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Assisted Suicide and Malingering in Xenophon of Ephesus' *Anthia and Habrocomes*: Literary Sources, Medical Ethics and Parascientific Aspects (Xen. Eph. 3,4-5; 5,7)

Christina Savino

Department of Clinical and Molecular Sciences, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery - Università Politecnica delle Marche, Ancona, Italy

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Corresponding author:

christinasavino@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In Xenophon of Ephesus' *Anthia and Habrocomes* (1st – 2nd centuries AD) two episodes address medical topics that are most controversial nowadays: assisted suicide and malingering. This article provides an analysis of both episodes of this Greek novel aiming to reconstruct the ancient views on these subjects and better understand their cultural past.

Key words: Xenophon of Ephesus - Assisted suicide - Malingering - Herodotus - Hippocrates' *Oath* - Cardiocentric views - Medical ethics

Ancient Greek literature abounds in fascinating sketches concerning illness, healing, patients and physicians beginning from Homer's epics, which considerably contributed to the Western cultural identity. In the classical era, the development of Greek rational medicine had a significant impact on different literary genres: scholars have focused on Thucydides' *Histories*, with its famous description of the Athenian plague, but ancient Greek drama has been also profitably investigated; in fact, medical knowledge was widely circulating among Greek intellectuals and authors at that time. Not less interesting is the post-classical literature, which attests the dissemination of medical ideas beyond specialistic environments to wider audience. It is well known that Plutarch and Athenaeus had a marked interest in medical topics, but also Greek novelists have created representations that reveal both their medical knowledge and most influential ideas in late Hellenism and the Roman Empire.

Interesting findings already emerged from the analysis of two Greek novels that have survived intact. In Achilles Tatius's novel, the female protagonist, Leucippe, suddenly falls to the ground with distraught eyes to get back up and act violently and forcibly for a long time, until she is tied up with ropes, while still delirious. Her illness, actually caused by a love poison, is conveyed through terms and notions which are incoherent—as partly referable to epilepsy partly to *μανία*—but all responding to an encephalocentric view¹. In Heliodorus' novel, Charicleia falls in love experiencing a state of asthenia, looking pale, absent, suffering from insomnia and emaciation for several days, leading to an unexpected outburst of anger with self-harming impulses, a sort of demonic possession. This lovesickness is depicted with recourse to ideas belonging to the ancient tradition, such as the miasmatic theory, but also with more specific and updated concepts compatible with the thought of the Methodical school and Galen².

These two examples suggest that in the Greek novels—at least of the second phase, close to the Second Sophistic—medical knowledge, cultural interests and literary pretensions of the authors intertwine giving rise to representations that are suggestive, yet theoretically contaminated and difficult to be used for retrospective diagnosis. It seems that novelists make use of the illness narrative device in order to enliven action, impress the reader's imagination and stimulate him visually; hence best and most suitable illnesses are characterized by seizures in conjunction with pronounced, striking symptoms, including convulsions and emotional outbursts. Such illnesses require medical intervention to find out their non-somatic causes, and are eventually solved outside the medical realm.

This first sketch, of course, does not exhaust the topic of illness representation and medical knowledge in the Greek novel, if nothing else, because it leaves out the early novelists³. In this regard, Xenophon's *Anthia and Habrocomes* (1st – 2nd centuries AD) deserves special attention for two episodes, respectively concerning assisted suicide and malingering⁴. Both themes have remained crucial for many centuries and have become most controversial in medicine today. In what follows I will recall the two

episodes (1; 2) in order to analyze: with regard to the physician, the characterization, the relation to the female protagonist-patient, and the medical fee (3); as for the illness, the pathological view and the feigning (4).

