Abstract Booklet

Keynote Speeches

Prof. Lesley Dean-Jones, *The Therapy of the Speaker: The Importance of "Heracles" in the Cure of Philoctetes.*

This paper will argue for the minority view that Heracles at the end of the Philoctetes is Odysseus in disguise. This is not just because no other extant play of Sophocles uses the deus ex machina trope, or because Odysseus is the consummate trickster, or because the same actor would have to play both roles (though all of these factors have a bearing on the issue). More importantly, Sophocles has structured the plot, dialogue and action to strongly suggest the disguise, and in doing so aims to minimalize the dolos and portray it as forgivable in the context of curing Philoctetes.

Prof. Chiara Thumiger, *Tongue, Voice, Word, Text in Ancient Physiology, Pathology, and Therapy.*

In this paper I explore the topic of voice as part of human physiology in continuity with its effects on individual human health and its dependence on individual bodies' different states, internal and external. It is well known that the phone was observed in detail since the time of the first 'Hippocratic' doctors, and several non medical sources attest to the importance of speech and voice for human psychological states. I examine here the continuity between the discourses of physiology and the 'softer' evidence provided by poetry first, and later n by the development of soothing practices within learned medicine, effectively bridging the gap between the material account of tongue and skull, dry and wet, feverish and not so and the more construed acknowledgement of composed texts as having an effect on health as much as representing it.

Panel One: Inscriptions and Oracular Medicine

Polyxeni Strolonga, *Coping with Infertility: The Delphic Oracles as early medical texts*

Oracles cannot be treated at first sight as quasi medical texts especially due to their ambiguous meaning. However, in the specific context of oracles delivered to infertile kings—concerning their inability to produce heirs—there is a reflection of medical attitudes and rhetorical elements found in later ancient medical corpora. The language used in these oracles does more than foretell future offspring; it prescribes actions that the petitioner must undertake, much like the course of actions that is presented in the Epidaurian Iamata or the Hippocratic corpus. These oracles as they are represented in literary sources turn into stories of healing through divine intervention that nevertheless pose the dangers of illegitimate procreation. By examining the cases of Aegeus (L4, PW 110; Apollod. 3.15.6; Plut. Thes. 3.5; E. Med. 679), Xuthus (L28; E. Ion 534-536) and Lyrcus (Parthenius, Love Romances 1), I will demonstrate that the oracles they receive in Delphi and Didyma in response to their childlessness can be understood as early forms of medical treatment and reveal persistent social attitudes towards infertility.

Scott Calloway, *Bodies of Text: Reading and Ritual Therapeutics at Epidauros*

Asklepios' healing sanctuary at Epidauros organized space in ways that brought reading to the foreground. From the inscription greeting suppliants at the propylon, the leges sacrae which instructed the suppliants on proper behavior, the inscribed hymns sung at various hours, and a multitude of personal dedications, this sanctuary was embellished with text. The iamata—the inscribed records of Asklepios' miraculous cures performed in the sanctuary—thus join in a wider program of visual interaction within a wider religious landscape that drew the patient's attention and demanded forms of scrutiny. From the first, the suppliant was encouraged to engage with and reflect upon a textual landscape as an essential element of ritual therapeutics. This paper shows that one of the most striking features of the *iamata* is their heightened "self-awareness" as an inscribed corpus. They reflect upon themselves as a deliberate assemblage of texts to be read. The supplicants are, again and again, presented as readers. These are not just readers of the *iamata* as aretological or even didactic documents: they are rather encouraged to become readers of the embodied experiences within. Thus, as the suppliant reader moves through the *iamata* narratives, they themselves encounter and learn to "read" both the inscriptional texts and those of the body. This paper, then, opens up the processes through which the suppliant reader is invited to read the bodies of others as a kind of protreptic to reflect about their own experiences of illness and pain and the possibilities of communicating this embodied experience to others. Indeed, the challenge of putting into precise language the nature of private and embodied experience is staged as a drama continuously unfolding between divine physician and patient. Ultimately, however, the supplicants emerge not only as successful readers of these texts but of the text of the body itself.

