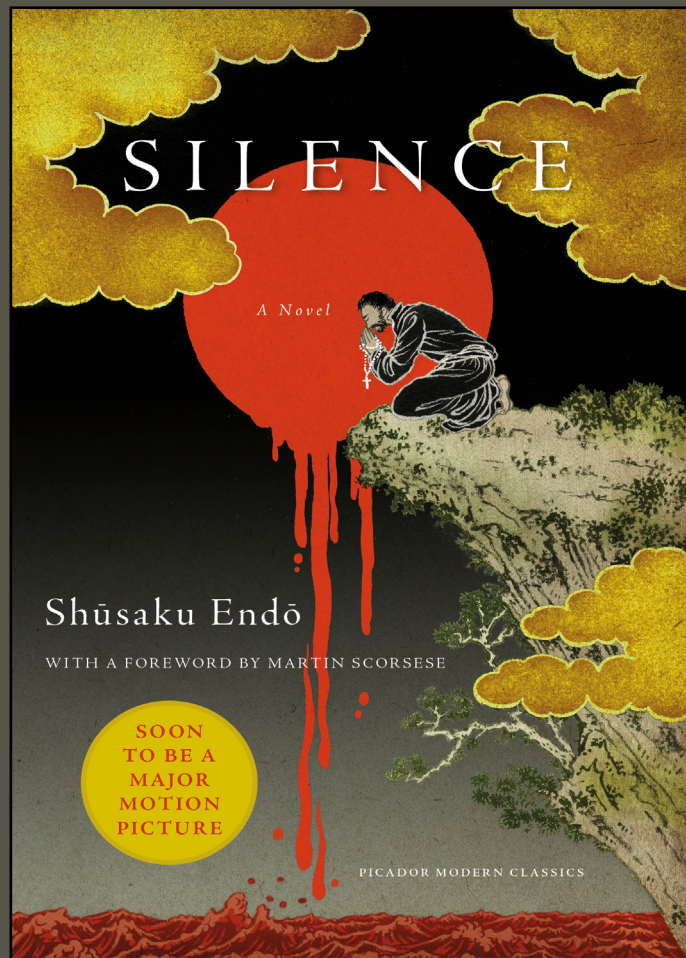


Picador Modern Classics

A Special Expanded Discussion Guide



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PICADOR

Silence: A Novel

By Shūsaku Endō

ABOUT THE BOOK

“And like the sea God was silent” (*Silence*, p. 72).

Unsettling news out of Japan marks the opening of Shūsaku Endō’s masterwork, *Silence*. The year is 1635, and Church officials in Rome receive word that Father Christóvão Ferreira has apostatized under persecution by the Japanese government. How did it happen? What could have made this dedicated missionary renounce his faith?

A half-century earlier, European missionaries were welcomed by Japan’s elite, many of whom converted along with thousands of peasants. More recently, however, Christianity has been outlawed, its missionaries expelled from the country, and its adherents tortured and killed for their beliefs.

While many are undaunted by the prospect of persecution, “Church authorities felt reluctant to send any more priests to such a country and to a mission fraught with such peril” (p. 5). Three would-be missionaries, Fathers Francisco Garrpe, Juan de Santa Marta, and Sebastian Rodrigues, studied under Ferreira and petition to be sent, so they may learn the truth about their beloved teacher.

When the Church relents two years later, the situation has only grown worse. After a bloody insurrection by Japanese Christians, “Portuguese ships were forbidden to enter the harbors of Japan” (p. 9). The 35,000 rebels—men, women, and children alike—were slaughtered. Still, Garrpe, Santa Marta, and Rodrigues are determined to continue, even if they must do so as outlaws.

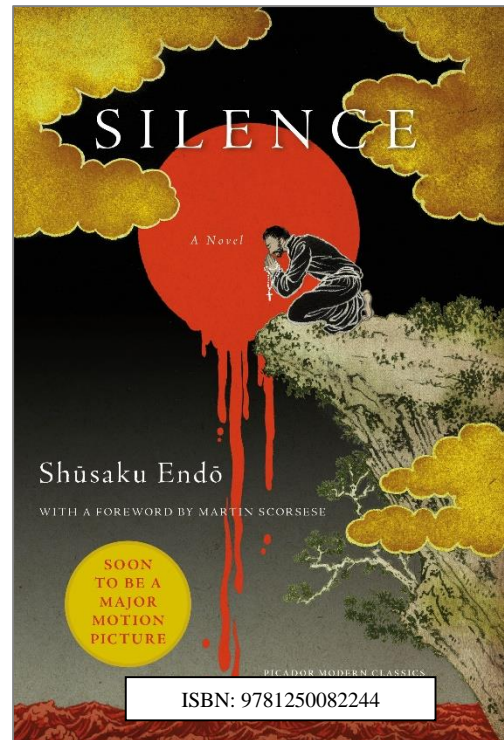
When they reach Macao, their final stop before Japan, Rodrigues begins writing letters back home to Portugal. In one, he records learning about a Japanese functionary named “Inoue,” who is “for all practical purposes the architect of the Christian persecution” (p. 13). Inoue, who was once baptized, is reputed to be savvy, ruthless, and terrifyingly efficient in his efforts to exterminate Christianity in Japan.