1. Anthia wants to commit suicide

In Xenophon's novel the two protagonists meet at the festival of Artemis in Ephesus, fall in love at first sight, then get married. Later on, the couple takes a trip to Egypt, where a series of adventures begin: after being kidnapped by robbers, Anthia is rescued and taken to Tarsus by Perilaos, the irenarch of Cilicia, who forces her to marry him (2,13). Faced with this situation, Anthia decides to commit suicide and seeks medical help from the physician Eudoxus (3,4: *πρεσβύτης Ἐφέσιος ἰατρὸς τὴν τέχνην, Εὐδόξος τοῦνομα*). Eudoxus was introduced to Anthia because of their common origin – the physician was also from Ephesus – but they share common misfortunes too: indeed, Eudoxus came to Tarsus as a castaway (*ἦκε δὲ ναυαγίῳ περιπεσὼν εἰς Αἴγυπτον πλέων*), and here lives at the mercy of the local notables, from whom he begs all kind of things (*περιῆει μὲν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἄνδρας, ὅσοι Ταρσεῶν εὐδοκιμώτατοι, οὓς μὲν ἐσθῆτας, οὓς δὲ ἀργύριον αἰτῶν, διηγούμενος ἐκάστω τὴν συμφορὰν*). Actually, while Anthia feels empathy for Eudoxus as a fellow-citizen, he seems to be more interested in the benefits she could provide: in particular, the physician seeks help to return to Ephesus, where he still has a family. However, with the wedding getting closer, it is Anthia who asks Eudoxus for help: leading him away from other people in Perilaos' house (*ἀφικομένου παρ' αὐτὴν τοῦ Εὐδόξου τοῦ Ἐφεσίου ἰατροῦ, ἀπαγαγοῦσα αὐτὸν ἐπ' οἴκημά τι ἡρεμαῖον*), she throws herself at his feet, begging him to keep the secret and makes him swear by Artemis that he will collaborate in all that is required of him (*προσπίπτει τοῖς γόνασιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰκετεύει μηδενὶ κατεπειν τῶν ῥηθησομένων μηδὲν καὶ ὀρκίζει τὴν πάτριον θεὰν Ἄρτεμιν ξυμπρᾶξαι πάντα ὅσα ἂν αὐτοῦ δεηθῆ*). Eudoxus swears, promising to do everything (*ὁ Εὐδόξος... ἐπώμνυε, πάντα ποιήσειν ὑπισχνούμενος*). Thus, Anthia tells him of her love for Habrocomes, whom she absolutely does not want to betray, and orders Eudoxus to help her to find a *pharmakon* that will rid her of her misfortunes (*σὺ τοίνυν βοηθὸς ἡμῖν γενοῦ, φάρμακον εὐρών ποθεν, ὃ κακῶν με ἀπαλλάξει τὴν κακοδαίμονα*). He would be rewarded by the gods, whom she would invoke (*Ἔσται δὲ ἀντὶ τούτων σοι πολλὰ μὲν καὶ παρὰ τῶν θεῶν, οἷς ἐπεύξομαι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου πολλάκις ὑπὲρ σοῦ*), and by Anthia herself, who will give him money and arrange his repatriation (*αὐτὴ δὲ σοι καὶ ἀργύριον δώσω καὶ τὴν παραπομπὴν ἐπισκευάσω*): before word gets out, Eudoxus would be on a ship to Ephesus (*Δυνήσῃ δὲ πρὸ τοῦ πυθέσθαι τινὰ ἐπιβάς νεὼς τὴν ἐπ' Ἐφέσου πλεῖν*). Anthia keeps asking him to provide the *pharmakon* (*Εἰποῦσα τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ προυκυλίετο καὶ ἐδεῖτο μηδὲν ἀντειπεῖν αὐτῇ δοῦναί τε τὸ φάρμακον*). Then she gives him twenty silver mines and necklaces belonging to the treasures of Perilaos (*Καὶ προκομίσασα εἴκοσι μνᾶς ἀργυρίου περιδέραιά τε αὐτῆς (ἦν δὲ αὐτῇ πάντα ἄφθονα, πάντων γὰρ ἐξουσίαν εἶχε τῶν Περιλάου) δίδωσι τῷ Εὐδόξῳ*).

In the novel, which is renowned for its very simple, possibly epitomized style⁵, Anthia's request is not followed by any reply. But we do know that Eudoxus agrees out of pity for the unhappy girl and also out of convenience: what convinces him are in fact all the money and the spoils bestowed on him (Ὁ δὲ βουλευσάμενος πολλὰ καὶ τὴν κόρην οἰκτείρας τῆς συμφορᾶς καὶ τῆς εἰς Ἐφεσον ἐπιθυμῶν ὁδοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀργυρίου καὶ τῶν δώρων ἠττώμενος ὑπισχνεῖται δώσειν τὸ φάρμακον). He then goes off to look for the *pharmakon*, and shortly after returns not with a deadly drug, rather with a sleeping one (θανάσιμον οὐχὶ φάρμακον, ὑπνωτικὸν δέ), so that Anthia would not die from it and he, thanks to the reward, would save himself (ὡς μὴ τι παθεῖν τὴν κόρην καὶ αὐτὸν ἐφοδίων τυχόντα ἀνασωθῆναι). Immediately afterwards, Eudoxus embarks and Anthia searches for a suitable moment to take the drug (Καὶ ὁ μὲν εὐθὺς ἐπιβὰς νεῶς ἐπανήχθη, ἡ δὲ καιρὸν ἐπιτήδειον ἐζήτει πρὸς τὴν πόσιν τοῦ φαρμάκου).

In 3,6, at night, Anthia finds herself alone and encourages herself to commit suicide. She asks a maid for water, pours the drug into the cup and drinks it. Suddenly she falls into a deep sleep collapsing to the ground. In everyone's eye she is dead, so much that she would be taken to the necropolis (3,7), but it is here that she later awakens (3,8) exclaiming with resignation: "O deceitful drug, that you prevent me from embarking on the happy journey to Habrocomes: I have failed, poor me, even in my desire to die!" ("ὦ ψευδάμενόν με [τὸ] φάρμακον" φησίν, "ὦ κωλύσαν ὀδεῦσαι πρὸς τὸν Ἀβροκόμην ὁδὸν εὐτυχῆ· ἐσφάλην ἄρα παντάλαινα καὶ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ θανάτου"). Locked in the tomb, she still hopes to achieve her goal by letting herself starve to death, but another fate awaits her: bandits come to plunder the tomb and kidnap the girl, once again, to get a ransom.

