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Social and Familial "Generativity" in *An Artist of the Floating World*: An Eriksonian Approach

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Abstract

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Kazuo Ishiguro gives an account of Masuji Ono, an ageing painter who reviews his life and profession in the post-World War II Japan. Though the novel has huge potentials for psychosocial development of characterization, few studies have paid attention to this potentiality. This study is going to investigate the characterization of the protagonist in terms of the midlife crisis with which he is involved. Considering the fact that Masuji's review is characterized by the obsession with family and profession with an attempt to decide whether he achieved "generativity" or "stagnation," his account can be discussed in terms of Erik Erikson's psychosocial development. Focusing on the seventh stage of Erikson's theory which is primarily characterized by deciding over the binary "generativity versus stagnation" and the individual's struggle to decide on the meaning of life, the present research explores Masuji's attempts at creating a positive image of his past and also his tendency to compensate his shortcomings in familial issues in order to finally feel "generative" in his midlife years. Ultimately, this research comes to the conclusion that Masuji is able to overcome the psychological tribulations of the stage by developing the virtue of "care."

Keywords

Ishiguro; Erikson; Midlife Crisis; Generativity; Stagnation; Care.

1. Introduction

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Kazuo Ishiguro explores the flashbacks of Masuji Ono, an elderly painter, who looks back on his life to consider how he has spent it. Set in the years following the Second World War, the novel goes into the mind of Ono who sees how his formerly excessive reputation has weakened since the war and how people's consideration of him and his paintings have changed. A central issue in the novel is Ono's need to agree to take responsibility

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for his past deeds and the protagonists to find a path to peace in his benevolence for the young white-collar workers on the streets at lunchbreak. Such concerns in the novel reveals that Ishiguro explores the role of people in a hurriedly changing environment.

In *An Artist of the Floating World*, the narrator remembers his personal history. It contains his beginning activities in the role of an artist around 1913, a time when he learns his craft as an apprentice, the reputation that comes after his apprenticeship, the zenith of his fame around 1938, and finally the decline he experiences after the war. The narrative is primarily concerned with the timespan between October 1948 and June 1950. In the beginning of the narrative, it is revealed that Ono has lost his wife and son in the war, and that he is now left with two daughters. The older daughter is Setsuko who is married and the younger one is named Noriko who is still single, living with Ono. It becomes known that Ono is indirectly seen to be responsible for the demise of his wife Michiko, who was present in one of the bombings in Nagasaki. Also, he is seen responsible for the death of his son, Kenji, who was a soldier outside the borders in Manchuria. Setsuko's husband, named Suichi, emphasizes that Ono needs to be accused for the deaths since Ono as an artist supported the ultranationalist association that "led the country astray" and has caused the deaths of millions of soldiers and sailors, who lost their lives in the way of "that hopeless charge across the minefield" (37).

The painter is apprehensive about the likelihood that his endorsement of the nationalist government would be a hindrance of his daughter's marriage negotiations, and this makes him initiate a review and an evaluation of his profession. Such a review results in a flashback to the time when the father and daughter had some problems with one another, to a period when he was a contributor to a studio that created cheap replicas of conformist pictures of Japan, to the time when he collaborated with the nonconformist Mori-san's villa trying to capture the floating world, and to the period when was known to be a nationalist painter. What frequently follows such descriptions is a sense of an unreliability that Ono might be hiding some information or that there might be different versions of the same narrations and facts.

Though there are many events that are described in the novel, the psychological inclinations of the chief character are as important as the evets. This means that the novel has many psychological potentialities that need to be uncovered. It is also evident that the chief character is situated in a social background that is as influential as the psychological drives. The importance of both society and psychology in the novel makes it appropriate to be approached from Erik Erikson's psychosocial theories. Through such an undertaking, it becomes possible to investigate the personality and motives of the chief character of *An Artist of the Floating World*.

2. Methodology

Because of the concern for of both public and the private forces in *An Artist of the Floating World,* the novel is potential to be studied in terms of Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages of development. Erikson contends that after puberty, development appears significantly in the resolution of "the person one has come to be" and "the person society expects one to become" (Erikson, qtd. in Hunt 112). Involved with such a conflict, the human subject becomes principally concerned with ego development, which depends, as Erikson points out, "on the recognition that there is an inner population of remembered and anticipated sensations and images which are firmly correlated with the outer population of familiar and predictable things and people" (*Childhood and Society* 247). The consequence of such recognition is the decision about "Generativity versus Stagnation" in the individual's review of what has been achieved and what has been lost.

