Humanities 490: Senior Seminar

The Symposium Seminar

Texts

REQUIRED TEXTS


Plato, *Symposium*. (Gill, C., tr.) Penguin, 1954. 0-14-044616-8

Course Description and Requirements

Here is a seminar about three things...well, four, actually. Here is a seminar in the symposium and the central place of this cultural device in European humanities. Here also is a seminar on Plato’s *Symposium* and the central place of this philosophical-literary text in European humanities. And here is a seminar which tracks the central theme of both the symposium and *The Symposium*: appetite, desire, thirst, craving, lust, passion, love, and Love. And finally, this seminar will explore the rhetoric and finely crafted words that are generated out of all that passion which constitute one of the effective devices for obtaining the object of desire. So: symposium, *Symposium*, love, and persuasion. Four things.

Well, five things. It’s also a tasting course. Here is a seminar whose purpose and objective is to treat the major themes of symposium as closely bound and connected to historic realities of various times and places in the European heritage. We want to bring texts to life here and the historic contexts of those texts by adding some extra-textual savor to our seminar. And what better way reify historic reality than to attempt to recreate some of the reaalien right under our noses. We’ll have tastes of various ancient dainties (and not so dainties) through the course of the semester.

While I’m thinking about it, there’s another thing which we’ll discover cooks out of texts once we get our hands dirty with them: the theme of comedy and tragedy. I have selected a series of text which follow Plato’s *Symposium* all of which in some way are speaking back to Plato. But, as we shall see, some responses to Plato accentuate the positive; some play upon Plato rather grimly. We’ll see in the course of this seminar how we may theoretically incorporate various manners and modes of response of Plato’s ideas in *The Symposium*. So six things: symposium, *Symposium*, love, persuasion, cooking, theoretical diversity.

Oh, one other thing. Research writing. As a senior seminar course, one of the exit skills
the department would like to see you master is the art of writing in the style of formal research. Your paper for the seminar will be a typical seminar paper. I'll show you though the course of the semester what this involves. But along the way toward writing your paper, you will be honing skills in selecting an appropriate topic which isolates one facet or problem of our seminar them, gathering bibliography, critiquing secondary sources, and finding a narrative voice which can weave together the various approaches to your topic, perhaps going so far as to offer a unique perspective on your topic.

Seven things: symposium, Symposium, love, persuasion, ancient and modern food, theory, and research writing. The student will demonstrate mastery level understanding of the methods of this seminar (i.e., typical seminar discourse) by responding to the topics of the course with an original seminar paper, 12-15 pages in length, on a topic, individually selected by the student and approved by the instructor) based on your personal field of interest, expertise, or curiosity.

**Grading**

| Weekly participation (including some online quizzes, 2 in-class presentations, office visits to plan/prepare presentations, handout and samples accompanying presentations) | 60% |
| Seminar Paper | 40% |