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Shusaku Endo’s *Deep River*: Trauma, Screen-Memories, and Autobiographical Confessions

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_Art is a wound turned to the light._
—Georges Braque

_Scars do not blush. Adolescents, on the other hand, blush quite frequently._ What this essay examines is the scarring—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual—that occurred during the life of one particular author, Shusaku Endo (1923-96). Further, this essay will analyze how those scars come to figure in his fiction, perhaps the best-known Japanese Catholic fiction written during the last century. My claim will be that Endo transformed his own life’s scars into a powerful metaphor for the deification of the wounded self. God, in other words, becomes embodied in his fictions in recognizably human forms—the suffering mother and the foolish father—or to put it another way, the suffering mother and the comical father transform themselves in Endo’s fictions into an androgynous, battered, and forgiving god. When Endo published his last novel _Deep River_ in 1993 he was close to death from the complications of hepatitis, having suffered all his life from pulmonary disease. In this powerful last statement he returns for the final time to the dominant fantasy-formations that had persistently haunted his consciousness and his fiction: the suffering mother and the clown-like Christ-figure as idealized aspects of himself. As I will argue, these two figures emerged as healing mechanisms out of the various crises he experienced before the age of 30.

First, a description of the childhood traumas he suffered. As a very young boy Endo’s father deserted the family for another woman and took his eldest son (Endo’s brother) to live with him. Endo and his mother then moved in with relatives who had converted to Roman Catholicism, a religion with a membership in Japan of less than 1% of the population. At the age of 11 Endo was told by his mother that he also was to become a Catholic, and throughout his life he referred to this forced conversion as being stuffed by his mother into an ill-fitting, Western suit of clothes that, as he remarks, did not fit his Japanese body. In an interview published in 1986, Endo stated that “Since as a child I was constrained, as it were, to become a Christian, my Japanese mentality was highlighted from the Christian side.... The problem I was at most pains to solve was that the Christianity which I was taught, that is, the Christianity of fifty years ago which was under the shadow of the end of the nineteenth century and of

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the beginning of the twentieth century, seemed to indicate that God was outside man.” Endo goes on to explain that such a notion is alien to the Japanese mind, for “the Japanese have an underlying sense of religion; that is, they feel that a Cosmic Life operates in various forms in man and in other beings... this very feeling makes connections between man and what is beyond man.”3 A profoundly deep theological thinker, Endo spent his life meditating on the differences and similarities between Christianity and various Japanese religions, such as Buddhism, Shintoism, and Hinduism. Repeatedly when he discusses the subject, he talks about how the Japanese mind consistently transforms the religions it has inherited from other cultures, suggesting his appreciation for the Japanese capacity for flexibility and adaptation. Clearly, however, there is a split or distinction between the two world views, and it was to puzzle, or more accurately, plague Endo throughout his life. The notion of a god outside of humanity versus a god within humanity was the central crux of the dilemma, and in many ways it would appear that Endo tried in Deep River, his last completed novel, to solve once and for all the bifurcation, the spiritual duality that had haunted him since he was a child.

After his and his mother’s conversions, Endo’s mother was befriended by a Western priest, who served as a sort of substitute father-figure for the adolescent Endo, until the man suddenly left the priesthood to marry a Japanese woman. We have, in other words, two desertions by flawed fathers, and a mother who forces an alien, outsider identity on her physically frail adolescent son. Finally, we have the mother’s death, an event that was to haunt Endo for the rest of his life. As he tells us, he was with a group of friends looking at and laughing over pornographic pictures as his mother was going into her death rattle a few blocks away. The association between death and female sexuality, always perhaps present on an unconscious level, was here made stark and painful to Endo. He returned from his amusements with his friends to find his mother dead.4 His guilt was to be replayed over and over again in his fiction until it finally coalesced into the healing fantasy of a powerful mother goddess who forgives all sins and suffers vicariously for the failings of her frail sons.

