THE UNDERGRADUATE

THE NEWMAN PRIZE ESSAYS
2010-2011

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Published by
THE COLLEGIATE SEMINAR
PROGRAM

Saint Mary's College of California

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A warm thank you to all the students whose work was submitted to the Newman Awards Contest, to the instructors for their guidance, to the judges for their time and work in selecting the 2010-2011 prize essays, to my UG staff for their invaluable editing assistance, and to the Collegiate Seminar Program and the School of Liberal Arts for supporting The Undergraduate and the Newman Writing Awards.

— Torbie Phillips
CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL
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In Homer's The Odyssey, the Greek gods and goddesses dominate the lives of the mortals, using their control of the weather and their ability to alter the physical appearance of objects to make the mortals subservient to their whims. However, the relationship between Athena and Odysseus is one of equals, as they each rely on the other: Athena depends on Odysseus in order to achieve honor, glory, and praise, while Odysseus relies on Athena to help him get home.
Athena's affection for Odysseus predates the events and actions in *The Odyssey*. At Troy, Athena is Odysseus' guardian, giving him physical strength, courage, and inspiring him with ideas like the Trojan horse. Heralds sing of "the wooden horse / Epeus built with Athena's help, the cunning trap that / good Odysseus brought one day to the heights of Troy" (VIII 552-554). The wooden horse helps secure victory for the Achaeans and end the Trojan War, neither of which would have been possible had it not been for Athena's patronage and inspiration.

It can be argued that Odysseus gains much more from his relationship with Athena than he contributes to it. Athena actively advocates his cause, making him the recipient of much assistance. However, Athena gains something as well: she receives personal satisfaction, glory, and honor from Odysseus' victories. Why Athena takes an interest in Odysseus becomes clear over the course of the poem. She admires many of the qualities he possesses and revels in the glory she receives by advocating his cause. Zeus claims that Odysseus "excels all men in wisdom, excels in offerings too / he gives the immortal gods who rule the vaulting skies" (I 79-80). Through his wisdom and piety, Odysseus also receives glory and honors the gods and goddesses. Although Athena is more powerful, she still depends on Odysseus to do his part in paying homage to her.

Athena's plans and actions rely on Odysseus' playing his role well and not deviating or improvising too much. Athena's speech to Odysseus upon his return to Ithaca illustrates two
important things which reveal much about the dynamic relationship between these two characters. In the first part of the speech Athena praises Odysseus for the traits she finds most admirable. The reason she finds these traits so important is because she also possesses them or because they are complementary to her strengths. She demonstrates this when she remarks to Odysseus,

‘Any man—any god who met you—would have to be some champion lying cheat to get past you for all-round craft and guile! You terrible man, foxy, ingenious, never tired of twists and tricks—so, not even here, on native soil, would you give up those wily tales that warm the cockles of your heart!’

(XIII 329-334)

Here, she compliments him on his craft, guile, and ingenuity. Athena also reflects upon their dependence on one another when she says,

‘Here among mortal men you’re far the best at tactics, spinning yarns, and I am famous among the gods for wisdom, cunning wiles, too. Ah, but you never recognized me, did you? Pallas Athena, daughter of Zeus—who always stands beside you’

(XIII 336-342)
Athena reminds Odysseus that she is “here once more, to weave a scheme with you” (XIII 344). This shows how they are complicit in each other’s schemes and depend upon one another to help their plans succeed.

