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Erosophia. Or: the Love/Lack of Wisdom

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## Erosophia. Or: the Love/Lack of Wisdom

NINA BELMONTE

Anne Carson's 1986 book, *Eros the Bittersweet*, begins with a very short story by Kafka about a philosopher who runs breathlessly after children's spinning tops hoping that if only he can fully grasp the "fantastic motion," he might understand all things. But as soon as he has a top in his grasp, of course, its motion stops. Carson suggests that rather than pity this perennially dissatisfied philosopher, we might better ask if perhaps he has chosen this profession precisely because he delights in the pursuit? Perhaps it is the longing and not the possession that makes one a lover of wisdom? Perhaps the nature of wisdom, like the motion of the top, is such that it cannot be possessed, but only pursued, only desired? I don't know about you, but I did not choose philosophy. I couldn't help myself. You love who you love.

We are told by the Ancients that a philosopher is a "friend" (*philos*) of wisdom. One's *philo*i are those dear to you. In Homer, *philos* can also mean "proper," "very own"—as in my very own hand or my own dear heart (*Iliad*, H130; E155). So wisdom would seem to belong to the philosopher, and s/he to it, like family, or a precious possession. The two are made of the same stuff. But Plato himself seemed convinced that the pursuit of wisdom begins not with belonging but attraction. In book six of the *Republic*, mid-way, at the climax of the dialogue, after convincing his interlocutors that the beautiful city (*kalipolis*) must be governed by lovers of wisdom (*philosophoi*), Socrates is asked how it is that some people become philosophers. Socrates' answer is love. The thing about "philosophic natures" (*philosophon physeon*) is that they are always "in love" (*erosin*) with learning (*mathematos*) that "might reveal" (*deloi*) to them "the things that always are" (*tes ousias tes aei ousias*). It is the intervention of a god (*Eros*). This is not a matter of a single metaphor. His *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* address this erotic intervention, describing it while performing it. *Philosophoi* it seems identify themselves not by what they have, but what they desire; they are first and foremost *erosophoi*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The properly grammatical parallel might be "*erastesophia*," but I am keeping the verbal form of *eros* for concerns of recognizability and euphonia.

So why *philo-sophia*? “*Philos*” is the word that holds Plato’s metaphysics. In the *Republic*, the soul’s love of eternal things is made possible by sameness. The soul can contemplate the Ideas because it is “akin” to them; it is immortal; it is drawn to its own. It is an ontological claim hidden in an argument from analogy.<sup>2</sup> In the *Republic*, the love of wisdom that begins in desire is consummated on the basis of ontological kinship. The soul is a friend (*philos*) of wisdom because it belongs to the same family (*oikeios*).

This smooth replacement of erotic love with sameness and propriety is repeated in the *Symposium*. Here, it is a logic of “only opposites.” If desire is lack, then it must desire to not-lack. The lover of beauty desires to have the beauty (*ton kalon*) of his beloved for himself. But to desire beauty, Diotima says (204e), is the same as to desire the good—*ton agathon*. (Socrates makes the same substitution in the *Meno* 77b.) So the aim of all lovers is the possession of the good for themselves—literally, “they love it to be to/for themselves” (εἶναι αὐτοῖς ἐρῶσιν).<sup>3</sup> By a sleight of dialectical and literary genius, what begins as desire rooted in particularity and lack ends in belonging, ideality and sameness: *ero-* becomes *philo-sophia*.

There is a long tradition of scholarship on the beginnings of *paedeia* in desire, a tradition that accepts the “maturation” of erotic desire into “higher” contemplation.<sup>4</sup> But Plato’s dialogues also suggest that thinking itself is erotic in nature. What implications, then, would reconceiving the love of wisdom as an erotic experience have for philosophy’s claims about the relationship of epistemology to ontology, or for the pursuit of understanding as a way of life? This paper brings Carson’s extraordinary *Eros* into “resonance” with Jan Zwicky’s 2015

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<sup>2</sup> Zwicky (*Alcibiades* 160-172) makes a case for linking Plato’s claims for the soul’s innate knowledge of the Ideas as recollection with the Eleusinian Mysteries that seemed to have celebrated the cycles of death and rebirth; the soul remembers Ideas because it has *seen them before*. I do not think this disturbs the point about analogy—the soul is reincarnated because it is eternal, like the Ideas.

<sup>3</sup> The language of possession is so deeply ingrained in romantic literature and song that it is impossible to overstate it. Consider how many times we here desire expressed as “to be as one”: “be mine,” “make you my own.”

