

## VIRTUE, MASCULINITY, AND HIERARCHIES OF DOMINATION IN PLUTARCH'S *ANTONY* AND *DE ISIDE*

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Plutarch's *Antony* and *De Iside et Osiride* together tackle the manly woman and the effeminate man. I suggest that *De Iside* is the theoretical exposition of the metaphysics underlying this problem of gender, resolved by gendering the parts of the tripartite soul. In the *Antony*, these expressions of gender in the body are examined in practice. Female masculinity is defined as a manifestation of virtue without contradicting the natural fact of the female body, while manliness is an unvirtuous expression of a desire to dominate. Plutarch refines the hierarchy of domination that affirms women's claim to virtue and preserves traditional social order by examining the relation between embodied sex and ensouled gender and assigning an ethical value to its expressions.

*Keywords:* Plutarch; soul; gender; virtue; masculinity.

Plutarch's *Life of Antony* has proven itself of enduring interest and remarkable depth, and has elicited special interest from scholars concerned with gendered discourse in imperial Rome and provincial Greece. Brigitte Ford Russell (1998) has drawn together various aspects of the text that serve to emasculate Antony, while others have focused on the relationship between Antony and his wives as a model for the detrimental impact of uncontrolled *erōs* (Beneker 2012:153ff) or female domination in politics (Blomqvist 1997:76). For Jill Harries (1998:184), Plutarch was a significant voice in the gender debate in antiquity, while McNamara (1999:151) suggests that he represents a rupture in the philosophical discourse of gender. That Plutarch considered Antony's marriage to Cleopatra disgraceful is not in doubt, indeed he says just that in the *comparatio* to the *Lives* of Demetrius and Antony (1.3). Nor is Russell (1998:122-125) mistaken when she points out that Antony's masculinity degenerates throughout the course of the biography, and that it is often tied to his relationship with Cleopatra or his assimilation into foreign cultures.

In the *Antony*, gender continually appears as a site of contention and (mis)identification. Like *De Iside et Osiride*, it was likely created during the latter part of Plutarch's career, though the order is not certain.<sup>1</sup> For Fred Brenk (1992) Cleopatra and Antony represent an anti-Isis and anti-Osiris. Brenk made excellent

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<sup>1</sup> Brenk 1992:162. With gratitude to the National Research Foundation of South Africa for funding this project, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

points, above all that elements from *De Iside* appear again in the *Antony* but are distorted (1992:164). I aim to continue this line of inquiry by arguing that Plutarch engenders the tripartite soul as a means to examine how bodies come to express non-binary gendered characteristics, i.e. how the female participates in masculinity and the male in femininity, and thus to assign an ethical value to such expressions. The *Antony* serves as the practical examination of this theory of the gendered soul.

Like *De Iside*, the majority of the *Antony* is structured as a triadic struggle for power, with Cleopatra on one end as a foreign threat, Octavia(n) on the other as the champion(s) of Rome, and Antony caught in the middle. Platonic allusions to the soul elevate this push-and-pull of power to the level of moral-psychological failing and metaphysical struggle.<sup>2</sup> References to mythological figures that unsettle the gender binary strengthen this meta-narrative of psychic domination and submission. In doing so Plutarch highlights the changeability of human nature. He's often concerned with the soul of his subjects.<sup>3</sup> Morality is a fundamental aspect of the *Lives*, where ideas of right and wrong — virtue and vice — are explored in practical terms (Duff 1999:65). The *Antony* deals with the complex relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and continually echoes themes found in the *Moralia* that highlight the conflict of gender.

Georgia Tsouvala claims that Plutarch 'believed that a woman with a 'masculine' mind and soul could be an ideal partner' (2014:192); what Plutarch means when he endorses *masculine* qualities in women is almost exclusively confined to a philosophical understanding of female masculinity as *logos*. McInerney (2003:321) notes the problems that arise when virtue is construed as a transfiguration into masculinity, and the implicit approval of *manly* women that shift entails. Consequently, he argues (2003:324-325) that Plutarch's manly women in *Mulierum virtutes* are 'manly' in the sense that they exhibit masculine virtue in a traditional way, but it requires a great deal of obfuscation to avoid thereby also approving of expressions of manliness in female bodies. In the same vein, Halberstam (1998:28) questions why femininity is so readily accessible and masculinity so resilient to imitation. Ancient models suggest that this is because

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<sup>2</sup> For this metaphor in Plato see *Resp.* 439d. Duff 1999:72-80 has shown that Platonic psychology is fundamental to understanding the *Lives*, as has Beneker 2012 and Swain 1999:86. The more recent consensus — exemplified in Nikolaidis' 2008 collection *The unity of Plutarch's work* — that the *Lives* and the *Moralia* are mutually reinforcing has opened new avenues for the exploration of gendered discourse in Plutarch's work. See also van Nuffelen 2012:50 on the unity of philosophy and religion in Plutarch.

<sup>3</sup> Duff 1999:60-62 points out that the *Antony* does not contain a simple moral lesson, but rather hinges on an exploration of Platonic 'great natures' present in the *Moralia* as well. Duff 1999:72-82 also provides an excellent analysis of the Platonic conception of the soul in Plutarch's work, its functioning in the *Lives* and the role of education within this moral framework.

effeminacy is already a defective masculinity, that personhood aspires to *maleness* by way of rational masculinity or devolves into *femaleness* by way of irrational femininity, and that virtue and vice are contingent on this distinction. Plutarch's 'masculine' women therefore don't challenge the established social hierarchy, they only redefine it within the framework of male domination.