Erikson's seventh stage is termed "Generativity versus Stagnation" in which the psychoanalyst applies the notion generative, defined "having the power or function of generating, originating, producing, or reproducing" (Erikson, qtd. in Rimbach 87), to give a psychological facet to the concept with the aim of discussing the subject's disposition for finding achievement in life. Occurring between 40 and 65, the seventh stage is also known by the notion "midlife crisis," a time when the subject is stimulated by the reconsideration of social demands such as career and marriage. As Erikson points out, it is "primarily the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation" to include "productivity and creativity, neither of which, however, can replace it as designations of a crisis in development" (Erikson, *Identity: Youth* 55). Erikson argues that individuals, in the course of their adulthood, are constantly involved with developing their psychological lives. Such development contains the individual's preoccupation with the questions of profession and family. Once the individual successfully passes the stage of finding and feeling achievement in profession and family, they come to the belief that they have contributed to their society by having a role and position in both the family and the community. When subjects fail in such an achievement, they undergo the feeling of barrenness in their consideration of the self (Carducci 193).

The subject's success in the profession and family stage results in the appearance of the virtue of "care." Care is an ego quality related to generativity which refers to an aptitude to give with no expectation of return. In the words of Erikson, it is "the widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident; it overcomes the ambivalence adhering to irreversible obligation" (*Identity* 291). The seventh stage of Erikson's psychosocial development is characterized by the accomplishment of a positive feeling about life, the observation of children's entrance into adults, and the formation of a fruitful sense of agreement with the partner (Carducci 193). The application of Erikson's psychosocial theory to the characterization of Masuji Ono reveals how an artist defines himself in a world of identity crisis following the Second World War.

3. The Past in Present

Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* represents a character in his midlife years who has both personal and social concerns. It seems that he is in his midlife stage and, being in the Eriksonian seventh stage, he reviews his "generativity" in life. As both the narrator and the protagonist of the novel, Masuji Ono is portrayed as an ageing artist, a father and a grandfather. During his narration in the novel, he shows concern for the negotiations of his youngest daughter's marriage. Ono also reveals that in his childhood, his father did not like to see his son to become a painter, but in the course of time he finally became an artist. He reveals his social side by mentioning that in his younger years, he formerly had cooperation with the nationalist government in the production of wartime paintings. At the time when he narrates himself, though his art career before his contribution to propaganda paintings is commended, his other work is disdained. This dual understanding of artistic career makes Ono have a conflicting life.

An Artist of the Floating World can be considered as a historical fiction because it explores the past with an acute sense of historical facts. At the same time, the novel can be taken as a global literature because it has collective concerns and reveals the way the contemporary world is interrelated. The title of the novel with the use of the word "floating" clearly refers to the themes of transience and change that exist in the novel (Drag 36). Ono's reconsideration of his life explores the decision over what has been left and what has permanently been missed. This solicitude results in the fact that the narrative frequently goes back and forth in the past and the present. The very concern for the past can be taken as the protagonist's involvement with the seventh stage of Erikson's psychosocial development. This claim is also confirmed by the age span of the protagonist.

Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* is characterized by an acute sense of loss. The present that the central character Ono narrates appears to be merely a remembrance of a past magnificence that he experienced. In fact, the present is nothing but "a sorry anticlimax to a successful past" (Drag 36). The narrator and the narrative draw a distinction between the barrenness and absurdness of the present and the abundance of meaning which existed in the past. Ono frequently points out the difference between the unsatisfactory present and the perfect past, a time that went before the loss of meaning and glory. It is noteworthy that Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* presents the events in the context of the years that come after the close of the Second World War. It is the years 1948-49 that Ono is concerned with.

The overarching presence of the war gives a social side to Ono's recollections. In fact, the war taints Ono's personal concerns with a social-historical background, making the novel more capable of being read in the light of Erikson's psychosocial development. Also, the presence of the war affects the structure of the novel as it draws a distinction between the old and the new. The war is a locus where fundamental changes in social and political values are observed, and a background against which the protagonist is judged. Even, the protagonist himself sees the war as a dividing line when describing the people around him. For instance, when referring to Mrs. Kawakami, a bar owner, he describes her based on what she was before and after the war:

> As for Mrs. Kawakami, although she will do her best not to allow the current mood to affect her, there is no denying she has been greatly aged by the war years. Before the war, she may still have passed for a "young woman", but since then something inside her seems to have broken and sagged. (13)

For Ono, war as one of the greatest social phenomena turns out to be a touchstone to evaluate people and events. This means that the protagonist tries to read everything in the social context. This mindset can mean that the protagonist himself has a psychosocial approach to what he describes all through. This is best evidenced when he describes the psychological pressure that the President experienced when confronted with the facts of the war:

> You see, to be quite frank, the President committed suicide… It was his apology on behalf of the companies under his charge… 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. (35-36)

War gives the personal experiences of characters a robust social side. Ishiguro's attempt at setting the novel in the years following the war and the frequent reference to this event was in fact informed by his awareness of how history is always a determinant in people's lives, how it forms the psychology of characters, and how it undermines the principles and ethics which were previously considered to be praiseworthy. This means that a great deal of Ono's personality is fashioned by his social and political reality. Though he is at times alienated and baffled by such realities, he tries to go into the past, in an attempt to narrate, describe, justify and make sense of himself and his surroundings.

