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—Torbie Phillips
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In Homer's epic *The Odyssey*, fate is a tool of the gods used to bind mortals to certain paths and actions through life. This allows the Olympian gods both to use some humans as instruments of their will and to eliminate other mortals who are impious or displeasing to the divinities. Despite the power of this divine tool, *The Odyssey* demonstrates that humans can change their own destinies through their choices and actions.

The choices mortals make in *The Odyssey* do not at first appear significant. The immortal gods of Olympus
have overwhelming power and seem able to thwart or aid the endeavors of any mortal. This is the case when Athena, disguised as a man named Mentes, speaks to Odysseus’ son Telemachus about the mortal’s father:

And now I’ve come—and why? I heard that he was back… your father, that is. But no, the gods thwart his passage. Yet I tell you great Odysseus is not dead. He’s still alive,

I’ll make you a prophecy, one the immortal gods have planted in my mind—it will come true, I think,

He won’t be gone long from the native lands he loves, not even if iron shackles bind your father down. (I, 226-228, 231-234, 236)

This prophecy, coming straight from the mouth of a god, would seem to leave little room for the mortal Odysseus to influence his own fate; immortal, divine Athena has, after all, guaranteed his rapid return. This quote implies that it does not matter what he or other mortals do. Even if Odysseus were to commit a crime and find himself bound by “iron shackles,” Athena’s comment implies that she will help him break out of such bondage, so that he can still return home and fulfill this destiny. This implication, however, is not necessarily the entire truth; beyond her apparent promise of divine assistance is the methodology behind her action. While the reader knows it is Athena who is making this claim to Telemachus, the young mortal does not. By disguising herself as Mentes, Athena is both simplifying her meeting with Telemachus and,
more importantly, preventing her divine personage from being associated with these prophetic words should anything interfere with the proceedings she has set into place. In this prophecy, Athena is demonstrating the idea that the gods exert control over the events of the world, but not an unalterable control.

The possibility of mortal action interfering with the gods' plans is introduced in the first pages of *The Odyssey*, when Zeus gripes to Athena: “From us alone, [mortals] say, come all their miseries, yes, / but they themselves, with their own reckless ways, / compound their pains beyond their proper share” (1, 38-40). Here Zeus states that it is not the gods alone who control the destinies of mortals. He is talking about a man called Aegisthus, who has murdered a great Achaean king and courted the dead man's wife. Zeus says these are things the gods did not want to happen, and that they warned Aegisthus against committing either crime. While it is true that in doing these things Aegisthus spread only misery and death, he did so of his own free will, in direct defiance of the warnings and instructions he received from the gods. If mortals can go beyond the proper share of miseries allotted to them by the immortal gods as Aegisthus did, then mortals must, in some instances at least, have control over their own lives in *The Odyssey*.

Of course, it can be argued that the gods are merely allowing humans to increase their own misery or bring about punishment for their own transgressions, that indeed the gods use the illusion of free will as a tool. However, this argument
in favor of attributing all events to divine influence is flawed. Firstly, it doesn't explain how free will exists—whether it is representative of the nature of mortal existence or merely a dispensation from a divine entity wishing to see a mortal brought down purely by his own errors. More critically, however, it overlooks many pieces of the tale from Odysseus' journey before Athena's intervention—an intervention that began with her visit to Telemachus. During those years Odysseus visited the shade of the prophet Teiresias who related, "Even so [in spite of Poseidon's anger], you and your crew may still make it home, / suffering all the way, if you only have the power / to curb their wild desire and curb your own," (I, 117-119). Even this prophet only predicts that he "may" make it home, which implies that the future is not set in stone by the will of the gods. Teiresias is telling Odysseus that he and the crew still remaining can make it home in the face of the wrath of Poseidon. This does not sound as if free will is an allowance granted on occasion to mortals by the will of the gods, nor does it sound like free will is merely something the gods use to get mortals to punish themselves. Teiresias goes on to say, "Leave the [Sungod's cattle] unharmed, your mind set on home, / and you all may still reach Ithaca—bent with hardship / true," (XI, 125-127). This statement, with its reference to a purely mortal decision—the treatment of the cattle—is the deciding factor in their destiny, confirming the idea that humans, even in the face of a god's implacable wrath, have a chance at reaching the fate they desire through their own actions.

