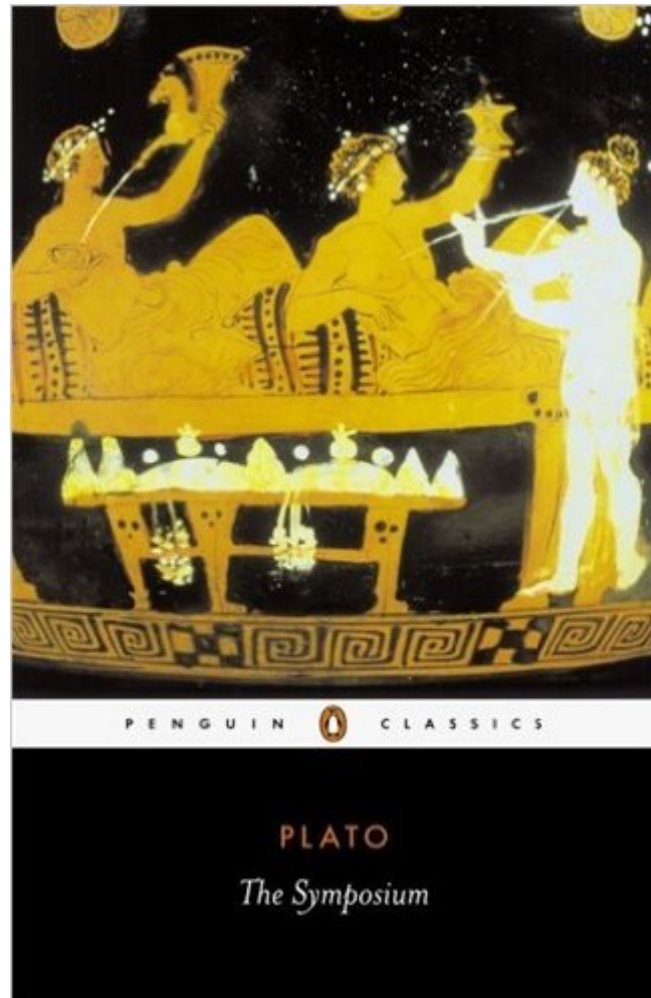


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The Symposium (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

A fascinating discussion on sex, gender, and human instincts, as relevant today as ever. In the course of a lively drinking party, a group of Athenian intellectuals exchange views on eros, or desire. From their conversation emerges a series of subtle reflections on gender roles, sex in society and the sublimation of basic human instincts. The discussion culminates in a radical challenge to conventional views by Plato's mentor, Socrates, who advocates transcendence through spiritual love. The Symposium is a deft interweaving of different viewpoints and ideas about the nature of love "as a response to beauty, a cosmic force, a motive for social action and as a means of ethical education. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Reissue edition (April 29, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140449272

ISBN-13: 978-0140449273

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.4 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 0.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (15 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #13,551 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Ancient & Medieval Literature > Greek #33 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Greek & Roman #62 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Essays & Correspondence > Essays

Customer Reviews

I've read quite a few pieces of ancient Roman & Greek literature and each time I come away greatly surprised at how these 2000 to 3000-year old cultures were so similar to ours in many ways. Well, Plato's somewhat short dialogue "The Symposium" both re-affirms and counters these past impressions. "The Symposium" investigates the nature of romantic Love. What is it? From where

does it arise? What is the aim of Love? What does it accomplish? On the one hand, this dialogue asks questions that people today still can't really answer. Modern readers should be able to relate very well to these aspects of the dialogue. It should be noted that most of the viewpoints and opinions presented through several speeches in the dialogue make some sort of sense, but only when Love is thought of as a sentient being that can influence a person's thoughts and actions. Most of us today have been schooled in science and don't perceive Love as a separate entity but rather as a mental condition springing from somewhere in the brain. But overall, the speeches are easy to relate to in the sense of scrutinizing the fundamental nature of Love. However, where "The Symposium" evinces stark differences with modern culture is with respect to homo-eroticism. So many references are made to homosexuality (including one embarrassingly revealing anecdote by Alcibiades about his lover Socrates) that if we consider Plato's work to be representative of the time, then we have to believe that many, if not most, highly educated men in ancient Athens were essentially homosexuals whose relations with their wives were limited to providing for them and fathering children by them. The most convincing support for this is in Aristophanes' and Alcibiades' speeches.

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