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Platonic Strategies in Ovid’s Tales of Love

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1. Introduction

What kind of love narratives do the *Ars* and *Remedia* produce? This question, for a variety of reasons, has not always been considered relevant for the study of Ovid’s erotodidactic works. In the philological tradition of the commentary, the *Ars* and the *Remedia* are studied in a discrete manner, independently of each other. Commentaries on these works are usually dedicated either to the books of the *Ars* or separately, to the *Remedia*. Furthermore, in spite of the general acceptance that the *Ars* and the *Remedia* are thematically and discursively intertwined, the internal logic connecting these works has not been carefully studied. When these works are read together, the *Remedia* is typically understood as the *Ars*’ afterthought: this is probably due to the fact that the publication of the *Ars* preceded the *Remedia* and because it seems so natural to understand the decay and death of love as a sequel to the blossoming of love. This leads to a reading of the *Remedia* as an optional coda, one that gives expression only to the life of the unhappy lover. If

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1. Although the *Ars* and *Remedia* are often put together, encompassing a didactic cycle, or an erotic “trilogy,” they are not traditionally treated as consecutive parts of the same grand narrative. See Conte (1994b), 346, who includes the *Medicamina* in the didactic cycle. Henderson’s (1979; 1980) “trilogy” refers to the *Ars* as two parts (distinguishing between the first two books addressed to men and the third book which addresses women), and finally to the *Remedia* as the trilogy’s third part.


3. The first two parts of the *Ars Amatoria* were published around the end of 2 BCE, and were followed by the publication of Book 3. We know that the *Remedia Amoris* was written after Book 3 since it draws on the three books of the *Ars*. On the chronology, see Henderson (1979), xi–xii.

4. Henderson, for example, considers the programmatic paragraph in *Rem*.13–16, where Ovid
considered in terms of its didactic value, the *Remedia* thus seems to have no necessary and general standing, as it seems to speak only to those readers who have lost love. For the happy lover, the *Remedia* offers a completely irrelevant narrative.

Unlike the *Ars*, which leads the reader through the developing course of love, the instruction of the *Remedia* has an entirely different goal. The gist of the remedial process is renunciation, toward a perspective that allows the wounded lover to see love as a malaise. Hence, when juxtaposed as two independent texts, as two equally legitimate perspectives on the experience of love, the *Ars* and *Remedia* create an unsettling palinodic structure. This tension is accentuated by the tendency to read the *Ars* and *Remedia* as manifestations of two different literary traditions: the *Ars* is considered a natural progeny of the Roman love elegy, while the *Remedia*, with its Stoic and Epicurean sentiments, is much more akin to philosophical literature. This alleged difference between the generic provenances of the *Ars* and the *Remedia* seems to stand in the way of a unified reading of the works. Given the presence of an apparent tension—even a contradiction—between the *Ars* and *Remedia*, there seems to be hardly any room for reading these works as part of one cohesive love narrative.

In current treatments of his erotodidactic works, Ovid’s conception of the love narrative remains unexplored. This is indicative of the clear influence that poststructural theory has had on the study of Ovid. In the context of new perspectives on love as a literary phenomenon, a strong “linguistic turn” is commonly assumed in various postmodern readings of the Roman love elegy. Hence, the framing of the experience of love as a discursive phenomenon has carried no implications for an understanding of the significance of the love story as a unified structure. In Julia Kristeva’s *Tales of Love*, for example, the language of love is severed from the idea of a homogeneous or a coherent speaking subject; speaking of love, language lacks a unified voice since it is couched in an experience in which “the limits of one’s own

addresses his curing guide specifically to unhappy lovers, as an indication that “Ovid saw the *Remedia* as a sequel to the *Ars*, and perhaps also as a reversal of it.” Henderson (1979), xii.

5. The palinode is a poem retracting an earlier poem written by the same poet. The *Remedia* can be seen as a palinode since its didactic speaker renounces his previous work, i.e., the *Ars*.

6. “The title of the poem,” writes Henderson on the *Remedia*, “immediately indicates that we are dealing with a different notion of love from that in the *Ars*: love as a disease or hurt (vitium, morbus, vulnus), instead of a skill or social activity.” Henderson (1979), xii. See also the consideration of the thematic connections of the *Remedia* to the Roman satirists in Brunelle (2005), 141–58.

7. Groundbreaking studies, such as those by Veyne (1988), Myerowitz (1985), and Kennedy (1993), have led to a reassessment of the genre’s aesthetic value by redefining the concept of love as a linguistic and literary phenomenon.
identity vanish.” The banishment of a stable self from the discourse of love is implicit with the departure from the traditional view of narratives as stable and unified structures. Hence, while searching for ways of integrating the ordeal of love into the communicative order, Kristeva deliberately resists the singular structure of a coherent and cohesive tale. As the book’s title suggests, a lover’s discourse must consist in more than one narrative. Love narratives are essentially in the plural.

Questioning the possibility of a unified self, postmodern writing on love no longer sees in linearity a central form for narrating love. Instead of a linear history of love, tales of love are interpreted today with an emphasis on the multiplicity of moods, situations, and cultural references that constitute the love experience. One of the most influential texts in articulating the fragmentary character of a lover’s discourse is, of course, Roland Barthes’s *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* (1978). No longer dominated by the traditional question of what love is, Barthes allows a new question to take its place: How do we speak of love? What is the lover’s language? His aim is not to understand the essence of Love, but to decipher the “grammar” of the discourse of love. And in this sense, he studies love as a linguistic phenomenon: “Amorous dis-cursus is not dialectical; it turns like a perpetual calendar.”

Barthes composes a love discourse, a mélange of fragments which catch the lover in action. These fragments could be used by readers in filling in their own history. And yet, Barthes’s figures resist the order of linearity.