Despite both the helpful divinities and the wrathful gods Odysseus' crew deals with, it is not the gods alone who
decide whether the human warriors will reach their homes on the island of Ithaca. It is by a coming together of the mortals’ own folly and the hostile efforts of immortals that the crew is killed and Odysseus becomes imprisoned, returning to Ithaca only years later. Odysseus recounts later to the people who finally did take him home that the crew had moored their ship on the island of the Sungod against Odysseus’ advice, and the winds of Zeus had trapped them there for a whole month. Despite the crew’s oath to never harm the herds, Eurylochus leads the crew to drive off and slaughter the Sungod’s “finest” cattle when Odysseus goes inland to pray (XII, 315-386).

This example illustrates how the decisions of Odysseus’ mortal crew—led by Eurylochus—pile folly on top of the disasters the gods have already presented them and doom the crew to death, leaving Odysseus trapped. An immortal, Zeus, traps them on the island with “demonic gale,” but mortal men had convinced Odysseus to bring the ship into the harbor of the island on which they became trapped. It is the rulers of Olympus who put Odysseus into a “sound sleep” after he prays, but the crews who slaughter and skin the cattle of the Sungod, guaranteeing their deaths as prophesied by Teiresias and the goddess Circe. The mortal free will meets with the will of enough gods that the Ithacans’ venture home is obliterated “with a lightning-bolt and thunder,” and Odysseus is condemned to wait years more to return to his wife and the son he has never met (XII, 47-48).

Godly fate and mortal free will are two central ideas portrayed in the Homeric verses. Divine intervention
influences the destinies of mortals, but their intentional actions also help to determine the future. As a careful reading of this epic shows, it is not solely fate or free will that facilitates Odysseus' return, but a complicated combination of both that shapes the course of his journey.

Work Cited


*This essay was written for Cathy Davalos' Greek Thought Seminar.*
Aristophanes' final installment in his trilogy of plays concerning peace is a brazen comedy in which a group of frustrated women from all across Greece unite in a devious scheme to end the Peloponnesian war. In "Lysistrata," the mastermind and ringleader, Lysistrata, convinces all of the women of Hellas to deprive their husbands and lovers of sex until the men swear to instill peace in the nation. Skittishly, the women agree to participate in her plan and assist in the capture of the Acropolis, in which the city's money is stowed away. If the money is out of the reach of the men, they have no way to finance their war. Aristophanes, through slapstick
humor and shameless sex jokes, juxtaposes discomforts of war with the joys of fulfilled desire.

The women in “Lysistrata” are distressed over losing their lovers, husbands, and sons to war for years at a time and even possibly forever. The young, single women are in fear of remaining virgins as the number of eligible bachelors decreases. The women recognize that the war is destroying Greece as the city-states are pitted against one other. However, their argument for peace is severely lacking. They fail to properly explain and outline the violent atrocities of war, and the solution they propose to fix the nation’s diplomatic problems is naive and unrealistic. Aristophanes’ play, while pro-peace in the simplest sense, is insufficient in anti-war literature terms. While the play is often seen as an anti-war argument, the men only establish peace because they can’t stand the sex deprivation, not because they are opposed to war.

Lysistrata realizes that Athens cannot end the war on its own. She brings all of the women of the warring states together, including Sparta and Thebes, and they cooperate in order to unite all of Greece and establish peace. They are motivated to do so only because they cannot stand to be separated from their husbands for so long due to the burden of war. In her supplication of her fellow Greek women, Lysistrata asks, “I know you all have men abroad—Wouldn’t you like to have them home?” (23). This starts off a flood of complaints from the women, all lamenting at the absence of their military husbands. She then asks whether they would
be willing to participate in a plan to end the war, to bring about peace by complete abstinence from sex. The women are hesitant at first but finally agree as Lysistrata promises that after a time without sex, their men will be so mad with lust that “they’ll conclude a treaty rather quickly” (27). For extra measure and to ensure the men’s disadvantage and weakened state, they also take over the Acropolis, cutting off the men from the money supplying their war (28).

