

Master's Thesis Literary Studies  
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**'Lost in a storm without a chart'**  
*Endo Shusako's Father Rodrigues*  
*through the eyes of Jean-Paul Sartre*

For my parents,  
이화정 (Ri Hwajung) and 박수련 (Park Soo Ryun)  
in exchange for their presence and patience

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## Introduction

There is a man on the run in seventeenth century Japan. The man is a priest and has devoted his life to spreading the message of God. But he has come to the Far East at a time where the God of Christianity is an unwanted guest. And because of that His earthly representatives are being hunted by the authorities. The priest finds himself caught in a classic struggle between State and Church. While attempting to influence the lives of the local population, his own existence is that of a fugitive, with a dark cloud of doom constantly hanging over his head.

Endo Shusako's *Silence*<sup>1</sup> (1966) addresses multiple, very substantial themes that touch upon the very notion of human existence. On the one hand, it is a deeply religious story revolving around big, classic Christian topics like sin, redemption, the presence (and absence) of God and oppression of the Catholic Church. On the other, it explores a clash between two fundamentally different cultures. Endo lets the two hands find each other in the protagonist, around whom all the central themes revolve. The utterly hostile - and alien - environment in which the Portuguese priest tries to survive lays bare inner struggles with his faith. Moreover, he is forced to redefine himself as a human being, as his extreme situation threatens his identity on both an emotional and rational level. It is this friction between earthly existence and commitment to the divine that will be examined here. What happens to a religious man when he is robbed of his assumed purpose in life and comes to question the meaning and truth behind it all?

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<sup>1</sup> For this thesis I chose to uphold the traditional Japanese naming order where Endo is concerned, placing the family name first, given name second. Because Endo's novel was read in the English translation, and for the sake of lingual consistency, the English title of Endo's novel will be used throughout.

The theoretical framework in which the fiction will be placed is that of existentialism. Arguably, there is no other philosophy that addresses the exploration of the self in such an immediate, personalized manner. By stating that human life precedes its essence by default, existentialism focuses on the individual subject rather than on humanity as a whole, thus setting itself apart from other philosophical discourses, which are generally more systematic in their approach.<sup>2</sup>

The starting point of this thesis is pointing out the remarkably tight connection that existentialism has with literature. Such can be seen in Dostoevsky and Kafka being staples in the existentialist debate and the fact that existentialist thinkers like Camus and De Beauvoir are also well known novelists. Mary Warnock has argued that a certain characteristic of existentialism, which she calls 'Concrete Imagination', provides it with literary qualities. By favoring sensibility over abstractions and particularity over generalizations, existentialism as a written discourse often moves away from the theoretical and closer to the arts.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, the link between existentialism and Christianity will be examined, which is somewhat ambiguous. Warnock for example considers it to be a strong one, stating that existentialists set out to convert their audience, much like priests and missionaries. They too urge people to reconsider their place in the universe, because it may not be what they think it is.<sup>4</sup> Walter Kaufmann, on the other hand, writes that the story of existentialism can be told perfectly without referring to religion. It bears a certain similitude to religion in that both ask questions about fear, death and the need to change one's life. But ever since existentialism separated those

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<sup>2</sup> S. Earnshaw, *Existentialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2006) 2

<sup>3</sup> M. Warnock, *Existentialism* (1970) 133

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, 2

issues from their religious context, that context became obsolete altogether.<sup>5</sup> It will become clear that Kaufmann may be slightly off the mark with his conclusion, especially when looking at the existentialist thought as developed by Jean-Paul Sartre, who will serve to specify the abovementioned framework.

Sartre's status as 'poster boy' for existentialism as a philosophical movement has been widely acknowledged, and his ties to Japan have been subject of academic study.<sup>6</sup> More relating to the content, Sartre's religiously laden, but simultaneously secularized theory allows for an enrichment of the tension between the worldly and unworldly that is present in the fiction. By confronting the Jesuit priest of Endo with a humanist philosophy, his thoughts and actions can be more understood as those of a mere *man*, not just a man of God. It should be stressed that this thesis is not an attempt to secularize the novel being discussed. However, it does aim to pull the fiction away from the theological discourse that has dominated it, in order to shed a more balanced light on a highly complex literary character.

The question that lies at the heart of this thesis can be formulated as follows: *how does Sartre define the concept of meaning, and to what degree can his definition be found in the priest character of Silence?*

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<sup>5</sup> W. Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1975) 49, 50

<sup>6</sup> See for example D.N. Slaymaker, *Japanese Literature after Sartre: Noma Hiroshi, Ôe Kenzaburô, and Mishima Yukio* (1997) wherein Sartre's influence on post-war Japanese literature is being examined. Slaymaker stresses that Sartre was introduced in Japan first and foremost as a novelist, not as a philosopher. His theoretical works would reach Japan sometime later in translation. Also consider S. Light (ed.), *Suzo Kuki and Jean-Paul Sartre: Influence and Counter-Influence in the Early History of Existential Phenomenology, Including the Notebook "Monsieur Sartre" and Other Parisian Writings of Suzo Kuki* (1987). For an illustration of Sartre's broad popularity in Japan see J.P. Boulé & B. O'Donohoe, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Mind and Body, Word and Deed* (2011) where Sartre's visit to Japan in 1966 is being discussed (coincidentally also the year in which *Silence* was published).

## 1 The Frame

Ultimately, this thesis sets out to confront the character of Father Rodrigues with the existentialist philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre. But before such a confrontation can happen, it is important to place the novel as a whole within a theoretical perspective as well. First, by briefly considering the interaction between existentialism and literature. With the help of an analytic framework developed by Hans van Stralen, the selected scenes from the novel, which are the focus of chapter three, can be better understood from an existentialist point of view. Secondly, the role of God within existentialism will be highlighted. This is important because *Silence* heavily revolves around the question of what kind of role God actually plays in the life of man. As stated in the introduction, total secularization of the novel is not a goal here, therefore the issue will be looked at from both the religious, as well the non-religious side of the spectrum. The concept of absurdity is chosen to illustrate the absence of the divine, as the absurd is an established concept within existentialist literature (see 1.3). It also forms an excellent typification of the particular situation of Rodrigues, who frequently refers to his heavily altered life as absurd. The final paragraph of this chapter deals with the relationship between existentialism and Christianity, simultaneously anticipating the second chapter by zooming in on the case of Sartre.

### *1.1 Existentialism and literature*

Warnock has already been mentioned in regards to her coined phrase 'Concrete Imagination', with which she builds a bridge between the methodologies of existentialist philosophy and the art of literature. All this has to do with how both tend to approach reality. Existentialist philosophers write in particularities and detail. They

use small examples from everyday life in their descriptions of the world. They do this because their defiance of universalism forbids them to use language that speaks in universalities. But paradoxically, it is the zooming in that brings the big picture into focus. Where physicists look for the smallest possible particle to explain the universe, the philosophers create lingual microcosmoi to place human existence in a larger context. Warnock paraphrases Heidegger who depicts his concept of an inauthentic individual as someone who walks around in ready-made clothes.<sup>7</sup> The clothes are evidently a symbol; a small fragment of existence used to illustrate an idea. Novelists, Warnock argues, operate in exactly the same way. They too use symbols, metaphors and details, because they cannot possibly fit the whole universe between two covers. But out of small narratives the reader is able to extract bigger things. It is like having finished the story of one single Stranger in Algeria and suddenly one's entire outlook on reality as a whole has changed. As Warnock writes: "[o]ne can *read* the world, and, by looking at it in detail, one can understand its meaning."<sup>8</sup>

Other scholars have also acknowledged this relationship between existentialism and literature based on the particular. Maurice Natanson calls it 'irrealization', basically making the same point as Warnock when he concludes that "[...] the "irrealization" of the particular is the condition for the possibility of seeing the universal."<sup>9</sup> A term closely related to Natanson's irrealization could well be defamiliarization: a displacement of ordinary things so that they reveal new and different truths.<sup>10</sup> Henry Nordmeyer feels that a fictional narrative, in order to allow for an existential analysis, should always have the experience precede a philosophical

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<sup>7</sup> Warnock, *Existentialism* 136

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> M. Natanson, *Literature, Philosophy and the Social Sciences. Essays in Existentialism and Phenomenology* (1962) 108

<sup>10</sup> When reading closely, one could very well see traces of Russian formalism in Natanson's words.



absolute. It is the experience that triggers conflict, choice, and ultimately the making of decisions. When a philosophical precedent is put in place, all thoughts and actions of the character are basically taken away from him by assuming an essence that is the same for all human beings.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Nordmeyer too seeks to move away from the universal in favor of the individual.

Since the focus of this study lies on one specific fictional character, it is necessary to try and characterize this individuality further as a literary phenomenon. Hans van Stralen opts for three semantic categories, or *topoi*, to identify existentialism in a literary work.<sup>12</sup> The first is the limit situation, which forms the grand stage of a story. This is an event that unfolds without the character having any sort of control over it. Usually it is something that makes a big impact like a disease or a war. It is called a limit situation, because it triggers within severe emotions such as anxiety and fear of death. The character feels that his life is being threatened, without really understanding how or why, which brings him face to face with an eminent reality and the absurdity of his current state. It is life being turned upside down and inside out.