Throughout any love life, figures occur to the lover without any order, for on each occasion they depend on an (internal or external) accident. Confronting each of these incidents (what “befalls” him), the amorous subject draws on the reservoir (the thesaurus?) of figures, depending on the needs, the injunctions, or the pleasures of his image-repertoire. Each figure explodes, vibrates in and of itself like a sound severed from any tune—or is repeated to satiety, like the motif of a hovering music. No logic links the figures, determines their contiguity: the figures are non-syntagmatic, non-narrative.

For Barthes, the logic of love is precisely “non-narrative.” His account of that logic is therefore not synoptic but takes the form of a lexicon arranged

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9. See how Currie (1998), 3 describes the shift from modern to postmodern approaches to narrative: “Like the physicist, the chemist or the microbiologist, the role of the narratologist was traditionally to uncover a hidden design which would render the object intelligible. For the traditionalist critic, the most profound hidden design in a narrative was its unity. . . . In the view of the poststructuralist critic, this was just a way of reducing the complexity or heterogeneity of a narrative.”
alphabetically: i.e., arranged in a manner that would circumvent the old story of how love “develops, grows, causes suffering, and passes away.”

2. Ovid’s Love Story

Ovid’s work on love is completely absent in Barthes’s and Kristeva’s discussions of love. This is surprising, since both Barthes and Kristeva make it a point to return to the texts of antiquity as a backdrop for their discourse of love and, in this sense, need to circumvent Ovid’s authority as a *magister* or *praeceptor amoris*. At the same time, however, the exclusion of Ovid from the definitive textual core of the Western discourse on love is not uncharacteristic of a tradition that has consistently consecrated the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of love. As suggested, the tendency to dismiss the value of the Ovidian teaching in the *Ars* and *Remedia* is an integral part of the history of Ovid’s reception.

The dismissal of Ovid’s works on love—the frivolity and lightness traditionally ascribed to these works—is the mirror image of an opposite tendency of appraisal that is just as symptomatic of the tradition: the canonization of the Platonic doctrine of love. Indeed, on the question of love, Plato and Ovid seem to stand out as mutually exclusive options, as opposites. Describing Ovid’s rhetorical position as conflicting with Plato’s philosophy of love, Richard Lanham, for example, writes: “Ovid’s strategy in both the love poetry and in the *Metamorphoses* stands opposite to Plato’s. Plato sought an externally sanctioned center beyond language; Ovid writes poems that have holes in the middle. He denies any sanctions his poetry itself has not created.”

Charging Ovid as a writer of “poems that have holes in the middle,” Lanham seems to suggest that the ethical force of Ovid’s poetry is

11. Barthes dismisses from his discourse the grand structure of narratives of transcendence, deliverance and other sorts of moral tales of love, and creates an ahistorical portrait of the speaking lover. Yet, as I read it, the arbitrary alphabetical order which is not free of repetitions and contradictions, creates a story, which following Barthes can be coined as the narrative of “perpetual calendar.” Paradoxically, the reading of Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse* finds itself oriented toward the structure of story. See, for example, Donnelly’s conclusion in her essay on the structure of Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse*: “It is a book that has the power to tell a story and to analyze itself” (emphasis added). Donnelly (1988), 180. For the way Barthes employs the terms “narrative” and “story” in his love grammar see the section on Novel/Drama (1978), 93.

12. For Barthes and Kristeva, Plato is the fundamental ancient source for discussing love. In the programmatic chapter “How this Book is Constructed,” Barthes specifically mentions Plato’s *Sympo- sium* as a fundamental text for composing his “amorous subject.” (1978), 8. He also refers to *Phaedrus* in the figure titled “I am Odious” (165). Kristeva dedicates the second chapter of *Tales of Love* (59–82) to Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.

problematic since it is bound to an illusionary image of the world. Ovid’s poetic world is understood as morally dangerous since it lacks any metaphysical foundations. This world not only lacks a specific moral design, but is, moreover, completely severed from the eternal dominion of the Good and the True. In a similar manner, for traditional readings of Ovid, the narrative framework of the *Ars* and *Remedia* appears to be arbitrary and whimsical—the kind of poetry ruled by voids in the scheme of meaning and narrative. Furthermore, Lanham characterizes the irreconcilable difference between Ovid and the Platonic Socrates as teachers of love in terms of the opposition between *homo rhetorius* and *homo seriosus*. This opposition clearly underscores, as Molly Myerowitz shows, the longstanding reception of Ovid’s erotodidactic poetry as insincerely didactic.\(^\text{14}\)

At this point we need to pause. Ovid’s derogatory characterization as *homo rhetorius* should in no way mislead us. Rhetoric, as Plato teaches us, is vain unless it serves the desire of knowledge, philosophy. But philosophy is not the only possible mode of writing which seeks knowledge, especially not self-knowledge. By the same token, philosophy is not the only authorial framework within which rhetoric can escape the charge of emptiness. In Ovid’s erotodidactic writing, the lover’s rhetorical skills are subjected to a deep motivation of gaining self-knowledge. The reader who begins as an ignorant of the art of love (*artem . . . non novit amandi, AA. 1.1*) would become through the process of reading a skilled lover (*hoc legat et lecto carmine doctus amet, AA. 1.2*).\(^\text{15}\) Reading of the erotodidactic text is, according to Ovid, a transformational experience: the lover becomes aware of the power of words, expressions, and above all, the language of poetry.\(^\text{16}\) The skilled lover, the master of words, uses his art in order to seduce his object of desire, and to become a skillful narrator as well. In making the lover aware of the logic of love, that which puts the love experience into a comprehensible order of transitions, the lover not only gains mastery in the field of love, but realizes the best of his seductive powers. The lover who knows himself knows the ways of love, and hence he knows how to fashion a love tale. As we shall see, Ovid’s *doctus* reader is not trained to become a whimsical narrator, or a narrator who tells a story lacking a structure. Ovid’s lover is one who can

\(^{14}\) Myerowitz (1985), 17–40. The reason why Ovid was not considered to be a natural heir of Plato is connected to the way his didactic position was understood. In the context of the important changes brought about by the discursive approaches to Ovid, the didactic claim of the *Ars* and *Remedia* has been unable to call for any serious attention to itself. Exceptional treatments of Ovid’s didacticism are Downing (1999), 235–51; Kennedy (2000), 159–76.

