Biography as Self-Promotion: Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*

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Porphyry (234–305 CE) was the student of the Neoplatonist Plotinus (204/5–270 CE). A Neoplatonic philosopher in his own right, Porphyry also published Plotinus' *Enneads* after the latter's death and appended to them the *Vita Plotini*. Porphyry's composition of the *Vita* fulfills many purposes, among which is the desire to portray Plotinus as a philosopher and teacher *par excellence* and as a *theios aner*, a holy man with a hint of supernatural powers and a healthy dose of asceticism.[1] In a recent *ANRW* volume, Schroeder has argued that Porphyry also had another motive: to secure his place in the Plotinian succession.[2] It is in this light that I propose to examine and

1. Porphyry begins at once, in *Vit. Plot*. 1 emphasizing his unusual philosophical temperament. Plotinus was the single most important philosopher of the day and was ashamed of being in a body: Πλωτῖνος ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς γεγονὼς φιλόσοφος ἐώκει μὲν αἰσχυνομένῳ ὅτι ἐν σώματι εἴη. He refused to have an image made of himself (forcing Amelius to resort to subterfuge to have one made). In chapter 2, we learn of his equanimity in death, refusing healthful enemas and medicines that contained animal matter; in chapter 8 that he ate and slept little. As for his role as nourishing teacher, we learn in chapter 7 the effect he had on his students, all of whom learned much from him and were devoted to him. In chapter 13, we hear how Plotinus's face radiated when he taught and how he combined gentleness. (τὸ προσηνές) and vigor (τὸ εὔτονον) in his replies to questions. Indeed in the same chapter comes the tale of his three-day discussion with Porphyry of the soul's connection to the body. In chapter 14, Porphyry expatiates on Plotinus' learnedness, from Aristotle through the Middle Platonists. As for Plotinus' divine qualities, see chapter 10 (Olympius' failed magical attack, and an unnamed Egyptian's discovery that in place of a guardian δαίμων Plotinus possessed a god) and chapter 22 (Apollo's 51-line hexameter poem on the glorious afterlife for Plotinus' soul). On this topic, see also H.D. Saffrey, "Pourquoi Porphyre a-t-il édité Plotin?" in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin*, vol. 2, ed. L. Brisson *et al.* (Paris, 1992) 31–64. Saffrey thinks that Porphyry composed the *Vita* in order to "présenter son maître comme une lumière pour les générations à venir" (32) and "montrer la qualité exceptionnelle de Plotin comme professeur de philosophie, qui l'a conduit à la divinisation" (33).

2. F.M. Schroeder, "Ammonius Saccas," *ANRW* 36.1 (1987): 493–526. As evidence for Porphyry's concern for "a struggle for succession (διαδοχή)," Schroeder cites Porphyry's late arrival at Plotinus' school and "his consistent and self-conscious use of the first-person pronoun to intensify his own name" (518). Schroeder then discusses the possibility that the oath of Plotinus, Origen, and Erennius not to divulge the doctrines of Ammonius (*Vit. Plot*. 3) was concocted by Porphyry, allowing him to claim knowledge of the earlier life of Plotinus (518–20).

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interpret the *Vita*. I intend to show that Porphyry, who came late to Plotinus' school, was in competition with Plotinus' top pupil Amelius and used the *Vita* to promote himself, at the expense of Amelius, as the true successor to the philosophy of Plotinus.

Before I begin, let me make one point about the rhetorical background of Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*. As recent works by Patricia Cox, Gillian Clark, and Mark Edwards have shown,[3] there is a real and definite correspondence between biography and Panegyric. Following the principles of Hermogenes and Menander Rhetor, Porphyry clearly intends to praise Plotinus and his way of life. His purpose is propaedeutic, leading the reader to adopt the Plotinian philosophy in part because Plotinus is a man worthy of emulation. I am, however, proposing a second purpose ensconced in the *Vita*. This purpose is more hidden but no less real and important to Porphyry, for it involves the succession of Plotinus' philosophical line. Then as now, students fought to lay claim to the magisterial authority of their teachers. Porphyry's problem lay in defeating Amelius' claim.

Amelius came to Rome to study with Plotinus in 245/6 and remained with him until 269, a period of twenty-four years.[4] During this time Amelius, even by Porphyry's own evidence, showed himself to be Plotinus' best student. Porphyry, by contrast, arrived in 263 and stayed with Plotinus until 269. It would seem therefore that if any student of Plotinus had claim to the title of "successor," it would have been Amelius and not Porphyry. Yet it was Porphyry who undertook the task of editing and publishing Plotinus' works. Clearly some explanation was called for, and Porphyry provides it in the *Vita*.

