

A PORTRAIT OF PLOTINUS

Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* is the earliest extant memoir of a philosopher by his pupil. Historians of philosophy have embraced it as a key to the intellectual development of Plotinus,¹ while historians of the third century have found it an invaluable supplement to the fragmentary records of this era.² Yet few have cared to read it as an original work of literature, or even as the mature work of a scholar and philosopher who for centuries eclipsed his master in influence, if not in reputation. In consequence, attention has not been paid to certain striking peculiarities in Porphyry's selection and arrangement of materials, which, if studied, will shed light on the form and purpose of the whole biography. This article is devoted to a strange chapter which, as in any ancient writing, we should expect to be the most instructive because it is the first.³

A literary life began conventionally, like a natural one, with the date and circumstances of the birth. Porphyry, however, shares the reticence of his master, who would not speak of his race or the time and place of his nativity;⁴ such details as are given of Plotinus' childhood occupy the third chapter, and follow the long description of his death. This, of course, is excellent Platonism: if philosophy is a preparative for death, then the philosopher's hour of dying will be the seal and vindication of his life.⁵ In his opening chapter Porphyry hints immediately at his reasons for avoiding the facts of genesis: Plotinus was 'ashamed to be in the body' (*VP* 1.1–2), preferring to abide, like a true philosopher, in a realm beyond sense and change.⁶ We may compare

¹ See e.g. J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent, 1913); R. Harder, 'Eine Neue Schrift Plotins', *Hermes* 64 (1936), 1–10; J. M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 2–20; J. Igal, *La Cronologia de la Vida de Plotino de Porfirio* (Deusto, 1972); M. J. Edwards, 'Two Episodes from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*', *Historia* 40 (1991), 456–64.

² See e.g. T. D. Barnes, 'The Chronology of Plotinus' Life', *GRBS* 17 (1976), 65–70; L. Brisson (ed.), *La Vie de Plotin: Travaux Préliminaires* (Paris, 1982); D. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1990), esp. p. 210 on the death of Gordian. L. de Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden, 1976), has fallen into unfortunate speculations, which he ought to have corrected by a perusal of the *Enneads*.

³ One illegitimate use of the chapter as historical evidence is illustrated by P. L'Orange, 'The Portrait of Plotinus', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 5 (1951), 15–30 and 'Plotinus-Paul', *Byzantion* 27 (1957), 473–86. L'Orange argues that a portrait from the third century must be a representation of Plotinus because of the obvious greatness of the subject's intellect, his 'transcendental gaze' and his oriental appearance. The first was not so obvious to all Plotinus' contemporaries as it is to us; the second may, like the brow of Mona Lisa, be a consequence of decay in the artist's materials; as for the third, I observe in the present article that we know nothing of Plotinus' origins, and it follows that we know nothing of his appearance.

⁴ Thus *VP* 1.1–4; 3.1–5. Eunapius, *Vitae Philosophorum* p. 455.32ff Boissonade, names Lyco (perhaps Lycopolis, as in the *Suda*?) as his birthplace, inspiring e.g. F. Zucker, 'Plotin und Lycopolis', *Sitzungsberichte der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst* (1950), pp. 3–20. But on the inaccuracy of Eunapius see R. Goulet, 'Variations Romanesques sur la Mélancolie de Porphyre', *Hermes* 110 (1982), 443–57.

⁵ See *Phaedo* 64a. On the importance of the deathbed see G. E. L. Owen, 'Philosophical Invective', *OSAP* 1 (1983), 12 and cf. *Phaedo* 59a. Porphyry, like Plato, is embarrassed by his absence from the deathbed of Plotinus (*VP* 11.18–19 etc.). There may be some assimilation of the death of Plotinus to that of Socrates if the snake who leaves the house on the arrival of the human doctor Eustochius (*VP* 2.25–30) is the god Asclepius (cf. *Phaedo* 118a for the dying philosopher's sacrifice to Asclepius, and Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* p. 24.11–14 Nauck for the attendance of a physician at the deathbed of Pythagoras).

⁶ Though other reasons for the concealment of the birthday are suggested by *VP* 10, in which a magician attempts to injure Plotinus through the power of the stars. Despite his eventual

the biographer of Plato who, in writing of his subject's birth, insists upon the distinction between true being and generation;⁷ but Porphyry was following no convention when he chose to give the painting of a picture the priority over every philosophical confrontation, every journey, every miracle and supernatural utterance, and even over the signal act of death.⁸