\(^{15}\) I am speaking here of “the naïve Reader in the text.” See Sharrock (1994), 16 for the distinction between the naïve Reader in the text and the sophisticated reader.

\(^{16}\) The transformational effect is a central theme of the double *Heroides* where the female readers become manipulative and seductive authors.
compose from the different amorous segments (Ars and Remedia) a unified structure of a love story.

Indeed, unlike the Platonic Socrates, Ovid practices an art for which the absolute, eternal form of the good is not at all a desired goal. Ovid’s art seems to lack the ethical dimension of the Socratic art of love and, subsequently, appears as an antimetaphysical approach to love, one which the Platonic tradition could only reject. However, despite the clear opposition between a Platonic and an Ovidian conception of love, I would like to show that these conflicting perspectives, nevertheless, present themselves—surprisingly—through common structures.

While Ovid’s didactic framework makes no room for a metaphysical revelation of love, it is not altogether severed from the Platonic language of love. Furthermore, I believe that Plato’s philosophical language of love provides an important source of influence for Ovid’s erotodidactic elegies. As suggested, the guides provide an actual narrative of love which readers can use as a biographical model. Moreover, the structure of this narrative, its constitutive tropes, can be traced back to Plato. In this respect, we would be able to re-appreciate Ovid as Plato’s successor and, perhaps, find a serious way of embracing Ovid’s postulation of the Delphic imperative, “know thyself,” as the lover’s main concern. That is, once we recognize the affinity between Plato’s and Ovid’s narratological frameworks, we shall also be in a position to see that the erotodidactic goal of self-knowledge is also fundamental to Ovid’s teaching. And it is this goal that the divine intrusion of the Apollonian message into the text of the Ars (AA. 2.498–502) is meant to incite: the lover should become sapiens (2.501).

In establishing the affinity between Ovid’s and Plato’s narratives of love, I shall focus on two narrative strategies that are central to Plato’s major dialogues on love: Phaedrus and Symposium. I will be concerned with (1) the palinodic structure of a love narrative as it is expressed in Socrates’ speeches of the Phaedrus and in the contradiction between Ars and Remedia, and with (2) the structure of the transformational narrative which we find in the Symposium’s image of the ladder of love and in the Ovidian shift from an art of love to techniques of remedy against love.

17. In calling attention to Ovid’s narrative strategies I do not refer to the praetor’s specific advices, i.e., to his specific praetor’s amorum. I wish, rather, to focus here on patterns of narrativity that are embodied in the form and structure of Ovid’s Ars Amatoria and Remedia Amoris.

18. Green (1982), 376 reads Ovid’s “know yourself” as a prescription to adopt “favourable, self-flattering positions.” In other words, according to him, Ovid ridicules Apollo’s wisdom by giving it a pragmatic and physical twist. For a different view see Myerowitz (1985), 130 and Sharrock (1994), 245–56. See also Dillon (1994) who explored the philosophical sources of Ovid’s Art of Love in the philosophical tradition, and in particular in that of Platonism.
3. Narrative and Contradiction

“Do we speak of the same thing when we speak of love?” asks Julia Kristeva in *Tales of Love*. “The ordeal of love,” she replies “puts the univocality of language and its referential and communicative power to the test. . . . Trying to talk about it seems to me different from living it, but no less troublesome and delightfully intoxicating.” Despite the differences between being in love and talking about love, Kristeva points to a strong effect which she finds to be dominant in both experiences. Being in and speaking about love are experiences that are distressing, just as they are exhilarating. Kristeva’s understanding of the oxymoronic nature of the love affect is not new and is perhaps best captured in Sappho’s poetic language through a metaphor of taste: *glukupikron*. That bittersweet taste of love does not seem to disappear from the lover’s mouth as he or she begins to speak. Touched by this dominant taste of love, our tongue produces contradicting and perplexing utterances which today are called “a lover’s discourse.”

Let us read Sappho’s fragment 130, in which she uses the figure, *glukupikron*, in describing the paradoxical experience of love:

Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me
Sweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up.

(tr. Anne Carson)

Sappho captures a moment in a love experience. What happens in this particular moment is that the lover experiences the fierce effect of Eros through language. In naming Eros the “bittersweet,” Sappho is not making a reflective statement. “Bittersweet” is an instinctive response to the effect of Eros. It is not a descriptive but an expressive utterance (just as “it hurts!” is primarily an expression of pain rather than its description). For Sappho, the taste of Eros is familiar. But, what are the grounds for this familiarity? In ordinary circumstances, we are used to encountering the tastes of sweetness and the bitterness; but where do we encounter the bittersweet? For Sappho, love itself is the origin of this paradoxical taste. The moment of naming Eros is the very one in which Eros has seized and whirled the lover. The movement is sudden, unpredictable, and therefore hard to defy. Although unexpected, Eros is not a stranger. He is familiar in his sudden appearance each time anew.