Never in the *Vita* does Porphyry openly attack Amelius. In fact, a cursory reading will suggest that Porphyry is deferential to him. A more careful reading, however, shows that there is an ongoing comparison taking place between the two philosophers, and that Amelius invariably comes up short. Although Porphyry had a rhetorical basis for using biography to praise its subject, he is progressing into *terra incognita* when he uses biography to praise himself at the expense of his rival. Porphyry had access to the "figured problem" of the rhetoricians, in which orators would ostensibly argue for one point while actually arguing for another. Handbooks do discuss ways of discrediting an opponent in forensic speech, but these ways are not directly applicable to praise literature. Aristotle, for instance, at *Rhetoric* 3.15, 1416b4–8, says:

3. See P. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, 1983) chapter 5; G. Clark, "Philosophic Lives and the Philosophic Life: Porphyry and Iamblichus," in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (Berkeley, 2000) 29–51; and M.J. Edwards, "Birth, Death, and Divinity in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*," also in *Greek Biography and Panegyric* 52–71.

4. On the philosophy of Amelius, see L. Brisson's "Prosopographie," in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin*, vol. 1, ed. L. Brisson *et al.* (Paris, 1992) 65–69.

> Another way of attacking an accuser is greatly to praise a small character trait but then concisely to reproach a great one, or after having put forward many good traits to reproach the one that is conducive to the case at hand. Such are the most skilful and unjust [detractors], for they undertake to harm the good by mixing good and bad traits.

Other methods may be found in the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, such as at 1441b16–18, 19–23, 24–25:

> You should not mock the one whom you are discrediting, but rather discuss his life, for [such] words persuade listeners more than mocking does …. Guard against calling shameful acts by shameful names lest you attack his character, but rather discuss such matters riddlingly (αἰνιγματωδῶς) …. You should use irony when discrediting a person.

Porphyry skillfully made use of such rhetorical precepts but transformed them for use in the *Vita*. The result is more subtle than the methods suggested in the handbooks.

Porphyry's rhetorical strategy appears immediately in chapter 2 of the *Vita*. He refers to himself, with his usual use of the pronoun ἐγώ, which adds an impression of authority to his words and a sense of his omnipresence (2.31–32).[5]

> Τελευτῶντι δὲ αὐτῷ ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ Πορφύριος ἐτύγχανον ἐν Λιλυβαίῳ, διατρίβων, Ἀμέλιος δὲ ἐν Ἀπαμείᾳ τῆς Συρίας, Καστρίκιος δὲ ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ· μόνος δὲ παρῆν ὁ Εὐσστόχιος.
>
> While he [i.e., Plotinus] was dying, I Porphyry happened to be spending time at Lilybaeum. Amelius was in Apamea in Syria. Castricius was in Rome. Eustochius alone was present.

Plotinus, who was suffering terribly, had left Rome for the Campanian villa of Zethus, a deceased friend. His disease, possibly diphtheria or tuberculosis,[6] meant that Plotinus was highly contagious and that no one visited him, except the doctor Eustochius, who arrived just as Plotinus died. At this point, Porphyry informs us that he was in Sicily, that Amelius was in Syria, and that Castricius[7] was in Rome. Thus, no one except Eustochius—not even Amelius—was with Plotinus, and no fault can attach thereby to Porphyry. Another point to notice is that the Plotinian circle now consists of four people: Porphyry, Amelius, Castricius, and Eustochius. Of these the two

5. On Porphyry's frequent use of the first person, see Schroeder (above, note 2) 518 note 142, where he cites 13 instances, but not this one in book 2. Cf. A.P. Segonds' note in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 221–22 and G. Clark (above, note 3) 35.

6. See M.D. Grmek, "Les Maladies et La Mort de Plotin," in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 335–53.

7. On Castricius, see Brisson (above, note 4) 89–90. In chapter 7, Porphyry tells us that he is a devoted follower of Plotinus, but one who decided to pursue a political career (*Vit.* 7.24–29).

philosophers are Porphyry and Amelius. Thus, the two rivals are far from the center of activity at the time of Plotinus' death.[8]

It is not until chapter 4 that Porphyry next mentions Amelius and himself (1–6):

> Τῷ δεκάτῳ δὲ ἔτει τῆς Γαλιήνου βασιλείας ἐγὼ Πορφύριος ἐκ τῆς ἑλλάδος μετὰ Ἀντωνίου τοῦ Ῥοδίου γεγονὼς καταλαμβάνω μὲν τὸν Ἀμέλιον ὀκτωκαιδέκατον ἔτος ἔχοντα τῆς πρὸς Πλωτῖνον συνουσίας, μηδὲν δέ πω γράφειν τολμήσαντα πλὴν τῶν σχολίων ἃ οὐδέπω εἰς ἑκατὸν τὸ πλῆθος αὐτῷ συνῆκτο.
>
> In the tenth year of the reign of Galienus [263 CE], I Porphyry, having arrived from Greece with Antonius of Rhodes, came upon Amelius in the eighteenth year of his association with Plotinus. Amelius had not yet dared write anything except notes, which he had not yet collected into the total hundred.