Orestis Lantzos, *Therapeutic Mythology: The Use of Myth in Coping with Illness*

In the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, myths were much more than entertaining stories—they were essential tools for making sense of the experience of illness and suffering. This paper explores how myths surrounding healing figures such as Asklepius, the god of medicine, and Chiron, the wise centaur and healer, functioned as therapeutic resources for those facing physical and psychological ailments. Through an examination of inscriptions from healing sanctuaries at Epidaurus and Pergamon, alongside literary texts like Pindar's Pythian 3 and Ovid's Metamorphoses, I investigate how these mythological narratives provided emotional comfort and shaped cultural attitudes toward health and disease. The purpose of this research is to uncover how myth functioned as an active therapeutic tool in antiquity, offering psychological relief and fostering hope among the sick by framing illness within meaningful, culturally resonant narratives. The votive inscriptions left by patients at these sanctuaries frequently record miraculous cures attributed to divine intervention, blending personal testimony with religious belief and storytelling. These narratives created a space where suffering was acknowledged and framed within a hopeful, meaningful context. Additionally, ritual texts such as the Orphic Hymns and the Greek Magical Papyri reveal how spoken incantations and mythic stories combined in healing ceremonies to promote psychological and spiritual well-being. The poetic elements of these myths—metaphor, repetition, and moral exempla—further contributed to their calming and reassuring effects, acting as a form of ancient narrative therapy. Building on the work of scholars like Chiara Thumiger, who has emphasized the cultural dimensions of health in antiquity, and Emma Edelstein, whose research on Asklepius has illuminated the practical role of myth in healing, this study argues that myth was a vital part of ancient therapeutic practice. Far from being mere folklore, these stories offered a lived, experiential framework that helped people cope with the uncertainties of illness. In this way, ancient mythology can be seen as an early form of narrative medicine, demonstrating the enduring power of storytelling in the human quest for healing and meaning.

Panel Two: Hippocrates and the Hippocratic Tradition

Helen Ruger, *Disorientation from the Self: Infertility, Identity, and the Limits of Language in Ancient Greek Medicine*

Prior scholarship on ancient Greek infertility has explored methods to improve fertility, types of reproductive failure, and the relation between medicine and female knowledge (Blundell 1995; King 1998, 2018; Flemming 2013, 2017). This discourse focuses more on infertility as a medical concept and less on the words with which doctors communicated infertility. To extend this scholarly discourse, this paper asks—how do medical authors discuss infertility? And what is the psychological and physical effect of their language on the patient? Such questions seek to understand the role of language in healing and how words shape patients' experiences with illness. Methodologically, I close-read Hippocratic Barrenness alongside sociological and psychological studies of illness and identity (Kelleher & Leavey 2004; Stolberg 2011) to understand how the language of diagnosis and treatment affects one's identity as (in)fertile. I argue that the Hippocratic text, through its language and approach to treatment, disorients one's illness identity (defined as one's "sense of self as an ill person," Pelters 2024). Indeed, Barrenness uses adjectives (e.g. ἄφορος) and verbal descriptions (e.g. οὐ δύναται κυῆσαι) to categorize infertility as an illness. This language ruptures a woman from a prior (fertile) identity by constructing a new (infertile) identity defined in terms of who she is or what she cannot do. Through language of becoming (e.g. γίγνομαι), temporal descriptions (e.g. τάχος), and third-person imperatives, the text emphasizes the need to transfer from a present infertile (unhealthy) identity to a future fertile (healthy) identity. It is (what I term) a rupture and remedy framework. Further, since the physician communicates to the patient that she must engage in her own treatment, her body becomes something to act on, rather than something incorporated into, herself. Thus, Hippocratic speech, words, and language disorient a woman's relationship to herself in ways that affect her infertile identity.