Secondly, there is the Other. Only in interaction with an Other can conflicts truly arise and be resolved. The Other is the one that can alter a character's environment, which is often, just like the limit situation, an unpleasant alteration. Moreover, the Other is more powerful and as such forces the character to make

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<sup>11</sup> H.W. Nordmeyer, 'An Existentialist Approach to Literature' *The Modern Language Journal* 33.8 (1949) 583-593, 592

<sup>12</sup> H. van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes. Een inleiding in het literaire existentialisme* (1996) 57; Van Stralen sees literary existentialism mainly as a specific movement or genre, with a beginning and an end which can be more or less historically identified. Here, the primary concern is to pinpoint a few key elements that could allow for an existentialist interpretation of a novel that does not belong to Van Stralen's genre of literary existentialism. This means a more generalized use of Van Stralen's categories. The fact that the author makes clear that these categories are extrapolated from existentialist phenomenology makes such a separation from the original main argument possible and justifiable in my opinion.

choices. While interaction implies that the Other has to be another human being, that does not have to be the case. The struggle can be just as well an internal one, with multiple voices belonging to a single individual. Van Stralen also notes that even God can fulfill the role of the Other.<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, Van Stralen considers engagement as a literary existential topos, about which he writes the following:

[...] een levenshouding die in de vorm van gerichte opvattingen en keuzes blijk geeft van betrokkenheid met de persoonlijke situatie en die van de ander, keuzes die voltrokken worden vanuit inzicht in een gespannen situatie die voor het personage tijdelijk onoverzichtelijk is geweest.<sup>14</sup>

A decision is triggered by the character's position regarding both the limit situation and the Other. Engagement encompasses all such decisions, contemplations and thoughts that reveal a conscious route of action. Whatever it is that the character is going through, whatever he is confronted with, he engages it and by doing so gains new insights regarding the conflicts and changes. It is important to note that this is not to be understood as a template for story development, leading to some sort of catharsis; rather, it is a specific mindset adopted by the character in order to make sense of his environment, for better or worse.

### *1.2 Existentialism with God*

At first glance, the title of this paragraph appears to be a contradiction in terms. How can existentialism, a school of thought steeped in subjectivity, be possibly connected

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<sup>13</sup> Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 58

<sup>14</sup> Idem 59

with an absolute God-concept? The answer is that such a concept is not an absolute one, at least not for Christian existentialists like Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Marcel. Their ideas about God differ greatly from those an average Christian would have, as they attempt to draw Him away from the objective and the absolute, and place Him within the existentialist frame of subjectivity.

For Kierkegaard, God is two things: subjectivity<sup>15</sup> and love. Firstly, Kierkegaard denies the possibility that God can be known in an objective manner, i.e. as a concrete being that can be perceived within human reality and thus as a piece of knowledge. Contrary, God is a subject, or part of human subjectivity. He is to be internalized and integrated into the individual existence of each person, rather than externalized as a one-size-fits-all. Indeed, this makes the relation to God a very emotional one, as one can approach an object in a detached and even indifferent way.

By denying God's objectivity, Kierkegaard concludes that his existence is impossible to prove. This is not only true in regards to God, however, as proving the existence of something outside oneself is always difficult. Such can only be done indirectly where one has to presume that something in fact exists.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, Kierkegaard does not say "that God lacks independent reality."<sup>17</sup> He also does not claim that one can never know God because He resists rational comprehension. It is certainly possible to know God, but only through one's own individual connection with Him. And it is because of this argument that Kierkegaard states that God *is* love. It is out of love that God has granted mankind its existential freedom, and by *being* love, God loves and wants to be loved at the same time. It is up to the individual to

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<sup>15</sup> For a clear explanation of Kierkegaardian subjectivity, see S. Walsh, *Kierkegaard. Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode* (2009) 37-38; important here is what Kierkegaard refers to as 'inwardness', the act to apply big questions and concepts to one's own personal life, rather than letting them say anything universal about human existence as a whole.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem* 55, 57

<sup>17</sup> *Idem* 54

establish his personal relationship by acknowledging that God is needed and by believing that God is indeed love.<sup>18</sup> This is what Kierkegaard has come to call a 'leap of faith': a conscious embrace of that which can never be known, but takes shape from within the subject.

A similar subjectification of God can be observed in the theory of Marcel, who also objected to a universalism wherein "God is [...] a *quid* with a certain number of predicates."<sup>19</sup> To Marcel, then, God is not an absolute abstraction that exists outside of time, but rather something that lives and reveals itself through relationships between people. Where Kierkegaard lets the existence of God derive from each subject individually, Marcel puts emphasis on intersubjectivity, as he regards God to be the source of the emotions one experiences when communicating with others. In many ways, human existence and its meaning transcend rational comprehension; Marcel calls this the mystery of one's Being. Like God, this Being cannot be understood, but one can engage in it. Through interaction with others one's existence becomes 'real'; and through established relationships and the freedom to adopt faith God becomes 'real'. Both phenomena defy explanation, but that is not important here. What matters most is the experience.<sup>20</sup> Much like Kierkegaard, Marcel holds open the possibility of God existing in His own metaphysical reality, as God remains a transcendental notion in his philosophy.

Finally, Jaspers, too, argues that an actual existence of God can neither be proven nor completely disproven. Coinciding with the views of Kierkegaard and Marcel, he regards faith as the only valid way to become conscious of the divine. Man cannot objectively look at God, just as he cannot objectively consider his own

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<sup>18</sup> Walsh, *Kierkegaard* 66-67

<sup>19</sup> D.E. Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief* (1957) 313

<sup>20</sup> *Idem* 306, 313

existence. Jaspers states that man is unable to separate himself from being. Being is what one *is* and continually becomes, not something that is owned. Therefore it lacks objectification, and since God is the origin of human existence, He too cannot be objectified.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Jaspers finds that if God were to be an actual being which could physically reveal itself, man would cease to be truly free. After all, physical entities could exert power over others. Thus, Jaspers "[...] holds that if God ever literally appeared in history freedom would be destroyed. Only because He remains transcendent is man impelled to seek him through free activity."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, this may be one of the core points of Christian existentialism: the physical absence and unknowable nature of God guarantees freedom of man on earth.

### *1.3 Existentialism without God*

But what if God, or faith in God, is seen to play no vital role in human existence at all? In Christian existentialism, it could be argued that the deity remains a form of the highest value. Despite emphasizing that the freedom of man is paramount and the transcendent God does not restrict that freedom, He is still the source of it and therefore the Alpha and Omega for those who have chosen to believe.

But in secular existentialism, no such constant from which everything can be derived exists. As Nietzsche famously proclaimed: God is dead. With this statement Nietzsche pushes the notion of life to the extreme. Man is totally independent; his world begins and ends with him. One is able to shape reality to suit one's own individual needs in every realm of existence. Nietzsche opposes every single form of objectivity and truth, even in science and morality. This leaves interpretation as the

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<sup>21</sup> Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief* 234, 235

<sup>22</sup> Idem 251

only way to look at the world; everything else is an illusion. Simultaneously, while man is driven by his will, allowing him to exercise full control over his environment, he still longs for the safety of objectiveness. As a result, illusionary security blankets are created, such as religion, so that life may be less intimidating and the burden of creation is lifted.<sup>23</sup>

This need for illusions in order to avoid having to create existence coincides with the observation that life, in and of itself, is an absurd phenomenon. It has no logic, it does not seem to serve any purpose at all. The absurd<sup>24</sup> has been greatly popularized by literature. Prominent examples are Sartre's *La Nausée* and Camus's *L'Etranger*, in which the protagonists are living in a world where things have stopped to make sense. Within these novels, an awareness of the absurd is made possible because it is preceded by a (false!) conviction that everything has an inherent meaning. It is only when life is being stripped of this conviction that the absurdity of it becomes visible. Roquentin is confronted with the existential 'revelation' of the absence of meaning; Meursault clashes with a world that desperately tries to rationalize his presence, while he simply just *is* without any clear reason. Reality is shown for what it is: irrational and chaotic.<sup>25</sup>

David Cooper writes that the central aspect of existentialist absurdity from a philosophical perspective lies in the conflict between seriousness of choice and the awareness that there is no real justification for it -- a conclusion he derives from Sartre. By the seriousness of choice is meant that one engages in existence and applies a certain hierarchy of value to all things thought and done. Without choice nothing

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<sup>23</sup> Warnock, *Existentialism* 14

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that 'the absurd' as an existentialist concept is not exclusively secular. For example, Kierkegaard also speaks of absurdity in regards to faith. God's will, as illustrated by the biblical story of Abraham sacrificing his son, may seem devoid of logic to man, and is thus perceived as absurd.

<sup>25</sup> D.E. Cooper, *Existentialism. A Reconstruction* (1990) 140, 141

would ever happen. At the same time, however, one is able to realize that there is no rational basis on which such a hierarchy can rest. One can step outside the confines of one's own life, look at it and see that the seriousness that is being applied to it is actually based on nothing; it is beyond reason. This awareness causes uncertainty, a feeling that cannot be taken away and is often simply ignored.<sup>26</sup> Herein lies, according to Cooper, the true meaning of absurdity: living life as if one was looking into a fun house mirror while keeping a straight face.

#### *1.4 Sartrean existentialism and Christianity*

With Christian existentialists like Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Marcel, the boundaries between religion and philosophy have been crossed and blurred, shedding unconventional perspectives on Christian faith along the way. But when it comes to polarizing the relationship between the two discourses, arguably no existentialist has done it so explicitly and ambiguously like Jean-Paul Sartre. It is for this reason that the adjective 'Sartrean' has been added to the title of this paragraph. The ambiguity between (atheist) existentialism and religion belongs to Sartre alone, and it is thus somewhat dangerous to extrapolate this observation to fit the whole of existentialism.

