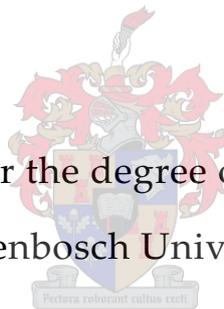


**Psychagogy in Plutarch's *Moralia* and *Parallel Lives*:
the image of the ideal Woman**

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ABSTRACT

Plutarch's views on women are significantly influenced by Plato's metaphysics and virtue ethics, while he draws from other traditions as he sees fit. The theoretical-philosophical works of the *Moralia* conceptualise Woman as Man's equal in terms of moral ability, but more susceptible to irrationality and thus vice. To correct this inherent weakness, Woman needs the guidance of the male principle, which will guide her towards reason and virtue. The popular-philosophical works share the assumptions of this metaphysical basis in Plutarch's psychagogy for women. These texts show a desire to control women by rendering them completely subservient to their husbands. An extensive list of virtues and vices of women is discussed in the four works that form part of this psychagogic programme: *Conjugalia praecepta*, *Consolatio ad uxorem*, *Mulierum virtutes* and *Lacaenarum apophthegmata*. Plutarch uses these same virtues and vices to judge the female characters of his *Lives*, who are presented according to the virtue-vice binary, unlike his male characters. These historical women are written in such a way as to serve as exempla for his female audience. The image of Woman that emerges from the *Moralia* and the *Lives* is reactionary, based on a belief that social values were deteriorating. The literary and material records show that women of the early Imperial Period gained much in terms of social rights and public participation, and therefore they have little in common with Plutarch's ideal Woman.

OPSOMMING

Plutarchos se siening van vroue is aansienlik beïnvloed deur Plato se metafisika en deugsetiek, met aanvulling vanuit ander tradisies soos hy voel nodig is. Die teoreties-filosofiese werke in die *Moralia* konseptualiseer die Vrou as Man se gelyke i.t.v. morele vermoë, maar meer vatbaar vir irrasionaliteit en dus ondeug. Om hierdie inherente swakheid reg te stel, benodig die Vrou die leiding van die manlike beginsel, wat haar na die rede en deug sal begelei. Die populêr-filosofiese werke deel in die aannames van hierdie metafisiese basis vir Ploutarchos se psigagogie vir vroue. Hierdie tekste toon 'n begeerte om vroue te beheer deur hulle totaal onderdanig aan hul man te maak. 'n Omvangryke lys van deugde en ondeugde word in die vier werke wat deel vorm van hierdie psigagogiese program bespreek: *Conjugalia praecepta*, *Consolatio ad uxorem*, *Mulierum virtutes* en *Lacaenarum apophthegmata*. Plutarchos gebruik hierdie selfde deugde en ondeugde om die vroulike karakters van sy *Vitae* te beoordeel. Anders as die manlike karakters, word hierdie vroue word volgens die deug-ondeug binêr voorgestel. Die historiese vroue is so geskryf dat hulle as exempla vir Plutarchos se vroulike gehoor kan optree. Die beeld van die Vrou wat uit die *Moralia* en *Vitae* te voorskyn kom is reaksionêr, gebaseer op die geloof dat sosiale waardes besig was om af te brokkel. Die literêre en materiële rekord wys egter dat vroue in die vroeë Keisertyd groot winste i.t.v. sosiale regte en publieke deelname gemaak het, en dus het hulle min in gemeen met Plutarchos se ideale Vrou.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations are from the *SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd ed.), supplemented by the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th ed.), except for the following:

Catullus

Carmina

Carm.

Livy

Ab urbe condita

Ab urb. cond.

Plutarch

Lacaenarum apophthegmata

Lacae. apoph.

Polybius

Historiae

Hist.

CONTENTS

Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Opsomming	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abbreviations.....	v
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Ethical Subjectivism.....	6
1.2. Intersections and Generic Boundaries	9
2. Women in Social Context.....	18
2.1. Plutarch’s (Female) Audience.....	10
2.2. Theory and the Biology of Women.....	20
2.3. The Socio-Economic and Political Context: <i>ca.</i> 500 BCE-100 CE	25
2.3.1. Greece	26
2.3.2. Rome	42
2.3.3. The Social Atmosphere of the 1 st Century CE.....	50
2.4. Gendered Virtue and Space.....	53
3. Plutarch’s Philosophical Framework	62
3.1. Eclecticism, Practical-, Popular- and Personal Philosophy	63
3.2. Plato’s Woman.....	69
3.3. The Feminine Principle: <i>De Iside et Osiride</i> and the <i>Amatorius</i>	74
3.4. Philosophical <i>topoi</i> in Plutarch’s work.....	85
3.4.1. Harmony	87
3.4.2. Temperance	91
3.4.3. Education.....	94
3.4.4. Grief	95
3.4.5. Public action.....	97

4. Psychagogy	101
4.1. The Formation of the Self.....	116
5. Plutarch's Woman.....	120
5.1. Virtue and Vice in the <i>Moralia</i>	120
5.1.1. Harmony	121
5.1.2. Temperance and shame.....	124
5.1.3. Education.....	128
5.1.4. Superstition, spells and potions	129
5.1.5. Public action.....	131
5.1.6. Grief	135
5.2. The Conjugal Self	138
5.3. The Women of the <i>Lives</i>	140
5. Conclusion	153
Bibliography	160
Primary Sources	160
Secondary Sources	164

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Plutarch has never not been popular. In the history of Plutarch scholarship we can only pinpoint times when he is more or less so. Currently he is experiencing a major revival, and finally Plutarch is being studied as valuable in his own right, and not just as a source for other, more interesting, men and women. Plutarch has especially gained ground in the study of his non-biographical works, the collection of texts known as the *Moralia*. This selection of works is by no means homogeneous, and in fact encompasses a variety of genres and topics, for which the name *Moralia* is a somewhat generic marker.¹ In recent years especially, Plutarch has garnered a reputation as a philosopher in his own right, rather than as a commentator on the philosophical tradition. It remains, however, the case that Plutarchan scholars tend to remain within the boundaries of their chosen genre, and as a result it has become the tendency to see these genres as independent bodies of work, as in the case of Dillon, who considers the theoretical-philosophical texts to have a different philosophical framework to the popular-philosophical texts (2014: 63).²

Furthermore, many studies on theoretical or popular philosophy focus solely on aspects of the texts aimed at a male audience, and gloss over or in some cases ignore the possibility of a female audience, even when such an audience is

¹ Cf. Ziegler (1951: 768-825), who subdivided the *Moralia* into categories according to the content of the work. His recategorisation was influential and immensely valuable, but by no means faultless.

² 'Popular philosophy' is philosophy aimed at the moral advancement of a large group of people (who may in some ways be characterised as 'students') by using principles from theoretical philosophy and applying them in practical ways to daily life. It has become common to identify ancient ethics with this goal (Miller 2011: 1570; Oikonomopoulou 2012: 449). For a full discussion of popular philosophy and related concepts in the ancient world, see chapter 3.

explicit.³ Plutarch's women thus occupy a liminal space in current scholarship; they have not yet become subjects worthy of study as subjects-in-themselves, and yet they are no longer visible only by their proximity to their men. A few recent studies have brought them briefly into view. Of these the most misleading has been that of Walcot (1999), whose attempt to do a survey of Plutarch's views on women resulted in an excessively negative view that failed to capture the nuance and contradictions of Plutarch's writings. Buszard takes note of the limitations of Plutarch scholarship on women, especially those studies which has been broad in scope (Buszard 2010: 83n3).⁴ His own study focuses on the speech of women in the *Lives*, who he argues are depicted as highly intelligent and focused on civic duties. Even so, he shows an awareness of the dangers of imposing a progressive view onto Plutarch, and admits that his study includes only women who are elite, who speak not for themselves but for their (mostly male) relatives, and who are mobilised only by the extraordinary circumstances in which they find themselves (2010: 112). Buszard's study is valuable as an analysis of the role Plutarch allows elite women to play in the *Lives*, but it does not attempt to reconcile these views with his views elsewhere in the *Moralia*, and it misses the crucial point that most of the women that make speeches in the *Lives* act as arbiters of peace.

While there is certainly value in narrow studies such as Buszard's, broad studies that span a range of texts in Plutarch's oeuvre are necessary in order to gain a full understanding of his philosophy in theory and in practice. In this vein studies such as that of Beneker (2008, 2014) have been influential. Beneker

³ Cf. Dillon (2002, 2014), Hadot (1995), Hägg (2012), Malherbe (1986), Nussbaum (1994), Opsomer (2007a, 2007b), Pelling (2011), Rabbow (1954), Rist (2001), Roskam & Van der Stockt (2011), Russell (1973), Trapp (2014), van Hoof (2010, 2014). Plutarch's audience is further discussed in chapter 2.

⁴ Buszard (2010: 83) gives a good overview of some of the recent scholarship on Plutarch's women.

has argued that Plutarch considers *erōs* a necessary prerequisite for a successful marriage within which *philia* and virtue can flourish (2008: 689). He sees the philosophical groundwork for this argument in the *Amatorius* (cf. Rist 2001) and the practical application in the *Lives*, particularly the *Brutus* and the *Pompey* (2008: 697-98). His arguments hold that Plutarch considers a legitimate marriage one that is contracted at the right time between two sensible people, and it is this which allows him to condone the marriage of Ismenodora and Bacchon in the *Amat.* (2008: 698; 2012: 32). Beneker's research does not consider what these views mean for women, but rather what they mean for men (cf. Beneker 2014). Consequently, he assumes certain things about Plutarch's Woman that are problematic in the broader context of Plutarch's works and the social context of the 1st century CE. As a result of his broad view of the *Lives* but narrow consideration of the *Moralia*, he rarely touches on the *Conjugalia praecepta* or the *Consolatio ad uxorem* in his analyses of Plutarch's view of the role of *erōs* in marriage.

Some other studies fill this gap in the scholarship, but have distinct shortcomings nevertheless. Pomeroy's (1999) edition of the *Conj. praec.* and *Cons. ux.* has been an important addition to the study of Plutarch's women, and many of the essays contained within the volume are careful and considered. Stadter's (1999: 173-82) essay on Plutarch's view of women is especially valuable, since it takes a broad view of Plutarch's works, including not only some of the popular-philosophical works in the *Moralia*, but also *De Iside et Osiride* and some evidence from the *Lives*. As a result, he comes to the rather sensible conclusion that Plutarch expects the wife to apply her philosophical knowledge in the household, and that the couple should act as a unit with the husband as its leader (1999: 182).

Few other works have attempted to confront Plutarch's women directly,⁵ preferring instead to include them in studies of themes such as love (Rist 2001; Beneker 2008; Tsouvala 2014), marriage (Goessler 1962, 1999; Beneker 2008; Tsouvala 2014), and sex (Walcot 1998; Beneker 2014), that consider them in relation to their men rather than on their own.⁶ The most common view that persists in these studies is that Plutarch places great emphasis on the conjugal relationship as one of affection and reciprocity. Along these lines Patterson declares that Plutarch pays the "larger social, political, or cosmic purposes" of the marriage very little mind, as he focuses rather on the relationship between the husband and wife itself (1999: 129). Goessler similarly lauds the *Cons. ux.* for revealing "the close emotional union of the couple, the harmony of their marriage, and their shared spiritual life, their perfect unity (*symbiōsis*) in every respect" (1999: 115). Despite the obvious double standards of some of Plutarch's writings,⁷ the major scholarly opinion remains that he "concentrates on the equal status of the conjugal partners, on the positive evaluation of *erōs* (both physical and spiritual-philosophical), and on the reciprocity and the sharing in the marital relationship" (Tsouvala 2014: 191).

Many of these studies draw from the work of Michel Foucault, in particular volume three of *The History of Sexuality (The Care of the Self)*, which relies heavily on analysis of some of Plutarch's works, amongst others *Conj. praec.*, and which has been quite influential in the renewed interest in Plutarch in recent years.

⁵ Beneker (2008: 689) sums up this tendency quite well: "Some scholars have studied the societal aspect of marriage in Plutarch's works, raising questions about women's role in the household, in the community, and especially in their interactions with men...". For studies of Plutarch's women, see also Blomqvist (1997), Castellani (2002), Håland (2011), Le Corsu (1981), and McNerney (2003).

⁶ Cf. Rabinowitz's (1993: 11) criticism of this tendency in Classical scholarship in general.

⁷ These are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Most of these studies do not take into account the practice of psychagogy,⁸ leading the soul to virtue, in Plutarch's works, despite the fact that psychagogy became a focal point of Foucault's other work (2005, 2015), and therefore never quite catch sight of what Plutarch might hope to achieve through his popular philosophy, or how he might try to support his ultimate moral goals *for women* through his theoretical philosophy.

The apparent contradictions in Plutarch's views become even more manifest when taking into account the *Lives*, Plutarch's biographical works, which are sometimes treated as related to popular-philosophical practice (e.g. Duff 1999; cf. Tatum 2013: 5365), but are too often cited as sources for the historical circumstances of women's lives.⁹ Scholars of biography are generally convinced that Plutarch remains removed from his subject material and presents his characters as objectively as possible, leaving moral judgement to his readers instead of imposing it on the text himself.¹⁰ This is of course not mutually exclusive with the possibility that the *Lives* have a moral agenda, as is readily admitted. This admission often has a caveat that still allows for Plutarch's moral objectivity despite his psychagogic/pedagogic aims. Duff, for example,

⁸ Psychagogy aims at leading the student to a life of fulfillment through the practice of philosophy. The concept is also commonly known in German as *Seelenführung* (Rabbow 1954) or *Seelenleitung* (I. Hadot 1969). For a full discussion of the practice of psychagogy, see chapter 4.

⁹ E.g. Pomeroy (1975: 181 & 246n108, 155 & 246n17), Brulé (2003: 140) and Fantham et al. (1994: 74, 390, 144). Cf. Tsouvala (2008: 701-02): "The historicity of Plutarch's *Lives* has not been refuted by modern scholars... One, therefore, can no longer doubt the historicity of the *Lives* and the *Moralia* as primary sources for the history of provincial Greece in the first and second centuries CE, for that suggests scepticism about Plutarch as a historical person and his self-portrayal as a Greco-Roman aristocratic statesman, a Delphic priest and a diplomat."

¹⁰ Cf. Goessler (1962: 12); Duff (1999: 5); Whitmarsh (2001: 34); Hägg (2012: 249), and van Hoof (2010: 10). Russell's (1966) article on Plutarch's moral aims in the *Lives* is excellent and insightful, yet still leaves the impression that Plutarch at a fundamental level did not judge his subjects.

distinguishes between the *Moralia* as “works of moral theory” and the *Lives* as “works in which the theory is examined – and questioned – in practice” (1999: 5), while Beneker sees Plutarch as presenting the material in the *Lives* in a morally neutral way: “[frequently] Plutarch does not apply labels at all when he narrates examples of sexual behavior, preferring to let his readers evaluate actions for themselves, and then to draw conclusions about character and to anticipate the course of future events” (2014: 507). Even those scholars who do take Plutarch’s women into account generally agree; Walcot also seems to hold the opinion that the *Lives* can be considered to be historically accurate and generally free from Plutarch’s moral convictions: “...what does Plutarch isolate in the *Moralia* and confirm by the *Lives* as the particular faults of women?” (1999: 167).

The *Lives* and the popular-philosophical works of the *Moralia* cannot be strictly divided by Plutarch’s own account, as he states that a study of virtue and vice (with reference to Plato, no less) is the main aim of the *Lives* (*Demetr.* 1.4-6). In the popular-philosophical works Plutarch aims to educate his readers on virtue, in order to lead them to a life of fulfilment through the study of philosophy. In order to do so, Plutarch must necessarily select suitable material for his audience. If this general psychagogic goal is present in the *Lives* too, we must ask to what extent the author did, and really is able to, eliminate his own judgement from his writings.

1.1. ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM

The question of ethical objectivism vs. ethical subjectivism has been one of the most important questions of 20th century philosophy, and remains a contentious issue. According to Ayer, moral statements are by definition not factual descriptions of objective facts. Ayer argues that moral statements are fundamentally unempirical, since it is impossible to analyse them according to

the criteria for empirical facts. Moral concepts do not add any information about the factual basis of a statement, but rather voices the speaker's/author's moral approval or disapproval. Ethical statements are thus first and foremost emotive responses to actions (1936: 107). The earliest version of this type of argument was put forth by Hume in the 18th century, who argued that moral statements are emotional responses and are not based in reason (Fieser 2000: 124). Ayer takes the argument further by claiming that ethical statements have no basis in fact. He then expands on this theory by arguing that ethical statements are not only emotive, but also hortatory: in one sense they express feeling about an action, and in another sense they arouse feeling in others about that action (1936: 108). In doing so the speaker/author lets others know that they approve/disapprove of an action, and would like to encourage them to act accordingly. The author may choose to do so explicitly, by simply making a command, or implicitly, by sharing a moral statement with others.

Like Ayer, Stevenson also considers ethical statements fundamentally "extrascientific", that is to say they differ from scientific statements in that they aim to influence the behaviour of others (1944: 20). Stevenson argues that the implicitness of moral statements has the benefit of modifying the behaviour of others instead of creating an immediate awareness of the inability to obey an explicit command (1944: 22). Ethical terms can and do act in two ways: in the first, they are descriptive, in the sense that they describe the act in terms of its natural purpose. This is their most important function. In the second they are emotive, not only in the sense that they describe the speaker/author's attitude towards an action, but also in the sense that they suggest a course of action or a manner in which one should conduct oneself (Stevenson 1944: 206). According to Stevenson, ethical terms carry both a descriptive and an emotive meaning that cannot be easily untangled. Although vague, ethical terms are not

simply arbitrarily used, and cannot be replaced with non-ethical terms (1944: 207-08).

Theories such as Ayer's and Stevenson's have been influential, and follow in an anti-realist tradition which refutes the idea that truth has an intrinsic nature. Theorists in this tradition claim that the distinction between opinion and knowledge is unnecessary. Instead they claim that well-justified beliefs may be described as true, but they do not claim that they therefore *are* true (Rorty 1991: 24). Ethical subjectivism is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between ethics and communities, and rejects the ahistorical search for objective knowledge in favour of what Rorty calls "solidarity". Those who hold these views regard the beliefs they hold "so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed" (1991: 24). Even so, subjectivists¹¹ admit that at any time they might be confronted with a belief that opposes their own and is better-justified, and that it might be necessary to adjust accordingly (Rorty 1991: 23).

Theories regarded as subjectivist focus on the use of moral language to determine the value and progress of ethical judgements (*cf.* Rorty 1991: 28-29). In order to determine the moral value of Plutarch's *Lives* we will therefore have to pay close attention to their linguistic content, particularly the presence or absence of ethical terms. We will give him the benefit of the doubt, and start from the assumption, which is current in contemporary Plutarch scholarship, that he remains morally removed from his characters and adopts a persona of Platonic interest in the personal and historical circumstances that gave rise to their greatness.

¹¹ Rorty uses the term "pragmatist" to describe this position, which he argues is often misconstrued as relativism (1991: 23).

Does Plutarch give us reason enough to believe that he does not pass judgment on the characters whose lives he writes, that is to say that he merely presents historical persons for his students' moral consideration, rather than constructing these characters in such a way as to suit his psychagogic purposes? And furthermore, is he as careful with the characters of women as he is with men? The crux of the problem, and therefore its solution, thus lies at the intersection of these three genres: theoretical philosophy, popular philosophy, and biography.

1.2. INTERSECTIONS AND GENERIC BOUNDARIES

The *Lives*, however, deal primarily with powerful men, while women are secondary characters who support them.¹² In the theoretical- and popular-philosophical works of the *Moralia*, this is not always the case; Ismenodora in the *Amat.* is a rather curious example of a woman acting independently. There are other works in which women are the primary characters as well. The *Conj. praec.*, a collection of *chreiai* and *gnōmai* intended to guide the husband and wife through their marriage and towards a virtuous union, has a clear psychagogic aim that is intended mostly for women, though some parts are intended for the husband or for the couple as a unit. The text, written in the form of comparisons, gives practical advice on common problems the couple may face, such as anger, distribution of financial assets, and sex. How these precepts will have reached women in the ancient world is an important question, as is the scope of the audience and the author's intent. Similar questions may be asked of the *Cons. ux.*, a published letter from Plutarch to his wife, Timoxena, which focuses specifically on how to deal with grief and the loss of a loved one. Two

¹² Cf. Buszard's (2010) study on the speeches of women in the *Lives*, which raises some important points: 1) the women who speak are all from elite families; and 2) they only speak when given no other option, or when their men fail to act appropriately (2010: 112).

other texts with less clear psychagogic aims are the *Mulierum virtutes* and the (spurious) *Lacaenarum apophthegmata*, both of which present collections of women's deeds and sayings that ought to be considered brave and admirable. These are four works that directly relate to the lives of women and in which women are the main focus of the text, though other popular-philosophical works that are traditionally read as applicable to the male sphere can easily be brought in relation with them as texts on general psychagogic practice (e.g. *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur*, *De virtute et vitio*, *An virtus doceri possit*, and *De virtute morali*). Narrowing down the audience of the predominantly male-oriented texts in Plutarch's oeuvre is a rather easier task than saying anything at all about the audience of female-oriented texts, given what we know about women in the ancient world. It is however necessary to attempt to delineate Plutarch's audience before we proceed, in order to gain a clear idea of the type of woman Plutarch was writing for.

1.2.1. *Plutarch's (Female) Audience*

The question of Plutarch's audience may seem an easy one to answer, but recent suggestions on the topic are quite divergent and merit at least some cursory discussion. It may be useful to start from the position of the texts as literary works and thereby deduce that only those with access to both education and the text itself (i.e. members of the Greek-speaking male elite and a small group of wealthy women; cf. van Hoof 2014: 142; Thom 2012: 284-85) can be considered audience members, but this assumption rules out the spirit of popular philosophy, which aims at educating the public through philosophy. Thus, the scope and the demography of the potential audience expands immediately upon learning that Plutarch often travelled around areas of the Roman empire (and in fact was given Roman citizenship) to deliver public lectures (Beck 2014: 6; Karamanolis 2014; Perrin 1914: 1). Such lectures appear to have been quite popular in the Roman world as a form of entertainment

(Huizenga 2013: 52), though we cannot say what benefit the audience gained from listening to them. On the basis of this some, like Fantham, have argued that the oral tradition informed and shaped the literary tradition (1996: 214). Letters appear to have been one of the most popular genres, judging by the number of them that are extant (Huizenga 2013: 53). Plutarch's *Conj. praec.* and *Cons. ux.* are thus both most likely public letters that were written with a larger audience in mind, or at the very least edited after the initial private correspondence and then published.

As for the audience Plutarch himself had in mind, some of the texts examined here are addressed to women (*Cons. ux.*, *Mulier. virt.*, *Is. Os.*), some are addressed to men (the *Lives*), and some are addressed to either both or to neither sex explicitly (*Lacae. apoph.*, *Conj. praec.*, *Amat.*). All of the works take special interest in women's words and actions, and the effect this has on the men in their lives. This seems to be a central concern for Plutarch, and from this we may deduce that a female audience was expected even for those works that were aimed primarily at a male audience. The inclusion of women in male-oriented texts may also serve the purpose stated explicitly in *Conj. praec.*: "for your wife you must collect from every source what is useful... carrying it within your own self impart it to her, and then discuss it with her, and make the best of these doctrines her favourite and familiar themes" (145c; tr. Babbit 1928). Plutarch says the husband must be a *καθηγητής καὶ φιλόσοφος καὶ διδάσκαλος* (145c) for his wife, and he provides ample material to choose from in both the *Moralia* and the *Lives*. Huizenga comes to the same conclusion with regard to the female Pythagorean letters, stating that while the audience must ultimately be female, since they focus on the regulation of women's behaviour, we cannot say that they didn't sometimes reach their target via a male intermediary (2013: 54-55). Even so, a directly female audience is not completely out of the question. It is possible, for example, that women heard

these texts read aloud to them while they were engaged in repetitive domestic activities such as weaving, as women's entertainment after dinner, or as "educational entertainment" at a bridal shower (Huizenga 2013: 55).

Such an expanded audience, freed in some sense from the limitations of literacy, creates opportunities for speculation on just how far these works may have travelled down the social hierarchy. Morgan suggests that "popular philosophy" was popular by virtue of being in wide circulation and available to many citizens across the social spectrum (2007: 1-2). Despite the small audience for literary works in the ancient world, she argues that the texts were disseminated by other means, most notably orally, referring to Homer as a case in point, and deduces that popular philosophical texts with a moral aim had a "mass audience" (2007: 4).

To delineate Plutarch's audience, where do we then draw the line, if we draw one at all? I would suggest that the texts function on two levels, and thus that it would be useful to categorise the audience as 'primary' and 'secondary'. The primary audience is the audience that Plutarch has in mind when he writes a work, *i.e.* the literate elite and especially those with prior knowledge of philosophy. Given the rise of the new middle class (*equites*) in the 2nd century BCE, it is probable that they too form part of the primary audience. Members of this class were literate and upwardly mobile, and therefore probably interested in learning how to live in the socio-political climate populated thus far almost solely by the aristocracy.

In contrast to the literacy and relative wealth of the primary audience, the secondary audience is most likely an incidental audience that does not figure into Plutarch's consideration when he composes the text. This audience gains access to his work through oral performance – perhaps Plutarch's own public lectures or perhaps the performance of the work for entertainment purposes in

a private setting – and has little or no prior knowledge of philosophy, especially not technical knowledge. Some of the text’s content and aim is therefore likely to be lost on the secondary audience, but we cannot say that they will gain nothing from it. The secondary audience serves as an expansion of the primary audience, but I do not agree with Morgan that popular philosophy has a “mass audience” that includes slaves and the lowest classes, except in extraordinary circumstances where they came into contact with Plutarch’s work through a member or members of a higher class. Even so, the nature of Plutarch’s texts and the ease with which the majority of them can be read does indicate an aim at a larger audience, instead of indicating a lack of skill or shortage of imagination. In fact, most of the texts are highly rhetorical and Plutarch reminds us frequently that he has extensive philosophical knowledge, which we can see him display in *Amat.* and *Is. Os.* It is probably not by accident that of the texts in the Lamprias Catalogue that are lost, many are those that deal with especially high-philosophical themes.¹³ Fortunately, there are some theoretical-philosophical works extant that support the popular-philosophical works.

1.2.2. Methodology

Two other works from the *Moralia* are pertinent to the study of Plutarch’s psychagogic programme for women: *Is. Os.* and *Amat.*, neither of which can in good conscience be classified as popular-philosophical. Instead, they fall under Plutarch’s theoretical-philosophical works. *Is. Os.* is a complex text that incorporates elements of Egyptian religion as a vehicle through which Platonic metaphysics on the origin of the cosmos can be explained.¹⁴ In *Amat.* Plutarch expounds on the Platonic theory of love, and adds his own philosophical

¹³ For a discussion of Plutarch’s lost philosophical texts, see chapter 3.

¹⁴ Richter (2001: 191-92) discusses the reception of the text by scholars.

expertise in order to counterbalance the view that Platonic love is homoerotic (cf. Rist 2001). Both works deal (in part) with the metaphysics of Woman. As such they form the metaphysical basis of the psychagogy that appears in Plutarch's popular-philosophical works, as well as in the *Lives*, and in the image(s) of Woman that results from it. A close reading of these texts will reveal that they have much more in common than meets the eye; not only are all of them concerned with women, they all consider women's place in the lives of men and how they might influence the circumstances they find themselves in.

We are, however, ultimately also concerned with the details of the historical woman's life in the ancient world. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between Woman as a theoretical and theoreticised entity and the woman as the individual who exists in the world and experiences herself as a subjective being. Rabinowitz rightly criticizes the tendency in classical scholarship to treat 'women' as "some pre-existent singular entity" (1993: 8). Similarly, ancient philosophical theory treats Woman as an essential being,¹⁵ and it does not allow for differentiation with regards to race, class, sexuality, and other relevant factors.¹⁶ While this approach is by no means surprising given the nature of the production, dissemination and preservation of ancient texts, whose processes favoured elite men, it is problematic for the historian who hopes to learn from the literary record about the lives of women in the ancient world.

For these reasons it is necessary to contextualize the philosophical and biographical work of Plutarch, in order to create a framework against which to

¹⁵ It should not be assumed that Man is exempt from this essentialist treatment.

¹⁶ The acknowledgement of the complexity of identity formation and structures of oppression has been an important tool for feminist criticism. According to the theory of intersectionality the identity of a woman (or any person whatsoever, in fact) is fundamentally shaped by the intersections of her experiences with race, class, sexuality, nationality, etc. (Nash 2008: 2-4; Garry 2011: 827).

measure the author and his views. Plutarch, one of our most important literary sources for the lives of women in the early Imperial period, is here under question, and thus it stands to reason that other literary sources should be treated with like caution. In order to properly contextualize Plutarch an approach that gives the material record its due diligence is needed. An image of ancient women's lives and the socio-economic changes they experienced between the time of Plato and Plutarch, however vague, should be drawn, with which Plutarch's Woman can be compared.

The Woman presented in the popular-philosophical works of the *Moralia* is at first glance a contradiction. Plutarch's views on women are peculiar, to say the least. Yes, they are conservative, and at times even incompatible. In the *Conj. praec.* Plutarch suggests that a woman should be educated and should study philosophy (145c-d), but that she ought not to make any friends of her own (140d). Yet it is hard to doubt that Plutarch was unfamiliar with the philosophical tradition's scepticism of the ability of written material to convey philosophy (Hadot 1986: 448), which went as far back as Plato, whom we know Plutarch was very well acquainted with. It was best for the psychagogue to be a philosopher and a friend with whom the student could converse (Hadot 1986: 445; Glad 1995: 60). He also says in *Mulier. virt.* that he disagrees with Thucydides who says that "a good woman... ought to be shut up indoors and never go out" (242e), but in *Conj. praec.* he says that a good wife ought to "stay in the house and hide herself when [her husband] is away" (139c). There are also various incidents in *Lacae. apoph.* and *Mulier. virt.* in which women were not only seen in public, but seen baring their genitals in order to shame their sons. In the same texts women also often act with "manly" courage. These women are not only Spartans, and therefore the argument that different rules apply does not stand. These tensions may leave the reader with an incoherent idea of Plutarch's views on women, and the resulting conclusion may be that

Plutarch himself simply did not follow a strict paradigm when it came to his female students. This is not the case.

Bound within the tensions of the *Moralia* and the *Lives*, I will argue that there is a Woman to be found. The major texts on which this study focuses include the following: *Conj. praec.*, *Mulier. virt.*, *Cons. ux.*, *Lacae. apoph.*, *Is. Os.*, *Amat.*, *Caesar*, *Alexander*, *Antony*, *Pericles* and *Tiberius & Caius Gracchus*. The rationale for the works from the *Moralia* has already been discussed – these are works that deal especially with issues related to women – while the selection from the *Lives* features some of the most prominent women in Graeco-Roman biography: Aspasia, Olympias, Cornelia, Octavia, and Cleopatra.¹⁷ These women occupied a range of public and social spaces and as such are the closest to a representative example of womanhood we can hope to get from Plutarch. Where necessary, additional texts are consulted in the hopes of gaining a clear picture of Plutarch’s Woman. The texts will be examined and analysed thematically.¹⁸ In addition to a thematic analysis a close reading of each text will be done. Close reading emphasises the dependency of literary texts upon their socio-cultural contexts, and pays careful attention to the texture of the text, i.e. its structure and use of language (Whitmarsh 2004: 7; van Hoof 2012: 8-9; Nussbaum 1994: 7). Close reading takes into account various aspects of a text that together form part of the complete work; these aspects cannot stand alone, they interact with one another, and close reading takes this into consideration. One of these aspects that in theory ought to be particularly prominent in the *Moralia* is the “language of morality” (Morgan 2007: 191-206). In the language of morality,

¹⁷ It is worth noting that women have no single chapter dedicated to them in the much-anticipated *Blackwell Companion to Plutarch* (Beck 2014), and that none of these women are ever discussed in detail (if at all), and very rarely not as an accessory to a male character (*cf.* Beneker 2014: 507; Frazier 2014: 498; Nikolaidis 2014: 364; Schmitz 2014: 38).

¹⁸ Recently several studies have been done on themes such as anger, enthusiasm, religion and education within Plutarch (van Hoof 2010: 4).

certain words are associated with particular actions or characteristics over a sustained period of time and in many instances. Words that often appear in conjunction with other words may be used as synonyms or may indicate a moral condition (Morgan 2007: 195). The presence or absence of words that have particular moral connotations in Plutarch's *Moralia* may also serve as indicators of authorial imposition on the text where they appear in the *Lives*.

A further methodological consideration is the bridge between Plutarch's theoretical-philosophical and popular-philosophical works, and the extent to which Plutarch's Platonism gives way to the influence of "eclecticism" in the latter. How much he borrowed ideas from different schools with which he had come into contact as part of the formation of his own thought (*cf.* Malherbe 1992: 277) cannot be ignored, nor can the influence of Plato's works on Plutarch's philosophy. Both *Is. Os.* and *Amat.* show a strong Platonic influence and lend themselves to an interpretation which favours a Platonic-Stoic framework above all else. This philosophical framework undoubtedly influenced the formation of Plutarch's ideal Woman.

The final question we must raise concerns the historicity of Plutarch's Woman, and the possibility of success for his psychagogic programme in the socio-economic environment of the 1st century CE. Whether or not his pedagogic aims were tenable in the physical world is a central aspect of this study, as it finally determines the level of validity of Plutarch as a source for the historical circumstances for the lives of women in the ancient world.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

Any study of the socio-economic position of women in the ancient world can become very broad, and so it is necessary here to impose some restrictions even before attempting a summary. Firstly, it must be noted that 'women' as a category is not uniform¹⁹ and as such speaking of their social situation as a single irrefutable fact of existence is impossible. In a single society, say Athens, at any point in time there are different social classes divided by social and economic factors, and so we have to account for upper classes and lower classes, citizens, slaves and *metoikoi*, *hetairai* and *pornai*, all of whom would lead considerably different lives.²⁰ Not only is there a marked class distinction, there is also a fluctuation in the socio-economic and political position of women in different eras in the ancient world that needs to be taken into account when studying their lives. The issue is further complicated by differences between city-states and geographical areas; for example, for the lives of women in the Classical Period our sources are overwhelmingly skewed towards the Athenian record, especially when it comes to literary evidence.

¹⁹ Cf. Rabinowitz (1993: 8), who notes that it has long been a tendency in classical scholarship to treat 'women' as "some pre-existent singular entity". In recent scholarship, especially that of feminist classicists, much work has been done to abolish this idea and move towards a more complex understanding of the ancient female population. Even so, studies of homoeroticism tend to focus on male homosexuality and especially pederasty, while similar studies of lesbianism are in short supply; Rabinowitz says that feminist classicists have turned to gender studies, because "it is safer; by never studying women without men, such studies avoid the specter of lesbianism" (1993: 11).

