

**PAGAN TAYLOR: THE EMERGENCE OF A PUBLIC CHARACTER 1785-1804.**

**AN ENQUIRY INTO THE LIFE AND SELECTED WORKS OF**

**THOMAS TAYLOR THE PLATONIST (1758-1835)**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and entitled *Pagan Taylor: The Emergence of a Public Character 1785-1804. An Enquiry into the Life and Selected Works of Thomas Taylor the Platonist (1758-1835)*, represents my own work.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis has three main objectives; to provide an analysis of aspects of the life of Thomas Taylor the Platonist (1758-1835) in more depth than has hitherto been accomplished; to explore Taylor's role as a philosopher, translator and innovator within the Platonic tradition in Britain and to consider aspects of his influence on British Romanticism.

Chapter 1 investigates Taylor's formal education and then considers the nature and scope of his autodidactic reading of key philosophical, alchemical, mathematical and literary works in the context of his socio-religious and domestic background.

Chapter 2 examines Taylor's efforts to emerge from obscurity and take his place, as a public character, amongst the literati of London as a lecturer, author, translator and philosopher. In the chapter, there is also discussion of how Taylor related to the Platonic tradition in Britain; particular attention is given to understanding the specific nature of Christian Platonism and how Platonism was, or was not, a cultural influence in the eighteenth century.

Chapter 3 explores Pagan Neoplatonism and its manifestation in the late eighteenth century through the work and religious activities of Taylor. Particular attention is given to establishing an understanding of Taylor's philosophical position and his religious beliefs and practices.

Chapter 4 presents a discussion of Taylor's translations, specifically his *Mystical Initiations; or, Hymns of Orpheus* (1787) and *Pausanias' Description of Greece* (1794) and how critics received them. There is also some exploration of key criticisms that were leveled against Taylor in relation to his religious convictions and the quality of his translations and a discussion of how Taylor responded to Greek Pederasty and Pedagogy as a translator.

Chapter 5 investigates Taylor's influence on aspects of British Romanticism, particular attention is given to discussing 'Romantic Neoplatonism' and 'Romantic paganism'. Blake's poem *Ah! Sun-Flower* is discussed in the context of Taylor's *Mystical Initiations; or, Hymns of Orpheus*: there is also discussion of Taylor's links with the character 'Mr. Mystic' in Thomas Love Peacock's satirical novel *Melincourt*.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Aristotle Works* Aristotle, trans. Thomas Taylor *The Works of Aristotle Translated from the Greek with Copious Elucidations from the Best of his Greek Commentators viz. Alexander, Aphrodisiensis, Syrianus, Ammonius, Hermæas, Priscianus, Olympiodorus, Simplicius & co.* 9 vols. (London: Printed for the Translator, Manor Place, Walworth, Surry; by Robert Wilks, 89, Chancery-Lane, Fleet-Street, 1806-1812)
- Cupid and Psyche* Apuleius, trans. Thomas Taylor *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche, Translated from the Latin of Apuleius: To which are added, A Poetical Paraphrase of the Speech of Diotima, in the Banquet of Plato, Four Hymns, &c. &c. With an Introduction in Which the Meaning of the Fable is Unfolded* (London: Printed for the Author, and sold by Leigh and Sotheby, York Street, Covent Garden, 1795)
- Description of Greece* Pausanias, trans. Thomas Taylor *The Description of Greece, by Pausanias. Translated from the Greek. With Notes, In which much of the Mythology of the Greeks is unfolded from a Theory which has been for many Ages unknown. And illustrated with Maps and Views Elegantly Engraved*, 3 vols. (London: R. Faulder, New Bond Street, 1794).
- DNB* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. May 2005. <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.
- Eleusinian Mysteries* Thomas Taylor *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (Amsterdam [London]: n.d. [1791])
- Gods and the World* Sallust, Demophilus and Proclus, trans. Thomas Taylor *Sallust on the Gods and the World; and the Pythagoric Sentences of Demophilus, Translated from the Greek; and Five Hymns by Proclus, in the Original Greek, with a Poetical Version. To Which are Added Five Hymns by the Translator* (London: Printed for Edward Jeffry, Pall Mall, 1793)

- Hymns (1787)* Orpheus, trans. Thomas Taylor *The Mystical Initiations; or, Hymns of Orpheus, Translated from the Original Greek: with a Preliminary Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus: By Thomas Taylor* (London: Printed for the Author, and sold by T. Payne and Son, at the Mews-gate; L Davis; Holborn; B. White and Son, Fleet Street; and G. Nichol, Strand, 1787)
- NWB* George Mills Harper *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961)
- Plato 1793* Plato, trans. Thomas Taylor *THE CRATYLUS, PHÆDO, PARMENIDES AND TIMÆUS OF PLATO. Translated from the Greek by Thomas Taylor. With Notes on the Cratylus, and an Explanatory Introduction to Each Dialogue* (London: Benjamin and John White, Fleet-Street, 1793).
- Soth. Cat.* Ann Arbor ed. *Sotheby & Co. London England Catalogue of Sales 1734-1850: Catalogue of the Singularly Curious Library of the Late Thomas Taylor Esq. The Celebrated Platonist* (London: Mr. Sotheby & Son – Wellington Street, Strand, 1836 [Microfilm] (Xerox University Microfilms, 1973).
- SW* *Thomas Taylor the Platonist: Selected Writings*, eds. Kathleen Raine and George Mills Harper (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).
- The Commentaries* Proclus, trans. Thomas Taylor *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus on the First Book of Euclid's Elements. To which are added A History of the Restoration of the Platonic Theology BY THE LATTER PLATONISTS: and a Translation from the Greek of Proclus's Theological Elements*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for the Author – sold by T. Payne & Son; B White & Son, J. Robson; T Cadell; Leigh & Co. G Nicol; R. Faulder; and T. and J Egerton, 1792).

*TTS*                    *The Thomas Taylor Series*, eds. The Prometheus Trust, 33 vols.  
(Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1994 – 2006).

*WP*                    Plato, Thomas Taylor and Floyer Sydenham trans. *The Works of  
Plato viz. His Fifty Five Dialogues, and Twelve Epistles,  
Translated from the Greek, Nine of the Dialogues by the Late  
Floyer Sydenham, and the Remainder by Thomas Taylor with  
Occasional Annotations and Copious Notes by the Latter  
translator; in Which is Given the Substance of Nearly all the  
Existing Greek Ms. Commentaries on the Philosophy of Plato, and  
a Considerable Portion of Such as are Already Published*, 5 Vols.  
(London: Printed for Thomas Taylor by R. Wilks, Chancery-Lane;  
and Sold by E. Jeffrey, and R. Evans, Pall-Mall, 1804)

## Introduction

Thomas Taylor (1758-1835), was the first person to translate the whole of the works of both Plato (1804) and Aristotle (1806-1812) into English. In conjunction with and independently of his translations of those authors, he also translated many of the works of the Neoplatonists into English for the first time. Taylor was very much a public character in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and probably Keats (introduced by his friend Benjamin Bailey) all read Taylor. Hence, to some degree, he made a contribution to British 'Romanticism'. There is no doubt that Taylor's place in British literary history was significant; yet for the most part, he has been neglected.

During the planning of this thesis, it became evident that three main areas offered scope for research. First, a full-length biography of Thomas Taylor has never been written and as a result there has never been a trustworthy account of Taylor's educational background, his motivations and interests, his translation practice and his perceived eccentricities, especially regarding the nature of his religious 'pagan' beliefs, and how they influenced his writing. Secondly, there was a need to contextualise Taylor in the Platonic tradition in relation to its ancient Hellenic roots and to its manifestation in Britain, and perhaps even Western Europe, in the long eighteenth century. Thirdly, there was the question of how Taylor might be better understood in relation to British Romanticism.

Each of the three potential research topics could warrant a substantial thesis or a book-length-study. A presentation of a full analysis of Taylor's translation practice would certainly demand a volume, perhaps several. During the seven years that I have

been researching Taylor (I wrote my MA thesis on Taylor in 1999)<sup>1</sup> I have found that all three subject areas, the biographical, the Platonic and the Romantic (especially in the context of British Romantic Hellenism)<sup>2</sup> were all relevant to understanding Thomas Taylor as a literary phenomenon. In consequence of this, in this thesis, I attempt to present a consideration of Taylor in the contexts of biography, the Platonic tradition in Britain and British Romanticism. I may have tried to cover too much ground; but I hope to provide a foundation for a better understanding of Taylor. In each of the three areas addressed in the thesis, I have necessarily had to be extremely selective regarding what I have included and excluded. In many respects, the thesis is an introduction to Taylor's life and works.

There are four primary published sources, of biographical data relating to Thomas Taylor. Besides these, biographical information can be collated from manuscript letters to, from, and concerning Taylor, miscellaneous documents in archives, such as rate assessment books and various registries, brief articles and notices in books and journals, footnotes and introductions in Taylor's works.

The primary source of all the published biographies of Taylor is an article entitled: *Mr Taylor the Platonist*, from *British Public Characters of 1798*,<sup>3</sup> which was

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<sup>1</sup> See Steven G. Critchley, *Thomas Taylor Singer of Songs: Mystical Hymns and Initiations in London 1787-1824*, unpublished MA thesis: The University of York, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See Timothy Webb, *British Romantic Hellenism 1700-1824* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> *British Public Characters of 1798* (London: Richard Phillips, 71 St. Paul's Church Yard, 1798). Note: This is the first volume of *British Public Characters of 1798-1810*, 10 vols., pp. 100-124. The first volume which contains the biographical sketch *Mr Taylor the Platonist*, was printed five times, in 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801 and 1803, presumably so that whole, ten-volume, sets could be purchased by readers. While reading *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* in all five editions I found that the 1799, and 1800 editions were reprints of the original 1798 version of the text; however, the 1801 edition had a few small changes and can be considered the second edition. The 1803 version was subjected to many editorial revisions and contained some additional information and this is the third edition. I have included a list of all the changes made between the first and third editions in appendix 1 of this thesis.

published by Richard Phillips (1767-1840), later Sir Richard Phillips and Sheriff of London. Phillips' bookselling and publishing premises were located at 71 St. Paul's Churchyard (1797-1804). He published the ten-volume series *British Public Characters of 1798-1810*. Phillips was the son of a Leicestershire farmer who was educated in Soho Square and Chiswick, London. In Leicester, he founded an academy in 1788 and in 1789; he became a stationer, bookseller and patent-medicine-vendor. From 1789, he began publishing and printing, he established a circulating library and he founded a newspaper the *Leicester Herald*, in 1792. In 1793, he was imprisoned for eighteen months for selling Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. Phillips' Leicester business premises were destroyed by fire in 1795: on the proceeds of an insurance claim enabled Phillips to move to London where he established the *Monthly Magazine* in 1779, the *Antiquaries Magazine* in 1797 and the *Monthly Musical Journal* in 1801.

Phillips was a political radical and it is notable that he was active as an entrepreneur in St. Paul's Churchyard, a publishing district noted for its dissenting and radical milieu, Joseph Johnson's business premises were also in St. Paul's Churchyard. The annual periodical *Public Characters* provided readers with short, oftentimes gossipy, biographical sketches of prominent people of the day. Bibliographical searches reveal that imprints of the *Public Characters* series were printed in Dublin, Ireland and also in the United States of America; the publication appears to have been a profitable venture on Phillips part, though some of the imprints published outside London may have been pirated editions. The volume in which *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* appears includes biographical sketches of public characters such as Charles Howard the 11<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk; the Archbishop of Canterbury; Joseph Priestley; Nelson; Charles James Fox; William Pitt the younger; Lord Monboddo; Isaac D'Israeli; Erasmus

Darwin; Hannah More, and Sarah Siddons. The volume for 1798 contains a pull-out illustrative sheet that gives portrait-sketches of thirty out of the seventy-one personalities presented. An image of Thomas Taylor is included amongst the thirty cameos. Phillips' *Public Characters* seems to have had a political motivation. It would appear to be an attempt, under the cover of being an innocent collection of biographies, to elevate key personalities from politically radical and Protestant dissenting backgrounds to the same stature of national importance as conservative establishment figures. In this context, it is significant that Taylor's biography was included. A more precise analysis of Taylor's political views and the nature of his political dissent follows in the thesis; however let it be noted that it is a remarkable juxtaposition that the biography of a vehement anti-Christian, who attacked the Christian religion often in print, appears besides the biographies of eight prominent Anglican bishops.

Another of Richard Phillips' publications, which contains references to Taylor is his *Biographical Anecdotes of the Founders of the French Republic and of Other Eminent Characters Who Have Distinguished Themselves in the Progress of the Revolution*.<sup>4</sup> This volume, written with some sympathy towards the French Revolution, is nonetheless strongly anti-Terror and anti-Jacobin. It is also noteworthy that it was published in 1797, when English political radicalism that attached itself to the sentiments of the Revolution was under great pressure and under threat from the loyalists and the British government. Many who had initially supported the Revolution became disillusioned and distanced themselves from it: others strongly regretted the bloodshed, and criticised mob-violence, but still hoped that the

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<sup>4</sup> *Biographical Anecdotes of the Founders of the French Republic and of Other Eminent Characters Who Have Distinguished Themselves in the Progress of the Revolution* (London: Printed for R. Phillips and sold by Mr. Johnson, St Paul's Church Yard, and by Mr. Debrett, Piccadilly, 1797).

Revolution would prove beneficial for humankind. In the *Preface to Biographical Anecdotes* half of the 134 descriptions of characters are termed 'memorials':

Memorials of men who have borne an active, and many of them a principal part in one of the greatest events in the moral and political history of the world, must interest every one who wishes well to his species. It is impossible to recollect without horror, that about one-half of the persons mentioned in this Volume, have fallen victims to political phrenzy under the guillotine. The sudden and astonishing vicissitudes of fortune, exhibited in the condition of individuals, afford a most instructive moral lesson. The dreadful waste of human talents and virtues, and even of human existence, which has accompanied this grand effort for the recovery of political freedom, must fill every benevolent mind with infinite regret. Nor can any thing relieve the painful feelings excited by the first part of this distressing drama, but the "trembling hope" of a happy termination, in which the VAST PRICE which has been paid for the purchase of liberty, will be abundantly recompensed in the happiness of COUNTLESS MILLIONS yet unborn.<sup>5</sup>

Taylor is mentioned in the biographical sketch of Godefroi Izarn, Marquis de' Valadi, a minor French nobleman who was a 'Pythagorean' and ritual esotericist, probably with a Masonic background, who stayed with Taylor in Walworth for a few months between 1788 and 1789.<sup>6</sup> A letter from the Marquis, requesting that Taylor adopt him as a disciple and initiate him, which must have been supplied to Phillips by Taylor himself, was published in full in the same article.<sup>7</sup> The encounter between Valadi and Taylor is discussed in the thesis, but it can be noted at the outset that Taylor co-operated fully with Phillips, or whomever the editor might have been, to make the incident public.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.150-163.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.156-157.

*Mr. Taylor the Platonist* can be considered as autobiographical in the sense that the information presented in the article was provided by Taylor himself. Indeed, while working as Assistant Secretary at the Royal Society of Arts Manufactures and Commerce, Taylor wrote to his friend George Cumberland:

Adelphi, Society of Arts  
Octr. 7<sup>th</sup> 1798

Dear Sir,

A volume will be published next month entitled "Public Characters of the Year 98". In this volume I am to make an appearance: and as the Editor requested me for this purpose to give him some memoirs of my stormy life, I have drawn up an Account of myself as memory would permit; thinking it better to be my own executioner, than to be murdered by any editor, or hireling Author in Great Britain. In the course of these memoirs, I have taken care to inform the world, that it was principally owing to you, that I was enabled to emerge from the obscurity & servility of a Bankers Clerk; & have mentioned you as well known, by the publication of several works. This I thought no more than justice, & hope you will consider what I have done in that light. Wishing you health, peace and temperance,

I remain  
Yours sincerely

Thomas Taylor.<sup>8</sup>

Taylor mentions 'the Editor' of *Public Characters* to Cumberland; however, I have not been able to trace who the editor of *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* was, it almost certainly was not Richard Phillips, both *Public Characters of 1798* and *Biographical*

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<sup>8</sup> A transcription of a microfilm copy of Taylor's letter to Cumberland printed by the courtesy of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in *Thomas Taylor the Platonist: Selected Writings*, eds. Kathleen Raine and George Mills Harper, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) [Illustrations Plate 19]. Note: hereafter cited as *SW*.

*Anecdotes of the Founders of the French Republic* contain biographical sketches that are unsigned.

G.E. Bentley Jr. was right when he asserted, referring to the above letter, that, 'Scholars interested in the career of Thomas Taylor may therefore accept as absolutely authoritative the essay in *Public Characters of 1798*'.<sup>9</sup> The biographical sketch in *Public Characters* (1798 1<sup>st</sup> edn.) provides readers with information regarding Taylor's life, his interests, reading and work, and friends and relationships from his birth in 1758 through to 1798. The fifth edition of the first volume of *Public Characters* (1803) gives some further information concerning events subsequent to those documented up until 1798, in the first edition, such as the research and preparation of his translation of *The Works of Plato* (1804). *Mr. Taylor the Platonist*, although authoritative, is fraught with interpretative problems in relation to chronology. Only a few precise dates are divulged. In most instances the chronology related in the article is delivered through non-specific phrases such as 'at about this time' and 'immediately following this'. Dateable events are only allusively referred to in connection with the publication dates of Taylor's books.

Attempts were made to provide something more satisfactory. Edward Peacock (1831-1915), an antiquary, was an admirer of Taylor who enquired in *Notes and Queries* in 1860, 'Has there ever been a published biography of Thomas Taylor the Platonist?'<sup>10</sup> In 1866 he announced, 'I am anxious to collect materials for a biography of Thomas Taylor. Any notes concerning him, his works, or his family, will interest

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<sup>9</sup> G.E. Bentley JR. 'Thomas Taylor's Biography' in *Studies in Bibliography*, 14, (Virginia: The Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1961), 235-236.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Peacock, 'Taylor the Platonist' in *Notes and Queries*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, IX, (1860), 28. Note: hereafter cited as *N&Q*.

me.’<sup>11</sup> Peacock produced a short biography of Taylor, in which he gave some facts that had not been published before, such as the date and place of Taylor’s birth.<sup>12</sup> In the mid-to-late nineteenth century a North American lawyer, private scholar and bibliophile named Thomas Moore Johnson (1851-1919) became a committed disciple and emulator of Thomas Taylor. Johnson collected Taylor’s books and gathered all the information he could about the life of the Platonist. Johnson himself was a Platonist.<sup>13</sup> He lived in the small Midwestern town of Osceola Missouri in a house on the banks of the Osage river. Johnson was a reasonably competent classical scholar who read and translated both Greek and Latin. In his pursuit of knowledge, he collected some 8,000 books, most of which he had shipped to the States from Europe.<sup>14</sup> In 1881, Johnson began publishing a journal entitled *The Platonist*. He advertised extensively in newspapers and journals for biographical information on Taylor; he was particularly interested in locating any of Taylor’s living descendants. In the first edition of *The Platonist* Johnson included a biography of Thomas Taylor: but despite his efforts, it is very much a regurgitation of *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* from *Public Characters of 1798*.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. William Edward Armytage Axon (1846-1913), was a Mancunian, a librarian, bibliographer, journalist, folklorist, antiquarian, Unitarian social reformer and

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Peacock, ‘Taylor the Platonist’ in N&Q, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, X, (1866), 302.

<sup>12</sup> See Edward Peacock, ‘Thomas Taylor the Platonist’ in *The Antiquary*, XVIII (1888), 1-5.

<sup>13</sup> See David Fideler, ‘Two Platonic Voices in America: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas M. Johnson.’ in *Alexandria: Cosmology, Philosophy, Myth and Culture*, 5, (Phanes Press, 2000), pp. 235-251. Note: on Taylor’s vital and key influence on American idealist philosophy, particularly Transcendentalism in relation to Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), see Jay Bregman, ‘Alcott’s Transcendental Neoplatonism and the Concord Summer School.’ in *Alexandria: Cosmology, Philosophy, Myth and Culture*, 5, (Phanes Press, 2000), pp. 253-270. Also see George Mills Harper’s essay ‘*Thomas Taylor in America*’ in SW, pp. 49-102.

<sup>14</sup> T. M. Johnson’s son, Franklin P. Johnson, donated 16,000 classical and philosophical volumes of his father’s library to the University of Missouri in Columbia in 1947. The Johnson family still holds a private collection of books and memorabilia associated with Thomas Taylor.

<sup>15</sup> See T. M. Johnson, ‘the Life and Works of Thomas Taylor the Platonist’ in *The Platonist*, I, (1881), pp. 61-64, 102-109, 147-154, 179-187.

promoter of vegetarianism. Axon's interest in Taylor probably arose from his research into antiquarianism and the history of vegetarianism.<sup>16</sup> It has always been assumed (wrongly, as I show later in this thesis), that because Taylor was a Pythagorean he abstained from eating meat. Axon published a short biography of Taylor in 1890, based on *Mr. Taylor the Platonist in Public Characters of 1798*, including many valuable biographical observations such as identifying Taylor as a pupil of the Rev. Hugh Worthington (1752-1813) and disclosing that the banking house he worked at in London was Lubbock's bank.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the four sources of biographical information, discussed above, there are two further sources of biographical and bibliographical information, which also engage in critical analysis and discussion of Taylor as a scholar and Platonist. Ronald B. Levinson wrote his doctoral thesis on Thomas Taylor in the Classics Department at the University of Chicago in 1924.<sup>18</sup> The dissertation contains biographical information, based again on *Mr. Taylor the Platonist*, but with a valuable appendix, *Taylor as a Translator*, which is the best analysis, by a competent classicist, of Taylor's scholarly abilities and proficiency in Greek and Latin and the resultant reliability of his translations from those languages into English.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the thesis contains an enlightening chapter, *Taylor and the Reviewers*.<sup>20</sup> Levinson's

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<sup>16</sup> See W.E.A. Axon ed., *Manchester Vegetarian Lectures: First Series* (Manchester: Vegetarian Society [England], 1888), and W.E.A. Axon, *Shelley's Vegetarianism: Read at a Meeting of the Shelley Society, November 12<sup>th</sup> 1890* (Manchester: The Vegetarian Society [England], 1891).

<sup>17</sup> W.E.A. Axon, 'Thomas Taylor the Platonist a Biographical and Bibliographical Sketch.' in *The Library*, (July and August 1890). 245-250, and 292-300. Note: this article is reprinted [slightly abridged] in SW, pp. 122-132.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald B. Levinson, *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: University of Chicago, 1924). Note Levinson was a competent classical scholar, later in life he published on Plato. See, Ronald B. Levinson, *In Defence of Plato*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1953) and Ronald B. Levinson, ed., *Plato a Reader*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967).

<sup>19</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 172-187.

<sup>20</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 89-105.

research and his conclusions regarding Taylor as a translator have made an invaluable contribution to my own research.

Frank B. Evans wrote his doctoral thesis on Taylor at Princeton University in 1938.<sup>21</sup> In his thesis, Evans examined Taylor's life and his works in the context of British literary history, the Platonic tradition and British Romanticism. Evans published the biographical findings from his thesis in an article, '*Thomas Taylor: Platonist of the Romantic Period*'.<sup>22</sup> Evans also published an important article on the Platonic tradition in eighteenth-century Britain, a subject, which has been relatively neglected until recently.<sup>23</sup> I have consulted Evans's work and found his research to be an invaluable resource in the preparation of this thesis.

Kathleen Raine and George Mills Harper's research on Taylor was indebted, in many ways, to the scholarship of both Levinson and Evans, as is my own. Kathleen Raine contextualised many biographical details concerning Taylor in her essay *Thomas Taylor in England*.<sup>24</sup> The second chapter in Mills Harper's *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*, entitled, *Thomas Taylor, Friends, and Relationships*, is a biographical essay, which contains valuable contextual information on Taylor's life.

It is not known if Taylor kept diaries or a journal of any sort; if he did, they have not survived him or at least such material has never been made available publicly or

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<sup>21</sup> Frank B. Evans, *The Background of the Romantic Revival of Platonism*, (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: Princeton University, 1938).

<sup>22</sup> Frank B. Evans, 'Thomas Taylor Platonist of the Romantic Period' in *PMLA*, LV, (1940), 1060-1079.

<sup>23</sup> See Frank B. Evans, 'Platonic scholarship in eighteenth-century England' in *Modern Philology*, 41, (1943), 103-110.

<sup>24</sup> See *SW*, pp. 3-48.

identified. He did keep manuscript notebooks containing working notes of his translations and published works original to him. These may have contained valuable biographical information, and given a vital insight into Taylor's translation practice. On Tuesday 2nd and Wednesday 3rd February 1836, Sotheby and Son auctioned eleven manuscript notebooks with his library.<sup>25</sup> If the notebooks have survived, I have not been able to locate records of their existence or whereabouts. George Mills Harper stated that he owned a microfilm copy of the sale catalogue.<sup>26</sup> However, he does not cite from the catalogue or discuss its contents in detail in his *Neoplatonism of William Blake*. Throughout my research, I have consulted the Sotheby sale catalogue of Taylor's library and I cite it often in this thesis. This is due to its being a repository of rich and otherwise unknown biographical as well as bibliographical information.

Taylor died at his home in Walworth on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1835. During the two months between his death and the auction an unknown person, or persons, prepared the sale catalogue; whoever they were, they had a sympathetic understanding of Taylor's Classical interests and of his devotion to Neoplatonism. The copyright to Taylor's works was offered for sale with the library, the notification of which betrays the allegiance of the preparator of the catalogue:

The COPY-RIGHT of the ENTIRE WORKS published and printed for the late Tho. Taylor, Esq., from the year 1787 to 1834. During the period above-mentioned, Mr Taylor produced above 35 various works, consisting, principally, of Translations of the works of Aristotle, Plato and Proclus. It is quite unnecessary here to enter upon the merits of

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<sup>25</sup> Ann Arbor ed., *Sotheby & Co. London England Catalogue of Sales 1734-1850: Catalogue of the Singularly Curious Library of the Late Thomas Taylor Esq. The Celebrated Platonist* (London: Mr. Sotheby & Son – Wellington Street, Strand, 1836, [Microfilm] (Xerox University Microfilms, 1973). See Lots 707-717 for a full list of 'Manuscripts by the Late Thomas Taylor ESQ.' Hereafter cited as *Soth. Cat.*

<sup>26</sup> George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961), n. 72, p. 284. Note: hereafter cited as *NWB*.

these publications. “ His unexampled efforts in dissemination of the ancient philosophy, and the singular felicity with which he has unfolded the recondite doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, entitle him to the grateful thanks of every admirer of the genius and wisdom of antiquity.” The reason the entire copy-right of all the works is being thus offered for public competition altogether, is, to enable the purchaser to publish his works in a uniform manner; and it will be seen that many of them are quite out of print, and the few copies that remain of the others will speedily call for a re-impression.

Thus, as Mr. Taylor so indefatigably directed his whole life to the promulgation of the opinions of the ancient philosophers, in their true light, it is sincerely hoped that some spirit will be found in those interested in literary property to come forward and purchase this, the only, comparatively speaking, legacy bequeathed to an only son.<sup>27</sup>

Whoever prepared the sale catalogue carefully noted, in explanatory notes advertising the lots for sale, many distinctive and valuable features of books and manuscripts. These included identifications of texts containing manuscript annotations in Taylor’s hand, biographical inscriptions and notes by Taylor, or addressed to Taylor, on the fly-leaves of books and also indications of bilingual, Greek text and Latin translation, texts that contained manuscript emendations by Taylor.

At one stage, during the planning of this thesis, it was proposed that I should write a full-length critical biography of Taylor. Though I have never been trained as a genealogist, or as a biographer, I spent many months researching Taylor’s life. The method I adopted was to analyse the ‘autobiographical’ article *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* line by line. Whenever a person, place, book or event was mentioned, I sought to verify, contextualise and identify as much as I could from published works and archive materials in order to build a more detailed biographical narrative than had been published previously. The chronology presented in *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* only

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<sup>27</sup> *Soth. Cat.* Lot 742. Note: the ‘only son’ referred to was Thomas Proclus Taylor, the playwright.

covers aspects of Taylor's life until 1803-1804 when Taylor published his *Works of Plato*. I initially concentrated on the period between 1758 and 1804 and discovered a considerable amount of cultural and sociological information relating to Taylor, such as the registration of his birth and the Land Tax Assessment Records confirming his family's different London addresses from his childhood through to adulthood. I also made significant discoveries pertinent to Taylor's life after 1804 up until his death in 1835. Due to the decision to attempt to examine Taylor in a biographical context but also in relation to his place in the Platonic tradition in Britain and his role in British Romantic Hellenism I decided to cut any biographical information that was not important to Taylor's intellectual, educational and spiritual development. I also decided not to discuss research that related to Taylor's life post 1804.

In Taylor's letter, of October 7<sup>th</sup> 1798, to George Cumberland, he spoke of rising from obscurity and servility with Cumberland's aid. In *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* it is stated that he made an effort to 'emerge from obscurity' by composing twelve lectures on the Platonic philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Taylor desired to step out of obscurity and onto a public platform. It was no accident that Taylor ended up being featured in *Public Characters of 1798*: he fully intended to occupy a position of prominence in London's literary, cultural and artistic world. First Levinson, when he wrote the appendix to his thesis, *Taylor and the Reviewers*, and then Mills Harper in the appendix to *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*, demonstrate that a vital element of Taylor's attainment of the status of a public character was that his name was continually kept before the reading public.<sup>29</sup> An important aspect of any biography of Taylor would have to be an

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<sup>28</sup> See *SW*, p. 114.

<sup>29</sup> See *NWB*, pp. 272-273. Note: here Harper provides, what is probably, an exhaustive list of the reviews of Taylor's publications between 1787 and 1809. The compilation of the list should be credited to Levinson see pp. 90-91 of his thesis.

assessment of Taylor's public persona as it was reflected in reviews as well as in literature. Therefore, in this thesis I discuss Taylor in the context of how he was portrayed in contemporary reviews and consider some of the recurrent criticisms, some of which were attempts at literary assassination, made against Taylor's theosophical and personal religious stances and his ability as a translator from Greek and Latin into English.

George Mills Harper has observed that, 'From 1787 (when the *Hymns of Orpheus* appeared and before any of Blake's prophetic books) to 1804 (when the *Works of Plato* was published), Taylor was most active. During these years he published and republished twenty-one separate works.'<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, at least thirteen of Taylor's publications were reviewed between 1787 and 1809 in no less than eight separate journals. As I wanted to discuss aspects of Taylor's writing and reviews of his writing, specifically in relation to recurrent and dominant themes and details of his translation practice, I needed to set limits and identify which texts, and from what period, I would focus on. In consultation with my supervisors, and in view of Harper's observation above, it was decided that the most fruitful period in which to carry out my enquiry into Taylor's life and selected works should primarily be between 1787 and 1804. My biographical discussion of Taylor commences with his education, from 1767, when Taylor entered St. Paul's school in London. The reason for this is that an understanding of Taylor's educational background is of vital importance when considering his aptitude and ability as a translator and classicist. By 1804 Taylor's reputation, even notoriety, and his religious and philosophical adoption of 'pagan Hellenistic Neoplatonism' was fully established. The literary, philosophical

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<sup>30</sup> *SW*, p. 273.

and religious position he had cultivated publicly between 1782, when he first published a paraphrase translation of Ocellus Lucanus in *The European Magazine* and the publication of *The Works of Plato* 1804 did not change between that time and his death in 1835. Although Taylor produced more than fourteen more translations of various Neoplatonist and Pythagorean authors, and a ten-volume translation of the complete works of Aristotle, and several articles published in journals, such as *The Classical Journal*, his philosophical position was a life-long commitment and did not change.

In the thesis, I attempt to identify Taylor's position in and contribution to the Platonic tradition in Britain in the late-eighteenth century.<sup>31</sup> I identify three 'strains' of Platonism in the period, Christian, pagan and Romantic Neoplatonism. Thomas Taylor was the sole propagator of pagan Hellenistic Neoplatonism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His denunciation and rejection of Christian Platonism, as it had been expressed in Western Europe since the Italian Renaissance, in favour of the recovery of pagan Hellenistic Platonism as it was developed initially by the philosopher Plotinus and brought to maturity by Proclus, was Taylor's most significant achievement in philosophical, religious and literary terms. I have focussed primarily on this 'pagan' Platonism and situate it, in an eighteenth-century context, as flowing out of the Christian Platonic tradition. I argue that 'Romantic Neoplatonism' primarily and distinctively emerged following the restoration of pagan Platonism by Taylor.

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<sup>31</sup> Some helpful works that I have read that are relevant to understanding eighteenth-century Platonism are: Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trns. James P. Pettegrove (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953). Cassirer surveys Platonism in the context of Renaissance humanism, the Cambridge Platonists and the last chapter, 'The End of the Cambridge School and its Influence' is helpful in an eighteenth-century context. See also: W.R.Inge, *The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1926.)

The study of paganism in Britain in the long eighteenth century is under-researched. Taylor, who was referred to as 'the English Pagan' used the term 'pagan' and the related term 'heathen' in his writings. The etymology of the term 'pagan' reveals that it is from the Latin *pagus* 'the countryside' and the Latin term *paganus* simply referred to peasant dwellers in the countryside, to rustics, those who lived beyond urban environments. In the Roman Empire, when the Christian cult became dominant in cities, and was adopted by governments, the last vestiges of the practices of the old pre-Christian religions were perceived to survive amongst the plebeian country-folk: the *pagani*. From those roots, the term was applied to anyone who worshipped the pre-Christian divinities. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'pagan' as 'A person not subscribing to any major or recognized religion, esp. the dominant religion of a particular society; *spec.* a heathen, a non-Christian, esp. considered as savage, uncivilized, etc. Now chiefly *hist.*' The term is also defined as, 'A follower of a pantheistic or nature-worshipping religion; *esp.* a neopagan'. When I use the term pagan in relation to Taylor I mean it in the latter sense, and use it to convey that he was a pantheist, and specifically a worshipper of the many processions of divinity, known as gods, emanating from an absolute and indefinable divine source, termed the One and the Good in the Platonic tradition. Taylor was a pagan in the religious and theosophical sense that Plotinus and Proclus were pagans. In the thesis I discuss specific aspects of the theological tenets of pagan Hellenistic Platonism, which Taylor promoted and to which he subscribed. The terms 'pagan' and 'heathen' had very negative, and even shocking, connotations in the eighteenth century. Taylor was comfortable with the terms, which was unusual. Taylor's critics no doubt used the terms in denigratory senses and intended the soubriquet 'Pagan Taylor' as an insult.

Taylor adopted the nickname without shame; it was distinctive and became a well known 'brand-name': there were many Taylors in London but there was only one 'Pagan Taylor' who was also often designated 'the Platonist'. The OED defines 'heathen' as ' Applied to persons or races whose religion is neither Christian, Jewish, nor Muslim; pagan; Gentile. In earlier times applied also to Muslims; but in modern usage, for the most part, restricted to those holding polytheistic beliefs, esp. when uncivilized or uncultured.' The term 'heathen' is of Germanic derivation and is broadly interchangeable with the Latinate 'pagan'. When Taylor used the terms 'pagan' and 'heathen' he was primarily referring to those who held religious beliefs outside of the restrictive definitions placed upon conceptions of divinity within Hebraic monotheism (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

A textual manifestation of Taylor's paganism was that he frequently, though not consistently, capitalised the nouns 'God' and 'Goddess' and their derivatives, rather than using the lower-case spelling 'god' and 'goddess' as is customarily correct in English. It is understandable that Taylor might have been trying to make a religious and political point by utilising 'rebellious capitalisation' – why should the Christian divinity be termed 'God' and the pagan divinities be termed 'gods'? The Greek for 'gods' is *theos* (θεός). John Dillon and Lloyd P Gerson write concerning the translation into English of the Neoplatonic use of *theos* and state that it is 'used for principles of the intelligible world, often virtually as an honor. Seldom if ever used as a proper noun, hence, the inappropriateness of translating the term "God."<sup>32</sup> In this thesis, if the term is inappropriately capitalised, it is when quoting Taylor, who

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<sup>32</sup> John Dillon and Lloyd P Gerson, *Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), p. 362.

sometimes used the term to ‘textually elevate’ the pagan divinities to the same level of ‘importance’ as the Christian divinity.

Throughout the thesis, I refer to Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism is a specialist subject to which I was introduced only when I studied Taylor. I am aware that some of my readers may not be specialists in Greek philosophy. Therefore, I have attempted to write about aspects of Neoplatonism, Orphism and Pythagoreanism in a way that is not unduly technical. I have attempted to explain any specialist terms I employ.<sup>33</sup>

Neoplatonism is a notoriously difficult subject to understand. The term originated in the second half of the nineteenth century to describe the distinctive expression of the Platonic tradition in late antiquity. The idea that ‘Neoplatonism’ existed as a fully comprehensible, definable and quantifiable system, is erroneous. The subject is better understood as a plurality of ‘Neoplatonisms’ which are all in some way connected and yet distinctive. R.T. Wallis introduces Neoplatonism, with refreshing clarity, in his book *Neoplatonism*, where he gives the following short overview of the structure and origins of three Neoplatonic schools:

‘Neoplatonism’ is a term coined in modern times to distinguish the form of the Platonic tradition inaugurated by Plotinus (A.D. 204-70) and lasting in its pagan form down to the sixth century A.D. from the teaching of Plato’s original disciples (the ‘Old Academy’) and from the Platonism of the earlier Roman Empire (‘Middle Platonism’). Among the movement’s post-Plotinian developments three periods may be distinguished: first the teaching of Plotinus’ pupils Porphyry (c. 232–c. 305) and Amelius; secondly, the Syrian and Pergamene schools deriving from the teaching of Iamblichus (died c. 326) and finally the fifth- and sixth-century schools of Athens and Alexandria. The latter school, important mainly for its commentaries on Aristotle, passed in

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<sup>33</sup> The second hypostasis, or level of reality (consciousness) is the intellect or mind. In Plotinus, there are three foundational hypostases: the One (transcendent divine), the intellect, and soul.

the sixth century into the hands of Christian teachers and was still active when the city was captured by the Moslems in 641; its dominant themes were subsequently incorporated into Islamic philosophy. The Athenian school, on the other hand, being more determinedly pagan, had been closed by the emperor Justinian in 529; its leading members were Plutarch of Athens (died 432),<sup>34</sup> Syrianus (died. c. 437), Proclus (412-85), Damascius, head of the Academy at the time of its closure, and Damascius' younger contemporary Simplicius, the Athenian School's most important Aristotelian commentator.<sup>35</sup>

An important pagan Platonic commentator of the Alexandrian school was Olympiodorus whom Wallis happens not to mention in the passage above.<sup>36</sup> There were subtle, but nonetheless important, differences in the philosophical practice and dogma of the three schools, though they were all Platonic and pagan until dispersed by Christian or Islamic forces. For instance, Plotinus taught that the higher part of the soul, the intellect, never fully incarnated into the world of matter, the body of flesh. However, Iamblichus taught that the soul fully incarnated into the flesh. Iamblichus also developed a meditative and ritual practice within the context of Neoplatonic philosophy, Pythagoreanism and Orphism, and Oriental influences such as *The Chaldean Oracles* and Egyptian temple practices, called theurgy. Theurgy was a form of religious devotion to the gods and it was also a form of ceremonial 'magic' whereby divine powers were called into manifestation; the souls of participants in theurgic rites were believed to benefit by evolving and to experience elevation towards the divine. Both Iamblichus and Proclus were initiated into pagan priesthoods, and were philosopher-priests. Thomas Taylor, saw himself as reviving theosophical beliefs and ritual practices of the pagan Hellenic Neoplatonists of late antiquity. Taylor favoured Proclus most amongst all the Neoplatonists. The teaching

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<sup>34</sup> Not to be confused with the more famous Plutarch of Chaeronea, the second-century amateur Platonist philosopher and author of *Moralia* and *Parallel Lives*.

<sup>35</sup> R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* [Forward and Bibliography by Lloyd P. Gerson] (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1972. [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.] rpt. 2002), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

of Proclus heavily influences much of Taylor's expression of Neoplatonism. When reading Taylor's translations and works original to him you are reading the works of an eighteenth-century disciple of Proclus.

I was not a schoolboy classicist. In the early stages of the preparation of this thesis, I found that I needed some grasp of Classical Greek, as portions of Greek text frequently appear in Taylor's works and I wanted to understand him better. Therefore I attended the Greek Latin Summer School, hosted by the Department of Classics at the University of Cork. This was my first attempt at acquiring a foreign language! I now have a limited grasp of Greek and can navigate a Greek text with Smyth's Greek Grammar in one hand and a Liddell and Scott lexicon in the other, and preferably a good English translation within reach. In the thesis, I have for the most part, given the Greek in Greek characters with English transliteration. When Greek is printed in eighteenth-century texts accents and breathings are often omitted, also, Greek characters were often printed in antique styles (derived from characters in Byzantine manuscripts), which are now redundant; for instance, one will often see the vowels ο (omicron) and υ (upsilon), when they occur together, presented in a combined form by the character ϝ. In the thesis, whenever I have reproduced Greek text from eighteenth-century sources, containing odd-looking characters, I have edited the text by substituting archaic characters with modern standard equivalents. If accents and breathings were not supplied with the Greek printed in primary-source texts, which I cite from, such as is more often than not the case in both Taylor's works and in eighteenth-century journals, I have not supplied accents and breathings, and reproduce the Greek text as it was originally printed.

I have written the thesis hoping that readers will already have some familiarity with the biographical article *Mr. Taylor, The Platonist*,<sup>37</sup> and W.E.A. Axon's *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*.<sup>38</sup> This thesis considers, and adds to, those accounts of Taylor's life. I have consulted primary sources wherever possible and cite from first editions of Taylor's works. Due to the scarcity of Taylor first editions and for the convenience of my readers I have also provided citations of reprints, wherever possible, primarily from *Selected Writings* and from *The Thomas Taylor Series*, a reprint of Taylor's works amounting to thirty-three volumes, by the Prometheus Trust.

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<sup>37</sup> *SW*, pp. 105-121.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-132.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Education of Thomas Taylor the Platonist**

## 1. Formal Education

Shortly before Thomas Taylor's ninth birthday, May 15<sup>th</sup> 1767, Joseph Taylor applied for his son to enter St. Paul's School 'on the Foundation.' John Colet (1466-1519), who held the important ecclesiastical office of Dean of St Paul's Cathedral from 1504 until his death, inherited his father's estates in about 1507 and used his fortune to found St. Paul's School in 1509. Colet appointed William Lily, a friend he shared with Erasmus (c.1469-1536), as the first high master and it was under his leadership that the teaching of Greek was established. Colet's vision for his grammar school, set up to accommodate 153 boys, was that it would be a school for all 'nacions and countres indifferently'.<sup>1</sup> It would seem that the original vision meant that the boys be selected with no regard for race, class or geographical origin, which was progressive and generous for the time. The 153 would also receive a free education. Colet drew up the rules of conduct for the school and provided an English translation of the Creed and other prayers for devotional use there. Together with Lily he created a Latin grammar, which was used in the school well into the eighteenth century and was the basis of the pupil's elementary introduction to Classical languages. It cost Colet over £150,000 to set up the school. This included a new stone building in the eastern sector of St. Paul's Church Yard, furnishings, equipment and endowments. Importantly, upon his death Colet left the bulk of his considerable estate in trust to the Mercer's Company together with total responsibility for administration of the school and oversight of its welfare. The Mercer's Company thus held responsibility not only

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<sup>1</sup> A.H. Mead, *A Miraculous Draught of Fishes: A History of St. Paul's School 1509-1990* (London: James & James, 1990), p. 15.

for the financial provision of the school but also for all of its appointments from the High Master through to the junior teaching staff. Colet's desire for there to be 153 boys in the school who should receive a free education at the expense of his foundation has been implemented by the Mercer's Company with few administrative variations to the present day.

Why 153 boys? The most obvious answer relates to the last chapter of John's gospel where Simon Peter is said to have caught 153 fish when he obeyed the instructions of the resurrected Christ to 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.'<sup>2</sup> In line with Colet's Platonism and Renaissance mystical interests,<sup>3</sup> other, esoteric answers to the question have been postulated. Such as, '153 is the triangular of the mystic number 17, and 'the sum of ten and seven [are] both symbols of perfection' – that is, a triangle of 153 dots with one dot at the top, two in the next row, and so on has a base of 17.'<sup>4</sup> Thomas Taylor, who developed a lifelong interest in mystical mathematics and sacred geometry, would probably have preferred this explanation to the Christian analogy.<sup>5</sup> Taylor studied in a school whose founder 'read, and may have met, the Florentine Platonists, Pico and Ficino: he believed that the universe was ordered hierarchically, that its order was numerically structured and that

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<sup>2</sup> *John* 21. 5 –10

<sup>3</sup> See, Leland Mills, *John Colet and the Platonic Tradition* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> A.H. Mead, *A Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note too that the bequest of a Platonist – albeit of the renaissance Christian humanist variety – provided an education for and succoured the mind, not only of Thomas Taylor the Platonist but also of Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893) the much admired classicist whose translation of the dialogues of Plato into English superseded Taylor's in 1871. Note: between the publication of Taylor and Jowett's translations of Plato's works, an English translation, by Henry Cary and H. Davis, of the complete works of Plato was published in 1848-54 (6 vols.) but it has not received much critical attention.

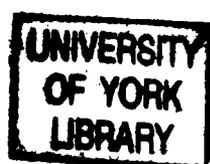
understanding was to be had by applying numerical keys, especially the key of threes.<sup>6</sup>

In the eighteenth century, entry to the school on the Foundation was in the hands of the Surveyor Accountant of the Mercer's Company. The Surveyor Accountant was usually the outgoing Master of the Mercer's Company, a position that changed annually.<sup>7</sup> Due to the variable nature of this key appointment, there was no constantly maintained admissions policy to the school. Boys who entered were expected to be reasonably proficient in basic literacy in English; however, at some periods, evidence suggests that boys may have entered the school that had no education at all before entry. Children were tested on the alphabet by means of a teaching aid called a 'horn book', a tablet made of horn but often of metal or pewter, which took the form of a rectangle; it was about the size of a modern optometrist's visual examination chart, with twenty-six capital letters displayed in relief. They had to compose copy and read aloud some short passages. The Surveyor Accountant also provided, by private financial arrangement, for boys in addition to the 153 provided for by Colet's estate to enter the school. Thomas Taylor's candidacy was successful and he was offered a place on the Foundation. This must have been the cause of great rejoicing in his household as it presented the boy with an advantageous start in life. The list of alumni was impressive; it included boys who went on to serve in key government or military positions together with academics, scientists and notable literary figures such as John Milton (1608-1647), Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) and Samuel Johnson (1649-1703). Joseph Taylor, in line with his religious convictions, saw Thomas's purpose of being

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<sup>6</sup> A.H. Mead, *A Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, p.15.

<sup>7</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 49.



there 'to be educated for a dissenting minister.'<sup>8</sup> In the decades before Thomas entered the school it had gone through a number of administrative and practical difficulties under the leadership of George Charles, High Master from 1737 to 1748. The Mercer's Company was also in dire financial difficulties during that period. In 1748 the Mercer's Company's financial difficulties were settled by an Act of Parliament and George Charles was dismissed, when the number of boys attending St. Paul's had dropped to 35. George Thicknesse became the new High Master, he served in that role from 1748 to 1769, and it was he who revived the schools reputation. Thicknesse was serving the last years of his appointment when Thomas Taylor registered as a pupil at St. Paul's School on 10 April 1767.<sup>9</sup>

The building in which Thomas went to school was not the original built by Colet, although it stood on the original foundations in the eastern sector of St. Paul's Churchyard. Two four-storey square towers with a low hall between them had been built following the Great Fire of 1666. The hall was the main schoolroom and the adjoining houses served as lodgings for the masters and providing accommodation for boarders. Three or four masters worked under the sur-Master; in Taylor's time, the sur-Master was The Rev. Mr Ryder. The High Master had a residence at Stepney. All of the masters in the school were Anglican divines. Each week boys were to bring a wax candle to school with them, together with a shilling for payment to the school porter. The candle, itself expensive, was an essential item as the schoolroom took the

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<sup>8</sup> *SW*, p 105.

<sup>9</sup> See R.B Gardiner, *The Admissions Registers of St Paul's School from 1748-1786* (London: 1884), p. 137. Note: Continuous admissions registers of St. Paul's School commenced under the High Master George Thicknesse in 1748. Gardiner's reproduction of them is a faithful transcription of the originals, which can still be inspected in the archives of the Mercer's Company. Gardiner adds biographical annotations to the entries of notable boys. Beside Thomas Taylor's entry he simply recorded, 'The Platonist'.

form of a long hall, which could be quite dark inside even though it had large windows. In autumn, winter and early spring a candle was a necessity. All three levels of boys – juniors, middles and seniors – within which there were eight ascending forms, shared the hall, each form being separated from the others by heavy curtains. The pupils were between ten and fourteen years old, though boys as young as seven or as old as sixteen might attend. Students stayed in the school for an average of three to four years; not all stayed on to attend the higher forms. Progression through forms was not an automatic consequence of age but a consequence of ability; the terms, junior, middle and senior referred to this progression. Boys rose from one form to the next by passing tests.

Thomas would have begun his education there by learning the Ten Commandments in English. As a junior, he would have begun with Latin; at that time, a Grammar School meant a school which taught Latin. Taylor would not only have learned to read and identify the formal parts of Latin; fluency both written and spoken, was the aim. His day would have started promptly at seven in the morning with Latin prayers and Bible reading. Six days a week were employed to educational ends and Saturdays were set aside for catechising and learning verbs. His early education there would have involved a lot of repetition and copying. *A Short Introduction to Grammar*, officially endorsed for use in all English schools during the eighteenth century by royal monopoly, originated in St. Paul's School and reflected the establishment's commitment to the Classics. In essence, the grammar-book was much the same as the one created by the first High Master, William Lily, in 1509, though it had grown over

time due to alterations and additions.<sup>10</sup> Bringing the boys from language rules to real reading as quickly as possible was its intent. The most expeditious method of promoting language acquisition was reading Latin prose, the standard text used in the school for this purpose being Erasmus's *Colloquies*, which Erasmus had written for the school. The *Colloquies*, simple conversations, demonstrated the rules of the Latin language. This encouraged *éclaircissement* when conjugating and declining verbs and nouns by repetition, which had a limited mnemonic effect. As a junior, Taylor would have spent almost all his time learning Latin. Boys did not progress to Greek until they entered the sixth form and Hebrew was taught in the eighth form, but not many boys reached that level.

How many forms did Taylor ascend in the three years spent at St. Paul's School, and was his time there sufficient for some Greek to be absorbed as well as Latin? In later life, when training to be a dissenting minister, Taylor stated that he was then recovering 'his knowledge of the rudiments of the Latin and Greek tongues'.<sup>11</sup> If this statement is true, it means that Taylor reached the sixth form at St. Paul's in the three years between the ages of nine and twelve, thus acquiring the 'rudiments' of Greek, which seems unlikely. Alternatively, he gained some knowledge of Greek during the time when he was concentrating mainly on Latin, in the lower forms, which would have made him an exception to the usual progression through the syllabus. Taylor gives the following description of his time as a Pauline:

Here, it seems, he soon gave indications of that contemplative

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<sup>10</sup> For further information on the curriculum, from which my descriptions are sourced, see A.H. Mead, *A Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, pp. 17-18, 38 & 92.

<sup>11</sup> *SW*, p. 107.

turn of mind, and that aversion to merely verbal disquisitions, which have since become such predominant features of his character. In proof of this, Mr. Ryder, one of the masters of the school, whenever a sentence occurred remarkably moral or grave, in any classick which young Taylor was translating to him, would always preface it by saying to the youthful Platonist: "Come, here is something worthy the attention of a philosopher."<sup>12</sup>

The above quotation from *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* raises some important aspects of Taylor's emergence as a public character and his portrayal of himself. The reference to 'merely verbal disquisitions' relates to the long-established philosophical disputation about the difference between words and things; when mere words were considered as being like shadows instead of substances: it is a theme, which recurred frequently in Taylor's publications in later life. Taylor's youthful self-portrayal is a manipulative construct as all biographical writings are. Taylor presents the reader with an image of himself as a boy who had a distinguished 'contemplative turn of mind' and who as an infant was termed 'a philosopher' by his teacher; he even refers to himself in the third person as 'the youthful Platonist'. All of the above assertions and the inferences arising from them may well be true, but should be received with caution. In a footnote to the above quotation, Taylor also asserted:

Thus too, at an early period, one of the first scholars of the age, discovered the critical turn of his mind: for when, on reading the Latin Testament, *at Jesus* was printed instead of *ait Jesus*, he shrewdly conjectured that *at* must be a verb, and be derived from *ao*.<sup>13</sup>

This occurrence could have happened at home or in school and it is impossible to define who the 'first scholar of the age' was. The boy's observations reveal a keen mind. The phrase '*at Jesus*' translates as 'but, in the meanwhile Jesus' 'at' being a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

conjunction in Latin, meaning ‘but’ or ‘meanwhile’; the young Taylor had identified a misprint. The Testament should have read ‘*ait Jesus*’ or ‘said Jesus’ (*ait* being derived from *aio*). Taylor was correct when he identified that the use of the ‘*ait*’ ‘said’ could replace ‘*at*’ ‘but... in the meanwhile’. However, the cleverness of the observation is somewhat undone by a misprint in *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* for ‘*ao*’ is meaningless in Latin and should be ‘*aio*’ the root of ‘said’, ‘says’ etc.

Taylor states that as a boy he was ‘so disgusted with the arbitrary manner in which the dead languages are taught in that, as well as all other publick schools, that he entreated, and at length prevailed on his father to take him home, and abandon his design of educating him for the ministry’.<sup>14</sup> The twelve-year-old was able and persuasive enough to cause his father to remove him from St. Paul’s School and to ‘abandon his design of educating him for the ministry’. The picture of a boy persuading his father to make such a life-changing decision on his behalf based on discomfort and disillusionment with the teaching practice of the establishment seems questionable. At the school, Thomas was a Foundation boy and consequently he received a free education in one of the most distinguished educational establishments in London. Would a parent bend their will to their child’s complaints when sacrificing such an education was at stake? Such a scenario is difficult to believe; either Taylor left St. Paul’s under a cloud, perhaps he failed to pass some of his exams and had to leave, or maybe he had to leave and work for his father. It is possible that the portrayal is true; Taylor’s father ‘considered the office of a dissenting minister the most desirable and the most enviable employment upon earth!’<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Joseph Taylor accepted that Thomas did not feel a call to serve God through a formal

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106

ministry. Perhaps in his wisdom, Joseph decided to let the boy live out his own dreams and convictions. After all, three years at St. Paul's was the average time spent there by tradesperson's sons, and if Thomas wanted an apprenticeship in a trade rather than following an enforced religious vocation then he could still do well. Joseph Taylor must have been a remarkable father if his prescience and wisdom recognised that his child could not follow a father's dreams and desires but that he must fashion his own. What is certain is that Taylor left St. Paul's with an average rather than a specialised knowledge of the classical languages. He may have learned some Greek, but due to the period of time he spent there it is unlikely that he would have progressed to the sixth form; thus his initiation into the Greek language would have been introductory to say the least.

