

**Classics Graduate Program
The University of Western Ontario**

Greek 9902A, Fall 2019

Plato's Symposium

Prof. Aara Suksi

Thursdays 2:30-5:30



Plato's *Symposium* is a literary masterpiece central to our understanding of Platonic thought and enormously influential in subsequent literary and philosophical traditions to the present day. It responds to a unique moment in history that brought together major figures of Classical Athenian politics, science, philosophy and drama in the years just before and subsequent to the calamitous Sicilian expedition. It exemplifies a newly emergent genre, the philosophical dialogue, even while it responds to a long tradition of sympotic literature, and it engages in complex ways with such diverse cultural phenomena as the civic institution of the Athenian dramatic festivals and the cults of the Greek mystery religions. The central questions it addresses are: the nature and role of erotic desire; the relationship of desire to the pursuit of wisdom; the relationship between embodied and abstract beauty; the implications of various answers to these questions; and the problem of articulating satisfactory responses to them.

In this course we will undertake a close reading in Greek of the *Symposium*. We will also read and discuss a range of scholarly responses to this complex and enigmatic text.

Instructor Contact Information

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3 pm

OWL Site

There is an OWL site dedicated to this course. I will use the site to post course materials, readings, and grade information. If you would like to add anything to the site, please let me know and I will post it.

Course Information

Objectives and Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course you will be very familiar with Plato's *Symposium*, through a close reading of the text in the original Greek. Your ability to read Attic Greek and to identify vocabulary and grammatical structures will be stronger, and you will be able to identify the stylistic features of Plato's prose.

You will become familiar with some of the scholarly debates and discussions arising from this dialogue, and from Platonic philosophy in general. You yourself will participate actively in these discussions. You will have gained experience in formulating a viable research question, in developing an appropriate method for addressing it, and in presenting the results of your research to your colleagues by means of a conference-style presentation and a related formal research paper.

Text

Dover, Kenneth. J. ed. 1980. *Plato: Symposium*. Cambridge University Press.
This text has been ordered by the Campus Bookstore.

All other assigned readings will be posted online.

Evaluation

Class Participation: 15%
Presentation: 15%
Paper: 20%
Midterm Test: 15%
Sight Translation: 10%
Final Exam: 25%

Important Dates

Midterm Test: Thursday October 17
Paper Due: Thursday December 5
Final Exam: TBA

Class Participation

Attendance for this course is mandatory. The success of the course as a learning experience for all of its members depends on the preparation and participation of each one of us. If you do need to miss class for some reason beyond your control, please contact me in advance. Also note the program policies on requests for accommodation listed below.

You should be prepared to participate at every class meeting. I will ask you to translate passages of Greek, to identify forms, and to explain syntax. We will not have time to translate all the assigned Greek in class, so as you prepare, be sure to flag any problem areas you would like us to go over.

In addition to this language work, we will discuss critical and theoretical issues arising from both primary and secondary readings. For our discussions of the assigned readings, be prepared to: 1) briefly summarize the main arguments in the reading; 2) offer a brief analysis of the place of the reading in the larger discussions of the *Symposium*; 3) identify the scholarly and theoretical method(s) used; 4) comment on the rhetorical strategies employed by the author; and 5) note any questions or problems that arise for you from the reading.

In evaluating your participation, I will consider the quality as well as the quantity of your contributions. I will also consider how well you demonstrate attention, courtesy and respect for the contributions of your colleagues to our discussions.

If class size permits, each week, one student will be assigned to lead a discussion of a secondary reading. The idea is **not** to summarize the reading for your colleagues, who will have completed the reading, but to **lead** the discussion by providing context and raising a few central questions.

Presentation

Each student will present a formal, conference-style paper on any topic related to the *Symposium*. Please speak to me about your proposed topic as early in the term as possible, and certainly by mid-October. There will be a sign-up sheet with available dates for the presentations.

Each presentation should be accompanied by: a written abstract of up to 300 words; a handout or digital presentation including an outline of your argument, relevant passages, where appropriate, and a bibliography. These should be sent to me to be posted on the course OWL site by the Monday before your presentation.

The formal presentation itself should be fifteen to twenty minutes long, to be followed by up to fifteen minutes of class discussion, for a total of thirty minutes.

The presentation will be a preliminary version of your final research paper. It will be graded for effective communication as well as content. Criteria will include the quality of the research and argument, the clarity, timing and organization of the presentation, and its integration with the handout and/or slides that are shared with the class.

Research Paper and Abstract

Your paper will be a revised version of your presentation and should be about 3000 words in length. You should include an abstract of up to 300 words (a revised version of the one included with your presentation). All of your research should be properly, consistently and formally documented by means of footnotes and bibliography. If you are citing any Greek (or Latin), you should include your own translations.

Your paper is due by midnight on the last day of term (Dec. 5). You may submit your paper by e-mail as a Word attachment to meet this deadline, but in this case you should also submit an identical hard copy by the end of the next business day.