2. Anthia feigns epilepsy

After the apparent death, Anthia goes through new misadventures, eventually being bought by a pimp of Tarentum (5,5). In 5,7, when forced into prostitution, she tries to escape her duties by pleading her master, but in vain. Thus, realising how desperate is her situation, she feigns a sudden illness: she throws herself to the ground, shaking her body and imitates those affected by the "divine illness" (πίπτει μὲν γὰρ εἰς γῆν καὶ παρεῖται τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἐμμεῖτο τοὺς νοσοῦντας τὴν ἐκ θεῶν καλουμένην νόσον). The feigning has the desired effect: the bystanders are seized with pity and fear – just like Aristotelian spectators of a tragedy – and recede from sexual desire and rescue Anthia (ἦν δὲ τῶν παρόντων ἔλεος ἅμα καὶ φόβος καὶ τοῦ μὲν ἐπιθυμεῖν συνουσίας ἀπείχοντο, ἐθεράπευον δὲ τὴν Ἀνθίαν); the pimp takes Anthia home, makes her lie down and cures her; later on, thinking she is recovering from the seizure, asks her the cause of the illness (ὁ δὲ πορνοβοσκὸς συνεῖς οἷ κακῶν ἐγεγόνει καὶ νομίσας ἀληθῶς νοσεῖν τὴν κόρην, ἦγεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν καὶ

κατέκλινέ τε καὶ ἐθεράπευε, καὶ ὡς ἔδοξεν αὐτῆς γεγόνει, ἀνεπυθάνετο τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς νόσου). First of all, Anthia declares that she would not tell him of her misfortune, but instead hides it feeling ashamed (“καὶ πρότερον” ἔφη, δέσποτα, εἰπεῖν πρὸς σὲ ἐβουλόμην τὴν συμφορὰν τὴν ἐμὴν καὶ διηγῆσασθαι τὰ συμβάντα, ἀλλὰ ἀπέκρυπτον αἰδουμένη). Furthermore, she provides an imaginative and impressive explanation: when she was still a child, during a night feast, she was attacked by a dead man coming out from the grave; the dead man chased and tried to grab her, and finally struck her on the chest inflicting the disease (Παῖς ἔτι οὖσα ἐν ἑορτῇ καὶ παννυχίδι ἀποπλανηθεῖσα τῶν ἐμαυτῆς ἦκον πρὸς τίνα τάφον ἀνδρὸς νεωστὶ τεθνηκότος· κἀνταῦθα ἐφάνη μοί τις ἀναθορῶν ἐκ τοῦ τάφου καὶ κατέχειν ἐπειρᾶτο· ἐγὼ δ’ ἀπέφυγον καὶ ἐβόων· ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἦν μὲν ὀφθῆναι φοβερός, φωνὴν δὲ πολλῶ εἶχε χαλεπωτέραν· καὶ τέλος ἡμέρα μὲν ἤδη ἐγίνετο, ἀφεις δὲ με ἔπληξέ τε κατὰ τοῦ στήθους καὶ νόσον ταύτην ἔλεγεν ἐμβεβληκέναι). Since then, she had been subject to misfortune in various ways and at various times (Ἐκεῖθεν ἀρξαμένη ἄλλοτε ἄλλως ὑπὸ τῆς συμφορᾶς κατέχομαι). Of all this she did not hold herself guilty (οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ τούτων αἰτία), and this is also conceded by the pimp (συνεγίνωσκε δὲ αὐτῇ, ὡς οὐχ ἐκούση ταῦτα πασχούση). In 5,8 the pimp cures Anthia as if she were really ill (ἡ μὲν ἐθεραπεύετο ὡς νοσοῦσα παρὰ τῷ πορνοβοσκῷ). A breakthrough occurs in 5,9, when the pimp decides to get rid of Anthia, who seems to be healed by him, and to resell her (Ὁ δὲ πορνοβοσκὸς ἤδη τῆς Ἀνθίας ὑγιαίνειν δοκούσης ἐνενόει ὅπως αὐτὴν ἀποδώσεται, καὶ δὴ προῆγεν αὐτὴν εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν etc.).

3. The physician and his intervention

The character of the physician appears also in Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus. In the *Adventures of Leucippe and Clitophon*, a physician is summoned after Leucippe has fallen in public and passersby, who happened to be watching, have already diagnosed the illness; the physician, who has no name, shows up in a few scenes, in which he administers a therapy that will lead nowhere, and is soon eclipsed by an expert in magic who finally manages to cure the girl. In *Charicleia and Theagenes* the physician, the λόγιος Accessinus, is depicted as a qualified and competent doctor; he very scrupulously examines Chariclea to establish that she is ill not in the body, but in her soul: such a diagnosis, however, leads him to a delimitation of medical competence and implicitly gives way to philosophy. Therefore, in both these novels, we find a physician who cannot heal the heroine, whose illness transcends the physical dimension of her person, and leaves room for another kind of intervention. On the contrary, in Xenophon's novel, the physician might be a secondary character, but it plays an important narrative function: his actions directly affect the development of the plot, preventing Anthia both from marrying Perilaos and dying⁶.