In chapters 4–6, Porphyry presents us with the titles of the fifty-four Enneads and the three periods of Plotinian scholarship under which they fall. The quotation above, the first words of chapter 4, is therefore a subtle opening salvo in the battle of the publication over Plotinus' corpus. It is of no small moment. The publisher gains a certain power over all rivals.

To understand more clearly what Porphyry is about to do in chapters 4–6, we must go to the end of chapter 3, where Amelius is mentioned. Porphyry tells us that Plotinus wrote nothing for his first ten years in Rome (244–253/4 CE, 3.35–36). Amelius arrives in 246 CE and remains twenty-four years (38–42). According to Porphyry, Amelius (43–48)

> φιλοπονίᾳ δὲ ὑπερβαλλόμενος τῶν καθ' αὑτὸν πάντων διὰ τὸ καὶ σχεδὸν πάντα τὰ Νουμηνίου καὶ γράψαι καὶ συναγαγεῖν καὶ σχεδὸν[9] τὰ πλεῖστα ἐκμαθεῖν. σχόλια δὲ ἐκ τῶν συνουσίων ποιούμενος ἑκατόν που βιβλία συνέταξε τῶν σχολίων, ἃ Οὐστιλλιανῷ Ἡσυχίῳ τῷ ἀπαμεῖ, ὃν υἱὸν ἔθετο, κεχάρισται.
>
> surpassed all of his [Plotinus'] students in love of labor because he had written and collected nearly all of Numenius' works and had nearly memorized most of them. He made notes from meetings [of Plotinus' school], and he collected (I suppose) one hundred books of them, which he gave to Hostilianus Hesychius of Apamea, whom he adopted as his son.

8. Edwards (above, note 3) points out that Plotinus "left Rome voluntarily to spare his friends the affliction of his presence" (57). This too tends to free Porphyry from blame in being absent. Edwards is certainly correct that Porphyry opens the *Vita* with Plotinus' death because, for Platonists, life is a preparation for death.

9. On this second σχεδόν, see the note of M.O. Goulet-Cazé in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 219–20. There is certainly no overwhelming reason to delete it nor to translate it differently from the first σχεδόν. The resulting sentence is no more odd than many others of Porphyry.

The first thing to note is what Amelius is being praised for. He collects other people's works and has an extraordinary memory. It is in this sense that he is φιλόπονος (labor-loving).[10] Amelius can write notes well, but he does not seem to advance beyond this stage. He collected perhaps a hundred books of notes on Plotinus' lectures, but he did not publish them.

This brings us to the opening of chapter 4. Amelius "had not yet dared write anything except these notes." Plotinus had been writing treatises for ten years before Porphyry arrived and now had completed 21 treatises that had not been circulated widely (ἐκδεδομένα ὀλίγοις, 4.14).

We are left with the impression that Amelius, during his years with Plotinus before Porphyry's entry into the school, was engaged in time-consuming fruitless tasks. Further, if we emphasize Porphyry's phrase μηδὲν δέ πω γράφειν τολμήσαντα πλὴν τῶν σχολίων ("he had dared to write nothing except notes," 4.4–5), Amelius appears insecure and paralyzed about acting on behalf of Plotinus.

In chapter 5, Porphyry lists the twenty-four treatises that were written during his six-year stay at the school. These treatises, he tells us, both Amelius and he pressed Plotinus to write (5.5–7). We notice, however, that it took Porphyry's presence before Plotinus composed these treatises or even before Amelius could bring himself to prod Plotinus to write.

In chapter 6, Porphyry records the names of the nine treatises written by Plotinus while Porphyry was in Sicily. These treatises, it should be noted, Plotinus sent to Porphyry himself (6.3–4; 15–16). There is no mention of Amelius. Porphyry then assesses the relative merits of the treatises in the three groups. Those in the first group (before Porphyry was at Rome) and the last group (after Porphyry had left) are found wanting compared to those written while Porphyry was in residence. This may be a true assessment of the treatises' worth, but the underlying message is also clear: Plotinus did his best work when Porphyry was present. Porphyry therefore knew the master in his prime. The fact he knew Plotinus for less time than Amelius is irrelevant both because the time before he arrived Amelius never attained the station of a trusted and influential student and because Plotinus was still working up to his best writings.