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Sayre (ch. 4), who sees the “higher forms” of *eros* as pretty much the same as *philo-sophia*, although he does point out that uses of the latter term tended to conflate the lover with the possessor of wisdom, and sophistry. Hunter (ch. 3) attributes this “maturation” to the relational character of *eros* in the *Symposium*: there can be good or bad *eros* depending on what is desired. Sallis (127-59), like Grube, recognizes that there is “something problematic” in the relation of love to logos, in that “philosophy by the very word is a kind of love” but he does not go on to press the problem—though he does give full measure to *eros* as the source of the mortal soul’s “movement” toward the divine. Grube (114) attributes the problem to the physicality of *eros*.

collection of essays, entitled *Alcibiades' Love*, in order to elucidate how the two women see the role of *eros* in the construction of meaning, in the movement of thought and in the ongoing life of the love of wisdom. I do not here intend a thorough review of the literature on Carson or Zwicky, nor do I claim to be a Plato scholar. My aim is rather explore a reinterpretation of *philosophia* that doesn't so much critique the tradition as *reimagine* it from within, calling into question its claims to a proprietary relationship to knowledge grounded in imagery of identity, ideality and subsumption. These thinkers rediscover a love of wisdom that dwells in difference and desire as the mode of its true calling: a love of wisdom that I will call "*Erosophia*."

### **Eros, the Bittersweet**

Eros begins its mythic life as a cosmic force of binding attraction: the child of Chaos, who brings and holds Uranus and Gaia together (Olympian), or the primordial deity hatched from a silver egg in the womb of Darkness, to set the universe in motion (Orphic; see Graves 10). Ann Carson reminds us that in ancient Greek poetry, however, the fundamental constituent of *eros* is lack—"desire for that which is missing." (*Eros* 10) The lover wants what s/he necessarily cannot have, because as soon as it is possessed, it is no longer wanting—and the lover is no longer a lover. This is the "dilemma"—even tragedy—of erotic desire. Without lack, there is no delight. Which is why Sappho names this feeling *glukupikron*—"bittersweet." Carson cites examples of the self-destruction of desire from Sappho to Petrarch to Sartre and Lacan. And also, of course, Plato the ventriloquist, through the mouth of Diotima: "Eros is a bastard got by Cunning (μητις) on Poverty and ever at home in a life of want" (*Symposium* 203b-e).

In erotic love, the beloved is present as absence. "A space must be maintained or desire ends" (Carson, *Eros* 26). *Eros* is a "reach that never quite arrives," he exists "because certain boundaries do." (30) Carson's book devotes five chapters to the depiction of the edge and the erotic dynamic that occurs there: "Finding the Edge," "Logic at the Edge," "Losing the Edge," Archilochus at the Edge." In question are the physical limits of the flesh (two can never become one), as well as borders between the flesh and what is not flesh—ideas, meaning, eternal truths. *Eros* (as love and cosmic force) can bind together only what remains separate.

Erotic experience is not a decision; it is an invasion. It "forces itself irresistibly from without" (4). Carson points out that most ancient poetic descriptions of the "onset" of desire speak in metaphors of war, assault and resistance: "piercing, crushing, bridling, roasting, stinging, biting, grating, cropping, poisoning." In an erotic encounter we are opened up, expropriated, changed, pulled along by what we are not. Having its

source in the not-me, *Eros* is a curse and a “grace” that challenges the integrity of the self.

As a movement impelled by lack, *eros* is also a temporal deferral of the not-yet, the still-not-yet. The pull of desire is like the trajectory of consciousness trapped in the “double-bind”<sup>5</sup> of a now that is always also toward a future that will be repetition. The experience of *eros* is a sustained going out of oneself only to come back to a lack: a suspension in a strange-loop. *Deute* is the Greek word that appears time and again in ancient erotic poetry: *de*—now, *aute*—once again (118).

For Carson, this “remarkable operation” of *eros* is akin to that at work in language as the metaphorical production of meaning, and in the invention in Ancient Greece of a phonetic alphabetic script. It cannot be mere coincidence, she suggests that the Ancient Greek poets who invented *eros* as “a divinity and literary obsession” were also the first in our tradition to write down their poems. Greek is the first ancient script to “symbolize the phonemes of the language exhaustively, unambiguously and economically” (53) by using distinct symbols for sounds that cannot be heard independently (con-sonants), i.e., by drawing an inaudible edge. For Carson, this represents an act of unparalleled erotic imagination. The breath makes present an absent meaning by way of sound, and in turn the letters themselves make visually present an absent sound, by means of inaudible edges and boundaries. Carson here is not indicting the ontology of presence (see, e.g., Derrida, “Pyramid”), but celebrating the erotic power of thought and expression.