The Portuguese priests also meet their first Japanese. Stranded in Macao by Japan’s recently enacted isolationist policies, Kichijirō, a pitiful drunkard, agrees to accompany them in exchange for passage back to his homeland. Santa Marta, however, has become too ill to travel, so Garrpe and Rodrigues must undertake the most hazardous leg of their journey without him.

Even before they leave Macao, Garrpe and Rodrigues feel uneasy about their guide. Cunning, lazy, and a shameless coward, Kichijirō “has promised to put us in touch with Christians who will give us shelter; but now I see his way of acting I wonder how much he can be trusted” (p. 19).

When their ship arrives on Japanese shores, Kichijirō defies the fathers’ expectations and hands them into the care of local Christians. These desperately poor villagers have struggled for years without a priest to guide their religious practice and happily risk their lives to hide and feed these men of God. But Garrpe and Rodrigues know their presence will not go undetected for long.

In a narrative interspersed with Rodrigues’ letters, *Silence* follows the novice missionary from the heart of the Church to a land where Christianity “decayed at its roots” (p. 163). Compelling, profound, and deeply moving, Shūsaku Endō’s novel offers a timeless exploration of man’s struggle to maintain faith in a world committed to destroying it.



QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. While still in Macao, Rodrigues is told that Inoue, “quite unlike his predecessor Takenaka . . . was as cunning as a serpent so that Christians who until now had not flinched at threats and tortures succumbed one by one to his cunning wiles” (p. 13). What makes Inoue’s style of persecution so effective? Does the fact that Inoue was once baptized affect his actions?
2. The Japanese Christians pester Rodrigues with requests for “a small crucifix or medal or holy picture of some such thing” (p. 45). Does this desire indicate—as Rodrigues fears—“some error in their outlook” (p. 45)?
3. Did your opinion of Ferreira and his apostasy change over the course of the novel? If so, how? Was there a particular moment you consider the turning point?
4. Rodrigues comes to regard Kichijirō as his Judas. Is this a fair comparison? Why can’t Rodrigues bring himself to love and forgive Kichijirō as he believes Jesus would?
5. Do Kichijirō’s many weaknesses and acts of betrayal make him less Christian than someone like Mokichi, who dies rather than renounce his faith? What compels Kichijirō to seek Rodrigues out again and again?
6. We learn early on that Rodrigues is “fascinated by the face of Christ just like a man fascinated by the face of his beloved” (p. 21). What does this tell you about him?
7. Would Rodrigues have welcomed his own martyrdom? Why is Garrpe “allowed” to die while Rodrigues is kept alive?
8. Were Garrpe and Rodrigues adequately equipped for their mission? Is there any way they could have better prepared themselves for what they were about to experience?
9. When they finally meet, Ferreira tells Rodrigues, “the Christianity [the Japanese] believe in is like the skeleton of a butterfly caught in a spider’s web: it contains only the external form; the blood and the flesh are gone” (p. 163). Do you agree or disagree with his assessment? Why?
10. Rodrigues is fully aware that his letters may never reach Portugal and may, in fact, never be read by anyone. Why then does he write them?
11. Before he and Garrpe leave Macao, Rodrigues writes, “But everything that God does is for the best. No doubt God is secretly preparing the mission that someday will be his” (p. 21). In what way might Ferreira and Rodrigues’ apostasy be part of God’s plan?

ADDITIONAL THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

1. The novel’s primary theme—maintaining faith during difficult times—is one that still powerfully resonates today. Although persecutions of the kind suffered during the era depicted in *Silence* are largely over, what are some of the biggest challenges faced by today’s Christians?
2. Rodrigues suspects that the villagers of Tomogi and the other Japanese Christians he meets are susceptible to the idea of a heavenly paradise because “life in this world is too painful for these Japanese peasants” (p. 63). Do you agree? Is religion too often simply a balm for an unhappy existence?
3. What insights did Rodrigues’ struggle offer you about your own relationship with Christ?
4. When Rodrigues arrives in Tomogi, it’s been several years since the Japanese Christians had a priest to guide their religious practices. How might you continue to practice your faith without the support of an institution?