Ζωγράφου δὲ ἀνασχέσθαι ἢ πλαστοῦ τοσοῦτον ἀπηξίου ὥστε καὶ λέγειν πρὸς Ἀμέλιον δεόμενον εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι ἐπιτρέψαι· οὐ γὰρ ἀρκεῖ φέρειν ὃ ἡ φύσις εἰδῶλον ἡμῖν περιτέθεικεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰδῶλον εἰδῶλον συγχωρεῖν αὐτὸν ἀξιούν πολυχρονιώτερον καταλιπεῖν ὡς δὴ τι τῶν ἀξιοθεάτων ἔργων; Ὅθεν ἀπαγορεύοντος καὶ καθεδείσθαι ἔνεκα τούτου ἀρνούμενου ἔχων φίλον ὃ Ἀμέλιος Καρτέριον τὸν ἄριστον τῶν τότε γεγονότων ζωγράφων εἰσιέναι καὶ ἀπαντᾶν εἰς τὰς συνουσίας ποιήσας—ἐξῆν γὰρ τῷ βουλομένῳ φοιτᾶν εἰς τὰς συνουσίας—τὰς ἐκ τοῦ ὁρᾶν φαντασίας πληκτικωτέρας λαμβάνειν διὰ τῆς ἐπὶ πλέον προσοχῆς συνιθίσεν. Ἐπειτα γράφοντος ἐκ τοῦ τῇ μνημῇ ἐναποκειμένου ἰνδάλματος τὸ εἶκασμα καὶ συνδιωρθούντος εἰς ὁμοιότητα τὸ ἵχνος τοῦ Ἀμελίου εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι ἢ εὐφύια τοῦ Καρτερίου παρέσχεν ἀγνοούντος τοῦ Πλωτίνου ὁμοιοτάτην.

So far was he from agreeing to sit to a painter or sculptor that when Amelius asked him to allow a picture to be painted of him, he answered: 'Is it not enough that to carry about the simulacrum that nature has put around me, that you ask me also to consent to leave behind me a more enduring simulacrum of a simulacrum, as though it were some work for public show?' Since for this reason he declined the request, and refused to sit, Amelius caused one of his friends, Carterius, the most accomplished painter of all those living at the time, to come in and attend the lectures. (I should explain that the lectures were open to anyone who wished to enter.) Amelius accustomed him to acquire more lively visual impressions through increasingly frequent attendance. Then he drew an outline from the image which was implanted in his memory; Amelius helped him to correct the sketch to a truer likeness; finally the genius of Carterius produced the closest possible similitude without the knowledge of Plotinus (*VP* 1.4-19).

The importance of this episode will be obvious if we remember that the portrait in the ancient world, for its clients at least, was a means of avoiding posthumous obscurity. Portraiture competed with philosophy and biography for the distinction of bestowing immortality: philosophers could scorn it as a trifling substitute, but the biographer must take some pains to show the inferiority of this rival form of art. The portrait, I shall argue, is a symbol of the illusory world of sense above which Platonism strives to raise the soul; and, by showing the inadequacy of the portrait as a relic of the emancipated soul, Porphyry justifies his own temerity in the writing of the *Life*.⁹

ART, BIOGRAPHY AND COMMEMORATION

One cannot read very much Greek or Latin without encountering a reference to visual portraiture. Any Roman of a distinguished house would call the statues of his ancestors to support his claim to office;¹⁰ a city would put up statues of its great men,

denigration of astrology (*Enneads* II.2), Plotinus made a close study of horoscopes (*VP* 15.21-6) and celebrated the birthdays of Plato and Socrates (*VP* 2.37-42). He apparently did not believe, like Origen (*Hom. in Levit.* 8.3) that only the wicked know their birthdays.

⁷ Anonymi *Vita Platonis*, p. 6.12-15 Westermann; on records of the birth of Plato see A. Riginos, *Platonica* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 9-34.

⁸ Not at least a convention of biography, unless Plutarch's *Sulla* (noted below) be taken to imply one. The novel, perhaps a new genre of the imperial epoch, regularly opens with a picture or static scene (Longus, Achilles Tatius, Heliodorus).

⁹ Porphyry's edition of the *Enneads*, prepared some thirty years after Plotinus' death, may have had precursors and rivals. Eustochius was a much older friend of Plotinus and, as his doctor, an intimate: on his edition of the *Enneads* see now L. Brisson, 'Amélius, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa doctrine, sa style', *ANRW* II 36.2 (1987), 805-10.

¹⁰ See e.g. the scornful remarks of Marius at Sallust, *Jugurtha* 85 and Propertius I.5.24.

and could expect to be upbraided if it failed to preserve these relics;¹¹ the Emperor was visible throughout the world in statues, which were inviolable in his lifetime and a prey to victorious rivals after death.¹² The portrait was less costly and susceptible of translation to a number of different surfaces. The authority of the painter over his medium enabled him not only to inform the observer's memory, but to prevail upon his judgment: here, in the plastic element, the sitter is seen exactly as he wishes to be seen. Such was its power that, suitably attired in mythological insignia, a hero, saint or emperor might demand to be remembered as a god.¹³

Anyone who hoped to survive in monuments was appealing to the goodwill of the public, and under the Roman Empire the opinion of the public was divided. On the one hand, the orator Dio Chrysostom (c. 45–c. 110), himself a candidate for immortality in a different art,¹⁴ laments the indignities that the careless Rhodians have inflicted on their statues:

Men need garlands and images, respect and commemoration. And many before now have died for this, to acquire a statue and public mention, or some other honour, and to leave to those after them a distinguished name and memory of themselves (*Oratio* 31.16).