Thomas did not need to board at St. Paul's School as he lived literally around the corner from it.<sup>16</sup> At home his parents would have given the boy ample encouragement to study and helped him establish a beneficial routine. Taylor was brought up in a nonconformist household – his parents were Protestant dissenters who did not conform to the teachings of the Anglican Church and who worshipped independently of it.<sup>17</sup> Most, if not all, dissenting households in the late eighteenth century would have taken their commitment to religion seriously. Eighteenth-century Protestant dissent fell into two historically defined groups. Firstly, there were the heirs of the Puritans, the Congregationalists (also called Independents), Baptists and loyal

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<sup>16</sup> The Taylor family lived at Round Court, St. Martin's Le Grand, in the Adersgate Within borough, very near to St. Paul's Cathedral. Taylor's father, Joseph, was a staymaker by trade. For records of the family's residence in Round Court see: Guildhall Library, London, *Land Tax Assessment Books: Alders Gate Within 1764-1765*, [Microfiche], MS.11, 316/195.

<sup>17</sup> All of the Taylor children had their births recorded in *The Protestant Dissenters Registry*, was set up to record the births of the children of Presbyterians, Baptists and Independents at Dr. Williams's Library. Dr Daniel Williams (1643-1716) library was part of his bequest and opened in Red Cross Street in 1729. For over a century it served as the headquarters of London dissent. *The Protestant Dissenters Registry 1716-1837* is now held in the Public Records Office (PRO Series RG4/RG5). Thomas Taylor's birth on May 15<sup>th</sup> 1758 is recorded.

Presbyterians: these three nonconformist denominations are often referred to as practitioners of 'Old Dissent'. Secondly, there were congregations who are often referred to under the banner of 'New Dissent' – the various Christian sects and congregations that arose within, or after, Methodism.<sup>18</sup> Late eighteenth-century England, before the French Revolution, saw a relatively relaxed attitude towards religious sectarianism and protestant dissenters enjoyed a level of freedom and peace that they had not enjoyed historically. Protestant dissenters had struggled immensely to maintain a witness of their faith especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Dissenting families, including the Taylors, would have embodied familial memories of persecution; any liberty they enjoyed had cost ancestors a high price and therefore they maintained their religious commitment with a high degree of sobriety and historical awareness. Under William III, the Toleration Act of 1689 was enacted, which recognised the Meeting Houses of all dissenters and so throughout the long eighteenth century toleration of protestant dissenters gradually prospered as the English constitution enjoyed stability. Protestant dissenters were only allowed to call their places of worship, chapels or meeting houses; the term 'church' was exclusively attached to Anglican places of worship. However, nonconformists were still very much restricted in relation to social opportunity and equality: for instance, non-communicants of the Anglican Church could not serve in Parliament or in the courts of law or in the armed services, or be appointed to political positions in any form of 'local government'; nor could dissenters go up to either of England's two universities. These stipulations were embodied in English law following the Restoration, in *The Corporation Act of 1661* and the *Test Act of 1673*, which were among the several statutes passed after the Restoration that imposed civil and religious disabilities on

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<sup>18</sup> See: Horton Davies, *From Watts and Wesley to Maurice 1690-1850: Worship and Theology in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). Note: the *Introduction* (pp. 3-15) provides a useful overview of the different traditions within Protestant dissent in the long eighteenth century.

non-Anglicans.<sup>19</sup> During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Protestant dissenters formed a political lobbying committee: The Committee for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, in an effort to restore political and civil rights to dissenters.

The Taylor family were almost certainly Presbyterians.<sup>20</sup> The following descriptions are generalisations and are included here because Taylor's account of his childhood in *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* places a strong emphasis on the fact that he was raised and educated in the culture of Protestant dissent. Thomas Taylor, as a young boy and as a teenager, grew up in a household which was imbued with the realities of what it meant to be a nonconformist in social terms in both contemporary and historical contexts. The private personal and family devotional lives of dissenters were diverse and individualistic. The universal priesthood of all believers was a key tenant of dissenting theology. The Scriptural authority for this is Paul's first letter to Timothy: 'For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.'<sup>21</sup> Also, the apostle Peter wrote to his flock: 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.'<sup>22</sup> These two passages of scripture highlight a key 'pan-sectarian' belief that no human mediators, such as ordained priests, were necessary when approaching God: all that the believer needed was Christ and their individual faith. Dissenters maintained their

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<sup>19</sup> See, T.W. Davies, ed., *Committees for Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: Minutes 1786-90 and 1827-8* (London: London Record Society, 1978), pp. VII-XXVI.

<sup>20</sup> See, SW. p. 109. The likely Presbyterianism of the Taylor family is discussed more fully on pp.38-39 following.

<sup>21</sup> 1 *Timothy* 2.5

<sup>22</sup> 1 *Peter* 2.9

own 'walk with God' and as all believers were a 'royal priesthood' they interpreted the Bible and lived their Christian lives in light of their own reason, conscience and understanding. Rationalistic Moralism and a rational approach to theology were hallmarks of Protestant dissent.<sup>23</sup> Dissenters, in terms of individuals and sects, agreed broadly on many doctrinal issues. Autodidactism flourished in dissenting circles. Many chapels were hotbeds of political as well as religious debate and members of the various dissenting sects were often highly opinionated and well informed in political terms. Most dissenters saw the established church as perverted and often described it as being 'antichrist'; the Church and State establishment was Ezekiel's 'Whore' conflated with 'Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots' and the 'Beast' of John's *Revelations*. Exuberant and emphatic politico-religious expression would have surrounded Thomas Taylor as he grew up and had some degree of effect on his developing mind.

At around the age of twelve or thirteen Taylor became acquainted with the first book that would play a part in forging his future destiny. This proved to be Taylor's first step on the Platonic path and accordingly its importance is marked. Taylor recorded:

During Mr. T's residence at home, while his father was yet undetermined as to his future situation in life, he happened to meet with Ward's Young Mathematician's Guide, and was so struck, in looking over the book, with the singularity of *negative quantities*, when multiplied together producing *positive ones*, that he immediately conceived a strong desire to become acquainted with mathematicks.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Davies, *Worship and Theology in England* (1961), 'Part One: 1690-1740: The Dominance of Rationalistic Moralism', pp. 19-139.

<sup>24</sup> *SW*, p. 106.

Taylor was a mathematician for the rest of his life after reading John Ward's *Young Mathematician's Guide Being a Plain and Easy Introduction to the Mathematick's: With an appendix of Practical Gauging*. Ward hailed from Chester: his guide to mathematics was first published in 1706. The guide was a staple introduction to maths for thousands of juvenile, and probably a good number of adult readers too, throughout the eighteenth century. By the time that Thomas Taylor 'happened to meet' the guide it was in its 12<sup>th</sup> edition of 1771. In the preface, the author remarks that the book can be used by 'students lacking even the rudiments of mathematick education' and that if they were willing to spend time and work through it they could grasp the subject. The guide is 480 pages long, in the 1771 edition, and interspersed with tables that demonstrate mathematical principles, sequences and concepts. Ward also commented that 'the book is plain and homely, it being wholly intended to instruct, and not amuse or puzzle the young learner.'<sup>25</sup> The words 'Let None Enter Here That Does Not Know Geometry' were famously inscribed over the gateway to Plato's academy in ancient Athens. Ward's guide was Taylor's first step towards an appreciation of mathematics that would be a key to his initiation into the Platonic tradition. Taylor's first published work was a mathematical tract. His interest in mathematics verged towards what might be called 'mystical mathematics'; he also practised 'sacred geometry.' Like the ancient Pythagoreans and Platonists, and many other mystical traditions such as the Cabbala, Taylor believed, long before the Polish-born mathematician Benoit B. Mandelbrot introduced the theory of Fractals as underpinning the structural progression and cohesion of natural phenomena, that

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<sup>25</sup> John Ward, *Ward's Young Mathematician's Guide... The Twelfth Edition, Carefully Corrected and Improved by Samuel Clarke. To which is added, a supplement, containing the history of logarithms, and an index to the whole work* (London: J. Beecroft, 1771), n.p. [Preface] Note: Samuel Clarke is identified in the work as 'a teacher of Mathematicks'.

numbers and their sequences were a key to understanding the universe. The apex of Taylor's lifelong mathematical studies is his *Medicina Mentis* [Mind Medicine] or *A Specimen of Theological Arithmetic*.<sup>26</sup> Taylor prefaced the work with the phrase; 'Far ye profane, far off...' that was employed as an exorcism, warning and banishing in sacred shrines and in the mystery cults of ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>27</sup> In *Public Characters of 1798*, Taylor emphasised the link between his study of mathematics and his Platonic quest writing:

To this early acquaintance with those leading branches of mathematical sciences, arithmetick, algebra, and geometry, Mr. T. ascribes his present unrivalled attachment to the philosophy of Plato, and all the substantial felicity of his life.<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting that Taylor credited his mathematical studies as being the basis of 'the substantial felicity of his life'. He is here referring to the greater part of the happiness of his life. Taylor is not suggesting that the act of sitting down working out equations, mathematical formulas and the like provided the 'substantial felicity' of his life, though he likely gained a great amount of pleasure from doing so, as some people gain immense pleasure from doing crosswords or other problem-solving activities. Rather Taylor is indicating the importance of mathematical disciplines in training the mind towards the end of developing rigorous mental discipline and aptitude in the execution of logical processes. It was for these purposes that the Platonists valued

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<sup>26</sup> *Medicina Mentis* was never published by Taylor: the original holograph manuscript is bound into the back of a copy of Taylor's 1788-89 translation of Proclus on Euclid's Elements in the Houghton Collection at Harvard University Library [*Houghton EC8 T2185: 788p*]. The copy of Proclus at Harvard was Taylor's personal copy and is interspersed with ms. notes on the text in his hand, the holograph manuscript of *Medicina Mentis* bound with Taylor's translation of Proclus is 23 pages long. In 1974 the Shrine of Wisdom, (an esoteric order in the south of England) published a printed transcript of the work: Thomas Taylor, *Medicina Mentis or a Specimen of Theological Arithmetic* (Godalming: Shrine of Wisdom, 1974).

<sup>27</sup> From Virgil's *Aeneid* VI : 258 and often given in Latin: '*Procul, O Procul este, Profani*'.

<sup>28</sup> *SW*, p. 106.

mathematical application. The principle purpose of the Platonic philosopher being primarily trained in mathematics, especially geometry, was that it opened the mind of the initiate to abstract concepts which could be examined, proved and quantified logically. Plato's method of approaching problems of any sort was to apply exhaustive dialectic enquiries to them. Evidence of this is abundantly manifest in Socrates' approach to questions and in his interactions with interlocutors in the Platonic dialogues. Taylor is attributing the greater part of his happiness in life to the training his mind received and the subsequent analytical skills he developed while on the Platonic path.

Taylor's father did not sympathise with, nor understand, his son's emergent obsession with 'mathematicks.' Taylor wrote that, 'His father, however, who was deeply skilled in modern theology, but utterly unacquainted with this sublime and most useful species of learning, was, it seems, averse to his son's engaging in such a course of study'.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Taylor related that he began to devote his 'hours of rest to mathematical lucubrations' and that in order to accomplish this 'he was obliged to conceal a tinderbox under his pillow'.<sup>30</sup> This information reveals that Joseph Taylor was not agreeable to indulging his son's eagerness for learning if he considered it redundant in relation to present and future productivity. Thomas had made a decision not to follow through with training for the dissenting ministry. After he finished at St. Paul's he would have gone up to one of the Scottish universities, which were open to English dissenters, unlike Cambridge and Oxford. Although Joseph had accepted that his son might not be 'called' to the ministry, and thus did not press him to pursue a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

vocation, he nonetheless realised that Thomas must be fitted for some kind of trade or career. In the eighteenth century, mathematics was not valued as much, in relation to general education, as it is today. Basic arithmetic was the only useful application of mathematics in most cases. Though the study of mathematics was highly developed in the universities. Joseph Taylor believed that his son needed a trade and to begin making a living. In 1773, at the age of fifteen, 'Mr. T. was placed under an uncle-in-law at Sheerness, who happened to be one of the officers of that dock yard.'<sup>31</sup>

Many of the ships were named after gods, goddesses, heroes and personalities that originated from Classical mythology and history and were finished in impressive 'gingerbread' (the term for a ship's carved decoration) that befitted the named personality of the vessel. Taylor would have seen many massive painted and gilded ship's figureheads that represented the characters and deities about which he would soon commit his life to writing. The port was very much a microcosm of the identity, values and aspirations of empire: trade, commerce, colonialism, slaves, exploration, war, defence, national pride and regimen were apparent there.

Taylor hated his time in Sheerness, which lasted for three years. His account of the time he spent there is a jeremiad. He found his charge 'so very tyrannical' that he despaired of his situation every day and regarded it as 'a state of slavery'.<sup>32</sup> This however, did not impede his thirst for learning or his ambition for knowledge. Taylor recorded that, 'Here at his leisure hours, which were but few, he still pursued the study of the speculative part of mathematics; for he was of opinion that those sciences

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *SW*, p. 107.

were degraded when applied to practical affairs, without then knowing that the same sentiment had been adopted by Pythagoras, Plato and Archimedes.’<sup>33</sup> This would seem to suggest that Taylor’s role at the dockyard involved mathematics ‘applied to practical affairs’. This information indicates that either his uncle-in-law was the Clerk of Check, or the Clerk of Survey or a sub-officer attached to one of them. Taylor spent his days, and some nights, in administrative work, which involved keeping accounts and monitoring supplies.

As well as studying ‘speculative’ or theoretical mathematics Taylor also, ‘read Bolingbroke and Hume, and by studying their works became a convert to the *sceptical philosophy*’.<sup>34</sup> From the age of fifteen through to seventeen or eighteen, Taylor was not a Platonist. However, he was an autodidact and was such from the time that he applied himself to *Ward’s Young Mathematician’s Guide* with the aid of the tinderbox kept under his pillow at the age of thirteen. Autodidactism was commonplace amongst individuals brought up in the intellectually curious culture of Protestant dissent. Taylor’s father was described as being ‘deeply skilled in modern theology’ and no one can grapple with the depths and subtleties of theology without reference to philosophy. Joseph Taylor must have imbued his son with a passion for learning, and perhaps even for theologising and philosophising. Amongst the machinations of the dockyard, Taylor turned his mind towards psychological and philosophical subjects and explored concepts such as life, being, intellect and morality.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

In his late teenage years, he was becoming a student of ideas relating to the governance of the universe and humanity's place and experience in it. At this stage, through the ideas of the arch anti-Platonist, Viscount Henry St. John Bolingbroke (1678-1751) and the Scot David Hume (1711-76), Taylor was a student of mind, in terms of its evolution, limitations and perceptive capacities. Hume was still alive while Taylor worked at Sheerness. Hume's published works available to him were, *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-42) also published with additional essays in 1748, the benchmark *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* which, included the controversial and infamous 'Of Miracles' (1748): reissued as *An Enquiry...* in 1758, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) *Political Discourses* (1752) and *Four Dissertations* (1757). During his time at Sheerness, Taylor could have obtained any of these works, which constitute the bulk of Hume's works barring the posthumously published *Dialogues on Natural Religion* (1779). Taylor stated that he became a 'convert to the *sceptical philosophy*' through the works of these two philosophers. Through Hume in particular Taylor would have been inspired to take nothing at face value and to rigorously analyse, sceptically and rationally, the claims of individuals, institutions and systems which purported to 'know' and dispense the truth or define reality. Both Bolingbroke and Hume's works evince a cross-fertilisation of French and British philosophical thought from their relative experiences of different periods of the eighteenth century. Both philosophers travelled widely in France and interacted with her philosophical culture. What did Taylor mean by 'the *sceptical philosophy*'? In relation to Bolingbroke and Hume's philosophico-religious stance, he was referring to the philosophical scepticism that

arose from eighteenth-century deism. Both Bolingbroke and Hume paid homage to the idea of the watchmaker, several references or allusions to which are found in their writings. The idea that the creator of the universe was a designer and maker who set the cosmos into motion, rather like a watchmaker makes an intricate timepiece and then departs from his creation leaving it in good working order, was a hallmark of deism.

Such a concept of God was opposed to and problematic for the Churches' metaphysical teachings. Deism questioned the supernatural intervention of God in human affairs and destiny in both historical and individualistic terms. Established, mainstream Christianity advocated the idea of a God who acted in history and in human affairs. Deism was sceptical in that it questioned the rigid philosophical, theological and 'scientific' conclusions of medieval Aristotelian scholasticism. Deism was anti-supernatural and was considered by the established church, both Catholic and Protestant as anti-Christian; indeed, deists were branded as atheists. Taylor 'became a convert to *the sceptical* [Enlightenment and deist] philosophy' while at Sheerness.<sup>35</sup> However, his mind was still forming opinions and he would not hold to his views for long. In 1775, or possibly 1776, at around the age of seventeen or eighteen Taylor left Sheerness. He would return to London and become a pupil of one of the most celebrated dissenting ministers of the day, as is recorded in *Mr Taylor the Platonist*:

The behaviour, however, of his uncle-in-law was so very tyrannical, and his opportunities for the acquisition were so very inadequate to his thirst for knowledge, that after

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<sup>35</sup> *SW*, p. 107.

having been in what he considered a state of slavery during three years, he determined to break his fetters, and, as he could find no other refuge from oppression, cast himself once more into the arms of the church.<sup>36</sup>

During 1775, when he was in his seventeenth year, two forces were primarily shaping Taylor's life: the first being a need and the second a decisive action based on that need. He realised that his personality and the capacity of his mind could not find adequate expression or fulfilment apart from the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge: that was his need. The biographical narrative of *Public Characters* is interlaced with suggestions that attempt to persuade the reader that Taylor, from the age of nine upwards, had a manifestly independent turn of mind and a thirst for specialised knowledge. He had found time to study Bolingbroke and Hume while maintaining a demanding job at Sheerness dockyards.

It would appear that Taylor's mind was enticed and excited by reading contemporary philosophy; he was hungry for educational opportunity that would provide him with the time and resources needed to develop opinions and interpret himself, his fellow creatures and the world around him. Perhaps as a seventeen-year-old, Taylor regretted the abandonment of his education at St. Paul's School. If he had stayed at St. Paul's for longer, he would have been in a position to go up to Scotland to university as many English youths from a background of protestant dissent did. At the age of seventeen Taylor felt the desire to become a scholar; he found himself

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

trapped by financial necessity in what he found to be irksome and slavish employment.

In 1775, Taylor's intellectual need gave birth to decisive action that entailed a measure of risk and financial sacrifice. If he was going to find a place in a university, he needed to remedy his lack of education and find individuals or institutions that would vouch for him and support an application to study. Two options were open to the young dissenter. Firstly, he could attach himself to a dissenting academy – of which there were a number to choose from in England in the late eighteenth century – or he could introduce himself to a dissenting minister of some academic reputation and apply to study under his tutelage. Taylor chose the second option. Having left Sheerness, he returned to London and began the search for a mentor.

Joseph Taylor was most probably an enthusiastic supporter of his son's attachment to a leading dissenting preacher; his dreams of his son being a pastor might then come true. Nevertheless, an important fact was that Thomas Taylor was not embarking upon study in the environment of Protestant dissent out of a love of God and a desire to serve him as a shepherd; rather he was using the opportunity to pursue knowledge for its own sake. Taylor was not isolated in his exploitation of the culture of Protestant dissent as a means of acquiring knowledge with a view to self-advancement; many intellectually thirsty souls attached themselves to chapels, ministers and academies, which provided academically stimulating environments. Dissent was a medium of vigorous enquiry in relation to politics and a range of academic and scientific

subjects. Dissenting meetinghouses were places, like some coffeehouses and taverns, where both social and ideological connections were available. Taylor:

became during the space of two years, a pupil of one of the most celebrated dissenting preachers. Under this gentleman he recovered the rudiments of the Latin and Greek tongues, but made no great advancement in the attainment of those languages, as his mind, naturally propense to the study of things, required an uncommon stimulus to make it stoop to an attention to words. This stimulus the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle could alone inspire.<sup>75</sup>

*Public Characters* does not supply the name of the individual under whom Taylor commenced ministerial study. W.E.A. Axon, in his biographical sketch *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, is responsible for revealing the name of Taylor's tutor. Axon wrote that Taylor 'had also been a pupil of Mr. Worthington the dissenting minister of Salter's Hall.'<sup>76</sup> However, Axon confused the chronology of events; his article portrays Taylor as studying with Worthington while he was a boy at St. Paul's School.<sup>77</sup> Axon then states that Taylor studied under an unnamed dissenting minister while working at Sheerness Dockyard:

He [Taylor] was sent at fifteen to work under an uncle-in-law at Sheerness Dockyard, but rather than endure this unpleasant situation he attempted to fall in with his father's views and became a pupil to a dissenting minister.<sup>78</sup>

The chronological continuity of '*Mr. Taylor the Platonist*' in *Public Characters* is often difficult to discern and Axon would appear to have fallen victim to it. The

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. (see paragraph 2)

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

primary, and authoritative, information provided in *'Mr. Taylor the Platonist'* does not allow for Taylor's studying under two dissenting ministers at two different periods; rather it allows for one period of training for the dissenting ministry, and that when Taylor was seventeen. Even though Axon confused some chronological elements, there is no reason to doubt that Thomas Taylor studied for the ministry under Hugh Worthington. Worthington's character and interests certainly seem to match Taylor's, at least superficially, and one could well imagine Taylor being his pupil.

The Rev. Hugh Worthington (1752-1813) was the son of a well-respected dissenting minister of the same name; hence he was known as 'Worthington the Younger.' Hugh Worthington senior was born in Stockport though he gained his reputation in Leicester where he was pastor of the Dissenting Society of what was called the 'Great Meeting' for 52 years. Hugh Worthington the younger decided to test his calling to the ministry by moving away from Leicester and entering the Dissenting Academy at Daventry in 1769 when he was sixteen. He would have had a substantial education at home in Leicester that prepared him well for entering the seminary. Worthington thrived under the supervision of the principal of the Daventry training college, Rev. Dr. Ashworth, and found that he had a strong disposition towards both the classics and mathematics.<sup>79</sup> In the context of a mid-eighteenth-century dissenting academy the term 'classics' primarily referred to the study of Latin and Greek, ancient history, literature, topography; theology and philosophy were studied too but usually only in the context of how they related to set texts. Some, of course, developed specialised

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<sup>79</sup> Rev. B. Carpenter, *Memoirs of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. Hugh Worthington: Natus July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1775, OBIT July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1813, Being a Tribute of Respect to his Memory* (Dudley: W. Maurice, 1813), p. 6.

interests in areas to which their acquired skill in the ancient languages afforded them access. Taylor himself might have gained a place in an institution like that in Daventry if he had not abandoned his formal education at so young an age. On a superficial level both Hugh Worthington and Thomas Taylor were deeply interested in both classics and mathematics and such shared interests would have provided them with some common ground around which they could construct a working relationship.

The Rev. B. Carpenter, a friend of Worthington, from Dudley in the West Midlands wrote concerning Worthington's time at Daventry, 'he had not only made a greater proficiency in classical knowledge than is usual at that period of life, [aged sixteen – seventeen] but had also made some progress in the mathematics.'<sup>80</sup> After three years at the Daventry academy, in 1772, the principal Dr. Ashworth asked him to take over the classical department, which obviously indicates that he was a gifted and capable linguist.<sup>81</sup> Worthington agreed, but only for a short time; in 1773, he was posted to London as an assistant pastor to one of the capital's most prestigious dissenting congregations, which met at Salter's Hall Chapel, which housed a Presbyterian congregation.<sup>82</sup> At Salter's Hall Worthington served as assistant pastor to Mr. Spilsbury the senior minister from 1773 to 1782, and as senior pastor from 1782 to 1813, following Spilsbury's death. It was during the third year of his tenancy as junior pastor that Thomas Taylor came under Worthington's wing.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> See: Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, pp. 97, 347. Note: also frequently called 'Salter's Hall Chapel for Protestant Dissenters'.

Salter's Hall Chapel was situated just off Oxford Court on Cannon Street near to the financial centre of the City. Worthington preached there regularly as well as at The Old Jewry Meeting House, situated at the junction where Cheapside becomes the short street called Poultry near the Bank of England. Worthington was an eloquent man and held his congregation spellbound when preaching. Indeed, he is said to have 'uttered the living words of the living God with power and energy' and he, 'often used to preach without notes.'<sup>83</sup> The energetic manner in which he displayed his personality and discharged his duties was impressive. It was to this energetic young preacher, classicist, mathematician and linguist that Taylor was drawn. Worthington was putting himself on the map amongst London's dissenters when Taylor studied with him. He had connections with a number of elite dissenting ministers who energised their congregations and wider audiences through the publication of their key sermons, on faith, politics and morals. In fact, many dissenters of the period displayed intellectual elasticity, curiosity and specialist expertise: they voraciously and yet skilfully debated, analysed and experimented in any sphere of knowledge which caught their attention; in this sense many dissenters can be considered as an important force in the Enlightenment. Worthington worked to establish himself in a formidable intellectual network of dissenting ministers that included Robert Robinson, Joseph Priestley, John Disney, Theophilus Lindsay and Richard Price; such men were more than dissenting ministers, they were at the forefront of literary, political, scientific and religious debate of the times. Both Richard Price and Joseph Priestley consulted and referred to Plato and the Platonic tradition in their religious, scientific and moral debates (as shall be discussed in the next chapter). Their reputations qualified them as dispensers of Enlightenment values; they frequently

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<sup>83</sup> *SW*, pp. 11-12.

displayed a love of liberty and a social conscience and they delighted in discourse and action governed by rational and scientific principles. Worthington valued education and saw it as the means of conveying truth and helping men and women develop their potential and gain opportunities. Thomas Taylor, and his need of education, would have been welcomed by Worthington.

No records exist that reveal the precise nature of Taylor and Worthington's working relationship. However, some manuscript letters have survived that passed between Worthington and another of his 'pupils,' the writer Mary Hays (1759-1843).

Worthington assisted Hays as a tutor, mentor and friend in the early seventeen nineties. Although the correspondence between them dates from just over a decade after the time when Worthington assisted Thomas Taylor, it is reasonable to speculate that some elements of Worthington's tutelage of Hays might be similar to the kind of tutelage that he offered to Taylor. Firstly, something of Worthington's humility and liberality is revealed in his letter to Mary Hays, dated 15<sup>th</sup> November 1791:

I resemble Dr. Price in one thing (would I did in 100 more) in being "free from the rage of Proselytism"; I wish all to think for themselves and esteem the circumstance of making them my Disciples, a very small matter compared with their being disciples of Goodness.<sup>84</sup>

The above quotation reveals open-mindedness and a reluctance to instil conformity into those he taught. Thomas Taylor was in the hands of a teacher who primarily sought to lead his disciples towards 'Goodness' rather than into catechism or creed. Worthington capitalised the word 'Goodness' and this lends the term a distinction

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<sup>84</sup> London, Dr. Williams's Library, *Hugh Worthington to Mary Hays 15<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1791*: MS 24:93 (ii).

which is subtle and yet important. Worthington could be emphasising the word as an expression of an attribute of the Christian divinity. In this sense he could have similarly written of ‘disciples of Love.’ However, the term ‘Goodness’ is employed in the same letter with the wish for ‘all to think for themselves’ which is primarily expressed as an alternative to religious proselytism. Worthington came from a breed of religious dissent, which favoured tolerance and liberality. Worthington was keen for his students to develop their characters and their minds under the guiding concepts of goodness, broadmindedness and tolerance; personal actions, social conduct and beliefs were to flow out of such concepts. Worthington, and many other rational dissenters, prized independent, mature and well-informed thought and the intellectual diversity, which naturally arose from it in their students, indeed, they desired such traits to be evinced in wider society. Knud Haakonssen has defined Rational Dissent as, ‘Properly speaking ‘Rational Dissent’ meant the rejection of Calvinism and the denial of the necessity of spiritual regeneration. Indeed, the label was – and is – often taken to be more or less synonymous with intellectual Unitarianism.’<sup>85</sup> Although Salter’s Hall Chapel was historically affiliated to Presbyterianism it was a place where heterodoxy flourished. In 1719 it had hosted a conference of representatives of the Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Baptist denominations, often called ‘the Salter’s Hall Synod’ which sought to establish a loosely agreed subscription, on the part of the three denominations represented, to key doctrines in the context of Protestant dissent. During the time, that Hugh Worthington was the senior minister (1782 – 1813) an Independent (Congregationalist) minister Robert Winter (1762-1833) was

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<sup>85</sup> Knud Haakonssen, ‘*Enlightened Dissent: an Introduction*’ in Knud Haakonssen ed. *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 4-5. Note: Haakonssen adopts the term ‘Enlightened Dissent’ as a more incorporative term than ‘Rational Dissent’ as many dissenters were modernizers and progressives, who held to Enlightenment values, but who maintained various levels of belief in divine revelation and spiritual regeneration. Rather than adopting Haakonssen’s term I use the term ‘Rational Dissent’ with caution and acknowledge its limitations.

the morning preacher from 1790 to 1802 at Salter's Hall Chapel, which demonstrates that the chapel maintained a multi-denominational and heterodox milieu during Worthington's investiture.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, Presbyterianism was not a static denomination; Presbyterianism contained traditionalists and innovative radicals within its confines. Horton Davies has noted that in the late eighteenth century radical Presbyterianism (Davies terms Joseph Priestley a radical Presbyterian) was the hotbed from which Unitarianism arose.<sup>87</sup>

In another letter, dated January 17<sup>th</sup> 1794, Worthington responded to Hays regarding the studies that he had set for her in geometry, writing: 'You have done wonders in Geometry, both as to extent and dispatch. Mathematics were always my delights, + you will find them a great relief to the mind.'<sup>88</sup> Thomas Taylor, whom, as we have already seen, was delighted by and dedicated to the study of mathematics, must have found the prospects offered by his and Worthington's joint interests promising. When he went to study with Worthington Taylor was already an established mathematician; he was interested in 'recovering' his knowledge of Latin and Greek but he was by no means a devotee of any ancient author, least of all Plato. It could be that Taylor's interest in ancient Roman and Hellenic writers was stimulated by Worthington to some degree. Coincidentally, Worthington published a mathematical work: *An Essay on the Resolution of Plain Triangles, by Common Arithmetic: with a New and Concise Table Adopted to the Purpose* in 1780, the same year in which Taylor produced his first publication, a pamphlet, entitled *A New Method of Reasoning in Geometry: Applied to the Rectification of the Circle*.

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<sup>86</sup> See T.W. Davies ed. *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, p. 113.

<sup>87</sup> See H. Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, p. 85.

<sup>88</sup> London, Dr Williams's Library, *Hugh Worthington to Mary Hays Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> 1794*: MS 24:93 (18).

Worthington was an Arian divine, which entailed rejection of the Trinity. Indeed, the Catholic, established and orthodox churches would have designated him a heretic – as they would many protestant dissenters. Worthington’s friend, the Rev. Carpenter, described Worthington’s beliefs thus:

With respect to his religious sentiments, he embraced at the Academy and continued through life to retain that System, which is equally distant from the doctrines of Calvin on the one hand, and from those of Socinus on the other, and which is comprehended in that concise declaration of the Apostle Paul “To us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by whom are all things” A System which, whilst it ascribes Self-existence, Unrivalled Glory, and Supreme Dominion to the Father only, ascribes also high honour and glory and might and majesty unto Him, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all Fullness should dwell, and unto him he hath subjected all things. <sup>89</sup>

In many modern theological seminaries the orthodox trinitarian John Calvin’s (1509-1564) primary doctrines are condensed into the acronym and mnemonic term ‘T.U.L.I.P.’ Which is often written down as an acrostic which stands for, Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and the Perseverance of the saints. The ultimate significance of which is that God has fore-chosen and elected those who will be saved and that they will inescapably become Christians and go to heaven. The same inescapability of God’s will applies to those who are not chosen; they are doomed forever to hell. This view of a predestining God has often been repugnant to many Christians. Worthington was one such. As an Arian Worthington held that Jesus Christ was divine, but that he had a beginning – he was created by the Father and he was not of one substance with God or equal to God. When Carpenter mentions Socinus he is referring to Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604) (the

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<sup>89</sup> Carpenter, *Memoirs of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. Hugh Worthington*, pp. 13-14.

Latinised form of his name being Faustus Socinus). Socinus taught that Jesus Christ was human, not divine, though he was the most perfect human and without sin. He also taught that the Holy Spirit was a 'divine force' rather than a person. The basic difference between Arianism and Socinianism, even though they are broadly conjoined in antitrinitarian terms, is that Arius taught that Christ was just beneath God whereas Socinus taught that Christ was the pinnacle of humanity.

The doctrines of Socinus were an important factor in the rise of Unitarianism in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Thomas Taylor displays knowledge of scripture and theological issues in his writings. He absorbed such knowledge from his father Joseph and while learning Latin at St. Paul's School where the Latin *New Testament* was one of the set texts; however, he must also have learned a great deal about some of the intricacies of hermeneutics and theological issues while studying with Worthington. Taylor was antitrinitarian in his Platonism, seeing it as illogical that the One could be three, especially as the Creeds term the trinity 'One God in three persons', although he believed in a Neoplatonic triad or triads.<sup>90</sup> Plotinus, the 'founder' of Neoplatonism believed in three hypostases which he saw as underpinning reality on all levels; they being, The One (also referred to as the Henadic), The Intellectual Principle (also referred to as the Noetic), and the All-Soul (also referred to as the Psychic). The inheritors and developers of Plotinus' original philosophical postulations, primarily Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus, developed the basic Plotinian triad by categorising further divisions and subdivisions within Plotinus' original triad.

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<sup>90</sup> See for example Taylor's introduction to *The Theology of Plato* (1816) rpt. in *The Thomas Taylor Series*, eds. The Prometheus Trust, 33 vols. (Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1994 – 2006), VIII, 4-12. Note: Hereafter cited as *TTS*.

Under Worthington Taylor concentrated primarily on ‘recovering the rudiments’ of Latin and Greek, though he confessed that he ‘made no great advancement in the attainment of those languages.’<sup>91</sup> Taylor’s assertion that he gained proficiency in both Latin and Greek through reading philosophical works in those languages reveals an important component of the pattern of his language acquisition. By principally concentrating on Greek philosophical writings and excluding other prose forms such as histories and topography, Taylor was limiting his understanding of Greek in relation to that language’s plasticity and idiom, which is notoriously fluid. He did not acquire a broad experience of ancient Greek style because he concentrated primarily on philosophical writings.

## 2. Greek Logic: Mathematics and Geometry

*Public Characters* states that Taylor, ‘during his course of ministerial study renewed with redoubled ardour his acquaintance with Miss M. and, what indeed is singular in the extreme, was able to unite in amicable league, courtship and study.’<sup>92</sup> Taylor’s daily routine during his period of study under Worthington is described in *Public Characters* in a single sentence: ‘Hence he applied himself to Greek and Latin in the day, paid his addresses to his fair one in the evening, and had the courage to

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<sup>91</sup> *SW*, p. 107.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

begin and read through the Latin quarto of Simson's *Conic Sections* at night.'

According to the chronology of *Public Characters*, this pattern of events (and it is understood that the routine described is a general description) continued for two years between 1775 and 1777. We do not know what the Greek and Latin texts that Taylor studied in the daytime were; he most probably worked through schoolroom textbooks, and perhaps Worthington set him some specific work which was tailored to his interests.

Conic sections describe one of three curves, parabolas, hyperbolas and ellipses, which are obtained by intersecting a plane with a double-sided cone. Taylor studied the geometrical possibilities offered by the use of conic sections as conveyed by Robert Simson (1687-1768) who for fifty years held the Chair of Mathematics at Glasgow University. Simson was distinguished in his lifetime for his recovery of Greek mathematical wisdom from the texts of ancient writers; for instance, he was responsible for providing a Latin translation of *Euclid's Elements* which was the standard translation of that work for most of the eighteenth century. Simson used to give his lectures in Latin and he published exclusively in that language. His work on conic sections, in five parts, *Sectionum Conicarum* was published in 1748. An edition of *Conic Sections* was published in 1775, the first three sections of which were translated into English by A. Marshall; the remaining two books remained in Latin. It is this edition which Taylor refers to as having been studied at night. The book was newly published, in its bilingual form, when Taylor studied it. It could well be that *Simson's Conic Sections* was included in Taylor's curriculum at the suggestion of Worthington. Taylor studied mathematics throughout his life. The sale catalogue of Taylor's library contains some annotations, which complement books that were sold.

Under lot 55 'Barrow's (I) Geometrical Lectures' (1735)<sup>93</sup> the following was inscribed in the volume by Taylor: 'I began this book the latter end of April 1778, and finished as far as No. 11 of the 11<sup>th</sup> Lecture but had no time to prosecute my business any farther, several things occurring about the centers of gravity and the mensuration of spaces, which the reader was supposed to be previously acquainted with, but I was stranger to. – TT.'<sup>94</sup>

Taylor's candid admission of ignorance, which debilitated his learning, is a character trait that was evident throughout his life. While struggling to comprehend Barrow's edition of the *Geometrical Lectures*, which contained essays by John Collins and Edmund Stone – both mathematicians – and Sir Isaac Newton, Taylor was being introduced to new concepts as well as his own limitations. It was probably while he studied the *Geometrical Lectures* that he was enticed into studying Newton's watershed publication *The Principia*, which may have been an effort on Taylor's part to remedy his ignorance of the concepts he could not understand in *Geometrical Lectures*.

At some stage in his two years with Worthington Taylor set his heart on going up to Aberdeen University. His interest in philosophy was ever-widening and insatiable, and as well as studying Greek, Latin and geometry Taylor turned to Newton's *Principia*. He described the *Principia* as 'that difficult work'<sup>95</sup>, and of course, what he

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<sup>93</sup> Barrow Isaac DD, *Geometrical Lectures: explaining the generation, nature and properties of curve lines... Translated from the Latin edition, revised, corrected and amended by the late Sir Isaac Newton [and John Collins]. By Edmund Stone* (London: Stephen Austen, 1735).

<sup>94</sup> See *Soth. Cat.*

<sup>95</sup> *SW*, p. 107.

read of it he read in Latin. How far he got he does not disclose, but the following summary was the consequence of the perusal:

We are informed, however, that he soon closed the book in disgust, exclaiming, "Newton is indeed a great mathematician, but no philosopher!" He was principally induced it seems to form this conclusion by Sir Isaac's assertion that "every the least possible particle of matter or body, attracts all distances; that the being whatever it is, that attracts or impels bodies towards each other proceeds to those bodies to which it belongs, and penetrates the whole substance of the bodies on which it acts." It appeared to him that from this assertion it must inevitably follow, that bodies act immediately or by themselves, without the intervention of any other being, in a place where they are not, since attraction is the *immediate* action of attracting bodies; that they thus act in many places at the same time; that they penetrate each other; and that the least particle of matter is extended as far as the limits of the universe: all which consequences he considered glaringly absurd.<sup>96</sup>

Taylor's understanding of Newtonian physics reads in the above passage like gobbledygook. Taylor was not qualified to understand, much less consider critically, Newton's principles of physics. Taylor's premise for reading Newton and for believing that he was qualified to understand him was 'his knowledge of the more abstruse parts of mathematics.'<sup>97</sup> The above passage is only half-heartedly serious and was designed to be read as such; in many respects, it is a self-mocking joke. The image of the seventeen or nineteen-year-old, who was just coming to terms with reading in classical languages, and who having studied some advanced mathematics and conic sections, thought himself qualified to read the *Principia* is intended to be humorous.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 107-108.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

What the account reveals is the eagerness and ambition of Taylor's mind. Many individuals who aim to achieve formidable tasks often over-estimate or over-stretch themselves in their early attempts. It is a sign of a healthy perspective when individuals can laugh at themselves and in the above passage that is what Taylor is doing. That being said, throughout his life Taylor held the position that Newton 'was a great mathematician but no philosopher.' One wonders if people in the eighteenth century would have interpreted Newton differently, who objected to Newton as a materialist on spiritual or philosophical grounds such as Blake and Taylor, if they knew of Newton's secret activities as an alchemist and astrologer. Taylor was wrong in assessing Newton, as being 'no philosopher' it would have been more candid of him to refer to Newton as 'someone who has different philosophical, and metaphysical, views to mine.' Taylor's statement reveals more about Taylor's view of philosophy than it does about Newton.

### 3. Love, Domesticity and Elopement

In 1777 or 1778, Taylor was preparing to leave London in order to attend university in Aberdeen. His childhood sweetheart, the daughter of a wealthy coal merchant, Mary Morton (1757-1809) was one of the attractions that pulled Taylor back to London. Her father was aware of Taylor's plans and 'intended to marry her to a man of large fortune, who had made her the offer of his hand'<sup>98</sup> while he was in Aberdeen. This caused the young couple a great amount of distress and presented a dilemma.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.108.

Taylor described the course his life took from this time onwards as ‘some dark river rolling with impetuous rage to the main.’<sup>99</sup> In the face of losing his beloved, Taylor proposed marriage to Mary; she consented ‘to secure herself from the *tyrannical* exertion of parental authority.’<sup>100</sup> The pair made a decision that ‘nothing further than the marriage ceremony would take place’<sup>101</sup> until Thomas had finished his studies in Aberdeen. By ‘nothing further,’ it would appear that Taylor meant the consummation of the marriage and the usual domestic arrangements. Thomas and Mary were married in secret. It is not known whether they eloped to Scotland, which was exempted from Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1753, or whether they married in London, or somewhere in the countryside, being registered as resident in a parish while banns were read.<sup>102</sup> An illustration of the commonality and attainability of successful clandestine marriages, which fulfilled the legal criteria of the Marriage Act of 1753, is given in a quotation of a letter, dated 20<sup>th</sup> November 1780, from Mathew Boulton (1728-1809) to Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744-1817) in Jenny Uglow’s *The Lunar Men*. Boulton advised Edgeworth concerning marriage:

I advise you to say nothing of your intentions but go quickly and snugly to Scotland or some obscure corner of London, suppose Wapping, and there take Lodgings to make yourself a parishioner. When the month is expired and the Law fulfilled, Live and be happy. The propriety of such a marriage is too obvious to men who think for themselves to need my

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Though extensive searches have been made I have not been able find a record of Thomas and Mary’s marriage. In *Boyd’s Marriage Index*, one record exists for a Thomas Taylor and Mary Morton, in 1772 in Olveston in Gloucestershire. If this record relates to Thomas Taylor the Platonist’s marriage, the chronology of *Public Characters* is misleading and the marriage took place some time before Taylor left for Sheerness when he was nearly fourteen. Boys of fourteen could be married legally in the 1770’s. Without further evidence this is purely conjectural.

comments... I recommend Silence, Secrecy and Scotland.<sup>103</sup>

The above quotation has a contemporary resonance with Thomas and Mary's situation: the letter was written in 1780, and Thomas and Mary were probably married between 1777 and 1778. Such clandestine marriages were routine; at the present time they prove to be fatiguing and frustrating to genealogists as the secrecy of the event has a permanency that the original perpetrators could never have envisaged.

Unfortunately, Taylor's mother-in-law (the term might refer to either Mary's mother or his stepmother if his father had re-married after his mother's death) discovered the couple's elopement. The narrative of the combustible marital saga in *Public Characters* reads thus and there seems to be some ambiguity about who discovered the elopement:

But when the fates are adverse, how vain are the most prudent projects! how unfortunate the most generous intentions! The low cunning of Mr. T.'s mother-in-law discovered the secret, soon after the union of the platonick pair; who from a combination of ecclesiastical indignation with parental rage, were exposed to the insult of undeserved reproach, and bitterness of real distress.

We are happy to find however, that Mr. and Mrs T. exculpate their parents on this occasion: Mr. T. entirely ascribing his father's conduct to the malicious misrepresentation of his mother-in-law, and the anger of the church, and Mrs. T. to the unnatural and selfish conduct of some of her very near relations.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men The Friends Who Made the Future 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 63.

<sup>104</sup> *SW*, pp. 108-109.

It would seem from paragraph two that Taylor is more likely to be referring to his stepmother rather than his wife's mother. W.E.A Axon observed this possibility in a footnote to his '*Thomas Taylor the Platonist*' writing, 'It is said to be the mother-in-law in the sketch in *Public Characters*, but the context seems to indicate that it was his father's wife.'<sup>105</sup> If this is so, it means that Taylor's mother died at some point before he reached the end of his teenage years. The 'ecclesiastical indignation' which was repetitively emphasised as the 'anger of the church' that influenced Joseph Taylor's zealous rage towards the young couple was specifically identified with Presbyterianism in *Public Characters* where it is recorded that:

Whether Mr. T.'s great aversion to presbeterians and presbeterian ministers originated in this time or some other circumstance, we are unable to determine. Certain however, it is, that he has ever since considered the clergy of this description as men implacable in their resentments, whom neither pity can soften, nor penitence appease; and has often been heard to say, that of all the christian sects, the members of the church of England are the best, and the presbeterians the worst.<sup>106</sup>

From the facts presented in this paragraph, it can be confidently surmised that the Taylors were Presbyterians. The staunchness and lack of liberality described indicates that the Presbyterianism of the Taylors was probably affiliated to 'Old Dissent' which was much closer to its Puritan roots than the liberalised intellectuality, and humanism, of 'New Dissent' Presbyterianism that evolved into Unitarianism.

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>106</sup> *SW*, p. 109. Note the spelling of Presbyterian as 'presbeterian' and the non-capitalisation of 'Christian' and 'Church of England' are cited as they appear in Raine and Harper's edition and this is how they were given in the original 1798 edition. See 'Mr. Taylor the Platonist' in *British Public Characters of 1798*, ed. unknown, (London: Printed for R. Phillips, 71 St. Paul's Church-Yard), p. 106. Interestingly: the 1801 edition of *British Public Characters of 1798* omits this paragraph, see p. 133. However, the paragraph is included again in the 1803 edition, see p. 127.

The actions of the young lovers had dire consequences for them both. Some of Mary's 'very near relations' appear to have inflamed the anger of Mary's father and contributed to worsening the situation. Furthermore, one of Mary's male relatives manoeuvred themselves into the position of being left sole executor of her father's will which entailed them having full control over the administration of Mary's inheritance following her father's death. Mary's father must have been ill and approaching death when the elopement occurred. The narrator of '*Mr. Taylor the Platonist*' wrote:

Such indeed was the distressed situation of this young couple at this period, that we are informed they had no more than seven shillings a week to subsist on, for nearly a twelve month! This was owing to the base artifice of one of Mrs. T.'s relatives, who was left executor, and who prevailed on her father, at this time [the time of the elopement or just after it] in a dying state, to let him pay her what he had left her as he pleased.<sup>107</sup>

As a young woman of the late eighteenth century, Mary was effectively the property of her father and the property of her husband after marriage. Punishment is often the form in which anger vents itself and Mary was punished. The aphorism 'you have made your bed so now you can lay in it' encapsulates the attitude that Mary's family adopted towards her. The executor of her father's will operated within the social convention that Mary, and her material welfare, were the full responsibility of her husband now that she was married. The fact that Mary was allowed seven shillings a week to subsist on demonstrates a harshness and cruelty towards Mary and her

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

husband that was extremely severe. An income of seven shillings a week was well below the poverty line in the late eighteenth century. Thomas Taylor had no private income and no job so the fledgling couple found themselves in a desperate situation. Women of Mary's class were virtually commodities, domestic facilitators and social adornments. Mary's father must have been vexed or disappointed as he had arranged a marriage between Mary and a man of 'good fortune' and his daughter rejected the provision. Mary's rejection of her father's provision for her future, especially by means of elopement, would have caused her family a degree of social embarrassment and proved to be the source of ostracising anger. Furthermore, the Morton clan may have seen Mary's fortuitous marriage as an insurance policy for their financial security; familial contacts were often essential aspects of successful business. When Mary agreed to marry Thomas Taylor in secret, she must have been aware of possible adverse consequences.

The young couple took lodgings in Camberwell.<sup>108</sup> He did not take flight to Aberdeen University, as the couple had earlier agreed he would; he sought a position as an usher in a boarding school in Paddington. Working as an usher was one of the most humble stations of employment for educated individuals, besides labouring, that Taylor could have opted for; the job situated him at the very bottom of what would now be termed 'white collar' work. It also meant that he had to live at the school, which dictated separation from Mary. The situation is related thus in *Public Characters*:

Mr. T. endeavoured indeed to obtain employment as an usher

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

to a boarding-school; but it was some time before he was able to effect this, as he was abandoned both by friends and relatives, and could not even borrow ten shillings and six pence, which it seems is the usual fee of those who procure such situations.

At length he was separated from his partner in affliction, and settled as an usher to a boarding-school at Paddington. As his embarrassments were such, that he was unable to remove Mrs. T. from Camberwell, where she then resided, and the only time he was able to see her was on Saturday afternoon, he could enjoy but little of her company.<sup>109</sup>

In *Public Characters*, there is no explanation why Taylor never went up to Aberdeen University and the reader is left to surmise why he did not. Though bursaries were made available to a fortunate few – and it is not known if Taylor applied for such assistance – material poverty probably contributed to Taylor’s academic ambitions being thwarted. However, another form of poverty might also have destabilised his intentions: the emotional kind. The elopement and its consequences caused the young couple a great amount of harm and was an extremely painful experience. Thomas and Mary experienced complete rejection and ostracism and their only solace was their relationship, which must have suffered at times due to such extreme circumstances. As seen earlier, Thomas Taylor suffered emotionally in the elopement scandal at the hands of his father whose wrath was exacerbated by the ‘malicious representations of his mother-in-law and the anger of the church’.<sup>110</sup> A studentship at Aberdeen would have been procured through Taylor’s studies with Hugh Worthington and his commendation; it would also have been a place where Taylor would have prepared in academic and formal terms for entry into the dissenting ministry. The ‘anger of the church’ was a contributing factor to Taylor’s emotional pain. Three things are to be ascertained about the direction which Taylor’s

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

life took at this time and all of them are shadowed by the term ‘the anger of the church’; firstly, Taylor stopped studying with Hugh Worthington, secondly, he did not go up to Aberdeen and thirdly he gradually turned his attentions toward an alternative form of spirituality: namely pagan Hellenic Neoplatonism. Taylor did not become a pagan through a single decision; rather he began to turn away from the Christian faith and its related institutions and to explore alternative and opposed ideological systems.

Taylor’s rejection of Christianity was not embellished by the intellectual liberties offered through deism or the anti-supernaturalism presented by libertines and the *philosophes*. It was while he and Mary were suffering the fallout of their elopement that Taylor began to pursue his own anti-Christian path, which would lead him to becoming a revivalist of ancient classical paganism. The ancient religions of Greece and Hellenic philosophy, which the ‘anger of the church’ had supposedly stamped out in antiquity, were to become Taylor’s cause. The expression of ecclesiastical anger, which Taylor encountered in deeply affecting personal terms, would appear to be a root of his latterly penning such words as:

in scripture there is frequent mention of harts, hinds and lambs; and such as are destined to eternal life are called sheep, than which creature there is not any thing more foolish, if we may believe that proverb of Aristotle (προβατειον ηθος), *sheepish manners*, which he tells us is taken from the foolishness of that creature, and is usually applied to dull-headed people, and lack-wits. And yet Christ professes to be the shepherd of this flock, and is himself delighted with the name of a lamb!<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Thomas Taylor, trans., *The Arguments of the Emperor Julian Against the Christians Translated from the Greek fragments preserved by Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria to which are added Extracts from other Works of Julian relative to the Christians* (London, privately printed for the translator, 1809), pp. 118-119. Note: only 25 copies of this work were published. The quotation is of Taylor’s own words written in conclusion of his translation. Julian’s original text was called *Julian Against the Galilaeans*

During his tenancy as an usher, Taylor saw Mary on Saturday afternoons. They wrote to each other during the week and the letters that passed between them during what is described as a ‘painful separation’ were ‘replete with sentiments which express the most tender and disinterested regard’.<sup>112</sup> Sacrifice is often easier to bear when motivated by piety or when it serves a worthy cause; the sacrifice of separation from Mary being due to working as an usher rather than beginning a university career must have been painful and very humbling for Thomas. Mary made her sacrifice more intense by going without during the week in order to provide her husband with a good meal on Saturdays. While living at Camberwell and seeing her husband only on Saturdays Mary became pregnant.<sup>113</sup> The Taylors first child, George Barrow, was christened on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1779.<sup>114</sup> The fact that the couple had all of their children christened in the Anglican Church is noteworthy, in the light of Taylor’s dissenting background, and could be interpreted as indicative of an element of Thomas’s rejection of his dissenting past. The child’s christening date would situate the Taylors renting in Camberwell in 1778; furthermore this date, when interpreted in the context of the disjointed chronology in *Public Characters*, situates the elopement as having taken place in late 1777 or early 1778.

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(*ΙΟΥΛΙΑΝΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ ΚΑΤΑ ΓΑΛΙΛΑΙΩΝ*), which was Julian’s way of emphasising that the Christianity was just another a regional cult.

<sup>112</sup> *SW*, p. 110.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109

<sup>114</sup> Details of the Christenings of the Taylor children are all found in the register of St. Mary’s, Newington-Butts, situated north-east of the village of Walworth, Surrey. The entries of the church registers, and notes taken from the Taylor family tombstone in the churchyard, now destroyed and converted into a playground, were recorded by ‘TN’ and published in *Notes and Queries* see *N&Q*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, IX (1890), p. 194.