How can we make sense of the paradoxical experience of the lover? How can the speaker’s words be meaningful? And how can we decide whether

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“bittersweet” is desirable or distasteful? The speaker loves what causes pain and she detests what brings her pleasure. In representing Eros as a contradictory phenomenon, Sappho’s *glukupikron* impedes the unfolding of a narrative. Anne Carson puts this in the following way:

Her poem begins with a dramatic localization of the erotic situation in time (*deute*) and fixes the erotic action in the present indicative tense (*donei*). She is not recording the history of a love affair but the instant of desire. One moment staggers under pressure of eros; one mental state splits.20

Yet, if Sappho’s *glukupikron* is indeed so revealing, if it touches the heart of a lover’s experience, then we may, nevertheless, wish to examine the role it has in shaping “the history of a love affair.” If, as Sappho claims, *glukupikron* regulates the beginning of love, how does such a beginning determine the story’s progression? This question becomes even more complicated as the story is constructed by a didactic author. A didactic perspective should be able to release us from the paradox of love, and it paradigmatically does so in one of two ways: by doing away with either love’s sweetness or its bitterness, i.e., by renunciation or by the embracing of love. The reliable teacher cannot afford to be ambiguous here; the love guide must point to one—and only one—narrative track.

Ovid’s *Ars* and *Remedia* complicate this dilemma rather than solve it. The *Ars* encourages the lover to enter into a love relationship. But the *Remedia*—if we take its curative position seriously—renounces it. Things become even more complicated as we realize that the *Ars*’ enthusiasm about the domain of love nevertheless admits love’s painful aspects. The writer of the *Ars* is fully aware of love’s problematic nature. In this sense, the *Ars* anticipates the need for a *Remedia*. The *Ars* tells of dangerous moments in which love weakens the mind (*AA. 1.230–52*). It also makes frequent allusions to ferocious expressions of passion and to unhappy examples of love stories (*AA. 1.283–350*); it refers to the financial losses (*AA. 1.399–436*) and to the psychological damage brought about by the illusionary power of erotic language (*AA. 1.437–58*). While the *Ars* teaches self-control in the practice of language (as a measure against erotic risks), Ovid, at the same time, recognizes that the refined lover is ultimately defenseless against the seduction of his own words:

> saepe tamen vere coepit simulator amare,  
> saepe, quod incipiens finxerat esse, fuit.

Many times indeed the imposter begins to love. Many times happens what he has fabricated. (AA. 1.615–16)

But as the lover falls into his own rhetorical trap by falling in love, he realizes the Ars’ vocation. Ovid tells us in the Remedia that the main motivation of the Ars is to teach loving, not feigning love: *Discite sanari, per quem didicistis amare* (Rem. 43). But as Ovid exhorts, “Learn healing from whom you learned to love,” he confuses the reader with the love story’s riddle: To be or not to be in love?

While the Ars favors love despite its predictable ending, the Remedia’s didactic value corresponds to the successive stage where love is lost. Once we try to integrate both the Ars and Remedia into the same didactic space, we seem to lose the possibility of creating a coherent love story. When juxtaposed, the two parts do not seem to belong to the same story. They are rather read as two equally relevant perspectives on love which create a puzzling literary structure: a palinodic structure, a contradiction. What, then, can the didactic value of the Ars and the Remedia be when these works are read together? No doubt, Ovid wrote the two parts—the pursuit of and then the recovery from love—as texts to be read together. As such, he was also aware that these works create a unique reading experience. Ovid begins the Remedia with an explicit reference to the contradiction generated by his two poems:

> legerat huius Amor titulum nomenque libelli
> bella mihi, video, bella parantur ait.
>
> Amor read the name and title of this book and said: “I see that wars are prepared against me.” (Rem. 1–2)

Ovid is uncomfortable about the apparent contradiction existing between the Ars and Remedia. He understands that the Remedia threatens to undermine the value of the Ars, and yet, he reassures his reader, again and again, that the reading of the Ars is not a pointless exercise.

> nec te, blande puer, nec nostras prodimus artes,
> nec nova praeteritum Musa retexit opus.
>
> I do not betray you nor my own arts; this new Muse does not unravel my past work. (Rem. 11–12)
He promises that the advice he gave in the first work will not lose its meaning or validity in the face of the ultimate curative antithesis of the second work. Both parts of the project, he declares, both the “pro” and the “con,” can still be seriously read.

Naso legendus erat tum, cum didicistis amare
idem nunc vobis Naso legendus erit.

Just as in the past the reading of Naso was invaluable for you to learn how to love, so reading Naso now will be invaluable for you. (Rem. 71–72)

But Ovid’s authorial reassurances do not, in themselves, provide any solution to the literary puzzle, the tension, created by the juxtaposition of Ars and Remedia. How can we interpret Ovid’s double gesture? How can Ovid’s didactic position be taken seriously if his didactic text is self-contradictory? Or in other words, how can the author claim authority for his writing if his text produces an ambiguous structure for a love narrative?

The contradiction between the Ars and Remedia is not something that can be easily dismissed. Its presence calls for reflection. And yet, in reflecting on this contradiction, we need to resist the temptation of doing away with the contradiction on which we reflect. The contradiction that surfaces in reading Ars and Remedia is a real one and should be addressed as such. Any interpretation of these works must rest on a reading that embraces the structure of contradiction as being integral to them. More specifically, I think that the palinode created by Ars and Remedia must be understood within the horizons of a narrative underlying Ovid’s articulation of the paradoxical experience of love. That is, the paradoxical structure of the Ars and Remedia reflects, in my view, a new kind of textual awareness on Ovid’s part, one that is inseparable from his understanding of what a love narrative is.

