

‘The (Un)happy Romance of Curleo and Liliet’
Xenophon of Ephesus, the *Cyropaedia*
and the birth of the ‘anti-tragic’ novel

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In his classic book on the late Roman Empire,¹ John Bagnell Bury devotes a few illuminating words to Xenophon of Ephesus and his novel:

“The story of *Abrocomas and Antheia* is the story of the adventures and misfortunes of a pair of married lovers. The name of the author is Xenophon of Ephesus, but it occurs to one that Xenophon may be a pseudonym, and that the author may have adapted the names of his hero and heroine, Antheia and Abrocomas, from Pantheia and Abradates, of whom a touching story is told in the *Cyropaedia* of Xenophon the Athenian”.

Given the subject of the book, dating to the late 19th century, this is nothing more than a passing remark, and yet it sounds very promising. Once we accept that the name of Xenophon of Ephesus may be a pseudonym, as most later scholars do,² the second inference on his character names should be obvious enough. Apparently, however, this has not been the case.

Nowadays, there exist three whole books and a very accurate *Überblick* on Xenophon of Ephesus,³ none of which makes this point, although one of them singles out *The Cyropaedia* as the main model for the *Ephesiaka*, as his

¹ Bagnell Bury 1889, 324.

² Particularly after the seminal work of Momigliano 1971, 55–56.

³ Schissel von Fleschenberg 1909; Schmeling 1980; O’ Sullivan 1995; Ruiz Montero 1994. Bibliography on Xenophon of Ephesus also includes two more good general presentations: see Gärtner 1967 and Kytzler 1996. For Xenophon of Athens as a model, see Schmeling 1980, 40ff.

novel came to be known.⁴ Moreover, no less than three recent articles are devoted to the naming of characters in Xenophon's novel,⁵ and yet they make no reference whatsoever to such a possibility. The same is true when we turn to scholars dealing with the reception of Panthea and Abradates' story and its impact on the novel as a genre,⁶ and even such a title as *Panthea's Children. Hellenistic Novels and Medieval Persian Romances* proves to be disappointing, for the book never suggests that Xenophon may have borrowed and adapted his main characters from the *Cyropaedia*.⁷ In spite of Bagnell Bury's illuminating remark, we can fairly say that scholarly work on Xenophon of Ephesus has remained unaffected by such an intriguing, if unsophisticated, hypothesis.

In what follows, I will argue that in Roman Greece, when the *Ephesiaka* was composed, Panthea and Abradates' story was so celebrated that we can take for granted a reference to it on the part of Xenophon of Ephesus, who adapted his character names so as to make them *sprechende Namen* ('Anthea' = 'Flora', 'Abrocomes' = 'Delicate hair'). Imagine a contempo-

⁴ More fully, *Ephesiaka about Anthea and Abrocomes*. To the *tituli* of the *codex unicus* (Laur. Conv. soppr. 627, late XIII cent., see the *Praefatio* and bibliography included in J. O'Sullivan's 2005 Teubner edition of Xenophon) and the *vox* of Suidas ("Xenophon Ephesius": here Abrocomes' name precedes Anthea's) one may add the brief and mostly disregarded testimony of Gregorius of Corinth (XI–XII A.D., *Rhetores Graeci*, ed. Walz, vol. 7,2, p. 1236). See Gärtner 1967, 2057 and 2087.

⁵ Hägg 1971; Ruiz Montero 1981; Bierl 2006 (the last part of this article is devoted to *sprechende Namen* as a "Signifikantenkette").

⁶ See Zimmermann 1989; Tatum 1989 (esp. Ch. I, "The Classic as a Footnote", 3–35); Tatum 1994; Due 1996; Consonni 2000. Little more than a false track can be found in Reichel's otherwise excellent article (1995). In a footnote, he merely states that "it has been argued that the couple in Xenophon of Ephesus, Anthia and Habrokomes, owe their names to the phonetic resemblance to Pantheia and Abradates in the *Cyropaedia*" (6, n. 24), and refers the reader, for such an argument and for "further literature", to Kuch 1989, 49. To the reader's surprise, however, Kuch confines himself to approximately the same statement, namely that "der Romancier Xenophon von Ephesos in 2. Jh. u. Z. sein Liebespaar Abrokomes und Anthia nennt, was bei aller Variation als Anspielung auf das Paar in Xenophons *Küropädie* aufgefasst werden kann". The alleged "further literature" is vaguely referred to in note 151 (after "Anthia nennt"): "Vgl. die Ausgabe von A.D. Papanikolaou, Leipzig 1973, J.N. O' Sullivan, *Notes on Xenophon of Ephesus* Book II, in: *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* N.F. 127, 1984, 266–275". The trouble is that neither Papanikolaou nor O' Sullivan make the slightest reference to Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. In all probability, Reichel has simply misinterpreted Kuch's puzzling footnote, which possibly hints at the textual problem of the name forms (Habrokomes vs. Abrocomes and Anthea vs. Anthia, see below, part 4). Be that as it may, we are left with vague hints and no arguments. Similarly, no more than a hint is to be found in Stephens-Winkler 1995, 160, n. 5.

⁷ Dick 2002.

rary writer, known e.g. as 'Shakespeare of Sheffield', coming up with a touching love story called, say, *Curleo and Liliet*: would anyone fail to detect a reference to the 'real' Shakespeare among the curls and the lilies? Of course not, and we shall see that Panthea and Abradates were really a Romeo and Juliet of Greece.⁸ Once this is established, I will explore the intertextual potential of such a reference. As we shall see, echoes from the *Cyropaedia* are an important ingredient of Xenophon's novel, helping to define its fictional status in and against the background of its classical model. Finally, I will turn to the names themselves: why did Xenophon of Ephesus decide to alter precisely those few letters, so as to have 'Anthea' and 'Abrocomes'? Arguably, Xenophon felt the need to hellenise his character names, and, moreover, these speaking names suit very well his implicit 'revision' of the *Cyropaedia*.