#### 4. The Banker's Clerk, Alchemist and Fledgling Philosopher

Thomas Taylor did not tolerate the position of an usher for long. Mary's pregnancy and the fact that he only met with her once a week added to his sense of dissatisfaction with the job. Taylor sought 'less irksome employment; and at length, by the exertions of his few friends, he obtained a clerks place in a respectable banking-house in the city'.<sup>115</sup> In *Public Characters* Taylor does not disclose which bank he found employment at; however, in his biographical article W. E. Axon asserts that the bank where Taylor found employment was Lubbock's Bank, though he does not cite the source of his information. When Axon penned *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* in 1890, the bank in which Taylor worked was exclusively called 'Lubbock's Bank'. However, in the late eighteenth century the banking house was called 'Sir William Lemon Bart., Furley, Lubbock & Co', the premises of the company were situated at 11 Mansion House Street from 1775 until 1795 when the bank moved to 15 Lombard Street, the site of the famous Lloyd's Coffee House.<sup>116</sup> A letter from George Cumberland to his brother dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 1784, in which Cumberland recounts meeting Thomas Taylor, states that 'he is a Clerk As. [assistant] to Mr. Lemon the banker and I fancy in rather indifferent circumstances'.<sup>117</sup> Cumberland's letter confirms Axon's assertion that Taylor worked at 'Lubbock's' bank; however he was more properly an employee of Sir William Lemon Bart. Furley, Lubbock & Co. and was the assistant clerk to Sir William Lemon (1748-1824). Sir William Lemon hailed

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<sup>115</sup> *SW*, p.110.

<sup>116</sup> Mr. Lyulf Lubbock gave access to Lubbock family archive material and kindly provided information on Lubbock's Bank.

<sup>117</sup> London, British Library, *Cumberland Papers*, MS 352/358.

from Cornwall where he had large estates and copper mines.<sup>118</sup> Lemon was a Whig and was elected to Parliament as the MP for Penryn, Cornwall, from 1769 until 1772 and for the County of Cornwall between 1774 and 1824.<sup>119</sup>

Taylor must have taken up his clerkship at the bank between late 1778 and 1780.

When Taylor became a clerk, he appears to have moved back to Camberwell, sharing lodgings with Mary where preparations must have been underway for the arrival of a child. *Public Characters* states that:

In this situation, however, he at first suffered greatly; for as his income was but fifty pounds a year, and this paid quarterly, and as he had not any money to spare for himself, and could not from his embarrassments quit his lodgings at Camberwell, he was unable to procure nutriment in the course of the day, adequate to the great labours he endured. Hence he was so exhausted by the time he had reached home in the evening, that he frequently fell senseless on the floor.<sup>120</sup>

As soon as Taylor 'was settled in his new employment'<sup>121</sup> which presumably means 'when he received his first wages' he 'took a house at Walworth.'<sup>122</sup> *Public Characters* states that Taylor obtained a house 'by the assistance of a friend.'<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ian R. Christie, *British 'Non-Elite' MPS, 1715-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 70.

<sup>119</sup> William Thomas Laprade, ed., *Parliamentary Papers of John Robinson, 1774-1784* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1922), p. 23. Also see, Brooke, J. 'Sir William Lemon's Quay' *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries*, 20 (1965).

<sup>120</sup> *SW*, p. 110.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

Taylor lived in 9 Manor Place from approximately 1780 until his death in 1835. Mary lived at Manor Place with her husband until her death on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1809, aged 52.<sup>124</sup>

Taylor's job at the bank was a matter of material necessity rather than vocational ambition. He continued to study, as he had done earlier when working under his uncle's charge at Sheerness dockyards. Taylor's studies, we are told, 'were chiefly confined to chemistry.'<sup>125</sup> In the latter part of the eighteenth century, chemistry was evolving in both Britain and Europe. In Britain, Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) was at the fore of experimental developments in chemistry and perhaps his greatest achievement was the isolation and identification of oxygen in 1774. Priestley's British colleagues Joseph Black (1728-1799) and Henry Cavendish (1731-1810), amongst others, also contributed to the development of chemistry by modernising it and shaping it into a branch of science that is recognisable today. Though Taylor lived contemporaneously with those who were modernising chemistry he was not enticed by their work, rather he immersed himself in the writings of Johann Joachim Becher (1635-1682) whose seventeenth-century 'chemistry' would now be termed alchemy. Until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one could not read chemistry without encountering Aristotle and the Christian medieval scholiasts that interpreted his works. Aristotelian theory was the major basis of philosophical, moral, 'scientific' and theological interpretation throughout the Christian West from the middle ages through to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the Aristotelian basis of learning was disputed or radically revised by major modern philosophers such as René Descartes (1596-1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and by John Locke

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<sup>124</sup> 'TN', in *N&Q*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, IX (1890), 194. Note: the details of the date of Mary Taylor's death, and her age at that time were recorded from the tombstone in St. Mary's Churchyard by 'T.N.'

<sup>125</sup> *SW* p. 110.

(1632-1704). In relation to Taylor's studies in chemistry *Public Characters* reveals that, 'Of all the authors in this branch of natural philosophy, he was most attached to Becher, whose *Physica Subterranea* <sup>126</sup> he read with great avidity, and became a complete convert to the doctrines of that illustrious chemist.'<sup>127</sup>

Becher's *Physica Subterranea* was first published in Leipzig in 1669 and the last edition of the work, by G. E. Stahl, was published in 1738. It was the last edition that Taylor owned. The *Physica Subterranea* is an iatrochemical treatise, written in the style of the occult and medical pioneer Theophrastus Phillipus Aureolus Bombastus von Hohenheim (c.1493-1541), better known as Paracelsus. As previously mentioned, Taylor 'became a complete convert' to Becher's doctrines. What were these 'doctrines'? The engraved frontispiece of the 1738 edition of *Physica Subterranea*, is a semiotic map of the doctrines which underpin the text. A bald, almost Buddha-like, figure is floating on clouds behind an open curtain or rent veil. Above the figure the Latin *Circulus ÆTerni Motus* ( the circle of everlasting motion) is inscribed. Unfurled before the figure's lap on a banner is the title *Physica Subterranea* (underworld or subterranean physics or natural science) and beneath that banner another is revealed bearing the capitalised Greek phrase ΤΟ ΞΥΜΠΙΑΝ (all together, all at once, all in a body). Four other pieces of text appear in the engraving,

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<sup>126</sup> First published in 1669 and reprinted until 1738 when the last edition was published. The full bibliographical details of the book are: G.E. Stahl, ed., Joh. Joachimi Beccheri, *Physica Subterranea profundam subterraneorum genesin, e principiis hucusque ignotis, ostendens ... (Experimentum chymicum novum, quo artificialis, & instantanea metallorum generatio & transmutatio ad oculum demonstratur. Loco supplementi ... et responsi ad D. Rolfincii schedas de non entitatye mercurii corporum. Supplementum secundum ... demonstratio philosophica, seu theses chymicæ, veritatem et possibilitatem transmutationis metallorum in aurum evincentes.- tertii.) Editio novissima, præfatione utili præmissa... libro tersius & curatius edendo operam navavit & specimen Beccherianum, fundamentorum, documentorum, experimentorum, subjunxit G.E Stahl* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1738). The 1738 edition of this work, edited by G. E.Stahl and published by Weidmann, with two supplements in addition to Beccher's original text, see *Soth. Cat. – Lot 250*.

<sup>127</sup> *SW*, p. 110.

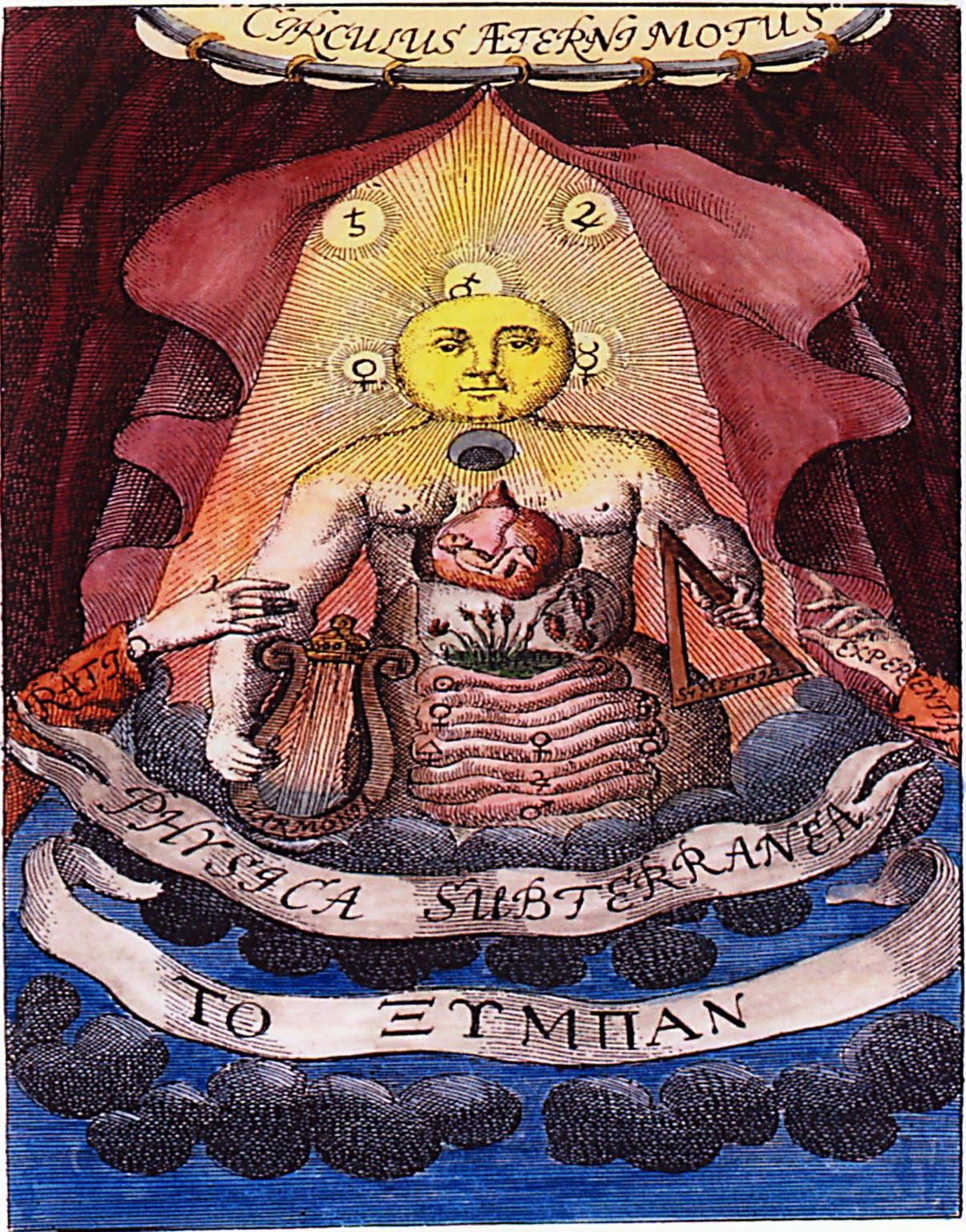


Illustration Plate 1

Frontispiece to J.J. Becher's  
*Physica Subteranea* (1738)

two forearms with extended hands reach towards the figure marked *Ratio* (system, reason, theory) and *Experientia* (trial, test, knowledge gained by experience).

The central figure also holds a lyre in its right hand inscribed *Harmonia* (harmony, concord, melody, music) and an isosceles triangle in its left hand emblazoned *Symetria* (symmetry, measurement). The figure itself is a literal composite of the elements, as the alchemists understood them to exist in the heavens and within the earth, and appears androgynous. A face set in a spherical head, which immediately evokes solar qualities, is at the centre of the engraving. About the head, floating in the glory of the sun, are the planetary glyphs, in an astrological context, of Saturn (♄), Jupiter (♃), Venus (♀), Mars (♂) and Mercury (☿). The Lunar crescent is pointing downwards on the breast of the figure. The earth is often referred to as the sub-lunar realm in Neoplatonism. The glyphs, the head itself representing the sun (☉), also correspond to the seven original metals, in an alchemical context. Indeed the glyphs seen about the figure's head are also seen in 'subterranean' intestines coiled beneath the surface of the fruitful earth with the additional alchemical symbols for antimony and sulphur. The historian of chemistry, Arthur Greenburg, has written concerning the figure:

**What does this allegorical figure represent? This bald muscular figure has the symbols of the seven original metals arrayed around (and possibly including) the head. The all-too-perfect roundness of the head appears to correspond to the perfect circle that represents gold.**

The elements including antimony and sulphur are also buried in the intestines of the figure – literally its bowels – and now we have a hint of its nature. Any attempts at further interpretation are in the realm of psychology rather than science, and indeed the famous psychologist C.G. Jung owned a valuable collection of alchemical books and manuscripts and wrote extensively on

that subject.<sup>128</sup>

Although it is true that alchemical works contributed greatly to Jungian psychoanalytical theory it is not true that ‘any attempts at further interpretation are in the realm of psychology rather than science’. A further key to understanding the allegorical figure is Hermetic literature: which Greenburg does not mention. Writings, spuriously but generically, attributed to the mythic and quasi-historical figure Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the Thrice Great)<sup>129</sup> such as *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes*,<sup>130</sup> so often quoted in esoteric writings, provide a framework that can be utilised interpretatively concerning the allegorical figure. *The Emerald Tablet* contains thirteen precepts; historically alchemists, other esoteric technicians, and quasi-scientists have utilised the thirteen precepts in their various disciplines. Precepts two and eight provide an intriguing basis of interpretation for understanding the figure:

- II. What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below. They work to accomplish the wonders of the One Thing.
  
- VIII. Use your mind to its full extent and rise from Earth to Heaven, and then again descend to Earth and combine the powers of what is above and what is below. Thus you will win glory in the whole world, and obscurity will leave you at once.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Greenberg, Arthur, *A Chemical History Tour: Picturing Chemistry from Alchemy to Modern Molecular Science* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), p 1

<sup>129</sup> Hermes Trismegistus was a prototype sagacious figure that was deeply identified with Thoth the Egyptian god of the arts and sciences. Thoth was attributed with the invention of writing and was particularly invoked in relation to hidden knowledge. The Greek Hermes and the Roman Mercury were the Classical counterparts of Thoth and these figures contributed to the grandeur and mystique of the eminent figure of Hermes Trismegistus both in late antiquity and later in the Italian Renaissance.

<sup>130</sup> Sometimes called the *Emerald Table of Hermes* or *The Precepts of Hermes Trismegistus*, the precepts were possibly engraved on an emerald tablet in antiquity.

<sup>131</sup> Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds, a Collection of Ancient Texts Translated, Annotated and Introduced by Georg Luck* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 370. See also pp. 367-369 for introduction and commentary on *The Emerald Tablet*.

Greenburg does not utilise *The Emerald Tablet* when discussing the allegorical figure. The figure with the planetary and metallurgic glyphs suspended above it and within its bowels can be interpreted as being a depiction of the interrelated universe of the ancients where sympathetic correspondences between astral and physical entities was often the basis of philosophy, theology, religion and magic. Combining the powers of earth and heaven and understanding the sympathies that were said to exist between the above and the below was at the heart of alchemy. Such notions are also found at the heart of Neoplatonic philosophy. Thomas Taylor's study of alchemy no doubt introduced him to Hermetic lore and his curiosity led him to one of the keystones of Hermetic belief namely Platonism and Neoplatonism. It was undoubtedly the rich Hermetic and mystical traditions which fed alchemy that *Public Characters* speaks of when it states that Taylor became a 'complete convert to the doctrines of that illustrious chemist' Johan Joachim Becher.

Taylor's years as clerk to Sir William Lemon, the banker, were marked by 'lassitude of bodily weakness, the pain incident to uncommon fatigue, and the immediate pressure of want.'<sup>132</sup> Taylor's work schedule, his commitments to a wife and child, and the physical deprivation he endured due to living just above the breadline did not stop his insatiable quest for knowledge. The intellectually curious Taylor immersed himself in alchemy and associated lore, philosophy and doctrine. It was inevitable that Taylor would eventually encounter the Classical writers within the confines of such a

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

crucible of learning. Indeed, Taylor already had a limited introduction to aspects of the Classics when he was at St. Paul's and his mathematical studies had introduced him to aspects of Greek logic. In 1780, Taylor's first publication appeared in the form of a pamphlet. The pamphlet entitled *The Elements of a New Method of Reasoning in Geometry: Applied to the Rectification of the Circle* was in keeping with Taylor's interests in mathematics which he never neglected either while studying chemistry.<sup>133</sup>

As an autodidact, Taylor began to follow a curriculum that was innovative and unrestrained. *Public Characters* states that:

Hitherto Mr. Taylor's studies may be considered as merely preparatory to those speculations which were to distinguish him in the literary world; at least, they are considered in this light by the followers of Plato. It appears too, that, without knowing it, he was led to the mystick discipline of that sublime philosopher, in the exact order prescribed by his disciples; for he began with studying the works of Aristotle. He was induced, it seems, to engage in this course of study, by a passage in Sir Kenelm Digby's treatise "On Bodies and Man's Soul," in which he says that "the name of Aristotle ought never to be mentioned by scholars but with reverence, on account of his incomparable worth." This eulogium from a man who was very far from being a Peripatetick, determined Mr. T. to enter on the study of Aristotle, as soon as he could procure any of his works, and had sufficiently recovered his knowledge of Greek.<sup>134</sup>

The above quotation portrays Taylor's studies as being under the tutelage of some kind of providence. He is presented as being 'led' into a tradition, as well as into learning. Taylor insisted that he was led into Platonism 'in the exact order prescribed by his disciples' is based on descriptions of the teaching curriculum in the school of

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> *SW*, p. 111.

Syrianus (died c. 437 CE) the teacher of Proclus.<sup>135</sup> Richard Sorabji has written concerning Neoplatonist school practices:

The Neoplatonist commentaries increasingly come to reflect a teaching curriculum. Under Iamblichus, twelve dialogues of Plato were selected for study in a set order, culminating in the two ‘theological’ dialogues, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*. Syrianus had Proclus study Aristotle as the ‘Lesser Mysteries’ serving to introduce the ‘Greater Mysteries’ of Plato.<sup>136</sup>

Taylor could have construed his own biographical data to fit with ancient facts. However, this seems unlikely, as Taylor was pious and devout. It is possible that Taylor remembered his encounter with the Platonic tradition via the ‘Lesser Mysteries’ of Aristotle towards the ‘Greater Mysteries’ of Plato with a certain amount of embellishment that was fed by his enthusiasm. Nevertheless, Taylor’s belief that some sort of providence guided him is an undeniably important aspect of Taylor’s confidence as a writer and the manner in which he projects a persona so frequently in his publications. Taylor wanted to be understood to be someone that was chosen, dedicated, fated or set apart in a spiritual sense. The phrases ‘mystick discipline’, ‘sublime philosopher’, and the word ‘disciples’ all appear in one sentence and evoke the distinct individuality and spirituality that Taylor wore like an aura. Taylor’s hierophantic tendencies were interpreted more often than not in terms of novelty rather than spiritual gravitas by many of those who encountered him personally or in print during his lifetime.

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<sup>135</sup> See Marinus of Neapolis, *The Life of Proclus* Ch. 13.

<sup>136</sup> Richard Sorabji ed. *Aristotle Transformed the Ancient Commentators and their Influence* (London: Duckworth, 1990), p. 5.

Taylor states that he encountered Aristotle's works through Sir Kenelm Digby's *On Bodies and Man's Soul*<sup>137</sup> which was first published in Paris in 1644. Taylor owned an edition of the book, published in London in 1669.<sup>138</sup> Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-1665) was a physicist, naval commander and diplomat; although he was a founder member of the Royal Society in 1660, he was also a practising alchemist. Amongst his popular concoctions was the Powder of Sympathy which was said to cure wounds at a distance and 'viper's wine' which was said to enhance and prolong the beauty of its drinkers.<sup>139</sup> In reading Digby Taylor was immersing himself in literature that was already outdated and marginal especially when considered in the light of the modernising Age of Reason. Taylor was enticed by Digby's commendation of Aristotle, though he knew Digby was not a typical 'peripatetick' (Aristotelian). Taylor's thirst for reading Aristotle was the primary stimulus for his re-learning Greek. There is no doubt that Taylor did not possess an expert knowledge of Greek following his education at St. Paul's or under Worthington. Indeed, *Public Characters* states that under Worthington Taylor 'recovered his knowledge of the rudiments of Latin and Greek'.<sup>140</sup> Taylor tells us that 'by fortunate circumstance, he soon met with a copy of that philosopher's Physicks'.<sup>141</sup> It is not disclosed if the copy of Aristotle's *Physics* was in Latin or in an English translation but it was not in the original Greek.

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<sup>137</sup> Sir Kenelm Digby, *Of Bodies, and of Man's Soul. To Discover the Immortality of Reasonable Souls. With two discourses of the Powder of Sympathy and the Vegetation of Plants* (London: John Williams, 1669)

<sup>138</sup> *Soth. Cat.* – Lot 277.

<sup>139</sup> For more information on Digby as a natural philosopher and alchemist see the following three articles in *Ambix* (the Journal of the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry) by Betty Jo Dobbs 'Studies in the Natural Philosophy of Sir Kenelm Digby', *Ambix* 18 (1971), 1-25; 'The Powder of Sympathy', *Ambix* 20 (1973), 143-163; 'Sir Kenelm Digby and Alchemy', *Ambix* 21 (1974), 1-28.

<sup>140</sup> *SW*, p. 107.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Taylor reveals that he 'was so enamoured with his (Aristotle's) pregnant brevity, accuracy and depth that he resolved to make Aristotle's philosophy the great business of his life.'<sup>142</sup> Taylor's thirst for Aristotle in translation stimulated him to build on and revise his knowledge of Greek in order for the study of Aristotle to be the 'great business of his life' for he states:

Such, indeed, was his avidity to accomplish this design, that he was soon able to read that great master in the original; and has often been heard to say, that he learned Greek rather through the Greek philosophy, than the Greek philosophy through Greek.<sup>143</sup>

This statement lies at the heart of Taylor's identity and confidence as a translator. Any competent classical linguist knows the pitfalls and rigours involved in translating Greek into English accurately. Taylor was in a seriously disadvantaged position in that he was for the greater part self-taught. A student who had only formally studied the 'rudiments' of Greek and Latin would struggle to read Aristotle with any substantial measure of accuracy. Indeed, it is questionable as to how accurate an understanding of Aristotle Taylor attained in his early readings of that philosopher. Be that as it may, Taylor's early encounter with Aristotle was an experience that enticed and encouraged him to press further into a study of Greek philosophy. Taylor's study of Aristotle most probably began in 1780 or 1781 not long after he had moved to Walworth and begun working at the bank; therefore, he began a serious study of Greek philosophy in the original language when he was twenty-two or twenty-three years old. Taylor's mind began connecting together the various strands of knowledge he had immersed himself in during his life thus far. Reading Aristotle when already

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

interested in alchemy and also being a ‘complete convert’ to the doctrines expounded in *Physica Subterranea* must have excited a curiosity in Taylor concerning the nature of the universe, its appearance, laws and his place in it. He had already shown a desire to be in print having published the pamphlet *A New Method of Reasoning in Geometry* in 1780. Over the next few years, Taylor’s desire to write must have burgeoned along with his acquisition of knowledge; 1782 would see Taylor’s second publication in the form of an article in *The European Magazine and London Review*, which will be discussed shortly.

In 1781 a second child was born to Thomas and Mary; John Buller Taylor was christened at St. Mary’s Church, Newington Butts – just north of Walworth – on May 30<sup>th</sup> of that year.<sup>144</sup> Taylor’s financial and domestic circumstances dictated that he continue working at the bank. Under extreme pressure Taylor provided for his family, though they lived according to the barest necessities, and continued to study; *Public Characters* relates his situation thus:

However, as he was engaged every day in the banking-house till at least seven in the evening, and sometimes till nine or ten, he was obliged to devote part of the night to study. Hence we are informed, that for several years, while he was at the banker’s he seldom went to bed before two or three o’clock in the morning; and having, by contemplative habits, learned to divest himself during the time which he set apart for study of all concern about the common affairs of life, his attention was not diverted from Aristotle, either by the inconveniences arising from his slender income, or solicitude about the business of the day.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> See note 124 above.

<sup>145</sup> *SW*, p. 111.

The above passage demonstrates Taylor's commitment to learning and it reveals one of his lifelong practices: he meditated. Taylor's practice of contemplation and meditation were not a luxury but a necessary tool. In a footnote to his *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus on Euclid's Elements*, first published in 1788-1799 and reprinted in 1792, writing about 'the true light' – a term that is interchangeable with the phrase 'spiritual truth' – Taylor commented that: 'For this light is alone brought into the mind by science, patient reflection, and unwearied meditation'.<sup>146</sup> Taylor nurtured contemplative habits as a means of obtaining knowledge which he perceived as being beyond cognition and understandable only by intuitional and spiritual faculties: this shall be explored in greater depth subsequently.

Taylor's first encounter with Aristotle was a reading of the *Physics* which is mentioned again, to emphasise its importance during Taylor's genesis in Greek philosophy, together with the books *On Soul (de Anima)*, *On the Heavens (de Caelo)* together with Aristotle's 'Logick', *Morals* and *Metaphysics*.<sup>147</sup> Taylor's reading of Aristotle was not confined to his own interpretation; he utilised commentaries to augment his understanding. Taylor commented that he read Aristotle 'by the assistance of his Greek interpreters.' *Public Characters* does not divulge which Greek commentators Taylor used. However, Taylor's complete *Works of Aristotle*, published

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<sup>146</sup> Thomas Taylor, trans., *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus on the First Book of Euclid's Elements. To which are added A History of the Restoration of the Platonic Theology BY THE LATTER PLATONISTS: and a Translation from the Greek of Proclus's Theological Elements* 2 vols. (London: Printed for the Author – sold by T. Payne & Son; B White & Son, J. Robson; T Cadell; Leigh & Co. G Nicol; R. Faulder; and T. and J Egerton, 1792), I, xxv. Note: The 1792 edition of this work was a reprint, without alterations, of an earlier edition Volume 1 of which was published in 1788 and Volume 2 in 1789. *A History of the Restoration of the Platonic Philosophy* is an essay original to Taylor. This work is hereafter cited as *The Commentaries*.

<sup>147</sup> *SW*, p. 112.

in nine volumes between 1806 and 1812,<sup>148</sup> displays the bulk of commentaries written on Aristotle by Porphyry and four other Platonists who stood in teacher-pupil relationships, Ammonius Hermiae (c. 435/45 – c. 517/26 CE), Philoponus (c. 490-570s CE), Syrianus and Proclus. In the *Preface to the Introduction of Porphyry to The Categories of Aristotle* Taylor wrote that ‘it is my intention in the notes to this my translation of Aristotle’s works, to extract the commentaries of the best of his Greek interpreters, whatever appears to me to be the most important, and best calculated to restore his philosophy.’<sup>149</sup> Taylor, in agreement with the Neoplatonic commentators sought to harmonise and reconcile the differences between Plato and Aristotle and this was his aim when he sought to ‘restore’ Aristotle’s philosophy. The Neoplatonists sought to assimilate Aristotle into their understanding of the Platonic tradition.

Taylor’s *Works of Aristotle* also contained commentary translated from Alexander of Aphrodisias (no dates of birth or death exist in relation to this peripatetic philosopher, who lived between the late second and early third centuries of the Common Era).

Taylor also refers to the commentaries of Olympiodorus the Younger (c.495/505 – c.565 CE) and of Priscian of Lydia and Simplicius who were all Neoplatonists of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century of the Common Era.

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<sup>148</sup> Taylor’s *Works of Aristotle* is sometimes numbered as containing 9 volumes and at other times 10 volumes. My copy of Taylor’s Aristotle (9 vols.) has two title-pages in each volume, all contain the same first title-page dated 1812 and state that the works are published in 9 volumes. The second title page does not mention any number of volumes but simply states the title of the volume and gives a date ranging from 1806 – 1812, for example, the second title page of the first volume reads: *The Organon or Logical Treatises of Aristotle. Translated from the Greek with Copious Elucidations from the Commentaries of Ammonius and Simplicius By Thomas Taylor. Jove Honours Me, and Favours My Designs Pope’s Homer’s Iliad Book 9<sup>th</sup> v. 717* (London, Printed for the Translator, 1807). It would seem that Taylor’s *Aristotle* was available to subscribers as it was printed between 1806 and 1812. In 1812 Taylor Published *A Dissertation on the Philosophy of Aristotle*. This book is often numbered as volume 10 of Taylor’s *Aristotle*. See Raine & Harper’s annotations to Taylor’s *Aristotle* in the bibliography in *SW*, pp. 526-527.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas Taylor, trans., *The Works of Aristotle Translated from the Greek with Copious Elucidations from the Best of his Greek Commentators viz. Alexander, Aphrodisiensis, Syrianus, Ammonius, Hermæas, Priscianus, Olympiodorus, Simplicius & co.* 9 vols. (London: Printed for the Translator, Manor Place, Walworth, Surry; by Robert Wilks, 89, Chancery-Lane, Fleet-Street, 1812), Vol. 1 [*THE ORGANON*], 3. Hereafter cited as *Aristotle Works*.

In the early seventeen eighties while working at the bank and being committed to domestic responsibilities it is remarkable that Taylor progressed so rapidly from reading Aristotle alone to reading his commentators. Of course, Taylor could not have read all of the commentaries that the above-mentioned Platonists wrote on the five works of Aristotle that he mentions studying in *Public Characters*.<sup>150</sup> The hand of fate (or coincidence) guided Taylor in his studies via references in books he read, such as Digby. However, Taylor also utilised bibliographies and throughout his works, the name Fabricius recurs frequently in footnotes and endnotes.<sup>151</sup> Johann Albert Fabricius (1668-1736), a native of Leipzig, edited and authored over 150 works in his lifetime. His greatest achievements were his *Bibliotheca Latina* (1697) and the 14-volume *Bibliotheca Graecae* (1705-1728). The sale catalogue of Taylor's library records that he owned three editions of *Bibliotheca Latina*<sup>152</sup> being, 'Fabricii *Bibliotheca Latina*, 2 tom. (Hamburg 1712)' and two further amended and expanded editions marked 'Editio altera' published in both London (1703) in two volumes and in Hamburg (1722) in three volumes. The library catalogue also records the twelve-volume *Bibliotheca Graecae* as having been in Taylor's possession.<sup>153</sup> It is unlikely that Taylor could have afforded the fourteen-volume *Bibliotheca Graecae* in the early seventeen eighties. However, Taylor refers to the *Bibliotheca Graecae* so frequently

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<sup>150</sup> The extent of the commentaries on Aristotle written in late antiquity is demonstrated in the work of H. Diels, ed. *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graecae* (Berlin: Reimer, 1882-1909), 23 Vols, with 3 supplementary Vols. [Includes text of most of the ancient Greek commentaries. The commentators included are, in chronological order: Adrastus, Aspasius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, Dexippus, Themistius, Syrianus, Ammonius, Priscian of Lydia, Asclepius, Philoponus, Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Elias, David, Stephanus, Eustratius, Michael of Ephesus, Sophonias.]

<sup>151</sup> See for example, *The Commentaries*, 2. p. 217 and p. 221.

<sup>152</sup> See *Soth. Cat. – Lots 138, 139 and 140*.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, Lot 282. Note: listed as 'Fabricii (JA) *Bibliotheca Graecae*, 14 tom, Hamb. 1708.

in his works that he must have had frequent access to one such as in the library departments of the British Museum, founded in 1753.

Taylor's use of ancient commentaries as the foundation of his understanding of authors such as Plato and Aristotle is emphasised in *Public Characters*:

in the opinion of Mr. T. a man might as reasonably expect to understand Archimedes who had never read Euclid, as to comprehend either Aristotle or Plato, *who wrote obscurely from design*, without the assistance of their Greek commentators. Hence he has often been heard to say, that the folly of neglecting the invaluable commentaries of the ancients, on those philosophers, is only to be equalled by the arrogance of such as affect to despise them; since these interpreters possessed a traditional knowledge of Greek philosophy, had books to consult on that subject which are now lost, spent their whole lives in the study of it, were men of deepest erudition, and must be infinitely better qualified to explain the meaning of the text of Plato and Aristotle than any modern can pretend to be, because the Greek was their native tongue.<sup>154</sup>

The quotation above contains many key arguments that were the bedrock of Taylor's scholarly opinions and attitudes throughout his life. Taylor must have begun to form his opinions about the works of Plato and Aristotle containing occult truths in the early seventeen eighties while working at the bank. As is stated above, Taylor believed that both authors '*wrote obscurely from design*'. He states this because of his belief that Plato and Aristotle were links in a 'golden chain' of philosophers and mystagogues that were rooted in a tradition founded by Orpheus and Pythagoras of which both were perceived to be initiates and transmitters. This view was not original to Taylor; it was one of the tenets of the Neoplatonists. Another essential aspect of

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<sup>154</sup> *SW*, p. 112.

Neoplatonism was the use of hermeneutical apparatus as a key to understanding original authors. Taylor fully adopted the view that to understand Plato and Aristotle commentaries needed to be utilised. In the above quotation, five statements are posited as a defence of the ancient commentators, of which two are assumptive and three are arguably accurate. Firstly, that the Neoplatonic commentators possessed a traditional knowledge of the Greek philosophy is a fair statement. Secondly, that the Neoplatonists had texts available to them that the ravages of time had denied to modern readers is true. It does not necessarily follow that lost texts contained infallible information – but they nonetheless provided ancient scholars with much less fragmented information. Thirdly, that the Neoplatonists spent their whole lives in the study of philosophy is true and it seems to be the dedication, and zealous commitment to the Platonic tradition that the ancient commentators possessed that Taylor is emphasising. Fourthly, that the Neoplatonists were men of the deepest erudition is a justifiable statement; however, the view of many in the history of philosophy – particularly in Britain and Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – was that the Neoplatonists might have been erudite but that they were erudite fanatics or even lunatics. Fifthly, that the Greek was the native tongue of the Neoplatonists is not a necessarily true statement. That the Neoplatonists all wrote in Greek is true; however, Iamblichus for example, was Syrian and might have communicated in his native tongue as well as in Greek.

Taylor believed in the Neoplatonists in the religious sense of believing and thus the statement was made, ‘Mr. T. even carries his attachment to these interpreters so far as to assert, that from the oblivion in which they have been so long concealed, the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle has not been accurately understood for upwards of a

thousand years.’<sup>155</sup> The above quotation and the one preceding it are retrospective interpolations on the part of the speaker’s voice in *Public Characters*. While Taylor was initially studying Aristotle and his commentators, he was not the unswerving devotee he was to become. The years between 1780 and 1785 were the incubation period when the young Christian dissenter became a pagan Platonist.

In *Public Characters*, Taylor is presented as leading a double life, a life that was split between work and contemplative study. The following quotation offers a view of the situation:

Mr. T. therefore, who, by divesting himself at night of those habits of business which he had been contracting in the day, may be said in this respect to have resembled Penelope, made it a constant rule to digest what he had learned from Aristotle, while he was walking about with bills. This, when he was once master of his employment, he accomplished with great facility, without either committing mistakes, or retarding his business. We are, indeed, informed from good authority, while in that department, he was always distinguished for accuracy and dispatch.<sup>156</sup>

Taylor’s work at the bank was far beneath his capabilities and so after initially familiarising himself with his post he could perform his duties effectively without compromising his effectiveness. The mention of Penelope is a reference to the Homeric character from the *Odyssey*; but how did Thomas Taylor resemble the daughter of Icarius and wife of Ulysses? Many suitors approached Penelope when Ulysses was feared dead, shipwrecked, and never likely to return to Ithaca. She always promised to give an answer to the proposals she had received when she had

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

finished weaving a tapestry, which she, constantly hoping for reunion with her husband, never finished because she unpicked at night what she did in the day. A proverb, current in the eighteenth century and mentioned in the 1797 edition of J. Lemprière's *Bibliotheca Classica; or A Classical Dictionary*, throws light on Taylor's being quoted as resembling Penelope the weaver, 'This artifice of Penelope has given rise to the proverb *Penelope's web*, which is applied to whatever labor can never be ended.'<sup>157</sup>

By 1782, Taylor was ready to publish his first work on ancient Greek philosophy. Indeed it was at this time that Taylor 'the Platonist' made his first tentative steps onto the literary stage of the late eighteenth century as a public character. Financially he was in no position to provide the outlay for publishing a book and yet he had not found a patron or literary sponsor, as he would do later. The twenty-four year old looked to the format of the magazine, or journal, as a medium to express his burgeoning views. In January of 1782, a journal was founded entitled *The European Magazine*. The *European* was established by the journalist James Perry as the mouthpiece of the Philological Society of London. It quickly passed under the proprietorship of the Shakespearean scholar Isaac Reed and his co-partners John Sewell and Daniel Braithwaite, who would preside over the magazine's fortunes during its first two decades.'<sup>158</sup> Taylor wrote to the editors of the magazine, in August

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<sup>157</sup> J. Lemprière, *Bibliotheca Classica; or a Classical Dictionary, containing A Full Account of all the Proper Names mentioned in Antient Authors with Tables of Coins, Weights, and Measures, in use among the Greeks and the Romans: To Which is prefixed a Chronological Table*. 3<sup>rd</sup>. edn. (London: T. Cadell Jr, 1797), (no page numbers quotation under 'Penelope').

<sup>158</sup> Emily Lorraine de Montluzin 'Attributions of Authorship in the European Magazine, 1782-1826', University of Virginia Electronic Archive, see: <http://etext.virginia.edu/bsuva/euomag/.html#int>

1782, submitting a translation of *On the Nature of the Universe* by Ocellus Lucanus;  
the letter reads:

To The Editors of the European Magazine

August 21 1782

Gentlemen,

From such as you as possess any taste for antient philosophy, every attempt to restore its decaying credit will, I persuade myself, meet with a candid reception and, perhaps, those who have no inclination this way, may, at least, find some entertainments, in contemplating the ruin of a system, once fair and flourishing, and which will ever be venerable, both from the antiquity and authority of its founder.<sup>159</sup> The following then is a paraphrase on part of a small Greek tract, “On the Nature of the Universe” by Ocellus Lucanus, a disciple of the celebrated Pythagoras, remarkable for the great conciseness of its composition, and the subtle arguments by which the opinion of the world’s eternity is established. If you think it is worth inserting, you will oblige.

Your humble servant,

T.T.<sup>160</sup>

Taylor’s submission was a success. The publication of *On the Nature of the Universe* and the above letter indicate that Taylor felt capable enough to produce a translation from Greek in the form of a paraphrase. Taylor’s first efforts as a translator all took the form of paraphrase. Another important aspect of Taylor’s first steps through the ‘ruin of a system, once fair and flourishing’ is that he developed his theological, philosophical and religious interests before the French Revolution and the ensuing

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<sup>159</sup> Taylor is here referring to Pythagoras.

<sup>160</sup> Thomas Taylor, published letter in, *The European Magazine and London Review Containing the Literature, History, Politics, Acts, Manners and Amusements of the Age. By the Philological Society of London*, 87 Vols. (London: Printed for John Fielding, John Debrett and John Sewell, 1782) II, 180-181.

Terror. Another article, in the same volume of the *European Magazine* as Taylor's *On the Nature of the Universe* appeared in, regarding 'A brief account of the UNITARIANS, associated with Mr. Lindsey at Essex Street Chapel'<sup>161</sup> states that:

The growing Spirit of Liberality, which, for the happiness of mankind, diffuses itself at the present day, naturally produces a great variety of religious societies. While pains, penalties, and torture, were consequences of an honest avowal of sentiment, there were few hardy enough to present themselves as martyrs to opinion. But now that men are left at liberty to publish the doctrines they believe, those creeds which before, whether dangerous or innocent, lay lurking in secrecy, are exposed to examination, to refutation, or to confirmation, as their fairly canvassed merits may deserve.<sup>162</sup>

This paragraph, while referring to Christian sects and the history of dissenters in Britain from the Puritan persecutions through the Glorious Revolution and up to the late eighteenth century, seems almost prophetic concerning Taylor's initial endeavours and subsequent literary career. Taylor, commencing with his paraphrase translation, was to make himself a 'martyr to opinion' and exercise liberty in publishing the doctrines in which he believed.

Taylor became a convert to pagan Neoplatonism roughly between 1778 and 1787. His short-lived conversion to deism through the works of Bolingbroke and Hume was a phase of his intellectual development; particularly regarding the revision of his Christian beliefs. Taylor may have also been involved in a debating society, of sorts,

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 343. Note this refers to Robert Lindsey the former Anglican divine who founded Unitarianism. He was one of the foremost dissenting preachers in London and worked closely with other notables including Dr. Joseph Priestley.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

which might have further influenced his revision of Christianity and stimulated his interests in mystical and esoteric subjects. No mention is made of Taylor belonging to any debating societies in *Mr. Taylor the Platonist*. However, in March 1872 a subscriber called C. Elliot Browne placed the following notice in the journal *Notes and Queries*:

SOCIETY OF ANCIENT DEISTS: SPIRITUALISM IN 1780 – In Reid’s *Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in this Metropolis*, Lond. 1800, there is an account of “a kind of infidel mystics,” calling themselves Ancient Deists, who met at Hoxton between 1770 and 1780. Their meetings appear to have resembled the *séances* of more modern times...

I remember hearing that Thomas Taylor, the Platonist, was a member of this society. Is anything further known of it, and did they publish anything? <sup>163</sup>

This query could be based on hearsay alone, however; William Hamilton Reid’s description of the ‘Ancient Deists’ provides further information, which corresponds with Taylor’s interests. According to Reid, the locus for the propagation of deism in London between 1775 and 1776 was a chapel in ‘Margaret-street, Oxford-road’ where a preacher ‘known by the appellation of the *Priest of Nature*’ delivered ‘Deistical lectures’.<sup>164</sup> Reid stated that the group at Hoxton had partially emerged out of ‘debating society’ and the activities of a preacher in a chapel on ‘Margaret-street, Oxford-road.’ Reid does not name the ‘*Priest of Nature*’ who preached at Margaret Street. The preacher was David Williams (1738-1816), who was nicknamed the ‘*Priest of Nature*’ by his friend Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790). Williams and Franklin had been founding members of the deist Club of Thirteen, also known as The

<sup>163</sup> C. Elliot Browne, ‘SOCIETY OF ANCIENT DEISTS: SPIRITUALISM IN 1780’ in *N&Q*, 1772; S4 – IX: 181.

<sup>164</sup> William Hamilton Reid, ed. Victor E. Neuburg, *The Rise and Dissolution of Infidel Societies in this Metropolis (1800)*, rpt. in *Literacy and Society: The Social History of Education*, 8 Vols. (London: The Woburn Press, 1971), V, 90.

Wednesday Club, which met at Old Slaughter's Coffee House, St. Martin's Lane or at the Swan on Westminster Bridge.<sup>165</sup> The precise nature of Williams' deism is conveyed in his well received book *The Philosopher* (1771), published anonymously, 'in which, in the form of a dialogue [perhaps a hint of copying the Platonic model here] between a philosopher (clearly Williams's mouthpiece), a courier, a whig, a Presbyterian minister and an Anglican clergyman, he discusses the corruption of the political and religious *status quo*, enjoining doctrinal freedom and the need for a form of public worship based on a fundamental moral deism.'<sup>166</sup> Reid disassociated the Margaret Street Chapel congregation from the eccentricities of the Ancient Deists; but nonetheless he asserted:

But neither the gentleman, then known by the appellation of the *Priest of Nature*, and who delivered Deistical lectures in his chapel, in 1775-6, nor his congregation, should, by any means, be ranked with those pestiferous clubbists of late date; [the Ancient Deists] although it unfortunately happened that this renewal of a dangerous profession of false philosophy continued the concatenation of Infidelity nearer to the era of the French Revolution which, afterwards co-operating with those principles, increased the number of English Infidels beyond all precedent.

From the period when the above-mentioned lectures, in Margaret-street, had closed till the publication of the *Age of Reason*; Deism, and the heterodox opinions of the times, seemed to have taken up their last refuge in a pretty numerous circle, near Hoxton...<sup>167</sup>

Reid states that the lectures in Margaret Street stopped in 1776 and that the Ancient Deists met in Hoxton, near the City of London but then outside of the legal

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<sup>165</sup> See 'Williams, David (1738–1816).' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. May 2005. <http://www.oxforddnb.com>. Note: hereafter cited as *DNB*, all citations from the *DNB* in this thesis are from the online edition.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Reid, ed. Neuburg (1971), pp. 90-91.

jurisdiction of the City, 'till the publication of the Age of Reason.'<sup>168</sup> There was probably less fear of suppression of meetings of infidel, freethinking and dissenting societies outside the City limits during the politically feverish and insecure times of the late eighteenth century. Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* (Part 1) was published in London, New York and Paris in 1794. C Eliot Browne, quoted above, stated that the Ancient Deists convened between 1770 and 1780, but the chronology presented by Reid indicates that the 'society' was active between 1776 and 1794. Reid reported that the members of the group were:

a kind of *Infidel Mystics*, known to strangers, from the circumstance of broaching their sentiments in some writings and public places, by the appellation of *Ancient Deists*, as well as by profession of their belief in the eternity of the universe, &c. This place being attended by some persons above the common line of life, finally operated as a kind of vortex, which naturally attracted the restless and dissatisfied of every sect within its circle. Here human learning was declaimed against, as one of the greatest enemies to human happiness or the improvement of the intellect, and dreams, visions, and immediate revelations, were recommended as a substitute! The faculty of telling future events was also insisted upon; the discernment of spirits, by the physiognomy, the voice, the gait, &c. together with the possibility of conversing with departed souls. In fact, those pretences were carried so far, that any visitor, not in the habit of hearing supernatural voices, or not informed of the common occurrences of the day, by the ministration of Angels, would be treated as a novice and a disciple of the lowest form.

It was by no means unnatural, that this assemblage should be made up of Alchymists, Astrologers, Calculators,<sup>169</sup> Mystics, Magnetizers,<sup>170</sup> Prophets, and Projectors<sup>171</sup> of every class. In fact, this community seemed to embrace all the eccentric modes, sectaries, visionaries, fanatics, enthusiasts, rationalists, and every other name, into which affectation, whim, folly, or caprice divide the populace.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>169</sup> 'Calculator' a 'reckoner' possibly used here in reference to numerology, isopsephy or gematria.

<sup>170</sup> Practitioners of Mesmerism or those who experiment with 'animal magnetism' especially in relation to healing.

<sup>171</sup> An instigator of a project, a founder. Probably used here with sectarian connotations.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91-92.

Three aspects Reid's report could be related to Thomas Taylor's life. Firstly, Taylor was 'restless and dissatisfied' within Christianity, and with the harsh religious intolerance (itself an expression of Christian sectarianism) reflected by the reaction of his father and stepmother to his elopement with Mary Morton. Secondly, the Ancient Deists professed a belief 'in the eternity of the universe.' Taylor's first publication after his pamphlet on the quadrature of the circle betrayed a personal belief 'in the eternity of the universe' as well as being a translation of Ocellus Lucanus on that subject. Thirdly, Taylor was interested in all manner of occult theories and practices such as were noted as being prominent features of the society of '*Infidel Mystics*' described by Reid. The sale of Taylor's library by Sotheby offered 'An Extensive Collection of Miscellaneous Books, comprising several hundred volumes, consisting of many editions of the works of Aristotle and other philosophers; works on Magick, Astronomy, Mathematicks, Geometry, Rhetoric, &c.' <sup>173</sup> If Taylor was a member of the Ancient Deists it would explain, more succinctly than the narrative of *Mr Taylor the Platonist* does, how Taylor first became interested in ancient mysticism and the occult. Reid mentioned that 'Alchymists' were amongst the esoteric menagerie of Ancient Deists: where better could Taylor be stimulated to start experimenting with the construction of eternal lamps, as shall be discussed shortly, and delving into the arcane?

In his introduction to his translation of Ocellus Lucanus Taylor revealed important facts about the formation of his intellectual persuasions pertaining to Greek philosophy, facts which are not mentioned in *Public Characters*. Indeed, in the

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<sup>173</sup> *Soth. Cat. – Lot 706.*

following quotation, given in length due to its importance, Taylor reveals one of the primary sources of his philosophical position:

This is all that Ocellus Lucanus has written concerning the Universe in general: a small but valuable work, however it may be ridiculed by those superficial censurers, who esteem everything not modern, unworthy their perusal. The author of the *Antient Metaphysics*, observes that it is the most antient book of philosophy in the world, and often refers to it in the course of his work, in support of his grand opinion, that mind is that which moves, and body that which is moved. I was happy to find my sentiments in favour of this little tract, confirmed by so respectable an authority, and still more so, to meet with such an elaborate defence of the only true philosophy in an age so totally immersed in the study of sensible particulars; with the same views as Lord Monboddo, although not with equal abilities, nor equal learning, I have devoted my leisure hours to the same pursuits, and hope I shall yet live to see the Greek Philosophy, restored to its pristine dignity in Britain, and the taste for experimental knowledge, which is now so prevalent, united with the nobler study of mind, which is truly the fairest, as well as the first of things; and that philosophers, quitting the study of particulars, knowing their number to be infinite, will (according to the advice of Plato) turn their intellectual eyes, to what is general and comprehensive, and through generals learn to see and recognise whatever exists.<sup>174</sup>

This quotation reveals that Taylor was considerably indebted to James Burnett, Lord Monboddo (1714-1799). From the above passage, it is evident that Taylor read volume one of Monboddo's *Antient Metaphysics, or the Science of Universals with an Appendix, Containing an Examination of the Principles of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy*, 6 Vols. (1779-1799) between the date of publication and the summer of

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., pp. 429-430. Note the translation is given in three sections, pp. 262-263, 350-351 and 429-430. Ocellus Lucanus' *On the Nature of the Universe*, was republished by Taylor in later life in his *Ocellus Lucanus. On the Nature of the Universe. Taurus the Platonic Philosopher, On the Eternity of the World. Julius Firmicus Maternus of the Thema Mundi; in which the Positions of the Stars at the Commencement of the Several Mundane Periods is Given. Select Theorems on the Perpetuity of Time by Proclus. Translated from the Originals* (London, Privately Printed for the Author, 1831). This work is also reprinted in *TTS*, IV, 105-118.

1782. Volume 1 of *Antient Metaphysics* expounds on many of the themes that had been important in Taylor's reading and philosophical evolution up to the early seventeen eighties as divulged in *Public Characters*. The most recent editor of *Antient Metaphysics*, Aaron Garrett, has described it as 'a cornucopia of the idiosyncratic and unfashionable'.<sup>175</sup> Monboddo seemed to delight in controversy and the themes of his work often flew in the face of conventional views. *Antient Metaphysics* was inaugurated following an exceptional, though highly subjective incident. Garrett relates that:

In 1778 he suffered a fever during which he dreamed of a beautiful lady lecturing him in French, and of the separation of mind and body. This experience fuelled his resolve to write a work affirming the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies as against the modern schools of Locke and Hume. The first volume of this work, *Antient Metaphysics*, appeared in 1779 and did fairly well in England, where Monboddo became a minor celebrity in the bluestocking circle of Hannah More (to whom Monboddo apparently proposed marriage a number of times). There was clearly an affinity between Monboddo's reactionary philosophy and bluestocking conservatism, with its emphasis on virtue and worship of the ancients, although the bluestockings were amused by Monboddo's oddity.<sup>176</sup>

The first volume of *Antient Metaphysics* is probably the most significant work that Taylor read in relation to his being initiated into his lifelong obsession with the Platonic philosophy and Neoplatonism in particular. Monboddo taught that man's ideal state could be achieved through a mixture of Athenian wisdom and Neoplatonic

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<sup>175</sup> James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, *Antient Metaphysics, or the Science of Universals with an Appendix, containing an Examination of the Principles of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy*, ed. Aaron Garrett, 6 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2001), I, v.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, I, viii.

intellectualism.<sup>177</sup> Garrett notes that, ‘Monboddo’s variety of Neoplatonism, which he called ‘Antient Theism’, had affinities with the philosophy of Cudworth,<sup>178</sup> an author whom he greatly admired (*AM* I, ‘Preface’, iii) and more broadly Cambridge Platonism’.<sup>179</sup> Monboddo’s written style was often repetitive and declamatory; Garrett notes that *Antient Metaphysics* ‘does not make for linear reading, as Monboddo relentlessly argues for a rather unfashionable Neoplatonist philosophy in both style and content (*AM*, I, ‘Preface’, i-ii).’<sup>180</sup> Monboddo’s antimaterialist stance and even the style of his written denunciation of Newton as a philosopher and the popular philosophies of the late-eighteenth-century influenced Taylor. The passage from Taylor’s introduction to his paraphrase of Ocellus Lucanus above reads like a manifesto, and indeed, it was. It was Taylor’s first battle cry as one who had dedicated himself to seeing the Platonic philosophy, ‘restored to its pristine dignity in Britain’. The first volume of Monboddo’s *Antient Metaphysics* must have confirmed, and perhaps in some respects instigated, Taylor’s leanings towards ancient metaphysics as opposed to modern philosophy and religion. Other works, already mentioned, such as Digby’s *On Bodies* and Becher’s *Physica Subterranea*, were obviously important catalysts that were publicly acknowledged by Taylor in 1798. It is curious that Monboddo’s name was not on the list of acknowledged influences in *Public Characters*. It would appear that by 1798 Taylor wished, at least publicly, to distance himself from Monboddo and his writings. This could be because by 1798 Taylor rejected all forms of Christian Neoplatonism, such as that espoused by Cudworth, and

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, I, ix.

<sup>178</sup> Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) a leading member of the group known as the Cambridge Platonists.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

even Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) as contaminating purely pagan doctrine. The subsequent volumes of *Antient Metaphysics* may not have met with Taylor's approval. What is certain is that, for a time, Taylor sat at the feet of Monboddo and imbibed his teaching and Monboddo led Taylor inextricably into Neoplatonism.