Ono's story can be seen as a touchstone by which each reader can evaluate himself or herself when putting themselves in his shoes. In the background of a changing world, or what Ishiguro calls "the floating world," readers can see how values are in constant fluctuation and how they may react in such a situation. Rebecca L. Walkowitz believes that the novel resorts to history so as to present an advisory moral lesson: "Ishiguro would have his readers see, as Ono begins to see, that what is 'correct' has changed: Ono needs to betray his past—to display it, to question it, and to turn away from absolutism—in order to live responsibly in the present" (128). Considering the role of the reader in the course of experiencing the novel, Cynthia F. Wong points out,

> Ono [. . .] gains a reader's sympathy: how could any one of us have performed or behaved differently from him? At the very end, however, a reader's better sensibility takes hold, and Ono's false sense of himself in the context of world history resonates too much with a sense of self-inflicted wounding; his warped views of the past ultimately cannot offer redemption when his life is woven from such a dense fabric of lies. (51)

Ono can thus be taken as everyman involved with various social forces. Ono's act of delving into the past provides the reader with some valuable information, including how the

very act of the consideration of the past becomes a source of discussion for the psychological complications of the protagonist. Because of the fact that *An Artist of the Floating World* explores the concerns of an elderly protagonist who frequently revisits the past, it is possible to argue that the novel is characterized by the theme of midlife crisis. For Ono the protagonist, the past is always a present fact, the one that he should overcome. The past in question is frequently represented to be overshadowed by some social forces. The combination of personal and social issues in the novel means that the binary of "stagnation versus generativity," which is a central issue in midlife crisis, is clearly present in the novel.

4. Social "Generativity"

In Erikson's seventh stage of development, one's contribution to the social arena finds centrality in the evaluation of the past for concluding whether one has had "generativity" in life. Ono's narration is evidently concerned about social events he experienced in his life and what role he assumed in coming across with them. Such concern is clearly mentioned in the beginning of the novel through Ono's acknowledgment of how he is now preoccupied with the issue of social standing:

> I was very lax in considering the matter of status, it simply not being my instinct to concern myself with such things. Indeed, I have never at any point in my life been very aware of my own social standing, and even now, I am often surprised afresh when some event, or something someone may say, reminds me of the rather high esteem in which I am held. (10-11)

Though Ono argues that he still does not feel aware of "social standing," the very act of confessing this fact means that he has come to be conscious of it in his midlife years. This argument can later be substantiated in his acknowledgement of the way one can get status in life: "I recounted my view on how influence and status can creep up on someone who works busily, not pursuing these ends in themselves, but for the satisfaction of performing his tasks to the best of his ability" (15). All such remarks by Ono indicate that regarding obsession for social standing, he has turned from an indifferent person to a conscious one, a fact that is arguably the result of his entrance into the midlife stage.

In his review of the past, Ono frequently remembers the process by which he formed his social persona. He remembers how his pursuit of an artistic career was a great challenge with his family and how the process helped him better his defective character, dissociating himself from the pressure coming from his family. Though such a recollection of the development of social persona is an attempt at deciding on the possibility of social "generativity" in midlife stage, it contains reference to other stages of development. Erikson's fourth stage "Industry versus Inferiority" is clearly seen in Ono's recollection. In a very critical stage in the narration of his life, Ono points out how he struggled against the familial and social demands. In fact, the young Ono proves to be industrious in his encounter with the forces that try to make him inferior.

This is best evidenced in Ono's attempt at repudiating authority and dissociating himself from the dictatorial obligations coming from his business-minded father, who believes that a real job is in the market not in the arts. It is against this idea that Ono revolts by insisting on being an artist. Another social barrier, Ono remembers, is a priest who tries to write Ono's destiny by claiming that the young man was born "with a flaw in his nature. A weak streak that would give him a tendency towards slothfulness and deceit" (29). The priest's argument is a source of inferiority, especially when he takes Ono's "flaw" for granted and tries to provide remedy: "we've had to combat his laziness, his dislike of useful work, his weak will [since] artists […] live in squalor and poverty. They inhabit a world which gives them every temptation to become weak-willed and depraved" (29). When it is revealed that the father burns Ono's paintings, it becomes clear how the protagonist has to make his way through resistance to the forces that actively try to mold his personality.

