It is a remarkable feature of the mass of modern literature on the Symposium that while there are many treatments of its various parts, and of the relationship of individual parts to each other, there is rather little in the way of treatments of the structure and purpose of the dialogue as a whole. This may suggest a general view of the Symp. as a kind of episodic survey of differing perspectives on eros, with the other speakers acting to provide a counterpoint—whether negative or positive, or partly negative, partly positive—to what Socrates claims to have learned from Diotima. Such a view appears to legitimate a piecemeal approach, in which each speaker’s contribution may be considered more or less in isolation from the others’. At the same time, given the apparent restriction of anything approaching hard philosophical argument to one speaker’s contribution (i.e., Socrates’), it also tends to lead to a divorce between literary and philosophical discussions of the work. This is a strange state of affairs, when—as studies of the Symp., however partial, repeatedly indicate—there is a high degree of connectedness between the varied elements of the whole. While it might indeed turn out that the Symp. has a complex and ambiguous structure, with diverse and even competing outcomes to match the diversity of modern interpretations, its status as an artistic construct (in the widest sense) demands that we do not simply assume it to be so. My own view (although I shall not have the space to justify it here), is that it is in fact a

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1 I.e. ἔρως, which—at least within the context of the Symp.—I regard as strictly untranslatable; when I am, inevitably, forced back to the traditional translation, ‘love,’ this should be regarded simply as a place-filler for ἔρως (similarly with its cognates, except perhaps in the single case of ‘lover,’ which conveys the sense of ἔφαρτης and ὁ ἐρωτέω fairly precisely).

2 For an extended justification, see Rowe 1998, which includes an extensive bibliography. In the present essay, I propose to engage only fitfully with other
highly unified work: one in which the author is always in control of his material, directing the actions and words of his characters, like an expert impresario, for a purpose which is no less well-defined for remaining (as it must) inexplicit.

Having said this, I have immediately to confess that—as my title itself indicates—I shall be adding yet another partial study of the *Symp.*, and indeed of the Socrates/Diotima portion itself, to the pile. However it will be a presupposition of this partial study that the relevant section of the dialogue must be read, and can only properly be understood (I mean, with due attention to the detail, and apparent intentions, of the text), in terms of its context within the economy of the whole. It grows out of what precedes it, and will grow—though in fact I shall not here directly discuss the later parts of the *Symp.*—into what follows it.³

The basis of my treatment will be provided by the passage in which Socrates introduces his contribution to the feast. This is 198b-199b, where he roundly declares that he will *tell the truth*, unlike those who have spoken before him:

> It looks as if this [i.e., telling the truth in the most attractive way] wasn't after all [sc. looking back at the way you others did it] the way to praise anything whatsoever well; the thing to do is to attribute the greatest and most beautiful interpretations of the dialogue, or of the Socrates and Diotima episode (though I refer in n.13 to four interpretations of the latter which I find particularly helpful); my aim is simply to develop what is in some important respects an alternative reading, leaving it to my admirable respondent, David Konstan, to represent a differing point of view. It should be added that the present paper is an only lightly modified version of the one originally presented at the colloquium (at Harvard) in April 1998. This is not because I find no weight in Konstan's comments, but simply because to take note of them in this printed version might be partly to remove the grounds for them (which is not necessarily to imply that I wish to retreat, in response to those comments, on any significant front). The general discussion both at the colloquium itself and in the succeeding seminar was also lively and productive. I should like to thank Rachel Barney, who organized the whole event; and an anonymous reader at the final pre-publication stage, who attacked—in velvet gloves—at new points. The outcome of this last assault is what I hope is an improved argument at one point, and some extra defensive works in the footnotes.

³ In itself, this is hardly a controversial claim; however I believe that both the degree of the connections between the Socrates/Diotima passage and its surrounding context, and the directedness of its argument in that context, have been widely underestimated.