Taylor, believing in the merits of Neoplatonism, read indefatigably on the subject. Between 1780 and 1785, he confirmed his position as a student and would-be exponent of the Platonic tradition:

Mr. T. having in this manner applied himself to the study of Aristotle, and presuming that he was sufficiently instructed in his philosophy, betook himself to the more sublime speculations of Plato; considering the Peripatetick discipline, when compared with that of Plato, as bearing the relation of the less to the greater mysteries: and in this light it seems, the two philosophies were always considered by the best of the Platonists. Mr. T had not long entered on the study of Plato before he met with the works of Plotinus, which he read, we are told, with an insatiable avidity and the most rapturous delight, notwithstanding, the obscurity of his diction, and the profundity of his conceptions. After having been well imbued in the doctrines of Plotinus, he betook himself to the six books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato, a work which he found so uncommonly abstruse, that he is heard to say he did not thoroughly understand it till he had read it thrice over.<sup>181</sup>

The most likely place in which Taylor could read Plato was in Marsilio Ficino's monumental edition of the works of Plato. Taylor owned a single volume of Ficino's Latin translation in the 1557 edition edited by Simon Gyraeneus (1493-1541) who

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<sup>181</sup> *SW*, p. 113.

was professor of Greek at Basle.<sup>182</sup> The title page of this book and Taylor's manuscript note on the flyleaf, describing the unfortunate demise of Mr. Ballow a former owner of the book who committed suicide, are given in Raine and Harper's *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*.<sup>183</sup> The Sotheby catalogue of Taylor's library also offered the 12-volume Bipont edition of Ficino's Greek and Latin edition of the works of Plato (1781-1787), containing the text established by Henri Estienne (1528-1598), better known as Stephanus, and edited by F.C. Exter and J.V. Embster.<sup>184</sup> Taylor probably owned the single-volume, 1557, edition of Plato before the 12-volume Bipont 1781-1787 edition, due to cost, though he might have purchased the set volume by volume between 1781 and 1787. Taylor also owned Ficino's translation of the complete works of Plotinus.<sup>185</sup> Taylor undoubtedly first read both the complete works of Plato and Plotinus in Ficino's editions. Taylor digested these works over months and years between 1780 and 1785. During this period he also read, 'thrice over' the *Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*. This book was sold by Sotheby in 1835.<sup>186</sup> It must have been auctioned by Sotheby again in 1839 as the book

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<sup>182</sup> *Soth. Cat.*, Lot 669. Note listed as 'Platonis Opera, Lat. Ficini. Lugduni, 1557.'

<sup>183</sup> See *SW*, 'Illustration Plates' 4&5.

<sup>184</sup> *Soth. Cat.* – Lot 439. Note listed as 'Opera Gr. et Lat. Mars. Ficini, 12 tom. Biponti, 1781. Platōn. Platonis philosophi quae exstant; Graece ad editionem H. Stephani accurate expressa. Cum M. Ficini interpretatione. [The Latin version of the spurious dialogues by R. Agricola and S. Corradus.] Praemittitur L. III. Laertii de vita et dogm. Platonis, cum notitia literaria. Accedit varietas lectionis. Studiis Societatis Bipontinae. [Edited by F. C. Exter and J. V. Embster.]

<sup>185</sup> *Soth. Cat.* – Lot 670. Note: listed as 'Plotini Opera. Gr. et Lat. Ficini, Basil, 1580.' Note: This was the first bilingual edition of Plotinus works providing both text and commentary. Plotinus. Marsiglio Ficino, trans. & comm. *Operum Philosophicorum Omnium Libri LIV In Sex Enneades Distribuiti. Ex antiquiss. Codicum fide nunc primum Graece Editi, cum Latina Marsilli Ficini interpretatione & commentatione*. It opens with a preface written by the printer, which is followed by Ficino's address to Lorenzo de' Medici the Magnificent. The text is preceded by the Life of Plotinus by Porphyry, to whom is owed the division of the work into six groups, each consisting of nine works, that has given rise to the title Enneads.

<sup>186</sup> *Soth. Cat.* – Lot 675. Note: listed as 'Proclus in Platonis Theologiam, Gr. et Lat. Per Æm. Portum, Hamb. 1618'. Note full details: *Procli Successoris Platonici in Platonis Theologiam libri sex / per Aemilium Portum ex Graecis facti Latini, et in gratiam Platonicae philosophiae studiosorum ex illustrissimi, celsissimique principis ac Domini. Dn. Friderici, Dn. Joannis Adolphi nunc primum in*

was bought then by Alexander Dyce (1798-1869) who wrote on the inside of the front cover, 'Bought this vol, which contains the MS notes of my old friend T. Taylor at a sale by Sotheby in 1839'.<sup>187</sup> The Rev. Alexander Dyce was a keen Shakespearean scholar, theatre critic and antiquarian who donated over 14,000 books to the South Kensington Museum, and was a close friend of Taylor. Aemelius Portus (1540-1614) edited Taylor's copy of *The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*. The Life of Proclus by Marinus prefaces the main text. Taylor made numerous manuscript emendations to both the Greek text and the Latin translation, in Greek, Latin and occasionally in English. Whether Taylor began to emend the text between 1780 and 1785, or over the years up until he published his translation of *The Six Books of Proclus* in 1816 is difficult to surmise. Later in *Public Characters*, in 1780 – 1781, when Taylor was twenty-two years old, after reading Digby he confessed he needed to recover his knowledge of Greek in order to read Aristotle in the original but on that occasion he does not mention needing to study more Latin to become a proficient reader in that language.<sup>188</sup> In the early seventeen eighties Taylor was most probably much more proficient in reading Latin than he was Greek. Taylor must have found the above editions of Plato, Plotinus and Proclus invaluable in his acquisition of the Greek language as they all gave access to the Greek through Latin translation. In *Public Characters* where Taylor stated that, 'he learned Greek rather through the Greek philosophy, than the Greek philosophy through Greek'<sup>189</sup> he could have added 'with the aid of Latin translation'.

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*lucem editi ; accessit Marini Neapolitani libellus de Vita Procli ; item Conclusiones LV secundum Proclum quas olim Romae illustris Picu Mirandula a disputandas exhibuit.*

<sup>187</sup> National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, Dyce Fol. 7953. Note: Autograph and MS notes of Thomas Taylor.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. The Celebrated Mary Wollstonecraft

While Taylor was becoming conversant with the Proclian exposition of the Platonic theology, he and his wife gave lodging to two notable female guests.

While he was engaged in the study of Proclus, who appears upon the whole to be of all the Platonists, Mr. T.'s greatest favourite, the celebrated Mrs. Wollstonecraft, and her friend Miss Blood, resided with our philosopher for nearly three months. Mr. T. has been known to observe of Mrs. W. that during her stay with him, he thought her a very modest, sensible, and agreeable young lady; that she has often heard him explain the doctrines of Plato, and was always pleased with his conversation on that subject; but confessed herself more inclined to an active than a contemplative life. She often too complimented him on the tranquillity of his manners, and used to call the little room which he made his study, "the abode of peace."

Mr. T. observed, that he afterwards called on her when she lived in George-street, and that he has there drunk wine with her out of a *tea cup*; Mrs. W. remarking at the time, that she did not give herself the trouble to think whether a wine-glass was not a necessary utensil in a house. He added, he has heard her say, that one of the conditions she should make previous to marriage, with the man she intended for her husband, would be this – that he should never presume to enter the room in which she was sitting, till he had first knocked at the door. <sup>190</sup>

William Godwin did not mention Mary Wollstonecraft and her friend Fanny Blood lodging with the Taylors in his *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights*

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

*of Woman* (1798) and hence the episode has been omitted by most of her biographers. George Mills Harper cites W. Clark Durrant's edition of Godwin's *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1922)<sup>191</sup> as mistakenly placing Mary Wollstonecraft's residence with the Taylors as being in the year 1777.<sup>192</sup> Frank B. Evans wrote:

From some time in 1778 to 1780 Mary was in Bath, and then for two years lived with Fanny at Walham Green, Fulham; almost across the city from Walworth; finally, after a few months at Islington, the two women returned, in 1783, to Newington Green, where they superintended a school. They were again in the immediate neighbourhood of Taylor and probably at this time lived for three months in his home.<sup>193</sup>

If it is taken into account that the Taylors were not in Walworth until 1780 it is impossible that Wollstonecraft and Blood resided with the Taylors in 1777. Fanny Blood left England to be married in Lisbon in 1785. Evan's date of 1783 as being the probable time when the two women lodged with the Taylors concurs with not only the Wollstonecraft chronology and her known proximity to Walworth at the time but also with the chronology in *Public Characters*, for Taylor states that Wollstonecraft stayed with him while he was studying Proclus. Ultimately she moved to George Street with the assistance of her ally and publisher Joseph Johnson at Michaelmas, the end of September to early October, 1787.

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<sup>191</sup> William Godwin, *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. W. Clark Durant, (London & Greenberg, New York: Constable & Co., 1927)

<sup>192</sup> See *NWB*, n. 14, p. 279.

<sup>193</sup> Frank B Evans, 'Thomas Taylor, Platonist of the Romantic Period' in *PMLA*, Vol. LV, (1940), 1065.

In the narrative of *Public Characters* Wollstonecraft is presented in a passive role in that she was the recipient of Taylor's Platonic homilies. There is some indication that she expressed her own views: she, 'confessed herself more inclined to an active than a contemplative life'. Overall, the brief relationship between Taylor and Wollstonecraft seems to have been amicable. There is no mention in *Public Characters* of Mary Taylor, apart from Taylor's falling in love with her and the couple's elopement, nor are any of their children mentioned. When Wollstonecraft and Blood stayed with the Taylors, Thomas was working very long hours at the bank and although Wollstonecraft and Blood were probably involved in superintending a school at the time, one wonders what conversations took place between Mary Taylor and Mary Wollstonecraft? Mary Taylor's role in Thomas Taylor's life could be easily imagined as purely domestic, passively supportive and remain obscure. Unfortunately, there are only hints concerning the nature of her character and of how involved she was in her husband's struggles, battles and triumphs. As shall be seen later, she played a much more active role than might previously have been thought.

## 6. Emerging From Obscurity

Taylor's remarks on Wollstonecraft reveal that he used a small room in his house as a study, which his lodger called 'the abode of peace'. Another view of Taylor's house and study is found in Isaac Disraeli's novel *Vaurien*<sup>194</sup> (French for 'worthless' or

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<sup>194</sup> Isaac Disraeli, *Vaurien, or Sketches of the Times: Exhibiting views of the Philosophies, Religions, Politics, Literature and Manners of the Age*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell, junior, W. Davies, John Murray and S. Highly, 1797). Note: This livre à clef was written in reaction to the excesses of the French Revolution, and is the first such work in which the attack was directed at Revolutionary

‘never-do-well’), which is titled after its protagonist. Disraeli’s character Vaurien, encounters a character called ‘the Platonist’. Taylor and Disraeli were acquaintances, if not friends; Disraeli attended Taylor’s funeral.<sup>195</sup> Disraeli also mentioned Taylor in his *Curiosities of Literature* writing:

To strain human curiosity to the utmost limits of human credibility, a *modern Pletho* has arisen in Mr. *Thomas Taylor*, who constant with the Platonic philosophy, in the present day religiously professes *polytheism*! At the close of the eighteenth century, be it recorded, were published many volumes, in which the author affects to avow himself a zealous Platonist, and asserts that he can prove that the Christian religion is ‘a bastardised and barbarous Platonism!’ The divinities of Plato are the divinities to be adored, and we are taught to call God, Jupiter; the Virgin, Venus; and Christ, Cupid! The Iliad of Homer allegorised, is converted into a Greek bible of the arcana of nature!<sup>196</sup>

Taylor’s being termed ‘the modern Pletho’ is one of the quotes that opens ‘*Mr. Taylor the Platonist*’ in *Public Characters*, where *Curiosities of Literature* is cited as the source, so Taylor was aware of what Disraeli wrote of him.<sup>197</sup> When Disraeli called Taylor ‘Pletho’ he was making reference to Chrysoloras Georgios Gemisthos (c.1360-1452), called ‘Plethon’ (also Pletho). He was a Byzantine scholar and philosopher who was instrumental in Cosimo de’ Medici’s patronage of the Florentine Academy of Eloquence in 1541. Pletho promoted Neoplatonism, polytheism and

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sympathisers on English soil; several of the characters are based on well-known Republican enthusiasts including William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, and the radical activist John Thelwall.

<sup>195</sup> See *NWB*, p. 31.

<sup>196</sup> Isaac Disraeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Edward Moxon, 1841), p. 77.

<sup>197</sup> *SW*, p. 105.

ritual magic based on the Chaldean Oracles and Hermetica.<sup>198</sup> Taylor was probably proud to have seen his name associated with him.

W.E.A. Axon, in his 'Thomas Taylor the Platonist' quoted Disraeli's *Vaurien* and identified the character of 'the Platonist' with Taylor:

The elder Disraeli wrote a now-forgotten novel entitled *Vaurien* which appeared anonymously in 1797. In this there is a satirical sketch of the Platonist. It is not easy to select passages from it sufficiently brief and unobjectionable. Vaurien waits in conversation with the wife of the Platonist until he has completed his morning worship: "By this time the Platonist had concluded his long hymn to Apollo. Vaurien now ascended with difficulty. At the bottom of the stairs a large kennel of dogs of various nations, who lived in a good understanding with each other, excepting when a bone was thrown among them, for then the dogs behaved like men, that is they mangled and tore each other to pieces with sagacity and without remorse. Monkeys and apes were chained on the banisters. A little republic of cats was peacefully established on the first landing place. He passed through one room which was an aviary and another which was an apiary. From the ceiling of the study of the Platonist, depended a polished globe of silvered glass, which strongly reflected the beams of the sun. Amidst this aching splendour sat the Platonist, changing his seat with the motions of his god, so that in the course of the day he and the sun went regularly round the apartment. He was occupied in constructing a magic lanthorn, which puerile amusement excited the surprise of Vaurien."<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> For more on Pletho see: Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964, rpt. Midway, 1991), pp. 13-15, 18n., 423.

<sup>199</sup> W.E.A. Axon, 'Thomas Taylor the Platonist' in *SW*, p. 128.

The above passage should be considered for what it is, satire. However, there are hints of truth contained in it. It is unlikely that Taylor's house was a zoo; Disraeli may have been exaggerating the fact that the Taylors kept a few pets. Be that as it may, the character of the Platonist is obviously that of a devotee; Thomas Taylor did write a hymn to Apollo, amongst others. Silvered glass balls, commonly called 'Witch Balls' were popular ornaments in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries. Taylor may have had one in his study. A Victorian writer commented that:

This description of Taylor's dwelling is said to be but little over-drawn; and it is also true, we believe, that at one period of his life Taylor did use a device of the kind described to symbolise his Zeus.<sup>200</sup>

An interesting link is that Disraeli's character was 'occupied constructing a magic lantern' and this is something that Taylor did as part of his plan to emerge from obscurity. *Public Characters* states that:

When Mr. T. had been nearly six years at the banking-house, he became so disgusted with the servility of his employment, and found his health so much impaired from the combination of severe bodily and mental efforts, added to an incurable disorder in the bladder, which he had laboured under for a long time, that he determined to emancipate himself from slavery, and live by the exertion of his talents.

In order to effect this, he turned his attention to a subject which he had often thought on in the days of his youth, viz. the possibility of making a *perpetual lamp*; as he was convinced from Licetus and Bishop Wilkins, that such lamps had been constructed by the ancients.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Anon., 'The Survival of Paganism' in *Fraser's Magazine*, (1875), Vol. XII, p. 646.

<sup>201</sup> *SW*, pp. 113-114.

It was probably between 1783 and 1784 when Taylor began working on his ‘perpetual lamp’ or ‘magic lanthorn’. John Wilkins, Bishop of Chester (1614-1672) in a curious work entitled *Mathematical Magic* (1648)<sup>202</sup> – the title probably caught Taylor’s eye as a keen amateur mathematician in his youth – gave various recipes for the construction of perpetual lamps. The bishop was also an expert cryptographer. He wrote a small book on cryptography in 1641 called *Mercury or The Secret Messenger*, and in 1638 he had written *A Discovery of a World in the Moon*, which contained an appendix ‘*The Possibility of a Passage Thither*’. Besides speculations about perpetual lamps, *Mathematical Magic* contains various hypotheses, based on geometrical speculations, about the engineering and construction of submarines, flying chariots, pulleys, screws, and the possibility of life on the moon. Chapter 10 of *Mathematical Magic* is entitled ‘*Of Subterraneous Lamps: Diverse Historical Relations Concerning their Duration for many Hundred Years Together*.’<sup>203</sup> Wilkins acknowledges his indebtedness to the writings of Fortunius Licetus (1577-1657), an Italian physician and philosopher concerning the methods and recipes he presents.<sup>204</sup> The use of perpetual lamps in ancient temples and at the graves, or shrines, of heroes in the Classical world is well attested, though they would now be considered to have been tended constantly for generations as a religious act rather than to have constantly burned for hundreds or thousands of years unattended. The sacristy lamps in modern churches evolved out of perpetual flames that burned in ancient temples. Wilkins commented that, ‘St. Austin mentions one of them in the Temple dedicated to Venus

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<sup>202</sup> John Wilkins (Bishop of Chester), *Mathematical Magic or the Wonders that May be Performed by Mechanical Geometry. In Two Books Concerning Mechanical Motions and Powers. Being one of the most easie, pleasant, useful (and yet most neglected) parts of Mathematicks. Not before Treated of in this Language* (London: Edward Gellibrand at the Golden Ball in St. Paul’s Church yard, 1680).

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

which was always exposed to the open weather and could never be consumed or extinguished'.<sup>205</sup> He also states that 'Panyrollus mentions a Lamp found in his time in the sepulchre of Tullia, Cicero's daughter, which had continued there about 1550 years, but was presently extinguished upon the admission of new air.'<sup>206</sup>

Taylor believed the reports in Wilkins's book and began to construct a lamp for his own use and perhaps profit. The religious implications of constructing an eternal lamp due to the symbolism pertaining to spiritual light that one would represent was probably also attractive to Taylor. Indeed Wilkins had commented that, 'Concerning the reason, why the Ancients were so careful in particular; [creating everlasting lamps] there are diverse opinions. Some think it to be an expression of their belief concerning the soul's immortality, after its departure out of the body, a lamp amongst the Egyptians being the Heiroglyphick of life.'<sup>207</sup>

He began, therefore, to make some experiments with Phosphorus, determining for a while to descend from mind to matter, and stoop in order to conquer. In the course of these experiments he found that oil and salt when boiled together, in a certain proportion, formed a fluid which, when phosphorus was immersed in it both preserved and increased its splendour.<sup>208</sup>

The idea of Taylor experimenting evokes something of Joseph Wright (1734-1797) of Derby's painting *The Alchymist, In Search of the Philosopher's Stone, Discovers*

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>208</sup> *SW* p. 114.

*Phosphorus, and Prays for the Successful Conclusion of his Operation, as was the Custom of the Antient Chymical Astrologers* of (1771). Boiling salt and oil together was included in Wilkins's recipes, together with a 'snuff or wick, which must administer to the flame' and 'the oyl, which must nourish'.<sup>209</sup> He recommended 'several substances which will retain fire without consuming, such as that mineral they call Salamander's wool, plumeallum, for the wick – inconsumable.'<sup>210</sup> Pluemallum, or Salamander's wool refers to asbestos. Many other exotic ingredients are listed and called for both in relation to how they might be obtained and prepared. Interestingly, Sir Isaac Newton also gave a recipe similar to Wilkins, mentioning the same ingredients in his notebook under the heading 'of a Perpetuall Lamp.'<sup>211</sup>

Taylor took his discovery, along with a lecture on light, to the 'Free Masons' Tavern' in Great Queen's Street, in the Lincoln's Inn Fields district of Holborn, London. The name the 'Freemason's Tavern' instantly evokes an image of a public house but nothing could be further from the truth. The Freemason's Tavern contained one of London's grandest Masonic Temples, a great hall that sat hundreds of people and many anterooms as well as typical tavern rooms where people could eat, drink, smoke and converse. The Freemason's Tavern was also opposite James Basire's studios, where Blake was apprenticed as an engraver for seven years, from 1772 to 1779. Marsha Keith Schuchard has described the environment of Blake's apprenticeship writing:

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<sup>209</sup> Wilkins, (1680), p 246.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> See The Newton Project, (Source) Pierpont Morgan Library New York, Newton's Personal Notebook. Electronic Text: [http://www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk/texts/pierpontmorgan\\_notebook\\_n.html](http://www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk/texts/pierpontmorgan_notebook_n.html)

Young Blake now moved into the engraver's studio at 31 Great Queen Street, where for the next seven years he was situated in the heart of London's Masonic world. Directly across the street was the Freemasons' Hall and Tavern, where many of his artistic and theosophical friends would gather.<sup>212</sup>

While Blake was still working with Basire the Freemasons' Hall and Tavern were renovated and the result was the construction of one of the most lavish Masonic Temples in Europe which was dedicated with a fanfare of public parades and ceremonies on 23 May 1776.<sup>213</sup> The Freemason's Tavern attracted visitors from all over the British Isles and Europe to London: it was a major centre of esotericism, which facilitated the exchange, and expression of various theosophical and ritualistic beliefs and practices.

Taylor chose a venue in which to demonstrate his lamp and give his lecture on light that would afford him substantial and well-connected auditors. Taylor also chose a day when people would be free to attend his demonstration and that was Sunday the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1784.<sup>214</sup>

*Public Characters* states that:

In consequence of this discovery, he exhibited at the Free

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<sup>212</sup> Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision* (London: Century, 2006), p. 159.

<sup>213</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>214</sup> London, The British Library: Cumberland MSS 352-358. Note: a manuscript letter from George Cumberland to his brother in which he describes having attended Taylor's lecture. This letter is not cited by Raine, Harper or Evans.

Masons' Tavern a specimen of phosphoric light, sufficient to read by at the distance of a yard; but the room in which this was shewn being small, and very warm from the weather and the number of persons that came to see it, the phosphorus caught fire, and thus raised a prejudice against the invention, which could never afterwards be removed.<sup>215</sup>

The author, dilettante and friend of William Blake, George Cumberland (1754-1848), attended Taylor's lecture and demonstration at the Freemason's Tavern and he described the experience in a letter to his brother. The portion of the letter referring to Taylor on page 2 is given in its entirety below due to its importance and the fact that it is not quoted in any of the published work on Thomas Taylor. Unfortunately the letter has been damaged and has seriously deteriorated, particularly on the right-hand-side of the folded sheet which makes portions of the text indecipherable, such portions of text are marked [damaged] below:

Mev: Cumberland  
Driffield near  
Cirencester  
Gloucestershire

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> October 1784  
(Monday Evening, Holland)

p.2

to night I have been to Mr. Taylor's lecture at the Free Mason's Tavern which was a composition that not only betrays much science but much eloquence also, it consisted of an introduction to the nature and properties of lights, then related a little history of the few lamps which we know have been found, and lastly described the progress of his own experiences.

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<sup>215</sup> *SW*, p. 114.

He then shewed us a specimen of his lamps which was a kind of glass salver and with about an ounce of Phosphorous deposited in pieces in an unctuous matter, and the whole was about a span broad – it gave a pale light resembling the moon and by it you might distinguish letters at about a foot distance – this he assured us had retained light, 8 months: and next he produced a specimen of his everlasting lamps which was a common decanter on the bottom of which was deposited some pieces of stone, lead the orifice was so closed that little air could enter, and this he warrants ... [damaged]

Upon the Whole he seems to be a modest philosophic young man; who has no other aim but the promotion of science, he is clerk As. to Mr. Lemon the Banker and I fancy in rather indifferent circumstances

I introduced myself, he asked me to come and see him I returned the complement, an acquaintance of mine [damaged] affords him the use of his House for the next lecture.

Hencewith it is it is hoped and requested him to print [damaged] and this it seems he will comply with.

An accident happened during the exhibition owing... [damaged]

Except we ready the room [damage] the phosphorous too caught fire – in trying to extinguish it we broke his lamps. He stood the trial like a philosopher indeed. The objection... [damaged]

In a letter published in *The Morning Chronicle* on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1784, Cumberland wrote a brief notice, using the pseudonym ‘Candid’, concerning his attendance at Taylor’s lecture and he omits mentioning the fire that broke out. The article reads:

To the PRINTER of the MORNING CHRONICLE

I attended this evening Mr. Taylor’s Lecture on Lamps of the Antients, which he had composed with peculiar modesty and neatness. The subject is so singular that perhaps it may give pleasure to your readers to know the particulars.

It consisted of an introduction on the nature and properties of light, which was very learnedly and clearly defined in a style occasionally florid, but for

the most part much condensed. He then related the concise history of those lamps which we know have been found, and lastly described the progress of his own experiments.

We were then shewn a specimen of his lamps, which was a kind of a glass salver, with about an ounce of phosphorous, deposited in an unctuous matter, and spread over the surface of about a span broad; it gave a pale light, resembling the moon, and by it you might distinguish letters at about a foot distance: this he had so chained by the liquor, that it will retain its light eight months.

He next produced a specimen of his everlasting lamp, which is by far the most curious use of a common decanter, on the bottom of which were deposited some pieces in the matter above mentioned, but the orifice so closed that very little air could enter, so that it is supposed this may burn in undiminished splendour for ages, it having already remained in the same state for many months.

If the lecture should be published, I think it may be of service to science and have a tendency to procure a more complete knowledge of this fleeting element.

Yours, in haste,

CANDID<sup>216</sup>

Cumberland's report confirms that given in *Public Characters*. Despite the accident and small fire, Taylor made contact not only with Cumberland but also with his friend John Flaxman (1756-1826) the sculptor. It is Flaxman to whom Cumberland was referring when he wrote, 'an acquaintance of mine affords him the use of his House for the next lecture'. The 'next lecture' would in fact be a series of twelve lectures on the Platonic Philosophy given in Flaxman's house; and there shall begin the next chapter.

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<sup>216</sup> London, The British Library, Newspaper Library: C0879. Morning Chronicle: 21/10/1784, pp 1-2. 'I attended this Evening' Reel No. 512//2.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Pagan Taylor: Platonic Philosopher**

## 1. Lectures and Literary Connections

Taylor's plan to emerge from obscurity proved successful to a degree in that he had been introduced to two gentlemen with literary, entrepreneurial and artistic connections. George Cumberland's introduction of Taylor to John Flaxman and the subsequent offer from Flaxman that Taylor might give a series of lectures on the Platonic philosophy in his home was the first significant step in Taylor's public career as London's Platonist. Cumberland and Flaxman were both close friends of William Blake and it is Taylor's connection with them that initially places him within the circumference of Blake's circle during the seventeen eighties.

Following his marriage in 1781, or possibly 1782, John Flaxman moved to 27 Wardour Street in the Soho district of London; and Flaxman's house is said to have been the smallest in the street.<sup>1</sup> In *Public Characters* it is related that following Taylor's demonstration of perpetual lamps at the Freemason's Tavern:

His first effort after this, to emerge from obscurity, was by composing twelve lectures on the Platonic philosophy, at the request of Mr. Flaxman, the statuary, who had been one of the auditors of Mr. T's Lecture on Light, and who very benevolently permitted him to read his Lectures in the largest room of his house. He likewise procured for him some very respectable auditors, such

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<sup>1</sup> See Osbert Burdett, *William Blake* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1926), p.108. ,Thomas Wright, *The Life of William Blake* 2 Vols. (Olney, Bucks: Thomas Wright, 1929), 1, 11, and William Blake, ed. Michael Phillips, *An Island in the Moon: A Facsimile of the Manuscript Introduced, Transcribed and Annotated by Michael Phillips with a Preface by Haven O'More*, (Cambridge: Institute of Traditional Science and Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 13.

as Sir William Fordyce, the Hon. Mrs Damer, Mrs Cosway, Mr. Romney, &c. and was the means of his becoming acquainted with Mr. Bennet Langton, well known for his great intimacy with Dr. Johnson.<sup>2</sup>

The above passage reveals that the lectures were given in the ‘largest room’ of Flaxman’s house and the largest room of 27 Wardour Street cannot have been very large. It is reasonable to speculate that Taylor gave his lectures on Platonism on a weekly or perhaps monthly basis. Taylor’s Lecture on Light at the Freemason’s Tavern must have impressed Flaxman to such a degree that he envisaged Taylor as being capable, even though he was unknown, of delivering lectures on the ‘Platonic Philosophy’. We are told that Flaxman ‘procured’ auditors for Taylor, this is also indicative of Flaxman’s confidence that Taylor could deliver a series of lectures without embarrassing him. G.E. Bentley JR. has published a letter of reference by Flaxman, which undoubtedly refers to Thomas Taylor; unfortunately, Taylor is not mentioned by name, the addressee is not identified and the letter is undated. The letter reads:

Sir  
 Some time ago you wished to employ a person in your Show-room whose education was above the generality of Clerks in your service – I know a Gentleman who would like such a situation & possesses talents which I think you might turn to considerable account, he is an admirable Greek and Latin scholar[,] well versed in Philosophy, History, & Poetry [,] is a Great Mathematician & something of a Chymist; of his Integrity you may receive the most undoubted assurances, & his humility is such as usually accompanies uncommon talents; his terms will be very reasonable & if you can find employmen [t] for him you will do a benevolent act to a family in narrow circumstances [.]

I have the honor to be  
 Sir  
 your much obliged servant

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<sup>2</sup> *SW*, p 114-115.

J. Flaxman

The Gentleman writes in a fine hand & understands & is diligent in the execution of all accompting house business[.]<sup>3</sup>

The letter corresponds with known facts about Taylor's character, abilities and circumstances in the early-to-mid 1780's. The letter also demonstrates the faith Flaxman had in Taylor and his willingness to promote his welfare. It is noteworthy that twelve lectures, a significant number, were given. It could be that Taylor was originally asked to give fewer lectures and that due to their success he gave more. It is certain that immediately following his Lecture on Light at the Freemason's Tavern, Taylor felt able to proffer himself, in an erudite environment, as an instructor in the Platonic Philosophy.

The lectures were probably commenced in late October or November of 1784 and ran through to the summer of 1785. The exact time when Taylor gave his Lecture on Light at the Freemason's Tavern and the subsequent twelve lectures at Flaxman's house had hitherto been a matter of speculation amongst writers on Taylor's life as Cumberland's letter dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 1784, quoted at the end of the last chapter, was not sourced by them. Both George Mills Harper and Frank B. Evans placed the lectures, correctly, as having occurred between 1784 and 1785. George Mills Harper wrote:

these famous lectures perhaps were given some time in 1784, and certainly no later than 1785, even if we estimate the time at the school [when Taylor was an usher in Paddington] as a calendar year and the time at the bank as a full six years. There is one other

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<sup>3</sup> G.E. Bentley Jr. 'John Flaxman and Thomas Taylor' in *N&Q*, 16, (September 1969), 354-355.

substantiation for these surmises. Some time after he began work in the bank, he published “a quarto pamphlet” entitled “A New Method of Reasoning in Geometry.” Since it was published in 1780 and we know he was still in Paddington during his wife’s pregnancy before July, 1779, Evans’ conjecture of 1785 as the date of the twelve Platonic Lectures is the latest probable date.<sup>4</sup>

Kathleen Raine approximated that ‘in (probably) 1788 Taylor delivered his twelve lectures on Platonism at the house of Flaxman’.<sup>5</sup> Raine’s approximation was by no means definite and illustrates how scholars who have studied Taylor’s life have been inextricably forced to provide an interpretative chronology of life events based mainly on the article *Mr Taylor the Platonist* in *Public Characters of 1798*. Cumberland’s dated letter to his brother concerning his attendance at Taylor’s lecture at the Freemason’s Tavern provides positive verification of the date when the hitherto speculatively dated lecture took place.

The auditors that Flaxman gathered for the lectures were distinguished persons with artistic and literary backgrounds: Sir William Fordyce (1724-1792) was a widely published physician who was also academically distinguished in both Greek and mathematics. Mrs. John Damer, better known today as Anne Seymour Damer Conway (1749-1828) was a classical sculptress of high repute and learned in Greek and Latin; she inherited Strawberry Hill from her friend Horace Walpole. Maria Cosway (1759-1802) was a fashionable painter of miniatures; together with her husband Richard, she is often remembered for both her art and her intimacies with Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States. George Romney (1734-

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<sup>4</sup> *NWB*, p. 22. See also Frank B. Evans ‘*Thomas Taylor, Platonist of the Romantic Period*’ in *PMLA* LV (1940), p. 1066.

<sup>5</sup> *SW*, p. 36.

1802) was a celebrated portrait painter, whose innovative sketching style and comments influenced both Flaxman and Blake.

It has been suggested that William Blake was amongst Taylor's auditors during the twelve lectures at Flaxman's house.<sup>6</sup> Though this is a strong possibility, it is by no means a certainty. It is certain however, that Blake and Taylor were acquainted, although the precise nature and duration of their friendship is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain as G.E. Bentley Jr. has written:

A clear connexion between Blake and Thomas Taylor is seen in the commonplace book of William George Meredith (1804-31), the nephew of Thomas Taylor's patron William George Meredith (?1756-1831):

Wednesday. Dec. 30. 1829.

T. Taylor gave Blake, the artist, some lessons in mathematics & got as far as the 5.<sup>th</sup> proposit<sup>n</sup>. wch proves that any two angles at the base of an isocetes triangle must be equal. Taylor was going thro the demonstration, but was interrupted by Blake, exclaiming, "ah never mind that – what's the use of going to prove it, why I see with my eyes that it is so, & do not require any proof to make it clearer."

This association could have been at almost any time, but an early date, perhaps in the 1780s, seems most plausible.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *NWB*, pp. 21-22. See also, *SW*, p. 13 and William Blake, ed. Michael Phillips, *An Island in the Moon*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> GE Bentley Jr., *Blake Records Second Edition, Documents (1714-1841) Concerning the Life of William Blake (1757-1827) and his family. Incorporating Blake Records (1969) Blake Records Supplement (1988) and Extensive Discoveries since 1988* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 500. Note; Bentley accompanies the quotation from Meredith's commonplace book with the following footnote on the same page: 'Reproduced from the MS now in McMaster University Library in James King, "Studies in the Society's Archives C: Thomas Taylor, The Meredith Family, and the Society (i)". *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts Manufactures and Commerce* (March 1973), 255, and discussed in James King, "The Meredith Family, Thomas Taylor and William Blake", in *Studies in Romanticism*, XI (1971), 57.' The Manuscript which Bentley refers to is held in The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections in McMaster University Libraries, Ontario, Canada, MSS ref. W.G. Meredith fonds/m/ms66.

Bentley also wrote that:

Another anecdote of the two men was reported c. 1867-9 in the *reminiscences* of Taylor's long-time friend Alexander Dyce (1798-1869):

Taylor, so absurd himself in many aspects, was ready enough to laugh at the strange fancies of others, for- instance, at those of the half-crazed man of real genius, Blake the artist. "Pray, Mr. Taylor," said Blake one day, "did you ever find yourself, as it were, standing close beside the vast and luminous orb of the moon? – [“] Not that I remember, did you ever?" – "Yes frequently; and have felt an almost irresistible desire to throw myself into it headlong." – "I think, Mr. Blake, you had better not, for if you were to do so, you most probably would never come out of it again." <sup>8</sup>

This remark demonstrates eccentricities on the parts of both interlocutors and may be accurate reportage but it is just as likely to be a gossipy reminiscence of an exchange between Blake and Taylor. Blake and Taylor may have been discussing an aspect of the 'orb of the moon' in a Neoplatonic context; and time, humour and anecdotal licence could have corrupted the original conversation and deposited traces of it in the bizarre form cited above. Be that as it may, the recollection provides further evidence that Blake and Taylor were acquaintances.

Taylor has also been identified as the Blakean acquaintance behind the dramatis personae of either Sipsop the Pythagorean, or more likely that of Obtuse Angle the Mathematician, in Blake's incomplete burlesque satire *An Island in the Moon*, which

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Note: see Bentley's accompanying footnote and R.J. Schrader, *The Reminiscences of Alexander Dyce* (Columbus Ohio, Ohio State University Press, 1972), pp. 134-5.

Phillips suggests was written intermittently between 1782 and 1785 or perhaps even later.<sup>9</sup> Blake wrote *An Island in the Moon* during the period when Taylor gave his lectures on the Platonic Philosophy at Flaxman's house. Michael Phillips has stated that, 'At Taylor's series of lectures, given in the 'largest room' of Flaxmans' very small house, Blake would have been in company with George Cumberland, Maria Cosway (in 'Balloon hat'?), George Romney, probably Thomas Stothard, perhaps Robert and Catherine (who might have appeared 'ignorant' given the occasion), and presumably no more than a dozen others, including their hosts'.<sup>10</sup>

As aforesaid, there is no evidence that definitely includes Blake, let alone his brother Robert and wife Catherine, amongst the auditors at Taylor's lectures though Phillips appears confident in placing Blake amongst the auditors. The narrative sequence of *An Island in the Moon* unfolds in four dramatic settings; they being firstly, the house of the three philosophers, secondly, the study of Obtuse Angle the Mathematician, thirdly, the library of Steelyard the Lawgiver and fourthly the house of Inflammable Gas the Windfinder.<sup>11</sup> The structure of *An Island in the Moon* flits between characters and locations with fluidic rapidity in defiance of fixed categorization or interpretation. Phillips, before asserting that Blake attended the lectures at Flaxman's house and responding to a quotation from *Mr Taylor, the Platonist in Public Characters of 1798*<sup>12</sup> wrote that 'Here we may share the kind of experience that was Blake's at the

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<sup>9</sup> See William Blake, ed. Michael Phillips, *An Island in the Moon*, pp. 6, 7, 9-10 & 12-14. See also *NWB*, pp. 39-42.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> *SW*, pp. 114-115.

time of writing *An Island in the Moon*'.<sup>13</sup> This assertion is undoubtedly correct. The characters in Blake's *An Island in the Moon* can be read as composites and exaggerations of multiple caricatures as well as being identified, cautiously, as specific individuals. Blake most probably had Thomas Taylor, or aspects of his character, in mind when he created Obtuse Angle the Mathematician. The dramatic settings that appear in *An Island in the Moon* are a composite of Blake's experiences in literary salons, such as those hosted by Mrs. Mathew of bluestocking fame, lectures conversations and debates that took place in sitting rooms, libraries and studies of his acquaintances in the 1780s. The extent to which Blake's *Island in the Moon* is indebted to Thomas Taylor or his lectures in 1784-1785 will probably never be ascertained conclusively.

That Blake knew of Taylor is beyond doubt. The question of how significant an influence Taylor and his writings were on Blake is the impetus behind much of George Mills Harper's *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* where Harper draws parallels, often effectively, between Taylor's published works and those of Blake. The narrative of *Public Characters* seems to indicate that Taylor read the lectures he had given at Flaxman's house privately to Mr Bennet Langton (1737-1801):

To this gentleman he read his Platonic Lectures, with which Mr. L. was so much pleased, as likewise with the conversation and uncommon application which our Platonist had given to study, that he at length mentioned him to the king, under the appellation of a *gigantic reader*, in hopes that the rays of royal attention might be so strongly collected upon him, as to dissipate the obscurity in which he was then involved, and give additional vigour and ardour to his pursuits. Mr. L. it seems, mentioned him thrice to his majesty, who was pleased to enquire after his family, and to express his

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<sup>13</sup> William Blake, ed. Michael Phillips, *An Island in the Moon*, p. 13.

admiration of Mr. T's ardour and perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge, in a situation so unfavourable to its acquisition as that of a banker's clerk; but we do not find that this well-meant effort on the part of Mr. L. procured our Platonist any patronage from the throne.<sup>14</sup>

Bennet Langton hailed from a wealthy family who had a seat in Langton in Lancashire. Langton was a graduate of Trinity College, Oxford, a competent classicist and Greek scholar.<sup>15</sup> He was an intimate friend<sup>16</sup> of Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), and a member with him of the exclusive literary, intellectual and artistic group known as the Club. Langton's social, literary and artistic connections do not seem to have extended any lasting benefit to Taylor other than by augmenting his confidence, in that he was noticed and encouraged, during a formative stage of his vocation. If Langton mentioned Taylor at court, he no doubt mentioned the autodidactic banker's clerk to many in his circle. Taylor's desire, or psychological need, for release from obscurity was being attended to. At least three of Taylor's early auditors, Sir William Fordyce, Anne Seymour Damer and Langton, were already accomplished classicists and proficient in ancient Greek. Langton's involvement with Taylor was particularly acute, at least for a short time. Taylor was encouraged that an erudite scholar 'was so much pleased' with his lectures and conversation and recognised his commitment to study.

During 1784 – 1785, Taylor was establishing a reputation within literary and artistic circles in London and was successfully marketing himself through what would now be termed 'networking'. Taylor understood self-promotion and publicity and though

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<sup>14</sup> *SW*, p. 115.

<sup>15</sup> See Washington Irving, *The Life of Oliver Goldsmith* (Chicago and New York: Belford, Clark and Company, 1888), pp. 102-3. and Fanny Burney, eds. Lars E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, 12 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994), III, 85.

<sup>16</sup> *SW*, p. 115.

his vocational path was motivated by personal spiritual impetus, it would be naïve to suppose that his emergence as a public character was accidental. Because of his efforts, Taylor met his first patron:

About this time, Mr. T. became acquainted with Mr. William Meredith of Harley-place, a circumstance which he justly considers as forming, by far, one of the most important and fortunate events of his life. This gentleman, as we are informed, in addition to an ample fortune, possesses a most elegant and liberal mind; and though concerned in a very extensive trade, has found leisure for the study of the best English writers, and the best English translations of the works of the ancients. He became deeply enamoured with the doctrines of Plato, from reading Mr. Sydenham's translation of some of that philosopher's dialogues; and his fondness for Plato, at length occasioned his attachment to Mr. Taylor.<sup>17</sup>

William George Meredith (?1756-1831) and his brother George Meredith (1762-1831), an architect who specialised in the Gothic style, were the most important patrons of Taylor. George Mills Harper wrote concerning them:

Although I can find little record of the activities of these two brothers, they were apparently well known. E.H. Barker, one of the most eccentric literary gossips of the day and a friend of Taylor's, left an interesting but somewhat confusing record of their financial status: "At the Kings Bench Prison, I met with a Mr. Thomas Gilliland, who was well-acquainted with Wm Meredith Esq. of Harley-place, who had the paving of Maryle-bone Parish, and died worth 70,000. His brother, Geo. Meredith, was surveyor of Islington; the nephew George died in Egypt, and wrote the Life of Gustavus Adolphus: the widow of the brother enjoys the property worth £100,000. He says that Th. Taylor was a dram-drinker latterly" (*Literary Anecdotes* [London, 1852], I, 88).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>18</sup> *NWB*, p. 280.

William George Meredith was an entrepreneurial businessman of great wealth; he died on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 1831, with government stock investments worth £10,000 and a personal estate worth just under £45,000.<sup>19</sup> 1831 was a calamitous year for the Meredith family for in that year William George, George his brother and George's son, named William George Meredith after his uncle, all died. The first volume, dated "1829-30", of the younger William George Meredith's (1804-1831) commonplace books,<sup>20</sup> contains many anecdotes concerning Thomas Taylor and other notable literary and artistic guests who frequented the home of his uncle, 3 Harley Place.<sup>21</sup> Harley Place was situated in the Mile End Old Town district of East London beyond Whitechapel. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Harley Place had few neighbours and overlooked an agricultural nursery and was surrounded by market gardens; before the population boom of the mid-nineteenth-century and the consequent expansion of London, Mile End Old Town was the agrarian supply centre of the East End.

William George Meredith (?1756-1831), provided Taylor with an annuity of £100 per annum, which was double his salary as a bankers' clerk.<sup>22</sup> This was the material opportunity that Taylor needed to leave the position of assistant clerk at Lubbock's Bank. Taylor could have been introduced to William George Meredith via one of the

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<sup>19</sup> See The Society of Genealogists, MSS: Bank of England Will Extracts 1717-1845, Book for 1831, 36-K-Z, 7541, Ac. ref: 125901 'William Meredith of Harley Place Esquire'. Note: The Bank of England Will Extracts contain extracts of the wills of individuals who died with monies in public, government, funds. Often the amounts deposited were relatively low; Meredith's having £10,000 invested in public funds demonstrates the measure of his surplus wealth.

<sup>20</sup> McMaster University Libraries, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections: MSS. W.G. Meredith fonds/m/ms66.

<sup>21</sup> See James King, 'The Meredith Family, Thomas Taylor and William Blake' in *Studies in Romanticism*, 1972, Vol. XI, pp. 153-7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 155. See Also *The Annual Review for 1835*, Vol. 34 (1836). 239.

auditors at his lectures at Flaxman's house, or George Cumberland could have aided Taylor as he had before as he was a familiar visitor at 3 Harley Place.<sup>23</sup> Be that as it may, both William Meredith and his brother George not only dispersed funds to Taylor but they also financed the publication of many of his books. In *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* it was disclosed that the Meredith brothers paid for the publication of *The Mystical Initiations or Hymns of Orpheus* (1787), *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* (1788-1789), and *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche* (1795) from Apuleius.<sup>24</sup> One of Taylor's first publications was a paraphrase translation of Plotinus' *An Essay on the Beautiful* from *Ennead 1 Book VI*, and this does not appear on the acknowledged list of Meredith-funded publications cited above. Most of Taylor's works state that the work was 'privately printed for the author' on the title-page. It is probable that Taylor funded the printing costs of some of his books out of his own pocket, although his income was slight. He also sold some of his work to publishers from which he did not generate much revenue as will be discussed later.<sup>25</sup>

The Merediths' financial support of Taylor and his authorial ventures may be only partially disclosed in *Mr. Taylor the Platonist* for the reader is informed that, 'We likewise do not, in the least doubt but that Mr. T. in the course of his stormy life, has experienced the liberality of these gentlemen upon occasions with which we are entirely unacquainted.'<sup>26</sup> It is certain that the Meredith brothers financed Taylor's

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154 – 155.

<sup>24</sup> *SW*, p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118 – 119.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

publications well beyond *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche* in 1795. They bore the expense of Taylor's translation of the *Complete Works of Aristotle* 10 Vols. (1806 – 1812) of which only 50 copies were printed.<sup>27</sup> While working under the patronage of the Meredith brothers Taylor also generated an income for himself by 'teaching the Classics.'<sup>28</sup> Taylor received enough patronage from the Merediths, and others, to enable him to amass an expensive library. He, no doubt, also invested a significant part of his salary, when he worked in various jobs, in books. He trawled through bookshops in London and sometimes haunted book auctions. Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1789, Taylor attended a prestigious auction, to which he may have been enticed by the catalogue which declared:

Bibliotheca Pinelliana. A Catalogue of the Magnificent and Celebrated Library of Maffei Pinelli, Late of Venice, comprehending an unparalleled Collection of the Greek, Roman, and Italian Authors, from the Origin of Printing: With many of the Earliest Editions printed upon Vellum, and finely illuminated; a considerable Number of curious Greek and Latin Manuscripts of the XI. XII. XIII. XIV. XV. and XVI. Centuries...the whole Library... will be Sold by Auction, on Monday March 2, 1789, and the Twenty-two following Days...<sup>29</sup>

The library had been bought in Venice by the English bookseller James Edwards for 6000 pounds and the auction was a highly publicised event. In the Sotheby catalogue

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<sup>27</sup> See, Thomas Taylor, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse: Containing The Triumph of the Wise Man Over Fortune, according to the Doctrines of the Stoics and the Platonists; The Creed of the Platonic Philosopher; A Panegyric on Sydenham, &c. &c.* (London: Privately Printed for the Author, and sold by C. Whittingham, Dean Street; and sold by Symonds, Paternoster Row; and Upham, North Parade, Bath, 1805), pp. vii – viii.

<sup>28</sup> *SW*, p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> *AUCTION CATALOGUE: PINELLI Bibliotheca Pinelliana. A Catalogue of the Magnificent and Celebrated Library of Maffei Pinelli* (London: Robson, Clarke, & Edwards, 1789) p. 1.

of Taylor's library a note appears in reference to 'Calcagnini (Caelii) Opera' which states, 'This very book was bought by me at the sale of the Pinelli Library, between forty and fifty years ago. The Commentary De Rebus Ægyptiacis, p. 229, is for the most part a translation of Plutarch's Treatise respecting Isis and Osiris. But this is noticed by Fabricius in his Bibliotheca Græca.'<sup>30</sup> Taylor's love of his books is demonstrated in the annotations that he made in many of them; and the annotations cited in the Sotheby catalogue most probably only represent a small proportion of the messages he left for those who would own the books in posterity. Not all of the inscriptions that Taylor made were complimentary; he was opinionated and could be dismissive of the efforts of other authors if he objected to what they wrote.

It is not known how many private pupils engaged Taylor's services as a tutor. However, one of Taylor's pupils was Dr. William Kitchiner (1775-1827), who was best known for his gastronomical innovations and expertise which he demonstrated through exclusive dinner parties in his home and his authorship of the bestselling cookbook of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries *The Cook's Oracle*. Kitchiner was also dedicated to the study of optics and successfully designed, and had manufactured, telescopes, spectacles and opera glasses which he often exhibited and lectured on around the country. The Sotheby sale catalogue of Taylor's library contains the following annotation in relation to Kitchiner's book *On Telescopes* (1815): 'To Tho. Taylor, a token of regard from the Author, who has been his pupil 30 years.'<sup>31</sup> The inscription from the presentation copy of Kitchiner's *On Telescopes* reveals that Kitchener was Taylor's pupil from 1785 onwards, and this date

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<sup>30</sup> *Soth. Cat. – Lot 314.*

<sup>31</sup> *Soth. Cat. – Lot 199.* Dr. William Kitchiner, *Practical Observations on Telescopes* (London: S. Bagster, 1815).

corresponds with the date when Taylor resigned from the bank and came under the Merediths' patronage, and when Taylor started teaching 'the Classics'. George William Meredith wrote in his notebook that:

T. Taylor instructed the late Dr. Kitchiner in Latin at his father's Wharf w.q. Strand.<sup>32</sup>

The Meredith notebook reveals that an aspect of Taylor's teaching 'the Classics' involved the teaching of Latin. The above quotation mentions that Taylor taught Kitchiner Latin at his 'father's Wharf'; Kitchiner's father was an extremely wealthy coal merchant who had offices and a wharf near to the Strand in London. Kitchiner 'was very slow at his studies'<sup>33</sup> and this was probably part of the reason for his claiming to have been a pupil of Taylor's for thirty years. Kitchiner may also have been a subscriber to Taylor's books and called himself a 'pupil' of Taylor's in that respect.

## 2. Floyer Sydenham and Late-Eighteenth-Century Platonism

Taylor became conversant with the Platonic tradition, primarily, by means of his own autodidacticism and research. However, Floyer Sydenham (1710-1787), with whom Taylor was personally acquainted, also influenced Taylor's Platonism.

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<sup>32</sup> McMaster University Libraries, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections: MSS. W.G Meredith fonds/m/ms66.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Sydenham was the most dedicated exponent of the Platonic tradition, in England in the late eighteenth century, which is why Taylor sought him out. William George Meredith had been attracted to Platonism through the works of Floyer Sydenham, who had published translations of nine of Plato's dialogues.<sup>34</sup> In 1759 Sydenham published his proposals to translate Plato into English in a quarto tract, and accomplished his purpose between 1759 and 1780 in four quarto volumes.<sup>35</sup>

Sydenham was a brilliant Greek scholar and an MA of Wadham College, Oxford.<sup>36</sup>

Thomas Taylor met Sydenham, possibly through William Meredith or because of Meredith's extolling him, towards the end of the scholar's life. It is reasonable to propose that Taylor met Sydenham in 1786, though he could have met him earlier.

Taylor reported the following to his friend Rev. Alexander Dyce, concerning

Sydenham:

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<sup>34</sup> Plato, trans. Floyer Sydenham, *Dialogues of Plato*, 4 Vols. (London: W. Sanby, 1767-1780) Note: The set advertises twelve dialogues but in fact only nine are translated, this is because some of the dialogues, such as *The Banquet* were split into two halves in the edition and *A Dissertation on the Doctrine of Heraclitus* is counted, confusingly, as part of the set, but it is not as a Platonic dialogue but rather original to Sydenham. Thus the works included in the four volume set are listed here in the chronological order in which they were originally published [with the previous publishers name cited] and they were collected in the same order in the 4 Vol. Sanby edition of 1767-1780: (1) *Io* (London: Woodfall, 1759), (2) *The Greater Hippias* (London: Woodfall, 1759), (3) *The Lesser Hippias* (London: Woodfall, 1761), (4) *The Rivals* ([London: Richardson, 1769) (5) *The Banquet...First Part* (London: Woodfall, 1761), (6) *The Banquet...Second Part* (London: Sandby, 1767), (7) *Meno* (London: Richardson, 1769), (8) *The First Alcibiades* (London: Baker and Leigh, 1773) (9) *The Second Alcibiades* (London: Richardson, 1776), (10) *A Dissertation on the Doctrine of Heraclitus* (London: Richardson, 1775), (11) *Philebus...First Part* (London: Hett, 1779), (12) *Philebus...Second Part* (London: Hett, 1780). There are also, various introductions, prefaces, synopses and dissertations by Sydenham. With a synopsis or general view of the works of Plato prefixed. See also Floyer Sydenham, *Onomasticon Theologicum; or, An Essay on the Divine Names, according to the Platonic Philosophy* (London: Joseph Cooper, and sold by T. Payne and Son, 1784).

<sup>35</sup> Sydenham's edition of selected Platonic, and pseudo-platonic in the case of *The Rivals* and *The Greater Hippias* and *Lesser Hippias*, dialogues were published un-uniformly between 1759 and 1767. A collected four volume edition was published between 1767 and 1780 as cited above.

<sup>36</sup> See, 'Floyer Sydenham (1710-1787)' in *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century British Philosophers* eds. John W. Yolton, John Vladimir Price and John Stephens, 2 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999), II, 858-9; M. L. Clarke, *Greek Studies in England 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), p. 113.