Athena’s actions are driven by a desire to help Odysseus, but she also has an ulterior motive. Even though she genuinely seems to care about Odysseus, as she tells Zeus that her “heart breaks for Odysseus” (I 57), it becomes apparent that her interest in Odysseus is more self-serving. In her speech to him, she builds her own ego by reveling in the reputation they share as cunning, ingenious, crafty, and full of guile. All of these traits require some level of deception and deviousness. Athena and Odysseus are able to achieve their individual goals through these shared traits. As Odysseus ventures home, he undergoes a series of challenges that spread his fame. Using her wit and power, Athena helps him overcome obstacles that lie in the path of his journey so that he will praise her and increase her honor and glory even more. Ultimately Athena does succeed in bringing Odysseus safely home to Ithaca. In doing so, however, Odysseus is forced to kill the suitors overrunning his house as well as confront the suitors’ families seeking to avenge them. Athena averts the impending civil war and “hand[s] down her pacts of peace / between both sides for all the years to come” (XXIV 599-600). By preventing the slaughter—that she helped to facilitate—Athena is showcasing her wisdom and building up her reputation at the risk of the safety and well-being of both Odysseus and his family.
Athena relies on Odysseus’ piety and honor in order to get the support they each need in order to achieve their independent goals. She tries to invoke pity from Zeus for Odysseus, because she alone does not have enough power or authority to give orders to other gods or even nymphs, imploring Zeus:

‘have you no care for him in your lofty heart?
Did he never win your favor with sacrifices
burned beside the ships on the broad plain of Troy?
Why, Zeus, why so dead set against Odysseus?’
(I 71-75)

Zeus agrees with Athena’s proposal to let Odysseus go free primarily because he remembers the offerings Odysseus has made to him (I 76-80). This shows that Athena alone could not secure his release; therefore she depends on Odysseus’ piety and respect to help his case. Thus, neither Odysseus nor Athena could have succeeded alone had it not been for the actions of the other.

Athena also alters Odysseus’ appearance when necessary to make their plan succeed. She relies on Odysseus to play the part and he depends on her to change his physical appearance. When the Phaeacians propose a contest to test their strength and prove their valor, “over Odysseus' head and shoulders now / Athena lavished a marvelous splendor, yes, / making him taller, more massive to all eyes / so Phaeacians might regard the man with kindness, / awe and respect” (VIII 20-24). Athena enhances Odysseus’ stature, so that the Phaeacians, who value physical strength, are more willing to help Odysseus.

By winning these contests, Odysseus gains respect.
By winning these contests, Odysseus gains respect, honor, and glory, which reflect upon Athena and venerate her as well.

In the journey of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus and Athena have a mutually dependent relationship. Odysseus wishes to return home to Ithaca and make a name for himself, neither of which he can do without the help of Athena. On the other hand, Athena wants honor and devotion from the mortal hero. In order for them to achieve these goals, they must rely on each other. In the end, Odysseus returns home with honor and Athena is praised for her patronage of such a great warrior and her role in preventing a civil war. Homer ultimately makes the point that the human capacity for success is very limited without the assistance of the gods. The gods of this epic, however, have self-serving motivations for the success of their human protégés. This perception of the relationship between man and immortal is more complicated than the power differential may suggest. Through this, Homer brings into question the true nature of humanity's connection to the divine.

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*This essay was written for*

*Ben Klein's Greek Thought Seminar.*
Ancient Greek figures often face troubling dilemmas. Philosophers and characters of plays and poems such as Socrates, Orestes, and Antigone are trapped again and again between conflicting laws pulling them in opposite directions, forcing them to make decisions that will affect the rest of their lives. What Sophocles, Plato, and Aeschylus seem to express in common is best put by Pylades in Aeschylus' "The Libation Bearers." Though he is onstage for most of the play, a constant companion of the hero, Orestes, Pylades is bestowed only
one line—but that line is imbued with such simple, powerful advice that it is possibly the most important line of the play: “Make all mankind your enemy, not the gods” (“The Libation Bearers” 888). **When we are faced with a choice between obeying man’s laws and the laws of the gods, Antigone, Socrates, and Athena advise us to honor the gods.**

“Antigone” by Sophocles is a prime example of this message. The drama opens with Creon’s declaration that Antigone’s brother Polyneices “shall no one honor with a grave that none shall mourn” (Sophocles 223). Because Creon is king, the edict becomes man’s law, a law to “leave him without burial” (Sophocles 224). Though man’s law forbids Antigone from burying her brother, she buries him anyway because the law of the gods bids her to do so. Even though Polyneices has battled with their brother, Eteocles, and has attacked her home, she feels that “the god of death demands...[burial] rites for both” her siblings (Sophocles 570). She is willing to die for her sacred duty to bury Polyneices because she “[does] not believe / [Creon’s] proclamation [has] such power to enable / one who will someday die to override / God’s ordinances, unwritten and secure” (Sophocles 496-499). She believes that Creon is not acting in the name of Justice, but instead is acting from his own petty, human perspective. She makes the choice to become “a criminal—but a religious one” (Sophocles 85). The tie she feels to her brother and her holy responsibility to love and pay respect to him requires her to act against man’s law.

