

## Echoes and Reflections: Ono's Life in the Floating World

### Part II—Echoes

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### Introduction

Part I of this article attempted to show how Kazuo Ishiguro uses the style of indirection in presenting the reader with the complex character of Masuji Ono in *An Artist in the Floating World*.<sup>1)</sup> Ono's four meandering first-person narratives are the only information we get about Ono and his life. During these narratives, delivered over a two-year period, the listener/reader receives a detailed account of Ono's life from earliest boyhood days (1910) to the time of his premature retirement (1950).

Part I showed that Ono's memory in the retelling and his reflections of past events gave a picture that was sometimes uncertain, sometimes contradictory. Because Ono's tone is confident and strong, the reader may lose sight that the information received or attitude projected is at variance with reality. Whereas Part I focused on the the issues of Ono's vision, his process of reflection on his past, Part II will focus on the echoes, the aural repetitions and thematic parallels that fill his story.

### Echoes of Words and Phrases<sup>2)</sup>

At the superficial level, the reader is struck by the use of clusters of key words designed to give a certain impression. For example in the first scene with Setsuko, Ishiguro uses the phrases, "shifted uncomfortably," "smiled nervously," "look uncomfortable," "said quietly," "profound uneasiness," "urgent whisper," "nervous smile," "trailed off," "trail-

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1) Kazuo Ishiguro. *An Artist of the Floating World*. London: Faber & Faber, 1990.

ed off awkwardly" (pp. 13-18) to show Setsuko's politeness and timidity in approaching a delicate subject with her father. And whereas Setsuko almost invariably begins her sentences with a polite, "Excuse me," or "Forgive me," Ono punctuates his conversation with a slight laugh. This pattern is repeated in almost every encounter.

Another example of emphasis is the use of a key word repeated over within a conversation. Some examples are the use of "precautionary steps" used three times (p. 49), "apology" used five times (p. 55), "coward/cowardice" used five times (p. 56), "loyal/disloyal" used six times (p. 72), "naive/child" used seven times (pp. 170-171), etc. Almost every conversation uses the pattern of a repeated word or phrase, which gives the conversation a spiral quality and attunes the reader to those key words which are certain to reappear later on.

For example, when Ono first meets Matsuda, Matsuda says, "I would very much like to discuss certain ideas with you..."..."I merely wish to discuss certain ideas with you..." (p. 89)<sup>2</sup>). Not knowing what the "certain ideas" are creates an ominous tone. Of course the question is left hanging until much later, when we are to find out what those ideas were and whether Ono was receptive to them.

In another example, in Ono's first visit to Matsuda's house to solicit his help for Noriko's omiai, the words "delicacy" and "past" are repeated back and forth:

'...if you'd answer any queries which may come your way with delicacy.'

'With utmost delicacy.'

'Particularly, that is, with regards to the past.'

'But I've said already,...I have only the best of things to report of you from the past.'...

'...one has to appreciate the delicacy of the situation.'...

'Naturally,' Matsuda broke in, 'I'll do my best to exercise delicacy.'...

'But tell me, Ono if it's the case that you're worried about the past, I assume...'

(pp. 94-95)

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2) Note: All underlinings are mine, and do not appear in the original text.

## Echoing Themes

### a. Flawed

An extension of this technique is where the same phrases or ideas appear in different contexts, as a thematic leitmotif. The first example cited here is Mori-san's use of the term "fatally flawed" to describe his early works:

Then he shook his head and muttered to himself: 'Fatally flawed. Fatally flawed by trivial concerns.'...

Then he shook his head again, saying, 'But these are all fatally flawed, Ono.'... 'Fatally flawed,' he repeated....

Then after a moment or two, he said again: 'These are fatally flawed, Ono.' (pp. 148-149)

This phrase occurs later in a different context. This time it is Matsuda who uses the phrase in describing their lives and work together, '...when we look back over our lives and see they were flawed, we're the only ones who care now.' (p. 201) This rhetorical device, skillfully used by Ishiguro, leaves the reader with the echo of two men, one an old painter looking over the paintings of his youth and the other, an old political activist, looking over the campaigns of his youth, both using the word "flawed" to describe their younger days and work. Ono responds by repeating the term while denying its meaning: 'He may indeed have looked back over his life and seen certain flaws, but surely he would have recognized also those aspects he could feel proud of.' (p. 201)

### b. Suicide

A second example of this kind of echo is the repetition of the theme of suicide. In the first instance, Ono meets Noriko's potential husband by accident on the street outside his office building. Jiro Miyake tells Ono of his company president's suicide:

'You see, to be quite frank, the President committed suicide.'