### *Engendering the soul*

Plutarch was in many ways a traditionalist. *Conjugalia praecepta* takes a prescriptive approach to conjugality in which the husband is the leader of the household (139a, 139d). Much of the text rests on the premise that submission is woman's natural state of being and that harmony in the household is achieved through male domination. Here, as elsewhere, Plutarch connects the proper functioning of the home and the roles of husband and wife in it with gendered first principles. Wohl (1997:171) argues that while *Conjugalia praecepta* is focused on the couple, it does not do away with the (barely) implicit hierarchy which identifies the female with corporeality and the male with reason. Plutarch himself could not have made it more explicit (*Conj. praec.* 142e):

So is it with women also; if they subordinate themselves to their husbands, they are commended, but if they want to have control, they cut a sorrier figure than the subjects of their control. And ***control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman*** (κρατεῖν δὲ δεῖ τὸν ἄνδρα τῆς γυναικὸς), not as the owner has control of a piece of property, but, ***as the soul controls the body*** (ὡς ψυχὴν σώματος) ...<sup>4</sup>

In *De Iside* a similar gendering of principles occurs.<sup>5</sup> The text lays emphasis on Isis acting in support of Osiris, identifying the former with materiality (365c) and the latter with reason (352a, 373f). Isis is the feminine principle of nature (τὸ τῆς φύσεως θῆλυ, *De Is. et Os.* 372e), as Osiris is the masculine (372a). The corporeal principle appears also in *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, where matter is

<sup>4</sup> All translations are from the LCL. Cf. *Quaest. Plat.* 1001b-c on the two constituent parts of the universe, body and soul, and the former's submission to the latter.

<sup>5</sup> For Ann Chapman 2011:7 *De Iside* is not 'concerned with either gender or the relationship between male and female', but its female addressee, Clea, is particularly important for Plutarch's purpose, i.e. the establishment of a principle of domination and subordination. The establishment of such a principle necessarily concerns male-female relationships and must therefore be incorporated with the text, as the focus on the relationship between Isis and Osiris throughout shows. Wohl 1997:171 also suggested that *Conjugalia praecepta* is fundamentally based on domination and male hegemony, and Lin Foxhall 1999:139 argued that discourses of domination are ubiquitous in Plutarch's work, especially those aimed at regulating women's behaviour in marriage.

described as ‘mother’ and ‘nurse’ (1015e, *De Is. et Os.* 364d, 373f; cf. *Pl. Ti.* 51a). In this metaphysical schema the mother becomes the paradigm for the female (Irigaray 1985:16), *mothering* is the quintessential function of the feminine.<sup>6</sup> For Irigaray this separation of matter and form amounts to an obfuscation of the female in favour of the pre-existent authority of the male (1985:307). She is reduced to her reproductive function, barely-existent without it and yet necessary for the figuration of the masculine, which contains the reproductive power.<sup>7</sup>

When Plutarch identifies the deities with heavenly bodies his language invokes reproduction and sexual duality: Osiris is the moon with whom Isis associates, but the moon is the *mother* of the world and by nature both male and female (*De Is. et Os.* 368d). Therefore, it’s better to identify Osiris with the sun (372a-d) upon whom the moon depends (372f; cf. *Quaest. Plat.* 1006f).<sup>8</sup> The feminine continually strives toward masculinity, is defined by her proximity and submission to it, and is helpless without it (374d). As the maternal figure, Isis cares for the child Osiris fathers with her sister Nephthys (*De Is. et Os.* 368e). She takes on the role of a loving wife, the materiality unto which the dominant principle imparts the Forms. His is the Mind in which concepts are assembled, in which rational thinking finds its origin, and hers is the body moved by him (*De Is. et Os.* 374f-375a).<sup>9</sup> But she is not inert or inactive (*De Is. et Os.* 370f, 375c-d,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Brisson 2002:41, who notes the connection between active and passive sexual roles and their gendered expressions, which assigns to women the role of wife and mother, while men are warriors.

<sup>7</sup> So too Plutarch at *De Iside* 375a. Butler 1993:18 argued that Irigaray mimes the Platonic discourse which excludes the feminine to show that it necessarily includes the feminine in its attempt at exclusion. In *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam 1998:13 examined the notion that masculinity is a product of maleness and suggested that contemporary models of masculinity ‘depend on the prior production of masculinity by and through women as well as men’ (1998:46).

<sup>8</sup> Only allegorically: ‘it is not right to believe that water or the sun or the earth or the sky is Osiris or Isis; or again that fire or drought or the sea is Typhon, but simply if we attribute to Typhon whatever there is in these that is immoderate and disordered by reason of excesses or defects; and if we revere and honour what is orderly and good and beneficial as the work of Isis and as the image and reflection and reason of Osiris, we shall not be wrong’ (*De Is. et Os.* 376f).

<sup>9</sup> This conception of the male-female relationship is hardly ancient, see e.g. Perl’s dedication in *Thinking being, Introduction to metaphysics in the Classical tradition* (2014): ‘To Christine, In spousal togetherness, being to my thinking’ — the persistence of the body-mind distinction between the sexes has serious implications for our understanding of gender in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

376b), she is moved by her *erōs*, her search for *his reason*, her desire for *existence*. Because the alternative is no existence at all.<sup>10</sup>

Elizabeth Spelman argued that philosophers' conceptions of the soul/body distinction has consequences throughout much of their work (1982:110). This is especially true in Plutarch, where women are more visible than most other ancient philosophers. It's nearly impossible to remove from Plutarch his interest in conjugality and read only what's left: he considered the (heterosexual) married couple the most sacred and beneficial union (*Amat.* 750c). The myth of Isis and Osiris is therefore reconstructed within the framework of Platonic first principles to represent a loving and virtuous conjugal union (Stadter 1999:176; cf. *De Is. et Os.* 374f-375a). The relationship between Isis and Osiris is similar to that between Soul and Intellect at *De animae procreatione* 1024c-d, where Plutarch describes the effect of the *logos* upon entering the soul as turning it towards the Good. Osiris, he tells us, is only accessible as a dim vision or through contemplation (*De Is. et Os.* 382c-f). Isis, in her role as distributor of the Forms, is enamoured with the beauty of the Good and always pursues it (383a; cf. *Pl. Resp.* 440e).