Though some might argue that Antigone is not a good example of being rewarded for honoring the gods because she
is punished for her actions, this is only partially true. Antigone
is punished for breaking man's law, but the gods honor her by
making her a hero. Creon's edict makes the punishment for
burying Polyneices "death by stoning publicly," but he amends
the law when Antigone breaks it (Sophocles 41). Knowing
that killing her is, in truth, wrong, but still wanting to exercise
his power over her, Creon changes the punishment for the
crime to being "enfold[ed]... / in that rocky tomb" (Sophocles
937-938). He believes that by leaving her to choose "to die
if she so wishes / or live a buried life in such a home," he
becomes "guiltless" in her death (Sophocles 940-941, 942).
Antigone's punishment, however, is designed to be drawn-out
and horrible: living alone in the dark for the rest of her life
or taking her own life. Creon probably does not imagine that
Antigone will choose to kill herself, so his lengthy punishment
is meant to make a statement about his power and show that
his laws are absolute.

Antigone makes the ultimate statement of defiance by
taking her own life rather than subjecting herself to Creon's
punishment. She is willing to suffer the consequences of her
actions before Creon changes the law but will not obey his
arbitrary amendment. She follows the original law as closely
as possible in taking her own life, showing that she fully
intends to suffer the consequences of her actions. Her fiancé,
Haemon, Creon's son, follows suit, committing suicide "in
his anger / against his father for a murder" (Sophocles 1253-
1254). Antigone and her lover defy the unjust punishment for
an unjust law by killing themselves.
While Antigone becomes a martyr, Creon is left alive with nothing. The gods grant Antigone's prayer that "if Creon and his people are the wrongdoers / let their suffering be no worse than the injustice / they are meting out to me" and punish those who have wronged her (Sophocles 984-986). Though Antigone dies, Creon seems as though he might be better off dead by the end of the play. He loses his wife, his son, and the approval of his kingdom. At the end of the play, he weeps, saying, "everything in my hands is crossed. A most unwelcome fate / has leaped upon me" (Sophocles 1418-1419). For placing his own laws above the laws of the gods, Creon loses everything he loves and suffers alone, while Antigone is made a hero.

According to Plato, Socrates dies much the same way as Antigone. Socrates claims in "The Apology," which takes place during his trial, that he has been charged by Apollo to be a philosopher. Apollo's oracle at Delphi proclaims that "no one [is] wiser" than Socrates (Plato 26). Socrates is puzzled by this, so he proceeds "systematically" to find out why he has been chosen as the wisest (Plato 26). He realizes that he is considered the wisest because he knows that he is not wise and feels that this is what the oracle wants men to realize. He "continue[s]... as the god bade" and shows man after influential man how each is "not wise," thus making each man wiser (Plato 27). Though this causes him so much "unpopularity" that he is eventually put on trial and sentenced to death, he says, "when the god ordered me, as I thought and believed, to live the life of a philosopher, to examine myself and others, I had abandoned my post" (Plato 27, 33). Ironically, one of the charges against him is that he is guilty of "not believing in the gods" (Plato 28).
Socrates is like Antigone when she states, "because of piety I was called impious," because he acts in reverence to Apollo (Sophocles 981). He does not fight against the accuser's call for death because "to fear death... is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not," which is exactly what Apollo wants Socrates to prevent (Plato 33). He explains that since "no one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man" or whether "it is the greatest of evils," being afraid of death is like pretending to know that death is evil, and knowing what one does not know is why Socrates is willing to stand trial (Plato 33). Though it causes his death, Socrates vows to "obey the god rather than you [men]" and to practice philosophy as long as he "draws breath" (Plato 34). While Antigone is a literary example, Socrates is a historical example of honoring god's law above man's.