Next it is necessary to examine the physical illness that struck Endo as an adult. As I noted, Endo was throughout his life plagued by weak lungs, caused by a severe bout with tuberculosis. While living in France from 1950-53, during which time he was studying French Catholic writers, Endo was forced to return to Japan because of his failing health. As the world learned in 1999, while in France Endo fell in love with and became engaged to Françoise Pastre, an atheist and a student of Philosophy at the University of Lyons. His illness forced him to leave France in 1953 and desert Françoise, who in 1966 inconveniently followed him to Japan although by this time she knew that he was married and had a son. This love affair, which Endo attempted to deny for the rest of his life, placed him in the posi-
tion of recapitulating his father’s and the priest’s earlier betrayals and desertions. Françoise died of breast cancer in 1971, leaving a record of her version of the affair that her sister later published in Japan, revealing for the first time the full nature of the relationship and Endo’s betrayal.\(^5\)

Although he tried to make another extended trip to France in 1959, this time to study the writings of the Marquis de Sade, once again he became too ill to remain (or too guilty to resume and then renounce again his relationship with Françoise). The need to journey to the West to study the paradoxical figures of Francois Mauriac and Sade alongside each other has been noted by several critics, who have stressed Endo’s lifelong fascination with both sides of human experience, both the idealistic and the evil. Once back in Japan, however, he spent the next two and a half years in a hospital undergoing three dangerous operations, any one of which could have been fatal. He finally emerged from the hospital without one of his lungs and with a long scar bifurcating his chest. This scar, bisecting him, splitting him into two component parts so to speak, can be seen as a physical manifestation of what would become his split identity: Western and Eastern, Catholic and Shinto, survivor and victim. The body is written on by the scar and the white line that scrawled down his chest was a message that Endo sought to read and to transform throughout the rest of his life through his fiction.

II

*One sheds one’s sicknesses in books—repeats and presents again one’s emotions, to be master of them.*

—D. H. Lawrence

As Paul de Man notes in “Autobiography as De-Facement,” autobiography does not and cannot “reveal reliable self-knowledge; [instead] it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions” (922). More recently, Graham Allen has advocated the need to go beyond “biographism” in order to understand an author’s particular use of autobiography and intertextuality (170). There is no question that there are autobiographical elements in virtually everything Endo wrote, but I would like to complicate exactly how we interpret those autobiographical elements by introducing Freud’s notion of the screen-memory. A Freudian understanding of memory as a screen-discourse is crucial in analyzing Endo’s odd fictional portrayals of himself and his parents. Freud describes the mnemonic trace as the product of two opposing forces: the conflict between the need to provide a record of a past experience and the psyche’s resistance to record that memory. What Freud calls a “screen-memory” is not a record of what happened, but rather can be more accurately described as a history of its remembrance and re-remembrance. We repeat and erase an experience in our minds, or we write it and then rewrite it, or we continuously remember and forget the same experi-
ence in our minds, so that we ourselves are not sure what happened and what we think, remember, or imagine may have happened. As Freud has noted, screen memories may be actual memories or imagined fantasies constructed later in life to explain ambivalence, rejection, or the frustration of some childhood desire: "screen memory [is] one which owes its value as a memory not to its own content but to the relation existing between that content and some other, that has been suppressed" (126).

I would propose that what has been repressed in Endo's fiction is his deeply troubling attraction to and dependence on a variety of female figures who he consistently failed. In the fiction this failure on the part of the hero is replayed so that the disappointed woman is transformed by the end of the fiction into a forgiving mother-figure and the hero becomes infantilized, ill, and dependent on a miraculous virgin who will cure his weaknesses. In an analogous fashion, Endo needs to supplant the disappointing father-figure, to displace and deny him; therefore, the fictions most frequently transform the father into a clown-figure, non-threatening and almost buffoonish in his actions. Because Endo had recapitulated his own father's crimes, betrayal and desertion of a woman, he was compelled to reconstruct the father as benign, just as he was driven to portray various femme fatales as finally disappointed and forgiving mothers. But the literary pursuit of Endo's adult life became the need to find a screen to block the view of both himself and his father as failures, and thereby to restore the memory of infantile love for the idealized mother and her substitute, a loving mother God. As Freud has noted, screen memories function by positioning a substitute memory in the place of the original memory. Such a move allowed Endo to distance and repress his ambivalence toward his father until adulthood, when the facade of his screen memories began to crumble and he began furiously idealizing the father's substitute, "God." A screen memory functions as a blocking agent, protecting the psyche from confronting a more painful memory that would damage or hurt the self. The key to understanding Endo's use of screen memories is to uncover the wound that is being concealed in each text, partially screened from view. If, as de Man observes, all autobiography is ultimately fictional because of its need to resort to tropological constructions, then Endo's use of split characters and screen memories paradoxically serves his agenda.