Carson declares that she is “in love” with language and the act of writing. “I am writing this book because that act astounds me. It is an act in which the mind reaches out from what is present and actual to something else.” For Carson the movement of *eros* as lack, binding and reach—this “tension of an acute and irresolvable kind”—is essential to the metaphorical act that produces all meaning. The tension of metaphor holds a shift of distance from far to near (73); it is a “stereoscopic” vision (see Stanford) of the mind that holds two perspectives, two meanings in “equipoise”, forging new understanding from what was discontiguous.

There is nothing new, Carson admits, about saying that “all language shows the structure of desire at some level.” She reminds us that even for Homer, *Peitho* is at once the goddess of rhetorical persuasion and seduction. What is more alluring is the idea that thinking itself would

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<sup>5</sup> It is Carson’s word, recalling Derrida. There is another study that can only be suggested here, exploring the points of resonance between Carson’s concept of *Eros* as the beloved’s absent presence and Derrida’s understanding of the “trace.” See Derrida, “Pyramid” and “Pharmacy”; also, the discussion on Heidegger and language, in “Différance”; and the discussion of repetition in Husserl’s ideality, in *Speech & Phenomena*.

seem to be an inherently erotic, metaphorical movement. “There would seem to be some resemblance between the way *Eros* acts in the mind of a lover and the way knowing acts in the mind of a thinker” (70). Carson quotes Ricoeur: “We may speak with Gadamer of the fundamental metaphoricality of thought to the extent that the figure of speech that we call ‘metaphor’ allows us a glance at the general procedure by which we produce concepts.” (64; quoting Ricoeur, “Process” 149)

This claim regarding the erotic nature of thinking seems to me the ultimate aim of Carson’s book,<sup>6</sup> though it has been largely passed over or misunderstood by critics who see the focus on lack to be a kind of “post-modernist abandon” (Northrup 194).<sup>7</sup> The book leads us from a poetic meditation on the nature of *eros* as lack to contemplate the great erotic risk involved in thinking as the continued reach for something other, something not to be possessed.

### Lyric Desire

*Eros the Bittersweet* reads as a book somewhere between scholarship, meditation and poetry. It is an example of what Jan Zwicky calls “lyrical thinking”—her challenge to main-stream academic, argument-focused Philosophy (see Northrup 19). The two writers share a profound awareness of the erotic operation at the core of the creation of meaning, and the challenge it presents for the way we understand thinking, and the life of the love of wisdom.<sup>8</sup>

In the introduction to her recent essay collection, *Alcibiades’ Love*, entitled “What is Lyric Philosophy,” Zwicky gives us 61 “numbered entries” meant to constitute “a signposted boardwalk tour of a wetland,” or more lyrically, “a melodic line of sorts” aimed at giving us a sense of what it might mean for philosophy to be “lyric.” “The characteristic formal properties of lyric thought are resonance and clarity” (No 1). The form of lyric philosophy cannot follow the strict demands of logic and argumentation, what Zwicky calls “logic-linguistic analysis,” but must

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<sup>6</sup> The greatest evidence that this claim is Carson’s motivating impulse is the Cartesian title of her 1981 Ph.D. dissertation in Classics at the University of Toronto, of which *Eros the Bittersweet* is a revised, augmented version: *Odi et Amo Ergo Sum* (“I hate and I love, therefore I am.”)

<sup>7</sup> But Northrup herself does not seem to notice the philosophical point of the final seven chapters of the book.

<sup>8</sup> There is another “salient” coincidence—they both seem to have been inspired simultaneously by the same *daimon*; Zwicky’s *Lyric Philosophy* is the development/transformation of her own PhD thesis in Philosophy (entitled *A Theory of Ineffability*), completed in the fall of 1981 at the University of Toronto, the same year that Carson defended her thesis in Classics at the same university.

also include other modes of expression—metaphor, music, aphorism, poetry, and forms of artistic expression. This is necessary because Being, Zwicky posits, is the “interconnectedness” of things, their “resonant ecology” or “resonant structure” (No 39). Intelligence (broader than reason) is an *eros* that seeks to understand this “resonant ecology”, a meaning prior to and independent of language. Broadening the conception of what counts as philosophy is crucial for Zwicky, who sees a connection (echoing the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School) between the partitioning of the world for use (and destruction) and the language of analytical dissection. Analytical language holds the distinctness of things to be “ontologically fundamental”—it “tames resonance, mutes it, proscribes it.” This idea of the world as “a mechanically organized collection” of parts and analyses has done “vast, almost incomprehensible, damage” (260).