In his famous 1945 lecture 'Existentialism is a Humanism' Sartre draws a sharp distinction between a theistic and an atheistic tradition within existentialist thought, and emphasizes that existentialism should be exclusively concerned with the latter. While the polarizing tone of Sartre's work concerning Christianity lying in his much cultivated atheistic stance is evident and has received broad attention, the ambiguity originating from his extensive use of Christian terms and symbolism has remained underexposed. As Stuart Charmé writes, Sartre's outlook on human

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<sup>26</sup> Cooper, *Existentialism. A Reconstruction* 143

existence has been mainly regarded as a "wholesale *rejection* of religion", when it could just as easily be "a *displacement* of religious issues and themes in the shadow of his atheism."<sup>27</sup> Charmé observes three main ways in which Sartre's position on religion has been classified. The first is the most obvious one, simply labeling Sartre an atheist. His own philosophy practically forced Sartre to dispute the linearity of such a claim (see 2.2 and 2.3) and he therefore stressed that becoming an atheist was actually an long-lasting inner conflict.<sup>28</sup> The second classification revolves around Sartre as an "'*imaginary Christian*," [sic] one who still thinks in the categories and framework of the religious tradition he rejected."<sup>29</sup> Thirdly, it has been suggested that many of Sartre's claims are remarkably similar to those made by various religions. This way, he uses the same methodology, the same language, but presents them in the context of a different truth. "This Sartre senses that there may be different ways of being religious besides the dominant perspective that he has rejected."<sup>30</sup>

In any case, Sartre was highly interested in Christianity and religion, albeit certainly not as a committed believer. His writings reflect a "fascination with religion and [an] appreciation of the power of religious images."<sup>31</sup> Sartre frequently strips Christianity of its iconic imagery, to use it in his own modified context, and addresses its narratives in that same manner. Van Stralen has elaborated on this. He states that Sartre's philosophy ultimately aimed at transforming Christian doctrine, in order to reach an audience that was brought up in a society heavily influenced by that same doctrine. According to Van Stralen, Sartre should not be looked at as an atheist, but rather an antitheist, because his existentialism could be interpreted as an inverted form

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<sup>27</sup> S.Z. Charmé, 'Revisiting Sartre on the question of religion' *Continental Philosophy Review* 33.1 (2000) 1-26, 2

<sup>28</sup> *Idem* 6

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Idem* 7

<sup>31</sup> *Idem* 4



of Christianity that resists the presence, or possibility even, of God.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Sartre's perspective on the concept of God is characterized by much negativity, mainly because it is the existence of a God that would significantly reduce and restrict the freedom of human beings.<sup>33</sup>

Van Stralen finds himself in agreement with Warnock when he argues that Sartrean writings share with Christian texts the aim of persuading people. Both speak to the reader on a moral and ethical level and present a desired mode of conduct to which he is to be moved, more specifically to "de onthechting van een inauthentieke levenshouding en tot de keuze voor de weg naar het heil."<sup>34</sup> This has a close correlation with how Sartre and Christianity feel that man is positioned in the universe: estranged from an ideal form of being and walking the wrong path. The religious origin for the estrangement lies in Adam's banishment from the Garden of Eden, while Sartre points to man's inability to acknowledge and engage in his freedom. Both Sartrean and Christian ideas focus on conversion as a means to the end of salvation, which would rid the individual of an otherwise sinful existence.<sup>35</sup>

While man is free to choose which path to take, there has to be something outside him that calls him to action. In the Christian tradition that 'something' can evidently be God, whose signs are always seen as being positive. Looking at Sartre, it is a limit situation, confronting an estranged person with a highly unpleasant state of affairs, that makes him see the error of his ways. In both cases, Van Stralen writes, the catalyst is formed by a force that rises above the individual.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> H. v. Stralen, 'Bariona, Sartre en zijn relatie met het Christendom' <http://bit.ly/RPQv1k> 1; Also published in: R. Welten (ed.), *Sartre, een hedendaagse inleiding* (2005) 51-64

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. See also: Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 131; Van Stralen notes that God would be in competition with man in regards to exercising freedom, and that this train of thought is more pragmatic than it is philosophical.

<sup>34</sup> Van Stralen, 'Bariona' 2

<sup>35</sup> Idem 3

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Here a link can be seen to Van Stralen's literary topos of the limit situation, see 1.1.

## 2 The Picture in the Frame: Sartre

If there is one main point that can be taken away from Sartre's existentialist thought, it is that for human beings *presence precedes essence*. 'Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself'<sup>37</sup>, as he states. Existence is driven by human subjectivity, and for Sartre, this notion is not one to be feared, but to be celebrated. After all, it means that everything, all of reality, has to come from within. There is no external power of any kind that forces directions upon man, who then sees endless possibilities ahead, restricted only by his own creativity.

The meaning of Sartrean subjectivity is twofold. First, it means that each and every individual has their lives completely in their own hands. There is no such thing as human nature, which suggests that there is some sort of universal blueprint that is applicable to all humans, causing them to think and act in the same way. Such a concept lets essence come before existence. Moreover, it takes away the possibility to create oneself. Declaring that one cannot help what one is, because it is simply in his nature, destroys human subjectivity; it is an attempt at objectification of oneself.

Secondly, it means 'that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity', and Sartre labels this "the deeper meaning of existentialism."<sup>38</sup> In the process of self-creation does lie a certain link to mankind as a whole, for Sartre argues that man himself shapes his individual being according to an ideal image he holds of humanity. Choices reflect values, and more often than not, one chooses not only that which he thinks is best for himself, but also what one thinks would be best for everyone else. Sartre illustrates this with the examples of a working choosing to join a Christian

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<sup>37</sup> J.P. Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' 1945 in: W. Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1975) 345-369, 349

<sup>38</sup> Idem 350

union over a Communist one - thereby willing a belief in heaven upon the whole of mankind - and the choice of marriage reflecting the ideal image of monogamy.<sup>39</sup>

On the surface, this may suspiciously look like just a different form of universalism, but Sartre is quick to point out that this is not totally the case. Although via such a mode of action universally shared values are created, they come from within the individual: they are completely man made. Contrary, the concept of human nature is external and thus imposed on humanity. So, while Sartre's view can indeed be perceived as a universalism, it rests totally upon intersubjectivity: "[...] it is not something given: it is being perpetually made."<sup>40</sup>

A seemingly logical consequence of this thinking, but with Shusako Endo's work in mind an interesting one nonetheless, is that Sartre finds that such intersubjective universality transcends ethnicities and cultures. Depending on place and time, man may find himself in varying conditions that put a priori limitations on his life, like the society or social status he is born into. But each man's purpose, the choice of how to meet those limitations, is universally recognizable. That is not to say that those purposes are not relative, because they certainly are. It is the "absoluteness of the act of choice" that always allows for "[...] some way of understanding an idiot, a child, a primitive man or a foreigner if one has sufficient information."<sup>41</sup>

### *2.1 Freedom in the absence of God*

Indeed, with human subjectivity as the foundation of existence and man being nothing more than what he makes himself to be, it seems only fitting that Sartre considers God

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<sup>39</sup> Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in: Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* 350

<sup>40</sup> *Idem* 362

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

to be a redundant concept.<sup>42</sup> Like Nietzsche did before him, he denies the existence of any kind of transcendent reality. There is just a human reality, and since that reality is the only one that is known to us, it is the only one that exists. In that sense, man is truly alone in the universe. Or, to put it more strongly: he *is* his own universe.

In every monotheistic doctrine, God is considered to be the creator of man and his environment. This leads Sartre into comparing the deity with a manufacturer, someone who has a final product in mind and takes certain predetermined steps to create that product. For God, man would be his main 'product', made "according to a procedure and a conception [...] following a definition and a formula. Thus, each individual man is the realization of a certain conception which dwells in the divine understanding."<sup>43</sup> A conception springing out of the mind of God could be labeled human nature, something that, as has been shown, does not exist according to Sartre. Man is born into this world without a preconceived plan for his life, and he simply *is* until he takes his freedom into his own hands.

Because God is dead, human freedom is practically limitless. Sartre rejoices in God's death. It does mean the end of transcendence, plus all the comforts that may come with it. But at the same time man sees himself as the one true successor of God, and can rule over what was formerly known as His kingdom. The freedom of humanity is the only thing that can be regarded as absolute.<sup>44</sup>

While Sartre first and foremost declares that the disposal of God is an act of liberation, he also acknowledges that the realization of an absent God can cause a feeling of abandonment. To say that God does not exist is not totally without

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<sup>42</sup> C. Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* (2010) 41-42 Although referring to Sartre's philosophy as 'necessarily atheistic', Daigle shows that his denial of God is not only an intellectual consequence, but also very much a personal matter.

<sup>43</sup> Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in: Kaufman, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* 348

<sup>44</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 43

consequence; one cannot simply declare Him dead and expect nothing to change. It means that humanity has gotten rid of its ultimate authority from which guidance and determination can be derived. That is why it is a big step to be taken, even for existentialists, who "[find] it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven."<sup>45</sup>

Sartre goes on to say that, as soon as God is out of the picture, a great responsibility is being placed upon man's shoulders. Freedom is not a gift; after all, there is no one or nothing that can give it. Therefore, as Sartre has famously put it, man is condemned to be free. He is born into the world with no apparent reason, he will never know why or how he came to be. In other words, meaning is completely absent. The responsibility lies in the fact that meaning has to be created: "[i]f there is no God, we are entirely responsible for what we make of ourselves. We are left without any excuses."<sup>46</sup> Being totally in control of oneself with nothing to fall back on can trigger great feelings of anxiety and reluctance. It is to these feelings originating from the responsibility of absolute freedom that we shall now turn.