Plutarch then turns to a cosmic structure in which he refers to Osiris as the creative element, Typhon as the destructive element, and Isis as the nurturing element that harmonises the two opposing forces (374d-375a; cf. *Pl. Resp.* 442a). He connects these principles with the Pythagorean numbers, where one is Apollo, two is Strife, and three is Justice, which, 'by reason of its equality intervenes between the two' (*Is. Os.* 381f; cf. *Arist. Metaph.* 986a21-6). Isis is Justice because of her wisdom and her role as guardian of and guide to the Realm of Truth (*De Is. et Os.* 352b). This view of a divine triad stems from his reading of Plato (*De Is. et Os.* 370f-371a):

but in his *Laws*, when he had grown considerably older, he asserts, not in circumlocution or symbolically, but in specific words, that the movement of the Universe is actuated not by one soul, but perhaps by several, and certainly by not less than two, and of these the one is beneficent, and the other is opposed to it and the artificer of things opposed. Between these he leaves a certain third nature, not inanimate nor irrational nor without the power to move of itself, as some think, but with dependence on both those others, and desiring the better always and yearning after it and pursuing it...

Here Plutarch argues that Plato posits at least two principles and an additional 'third nature' (τρίτη φύσις). This allows him to identify the triad Osiris-Isis-

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<sup>10</sup> *De Iside* 375c-d is particularly enlightening: 'The creative and conserving element of Nature moves toward him and toward existence while the annihilating and destructive moves away from him towards non-existence' (375c).

Typhon with three principles that together form the soul, in which Osiris is Intelligence and Reason (371b), Typhon is *κακία* (371d), ‘that part of the soul which is impressionable, impulsive, irrational and truculent, and of the bodily part the destructible, diseased and disorderly’ (371b), and Isis is filled with emotion, she gets sad and angry (357d-e; *cf.* Pl. *Resp.* 436b, 440a-b) in Osiris’ absence.

The reference at *Antony* 36.1 to the ‘stubborn and unmanageable beast of the soul, of which Plato speaks’ (*cf.* Pl. *Phdr.* 246a, 254a) suggests that at least here Plutarch is considering the soul in its tripartite form (*cf.* Pl. *Resp.* 435c). This soul — the soul present in humans — is a copy of the World Soul, constituted of the principles present in *De Iside* and from which Plutarch constructs his moral psychology (Opsomer 2005:180, 2012:311). Following Plato, the soul therefore consists of a rational, spirited and appetitive part (*Resp.* 439d-440e), personified by Osiris (reason), Isis (passion) and Typhon (appetite) in their allegorical roles as cosmic forces in *De Iside*. Osiris and Typhon are principles of *logos* and chaos that are fundamentally opposed (*De Is. et Os.* 367e, 371b; *cf.* Petrucci 2016:234-235). Isis, caught in the middle (367a), acts as Mediator (369f).<sup>11</sup>

Typhon, as a principle of chaos, is described in terms that evoke irrationality, passion and changeability in the soul (*De Is. et Os.* 369a-e; 371b), and disease and disorder in the body (371b; *cf.* *An. proc.* 1014e-1015b). Thus the name Seth denotes the overpowering and Bebon the restraint of reason (371b-c).<sup>12</sup> This chaotic force is present especially in the body (371a). Isis remains susceptible to the power of Typhon (375a) and is ever more so once embodied (*An. proc.* 1025d); he draws her away from reason.<sup>13</sup> Accounting for Typhon’s gender is particularly difficult; how could the lowest part of the soul be male and maintain the supremacy of the male and the masculine? Indeed, according to Dillon, Isis and Typhon are aspects of the *same* corporeal female principle, though he notes that Plutarch assigns the origin of evil to Typhon, a male entity (1985:118-119). More recently, he assigned Typhon to the role of matter and Receptacle (2014:64), a distinctly feminine aspect of the cosmos. Dillon also considers the irrational soul not only passively material but actively disruptive (2002:231), though this

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<sup>11</sup> *Cf.* *Quaest. Plat.* 1007e-1008e which argues that the θυμοειδής occupies the space (χώρα) midway between the λογιστικόν and the ἐπιθυμητικόν.

<sup>12</sup> Two other names by which Typhon is known, *cf.* *De Is. et Os.* 376b.

<sup>13</sup> Isis yearns for the good and tries to avoid and reject the portion which comes from evil ‘for she serves them both as a place and means of growth’ (372e-f). In *Quaest. Plat.* 1008b Plutarch makes the further point that the mediating principle, i.e. passion, must be intermediate between reason and appetite because it is natural for it to be ruled by and obedient to reason and to chastise appetite when it disobeys reason. This is the role filled by Isis in *De Iside* when Horus defeats Typhon but she refuses to destroy him, desiring rather cosmic (or: psychic) harmony (358d, 373c-d).

disruptive force represented by Typhon in *De Iside* is not identical with matter (2002:233). He conflates Isis and Typhon in an attempt to reconcile this triad within the framework of Platonic dualism but makes no further attempt to explore the implications of this gendering of the irrational soul. Yet in assigning Isis and Typhon to a single feminine entity, Dillon perhaps unknowingly exposed the problem of gender present in both *De Iside* and the *Antony*.

