

Polysemy of the Other: Endō Shūsaku's Encounter with the West

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Abstract

The paper discusses the polysemy of the categories of otherness and the Other in selected works of a Japanese contemporary writer, Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996).

These categories, situated within Paul Ricœur's interpretative framework differentiate three figures of otherness recognisable in Endō's texts: the physical otherness (termed by Endō as "white man" versus "yellow man"); the notion of the Other as the interlocutor on the level of the cross-cultural discourse; and the third figure of otherness, termed by Ricœur the "otherness of conscience", that brings identity into question. This paper explores the significance of these categories in Endō's writing in two consecutive stages. First, in the writer's encounter with French literature and thought, and later by a transformed and expanded form of otherness found within his fictional works, particularly in his last novel, *Deep River*. Based on Endō's literary experience of encounters, exchanges and transformations, I argue that for Endō otherness is an important device in understanding of the self. Thus, the writer's approach to otherness echoes Ricœur's words: "the self could return home only at the end of long journey. And it is 'as another' that the self returned."

Keywords: Endō Shūsaku, otherness, the Other, Ricœur, hermeneutics

Introduction

The article discusses the categories of otherness and the Other¹ in the works of a contemporary Japanese writer Endō Shūsaku² (1923-1996). Broadly understood the “literary experience” of Endō, first as a reader of Western literature and further as a novelist, is based on constant transition from the “encounter” with what to him is foreign, distant and alien within the Western world to the definitive attempt to appropriate this otherness into his fictional works. In line with the theme of the present volume, *Interpretative Encounters*, it is legitimate to identify Endō’s oeuvre as a continual interpretation and re-interpretation of his own *journey*, understood both literally and metaphorically, that led him to encounter the Other manifested in the people he met, the books he read, the places he visited, as well as his own memories and reflections.

Endō Shūsaku’s encounter with the West was multi-dimensional, not limited to purely personal experiences, and it was represented by more than one literary expression. It is to emphasise such features of Endō’s journey to the West that I introduce the perspective of otherness and the Other as it captures diverse and multiple encounters and exchanges.

The otherness of the West is not unfamiliar to modern Japanese literature. The works of leading writers and intellectuals of the Meiji (1868-1912) and the Taishō (1912-1926) periods – Natsume Sōseki, Mori Ōgai, Nagai Kafū, Kawabata Yasunari, Watsuji Testurō, Nishida Kitarō – testify to the multiform, multilayered encounters with various Western aesthetic and intellectual currents. The concepts of the Orient (*tōyō*) and the Western world (*seiyō*) were employed in the cultural and literary discourse as the means to define Japan’s place in the world. The otherness of the West left its trace on the consciousness of the writers and intellectuals but its lasting significance was restricted to the extent to which it could be referred to and incorporated in the context of Japan. The binary oppositions of what “belongs to me” (*uchi*) and “what is foreign” (*soto*) was clearly delineated, and the point of reference always focused on Japan.³

While for the aforementioned writers otherness was unidirectional as it referred to the foreignness of Europe, for Endō it initiated a sense of otherness towards his own cultural background – that is Japan. This particular approach was linked to both Endō’s religious background as a Christian convert and the historical and political conditions that the war-time generation (*senchū-ha*) experienced. As the critic Watanabe Kazutami argues, this generation was forced to “re-discover their proper Japan through their Western experiences”. Watanabe concludes:

Before the war [. . .] it was widely believed that there indeed existed an actual Japan to return to. After the war, however, all of the myths attached to that Japan had dissolved and there no

¹ The paper is based on my PhD research for the thesis entitled ‘The Problem of Evil in the Works of Endō Shūsaku: Between Reading and Writing’.

² Note that in Japanese the first name follows the family name: Endō (family name), Shūsaku (first name).