²⁰ This important distinction was already recognised in 1975 by Pomeroy: "the women who are known to us from the formal literature of antiquity are mainly those who belonged to or associated with the wealthy or intellectually elite groups of society... I have felt that my task was to examine the history of *all* women..." (1975: xi; my emphasis).

The question of sources poses a further problem. The literary record has been generated almost exclusively by the male elite; this is true of any era in the ancient world. What was written by women is largely lost to us, and what is extant is often fragmentary or problematic for other reasons (*e.g.* in the case of the Pythagorean women's letters, where the question of authorship has been posed repeatedly). Literature is by no means a straightforwardly reliable source, even when it is without a doubt written by women on/for women. Working with literary sources poses the danger of interpretation, around which we must tread carefully. Who wrote the source, for whom, when, and why? Genre is often but not always helpful as a starting point to answer some of these questions.

We cannot however glean everything about women's lives in the ancient world from literary sources alone. In order to build a comprehensive view of what a woman's life may have been like and how she may have experienced it, it is necessary to look towards other types of sources. In this case material culture is especially helpful, as it can tell us a lot about women's lives and possessions, as well as about their ideological place and function in their societies. Grave sites, epithaphs, murals, statues, graffiti and inscriptions all offer views that may not be available or may be distorted in the literary record.

When we look towards the lives of women in the ancient Mediterranean, it is useful to keep in mind our objective: to establish to what extent Plutarch's ideal Woman can function in the socio-economic and political atmosphere of 1st century CE. I would like to extend the question somewhat to include the Classical Period, in particular Athens, to pose the question whether Plutarch's ideal Woman would be able to function in the most conservative city-state we

know of.²¹ In order to do so we must establish what the lives of women in the ancient world were like between the Classical Period and the 1st century CE by considering both the literary record and the material record. The literary record will be treated carefully and for the most part as a source of ideology rather than historical fact. A variety of genres will afford us a more nuanced view of the lives of ancient women, as is also the case with material culture. Focusing on only one genre or limiting our sources to only literary or material will necessarily limit our view of women's lives in the ancient Mediterranean. It is our aim to gain as honest and representative image of the ancient woman as is possible. This overview is however of necessity less extensive than the sources may allow it to be, and should serve only as a brief introduction to the study of the socio-economic and political position of women in the Graeco-Roman world. It would be impossible to give a simple and brief account of the lives of women here, nevertheless, the attempt should be made. What follows is intended as an overview of the socio-economic status of women in the ancient world, and the changes they experienced between the 5th century BCE and the 1st century AD.

2.2. THEORY AND THE BIOLOGY OF WOMEN

In the ancient world women were regarded as wild and ungovernable.²² They are characterised by ancient authors, philosophers and medical practitioners as the opposite of man (Parker 2012: 107). These arguments come to rest largely

²¹ In chapter 3 the intent of this question will become even clearer when we consider the influence of Plato's philosophical views on women on Plutarch.

²² This was apparently symbolised by the rites of the *arkteia* in Athens during which they dressed up as bears (Lane Fox 2006: 180), though the full details and meaning of the ritual are largely unknown to us (Stehle 2012: 197-98). Aristotle says wild animals are naturally inferior to tame animals, and he follows this with the statement that woman therefore is inferior and subject to man (*Pol.* 1254b5-12).

on a biological basis of the difference between Man and Woman, an idea that endured and found new proponents in the sixteenth century.²³ According to these theories, the womb is what distinguishes Woman from man and thereby what makes her inferior to him. Ancient theory took many views of Woman's intrinsic nature, almost all based on this basic difference, and sought to clarify what the womb was and how and why it functioned in the body of the woman. The Pythagorean Table of Opposites sees Woman as empty and unfulfilled in direct opposition to Man, who is perfect and unchanging (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 986a21-6):²⁴

Bounded	Unbounded
Odd	Even
One	Many
Right	Left
Male	Female
Resting	Moving
Straight	Crooked
Light	Darkness
Good	Bad
Square	Oblong

This opposition of male to female, which places the Woman on the wrong side of the categorical divide, held the imaginations of philosophers for centuries, but it is perhaps Aristotle who most clearly attempts to describe why Woman is different/inferior to Man. In *De generatione animalium* he describes Man as the active life force, while Woman is the passive receiver of seed through which life is generated. Aristotle draws this conclusion from the man's ability to produce

²³ Medical practitioners of the middle ages argued that the difference between Man and Woman was essential for their practice. According to Paracelsus, the sexes are ruled by different elements, and Johann Baptist van Helmont agreed that the element that rules the female is the womb (Stolberg 2003: 289). Simone de Beauvoir quotes the phrase *tota mulier in utero* in *The Second Sex*, but does not attribute it to anyone in particular (2010: 1).

²⁴ cf. Parker (2012: 107) for a more detailed discussion of the Pythagorean Table of Opposites and Woman's position therein.

semen, which he believed to be superior in Man because of its ability to create something outside of itself (*Gen. An.* 716a2-18). Semen in Man and Woman is different, and therefore conception does not occur from the mixture of two semens. He also argues that the Woman who derives no pleasure from sex will not conceive because she has no nourishment for the *dynamis* to draw on, but the Woman who does have pleasure will also not conceive because the 'menstrual liquid' will wash the semen away. Instead he suggests that she conceive only "after the evacuation is over". The remaining menstrual fluid then develops into the foetus (727b7-34). Because Man is by nature hotter than Woman he has the ability to create sperm, which contains *pneuma* (air/breath), while Woman lacks this ability and therefore can only contribute raw matter (*i.e.* menstrual fluid) to conception (729b15-21). Life and animation (the *dynamis*, "the active and efficient ingredient") comes from the Man, who therefore must be superior: "regarding the male *qua* active and causing movement, and the female *qua* passive and being set in movement" (729b13-15; tr. Peck 1963).

Woman's role in conception was a hotly debated topic in ancient scholarship, and in fact there were some who contended that Woman does contribute seed to conception. The debate revolved primarily around the question of which fluid in Woman corresponds to semen in Man. The theories in this regard are especially intriguing given that the mammalian ovum was only discovered in the 19th century. Ps.-Aristotle, for example, suggested that twins are born when both the Man and the Woman emit more seed than is necessary; the second foetus is formed from what remains after the first one is formed, and it forms in a different part of the uterus. He also suggested that women have a tube similar to the penis but inside the body from where the seed is emitted (*Hist. an.* 10, 636b15-37b7), while Empedocles posited the seeds of the mother and father as two incomplete pieces that create a whole when put together (frs. 57-

65). Many of these theories take the stance that female pleasure is necessary for conception (Parker 2012: 115-17).²⁵

Other medical-philosophical literature²⁶ refers to Woman as sponge-like and therefore naturally more moist than Man:

I say that a woman's flesh is more sponge-like and softer than a man's: since this is so, the woman's body draws moisture both with more speed and in greater quantity from the belly than does the body of a man.

(Hippoc. *Mul.* 1.1; tr. Hanson 1975)

Being "wet" is not a good thing for the Woman, as excess fluid in the body can cause all sorts of diseases connected to the menses (Hippoc. *Nat. puer.* 495-96).²⁷

During menstruation she also expels heat along with excess moisture, and this makes her cooler than her male counterpart (Parker 2012: 110). Expelling excess moisture is good, but the same cannot be said for excess heat when being hotter is deemed the "better" of the two conditions. It is, after all, where men gain their generative power from.

At the same time women are said to leak because their flesh is more porous. Unlike men, they "leak" menstrual blood, sexual lubricant, lochial discharge after giving birth, and yeast infections (Parker 2012: 111). Plato compares this tendency of the Woman to leak to the weak, ignorant, irrational soul:

... the part of the soul where the desires are, the unrestrained and leaky part, he compared to a perforated jar, because it cannot be filled.

(*Gorg.* 493b; tr. Lamb 1925)

²⁵ The stance, though at first glance beneficial for women's sexuality, is not without its problems. Parker briefly mentions the implications of the need for pleasure in conception in the case of rape (2012: 116-17), but does not elaborate. The impact of this theory can still be seen in contemporary discourse surrounding rape.

²⁶ Many medical texts have a philosophical basis that aims to apply the theory practically, while others, such as Aristotle, approach questions of biology philosophically. It is therefore not quite as easy to say of a medical text that it is strictly speaking not philosophical.

²⁷ At the same time, being "too dry" is also not good, as it causes the semen to wither away and fall out before the proper time (Ps.-Arist. *Hist. an.* 636b11-19).

This constant discharge from the Woman, specifically from the womb (though again, the two can hardly be separated at this point), thus leaves the Woman hollow and in need of being filled. The truth of this statement can be no more obvious than in the myth of Pandora's box, which Parker reminds us is actually a jar (2012: 112; *cf.* Hes. *Op.* 94). In fact, some images visualize the womb as an upside-down *pithos*, which was directly connected to the mouth (Parker 2012: 112). This idea is reinforced by fertility tests that place a strong scent near the vagina. If it can be smelled on the woman's breath, she is fertile (Hippoc. *Nat. mul.* 96).²⁸

All of these perceived irregularities within Woman, bound up with the womb and placing her in direct opposition to man, inevitably cause problems.²⁹ Because she is restless, imperfect and in need of being filled, the animal that drives her to sex (the uterus)³⁰ starts to wander around the body if she does not conceive within the proper time (Pl. *Tim.* 91a-c). In doing so the womb prevents the Woman from breathing and causes madness (*hysteria*); the cure is regular intercourse and pregnancy (Hippoc. *Mul.* 1.7; *Nat. mul.* 3, 8, 44; Ps.-Arist. *Hist. an.* 582b23-5).

All of this leads to the crux of the matter: according to the medical-philosophical view, Woman's role in society is primarily, though not solely, reproductive. If this is the case, then the best way to deal with a woman,

²⁸ *Cf.* Parker (2012: 112) for more ancient fertility tests.

²⁹ According to Hippocrates, the womb is the cause of all "womanly" (γυναικεῖα) diseases (*Loc. hom.* 47; tr. Potter 1995: 94). See also *Nat. mul.*, which treats the diseases caused by the womb extensively throughout the text.

³⁰ In Plato's account there is a cognate animal in men's bodies, but it causes little or no trouble (*Tim.* 91a). History soon forgets this animal in favour of the more troublesome female animal.

particularly a citizen woman,³¹ is to tame her through marriage and cure her of *hysteria* through constant pregnancy. The latter can only be achieved through the former; if one of Woman's central roles is reproductive then she is expected to bear citizen sons and heirs (Pomeroy 1975: 60, 62). As a vessel, she thus becomes politicised and keeping her under control is of vital importance, not only for the household, but also for the state.

Despite the rather dreary picture of women's biology as perceived by men this paints, it is certainly not all as black and white as that. Philosophical work such as that of Aristotle takes a largely negative view of the biology of Woman and how this influences her well-being and social position in relation to Man. However, there is ample evidence in the practical medical texts (even those with a philosophical basis) themselves that women were considered knowledgeable where their own bodies are concerned; several practical medical texts state a shared belief that women knew almost instantly if they had become pregnant (Ps.-Arist. *Hist. an.* 582b10-12; Hippoc. *Nat. puer.* 490; Gal. *Nat. fac.* 3.3.150). In some cases the doctor was even required to "defer to women's superior knowledge" (King 1995: 141). Parker briefly discusses the aim of ancient medical texts on Woman, identifies in them genuine concern for the well-being of the female patient, and deduces that Woman is not seen simply as a tool for reproduction. He also writes that women were frequently well-respected medical practitioners themselves, so much so, in fact, that statues were erected in their honour (2012: 122-23).

2.3. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT: CA. 500 BCE-100 CE

³¹ The citizen woman should not be confused or conflated with the citizen man; in the citizen woman the rights of the citizen are not conferred to the woman but through the woman (*cf.* Henry & James 2012: 85 on the legal rights of citizen women).

2.3.1. Greece

The social position of women in the classical world is often presented as being only slightly above slaves, and quite far beneath men. This opinion is so pervasive that women are often treated in the same broad category as slaves and servants.³² Both women and slaves are after all disenfranchised groups, in some ways similar, though simultaneously distinctly different. The prevailing view remains that women, like slaves, were property that in some sense could be sold.³³ This view comes largely from our sources of Athens, many of which are literary. In reality a free Athenian woman in the Classical period could only be sold into slavery by her guardian (*kyrios*) if she was unmarried and unpure (i.e. she had lost her virginity; Pomeroy 1975: 57). Characterising a woman as the rightful property of a free man has a certain sense of truth behind it, as she would always be under the guardianship of her nearest male relative, whether that be her father, her husband, her brother or her son. Indeed, her husband (her *kyrios* at the time) had the right to pass her along to a new husband when he felt the time was right (Brulé 2003: 118). That a woman had very little control over the course of her own life is by now an old and tired refrain (*cf.* Pomeroy 1975: 61; Brulé 2003: 121), but its truth seems to be wearing thin.

By treating women as a homogenous group akin to slaves we risk losing sight of the complex gender, class and racial power dynamics that inform and shape social norms. The free Athenian woman in all likelihood saw fewer similarities

³² Examples of this sort of treatment can be found in Pomeroy's massively influential book *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (1975) and Joshel & Murnaghan's compilation *Women & Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture* (2001). The latter includes several useful discussions of the conceptual relationship between the Woman and the slave, and their (shared) relationship to the free Man.

³³ It might be more accurate to say that women are vessels through which property can be transferred from one (male) generation to the next (Henry & James 2012: 87; Levick 2012: 100); it is from this that the daughter in Athens gains the name *epiklēros* (Pomeroy 1975: 61). For more on the analogy of women as vessels, see above and Parker (2012: 112).

between herself and the slave woman who served her than she saw between herself and her male relatives. As Schaps notes, not being enslaved and not being barbarian puts a free Athenian woman on the right side of two out of three dichotomies: *human-male-free* : *beast-female-slave* (1998: 162-163). An Athenian woman born free therefore most likely did not consider herself enslaved or disenfranchised to the same extent we do today.³⁴ Perhaps that is because she had more freedoms than we are wont to assign to her; certainly the literary record paints a bleak picture, but the material record adds dimensions that expand our understanding of the life of the free Athenian woman as rich and in all probability quite fulfilling.

In Athens the *telos* of every free woman was to marry, and it was her duty to fulfil her role as a citizen woman by being a faithful wife and a loving mother (Pomeroy 1975: 62). In Sparta something of the opposite is true: a tax was imposed on bachelors, which led to the practice of polyandry.³⁵ More married men meant the birth of more sons, emphasising again the role of the woman as childbearer,³⁶ but moving the focus away from the dangers of female sexuality

³⁴ Schaps describes what distinguishes the free woman from the slave: she cannot be sold, she cannot be detained, she does not get beaten, the wealth attached to her affords her certain benefits within her family and marriage, she has freedom of speech and judgment, she is protected from sexual abuse, and she probably had slaves (1998: 167-176). Some of these points are discussed in more detail below.

³⁵ Conversely, the Athenians legalised polygamy after the Peloponnesian war due to the lack of men, making it lawful for a man to have children by more than one woman, provided only one of them is a citizen woman (Diog. Laert. 2.5.26).

³⁶ Focusing on the woman as childbearer is a significant factor in the study of women in the ancient world, as it often excludes post-menopausal women. As a result of the focus on women's duties as childbearers, it has been suggested that older women had a greater amount of freedom, as their sexuality no longer posed a risk to society (Bremmer 1987: 192; Garland 1990: 244). In contrast, Pratt (2000: 43-49) argues that older women did not necessarily lose their social value along with their ability to bear children, but rather that their social function changed. The value of old women (and women in general) in ancient Greece is therefore much

the Athenians were so keenly aware of. Removing children from maternal care at age seven meant that Spartan women's lives looked quite different to Athenian women's (Schaps 1998: 184). The Spartans uniquely also believed that a woman who exercises will bear healthier children (Brulé 2003: 139-40), and they allowed their women to exercise in the nude, a custom the Athenians did not approve of (Schaps 1998: 180). Sparta's attitude towards women was far more relaxed than at Athens, but we should by no means assume that it was an egalitarian society (Schaps 1998: 180).

The Classical Athenian woman typically had no choice in her betrothal, and as a wife she had little or no say in her marriage (Schaps 1998: 178), though she could initiate its dissolution (Schaps 1998: 166, 170). It also seems likely that the inclusion of the dowry and its relative size afforded the woman at least some small amount of power within the household. In Plato's *Leg.* dowries are abolished because they lead to arrogance in women in servitude in men (774c). Similarly, Plutarch warns a husband to "pay heed to her position" instead of trying to humble a wife of noble birth or wealth as one might try to break in a horse (*Conj. praec.* 139b). In other Greek city-states from as early as the Classical period and in Rome women had varying levels of participation in the organisation of their marriage, including choice of partner (Brulé 2003: 153; Henry & James 2012: 88-89). Papyri from the early Hellenistic period onwards show marriages contracted directly between the bride and groom, even in Athens (Schaps 1998: 178n86). Nevertheless, it is believed that marriage for the most part is primarily an arrangement between men for political, social and/or

more complex than simply their ability to bear children, as women also produced textiles, acted as midwives, wet-nurses and medical practitioners, etc.

economic gain; love certainly has no place in it (Brulé 2003: 154).³⁷ This furthers the view that many marriages were loveless partnerships akin to that of Socrates and Xanthippe, in which the wife hardly plays a role in the greater scheme of her husband's life. In Plato's *Phd.*, Socrates sends Xanthippe home with their son and prefers to spend his last hours in the company of his male companions (60a).

Socrates and Xanthippe seem like the perfect example of the traditional view that men did not care for their wives. That this is a reliable inference to make from what is known about Socrates and Xanthippe's relationship is however uncertain, and in fact even in the most critical source, Xenophon, Socrates appears appreciative of his wife despite her disagreeable nature, or rather because of it:

I observe that men who wish to become expert horsemen do not get the most docile horses but rather those that are high-mettled, believing that if they can manage this kind, they will easily handle any other. My course is similar. Mankind at large is what I wish to deal and associate with; and so I have got her, well assured that if I can endure her, I shall have no difficulty in my relations with all the rest of human kind.

(*Symp.* 2.10; tr. Marchant & Todd 1968)

Men in fact seemed to have a great deal of affection for their wives, daughters and other female relatives in very many instances, so much so in fact that fighting for their women was often used as a rallying cry in times of war (Schaps 1982: 196-97).³⁸ Protecting their women was one of the primary things

³⁷ The possibility that affection might develop does of course exist, but it is never of primary concern, and even when it is present the man does not make it public for fear of taunting (Brulé 2003: 155-57).

³⁸ The question may be asked what the men are protecting their women from, and here the simplest answer may be the right one: in many cases the women on the losing side of a war would be raped and then sold into slavery, where they might have to work as *pornai* (Schaps 1982: 203-04). It would therefore be reasonable to argue that in protecting the women the men were protecting themselves and their property, which their sons by their wives were to inherit. Cole's discussion of the Greek verbs used in relation to sexual assault does however suggest that there was in some cases a genuine concern for the effect of the crime on the victim: in the

men saw themselves as fighting for, and sometimes protecting women even caused the friction, as in the case of the Macedonians and Persians. Herodotus claims that the King of Macedon slaughtered the Persian ambassadors because they got too close to the women, creating a diplomatic dilemma (*Hist.* 5.18-21). Schaps carefully evaluates the literary evidence and surmises that in some cases the women managed to persuade the men to take a certain action, but that this doesn't translate into women's active participation in the dialogue (1982: 198). It certainly does give the impression that the men weren't all as cold towards their wives as Socrates often appears to have been.

Regardless of marital affection, the established view holds that almost all major decisions within the household were made by the father or husband, including whether to expose an unwanted child, most often a girl (Pomeroy 1975: 62; Lane Fox 2006: 178). Exposing a girl was initially and primarily a financial decision. The father had to provide a dowry for each of his daughters according to his means and larger dowries meant better (or "more desirable") suitors (Pomeroy 1975: 63). According to this argument, it was therefore better to have fewer daughters (*i.e.* to expose some daughters but not sons as often), but neither the material nor the literary record supports this claim. Votive reliefs from Classical Athens often show deities (especially Apollo, Artemis and Leto) with their families. In these reliefs female offspring are often as numerous or even more so than male offspring. Ridgway asserts that this may reflect the reality of the Athenian household, and as a result concludes that the material evidence in this case does not support an argument for female infanticide (1987: 406). Furthermore, considering the high mortality rate in the ancient world (roughly half of all children born did not make it to adulthood) in conjunction with the

translation of the verbs ὀβριζέειν (outrage), αἰσχύνειν (shame) and ἀρπάζειν (seize – also used of abduction, an equally abominable crime) with a female object(s) this type of crime is consistently condemned for the negative effects it has on the victim (1984: 98).

overwhelming literary evidence that the Greeks wanted to have large numbers of children and mourned their loss, Ingalls concludes that it is highly unlikely that they practiced infanticide with any rate of regularity whatsoever, for male or female newborns, even when the obligation of dowries for daughters is taken into account (2002: 247-52).

Though the dowry was technically not a woman's property (it belonged to her *kyrios*), it was intended for her support and as such it was expected to remain intact throughout her lifetime. In the case of divorce the groom would be required to return the dowry, thus ensuring that she could remarry (Pomeroy 1975: 63; Schaps 1998: 170). According to Pomeroy, Athenian women in the Classical period were not allowed to own any property apart from what was collected in their trousseaux; this was limited by law to three dresses and a collection of small items such as jewellery (1975: 63). However, Pomeroy here quotes Plutarch's *Sol.* (20.4) as the source for this law, and since Plutarch's use of historical material for moral purposes is under question, we should treat this source with caution. In any case, outside of Athens women most likely did have varying levels of ownership of their property, including her inheritance and her dowry. This was particularly the case at Gortyn (Schaps 1979: 58-60). It is not uncommon for archaeologists to find jewellery, dress pins and cosmetic boxes (*e.g.* a *pyxis*) during the excavation of houses and grave sites. These items are often made from materials such as bone and ivory, and are richly decorated (Nevett 2010: 12-14).

With regards to women's property and their engagement in activities of exchange, Lyons identifies an ideological distinction between 'male wealth' and 'female wealth'. The latter is generally identified with soft consumable goods such as food and textiles (economic spheres that women were particularly active in; see below), while the former is identified with hard goods such as

metal (2003: 93-94). In her analysis of texts from the archaic and Classical periods, Lyons notes a certain anxiety over women crossing the boundaries between *being exchanged* and *exchanging*, and the power-dynamics that shift along with this transgression of social norms and allows women to become agents of exchange, a role traditionally ear-marked for men (2003: 95). The ability to exercise the small amount of economic power they have is directly related to their role in the household, and because of this Lyons identifies the anxiety over women's exchanging of goods as a mechanism to incorporate the wife as a necessary and contributive member of the *oikos* she marries into. Another possibility, according to Lyons, is that this anxiety stems from the recognition of women's inherent alienation within their families, which leads to distrust (2003: 127). The anxiety over women's illegitimate exchange extends therefore naturally to her body. The Greek male elite has a certain obsession with their lineage and the legitimacy of their heirs, which imprints itself on all aspects of their ideology, and Lyons sees that here also (2003: 127-28). As objects of exchange – 'property', in a sense – women never truly belong to either the family they are born to, or those they marry into. Similarly, the property they exchange is not automatically theirs to exchange, even when they are its producers.

In the Graeco-Roman world the aristocratic woman did not typically have the need to engage in tasks that supplied income for her household, as poorer women did, but when she did perform household duties they were the same tasks a slave was likely to perform, as it was their duty to supervise the household slaves. As a result, Pomeroy deduces that women spent most of their time indoors and their economic contributions were undervalued (1975: 71). The lavish tombstones donated to some nurses and wet-nurses indicate however a great deal of affection for them. On the tombstones they are often

depicted with their former charge and described as *χρηστή* and/or *φίλη*.³⁹ Nurses in tragedy are frequently depicted as caring and concerned over the well-being of the children in their care; the nurse in Euripides' *Medea* is perhaps the most well-known example. Further indication of their value is the fact that some were freed (Brock 1998: 337; *IG II*² 1559.60). That women's labour was considered less useful and valuable is therefore not easy to proclaim as straightforwardly true, especially because in many cases their contributions to and involvement in economic activities were necessary for the continued functioning of society, rather than simply being a way to keep them busy.

Women of most (if not all) classes were involved in textile production, which was a major industry in the ancient world (Vivante 2007: 105).⁴⁰ Weaving also offered women an opportunity for socialization in the home, making it an especially attractive – but suspicious – female task (Vivante 2007: 108).⁴¹ According to Xenophon, Aristarchus complained to Socrates about several of his female relatives who had moved into his house for protection, but had become a financial burden for him, to which Socrates suggested they should be put to work as spinners and weavers, tasks they know from their training in slave supervision. Aristarchus apparently took Socrates' advice to the great benefit of all involved (*Mem.* 2.7.7-12). The production of textiles could be divided into several categories, such as wool-working, dyeing, sewing, weaving, and washing.⁴² Some of these areas became professionalised, and the

³⁹ See for example *IG II*² 11647, 12242, 12632, 12815 and 12816 (Brock 1994: 336n4).

⁴⁰ Textile manufacture was not exclusively a female enterprise, as recent scholarship has shown. Men, especially male slaves, were involved in manufacturing canvas for ships' sails, are referred to as "professionals" and may have been active in other areas of textile work as well (Lyons 2003: 104-05).

⁴¹ Weaving becomes a metaphor for women's deceit in literary sources (Vivante 2007: 108).

⁴² See *IG II*² 1556.28, 11254, 1672.70-71, *IG I*² 473, and *SEG* 18-36 B62 (Brock 1994: 338n12, 339n21).

products of their labour could in many cases turn a profit (Brock 1994: 338), as Aristarchus' female relatives do for him.

While upper class women probably did not need to take part in economic labour, they did supervise it, and women of the lower classes who did need to work had a variety of opportunities available to them. In keeping with their traditional role as care-takers and nurturers, they could work as wet nurses and midwives for the elite. Some of these women may have been highly educated and were closely involved in rearing and educating the children in their care (Vivante 2007: 96-99). There were at least some nurses who were Spartan, not all of them slaves, and it is possible that they were sought after because of their level of education (Brock 1994: 339).⁴³ Women who were not suited to or interested in child-rearing most likely worked as textile manufacturers or as food producers. The latter seems to have been most suited to women of the lower classes, upper class women rarely partook in food preparation and sale (Brock 1994: 338-39). Women were probably involved in all stages of the process, from field work, herding and hunting animals to grinding grain for beer and bread and selling the finished products (Vivante 2007: 99-103). Women are known to have traded in the market in various foodstuffs including bread, beer, fruit and vegetables (Brock 1994: 339).⁴⁴ There is further evidence from inscriptions that at least some women worked as cobblers, gilders, potters and groomers (Brock 1994: 342).⁴⁵ As Brock notes, these occupations would in many cases take women out of the home (1994: 345).

⁴³ See *IG II²* 9112, the epigraph of Malicha of Cythera, which Brock argues might be read as evidence for nursing as a lucrative enough vocation to inspire migration to Athens (1994: 339n22). Midwives were also likely to have some medical knowledge, and Phanostrate is referred to as a *ιατρὸς* (in the masculine form) along with being a midwife. Her tombstone is elaborate and suggests that she was a woman of status (*IG II²* 6873; Brock 1994: 340 & n23).

⁴⁴ See *IG II²* 1554.40, 1558.67, 1561.27, 12073, 1570.73 (Brock 1994: 339n18, 339n20).

⁴⁵ See *IG II²* 1578.5, *SIG³* 1177, *ARV²* 571.73 and 658.29, *SEG XVIII* 36 B91 (Brock 1994: 342n33).

According to Pomeroy, wealthy women sent slaves to fetch water, they rarely went out of the house to the fountain or the market themselves (1975: 72). When they did go out, they wore veils and were accompanied by a male relative or slave (Lane Fox 2006: 181), though the use of the veil appears to have been drastically reduced in the early Roman Imperial period (Llewellyn-Jones 2007: 252).⁴⁶ It is also unlikely that women spent quite as much time inside the house as many scholars, including Pomeroy, would like to suggest. Women's work alone would take them out of the home on occasion, the regularity depends on the occupation. In the textual sources there is a clear tension between an ideal of the secluded woman and descriptions of instances where women went outside the house to attend festivals, funerals (public and private), women's parties, gather in the streets, visit relatives in prison, and fetch water at the fountain; in the latter case it seems especially likely that many free women in Classical Athens fetched their own water (Brock 1994: 339n16). Not all of these activities were guaranteed to be exclusively female and certainly some socialising happened (Pratt 2000: 51; Brock 1994: 346). Even if women were quite secluded, this is unlikely to refer to any class other than the aristocrats, since women of the lower classes probably out of economic necessity spent a large amount of time outside in the markets and fields, where they came into contact with a range of people, including unknown men. Outside of Greece the women of Hellenistic Alexandria certainly had much more freedom to move about the city, albeit still accompanied by slaves (Fantham et al. 1994: 141), and

⁴⁶ Llewellyn-Jones contends that the veil may be read as a liberating garment, "rendering the woman a 'non-person' beneath layers of clothes", and as an extension of the domestic space, it both protects the woman from the prying eyes of outsiders and allows her to leave the *oikos* and enter the public sphere wherein she can thereby be more active (2007: 256-57). Bonfante disagrees that the veil was quite as ubiquitous as Llewellyn-Jones would have us think, asserting instead that women may have veiled their heads, but we scant have evidence for Greek women covering their faces in the style of the modern Islamic *burqa*, as Llewellyn-Jones suggests (2006: 287).

evidence of their economic activity is abundant especially in the material record.

In Classical Greece it is believed that women's economic dealings were generally limited to the value of a bushel of barley (Lane Fox 2006: 181), though their ability to make economic transactions and control property increased as their wealth increased during the Hellenistic era and onwards (*cf.* Biemann 2012). The so-called 'law of the medimnus' is however only attested in two sources: Isaeus 10.10⁴⁷ and Aristophanes' *Eccl.* 1024-1025, and has been the subject of some scholarly concern (Hunter 1994: 22). It is possible and even likely that women in Classical Athens had the ability to carry out a range of transactions with the implicit consent of the *kyrios*, which allowed them to act with relative economic freedom. Women's economic contributions to society, while considered in the realm of menial tasks, were therefore important not just for their own upkeep, but also for the effective functioning of society. The same cannot be said of their political participation.

In politics, Classical Athenian women were more or less side-lined. That is not to say that they were not of political value; on the contrary, the laws of Classical Athens show that women played an essential role in the political dealings of the time, just as their economic contributions were essential but restricted. Their participation in the political climate was however not one of active involvement, but of passive submission. In effect, women occupied the parts of pawns in political games. Many marriages were formed out of necessity, either political or economical (Henry & James 2012: 85). Athenian women were not full citizens (Henry & James 2012: 85), but they were essential for the bearing of the next generation of Athenian males, and thus they preoccupied the male

⁴⁷ ὁ γὰρ νόμος διαρρήδην κωλύει παιδὶ μὴ ἐξεῖναι συμβάλλειν μηδὲ γυναικὶ πέρα μεδίμνου κριθῶν.

imagination. Pomeroy attributes to this sense of protectiveness the seclusion of the woman in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE (1975: 71-72).⁴⁸

The political situation of the Hellenistic and Imperial woman is quite different, especially in areas outside of Greece. Egyptian queens such as Berenice II and Cleopatra VII wielded enormous political and economic power, as did Macedonian royal women such as Alexander's mother Olympias, and the women of the upper classes were inspired to emulate them. Several elite women of the time were awarded magistracies (Fantham et al. 1994: 155). Coins from the early Imperial period show women in the Greek provinces who attained some of the highest offices; Ulpia Carminia Claudiana is commemorated as *stephanephoros* at Attuda in Turkey (CIG 2782), Secunda was *prytaneus* of Cymae, Flavia Asclepia became *strategos* of Germe, Marcia Aurelia Glaucia was *grammateus* of Tralles, and Menodora of Pamphylia was gymnasiarch and *demiourgos* amongst other titles (MacMullen 1980: 213-14).⁴⁹ These women who became public figures were often also known for their generosity as benefactors to the city (Bielmann 2012: 239).

Due in part to her intended seclusion and to the impossibility of her participation in politics, a girl in Classical Athens received no formal education and was lucky to learn to read if she lived in an aristocratic household with a literate mother or slave willing to teach her (Lane Fox 2006: 180). Even so, there are well-known instances of women, both aristocratic and freed (in the latter case mostly *hetairai*), who had considerable knowledge and were respected for their intellectual achievements. In Classical Athens perhaps the most famous of these is Aspasia, a metic who became the partner of Pericles and whose

⁴⁸ This protectiveness is also mirrored in the law that regards the woman as a perpetual minor, in effect simply another child of her husband (Pomeroy 1975: 74).

⁴⁹ See *IGRom* 3.800-802 on Menodora and her family's wealth and influence.

influence on him is legendary. Plutarch quotes sources that claim she had “rare political wisdom”, so much so that Socrates took his pupils to visit her, and he says that she was a respected teacher of rhetoric (*Per.* 24.3-4; tr. Perrin 1916). Plato even says that Aspasia composed Pericles’ famous funeral oration (*Menex.* 249c). Plato’s own mother, Perictione, is said to have been a Pythagorean philosopher (Waithe 1987: 86-71).⁵⁰

Despite the ideal of the domestic woman, we also have records of some women who performed their poetry in public in Athens during the Classical Period. Women such as Telesilla, Myrtis and Praxilla were admired for their poetry in antiquity and wrote on a diverse array of topics. Telesilla’s reputation suggests that she wrote martial poetry, while Myrtis, whose works are lost to us, probably focused on mythological themes, and Praxilla wrote drinking songs in addition to choral odes and hymns (Plant 2004: 2, 33, 36, 38). These women were relatively well-known in the ancient Mediterranean, as the survival of their poetry suggests. While the Athenians were unwilling to educate their women during the Classical period, their attitude towards educated women was not unilaterally negative. Female poets were respected in antiquity; Sappho’s reputation even within Athens speaks for itself.⁵¹

Outside of Athens it is often difficult to say anything definitive about women’s education, especially in the Classical period. We know that Spartan girls were by law prescribed a public education similar to those of Spartan boys (Deslauriers 2012: 352). During the Hellenistic period the prevalence of

⁵⁰ This theory is well-known, but has been questioned frequently (*cf.* Plant 2004: 76; Deslauriers 2012: 346). See chapter 5 for more detailed discussion of Pythagorean women.