3.1 Characterisation

The physician portrayed by Xenophon is characterised by a few problematic aspects of his social and economic condition. Except for the name, Eudoxus has nothing illustrious about him: he is a castaway who could find no resources to repatriate, nor has he been able to rebuild his life in Tarsus, where he lives as a beggar, humble and looking for money. It is difficult to see in this portrayal a reflection of Xenophon's times: back in the day, in fact, medicine was having great advances in regard with anatomy and physiology; new applications of drugs; development of technical instruments and flourishing of various schools as well as medical writings. Hand in hand with scientific progress arose new and higher profiles of physician, such as the *medicus amicus*, bound by a personal relationship with the patient and rewarded with benefits; the public physician, more prestigious now with the prosperity of the Hellenistic cities and monarchies; the court physician became a high rank individual, like those of the doctors getting leading roles in society and politics. All these achievements mirrored in the work of non-medical writers, such as Plutarch, who would then become one of Heliodorus' favourite sources.

Far removed from the reality and the spirit of the time, the physician portrayed by Xenophon seems to be rather influenced by literature. Herodotus had written about Democedes of Croton, a Greek physician who, after a brilliant career, found himself in a difficult condition as a slave, neglected and dressed in rags, among the Persians⁷. Then there had been the Comedy, which had certainly not put doctors in a good light: this is the case with Menander's *Shield*, where Daos, while searching for an accomplice to the deception planned by him with regard to Chairestratos' health, significantly thinks of a foreign doctor, a sort of charlatan⁸. Even before the Middle Comedy had made a type of comedy out of the physician, after whom several authors named their playwrights, such as Aristophon and Antiphanes⁹; also Alexis, in the *Woman drugged with mandrake*, alluded to a foreign doctor, more respected than the local one by the patients, but also mocked for speaking with Doric accents¹⁰. And even earlier the better-known poet of Old Attic Comedy, Aristophanes, had expressed negative views on physicians as well as the other intellectuals of his own period: for instance, in *Pluto*, he had said in the mouth of Cremilus, when asked to summon a doctor to heal the blind god, "there is no salary, nor art"¹¹. The comedians' mistrust extended also to a category akin to the doctor, albeit a competitor: the *φαρμακοπώλης*, a seller of drugs, similar to a pharmacist, who in Hippocrates' time could sell as much drugs as poison¹².

a. *Relationship with the patient*

Eudoxus' intervention is subjected by Anthia to a pact, which consists of three points:

1. The prayer not to tell anyone anything that will be said to him (ἰκετεύει μηδενὶ κατειπεῖν τῶν ῥηθησομένων μηδέν);

2. The oath, to Artemis, to collaborate in everything asked from him (ὀρκίζει τὴν πάτριον θεὰν Ἄρτεμιν ξυμπράξει πάντα ὅσα ἂν αὐτοῦ δεηθῆ);
3. The request to provide a drug that would put an end to the patient's suffering (φάρμακον εὐρών ποθεν, ὃ κακῶν με ἀπαλλάξει τὴν κακοδαίμονα).

This passage draws comparisons with two other texts, in which a pact involving a physician is bound by an oath. The first one is the aforementioned story, is the story of Democedes: while held as a slave in Susa, the physician was respected by King Darius, who had happened to sprain his foot while hunting: the King gave him rewards, but did not put an end to his exile. This would happen only later, thanks to Queen Atossa, who had fallen ill with a breast abscess¹³: Atossa, after having hidden her disease and *not having told anyone* out of shame (ἡ δὲ κρύπτουσα καὶ αἰσχυνομένη ἔφραζε οὐδενί), summons Democedes, who announces that he will cure her and makes her *swear* that she will reciprocate the service by doing *what is required of her* (ὃ δὲ φὰς ὑγία πούσειν ἐξορκῶ μιν ἣ μὲν οἱ ἀντιपुरγήσειν ἐκείνην τοῦτο τὸ ἂν αὐτῆς δεηθῆ): the similarities with the first two points of the speech pronounced by Anthia in Xenophon's novel are strikingly evident, not least because of some lexical choices. But all three points of Anthia's speech can be found in the Hippocratic *Oath*¹⁴. This short work, foundation for medical ethics, begins by swearing to fulfill the principles spelled out in the following and invoking the gods (Ὁμνυμι Ἀπόλλωνα ἱητρὸν, καὶ Ἀσκληπιὸν, καὶ Ὑγίαν, καὶ Πανάκειαν, καὶ θεοὺς πάντας τε καὶ πάσας). Obviously, the *Oath* mentions the healing gods and goddesses – Apollo the physician, his son Asclepius, Hygieia and Panacea – whereas Anthia calls upon Artemis as guarantor; but Anthia's choice is entirely understandable, given the role of Artemis in Xenophon's novel; in addition, one could observe that Artemis is very close to the above-mentioned healing gods, as she does have a relation with health and disease for the Greeks: Apollo's twin-sister, Artemis was invoked under the name of Lochia by the expectant mothers in order to protect them from the risks of childbirth, and she herself presided over extinction; very well-known is her killing of one famous and unfaithful Apollo's lover, Coronis, while she was carrying his child: Asclepius¹⁵. After the invocation, the Hippocratic *Oath* presents the principles of medical ethics, including positive and negative obligations; the first three principles concern the relationship between the swearing physician and his master; the following ones concern the relationship of the physician with the patient¹⁶. In the second group we find the principle of confidentiality, according to which a physician must preserve and not divulge whatever he learns about his patients in the course, or even outside, of the treatment (Ἄ δ' ἂν ἐν θεραπείῃ ἢ ἴδω, ἢ ἀκούσω, ἢ καὶ ἄνευ θεραπήτης κατὰ βίον ἀνθρώπων, ἃ μὴ χρή ποτε ἐκλαλέεσθαι ἔξω, σιγήσομαι, ἄρρητα ἡγεύμενος εἶναι τὰ τοιαῦτα): also Anthia appeals to confidentiality, setting it as a precondition: it must never be known that the drug she requested was a poison.