Nevertheless, Ono seemingly enhances his "industry" to prevent the sense of inferiority that are imposed on him by the elders. For instance, when the young Ono sees his father's insistence on business, he resolutely states, "I have no wish to find myself in years to come, sitting where Father is now sitting, telling my own sons about accounts and money […] What are these meetings I'm so privileged to attend? The counting of loose change. The fingering of coins, hour after hour" (30). Though Ono's revolt brings him punishment from the authority, he proceeds to seek out his identity. His father destroys his paintings and his former teacher Mori-san, charging him with artistic disobedience and disloyalty because of dealing with "curious avenues" (118), believes that he should be punished by the appropriation of the paintings as the offender "would then abandon the painting, or in some cases, burn it along with the refuse" (91). At first, though Ono resists to the patriarchal authority, he finally accepts the punishment. But he later shows more resistance when he does not give his artistic works to Mori-san to be confiscated. The result of the latter resistance is his expelling from Mori-san's coterie, but the protagonist shows another step towards solidifying his identity.

Ono proves to be intent on developing the distinctive identity he aimed to achieve in his early stages of psychosocial development. This persistence means that he has been able to successfully pass fifth Eriksonian stage, namely "Identity versus Role Confusion." This solidification of identity goes to the extent that the detraction coming from the authority cannot stop him from proceeding. When Ono is expelled from Mori-san's coterie, his former teacher attacks him by saying "You will no doubt succeed in finding work illustrating magazines and comic books', but 'it will end your development as a serious artist'" (120). Having remembered Mori-san's prediction, Ono rejects his former teacher's authority through his ironical expression: "it is surely understandable if a teacher who has actually supplied most of the paints and materials should forget in such a moment that his pupil has any right whatever over his own work" (120). Ono's reaction to his former teacher's remark indicates his resolution in forming a strict identity in the Eriksonian fifth stage.

Ono follows his principles resolutely and assumes a certain political role in his artistic career. He decides to support the imperialist regime of the time which brings him the support of the government. As a result, he becomes able to promote his art by assuming the role of a *Sensei*, a teacher. Such a position gives Ono a higher place than that Mori-san occupies and this position makes him contribute to the burning, conducted by authorities, of the paintings of one of his students, though he is reluctant to do so. The contribution makes worries Ono worried when he sees that a State worker, describing the process of burning paintings, arguing, "Bad paintings make bad smoke" (122). Such an argument reveals how a seemingly neutral, aesthetic practice is deeply affected by politics. Ono is well-aware of this issue when he associates the smell of burning with the smell of bombings he experienced in previous wars: "It's not so long ago it meant bombing and fire" (131-132). This shows how individuals are surrounded by politics and how their sense of "generativity" in social interactions is always overshadowed by politics.

The narrator remembers how the overarching presence of politics is at work in defining "generativity" in the arts. Ono's alignment with the imperialist regime and its specific aesthetics becomes a source of power struggle with Mori-San. While the former teacher emphasizes the modernization of the arts by sheltering in European tradition, Ono assumes a cynical attitude towards this argument, showing his sense of chauvinism in resisting to foreign influences. In his rejection of the former teacher, Ono assumes the discourse of the arts, detailing why he challenges his contestant:

> he had, for instance, long abandoned the use of traditional dark outline to define his shapes, … And no doubt he had taken his cue from the European in what was his most central concern: the use of subdued colors, Morisan's wish was to evoke a certain melancholy, nocturnal atmosphere around his women. (141)

As Ono's argument reveals, aesthetics and "generativity" in the arts are defined in terms of the political discourse. It is merely because of Ono's alignment with the nationalist ideology that he calls Mori-san's art "fundamentally unpatriotic" (133). The social, political context is shown to be a source or a driving force for the production of the committed art: "It is my belief that in such troubled times as this, 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" (119). This background is so important in the world of the novel that it leads to "the steady decline of Mori-san's reputation in the city" because merely he tries to "bring European influence into the Utamaro tradition" (133). The result of such a social influence is that Mori-san's artistic production is labelled as disloyal and unpatriotic, sent finally to margins.

In Ono's narrative, things are described against the backdrop of social forces. Considering the psychological complications of the artist in his reminiscence of the past, it is possible to argue that Ono's sense of "generativity" is clearly related to his involvement with the sociopolitical forces that surround him. When remembering his past decisions and actions from his midlife years, Ono struggles to define "generativity" in the social context he was situated. His definition of "generativity" appears to be at times prejudiced, the one that helps him overcome his personal competitions with the people around like his father and his former teacher. When Ono mentions that Mori-san's art is characterized by the tendency "to capture the fragile lantern light of the pleasure world" (116), he tries to emphasize that the former teacher is afflicted with the lack of "generativity." Ono's sense of having the upper hand in the decision over who has achieved "generativity" in life acts as a way of overcoming the sense of "stagnation" in midlife crisis.

