The Annals of Ovidius University of Constanța: Philology Series Vol. XXVIII, 2/2017

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF LOVE THROUGH AQUATIC METAPHORS IN OVID'S *REMEDIA AMORIS*

Florentina Nicolae
Ovidius University of Constanța

***Abstract**: In this study we aim to analyze Ovid's work,* Remedia amoris, *from the perspective of the functions of aquatic metaphors. The Ovidian opusculus is both an anti-*Ars amatoria, *a manual of de-love, healing and emotional balancing. Aquatic metaphors are used by Ovid as a symbol of the soul's balance, the inner force to move forward, to the struggle for a fulfilled life. Uninhabited or unfulfilled love is destructive to the one who cannot find inner peace. Passionate love is patronized by Amor, the god-child, whose arrows cause irrational, euphoric gestures and attitudes that Ovid enthusiastically greet in Amores, his first published work, but in* Remedia amoris, *the god invoked is Phoebus, god of light and the sun, music, poetry, medicine, patronizing the healing tools of Ovid's poem (*carmine sanati ... meo*), as an inner balance source.*

***Keywords**:* reason, passion, remedies, metaphor, aquatic

Remedia amoris is a collection of counseling for disappointed young people (*decepti iuvenes*, l. 41), who, from Ovid's point of view, suffer in love. It is a disease that the poet, as a soul physician, knows to heal with remedies (*remedia*) that balance techniques of reason and feelings alike. The love which the poet offers to heal is irrational, destructive (*saevas ... flammas*, l. 53 – "wild flames"; *servum viti ... pectus*, l. 54 – "slave of vice ... the soul").

In the erotic lyric of his debut, Ovid is proud to have the courage both to confront the sober tradition of epic poetry, as well as Augustus's austere policy, and to leave himself carried away by passions and irrational impulses. The idea is emphasized by the opposition between Amor and Phoebus, that is to say, between passion and reason, at the beginning of the *Art of Love*, in which Ovid appealed despising Phoebus and left Amor's arrows, invoking his mother, Venus: *Ego, Phoebe, datas a te mihi mentiar artes* (*Ars amatoria*, I, 25) – "I will not lie, Phoebus, that I have these crafts from you." In *Remedia amoris*, Ovid no longer refers to the god Amor, invoked both in the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria* as a protecting god, but to Phoebus, in his double quality, as the god of lyrical art and of healing:

Carminis et medicae, Phoebe, repertor opis.
Tu pariter vati, pariter succurre medenti:
Utraque tutelae subdita cura tua est.
Dum licet, et modici tangunt praecordia motus.

(ll. 75-79)

Phoebus, thou god of physic and of verse,
Assist the healing numbers I rehearse;

BDD-A27697 © 2017 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:53:52 UTC)

Direct at once my med'cines and my song,
For to thy care both provinces belong.

(trans. Anne Mahoney)

An emblematic character for the conflict between life dedicated to passion and the one dedicated to the city is Leandro (Leander), whom Ovid uses in many of his creations. Leander was a young man from Abydos, in love with Hero, Venus's priestess from Sestos. To get from Abydos, in Sestos to Hero, Leander crossed each night the Hellespont Strait, which separated the two cities. Hero put a lantern on top of the tower where she lived to help Leander to swim in the darkness of the night. In a winter, the strong wind stops the lantern, and Leander, losing the path in the darkness, dies drowned. Discovering his inert body at the base of the tower, Hero sank into the waves.

In *Amores*, II, 16, 31-32, the legend of the two is invoked in the context of examples in which bad weather is adverse to erotic fulfillment: *saepe petens Hero iuvenis transnaverat undas; tum quoque transnasset, sed via caeca fuit.* – "The boy in search of Hero often swam / and would have swum once more, but missed his way" (trans. Tom Bishop). In *Ars amatoria*, II, 249-250, Ovid urges those who want to conquer a girl that they prove mad courage, risk their life, like Leander in his attempt to reach Hero:

Saepe tua poteras, Leandre, carere puella:
Transnabas, animum nosset ut illa tuum.
Leander could have left his love to fret and stew,
Yet swam the Hellespont to prove it true.