These three chapters on the treatises are followed by a chapter on eleven of Plotinus' students, beginning with Amelius and ending with Porphyry. The placement is relevant: these are the two most important students. There were doctors, politicians, a poet, a rhetorician, and even a politician who gave up all his worldly goods (Rogatianus, to whom Porphyry devotes the longest

10. On the derogatory nature of "philo-" words when compared to "philosophy," see below on φιλοθύτης (in *Vit.* 10).

account by far, 7.31–46), but there were no philosophers of the caliber of Amelius and Porphyry. Of Amelius we learn (7.2–5) that he and his family (Gentilianus) hailed from Tuscany, that Plotinus punned on his name by calling him "Amerius" ("indivisible") rather than Amelius ("indifferent"). Then, in the account of the next student, the doctor Paulinus (5–7), Porphyry says that Amelius called him "Mikkalos" (Μίκκαλος, "the very small").[11] The juxtaposition of the two plays on a person's name is instructive. Whereas Plotinus bestows on Amelius a name more fitting for a philosopher, Amelius derides Paulinus for his failures. Amelius again comes up short and appears petty. Further, Plato uses the verb μελετάω for the care that a philosopher should give to living the proper kind of life. Porphyry hints that even in name Amelius is not philosophically correct.[12]

At the end of chapter 7, Porphyry says this of himself (49–51):

> Ἔσχε δὲ καὶ ἐμὲ Πορφύριον Τύριον ὄντα ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα ἑταῖρον, ὃν καὶ διορθοῦν αὐτοῦ τὰ συγγράμματα[13] ἠξίου.
>
> He [Plotinus] held me Porphyry the Tyrian among his best friends, and he deemed me worthy even to edit his writings.

The contrast with the earlier passage on Amelius could hardly be starker. Porphyry was a top student, one so respected as to be entrusted with the master's own writings.[14] The composition of chapter 7, with the contrast between Amelius' derogatory wordplay at the beginning and Porphyry's acceptance of the honor of editing Plotinus' words at the end, again displays Porphyry's subtle use of rhetoric. Amelius had a talent for playing with words, but Plotinus chose Porphyry as publisher of his serious work.

Porphyry continues to juxtapose Amelius and himself in the *Life of Plotinus*. In chapter 16, we are told that Plotinus left it to Amelius and Porphyry to complete his attack on the Gnostics (*Enn*. 2.9).

11. On the pun, see Brisson (above, note 4) 97–98. Amelius construes the name "Paulinus" as the diminutive of the Latin *paulus*. The Greek word Μίκκαλος "est le diminutif de μίκκος, c'est-à-dire μίκρος, en béotien et en dorien."

12. For the Greek verb μελετάω, see especially *Phd*. 67e4-5: οἱ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντες ἀποθνῄσκειν μελετῶσι ("They correctly do philosophy who practice dying"). This is, of course, one of the key tenets of Platonic philosophy; see the contrast between the unphilosophical and philosophical lives at81e3 and 82a10–b3 (where the noun form, μελέτη, is used).

13. On the meaning of σύγγραμμα, "writings intended for publication inside and outside of the school," see M.O. Goulet-Cazé, "L'Arrière-Plan Scolaire de la *Vie de Plotin*" in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 271–72.

14. Porphyry claims that Plotinus selected him as "arranger and editor" in 24.2–3: Ἐπεὶ δὲ αὐτὸς τὴν διάταξιν καὶ τὴν διόρθωσιν τῶν βιβλίων ποιεῖσθαι ἡμῖν ἐπέτρεψεν.

> Amelius, writing against the book of Zostrianus, put forth as many as forty books. I Porphyry published many refutations of the book of Zoroaster, proving that the book was a complete fabrication and new, devised by those organizing the doctrine to encourage the belief that the teachings that they chose to esteem were those of Zoroaster, who lived long ago (16.12–18).[15]

On the face of it, both of Plotinus' students are carrying on his legacy, and this perception is in fact true. Porphyry, however, also insinuates that whereas Amelius is a prolific writer (perhaps too much so—we are reminded of his one hundred books of Plotinian lecture notes), it was Porphyry who went beyond mere voluminous writing to bare the essential nature of the Zoroastrian books: they were frauds.