In order to pass his midlife crisis successfully, Ono reads the past in a way that seems to be favorable. His prejudiced reading goes to the extent that he falls into the trap of ignoring some realities about the past. Ono's association with an anti-Western imperialist movement has some historical reverberations that the protagonist does not mention. They include the atomic bombing of Japan, the military seizure of the country, and the damage to Japanese hegemony. Such effects are symbolized in the fact that Ono's son dies in the events of the very militarism he supported. Though there are highly negative events that Ono can potentially refer to,

> None of these events is mentioned directly, and Ishiguro's text thus avoids the potential danger of slipping into the gothic, of placing deeply shocking events in the realm of the supernatural and caricatural. Rather, the horrors of the novel are buried in the silences of Ono's day-to-day ruminations and emerge only through the excavations of the reader. (Wright 62)

Clearly, Ono does not mention that he lost his reputation and was forced to give up his job of painting. This means that he proves to be an unreliable narrator. Such unreliability is apparently rooted in the narrator's inclination to feel generative in life in order to finally evade the possible sense of "stagnation." This "stagnation" shows itself in the potential sense of guilt that may come to the protagonist while examining his past. Timothy Wright perceptively sees a social side to this sense of guilt:

> In examining Ono's guilt, one should not forget that guilt, like shame, is a social emotion, and that its presence can often tell us more about the society producing it than about the individual experiencing it. The critical tendency to find Ono guilty, while not misplaced, has the unintentional effect of recapitulating in a different form the very act of judgment by which the new order of postwar Japan finds Ono guilty (and itself, by implication, innocent). (Wright 63)

Ono is thus a product of the society in which he is a member. His struggle against the sense of guilt, or of "stagnation," is in fact the one against the social forces that drive individuals into predetermined social and political roles. Thus, "the focus of the novel is not the guilt of Ono—the mistakes he made, his evasiveness in owning up to them—but the historical construction of moral right" (Wright 63). Confronted with this construct, in his midlife years, Ono is at times busy with making changes to the unfavorable aspects of the past. This is why he is labelled as an unreliable narrator.

Unreliability seems to be an unavoidable fact in the society where Ono lives. Through the title, namely "Floating World," it is indicated that the narrator is situated in a changing society where he cannot develop a solid personality. The "Floating World" is emphasized in the novel through Ono's changing perceptions. In his exploration of the past, Ono narrates the story of the Hirayama boy, a child with a slow mind who repeats nationalistic expressions and ancient military anthems. Prior to the war, he was highly praised people who would "stop to give him money" (61). After the defeat of the country, the child was seen attacked by people when he chanted his songs. The story of the retarded child suggests how the floating world that Ishiguro describes stands against its own ideals. Also, it is arguable that the child bears resemblance to Ono who he is similarly "shown to mimic patriotic themes and slogans, and to be incapable of understanding why his message no longer falls on sympathetic ears" (Shaffer, qtd. in Beedham 33). Ono's psychological state represents the collective psychological state of Japan in a critical point in history. Referring to this history, Silvia Tellini points out,

> During that period, the idea of belonging to the nation suffers changes insofar as identity becomes less predetermined, hierarchical and non-negotiable, while it becomes more relevant on an individual basis … Ono's narration begins three and a half years after the beginning of the occupation by the victors, in October 1948, and ends one year and ten months before the end of the occupation process, a time when Japan had no sovereignty and accordingly no diplomatic relations. No Japanese were allowed to travel abroad until the occupation was almost over; no major political, administrative, or economic decisions were possible without the conquerors' approval. (Tellini 5-6)

Ono's association with fascism is an indispensable part of his past, the one that he seemingly did not have any choice to evade. This social pressure is something that remains with Ono until his midlife years. In order to evade the residual effects of his decisions in the past, Ono reads his career in a way that would give him a sense of satisfaction and "generativity." Along the way, he forgets some aspects of the past and alters some facts in order to create consent in himself.

5. Familial "Generativity"

Regarding his concern for his social side in his midlife years, Ono proves to be struggling for creating "generativity" for himself, though his past is characterized by negative aspects. Because the artist is situated in an unpleasant past, "Part of Ono's narrative strategy is to denaturalize and even invert that moral condemnation, so that he appears not as a monstrosity but instead as an idealist who happens to have fallen on the wrong side of history" (Wright 64-65). In addition to be concerned with giving himself a positive view of his profession, Ono is highly preoccupied with familial relations. In fact, in his midlife years, he is interested in feeling generative by serving his offspring.