Zwicky presents lyric philosophy rather as an erotic operation grounded in the ontic desire for union with a meaning that precedes and exceeds it. Meaning is not, as both linguistic positivists and post-structuralists would have it, the exclusive domain, or the by-product of language. Language strives to express meaning, with the constant risk of failure, and the awareness that there might be such a thing as meaning that is ultimately “ineffable.” Truth is an “asymptotic limit of sensitive attempts to be responsible to our actual experience of the world” (No 58). Truth is the as-precise-as-possible expression of resonance; a form of “clarity” that is more representative of what-is than logico-linguistic analysis. Philosophy takes lyric form when thought “whose *eros* is clarity” is “driven by profound intuitions of coherence” (No 11).

In her writings Zwicky certainly privileges the connectedness of things—a strategy that might have its motivation in the “immense problem” of asserting the value of lyric philosophy and the political force of its challenge to logico-linguistic philosophy and the strict division of academic disciplines. But she also insists on ontological distinctness. The deep connectedness of things does not “erase” the particularity of individual things (No 55); which “remains the foundation of their resonant connection.” In this way, Zwicky can say that the world’s “internal relation to itself has the structure of metaphor” (261). “X is Y” is metaphorical only when X is not Y. “The metaphor tells two truths at once: ‘not two’ it says, while remembering ‘not one.’ Its truth is thus a paradox” (16).<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, for Zwicky, metaphor holds a privileged position among forms of linguistic expression. Metaphor itself becomes a metaphor both for the connectedness of the world, and for the thinking that holds

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<sup>9</sup> It is obvious from this why Zwicky’s writings are so attractive to some ecologists (see Dickinson & Goulet).

together distinct entities in intimate connection while yet holding itself apart. Thus for Zwicky, too, metaphor is an erotic operation. Metaphorical thinking can dwell in the paradox; it lives within it as it lives within the world. It is “domestic” thinking. “Those who think metaphorically are enabled to think truly because the shape of their thinking echoes the shape of the world.”

For Zwicky, as for Carson, *eros* comes to us from outside. Understanding is founded not on sameness but on difference, not possession but response. Lyric thinking is “a kind of ontological seismic exploration” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 10). This is best illustrated through Zwicky’s explanation of “clarity”: “The root of the English word ‘clarity,’ according to Ernest Klein, is \*kla- or \*kal- a proto-Indo-European base meaning to shout or to resound. The old image, then, is not one that evokes control, either by the hand or the intellect; it is not even visual. It is an aural image—of sound as a physical force, by which we are literally moved or shaken, with which we move together.” Clarity is something like a call but less polite. And philosophy is thinking in love with clarity.

In this way, the love of wisdom as *eros* brings with it a loss of control, a disruption of the supposedly solid boundaries of the self. “Lyric awareness desires ongoing dissolution of the self in the resonance of being: it desires this dissolution as the complete fulfillment of the *eros* for coherence, its limiting case.” For both Carson and Zwicky, *eros* pulls the self apart in order to pull it toward the beloved. The structure of one’s self is dis-integrated in order that it might vibrate at the same frequency, matching its life to that of the world of which it is an integral piece.

Thus, what is ultimately at stake for both Carson and Zwicky is the way in which writing and metaphor reflect the movement of thought as an erotics of binding-in-difference. As Carson puts it, they are “following the traces of an ancient analogy between the wooing of knowledge and the wooing of love” (Carson, *Eros* 170). To explore this relationship, both thinkers look to the “roots” of Western culture (see Aitken) in Ancient Greek understanding of *eros* and particularly Plato’s enactment of the erotics of thinking.

### *Erotikos Logos*

Phaedrus is in love with a written copy of a speech by Lysis, which argues that the best lover is one who is not in-love. Socrates fears that Phaedrus is in danger twice over: if he accepts the lover who does not love, and if he admires the speech that does not speak. Both are cheats, lacking the force *eros* that would enable them to move the soul of the beloved. Both would avoid encounter between participants on the ground of a mutual, living



desire. The *Phaedrus* ends with a condemnation of writing that appears to render the dialogue itself irrelevant.

Most scholars believe that it is this description of the role of *eros* as the first step on the path to mature wisdom, as much as this strange self-destruction of written philosophy<sup>10</sup> that is really the point of the *Phaedrus*. But Carson and Zwicky see Plato's true intention to be an inquiry regarding the critical role of *eros* in the living pursuit of wisdom—not just as a convenient “bait and switch” in the practice of *paideia*, but in the ongoing reach of understanding. Zwicky assumes “that Plato agreed with a doctrine attributed to Sokrates in *Symposium* as well as *Phaidros*: that true philosophy is grounded in *eros*: that it is an impassioned desire to understand.” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 60). For both Carson and Zwicky, the *Phaedrus* is about *eros* as the life of a philosophical encounter—not just between participants in dialogue but between thought and its ‘object’. “*Eros* and *logos* are fitted together in the *Phaedrus* as closely as two halves of a knucklebone” (Carson, *Eros* 123).<sup>11</sup>