³ See *Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature*. 2007. R. Hutchinson and M. Williams eds. London: Routledge.

longer was an “actual” Japan that could be shared. The postwar [. . .] students discovered this for themselves in their different experiences in Europe. (Watanabe, 2002, p. 123)

The following discussion of otherness in Endō’s writings focuses not on the writer’s literary identity shaped through the Western influences, rather, the ways the writer articulates the experience of otherness in his writing. This pays attention to content as well as to the forms of narrative expressions Endō chooses to render his experience: diary, essay, travelogue or fiction. The texts’ narrative diversity reveals how otherness in Endō’s writing takes a number of shapes and is unavoidably linked to two other important categories: the “distance” and the problem the writer’s subjectivity, his cogito. Hence, the term “polysemy” introduced in the title of the article that conveys the multilayered, multiform, multivocal dimensions of the otherness.

In my discussion of the otherness in Endō’s works, I refer to the category of the Other as formulated by the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005). In his interpretative project, which the philosopher classifies as phenomenological hermeneutics, the category of otherness is included in the long and complicated process of acquiring identity.

Continuing the French tradition of reflexive philosophy, Ricœur establishes human subjectivity as the focal point of his philosophical inquiries. He refers in this way to the Cartesian tradition of thinking on subjectivity. However, Ricœurian cogito is neither the framework nor the foundation of cognition. That is why it is, as the philosopher terms the “shattered cogito” that renounces the ambition to be the foundation, the basis of cognition; it does not have pretence to direct insight and self-knowledge through auto-reflection but it is still the same cogito that maintains a relationship with the horizon of experience. The path, the journey that such a weakened, “shattered cogito” takes in the process of regaining its identity leads through a number of intersubjective and trans-historical connections, and this in turn leads to the requirement to give an account of them; to interpret them as a kind of experience. It is therefore the self-narrating subject that remains both the reader and the writer of one’s story, one’s life.⁴ For Ricœur, our existence “cannot be separated from the account we give of ourselves. It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves.” (Ricœur, in Madison, 1993, p. 80). Thus, through the stories of life, the subject’s identity becomes the narrative identity.

In the process of self-narration the “shattered cogito” encounters the figure of the Other whose characteristic feature is polysemy. For Ricœur, three figures of otherness shape the image of the “shattered cogito”:

1. The otherness of one’s own body that implies strangeness towards the world and towards the Other.
2. The Other that functions as the interlocutor on the level of discourse and the protagonist and the antagonist on the level of interaction. It is the Other who possesses other “stories that require to be told.”
3. The “otherness of conscience,” which brings identity into question.

⁴ More on this issue in Ricœur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 3, p. 246.

When considering the third figure of conscience in relation to the two former figures of otherness, Ricœur admits an inability to point out one single source of the third figure and at the same time, he singles out the number of factors that make up the third figure of otherness. He questions

whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God – living God, absent God – or an empty place. (Ricœur, 1992, p. 61)

Ricœur's concept of the otherness offers an enlightening perspective in the exploration of the literary texts as it illuminates the *subject*—the author, the narrator, the writing persona whose presence in the process of narration is being regained and restored. The hermeneutical subject is a speaking/spoken subject that seeks to make sense of one's own experience in the form of the story. So does Endō in his encounters with the Other.

Before moving to a more detailed analysis, I am committed to make short explanation on how the terms “East” and “West” have been used throughout the article.

The use of these notions derives from the original texts written by Endō: *seiyō* (West) – *tōyō* (East). Endō uses these terms in a number of configurations, e.g. *seiyō bungaku* (Western literature) – *tōyō bungaku* (Eastern literature); *seiyō bunka* (Western culture) – *tōyō bunka* (Eastern culture); *seiyōjin* (people of the West) – *tōyōjin* (people of the East). At times, Endō would use more specific and precise expressions, for example: *Seiō sakka* (the writers from the West/Europe); *Yōroppa bungaku* (European literature) as opposed to *Nihon bungaku* (Japanese literature). It is important to maintain the binary opposition of “East”-“West” without deliberation whether the understanding of these notions is determined by historical-geographical, or aesthetical and cultural context. The generalized use of the notions “East-West” (as faithfully, as did Endō in his texts) is intentional in the article in order to render the tension that stems from the dialectical confrontation of this pair of contradictions. “East-West” is one of a number of pairs of oppositions that Endō introduced to his texts in different textual configurations.⁵