On the other hand, the Christian Athenagoras (fl. 176 A.D.) mocks the images of pagan wonder-workers, which, being only memorials of dead men, cannot match the power of the resurrected Christ:

Troas has a statue of Neryllinus—one of our own contemporaries!—and Parium of Alexander [of Abonutichus] and [Peregrinus] Proteus. And the other images of Neryllinus are public ornaments, if such things can be said to adorn a city; and one of them is thought to give oracles and heal the sick. The people of Troas sacrifice to these images, anoint them and crown them with gold (*Legatio ad Graecos* 26.3).

Neryllinus, Alexander and Proteus were the butts of Athenagoras; but, since one was a false diviner and the other a versatile charlatan, they suffered even more at the hands of Lucian, a fellow-Greek.¹⁵ Had there been a Lucian in the third century, equally ill-disposed to all philosophers, he might have scoffed at Plotinus, or at least at his admirers. Plotinus has been claimed as the original of at least one surviving portrait of the era, and Eunapius, who inflates his reputation while showing little knowledge of him, boasts that his altars were still being kindled a century after his death.¹⁶

If Porphyry takes sides in this debate with Athenagoras, as he does in his opening chapter, the reasons are that he is a biographer and that his subject is Plotinus. The literary tradition held that writing, though inadequate, was always a better medium

¹¹ See e.g. the *Rhodiacus* of Dio Chrysostom, quoted below.

¹² See e.g. F. Millar, 'The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions', *Entretiens Hardt* 22: *Culte des Souverains* (Geneva, 1972), 148–75 on the statue in the Imperial cult, and on its importance to the Christians as a symbol of worldly depravity.

¹³ See P. L'Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture* (Oslo, 1947); P. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 12–16 on physiognomy in political biography.

¹⁴ On Dio's speech to the Rhodians see C. P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 26–35, where the purpose of the speech is deemed to be rather ethical than political, though it is not entirely devoid of political significance.

¹⁵ For the reputation of Proteus see also Lucian, *Fugitivi* 1ff, *Peregrinus* 5–6 and 15, *Demonax* 21; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 25.1; Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 4.5; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* VIII.3, XII.11; Philostratus, *Vitae Sophistarum* II.1.33. Of the pagans only Aulus Gellius fails to disown him.

¹⁶ Quoted in Bidez (op. cit. no. 1), Appendix III, p. 47.7; for other examples of altars raised to men see Aristotle Fr. 673 Rose and Virgil, *Eclogues* I.7–8.

than painting for the representation of the inward character; Platonism had always held that painting was a veil between the philosopher and his object, which was to see, to comprehend and to be at one with the divine.

There was an old convention in ancient writing of protesting that the portrait, as a means of representation, was inferior to the pen. The most important duty to the dead is the commemoration of virtue, and how can the virtues even of the greatest men be apparent in their bodies? The celebrated epilogue to the *Agricola* of Tacitus (c. 100 A.D.) insists that only the mind can represent the inner man, and thus enable us, by our actions, to immortalise the qualities that time has snatched away from mortal eyes:

Let us decorate you with admiration rather than with temporal praises, and, if nature will allow, by imitation. This is genuine honour, this is the devotion required of all one's nearest kin. This too I would enjoin upon your daughter and your wife: to so revere the memory of a father, of a husband, that, meditating inwardly on all his acts and words, they may embrace the form and figure, not of his body, but of his mind (*Agricola* 46.2–3).

The body being unworthy of veneration, it is necessary to hand down some depiction of the character, and this, of course, would be beyond the capacity of a visible simulacrum. The only true homage is to become oneself a walking likeness; but how are those who undertake this service to remain mindful of the traits to be imitated? In this peroration the biographer of Agricola writes the apology for his book.

Plutarch (c. 45–c. 120 A.D.) remarks near the beginning of one biography that even the physical traits of his subject cannot be fully revealed by an effigy:¹⁷

As to [Sulla's] body, the rest of his appearance is visible in his statues, but the colouring of his visage made still more terrible the harsh and untempered lustre of his eyes (*Sulla* 2).

By noting the defects of the image, Plutarch has corrected them. Here too it is evident that the solicitude of a writer for the accurate representation of his subject may be also an advertisement for himself. This is not a weakness only in biographers; for every author has his share of vanity, and any didactic treatise which alluded to the visual arts was likely to assert the superiority of the author's own profession. Dio Chrysostom—a champion of statues, as we saw, in his Rhodian speech—puts the case for Phidias with the irony of a practised rhetorician (*Orations* 12). In this treatise Phidias, the great sculptor of the Periclean age, is accused of having failed to give an adequate representation of Zeus in his celebrated statue at Olympia. In reply he confesses himself inferior to the poets, since he cannot create a form of unlimited magnitude; yet even the ingenuity of Homer, he tells his audience, is not equal to the dignity of an Olympian. The result is more satisfactory for artists than to poets, but it is best of all for Dio, since Phidias acquits himself by a speech and not a painting, and it would therefore seem that the verdict on an artist is to lie with connoisseurs of the spoken word:

'I for my part would not admit that any man has exceeded me in technical ability, but no man should compare himself to Zeus, who made the whole world.' It seems to me that when Phidias spoke thus in his own defence, the Greeks would have acted rightly had they repaid him with a crown (*Oration* 12.83–4).

