next seven years living in Mori-san's villa. Then, under the influence of the nationalist Matsuda, Ono decides to change his style of painting to promote Japanese imperialism. During the war and the years leading up to it, Ono's propagandist paintings earn him prestige in the city, but after the war's end, nationalist ideas are discredited and Ono is forced into retirement. In the post-war period, Ono feels that, even if his work pursued a mistaken ideology of nationalism, his good faith effort to do what he believes in and make an important contribution means that he can be proud of his life's work. Ono lost his wife Michiko and son Kenji in the war, but he doesn't discuss his grief. Ono also feels that the younger generation's bitterness towards his generation and desire to sweep away all the old traditions is too extreme a response to the devastation of the war. Instead, he concerns himself with arranging the marriage of his youngest daughter Noriko, who resents her father because of what she

sees as his sordid past and the shadow it casts on her marriage prospects. Ono also cultivates a close relationship with his grandson Ichiro. Near the end of the novel, doubt is cast on Ono's account of his career's importance and impact by his daughter Setsuko, who suggests he was "merely a painter" who had little impact on the fate of Japan or even, as he had thought, on his daughter's failed first engagement.

Noriko – The younger, prettier, and more outspoken of Ono's two daughters, Noriko is unmarried for much of the novel and, at nearly twenty-six years old, is becoming worried that she will not find a husband. The year before the action of the novel, the Ono family was in talks to marry Noriko to Jiro Miyake. After the Miyake family withdrew from marriage negotiations without providing a believable explanation, Noriko suspects that perhaps something her father said or did caused the rupture. At the novel's start, Noriko is living alone with her father in their home, but working in an office. She often complains to Ono about his laziness, meddling, and lack of activity. Noriko is playful and good with children, getting along especially well with her nephew, Ichiro. Later, as marriage negotiations progress with a new match, Taro Saito, Noriko becomes stiff and nervous during the formal meeting of the two families. It is only after Ono tells the assembled group that he regrets some of his work during the war that Noriko begins to show her personality during the all-important meeting. The engagement goes through, the couple is eventually married, and Noriko moves out of her father's spacious home and into a small modern apartment with her husband Taro. At the novel's end, she is expecting her first child.

Setsuko – Mannerly, self-deprecating, and indirect, Setsuko is Ono's older daughter. Ono thinks she is not as attractive as her sister, but gains in dignity and attractiveness as she ages. She marries Suichi before the war and is a mother to the young Ichiro. Setsuko is the one who gently suggests to Ono that there may be something in the family past which is getting in the way of her sister Noriko's marrying. Later in the novel, when she sees that Ono believes she had been referring to his wartime career as a propaganda artist, Setsuko tells her father that she never thought his art had enough of a reputation to damage the prestige of the family. However, because Ono's narration is unreliable and Setsuko herself is so political in her speech, it remains unclear whether this is true.

Suichi – Formerly a polite and friendly man, Setsuko's husband Suichi has become angry and sullen, scarred by his experiences as a soldier in Manchuria. He is bitter toward the older generation, holding them responsible for the many losses of the war. He walks away from the funeral service for his brother-in-law Kenji, which Setsuko explains is a result of his anger at the many lives lost during the war.

Ichiro – A strong-willed boy of seven, Setsuko's son Ichiro grows up without any memory of the events of the war that so heavily affected his world. He frequently asks uncomfortable questions of his grandfather Ono, like whether he had to retire from painting because Japan lost the war. Ichiro is obsessed with icons of American pop culture, like the cowboy Lone Ranger and the cartoon sailor Popeye. He likes to act macho and enjoys acting out male solidarity with his grandfather while mocking the weakness of his mother and aunt.

Dr. Saito – An art professor with a good social status, Dr. Saito is a confident, pleasant man. Ono believes he met Dr. Saito before the war and that Dr. Saito knows his work, but Setsuko tells Ono that Taro does not think Dr. Saito was acquainted with Ono's work or that the two older men had met. Ono's depiction of himself as a prominent artist is called into question by Setsuko's claim that Dr. Saito was not familiar with his work.

Jiro Miyake – A potential husband for Noriko, who pulled out of marriage negotiations a year before the beginning of the novel's action. Ono dwells on his memory of an interaction he and Jiro had while waiting for the tram one day, in which Jiro said something to Ono that makes Ono think that his past is to blame for the failure of Noriko's marriage negotiations.

Kuroda – Ono's most promising student, Kuroda eventually strikes off in his own direction artistically. Disapproving of the new direction of Kuroda's work, Ono gives Kuroda's name to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities, which leads to Kuroda's arrest, interrogation, and mistreatment in prison. After the war, Ono goes to visit Kuroda, who has secured a good position as a teacher at the same school that Mitsuo Saito attends, but Kuroda's student Enchi tells Ono that Kuroda will not want to see him. Kuroda affirms this to Ono in a letter, which leaves Ono concerned that Kuroda's dislike for him will have a negative influence on Noriko's marriage prospects.

Shintaro – One of Ono's less promising students, Shintaro is nonetheless someone whose company Ono seeks out. While Ono's most promising students gather at the Migi-Hidari for high-minded discussions about art and patriotism, Shintaro frequents the small bar owned by Mrs. Kawakabi. Shintaro is extremely grateful to Ono for helping his brother Yoshio get a job and often showers Ono with praise. After the war, Ono and Shintaro continue to spend time drinking together, until Shintaro asks Ono to write to a school where he is applying for a job saying that Shintaro had not liked the direction their work together took during the war. Ono refuses to help Shintaro, and their friendship ends. After this, Ono compares Shintaro to his fellow pupil the Tortoise, saying both men lacked the courage to follow their convictions or admit their mistakes.

Mrs. Kawakami – A bar owner in the pleasure district, Mrs. Kawakami has been greatly aged by the war. Even after all the other buildings in the area have been torn down, and Ono and Shintaro are her only customers, Mrs. Kawakami keeps her bar open in the hopes that the pleasure district will see a resurgence. Eventually she sells her bar.

Akira Sugimura – A prominent, wealthy, and eccentric man who

is very influential in the city where the novel takes place from 1913 until 1920. Sugimura attempts to enrich the city by establishing cultural institutions in Kawabe Park, but loses all his wealth in the early 1920s and cannot carry out his plans. Ono buys his house from the Sugimura family after Sugimura's death and respects Sugimura's boldness and ambition, which led him to rise above mediocrity, even if his plans ended in failure.

Chishu Matsuda – A nationalist and art-appreciator, before the war, Matsuda influences Ono to take a new direction in his art. Matsuda believes that artists are failing to address the social and political problems around them, and he mocks Ono's naïve attitude towards the world. Ono comes to work closely with Matsuda and to have great respect for him as an independent thinker who tries to achieve something meaningful through his work. After the war, Matsuda is in poor health and confined to his home. He seems regretful that he never married and has no heirs and says that his life's work amounted to little. Ono, however, believes that Matsuda doesn't truly believe this.

Seiji Moriyama, Mori-san – A rich and talented artist who takes on young pupils, including Ono and the Tortoise, inviting them to live in his villa and study his aesthetic. Mori-san lives in a large decrepit villa in the countryside. He believes that the most delicate beauty in the world exists in transient moments at late-night bars among geishas in the pleasure district, and is dedicating his life to trying to capture this beauty in his art. He uses European techniques in his painting, eschewing the use of dark outlines in favor of shading. When students try to take a different direction in their painting, Mori-san demands that they leave the villa.

Yasunari Nakahara, the Tortoise – The Tortoise is an artist who paints very slowly and earns the mockery of Ono's colleagues at the Takeda Firm, until Ono defends him and takes him under his wing. Ono convinces the Tortoise to move with him to Mori-san's villa, and the Tortoise often showers Ono in praise. This all ends when Ono changes his art to match Matsuda's ideas instead of Mori-san's and the Tortoise dissociates himself from Ono, whom he says is a traitor.

Miss Sugimora – A middle-aged woman who cares deeply about her father's legacy, Akira Sugimora's younger daughter comes to visit Ono to sell him her house. She and her older sister propose an "auction of prestige," in which they will sell the house for a fixed price to the buyer whom they feel deserves the house. She comes to visit the house after the war. Ono is at first offended that she doesn't seem to care about all that he has lost but grows to pity her after realizing that she has lost a great deal in the war too.

President of Kimura Company – The President of the parent company of Kimura Company, where Jiro Miyake works. Jiro tells Ono that the President killed himself as a way to atone for the things the company did during the war, thereby allowing the company and all its workers to feel they have a fresh start. Ono disapproves of this action, while Jiro says that many of the most responsible parties are too cowardly to take responsibility as the president has. This comment leads Ono to believe that Jiro broke off his engagement with Noriko because of Ono's past.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Taro Saito – A friendly young man who works in an office, Taro Saito becomes Noriko's husband at the end of a stressful courtship for the Ono family. He is a good conversationalist, who enjoys joking. At the same time, he has a reverent attitude toward the corporation where he works.

Mrs. Saito – Taro's mother, Mrs. Saito, is a pleasant, confident, well-coifed woman who is respected in her family. From the Saitos treatment of Mrs. Saito, the Onos infer that the Saitos are looking for a more modern, less submissive wife for Taro.

Mitsuo Saito – The younger brother of Taro Saito, Mitsuo is studying at the school where Kuroda teaches. Because of his troubled history with Kuroda, Ono worries that Mitsuo is against his brother marrying Noriko.

Yoshio – Shintaro's brother who receives a white-collar job with a good trajectory after receiving a recommendation from Ono.

Enchi – Kuroda's protégé and a talented artist by Ono's standards, Enchi welcomes Ono into Kuroda's apartment because he believes he is someone else, but upon learning Ono's identity, chastises Ono for having reported Kuroda to the police, telling Ono that Kuroda was beaten in prison and denied medical care.

Master Takeda – The owner of a firm producing art for import to foreigners, Master Takeda pressures his employees to work around the clock to meet deadlines. Ono and the Tortoise leave his firm to move to Mori-san's villa.

Yamagata – The owner of the Migi-Hidari, the bar that Ono frequents with his best pupils and where he has a table reserved for him.

Sasaki – Mori-san's favorite pupil when Ono first starts his residence at the villa, Sasaki later changes his technique and is branded a traitor. He is forced to leave the villa without any of his paintings, which seem likely to have been destroyed.

Ono's Father – Business-minded and strict, Ono's father disapproves of his son's aspiration to become an artist, at one point making a threat (on which he perhaps follows through) to burn all of teenaged Ono's drawings.

Sachiko Ono – Sympathetic to the values of both her son and husband, Ono's mother tries to prevent a confrontation between them over Ono's future.

Plain-clothes Officer – The commanding officer overseeing the burning of Kuroda's paintings.

Uniformed Officer – The policeman guarding the door to Kuroda's house while his paintings are burned and his mother is interrogated.

Kenji Ono – Ono's son, who was killed in Manchuria as he charged across a mine field.

Michiko Ono – Ono's wife, who is killed at the very end of the war in June 1945 by a bomb.

Hirayama Boy – A developmentally disabled man of fifty, the "Hirayama boy" learned that he would get praise and money from strangers by singing patriotic songs during the war. After the war, he gets beaten up for singing these songs.

Miss Suzuki – Matsuda's nurse.

Botchan – A young boy who looks over a wall at Matsuda as he feeds his carp.

Mr. Kyo – The go-between for the meeting of the families of Taro Saito and Noriko.

Yukio Naguchi – A famous composer of patriotic songs during the war, Naguchi was one of many prestigious men who committed suicide as an act of atonement for his role in encouraging Japan to persist in its war effort.

Gisaburo – An unhappy actor past his prime who comes to visit Mori-san's villa.

THEMES

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MEMORY, SELF-PERCEPTION, AND SELF-DECEPTION

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.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE ARTIST

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.

