

Plutarch and his Intellectual World

Essays on Plutarch

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FROM OLYMPIAS TO ARETAPHILA

Women in Politics in Plutarch

Karin Blomqvist

This study aims to establish the attitude, or attitudes, towards women that Plutarch reveals, in his general observations with regard to the female sex and in his descriptions of its individual members. What does he say, explicitly as well as implicitly, about women in general and in particular their moral and intellectual capacity to lead active lives?¹ Is there complete harmony between Plutarch's explicit declarations and the implicit message as it appears in his stories and descriptions of women, or do we find any inconsistencies? As I shall try to prove, the implicit message as it appears in Plutarch's descriptions of active women is not without corroboration in his explicit precepts in the *Moralia*.

Let us first briefly recapitulate how Plutarch's attitudes towards women have been received among scholars. R. Flacelière, the French translator and commentator of Plutarch, underlines the philosopher's appreciative attitude towards marital love,² an attitude which vividly contrasts with the traditional partiality to pederasty of most earlier Greek philosophers. It is an incontestable observation. However, one may be more hesitant to agree when he also ascribes 'feminism' to Plutarch.³ Flacelière suggests that it was under Roman influence that Plutarch gave vent to his ideas. He underlines the philosopher's profound knowledge of Roman language and culture and even goes as far as drawing parallels between Plutarch and the Roman Stoic Musonius Rufus, who, according to Flacelière, was a veritable theoretician of feminism in antiquity.⁴

The image of Plutarch as the advocate of women has been modified and called in question in more recent studies by P. Schmitt Pantel and G. Sissa,⁵ who have commented upon certain quotations of Plutarch which throw into sharp relief his notions of female inferiority, which he obviously regarded as a veritable axiom. One of the examples quoted by G. Sissa is the parallel which Plutarch draws between marriage and the mixture of wine and water. This is a Stoic image,

originating from Antipater of Tarsus, according to whom marriage should be a complete union, like that of wine and water.⁶ Quoting the metaphor, Plutarch employs it in order to show that the husband is always superior to his wife. Husband and wife should bring their property together, and just as the mixture of wine and water is always called 'wine' (οἶνος), even if it contains more water than wine, the property should be said to belong to the husband, even when his wife contributes the larger part of it.⁷

So far, F. Le Corsu is the scholar who has studied Plutarch's descriptions of women most thoroughly.⁸ As the title of her work indicates, she concentrates upon the women described in the *Vitae*. Le Corsu divides these women in different categories: geographical (Spartan women, Athenian women) and sociological (wives, *hetairai*, slaves). Stressing Plutarch's contemptuous attitude towards women, she concludes: 'Pour notre moraliste, la femme idéale est l'épouse soumise, menant une vie discrète et digne, toute de dévouement à son mari, sans tapage et sans luxe.'⁹ This conclusion could well be modified and supplemented, it seems to me. The purpose of the present study is to continue where Le Corsu finishes, as I intend to focus my interest upon which images and types of women are presented by Plutarch as compared to his explicit statements regarding women's capacities in general.

The texts to choose, and how to read them

First, a few words on the method employed in this study. It is not possible to arrive at a reliable conclusion if we restrict ourselves to discussing merely Plutarch's explicit statements regarding women. It is necessary also to study the implicit message as it appears in his descriptions of women appearing in the narrative portions of his work. It is of no consequence whether the women in question are mythical or historical. Plutarch was, among other things, an independent artist, intent on composing a literary work. From the very beginning of his writing a story, fictitious or real, the persons in it must be regarded as creations of the author's mind, their acts and characters being subordinated to the literary or moralistic purpose of the story.

Historical reality, of course, could not always be transformed to serve that purpose, but Plutarch was free to treat the historical persons in a manner compatible with his own purpose. Thus, we are interested in the reality of his thought, which is not necessarily equivalent to reality itself. It goes without saying that it would have been interesting to establish the relations between the historical persons and those created

by Plutarch, but this does not belong to this study. What interests us is the Aspasia of Plutarch's *Pericles*, not the Aspasia of fifth century Athens.

However, the vast corpus of Plutarch's essays and biographies could not as easily be studied in detail as, for instance, the corpus of Dio Chrysostom.¹⁰ Reading Plutarch, especially if one takes the *Moralia* as well as the *Vitae* into consideration, one runs the risk of not seeing the forest for the trees. Consequently, we are forced to concentrate upon some women appearing in the *Vitae* and, in one case, in the *Moralia*, who are described with eloquence and in detail, and who are of interest to us since they represent an idea which goes beyond the role that they are playing in their context. Limiting the material somewhat further, I have also chosen a certain type of active women who have apparently been of great interest to Plutarch, viz. women busying themselves with politics, either by supporting men or by manipulating them.

Active women, passive women

At first, the women described do not seem to correspond well with our philosopher's dicta, nor is it easy to reconcile the widely differing statements appearing in his texts. How are we to understand the intention of the *Mulierum virtutes*, which is explicitly said to be to prove by way of historical exposés, that women's virtue in no way differs from that of men,¹¹ if we consider the declarations asserting women's inferiority frequently appearing in other contexts?¹² These latter declarations are so famous that it is hardly necessary to repeat them in detail; women are always presented as passive, receptive and cold, whereas men are active, creative and warm; the sun is masculine, while the earth and the moon are female;¹³ even numbers are female, whereas odd numbers – thought to be dynamic and powerful – are masculine.¹⁴ Women are cold and passive; they can tend and nourish but are unable to create.¹⁵ These affirmations of Plutarch are without any doubt sincere expressions of his own thought; for him, this is the order of nature.¹⁶

In short, women should be inactive and subordinate at all times, and all female beings (women or goddesses) are inferior to all male beings. Without any doubt, this is an essential theme for our philosopher. He constantly rejects any possibility that a woman, or even a goddess, could be superior to a man. For example, in his comments on Numa and Egeria, the fable according to which the king had a relationship with the nymph is hardly probable, he says, for according to the Egyptians, it is impossible for a mortal man to have a relation with a female divinity, even though the opposite is possible, i.e. that a male

god has a liaison with a human woman.¹⁷ As regards the traitress Tarpeia, Plutarch declares that she was not a commanding officer, as some people will have it (thus indicating that Romulus was a fool), but that she was the *daughter* of the commanding officer.¹⁸ In *Amatorius*, Eros represents love and Aphrodite sexuality. The notion that Aphrodite would have been older than Eros, or superior to him in rank and dignity, is absurd: Eros came first, and it is Aphrodite who is subordinated to him.¹⁹

Consequently, whenever a woman appears who is particularly estimated or honoured, this phenomenon is immediately given a reassuring explanation by Plutarch. Roman women's habit of kissing the men of their families is explained by the anecdote about the Trojan women. Tired of the long voyage after the flight from Troy and wishing to find a permanent dwelling-place, they burnt their ships on the coast of Italy in the absence of their husbands, led by a woman called Rome. Thus, it was actually their bold and determined action that led to the Trojans' colonization of Italy. But as soon as their husbands returned to the camp, their wives, in fear of their boldness, tried to placate them with kisses. Hence the habit of Roman women of kissing the men of their family.²⁰ The insistence in *Quaestiones Romanae* on using the abduction of the Sabine women – and their ready acceptance of their new situation – in order to explain different Roman customs and even the honoured position of the *matronae*, points in the same direction.²¹ The most striking example, however, is provided by the description of Isis. In his allegorical interpretations of her aretalogies in *De Iside et Osiride*, Plutarch presents the goddess as a passive and receptive woman: Isis, the feminine nature, constitutes matter, which receives the seed of the Good.²²

This could well lead to the obvious conclusion that, if we find in the Plutarchean corpus an active and independent woman, she is depicted as a freak, a bad example to avoid. This is true, but only up to a point, since in his texts we also find a surprisingly high number of active and independent women who are praised and honoured. What is the difference between Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, and Aretaphila, queen of Cyrene, and where lies the difference between Cleopatra and Octavia, two important women in Antony's life? Although they all have the trait in common that they acted in politics, to Plutarch they represent entirely opposite conceptions.

As I have said, the focus of this study lies on the women who act in politics. Although it thus concerns women who meddle in men's affairs, the way in which they are described is not the same. Principally,

the reader discerns two different types of women belonging to this category: in the one, we meet with those who act for purely selfish reasons, and in the other, those who are driven by nobler motives. Thus, one may distinguish 'dominant women' from 'supportive women'.