Although in Xenophon's novel it is not uncommon for both spouses to announce their intentions to commit suicide¹⁷, this passage is particularly interesting, since this very intention addresses the physician requesting assistance, just like in a case of assisted suicide. This brings us back to the second principle of Hippocrates' *Oath*, namely the refusal to administer a deadly drug, even if asked for (Οὐ δώσω δὲ οὐδὲ φάρμακον οὐδενὶ αἰτηθεὶς θανάσιμον, οὐδὲ ὑφηγήσομαι ξυμβουλίην τοιῦνδε)¹⁸. As a matter of fact, in Anthia's speech the requested *pharmakon* is never qualified, except with euphemistic periphrases, but the *pharmakon* is precisely called θανάσιμον shortly afterwards, in the passage in which Eudoxus returns to Anthia bringing a drug that is not deadly (ὁ Εὐδοξὸς ἔρχεται κομίζων θανάσιμον οὐχὶ φάρμακον), so that the girl does not suffer any harm (ὥς μή τι παθεῖν τὴν κόρην): we do know, therefore, that Xenophon's doctor does not transgress the Hippocratic principle, even if asked for.

But why is confidentiality so important in this episode? And what should be never come to light: the suicide committed by Anthia or the supply of the φάρμακον θανάσιμον on the part of the physician? Certainly, for Greek physicians, there was an obligation "not to harm", the famous *non nocere* that is mentioned in the *Oath* and in *Epidemics 1*, most likely echoed in Xenophon (ὥς μή τι παθεῖν); even Galen, in his *Commentary on Epidemics 6*, criticizes physicians who practise in spite of this principle, and only out of greed: some are complacent towards their patients' requests, even if it is risky for their lives¹⁹. On the other hand, studies on medical ethics make it clear that deadly drugs had a market in the ancient world: various plants with toxic properties, such as hellebore, were already known and used by Hippocratic physicians; their use was aimed to commit suicide in some cases, but in all cases, there were risks for physicians: indeed, they risked being accused of poisoning, with the consequent punishment for such an offence²⁰. The problem must have been serious, if Plato, in the *Laws*, advocates punishments for poisoning that are commensurate with the competence of the responsible person: if the latter is a doctor or a soothsayer, let the death penalty be imposed²¹! This is why it is fully reasonable to believe that the refusal of administering or dispensing deadly drugs in the Hippocratic *Oath* was not intended to prevent suicide, or assistance to it, on the part of the physician, but rather to protect the physician himself from possible charges²². Anthia and Eudoxus seem to be concerned about this possibility too: the girl, in fact, seems to want to reassure the doctor telling him that she will put him in a position to leave before facts become known (τὴν παραπομπὴν ἐπισκευάσω... πρὸ τοῦ πυθέσθαι τινα); the doctor, for his part, opts to hand her a sleeping drug, collects his fee and immediately afterwards sets sail (ὥς... αὐτὸν ἐφοδίων τυχόντα ἀνασωθῆναι... ὁ μὲν εὐθὺς ἐπιβὰς νεὼς ἐπανήχθη): of course, even an apparent death might have caused problems for the doctor found responsible for it!