Though the laws of the gods should be honored above those of men, this does not mean that man's law is to be ignored. Man's law is meant to be a proxy of god's law. Aeschylus' "The Eumenides" tells the story of how the court system was first created. In Orestes' trial for the killing of his mother, two laws are in conflict. Athena is called in to decide whether Orestes should be killed, as the Furies propose, for killing his own blood, or if he should be set free for following Apollo's orders and avenging the blood of his father. The issue is so confusing that Athena admits "by all rights not even I should decide" ("The Eumenides" 486). Instead, she creates "a tribunal...for all time to come" where the "finest men of Athens, / return and decide the issue fairly, truly— / bound to our oaths, our spirits bent on justice" ("The Eumenides" 499-500, 503-505).
In this way, Athena sets up a court of mortals to decide on issues usually reserved for judgment by the gods. By making this jury, she approves of men's deciding laws for themselves in the name of the gods. This means that the law of men is meant to carry out the same purpose as the law of gods.

Though man's law is supposed to be an extension of god's law, this is not always so. Sometimes, as in Creon's case, human motives or bad interpretations of the law get in the way of carrying out the will of the gods. Creon feels that Polyneices should not be honored because he has attacked his own city, and in doing so, has attacked the gods of the city. In trying to show reverence to the gods, he refuses to bury Polyneices. When signs reveal that his attempt at reverence is ill-advised, he sticks by his decision because of pride; when Antigone argues for the virtue of her actions and the people begin to see her as a hero, his pride forces him to act without forethought. His hubris drives him past the point of no return, so that when he finally listens to the prophet Teiresias and tries to release Antigone, it is too late. Pride also plays a part in Socrates' trial; Socrates injures the pride of influential men by showing them that they are ignorant. This wounded pride causes the men to bring Socrates to trial. When Socrates examines the arguments of one such man, Meletus, in the course of the trial, Socrates is able to prove each successive point wrong. Though wrong, Meletus still receives his wish and Socrates is sentenced to death. Being human, the makers of law are prone to err or to be swayed by factors other than justice, in spite of the fact that the laws of man are designed to encourage morality. When a friend tells Socrates that a jury is capable of inflicting "the
for the sake of his father, Agamemnon. Both attribute their actions to the same principle: justice. Orestes seeks Athena’s help in deciding the nature of his killing – was he carrying out the will of Justice, or did he murder his mother in personal revenge? Athena admits that even she, the goddess of wisdom and civilization, cannot decide. Athena’s indecision raises a crucial question: **How can we tell the difference between “justice” and “revenge?”** In his trilogy of plays, *The Oresteia*, Aeschylus seeks to answer this through an explanation of the perception of what is just.

Often throughout the trilogy, the idea of justice is referred to as a person, with a capitalized “J,” who dictates actions as though they are destiny. After Clytaemnestra kills Agamemnon, she confesses that even though she “did it all,” Agamemnon “had no way to flee or fight his destiny” (“Agamemnon” 1400-1). Furthermore, once Aegisthus enters, he calls himself “the weaver of Justice” for orchestrating Agamemnon’s death (1635). Both claim that they are simply following the bidding of Justice, that they are not responsible for their actions. By personifying justice, these two characters cast the guilt of the crime away from themselves. Clytaemnestra refers to the part of herself that killed Agamemnon as “the spirit [that] lives within me, / our savage ancient spirit of revenge” (1529-30). She disassociates herself from the crime, believing Agamemnon simply “got what was coming to him,” that it was not her decision to kill him, but simply a result of cause and effect. She argues that justice is only “act for act, wound for wound” (1555). She fails to differentiate between justice and revenge. The fact that she separates herself from her crime
In "Agamemnon," Clytemnestra emerges from her house, carrying the sword that just killed her husband, Agamemnon. Orestes emerges from the same house years later in "The Libation Bearers," carrying the sword that has just killed his mother, Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra murders for the sake of her daughter, Iphigeneia, while Orestes murders
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This essay was written for Elena Songster and Roy Allen's Greek Thought Seminar.
developed adults, involves being “willing to break [an unjust] law and suffer the consequences” and placing self need below the needs of society or the greater good. Few people reach this last level of development, and examples of those who have are extraordinary figures such as Martin Luther King and Gandhi. Both Socrates and Antigone belong to this list because they break laws they do not believe in and choose to die because of their beliefs. Even though Socrates lived and died and Antigone was created and destroyed thousands of years before the development of these stages, they fit this postconventional description perfectly, showing that their values still have relevance today. Both characters lived and died by Pylades’ advice: “Make all mankind your enemy, not the gods” (“The Libation Bearers” 889). Socrates and Antigone show us how to stand up for our higher morals, even when all of society is against us.
and Socrates are prepared to suffer the consequences of their actions.