Dominant women

Let us begin with the dominant women, who by plotting and scheming control (or try to control) the men in their lives. Since they exercise their influence on men with political power, these women belong themselves to the higher social classes.²³ They use several methods to attain their goals: an exceptional charm, a troublesome character, or even, in certain cases, drugs and poisons.

I intend to concentrate on three women in particular, Aspasia, Cleopatra and Olympias. All three of them were, according to Plutarch, dangerous or even disastrous, since they manipulated men in prominent positions in society; Pericles in the case of Aspasia, Caesar and in particular Antony in the case of Cleopatra, and Alexander in the case of Olympias.

Aspasia

Aspasia²⁴ is introduced in *Pericles* in a diabolically clever manner: 'Since it seems that it was in order to do Aspasia a favour that he (sc. Pericles) undertook this Samian expedition, this is perhaps the best occasion to put the question, etc...' In this manner, without any other witnesses or proof than *δοκεῖ*, 'it seems',²⁵ Plutarch immediately creates a picture of a plotting, vile, and mean woman. He succeeds by reporting the rumours spread about her, by referring to her as *ἡ ἄνθρωπος*, simply – 'the woman',²⁶ and with the pejorative diminutive *τὸ γύναιον*, 'the female' (24. 7), as well as by qualifying her methods in terms of *τέχνη ἢ δύναμις*, which, in this context, is likely to imply nothing less than 'cunning devices' (24. 2).

The word *γύναιον* is particularly enlightening. With the very few exceptions where it neither bears a negative nor a positive meaning,²⁷ or where it stands for 'the poor woman',²⁸ this diminutive is solely employed in a clearly pejorative sense: (i) *γύναιον* denotes a 'female' in general²⁹ and, in particular a woman of the lower social classes³⁰ or even a slave or a captive;³¹ (ii) most often, however, the word is used to indicate a woman of dubious character – here, we find seduced women³² or, above all, concubines, *hetairai* and prostitutes.³³ Normally, the *γύναια* belong to both categories, i.e. they are at the same time

lower-class and not respectable. Plutarch never employs the diminutive when describing honourable *matronae*. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that these women do not appear in elevated contexts; they belong to stories or dialogues.

In fact, all that Aspasia accomplished which did not coincide with the behaviour thought normal for an Athenian housewife is suspicious and almost criminal in itself. According to Socrates, she was famous for her skill in rhetoric.³⁴ Plutarch refuses to believe this, however; instead, he creates his own version of the story and supposes that Aspasia kept a school for *hetairai* (24. 5) – in Pericles' home! Our philosopher carefully avoids explaining how the great statesman Pericles, who was so concerned for his own reputation that he did not even attend parties (7. 5–6), would ever have allowed such a scandalous activity in his own home. In this manner, as well as by asking initially how the woman could have exercised such influence (24. 3), Plutarch is careful to suppress in his reader the idea that she could ever have had anything to say worth listening to – as he concludes explicitly (24. 5–7): 'As for Aspasia, they say that she was appreciated by Pericles for her intelligence and political skill (ὡς σοφὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν)... But it seems that his attachment was caused rather by erotic passion.'³⁵ Thus, her reputation for intelligence and good sense is repudiated as something inconceivable.

Aspasia's Ionian background makes her even more questionable (24. 3–4); Plutarch states that it is incontestable that she was from Miletus. This fact is obviously suspicious in itself,³⁶ but from there he proceeds by comparing her to another Ionian woman, the *hetaira* Thargelia, and maliciously implies that Aspasia had the ambition to compete with this far-from-respectable woman.³⁷ Since Thargelia is also accused of having spread sympathy for the Persians among Greeks in Asia Minor in the beginning of the fifth century, Plutarch manages to present Aspasia, as well, as both politically and morally depraved. She is declared guilty by association, and thus, in a few words, Plutarch creates effectively the picture of a lascivious, dominating and scheming person, and politically dangerous at that, not only for the man in her life (the Samian expedition) but for the Athenian state itself (the association with the alleged pro-Persian Thargelia).

Cleopatra

We turn from Athens to Alexandria, and from Classical times to the late Hellenistic epoch. Cleopatra,³⁸ the last queen of the Ptolemies, is for Plutarch the worst example of all the wicked women who ever

meddled in politics. Apparently, she was even worse than Aspasia, for after all, Aspasia could not hinder Pericles from succeeding in his projects, whereas Cleopatra proved to be disastrous to Antony from the very start until the catastrophic finale at Actium. We are explicitly told that Cleopatra destroyed all the good qualities that Antony ever had.³⁹ According to Plutarch, Cleopatra managed to make Antony her captive by pretending to love him. She is even accused of having used drugs; this accusation, however, is put forth implicitly, since it is attributed to Octavian.⁴⁰ It is significant that Cleopatra is described like a barbarian, with the manners of an Oriental despot, although she is actually of Greek descent.⁴¹

Cleopatra's vices are exploited in order to accentuate Antony's bad character (whereas in the case of Olympias and Alexander, the mother's vices are rather used to enhance the king's virtue and self-control). The simple fact that Antony permits women to dominate him is a sufficient reproach in itself (10. 6). He is presented as Heracles at Omphale's court (90. 4–5). Apparently, this bad habit of his went back to his parents' way of life, since his mother, Julia, was a severe woman who dominated her husband Antonius entirely, while his father was insignificant, though kind (1. 1–3). In addition, Julia was superior in birth to her husband (2. 1).⁴² This pattern followed Antony all his life. Both Fulvia, his first wife, and Cleopatra used his weakness; they are sharply contrasted with Antony's second wife, Octavia, whom we shall consider below.

Thus, Cleopatra pretended to love Antony in order to subdue him; she corrupted him with Oriental habits and a life of depraved luxury (in opposition to Demetrius, 90. 2–5), she drove him into a disastrous war, and finally she deserted him at the battle of Actium (76. 3). She was both dominating and sly, debauched and hypocritical. Nevertheless, the black picture of her is not entirely without nuances. Her behaviour in the moment of defeat was composed and dignified, and when by her suicide she deprived Octavian of the triumph of bringing her to Rome as his slave, she proved to be the true offspring of an incontestably royal family (85. 4–8).⁴³

Olympias

Olympias,⁴⁴ wife of Philip II and mother of Alexander, showed her ambitions from the very beginning. She was irascible and domineering, and the allegations that she was addicted to ecstatic bacchanals (ζηλώσασα τὰς κατοχὰς καὶ τοὺς ἐνθουσιασμούς, 2. 9) and that she did this in an all too barbaric way (βαρβαρικώτερον, *ibid.*), imply her

violent temper and almost non-Greek background.

Although Olympias is as good a representative of the same type of women as the above-mentioned Aspasia and Cleopatra, she differs from them in certain aspects. First, in opposition to the other two, who mainly relied upon their personal charm in order to retain their influence, Olympias is instead characterised by her difficult character, her harshness (*χαλεπότης*, 9. 5) and her being jealous and irascible (*δύσζηλος καὶ βαρύθυμος*, *ibid.*). The different marriages of her husband⁴⁵ caused problems in the women's quarters which had consequences for the whole Macedonian kingdom, since Olympias in her extreme jealousy set Alexander against his father. From the manner in which Plutarch describes the situation, it is apparent that even though it was Philip who provoked the tensions by marrying a second wife, Cleopatra, and by letting her uncle insult Alexander (9. 7–10), it was still Olympias' fault that the domestic turbulence infected political life.

The queen's cruel and ferocious character is particularly underlined. Even Philip, her own husband, was frightened of her (2. 6). It is implied that he had good reason to be so, since Plutarch retells the rumours spread after Philip's death accusing her of having instigated his murder by inciting Alexander against his father (10. 6). By reporting these rumours without further comment, Plutarch actually depicts her as having been capable of the atrocious deed. It is true that at the same time he relates another rumour, according to which it was Alexander himself who of his own accord inspired Pausanias to murder Philip. However, the two versions are not ascribed the same credibility, for Plutarch hastens to comment on the latter version by affirming that Alexander in fact severely punished Pausanias for murdering the king. This should be interpreted as an implicit refutation of the accusations against Alexander. At the same time, by *not* refuting the allegations against Olympias, Plutarch actually leaves her under suspicion of murder through a third party, a plotting woman who does not act openly but conspires and uses men as her instruments.

Furthermore, the queen is said (10. 8) to have 'cruelly treated' Cleopatra, Philip's younger wife (a good euphemism for the murder of the woman, a deed that Alexander strongly rebuked, by the way), and of having assassinated several people upon the accusation that they had killed Alexander with poison five years earlier (77. 2). Finally, she is accused of having administered drugs to Alexander's half-brother Philip Arrhidaeus, thus rendering him imbecile (77. 7–8).

