*Classical Quarterly* **44** (ii) 387–392 (1994) *Printed in Great Britain* 

# A PLATONIST *ARS AMATORIA*[1]

The concept of an 'art of love' has been popularised for all time by the naughty masterpiece of Ovid. A good deal of critical attention has been devoted to this work in recent times,[2] including some to his possible sources,[3] but under this latter rubric attention has chiefly been directed rather to his parody of more serious types of handbook, such as an *ars medica*, an *ars grammatica*, or an *ars rhetorica*, than to the possibility of his having predecessors in the actual 'art' of love.

However, there is some evidence that even in the area of erotic instruction Ovid had predecessors. What I propose to do in this essay is to explore the evidence for something like an 'art of love' in the philosophical tradition, and in particular in that of Platonism. The evidence for such a development is largely very late, but it may be none the less useful on that account, as it gives the strong impression of reflecting a long-standing tradition.

Let us start from a programmatic passage near the beginning of the *Ars Amatoria*, at I 35–40:

> Principio, quod amare velis, reperire labora
> qui nova nunc primum miles in arma venis.
> Proximus huic labor est placitam exorare puellam;
> tertius, ut longo tempore duret amor.
> Hic modus; haec nostro signabitur area curru;
> haec erit admissa meta premenda rota.

From this passage we may, in prosaic terms, extract three principles of procedure:

(1) Select a proper object of love (*quod amare velis, reperire labora*).

(2) Commend yourself to your chosen beloved (*placitam exorare puellam*).

(3) Strive to ensure that the love shall be long-lasting (*tertius ⟨labor⟩, ut longo tempore duret amor*).

Ovid proceeds to elaborate on each of these injunctions in ways that we need not go into in the present context. Let us turn instead to the Platonist tradition, to see if we can come up with anything comparable.

We find a mention of an 'art of love' (ἐρωτικὴ τέχνη) – the Greek original of *ars amatoria* – in Plato's *Phaedrus*, at 257a, in the course of Socrates' ironic final prayer at the close of his 'palinode', where he prays to Eros not to deprive him of 'that ἐρωτικὴ τέχνη which you bestowed upon me', but here the phrase does not refer to anything very technical – simply the 'feel' for love that Socrates prides himself on having. For the scholastic minds of later Platonists, however, such a reference would naturally be taken, in the light of subsequent developments in the Hellenistic era, to refer to something systematic.

[1] This essay was first delivered to a colloquium at the University of Washington in Seattle. I am most grateful to colleagues there, especially Stephen Hinds and Mary Whitlock Blundell, for much useful discussion. A subsequent airing at the University of California at Berkeley produced valuable comments, in particular from Alexander Nehamas and John Ferrari.

[2] See e.g. A. S. Hollis, *Ovid, Ars Amatoria, Book I*, ed. with introduction and commentary (Oxford, 1974) and, more recently, Molly Myerowitz, *Ovid's Games of Love* (Wayne State U.P., Detroit, 1985).

[3] There is a useful article by Knut Kleve, 'NASO MAGISTER ERAT – sed quis Nasonis magister?', *Symbolae Osloenses* 58 (1983), 89–109, where a good many analogies between Ovid and previous sources are discussed, but he addresses himself only minimally to the particular subject of this paper. The older work of R. Bürger, *De Ovidi carminum amatoriorum inventione et arte* (Wolfenbüttel, 1901), is of no relevance to the present enquiry either.

The Neoplatonist Hermeias, in commenting on this passage (*In Phaedr.* 207, 17ff. Couvreur), sees here a reference to the system presented by Socrates in the *Alcibiades*:

'What is the nature of this "art of love"? It is what he himself has demonstrated in the *Alcibiades*, where he teaches that one must first seek out the worthy object of love (ὁ ἀξιέραστος) and discern whom one should love (for one should not love everyone, but only the large-minded [μεγαλόφρων], who despises secondary things); then, after deciding to love, not even to speak to him until the critical moment comes when he is ready to listen to philosophical discourses; and then, when he is ready to listen, take him in hand and teach him the principles of love, and so generate in him a reciprocal love (ἀντέρως).'