*De virtute morali* describes the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul as aspects of the same irrational principle (Opsomer 2007:387, 2012:321; *Virt. mor.* 441f-442a, *Adul. amic.* 61b, *Quaest. Plat.* 1008e; cf. *Pl. Ti.* 35a). Gendering this lower part of the soul as both male and female through the personifications of Typhon and Isis therefore affords Plutarch an opportunity to explore the nature of non-binary gender and to assign an ethical value to such expressions of gender. In the just soul *logos* reigns supreme, supported by the spirited part (*Pl. Resp.* 442a-b). In *De Iside*, Isis as the spirited part moves towards the Good, represented by Osiris (370f, 375a, 383a). Together they force the appetites into submission, thereby creating a harmonious soul. Being virtuous requires that the soul deny the lowest part of itself (*Pl. Grg.* 505a-b). Virtue then amounts to a masculinisation of the soul through the subordination of passion to reason without contradicting the facticity of the body.<sup>14</sup> This movement of the feminine towards reason at the level of human soul represents the actions of a virtuous person; the union of Isis and Osiris in their roles as passion and reason therefore produces a masculine soul with a positive ethical value. The relation of this masculine soul to the body is one of normative gender, exemplified in its ability to produce legitimate offspring (Horus; cf. *De Is. et Os.* 366a-c) capable of defeating Typhon.<sup>15</sup>

There's a close relation between these principles of feminine corporeality and masculine rationality and conceptions of the male as active and dominant and the female as passive and submissive. Being passive is feminine or effeminate, assuming the role of the woman as receiver (Krenkel 2006:472; Brisson 2002:41, 61).<sup>16</sup> Aristotle links passion and passivity in men to deformity in the genitals (such

<sup>14</sup> On the natural submission of passion to reason, see *Pl. Resp.* 441e.

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch affirms the legitimacy of Horus' birth in terms that recall the participation of Matter in the Forms, thereby also reaffirming to the reader that the work is dealing with metaphysical principles by way of religious study: 'Therefore it is said that [Horus] is brought to trial by Typhon on the charge of illegitimacy, as not being pure nor uncontaminated like his father, reason unalloyed and unaffected of itself (λόγος αὐτὸς καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀμυγῆς καὶ ἀπαθής), but contaminated in his substance because of the corporeal element (ἀλλὰ νενοθευμένος τῇ ὕλῃ διὰ τὸ σωματικόν)' (*De Is. et Os.* 373b; cf. 358d).

<sup>16</sup> See Dover 1989:103-105 on the assimilation of the passive partner to the role of a woman or a foreigner, which in effect denies his citizenship. A similar dichotomy

as that found in eunuchs), which is only a small step away from becoming female ([Arist.] *Pr.* 4.26, *cf. Gen. an.* 775a). The penetrated body is feminised by its passivity (*Amat.* 751e):

But to consort with males (whether without consent, in which case it involves violence and brigandage; or if with consent, there is still weakness and effeminacy (μαλακία καὶ θηλύτητι) on the part of those who, contrary to nature, allow themselves in Plato's words 'to be covered and mounted like cattle') ...

But a system that is reliant on a sort of biological determinism to regulate sexual roles is ill-equipped to deal with the active feminine and the passive masculine, i.e. the *manly* woman and the *effeminate* man, and even more so in cases where that distinction is increasingly blurred. Thus for Butler (1993:22-24), the inversion and reversion of activity and passivity pose serious risks to Plato's metaphysical hierarchy of gender.

It's within this context that Plutarch wrote a treatise endorsing *masculine* (τὸ ἀνδρεῖον, *Amat.* 769b) qualities in women. Ismenodora threatens to destabilise the division between male-masculine and female-feminine made on the basis of sex and enforced through a system of social exclusion.<sup>17</sup> Her actions are improper because it upsets the balance of power, where power is understood as a position of *action* in opposition to *passion*,<sup>18</sup> which is effeminate and weak. Beyond the *act* of seizing control that upsets Plutarch's interlocutors,<sup>19</sup> Ismenodora is motivated by desire, by her passion for Bacchon, by the thing that decent women cannot have, *erōs*. But Ismenodora is a decent woman by all accounts, old enough to be wise yet still young enough to produce children (*Amat.* 749d). For Plutarch, there's no logical reason such a woman should be excluded from participating in virtue, and thus by definition in some form of masculinity (*Amat.* 769b). After all, men and women have the same souls,<sup>20</sup> though women possess the weaker, the second-hand

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between being male and being feminine and foreign arises in the *Antony* and is discussed below.

<sup>17</sup> See Becker 2016:922-924 on the restrictions on Roman women's daily lives.

<sup>18</sup> Effeminate men were considered both passive and passionate, qualities that were more properly assigned to women (Edwards 1993:81).

<sup>19</sup> Pisis condemns Ismenodora on the grounds that she has rejected many viable suitors and settled on young Bacchon out of a desire to command and to dominate (ἄρχειν καὶ κρατεῖν, *Amat.* 752f).

<sup>20</sup> 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; *cf. Amat.* 764e). See *Grg.* 493a and *Cra.* 400b-c, both of



souls, embodied as not-quite-men.<sup>21</sup> In this matrix, female masculinity becomes a signifier of virtue, but it also poses the danger of legitimising manly women and so necessitates delimitation of the parameters of virtuous *masculinity* and unvirtuous *manliness*, virtuous *femininity* and unvirtuous *effeminacy*.

Plutarch addresses this destabilisation of gender by locating the site of its conflict in the soul. Doing so preserves the body and its reproductive functions and assigns its expressions to a psychology of gender. McInerney's (2003:339-343) analysis of the *Mulierum virtutes* shows that women's virtue, their *masculinity*, can only be commended when it functions in service of eliminating a threat to social order, thus maintaining and reproducing it. Similarly, Halberstam (1998:20, 27) argues that the fluidity of gender is precisely what allows its reification in a binary system. For Plutarch, then, gender functions within a heterosexual matrix reproduced in *De Iside* which attempts to stabilise the signification of 'masculine' and 'feminine' in relation to 'male' and 'female'. In the cosmic hierarchy, the virtuous woman now comes to occupy a position of privilege in relation to the unvirtuous man — the man who is not *man enough* because he cannot control the feminine part of his soul. Naturally, the virtuous man will always enjoy primacy, but that is not what is really at stake in the *Antony*, one of only two explicitly negative biographies in the *Lives*.