As the women’s efforts are criticized by the Commissioner, who claims that the women bear no share in the war, Lysistrata retorts,

The quota we bear is double. First, we delivered our sons to fill out the front lines in Sicily. . . Next, the best years of our lives were levied. Top level strategy attached our joy, and we sleep alone. But it’s not the matrons like us who matter. I mourn for the virgins, bedded in single blessedness with nothing to do but grow old.

(61-62)

Here, Lysistrata maintains that women do share a part in the pain of war, but only in a limited sense. She complains that the women are left alone, and that some are left lonely and unmarried. Because they neglect to mention the unnecessary violence, the tragic loss of lives, and the money ill-spent, the argument posed by the women is narrow and self-centered. Their argument for peace is not as thorough as a plea to end
a war could be. When asked for an alternative to solving the diplomatic problems between the warring city-states, Lysistrata poses a solution. She suggests that the men should treat the sensitive state of affairs just as the women handle the production of yarn from fleece. She delineates a step-by-step process of cleansing and combing out the fleece, removing all the "knots and snarls," a process that leads to the "spinning" of all of the citizens of Greece together in friendship, including immigrants and debtors, and "weaving" them into a protective "cloak" for the city (61). Romantic and idealistic as her plan may be, it is terribly unrealistic and impossible to implement. She has reduced complex political disagreements to an analogy of spinning yarn. In reality this situation could not so simply be resolved.

Peace is nonetheless established as the men from Athens, Sparta and Thebes, united by the suffering they've all endured due to lack of sex, put down their weapons. "Let's send for Lysistrata. Only she can reconcile our differences. There'll be no Peace for us without her" (100), cries Kinesias, as the men convene and decide they cannot take the forced celibacy any longer. To begin the peace meeting, Lysistrata calls for a personification of peace: a beautiful, young, unclothed girl. Lysistrata commands Peace to bring the men from Sparta and the men of Athens together at the site at which she'll command the delegation. The attractive, naked Peace acts solely as an enticement to push the men further over the edge and cause them to agree to stop fighting that much faster. And while Lysistrata makes the effort to explain to the men of Athens and Sparta how much they owe each other and how much
more beneficial it would be to be allies, the men are completely
distracted by their lust for Peace (101-104). After some hasty
discussion over land possession, Kinesias once again lets his
opinion be known: “We’re over-extended already! Wouldn’t
every ally approve our position—Union now?” (105). The men
from Sparta agree. Lysistrata rewards them with an invitation
to the Acropolis, where they will be treated to an extravagant
banquet and after which, “every man... will take his wife and
depart for home” (105). This resolution and establishment of
peace is accomplished in such a shallow manner that it does
not allow for a real argument against war.

The notion that “Lysistrata” is Aristophanes’ argument
for peace is a romantic one; however, it holds no water. It seems
this comedy is not a piece of real anti-war literature because the
women resolve to partake in their peace-establishment plan
only for narrow, self-centered reasons. They are tired of being
left alone and the young single women fear the life of a spinster.
While it is mentioned that the war would destroy Greece only
for the Persians’ benefit, the play neglects to explore this idea
any further. It is mentioned that the men are squandering
the city’s money in the senseless fighting, but that is also left
unexplained and unexplored in the play’s text. Furthermore,
the deviant scheme carried out by the women of Greece only
succeeds due to their male counterparts’ physical desires and
is contrived only out of knowledge of the males’ inability to
be forced into celibacy. The women have no real intention of
enlightening their men to the atrocities and fallacies of war.
They only want to drive them to mad lust by depriving them
of sex so that they will do anything, including agree to stop
fighting, in order to alleviate their lust. Aristophanes fails to present a real argument against war; his aim is apparently only to entertain with a silly situational comedy posed by the ridiculous and absurd circumstances of the play. "Lysistrata," as subversive and inflammatory as it is, does nothing to condemn war and consequently lacks a substantial anti-war message.