FAMILY REPUTATION, FAMILY SECRETS, AND FAMILIAL LOSS

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 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.

INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT

An Artist of the Floating World portrays a society that instills the importance of respect and obedience towards elders in the young, but is, nevertheless, defined by intergenerational conflict and distrust. This conflict becomes particularly fierce after the war, as the younger generation heaps blame on the older generation for leading the country down a disastrous path. Although Ono's generation seems to have definitively lost in the intergenerational struggle over the country's values, this can hardly be said to be the end of intergenerational conflict. Instead, the book suggests that the issues at stake will arise over and over again, as a new generation will always come along to challenge the beliefs of those who used to make up the younger generation.

The novel shows intergenerational conflict in a variety of different contexts: between parents and children, teachers and students, and political elites and the young men who are sent to fight when those elites decide to declare war. Ono experiences many of these intergenerational conflicts from both sides. As a young boy, Ono dreams of becoming a painter, while his father looks down on artists' lifestyles. While Ono never tells his father directly that he despises his values, he becomes ever more determined to become an artist after his father burns his paintings. Ono also comes into conflict with his own children. His daughter Noriko is often critical of her father, criticizing his idleness, his meddling, and his pride. Ono finds these criticisms utterly inexplicable, except as a symptom of Noriko's anxiety

about her marriage prospects. In his interactions with his older daughter Setsuko, Ono feels a sense of hostility or mistrust that is concealed by her polite manner.

Intergenerational conflict also defines Ono's experiences in the art world, both as a pupil and a teacher. While Ono treats his teachers with courtesy, never criticizing them outright, he still lauds himself for boldly breaking with his teachers' styles of painting. At the same time, Ono is unable to apply this perspective to his dealings with his own students, like Kuroda. Instead, Ono is critical of his own students when they break from his teachings.

The most acute intergenerational conflict in the novel springs from the outcome of the war, as an entire generation is embittered with the elders who decided to continue the war long after it was clear that Japan would be defeated. The terrible destruction Japan suffered during the war is blamed on the older generation who helmed the government, military, and centers of culture. By blaming the elder generation for losing the war, the younger generation experiences an unusually definitive "win," as far as intergenerational conflicts go. To atone for what they have done and display their repentance, many members of the older generation kill themselves. This discredited generation is also forced to give way in most matters in the cultural battles between the younger and older generation. Ono, for instance, seems to defer to his daughters in almost everything. Noriko says in a conversation early in the novel that Ono used to be a "tyrant" who ordered them around, but that he has become quite gentle. Indeed, Ono now knows that he should not try to force his point of view on others. When his grandson idolizes American heroes instead of Japanese ones, Ono stifles his urge to encourage his grandson to have more patriotic idols, knowing that this is a point of view his generation held which has been discredited by the defeat in the war.

The victory of the generation who came of age during the war over their parents' generation is not the end to intergenerational conflict. Instead, the novel hints that the issues that cause intergenerational conflict will surface continually between future generations. The novel shows the cyclical nature of these issues by drawing parallels between the beliefs held in alternating generations. For instance, Ono looks down on his father for being interested in nothing but money and commercial success, preferring to pursue a career in art, even though that career would not be very lucrative. Years later, Ono's children's generation have little sympathy for his values, prioritizing prosperity and a good career above all else, in much the way his father once did. Similarly, in the artistic realm, Ono finds the early works that his teacher Mori-san considers "fatally flawed" to be evidence of "how an artist's talent can transcend the limitations of a particular style." This earlier generation's style of painting that Mori rejected has growing appeal to the next generation, Ono's. Ono has a strong bond with his grandson, Ichiro, who seems to share his grandfather's sense that they are both at odds with the generation that separates them. Often, Ono tries to defy his daughter, Ichiro's mother, to cultivate this sense of solidarity with Ichiro. Ichiro seems to respond in kind: when Setsuko and Noriko refuse to let Ono give Ichiro a taste of sake, Ono believes Ichiro will be upset, but Ichiro instead consoles his grandfather for having failed to prevail over Setsuko.

The novel shows that the cataclysm of war has precipitated an unusual break in the constant cycle of low-level conflict and tension between generations. The nationalist views and beliefs of Ono's generation have been completely discredited by the course of the war, and his children's generation hopes to create a new world on the rubble of the old one. But the novel suggests that similar conflicts will arise anew as soon as another generation that does not remember the war comes along to mount even fresher challenges to this newly established order.

CITY, NATION, HISTORY

An Artist of the Floating World is set in Japan between 1948 and 1950, a time of great upheaval after the country's defeat in World War II. But the novel's protagonist and narrator, Masuji Ono, focuses almost entirely on the relatively narrow world of a single city. Detailed descriptions of the building, renovation, destruction, and erasure of the various physical landmarks in his city that are important to him suggest a narrator much more interested in his own legacy than in the larger historical changes gripping his country. The irony of this is that Ono rose to prominence as a nationalist painter, painting pictures whose purpose was to urge Japanese patriots to fight foreign wars and create a dominant imperial power. In the end, the contrast between Ono's narrow focus on his city and the nationalist and imperialist themes of the work that brought him acclaim proves that Ono was an opportunist who painted propaganda. This runs contrary to his self-portrayal as an independent thinker. At the same time, Ono's careful descriptions of the city suggest that his true talent lies in capturing accurate depictions of the physical world.

The city Ono describes, which is never named, is where Ono has lived since 1913, and where he rose from obscurity to prominence during the lead-up to the war and during the war itself. Ono's treatment of the local pleasure district east of Furukawa exemplifies his narrow focus on the world of his own city, instead of the fate of the nation. Ono describes the creation, growth, damage, destruction, and erasure of the local pleasure district where his favorite two bars, the Migi-Hidari and Mrs. Kawakami's place, are located. This evolution mirrors developments going on in Japan at the time between 1931 and 1950, but Ono ignores the ways in which the region's development may have been connected to the larger events

catalyzing change. The pleasure district first comes into being with the expansion of the city's tramlines in 1931. The new tramline goes to the suburb of Arakawa, relieving the congestion and crowding in the city. Although Ono does not draw the connection, 1931 was also the year that Japan invaded Manchuria, in an attempt to relieve economic pressure by gaining land and resources. Ono is concerned only with the tramlines and how they open up his city to the suburbs, not with this watershed moment in Japan's move towards imperialism. Later, as a nationalist painter, and while nationalist sentiment is taking hold throughout Japan, Ono's prestige allows him to bring official support to the expansion of a patriotic bar, the Migi-Hidari. There, he holds court with his pupils. This is the period for which he is most nostalgic later on—when his work was praised as visionary and important, and when he was able to exert influence. During the war, some, but not all, of the pleasure district is damaged by bombs. While the Migi-Hidari closes, Mrs. Kawakami's place continues to operate. In the first few years after the war, Ono hopes that the district can be reconstructed and restored to its wartime splendor. But one day the local authorities tear down all the surrounding buildings, leaving nothing but ruins for several years afterwards. While Ono expresses confusion at this, the destruction of his pleasure district corresponds to the post-war period in Japan when the country sought to purge itself of nationalist symbols. Ono seems unaware, or unwilling to acknowledge that, in this new climate, the old nationalist pleasure district has no role. In the final chapter, the pleasure district has been completely rebuilt as a commercial district. Young Japanese office workers, enthralled by hopes of American-style prosperity, now work in the area. Ono sits on a bench in the district and considers the younger generation's enthusiasm. At the novel's end, Ono seems to have come to terms with the fact that his legacy has been erased, but he credits himself with having acted in good faith, even if his ideas turned out to have been mistaken. Other landmarks, like Kawabe Park, the Nishizuru District, and the suburb of Arakawa all receive similar treatment. The ways these parts of the city have changed with the times are meticulously recorded, but Ono himself never draws any connection between historical events and the changes he witnesses on the local level.

Ono's narrow focus on his city stands in marked contrast with his work as a nationalist painter. At the same time as he trains a narrow focus on his immediate surroundings, he paints work with nationalist, militarist, and imperialist themes and global implications. While Ono's talent seems to be for accurately capturing the look of specific places around him, he chooses to work in whatever artistic style seems most promising at a given time. This opportunistic attitude leads Ono to paint the geishas of pleasure districts using Western style painting techniques when that style of work is in fashion, and then to make a definitive break with this style when nationalism begins to rise in Japan. Because Ono seems mostly unaware of and indifferent toward the world beyond his city, when he claims that strong feeling motivated him to turn towards a propagandistic style in his art, this rings hollow.

In the end, the intense focus on physical spaces and how they look at different moments in time that characterizes Ono's narrative also suggests what might have been a truer path for him as an artist. Instead of work that focuses on human subjects or political messages, Ono's true talent lies in capturing a place at a particular time. His first paintings, which his father burns, are notable for their striking verisimilitude, or resemblance to reality. If Ono had not been embarrassed of his "narrow artist's perspective" and sought to expand it to take in the wider world of political and historical changes, he might have created paintings that would have captured a moment in time and been looked at as a valuable record and significant artistic contribution for many years to come.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE SMELL OF BURNING

Although the novel's narrator, Masuji Ono, never describes the grief and pain he has suffered over a lifetime punctuated by trauma, the way these traumas impact him is suggested by the melancholy feeling that comes over him when he smells burning. The smell of burning brings two kinds of associations for Ono, both having to do with the loss of what is most precious to him. Burning's first association is with the smoke produced by paintings being destroyed, and its second association is with the smoke produced by bombs. The smell of burning evokes both the trauma of having his own paintings destroyed by his father when he was fifteen years old, and the trauma of having accidentally caused the paintings of his protégé Kuroda to be burnt by the authorities. It also evokes the smell after a bomb killed Ono's wife. Importantly, Ono's father's decision to burn Ono's paintings only makes Ono more determined to become an artist against his father's wishes, which ultimately leads to a split between Ono and his parents. While Ono never discusses the circumstances surrounding his rupture with his parents, the smell of burning is a symbolic link that associates his loss of his parents with the loss of his wife Michiko in a bomb attack. The smell reminds Ono vividly of both events. At the end of the novel, when Matsuda says the smell of burning these days usually suggests nothing more than a garden being cleared, the suggestion is that the post-war future will not be as marred by traumatic losses as the years of Ono's life.

LANTERNS

Lanterns in the novel are associated with Ono's teacher Mori-san, who includes a lantern in each of his paintings and dedicates himself to trying to capture the look of lantern light. For Mori-san, the flickering, easily extinguished quality of lantern light symbolizes the transience of beauty and the importance of giving careful attention to small moments and details in the physical world. Lanterns, then, symbolize an outlook on life which prizes small details and everyday moments above the ideological concerns of nationalists or commercial concerns of businesspeople. It is an old-fashioned, aesthetically focused, and more traditional way of viewing the world.

GARDENS

Gardens represent an uncomplicated, beautiful collaboration between humans and nature that exists across historical moments and outside of ideology. Ono's true connection (which he seems to have ignored out of his ambition) is with the details of the natural world and with the ways that humans shape that world, not with the subjects he takes up under the influences of Master Takeda, Mori-san, or Matsuda. In his efforts to become a relevant artist, Ono does not dedicate himself to exploring this subject in his art. Often, during an upsetting conversation, Ono turns his attention away from the person with whom he is speaking and begins to observe what is happening in a garden in minute detail. At the end of the novel, Ono reports to Matsuda that he has begun painting again. He says he paints "plants and flowers mostly, just for my own amusement." From this, it is clear that Ono's interest in depicting gardens was his true passion all along, which, unbeknownst to him, might have provided him with the material to make a truly valuable artistic contribution.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *An Artist of the Floating World* published in 1986.