### *Destabilising gender*

Thus we return to the structure of the *Antony* and its relation to *De Iside*. After Fulvia's sudden death (*Ant.* 30.2), the majority of the biography orbits a 'love triangle' that bears striking similarities to *De Iside*. For Brenk (1992:164), Octavia-Antony-Cleopatra corresponds to Nephthys-Osiris-Isis, but Plutarch's silence on Antony's identification as Osiris is significant here. Brenk's meticulous documentation of the allusions in the text make a compelling case for considering Antony an (anti-)Osiris figure of sorts, based on the identification of Osiris with Dionysos (*De Is. et Os.* 356b, 364d-e) and Plutarch's identification of Antony with the latter (*Ant.* 24.3-4). Antony also identified himself with Heracles, a virile hero constituted on the spectrum between masculinity and femininity and actualised by those very contradictions (Loroux 1990:22). The identification with Dionysos creates a similar dichotomy between masculine and feminine, Greek and Oriental,

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which refer to the Orphic doctrine of  $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$   $\sigma\tilde{\eta}\mu\alpha$ , and *Phd.* 70a-72d, which argues that souls are immortal but bodies perishable. Unvirtuous men are reincarnated into the bodies of women or brutes (*Leg.* 944e, *Ti.* 42b-c, 76e, 91a; cf. *De Is. et Os.* 363b).

<sup>21</sup> One barely needs to be reminded of Aristotle's view that 'we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature' (*Gen. an.* 775a15-16).

which risks his identity as male and as Roman citizen (*cf.* Burkert 2011:249-251; Krenkel 2006:465-466). When Plutarch first makes the connection between Antony and Dionysos he emphasises the god's dual nature (*Ant.* 24.3-4):<sup>22</sup>

At any rate, when Antony made his entry into Ephesus, women arrayed like Bacchanals, and men and boys like Satyrs and Pans, led the way before him, and the city was full of ivy and thyrsus-wands and harps and pipes and flutes, the people hailing him as Dionysos Giver of Joy and Beneficent. For he was such, undoubtedly, to some; but to the greater part he was Dionysos Carnivorous and Savage.

The assimilation of Dionysos to Osiris in *De Iside* however denies this duality, laying claim instead to the simplicity of the god (*cf.* *De Is. et Os.* 382c; *De E.* 393bc). This assimilation entails a change of nature (*De Is. et Os.* 362b) quite opposite to Antony's descent into effeminate enslavement; Plutarch connects Osiris-Dionysos in his role as *logos* with virility (τὸ ἀνδρεῖον, *De Is. et Os.* 365f, *cf.* 365b-c) and beneficence (368b). Antony's fall depends on this gendered dichotomy. Likewise, his association with Heracles at first seems to confirm his masculinity (*Ant.* 4.1-2):

He had also a noble dignity of form; and a shapely beard, a broad forehead, and an aquiline nose were thought to show the virile qualities peculiar to the portraits and statues of Heracles. Moreover, there was an ancient tradition that the Antonii were Heracleidae, being descendants of Anton, a son of Heracles. And this tradition Antony thought that he confirmed, both by the shape of his body, as has been said, and by his attire.

As the narrative continues the Heracleian link proves to be prophetic: Antony's attempt to legitimise his children with Cleopatra via his Heracleian lineage is at best mildly successful (37.3), and before the Battle of Actium the Heracleium in Patrae is destroyed by lightning while Antony is staying there, as is the image of Dionysos in the Battle of the Giants at Athens, both bad omens (61.2-3). Finally, we are invited to consider how Omphalé and Cleopatra alike emasculate the hero (*Comp. Demetr. et Ant.* 3.3-4; *cf.* Prop. 3.11.17-20):

Antony ... like Heracles in paintings where Omphalé is seen taking away his club and stripping off his lion's skin, was often disarmed by Cleopatra, subdued by her spells, and persuaded to drop from his hands great undertakings and necessary campaigns.

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<sup>22</sup> Brenk 1992:164 focuses on the positive aspect of Dionysos here, but it is clear that Plutarch intended the rather more negative 'Dionysos Carnivorous and Savage' to stick in the minds of his readers.

The episode with Omphalé also involves a transgressive act of crossdressing, though it's not the only example of Heracles wearing women's clothing (Loraux 1990:34-36; cf. Plut. *Quaest. Gr.* 304c-d), and both the cults of Heracles and Dionysos celebrated festivals during which men dressed in women's clothing (Krenkel 2006:465-466).<sup>23</sup> Antony's masculinity is therefore questioned at the outset through his association with Heracles, his compulsive conjugality confirmed when he projects Heracles' succession onto his own, his submission to female domination solidified in the comparison between Cleopatra and Omphalé. Heracles' connection with 'Oriental' motifs like the lion (Burkert 2011:320) here further serves the purpose of alienating Antony. Presenting his children in Macedonian and Median clothing (*Ant.* 54.5-6) suggests a cumulative descent into effeminate barbarism which recalls Heracles' crossdressing, episodes that further these contradictions between the virile hero and emasculate enslavement to foreign habit.<sup>24</sup>