Antigone and Socrates may have had an easier time distinguishing between right and wrong than we do today. With the separation of church and state, religion is no longer directly involved with law. Many people practice different religions, so there is no one identification of "god's law." Even so, these readings still provide useful advice to the modern reader. Greek figures like Antigone and Socrates show us the virtue of standing up for one's beliefs and not shying away from the consequences. Being a responsible member of society requires a person to have morals that he or she lives by in addition to the laws made by society. These laws show us how to use our morals to reject man's frailty of logic, and they make a lasting impact even when we know we may well lose the battle.

Both Socrates and Antigone break unjust laws that they do not believe in and accept the consequences. In modern psychology, these actions reflect the highest possible level of moral development (Feist 191). Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg poses a moral to people of different ages and, according to the reasoning they provide subsequently separates these people into three distinct stages of moral development. The first level, the preconventional, is marked by avoiding punishment and maximizing benefits to oneself. The second level, the conventional, is based on following rules and getting the approval of social groups. The final level, the post-conventional, which is not always reached by fully
greatest of evils," Socrates replies that if they can "inflict the
greatest evils. . . they would then be capable of the greatest
good," meaning that if men are capable of doing wrong, they
are also capable of doing right (Plato 47). Though man's right
to create laws can sometimes be ill-used, human law is still
ordained by the gods, with the goal of allowing humans to
determine what is right.

Both Socrates and Antigone seem to recognize the holy
sanction of man's law, even if they do not agree with the law
itself. Though both figures violate man's law, they both still
recognize man's law as powerful enough to force them to
accept their punishments. Antigone is prepared to accept her
punishment even before she commits her crime, deciding "it
would be good / to die" in burying her brother (Sophocles 82-
83). When Creon does not carry out the letter of his own law
by stoning her to death, Antigone completes the punishment
by hanging herself. Though Socrates does not see that he is
breaking man's law until after the fact, once he is sentenced, he
is intent on completing the punishment. In a dialogue of the
same name, Crito tries to convince his friend Socrates to escape
into exile. He makes many arguments that appeal to Socrates'
human wants and obligations—dying leaves a bad reputation
and loneliness for his friends, and he could avoid "betraying"
his sons and making them "orphans." Nonetheless, Socrates
feels an obligation to a higher law (Plato 48). Socrates says that
by running away, he would be "breaking the commitments
and agreements" he made by staying in Athens when he could
have left before had he not agreed with those laws (Plato 55).
Though they disagree with the laws of man, both Antigone
Revenge or Justice? Morality in The Oresteia

implies that if she had done it without any guidance from Justice, the guilt would be hers and hers alone. By eliminating the personal element of her crime, she also rids herself of any personal reasons for wanting to kill Agamemnon. As a solitary act, the murder would have been one of revenge, but she turns it into an act of justice.