Anna Gili, *Narratives of Disease: Clinical Case Studies from Greek Sources to Medieval Arabic Medical Practice*

Narratives of clinical case-studies offer scholars a valuable glimpse into the doctor-patient relationships in the ancient world. Despite the mediation of the physician as narrator, these accounts also depict how patients coped with their conditions and communicated their own perceptions of illness. To this end, scholars have extensively analysed Greek sources such as Hippocrates' Epidemics, Rufus of Ephesos' collection of clinical accounts (now preserved only in Arabic), Galen's On prognosis, as well as sections of On the Affected Parts and On the Method of Healing. As Cristina Álvarez Millán has argued in several studies, all of these texts reached physicians of the medieval Arabic world through translation and helped shape the clinical narratives that can be found in their writings. My contribution aims to further investigate these still relatively understudied sources to assess the extent to which depictions of the doctor–patient relationship were influenced by Greek models, or whether they underwent significant transformation. I propose that the new contexts in which medicine was practiced – Arabic hospitals, caliphal courts, and the homes of the poor – impacted on the way encounters with illness were recorded and narrated. This study will examine a range of texts that have been only partially, or never, edited or translated into a modern language. These include: al-Rāzī's clinical accounts (taǧārib, mid-9th / early 10th c.); al-Ṭabarī's "Hippocratic Treatments" (al-Muʿālaǧāt al-Buqraṭiyya, 10th c.); al-Kaškarī's medical compendium (10th c.); and a

collection of clinical cases from al-Andalus associated to the physician Aḥmad b. ʿIsā al-Hāšimī (11th c.).

Panel Three: Plato and Hippocratic Medicine

Matilde Berti, *Liver's Physiology and 'Inner' Divination of* 'Phantasmata' *in Plato's Timaeus*

In the *Timaeus*, Plato assigns the liver two seemingly unrelated functions: mediating communication between rational and non-rational parts of the soul, and enabling divination (Tim. 71e1), which is traditionally performed also through the liver (Dillon 2017). Although it seems key to shed light on liver's role, the mention of divination is so puzzling that it is often dismissed as comical (Steel 2001). Scholars largely agree that the goal of Plato's account is promoting harmony and virtue within the tripartite soul (Steel 2001, Thein 2019). However, the physiological views about the liver, its functions, the means of communication it deploys, and the resulting cognitive state of an individual ruled by the non-rational parts of the soul remain debated (Moss 2012, Fletcher 2016). This paper argues that Plato's liver physiology and divination draw meaningfully on Hippocratic views to explain how non-rational individuals can act rationally. Reassessing relevant Hippocratic texts (e.g., *Vict*. 57, 89.53–54, Int. Aff. 48, Morb. 18–20) and building on Plato's account of divination in the Ion (534c8–536c1), I show how the liver's production of images (*phantasmata*) in sleep and their interpretation through divination enables the non-rational parts of the soul to act in accordance with reason, despite lacking it. Thus, Plato's physiological account of the liver is not only seriously meant, but instrumental to the ethical and epistemological views maintained in the *Timaeus*. For liver divination explains how and why the non-rational individual may temporarily sense and perform what is appropriate, offering an innovative model of rational behaviour without rational and discursive understanding.

Elizaveta Sherbakova, *Comedy, Soul Motion, and Early Psychotherapy in* On Regimen