Brenk notes that 'when one recalls that Plutarch's Osiris is Logos itself, the irony of an assimilation to Dionysus-Osiris becomes more ridiculous' (1992:165). Antony thus cannot be an Osiris-figure since Osiris is perfect (*De Is. et Os.* 373b), and he is not the Dionysos identified with that deity, so who or what is he? To this Plutarch presents another allusive answer: Antony was the *New Dionysos* to Cleopatra's *New Isis* (*Ant.* 60.3). If ancient custom and religion holds some semblance of the truth (*De Is. et Os.* 352e-f, 378a), the epithet 'new' might refer precisely to those whose misinterpretations of the nature of the gods are woefully inaccurate. Plutarch dismisses those who regard Dionysos as the god of wine for their misunderstanding of divinity (*De Is. et Os.* 377b-e, cf. 365a, 360c-d). Likewise, Philo reproaches Caligula for his cruelty and greed, calling him the 'new Dionysos' (*Leg.* 12.88-89), and Athenaeus seems to have connected expressions of νέος Διόνυσος to instances of excessive luxury (148d, 212c-f). Though there is ample evidence for Cleopatra's assimilation to Isis, Plutarch is the only source that attributes to her this specific title, νέα Ἴσις (*Ant.* 54.6; Brenk 1992:162). Cleopatra as the 'new Isis' can also not be assimilated to the wise goddess in *De Iside*, not least because her actions are not in accord with those of Isis (cf. *De Is. et Os.* 361d).

Brenk's suggestion that Antony and Cleopatra represent an anti-Osiris and anti-Isis fails to address a number of further contradictions raised by Plutarch's references to the soul. Beneker suggests framing the progression of Antony's

<sup>23</sup> Krenkel 2006:473-474 points out the connection between feminine clothing, sexual preference and control, and conceptions of masculinity and effeminacy.

<sup>24</sup> Cicero reproaches Antony for assuming the dress of a Gaul instead of that of a Roman (*Phil.* 2.76) as part of his strategy to emasculate his opponent.

*Life* within the constraints of his conjugal status, each period representing the progressive ‘psychological struggle between reason and *erōs* in his soul’ (2012:171-173; *cf.* Duff 1999:75). Such a framework highlights the gendered nature of virtue. Antony’s failure to practice self-control emasculates him and feminises his soul, while Cleopatra is masculinised. Beneker (2012:178n60) differs on the latter point on the basis that Plutarch is not concerned with Cleopatra’s manliness but with Antony’s weakness. On the contrary, there is ample indication that Plutarch considered the two mutually reinforcing.

### *The embodied soul*

Consider now the primary conflict of the *Antony*, occupying roughly two-thirds of the biography, between Octavia, Antony and Cleopatra. Brenk’s suggestion that this ‘love triangle’ is significant (1992:164) remains cogent, but I disagree with his identification of Octavia with Nephthys. It appears that his main justification for this connection is the completion of the love triangle, but Osiris’ legitimate partner is Isis (*De Is. et Os.* 356a, 366c), as Antony’s legitimate partner is Octavia (*Comp. Demetr. et Ant.* 4.1), while Osiris only accidentally sleeps with Nephthys (*De Is. et Os.* 356f, 375b). It seems unlikely that Plutarch would opt to gloss this particular point in view of his regard for the sanctity of marriage. Brenk’s error in this regard is his rigidity when it comes to gender, leading him to seek out two women and a man in *De Iside* that correspond to the trio in the *Antony*. The references to Cleopatra as Isis lends this theory credence but does little to explain the metaphysical structure of the soul suggested in *De Iside*. Each of these three characters can be identified with one of the deities of *De Iside* only if the purpose of such an identification is to provide an allegorical key to the parts of the soul that rule them. If anything, it appears that Plutarch has committed another inversion that seeks to explore the psychic hierarchy and its gendered implications in practical terms.<sup>25</sup>

Since the *Antony* is intended as a negative example, let us start with the principles that contribute to change, Isis and Typhon. Though Osiris is not once named in the *Antony*, Typhon is briefly mentioned near the start of the narrative, notably at Antony’s first foray into Egypt (3.2-4). Antony doesn’t take the role of a Typhonic figure, in fact, he plays the role of mediator between Ptolemy and the citizens of Pelusium, preventing the Egyptian from massacring his own people (3.5-6). Instead, Egypt itself is set up as a site of chaos and its pharaohs appear as agents of destruction. The ‘blasts of Typhon’ (*Ant.* 3.3) is a warning of decay,

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<sup>25</sup> As Duff rightly noted, the *Moralia* are works of moral theory, the *Lives* ‘works in which the theory is examined — and questioned — in practice’ (1999:5).

Egypt signifies his sphere of influence and the resulting events that would lead to Antony's fall.

Consequently, the Egyptian queen appears as a chaotic force in the *Antony*. His passion for Cleopatra is the final evil Antony must face (*Ant.* 25.1) and from which he cannot escape; he was taken captive (28.1).<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, Cleopatra would become 'the woman who had already ruined him and would make his ruin still more complete' (*Ant.* 66.5). Her actions echo Typhon's: she's jealous of Octavia and sees her as a competitor to be conquered (*Ant.* 53.3-5, 57.1), and she deceives Octavian into thinking that she wished to live (83.4-5), as Typhon also tricked Osiris into his coffin (*De Is. et Os.* 356c-d). One might well imagine the following extract as describing Cleopatra (*De Is. et Os.* 361d):

Stories akin to these and to others like them they say are related about Typhon; how that, prompted by jealousy and hostility, he wrought terrible deeds and, by bringing utter confusion upon all things, filled the whole Earth, and the ocean as well, with ills, and later paid the penalty therefor.