The Chorus is also unable to separate revenge from justice; they say that “none can judge between [the two]” and plead to Justice to resolve the question (1589). They believe in “truth” but are not certain about the law. The law that “the one who acts must suffer” is contradicted by Clytaemnestra’s defense against their claims (1592). In claiming that Justice has guided her to kill Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra implies that the law is not always right. As a result, the Chorus can no longer put their faith in the law to carry out justice. They need the law to decide what is true and false—what is just and unjust—but with their current legal system, they cannot. They have no way to separate revenge from justice because the two are too similar in the eyes of the law. They can only pray that an “avenger” will exact the punishment Clytaemnestra deserves (1536).

The subsequent play, “The Libation Bearers,” opens with this avenger, Orestes. Before he kills Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, the Chorus describes the justice of his actions, saying, “The anvil of Justice stands fast / and Fate beats out her sword. / Tempered for glory, a child will wipe clean / the inveterate stain of blood shed long ago” (“The Libation Bearers” 628-631). To the Chorus, justice is carried out in the form of punishment. This mentality remains true in the case of irreversible crimes,
such as murder, when the only course of action is the “sword.” Once again, revenge is nearly synonymous with justice. The only difference between the two is that Fate decrees that Orestes will commit the crime. By referring to Fate, Orestes is removed from any blame, just like Clytaemnestræ. Both say they are carrying out the ideal of justice, yet their actions clearly contradict each other’s. This implies one of two things, the first being that Justice has changed her mind. However, this would go against the concept that justice is a singular course of action—that there is one true thing that is right. The will of Justice has been taken as though it is law; however, if it is indeed law, Justice cannot change verdicts for identical crimes. She cannot say that both Clytaemnestræ and Orestes are performing her work. The other implication is that justice does not exist as a singular thing, such as a goddess, but rather exists independently within each individual. People already have a sense of right and wrong—a sense of what justice is. If people feel they have been wronged, they want to set things right. However, this does not imply that justice is a synonym for revenge. With revenge comes a personal reason for wanting to see punishment inflicted upon the criminal. Revenge means that the person who has been wronged has an emotional investment in seeing the criminal punished.

In “The Eumenides,” Athena first attempts to eliminate this emotional investment by asking for objective evidence of what happened. She “accept[s] the facts” as long as they are told “clearly” (432), with no emotion or bias. She tries to make a judgment based on the law as it is but quickly realizes that she cannot, that this case has become “Too large a matter/ . . . / by
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all rights not even [she] should decide” (484-6). She knows that individual people alone cannot truly decide what is just or not, given their inherent biases. She reconciles these differences by removing herself from the conflict, “appoint[ing] the judges of manslaughter / . . . / the finest men of Athens” to determine Orestes’ guilt (497, 503). She returns with ten citizens, all sworn to uphold justice. By bringing in people who are not directly affected by the crime, personal investment is eliminated and is replaced only by the desire to deliver justice. Furthermore, because there is more than just one judge, individual biases among them are eliminated as well. Athena, in the pursuit of the most perfect form of justice, creates the trial by jury.

As the trial starts, Apollo bursts in, calling to Athena and the jury, “You know the rules, now turn them into justice,” declaring that justice is not simply about the word of the law (588). The trial is set up so that the verdict will decide what is just and unjust. Justice here is about using the law to find what is right and what is wrong. Just as revenge and justice are not synonymous, the law and justice are not synonymous, either. In this trial, there are two interpretations of “right” that the jury must decide between—one expressed by the Furies, who argue that Orestes is guilty of murdering Clytaemnestra, and the other expressed by Orestes, who argues that Clytaemnestra is guilty of killing Agamemnon. Their definitions of justice directly contradict each other’s, yet both sides believe they represent the ideal of justice. This is the case with every trial, in that there are always two sides to every crime. The jury attempts to differentiate between right and wrong by listening to both sides of the argument, eventually
reaching a verdict through an unbiased analysis of the facts. After learning exactly what wrong has been committed, they then have to make the crucial judgment: What is most just in this case? The jury has to decide which of the two arguments best represents the ideal of justice. Their decision is seen as the most just course of action for this trial. Through this decision, the jury has become Justice herself.