I give the following particulars concerning him on the authority of Taylor, who when a young man was intimate with Sydenham, and who, let me add, had a scrupulous regard to truth in whatever he stated.-Sydenham was originally a clergyman with a living of about 800 l . per annum; but, having fallen in love with a young lady whose father objected to his addresses because he was in the church, he threw up his living, and had recourse to the law as a profession. After all, it appears, he did not marry the fair one for whose sake he had sacrificed so much. Having made no progress at the bar, he entered the naval service, went abroad, endured many hardships, and finally worked his way back to England as a common sailor. He was far from young when he first applied himself to the study of Plato. During his later years Taylor became acquainted with him. On their first meeting, Sydenham shook Taylor cordially by the hand, and said he reckoned himself truly fortunate in having at last met with a real Platonist--deeply regretting his own want of familiarity with Proclus and Plotinus. He at that time lodged at the house of a statuary in the Strand. He was in very distressed circumstances; and regularly received two guineas a month from Harris (the author of *Hermes* ). He used to dine at a neighbouring eating-house, where he had run up a bill of 40l. This debt, as well as several other debts, he was unable to pay; and his acquaintances refused to discharge his bills, though they consented to maintain him during his abode in the Fleet-prison, where he was about to be confined. The night preceding the day on which he was to be carried to gaol he was found dead--having undoubtedly (as Taylor asserted) put an end to his existence. For some time before his death he had been partially insane: as he went up and down stairs, he fancied turkeys were gobbling at him, &c.<sup>37</sup>

The above quotation demonstrates Sydenham's stormy and colourful life through the stages of clergyman, barrister, seaman, debtor and eventual suicide; yet in spite of circumstances that were uncongenial to scholarship Sydenham was a distinguished translator of Plato. There is no doubt that Sydenham was also a devout Platonist who perceived elements in the Platonic tradition that could supply spiritual and philosophical riches. In his introduction to, the now considered to be pseudo-platonic but attributed to Plato in the eighteenth century, dialogue *The Rivals* Sydenham wrote that, 'The philosophy of Socrates is like the Ladder in the Patriarch Jacob's dream: his

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<sup>37</sup> Samuel Rogers, ed. Alexander Dyce *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers. To Which is Added Porsonianiana* (London: Edward Moxon, 1856), pp. 324-325.

Metaphysicks ascend gradually up to the First Cause of Things; from which depend, and from whence come down to Earth, the Science of Ethics and Potiticks, to bless Mankind.’<sup>38</sup> Sydenham obviously encouraged Taylor at their first meeting when he complimentarily acknowledged Taylor as a ‘real Platonist, deeply regretting his own want of familiarity with Proclus and Plotinus.’

It is not known how many meetings Taylor had with Sydenham; however it is certain that Taylor became well enough acquainted with the older man to feel genuinely respectful and affectionate towards him, as is evinced in Taylor’s *A Panegyric on the Late Dr. Sydenham. The Translator of Some of Plato’s Dialogues*. Taylor noted that his elegiac ‘verses first appeared in the General Advertiser in 1787, and were thence copied into most of the evening papers.’<sup>39</sup> The version of the panegyric that Taylor published in his *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1805) differed from the earlier version which appeared in newspapers in 1787 because, as Taylor revealed, ‘In republishing them, I found myself under the necessity of making some occasional alterations, the enthusiasm of friendship at the moment having betrayed me into greater panegyric than was strictly conformable to truth. See an account of this unfortunate but excellent scholar in the Introduction to my Plato.’<sup>40</sup>

Sydenham’s tragic death and the lack of personal dignity that culminated in it was sorely felt by the wider literary community in London at the time and resulted in the founding of The Literary Fund, still extant, which endeavoured to alleviate some of

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<sup>38</sup> Plato, trans. Floyer Sydenham, *Dialogues of Plato*, 4 vols. (London: W. Sandby, 1767-1780), II, 32.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Taylor, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1805), p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

the poverty endured by many authors. In 1797, George Dyer (1755-1841) a radical pamphleteer, author and friend of Thomas Taylor's, published *The Poet's Fate: A Poetical Dialogue* which is inscribed 'To The Society for the Establishment of a Literary Fund' in the preface. Dyer mentions both Taylor and Sydenham, writing:

And Taylor sighs, as Sydenham Sigh'd before,  
And now like Holland,<sup>41</sup> gives translation o'er

nt. Thomas Taylor the indefatigable translator of many of the Greek writers, particularly Pausanias's history, Proclus's Commentary, the Orphic Hymns &c. &c. Of Philemon Holland, it was formerly said, on his translating Suetonius,

Holland with his translations does so fill us  
He will not let Suetonius be Tranquillus

While I was writing the lines in this poem, that alludes to Thomas Taylor, it occurred to me, that he had not presented the public with any translations for a considerable time. Shortly after, however, was announced in the Monthly Magazine, his intention of giving a complete translation of Plato's works, partial translations of which he has already presented to the public.

It may not be improper to subjoin that Taylor is himself a sincere and zealous Platonist; that as a believer in Plato's doctrines, and a translator of his works he may be considered as the rightful successor of Sydenham.

On the mention of Sydenham's name, every friend of humanity will drop a tear: at the close of his life, this learned and useful man was involved in the greatest difficulties, an acquaintance with which excited the sympathies of some literary, benevolent men, and gave birth to that excellent institution, established for the purpose of relieving authors in distress, entitled The Literary Fund.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Philemon Holland (1552-1637) first English translator of Livy and Suetonius, of Plutarch's *Morals* and Pliny's *Natural History*, and of Ammianus Marcellinus amongst others. (My Note)

<sup>42</sup> George Dyer, *The Poet's Fate: A Dialogue By George Dyer* (London: G G and J Robinson, 1797), pp. 17-18.

Dyer mentioned Taylor again in a letter to his friend Charles Lamb (1775-1834) which is quoted here at length due to its biographical relevance to Thomas Taylor and the above quotation from *The Poet's Fate* (1797):

Again: I the other day met Mr. Taylor, the Platonist, he had read himself what I had formerly said of him (in the first edition of the Poet's Fate) and someone had pointed out to him, that I had omitted it in the edition of 1801; he was grievously offended, and I was obliged to explain the matter to him, that I had my reason for believing I had made too free with living Characters, and therefore; I left them all out in the edition of 1801, and that therefore my leaving his name out meant no slight; besides that what was said of some of them in the first editions could not have been repeated in 1801, when the circumstances and situations of several were materially altered; as thus, how could it have been said of himself,

And Taylor sighs, as Sydenham sigh'd before,  
And now desponding gives translating o'er,

When between the periods of printing the first and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions of the Poet's Fate he had published so many translations: Mr. Taylor too was thus satisfied.

The truth indeed is that neither are the said words in the 2 first editions properly taken in their connection to a sneer, nor do I speak in my own person. The Poet's Fate is a dialogue, between two imaginary or fictitious persons. Where I speak, (in the notes) in my own person, nothing is said but what is respectful; and nothing was intended but what was respectful.<sup>43</sup>

Taylor was perceived as Sydenham's successor, but why did Taylor revise his admittedly overenthusiastic panegyric of his predecessor? The answer to this question lies in the introduction to his 1804 edition of *The Works of Plato*, as Taylor indicated

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<sup>43</sup> The British Library MSS Ashley B 3518, ff. 106-107b. Note: the mss letter is not the original but a copy [copied for T.J.W. by G.A.A. from an original in her possession Oct. 16. 1922] The letter is not dated but is marked [undated but prob. about Feb 1831]. The dating of the letter to 1831 seems rather late as, considering the context of the letter, Taylor would have been 'grievously offended' about what Dyer omitted in a publication in 1801, thirty years beforehand. The letter is much more likely to date from the early nineteenth century.

in the above citation from *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1804). In the introduction to the *Works of Plato* Taylor wrote of Sydenham:

I have already observed, and with deep regret, that this excellent though unfortunate scholar died before he had made that proficiency in the philosophy of Plato which might have been reasonably expected from so fair a beginning. I personally knew him only in the decline of life, when his mental powers were not only considerably impaired by age, but greatly injured by calamity. His life had been very stormy: his circumstances, for many years preceding his death, were indigent; his patrons were by no means liberal; and his real friends were neither numerous nor affluent. He began the study of Plato, as he himself informed me, when he had considerably passed the meridian of life, and with most unfortunate prejudices against his best disciples, which I attempted to remove during my acquaintance with him, and partly succeeded in the attempt; but infirmity and death prevented its completion. Under such circumstances it was not to be expected that he would fathom the profundity of Plato's conceptions, and arrive at the summit of philosophic attainments. I saw, however, that his talents and his natural disposition were such as might have ranked him among the best of Plato's interpreters, if he had not yielded to the pressure of calamity, if he had not nourished such baneful prejudices, and if he had not neglected philosophy in the early part of life. Had this happened, my labours would have been considerably lessened, or perhaps rendered entirely unnecessary, and his name would have been transmitted to posterity with undecaying renown. As this unfortunately did not happen, I have been under the necessity of diligently examining and comparing with the original all those parts of the dialogues which he translated, that are more deeply philosophical, or that contain any thing of the theology of Plato. In these, as might be expected, I found him greatly deficient; I found him sometimes mistaking the meaning through ignorance of Plato's more sublime tenets, and at other times perverting it, in order to favour some opinions of his own. His translation however of other parts which are not so abstruse is excellent. In these he not only presents the reader faithfully with the matter, but likewise with the genuine manner of Plato. The notes too which accompany the translation of these parts generally exhibit just criticism and extensive learning, an elegant taste, and a genius naturally philosophic. Of these notes I have preserved as much as was consistent with the limits and design of the following work.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Taylor and Floyer Sydenham trans., *The Works of Plato viz. His Fifty Five Dialogues, and Twelve Epistles, Translated from the Greek, Nine of the Dialogues by the Late Floyer Sydenham, and the Remainder by Thomas Taylor with Occasional Annotations and Copious Notes by the Latter translator; in Which is Given the Substance of Nearly all the Existing Greek Ms. Commentaries on the Philosophy of Plato, and a Considerable Portion of Such as are Already Published*, 5 Vols. (London: Printed for Thomas Taylor by R. Wilks, Chancery-Lane; and Sold by E. Jeffrey, and R. Evans, Pall-Mall, 1804), I, cvi-cvii, rpt. *TTS*, IX, p. 74. Note: hereafter cited as *WP*.

Taylor not only revised his panegyric on Sydenham but also the nine dialogues previously published by him that were included in the 1804 edition of Plato. When Taylor first met Sydenham, probably in 1786 as already proposed, he was clearly impressed with Sydenham's accomplishments. However, subsequently – between Sydenham's death in 1787 and the publication of *The Works of Plato* in 1804 – Taylor was less enamoured with Sydenham and saw him as ignorant of 'Plato's more sublime tenets.' Taylor clearly respected the older man in respect of his application to study and his achievements and yet he saw Sydenham's work as limited and incomplete due to his ignorance of Plotinus and Proclus. In Taylor's view a translator of Plato had to transmit Neoplatonism, while translating Plato's text. Taylor read and translated Plato through the medium of the commentaries of the Neoplatonists and in this respect his translation of Plato is often contaminated by foreign matter, in notes and sometimes through the introduction of obscure vocabulary, rather than being allowed to stand by itself.<sup>45</sup>

Taylor's apparatus for translating Plato was not the text alone but the commentaries of the Neoplatonists on the text. Taylor's translations were driven and influenced by a desire to communicate his understanding of the Platonic tradition. The presence of such a personal agenda in Taylor's version is ultimately what led to his being denounced as a translator by James Mill (1773-1836) in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1809;<sup>46</sup> and is also what has led contemporary critics such as Richard Jenkyns to

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<sup>45</sup> Taylor often introduces words such as 'anagogic'; 'dianoetic', 'doxastic' and 'orectic' into his prose, even in translation. He did explain these terms immediately following the introduction to his *Works of Plato* in an *Explanation of Platonic Terms*.

<sup>46</sup> See James Mill, 'The Works of Plato' in *The Edinburgh Review* XIV (1809), 187-211.

comment that Taylor translated Plato, ‘with more zeal than skill.’<sup>47</sup> This is an obvious weakness in Taylor’s translation of Plato, at least in contemporary academic terms; but not necessarily in terms of the Platonic tradition. Taylor saw his translation of Plato as being an extension of the Platonic tradition and as a medium for a re-emergence of antique pagan spirituality, philosophy and theology to occur in his own time and for posterity. Taylor stated that Sydenham failed as a transmitter of Platonism and not necessarily as a translator: his translation was only ranked as insufficient where Taylor believed that Platonic theology and mystical arcana should be evoked to supply, or clarify, meaning.

In his comments on Sydenham in the introduction to *The Works of Plato* Taylor portrays himself as a sort of Platonic ‘minister’ seeking to alleviate the suffering of the deteriorating Sydenham. He notes that Sydenham had ‘unfortunate prejudices against his best disciples,’ the Neoplatonists, which Taylor, ‘attempted to remove’ during his ‘acquaintance with him, and partly succeeded in the attempt; but infirmity and death prevented its completion.’<sup>48</sup> Taylor presented himself as a more accomplished Platonist than Sydenham, and as one who could lead the aged scholar to ‘fathom the profundity of Plato’s conceptions, and arrive at the summit of philosophical attainments.’<sup>49</sup> There is no doubt that Sydenham was a devout Platonist. His notes and introductions to his editions of selected Platonic dialogues are replete with an intelligent engagement with metaphysical elements in the dialogues.

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<sup>47</sup> See Richard Jenkyns, ‘Introduction to Platonism in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, eds. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 201.

<sup>48</sup> *WP*, I, p. cvi, rpt. in *TTS*, IX, p. 74.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Sydenham also worked on a manuscript autograph poem written mainly in blank verse, intermittently for many years, called '*Truth or the Nature of Things*' which was never published.<sup>50</sup> The poem could be private and devotional or Sydenham may have envisioned it as a didactic poem that he intended to publish. In the first pages of the manuscript written under the heading, *Arguments of the First Book of Truth*

Sydenham outlined themes which would feature in the poem:

Ignorance and error = obstructions in the way.

That Intellectual Sun, which illuminates the mind, in like manner as the sensible sun enlightens the sensible world: which metaphor is carried on in the whole work.

Before Wisdom, true knowledge, or right opinions can gain  
Admittance into the Mind; all which is foolish, false and wrong

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<sup>50</sup> London, The British Library Add Mss. 45181, 45182 'TRUTH: OR, OF THE NATURE OF THINGS' by Floyer Sydenham: The British Library Manuscripts catalogue description of the poem states that 'books i-iv and v (*imperfect*) (45181) and books xviii, xix and xxi (45182) of a poem in blank verse expounding Platonic philosophy; *circ.* 1751-aft. 1778 (see below). *Autograph*, with *autograph* revisions. The numbering and arrangement of the books appear to be provisional. The title pages preceding books i and ii (45181, ff. 17, 34) describe the poem as consisting of twenty-four books (on f. 34 this number has been amended from eighteen), but those preceding books xviii and xix (45182, ff. 1, 27) reduce this total to twenty. The numbering of books xviii, xix and xxi (45182, ff. 1, 28, 57) has been altered more than once. There are frequent marginal references to lines in the missing books vi-xvii and xx, but none to books xxii-xxiv. The latter part of book iii (45181, ff. 85-103) is cancelled with the text breaking off in mid-sentence on f. 103. (Notes on f. 130b, now facing the title-page of book iv, f. 104, apparently relate to a continuation of the same text.) A draft of the argument of books i and ii has been placed before book i (45181, ff. 1-16) and shorter summaries of books i and iv are also included (45181, ff. 18-18b, 105). Terminal dates for the composition or revision of parts of the poem are indicated by (1) a complimentary reference in book iii (45181, f. 71b) to Granville (John Carteret, 2nd Earl Granville 1744, d. Jan. 1763), whose name is deleted in favour of Chatham (William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham Aug. 1766, d. 1778) whose name is in turn deleted in favour of 'Campden' (Charles Pratt, 1st Baron Camden July 1765, and 1st Earl 1786); (2) an allusion in book xix (45182, f. 31) to the recent death (June 1757) of Sophia Dorothea, daughter of George I; (3) an allusion in book xxi (45182, f. 59) to the 1st Earl Harcourt as governor of the Prince of Wales (1751-1752). There are also in books i and iv (45181, ff. 20b, 124b) appeals for patronage to the 4th Earl of Chesterfield (d. 1773) and to the 1st Baron Lyttelton (d. 1773) to whom, respectively, Sydenham dedicated his translations of Plato's dialogues *Hippias Major* and *Io*, published in 1759. 45181 also contains two poems in *Latin* hexameters in praise of the philosophies of Plato (ff. 132-133) and Varro (ff. 134-139), both in Sydenham's handwriting, with contemporary ink pagination. Paper; ff. i + 139, i + 90. Quarto. *Circ.* 1751-aft. 1778. Written on loose quires and subsequently (probably in the early 19th cent.) bound in half-russia, the spines (45181, f. i; 45182, f. i) being lettered 'Sydenham MSS.' *Presented by Dr Mabel Day.*'

must be removed out of it, as so many obstructions in the way:

Ignorance and Error Descending to Particulars

Are neither the immediate nor necessary effects of any sensible object, but are accidental offspring of some or other of the natural passions and are therefore Levity, Fancy, & Opinion, vain Fears and empty Hopes.

Descending perturbations of the soul to cupid → Particulars; the several passions of which are either non-natural or natural. The non-natural are such, as rise not in the mind universally or naturally; and not peculiar to any certain time of life. These are Fury or Malice, Jealousy, Revenge, Superstition, Atheism; Envy, Despair and Tyranny; passions all of the most pernicious kind.

The natural are such as are incident to the Several Ages of Man, by means of his connection to the Sensible World and the effect which eternal Things naturally have upon him.

For every passion has for its object some external Thing, and arises from a preconceived false opinion of it. Every false opinion of external Things is owing to the Appearance which they make in the Fancy...<sup>51</sup>

The above outlines of some of the themes which Sydenham introduced into the first two books of *Truth, Or the Nature of Things* reveal a mature observance of key tenets of the Platonic philosophy. Taylor's rejection of the standard of Sydenham's Platonism was due to its not being overtly identifiable with, or in identifiable sympathy with, the commentaries of the Neoplatonists. Taylor became acquainted with Sydenham when the scholar was in a distressed state of physical and mental decline; and even in such a state of decline, Sydenham's erudition and devotion to Platonism obviously impressed Taylor. Sydenham the Platonist did not reject Christianity as Taylor had done. The metaphorical language of the Platonic tradition lends itself to both pagan and Christian considerations and interpretations. For

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp 1-3.

instance, Sydenham's lines, 'That Intellectual Sun, which illuminates the mind, in like manner as the sensible sun enlightens the sensible world...' could be applied as a metaphor in a Christian context as well as in a pagan context. In both Christian and pagan semiotics the sun is often deployed as a symbol of the divine, though in a Christian context this is always overtly metaphoric whereas in paganism the very disk of the sun in the heavens could connote the celestial manifestation of an actual god, and be worshipped as such, as well as serving as a metaphor for the divine.

Taylor wrote that: 'My principal object in this arduous undertaking [providing a complete edition of Plato in English] has been to unfold all the abstruse and sublime dogmas of Plato, as they are found dispersed in his works.'<sup>52</sup> Shortly before discussing Sydenham in the introduction to *The Works of Plato* Taylor mentioned a list of Platonists, all of whom had revitalised the Platonic tradition in continental Europe and Britain, but whom he rejected as tradition-bearers because of the Christianised Platonism they espoused. Taylor mentioned that those he rejected were familiar with the writings of the pagan Neoplatonists,<sup>53</sup> commenting that:

Others again have filled themselves with a vain confidence, from reading the commentaries of these admirable interpreters, and have in a short time considered themselves superior to their masters. This was the case with Ficinus, Picus, Dr. Henry Moore, and other pseudo Platonists, their contemporaries, who in order to combine Christianity with the doctrines of Plato, rejected some of his most important tenets, and perverted others, and thus corrupted one of these systems, and afforded no real benefit to the other.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *WP*, cix, rpt. in *TTS*, IX, 76.

<sup>53</sup> See *WP*, lxxxviii – xc, rpt. in *TTS*, IX, 61- 63.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, *WP*, xc, rpt. in *TTS*, IX, 63.

Taylor's reference to Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) and Dr. Henry More<sup>55</sup> (1614-1687) as 'pseudo Platonists' is highly significant as it places Taylor in opposition to the Christianised Platonic tradition (an important aspect of Renaissance Humanism), as it had been hitherto expressed, in Europe and indeed Britain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Taylor owned Marsilio Ficino's Latin translation of the *Works of Plato*, with the accompanying Greek text of Stephanus in the twelve volume (1787) edition and as Ficino was indebted to the commentaries of the latter Platonists as a Platonic translator and commentator so Taylor certainly owed a debt to Ficino. Taylor also owned Ficino's 1580 edition of Plotinus' works (*Plotini Opera*) and his own understanding of Platonism must have benefited from the instruction and labours of Ficino. Furthermore, Ficino's visionary work and philosophical masterpiece the *Theologia Platonica De Immortalitate Animorum* (The Platonic Theology on the Immortality of Souls), published in 1482, reveals the magnitude of his learning and the application of Platonism to daily life in a philosophical and devotional sense.<sup>56</sup> Ficino's *The Platonic Theology on the Immortality of Souls* is explicitly Christian though the grandmasters of later Platonism from Plotinus through to Proclus are respectfully acknowledged as pagans and revered as metaphysicians.

Ficino can be considered to be a magus. The magic he practiced was a Christianised form of sympathetic astral magic which focused primarily on perceived astrological correspondences between the above and the below – or the macrocosm and the

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<sup>55</sup> Taylor's spelling of the surname was 'Moore'.

<sup>56</sup> See Marsilio Ficino, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen, with John Warden, *Marsilio Ficino Platonic Theology* 6 Vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 2006). Note: The set is bilingual with Latin text faced with English translation.

microcosm, which owed as much to Hermetica as it did to Neoplatonism. A distinct feature of the Hermetic tradition, as it flourished in Renaissance Florence, was that it 'regarded both Platonism and Christianity to be descendants and corrupted forms of Hermeticism.'<sup>57</sup> The Hermetic corpus, due to its claimed antecedence and influence on Platonism and Christianity, was of great interest to Ficino: he absorbed Hermeticism before he translated Plato.

Ficino's Neoplatonism contains many pagan elements that are thinly veiled and ornamented by Christian allusions, references and glosses. Ficino however, was by no means a pagan; rather he augmented his understanding and practice of Christianity by reviving elements of the metaphysics and theology of Hellenistic pagan Platonists through his translations and commentaries. Ficino was a vital force, if not the vital force, in reintroducing Platonism to the West and his work was original in many respects; however many of the Greek and Latin Church Fathers, and theologians such as St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas had invoked the Platonic tradition to confirm and augment Christian theology.<sup>58</sup> Ficino was securely conversant with Christian Platonism, and the theological expressions informed by it in Church history, and this is reflected in his *Platonic Theology*. In this sense, Ficino can be understood as working in an already established Christian theological tradition that utilised aspects of Hellenic pagan philosophy in the context of Christian theologising. At the

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<sup>57</sup> Duane Roller, 'Aristotle, Plato and Gemisthos' in *Transformation and Tradition in the Sciences: Essays in Honour of I. Bernard Cohen*, ed. Everett Mendelsohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 437. Note: Roller's essay provides an insightful introduction to the establishment of a Platonic Academy in Florence, as suggested by Gemisthos, see pp. 432-437. Gemisthos is discussed above in relation to his pseudonym 'Pletho'.

<sup>58</sup> For the best discussion of the history of the Platonic tradition before the Italian Renaissance, and especially the influence of Hellenistic pagan Platonism on the Church Fathers see: A.H. Armstrong, ed. *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967 rpt. [with corrections] 2005). For the influence of Greek philosophy and religion on early Christianity see: Vittorio D. Macchiore, *From Orpheus to Paul: A History of Orphism* (London: Constable, 1930).

beginning and the end of his *Platonic Theology*, dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, Ficino included the following disclaimer, in capitals:

IN ALL I DISCUSS, EITHER HERE OR ELSEWHERE, I WISH TO MAINTAIN ONLY THAT WHICH MEETS WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE CHURCH.<sup>59</sup>

Ficino's expression of Platonism, though it was significantly indebted to Pagan Platonism, was conditioned, by a personal, political and theological obligation towards Christianity, specifically the Roman Catholic Church.

Taylor was familiar with the work of Henry More, though none of More's works are listed in the Sotheby sale catalogue of Taylor's library. The Sotheby catalogue did offer Ralph Cudworth's (1617-1688) *Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678)<sup>60</sup> for sale, and this was one source of Taylor's familiarity with the wider work of the group commonly referred to as the Cambridge Platonists, of which More, Cudworth and also John Smith (1618-1652) were dominant. Like Ficino, the Cambridge Platonists continued political and theological obligations towards the sustenance of personally avowed and politically established Christianity. The Cambridge Platonists, also called 'Latitude Men' were also concerned with breaching the gulf between Christianity and science; they wanted to promote reasonable or rational Christianity and protect Christian faith and metaphysics from the erosion of materialism. R. L. Brett noted:

The work of the Cambridge Platonists consisted, therefore, in building up a new world-picture which would reconcile religion and science.

<sup>59</sup> Marcilio Ficino, ed. and trans. Allen and Hankins, (2001-2006), I, 1. and VI, 219.

<sup>60</sup> See *Soth. Cat. Lot.*, 322.

There were those who claimed that not only the mythology, but the truths behind the mythology of the Christian faith, had been invalidated by the new science. It was here that the Cambridge Platonists joined issue with the mechanistic philosophers and defended their religious beliefs against the writings of men like Hobbes and other “professed theists of later times, who might notwithstanding have an undiscerned tang of the mechanic atheism, hanging about them” and who admitted

“no other causes of things as philosophical, save the material and mechanical only; this being really to banish all mental, and consequently divine causality, quite out of the world; and to make the whole world to be nothing else but a mere heap of dust, fortuitously agitated.” (True *Intellectual System*, I, p. 217.)<sup>61</sup>

Taylor’s first translation of a complete Platonic dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, was published in 1792;<sup>62</sup> and in 1793 he published a volume which contained translations of *The Cratylus*, *The Phaedo*, *The Parmenides* and *The Timaeus*, which included introductions and notes.<sup>63</sup> This translation was owned by Shelley. James Anastasios Notopoulos has suggested, with some justification, that it was one of the editions of Taylor that Hogg and Shelley consulted while at Oxford University; Shelley’s copy is now kept in the Bodleian Library.<sup>64</sup> In his introduction to the *Parmenides* Taylor refers to Cudworth’s *Intellectual System* (1678): ‘A superficial reader, who knows no more of Platonism than what he has gleaned from Cudworth’s *Intellectual System...*’<sup>65</sup> A discussion of Platonic triads follows. Taylor saw Cudworth’s work as being an inferior expression of Platonism when compared the Hellenic pagan

<sup>61</sup> R. L. Brett, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1951), p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> Plato, *The Phaedrus of Plato: A Dialogue Concerning Beauty and Love, Translated From the Greek with Notes and an Introduction by the Translator*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Edward Jeffrey, 1792).

<sup>63</sup> Plato, trans. Thomas Taylor, *THE CRATYLUS, PHÆDO, PARMENIDES AND TIMÆUS OF PLATO. Translated from the Greek by Thomas Taylor. With Notes on the Cratylus, and an Explanatory Introduction to Each Dialogue*, (London: Benjamin and John White, Fleet-Street, 1793). Note: hereafter cited as *Plato (1793)*.

<sup>64</sup> See James Anastasios Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (New York: Duke University Press, 1949, rpt. Octagon Books, 1969), n. p. 42. Notopoulos also records the same translation being in Wordsworth’s library, see p. 163.

<sup>65</sup> *Plato (1793)*, p. 285.n.

Neoplatonism he adopted. Cudworth's Platonism was rational, rather than overtly idealist: he utilised Platonism as part of his apologetics against materialism and the mechanised universe it delivered. J. R. Cragg has observed that the 'Cambridge Platonists saw 'the use of reason' and 'the exercise of virtue' as the twin spheres in which we enjoy God.'<sup>66</sup> Taylor would have been in sympathy with Cudworth's attacks on Hobbes and atheistic materialism. He would also have supported Cudworth's maintenance of the belief that moral ideas are innate in man. If Cudworth had been more of an idealist and evoked the assistance of the pagan Neoplatonists, Taylor would have revered him.

The Platonism expressed by Sydenham was greatly influenced by the *Didaskalikos*, or *The Handbook of Platonism* by Alcinous. John Dillon wrote that the *Didaskalikos* was popular, 'both in the Byzantine period and in the Renaissance' and that its popularity is 'attested by the numerous manuscripts and editions emanating from the period of the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries AD.'<sup>67</sup> The *Didaskalikos* is a short work containing thirty-five chapters beginning with a *Definition of Philosophy and the Philosopher* and *The Contemplative and Practical Life* (chapters one and two), the *Handbook of Platonism* progresses through a foundational repertoire of practical and theoretical advice about the vocational practice of Platonic philosophy.

Platonism, as it was expressed and practiced in antiquity, is critically understood under three general headings, namely: Early Platonism, Middle Platonism and

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<sup>66</sup> Gerald R. Cragg, *The Pelican History of the Church [Volume Four] The Church and the Age of Reason 1648-1789* 5 vols. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1962), IV, 69. For more on Cudworth's *Intellectual System* and also his *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (1731) in relation to the Platonic tradition see: J.H. Muirhead, *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), pp. 33-71.

<sup>67</sup> Alcinous, trans. John Dillon *Alcinous The Handbook of Platonism Translated with an Introduction and Commentary by John Dillon*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. v.

Neoplatonism (also sometimes referred to as Later Platonism). Such critical terms originated in the later-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Martha K Zebrowski has noted that: 'No one in eighteenth-century Britain drew clear distinctions between Plato's own ideas and those of later Platonists, and certainly no one used the terms 'Middle Platonist', 'Middle Platonism', 'Neoplatonist', and 'Neoplatonism'.<sup>68</sup>

Zebrowski is correct. However, Thomas Taylor certainly 'drew distinctions' between Platonists and frequently refers to the 'later Platonists' in his writings. Taylor knew that the writings of the later Platonists from Plotinus through to his favourite Proclus were distinct from earlier Platonic writings. However, Taylor believed that the distinctiveness of the writings of the later Platonists were a final flowering of Plato's original teaching and consistent with an unbroken Platonic tradition, that was rooted in Pythagoreanism and Orphism. Taylor believed that esoteric elements of such a 'unbroken Platonic tradition' were originally preserved cryptically in Plato's, and Platonic, writings which were only understood exoterically when conveyed to initiates by word-of-mouth. The Neoplatonists perceived that the pagan Platonic tradition was under threat of obsolescence during the period of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, which was accompanied by the political and popular ascendancy of Christianity. The writings of the Neoplatonists claimed to make that which had been esoteric (a hidden oral tradition shared by select initiates) available, though still in obscure terms, to posterity. Taylor believed that the writings of the Neoplatonists represented a textual embodiment of Pagan Neoplatonism that was encoded with all the necessary elements for a faithful reconstitution of Platonic philosophy, theosophy, theology, ritual and religion. The ritual and religious aspects of Neoplatonism, known as 'theurgy' will be discussed later. Taylor would not allow that 'later Platonism'

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<sup>68</sup> Martha K. Zebrowski, 'We may venture to say, that the number of Platonic Readers is considerable: Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, and the Platonic strain in eighteenth-century British thought' in *Enlightenment and Dissent* 19, (2000), 198. n.

represented an innovation in Hellenic philosophy that was distinct, and quite separate from – though undeniably influenced by – Plato’s original teachings. For him the Neoplatonists presented the consummate expression of Plato’s original teachings and Hellenic pagan religion.

Zebrowski cites Paul Oscar Kristeller in the context of the complexities of defining ‘Platonism’ writing: ‘The history of Platonism (as distinct from the history of Plato scholarship) is not a constant repetition of what Plato said, but a sequence of variations on the themes proposed by Plato.’<sup>69</sup> This is undoubtedly the case; however when considering Taylor and his definition of Platonism it has to be remembered that he saw the tradition as being ‘a constant repetition’ or perhaps more accurately as ‘a constant transmission’ of secret doctrines and religious codes that conveyed distinct devotional, meditative and ritual techniques that originated with Orpheus and Pythagoras.

The *Didaskalikos* is a Middle-Platonist document that conveys pre-Plotinian instructions relating to the practice of Platonism. Zebrowski has commented on *The Handbook of Platonism*’s importance in Floyer Sydenham’s exposition of Platonism:

To Sydenham, Plato was the Divine Plato and also a political scientist. Platonism was a philosophy still more ancient than Plato that remained essentially consistent through successions of Platonists. In explaining Plato, Sydenham actually reiterated a view the second-century Platonist Alcinous presented in the *Didaskalikos* or *The Handbook of Platonism*, that Plato postulated as the divine first principle a mind or intellect that is likewise the good, truth and beauty. Sydenham recommended Plato as an antidote to those who placed too great an emphasis on sense in the explanation of human understanding, and he insisted that the divine mind is the sole rightful measure in moral,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

legal, and aesthetic judgement.<sup>70</sup>

Thomas Taylor was also familiar with the *Didaskalikos* and utilised it at times in his presentation of Platonic philosophy.<sup>71</sup> However, Taylor does not refer to the *Didaskalikos* with any degree of frequency and it could therefore be considered a minor, or foundational, influence on his understanding and transmission of Platonism. This is important as many practitioners of Renaissance Humanist Platonism (which might also be justifiably termed 'Christian Neoplatonism') consulted the *Didaskalikos*, as a guide to authentically understanding the practice of Platonic philosophy. Many editions of Plato's works, printed between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, had the *Didaskalikos* appended to them. Taylor's slight acknowledgement of Alcinous as a guide to Platonism demonstrates that he understood that the Platonism proffered in the *Didaskalikos* was 'different' to post-Plotinian Platonism: the playing-down of Alcinous was also a move on Taylor's part to distance his presentation of Platonism from Christianized, and therefore in his view contaminated, expressions of the Platonic tradition. Taylor understood Plato in the context of the pagan Neoplatonic tradition of late antiquity: many critics – both at the present time and in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – would, justifiably, consider the pagan Neoplatonism which Taylor so devotedly advocated to be a contamination of, or something different from, 'original' Platonism (the Platonism of Plato himself). Floyer Sydenham's work as a translator of Plato and a transmitter of the Platonic tradition is distinctive in the sense that he focussed on Plato and Platonism exclusively within the bounds of elements of the Platonic tradition. He

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>71</sup> See *WP*, p. xxxv, rpt. *TTS*, IX, 49.

did not come to Plato as a Christian revisionist (in ecclesiastical, theological or apologetic terms). He did work, broadly, in the context of a Renaissance humanist (or Christian Neoplatonic) school and his utilisation of Alcinous was in sympathy with that tradition. Sydenham can be understood as a Platonic idealist, who, from the basis of metaphysical idealism, sought to communicate Plato's works – via translation and commentary – as a contribution towards the cultural enrichment of moral philosophy, aesthetics and theology.

Taylor rejected all forms of Christianised Platonism, between 1787, the time of Sydenham's death when he unreservedly praised him, and 1804 when he publicly rejected the Sydenham's Christian Platonism. Floyer Sydenham had begun his working life in the Anglican Church: he was probably discharging the duties of a curate when he rejected the ministry. Sydenham rejected the ministry but he did not reject Christianity; at least not to the extent, that Taylor did. Following Sydenham's death Taylor emerged as his literary successor and it would take him the next twenty years to promulgate, 'authentic' Platonism, and so Taylor became widely known not only as 'Thomas Taylor the Platonist' but also as 'Pagan Taylor'. Being called a 'Platonist', in late-eighteenth-century Britain would have marked Taylor out as an odd public character, the term certainly defined him as being different, mystical, and that he was a contemporary echo of the past. Amongst Taylor's contemporaries, the term 'pagan', especially when used as a definition of the character and religious beliefs of a contiguous personality, would have engendered mixed responses that ranged from shock, horror and indignation to ridicule. The literati of the day viewed Taylor as a curiosity, some were indignant towards him; others admired his devotion to Hellenic

ideals – even if he was eccentric: few amongst his contemporaries would have been comfortable with a ‘pagan’ living next door.

### 3. English Rational Dissent and Platonism

Richard Jenkyns has commented that

for much of the eighteenth century Plato was rather neglected (Aristotle too, for that matter). But between 1759 and 1780 Floyer Sydenham tried to give him wider currency by translating nine Platonic (or Pseudo-Platonic)<sup>72</sup> dialogues, and in 1792 the industrious Thomas Taylor began translating the rest, with more zeal than skill; he published the first complete English version of Plato’s works, incorporating Sydenham’s translations in 1804.<sup>73</sup>

If it is true that both Plato and Aristotle were ‘rather’ neglected for most of the eighteenth century, in what sense was it true? On the front of translations from the Greek they certainly were.<sup>74</sup> However, the philosophical works of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and Bishop George Berkeley (1685-

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<sup>72</sup> The nine dialogues translated by Floyer Sydenham (1710-1787) and included in Taylor’s 1804 edition of the *Works of Plato* are: *First Alcibiades*, *Second Alcibiades*, the *Greater Hippias*, the *Lesser Hippias*, the *Banquet* (except the speech of Alcibiades), the *Philebus*, the *Meno*, the *Io* and the *Rivals*. Taylor edited Sydenham’s work, which had been published formerly, and distinguished between his own and Sydenham’s notes by signing either T. or S. Post eighteenth century scholarship has rightly questioned the provenance of the first and second *Alcibiades*, the *Lesser* and *Greater Hippias* and the *Rivals* (the *Rival Lovers*); most scholars do not attribute them to Plato. The *Banquet*, the *Meno* and the *Io* (*Ion*) are accepted as being by Plato. For a good general introduction to the Platonic cannon and the provenance of Platonic texts see John M. Cooper’s introduction to *Plato the Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper and John Hutchinson (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1997), pp. vii-xxvi.

<sup>73</sup> Jenkyns, (1994), pp. 201-2.

<sup>74</sup> A good, though not exhaustive, bibliographical survey of translations from Greek into English is Finley Melville Kendall Foster’s *English Translations from the Greek: A Bibliographical Survey*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918). Surveys of translations from Plato are found on pp. 90-91, and from Aristotle in pp. 26-35. Both authors were translated sparingly in the eighteenth century.

1753) for example, owe a great debt to Plato and place the philosopher in the mainstream of eighteenth-century philosophical thought and intellectual speculation in Britain.<sup>75</sup> Shaftesbury, though often described as a 'Platonist' should also be understood as standing in the Stoic tradition. He was also a deist. Shaftesbury's Platonism was more dialectical and sceptical than idealistic, he could not be described as a practitioner of 'ecstatic' and idealist Platonism. Neoclassical philosophy strongly influenced his expression of deism, which was often identified with atheism by Christian apologists. Shaftesbury's work, particularly his culturally influential *Characteristics*, was marked by the promotion of good-natured religion as a mark of breeding, good taste, wit and cultural refinement. Pat Rogers has commented that:

In speaking of the 'three provincial centuries' marked by British neglect of Plato, W. B Yeats lumped together the period from 1600 to 1900. But the start is too early and the end too late, for Plato's sojourn in the shadows cannot plausibly be dated prior to the death of the Cambridge Platonists, nor construed as surviving undiminished through the Victorian Age. Yeats really had in mind the high noon of empiricism, Newtonianism and Enlightenment. He meant, to be blunt, the eighteenth century.<sup>76</sup>

Rogers argues that three levels of neglect of Plato were evinced in the eighteenth century. Firstly, there was a neglect of the Greek language in the English educational systems. Secondly, there was 'a paucity of editions, translations and commentaries' and thirdly there was distaste for the mysticism of the Neoplatonists.<sup>77</sup> Rogers

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<sup>75</sup> See James Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1700 – 1789* (London and New York: Longman, 1986, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1993). Chapter 3, 'Philosophy', pp. 59-85 provides an excellent survey and discussion of both Shaftesbury and Berkeley's works, and chapter 7, 'Models', pp. 202-209 provides important information pertaining to Greece.

<sup>76</sup> Pat Rogers, 'The Eighteenth Century: Introduction' in Baldwin & Hutton eds. (1994), p. 181.

<sup>77</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 181-183.

comments that the widespread undervaluing of the name of Plato was due to the association of Plato with Neoplatonism, or supernaturalism. Rogers wrote:

Neoplatonism had come to seem a kind of secret-society activity, equivalent to Rosicrucianism or freemasonry: and these things were suspect until mysticism re-entered the European mind towards the end of the century. At a time when many people wished to show that not just Christianity but all serious thought was 'not mysterious', as John Toland's deistic slogan had it, the hermetic side of Neoplatonic doctrine (part of its appeal to later generations) limited both its own attraction and that of its ultimate progenitor.<sup>78</sup>

Both Jenkyns' and Rogers' comments concerning the neglect of Plato in the eighteenth century reflect the contemporary view of Owen Ruffhead (1723-1769) who wrote '*Plato is unfashionable*' in his review of Sydenham's translation of Plato's *Banquet* in the *Monthly Review* in 1762.<sup>79</sup> Martha K Zebrowski comments, 'Ruffhead praised Sydenham and his project, but he also wrote: 'There have been few, it is thought, if any, Platonic Lovers; and we may venture to say, that the number of Platonic Readers is now very inconsiderable.'<sup>80</sup> Zebrowski took Ruffhead's sentence, changing the last word 'inconsiderable' to 'considerable', as the title of her important essay on the vitality of the Platonic tradition in eighteenth century Britain. Zebrowski argues that Ruffhead's statement that there were not many readers of Plato in Britain in the late eighteenth century was 'not entirely true.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>79</sup> Zebrowski (2000), p. 193.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Zebrowski wrote that: 'Plato may not have been in fashion in eighteenth-century Britain, but he certainly did have readers, and the number of Christian theologians among them was quite considerable.'<sup>82</sup> Her essay focuses, primarily, on how Richard Price and Joseph Priestley utilised Plato's writings and writings emerging out of the Platonic tradition, in both pagan and Christian contexts, to inform and support their own philosophical and theological positions. Zebrowski demonstrates that Price's utilisation of the Platonic tradition was sympathetic with, and influenced by, the Christian theologian Samuel Clarke's (1675-1729) employment of Platonic writings and philosophy in support of his apologetics, hermeneutics and homiletics.<sup>83</sup> Samuel Clarke's incorporation of Platonism into Christian doctrine was in the tradition of the Greek Church Fathers, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Price was in agreement with Clarke's objective to understand the divine in terms of 'God as mind' or absolute intelligence.<sup>84</sup> Clarke's paramount theological objectives were also shared by Price; Zebrowski defined them thus:

Samuel Clarke had two related theological projects. He wanted to recover the beliefs of the early Christians regarding the nature and relation of God and Christ the Word or Logos, and he wanted to ground these beliefs not only in scripture, but also in reason and natural religion.<sup>85</sup>

Platonism offered both Clarke and Price a mode of learned discourse through which theological and metaphysical ideas could be expounded upon and debated in the light

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>83</sup> See also: Martha K. Zebrowski, 'Richard Price: British Platonist of the eighteenth century', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 55 (1994), 17-35; and ' "Commanded of God because 'tis Holy and Good": The Christian Platonism and natural law of Samuel Clarke', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 16 (1997), 3-28.

<sup>84</sup> Zebrowski (2000), p. 203.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 202

of deliberation, analysis and reason that functioned independently of dogma or conventional Christian hermeneutics when necessary.

Priestley, on the other hand, is demonstrated to have been sympathetic with the agenda of, 'Matthieu Souverain, a French Protestant minister who emigrated first to Holland and then to England after the revocation of the edict of Nantes and who wrote *Platonism unveil'd: or, an essay concerning the notions and opinions of Plato*, published posthumously in 1700'.<sup>86</sup> Souverain criticised the incorporation of abstract and complicated theological nuances (derived from the Platonic tradition) into Christian theology. Zebrowski comments: 'Souverain wanted to recover the simple Christian beliefs of apostolic times from the doctrinal confusion he thought Clement of Alexandria and Origen introduced into Christianity with their Platonizing explication of the Prologue to the Gospel of John.'<sup>87</sup> Priestley was limitedly familiar with aspects of the Platonic tradition and he certainly read Plato; however, he was not a practitioner of any kind of Platonism as were Price and his forebear Clarke. Priestley could accurately be termed an anti-Platonist and inasmuch as he was a philosopher, he was so in the context of Lockean empiricism.<sup>88</sup> Zebrowski quotes from Priestley's *The doctrines of heathen philosophy, compared with those of revelation* (1804) while illustrating Priestley's rejection of Platonic metaphysics: 'he certainly had no appetite for Plato's 'mysterious doctrine of ideas' and 'mysterious doctrine of numbers'. Plato, he said, 'indulged in various speculations concerning the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> See, James A. Harris, 'Joseph Priestley and 'the proper doctrine of philosophical necessity' in *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 20, (2001), 23-44.

nature of god and the universe.... Indeed, on these great and obscure subjects he is in many respects perfectly unintelligible.’’<sup>89</sup>

Price and Priestley’s approaches to Plato and the Platonic tradition in late-eighteenth-century Britain is representative of a wider community of individuals who appealed to Plato in the context of the defence and revision of institutionalised and personal Christianity, and in relation to philosophy. Zebrowski describes how Platonism, specifically as expressed in Renaissance Humanist terms, was an influence throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries in both Europe and Britain.<sup>90</sup> She cites several examples of the relevance of the textual transmission of Platonism in cultural, philosophical and religious contexts and debates featuring Ficino in the Italian Renaissance, Ralph Cudworth and the writings of the Huguenot intellectual Isaac de Beausobre (1659-1738), the important pioneer of the modern study of Manichaeism. The Platonic tradition was transmitted, often diversely, in antagonistic as well as sympathetic contexts, from the Renaissance to Price and Priestley in the eighteenth century. Concerning Price and Priestley, she comments:

While neither had the philological interest or historical skill of their predecessors, both wanted to recover the beliefs of the early Christian church and saw Plato as a key to this recovery. Both looked at Plato from the perspective of Hellenistic pagan and Christian Platonists. Moreover, both used Platonic texts and doctrines to develop and explain their own positions regarding mind, spirit, and matter, moral truth and knowledge and moral freedom and necessity. Yet, in all of this they disagreed fundamentally. With their very different valuations and strategic uses of Plato, and their disagreements over philosophy and theology, Price and Priestley illustrate well the manifold and formative role Plato had in eighteenth-century British thought.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Zebrowski (2000) p. 209.

<sup>90</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

William Godwin (1756-1836) was a good friend of Richard Price and they moved in the same social circles. Mary Wollstonecraft was also a member of Price's congregation at Newington Green. Godwin confronted and revised his conceptions of deity throughout his life as a philosopher and writer. F.E.L. Priestley, in his excellent edition of Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), has commented on Godwin's search for a definition of deity:

The place of the Creator in the closed universe is somewhat doubtful. Nor does this system of the universe provide for any objective criterion of value. Yet the extreme moral relativity of the mechanist and hedonist French philosophers was highly repugnant to Godwin and not compatible with his views on rational improvement. And while he is willing to abandon the orthodox Christian deity, he is not willing to reject every idea of a spiritual power external to the system of the universe. In the latter respect he was very firmly attached, not to the tradition of the French materialists, but to that of English Rational Dissenters. This tradition, of which Richard Price was a contemporary representative, continued the Platonic rationalism of Cudworth and Clarke. But the influence of English Platonism of Price and of Clarke was reinforced by a more direct Platonism.<sup>92</sup>

Plato as a moral and political philosopher, rather than as a metaphysician, had a strong and sustained influence on English Rational Dissent. There is no question that Richard Price, and Clarke before him, were Christian Platonists. It should be remembered that Plato himself refrained from overtly prescriptive didacticism in his dialogues: instead of telling his readers what to think, he sought to teach them how to think: hence the importance of dialectic as a means of philosophising. The rational

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<sup>92</sup> William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness: Photographic Facsimile of the Third Edition Corrected Edited with Variant Readings of the First and Second Editions And with a Critical Introduction and Notes*, ed. F.E.L. Priestley, 3 vols. (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1946), III, 8.

Platonism of his friend Price no doubt influenced Godwin. However, Godwin also came to Plato himself. Priestley wrote:

At the time when *Political Justice* was being planned, in 1791, Godwin recorded in his diary that he was reading Greek philosophy. Specific references to Plato and to the *Parmenides* in the first edition of *Political Justice* make it clear that his reading included Plato. From Plato, Godwin adopts a doctrine of eternal and immutable truths, existing independently of the Creator, and serving as a formal cause in the process of creation. The doctrine of eternal truths is of fundamental importance in Godwin's scheme of rational progress, since all progress demands some external standard towards which progress is made, and to which all is relative; rational progress demands as the external standard a system of absolute truths discoverable by reason. Although Godwin is impelled to rest his own body of doctrines upon the mechanistic necessity of the "eternal chain of causes," feeling that if he allows freedom to enter at any point his confident predictions must be invalidated, the real foundation upon which his system rests is Platonic.<sup>93</sup>

Though Plato was a significant influence on Godwin, it should be noted that Platonism was not an exclusive influence. Priestley also demonstrates that Godwin was significantly influenced by d'Holbach's (1723-1789) *Système de la Nature* (1780) whose materialist metaphysics, ultimately derived from Lockean influences, Godwin 'very definitely rejected'.<sup>94</sup> Priestley also mentions Godwin's considerations and ultimate rejection of the materialist theories, specifically the theory of vibrations, of David Hartley (1705-1757) who was in sympathy with Locke at least in relation to the mind being blank, prior to sensation.<sup>95</sup> Besides d'Holbach and Hartley, Priestley provides an overview of a rich and diverse variety of influences pertaining to metaphysics and psychology on Godwin and the development of his philosophy: of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

which Plato was only one.<sup>96</sup> Godwin was not a Platonist, in the same sense, as Richard Price was; however, his consultation of Plato, and his adaptation of some Platonic concepts in his own philosophical system is evidence that Plato was a relevant and considerable influence, especially in the culture of dissent, in the late eighteenth century. From the mid eighteenth century onwards, Plato certainly had readers though he was certainly not in fashion and Plato's relevancy and influence on English rational dissent should not be considered as a marker or popularity for there was nothing fashionable about Protestant dissent.

Thomas Taylor emerged from a dissenting background: his family probably belonged to the Presbyterian tradition of 'Old Dissent' rather than to radical Presbyterianism which evolved into intellectual Unitarianism. As was mentioned in the last chapter, he trained for a while under the dissenting minister Hugh Worthington. We saw how Worthington had written to the writer Mary Hays, whom he also instructed, that he resembled Richard Price in his being 'free from the rage of proselytism'. He also stated to Hays that he wished he resembled Price 'in 100 ways more'. Richard Price was one of the most respected and imitated dissenting preachers in London in the late eighteenth century. Taylor was attached to Worthington for approximately two years. In that time he was exposed to the culture of English Rational Dissent and in that context Platonic Rationalism, as expressed primarily by Price, was a permeative force.

Taylor maintained friendships with Protestant dissenters and radicals, many of whom were key constitutional and political reformists and republicans, throughout his life. He socialised with William Godwin, on several occasions, at dinner parties of

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<sup>96</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 6-14. Note: Priestley also discusses Godwin in the context of *Moral Philosophy*, pp. 14-27, *Political Philosophy*, pp. 27-62, and *Economic Thought*, pp.62-78.

their mutual friend Thomas Brand Hollis (1719-1804), at his London home in Chesterfield Street, Westminster. In *Mr Taylor the Platonist* it was related that:

We are likewise happy to inform the public, from good authority, that Thomas Brand Hollis, esq. has been for many years very much attached to our Platonist; that he frequently invites him to his table; and that he has always shewn himself active in promoting his welfare, though we are uncertain as to the time when Mr. T.'s intimacy with Mr. Hollis commenced.<sup>97</sup>

Thomas Brand Hollis was one of the leading radicals in London in the late eighteenth century. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 1756 and the Society of Antiquaries in 1757; he became a member of the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in 1759.<sup>98</sup> Brand Hollis was a prominent member of the Revolution Society, which commemorated the Glorious Revolution of 1688; he was also a founding member of the Society for Constitutional Information. He supported the French Revolution but retracted, as many English radicals did, from the horrors of the Terror. He withdrew from the Society of Constitutional Information in 1791, 'after its capture by more extreme reformers, but alarmed by ministerial attacks on free expression, he joined the moderate Society of Friends of the People, and the Society of Friends to the Liberty of the Press in 1792-3'.<sup>99</sup> Brand Hollis admired the example of the American Colonies and developed strong links with American intellectuals and politicians, including John Adams (1735-1826), second President of the United States.

The broadcasting of Taylor's close association with Thomas Brand Hollis in *Public*

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<sup>97</sup> *SW* p. 120. Note the 1803 edition of *Public Characters of 1798* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.) 'Mr. Taylor the Platonist' was subject to some editorial changes. For a complete account of them, see appendix 1. In the 1803 edition, the quotation cited above is slightly changed to: 'That respectable patriot, Mr. Thomas Brand Hollis, has been for many years very much attached to our Platonist; he frequently invites him to his table, and has always shewn himself extremely active in promoting his welfare.'

<sup>98</sup> See, Colin Bronwick, 'Hollis, Thomas Brand (c.1719-1804), radical,' in *DNB*.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*.

*Characters of 1798* is significant as it was a notification of an association with radical political dissent: if association could prove guilt, Taylor would be found guilty.

However, Taylor seems to have been deeply conservative in his political views, at least in those he expressed in print, as shall be discussed in the next chapter in relation to the preface of his translation of *Pausanias* (1794). Taylor was not an overtly political writer. He was primarily philosophically and religiously motivated as a writer.

John Disney (1746-1816), a Unitarian minister, to whom Brand Hollis left the bulk of his estate upon his death, published a memoriam to his friend and benefactor, *Memoirs of Thomas Brand Hollis* (1808). Thomas Brand Hollis was originally named Thomas Brand. On the death of Thomas Hollis (1720-1774), his friend and companion on two grand tours, he took Hollis's name. He was a libertarian, writer, bibliophile and patron of the arts. When Thomas Hollis died he left Brand most of his estate. Thomas Brand Hollis's country home was The Hyde, a modest mansion-house with its own parkland and gardens, near Ingatestone, Essex. Sir William Chambers (1723-1796) remodelled The Hyde in a neo-classical style in 1761. Brand Hollis was a committed classicist and antiquary and he filled The Hyde with artefacts and statuary, including a Roman and a Greek Sarcophagus, many of which found their way into the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge in the nineteenth century.

In the *Memoirs*, John Disney noted that 'Mr. Brand-Hollis's knowledge of virtue and of antiquities was considered as particularly chaste and correct.'<sup>100</sup> He also noted,

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<sup>100</sup> John Disney, *Memoirs of Thomas Brand Hollis, ESQ. FRS and SA* (London: Printed by T Gillet, Crown-Court, Fleet-Street, 1808), p. 21. Note: The *Memoirs* contain copies of several letters from John Adams to Thomas Brand Hollis and there are also nine illustrative plates, including representations of the Roman and Greek sarcophagi mentioned, engraved by James Basire.

pertaining to Brand Hollis's social contacts, 'he cultivated the intimacy of those alone who were well informed on religious and political subjects, and liberal in the discussion of them.'<sup>101</sup> Brand Hollis certainly 'cultivated the intimacy' of Thomas Taylor, and he was certainly one of the most comprehensively informed classicists in London. Taylor was also, no doubt, well informed on religious, and probably, political subjects. The condition for intimacy, however, that Brand Hollis placed on the learned company he kept, according to Disney, was that the his friends should be 'liberal' in discussion and social intercourse. The term 'liberal' was employed by Disney connoting 'openness' and 'broad-mindedness' as well as comprehensiveness. Taylor must have fitted the bill. Taylor often addresses his readers using the term, 'the liberal reader will...' or 'for the sake of the liberal reader' which conveys the same spirit as Disney's usage of the term 'liberal' related.