Midterm Test and Final Exam

The midterm test and final exam will each be three hours long and each will consist of 3 passages selected from the *Symposium*. You will translate all three passages, and choose two of the three for commentary. In your commentary, briefly describe the context of the passage within the *Symposium*, and write a short essay about the significance of the passage, with some reference to the relevant scholarship read for class. Your commentary should demonstrate your knowledge of some of the important scholarly approaches to interpreting the *Symposium*. You may choose to comment on, for example, elements of style, language, thematic concerns, the philosophical problem(s) addressed, engagement with contemporary historical or social contexts, reception. etc.

There will also be passages for sight translation given along with both the Midterm and the Final Exam. The sight passages will be taken from Platonic dialogues. We will spend some class time working on strategies for sight translation. The final exam will include passages from the second half of the *Symposium*, but you are encouraged to discuss the first half also in your comments, where relevant.

Tentative Course Schedule

Date	Read in Greek	Other Assigned Readings
Week 1: Sept. 5	No assigned reading	Introduction to the course, Some background to the <i>Symposium</i>
Week 2: Sept. 12	<i>Symposium</i> 172a1-177e6: Opening frames	Von Blanckenhagen, Peter. "Stage and Actors in Plato's <i>Symposium</i> ", <i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i> , vol. 33.1 (1992) 51-68.
Week 3: Sept. 19	<i>Symposium</i> 177e7-182a6: Phaedrus; Pausanias	Ziolkowski, John E. "The bow and the lyre: Harmonizing duos in Plato's <i>Symposium</i> ", <i>The Classical Journal</i> 95.1 (1999) 19-36.
Week 4: Sept. 26	<i>Symposium</i> 182a7-188e4: Pausanias (con't); Eryximachus	Edelstein, L., "The role of Eryximachus in Plato's <i>Symposium</i> ", <i>TAPA</i> 76 (1945) 85-103.
Week 5: October 3	<i>Symposium</i> 189a1-194e3: Aristophanes	Hooper, Anthony, "The Greatest Hope of All: Aristophanes On Human Nature in Plato's <i>Symposium</i> ", <i>CQ</i> 63.2 (2013) 567-579.
Week 6: Oct. 10	<i>Symposium</i> 194e4-199c2: Agathon	Anton, John, "The Agathon Interlude", <i>GRBS</i> 37.3 (1996) 209-35.
Week 7:	Mid-term Test	

Oct. 17		
Week 8: October 24	<i>Symposium</i> 199c3-205a4: Socrates and Agathon; Socrates and Diotima	Halperin, David, "Why is Diotima a Woman?" in <i>One Hundred Years of Homosexuality</i> , Routledge: New York (1990) 113-152.
Week 9: October 31	<i>Symposium</i> 205a5-209e4: Diotima	Nehemas, Alexander. "Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living' Plato, <i>Symposium</i> 211d" , <i>European Journal of Philosophy</i> 15.1 (2007) 1-18.
Nov. 7	Study Break	
Week 10: Nov. 14	<i>Symposium</i> 209e5-215a3: Diotima; Alcibiades	Sheffield, Frisbee, "Alcibiades' Speech: A Satyric Drama", <i>Greece & Rome</i> vol. 48.2 (2001) 193-209.
Week 11: Nov. 21	<i>Symposium</i> 215a4-219d2: Alcibiades.	Nussbaum, Martha. "The Speech of Alcibiades: a Reading of Plato's <i>Symposium</i> ", <i>Philosophy and Literature</i> , Vol 3.2 (1979). 131-172.
Week 12: Nov. 28	<i>Symposium</i> 219d3-223d12: Alcibiades; Closing frame	Clay, Diskin, "The tragic and comic poet of the <i>Symposium</i> ", <i>Arion</i> n.s. 2.2 (1975) 238-61.
Week 13: December 5	Review Research Paper Due	

Classics Program Policy on Requests for Accommodation

If academic accommodation should become necessary at any point, students should contact their course instructor(s) and/or supervisor, as appropriate. Students should also contact the Graduate Chair in most cases, and especially if accommodation is needed for:

- more than one course
- more than one week
- any tests, exams, and/or assignments worth 10% or more of a final grade
- any program milestone (comprehensive exams, thesis, etc.)

In these cases, the Graduate Chair may request that a student work with Student Accessibility Services (<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>) to arrange a plan for accommodation (see SGPS Regulation 14: http://www.grad.uwo.ca/current_students/regulations/14.html).

Staying healthy – physically and mentally – is an essential part of achieving your academic goals. There are many resources on campus available to help you maintain your health and wellness (start here: <http://wec.uwo.ca/> and <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>). Please contact the Graduate Chair if you have any concerns about health or wellness interfering with your studies.

UWO Policies

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

UWO Accessibility Policy

Western has many services and programs that support the personal, physical, social and academic needs of students with disabilities. For more information and links to these services:

<http://accessibility.uwo.ca/>

Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.