Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro's 1986 novel *An Artist of the Floating World* intrigued me when I first read it because of the linguistic oddity it was depicted in. It paints a poetic small corner of the world, a universe of a seemingly famous artist, living his retirement. I found it peaceful and refreshing. However, the duality of the language used, the incongruence in events that arose with every page, and the lack of climax in the novel intrigued me and I tried to find out more. Reading articles by other scholars I learned that all those mysterious incongruencies are framed in the academic world as a form of self-deceit on the part of the narrator. Many have framed this novel as an expression of two systems clashing, the old and the new, a conflict seen in the discrepancy between the protagonists' sense of reality and that of those around him. I wanted to combine this newfound perspective with my own personal impressions and by using a cultural studies lens. I want to take an age-old generational dispute through a semiological analysis and analyze the transitional period that brings individuals from different generations into conflict.

Ono is an unreliable narrator, a trait obvious in his inconsistencies and his avoiding answering tough questions, while at the same time talking himself up for the reader. Masuji Ono finds himself in constant conflict with the young generation because he is part of the generation that brought Japan to war. He finds that marriage arrangements fall through because of his past, while his son in law and youngest daughter resent him. Ono, however, finds no fault with his views and recounts his past nostalgically, even though his political convictions were indirectly the cause for his son and wife's deaths. He is constantly relying on memory to justify not only his actions but also to refute the accusations the younger generation raises.

Literature Review

I will introduce Ferdinand de Saussure's theory on semiology and the concepts of signifier, signified and sign in order to proceed to the concept introduced by Barthes, namely the myth. The concept of mythology will be used as the main theoretical framework upon which I will conduct my analysis. I will specifically look at two concepts introduced by Barthes: myth as a stolen language and language as depoliticized speech in order to analyze how and why individuals from different generations desert or hold onto different meanings.

In aiding my analysis, I will frame the historical moment that the novel refers to Japan in 1945, just after the Second World War. I will mainly use *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire* edited by Asako Ikeda et. al and *The Confusion Era* edited by Mark Sandler. These two books will help frame the status of Japanese artists during and after the war and will give context to how and why the public was unhappy with artists after the War.

I will also explain the concept of the floating world, a concept central to Zen Buddhism and Japanese culture in general by using information from Hu Tze-Yue . This concept frames the whole narrative in the novel and ties smoothly with the semiological theory. The floating world refers to the inevitable change in life, which is why I will also use Yael Zerubavel's observations on collective memory in order to support my analysis of the difference in the way people refer to the same concepts, depending on generation. Zerubavel introduces in their work "Transhistorical Encounters in the Land of Israel: On Symbolic Bridges, National Memory, and the Literary Imagination" the concept of "symbolic bridges" between past and present and how they operate. This article not only touches upon the shared identity of a nation and the need of its members to

connect to a shared ancestry, but also on the challenges that come after periods of regression like wars. Maurice Halbwachs' work "Individual Consciousness and Collective Mind" introduces the concept of "collective psychology". This idea states that individuals find themselves identifying with the collective through different social milieus, including art, while the identity is expressed through language. This theory is meant only to supplement the ideas of Zerubavel. These two ideas will help support the semiological analysis I will conduct using Barthes' and de Saussure's ideas in the second chapter.

Through reading articles by other scholars who tackled this topic I found out new things that I had not noticed before. Most of them focused on specifically the language used in relation to the memory of the main character. There were two articles that struck me in particular: "Floating Signifiers and *An Artist of the Floating World*" by Charles Savran and "Kazuo Ishiguro's Authoritarian Narrators: An Artist of the Floating World, The Remains of the Day, Never Let Me Go, and the Authoritarian Personality" by Moritz Bareiß. Both articles bring forward the same topics that are discussed by most, like the unreliability of the author, his bias, and disillusion, but specifically focus on the narrator's relationship with the others, while focusing on the idea of semiology as a method of analysis. Savran uses Lancanian ideas to analyze the unreliability of the author and the emptiness or shifting quality of his memories depending on what is convenient. Bareiß, on the other hand, looks at the whole novel and spots patterns of behavior that the main character first defies, then appropriates and later propagates to the next generation. The aim of my thesis is to bring the two approaches together and go even further in order to answer my final research question. Specifically. I am interested in the generational conflict that sparks the actions of the novel. The reason for this is to explore a social

trait we see up to today, namely the lack of understanding between generations. I will also supplement these two main ideas with other articles on the same theme by Cynthia F. Wong and Silvia Tellini who offer new insights from the same perspective on these two topics. In addition, I will also briefly use Rebecca L. Walkowitz and Marilena Parlati's comments on the unreliable narrators and possible reasons for their unreliability.