¹⁷ For comments on *Moralia* 17f and 346f see G. Zanker, 'Enargeia in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry', *RhMus* 124 (1981), 297–311, esp. 311, J. M. Mossman, 'Plutarch's use of Statues', in *Georgica: Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell*, *BICS Supplement* 58 (1991), 98–119 is the only article known to me which attempts a comprehensive survey of Plutarch's use of statues in biography.

Many authors wrote in defence of images, and especially of divine ones: Porphyry's *De Statuis*, now surviving only in fragments, has its prototype in an extant work by an essayist of the second-century, Maximus of Tyre.¹⁸ The vindication, however, is a literary exercise: the writer can assume that the visual arts are always on trial, while the reputation of authors is secure. The following passage of Cicero (106–43 B.C.) is often advanced as a proof that some philosophers had conceived a higher esteem for the plastic arts:¹⁹

And so it is that, even though there is nothing in their own kind that is more perfect than the images of Phidias and those pictures that I have mentioned, we can imagine ones more beautiful. Yet even that artisan, when he was shaping the form of Jupiter or Minerva, did not have anyone before his eyes as a model for his likeness, but a certain outstanding apparition of beauty occupied his mind, fixing his gaze on which he directed his art and its hand to make its likeness (*Orator* 8–9).

Cicero pays a compliment to Phidias, and a double compliment to his own profession. Not only is the true orator, as the mind conceives him, a goal of emulation; it is only through the statements of the true orator that he is adequately conceived. Phidias was endowed with uncommon powers of imagination, but these did not suffice to impress his vision on the stone. The writer is under less of an impediment, since words are the proper vehicle for thoughts, and so the author of the *Orator* is confiding in the power of a book to set before the intellect that Idea of perfect eloquence which our ears desire in vain (*Orator* 9).

Thus Porphyry is setting out to create a more enduring and more faithful representation of his master than the highest powers of the artist could have fashioned. Just so, in his *De Statuis*, he began with the observation that the image cannot manifest the true features of its subject;²⁰ he is speaking of sacred images, but as we shall see, the Platonist makes frequent use of images from craftsmanship to describe his imitation of the gods.

PLATONISM AND THE HUMAN DEMIURGE

To take the world of transitory phenomena for the real one is to live with an illusion; of all illusions the most remote from truth is the imitation of this transitory universe in art. This is the crux of Plato's denunciation of the artist as the man who makes the shadow of a copy of a form:²¹

'What then is the carpenter? Is he not the creator of a bed?' 'Yes' 'And is the painter also the creator and author of such a thing?' 'Not at all.' 'But then what will you call him in relation to the bed?' 'This', said he, 'appears to me the most appropriate name for him, an imitator of that which they create.' 'So, then' said I, 'you give the name imitator, to the maker of the third in descent from nature [i.e. the Form]?' 'Absolutely' (*Republic* 597d–e).

¹⁸ Maximus of Tyre, *Philosophumena* II Hobein. In his fifth discourse the same essayist defends the poets against the more austere of the theologians, and at IX.7i he claims to have seen Asclepius and Heracles. For the *De Statuis* see Appendix I to Bidez (1913), pp. 1–23. On the representation of gods in dreams and statuary see R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth, 1986), pp. 102–67.

¹⁹ So G. Watson, 'Discovering the Imagination: Platonists and Stoics on *phantasia*', in J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long (edd.), *The Question of Eclecticism* (California, 1988), pp. 211–12. The theory may call for support upon J. M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977) pp. 91–6, who maintains that for Antiochus of Ascalon, Cicero's master, the Ideas were immanent in the observing mind. The contrast between *phantasia* and *mimesis*, decided in favour of *phantasia*, in Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* VI.19, may also be compared, though the relation between Porphyry and Philostratus is obscure.

²⁰ See pp. 1–3 Bidez.

²¹ On *Republic* X and the consistency of Plato's aesthetic theory see e.g. A. Nehamas, 'Plato on Imitation and Poetry in *Republic* 10', in J. Moravcsik and P. Temko (edd.), *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom and the Arts* (Totowa, NJ, 1982), pp. 000.

The dialogue from which these words are taken is the *Republic*, in which Socrates shapes in words the perfect image of a city. He does not pretend that this city can exist outside the mind of the philosopher,²² but in another dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, the philosopher in love is represented as a sculptor, who works on the beloved with benevolent and visible effect:²³

But when the new initiate, who has seen much of [the mysteries], beholds a godlike face or a certain human form that finely imitates beauty, first he shudders and some of the fears he experienced then come over him, then gazing he reveres it as a god, and were he not afraid that he would be thought a total madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as if to a statue and a god (*Phaedrus* 251a).

