

When loyalties
collide: familial and
religious alliances in
"dr. ogata, a
memoran...



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Loyalty is a character trait which is held in high esteem throughout the world, and even people who do not explicitly value loyalty still have loyalty to certain ideas. Whether it is to people, ideas, religions, or objects, most people carry numerous loyalties to things that they care about. However, occasionally two loyalties collide with each other and become mutually exclusive with one another. This is the case in two of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's short stories. In both "Dr. Ogata, a Memorandum" and "O-Gin", characters are forced to choose between their loyalty to beliefs and loyalty to their family. Although the stories are different, by examining the similarities and differences between them such as the situation the protagonist is faced with and the bias of the narrator, one can discern Akutagawa's beliefs on whether loyalty to people or loyalty to religion is more important.

"Dr. Ogata, a Memorandum" follows a woman named Shino who is a believer in the "Kirishitan", or Christian faith and is told from the village Doctor Ogata's point of view. Following the death of Shino's husband, she converted from the traditional faith system to a new faith, Christianity, much to the chagrin of those around her. She took her faith very seriously and "She and daughter Sato worshiped each day before a tutelary image called a 'kurusu' [cross]," however, because it was contrary to the popular belief at the time, "soon she was disowned by her relatives and the village officials were said to be meeting frequently to discuss formally banishing her from the village". Aside from the scorn she received from her peers, Shino's different beliefs did not seem to cause her any significant issues until her daughter got sick. One day she approaches the narrator, Dr. Ogata, and asks

him to do a pulse diagnosis on her daughter, Sato, who is extremely sick. However, he refuses her, saying that her “ behavior of late is truly offensive. In particular, I have heard that you often vilify the people of our village,- including me; you say that our worship of the gods and Buddha is an act of heresy...If you want me to perform a pulse diagnosis, you must first renounce your faith in the Kirishitan sect”. Ogata will not help Shino or her daughter because he disagrees with their faith system. Shino then refuses him and somberly returns home to her sick daughter. However, the next day she returns to the doctor and pleads with him again to save Sato, which he again refuses unless she denounces her faith. This time, she accepts and renounces her faith, which she proved when she “ took one of those kurusu things out of the breast of her kimono, laid it on the entryway step, and silently trod upon it three times”.

Shino was extremely loyal to her religion, however, she was also very loyal to her daughter. Therefore, when the two began to clash, she was forced to choose between the two. She chose the latter, sacrificing her religion in order to potentially save her daughter. However, when the doctor goes to help Sato, he discovers that she is too sick for him to be able to help her. He leaves, much to Shino’s dismay, and Sato dies shortly after. Following this, Dr. Ogata goes past Shino’s house to discover that Sato has been brought back to life by a Christian figure from a neighboring town.

The story of Ogata is not the only story concerning Christianity that Akutagawa wrote. His other story that discusses Christianity is “ O-gin”, the story of a young Christian girl named O-Gin, who lived and practiced her religion during a time in which “ As soon as a person was discovered to be <https://assignbuster.com/when-loyalties-collide-familial-and-religious-alliances-in-dr-ogata-a-memorandum-and-o-gin/>

following the teachings of the heavenly lord, he was either burned at the stake or impaled on the rack” (82). O-Gin’s parents died when she was an infant, at which point she was taken in by a Christian couple. She was then raised in this religion and was very pious. Despite it being illegal, “ Many times O-Gin would stand in the shade of the fig tree by the well, looking up at the large crescent moon and praying with her whole heart”. However, one day she and her family were caught practicing their religion, and thus they were thrown in jail, tortured, and sentenced to be burnt at the stake. The entire time that they were being tortured, they stayed true to their religion, until they were tied to posts, about to be burned at the stake. They were given one last chance to denounce their religion, and after a pause, O-Gin decrees that she will give up her religion because her “ parents do not know the teachings of Our Heavenly Lord, and by now they must have fallen down into inherno [hell]. It would be unforgivable of me to enter the gates of Haraiso [Heaven] without them”. Her adoptive mother then tells her husband that she will burn to death “ not because I want to go to Haraiso, but because I want to be with you.” They both then fall from grace so that they can all go to hell together.

