

Forte Academy: Challenge the Canon in the Classroom

Lesson Activities

Day 2: Literature & Philosophy



1. Starter: Diotima's Ladder of Love

Diotima's Ladder of Love is a philosophical concept of love expounded at the end of Plato's *Symposium*. It breaks down the concept of love into an ascent from a type of physical attraction up to a divine or sublime love.

This concept remained central in later Neoplatonic thought and also fused with Christian thought in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as writers and artists depicted their own ascents towards Divine Love (e.g. in Dante's *Divine Comedy*).



From a copy of Dante's *Commedia* illustrated by Sandro Botticelli (c. 1485)

Diotima's Ladder from Plato's *The Symposium*

Beauty is revealed
to us and
we contemplate
the Form of Beauty

Gazing on the 'ocean
of beauty' of the
sciences, we beget
fine ideas

We see beauty
in activities,
institutions, sciences

Beauty of soul
outweighs
beauty of body

We realise beauty is
similar in all persons
and love *all* beautiful
bodies

We love one beautiful
person and beget
noble sentiments
with them



“

DIOTIMA'S DIALOGUE WITH SOCRATES

‘Now I’ll let you go. I’ll try to restate for you the account of Love that I once heard from a woman from Mantinea called Diotima. She was wise about this and many other things. On one occasion, she enabled the Athenians to delay the plague for ten years by telling them what sacrifices to make. She is also the one who taught me the ways of Love. I’ll report what she said, using as a basis the conclusions I reached with Agathon, but doing it on my own, as far as I can.’⁹⁵

”

- Socrates on Diotima

1. Activity: Read through these extracts in Fig. 1 – 4.

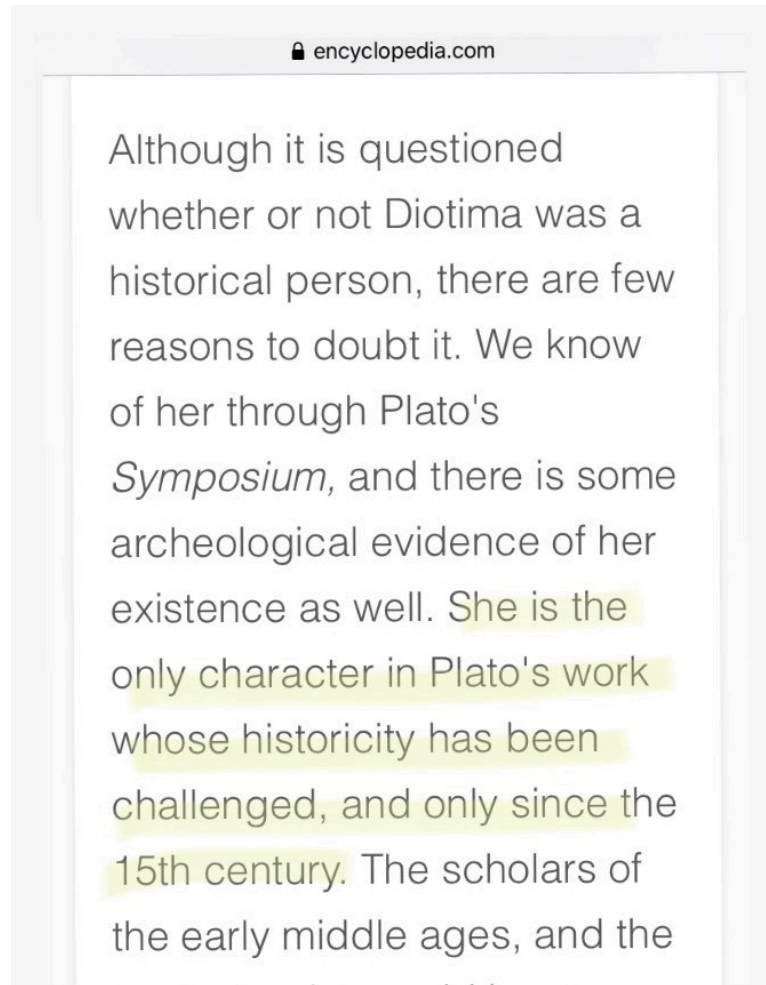


Fig. 1.