Here there seems to me to be a reference not to any particular passage of the *Alcibiades*,[4] but rather to the theme of the whole dialogue, which constituted for later Platonists a paradigm case of how the wise man should conduct a love-affair.

Hermeias, however (or rather Syrianus, since Hermeias is really just transcribing the proceedings of his master Syrianus' seminar), was not the first Platonist to attempt to formalise the various steps to be gone through in an erotic relationship. We find a similar effort recorded already in the (probably) second-century A.D. handbook of Platonism by Alcinous[5] known as the *Didaskalikos*. In ch. 33 of that work, which concerns friendship (φιλία), there is appended to the discussion of that topic a discussion of erotic love (187, 20ff.), which leads in turn (187, 37ff.) to the propounding of a sort of *ars amatoria*. This linking of a discussion of ἔρως to that of φιλία is both obvious enough and sanctioned by age-old usage. In Plato's *Lysis*, after all, a discussion of ἔρως leads in to the more important attempt to analyse φιλία, while Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* brings ἔρως in at *EN* VIII 4 (though without using the word), under the heading of 'friendship for the sake of pleasure'. Later, in the first century B.C., Arius Didymus mentions ἔρως just before φιλία in his review of Peripatetic ethics (*ap.* Stob. *Anth.* 2.142, 24–6 Wachsmuth), which indicates that this conjunction of topics in a handbook is not an innovation of Alcinous'.

Alcinous first lists (as, indeed, did Arius) three levels of ἔρως, 'good', 'bad', and 'middling', the good having as its object the soul alone, the bad the body alone, and the middling sort both. Only the good, he then says, being free from passion, takes on the nature of an art (τεχνική τις ὑπάρχει). Being a τεχνή, it has θεωρήματα, and these are as follows. There are three of them, and they may be considered with a glance back at the passage from Ovid quoted at the outset:

(1) getting to know (γνῶναι) or discerning (ἐπικρίνειν) the worthy object of love (ὁ ἀξιέραστος);

(2) gaining possession (κτᾶσθαι) of him, by making his acquaintance;

(3) making use (χρῆσθαι) of him, by exhorting him to, and training him in virtue, so that he may become a 'perfect practitioner' (ἀσκητὴς τέλειος) of it, and that true friendship may result (as between equals who are also good), instead of the relationship of lover and beloved – in other words, that ἀντέρως should be generated in the beloved, as Hermeias discerns being prescribed in the *Alcibiades*, and as is certainly attested to by 'Alcibiades' himself, in his famous tribute to Socrates in the *Symposium* (222b).

[4] 'Discerning whom one should love' seems to refer to Socrates' opening speech as a whole, while 'not speaking until the critical moment' refers in particular to Socrates' mention at 103a of the δαιμόνιόν τι ἐναντίωμα which has hitherto held him back from addressing Alcibiades. 'Taking in hand and teaching' really covers the remainder of the dialogue.

[5] Widely known as Albinus, ever since the monograph of Freudenthal, *Der Platoniker Albinos und der falsche Alkinoos* (Berlin, 1879), but I am now persuaded by the arguments of John Whittaker (in a series of articles, but see now his Budé edition [Paris, 1989], Intro, pp. vii–xiii) that the identification rests on very shaky palaeographic foundations.

We may note here the postulation of a triad of γνῶσις, κτῆσις, and χρῆσις (admittedly in verbal form), such as is obviously relevant to the acquisition of any art or craft. It may be, though I do not regard it as likely, that Alcinous is being original in applying this formulation to the art of love. Apuleius, in the parallel section of his *De Platone* (II 13), it must be said, shows no sign of such a development.

For an extended exposition of the Platonist *ars amatoria*, we must turn to the Neoplatonist exegesis of the *First Alcibiades*, and in particular to that of Proclus (who was, of course, like Hermeias, a pupil of Syrianus). Proclus chooses the lemma 104e7–105a1 for an exposition of the Platonist doctrine of the ἀξιέραστος, or 'worthy object of love'. There Socrates says: 'For if I saw you, Alcibiades, content with the things I set forth just now (sc. beauty, good family, wealth, 104a–c), and minded to pass your life in enjoying them, I should long ago have put away my love – so at least I persuade myself!'