III

But, if nothing else, I have finally learned that when one person comes in contact with another, it is no simple encounter—there is always some sort of scar left behind.
—Shusaku Endo

Deep River, like all of Endo's works, is meticulously structured, with the life stories of five Japanese men and women told in overlapping sequence as they journey together to various temples in India and ultimately find
themselves at the edge of the Ganges River. Sort of a postmodern *Canterbury Tales*, *Deep River* presents a powerful portrait of how the major historical events of the twentieth century have scarred the lives of ordinary Japanese citizens. The first character to be introduced is Isobe, who watched his wife Keiko die of cancer. Convinced that a tree has spoken to her and assured her that life never ends, Keiko makes Isobe promise to search for her reincarnated form after her death. Her grieving husband is on the pilgrimage to India because he has received a report that a young girl living there claims to have memories of a previous life as a Japanese woman.

Also at the hospital Isobe meets Mitsuko Naruse, the anti-heroine of his earlier novel *Scandal*, now a divorced hospital volunteer, whose life becomes the next to be interwoven into this elaborate tapestry of life and death. Mitsuko Naruse is the only major female character in the novel, and her depiction is less than flattering. As a university student she decided to seduce Otsu, a young man studying for the Catholic priesthood, because, as she recalls, “the whole thing had started from the rather childish desire to make fun not of Otsu, but of the God in whom he believed” (37). Adopting the nickname of Moira, or fate, Mitsuko compares herself to Eve, noting that “within each woman lurked the impulsive drive to destroy herself” (41). But Mitsuko’s real desire is to destroy the innocence and faith of Otsu, who bungles his way into an affair with Mitsuko, unaware that she is toying with him. After the seduction, she informs him that she will continue seeing him only if he renounces his belief in the Christian God and tramples on a statue of the suffering Jesus, the *fumie*. When he refuses and is rejected, Endo compares Otsu to Christ, and of course the vignette reminds us of Endo’s most famous work on the same theme, Father Rodriguez’s betrayal and trampling on the *fumie* in the novel *Silence* (1969). Otsu flees to France to study for the priesthood and Mitsuko seeks him out there while on her honeymoon, again taunting his belief in a Christian God. At the conclusion of the novel, on the shore of the Ganges River, Mitsuko and Otsu meet again and, when Otsu attempts to mediate between two rival groups, he is trampled to death, becoming quite literally the human embodiment of a *fumie*, the statue of Christ that earlier Japanese Christians had to stamp on to prove their apostasy.

Another character on the pilgrimage, Mr Kiguchi, goes on the tour to India in order to seek penance for surviving the jungles of Burma during WWII at the expense of his best friend. Haunted by his memories of starvation, malaria, and despair, Kiguchi was saved by the heroic acts of his best friend Tsukada, a man who cannibalized his dead comrades in order to stay alive and carry Kiguchi to safety. After the war Tsukada became an alcoholic in a desperate attempt to self medicate and forget his sins. Dying from alcohol poisoning, Tsukada is in a hospital visited only by Kiguchi and a young French Catholic volunteer named Gaston, who “performed the role of the pierrot in a circus” (99). Gaston, like Otsu, is another bumbling
clown-like father-figure, someone everyone in the hospital laughs at for his humorous attempts to speak Japanese in order to comfort the sick and dying. Desperate to confess what has driven him to drink, Tsukada tells Kiguchi that they were both forced to eat one of their fallen comrades in order to survive, and Kiguchi, despite his best efforts, is unable to comfort him. But at the point of death Tsukada confesses again, this time to Gaston, who is able to relieve his guilt by almost absorbing it into his own body and allowing Tsukada to die in peace.