George Mills Harper cites from an autobiographical fragment of William Godwin's from 1788, which reads:

At the parties of Mr. Brand Hollis, whom I first saw at Mr. Timothy Hollis's of Ormond Street, I became acquainted with Mr. John Adams, American Ambassador. Mr. Romilly, Mr. Richard Sharp, Mr. Capel Lofft, Mr. Woodhull, Mr. Grosse, Thomas Taylor the Platonist, Dr. Geddes, Mr. Gilbert Wakefield, Mr. George Walker of Nottingham, Mr. Paradise, etc. etc.<sup>102</sup>

As well as reading Plato for himself, Godwin had opportunity for conversation with Thomas Taylor, who was identified by Godwin as 'the Platonist' in 1788. Taylor's soubriquet must have been attached to him rapidly as his first important publications,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> *NWB*, p. 29.

*The Mystical Initiations, or Hymns of Orpheus* and Plotinus' *Essay Concerning the Beautiful*, had appeared only the year before.

#### 4. Greek Literature and Plato: Eighteenth-century Contexts

Though Plato might be rightly considered to have been 'unfashionable' in the eighteenth century, within the domain of literature, the Platonic tradition was still relevant to philosophical, intellectual and religious debate. Throughout the eighteenth century, Plato was primarily appreciated in moral and political terms. However, Plato and Platonism might also have played a greater role in eighteenth-century English literature, than has been hitherto recognised. Rogers has noted that before Blake literature 'scarcely makes a nod at Platonism'. He also observes that the significant re-introduction of Platonism into the English literary tradition, initially via Blake, occurred 'in the era of Thomas Taylor'.<sup>103</sup> Rogers is undoubtedly correct that literature was significantly unaffected by Platonism throughout most of the eighteenth century, particularly in the early part of it. However, Michael Prince has demonstrated that Platonism was an influence on what would be considered, for the most part, minor literature, some decades before Blake was born, especially in the context of philosophical dialogue.<sup>104</sup> Prince cautiously observes that 'However significant the revival of Platonism may be for the cultural history of mid-eighteenth-century England, its textual embodiment occurs in works now considered minor.'<sup>105</sup> Prince acknowledges that Rogers' comments about the virtual redundancy of Platonism's

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<sup>103</sup> Rogers, in Baldwin & Hutton eds. (1994), p.184.

<sup>104</sup> See Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Chapter six 'The Platonic revival: 1730-1770' is particularly relevant to issues raised in this thesis and contains important analysis of Floyer Sydenham's significance in eighteenth-century British Platonism.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

relevancy to English literature before Blake has weight and validity.<sup>106</sup> However, Prince's location of 'approximately thirty separately issued works translating, imitating or discussing Plato, Xenophon, and Plotinus between 1730 and 1775' and his subsequent argument for the significance of the Platonic tradition in minor works of English literature in the mid-eighteenth-century warrants a reconsideration of the relevancy of Plato and Platonism to literature before Blake.<sup>107</sup>

George Mills Harper observed that 'Platonic idealism was never in greater disrepute in England than it was during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was a monistic age, and the one substance was matter: as Leslie Stephen said, with Bolingbroke in mind, "All who thought that anything could be known of the spirit as distinct from the body are 'pneumatical madmen.'"'<sup>108</sup> Harper argues that by the end of the eighteenth century that, 'the stream of Platonic idealism again flowed bankfull, but the flood came as a result of no freak cloudburst.'<sup>109</sup> Harper attributes the revitalisation, continuity and development of the Platonic tradition in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century to the labours of several, now mostly forgotten, men. He lists 'Nathaniel Forster, Zachariah Mudge, Edmund Massey, Henry Spens, Martin Routh, Ebenezer MacFaite, Thomas Blackwell, the Foulis brothers, and Floyer Sydenham' as having preceded Taylor as labourers in the cause of Platonic idealism

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<sup>106</sup> See *Ibid.*, n.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166. n.

<sup>108</sup> NWB, p. 5. For an excellent analysis of the context of Leslie Stephen's comment and the eighteenth-century observations, debates and revisions concerning the nature of the human spirit, or soul, as part of the physical body or something distinct from it, see: Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: How the Enlightenment Changed the Way We See Our Bodies and Souls*, (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

in Britain.<sup>110</sup> Harper acknowledges that the list of names were extracted from Frank B. Evans' important article *Platonic Scholarship in Eighteenth – Century England*.<sup>111</sup>

Unfortunately, Harper does not elaborate regarding the list of individuals, nor does he divulge the specific nature of the contributions made, by those he lists, to Platonic idealism in Britain. However, he does state that, 'the last four – all writing after 1750 – proposed complete editions of Plato'.<sup>112</sup> Evans discusses all of the men mentioned as being important in the context of the development and survival of Platonism in Britain in the eighteenth century.<sup>113</sup> All of them were important contributors to the textual embodiment and relevancy of either Hellenic subject matter or Platonism in England, with the exception of Zachariah Mudge (1649-1769) who is not discussed below.<sup>114</sup> Taylor drew upon the literary legacy of the scholars listed by Evans and Harper as shall be indicated below. Although the following individuals contributed to what Harper termed, 'the stream of Platonic idealism' in Britain, caution should be exercised in terming any of them as 'Platonists' in the sense that Marsilio Ficino, Ralph Cudworth, Richard Price and Floyer Sydenham were Christian Platonists.

Nathaniel Forster (1718-1757) was a classical and biblical scholar and Anglican priest<sup>115</sup> who in 1745 published a popular edition of five of Plato's dialogues.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> See Ibid., p. 275. n. 21.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>113</sup> See Frank B Evans, 'Platonic Scholarship in eighteenth-century England', in *Modern Philology*, 41 (1943)103-110.

<sup>114</sup> See, *ibid.*, p. 105. Note: Evans wrote that Mudge was 'a Platonic amateur'.

<sup>115</sup> See *DNB*.

<sup>116</sup> Plato, ed. Nathaniel Forster, *Platonis dialogi V. Recensuit, notisque illustravit Nath. Forster* (Oxford: e typographeo Clarendoniano, impensis Jac. Fletcher, 1745.) Note: a reprint of this edition was published in 1752. Included are four genuine Platonic dialogues (*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*), and one now regarded as spurious: *The Rivals* or *The Rival Lovers* (Erastai). With a Latin translation at the foot of each page, and an extensive section of scholarly annotations ("notæ et variæ lectiones") in the form of endnotes.

Forster edited the Greek text and added translation in Latin at the bottom of each page with extensive endnotes. In the introduction to the *Works of Plato* Thomas Taylor stated that he availed himself, 'of the learned labours of the editors of various dialogues of Plato, such as the edition of the Rivals, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito and Phaedo by Forster'.<sup>117</sup> Forster's work on Plato is not only a significant text consulted by Taylor in preparation of his *Works of Plato*, it is also demonstrative of a level of mid-eighteenth-century interest in Plato (amongst those that had the Classical languages).

Edmund Massey (1690-1765) was an Anglican clergyman who in 1727 published an edition of Plato's *Republic*.<sup>118</sup> Massey edited the text and provided Latin translation with notes. Massey is perhaps best remembered for a sermon, which he preached, and which was published: (*A Sermon against the dangerous and sinful practice of inoculation Preach'd at St Andrew's Holborn, on Sunday, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1722*) in which he damned inoculation against smallpox. In his introduction to his *Works of Plato*, Thomas Taylor acknowledged that he consulted Massey's edition of *The Republic*.

Henry Spens (1714-1787) was a Scottish divine and professor of divinity at St Andrews. Spens made the first English translation of Plato's *Republic*, published by the Foulis brothers in Glasgow in 1763.<sup>119</sup> Spens' translation provided the basis of the text of *The Republic*, which appears in Taylor's *Works of Plato*. Taylor acknowledged that he reproduced the bulk of Spens' translation writing:

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<sup>117</sup> WP, I, cviii. rpt. in TTS, IX, 75.

<sup>118</sup> Plato, ed. Edmund Massey, *Platonis de Republica, sive de Justo libri X. Versionem emendavit natasque adject* (Cantabrigiæ: Typis Academicis, 1713).

<sup>119</sup> Plato, trans. Henry [Harry] Spens *The Republic of Plato In Ten Books: Translated from the Greek by H. Spens DD. With a Preliminary Discourse Concerning the Philosophy of the Ancients by the Translator* (Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Foulis, Printers to the University, 1763).

Of the translation of the Republic by Dr. Spens, it is necessary to observe, that a considerable part of it is very faithfully executed; but that in the more abstruse parts it is inaccurate; and that it every where abounds in Scotticisms which offend the English ear, and vulgarisms which are no less disgraceful to the translator than disgusting to the reader. Suffice it therefore to say of this version, that I have adopted it wherever I found it could with propriety be adopted, and given my own translation where it was otherwise. <sup>120</sup>

Martin Joseph Routh (1755-1854) was president of Magdalen College, Oxford and was ordained an Anglican priest in 1810: he was a formidable and celebrated academic. Routh edited the Greek text and provided a Latin translation, with notes and commentary, of Plato's *Euthydemus* and *Gorgias*, which he published in 1784. <sup>121</sup> Following his translation of Plato, which was a singular event, he turned his talents towards patristic studies and translated many obscure texts, and fragments, from 'the lesser-known ecclesiastical authors, the ante-Nicene fathers of the second and third centuries'. <sup>122</sup> Thomas Taylor usually scorned those he considered mere philologists, whom he often termed 'verbal critics'; however, in the introduction to *The Works of Plato*, he gave unreserved praise to Routh writing,

This... editor has enriched his edition of these two dialogues [the *Euthydemus* and *Gorgias*] with very valuable and copious philological and critical notes, in which he has displayed no less learning than judgement, no less acuteness than taste. He appears indeed to me to be one of the best and most modest of philologists; and it is to be hoped that he will be imitated in what he has done by succeeding editors of Plato's text. <sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup> WP, I, cvii, rpt. TTS, IX, 75.

<sup>121</sup> Plato, ed. & trns. Martin Joseph Routh *Platonis Euthydemus et Gorgias. Recensuit, vertit, notasque suas adjecit Martinus Josephus Routh*, (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1784). Note: one of the copies of this book in the British Library [shelf mark 525.h.13] has a few MS notes by Dr Charles Burney who was an acquaintance of Taylor's.

<sup>122</sup> See DNB.

<sup>123</sup> WP, I, cviii, rpt. in TTS, IX, 75.

Taylor does not reveal specifically what Routh had done in his edition of the *Euthydemus* and *Gorgias* that he hoped would be an exemplary format, or benchmark, to 'succeeding editors of Plato's text'. What was so significant to Taylor about Routh's edition? In his edition, Routh utilised the commentary of the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus on the *Gorgias* (*In Platonis Gorgiam Commentaria*) sympathetically and extensively in his notes and commentary of that dialogue. This is an important example (the only one as far as I know), of a respected Oxford scholar of the late eighteenth century who published an edition of Plato, which incorporated as an essential part of its editorial apparatus the commentary of a pagan Neoplatonist. A scholarly approach to pagan Plato through the pagan Platonic tradition was very rare in the late eighteenth century. Routh cited Olympiodorus as an authority on Plato's *Gorgias* and this is interesting as the later Platonists were generally viewed, when not ignored altogether, throughout the eighteenth century and especially in established academia, as exotic polluters of the Platonic tradition. This was mainly due to the reputation of the Neoplatonists as being extreme, if not laughable, mystics and metaphysicians in an age where rationality, reason and materialism were being widely subscribed. It was also due to the fact that most of the writings of the Neoplatonists had not been edited or published and were only available in rare Greek and Latin editions of Plato, such as Ficino's, and in manuscript form in libraries and private collections. Routh had ready access to the Bodleian library and it was probably there that he consulted Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Gorgias*. Taylor's edition of the *Goorgias*, published in the *Works of Plato*, is accompanied by the commentary of Olympiodorus on that dialogue in the form of notes in which Routh is not cited;<sup>124</sup> although Taylor had acknowledged that he consulted Routh in the introduction to the

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<sup>124</sup> See WP, IV, 343-460. rpt. in TTS, XII, 323-431.

*Works*. As well as consulting Routh's edition of the *Gorgias*, Taylor copied into one of his notebooks, which has since been lost, a manuscript of Olympiodorus' commentary on that dialogue, in which he made emendations to the Greek text.<sup>125</sup>

The Scot, Ebenezer MacFaite<sup>126</sup> (d. 1786), published *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Plato. With Answers to his Principal Objections Against Him; and a General Review of His Dialogues* in 1760.<sup>127</sup> Taylor does not mention MacFaite in any of his works, as far as I am aware.

Thomas Blackwell (1701-1757), a Scottish divine and a Professor of classics at Aberdeen University was an important classical scholar and figure in the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>128</sup> If Thomas Taylor had gone up to Aberdeen to university, nearly twenty-years after the death of Blackwell, he still would have encountered the professor's legacy. In 1735, Blackwell, anonymously, published a work that proved to be a watershed in classical studies: *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer*.<sup>129</sup> In 1748, he published *Letters Concerning Mythology*,<sup>130</sup> anonymously, which was an important revisionist and pioneering work in the study of mythology; the *Letters* were not solely written by Blackwell an unknown agent produced some of them. Taylor certainly knew Blackwell's *Letters Concerning Mythology*, though he does not refer

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<sup>125</sup> See Soth. Cat. Lot 715. *Excerpta ex Procli MS. Commentarris in Parmenidem Platonis, ex libris Damascii περὶ ἀρχῶν et ex Olympiodori Scholis in Platonis Phædonem et Georgiam, cum multis Emendationibus a Thos. Taylor, 6 parts in 3 vol. 8vo.*

<sup>126</sup> Also spelt 'Macfait' see *DNB*.

<sup>127</sup> Ebenezer Macfait, *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Plato. With Answers to his Principal Objections Against Him; and a General Review of His Dialogues* (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and J. Bells, 1760). Note: For more on Macfait and his comments on mid-eighteenth-century mock Platonic dialogues, in literary and dramatic contexts, in his *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Plato*, see Prince (1996), p. 65 & 174.

<sup>128</sup> See *DNB*.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas Blackwell, *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (London: n.p., 1735).

<sup>130</sup> Thomas Blackwell, *Letters Concerning Mythology* (London, n.p. 1748).

to him by name. In the introduction to his *Hymns of Orpheus* (1787), Taylor commented on Blackwell; he gives the title of Blackwell's book inaccurately:

The author of Letters on Mythology gives it as his opinion, that it is impossible to translate an ancient author so as to do justice to his meaning. If he had confined this sentiment to the beauties of the composition, it would doubtless have been just; but to extend it to the meaning of an author is to make truth and opinion partial and incommunicable. Every person, indeed, acquainted with the learned languages, must be conscious how much the beauty of an ancient author generally suffers in translation, though undertaken by men who have devoted the greatest part of their lives to the study of words alone.<sup>131</sup>

Taylor did not shy away from criticising or correcting other authors. In his publications, he frequently makes digressive comments where he takes other authors to task or defends his own position against the criticisms of others. An interesting aspect of Taylor's emergence and *modus operandi* as a public character was the way in which he attacked and responded to other authors and critics. In the last sentence of the above quotation, Taylor raises a theme that occurs in his writing frequently: the difference between the study of words and the study of things – this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Burton Feldman diagnosed that Blackwell was essentially a Platonist. Commenting on Blackwood's identification of the influence of Orpheus on Homer and the Greek epic tradition, Feldman wrote:

If poetry is conditioned by its age, the epic may no longer be possible. But Blackwell does not equate all poetry with mythology.

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<sup>131</sup> See, Pseudo Orpheus, trans. Thomas Taylor, *The Mystical Initiations; or, Hymns of Orpheus, Translated from the Original Greek: with a Preliminary Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus: By Thomas Taylor* (London: Printed for the Author, and sold by T. Payne and Son, at the Mews-gate; L Davis; Holborn; B. White and Son, Fleet Street; and G. Nichol, Strand, 1787), p. vii-viii, rpt. in TTS, V, 260, and in SW, p.164. Note: *The Mystical Initiations; or, Hymns of Orpheus*, shall hereafter be cited as *Hymns* (1787) in the notes.

Poetry may indeed be historically conditioned; but mythic poetry deals with what is ever unchanging and unchanged: "the primary *great* Gods" represent the "Natural Powers of the Universe." Blackwell reveals himself thus a Platonist, but a most balanced one. He warns against the "madness" that allegorists are prone to, like the Neoplatonists Iamblichus or Porphyry who fantasize about gaining magic or doing miracles, or those who, like Thomas Burnet,<sup>132</sup> madly systemize similarities. Unlike other Platonists, too, Blackwell does not see mythology finally as a kind of raw material: he rejects Varro<sup>133</sup> and Plutarch as too rationalistic and thus are missing the true heights of mythic wisdom.<sup>134</sup>

Taylor would have marked Blackwell out as an enemy, as he did anyone who denigrated the later Platonists as being wild, irrational or mad. Nonetheless, Blackwell was an important scholar who promoted and revived the scholarly importance of Greek literature and mythology in Britain in the late eighteenth century. Though Harper asserted that Blackwell proposed a full English translation of Plato's works I have not been able to verify this.

Robert Foulis (1707-1776) matriculated at Glasgow University in 1730 and studied moral philosophy under the Irish Presbyterian scholar Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), though there is no record of him taking a degree.<sup>135</sup> His brother Andrew Foulis (1712-1775), also matriculated at Glasgow University as a student of humanities and taught Greek, Latin and French at the university throughout his life.<sup>136</sup> In 1740, following extensive continental travels where the brothers collected books that they intended to re-sell in Scotland, Robert established himself as a bookseller in Glasgow

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<sup>132</sup> Thomas Burnet (1635-1715) who published *Telluris Theoria Sacra* (1681) which was translated into English as *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684-1689) due to the controversial interest it stirred. (My note).

<sup>133</sup> Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BCE), prolific Roman author. (My note).

<sup>134</sup> Burton Feldman and Robert D Richardson, Jr. *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860* (Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 102.

<sup>135</sup> See *DNB*.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*.

University. Robert was an entrepreneurial bookseller and printer. Andrew specialised as a printer. Together the Foulis brothers published 'some 586 editions together during their active partnership'.<sup>137</sup> The Foulis brothers published many Latin and Greek texts and translations, as Richard Ovenden has recorded: 'The range of classical authors represented in their list was in fact very wide – sixty three Latin and Greek authors, the majority of whom were published only once or twice, ranging from Euclid to Velleius Paterculus, but with many Greek texts with Latin translations and a Greek grammar.'<sup>138</sup> As cited above, the Foulis brothers published Henry Spens's translation of Plato's *Republic* in 1763. In 1750, Robert Foulis proposed to produce a Greek and Latin edition of the whole of Plato's works but the immense project never came to fruition.<sup>139</sup>

Besides the individuals discussed above, there were many other artists, both in the fields of literature and the visual arts, who laboured to understand ancient Greece and to make ancient Greece known. The Greek revival, the burgeoning interest in Greece and the desire of artists, writers and architects to understand and reflect the grandeur of Greek achievements and to sublimize their own work through interaction with it, was a massive influence on the arts in Britain, and in Europe, in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. The work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) had a monumental influence on the reception, and contemporary reproduction, of ancient Greek, and Greco-Roman, art in Europe and in Britain. Winckelmann's *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Wercke in der Mahlerey und Bildhaur-Kunst*

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> See George Fairfull-Smith, *The Foulis Press and the Foulis Academy. Glasgow's Eighteenth Century School of Art and Design* (Glasgow: Glasgow Art Index, 2001). See also George Fairfull-Smith, *Robert & Andrew Foulis, The Foulis Press, and Their Legacy* [Webpage: Glasgow University Library Special Collections Department] <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/foulis/books1.htm>

(1755), was translated into English as *The Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1765) by the Swiss-born painter and art critic Henry Fuseli (1741-1825). Fuseli also published, *Description of the Apollo Belvedere* in 1765, which was a translation of Winckelmann's *Beschreibung des Apollo im Belvedere* (1759).

Winckelmann was an astute critic but he was by no means a dry one. In his works, he communicated passionate excitement and deep admiration for the skill and artistry of the ancient Greeks, Winckelmann's admiration for Greece was contagious. Another major influence on the Greek revival was The Society of Dilettanti, founded in 1732. The Dilettanti (lovers of the fine arts) sponsored, or partially supported research towards, a small number of highly influential publications including the highly influential *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762), by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, which was reprinted throughout the Romantic period.<sup>140</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century, but especially from the mid-eighteenth century through to the early nineteenth century, at the same time as the Greek revival in the fine arts, there is evidence that Plato was an influence on British literary and philosophical culture, though he was not popular or fashionable. Plato was influential amongst specialist readers and scholars and his writings informed aspects of philosophical debate. Earlier on in the eighteenth century, Roman literature and art had been the dominant influence on British and European neoclassicism. From the mid-eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, the literature, visual arts and architectural accomplishments of the ancient Greeks, began to influence British and European culture and art: significantly. Taylor began to revive pagan Platonism at the same time as there was a Greek revival in the visual arts and in architectural

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<sup>140</sup> Note: For more on English and European philhellenism in the eighteenth century see Timothy Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism 1700-1824* (1982).

design. Kathleen Raine has written that although Taylor lived during the time of the Greek revival in the visual arts, 'one has the impression that Taylor was not himself much interested in the visual arts, he makes no mention of them, and his omission is striking when we consider the immense excitement such things were causing at the time'.<sup>141</sup> To a degree Raine was right. However, Taylor dedicated his translation of *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche*, excerpted from *The Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, to contemporary artists. A flyleaf, between the title-page and the introduction was inscribed:

TO THE  
PRESIDENT, COUNCIL, AND MEMBERS  
OF THE  
ROYAL ACADEMY,  
THE FOLLOWING  
TRANSLATION AND EXPLANATION  
OF THE  
FABLE  
OF  
CUPID AND PSYCHE,  
WHICH HAS BEEN A FAVOURITE SUBJECT  
OF THE MOST EMINENT ARTISTS,  
ANCIENT AND MODERN,  
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

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<sup>141</sup> *SW*, p. 12.

BY THOMAS TAYLOR.<sup>142</sup>

Raine was right that Taylor does not focus on the arts, for the most part, in his work. Raine stated that Taylor made 'no mention' of the visual arts, and this is true in the sense that he did not engage in critical discussion of them; however the inscription above demonstrates that Taylor made a formal attempt to introduce his work to the artistic community. The inscription itself is 'a mention' of the arts and indicates that Taylor considered that his interpretation of the fable could augment contemporary theories of art in the heat of the Greek revival. The inscription is important: it is evidence of Taylor's intention to influence the visual arts by means of his translation and the explanation of the fable in his introduction. Though *The Golden Ass* is properly recognised as a Roman work, and often as the only fully extant 'novel' to have survived from antiquity, it can be considered Greco-Roman in that Apuleius was a Platonist and philhellene. Taylor also delivered his lectures at Flaxman's house not only to Flaxman himself, who was at the heart of the Greek revival through his statuary and designs for Wedgwood, but also to other artists. Taylor certainly had some influence on artists, and a key figure in the Greek revival in Flaxman's case. What influence, if any, Taylor had on the productions of the artists he lectured or who may have read his *Cupid and Psyche*, is difficult to measure. Taylor certainly believed that Neoplatonic interpretations provided interpretative keys that could unlock the

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<sup>142</sup> Apuleius, *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche, Translated from the Latin of Apuleius: To which are added, A Poetical Paraphrase of the Speech of Diotima, in the Banquet of Plato, Four Hymns, &c. &c. With an Introduction in Which the Meaning of the Fable is Unfolded*, trans. Thomas Taylor, (London: Printed for the Author, and sold by Leigh and Sotheby, York Street, Covent Garden, 1795). [no page number] Note: 'Diotima's Speech' is reported in the speech of Socrates in the *Symposium*. Taylor arranges the speech into two cantos and is composed in heroic couplets. The four hymns are not translations but are original to Taylor, written in either heroic couplets or blank verse, and are addressed the anthropomorphic deities Venus, Love, and Neptune and the fourth hymn is addressed to a Neoplatonic abstraction of deity and is entitled: *To the Whole of a pure intellectual Essence, considered as forming one intelligible World*. There is also a poem by Taylor, *A Panegyric on the most eminent intellectual Philosophers of Antiquity* and a verse translation; *A Translation of a fragment of an ancient astrological Greek Poet, preserved by Stobaeus*. Hereafter, cited as *Cupid and Psyche*.

inherent symbolism of Greek mythology. Mythology, and its interpretation, provided artists, not only in the visual arts but in literature too, with a vast storehouse of raw material: the mythological narratives of the past could be utilised to mythologize the present.

Prince's work, in his *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment*, is not limited to a revaluation of the existence and relevancy of Platonism to the arts and philosophy in the eighteenth century: though such a revaluation forms a central part of his argument, other philosophical contexts such as Pyrrhonism (or neo-Pyrrhonism) are also considered. Throughout the eighteenth century, there were anti-Platonists who dismissed Platonism in all its forms in preference of the modern philosophy. Prince examines important cultural tensions that existed in the eighteenth century between Christian Neoplatonism, Pyrrhonism (i.e. the new scepticism and empiricism), and natural religion (or rational Christianity) within the arena of theology and philosophy, aesthetics and the novel. Both Zebrowski and Prince have demonstrated that the Platonic tradition, though it was not obviously in the forefront of eighteenth-century cultural and intellectual life, development and debate, was uniquely relevant to intellectual, cultural and even religious life. Taylor is best understood in the context of the Platonic tradition in Britain that had informed philosophical and theological debate and that was an important aspect of Rational Dissent.

Platonism in the eighteenth century was dominantly a Christianised system. Taylor emerged out of that already established tradition which had its own intellectual

currency, parameters, objectives and defences. Taylor revised and transformed the Platonic tradition in Britain by reinstating its pagan context, Taylor was truly a philosophical 'radical' in that he returned to the roots of the Platonic tradition and strove to understand Plato in purely Hellenic pagan terms. Taylor's importance in the history of British philosophy is that he introduced 'Pagan Neoplatonism' into England, which had cultural and religious implications. Taylor did not 'revive' pagan Neoplatonism in Britain as before his efforts Plato had never been revealed to the English-speaking world in a purely pagan context. Most of the later Platonists from Plotinus through to Damascius had never been translated into English before Taylor's efforts; indeed, as the eminent scholar of neoplatonism R.T. Wallis, who called Taylor 'remarkable,' correctly observed, some of Taylor's translations of the Neoplatonists are still the only ones available in English.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* [Forward and Bibliography by Lloyd P. Gerson] (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1972. [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.] rpt. 2002), p. 175.

### Chapter 3

#### **A Notable Disciple: Eighteenth-Century Pythagorean Cults, Sex, Initiations and the Nature of Taylor's Pagan Neoplatonism**

## 1. Revolutionary Discipleship

In 1787, Taylor published a paraphrased translation of Plotinus' *Concerning the Beautiful* and *The Mystical Initiations or Hymns of Orpheus*, and between 1788 and 1789, he published the two-volume translation of *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus on Euclid's Elements*.<sup>1</sup> In a final note to his translation of Plotinus' *Concerning the Beautiful*, his first important translation which further launched his career as a public character, Taylor addressed 'the Platonical part' of his readers; the entirety of the note is reproduced below due to its importance. In the note, Taylor sought to rouse his readers to participate in a philosophical revolution and it can be read as a 'mission statement' and a battle cry against which defined the whole of Taylor's literary career, he wrote:

But before I take my leave of Plotinus, I cannot refrain from addressing a few words to the Platonical part of my readers. If such, then, is the wisdom contained in the works of this philosopher, as we may conclude from the present specimen, is it fit so divine a treasure should be concealed in shameful oblivion? With respect to true philosophy, you must be sensible that all modern sects are in a state of barbarous ignorance: for Materialism and its attendant Sensuality, have darkened the eyes of the *many*, with mists of error; and are continually strengthening their corporeal tie. And can any thing more effectually dissipate this increasing gloom than discourses composed by so sublime a genius, pregnant with the most profound conceptions, and every where full of intellectual light? Can any thing so thoroughly destroy the phantom of false enthusiasm, as establishing the real object of the true? Let us then boldly enlist ourselves under the banners of Plotinus, and, by

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<sup>1</sup> Note: all of these titles were reprinted in 1792, the title of *Concerning the Beautiful* was changed to *An Essay on the Beautiful* but no revisions were made to the text itself, which demonstrates that Taylor was well read at the commencement of his career. Furthermore, all of the publications were reviewed, which brought Taylor to the attention of more readers.

his assistance, vigorously repel the encroachments of error, plunge her dominions into the abyss of forgetfulness, and disperse the darkness of her baneful night. For, indeed, there never was a period which required so much philosophic exertion; or such vehement contention from the lovers of Truth. On all sides, nothing of philosophy remains but the name, and this is become the subject of the vilest prostitution: since it is not only engrossed by the Naturalist, Chemist, and Anatomist, but is usurped by the Mechanic, in every trifling invention, and made subservient to the lucre of traffic and merchandize. There cannot surely be a greater proof of the degeneracy of the times than so unparalleled a degradation, and so barbarous a perversion of terms. For, the word philosophy, which implies the love of wisdom, is now become the ornament of folly. In the times of its inventor, and for many succeeding ages, it was expressive of modesty and worth; in our days, it is the badge of impudence and vain pretensions. It was formerly the symbol of the profound and contemplative genius; it is now the mark of the superficial and unthinking practitioner. It was once revered by kings, and clothed in the robes of nobility; it is now (according to its true acceptance) abandoned and despised, and ridiculed by the vilest Plebeian. Permit me, then, my friends, to address you in the words of Achilles to Hector.

*Rouse, then, your forces, this important hour,  
Collect your strength, and call forth all your pow'r.*

Since, to adopt the animated language of Neptune to the Greeks,  
*on dastards, dead to fame,  
I waste no anger, for they feel no shame;  
But you, the pride, the flower of all our host,  
My heart weeps blood, to see your glory lost.*

Nor deem the exhortation impertinent, and the danger groundless.

*For lo! the fated time, th' appointed shore;  
Hark! the gates burst, the brazen barriers rear.*

Impetuous ignorance is thundering at the bulwarks of philosophy, and her sacred retreats are in danger of being demolished, through our feeble resistance. Rise, then, my friends, and the victory will be ours. The foe is indeed numerous, but, at the same time, feeble: and the weapons of truth, in the hands of vigorous union, descend with irresistible force, and are fatal wherever they fall.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Plotinus, *Concerning The Beautiful, or, A Paraphrase Translation of the Greek of Plotinus*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Payne, White and Nicol, 1787), pp. 46-47. Note: rpt. in *TTS*, III, 19-20. *Ennead* (I: VI).

Taylor's use of militaristic language, mixed with the style of a biblical prophet, is distinctive: it certainly reveals the passion of an idealistic young man who had decided to pit himself against that which the majority of his peers saw as progress, namely Enlightenment science, philosophy and its industrial innovations. The name of Plotinus was evoked due to his significance as the inaugurator of Neoplatonism. Taylor's paraphrase translation, *Concerning the Beautiful*, was reviewed in *The Critical Review* in 1787 and then in *The Monthly Review* in 1788. The review in *The Monthly* was short, amounting to only two and a half pages. The reviewer, anonymous, identified that Taylor had a 'enthusiastic admiration for the Platonic school'.<sup>3</sup> The word 'enthusiasm' was not a complimentary term in the late eighteenth century. Popular experimental religious groups, such as the Methodists, were often criticised for being emotionally and excitably, rather than rationally, motivated. The reviewer responded to the battle cry, cited above with laughter, irritability and dismissiveness.<sup>4</sup> He also commented on Taylor's accomplishment as a translator:

We have carefully compared it [the translation] with the original, and cannot refuse our testimony to its *general* fidelity, and our approbation of *some* passages, in which the sense of an author, whose style is harsh, and whose language is obscure, is skilfully preserved, in a paraphrase, at once perspicuous and sublime. This ought to convince Mr. Taylor, that we are neither insensible to the real value of his author's work, nor blind to the merits of the translation.<sup>5</sup>

This was praise indeed for a new translator. Plotinus' Greek is notoriously difficult to read and even more difficult to translate fluently and intelligibly into English. The reviewer did not question Taylor's ability as a capable Greek scholar, nor did he accuse him of relying on Latin translation in order to produce his Englished edition of Plotinus,

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<sup>3</sup> Anon. 'Concerning the Beautiful: or, a paraphrased Translation from the Greek of Plotinus, Ennead I, Book VI. By Thomas Taylor. 8vo. 1s. 6d. Payne, &c. 1787' in *The Monthly Review*, 79 (1788), p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

which was to be the case in future years. However, the reviewer responded defensively to Taylor's criticism of late eighteenth-century culture:

And yet, we cannot absolutely condemn the present age for bestowing on natural and experimental philosophy some part of the attention which Mr. T. would confine exclusively to the later Platonists.<sup>6</sup>

Taylor had caught the attention of the reviewers but they were not his target audience. The reviewer of *Concerning the Beautiful* had a classical education and was adept enough with Greek to compare the translation with the original. Taylor primarily translated for those who had no Greek or Latin. He also published to proselytise. He was seeking converts to his restored version of pagan Neoplatonic religion and his restored version of the 'Platonic Theology'.

One reader who responded to Taylor's summons to 'enlist beneath the banners of Plotinus' was the minor French nobleman, Godefroi Izarn, Marquis de Valadi (1766-1793).<sup>7</sup> Valadi was described in *Biographical Anecdotes* as a studious youth who, 'imbibed from the ancient authors a love of philosophy, an ardent passion for liberty, and a romantic turn of mind'.<sup>8</sup> In the eighteenth century 'romantic' meant nostalgia and conveyed a quixotic sense of looking at the past as being better than the present. The Marquis made an excursion to Geneva in 1787, 'and there he chanced to meet with an

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Note: for a detailed biography of the marquis see 'Valadi' in *Biographical Anecdotes* (1797), pp. 150-163. The full name of the marquis was Jacques Godefroi Charles Sebastien Xavier Jean Joseph de Fraissinet Marquis d' Izarn de Valadi. In 1789 he returned to France to write about the States-General (*états généraux*) and the Revolution. Fearing persecution because of his close ties with the Girondists, he fled Paris but was captured and guillotined on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1793.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-151.

English Pythagorean, well known by the name of *Black Pigot*, who confined himself entirely to vegetable fare'.<sup>9</sup> Valadi adopted vegetarianism, for several years, due to the influence of Pigot. The English Pythagorean who was called 'Black Pigot' was Robert Pigott (1736-1794). Pigott's presence in Geneva is accounted for in the *Dictionary of National Biography*:

In 1776, imagining that the outbreak of the American War of Independence heralded England's imminent ruin, he sold his Chetwynd and Chesterton estates, worth £9000 a year, and retired to the continent, where he made the acquaintance of Voltaire, Brissot, and Benjamin Franklin. He lived mostly at Geneva but paid occasional visits to England. While on the continent he became a zealous Pythagorean or vegetarian, and was an advocate of the benefits to be had from James Graham's 'celestial bed', displayed in London in 1780.<sup>10</sup>

Valadi was attracted to unusual characters.

The cultural history of eighteenth-century Britain is often perceived as one in which supernaturalism and all forms of quasi-religious and quasi-scientific quackery were marginalised, impotent and historically irrelevant. The reputation of Newton is perhaps the clearest case of such suppression: knowledge of his dedication to alchemy and the related 'old-world sciences' such as astrology, and of his unorthodox theological speculations was made public sporadically, between the late nineteenth century and the nineteen-sixties. Of course, Newton was no quack and his experiments and enquiries in such matters were only one aspect of his rich intellectual

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154

<sup>10</sup> Alger, J. G. 'Pigott, Robert (1736-1794),' Rev. Stephen M. Lee, in *DNB*. Note: Pigott was a nephew of the poet John Dryden. Pigott is identified as 'Black Pigot' and also as 'the Black Prince' in, James M. Osborn, *John Dryden: Some Biographical Facts and Problems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 244

life. Many educated, artistic and intellectually respectable members of late eighteenth – century polite society either dabbled in, or were fervently committed to, mystical, quasi-religious and quasi-scientific interests, inventions and philosophical systems.

Dr. James Graham's (1745-1794) 'celestial bed' was an invention, founded on electromagnetic, mesmerist and Cabbalistic principles, it was said to re-vitalise couples who copulated on it. Marsha Keith Schuchard wrote that, in his grandiose Temple, located in the fashionable Adelphi Buildings in London, the quack:

placed in the Holy of Holies a spectacular 'Celestial Bed', twelve feet by nine feet, which was infused with electromagnetic currents, perfumed with Oriental incense, rhythmically rocked to ethereal music, and decorated with paintings and sculptures of Cupid, Psyche and Hymen. For a mere £50 a night, a couple could prolong their sexual pleasure, turning the 'critical moment' into the 'critical hour' and could 'partake of the heavenly joys it affords by causing immediate conception'.<sup>11</sup>

During 1784 – 1785 when Maria Cosway was attending Thomas Taylor's twelve lectures on Platonism in John Flaxman's house, she and her husband Richard were reputedly enjoying the 'Celestial Bed'. This was due to the erratic fortunes of Dr. Graham who had been forced to move from the Adelphi to the central apartment of Schomberg House in Pall Mall, which the Cosways took over in 1784 after Graham had been ejected from the premises due to debt. The Cosways inherited the bed when they took the apartment.<sup>12</sup>

Valadi visited England in 1788. In London, he sought out 'a gentleman of eminence in the literary world'. It is not known whom he visited, but the reasons for his visit

<sup>11</sup> Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Why Mrs. Blake Cried*, p. 173.

<sup>12</sup> See, *ibid.*, p. 181. See also, Stephen Lloyd, 'Cosway, Richard (*bap.* 1742, *d.* 1821)' in *DNB*.

were of a sectarian nature. In *Biographical Anecdotes* it states that he visited the anonymous literary gentleman, 'to propose to him the station of chief of the Pythagorean sect'; as before mentioned, Pythagoreanism was, and still often is, a term that signifies vegetarianism.<sup>13</sup> However, Valadi seems to have been suggesting more than that the gentleman become the 'chief vegetarian', and the term Pythagorean is used in conjunction with the word 'sect'. Valadi is reported to have conveyed, to the gentleman, that, 'Followers, he assured him, he could not fail to find in every quarter of the globe'.<sup>14</sup> The gentleman turned down Valadi's offer. Ronald Hutton has written that, 'One of the most remarkable aspects of eighteenth-century European culture, and till recently one of the least studied, was a widespread growth of secret societies, into which members were initiated upon an oath to observe confidentiality of proceedings, and which contained a strong ceremonial element.'<sup>15</sup> Freemasonry was a strong influence on such secret societies, particularly in its more Rosicrucian and Cabbalistic forms, such as Count Alessandro Cagliostro's (1743-1795) Egyptian Rite, which developed intensely in the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Valadi was familiar with both the language and practices of secret, or occult, societies; he was also, evidently, interested in founding, or co-founding, some sort of Pythagorean philosophico-religious movement. When he was turned down by the man he had first chosen, he searched for an alternative collaborator. He heard that Taylor was 'considered as the principal Pythagorean in England' and immediately 'purchased his works', which in 1788

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<sup>13</sup> *Biographical Anecdotes*, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> See, Iain McCalman, *The Last Alchemist: Count Cagliostro, Master of Magic in the Age of Reason* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), Christopher McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), and Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Restoring The Temple of Vision: Cabbalistic Freemasonry and Stuart Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

could only have consisted of Plotinus' *Concerning the Beautiful, The Hymns of Orpheus*, and perhaps the first volume of *Proclus on Euclid's Elements*.

Valadi wrote an unusual letter to Taylor, portions of which were re-produced in *Biographical Anecdotes* in which the letter is termed a 'scroll', which must have been supplied to the editor, possibly Richard Phillips, by Taylor himself.<sup>17</sup> The excerpts from the letter are of considerable length; as I have not seen them fully reproduced anywhere else, other than in the scarcely available *Biographical Anecdotes*, and an article, *The Survival of Paganism*, from Fraser's Magazine<sup>18</sup> I provide a full transcript of the letter below and provide some annotations to the more obscure references:

TO THOMAS TAYLOR, BETTER NAMED LYSIS,<sup>19</sup> G. IZARN  
VALADI, OF LATE FRENCH MARQUIS  
AND JANISSAIRE.<sup>20</sup>

*Sendeth Joy and Honour. 12 Xbre. 1788, vulg. æra.*

"Oh Thomas Taylor! mayest thou welcome a brother Pythagorean, led by a Saviour God to thy divine school! I have loved wisdom ever since a child, and have found the greatest impediments, and have been

<sup>17</sup> The letter appears in *Biographical Anecdotes*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>18</sup> Anon., 'The Survival of Paganism' in *Fraser's Magazine* (1875), Vol. XII, p. 647. See also *SW*, p. 127, n. 7. I have not been able to trace the article by Louise Schutz Boas on Valadi which Raine and Harper stated was 'forthcoming'. However, the note in *SW* gives some good background information on the marquis. Also, Raine and Harper state, 'There is a biographical sketch of J.G.C.S.X.J.J. Izarn de Valady in the *Lives of the Remarkable Characters of the French Revolution*' which would seem to be another edition of *Biographical Anecdotes* (1797).

<sup>19</sup> Note: this could be an eccentric term for 'friend' as in Plato's *Lysis* (dialogue on friendship). However, it is more likely to be a reference to Lysis of Tarentum (d. ca. 390 BC) the Pythagorean. Escaping the holocaust at the Pythagorean commune at Crotona in southern Italy, he fled to Thebes. Lysis conserved and transmitted Pythagoras' doctrines through teaching and writing, his *Letter to Hipparchus* was famous in antiquity, and the *Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, which influenced the Neoplatonists, were often attributed to him.

<sup>20</sup> Note: I have given Janissaire in accordance with the (*Errata*) corrections on a flyleaf facing the preface. In *Biographical Anecdotes* (p. 156), the confusing term 'Tanissaire' was printed instead of 'Janissaire', which is a figurative expression referring to Valadi's status as an elite soldier or janissary; it can also connote the slavishness of military employment.

forced to great struggles, before I could clear my way to the source of it; for I was born in a more barbarous country than ever was Hlyria of old. My family never favored my inclination to study; and I have been involved in so many cares and troubles, that it cannot be without the intervention of some friendly Deity, and I have escaped the vile rust of barbarism, and its attendant meanness of soul. My good fortune was, that I met, eighteen months ago, an English gentleman of the name of Pigott,<sup>21</sup> who is a Pythagorean Philosopher,<sup>22</sup> and who easily converted me to the diet and manners agreeable to that most rich and beneficent Deity---Mother Earth; to that heaven-inspired change I owe perfect health and tranquillity of mind, both of which I had long been deprived of. Also my own oath has acceded to the eternal oath, (which mentions the golden commentator on G.V.)<sup>23</sup> and I would more cheerfully depart from my present habitation on this Themis-forsaken earth, than defile myself evermore with animal food, stolen either on earth, in air, or water.<sup>24</sup>

“I met with thy works but two days past. O divine man! a prodigy of this iron age!<sup>25</sup> who wouldst ever have thought thou couldst exist among us in our shape!<sup>26</sup> I would have gone to *China* for a man endowed with the tenth part of thy light! Oh, grant me to see thee, to be lustrated<sup>27</sup> and initiated by thee! What joy, if, like *Proclus* [Proclus’s] *Leonas*,<sup>28</sup> to thee I could be a domestic! who feel living in myself the soul of *Leonidas*.<sup>29</sup>

“My determination was to go and live in North America, from love of Liberty, and there to keep a school of Temperance and Love, in order to preserve so many men from the prevailing disgraceful vices of brutal intemperance and selfish cupidity.---There, in progress of time, if those vices natural to a commercial country are found to thwart most of the blessings of Liberty, the happy select ones, taught better discipline, may form a society by themselves, such a one as the gods

<sup>21</sup> Note: Valadi gives the correct spelling of Pigott’s name.

<sup>22</sup> Note: this suggests more than the practice of vegetarianism.

<sup>23</sup> Note: G.V. must refer to the *Golden Verses of Pythagoras*.

<sup>24</sup> Note: ‘Themis-forsaken’ Themis the Titaness was the goddess of justice and order.

<sup>25</sup> Note: for the ‘iron age’ age see Plato’s *Republic* – 415a–415d where precious metals are used metaphorically to describe the constitution and characteristics of various types of souls. Plato was influenced by Hesiod’s poem *Works and Days* and his allotment of metals to metaphorically describe five stages of human evolution. This theme influenced Thomas Love Peacock’s essay *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820) and Shelley’s ingenious response in his essay *A Defence of Poetry* (1821).

<sup>26</sup> Note: This hyperbole refers to the Neoplatonic belief that certain classes of souls, considered divine, termed ‘heroes’, would incarnate in order to teach or benefit humanity. Pythagoras; Orpheus; Plato; Plotinus &co. were considered to be souls of this class.

<sup>27</sup> Note: in relation to light, just before mentioned, he is requesting that Taylor ‘illuminate’ him. This could also refer to a ceremonial washing, or anointing, with wine or some other liquid, or oil, in an initiation ceremony.

<sup>28</sup> Note: some punctuation seems to be wanting here. As a youth in Alexandria, Proclus was taught by a rhetorician named Leonas who welcomed him into his home and cared for him as if he were a member of his own family. Here, Valadi is asking if he can be a domestic in Taylor’s house; he desired to lodge with him and offer services in payment.

<sup>29</sup> Note: A reference to reincarnation? Leonidas I was a great Spartan King and general.

would favor and visit lovingly, which would preserve true knowledge, and be a seminary and an asylum for the lovers of it.

“There I would devoutly erect altars to my favourite gods--- Dioscari,<sup>30</sup> Hector, Aristomenes, Messen,<sup>31</sup> Pan, Orpheus, Epaminondas,<sup>32</sup> Pythagoras, Plato, Timoleon,<sup>33</sup> Marcus Brutus, and his Portia; and, above all, Phoebus,<sup>34</sup> the god of my hero Julian,<sup>35</sup> and the father of that holy, gentle *Commonwealth* of the Peruvians,<sup>36</sup> to which *nullus ultor*<sup>37</sup> has, as yet, been suscited.<sup>38</sup>

“Music and Gymnastic are sciences necessary *for a teacher to possess*---(what deep and various sense these two words contain!) and I am a stranger to both! Oh Gods! who gave me the thought and the spirit, give me the means, for all things are from you.

“Thomas Taylor, be thou their instrument to convey into my mind knowledge, truth, and prudence! Do thou love and help me. I will go to thee to-morrow morning.

“P.S. May I look to thee, endowed with an *ancient* and no modern enthusiasm!<sup>39</sup>

Gracchus Crotoneios.’’<sup>40</sup>

An interesting feature of this bizarre letter is that Valadi was evidently already a pantheist before he read, or, as the letter reveals, perused Taylor’s books. After

<sup>30</sup> Note: The ‘Dioscuri’ i.e. Castor and Pollux. The odd spelling (above) is probably a printing error.

<sup>31</sup> Note: ‘Messene’ daughter of Triopas King of Argos, who roused troops to battle and received divine honours after her death.

<sup>32</sup> Note: Theban general, war strategist and statesman.

<sup>33</sup> Note: Corinthian general, also known as ‘the friend of fortune’.

<sup>34</sup> Note: A name of Apollo, meaning ‘the Bright one’.

<sup>35</sup> Note: the pagan emperor Julian. Julian primarily worshipped Apollo (and Mithras) as a solar deity, hence Valadi stating that ‘Phoebus’ was Julian’s favourite god. Taylor translated Julian’s *Oration to the Sovereign Sun* (1793).

<sup>36</sup> Note: The ancient Peruvians were known as sun-worshippers.

<sup>37</sup> Note: ‘nullus ultor’ means ‘no avenger’ or ‘no destroyer’.

<sup>38</sup> Note: ‘suscited’ must mean ‘raised up’ and be derived from the obsolete ‘suscite’ which means to raise up.

<sup>39</sup> Note: The term ‘enthusiasm’ had negative connotations in the eighteenth century and was connected to overly-emotional religious experience; the Methodists were often criticised for ‘enthusiasm’ in their worship.

<sup>40</sup> Note: Possibly Valadi’s initiatory pseudonym, which might mean Gracchus from Crotona or Gracchus the Pythagorean? Taking another name at the moment of initiation was common practice within ‘secret societies’ and in some religious cults. The Roman Catholic practice of adopting a new name when holy orders were assumed, such as in the case of monks and nuns, is an example of the practice.

hearing of Taylor's reputation by word of mouth, and then poring over his books over a two-day period, the marquis felt confident enough to approach him as a fellow Pythagorean. The Pythagoreanism that Valadi practised was evidently much more than adhering to a vegetarian diet; it involved religious belief and the ritual expression of that belief. The marquis approached Taylor as a pagan pantheist. Valadi's letter demonstrates that pagan pantheism was being religiously practised in Europe, if only by a few enthusiasts, before Taylor promoted pagan Pantheism as a religion in England. It has to be remembered that a revival of pagan imagery and Greco-Roman rituals in the form of pageants went hand in hand with French radicalism and the stirrings, occurrence and aftermath of the French Revolution: the ultimate example of which must be the transformation of Notre-Dame Cathedral into the Temple of Reason in 1793. In England in 1819, the radical reformer, Henry Hunt (1773–1835), popularly known as 'Orator Hunt', borrowed from the neoclassical iconography of the French Revolution and adopted greenery and laurels, along with the customary display of the *Bonnet Rouge* in political processions and meetings.<sup>41</sup> However, the sentiments expressed in Valadi's letter appear to be sincerely religious rather than displaying neoclassically dressed radicalism. Valadi must have had experience of some kind of Masonic lodge-work, or been involved in some sort of secret society to have been able to write such a heavily 'encoded' letter. Taylor, was called 'the apostle of Paganism' in the *Analytical Review* of his *Sallust on the Gods and the World* (1793), a phrase that was repeated, presumably with Taylor's authorisation, in *Mr. Taylor the Platonist*.<sup>42</sup> Valadi certainly approached Taylor as 'the apostle of Paganism'. What is more, Taylor received him and Valadi lodged with the Taylors for

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<sup>41</sup> See, Nicholas Roe, 'John Keats's "Green World": Politics, Nature and the Poems' in *The Challenge of Keats: Bicentenary Essays 1795-1995*, *DQR Studies in Literature* 28 (1995), p. 65

<sup>42</sup> *SW*, p. 105.

'three or four months'.<sup>43</sup> From December 1788 until March or April 1789, Taylor had a live-in disciple.

In *Mr. Taylor, the Platonist* the relationship between Taylor and Valadi is presented as having been less than ideal. Valadi identified with the god Mars, indeed, 'the Marquis seemed naturally inclined to war'<sup>44</sup> and he sought a Venus:

The Marquis, who professed himself a rigid Pythagorean, under the notion that a community of possessions in *every thing* was perfectly Pythagoric, often conversed with Mr. T. on this subject, and once asked him if he did not think it consistent with Pythagorean friendship for the wife of the married to be shared by the unmarried friend? The *hint was broad*, but Mr. T. thought proper not to take it; on the contrary, he severely reprobated the idea, as entirely foreign from that purity of conduct which forms the basis of the Pythagoric and Platonic philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

William Hazlitt, who met Taylor a few times at their mutual friend George Dyer's chambers, wrote about Taylor in a footnote to his essay *On Reading New Books* (1825) where he made the following gossipy comment:

Mr. Taylor (the Platonist, as he was called) was a singular instance of a person in our time believing in the heathen mythology. He had a very beautiful wife. An impudent Frenchman, who came over to London, and lodged in the same house, made love to her, by pretending to worship her as Venus, and so thought to turn the tables on our philosopher.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116-117.

<sup>46</sup> William Hazlitt, 'On Reading New Books' in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, introd. Tom Paulin, 9 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), IX, p. 164. n.

It is understandable that Taylor may not have divulged the whole story about Valadi and his wife in *Mr. Taylor the Platonist*. Alternatively, Hazlitt could have simply been passing on unfounded gossip. The poet Robert Southey said that 'Taylor the pagan's wife caught her husband's paganism'.<sup>47</sup> Taylor believed in teaching Platonism to women, as well as to men. He translated with female as well as male readers in mind. In *The History of the Resoration of the Platonic Theology* Taylor wrote that

The Platonic philosophy, indeed, as it necessarily combines truth with elegance, is naturally adapted to captivate and allure the female mind, in which the love of symmetry and gracefulness is generally predominant. Hence, in every age, except the present, many illustrious females have adorned the Platonic schools, by the brilliancy of their genius, and an uncommon vigour and profundity of thought. This too, would doubtless be the case in our own country, if all the works of Plato and his disciples were but once faithfully and elegantly translated into English: but till the obstacle of Greek is removed, we may in vain expect thinking females, and I had almost said Platonic philosophers among men.<sup>48</sup>

Taylor's attitude towards the education of women was progressive for the time, although he was more conventional when he insinuated that women could not learn Greek. However, in a footnote given with the phrase, 'we may not expect thinking females', Taylor wrote that

I have, however, the happiness of being intimate with a lady, who is a noble exception to this remark; and is both an excellent Greek scholar, and skilled in the Platonic philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *NWB*, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> *The Commentaries*, II, p. 225.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

This was probably a reference to his wife, Mary; if so, Taylor and his wife could have worked as a team. Perhaps Taylor's productions were, in part, up until Mary's death in 1809, the work of 'Mr. and Mrs. Taylor the Platonists'.

