

# [Love, sex, and the gods in world literature assignment](https://assignbuster.com/love-sex-and-the-gods-in-world-literature-assignment/)

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Love, Sex, and the Gods in World Literature Literature throughout world history contains many of the same themes and motifs. The works that will be discussed in this paper: Homer’s The Iliad, Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, and Ovid’s Metamophoses, all contain common themes. The first theme is love, whether it is the love between a man and a woman, parent and child, or the love of siblings. Love is a driving force for many of the characters in these works. The second theme is sex, whether it is symbolic or literal, forceful or complaisant.

Sex is not always the main theme of a story, but the sexual overtures are dominant in many of these works. Finally this paper will discuss the intervention of the gods. The gods play a major role in world literature. Sometimes a character acts in a certain way so the gods will not be upset. Other times, the gods intervene personally to alter the way life is lived by the mortals. This paper will discuss how love, sex, and the gods are the driving forces of many of the characters in the works of historical literature. In Homer’s The Iliad, the gods are the motivation of many of the characters.

In fact, the gods play major roles in The Iliad. The gods speak to the mortals, they watch over them, and they even fight alongside them. The gods favor certain sides and certain warriors involved in the Trojan War. For instance: “ Aphrodite… was on the side of Paris. Equally… Hera and Athena were against him. Ares, God of War, always took sides with Aphrodite; while Poseidon, Lord of the Sea, favored the Greeks, a sea people, always great sailors. Apollo cared for Hector and for his sake helped the Trojans, and Artemis, as his sister, did so too.

Zeus like the Trojans best… ” (Hamilton 81) The gods went out of their way to fight for and support the mortals they favored. The first intervention of the gods comes in the subplot of Chryseis. Chryseis was the daughter of Apollo’s priest. Agamemnon had taken her as a prize of war. The priest went to Agamemnon and begged for his daughter to be given back to him. The priest then prayed to Apollo to curse the Greeks until Chryseis was returned. Apollo heard him, and “ from his sun-chariot he shot fiery arrows down upon the Greek Army, and men sickened and died so that the pyres were burning continually” (Hamilton 80).

The prophet Calchas tells Achilles at an assembly that the reason they are ailing is because of the priest and his daughter. Agamemnon agrees to give back Chryseis, but because his prize was taken from him, he takes Briseis, Achilles’ prize, as his own. This angers Achilles, and he swears revenge and stops fighting with the Greeks. Agamemnon causes other gods to get involved. Achilles’ mother, Thetis the sea nymph, asks Zeus to return Briseis to Achilles. Zeus is hesitant because it will anger other gods.

The actions of Apollo triggered a chain of events that caused Achilles to clash with Agamemnon, Achilles to stop fighting, and eventually caused Zeus to get involved. (Hamilton 80-81) Another intervention that changed the events of the Trojan War was the fight between Menelaus and Paris. Menelaus and Paris decided to fight to settle their dispute over Helen. Menelaus hurled his spear at Paris, piercing his shield and his breastplate, but not wounding him. Menelaus then drew his sword and swung it at Paris’ helmet. Upon impact, the sword shattered into pieces.

Menelaus then seized Paris by his helmet and began to drag him back into the ranks. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, broke the strap of the helmet. When Menelaus went after Paris again, Aphrodite hid Paris in a dense mist, and brought him back to his bedroom in Troy. It is clear that if Aphrodite would not have helped Paris, he surely would have perished under the sword and spear of Menelaus. (Hamilton 83) There are many instances of love in The Iliad. For instance, it is the priest’s love for his daughter that causes him to pray to Apollo and curse the Greeks.

Love is what causes the Trojan War in the first place. Paris falls in love with Helen, Menelaus’ wife, and brings her back to Troy. This causes Menelaus, his brother Agamemnon, and the rest of the Greek army to pursue her and go to war with Troy. Sometimes the love of a close friend or the love of a child can be just as devastating a loss as the love of a woman. When Achilles finds out that his close friend, Patroklos, had died in battle, he breaks into tears. The love for his friend causes him to avenge his death and kill Hector.

Instead of returning Hector’s body to his father, Priam, and allowing a proper burial, Achilles takes it with him. Priam, stricken with grief over his loss, goes to Achilles to beg for the return of his son’s body. As they talk, they realize that they both have suffered greatly in losing their loved ones. Achilles, not usually possessing a warm personality, relates to Priam, and eventually gives back Hector’s body. Achilles’ love for Patroklos changes the way we perceive him, at least for a moment. He transforms from a god-like warrior to a person who loves and mourns.