'In these words', says Proclus (133, 18ff. West), 'Socrates clearly shows what sort of nature it is that is worthy of love. And even as in the *Republic* he has given us an account of the elements of the character of the philosopher, so also here he seems to me to be setting out certain elements in the character of the worthy object of love.

'These elements are two-fold, the one set visible, the other invisible, the one manifesting themselves in relation to the body, the other being movements observed internally, in the soul; the one set the gift of fate and nature, such as beauty and stature, the other the seeds of divine providence instilled in souls with a view to their salvation, as for instance the quality of (military) leadership, the quality of (political) command, and the kind of life that is elevated to the heights.'

Proclus goes on to note that it is precisely this quality of not being satisfied with the external goods of life that attracts Socrates in Alcibiades. Why is this, he asks. 'Because,' he replies (135, 4ff.), 'this is characteristic of a soul which disdains what is vulgar, is convinced of its worthlessness, and yearns to behold, I presume, only what is great and of value, not realising what has come over it' (*Phaedr.* 250a), but in accordance with its innate notions picturing to itself some other genuine greatness and sublimity.

We may note here how the *Phaedrus* is brought in to buttress the exegesis of the *Alcibiades*, even as the *Alcibiades* is brought in by Hermeias to elucidate the *Phaedrus*. The reference to *Phaedr.* 250a7 should turn our minds to that section of the *Phaedrus*, particularly 253c–256e, where precisely, one would think, one finds directions for capturing one's beloved, and generating in him a counter-love. As we recall, the philosophic lover, having quelled his unruly horse, approaches the beloved, rather as Socrates is seen doing to Alcibiades in the *Alcibiades*, and finally the beloved, overcoming all the negative propaganda about not gratifying lovers put about by his school-mates (255a), welcomes his lover and finds pleasure and edification in his company (255b).

Then, through repeated contact in the gymnasium and elsewhere, the beloved comes to see in the lover a sort of reflection of the love that is being unremittingly beamed at him, and comes to feel a sort of love himself, at first for he knows not what, but then for the lover. This is the much-vaunted ἀντέρως (255e1).

We do thus have in the *Phaedrus*, albeit in rather high-flown and poetical terms, an account of how the initial approach is to be made, and how a counter-love may be generated in the beloved, but from the scholastic point of view the *Phaedrus* account might seem to fall short of utility in various ways, in which the *Alcibiades* is more satisfactory. We are not really shown in the *Phaedrus* what sort of discourse we

should indulge in to impress our beloved, whereas this is precisely illustrated in the *Alcibiades*, as is the satisfactory reaction of the beloved.

This, I think, is the solution to what might seem to us the paradox of passing over the two great Platonic accounts of love, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, at least for the purpose of composing a practical handbook, in favour of the more pedestrian treatment presented in the *Alcibiades*. There remains, I suppose, the *Lysis*, which is also passed over for this purpose. I can only suppose that the *Lysis* was regarded as rather too aporetic and confusing to form a basis for positive doctrine, though we can certainly derive some positive principles from it. The chief principle, however, the need to demonstrate some degree of usefulness if one is to be lovable, may have distressed later Platonist theorists, even as it has in recent times offended such a great Platonist as Gregory Vlastos,[6] so it may have been disregarded for that reason, as well as because of its aporetic nature. Even the *Alcibiades*, after all, had to be processed through the meat-grinder of later scholasticism, but at least the material was there in reasonably adaptable form.[7]

However, if the later Platonist theory of Love takes its ultimate inspiration from Plato, it must also owe something to Stoic treatments of the subject, which will themselves have been to a large extent scholastic formalisations of positions taken up by Plato, and indeed by Aristotle.[8]

We know that both Zeno and Cleanthes composed works entitled *The Art of Love* (ἐρωτικὴ τέχνη, DL 7.34; 174), but we have unfortunately no idea of what they said in them.[9] Chrysippus, also, composed both a treatise *On Love* (Περὶ ἔρωτος, DL 7.129) and another *On Friendship* (in at least two books, Plut. *Stoic. Rep.* 13, 1039b), and we are slightly better informed about the contents of these. He also touched on the subject of love in his treatise *On Ways of Life* (Περὶ Βιών, DL 7.129 = *SVF* III 716). He says there, and in the Περὶ ἔρωτος, that the Sage will fall in love with youths who exhibit in their outward form a natural tendency to virtue, which is very much what Socrates is doing in respect of Alcibiades. The purpose of noble love is said to be friendship, or 'the creation of friendship' (φιλία or φιλοποιία)[10] not sexual intercourse (συνουσία) and it is defined[11] as 'the science of hunting out naturally

[6] Cf. 'The Individual as Object of Love in Plato', in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton U.P., 1973) 3–42.