## *2.2 Being, responsibility and anguish*

The process of creation of the world revolves around two types of being. Sartre calls these two types *être en-soi* (being in-itself) and *être pour-soi* (being for-itself). Rather than being two distinct, independent types of reality, like the idea that there is another life after this one on earth has ended, the relationship between *en-soi* and *pour-soi* is a bit more complex. In an attempt to counter claims that his view on

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<sup>45</sup> Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in: Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* 353

<sup>46</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 42

existence can be categorized as dualism, Sartre emphasizes that his types of being "are intertwined and necessitate each other."<sup>47</sup>

In *L'Être et le Néant*<sup>48</sup> being in-itself is described as something that has no "binnenkant die tegenover een *buitenkant* staat en analoog is aan een oordeel, een wet, een bewustzijn van zich. Het op-zich heeft geen geheim: het is *massief*."<sup>49</sup> When considering an object that is seemingly lifeless like a desk, or something is alive but appears to have no consciousness like a tree, it can be said that it just *is*. Both appear in human reality, therefore we can say that they are actually there. But their being is not consciousness-driven, and even if it were somehow, it falls outside of human cognition. We cannot know if a tree is conscious, consequently it automatically ceases to matter altogether. This is because, as has become clear, anything beyond human reality does not exist. Of objects we can ever only say that they merely are; we can never comprehend what it is like to be a tree, for that "lies beyond the phenomenal experience of humans."<sup>50</sup>

*Être en-soi* is a static, or fixed, mode of being, in that it is what it is, and can never be anything more than that. Since it lacks a form of consciousness, it is not able to know how to be something else. It is not even aware of itself. *Être pour-soi*, on the other hand, is able to do just that. This is possible because *pour-soi* is conscious and aware of itself. (When Sartre speaks of being for-itself, he refers exclusively to the human being.<sup>51</sup>) Whenever there is consciousness, being is in a constant state of flux,

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<sup>47</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 33

<sup>48</sup> For the writing of this thesis, the Dutch translation (*Het Zijn en het Niet*) of the original work has been used. Instead of converting them into English, all the terms and quotations extracted from this work are kept in Dutch, so as to stay as close to the original ideas as language allows, and to avoid any possible misrepresentations.

<sup>49</sup> J.P. Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet: Proeve van een Fenomenologische Ontologie* 2003 [1943] 52

<sup>50</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 32

<sup>51</sup> Idem 34

whereas with an in-itself object there is no difference between existence and being.

Sartre explains it as follows:

In feite kan het *zich* niet worden gevat als iets wat werkelijk bestaat: het subject kan zichzelf niet *zijn*, want door het samenvallen met zichzelf verdwijnt het 'zich' [...] Maar het kan evenmin zichzelf *niet zijn*, aangezien het 'zich' aanduiding van het subject zelf is. Het *zich* vertegenwoordigt dus een ideële afstand binnen de immanentie van het subject in relatie tot zichzelf, een manier om *niet met zichzelf samen te vallen*, om te ontsnappen aan de identiteit terwijl het deze als eenheid poneert, kortom, om voortdurend in een instabiel evenwicht te verkeren tussen de identiteit als absolute samenhang zonder een spoor van verscheidenheid en de eenheid als een synthese van veelheid.<sup>52</sup>

Humans, as beings for-itself, are capable of transcending their own existence by reflecting on their state of being. We are never simply what we *are*, but can at any time choose to remake ourselves. Hence the state of flux that our being is constantly in: we are not predetermined in any way, we are free to invent and re-invent ourselves whenever and as often as we see fit. Ultimately, we are defined by our actions and choices, with which we can detach ourselves from history.<sup>53</sup>

An inherent problem with being for-itself is that it always transcends itself. On the one hand, this transcendence is what makes freedom possible. On the other, it triggers anguish. Let's clarify this by taking a step back, and see how Sartre defines consciousness. First, consciousness leads to awareness. We are aware of our distinct place in the world, in that we are able to separate ourselves from things that exist outside of us. It is the most basic level which Sartre refers to as pre-reflective consciousness. This is followed by self-reflective consciousness, the level where we

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<sup>52</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 145

<sup>53</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 35

are not only aware that we are looking at an object that is not us, but also reflect upon that object. We can study things and make sense of them.

The problem starts to arise on the third level: self-reflective consciousness. It is consciousness folding back upon itself, and looking at itself as if it were an external object. Humans are transcendent in that they can think about themselves as conscious beings.<sup>54</sup> When consciousness folds back upon itself, something which Sartre calls 'nothingness' appears. Being for-itself reflects on its own awareness, so it can define itself by which it is not: a being in-itself. But if it is not a being in-itself, then what is it? The answer to that question comes from the concept of nothingness, but it is not a real answer. We can only conclude from it that being in fact exists. Nothingness itself cannot be grasped, for "*het niet is niet*."<sup>55</sup>

There are two reasons for this. The first one, as we have seen, is the fact that the origins of our being remain unknown, we have no idea where our consciousness came from; for the existentialist it just came out of nothing. The second reason is that the absolute freedom of being for-itself demands that one creates himself out of nothing, as no essence or meaning is present. Because being in-itself already is what it is, it is a 'fullness of being'; it will never change. But being for-itself constantly moves away from itself, and is therefore never 'full'. As humans, we are aware that we lack an origin and that we are forever unfulfilled. Such absolute freedom does come with a price. We, and we alone, are responsible for ourselves.

We are our own makers, since nobody chooses for us but ourselves and nobody determines our actions. We cannot, under any circumstance, "blame [our]

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<sup>54</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 22 Although the word 'level' may suggest that these processes of consciousness are sequential, for Sartre they all happen simultaneously.

<sup>55</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 81



situation or any other factor to excuse [our] way of being."<sup>56</sup> Having to accept that one is basically responsible for everything can be scary. This is where the feeling of anguish sets in. Sartre describes human behavior as a set of possibilities, to show that there is never one action to be taken and that one choice is as relative and undetermined as the other. Nothing we do can set us in stone, it only shapes us temporarily. However, anguish is a sensation that we desperately try to avoid. That is why we tend to deny our state of absolute freedom in order to achieve a fullness of being: "[a]ls ik dus de angst en duizeligheid zou willen vermijden, zou ik alleen maar de motieven [...] in ogeschouw hoeven kunnen nemen die maken dat ik de als *bepalend* voor mijn vroegere gedrag beschouwde situatie afwijs [...]: ik zou in mijzelf een strak psychologisch determinisme moeten vatten."<sup>57</sup> This 'psychological determinism' is what Sartre speaks of when he says that people have an urge to engage in bad faith.

### 2.3 *Bad faith*

When one is confronted with anguish, the natural response is always to escape from it. In order to escape the anguish caused by the realization of freedom, consciousness has to "lie to itself"<sup>58</sup> because freedom is inescapable, and thus anguish remains present as well. The best one can do is to mask it with a lie, the lie that one is not free. Sartre stresses that bad faith is not an act of lying as we would normally understand it. Normally a lie is told to deceive an other person, but in the case of bad faith the liar deceives himself. When a person is lied to by another he only perceives the lie to be true, the real truth behind the lie remains invisible. But when a person lies to himself,

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<sup>56</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 50

<sup>57</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 91

<sup>58</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 61

truth and lie are simultaneously known as they originate from the same consciousness. According to Sartre, the self-deceiver has to be fully aware of the truth if he wants to hide it from himself in the most effective way.<sup>59</sup>

What people are continuously telling themselves is that they *are* something instead of *becoming*. They *are* their professions, their nationalities, their social statuses, etcetera. This is a denial of freedom and therefore an act of bad faith. Saying that one *is* reflects a state of being in-itself, whereas *becoming* is connected to the for-itself. Sartre illustrates this with an example of a waiter. Like any other profession, the position of waiter comes with a fixed set of activities, rules and privileges. They make what that profession ultimately is. But that does not mean that the individual who happens to be a waiter actually *is* a waiter. It is merely something he does, for it can never be the essence of his being.<sup>60</sup>

The anguish of freedom, however, causes the waiter to convince himself that he indeed *is* a waiter and can be nothing else than that. He lives through the actions and rules of his profession in an attempt to reach the in-itself, an attempt that is destined to fail. As stated earlier, freedom is fundamental and inescapable. The waiter always keeps the choice to quit his job and *become* something else. This is why Sartre refers to being for-itself as a 'project': it is not only to indicate that is something that is being made, but the word project also reflects that it is something that one does or has, not *is*. Since being in-itself can never be reached and transcend the immediate act of doing, Sartre draws a comparison between bad faith and acting out a play. A person can dress up as a waiter (or anything else for that matter) and act like one, while at the

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<sup>59</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 111; This is why Van Stralen disagrees with Daigle's use of the word 'lie' to illustrate Sartre's point, and interprets bad faith as a much more fundamental concept. See: Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 101

<sup>60</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 123, 124

same time knowing that he never really is one: "[c]oncentrating on the gestures and attitudes, he is dwelling in bad faith; his focus is misplaced."<sup>61</sup>

In the conclusion of *L'Être et le Néant* becomes apparent that Sartre sees humanity as deeply engaged in bad faith: "[d]e mens zoekt naar het zijn, maar in den blinde, doordat hij het vrije project dat dit zoeken is voor zichzelf verbergt."<sup>62</sup> He holds it to be an attitude which, although tied to consciousness in that one will always want to avoid anguish, must and can be overcome. An individual is to strive for authenticity.<sup>63</sup> In a way, humans are already aiming to be authentic. In denying freedom lies the acknowledgement that we are indeed free beings. The only thing we do not do is to make that freedom the central focus of our 'being project'. To be truly authentic means to recognize oneself as the only source of value and meaning.<sup>64</sup> Our tendency to resort to bad faith keeps us from reaching that ultimate goal, and, as will become clear in the concluding paragraph of this chapter, the Other keeps us away from it as well.