October 1948 Quotes

It is now already a thing of some fifteen years ago. In those days, when my circumstances seemed to improve with each month, my wife had begun to press me to find a new house. With her usual foresight, she had argued the importance of our having a house in keeping with our status — not out of vanity, but for the sake of our children's marriage prospects. I saw the sense in this, but since Setsuko, our eldest, was still only fourteen or fifteen, I did not go about the matter with any urgency. Nevertheless, for a year or so, whenever I heard of a suitable house for sale, I would remember to make enquiries.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Setsuko, Michiko Ono

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7-8

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Ono reflects on the way he came to own his impressive house. His words here immediately establish the importance of status and reputation in Japanese society and set the stage for the marital drama that will inform much of the text. This moment also reveals Ono's personal preoccupation with status, as well as his tendency to gloss over—if not outright lie about—potentially negative aspects of his personality. Here, for example, he thrusts the desire for a grander house solely onto his wife, insisting that he personally was unconcerned with such markers of wealth and prestige. Throughout the book, however, it will become clear that Ono is both a deeply unreliable narrator and extremely concerned with issues of reputation, suggesting that he likely felt just as much urgency as did his wife when it came to obtaining a house "in keeping with" their social standing.

Besides, there was surely much to admire in the idea of 'an auction of prestige', as the elder daughter called it. One wonders why things are not settled more often by such means. How so much more honourable is such a contest, in which one's moral conduct and achievement are brought as witnesses rather than the size of one's purse. I can still recall the deep satisfaction I felt when I learnt the Sugimuras — after the most thorough investigation — had deemed me the most worthy of the house they so prized.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Miss Sugimora

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Ono has explained that his wife is annoyed that the Sugimuras are snobbishly looking for a buyer who "deserves" to live in their extravagant house. But to Ono, winning this "auction of prestige" by being selected to buy the Sugimura house becomes a tangible sign of the social status he has achieved through his work as an artist. This is yet another early moment that evidences Ono's obsession with his reputation as an artist. Here, his (ultimately delusional) belief in the potency of his artistic legacy comes wrapped in a veneer of disbelieving humility, as it will continue to be presented throughout the novel.

> Coming out of Mrs Kawakami's now, you could stand at her doorway and believe you have just been drinking at some outpost of civilization. All around, there is nothing but a desert of demolished rubble. Only the backs of several buildings far in the distance will remind you that you are not so far from the city centre. 'War damage,' Mrs Kawakami calls it. But I remember walking around the district shortly after the surrender and many of those buildings were still standing. The Migi-Hidari was still there, the windows all blown out, part of the roof fallen in. And I remember wondering to myself as I walked past those shattered buildings, if they would ever again come back to life. Then I came by one morning and the bulldozers had pulled down everything.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Mrs. Kawakami

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

For Ono, Mrs. Kawakami's bar is a vestige of a time when he was at the height of his artistic career This moment evidences his desire to return to the world as it was before the war, as well as his preoccupation with the physical landscape of the world around him. His observations hint at the breadth of physical changes to the Japanese landscape following the war, themselves reflective of colossal cultural shifts that left men like Ono behind. Though he doesn't pinpoint the reason that the authorities tore down the buildings in the district, it is probable that authorities razed buildings that had been associated with nationalism following the war.

> "We took him once to the cinema to see an American cowboy film. He's been very fond of cowboys ever since. We even had to buy him a ten-gallon hat. He's convinced cowboys make that funny sound he does. It must have seemed very strange."
>
> "So that's what it was," I said with a laugh. "My grandson's become a cowboy."
>
> Down in the garden, a breeze was making the foliage sway.
>
> Noriko was crouching down by the old stone lantern near the back wall, pointing something out to Ichiro.
>
> "Still," I said, with a sigh, "only a few years ago, Ichiro wouldn't have been allowed to see such a thing as a cowboy film."
>
> Setsuko, without turning from the garden, said: "Suichi believes it's better he likes cowboys than that he idolize people like Miyamoto Musashi. Suichi thinks the American heroes are the better models for children now."

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Noriko, Suichi , Ichiro

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35-36

Explanation and Analysis

While reflecting on Setsuko's recent visit, Ono remembers watching her son, his grandson, impersonating the Lone Ranger and pretending to yell in English. Though Ono does not know who the Lone Ranger is, he understands enough to realize that Ichiro is not impersonating a Japanese hero—something Setsuko soon confirms. Miyamoto Musashi was a famous 16th-century samurai often considered Japan's greatest swordsman, and implied to be someone many children of Ono's generation and earlier idolized. The fact that Setsuko took her son to see an American film reflects how drastically values have shifted away from Ono's professed Japanese nationalism since the war, and further emphasizes the vast generational gulf between Ono and his children.

My respect for reception rooms may well appear exaggerated, but then you must realize that in the house I grew up in — in Tsuruoka Village, a half-day's train journey from here — I was forbidden even to enter the reception room until the age of twelve. That room being in many senses the centre of the house, curiosity compelled me to construct an image of its interior from the occasional glimpses I managed to catch of it. Later in my life I was often to surprise colleagues with my ability to realize a scene on canvas based only on the briefest of passing glances; it is possible I have my father to thank for this skill, and the inadvertent training he gave my artist's eye during those formative years.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Ono's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Ono explains that, during her recent visit, Setsuko found her father lost in thought in his reception room, a habit he insists only began following his retirement. Before that, he did not enter such rooms except upon special occasions, in large part due to the influence of his own father. Ono's explanation of his past experiences with reception rooms reflects the fact that they are places strictly controlled by adults and also reveals the way in which they have shaped his art. It was the secrecy around his father's reception room that led him to become interested in capturing the essence of a physical space. His "artist's eye" manifests throughout the book as he latches onto the physicality of the world around him. Ono's father was vehemently opposed to his son's chosen profession, further suggesting a subtle smugness in Ono's pronouncement that his father accidentally helped shape his artwork.

But as I say, there is a different mood in the country these days, and Suichi's attitudes are probably by no means exceptional. Perhaps I am being unfair if I credit young Miyake, too, with such bitterness, but then the way things are at present, if you examine anything anyone says to you, it seems you will find a thread of this same bitter feeling running through it. For all I know, Miyake did speak those words; perhaps all men of Miyake's and Suichi's generation have come to think and speak like that.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Suichi , Jiro Miyake, Hirayama Boy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Ono believes that his son-in-law's generation is full of anger towards men of Ono's generation for leading the country to war, and that this discontent is to blame for the country's current climate of bitterness. Ono further associates this bitterness with Jiro Miyake's relief at the suicide of the president of his company; earlier in the story, Ono reflected upon a conversation with Jiro in which the young man called the president brave for killing himself to repent for his role in riling up Japanese nationalism. Here, however, Ono wonders if he was confusing Jiro's words with Suichi's. This further establishes Ono's unreliability as a narrator and makes clear how he alters his memories to fit into a narrative with other memories. This moment also reflects the distance and tension Ono perceives as existing between his generation and that of his children.

I have still in my possession a painting by the Tortoise — a self-portrait he painted not long after the Takeda days. It shows a thin young man with spectacles, sitting in his shirtsleeves in a cramped, shadowy room, surrounded by easels and rickety furniture, his face caught on one side by the light coming from the window. The earnestness and timidity written on the face are certainly true to the man I remember, and in this respect, the Tortoise has been remarkably honest; looking at the portrait, you would probably take him to be the sort you could confidently elbow aside for an empty tram seat. But then each of us, it seems, has his own special conceits. If the Tortoise's modesty forbade him to disguise his timid nature, it did not prevent him attributing to himself a kind of lofty intellectual air — which I for one have no recollection of. But then to be fair, I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty; however accurately one may fill in the surface details of one's mirror reflection, the personality represented rarely comes near the truth as others would see it.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Master Takeda, Yasunari Nakahara, the Tortoise

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Ono remembers Yasunari Nakahara, an artist who joined the Takeda firm a year after Ono and whose lack of productivity earned him the nickname "the Tortoise." Despite possessing a clear sense of disdain for the Tortoise, Ono still owns a self-portrait by the man that he, in a roundabout way, admires for what he perceives as its relative honesty. Ono's words here about artists' self-deluding nature could very easily be applied to himself, as he has been revealed by this point to be a deeply unreliable narrator who alters his memories to better suit his self-conception as a remarkable and influential artist. Ono has not proven particularly self-aware, and likely does not grasp the irony of calling out his fellow colleagues for the inability to see themselves as others would.

> You may perhaps think I am taking too much credit in relating this small episode; after all, the point I was making in the Tortoise's defence seems a very obvious one — one you may think would occur instantly to anyone with any respect for serious art. But it is necessary to remember the climate of those days at Master Takeda's – the feeling amongst us that we were all battling together against time to preserve the hard-earned reputation of the firm. We were also quite aware that the essential point about the sort of things we were commissioned to paint — geishas, cherry trees, swimming carps, temples — was that they look 'Japanese' to the foreigners to whom they were shipped out, and all finer points of style were quite likely to go unnoticed. So I do not think I am claiming undue credit for my younger self if I suggest my actions that day were a manifestation of a quality I came to be much respected for in later years — the ability to think and judge for myself, even if it meant going against the sway of those around me.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Master Takeda, Yasunari Nakahara, the Tortoise

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Ono recalls at one point defending the Tortoise's lack of speed by declaring the artist was full of integrity, rather than laziness, and as such refused to rush his work. Here Ono defends his role in what may be viewed as making a minor, obvious point, revealing a tendency to bolster his own self-importance that will echo throughout the novel. He defends his actions by pointing out how most of Takeda's employees cared only about speed, and as such that standing up for the Tortoise showed that he was able to think independently even if it meant going against those around him. Ono will repeatedly return to this notion that he is an independent thinker, even as he proves to clearly latch onto and follow in the footsteps of his various artistic teachers throughout the book. Ono further undermines his role as a maverick by highlighting the stereotypical work of the firm for which he works. Ishiguro subtly mocks overly-simplistic notions of Japanese culture in the wake of the war, evidenced by foreign demand for stereotypical images with little regard for authenticity.

> "I realize there are now those who would condemn the likes of you and me for the very things we were once proud to have achieved. And I suppose this is why you're worried, Ono. You think perhaps I will praise you for things perhaps best forgotten."
>
> "No such thing," I said hastily. "You and I both have a lot to be proud of. It's merely that where marriage talks are concerned, one has to appreciate the delicacy of the situation. But you've put my mind at rest. I know you'll exercise your judgement as well as ever."
>
> "I will do my best," Matsuda said. "But, Ono, there are things we should both be proud of. Never mind what people today are all saying. Before long, a few more years, and the likes of us will be able to hold our heads high about what we tried to do. I simply hope I live as long as that. It's my wish to see my life's efforts vindicated."

Related Characters: Chishu Matsuda, Masuji Ono (speaker), Noriko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

Ono visits his former teacher for the first time in thirty years because he thinks that Setsuko suggested that Ono's work as a nationalist painter during the war will tarnish his family's reputation and prevent Noriko from marrying. Ono wants to ensure that Matsuda will give investigators a good impression of Ono's family and, without saying so outright, that he will temper their dedication to nationalist art. Ono speaks euphemistically, refusing to say aloud that he fears that his past work will be seen as a bad thing. Matsuda voices these thoughts for him, but also tells Ono his own position that he hopes to one day again be proud of what

they tried to accomplish and to be reassured that they did not waste their lives in pursuit of art unequivocally rejected by society. Ono will go on to adopt Matsuda's language to describe how he feels about his wartime work, further complicating his conception of himself as a radically independent thinker.

April 1949 Quotes

Mrs Kawakami was quiet for a moment, as though listening for something amidst the sounds the workmen were making outside. Then a smile spread over her face and she said: 'This was such a splendid district once. You remember, Sensei?"