Even when Porphyry praises Amelius and indeed quotes him at length, there is still an argument under the surface about who is the rightful heir of Plotinus. In chapter 17, we find that when unnamed Greeks accused Plotinus of plagiarizing Numenius, Amelius wrote a defense of Plotinus, which he dedicated to Porphyry (17.1–15).[16] Porphyry then quotes Amelius' letter to him (16–44). As Armstrong has pointed out,[17] "Amelius's style throughout this letter is excessively pompous and high-flown." Amelius says that he has made use of Porphyry's suggestion in writing the work. Further, Amelius claims that for lack of time he wrote the work almost haphazardly in three days and that Porphyry will correct any errors. Although it is certain that Amelius wrote the letter in a humorous vein, showing off his rhetorical style and clever wordplay, the effect of the letter in the *Vita* is to make Porphyry look the serious scholar, closer to Plotinus, who can (and no doubt will) correct any of Amelius' errors.

15. Even though the Nag Hammadi corpus contains a treatise *Zostrianus*, there is little reason to hold that this is the treatise that Amelius and Porphyry possessed. One gets the impression that there were numerous "books of Zoroaster" available at that time. Indeed, it is even possible that our *Zostrianus* was written by someone familiar with Plotinian metaphysics. For the date of Zostrianus, see R. Majercik, "The Existence-Life-Intellect Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *CQ* 42 (1992): 488 and J.F. Finamore, "Iamblichus, the Sethians, and *Marsanes*," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism*, ed. J. Turner and R. Majercik (Atlanta, 2000) 226–27, note 5.

16. The fact that Amelius wrote the work but that both he and Porphyry titled it (ἐπεγράψαμεν, 17.5) may also be a claim of partial credit for the whole work on Porphyry's part. We note again in this anecdote Amelius' love for wordplay, dedicating it to "Basileus," since Porphyry's Syrian name, Malcus, means "king." Amelius was clearly a philosopher who delighted in words and puns. In this case, there is no pejorative intent on Amelius' part. Longinus refers to Porphyry as "Basileus" as well at 20.91.

17. A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, *Enneads*, Vol. 1, rev. (Cambridge, 1989) 48–49, note 1. See also the note of L. Brisson and A.P. Segonds in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 276, who call the style "grandiloquent" and point out that the passage lacks hiatus. See L. Brisson, "Amélius: Vie, Oeuvre, Doctrine," *ANRW* 2.36.2 (1987): 853.

In chapter 18, Porphyry tells the story of his first entry into Plotinus' school, when he failed to comprehend how the Intelligible object existed within the Intellect (18.8–23). Plotinus assigned Amelius the task of correcting the new pupil's error. In a series of three papers, the two students argued the topic until at last Porphyry recanted and never again doubted Plotinus' doctrines. On the surface, this again seems like a story that elevates the knowledgeable Amelius, but the final lines suggest another interpretation (18.20–23):

> From that time on I trusted in Plotinus' books and I kept urging the master himself toward an ambition of completing his doctrines and writing them more fully. Plotinus too urged Amelius to write.[18]

We notice how Porphyry takes the lead in urging Plotinus to write. He animates Plotinus, who in turn motivates Amelius. The debate between Porphyry and Amelius is therefore pivotal. The torch has passed to a new generation. Yes, Porphyry was young and misguided at first. Yes, Amelius had knowledge of the arguments of Plotinus to straighten the newcomer out. But now the newcomer has supplanted the old champion. Porphyry sets the whole school in motion, bringing it back to the worthy goal of writing and publication, a goal to which (Porphyry implies) Amelius has not applied himself.

The importance of Porphyry as the upholder and defender of Plotinian philosophy continues in chapters 19–21, where Porphyry introduces Longinus, the other leading Platonic philosopher of his day. In chapter 19 Porphyry quotes a letter from Longinus to Porphyry himself, in which he requests better manuscripts of Plotinus' Greek than those of Amelius and in which he ranks Plotinus' writings as "among those in the highest repute" (μετὰ τῶν ἐλλογιμωτάτων, 19.41), although Longinus himself does not agree with all of Plotinus' doctrines. The importance of this chapter does not lie in Longinus' criticism of Amelius, for Porphyry will defend Amelius' manuscript-copying skills (but not his philosophy, we note) in chapter 20.[19] Rather, Porphyry is establishing his credentials as a leading Platonist

18. I retain the MSS. reading (Ἀμέλιον εἰς τὸ συγγράφειν πρόμυθον ἐποίησεν), as R. Goulet argues, in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 128 and 281. The editors print the correction of Henry and Schwyzer: Ἀμέλιον εἰς τὸ συγγράφειν πρόμυθον ἐποίησα ("I too have urged Amelius to write"). If this reading is accepted, Porphyry is taking credit for spurring on both Plotinus and Amelius. A third possibility is the conjecture of Cherniss (accepted by Armstrong): Ἀμέλιος εἰς τὸ συγγράφειν πρόμυθον ἐποίησεν ("Amelius too urged [Plotinus] to write"). In this case, Amelius joins with Porphyry in encouraging Plotinus, but Porphyry is the prime mover.