‘Really?’

‘Indeed. He was found gassed. But it seems he tried harakiri first, for there were minor scratches around his stomach.’ Miyake looked down at the ground solemnly. ‘It was his apology on behalf of the companies under his charge.’

‘His apology’?

‘Our President clearly felt responsible for certain undertakings we were involved in during the war. Two senior men were already dismissed by the Americans, but our President obviously felt it was not enough. His act was an apology on behalf of us all to the families of those killed in the war.’

‘Why, really,’ I said, ‘that seems rather extreme. The world seems to have gone mad. Every day there seems to be a report of someone else killing himself in apology. Tell me, Mr. Miyake, don’t you find it all a great waste? After all, if your country is at war, you do all you can in support, there’s no shame in that. What need is there to apologize by death.’

‘No doubt you’re right, sir. But to be frank, there’s much relief around the company. We feel now we can forget our past transgressions and look to the future. It was a great thing our President did.’ (p. 55)

In the conversation with Jiro Miyake, Ono’s view of the superfluosity of suicide as a means of atonement for “past transgressions,” i. e. participation in the war, is quite clear. Yet, he expresses a different attitude when the subject of suicide comes up a year again later with the mention of a famous composer, Yukio Naguchi, committing suicide. His grandson Ichiro has been hearing the adults talk about Naguchi the night before and bluntly asks Ono:

‘Oji, why did Mr Naguchi kill himself?...Was he a bad man?’

‘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. The songs Mr Naguchi composed had become very famous, not just in this city, but all over Japan. They were sung on the radio and in bars. And the likes of your Uncle Kenji sang them when they were marching or before a battle. And 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. (p. 155)

This response is a complete turnabout in his attitude toward suicide. In the first case, he sees the President's suicide as a waste, without honour, without need for apology; a year later, he finds Naguchi's gesture "brave and honorable." One possibility for the contradictory responses to suicide may be the parallels between his career and Naguchi's. Naguchi was a musician who used his talents in the service of the war effort in the same way that Ono used his talents as a painter. Ono, at this point, is riding the crest of the wave of self-satisfaction in having faced, admitted and apologized for his wartime "mistakes" at Noriko's omiai with the Saitos. In a sense Ono gave the supreme sacrifice at the omiai because, by his public confession and apology, he denied and rejected his life's greatest accomplishments. In this way, he would also feel that for himself, too, "He was brave to admit the mistakes he'd made. He was very brave and honourable." (p. 155)

Ono's enthusiastic response to Naguchi's suicide causes some concern to his daughters but Ono reassures Setsuko that he has no intention of following Naguchi's gesture. Ironically, it is Taro Saito, Noriko's husband and a member of the younger generation, who calls Naguchi's suicide "pointless." (p. 192) This is in counterpoint to Jiro Miyake's enthusiasm for his President's suicide and echoes Ono's response that it was "a great waste." (p. 55) Clearly intergenerational attitudes have changed on this issue.

### **c. Burning**

A third example of an echoing theme is the motif of burning. The first instance of burning is when Ono was 15, still living with his parents. His father is afraid that Ono may be developing an interest as an artist. In the candlelight of his study, Ono's father demands that Ono present him with all his paintings:

'Masuji, are you sure all your work is here? Aren't there on or two paintings you haven't brought me?'...

'It's possible there may be one or two I have not brought.'

'Indeed. And no doubt, Masuji, the missing paintings are the very ones you're most proud of. Isn't that so?' (p. 43)

Later, on meeting his mother in the dark hall, he remarks:

'There's a smell of burning around the house,' I remarked.

'Burning?' My mother was silent for a while, then she said: 'No, I don't think so. It must be your imagination, Masuji.'

'I smelt burning,' I said. 'There, I just caught it again. Is Father still in the reception room?'

'Yes. He's working on something.'