Zwicky reads the *Phaedrus* as “the enactment of the principles of erotically driven philosophical discourse” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 77). She also holds that Plato is not putting his own claims into the mouth of Socrates; he is asking and responding. The dialogue is addressed first of all to Socrates; it is a conversation with the dead. Zwicky shows how the *Phaedrus* in its content as well as its form enacts a dialogue with the teacher, by identifying Socrates' six basic objections to writing and the text's response. To summarize briefly: (1) Writing need not be mere record; the dialogue does not present a mere record of claims but provides us with real philosophical understanding. (2) The *Phaedrus* is not “unresponsive”; as a dialogue and not a speech, it does indeed respond to questions put to it. (3) The *Phaedrus* is not “indiscriminate” as to its audience; its readers will be those troubled by its questions. (4) The *Phaedrus* is not helpless to defend itself- but raises objections to its own claims in an attempt to show us how to think through for ourselves. (5) The *Phaedrus* is not a lifeless ‘mere copy’ of a living original; it is a crafted piece. In its form and the “presence and power of its address” it is an attempt to mean something, to “go up to someone.” (Zwicky, *Wisdom* § 51) It has a life of its own. (6) The *Phaedrus* is “able to demonstrate the inferiority of its writings out of its own mouth.” Indeed, for scholars

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<sup>10</sup> Derrida (“Pharmacy”) of course uses this self-destruction as a lever to critique the tradition of the philosophy of presence.

<sup>11</sup> The knucklebone—*symbolon*, in Ancient Greek—was half a knucklebone carried as proof of identity to another possessing the other half. It is the word Aristophanes uses in the *Symposium* to describes his half-whole lovers (see Carson, *Eros* 75).

throughout the last two millennia, this ironic self-critique has been precisely the problem.

Zwicky insists that the *Phaedrus* belies its self-indictment. It is not a dead record of a dialogue; it is a living dialogue enacted, whose task is “to awaken in us a desire to embrace moral beauty; and this task it still pursues out of deep and passionate reflection, a conviction that it is *eros* that names the movement toward all genuine insight” (*Alcibiades* 75). The *Phaedrus*, then, is an act of love, enacting an act of love. It is

thought that through imagination completes itself in a gesture of questioning address; questions focused and enriched because of love; thinking sustained in its attempt to complete and clarify itself by love; thinking, then, that is alive, and that remains alive, because its questions mattered to the one who framed them; and he believed they would have mattered to the one to whom they were addressed (81).

Zwicky’s lyric reading of the *Phaedrus* adheres to Socrates’ method of gathering together (*synagoge*) and separating apart (*diaeresis*), dividing up the objections to writing, then gathering the entire dialogue through its overall “architectonic.” As Zwicky sees it, the *Phaedrus* is alive because it is driven by *eros*. It repeats its erotic movement in successive levels, in the love of Phaedrus for the written word, in the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, in the address of the dialogue by Plato to Socrates, and in the written dialogue’s guidance of self-selected readers into a position whereby they enter into a dialogue with the text.

Zwicky’s analysis is discursive, dialectical.<sup>12</sup> She is a poet-philosopher. Carson, in the final chapters of *Eros the Bittersweet*, takes a more literary lyrical approach, weaving textual analysis and metaphor to come to the same conclusions about the erotics of thinking.

For Carson, the core of the *Phaedrus*’ meditation on *eros* is an exploration of the dangers of control and possession—control of the beloved and of time (Carson, *Eros* 165). The movement of *eros*, drawn toward the not-me, the not-yet mirrors the tragic intentionality of life lived in the now but hurling toward a future that is never-yet. The non-lover in Lysis’ speech accuses the erotic lover (*erastes*) of being himself wholly without self-control (*sophrosyne*), but wishing rather to control the beloved. The *erastes* wants to have his beloved always by him, always young, and thereby does him damage. What the lover really wants, says Carson, is to control time, to rest in the perpetual now, to stay in love, to stop time altogether (127).

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<sup>12</sup> This is counter to charges that her philosophy is anti-rational. Krajewski compares his experience of reading Zwicky to the “fogginess” of a visit to the oracle at Delphi.

Such lovers, Carson suggests, are like the Cicadas who sing in the background throughout the *Phaedrus* (230c). The Cicadas have achieved what any lover wants; they are spending their lives in the pleasure of the “present-indicative”—neither eating nor drinking but only doing what they love, singing, from birth to death. Whereas Zwicky sees this as a beautiful image perhaps describing Socrates himself, “singing” his life through until he dies almost “without noticing it” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 61), Carson sees in the Cicadas an image of the “fundamental erotic dilemma.” Caught in a torturous perpetual orgasm, the Cicadas are “stranded in a living death of pleasure” (139). Like the lover they are “creatures pulled into a confrontation with time by their own desire” (Carson, *Eros* 139).