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This essay was written for David DeRose's Greek Thought Seminar.
The founding fathers of the United States of America created divided branches of government because they were deathly afraid of one individual's holding too much power. Power has long captivated the attention of mankind. Sophocles recognizes the dangers power poses in the hands of any one individual and uses his plays "Oedipus the King," "Oedipus at Colonus," and "Antigone" to convey his ideas about power to his readers. Although many argue that Oedipus' personal faults uniquely produce catastrophe, Sophocles contends that power is the true catalyst of catastrophe and corrupts even the virtuous.
When Oedipus wins power in Thebes, his resulting arrogance and obstinacy lead him to uncover the tragedy he has perpetuated. In response to the people of Thebes crying out for rescue from the blight that plagues their land, Oedipus touts himself as "the Great," the "Champion of [his] country" who will "do everything" ("Oedipus the King" 8, 136, 145). Oedipus thumbs his nose at the gods and prophets because he has not only ridden Thebes of the Sphinx, but also has solved the riddle by his wit alone ("Oedipus the King" 399). Oedipus’ arrogance is staggering; his downfall is expected and proceeds accordingly. Oedipus sends for Teiresias, the well-respected seer of Thebes, to ask who the murderer of Laius is and then flies into a temper when the prophet claims he will tell Oedipus nothing because it will be easier for both of them ("Oedipus the King" 334). The power Oedipus has enjoyed as King of Thebes makes him irascible when he does not get his way. Even though eventually he does get his way, his pride blinds him to the fact that it might have been best to follow Teiresias’ advice. When Teiresias can no longer endure being called a “villain” and the “complotter” of Laius’ murder, he finally admits that Oedipus is the murderer of the king ("Oedipus the King" 335, 347, 361, 358). Oedipus goes through the roof; ranting and raving, he does not even pause to consider if there might be any accuracy in the prophet’s words. This ignorance results from his excessive sense of self-importance, an inflated sense that is partly a result of his power as the King of Thebes. Obstinacy, fatally combined with arrogance, further provokes his catastrophic end. Oedipus blocks out not only Teiresias’ warnings but also the herdsman’s cries of “please don’t ask me more” ("Oedipus the King" 1165). He even turns a deaf ear on
Jocasta when she begs him to “not hunt this out” (“Oedipus the King” 1060). Oedipus stubbornly persists in seeking the truth from the chorus, until he discovers that he has killed his father and slept with his mother, and his anguish over this discovery leads him to violently blind himself (“Oedipus the King” 1270). As the chorus so wisely warns, “insolence breeds the tyrant” (“Oedipus the King” 874), but a tyrant cannot exist without power; power exacerbates Oedipus’ less than honorable qualities, resulting in his downfall.

While Oedipus demonstrates obvious arrogance and superciliousness, Creon remains composed and sensible. Although “[injured] doubly and most vitally [and] called a traitor to [his] city” by Oedipus, Creon remains calm, asking if Oedipus is in his “right mind” when he accuses Creon in this way (“Oedipus the King” 521-522, 528). Immediately, the contrast between Creon and Oedipus presents itself: Oedipus flies into a rage before being accused of anything, but here Creon, accused of high treason, accepts it and looks to solve the issue. Later, when confronted by Oedipus himself, Creon asks if he will “listen to words... and then pass judgment,” avoiding conflict and attempting to provide an explanation if given the chance (“Oedipus the King” 544). Even when Oedipus flings further insults, calling Creon “foe” and accusing him of plotting against him, Creon remains even-tempered, only saying, “when I know nothing, I usually hold my tongue” (“Oedipus the King” 569-570). Creon’s patience is masterful; as the chorus claims, “his words are wise,” and Oedipus had best leave it alone (“Oedipus the King” 617, 685). Creon’s peaceful manner allows him to explain the absurdity of Oedipus’ charge,
for, as Creon states, “as it stands now, the prizes are all mine—and without fear” (“Oedipus the King” 590). Creon states that desiring power, given that its problems outweigh its benefits, is completely nonsensical. By remaining removed and relaxed when wrongfully accused, Creon appears to be unaffected by the corruption of power.

