

Maximus by D.H. Lawrence

Posted on September 13, 2019

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 contract 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.

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.

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-quatrains form.

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 how 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.

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.

The third stanza of the poem repeats the first three lines about how God is incomprehensible. 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.