Ono's obsession with family is shown in his struggle for finding a proper marriage case for his younger daughter, Noriko. Ono struggles to do something for Noriko in order to evade the charges that his elder daughter, Setsuko, sets against him. Setsuko believes that the failure of her sister in marriage is related to their father's failure to properly satisfy those who investigate their family as suitors. This observation makes Ono appear to be the only impediment that disturbs the tradition of marriage. Because of such a charge of stagnation in familial relationship, Ono in a great deal of the novel is seen moving around the city in an attempt to alter some parts of his former decisions and actions before they are found out by the family of Noriko's most recent suitor, who have hired investigators to know more about Ono's family. Because of this concern for his daughter, Ono's account can be seen as a struggle to overcome the psychological complications of midlife crisis in terms of "generativity" for the collective institution of family. This struggle becomes more and more incumbent on him as there is an unfavorable past in family relations, a fact that is emphasized in the opening pages of the novel:

> At one point last month … we were sitting there on the veranda after breakfast, when Noriko said: "I'm relieved you've come at last, Setsuko. You'll take Father off my hands a little." … "Father takes a lot of looking after now he's retired," … "You've got to keep him occupied or he starts to mope." "Really..." Setsuko smiled nervously, then turned to the garden with a sigh. "The maple tree seems to have recovered completely. It's looking splendid." "Setsuko probably has no idea of what you're like these days, Father. She only remembers you from when you were a tyrant and ordered us all around. You're much more gentle these days, isn't that so?" (6-7)

Ono's past keeps to be following him even in simple familial relationships. The difference between the past and the present is emphasized through the comparison that Noriko makes for her elder sister between what Ono was and what Ono is: "Father's very different now. There's no need to be afraid of him anymore. He's much more gentle and domesticated" (7). The change to which the younger daughter testifies is an indication of Ono's attempt to be "generative" in family matters in his midlife stage.

Ono turns into a father who pays more attention to his children. He perceives what changes his daughter have undergone throughout the years: "It is no coincidence, surely, that Noriko should have grown up so headstrong, and Setsuko so shy and retiring. But now, it seems, as she approaches her thirties, Setsuko's looks are taking on a new and not inconsiderable dignity" (9). This perception can be taken as Ono's movement from a tyrannical father into a democratic one. This means that the inclination for "generativity" in the seventh Eriksonian stage shows itself in the concern for family in Ono.

This is why an important deal of Ono's expedition in the novel is related to altering the past for the sake of the future of his daughter. Because he is afraid that his pre-war political association may act as a hindrance to the attainment of a positive result for Noriko's negotiations, he goes to meet his previous acquaintances to make sure that they would provide a positive description of his personality when they are approached by the Saito family's investigators: "'I simply meant to suggest that Father may wish to speak to certain acquaintances from his past. That is to say, before the Saitos' detective does'" (57). Ono's attempt at creating a positive view of himself is an inclination that is driven by the need in midlife years to feel fruitful regarding family life. Such a solicitude for family success is shown to be more powerful in Ono's midlife crisis. This solicitude that shows itself in an obsession that always accompanies Ono is directly stated by him in his own thoughts and in his dialogues with Setsuko:

> We had been comparing our impressions on how Noriko was taking to her new life, and had agreed that to all appearances, she was very happy indeed. "It's all very gratifying," I was saying. "Her future was becoming a grave worry to me, but now everything looks very good for her. Taro is an admirable man. One could hardly have hoped for a better match." (127)

Ono feels generative when he sees that his elder daughter is now married to "an admirable man." When he remembers his concerns in other stages of life, he shows to be obsessed with his personal achievements, especially in his profession. In fact, his younger years is characterized by a certain degree of egoism which leaves a less space for family issues. However, this egoism is replaced by altruism in his midlife years since the target by which generativity is achieved changes. As a result of the occasional confessions that Ono makes about the past, he achieves a therapeutic capacity. Though he at times eludes people about his past decisions, he comes across realities in critical moments in life. The prize of this honesty is his daughter's successful marriage. In his dialogues with his elder daughter at the close of the novel, his candor comes to its acme:

> Now Setsuko, there's no need to be so tactful. I'm quite now to acknowledge there are certain aspects to my career I have no cause prepared to be proud of. Indeed, I acknowledged as much during the negotiations, just as you suggested … I dare say I would have done so in any case, but I was nevertheless grateful for your 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. Noriko always did underestimate her old father. But I'm hardly the sort to allow my own daughter to suffer simply because I'm too proud to face up to things. (127)

The mechanism of talking cure is clearly seen in Ono's narrative. His acknowledgement about his career has double functions in midlife years. On the one hand, it is a failure as the narrator did not have an absolutely generative career. On the other hand, the fact that he has been successful in having a generative life in familial terms is a solace for the shortcomings in his career. It is noteworthy that Ono confesses that he has been somehow conscious in hiding truth about his past. However, he seems to be still hiding some aspects of truth, whether consciously or unconsciously, as he believes "certain aspects" of his career have been unworthy of consideration. Still he appears to be interested to feel generative in his career, though the extent of his success in profession remains somehow unclear.