Finally, Mr Numada has embarked on this pilgrimage because of the opportunity to seek out bird sanctuaries in India. Raised, like Endo, in a Manchuria that had been colonized by the Japanese, Numada was the only child in a household where his parents fought continually until they finally separated. As a young boy he listened to their screaming every night, and he could turn only to his old dog Blackie for comfort. Blackie always had one response for him: “Can’t be helped. That’s what life’s all about” (73). Somehow Numada and his divorced mother survived, but Numada as an adult knows that he has become a successful writer of children’s books because he learned as a child that animals were the only beings who could “understand the sorrows of children—because the various sorrows associated with human life have already been generated in childhood” (74). Throughout his life Numada lived with birds and, like Endo in a number of other novels, Numada thought of these birds as another representation of Christ: “It is a strange metaphor to compare such a bird with Jesus, but Numada had his reasons for doing so. Numada had taken a liking to Rouault’s paintings, and there was something about the many Pierrot faces he portrayed in his works that resembled this hornbill. He knew that for Rouault clowns were a symbol of Christ” (77). We also have learned, however, that Françoise Pastre was inordinately fond of birds and protested what she considered to be their cruel treatment in Japan (Okada 80). Numada contracts tuberculosis, spends two years in a hospital, and undergoes three operations to save his life. While in the hospital, Numada’s wife gives him a myna bird for company, and just as he did during his childhood, Numada turns to the bird for comfort. When he asks the bird, will I survive? The bird can only answer, “Ha! Ha!,” a laugh that seemed to Numada to “mock his cowardice and to offer encouragement” (81). As he is taken in for his final operation he realizes, “he didn’t know anything about God, but if God was someone humans could talk to from the heart, then for him that was, by turns, his dog, the hornbill, and this myna” (81). As Numada gradually recovers after his lung surgery he asks about his bird, only to be told that the bird died from neglect while he was recuperating, and Numada’s first response is to cry, “I wonder if it died in place of me?” (82).

Knowing only the briefest sketch of Endo’s life allows us to see that he has used his own personal traumas, illnesses, and operations to create
aspects of each of the novel’s five major characters. Isobe, the man who cannot accept the finality of death, is that part of Endo who clung to the vestiges of the Hindu belief in reincarnation. Mitsuko is the demonized Françoise as depicted by the guilty conscience of Endo who longs for love and meaning in life, but is continually frustrated by her own solipsism and self-deceptions. By reverse imagery, Kiguchi represents Endo’s guilt at not having served as a soldier during World War II as well as his failure to save a French priest during the war who was falsely accused of espionage (Okada 101). Numada is the physically frail Endo who shaped his own illness into the subject matter of art and saw animals and clowns as yet another way that God sought to heal the wounded. Their Indian tour guide is reminded as he journeys through temples dedicated to Hindu goddesses of his own mother, who was deserted by her husband and raised her son through great sacrifices of her own. The novel, in other words, is a kaleidoscope of pain, of writhing bodies, minds, and spirits seeking some relief from the torturous journey that really is not only a trip to India but is the recapitulated journey of their lives.

Finally, it is necessary to analyze the major fantasy-formations that emerge out of Endo’s personal and emotional traumas as well as his illnesses and operations. The father god in this novel appears as a sacrificial Christ figure, either a bird or dog, or a human clown like Otsu or Gaston, someone who suffers or takes on the sufferings of others. As I have already mentioned, the idea of the mother as a god emerged quite early in Endo’s fiction. It reaches its culmination in Deep River when the Japanese tourists travel to the famous Nakshar Bhagavati Temple in India. The tour guide informs them that the name of the temple translates as “a woman who showers mercy” and throughout the temple they see nothing but images of hundreds of Indian goddesses, who together “symbolize all the activities of life, both birth and, simultaneously, death” (138). In contrast to the Virgin Mary, the goddesses of India, as the guide explains, “are at the same time symbols of the forces of nature that exult in death and blood” (139). Finally, the guide Enami leads the group to the image of what he calls his favorite goddess, Chamunda, and in many ways the novel reaches its climax in her extended description:

Chamunda lives in graveyards. At her feet you can see human corpses that have been pecked by birds and devoured by jackals.... Her breasts droop like those of an old woman. And yet she offers milk from her withered breasts to the children who line up before her. Can you see how her right leg has festered as though afflicted with leprosy? Her belly has caved in from hunger, and scorpions have stung her there. Enduring all these ills and pains, she offers milk from her sagging breasts to mankind. (139-40)

For Endo, the Virgin Mary in her Western guise is a representation of triumphal femininity, maternity bathed and clothed in gleaming garments,
untouched by blood or milk. This is the Mary that Endo rejects in favor of the suffering mother, Chamunda, beaten and bloody by the scarring process known as life.

In his earlier short story "Mothers" (1969) Endo develops this idea at greater length, describing a man who visits a village of hidden Christians who have never reunited with the official Christian church in Japan. These people worship an ancient painting of the Virgin Mary, having forgotten all about Jesus or a father god. As the hero notes by way of explanation, the Japanese had driven the Christian missionaries out of their country, but they kept certain of their beliefs: "the teachings of God the Father were gradually replaced by a yearning after a Mother—a yearning which lies at the very heart of Japanese religion. I thought of my own mother. She stood again at my side, an ashen-colored shadow. She stood gazing at me with a touch of sorrow in her eyes." The painting of the virgin and child that these people worship recalls not simply all mothers, but most specifically the disappointed, suffering, and damaged mother of the narrator, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Endo himself. As he prepares to journey into the village of the hidden Christians, he begins dreaming that it was his mother who had comforted him as he emerged from his surgeries. But his mother has been dead for many years, and it was his bird that had stood sentry before the operations. But the narrator is determined to replace in his memory the bird-substitute (the Holy Spirit?) with the mother as healing agent. He replaces the plucky survivor with a compassionate figure who has been as injured by life's disappointments as he has: "I superimposed on [my mother's] face that of a status of 'Mater Dolorosa,' the Holy Mother of Sorrows, which my mother used to own... Once my mother was dead, I took those few precious things with me in a box every time I moved from one lodging-house to another.” After the house is bombed during the war, the statue is damaged “and the plain face was even uglier than before. Today, with the passage of time the facial features have grown vaguer.”

But the clarity and beauty of the face is not the issue. Rather, the crucial factor for Endo is the grief, the sorrow, and the forgiveness and love that radiate out of the idea of mother. If God exists for the Japanese religious imagination, Endo implies, it is as a mother who forgives and loves her children in spite of themselves.

His Christ is similarly constructed. The patriarchal Western imagination has represented Jesus as the triumphant shepherd and king, confidently rising above his sufferings and rejections, but Endo rejects such a Christ in favor of what he calls in The Samurai a "mangy dog," or for what in Deep River is a myna bird or the bumbling Otsu or Gaston, fellow sufferers who are flawed and therefore accept and forgive flaws in others. Endo’s god mourns along with human beings and provides friendship and solace to those who have been kicked in the teeth by life. His god is not above humanity or immune to suffering. Instead his god has known personal weakness, sin and the power of evil just as human beings have.
For Endo, being human meant that he tried to make sense of his life's experiences by reading them as moralistic lessons or vignettes. In an early short story entitled "The Despicable Bastard" (1959), Endo portrays a college student who works as a volunteer at a leper hospital near the base of Mount Fuji. One afternoon he finds himself playing baseball, even though he has a pathological fear of coming into contact with the lepers. Suddenly he is trapped between two bases, with two lepers trying to chase him down and tag him. Knowing that his nervousness was apparent, Egi, the student, "saw a plaintive flicker, like the look in the eyes of an abused animal. 'Go ahead. I won't touch you,' the patient said softly." After escaping from the field, Egi confronts himself in the story's conclusion and realizes, "Thanks to my fear of physical pain, I'll probably go on betraying my own soul, betraying love, betraying others." Endo's fiction continually pits the flawed body—prone to illness as readily as it is prone to sin—against the best instincts of the human conscience.