My research object is the main character in Ishiguro's novel *An Artist of the Floating World*, and my topic of choice is his interactions with key characters in his life, with a focus on language. Ono is a retired artist who reminisces on his life as a successful artist. In old age, he finds his past held against him, but he seems to resist the new narrative the Japanese society has adhered to.

Research Method

My scope will be restricted to interactions between Ono and a few key people in his life. The moments these interactions happen coincide with the turning points in his youth, his adult life, and old age. The way Ono presents these interactions will be the basis of my analysis of the way he frames the world around him and it will allow me to analyze the differences in discourse between him and the other characters.

By using a semiotic analysis framework, I want to conduct a discourse analysis in order to show how language can play a great role in creating a generational gap because of pre-existing beliefs that are not necessarily anchored in reality, but rather in nostalgia. These pre-existing beliefs will be explained by using Saussure and Barthes' theories on semiology. I intend to start from Saussure's ideas on the signifier-signified relationship and continue with Barthes' theory

about mythology. Overall, I want to uncover the biggest Barthesian myths that could explain the main character's alienation from his younger contemporaries. I will accomplish this by conducting a thorough discourse analysis and by interpreting the outcomes of the main character's interactions both from his point of view and the other characters' point of view. By running key moments in the novel through a first and second semiotic order analysis I hope to uncover the stereotypes they are based on. By doing this I can show the discrepancy in expectations between Ono and his surrounding characters.

My research question, therefore, is: How is the myth behind language, a catalyst for creating discrepancies in collective identity, specifically between the main character in Kazuo Ishiguro's 1986 novel *An Artist of the Floating World,* Masuji Ono, and the younger generation?

In order to answer the research question, I will first address smaller topics and issues that will lead me to the final answer.

1) What are semiotics and how can this theory be used in analyzing the discourse beneath each character's point of view?

2) Why do myths differ from Ono's generation to the younger generation?

I have started by researching the general consensus in the academic field about Ishiguro's novel. The three main topics that have been analyzed in depth are : memory and identity, language and the unreliability of the narrator. Many have referenced in their works key interpretations offered by the author himself in the novel. Most of the important aspects of the novel have already been covered. One thing I have noticed is that the cultural studies approach is rather scarce. Therefore, this paper would bring a new lens over the general consensus that already exists. This is why I have chosen Barthes' theory on myths as my main theoretical

framework. I will analyze the same topic of memory and language, but from a different perspective in hopes that my interpretation will be able to be linked to a new framework.

Theoretical Framework

More often than not the communication between characters seems to be unfruitful, standing under a shadow of misinterpretation. The main character constantly comments on the lack of insight the new generation has about his past. At the same time, the new generation blames their predecessors. The communication is flawed because there are different perspectives led by different myths: the pre-war myths of Imperial Japan and the post-war myths of democratic Japan under American occupation. By specifically focusing on what Barthes calls myth as depoliticized speech and the myth as a stolen language I am hoping to show how hollow signifiers within language are used by Ono in order to create a narrative devoid of historical accuracy, but that which makes sense within his world view. On the other hand, I will argue that the American influences create a whole new different myth by introducing not only new, foreign myths, but also whole new signifiers that Ono is not familiar with. By looking at Ono's key relationships through time and with different generations, I want to show how the gap is created from the different interpretations of signifieds that create very different myths for the same signs.

The following chapters will be exploring key aspects of the main character. In the first chapter I will present the theory that I will be using in depth. Next, I will offer a bit of context into post-war Japan that should inform the reading of the myths. The following chapter will be an analysis of different case studies, relationships between the main character and other key characters throughout his life. By applying the aforementioned theory, I am hoping to uncover

the motives of the main character for which he frames reality the way he does. As a concluding

chapter, I will gather all the findings in one analysis and try to show how language has had an

impact in shaping relationships to be closer or more distant depending on the narrative Ono

believed in at the time, and how the myths shaped his personality through language.