The second feature distinguishing Olympias from the other two women, however, is the fact that she did not succeed entirely in

managing Alexander into acting on her will as Antony had acted upon Cleopatra's will and Pericles upon Aspasia's. This is by no means due to any lack of ambition on Olympias' part, but rather caused by her son's good judgement and determination. It is true that his affection towards his mother was deep and sincere,⁴⁶ but his filial devotion was free from exaggeration. It is explicitly said that Alexander did not permit his mother to interfere with political matters (39. 12), although he affirmed that 'one single tear from a mother wipes out [the writing of] ten thousand letters' (39. 13). While honouring Olympias as his mother, he refused her all influence outside the women's sphere. Due to a sound and hardening Spartan upbringing (his principal paedagogue, Leonidas, was a Spartan, 5. 7), Alexander managed to avoid the fate of being spoilt by Olympias' excessive attentions (22. 10). This means that he was capable of resisting the damaging influence of other women as well.⁴⁷ One episode in particular (68. 4-5) illustrates both the intentions of the mother and the attitude of her son. In Alexander's absence, Olympias and Alexander's sister Cleopatra plotted against Antipater and managed to seize power. They divided it among them so that Olympias took hold of Epirus and Cleopatra of Macedonia. Alexander dryly commented that it was Olympias who had taken the wiser decision, since the Macedonians would never tolerate being governed by a woman.

True or false, all these accusations contribute to describing Olympias as a woman of extreme viciousness and ambition, but they also enhance the impression that her son was gifted with exceptional composure and good sense.⁴⁸

To conclude, the three women described above represent the considerable number of dominant women appearing in Plutarch.⁴⁹ Besides the resemblances already pointed out, all three of them, but Olympias and Cleopatra in particular, have some traits in common which deserve to be mentioned.

(i) They correspond with a type of men frequently described – and denounced – by Plutarch, i.e. the tyrants,⁵⁰ since they reveal the same unpredictable and cruel behaviour. By misusing their power and influence, they are transformed into monsters. However, there is an important difference between the two groups: the man who turns into a tyrant could well have been a legal king at first; what was wrong was that he exercised absolute power in a fashion contrary to the common good. The women in question, on the contrary, never had this right to power at all, nor even to busy themselves with politics if it was to

promote their own interest.

(ii) The second trait that these women have in common is that all three of them are described as barbarians or at least semi-barbarians. By underlining their almost oriental characters, our philosopher manages to put their Greekness in question. Aspasia's origin, Olympias' ferocious character and cruelty, and Cleopatra's hypocritical manners, flattery⁵¹ and Oriental pomp and circumstance, all point in the same direction: these women are characterized as the very opposite of Greek and Roman women, and thus, they become 'the other'.

It is true, that among the self-willed and manipulating women described in Plutarch, we do meet with purely Greek and Roman specimens as well.⁵² But these women are not assigned the same characteristics as our three prototypes; difficult and ferocious, they work by way of the obstinate determination of a Roman matron rather than by illicit and sophisticated methods such as seduction or drugs; nor are barbaric features attributed to them.

This tendency to depict persons of a certain character as barbaric is in line with Plutarch's attitudes in ethnic matters, as we can discern them. In his texts, it is frequently pointed out that persons of non-Greek or non-Roman origin are inferior to Greeks and Romans. This attitude is apparent in explicit statements as well as implicitly in the descriptions of barbarians (especially Orientals), even those of royal family, who are frequently depicted as uncivilized in every way, ferocious, cruel and cowardly.⁵³ In short, Aspasia, Cleopatra, and Olympias have more features in common with the Persian queen Parysatis⁵⁴ than with honourable Greek and Roman housewives.

Supportive women

Is it at all possible to find, in Plutarch, women who are described as good examples although they act independently? The answer is affirmative; there is a considerable number of women who act in politics, rendering support to the men of their families or to their peoples. Some of these women assisted the men in their glorious enterprises, others succeeded in preventing men from dishonouring themselves or their state.

Let us consider the most typical example of this category, Octavia, sister of Octavian, second wife of Antony, and Cleopatra's main rival, who is described in detail as a favourable contrast to the mean and vicious women.

Octavia

Octavia⁵⁵ appears in *Publicola*, *Cicero*, and *Marcellus*, but it is in *Antonius* that she is described as the very opposite of Cleopatra and, to a certain extent, of Fulvia and Julia. Plutarch describes Antony as a mere military man, efficient as such but cruel and violent – and too weak to resist the influence of women. Both the ambitious and ferocious Fulvia and the equally ambitious and seductive Cleopatra strove to attain political power and used Antony as their instrument. In contrast to the others, Octavia kept herself outside the political sphere; in fact, the only time she engaged herself in these matters was when she tried to reconcile Octavian and Antony. She remained a loyal wife, even when her husband's adultery with Cleopatra had become public, and she did not leave his house or renounce the marriage until she was forced to do so by his divorcing her. As a good mother, she raised her own children as well as Antony's (with the exception of his eldest son, who stayed with his father), and she saw to it that they were married off well (87. 1–6).⁵⁶ In short, she appealed to Antony's reason (31. 4), whereas Cleopatra took advantage of his intemperate desires, and she personified a commendable female modesty in opposition to the other women's high ambitions. In addition, she was very popular among the Athenians, something which roused Cleopatra's jealousy (57. 2). Thus, Octavia combined the virtues of a true aristocrat with the modesty of an ideal house-wife, while Cleopatra's behaviour only revealed her semi-barbaric ferocity and intemperance.

Besides these implicit contrasts, Plutarch also explicitly compares Octavia to Cleopatra, to the detriment of the latter. In 53. 5 and 56. 4, we are told that Cleopatra feared her rival's good qualities and that she therefore did all that she could to prevent Antony from seeing Octavia. After the divorce between Antony and Octavia, which the latter sincerely deplored, the Romans 'felt less sorry for Octavia than for Antony, in particular those who had seen Cleopatra and knew that she in no way was superior to Octavia, either in beauty or in youth' (57. 5). Le Corsu remarks in her book that in the *Vitae*, women are described as 'beautiful' at most, without any detailed information about their physiognomy, and that neither Aspasia nor Cleopatra receive even this vague epithet.⁵⁷ I suggest the following explanation: the 'wicked' women are not allowed any real beauty, but rather possess allure and erotic appeal which they utilize in an inappropriate manner. On the other hand, it seems almost obligatory that the 'good' women are gifted with true beauty, which confirms their moral superiority. 'Beauty comes from within', as the saying goes,⁵⁸ and above all it is the

product of noble birth and character.

Thus, Octavia remains the ideal matron *par excellence*, but she is in no way unique. Throughout Plutarch's corpus, we are presented with honourable wives, mothers and grandmothers endowed with virtue and good sense, who bring up their children and manage the household. It is hardly surprising that the majority of them are Roman matrons or spirited Spartan ladies. If they ever enter into politics, it is principally in order to promote concord and harmony.⁵⁹

Aretaphila

Let us now discuss a woman who turns out to be more problematic than Octavia. Although definitely a supportive woman, she engaged herself very actively in politics – and by employing dubious methods at that. Aretaphila, queen of Cyrene,⁶⁰ is vividly described as a veritable heroine, who spared neither her own security nor that of her daughter, provided she could liberate Cyrene from its tyrants. Although beautiful to look at,⁶¹ Aretaphila gained her reputation because 'she possessed exceedingly good sense and was gifted with skill in political matters'.⁶² Cyrene suffered under the tyrant Nicocrates, who incessantly violated both human rights and divine laws. Among all the atrocities that he committed, let it suffice to mention that he assassinated the priest of Apollo, Melanippus, in order to seize his sacerdotal function himself, and that he murdered Aretaphila's husband Phaedimus, whereupon she was forced to become his own, unwilling, wife. Since the tyrant was in love with her, Aretaphila could well have led a comfortable, although unhappy, life, but instead, she undertook the dangerous task of killing him. First, she tried poison, but was betrayed and was subjected to a terrible torture by the tyrant and his mother, the cruel Calbia. Aretaphila did not give in to the torture, however; far from confessing anything, she courageously claimed that all she had done was to prepare love-potions in order to retain her husband's passion for her. Eventually, Nicocrates accepted her explanation and reinstated her as his queen. Thus, Aretaphila's life was saved, but her project had failed and she had to start all over again. This time, she chose another *modus operandi*: she virtually sacrificed her own daughter, a good-looking girl. By means of certain drugs, she rendered her irresistible to the tyrant's brother, Leander, whereupon the girl incited him to kill his brother and seize the power himself. However, this effort to free Cyrene failed, too, for once the deed was accomplished, it became clear that, although Leander had killed his brother, he had not removed the tyranny, but proved to be even worse than his

predecessor. So Aretaphila had to take up her mission once again. This time, she acted both within and without the town's gates. First, she induced the Libyans⁶³ to start a war against Leander, then she deprived Leander of his friends and generals by falsely accusing them of treason, and finally, she betrayed him by leading him to the enemy under false pretences, whereupon he was immediately taken prisoner.