Summarizing, the comparisons that we just made with Herodotus' and Hippocrates' writings provide a better understanding of this passage by Xenophon. With regard to the principles of medical ethics stated by the *Oath*, the novel can be seen as a liter-

ary testimony. As for Herodotus, it is most likely to assume a reprise. Herodotus may also have inspired the repatriation of Eudoxus in return for his supply (cf. νεὼς τὴν ἐπ' Ἐφέσου), as the same thing could be found in the *Histories*, where the benefit requested by Democedes in return for the medical treatment to Atossa consists precisely in persuading King Darius so that the physician may return home²³. In this web of intertextual relationships one motif stands out: the heroine taking a sleeping potion to escape an unwanted marriage and apparently dying from it enjoyed great success in western Europe, being eventually immortalized by William Shakespeare in his play *Romeo and Juliet* (1591–1597)²⁴.

b. Fee

For physician services Anthia offers Eudoxus twenty silver mines and jewels (εἴκοσι μνᾶς ἀργυρίου περιδέραιά τε αὐτῆς). Xenophon writes that the fee is crucial in convincing him to collaborate, perhaps insisting on the greed of the character of the physician. In fact, however, the interest in the fee and its collection by the physician makes sense in a precise historical time. In the ancient world, where *technai* were divided into liberal and servile, the latter were provided in exchange for a fee, and medicine was no exception, as Plato attests²⁵. This aspect of the everyday practise clearly emerges from the deontological texts of the Hippocratic collection, also in relation to the risk of insolvency of the patients²⁶. This is why the fee had to be agreed upon in advance, but not collected in advance: it seems indeed that the doctor would have been entitled to receive the fee only in case of a successful intervention. In a case of physician-assisted suicide, however, the advance payment would have been, so to speak, imposed by the very nature of the intervention itself.

4. Illness: conception and deception

The illness represented by Xenophon is not real, but just simulated by the female protagonist: as such, it necessarily had to be imitable, and thus endowed with a visible and relevant acute symptomatology. I have already noticed a visual and even spectacular dimension of the illness in Achilles Tatius' and Heliodorus' novels. Moreover, all three of these novelists preferentially assign scenes depicting illness to their heroines, and it is perhaps no accident. If portraying heroines as patients had become a cliché in the fully developed Greek novels, this is not the case with Xenophon's early novel, which rests on an previous tradition, validated by ancient medicine: the belief that women were imperfect animals, weak and keen to bodily and mental disturbances because of their very nature had been already outlined in the *corpus Hippocraticum* –which connected feminine diseases to the reproductive system, requiring often coitus or pregnancy to get solved– and ideas of women as different, i.e. less perfect than males, in relation to physiology and anatomy spread and persisted for centuries, up to early modern medicine²⁷.

4.1 Epilepsy: symptoms, name

The illness simulated by Anthia is described by Xenophon with a few words, all of them essential and useful for an identification: the author speaks about falling down, convulsions, and connection to the supernatural. The first two elements belong to symptomatology. Many illnesses and diseases may be characterized by suddenly falling to the ground, but only one of them is named –or takes at least one of its names– after this very symptom, and this is the falling sickness, still synonymous with epilepsy²⁸. Isidore of Seville wrote about it: “*haec passio et caduca vocatur, eo quod cadens aeger spasmos patitur*” (*Etymol.* IV 7,5). By imitating the falling and the convulsions, Anthia simulates a tonic-clonic seizure (*grand mal*)²⁹. The same symptoms are reported in several definitions of epilepsy during Xenophon’s day. For example, the pseudogalenic author of the *Definitiones medicae* (1st century AD) defines epilepsy as “a seizure of mind and senses with a sudden fall, with or without convulsions”³⁰. Aretaeus of Cappadocia, an author of an unknown date, but close to the Pneumatic School of the 1st – 2nd century AD, wrote that epileptics fall for the mildest reason, out of fear, because of fear or fantasy of danger, and lie insensitive³¹.

The name of “divine disease” reminds us of the treatise *On the sacred disease*, which also testifies the above-mentioned symptoms of falling and psycho-motor automatisms³². It is well known that the treatise *On the sacred disease* represents the first testimony of a rationalist conception of disease and the clearest formulation of encephalocentrism. In its famous *incipit* it states that the so-called divine disease is by no means more divine than others, having a very natural cause: epilepsy is a disease of the brain, hereditary and widespread among the phlegmatics; phlegm happens to obstruct the veins, indeed, blocking the flow of blood to the brain, which is the main organ and seat of the most severe diseases; if the purification of the brain, which should take place already in the embryonic stage in the mother’s womb, does not succeed, the person would suffer epileptiform disorders during his growth and especially adolescence³³. Briefly, the author exonerates the gods from any involvement in this disease; excludes any transcendent element from the physio-pathological investigation of the brain; and attacks the opinions of those who, out of ignorance or naivety, seek solutions to epilepsy in superstitious religion and magic.

4.2 Epilepsy: conception and etiology

Xenophon’s representation of epilepsy offers an exceptional point of view on this disease, namely that of the laymen: in front of Anthia’s epileptic seizure bystanders are said to feel terror and pity, and recede from sensual desire; the pimp too pities the girl, but also plans to get rid of her as soon as possible. It seems that Xenophon’s characters embody every opinion condemned in the treatise *On the sacred disease*. Even Anthia, who only faked the seizure, will claim later to have hidden her illness out of shame

(ἀπέκρυπτον αἰδουμένη): something that immediately makes us recall Atossa (cf. ἡ δὲ κρύπτουσα καὶ αἰσχυνομένη ἔφραξε οὐδενί), but also the epileptics who are ashamed of their illness, according to the treatise *On the sacred disease* and Aretaeus³⁴.