An interesting aspect of Hazlitt's reportage is that Valadi is said to have approached Mary 'by pretending to worship her as Venus'. When Hazlitt wrote that Valadi made love to Mary, he was not necessarily stating that they had sex: 'making love' was a common term for courtship rather than consummation at the time. However, Valadi emerged onto the London scene from a masonically inspired, quasi-Pythagorean, ritualistic background. The enactment of ritual sex acts was not unknown in the late eighteenth century. There were those who attempted to reconstruct ancient mystery-cults, by means of dramatic ritual enactments of supposed Greco-Roman and Egyptian ancient rituals, which were often reinterpreted in Cabbalistic contexts and influenced by mystical Masonry.<sup>50</sup> The *hieros gamos* or 'sacred marriage' was a deeply revered cultic practice, which was widespread in classical antiquity.<sup>51</sup>

Participants, would assume, and act out, the characteristics of gods or goddesses, in an attempted to experience the divine – through sexual ecstasy, and propitiate benefits for themselves and the wider community such as fertility of crops, livestock and humans, through ritualised sexual intercourse.

Taylor was morally conservative and when he translated bawdy passages from ancient authors he did so with tact and delicacy, while still attempting to be faithful to the original meaning. In 1798, when Taylor had recently been appointed as assistant

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<sup>50</sup> See, Schuchard, *Why Mrs. Blake Cried*, pp. 179-189; 218-248.

<sup>51</sup> See Taylor's reference to the *hieros gamos* in: *The Commentaries*, II, p. 230.

secretary at the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, his friend George Cumberland produced a novel called *The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar: An African Tale*. Marsha Keith Schuchard wrote that in his novel Cumberland had tried to echo Blake by linking 'sexual liberation to political liberation'.<sup>52</sup> Cumberland had already praised the Greeks, in his *Thoughts on Outline* (1796), for their unashamed displays of nakedness, especially the 'masculine parts', in their statuary.<sup>53</sup> Cumberland never published his erotic novel *The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar*, after sending copies of it to select friends who discouraged him from publishing it due to its explicit nature and the censorious stance of the government at the time.<sup>54</sup> Cumberland sent Taylor copies of his books, *Thoughts on Outline* and *The Captive of the Castle of Sennaar*, soliciting Taylor's opinion concerning the publishability of the *African Tale*. Taylor responded, writing:

I thank you for the present of the two books. With respect to your novel, since you desire me to give you my opinion freely of its merit, I must own that I think it more entertaining than instructive, more ingenious than moral. I will not, indeed, I cannot suppose that you would undertake to defend lasciviousness publicly & yet to me it appears that it is as much patronized by the conduct of your Sophians,<sup>55</sup> as by the works of Mrs Woolstoncraft [sic]. You will doubtless excuse the freedom of this Opinion, when you consider that as I am a professed Platonist, love is with me *true* only in proportion as it is *pure*; or in other words in proportion as it rises above the gratification of our brutal part.<sup>56</sup> Hence, I consider the delight which lovers experience when in poetic language they drink large draughts of love thro' the eyes as far superior to that arising from copulation, because the union is more incorporeal; since in the former case there is

<sup>52</sup> Schuchard, *Why Mrs. Blake Cried*, p. 276.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275. Note: Cumberland employed Blake to engrave sexually explicit illustrations of Greco-Roman statuary for his *Thoughts on Outline* (1796).

<sup>54</sup> See, *ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>55</sup> See, *ibid.* Note: 'Sophians' in Cumberland's novel there is a description of a fictional island of Sophis. The Sophians: the natives of Sophis, practice a type of Hermetic and Cabbalistic natural religion devoted to the female emanation of the Godhead. Cumberland borrowed from the Cabbalistic concepts of *Sophia*, the female Wisdom of God, which is linked to *The Shekhinah* the female glory of God.

<sup>56</sup> Note: 'brutal part' means animalistic or lustful, animals were commonly called 'brutes' in the eighteenth century.

a conjunction of the pure *image* of the lover with that of the beloved, but in the other there is nothing, but a union of *bodies*. This notion will doubtless appear to you as eccentric as it is novel – I wish, however, you may at length become such a convert to it as I am.<sup>57</sup>

Taylor was not celibate, as his fathering of several children demonstrates, though the letter to Cumberland suggests that as ‘a Platonist’ he practised a kind of mental technique whereby he supposed he could transcend lust and brutishness during, and independently of, copulation by spiritualizing the sex act and sexual desire. Using sex as an opportunity to enter into ecstasy of an intellectual, intelligible or mystical nature, that transcended physical pleasure and carnal gratification, was also a goal of other eighteenth-century mystics such as Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772).<sup>58</sup>

## 2. Urban Myth, the Survival of Paganism and Phronimus the Muse

An aspect of Taylor’s emergence and establishment as a public character is that unfounded myths grew up around him, particularly in the Victorian period. Valadi had visited London, and eventually sought Taylor out, in order to establish some kind of a Pythagorean cult, and eventually perhaps even a commune. Taylor ultimately rejected Valadi, and presumably his proposals. This is understandable in light of Valadi’s ideas concerning communal sharing of *every thing*. However, Taylor had his own ambitions concerning the revival of Neoplatonic mysticism that included religious

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in, Geoffrey Keynes, *Blake Studies: Essays on his life and work* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [Second Edition] 1971), pp. 440-421.

<sup>58</sup> See, Schuchard, *Why Mrs. Blake Cried*, pp. 69-83.

observation, pantheistic worship and ritualism. The writer of *The Survival of Paganism* wrote that

It was one of the dreams of his life to establish in London a Pantheon, in which the worship of the deities should be performed in an appropriate and decorous manner. Failing this – for the patrons who paid for the printing of his books were scarcely mad enough for this scheme – he turned one of his rooms at Walworth into a sacrarium, in which at times he offered up sacrifices to his favourite gods.

There is even a tradition that one night, when the fury of the French Revolution was at its height, the sleepy old Charlies<sup>59</sup> who guarded the City were astonished by the appearance of a procession of priests, with Taylor at their head as Arch-flamen,<sup>60</sup> who performed the sacred rites of lustration in front of the Old Exchange, formally receiving once more the sleeping city into the dominion of the king of the gods.<sup>61</sup>

Sacrificing bulls or rams to Jupiter in his parlour and pouring libations out to statues of gods and goddesses in his back garden, were all eccentricities attributed to Taylor.<sup>62</sup> The overt gothic and melodramatic, ambiance of the tale of the 'Arch-flamen' at the Old Exchange and the sensationalist nature of stories of domestic sacrifices are undoubtedly exaggerations. However, Taylor did practise pagan ritual observances and perform acts of worship to the divinities he believed in. In 1788 he published the first volume of *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*; then the second, and final, volume of

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<sup>59</sup> Note: 'The name formerly given to a night-watchman.[The origin is unknown: some have conjectured 'because Charles I in 1640 extended and improved the watch system in the metropolis'.]' *OED*.

<sup>60</sup> Note: Latin for 'Priest'. 'The *L. flamen* and *archiflamen* were used by Geoffrey of Monmouth to denote the two grades of alleged sacerdotal functionaries in heathen Britain, whose place was taken on the conversion of the island by bishops and archbishops.' *OED*.

<sup>61</sup> Anon. 'The Survival of Paganism' (1875), 646–647. Note: a book called *A New System of Religion* (1791) is attributed to Taylor in this article, see p. 643. Taylor never claimed this work as his own and so the attribution should be questioned. I have never seen a copy so I am unable to comment further.

<sup>62</sup> See, J.S Noldweitt, 'Thomas Taylor', in *N&Q* 1864; s3-VI: 217.

the set was published in 1789. In the first volume, Taylor provided a translation of *The Life of Proclus* by his disciple Marinus.<sup>63</sup>

Proclus was presented by Marinus as honouring the divinities and sacred festivals, not only of the Greeks but also of the Romans, specifically festivals honouring the 'Mother of the Gods' (this would probably have been Cybele) and of the Phrygians and of the Egyptians.<sup>64</sup> This was not unusual in the climate of religious syncretism in which he lived during the decline of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, the *Chaldean Oracles*, themselves of Oriental rather than Greek origin, were an important influence on the Neoplatonists, particularly Iamblichus and Proclus. The *Oracles*, which were first translated by Taylor in 1797 and reissued in 1817-1818 with additions and corrections, constituted a guide to Neoplatonic religious practice and philosophical preparedness for evocatory ritual.<sup>65</sup> The *Oracles* instructed that: 'You should never change barbarous names. For in every nation there are names of divine origin, and which possess an ineffable power in mystic operations.'<sup>66</sup> Another reflection of such religious syncretism is the appearance of the great 'Goddess' to Lucius in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* where she reveals herself as:

I who am Nature, the parent of things, the queen of all the elements, the primordial progeny of ages, the supreme of Divinities, the sovereign of the spirits of the dead, the first of celestials, and the uniform resemblance of Gods and Goddesses.<sup>67</sup>

(trans. Thomas Taylor)

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<sup>63</sup> *The Commentaries*, I, 1-33.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> See, 'Chaldean Oracles', trans. and ed. Thomas Taylor, in *The Monthly Magazine* [Supplementary number] XIX, Vol. 3 (June 1797), and 'Collection of the Chaldean Oracles', trans. and ed. Thomas Taylor, in *The Classical Journal* XVI (Sept. and Dec. 1817), 333-344, and *ibid.*, Vol. XVII (Mar. and June 1818), 128-133, 243-264. Note: rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 1-57.

<sup>66</sup> *TTS*, VII, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> *TTS*, XIV, p. 202.

The goddess stated that she was known by many names in many nations but that ultimately 'the Egyptians skilled in ancient learning, worshipping me by ceremonies perfectly appropriate, call me by my true name, queen Isis'.<sup>68</sup> Ritual observances were performed by Proclus in conjunction with 'lunar appearances', such as when the moon was new, full and waning.<sup>69</sup> He is said to have 'purified himself every month with sacred rites' and 'employed himself in continual prayers, hymns and the like'.<sup>70</sup> In a footnote relating to the description of Proclus' religious observances, Taylor confessed that:

The religion of the Heathens, has indeed, for many centuries, been the object of ridicule and contempt: yet the author of the present work is not ashamed to own, that he is a perfect convert to it in every particular, so far as it was understood and illustrated by the Pythagoric and Platonic philosophers.<sup>71</sup>

As a 'complete convert' to the pagan religion, 'in every particular' exemplified by Proclus, and the context in which the above footnote was given, reveal that Taylor was a ritualist. However, it is doubtful that his rituals were as excessive as the Victorians, cited above, liked to think. Like Proclus Taylor certainly practised his pagan religion through meditation, contemplation and adoration of the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece. Part of his devotional practice involved the composition of many hymns addressed to classical divinities. For example, his translation of Sallust *On the Gods and the World* (1793) contained translations of five hymns of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>69</sup> *The Commentaries*, I, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Proclus, *To the Sun*, *To the Muses*, two hymns to Venus, and *To Minerva*. The hymns are given first in Greek, with accents and breathings omitted, and English translations follow.<sup>72</sup> Taylor then gives five of his own hymns, *To Ceres*, *To Jupiter*, *To Minerva*, *To Vesta* and *To Mercury*.<sup>73</sup> Taylor's hymns, both translations and those original to him, are most often composed in heroic couplets or sometimes in blank verse. In 1923, Franklin P. Johnson, the son of Thomas M. Johnson, discovered a small book, bound in blue boards, which contained fifty-seven pages of holograph manuscript in Taylor's hand. The first page of the book bore the title: *Hymns and Prayers / by / Thomas Taylor*. The hymns in the book were never published by Taylor and are of an intensely personal and devotional nature. In one section, the hymns are addressed to abstracted, rather than anthropomorphised, conceptions of deity such as *To the Order of Gods Denominated Intelligible & at the Same Time Intellectual*.<sup>74</sup>

Taylor's hymns and other flourishes of poetic writing that were conjoined with his translations and other publications, such as *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1805) and *Collectanea; or Collections, Consisting of Miscellanies Inserted by Thomas Taylor in the European and Monthly Magazines, with an Appendix Containing Some Hymns by the Same Author Never Before Printed* (1806), would be considered as minor poems. However, Taylor's poems were written in the 'Romantic period' and Hellenic subject matter is revived and considered in contemporary religious, rather than political or primarily aesthetic, terms in them. A closer examination of Taylor's, explicitly Neoplatonic, poetry might lead to a richer critical contextualisation of the

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<sup>72</sup> Sallust, Demophilus and Proclus, *Sallust on the Gods and the World; and the Pythagoric Sentences of Demophilus, Translated from the Greek; and Five Hymns by Proclus, in the Original Greek, with a Poetical Version. To Which are Added Five Hymns by the Translator*. trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Printed for Edward Jeffry, Pall Mall, 1793), pp. 119-150. Note: hereafter cited as *Gods and the World*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-169.

<sup>74</sup> See, Franklin P. Johnson, 'Neo-Platonic Hymns by Thomas Taylor', in *Philological Quarterly* VIII (April 1929), pp. 145-156.

phenomenon of 'Romantic Neoplatonism' where major poets such as Blake, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats expressed degrees of Platonism and the Platonic interpretation of Hellenic myth and symbolism in their poetry.<sup>75</sup> Harper wrote, 'Coventry Patmore owned the *Five Books of Plotinus* and thought enough of Taylor's poetry to compare one of Keats's poems unfavorably with one of Taylor's'.<sup>76</sup>

Taylor claimed to have a muse who was, significantly, not one of the chorus of nine led by Apollo. Taylor called his muse *Phronimus*. He dedicated this *Cupid and Psyche* to a gentleman friend, probably his patron William George Meredith, whom he praised in a panegyric poem at the end of his introduction.<sup>77</sup> Taylor wrote:

Yes, PHRONIMUS, my muse, in lib'ral lays,  
This friendly tribute to thy merit pays;  
And ardent hopes that ages yet unborn  
May see well pleas'd thy name her works adorn!<sup>78</sup>

His muse *Phronimus*, the Latin transliteration of the Greek *pronimos* (φρόνιμος), was a personification of practical wisdom or prudence; it was also the Pythagorean term for the number 'three', which might have held some significance for Taylor the mystical mathematician. The Greek term *phronēsis* (φρόνησις) means practical wisdom, being in control of one's senses and judicial prudence. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates defined the term: 'Prudence, or φρόνησις: for it is the intelligence of local motion or fluxion. It may also imply the advantage of local motion; so that it is

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<sup>75</sup> Note: I address Taylor's influence on 'Romantic Neoplatonism' in more detail in the final chapter, though I do not discuss his poetry in relation to Romantic poetry there. I merely make suggestions here, which may be the basis of future research.

<sup>76</sup> *NWB*, p. 29. See also n. 57, p. 283.

<sup>77</sup> *Cupid and Psyche*, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

plainly conversant with agitation'.<sup>79</sup> Taylor's translation sounds very complex and metaphysical; Socrates was suggesting that wisdom is the understanding of motion and flow. Poetry is often the textual embodiment of a motion and flow of thought expressed in a cadence of words; Taylor the poet chose his muse wisely.

### 3. Carnivore or Vegetarian?

The ultimate role model for Taylor's practice of Neoplatonic philosophy and religion was Proclus. Pythagoreanism, Orphism and elements of Egyptian religion, together with the significant influence of the *Chaldean Oracles*, as well as Platonism and the Peripatetic philosophy, were all vital components of the philosophico-religious system developed by Iamblichus and Proclus. Both Pythagoreans and Orphics adhered to strict dietary codes, which included not eating flesh, not eating beans, not drinking wine, and so on. Marinus revealed that Proclus, Taylor's great psychopompos, was not a strict vegetarian:

But he used meat and drink, and other necessary pleasures, only as far as was necessary to avoid the molestations of disease; for he was in these by much the most frugal, and particularly loved abstinence from animal food. And if at any time he was invited to eat it more vehemently, he was so cautious in its use, that he ate it merely after the manner of a taster.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Plato (1793)*, p. 76. Note: this quotation is reproduced exactly in the 1804 edition of Plato, apart from the printing of the Greek where the acute accent is omitted from the letter omicron in φρόνησις. All the Greek given in *Plato (1793)* has accents and breathings; this is not so in the *Plato of 1804*. See, *WP*, V, 536-537, rpt. in *TTS*, XIII, p. 493. *Cratylus* – 411d.

<sup>80</sup> *The Commentaries*, I, 16-17.

One of the reasons that Proclus purified himself in monthly rituals, in honour of the mother of the gods, was due to his need of purification because he ate animal food. Valadi had naturally expected that Taylor, 'the greatest Pythagorean in England' would be a vegetarian. Every modern critic who has written about Taylor has accepted his status as a vegetarian.<sup>81</sup> Taylor has often been associated with Shelley in the context of shared vegetarian interests. In 1823, Alexander Burnet M.D. published an attack on quack doctors, and the perceived dangers of vegetarianism, in a periodical entitled *The Medical Advisor*. Part of Burnett's criticism of vegetarianism included a discussion of Shelley and his Pythagorean friends, one of whom was identified as Thomas Taylor.<sup>82</sup> Burnett's *Shelley and his Pythagorean Friends* was ultimately written as a satire of vegetarianism and famous vegetarians. Burnett was not writing a serious, or respectful, account of the practice of vegetarianism by Shelley and his 'friends' and his account of Taylor's association with Shelley, should be considered cautiously. *Shelley and his Pythagorean Friends* was intended as a squib against Shelley and vegetarianism. Burnett's report does not 'prove' that Shelley knew Taylor personally. Taylor admired vegetarianism, promoted it, and had many vegetarian friends, such as Richard Phillips the publisher of *Public Characters of 1798*. However, Taylor himself was not vegetarian. In a footnote to the introduction of his translation of Porphyry's *On the Abstinence from Animal Food* (1823) Taylor wrote:

The translator of this work, and of other treatises contained in this volume, having been so circumstanced, that he has been obliged to mingle the active with the contemplative life (μετα θεωρητικου νου

<sup>81</sup> See *SW*, p. 40, 127 n. 7. Also *NWB*, p. 28. Also, Frank B Evans, 'Thomas Taylor, Platonist of the Romantic Period', in *PMLA* Vol. LV, (1940), 1077-1078.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander Burnet, 'Shelley and His Pythagorean Friends', in *Book Lore* III (1885-1886), 123, 125, 129. Note: This is a reprint of the original journal article from *The Medical Adviser* (1824). I have not been able to trace the original article.

πολιτευομενος) in acquiring for himself a knowledge of the philosophy of Plato, and disseminating that philosophy for the good of others, has also found it expedient to make use of a fleshy diet. Nothing, however, but an imperious necessity, from causes that would be superfluous to detail at present, could have induced him to adopt animal, instead of vegetable nutriment. But though he has been nurtured in Eleatic and Academic studies, yet it has not been in Academic bowers.<sup>83</sup>

Taylor mirrored Proclus' example and used meat in his diet. The above confession indicates that Taylor experimented with vegetarianism, but that he ultimately needed meat in his diet to keep up his strength. Protein deficiency can be alarmingly detrimental to health and cause severe debilitation and even death. When Taylor states that he had been nurtured in 'Eleatic' studies he meant that he had been trained in dialectic through his study of Plato. Dialectic, the art of reasoning or disputation by question and answer, was 'invented', according to Aristotle, by Zeno of Elea. Taylor was nurtured in 'Academic' studies, the original Platonic Academies at Athens, Alexandria and Rome are meant here, through his study of the writings not only of Plato but of the latter Platonists who were nurtured themselves, variously, in the academies at Athens, Alexandria and Rome. Taylor's understanding of the Platonic tradition was gained by autodidactic means, his statement that he had 'not been in Academic bowers' refers to his never having received a university education nor an academic stipend.

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<sup>83</sup> Porphyry, *Select Works of Porphyry. Containing His Four Books on Abstinence from Animal Food; His Treatise on the Homeric Cave of the Nymphs, and His Auxiliaries to the Perception of Intelligible Natures. Translated from the Greek. With an Appendix, Explaining the Allegory of the Wanderings of Ulysses. By the Translator*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Printed for Thomas Rodd 17 Great Newport Street, 1823), p. xi. Note: rpt. in *TTS*, II, p. 4. This work was dedicated to 'The Rev. William John Jolliffe: A testimony of great esteem for his talents and worth; and a tribute of warmest gratitude for his patronage – this work is dedicated by the translator... Thomas Taylor'.

#### 4. Restoring Platonic Theology and 'being in the know'

Taylor's devout paganism and his resultant interpretation of Platonism is unmistakably present in the very earliest of his published works, after 1784 – 1785, following his lectures on the Platonic Philosophy at Flaxman's house. However, Taylor's sympathy with the pagan Platonists of late antiquity, and their philosophical systems, is already evident in his publication of Ocellus Lucanus' *'On the Nature of the Universe'* in the *European Magazine* in 1782. Kathleen Raine has suggested that Taylor's lectures at Flaxman's house were the basis of essays, original to him, that appeared as appendices or introductions, in his works published in the latter half of the 1780s and early 1790s.<sup>84</sup>

The second volume of the *Commentaries of Proclus on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* contains an essay by Taylor, entitled *A History of the Restoration of the Platonic Theology*, in which he justifies his commitment to the maintenance of pagan elements of Neoplatonic commentaries and traditions. It is likely that a correspondence exists between the ideas and sentiments expounded in this essay and the lectures which Taylor gave at Flaxman's house on the Platonic philosophy. The essay is important biographically as it is a repository of Taylor's views. The paratextual matter which supports Taylor's translations, especially up to 1805, is often of a personal nature and is therefore a useful supplement to his biography representing a history of his views and a kind of biography of the mind, in relation to beliefs, prejudices and intellectual pursuits.

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<sup>84</sup> See *SW*, p. 36. Note: Raine wrongly estimated that 'in (probably) 1788 Taylor delivered his twelve lectures on Platonism at the house of Flaxman'. The date of the lectures was 1784-1785 as discussed above.

Taylor's edition of the *Commentaries* is consistent with his lifelong interest in mathematics, and specifically geometry. One of the primary foundations of Taylor's ability to engage with the philosophical, theological and religious systems of the Neoplatonists was that he was a mathematician as well as a metaphysician. Like the Neoplatonists themselves, and in particular Proclus Diadochus (literally the successor to the teacher's chair), Taylor's metaphysical speculations and theories were governed by rigorously systematic, technical and logical procedures of exegesis which were akin to, and rooted in, mathematical discipline. Taylor's publication of the *Commentaries* afforded him the platform of a text which would have an appeal to erudite specialist readers around which he could convey his Platonism. This is not to say that the *Commentaries* themselves were a redundant text, either mathematically or philosophically, but that they were used as a vehicle for the transmission of wider Platonic dogma than the central text contained. Taylor used the *Commentaries* in this way with the aim of attracting specialist readers to his Platonism who might have a predisposition towards, and certainly the ability to intellectually consider it. This raises an important point in relation to the accessibility of Taylor's Platonism, the schemata of his proselytism and consequent soteriology. Historically Neoplatonism had always been the parlance and specialisation of intellectually elite consociations or independent scholars. Taylor was not attempting to disseminate Platonism to the masses in accessible terms; rather he was seeking to appeal to readers who were already erudite, such as the auditors at his lectures in Flaxman's house, who were interested in subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, mythology, ancient history, and religious mysticism.

Taylor's *Essay on the Restoration of the Platonic Theology* is divided into three sections.<sup>85</sup> Section one provides an introduction to basic tenets of the Platonic tradition and Plotinus is discussed biographically as the primary reviver and advancer of the Platonic tradition in late antiquity. Section two, concentrates on Porphyry the disciple of Plotinus and also introduces the basic parameters of the exegesis of myth by the Neoplatonists.<sup>86</sup> Plato's myth of the cave is discussed in conjunction with Porphyry's exegesis of the Homeric cave of the nymphs, and Taylor goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Homer should be read as a divinely inspired 'pre-Platonic' prophet of sorts. Section two also provides the reader with an introduction to Greek divinities, who are always signified in Taylor's work by their approximate Latinate counterparts (i.e. Jupiter represents Zeus) as was standard in classical studies in the eighteenth century.

The deities are discussed as being anthropomorphised symbols of divine powers, energies and essences which function as a complex matrix of correspondences and coherences in the universe and which are the highest perceptible absolute realities of both the intelligible and sensible worlds. In this context Taylor also discusses the human soul and its place in the Neoplatonic divine hierarchy. He also discusses some obscure elements of astrology in relation to the descent of the soul into matter. In section three Iamblichus and Proclus are introduced and discussed in relation to Taylor's understanding of Platonic theology and philosophy. The section ends with a

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<sup>85</sup> The three sections appear as follows: Section 1, *The Commentaries*, II, 213-266, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 129-190, Section 2, *The Commentaries*, II, 267-307, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 191-222, Section 3, *The Commentaries*, II, 308-320, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 223-236.

<sup>86</sup> For example, Plato's myth of the cave from the seventh book of *The Republic* is discussed; see *The Commentaries*, II, 282, rpt. in *TTS* VII, 209.

diatribe against both Christianity and the state of contemporary late eighteenth – century philosophy.

The essay is a textual repository, or record, of Taylor's personal beliefs, intellectual passions and understandings of Platonism many of which appear to have been mature and considered views that Taylor held consistently from 1788, when the essay appeared in print, and the end of his life in 1835. The preface to Taylor's paraphrase translation of Plotinus' *Concerning the Beautiful* reveals that many of the opinions and sentiments he later deployed in his *Essay on the Restoration of the Platonic Theology* (particularly contempt for materialistic philosophy) were views that Taylor already passionately held in 1787.<sup>87</sup>

Taylor opened his *Essay on the Restoration of the Platonic Theology* with the following statement:

The Grecian theology, the history of whose restoration by the latter Platonists is the design of the present dissertation, did not originate among the Greeks, but was the progeny of barbarian propagation. This will be evident by considering that Orpheus was a Thracian; Thales, a Phœnician; Hermes Trismegistus, an Egyptian; Zoroaster, a Persian; Anacharsis, a Scythian; and Pherecydes, a Syrian. Yet though Greece was not the parent of theology, she was notwithstanding her benevolent nurse, by whom she was kindly educated, and received the full perfection of her nature. Indeed, though illustrious men flourished in the East, and theology was there particularly cultivated, yet her education was limited and rough, entangled with inexplicable ceremonies, and guarded by the sanctity of inviolable oaths. But when she was removed into the Grecian soil, and experienced the happy temperature of its climate, her genius became both elegant and

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<sup>87</sup> See, *Concerning the Beautiful; or a Paraphrase Translation from the Greek of Plotinus. Ennead I Book VI*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Printed for the Author and sold by T. Payne and Son, 1787), pp. vi-viii, rpt. in *TTS*, III, 1-2, and in *SW* pp. 138-139.

profound; her person magnificent and graceful; and her ceremonies rational and sublime.<sup>88</sup>

The Neoplatonists acknowledged that the tradition they maintained and developed, though generally termed Platonism, was in fact the recipient of wisdom from the βαρβαροι, non-Greek speaking, cultures; as Taylor noted, the Grecian theology as it was understood by the later Platonists ‘was the progeny of barbarian propagation’. He cites a line of influences, which is not all-inclusive but broadly representative, on the Platonic theology as practised by the Neoplatonists. Taylor’s list commences with Orpheus, who was for him, along with the later Platonists, a highly significant figure and progenitor of mystical theology. The historical and mythological dimensions of the person of Orpheus are discussed by Taylor at length in section one of his *Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus* which complemented his translation of *The Hymns of Orpheus* (1787).<sup>89</sup> Thales is also mentioned and Taylor is here referring to Thales of Miletus (640/610-548/545) BCE, who was a mathematician, astronomer and philosopher. The quasi-historical figure of Hermes Trismegistus is also mentioned: aspects of this character were discussed in the last chapter, and the importance of this character in western esoteric traditions is of distinguished and vital importance. Zoroaster (660-583) BCE, also called Zarathustra, is considered to be the founder of what is often called the world’s first universally oriented religion Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism is a religion that worships the metaphysical properties of light through the physical medium of fire. The dualistic nature of the religion with goodness being represented by the deity Ahura Mazda

<sup>88</sup> *The Commentaries*, II, 213, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 129.

<sup>89</sup> *Hymns* (1787), pp 1-12, rpt. in *TTS*, V, 261-265, and in *SW*, p. 166-170.

(Wise Lord or Lord of Wisdom) and evil by the hostile spirit Angra Mainyu influenced all dualistically oriented religions such as Judaism and Christianity. Anacharsis (unknown dates but around 600 BCE) was an important precursive philosopher in ancient Greece who was often reckoned amongst the seven wise men of Athens and is said to have been initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries. Anacharsis was in vogue in the late eighteenth century following the publication of the learned imaginary travelogue, *The Travels of Anacharsis the Younger in Greece, During the Fourth Century before the Christian Era* (1787), by Jean-Jaques Barthélemy (1716-1795). The first English edition of the French historical novel appeared in 1791 and was translated by William Beaumont. Pherecydes of Syros<sup>90</sup> (unknown dates but active around 600 BCE) was reputed to have been a teacher of Pythagoras and is thus cited by Taylor for his importance as a teacher of a major source figure in the Platonic tradition.

Taylor ultimately demonstrated that the religion, philosophy and theology of the ancient Greeks, and the Neoplatonists, was influenced by Phoenician, Egyptian, Persian, Scythian and Syrian wisdom and that it was born of religious synchronicity and eclecticism. When Taylor listed the influences of ancient barbarian civilisations on Greek religious and mythological culture he was not only reiterating supposed facts of an anthropological nature, concerning the establishment of Greek religion and belief – he was linking Greek religious phenomena to tradition. Antiquity and tradition are often called upon to lend veracity, authority and venerability to religious dogma and cult practices, and this is precisely what Taylor was doing when he presented his interpretation of Platonism to his readers.

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<sup>90</sup> This Pherecydes should not be confused with Pherecydes of Leros (c.450 BCE) the Mythographer.

The exotic influences on the Platonic theology, referred to above, were represented as converging in Greece and cross-fertilising with the native religion. The religious foundation of the Platonic theology, in Taylor's view, emerged from an interaction between mystery cults, such as those that flourished at Eleusis in honour of the goddesses Demeter and Persephone, and vernacular expressions of Greek religion. The official religious practices of the polis or city states, such as Athens, which were often mingled with civic and political elements, did not feature highly as being contributory to the Platonic theology in Taylor's view. This may be in part due to the fact that Socrates himself suffered at the hands of the religious city state when accused of corrupting the youth of the city and introducing 'strange gods' into the polis. State religious institutions such as civic temples or priesthoods never sponsored the theologised religious syncretism proffered by Neoplatonic interpretations of the roots of the Platonic tradition: it was a system suited to the theologically and ritualistically multifaceted hinterland that was the provenance of the mystery cults.

The Neoplatonists believed that they were restoring theology to a former pristine condition that it enjoyed originally under the authority and auspices of Plato himself. Taylor was fully committed to the same ideal. The later Platonists understood Plato only in the context of paratextual apparatus such as glosses and commentaries and much of the authority of their interpretations rested on arcane, and reputedly secret, dogmata. As well as reliance on glosses and commentaries, Neoplatonism also promoted intuitive responses to texts: in this context, the exegetical practices of the Neoplatonists were theosophical. The opening sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* encapsulates the motivation that was at the heart of Greek philosophy: 'All men by

nature desire to know.’ The Neoplatonists wanted ‘to know’ what they perceived to be the truths of reality as related in sacred texts. The Greek for ‘know’ is *gignōskō* (γινώσκω) which can be translated as ‘to be acquainted with, recognise, cognise’ and the Neoplatonists used the verb ‘widely for cognition above the level of sense-perception. Related terms are ‘‘cognising’’ (*gnōrizō*, γνωρίζω) and the noun ‘‘cognition’’ (*gnōsis*, γνώσις).’<sup>91</sup> A reflection of the importance of exploring perception and the cognitive apprehension of reality, or ‘realities’, is the substantial Greek lexis pertaining to ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowing’ that is employed in philosophical literature. Five more Greek terms, given for illustrative purposes here, provide insight into the Neoplatonic conception of knowledge and its theoretical and experiential derivatives: they being νοερά γνώσις, θεωρία, νοερά θεωρία, κρίσις and διανοητικόν.

Firstly, ‘intuitive knowledge (*noera gnōsis*, νοερά γνώσις)’ which can also be termed as ‘nondiscursive knowledge’<sup>92</sup> and secondly ‘contemplation (*theōria*, θεωρία) also, (mental) seeing. Primarily, the relation between intellect and Forms, or intelligible reality.’<sup>93</sup> Thirdly, ‘intellectual insight (*noera theoria*, νοερά θεωρία) in Iamblichus, a term indicating the ability to see the inner meaning of an observed subject.’<sup>94</sup> Fourthly, ‘discernment (*krisis*, κρίσις): also judgement. The fundamental

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<sup>91</sup> John Dillon and Lloyd P Gerson, *Neoplatonic Philosophy Introductory Readings*, (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2004), p. 363.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 363

property of all cognitive powers; the ability for or state of distinguishing sameness and difference among things.’<sup>95</sup> Fifthly, ‘discursive power (*dianoētikon*,

διανοητικόν): that faculty in virtue of which we engage in nonintuitive cognition.

This is the lowest part of intellect and the highest part of the soul. The activity of this faculty is called ‘discursive thinking’ (*dianoia*, διάνοια).’<sup>96</sup>

Thomas Taylor often used the term ‘*dianoetic*’ in his writings, whenever he did so he provided an explanation of the term when it was initially employed or, in the case of his five-volume translation of the works of Plato (1804), he provided a definition of the term in a glossary. Taylor defined ‘*dianoetic*’ thus, ‘This word is derived from διάνοια,<sup>97</sup> or that power of the soul which reasons scientifically, deriving the principles of its reasoning from intellect. Plato is so uncommonly accurate in his diction, that this word is very seldom used by him in any other than its primary sense.’<sup>98</sup> A major concern of Neoplatonism was systemising and exploring ideas about potential levels of knowledge, cognition and perception in relation to human consciousness and the interpretation of texts, symbols and phenomenal ‘reality’. Taylor also wrote about the five ways in which the soul perceived and assimilated knowledge, which he called the five ‘gnostic’ powers of the soul:

In order to understand this distinction properly, it is necessary to observe, that the gnostic powers of the soul are five in number, viz.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Note: ‘διάνοια’ is lacking the acute accent on the letter alpha in Taylor’s glossary definition. When Greek text is printed in Taylor’s publications, accents and breathings are often, though not always, omitted.

<sup>98</sup> *WP*, I, cxvii, rpt in *TTS*, IX, 84.

*intellect, cogitation, (διανοια) opinion, phantasy, sense. Intellect* is that power by which we understand simple self-evident truths, called axioms, and are able to pass into contact with ideas themselves. But *cogitation* is that power which forms and perfects arguments and reasons. *Opinion* is that which knows the universal in sensible particulars, as that every man is a biped; and the conclusion of cogitation, as that every rational soul is immortal; but it only knows the *οτι*, or *that* a thing is, but is perfectly ignorant of the *διοτι*, or *why* it is. And the *phantasy* is that power which apprehends things clothed with figure, and may be called *μορφωτικη νοησις*, a *figured intelligence*. And, lastly, *sense* is that power which is distributed about the organs of sensation; which is mingled with passion in its judgement of things, and apprehends that only which falls upon, and agitates it externally. Again, the basis of the rational life is *opinion*; for the true man, or the rational soul, consists of *intellect, cogitation, and opinion*; but the summit of the irrational life is the *phantasy*. And *opinion* and *phantasy* are connected with each other; and the irrational is filled with powers from the rational life: so that the fictitious man commences from the phantasy; under which desire, like a many-headed savage beast, and anger, like a raging lion, subsist. But of these powers, *intellect* and *sense* do not employ a reasoning energy, on account of the acuteness and suddenness of their perceptions. And with respect to *cogitation*, it either assumes the principles of reasoning from intellect, which principles we call axioms; and in this case it produces demonstrative reasoning, the conclusions of which are always true, on account of the certainty of the axioms from which reason receives its increase: or the same *cogitation* converts itself to *opinion*, and deriving its principles from thence, forms dialectic reason, so called from its being employed by men in common discourse with each other; and hence its conclusions are not always true, because *opinion* is sometimes false: or, in the third place, *cogitation* conjoins itself with *the phantasy*, and in consequence of this produces vicious reasoning, which always embraces that which is false.<sup>99</sup>

When Taylor employs the term 'the phantasy' (often used interchangeably with 'the fancy' in the eighteenth century) it broadly means what we would consider 'imagination', and its derivatives to mean, today. However, the currency and usage of the terms, 'phantasy', 'fancy' and 'imagination' in eighteenth-century contexts involved either subtle shades of difference of meaning, or complex and seemingly contradictory applications of the terms, even when used in the same contexts. In

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<sup>99</sup> See *Gods and the World*, n. pp. 38-40, rpt. *TTS*, IV, 25.

scholastic psychology the term 'phantasy' meant the mental apprehension of an object of perception and the faculty by which this is performed; this is what Taylor understood the term to mean. Taylor was also using the term in a negative context to denote the illusionary and insubstantial nature of images that arise in, and often apprehend, consciousness and that can dominate mental attention, which was informed by Neoplatonism as much as by the etymology of the word and its English usage. The problem with 'the phantasy' for Taylor was that although it was a kind of 'mental seeing' the images seen were simply aggregative and associative representations of sense perceptions; which in a Neoplatonic context were simply shadows of shadows, or insubstantial reflections of insubstantial phenomena. Reality, for the Neoplatonist, was ultimately the domain of the Platonic Forms, which was the intelligible world, which could only be directly perceived intelligibly and which could be approached, not through the senses but through intellect.

In his introduction to the *Phaedo*, in the *Works of Plato*, Taylor discussed four levels of knowledge, the most elevated of which was 'divine reason' or *theios logos* (θειος λογος) that could be attained by human beings, 'in the present life'. He extracted the four distinctions of attainable knowledge from Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Phaedo*. Taylor wrote that

It is well observed, therefore, by Olympiodorus, in his MS. Scholia on this dialogue, that by this θειος λογος, or *divine reason*, we must understand *self-beholding intellect*, which, agreeably to Plato's description of it in the *Phædrus*, associates with Deity itself. Τις ο ασφαλεστερος, και ακινδυνότερος, και βεβαιότερος, και θειος λογος; ου δηπου ως φασιν ο θεοθεν εκδοθεις, δοξαστικός γαρ ο γε τοιούτος· αλλ' εστιν ο ειρημενος αυτοπτικός νους, ο θεω τω οντι συνων, ως εν

Φαιδρῳ. In order however to understand what Olympiodorus means by *self-beholding intellect*, it is necessary to observe, that there are four modes of knowledge which we are able to acquire in the present life. The first of these results from opinion, by which we learn *that* a thing is, without knowing *the why*: and this constitutes that part of knowledge which was called by Aristotle and Plato παιδεία, or erudition; and which consists in moral instructions, for the purpose of purifying ourselves from immoderate passions. But the second is produced by the sciences; in which, from establishing certain principles as hypotheses, we educe necessary conclusions, and arrive at the knowledge of *the why* (as in the mathematical sciences); but at the same time we are ignorant with respect to the principles of these conclusions, because they are merely hypothetical. The third species of knowledge is that which results from Plato's dialectic; in which, by a progression through all ideas, we arrive at the first principle of things, and at that which is no longer hypothetical; and this by dividing some things and analysing others, by producing many things from one thing, and one thing from many. But the fourth species is still more simple than this; because it no longer uses analyses or compositions, definitions or demonstrations, but by a simple and self-vidue energy of intellect speculates things themselves, and by intuition and contact becomes one with the object of its perception; and this energy is the *divine reason* which Plato speaks of in the present passage, and which far transcends the evidence of the most divine revelation; since this last is at best but founded in opinion, while the former surpasses even the indubitable certainty of science.<sup>100</sup>

The concept of 'divine reason', which Taylor further amplified as meaning 'self-beholding intellect', was explained by Taylor as relying on some sort of intuition, which is the same as *noera gnōsis* (νοερά γνωσις) defined above, which enabled an absolute identification, or a unity without distinction, between an observer and the observed. When Taylor practiced 'meditation' or 'contemplation' he was attempting to rise above a consciousness of particulars (things either in the phenomenal world or in his imagination) towards an intuitive bonding of his consciousness with wholes (Ideas – the famous Platonic Forms), which imparted a sense of euphoria and unity, which might be roughly compared with the Buddhist concept of attaining nirvana. In

<sup>100</sup> *WP*, IV, 249-250, rpt. in *TTS*, XII, p. 231.

the *Symposium* Diotima, reported in the speech of Socrates, described the loss of a sense of separateness and the gaining of a sense of unification with 'the beautiful itself' (the Divine or the divine form of beauty as opposed to temporal manifestations of the Beautiful) through the 'mysteries of love'. Diotima reportedly instructed Socrates to concentrate hard and consider the following teaching:

Whoever then is advanced thus far in the mysteries of Love by a right and regular progress of contemplation, approaching new to perfect intuition, suddenly he will discover, bursting into view, a beauty astonishingly admirable; that very beauty, to the gaining a sight of which the aim of all his preceding studies and labours had been directed: a beauty, whose peculiar characters are these: In the first place, it never had a beginning, nor will ever have an end, but always *IS*, and always flourishes in perfection, unsusceptible of growth or of decay. In the next place, it is not beautiful only when looked at one way, or seen in one light; at the same time that, viewed another way, or seen in some other light, it is far from being beautiful: it is not beautiful only at certain times, or with reference only to certain circumstances of things; being at other times, or when things are otherwise circumstanced, quite the contrary: nor is it beautiful only in some places, or as it appears to some persons; whilst in other places, and to other persons, its appearance is the reverse of beautiful. Nor can this beauty, which is indeed no other than the beautiful itself, ever be the object of imagination; as if it had some face or hands of its own, or any other parts belonging to body: nor is it some particular reason nor some particular science. It resides not in any other being, not in any animal, for instance; nor in the earth, nor in the heavens, nor in any other part of the universe: but, simple and separate from other things, it subsists alone with itself, and possesses an essence eternally uniform.<sup>101</sup>

Plotinus was concerned with the ascent of the consciousness away from the physical world, beyond the imaginary world towards the ultimate realities, the Forms, of the intelligible world. Porphyry disclosed that his master Plotinus had attained a union

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<sup>101</sup> *WP*, III, 513-514, rpt. in *TTS*, XI, p. 541. Note: For a very interesting evaluation of Diotima's role and teachings in the *Symposium* in relation to 'The Orphic Cosmology' as understood by the Neoplatonists, see: Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive thinking in the texts of Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 149-157.

with the ultimate transcendent power of divinity in his *Life of Plotinus*.<sup>102</sup> Taylor provided a translation of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* in the first part of his *The History of the Restoration of the Platonic Theology*. Taylor translated Porphyry's description of Plotinus' union with the divine:

he had often raised himself by intellectual conceptions, to the first god who is superior to intellect, and had ascended according to all the gradations in the banquet of Plato to an union with his ineffable nature, this supreme principle suddenly appeared to him, neither possessing any form, nor any idea, but established above intellect, and every intelligible essence. And to this supreme god I Porphyry once approached, and was united with his nature, when I was sixty-eight years of age.<sup>103</sup>

In Plotinus' teaching mystical union with the ultimate divine came about after rigorous training and moral discipline. The journey, though described as an ascent, was inward; the individual gained an ecstatic union with the divine, which was free from any sense of duality or separateness. R.T. Wallis defined this aspect of Plotinus' mysticism writing, 'Plotinus' experience of union with the One corresponds to the experience which W.T. Stace calls the 'undifferentiated unity', a state in which sensuous imagery and conceptual thought are transcended, the mind becomes perfectly unified and individual limitations are felt to be abolished'.<sup>104</sup> Plotinus refrained from naming the One but he did, on one occasion, call the One Eros (Ἔρως) which has interesting implications when Diotima's teaching on the 'mysteries of love'

<sup>102</sup> See Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of his Work* – xxiii, in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen Mackenna, abridged with an introd. by John Dillon (London: Penguin, 1991), p. cxxi.

<sup>103</sup> *The Commentaries*, II, p. 235.

<sup>104</sup> Wallis, *Neoplatonism* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2002), p. 3.

are considered, though such a singular naming of the One should be interpreted cautiously.<sup>105</sup>

Plato's writings were not the only texts of classical antiquity that were reserved for interpretation within the bounds of esoteric beliefs which could only be decoded and understood through the rigorous application of exoteric commentaries or mystical experiences. The Neoplatonists, particularly those who came after Plotinus and Porphyry, also claimed Homer as a luminary and as a kind of pre-Platonic prophet. Taylor was fully committed to the idea that Homeric literature should be interpreted theologically. He saw Homer as a theological writer who conveyed spiritual truths obscurely through the fables and imagery contained in his epics.<sup>106</sup> In 1804 Taylor gave a fuller account of his views on the 'divinely inspired' status of Homeric literature in his *Introduction to the Second and Third Books of the Republic* in his *Works of Plato*, which contained a translation of Proclus' *An Apology for the Fables of Homer*.<sup>107</sup> Taylor's own views were fully in accord with those of Proclus who was arguably his favourite philosopher after Plato. In his essay on *The Restoration of the Platonic Theology by the Later Platonists* Taylor displayed his philhellenism and elevation of Homer to a literal 'divine genius', writing that

the Greeks have ever been celebrated as a people by whom every branch of knowledge received its ultimate perfection. They were a nation equally favoured by the graces, the muses and philosophy; whose celestial union formed the divine genius of Homer, and inspired that elegance and depth with which the works of Plato are replete. They were, in short, the standards of excellence to the ancient, and are

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<sup>105</sup> See, *Ennead* – VI 8. 15, I. See also, Armstrong, ed., *Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 258-263.

<sup>106</sup> See *The Commentaries*, II, 213-4, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 129.

<sup>107</sup> See *WP*, I, 133-199, rpt. in *TTS*, IX, 245-303, and *SW*, pp. 449-520.

the objects of imitation to the enlightened part of the present world; and their theology, as well as their arts, will be admired when modern systems are no more.<sup>108</sup>

Taylor observed that political and cultural stresses were present, in the form of the decline of the Roman Empire, when the later Platonists revived the Platonic Theology.<sup>109</sup> He also noted that the Neoplatonic Philosophy arose ‘in a period when a new religion (I mean the Christian) was continually increasing in reputation, and advancing with rapid steps to despotic establishment’.<sup>110</sup> Taylor perceived that political and cultural stresses and the increasing power of Christianity, a religion which was for the most part vehemently anti-pagan, acted symbiotically as a refiner’s crucible rather than as annihilating forces in relation to pagan theology. Taylor was aware of the mutually influential relationship, in relation to theological development, that existed between Christianity and Neoplatonism when he wrote that, ‘the foreign ceremonies of a new religion were the proper means of bringing to light the secret mysteries of the old’.<sup>111</sup> When Taylor commented that, ‘Hence we shall often find, that while kingdoms descend in the circle of vicissitude, philosophy ascends and perhaps attains to her ultimate perfection, at the very period when the most powerful nations become extinct.’<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *The Commentaries*, II, 213–4, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 129.

<sup>109</sup> *The Commentaries*, II, 214, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 130.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

Taylor anthropomorphises Hellenic theology in a female form and speaks of her as a 'real person'. He refers to Hellenic philosophy in the same way throughout the essay. For Taylor and his mentors the later Platonists' theology and philosophy were closely intertwined and likened to a divine personage or goddess. By conceptualising philosophy and theology through the medium of metamorphoses Taylor was indicating that the wisdom of the ancients was an intelligent self-governing force that could manifest itself to humanity beneficially. This idea was exemplified by Taylor when he wrote that

While Greece maintained her independence unconscious of the Roman yoke, and undisturbed by religious invasions, she disdained to expose her genuine wisdom to vulgar inspection, but involved it in the intricate folds of allegory; and concealed it from the profane under the dark veil of impenetrable mystery. But when she lost her liberty and submitted to foreign domination, when her most ancient rites were threatened with invasion, and her sacred mysteries were treated with contempt, she found it necessary to change the dress of theology and to substitute a simple and elegant garb, instead of one highly marvellous and mystic. Yet we must not imagine that theology, now stript of her ancient concealments, became the object of open inspection to the profane and vulgar eye. She had not lost her refulgence, though she had changed her appearance: for the rays of celestial majesty yet beamed from her countenance, with a light awful and terrific to the multitude, but lovely and alluring to the wise. Hence the splendours of divinity no less secured her person from impious curiosity than the dark symbols in which she was formerly involved. The enchanting imagery of a celestial phantasy, and the pure light of an exalted intellect, while they captivated and converted the philosophical part of mankind, were inaccessible to the vulgar, whose mental eye, yet lost in the night of oblivion, was darkened by the splendid vision.<sup>113</sup>

The Christian Platonists, such as Ficino and Cudworth, had seen Plato and the Platonic theology as being pre-indicative of, and complementary to, Hebraic

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

revelation. The pagan Plato was converted into a figure who prepared the way intellectually and philosophically for the reception of the Mosaic divinity and the religious systems identified with Yahweh. Taylor wrote concerning the reception and attempted utilisation, and oftentimes distortion, of Platonic theology at the hands of those whom he counted as enemies of his cause:

However, though the real person of theology was not the object of vulgar inspection, her shadow at least was beheld by the benighted multitude, and became the subject of ridiculous opinions, and idle investigation. Hence some of these astonished with the majesty of her image, fondly fancied she was the progeny of the Jewish religion; and that her sacred mysteries were nothing but corrupt imitations of Mosaic divinity: while others, measuring the obscurity of her real person by the darkness of her shadow, considered her doctrines as delusions, and her sublimest truths as the reveries of a distempered imagination. Thus was true theology perverted and vilified by the multitude, when she appeared in her natural dress to mankind; till, in a few centuries after, indignant of the daring profanation, she ascended to her native heaven, and left the sons of folly involved in the shades of midnight error, and the gross delusions of fancied inspiration.<sup>114</sup>

Having introduced his subject and contextualised his position Taylor invited his readers to ‘contemplate her history more minutely and mark the several particulars which distinguished her appearance on the earth.’<sup>115</sup> The *modus operandi* of Taylor’s presentation of the Platonic Theology, besides assertions of his own comments and observations, was a presentation of biographical data relating to key Neoplatonists. Taylor introduced this aspect by writing, ‘Let us survey the great geniuses who so largely participated her celestial light; and so admirably transfused it in their writings

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<sup>114</sup> *The Commentaries*, II, 214-215, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 130-131.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

for the benefit of hitherto ungrateful posterity.’<sup>116</sup> This sentence contains two important aspects of Taylor’s understanding of Neoplatonism. Firstly, the use of the word ‘participated’ in the context of the sentence is highly significant in Neoplatonic terms and is related to the latter Platonists’ dogma concerning divine hierarchies and the human soul’s relationship to those hierarchies. Secondly, Taylor uses the term ‘transfused’ to connote the process by which the ‘celestial light’ or spiritual essence of philosophy was related to readers through the medium of the written word.

## 5. The Divine Order of Beings

Taylor’s understanding of divinity was much more complex than a devotion, and subscription to the One and the Good, the inconceivable – great unmanifest – divinity of the Platonic tradition. Plato’s concept of the ultimate divine power conveyed by terms denoting that which is unified, by itself, and also ultimately good, or excellent, is ultimately reconcilable with monotheism. The concept of the One and the Good was ultimately, what enabled Christian Platonists to import Platonism into the Christian systematic theology with some degree of comfort. The Platonic tradition taught that the divine resided in and could only be fully experienced insofar as it was possible for the human soul to experience and contemplate the divine, the intelligible and intellectual realms. The intelligible and intellectual realms ultimately resided in, and were accessible only to, mind, thought, internal perception and contemplation. Taylor, being a pagan Neoplatonist, embraced the ultimate reality of the One and the Good, but he also revered that which proceeded from the ultimate divine as being fully divine. He was a pantheist. What was the specific nature of Taylor’s pantheistic

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

beliefs? The following pages explore, in some detail, the schema of divine beings, in terms of general levels of classification, that Taylor religiously believed in and which he discusses, in varying degrees of detail, in all of his publications.

Plotinus taught that there were three hypostases, levels of perceptible reality: the One, Intelligence (*nous*) and Soul (*psychē*).<sup>117</sup> The hypostases were believed to exist independently of the individual, as an external reality, but also to exist within the mind of the individual. The point of training in philosophy, for the Neoplatonists, was to experience Soul, which had several levels and the individual soul was inextricably linked to, or suspended from, the World Soul. The philosopher would then move beyond soul towards Intellect, which had several levels, towards the One, which dwelt above the higher aspects of Intellect which are termed the Intelligible Realm. Each of the hypostases might be considered to be realms, or parallel realities, where humans, in the form of souls, and non-human beings, such as daimons, angels and gods, existed. Iamblichus and Proclus moved far beyond Plotinus and Porphyry in their elaboration of levels within, and beyond, the original three hypostases of Plotinus. Proclus' schema of the levels of reality, based on Plotinus' original three hypostases, is given in his *Elements of Theology*, which was first translated by Taylor in 1789, and included in the second volume of *the Commentaries of Proclus on Euclid's Elements*, and then reissued in *The Six Books of Proclus*, with some corrections in 1816.<sup>118</sup> The 1816 edition was included in *The Six Books of Proclus: The Platonic Successor*, and Taylor claimed that *The Elements of Theology* was the most difficult work he had ever translated. He wrote: 'I have never translated anything which

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<sup>117</sup> See *Ennead* – V. I., see also Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (2002), p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> See *The Commentaries*, II, 321–437. Note revised edition of 1816 is rpt. in *TTS*, I. [The entirety of Vol. I of *The Thomas Taylor Series* is given to Proclus' *Elements of Theology*].

required so much intense thought and severe labour in its execution'.<sup>119</sup> This was due to frequent lacunae in the Greek text and to the abstruseness and complexity of Proclus' thought. In the *Elements* Proclus wrote in a highly technical and condensed style. Rather than discussing the *Elements of Theology* in detail, I have decided to look at a condensed version of the Proclian hierarchy of divine beings.<sup>120</sup>

The Proclian expression of the divine order of the cosmos is found in a dedicatory preface to *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* which reads thus in the translation of Glenn B. Morrow and John M. Dillon:

#### Introductory Invocation

I pray to all the gods and goddesses to guide my mind in this study that I have undertaken – to kindle in me a shining light of truth and enlarge my understanding for the genuine science of being; to open the gates of my soul to receive the inspired guidance of Plato; and in anchoring my thought to the full splendour of reality to hold me back from too much conceit of wisdom and from the paths of error by keeping me in intellectual converse with those realities from which alone the eye of the soul is refreshed and nourished, as Plato says in the *Phaedrus* (246e-251b). I ask from the intelligible gods fullness of wisdom, from the intellectual gods the power to rise aloft, from the supercelestial gods guiding the universe an activity free and unconcerned with material enquiries, from the gods to whom the cosmos is assigned a winged life, from the angelic choruses a true revelation of the divine, from the good daemons an abundant filling of divine inspiration, and from the heroes a generous, solemn, and lofty disposition. So may all the orders of divine beings help to prepare me fully to share in this

<sup>119</sup> *TTS*, I, p. viii.