But the non-lover, too, wants to cheat time. Socrates asks Phaedrus twice to read him the beginning again, because Lysis’ speech doesn’t have one: “the thing you are looking for isn’t there” (*Phaedrus* 263e). Unlike an organic, living creature, the speech has no beginning, middle or end—no head, no feet and no body. “He does not begin at the beginning but tries to swim backward against the current of *logos* starting from the end” (264a). The non-lover seeks to avoid the necessity of living through Eros, to control love’s suffering by side-stepping the risk, the lack, the process (Carson, *Eros* 126). In refusing to begin, and to live through the experience of being in-love, the non-lover refuses life and like Midas in his “deadly stinginess” is incapable of truly touching the soul of the beloved (150).

According to Carson then, time is at the core of Plato’s concern with reading and writing.<sup>13</sup> The written *erotikos logos* would seem to deny time just like the jealous lover and the non-lover, also from a delusion of control. Writing seeks to fix thoughts forever in time (131), to convey wisdom without doing the work of seeking it, without living through the perils of the journey from ignorance to enlightenment. Writing thus does damage to the “authentic communication” between two people in search of understanding. For Plato there can be no “quick-access *sophia*”; wisdom cannot be forced to maturity like seeds in the gardens of Adonis. The reach for knowledge must be lived out in space and time in philosophical inquiry and conversation (142-3). “In Sokrates’ view, a true *logos* has this in common with a real love affair, that it must be lived out in time” (165). We must begin at the beginning and submit to the “wholesale erotic takeover or the change of self entailed in it.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This, of course, is another way of understanding Derrida’s reading of the same as the critique of the philosophy of “presence,” wedded to the living voice.

<sup>14</sup> Unlike Zwicky, Carson does not allude to Hegel’s dialectic. But one is reminded here of Hegel’s insistence in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Right* (§ 32) that the Negative is not to be feared, but “tarried with” because its power is movement, identical with the Subject. The Negative is life.

For Carson, like Zwicky, the *Phaedrus* is an exploration of the living, erotic energy compelling the search for wisdom as a love/lack. In “What a Difference a Wing Makes,” Carson ponders Socrates’ vision of the philosophical soul—the famous chariot myth in his palinode. Carson’s focus is not on the ethical exhortation to self-control incarnated in the horses, or the epistemological claim of the soul’s immortality and previous vision of the eternal, but rather the erotic image of the promise of flight. “Erotic mania” puts wings on your soul (155); “you find out what is in your nature.” Socrates says it is the glimpse of a god (*Phaedrus* 253a). *Eros*’ takeover of the self is an education—and in fact there is no education without *eros* to move you out of yourself toward something else.

Carson, like Zwicky, ultimately links *eros* with the movement of thought through the erotic reach of imagination. Even for Aristotle (*Soul* 3.10.433a-b), *phantasia* is what moves living beings to reach out for what they do not know. Imagination “stirs the mind to movement” and “tells the mind a story” of what is actual, what is not, and the difference between them. The reach for what is unknown is what connects poets, lovers, writers of novels and seekers of wisdom—and for Aristotle desire (attraction to the Unmoved Mover) indeed moves the cosmos itself. So it is not surprising that Socrates can claim that his wooing of love and the wooing of knowledge are the same—his is a “single research in which the comprehension of the truly real and pursuit of the truly desirable are identified” (Carson, *Eros* 170). Socrates himself insists in the *Symposium* (177d) that his wisdom is “nothing but a knowledge of erotic things (*ta erotica*).”

Carson’s book ends with a claim about the erotic nature of thinking that is nearly identical to Zwicky’s description of the erotic operation of metaphorical thought. For Carson, we think by reaching across an “erotic space” (*Eros* 171), by “drawing things together in a relation or idea while at the same time maintaining the distinctions between them” (171). *Eros* “lies at the intersection” of *synagoge* and *diaeresis*. Thus, Carson claims, the same “erotic ruse” that she has uncovered in poetry and writing “now appears to constitute “the very structure of human thinking.”