The etiological explanation given by Anthia too fits within the framework of superstition and irrationality, as she tells an unbelievable story of a curse, or maybe demonic possession. Herein, however, one meaningful element emerges, that is the localization of the disease in the chest (cf. κατὰ τοῦ στήθους καὶ νόσον ταύτην ἔλεγεν ἐμβεβληκέναι). The story invented by Anthia is somehow echoed in Aretaeus, who writes that the epileptic seems to have been seized or attacked by a demon³⁵. The same interpretation is recalled by O. Temkin in his seminal monograph on epilepsy³⁶: considering all the names attributed to epilepsy, Temkin mentions *demoniacus* and *lunaticus*, popularly attested for an epileptic was believed to be under supernatural influences due to the intrusion of a god, demon or ghost, into the human body; convulsions themselves are seen as blows inflicted by the host on the victim. In the ancient world, therefore, the association between epilepsy and symptoms which could have been believed results of possession must have seemed plausible, and not only to the layman's eye.

Indeed, the Anonymous Parisinus testifies the doctrines of Praxagoras of Cos (4th century BCE), contemporary of Aristotle, who dealt with physiology and pathology, describing many diseases³⁷. Praxagoras is said to have believed that epilepsy was caused by phlegmatic humors that impede the flow of psychic pneuma, while obstructed, causes convulsions and spasms; the responsible humors originate in the area of the aorta³⁸. Also, Praxagoras was the only one among the ancients to classify divine possession as a disease (ἐνθραστικός), and this would have originated in the region of the heart and of the aorta³⁹. Uncoincidentally, the above-mentioned two fragments have been edited contiguously both in the first edition of Praxagoras by F. Steckerl and in the more recent one by O. Lewis⁴⁰. The two fragments, indeed, constitute testimonies pertaining to the pathology of the arteries and pneuma of a physician who advocated cardiocentrism. A similar view on epilepsy was that of Diocles of Carystus (4th century BCE)⁴¹. Another example of cardiocentric positioning is the Hippocratic author of *Diseases of virgins*; he writes about an epileptic girl that, if the blood does not find an outlet, by overabundance, it flows to the heart and diaphragm, causing delirium⁴².

Summarizing, the explanation of epilepsy in Xenophon's novel blends elements of magical and medical origin, as it will become standard in the later novels. Xenophon's pathological conception seems to be influenced by cardiocentrism, according to which psychic faculties and functions, hence psycho-physical issues including epilepsy, were localized in the heart. Cardiocentrism found an influential supporter in Aristotle, and its persistence in the 2nd century CE is attested by Galen, who criticizes this theory many times in his writings⁴³.

4.3 Malingering

Feigning illness is well-attested in ancient Greek literature. In this respect Xenophon's novel may mark another agreement, or rather debt, with the comic poets, who left us memorable scenes. For example, in the *Shield*, the clever slave Daos, while observing the melancholic nature of Chairestratus, suggests that he pretends to die from it, in order to deceive his greedy brother Smicrines⁴⁴. Other examples can be found in Aristophanes: in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Mnesilochus, dressed in women's clothes, talks in front of the assembly a (fake) story about having feigned colic and urgent desire to evacuate, in order to deceive the husband and meet a lover at night⁴⁵; in *Lysistrata*, a woman simulates having given birth, although she was not even pregnant the day before⁴⁶. Something similar can be found in Achilles Tatius, when Menelaos, a friend of the two protagonists, deceives Charmides, who has fallen for Leucippe, by telling him that the girl cannot immediately meet him because of menstruation, which prevents sexual intercourse⁴⁷; shortly after, Leucippe happens to be seized by the crisis already mentioned right under Charmides' eyes, and at first he suspects that the seizure could be just a ruse⁴⁸.

Plutarch recorded also two historical cases: Nicias pretended to be mad in front of the assembly, during the Second Punic War, not to be handed over to the Carthaginians⁴⁹; and Sosides showed up in public naked, with a bloody face and head, pretending to have been attacked by Dion's own mercenaries; later on, physicians examined him, declaring that his wounds were too superficial to have been inflicted by a sharp weapon and that the wounds had many initial points as if the blow were self-inflicted⁵⁰.

But the most compelling parallel, in my view, is with Galen, who informs us on a specific form of feigning, whose goal is avoiding work or duties, that is malingering. To this topic Galen devoted an in-depth discourse, originally part of his *Commentary on Epidemics 2*, subsequently lost, and later transmitted in an independent form. In this excerpt, entitled *How to detect malingerers (Quomodo morbum simulantes sint deprehendendi)*⁵¹, physicians are invited to take into account malingering while diagnosing pain. They should be capable to recognize a feigned illness having experience of spontaneous bodily manifestations and being able to distinguish them from signs and symptoms that were artfully induced, for example by the use of drugs, or simulated, even in the sphere of language and behavior. Galen reports two cases: a citizen feigning colic not to have to participate in the assembly, and a slave boy who flaunted a large swelling on his knee (actually provoked by rubbing a toxic and corrosive plant) in order not to travel with his master and stay at home with his mistress. In cases like these, physicians should make use of both technical experience and common sense, i.e. *suspicion*: object of suspicion must be the circumstances and the attitude of patients, who might be well informed about disease and treatment, prone to lying, and subject to a certain authority: malingerers might feign illness as they are forced by

authorities to act against their will. This was definitely the case with *Anthia*, a young woman forced into prostitution, who avoids it by feigning a sickness which can be frightening to onlookers, that is epilepsy.