I A Romeo and Juliet of Roman Greece

Imagine a herm with two faces, the one portraying Arrian of Nicomedia, the other the famous Xenophon of Athens. Such a herm, dating to the reign of Antoninus Pius, belongs to the collection of *Glypta* of the National Museum of Athens.⁹ Either because he chose it as a *nom de plume*, or because Xenophon was his 'Greek' name, it is a matter of fact that in his works Arrian refers to himself as 'Xenophon'.¹⁰ Thus, the meaning of the herm is obvious, as Arrian, whose literary output is clearly much influenced by his 'ancestor', is willing to present himself as a kind of 'reincarnation' of Xenophon the Athenian.

This story about Arrian is a good starting point to understand Xenophon's widespread influence in Roman Greece.¹¹ Among Xenophon's works, the *Cyropaedia* was certainly one of the most read and imitated, and the story of Panthea and Abradates is arguably the best known part of it. Plutarch mentions the story no less than five times and explores its meaning from different moral perspectives.¹² Rhetors as well were fond of the story,

⁸ And their names are of course even closer to their subsequent adaptation than in my fictitious example. For the spelling of the names and the alternative forms *πάνθεια/πανθία* and *ἄνθεια/ἀνθία*, see below, part 4.

⁹ National Museum Glypta No. 538. See Oliver 1972.

¹⁰ See e.g. Stadter 1980, 6–7.

¹¹ Xenophon's style and language were a much debated issue. See Sgobbi 2004.

¹² Plut. *Mor.* 31c, 521f, 84f, 706d, 1093c.

and it is no surprise that Dio Chrysostomus mentions it, while Hermogenes, Aelius Aristides and Valerius Apsines all commend its style.¹³

Along with these ‘moral’ and ‘rhetorical’ echoes, the story made its way into the world of the painters (or at least into the business of the literary descriptions known as *ekphraseis*). In the *Eikones*, Philostratus devotes a painstaking description to a fresco of Panthea’s theatrical suicide over the corpse of her beloved husband.¹⁴ Allegedly, the painter has filled a gap in the story. Xenophon, we are told, has marvellously narrated the story of Panthea so as to emphasise her extraordinary virtues, yet he has provided no description of her beauty. Consequently, the painter shows Panthea’s virtues *through* her beauty, “as he imagined it in his soul”. And what the painter imagines is a portrait of majestic beauty, unaffected by the violent suicide of Panthea, who has stabbed herself to death.

We shall never know if such a painting ever existed, but it is probably no coincidence that Panthea’s celebrated beauty and virtues are prominent in a work by the same title, namely Lucian’s *Eikones*. This short dialogue features two characters, named Lycinus and Polystratus. Right at the beginning, Lycinus tells his friend about a gorgeous woman who has “petrified” him with her beauty. The woman is from Ionia, but Lycinus does not know her name, so he tries to describe her, by way of comparison with famous statues, paintings and literary descriptions. Eventually, her identity dawns on Polystratus:

POLYSTRATUS: Wait! Now I see very clearly who she is [...] Did you mention there were some eunuchs following her?

LYCINUS: Yes, by Zeus, and some soldiers too.

POLYSTRATUS: My dear, you’re talking about the emperor’s woman, the famous one.

LYCINUS: And what’s her name?

POLYSTRATUS: Oh, a sweet and lovely one, my Lycinus. She shares her name with that famous beauty, Abradates’ wife. You must know, for you often heard Xenophon singing the praises of a wise and beautiful woman.

LYCINUS: By Zeus, yes! Whenever I find myself reading that passage, I’m so moved that I think I can see her and listen to her recounting what

¹³ D. Chr. *Or.* 64; Hermog. *Peri ideon logou* 2,7 and 2,12; *Ars Rhet.* 3,1,6; Aps. *Ars Rhet.* 10.41 Patillon.

¹⁴ Philostr. *Iun. Im.* 2,9.

she did, and how she provided a suit of armour for her husband, and she bade farewell to him when he left for the battle (Luc. *Im.* 10).

Intriguingly, Lucian withholds the name of Panthea, thus she is never explicitly mentioned. Her sweet name is so famous that Lucian can enjoy the luxury of toying with it. Incidentally, the woman who 'petrified' Lycinus was the mistress of Lucius Verus, whom Marcus Aurelius records as a paradigmatic case of mourning.¹⁵ Lucius' mistress, then, suspiciously resembles Xenophon's Panthea, and it is a fair guess that hers might be a nickname. Be that as it may, it is clear enough that everybody knew the story of Abradates and his wise and beautiful (*sophron kai kale*) wife: they really are the Romeo and Juliet of Roman Greece.

So much for philosophical, rhetorical and iconographic reception. Xenophon's fame, however, had also a distinctively *creative* effect, as is obvious from Arrian's example:

We know that Epictetus' pupils exercised themselves by writing philosophical dialogues in the style of Plato, Anthisthenes, or Xenophon (Diss. 2,17,35–36). We can imagine the young Arrian deciding instead to attempt, on the basis of notes and memory, to capture the exact flavor of Epictetus' teaching for his own use, and incidentally to imitate the writers of Socrates' dialogues much more genuinely than by a scholastic dialogue in the Attic dialect. As Wirth has pointed out, Arrian's Discourses in both conception and execution are strongly influenced by Xenophon's Socratic works, especially the *Memorabilia*...¹⁶

Thus, a fuller picture begins to emerge. Arrian, for example, follows in Xenophon's footsteps both from the 'historical' (think of his *Anabasis of Alexander*) and the 'philosophical' (the *Dissertationes*) point of view, and he does so in a creative way. It is only to be expected, then, that a similar *aemulatio* should take place also in the case of a quasi-novel like the *Cyropaedia*, with its famous story of sweet-named, wise-and-beautiful Panthea.

As a matter of fact, the story of Panthea and Abradates was a favourite also among the novelists. Chariton, in particular, echoes it openly and repeatedly, as scholars have argued.¹⁷ What is more important, however, is the

¹⁵ M. Aur. 8,37.

¹⁶ Stadter 1980, 29. The reference is to Wirth 1967.