'Whatever he's doing in there,' I said, 'it doesn't bother me in the least...The only thing Father's succeeded in doing is kindling my ambition.' (p. 47)

A parallel scene occurs much later in his life, in an interview between Ono and his teacher Mori-san. Ono is lighting lanterns around the pavillion at the Takami Gardens. It is clear that Mori-san has taken Ono's paintings and is concerned that Ono is "exploring curious avenues." Mori-san, like Ono's father, suggests that Ono has withheld some of his most prized paintings:

'Incidentally, Ono,' he said, eventually, 'I was told there were one or two other paintings you've completed recently that were not with those I have now.'

'Quite possibly, there are one or two I did not store with the others.'

'Ah. And no doubt these are the very paintings you are most fond of.' (p. 178)

Despite the verbal manoeuvring for possession of the paintings, Ono is aware of the code of conduct at the master's studio and knows that his paintings will be burned:

...if...a person's painting was in any way 'disloyal' to our teacher, this would almost

always lead to immediate capitulation on the part of the offender—who would then abandon the painting, or in some cases, burn it along with the refuse.” (p. 140).

In this case, however, Ono's paintings have been confiscated by his teacher, who like his father, will destroy them. Ono segues from recalling Mori-san's destruction of his paintings to his causing the destruction of his prize student Kuroda's paintings:

...it is clear that such arrogance and possessiveness on the part of a teacher—however renowned he may be—is to be regretted. From time to time, I still turn over in my mind that cold winter's morning and the smell of burning growing ever stronger in my nostrils. It was the winter before the outbreak of war and I was standing anxiously at the door of Kuroda's house... (p. 181)

Here, for the third time, we have the destruction of paintings. In the first case, Ono catches the smell of smoke in the hallway. In the second instance we know that his work disloyal to Mori-san will be burned. And in this third case we see the police presiding over a bonfire in the yard behind Kuroda's house, “‘It's our policy to destroy any offensive material which won't be needed as evidence...The rest of this trash we're just burning.’ (p. 183)

Ono was clearly responsible for informing the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities of Kuroda's aberrant, hence disloyal, artistic direction. In his typical self-serving manner, Ono never comes out directly to say that he also feels regret for causing the burning of Kuroda's paintings. Only by recalling Mori-san's actions does he soften his reaction and accept responsibility: “‘it is perhaps understandable, if not entirely excusable, that the teacher lose for a moment his sense of proportion and react in ways he may later regret.’ (p. 181)

In a final example of the use of fire, Ono is visiting Matsuda for the last time:

A soft breeze was coming into the room, and with it a faint odour of smoke. I rose to my feet and went over to the screens.

‘The smell of burning still makes me uneasy.’ I remarked. “‘It's not so long ago it meant bombings and fire.’ (p. 200)

On the surface this is true. Ono's house was damaged in a bombing raid and his wife killed during "a freak raid" toward the end of the war. But it is probably true that for Ono, the smell of smoke has also played a central role in the course of his career as an artist.

#### **d. Loyalty and Betrayal**

Probably the most echoed theme running throughout the novel is the concept of loyalty and betrayal. This comes up in almost every setting, with Ono's relationship with Takeda and Mori-san, with Ono's relationship with his students and with his relationship with the younger generation in regard to his war efforts.

In the first instance, Ono confides in the Tortoise that he is planning to leave Takeda's studio for Mori-san's and suggests that the Tortoise come with him:

'How can I be so disloyal as to leave after only a few months?...But, of course, Ono-san, I don't imply you are in any way disloyal...'

'In my opinion, I said, 'Master Takeda doesn't deserve the loyalty of the likes of you and me. Loyalty has to be earned. There's too much made of loyalty. All too often men talk of loyalty and follow blindly. I for one have no wish to lead my life like that.' (p. 72)

Ono recalls this lesson that he learned at Takeda's studio:

'Being at Takeda's', I told them, 'taught me an important lesson early in my life. That while it was right to look up to teachers, it was always important to question their authority. The Takeda experience taught me never to follow the crowd blindly, but to consider carefully the direction in which I was being pushed. And if there's one thing I've tried to encourage you all to do, it's been to rise above the sway of things.'" (p. 73)

The irony of this is revealed in the letter Ono had written previously to the State Department requesting permission for the the establishment of the Migi-Hidari. In his letter he



names other artists, playwrights and journalists, “producers of work unflinchingly loyal to his Imperial Majesty the Emperor.” (p. 64)

The “sway of the crowd” Ono refers to are the “undesirable and decadent influences that have swamped us...these past ten, fifteen years.” (p. 73) Ono is referring to the anti-militarists and those artists like his former teacher Mori-san, who simply have chosen not to use their art for propagandist purposes. A further irony is the fact that Ono was once a member of this “decadent” crowd of artists. It was this kind of decadence that Ono's father referred to in admonishing him to give up being an artist: “‘Artists,’ my father's voice continued, ‘live in squalor and poverty. They inhabit a world which gives them every temptation to become weak-willed and depraved.’” (p. 46) Such was the world that Ono lived in during the seven years he spent at Mori-san's dilapidated villa pursuing and painting the floating world, but which now he self-righteously opposes.