When Creon comes to power, however, his virtuous character decays as his flaws are exacerbated. At first, Creon demonstrates wisdom and constraint in his ruling, allowing Oedipus to hold his children one last time, saying that he “will not taunt [Oedipus] with evil of the past” (“Oedipus the King” 1423). Creon, less arrogant and impulsive than Oedipus, wisely guides his country through hard times and forgives past mistakes in the interest of progress. Again, unlike Oedipus, Creon claims he will “learn from the God the course of action [he] should follow” (“Oedipus the King” 1439). Pious rulers have traditionally been highly praised and brought prosperity for themselves and country. This happens with Creon—at first. As Creon becomes accustomed to his power, however, cracks begin to emerge in his character. Once so forgiving of Oedipus’ crimes, now in “Oedipus at Colonus,” he calls him a “miserable creature” and threatens to take his daughters away to further his own ends (“Oedipus at Colonus” 804, 818). Creon changes drastically from the virtuous, idyllic ruler to a corrupted fiend. The chorus cries to Creon, “You appear / to be of those who are just, but what you do / is found to be evil” (“Oedipus at Colonus” 938) and later calls him a fool (“Oedipus at Colonus” 1212). Powerful fools are dangerous, as Creon proceeds to demonstrate. Creon’s power leads him to flaunt an inflated
sense of self-righteousness and infallibility. His previous sagacity vanishes, leaving him complacently convinced of his own superior judgments. Increasingly egotistical, when Creon learns that his law regarding the fallen Polyneices has been broken, he loses his patience as well, obsessed with discovering and punishing the wrongdoers. Creon’s rise to power destroys the very virtues that set him apart from Oedipus in the opening of “Oedipus the King”—a tyrant once again rules Thebes.

Creon’s narcissistic confidence in his own infallibility, a direct result of his newfound power, blinds him from the truth and leads him to tragedy in “Antigone.” Although Creon’s initial judgment that never “shall the wicked man have precedence in honor over the just” may be righteous, he disgraces Polyneices by letting his corpse be “chewed up by birds and dogs and violated” (“Antigone” 208, 206). Creon’s colossal blunder occurs when he, like Oedipus, fails to listen to wise advice. The sentry warns him that “it’s a bad thing if one judges and judges wrongly,” but Creon snubs him and persists in his own ways (“Antigone” 323). His own son Haemon points out that the city mourns for Antigone and that Creon may be mistaken, but Creon ignores him too, lashing out in anger (“Antigone” 693, 743). Even Teiresias cries that Creon stands “on the razor edge of danger”; although Creon admits that he has “steered well the ship of state” because he has never turned from Teiresias’ advice, here he refuses to see sense, caught up with the idea that he is right (“Antigone” 998, 994). Deeming himself infallible, the holder of all authority, Creon refuses to listen to others. Integral to a good leader is the ability to admit personal mistakes and listen to advice—particularly
wise advice. Creon’s love of power produces an arrogance and sense of infallibility that render him incapable of doing either. Even when Antigone stresses that he cannot “override God’s ordinances,” namely, respect for the dead, Creon refuses to change his mind and rectify his mistakes, accusing Antigone of plotting against him and screaming, “When I am alive no woman shall rule!” (“Antigone” 455, 526). Creon’s blind enforcement of his own erroneous judgments leads to debacle: Haemon leans on his sword and drives it into his own ribs, and the Queen is found dead, grief-stricken for her son (“Antigone” 1235, 1282). Creon’s actions result in “mistakes... laden with death” (“Antigone” 1262). Once so virtuous and content, Creon rises to power, leading to utter ruin for himself and others.

The chorus asserts that one with an “ill-starred pride of heart” should be stricken with “an evil doom” (“Oedipus the King” 887-888). Sophocles leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind that this is true. Power, however, appears not only to exacerbate but to produce this fateful arrogance. If all power leads even the virtuous to the level of devastation that Creon incurs, perhaps distancing ourselves from power provides the only foolproof solution. Creon claims “it is impossible to know any man. . . / until he shows his skill in rule and law” (“Antigone” 173, 175). If rulers inescapably become prideful and assured of their own infallibility, perpetuating disastrous consequences, let us pray that Creon is incorrect here once again, for that is indeed a sad indictment of mankind.
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_This essay was written for Victoria Phillips' Greek Thought Seminar._
In 19th century thought, Karl Marx, John Henry Newman, Charles Darwin, and Henry David Thoreau present civilization as something that inhibits people from reaching their full potential as human beings. The ways in which people are encouraged to live and think alienate them from their own humanity. Society's unspoken requirement of specialization of knowledge, the resulting lack of time, and the imposition of society's thoughts and...
values on individuals—each prohibits the individual from reaching his full potential.