¹⁷ See e.g. Papanikolaou 1973, 19–20 (eight textual echoes, most of which unmistakable); Laplace 1997, 65–68 (shared motives).

creative potential of the story. Under the reign of Domitianus, apparently, the Egyptian poet Soterichus wrote a poem on Panthea.¹⁸ Still more intriguingly, Philostratus, in his *Lives of the Sophists*, mentions one Caninius Celer who, under Hadrian, wrote an “Araspas in love with Panthea”, quite possibly a *novel* about Panthea.¹⁹ Thus, when Xenophon (!) introduced his own wise-and-beautiful (*sophron kai kale!*) Anthea,²⁰ none of his contemporary readers could help thinking of Panthea: somehow, his *Anthea and Abrocomes* jokingly *recreates* the story of Panthea and Abradates from the *Cyropaedia* of Xenophon the Athenian. Yet, what are we to make of our ‘Curleo and Liliet’? What is the point of the allusion?

2 Genre subversion and the ‘tragedy’ of Panthea and Abradates

In the novels of both Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, the theme of apparent death is a crucial one, marking the anti-tragic flavour of both stories. In this respect, my jocular comparison between Romeo-Juliet and Anthea-Abrocomes can be further developed:

With some exceptions, the protagonists of the traditional romance are virtuous and idealistic figures who struggle successfully to maintain their honor, despite the many challenges and temptations thrown their way. The interest in their tales generally lies, not in the protagonists themselves (who are, for the most part, rather blandly tedious in their virtue), but in the exciting, colorful, and exotic incidents that make up their stories. In this sense, the typical Greek romance is not unlike the play, *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate’s Daughter*, initially proposed by the young Will Shakespeare in Tom Stoppard’s *Shakespeare in Love*: “It’s a crowd tickler. Mistaken identities, shipwreck, a pirate king, a bit with a dog, and love triumphant!” [...]. The connection here is not accidental. Shakespeare did in fact compose such romances: note, e.g., *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and compare the plot of the ancient romance of *Apollo-nius, King of Tyre* [...]. What is interesting about *Romeo and Juliet* is the manner in which it toys with the audience’s expectations. While modern

¹⁸ Suidas, s.v. Σωτήριχος. Such a poem might be an interesting precedent for the verse romances of Byzantine times. Incidentally, in modern Spain Juan de la Cueva composed narrative poetry inspired by Panthea’s novella. See Gallé 2002.

¹⁹ Philostr. *VS* 1,22,524. Alternatively, one may think of a *declamatio*. See Consonni 2000, 237, n. 10.

²⁰ Xen. Eph. 1,2,6 (if O’ Sullivan’s text is correct).

audiences watch this play thinking that they will be viewing a work of high tragedy with a suitably woeful conclusion, many in the original audience would have been uncertain about the outcome. A significant number of the original viewers might well have expected a happy ending along the lines of that in the quite similar episode at Xenophon 3,4–8.²¹

Although in the *mare magnum* of Shakespeare's bibliography there are some scholars who point to Xenophon of Ephesus as a possible, if indirect, source for *Romeo and Juliet*,²² the important thing to bear in mind is that the tragedy toys with certain conventions shared by the ancient novel and Graeco-Roman comedy. In the light of a well-established comic tradition, the apparent suicide was likely to prompt 'comic' assumptions and eventually create strong expectations of a happy ending.²³

Shakespeare's subversion, then, turns comedy into tragedy.²⁴ Generally speaking, ancient novels do the opposite, in that death and tragedy are always very close, and famous tragic plots and motives are often clearly in the background, but in the end everything turns out to be for the best. Despite its simplicity of style and structure, Xenophon's novel shares in this anti-tragic subversion. The unhappy stories of Hippolytus, Io and Electra, as well as some minor tragic themes, are visible through the adventurous surface of the novel, and such a tragic background is central to what Marcelle Laplace refers to as Xenophon's "romanesque antitragique".²⁵ As we shall see, the allusion to the story of Panthea and Abradates is likely to serve an analogous function.

In order to appreciate the tragic quality of Panthea and Abradates, a summary of their 'novella', as it is often referred to, may be in order. Xenophon's narration is divided into six detached episodes, covering four books of the *Cyropaedia*.²⁶

²¹ Porter WEB (<http://homepage.usask.ca/~jrp638/CourseNotes/xeneph.htm>).

²² See Velz 1968, items 178, 207, 1900, 1909, 1963, 2096, 2294. Shakespeare might have known something about the *Ephesiaka* through novel 33 of Masuccio Salernitano (Naples 1476), who possibly had access to the manuscript containing the *Ephesiaka*. See Gibbons 1980, 32–37. The manuscript was read by Angelo Poliziano, who was impressed by Xenophon and translated a few lines of the novel (e.g. 1,13,5–8 and 1,23,3–4). See Bianchi 2002.

²³ See Snyder 1979.

²⁴ Or should we say that he subverts the anti-tragic subversion of Graeco-Roman comedy and of the Hellenistic novel?

²⁵ Laplace 1994. See now Giovannelli 2008.

²⁶ I closely follow the excellent introduction of Consonni 2000 (*Pantea e Abradate*).

- 1) Cyrus the Great entrusts Panthea to Araspas. The exceptional beauty of the prisoner prompts a discussion between the two friends. Cyrus refuses to see Panthea for fear of her beauty, whereas Araspas feels invulnerable, on the ground that falling in love is a free choice, and tries to persuade the King, to no avail (4,6,11 and 5,1,2–18).
- 2) Araspas proves wrong, for he soon falls in love with Panthea and tries to seduce her. Panthea, however, is true to her husband and refuses him, and as Araspas resorts to harassment, she denounces him to the King. Araspas is terrified, but to Cyrus Araspas' weakness is great fun, so he proves merciful. Araspas, supposedly in disgrace with the King, pretends to desert Cyrus, only to spy on the enemy's movements (4,6,11 and 5,1,2–18).
- 3) Panthea sends for her husband Abradates, and husband and wife can thus embrace warmly, against all expectation. They are so grateful to Cyrus that Abradates volunteers to take Araspas' place in the war. Abradates is all the more ready to join Cyrus because his former ally had tried to separate him from Panthea (6,1,45–51).
- 4) Abradates puts on the golden suit of armour that Panthea has forged for him by melting her jewels. After a moving farewell, Abradates leaves for the battle. Panthea kisses his chariot until she is finally taken to her tent. Her sight is so beautiful that the people have no eyes for Abradates until she leaves the scene (6,4,1–11).
- 5) Abradates' heroic death secures the victory of Cyrus (7,1,29–32).
- 6) An official announces the death of Abradates. Cyrus promptly reaches Panthea, who has rearranged the body and is mourning. Cyrus prompts an ambiguous answer on her part by promising to escort her to whomever she may wish. Soon afterwards, in spite of the nurse's protests, she commits suicide with a dagger she had purposefully hidden. The eunuchs follow her example, and Cyrus rushes back, too late. All he can do is build a great monument over the lovers' tomb (7,3,2–16).