[7] We do not find any clues as to the views of Plato's immediate successors, Speusippus and Xenocrates, on the correct indulgence in, or use of, love, but a straw in the wind, I think, is provided by a rather obscure dictum of Polemon, last head of the Old Academy, reported by Plutarch (in his essay *To an Uneducated Ruler* 780d), to the effect that 'Love is the service of the gods for the care and preservation of the young' (θεῶν ὑπηρεσία εἰς νέων ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ σωτηρίαν). This at first sight rather baffling remark might seem to gain some significance if it is regarded as a summation by Polemon of the 'doctrine' of the *Alcibiades*. Socrates' kind of loving can be seen as a service of the gods in the form of conferring benefits on the youth. If so, we have here the bare bones of the later Stoic/Platonist art of love, and our appreciation of Polemon's contribution to Hellenistic philosophy may move up another notch.

[8] There were also, it must be said, Epicurean treatments of the theme (e.g. a treatise by Epicurus himself *On Love*, DL 10.118), but Platonists are hardly likely to have borrowed much from that source.

[9] Of Zeno's other followers, Ariston is credited with *Discourses on Love* (ἐρωτικαὶ διατριβαί, DL 7.163), and Sphaerus with *Dialogues on Love* (διάλογοι ἐρωτικοί, DL 7.178), but we are no better informed about their contents.

[10] The point of this latter term, if pressed, might be discerned as being the stimulation of reciprocal affection (ἀντέρως) in the beloved, which would constitute a further close connection with later Platonist theory – and, of course, Socratic practice.

[11] *ap.* Stob. *Ecl.* 2.65, 15ff. Wachs. = *SVF* 3.717; and cf. Cicero, *TD* 4.72.

gifted youths, with a view to exhorting them to live in accordance with virtue'.[12] All this sounds as if a process of formalisation of the contents of the *First Alcibiades* has been taking place.

This is not an awful lot to go on, but it does indicate, I think, that there was an appreciable body of Stoic theorizing on the subject of Love, and on how and why it is to be indulged in by the Sage, and that it followed very much the lines adumbrated by Plato, or whoever may be the author of the *Alcibiades* (at all events, surely, a member either of the Socratic circle or of the Old Academy). As one would expect of the Stoics, things are very much more formalized than they would be in a Platonic dialogue. I suspect that it is here, rather than among later Platonists, that one finds the first emergence of anything like a formal philosophic *ars amatoria*, but on the basis of the available evidence it would be rash to assert this.

There seems, however, to be a reference to treatises of this sort in the *Anonymous Theaetetus Commentary*, dating probably from the mid-second century A.D.,[13] where the author remarks, à propos *Theaet.* 143d, that 'in treatises on Love (ἐν τοῖς ἐρωτικοῖς) it is declared that it is the task of the good man (ὁ σπουδαῖος) to identify (γνῶναι) the proper object of love (ὁ ἀξιέραστος)'. This has been thought by Diels and Schubart, the editors of the *Anon.*, and by John Whittaker (in his Budé edition of Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, n. 548), to be a reference to dialogues of Plato such as the *Phaedrus* or the *Symposium* (though indeed the *Alcibiades* would be more apposite, one would think), but it seems to me more likely that it is a reference to some treatise such as that of Chrysippus, where the ἀξιέραστος is precisely defined as one who is worthy of σπουδαῖος ἔρως (*SVF* 3.717). We may recall the first θεώρημα of the art of love set out in *Did.* 33, γνῶναι τὸν ἀξιέραστον, where the terminology matches closely that in the *Anon. Theaetetus Commentary*, suggesting a common source.

