Rose Catherine Looby
Miami University
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loobyrc@miamioh.edu

“She is the Best, as We Are”: Porcia’s Nature & Character in Plutarch’s Work Handout

Passage 1

 “ἐπειδὴ διαφορὰς γέ τινας ἑτέρας, ὥσπερ χρόας  ἰδίας, αἱ ἀρεταὶ διὰ τὰς φύσεις λαμβάνουσι καὶ συνεξομοιοῦνται τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἔθεσι καὶ κράσεσι σωμάτων [[1]](#footnote-1)

(“Furthermore, at any rate, virtues, through nature, assume/take up some differences in different persons, like one’s own complexion and assimilate with the underlying customs and constitution of the body” Plut. *Mulier*. 0).

Passage 2

‘ὅτι γυναικεία φύσις ἀσθενὴς δοκεῖ λόγον ἐνεγκεῖν ἀπόρρητον ἀλλ᾽,' ἔστι τίς, ὦ Βροῦτε, καί τροφῆς ἀγαθῆς καί ὁμιλίας χρηστῆς εἰς ἦθος ἰσχύς: ἐμοὶ δὲ καί τὸ Κάτωνος εἶναι θυγατέρα καί τὸ Βρούτου γυναῖκα πρόσεστιν οἷς πρότερον μὲν ἧττον ἐπεποίθειν, νῦν δ᾽ ἐμαυτὴν ἔγνωκα καί πρὸς πόνον ἀήττητον εἶναι.’

“I know Feminine Nature seems too weak to bear secrets, but, O Brutus, it was both excellent upbringing and good companionship that added strength towards my character. I am both the daughter of Cato, added to that the wife of Brutus. Before [this test upon myself] I believed [I was] inferior, but now I perceive that I am unconquerable by pain (Plut. *Brut*. 13.5).

Passage 3

“Φιλόστοργος δ᾽ ἡ Πορκία καί φίλανδρος οὖσα καί μεστὴ φρονήματος νοῦν ἔχοντος.

“Porcia was affectionate [to her family] and loving [to her spouse] and was full of willpower” (Plut. *Brut*. 13.3)

/

: “*[…] ἢ τὸ Πορκίας φρόνημα τῷ Βρούτου* […]

“Porcia’s will [is] [the same] as Brutus’s,” Plut. *Mulier*. 0).

Passage 4

“θυγάτηρ τοῦ Κάτωνος οὔτε σωφροσύνης οὔτε ἀνδρείας

“The daughter of Cato was without neither wisdom nor courage,” Plut. Cat. Mi. 73.4).

Passage 5

λαβοῦσα μαχαίριον ᾧ τοὺς ὄνυχας οἱ κουρεῖς ἀφαιροῦσι, καί πάσας ἐξελάσασα τοῦθαλάμου τὰς ὀπαδούς, τομὴν ἐνέβαλε τῷ μηρῷ βαθεῖαν, ὥστε ῥύσιν αἵματος πολλὴν γενέσθαι καί μετὰ μικρὸν ὀδύνας τε νεανικὰς καί φρικώδεις πυρετοὺς ἐπιλαβεῖν ἐκ τοῦ τραύματος.

Having seized a surgeon’s knife, such as barbers cut nails with, and having driven all of her attendants from her room, she put a deep cut in her thigh, such as to bring about a great flow of blood and in a short

time, violent pains and chills and fever came from the wound.

(Plut. *Brut.* 13.3)

…

“οὐ πρότερον ἐπεχείρησεν ἀνερέσθαι τὸν ἄνδρα περὶ τῶν ἀπορρήτων ἢ λαβεῖν ἑαυτῆς τοιαύτην διάπειραν

“Indeed before she attempted to ask her husband about his secrets she took such a trial on herself,”

(Plut. *Brut*. 13.3).:

Passage 6

ὁ δ᾽ἐκπλαγεὶς καί ἀνατείνας τὰς χεῖρας ἐπεύξατο δοῦναι τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτῷκατορθοῦντι τὴν πρᾶξιν ἀνδρὶ Πορκίας ἀξίῳ φανῆναι. καί τότε μὲνἀνελάμβανε τὴν γυναῖκα

“He [Brutus] was amazed and put up his hands to pray that he would set [his endeavor] upright, and the gods would proclaim him [to be] Porcia’s deserving husband. And then he endeavored to heal his wife,” (Plut. Brut. 13.6).