1. Encounter with the Other

a) First figure of otherness: white man/yellow man

Following Ricœurian classification of otherness, we begin with the otherness of one's body that implies the sense of strangeness towards the world and the Other. It results from the physicality that affects the most basic experiences of difference. In the case of Endō, it is his Japanese physiognomy that distinguishes him from the Europeans. Endō registers and vividly portrays this form of otherness in his early short stories written soon after his return from Europe, after having spent three years as a foreign student in France (1950-1953). The bodily experience of otherness led Endō to formulate the concepts of the “world of the white man” and the “world of the yellow man.” Structurally, the narrative forms that the writer chose as a means to deliver the experiences of being the “yellow man in the white world” remains on the fringe of fiction and autobiography. Endō either opts for clearly identifiable narrator in first-person (where ‘I’ equals the author) or invents the imaginative ‘I’ that nevertheless remains in accurate relation to the author.

⁵ I believe that the above perspective is also applicable to the analysis of the works of other Japanese writers and intellectuals, including Mishima Yukio and those affiliated with the Kyoto School, especially Nishida Kitarō and Watsuji Tetsurō.

Further exploration of the genre of writing employed by Endō in his early texts, shows a shift from the traditional and conventional use of personal experiences (as, for example, in Japanese *shishōsetsu*/I-novel with the author as the character of the plot)⁶ to more flexible treatment of the self as can be observed in a contemporary type of life-writing known as autofiction, in which the discrepancy between author and character(s) with the simultaneous emphasis on the author's appearance in the narration occur.⁷ This will become a characteristic feature in Endō's approach to his experiences and the selfhood reflected in numerous fictional texts including in *Deep River*.

One of the first open depictions on skin colour that determined Endō's view of the self and the others – and the self as the Other – is the story *Aden Made* (To Aden) from 1954. In this first person narrative set in early 1950s France, we encounter the Japanese student, Chiba (the narrator), who is forced by his deteriorating health to return to Japan. As he prepares to leave, he reflects on his time spent among the French, in particular to his close relationship with a white woman called Maggie. The narrator recalls how despite being treated decently and with respect, he nevertheless was not able to create the harmonious unity with the white woman he came to love. Here is how Endō, through the words of Chiba, reveals the dissimilarity between white and yellow:

She was pure white, and my body sank into the light [. . .] in a dark yellow shade unlike the brightness [. . .] of the woman. [. . .] And the two colours of our entangled bodies had no beauty, no harmony. Rather it was ugly. It was like a yellow ground beetle clinging on to a pure white flower. (Endō, in Logan, 2009, p. 33)⁸

In the further part of the story, the narrator states that:

Just by loving me, the woman would not become a yellow person, and I was not to become white. Love, theory or ideology were unable to erase the differences in the skin colour. [. . .] The white people are ready to let me into that part of their world that does not harm their self-respect and pride. They have given me a permission to wear their Western-style garments, to drink red wine, and to love their woman. However, they categorically could not accept the fact that a white woman could love me. It was because, the skin of the white people remains white and beautiful. The yellow skin is

⁶ I realize that the above definition the Japanese I-novel is much of a shortcut. In history of the twentieth-century Japanese literature, *shishōsetsu* has undergone much transformation and there has been not only one manner of self-narration within this particular genre.

⁷ I base my understanding of *autofiction* on the definition given by a French writer Serge Doubrovsky.

See: Doubrovsky, S., 1988. *Autobiographies: de Corneille à Sartre*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France. Doubrovsky defines *autofiction* as 'fiction of truthful events'.

⁸ Translation modified. All translations from Japanese in the paper are mine, unless the translator's name is provided.

vague, and indistinct. It was intolerable that a white woman could love someone who possesses such lifeless yellow face. (Endō, 2004, p. 16)

In his initial testimony to otherness of the skin, Endō emphasises the apparent dichotomy between the West represented by the white race and Japan – the country of yellow people without yet addressing more profound deliberations on the nature of the differences. Otherness remains on the level of surface. Thus, Endō discovers the meaning of the “horizon of the surface.”