Chapter One-Mythology

This chapter will focus on introducing the reader into the universe of *An Artist of the Floating World*, my approach to it, and the theory that will be used in order to analyze the central issue of this paper, namely the generational conflict. The novel is multi-layered and there are countless approaches to it, but I will only be focusing on language and meaning. This chapter's aim is to answer the question: How can Semiotics and Myths help decipher the main character's motives behind his seemingly ill intended actions? In the first part of this chapter I will introduce the main point of the novel and a short summary of the events. Next, I will introduce the concept of Semiotics as first postulated by de Saussure and explain why they are relevant to my analysis. Lastly, I will expand the first definition by introducing Barthes' extensive definition of semiology through myths, which will serve as a theoretical basis for the rest of the thesis. Therefore, the main question to be answered in this chapter is: What are semiotics and how can this theory be used in analyzing the discourse beneath each character's point of view?

The novel debuts with the main character, Masuji Ono, presenting his social status through a small anecdote about how he was granted his current house through an "auction of prestige" (Ishiguro 10). This should be the basis of his character: an elderly man, overly obsessed with his own persona. Throughout the novel, he reminisces about his successful life as an artist, trying to hide his bragging under fake modesty, all while dealing with the consequences of his esteemed and successful life. Ono is at a crossroads in his life, where the life-long stability and security of his younger daughter depends on his past. After the end of the Second World War, he tries to find her a good fit for marriage. The story unfolds a year after the first attempt at an

arranged marriage. After agreeing with the family of the groom, they unexpectedly pull out of the deal, without an actual reason. The novel lets the reader know that it is not unusual, in cases of arranged marriages for people to hire private investigators on the families of the future wife/groom. At the suggestion of his eldest daughter, Ono goes out to tie any loose ends he might have left before the end of the War with different people, in order to insure the success of the arranged marriage. While the novel has a neutral ending, with the daughter getting married, Ono's process of tying loose ends brings him into conflict with anyone from a younger generation. This conflict is what I want to focus on in my thesis.

Masuji Ono is not an ill-intentioned character. He is a normal person, who has led his life the way he thought was best. During the Second World War, he believed that the values of his country must be protected. He switched paths in his career many times, standing up to authority and defending what he believed in. He betrayed two of his masters in the pursuit of the superior form of painting. Changing from mass-produced paintings to representations of the Japanese pleasures districts, to nationalist content, Ono believed to defend the right purpose. He spends the novel making sense of his past, avoiding directly addressing certain actions, using his good intentions as a justification. Ishiguro sheds some light into the reading of his novels saying that the reason he uses the post-world war setting is that he is "interested in this business of values and ideals being tested, and people having to face up to the notion that their ideas weren't quite what they thought they were before the test came" (Swift 22). This statement is important because it is telling of the approach the author took when writing the book. The main point is that ideas sometimes turn out to have been a good conviction, sometimes a bad one. Ideas and

ideals can only be expressed linguistically. As I will try to prove, language lacks the specificity

that can lead to misunderstandings.

Introduction to Semiotics

Semiotics is the practice that deals with the deconstruction of words and their assumed

meanings. In our process of assigning a word to an object or a meaning, it is generally assumed

that the connection between the two is inherited. De Saussure does not agree with this idea, in

fact he criticizes it. He explains that:

> … the linguistic sign are psychological and are united in the brain by an associative
>
> bond. The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a
>
> sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the
>
> psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. (65,6)

In order to analyze this coupling, he defines the relationship between the concept and the

sound/image as the relationship between a signifier and a signified. To de Saussure this

relationship is arbitrary, therefore our own association between them is arbitrary (67). In short, a

chair is not called a chair because there is an inherited quality of the object that links it to the

word, but because people are following a prior established tradition of naming.

De Saussure maps out a few typical qualities of a sign (signifier-signified relationship),

out of which the most important for my thesis is the following: sign exists because it is tolerated

by the community using it, it is inherited, it is arbitrary and it is continuously changing (71, 73,

74, 76). These qualities could explain the conflicts the main character faces when interacting

with younger generations, like his grandson who uses American words. For Ono, the signifier (sound/image) does not equate with a signified, causing him confusion and impossibility of communication. Ono is the witness of the introduction of a new trend in his own language, passed down by the American occupants.

The mutability of the sign, de Saussure says, represents the change in the relationship between the signifier and the signified. This can happen by different means like the change of the grammatical purpose of a word, or the slight change in spelling of the signifier (de Saussure 75). Relationships can become looser as language evolves and changes constantly. This theory is helpful in order to understand Barthes' ideas on the shift of meaning when the sign remains the same, but the deeper meaning behind it changes.