Passage 7

ἐγὼ, Βροῦτε, Κάτωνος οὖσα θυγάτηρ εἰς τὸν σὸν ἐδόθην οἶκον οὐχ ὥσπερ αἱ Παλλακευόμεναι, κοίτης μεθέξουσα καί τραπέζης μόνον, ἀλλὰ κοινωνὸς μὲν ἀγαθῶν εἶναι, κοινωνὸς δὲ ἀνιαρῶν. τὰ μὲν οὖν σὰ πάντα περὶ τὸν γάμον ἄμεμπτα: τῶν δὲ παρ᾽ ἐμοῦ τίς ἀπόδειξις ἢ χάρις, εἰ μήτε σοι πάθος ἀπόρρητον συνδιοίσω μήτε φροντίδα πίστεως δεομένην; ’

‘I, Brutus, Cato’s daughter, was given into your home not to be a concubine, only to share your marriage-bed and bank-table, but to be a partner in good [things] on one hand and a partner through troubles on the other. While truly, you are, all around, blameless within this marriage; yet what will demonstrate my own grace if I neither bear your secrets and pains alongside you nor am I bound by faithfulness and care?’ (Plut. *Brut*. 13.4).

Passage 8

Ἀκιλίου δέ τινος τῶν Βρούτου φίλων τὰ πρὸς Ἕκτορα τῆς Ἀνδρομάχης ἔπη διελθόντος, Ἕκτορ, ἀτὰρ σύ μοί ἐσσι πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ ἠδὲ κασίγνητος, σὺ δέ μοί θαλερὸς παρακοίτης.” μειδιάσας ὁ Βροῦτος, ‘ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἐμοί γ᾽,’ εἶπε, ‘πρὸς Πορκίαν ἔπεισι φάναι τὰ τοῦ Ἕκτορος, ἱστόν ἠλακάτην τε καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε: σώματος γὰρ ἀπολείπεται φύσει τῶν ἴσων ἀνδραγαθημάτων, γνώμῃ δ᾽ ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος, ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς, ἀριστεύει.’

Achilius, one of the Brutus’s friends, recited the verse of Andromache’s words to Hector:  “Hector, to me you are father and honored mother and brother as well as lively husband to me.” Brutus responded, “I do not, at any rate,” He said, “speak to Porcia in the words of Hector; ‘Set up your spindle and command your handmaidens’. For while her body is not strong enough by nature to perform manly deeds, in mind, she is the best, as are we, in the name of her fatherland
(Plut. Brut. 23.3-4).

Passage 9

Πορκίαν δὲ τὴν Βρούτου γυναῖκα Νικόλαος ὁ φιλόσοφος ἱστορεῖ καὶ Οὐαλέριος Μάξιμος βουλομένην ἀποθανεῖν, ὡς οὐδεὶς ἐπέτρεπε τῶν φίλων, ἀλλὰ προσέκειντο καὶ παρεφύλαττον, ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἀναρπάσασαν ἄνθρακας καταπιεῖν καὶ τὸ στόμα συγκλείσασαν καὶ μύσασαν οὕτω διαφθαρῆναι.

The Philosopher Nicolaos, and Valerius Maximus both narrate Porcia, wife of Brutus wanting to die, that none of her closest people would yield to it, but remained close and watched her. And so from the fire she snatched up coals, and let them slip down her mouth, and then shut them up [in her mouth], and

closed herself off [from others], and thus she destroyed herself.
(Plut. Brut. 53.4)

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1. All Translations of Plutarch are my own, taken from Loeb Classical Library’s editions of the Greek [↑](#footnote-ref-1)