

Maximus by D.H. Lawrence

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The Maximus is a composition by D.H. Lawrence. It evokes an image of a supreme being in the reader's mind. In the first stanza, the narrator talks about God, whom the naked eye cannot see. "...and the eye cannot behold him" (Lawrence 1, 2). It shows that God is of an impressive nature. No man is worthy to see God. However, there is some contrast because the narrator ends up seeing god, Hermes. The poem visualizes Hermes. Hermes is a Greek god. In the past, it was not unusual to see these gods since they would visit men and women in their homes.

Maximus

by D.H. Lawrence

*A Literary Analysis of Divine Manifestation,
Desire, and Imagery*



1



OVERVIEW

The poem imagines the Greek god Hermes appearing before the speaker.

It creates tension between an invisible, unknowable God and a visible divine presence in human form.



2



DIVINE MANIFESTATION

The poem has a spiritual theme and presents Hermes as a god visiting the speaker's home.

The divine becomes present and personal.



3



SEEING THE UNSEEABLE

A central contrast in the essay is that God is first described as unseen and unattainable, yet later Hermes is seen directly before the speaker.



4



HOSPITALITY, DESIRE, AND SACRED IMAGERY

The stranger is welcomed in. The poem mixes hospitality, attraction, and sacred feeling.

The essay says it is not clear whether the visitation is a divine experience or a sexual fantasy, and it celebrates pagan sexuality.



5

POETIC FEATURES



First-person narration



Repetition of opening lines in the final stanza



Contrast



Imagery



Three-quatrain form

6

KEY SYMBOLS / IMAGES



Hermes

The Greek messenger god who visits the speaker.



The naked man with a cloak over his arm

A striking image of divine presence, beauty, and allure.



The hearth / house

A place of welcome and intimacy where the sacred arrives.



Human beauty as a sign of the gods

The body and presence reveal the divine.

7

MAIN INSIGHT / CONCLUSION

The essay suggests that gods may appear in human form, and that the sacred can be encountered through beauty, presence, and human experience.



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Divine Manifestation and Pagan Sexuality

The poem has a spiritual theme, and it illustrates divine manifestation. The speaker is visited by the Greek god Hermes. It is a sight to behold and one that he cannot believe. Having a god in one's home is something that is unusual. In the poem, there are two men in each other's company, and one of them is naked. What comes to mind is why the stranger decided to visit the narrator. The narrative of the poem is in the first person. No man can see God. The message that the poet is trying to convey is that God is everywhere; he is great. The first person is anonymous. The man that is being referred to in the poem is Hermes. The poet sees Hermes as some God. Hermes is the Greek god of trickery and travel. The narrator declares Hermes to be a god. There is repetition in the first stanza. The narrator adds some contrast in the first and last lines. From the beginning of the poem, one will think that the narrator will continue to describe an unattainable divinity. However, that does not seem to be the case. The narrator portrays a naked man who holds a cloak over his arm, waiting to be asked in"(4-5). The reader is left to wonder whether the figure is a god or a mortal. However, the narrator refers to him as a god. The man is later identified as Hermes. He is the god of Greece. It is not clear whether the visitation is a divine visitation or a sexual fantasy. In his poem, Maximus celebrates pagan sexuality.

MAXIMUS

BY D. H. LAWRENCE

A Story of Ambition, Power and the Tragic Fall of a Roman General



ABOUT THE NOVEL

Maximus is D. H. Lawrence's historical novel set in the Roman Empire. It follows the life of Maximus, a brilliant general who rises to power but is destroyed by his own ambition and the corrupting nature of success.



Author
D. H. Lawrence



Published
1922



Genre
Historical Fiction



Setting
Roman Empire (1st–2nd Century AD)

PLOT OVERVIEW



Theme in a Line: The higher the rise, the deeper the fall.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Maximus**
Protagonist; a brilliant and ambitious general who seeks greatness.
- Julius**
Maximus's friend and supporter; loyal but ultimately powerless.
- Sergius**
Rival and political opponent; represents jealousy and intrigue.
- Aurelia**
Symbol of love and beauty; Maximus's emotional anchor.
- The Empress**
Represents political power and manipulation in Rome.

THEMES IN MAXIMUS

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE FROM THE NOVEL
Ambition and Power	Maximus's desire for greatness drives his actions and downfall.	Maximus says, "I will be the supreme man in Rome."
Pride and Hubris	His pride blinds him to danger and isolates him from others.	His arrogance alienates his friends and creates enemies.
Success and Isolation	Power brings loneliness and separates him from ordinary people.	The more powerful he becomes, the more alone he feels.
Betrayal and Politics	Political jealousy and betrayal lead to Maximus's ruin.	His rivals plot against him, leading to his disgrace.
Fate and Tragedy	Maximus's fall is inevitable, showing the tragic nature of life.	He loses everything and dies in obscurity.