Each one selects a love from the fair according to his character, and as though this one were himself a god, he fashions and adorns him like a statue, as though to honour and adore him (*Phaedrus* 252d).

The philosopher, in this famous myth, is striving to reproduce in his beloved the eternal and perfect beauty which his soul discerned in a timeless realm before it fell to its present earthbound state. Plato assumes (for the purposes of metaphor) that the artist can portray the form of a deity, but we are not told how he perceives the original. Does he, like the philosopher, apprehend the celestial paradigm,²⁴ the ideal form, that eludes the untutored eye? While this was the theory of Plotinus, as we shall see, we have no reason to attribute it to Plato; it is, after all, the philosophic lover, a craftsman not in stone but in the spirit, who is the subject of the second passage quoted from the *Phaedrus*.²⁵ The myth of the *Timaeus*, perhaps one of Plato's latest dialogues, implies that the only mind to which the paradigms are visible is God's:

This, again, we must ask concerning the world, which paradigm its artisan took for its model, that which always exists in a certain mode and in the same respects, or that which comes into being. Now if this world is beautiful and its creator good, it is obvious that he looked toward the eternal one; but if that is true which is not even lawful for anyone to utter, he looked toward that which comes into being. But to everyone it is clear that he looked toward the eternal one (*Timaeus* 29a).

The human demiurge, we gather from Plato, is no philosopher, for while he can produce a deceitful copy of the visible, he cannot grasp the intelligible form. On earth the true creator is the philosopher, and his matter is the soul of his disciple; fashioning his beloved in imitation of a recollected beauty, the philosopher can do in part what God has accomplished perfectly, and the artist only in seeming. Inspired by the recollection of supernal beauty, the art of the philosopher has for its object not the concrete but the ideal, and for its substrate no material but the soul.

²² *Rep.* 592a; see further C. Osborne, 'The Repudiation of Representation in Plato's *Republic* and its Repercussions', *PCPhS* 33 (1987), 53–73, esp. 70–71.

²³ Cf. *Gorgias* 254e–255b on rhetoric as the demiurge of the plausible, unfavourably contrasted with the other crafts, see *Gorgias* 254e–255b.

²⁴ On the use and criticism of the notion of Forms as paradigms in Plato see G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato on the Undepictable', *Phronesis* suppl. vol. 1 (1973), 349–61.

²⁵ On the *Phaedrus* as an essay in self-knowledge see 230a and C. L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven, 1986). As M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 200–233 observes, this dialogue reverses the assumptions of the *Symposium*, in which the only love is that of the lower for the higher. Her account, however, seems to me inadequate, since she does not observe that this is merely a different form of a question which pervades the major dialogues: thus the difficulty to which the *Timaeus* responds is that of explaining why and how the beauty of the noetic realm imparts itself to matter, and the *Republic* asks how the man who is once illuminated can be induced to return for the good of his fellows in the Cave.

When Porphyry starts by warning us to ignore a man's exterior he is following the example of his teacher. In *Enneads* I.6, the first in chronological sequence,²⁶ Plotinus states that, while the perception of sensible objects may reveal the *ἵχνη* or vestiges of beauty (I.6.2.9), the only source, the unifying principle, of this beauty lies elsewhere. Therefore we must forsake these shadowy vestiges (I.6.8.7), and the soul must fashion herself into that form which truly belongs to her, that form in which she is naturally fitted to behold the ideal realm (I.6.9.30ff). She must possess herself in her nakedness, stripping off the adventitious properties of the body as a sculptor pares away the redundant matter which hides the statue in the stone:²⁷

And if you do not yet perceive yourself to be beautiful, act like the maker of a statue which it is his duty to render beautiful. He cuts away this and polishes that; he makes this smooth and that clean; and finally he brings to light the beautiful face in the statue. In the same way you must pare away whatever is excessive and make straight whatever is crooked; whatever is dark, work upon it until it is clean and brilliant, and do not rest from chiselling your own statue, until you see shine forth the divine radiance of virtue, until you see Modesty fixed upon the pedestal (*Enneads* I.6.9.7–15).

The simile of Modesty on her pedestal is derived from Plato's *Phaedrus* (254b),²⁸ in which the lover is said to be restrained in his pursuit by the recollection of this virtue as she was seen enthroned above. Plotinus, however, has made the artist the subject of his own sculpture, and surely not in error, but advisedly. For while he allows, with Plato, that a soul may learn to apprehend the Good through its cognizance of the Beautiful, he insists that the Good is prior, and warns that if an untutored soul should come upon the Beautiful unsuspectingly, it will be overcome with passion and dismay.²⁹ As for the charm of bodies, he maintains that this is the bait that has trapped the Gnostics;³⁰ such men pursue a 'shadow of a shadow' (*εἰδῶλον εἰδῶλου*), a phrase that uses Plato's vocabulary and which, when it recurs in the opening chapter of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, is as likely to be authentic as any utterance ascribed to him in this work.³¹

All beauty of the visible, at worst meretricious, is at best unfruitful. Some statues, it is conceded, have a vivacity that pleases (*Enneads* VI.7.22), and the image of a figure in a glass or pool is revealing in so far as we can infer from it the continuing existence of its original. The product of the graphic arts, however, the painting or the statue which may well survive its archetype, is an idol, not an icon: it is not the mirrored image of the living, but the shadow of the dead.³²

²⁶ Porphyry, *VP* 4.23. Harder (art. cit. n. 1) produced the conclusive proof that Porphyry's order is the right one.