The emphasis civilization puts on the specialization of knowledge and the lack of time many workers face obstruct the path to achieving full human potential by limiting knowledge to a small window of expertise. Karl Marx, in *Wage-Labor and Capital*, criticizes civilization for the “sacrifice of... life” endured by the working class (Marx 19). A working-class man only had one developed skill to work with, and he worked full days doing this one task. By receiving only enough pay to cover his “means of subsistence,” what was necessary to “keep alive,” a working-class man was forced into a vicious cycle (Marx 26, 19). Any wages went directly to immediate needs such as food and rent, and therefore nothing was left over. The worker was forced to work full days in order to survive to the next week, when he would then spend his wages on the same immediate needs, and the cycle would start over again. The twelve hours of work had “no meaning for him,” as the product meant nothing to the worker (Marx 19). As a result, the worker was reduced to “a simple monotonous force of production, with neither physical nor mental elasticity” (Marx 45). The time a worker devoted to work in order to survive week to week meant there was little to no time left to do other things with his life. He was unable to mentally explore areas of knowledge outside of his chosen skill and was therefore limited in terms of how far he could progress toward his full potential as a human.

John Henry Newman builds on Marx’s point in *The Uses of Knowledge*. He declares: “we perfect our nature...
by adding to it what is more than nature” (Newman I, 709-710). This carries the implication that our full potential lies in expanding on what we already have. Like Marx, Newman is adamant about the need to explore multiple subjects to advance the self. He adds, however, that it is even more important to have an opportunity to connect what is learned to what is already known. “Viewing many things at once as a whole,” understanding their “place in the universal system [and] their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence” provide for the “perfection” of the intellect (Newman II, 378-383). The problem created by civilization here is the same as the problem that Marx found: there is little time or opportunity to study more than one skill. For Newman, however, this issue simply leads to a more destructive problem for human potential. By having little substance in the intellect, only a few connections can be made, and thus the person will have a limited understanding and respect for each skill and its place in the whole. Examining multiple disciplines in order to make connections among them is therefore necessary in order to move towards full human potential, and possessing “even a portion of this illuminative reason... is the highest state to which nature can aspire” (Newman II, 400-401).

In addition, the force of society’s firmly-established values inhibits an individual’s potential through the restriction of any deviation of thought. As a result of this societal pressure, it is much easier for an individual to acquiesce to the majority’s accepted ideas than to battle the difficulties of questioning them. The reception of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* is a prime example of the common resistance to new
The authority of society makes deviation nearly impossible. A "load of prejudice" was mounted against Darwin's theory of evolution, as it was a new theory contradicting millennia of accepted thought (Darwin 116). The change was potentially threatening in the opinion of societal organizations such as the Church, so civilization rejected the theory. Therefore, many people were less inclined to consider the possible validity of Darwin's theory because civilization dictated that it was more suitable to "attach more weight to unexplained difficulties than to the explanation of... facts" (Darwin 116). The immense authority society has over the individual makes deviation nearly impossible, and consequently the intellect is confined to the slim box of acceptable thought. Thinking outside the box and questioning what is accepted, however, are central to the expansion of intellect. Even today, it is against common practice to question an authority figure and consequently, it is much easier to take what is taught as fact, without question. The intellect is still restricted to civilization's accepted thought, rather than expanded through personal exploration. Lack of exploration stunts intellectual growth, which contributes directly to one's inability to reach full human potential.