On the one hand, Ono is exhorting his students to think independently and not be carried along by the “sway of things.” Yet at the same time, he is in the center of a movement whose very purpose was to inspire a blind obedience, in this case, to the Emperor and the Japanese military campaigns in Asia.

The second instance of loyalty is described in relation to Mori-san. At Mori-san's villa, the ten students were free to paint at their own rates, which was a favorable condition for the Tortoise, but they were bound to the master's style. Being accused of being “disloyal” as mentioned above would usually lead to voluntary recanting and the destruction of the offensive work. (p. 140)

The role of defender of standards usually fell to the teacher's best student, whose loyalty was absolute. When Ono first arrived at Mori-san's villa, this protege was an artist called Sasaki. But after a few years, Sasaki began to have independent ideas. His paintings were confiscated by another student, the others refused to talk to him and eventually Sasaki tearfully left the villa. Henceforth he was referred to as “the traitor.” (pp. 142-143)

Eventually Ono inherits the mantle of star pupil, yet, after his walk with Matsuda, Ono begins to depart from his master's style. His new style uses a more strident technique depicting scenes with social relevance. Although Ono is quite proud of his new approach, the Tortoise, loyal and indebted to his teacher, can barely bring himself to look at it:

I walked over to the painting, pulled off the drapes and turned it around to face us. The Tortoise immediately averted his eyes....

The Tortoise continued to hold his face away. He said: 'Ono-san, is our teacher aware of this painting?'...

'No, not yet. But I suppose I may as well show it to him. From now on, I intend to always paint along these lines.'...

At last he turned to look at me. 'Ono-san,' he said, in a near whisper, 'you are a traitor. Now please excuse me.' With that, he hurried out of the building. (pp. 164-165)

The parallel is the scene where Kuroda's work is being burned in Ono's presence. The same sense of treachery is used for Kuroda when the police officer calls his paintings "un-patriotic trash." We never know exactly what new directions Kuroda was taking that inspired Ono to suggest to the authorities to have "someone come round and give Mr Kuroda a talking-to for his own good." (p. 183) While for Sasaki and Ono the consequence for disloyalty to their teacher is banishment, in wartime the consequence for Kuroda's disloyalty to his teacher is prison and torture.

### **Echoing Characterizations**

In a novel so compact as this, it is remarkable that so many of the characters find a resemblance to each other. Ono often points out these similarities, which is often done as a form of comparison or contrast with himself.

For example, Ono expresses similar opinions of Shintaro and Yasunari Nakahara, the Tortoise, as artists and people. Although "Shintaro was certainly not regarded as of the first rank" (p. 24) of his students, ironically, he is the one who proved to be the most loyal in the end. Later, when describing the Tortoise, he quite bluntly says that one would probably have never heard of his name, "In fact, there is no reason why you should have come across it, since he never achieved any kind of reputation." (p. 66-67) The Tortoise presently holds a post teaching at a high school. Shintaro, likewise, breaks his relationship with Ono in an attempt to secure a high school position.

Much later, Taro is recounting a story about one of his office colleagues who is so slow,

he, too, has been given the name “Tortoise.” Ono reflects that “amongst my own pupils, for instance, it was Shintaro who fulfilled such a role. This is not to deny Shintaro’s basic competence; but when placed alongside the likes of Kuroda, it was though his talent lacked an entire dimension.” (p. 159)

This comparison has its deeper significances. It mirrors Ono’s sense of self in contrast with those pupils or colleges he considers inferior:

I suppose I do not on the whole greatly admire the Tortoises of this world. While one may appreciate their plodding steadiness and ability to survive, one suspects their lack of frankness, their capacity for treachery. And I suppose, in the end, one despises their unwillingness to take chances in the name of ambition or for the sake of principle they claim to believe in....they will never accomplish anything above the mediocre. (p. 159)