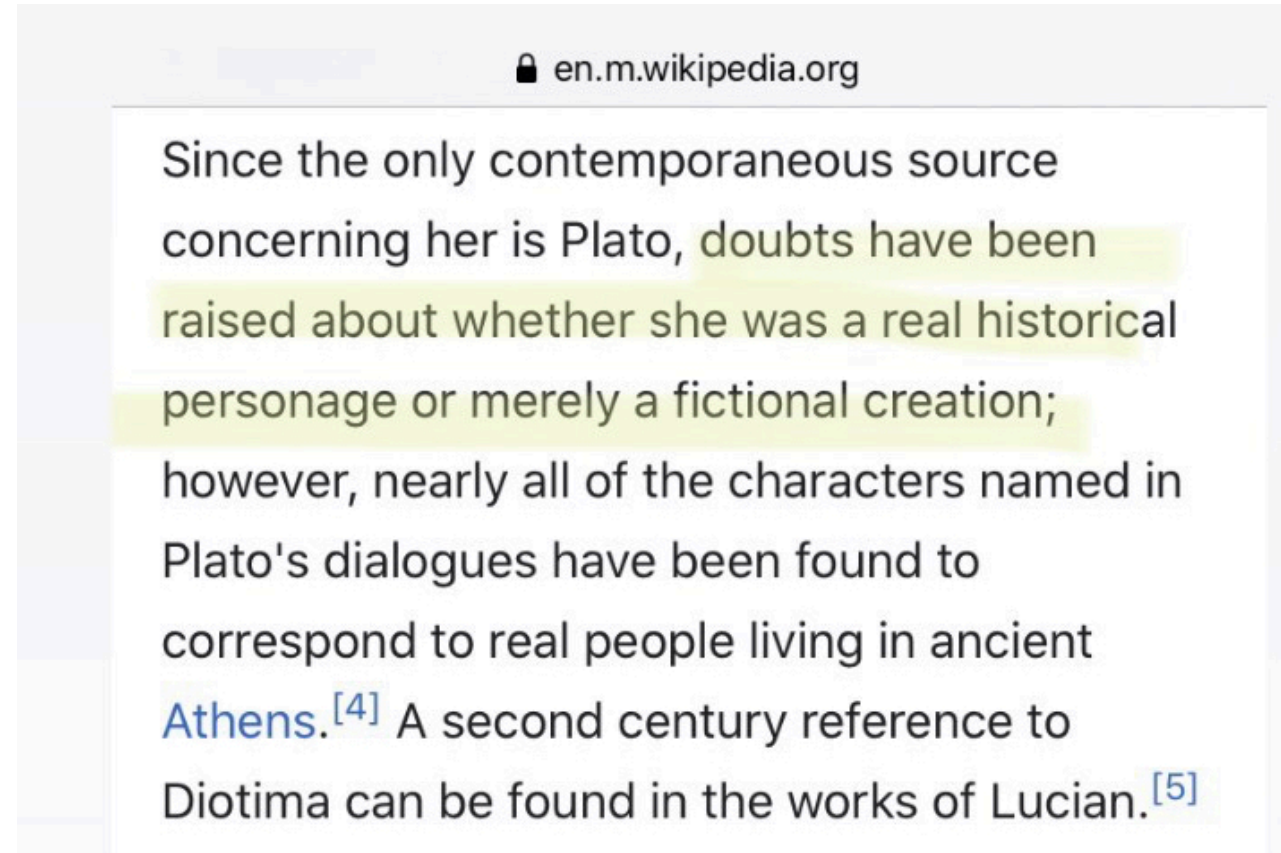


Fig. 2.

About



Welcome to Diotíma (v. 3.0), a resource for information on women, gender, sex, sexualities, race, ethnicity, class, status, masculinity, enslavement, disability, and the intersections among them in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Why Diotíma? She's the sage who taught Socrates the "philosophy of love" in Plato's *Symposium*. She's probably not real. Why *docta femina* in the site's address? She's the educated woman audience of the Roman elegists. She's not real either. But hopefully

Fig. 3.

Very few modern commentators and translators of Plato's *Symposium* turn to Ficino's *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis, De amore* (or his translation of the *Symposium* into Latin) for assistance, or indeed mention Ficino or any of his works at all. An exception is Osborne (1994: 94), who notes Ficino's observation in *De amore* 7.2 that Socrates is portrayed by Plato as a representative of Amor (*Erôs*) as depicted by Diotima (the fictional religious figure who describes *Erôs* as a *daimôn* in 202-3). Another is Rosen, who also remarks on this resemblance, and in addition mentions both Ficino's discussion of the topos of whether characters in the dialogue are barefoot or shod and his treatment of the halved proto-humans in Aristophanes' speech.⁶ But in general scholars of the *Symposium* pay no regard to Ficino unless they are interested in what Renaissance readings of the work can tell us about the Renaissance itself.⁷

Fig. 4.