When Aretaphila's citizens had received the good news, they all greeted her like a goddess, and, which is perhaps even more remarkable, they asked her to take an active part in the government of the town. The queen, however, refused; her task completed, she withdrew from public life to the women's quarters and spent the rest of her life with her friends and her family.

All this adds up to a portrait of a persistent and courageous woman, who performed the extraordinary act of liberating her people, not from one but from two tyrants, while managing to keep her female modesty. Thus, she represents the numerous heroines who fought tyrants or external enemies.

One of the most typical examples of these heroines is Thebe, who killed her own husband, Alexander, the tyrant of Pherae.⁶⁴ There are also Volumnia and Vergilia, Coriolanus' mother and wife respectively, who saved Rome from a disastrous war, although they achieved their aim by way of persuasion rather than violence.⁶⁵ In the *Vitae*, the women belonging to this category are for the most part Spartan or Roman, whereas in the *Moralia*, we also meet with women of this kind from several different Greek states, and even a few barbarians. However, no matter what their origin, they are endowed with 'Roman' qualities, since the virtues supposed to be the prerogatives of Roman matrons form the ideal for all women for Plutarch.⁶⁶

However, what strikes us when reading the praise of Aretaphila is the fact that, neither in character nor in methods, does she differ very much from the despicable women mentioned above. Her character is presented as stern and rigid and her methods are ruthless, to say the least. Not only did she exploit her charm and the passion that her husband felt for her, but she also administered drugs and poison, and she did not shrink from betraying the (Greek) despot to the (barbarian) enemy. Contrary to what Plutarch normally preaches, she definitely meddled with men's business, and in a persistent and unrelenting manner at that. Consequently, it is perhaps not out of the way to ask oneself what difference there is, after all, between this heroine and the vile queen of Egypt.

I suggest that the difference be defined in the following manner. As

we have observed, it is not always prohibited for women to undertake political projects; strong and active women actually do exist as good examples in Plutarch's universe, provided that they defend themselves, their clans or their states – or that they take revenge when offended. These women must be called 'active', and there is no doubt that Plutarch admires their virtue and moral status, but they can only be approved as honourable and virtuous if they keep within the strict and narrow limits imposed upon all women. All our heroines are content with acting in a glorious manner; they do not make any claims upon the rewards offered to glorious men.⁶⁷ The dominant women, on the other hand, who influence, or at least try to influence the men in their lives, refuse to obey the laws imposed upon their sex which are so important to Plutarch.

However, this constant returning by Plutarch to the theme of the dominant women, and the ferocity with which he expresses his views on the matter, leads one to ask why this particular subject causes such reactions from our philosopher, whereas he is less coherent in other matters. Why this animosity as regards women acting in politics and not, for instance, adulteresses? It is true that the former threatened the family structure and the authority of the *pater familias*, but so did the latter. Occasionally, Plutarch even regards women of irregular behaviour with astonishing indulgence. Take the case of Chilonis, a Spartan woman. Although she was deceiving her husband Cleonymos with the younger Acrotatos, Plutarch next to applauds her conduct, since in his eyes, she belonged to the right side while her husband did not.⁶⁸ It is relevant to observe, here, that none of the wicked, manipulating women mentioned above is accused of adultery; their crimes occur in another area, and their ambitions touch a more sensitive spot than their sexuality does.

That women of unconventional behaviour may well not only receive pardon, but also appreciation, is well illustrated in the case of Ismenodora, the obstinate heroine of the *Amatorius*. Since she provided herself with the husband she wanted simply by abducting him in public, her behaviour must definitely be regarded as quite unladylike and contrary to the passivity and submissiveness that Plutarch preaches for women. Nevertheless, he treats the lady with surprising indulgence. The story even ends in her favour, for she wins the fight with the pederasts who wanted to prevent the marriage between her and the young man of her fancy. There are mainly two reasons why the story ends in this manner. First, under its superficial facetiousness, the whole essay is a sincere apology for the traditional gods in general

and Eros in particular. Ismenodora acted under the influence of the mighty Eros, and no man or woman should fight the impulses sent by the gods. When human and divine laws are opposed, one has the right – or rather the duty – to obey divine commandments at the cost of human rules. Secondly, in this essay, it is a question of a veritable combat between homosexual and heterosexual love, and there is no doubt where Plutarch's sympathy lies. Plutarch was a sincere apologist of marriage, which he regarded as a sacred institution.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it is evident that according to our philosopher, this institution should be based upon mutual affection and respect; although the wife was always inferior to her husband, she deserved his respect nonetheless.⁷⁰ In this context, it is perhaps not irrelevant to add that the importance of taking good care of one's children is repeatedly stressed in his work. This notion, which appears both by way of explicit precepts and in frequent allusions to children and their nurses, reveals Plutarch's sympathy for and interest in children and their maturation.⁷¹ Thus, even if it is remarkable that it is a woman who is allowed to represent the defence of marriage, her behaviour only confirms the strict dogmas regarding the importance of this institution – and of religion. Let us not forget that the climax of the *Amatorius* consists of a fervent apology for Eros.

Thus, it is apparent that what causes Plutarch's violent reactions is not the fact that a woman acts, or even that she employs coarse methods, but that she acts in order to promote her own interests, and that her activities concern politics and politics alone. In short, there is a clear antithesis between women who accept that their position is subordinate and those who do not.

Once this is established, it still remains to ask why this particular type of dominant women posed such a threat. It is true, admittedly, that the Roman matrons of this epoch could well have been regarded as dangerously elevated by Plutarch and that they are likely to have troubled him,⁷² and it is equally true that we find women who are just as dangerous in Roman literature as in the Plutarchean world. His remarks on wicked women could well have been uttered in the lively debate going on in Rome on women's position, as attested by, e.g. Tacitus, Juvenal, and Suetonius.⁷³ However, merely pointing at Tacitus and the other Roman authors as models followed by Plutarch is not sufficient as an explanation. In fact, Plutarch shows himself appreciative of, or at least not negative towards, *matronae*, and, when they behave according to his standards, they can even represent an

ideal. Besides, if all he ever did was to copy the Roman authors, we must ask ourselves why he was so particularly keen on describing women of the Livia-type, while neglecting, for example, adulteresses such as Messalina.

Consequently, I propose that Plutarch's attitudes in the matter could well have been occasioned by his encountering a real example of these influential and independent women. There lived, in his times, one *matrona* in particular, who on several crucial points answered to the descriptions of the dominant and demanding women appearing in his corpus. Even if he never mentions her explicitly, her activities certainly had an impact on his opportunities to promote himself in the inner circle near the imperial throne. The woman in question is Pompeia Plotina, the wife of Trajan and the adoptive mother of his successor, Hadrian.⁷⁴

Let us recapitulate the principal facts of her career. She was already married to Trajan when he became emperor in 98;⁷⁵ she refused the title *Augusta* in 100⁷⁶ but finally accepted it in 105.⁷⁷ She is honoured on coins where her portrait appears in 112; in particular, she is presented as Vesta. When Trajan died, her influence became even greater. She was with him at his death-bed in 117, and it was said that she had 'facilitated' Hadrian's adoption, the authenticity of which was questioned at the time.⁷⁸ Hadrian, who was clearly her favourite,⁷⁹ honoured her on coins in 117-118 and proclaimed her *diva* after her decease in 121. At least two temples were erected in her honour.