5. Like Rodrigues, have you ever found yourself asking why God is silent when so many yearn for His succor? If so, how do you respond?
6. Do you agree with Ferreira's assertion that Jesus, during his time on earth, would have apostatized rather than allow the Japanese Christians to be tortured and martyred on his behalf?
7. Why do you think so many of Japan's "Hidden Christians" chose not to become a part of the Catholic Church once the country tolerated its presence?
8. Rodrigues noted how "the greater part of the Chinese show no interest in our teaching. On this point Japan is undoubtedly, as Saint Francis Xavier said, 'the country in the Orient most suited to Christianity (p. 14).' " Yet, today Christianity is a minor religion in Japan, whereas there are as many as 100 million Christians in China. Besides the period of persecution featured in *Silence*, what might be some other reasons for this shift?

ADDITIONAL LITERARY QUESTIONS

1. How convincingly does Endō inhabit the mind and soul of this Portuguese missionary? What, if any, elements of the novel reveal that the author is Japanese?
2. Rodrigues pays a tremendous amount of attention to the country's flora. Discuss an instance in which Endō uses Rodrigues' meditation on the country's natural vegetation to reflect the bigger story.
3. Why does Endō employ both a third person and a first person narrator? What would the novel lose if it were only written from Rodrigues' point of view? The narrator's?
4. Endō is often compared to Graham Greene, who also used his novels to explore issues of faith. Are there any other similarities between their work? Can you think of any other writers whose work Endō's evokes?
5. Do you consider yourself a Christian? How do you think the answer to this question informs your understanding of the novel?

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Shūsaku Endō is widely regarded as the greatest Japanese novelist of his time, and *Silence* as one of twentieth-century literature's most enduring literary works. When he was eleven years old, Endō converted to Catholicism, a minority religion whose members compose less than one percent of modern Japan's total population. Many critics have noted that this powerful work of historical fiction reflects Endō's own struggle as a Japanese Catholic growing up in the margins of society. Readers in the West, however, may be unfamiliar with the period of Japanese history depicted in the novel, which recalls a time of Christian persecution by the Japanese national leadership.

In 1549, Francis Xavier, one of the founders of the Jesuits (also known as the Society of Jesus), arrived on a trading vessel to introduce Christianity to the people of Japan.

A short time earlier, Spain, Portugal, Holland, and England had established a trade route to Japan and China. It was the era of Warring States, and Japan lacked a central authority to regulate either foreign trade or the introduction of a new religion.

Most Japanese had never heard of Jesus, but as Xavier wrote in a 1551 letter to Jesuits at Goa, "The Japanese are very curious by nature, and as desirous of learning as any people ever were. . . . They desire very much to hear novelties, especially about religion." While various warlords vied for power, Jesuits like Xavier spread their message to Japan's lords and gentry, the daimyo. Once their country's leaders embraced Christianity, the common folk followed suit and this new religion gained a strong foothold.

Then Toyotomi Hideyoshi united Japan in 1590, setting off a dramatic shift. The powerful warlord saw Christianity as a movement that could fracture Japan's still fragile unity. He also saw a link between the growing Christian movement and another threat to Japanese power: Europe's "black ships" of commerce. Trade continued, but Hideyoshi's government sought to curb Christian influence and emphasize its own power and authority. New laws severely restricted ordinary citizens' contact with Westerners and the government began to purge the country of Christian converts. In 1597, Hideyoshi ordered the execution of twenty-six Christians. All of them were mutilated and paraded for public display before being publicly crucified in Nagasaki.

As Japan entered the 250 years of isolation called the Edo period (1603 to 1868), the persecution grew still harsher. In *Silence*, Endō refers to the 1637 Shimabara Rebellion, a protest against both oppressive taxes and Christian persecution. After thousands of men, women, and children were murdered, the uprising was suppressed, squelching the seeds of the Christian faith and driving Japan's remaining practitioners into hiding.

Endō sets *Silence* approximately fifty years into this period of persecution and uses the experiences of three historical Jesuit priests as his launching point. In the novel, two of the priests are driven, in part, by their desire to find their theological mentor, a priest who was rumored to have apostatized, denying and rejecting his faith. They also hope to support and encourage the many Japanese converts who were suffering under their government's persecution.

The priests both in history and in Endō's novel were following Jesus' teachings as they understood it. Jesuits take four vows pertaining to poverty, chastity, obedience, and mission. This last vow directs them to engage with the world to share knowledge of Jesus and his way. Priests before them, faithful to these vows, had gone to Japan to establish an indigenous Christian presence, obeying the command of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus directed his followers to leave the comforts of the known to journey into the unknown, promising that they would not be traveling alone. The gospel writer Luke wrote in Acts 1:8:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and
Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.”