²⁷ A. H. Armstrong *ad loc.* (ed. and trans., London and Cambridge, MA, 1966) observes that 'chiselling your own statue' is a reference to *Phaedrus* 252d.

²⁸ For commentary see R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 107–9.

²⁹ See esp. *Enneads* V.5.12; Rist (op. cit. n. 1) pp. 53–66; Armstrong, *ad loc.* On the inferiority of the Beautiful to the Good see *Enneads* I.6.9; F. D. White, 'Love and Beauty in Plato's *Symposium*', *JHS* 109 (1989), 149–57; A. Meredith, 'The Good and the Beautiful in Gregory of Nyssa', in H. Eisenberger (ed.) *HERMENEUMATA: Festschrift Hörner* (Heidelberg, 1990); M. J. Edwards, 'Middle Platonism on the Beautiful and the Good', *Mnemosyne* 44 (1991), 161–7.

³⁰ *Enneads* II.9.17.27, and perhaps *Enneads* I.6.8.

³¹ The argument that the painter creates the copy of a copy (though not the phrase *eidōlon eidōlou*) is found at *Rep.* 597a–598a. A parallel to this passage in *VP* is found in the *Acts of John* 27–9, where a portrait of the Apostle, secretly painted, causes great surprise to the subject, who has never seen his own face. The two works may be roughly contemporary.

³² A thought as old as Pindar, *Nemean* V.1–4, On the famous maxim of Simonides, that painting is silent poetry and the poem a speaking picture, see Zanker (art. cit. n. 17), 311; on the verisimilitude of silent images see the remarks of the loquacious women in Herodas, *Mime* IV and Theocritus, *Idyll* XV.78–83, with A. H. Armstrong, 'Platonic Mirrors', *Eranos Jahrbuch* 55 (1988), 147–81, esp. 152–3.

Nevertheless, there are those who maintain that Plotinus was more generous to the demiurgic faculty than Plato,³³ and *Enneads* V.8.1 is too often alleged as though it were a Platonist's apology for the arts. Plotinus indeed allows that nature herself is an imitator and that Phidias did not derive his image of Zeus from any sensible object; but he also declares that if the artist has formed a mental image of the ideal, he would do better to retain it than to translate it into the less veracious medium of stone:

This form the matter itself did not possess, but before it entered the matter it was in the conceiving mind. It was in the craftsman, not insofar as he possessed hands and eyes, but insofar as he had a share in art. But indeed, that beauty was far better in the art; for it was not that beauty which resided in the art that was translated into the stone, for that remained, and what entered the stone was beauty of an inferior kind, though proceeding from the art (*Enneads* V.8.1).

To speak more kindly of the plastic arts would have been not merely to modify but to renounce his Platonism. For anyone who adhered to that school in late antiquity, matter was the formless half-reality at the vanishing-point of truth and understanding. The contents of the mind are pure activity, which is to say that all their properties belong to them by virtue of their essence. The Good, the True and the Beautiful are by logic and necessity what they are. Matter, on the other hand, is mere potentiality: such properties as it has, though it derives them from those entities which possess them absolutely and eternally, are temporary, contingent and defeasible, expressing not the attributes intrinsic to its nature (for it has none), but those which it has transiently acquired through its unlimited capacity to receive.³⁴

The purpose of philosophy is to unite oneself with the objects of the intellect, and even at last with the One that is above all intellection, so that thinker, thought and the object of the thought are all a unity. In this state of union, awareness is suspended, not only of things without the mind, but even of mind itself. The plastic form created by the artist, on the other hand, cannot but be external to the mind, and rests in a medium whose compliant transformations merely illustrate its distance from reality. In moulding these, the reason becomes discursive, not contemplative, seeking knowledge only by analogy and inference, and endeavouring to express in rigid signs the results of an intuition to which neither common utterance nor common understanding can aspire.

Thus Porphyry has embarked on the *Life of Plotinus* with an anecdote that characterizes his master, his philosophy and the importance of his task. He too, in his *Sententiae*, alludes to the work of Phidias, on whom he holds a philosopher's opinion (p. 37.18, Lamberz); it is by the imitation of great philosophers that the soul escapes from pleasures to which the artist would enslave her, and the form to be imitated is most suitably represented, not by a picture, but in words.