Plotina was invariably admired for her modesty, her dignity, her lack of coquetry, etc.⁸⁰ She was praised for her good manners, her chastity, her sound judgement and her role as the emperor's advisor and helper.⁸¹ Thus, she seems like an ideal *matrona*, almost too good to be true. However, she was also an adherent of the Epicurean school, and thus by definition one of those 'all too learned women' whom Plutarch criticises,⁸² and this particular school was one which he violently opposed. Furthermore – and this is of no small importance – it is obvious from the epigraphic material that Plotina influenced Hadrian in appointing the head of the Garden in Athens.⁸³ Plotina had the emperor's ear and intervened actively in his life. Plutarch must have felt her influence already under Trajan⁸⁴ and not less under Hadrian. Already in the first year of Hadrian's reign, four *consulares*, two of whom were good friends of Plutarch, were executed – the times were evidently dangerous for the men in his circle.⁸⁵

Hadrian mourned Plotina's death and said, according to Dio Cassius, that since she had never asked for any improper favours, he

had never refused her anything. But this anecdote, told in order to illustrate her modesty, proves above all that she actually *did* ask for favours, and that they had always been granted her.⁸⁶ It is thus incontestable that this highly admired woman did exercise a considerable influence on Trajan and Hadrian, and it is hardly probable that she would have intervened in favour of an ardent advocate for a rival philosophical school. Thus, it is not unreasonable to ask to what extent Plotina herself contributed to Plutarch's hostility towards the women of the Olympias-type. Although the known facts do not justify a categorical answer, the arguments proffered indicate that the figure of the empress may well lurk behind some of the images of repugnant women that Plutarch conjures up.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this discussion, I showed that in Plutarch's corpus, women are systematically and invariably considered as inferior to men. Should I, then, contradict Flacelière, and replace his 'feminism' with 'misogyny'? Is it really possible to describe a man thus who with such elegance and *esprit* so often defends love between man and woman, who has such a high respect for marriage (which he obviously regarded as an institution based upon the co-operation of both parties), and who expresses such admiration for certain *matronae* and their Greek counterparts?

In my opinion, it is hardly constructive to define our philosopher in terms as blunt as 'feminist' or 'misogynist'. According 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 morally depraved unless they transgress the rules of their sex and strive to achieve privileges reserved for men. Women are capable of courageous defiance of tyrants and external enemies – but after their exploits, they are to renounce all power. What makes Plutarch react violently is in every case a woman who acts in politics almost like a man and not in her capacity as a wife or mother, since she should always put the interests of others before her own. The reaction in itself is quite natural for a man with his ideals, whereas the vehemence with which he expresses himself ought to be explained by the fact that he had actually encountered women who did not respect these rules which he regarded as virtually sacred – and who may even have been obstacles to his own ambitions.

On the other hand, the women who acted according to his standards were met with a definitely appreciative attitude by Plutarch.

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Accepting her supposedly natural inferiority, a woman was herself accepted as morally equal and allowed to give proof of virtue and magnanimity – and it is in this sense that we are to understand the remark in *Mulierum virtutes* that women's virtue does not differ from that of men. This may well seem somewhat commonplace; we should, however, regard this attitude in the light of the long and persistent habit of Greek thinkers of considering all women as vile and above all incorrigible *in themselves*. In this area, as so often, Plutarch adopts a Roman ideal; his heroines are essentially Roman matrons, strong and virtuous, even when dressed in the traditional Greek peplos.

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Notes

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¹ The Greek quotations follow the edition of the Collection Belles Lettres, when available; the translations are my own. All passages mentioned within parentheses denote that the reference in question is indirect.

² R. Flacelière, *L'Amour en Grèce*, Paris 1971, *passim*. His ideas of Plutarch as the ladies' friend and defender appear also in his commentaries and introductions to and translations of the *Moralia*, and especially in the introduction to *Amatorius*.

³ R. Flacelière, *Le Féminisme dans l'ancienne Athènes*, Paris 1971 (Institut de France. Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-lettres no. 23), *passim*.

⁴ R. Flacelière, 'Rome et ses empereurs vus par Plutarque', *L'Antiquité classique* 32 (1963), 47.

⁵ P. Schmitt Pantel, 'Introduction' (in *Histoire des femmes en occident*. Sous la direction de G. Duby & M. Perrot. 1, L'Antiquité. Sous la direction de P. Schmitt Pantel, Evreux 1991), 22–3; G. Sissa, 'Philosophies du genre. Platon, Aristote et la différence des sexes' in: *Histoire des femmes...*, 97–8.

⁶ *SVF* III. 255. 14–16 αἱ δ' ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς (sc. φίλῃαι) ταῖς δι' ὅλων κράσεσιν, ὡς οἶνος ὕδατι καὶ τοῦτο ἐπιμέν<ων> μίσγεται δι' ὅλων.

⁷ *Coni. praec.* 140e–f.

⁸ F. Le Corsu, *Plutarque et les femmes dans les Vies parallèles*, Paris 1981.

⁹ *Ibid.* 274.

¹⁰ K. Blomqvist, *Myth and Moral Message in Dio Chrysostom. A study in Dio's moral thought, with a particular focus on his attitudes towards women*, Lund 1989.

¹¹ *Mul. virt.* 242f–243a μίαν...καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς ἀρετὴν. Cf. *Cle.* 39. 1.

¹² However, it is essential to emphasise that this attitude is not identical with the active misogyny prevalent among Greek (and Roman) poets and philosophers, according to which women are morally depraved *qua* women (cf. my discussion on active misogyny in op. cit., 191–5). As I intend to demonstrate, Plutarch is an earnest defender of women's virtue in the way that he recognises it.

¹³ *Is. et Os.* 368c (here, however, it is a question of the moon's double nature); *Def. or.*, *passim*; *Amat.* 764d, 770a–b; *Quaest. nat.* 918a; and especially *De facie in orbe lunae*, *passim*, where the moon is throughout presented as so typically feminine that she is even compared to the earth. Cf. also *Pyth. or.* 402d–e (Gaia is inferior to the god); 404d (the obedient moon); *Prim. frig.* 954d.

¹⁴ *Quaest. Rom.* 288d; *E ap. Delph.* 388c; *Def. or.* 429 ff.; *Quaest. Conv.* 657d; *Anim. procr.* 1018c.

¹⁵ *Is. et Os.* 358e, 364d, 372e–f, 373f–374a, 374f, 382c–d; *Quaest. Conv.* 650f–651e; *Amat.* 770a–b; *De facie in orbe lunae*, *passim*, and especially 938b, 943e; *Anim. procr.* 1015d–e.

¹⁶ Other explicit declarations, ironical remarks or indirect allusions regarding women's inferiority or passivity: *Thes.* 23. 3, 27. 1; *Sol.* 21. 7; *Caes.* 63. 11; *Aud. poet.* 16e–f, 36d; *Aud.* 41e; *Adul.* 70a; *Cons. ad Ap.* 102d–e, 112f–113a; *Coni. praec.* 139b (here, however, it is stressed that although she ought to be subordinated, the wife is worthy of respect; I shall return to this aspect below), 140c–d; *Reg. et imp.* 190a; *Ap. Lac.* 212b, 215d, 219f, 223c, 230c, 231b, 240e; *Quaest. Rom.* 289e; *Alex. fort.* 331d–e; *Is. et Os.* 375a; *Virt. mor.* 442d–e (cf. *Tranqu. an.* 475a); *Cohib. ira* 457b–c, 460c, 463e (cf. *Tranqu. an.* 472b); *Tranqu. an.* 465d; *Garr.* 507b–508a (a woman, who was τὰλλα σώφρων, γυνή δέ, 'prudent in other respects, but still a woman' could not guard her tongue. This passage is to be compared to 509a–c, where a talkative man is described without any comments on his sex; here, it is his social position that is pointed out – he was a barber); 508a–b; *Vit. pudore* 528e–f, 529f; *Quaest. Conv.* 645d, 650b, 650e–651f, 711c–d; *An seni* 790c; *Ad princ.* 780c; *Reip. ger.* 819d; *Her. mal.* 869f–870a; *Terrest. an aq.* 964c; *Bruta an.* 988b, 989e, 990b–f; *Adv. Col.* 1126d–e. Men (or cities) accused of female character or behaviour; 'female' employed as a pejorative term, etc.: *Lyc.* 14. 4, 15. 11; *Num.* 22. 11; *Per.* 12. 2; *Alc.* 2. 3, 23. 6; *Tim.* 15. 10, 32. 3; *Dem.* 16. 4; *Mari.* 34. 3; *Crass.* 32. 2, 3; *Gal.* 25. 2. Cf. in this context *Rom.* 32. 2: the treacherous Phaedra is referred to as 'a woman'.

¹⁷ *Num.* 4. 6–7.

¹⁸ *Rom.* 17. 2.

¹⁹ *Amat.* 756e–f.

²⁰ *Rom.* 1. 2–3; *Mul. virt.* 243e–244a; cf. *Quaest. Rom.* 265b–c, where different explanations are presented.