⁵¹ Sappho was so well-known and respected in the ancient world that not only the literary record but also the material record attests to her popularity; there are at least four depictions on vases from the 5th century BCE of a poet widely believed to be Sappho, some bear inscriptions identifying her directly (Yatromanolakis 2001: 159-160).

educated women seems to have spread, and we find an unprecedented number of extant texts celebrating female poets, describing their participation in festivals, and papyri containing the work of female poets such as Erinna, Nossis and Corinna (Fantham et al. 1994: 163-67). There is also reason to believe that at least one poetess, Hedyle, originated from Athens as early as the latter half of the 4th century BCE (Plant 2004: 53). Though only five lines of Hedyle's poem *Scylla* are left to us, Plant argues that it is of great literary value (2004: 53-54).⁵² The content of these fragments shows that female poets were every bit as daring and inventive as their male contemporaries, and that they sometimes performed in spaces reserved for male entertainment.

It is however considered common knowledge that women were not allowed at symposia or dinner parties, where men drank, told stories, played drinking games, and perhaps most importantly, made connections and talked about business. At least, no respectable women were allowed (Fantham et al. 1994: 280). This would seem to be largely untrue, and in fact we find evidence from as early as the Homeric epics that aristocratic women not only attended such occasions, but even at times occupied roles of power within them. Burton refers to the fact that Odysseus has to appeal to Arete for his passage home at *Od.* 7.136-43, and to Helen's very active participation in symposia after her return from Troy at *Od.* 4.219-64 as key examples of women's involvement in symposia (1998: 145). While the Classical period did include a marked restriction on the movement of women, there are a few notable women who did appear to have attended dinner parties, including Aspasia (though her presence as (former) *hetaira* certainly would have been less scandalous) and women in the Pythagorean communities. We know that Spartan women even in the Classical

⁵² According to Plant (2004: 54), Hedyle leads the evolution of *Scylla* "from monster to human, beast to beauty" in the extant literature.

Period consumed wine publicly and probably attended symposia freely (much to Athenian distaste; Neils 2012: 161). By the late 4th century and onward the restrictions on women's participation in broader society became ever fewer, and we know, for example, that Hipparchia (aristocrat, wife of the Cynic Crates and a philosopher herself) attended symposia frequently (Burton 1998: 148). There are also other writings (such as Theocritus' *Id.*) that suggest that some of the women attending symposia were free women and that they did so regularly and voluntarily (Burton 1998: 149).⁵³

One aspect of public life that women participated in regularly even in the Classical Period and that they were considered crucial for is religious rites. The Brauronia at Athens, a festival in honour of Artemis during which the *arkteia* was performed by pre-pubescent girls possibly acting as bears,⁵⁴ was a very important ritual in young girls' lives and has been interpreted as a coming-of-age ritual intended to prepare girls for marriage (Stehle 2012: 199). Women and girls were also central to the organisation and ritual of the Panathenaia in Athens (Stehle 2012: 201).

The most famous of these religious festivals however, and best-attested in the surviving literature, is the Thesmophoria in honour of Demeter. All respectable citizen-wives were allowed to participate in the rites, which took place in Athens in the autumn (Stehle 2012: 192). Like the Thesmophoria, the Eleusinian mysteries was also a cult of Demeter and Persephone. Unlike the Thesmophoria, anyone could be initiated into the cult, even slaves, though

⁵³ Unfortunately the material evidence for women's participation in symposia often focus on *hetairai*, but we do have some evidence of women as musicians on vases (Pipili 1998: 90), and inscriptions celebrating their fame as musicians and not as courtesans (e.g. Polygnota at Delphi in the 2nd century BCE; Pomeroy 1977: 54).

⁵⁴ The textual evidence for the events at the Brauronia do not make it exactly clear what the girls did or why, and the material evidence makes the purpose of the festival even harder to discern (Stehle 2012: 197).

generally it is also associated more with women's participation (Nixon 1995: 75). Both the Thesmophoria and the Eleusinian mysteries were fertility cults shrouded in secrecy; both lasted well into the Roman Imperial Period (Nixon 1995: 76). It seems strange that a cult with roots in a myth that may be considered somewhat feminist (by ancient Greek standards)⁵⁵ was relatively visible in the ancient world – at least four Demeter sanctuaries were located within city walls,⁵⁶ though they were not in the city centre and relatively isolated (Nixon 1995: 76; Vivante 2007: 44) – but Nixon does not elaborate on this. She does however discuss the plants mentioned in connection with the cults (pennyroyal, pomegranate, pine and vitex; 1995: 85-88) and deduces that the cults of Demeter gave women (and in some cases men) power over their own fertility: all four plants were considered useful as contraceptives and/or abortifacients in the ancient world (1995: 91-92).

The Athenian record dominates our discourse on the fate of the Greek woman, this much is true (*cf.* Henry & James 2012: 86), but it would be a mistake to ignore the 600 years that had passed between Classical Athens and Plutarch's lifetime in the 1st century CE Roman Empire, and we cannot suppose that in that time absolutely nothing had changed. Close inspection of the various sources available to us does show a change in the social and economic status of women as time passed, although it is difficult to ascertain how far such change reached or how evenly it was spread out by the early Imperial period. This social change may perhaps be ascribed to the expansion of Alexander's Macedonian empire and the creation of a Greek cosmopolis, or perhaps the later "romanization" of Greece after it was conquered by the Romans, or most likely

⁵⁵ The Demeter-Persephone myth is unique in that it focuses on the relationship between the mother and the daughter and that the mother rescues her daughter from an undesirable situation, a central feature of later feminist literature (Nixon 1995: 90).

⁵⁶ Corinth, Priene, Eleusis and Gela (Nixon 1995: 77-85).

a combination of the two.⁵⁷ There are also some general similarities and differences between the status of women in the Classical Period and the early period of Rome that should be noted. Both societies saw a need to control their women to a certain extent (Henry & James 2012: 86-88). The dangers of women's sexual desires appeared to them a very real and immediate threat and at times they went to extreme measures to ensure that the sons born to them were legitimate; in Athens laws and governing bodies were established to deal with women, in Rome they were brought to submission by force (Henry & James 2012: 88-89).⁵⁸

2.3.2. Rome

The life of the Roman woman differed significantly from that of the Athenian. For one thing, the Roman woman was certainly a more public figure than the Athenian woman. Indeed, from the very beginning of Roman mythological history women played an integral part in the founding and subsequent success of the city. Rhea Silvia, seduced by Mars and knowing that bearing his sons will bring her harm, does so anyway; the twins Romulus and Remus are saved and raised by a *lupa* – a she-wolf or perhaps a prostitute. The Sabine women, abducted by the Roman men by order of their king Romulus, willingly become Roman wives, thus ensuring the continuation of the Roman people. Lucretia submits to the will of Sextus Tarquinius rather than have her reputation tainted

⁵⁷ Cf. MacMullen (2000: 27-29), who discusses the ways in which the Roman expansion facilitated cultural exchange, and the willingness of the Greeks to assimilate and of the Romans to let the *mos regionis* thrive. The Greek poetess Melinno wrote a poem dedicated to the power of Rome, dated to the late 2nd century BCE (Plant 2004: 99-100).

⁵⁸ It should not be assumed that the establishment of laws excludes the use of force, nor is the use of force necessarily lawless, but rather that the two can and did coexist to varying degrees. On this see also Henry & James (2012: 91).

and in doing so she helps overthrow the corrupt monarchy and bring about the founding of the Roman Republic (Liv. 1.4.1-6; 1.10.1; 1.4. 1.57.7-60.3).

The Romans certainly valued their women highly, as is evident from the prominent place they occupy in myth, but let us not forget that both Rhea Silvia and Lucretia were lauded for their purity, and both paid with their lives for it,⁵⁹ an unfortunate double punishment given the fact that their loss of chastity resulted directly in two of the most important historical moments in early Roman history. The Romans equate female chastity with male honour,⁶⁰ and are willing to go to war to regain the latter if the former is taken by force (Joshel 2002: 174). The importance of (pure) women to the Romans is never more clear than in the role of the Vestal Virgins (Rhea Silvia herself was one).⁶¹ These women were required to stay chaste for the duration of their term as priestesses, usually thirty years (Holland 2012: 208). Their involvement not only in tending the sacred hearth-fire in the temple of Vesta, but also in other festivals throughout the year such as the Fordicicia, the Lupercalia and the Vestalia indicates that they were central to Roman religious practice, and furthermore that they were highly public figures (Holland 2012: 209).

Other religious practices in Rome also require a virgin to complete certain rituals, such as the worship of Juno Sospita at Latium and rituals in honour of Diana (Holland 2012: 210). Both of these goddesses have surprisingly male

⁵⁹ Livy does not elaborate on the fate of Rhea Silvia beyond “neither gods nor men protected the mother herself or her babes from the king’s cruelty; the priestess he ordered to be manacled and cast into prison...” (1.4), after that she simply disappears from the action. It may be safe to assume that she met the same fate any unchaste Vestal Virgin met: death by live burial.

⁶⁰ Male chastity is never expected in Roman society, and even Augustus’ morality laws (the *lex Iulia et Papia*, see below) never attempted to regulate male sexuality. For men relations with slaves, prostitutes and courtesans are part of daily life (Finley 2002: 152).

⁶¹ The case of the *lupa* is one of few anomalies in Livy’s work, as it concerns an unpure woman doing a deed that has great positive implications for the future of Rome.

characteristics and are depicted in military gear; it has been suggested that this could signify *virtus*, not just in the sense of 'virtue', but specifically the male qualities of courage and bravery (D'Ambra 2007: 248). The proliferation and number of cults such as these and the Bacchic rites that spread after the Punic wars suggest that religion was a safe outlet for women, especially in female-only cults. It would certainly explain the popularity and endurance of the cults of Dionysus and Isis, which offered women liberation and salvation (Finley 2002: 155). Many of these mystery religions were not as easily accepted by the state⁶² and were banned or struggled to gain acceptance as official religions (Finley 2002: 156).

While mystery religions were suppressed or relegated to spaces outside city boundaries, domestic religion occupied a central role in the Roman woman's life. The Romans had a great multitude of deities, many of whom were especially of relevance for women of child-bearing age (such as Juno Lucina) and women in the home, such as the domestic Vesta, the *lares* and the *penates* (Holland 2012: 212). The Matronalia, a festival in honour of Juno, involved the giving of gifts from the husbands to their wives as a sign of respect (Vivante 2007: 46). Even though many of the religious activities were led by men, women especially tended to be occupied with religious activities that bound them to the *familia* (Finley 2002: 154). This includes the worship of Verticordia, an aspect of Venus established during the Carthaginian wars that was meant to keep married women chaste (Vivante 2007: 47).

Domesticity is an important aspect of the Roman woman's identity, as she is the keeper of peace. The first instance of appropriate domestic behaviour is that of the Sabines, who place their bodies between their husbands and their kin,

⁶² I use "state" to refer to patriarchal institutions and male-dominated systems, which may be assumed to be in opposition to modern feminist idea(l)s of liberation and gender equality.

creating a boundary and restoring relations between the Romans and their enemies. In contrast, Tarpeia⁶³ goes outside the city wall and the boundaries of domesticity to let enemy soldiers in, an act she pays for with her life (Joshel 2002: 175). The Roman woman is not bound to the home in the same way as the Athenian woman, she is permitted the freedom to move about the city and interact with her friends,⁶⁴ but she is bound to domestic life. The integrity of her chastity is in a sense directly relatable to the harmony of her home, and its removal removes the boundaries between Roman men and their enemies (Joshel 2002: 180). The early Roman woman of mythology is thus highly politicised and ideologically charged.

Sources suggest, however, that by the late Roman Republic the chaste woman had become legendary precisely because she could no longer be found on the streets and in the domiciles of Rome – or so Livy says, accusing the Romans of *luxus, avaritia, libido, cupiditas* and *abundantes voluptates* (*praef.* 11-12). This appears to have been a general feeling amongst (male) Romans of the late republic, Horace certainly felt the same (*Carm.* 3.24.51-54) and Augustus' later *lex Iulia et Papia*, which were unsuccessful (Joshel 2002: 165), suggest that the concern did not abate once the civil war had ended. Literary-historical figures such as Catullus' Lesbia and Ovid's Corinna did nothing but add further fuel to the fire.

What could have caused this radical shift from the *mos maiorum* to the debauchery decried by traditionalist Roman men? It seems that Dido is to be credited with the change in social structure – the prolonged Punic wars required women to become more active economically as more and more men

⁶³ According to Livy, Tarpeia was a Vestal Virgin who fell in love with the enemy leader Titus Tatius and betrayed Rome (1.11).

⁶⁴ Livy mentions the Bacchanalian conspiracy, which was outed via the grapevine, an indication that women did have opportunities to socialise (39.8-19).

needed to leave home to fight the Carthaginians in a war started (according to myth) by Aeneas. The increased economic activity of women combined with the independence gained as husbands and fathers succumbed in the war disrupted the gender power balance in Rome (Fantham et al. 1994: 260). The war brought with it also laws of austerity, for example prohibiting women from riding in carriages. After the war a repeal of this law was supported by women and suspected by men of being a sign of extravagance (Fantham et al. 1994: 260-61). That carriages would hide women from the public eye never seemed to be a concern in the debate on this matter, as Roman women were allowed to roam freely as long as their actions did not transgress the boundaries of social convention.⁶⁵

Polybius writes that Roman women of the upper classes were accustomed to luxuries, and that his patron, Scipio Aemilianus, had given enormous dowries to his sisters' husbands for their upkeep, as well as having kept his mother living in suitable splendour (*Hist.* 31.9.26-27). He pays special attention to their luxurious appearance when they appeared in processions, and the value of women's property⁶⁶ is clear from the context. Especially older women were used by their husbands as markers of affluence, while younger women were not encouraged to draw attention to themselves in public (Fantham et al. 1994: 262).

Throughout the late Republic women continued to accrue wealth through dowries and inheritance,⁶⁷ and a sign of men's discomfort with this state of

⁶⁵ Clark (1981: 201) mentions that Roman women, though somewhat domestically bound, had the ability to move around in order to work (women's work in Rome is much the same as in Greece, discussed above), and to visit friends, festivals and the circus.

⁶⁶ "Property" not only in the sense of land ownership, but in the more general sense of possessions of any kind.

⁶⁷ Cicero's wife Terentia apparently amassed a great amount of wealth, which allowed her to remarry several times and live a long and prosperous life (Plin. *Nat.* 7.48; Carlon 2009: 219).

affairs is the laws passed to curtail it. Some limited the portion of the dowry a woman could take back in the event of a divorce, some separated the original dowry from accrued interest or classified the woman's wealth categorically, while others limited the property inheritance of a daughter to no more than half her father's fortune (Fantham et al. 1994: 263).

The gains continued as Caesar's civil war loomed, perhaps even because Caesar himself was exploiting his mythical ancestry in order to make gains. Women were given the honour of a public eulogy at their funeral, and eventually some even gained some political power, albeit behind-the-scenes (Fantham et al 1994: 271). By the first century CE Carlon describes the women of Pliny the Younger's letters as "persistently independent and powerful players in Roman social, economic, and political circles" (2009: 218). These women may not be seen as free from the traditional gendered categories which put men in charge, but they are certainly not subordinate to them either; they frequently control large portions of their family wealth and act with a considerable amount of autonomy in both economic and social spheres. They even have considerable influence in the political sphere through the men in their lives (Carlon 2009: 218-19).

Regardless of gender, neither political nor economic savvy generally comes naturally, but unfortunately sources for women's education are scarce. Plutarch's Eurydice certainly does receive some education:

I have therefore drawn up a compendium of what you, having been brought up in the atmosphere of philosophy, have often heard...

(*Conj. praec.* 138c)

In earlier Roman times girls in aristocratic households probably learned what they could from their brothers' instruction, including reading Greek and Latin poetry. Certainly by the early Imperial period references to educated women are abundant. Pliny has such high praise for the letters written by Saturninus' wife that he can scarcely believe she wrote them herself, comparing them to

“Plautus or Terence freed from metrical constraint” (*Ep.* 1.16; tr. Carlon 2009: 161). Some women are also (not necessarily negatively) reported to have had an avid interest in philosophy and to have written poetry. A famous mural from the Villa di Guilia Felice in Pompeii shows Terentius Nero and his wife as an educated couple. She holds a stylus and a tablet while he holds a papyrus scroll; the painting is testament to their education and therefore to their status (Fantham et al. 1994: 342).

There are also those who had the confidence in both their status and their rhetorical skills to appear in court (Fantham et al. 1994: 273), though whether this can be attributed to education or to privilege is uncertain – most likely both aspects are at play. Merely the fact that they had the opportunity is however remarkable enough in comparison to the Athenian woman’s legal status. We do have knowledge of a few skilled female orators, such as Hortensia, the daughter of the advocate Quintus Hortensius Hortalus. It is possible that she learned rhetoric from her father; at the very least we can say that she must have had some education, because she apparently made an impressive speech before the second triumvirs in 42 BCE, arguing for the repeal of the tax on wealthy women imposed during the austerity of the Punic wars (Plant 2004: 104-05; Fantham et al. 1994: 273).

Hortensia is not the only woman to have been active in affairs of the state. In Pompeii inscriptions abound in which a woman, a husband and his wife, or a wife and her husband exhort passersby to vote for the candidate of their choice for office. These women can often be identified by name as slaves or freedwomen working as waitresses or in bakeries, and were thus most likely of the lower classes (MacMullen 1980: 209-10).⁶⁸ Their participation in politics, given what (we think) we know of the gendered political climate of the day, is

⁶⁸ See for example *CIL* 4.913, 171, 1083, 3291, 3403 and 3527.

quite astonishing. As MacMullen notes, they have no wealth to offer the political candidates and thus must have been participating because “they wanted to take part and no one told them it was useless and ridiculous” (1980: 210). Those women who do have wealth and a reputation to offer seem to have done exactly that: on the forum in Pompeii stands a large building indicating the patronage of Eumachia, *sacerdos publica* (CIL 10.810).⁶⁹ Her office was very public and brought her and her family very useful business and political advantages, advantages she in any case probably had in order to get elected priestess in the first place (MacMullen 1980: 209). There are also records of Pompeiian women as landowners and selling or renting properties, as in the case of Julia Felix (CIL 4.1136), and female money-lenders (e.g. Faustilla; CIL 4.8203). Such economic transactions were often very public, involving large crowds and an auction (MacMullen 1980: 210).

Despite the more widespread public participation of women in the early Imperial Period, the male elite continued to live in Romulus’ Rome. The laws of Augustus targeting the upper classes has traditionally been seen as an attempt to curb the moral decay of the late Republic and to restore the *mos maiorum*, partially by repopulating the senatorial and upper classes that had been depleted by the civil wars preceding his consulship. It is however quite possible that he had another goal entirely. His laws compelled Roman men and women to marry within their social class and to produce several children. Having to divide an inheritance between a larger number of children would eventually have weakened the power structures of the most influential families, leaving fewer rivals to his legitimacy as ruler of the state (Hallet 2012: 374). In any case his supreme control over Rome resulted in a long line of powerful

⁶⁹ A similar inscription appears on the Temple of the Genius of Augustus in Pompeii, dedicated and financed by Mamia (CIL 10.816; MacMullen 1980: 209n5).

imperial women who lived very public lives that at times deviated far from the ideals of the early Roman woman.

The upper class women of the early empire are (as is the custom) noted for some traditional characteristics including devotion to their husbands and fertility, but some, like Agrippina⁷⁰ and Cornelia⁷¹ were also lauded for outstanding military accomplishments and bravery (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.40-41; Hallet 2012: 376). The poetry of Sulpicia gives us a glimpse of the life of an aristocratic woman who finds pleasure in an illicit affair, while simultaneously showing great literary skill on a par with the *poetae novi*.⁷² The poetry is especially notable for its distinct sense of independence and its (traditionally unfeminine) passion and sexuality:

Venus has fulfilled her promises: let them talk about my delights, 5
as they will, if they do not have any of their own.
I would not want to entrust anything to sealed tablets
so that no one could read it before my lover,
but to err is fun, to maintain appearances because of the scandal
a bore; may I assert that I a worthy woman am with a worthy man. 10
(tr. Plant 2004: 107)

Given the reputations of these women, and the many others that came before or after them, it's perhaps not surprising that the (male, elite) literary record glorifies the virtuous women of legend.

2.3.3. *The Social Atmosphere of the 1st Century CE*

Evidently the socio-economic and the political position of women had changed quite drastically in the approximately 600 years between the Classical Period and Plutarch's lifetime in the latter half of the 1st century CE. The society of

⁷⁰ Granddaughter of Augustus through Julia the Elder.

⁷¹ Augustus' step-daughter by Livia.

⁷² Cf. Hallet (2012: 377), who speculates that the lover in Sulpicia's poems, called by the pseudonym Cerinthus, could well have been a member of the imperial family.

early Imperial Rome, and especially its women, who represented the virtue of Rome, was thought to have fallen into a state of decadence and immorality. Women were suspected of intemperance, over-indulgence and licentiousness (Joshel & Murnaghan 2001: 8). Augustus already sought to correct these perceived immoral tendencies at the turn of the millennium with the two *lex Iuliae*, laws that sought to punish adulterers and regulate Roman marriages. He later added the *lex Papia et Poppaea* in order to reinforce the first two laws; the three laws together became known as the *lex Iulia et Papia*, and it was under the first of these that he was required to exile his daughter and grand-daughter on charges of adultery (Henry & James 2012: 93-94). Laws alone do not, however, give a good indication of the state of a society. To get a better idea of the social atmosphere we must take into account the literature of the era.

The Latin elegists of the late Republic and early empire are perhaps our most notable records of the change in the social atmosphere of Rome. Both male and female poets were writing deeply personal poems inspired by Sappho, and in doing so they were exposing the most personal details of their own and their lovers' lives. Catullus' poetry is known for taking his affair with Clodia very seriously. Apart from his expressions of love and jealousy (*Carm.* 2, 5, 7, 43, 51), he also wrote numerous invectives (*Carm.* 16, 83, 110, 111). Ovid made light of the rituals of courtship, but importantly also gives us an indication that women attended the gladiatorial games in the late Republic and early Imperial period:

Though I am sitting here, it's not in the least because I am interested in the racing; all the same! I want your favourite to win. What I've come here for is to talk to you, to sit near you and to tell you how tremendously I love you. So you are looking at the races, I am looking at you.

(*Am.* 3.2.1-8; tr. May 1930)

Male poets might have dominated the scene, but like Sulpicia, some female writers of the larger Graeco-Roman world also became (in)famous during this period for taking topics of love and sexuality beyond the traditional boundaries of femininity. Elephantis (*fl.* late 1st century BCE), most likely as her name

suggests from Elephantine in Egypt, wrote popular erotica of which the emperor Tiberius was apparently quite fond (Plant 2004: 118). Pamphila (*fl.* mid-1st century CE) is also reported to have written a work on sex, although the remaining fragments attest rather to a keen interest in the history of philosophy and biography, as well as innovation in style and genre (Plant 2004: 127).

On the other side of the coin stand the traditionalists, who respond to the social climate in literary and rhetorical forms. Cato the Elder already denounced the freedoms of women as infringing on the freedoms of men long before the fall of the Republic:

It is complete liberty or, rather, if we wish to speak the truth, complete licence that they desire. If they win in this, what will they not attempt? Review all the laws with which your forefathers restrained their licence and made them subject to their husbands; even with all these bonds you can scarcely control them. If you suffer them to seize these bonds one by one and wrench themselves free and finally to be placed on a parity with their husbands, do you think that you will be able to endure them? What of this? The moment they begin to be your equals, they will be your superiors.

(Liv. *Ab urb. cond.* 34.2.14-3.1-2; tr. Sage 1935)

Livy goes to great lengths to present a long line of traditionally virtuous women to his readers, though not without the occasional anomaly (Hallet 2012: 380).⁷³

Virgil attempted to brush large portions of Venus' record of sexual infidelity under the rug simply by not mentioning her past transgressions, while attempting to explain the actions of Dido as divine compulsion (Hallet 2012: 380). Roman men made special effort to avoid being associated with women of low character, but they freely shared their associations with women they deemed of good character and training, even if these women were highly public figures in the socio-economic and political spheres (Carlon 2009: 218-20).

⁷³ Livy mentions Hispalia Faecenia, a freedwoman and former prostitute, who exposed the Bacchanalian conspiracy in 186 BCE (39.8-19), though the *lupa* who saved Romulus and Remus from drowning in the Tiber is perhaps the most well-known example.

Even so, instances of women in public, especially in the forum, are described by authors like Cicero, Livy and Valerius Maximus in terms that suggest that they are acting against social convention and that such actions are disturbing to the general (*i.e.* male) *populus* (Boatwright 2011: 114-16). Such accounts are not without problems of their own, as Livy himself also represents Verginia as entering the forum with her nurse to attend school as a perfectly normal daily activity (3.44.6). The implication, supported as we have seen by the material record, is that the appearance of women in public and even in the forum may have been an everyday sight.⁷⁴ At the same time we are also faced with the possibility that the increased visibility and freedoms of women in areas other than the domestic, including economic and civic spheres, was causing friction for a certain segment of the (again: elite, male) Roman population.⁷⁵

2.4. GENDERED VIRTUE AND SPACE

The traditional view of the *polis* maintains that in Classical Athens men and women occupied fundamentally different spheres of society, and as a result the city space can be said to have belonged in a sense to a certain gender based on its function. Men spent their time outside and in public, engaging in political and economic dealings, moving between the *agora* and the gymnasium, going to war or perhaps hunting (Brulé 2003: 159). Ischomachus declares that he does not spend any time in the house, because his wife “is quite capable of looking after the house by herself” (Xen. *Oec.* 7.3; tr. Todd 1968). He is concerned as much with the administration of the city as his wife is (and should be) with the running of the household. In contrast women are generally believed to have

⁷⁴ Boatwright (2011: 118) also notes that activities such as shopping would have been women’s tasks, and that going to the market would have meant being in public.

⁷⁵ See also Milnor (2005: 158-85) on the unease with which the male ruling class approached female liberty and publicity.

spent their time at home and in the residential areas, in other words, in private (Pomeroy 1975: 79). Even in the private space of a home a further division was made between male and female space: the women spent their time in the women's quarters (*gynaikonitis*), usually upstairs, while the men usually spent time downstairs in the *andron* (Pomeroy 1975: 82; cf. Nevett 2002: 82-83). Men are considered best suited to a public life, women to a life in private.⁷⁶

Theories of such a dichotomous organisation of space are problematic, primarily because it is difficult to maintain arguments that a strict genderisation of space can be upheld in the practice of daily life, where lived experience is much more complex (cf. Löw 2008;⁷⁷ Trümper 2012: 290; Nevett 2010: 49). Within such a theory it becomes necessary to explain the presence of the symposium within the household space, and scholars often use the *andron* as evidence of gendered space even within the home. It is further problematic that such arguments often rest on a textual basis, and scholars concerned with the daily lives of Greek and Roman women have (or at least should) come to be distrustful of the large majority of literary sources available to us that present an elite male view (cf. Nevett 2010: 49; Trümper 2012: 291). The view that

⁷⁶ For the purpose of this study, "public" is defined as any space where a person comes into contact with other members of society outside of their domestic group (i.e. family and household slaves), while "private" is defined as those spheres where a person is alone or in contact with close relatives or household slaves. Cf. Trümper (2012: 291) on the problems of defining "public" and "private" in contemporary scholarship, and Nevett (2010: 6) on the dangers of assuming the universality of these concepts. Some scholars prefer the use of terms such as "civic" instead of the dichotomy suggested by public-private/male-female (e.g. Boatwright 2011: 108); however, as the preceding sections have shown, women were not excluded *de facto* from civic life in the 1st century CE, therefore the term does not apply in this case.

⁷⁷ Löw's argument refers to the "institutionalization of spaces", i.e. that similarity between spaces that generalises the space and its function based on the repetitive action associated with it (2008: 37). However, she questions the assumption that all insitutionalised spaces are approached in the same manner by all people (2008: 36-38).

women occupied separate areas of the home represents a Greek ideal that could be put into practice very rarely, and if at all, only by the very wealthy.⁷⁸ Trümper suggests that the use of space is continuously negotiated by the participants rather than being rigorously assigned, as has long been argued (2012: 295). This is supported by the archaeological evidence: many houses in the ancient world served an economic purpose as well as a domestic purpose. Houses could function in a variety of different ways, *e.g.* as weaving and spinning workshop, as food processing location, as metallurgy workshop or as retail shop (Nevett 2010: 7). Nevett also argues that based on depictions of symposia on pottery from the Classical period, it is possible that these events sometimes did not take place in the *andron* at all, but rather in the courtyard of the home, and that the domestic space is likely more fluid than is often suggested (2010: 60-61).

Greek houses in the Roman period also underwent some stylistic changes that imply a less strict sense of social control over members of the household, and as a result could have meant more social freedom for women. During this period all rooms no longer connect to the courtyard by a single entrance, but are rather connected internally and therefore more difficult to monitor. Houses also tend to have a second and in rare cases even a third entrance, thus fostering contact between members of the family and the larger public instead of impeding it (Nevett 2002: 84-86). The inclusion of Roman architectural features such as the *atrium* in some Greek houses of the Roman period attest to a strong Roman influence on architecture, and may reflect a similar Roman influence on Greek lifestyle (Nevett 2002: 91). Changes in decoration of the courtyard during this period may also be indicative of a simultaneous change in priorities: during

⁷⁸ Trümper (2012: 292) discusses the major current scholarship on gendered public and private space and the problems inherent in such research.

the 1st century BCE some Greek houses feature a central garden and *impluvium*, while the entrance to the house is no longer screened but instead opens up directly onto the courtyard (Nevett 2002: 88-89). The full view of the interior space of the house thereby offered, as well as the added emphasis on a recreational space, implies that privacy is no longer as high on the agenda for the success of the *oikos*.

As a result, when taking into account the archaeological and material record representations of women in public spaces present a particular problem. A black-figure hydria from the late 6th century BCE shows elegantly dressed women meeting at a water-fountain, from which it is generally concluded that the Archaic woman had more freedom than the Classical woman (Trümper 2012: 288-89), though we have seen that this interpretation of women's seclusion in ancient Greece is problematic. Rome poses a different question, because even its elite authors were less concerned with women's seclusion than they were with their virtue, and during the early Imperial period images of women become more common in public areas. The images they do present of women suggest that their virtue, rather than they themselves, is on display: in most statues the women are shown draped in heavy clothing, rarely are they shown in the nude (Davies 2008: 211). The feminine virtues suggested by these statues are modesty and chastity, though many of them are sexualised in stark contrast to the many layers of clothing, showing the shape of the breasts and even the pubic triangle. At the same time these are women of luxury, portrayed especially to show off their riches (Davies 2008: 216-17).

Davies claims that the women's body language (arms close to the body, constrained by drapery, "defensive") is one of submission, while male statues show men occupying social space by stretching out their limbs, an act of

assertion (2008: 215).⁷⁹ The argument that “men wear the toga with an assurance that can hardly bear much relation to reality” (Davies 2008: 215), but that women’s statues are directly relatable to reality, is simply illogical and cannot be sustained. Furthermore, the female statues’ legs are often just as assertive as the males’, with the legs spread apart and one knee bent outwards. Some statues are stepping forwards actively (Davies 2008: 215).⁸⁰ These statues show women of power, negotiating the space between social convention and civic action. Davies further contends that the body language of female statues played an important role in reinforcing ideas about traditional gender roles: “men appear active and dominant, the women passive and hesitant” (2008: 215). While this is a valid observation and in some cases may be true, I do not agree that it “neutralize[s] their display in public” (2008: 215). It is simply too easy to put forth this argument while ignoring the public power many of these women wielded, even if that power was by virtue of (subordination to) a generous husband or father.⁸¹

Like the ideology of space, the virtues ascribed to men and women can be gendered, and they can be related to the space in which these qualities should be practiced. In the *Meno*, Plato argues that virtue is the same for men and women (72c-73d), but that the sexes should apply their virtue in the appropriate sphere, women in the household, men in the state (73a-b; cf. 71e-72a). According to Aristotle the virtue of men and women differs. Both partake in moral virtue,

⁷⁹ Cf. Munich, Glyptothek, inv. no 540, a statue of an unknown young man (ca. 20-30 CE) whose arms are missing, but at least one of which were clearly reaching out. This young man is also draped in heavy clothing and his knee is bent inwards and his feet close together, signaling (according to Davies’ criteria) submission.

⁸⁰ Cf. Munich, Glyptothek, inv. no 427, a statue of an unknown woman (ca. 170 CE) draped in heavy robes, but with her breasts and body shape accentuated. She is stepping forward.

⁸¹ In contemporary politics many women who are elected to office are preceded by their husbands. The phenomenon is so wide-spread that it was coined the “widow’s mandate” (Gertzog 1995: 17-35).

but only according to his or her function, and therefore they do not share virtue in the same way. Temperance, courage and justice are thus essentially different in men and women (*Pol.* 1.13.1259b38-1260a20). Philosophers generally agree that the public sphere belongs to men, while women should remain private, and they relate this use of space to the practice of their virtue.

From men courage, a thoroughly public virtue, is expected, because it is this virtue which guarantees success in war (Brulé 2003: 76) and helps them protect their property (*Xen. Oec.* 7.25). Women, on the other hand, are cowardly and therefore fearful, as are the females of all species according to Ps.-Aristotle (*Hist. an.* 8.628a35-b31; cf. *Xen. Oec.* 7.25). Plato agrees:

All those creatures generated as men who proved themselves cowardly and spent their lives in wrong-doing were transformed at their second incarnation into women.

(*Tim.* 90e-91a; tr. Bury 1929)

It is unlikely that a woman can be courageous at all, since the concept is so bound up with masculinity that only one word is needed to encompass both of these ideas; at its very roots *andreios* signifies the male (Brulé 2003: 76). The only courage a woman possesses is the courage to be subordinate (*Arist. Pol.* 1260a20).

Being fearful makes a woman watchful and therefore more attentive, and due to a combination of this and by nature belonging to the private sphere it is her duty to run the household (Phyntis, *On the Chastity of Women*, 85; Perictione, *On the Harmony of Women*, 77; Melissa, *Letter to Cleareta*, 83).⁸² This too requires a certain virtue, as she must be conservative and preservative in her management of her husband's property, including his slaves, to whom she must tend when they are ill (*Theano, Letter to Callisto*, 72; *Xen. Oec.* 7.35-37; Brulé 2003: 167). By

⁸² All references to the Pythagorean women's texts are to page numbers in I.M. Plant (tr.), *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome* (2004).

cultivating these virtues the woman can cultivate a good atmosphere at home between herself and her spouse (Brulé 2003: 168).

Furthermore, women, like slaves, are not suited to leadership (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1254b10-25; Phytis, *On the Chastity of Women*, 85). This task is left to only the right sort of man, the man who is erect and therefore suited to politics. Nature has of course not imbued certain men with this ability without a purpose, bodies are made according to the functions they are *supposed* to perform in society, and if nature didn't imbue women with the ability to lead, it must be because they are not supposed to do so (Brulé 2003: 77).