Here, we may return to Plato and recall how Phaedrus with its erotic palinode, with Socrates’ opposing orations on love, provides Ovid’s Ars and Remedia with an antecedent. As they leave the city and submerge themselves in nature, Phaedrus tells Socrates of Lysias’ speech which poses at its center the question of who the better lover is; is he the disinterested or the passionate one? Lysias constructed an argumentative case to support the supremacy of the nonlover. Recognizing the extent to which Phaedrus is impressed by Lysias’ rhetoric, Socrates hurries to show that he can surpass Lysias and composes a competing speech on the subject. He endorses Lysias’ position while showing that his argumentative and rhetorical powers are superior to
Lysias’ (235a). However, once he succeeds in enchanting Phaedrus and in proving himself as a superior rhetor, dissatisfaction takes hold of Socrates, who turns to deliver a second speech. In this speech, Socrates repudiates his former claim by making a stronger case for the supremacy of the passionate lover. Hence, Socrates’ first speech represents an indifferent lover whose deep disdain for passion is translated into a strictly instrumental approach to love. The second speech, in contrast, assumes the voice of a passionate lover defending erotic madness. Like Ars and Remedia, both speeches are didactic in character. And, again like the case of the Ovidian guides, a contradiction becomes apparent. The Ars and Remedia consist in inverting the Platonic order of the two Socratic speeches, against and then in favor of, passionate love.

Socrates attempts to justify his rhetorical gesture of reversal. In a non-Socratic manner, he turns to the poetic tradition as a source of authority. According to him “There is an ancient purification for those who have erred in muthologia, one which Homer did not perceive, but Stesichorus did” (243a24). Socrates ties the palinode’s rhetorical provenance with the ancient authority of the poet Stesichorus who blamed Helen for the Trojan War. Having lost his eyesight, Stesichorus realized that his defamation of Helen is a blasphemous error. He consequently composed a poem of recantation which exonerated Helen, thereby also recovering his sight. The palinode is reflective of Stesichorus’ moment of enlightenment. Socrates explains that this form of writing justifies Stesichorus’ reputation as mousikos (243a), a poet whose drive is akin to philosophy.

Furthermore, the palinode of Stesichorus serves Socrates in dramatizing his own moment of self-realization. In presenting Stesichorus, Socrates quotes only the second part of the poet’s palinode, implicitly suggesting the possibility of completely forgetting the impact of the first part:

This is not a true story,
You did not embark in the broad-benched ships,
You did not reach the citadel of Troy. (Phaed. 243a–b)

21. In both of his two orations, Socrates assumes the role of an older lover addressing an adolescent. But Socrates, who uses a rhetorical “you,” is speaking at the same time to his actual listener, Phaedrus.
25. Plato mentions Stesichorus’ palinode as a victorious poetic fight against the ignorance of truth in Rep. 586c and again in Epis. 3.319e.
Stesichorus’ clear denial of his previous position is a model for Socrates who strives to leave his first speech behind, as if it did not exist. It allows him to denounce his speech against love as one might “wash the bitter taste out of . . . [his] mouth” (243d). With this declaration Socrates commences a philosophical *Ars Amatoria*, a miniature treatise in praise of love.

Yet, despite his explicit intention, the relationship between Socrates’ two speeches is more complex than he is willing to admit. In particular, as can be seen by a close reading of the second speech, the strong presence of the first speech is never done away with. We should notice that Socrates’ defense of love is not simply a reversal of his earlier speech. Indeed, opposite conclusions can be drawn from the two speeches, but Socrates’ psychological description of the lover’s tormented soul in the first speech remains the grounds for his argument in the second speech. The agonies, follies, and shortcomings of the condition of being-in-love are recounted in both speeches. The irrational force of desire plays a crucial role in both. In the attempt to save passionate love, the second oration not only returns to, but also penetrates deeper into, the bittersweet taste of falling in love: the two contrasting *logoi* leave a contradicting experience of taste. Socrates promises that with the second speech the bitter taste of salty water will be washed out with the sweetness of drinkable water. Socrates is saying that the bitter taste of love (*halmuran akoen* 243d) produced by the first speech will be overcome by a talk (*potimo logo* 243d) that underscores the sweet effect of love. Yet, as we read the second speech, we realize that eros is no more sweet than bitter. Socrates does not solve the oxymoronic description of eros; he does not overcome Sappho’s *glukupikron*, but taints his second speech with an even stronger impression of the tantalizing effects of eros:

> Above all other does she [the lover’s soul] esteem her beloved in his beauty; mother, brother, friends, she forgets them all. Naught does she reckon of losing worldly possessions through neglect. All the rules of conduct, all the graces of life, of which aforetime she was proud, she now disdains, welcoming a slave’s estate and any couch where she may have suffered to lie down close beside her darling. (252a)

Reading this passage independently of its immediate context makes it difficult to ascertain whether it is being spoken by an advocate or an opponent to passionate love. The miserable and ethically problematic condition of the lover who abandons his closest relatives (like the Homeric Helen), betraying them and, above all, betraying himself, is not a favorable description. And

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yet, this description is a necessary starting point also for Socrates’ attempt to redeem love. The traumatic sides of the amorous experience are presented as essential to the phenomenon of love. Hence, for example, betrayal and ingratitude, poverty and humiliation, immoderation and obsessed servitude which were integral to the first speech (238d–241d) are all recurrent in Socrates’ second speech as well. If we then bracket the apparent conclusion of the two speeches, we see that Socrates’ position remains consistent. In regards to the problematic nature of love, Socrates has never really changed his mind. What, then, is the meaning of Socrates’ gesture of recantation in *Phaedrus*? Does Socrates see his speech against love as a sacrilegious act, if he generally affirms the pathological aspect of love? Does Socrates make a true reversal?

In the second speech Socrates does not deny the disappointments lovers undergo. Love is illusory and yet—and this is one of the key points of this speech—it can also be a source of great enlightenment. Responses to love alternate according to the lover’s personality. Love has the potential of tying the mortal experience to immortality, of letting the finality of human life be touched by the immortality of the divine realm. Few lovers, we are told, have the privilege to acknowledge the metaphysical dimension of their erotic suffering. Those who suffer from erotic torture (sexual longing) and who at the same time are able to identify in the exquisite image of their beloved a primordial memory of the soul’s immortal beauty, are genuine philosophical lovers. Socrates’ second speech opens up the metaphysical dimension of eros which is missing in the first oration. Yet, it does so by intrinsically tying eros’ metaphysical force to the illusionary and irrational experience of love.