The story echoes at least two famous epic scenes from the *Iliad* (Achilles receiving a new suit of armour from Thetis and the farewell of Hector and Andromache), and more generally it features epic motives and, occasionally,

even epic vocabulary.²⁷ At the same time, however, there is an unmistakable tragic feel to it. The foreshadowing of Abradates' death, the messenger-like role of the official, the ambiguous words of Panthea, the 'chorus' of the eunuchs, the sudden suicide: all of these features play with tragic conventions, and Xenophon himself labels the story a *pathos*.²⁸

Myth was of course the primary ingredient of tragedy, but we must bear in mind that also 'oriental' stories could make their way to the scene: think of Phrynichus' *Persai* and *Fall of Miletus*, of Aeschylus' *Persai*, or of the anonymous fourth-century tragedy on Gyges and Kandaules.²⁹ In the same vein, the one 'non-mythical myth' in the victory odes of Pindar and Bacchylides is the moving story of Croesus on the pyre.³⁰ Presumably, the grandeur of these stories, set in faraway and fabulous places, granted them a mythical quality which made them eligible for choral performance, as if their spatial distance were tantamount to the temporal remoteness of traditional myths. It is no surprise, then, that Philostratus Senior refers to the story of Panthea as a *drama*,³¹ which is incidentally one of the few ancient definitions of the novel.³² Xenophon of Ephesus, too, is likely to have perceived the romance of Panthea and Abradates as a kind of tragedy, which he could exploit in order to create his own "romanesque antitragique". From its very title, the novel of Anthea and Abrocomes must be read against the background of Panthea's novella, with an obvious subversion of its tragic features. However, the title is nothing more than a starting point.

3 Play it again, Xenophon!

'Episodes' 1 and 4 of Panthea's story lay a special emphasis on *sight*. Araspas feels invulnerable and cannot believe that lingering on Panthea's beauty will ever distract him from his usual occupations, so that, generally speaking, his *hybris* reminds "the mundane heroes and heroines of romance" who "boast of their immunity to love and indulge in philosophical and rhetorical arguments against love".³³ It seems to me, however, that Abrocomes' behav-

²⁷ See below.

²⁸ Consonni 2000, p. 212 (and Xen. *Cyr.* 7,3,6 for *pathos*)

²⁹ P.Oxy 2382. See Travis 2000.

³⁰ Bacch. 3.

³¹ Philostr. *Im.* 2,9,2. In modern times, L. Gottsched has composed a *Panthea*, based on Xenophon (1744).

³² Marini 1991. For a more theoretical approach, see the first chapter of Crismani 1997.

³³ Trenkner 1958, 27.

our parallels Araspas' in a more specific way. Like Araspas, he maintains that he will never be conquered by Love (*ouk an Eros pote mou kratesai ~ ou me kratetho*), refers to eros as a free choice (*ean theleis ~ ethelousion*), until he is finally forced to surrender (*erotos...healoka ~ helisketo eroti*).³⁴ Still more striking is the similarity between Panthea's beauty in 'episode' 4 and the first appearance of Anthea and Abrocomes in the novel:

And the people, beautiful as was the sight of Abradates and his chariot (*kalou ontos tou theamatos tou te Abradatou*), had no eyes for him, until Panthea was gone (*apelthe*) (Xen. Cyr. 6,4,11).

Anthea was in everybody's mouth, but when Abrocomes arrived (*parelthe*) ... everybody, beautiful as was the sight of the virgins (*kalou ontos tou kata tas parthenous theamatos*), turned their eyes on him... (Xen Eph. 1,2,8).

There is a striking parallelism between the two scenes,³⁵ which can be both construed as an implicit contest of beauty.³⁶ In the *Cyropaedia* the winner is the woman, because nobody has eyes for fully armed Abradates until Panthea is gone. In the *Ephesiaka*, however, the winner is the young man, because as soon as he arrives on the scene no one has eyes for Anthea, who is fully armed as a huntress and was previously the object of general admiration.³⁷

We may notice that Xenophon of Ephesus, comparatively, plays down the heroine's beauty, while at the same time emphasising the beauty and arrogance of the hero, who inherits some unpleasant features from Araspas the suitor. Such a shift is confirmed by the very beginning of the novel. Abrocomes is described as the most handsome man who has ever lived in Ionia and, by extension, Asia (*tosoutou kallous oute en Ionia oute en allei gei*

³⁴ Compare Xen Eph. 1,4 with Xen Cyr. 5,1,10–11 and 17–18.

³⁵ According to the electronic TLG, in all extant Greek literature the only instances of the group of words *kalou ontos tou theamatos* are found in our passages from the *Cyropaedia* and the *Ephesiaka*.

³⁶ Chariton, too, clearly imitates this passage from the *Cyropaedia*: see the 'contest' of beauty between Callirrhoe and Rhodogyne, 5,3,10, and Papanikolaou 1973, 20. Chariton and Xenophon, however, are no doubt independent from each other, since they echo different details of the same scene.