Because men (the right sort of men, free men) are born to live a life in public, involved in politics and thus to lead, they must also therefore be the beacons of truth, justice and order, without which one cannot rule over a city. He is naturally suited for these tasks, being a rational being. Because of her ease of understanding, Socrates tells Ischomachus that his wife has a masculine (ἀνδρικήν) intelligence (ἐπιδεικνύεις; Xen. *Oec.* 10.1). This is an extraordinary case, since the female is naturally the inferior version of the male, uncivilised and unruly (Brulé 2003: 81).⁸³ This also makes her more lustful (Brulé 2003: 87, 96), and as a result modesty and chastity (*sōphrosynē*)⁸⁴ are the primary female virtues towards which a woman must work. These are virtues that are particularly suited to the life in private and can therefore be characterised as private virtues.⁸⁵

⁸³ Plato's *Tim.* is again in agreement: not only is the woman's soul cowardly, it is also immoral (91a).

⁸⁴ *Sōphrosynē* is a virtue properly attributed to both men and women, but it means different things for each sex (North 1977: 36-37).

⁸⁵ Cf. the popular anecdote about Theano, who was putting on her cloak and accidentally exposed her arm. A (male) bystander commented, "Your arm is beautiful", to which she replied, "But it is not public" (fr., tr. Plant 2004: 70; Plutarch, *Conj. praec.* 142c).

In Rome even more than in Greece the virtue of chastity for women was proclaimed loudly in their myths and the role of women in religion, but here chastity becomes a virtue of public importance. The tales of Lucretia and Verginia, who both died when their chastity was taken from them or under threat, and the important roles they play in the subsequent historical development of Rome – Lucretia as catalyst for the overthrow of the Roman monarchy and the establishment of the Republic, Verginia as the catalyst for the plebeian revolt that leads to the institution of the *plebiscita* – underscores the importance of female chastity to the most basic structure of Roman society (cf. Liv. 1.57.9-60.12; 3.45-50). Female chastity, a most private virtue, is thus publicised – not only in myth, but in religious institutions such as the Vestal Virgins, who also play a central role in the upholding of Roman ideals and whose chastity also plays a large part in the formation of Roman history and custom in the stories of Rhea Silvia and Tarpeia. Female chastity was so central to the ideological identity of the early Roman woman that they are said to have formed entire cults around it, including the cult of *Pudicitia*, *Fortuna Muliebris*, *Pudicitia Patricia* and *Pudicitia Plebeia* (Henry & James 2012: 92).

As a virtue, chastity belongs almost exclusively to women, and in fact we find evidence in both Greece and Rome of prostitution and state-sanctioned brothels (Henry & James 2012: 91). Men are not required to stay faithful to their wives, and in fact are praised for visiting brothels and thereby keeping citizen women pure and chaste (i.e. by not interfering with other men's wives; Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.30-35). Virtue in the Classical Period and during the early history of Rome (including the Republic) is thus gendered in the same way spaces in Classical Athens were in many ways gendered (Pomeroy 1975: 78). It is thus possible to loosely categorise virtue in ideological terms as *male-female* : *public-private*.

Towards the Imperial period it becomes increasingly difficult to uphold this strict categorisation of gender and space, as space becomes much more loosely defined, and even the traditional categorisation of virtue sees a slight shift. We have seen cases of women lauded for bravery, intelligence, military cunning, medical knowledge, philosophy, and literary prowess. We have also seen the virtues of women enter the public sphere and carve out for themselves in Roman society a legitimate (though strongly contested) space. During the same time, philosophies such as Stoicism and Epicureanism that view the place of women in society quite differently to the groundwork laid by their predecessors gain influence in the Graeco-Roman world. These philosophical traditions inevitably play a role in Plutarch's own formation of the image of the ideal woman.

CHAPTER THREE

PLUTARCH'S PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

It is well known and oft-proclaimed that Plutarch was a Platonist (Baltes 2007: 416; Tatum 2012: 5364; *cf.* also Russell 1973). We can with relative certainty say that Plato was a major influence in the works of Plutarch, but claiming that other traditions did not also play a role in the formation of his philosophy would be to misunderstand the spirit of philosophy in the ancient world. It is abundantly clear that Plutarch was not only aware of the existence of different philosophical schools, but often interacted with them in his writings. As a result we can be certain that Plutarch was well acquainted with the theories of different schools of thought, especially the Stoics, Epicureans and Skeptics, and we can clearly see how extensive his knowledge was from works such as *Virt. mor.*, *Suav. viv.*, *Stoic. rep.* and *Adv. Col.* A number of other lost works indicate a far greater scope: *Whether He Who Suspends Judgment on Everything is Led to Inaction*, *On What Heraclitus Maintained*, *On Empedocles*, *On the Cyrenaics*, *On the Difference between Pyrrhonians and Academics*, and *On Aristotle's Topics*.

A number of Plutarch's works also deal with Platonic philosophy, and it is clear that Plutarch considered himself a Platonist (Dillon 2014: 61). Works such as *Quaest. Plat.*, *An. procr.*, *Is. Os.* and *Amat.* are concerned with Plato's metaphysics, whilst such lost works as *Where are the Forms?*, *How Matter Participates in the Forms: It Constitutes the Primary Bodies*, *On the World's Having Come into Beginning According to Plato*, *On Matter* and *On the Fifth Substance* likely dealt with similar topics. Furthermore, Plutarch makes frequent reference to Plato and is not shy to let his readers know that he may be considered an expert on the subject. These references occur also in works related to women, and as such it will be useful to attempt to discern exactly how Plutarch interpreted Plato's philosophy, and what this means for his views on women.

Furthermore, other aspects of ancient philosophy will likely also play a role in our understanding of Plutarch's philosophy. The Hellenistic tradition of eclecticism must be considered carefully, as must the practical and popular philosophy of (especially, but not exclusively) the third century BCE onwards and so too the notion of "personal philosophy" recently put forward by Elizabeth Asmis (2014: 128). Only when we have considered the implications of these concepts and the practices that accompany them on Plutarch's own philosophy can we with any degree of success attempt to reconstruct his intellectual framework.

3.1. ECLECTICISM, PRACTICAL-, POPULAR- AND PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY

The separation of eclecticism, practical philosophy, popular philosophy and personal philosophy is not a clear and well-defined one, and often one or more of these terms overlap in the service of a goal. This goal is to be free from disturbance and to attain a state of *eudaimonia* (in some traditions characterised as *ataraxia*). Ethics in the ancient world is therefore very practical, as ancient moral philosophers were concerned with the problems of daily life, the very real human problems that each person must face (Nussbaum 1994: 3). In the ancient world philosophy is not only an academic exercise concerned with theoretical problems, nor is it the case that only the results of the philosophical enterprise are applied in social context, but rather that the entire philosophical endeavour is from the outset a practical matter (Trapp 2014: 43). In fact, it is the duty of the philosopher to share the insight gained from theoretical philosophy with his fellow citizens in order to lead them on the path to a better life.⁸⁶ To this end even Epicurus, notorious for his abstention from public life, made exceptions (Roskam & Van der Stockt 2011: 7).

⁸⁶ This practice is known as 'psychagogy', and will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Practical ethics therefore attempts to popularise philosophy for the general public, in effect blurring to the point of completely obscuring the boundary between practical- and popular philosophy.⁸⁷ The basis of scholarship on practical ethics lies, according to Lieve van Hoof, in Konrat Ziegler's immensely influential *Realencyclopädie* article (1951), which first made the distinction between Plutarch's technical and other works and what Ziegler termed his *Popularphilosophie* (van Hoof 2014: 136). The term emerged from the philosophical project of a group of German philosophers during the Enlightenment, whose aim was the moral education and spiritual growth of the general public. They saw themselves as directly in opposition to the rationalism and sense of social seclusion that dominated German academic philosophy at the time (Van der Stockt 2011: 19-20). *Popularphilosophie* had, in both methodology and aim, much in common with ancient popular philosophy and eclecticism.

Popular philosophy is aimed at an audience with little technical philosophical knowledge; this audience for Plutarch primarily consists of politicians and educated men (*Tu. san.* 122d-e) who need practical advice on a variety of subjects including care of the self, relations with friends and family and professional activities (van Hoof 2014: 138). According to van Hoof, this is not an audience of laymen that includes slaves, but rather a highly elite group of men who are not philosophers (2014: 142; cf. Thom 2012: 284-85; Roskam & Van

⁸⁷ Pelling (2011: 41) notes the difficulty of categorizing Plutarch's works as either 'popular philosophy' or 'practical ethics', bringing to light the close association between the two categories. His account of popular philosophy (2011: 41-50), while far-ranging, is narrow in scope, focusing only on popular philosophy in the sphere of politics. The conclusion that "any 'popular philosophy' or 'wisdom' should not be *that* popular, and certainly not vulgar", since "men engaged in public affairs need to *exploit* the people's superstition and ensure it serves the public good" is therefore problematic, since it implicitly assumes that Plutarch is writing only for men in government and ignores the (aspects of the) texts aimed at a female audience.

der Stockt 2011: 8). Pelling also expands the audience to a larger group of educated men, but excludes the general population, especially those who will not take part in politics (2011: 57). Both Huizenga and Morgan disagree, arguing that a much wider, non-specialised audience is exposed to these texts (Huizenga 2013: 55; Morgan 2007: 4).⁸⁸ The problems facing the audience of popular philosophical texts are real and immediate and the philosopher is considered someone with special skill in proposing practical solutions exactly because of his technical knowledge of philosophy and his ability to deliver this knowledge to a non-specialised audience. The popular philosopher is the one who can take his theoretical philosophical knowledge and transpose it into ‘common sense’ wisdom – the kind of wisdom that someone may struggle to reach on their own because of barriers imposed by flatterers, too much wealth or ambition (Pelling 2011: 57). It is the responsibility of the philosopher to help his audience overcome these barriers which stand in the way of their *eudaimonia*, and to offer them practical advice on how to do so.

According to van Hoof, Plutarch does not take a protreptic approach to his practical ethics (unlike his contemporaries such as Musonius Rufus and Epictetus) but rather a paraenetic approach:⁸⁹ instead of attempting to convince his audience of their folly in pursuing a certain goal, he suggests ways in which the reader may achieve his goals and reach fulfilment (2014: 142). Describing Plutarch’s work in such binary terms is problematic, as it disregards Plutarch’s work on and for women in a social context. Assigning Plutarch’s work to the category of paraenetic assumes only what I have described in section 2.1 as the “primary audience”, *i.e.* that audience of educated elite men and women who

⁸⁸ For a more complete discussion of Plutarch’s audience, including the women some of these texts may have reached, see Chapter 2.

⁸⁹ In modern scholarship protreptic is generally characterised by the aim at conversion, while paraenetic aims at confirmation of belief (Kotzé 2011: 5-6).

have already been trained in philosophy and therefore likely do not need to be convinced of philosophical ideas on gender roles. The language of many of Plutarch's popular-philosophical texts does not support such a categorisation. Though they are highly rhetorical, they are also easily understood, and there is a marked difference between the philosophical language of a work such as *Amat.* and that of *Conj. praec.*, with the former for example containing far more technical philosophical language than the latter. This indicates a wider scope for the latter text, which also contains elements of psychagogy.

We must therefore consider the secondary audience, those with non-specialised, non-technical philosophical knowledge (if any at all), and the purpose of the text on this level. When the social context is taken into account, it may be that here the text functions as protreptic. Plutarch's works may therefore, like many texts, function as both *paraenesis* and *protrepsis* – reinforcing the (philosophical) beliefs and foundations of the primary audience while aiming at convincing the secondary audience that philosophy has something useful to offer them (*cf.* Kotzé 2011: 7).

It is this approach to his practical ethics that makes Plutarch's popular philosophy seem somewhat 'eclectic'. His attempt to lead his audience to a fulfilled life requires that he use references and ideas from various philosophical schools whenever he needs to and in whatever way suits him. The message Plutarch's practical ethics thus conveys, both consciously and rather successfully, is not that one school or the other may help the reader with her problems, but rather that philosophy as a whole holds some benefits for those that study it (van Hoof 2014: 143). This should not be taken to mean that Plutarch engages with his sources uncritically, in fact, he is very careful to select only what he deems suitable.

Eclecticism itself rests on the idea that the philosopher selects the best and most worthwhile doctrines from each school and builds from them a “new” philosophy.⁹⁰ Often this meant that the philosopher started from the general framework of one philosophical tradition, in Plutarch’s case Platonism, and then incorporated ideas from Stoicism, Skepticism and so forth into the formation of their own philosophy (Thom 2012: 282). The label ‘eclectic’ itself may not strictly speaking be applicable to Plutarch, as it is generally applied to philosophers who do not fit quite snugly into any philosophical school (Asmis 2014: 127). Plutarch is easily identifiable as in the broad sense being a Platonist, but it is useful to keep eclecticism in mind especially when it comes to his ethics. The application of the concept of eclecticism to philosophies such as Plutarch’s has however been questioned (Frede 2015; Thom 2012: 282) and attempts have been made to supply more apt terms for this phenomenon. Along this line Elizabeth Asmis has suggested that what is generally considered ‘eclectic’ philosophy may be characterised rather as ‘personal philosophy’ (2014: 128). According to Asmis a personal philosophy is much like an eclectic philosophy but stands in opposition to the school and to popular philosophy and thereby is inherently private. In forming a personal philosophy, a person must examine the theories and positions of several schools and select from them what fits her own life according to her own judgment. Asmis identifies five features of personal philosophy, namely that it is critical, oriented toward the past, far-ranging, constructive, and integrated with one’s life (2014: 129). In this way, she says, personal philosophy may be identified in many ways with eclecticism

⁹⁰ It is this feature of eclecticism and *Popularphilosophie* which gave it the reputation of unsystematic and non-rigorous philosophy, and by the late 18th century caused it to be discarded by the most influential thinkers of the time, including Kant (Ruth 2015). For a thorough overview of the history and development of the concept of ‘eclecticism’ from antiquity onwards, see Donini (1988: 15-33).

generally, but whereas eclecticism seems impersonal, Asmis lays special emphasis on the aspects of originality and individuality, which she considers central to personal philosophies.

It may be useful to identify Plutarch's gender ethics as an exercise in building personal philosophies were it not that the practice of psychagogy is centred not only on the care of the self, but also on the care of others. While a personal philosophy thus looks inward and is private, Plutarch's psychagogy *for women* functions both in the former sense as well as in the outward sense and as such it is public. As a result we may describe it as popular, practical and 'eclectic', but it cannot be personal. It is interesting to note that Plutarch does suggest that one section of his audience formulate their own personal philosophies in *Conj. praec.* ("Pollianus... you already possess sufficient maturity to study philosophy... beautify your character with the aid of discourses which are attended by logical demonstration and mature deliberation"; 145b), but he cannot formulate these personal philosophies for them. This section of the audience is furthermore strictly speaking male, and Plutarch addresses his advice on forming and evaluating philosophies strictly to the husband (and presumably to the primary audience). Women are neither expected to nor is it recommended that they form their own personal philosophies. On the contrary, their philosophies are chosen for them: "for your wife you must collect from every source what is useful... and make the best of these doctrines her favourite and familiar themes" (*Conj. praec.* 145b-c).

Though the notion of a personal philosophy may therefore not be directly applicable to Plutarch's psychagogic practice for women, it is clear that while he works from a Platonic basis, the influence of eclecticism cannot be denied. It would be impossible to form a clear idea of what Plutarch's view on the philosophical ability of women and their proper place in society is without

taking his other philosophical influences into account and attempting to situate them within his primary philosophical framework: his relation to Platonism.

3.2. PLATO'S WOMAN

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Plutarch's interpretation of Plato's *Woman* is that even today scholars cannot agree on what exactly Plato himself thought of (the ability of) women.⁹¹ Research into Plato's views on women has placed him on wide spectrum from liberal (Calvert 1975; Vlastos 1994) or even radical (Taylor 2012: 83)⁹² to extremely conservative and even actively harmful (Buchan 1999).⁹³ Plato has been famously, or perhaps rather notoriously, credited with being the proto-feminist (Lucas 1973: 161; 1990: 223; Vlastos 1989: 277; 1994: 11), and Rosenthal went so far as to declare that "the feminism of Plato is exemplary and unparalleled in philosophy or political theory" (1973: 32). One of the earliest proponents of this view was Vlastos, whose argument rests on a social constructivist basis that holds that women aren't inherently flawed but rather bred by society into flawed beings (1994: 17-18). Vlastos believed that this was enough to explain the variation in Plato's views found between the *Resp.* and the *Leg.*, and Annas agrees on the basis that the former text presents an ideal state and the latter text attempts to present a state which may be achievable. According to Annas, when Plato loses faith in the ideal

⁹¹ "Among contemporary women's liberationists, Plato is beginning to emerge as something of a hero" (Calvert 1975: 231). Annas disagrees with this view: "...it is quite wrong to think of Plato as 'the first feminist'. His arguments are unacceptable to a feminist, and the proposals made in *Resp.* V are irrelevant to the contemporary debate" (1976: 307; reprinted 1996: 3ff).

⁹² Taylor (2012: 83) does not necessarily agree with such an interpretation, but does suggest that the abolition of the family in the *Resp.* (book 5) is in line with contemporary radical feminism and thus may be construed that way.

⁹³ Buchan (1999: 123) argues that Plato's guardian women are chosen for their breeding prospects and little more, and that ultimately his position radically disempowers women by denying them their femininity and sexuality and consigning them to the role of glorified child-bearers.

state's attainability, his view on the possibility of a radically higher level of social participation for women changes too (1996: 12).

Annas does not however agree with Vlastos that Plato's views can be brought in line with the ideas of contemporary feminism. In her view, he assigns equal education and equal roles in government to women and men in the guardian class not because he is concerned about human rights, but because he is concerned with the well-being of the state (1996: 3-12). Plato does not even attempt to argue that his proposals for women's participation in society are just, nor does he expand his proposals beyond the guardian class (Annas 1996: 9-10). Taylor points out that Plato came of age in a time when political factions within Athens' elite caused great civil strife, the rule of the Thirty Tyrants and ultimately the death of his mentor, Socrates. Abolishing private property (which in the *Resp.* includes women and children)⁹⁴ and families is Plato's way of attempting to stabilise the political climate of the *polis* (Taylor 2012: 82).⁹⁵

Taylor is not the only scholar to have noted that Plato takes issue with the agonistic culture of the Athenian elite. Brown discusses it extensively as well, along with Plato's polemic against sophism, and argues that he is attempting to subvert the traditional masculine discourse of the *polis* (1988: 594-97). He does this by speaking of philosophy as a lover, and referring to the love of philosophy as a passion (Brown 1988: 606).⁹⁶ Brown also argues that Plato's

⁹⁴ "...concerning the acquisition of wives and marriages and the begetting of children... friends have all things in common." (*Resp.* 423c-424a; tr. Shorey 1937).

⁹⁵ Taylor (2012: 85) argues that the ultimate goal of Plato's ideal state is individual self-fulfillment (*eudaimonia*) through the principles of justice and the preservation of the state, but that he is wrong to believe that the state of the *Resp.* can attain that goal because it ignores the need for individual autonomy.

⁹⁶ See *Phdr.* 249d-e, *Resp.* 490b, and *Symp.* 175.

characterisation of philosophy as a woman⁹⁷ is an important part of his subversive tactic. Herein the highest pursuit, love of wisdom and truth, has become feminine. The acquisition of wisdom and truth is facilitated by loving another's beauty, which in Athens tends to imply homosexual/ pederastic love, but this love cannot consummate true love. Plato thus makes the entire philosophical endeavour female, just as Socrates is taught about *erōs* by a woman, Diotima, in the *Symposium* (1988: 607-08). By doing this he leaves behind the Western philosophical rationalism, traditionally characterised as masculine, he is said to have founded (Brown 1988: 608-09).⁹⁸ This subversive attitude towards the Athenian construction of masculinity, says Brown, stems from a concern for "ethical politics and philosophy, not its consequences for women" (1988: 599).

As a result of this ambiguity that seems inherent in Plato's political philosophy, his assessment of the nature of Woman seems more nuanced than it is in much of the contemporary literature. Levin argues that Plato does not simply take a negative view on women, but instead allows for types of women, some good and some bad (1996: 22-23). In accordance with his theory of the tripartite soul, Plato does admit that Woman has the ability to be rational, *i.e.* for the rational

⁹⁷ Brown (1988: 595) does not elaborate on how she sees Plato's characterization of philosophy as being female, nor does she explain why she thinks that it is female souls that finally gain access to the forms; one assumes that this case rests on the gender of the nouns ἡ φιλοσοφία and ἡ ψυχή. Dillon (1985: 107-108) warns against reading too much into grammatical femininity, since it does not always translate into what he calls 'functional femininity'.

⁹⁸ While I find Brown's characterization of philosophy as female problematic and underdeveloped, there is an interesting aspect which she seems to allude to here, namely that she considers Plato against homosexual love: "Plato ultimately proscribes male homosexual intercourse and Socrates refuses the sexual advances of his beloved Alcibiades (*Symp.* 219)" (1988: 607). The logical inference is that the only valid intercourse is that between a man and a woman, presumably for procreation. The *Resp.*'s policies on sexual relations support this inference (458e, 461a-e). Plutarch expands on this in *Amat.* by attempting to legitimise female *erōs* within the Platonic framework.

element in the soul to be dominant, just as it is possible for male souls to be ruled by the appetitive or spirited elements. In the ideal *polis* of the *Resp.*, women and men alike will be educated in philosophy so that they may learn to control these elements of their souls (Levin 1996: 24-25). Because souls are inherently sexless (and in fact not bound to human beings), Levin believes that Woman must have the same ability to attain virtue as Man does (1996: 29-30). Like many arguments on Plato's Woman, Levin makes good points, but some aspects do not sit as easily as others. While it is true that Plato could easily have rendered Diotima a man (Levin 1996: 30), he could also easily have left out the concession at *Resp.* 455d that men are better at all tasks than women. The suggestion that Plato therefore does consider Woman equal to Man still seems somewhat unlikely.

The debate on Plato's Woman is by no means settled, but there is one aspect of his treatment of the subject which is very difficult to deny: he believes that women are fundamentally inferior to men, even though their souls possess the same capacity for virtue. In both the *Resp.* and the *Leg.* as well as elsewhere Plato explicitly expresses this view. *Tim.* 90e-91a states that men who choose cowardly or immoral lives in their first incarnations are reincarnated as women in their second lives. Women are therefore born at a disadvantage by having souls that have shown moral weakness. The *Resp.* builds on and complexifies this notion of women's inferiority (reinforced at *Resp.* 451d-e and 455c-d) by claiming that the differences between Man and Woman are biological, but they have the same moral capacity as men because they have the same souls (*Resp.* 545e). The implication is that the path to virtue is much more difficult for Woman, though Plato does not state that it is impossible. The *Leg.* also proclaims unequivocally that women are in all things weaker and inferior to

men (781b, 805a, 813e).⁹⁹ At the same time, the argument that women as a class is inferior to men as a class does allow for the caveat that “many women... are better than many men in many things” (*Resp.* 455d), and it is this concession which allows them entry into the guardian class and equal education.

Ethically, Plato’s views are further complicated. In the *Meno*, Socrates expounds on the definition of virtue by arguing that virtue is the same in all people of all ages and genders (72c-73d). This argument is used within the framework that each person should apply her or his virtue within the proper sphere; Man’s virtue is to govern a state, Woman’s virtue is to manage a household (73a-b; cf. 71e-72a).¹⁰⁰ Whether virtue is available to Woman in the same degree as it is to Man is another question altogether. Scaltsas argues that according to Socrates (who she believes in this case especially was a major influence on Plato) virtue does not allow for degrees; one either possesses virtue fully or one does not (1992: 126-27). On this basis she argues that virtue is degendered in Plato, and therefore that Woman’s virtue can be applied in the public sphere. It is this that allows Plato to give the women of the *Resp.* access to the guardian class (1992: 127-28).

Not everyone agrees that Plato is so generous towards women, and some have taken the position of women as inferior to men as the starting point for a reconciliation of his views on women. According to Allen such a conciliation is quite possible: women have the same souls as men and therefore they have the same moral capacity. As such they should be educated in the same way as men, not only because they have the same moral capacity, but because these souls

⁹⁹ Eide (2002: 107-08) proposes that the passage at *Leg.* 781b is commonly misunderstood when it is taken to mean that including women in public life will double the lawgiver’s task. Instead, he suggests on the basis of textual evidence that it means that the lawgiver’s task will be more than doubled by the inclusion of women because of their nature, which is shy and unequipped for public life.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Xen. Oec.* 7.14-15.

have shown a natural weakness and therefore need instruction the most. To deny them education is harming the state more than the legislators realise (1975: 132-136). Furthermore, Allen argues that Plato considers guardian women above worker men, even though a guardian man would still be superior to a guardian woman (1975: 136). This is certainly not ascribing a feminist view to Plato, but it does seem a reasonable conciliation of at least some of the disparate views on women found in Plato's work.

Allen's interpretation highlights the complexity of the male-female status-relationship, and it is reasonable to think that Plutarch would have carefully considered these aspects in his reading of Plato and the subsequent formation of his own philosophy. It may therefore be possible, and certainly the attempt must be made, to reconstruct Plutarch's reception of Plato's Woman as narrowly as possible from the information available to us. Two of Plutarch's works may be especially useful in this regard: the *Amatorius*¹⁰¹ and *De Iside et Osiride*.

3.3. THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE: *DE ISIDE ET OSIRIDE* AND THE *AMATORIUS*

While many of Plutarch's works contain references to the Platonic corpus, he appears to favour some of Plato's dialogues over others. We know, for example, that he held the *Timaeus* in high regard, and used it extensively to form his understanding of Platonic philosophy (Karamanolis 2010). Elsewhere, Plutarch's work is filled with references to Plato, including *Conj. praec.*, which makes special reference to the passage in the *Resp.* which states "that the state is most prosperous and happy in which the people hear the words 'mine' and 'not mine' most rarely uttered" (*Conj. praec.* 140e, cf. *Resp.* 462c, also quoted in *Amat.* 767e). *Conj. praec.* also refers *i.a.* to *Leg.* 729c and 839a. *Leg.* 729c is a

¹⁰¹ Also known as the *Eroticus*.

particularly popular passage in Plutarch; he refers to it again at *Mor.* 14b, 71b and 272c. The passage highlights the importance of living in plain sight according to the advice one would have others follow. The *Amatorius*, a ‘dialogue’ on the nature of homosexual and heterosexual love (*erōs*), contains further numerous references to Plato’s *Phdr.*, *Symp.*, *Leg.*, *Phd.*, *Resp.* and the *Tim.*, as does *De Iside et Osiride*.

Plutarch was clearly very familiar with Plato’s work, and his efforts at presenting a unitary interpretation of Plato during a time when the Academy was struggling with the legacy the Athenian philosopher had left behind are admirable. This project involved using many inherited ideas, but Plutarch’s originality should not be underestimated (Bonazzi 2012: 140). Plato’s biggest influence on Plutarch is metaphysical. Plutarch shares Plato’s view on the immortality of the soul; in the *Cons. ux.* he tells Timoxena that the soul is “imperishable”, and “affected like a captive bird, if it has long been reared in the body and has become tamed to this life by many activities and long familiarity” it becomes “entangled in the passions and fortunes of this world through repeated births” (611e; tr. De Lacy & Einarson 1959; cf. *Amat.* 764e).¹⁰² He repeats this view again in *Is. Os.*, stating the Platonic belief that immoral men are reincarnated into the bodies of certain animals. In this case he is discussing sacrifices to the Egyptian demi-god Typhon (Seth), saying that the Egyptians do not sacrifice animals if they have a single black or white hair because of their belief that “unholy and unrighteous men” are reincarnated only into suitable animals (363b-c; tr. Babbit 1936).¹⁰³ Plutarch warns Clea that

¹⁰² Cf. for example *Gorg.* 493a and *Crat.* 400b-c, both of which refer to the Orphic doctrine of $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ $\sigma\eta\mu\alpha$, and *Phaed.* 70a-72d, which argues that souls are immortal but bodies perishable.

¹⁰³ Apparently, because of his ‘red’ colouring, Typhon would only be incarnated into red animals, particularly the ass and cattle. The ass apparently deserves to be sacrificed not only because of his resemblance in colour to the god, but also because of his behaviour (*Is. Os.* 363a-

the myth is obviously not literally true, but allows us a glimpse of the Truth (358e-f; cf. Stadter 1999: 175).

Plutarch identifies Osiris indirectly with the element of water (*i.e.* order, Reason, wisdom and truth; 371b, 377a, and the “active and beneficent power”; 366b), the ἀρχή which created the elements of fire, earth and air from itself (365c). This assigns to Osiris the creative and generative power (364b) and essentially conflates his function with that of the demiurge (Brenk 1988: 464). Being akin to the element of water, Osiris is also identifiable with moisture, and his antithesis is drought. Typhon is therefore associated with fire and any type of dry condition such as dry winds (365e) as well as the ocean, which is saline and therefore unsuitable for reproduction (*i.e.* Typhon is disorder, intemperance, excess and defect; 371b, 377a). The Nile is the domain of Osiris and the land that it fertilises is the body of Isis (*i.e.* Isis is generation and the Receptacle of matter, as well as the reflection of the Forms, Reason and order; 368b, 377a).¹⁰⁴ This union brings forth Horus (air; 366a, and the physical world; 373e).

Plutarch refers to Osiris as the creative element, Typhon as the destructive element, and Isis as the nurturing element (374d-375a). Both Osiris and Typhon are male principles, the former benevolent and the latter malevolent. The actions of Osiris are in accord with reason and perfect wisdom, while Typhon acts irrationally and impulsively (367e, 371b). Isis, the feminine principle, stands between these two and therefore she is neither (367a). At *Is. Os.* 370f, Plutarch refers specifically to *Leg.* (896e-897d) as the passage he considers to be

c). As the evil principle of the World Soul (369e; see below), mortals therefore desire to get rid of Typhon by sacrificing his incarnation.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. 365c, where Plutarch says Isis could not find Osiris’ dismembered penis and so instead reconstructed it. He uses ὕλη to describe the substance of the penis, which recalls Aristotle’s prime matter (ὕλη – also at *An. procr.* 1022f). Identifying ὕλη with the Receptacle had become common in Plutarch’s time (Phillips 2002: 233).

Plato's final word on the principles of creation, rejecting the *Timaeus* as an earlier theory. Here he says Plato sees at least two components of the World Soul, one malevolent and one benevolent. A third nature exists and can be moved by either of these two, though it leans towards the Good.¹⁰⁵ Plutarch then attempts to interpret the nature of Isis within this framework. As the "female principle of nature", she is "receptive of every form of generation" and the "gentle nurse" (372f). She is neither benevolent nor malevolent, but the force of Reason continually acts on her and she is always moving towards the Good (cf. 383a).¹⁰⁶ As the "all-receptive" nurse, she is also the incubator for evil, and therefore she tries to avoid it, since it too has the ability to act on her (372f).¹⁰⁷

It is inadvisable to attempt to apply ideas about women directly from the text of *Is. Os.*, but it is perhaps possible to extrapolate Plutarch's conceptualisation of female nature. It seems reasonable, for example, to infer that Plutarch considered Woman capable of attaining the highest good. If he was indeed in agreement with Plato's theory of metempsychosis, as the *Cons. ux.* and *Amat.* strongly suggest, Man and Woman necessarily have the same souls and therefore the same capability of attaining virtue. By attaining the highest good Woman, like Man, has the ability to assimilate herself to god (*Is. Os.* 351c-d).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Tim.* 35a, where Plato says that the demiurge blended the third nature, Being, from the divisible and indivisible souls, and then blended the three together with the use of Being.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. also 373c, where Plutarch says that Isis bore Apollo, also known as the elder Horus, while she was still in Rhea's womb. The god she bore was imperfect, but for Plutarch this indicates again that the female principle always strives towards the Good (Dillon 1985: 212; Stadter 1999: 176).

¹⁰⁷ Dillon (1985: 119, 123) argues that Plutarch (along with other Platonists) attempts to reconcile the views in the *Tim.* and the *Leg.*, which are problematic and the cause of much debate. He furthermore views Isis as an essentially irrational principle capable of accepting the ordering of Reason (*i.e.* Osiris) (2002: 232-33). Plutarch's description of this principle however suggests that she is not only capable, but prefers the ordering of Reason.

Yet he also considers Woman by nature more susceptible to temptation, being constantly caught between Good and Evil. For this reason, he says Isis is “helpless and without means” and clings to her partner, who is “perfect and self-sufficient” (374d).¹⁰⁸ Being linked to her male partner keeps her on the path to *logos*, but even so Typhon may force his way in and corrupt her. When this has happened she may be regarded as sad and in search of Reason (375a). The metaphysical argument in *Is. Os.* and to a large extent also that of *An. procr.* (both of which identify a good and evil aspect of the world soul) forms the basis of Plutarch’s moral psychology. Strong emphasis is placed on the imposition of order on the irrational and chaotic element of the soul, though it can never truly be defeated (*Is. Os.* 358d). The aim of the moral life is rather to bring the elements into a harmonious relation, as the demiurge did upon creation of the World Soul (*cf.* Opsomer 2007b: 386).

Opsomer makes the observation in his analysis of the psychological dualism of *De virtute morali* that Plutarch regarded the soul as fundamentally constituted of two parts, the rational and irrational, following Plato’s account. The irrational aspect of the soul can be further divided into the appetitive and the spirited parts, while the rational aspect is indivisible (Opsomer 2007b: 387; *cf.* *Tim.* 35a; *Virt. mor.* 441f-442a). In his analysis of *Is. Os.* Opsomer places little focus on the role of Isis. However, from the extent of Plutarch’s description of her activities and role in the myth, it would be fair to say that he deemed the feminine principle important. It seems probable that Plutarch, in his attempt to unify the various doctrines of Plato, considered the World Soul to have the same tripartite division as all souls according to the *Resp.* (435c), a dialogue we know he held in high esteem. The bipartite division he discusses in *Virt. mor.*

¹⁰⁸ Plutarch uses Plato’s myth on the birth of Love from Poverty and Plenty (*Symp.* 203b) here. In this case ἡ πενία does translate to functional femininity, as the female-ness of Poverty plays an integral part in the myth.

incorporates elements from the passages in the *Resp.*, but in *Is. Os.* he makes it clear that he favours the *Leg.* when it comes to the World Soul. For Plutarch, Osiris, as Reason, therefore corresponds to the λογιστικόν, while Typhon, as Chaos, stands in opposition to him as the ἐπιθυμητικόν (cf. *Resp.* 439d). Plato identifies the third part of the soul, the spirited part, as the θυμοειδής (*Resp.* 440e; *Virt. mor.* 442a), which is caught between the ἐπιθυμητικόν and the λογιστικόν (*Resp.* 439e, 440b). In the just soul it sides with the latter, but in unjust souls it sides with the former (*Resp.* 440b). Plutarch places the θυμοειδής closer to the appetitive part of the soul in *Virt. mor.*, but in *Is. Os.* he views this principle as leaning towards the Good.¹⁰⁹

As aspects of the same divisible soul, the description of Isis in Plutarch's *Is. Os.* is in keeping with the activities of the spirited part of the soul, while Typhon is referred to as ἄλογος (e.g. at 371b). Isis throws herself on the coffin of Osiris with "such a dreadful wailing" that the youngest son of the king (a bystander) dies (357d). In a separate incident shortly afterwards she caresses the coffin while weeping, and when a young boy approaches her she gives him such a look of anger that he too dies of shock (357e). Horus defeats Typhon, but it is Isis who prevented his death and instead set him free (358d, 368f; cf. 371a). Plutarch thus equates Isis with the role of "Mediator"¹¹⁰ between good and evil (369f). He describes her as leaning towards Reason, but susceptible to the influence of the irrational and chaotic, i.e. Typhon. For this reason she does not vanquish Typhon, but weakens him, because she desires to maintain a state of harmony between the elements, which would not be possible without disorder

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Adul. amic.*, which also divides the soul into two parts, and places the spirited part with the irrational element (61d).