Introduction to Mythology

Roland Barthes builds on de Saussure's ideas between the signifier and signified and names it the first order semiological system, composed of just this association. However, he goes a step further and introduces a second-order semiological system, where the sign becomes a signifier, that in turn has it's on signified (Fig. 1). This new relationship forms a new type of sign that Barthes names myth. For Barthes a myth is the science that "studies ideas-in-form", a second language, a metalanguage (Barthes 138). This type of analysis from the first-order semiological system to the second-order will be employed to show specific differences in myths between characters.

	1.Signifier	2.Signified

Language

MYTH

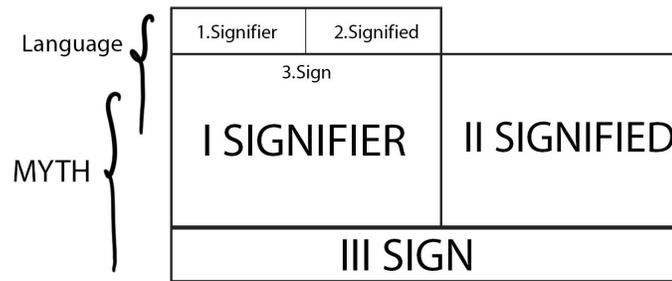| 3.Sign	
I SIGNIFIER	II SIGNIFIED
III SIGN	

Fig.1: Myth construction table from *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes, p 138

He expands the semiotic analysis from just linguistic to also illustrative. For him what is important is the meaning, the intention, behind the language (words or writing), not the form. Therefore, when talking about mythology and this theory focuses solely on the signification of a whole system, be it a painting, or a whole novel. For Barthes, the myth imposes something on the receiver (140).

In analyzing *An Artist of the Floating World*, this method of analysis will come in handy as I will be able to analyze and explain why different characters find themselves in conflict, even though they use the same signs, i.e. words. I explained before that Masuji Ono does not understand his grandson who uses english words, but he has the same issues with people who speak his own language. The idea of myth should help uncover the reason.

Barthes explains that "Myth...distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession, it is an inflexion" and "speech justified in excess" (153-4). Myth represents the meaning of a statement, the signification that is not explicit, not because it is hidden, but because it has become naturalized. He explains that people who consume myths do not notice them anymore because

they do not see this signification in a semiological system, but an inductive one (Barthes 154). In short, myth becomes common sense, that is widely assumed by groups of people. The problem is that, as Barthes explains, meaning is not fixed, in fact it is floating and "can almost always be interpreted"(157). This is what Barthes calls myth as a stolen language, because it can insinuate itself into language and "swell there: it is a robbery by colonization" (157). This takes me to my main point of my analysis method: if meaning is not fixed and can be easily interpreted, it means that it is possible for people to use the exact same words, speech patterns even, but have different sets of values that they assume. The novel deals with three different generations: the generation that had to fight in the war, the generation that provoked the war and was safe from it, and the generation after the war. Between the first two, the culture is shared, but the experiences, being so completely different, while they might use the same language, they will have opposite perspectives. In the following chapters I will try to analyze a few study cases and spot key concepts that even though are used the same, transmit different ideals.

The reason why the myth is so easily to adopt and accept is because it purifies things, rids them of any historical quality and fills them with nature, or rather instinct. It becomes easy to understand and appropriate by everyone because:

"[it] is constituted by the loss of historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made. The world enters language as a dialectical relation between activities, between human actions it comes out of myths as a harmonious display of essences…[myth] has turned reality inside out, ,.,it has removed from things their human meaning so as to signify a human insignificance. The function of myth is to empty reality…" (169)

In short myth only works with simplified versions of human acts, with the essence of the meaning, with very little details, creating a world without depth, which is why Barthes calls it "depoliticized speech"[1] .

The premise of this thesis is that no meaning is self evident, but it fosters a myth, a collection of assumptions that are believed to be accepted by everyone. This discrepancy, along with the changing quality of the myth is the basic idea that I am starting from in order to conduct my analysis. By using a semiological approach I can observe in different study cases the meaning behind each character's ideas and where and why they clash. By using this type of discourse analysis I am hoping to uncover the myths that make it impossible for generations to communicate.