The Hippocratic treatise *On Regimen* (late 5th–early 4th c. BCE) offers what appears to be a strikingly banal therapeutic recommendation: when the soul is anxiously preoccupied, it should be diverted by watching a comedy (*Vict*. IV.89). It may seem straightforward that laughter can help relieve distress, but why this should qualify as a form of medical therapy is far less clear. This paper addresses what makes such an intervention therapeutically intelligible. I argue that behind this seemingly trivial advice lies one of the earliest fully developed psychotherapeutic programmes and a highly original conception of the soul. *Regimen* is our first extant text to explicitly conceptualize mental functions — such as thought and perception — as motions of the soul. These motions are periodic and in some way analogous to the revolutions of celestial bodies, which serve as models in diagnosis and therapy. Health is understood as the regularity of these motions, and therapy aims to restore that regularity. In *Regimen*, these motions are primarily regulated through dietetic interventions, but it also gestures toward the possibility that certain forms of logos — such as comedy, and potentially other kinds of discourse or spectacle — can induce motions that help stabilize disturbed ones. The idea that logos can have a therapeutic effect is already central in Gorgias (and likely Antiphon [A 6]); *On Regimen* offers a naturalistic explanation of how this is possible: *logos* causes actual motion in the soul. I will show that *Regimen*'s conception of soul-motion, which allows for therapeutic regulation through cognitive activity, makes it an even closer antecedent to the kind of psychotherapeutic program we find in Plato's Timaeus, where contemplation of cosmic circuits serves to stabilize the soul's motions.

Session Four: The Medical Voice and Medical Speech

Carlo Delle Donne, *Speaking metaphors, (Or how ancient patients would represent their body and suffering)*

This paper explores a crucial aspect of ancient medicine: the role of patients' figurative language in expressing their bodies and experiences of suffering. It specifically examines the prognostic, diagnostic, and therapeutic implications of the metaphors used by patients to articulate and conceptualize their physical condition and illness experiences. These metaphors are particularly illuminating when addressing less immediately observable dimensions of suffering, such as its nature or underlying causes, especially in the context of gynecological disorders. For physicians, these metaphors can serve as medical signs, akin to physical symptoms, if interpreted accurately.
Despite its significance, this facet of ancient Greek medicine has garnered limited scholarly attention—a notable oversight considering the importance of imagery and analogy in the communication between patients and physicians. To address this gap, a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of textual evidence from both Hippocratic and Galenic works is essential, forming the backbone of this paper.

Enrico Piergiacomi, *The Voice that Heals. Antyllus and the Medical-Performative Tradition* [ONLINE Paper]

The Roman practitioner Antyllus (2nd century AD) is mostly recognized as a surgeon, especially since he was the first to have introduced novel methods of curing cataracts and aneurysm. However, according to some fragments transmitted by Oribasius, he also devised an interesting therapy based on conversation and declamation. Antyllus thought that conversing and reciting is not indicated for curing the head, but that it is extremely useful for removing the disturbances in the stomach and preserving health. Indeed, a correctly trained voice causes beneficial motions in the internal heat of the body and helps to have a better control of respiration, thus generating a good balance in the organism. This topic has been already investigated by Antoine Petrobelli (*Déclamer pour soigner son corps: l'anaphonèse chez Antylle et Oribase*, in «Métis» 15, 2017, 95-122) and Konstantinos Melidis (*Quelle vocalité?: deux exercices vocaux de l'Antiquité gréco-romaine*, in M-H. Delavaud-Roux, Corps et voix dans les danses du théâtre antique, Rennes 2019, 29-43). However, I would like to return to it once again with a twofold aim. On the one hand, I propose to investigate in greater detail the medical-performative tradition behind Antyllus' own vocal therapy. In particular, I hope to show that some anticipations can be found in the Hippocratic works and in the rhetorical treatises, which in different ways describe the positive effects of a trained voice. On the other hand, I intend to compare Antyllus' vocal therapy with the versions of the same healing method that we find in Soranus and Caelius Aurelianus. The comparison will highlight the similarities and differences between these practitioners. The divergences in their thoughts on vocal therapy may be interpreted as different ways of developing the same medical-performative tradition.