The events in *Silence* unfold at a point when the vast majority of Japanese Christians had died or apostatized. Only a small minority of faithful secretly continued to follow the ways of Jesus. This underground community is called Kakure Kirishitan or “hidden Christians.” Once they reach Japan, the Jesuits in Endō’s book encounter one such group.

When they reach the village of Tomogi, the Jesuits begin performing baptisms and communion, again in accordance with Jesus’ teachings. Baptism (Matthew 28:19) is the public act of declaration that an individual—either a new believer or the child of a family of believers—has joined the church or community of followers. Communion (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) is the eating of bread and drinking of wine that represents the intimate relationship between Jesus and a community with Jesus and other members of the community. Jesus told his disciples that both are key sacraments, and leadership of these rites has historically been reserved for clergy. After all Western clergy had been either killed or driven out of Japan, local converts were unable to faithfully follow Jesus’ instruction until Fathers Garrpe and Rodrigues arrived. The two Jesuits begin performing these rites in secret and without holy water, wine, or bread, but the Kakure Kirishitan they encounter are deeply grateful for their presence.

Silence is the story of two men who risk their lives to follow the command of Jesus during this period of brutal. In the face of such devotion, shouldn’t God bless them or at least protect them from harm? Jesus says he would be present with them, but where was he when the Japanese Christians were killed? Jesus said the Holy Spirit would give them power. Why didn’t the power of God deliver them? And how would he judge the Japanese who verbally rejected their faith when faced by torture or death?

As readers, we are drawn to stories about winners. Yet, in real life, we all face trials that make us feel as if the world is stacked against us. We wonder whether God cares—or if God is even there at all. With unflinching honesty and insight, Endō tells a story in which two men must choose between their lives and their faith. In so many ways, *Silence* is the story of us all.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Born in Tokyo on March 27, 1923, Shūsaku Endō was the second son of a bank clerk father and violinist mother. When he was three, his family relocated to Japanese-occupied Manchuria. After his parents divorced, the ten-year-old Endō moved back to Japan with his mother. Soon after their return, Endō and his mother converted to Catholicism, a minority religion in Japan.

When World War II broke out, Endō was exempted from military service because of his poor health. He graduated from Keio University with a degree in French literature in 1949 and continued his studies at the University of Lyon in France from 1950–53. In 1955, he published his first works of fiction, two collections entitled *Shiroi hito* (*White Man*) and *Kiiroi hito* (*Yellow Man*). Like much of his later work, the stories in these volumes examined the collision of Japanese and western perspectives. *Shiroi hito* earned Endō the Atukagawa Prize for Promising Young Writers.

In 1959, Endō contracted tuberculosis and underwent multiple surgeries, ultimately losing one of his lungs. Along with his faith, this period of protracted illness would influence his subsequent work.

He published *Chimmoku* (*Silence*) in 1966, winning the Tanizaki Junichiro Prize. In 1994, Endō was a strong contender for the Nobel Prize, but lost to fellow Japanese writer, Kenzaburō Ōe. Endō was awarded a medal from the Vatican in 1971 and the Order of Culture from the Japanese government in 1995. He died from a brain hemorrhage on September 29, 1996.

Graham Greene, to whom Endō was often compared, praised him as one of the finest writers of his era. His other major works include *The Sea and Poison*, *The Samurai*, and *Deep River*.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING

In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy and Survival
John Dougill

Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians
Christal Whelan

A History of Japan, 1334–1615
George Sansom

Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shūsaku Endō's Classic Novel
Mark Dennis and Darren J.N. Middleton

Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering
Makoto Fujimura

ENDŌ'S INFLUENCE

Since it was first published in 1966, Shūsaku Endō's *Silence* has touched generations of readers. Graham Greene and John Updike were early admirers, and this powerful novel continues to attract a broad range of fans. Martin Scorsese's film adaptation will be released in 2016 and Bethanne Patrick's recent volume, *The 100 Books That Changed My Life*, was inspired by her experience reading *Silence*. Memoirist Phil Klay, novelist Caryl Phillips, and graphic novelist Gene Luen Yang have all cited *Silence* as an influence on their own work and were generous enough to share their thoughts in a brief Q&A.

Phil Klay, author of *Redeployment*, Winner of the 2014 National Book Award

Q: *When did you first read Silence?*

A: I read Endō first as a high school student, and then went back to him when I returned from Iraq, since so many of the questions he deals with—suffering, guilt, and empathy in a world which sometimes offers us few options to act in a way that feels righteous or pure—were very much on my mind.