As we have seen, Plato’s conception of the exuberance involved in erotic suffering is tied to the way Sappho fathoms the erotic experience as bittersweet. Socrates’ palinode aims in my view to capture this paradigmatic moment as the source of an enlightening process which structures the lover’s transformational narrative. The story of the lover’s recognition of his immortal soul resides in the paradox that expresses the intertwining of two essential dimensions of eros. Eros functions concomitantly as a blinding and as a revelatory force. As much as it calls for regret, eros is the object of our longing. In this sense, Socrates’ palinode is not simply a rhetorical exercise. It aims rather to structure a new narrative pattern for love which is based on the paradox of love. As such, Socrates’ love narrative stands in opposition to Lysias’ narrative which lacks in contradictions. Lysias’ constructs a coherent
story. In his story there is no room for the seductions of the bittersweet experience of love which would lead the lover to a fatal end.

Ovid was clearly not attracted by Lysias’ calculated form of rationality. As we have seen, he fashions the relationship between the Ars and Remedia through a paradox. Hence, the implicit contradiction underlying Socrates’ speeches in Phaedrus become an explicit part of Ovid’s understanding of the experience of love. In Ovid the paradoxical experience of love has a role in shaping the lover’s narrative. Following Plato, Ovid uses the palinode as a regulating principle in the structuring of his Ars and Remedia, and concomitantly the different stages of the love life. The palinode thus offers a narrative structure which allows the lover to express a contradictory experience. The lover regrets a love affair which is a source of happiness, and at the same time, he craves to be in love again although the pain of love still hurts. Hence, the Ars and Remedia are intertwined: each of them foreshadows the other.

By juxtaposing the Ars and Remedia, Ovid creates a retrospective narrative framework within which a lover can escape the grip of the past. For Ovid, healing requires the rejection of a lover’s prior amorous experience. This renunciation is a strategy for coping with the painful past. In this sense, Ars and Remedia present a chronology of two fields of consecutive, albeit separate, forms of experiences. The Ars comes first, representing an erotic experience that ultimately fails. And the Remedia provides a perspective by which the “now” of the Ars can turn into a past. The Remedia can serve as a remedy for the failures of the Ars precisely in the manner it puts the present of the Ars into relief.

But, following our discussion of Phaedrus, can we think of the present of a Remedia as simply canceling the presence of an Ars? Can the relationship between the Ars and Remedia be read only in terms of the sublimation of Ars by Remedia? Clearly not. This would leave the Ars bereft of any genuine significance. And, furthermore, this would dissipate the sense of contradiction so central to the Ovidian text. While couching his didactic elegies on love in a contradicting structure, Ovid explicitly resists any privileging of one temporal stage over the other. Ars and Remedia are both present to the reader as legitimate possibilities. Hence, making a dormant Platonic theme explicit, Ovid is unwilling to grant the second part of his palinode any absolute priority. On the contrary, for him, only the juxtaposition of Ars and Remedia can reflect the conflicting character of the experience of love.

Ovid is indeed concerned with the possibility of redeeming the sick lover of his predicament.
utile propositum est saevas extinguere flammam,
nec servum vitii pectus habere sui.

To quench savage flames is a useful objective, also not to have a heart sub-
dected to its weakness. (Rem. 53–54)

Yet, his articulation of a place and time in which the lover is no longer
enslaved by a painful love does not imply that the possibility of love should
be altogether forsaken. *Remedia* is not meant as a cure from a stage in human
life that must be overcome and left behind forever. It denotes, rather, the
possibility of freeing oneself from specific love episodes by allowing them to
become part of the past. But what kind of wisdom does the lover gain from
the Ovidian tale of love? We should recall, that, on the one hand, Ovid's
story does not renounce love (as Lysias does), and on the other hand, it
does not sanction erotic suffering as a means of a transcendental experience
(as the Platonic Socrates does). How can the transition from the *Ars* to the
*Remedia* be narrated, and how can our love experience be narrated from the
*Remedia*'s point of view?

4. Narrative and Transcendence

In the *Remedia*, the story of love comes to its end. By adding the *Remedia* to
his three *Artes*, Ovid integrates the theme of love's finitude into the story of
love. The notion of love as an accomplished event is essential to the *Reme-
dia*'s teaching: a love affair is destined to decline. In Barthes's words, *Remedia*
performs the declamation of a *fait accompli*. But *Remedia* also specifies a
stage of time in which the lover gains a distance from the experience of love.
In elaborating methods for achieving a proper distance from the beloved,
*Remedia*'s narrative strategy performs its therapeutic utility. The precepts
speak of the importance of creating a new life for the lover, *alter . . . orbis
habendus erit* (630). The lover's new life is an indication of his or her ability
to create a different world (*alter orbs*), one which is exempt from the pain-
exerting presence of the beloved. In this new surrounding, the avoidance of
eye contact is a necessary measure (615). The lover should remove himself
from Rome and the neighborhood of the beloved and hence is advised to
travel as far as possible: *i procul, et longas carpere perge vias* (214)—“go far
away, and make a long journey.” Geographical distance is only one of sev-
eral tactics by which a lover could develop indifference toward a previous
beloved. But time alone is the ultimate test: *nam mora dat vires* (83)—“For
time gives strength.” Time is the essence of emotional distance.
From the vantage point of time, love—always a previous love—is traditionally narrated as a folly, a mistake. “Every amorous episode can be . . . moralized,” remarks Barthes and he cites the conventional manner in which narrators fashion their love story: “I was out of my mind, I’m over it now”; “love is a trap which must be avoided from now on.” Likewise, Ovid deals with the lover’s curative stage in terms of modifying one’s misperception. The precepts which concern the beloved’s limitations (309–38) and destruction of the lover’s illusions (339–54 and 401–34) are all cases that refer to a healthier position, the construction of which depends on a retrospective standpoint. As we shall see, however, in teaching the lover a technique of retrospective narration Ovid does not demand the lover denounce completely an old love.