³⁷ Note that in both scenes hero and heroine are more or less explicitly surrounded by young men and women respectively.

proteron genomenou ... kai tois ten allen Asian oikousi).³⁸ It is probably no coincidence that right at the beginning of her novella Panthea is said to be the most beautiful woman ever to have lived in Asia (*kalliste... en tei Asiai gune genesthai ... mepo ... genesthai gune toiaute en tei Asiai*).³⁹

What is the point, if any, of these shifts? A plausible answer might be the following: in the world of “romanesque antitragique” there is no place for a brave man dying at war only to be mourned by his faithful and beautiful wife. Gone is the classical antithesis between ‘male’ and ‘female’ virtues. Instead, hero and heroine closely resemble each other in being beautiful, loyal and peaceful, whereas some original sin (arrogance, as in Chariton’s novel) is needed to set the story in motion.⁴⁰

A similar pattern is recognizable in what is possibly one more allusion to the *Cyropaedia*. I am referring to what we may call the motive of the ‘oath and golden armour’. True to her Iliadic model, Panthea gives Abradates a new suit of armour made from her jewels, and pronounces a solemn oath:

I swear to you by my love for you and yours for me that, of a truth, I would far rather wear a shroud of earth with you, if you approve yourself a gallant soldier, than live disgraced with one disgraced: so worthy of the noblest lot have I deemed both you and myself (Xen. *Cyr.* 6,4,6).

Back to Xenophon of Ephesus, we find Anthea and Abrocomes bound for Rhodes, exchanging fervent oaths:

“...Anthea, my dearest, if it is fated that we are separated let’s swear to each other that you will remain pure and not submit to any other man, and that I will not live with another woman”. At these words, Anthea gave a loud sigh and said: “What, Abrocomes! If we are separated, do you think that I would ever think about a man or a marriage? How could I even breathe without you? Anyway, I swear to you by the goddess of our fathers, the great Ephesian Artemis, and this sea we are crossing, and the god who has driven us mad with this incredible passion, that I will not live nor look upon the sun if I’m separated from you, however

³⁸ Xen. *Eph.* 1,1,1 and 1,1,3.

³⁹ Xen. *Cyr.* 4,6,11 and 5,4,7.

⁴⁰ On symmetry and erotic reciprocity in the novel see Fusillo 1989, 186ff.; Konstan 1994. These ‘new values’ are clearly derived from new comedy, but at the same time they probably reflect a new attitude towards women, which is apparent in Plutarch as well. See Del Corno 1989.

shortly". Anthea said this, and Abrocomes took an oath as well, and the occasion made their vows still more solemn (Xen. Eph. 1,11,3–6).

As soon as they set foot on Rhodes, Anthea and Abrocomes dedicate to Helios a golden suit of armour, complete with an epigram of their own making. When they leave Rhodes, pirates come along and attack their ship. They easily get the upper hand, so they capture and eventually separate the couple, thus marking the beginning of a seemingly endless series of lonely adventures for both hero and heroine. In the long run, however, the golden offer proves to be a very wise move, because Helios himself, when Abrocomes is sentenced to death in Egypt, will come to his rescue, not to mention his palpable, if implicit, role in the final reunion of hero and heroine.⁴¹

The motive of the 'oath and the golden armour' in the *Ephesiaka* may or may not point to a self-conscious echo of the *Cyropaedia*, but in either case a comparison between the two scenes is quite revealing of the ideology underlying both works. In the *Cyropaedia*, Panthea takes her oath in quasi-epic style, as is clear from the Homeric phrase "shroud of the earth" (*gen epiesasthai*). As in the Iliadic culture of shame, the emphasis is firmly on military *honour*, and both the golden armour and the oath are ominous features of the story, foreshadowing the impending fate of both hero and heroine. On the contrary, in the *Ephesiaka* the oaths are expressed in simple, almost trivial words, the threatened suicide will never take place, and the notion of military honour is readily replaced by an ideal of reciprocal faithfulness. Moreover, the golden armour, far from being an instrument of war and destruction as in the *Cyropaedia*, reappears in the form of a shared offer or even a pledge of love, which will play a constructive role in the final scenes of the novel. In both the *Ephesiaka* and the *Cyropaedia*, the oath and the golden armour are meant to trigger the main action, but the values are turned upside down, and, again, the 'tragic' motives take the form of the "romanesque antitragique".⁴²

After examining the beginning of both works and the incident triggering the main action, it is now time to have a look at the grand finale:

And when Cyrus drew near to the place of sorrow he marvelled at the woman; and having made lament over her, he went his way. He also took

⁴¹ Xen. Eph. 4,2,1ff. and 5,11,3ff. See König 2007, 15ff.

⁴² It is noticeable that in the *Ephesiaka* even Ares, on a drape covering the nuptial bed, is depicted as a harmless and tender lover (1,8,3).

care that they should find all due honours, and the monument reared over them was, as they say, exceedingly great (Xen. *Cyr.* 7,3,16).

Thus, at the end of the novella, the tragic death of Panthea and Abradates is honoured through the most ‘epic’ of compensations: the greater the glory, the higher the tumulus, in an attempt to make *kleos* visible through space and time. Such a motive is common in ancient epic, and is silently picked up by tragedy: if we believe Herodotus, the function of tragic choruses was originally to celebrate the trials (*pathea*) of the heroes.⁴³

The motive of the high tumulus is conveniently exploited in the novel of Chariton. The hero is believed to be dead, so Dionysius, the suitor and new husband of the heroine, decides to rear a huge monument to honour him “that it might be seen from far over the sea by men”.⁴⁴ This quote from the *Odyssey*, along with another epic allusion to the *topos* of the high tumulus,⁴⁵ is entirely typical of Chariton’s style,⁴⁶ but of course the threat of tragedy is carefully avoided, for the hero is alive, and the readers know it very well. Unlike Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus never quotes from the poets, but we have seen that his “romanesque antitragique” has its own peculiar ways. After countless adventures, Abrocomes is back in Rhodes, on his way to native Ephesus. He believes that Anthea is dead, and in a sad monologue, he foresees his unhappy *nostos*:

“Survive, Abrocomes, until you rear a tomb for Anthea, you mourn her, you bring your drink-offerings to her. Then just follow her” (Xen. *Eph.* 5,10,5).

Abrocomes’ suffering is made all the more poignant as he recognises the golden armour in the temple of Helios. More tears follow,⁴⁷ but of course Anthea is not dead nor faraway. She enters the temple too, she prays and she offers a lock of her hair to Helios. Along with the golden armour, this sign, clearly reminiscent of Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*,⁴⁸ paves the way for the final recognition and reunion. After much feasting, the night falls, and Anthea and Abrocomes, at long last, can sleep together. Like Odysseus, Anthea recounts

⁴³ Hdt. 5,67.