¹¹⁰ In this section Plutarch draws on Persian religion and refers to the sage Zoroaster, who called good Oromazes and evil Areimanius, while midway between the two stood Mithras, also known as "Mediator" (369b).

in a moderated form (367a). Plutarch does however at times conflate the traits of Isis and Typhon, so that it seems that they could be aspects of the same divisible soul, *e.g.* at 371b, where he says that Typhon is τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ παθητικὸν καὶ τιτανικὸν καὶ ἄλογον καὶ ἔμπληκτον (“the part of the soul which is impassioned, impulsive, irrational and capricious”).

As the feminine principle, Isis is repeatedly referred to as the receptacle of the creative and generative power of Osiris and of the destructive and chaotic power of Typhon. Plutarch does say that she has the ability to move herself to action (373c), but only when she is in search of the Good. It’s tempting to see Isis as the bearer of offspring, and in some sense that is certainly what Plutarch has in mind (*e.g.* at 366a). Here it is however quite difficult to say that Plutarch therefore sees Woman simply as the bearer of children, as Isis’ role is metaphysically much more complex than that. She is an essential partner to Osiris, who imparts to her the Forms so that she can give them matter and distribute them to the world (*cf.* 375a, 382d). The treatise suggests that Plutarch considers Isis as fundamental to this process despite not being the guardian of the Forms herself. He also does not discount the essential role of Isis in the birth of Horus (the physical world; 373e). Another equally important matter for Plutarch is the union of Isis and Osiris, which he sees as part of a divine triad with Horus (373ef).¹¹¹ This theme of male-female union recurs in *Amat.*, where Plutarch further discusses Woman’s generative power and the benefits that can be gained from heterosexual love.

Plutarch’s main aim in *Amat.* is the expansion on and further development of some of the central ideas of Platonic *erōs*. In the dialogue Plutarch develops a systematic argument for Woman’s ability to generate *erōs* (766d-767a) against

¹¹¹ This triad is more akin to the family structure, but within it Isis is the antithesis to Osiris. The malevolent aspect of the World Soul no longer features here, but we must assume that the Good doesn’t either (Dillon 1985: 119).

his opponents' views that *erōs* can only occur between men (750c-f). The most balanced of the opponents, Protogenes, argues that true (*i.e.* pederastic) *erōs* brings about a state of virtue through friendship, while the feelings between a man and a woman amount to little more than desire (ἐπιθυμία) for pleasure (ἡδονή; 750e). Such relationships, like those between men and slaves, are devoid of friendship and inspiration, because women (like slaves) are base creatures incapable of reaching the state of virtue that *erōs* inspires (751a-b).

When Daphnaeus steps in in favour of heterosexual love, he argues that if love between men and boys does not destroy friendship, love between a man and a woman, which is τῆ φύσει ("natural"), surely does not either (751d). The argument for conjugal *erōs* does not attempt to show that homosexual love is illegitimate, but it does assign to it a lower rank (751f). Daphnaeus argues that *erōs* without *aphroditē* is unfulfilling and will weary quickly (752b). At this point Piasias exclaims against the notion that *aphroditē* is necessary for *erōs*, and maintains that decent women cannot give or receive passionate love (752c). Here Plutarch joins the discussion to disagree that marriage should be a union devoid of *erōs*.

Plutarch does not lay out any arguments against pederasty or homosexual love, but from the dialogue it is clear that he favours conjugal (*i.e.* heterosexual) love.¹¹² His arguments for heterosexual love firstly claim that *erōs* is a divine agitation of the soul (756e). Secondly, he focuses on the benefits that can be gained from it, which he maintains are the same and even more than can be gained from homosexual love: the latter can provide *philia*, *erōs* and wisdom, but the former can provide those things as well as offspring, therefore it is more beneficial. The argument relies on Plutarch showing that Woman is capable of

¹¹² Cf. Opsomer (2007a: 156-58, 161-62), who pays some attention to the importance of moderation, especially as characterised in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, for Plutarch's moral psychology and the implications this carries for his theory of *erōs*.

philia, *erōs* and wisdom too, and in doing so he expands on the Platonic doctrine of the four types of *philia* (*Tim.* 86e-87a; *Phdr.* 244a; *Symp.* 179a) to include a fifth: *philetikon* (friendship or affection) which is affection for boys and “decent women” (758e-759a; Tsouvala 2014: 196).

By arguing that women are capable of *philia*, *erōs* and wisdom, Plutarch reveals to us how he has interpreted Plato’s views on women. *Amat.* relies heavily on Plato’s metaphysics to arrive at some of its most fundamental conclusions, and in doing so it characterises *erōs* as *anamnēsis* (ὁ Ἔρως ἀνάμνησις ἐστίν; 764e). Plutarch says that the soul gains access to the Realm of Truth through Love, which persuades it that Beauty exists in a realm other than the physical. Before Love’s intervention, the soul is blinded by the light of the sun (as if it becomes drugged or falls into a dream) and therefore forgets what it once knew, thinking that the Earth is the only place where beauty and value exists (764e-765d). By ascribing to Woman the ability to generate *erōs*, he ascribes to her a soul capable of the greatest good, namely attaining knowledge of the divine Realm of Ideas (*cf.* 769c: “So it is ridiculous to maintain that women have no participation in virtue”).¹¹³ That women have souls capable of virtue in the same way as men’s souls are capable of virtue is also a Platonic idea (*cf.* *Pl. Meno* 72c-73d). By denying women the capability of attaining virtue Plutarch’s opponents are making the mistake of “masculinizing” ethics, an interpretation that Plutarch necessarily corrects through his arguments (Barberà 2007: 124). The Realm of Truth, Plutarch argues, is genderless and does not discriminate (Barberà 2007: 129).

Plutarch also briefly discusses the complex gendered hierarchy by admitting that an older, more experienced woman such as Ismenodora, who has

¹¹³ Plutarch says that there are many instances of women having displayed masculine (ἀνδρεῖον) daring and courage, therefore they should not be excluded from displaying (presumably also masculine) friendship (769c).

kidnapped the young Bacchon with the intention of marrying him, may be useful to a younger husband if she is intelligent, virtuous and wise (*Amat.* 754d). In all other cases, however, Plutarch asserts that the husband should be the leader of the couple (*Conj. praec.* 139c-d, 142d). Ismenodora's action in kidnapping Bacchon defiantly goes against accepted custom, and in doing so effectively shows that women are in fact inspired by divine *erōs* just as men are.¹¹⁴ Throughout *Amat.* Plutarch continuously assigns to *erōs* a transformative power, and he particularly discusses how *erōs* makes lovers "gentle and amiable" (cf. *Conj. praec.* 138c; *Amat.* 757d, 762d). Plutarch does not however discuss how (if at all) Man is transformed by *erōs*. Tsouvala suggests that this may be because Plutarch sees an inherent weakness in Woman that can be corrected by the power of *erōs* (2014: 202). If Plutarch interprets Plato's views on women as Allen suggests they could be interpreted, it would seem reasonable to assume that Plutarch sees some inherent weakness in Woman, and certainly there are other texts which support this claim, most notably the psychagogic text *Conj. praec.*, a book of advice for newlyweds that is aimed mostly at the bride, suggesting that she needs to work much harder at the marriage (and by extension at attaining virtue) than the groom. That he does believe that female souls can achieve the same moral standard as male souls is however clear.

The metaphysics of *De Iside et Osiride* and the *Amatorius* complement each other here. Isis, the feminine principle of nature, is styled as emotive and susceptible to forces of chaos, destruction and irrationality, but as the lover of Osiris she constantly seeks his presence. When read in conjunction with the *Amat.*, the feminine in this case is functional, in that Isis is representative not only of the

¹¹⁴ Barberà (2000: 41) argues that Ismenodora's actions are a radical political statement against the sexualisation of ethics, that it is a will to freedom that in effect frees men from the "prison they have built themselves with the help of their erratic *noûs*".

transformative power of Love, but also of Reason. In both *Amat.* and *Is. Os.* Plutarch identifies Egyptian elements with the heavenly spheres. Isis' actions are motivated by love, and accordingly the Egyptians identify her with the moon and consider her a love goddess (*Is. Os.* 368d-e, 372b; *Amat.* 764b), while Osiris/Eros is identified with the sun because of his creative and generative power (*Is. Os.* 372a-f).¹¹⁵ In *Amat.* Plutarch makes a clear connection between the heavenly bodies and Beauty, which can be attained through the co-partnership of *erōs* and *logos* (764d). By giving Isis the keys to the kingdom, so to speak, Plutarch unequivocally makes it clear that the feminine has the ability and the moral imperative to attain the greatest good. Yet at the same time his reservations are hard to disguise.

Isis is fundamentally ambivalent at best, even if not wholly irrational (*Is. Os.* 374d; Dillon 1985: 119-20). If Isis is the fertile soil for the generation of the Good, so too she is receptive of the growth of Evil if she does not take care to avoid it (*Is. Os.* 372f). Perhaps the most puzzling aspect of Plutarch's account in *De Iside et Osiride* is that Isis and Osiris were deified, while Typhon remained a daemon (*Is. Os.* 362f-363a). Isis (as did Osiris) received her apotheosis because of her virtue: αὐτὴ δὲ καὶ Ὅσιρις ἐκ δαιμόνων ἀγαθῶν δι' ἀρετὴν εἰς θεοὺς μεταβαλόντες (361e). In the just soul, the feminine principle is therefore capable of attaining a state of assimilation to the gods, which is the primary aim of psychagogic practice. As male principles, Seth and Osiris may at first glance seem to be equals, but Plutarch tells us that Osiris was born to rule (355f, 356b, 383a; cf. *An. procr.* 1016b). Reason therefore has an innate ability to triumph

¹¹⁵ There is a lacuna in the MSS. of *Amat.* here, but it is generally accepted that the missing section would have identified Aphrodite with the moon. Cf. also Brenk (1988: 462 & 470), who notes Plutarch's reference to the harmonious relationship of the sun (male) and the moon (female). The sun is however not identical to Osiris/Eros, but only akin to him insofar as his relationship with Isis/Aphrodite facilitates access to the Realm of Truth (*Is. Os.* 764e).

over Disorder and Irrationality, because of its superiority. Only in unjust souls where the feminine principle leans towards chaos is Reason overpowered. While in *Virt. mor.* Plutarch places the spirited part of the soul in opposition to reason, *Is. Os.* he describes the activities of the just soul, in which the feminine principle chooses the Good over Evil.

Plato's metaphysics certainly plays a central role in the formation of Plutarch's ideas about women, ideas he develops on a theoretical level in *Is. Os.* and *Amat.* The result is an interesting mix of Platonic ideas with Plutarch's own conservative gender ethics, and he finds himself attempting to reconcile these ideas in works such as *Conj. praec.* and throughout the *Lives* by incorporating ideas from other philosophical traditions in order to form a systematic programme of moral guidance.

3.4. PHILOSOPHICAL *TOPOI* IN PLUTARCH'S WORK

Middle Platonism had already seen considerable influence from other intellectual traditions by the 1st century CE, which may appear to be 'eclecticism', but this label has been rejected recently by scholars (Dillon 2014: 61). That Plutarch assimilates ideas from Aristotelianism, Stoicism, the Pythagoreans and even at times the Cynics is clear from the wide scope of his work and the way in which his thought is developed. Dillon claims that Plutarch's ethics follows a fairly consistent Peripatetic doctrine, although "his true views are frequently obscured in his more popular ethical treatises, where the tradition that he is following is predominantly Cynic-Stoic" (2014: 63). Plutarch's popular-philosophical works do incorporate views from other traditions, and therefore his relationship with these other philosophies is crucial to our understanding of his views on women, or at least the view he aims to popularise. However, it should not be understood that his popular-philosophical works can be separated from his high-philosophical works on the

basis of some methodological or philosophical difference.¹¹⁶ The views Plutarch develops in the latter form the basis of the former, while he uses different traditions carefully and judiciously to create his psychagogic programme for women. As a result, his Platonism plays a fundamental role in his popular-philosophical works as well, and his engagement with the philosophical tradition is careful and critical. The philosophical framework within which Plutarch operates often reveals itself unobtrusively, and we find that the only philosophical school that Plutarch regularly makes positive reference to is Platonism. Despite this, many of his ideas find broad resemblances in other traditions, especially Stoicism. Giving advice to women had been a feature of popular philosophy from the start of the tradition, and Plutarch certainly had an established philosophical basis from which to launch his own psychagogic programme. Psychagogy for women often focused on common *topoi*, adapting and expanding the advice within the appropriate philosophical framework. Plutarch is no different, as he uses his Platonic foundations to build his own version of the ideal Woman. This philosophical framework is evident in ideas held about the proper application of virtue.

In both the *Moralia* and the *Lives*, Plutarch develops his conceptual framework for the proper virtue of men. Successful men in the ancient world must be respectable, and for that he needs a wife who is respectable too. Plutarch therefore finds it necessary to develop a concept of virtue that encompasses both sexes and their relationship with one another. How should their virtue interact in service of a common goal? How is Woman's virtue different to

¹¹⁶ Cf. Bonazzi (2012: 140), who argues that Plutarch throughout his works stressed the importance of a combination of *theoria* and *praxis*, and did not believe that either one or the other should be afforded philosophical primacy. For Plutarch *theoria* and *praxis* cannot function separately and are in fact ultimately an epistemic unity. It is this notion that distinguishes him from the Peripatetics, who regarded things and activities as either *theoria* or *praxis* (Bonazzi 2012: 147).

Man's? It is impossible for the practical philosopher to subscribe to a strictly Platonic doctrine on Woman's virtues, not only because we have seen the difficulty encountered when attempting to reconcile the different views, but also because the *zeitgeist* simply did not allow for it. What we therefore find in Plutarch is an attempt to reconcile his broadly Platonic views with the needs of his audience. In doing so, he focuses on several *topoi* common to the philosophy of women of his time: harmony, temperance, grief, education, and public action.¹¹⁷ Plutarch considers these five aspects crucial to the proper development of virtue in Woman. These *topoi* are common to women's moral education in almost every ancient philosophical tradition.

3.4.1. *Harmony*

Harmony is one of the most frequently recurring themes in Plutarch's works on women. For him, it is especially important for a woman to maintain harmony in her home: the theme of *Conj. praec.* is harmony (ἑμμέλεια; 138c) in the household and in marriage, which can be achieved διὰ λόγου καὶ ἁρμονίας καὶ φιλοσοφίας (138c). Harmony in the household is the responsibility of both parties, but Plutarch approaches the methods by which they may attain marital harmony in different ways. For the husband, harmony first and foremost is a question of leadership (139d-e, 142e), while it is the wife's duty to be obedient and agreeable (140a). This division of marital obligation extends to the bedroom, where the husband takes action and the woman follows – a reversal of roles would be considered shameful for both (140d). If her husband has sex with prostitutes, concubines and slaves, he must preserve the peace by not approaching his wife reeking of another's perfume (144d), but if he does not show this consideration for her, it is her duty to speak nothing of it, and to assume that he is acting in her best interest (140b, 144a-b). The virtuous wife is

¹¹⁷ These *topoi* are treated in relative order of importance. I expand on this notion in chapter 5.

above all agreeable at all times; by being pleasant and never annoying her husband she creates a tranquil atmosphere for the marriage to flourish (141b-c, 141f, 142a, 143c, 143e, 144a).

Plutarch's views on women's harmony finds parallels elsewhere. According to Aristotle, as also to some extent for Plato in the *Meno*, men and women's virtues differ, that is to say courage in a man is not the same as courage in a woman (*Politics* 1.13.1259b38-1260a7). Similarly, Plutarch seems to suggest that men and women do not possess harmony in the same way. For men, harmony consists in successful leadership of the state, which must be reflected in the harmony of his home (*Conj. praec.* 144c), while for women harmony is a virtue of subservience. Xenophon's Socrates puts forth a similar view when he argues that a household can only function well when both the husband and the wife perform their duties adequately (*Oec.* 3.16). The husband's duties involve being outdoors, involved in the state and war, while women should spend their time indoors. Men who are too involved with women's work eventually become "womanish" (θηλυνομένων) in body and soul (*Oec.* 4.2-4).

The Stoics, the most influential school in the early Imperial period, do not hold the same view. For them, harmony in the household is achieved through co-partnership and collaboration between the husband and wife. The burden of harmonious living falls on both parties, though the wife must play her role in the household and the husband must play his in the public sphere. Together, they make each other's lives easier (Asmis 1996: 79-80; Muson. fr. 13a-b, 89-91).¹¹⁸ Hierocles the Stoic shares this view with Musonius (*On Marriage*, 75-77; *Household Management*, 93-95).¹¹⁹ This is a natural consequence of the Stoic belief

¹¹⁸ All references to Musonius are to page numbers (and, where applicable in the case of quotes, line numbers) in C.E. Lutz, *Musonius Rufus: The Roman Socrates* (1947).

¹¹⁹ All references to Hierocles are to page numbers in I. Ramelli, *Hierocles the Stoic: Elements of Ethics* (2009).

that men and women have the same abilities and the same capacity for virtue (Muson. fr. 3, 39-40), a view influenced in part by an interpretation of Plato's *Resp.* (Asmis 1996: 80-81).¹²⁰ According to Stoics like Musonius, studying philosophy will equip women with the skills to be excellent housekeepers. In fact, he argues that both husband and wife should be trained in philosophy so that they may have understanding, self-control, temperance and justice (Muson. fr. 4, 46-47). If both are not naturally disposed to virtue, a marriage cannot be harmonious (Muson. fr. 13b, 90-91).

Plutarch is certainly aware of the Stoic stance on women and their abilities, in fact, he refers to a Stoic theory on the mixing of elements in *Conj. praec.* (142f-143a). In the passage he says that a married couple should be like the mixture of water and wine, inseparable after the fact, and they should consider all things between them shared in common. This is reminiscent of Plato's *Resp.* 462c, and the early Stoics such as Zeno and Chrysippus took a view akin to the *Resp.*'s radical proposals, but these views are generally thought to be closer to Cynic than Stoic philosophy (Asmis 1996: 68). In any case, Plutarch certainly doesn't think that the husband and wife should regard all things in common in quite the same way as the Stoics do; at *Conj. praec.* 140f he also refers to the mixture of water and wine, but here he adds the caveat that "as we call a mixture 'wine', although the larger of the component parts is water, so the property and the estate ought to be said to belong to the husband even though the wife contributes the larger share." For Plutarch, harmony is therefore clearly attainable only through the husband's leadership and the wife's

¹²⁰ Musonius does not believe that men and women should share all tasks equally, as Plato apparently does in the *Resp.* Instead, he argues that men should do the heavier tasks and women the lighter ones, purely on the basis of strength, although he does make room for exceptions. Importantly, this only applies to work where strength is an issue, in cases where the work is based on virtue, Musonius is clear about his view that he believes both men and women are equally suited to the task (Muson. fr. 3, 47).

obedience. This sentiment is echoed in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, where Ischomachus praises his wife's readiness to be obedient in the same breath as he praises her masculine intelligence (10.1-2, *cf.* 10.13). Clearly a masculine mind does not free a woman from the constraints of gendered propriety, neither for Xenophon, nor for Plutarch.

Plutarch also makes it very clear that he is aware of the Pythagorean women and holds them in high esteem. He uses Theano as an exemplum of moral excellence in *Conj. praec.* (142d), but he focuses specifically on temperance. As one of the most woman-friendly schools of ancient philosophy,¹²¹ the Pythagorean school has left us one of the largest collections of ancient philosophical texts by women from any one tradition, although the authenticity of many of the works attributed to Pythagorean women, including Theano, Phytis and Perictione, is still a topic of debate. Despite this it is generally accepted that the texts would have been recognisable as credible applications of Pythagorean philosophy to women's lives (Plant 2004: 68-69). Cosmic harmony, mirrored in moral life, occupied an important place in the Pythagorean philosophical doctrine. Thus Perictione and Phytis write of the harmony of the woman:

It is necessary to consider the harmonious woman full of intelligence and moderation. For it is necessary for a soul to be extremely perceptive regarding virtue to be just and brave and intelligent and well-decorated with self-sufficiency and hating baseless opinion.

Perictione, *On the Harmony of Women*, 77

...each virtue is appropriate to a different thing and improves what is receptive to it: the virtue of the eyes the eyes, the virtue of the hearing the hearing, the virtue of the horse the horse, and the virtue of a man a man. Thus too the virtue appropriate to a woman improves a woman. And a woman's greatest virtue is chastity.

Phytis, *On the Chastity of Women*, 84-85

¹²¹ Initiation into the school was the same for both sexes (Lambropolou 1995: 122).

Feminine harmony in Pythagorean terms thus consists of moderation (*sōphrosynē*), intelligence, prudence and temperance (*enkrateia*). The virtuous woman is one who maintains harmony in her soul by seeking and obtaining the necessary virtues. By seeking these virtues she can also attain justice, reason/intelligence and courage, qualities that men and women share (Phyntis, *On the Chastity of Women*, 84-85; Lambropolou 1995: 124, 129). The true test of a woman's harmony is in her household, which she must keep in a good state by being prudent and doing things that are pleasing to her husband, even if this means turning a blind eye to his adulterous acts (Theano, *Letter to Nicostrate*, 73; Perictione, *On the Harmony of Women*, 77).

The Pythagorean theory of harmony extends well beyond the life of the virtuous woman, and is well-developed. In other parts of Plutarch's philosophy, especially in *Conj. praec.*, we can see the extent to which ideas of harmony from Pythagorean sources has influenced him. He especially regards temperance as an important characteristic of the virtuous woman, and an invaluable trait if she is to keep her household and her marriage in good order.

3.4.2. Temperance

Plutarch's views on women's temperance also find parallels in the philosophical tradition, particularly in that of the Pythagorean women's letters. In *Conj. praec.* he tells Eurydice that adornments such as luxurious clothing and jewellery will spoil her, and that she should rather decorate herself with her character ("dignity, good behaviour, and modesty"; 141e, *cf.* 142c-d, 144e, 145b). In these passages he recommends that she stays away from all forms of extravagance, including cosmetics, brightly coloured clothing and jewels. Plain living features prominently in the philosophy of the Pythagoreans as well. They believed that prudence and temperance leads a woman to avoid actively seeking out wealth and beautiful material goods, though if she has these

already she does not refuse them (Perictione, *On the Harmony of Women*, 77; Lambropolou 1995: 125). The frequent recurrence of temperance in the Pythagorean women's letters makes it clear that it is an important female virtue, and women are often discouraged from wearing anything ostentatious (Melissa, *Letter to Cleareta*, 83).¹²² It is furthermore her duty to manage her household in such a manner that she will pass on her *sōphrosynē* and *enkrateia* to her children, so that her virtue may be reflected in them and so in society (Theano, *Letter to Euboule*, 70).

Sōphrosynē is the virtue *par excellence* of women from the Classical Period onwards (North 1977: 35). It is telling that Babbit almost always translates the noun and its cognates as 'virtue', e.g. at *Conj. praec.* 142a: ἡδέως συνοικῆ καὶ μὴ ὀργιζομένη ὅτι σωφρονεῖ, "she may live pleasantly with him and not be cross all the time because she is virtuous"; and at *Conj. praec.* 142c: οὕτω λογίζεσθαι περὶ τῆς σώφρονος καὶ ἀσθηρᾶς γυναικός, "so the husband must reason about his virtuous and uncompromising wife". As a female virtue, *sōphrosynē* thus comes to mean more than just "moderation" or "soundness of mind". Instead, it broadly encompasses everything the virtuous woman ought to be: quiet, reasonable, a good housekeeper, and temperate (North 1977: 35-48). Virtue, for a woman, is moderation.

In philosophy, the concept of *sōphrosynē* retains the primary meaning of self-control, soundness of mind, prudence and temperance (LSJ A.II). For Musonius, *sōphrosynē* is a virtue appropriate to both men and women, because if women do not possess self-control, they cannot be good housekeepers (Muson. fr. 3, 41). Having self-control also applies to sexual desires, and thus Musonius says that the wife trained in philosophy will be chaste with respect to "unlawful love" (ἀφροδισίων παρὰ νόμων; Muson. fr. 3, 41.18). Epictetus similarly

¹²² See also Phytis, *On the Chastity of Women*, 85 and Perictione, *On the Harmony of Women*, 77.

criticizes Roman women for misreading Plato's *Republic* and using its "community of women" as a licence for licentiousness (fr. 15; tr. Oldfather 1928). He, like Musonius, is not only against adultery in the case of women, but even condemns it in the harshest terms in the case of men (*Diatr.* 2.4; Muson. fr. 4, 44-45; Muson. fr. 12, 85-89). The Pythagorean Phytis also considers chastity a virtue more properly attributed to the woman, while courage and intelligence are male virtues. This does not exclude the other sex from these virtues, but rather assigns virtues according to gendered categories of propriety. So a woman's chastity must be visible through the resemblance of her children to her husband (Phytis, *On the Chastity of Women*, 85). Plutarch seems undecided on this matter; he certainly agrees that women should be chaste, but he wavers on the case of male fidelity.¹²³

The temperate woman also does not indulge in luxuries such as expensive clothing, but whereas the Pythagoreans permitted it when they were available, some philosophers rejected luxury outright. Perhaps the most extreme example is the Cynic Hipparchia, who gave up her wealth and the comfort of her home to live a Cynic's lifestyle on the streets with her husband, the philosopher Crates (Diog. Laert. 6.7.97-98; Kennedy 1999: 49). Musonius also says the temperate woman avoids luxury ([εἶναι] μὴ πολυτελή, μὴ καλλωπίστριαν; Muson. fr. 3, 41.19-20).¹²⁴ Seneca, on the other hand, while clearly of the opinion that some women can exercise self-control, sees lack of it as particularly womanly (*Helv.* 14.2). Ischomachus commends his wife's ability to control her appetite (σωφρονεῖν, Xen. *Oec.* 7.14), and calls it a virtue applicable to both

¹²³ Plutarch's opinion on the matter of male and female adultery and sexual indulgence will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

¹²⁴ Epictetus also dismisses love of finery as a vain attempt to disguise shortcomings of character in general, and one must assume that this applies to both men and women (*Diatr.* 3.1).

men and women (*Oec.* 7.6, 7.14-15). Many of these arguments rest on the basis of women's ability, and the qualities they need in order to be a good housekeeper.

Plutarch's ethics have recently been identified as following an especially Peripatetic doctrine (Dillon 2014: 61; Becchi 2014: 73), although an in-depth study on the influence of the Peripatetic tradition on Plutarch has not yet been done. There have so far been no studies on how Plutarch's Aristotelian ethics may have influenced his views on women, and most scholars do not consider this a question at all. The greatest influence on Plutarch's work seems to come from the development of ideas sprung from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in particular the Doctrine of the Mean. Plutarch continuously lays emphasis on the importance of education for moral advancement, as in *Conj. praec.* 145d-f and in *Demetr.* 1.4. Through education and reason one may achieve moderation (Becchi 2014: 74), which not only men must master in order to rule well, but women must master in order to become virtuous. *Conj. praec.* places moderation in terms of modesty and temperance at the centre of a woman's virtue, bringing the Aristotelian doctrine in relation with the Pythagorean principle of harmony.

3.4.3. Education

By the 1st century CE many philosophers do not deny that women possess at least some intellectual and moral ability, though the debate as to what that ability is and what its proper application is carries on. For most philosophers, as for Plato and Aristotle, women are particularly suited to running the household and performing domestic tasks. Women must therefore be educated in order to become good housekeepers (*cf.* *Xen. Oec.* 3.11), and philosophy can equip them better than any other type of education.

Plutarch's Eurydice is certainly educated, and his opinion of her knowledge of philosophy is positive, as he clearly believes that this will equip her with the

tools to run her household and serve her husband (138c-d). On this point Musonius agrees, saying that philosophy will make a woman *σώφρονα*, *δικαίαν*, and *ἀνδρειοτέραν* (Muson. fr. 3, 40.18-33). These are qualities that she needs to be a good mother and housekeeper, and philosophy will furthermore teach her to be content with the life she has been given (Muson. fr. 3, 42). Stoic attitudes towards women have historically been described as fairly egalitarian; they believed that men and women possessed the same virtues and moral capabilities (Nussbaum 1994: 322-324; Engel 2003: 269).¹²⁵ It is therefore not entirely surprising that Seneca wrote two *Consolations* to women, and that both of them admit by their very nature that women's education is not out of place in the Stoic framework. Yet Seneca seems wary of women's ability and use of their education, accusing them of "wear[ing] out their eloquence in lending it to others" (*Helv.* 14.2; tr. Basore 1932) and "womanish weakness of mind" (*Marc.* 1.1; tr. Basore 1932). According to him, the great majority of women misuse the education they receive, and display it carelessly (*Helv.* 17.4). Thus he tells Marcia that she may be able to overcome her grief *despite* being a woman (*Marc.* 16.1), and one of the things that may help her do so is the study of philosophy (*Helv.* 17.3; *Marc.* 4.2).

3.4.4. *Grief*

Consolatio was a popular literary form in antiquity, though not many of the extant examples are addressed to women (Wilcox 2006: 75). Plutarch's *Cons. ux.* is one such a rare example, as are Seneca's letters to Helvia and Marcia. These letters have a single addressee, though often they have a larger audience in mind and as such are edited and published after their initial correspondence (Wilcox 2006: 75). Their aim is to lead the woman through her grief with

¹²⁵ Cf. the contrasting view of Philodemus, who appears to deem women weaker than men, though it is unclear whether he considers this a natural or cultural vice (*Lib.* 22a; Tsouna 2007: 109).

minimal display of impropriety; they are consolatory, but a large part of the message is that if she could only bear her grief like a man, it wouldn't be so hard (Sen. *Helv.* 16.5; *Marc.* 12.5-15.3).¹²⁶

As a result of their lack of self-control, grief affects women more than men (Sen. *Marc.* 7.3). Women who are educated, especially those who are educated in philosophy, should therefore be able to learn to be moderate in everything, even in grief (Muson. fr. 3, 40; Sen. *Marc.* 3.4; Plut. *Cons. ux.* 609a). Plutarch also asks Timoxena to control her emotions (*Cons. ux.* 608c) and commends her for her moderate display during the period since the death of their daughter (608f). The *Cons. ux.* has a strong Stoic influence and shows many parallels with ideals of exemplary grief (Wilcox 2006; Baltussen 2009:78-80). Both Plutarch and Seneca elevate motherhood and warn their addressee against the perception that they regret having had children (*Cons. ux.* 610d; Sen. *Helv.* 19.7), both bid that they be content with their lot (*Cons. ux.* 610e; Sen. *Marc.* 12.1), and both caution against immoderate displays of grief (*Cons. ux.* 609f; Sen. *Marc.* 7.1, 19.1). Furthermore, they also commend their addressee for her past exemplary behaviour, not only in grieving loved ones (*Cons. ux.* 608f, 609d; Sen. *Marc.* 1.2; *Helv.* 2.4-5), but also in temperance and moderation in dress (*Cons. ux.* 609a; Sen. *Helv.* 16.3). While Plutarch's *Cons. ux.* bears strong resemblances to Stoic consolatory letters, aspects of other philosophical traditions are also present in the letter, most notably Platonism.¹²⁷

However, despite his proselytising against the Epicureans, Plutarch cannot help but find some small point of agreement in the *Cons. ux.* when he tells Timoxena that life before the birth of their daughter and life after her death will

¹²⁶ Despite his comments about womanish behaviour, Seneca does admit that grief touches some men and causes them to brood and linger on it (*Marc.* 1.1).

¹²⁷ Platonism, in particular metempsychosis, in the *Cons. ux.* is discussed more fully above.

be no different (610d; *cf.* Diog. Laert. 10.124-127). This argument is usually used with reference to the deceased, who did not exist before and no longer exist after life, but Plutarch deems it fitting to apply it to the living too (Baltussen 2009: 87). The appeal to memory, whether fond or not, as a mechanism which may help one overcome grief is also an Epicurean notion (*Cons. ux.* 610e; Diog. Laert. 10.22). A common theme in *Consolatio* is the public perception of women's actions, and thus Plutarch commends Timoxena for not having made a grandiose public display of her mourning (*Cons. ux.* 608f4). This is a recurring *topos* especially in the *Lives*, where how a woman grieves is often held up as a barometer for her virtue.

3.4.5. *Public action*

Women's appearance in public in the 1st century CE was not an unusual occurrence, nor was their participation in certain systems of government, economic activities, and religious rituals.¹²⁸ Plutarch does not however suggest that Eurydice goes out and joins the increasing numbers of publically and visibly active women. On the contrary, he strongly urges her to remain at home, to be quiet and to let her husband handle their public affairs (*Conj. praec.* 139c, 142d30-32; *cf.* Xen. *Oec.* 7.21-22, 7.30, 11.13-20).

Musonius would appear to be the most likely candidate to endorse women's public action, since he is eager to agree that they possess equal virtue as men and should also be taught philosophy. Yet he does not advocate that women go out and participate in public life with men, but rather that they apply what they have learnt through philosophy practically in order to run their household well and to serve their husbands (Muson. fr. 3, 41-43). He in fact anticipates the criticism that such an educated woman will abandon her home in favour of

¹²⁸ See chapter 2 for a thorough overview of the socio-economic and political status of women in the 1st century C.E., specifically 2.3.2. and 2.3.3., which compares the ideological view of women with what is known about the historical accuracy of this view.

joining in the public debates of men and counters that exactly because of her education such a woman will know what her proper duty is. If she therefore does engage in discussion with men she will do so only to improve her virtue's practical application: housekeeping (Muson. fr. 3, 42-43; fr. 4, 46-49). Seneca similarly disapproves of women who are too visible. He lauds Helvia's sister for escaping a province notorious for gossip's notice for sixteen years (*Helv.* 19.7). He can scarcely think of greater praise, and makes disparaging remarks about women who use their sons to gain power that they ought not to have (*Helv.* 14.3), and who employ their education for public display (*Helv.* 17.4).