Chapter 2-Same Language, Different Meanings

Many scholars have analyzed Ishiguro's novel from a semiological, cultural, and sociological perspective, but I have not seen so far any analysis that took into account the cultural reality of post-war Japan. I believe it is important because rather than framing Ono as just an unreliable narrator trying to cover up for his own mistakes, I would like to look at his motives informed by society. Like this, I want to show that history can reshape the image of Ono as not unreliable, but as a nationalist who refuses the new reality after the War, while at the same time tries to impose this out of date view back onto society. This is why this chapter will tackle three moments from the novel, in an attempt to show how communication between him and his peers is informed by different ideological systems. This chapter will first look at the social climate during and after the war and artists' role in it, and next, I will conduct a myth analysis of different key concepts. The aim is to answer the question: Why did the myths different generations use become so different in the aftermath of the war?

The premise of the novel, right from the title is "the floating world". For the typical Western reader the title does not really convey anything, but it is crucial to the reading of the novel. The "floating world" is a concept attributed to the Japanese form of woodblock painting called *ukiyo-e*, a form of genre paintings that depicted ephemeral moments of life and small details. In the beginning it would generally depict the pleasure districts, but it was not limited to it. Also referred to as "the drifting world", the concept refers to a "Buddhist terminology used for describing the passing pleasures and sorrows of the living sphere" (Hu 32). In the novel, Ono remembers regularly the pleasure district where he spent the golden age of his career surrounded

by students. He still visits it, but now, just as the floating world, it too has faded away, establishments have closed and people have moved on. This constant visit to a district that no longer functions is a great illustration of Ono's longing for the old days and his refusal to let his old life go. While they are not mentioned in the novel by name, Ono begins his career by painting for the Takeda firm where "[Him and his colleagues] were also quite aware that the essential point about the sort of things [they] were required to paint -geishas, cherry trees, swimming carps, temples- was that they look 'Japanese' to the foreigners to whom they were shipped out…" and later in Mori-san's studio where he was "exploring the city's floating world" (Ishiguro 69, 144-5). This concept follows Barthes' definition of myths because both ideas warn/inform the reader of the fragility of one specific meaning in the face of the continuously flowing time. Ono, most probably informed by his father's dismissive attitude towards the arts, spends his life in pursuit of a higher meaning of his art. He lives peacefully in the floating world until he is introduced to nationalistic ideals of higher art in the service of the government.

Before starting the analysis of the first case study, I want to first present the status of artists in post-war Japan. Ono has been called by many an unreliable narrator because his thinking does not seem to line up with the reactions of other characters. He always pleads not guilty when accused of anything related to the war, always keeping his position that he followed a superior form of art. Sandler explains that "Those painters who had openly supported Japanese militaristic policies were never called to account, and indeed such wartime activities are now usually left out of their official biographies…" (13). The general consensus during the war was that artists should not cater to please the rich through their work, but to focus on the poor and suffering, toiling in the fields and faraway colonies (Ikeda 159). In short, artists were to dedicate

the art to the common folk. It should then not come as a surprise that young veterans feel anger

towards the likes of Ono for not only for not taking responsibility, but also subtly defending the

actions of his peers during the war. With the end of the war, also came the end of a whole

system: "With that destruction came the dissolution of the entire national system, including

crucial government support mechanisms for culture and for the creation and display of

contemporary painting"(Slander 23).

While a number of characters hint at Ono's involvement and responsibility in the war,

there are three characters who directly confront him about it. By looking at their approach, I will

try to point out using the idea of myth as depoliticized speech how myths impair Ono's ability to take

responsibility for his actions.

Deflecting Accusations with Depoliticized Speech

The main theme of the novel is built around the dichotomy of being either loyal or a traitor. In

his encounters with any other character, Ono tries to subvert meaning in order to show he was

never the traitor. He reminisces about two similar encounters he had, one with a man named

Miyake, who was supposed to become his son-in-law and one with Shuichi, his son-in-law. Both

say similar things, granted one more veiled than the other. Miyake tells a story about the

president of his company who committed suicide to atone for his war crimes that he has not been

held accountable for by the authorities. The young man expresses to Ono he is glad the president

took responsibility, and characterizes the act as an apology, adding that "There are plenty of men

already back in positions they held during the war. Some of them are no better than war

criminals" (Ishiguro 56). A similar critique is brought up by Shuichi, crying over the fact that

young men died in battle while "Culprits are still with us" (Ishiguro 58). Towards both of them