⁴⁴ Chariton 4,1,5, quoting Hom. *Od.* 24,83.

⁴⁵ *Il.* 23,245–247.

⁴⁶ See Fusillo 1990.

⁴⁷ Among the extant Greek novels, Xenophon’s heroes are especially prone to crying. See Scarcella 1989.

⁴⁸ Aesch. *Ch.* 164ff.

her many wanderings,⁴⁹ and both hero and heroine declare solemnly that they are pure, that is they have kept their oaths. The day after, they set sail for Ephesus, where they are received by the whole population. As soon as they set foot on Ephesus, they rush to the temple of Artemis and offer many sacrifices, and in particular “they dedicate to the goddess an inscription recounting their deeds, what they suffered and what they did”.⁵⁰ After building a big tomb for their parents, who have died of old age and sorrow, Anthea and Abrocomes live their life as if it were a never-ending feast, which was precisely their blessed status before their separation.⁵¹

Through the motives of the oath, the golden armour and the never-ending feast, the story comes full circle, shaping a neat ring composition. The cruel fate of Panthea and Abradates is always in the background, because Abrocomes, in his monologue, foresees precisely such an ending for his story. However, the motive of the tumulus is conveniently reduced to normal, non-tragic proportions, since it is built to honour the non-sensational death of old parents.⁵² Nevertheless, this ending shares with Panthea’s novella a certain epic and tragic quality. The first night together is clearly modelled on the *Odyssey*, but once again male and female roles are blurred, and it is Anthea who most closely resembles Odysseus. The allusion to the recognition scene of the *Choephoroi* contributes to the analogy between hero and heroine, who are implicitly compared to the brother and sister Orestes and Electra. Note that Abrocomes’ plan was to return to Ephesus and, among other things, “to bring drink-offerings” (*epenegkai choas*, that is, literally, being a *choephoros*) to Anthea, and note also that Aeschylus’ scene was famously ridiculed by Euripides precisely because it failed to account for the difference between male and female.⁵³ Finally, the inscription recounting “what they suffered and what they did” (*hosa te epathon kai hosa edrasan*) has an unmistakably epic flavour, as Richard Hunter has recently noticed.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Note the Odyssean verb *planetheisa*, Xen. Eph. 5,14,1.

⁵⁰ Xen. Eph. 5,15,2.

⁵¹ Cf. Xen. Eph. 1,10,1 and 5,15,4 (*heorte en hapas ho bios autois ~ diegon heorten agontes ton met’allelon bion*), with Laplace 1994.

⁵² And that of Hyperanthes, Hippothoos’ *eromenos*, who had died long before. Hippothoos has eventually overcome his sorrow, but now he sails to Lesbos in order to build a big tomb for him.

⁵³ Eur. *El.* 524–537. See e.g. Bond 1974. Xenophon, apparently, echoes Euripides’ *Electra* in 2,9,2ff. Manto tries to humiliate Anthea by handing her over to a goatherd, who, unexpectedly, takes pity on her and does not abuse her. Similarly, in the play Clytaemestra hands Electra over to a peasant, who unexpectedly proves to be no less respectful. Thus, the ‘Electra motive’ in the *Ephesiaka* is likely to be far from coincidental.

⁵⁴ Hunter 2005, 159.

At the end of their voyage, the heroes dedicate their story in the form of a somewhat gentrified epos,⁵⁵ which preserves their glory while at the same time sparing them the tragic doom of Panthea and Abradates – as well as the notorious paternalism of Xenophon the Athenian.⁵⁶

4 How to craft a hero's name

Why did Xenophon bother to alter his character names in the first place? And why did he alter them precisely that way?⁵⁷ To be sure, playing with names is a long-established tradition in Greek literature,⁵⁸ and Xenophon was of course eager to tell a *new* story. However, we should also bear in mind that the author of the *Ephesiaka* shares with other Greek novelists an uncompromising contempt towards the ‘barbarians’.⁵⁹ Time and again, the ‘barbarians’ are associated with ignorance, arrogance, furious rage and violence.⁶⁰ At best, the ‘barbarians’ can experience a sentiment of awe before

⁵⁵ On the whole, the *Ephesiaka* has a somewhat bourgeois flavour, which is evident in a sort of “coloritura ‘borghese’ del linguaggio” and “attenzione alle buone maniere”. See Zanetto 1990, 236.

⁵⁶ The *Cyropaedia* goes so far as to explicitly theorise, through Cyrus, the didactic nature of invented stories. See Xen. *Cyr.* 2,2,1 with Reichel 1995, 16ff.

⁵⁷ Except for Xen. Eph. 1,2,5 (ἄνθεια), the *codex unicus* of Xenophon Ephesius writes ἀνθία rather than ἄνθεια, and O’ Sullivan, in his 2005 Teubner edition, prints the former, although the latter is guaranteed by the meter in *Iliad* 9,151, 293 and in *Scutum* 381 (where it designates a city) and, more importantly, is found in a papyrus as the name of a heroine in what was probably a novel (PSI 6,726, see Stephens-Winkler 1995, 277–288). On the other hand, even Xenophon’s Panthea is sometimes referred to as πανθία: cf. Maximus Soph., *Dialexeis*, 22,5. Moreover, the form πανθία becomes standard in byzantine times: cf. Joannes Siculus, *Commentarium in Hermogenis librum Peri ideon*, p. 431 Walz, not to mention the characters bearing this very name in the novels of Theodorus Prodromus and Eustathius Macrembolites, probably a self-conscious echo of the Πάνθεια we find in Achilles Tatius’ novel. Both πάνθεια/πανθία and ἄνθεια/ἀνθία are clearly alternative forms (as ὠφέλεια and ὠφελία), with the oxytone becoming increasingly frequent in the course of time.

⁵⁸ The subject is huge. See e.g. Bonanno 1980; Barchiesi 1984; O’Hara 1996; Levin 1997; Crawford 2001.

⁵⁹ See Kuch 1996 (there were of course also ‘barbarian’ novelists, as Kuch aptly notices). The antithesis Greek/barbarian, moreover, is purely cultural, inasmuch as Xenophon is characteristically vague about the political details (states, constitution...) of the many places visited by his heroes. See Scarcella 1979 (esp. 106–107) and Ruiz Montero 2003, 229.