On the other hand, Ono contrasts those who will never “accomplish anything above the mediocre” with Akira Sugimura, the man from whom he bought his house. At the peak of his success, Sugimura attempted to create an entire cultural complex around Kawabe Park, “a project that would allow him to leave his mark for ever on this city and its people.” (p. 133) As it turned out, the project ran into financial difficulties, was never completed and Sugimura lost much of his money and influence. But Ono clearly admires what he attempted to do:

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....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. (p. 134)

Ono expresses a similar attitude of admiration toward his former teacher, Mori-san as someone:

“who has held ambitions on a grand scale, [some] one who has been in a position to

achieve something large....It was Mori-san's wish at that time to do nothing less than change fundamentally the identity of painting as practiced in our city. (p. 144)

Unfortunately, Mori-san, too, like Sugimura, saw his empire crumble toward the end of his career. The values of art he hoped would "change fundamentally the identity of painting" were discredited and in the end, Mori-san was forced to make his living as an illustrator of magazines. Yet it was Mori-san's ambition that Ono appreciated, perhaps realizing that this same kind of grand change was what he attempted when he broke with Mori-san. But again, despite the heights of influence and accomplishment that Ono reached, highlighted by winning the Shigeta Foundation Award in 1938, he, too, fell short of his goal. His ideas discredited, he was prematurely retired from his teaching post, becoming a pariah to his former students.

There are several inter-generational parallels among the characters. In one obvious example, there is the similarity between Mori-san, the teacher whom Ono rebelled against and his father. In the scene cited above, in both cases, the teacher/parent demanded to see his paintings and, for different reasons, had them destroyed, predicting a dire future in the direction Ono was taking. In both cases, Ono was able to surpass their expectations.

Another example is the similarity between his son-in-law Suichi and Jiro Miyake, both of whom represent the younger generation, which also included Ono's son Kenji. Ono confuses a conversation he had with Jiro Miyake about his company president's suicide, with a similar one he had with Suichi at the time of Kenji's belated funeral ceremony:

Did Miyake really say all this to me that afternoon? Perhaps I am getting his words confused with the sort of thing Suichi will come out and say....I had after all come to regard Miyake as my prospective son-in-law, and I may indeed have somehow associated him with my actual son-in-law. Certainly, phrases like 'the greatest cowardice of all' sound much more like Suichi than the mild mannered young Miyake. (p. 56)

Ono makes a further connection between his son, Kenji, and Setsuko's son, Ichiro, and comments that he takes a "strange comfort from observing children inherit these resemblances from other members of the family..." (p. 136)

This observation sequesters into a parallel observation about the resemblances between teacher and students, that:

certain traits will tend to survive, like some shadow of that influence, to remain with one throughout one's life....I am aware, for instance, that certain of my mannerisms—the way I poise my hand when I am explaining something, certain inflexions in my voice when I am trying to convey irony or impatience, even whole phrases I am fond of using that people have come to think of as my own—I am aware these are all traits I originally acquired from Mori-san, my former teacher. And perhaps I will not be flattering myself unduly were I to suppose many of my own pupils will in turn have gained such small inheritances from me. (pp. 136-137)

This teacher/pupil relationship comes up several times. There are obvious parallels between Mori-Ono and Ono-Kuroda relationships, similarities that perhaps Ono fails to notice even as he describes them. For example, when Ono describes the banishment of Sasaki from Mori-san's villa for going against his teacher's principles, is he also describing his own break from Mori-san or is he describing Kuroda's break from him?

...it is this same leading pupil who is most likely to see shortcomings in the teacher's work, or else develop views of his own divergent from those of his teacher. In theory, of course, a good teacher should accept this tendency—indeed, welcome it as a sign that he has brought his pupil to a point of maturity. In practice, however, the emotions involved can be quite complicated. Sometimes, when one has nurtured a gifted pupil long and hard, it is difficult to see any such maturing of talent as anything other than treachery, and some regrettable situations are apt to arise. (p. 142)

Whereas the beginning of this quotation sounds very much like Ono describing his own relationship with Mori-san, the second half of it echoes his sense of treachery he might have felt with Kuroda, and the “regrettable situations” that subsequently happened to Kuroda as a result of that rift.