I returned her smile, but did not say anything. Of course, the old district had been fine. We had all enjoyed ourselves and the spirit that had pervaded the bantering and those arguments had never been less than sincere. But then perhaps that same spirit had not always been for the best. Like many things now, it is perhaps as well that that little world has passed away and will not be returning. I was tempted to say as much to Mrs Kawakami that evening, but decided it would be tactless to do so. For clearly, the old district was dear to her heart — much of her life and energy had been invested in it — and one can surely understand her reluctance to accept it has gone for ever.

Related Characters: Mrs. Kawakami, Masuji Ono (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126-127

Explanation and Analysis

Ono reflects on all the construction happening around the city as the rubble from the war is cleared away and new businesses are being built in its place. Mrs. Kawakami is considering an offer to sell her property, and the two recall the district as it once was. Ono again focuses on the changing physicality of the world around him as a reflection of societal shifts, which he has come closer to accepting as inevitable. Ono reveals a subtle change in attitude in this moment, as he expresses nostalgia for the past while also acknowledging that the ideals of his generation may indeed be best cleared away with the rubble of the war. His refusal to speak these thoughts aloud solely due to concerns about Mrs. Kawakami's feelings, however, ring hollow; as someone who similarly invested his life and energy in the district, he is likely not ready to fully admit the truth to himself either.

November 1949 Quotes

Nevertheless, whenever I find myself wandering around Kawabe Park these days, I start to think of Sugimura and his schemes, and I confess I am beginning to feel a certain admiration for the man. For indeed, a man who aspires to rise above the mediocre, to be something more than ordinary, surely deserves admiration, even if in the end he fails and loses a fortune on account of his ambitions. It is my belief, furthermore, that Sugimura did not die an unhappy man. For his failure was quite unlike the undignified failures of most ordinary lives, and a man like Sugimura would have known this. If one has failed only where others have not had the courage or will to try, there is a consolation — indeed, a deep satisfaction — to be gained from this observation when looking back over one's life.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Akira Sugimura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

Ono reflects on the origins of Kawabe Park, which was developed by the influential and wealthy Akira Sugimura—the same man who built Ono's house. Sugimura had initially planned to build a kabuki theater, European-style concert hall, museum, and pet cemetery in the park, but the plans were ended after Sugimura lost too much money. Ono wants to envision himself as similar to Sugimura, who tried to reshape the culture of the city by funding the building of new institutions. In his mind, Ono, too, shaped Japan's culture through his support in establishing of the Migi-Hidari in the pleasure district, where he held court with his students. Ono's assertion that Sugimura's work was not in vain betrays his own desire to see himself as someone who pursued his dreams and rose above mediocrity, even if the ideas he once subscribed to are no longer relevant.

> You may gather from such recollections that our devotion to our teacher and to his principles was fierce and total. And it is easy with hindsight — once the shortcomings of an influence have become obvious — to be critical of a teacher who fosters such a climate. But then again, anyone who has held ambitions on a grand scale, anyone who has been in a position to achieve something large and has felt the need to impart his ideas as thoroughly as possible, will have some sympathy for the way Mori-san conducted things. For though it may seem a little foolish now in the light of what became of his career, it was Mori-san's wish at that time to do nothing less than change fundamentally the identity of painting as practised in our city. It was with no less a goal in mind that he devoted so much of his time and wealth to the nurturing of pupils, and it is perhaps important to remember this when making judgements concerning my former teacher.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Sasaki, Seiji Moriyama, Mori-san

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

While Ono is working at Mori-san's firm, the star pupil, Sasaki, is banished from the villa after straying from Mori-san's teachings. This is a consequence of the fact that Mori-san demands complete loyalty from his students, fostering an intense atmosphere in which pupils even come to blows over accusations of being traitors. In hindsight, Ono urges the reader not to judge their devotion to their teacher, insisting that Mori-san was laudably dedicated to his pupils and changing the city's artistic culture. As Ono seeks to justify the atmosphere of total loyalty that Mori-san fostered, he also indirectly defends his decision to create a similarly stringent environment among his own students later in life. Sasaki's fate is echoed by Kuroda's, who is called a traitor while being beaten in prison much like Mori-san's students are driven to violence at the suggestion that they have betrayed Mori-san's ideas.

> 'No. He wasn't a bad man. He was just someone who worked very hard doing what he thought was for the best. But you see, Ichiro, when the war ended, things were very different. ... after the war, Mr. Naguchi thought his songs had been — well — a sort of mistake. He thought of all the people who had been killed, all the little boys your age, Ichiro, who no longer had parents, he thought of all these things and he thought perhaps his songs were a mistake. And he felt he should apologize. To everyone who was left. To little boys who no longer had parents. And to parents who had lost little boys like you. To all these people, he wanted to say sorry. I think that's why he killed himself. Mr Naguchi wasn't a bad man at all, Ichiro. He was brave to admit the mistakes he'd made. He was very brave and honourable.'

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Yukio Naguchi, Ichiro

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

While having lunch together in a department store, Ichiro asks his grandfather who Yukio Naguchi was and whether Ono is similar to him. Ono explains that Naguchi was an influential composer whose songs were sung all over Japan during the war. Believing himself partly to blame for the nationalist sentiment that led to the fighting, following the surrender Naguchi felt he should apologize to all those who lost loved ones and killed himself. Ono clearly sees parallels between himself and Naguchi, one of the most famous wartime figures, in his belief that his influence as an artist promoted destructive ideas throughout the country. The story of Naguchi further echoes Jiro Miyake's words earlier in the novel, when he tells Ono that the president of his company killed himself to atone for leading the company in a bad direction during the war. While Ono had said back then that this seemed like a waste of life, he now suggests that suicide is a laudable means to atone for exerting a powerful, negative influence on society. This kind of talk betrays Ono's inflated sense of self-importance, and also makes Ono's family worry that he is considering suicide.

I have learnt many things over these past years. I have learnt much in contemplating the world of pleasure, and recognizing its fragile beauty. But I now feel it is time for me to progress to other things. Sensei, it is my belief that in such troubled times as these, artists must learn to value something more tangible than those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light. It is not necessary that artists always occupy a decadent and enclosed world. My conscience, Sensei, tells me I cannot remain forever an artist of the floating world.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Kuroda, Seiji Moriyama, Mori-san

Related Themes:

Page Number: 179-180

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the novel, Ono has begun to imitate the artistic style of Matsuda, creating more politically-focused work with specifically nationalist overtones. Mori-san, who demands total loyalty from his students, has confiscated as many of the offending works as he could find, and here Ono attempts to explain to his teacher why he has shifted his creative endeavors. He declares that he is beyond focusing on the "floating world"—that is, "the night-time world of pleasure, entertainment and drink" that serves as the backdrop for Mori-san's students' paintings. Ono grants his declaration a sense of noble importance in his remembrance, presenting it as yet another moment in which he revealed his independence and conviction. Shortly after this moment, Ono will describe how he learned of Kuroda being jailed—implicitly drawing a parallel between himself and the rebellion of his student, despite the fact the he is responsible for Kuroda's arrest.

'Did you have authorization to bum those paintings?' I asked.

'It's our policy to destroy any offensive material which won't be needed as evidence. We've selected a good enough sample. The rest of this trash we're just burning.'

'I had no idea', I said, 'something like this would happen. I merely suggested to the committee someone come round and give Mr Kuroda a talking-to for his own good.' I stared again at the smouldering pile in the middle of the yard. 'It was quite unnecessary to bum those. There were many fine works amongst them.'

Related Characters: Plain-clothes Officer, Masuji Ono (speaker), Kuroda

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

Ono recalls arriving at Kuroda's house one winter years before only to be confronted by the smell of burning and two police officers. This recollection of Kuroda's fate shows what Ono really has to be ashamed of: he has tried to convince himself that his great sin was that his influence as an artist caused his countrymen to follow nationalist ideas that led to war, but in reality his betrayal was petty and vindictive. Here it is revealed that Ono used what little stature he had to settle personal grievances by reporting a student who had rejected his teachings to the authorities. Although he may have naively expected that Kuroda and his paintings would not be harmed, this is another sign of how little he truly understood the nationalist ideas his art propagandized. This moment further reflects Ono's father burning his own work when Ono was young. It is clear from Ono's desire to save some of the paintings that he feels immense guilt for what he has done, regardless of the fact that he does not admit this aloud.

'I've no doubt your new leaders are the most capable of men. But tell me, Taro, don't you worry at times we might be a little too hasty in following the Americans? I would be the first to agree many of the old ways must now be erased for ever, but don't you think sometimes some good things are being thrown out with the bad? Indeed, sometimes Japan has come to look like a small child learning from a strange adult.'

'Father is very right. At times, I'm sure, we have been a little hasty. But by and large, the Americans have an immense amount to teach us. Just in these few years, for instance, we Japanese have already come a long way in understanding such things as democracy and individual rights.

Related Characters: Taro Saito, Masuji Ono (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

While having dinner with his family, Ono asks his son-in-law

if he thinks all the sweeping changes in Japan are entirely a good thing, suggesting there may be too much hastiness to copy an American way of life that is not entirely suited to Japan. Taro admits that the changes have happened quickly but adds that he thinks Japan is finally on a good path. This conversation further establishes the gap between Ono's generation and his daughters'. It also reveals Ono's difficulty in understanding why his daughters seem devoted to building Japan by imitating American practices. The younger generation's embrace of America here echoes Setsuko's comments earlier in the novel about preferring that her son idolize American cowboys over Japanese warriors, again suggesting a complete rejection of nationalism as a response to the devastation of the war. Ono is quick, however, to concede to Taro that the younger generation must know better. While he used to proudly spout nationalist rhetoric, Japan's defeat in the war has made ideas about the importance of Japanese traditions suspect.

'Noriko hasn't told you about the *miai*? Well, I made sure that evening there'd be no obstacles to her happiness on account of my career. I dare say I would have done so in any case, but I was nevertheless grateful for your advice last year.'

'Forgive me, Father, but I don't recall offering any advice last year. As for the matter of the *miai*, however, Noriko has indeed mentioned it to me a number of times. Indeed, she wrote to me soon after the miai expressing surprise at Father's . . . at Father's words about himself.'

Related Characters: Setsuko, Masuji Ono (speaker), Noriko

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190-191

Explanation and Analysis

Towards the end of the novel Ono finally reveals the contents of his conversation with Setsuko in Kawabe Park. While walking along, Ono says that it was good that he heeded Setsuko's advice to take precautionary steps to ease Noriko's marriage negotiations, but Setsuko repeatedly responds that she doesn't know what her father is referring to. She does not recall ever telling Ono to take such steps, and further reveals that his behavior at the miai was deeply confusing to seemingly everyone apart from Ono himself. Setsuko's insistence that she does not remember her conversation with Ono raises the possibility that he made the entire conversation up. If this is the case, it follows that nothing Ono has described throughout the novel should be taken at face value. Another possibility is that, in her vague warning to her father, Setsuko may not have been referring to Ono's role as a cultural influencer during the war at all, but rather to his role in having Kuroda jailed. Ono may have misunderstood Setsuko's meaning, or, in fact, known exactly what she was referring to and only later came up with a different interpretation that did not cause him so much anguish.

'Let me assure you, Setsuko, I wouldn't for a moment consider the sort of action Naguchi took. But then I am not too proud to see that I too was a man of some influence, who used that influence towards a disastrous end.'

My daughter seemed to consider this for a moment. Then she said: 'Forgive me, but it is perhaps important to see things in a proper perspective. Father painted some splendid pictures, and was no doubt most influential amongst other such painters. But Father's work had hardly to do with these larger matters of which we are speaking. Father was simply a painter. He must stop believing he has done some great wrong.'