19. "He [Longinus] seemed to be mistaken about the manuscripts which he possessed, having received them from Amelius, because he did not understand the accustomed expression of the man [i.e., of Plotinus]. For in no wise would any other manuscripts be better than those edited by Amelius, since they are taken from Plotinus' own writings" (20.5–9). For the eccentricities of Plotinus' style and method of writing, see *Vit.* 8.

himself by showing the deference extended to him by Longinus, his former teacher.

In chapter 20, Porphyry quotes from Longinus' Περὶ Τέλους ("On Ends"), a response to Plotinus and Amelius. In this very long extract (20.17–104), Longinus ranks Plotinus and Amelius together (both "now engaged at Rome," οἵ τε μέχρι νῦν ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ δημοσιεύοντες, 32, so when Amelius was Plotinus' student) as philosophers who publish (25–33) and who have written originally on many topics (69–71). Longinus says that Plotinus has a clarity beyond other Platonists (71–76), and says the following about Amelius (76–80):

> Amelius chooses to follow in his footsteps, holding many of the same doctrines, but is verbose in discussion and led by a circuitous way of expression (τῇ τῆς ἑρμηνείας περιβολῇ) to a style opposed to his.

Here Longinus criticizes Amelius' style, not the substance of his writings, which are basically Plotinian. The term "circuitousness" (περιβολῇ, 79) is in Hermogenes and is defined as "a statement which does not allow us knowledge of some element in a speech in its simplicity, but rather forces us to connect it to other elements."[20] This is a problem that we have encountered earlier. Amelius tends toward verbosity and indirection in his style. This passage comments on Amelius' way of thinking and writing, and ultimately on his philosophy, as we shall see shortly.

Porphyry then raises an area of difference between his former teacher Longinus and Plotinus concerning the placement of the Intelligible objects in the Intellect. Although Longinus continues to think that the objects exist outside the Intellect, he says that Porphyry "has written a good deal in imitation of Plotinus" (οὐδ' αὐτὸν ὀλίγα πεπραγματευμένον κατὰ τὴν Πλωτίνου μίμησιν, 20.91–92).

In chapter 21, Porphyry repeats both of Longinus' assertions about Amelius' and his styles of writing (21.9–16) and then gives what he sees as the conclusion to be drawn from Longinus' letter (16–23):

> He composed these matters in this way because he saw that I completely shunned Amelius' unphilosophical method[21] of circuitousness and looked to writing in the manner of Plotinus. Such a man who is first in judgment and is accepted as such now, writing about Plotinus, shows sufficiently that if I Porphyry could have met with him (since he had invited me), he would not have written against those things which he had undertaken to write before understanding the doctrine.

20. See the note of A.P. Segonds in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 289.
21. See the note of A.P. Segonds in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 292.

Amelius' "circuitousness" (περιβολή, 17) is now condemned as "unphilosophical." Porphyry, on the contrary, writes appropriately in Plotinus' style. The conclusion is unmistakable. The philosophical heir of Plotinus cannot be the unphilosophical Amelius who does not properly imitate his master (in writing or, we are to infer, in philosophy) but Porphyry, Plotinus' true imitator.[22]

Thus, for Porphyry, Longinus' letters demonstrate that he, Porphyry, is the superior student and that he could have himself have won Longinus over to Plotinus' side, as of course the letters of Amelius had not. Further, although Longinus expressed esteem for Amelius, it was to Porphyry that he addressed his letter and from Porphyry that he sought information about Plotinus' philosophy.

These are the places in the *Vita* where Porphyry and Amelius are placed in close juxtaposition. These passages lead us from Porphyry's entry into the school, to his embracing of Plotinian philosophy, to his role as primary motivator of Plotinus' writings, and (ultimately) to his role as the foremost philosopher of his day (as recognized by that great man, Longinus) and as heir to Plotinus' doctrines. There remain three passages in which Amelius appears alone, although Porphyry brings himself on the scene in the immediately following chapter.