⁶⁰ Xen. Eph. 1,5,7; 2,1,2; 2,3,5–8; 2,4,5; 3,11,4. The comparative *barbaroteros* is used in 2,4,3 as a term of abuse.

Hellenic beauty, a wonderful sight they are not accustomed to.⁶¹ In this respect, Xenophon of Ephesus is very much at variance with Xenophon of Athens, who not only resorts to the term ‘barbarian’ mainly in a neutral sense, but chooses Persia as the ideal setting of his moral and political utopias.⁶² As a consequence, the names of Panthea and especially that of Abradates, with its barbaric ending, had to be hellenised, and Xenophon has chosen what is possibly the simplest shortcut to get there.

Xenophon’s solution, however simple, is also fully appropriate to his characters. As Tomas Hägg and Anton Bierl have shown, Xenophon is extremely careful about the naming of his characters, however obscure they may be.⁶³ *A fortiori*, we should expect great care in the choice of the two most important names. Both Anthea and Abrocomes are clearly speaking names, and as no reader can fail to notice, Xenophon goes so far as to etymologise the name of Anthea, when he records that her body was in bloom (*enthei*).⁶⁴ Yet the names are appropriate on other grounds as well, as we shall see.

To the best of my knowledge, Xenophon’s Abradates is the only character known by this name in the ancient world. Moreover, many writers mention the story of Abradates and Panthea, but it should be noted that the name is never found in poetry. My reason for saying this is that Anthea and Abrocomes are themselves both *poets* and *objects of poetry*. Here is the epigram they carve near the golden panoply in Rhodes:

Οἱ ξεῖνοι [κλεινοὶ] τάδε σοι χρυσήλατα τεύχε’ ἔθηκαν
 Ἐνθία Ἀβροκόμης θ’ ἱερῆς Ἐφέσοιο πολίται
 The guests have dedicated to you this golden armour
 Anthea and Habrocomes, citizens of sacred Ephesus (Xen. Eph. 1,12,2)

When in Memphis, Anthea hears a group of prophetic youths delivering a similar line:

Ἐνθία Ἀβροκόμην ταχὺ λήψεται ἄνδρα τὸν αὐτῆς
 Anthea will soon find her husband Abrocomes (Xen. Eph. 5,4,11)

⁶¹ Xen. Eph. 2,2,4.

⁶² See Rzchiladze 1980.

⁶³ See Hägg 1971 and Bierl 2006.

⁶⁴ Xen. Eph. 1,2,5. Hyperanthes is likewise etymologised at 3,2,13.

No wonder, then, if Xenophon felt compelled to alter Abradates’ name, which is both barbaric and alien to Greek hexameter.⁶⁵ But what are we to make of Abrocomes? To begin with, the *codex unicus* oscillates between rough and smooth breathing, and the editors are likewise uncertain.⁶⁶ On the one hand, Abrocomes, with smooth breathing, is a Persian name, associated with different people.⁶⁷ On the other hand, *habrocomes*, with rough breathing, is found in Euripides as an epithet for a palm-tree, and it soon becomes very common in late hexametric poetry.⁶⁸ Rough or smooth, then? Admittedly, this is not the kind of dilemma that keeps you up at night, especially if we bear in mind that in Xenophon’s time the rough breathing, as a phonetic phenomenon, had probably long disappeared.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, I would opt for the ‘rough’ form, on the ground that a) the epithet often occupies exactly the same metrical position as in Xenophon;⁷⁰ b) it is the name of one of Aristaenetus’ (pen) lovers;⁷¹ c) it is more distinctively Greek d) in the vast majority of cases it has to do with the sphere of Eros. In other words, (H)abrocomes sounds poetic, Greek and sexy, because in extant poetry it qualifies the likes of Eros, Aphrodite, Endymion, Bacchus, Hymenaios, various lovers, and even Adonis.⁷² This is why, I would venture to say, Xenophon has chosen it.⁷³

⁶⁵ Analogous names such as Mithridates have a long alpha, which in Abradates’ case is likely to give the sequence long-short-long-long. Abradates’ name is thus far from ideal for a poet composing hexameters.

⁶⁶ O’Sullivan’s 2005 Teubner edition opts for rough breathing. For previous options, see Ruiz Montero 1981, eventually advocating smooth breathing.

⁶⁷ Ruiz Montero 1981, moreover, mentions at least one inscription where the name is legible. In *IG XIV 1318*, from Italy, we find ABPOKOMA, “que el editor transcribe por Ἀβροκόμα sin precisar fecha” (85).

⁶⁸ Eur. *Ion* 929, *Iph. Taur.* 1099. For hexametric poetry, see below.

⁶⁹ However, similar problems are already to be found in Attic Greek from as early as in the fifth century. See e.g., for opposite view on the name (H)abronicus, Chambers 1958 and Raubitschek 1956.

⁷⁰ *A.P.* 12,164 (Meleager); 12,55 (*adelon* or Artemon); Nonnus *Dion.* 13,456, 13,559, 48,148.

⁷¹ Aristaen. 2,21. Note that Aristaenetus knows and imitates Xenophon of Ephesus: e.g. 2,7,15 echoes Xen. Eph. 1,9,4. See Gärtner 1967, 2087.

⁷² Eros: *A.P.* 12,55, Nonnus *Dion.* 13,456; Aphrodite: Manetho 2,466, 6,723, Nonnus *Dion.* 48,356; Endymion: Nonnus *Dion.* 42,243; Bacchus: *A.P.* 9,524, Nonnus *Dion.* 16,172; Hymenaios: Nonnus *Dion.* 13,91, 33,81; lovers: *A.P.* 12,164, Aristaen. 2,21; Adonis: *Hymn. Orph.* 56,2.

⁷³ A different explanation is provided by Merkelbach 1962, who maintains that “Solches langes Haar war ein Kennzeichen des Horos-Eros bzw. eines dem Horos geweihten Knaben” (92).