Session Five: Theatre, Art, and Healing

Christian Attard, *When Art Heals: Sacred Image, Ritual, and Aesthetics as Medicine*

Galen's ancient divide between empirical science and superstition was severely tested during the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, especially when confronting diseases with mysterious origins. The Black Death of the 14th century exposed the profound limits of inherited medical knowledge. As effective cures remained elusive, faith, magic, and superstition once more took centre stage. Religious rituals, charms, relics, and astrological interpretations became vital forms of protection and healing. One revival was the belief in the healing power of images, echoing ancient bronze sculptures of Greek athletes believed to possess therapeutic abilities. In *Consolation et Réjouissance* (1627), Jesuit theologian Étienne Binet reaffirms this tradition. He urges that the sick be surrounded by paintings "excellent in beauty and in representation of some beautiful story", a crucifix, a tender Madonna, Saint Stephen under a hail of stones, or Saint Sebastian pierced with arrows. The therapeutic function of sacred images both predates and outlives Binet. Hospitals often incorporated altarpieces into treatment: the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, present in a hospital attended to by Antonine monks, is a striking case. Patients, typically suffering from ergotism (or St Antony's fire) could draw spiritual strength from Grünewald's visceral depiction of Christ's suffering and hope in His resurrection. Similarly, at the *Sacra Infermeria* in Valletta, a cycle of paintings by Mattia Preti offered consolation and healing to the ailing. Art's healing role extended beyond hospital walls in the form of expiatory processions. During the 1576 plague of Milan, a barefoot St Carlo led processions, whilst carrying a relic of the Crucifixion and wearing a rope believed strong enough to "strangle" the plague. This paper argues that beyond potions, bloodletting, and amputations, sacred images, aesthetic experiences, and ritual performances formed a crucial, though often overlooked, dimension of early modern healing. Here empirical observation and mystical beliefs, as in antiquity, were blurred once again.

Vassiliki Kampourelli, *Greek tragedy and Narrative Medicine: Speech, empathy and compassion* [ONLINE]

Speech and narrative have played a pivotal role in medicine from antiquity to the present day, shaping our understanding of the illness experience within changing and challenging contexts. The articulation of suffering- both verbal and non-verbal- holds therapeutic value, with the potential to transform the ways in which care is both delivered and received. In Greek tragedy, the presumed communicative power of language is frequently questioned. Yet, speech as a performative act has the potential to cultivate empathy and compassion, reclaim identity, and initiate healing. In recent years, Narrative Medicine, the interdisciplinary field within Medical Humanities which examines the role of storytelling in the multifaceted understanding of human nature and the experience of illness, has particularly focused on the
connection between speech and the relationship between patient and physician, with particular attention to the cultivation of empathy and compassion through narrative competence. Even though speech and narratives are central in the problematization of human experience, especially suffering and its effects, in ancient Greek tragedy, these texts have received limited attention within Narrative Medicine, which has predominantly drawn on English and American literary works.This paper aims to address this gap. First, the connection among speech, empathy, compassion and the deeper understanding of the shared human nature is briefly explored. Within this framework, the relationship between tragedy and

therapeutic speech, often viewed through the perspective of Aristotle's *Poetics* 6, 1449b24–8, is reconsidered, drawing on the proposal by Meineck (2020, 267) that eleos may align more closely with the concept of empathy than with fear. The analysis then turns to selected passages from Euripides' *Heracles* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes* to illustrate the diverse ways in which the portrayal of speech, empathy and compassion in Greek tragedy can offer valuable insights into the practice and perspectives of Narrative Medicine.

Session Six: Healing and Suffering in Roman Literature

Marsha Mac-Coy, *Cicero, the Death of Tullia, and Depression: Coping through Writing*