Yet not all philosophers relegate women firmly and only to indoor work. Even Musonius admits that there are exceptions, cases when women might be fit to undertake outdoor tasks, though they are more suited to staying indoors (fr. 4, 46-47). Hierocles also makes provision for women doing traditional male tasks like working in the fields, arguing that in a marriage where all responsibility is shared, husband and wife should be able to assist one another in all their duties (*Household Management*, 93-95). Both Hierocles and Musonius insist that where virtue is concerned men and women should be assigned the same tasks (Ramelli 2009: 129). Hierocles's focus is however geared toward the practical running of the household and the tasks related to it, while Musonius pays particular attention to the development and application of virtue (Ramelli 2009: 130). Engel rightly notes that Hierocles does not extend his argument to the public sphere at large, *i.e.* politics and warfare, and while some might take the passage to be a marker of Hierocles' gender equity, this interpretation is unlikely. The only reason Hierocles extends women's knowledge to agricultural work is in order to fulfil her duty as subordinate to her husband (2003: 284-285).¹²⁹ In the

¹²⁹ Cf. Ramelli (2009: 134-135), who agrees with Engel. Engel eventually concludes that feminism and Stoicism are "not just contingently, but essentially incompatible" (2003: 288).

Stoic framework there is thus no place for women in politics, but this is not true of women in all philosophical traditions.

Strikingly, the Pythagorean woman is not necessarily excluded from a public life. Perictione writes:

From this there comes great benefit for a woman, for herself as well as her husband and children and her house, often too for her city, if such a woman rules cities and peoples, as we see in kingdoms.

(On the Harmony of Women, 76)

The possibility of female involvement in politics does not seem outrageous or far-fetched to the writer of this treatise, because the Pythagorean woman has the ability to curb the lustfulness which plagues her sex and thus achieve the same moral status as man. Even so, the household is the woman's most important duty, as Perictione makes clear. According to Phytis politics and public speaking are male activities, while women should concern themselves with the household (*On the Chastity of Women, 85*). The Cynics, who also proclaimed women's equal ability, is the only tradition from which there is an example of a woman, Hipparchia, participating with her husband in all of his activities, including going to dinner parties and engaging other philosophers in debate (Diog. Laert. 6.7.97-98). Hipparchia and her husband Crates lived on the street, however, and involvement in politics was not for them a concern for them at all. Bosman suggests that the Cynic maxim attributed to Diogenes, "[I am a] citizen of the world", may be read positively as individual self-expression, and carries some political, social and economic weight (2007: 32-34). With this in mind, one might surmise that Cynics considered women at least as fit as men to participate in politics, should they deem it necessary, especially since they placed no emphasis on women as housekeepers.

If we are then to surmise that Plutarch's popular-philosophical works follow a predominantly Cynic-Stoic tradition, as Dillon suggests (2014: 63), how do we reconcile those texts aimed specifically at women with this view? Perhaps it is

possible that these works do not meet the criteria for “popular-ethical” texts at all. In order to establish whether we are truly dealing with texts aiming at the moral education of women, they must first be tested against the known features of other ancient psychagogic literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

PSYCHAGOGY

Thus far we have only briefly touched on aspects of psychagogy as points of reference in the preceding discussions. It is however necessary to gain a full understanding of the concept and practice of psychagogy in order to continue towards our goal. What then, is psychagogy, and how does its application influence Plutarch's *Woman*? It is also necessary to determine whether Plutarch's works can be classified as psychagogy, and which works do not qualify for such a classification.

First and foremost, it will be useful to situate psychagogy within the greater context of ancient philosophy. The project of ancient philosophy may be characterized as an attempt to examine the structure of nature, both internal and external to human experience. For many philosophers this served the final purpose of clarifying how we ought to interact with the world, and how we might ultimately attain *eudaimonia* through *aretē*. It is widely acknowledged that ancient philosophy does not concern itself incidentally with the fulfilled life, but in fact is geared towards the attainment of this moral ideal (I. Hadot 1986: 444; P. Hadot 1995: 83; Vegge 2008: 49; Thom 2012: 281). Philosophy for the ancient Greeks and Romans is thus as much a way of life as it is an intellectual exercise,¹³⁰ and from the early Pythagoreans onwards we find a tendency towards living life according to certain guidelines that are designed to lead the philosopher on her journey towards fulfilment. Developing a set of 'guidelines' for achieving *eudaimonia* seems a natural step in a tradition which takes great pride in the education of others, so eventually the practice of leading

¹³⁰ Foucault (2005: 316) also draws the link between practical and theoretical knowledge, both of which are equally necessary for philosophical training aimed at attaining virtue.

students to *arête* developed into a therapeutic system. This practice is known in modern scholarship as ‘psychagogy’,¹³¹ although some scholars refer to it as ‘psychotherapy’ (Gill 1985: 321), the ‘care of the self’ (*epimeleia heautou*; Maier 1994: 719; also in Foucault 2005, 2015), and the ‘cure of the soul’ (Kolbet 2010). This kind of philosophy as healing *praxis* has been compared to the modern practice of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Overholser 2010).

Aspects of psychagogy can be found in almost all major philosophers’ work, and is especially prevalent during the Hellenistic era and the early Roman Empire, as well as in early Christian literature.¹³² Philosophers such as Seneca, Lucretius and Plutarch focus extensively on the moral education of their audience (Thom 2012: 281; cf. I. Hadot 1969 & P. Hadot 1995). The philosopher will in this respect act as the teacher, or psychagogue (‘spiritual guide’; I. Hadot 1986: 445), in charge of his student’s moral progress (Vegge 2008: 54). In order to achieve their goal, a set of methods and educational strategies was developed over the course of several centuries of philosophical practice. These strategies could often be applied on a textual platform, and are especially common in moral epistles (Malherbe 1992: 283-84), such as Plutarch’s *Conj. praec.* and *Cons. ux.*, but also involve some direct interaction between teacher and student. Where direct interaction was not possible, letters were considered a good replacement in the meanwhile (Malherbe 1986: 79). Plutarch’s *Conj. praec.* and *Cons. ux.* may be considered examples of letters with a moral educational purpose, since both offer practical and philosophical advice on how to deal with commonplace matters such as a new marriage or the death of a young child.

¹³¹ Cf. Rabbow 1954: 17 & 301n1 on the origin of the term in modern scholarship.

¹³² See for example the extensive work done on the topic by Gaden (2002), Glad (1995), I. Hadot (1969, 1986), P. Hadot (1995), Huizenga (2013), Kloppenborg (2010), Malherbe (1986, 1992), Thom (2012) and Vegge (2008).

Inasmuch, therefore, as philosophy is the art of life,¹³³ psychagogy is thus the way in which this art can be taught. Psychagogy may therefore seem akin to, and perhaps even identical with, pedagogy, but this is not quite the case.

Foucault describes the distinction between the former and the latter:

Let us call 'pedagogical,' if you like, the transmission of a truth whose function is to endow any subject whatever with aptitudes, capabilities, knowledges, and so on, that he did not possess before and that he should possess at the end of the pedagogical relationship. If, then, we call 'pedagogical' this relationship consisting in endowing any subject whomsoever with a series of abilities defined in advance, we can, I think, call 'psychagogical' the transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow any subject whomsoever with abilities, etcetera, but whose function is to modify the mode of being of the subject to whom we address ourselves.

(2005: 407)

Psychagogy is therefore a transformational practice of philosophy that is concerned with the care of the self, and by extension, with the care of others. Ancient psychagogic practice is very close to pedagogy, since both hold its participants in a truth-relation to one another. The "obligations of truth", and therefore of *parrhēsia*, fall on the teacher (the psychagogue/pedagogue), who stands in relation to his subject (the student) as both caretaker and role model (Foucault 2005: 408). Foucault considers *parrhēsia* as the absolute prerogative of the other party involved in the *epimeleia heautou*, that is to say the psychagogue has the responsibility of truth-telling, while the student has the responsibility of listening, and of moral improvement (2005: 334; 2015: 222).¹³⁴

Parrhēsia was a common method in ancient psychagogic practice, and it was widely believed that frank speech could lead the student to moral improvement. As a practice, it is commonly associated with the Cynics, but the Epicurean Philodemus wrote the only extant treatise dedicated to the topic

¹³³ Cf. Nehamas (1998: 20), who connects the roots of philosophy as the art of life with the Socratic-Platonic tradition of irony as pedagogic tool.

¹³⁴ This is only the case in ancient philosophy, and Foucault is quite interested in why later Christianity inverts this tradition by making *parrhēsia* the obligation of the supplicant by requiring truth-telling not just of sins, but of every thought (2015: 220-221).

(Tsouna 2007: 91). The practice of *parrhēsia* presupposes a relationship between the psychagogue and the student that is built on trust (Tsouna 2007: 94). Lack of trust corrodes the therapeutic value of *parrhēsia*, and therefore it is the psychagogue's duty to establish the foundation of his motives clearly and to inspire confidence in his ability and authority.¹³⁵ In *Adul. amic.* Plutarch warns against flatterers (οἱ κόλακες) who imitate the actions of friendship by putting on an air of *parrhēsia* (51c-d). In the section that follows he advises how to distinguish between a flatterer and a true friend. Plutarch compares *parrhēsia* to medicine, which does not damage the patient, but has a therapeutic and, ultimately, a healing effect (55d; 59d-e; cf. 66b).

An important aspect of psychagogy, and therefore of *parrhēsia*, is epideictic rhetoric, in which emphasis is especially placed on praise and blame. The goal of this strategy is to present on the one hand an idealized vision of the student in order to inspire her to imitate this version of herself, and on the other hand to induce a sense of shame at her own shortcomings in order to inspire her to become a better person (Vegge 2008: 56-59). In doing so the psychagogue might employ *parrhēsia* based on the disposition of the student: those who are more in need of treatment or who are less inclined to accept it are given harsher criticisms (Phld. *Lib.* 7.1-10). Corrective criticism is always applied on an individual basis, and even in its mildest form must involve some level of discomfort on the part of the student in order to be effective (Tsouna 2007: 96). The harshest form of corrective criticism is applied when the student's moral failing is particularly egregious. In this case the psychagogue does not only respond with criticism, but also with anger. Such a response must necessarily be tailored to the student, taking into account her progress thus far and her

¹³⁵ Malherbe (1992: 285) refers to Seneca's frequent usage of himself as an example of virtuous behaviour. The efficacy of this tactic is fundamentally based on the authority of the psychagogue.

general emotional disposition (Tsouna 2007: 97-98).¹³⁶ Philodemus believes that women are less inclined to accept *parrhēsia* graciously, because they are suspicious, oversensitive, and too concerned with their reputation (*Lib.* 22a). However, women who truly wish to advance morally should receive the same treatment as men (Tsouna 2007: 109). On the other hand, the philosopher will use praise, usually at the same time as blame, as a method of emotional support during the therapeutic process (Tsouna 2007: 98). Unlike blame, praise gives the good psychagogue pleasure, though he does not shy away from using blame if need be (Tsouna 2007: 111-13). In the *Cons. ux.* Plutarch warns Timoxena against excessive display of grief, but also praises her past moderate behaviour in grief and in general (608c, 608f-609b). This strategy is evident in the conclusion to the *Conj. praec.* as well. Plutarch praises Pollianus at length for his knowledge of wisdom and his maturity (145b-d) before turning to Eurydice with a brief reference to her love of philosophical sayings during her childhood (145e). At the same time Plutarch warns both husband and wife against the trappings of excess, aimed primarily at Eurydice's cultivation of temperance (145a-b). The passage reads as a culmination of the preceding cautionary tales, and urges the couple to practice temperance and moderation through the study of philosophy. Epideictic rhetoric therefore invites the student to contemplation by presenting her with the virtues she ought to imitate, and the vices she ought to avoid (Duffy 1983: 85; cf. *Pl. Menex.* 236a-237e).

Parrhēsia does not only consist of speaking the truth, but also of living it. The psychagogue must convince his student(s) that by following the advice he gives and the example he sets, she may reach the ultimate goal of psychagogic praxis:

¹³⁶ Malherbe (1992: 302) describes the adverse effects psychagogy can have on the student as "confusion, bewilderment, and sometimes depression", and stresses the need for the psychagogue to analyse and treat each student individually. See also I. Hadot (1969: 154-55).

assimilation to god (*Is. Os.* 351c-d; Bonazzi 2012: 149-50).¹³⁷ Along with *parrhēsia*, there are two other conditions that the psychagogue must fulfil: *eunoia* and *epistēmē*. Foucault identifies these characteristics from Plato's *Gorg.* (486d-487a; 2015: 229). Only those who are frank in speech, benevolent and who possess knowledge are suitable to be psychagogues. In order to facilitate the self-transformation and care of others, he must have undergone a transformation of his own; he must be more virtuous than his student (I. Hadot 1986: 447-49; Glad 1995: 53-54). Plutarch disapproves of those who presume to admonish or teach others without themselves having advanced knowledge (*Adul. amic.* 71f-72b). While he takes the role of psychagogue for his students, he also asks that the husband play his role in the education of his wife by being her *καθηγητῆς καὶ φιλόσοφος καὶ διδάσκαλος*, since he is already more educated and therefore further along the path to virtue than she is (145c).¹³⁸ It is therefore crucial that the psychagogue maintains his position of authority by being knowledgeable regarding virtue, and by living according to the precepts that he would have his students follow (Malherbe 1986: 34-40; 1992: 286).¹³⁹ Failure on the part of the psychagogue to maintain this standard of virtuous

¹³⁷ Cf. *Sen. Ep.* 95.50 (tr. Gummere 1925): "Would you win over the gods? Then be a good man. Whoever imitates them, is worshipping them sufficiently."

¹³⁸ The bride would generally be about ten years younger than her husband, assuming he is her first. Girls were married between the age of twelve and fifteen on average in aristocratic circles, but somewhat later on average in Roman society generally, while men only married from their mid-twenties onwards (Hopkins 1965: 326; Shaw 1987: 43-44). Plutarch clearly assumes that these cases are the norm and makes little mention of what should happen in a marriage to an older woman, or in cases such as the marriage of Ismenodora to Bacchon, in which theoretically the bride has more authority, at least for the first few years of the marriage.

¹³⁹ Cf. Plutarch's frequent reference to *Leg.* 729c (e.g. at *Mor.* 14b, 71b and 272c), which says that the most effective way to train the youth is to "practice what you preach". Plutarch uses the passage to stress the importance of living publically according to the advice one would have others follow.

living will result in a loss of trust and authority, which will fundamentally and perhaps irrevocably damage the teacher-student relationship.

There is a further aspect of women's psychagogy that is often overlooked when the focus is placed implicitly on the spiritual guidance of men by men (*cf.* Vegge 2012, P. Hadot 1995).¹⁴⁰ While this practice originated in spheres dominated by male discourse, it is not restricted to them. Huizenga (2013) focuses on aspects of moral education for women in the Pythagorean and Pastoral Letters and shows that there is sufficient indication that these texts serve a psychagogic purpose, and thus that the practice of psychagogy can be applied to either gender. While this may be the case, Huizenga notes that the practice of philosophy is different for men and women, and thus that while the same methods may be used for the moral instruction of either gender, the intended outcome will be different (2013: 3).

The biggest obstacle for psychagogy for women is therefore that the psychagogue is often not a woman, with the exception of the case of the Pythagorean women's letters. Plutarch joins a long, established tradition of male philosophers who believe themselves fit to attend to the spiritual guidance of women. To this end Seneca also wrote two letters of consolation to women (*Ad Marciam* and *Ad Helviam*) to women, counselling them on dealing with grief and using the methods of psychagogy to achieve his goal. Several fragments of the Stoic Musonius Rufus also deal with moral and educational

¹⁴⁰ It is especially telling that Pierre Hadot mentions the use of psychagogic methods in Plutarch, and goes on to mention specific texts in which these practices may be observed, but neglects to include *Conj. praec.* or the *Cons. ux.*, arguably two of Plutarch's most important moral philosophical texts. What is even more puzzling about the omission of *Conj. praec.* is that it is aimed at both the husband and the wife. Hadot takes a similar view on Seneca and omits the *Consolation to Marcia* (1995: 86). Ilsetraut Hadot (1969: 157) does place brief focus on Seneca's psychagogy for women, and concludes that he sees a fundamental inferiority in them which is directly opposed to Stoic doctrine.

issues pertaining to women (e.g. frs. 4, 13a, 13b). The psychagogue, in his position of power and knowledge, must act as a model of the life his student wishes to achieve. Plutarch is well-known and often praised for having lived according to his own philosophical teachings (Baltes 2007: 417). A male model is however not suitable for emulation by women; the expectations of gendered virtue are directly opposed to such a practice.¹⁴¹ Male virtue and female virtue is different, that is to say, when we speak of courage in a man and courage in a woman, many ancient philosophers may argue that we actually speak of different virtues, or they might argue that courage is not a virtue properly suitable for a woman. As such, men and women have different experiences of virtue. A man cannot be an adequate model and psychagogue for a woman without additional help from virtuous women for the simple reason that he does not have the lived experience of a woman, and therefore will always be unable to fully participate in the psychagogic process. Seneca already anticipates criticism on this front: “You forget that you are giving comfort to a woman; the examples you cite are of men” (*Marc.* 16.1). The psychagogue therefore finds it necessary to supplement his exemplary self with others that are more fitting. Seneca gives Marcia two examples of women dealing with grief, “the greatest of your sex and century” (*Marc.* 2.2), and reinforces this with examples of famous men dealing well with grief.

Plutarch follows the same pattern and makes sure that he provides enough suitable exempla for his female audience. In *Conj. praec.* he offers the following positive exempla: an unnamed Spartan woman (140d), Penelope (141a), an unnamed Thessalian woman (141c), the women of Egypt (142c), the Pythagorean philosopher Theano (142d), Aphrodite of the Eleans (142d), brides in Leptis (143b), Hermione (143f), an unnamed woman (144f), his wife

¹⁴¹ See chapter 2 on gendered virtue in ancient Greece and Rome, in particular section 2.4.

Timoxena (145b), Aglaonice (145d), and an assortment of well-known moral women (Theano, Cleobulina, Gorgo, Timocleia, Claudia, and Cornelia; 145f) He offers some negative examples for comparison: Circe (139a), Pasiphae (139b), and Helen (141a), though most of the negative exempla go unnamed (perhaps an implicit warning that immorality is not as often rewarded with immortality as virtue is). The *Mulierum virtutes*, a text that extolls the virtues of women, may be read as a compendium of exempla, though that is certainly not its only function.¹⁴² In the *Cons. ux.* Plutarch holds up his wife Timoxena as a model of virtue, offering praise for her past actions in order to inspire her (and his audience) to continue acting virtuously (609d-e).

The use of exempla in psychagogic literature was considered one of the most effective methods of spiritual guidance (Malherbe 1992: 282; Quint. *Inst.* 12.2.29-30). Generally, they are used to reinforce the will of the student. These examples could be historical or mythical, positive or negative (I. Hadot 1986: 452; Vegge 2008: 114-15). Exempla provided the student with models worthy of imitation (μίμησις, ζήλωσις) as well as lively depictions of the kind of life, character and actions to be avoided. The use of examples, or psychagogic models, was considered to be more effective when the student basically agreed on the moral status of the person-model from the outset (Vegge 2008: 115-17; cf. Langlands 2011: 104). It was widely believed that examples could have a direct influence on the moral education of a person, because lived experience had a stronger impact than mere words (Vegge 2008: 114).

Exempla are not quite as straightforward as positive and negative, and many of them, even in Plutarch's works, can be judged on a scale. This is part of the overall point, as the psychagogue does not simply aim to inform his student as

¹⁴² The most well-known example in the *Mulier. virt.* is Cloelia, who was commemorated for her bravery on the Via Sacra (250d-f). See also Roller (2004: 28-50) on Cloelia as Roman exemplum.

to what is good or bad, but to instil the sense of judgement that allows her to decide on the moral implications of each action for herself. This use of exempla is well-known from historical writing, such as that of Tacitus, who is in turn influenced by the Stoic tradition of using exempla for moral education (Turpin 2008: 360). Plutarch acknowledges the difficulty of judging character in *Demetr.* 1.6-8, where he briefly introduces the comparison of Demetrius and Antony. It is however not only men whose characters are on display in the *Lives*. Women in the Roman Empire played a great role in the lives of men of power, and as such they appear as secondary psychagogic models in Plutarch's *Lives*. As exempla they are supposed to urge the student to make value judgements on their characters. The proper value judgement is however often apparent from the outset, as is clear from the presence or absence of certain words which indicate moral status.¹⁴³

The women of the *Lives* are always the partners, mothers or daughters of powerful men who engage in politics and warfare. As a result a certain standard is expected of them, and more often than not their *sōphrosynē* comes under question. Olympias must endure speculation that she has used enchantments upon her husband, that she was “the partner of some superior being” (τὴν ὀμιλίαν ὡς κρείττονι συνούσης) and participated in Bacchic rituals (*Alex.* 2.2-2.6). Similar charges are made of Pompeia, who used the festival of the Bona Dea to consort with her lover. Naturally, these rituals are said to have an Orphic element (*Caes.* 9.1-10.2).¹⁴⁴ Caesar divorced Pompeia purely on the grounds of suspicion, refusing to remain married to a woman whose virtue was under question (11.6). Antony's third wife, Fulvia, is said to have taught Antony to obey women, to Cleopatra's benefit (*Ant.* 10.3). This is

¹⁴³ These indicators are examined in more detail in chapter 5.

¹⁴⁴ See chapter 2, especially sections 2.3.1-2 (e.g. at pp. 43-44), on the cultural significance of Orphic and Bacchic rituals, which promised women liberation and salvation, and were therefore banned by the state.

clearly not a good thing, as Plutarch disapproves of women who attempt to gain power over their husbands, and of men who let themselves be ruled by women (*Conj. praec.* 139a-b; *cf. Ant.* 60.1, 62.1).

Of Cleopatra Plutarch says that she used μαγγανεύμασι καὶ φίλτροις to seduce Antony and to avoid persecution (*Ant.* 25.4). Her opulence is described in great detail (*Ant.* 26.1-2), another trait that Plutarch manifestly disapproves of throughout the *Conj. praec.* (e.g. at 140c, 141a). His portrait of Cleopatra is not altogether negative, however, and he does praise her for having a certain sort of charm, though he stops short of calling it intellect (*Ant.* 26.3-4). In contrast to this Plutarch has nothing but praise for the beauty, intelligence and dignity of Antony's fourth wife, Octavia, even going so far as calling her "a wonder of a woman" (χρῆμα θαυμαστὸν [ὡς λέγεται] γυναικός; *Ant.* 31.2-3). Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, is similarly praised for being σώφρονα, φιλότεκνον and μεγαλόψυχον (*Ti. Gracch.* 1.4). Plutarch does deliver a rather more subtle portrait of Aspasia, who he says had a "rare political wisdom" (ὡς σοφὴν τινα καὶ πολιτικὴν) and was a teacher of rhetoric, despite having been a παλλακὴν and being well-known throughout Greece (*Per.* 24.2-7). Even so he does not go so far as to ascribe to her intelligence as such, and certainly not σωφροσύνη. The women of the *Lives* therefore as much as the men have a role to play in the psychagogic process.

Perhaps especially because psychagogy belonged to the realm of philosophy and the philosophers, the practice included a selection of 'intellectual' methods through which the student may attain moral fulfilment. The use of exempla was one such intellectual method that necessitated the active involvement of the student. Other methods included exercises that the psychagogue prepared for the student. According to I. Hadot, the exercises intended for moral advancement must be undertaken daily in order to maintain a steady rate of progress (1986: 452-53). In fact, the spiritual exercises were designed in such a

way as to be suitable for everyday use. In this vein a student may have been taught a selection of maxims or precepts which she had to memorize (I. Hadot 1986: 451). Maxims were considered particularly effective because of their concise nature. It was therefore easy for the student to memorize them and recall them when she needed them (Thom 2012: 284; I. Hadot 1986: 451).

Plutarch makes use of both *gnōmai* and *chreiai* in his psychagogic works. *Gnōmai* do not refer to a specific person, but are easily generalizable according to the situation, while *chreiai* refer to specific examples and situations (Malherbe 1986: 109, 111; Lardinois 2000: 642). The use of maxims is therefore closely related to the use of exempla, and in both cases it was expected that the student would study them so that they can be easily brought to mind when necessary (*cf.* Xen. *Oec.* 14.4-6). The *Lacae. apoph.* contains many *gnōmai* and *chreiai* that illustrate temperance (240e), chastity (240e, 242c-d), and duty (240f, 241a). In *Conj. praec.* Plutarch supplies Eurydice and her husband with several precepts that will help them have a successful marriage; this is the primary aim of the text.¹⁴⁵ In order to make the maxims more easily memorable, he makes use of quotations from famous poets, philosophers, and other characters. Presumably Eurydice would have been expected to memorise some of these sayings as a shortcut to the general moral rule itself. These sayings include a denunciation of the use of spells and love potions “you have your magic charms in yourself” (141c), “what if I am not virtuous?” (141d),¹⁴⁶ and “all women are the same when the lights go out” (144f) in reply to an adulterer. In the same vein a teacher often used poetry for moral purposes, as it was seen as a good way to introduce students to the study of philosophy and a good way to practice moral judgement

¹⁴⁵ “I have therefore drawn up a compendium for you... putting it in the form of brief comparisons that it may be more easily remembered” (138c).

¹⁴⁶ Plutarch suggests that the “ill-favoured” woman ask this when she looks in the mirror. The beautiful woman should instead ask, “what if I am virtuous as well?”

(Malherbe 1986: 115; *cf. Adol. poet. aud.* 15e-16a). Plutarch chooses to end *Conj. praec.* (146a) by quoting Sappho's invective against a rich woman:

Dead in the tomb shalt thou lie,
Nor shall there be thought of thee there,
For in the roses of Pierian fields
Thou hast no share

He uses this quotation to exhort Eurydice to a life of virtue through philosophy and asceticism, which ought to be her most prized adornments (145f).

It was common for the psychagogue to suggest that the student refrain from living extravagantly by avoiding all forms of luxury and living in accordance with nature (I. Hadot 1986: 451; P. Hadot 1995: 83).¹⁴⁷ By living frugally the student can avoid any temptations that may be a hindrance on the path to *eudaimonia* and can train the body to become less susceptible to desires and suffering (I. Hadot 1986: 451). In fact, this kind of suggestion is made for men and women generally, but Plutarch takes it to the extreme when he suggests that Eurydice should not speak to anyone but her husband (*Conj. praec.* 142d), should have no friends of her own (*Conj. praec.* 140d, 142d), should shun all luxuries (*Conj. praec.* 139e, 140b, 140c, 141e, 142c; *Cons. ux.* 608f-609a, 609c-d), and should stay indoors (*Conj. praec.* 139c, 142c). He does not suggest similar extremes for men, primarily because the men he writes for are politically active men who necessarily go out in public and need to keep up appearances. He does however suggest that they be pure and clean (ἀγνοῦς καὶ καθαρεύοντας) when they approach their wives (*Conj. praec.* 144d), or if they are going to indulge, they need to do it away from the company of their wives, and the wives should accept it as a sign of respect for their virtue (*Conj. praec.* 140b). Plutarch seems to allow for some leeway when it comes to men's pleasures, but the rule

¹⁴⁷ Foucault (2005: 317) sees *askēsis*, the "exercise" of philosophy, as a "practice of truth" which does not subject the self to law or custom. Through renunciation of elements outside the self, the subject constitutes and affirms the self by way of *askēsis* (2005: 320).

for women is an absolute. This is also reflected in the disproportionate number of precepts in *Conj. praec.* aimed at the bride's temperance and her virtue in general.¹⁴⁸ This suggests that the bar is higher and that women must work harder to attain *eudaimonia*.

Eudaimonia can ultimately be attained through *epistēmē*, which the psychagogue must pass on to and engender in his students (Vegge 2008: 53). Knowledge, both of the self, that is the condition of the individual as being in the world and yet exercising little control over it, and of philosophical doctrines, play a central role in psychagogic practice. As such, it is not enough for the student to simply memorize philosophical principles and moral maxims, but she must eventually also advance to a deeper understanding of philosophy. Knowledge will free the student from naïve superstitions and fear of death (I. Hadot 1986: 445, 452-53; Tsouna 2007: 84-85). Self-knowledge can only be gained through critical analysis of the self, and thus it is the psychagogue's duty to advise the student to undertake this arduous task.

Inasmuch as the psychagogue plays the part of a physician who cures the soul of its illnesses (Nussbaum 1994: 3),¹⁴⁹ it was necessary to identify the nature of the illness before a cure could be prescribed, and it was the student's own responsibility to diagnose herself (I. Hadot 1986: 453). Self-diagnosis is inherently related to issues of self-control and rationality, both of which are of particular importance in psychagogy for women. Because of pre-conceived notions that women are naturally less inclined to rational action and

¹⁴⁸ Temperance is closely connected with shame, a link Plutarch makes in *Conj. praec.* (144f-145a) and in *Mulier. virt.* (249c-d), where the young women of Miletus stopped committing suicide in droves on the threat that their corpses would be carried naked through the marketplace on the way to their funerals.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Plato, *Charmides* 156bc. The analogy of the philosopher as a physician of the soul is widespread in the ancient world, and it is a link that Plutarch himself also makes in *An virt. doc.* (440a).

temperance, they are less likely to self-diagnose. For this reason Plutarch recommends that the husband play an active role in his wife's moral advancement by sharing the best philosophical doctrines with her (*Conj. praec.* 145a, c, e). By doing so he may be able to avoid that she, having been left to her own devices, hatches immoral plans, naïvely falls for superstitious ideas, and loses control of her emotions (*Conj. praec.* 145d-e).

The process of self-examination is a meditative act that makes the student fully aware and in control of the present, which means that each action she undertakes is wholly conscious, deliberate and voluntary. Vigilance is thus a key factor in the spiritual life (Rabbow 1954: 23-25; P. Hadot 1995: 84-85). Meditation also involves imaginative acts of possible scenarios, especially those that might present her with moral difficulties, so that she may be ready should such an event come to pass (P. Hadot 1995: 85). According to Porphyry, Pythagoras recommended meditation twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. The purpose of this meditation was to reflect on the events of the day, first on what was planned and later on what was achieved, and always with a focus on the principles that guided the student's actions and reactions (I. Hadot 1986: 453-54; P. Hadot 1995: 85). The meditative act further served to confirm and validate the student's abstinence from worldly goods and cultivate in her a contempt for these things. Through meditation she must come to realise that *eudaimonia* cannot be attained through material things, because like all great men and women she too must die. The only thing of consequence is therefore the state of her soul (Rabbow 1954: 25, 43).

Self-knowledge is however not sufficient for moral progress, but is dependent on the desire to achieve *eudaimonia* (I. Hadot 1969: 163). Therefore, moral progress is ultimately the responsibility of the student, who must participate in the therapeutic process actively. The role of the psychagogue in this regard is to advise and to reinforce and strengthen the will of the student through the

service of friendship (I. Hadot 1969: 165-66).¹⁵⁰ According to Philodemus, the failure of therapy is ultimately not the fault of the philosopher, but that of the student who cannot be cured (*Lib.* 69.1-8).

4.1. THE FORMATION OF THE SELF

The psychagogic process involves a radical change in the mode of being of the student, and as such takes great interest in the student's definition of her identity. This becomes more problematic from the Hellenistic period onwards, as changes in social structure complexify the status-relationships of individuals to others in society. Changes in tradition and public function after the Classical Period see marriage diminishing the level of inequality between two partners. In the Hellenistic and Roman period the wife gains status as she gains more juridical and economic independence.¹⁵¹ In this atmosphere of social upheaval it is possible for the woman to radically free herself from traditional constraints, even going so far as to contract a marriage with a man of her choice by herself, as attested in Roman Egypt (Foucault 1986: 75). In this Foucault sees a marked change in social attitudes towards the conjugal couple, which is mirrored in their private life (1986: 76). Many scholars have seen this attitude mirrored in Plutarch's work, particularly in the *Cons. ux.*, *Conj. praec.* and *Amat.* (e.g. Stadter 1999: 182; Patterson 1999: 129; Goessler 1999: 115; Tsouvala 2014: 191). Furthermore, changes in the political structure of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, which facilitated the transition from city-states to monarchies and Empire, are mirrored in changes in emphases for moral reflection (Foucault 1986: 83). Along with the newly reorganised political life came a problematisation of the formation of the Self as ethical subject. Now there were

¹⁵⁰ Rabbow 1954 also pays special attention to the role of the student in her own moral education.

¹⁵¹ These changes in the socio-economic and political status of women in the ancient mediterranean are discussed in detail in chapter 2.

two ways for the individual to define his identity. The first is by way of a status-relation to others, *i.e.* by signs that affirm one's superiority, such as expensive clothing, a well-kept physique, a large and magnificently decorated house, conspicuous consumption, and so forth. This method results in a power-relation over others; by denoting superiority, the individual denotes his ability to control. The second method is definition of the Self in relation to the Self. Herein the individual becomes the subject of his own actions, and defines himself in the sovereignty over his own person (Foucault 1986: 85).

In the philosophical life and thus in psychagogic practice, emphasis is placed on the second method, while the first is rejected. In some cases, such as in Epicureanism and Cynicism, public life is therefore rejected in favour of a life in private, but it is not necessarily the case that the two are mutually exclusive. Rather, the man who defines himself in relation to himself thereby sets the conditions for participation in civic life (Foucault 1986: 86). Foucault draws on Plutarch's *Praec. ger. rei publ.* here to argue that the free man does not engage in politics because his social status makes it a foregone conclusion, but because he actively chooses the civic life (*cf.* 798d-e). Engaging in the political act is therefore fundamentally a personal act (1986: 87). As a result, psychagogic practice encompasses a return to the Self in relation only to oneself, and no longer in relation to others.

Foucault is perhaps mistaken in thinking that the second method of formation of the Self is a product of the Hellenistic and Roman forms of government, at least in Man (*cf.* 1986: 88-90). Certainly, there was already an emphasis on the importance of *enkrateia* for rulers in Plato, and Socrates is famous for his *askēsis*. There is a more radical change that happens during this period that Foucault leaves implicit, and that is the extension of the possibilities of self-definition to Woman. Theoretically, the second method of self-definition, *i.e.* that of the Self to oneself, is valid for both Man and Woman. The changes in social structure

during the early Imperial Period afford women more independence. Their increased economic activity, public visibility, legal freedom and political prowess emancipate them from the constraints of the traditional family life of earlier eras. They are no longer simply wives and daughters, but they are benefactors and *stratēgoi*, doctors and mathematicians. The Woman is therefore able to define her identity in the same way as the Man as either a status-relation to others, or as a sovereign-relation to herself. In becoming the ethical subject of her own actions, psychagogy gives Woman the ability to define her identity on her own terms, and to set the conditions for participation in public life according to her own criteria. According to psychagogic practice, she can only do so by engaging critically with philosophy.