Q: *What aspect of or moment in the novel continues to resonate with you most?*

A: The final vision of Christ in which He declares, "It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world."

Q: *How has Silence influenced your own work?*

A: I think about *Silence*, and Endō's work more generally, all the time. It was particularly on my mind while writing my short story "Prayer in the Furnace," where I tried to deal with the question of faith in the context of men causing as well as suffering violence.

Q: *If you could sit down for coffee with Shūsaku Endō, what would you like most to discuss?*

A: I don't know. It's always awkward to talk to a writer about their work. I'd prefer to take him to a Mets game and see what happens after a couple beers.

Q: *Does a reader need to be Christian in order to appreciate Silence?*

A: You no more need to be Christian to read *Silence* than you need to be Russian to read *Crime and Punishment*. Endō was a very particular sort of religious writer, anyway. He's less interested in delivering didactic lessons on whether to believe or not to believe than he is in allowing you entry into the turmoil of a believer thrown into doubt.

Caryl Phillips, Guggenheim Fellow and the Award-Winning Author of *The Lost Child*

Q: *When did you first read Silence?*

A: I first read the novel in the mid-nineties.

Q: *What aspect of or moment in the novel continues to resonate with you most?*

A: The inner turmoil of Rodrigues who finds himself caught in an impossible moral dilemma.

Q: *How has Silence influenced your own work?*

A: All of Endō's work has been influential. He truly understands what it means to be both of—and not of—a place.

Q: *If you could sit down for coffee with Shūsaku Endō, what would you like most to discuss?*

A: How his years in France after World War Two affected his development as a writer.

Q: *Does a reader need to be Christian in order to appreciate Silence?*

A: Absolutely not.

Gene Luen Yang, author of the National Book Award finalist, *Boxers & Saints*, and the 2016 Library of Congress ambassador for Young People's Literature

Q: *When did you first read Silence?*

A: I first read *Silence* when I was in my early twenties. I had attended a Christian retreat where the speaker talked at length about the book. When she described the moment that Father Rodrigues tramples on the image of Christ, I felt the passion in her voice. I was intrigued. I found a copy at my local library soon after.

Q: *What aspect of or moment in the novel continues to resonate with you most?*

A: When I actually read that moment for myself, I found it to be one of the powerful passages I've ever encountered in a story. Maybe the most powerful. With just a few simple images, Endō brings culture and faith, the individual and the community, crashing into each other. He lays bare for us the contradictions at the heart of the human experience.

Q: *How has Silence influenced your own work?*

A: So far, my most ambitious work as a cartoonist is a two-volume graphic novel called *Boxers & Saints*, a historical fiction story set during the Boxer Rebellion in China. It took me six years to research, write, and draw. In many ways, *Boxers & Saints* is a response to *Silence*. It's me wrestling with the questions that Endō posed. *Silence* was in the back of my mind the whole time I was working. When I got stuck, I would close my eyes and ask for Endō's intercession.

Q: *If you could sit down for coffee with Shūsaku Endō, what would you like most to discuss?*

A: I would ask him what his habits are, both as a writer and as a Catholic. I would ask him how he bears the contradictions.

Q: *Does a reader need to be Christian in order to appreciate Silence?*

A: No. Christianity is centered around an act of self-donating love. That sort of love is reflected in within every culture and every faith tradition. It's something we all understand, regardless of how we identify ourselves, and it's what Endō illuminates in *Silence*.

PRAISE FOR SILENCE

"One of the best historical novels by anyone, ever." —David Mitchell (from an interview on Foyles.com)

"Somber, delicate, and startlingly empathetic." —John Updike (from Endō's *New York Times* obituary)

"Endō has been repeatedly, tiresomely, compared to Graham Greene, who warmly praised [*Silence*]. . . . But Greene's fascination with sin and guilt looks very tame when put beside Endō's." —Gary Wills, *The New York Review of Books*

"A masterpiece, a lucid and elegant drama about a Portuguese missionary tormented by Japanese inquisitors." —Irving Howe, *The New York Review of Books*

"Endō's disarmingly direct and poignant narration masks a complex moral discussion." —Robert Coles, *New Oxford Review*

"Endō's grandest novel." —Robert Winder, *Independent* (London)

"Endō succeeds in creating a vision of Christian faith obstinate enough to endure even in soils that have never been fertile for its growth." —*The CS Lewis Review*

"At the height of his powers, the author produced two historical masterworks, [including] *Silence*." —*Crisis Magazine*



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Guide Written by Julie Shiroishi

For More Information Visit
www.SilenceTheBook.com