Related Characters: Setsuko, Masuji Ono (speaker), Yukio Naguchi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 192-193

Explanation and Analysis

As Ono and his daughter continue walking in Kawabe Park, Setsuko reveals her concern that Ono had drawn a comparison between himself and Naguchi, the famed composer who committed suicide to atone for his role in leading Japan to war. Ono reassures her that he is not considering suicide, but Sestuko remains concerned. She says that, from her perspective, Ono's role in the war was not significant enough for any such action to be warranted. Though she means to be supportive of her father and insist he has nothing to feel guilty about, she is implicitly threatening Ono's belief that he achieved relevance as an artist. Setsuko's words in this moment make all of Ono's prior apologies for his wartime mistakes seem disingenuous. Rather than feel shame for his role in agitating the national consciousness, it becomes clear now that Ono inflated his own importance to show that he left an artistic mark—even a negative one—on the country.

June 1950 Quotes

'But there's no need to blame ourselves unduly,' he said. 'We at least acted on what we believed and did our utmost. It's just that in the end we turned out to be ordinary men. Ordinary men with no special gifts of insight. It was simply our misfortune to have been ordinary men during such times.'

Related Characters: Chishu Matsuda, Masuji Ono (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198-199

Explanation and Analysis

Ono recalls visiting Matsuda for the last time before Matsuda's death. Matsuda remarks on Ono's desire to to make a grand contribution to the art world, before reflecting that neither of them saw the world broadly enough. He says they should not blame themselves; they merely turned out to be ordinary men without any special insight. Matsuda's words here seem to confirm Setsuko's earlier pronouncement that her father's art was of no great political importance. This moment also sees Matsuda admit that he was misguided in convincing Ono to insert nationalist messages into his art. In stark contrast to what Ono has been trying to convince himself about his own past, his former teacher sees both of their contributions as ultimately insignificant to the country and its history.

And all the while I turned over in my mind what might occur when I came face to face with Mori-san once more. Perhaps he would receive me as an honoured guest; or perhaps he would be as cold and distant as during my final days at the villa; then again, he might behave towards me in much the way he had always done while I had been his favourite pupil — that is, as though the great changes in our respective status had not occurred. The last of these possibilities struck me as the most likely and I remember considering how I would respond. I would not, I resolved, revert to old habits and address him as 'Sensei'; instead, I would simply address him as though he were a colleague. And if he persisted in failing to acknowledge the position I now occupied, I would say, with a friendly laugh, something to the effect of: 'As you see, Mori-san, I have not been obliged to spend my time illustrating comic books as you once feared.'

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Seiji Moriyama, Mori-san

Related Themes:

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

Ono recalls a moment at the peak of his career, when he won a prestigious award for his art in 1938. Proud of his success, he decides to visit Mori-san and wonders how his former teacher will greet him. Here Ono's feelings toward Mori-san mirror his feelings towards his father, who similarly rejected Ono's artistic ambitions. In this moment it is clear Ono believes he has proven both men wrong, and that his artistic prowess has been vindicated in a way neither foresaw. This scene further evidences Ono's preoccupation with his artistic legacy, yet also makes Ono appear somewhat pathetic; even as an old man, he continues to reflect upon feelings of inadequacy and pride from decades before.

It is hard to describe the feeling, for it was quite different from the sort of elation one feels from smaller triumphs – and, as I say, quite different from anything I had experienced during the celebrations at the Migi-Hidari. It was a profound sense of happiness deriving from the conviction that one's efforts have been justified; that the hard work undertaken, the doubts overcome, have all been worthwhile; that one has achieved something of real value and distinction. I did not go any further towards the villa that day — it seemed quite pointless. I simply continued to sit there for an hour or so, in deep contentment, eating my oranges.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker), Seiji Moriyama, Mori-san

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

Despite his excited musings about how Mori-san will react to the news that Ono has won a prestigious accolade for his art, he ultimately decides not to visit his former teacher. Instead, when he gets to a place on the mountain looking over Mori-san's villa, he simply sits down and eats an orange. So pleased is Ono with his own interpretation of his success that he decides not to threaten it by confronting his former teacher. However equal Ono may feel he and Mori-san now are, he clearly still holds his teacher's opinion in high regard and fears that dismissal by Mori-san would

puncture his tenuous feelings of triumph and satisfaction. Thus, rather than attempt to reconnect with a person whom he saw as a father figure, he sits looking at his old home and contemplating his own perception of his place in the world.

> I smiled to myself as I watched these young office workers from my bench. Of course, at times, when I remember those brightly-lit bars and all those people gathered beneath the lamps, laughing a little more boisterously perhaps than those young men yesterday, but with much the same god-heartedness, I feel a certain nostalgia for the past and the district as it used to be. But to see how our city has been rebuilt, how things have recovered so rapidly over these years, fills me with genuine gladness. Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things. One can only wish these young people well.

Related Characters: Masuji Ono (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

In the final moments of the novel, Ono sits on a bench in front of a newly-constructed office complex where the Migi-Hidari once stood. Ono thinks the bench is in approximately the same place where his old table in the bar was positioned and watches the world pass by from this perch. Here Ono seems to realize that the time of his generation has passed, and that the city will never be as he knew it again. His hope that the young office workers—who are of the same generation as his children—will succeed where Ono failed suggests his acceptance of the changing world. Of course, the younger generation's optimism resembles that of Ono's own generation. This suggests that they, too, may one day grow disappointed about their contributions to the world and, like Ono, delude themselves about their pasts.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

OCTOBER 1948

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 sees the manner in which he acquired his home as the most significant and lasting proof of his having been a respected artist. He cherishes the thought that an influential man like Sugimura knew his work, as well as the fact that his talent can buy him something that money cannot. As becomes clear later, this is a sore point for Ono because his father predicted that he would be impoverished if he pursued life 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 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 is 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.

The damage to his home–like the damage to other areas in the city—is a palpable sign for Ono of what he has lost. For Ono, the beauty of his house and the unusual way in which he acquired it pointed to his prominence and stature in the city. In the first years after the war, Ono hopes that he will soon return to that stature. His promise to Miss Sugimura is one of the first signs that he has not yet realized that his life and the lives of those around him will not return to the normal state of affairs that existed 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."

Marriage is a drawn-out process during which the families of the bride and groom assess one another's reputations and pedigrees before deciding whether they want to tie their families together. Noriko shows a great deal of indiscretion, then, in talking to strangers about her marriage before it has been finalized.

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.

Setsuko suggests that Noriko is acting indiscreetly because desperation has led her to recklessness. Setsuko, Noriko, and Suichi all seem to believe there is some reason, that Ono is aware of and they are not, as to why the marriage talks ended. This may explain some of Noriko's negativity towards her father.

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 addresses himself to his narrative's unspecified listener, which signals that he feels less certain than he is pretending to feel about the conclusions he is about to offer.

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.

The logical explanation for the Miyakes' decision is that they discovered something they didn't like about the Ono family. Ono refuses to acknowledge the possibility that his family has unpleasant secrets and skips over any exploration of his family history.

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.

It seems unlikely that Ono really does have influence that he doesn't know about. Instead, he is spending his time with Shintaro, a flatterer who helps him to pretend that his status has not diminished. While Ono doesn't really believe Shintaro's version of reality, he prefers it to the harsher truth around him.

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.

Shintaro seems not to recognize the great changes happening around him since the end of the war. While generals were widely celebrated throughout society during the war, they are now blamed for both war crimes and for leading the country in the wrong direction. Spending time with Shintaro, Ono is able to block out some of the ways the world has changed.

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.

Along with society's values, the look of the city has changed since the war's end. Mrs. Kawakami's place is the last vestige of an old neighborhood that has been destroyed. Spending time there, Ono is again able to block out how the world has changed.

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.

Because Ono helped bring Migi-Hidari to prominence he sees it as another reflection of his stature. He saw the bar's success as a way he made his mark on the city, but this mark turned out to be impermanent.

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.

Once again, while assuming a posture of modesty, Ono actually fixates on his stature and the proofs of it he has received. This incident shows how sensitive Ono is to validation from the rest of society—even those who know nothing about art—that his work is respected and relevant. Kuroda, on the other hand, seems to think that what Ono was able to do for Yoshio was not all that important or impressive. Still, once he sees that the incident matters to Ono, he affirms that Ono is very widely admired.

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 is still holding onto some hope that the city will be restored to the way it wasbefore the war. He doesn't pinpoint the reason that the authorities tore down the buildings in the district, though this was likely tied to the historic changes happening throughout Japan as a whole. It seems probable that, after the war, authorities wished to raze buildings that had been associated with nationalism.

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 apologizesto him.

Although Ono doesn't know who the Lone Ranger is, he realizes that his grandson is not impersonating a Japanese hero. He suggests a more patriotic game but seems to recollect how much society's attitudes have changed since the war's end. While his generation believed in Japanese nationalism and looked up to Japanese heroes, his children's generation has turned away from them.

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.

This moment when Ono holds the sketchpad away from Ichiro is echoed later in the novel when Ono's father and Mori-san confiscate Ono's paintings.

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.

Even though Ono refuses to tell his grandson anything about his past or show him any of his work, it seems that Ichiro has learned the truth from listening to his parents—that Ono had to stop painting after Japan's loss because his work had a nationalist character. While Ono's work used to command respect and enjoy relevance, it has no place in the present social and political climate.

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.

Ono and Ichiro bond by setting themselves in opposition to Ichiro's mother and aunt, but Ichiro's imitation of Lone Ranger reminds Ono of the cultural gulf that separates him from his grandson. When Ono says that he is thinking about nothing in particular, this seems likely to be his way of concealing that he is actually having distressing thoughts regarding the conversation with his grandson about his career.

Eventually Ono goes out to the veranda and finds Setusko 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.

Ono reflects aloud on how much values have changed since the war while looking out on the garden, which is notably not vulnerable to such change. Hearing that Suichi encourages Ichiro to watch cowboy movies, Ono tries to claim an opportunity to have his own chance to influence and bond with his grandson by taking him to the monster film. Noriko's plans for the next day are set in opposition to Ono's plan to take Ichiro to the movies, reflecting the competition between these two generations to influence the next.

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.

Noriko and Ono face off, vying for authority and the chance to influence Ichiro. Noriko, unlike her father, is working and interacting with people outside of her family. She is in the position of authority now, although it seems this was not always the case. Setsuko treats her father with deference but ultimately backs up Noriko. Ono projects his own feelings of disappointment about having little authority in his family onto Ichiro, who never actually says that he is upset about not going to the movie the next day.

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.

Ono refuses to come to the deer park the next day with the unconvincing excuse that he has something to do. Even though he has not been able to win the fight with Noriko over what they will do the next day, he refuses to fully concede to Noriko's plans. Noriko is angry at the idea that Setsuko is letting her father influence her, but Setsuko has an agenda of her own.

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 reception room is a place controlled by adults, where a family puts its best foot forward, important conversations are held, and visitors are hosted. It is a testament to Ono's distressed and distracted state of mind that he has aimlessly wandered into a room defined by appearances. In addition, he notes that it was the secrecy around his own family's reception room that led him to become interested in capturing the essence of a physical space.

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.

Ono feels afraid of disappointing his father by revealing that he doesn't understand his talk about business. He feels that this will prove he is not worthy of being let into the family secrets that center around the reception room. Although Ono's father is trying to hand down his business to and influence his son, Ono experiences this as a stressful faceoff between the two of them.

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.

There is a distinct sense of mutual mistrust between Ono and his father. Even though Ono and his father seem never to have discussed Ono's hopes to become an artist before, Ono assumes that his father means to destroy his paintings by burning them in the ashpot. Ono's father, who clearly does not approve of pursuing the life of an artist, correctly assumes that Ono has disobeyed him by bringing only some of his paintings to the reception room.

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.

Although Ono's father has not burned his paintings yet, Ono sees that he means to. He also senses that his father is not being straightforward with him, as evidenced by his pretending to hear his mother in the hall.

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.

By telling Ono the story of the wandering priest's negative predictions about Ono's character, Ono's father suggests that he knows Ono better than Ono knows himself and that Ono should not try to oppose him. While Ono clearly sees his father's predictions as having been wrong, it is left for the reader to decide whether to trust Ono's own characterization of himself or the characterization given by his father and the priest.