There is, however, a difference in the way Plutarch treats the formation of Self in Man and Woman. When he advises Menemachus to remember that the statesman is himself also a subject under the authority of the emperor and his delegates, he nevertheless strongly disapproves of assuming an attitude of servility. Instead, he counsels Menemachus to assume an appropriate air of authority and not to refer every small matter to his superiors. By doing so he makes the entire local government powerless and will cause the citizens to lose respect for him (814f-815c). Unlike his advice to Menemachus, which encourages Self-definition in relation to himself (thereby giving him the *enkrateia* to govern virtuously), Plutarch's psychagogy for women does not allow much space for Woman to define her identity in the absence of Man. Her identity, for Plutarch, is fundamentally a status-relation to man in which the formation of a Self that is the ethical subject of its own actions becomes impossible. Woman's identity is fundamentally linked to that of Man, and as a result, Plutarch's psychagogy steers her clearly in this direction.

Through the psychagogic process the student is expected to arrive at a new understanding of philosophy, and therefore of the world and her place in it.

Psychagogy, if it is successful, will transform her into a Woman of virtue, allowing her to leave all the imperfections of her sex behind. It is clear that Plutarch aims at such a transformative vision in the popular-philosophical texts aimed at women. Through the use of psychagogic methods, which are aimed at both men and women in these texts, a systematic methodology for the spiritual guidance of women is established. What is not clear is whether Plutarch is systematic *only* in methodology, or whether he has in mind some idea of Woman on which his psychagogic practice is built and towards which it is ultimately geared, and whether he truly believes that this ideal can be attained. In the next section we will (re)construct Plutarch's Woman by closely examining the texts, and it is here that we come to the central question of this study: who is She?

CHAPTER FIVE

PLUTARCH'S WOMAN

The goal of psychagogic practice is to lead the student to a life of fulfilment, which it maintains can be reached through philosophy and virtue. True virtue can be found in a likeness to god (*cf.* Plut. *Is. Os.* 351c), though psychagogy never insists that the pupil must reach this goal. The exercise and therefore the life of fulfilment can rather be found in the act of striving towards a life in emulation of godlike virtue. Plutarch believes that virtue is a skill that needs to be honed. In *An virt. doc.* he argues that virtue is no different from dancing, farming or rhetoric, which are all skills that men learn. That all these things are done in service of finding εὖ ζῆν (“the good life”), and yet to suppose that the good life cannot also therefore be taught, is ridiculous (439bc). Plutarch also places emphasis on the importance of knowledge in acquiring virtue (439d) and likens the one who teaches virtue to a physician (440d). For Plutarch, virtue can and indeed *should* be taught if society is to function properly. Marriage is mentioned four times in the short essay (439d-f), an indication that knowledge of virtue in the domestic sphere is just as important as it is in public affairs. Domestic virtue however appears to be a woman’s virtue. There are several virtues that Plutarch ascribes to women specifically, vices that he deems them particularly susceptible to, and actions that he disapproves of. These virtues, described and treated in the *Moralia*, recur in the *Lives*, where Plutarch finds it difficult to withhold his judgement. We will consider the *Moralia* first, and then turn to the women of the *Lives*.

5.1. VIRTUE AND VICE IN THE *MORALIA*

Plutarch consistently returns to certain *topoi* in both the *Moralia* and in the *Lives* when he writes about the proper behaviour of women. In the *Moralia* these *topoi*

are presented as the primary virtues that Woman must possess, and vices that She must avoid. The treatment of the *topoi* in both the theoretical- and the popular-philosophical texts of the *Moralia* place one virtue above all others: harmony. The role of Isis in *Is. Os.* is to preserve the harmony of the cosmos. Feminine harmony, for Plutarch Woman's most precious virtue, can only be attained by first mastering the other virtues. Temperance is second only to harmony, but it can only be achieved through education. The educated woman will possess sufficient knowledge to distinguish between virtuous and unvirtuous behaviour, and will therefore be able to cultivate temperance and ultimately to attain harmony. These are the three most important tenets of a virtuous life. Along with this Plutarch identifies three specific actions that a woman must abstain from. The first two, use of spells and potions and public action, relate to Woman's proper place in society. A woman who consistently displays these two vices manipulates men to their detriment, and is therefore not virtuous. Her role is to support men, not to control them. Public action and grief can be seen as aspects of temperance, insofar as the woman who appears in public and who grieves outwardly is intemperate and therefore not virtuous. Without attaining any of these virtues, or abstaining from these vices, Woman cannot attain the true female virtue: harmony.

5.1.1. Harmony

Plutarch ascribes special importance to two feminine virtues: harmony and temperance. While temperance is a familiar female virtue, the emphasis placed on the woman's role in domestic harmony is quite unique in Plutarch. It is a theme that recurs whenever he turns to the feminine and the female sphere. Harmony is a virtue that Plutarch ascribes particularly to the feminine principle

in *Is. Os.* (369f), and to which he returns in the *Conj. praec.*¹⁵² The aim of the text is, according to Plutarch, to “render [husband and wife] gentle and amiable toward one another” and to help them attain harmony (ἔμμελειαν) in their marriage through reason, concord, and philosophy (διὰ λόγου καὶ ἁρμονίας καὶ φιλοσοφίας; 138c-d).¹⁵³

The onus of a harmonious marriage lies almost solely with the bride, who is tasked with keeping her household and marriage harmonious as a supporting function to her husband. If he does not have to worry about domestic affairs, he will be better able to perform his public duties. Thus the wife should eat a quince before bed “that the delight from lips and speech should be pleasant and harmonious at the outset” (138d). Another precept commands the husband to be patient with his wife’s “irritability and unpleasantness” (χαλεπότητα¹⁵⁴ καὶ ἀηδίαν), because she will likely grow out of it (138e). Precept 14 rather ominously suggests that the wife “should have no feeling of her own” but should match her mood to that of her husband (139f), advice supported by the suggestion in Precept 37 that the sensible wife keeps quiet when her husband is angry, but tries to soothe him when he is silent (143c).¹⁵⁵ This advice denies

¹⁵² Cf. *Mulier. virt.* 246c, where Plutarch praises the Celtic women for acting as the arbiters of peace between the factions of the Celts. Here Woman again occupies the role of peacemaker, as the feminine principle does in *Is. Os.* (and again at 253f-254b, 254b-f, 255b-e).

¹⁵³ Tsouvala (2014: 191) sees harmony in the marriage as a blending of sexual pleasure and reason. She argues that Plutarch holds love and marriage up as a harmonising political relationship that transcends “ancestral feuds, philosophical factions, local competitions, and any type of discord in the *polis* and the empire.”

¹⁵⁴ χαλεπότης is often used to describe ill-tempered horses (LSJ s.v. II.2). It seems rather apt that Plutarch should choose this word to describe a difficult woman, in light of Precept 8, which compares the wife to a horse and the husband to its handler (139b).

¹⁵⁵ Beneker (2008: 693-95) also touches on this theme when he discusses the behaviour of Porcia in the *Brutus*. Beneker argues that the wife can be a good partner if she shares in her husband’s joys and troubles without being overbearing or overly curious. It is the husband’s choice how much he wishes to share with her, and she should respect that.

the woman any personhood and demands that she assimilates her Self into that of her husband. Precept 18 takes a similar stance in recommending that the wife should always be receptive of her husband's sexual advances, though she should never take the initiative in the bedroom (140d), and Precept 39 suggests that the wife use the bedroom as a means to avoid and resolve conflict (143e). In so doing she may render the marriage bed always gentle and agreeable, and not appear either too forward or bad-tempered.

Several of Plutarch's maxims are aimed at the wife's temper, and he especially exhorts her to put aside her bad temper and appear "accommodating, inoffensive, and agreeable" (141b) to her husband. Precept 40 advises the bride to accept her husband's ill treatment of her on the grounds that if she acted out against him, it could get a lot worse (143f-144a), while Precept 27 appeals to the authority of Hera in a further attempt to convince the bride that it is her duty to be pleasant at all times (141f). Precept 28 carries on the same thread by appealing to Plato's advice to Xenocrates to sacrifice to the Graces (142a). Precept 29 brings harmony and temperance together by advising the bride that even though she should shy away from all luxuries, she should not be afraid to join in laughter with her husband (142b-c). Plutarch takes this opportunity to implicitly warn the wife that if she fails in this task and is too disagreeable, her husband might turn to other women for comfort. The precept also reads as an *apologia* for some men's licentious behaviour, by essentially blaming their unfaithfulness on their wives' bad tempers. Precept 16 suggests that a wife should accept her husband's extramarital affairs as a sign of respect for her (140b).¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ On this last point Plutarch seems somewhat undecided, as he also suggests in Precept 42 that both parties should avoid "unholy and unlawful" intercourse, especially if they do not wish to gain children from it (144b), and in Precept 44 he suggests that the husband should be "pure and clean from all connection with others when they approach their wives" (144d).

At all times Plutarch suggests that the wife maintain a state of harmony by following the lead of her husband; Precept 8 likens the wife to a horse and the husband to its handler (139b; *cf.* 139d). Precept 20, though at first seemingly in favour of equal shares for both parties, also places the husband in charge of all matters (141e-f). It is clear that Plutarch deems marital harmony impossible without the complete submission of the wife (*cf. Lacaë. apoph.* 242c).¹⁵⁷ Even so, Plutarch warns the husband not to treat his wife like a piece of property, but to govern her with goodwill (142e) and to support her in her philosophical education by practicing temperance in her presence (144d).¹⁵⁸

5.1.2. *Temperance and shame*

Another major theme of the *Conj. praec.* is temperance, and while Plutarch continuously advises the wife to practice moderation, a deep skepticism of her ability to do so reveals itself throughout the text. The very first mention of the theme in Precept 7 concerns women's sexuality, and is not advice, but simply a negative statement about the tendency of some women to get bored with "uncompromising and virtuous men" (ἀυστηροὺς καὶ σώφρονας) and instead spend their time with licentious men (139b). Plutarch then returns to the question in Precept 10, where he argues that the virtuous woman should become even more modest in the nude, and the implication is that she should not attempt anything remotely sexual even in her sexual relations with her husband. The marriage bed is solely for procreation, and the wife would do well to remember that (144b).¹⁵⁹ Goessler argues that "there is no trace of

¹⁵⁷ Goessler (1999: 99), in her analysis of *Conj. praec.*, says a woman's husband "should be her main concern".

¹⁵⁸ Plutarch frequently refers to *Leg.* 729c (e.g. at *Mor.* 14b, 71b) to support his claim that one must live publically according to the advice one would have one's students follow. As intermediate psychagogue for his wife, the husband therefore cannot hope to better her education if he does not practice temperance in her presence.

¹⁵⁹ *Cf.* the reference to the "orderly behaviour" of the women of Ceos, who were so well-behaved that Plutarch says there was not a single case of adultery in 700 years (*Mulier. virt.*

asceticism in Plutarch” but that he approves of sexuality in marriage as its natural and necessary emotional basis (1999: 112). This is in keeping with his statements in the *Amat.*, e.g. at 769a. What Goessler does not take into account is Plutarch’s advice at Precept 18, which denies female sexual agency and urges her to suppress her needs yet always be receptive when her husband calls her to bed. Plutarch’s view is therefore less favourable to female sexuality in marriage than it is to male sexuality; in the case of Woman, temperance and restraint is the measure of virtue.

Precept 12 advises the husband that trying to remove his wife’s luxuries by force will only make her more stubborn and will make her cling to them more forcefully. Instead he should use reason to convince his wife to practice moderation (139e).¹⁶⁰ Plutarch strongly suggests that the husband lead by example, at least when in the presence of his wife,¹⁶¹ since indulging in luxuries himself while expecting her to refrain from them will lead to her seeking pleasure elsewhere (140b, 140c, 144d, 145b). Intemperance in couples causes strife, which Plutarch demonstrates briefly by juxtaposing Helen and Paris with Odysseus and Penelope (141a). The woman is advised to refrain from all luxuries, including expensive clothes and jewellery (ἱμάτια καὶ πλόκια τῶν πολυτελῶν; 141e; cf. *Cons. ux.* 609a), gold, emeralds and scarlet (χρυσὸς, σμάραγδος, κόκκος; 141e), gold-embroidered shoes, bracelets, anklets, purple, and pearls (ὑποδήματα διάχρυσσα... καὶ ψέλλια καὶ περισκελίδας καὶ

249d-e). The implication of the passage is that adultery is always the fault of the woman, not the man.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. the praise for Gorgo at *Lacae. apoph.* 240e.

¹⁶¹ Precept 16 adds the caveat that men who cannot help but indulge should do so away from their wives so as to protect their virtue, and advises the bride to accept his behaviour without question (140b).

πορφύραν καὶ μαργαρίτας; 142c; cf. *Cons. ux.* 609c, which also mentions perfume), and silk (σηρικὰ; 145f).¹⁶²

Women must also be aware that wearing elaborately dyed clothing, jewellery and perfumes might annoy their husbands, and therefore they would do better to simply refrain from such things (144e). Here Plutarch again brings temperance and harmony in connection with one another, and makes it clear that the one cannot exist without the other. The passage at Precept 45 likens men to bulls who are angered at the sight of red, and the tone mirrors the vague threat of physical violence at Precept 40. Contrary to his exclamations of a marriage in which the lovers are “gentle and amiable toward each other” (138c), these veiled threats instead hint at a domicile that is hostile to any woman who dares express herself on her own terms. Plutarch’s *Woman* is in a loving relationship insofar as she manages to keep the peace, but he makes it clear that any violent outbursts are her own fault.¹⁶³ The woman who cannot mollify her husband or refrain from trinkets and bright colours is surely not virtuous, and therefore deserves whatever treatment her husband sees fit.

Plutarch believes that a woman without these expensive luxuries will stay at home all day (*Conj. praec.* 142c), though he does not specify why. The implication seems to be that she will be ashamed to go out without them, though if she was practising temperance by choice and not because her husband had deprived her of luxuries, this should surely not be the case. Plutarch seems to blatantly ignore the fact that forcefully depriving a woman of luxuries will not make the woman more virtuous. Virtue is found in the temperance that is

¹⁶² Cf. Xen. *Oec.* 10.2-8, where Ischomachus disapproves of his wife wearing cosmetics, equating it to false advertising and trickery. The rhetoric is similar to contemporary popular rhetoric surrounding women and cosmetic usage.

¹⁶³ Ischomachus tells Socrates that he trains people to be obedient the same way one would train an animal to be obedient: by rewarding them for good behaviour, and punishing them for bad behaviour (Xen. *Oec.* 13.6-12).

cultivated through the continuous practice of philosophy. The truly virtuous Woman will relinquish all thought of extravagance out of recognition that these things will not lead her to *eudaimonia*, but will instead distract her from her goal. Reluctant or forced deprivation of luxuries will not create this attitude in women, but may instead lead to resentment and wilful disobedience. Furthermore, the virtuous Woman will take pride in her modesty and her temperance, and as such will surely experience a greater sense of shame if she were forced to wear jewels and bright colours than if she were deprived of these things. Plutarch's recommendations make it clear that he does not write with a female perspective in mind, nor does he care what the outcome of any female actions are except insofar as they affect her husband and her household.

In any case, a good sense of shame seems in Plutarch's opinion quite beneficial, as he also praises the way the women of Miletus reacted to the threat of having their naked bodies carried through the agora if they committed suicide: out of shame, they simply ceased to do so (*Mulier. virt.* 249c-d; cf. *Lacae. apoph.* 242c). McInerney notes that a large number of the exempla in the *Mulier. virt.* revolve around women's bodies, and often their virtuous action is a result of shame for what is improper (2003: 328). As such, Plutarch is clearly of the opinion that staying indoors is a good thing for a woman (*Conj. praec.* 142c),¹⁶⁴ since it will keep her away from bad influences (145e). He seems to believe that the woman should only be in contact with her husband for the majority of the time, and that he should lead her further education in philosophy, through which she can cultivate temperance (145c).

¹⁶⁴ Precepts 30 and 32 refer to women staying indoors; the latter uses the Aphrodite of Eleans as a symbol of women's submission.

5.1.3. Education

That Plutarch's Woman should be educated is undeniable.¹⁶⁵ Despite Ismenodora's unconventional actions in the *Amat.*, he has high praise for her knowledge and experience, and even argues that she may be useful to her young groom (754d). Eurydice in the *Conj. praec.* is clearly also educated in philosophy (138c), and is expected to continue her education in order to be able to better handle her marriage (138c-d, 145b-c, 145f).¹⁶⁶ Plutarch assumes a broad range of knowledge from her on topics that include Plato (140e, 142a, 144f), the Stoics (142f), and the Pythagoreans (142d, 145f); mythology (139a, 141a, 141f, 142d, 144b), history (139e, 141a, 141b-c, 141e, 142c, 143a, 143c, 144a, 144f), mathematics (140a) and literature (139c, 139e, 141d, 141e, 143d, 143e, 143f, 144b, 144c, 145c, 145d, 146a). These are not things that will be unfamiliar to Eurydice, as Plutarch states in the opening passages of the letter:

Of the many admirable themes contained in philosophy, that which deals with marriage deserves no less serious attention than any other, for by means of it philosophy weaves a spell over those who are entering together into a lifelong partnership, and renders them gentle and amiable toward each other. *I have therefore drawn up a compendium of what you, having been brought up in the atmosphere of philosophy, have often heard, putting it in the form of brief comparisons that may be more easily remembered...*

(138c; my emphasis)

The husband should assist his wife in her further education by selecting teachings that are appropriate for her (145c), and by guiding her in every aspect, including in the bedroom (145a). It is clear that the woman's education is therefore shaped according to what the prominent man in her life deems suitable and necessary for her, because her education is primarily a means to an end: the cultivation of the proper female virtues. These virtues are not those

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Stadter (1999: 173-75), who discusses the level of education of Clea, the addressee of *Is. Os.* and *Mulier. virt.* According to Stadter, Clea is evidence that the educated Woman is not an ideal, but Plutarch's reality.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Goessler (1999: 98), who discusses the importance of *logos* in the marriage.

that she may deem necessary or beneficial for her attainment of *eudaimonia*, but those that her husband considers necessary for her to serve him and their household most effectively. Education will also prevent the festering of untoward ideas and womanly scheming, and will cure a woman of the superstitions her gender is prone to, thereby equipping her with the skills to keep her marriage harmonious through reason and philosophy and without the aid of spells and potions.

5.1.4. *Superstition, spells and potions*

Plutarch does not only focus on aspects of her character the ideal Woman should cultivate, but also on vices that women are particularly prone to, and that he manifestly disapproves of. Of these, lack of knowledge that leads to superstition is a particularly harmful vice, which Plutarch disapproves of to such an extent that he wrote an entire treatise, *De superstitione*, on the subject. In the treatise Plutarch argues that superstition is an emotional state of false reason caused by fear of the gods and the subsequent belief that they are the cause of pain and injury (165c). This inherently makes Woman more susceptible to superstition, as she is more prone to irrationality and emotionality. Plutarch's description of the feminine principle in *Is. Os.* supports such a reading (*cf.* 357d-e),¹⁶⁷ and his advice regarding superstition in the *Conj. praec.* all but confirms it. Without education, warns Plutarch, women are prone to superstition:

It is said that no woman ever produced a child without the cooperation of a man, yet there are misshapen, fleshlike, uterine growths originating in some infection, which develop of themselves and acquire firmness and solidity, and are commonly called "moles". Great care must be taken that this kind of thing does not take place in women's minds. For if they do not receive the seed of good doctrines and share with their husbands in intellectual advancement, they, left to themselves, conceive many untoward ideas and low designs and emotions.

¹⁶⁷ See section 3.3 for the identification of Isis as the spirited part of the soul.

(Conj. praec. 146e)

The education that the husband shares with his wife therefore plays a central role in preventing superstitious beliefs from taking hold, and the implication seems to be that without the interference of male reason, the feminine principle will rule in the soul of the Woman and will fall under the influence of the irrational principle. She therefore needs a male counterpart to guide her on the path to virtue. Through knowledge and education she will be able to see through superstitious belief and discern the truth, as Plutarch demonstrates with the example of Aglaonice, who managed to convince the women of Thessaly that she was drawing down the moon because she had a keen understanding of the lunar cycle (145d). Women who catch men's attention are easily suspected of using φάρμακα (141c) to entrap them, but if they are educated they will be able to show that they have no need for such things (141c).

The uneducated woman is therefore naturally more likely to be superstitious, and to turn to the use of spells and potions in an attempt to manipulate the world and her husband. Plutarch wholeheartedly disapproves of women worshipping any deities that their husbands do not approve of, as is evident in Precept 19, where he argues that she should worship only the same gods as he does. Women who do secret rituals or participate in "curious rituals and outlandish superstitions" (περιέργοις ... θησκειάις καὶ ξέναις δεισιδαιμονίαις) are heavily discouraged from doing so (140d). He especially disapproves of association with Dionysos (βακχεύμασι; *Cons. ux.* 609a) and the worship of Cybele (κυμβάλοις καὶ τυμπάνοις; *Conj. praec.* 144e) These rituals and spells may render their husbands weak and easy to manipulate, but it also makes them fools and will garner the wives no goodwill, while relying on her character and charm will ensure a great love (139a). As Goessler (1999: 100) notes, using spells and potions isn't simply detrimental to the woman for her own sake, as is evident from the example of Circe and Odysseus at 139a. These

may make her husband dull-witted and degenerate, but at the end of the precept the emphasis is on the respect that Odysseus has for Circe, because she has not drugged him. The use of magic is therefore at least as much about the woman's reputation in the eyes of men as it is about her own quality of life. By using spells and potions Plutarch believes that women attempt to gain power over men (139a), and it is clear that he not only disapproves of female empowerment, but also prefers to have a woman at home and removed from public matters.

5.1.5. *Public action*

On the issue of women's participation in public life, Plutarch seems somewhat ambivalent. In *Conj. praec.* he clearly states that a woman should present herself only in the company of her husband, while at all other times remaining indoors and hidden (139c). At 140d he suggests that a woman should "have no friends of her own", but should rather share her husband's friends. Nevett takes this as a sign that Plutarch allows for married women to socialise with some degree of freedom (2002: 82), but either does not recognise, or does not acknowledge, the implication that a woman should therefore have no choice over her own social circle or personal bonds. She cannot make friends that are not pre-approved by her husband, and as a result she cannot do or say anything that will not be known to him. Not only does he disapprove of women's visibility out of the company of their husbands, but he does not want them to leave the house at all. So he seems to suggest that the husband deprive the wife of all luxuries (presumably if the force of reason was unsuccessful), in order that she may stay at home (ἔνδον; 142c). Not only should she stay indoors, but she should not speak to anyone but close relatives:

Pheidias made the Aphrodite of the Eleans with one foot on a tortoise, to typify for womankind keeping at home (οἰκουγίας) and keeping silence (σιωπῆς). For a woman ought to do her talking either to her husband or through her husband,

and she should not feel aggrieved if, like the flute-player, she makes a more impressive sound through a tongue not her own.

(142d)

Plutarch uses the Pythagorean philosopher Theano as an exemplum of modest female behaviour, who hides her physical self from the public (142d), and argues from this point that the virtuous woman is not only not seen, but also not heard.

In the *Mulier. virt.*¹⁶⁸ Plutarch takes a somewhat different stance, however, when he tells his friend Clea that he disagrees with Thucydides (2.45.2), who says that a good woman's name, like her person, should not be for the public. For Plutarch, a good woman remains out of public view, but her reputation should be known far and wide – if she is virtuous (242e). He argues that virtue manifests differently in different people because of character, disposition, culture, and upbringing (243d), and this seems to allow him to come to the conclusion that while women should refrain from public action, they may do so in rare instances where they are given no other choice.¹⁶⁹

Many of the examples of women's virtues involve some sort of domestic action, such as the Trojan women deciding that it is time to settle in Italy (243f; cf. 246c, 248a-d, 259d, 262f-263a). Other examples focus on the role of women in supporting their husbands,¹⁷⁰ as the Phocian women did when they voted in

¹⁶⁸ Babbit's (1931) translation of the title as "Bravery of Women" does not quite fit, nor does it do the content justice. A better rendering of the Greek title *Γυναικῶν ἀρεταί* would be "Virtues of Women".

¹⁶⁹ McNerney (2003: 322-23) discusses the problem that Plutarch creates for himself by asserting at the beginning of the *Mulier. virt.* that men and women's virtues are the same, but then having to avoid describing women as *andreia* in order to preserve the gendered structure of virtue. McNerney argues that the exempla undercut the text's opening passages by portraying a conservative view of female virtue that is at odds with the statement of equal virtue.

¹⁷⁰ See also Stadter (1999: 177-79, 182) on the role of women as supporters of men in *Mulier. virt.*

favour of the men's proposal to die should the battle against the Thessalians be lost (244b-e; *cf.* 245a, 246a-b; 246f-247a; 247b-c, 248f, 252a-d, 258d, 261c-d). Examples of women taking direct (sometimes violent) action are rare, and even then they usually act in defence of free men or their own chastity (245c, 249f, 250a, 253d-e), or with the help of men (258e-f, 261a-c). At times Plutarch ascribes this agency to divine inspiration, as in the case of Telesilla and the women of Argos (245e). In doing so he, perhaps not unintentionally, devalues the initiative of women and transposes it instead to something beyond their control. What results instead is a picture of women as vessels for the actions of others.

The escape of Valeria and Cloelia from the camp of Porsena is described as courageous, but ultimately a foolish and somewhat dishonourable act that caused more trouble than anything else (250c-f). Plutarch seems torn between praising the women for their brave deed and reprimanding them for meddling in men's affairs. Ultimately, it appears that he is somewhat confused by the Romans' admiration for Cloelia, who very nearly ruined their hard work. Contrary to this is Pieria, who convinced a suitor to make peace between their people in order for them to be together. Plutarch makes it clear that she is virtuous and pious; she attends a festival in honour of Artemis where she meets Phrygius (253f-254b). Pieria's actions are not public, her words are spoken in private, and the public action is not hers but Phrygius', even if it is the consequence of her deeds. Plutarch glosses over the fact that it is this woman's initiative that has the positive public outcome, and he doesn't touch the fact that in this love affair Pieria made a few very bold choices, for which her sexuality must take at least some credit.

Only in extraordinary circumstances may a woman take public action, and then it usually ends badly for her (*cf.* McInerney 2003: 325). When Lampsace

intervenes on behalf of the Phocians, she only does so because her father, the king Mandron, is away (255b-c; cf. 262c-d). She dies shortly after of an illness (255d). The same fate befalls Polycrite, even though her deed was done in a private manner (254f). Aretaphila is a rare example of Plutarch condoning to some extent the use of charms and potions against a murderous and brutal tyrant (255f-257d). These measures are deemed necessary to free her people, and she herself suffers torture for it, which Plutarch says she bore courageously. At the accomplishment of her goal he lauds her for declining a seat in the government of the people, and instead spending the rest of her life “quietly at the loom” (257e).¹⁷¹

The only woman in *Mulier. virt.* who undertakes public action for a sustained period and is praised for the excellent way in which she does so is the wife of Pythes, who remains nameless. She is ordered by her husband to take over his duties as ruler because they have no living sons, while he spends the rest of his days in his tomb awaiting death. His wife did, however, send him food (263b-c). It is somewhat ironic that this woman should remain nameless, out of all the women in *Mulier. virt.*, almost all of whom are named. Plutarch certainly feels that a woman may have the ability to participate in public life, but this does not save him from the paradox that she should not. In all things he deems it proper for her to be silent and unseen, and cases where she oversteps the boundaries of conventional behaviour are necessary exceptions, not the rule. A corrective measure is usually needed to redeem her reputation; sometimes it is death, while at other times it is the outright refusal of (further) wealth and power. Suffering and death, not least of all, is a punishment which she must bear with courage and grace, regardless of whether it is her own or that of a loved one.

¹⁷¹ For a thorough discussion of Aretaphila, see Blomqvist (1997: 84-85)

5.1.6. *Grief*

In *Mulier. virt.*, Megisto does not blink at the threat of her child's death, but rather calls on him to bear his death bravely, because it is better to die than to live under a despot (252d). Overt and ostentatious lamenting is a sign of weakness that Plutarch utterly disapproves of. He advises his wife to keep her emotions within bounds after the death of their young daughter (*Cons. ux.* 608c), as she has done in the past (608f-609a). Like expensive clothing and jewellery, excessive grief should have no place in the virtuous woman's soul (608c). Plutarch seems to believe that the period of grief should be almost non-existent, since giving in to it briefly will allow it to gain a hold, which it will not relinquish (609f-610b). Instead he recommends an attitude of serenity and happiness in view of what was gained while the person still lived (608d).

This type of attitude toward grief is praised elsewhere. Camma does not grieve her husband ostentatiously, but rather spends her time in the temple of Artemis, waiting for the right time to get revenge on his killer. When she kills him, she also does away with herself out of loyalty to her husband (*Mulier. virt.* 257f-258c). Timocleia is commended for the noble way she bears the misfortunes that have befallen her (259e). A great number of the *Sayings of Spartan Women* are in the same vein, with mothers either declaring pride for how bravely their sons fought and died or disowning them for cowardice (*Lacae. apoph.* 240c, 240f, 241a, 241c, 242a, 242b).

Grief, as with most of Woman's vices, can be ascribed to a lack of moderation, and is ultimately the result of insufficient education. This is however not the only explanation that Plutarch offers. Despite his arguments in *Amat.* that Woman has the ability to generate *erōs*, and the implication that she is therefore equal to Man in virtue, which he states explicitly at 769c, he seems unable to convince himself that the feminine principle of the soul will remain

uncorrupted if she does not take strict action to avoid the temptation of the ἐπιθυμητικόν. That men do not face a similar problem is clear in the way Plutarch describes the husband's duties in *Conj. praec.* Out of the 47 precepts in the treatise, 25 are aimed directly at Eurydice, while only 7 are aimed at Pollianus. The latter group mostly focuses on reinforcing the behaviours prescribed for Eurydice through her husband's guidance and education.

Furthermore, Plutarch's use of psychagogic models in *Conj. praec.* is aimed almost exclusively at Eurydice, despite the text's aim at both husband and wife (138b-c). Of the 37 exempla in the letter, the large majority (at least 28, a small number can be interpreted as either positive or negative) are positive, and almost as many are historical. 23 of the exempla are women, highlighting the aim of the letter in reinforcing Plutarch's ideas about gendered virtue.¹⁷² The characteristics most praised in the female exempla are modesty and chastity (Theano twice, Timoxena, an unknown woman, the women of Egypt, the statue of Aphrodite of the Eleans by Pheidias, an unknown young Spartan woman), virtue (Penelope, Hera, a Thessalian woman) and harmony (Women of Leptis), whilst the exempla that are criticised display avarice and licentiousness (Pasiphaë, Helen of Troy), manipulation through spells and potions (Circe) and being difficult (the wife of "the Roman", Hermione). The female exempla are supplemented by male models that prove the same point: Gorgias is scolded for discord, while Philip, generals in Cyrus' army and an unknown man are used to further expand Plutarch's ideas of the role of the wife in keeping marital harmony. At the same time Plutarch presents models of male virtues as exempla for Pollianus, featuring sense and reason quite prominently (Odysseus, Socrates, Phocion, an unknown man and Plato) and discouraging

¹⁷² Female examples are never appropriate for men, unless they are used to shame them by pointing out how *a woman* can be virtuous/courageous etc. while the male subject is failing at the task. This is a particularly harsh method.

hedonism in the general sense (Paris, a young man of Philip's court, Euripides, Gorgias), but making sure there are loopholes for adultery in case the wife proves disagreeable (Phocion).

Even the virtues that are shared by the husband and wife look different when ascribed to Eurydice rather than to Pollianus. Harmony, Woman's most fundamental domestic virtue, is also a male virtue, but he possesses it in a different way. For Woman, attaining harmony means marital harmony, of which she is the primary keeper. In order to preserve or restore harmony to the marriage, the wife must be submissive (142e), attentive to the needs of her husband (*cf.* the young Spartan woman who makes no advances towards her husband, but submits to his without protest), agreeable (*cf.* Plato's advice to Xenocrates at 142a and the wife of "the Roman") and silent when it is not her turn to speak (*cf.* the Aphrodite of the Eleans). For men, on the other hand, marital harmony is secondary to state harmony, as the example of Gorgias shows. Gorgias must work to keep marital harmony by taking charge of his household (*cf.* 139bd), so that faith in his ability to harmonize the public can be restored. Philip, on the other hand, uses reason in the service of harmony when he tries to appease his Greek subjects (144a). The same example of Philip is used to show how a woman might use submissiveness in aid of marital harmony:

For it is told that when he was being incited by his friends against the Greeks on the ground that they were being well treated, but were speaking ill of him, he said, "What would happen, then, if we were to treat them ill?" So when these back-biters say, 'Your husband treats grievously his loving and virtuous wife.' 'Yes, what would happen then, if I were to begin to hate and wrong him?'

(144a)

Therefore, it is Woman's duty to maintain domestic harmony so that Man can maintain state harmony without interference or distress. The Woman that emerges from the theoretical- and popular-philosophical works in the *Moralia* is clearly defined. What initially appears to be inconsistencies across the texts is in fact a complex web with which Plutarch delineates what is and is not

acceptable behaviour for his ideal Woman. Even when he allows for extraordinary behaviour, he strictly defines under what circumstances such behaviour is appropriate. His psychagogic programme in the *Moralia*, supported by his Platonic metaphysics, aims at leading women to a formation of Self that is inseparable from the notion of conjugality that he develops alongside it.

5.2. THE CONJUGAL SELF

Plutarch's conception of Woman in the *Moralia* sees her as being inextricably bound up with the conjugal relationship and the well-being of her partner. There is no description of a woman who is not at a fundamental level concerned with the men in her life. There is no option for her to define her identity in relation to herself, because her identity is largely dictated by external factors such as her husband's wishes. Plutarch's psychagogy sets the conditions for Woman's interaction with the world and with others, it does not allow her to set these conditions herself. Her identity must be defined as a status-relation to her husband, who is the ethical subject of her actions. In such a strict limitation of the freedom to define the self, one must ask whether any act can therefore be a personal act, or whether all of Woman's actions are by definition conjugal acts.

The preservation of virginity before marriage may in this sense be considered a conjugal act, since the woman who is not pure will almost surely be rejected by her first husband. The preservation of chastity in all instances thereafter is always necessarily a conjugal act that preserves the right of the husband to the marriage bed. Plutarch denies Woman's right to share her sexuality even with her husband, and demands that she repress it to such an extent that it becomes demonised. In this atmosphere, it becomes a radical act of personal freedom for the woman to have sex with anyone who is not her husband. By doing so she

breaks free from the conditions set for her participation with the world and redefines these conditions herself, according to criteria that suit her. Similarly, participation in cults, especially those associated with Bacchus and Cybele, promised initiates liberation and salvation.¹⁷³ Plutarch's psychagogy denies the woman any sense of liberation that may be found in these rituals. Taking part in mystery religions outside of the marriage does not constitute a conjugal act, since the gods are not those shared by the husband as well.