(trans. Len Krisak)

In the *Heroides* letters, the couple appears in the 18th and 19th letters. Hero says both are burning with the same passion, but she is weaker in strength: *urimur igne pari, sed sum tibi viribus impar* (XIX; 5); on the other hand, Leander writes that his arms are more suitable for swimming than to write letters of love (Ovid sometimes uses the metaphor of the letter to suggest the fulfillment of the erotic act), and shows that he stands against the wind and the water: *cuncta negant ventique fretumque* (XVIII, 53); and that his passion is at the shore: *…meus ignis in illo est: / Illa meum,' dixi, 'litora lumen habent* (XVIII, 85-86). In *Heroides*, VIII, 57, Leander said that for Hero he could swim *ad ultima Ponti* – "to the ends of the Pont." In *Tristia* III, X, 41, Ovid, describing the terrible winter of Tomis, writes about the frozen sea over which he can walk without the foot getting wet, and finds that if Leander had crossed such a water, it would not have killed him. In our opinion, Leander is overwhelmed by the duties of civic life and sacrifices his love, a gesture that a loved woman cannot approve of.

Ovid's plenary affirmation of love is opposed to active involvement in the life of the polity. The metaphor of the flowing water is used by Ovid as a symbol of the soul's balance, by the inner force to move forward, to fight for a fulfilled life. This explains why in the *Ars amatoria* he recommends the lover not to stretch the sails, that is, not to be involved in social life, because he will lose interest in his love life: *Non ego quaerentem vento dare vela iubebo (Ars amatoria,* I, 51) – "I will not recommend to the one who loves to stretch the canvas in the wind."

BDD-A27697 © 2017 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:53:52 UTC)

Unfulfilled love is destructive, and Ovid supports his idea with arguments from mythology, a preferred procedure in his lyrics, of Alexandrian origin: the passion of Tereus for Philomela, of Pasiphae for Neptune's bull, of Paris for Helena, etc. At the forefront of the rich list of such examples is that of Dido and Aeneas. The episode of love between the Carthaginian queen and the legendary Trojan is well known. He, out of love for Dido, is ready to give up his founding destiny – *conditor urbis* – assumed by the queen, but the gods watch that Aeneas fulfills his destiny and force him to flee from Carthage further to Latium.

Dido, torn by pain, humiliated because she had broken, as an act of supreme love, the oath not to remarry, after she became a widow, decides to commit suicide. In the last moments of life, she sees the Trojan ship departing:

Nec moriens Dido summa vidisset ab arce
Dardanias vento vela dedisse rates.

(ll. 57-58)

Dido had not died when she saw from the top of the city,
That the Trojan ships had put the sail in the wind.

(trans. mine)

It is worth noting, in this eclectic distich, the assonance of consonants d and v, which suggests the hatred that replaced love in the heart of the deceived queen; we also notice the emphatic positioning of the key words *vento* and *vela* in the caesura. The fact that the Trojans followed the course of their journey, that is to say, they respected their primordial destiny and the indications of the Olympian gods, is supported by the image of the sails in the wind.

The same symbolism is applied in a similar episode present in the Homeric *Odyssey* (X, 135 et seq.) and in the Vergilian *Eneid* (VII), the love of Circe and Ulysses. In love with the hero, the witch Circe, using a magic herb, detains him on her island for one year, along with his companions, transformed into pigs (Lăzărescu 104). Ulysses, however, does not surrender to her spells, because he receives an antidote from Hermes, the messenger of the gods and protector of travelers. Hermes also warns Aeneas that he has to fulfill his destiny as a founder of the city, and forces him to continue his journey. At the lexical level, we note the use of the same poetic term, *rates*, and the use of terms from the lexical sphere of air, *vento* and *aura*, symbolizing the inner, saving force.

Quid tibi profuerunt, Circe, Perseides herbae,
Cum sua Neritias abstulit aura rates?

(ll. 263-264)

Why did you use, Circe, Perseus's herbs,
When the Neritian ship left in the wind?

(trans. mine)

In both situations, male figures are under the sign of water and wind, that is, of the sentimental balance and of the inner rational force. On the other hand, the feminine figures are under the sign of fire: Dido ignites her own rug, and Circe is consumed by the inner fire of passion: *Omnia fecisti, ne te ferus ureret ignis* (l. 264) – "You have done all of these so that the wild fire does not burn you." The same image was used by Vergil for Dido: *uritur infelix Dido* – "the unhappy Dido burns" (*Aen*., IV, 68). Trying to dissuade Ulysses from leaving,

BDD-A27697 © 2017 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:53:52 UTC)

Circe invokes the unfavorable weather and the agitated sea, using words like *velis* and *ventus*, that also appear in the episode of Dido:

Et freta mota vides, et debes illa timere:
Utilior velis postmodo ventus erit.

(ll. 279-280)

The seas are rough, which you have cause to fear;
Wait but a friendlier season of the year.