The trope of temporal distance is already employed by the Homeric epic (Il. 3, 171–76). For Homer, the passage of time is indeed crucial for the depiction of Helen’s experience. Ten years have passed since Helen’s arrival in Troy. As the end of the war approaches, Helen’s anxiety concerning her own fate intensifies. Anxiety calls for self-reflection. And Priam’s inquiry about the identity of the Greek warriors thus serves as a good pretext for recalling Paris and a love experience that is past. Helen’s response to Priam has been interpreted as a manipulation. But it is, at the same time, no less important to see that her response opens up a unique pattern. Helen considers her life in retrospect and proclaims she regrets the famous love affair. At present, she wishes she could alter the past. It would have been better to die back then, instead of leaving her homeland following Paris to Troy. The tragic consequences of that love are made clear only within the horizons of the present. It is the present which allows Helen to acknowledge the fact that her erotic experience was consequential for those she cares about most. She now sees that her amorous affair consisted in a betrayal of her Greek family. As Helen narrates her life, her passion for Paris loses its burning effect because it is no longer at the focus of her gaze. Recalling how she abandoned home, relatives, friends, and above all, her beloved daughter, Helen rearticulates the passions of her past, presenting them as an erroneous experience. Aware of this structure of Helen’s self-realization, the Homeric narrator sets the stage with particular care: looking at events from a high tower, from above, Helen occupies a perspective by which she is released from the grip of love. Helen’s spatial distance from events enhances the temporal distance that separates her from her love and allows for the creation of what we today call emotional distance.

30. This emotional distance is further explored by Homer through means of a geographical dis-
Helen’s elevated position is significant for the history of love narratives and is reformulated by Plato through the image of the ladder of love. In Diotima’s speech in Symposium, Plato develops a new erotic ethos, which surprisingly sets for the pathology of eros an optimistic ending. For Diotima, eros is not a specific domain of desire but, rather, the very movement of transcendence. Eros transcends the domains of objects, beautiful bodies, beautiful souls, worthy actions and laws, the beauty of knowledge in order to fully realize itself, face to face, with the Idea of Beauty. Diotima’s philosophy of love offers a liberating process by which the lover may shun the tragic twist of worldly love and open the alternative possibility not only of truth but also of a “happy” kind of love.

Erotic education begins at the bottom of the ladder, a first stage (proton) consisting in the experience of falling “in love with the beauty of one individual body” (210a6). From there on, the various stages are connected by consecutive clauses (opening with hoste 210b5; ina 210c3, 5, 7). While this progression reflects an intellectual development of a mind acquiring the capacity of making logical moves from concrete to abstract forms of thought, it concomitantly depicts a progression in time. That is, the shift from one stage to the other creates a continuous sequence which is based on both logical and temporal orders: “Then (epeita 210a8) he should realize . . . (210a), “next he must grasp . . .” (210b), “and after . . .” (meta de 210b6, c6). In this sense, Diotima’s ladder provides an archetype for a narrative structured as a lover’s biography, as stages on a lover’s path.

The form of a lover’s narrative is teleological. The erotic goal is achieved once the lover is released from the grip of the world of appearances to which the mundane eros belongs. To put this differently, Plato sees Diotima’s art of love as the art of transcending worldly eros:

Always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful. (Sym. 211c32)

31. Although the term ‘ladder’ is not explicitly mentioned in Diotima’s speech, its image can nevertheless be captured by the reader who follows the lover’s ascending steps (epanabasmoi 211c) from the bottom to the utmost stage of Love.

The invaluable significance of Diotima’s ladder of love for the history of love is commonly recognized within the context of the Neo-Platonist and Christian traditions. Denouncing earthly passions and glorifying the love for God, Christian writing develops a narrative of self-realization that leads to a complete renunciation of the amorous past. The religious conversion narrative privileges the present over the past. Hence, the linearity of the conversion story is utilized to sanction the religious move from past to present. But should we really understand the Platonic ascension up the ladder of love as a story of conversion? In my view, that would be an overinterpretation, or even, a misunderstanding of the Platonic narrative of love.

Diotima offers an infrastructure for a lover’s biography, patterns of personal growth. The protagonist of such a biography is expected to undergo a series of different stages before he reaches the ultimate goal of love. However, unlike the paradigm of a conversion narrative, the personal transformation delineated by Diotima is more complex than that of a simple temporal linearity. First, in prescribing the move to higher forms of love, Diotima does not commend a total renunciation of the amorous past. Growing out of the love for bodies and climbing up toward the love of laws, for example, the lover is not said to negate the desirability of bodies. Instead of negation, Diotima speaks of sublation. Transcending the love for particular bodies, the lover is in a position which allows him to perceive the concrete beautiful body as small (σμικρόν 210c5). From this higher position the grandiosity of the desired object is trivialized. In other words, Diotima uses the rule of perspective in order to point at the insufficiency of an old love. As a lover’s narrative develops, the loves of the past can show themselves as partial and incomplete. Eros is a movement perpetuated by a form of lack. And lack is indeed fundamental for the ascendance to the new stage of love. But it is only through perspective that the lover can recognize his previous amorous experiences as lacking.