The values of modern society, such as the emphasis on the accumulation of wealth, further hinder the development of human potential. The busyness of work-oriented civilization prevents people from letting go of stress and attaining spiritual and emotional health, which are vital to attaining full human potential. In "Walking," Thoreau notes that the importance of spiritual health is often forgotten in the bustling, civilized world. He marvels that people who "confine themselves to shops
and offices the whole day for weeks, months... and years" have
not “committed suicide long ago” and are seemingly content
with being “submissive members of society” (Thoreau 75, 108). The art of walking, according to Thoreau, is the process
of spiritual renewal that completes and refreshes a man, who
is much more than a physical body. A walk is separate from
everything else in daily life and is a time to be reconnected with
the senses. Thoreau stresses the importance of integrating the
sensual and the spiritual, exclaiming: “I am alarmed when... I
have walked a mile into the woods bodily but not in spirit... What
business have I in the woods, if I am thinking something out of
the woods?” (Thoreau 78-79). Civilization’s condoned lifestyle,
however, is one centered around work. It is nearly impossible
for many people to leave behind trouble and stress to take a
walk, even if they have the time to go on one. Without
a form of release, stress can crowd and weaken the mind; it
strains the intellect, which, without being fully healthy, is less
able to perform to its fullest potential.

In the individualistic, capitalistic societies prevalent
today, these same values and lifestyles that Thoreau speaks
of prove problematic. The desire to work as much as possible
to achieve immense material gain has taken over. The result
is a society of busy people preoccupied with work and full of
stress. Few people take time out of their day to attend to the
health of their mind and spirit, especially time completely
free of daily concerns. In corporate America, for example,
constant worries about work overshadow any spiritual needs.
With the availability and popularity of cell phones, people are
expected to be available all the time, whether during work
hours or not. Therefore, it is difficult to ever leave work and the accompanying stress behind to tend to oneself. The result is a civilization of frazzled, spiritually needy people who cannot possibly reach their full potential due to all the stress that eats away at the spirit and invades the mind.

The authors of these texts highlight an important concept in modern thought: we as human beings are limited in our humanity. Our lives, values, and perceptions of the world prevent us from fully developing our potential as humans. It seems that for all of our advances there is plenty of room for improvement. This all begs the question: Is it really civilization that is to blame, or do humans choose to limit themselves? After all, we have created the civilization we live in, and if the desire is strong enough, we have the power to change it.

Works Cited


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In his book *Of Love and Other Demons*, Gabriel García Márquez describes the different effects of love on each of the characters. Márquez uses the story of the main character, Sierva Maria, to explain why he categorizes love in conjunction with “other demons.” The novel offers numerous
dichotomies in categories such as race, language, religion, mental state, culture, and class. **Although the combination of love and other demons may sound unusual, by the end of Márquez's novel, love has negatively altered each character's life.** The death of Sierva Maria may be caused by love, but with her life Márquez reminds us that society is filled with other demons that lead to the imprisonment and torture of Sierva Maria.

Márquez points out the fine lines between several opposing ideas; the culture in which Sierva Maria lives is one filled with contrasts. The 12-year-old girl is raised by the slaves at her home, but she also sees her parents' bleak lives. Márquez uses this setting to establish several binary oppositions. Two races (black and white), two types of languages (African and Spanish), two religions (Catholic and Yoruban), and two cultures and classes (slave and decaying nobility) are put side by side in the book. Even two mental states (sane and insane) appear throughout the novel. However, all of these dichotomies can exist together. For example, one of the slaves who raises Sierva Maria practices both religions:

Dominga de Adviento, a formidable black woman who ruled the house with an iron fist until the night before her death, was the link between these two worlds. . . [She] became a Catholic without renouncing her Yoruban beliefs and she practiced both religions at the same time, and at random. . .

(11)
Dominga is essentially Sierva Maria's mother at the beginning of the book. As a result, Sierva Maria speaks the African languages, practices the slave religion, and becomes familiar with their culture. Even though Sierva Maria rejects her parents' lifestyle, Dominga demonstrates that the two worlds can exist side by side. The peaceful coexistence of two religions for one individual also suggests that these faiths may not be entirely different.