In another short story from his collection Stained Glass Elegies, "A Forty-Year-Old Man," (1964) Endo tells the story of a middle-aged man who takes a myna bird with him into the hospital where he faces surgery on his lungs. This story is obviously retold in Deep River, but in this earlier version of the narrative the hero realizes before he goes into surgery: "I don't want to die. No matter how painful this third operation is, I don't want to die yet. I still don't know what life means, what it is to be a human being. I'm idle and I'm lazy, and I go on deceiving myself. But, if nothing else, I have finally learned that when one person comes in contact with another, it is no simple encounter—there is always some sort of scar left behind." And so, to return to my initial observation, if God speaks in Endo's universe and if humanity hears Him, then He speaks through scars. But, as I also noted, scars do not blush. They are like residue, emblems of the pain left behind by life. And not only does one not reveal one's emotions anymore through scarred skin, but one no longer can feel pain in scars. Like the "gift" of a physical defect or insanity, being touched by God is a double-edged marker, a sign on the body that speaks sometimes in the voice of poetry and sometimes in the shriek of torture.

Finally, in Endo's novel The Girl I Left Behind (1963), we are once more in a leper asylum where a young woman named Mitsu is committed after she is misdiagnosed with leprosy because of the brownish marks that first appear on her wrists as the result of a disastrous affair with a manipulative young man. The woman, clearly another Christ figure, is able to hear the voice of god urging her to commit herself to serving the lepers, while the unscarred seducer sinks into loneliness and guilt, musing to himself: "If Mitsu had taught me anything at all, it was that every single person with whom we cross paths during our journey through life leaves an indelible mark on us. If God truly exists, does He speak to us through these marks?"
God, Endo makes clear, speaks to us through the scars that are written on our bodies. But both characters—the one good and the one evil—have scars, one physically and one metaphorically. What Endo tells us in this imagery is that no one goes through life unscathed. All of us will at some point be scarred, damaged by the people and experiences that God has ordained for us. But the point of the journey is not to fear the scars nor to resent the pain. Rather, the God of scars has given us just as much pain as we each need to understand the lesson that each of us is fated to learn in life. The artist Georges Braque once observed, “art is a wound turned to light,” while D. H. Lawrence noted that “one sheds one’s sicknesses in books—repeats and presents again one’s emotions, to be master of them,” and such insights help us understand that Endo practiced just such a strategy within his fiction (Braque 5; Lawrence 90. While it is impossible to discuss all of the novels, short stories, autobiographies, or essays of this prolific writer, it is possible to say that they do move progressively toward a self-conscious transformation of his illness, his spiritual ostracism, and his personal abandonment. His wounds, his scars are writ large for his audience to vicariously share, and in the process he asks his readers to identify with his pain and transform themselves and their wounds into a triumphal embrace of frailty, sin, and guilt. All of this, however, begs the central question in Endo’s final novel: does he believe that the Western Christian god is a fantasy-figure that human beings have constructed out of their own pain? Have we projected our weaknesses onto an idealized being—whether animal or human—in order to deny our suspicion that there really is no afterlife, no meaning to suffering, no way to accept the pain of abandonment and betrayal that life hands us?

At the end of Deep River, Otsu is carrying the dead to their cremation on the banks of the Ganges River, where their ashes are then mixed with the water. Further down the shore, the living are drinking that water and swimming in it, an unsettling mixture of death and life swirling together in a manner that Endo suggests is all around us all the time, although at the Ganges the intermingling is just more blatant. His characters come to the side of the river to seek rebirth by confessing their sins, atoning for their shortcomings, or giving up their lives for others. All of them, that is, have made the trip to a Hindu calvary to lay down their burdens and lick their wounds. They arrive finally on the very day that Indira Gandhi is assassinated, suggesting that another suffering mother of India has once again offered up her life for her sinful children. And it is Mr Numada who comes closest to Endo’s own voice at the end of this work. Having bought a pet store myna bird and set it free in the jungle, Numada realizes that he has finally atoned for the bird who gave its life for him in the hospital so many years ago. He muses to himself, “The smell of death was thick in the city of Varanasi. And in Tokyo as well. And yet the birds blissfully sang their songs. To escape from that contradiction, he had created a world of chil-
children's fables, and when he returned home, he would most certainly write stories with birds and animals as their heroes once again" (204). Endo would not live to write any more fables, but his fictional substitute here confesses what we must suspect about his work as an artist. To blot out the stench of death, Endo embraced the world of art, the bird-spirit’s song, and he made that bird his god. He knew there was no ultimate escape from death and scars, but there was finally the belief that the artist could make the pain into something beautiful and ultimately divine.