Furthermore, the passage from an object-centered desire of the past to an enlightened present is not described by Diotima as a singular event in a lover’s life. The narrative scheme delineated by the ladder of love is based on a multiplicity. Transcendence does not consist in a singular break in one’s life, but appears throughout life in the plural, i.e., as context-dependent cases of transcendence that create a converging sequence. Although the

33. An example is Augustine’s *Confessions*, which is a narration of a self whose present only becomes meaningful through a critical review of the past, through recognition of one’s past as flawed. In the intellectual histories written by Blumenberg and Taylor, for example, the temporal structure of the *Confessions* is presented as the key for understanding the new mode of reflexivity created by this first autobiography. Blumenberg (1983), 309–23; Taylor (1989), 127–39.
ascendance to the final metaphysical stage of love is described as an ideal leap, the form of that leap is made possible only through its recurrent reverberation within the sensual domain. The lover’s readiness to undertake the ultimate metaphysical stage is conditioned by his familiarity with the form of transcendence underlying a succession of erotic experiences. While Diotima constructs the metaphysical goal as the climax of the philosopher’s erotic biography, that endpoint is governed by the same principle regulating the entire course of the lover’s life. Transcendence is not a singular event but, as suggested, a life composed of a series of infinite transcendental events. For each and every amorous event the strategy of release from an earlier erotic servitude is fundamental. And thus a narrative is created which consists of repetitive moves, falling in and out of love: thus requiring an *ars* and a *remedia*.

For the Ovidian love narrative, the replacement of one love with another is central: *successore novo vincitur omnis amor* (*Rem.* 462), “All love is overcome by a new love.” Or put in a different perspective: *alterius vires subtrahit alter amor* (*Rem.* 444), “One love undermines the other’s force.” The Platonic influence on Ovid can be seen here in the dialectical relationship between the *Remedia* and *Ars*: the end of love is never final, but always in itself, a point of departure. In this sense we might understand Ovid’s unfavorable reaction toward those who hate the one once loved, as Platonic. A healthy kind of love is one that withers while allowing for a new love experience to grow. It allows for a fading away of the amorous obsession without damaging the larger course of a love life. For both Diotima and Ovid the idea of a spiral sequence is an essential erotic expertise. In this respect, we may say that, although the life of the Ovidian lover lacks a metaphysical goal, its inner form is, nevertheless, like the Platonic narrative, the form of transcendence.

Grounded in a narrative of transformation, the lover’s passage from the *Ars* to *Remedia* is not, however, conversational. Instead of a linear form of

34. Diotima delineates the path by which a lover could transcend bodily love and earthly desire and reach the only stage where “man’s life is ever worth the living,”—i.e., when one “has attained this vision of the soul of the very beautiful” and hence “will never be seduced again by the charm of gold, of dress, of comely boys, of lads just ripening to manhood.” *Sym.* 212d. Yet, other objects of love that seduce the lover, such as beautiful customs and learning beautiful things, are not referred to as objects that lose their appeal in the eyes of the enlightened lover.

35. This understanding is also shared by Aristophanes’ speech in 192c–d. See Halperin (2005) on the metaphysical structure of desire.

36. A release from servitude is mentioned in 210d1 and is strategically incorporated by Ovid in *Rem.* 54, 73, 90, 293–94.

37. See *Rem.* 653–55.
transformation in which one stage in life completely gives way to another, Ovid presents a cyclical narrative that embraces both the *Ars* and *Remedia*. Or, in other words, he thinks of the life of the lover as a perpetual oscillation between the two passages. In this context, we may better understand such Ovidian exhortation that may have otherwise seemed awkward within the framework of the *Remedia*:

*quaeris, ubi invenias? artes, i, perlege nostras:*

*plena puellarum iam tibi navis erit.*

You ask where you can find a new love? Go read my *Ars* again: your ship will be soon full of women. (*Rem. 487–88*)

Returning to the *Ars* after reading the *Remedia*, readers will find themselves led again to the *Remedia* which, in turn, opens itself to the *Ars*, and so on. The way in which Ovid stipulates a cycle for the reading of his erotodidactic works epitomizes his understanding of love as a nonending cycle. Ovid’s theory of love is reinforced by a personal narrative, reflecting the instructor’s exemplary love life: *ego semper amavi, et si quid faciam, nunc quoque, quaeris, amo* (*Rem. 7–8*)—“I’ve always loved, and should you ask what I am doing now, I love.” Ovid’s words level the difference between past and present loves. There is no trace of the pain caused by old loves. “I’ve always loved and I now love” implies that the process of remedy, the *Remedia*, is no more than a strategy for stabilizing the amorous subject. According to Ovid, eros functions as a unifying principle through which the ego’s distinct temporal stages, its past and present, are integrated into a meaningful life.

The rejuvenating force of love finds its clear expression in Ovid’s literary career, in the trajectory of his writing. Ovid’s poetic career disclose a sequence of literary episodes of fallings in love. His infatuation with various literary genres reflects a diverse form of creativity. Ovid was challenged by tragedy (his lost *Medea*), was devoted to love elegy, and experimented in elegiac epistles. He then made a final transition within the field of love elegy by exploring didactic poetry. The *Remedia*, too, marks another important literary change. As Ovid’s passion for love elegy is worn out, he falls in love again, this time with a new form of love, the epic. The *Remedia* releases its author from his old love, announcing “the end of elegy.” In the line widely accepted as spurious, *et capiunt animi carmina multa mei* (*Rem. 392*),

38. For the significance of Ovid’s erotodidactic writing for the emergence of autobiography, see Lev Kenaan (2005), 167–84.
Ovid, or rather, his extrapolator, affirms the existence of a new passion. The repeated affirmation of “amo” underlies therefore the structure of the Ovidian love story, one which is, after all, captured by Barthes’s figure of affirmation:

What I have affirmed a first time, I can once again affirm, without repeating it, for then what I affirm is the affirmation, not its contingency: I affirm the first encounter in its difference, I desire its return, not its repetition. I say to the other (old or new): *Let us begin again.* (emphasis in original)

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40. The quotation is from Mozley (1947). See also Henderson’s edition which reads *et capiunt anni carmina multa mei*. Henderson comments on this line in (1980), 168.