Later in the novel, Márquez writes, “Crazy people are not crazy if one accepts their reasoning” (35). This phrase ridicules those who push the idea that Sierva Maria has rabies even though she shows no signs until her torture begins. However, the phrase also describes the fine line between fantasy and reality. The townspeople, Sierva Maria's father, and the believers at the convent turn their delusions of rabies and demons into reality when they push Sierva Maria to her wit's end. These contrasting conditions affect Sierva Maria even as she is growing up: “She had begun to blossom under a combination of contradictory influences” (12). She observes her mother's ignorance, her father's uncertain faith, and the world of the slaves. These different worlds coexist peacefully until the narrow-mindedness of the townspeople and their wish to create division influence her father and lead to Sierva Maria's eventual imprisonment and death. In this novel, the boundaries between sane and insane—and all other “opposing” ideas—are drawn by the public, who constantly search for a scapegoat.

As more people in the story become convinced that Sierva Maria has the "plague," a demon, or another disease
inside of her, Sierva Maria's father falls deeper into the belief that he truly loves his daughter. After the rabid dog bites Sierva Maria, the Marquis rebuilds his faith and calls his strict enforcements over his daughter "love." According to Márquez, "[the Marquis] always believed he loved his daughter, but the fear of rabies obliged [him] to admit to himself that this was a lie for the sake of convenience" (16). While Sierva Maria's mother openly hates her daughter, the father's sudden interest in his child's life is incredibly destructive. He separates her from her slave family, calls the doctor who tortures her, and decides to send her to a convent where she will be exorcised. His "love" for Sierva Maria is the demon that causes her death. The Marquis' actions demonstrate the small separation between love and pain. He claims to inflict all of these restraints on his daughter because it is a "commandment of God." When the doctor, Abrenuncio, asks where this sudden recovery of faith has come from, the Marquis answers: "One never quite stops believing . . . Some doubt remains forever" (72). The Marquis wants to trust in something because he has led such a disappointing life, but he wavers between belief and disbelief. Unfortunately, his hesitant faith negatively affects his daughter, and his love leads to her sabotage.

The worst torture inflicted upon Sierva Maria occurs during her time at the convent, as those who practice judgment, blame, and intolerance try to cure her of her "demon." Yet the priests and nuns who persecute the young girl inflict their own demons upon her. Cayetano Delaura, the priest who takes over Sierva Maria's case, explains:
The Corrosive Nature of Love

Sometimes we attribute certain things we do not understand to the demon, not thinking they may be things of God that we do not understand. . . One must not believe demons even when they speak the truth.

(80)

The leaders of the convent believe that there is a demon inside of Sierva Maria that caused the rabies, but what they perceive as evil and demonic are simply unfamiliar practices. Their ignorance is a demon as they isolate the young girl and strip her of everything familiar. The Marquis’ “love” for his daughter that caused him to send her to the convent is a catalyst for the rest of the events in the story, including Sierva Maria’s death. Delaura immediately recognizes, “Even if she were not possessed by any demon, . . . this poor creature is in the most propitious environment for becoming so” (82). The persecution of Sierva Maria, her father’s “love,” and the convent’s blame become so intertwined that there is no clear definition of ‘love’ or ‘demons’.

It is possible for Sierva Maria to be “dead of love” at the end of the novel because in the world Márquez describes, there is only a small separation between suffering and love. The description of love can be compared to the rumor about Abrenuncio:

He had invented a pill to be taken once a year, which enhanced one’s health and lengthened one’s life but caused such mental derangement
for the first three days that no one but the doctor had dared to swallow it.

(19)

The risk of the pill parallels the positive and negative effect of love. Although love has a chance to enhance health and lengthen life, it may cause suffering, mental derangement, and even death for all parties involved. While Sierva Maria suffers in her cell, her mother and father decay alone in their house; the man who falls in love with Sierva Maria suffers as well. Delaura states, "It is the demon, Father. . . The most terrible one of all" (118). This love for Sierva Maria causes considerable grief. In the world of indiscriminate separation between black and white, sane and insane, love and the demons become a part of Sierva Maria and ultimately cause her death.

By the end of the novel, love's destructive nature has affected every character. The "love" of the Marquis directly affects his daughter's life, the confinement of Sierva Maria leads to the decay of her parents, and the love Delaura has for the young martyr causes him suffering. Love then becomes associated with other demons such as prejudice and blame. Just like Abrenuncio's miraculous medication, love may produce beneficial results, but it has devastating side effects.
Work Cited


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Bronze, lost wax fusion
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