These stories obviously have many similarities. In both stories, a person is faced with a situation in which they must decide between their religion and those that are close to them. For Shino, if she did not give up her religion then she would lose her daughter. O-Gin was put in a very similar position, wherein she was forced to either follow her religion and go to heaven but be separated from her deceased parents, or go to hell and be with her family. In both situations, they were forced to either be loyal to their religion and

beliefs or to their family, they could not do both. Not only is the situation similar in both stories, but the outcome is as well. Both O-Gin and Shino choose their family over their religion, and they both have a somewhat happy ending. Therefore, if they both chose their family over their religion and it turns out relatively well for both, the stories indicate that choosing family over religion is a better choice, and thus family is more important than religion.

Although the stories are remarkably similar, there are slight differences between the two, and one such difference is the bias of the narrator. O-Gin's story is narrated by a character who is not directly involved in the story and it is not very clear what their view on Christianity is. However, although it is not easy to discern the narrator's view on Christianity, it is not impossible. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is discussing the prophet of the traditional religion, Shakyamuni, and says that " his teachings were obviously a pack of lies, and just as obvious was the enormous evil of Shakyamuni himself." In addition to this, while discussing O-Gin's parents who followed the traditional religion at the time, he says that they never had the " opportunity to learn these truths" because they died still believing in Shakyamuni's teachings. Additionally, the narrator continually refers to the officials who persecute O-Gin and her family as Satan, which indicates that they not only believe in Satan, who is a Christian figure, but they believe those who block others from following Christianity to be evil. At the conclusion of the story, the narrator is discussing the outcome of the story when he says that in one account of this story, " Satan, overjoyed at the way things turned out, changed himself into a huge book and flew around the

execution ground all night. The author of this present tale is highly skeptical: was it so great a victory for Satan as to prompt such excessive celebration?" This shows that the narrator is the author, who himself is skeptical if this story truly was a victory for Satan. This means that he does not believe that this story, in which loyalty to people is prioritized above loyalty to religion, is "bad" in the Christian religion. Therefore, the author does not believe that choosing family over religion is wrong.

In contrast to O-Gin's story which is narrated by a character who appears to be favorable of the Christian faith, Dr. Ogata, the narrator of the first story, is vehemently opposed to Christianity. The proof of his disdain of Christianity is the fact that he refuses to treat a potential very sick patient, Sato, who will die without his aid because he disagrees with their religion. His disapproval of the religion is also shown by his reaction to Sato's resurrection. While observing this scene, he noted that "the spring shower produced intense thunder just as the bateran was entering this village. I take this to mean that heaven was showing its abhorrence for him". The narrator is opposed to religion and paints this exchange in a negative light, despite the fact that he "had never heard of a case like Sato's, in which a person who has died from cold damage disorder regains his soul". Ogata was educated enough to be a doctor, and yet he had never heard of a situation similar to Sato's in which someone came back to life after dying from her disease. Therefore, it can be surmised that there is no scientific reasoning for Sato's resurrection, meaning that her resurrection occurred due to her faith. Therefore, this would seem to indicate that within the canon of this story, their religion, Christianity, is correct. Additionally, despite the fact that Shino sacrificed her

religion to save Sato, her religion still helped her and saved her daughter. This means that even though Shino chose her daughter over her religion, Christianity did not forsake her for it. Therefore, Christianity, would not punish Shino for sacrificing her religion to save her daughter.

When viewed separately, both of these stories stand alone as interesting explorations of family and religion. However, when compared to one another, themes arise that can be used to discern the author's opinion on certain issues, such as loyalty to family and religion. In both stories, the protagonist is forced to choose between their religion and their family. Both choose their family, and both stories work out to their favor. Additionally, the different perspective of the two narrators reveals that the decision made by the women to prioritize their family was right. Therefore, by comparing the two stories, one can see that the author, Akutagawa, believes loyalty to family to be more important than loyalty to religion.