

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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Themes in Homer

## LOVE

**ILIAD** Does our verdict on 'love in the romantic sense' apply to the *Iliad*? Is there nothing approaching romantic love apparent in the *Iliad*? Briseis is the war prize of Achilles, and is then traded to Agamemnon; who eventually returns her to Achilles. This is hardly romantic love. What then of our other two love-exchange specimens in the *Iliad*? Are Achilles and Patroklos romantic lovers, or for that matter are they lovers at all? One leans to a *yes*; these two male figures cluster apart; sulk and support together; despair and coo with tell tale intensity; and in the end battle and cry for one another with the intensity no ordinary mortal affection comprehends. Perhaps in the scenes between these two men the narrative comes closest to the fire of tell-tale passion. 'Middle class' love, the man and woman teamed up together to create a child, to care for one another, to exist as a unit; this is the very definition of Hector, Andromache and baby Astyanax; and the evidentiary touch is provided by a once in a lifetime moment, when the baby is brushed and tickled by the plume on his dad's helmet, and giggles or burbles, is 'baby makes three.'

**ODYSSEY** Did Odysseus fall in love with Calypso, as suggested under the theme of conflict? It seems unlikely, and totally anachronistic. (Even Sappho, for instance, may have 'been in love,' and written about it, but can hardly have 'fallen in love,' which is that little step toward Romanticism which never fits the classical Greek setting. Can we try out other pairs? What about Odysseus and Nausikaa? Comical, no? Odysseus and Circe? Odysseus and Athena? Well, the joke must taper out. The Greek figure of personality, the personal lover, is not emotionally afflicted by that tenderness which to us love seems to connote, and which, some have argued, was not to begin blossoming before the early Christian period, when the Virgin Mary's sister in law intuited the heartbeat of her savior? Given that last example mustn't we, however, slow down on the instance of Odysseus and Penelope? Was Odysseus 'a loving husband' toward Penelope? Or does the language clash with the character we have come to associate with Odysseus; action-oriented, adventure-inviting, crafty. Odysseus and Penelope were hardly an item in language, even during the short period of time we see them together. It might be added that Penelope, as well as Odysseus, was realistically pre romantic, when faced with the evidences that her long gone husband had returned. She wanted to see the evidence that this was really the guy.