Cleopatra is the signifier for destructive appetite which 'destroyed and dissipated whatever good and saving qualities [in Antony] still offered resistance' (*Ant.* 25.1). Her appearance at their first meeting is decadent and seductive and the feast she organises is beyond anything Antony could describe or replicate (26.4-27.1). Her excessive luxury is a recurring theme of the biography, exemplified in their societies of Inimitable Livers (28.2) and Partners in Death (71.3). When he's not with her Antony is able to refrain from such luxuries and live on bare necessities, as he had done before (17.2-3) and will do again during the Parthian campaign (45.5). Antony might have a natural taste for luxury (2.3), but it's Cleopatra who brings out the worst in him.

More compelling still is the reconstruction of Osiris' penis by Isis (358b), suggesting that the virtuous feminine will go to great lengths to preserve the masculine claim to authority of her partner. This Cleopatra does not do. Her position of power almost necessarily emasculates the men around her, so that resisting her, as Octavian does after the defeat at Actium, becomes a mark of strength of character (*Flor.* 2.10; *Prop.* 3.11). The men who serve her are enervated, they're eunuchs (*Ant.* 60.1, *Luc. B. Civ.* 10.133) and perverted men (*turpium morbo virorum*; *Hor. Carm.* 37.5-12). Octavian's decision to declare war on Cleopatra questions Antony's masculinity (Russell 1998:125); he has given his authority to a woman (*Ant.* 60.1) and as a result has less power than the effeminate men and enslaved women who serve her.

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<sup>26</sup> See Pelling 1988:193, who notes the connotations to war and violence the language here evokes.

Cleopatra is ruled by the Typhonic element of her soul, and thus possessed of an emasculate soul in a female body that is assigned a negative ethical value; Cleopatra is not virtuous. Clearly the dominant partner, she's masculinised through a series of domineering acts and the brute fact of her considerable political and military power (Wyke 2002:219,227). Plutarch documents her manliness early on; she adopts the manner of a soldier toward Antony, 'unrestrained and boldly' (*Ant.* 27.2), joins him in his activities, hunting with him, drinking with him, stopping just short of swordplay, though she keeps a watchful eye (*Ant.* 29.1). At Actium she insists on leading her own forces in direct defiance of Antony's orders (57.2-3). Even as early as the campaign in Parthia she had established control over Antony (*Ant.* 37.4). Like Osiris, Typhon loses his manhood (in the battle against Horus, *De Is. et Os.* 373d; cf. Griffiths 1970:33, 506-507), but unlike Osiris, there is nobody to reconstruct it for him. Plutarch suggests that he was infertile from the get-go,<sup>27</sup> not-quite-man, too defective to be *male*. So also Cleopatra plays at being male and fails.

If Cleopatra represents a Typhonic figure, Antony represents Isis. He occupies a contested space between reason and appetite in which his own actions would make a decisive difference. He is dominated by Cleopatra (οὐδὲ αὐτοῦ κρατοίη, 60.1), when he flees Actium he is not only emasculated (66.4), he is defined by the passion in his soul (τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ ἐρῶντος, 66.5) and finally he has no power beyond Egypt (71.1-2), and that by virtue of Cleopatra. Geminius and Canidius tell him that all would be well if he sent Cleopatra away (*Ant.* 59.4, 63.4), implying the necessity of controlling his appetites (and his woman). Spending time with Octavia might have corrected his course were it not for his passion for Cleopatra (36.1, cf. 72.2-3).<sup>28</sup> With her, Antony degenerates into passivity; she feminises him (τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐξέτηξαν καὶ ἀπεθήλυναν, *Ant.* 53.6). Antony has become Isis; the feminine principle rules his soul. Cleopatra's chaotic presence destroys Antony's reason, the masculine rationality of his embodied soul, as Typhon too destroys Osiris' body (*De Is. et Os.* 373a-b).<sup>29</sup> His cowardice at Actium (66.3-5) is the proverbial nail in the coffin.

<sup>27</sup> According to Plutarch, Nephthys was unable to produce children after her marriage to Typhon (*De Is. et Os.* 366c), which initially might suggest that she is the one who cannot reproduce, yet when Osiris sleeps with her she produces a child, suggesting instead that the problem might lie with Typhon. Thus his identification with drought and saline water.

<sup>28</sup> Appian drives this point home by describing the difference in Antony's character after spending a significant amount of time with Octavia: he was like a new man (*B. Civ.* 5.8.76).

<sup>29</sup> Dillon 2002:233 notes that Typhon destroys Osiris' body but not his soul, since the former represents the individual *logoi* derived from God, but the latter is indestructible as the eternal and unchanging *logos* of God.

Cowardly men were considered *androgynous* (Brisson 2002:61) and Plutarch refers to Antony as ‘dragged along’ (*Ant.* 66.4) by Cleopatra, with whom he had become incorporated (*Ant.* 66.4; *cf.* 62.1). The reference here to the soul of the lover and unity in marriage recalls advice from *Conjugalia praecepta*, which suggests that a couple in love form an intimate union in which they share all things in common (142f-143a).<sup>30</sup> Before he dies he declares himself inferior to her (76.3). These final scenes confirm that passion rules in Antony and that he followed it to its direst conclusion.

For Butler (1993:17), the descent into passion and appetite transfigures the soul into the signs of its descent, first woman, then beast. In Antony, the soul has become effeminate, yet embodied still as *male* and is thus assigned a negative ethical value. One might reasonably infer that Antony’s soul would be reincarnated as a woman, Cleopatra’s as a beast (*cf. De Is. et Os.* 380c). It’s this structure that informs Plutarch’s understanding of Antony’s failings, represented as uncontrollable *erōs*, as Beneker (2012:153-194) and Duff (1999:78-80) had shown. In *De Iside* and in the *Antony* this chaotic force is an expression of non-normative gender. Perhaps it is the suggestion of a partnership between Isis and Typhon, passion and appetite,<sup>31</sup> that constitutes the fundamental problem of gender in the *Antony*: a soul that veers away from the path of reason is embodied as an effeminate man or a manly woman, enslaved to its desires. Fulvia, by all accounts quite manly, so much so that Velleius proclaimed that ‘she had nothing of the woman in her except her sex’ (2.2), is diminished in Plutarch’s account of Antony’s life. Domineering women who wish to control men are written into obscurity; Cleopatra is an exception. Her story is so entwined with the fall of the Roman Republic and Octavian’s rise to power that she cannot be erased. There is thus only one resolution for her, to become the archetype of the unvirtuous woman, in whom disfigured gender leads to destruction and ruin.