The bodily experience of otherness is gradually reinforced by two other experiences that accompanied Endō during his stay in Europe: Christianity and the aftermath of the war. Endō elaborates the trichotomy of his “yellow” difference to white, Christianity and war further in his writing, often replacing the issue of the skin colour by the monotheism of the West and the pantheism of the East. This enables him to explore and, with time, expand the notion of otherness of the skin to the dissimilarity on the spiritual level. As he noted in the essay ‘Shusse saku no koro’, (The Time of My Promotion, 1967), during his stay in France Endō realized that the Christianity he knew from Japan had an entirely different form in Europe and it was in the post-war Europe that he came to perceive himself as “haisenkokku no ichiseinen” (a young man from the defeated country). These were three features that composed the distance that separated him from the West at that time.

The axis delineated by the physical and spiritual discrepancies between East and West complemented by the consciousness of the historical and political burdens moves the writer’s reflection towards the question *what is Japan?*

Okada Sumie in her study *Japanese Writers and the West* aptly points out that:

For Endō Shūsaku [. . .] it was far more significant to take note of the yellowness of his skin when he was in France than to focus on the impact of cultural differences in Franco-Japanese relationships. Indeed, the physical factor was for him the clearest indication of his national identity, a symbol of his Japaneseness [. . .] There was a conscious awareness of defeatism in the 1950s as consequence of the misery of loss in the Second World. (Okada, 2000, p. 95)

The otherness, Endō describes in his texts, progressively initiates the questions concerning his subjectivity – his place in the world. As seen in the passage below from the diary Endō kept during his stay in Europe, he was determined to define himself.

I have started to consider my place in the world. I cannot find the answer to that question, because in my world my position is not established yet [my position does not exist yet]. No, definitely I do not have the consciousness of being in the world. My world is limited to my family, friends – to all those matters that surround me. What shall I do to extend my awareness of being in the world? (Endō, 2007, p. 49)

Reading Endō’s diary, we observe the changing attitude towards the self. It is the transition from the position of the observer registering the outside world as the Other (the Japanese in France) to more personal character of the account where the outside world is becoming the source of impulses for the intimate experiences. At the end of the diary, Endō awaiting his return to Japan reveals his longing for his homeland. He notes enigmatically and hastily but

tellingly: “The unbearable loneliness...the love of Japan. No matter how beautiful France could be, I still miss Japan...” (Endō, 2007, p. 432)

The concerns surrounding differences of physiognomy remained troublesome and thought provoking for Endō even in later years. As a mature writer, he published an essay with a suggestive title ‘Awanai yōfuku.’ (Ill-fitting Western Garments, 1967), where he created one of the most appealing metaphors that illustrate the experience of otherness: “Western garments” (*yōfuku*). In the essay, Endō elaborates the notion of “Western garments” and confesses how writing became a means that enabled him to adjust “Western garments” – literally his adopted faith (Christianity) to his Japanese silhouette.

I eventually realized that my faith was like the Western clothes I was made to wear [. . .] Those Western clothes did not fit my body at all. Some parts were too baggy and loose, other too small. Being finally aware of that, I thought I should take off my Western clothes. These were, I thought, Western clothes, not Japanese *kimono*, that would fit my body. Between my body and that Western clothes there were empty spaces, that I could not consider myself. [. . .] But I could not simply take off and abandon my clothes. (Endō, 2004, p. 395)

The above quotation demonstrates Endō’s consciousness that the body is something that is one’s own and, at the same time, something that is alien. As Ricoeur would say: “one’s own body is revealed to be the mediator between the intimacy of the self and the externality of the world” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 322).

b) Second figure of otherness: from distance to appropriation

The second form of otherness is what Ricoeur terms as the “narration of the Other” and in the case of Endō this form is present and the most pronounced in the texts which constitute the writer’s dialogue with the culture and the thought of the West. Endō’s initial “encounter” with the West takes place in the 1940s, when he enters the French Department at Keiō University in Tokyo. Here, under the guidance of prominent scholars Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko and Satō Saku, Endō undertakes the academic exploration of leading themes in contemporary French literature and thought: existentialism, personalism and Neo-Thomism, and in the considerations of Christianity of François Mauriac, Georges Bernanos, and Julien Green.

