

Plato [ca. 427-347 B.C.], Symposium

A New Way to Love

Dramatic Date: ca. 400 B.C., recalling party held in 416

172a-185c: Setting, Phaedrus ("brilliant"), Pausanias ("cease distress")

1. Summarize the argument that Phaedrus makes about the nature of love. Likewise with Pausanias.
2. What professions do Phaedrus and Pausanias have? How does knowing their occupation help us understand their explanation of love? Give some specific examples from the text which illustrate this.
3. Are their descriptions of love contradictory? Complementary? Why?

185c-199c: Eryximachus ("belch battler"), Aristophanes ("best show"), and Agathon ("good and handsome")

1. Summarize the speeches of Eryximachus, Aristophanes, and Agathon.
2. What profession do each have? How does this influence their discourse on love? Find specific examples from each speech to illustrate this.
3. Which of the first five speeches about love do you find the most satisfying? Why? Or would you want to put together your own portrait of love which uses elements from several or all five speakers? Explain.

199c-223d: Socrates, Diotima, Alcibiades

1. Summarize Socrates's speech on love.
2. How does Socrates' speech fit within the rest of the discussion about love within the Symposium? Does he contradict the others? Complement them? Deepen them?
3. Why is Diotima a woman?
4. What is Alcibiades' state on entering? His attitude toward Socrates? What did he expect from Socrates? To Alcibiades' way of thinking, how does Socrates compare with the best men, "ancient or modern"? What is Socrates' response? Does it fit the attitude toward love expressed in his speech?