Amelius makes his first appearance in chapter 1, in the context of Plotinus' refusal to have a portrait made of himself. Amelius has the painter Carterius visit Plotinus' lectures and then draw Plotinus from memory. Again, this seems a harmless enough tale. Amelius is disobeying the wishes of his master, but the result is a fine portrait that posterity would not otherwise have had. The anecdote is meant to show Plotinus' other-worldliness, and so it does. It also puts Amelius into the role of the tricky slave, and given Porphyry's propensity to accentuate Amelius' foibles, this can be no accident. Further, the first appearance of Amelius contrasts vividly with that of Porphyry. After Plotinus has contracted a debilitating disease, Porphyry writes (2.10–12):

> While I Porphyry was present, no such disease had arisen, but when I went away, it increased so much that ….

Porphyry goes on to relate the symptoms recorded by Eustochius. The point is probably not that Porphyry's presence was salutary for Plotinus (although the idea may be implied), but rather that Porphyry had kept contact with

22. "Imitation" is important in philosophy as well as in style. The goal of Platonic philosophy was "imitation of god" (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, *Tht.* 176b). Since the holy man stands in place of god, his life too is a pattern for imitation. Thus, Porphyry's imitation of Plotinus would extend beyond style of writing and into the philosophical life.

his teacher and was in sympathy with him. If Amelius was the wily slave, Porphyry is the dutiful son, caring for Plotinus' well-being and seeking information from Eustochius about his last moments.

There is a related point here as well. Amelius is shown concerned with an image of Plotinus. As any reader of the *Republic* knows, images fall very low in the scale of being in Platonic philosophy. In Plotinian philosophy, the realm of matter is the pale imitation of the Intelligible world and the One itself. Our minds should be raised higher toward that true reality. On this basic tenet of philosophy Amelius again fails to make the grade. We will return to this point shortly.

In chapter 10, after the stories of Olympius' thwarted efforts of magic against Plotinus and of the anonymous Egyptian's priest's determination that Plotinus had a god for a guardian spirit, Porphyry relates this tale of Amelius (10.33–38):

> Since Amelius was fond of sacrifices and went around to temples at the new moon and at festivals, he once asked Plotinus to accompany him. Plotinus said: "It is right that they come to me, not I to them." From what sort of knowledge he thus uttered these lofty words we ourselves could not know and did not dare ask him.

The point of the story, most probably, is that according to Plotinian philosophy we have the gods—and indeed all the cosmos—within ourselves. Access to them is open and available to all, if we know how to look. There is, therefore, no need for Plotinus to visit a temple to find divinity.[23] Thus, Plotinus' words indicate a truth about Plotinian philosophy, one which Amelius should have grasped but did not. In this light the adjective φιλοθύτης ("fond of sacrifices," 33), the first word in the anecdote, takes on special importance. What Amelius should be is φιλόσοφος, i.e., taking in Plotinian philosophy and learning the true nature of ascent. Instead he is engaged in the superstitions of the masses. Porphyry may have in mind here the famous distinction of the *Republic* (476a9–b9) between the lovers of spectacle (φιλοθεάμονες) who "delight in beautiful sounds and colors and shapes" but not in the Forms themselves, as philosophers do.[24] Amelius is in the wrong camp.

Porphyry gives us an example of correct philosophical attitude in the next chapter (11.11–19). When Porphyry is pondering suicide, Plotinus tells him that his desire arises not from a rational decision (ἐκ νοερᾶς καταστάσεως, 11.14) but from melancholy. Plotinus bids him go away to recuperate, and immediately Porphyry sets out for Lilybaeum. In this anecdote Plotinus sug-

23. On this passage, see L. Brisson, "Plotin et la Magie: Le Chaiptre 10 de la *Vie de Plotin* par Porphyre," in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 472–75 and Edwards (above, note 3) 65.

24. Thus I cannot agree with Brisson (above, note 23) 472 note 31 that the word *as it is used here* "est un terme indifférent d'un point de vue moral en grec ancien."

gests a rational course of action and Porphyry accedes, whereas in chapter 10, Amelius did not take to heart Plotinus' teachings.

Finally, in chapter 22, which contains Apollo's oracle on the post-mortem existence of Plotinus' soul,[25] we read this bare statement about Amelius (22.8–12):

> For when Amelius asked where the soul of Plotinus had gone, Apollo, who had said of Socrates "Socrates was the wisest of all men," replied in so many and such words (listen!) ….