However, already in his initial contacts with French literature and thought Endō recognizes distance, *kyorikan*, as an important interpretative feature. Distance plays a crucial role in his entire relationship with foreign literature. It is probably the very first way of speaking about otherness. In his first essay, ‘Kamigami to Kami’ (The Gods and God, 1947) Endō states:

When reading Catholic literature, one of the most important issues is absolutely not to respectfully sidestep the “sense of distance” that is naturally evoked in us by the different nature of these texts. Quite the contrary, we should rather start from an awareness of this distance and resist it. But what exactly is this “sense of distance”? What is the basic factor that arouses in us the “sense of distance”? I shall try to investigate this issue. (Endō, 2004, p. 20)

In Ricoeurian hermeneutics, distance or distanciation is a significant element in the process of grasping and understanding the surrounding world. Ricoeur sees it as a medium in an area where a complicated process of transformation takes place; a battlefield between otherness and appropriation, which assumes constant dialectical tension between that which divides and

mediates. How then did Endō comprehend the “sense of distance”? How did he manage to overcome it?

In the essay ‘*Ihōjin no kunō*’ (The Anguish of an Alien, 1973, tr. 1974), Endō finds the most appropriate term that defines his predicament: *ihōjin* (the other, alien, foreigner, non-Japanese, stranger)⁹, establishing his position towards the West and Japan.

In university, I began to study French Catholic literature and to specialize in twentieth-century Catholic literature. [. . .] As I read the works of [C Claudel, Mauriac, Green], I kept feeling there was a gulf between us. Their conversion accounts implied to me that they had returned to Christianity as to their own homeplace. But myself had no such feeling. [. . .] Nowhere in those authors that I studied did I discover what I felt: the anguish of an alien. [. . .] All I can say at this point is that I have stayed with the theme of anguish of an alien, which sets me apart from foreign Christian writers. (Endō, 1974, p. 179-180; 183)

Ihōjin incorporates considerable burden of emotions and at the same time it implies subjectivity, a term full of ambiguity. Adriana Boscaro describes this as the “double-foreignness” of Endō (Boscaro, 1981, p. 85). *Ihōjin* refers to the image of his self both towards Europe and towards Japan, which is, therefore, a divided self, manifest in ambivalent affiliation to one cultural sphere and hesitancy to absolutely reject the other. In his diary and essays, for example ‘*Watashi to kirisutokyō*’ (Christianity and I, 1963) Endō describes how this constant oscillation between being self and the Other consists of existing between what he specified as “Eastern passive attitude” and “Western active attitude”.

The second form of otherness deeply affects Endō’s identity as a writer. The question that is continuously posed in his essays and critical works is “how am I supposed to write?”, “how am I supposed to deal with certain topics as a writer – as a Japanese writer?”

The Western literature that he reads and his discussions with Western thought constitute a multilayered encounter with texts narrated by the Other (the West) on the themes that interest him the most and which he further elaborates in his own writing. The significance of the figure of otherness is most evident in his relationship with novelist François Mauriac. Although they had never met personally, Mauriac was the guiding figure in Endō’s wanderings through Western literature, history, and thought, particularly Mauriac’s novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927). Mauriac appears in a number of Endō’s critical works, starting from the earliest essays ‘The Gods and God’, ‘*Katorikku sakka no mondai*’ (Dilemmas of Catholic Writers, 1947) and occupies a prominent place in his diary.