#### 2.4 "Hell is other people"

So far, Sartre's free subject has been analyzed as an isolated being. But evidently, we do not live alone in this world; we are constantly confronted and interacting with others. The Other is therefore a very important part of Sartre's existentialism, and it is necessary to look at his concept of the Other in regards to the literary analysis following this chapter. The novel *Silence* deals with the role of the Other in two

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<sup>61</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 64

<sup>62</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 768

<sup>63</sup> Christine Daigle rightfully observes that Sartre's logic triggers the question why humans would ever want to strive for authenticity, as it means a head-on confrontation with our anguish and would consequently result in existential suffering. The answer is that authenticity is a vital part of Sartre's ethics. Humans don't have freedom, they are their freedom. They may not like this, but nevertheless it is their duty to engage in being free, because denying it equals denying the absolute state of their being, that which makes them human. See: Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 66

<sup>64</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 68, 69

distinct and rather remarkable ways. Firstly, there is God, who, following Van Stralen's model from chapter one, can also function as an Other. Secondly, Rodrigues comes into conflict with a foreign Other, resulting in cultural and metaphysical difficulties that pose a challenge to his existence.

Being for-itself is very much connected to being for-others. We need others to fully comprehend our own being in the world. Sartre illustrates this via us being able to feel shame. Shame is something we need others for in order to feel it. The Other is the reason why we experience shame for what we do, for ourselves our deeds remain void of judgment. By making us feel ashamed, the Other reveals to us parts of our own being that were previously unknown. But there is a flipside to that coin. At the same time, Sartre argues, shame is a form of acknowledgement. By feeling it, we admit to being as the Other perceives us, and thus the Other does not only reveal, but also reassigns meaning to our being. While this is beyond any measure of control, we are still responsible for it because, says Sartre, "[...] dat nieuwe zijn dat *voor* de ander verschijnt, is niet *in* de ander gelegen [...]." <sup>65</sup>

Subjects have the power to objectify other subjects. This begins by simply appearing to one another as bodies. Consciousnesses in and of themselves are transcendent notions, they cannot be seen, but human consciousnesses are embodied. Thus, our flesh and blood automatically causes us to appear to others as objects.

The next step is more rigorous, and explains why Sartre puts so much emphasis on the look, or gaze of the Other in both his philosophical writings and his fiction. Objectification does not stop with the perception of the human body, it also contains essentializing the consciousness which inhabits that body. When we move in the public sphere, we never really see people as beings for-itself. We see a store clerk,

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<sup>65</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 312

a policeman, a schoolteacher, a beggar. Other people are being labeled and reduced to a single essence, with which we assign meaning to their existence. In turn, we are also being essentialized ourselves.<sup>66</sup>

It is not hard to see how this leads to freedom being taken away by the Other. The Other can objectify us because he is a free subject, just as we are. He is able to interpret our actions in ways we may never intend with them. We can never control the interpretations of the Other and at the same time, he cannot control ours. This reciprocal redefining of one another is an inevitable process when two consciousnesses are facing each other. They absorb each other in their own subjective worlds, which causes meaning to be significantly altered. In other words, when one is being looked at by the Other, he becomes a being for-others, in the sense that he is being recreated. The result is a feeling of alienation.<sup>67</sup>

Sartre's conclusion is that our relationship with others rests on conflict. We aim to rid ourselves of the gaze of the Other, so that we are no longer alienated from ourselves. As long as the Other looks at us, we are in his possession. If we want to regain control over our being, we must enter the Other's freedom, i.e. transcend that which is already transcendent in itself.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the fact that the look or gaze is a prominent symbol in Sartre's argument, it does not always have to be taken literally. The gaze can be experienced indirectly as much as one can actually see that he is looked at by a physical presence. As long as one feels that someone is looking, the Other is there.<sup>69</sup> This is where there is room for God as the Other, as mentioned by Van Stralen in his topos of the Other in

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<sup>66</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 75

<sup>67</sup> Idem 75, 76

<sup>68</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 471, 472

<sup>69</sup> Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* 75

literature. Rarely is God an embodied presence in a narrative<sup>70</sup>, but is rather described as being felt.

### 3 The Theory in Fiction

#### 3.1 *An uncomfortable suit: Christianity in Japan*

Before jumping into the beautiful, complex world of *Silence* a little detour must be taken. A very significant theme that is being dealt with in this novel is a clash of cultures, which is a direct result of Endo Shusaku's own personal background. His early conversion to Catholicism as a native Japanese has made for a uniting of East Asian culture with a western religion, but even more so for a struggle within. Endo once metaphorically described his being Catholic as "[...] a kind of ready-made suit [...] I had to decide either to make this ready-made suit fit my body or get rid of it and find another suit that fitted."<sup>71</sup> Besides (as well as connected to) his Catholic faith, the complications between East and West have remained a dominant theme in virtually all of Endo's writings. *Silence* forms no exception, and may arguably even be the one novel in which this theme is being dealt with in the most direct and elaborate way. In order to fully understand what is at stake here for Endo and the characters he has created, it is necessary to take a brief look at the role of Christianity in Japan.

"[...] [T]he Japanese must absorb Christianity without the support of a Christian tradition or history or legacy or sensibility."<sup>72</sup> Endo's observation touches upon a few fundamental problems that have made it virtually impossible for

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<sup>70</sup> Spoken of course from within the existential context of this essay.

<sup>71</sup> F. Mathy, 'Shusaku Endo: Japanese Catholic Novelist' *Thought* 1967; cited by W. Johnston in the translator's preface of S. Endo, *Silence* (trans.) 1969 [1966] xix

<sup>72</sup> *Idem* xx

Christianity to firmly establish itself in Japanese society. First, there is the lack of history. This holds true for the West as well, where many countries still remember and cultivate their pre-Christian pagan pasts. A big historical difference however, is that western Christianity began as vulnerable and under attack. This role got reversed over time, as the Church grew more powerful. By the time the Christian missionaries reached Asia, they were acting in the name of an aggressor, rather than a struggling faith in its infancy. In the case of East Asia, the Jesuits were more pragmatic in their approach to foreign cultures. It is this group of missionaries setting foot on Japanese soil in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that is depicted in *Silence*. They were known to integrate local traditions into their own message they were looking to spread; a method that was later condemned and banned by the Church in Rome on the grounds of dilution of and even heresy toward faith. Ever since that period Christianity has largely been regarded as a tyrannical force. As stated before, this image was greatly enforced during the nineteenth century when western supremacy was felt worldwide through colonialism.<sup>73</sup>

'Western-ness', or 'foreign-ness' is a strong rooted sentiment in Japan. For Christianity this was a sentiment of antagonism, because it has long been associated with suppression. Not its simply being foreign was responsible for its lack of success, as many other non-native elements evidently did find their way into Japan and profoundly transformed it over time. It may be because Christianity was *too* foreign for its own good, in the sense that it posed a direct threat to Japanese identity. Instead of complementing the native culture, Christianity was felt to supplant it, forcing the person who converted to it to give up everything that made him Japanese. As Caldarola writes: "[a] Christian is seen as having western manners and western

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<sup>73</sup> C. Caldarola, *Christianity: The Japanese Way* (1979) 11

affectations -- he is a kind of marginal man caught between two cultures and cut off from full participation in either of them."<sup>74</sup> This is what Endo typified as Christian sensibility.

Another suitable term instead of sensibility in this case could well be compatibility. Caldarola describes the role of *Shinto*, a religious system of thought and values that lies at the core of Japanese culture. As the oldest native form of religion, *Shinto* provided the Japanese with a distinctive cultural pride. The protection of the own culture became of the utmost importance for a nation which, for the better part of its history, has been remarkably isolated and introspective. Foreign influences have been accepted only when they were regarded to be compatible with Japanese cultural norms. If such an influence, be it material, ideological or otherwise, was considered to be fitting only partially, then only the compatible elements would be extracted from the whole and assimilated into the native context. Foreign religions like Buddhism and Confucianism have been successfully 'Japanized', because they largely coincided with the already present Japanese way of thinking. Christianity has never reached a level of acceptance big enough to have any significant impact on Japanese society as a whole.<sup>75</sup>

It is most interesting to note that Caldarola argues that the Japanese, because of *Shinto*, have been traditional existentialists: "[t]he Shinto spirit is dominated by an existential *élan* which makes the Japanese man existential by nature."<sup>76</sup> The East Asian spirituality clashes with western philosophy and religion, because the latter have traditionally revolved much more around objective rational thinking and institutionalized practice. The first harbors a highly subjective outlook on reality

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<sup>74</sup> Caldarola, *Christianity: The Japanese Way* 15

<sup>75</sup> *Idem* 211-212; even today, Japanese Christians only make up between one and six percent of the total population.