INADEQUATE SUBSTITUTES

The presence of Carterius in the seminars is felt to require a little explanation. He is indeed distinguished by *εὐφροσύνη*. The *Definitions* attributed to Plato define this quality as a natural quickness in learning (413d). It is frequently a property of artists; thus

³³ See A. M. Rich, 'Plotinus and the Theory of Artistic Imitation', *Mnemosyne* 13 (1960), 233-9; Osborne (art. cit. n. 21) 63-4.

³⁴ Notwithstanding the sarcasms of Plato at *Rep.* 596c, the *Enneads* use the action of a mirror as a simile for the representation of the Forms in matter: see A. N. Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One* (Toronto, 1967), F. M. Schroeder, 'Representation and Reflection in Plotinus', *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 37-60; Armstrong (art. cit. n. 32).

Aristotle observes that it is the only teacher of metaphor at *Poetics* 1459a6. The leitmotif of the *Life of Plotinus*, however, is that natural qualities are not sufficient to make a philosopher. Since being an artist is no proof of wisdom, we might wonder whether Carterius was qualified to take lessons with Plotinus, and Porphyry feels the need of a parenthesis to inform us that the lessons were open to all.

Carterius is able to perfect the likeness once he is in receipt of lively impressions or *phantasiai*. *Phantasia* stands here for the impression on the senses made by the faculty which translates the visual symbols into judgments, but cannot rise to the steadfast contemplation of the intellectual forms. In Porphyry and Plotinus the word more usually denotes the faculty—an important one, since if the soul had not the power of judging it would lack the power to act. Yet though it cannot fail to partake of intellect in some degree, *phantasia* stands to intellect as opinion stands to knowledge, and its impact on the soul is even deprecated in one place as ‘a stroke of the irrational from without’.³⁵ The *phantasma* which is its product is constitutive of memory, and it is evident (though Plotinus does not say as much) that only the retention of such images in the mind of the beholder can give rise to mimetic art.

Was it this capacity in Phidias which enabled him to conceive the invisible majesty of Zeus? There are indeed some passages of the *Enneads* in which the word denotes the higher faculty which we call the Imagination;³⁶ but these are sparse, and render the word equivocal without creating any doubt of its meaning in the majority of its uses, least of all its meaning in this chapter of the *Life*. The usual assumption, in both Porphyry and Plotinus, is that *phantasia* is engendered, even when not immediately occasioned, by the impression of an object on our senses. For this philosopher, as for most who wrote before or after him, *phantasia* in the soul is something less than the intuition of a form.

Porphyry distinguishes *phantasia* from intellect at *Sententiae* p. 55.6ff Lamberz: it differs in that it is concerned entirely with things external and does not perceive by retiring into itself.³⁷ The object of *phantasia* is the body; the subject of *phantasia* is the soul that has descended from the immaterial realm to the material, and has not yet been restored to its primal state of intellectual contemplation. Granted that *phantasia* is of some use to the philosopher in his sublunary condition, since neither God nor common things can be apprehended without it, it is none the less a faculty that the freed soul leaves behind in her ascent.

We have no reason to think Carterius capable of such a judicious exercise of his powers. He is said to wait for impressions that are ‘more striking’ (πληκτικωτέρας). *Ekplēxis* is a technical word in philosophy which signifies the propensity of some

³⁵ See G. Watson, *Phantasia in Classical Thought* (Galway, 1988), pp. 98–133. For *phantasia* as occurring in the soul see *Enneads* III.6.4.19. On the irrationality of *phantasia* see *Enneads* I.8.15.18; Watson, op. cit. pp. 98–99. On the liability to error of the perceiving faculty see *Enneads* I.1.9.10–12 and H. J. Blumenthal, *The Psychology of Plotinus* (The Hague, 1971), p. 106. A remark on the distinction between the exercise of *phantasia* and of the intellect occurred at an early point in Damascius’ *Vita Isidori* (sec. 13 in Photius’ summary).

³⁶ See J. M. Dillon, ‘Plotinus and the Transcendental Imagination’, in J. P. Mackey (ed.), *Religious Imagination* (Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 58–64.

³⁷ Cf. G. Watson (op. cit. n. 35), p. 103, citing *Enneads* VI.8.3.10ff, where Plotinus ‘understands *phantasia* mainly to mean that which is stirred up by the affections of the body’. See J. Bregmann, *Synesius of Cyrene* (Berkeley, 1982) 145–54 for discussion of a treatise *On Dreams* containing a more favourable account of *phantasia*, whose traces may be embedded in the work of that name by Synesius. He argues that the Christian dilettante was indebted to the discussion of the impressions which the soul retains in its earthly abode at *Sententiae* pp. 17.11–20.6 Lamberz. Cf. Watson, op. cit., pp. 107–116.

outward force or object to confound or startle the mind.³⁸ In the earliest treatise of Plotinus, a 'sweet *ekplēxis*' is the first sign of the soul's attraction to the spectacle of intelligible beauty (I.6.4.13 and 16, 7.14, 7.17), but in three consecutive works of his maturity (III.6.4.18, V.8.11.27, V.5.12.35) the term denotes the affliction which the soul incurs through ignorance or disease. The adjective in Porphyry may convey both that Plotinus could exert a striking effect upon all spectators, and that the effect upon Carterius, the mere artist, was the same that beauty has upon the uninstructed mind.