Ono keeps his stance that doing everything to one's best ability for one's country is nothing to be

upset about. Ono diminishes the atrocities of the war, defending all the ones in a position of

power who were involved, to a certain extent excusing himself indirectly. In her article

"Deflecting Truth in Memory: An Artist of the Floating World", Cynthia Wong looks

extensively at Ono's acts of self-deception. She explains that Ono establishes himself as an

interpreter of his own past and becomes a kind of "reader for whom fiction changes into illusion

to such a powerful degree that it finally replaces reality" (40). This act of self-effacing is

achieved by rejecting what de Saussure explained to be the natural evolution of meaning in

language and sticking to the beliefs that make Ono correct.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, myth reduces the complexity of human acts and

gives them the simplicity of essences, creating a world without contradictions (Barthes 170). In

Ono's case he simplifies the whole war as the act of a nationalist doing whatever it takes to

support the country. To Ono that should not be shameful, even less punishable by death (Ishiguro

55). Like this, he reduces the effects of the war to just good faith. Ono calls the young generation

cynical, for not understanding his higher purpose as a propaganda artist. Historically, artists like

Ono worked under the pretext of serving the nation and the common people, and it seems that

this is the myth Ono believes in, a myth that indicates the essence of the war: the greatness of the

Japanese empire that, if not destroyed by the Americans, would have benefited the young

generation that now criticizes him. Barthes says about depoliticized speech that "Men do not

have with myth a relationship based on the truth, but on use…"(171), which indicates that Ono

picks and chooses from his memories the parts that serve him the best. He talks about an ideal

world of ideas, whereas the younger men talk about their personal experiences. One myth is based on history, one on preferential memory.

On the other hand, both Miyake and Shuichi see the war as their lives' tragedy. They refer to the atrocities of the war they had to live through and when criticizing, they refer to historical facts. Their use of words like "culprits", "criminals" and "war" is informed by the shift in meaning of these words. This can be explained through what Barthes refers to as the myth as a stolen language, which means that no meaning is fixed, but "floating", meaning that the significance of a sign can almost always be interpreted (157). In this case, the culprits stop being the Americans (as Ono's generation believed), but the people who pushed to the war and wasted the lives of the young.

I mentioned before that I believe fitting Ono to be nothing less than a hypocrite is rather simplistic, and does not take into consideration what a trauma like the War, and consequently losing it, can do when all one's beliefs are being challenged at the same time. Yael Zerubavel, in discussing the generational memory in the land of Israel, introduces the idea of "bridging memory", a concept that fits perfectly with the situation of the novel. She defines them as following:

> The use of "symbolic bridges" between the past and the present offers the possibility of constructing a commemorative narrative that appears coherent and continuous even though it is inevitably selective and involves "mental bridging" between events that can otherwise be seen as disparate points in time. The challenge of creating symbolic bridges is even greater when national memory faces periods of "regression" (such as foreign rule or dispersion to exile) that introduces a historical gap between an older national past and

a modern nationalist movement. (116)

Applied to the novel at hand, it becomes easy to understand the lack of understanding between generations. When creating a collective memory of the past in times of the War, it is impossible to ignore that the ones who were supposed to be older, and to take care of the younger had failed. Such a time of regression, also forces people to reconsider how they view things and because the "symbolic bridge" is burnt between the two generations. The young do not want to take the inheritance from their predecessors because, in this case, they consider them responsible. As a result, the myths behind the language also change.

To use the scheme proposed by Barthes, the signifier most used in these conversations is the word "war". The signified is the concept of fighting against other countries for one's own freedom. Both parties in the conversation understand this to be the case, however, in the second semiological order, the concept of defending one's country becomes a signifier again, and the signified becomes twofold, different for each party. For Ono, the signification is "pursuing the dream of imperial Japan over Asia ", while for the two young men, due to their historical and practical experience with the war, the signification is "unnecessary deaths for a lost cause". Historically, the significance accepted by the young men is infinitely closer to reality than the one of Ono, who still holds onto the old ideology. The reason why Ono cannot see this difference is because he is an unreliable narrator, in need of making sense of his past. Rebecca L. Walkoitz explains that "unreliable narrators from fiction past regularly project their stories into the lives of the people they describe" (1067). In this case, Ono projects his disappointments about his past onto the ones around him, calling them cynical. This helps him hold onto the myth that makes him innocent.

Deflecting accusations from Stolen Language

A concept that the two characters hint at, but do not use actively is the concept of "treason".