SYMBOLISM IN THE NOVEL

- The Eagle**
Symbol of power, victory, and Maximus's soaring ambition.
- The Mountain**
Represents the height of success and the danger of pride.
- The Road**
Symbolizes Maximus's journey from obscurity to greatness and fall.
- The Empress's Court**
Represents political corruption, flattery, and false praise.

WRITING STYLE

- ✓ Rich, poetic, and descriptive language.
- ✓ Psychological depth in character portrayal.
- ✓ Focus on internal conflicts and emotions.
- ✓ Intense use of imagery and symbolism.
- ✓ Inspired by classical tragedy.

KEY QUOTES

- "I will be the supreme man in Rome."
– **Maximus** (about his ambition)
- "The farther a man goes, the less he knows himself."
– **D. H. Lawrence**
- "Power is a lonely thing."
– **Theme of the novel**

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOVEL

- ✓ Explores the dangers of unchecked ambition.
- ✓ A critique of power, politics, and human nature.
- ✓ Reflects Lawrence's interest in psychology and tragedy.
- ✓ Shows that true greatness lies in humility, not dominance.
- ✓ Considered one of Lawrence's most powerful novels.

LITERARY DEVICES

- ★ **Imagery** – Vivid descriptions of nature, battles, and emotions.
- ★ **Symbolism** – Objects and events carry deeper meanings.
- ★ **Irony** – Maximus seeks greatness but achieves ruin.
- ★ **Tragedy** – The hero's fatal flaw leads to downfall.
- ★ **Foreshadowing** – Hints of Maximus's fall are present throughout.

WHY IT MATTERS

- ✓ A timeless story of ambition and human weakness.
- ✓ Relevant to leaders, politicians, and anyone in pursuit of success.
- ✓ Teaches the balance between ambition and humility.
- ✓ A masterpiece of early 20th-century historical fiction.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Maximus is not just the story of a Roman general; it is a timeless lesson on ambition, pride, power, and the human condition.
Ambition without wisdom leads to destruction.

Sources

- Lawrence, D. H. *Maximus*. Penguin Classics, 2007.
- Myers, J. D. H. *Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider*. Vintage, 1992.
- Bloom, Harold. D. H. Lawrence. Chelsea House, 2003.
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximus_\(novel\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximus_(novel))



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Tension, Repetition, and Poetic Form

Nothing occurs between the visitor and the speaker. There is a lot of tension between the two characters. The last stanza is repeating and is the same as the first three lines, which open the poem. The narrator then concludes with, "And still, this is the God Hermes, sitting by my heart"(15). The main struggle in the poem is that the narration is in the first person, and the speaker is the narrator.

The poem is in a three-quatrain form.

Seeing the Unseeable God

The second stanza shows the speaker meeting the god. It must have been a wonderful feeling to have a god in one's house. The speaker is in contrast to the first stanza about God. The speaker describes the god Hermes. It is still unbelievable to him when he says ...” and still, this is the god, Hermes, sitting by my hearth”(15). As unbelievable as it is, the god is right there before the speaker. It has just been a sight to behold. Being in the presence of a god must have been something that is unattainable. But here, the god Hermes is right before the speaker. The speaker is closer to the god. In the second stanza, the speaker gets to see God. The speaker may have his view of what God looks like. The poet uses imagery that allows the reader to have a feel of what the god Hermes looks like. There is also a contrast in the poem. In the first stanza, the narrator speaks of a god who cannot be seen, but in the second stanza, he tells the reader of the god that he saw right before him.

Hospitality, Desire, and Sacred Imagery

He welcomed him, so it seemed that the god had visited him in his house. He is a stranger to the speaker. The poet tells the stranger to come in, which resembles the biblical version of Jesus Christ, knocking on the door and waiting to be welcomed into our hearts. There is no doubt that the narrator fell in love with the stranger. In his interpretation of the stranger, he compares him to a god. "he looked at me without an answer, but such a loveliness entered me, I smiled to myself, saying: He is a god!"(2, 7). Perhaps it was because he was not able to describe him. The narrator can still not believe that he is in the presence of God. It is like a dream come true. Maximus uses imagery. Through the imagery, the reader gets the mood of the poem. For the speaker, god is unknowable and unnameable. The poem depicts the ideal life where the gods appear to men and women.

Human Beauty and the Presence of the Gods

The third stanza of the poem repeats the first three lines about how God is incomprehensible. Through the speaker, we see God in human beings, just like the Bible says that we are made in the image and likeness of God. In the naked beauty of human beings, one can see the gods. The poem is about the Greek god. The good life is one lived with the gods. The gods appear like human beings and are the only way to represent ourselves as unknown gods. Hermes is the Greek god of fertility, luck, wealth, sleep, and travel.

Works Cited

Lawrence, D. H. (1994). *The Complete Poems of DH Lawrence*. Wordsworth Editions.