²¹ *Rom.* 9. 2, 14. 1–16. 2, 19. 2–10, 20. 3–4, 21. 1, 36. 2–3; *Num.* 25. 10; *Quaest. Rom.* 271d (the bride was carried over the threshold of her new home), 271f (the famous wedding song 'Talasios'; cf. *Pomp.* 4. 6–10), 284f (married women were neither obliged to grind grain nor to cook), 285b (the bride's hair was parted with the point of a spear), 287f (*bullae* which were hung

around the neck of little children), 289a (young women did not marry during public holidays); cf. J. Scheid, 'D'indispensables «étrangères». Les rôles religieux des femmes à Rome' (in *Histoire des femmes...*, 407–8).

²² *Is. et Os.*, *passim* and especially 372e–f.

²³ These women may be contrasted with those of a low social level, such as Martha, the Syrian prophetess employed by Marius (*Mar.* 17. 2–5), who do not belong in this category, since they manipulate men in order to attain other goals than political power; in Martha's case, greed seems to have been her chief motive.

²⁴ *Aspasia: Per.* 24. 2–11, 25. 1, 30. 4, 32. 1–5.

²⁵ This translation is preferable to 'on a cru' (R. Flacelière–E. Chambry); the verb displays that the author is personally engaged.

²⁶ 24. 2; 'cette femme' (R. Flacelière–E. Chambry) is not enough in this context. It is true that ἡ ἄνθρωπος is a more problematic term than τὸ γύναιον (v. below), since it is not undeniably pejorative; in certain cases, the term designates a woman presented positively (*Cle.* 1. 1; *Mul. virt.* 260d; *Amat.* 755e, 768b) or at least it is not denigrating (*Thes.* 27. 6; *Nic.* 13. 6; *Alex.* 2. 5 – here, however, it describes the undeniably problematic Olympias; *Alex.* 30. 1; *Artax.* 2. 2 – these two references, however, refer to barbarians; *Cons. ad Ap.* 112b). The term is usually pejorative, indicating vicious and plotting women (*Lyc.* 3. 4; *Pyth. or.* 401e), concubines or morally unstable women (*Cam.* 15. 6; *Fab. Max.* 20. 9, 21. 5; *Alc.* 23. 7; *Mar.* 40. 12; *Sulla* 2. 7; *Coni. praec.* 141b; *Pyth. or.* 404a; *Terrest. an aq.* 972e) or women belonging to the lower social classes (*Mar.* 17. 6. 1; *Def. or.* 412c) – or women both morally and socially inferior (*Aud. poet.* 26e; *Pyth. or.* 398a; *Amat.* 760c). Furthermore, it is to be noted, that when ἡ ἄνθρωπος is employed *in bonam partem*, it only describes women in a situation where they are subject to the acts of a human or a god (it is often best translated as 'the poor woman'); when the person in question is acting on her own part, the term is always pejorative.

²⁷ *Pyth. or.* 403b. Neither spuria, nor conjectures have been considered (*Mul. virt.* 259a; *Quaest. Conv.* 633c).

²⁸ *Amat.* 767c; *Ant.* 53. 8.

²⁹ *Adul.* 70a; *Pyth. or.* 407c; *Adv. Col.* 1126e (*bis*); *Caes.* 14. 8; *Cato minor* 52. 7; *Ant.* 10. 5; *Dion* 2. 4; *Artax.* 28. 2.

³⁰ *Cohib. ira* 457a; *Curiositate* 519f; *Quaest. Conv.* 628c; *Amat.* 760a; *Non posse* 1099b; *Pyrrh.* 2. 1, 2. 5, 13. 7; *Lys.* 26. 1; *Alex.* 22. 4; *Demetrius* 42. 7; *Arat.* 6. 4.

³¹ *Cato maior* 24. 2; *Alex.* 48. 4, 6; *Ant.* 86. 7.

³² *Reg. et imp.* 175d; *Tranqu. an.* 467e; *Lys.* 26. 1; *Crass.* 34. 2.

³³ *Adul.* 52d; *Reg. et imp.* 195f; *Mul. virt.* 259c (here, however, the girl in question, although not respectable, is courageous); *Quaest. Rom.* 277f; *Alex. fort.* 339b, d, e; *Cohib. ira* 457b; *Sera num.* 561d; *Gen. Socr.* 596f; *Them.* 26. 6; *Fab. Max.* 20. 7; *Alc.* 39. 9 (*bis*); *Tim.* 14. 3; *Pelop.* 9. 4 (it is hardly probable that γύναια τῶν ὑπάνδρων merely signifies 'des femmes mariées' (R. Flacelière–E. Chambry), since these women took part in a symposion; we are rather dealing with women belonging to a certain man, though not in the meaning of lawfully wedded wives); *Cato maior* 24. 2; *Alex.* 38. 1, 41. 9; *Cato minor* 73. 3, 4 (as the context clearly shows, the woman in question was one of the king's

women, not 'la femme du roi': R. Flacelière-E. Chambry); *Ant.* 2. 4, 9. 5, 9. 7.

³⁴ *Per.* 24. 7; cf. Plato, *Menex.* 235e. We do not concern ourselves with the question whether Plato himself speaks seriously or not in his affirmations that Aspasia was behind several of Pericles' intellectual achievements (for example, the famous funerary oration), since what matters to this study is the fact that Plutarch himself underlines the ironical tendency of the discourse.

³⁵ This translation of ἐρωτική τις ἀγάπησις is to be preferred to 'amour' (R. Flacelière-E. Chambry).

³⁶ Other accusations against Ionians in general and Milesians in particular: *Her. mal.* 869f-870a (which is, furthermore, a sneering allusion to Herodotus' own nationality), 873f; cf. *Phoc.* 19. 4; *Ap. Lac.* 240d.

³⁷ 'They say', φασί.

³⁸ Cleopatra appears in *Caes.* 48. 5, 49. 1-3, 49. 10; *Pomp.* 77. 1; but especially in *Antonius*: *Ant.* 10. 6, 25-29, 30. 4, 31. 3, 32. 6, 33. 2, 36. 1-5, 37. 3, 37. 5-6, (38), 50. 7, 51. 2-4, 53. 5-12, 54. (2), 54. 6-9, 56. 1-6, 57. 2-3, 57. 5, 58. 4, 58. 8-11, 59. 3-7, 60. 1, 60. 7, 62. 1, 63. 3, 63. 6-8, 66. 5-8, 67. 1, 67. 5-6, 69. 1, 69. 3-5, 71. 3-8, 72. 1-3, 73. 1-5, 74. 1-3, 74. 5-6, 76. 3-6, 76. 11, 77, 78. 1, 78. 4-6, 79, 81. 3-4, 82, 83, 84. 2-7, 85-87. 1-2, 88. 5, 90. 4-5. Unless stated otherwise, the passages quoted refer to *Antonius*.

³⁹ 25. 1; cf. 26. 1 and 90. 4-5.

⁴⁰ 60. 1; cf. Pelling (Plutarch, *Life of Antony*, ed. by C.B.R. Pelling, Cambridge 1988) *ad* 25. 6.

⁴¹ Cf. 91. 2 'the foreigner'; *Adul.* 61a-b 'the Egyptian woman'.

⁴² This was apparently a bad example. Antony, too, stretched himself above his position in marrying the Egyptian queen (this is explicitly pointed out in the comparison between Antony and Demetrius, 88. 5). Thus, Cleopatra's superiority in birth was in itself a reproach against Antony. He did not have the right to strive for a royal position; in Plutarch's eyes, he was a mere soldier, although a courageous and efficient one, and his place was on the battle-field and not at the royal court. Strong, yet weak, cunning and cruel, he could not but be influenced by the women who tried to dominate him (10. 6) - and, consequently, he could not avoid being defeated by the self-controlled Octavian.

⁴³ Plutarch's description of Cleopatra is very likely to have been influenced by that of Horace; in *Carm.* I. 37, she is presented as a savage and cruel barbarian, although her suicide creates some respect for her.

⁴⁴ Olympias: *Eum.* 12. 3, 13. 1; *Dem.* 22. 2; *Alex.* 2. 2-9, 3. (1), 3. 2-4, 3. 6, 5. 7, 9. 5, 9. (6-10), 9. 11, 9. (12-13), 10. 1, 10. 6, 10. 8, 16. 19, 22. 10, 25. 6, 27. 8, 39. 7-8, 39. 12-13, 68. 4-5, 77. 2, 77. 8. Unless stated otherwise, the passages quoted refer to *Alexander*.

⁴⁵ Actually, Philip himself is said to have introduced the institution of polygamy among the Macedonians; *Ant.* 91. 1.