Another example of myth as a stolen language is the interaction Ono has with an old student's

protégé. Ono likes to reminisce constantly about the times when he was a respected teacher,

even bringing up Kuroda, his most esteemed student. He mentions briefly that they did have the

occasional conflict of opinion, but Ono never explicitly states what caused them to grow apart in

the end. In order to tie loose ends for his daughter's marriage, Ono visits Kuroda, to resolve any

lingering issues from their past. Unfortunately, Kuroda is not home, but his protégé is. They get

into a conflict over Kuroda, shedding light on the fact that Ono was responsible for Kuroda's

imprisonment during the war. In a later chapter it is explained that Kuroda was accused of being

unpatriotic in his art. The protege tells Ono "Traitor. That's what they called him. Traitor. Every

minute of every day. But now we all know who the real traitors are" (Ishiguro 113). When

referring to the myth as a stolen language, Barthes means that myth borrows from what he calls

the ""expressivity" of language"", or its ability to mould the meaning of a word in a situation.

Just like in the previous case, the two mean very different things by the word traitor: for the

protege, the traitor is the ones who led Japan towards the demise of the war through foolish

ruling, while for Ono, traitor would still be the one who does not aid towards the cause of

Imperial Japan. Charles Savran, in his article "Floating Signifiers and An Artist of the Floating

World", summaries the situation best by saying that "So too, with the two key signifiers, "traitor"

and "loyalty" those who were loyal during the War are seen by the new generation as traitors

who misled the nation; conversely, the traitors of yesterday are now perceived as wise, courageous and truly patriotic" (95).

Loyalty and treason come up in the novel as a secondary theme. Ono's life is marked front he beginning by the idea of being a "traitor", from his father who opposed him becoming an artist, to his betrayal of his Second Master, and later, becoming a traitor by default after the war. Ono constantly searched for esteem and a higher form of art, taking pride in his moral compass and his ability for critical thinking, even when it meant going against his elders. To further explore how the "symbolic bridge" was interrupted after the War, I want to show how even though the concept of being a "traitor" has been used freely before the war, as a floating signifier, without a fixed definition, there is a difference between the former instance, before the War) and the latter (after the War). Before the war, the traitor was not necessarily someone who betrayed the nation. Ono strives for the approval of the powerful. He notes that Ono's willingness to follow the greatness and superior stats has nothing to do with a specific ideology, but a desire to submit to the hegemonic and hierarchical structures (Bareiß 398). In the past, Ono had betrayed his masters for superior ideals. This myth, however, that propaganda art is superior, is rejected, and the bridge can not be created towards the new generation. In fact, as Marilena Parlati explains "Ono perceives around him what he sees as an in..attempt at forgetting the imperial past of Japan, a maneuver he reads as annihilating what to many was an intractable past and thus entering a present made of Westerners…"(5).

The Making of A Myth

So far I have solely explored Ono's relationship with the people who have been involved with

the war. It has become apparent that, as Savran explains, signifiers are constantly floating,

meanings change and different and incompatible world views emerge. The fact that "symbolic

bridges" become challenged in the face of great national trauma explains why language can

change so drastically to the point members of the same community face a gap between

generations. However, in *An Artist* there is another type of floating signifier, that shows a more

modern problem that societies face even today: language colonialism. Ichiro, Ono's grandson,

growing up under the American occupation and influenced heavily by American consumerism,

introduces Ono to many foreign words that Ono does not understand, making their

communication many times lost in translation. The myth is not stealing from language in this

case, because the myth is still in the making. The signifiers have no signifieds and no

signification. They do not share a collective memory, which, as explained by Halbwachs, lies in

things like language and art and is expressed in common thought that rises "not from individual

introspection but from intelligence in its collective form" (Halbwachs 815).

  If collective psychology is found outside the individual then it is safe to say that Ono and

his grandson are alienated. Words like "Lone Ranger" and "Hi Yo Silver" are signifiers without

a signified for Ono (Ishiguro 30). For the little boy, the signified are the cartoon characters or

action figures, which translated as myths reinforce the positive image of post-war American

occupation of Japan and American supremacy in general. For Ono, who has no visual image or

understanding of the language, the myth that will be formed will inevitably be extremely

different from his grandson's, creating a generational barrier. That is because for the grandson

the American occupation holds a positive meaning, while for his grandfather, an avid follower of

the anti-western sentiment, will be negative. Tellini explains it best as a cultural gap "perceived

in the way they invest positive values in conflicting images and icons of two different historical moments" (7). Since the grandson is too young to remember anything before or during the war, while Ono is rejected by the society he now lives in, a "symbolic bridge" between them cannot be created. To Ono,