<sup>76</sup> *Idem* 213



where action is the element that defines a human being, as opposed to a static notion of essence. There is not one fixed reality outside of man, and there are no absolutes that dictate life.<sup>77</sup>

Still, something like a 'Japanese Christianity' has developed over the course of history. It is a very small movement, but it operates separately from the West and answers to the a-systematical and spiritual characteristics of Japanese culture.<sup>78</sup> As will become clear, *Silence* deals at large with this issue of assimilated Christianity.

### 3.2 "But supposing...of course, supposing"

Initially, Rodrigues sets sail for Japan in very good spirits. The country is still unknown to him when the story begins, and his hopes for successfully converting the Japanese people to Christianity are high. The only sign of things to come is the reason that Rodrigues also wants to find out what happened to his former teacher and mentor, father Ferreira. Many rumors about Ferreira are floating around, about torture, apostasy and even his possible death. Rodriguez finds it hard to imagine that his teacher, who had given him moral guidance for so long, could have been broken and died, or chose to deny God in order to save his life<sup>79</sup> -- the latter may be considered an even worse scenario.

The journey is not without difficulty and danger, but the priest remains confident. Despite being lost at sea, his ship is able to reach its destination and Rodrigues concludes that "[...] God did not abandon us."<sup>80</sup> Soon after his arrival in Japan he is confronted with the harsh conditions in which the local population has to live, and he finds that he always has to remain cautious of the authorities who have

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<sup>77</sup> Caldarola, *Christianity: The Japanese Way* 219

<sup>78</sup> Idem 209

<sup>79</sup> S. Endo, *Silence* (trans.), (1969) 16

<sup>80</sup> Idem 40

strict orders to apprehend anything and anyone that could be Christian. Things begin to slowly change in the mind of father Rodrigues.

His first moment of doubt is triggered by a question he is asked by one of his fellow Japanese travelers, who wonders what evil deeds his people could have done for God to place so much suffering on them.<sup>81</sup> This is a question that keeps resonating within Rodrigues. On the surface, this question seems to refer to a problem deeply rooted in religion: how can there be evil in the world if there is a God that created that world? But in a dialogue that takes place between the priest and a Japanese interpreter further in the novel, it becomes clear that there is more at stake here. The interpreter tries to undermine the Christian God, by suggesting that, if He indeed gave existence to everything, consequently He is also responsible for evil. This reasoning makes Rodrigues visibly angry, and he is quick to point out that God's creations come from good, but that it is the freedom of man to use his creations in a wrong, i.e. evil, way.<sup>82</sup>

The bigger issue refers to the one word that makes up the title of the novel: silence. Rodrigues may be convinced that the poverty and persecutions in Japan are caused by man, but he cannot comprehend why God would remain absent throughout:

Kichijiro was trying to express something different, something even more sickening. The silence of God. [...] the black soil of Japan has been filled with the lament of so many Christians; the red blood of priests has flowed profusely; the walls of the churches have fallen down; and in the face of this terrible and merciless sacrifice offered up to Him, God has remained silent. This was the problem that lay behind the plaintive question of Kichijiro.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Endo, *Silence* 84

<sup>82</sup> Idem 135-136

<sup>83</sup> Idem 84-85

Secondly, something happens that is arguably a catalyzing event that makes Rodrigues permanently question his whole belief system. It is the execution of Ichizo and Mokichi, whereby both are bound to a cross and planted on the shoreline, left for the sea to slowly kill them. Again, a feeling of incomprehension takes hold, as even now "[...] God remains with folded arms, silent."<sup>84</sup> Moreover, a few pages later, as Rodrigues reflects on the event, he directly questions God's existence for the first time. He tries to fight this fearsome and confronting thought, but cannot rid himself of it: "No, no! I shook my head. If God does not exist, how can man endure the monotony of the sea and its cruel lack of emotion? [...] From the deepest core of my being yet another voice made itself heard in a whisper. Supposing God does not exist..."<sup>85</sup>

On the other hand, Rodrigues, despite all his doubts and suffering for the part of the story, is able to hold on to what he believes to be true. A prominent example of this is during an interrogation, where he makes an argument in favor of universal truth. The Japanese in front of him are not concerned with truth, as they make it clear that Christianity may well be true in the West, but it is of no value in Japan. Rodrigues is very much concerned with universality. Furthermore, it can be said that he needs it in order to make sense of the suffering he endured. "If we did not believe that truth is universal, why should so many missionaries endure these hardships? It is precisely because truth is common to all countries and all times that we call it truth."<sup>86</sup>

This statement reflects a belief in human nature, something inherent to Christianity. The whole discussion between the priest and his interrogators arguably also illustrate what Sartre says when he juxtaposes Christian doctrine against the

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<sup>84</sup> Endo, *Silence* 93

<sup>85</sup> Idem 105

<sup>86</sup> Idem 167

existentialist mode of thought. Relativation of values and truth is obviously to ignore the idea that they come from God and are therefore eternal. It also makes it impossible to speak in terms of right and wrong, good and evil, since "[...] nothing remains but what is strictly voluntary."<sup>87</sup>

Sartre puts Christians in the right, as he goes on to say that relativation does indeed lead to voluntarism. But considering the concept of truth, an argument made by Van Stralen is noteworthy, as he claims that fundamentally, Sartre and Christianity share a similar understanding of truth. They both leave from the premise that there are certain things which are evident. These are phenomena extrapolated from visible reality and held to be the cause of that reality, i.e. the origin from which it came. "Het betreft hier een opvatting over waarheid, die zich als vanzelfsprekend aandient en die zich na haar onthulling tegen verdere bewijsvoering verzet."<sup>88</sup> For Sartre, this would be his conviction that presence precedes essence, and his whole philosophy revolving around the freedom of being. In the Christian tradition, these evident truths come from revelations which make the will of God visible. Obviously, while they may share the same truth-concept, the way in which Sartre and Christianity fill in that concept differs, as do the conclusions drawn from it. Rodrigues uses the Christian version to justify a universal idea of the divine. Sartre argues for a humanist, existentialist one, in which he sees certain evident truths that ensure subjective freedom.

Torn between his belief and the new reality of things, Rodrigues becomes aware of the absurdity that surrounds him. Exhausted from being on the run, he stops to clean himself in a water pool and he sees his face reflected in the water, a face he does not recognize at first. Then he starts to act like a mad man, laughing for no

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<sup>87</sup> Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in: Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* 346

<sup>88</sup> Van Stralen, 'Bariona' 2

reason. Shortly after, it becomes clear that this sudden awareness of the absurd is derived from feeling abandoned by God. "If he does not exist, how absurd the whole thing becomes. What an absurd drama become the lives of Mokichi and Ichizo [...] And the missionaries who spent three years crossing the sea -- what an illusion was theirs. Myself, too, wandering here over the desolate mountains -- what an absurd situation!"<sup>89</sup> These thoughts weigh heavy on his mind, and he fights to suppress them; Rodrigues is not ready to accept the absence of God.

### 3.3 *"Like puppets with no will of their own"*

"The Japanese are not able to think of God completely divorced from man; the Japanese cannot think of an existence that transcends the human."<sup>90</sup> During this conversation with Ferreira, who turns out to be still alive because he chose to apostatize, Rodrigues comes to realize the subjectivity of meaning in a way that totally frightens him. In the first few days of his stay in Japan, he is still filled with a sense of purpose. His priesthood means something, and especially in Japan where he perceived the people to be lost and without proper guidance, Rodrigues initially concludes that he is meant to be what he is. Still, from the beginning there is already some ambiguity noticeable in his words -- not for him, but for the reader. Even though he states that he is happy now that he feels that his life is useful in this country, he acknowledges that he derives this happiness and meaning from "a people and a country which you can never understand."<sup>91</sup> He writes this in a letter to someone back home, but the words very much reflect his own being. Rodrigues does not understand the Japanese and the ways in which they consider him and his religion (see 3.5).

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<sup>89</sup> Endo, *Silence* 105

<sup>90</sup> Idem 229

<sup>91</sup> Idem 70

Ferreira's words are a mirror Rodrigues does not want to look into. "They twisted God to their own way of thinking in a way we can never imagine. If you call that God..."<sup>92</sup> Rodrigues desperately tries to dismiss what he hears as nonsense and lies. He remembers all the Japanese who have died because of their faith and refuses to believe that their faith could have anything else but his own. Again, he questions the meaning of missionary work in a world where Christianity and the Church do not form the essence of every man's existence on earth. But he concludes that Ferreira must be lying.<sup>93</sup> God cannot be transformed, because He is the beginning and end of everything. Nor can he not exist, as that would turn the whole of man's existence upside down. As Sartre argues, in a Godless world we are no longer "provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour. Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse."<sup>94</sup> For Rodrigues, being a priest, this means that what he regards to be his essence would be taken away from him; not only professionally, but indeed very personally as well.