(The words of the oracle immediately follow.) On the face of it, this is a straightforward account of the actions of a dutiful Amelius. Amelius asks about Plotinus' fate, and Apollo provides proof that Plotinus' soul lives on in Neoplatonic bliss, where other Plotinian philosophers may follow. But the reference to the Oracle about Socrates points another way. Amelius is being placed into the role of Chaerephon, who had asked Apollo who was wiser than Socrates (*Apol*. 29a). Now Chaerephon, while performing an important task in relation to Socrates' future career, was himself of little importance to the history of Socratic and Platonic philosophy. Amelius, like Chaerephon, brings to light important information (through Apollo, not through himself), but (also like Chaerephon) his engagement in the philosopher's enterprise is not essential to the task. It was Plato, Socrates' other student, who (in effect) published his teacher's philosophy. This puts Porphyry into the role of Plato, since it was he and not Amelius who published Plotinus' writings.

A passage from the following chapter (23.7–18) sheds more light on the matter. Not only had Plotinus attained a heavenly bliss after death, but even while alive he had achieved union with the One four times.[26] Porphyry cannot help but adding (12–14):

> I Porphyry, now in my 68th year, state that I once approached and united with [the One].

Poor Amelius, it would seem, never did. Again the contrast is significant. Amelius *reported* news of Plotinus' life after death, but Porphyry *experienced* once what the master had achieved four times before. It is Porphyry, not Amelius, who has assumed responsibility for continuing Plotinus' philoso-

25. On this oracle, see L. Brisson and J.M. Flamand, "Structure, Contenu et Intentions de L'Oracle D'Apollo (*VP* 22)" and R. Goulet, "Sur quelques interprétations récentes de L'Oracle D'Apollon," in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 565–602 and 603–17, respectively.

26. It should be noted that Porphyry was present in the school when Plotinus had his four encounters: *VP* 23 and 8.19–20.

phy, not only by editing the *Enneads*[27] but also by continuing the practical application of that philosophy in his life. Porphyry lives the Plotinian life, albeit in a lesser degree than Plotinus himself.

Note the contrast here, at the end of the *Vita*, with chapter one, in which Amelius had Carterius surreptitiously paint a portrait of Plotinus. Amelius, as we saw, was concerned with the outward physical image of the philosopher;[28] Porphyry at the end continues to live the philosophic life of the divine Plotinus.

Thus, at the end of the *Vita* (24.2–5) Porphyry can make his final claim to the right to be the publisher of Plotinus' treatises:

> He [Plotinus] himself turned to me to arrange and edit his books, and I promised him while he was alive and I told other friends that I would do so.

We note that Plotinus named Porphyry, not Amelius, his editor. Porphyry portrays himself as the dutiful student, obedient to Plotinus, who will benefit his philosophical friends by editing Plotinus' works. He is the spiritual son of Plotinus, the one true heir to his philosophy.[29]

Porphyry mentions Amelius in nine chapters of the *Vita* (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 16, 18, and 21). Porphyry never attacks Amelius directly, but rather through innuendo and studied juxtaposition with himself shows Amelius' weaknesses in contrast to Porphyry's own strengths. Porphyry constructs a picture of Amelius as a plodding, prolix pedant who writes many volumes adding up to little. He is superstitious and too fond of wordplay. In every comparison, tacit or explicit, Porphyry shows himself surpassing Amelius.

Porphyry's strategy in the *Vita* is subtle. It builds slowly as the work progresses. In the end, the reader can conclude only that Plotinus chose wisely when he selected Porphyry as his successor.[30]

27. A fact that Porphyry will remind us of again in the next chapter (24.2–5).

28. The portrait is even further removed from reality since Carterius based it on his mental recollection of what Plotinus looked like. It is thus an image of an image of Plotinus, which is itself a mere material image of the true Plotinus (1.16–18). Cp. *Rep*. X.595a–602b.

29. There are two further references to Porphyry himself, both of which are intended to show Plotinus' regard for him. In *Vit*. 13.10–17, he relates that he and Plotinus engaged in a three-day discussion on how the soul was present to the body. In *Vit*. 15.1–21, Porphyry gives three related anecdotes. First (1–6), Plotinus praises Porphyry's poem "The Sacred Marriage." Second (6–17), Plotinus entrusts Porphyry with the refutation of Diophanes. Third (18–21), Plotinus has Porphyry respond to Eubulus' questions on Platonic philosophy. There is a steady movement upward, as Porphyry first shows himself a master poet and interpreter of matters divine, then a correct interpreter of Plato's *Symposium*, and finally an authority on Platonism generally. For a comparison of the first two passages in chapter 15, see A.P. Segonds' note in *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* 268.

30. I would like to thank Frederick Schroeder and Carol Poster for reading an earlier draft of my paper and making excellent suggestions. Any remaining mistakes are mine alone.