So much for Abrocomes. If we now turn to Anthea, we may begin by saying that this flowery name has excellent Homeric credentials, as it is found as early as in the Catalogue of ships. It is the name of a city, qualified by the meaningful epithet of *bathyleimon* (“surrounded by deep meadows”).⁷⁴ Apparently, the only women who ever bore this name before our Antheia are the eponymous girl of the Homeric city, an obscure figure that Pausanias mentions no more than once, and a courtesan recorded by Lysias (hers is likely to be a *nom de guerre*).⁷⁵ Finally, a scrap of papyrus contains a fragment of what might be a novel, whose heroine is again called Anthea.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, we know nothing about this novel or its author, although it is certainly possible that “this fragment came from a novel deliberately borrowing from the *Ephesiaka*”.⁷⁷

On the whole, the name Anthea seems to carry more cheerful associations than Panthea (‘all-divine’, at least in Greek). It is probably no coincidence that in the extant Greek novels Panthea is the name of no less than three invariably virtuous and mostly tedious mothers-in-law,⁷⁸ whereas our Anthea, as soon as she sees Abrocomes, “forgets what is convenient for a virgin” and is ready to “show as many parts of her body as she could”.⁷⁹ Most of all, however, Abrocomes and Anthea are clearly fictitious names, a long way from the world of both myth and history.

Si parva licet componere magnis, the revival of Panthea and Abradates in Roman Greece is also the time when Aristotle’s works are re-discovered and intensely studied. It has been argued that the plots of the novels closely parallel Aristotle’s analysis of tragedy,⁸⁰ and Chariton goes so far as to mention *katharsis* towards the end of his novel.⁸¹ Now, in the *Poetics* Aristotle famously singles out Agathon’s *Antheus* or *Anthe* as a successful, if unusual, example of a fictitious tragedy, where all the names are invented, only to suggest that poets “should not stick at all costs to traditional plots”.⁸² More-

⁷⁴ *Il.* 9,151; 381.

⁷⁵ Paus. 7,18,3; Lys. *apud* Ath. *Deipn.* 592e.

⁷⁶ See Stephens-Winkler 1995, 277–288, who place the papyrus “in the latter half of the second century C.E., though the ed. pr. placed it rather earlier” (279).

⁷⁷ Stephens-Winkler 1995, 278.

⁷⁸ See the novels of Achilles Tatius, Theodorus Prodromus and Eustathius Macrembolites.

⁷⁹ Xen. Eph. 1,2,2.

⁸⁰ See Cicu 1982.

⁸¹ More precisely, Chariton maintains that his last book will have a cathartic effect (*katharsion*, 8,1,4).

⁸² Ar. *Poet.* 1451b20ff.: “It is true that in some tragedies one or two of the names are familiar and the rest invented; indeed in some they are all invented, as for instance in Agathon’s *Anthe(us)*, where both the incidents and the names are invented and yet it is

over, as we know from Plato's and Aristophanes' brilliant parodies, Agathon was perceived as a womanlike poet, whose main achievement was to turn tragedy into a kind of sensual and amorous drama.⁸³ This brings me to a final point, which I tentatively put forward as a question: could it be the case that Xenophon's *Anthea*, in the light of sensual Agathon's *Anthe(us)* and Aristotle's relevant precept, reflects the romantic and fictional quality of the *Ephesiaka*, or even of the novel as a new, genre-subverting literary form?⁸⁴

5 *A crowd tickler... and love triumphant!*

As we have seen, the names of the main characters in Xenophon's *Ephesiaka* evoke the tragic story of Panthea and Abradates. The allusion is unmistakable, or should I say *inevitable*, given the extraordinary dissemination of the story. Reading the *Ephesiaka* with that story in mind was just as inevitable, and a number of clues suggest that Xenophon's novel can be construed (among other things) as an anti-tragic reworking of Panthea's novella, which in turn was no doubt perceived as a kind of tragedy. Finally, Xenophon's choice of his character names is fully consistent with such a reworking, for the altered names make the story more cheerful and 'Greek'. Our 'Curleo and Liliet' were probably designed to play with the expectations of a wide and popular audience. These people knew and possibly appreciated, along with the most famous tragic plots, the sad story of Panthea and Abradates. At the same time, they desperately needed something more tickling, as Shakespeare in *Love* would have it: a thrilling series of adventures, a consoling happy ending, a patriotic attitude, and more humane, if cheaper, emotions.⁸⁵

none the less a favourite". The manuscripts have ἄνθει, which Welcker aptly corrected into ἄνθει, but Φ has ἄνθη, which is supported by the Arabic version (Σ).

⁸³ The reference is of course to Plato's *Symposium* and to the prologue of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*.

⁸⁴ Note that lexicographers refer to *Antheus* as the *ethnikon* of *Antheia* (e.g. Steph. Byz. s.v. *Antheia*).

⁸⁵ Some scholars have detected 'popular' features in Xenophon's novel (see König 2007, with bibliography), and O'Sullivan 1995 has fruitfully compared its formulaic style with Homeric poetry and oral prose-narrative from Ireland, arguing that the *Ephesiaka* is a specimen of oral narrative, or at least a kind of "transitional text". Although I would find it hard to determine how much 'popular' or 'oral' Xenophon's novel might be, or whether these features are natural or contrived, I am sympathetic with such views, and I see my own interpretation as largely compatible with them, even in 'O Sullivan's radical form. For example, the *Odyssey*, when it comes to reworking certain Iliadic motifs, is by no means less subtle than Xenophon of Ephesus.

Thus, our author decided to ‘play Xenophon’: he adopted (or deserved...) the name of his ‘ancestor’ and reworked Panthea’s novella (and other tragic plots) for these people.⁸⁶ I bet that he never let them down.⁸⁷

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⁸⁶ According to the manuscript of the *Ephesiaka* the author’s name is simply “Xenophon”, whereas “of Ephesus” is likely to be an addition by the lexicographers, who felt the need to distinguish among various ‘Xenophons’. If this is the case, the use of the pseudonym ‘Xenophon’ may be compared to a standard practice of epic rhapsodes, who used to ascribe all of their lines to Hesiod or Homer (see Graziosi 2002, 33ff.).

⁸⁷ Warm thanks to Daniela Colomo, Alex Graab, Aglae Pizzone, Giuseppe Zanetto for their precious suggestions.

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