⁴⁶ See e.g. 16. 19 and 25. 6.

⁴⁷ Alexander also withstood the efforts of the Carian queen Ada to spoil him: *Alex.* 22. 7-10; *Tuend. san.* 127b; *Reg. et. imp.* 180a; *Non posse* 1099c-d. For other cases of a woman trying to make the hero forget his duties and/or his masculine virtues, cf. *Aud. poet.* 33a (Thetis and Achilles) and *Vit. aere al.*

831d (Calypso and Odysseus).

⁴⁸ Alexander's self-control is a recurrent theme in the *Moralia* as well: *Fort.* 97d; *Reg. et imp.* 179c-d; *Mul. virt.* 246b, 260d; and especially *Alex. fort.*, *passim*.

⁴⁹ e.g. Fulvia, Antony's first wife (*Ant.* 10. 5-10, 20. 1, 28. 1, 28. 7, 30. 1-6, 32. 1, 31. 3, 35. 8, 54. 3, 57. 4); Omphale, queen of Lydia (*Thes.* 6. 6; *Per.* 24. 9; *Ant.* 90. 4); the sister-in-law of Lycurgus (*Lyc.* 3. 1-4, 8). Other women, less prominent but revealing the same tendencies: Agathoclea and her mother Oinante, Ptolemy's mistress and her mother (*Cle.* 33. 2), Berenice, Ptolemy Soter's wife (*Pyrrh.* 4. 6-7, 6. 1), Berenice, mother of Ptolemy Philopator and of Magas (*Cle.* 33. 3), Cleopatra, sister of Alexander (*Alex.* 68. 4-5), Lanassa, wife of Pyrrhus (*Pyrrh.* 9. 2-3, 10. 6-7), Livia (*Gal.* 3. 2, 14. 5; *Ant.* 83. 6, 87. 2-6), Papiria, wife of Paullus Aemilius (*Aem.* 5. 1-5), Phaea of Crommyon (*Thes.* 9. 1-2), Praecia, Cethegus' mistress (*Luc.* 6. 2-5), Roxane, wife of Alexander (*Pyrrh.* 4. 3; *Alex.* 47. 7-8, 77. 6), the women in Cato minor's house (*Cato minor* 30. 8; *Pomp.* 44. 3-6) and, naturally, Xanthippe, Socrates' wife (*Cato maior* 20. 3). On the deplorable effects of letting women get the upper hand: *Solon* 21. 4; *Ages.* 10. 11; *Cleom.* 33. 1-2, 37. 12; *Cic.* 29. 2.

⁵⁰ Cf. C.B.R. Pelling, 'Truth and fiction in Plutarch's *Lives*' (in *Antonine Literature*, ed. D.A. Russell, Oxford 1990, 19-52), 33. The tyrants described in the *Vitae* hardly need mentioning; the following passages in the *Moralia* refer to tyranny: *Alex. fort.* 334a-b, 338b-c, *Cohib. ira* 455d, 457a; *Curiositate* 522f; *Sera num.* 555b-c; *Maxime cum*, *passim* and esp. 778e-f; *Ad princ.*, *passim*; *Adv. Col.* 1126e-f.

⁵¹ For Cleopatra as a κόλαξ, a despicable flatterer (29. 1), cf. Pelling's summary of Antony's and Cleopatra's characters (*op. cit.* 181-90, on *Ant.* 9-12).

⁵² e.g. Terentia, wife of Cicero (*Cato minor* 19. 5; *Cic.* 8. 3, 20. 2-3, 29. 2-4, 30. 4, 41. 2-6; *Ant.* 2. 2).

⁵³ Cf. e.g. *Aud. poet.* 30c, 36f; *Aud.* 37e; *Cons. ad. Ap.* 112f-113b, 114d; *Tuend. san.* 134d; *Coni. praec.* 140c-d; *Ap. Lac.* 211f, 240d; *Mul. virt.* 259d-260d; *Her. mal.* 857a-e, 868c, 869f-870a, 873f; *Bruta an.* 988b; *Non posse* 1098b, 1099b; *Adv. Col.* 1126f; and cf. A.G. Nikolaidis, 'Ελληνικός-βαρβαρικός. Plutarch on Greek and barbarian characteristics', *Wiener Studien* 99 (1986), 229-44.

⁵⁴ *Art.* 1. 2, 2. 2-5, 3. 6, 4. 1-3, 5. 5, 6. 6-9, 14. 9-10, 15. 1-2, 16. 1, 17, 18. 3, 18. 5-6, 19, 23. 1-5. The Persian queen Parysatis, wife of Darius II and mother of Artaxerxes and Cyrus the younger, is one of the worst examples of dominant and wicked women. Let it suffice to mention that she poisoned her daughter-in-law, caused the breach between her two sons, and treated her son's assassins with the utmost cruelty. However, being what she was, a true barbarian in her tantrums and revengeful malice (6. 8 βάρβαρος ἐν ὀργαῖς καὶ μνησικακίαις), her behaviour is apparently not as surprising as if she had been Greek or Roman.

⁵⁵ Octavia: *Pub.* 17. 8; *Marc.* 30. 10-11; *Cic.* 44. 1; *Ant.* 31. 1-5, 33. 5, 35. 2-8, 53. 1-9, 54. 1-6, 56. 4, 57. 2-5, 59. 3, 72. 3, 83. 6, 87. 1-6. Unless stated otherwise, the passages quoted refer to *Antonius*.

⁵⁶ In this aspect, too, she personifies the ideal matron; different from Greek ideals, it was the Roman mother's prerogative - and duty - to bring up her own children; cf. *Cor.* 1. 2 (regarding Volumnia), *T. Gra.* 1. 6 (regarding

Cornelia); cf. also *Lib. ed.* 3c-d: although probably a pseudo-Plutarchean treatise, *Lib. ed.* for the most part expresses a message concerning the upbringing of children which coincides with what Plutarch says himself on the subject: see also Albini in this volume, above pp. 59-71.

⁵⁷ Le Corsu (1981), 271.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Coni. praec.* 141d-e; looking in the mirror, the wife is not to ask herself whether she is beautiful, but if she is virtuous.

⁵⁹ Agiatis, wife of Cleomenes (*Cle.* 1. 1-3, 22. 1-2); Agesistrata, mother of Agis (*Agis* 4. 1, 6. 7, 7. 1-4, 9. 6, 18. 8, 19. 10, 20. 2-7); Antigone, wife of Pyrrhus (*Pyrrh.* 5. 1); Antistia, wife of Appius Claudius (*T. Gra.* 4. 3), Archidamia, grandmother of Agis (*Pyrrh.* 27. 4; *Agis* 4. 1, 7. 4, 9. 6, 19. 10, 20. 3-4); Arete, wife and niece of Dion (*Tim.* 33. 4; *Dio* 6. 1, 15. 1-2, 15. 5, 18. 8, 19. 2, 21. 1-6, 26. 5, 31. 3, 31. 6, 51, 56. 1-2, 56. 4-5, 57. 5, 58. 8-9; *Brut.* 56. 5); Phocion's second wife (*Phoc.* 19. 1-4, 37. 5); Aristomache, sister of Dion (*Tim.* 33. 4; *Dio* 3. 3-6, 4. 1, 6. 1-2, 7. 2, 14. 1, 15. 1-2, 15. 5, 18. 8, 19. 2, 31. 6, 51, 56. 1-2, 56. 4-5, 57. 5, 58. 8-9); Theste, wife of Proxenos (*Dio* 21. 7-9); Chilonis, wife of Cleombrotos (*Agis* 11. 8, 17. 2-18. 3); Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi (*T. Gra.* 1. 3-7, 4. 4, 8. 7; *C. Gra.* 4. 3-6, 13. 2, 19); Cratesiclea, mother of Cleomenes (*Cle.* 6. 2, 7. 1, 22. 3-10, 31. 6, 38. 2, 38. 4-12); Soso (*Arat.* 2. 3-4); Nicaia (who, however, was tricked by Antigonos: *Arat.* 17. 2-7), Porcia, daughter of Cato minor and wife of Brutus (*Cato minor* 24. 6, 25. 4-8, 73. 6; *Bru.* 2. 1, 13. 2-11, 14. 4, 15. 5-9, 23. 2-7, 53. 5-7), at the same time a loyal wife and a courageous woman, see below; Aurelia, Caesar's mother (*Caes.* 9. 3, 10. 2-3). Let us not omit Terentia, wife of Cicero (cf. n. 52 above) at the same time dominant and supportive. She was a good helper to her husband and very efficient in business, but she also meddled with men's affairs. Plutarch's sympathy for her is apparently at least partly caused by the fact that he thinks that Cicero was wrong in divorcing her. Vergilia and Volumnia belong to this category, too; I shall mention them below. Last but not least, Plutarch's own wife Timoxena is described as the prototype of the good wife; see *Cons. ad ux.*, *passim*.