What is evident is the fact that Ono feels generative in being able to prove himself to his daughters. Before Ono's confession, Setsuko brashly reminds her father of his past career as a source of shame. As a result of this past, the father has no elevated status in the family institution. But, Ono's success in preparing the ground for his elder daughter to have an appropriate marriage becomes a psychological compensation for him. As the excerpt reveals, a healthy relationship between Ono and Setsuko is formed. Ono's successful repentance is in fact prized by both Noriko's marriage and his reunion with Setsuko. The success of Ono's healthy relationship with Setsuko is evident in the beauty the daughter sees in accompanying her father: "Setsuko suddenly stopped walking and exclaimed: 'How wonderful the maples look at this time of year!' 'Indeed,' I said. 'No doubt they'll look even better further into the autumn'" (127). Ono's emphasis on the continuation of the beauty of the maples into the autumn can be taken as his emphasis on the continuation of the healthy relationship that now exists between the two. This very fact of being in a proper interaction with his family members is Ono's achievement of "generativity" in midlife years.

6. Overcoming the Crisis

An Artist of the Floating World employs typical first-person narrator who decides to reexamine and reconsider the past from the standpoint of old age. The travel that the protagonist initiates in time comes to be a distressed attempt to win back his reputation and to protect himself from the uneasiness that his professional life has been tragically mistaken. In the case of Ono, the protagonist is highly concerned with his former job as a painter and how his artistic career acts as an instrument to contribute to Japanese nationalism in the decade that leads to the Second World War. Though at the time of the decision to be a champion of Japanese nationalism Ono feels to be generative and contributing, he in his midlife years comes to be it as a source of shame because of the historical changes that his country faces. Thus, throughout the narrative, the protagonist becomes afflicted with a crisis to how bring back his social status. Also, this social status is highly critical in the success of his younger daughter in marital life. Though Ono is somehow successful in bringing back his social eminence and creating a successful marriage for his daughter, the questions that remains to be answered is Ono's extent of success in overcoming his personal crisis that he feels in his midlife years.

As Ono proves to be successful in resolving social aspects of his life, he feels a certain kind of satisfaction in himself. This is evident in his dialogues with Setsuko in the final pages of the novel. This means that he has attained a certain satisfaction by feeling being generative in his familial life. Being generative in the romantic life, or the social practice of marriage, is an achievement that Erikson considers as something that people in midlife years become concerned. Ritualization in all its forms is a manifestation of this concern (Stevens 54). This ritualization is seen in Ono's younger daughter's marriage at the end of the novel. In fact, the fact that his daughter is able to have a positive ritualization and is able to form a positive romantic life becomes a source of satisfaction for Ono in his midlife years. However, Ono's obsession with history and his place in the historical events remains to be following him all through the narrative. This historical obsession, Ishiguro himself acknowledges, is a major theme of Ishiguro's novels:

> How people justify to themselves the kind of life they've led . . . how they try to do something that will give their lives some kind of dignity, to do something and then have to come to terms with their ordinariness. Therefore, I'm interested in historical periods that are topsy-turvy, where people who've spent their whole lives doing something are suddenly told it's wrong. The things they could be proud of are suddenly something to be ashamed of. (Ishiguro, qtd. in Wright 67-68)

Ishiguro's acknowledgement of his major theme is shown in the novel through the fact that the disgraceful past that the artist experiences is indicated by way of the use of the word "shame" that he at times mentions in the novel. This is exemplified in one of his conversations: "there is surely no great shame in mistakes made in the best of faith. It is surely a thing far more shameful to be unable or unwilling to acknowledge them" (83). Clearly, Ono believes that the past is characterized by a certain shame. He proceeds to emphasize that the act of not acknowledging the faults is "far more shameful." This means that Ono in his midlife stage struggles to review and confront the past candidly.