Through the use of the laws at hand, the jury is able to interpret the meaning of justice in Orestes' trial. These interpretations of what is just and unjust eventually weave their way into the internal sense of right and wrong of subsequent jurors, becoming moral laws. These moral laws allow the essence of justice to be preserved in trials to come, setting a precedent for following cases. Athena says to "Never pollute / our law with innovations," defending the trial by jury and the justice that it has achieved (706-7). She sees that this is the truest embodiment of justice possible. The trial by jury eliminates the difference between revenge and justice by having the jury examine the facts and arguments of the case objectively. This also takes into account different interpretations of right and wrong, allowing both sides of the argument to make their case in presenting their interpretations of "justice." And, because each case is examined individually through its own trial, the subtle nuances of the crimes can be examined. As Orestes' trial proves, justice is not simply black and white. The gray area between right and wrong is explored with a jury. It is the jury that allows each case to have the same weight as every other case, for they are all dealt with in the same way. It is necessary to treat each disagreement about the meaning of justice with
the utmost importance, for it is upon these decisions that social morals are founded. Athena has given us the tools to determine the true meaning of justice. As long as there is an argument about what justice means, there is a need for a jury to decide what justice is.

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This essay was written for Elise Miller and Jia Wu's Greek Thought Seminar.
The white, Catholic majority of Gabriel García Márquez's Of Love and Other Demons does not take issue with the existence of African culture. They view all black men and women as slaves and property, and so this unfamiliar culture is unworthy of notice—so far outside the realm of their own lives—that it is inconsequential. It is only when the black world comes too close to infiltrating their own that they
become alarmed. Any aspect of slave life that approaches the lily white existence of slave owners is a threat because they depend on there being a clear distinction between their own kind and the slaves. This is why the Abyssinian in the novel is so unsettling to the Vicereine and the other guests; she is unmarred by her status as a slave and does not even have a "slaver's brand," leaving her with a perfection that is alarming because it allows her to have an "air of intimacy" (Márquez 98) with the white men and women around her. This capacity of a black woman to feel close to her white captors is troubling in that it defines her as something other than property, making her humanity seem too real.

Just as the Abyssinian threatens to do away with her very existence, Sierva María’s association with the slave culture creates an uncomfortably close association between black and white ways of life. It is easy to write off African culture as subhuman when it only applies to slaves, to those seen as property; however, when the white daughter of a once-affluent family is publicly associated with the culture, it becomes a threat. Sierva María’s preference for slave culture is so foreign to the white, Catholic characters in Of Love and Other Demons that their only method of comprehension is to subconsciously manifest their fear and hatred of what is different into the corrivable issue of demonic possession.

The irony of Sierva’s behavior is that the “blackness” of it originates from her parent’s decision to forgo responsibility for her upbringing as a young white lady. The family’s slaves
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are truly the only family Sierva knows, and yet, despite her culpability, Bernarda is “frightened” by her daughter’s “strange nature” (12). Bernarda expects Sierva to act how she thinks a proper white girl should, despite the fact that Sierva has no model of what this means. Sierva responds to her mother’s disapproval by simply ignoring it. She does not feel she has lost anything by being a part of the slave culture and instead embraces being “in her true home and with her true family” (12). In fact, Sierva feels so integrated into this culture that she works to fit in even more by blackening her face and learning African languages, behaving just as any slave child would (12). However, Sierva need not worry because she is accepted by Dominga de Adviento and the rest of the slaves from birth. She never needs to prove that she belongs with them as she does with the members of her own race.