⁶⁰ *Mul. virt.* 255e-257e.

⁶¹ Cf. my discussion of Octavia's beauty above.

⁶² τὸ φρονεῖν...περιττὴ τις εἶναι καὶ πολιτικῆς δεινότητος οὐκ ἄμοιρος, 255e.

⁶³ i.e. African Libyans and not Greeks residing in Libya, to judge by the general's name Ἀνάβους (Anabous).

⁶⁴ *Reg. et imp.* 194d; *Mul. virt.* 256a; (cf. *Amat.* 768f); *Her. mal.* 856a-b; *Pelopidas* 28. 5-10, 31. 5, 35. 5-12.

⁶⁵ Volumnia: *Cor.* 1. 2, 4. 5-7, 21. 3, 33. 3-10, 34, (35), 36. 1-6, 37. 3-5, 43. 4-5; Vergilia: *Cor.* 21. 3, 33. 4-10, 34, (35), 36. (1-3), 36. 4-6, 37. 3-5, 43. 4-5; *Fort. Rom.* 318f.

⁶⁶ Among the other passages in the *Moralia*, where women (collectively or individually) fight tyrants or external enemies: *Ap. Lac.* 223c; *Mul. virt.*, *passim*, *Garr.* 505d-f. Some courageous women in the *Vitae*: Cloelia (*Pub.* 19. 7-8); Porcia (v. n. 59 above), Nicaia (*Ara.* 17. 2-6); Tutula (*Cam* 33. 4-10; *Rom.* 29. 7-11; interesting since she is the only slave belonging to this category); Timoclea (*Alex.* 12. 1-5; cf. *Mul. virt.* 259d-260d); Valeria, sister of Publicola

(*Cor.* 33. 1–7); Valeria, daughter of Publicola (*Pub.* 18. 3, 19. 5, 19. 8). However, since several of the ‘supporting women’ are both loyal wives or mothers of the Octavia-type and heroines of the Aretaphila-type, it is impossible to make a clear-cut distinction between the two groups.

⁶⁷ Cf. e.g. *Mul. virt.* 243e–244a; *Quaest. Rom.* 265b–c. P. Schmitt Pantel (op. cit. 22–3) approaches this attitude of Plutarch’s from a different angle. In my opinion, what is remarkable is not the fact that Plutarch sends the heroines back to the women’s quarters after their achievements, but that he grants them the moral and intellectual capacity to leave those quarters in the first place.

⁶⁸ *Pyrrh.* 26. 17–18, 27. 10, 28. 5–6.

⁶⁹ *Adul.* 59e, 61c, 71b–c; *Cap. ex. inim.* 89a; *Coni. praec.*, *passim*; *Quaest. Rom.* 263d–f; *Alex. fort.* 329f; *Pyth. or.* 403f–404a; *An virtus*, *passim*; *Virt. mor.* 448d–e; *Cohib. ira* 455e, 461c, 462a; *Frat. am.* 491d–492b; *Curiositate* 517c; *Cons. ad ux.*, *passim*; *Quaest. Conv.* 712c–d; *Amat.*, *passim*; *An seni* 789a–b; *Stoic. rep.* 1034a; *Non posse* 1104c. Cf. D.A. Russell, *Plutarch*, London 1973, 6; P. Stadter, *Plutarch’s Historical Methods. An Analysis of the Mulierum Virtutes*, Cambridge Mass. 1965, 6–7.

⁷⁰ Thus, I do not agree with Le Corsu (op. cit. 272); it is true that Plutarch displayed no indulgence towards marriages based upon exaggerated passion, but it is to go too far to state that he preferred marriages of convenience.

⁷¹ *Adul.* 59e, 69b–c; *Reg. et imp.* 204f; *Alex. fort.* 329f; *Cohib. ira* 455e, 459a; *Tranqu. an.* 469d; *Am. prolis*, *passim*; *Vit. pudore* 529c; *Cons. ad ux.*, *passim*; *Quaest. conv.* 630e, 658e, 672f–673a, 673e, 738b–c; *Reip. ger.* 814a, 821c; *Plat. quaest.* 1008f; *Non posse* 1104c; *Adv. Col.* 1123a.

⁷² Cato maior is reported to have said (*Reg. et imp.* 198d): πάντες, εἶπεν, ἄνθρωποι τῶν γυναικῶν ἄρχουσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, ἡμῶν δὲ αἱ γυναῖκες, ‘all men govern their women; we govern all men but are governed by our women.’ Cf. *Cato maior* 8. 4–5, 9. 2.

⁷³ e.g. Livia, wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberius, Agrippina, mother of Nero and wife of Claudius, Poppaea Sabina, wife of Nero, and Domitia, wife of Domitian.

⁷⁴ It is well attested that Plutarch lived under Hadrian (C.P. Jones ‘Towards a chronology of Plutarch’s works’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 56 (1966), 61–74, esp. 63; this essay is now reprinted in B. Scardigli (ed.) *Essays on Plutarch’s Lives*, Oxford 1995, 95–123: see p. 100).

⁷⁵ Dio Cassius 68. 5.

⁷⁶ Pliny the younger *Pan.* 84.

⁷⁷ *CIL XI.* 1333.

⁷⁸ According to the *Vita Hadriani* (in the *Historia Augusta*) 4. 8–10, it was said that Trajan never had the intention of appointing Hadrian as his successor, but that it was Plotina who, after the death of her husband, declared that Trajan had adopted Hadrian.

⁷⁹ In *Vita Hadriani* 2. 10, 4. 1, 4. 4, Plotina is described with words such as *favente*, *favore*, *factione*, denoting an extreme affection towards Hadrian. Cf. H.W. Benario (1980, ad loc.), who cites Dio Cassius, according to whom (69. 1. 2) Plotina was even in love with her adoptive son.

⁸⁰ Pliny the younger *Pan.* 83. 5, Dio Cassius 68. 5. 5.

⁸¹ Dio Chrysostom III. 122; Pliny the younger *Pan.* 83. 4–8.

⁸² *Pomp.* 55. 2–3. Cf. my discussion on the interesting subject of Plutarch and intellectual women in 'Chryseïs and Clea, Eumetis and the Interlocutress. Plutarch of Chaeronea and Dio Chrysostom on Women's Education', *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 60 (1995), 173–90.

⁸³ *EM* 10404 (wrongly cited as '1004' by Oliver), consisting of two letters, dating from 121, in Latin to Hadrian, in Greek to the adherents of the Garden. My gratitude to the Epigraphic Museum in Athens for their kind permission to let me examine the inscription. Cf. J.H. Oliver, *Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors from Inscriptions and Papyri*, Philadelphia 1989 (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 178), 73–4, 179; and *id.*, *The Civic Tradition and Roman Athens*, Baltimore & London 1983, 87, regarding Plotina's concern for the Epicureans and her influence on this school – as well as on Hadrian.

⁸⁴ After Domitian's fall, Plutarch retired to Greece where he spent the rest of his life in what seems like a veritable interior exile (cf. D.A. Russell, *op. cit.* [n. 69 above], 8). C.P. Jones ('Towards a chronology of Plutarch's works', *Journal of Roman Studies* 56 (1966), 74 = Scardigli, *op. cit.* [n. 74 above], p. 123) regards his vast literary production as the proof of a new freedom to express himself: once the tyrant Domitian was assassinated, one dared say what one wanted. This is possible, but not necessary; in fact, it is possible to interpret this enormous activity as a sign of a contrary development. Forced to abstain from an active life in Rome, and realising that he had no means of making a career in high society in Rome (was he even compromised since he had too easily accepted the reign of Domitian? – nothing reveals that he opposed him), Plutarch could well have directed his energy towards a less dangerous field. His withdrawal from public life was compensated by an important literary activity – and a prominent position in local politics as well as in the cult in Delphi.

⁸⁵ Dio Cassius 69. 2. 5, *Vita Hadriani* 7. 1–2; cf. C.P. Jones (*Plutarch and Rome*, Oxford 1971, repr. with corrections 1972), 33, and R. Syme (*Tacitus*, I–II, Oxford 1958), I. 244.

⁸⁶ 79. 10. 3a.