5. Final considerations

Aiming at investigating the relationship between ancient Greek medicine and literature, notably the novel genre, this article focused on Xenophon's *Anthia and Habrocomes*, which contains two episodes of medical interest. Both are simpler and easier to interpret than that one can find in later novels. Literary sources and motifs are represented foremost by comedy and Herodotus. But the doctor-patient relationship involves problems and principles of medical ethics which can be found in the Hippocratic *Oath*, whose Xenophon's text can be seen as an echo. In addition, the representation of epilepsy –brief, unambiguous and effective– stands close to medical literature of the classic age both in reference to the magical-superstitious idea of the sacred disease and in allusion to an anatomo-pathological element of cardiocentric origin.

Xenophon's novel might be ingenuous and paraliterary, but is rather valuable for the medical topics. Both assisted suicide and malingering are relevant and hitherto debated subjects. *Anthia's* choice to die reflects what R. Rey called in her *History of Pain* "individual liberty at times to the point of suicide"⁵². Rey also wrote - with regard to the ancient pharmacopeia transmitted by Dioscorides and Pliny: "It also reveals a definite attitude that sought to fight sickness and pain actively and energetically through every means available as the only choice was most certainly either relief, or suicide. It also clearly demonstrates that life was not viewed as sacred but that value was placed on living a still life in as healthy a body as was possible"⁵³. Perspectives on death-related issues have changed, and are much more controversial nowadays. For the patient autonomy, a person has the right to refuse medical treatment, putting an end to his own suffering, but assisted suicide just like euthanasia is not permitted everywhere. At any rate, issues and practices related to death and dying impose ethical and clinical considerations, including the expression of a valid consent by the patient, which are most debated in medicine and bioethics.

Feigning illness was frequent in the Greek-Roman society, where laymen expected physicians to discover it, as Galen attests. He also argues that people may adopt such a deceptive behavior for many reasons, but especially to escape constraints and obligations imposed by authorities – a legitimate explanation for *Anthia's* feigned epilepsy. In fact, both Xenophon and Galen allude to an illness deception which would be classified as malingering nowadays. Malingering indeed is the falsification or exaggeration of symptoms in order to gain external benefits, such as avoiding work, exams, school, but also trials or military services, and seeking pain medication or financial compensation. The modern conception has much in common with the

Galenic one, as it addresses socio-economics causes, self-injury, and lack of compliance with treatment in the patients. Nonetheless, malingering has become much more complex in the present day. Although it is not considered as an illness, it represents a condition that may be a focus of clinical attention according to the DSM-IV-tr (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*)⁵⁴. First, it may occur in association with personality issues, such as anti-social and histrionic disorders. Also, it is similar to a set of psychological conditions, known as somatic symptom disorders, in which the subject experiences, overreports, or internally produces physical symptoms with the solely internal motivation of playing the sick role⁵⁵. Further, to determine malingering, a medical condition must be ruled out, and this may require laboratories studies or at least a careful history taking. Distinguishing malingering from a somatic symptom disorder on the basis of the motivation can be a difficult task. Moreover, there is no agreement about the very nature of illness deception, whether it could be considered as free will or whether it is a sign of an underlying pathological condition⁵⁶. All in all, malingering remains a challenge to physicians and a major feature of modern medicine.

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1. See Savino C, *Il romanzo greco fra teorie e controversie mediche: Ach. Tat. IV 9, 1-11; 15, 1-17,5. Med Secoli 2017;29(3):923-942*.
 2. See Savino C, *La principessa, il sacerdote e il medico. Note sulla rappresentazione del mal d'amore nelle Etiopiche di Eliodoro (Hdt. III.7-III.11; IV.7)*. *Prometheus 2022;48:236-252*.
 3. On the ancient novel genre see Whitmarsh T (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*. Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press; 2008; in this collective work Massimo Fusillo writes about the Greek novels entirely preserved (p. 329): "in the Greek novel it is easy to recognise, in my opinion, two different phases: a first one, more ingenuous and popular, which could be defined as paraliterary (Chariton, Xenophon) and a second one, much more complex and refined, linked to the second sophistic's neo-rhetoric, which basically does not correspond to the above mentioned categories (Achilles Tatius, Longus, Heliodorus: uncoincidentally, the three authors who enjoyed a rich renaissance and baroque reception)".
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 23. Hdt. 3,134.
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48. *Ibid.*, 4,9,3; later on, Charmides realizes his fault and feels sorry for Leucippe: her illness would eventually decrease sexual desire, just like in Anthia's case.
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