

The other side of happiness



One thing that Shusaku Endo's *Silence* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* have in common is the aftertaste they leave in the reader's intellectual palate. Unlike most authors, Endo and Kafka refuse to oblige the readers with a satisfying happy ending, opting instead for a less predictable but more dramatic finale. Despite the innocence of the central characters, both stories reach their zenith in the downfall of those characters: Rodrigues ends up a prisoner and an apostate, while Gregor dies alone in his room without ever regaining his humanity. In both books, the powerful though unhappy ending is balanced by a hopeful note that the character's downfall has contributed to a happy ending in another place and time. The hopeful addition is important in emphasizing the moral message in each story, which lies in how the central characters are able to find gratification in their defeat. The transformations of the characters in each work culminate in their respective downfalls, which come with other positive repercussions for themselves. In *Silence*, Rodrigues' downfall is epitomized in his new identity as an apostate and a prisoner. However, the positive repercussion of Rodrigues' apostasy is his amplified understanding of God's character. As he becomes aware of his spiritual filthiness, Rodrigues becomes ever more grateful of God's forgiveness and His presence as the only remaining comfort in his life. Rodrigues realizes the presence of God who was with Him the whole time, who told him that "it was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross" (171). His is a God who comes down to be condemned so that His people would not have to be condemned for the sins they commit in their weak and limited flesh. This alternative side of the power struggle is emphasized when Inoue confidently reinstates his victory over Christianity, to which Rodrigues objects, saying, "

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No, no. [...] My struggle was with Christianity in my own heart” (187). Thus, Endo implies that even though Rodrigues’ downfall is apparent in his power struggle against the Japanese, in a more positive light, he has won the faith struggle inside of his own heart through the strengthening of his relationship with God. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor’s downfall lies in his increasing isolation from humanity and his ultimate death. However, on the other hand, Gregor is able to escape his existentialist ennui through his death. This is evident in the description of Gregor’s train of thought as he lay dying. The narrator describes: He remembered his family with deep feeling and love. [...] He remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection until the clock struck three o’clock in the morning. [...] Then without willing it, [...] from his nostrils flowed out weakly his last breath. (85) This passage lies in stark contrast with his feelings in the rest of the book, such as his frustration at having to get out of bed in the morning or his trepidation at Mr. Samsa’s increasingly negative sentiments. For the first time, he feels peaceful and content. Thus, alternatively, the positive repercussion from Gregor’s death is his own victory over the stagnancy of life. The downfall of the characters also brings positive repercussions to the people around them. In *Silence*, even though Rodrigues is forever scandalized and imprisoned as an apostate, he imparts his newfound knowledge about salvation to Kichijiro. He consoles Kichijiro’s weakness by saying: There are neither the strong nor the weak. Can anyone say that the weak do not suffer more than the strong? [...] Since in this country there is now no one else to hear your confession, I will do it. [...] Go in peace! (191) Rodrigues relieves Kichijiro’s burden by indirectly noting the lesson that he himself learned through his apostasy: namely, that in their suffering, God Himself had suffered before them and with them. In <https://assignbuster.com/the-other-side-of-happiness-2/>

the end, Kichijiro goes off into the world with hope that he may learn from Rodrigues' mistakes and lead a faithful life. Similarly, in *The Metamorphosis*, despite the melancholy of Gregor's death, that very event allows the Samsa family to move on toward their bright future. Prior to this, Gregor sacrifices his time and efforts for his family by being the breadwinner. However, through his metamorphosis, that sacrifice is amplified. Without Gregor's financial support, the family is forced to take on their own jobs, which turn out to be a good idea. Gregor's death is the catalyst that allows the family to not be caged in their comfortable nest, but to keep moving toward a brighter future. The narrator describes how they talked "about future prospects, and they discovered that on closer observations these were not at all bad" (89). This fact is something that they would never risk and discover otherwise unless Gregor's metamorphosis occurred to break them free. The hopefulness of the situation is particularly highlighted through Grete; the narrator especially describes how "the daughter first lifted herself up and stretched her young body" (90). Kafka sets up Gregor's death while informing the readers that it allowed for these positive changes to occur. The hope that presents itself after the downfall of the characters is explored by the authors through the spiritual and natural settings. In both books, the setting changes during the falling action and denouement of the plot. In *Silence*, Rodrigues drinks in the atmosphere of Japan outside of his window as he sits in captivity. The passage that describes this scene does so with severe melancholy: His only consolation was to lean against the window and watch the people going to and fro. In the morning, women with boxes of vegetables on their heads would pass by. [...] In the evening, bonzes ringing their bells would pass down the slope. He would stare at this scenery of

Japan, drinking in every detail. (174) This passage describes the bucolic and peaceful scenery enjoyed by the Japanese, including the Japanese in the pit that Rodrigues saved by apostatizing. As an ironic contrast, Rodrigues himself is not able to take part in such beauty and is confined to his prison. However, this contrast also serves to highlight the balance between the hopelessness of Rodrigues' situation and the hopefulness that resulted from his sacrifice. Likewise, in *The Metamorphosis* after Gregor's death, the setting of the book dramatically changes. It becomes lighter and more serene, as can be seen from the serenity of the family as they embraced on the morning of Gregor's death, or how "the car in which they were sitting by themselves was totally engulfed by the warm sun" (89) as they talked to each other about their future. The hopefulness of the situation of the other characters such as Kichijiro and the Samsa family is saturated in contrast with the hopelessness of the central characters. Thus, the two stark images enhance and deepen the balance between despondency and optimism. The balance created by the bittersweet endings of these books is significant because it allows the authors to fit a hopeful moral message that balances the bleakness of the endings. The outcomes of the conflicts in the stories determine the moral messages conveyed to the readers. Because in both cases, the outcome of the conflict is the demise of the central character, both Endo and Kafka would have a difficult time sending positive messages in negative situations. Thus, the hopeful episodes of the secondary characters allow the authors to impart didactic messages. This stops both books from being a series of miserable events, instead making them into stories that can advise and teach the readers. This balance is evident in both books. Through the hopefulness presented in *Silence* when Rodrigues

acknowledges the hope he has in Christ and imparts that hope to Kichijiro, Endo successfully emphasizes the moral message about God's amazing grace and forgiveness to even the most vile of sinners. Through the hopefulness presented in *The Metamorphosis* when the family happily moves on with their lives after Gregor's transformation, Kafka is able to finalize the meaning of Gregor's downward spiral as a selfless and unsung sacrifice to allow for a positive metamorphosis in his family. The two authors have sacrificed conventionality, comfort, and the readers' good nights' sleep to deliver the books' emotionally powerful endings. Overall, Endo and Kafka have gone to great lengths in order to be able to pack more meaning into the stories they spun. However, the grotesqueness of the situations is balanced with a hopeful note to show the readers that their favorite characters did not perish in vain. Thus, through the hope that they give, both stories are able to deliver an ever more powerful moral message straight into the people's hearts. Bibliography: Endo, Shusaku. *Silence*. Taplinger Publishing: New Jersey. Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. Walking Lion Press: Utah.