In the next work, Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, the main theme of the play is sex and sexual symbolism. This story takes place during the Peloponnesian War. The Athenian and Spartan men had been at war for twenty years. With no end in sight, an Athenian woman named Lysistrata decided to call a meeting with the women from both sides. She tells the ladies that since the men will not end the war, the women have to. The women decide to use their sexuality to make their men stop fighting. They make a pact that no woman will give sex to their men until the war is over. This plotting on behalf of the women is inspired, since men and religion most often criticize women for using their sexuality as a way to maneuver men into abdicating control. In this play, Aristophanes takes his criticism of women and turns a traditionally negative view into a positive depiction of women” (Metzger 1). Lysistrata turns the war from “ Athens versus Spartans to man versus woman. ” She wants the men to “ exchange their spears and arrows for ‘ weapons’ of love, that is, their penises. ” (Presley 2) Lysistrata is loaded with sexual metaphors and symbolism.

After the women storm the Acropolis, the Chorus of Old Men carry up logs in order to force the women out by starting a fire. Daniella Presley suggests that “ the logs represent the phallus. ” The way the old men struggled with the logs represents their diminishing fortitude. Just like the men have trouble igniting their sexuality, they have trouble igniting the fires. The women decide to fight the men’s fire with water, dousing the flames and the men, making their objective impossible. The water of the women and the fire of the men are sexual metaphors for “ female wetness and male virility. Presley also suggests that the overall act of trying to force their way into the gates using logs is parody of sexual intercourse. The “ gates” of Acropolis have a double meaning, the entrance to the Acropolis and the entrance to the vagina. (Presley 2) It could be said that Lysistrata did not fight in the war and that she has no say in civil matters. The women, however, insist they have greater difficulty than the men do in this war. It is the women who are losing their sons in the war. “ The married women have wasted the years of their lives, and young virgins have had nothing to do but grow old. There also has not been much childbirth because of the long absence of the men. (Semel 57) Sherri Metzger wrote that the women depicted in Lysistrata are living in a truly fictitious world because women would never have the power to achieve what they have achieved in the play. “ In ancient Greece, women were not in control of their sexuality, and few men would have been willing to abdicate their desires to those of women. In the real Greek world, women were property… but always, they were subordinate to men” (Metzger 2). Men would not have relinquished their desires to women’s desires.

No matter how the women felt about the war, they never would have publicly disapproved it. The first audiences of Lysistrata would have thought this play was extremely far-fetched and ridiculous because men generally did not think women were intelligent, therefore her actions would have had “ no basis in reality. ” (Metzger 2) There are many instances of love and sex in Ovid’s Metamorphoses. The main theme, however, involves the gods and their interference in the world of the mortals. Since this work is about transformations, “ Metamorphoses deals constantly with the gods: almost every transformation is at the will of a god. (Cusick 2) “ In the gods preferred method of control… an otherwise beautiful and innocent girl is minding her own business in the woods when suddenly she is chased by a lustful, monomaniacal god who can only be sated by physically consummating his sexual desire. ” (White 2) In the story of Io and Jove, Jove spots Io returning home from her father’s stream. Jove is overcome by her beauty, so he rapes her. Afraid that his wife might find out, he turns her into a heifer. Not only is Io violated sexually by a god, she is transformed into a cow.

Another example of a god forcing his way on an innocent girl is the story of Europa and Jove. Jove turns himself into a bull so he can lure Europa to him, befriend her, and then take advantage of her. Jove’s actions are not just about sexual gratification. His actions are about his control and superiority over these girls. Because he is a god, he can do what he wants with little repercussions. In some cases, the gods intervene to assist in love or to answer the prayers of someone. In the story of Iphis and Ianthe, Ligdus and his wife Telethusa are planning to have a child.

Ligdus tells his wife that if she has a girl, he will put the baby to death because they are not rich and cannot afford her dowry. Telethusa sees a vision of Isis, goddess of fertility, and is told to conceal the sex of the child. Telethusa has a daughter and keeps it hidden from the world. Ligdus names his “ son” Iphis, and Telethusa raises her as a boy. Years later, Iphis is set to marry a young woman named Ianthe. Ianthe does not know that Iphis is a woman, but the wedding is fast approaching. Not knowing what to do, Telethusa prays to Isis, and asks for help, since it was Isis who gave her guidance when Iphis was born.

Isis intervenes, and turns Iphis into a male, so that he can marry and be with the woman he loves. This is a case where a god intervened not to control or manipulate, but to assist the love of Iphis and Ianthe, as well as the love of a mother in Telethusa. In all of these historical works of Literature, while very different in style, have common themes. Each story tells of love, whether it is the love of a child, brother, friend, sibling or spouse. These authors often wrote not only of love, but also wrote of sex in a time where sex was not as openly discussed.

The gods also played an important role in these works. The gods assisted the love of the characters. The gods helped Achilles relate to Priam. They helped Iphis and Ianthe get married. In the stories mentioned in this paper, the gods, unlike in today’s literature, play an important part in each of the characters journey. No matter what the setting of the story, or the type of characters in it, sex, love, and the gods are the driving forces in these historical works of literature. Works Cited Cusick, Edmund. Metamorphoses: Overview. Reference Guide to World Literature. 2nd ed. St.

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