The difference between Carson’s and Zwicky’s understanding of the erotics of thinking rests in the question of the possibility of consummation. Whereas Carson insists on the necessity of lack in erotic, temporal existence, Zwicky leaves open the possibility of the mystical union with what is Other: “fusion as the complete fulfillment of the intuition of coherence” (Zwicky, *Lyric Philosophy* 127, 133). Fusion is the experience of the “ineffable,” but it is a “limiting case,” achievable “only to the extent that words are bent to the shape of wordlessness.” Language, however, must operate by an erotic operation of binding/dividing; it “dis-integrates.” So the ontic desire for fusion cannot be consummated in

language. And philosophy as long as it is expressed in *logos* is a living experience of *eros*.

### “Erosophia”

By bringing us back to the beginnings of western philosophy, Zwicky and Carson are asking us to remember, like Meno’s servant boy, what we already know—not from a previous incarnation but from a shared “intellectual phenomenology.” And as is fitting given Plato’s Parmenidean roots, it is the voices of women that guide us (see Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 218-24). This is not a reinsertion of the feminine voice—an “*écriture féminine*”<sup>15</sup>—nor a critique of the masculine tradition in the name of its excluded Other, but an immanent reimagining of that tradition on its own terms. Carson and Zwicky reinterpret the love of wisdom by taking seriously Plato’s own claim that the love of wisdom lives in desire.

Which brings us to the other *erotikos logos*: the *Symposium*. It is a dialogue as Zwicky says, about, “lifting the eye of the mind from its bed of slime.” The final essay in *Alcibiades’ Love* is about the life of the love of wisdom. It begins in the first person, as love must. Zwicky asks: “What it would be like to make loving anything a way of life?” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 283)

The problem is that—popular songs aside—we cannot “make” love. We can will attentiveness, openness, honesty, humility; we can know that we do not know. But *eros* cannot be willed because it does not have its source in us; it is an invasion, a “takeover.” Socrates’ speech lifting the love of wisdom to cloudless heights of ideal Beauty and Goodness is interrupted by the drunken, love-sick Alcibiades. For Zwicky, and perhaps for Socrates, it is Alcibiades’ love, and not Diotima’s contemplative consummation that is the metaphor for the love of wisdom.

The moment Socrates begins to speak, Alcibiades is “transported”, “possessed”, “beside himself” (285). Socrates’ words touch his very soul, and make him feel that his life is “no better than a slave’s.” That kind of passion cannot be willed; it comes from outside. This from Carson: “As Sokrates tells it, your story begins the moment Eros enters you. That incursion is the biggest risk of your life ... As you handle it you come in contact with what is inside you in a sudden and startling way. You perceive what you are, what you lack, what you could be.” (Carson, *Eros* 153)

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Irigaray’s conversation with Nietzsche, or Cixous’s deconstruction of “phallogocentrism” by writing the woman into the text in “The Laugh of the Medusa.”

Alcibiades is in love with what he does not possess. Indeed, it is a double lack that attracts him to Socrates. Alcibiades, Zwicky tells us, is in love with “what Eros hasn’t got” but Socrates does: moral beauty. This beauty, this excellence, is the essence of integrity that opens itself to revelation, an egolessness, an availability—“that is *eros*; that is, awareness of absence; that is, knowing that one does not know.” Zwicky asks whether such integrity might itself be a kind of lack, an excellence of emptiness—one that has “enormous interior wealth” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 288). Neither cynical nor detached, but “an attentiveness in which one is and is not, the other. Identified but distinct.” Carson underscores this point with an image from the *Symposium*, of the night Alcibiades “slept with” Socrates. Alcibiades tell us how he wrapped the older man in his cloak and drew Socrates’ inferior one over them both, thus maintaining the separation while also enfolding them together, as Carson says “reifying the “guiding principle” of *eros* as separation, as lack (Carson, *Eros* 22-3).

Socrates, Zwicky tells us, is the best of lovers. He loves “without seeking to fill his lack, he embraces it.” He does not insist on possession and the damage it would inflict. “By loving without needing to own what we love,” Zwicky suggests, we might achieve what she calls a kind of Hegelian “erotic sublation” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 289). The lover of wisdom can court the beloved by turning the *elenkhos* inward. Rather than enclose ourselves in what Carson calls “a carapace of *sophrosyne*,” touting a “spirit of begrudgment commonly praised as virtue” (Carson, *Eros* 150), we might, by means of such self-directed *elenkhos*, be “cleaned out, unclogged, turned into the emptiness that is *eros* for the world and simply made whole.” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 293) But such openness requires great courage. The capacity to be affected, to remain engaged and unguarded is perilous. It is “an act of absolute spiritual daring” (Critchley 304), and a great risk. At the limit of *eros* is the dissolution of the self.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion

So why does it matter whether we understand the life of wisdom according to the kinship of *philos* or the binding-in-lack of *eros*? Even if one does not agree with Carson and Zwicky’s claim regarding the metaphorical nature of language and thinking, metaphors are never just figures of speech. They embody ontological and ethical claims that pervade our thinking even when we don’t deliberately reflect on them. Carson and Zwicky’s re-imagining of the love of wisdom as an erotic force offers an alternative that might serve to disentrall us from some of the most troubling and limiting implications of the tradition of *philosophia* that continue to our time.