A further inter-generational echo is the relationship between Kuroda and his star pupil Enchi. When Ono pays a visit to enlist Kuroda's support for Noriko's *omia*, he meets

Kuroda's protoge instead. Seeing a painting on the wall, he mistakes it for Kuroda's but it is in fact Enchi's. During the hospitable part of their conversation, Kuroda praises Enchi's talent and Enchi, echoing Kuroda's panegyrics to Ono, offers some of his own to his teacher, Kuroda:

I'm very fortunate in having Mr Kuroda for a teacher. But I fear I still have much to learn....I find so much to admire in Mr Kuroda's ways, I can hardly help mimicking him....I cannot begin to tell you, sir, what I owe to Mr Kuroda...It is impossible to tell you, sir, all he has done for me. (pp. 110-111)

The parallel to this occurs in the last conversation between Ono and Mori-san at the Takami Gardens:

'You are my most accomplished pupil. I have invested years nurturing your talent.'  
'Of course, Sensei, I cannot begin to estimate what I owe you.' (p. 177)

The parallels move back to the Mori-Ono/Ono-Kuroda connection, when later in the conversation, Mori says, "you seem to be exploring curious avenues." (p. 177) Ono reflects back and recalls that Mori-san may not actually have used that phrase but rather Ono himself may have used it during a similar conversation he had with Kuroda also at the same pavilion at the Takami Gardens. In the end, Ono ascribes that phrase as "probably another example of my inheriting a characteristic from my former teacher." (pp. 177-178)

Thus the conversations at the Takami Gardens becomes a vortex of the multiple relationships that Ono has been part of. His inability to distinguish whether it was his teacher speaking to him or he as a teacher speaking to his star pupil demonstrates the cacophony of echoes in Ono's memory.

## Conclusion

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, is written as a series of monologues by an aging artist, recollecting his life and the choices he made. Part I of this paper presented "reflections" as a multifaceted technique used by Ishiguro to show the

tendency of distortion by Ono to understand his life. While on the one hand, to reflect means to think seriously about something, reflections rarely mirror back accurately the subject of reflection. Ono's version of his life's events is the only one we have, but we find enough contractions, through his faulty recollections as well as the crucial conversations with his daughter Setsuko, to raise serious questions about his credibility as a witness to his life.

Whereas Part I dealt with reflections, Part II dealt with the echoes of the novel. Here it is more a stylistic conceit of the author than the reflexive content of the narrator that forms the thesis. Ishiguro creates echoes in several ways. First, he often uses a single word or phrase repeatedly in a conversation. Sometimes he will use clusters of synonymic equivalences to create a mood or image.

Second, he will use the same word or idea in different settings, which produce a delayed echo effect but which link two separate situations or conversations. Third, by repeating similar themes, like suicide, burning of paintings, loyalty and betrayal, in different contexts, the author enriches the texture of the theme itself, sounding it through the narrative in different tones.

The fourth technique of echoing relates to characterization, where Ono's relationships with almost everyone are superimposed on someone else. On a simple level Ono's relationship with one character resembles one with a different character, as in Father/Mori-san, Shintaro/Tortoise or Jiro Miyake/Suichi/Kenji. In a more complex polyphony, parallel relationships abound as in Ono-Takeda/Ono-Mori-san (theme of loyalty) or Ono-Mori-san/Ono-Kurodo/Kuroda-Enchi (theme of relationship between teacher and star student).

The result of the repetition of words, phrases, themes and relationships is a novel filled with ricocheting echoes of previous references. Everything bears relationship to some antecedent. The novel, despite the vagaries of the narration and the credibility of the narrator, is a very carefully spun story, taut, deliberate and internally consistent. Reading this novel is like listening to a jazz tune. There is a certain melody, but it is embellished by improvisations and responses all repeating the same basic melody or based around the same chord progressions. The result, in the novel, is thickly textured piece of writing. *An Artist of the Floating World* is a short work with little plot and just one main character. But its simplicity is deceiving, for the novel spans more than 40 years, in-

troduces more than 20 characters, all of whom appear repeatedly, and touches on several large themes such as loyalty and betrayal, wartime guilt and self delusion. The echoes and reflections of Ono's narrative may help prevent him from seeing himself clearly but for the reader, they amplify and clarify the way toward an more honest appraisal.