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.

Ono's father believes that artists rarely contribute anything positive to society and bring shame to their families. Not only does Ono's father think that artists in general lead depraved lives, he specifically has no faith in Ono's success or reputation. Ono's mother tries to protect her son from his father's unkind predictions, but she also does not fully support her son's desire to become an artist, saying that he may grow out of his desire to paint.

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.

Ono's mother denies smelling his paintings burning, but Ono, understanding exactly what is going on, boldly tells her that he will not be intimidated into giving up his dreams. Ono says that by kindling a fire to burn his paintings in, his father has only made him more sure that he wants to be an artist—suggesting a certain strength of character and contrarian streak within Ono. Ono also asserts a different, nobler view of the artist than the one his father presented. He thinks of the artist as concerned with more elevated topics than money and the family's reputation.

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.

The previous day, Ono thought Setsuko was suggesting that he knew the secret reason why the Miyake family withdrew from marriage negotiations at the last minute. Now Setsuko suggests that there is some secret in the family's past that might impact Noriko's marriage prospects, but she does not reveal what this is. Setsuko's hints suggest that she thinks her father should be able to guess what secret she is referring to, so Ono's attitude that they don't have anything to hide appears to be a stance of willful ignorance.

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.

Setsuko refuses to be explicit with her father about the family secret she fears will derail Noriko's marriage prospects again. She only suggests that there is something in the past that might get in the way. By saying that her husband Suichi could express himself better than she can, Setsuko may be hinting at what the secret is, or she may not be. The issue at hand is left ambiguous. Ono's comment about the beauty of the flowers—something Setsuko does not see—could be fatherly pride, or yet another means in which he denies the reality of the world around him.

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 feels that the intergenerational conflict between himself and his daughters is the result of his son-in-law's bitterness towards members of the older generation for their leadership during the war. Even though he was just recalling the conflict that existed between himself and his own father, he seems to think that it is Suichi, and the destruction of the war, rather than anything Ono has done, that has created hostility between him and his daughters.

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.

Noriko seems to blame her father for the marriage falling through and hopes to elicit an explanation from him. But as shocked as Ono is by Noriko's careless way of talking to Jiro, he sticks to the story that the Miyakes felt they were inferior to the Onos, even though it is clear that both Setsuko and Noriko find this theory preposterous. Noriko is described as quite pretty, so she is also saying she wasn't pretty enough to try to elicit a response from her father.


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 wants to believe that the Miyakes did not find something objectionable about the Ono family reputation, but rather found that reputation impressive and intimidating. He sees Jiro's unimpressive appearance as a sign that his theory is right. At the same time, Ono says that he can hardly remember what passed during the interaction. This may suggest that there is something about the interaction that Ono is refusing to acknowledge, because it threatens how he perceives himself and his stature.


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.

By saying he was trying to set Jiro at ease and hardly paying attention to their conversation, Ono continues to suggest that he is Jiro's superior and that it was up to him to treat this inferior with benevolence. Notably, his own daughter is not entirely convinced.


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.

In the light of his conversation with Setsuko about taking precautionary measures to make sure nothing from the family past gets in the way of Noriko's marriage, Ono rethinks his interaction with Jiro.

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."

Ono has said he cannot remember his conversation with Jiro, but now proceeds to recall what was said in great detail. This suggests that he was either deceiving himself about forgetting the conversation, or that he is now inventing or embellishing upon his memories. His new recollection suggests that Jiro feels a great deal of anger with wartime leaders, like the president of his company, who is a member of Ono's generation. Ono says that people like the President were doing what they believed was right at the time, but he thinks Jiro thinks that they should be blamed for the damage done to the country nevertheless.

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.

Ono sheds even more doubt on his recollection of his conversation with Jiro with his suggestion that he might be putting his son-in-law Suichi's words into his potential son-in-law's mouth. This phrase is one that he now thinks might come from the night of the ceremony to bury his son, a traumatic moment that may have seared itself on his memory.

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.

Ono does not discuss how his son's death makes him feel, and he says he cannot understand why Suichi would be angry. But it seems very clear why such a death would provoke anger: Kenji died a death that could have been predicted, or potentially prevented, if the commanders of the army had not sent him and his comrades on a useless mission charging a minefield.

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.

Suichi also fought in Manchuria, and as such has no illusions about this fight's bravery. He clearly resents not only the way the war was fought, but what his country fought for in the first place . Ono, on the other hand, is still attached to the frame of mind that prevailed during the war. He is surprised by Suichi's bitterness towards those who were in charge of the war effort.

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 now specifically remembers when Suichi said the words that he earlier recalled Jiro Miyake using. It is possible that both Jiro and Suichi said these words or that Ono is misremembering one, or both, of the interactions. Either way, it is clear that Ono's memory is not foolproof. When Ono says that he is too tired to challenge Suichi's assumptions, it seems like an excuse for why he did not confront or explore a hard truth that he fears might threaten his view of the world, himself, and his 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 associates the beating of Hirayama boy with Suichi's bitterness about his experience in Manchuria and with Jiro's relief at the suicide of the president of his company. This makes clear that Ono's account of what happened during his conversation with Jiro is influenced not only by his memory of that conversation, but also by his understanding of the political climate in the country at the time. It seems clear that Ono alters how he remembers things to fit into a narrative with other memories.

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.

Ono associates the Arakawa district with a way of life that has been preserved since before the war. He may think about Arakawa in order to put aside the unpleasant thought of the embittered mood in the country since the war.

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."

Although Ono doesn't draw the connection, the laying of tramlines in Arakawa in 1931 coincided with Japan's invasion of Manchuria. Just as the city felt cramped before the tramlines expanded, Japan as a whole felt that it needed to conquer new territories and gain new resources.

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.

In the 1930s, just as the authorities are building up the country's infrastructure, they are also taking a more active role in deciding what kind of culture should flourish. Patriotic establishments are encouraged, while less ideological activities are frowned upon. Ono doesn't explicitly describe the way Japan is changing and the way his life changed to match it, but it is clear that, by being in agreement with the official, nationalist line that reigned at the time, his stature as an artist became elevated.


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.

Ono describes how the city was different in the days before the nationalist push to build up the country's infrastructure and to make its culture more patriotic, but he does not connect the alterations to the physical landscape to the ideological changes happening throughout Japan. Instead, as an artist, the way the city looked at a specific time has personal associations for him. Notably, Ono doesn't give any account of leaving his father and mother to move to the city to become an artist.



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.

Ono clearly has disdain for the Tortoise, who, unlike him, did not have to leave his job after the war. This suggests that, while Ono took a strong nationalist position in his pre-war and wartime art, the Tortoise never staked much of an ideological claim with his art and has, for this reason, been able to keep working through all of society's changes in attitude. Ono feels that the Tortoise's failure to take an ideological stand in his art is a sign of his timidity.


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.

Ono saw his father's obsession with commercial concerns as petty and beneath him, and he sees the Tortoise's low productivity as a sign that the Tortoise cares more for quality than quantity. Notably, however, Ono never mentions says the Tortoise truly possesses the great talent as an artist that would justify such care.

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.

Once again, Ono casts doubt on his own account of something. He seems to be recalling this memory as a means to justify the way he wants to perceive himself: as an independent thinker and a true artist. While he was happy working at the Takeda firm initially, he now disdains this commercial production of stereotypically Japanese works.

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.

While Ono said that his defense of the Tortoise showed his ability to think independently, it seems equally likely that he had already been approached by Moriyama when he defended the Tortoise. If this is the case, then Ono was not thinking for himself, but being influenced by Moriyama's thoughts on what kind of art is valuable and the best conditions for producing such art.

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.

Although Ono never mentions it, it seems that he has cut off contact with his family in becoming an artist. Just as Ono rejected his father in the name of artistic ambition, he is now rejecting Takeda. For the Tortoise, on the other hand, his work as an artist is not in opposition to his family's wishes and he feels he should show loyalty to Takeda as a sign of respect for his father and his father's friend.

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 admits that his memories of events shift to fit how he perceives himself over the years. While he portrays this as something that naturally happens over time, it is also evidence of a pattern of self-deception.

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 tries to explain his decision to leave Master Takeda in the ideological terms popular during the 1930s. But, in fact, leaving Master Takeda actually marked a change towards living a decadent lifestyle, with much of his time spent drinking and sleeping. Ono reshapes his memories to suit his current beliefs, and, in this instance, those are nationalist beliefs. This shifting point of view suggests that Ono is not really the independent thinker that he portrays himself to be.

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.

While Ono interpreted Kuroda's painting of their group drinking as a depiction of true patriotism, the painting may have been meant to satirize those drinking at the Migi-Hidari for congratulating themselves on their patriotism when all they were doing was reveling and drinking. Either way, Ono hints that he later disagreed with Kuroda's beliefs.

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.

It is important to Ono to believe that his influence gives him the power to shape the city. Mrs. Kawakami encourages him to believe that, even after the war, he still has this influence and Ono seems ready to accept this flattery and to deceive himself into believing such a restoration of the neighborhood is possible in the current atmosphere.

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.

While Ono has not given detail about his falling out with Kuroda, this recollection makes clear that it was a bitter fight and that Kuroda no longer wants to show Ono the respect that a student gives a teacher, or that a younger man gives to an older one.

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.

Ono and Ichiro do not understand each other very well but they bond through their mutual opposition to the generation in between them. While Ono doesn't know anything about the American culture that interests Ichiro, Ichiro knows nothing about the pre-war Japanese world that shaped Ono's art. They both remain in the dark about one another's worlds, especially because Ono's has been discredited and he knows that he should not pass on its value to his grandson.

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.

Only the day before Ono's meeting with Dr. Saito, he and Setsuko discussed how he might need to take precautions to keep revelations about the past from harming the marriage negotiations. Ono respects Dr. Saito and sees himself as his equal, since they both have reputations in the art world, but his surprised response to Setsuko's worry shows he may have misjudged his own family's reputation.

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.

Dr. Saito seems not to know that Kuroda and Ono broke off ties. He happily tells Ono about Kuroda's current professional success. While Ono needed to retire from his work as an artist after the war because of the nationalist quality of his work, Kuroda's war-era work has not ruined his opportunities to succeed in postwar Japan.

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.

Even though Ichiro finds the movie terrifying, he wants to seem tough to his aunt and mother. Noriko and Setsuko, meanwhile, are preoccupied with Noriko's future. It is unclear what Noriko and Setsuko were discussing, because the account is limited to what Ono wishes to reveal. Ono's daughters may be worried that Dr. Saito knows Kuroda, as Ono assumes they are, about the impression Ono made on Dr. Saito, or about some other issue altogether.

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.

Ono is experiencing conflict with his daughter and, at the same time, fears that his conflict with his student will harm her marriage prospects. Intergenerational conflict marks both his family life and the legacy of his career. Notably, later in the novel, Setsuko seems not to recall this conversation with Ono and her suggestion that he visit Kuroda. This suggests either that Setsuko shares her father's manner of misremembering what has happened, or that Ono not only distorts memories of long-ago events, but also of recent occurrences.

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's attention again shifts away from emotional topics relating to his family to his interest in recording changes to the city's physical appearance. He does not, however, give any context for what this architecture means about Japanese society at this historic juncture.

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.

Ono's lifestyle at Mori-san's villa resembles the one that his father warned he would fall into if he became an artist. It is also the "decadent" lifestyle that Ono would go on to criticize during his days at the Migi-Hidari, once he had adopted a nationalist orientation.

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.

Matsuda wants to impart his ideas for the artist's role in society to Ono. Once again, Ono is being exposed to a new influence. Because Ono is so ambitious to succeed as an artist, refusing an offer to exhibit his work was probably hard for him; Mori-san likely foresaw that his ideas and Matsuda's are were conflict and that Matsuda could try to change the direction of Ono's art, in a repetition of what seems to have happened when Mori-san himself recruited Ono away from Takeda.