During his time in captivity Rodrigues begins to long for death. He envies a fellow priest, who has been killed and thus no longer has to deal with the pain and suffering of this life on earth. Evidently, this desire for death can be understood in the sense that we are dealing with a broken man, who is tired from being on the run and has no more hope of escaping out of imprisonment. However, it is not only the physical reality of his situation that drives Rodrigues to despair. "Even life with anguish about God and faith was a melancholy prospect. Secretly he prayed in his heart that the fatigue of mind and body would quickly bring him death. [...] How he

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<sup>92</sup> Endo, *Silence* 228

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in: Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* 353

envied his companion! Yes, how he envied Garrpe freed from anguish such as this!"<sup>95</sup> Indeed, this could also be the prayer of a man who sees himself no longer able to carry the burden of existence.

On anguish Sartre writes the following: "in de angst wordt de mens zich van zijn vrijheid bewust, of [...] in de angst staat de vrijheid in haar zijn voor zichzelf ter discussie."<sup>96</sup> Here the importance of the limit situation as mentioned by Van Stralen becomes apparent. Rodrigues' imprisonment is the culmination of such a situation and Sartre continues: "[e]en situatie die vrees oproept in zoverre ze mijn leven en mijn zijn van buitenaf dreigt te veranderen, roept angst op in de mate waarin ik mijn eigen reacties op die situatie wantrouw."<sup>97</sup> How this could relate to the priest is easy to see, as he finds himself in an environment that causes his thoughts to start eroding and contradicting each other. His primary reaction to this is attempting to deny, or flee from all this. Fear, as mentioned above, is the acknowledgement of freedom. And humans tend to try and escape from fear. What Rodrigues does, is engage in a "vlucht voor de angst in de richting van de geruststellende mythes [...]."<sup>98</sup> This, however, is doomed to fail. Sartre states that the flight from fear is only a way to become conscious of it. Just as we cannot escape our freedom, we cannot really escape the fear relating to it. The only way out is death.

Near the end of the novel, Rodrigues, like his former mentor Ferreira, apostatizes. But a secret confession he agrees to hear shows that he is still a faithful Christian at heart, despite everything that has happened. Or maybe it is *because* of everything. Rodrigues's faith continues, but in an altered form, and he has adopted a different stance on the silence of God. Based on a vision he received at the moment of

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<sup>95</sup> Endo, *Silence* 235

<sup>96</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 89

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Idem 105

his apostasy, Rodrigues concludes that God was there all along, having chosen to suffer alongside His creation that is humanity.<sup>99</sup> Sartre may help to shed a humanist light on this turn of events. He recalls an anecdote about a conversation between him and (coincidentally enough) a member of the Jesuit order. The latter had endured some hardships in his life, which he took as a sign that he was not cut out for a secular existence, and that he needed the divine to turn his luck around. Of this, Sartre asks "[w]ho can doubt but that this decision as to the meaning of the sign was his, and his alone?", as another person could just as easily have come to a different conclusion. Therefore, "[f]or the decipherment of the sign [...] he bears the entire responsibility. That is what "abandonment" implies, that we ourselves decide our being. And with this abandonment goes anguish."<sup>100</sup>

#### 3.4 *"What thou dost, do quickly"*

It could be argued that with the transformation of his faith, Rodrigues has found a way to justify his apostasy without having to betray his essence. And indeed, there are several scenes in the book possibly suggesting that the priest engages in a form of self-deceit as a way of dealing with the alienating environment that is Japan. One of those scenes occurs early, when Rodrigues is in danger of being discovered by the authorities. A strange voice outside the door of his hut signals that, once he opens the door, he could be walking into a trap. His partner realizes this and warns him not to answer. However, Rodrigues ignores him, thinking that it could be a Christian

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<sup>99</sup> Endo, *Silence* 285-286

<sup>100</sup> Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in: Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*; Charmé suggests that this anecdote may also be a sign of Sartre's sympathy toward religious thinking, as he regards the man's decision to become a Jesuit to be a "a useful and [...] "clever" way to decipher the meaning of his life." See: Charmé, 'Revisiting Sartre' 7



standing outside, whom he has no right to refuse. "[...] This is my duty."<sup>101</sup> He has no choice but to open the door, thus putting his life and that of his partner in danger, for it is his purpose to answer any potential call for help.

A more prominent example can be found when the priest is in prison. At this point, he can be seen to just go through the motions, without really feeling that his religious gestures hold any value in his current situation. And again, there is the silence:

But the more he tried to crush this picture the more vividly it came before his eyes, eluding the control of his will. 'Exaudi nos, Pater omnipotens, et mittere digneris Sanctum qui custodiat, foveat, protegat, visitet, atque defendat omnes habitantes.....' Repeating the prayer again and again he tried to wildly distract his attention; but the prayer could not tranquilize his agonized heart. 'Lord, why are you silent? Why are you always silent.....?'<sup>102</sup>

Rodrigues is aware that the security blanket of his priesthood is stained now. He knows the feelings he is trying so hard to suppress are not the ones a priest should have, that "his life was supposed to be devoted to the praise of God [...] Yet in this day of trial [...] how difficult it was to raise his voice in praise to God!"<sup>103</sup>

*Silence* has its own Judas-like character in Kichijiro; the priest's downfall begins with his betrayal. This allows for a classic biblical structure within the narrative, a structure upon which Rodrigues frequently reflects. Throughout the story, he keeps comparing his own experiences to those of Jesus Christ and sometimes wonders what Christ would have done in a similar situation. It becomes interesting when Rodrigues feels that Kichijiro is about to betray him to the authorities and he

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<sup>101</sup> Endo, *Silence* 61

<sup>102</sup> Idem 140-141

<sup>103</sup> Idem 141-142

starts to think about the Last Supper. He remembers a problem he has been struggling with ever since he became a priest. Basically, he cannot figure out why Christ let Judas do what he did. He could not have done it as to deny Judas his salvation, yet he did not stop him from taking the wrong path. Rodrigues, being a priest, places both men into the great scheme of things. Jesus Christ had to die; that was his purpose. And in order for Christ to die, it was Judas's essential purpose to betray him. "I have the feeling that Judas was no more than the unfortunate puppet for the glory of that drama which was the life and death of Christ."<sup>104</sup> Later, Rodrigues reverses this essentialist idea. In his vision, he asks Christ about Judas, to which the answer is that Judas needed to do what he was about to, because Christ found him to be "in anguish, just as you are now."<sup>105</sup> At this time, Rodrigues himself may feel like he stepped in the shoes of Judas, having denied his faith through apostasizing. This change of opinion could also be a part of Rodrigues's attempt to save his identity.

Sartre offers an analysis in *L'Être et le Néant* of another biblical story which may help to clarify the abovementioned passage. He proposes a different take on Adam and his taking the apple that caused him to be thrown out of Paradise. The conventional interpretation would be that Adam, just like Judas and Jesus, derives his essence from God and therefore lacks the ability of becoming. His being and his actions are predetermined, thus he holds no responsibility for himself. Adam, and indeed many biblical characters with him, is ultimately nothing more than an unfortunate puppet, to use Endo's words. There is no 'real' Adam, for his entire existence stems from God, who uses him to set in motion a fixed chain of reactions wherein human choice has been eliminated.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Endo, *Silence* 116

<sup>105</sup> Idem 285

<sup>106</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 587

It is easy to anticipate Sartre's counterargument here, which comes back to essence versus presence. When the first originates from God it precedes the latter, something that Sartre holds to be impossible, or highly undesirable at the very least. As Sartre explains:

Volgens ons [...] wordt Adam niet door een essentie bepaald, want voor de menselijke-werkelijkheid komt de essentie na de existentie. [...] [H]et probleem van de vrijheid [is] gesitueerd op het vlak van de keuze die Adam van zichzelf maakt, dat wil zeggen van de determinatie van de essentie door de existentie. Bovendien erkennen we [...] dat een andere handeling van Adam, die een andere Adam impliceert, een andere wereld impliceert, maar onder 'een andere wereld' verstaan we niet een zodanige structuur van de mede-mogelijkheden dat de andere mogelijke Adam daarin zijn plaats zou vinden: met een ander-in-de-wereld-zijn van Adam zal gewoon de onthulling van een ander aspect van de wereld overeenkomen.<sup>107</sup>

Here we see that Sartre has placed Adam in the midst of human reality, thus pulling him out of the realm of the divine which transcends it. An action is no longer part of a larger whole, logically followed by another, the sum of which makes up God's plan. The contingencies are based on random choices that defy real logic and predetermination, but are tied to the ever ongoing human project of becoming. And here becomes clear where Rodrigues and Sartre split ways. The priest uses a biblical story to justify essence, as he attempts to emulate that narrative in human reality. Contrary, Sartre strips a Christian narrative of its transcendent context and lays bare the illusion that human reality is anything else but a series of fluctuating contingencies, caused by the totally free choices made by individuals.

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<sup>107</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 588

### 3.5 "Something I fail to understand"

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Other reveals itself in two prominent forms within the novel. One is the foreign Other i.e. the Japanese; the other is the one mentioned by Van Stralen in the first chapter, the one that is not physically present: God.

