

The Philosophy Department Presents:
“Plato on the Unity of Comedy and Tragedy”
A Talk by Franco Trivigno (University of Oslo)



This paper takes its starting point from the end of the Symposium, in which Socrates argues that it is the "same man who knows how to compose comedy and tragedy and that the one who possesses the art of tragic poetry is also a comic poet" (223d). Socrates is trying to convince the tragedian Agathon and the comic playwright Aristophanes, both of whom are drunk and in the process of passing out. We are never told what the arguments are, and both dramatists doze off before the conversation is finished. This highly suggestive passage will form the starting point for my discussion of the unity of comedy and tragedy. I will attempt a speculative reconstruction of Socrates' arguments in order to formulate precisely the senses in which comedy and tragedy constitute a unity. I will deny that comedy and tragedy are the same; rather, I will argue that there are at least three ways in which comedy and tragedy may be said to form a unity: in that they share the same aim, in that they endorse a single theory of value and in that the objects that they imitate—ridiculousness and seriousness in agents and actions—form opposite parts of the same branch of knowledge.

Thursday, October 3, 2019
12:30 – 2:00PM 3308 Boylan Hall