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.

Neither man explains what occurred the last time they saw each other, but they fell out sometime around the end of the war, when many old assumptions and allegiances shifted in the wake of Japan's defeat. Matsuda forthrightly admits some awkwardness, while Ono pretends that there is no reason to feel strange after such a lapse in their relationship.

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.

This exchange reveals how very close Matsuda and Ono's relationship used to be by suggesting Matsuda's role in helping Ono marry. Given the formal demands of the matchmaking process, Matsuda and his family served as a surrogate family to Ono and helped him to build a new family after he broke off ties with his own father and mother to pursue a career as an artist.

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.

Ono finds it uncomfortable to talk about the changes to the country and its ideological direction that have happened since he last saw Matsuda. As is characteristic of Ono, he wants to look at the garden to escape distressing topics by putting all his focus on a minute consideration of the physical world.

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.

Matsuda rightly assumes that there is some reason that Ono has come to see him that Ono is too shy to talk about. He imagines that Ono has lost all his savings and suggests that he would be willing to give Ono some money if he is in need.

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.

Ono has come to see Matsuda because he thinks that Setsuko suggested that his work as a nationalist painter during the war will tarnish his family's reputation and prevent Noriko from marrying, but he is unable or unwilling to say this outright. It may be too painful for him to admit that his career has blighted his family's reputation instead of burnishing it because that is what his father predicted would happen.

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.

Ono speaks euphemistically, refusing to say aloud that he fears that the nationalist art he created in the past will be seen as a bad thing. Matsuda voices these thoughts for him, but also tells Ono his own position. After this talk with Matsuda, Ono will adopt Matsuda's language to describe how he feels about his wartime work.

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.

While Matsuda clearly believes that Kuroda is a person who would say negative things to a detective about Ono, Ono doesn't want to consider the idea that his actions regarding Kuroda (which still have not been revealed) are the problem that Setsuko was referring to. Ono refuses to speak forthrightly about the stress he is under, instead saying that it is merely the normal stress of being a father who wants the best for his children that makes him grow pale.

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.

Talking to Matsuda has made Ono feel better. He now has a better framework for how to think about his wartime work, adopted from Matsuda's remarks.

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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.

Ono still calls the bridge near his house by a name it received during the period when his career was at its zenith and the pleasure district thrived. This name no longer makes sense given the new buildings that are going up to replace the old drinking establishments. It does, however, make literal the novel's title. Ono is floating above the world on a bridge, while the old world of the pleasure district floats away and a new world, defined by the post-war focus on economic rebuilding, floats into view. The Bridge of Hesitation now reflects his own hesitation to let go of the world that is passing away.

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 expects Shintaro to look up to him and consult him as if he were still his teacher. Although Ono no longer has the respect of his more distinguished pupils like Kuroda, Shintaro's fawning praise boosts Ono's self-esteem. Now, however, Shintaro is asking Ono to say that Shintaro was not a committed nationalist during the war. In effect, this is the same thing that Ono himself asked of Matsuda when he visited his old colleague. Ono feels his role as a respected teacher is being taken away from him.

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.

The hiring committee does not want to hire a teacher who took a leading role in creating nationalist propaganda during the war, and Shintaro is asking Ono to tell them what they want to hear. This is a similar request to the one Ono made of Matsuda, but in the interceding six months, Ono's ideas have shifted. Ono sees Shintaro as having joined the ranks of the younger generation who sees Ono and his generation's ideas as discredited, and he rejects this point of view. As often occurs, Ono immerses himself in observation of the physical world—in this case, the garden—rather than deal with an interpersonal or ideological conflict.

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.

From what the reader knows now, it is unclear why Ono would treat Shintaro's request that he lie for him harshly, since he asked something similar of Matsuda. As it turns out from his subsequent description of the miai, Ono has reshaped the narrative he believes about his past and career.

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.

While Ono seeks to explain how wrong Noriko is to treat him with scorn, he actually shows why she could be right in her critique of his gardening. Perhaps after an upsetting conversation with Kuroda, Ono came home and did a terrible job pruning plants.

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.

While Ono worked as a nationalist painter during the war and had to retire afterwards because his ideology had become discredited, Kuroda seems to have taken the opposite stance during the war and to be succeeding in the postwar workforce as a result.

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.

Ono himself struggled with a landlord who got angry that he splashed paint on the tatami (a straw mat used as a flooring material), so he instantly relates to Enchi. He also went through cycles of imitating other people's styles and then breaking away from those styles. Although he says that Enchi will find his own style in time, and Ono tells himself that this occurred during his own career, the question of whether Ono really ever discovered his own style, or whether he merely adopted the styles of his various teachers, hangs over the novel.

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.

Enchi mistook Ono for someone who is currently influential in the art world, but his demeanor changes when he realizes who the visitor really is. The Cordon Society may be a reference to the honor Japan bestows on its most respected citizens, the Order of the Rising Sun. The most prestigious recipients of this award are called "Grand Cordons."

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.

Once again, the conflict between Ono and his daughter provides a hint into what Noriko and Setsuko truly worry will derail her marriage that differs from Ono's account of the situation. Perhaps, because Ono felt that Jiro Miyake and the Miyake family were his social inferiors, he acted proud and snobbish around them. While Ono believes an artist like himself has an elevated social status, this may not be the way he is now perceived.

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.

Ono finds the Kasuga Park Hotel's décor tacky and a bit offensive to Japanese pride. Although he looks down on this now, his first job as an artist was working to paint Japanese-looking paintings for foreigners.

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.

Ono feels that Noriko may be spoiling her own chances to get married by acting awkwardly during the miai. He wonders if the Saitos will be able to imagine a place for her in their family.

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.

Ono feels that the family is scrutinizing him to see if he has authoritarian impulses and believes that protesters should be stopped by police in the name of law and order. While Ono believes that this is a test of his ideological inclinations, the Saitos show that personal beliefs are not always dictated by the generation one grew up in. While Dr. Saito says that he approves of the demonstrations as an outlet for public feeling, his son Taro believes in a more controlled society. It seems that no member of the Saito family fought in the war, and the family's dynamics do not seem defined by intergenerational struggle or a desire to assign blame for what happened during the war.

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 refuses to address the topic of whom he agrees with , perhaps because he is afraid of being judged for having outdated, authoritarian attitudes, or perhaps because he doesn't actually know what he thinks.

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.

Ono himself has just given a stiff and formal answer, but he focuses on Noriko's formality instead of his own.

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.

For Ono this is a pivotal moment in which the issue of his behavior during the war is being examined, but the way Dr. Saito treats the topic of Kuroda suggests that he is merely making small talk about a slight acquaintance.

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 he 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.

Ono thinks that his remarks have cleared the air and allowed for the two families to finally put aside the issue of his past and come together. It also seems possible that his interruption to the small talk to make a statement about his artistic career has shocked Noriko out of her shyness.

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.

While Ono says his declaration about his past was a difficult admission for him to make, his attitude is also a self-aggrandizing one. While saying that he may have been a negative influence, he is granting himself a great deal of importance. He sees himself as superior to Shintaro because he has acted with more honesty and integrity in confronting his past, but it is uncertain that this is the case.

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.

Just six months before this moment Ono spent his time nostalgically reminiscing about the good old days with Shintaro and Mrs. Kawakami. Nevertheless, he now sees himself as someone who enjoyed the climate in the pleasure district in the past and cannot be blamed for any of the mistakes the nation made as a result of that patriotic spirit; he understands that it is better to move on and leave the past behind him. He looks with pity at Mrs. Kawakami's failure to realize this truth that he himself only recently decided upon.

NOVEMBER 1949

Ono remembers the first time he met Dr. Saito clearly. It was sixteen year 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.

Ono is recalling his first meeting with Dr. Saito because Setsuko suggested to him that Dr. Saito did not know Ono before the marriage negotiations began. Although Ono does not say it directly, Setsuko's suggestion that the professor of art Dr. Saito did not know Ono by reputation in the art world has shaken him. This fact contradicts the narrative he now uses to explain his career to himself: that he was a very influential nationalist artist who must apologize for having had a negative influence on his society. Instead, this suggests that he was not so influential after all.

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 seems to feel the need to defend and explain why he is still thinking about his conversation with Setsuko, which suggests that he doesn't want to admit to himself how much her suggestion that Dr. Saito didn't know of his reputation as an artist upset him.

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.

Instead of confronting his grief for his son, Ono describes the joy and comfort he feels in seeing his grandson's resemblance to Kenji.

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.

Although Ono doesn't make the connection explicit, Setsuko's suggestion that Dr. Saito did not know him by reputation seems to be forcing him to reexamine how much influence he really had on his students and the country. He hopes that there will be an unconscious trace of his work, even in those students who, like Kuroda, have rejected his teachings.


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.

In discussing Mori-san's influence on his students, Ono is also trying to weigh what his own influence on his students was without admitting that he feels any uncertainty about it. At the same time, Ono's exhaustive description of how the physical place he used to inhabit looked reflects his strong interest in the way the world appears.


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.

Although Ono defended the Tortoise at Master Takeda's firm on the grounds that the he was taking a long time with his paintings because he had artistic integrity, his inability to adjust to a new atmosphere shows that he may merely have little artistic skill. For Mori-san, there is one kind of art that he is interested in creating and that he wants his students to create. This art is concerned with capturing very transitory moments that occur between people. Since Ono seems to be naturally fascinated by physical spaces as they are in a moment, Mori-san's emphasis seems suited to Ono's talents. Still, Mori-san is more interested in human moments, while Ono seems to have skill for capturing the feeling of a place.

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.

Ono focuses on Sasaki's banishment from the villa after he decides to change his artistic focus, but he is also clearly weighing the parallels between Sasaki's experience breaking off ties with his teachers, and Ono's experience of Kuroda breaking off ties with him. The consequences of taking a different direction are much more severe for Sasaki and Kuroda than for Ono. It would seem that Ono breaks off ties only once he has found a new mentor's support, while Sasaki leaves with nowhere to go, and Kuroda goes to prison.

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.

The parallel between Sasaki and Kuroda is strong here. Just as Kuroda is called a traitor while being beaten in prison, Mori-san's remaining students are driven to violence at the suggestion that they are traitors to Mori-san's ideas. As Ono seeks to justify the atmosphere of total loyalty that Mori-san fostered, he is also indirectly defending his own decision to create a similarly stringent environment.

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.

Mori-san encourages his students to live a life of drunken debauchery, which is exactly the shameful existence that Ono's father predicted he would lead if he became an artist.

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.

Although Ono doesn't say this directly, he seems disturbed at the idea that his lifestyle reflects a fulfillment of his father's fears. Sensing this, Mori-san goes to talk to Ono and looks at work that he himself did when he was Ono's age. These wood-block prints were likely made before Mori-san adopted his current technique. Ono likes this older style of work, however, showing that styles and ideas that seem outdated can still be appealing to the following generation.

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.

In Ono's retelling, Mori-san feels satisfied that his life's work is worthwhile and that his art serves an important function, even if it seems from the outside that he is wasting much of his time with drinking and debauchery. Mori-san feels that capturing the mood of a single moment is the important work he is meant to do an artist. Ono likely brings up Mori-san's statement that he will feel happy when he looks back at his life because Ono is wrestling with doubts about his own career and whether he should feel proud or regretful.

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.

Once again, Ono suggests that he cannot be relied upon to give an accurate depiction of events. Instead, later events color the way he describes earlier ones.

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.

Ichiro is once again captivated by figures from American popular culture that are totally alien to Ono. Still, he looks up to his grandfather and they find ways to bond, especially out of a shared sense of being at odds with members of the interceding generation that now dominates them both. For this reason, Ichiro takes pleasure in the idea of his aunt's getting drunk and being unable to dictate to him and his grandfather.