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<sup>16</sup> Carson also sees this danger and explores it in *Decreation*.

First of all, the binding-in-lack of *eros* gives us a way to think the both-and of human knowing beyond the ontology of sameness embedded in the metaphor of “*philos*.” Taking seriously *eros* as relation and distinction allows us to take responsibility for our own role in the creation of meaning, while respecting the source of perception outside ourselves. Such an understanding might avoid the prisons of phenomenological solipsism on the one hand or determinist materialism on the other, as well as the epistemological mastery that appeals to truth as an ideal “objectivity” (including the mathematization of science). *Eros*, on the model of metaphor, is neither an Hegelian “determinate negation,” nor a Derridean “*differance*,” but a force of *relation*—for Zwicky, a “resonate affirmation” if you will.<sup>17</sup> In expressing the “not two/not one”, it provides us with a way of thinking about meaning as complex integration that goes beyond representation or correspondence and might therefore actually be more precise, truer to our experience, as well as more responsive and responsible to others and our world.

In addition, and perhaps consequent to the above, this interpretation of *eros* avoids its circumscription as appetite, as a drive having its source in the self-contained subject and determined by sexual desire and libidinal economy.<sup>18</sup> By going back to the Ancient Greek understanding, Carson and Zwicky can leap-frog behind Freud and subsequent psychoanalytic discourse in order to open out the meaning of erotic operation beyond the ego and its needs to a literary, intellectual and ultimately cosmic force, of which the sexual is just one manifestation. This new/old conception of *eros* might have profound implications for rethinking discourses on desire, objectification, and signification centered on the image of the phallus. Clearly, such implications are far beyond the scope of this paper.

Furthermore, by seeing metaphor as an erotic operation of binding-in-difference, Zwicky and Carson move us beyond the limitations of previous endeavors to explain human language and thinking as metaphoricity. Zwicky’s notion of “resonance” in particular is a counter to the skepticism that haunts Nietzsche’s or Ricoeur’s Kantian insistence on

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<sup>17</sup> This explains the appeal of Zwicky’s work for ecologists seeking an alternative to the technological view of nature as resource—what the Critical Theorists called “instrumental reason”: “there is a particular resonance of metaphorical thinking (call it: poetic practice) with the development of cogent ecological sensibility: by asserting the existence of relationships between things that, spoken non-metaphorically, are unrelated, metaphor facilitates the deep acknowledgement of a diversity of forms of life.” (Bifford, in Dickinson & Goulet 194)

<sup>18</sup> Consider Freud: “Love with an inhibited aim was in fact originally fully sensual love” and his description of Eros as “the power of love which made man unwilling to be deprived of his sexual object” (Freud 55-8).

the subjective creation of meaning. It is also an answer to the retreat into ec-stasy, or false “oracularity.”<sup>19</sup> For Carson and especially for Zwicky, thinking is metaphorical and erotic because it is about a real relation-in-difference with a distinct other. It is a kind of liberated empiricism, released from the law of non-contradiction, but not therefore irrational because it is founded on a resonance that holds together things in the world and ourselves to those things.

Carson and Zwicky bring us back to *eros* to remind us why we came to philosophy in the first place. We fell in love. But as true lovers of wisdom, we do not get to own what we love. “Only the god deserves to be called wise.” The fantastic motion of the spinning top ends with the grasp. *Eros* is the bittersweet lot of mortals; “to be running breathlessly, but not yet arrived, is itself a delightful, a suspended moment of living hope.” (Carson, *Eros* xi) And hope, as Zwicky tell us, is what keeps thinking “turned toward reality” (Zwicky, *Alcibiades* 168) in pursuit and the leap of imagination, the delight of the not-me, not-yet. *Erosophia*.

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<sup>19</sup> Freud, of course, on the basis of the ironically named “reality principle” refuses the notion that a feeling of connection might have its source outside the ego. “A feeling can only be a source of energy if it is itself an expression of a strong need.” So that any religious or “oceanic” feeling can be “traced back to an early phase of ego-feeling.” Religious inspiration then would be the projection of a megalomaniacal ego (masculine?) projecting outwards (Freud 19-20; also see Krjewski). At the other pole are the those who deny any role for the self, turning understanding and discussion into a kind of attunement to oracularity. This is a danger for Zwicky, she deals with it in her essay, “Oracularity,” (in *Alcibiades* 107-129).



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