(trans. Anne Mahoney)

The agitated sea and the wind are metaphors used in ancient Latin literature to symbolize the active life, full of hardships, shunned by Stoic philosophy. Ovid believes that involvement in active life is one of the most appropriate remedies for love, so that the agitation of everyday life becomes the source of inner balance:

Ad mala quisque animum referat sua, ponet amorem (l. 559)
If someone turns his soul to hardship, he will get rid of love.

Unknowingly, Circe offers Ulysses her kingdom, peace and love (*pax et amor*), but he chooses action, strength, struggle with life, ultimately life, as opposed to yielding to the destructive, irrational passion that generates death:

Illa loquebatur, navem solvebat Ulixes:
Inrita cum velis verba tulere noti.

(ll. 285-286)

While she was talking, Ulysses was unleashing the ship:
The wind carried the futile words together with the sails.

(trans. mine)

With almost the same words, Vergil portrays Aeneas as he continues his journey: *Tendunt vela noti* (Aen., 3, 268) – "The wind stretches the sail" – which indicates that Ovid had Vergil as a poetic mentor. In fact, the Mantuan is mentioned in the *Remedia amoris* as a symbol of epic poetry, as the equivalent of what Ovid wishes to achieve, at the level of elegiac poetry.[1] Using again the image of Ulysses, he urges the young to avoid the house of his lover, as Homer's hero has fled from the Lotophagi and the mermaids, and sails further in the wind:

Illo Lotophagos, illo Sirenas in antro
Esse puta; remis adice vela tuis.

(ll. 789-790)

For now's the time to stretch with whip and spur.
Think there's the Syren's den, the deadly bay.

(trans. Anne Mahoney)

[1] *Tantum se nobis elegi debere fatentur, / Quantum Vergilio nobile debet epos* (ll. 395-396).

BDD-A27697 © 2017 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:53:52 UTC)

The ship (*navis, carinae, rates, remus*) and sail (*lintea, carbasa, vela*) are objects made by humans; their harmony with the elements of the nature, like the air *(ventus, notus, aura)* and water *(aequora, fluctus, freta),* is the guarantee of an emotional balance found anew:

Desine luctari: referant tua carbasa venti,
Quaque vocant fluctus, hac tibi remus eat.

(ll. 531-532)

Do not fight: the winds will carry your canvas
And the ship will sail where the wind will call.

(trans. mine)

The use of aquatic metaphors is gender orientated (Rimell 187). Women in love are on the shore, and men who do not love them sail away to other ports. In the *Heroides*, Briseis is terrified by the idea that Achilles wants to stretch the sail in the wind (III, 58); Oenone knows that Paris's voyage to Sparta means the loss of his love (V, 53-54); Hyssipipyle, when she hears that Jason has anchored in Thessaly, not in Lemnos where she is waiting for him, is convinced that he has a new relationship (VI, 1-6); Dido reproaches Aeneas that his decision to resume a voyage at sea is equivalent to a violation of the marriage oath (VII, 8-9); Ariadne writes to Theseus on the shore where he left her to set sail in the wind (X, 3-4). At the same time, she testifies that even a boat and the right wind would not change her inner condition: *ut rate felici pacata per aequora labar, / temperet ut ventos Aeolus; exul ero* (X, 65-66) – "Even if I were floating through the quiet waves aboard a happy ship / And Eol reassured the winds, I would be exiled."

The metaphor of the port is reevaluated, compared to the symbolism of the erotic lyric of Ovid's first works, where the port was the end of the struggles to conquer, the erotic fulfillment (*Ars amatoria*, II, 10; III, 99, 748), and the wind symbolized the irrational whims of love (*carinam / Tangentem portus ventus in alta rapit - / Sic me saepe refert incerta Cupidinis aura* – "The wind takes up the ship that touched the harbor, / So I often carry Cupid's insecure breeze" (*Amores*, II, IX, 7-9). In *Remedia amoris,* Ovid uses the port image to symbolize the rational control of the man released under Amor's capricious mastery. In the case of the fulfillment of passionless love, put under the sign of Phoebus, not Amor, the ship can be populated by non-individualized female characters:

Quaeris, ubi invenias? Artes tu perlege nostras:
Plena puellarum iam tibi navis erit.
Quod siquid praecepta valent mea, siquid Apollo
Utile mortales perdocet ore meo.

(ll. 487-490)

You ask where you can find it?[2] Read to the end our *Artes*:
And then your ship will be filled with girls.
Because my teachings are pricey, because Apollo
He teaches the mortals, through my mouth, what is useful. (trans. mine)

[2] I.e. love.