In 1952 Endō wrote the travelogue ‘*Terēzu no kage o ōtte*’ (Following the Shadow of Thérèse) as an account of his trip to the south-western corner of France, the settings of Mauriac’s works. In order to deepen his knowledge of French literature – to appropriate the essence of Mauriac’s prose – he considered it vital to visit the places Mauriac used as settings for the novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. The trip enacts a Japanese mode of acquiring a sense of reality and of meaning through pilgrimage, a practice known in Japan since the Heian period (8th – 11th century), which consisted of “being here and now”, physically through one’s own body. From a purely compositional perspective, this text situates Endō into the tradition of poets-travellers, whose works are known in Japan as *kikō* (the diaries of journey to the places

⁹ Takayama Tetsuo in his studies on Endō uses another term: *tasha* (another person; other; others). This is a direct translation of the Other/Autre.

related to Japanese literature). As his predecessors from classical literature, Endō records his observations and impressions from the trip through France, with the detailed topographic descriptions serving as starting point in self-reflection. These ultimately lead to ideas and questions of Endō's identity, both as a reader and as a writer. By immersing himself into the landscapes of Mauriac's Landes, such as dense marshes and pine forests,¹⁰ Endō juxtaposes the imaginary world of fiction with the reality he sees, as he follows the path of the characters of the novels. Through the pilgrimage, Endō discovers another aspect of the distance and otherness that allows us to recognize them as tools applied in order to reconcile, to appropriate, to make more understandable. It is the feature of distance that aims at moving otherness closer, making it one's own.

Mauriac represents the Other with his own story, with his own narration, whose essence Endō struggles to appropriate. However, as a mature writer, conscious of his literary heritage, Endō assumed a more critical standpoint towards Mauriac's prose and towards his attachment to the French novelist. In the essay 'Furansuwa Mōriakku to watashi' (François Mauriac and I, 1970), he openly speaks about the accompanying sense of distance that emerged from his reading of Mauriac:

[. . .] for a writer like myself, coming from as distant a country as Japan, there have been times when his literature was helpful and supportive, but at the same time, it provided dissatisfaction. [. . .] Mauriac's thought developed in France, a country with a Christian tradition, and it turned out that this kind of thinking is absolutely out of reach of the emotions of a man baptised in a country like Japan. At that point, it seems to me that I ultimately started feeling distance towards the writer. (Endō, 2004, p. 80)

Endō would challenge once again the otherness of Mauriac's prose in his later years when he publishes collection of essays *Watashi no aishita shōsetsu* (The Novel I Have Loved, 1985), which constitutes detailed analysis of *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. The topic choice testifies that the encounter with the story of the Other – Mauriac's novel – is for Endō not finished yet. Conversely, he appears to anticipate further confrontations, possibly further attempts to overcome the distance.

[. . .] saying 'I have read' and 'I have finished reading' are two different things. I have not entirely closed the book yet. The novel has given me many questions to think about and it confronted me with many problems and, at this stage of my life, it conveniently imposed on me a painful topic (Endō, 2004, p. 123).

2. Exchange

Oneself as Another: *Deep River*

Ricœur's final figure of otherness, named "the otherness of the conscience" is relevant for the study of Endō as an exchange or transformation of otherness, particularly in Endō's last novel,

¹⁰ Although outside the scope of this paper, analysis of the travel essay reveals interesting issues about how his descriptions of the surrounding nature directly impact onto Endō as an individual and as a writer. I believe that this can be further elaborated and discussed in relation to other works of Japanese literature that undertake the theme of human-environmental relationships, e.g. in Kawabata Yasunari's *The Sound of the Mountain*.

Fukai kawa (Deep River 1993, tr. 1994). Comparison between his non-fictional texts and the novel discloses the internal discourses and interdependences that occur across genres. To some extent, we can say that the novelistic treatment of otherness stems from and is a consequence of previous accounts, recorded by the writer in his essays and critical works. However, *Deep River*, as a work of fiction and thus employing specific literary tools, creates more complex and equivocal portrayal of otherness than the non-fiction. Both the novel's topic and climax transpose the lived experience of biography into a literary structure, with multiple images of otherness described through the telling of various different personal and intellectual contexts.