In attempting to rid Sierva of her “demon,” the Bishop Don Toribio de Cáceres y Virtudes and his followers seek to extricate the qualities she has absorbed by having been raised within the slave culture. This is suggested in the text when Father Cayetano Delaura claims that “what seems demonic to us are the customs of the blacks, learned by the girl as a consequence of the neglected condition in which her parents kept her” (91). Delaura is the only member of the Church who does not seem to blindly accept the claim of demonic possession, as he understands that Sierva’s behavior simply stems from being raised in a different culture. What Delaura does not recognize is that the demons the Church sees within Sierva do not only grow from a misunderstanding, but are actually a projection of their own prejudices against the black community. Delaura
observes that the Abbess, Sierva’s most staunch oppressor, "attributes so much power to the forces of evil that she seems like a worshipper of the demon" (94); whether they realize it or not, the demon actually being worshipped here is their own racial and class prejudices. The Abbess is suspicious of anything that does not fit her cloistered lifestyle, as is evidenced by her initial reaction to Sierva. Before she knows it is Sierva she is complimenting, the Abbess is amazed by the beautiful singing voice she hears (67), but once she realizes that it is Sierva singing, and most likely singing an African song at that, her opinion changes. She brandishes her cross as if it is a weapon, and in a way it is. Her religion is the only weapon she has against the strangeness that is Sierva María, and claiming that her behavior is the result of the demon is the only way to give the Abbess’ religion a tangible villain to fight against.

What makes Sierva’s behavior truly unsettling to the white majority is her complete acceptance of the slave culture and lack of interest in embracing a white lifestyle. When Sierva’s father forces her to rejoin the household, she reacts with utter passivity—as if he is not even worth the effort it would take to fight him—until she has the opportunity to return to her black family. The Marquis’ reasoning for trying to make her move in the first place is “to make her understand that a masculine order governed the world” (25), and in order to survive, she must ascribe to the role they give her. This role does not include sleeping outside like a slave or speaking, singing, dressing, or eating like one. In refusing to conform to these guidelines, Sierva is merely clinging to life as she knows it. Even after she is sent to the convent, Sierva seeks out the slaves because
they are the ones who have always shown her kindness. These are her people, the ones she is comfortable with, and through them “she [has] recovered her world” (65). Sierva’s reversion to her chosen black name of María Mandinga shows that she is truly comfortable amongst the slave community in a way she never is with the race of her birth. Additionally, in giving up the name Sierva, she is actually giving up the name “Servant Mary.” This is ironic because in embracing her inner slave, Sierva is forgoing the servitude to her own race, the chains that are placed on her by all the restrictions of what it means to be alive and white. Aligning herself with the slave community is what helps her feel free.

The influence of the slave culture is made all the more dangerous by the freeing effect it has on Sierva. In the Catholic patriarchy, a woman must remain subservient to men and accept the absolute power of religious men as “the masters of God” (83). Sierva never appears subservient when she is among the slaves. In fact, she never seems more liberated than when she joyfully butchers a goat, something which would be unseemly for a woman to do in the eyes of the nuns and the Bishop. Since this behavior is different, it is a threat to the fragile infrastructure of the Church. Ironically, the white slave owners, especially within the all-powerful Church, cannot show fear because they are supposed to be infinitely stronger than the morally weak African community. They are supposed to be above them and can easily act the part when they encounter the Moors and their culture of “sodomy, idolatry and anthropophagy” (78). Africans are expected to be separate from their white oppressors, so good old-fashioned preaching
is enough for the Church to feel they have a handle on them. Sierva María, however, is a different matter. She is not supposed to be susceptible to the same anti-Christian behavior as the slaves and so must be contaminated by something stronger than human nature—a demon.

Sierva's supposed demonic possession ultimately amounts to an issue of control. In accepting what separates her from the majority of the white race, Sierva, at the tender age of twelve, has taken control of her life. She does not allow her father to control her, nor does she allow her time spent incarcerated by the Church to dampen her resolve. As a strong, independent woman who embraces a supposedly subservient culture, Sierva is a threat to the limitless power the Catholic Church claims to have. Thus, the Church declares that Sierva is possessed by a demon, just as they would anyone else who threatened the Church's doctrine and power. This is why the Bishop does not even need to meet Sierva in order to claim she is possessed; she is different and in the Catholic Church, to be different means to be under the spell of a demon. In this way, the Church turns all that would challenge it into an enemy, one that only those who have God on their side can possibly defeat.
Works Cited


This essay was written for David DeRose’s 19th and 20th Century Thought Seminar.