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“Love is like the Measles”  
Hippocratic and non-Hippocratic approaches to lovesickness.

This paper will examine the similarities and differences between Hippocratic and non-Hippocratic approaches to the diagnosis and treatment of lovesickness or *eros*. Lovesickness is well recognised and accepted as a *nosos* in a wide variety of non-Hippocratic texts of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Genres as diverse as history, drama and philosophy, including Plato’s most explicitly medical text, *Timaeus*, treat *eros* in the same category as other diseases, with causes, symptoms and treatments similar in type to those of other somatic *nosoi*.<sup>1</sup> Lovesickness was no mere literary device or poetic metaphor. There is abundant evidence to suggest that lovesickness was diagnosed and treated in the real world by a range of healers, from midwives and sorcerers to rootcutters and drugsellers.

Yet this widely accepted *nosos* does not appear in the Hippocratic corpus of the classical period. Conditions with a number of similarities to unrequited *eros* do appear, most obviously the so-called ‘disease of young girls’. Lovesickness also appears in post-classical medical texts, including Galen’s commentary on the Hippocratic *Prognostics* and Soranus’ *Vita Hippocratis*, later incorporated into the Hippocratic corpus, in which the father of medicine himself is said to have diagnosed and cured the condition.<sup>2</sup> *Eros per se*, however, is not included in the classical Hippocratic texts.

This paper will examine the fundamental features of *eros* as it is depicted in a variety of non-Hippocratic genres in order to synthesise a sort of clinical picture. I will consider its causes, symptoms and signs, course and prognosis, treatment, and the characteristics of both the sufferers and those healers who treated it. I will argue that the treatment of *eros* was strongly associated not with *iatroi*, but with folk healers, particularly female healers. I will compare this clinical picture with Hippocratic *nosoi*, characterised by symptoms reminiscent of non-Hippocratic descriptions of *eros*, most especially fever and mental confusion. I will argue that the Hippocratics redefine *eros* and legitimise certain aspects of it as other illnesses, particularly the disease of young girls, more firmly situated within their own domain.

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<sup>1</sup> For example Xen. *Cyr.* 5.1.12, Ar. *Thesm.* 1116-1117, Eur. *Andr.* 220, 956, *Hipp.* 131-140, 170-249, Pl. *Symp.* 207a, *Ti.* 86d.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. *Hippocratis Prognosticum commentarii* 1.4, Kühn 18.2, Sor. *Vita Hippocratis secundum Soranum* 2.4-10.