The novel's plot can be briefly summarized as an account of a journey to India undertaken by a group of Japanese people who do not know each other. In spite of the fact that the action takes place in present-day Japan, through the characters' memories it switches back to the past and that includes the time of the Pacific War. One way of looking at the otherness is as comparable to the depiction of the encounter with the Other that Endō recorded in his essays and critical works. Certain characters of *Deep River* read and interpret exactly the same pieces of Western literature as Endō did, such as Mauriac's novels, or they embark on identical journeys to the corners of France that Endō recorded in his own diary and non-fictional works. For these characters, the otherness that stems from the encounter with the culture of the West constitutes a significant, momentous event. The narration consists of polyphony – the multiple voices of the characters that put in order the author's biography, his own experience of encounter with the Other. Endō confirms that the characters of his novels are “portions of myself” (Endō, 1993, p. 5). In the realm of fiction, the narrative identity of the writer emerges more explicitly. Ricoeur says that narrative identity includes “change, mutability within the cohesion of one lifetime” (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 246).

In this last fictional work, Endō reconsiders the experience of otherness anew but his story of life, the narration remains unchanged. Indeed, Endō literally reinvents, for the sake of the fiction, his personal sense(s) of otherness. Here, Ricoeur's self-narrating subject and the purpose of autofictional writing converge, as the recognition of meaningful events of life that turn out crucial in the process of re-creating and re-gaining one's identity. Thus, the novel's characters, who individually and collectively testify of the writer's encounter with the Other, compose the picture of Endō's “shattered cogito”, revealing in turn the polysemical, complex and multifaceted quality of otherness.

For the characters of *Deep River*, another form of otherness emerges that initiates radical revaluations in their lives. The places that they visit in India bring to life a series of memories, feelings and experiences which are deeply traumatic. In the specific cultural context of India, and particularly in imagery of nature, darkness and dusk, otherness becomes closely linked with the tension constructed around the continuum “suffering – death – life”. Although the Other appears to be culturally and historically determined, the Other encountered by the Ganges speaks of the commonality of destiny and co-sympathy in suffering, features that permanently determine human condition regardless of the cultural context. In this way, India and the Ganges River mark the transition from the level of individual questions to the problem perceived on the principle of the generic, common destiny. Thus, “[t]he holy river took not only humans, but all living things in its embrace as it flowed away” (Endō, 1994, p. 143-144). As it flows, the deep river of the novel's title meanders through features of Hindu and Buddhist religion, a certain form of animism, and Christianity that interweaves with them as consubstantial with and complementary to the moment of universality. This moment is expressed through the necessity to resign to the uncertainty, helplessness and fragility of human existence.

The category of otherness captured in Endō's last novel, collects and makes audible a certain confessional character which may have gone unnoticed in his essays and critical works. We hear the confession of Endō the writer who through his characters was able to address many of his own dilemmas scattered among his non-fictional writings. In the condition of the novel, these speak in the manner termed by Ricœur as "otherness of conscience" that result from a number of factors which in turn lead to the self becoming obliged to restrain itself and to display respect that is directed to the outside, towards the Other. An aggregate of confrontations and disintegrations, cogito is a dynamic structure that comes into being within the dialectical processes and contradictions between being oneself and being the Other. It is a result of a process of which the most significant medium and its subject was Endō himself as *ihōjin*. Ricœur would say that "the self could return home only at the end of long journey. And it is 'as another' that the self returned" (Ricœur, 1995, p. 50).

Conclusions

Otherness in Endō Shūsaku's literary experience discussed through confrontation of various literary forms enables us to acknowledge that the significance of the writer's encounter with otherness and the Other included in his texts lies in exposing an exchange between what was alien and what he recognized as his own, as Japanese. Endō's constantly expanding, changing, developing form of the otherness takes multiple shapes and forms: internal (Japan) or external (the West); spiritual or physical; textual or personal. For Endō, the otherness possesses the polysemical character and the experience of the encounter is told in a number of ways, across different literary genres, characters and settings that all configure and refigure the story of one's life, re-reading its meaning anew.

The category of otherness, as understood by Ricœur, that has been employed to investigate a number of phenomena characteristic of Endō's works – including the problem of distance and the writer's subjectivity – stimulates an approach to the oeuvre of this writer, as well as perhaps many others, in a way that does not eliminate the writing persona, the author. Ricœur's category of otherness reminds us that the subject, the human being, in the form of the "shattered cogito" that has its own story to tell, cannot be eliminated from a series of questions that emerge within cross-cultural contemporaneity.

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