Carterius commences with the adumbration, the *ἔχθος* of his subject, and completes the sketch with hues that have been implanted in his intellect by *phantasia*. His art is thus a parody of the philosopher's ascent to vision: this begins with vestiges or *ἔχνη* and proceeds (at least in Porphyry's view) through the common apprehension by *phantasia* of the forms of outward things.³⁹ But whereas the philosopher will attain to a higher plane of intellection that annihilates the difference between the mind and its objects, Castrius can but falsify his vision by investing it with the spurious clarity of the artist's line.

It must be said that, if Porphyry strikes a hard blow at the artists in this chapter, he exposes himself to a harder one. When the book is likened to a picture in the *Phaedrus*, Plato is not implying that a book can be as vivid as a picture, but that, even in the hand of a philosopher, the pen must be as dumb as the artist's brush:

For it somehow seems, *Phaedrus*, that writing has this marvellous defect, in which it truly resembles painting. For the progeny of painting stand like living things, but if one asks them a question they are dumb; and so it is also with words (*Phaedrus* 275d).

Plotinus, who wrote nothing until he was forty, nor with care at any time, no doubt agreed with Socrates; but Porphyry, who was full of books and eager to inspire them, would have known that when he mocked the painter's copy of the living, he was also raising questions as to the value of his equally silent portrait of the dead. He might have replied that, once the subject vanishes, the shadow is better than nothing, and that Plato was prepared to write the *Phaedrus* for all his strictures on the book.

He can prove at least that he out-performed his rivals, both in rendering Plotinus' life and in editing his thoughts. One figure introduced to us in this prologue, who gains little credit from his first appearance, is Amelius,⁴⁰ at one time the most eminent adherent of Plotinus' school in Rome. Amelius is portrayed throughout the biography as one who, while he followed in the footsteps of his master (20.76ff), and was a worthy champion against all detractors, never attained to a perfect understanding of his mind. He incurred a strong rebuke when he invited his vegetarian master to one of the public festivals; Porphyry records (though he does not profess to understand) the answer of Plotinus: 'the gods should come to me, not I to them' (*VP* 10.35). As has been observed above, portraiture is another human rite which falsely pretends to admit a mortal to the company of the gods.

The picture was not the only representation of Plotinus that Amelius prepared in a clandestine and slipshod manner. The copies of the lectures that he presented to

³⁸ The corresponding verb describes the impact on the soul of physical beauty at *Phaedrus* 250a and 254b. For the association of the word with tragedy see *Phaedrus* 268c and Aristotle, *Poetics* 1455a and 1456b. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.2.3 represents *ekplēxis* as an affection of the fallen creative principle, the mother of the Demiurge, in the system of the heretic Valentinus.

³⁹ At *Sententiae* p. 54.17ff the ascent by way of the senses and *phantasia* to a pure intuition of *nous* is described by the verb *anichneuein*. Cf. *De Antro*, p. 58.15 and Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8.11.17. Cox (op. cit. n. 13), pp. 121–31 divines the importance of the footprint as an image in *VP*, though I confess that I find much of her exegesis whimsical.

⁴⁰ On Amelius and his relation to Porphyry see Brisson (art. cit. n. 9).

Longinus he did not correct, and thus the great critic formed erroneous notions of their content (19.22ff, 20.5). If Porphyry will not accuse his colleague of inaccuracy (21.7ff), he at least observes that his transcripts, like the picture, were made without the lecturer's assistance and consent:

Making notes from the seminars of Plotinus, he put together about a hundred books of them, and donated them to Ustillianus Hesychius the Apamean, whom he adopted as his son (*VP* 3.46–8).

The tacit depreciation of Amelius in the first chapter thus anticipates a persistent criticism: it is not enough to have studied with Plotinus if one retains a preoccupation with externals. It would be a mistake, however, to see this chapter only as a satire on Amelius, since its strictures on the visual arts are based, not on personal rivalry, but on ancient and familiar principles. Carterius is the more prominent figure, specially introduced as the embodiment of a vulgar curiosity that is enamoured of, and rapidly contented with, the apparent mastery of what it sees.

Porphyry can at least escape the imputation of stealing and of haste. His biography, written some thirty years after his master's death,⁴¹ vouchsafes to the public only what Plotinus had elected to make available—his *Enneads*, his considered replies to pupils and the merits of his life. Porphyry is the rival of Carterius as an artist and of Amelius as a philosopher. He therefore aims to show that his biography, and this alone, is the image of Plotinus. Of course, it is itself a mere *eidōlon* in comparison with the soul of the great philosopher, or even with the souls of those disciples who aspire, with the example of Plotinus and the help of his biographer, to fashion their lives and characters into an image of the Good.

New College, Oxford

M. J. EDWARDS

⁴¹ *VP* 23.13 and Igal (op. cit. n. 1), p. 121. It may not be unimportant that Porphyry had by this point reached his master's age at death.