Fig. 4. From A. Hobbs, 'The Erotic Magus: Ficino's *De Amore* as a Guide to Plato's *Symposium*' (2019)

Note down your thoughts:

1. Why do you think the existence of Diotima has been doubted?
2. Should we consider Diotima any less real than Socrates?

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1. Teacher's Notes

This starter is designed to raise awareness of the issue of canon formation and classical philosophy. The Canon is not only influenced by what *survives*, but also by the interpretations and prejudices of later generations of scholars and writers.

Some ideas:

- Why do you think the existence of Diotima has been doubted?
 - Should we consider Diotima any less real than Socrates?
- Let's discuss! Share your thoughts, or your students' thoughts to these questions by adding a note onto our Padlet wall: <https://padlet.com/forteacademyuk/diotima>.

Extension: Students could carry out their own independent research task to find out more about women philosophers from the Early Pythagoreans up to Late Antiquity.

2. Lesson Plan: Latin Love Elegy

Starter

2	Ovid and Latin Love-poetry	
	Ovid	21
	Catullus	31
	Propertius	34
	Tibullus	38
	Horace	42

SQA (June 2019) Advanced Higher Latin Prescribed Texts for 'Ovid and Latin Love-poetry'

- **Who is missing from this list?**

2. Lesson Plan: Sulpicia

Introduction

Many women, we know, wrote poetry in ancient Rome. The works of only one have survived. These six poems by Sulpicia, the niece of the distinguished statesman and patron of letters Valerius Messalla Corvinus, allow us to hear an aristocratic female voice from the late first century B.C. and the Augustan milieu of Horace and Vergil. Sulpicia's work has been handed down as part of the *Corpus Tibullianum*, a collection of poems by Tibullus and other poets affiliated with Messalla.

Activities

- Annotate Sulpicia's poetry on the worksheet (attached, in translation) or translate the Latin found here on [Perseus](#).

Plenary: Consider the reception history of Sulpicia's poetry by reading the article [Sulpicia I](#). Summarise what you have learnt from this article in 5 bullet points.

3. Lesson Plan: Perpetua



Introduction

Perpetua was a young African woman who fell in with an obscure Christian sect that must have seemed to outsiders like a kind of death-cult. She was arrested around the year 203 AD along with several other practitioners on unspecified charges, and it appears that her group was believed to pose a threat to the safety of the larger community. Given the opportunity to renounce the group and walk free, Perpetua chose execution in the arena.

The **Passiō**, an account of her death, includes Perpetua's prison diary (Chapters 3 – 10).

Translate [a section] from Perpetua's narrative: In [The Passion of Perpetua](#).

Perpetua begins her narrative with an argument she had with her father while under house arrest. She is then taken to prison.

3.1 Cum adhūc (inquit) cum prōsecūtōribus essem et mē pater verbīs ēvertere cupīret et dēicere prō suā affectiōne perseverāret, “Pater,” inquam, “vidēs verbī grātiā vās hoc iacēns, urceolum sive aliud?”

aequē: equally; likewise

affectiō, -tiōnis f.: feeling, attitude

alter, -tera, -terum: one (or the other) of two

circiter: around, about

cupiō, -ere, -ivī, -itum: to desire

ēvertō, -ere, -ī, -sum: to overturn

hinc: from here

iaceō, -ēre, -cuī: to lie down

martyrium, -iī n.: testimony; martyrdom

nārrō (1): to narrate, relate

ōrdō, -dinis m.: order, line, series (of events)

perseverō (1): to continue, persist

prōsecūtor, -ōris m.: prosecutor; escort

sēnsus, -ūs m.: feeling, sense; perception

sicut: just as

sive, seu: whether, or (if)

tōtus, -a, -um: whole, entire

ūber, -beris n.: breast

urceolus, -ī m.: litter pitcher, little pot

vās, vāsis n.: vessel

vīgintī duo, -ae, -o: twenty-two

3. Teacher's Notes

The study of Classics is typically limited by chronological, as well as geographical, boundaries. By stepping outside of these boundaries (and therefore, the Canon), there is plenty of Latin literature that can be used in the classroom to reflect diverse authors and experiences.

- [The Passion of Perpetua](#) is available as a free PDF download by **The Experrecta Series: Women Latin Authors** (with more books on the way!) This edition includes a running vocabulary and commentary for each section of the text.
- An English translation can be found online here: [Passions of Saints Perpetua and Felicity](#).