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Notes

1 Autobiographical details are available about Endo's early life in a number of sources. The most succinct is Brooker. An entire issue of Christianity and Literature (48) was dedicated to Endo's oeuvre, and was the first extended journalistic and scholarly attention given to his life and career in this country. Also see Seidensticker and Gessel ("Sting").

2 Endo's description of being stuffed into an ill-fitting suit is discussed in Mathy (72). His own comments can be found in Yamagata, passim.

3 Other discussions of Endo within the context of Japanese Christianity can be found in Takayanagi.

4 See Gessel ("Sting" 261) for a detailed description of this painful episode in Endo's life, fictionalized in his short story "Mothers."

5 See Okada for a full overview of Endo's affair with Pastre (1930-71), including brief discussions of Endo's attempts to "confess" the affair in fiction, his posthumously published novel The Hill at Rouen (edited by his wife Junko in 1998) and the earlier The Girl I Left Behind (1963).

6 All quotations from Deep River will be from this edition, with page numbers in parentheses in the text.

7 Otsu appears to be based on Endo's close friend Father Yoji Inoue, a Japanese Catholic who traveled with Endo to France in 1950 and trained for the priesthood there (Okada, 97). Gessel (1991) discusses Scandal at length, including the role played in the novel by Miss Naruse, who in the novel is a sadistic lesbian. Netland claims that in Silence "Endo explores the complicated relations of Christ and culture. Endo acknowledges that Christianity cannot entirely escape its cultural inscription, and in Silence he wonders whether Christianity can take root in the mudswamp of Japan without being radically neutered of institutional and cultural norms" (180).

8 "Gaston" also figures as a character in Endo's earlier novel The Wonderful Fool (1959), and is described by Gessel as one of those characters in Endo who "care, who devote their lives to sharing in the sufferings of others, doing what they can-no matter how trivial in the eyes of the world—to help even the most wretched of human beings endure their trials. That is why the popular novels are populated with murderers, thieves, abortionists, lepers, and social dropouts; they are the counterparts of the apostate priests, the weak-willed martyrs, and the ugly, pathetic 'bastards' who fill the pages of the religious works" ("Sting" 267).

9 Gessel notes that in the works written after 1963 a new theme begins to emerge in Endo: "the very act of suffering, of enduring the calumnies and assaults of the
world, is a sufficient act of penance, and that there is a redemption for the weak who cannot be banner-carriers for Christianity or any other creed...the sad, compassionate eyes of birds and dogs" begin to appear: "Clearly these eyes are a prototype of a divine gaze which sees all the external failings of men but mercifully penetrates to the purity of intent in the hearts of those too spiritually feeble to save themselves" ("Sting" 244).

10 Gessel ("Hearing") discusses Endo’s "Mothers," as well as his attitude toward the feminized divine. His Sting contains a similar discussion (266). Numerous critics have commented on the fact that Endo has constructed a "Christ-mother" god, what I would call an androgynous Jesus, a well established representation in mystical Western Christian traditions (see Hoeveler 9-11; 14; 43). The only extended published analysis of Deep River to date can be found in Reinsma who comments on the motif of the mother, although he differs from me in seeing Miss Naruse as Endo’s final ambivalent image of a saving mother in spite of herself.

11 "The Despicable Bastard" is analyzed by Gessel in "Sting" (236-37).

12 "A Forty-Year-Old Man" is analyzed by Gessel in "Silence" (154-55).

13 The Girl I Left Behind is analyzed by Gessel in "Silence" (156) and in "Sting" (268-73).

Works Cited