Tullia, the beloved daughter of Marcus Tullius Cicero, died in February, 45 BCE, at the age of 34, from complications of childbirth. Cicero was devastated, as his numerous letters to his good friend Titus Pomponius Atticus show, as well as the condolence letters he received from Caesar, M. Brutus, Lucceius, and Dolabella, among others. Though most of these latter letters do not survive (we know about them from Cicero's letters to Atticus), the letter of Cicero's close friend, Servius Sulpicius Rufus (ad Fam. 4.5), written from Athens in March, 45 BCE, is particularly relevant in its discussion of managing the emotions surrounding such a catastrophic loss, but it does not recognize the underlying issues already present that amplified and exacerbated Cicero's grief at the death of Tullia. Using modern theories of trauma, this paper argues that Cicero's exile in 58-57 BCE, which he likened not just to political death but to death itself, as he was separated not only from his professional life in Rome but also from his family, and especially his dear "Tulliola," traumatized him to the extent that he became extremely sensitive to any sort of loss. And so the unexpected death of the most beloved person in his life a little over a decade later was a profound blow from which he never recovered before his own shocking murder in early November, 43 BCE. His writings after Tullia's death, the mostly lost *Consolatio*, the *Tusculan Disputations*, and others, and his shifting views on building a fanum, or shrine, for Tullia reflect his attempts to make sense of her absence and memorialize it, but he never fully negotiated the traumatic emotions of loss and depression that were precipitated by his exile and amplified with the death of his only daughter.

Mina Petrova, O*vidian Purgatives: Words and* 'Medicamina' *for Evacuation of Elegiac Passion*

Throughout his elegiac corpus, Ovid symbolically evokes the transformation of erotic passion into disgust through striking analogies with sensory irritation and gastric revulsion. Thus the Ovidian strategy for eliminating the morbid passion in Remedia Amoris exemplifies the application of 'aversion conditioning', aimed precisely at inducing fastidium (Kaster 2005: 123-4). When Ovid vividly portrays a woman's toilette and feminine objects in Remedia (351–356) he incorporates unusually technical and medically nuanced terms (e.g. oesypum, nausea), merging cosmetic discourse with medical language. By loading his words of healing with imagery of rhetorical excess (greasy, oily, liquid, warm, foul-smelling substances etc), Ovid aims at representation of a nauseating feeling. This brings us back to the fundamental idea of the entire poem: Ovid is a poet-healer who cures by offering cleansing medicamina, this time prescribing them in the form of purgative words. The aim of this paper is to examine such Ovidian instances of erotic healing through depletion. It will focus primarily on poetic representations and vocabulary of excessive drinking, satiety and queasiness in Remedia, interpreting those as methodical acts of therapeutic evacuation. More broadly, this study investigates to what extent this Ovidian advice enhances the overall medical realism of the poem, by reconsidering elegiac morbid passion in the light of ancient medicine and the treatment of hypersexual disorders.

Anke Walter, *Beyond Pain: Statius'* Thebaid *and the Impossibility of Healing*

Pain is a key component of the *Thebaid* by the Flavian author Statius, yet one whose importance the scholarship on this epic has so far overlooked. The narrative contains the most gruesome depictions of wounds, agony, and pain, and as the frequent exclamations by the epic narrator (*o, a, heu*) and apostrophes suggest, he is himself deeply involved in the events and feels the characters' pain, leading us, the audience, to do the same. Statius is fully aware of the long epic narrative tradition of pain and healing. Yet in his *Thebaid*, healing is notably absent. When Menoeceus, on the way to committing suicide in order to save Thebes, tells his father Creon that he is fetching a doctor to heal his wounded brother (10.727–34), Statius nods to this tradition, while keeping it out of his own epic by limiting it to Menoeceus' mendacious words. Before the culminating duel of Book 11, in which the twin brothers kill each other, a simile of Hercules' pain on mount Oeta (11.234–8) underscores the importance of this theme. Yet, in the fraternal duel as well as in several other episodes of the Thebaid, the pain of a fatal wound is not the last thing the dying heroes feel, as their pain gives way to extreme anger, madness or joy that leads them to commit the most outrageous crimes. In the *Thebaid*, there is no room for the healing of wounds and for closure, but what dominates the epic is an ever-escalating spiral of hatred, revenge and violence. Reading the epic with an eye on the medical discourses of wounds and healing raises even more acutely, almost viscerally, the question of the contemporary political message of the epic and the possibility or impossibility of healing for the body politic of Flavian Rome.