Though Ono knows that he should fully come across his past deeds, his consideration of the past is characterized by reinterpretation and rearrangement of his recollections. He, in fact, alters the past so as to comfort both himself and his audience that what he did in the past is honorable. To substantiate this comfort, he looks for approval when conversing with Mori-san, emphasizing their contribution to the nation (Tellini 8). This means that Ono fails to completely carry out his own acknowledged mission of being candid about the past. Though he alters the past mostly for the sake of preparing the ground for a successful marriage for his younger daughter, it seems that he himself comes at times to believe in the changes he makes. For instance, he sometimes mentions the pleasure that he took from the style in which he worked: "We lived throughout those years almost entirely in accordance with his [Mori-san's] values and lifestyle, and this entailed spending much time exploring the city's 'floating world' – the night-time world of pleasure, entertainment and drink which formed the backdrop for all of our paintings" (144-5). Then, he proceeds to emphasize his nostalgia for the past: "I always feel a certain nostalgia now in recalling the city centre as it was in those days; the streets were not so filled with the noise of traffic, and the factories had yet to take the fragrance of seasonal blossoms from the night air" (145). This confession stands in sharp contrast to his other confessions about his regret about some of his decisions in the past.

Ono acts dubiously about his recollections. This is why he is considered to be an unreliable narrator. On the one hand, he expresses his discontent over some aspects of his past; on the other hand, he feels nostalgic for the past. When he remarks that "I cannot recall any colleague who could paint a self-portrait with absolute honesty" (44), he nearly admits that his narration might have some misrepresentations. Because of such an evasion of facts, it is arguable that "Ono's story might be more banal than he is willing to admit" (Wright 66). The fact that Ono is totally an unreliable narrator means that he has not fully come across the facts of his life, and this in turn means that he has not been able to be fully successful in overcoming the necessities of midlife crisis.

While personally Ono has some failures in his midlife years, he is socially successful to be generative. In addition to his achievement in his daughter's marriage, he shows concern for both older and younger generations. The preoccupation with generations in

Ono's personality is observed by Bruce King who argues that Ono's conflicting mind about the generations is a great concern for the protagonist: "If the old order is tyrannical and unrepentant, the younger generation is necessarily selfish. The choice seems to be between the living death of the past, which provides protection and guidance, and the new American democratic way, which offers opportunities and insecurity" (qtd. in Beedham 41). The very fact that Ono has to decide between two worlds means that he is obsessed with generations.

While feeling nostalgic for the past, Ono has good wishes for the generation to come. Watching the place where the old night bar Migi-Hidari stood, a place which acts as a symbol of the old days for the artist, Ono now observes a relatively empty place with a few young trees and a single bench. The old busy site is now a place where people have now no free time to stop and pass time resting. Comparing the then and now scenes, Ono contemplates: "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" (136). This final expression in the closing statements of the novel means that the protagonist has found solace in a view of a promising and optimistic future near the end of his narration.

The fact that Ono is empowered to have a positive feeling and a hope for a promising future means that there has appeared the virtue of care in him. This virtue, as it was pointed out in the second chapter, is an ego quality related to generativity that refers to an aptitude to give without expectation of return. Ono is characterized by the virtue of care as he is no longer selfishly concerned with his own gains, but he is honestly concerned for his nation. This is evidenced in Ono's observations at the end of the novel:

> Yesterday morning, with the sun shining pleasantly, I sat down on it again and remained there for a while, observing the activity around me… And as I watched, I was struck by how full of optimism and enthusiasm these young people were. At one point, two young men leaving the building stopped to talk with a third who was on his way in. They stood on the doorsteps of that glass-fronted building, laughing together in the sunshine. One young man … was laughing in a particularly cheerful manner, with something of the open innocence of a child… I smiled to myself as I watched these young office workers from my bench. (136)

Ono selflessly observes how his people are optimist and enthusiastic. He notices people of different ages and enjoys seeing how life is running in his society. Ono is no longer following his own commitments and his own interests. Rather, he is evidently preoccupied with the goods of the present and next generations. All these mean that Ono has turned into a caring man and he has been socially successful in achieving generativity and leaving behind stagnation. Thus, it is arguable that he has been socially successful in overcoming his midlife crisis.

7. Conclusion

The events described in Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* can all be taken to be Masuji Ono's projections of midlife concerns. The protagonist continuously proves to be interested in winning a good name in his Eriksonian Seventh stage to finally form a positive idea of self and thus achieve the feeling of generativity in life. Considering the ending of the novel, it is possible to argue that Ono has been successful in overcoming the seventh stage of his psychosocial development. The very fact that he is able to help his daughter have a successful marriage and also the virtue of care that he develops for the people to come in the end are the signs that he has been able to successfully overcoming the concerns of midlife crisis. Having established the psychological resolution of the chief characters in terms of Eriksonian psychoanalysis, it is proper to argue such an undertaking matters because it reveals how psychological complexities are intertwined with socio-cultural issues. As an Eastern artist, Ono does not limit his life to the professional concerns; rather, he believes that having generativity in family bonds is as important as the generativity in profession. This shows that cultural context in which Ono as the character lives and in which Ishiguro writes. Thus, the text of the novel can be taken as evidence that refers to the psychosocial facts of contemporary Japan.

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