What, then, may we derive from all this? One thing in particular that modern students of Plato may find interesting, if not paradoxical, as I have said already, is that on the subject of the art of love Platonists turned for inspiration primarily, not to the *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*, nor even to the *Lysis*, but to the *First Alcibiades*.[14]

But after all, that is not so strange. We must bear in mind, in addition to the considerations that I adduced above, that the *First Alcibiades* held a very much higher rank in the ancient Platonist tradition than it does with us. It was, of course, accepted as a genuine work of Plato, and as such was placed in later times (certainly by the second century A.D., to judge from Albinus' *Introduction to Plato*) as the first dialogue to be read in a course of Platonism, dealing, as it was deemed to do, with the subject of self-knowledge, a prerequisite to any deeper philosophical insights.

The second thing to be noted, I think, is a certain development on the rather self-centred and exploitative approach to love exhibited in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* criticized by Gregory Vlastos in the article mentioned earlier (above, n. 6). There, the ultimate purpose of loving an individual could be construed as being the attainment on the part of the philosopher lover of a vision of the essence of Beauty,

[12] Reading ἐπὶ τ⟨ὸ ζ⟩ὴν with Meineke, for the ἐπὶ τὴν of the MSS.

[13] Harold Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism? The Philosophy of the Fourth Academy* (Cambridge, 1985), wishes to attribute this work to the Platonist Eudorus, and thus to the late first century B.C., which is an attractive suggestion, but unfortunately not quite provable.

[14] Not so modern authorities, however. A perusal of two substantial French works on the subject, Ludovic Dugas, *L'amitié antique* (Paris 1894; repr. New York, 1978), and Jean-Claude Fraisse, *Philia, la notion d'amitié dans la philosophie antique* (Paris, 2nd ed., 1984) reveals no substantial attention paid to the *Alcibiades*, and the same is true for the recent English work of A. W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1989).

without there being much in the whole process, to all appearances, for the beloved. I happen to think that this is rather unfair to Plato (there is, surely, at the very least, for the beloved, the opportunity to learn how to become a philosophic lover in his turn, and so to exploit someone else), but I agree that this is an impression that can be derived from the texts.

In the later handbook tradition, both Stoic and Platonist, on the other hand, it would seem that much more emphasis was put (building, no doubt, on the *Alcibiades*) on the benefits to be derived by the beloved, and the justification for love is the instilling of noble thoughts in the beloved, and the institution of a lasting friendship. This is, admittedly, envisaged in the *Phaedrus* account at least, but it is undeniable that the emphasis in the two central Platonic dialogues is on the benefits accruing to the lover. It is only Aristotle who defines φιλία, which for him includes love, as 'wishing and acting for the good, or the apparent good, of one's φίλος, or wishing for the existence and life of one's φίλος for that man's sake' (*EN* 1166a2–5, cf. also *Rhet.* 1380b35–13811a1), a concept which, together with the old Pythagorean tag defining a φίλος as 'another self', does seem to have worked its way into the handbook tradition.

In view of all this, it is easily comprehensible that, in the light of the theorizing of Aristotle and of the Stoics about perfect friendship (the latter perhaps, indeed, itself influenced by a reading of the *Alcibiades*), later Platonists should have turned from the primarily self-directed accounts of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* to the more altruistic portrayal of Socrates' amatory procedure in the *Alcibiades*.[15]

*Trinity College, Dublin* JOHN DILLON

[15] The possibility has been put to me by Mary Whitlock Blundell of some influence filtering through from other treatments of the Socrates–Alcibiades relationship, such as in particular that of Aeschines of Sphettus in his dialogue *Alcibiades*, or perhaps in a dialogue where Aspasia took on a role analogous to that of Diotima in the *Symposium*. I would regard this as an attractive, but not a necessary, supposition. The Platonic *Alcibiades* provides, I think, an adequate explanation of the phenomena. Further, in Aeschines' *Alcibiades* (Fr. 11 Dittmar), Socrates seems to attribute any power he has to improve Alcibiades to 'divine dispensation' (θεία μοῖρα), rather than τέχνη, which would militate against the possibility that this is a source.