BDD-A27697 © 2017 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:53:52 UTC)

The metaphor of the ship is used in *Remedia amoris*, in direct relationship with the cathartic function of poetry. At the beginning of the poem, Ovid advises young people to read it in order to be free from problems:

Me duce damnosas, homines, conpescite curas,
Rectaque cum sociis me duce navis eat.
Naso legendus erat tum, cum didicistis amare:
Idem nunc vobis Naso legendus erit.

(ll. 69-72)

Learn, youths, from me, to curb the desp'rate force
Of love, and steer, by my advice, your course.
By reading me, you first receiv'd your bane;
Now, for an antidote, read me again.

(trans. Anne Mahoney)

To be noted in this essential fragment are the emphatic placement of the absolute ablative *Me duce* ("while I am the leader") and the repetition of the structure in the first two verses; then the repetition of the verb *lego* at passive peripheral conjugation with the change of the verb tense, *Naso legendus erat – Naso legendus erit*, because the imperfect tense refers to the *Ars amatoria* and the future tense to the *Remedia amoris*: "Naso had to be read" - "Naso would have to be read." It is also worth noting the opposition of the epithets *damnosa* and *recta*, which attracts the placement in the same relation of the nouns *curas* and *navis.* The ship is the metaphorical image that indicates the opposite of worries for unrealized love, so the symbolism of the harbor comes as an extension of the struggle with its own passions:

Praestiterat iuvenis quidquid mea Musa iubebat,
Inque suae portu paene salutis erat.
Reccidit, ut cupidos inter devenit amantes...

(ll. 609-611)

A young man respected what my Muse had recommended
And he almost reached the port of his salvation.
He fell again when he came across some passionate lovers...

(trans. mine)

The end of the poem is built around two dominant ideas: on the one hand, the reader's persuasion to follow his advice; on the other hand, the poet's achievement of glory. The latter notion permeates the entire Ovidian lyric:

Hoc opus exegi: fessae date serta carinae;
Contigimus portus, quo mihi cursus erat.
Postmodo reddetis sacro pia vota poetae,
Carmine sanati femina virque meo.

(ll. 811-814)

Now to our port we are arriv'd; bring down
The jolly wreath, our weary barque to crown.

BDD-A27697 © 2017 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:53:52 UTC)

Your grief redrest, and now a happy throng,
Ye nymphs and youths applaud my healing song.

(trans. Anne Mahoney)

Recovering one's emotional balance requires a long effort (*fessae ... carinae*); Ovid assumes this effort, as if he were suffering with the reader (*contigimus* – "we have arrived"). The end of the poem emphasizes the idea of healing through poetry (*carmine sanati*), which attracts the recognition of the artistic value of the poet, by awarding flowers (*date serta*) and by votive offerings (*pia vota*), because Ovid always emphasizes that he has acted as a messenger of Phoebus, which sustains the nickname *sacro ... poetae*.

In the *Remedia amoris* Ovid is not looking for cure for a certain love, but for love in general. Even if he exemplifies different circumstances, for which he gives a list of clear remedies, his goal is to reduce love to a disease that can be treated by returning to a participatory life, free of passions, based on reason and emotional balance. We do not have to understand the *Remedia amoris* as a retraction of the previous erotic lyric. Ovid is self-irritating, claiming to renounce his work, like a father his children. Yet he shows poetic talent irrespective of the chosen theme and the manifestation of a technique of versification by which he wants to secure his eternal glory among the other elegant poets of the moment, of which he has spoken eloquently both in the *Amores* and in the *Remedia amoris*.

WORKS CITED

Lăzărescu, George. *Dicționar de mitologie*. București: Casa editorială Odeon, 1992.

Ovidius Naso, Publius. *Art of Love (in three Books), the Remedy of Love, the Art of Beauty, the Court of Love, the History of Love, and Amours*. Trans. Anne Mahoney. Edited for Perseus. New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1855. Online at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu

Ovidius Naso, Publius. *Amores*. Trans. Tom Bishop, New York: Routledge, 2003. Online at book.google.ro

Ovidius Naso, Publius. *Ovid's Erotic Poems Amores and Ars amatoria*. Trans. Len Krisak. University of Pennsylvania Press: Pennsylvania, 2017. Online at book.google.ro

Ovidius Naso, Publius. *Remedia amoris.* Bibliotheca augustana. Online at https://www.hs-augsburg.de

Ovidius Naso, Publius. *Amores.* Bibliotheca augustana. Online at https://www.hs-augsburg.de

Ovidius Naso, Publius. *Ars amatoria.* Bibliotheca augustana. Online at https://www.hs-augsburg.de

Rimell, Victoria. *Ovid's Lovers. Desire, Difference, and the Poetic Imagination,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

BDD-A27697 © 2017 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 10:53:52 UTC)