It follows then that the truly virtuous woman cannot be *masculine* except in the very narrow philosophical sense, since maintaining social order requires that she remain the embodiment of female and femininity long established. Primary among these qualities is the maternal female. The virtuous woman is defined by her devotion to her children and her husband (*De Is. et Os.* 356f, 368e, 357a-c, 372e), thus Octavia cares for all of Antony’s children including those he had with Fulvia and Cleopatra, marrying them into noble families (*Ant.* 54.2, 87.1). She’s obedient even while her husband’s actions are detrimental to her (*Ant.* 53.1-3,

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<sup>30</sup> Of course, this doesn’t negate the advice that the husband ought always to lead.

<sup>31</sup> On the mediating principle’s ability to side with either reason or appetite see also *Pl. Resp.* 440b. In this sense Plutarch makes Isis as the feminine principle the decisive force in the struggle for virtue and vice in the soul.

57.3). In the paradigm of *De Iside* the virtuous woman is elevated to a status almost equal to that of the virtuous man: Isis and Osiris were deified because of their virtue (*De Is. et Os.* 361e, 362e) while Typhon remained a demigod (362e-f). Typhon considered Osiris a threat to his desire for power, as Cleopatra considers Octavia a threat because of her virtue (*Ant.* 53.3; *cf.* 57.1-2).

Octavia as Antony's legitimate partner therefore represents Osiris. She's described in much the same terms as Osiris and Ismenodora, with concepts that denote reason and virtue (νοῦς, 31.2; καλός, 54.2; *cf.* *Amat.* 754d). Likewise, 'in the soul Intelligence (νοῦς) and Reason (λόγος) ... is Osiris' (*De Is. et Os.* 371b). Octavia is ruled by the rational part of her soul, she's *masculine* but not *manly*, and thus her actions are assigned a positive ethical value; she is virtuous. In the absence of Antony's guidance Octavia doesn't seize control but rather defers to the next male authority figure: Octavian.<sup>32</sup> So also Octavia is more beautiful than Cleopatra (*Ant.* 27.2, 31.2, 57.3), because true beauty is not confined to the body but is a matter of the soul (*Amat.* 766a-c; *cf.* *Quaest. Plat.* 1002e, *Pl. Symp.* 221a). True beauty leads the lover to contemplation of things divine, while beautiful things — beautiful *bodies* — are images that distract the lover from noble pursuits.

Beneker (2012:185) argues that in the struggle for Antony's soul Cleopatra as foreign wife represents passion and Octavia as Roman wife represents reason. He also rightly notes the similarities between Octavia and Ismenodora, in particular in the terminology used (2012:186). But Cleopatra isn't the representative of passion so much as the chaotic force that draws Antony's soul away from reason. Antony himself is the passionate lover, the passive male to Cleopatra's active female. Octavia fills the vacuum where Antony ought to have been. Here is the example of a woman with a 'masculine' mind, embodied still as a wife and a mother. Nothing about her threatens the established social order, in fact, she confirms its validity. Octavia is only an Osiris insofar as her soul is governed by reason. As a woman submission and reproduction remains her *raison d'être*, and Plutarch is not about to throw that out of the window.

### *Equal, but sometimes superior*

Plutarch has, not surprisingly, elicited wildly differing evaluations of his views on women. It's undeniable that he had great respect for (some) women and considered them capable of virtue (Nikolaïdis 1997) and yet at times viewed them with contempt (Walcot 1999). Scholars have continually returned to the conclusion that

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<sup>32</sup> Octavia's deferral to Octavian in the absence of Antony's leadership is fundamental to her characterisation (*Ant.* 53.1), and her loyalty is a central aspect of the final chapter (87).



Plutarch considered women ‘equal, but inferior’.<sup>33</sup> As ridiculous as that statement appears to the contemporary feminist, it would no doubt have made sense to Plutarch, who might see in it similarities to Plato’s statement that ‘many women ... are better than many men in many things’ (*Resp.* 455d). In his metaphysical schema virtuous men and women, having *almost*-equal souls, work together to uphold the established social order. This is best done through the constraints of conjugality. In this framework he creates space for the *masculine* woman to surpass the *effeminate* man, who in turn supersedes the *manly* woman, all of whom are subject to the *masculine* man. In doing so, he assigns an ethical value to normative and non-normative expressions of gender.

*De Iside* and the *Antony* frame the hierarchy of domination as a distinction not just between sexed bodies but also between engendered souls. Plutarch refines in theory and in practice the relation of the body to the soul and its gendered expressions, transferring the signs of biological sex to the soul. If male and female are the bodily signs of the condition of the soul at the moment of its most recent incarnation, *masculinity* becomes an expression of virtue in the embodied soul, *manliness* and *effeminacy* the embodied signs of its decay. The virtuous soul aspires to masculinity only in ways that don’t threaten social order or contradict the necessary fact of the body. In this binary, virtue isn’t assigned on the basis of sex but on the relation of sex to gender at the nexus of domination and submission, all of which must be controlled and regulated through the practice of philosophy.

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<sup>33</sup> Blomqvist 1997:89, Stadter 1999:180-182, McInerney 2003:341-343.

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