The conjugal Self therefore stands in a master-slave status-relation to the husband. As intermediate psychagogue who must help his wife through her philosophical education, he necessarily occupies a position of power in relation to her. Because he is not bound by the same rules and is by virtue of his sex superior and able to define his identity for himself *by himself*, Man cannot be considered fundamentally bound to the marital unit. His connection to the marital unit is, for Plutarch, necessary and beneficial, but even so it is incidental and he may choose not to engage in it. Woman does not have the same choice. The only legitimate paths are those that define her in relation to Man: either she marries, or she becomes a virgin priestess. In marriage, every act she performs is for the sake of marital harmony, from mollifying her husband to studying the philosophy he chooses for her to grieving moderately. Refusal to perform the rituals of conjugality is judged in the strongest terms, and women who fail to conform are perceived as deviant.

The *Lives* contain many examples of women of both types. With these virtues and vices in mind we now turn to the women of the *Lives*, where we will examine how Plutarch deals with the complexities of (female) human nature,

¹⁷³ See the discussion of mystery religions in chapter 2, section 2.3.2.

and how these notions of gendered virtue and vice find expression in the biographies.

5.3. THE WOMEN OF THE *LIVES*

The *Lives* are populated by women who play supporting roles to great men. They are never the main subject under discussion in a *Life*; Plutarch only pays attention to a woman when she influenced the life of his subject in a significant way. We will consider the textual position of some of the most notable women in Plutarch's corpus: Aspasia, Olympias, Cornelia of the Gracchi, Octavia, and Cleopatra. These women occupy a range of social positions and therefore may offer us the most nuanced view of Plutarch's biographical treatment of women. Aspasia was a *metoikos* and *hetaira* in Athens, and the mistress of Pericles. Olympias was a Macedonian queen, wife to Philip II and mother to Alexander the Great. Cornelia was Roman nobility, daughter of Scipio Africanus and mother of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus. Octavia was also a Roman noblewoman, the sister of Octavian, who would later become Caesar Augustus, and Cleopatra was an Egyptian ruler of Greek descent under Roman occupation.¹⁷⁴ What stories does he choose to tell, and how does he present these influential women?

Plutarch does not shy away from praising a woman's intelligence. Cornelia is credited with being responsible for the character of the Gracchi; Plutarch says that "although confessedly no other Romans were so well-endowed by nature, they were thought to owe their virtues more to education than to nature" (*Ti. Gracch.* 1.5; tr. Perrin 1921). Aspasia had a "rare political wisdom" (*Per.* 24.3), though Plutarch does not elaborate on her intelligence, nor does he say that she is educated, like Cornelia and Octavia are. Instead, he says that Pericles'

¹⁷⁴ Blomqvist (1999: 82) notes that Plutarch treats Aspasia, Olympias and Cleopatra as outsiders and barbarians, highlighting the aspects of their characters that were non-Greek.

attraction to her was probably erotic rather than intellectual (Blomqvist 1997: 79), minimising the importance of her intellectual appeal and focusing instead on her sexual appeal. He praises Octavia for being beautiful (κάλλει), intelligent (νοῦν) and dignified (σεμνότητα; *Ant.* 31.2). When used of women, σεμνότης often means reserve or shyness (LSJ A.II), and thus means that she is being praised for knowing her place and not speaking out of turn.

In contrast to Octavia, Cleopatra is noted for her “subtlety and cleverness in conversation” (*Ant.* 25.2; tr. Perrin 1920), although the negative connotations of the adjectives δεινότητα and πανουργία should be noted; she could easily be described as shrewd and forceful, neither of which are desirable qualities in a woman. As in the case of Cleopatra, Plutarch uses δεινότης to describe Thargelia, and by extension Aspasia, whom he also says was εὐπρεπής (“good-looking”), but he does not describe her (as he does Octavia) as κάλλει¹⁷⁵ (*Per.* 25.2). This may be because her appearance is that of the ‘average’ beauty, but Plutarch says the same of Cleopatra and yet still calls her καλλός (*Ant.* 27.2). Perhaps a better explanation derives from Aspasia’s legal status as metic, compounded with her history as a *hetaira*, two factors that make it near impossible for her to be considered noble at all, and therefore virtue is for her even harder to attain. Seeing as Pericles is said to have attacked Samos on Aspasia’s behalf (*Per.* 24.1, 25.1), this does not reflect well on her (*cf.* Blomqvist 1997: 77).¹⁷⁶ Cleopatra is καλλός because she is noble, not because she is particularly beautiful, as Plutarch makes quite clear. Women who are commonly described with negative concepts such as these tend not to be

¹⁷⁵ *Cf.* *Conj. praec.* 141b-d, where Plutarch implies that noble birth and beauty is a great advantage to the virtuous woman.

¹⁷⁶ Plutarch also blames the war in Egypt, which he calls inglorious, partly on Caesar’s love for Cleopatra (*Caes.* 48.2). Beneker (2014: 507) disagrees, arguing that Plutarch withholds judgment and depicts Caesar as self-controlled and unaffected by the power of *erōs*.

described later on as σώφρων or with any other related concept, no matter how much their behaviour changes.

Cleopatra undergoes the most dramatic transition at the end of the *Life of Antony*, yet her redemption seems small in comparison with the invectives against her. Plutarch seems vexed by Cleopatra, as he is forced to admit her beauty and nobility (καλλός; *Ant.* 27.2), but disapproves of her behaviour. As such he qualifies the statement about her appearance by remarking that it was not incomparable or striking. He also says that she is “haughty and astonishingly proud in the matter of beauty” (σοβαράν καὶ θαυμαστὸν ὅσον ἐπὶ κάλλει; *Ant.* 73.2), which is by no means a good thing. Plutarch calls Antony an appendage (προσθήκη) of “the woman” (τῆς γυναικός; 62.1), and has Augustus saying that he has surrendered his authority to her, that he has been drugged (φαρμάκων) and that he is no longer his own man (60.1).

Plutarch’s judgment of a woman’s character becomes most clear when he accuses her of using potions and spells to manipulate the people around her. He ends the *Life of Alexander* by speculating that Olympias used drugs (φαρμάκοις) to mentally and physically harm Arrhidaeus, a contender to the Macedonian throne (*Alex.* 77.5). He also says that she was suspected of practising μαγείας... καὶ φάρμακα on Philip (*Alex.* 2.4). This kind of action tends to be connected to superstition and cultic practices, so Plutarch says Olympias pursued the Orphic mysteries ζηλώσασα and βαρβαρικώτερον (*Alex.* 2.6), and accuses her of being χαλεπότης, δυσζήλου and βαρυσύμου (*Alex.* 9.4).¹⁷⁷ Aspasia is also described as ζηλώσασαν (*Per.* 24.2), which Perrin translates as “emulation”, though the concept carries many negative

¹⁷⁷ Carney (2006: 132-35) discusses Plutarch’s depiction of Olympias in the *Moralia* and the *Lives* in some detail, noting inconsistencies in the stories and concluding that the depiction of Olympias in the *Alexander* as meddling, troublesome witch is hyped up to highlight the strength of Alexander’s character.

connotations, including “zealous pursuit” (LSJ A.II) and “jealousy” (LSJ A.III), even and perhaps especially in the context used here. Even if Plutarch only says that Aspasia was emulating or imitating Thargelia, he still likens her to a prostitute who infiltrated the high courts of Greece and by means of her beauty and talent, sold the Persian cause to men in power (24.2-3). The implicit charge against Aspasia is therefore that her sexuality and political wit is the tool with which she manipulates men around her, and that Pericles has fallen prey to this device.

Much like Olympias and Aspasia, Cleopatra is accused of manipulating Antony by the use of secret rites (ἐμπράττετο; *Ant.* 53.4) throughout their relationship. Plutarch explicitly refers to Antony’s passion for Cleopatra as a “dire evil” (ἡ δεινὴ συμφορὰ; *Ant.* 36.1), which he compares explicitly to the lowest part of the soul in Plato’s metaphysics.¹⁷⁸ Cleopatra renders Antony incapable of rational action, and Plutarch reasons that she does so by way of “certain drugs or witchcraft” (φαρμάκων τινῶν ἢ γοητείας; 37.4). Her effect on Antony is so strong that she manages to convince him to rely on his navy instead of his land forces at the Battle of Actium, despite his knowing that he has the weaker fleet (62.1; 63.5; cf. 66.4-5). Indeed from the very beginning she is under suspicion of using “the charms and sorceries of her own person” to win Antony’s favour and escape persecution (*Ant.* 25.4). This in itself is not a bad thing, as Plutarch uses an unknown Thessalian woman as an example of good character in the *Conj. praec.* The woman is accused of using φάρμακα on Philip, but proves herself so virtuous that Olympias exclaims, “Away with these slanders! You

¹⁷⁸ “And finally, like the stubborn and unmanageable beast of the soul, of which Plato speaks, he spurned away all saving and noble counsels and sent Fonteius Capito to bring Cleopatra to Syria.” The passage in Plato referred to here is *Phdr.* 254a, which discusses the analogy of the charioteer and the two horses travelling through the Realm of Ideas. Antony’s passion is like the horse that tugs and jumps wildly from side to side, bringing the chariot off course.

have your magic charms in yourself" (*Conj. praec.* 141c). Olympias thus believes her character is so virtuous that she does not need to use spells or potions. Carney sees this as a positive depiction of Olympias, which stands in stark contrast to the negative depictions in the *Alex.*, although she does not explain why (2006: 134). It is more likely, considering how negative Plutarch is towards Olympias in general, that he implicitly sets her up against the Thessalian woman, expecting his readers to know of her reputation for using potions. Since the *Conj. praec.* is from the outset meant to be a compendium of comparisons (138c), this interpretation gains some traction from the fact that it is one of only a few that are not presented as comparisons. The Thessalian woman is therefore the positive exemplum of the woman whose charms are encompassed in her own character, whereas Olympias is portrayed as making a power-grab "to get the woman into her power" (141c). This behaviour is manipulative and unseemly for a woman, as Plutarch makes clear in several other precepts.

Cleopatra does not escape so lightly with an implicit comparison, however, as she is placed in direct competition with Octavia, and comes out by far the worse off. Plutarch says that those Romans who had seen Cleopatra sympathised even more with Octavia when Antony abandoned her, because they knew that Cleopatra was inferior both in youth (ὠρῶν) and in beauty (κάλλει; 57.3). This can hardly be more than a bare-bones summation of opinions at best, while at worst it equates youth and beauty/nobility with virtue.

The expectation of Octavia is that her beauty and her virtues will win Antony's heart from Cleopatra, inspiring goodwill towards her and as a result also towards her family. If Octavia can make Antony happy, the civil war between him and Augustus will end. Plutarch describes her as fulfilling this role most virtuously (*Ant.* 35.2-4). Cleopatra, on the other hand, wilfully comes between Octavia and Antony and disrupts the harmony brought about by their marriage. When Octavia attempts to meet Antony at Athens, Cleopatra

becomes jealous and fearful lest Octavia's character and virtue prove irresistible to Antony. The action she takes to keep Antony under her control is manipulative and disingenuous. Plutarch says she "pretended" to be in love with Antony (ἐρᾶν αὐτὴ προσεποιεῖτο τοῦ Ἀντονίου; *Ant.* 53.3), lost weight, feigned love-sickness and made sure Antony saw her wipe away tears as if she had been crying (53.3-4). Her flatterers (οἱ κόλακες) also made sure that Antony knew that she was in pain from her belief that he would leave her, his devoted mistress and queen, for a wife who was married to him by duty (53.4-5). Cleopatra's attempts are successful, and Antony soon returns to her, partly out of fear that she would commit suicide (πρόηται τὸν βίον; 53.6).¹⁷⁹ This action on Antony's part is the ultimate catalyst for the civil war, but Octavia remains loyal despite his treatment of her. Augustus orders her to return to her own house, but she refuses and instead remains in Antony's house as his wife, living as though he himself were there. She even entreats Augustus to relinquish all thought of civil war, lest it be said that they started a war on behalf of a woman. She continues to care not only for her own children by Antony, but also for his children by Fulvia, and in conducting herself so virtuously (καλῶς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς), Plutarch says that she unintentionally damaged the reputation of her husband, who was thought all the worse for scorning a woman like her (54.1-3).

Cleopatra's death by suicide appears to be her redemption, an act of bravery from a woman who refuses to live in slavery, and above all a final sign of the loyalty she owes Antony. In fact when Antony initially mistakenly believes

¹⁷⁹ Beneker (2014: 508) argues that it is Antony's lack of self-control that ultimately caused his ruin, and while this may be partly true, it is hard to deny that Plutarch places at least some of the blame on Cleopatra. When Antony abandons the Battle of Actium, Plutarch says he "hastened after the woman who had already ruined (ἀπολωλεκυῖαν) him, and would make his ruin still more complete (προσαπολοῦσαν)" (*Ant.* 66.5).

Cleopatra dead, he declares, “I am grieved that such an imperator as I am has been found to be inferior to a woman in courage” (*Ant.* 76.3). Plutarch says that Augustus admired her εὐγένειαν (86.4), and as a result gave her a regal burial alongside Antony. This admiration is perhaps rather for the spirit afforded by her high birth than for courage or virtue. Plutarch is reluctant to admit that Cleopatra has any truly virtuous characteristics, but will readily admit that she is of noble birth, which naturally bestows some strength of character. At the Battle of Actium, however, Cleopatra is condemned for her cowardice; Plutarch accuses her of preparing to flee even while Antony was preparing for the next battle (*Ant.* 63.5), and of abandoning the fight at a crucial moment (*Ant.* 66.4). Even her death seems somewhat ignoble when Plutarch returns to Octavia shortly afterwards to describe her actions in the wake of her husband’s death. After the death of both Antony and Cleopatra, Octavia continues to care for all of Antony’s children, even those he had with Cleopatra, and makes sure that they are married into noble families (87.1-2). She accomplishes this task so well that Antony’s descendants eventually come to rule the Empire (87.4). In light of this description of Octavia’s actions on behalf of both Antony and his mistress, Cleopatra’s actions appear to be condemned as yet another act of cowardice and negligence. Plutarch seems convinced that Cleopatra wanted the war to happen (56.2-3), and thus intentionally manipulated Antony into a position from which he could not escape. Even as she mourns Antony’s death and prepares to take her own life, Plutarch describes her as deceptive (83.1-5), and even in death she is “royally adorned” (κεκοσμημένην βασιλικῶς; 85.4). As a result, her death appears to be a choice between freedom, particularly the freedom to rule, and slavery (*cf.* 84.2-3). She therefore fundamentally fails at cultivating some of the most basic female virtues, including acting as caretaker for her children, and her greatest sin is the intentional disruption of the

domestic and political harmony brought about by the legitimate union between Antony and Octavia.

Woman's role as peace-maker and peace-keeper is emphasised repeatedly throughout the *Lives*. Roman women especially are often married to the allies of their fathers or brothers; Pompey divorced his first wife Antistia to forge an alliance with Sulla by marrying his step-daughter, Aemelia (*Pomp.* 9.1-3). Cornelia's father married her off to the son of his enemy (*Ti. Gracch.* 1.3).¹⁸⁰ Caesar's daughter Julia is married off to Pompey in order to ensure a harmonious relationship between the two generals. Her death in childbirth, along with the death of the child, causes this relationship to dissolve (*Caes.* 23.4; cf. *Pomp.* 47.6, 53.1-5). Women who do not support their husbands by preserving the harmony of their marriage are represented as their undoing. Plutarch says that Lepidus died of despondency, not because Pompey thwarted his attempt at a coup, but because he found out that his wife was an adulteress (*Pomp.* 16.6). In this short mention of the cause of Lepidus' death the role of Woman as supporter to her husband is emphasised, and it is framed in such a way as to suggest that her deviation from this role is the ultimate cause of his ruin – after all, Lepidus may have gone on to redeem himself were it not for his wife's indiscretions.

As a result of the negative effects of being connected to an unchaste woman, men generally cast them off as soon as their reputation suffers. When Caesar's wife Pompeia is suspected of having an affair with Clodius, he divorces her at once, claiming that he believes his wife should be above reproach (*Caes.* 10.1-

¹⁸⁰ See also Dixon (2007: 4-5) for a dramatic retelling and insightful commentary on the circumstances surrounding Cornelia's betrothal. Carney (2006: 12-13) similarly discusses Olympias' marriage to Philip as a political arrangement. Unlike Cornelia, however, Olympias is accused of plotting the death of her husband (*Alex.* 10.4) and thus fails at preserving the harmony of her marriage and playing the supportive role she ought to.

6); Pompey takes similar action by divorcing his wife Mucia on charges of “commit[ting] adultery during his absence” (ἐξύβρισε... παρὰ τὴν ἀποδημίαν αὐτοῦ; *Pomp.* 42.7; tr. Perrin 1917). Aspasia’s reputation as a courtesan is so widely known that even Cyrus the Great named one of his courtesans after her (24.6-7; cf. 30.4). Plutarch says that Aspasia was the mistress of a brothel (24.3), and her reputation was so well known that she went on trial for impiety and “receiv[ing] free women into a place of assignation for Pericles” (*Per.* 32.1). Her association with Pericles in itself therefore damages his career and his reputation (33.7), since she is a woman of ill repute, though it is perhaps his inability to refuse her company that ultimately damages him most.

The sexual experience of a woman before (and after) her association with a man is an important factor in the determination of her virtue. Thus, when Pompey marries his third wife, Cornelia, Plutarch feels the need to point out explicitly that she is not a virgin but a young widow, and that despite her sexual experience her virtues were many (*Pomp.* 55.1-2). Pompey himself, however, is not a virgin at his first marriage, nor does Plutarch seem to think it an important matter. He relates the story of Pompey’s dalliance with the courtesan Flora not to show that Pompey was unchaste, but rather that he was magnanimous, since he gave her to a friend despite having a certain fondness for her himself, and afterwards did not sleep with her again (2.3-4). In fact, Plutarch follows this anecdote with one that relates how Pompey treated his freedman Demetrius’ wife contemptuously, lest he be thought licentious (2.4-5).

A woman who does display sexual experience and agency cannot be virtuous and is likely to lead those who associate with her into intemperance as well. Thus Cleopatra is a λαμυρᾶς (“bold coquette”) when she secretly meets Caesar by hiding in a bed-sack (*Caes.* 49.2). She also indulges and thereby exacerbates Antony’s taste for luxury; together they form the society of Inimitable Livers

(*Ant.* 28.2-7),¹⁸¹ which they disband after their defeat at Actium to form instead the society of Partners in Death (71.3). Both societies are built on the basis of luxurious indulgence and extravagance. Cleopatra indeed shows herself inclined towards intemperance from the outset when she arrives to meet Antony in a barge so splendidly decorated with gold and purple sails (ἰστίων ἀλουργῶν) that Plutarch compares her to “Aphrodite in a painting” (26.1-2; cf. 26.4). Aspasia, who certainly benefitted more from her association with Pericles than his with her, took a lowly sheep-dealer as a lover after Pericles’ death. The casual mention of her continued association with whomever she chose comes shortly before Plutarch tells us that Pericles was almost certainly genuinely in love with her (24.5), making Aspasia’s affections for him seem less than sincere. Even barbarian kings can be led astray; Pompey discovers “licentious letters” that Monime sent to Mithridates, as well as his answers to her (*Pomp.* 37.2), implying that this barbarian king had succumbed to an intemperate mistress and was therefore all the more deserving of being conquered. In contrast to the behaviour of these women, Caius Gracchus praises his mother Cornelia for her chastity, which is so legendary that he dares to declare to an opponent charged with “effeminate practices”: “...all Rome knows that she refrained from being (οὔσαν) with men longer than you, though you are a man” (*C. Gracch.* 4.4). Female chastity is therefore used as a tool to shame men into heteronormative sexual relationships as well. The implication seems to be that if a virtuous woman can overcome the natural vices of her sex, it is all the worse if a man cannot do the same.

Women are also more susceptible to grief and lamentation and thus have to prove themselves able to overcome the desire to give in to their base instincts in times of crisis. Plutarch takes the time to narrate in detail how Cleopatra

¹⁸¹ Cf. Chaveau (2002: 41-46), who draws on Plutarch as a credible source for Cleopatra’s extravagance, as well as the craftiness of the methods she used to ensnare Antony.

mourns Antony's death. While he dies in her arms she beats her breast, tears her clothes and smears his blood on her face (*Ant.* 77.2-3). After she has been captured, she refuses to eat and Plutarch reminds the reader that her breasts are bruised and swollen from her acts of lamentation (82.1). While some may read this as her redemption in showing Antony loyalty at the last hour,¹⁸² it is surely the egregious display of grief Plutarch warns Timoxena against in the *Cons. ux.* In sharp contrast to this Pompey's wife Cornelia, who is described as virtuous at the outset, resists her initial urge to give in to grief and lamentation when she hears that her husband has been defeated by Caesar (*Pomp.* 74.2). So too Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, is lauded for bearing her misfortunes "nobly and magnanimously" (εὐγενῶς καὶ μεγαλοψύχως), and remembering the deceased fondly without excess grief or lamentation (*C. Gracch.* 19.1-3).¹⁸³

The virtues and vices that Plutarch focuses on specifically in the women's works of the *Moralia* appear again in the *Lives*, and Plutarch's judgement in each case follows a familiar pattern. Aspasia is not virtuous, because she is a courtesan and a metic, who manipulates men for her own gain. Her actions and her reputation negatively influence the career of the man to whom she is connected but not married. Olympias is not virtuous, because she is superstitious and takes part in barbaric rituals, and she manipulates the people around her with spells and potions. Her chastity, and thus the paternity of Alexander, is questionable, and she is a difficult and vengeful woman. Cornelia is virtuous because she is educated and chaste, she knows her place and does not speak out of turn, she cares for her children in a magnificent manner and

¹⁸² Stadter (1995: 235-36; 1999: 181) sees Cleopatra's role after the defeat at Actium as wholly changed. In this stage of their lives he sees her as a loyal partner and affectionate lover to Antony, and thus as a woman who has finally "assumed her proper role".

¹⁸³ Cf. Dixon (2007: 11), who discusses Cornelia's posthumous honours, including her statue, and the way she honoured the memory of her sons after their deaths.

when they die she celebrates their lives and does not grieve them excessively. Octavia is virtuous because she is educated, noble, and chaste, she plays her proper role as harmoniser of the household and caretaker of all her husband's children, even those who are not hers. Cleopatra is everything that is bad in a woman and then some. Plutarch does not leave room for error in the matter of female virtue.

In cases where he concedes characteristics that are typical of the virtuous woman to one he deems unworthy, he finds a way to present them as incomplete or improperly utilised. As such he admits of both Aspasia and Cleopatra a certain level of intelligence, but does so with words that suggest that they are tricksters rather than truly educated women. Even when he calls them beautiful he says their beauty is not unsurpassable, and he even directly compares Cleopatra to Octavia on occasion to showcase the ways in which she is inferior.

Women who step outside the boundaries of conjugality, or refuse to conform to Plutarch's view of Woman's role in the marital union, are condemned in the *Lives* just as they are in the *Moralia*. As psychagogic models Plutarch presents them to his students in order for them to consider where these women went wrong. Aspasia, as a foreigner and a courtesan, never really had a chance.¹⁸⁴ In the case of Olympias and Cleopatra, we are reminded that nobility does not necessarily equal virtue. The virtuous woman is not only noble, she is also educated, self-controlled, temperate, loyal, and obedient. In contrast to the women who have been found wanting, Cornelia and Octavia are the models of perfect conjugal action. Even after the death of their husbands they continue to act according to the same standard by raising his/their children and preserving

¹⁸⁴ See section 1.2.2 on the importance of considering the intersections of socio-economic and environmental factors when studying women, and chapter 2 on the socio-economic status of women in different social strata in the ancient world.

the family name. Cornelia does not cease her actions even when her sons have died, but continues to speak fondly of them and preserves their name. Octavia cares for Antony's children so well that their descendants eventually become the emperors of Rome.

Plutarch's psychagogic practice for women in the *Moralia* sets the conditions for interaction within the conjugal couple. His advice makes it clear that Woman's proper role is as part of this unit, and that any interaction outside of it is strictly forbidden. In the *Lives* he uses the same moral language as in the *Moralia* when evaluating characters. An action that is consistently judged as bad in the *Moralia* is often connected with certain terms: φάρμακα, χαλεπότης, βακχεύμα, ζήλωσις, κόλακες, παλλακή etc., and these terms are often found in the *Lives* when Plutarch is describing women who transgress the boundaries of their sex. Similarly, positive moral terms are found in descriptions of virtuous women. These terms include καλλός, σώφρων, καλῶς, μεγαλοπρεπής, φιλότεκνος, εὐγένεια/εὐγενής, μεγαλόψυχος, etc. Women who are described with negative terms are rarely described with positive terms as well, with the exception of terms denoting nobility where applicable. Aspasia is never described as κάλλος or εὐγένεια/εὐγενής. In these cases it is clear that Plutarch is vexed by the prevalence of noble women who are not virtuous. Nobility is so intricately linked with beauty and virtue that often the same word is used to denote all three concepts. Noble women who fail to attain a proper standard of virtue are therefore largely described with negative moral concepts throughout the *Lives*. Plutarch's conception of ideal Womanhood in the *Moralia* is therefore not isolated, and is clearly the measure by which women are judged in the *Lives* as well.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Plutarch's ideal Woman is no contradiction, at least not in theory. His views in the *Moralia* are thoroughly reconcilable with the image of Woman presented in the *Lives*. His arguments in *Amat.* and *Mulier. virt.* propose a radical degendering of virtue, and a shift of focus instead to the nuanced ways in which individual character and disposition affect the manifestation of virtue. Thus the masculine actions of Ismenodora in the *Amat.*, namely kidnapping Bacchon and holding him hostage with the intent of marrying him, are acceptable within the framework of this new order. Plutarch proclaims himself convinced that Woman shares equally in virtue with Man, and has equal ability to attain a state of divinity at the end of the psychagogic process, but in *Is. Os.* he betrays this Socratic principle in favour of an Aristotelian approach which sees Woman as recipient and nurturer of Man's active and creative power.

It is clear that Plutarch struggled to get the principles to align; he seems genuinely convinced of his arguments in *Amat.* and elsewhere that women and men are equal in ability. Yet he seems similarly convinced that women have an inherent natural weakness that can only be corrected by the guidance of the male rational principle, *i.e.* through the study of philosophy and subservience to the leadership of her husband. This has led scholars to some truly confounding conclusions, such as Blomqvist's assertion that "[a]ccording to Plutarch, women are inferior as such, but once they accept their inferiority, they may well be regarded as men's equals as regards moral strength. Women are not wicked or depraved unless they transgress the rules of their sex and strive to achieve privileges reserved for men" (1997: 89). This judgement of Woman as "equal, but inferior" has become a recurring theme in scholarship on Plutarch's women, and includes the important work of Stadter (1999: 180, 182)

and McInerney (2003: 341-43). For Plutarch it is impossible for Woman to reach a state of divine virtue without the guidance of male Reason. Isis needs Osiris, and because she loves him, she is always in search of him. It is this erotic bond between them that keeps Isis free from the influence of Typhon and forms the just soul. Similarly, Ismenodora is a widow of noble birth who is above reproach in her lifestyle (*Amat.* 749d). There is nothing in the *Amat.* to suggest that she may have achieved this state of *sōphrosynē* without the firm guidance of her late husband. In the case of virtue in Plutarch, a concept such as “equal” is therefore strictly speaking not applicable. Woman may achieve a state of virtue comparable to Man’s, but only through Man’s guidance, rendering her at his mercy in matters of the soul.

As a result, his judgment of women who do not fit into the mould of female virtue, particularly those women who act in their own self-interest, foment discord and indulge in intemperance, is swift and harsh. He offers them very little opportunity for redemption, but rather holds them up as examples for his female students: *this is what vice looks like*. Plutarch’s *Antony* stands out among his *Lives* for his treatment of two women as polar opposites. Apart from being a biography of Antony, I suggest that it be treated as a psychagogic text for women, in which the virtues of Octavia are compared to the vices of Cleopatra. Unlike the *Lives* of the men he narrates, which allow for individualism (*cf.* Nikolaidis 2014: 363) and nuance, Octavia and Cleopatra fit neatly into the mould of Womanly virtue and vice that Plutarch created in the *Moralia*. He judges their actions and characters according to this metric, and pits them directly against one another. As an added warning to the reader, the results of their actions are directly reflected in the events of Antony’s life. This does not excuse Antony as a moral agent, placing all the blame on Cleopatra, but it does suggest that a temperate and supportive wife without her own political agenda could have affected the course of his life much differently. Had he chosen

Octavia, Plutarch seems to imply, how different would the empire not have looked?

Plutarch mentions in passing that Cleopatra styled herself as the New Isis during her affair with Antony (*Ant.* 54.6), but refrains from making any comparisons between her and the goddess of *Is. Os.* Plutarch's characterisation of Cleopatra makes it abundantly clear that she has nothing in common with that Isis, who through her devotion to Osiris attains her apotheosis. The New Isis, through her refusal to submit to the authority of men,¹⁸⁵ has succumbed to the temptation of Typhon and has dragged her lover down with her. Before her final victory over Octavia Plutarch says that Antony's Reason was still at odds with his love for Cleopatra (*Ant.* 31.2); she is contrasted with rationality and offered as its counterpart. The New Isis is a potentially dangerous force that must be tamed. Antony's own failure to overcome the feminine principle in his soul certainly contributed to his ruin, but Plutarch also uses the opportunity to give full form to the dangers inherent in allowing the feminine principle to run rampant. Untamed and naturally weak as she is, she is likely to cause destruction in the lives of the men who touch her.

In order to tame the feminine principle, Plutarch's psychagogic programme therefore aims to control Woman by keeping her indoors, silent, chaste, temperate, complacent, obedient, and above all subservient to her husband, who is the force of Reason in her life. The radical degendering of virtue in *Amat.* is a rhetorical exercise in Ideas, but Ismenodora is not Plutarch's ideal Woman. She is an example of what might happen if Woman managed to transcend her natural weakness and attained virtue. That this is an unlikely scenario is clear from Plutarch's attitudes towards Woman elsewhere; he is suspicious of her

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Ant.* 60.1: Augustus wanted "to take away from Antony the authority which he had surrendered to a woman."

ability to resist temptation, act modestly, cultivate a good character through education and philosophy, and not be overcome by grief. The women's works in the *Moralia* are aimed at helping women suppress the irrational principle and guide the feminine principle towards the Good. *Amat.* and *Is. Os.* are supporting texts for those endeavouring to find the good life; they detail the metaphysical basis for Plutarch's ideal Woman, assuring his female students that virtue is an attainable goal for them too. The *Lives* show women as secondary characters to men, playing supporting roles and failing or succeeding because of their virtue or vice. The emphasis is always on the effect their actions have on the men in their lives. Plutarch suggests that virtue and vice does not exist in a vacuum, and Woman should pay attention to the consequences of her actions on those around her. Her primary duty is to serve her husband, and she should always keep this in mind.

There is no reason to believe that Plutarch does not pass judgement on his female characters in the *Lives* according to the criteria set out in the women's works of the *Moralia*. The moral language in the latter is mirrored in the former, and is applied systematically. Words that denote positive characteristics are not applied to women whose actions are deemed immoral. Women who are foreign or who belong to the lower classes have almost no positive characteristics except in extraordinary circumstances. Plutarch's response to Cleopatra's actions verges on the polemical. One might easily argue that the statements for or against certain actions are emotive. Certainly the ethical terms inherent in these moral judgements render them prescriptivist and ultimately subjective. The most virtuous women are those who live according to the guidelines set out carefully in the *Conj. praec.* and explored elsewhere in the *Moralia*. The use of moral language in the *Lives* undoubtedly reveals something about Plutarch's own moral convictions. Some aspects of his ethics are not too far removed from

the general aristocratic state of mind evident from other writings of the time.¹⁸⁶ Like those elite male authors, Plutarch believes that there are an unsettling number of immoral, dissolute, and licentious women in the world, and that their actions are negatively affecting the well-being and success of the men in their lives. As a result, Plutarch believes that it is necessary to guide women towards a more prudent lifestyle in which they may find fulfilment in philosophy and virtue.

The psychagogic programme that Plutarch develops for women in response to the perceived moral crisis is overtly conservative and as such is not tenable in the socio-economic reality of the 1st century C.E. It is a combination of the most conservative tenets of other psychagogic philosophies aimed at women, and is significantly influenced by Platonic metaphysics. This life would see Woman defined by her marriage and in relation to her husband and children only. There is no longer any possibility for her to define her Self in her own terms, or to set the criteria for interactions with the world herself. She cannot choose what philosophers she will read and which doctrines she will make her own. Metaphysically, Plutarch sees Woman as a mixture of Logos and Chaos, and as a result she is continuously fighting to balance these principles. The only way to guide her toward Logos is to force her into it; giving her the choice is too risky an alternative. Several of the precepts in *Conj. praec.* advise the husband to be somewhat forceful with his wife if she will not be persuaded by reason, while others mask veiled threats of violence and deprivation. Plutarch's moral strategy therefore relies on rational argument, but includes the caveat that resorting to force in order to persuade women to live according to the philosophical way of life is acceptable.

¹⁸⁶ See chapter 2, especially section 2.3.3., and chapter 3, section 3.4, for women in the literary record.

The goal of the psychagogic project, insofar as it aims at attaining a state of divine fulfilment, perhaps may not seem altogether ignoble, but it is certainly not realistic. Philosophers from the Stoic tradition such as Musonius and Hierocles, as well as the Stoic Epictetus seem to have realised this, and as a result their views on women are somewhat more balanced. Musonius and Hierocles view marriage as an equal partnership between husband and wife, whereas Plutarch sees the husband as leading the household and claiming ownership over everything encompassed within it. Musonius and Epictetus condemn adultery in the case of both men and women, but Plutarch leaves a grey area for the husband's infidelity, implying that licentiousness is a vice more detrimental to Woman's virtue. In fact, Plutarch's psychagogy seems closest to the ethics of the Pythagorean women, and one is left wondering whether he would not have rather lived five hundred years earlier. Even then, his Woman would have been out of place. The Classical Athenian woman, living in the most conservative Greek city-state we know of, was rarely as controlled as scholarship makes her out to be. It is likely that Plutarch takes his cues from the Pythagorean women, Plato, Xenophon, and at times even Aristotle, but the philosophers' Woman does not correlate with what we can with reasonable certainty say about the average Jane.

Plutarch's Woman would have felt uncomfortable and lonely in Classical Athens. She does not exist in the early Imperial Period. The women who populate Rome and Greece during this time are educated, powerful and wealthy, some even in their own right. They marry and divorce and remarry, in some cases even for love. They act in public capacities as *stratēgoi* and gymnasiarchs and benefactors to the cities. They are commemorated on coins and celebrated with inscriptions, reliefs and statues. They travel through the city on day-to-day errands to the market place or religious festivals. They are politically active. They are sexually more liberated than they have ever been.

Plutarch's Woman cannot exist in the early Imperial Period and still be called a free woman.

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