For Rodrigues, one constant in his life is the face of Jesus Christ, which appears frequently in his imagination and even speaks to him near the end of the story. On a basic metaphorical level this face is a weapon with which Rodrigues attempts to fight the changes that he goes through, but it also reflects those changes on a metaphysical level. For a long time he upholds a very strong and positive image of Christ's face, which he can create totally from within himself as the bible does not mention what Christ looked like. All the sources Rodrigues has are a long history of envisages by artists and his own imagination. Before his departure for Japan, Christ appears to him as gentle and strong. "It is a face filled with vigor and strength. I feel great love for that face. I am always fascinated by the face of Christ just like a man fascinated by the face of his beloved."<sup>108</sup> When the priest's conditions worsen, there remains one light in the darkness, something he can hold onto and that still makes sense to him in the midst of all the absurdity. "Even in its moments of terrible torture this face never lost its beauty. Those soft, clear eyes which pierced to the very core of a man's being were now fixed upon him. [...] [F]ear and trembling seemed to vanish like the tiny ripples that are quietly sucked up by the sand of the sea-shore."<sup>109</sup>

Then, after his capture, the face begins to change. It is still very much present inside the priest, but now it is "filled with sorrow."<sup>110</sup> At the very end, the face on the

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<sup>108</sup> Endo, *Silence* 35

<sup>109</sup> Idem 185

<sup>110</sup> Idem 244

*fumie*, which he has to trample on to complete the apostasy, is unrecognizable and completely different from the one he used to know in Europe. "It was not a Christ whose face was filled with majesty and glory; neither was it a face made beautiful by endurance of pain; [...] The face of the man who then lay at his feet was sunken and utterly exhausted."<sup>111</sup> It is only through the words heard in his vision that Rodrigues remains connected to his beloved Christ and thus to his priesthood: "It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross."<sup>112</sup>

In Sartre an explanation for Rodrigues 'inner compass' can be found, when looking at his reference to the biblical story of Abraham. In the face of God, Abraham was given no choice but to sacrifice his son. He judged his situation on the basis of what he perceived as an external factor, namely God directly speaking to him. For Sartre, such visions are to be questioned at all times. "If an angel appears to me, what is the proof that it is an angel; or, if I hear voices, who can prove that they proceed from heaven and not from hell, or from my own subconsciousness or some pathological condition?" Consequently, because it is not possible for anyone else to say if an inner voice is real but for the one who hears it, that is where the responsibility for that voice lies. "If a voice speaks to me, it is still I myself who must decide whether the voice is or is not that of an angel."<sup>113</sup> The face and voice of Christ may be a way in which Rodrigues stays able to objectify his existence as a priest.

Indeed, a passage in *L'Être et le Néant* provides support for this argument. In chapter two, we saw how the gaze of the Other can trigger feelings of shame, and how shame coincides with transforming our being for-itself and objectification (see 2.4).

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<sup>111</sup> Endo, *Silence* 264

<sup>112</sup> Idem 259

<sup>113</sup> Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in: Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* 351

Now, in relation to God, an individual can also feel shame and transform into an object. But because he is not dealing with an Other in the conventional sense, the objectification process is totally self-inflicted. God is a subject that can never become an object, because He does not appear to us as an embodied consciousness. Still, a believing individual is aware of His gaze. "Het is de schaamte tegenover God, [...] de erkenning van mijn objectiteit tegenover een subject dat nooit object kan worden; daarmee *realiseer* ik meteen mijn objectiteit in het absolute [...] ik poneer mijn voor-God-object-zijn als reëler dan mijn voor-zich; ik besta vervreemd en laat me door mijn buitenkant leren wat ik moet zijn."<sup>114</sup> Rodrigues' doubts seem resolved by Christ speaking to him, and that allows him to stay a priest at heart and in a positive relationship with God. Sartre would explain this as an absolute form of being for-others, a mechanism that rests on alienation and bad faith. In it rests an attempt to be able to say how God perceives the relationship, be it for Good or for Evil. To put it differently: through establishing a relationship with Him, one tries to objectify God. But this only folds back onto the individual. Thus, Sartre says that "[d]ergelijke pogingen, die de absolute *erkenning* van God als subject dat geen object kan zijn impliceren, [...] hun tegenstrijdigheid in zich [dragen] en [voortdurend schipbreuk] lijden [...]."<sup>115</sup>

The Japanese are the physically observable Others who form a major source of conflict. It becomes clear that Rodrigues never really comprehends them, as he often describes their faces as expressionless, comparing them to masks or buddha statues.<sup>116</sup> These descriptions suggest that he is looking at something of which he cannot see the deeper reality that may lie behind it.

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<sup>114</sup> Sartre, *Het Zijn en het Niet* 387

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Endo, *Silence* 52, 64

Rodrigues' confrontation with magistrate Inoue begins to uncover the lack of understanding. They discuss the clash between Christianity and Japan. It is interesting to note that the priest and his interrogator almost exclusively speak in metaphors to form their arguments. Japan is being compared to a man, Christianity to an unwanted and unsuitable wife. The magistrate imagines western faith to be an ugly woman forcing her love upon Japan. Moreover, as Christianity does not seem to take hold there, it is not only an ugly woman, but also barren and therefore unsuitable for marriage.<sup>117</sup> Rodrigues plays along with this metaphor, stating that "[i]f our doctrine makes no progress here in Japan, this is not the fault of the Church. It is the fault of those who tear the Japanese Christians from the Church like a husband from his wife."<sup>118</sup> Also, the discussion runs through an interpreter, because Rodrigues does not speak Japanese. As metaphors are closely tied to language, it is not hard to imagine that much gets lost in translation, even more so than when the symbolism would have been left out. In any case, the two men do not seem to comprehend one another, as they conclude their conversation with the mutual agreement that Rodrigues does not know the country he has entered, and that Inoue does not know the Church.<sup>119</sup> The priest remains alien to the Japanese, the Japanese to the priest.

The one who confronts Rodrigues with the reality of things in a more effective, but also in a more frightening way (as seen in paragraph 3.3) is Ferreira. He is able to point out his former student's denial and true lack of understanding of the Japanese psyche. He mentions the problems that arose from translating religious terms, to which the Japanese assigned their own meanings separate from the Christian

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<sup>117</sup> Endo, *Silence* 188

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Idem* 189

ones. "In the minds of the Japanese the Christian God was completely changed."<sup>120</sup> Ferreira is able to provide these insights, arguably because for him his apostasy is linked to an acceptance of the Japanese more subjective view. For Rodrigues, ultimately, it was nothing more than a means to preserve his essence, his belief in the universal.

"My struggle was with Christianity in my own heart" says the priest later to Inoue. And just like Inoue calls him out on that, asking if his apostasy was not "just [...] self-deception? Just a cloak of your weakness?"<sup>121</sup>, Sartre may have asked Rodrigues those very same questions on a similar ground of subjectivity.

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<sup>120</sup> Endo, *Silence* 227

<sup>121</sup> Idem 280



## Conclusion

Existentialism and literature can be said to have a remarkably tight relationship. With a shared focus on the particular both share a same approach to reality. Van Stralen has developed three semantic categories with which existentialist literature can be identified. As this thesis has hoped to show, these categories of the limit situation, the Other and engagement can be used to still analyze literature, which strictly speaking would not be placed in the genre of literary existentialism, in an existentialist way. Extra noteworthy in the context of *Silence* is that Van Stralen argues that God can also be placed in the role of the Other.

The first chapter went on to consider two approaches to God within existentialism, pointing out that for Christian existentialism the physical absence of God is a vital criterium to guarantee man's freedom. For secular existentialism, the concept of the absurd was deemed useful, especially in regards to literary works, since that is where the absurd has been popularized. The closing paragraph showed how Sartrean existentialism has been interpreted as a secularized, inverted version of Christianity, forging a tighter connection between the theory and the novel.

Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, then, is a complex web of many different things that remain connected with each other. In the end, the main conclusion that can be drawn is that *existence precedes essence*. There is no longer a higher power that we can turn to for answers, no rational explanation for our being in the world. Hence, if there is to be any sort of meaning, we will have to create it. Because it is purely subjective and man's freedom is absolute, meaning is not a fixed notion, but rather something that is constantly in the making. Human beings are a project that is never entirely finished. Our ability to transcend ourselves is our greatest gift, because it

provides us with our freedom, but at the same time it is our worst enemy that keeps us away from completely exploiting that same freedom. Out of fear for the huge responsibility to create our own existence, we take refuge in bad faith; we rather choose to *be* something than to *become*. Additionally, it is the gaze of the Other that objectifies our being and assigns other meanings to our actions, leading to alienation and a desire to free ourselves from the Other. Therefore, relationships with other people are fundamentally based on conflict.

The literary world of Endo Shusako's *Silence* is a complex one as well, and contains metaphysical elements that Sartre's theories fail to fully explain. This holds true especially for the clash between two fundamentally different cultures. Even though it has been argued that Japanese society can be perceived as existentialist, it remains hard to clarify the problems in communication and perception between East and West. According to Sartre those problems are beatable with enough information, but needless to say, that argument does not entirely satisfy, if at all.

On the other hand, Sartrean existentialism has been able to provide some depth to the character of priest Rodrigues in adding a humanist perspective to understand his actions. With the concepts of fear for responsibility and bad faith, the priest can be seen to protect his being in a foreign environment which, to him, is filled with absurdity. Japan is a country he cannot comprehend and this destabilizes his essence and causes him to hold on to the only thing he believes to be true in life: his Christian faith. His conflict with the Other in the form of God and the Japanese are clues that Rodrigues may realize that adaptation in his situation is inevitable, but that even in changing, he prefers not having to change regardless.

His apostasy with which the novel ends remains ambiguous nonetheless, a sign that *Silence* is great literature indeed. The true reasons for it lie within Rodrigues

and Rodrigues alone. The priest and Sartre will therefore find each other in agreement with Rodrigues saying that "my struggle was with Christianity in my own heart." But where the priest might see his apostasy as a victory disguised as a defeat, the philosopher would say it is the other way around.

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