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.

Ono wants to cement his bond with Ichiro by giving his grandson his first taste of sake. Ichiro seems wary, realizing that his mother may oppose this idea. Perhaps he is also scared of trying sake, in the same way he was actually scared to see the monster movie that Ono took him to.

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.

Ono's belief that he was an influential artist who promoted destructive ideas has led him to compare himself to some of the most prominent wartime cultural figures, including the composer Yukio Naguchi. Earlier in the novel, when Jiro Miyake said that the president of his company had killed himself to atone for leading the company in a bad direction during the war, Ono said that this seemed to him like a waste of life. But now, he suggests that suicide is a brave way of atoning for exerting a powerful, negative influence on society. This kind of talk has clearly made Ono's family worry that he is considering suicide.

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.

It is clear that Noriko and Taro's marriage must have worked out by this point. Ono records the way the city is being altered by the construction of high-rise apartment buildings. Used to living in a large home, Ono finds the new style of building unappealing.

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 wants to cement his bond with Ichiro by giving him a taste of sake, but his daughters refuse to let him.

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.

This heated exchange between Ono and Setsuko (who is normally polite and unaggressive) reveals that there are things about the Ono family that Ono has not revealed in the course of his narrative—including exactly what Setsuko said in the park. It is unclear what Setsuko is referring to when she says that her brother's upbringing caused problems later. No answers are provided. Once again, in the face of a harsh and unpleasant statement that Ono does not want to think about, he says he may be misremembering what was said.

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 is in the process of reevaluating his artistic legacy once again. It is important to him to see himself as having made brave choices, even if those choices did not lead to his earning great influence like he has been telling himself he possessed. As he continues to come up with a narrative for his life that he can look at without regret, he lumps his two former friends Shintaro and the Tortoise together as a negative example with which he can contrast himself, and at the same time draws parallels between himself and Sugimura.

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.

Ono views the fawning attention and interest the Tortoise showed him with a mixture of pride and disdain. It has taken the Tortoise a long time to master Mori-san's techniques, but he feels he is succeeding. It does not occur to him that Ono may has asked for privacy because he is painting something that goes against Mori-san's teachings. The Tortoise's ambitions are limited to a desire to rise to his colleagues' level, and the more ambitious Ono sees this ambition as paltry and uninspired.

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.

Even though Ono does not respect the Tortoise's work, Ono likes to have him around because he praises and looks up to him. The Tortoise trusted Ono and left Master Takeda's, and it seems that Ono has similar thoughts of leaving in mind now. But, whether out of a lack of bravery or for some other reason, the Tortoise is not interested.

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.

While Ono portrays himself as bravely pursuing his own ideas even when they contradict others', the new direction in his artwork was not independently arrived at but in fact inspired by Matsuda's ideas. Japan experienced an economic slowdown in the early 1920s, but Ono has been living cut off from the currents of Japanese society at Mori-san's villa. Matsuda is keen to bring Ono's attention to the situation of real people because he believes that artists should pay attention to social and political problems and use their art to inspire others to improve society.

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."

Although Ono is inspired by the image of the three boys from the shantytown, he portrays them in quite a different, more ideological light. Instead of showing the three boys' cruel perversity in torturing an animal, Ono adopts Matsuda's idea that few politicians are paying attention to poverty and then depicts the boys as brave and pure-hearted—a depiction in keeping with the nationalist views Matsuda expounds.

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."

Later on, the nationalist tone of Ono's work became even more pronounced as he began to call for Japanese invasion of other countries. Far from seeming like a painting inspired by Ono's independent convictions, both the message and the style of "Eyes to the Horizon" would have resembled many works of propaganda created at the time.

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.

Ono describes himself as creating art that matches his principles, but he actually adopts the ideas of others without having a deep understanding of the politics himself.

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.

Before Matsuda shares his ideas about art being used to change society, Ono sees art's power as being limited to its value when sold for charity. Matsuda proves Ono's naivete when Ono shows he doesn't know who Karl Marx (a German philosopher who theorized how Communism would develop) is.

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.

Matsuda introduces Ono to nationalist and imperialist ideas that are gaining prevalence throughout Japanese society. He changes Ono's understanding of the artist's role in society with his suggestion that the artist can actively make society better. This idea is flattering to Ono's ambition to become a great and influential man through his art.

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.

Even though Ono subscribed to Mori-san's ideas about how to create art until he met Matsuda and learned his ideology, Ono mocks the Tortoise out of an assumption that he naively only recognized that Ono had changed his technique and did not recognize his new work's political message.

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 **Garden**s, which is elegantly decorated with hanging **lantern**s. 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.

The Takami Gardens are the place where Ono experiences both the influence of and conflict with his teacher Mori-san. Ono's memories quickly shift between memories of Mori-san and of Kuroda throughout this scene, reflecting their similarities in Ono's mind.

On the night he visits the pavilion with Mori-san, the **lantern**s 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.

Immediately after these reflections, Ono plunges into a description of how he learned about Kuroda's being jailed. Although Ono never says he is reflecting on his own role in Kuroda's fate, it is clear that these justifications he provides for Mori-san's treatment of him are also meant to justify his own treatment of Kuroda.

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.

This recollection about Kuroda's fate shows what Ono really has to be ashamed of. It is not that he was so influential that he caused his countrymen to follow nationalist ideas that have since been disproven. Instead, he used what stature he had to settle personal grievances by reporting his student who had rejected his teachings to the authorities. Although he may have naively expected that Kuroda and his paintings would not be harmed, this is another sign of how little he truly understood the nationalist ideas his art propagandized.

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.

Just as Ono's father burned his paintings, the authorities now burn Kuroda's. Ono has tried to force Kuroda to follow his artistic beliefs (which he himself learned from Matsuda), but instead has caused Kuroda's art to be destroyed and Kuroda himself to be endangered. Although Ono does not say so, it is clear from his attempt to save Kuroda and his paintings that he feels guilty.

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.

Almost despite himself, Ono has finally revealed the real source of his guilt during the war—his role in Kuroda's arrest—but he quickly shifts his attention back to the present because he is afraid to face these uncomfortable memories. He also feels guilty that he cannot keep his promise to Ichiro, whom he wants to cement a bond with by giving his first taste of sake.

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.

Ono also finds it hard to understand the way members of his daughters' generation pledge their lives to building Japan by imitating American corporate practices. He is quick, however, to concede to Taro that the younger generation must know better. While he used to proudly spout nationalist rhetoric, Japan's defeat in the war has made ideas about the importance of Japanese traditions suspect.

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.

Ono believes that Ichiro feels let down because he failed to give him sake and he blames the interceding generation for stopping him from bonding with his grandson. When Ichiro says he wants to be a president of Nippon Electrics, Ono likely feels this distance between himself and Ichiro grow larger.

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 believes Ichiro is disappointed that Ono was unable to convince Setsuko to allow Ichiro to try sake, but Ichiro himself seems relatively unconcerned with this. Despite his youth, Ichiro sees that not being able to provide him with sake made his grandfather feel powerless and disrespected. Ono has not said that he feels this way, so Ichiro's insight shows the reader something about Ono that Ono himself is not sharing. Meanwhile, the incident with the sake is only exacerbating a sense of grievance springing from whatever Setsuko told ono in Kawabe Park.

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 has still not revealed to the reader what Setsuko said to upset him, but what she said obviously challenged his sense of his reputation in the art world.

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.

Setsuko's failure to remember her conversation with Ono raises the possibility that he made the entire conversation up. If this is the case, however, nothing Ono has described throughout the entire novel should be believed. Alternatively, Setsuko may not have been referring to Ono's role as a cultural influencer during the war, but instead referring to his role in having Kuroda jailed. It seems most likely that Ono understood Setsuko's meaning at the time, but then, sometime after his visit with Matsuda, came up with a different interpretation that did not cause him so much anguish to reflect upon.

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 fears that her father may be considering suicide, which many prominent people did to atone for their role in leading Japan astray during the war. But from her perspective, Ono's role was not significant enough for this to be at all warranted. This means that all of Ono's apologies for his wartime mistakes were disingenuous. Instead of feeling sorry for his role, he was trying to inflate his own importance to show that he had a large, albeit negative, impact. Even though Setsuko is telling Ono that he did nothing terrible that he should feel guilty about, Ono feels that she is saying his career did not make any significant mark. She is threatening his belief that he achieved relevance as an artist.

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."

Now it becomes clear why Ono said to Taro that it was a shame he and Dr. Saito did not become better acquainted before their children brought them together: he wants to prove to Setsuko that he is a well-known and prominent nationalist artist, one whose wartime career was so significant that it could actually have had negative consequences for the whole family's reputation in the light of Japan's post-war orientation. Setsuko seems to have revealed that this was a delusion. Whether Dr. Saito and Ono really did meet before the war is left a mystery.

JUNE 1950

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.

Ono feels some regret that he had not spent more time with his old colleague, but the rest of the chapter will show that his last visit with Matsuda has shaped his thoughts about himself and his career just as much as earlier conversations with Matsuda did.

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.

Ono gives no further explanation of his recent illness, leaving open the possibility that he was so disturbed by Setsuko's insinuation about the insignificance of his career that he fell ill as a result. Most likely someone in Ono's family wrote to Matsuda to tell him of Ono's illness in the hopes that his influence could be helpful.

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.

Although Ono has experienced the stress of conflict with both his parents and children, the childless Matsuda reminds him that having children and grandchildren is a lucky thing.

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 is glad that Ono has not entirely given up painting, because he knows that working as an artist brings Ono pleasure. Ono has returned to simpler depictions of naturalistic scenes, instead of trying to bring ideological meaning to his work.

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.

Matsuda now admits that the nationalist message that he convinced Ono to put into his art was a mistake. He sees both of their contributions as insignificant to the country and its history. This perspective clashes with what Ono has been trying to convince himself about his own past.

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.

For the only time in the novel, Ono brings up his wife's death. While Matsuda sees the smell as a sign of rebirth and new life, Ono has long convinced himself that his career was the most important thing to him and he is only just beginning to face his grief for losing his family during the war.

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.

Even though Matsuda has no children of his own, he still experiences connection with younger generations through his contact with Botchan. Something undefined but meaningful passes between those who are at the end of their lives and those who are at the beginning of theirs.

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.

Matsuda was the one who convinced Ono to turn to nationalist art. Ono tried to subscribe to Matsuda's beliefs, convinced that through political art he could achieve his ambition to make a mark as an artist. Matsuda sees that their work failed to do this, but Ono is still unable to fully admit to himself that he wasted his talent doing something that will be forgotten.

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.

At the peak of Ono's career, he is celebrated for his nationalist work. Notably, Ono does not mention the larger political context: Japan's large-scale invasion of China. Instead, Ono is gratified because he feels like he has proven Mori-san wrong. This feeling of satisfaction after a conflict with a teacher mirrors Ono's other conflict with his father. Ono is pleased with his own interpretation of his success and decides not to threaten it with an actual encounter with his former teacher. Instead of trying to reconnect with a person whom he saw as a father figure, he sits looking at his old home and contemplating his own perception of his place in the world.

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.

Although Ono followed Matsuda's lead, he has convinced himself to believe that this was a brave and independent act. He also refuses to accept what Matsuda told him about how he now views their past careers, instead holding onto the self-deception that he and Matsuda were independent thinkers who should be proud.

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.

Ono continues to closely observe how the city is changing, but he realizes that his time has passed and the city will never be as he knew it again. He shows signs of accepting this, as he expresses his hope that the young office workers—who live a life similar to his children's—will succeed where he failed. Their optimism resembles the optimism of his generation, however, suggesting that they may also eventually live to be disappointed about their contributions and to delude themselves about their pasts.


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