To conclude, Ono is alienated on one hand by choice and on another by fate. Language builds for him a great barrier in relating to a world that he fought against through his work as a propaganda artist. He still holds onto myths that suit his interest and have little historical base. The reason these myths differ so much from one generation to another is in one part because the new generation does not want to adhere to the collective identity of their predecessors, in short refusing the symbolic bridge. On another hand, Ono seems to be trapped between his desire to submit to authority, and the tendency of the unreliable narrator to project onto the other characters his own perception.

Chapter Three-Conclusion

An Artist of the Floating World is a brilliant novel that serves the reader a multitude of cultural cues through its choice of language and subtle hints of irony. The topic of this thesis was to analyze how language, or more specifically, the implicit meanings behind it (myths) causes conflict between the characters of the novel. My scope was the relationship of the main character, Masuji Ono, with the younger generations around him. I have also recalled his own previous relationships with authority to see if there are any patterns. Most scholars, when talking about this novel, refer to semiotics and to the fact that Ono is knowingly lying to the ones around him about his contribution to the Second World War. Many have included the discussion about language in relation to memory, but have framed the story of Masuji Ono as the story of an unreliable narrator trying to keep his beliefs in the face of new facts. I did not fully agree with this assessment, which led me to my research question, namely: How is the myth behind language, a catalyst for creating discrepancies in collective identity, specifically between the main character in Kazuo Ishiguro's 1986 novel *An Artist of the Floating World,* Masuji Ono, and the following generation? In order to answer it, I have conducted a discourse analysis using theory by Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure.

My conclusion after conducting this analysis is that myths have taken over the main characters' objectivity.. He stops basing his ideas on the reality around him, but on the ideas that help him cope with it. People are not aware of them because they are so naturalized and taken at face value believing that everyone is referring to the same thing. The myths Ono believed in were indeed positive, and were meant to benefit the Japanese nation. Historically, propaganda artists had the interest of the common folk at heart, however the heroes of today had become the

villains of tomorrow. Due to this, what Zerubavel named "symbolic bridges", have been burnt, creating a lack of interest for the new generation to inherit the wisdom of their elders. This is reflected in the way myths change and create two different collective identities: the traitors and the victims.

This research has borrowed heavily from the current scholarly debate around this topic, but the trajectory is different. Instead of just uncovering the instances in which Ono is an unreliable narrator, I chose to also look into the reasons as to why. My motives behind this is because I believe it to be relevant to today's political debates that seem to be centered around the lack of understanding between generations. My contribution to the field is to show that, if taking into consideration both sides of the story, it becomes difficult to draw hard conclusions as to which character is evil and which is not. I believe a deeper reading of the novel should be employed, one that is less demonizing of the main character. My thesis tried to do just this: offer a new perspective when reading the novel.

The method I have used was a semiotic analysis on the discourse surrounding the main character of the novel. I believe it to have been a good method because it helped me put under a magnifying glass some of the main themes of the novel that come up constantly. This has allowed me to specifically look at myths that were used and to analyze them. A downside of my method is that the scope is very limited. The analysis went smoothly, however I would have wanted to apply it to many more aspects of the novel. I think I would need a second method to help. While this method did reach its purpose, it leaves out many other aspects of the novel that I think could have been just as important to support the theory: like analyzing the environment

around the main character and his ideological patterns. However, this can not be done through semiological analysis only.

The theory I chose for my topic fit really well with my theoretical framework, and I was not the first one to use it. However, the theoretical framework has given me a direction that I was not planning for in the beginning. I would have wanted to focus more on the effects of trauma on people's approach to art, but there was very little to no previous research on this. However, seeing that so many scholars have focused on the topic I have ultimately chosen for my paper, has helped me structure my ideas more easily.

For the future, I would recommend more insight into the philosophical dimension of the novel, that of "the floating world". This is an idea quite foreign to the Western World, but I believe it to be a good direction for future research, a counter culture to our approach of seeing things only in black and white. I would still recommend an analytical approach based on semiotics, but instead of discourse analysis I would recommend an ideological analysis.

Notes

1. By depoliticized speech Barthes refers to a deeper meaning of the concept of politics, he referees to it as "describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world…" (169)

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