<sup>120</sup> Note: I have omitted any discussion of Monads, (a unitary or unifying cause of a series or order of divine beings) and Henads (a unitary or unifying principle), though they are an important aspect of Neoplatonism (Taylor's pantheistic belief system). For Taylor's description of Monads see: Julian, *Two Orations of the Emperor Julian; One to the Sovereign Sun and the other to the Mother of the Gods; Translated from the Greek. With Notes and a Copious Introduction, in which some of The Greatest Arcana of the Grecian Theology are Unfolded* (London: Printed for Edward Jeffrey, Pall Mall, 1793), n. pp. xxxviii – xli, rpt. in *TTS*, IV, 45-46 [endnote]. Note: These are *Orations* IV and V; in antiquity the orations were properly called *Hymn to King Helios* and *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*; hymns are usually associated with verse compositions: however, Julian's hymns are written in prose, as was common in the fourth century C.E. when poetry was in decline.

most illuminating and mystical vision that Plato reveals to us in the *Parmenides*...<sup>121</sup>

Taylor's translation of the above dedicatory invocation followed his translation of Plato's *Parmenides* in the third volume of his *Works of Plato* (1804) in which most of Proclus' commentary was delivered under the heading of 'Additional Notes'. Taylor's translation is given here for purposes of comparison:

I beseech all the Gods and Goddesses to lead my intellect to the proposed theory, and, enkindling in me the splendid light of truth, to expand my dianoëtic power to the science of beings, to open the gates of my soul to the reception of the divine narration of Plato, and, conducting, as to a port, my knowledge to the most splendid of being, to liberate me from an abundance of false wisdom, and the wandering about non-beings, by a more intellectual converse with real beings, through which alone the eye of the soul is nourished and watered, as Socrates says in the *Phædrus*.<sup>[246e]</sup> And may the intelligible Gods impart to me a perfect intellect; the intellectual, an anagogic power; the supermundane rulers, an energy indissoluble and liberated from material knowledge; the governors of the world, a winged life; the angelic choirs, a true unfolding into light of divine concerns; beneficent dæmons, a plenitude of inspiration from the Gods; and heroes, a magnanimity permanently venerable and elevated! And, in short, may all the divine genera perfectly prepare me for the participation of the most inspective and mystic theory which Plato unfolds to us in the *Parmenides*<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 19. Note: I initially cite this translation rather than Taylor's as it is clearer especially in relation to the translation of technical Greek terms.

<sup>122</sup> *TTS*, XI, 77.

The divine order of the gods set out by Proclus presents a series of what could be cautiously termed ‘emanations’ of divine energies which flow from an ultimate reality. Within the Platonic theology an absolute tenet is that there is what Plato termed ‘The One’ or interchangeably ‘the Good’ which is totally unknowable and indefinable and absolute. The first god or divine principle, which is nearest to the One that can be perceived, in a limited fashion, is the craftsman (δημιουργός), the Demiourgos, who is seen as a wise and loving maker and sustainer of the universe. Explicit observance of the ultimate One and the Demiurge were not necessary in the invocation as those primary forces would have been understood to be silently acknowledged source concepts of any invocatory prayer to the divinities in the Neoplatonic metaphysical scheme.

The first orders of the gods invoked were the intelligible gods (νοετὸι θεοί) these were deities that were conceived as existing in pure intelligible form alone and were the furthest removed from the sensible, or mundane world. The term *ekei* (ἐκεῖ),<sup>123</sup> literally ‘there’, was employed by the Neoplatonists to describe the intelligible world, or realm of intelligible reality. It was in the intelligible world that the highest conceptions of divinity were thought to dwell. The Demiurge was ultimately ranked amongst this first class of gods although manifestations of the Demiurge, and demiurgic powers proceeding from him, were manifested at all levels of the divine procession; hence there was a Zeus of the heavens, a planetary manifestation of this divinity (grossly symbolised by the planet Jupiter), and a supercelestial Zeus or a Zeus beyond the heavens etc.

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<sup>123</sup> See Dillon and Gerson, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (2004), p. 363.

Following the intelligible gods the intellectual gods (νοεροὶ θεοί) were invoked. The intellectual gods were seen as being resident in the highest domains of mind. Morrow and Dillon translate Proclus as calling for the boon of ‘the power to rise aloft’ from the intellectual gods; whereas Taylor translated Proclus as praying for the gift of ‘an anagogic power’. Taylor provided a list of Greek phrases and his employment of them in his translation of the *Works of Plato* under the heading ‘*Explanation of Platonic Terms*’.<sup>124</sup> In the explanatory list, Taylor states that anagogic (αναγωγικός) is Englished as ‘Leading on high’.<sup>125</sup> Hence Taylor’s translation which at face value appears technically baffling is perfectly understandable when the key of terms given in volume one of the *Works of Plato* is employed by the reader.

Following the invocation of the intellectual gods Proclus called upon the supercelestial gods (ἀπόλυτοι θεοί) to grant him, in Morrow and Dillon’s translation, ‘an activity free and unconcerned with material enquiries’. Taylor Englished the ‘*apolutoi theoi*’ as being the ‘supermundane Gods’. The term ‘*apolutoi*’ (meaning liberated) denotes gods that are superior to the visible gods (the planetary deities), hence their being termed supercelestial; the higher orders of gods, of the intelligible and intellectual classes, could have the term ‘supercosmic’ (or being beyond the cosmos) applied to them as they were seen as being liberated (*apolutoi*) from cosmic concerns and spheres of existence. The ‘supercelestial’ or ‘supermundane’ gods, in Taylor’s terminology, were liberated from the sensible, or mundane world, and thus superior to the visible gods in the sky, the planets.

<sup>124</sup> *WP*, I, cxvii - cxxiii, rpt. in *TTS*, IX, 84 -89.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

Following the invocation of the supercelestial, or supermundane gods, Proclus invoked the ‘gods to whom the cosmos is assigned’ (ἐγκόσμιοι θεοί) in Morrow and Dillon’s translation, or ‘the rulers of the world’ according to Taylor’s translation. Interestingly the closer Greek term for ‘rulers of the world’ would be *kosmokratoroi* (κοσμοκράτοροι) rather than *egkosmioi theoi* (ἐγκόσμιοι θεοί). Taylor’s choice of translation reflects the terminology of the New Testament in *Ephesians* where Paul wrote ‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of this darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.’<sup>126</sup> Paul was attacking non-Christian or pagan spiritual cosmologies, such as the Platonic and the Gnostic systems, when he marshalled the Ephesians to spiritual warfare. Within latter Platonism the planets themselves were seen as manifestations of specific divinities, though they were also seen as being sacred, not in themselves, but in the sense that they were material manifestations of unseen powers, or gods. These were the divinities that were closest to humanity and the first divinities that the contemplative soul could expect to encounter as she ascended through the realms of reality, from the gross, or mundane world, towards the ultimate blissful reality of the intelligible realms (ἐκεῖ).<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Ephesians* 6:12 KJV

<sup>127</sup> Note: In a footnote in his *Gods and the World*, pp. 29-30, rpt. *TTS*, IV, p.10, Taylor gave instructions to readers who wanted to gain more understanding of the gods, ‘Such of my English readers as are capable of ascending to a knowledge of the gods, through a regular course of philosophic discipline, may consult my translation of the *Elements of Theology*, by Proclus, my Introduction to the *Parmenides* of Plato, and my Notes on the *Cratylus*; where the orders of the gods are more fully unfolded.’

Proclus also invoked angelic forces. Morrow and Dillon give the term ‘angelic choruses’ in their translation whereas Taylor employed the almost exact phrase ‘angelic choirs’. In western culture, due to highly stylised iconography employed in Christian art and architecture, angels are perceived as androgynous, winged and exquisitely robed beings. The Greek from which the English word ‘angel’ is derived is ‘*angelos*’ (ἄγγελος) which should be more accurately translated as ‘messenger’ or ‘envoy’ rather than ‘angel’ which is simply a Latinised transliteration of the Greek. The latter Platonists saw the ‘*angeloi*’ as semi-divine beings who functioned as conduits of divine order and who gave oracular pronouncements from the celestial or planetary divinities. The ‘choirs of angels’ were forces which linked the sublunary world of matter to the higher worlds of the gods.

Proclus also invoked another class of spirit, the ‘good daemons’ as translated by Morrow and Dillon which Taylor termed ‘beneficent *dæmons*.’ According to the latter Platonists a *daimōn* (δαίμων) was a spirit or supernatural power which acted as an intermediary.<sup>128</sup> Daimons tended to verge towards matter and energise the physical world, bodies, plants, geographical features and regions, with either auspicious or inauspicious power. The daimons were thought to play a key role in binding the human soul to matter and illusionary and sense-oriented existence, and hence some of them were termed a ‘*kakodaimon*’ (κακοδαίμων) or an evil genius. A good daimon ‘*agathodaimon*’ (ἀγαθοδαίμων) was an entity which could aid the soul and lead the human soul towards the gods and away from the engrossing folds of matter.<sup>129</sup> A

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<sup>128</sup> Although Dillon, Morrow and Taylor, give ‘daemon’ for the Greek δαίμων, I have used the OED spelling ‘daimon’ which is a direct transliteration from the Greek.

<sup>129</sup> For further details on daimons see Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 41, 47,

daimon was often thought of as being allotted to an individual upon birth that would directly influence the life, fate and destiny of a person. Socrates was portrayed by Plato as being conversant with dreams, oracles and a personal daimon in many of the dialogues.<sup>130</sup> In *The Apology* Socrates claimed that (in Taylor's translation) 'a certain divine and dæmoniacal voice is present with me' which 'attended me from a child; and, when it is present, always *dissuades* me from what I intend to do, but never *incites* me'.<sup>131</sup> Taylor wrote a short essay, *Remarks on the Daemon of Socrates*, in 1817 which elaborates on the idea of individuals being consigned a personal guiding spirit.<sup>132</sup> Within the Christian tradition the role of the good daimon has been subsumed into the tradition of holy guardian angels while all daimons became 'demons' or malicious diabolic evil spirits.

Proclus called on the heroes lastly to grant him 'a generous, solemn and lofty disposition'. Within the Neoplatonic cosmology the heroes '*hêrôs*' (ἥρωες) were those humans who had ascended towards the gods, in various degrees, while still in body. The hero had conquered the circumstances of human incarnation and excelled beyond the standard confines of human abilities and experiences towards some praiseworthy goal or objective. Heroes were commonly objects of worship throughout Greek

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61, 79-80, 131, 185. Note: Shaw also provides information on the later Platonic categories of divine hierarchies see his chapter '*Cult and Cosmos*', pp. 129-142.

<sup>130</sup> See for example *The Apology* – 31d and 40a

<sup>131</sup> *TTS*, XII, 199.

<sup>132</sup> Thomas Taylor, 'Remarks on the Daemon of Socrates' in *The Classical Journal*, XVI (Sept. 1817), 184-185.

history and perhaps the best-known recipient of both divine honours and human adulation was Heracles. The pagan and pan-Hellenic worship of heroes also included prayers offered to them beseeching their assistance; this of course was subsumed within Christianity as the cult of the saints, which is still maintained in Roman Catholicism.

The human soul sat on the bottom rung of the Neoplatonic ladder, occupying a hinterland between the realms of sense and matter and nous (νοῦς) the intellect and related intellectual and intelligible realms. The soul was considered as dwelling not in the body, but in a pneumatic-vehicle, or ochēma (ὄχημα) which connected the soul to the body. Indeed, rather than considering the soul to be some abstract and indefinable thing encased in flesh, the ochēma could be considered as enveloping body, so that body could be considered as being in soul, rather than soul in body.

Taylor wrote:

And soul is not in the world, but rather the world is in soul: for neither is the body the place of soul, but soul is in intellect, and body in soul.<sup>133</sup>

Such a concept was echoed in William Blake's assertion in *the Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 'But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged...' <sup>134</sup> The ochēma was also the seat of the imagination: the ability to see and experience in the mind, internally, and engage in non-physical perception. The ochēma is sometimes translated as 'astral-body' and was considered by the Neoplatonists to be the soul itself – while neither being a three-dimensional physical

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>134</sup> William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, PL. 14.

body nor fully incorporeal, it was something in between.<sup>135</sup> Part of the discipline of Neoplatonic contemplation involved 'purifying' the imagination so that the imaginings of the mind became focussed on intellectual conceptions, initially by means of mathematical and geometric abstraction, rather than on recollections of phenomena originally perceived through the five senses. The term 'astral body' means 'star' or 'heavenly' body and originates from a Platonic concept that the soul descends from its original heavenly source through the planetary spheres, wherein it is gradually clothed until it reaches the lunar sphere, whence it enters the sublunary world and is incarnated in the physical world and embodied. Taylor expressly believed in this, rather bizarre sounding, theory, which he conveyed in his *History of the Restoration of the Platonic Theology* where he discusses a short work by Synesius, *On Dreams*.<sup>136</sup> The concept is also discussed by Taylor in his translation of Porphyry's *Concerning Homer's Cave of the Nymphs* where zodiacal constellations, most especially Cancer and Capricorn (the signs in which the summer and winter solstices occur in the northern hemisphere), are considered as gateways which souls pass through when entering and exiting the sub-lunar realm of generation.<sup>137</sup>

Taylor described the nature of the human soul in his translation of Sallust, thought to be a Roman army general who served under the Pagan emperor Julian. Taylor introduces the translation as being 'composed for that class of mankind whose souls

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<sup>135</sup> See Dillon and Gerson, (2004), p. 364.

<sup>136</sup> See, *The Commentaries*, II, 269-277.

<sup>137</sup> Note: Taylor's translation of Porphyry's *Concerning Homer's Cave of the Nymphs*, first appeared in 1789 in *The Commentaries*, II, 278-307 [see, 290-292 for comments on Cancer and Capricorn], rpt. *SW*, pp. 297-342, [see, pp. 309-312 for comments on Cancer and Capricorn]. This work was reissued in 1823 in *Select Works of Porphyry* [see n. 83 on p. 198 above], rpt. in *TTS*, II, 145-167, and [comments on Capricorn and Cancer were maintained in 1823 revised edition, see pp. 155-158 and notes on pp. 162-167.].

may be considered as neither incurable, nor yet capable of being elevated by philosophy...'<sup>138</sup> He then, correspondingly with Sallust's treatise, discusses that there are three classes of souls. Firstly, 'divine souls, heroes and demigods, and when invested with a terrene body, form such men as Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, Jamblichus, Proclus, &c.'<sup>139</sup> Taylor explains that such souls descend into the world of matter in order to benefit humanity, that they easily 'recover a remembrance of their pristine state, and, in consequence of this descend no farther than to the earth'.<sup>140</sup> Souls of the second class are those who are bound to the material world and engrossed in body and its accompanying sense perceptions. They are essentially in an impure state though not incurable. Philosophy may assist them in rising once again towards the One and the Good, towards the 'beatific vision of the intelligible world,' to which they 'are with great difficulty, and even scarcely able to ascend, after long periods...'<sup>141</sup> The third class of souls are those who wander aimlessly and perpetually in oblivion, or 'Tartarus'. Tartarus, from the Greek denoting 'shivering cold' was thought to be beyond Hades, the realm of the dead, and to be a dimension of inescapable wandering.<sup>142</sup> Though Taylor was anti-Christian he still had some belief in a Hell of sorts. However, the process of ending up there was not a matter of being damned by a vengeful and offended deity as in Hebraic contexts. Rather it was due to a soul wandering so far into the labyrinth of matter, and its dark substrata, that it lost the capacity to ascend, or even realise it could ascend. In his notes on the *Cratylus* of Plato (1793), Taylor discusses the subject of Platonic 'heaven' and 'Galilean' notions of it.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Gods and the World*, pp. vi-vii.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>143</sup> See *Plato (1793)*, pp. 26-27. n.

In the *Essay on the Restoration of the Platonic Theology* when Taylor wrote of ‘the great geniuses who so largely participated’ in the celestial light of philosophy: the term ‘participated’ should be understood in the context of the teachings of the latter Platonists concerning heroes. For the latter Platonists the pedestal of the hero was not only occupied by warriors, great leaders and the likes of Heracles, the heroic pedestal was also the rightful place of divine philosophers. The great philosophers of the Platonic tradition were seen as heroes in the sense discussed above and as such they were seen as being linked to the divine cosmological hierarchy. Hence, Plato could be called upon, in a like manner to a Catholic calling upon a saint, for assistance in the struggle of life. Taylor called upon Plato and the Neoplatonists, as philosophical heroes in a metaphysical sense; he prayed for their assistance at the close of his hymnic poem *A Panegyric on the most eminent intellectual Philosophers of Antiquity*:

By you inspir’d, the glorious task be mine  
 To soar from sense, and seek a life divine;  
 From phantasy, the soul’s Calypso, free,  
 To sail secure on life’s tempestuous sea,  
 Led by your doctrines, like the Pleiad’s light,  
 With guiding radiance streaming thro’ the night;  
 From mighty Neptune’s overwhelming ire,  
 Back to the palace of my lawful sire.<sup>144</sup>

Taylor’s paganism was not academic but practical and at the centre of his everyday life. He prayed to the gods of the ancient Greeks and committed himself to exploring

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<sup>144</sup> *Cupid and Psyche*, p. 143. Note: Neptune (Poseidon) was identified by the Neoplatonists as ruling over generation and matter: ‘Neptune’s overwhelming ire’ means ‘Neptune’s overwhelming anger, or rage’. In the same volume [*ibid.*, p.131], Taylor included a hymn, of his own composition *To Neptune*, where the deity is addressed: ‘Whence souls in matter’s flow’ring regions tost, / Are under thy dominion said to live’.

the realms of the divine, as he understood them, by means of contemplation. We have seen that he was also a ritualist, though the mainstay of his religious practice was the development of his consciousness via meditative intellectualisation, which flowered in the composition of hymns and through mathematical theorisation and abstraction. Translation itself could have been 'sanctified' as part of Taylor's meditative practice, as it involved disciplining his mind and it was offered as a service to his gods as a means of expressing ultimate 'truths' concerning them. Taylor's pantheism was a coessential product of his adoption of pagan Neoplatonism, which was a religious, especially in the case of Iamblichus and Proclus, as well as a philosophical expression of the Platonic tradition. One of the primary differences between Pagan Neoplatonism and Christian Neoplatonism was that paganism promoted pantheism in two contexts: either in rivalry to Hebraic definitions of monism or by re-defining monism by promoting multifarious conceptions of the ultimate divine source. Taylor stands in a unique place in British philosophical and literary history as being the most prolific and comprehensive disseminator of Pagan Neoplatonism in Britain. This does not mean that he was successful in secular terms, or that he was ever popular or one of the literary fashionables of his time. However, he was notorious and was always referred to as 'the Platonist' or known by the apt soubriquet, 'Pagan Taylor'.

## Chapter 4

**Translation and Reviews: Orphic Hymns, Descriptions of Greece  
and Translation of Unspeakable Aspects of the Symposium**

## 1. The Mystical Initiations

Taylor planned his emergence as a public character. When he published his first two books in 1787, he blazed onto London's literary stage in the name of the mystic Plotinus, obviously identifying himself with the latter Platonists, and in the name of a mystical legend: Orpheus. The *Hymns of Orpheus* are a collection of eighty-seven 'hymns' addressed to various Greek deities as well as to lesser semi-divine beings, concepts and forces attached to the Hellenic pantheon. The *Hymns* are also sometimes called the *Indigitamenta of Orpheus: Indigitamenta* being 'the Latin term for an official collection of forms of prayer belonging to the *libri pontificii* [high priest's library]. In them were set forth the various powers of each god who was to be summoned to aid in particular cases'.<sup>1</sup> Eight types of *Thumiama* (θυμίαμα), literally fragrant-stuff for burning or incense, were recommended as offerings, perhaps in benign sacrifice, while evocatory prayers were chanted or sung: though during the recitation of a few hymns no incense was used. The eight incenses prescribed, used singularly or in combination, were, storax, firebrands (smoking torches probably made of fragrant wood), frankincense, crocus, myrrh, aromatic herbs, grain and opium poppy seeds. *Hymn 53, To the God of Annual Feasts*, which Taylor entitled *To Amphietus Bacchus*, calls for a libation of milk too; Taylor omitted mention of the libation. The *Hymns* were obviously intended for ritual use, Taylor understood them in that context and he translated them, complete with fumigatory instructions.

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar Seyffert, *A Dictionary of Classical Antiquities, Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art* eds. Henry Nettleship and J.E. Sandys (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891 rpt [with revisions/corrections] 1894), p. 318.

Taylor's *The Mystical Initiations or Hymns of Orpheus* was more than a translation of the *Hymns*: it was a formulary of pagan Neoplatonic prayer and worship.

The *Hymns* are prefaced by a poetic address, supposedly written by Orpheus, *To Musaeus* (Mousaios), the name of one of his disciples who is often associated with Orpheus in classical literature, where he is instructed: 'Learn now Mousaios, a rite mystic and most holy, / a prayer which surely excels all others'.<sup>2</sup> Taylor provided his translation in rhyming couplets:

Attend Musaeus to my sacred song,  
And learn what rites to sacrifice belong.<sup>3</sup>

In *The Mystical Initiations or Hymns of Orpheus* (1787), Taylor included *A Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus* which followed a short *Preface* and which preceded his translation of the *Hymns*. In the first edition, there is no mention of the Eleusinian Mysteries in the introductory *Dissertation*, though Taylor does mention the mysteries in a note to the hymn *To Prosperine* (Pesephone)<sup>4</sup> and Eleusis is mentioned in the hymn *To Ceres* (Demeter), which is not remarkable as the divine mother and daughter, were the primary focus of the rites at Eleusis.<sup>5</sup> Between his two

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudo Orpheus, *The Orphic Hymns: Text, Translation and Notes* trans. with notes and introd. by Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Atlanta: The Scholars Press – The Society for Biblical Literature, 1977, rpt. 1988), p. 3. Note: the *Hymns* belong to the pseudepigraphic (written in the name of a celebrated character for prestige, but essentially falsely attributed) tradition.

<sup>3</sup> *Hymns* (1787), p. 109, rpt. in *SW*, p. 209. Note: *The Mystical Initiations; or, Hymns of Orpheus* (1787), was reprinted in 1792 and then reissued as *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus, Translated from the Greek and Demonstrated to Be the Invocations Which Were Used in the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Second Edition, with Considerable Emendations, Alterations and Additions* (Chiswick: Printed by C. Whittingham for the Translator, 1824). The 1824 edition is reprinted in *TTS*, V, 1-191, the *Dissertation on The Hymns of Orpheus*, from the 1787 edition, is given in the same volume; see pp. 259-295.

<sup>4</sup> See *Hymns* (1787), p. 154. rpt. *SW*, p. 241.

<sup>5</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 171, rpt. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

editions of the *Hymns* Taylor wrote *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (c. 1791).

In the 1824 edition of the *Hymns* Taylor unreservedly asserted, as the new title made plain, that the *Hymns* were used as invocations in the mysteries at Eleusis. His insistence that the hymns were used at Eleusis is one of the main differences between the 1787 and 1824 editions. Another difference is that the 1787 edition contains eighty-six hymns, whereas the 1824 edition contains eighty-seven hymns. The source text, Greek with Latin translation and notes, for Taylor's 1787 translation was an edition of the '*Orphic poems*', by Henri Estienne (1531-1598) Andreas Christian Eschenbach (1663-1722), Johan Mathias Gesner (1691-1761) and Georg Christoph Hamberger (1727-1773), published in 1764.<sup>6</sup> Hamberger was the general editor of the 1764 edition; the *Hymns of Orpheus* were presented in Greek text originally edited by Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609) which was edited with Latin translation and commentary by Gesner. Taylor often refers to both Scaliger and Gesner's editorial work in relation to the *Hymns*. In Hamberger's edition and in all those before it, the hymn *To Hecate* is affixed to the prefatory address *To Musaeus*; and it is not counted as a hymn in the cycle. In 1805, Johann Gottfried Jakob Hermann (1772-1848) published a revised edition of Gesner and Hamberger's 1764 edition of the hymns entitled *Orphica*, with Greek text and Latin translation and notes, in which the hymn *To Hecate* was separated from the address *To Musaeus* and presented as the first

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<sup>6</sup> *ΟΡΦΕΩΣ ΑΙΛΑΝΤΑ: Orphei Argonautica Hymni Libellus De Lapidibus et Fragmenta cum notis H. Stephani et Andr. Christ. Eschenbachii, Textum Ad Codd. MSS. et Editiones Veteres Recensuit Notas Suas et Indicem Graecum Adiecit, Io. Matthias Gesnerus Curante Ge. Christo Hambergero. (Lipsiae, Sumtibus Caspari Fritsch, 1764)*, Note: this volume was in Taylor's library see *Soth. Cat.*, Lot 409. Also, an earlier edition of the *Hymns of Orpheus* edited by Eschenbach in 1689, was based on text originally edited by Joseph Scaliger who is not acknowledged on the title-page of the 1764 edition.

hymn in the cycle.<sup>7</sup> In Hermann's edition, the former sequencing of the *Hymns* is identified in Arabic numerals, whereas his new sequencing of the *Hymns*, making 87 instead of the former 86, are numbered in Roman numerals. Taylor followed Hermann's renumbering of the *Hymns* in his 1824 edition. He also revised his translation of many of the hymns, most probably in response to Hermann's re-edition of the Greek text. In 1824, he maintained his practice of translating the hymns into verse; many of the revisions to the original 1787 text are minor. For example, the couplet cited above, was slightly altered to:

Learn, O Musaeus, from my sacred song  
What rites most fit to sacrifice belong.<sup>8</sup>

Taylor's main agenda in reissuing the hymns was to promote his thesis that they were used at Eleusis. Taylor was wrong.

The *Hymns* were most likely to have been written 'in the second or third century of our era' in western Asia Minor, and were written much too late to have been used in Eleusis.<sup>9</sup> Taylor was elevating the importance of the *Hymns* when he identified them with a hypothetical Eleusinian 'liturgy'. M.L. West, disparagingly described the *Hymns* as being:

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<sup>7</sup>*Orphica. Cum notis H. Stephani, A. C. Eschenbachii, J. M. Gesneri, T. Tyrwhitti. (Cribelli versio Argonauticorum. J. J. Scaligeri versio Hymnorum. J. M. Gesnerus de Phoenicum navigationibus extra columnas Herculis. De aetate scriptoris Argonauticorum dissertatio, etc.) Recensuit G. Hermannus* (Lipsiae, Sumtibus Caspari Fritsch, 1805). Note: this work is not listed in the *Soth. Cat.*. However, Taylor makes reference to it several times in footnotes to the 1824 edition and cites Gesner's notes that were maintained in Hermann's edition. See *TTS*, V, 183-184.

<sup>8</sup> *TTS*, V, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 29.

used by members of a private cult society who met at night in a house and prayed to all the gods they could think of, to the light of torches and the fragrances of eight varieties of incense. Occasionally their ceremonial activity went as far as a libation of milk. We get a picture of cheerful and inexpensive dabbling in religion by a literary-minded burgher and his friends...<sup>10</sup>

The most prominent and frequently addressed deity in the *Hymns* was Dionysus, who was evoked eight times under different epithets and various contexts. Dionysiac predominance in the invocations and the inclusion of a curious hymn *To Protogonus*, together with the prefatory address, supposedly by Orpheus, to Musaeus, indicate that the 'private cult society' that created and used the *Hymns* was Orphic. Orphism is a religious phenomenon that reflects the diversity, complexity, syncretism and profundity of the history of Greek religion and theosophy.<sup>11</sup> West's reactionary denigration of the *Hymns* and his attribution of their provenance to a bunch of eccentric religious dabblers is unjustified. It is just as likely that a pious, sophisticated and sincere Orphic sect utilised the hymns in their collective, and solitary, worship of the Hellenic pantheon. Apostolos Athanassakis described the 'private cult society' writing that

It seems quite clear that the Hymns were used by a religious association (θείασος) [*thiasos*] of people who called themselves μύσται, [*mystai*] μυστιπόλοι, [*mystipóloi*] ὄργιοφάνται [*orgiophāntai*] (mystic initiates) and who, through prayer (εὐχή), [*euchê*] libation (λοιβή), [*loibê*] sacrifice (θύσῖα) [*thusia*] and, presumably, secret ceremonies (ὄργια, τελεταί) [*ōrgia, teletai*]

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29. See also, Steve Critchley, 'Thomas Taylor Singer of Songs: Mystical Hymns and Initiations in London 1787-1824', unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 1999, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Note: a full discussion of Orphism would be too much of a digression at this point. For a comprehensive overview of the different strands of Orphism in Greek religion, see: West, *The Orphic Poems*, pp. 1-38; and Gábor Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 68-73 and, pp. 352-372.

invoked a deity and asked for its presence or for the gift of some blessing...<sup>12</sup>

The *Hymns* all take a form borrowed from formal Greek prayer (εὐχή), which was tripartite in structure: a specific, named, invocation is made, followed by a narration concerning aspects of the invoked god or goddess's deeds or attributes, and finally a request is made of the divinity.<sup>13</sup> The *Hymns* contain a middle, narrative structure, but narration of deeds and attributes of divinities is brief and compressed and nothing like the detailed recitation of myth that one encounters in the *Homeric Hymns*. The *Hymns* are also related to *epōidē* (ἐπωιδή), 'incantations' and may have functioned as magical 'spells', in the sense that the chanting of them would bring about a specific result, such as healing when the hymn *To Asklepios* or *To Hygeia* was intoned. The first part of Taylor's title for the 1787 edition of the *Hymns*, '*Mystical Initiations*', is derived directly from the Greek *teletai* (τελεταί): the *teletai* were rituals, especially ceremonies involving initiation into the mysteries of a specific divinity, or divinities.

In 1993, L. J. Alderink, wrote that, 'most scholars question whether Orpheus ever lived and some doubt that any such thing as an Orphic religion ever existed'.<sup>14</sup> In the eighteenth century scholars were just as dubious as they are today about the identity of Orpheus and the definition of Orphic religion. The Neoplatonists embraced Orpheus as an historical character; indeed, they believed he was one of the transmitters, via initiation, of a secret philosophico-religious doctrine that extended

<sup>12</sup> Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns*, p. ix. Note: English transliteration in brackets is mine.

<sup>13</sup> See, Fritz Graf, 'Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual' in *Magica Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*; Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink eds. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 189; and Critchley, 'Thomas Taylor Singer of Songs: Mystical Hymns and Initiations in London 1787-1824', unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 1999, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* [with a new forward by Larry J Alderink] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953 rpt 1993), p. xiii.

through the centuries, via Pythagoras and Plato to their own time. Post-Iamblichean Neoplatonists believed that they were the guardians and practitioners of a theosophical religion that had been taught by the god Dionysus to Orpheus. They frequently cited Orpheus, via interpretation of sacred poems attributed to him, as an authority, as much as they did Plato or Aristotle (remember the Neoplatonists reconciled the Platonic and peripatetic philosophies, or at least they smoothed over divergences and contradictions), in matters of theogonical, cosmological and anthropological belief.

Taylor knew that the person of Orpheus was shrouded in mystery and that his existence had been questioned for centuries. In his introductory *A Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus* he writes that 'the first and genuine Orpheus was a poet of Thrace'.<sup>15</sup> He then mentions four potential authors of the *Hymns*, all called Orpheus, and affirms that in his opinion, the author of the *Hymns* was a Pythagorean called Onomacritus.<sup>16</sup> Taylor was wrong. Though to be fair, he was making assessments based on the information that was available to him which was seriously lacking by today's standards. However, Taylor's mention of Onomacritus, and others who might bear the mystical title Orpheus and carry the bard's mythic authority, is indicative of the number of individuals who wrote poems in antiquity in the name of Orpheus. The name 'Orpheus' did not only convey the magical; it conveyed authority and Taylor invoked the name in the late eighteenth century for the same reasons as his forebears did in classical antiquity. The *Hymns* were attached, rightly or wrongly, to a body of literature that was termed Orphic, that included theogonic poems such as *The*

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<sup>15</sup> *Hymns* (1787), pp. 2-12, rpt. in *SW*, pp. 166-170. Note: hereafter, I shall use the term *Dissertation* when discussing *A Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus* from *Hymns* (1787).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

*Rhapsodies* and the *Argonautica*.<sup>17</sup> The *Hymns* emerged into the west in manuscripts and codices that were all copied in Italy between 1450 and 1550.<sup>18</sup> The manuscripts were Byzantine and Arabian copies of earlier originals and the *Hymns* were often jumbled up with *Homeric Hymns*, hymns by Proclus and Callimachus, Hesioda and the Orphic *Argonautica*.<sup>19</sup> Apostolos Athanassakis has written that

The editio princeps was printed in Florence in 1500. It also contains the Orphic *Argonautica* and some of the Hymns of Proklos. By the year 1600 there were five more editions, one of which was the Aldine in 1517. From the editions which followed in subsequent centuries the one that excels all others – perhaps to this day – is Gottfried Hermann's *Orphica* (1805).

As we have seen, Taylor used Hermann's superior edition of the *Hymns* when he revised his translation of them in 1824. All editions of the *Hymns* that Taylor was familiar with, including Hermann's edition, presented the *Hymns* in the context of a wider spectrum of pseudo-Orphic literature. Taylor understood the *Hymns*, in this context and he received them as they had been transmitted in the west from the time of the Italian Renaissance.

Taylor knew that Plato and Pausanias had referred to Orphic hymns, he wrote, 'The hymns of Orpheus are not only mentioned by Plato in his Eighth Book of *Laws*, but also by Pausanias'.<sup>20</sup> In 1804, Taylor translated Plato's reference to Orphic hymns:

No one, therefore, shall dare to sing a Muse which is not approved by the guardians of the laws, though it should be sweeter than the hymns

<sup>17</sup> Note: not to be confused with the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius. The *Orphic Argonautica* dates from the fifth century CE and is based on Apollonius' earlier account of the Argonaut saga.

<sup>18</sup> Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns*, p. xii.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Hymns* (1787), p. 86. rpt. in *SW*, pp. 198-199.

of Thamyris and Orpheus: but such sacred poems shall be sung as have been examined and approved, and are dedicated to the Gods...<sup>21</sup>

In 1794, he translated Pausanias' mention of Orphic hymns:

But those who are conversant with the writings of the poets, know with respect to the hymns of Orpheus, that each of them is very short, and that the whole of them does not amount to any considerable number. The Lycomedae are well acquainted with them, and sing them in the mysteries of Ceres. These hymns are next to those of Homer for the elegance of their composition; but on account of their superior sanctity, they are preferred for religious purposes to those of Homer.<sup>22</sup>

In section three of his *Dissertation* Taylor cited Thomas Blackwell's (referring to him as 'the author of Letters on Mythology') comments on Pausanias reference to Orphic hymns:

The Thracian Orpheus (says Pausanias) was represented on mount Helicon, with TEAETH (initiation or religion) by his side, and the wild beasts of the woods, some in marble, some in bronze, standing round him. His hymns are known by those who have studied the poets to be both short and few in number. The Lycomedes, an Athenian family dedicated to sacred music, have them all by heart, and sing them at their solemn mysteries. They are but of the second class for elegance, being far excelled by Homer's in that respect. But our religion has adopted the hymns of Orpheus, and has not done the same honour to the hymns of Homer.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *WP*, II, p. 223, rpt. in *TTS*, X, p. 197. *The Laws* – 829d.

<sup>22</sup> Pausanias, *The Description of Greece, by Pausanias. Translated from the Greek. With Notes, In which much of the Mythology of the Greeks is unfolded from a Theory which has been for many Ages unknown. And illustrated with Maps and Views Elegantly Engraved* trans. Thomas Taylor, 3 vols. (London: R. Faulder, New Bond Street, 1794), III, 69-70. *Pausanias* – 9. 30.12. Note: The five engravings, all found in volume one, are after drawings by James Stuart 'the Athenian'; and the maps are after the French cartographer Jean Baptiste D'Anville. Hereafter cited as *Description of Greece*. This work was subsequently reprinted in 1824.

<sup>23</sup> *Hymns* (1787), pp. 87-88, rpt. in *SW*, p. 199.

Plato and Pausanias were not referring to the *Hymns* translated by Taylor although in 1787 he believed they were. By 1794, Taylor doubted that the hymns mentioned by Pausanias were the *Hymns of Orpheus* that he translated. In an endnote in his translation of the *Description of Greece*, he wrote:

*With respect to the hymns of Orpheus, &c.] Fabricius and others are of the opinion, that the Orphic hymns which are now extant are the very hymns mentioned in this place by Pausanias. But surely, if this were the case, Pausanias would not say, that the whole of the hymns of Orpheus does not amount to any considerable number; for how can eighty-six, the number of the Orphic hymns now extant, be called an inconsiderable number?<sup>24</sup>*

This note also demonstrates that in 1794, Taylor still maintained the traditional number of hymns as being eighty-six, which was before Hermann separated the hymn *To Hecate* from the address to Musaeus, making eighty-seven hymns in 1805.

In the 1787 edition of the *Hymns*, Taylor was primarily concerned with presenting them as mystical 'initiations'. The statue of Orpheus on mount Helicon, mentioned in Blackwood's translation of Pausanias, above, was accompanied by a representation of *Telete*. Taylor translated the same line from Pausanias: 'There is a statue here too of the Thracian Orpheus, with *Telete*, or *mystic sacrifice*, standing by his side'.<sup>25</sup> *Teletê* is not a well-known goddess of the Greeks; they deified and anthropomorphised many concepts, but it is fitting that a statue of such a goddess should accompany the statue of Orpheus on Helicon when his role as a teacher, or imparter, of mystical rites of initiation is considered. The Greek *teletê* (τελετή) [feminine, nominative singular] means initiation or a bringing to perfection and was used by Pausanias to describe

<sup>24</sup> *Description of Greece*, III, p. 348.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, III, p. 67. *Pausanias* – 9.30.4.

Orpheus' companion: the goddess of initiation. Taylor's translation, in his 1794 edition of Pausanias, of *teletê* as 'mystical sacrifice' does not reflect, accurately, the concept of the goddess 'initiation', and is more related to *teletai* (τελεταί) as discussed above.

Taylor translated the *Hymns* because they were the most direct way of communicating that Orphism was central to Neoplatonism, particularly post-Iamblichean and Proclian expressions of it. Throughout the *Dissertation* Taylor presents Orpheus as a giver of doctrines and this is highly significant: the Orpheus of the Neoplatonists, and hence, of Taylor the Platonist, was a theologian as much as he was a poet. In the *Dissertation* Taylor presented two hymns, which do not belong to the *Orphic Hymns*: Taylor designates them 'Orphic verses'. They were preserved by Proclus, and Ralph Cudworth described them as 'the grand arcanum of the Orphic theology'.<sup>26</sup> Taylor preceded his quotation of the verses with an important statement that, 'Orpheus was a monarchist, as well as a polytheist'.<sup>27</sup> This was because the verses concerned Jove (Zeus), who was considered king of the gods as well as the demiurge, or craftsman, in the Platonic tradition. Taylor could also just as easily have written that, 'Orpheus was a monotheist as well as a polytheist'. Taylor quoted from Proclus:

Hence with the universe great Jove contains  
 The aether bright, and heav'ns exalted plains;  
 Th' extended restless sea, and earth renown'd  
 Ocean immense, and Tartarus profound;  
 Fountains and rivers, and the boundless main,  
 With all that nature's ample realms contain,  
 And Gods and Goddesses of each degree;  
 All that is past and all that e'er shall be,  
 Occultly, and in fair connection, lies

<sup>26</sup> *Hymns* (1787), p. 33, rpt. in *SW*, p. 178.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29, rpt. in *ibid.*, p. 176.

In Jove's wide womb, the ruler of the skies.<sup>28</sup>

These verses primarily describe the perceived omnipresence of Jove. However, although Jove is presented as supreme, other divinities are contained in, and expressed through, him; or rather 'it'. All doctrinal expressions of Hebraic monotheism, including Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity, primarily present the divine in masculine terms. Within the context of such patriarchal expressions of 'God' feminine aspects of the alleged divine nature are minimised or eradicated. Within Roman Catholicism the mysterious cult of the Virgin, Mother of God, is an exception; though the Virgin is not 'God' in supreme, masculine, terms. Through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, Yahweh is recorded to have made the exceptional statement that, 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you...'<sup>29</sup> The Jewish Cabbalists, who were hardly representative of orthodoxy, revered the feminine embodiment of divine glory: Shekhinah. The Christian Hermetists, influenced by Gnosticism, often saw Christ in feminine terms as Sophia or 'wisdom'. However for-the-most-part, Christian orthodoxy, especially Protestantism, totally exorcised any aspect of the divine feminine from its authorised conception and promotion of God. Pagan Neoplatonism fully embraced the divine feminine and celebrated Jove's femininity, as well as a host of goddesses. An important difference between Christian Neoplatonism and pagan Neoplatonism was that the latter promoted the feminine divine and the exploration of the divine in androgynous, bisexual and incestuous, or

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30, rpt. in *ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>29</sup> *Isaiah* 66:13 KJV.

even self-incestuous terms.<sup>30</sup> This concept is further developed in the second set of verses that Taylor quoted from Proclus:

Jove is the first and last, high thund'ring king,  
 Middle and head, from Jove all beings spring;  
 In Jove the male and female forms combine,  
 For Jove's a man, and yet a maid divine;  
 Jove the strong basis of the earth contains,  
 And the deep splendour of the starry plains;  
 Jove is the breath of all; Jove's wondrous frame  
 Lives in the rage of ever restless flame;  
 Jove is the sea's strong root, the solar light,  
 And Jove's the moon, fair regent of the night;  
 Jove is a king by no restraint confin'd,  
 And all things flow from Jove's prolific mind;  
 One is the pow'r divine in all things known,  
 And one the ruler absolute alone.<sup>31</sup>

The Hymn *To Protogonos* (Πρωτόγονου) is possibly the most 'Orphic' hymn in the cycle of *Orphic Hymns*. In the hymn Protogonus is also called 'Erikepaios', the meaning of this epithet is still obscure; he is also called 'Antauges' meaning 'The One Reflecting Light', and also 'Priapos' the phallic god.<sup>32</sup> The hymn would be better called '*To Phanes*' (the name evoked in line 8) as all the just aforementioned epithets are attributed ultimately to this 'egg-born' god: who in the *Orphic Theogonies* is the ultimate progenitor of the cosmos being the hermaphroditic begetter the goddess *Nyx* (night) with whom he, incestuously, produces *Gaia* (Earth) and *Ouranos* (sky). Phanes is the mystical primordial god who was understood to precede the more familiar earth-mother and sky-father coupling of early religious myths. Phanes is the richly symbolised representation of the *Demiurge* in Orphic terms. The hymn is

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<sup>30</sup> Incest, sometimes with theological implications, was certainly a theme of great importance in some poetry of the Romantic period; for example, in Shelley's poetry; see, Richard Cronin, 'Shelleyan Incest and the Romantic Legacy' *Keats – Shelley Journal*, 45 (1996), 61-71.

<sup>31</sup> *Hymns* (1787), p 31, rpt. in *SW*, p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> See, Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns*, p. 114.

directly related to the Orphic *Rhapsodies*, also called the *Orphic Theogony*, which contains theogonical, cosmological and anthropogonic doctrines.<sup>33</sup> In the 1787 edition of the poems Taylor does not refer to the *Orphic Theogony*, or the *Rhapsodies* directly, though he does cite from Proclus' recapitulation of aspects of them, without calling them such, in the footnotes to the hymn *To Protogonus*.<sup>34</sup> In the 1824 edition of the *Hymns*, due to the influence of Hermann's *Orphica* (1805), he does refer to the theogony using both of its titles. He refers to 'the celebrated *Theogony* of Orpheus'.<sup>35</sup> He also refers to 'the Orphic rhapsodies'.<sup>36</sup> In both the 1787 and 1824 editions, Taylor cites from a text by Damascius called *On First Principles, Peri Archōn* (περὶ ἀρχῶν), which contain detailed references to the Orphic theogonies, including the *Rhapsodies*, with which the Neoplatonists were familiar.<sup>37</sup> The *Rhapsodies* differ from the more familiar Hesiodic accounts of the origins of the gods and of the cosmos. Hesiod's *Theogony* presents the emergence of the gods in a single direction and follows a linear progression: whereas the *Rhapsodies* contain a cyclical theogony, which revolves through three separate phases.<sup>38</sup> A cyclical, rather than a linear, understanding of the origin of the gods, the cosmos and humanity was one of the hallmarks of Neoplatonism.

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<sup>33</sup> There are actually three Orphic theogonies, *The Eudemian Theogony*, *The Hieronyman Theogony* and, the longest of the three, *The Rhapsodic Theogony*, also called *The Orphic Theogony* and *The Rhapsodies*, which influenced the Neoplatonists. It would be too much of a digression to discuss all three in depth for details see: West, *The Orphic Poems*, pp. 1-2 and 140-258.

<sup>34</sup> See, *Hymns* (1787), pp. 118-121, rpt. in *SW*, pp. 215-216.

<sup>35</sup> See, *TTS*, V, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5, and p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Hymns* (1787), p. 116, rpt. *SW*, p. 214. For the 1824 edition see, *TTS*, V, p. 34. Note: Taylor frequently refers to Damascius' *Peri Archōn* in his works.

<sup>38</sup> See, Luc Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), p. 85. Note: for an excellent description of the *Orphic Theogony/Rhapsodies*; see pp. 85-101.

## 2. Cosmic Cycles and Reincarnation

M. H. Abrams defined the cyclicism of Neoplatonic cosmology and theology, which is ultimately derived from interpretations of cosmological aspects of Plato's *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* as well as from the Orphic *Rhapsodies*, as 'circular monism'.<sup>39</sup>

Abram's term is useful as it concisely encapsulates aspects of the theological context of Taylor's statement that 'Orpheus was a monarchist, as well as a polytheist'. For the Neoplatonists everything revolved around, proceeded from and returned to 'The One': while it in itself simply was, neither extending itself nor depending on anything else.

Neoplatonic pantheism was ultimately monotheistic. Romanticism, in both British and European contexts, was greatly influenced by the idea of viewing human history, achievements and potentiality in cyclical rather than linear terms. In Neoplatonic terms, the human soul was considered to have originally existed in a pristine state, where it enjoyed undifferentiated unity with its divine progenitor where all was beauty, goodness and truth. Through desire and deviance the soul left its original state of unified bliss and moved towards individuality and the sense world, of 'particulars' rather than 'wholes' as Taylor would term it, of diversification. In a Neoplatonic cyclical context, redemption, progression and ultimate achievement of truth, beauty and happiness depended on reversion. Romanticism borrowed concepts from philosophical Neoplatonism, such as cyclicism, but redefined borrowed concepts in its own terms. Within the corpus of Romantic poetry, there are many instances of despair of the human condition and human waste, Byron's *Darkness* for instance, caused by greed, political tyranny, oppression and hypocritical religion. However, there is also often an overarching optimism that the human lot might be improved and beautified; not

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<sup>39</sup> M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York and London: Norton & Company, 1971), p. 183.

through returning to some metaphysical 'pristine condition' or a mythical 'golden age', but through endeavouring to be free of oppressive conditioning and by improving life in the present rather than dwelling on unobtainable and imagined past and future states. Abrams wrote that

In the central tradition of Neoplatonic thought the absolutely undifferentiated One had been the absolute good, perfection itself, the *primum exemplar omnium*, and the end to which all existence aspires. In this distinctive Romantic innovation, on the contrary, the norm of truth, goodness, and beauty is not the simple unity of the origin, but the complex unity of the terminus of the process of cumulative division and reintegration. William James once remarked of the Neoplatonic One that "the stagnant felicity of the absolute's own perfection moves me as little as I move it." James's recoil from the traditional apotheosis of static, uniform, and self-sufficient simplicity overpasses that of most thinkers of our period, who acknowledged the strong attraction of the primal unity of being; but they view such an attraction, we shall see, as a hopeless nostalgia for a lost condition to which civilized man can never return, and ought not to return if he could; for what makes him civilized, and a man, is his aspiration toward a harmony and integrity which is much higher than the unity he has lost. And it is higher, these thinkers point out, not only because it preserves diversification and individuality, but also because, instead of being a condition which has merely been given to man, it is a condition which he must earn by incessant striving along an inclined circuitous path. The typical Romantic ideal, far from being a mode of cultural primitivism, is an ideal of strenuous effort along the hard road of culture and civilization.<sup>40</sup>

Orthodox Christianity purported a linear view of creation with a fixed beginning, middle and prophesied ending. Furthermore, a key assertion of orthodox Christian theology, that is crucial to its understanding of divine revelation, is that God intervenes, or acts in, the linearly projected, and predestined, history of the world. One of the main differences between early Christian Neoplatonism, (such as in the theology of the Greek and Latin Church fathers and later in Ficino and the Cambridge

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 184-185.

Platonists) and Pagan Neoplatonism is that the former broadly supported orthodoxy in relation to creationism, divine revelation and eschatology, while the latter viewed the cosmos cyclically. The Christian Neoplatonism of eighteenth-century radical Presbyterianism and intellectual Unitarianism was more relaxed towards the theological complexities surrounding creationism, divine revelation, eschatology and even soteriology: its proponents concentrated instead on the reasonableness of Christianity and redefining doctrine in intellectual, moral and politically progressive terms. Christian orthodoxy taught that the human soul's fate was singularly determined by divine ordinance and judgement: the scripture unequivocally pronounced, 'it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement'.<sup>41</sup> Metempsychosis was an accepted doctrine of Pagan Neoplatonism. The soul was considered immortal and was part of a cycle of emergence and return to and from its original divine source. Reincarnation was a possibility for the soul as it experienced its cyclical journey. Belief in the pre-existence and immortality of the soul was foundational to the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis, as discussed in both the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, where learning was postulated to be a form of remembering. The Lockean hypothesis that the mind is a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) with no inherent knowledge in it that was awaiting rediscovery by means of recollection was a major, and widely accepted, revision of the understanding of human psychological development in the eighteenth century.

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<sup>41</sup> *Hebrews* 9:27.

By 1794, Taylor was publicly identified as a fervent believer in reincarnation in Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review* where a reviewer, signed A.Y., quotes from Taylor's *Two Orations of the Emperor Julian* (1793) and then comments:

In the introduction the translator, agreeably to his belief in the doctrine of metempsychosis, observes as follows...

'His [the Emperor Julian's] language is, indeed, highly magnificent, and in every respect becoming the exalted rank which he sustained, and the very great importance of the subjects of his discourse: in short, the grandeur of his soul is so visible in his composition, that we may safely credit what he asserted himself, that he was formerly Alexander the Great. And if we consider the actions of Alexander and Julian, we shall easily be induced to believe that it is one and the same person who, in different periods, induced the indians, bactrians, and inhabitants of Caucasus, to worship the grecian deities: took down the contemptible ensign of his predecessor, and raised in its stead the majestic roman eagles.'

Many of our readers probably will smile at this passage; the doctrine however, on which it is grounded, was very seriously believed in by some of the ancient philosophers, and is also, it should seem, seriously believed by the translator of this work.<sup>42</sup>

Hence, Taylor's personal belief, in this instance pertaining to reincarnation, is an important context in which his readers received his translations. As a translator, he contextualised, and some might say 'contaminated', his translations by obtrusively asserting his own personality and agendas arising out of personal religious beliefs. In an eighteenth-century authorial context, Taylor was not doing anything new when he

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<sup>42</sup> A.Y. 'Platonic Philosophy: Taylor's Translation of Two Orations of the Emperor Julian', in *The Analytical Review*, 20 (1794), 93. Note: *The Analytical Review*, founded by Joseph Johnson and Thomas Christie, was an important organ of the radical Johnson circle centred at his publishing/bookselling premises at 72 St. Paul's Churchyard. Reviewers remained anonymous signing their initials only; at times the initials were arbitrarily chosen, this makes often makes it difficult to attribute reviews to reviewers. Prominent authors and artists of the period who were part of Johnson's circle contributed, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Henry Fuseli and William Cowper.

conspicuously allowed his own religious convictions to contextualise, and influence, his presentation of philosophical and mythological texts. The bishop, William Warburton's (1698-1799) influential *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated* (1737-1741), and Jacob Bryant's (1715-1804) *A New System, or an Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774), which was very popular and reprinted, and expanded, several times up until 1807: are two examples of mythological works which sought to Christianize the most explicitly pagan aspects of ancient Greco-Roman mythology. Taylor attacked both Warburton, whom he called 'that mitered sophist',<sup>43</sup> and Bryant in print: by criticising their, sometimes ludicrous and inventive, Christianization of pagan myth and symbolism. A dominant aspect of the argument of the Taylor's *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* involved corrections of Warburton's Christianized interpretations of the symbolism involved in the pagan rites of the ancient mystery religions.<sup>44</sup> Taylor was unusual amongst English mythologists as he was a pagan who attempted to understand and interpret ancient paganism in pagan terms.

In the *Preface* to his translation, Taylor made important statements about the reception he expected the *Hymns* to receive and about his method of translation.

Taylor decried late eighteenth-century British cultural values writing that

In consequence of very extended natural discoveries, trade and commerce have increased, while abstract investigations have necessarily declined: so that modern enquiries never rise above sense; and everything is despised which does not in some respect or other

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<sup>43</sup> See *WP*, I, p. xci, rpt. *TTS*, IX, p. 63.

<sup>44</sup> See *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (Amsterdam [London]: n.d. [1791]), pp. 1-2, p. 63 and pp. 71-72, rpt. in *SW*, pp. 345-346, p. 374 and p. 377 and in *TTS*, VII, p. 59, p. 75 and 82-83. Note: Taylor's *Dissertation* is hereafter cited as *Eleusinian Mysteries*.

contribute to the accumulation of wealth, the gratification of childish admiration, or the refinements of corporeal delight.<sup>45</sup>

Taylor was often combative and declamatory, especially in introductions to his works. He clearly defined his anti-materialist, what would now be termed anti-Enlightenment, agenda. In the opening sentence of the *Preface*, Taylor wrote that ‘There is doubtless a revolution in the literary, correspondent to that of the natural world’.<sup>46</sup> The term ‘revolution’ was used here to denote cyclical change, not the overthrow or replacement of a regime or order. If Taylor had written this sentence a few years later, after the French Revolution, the sentence would have had a more aggressive and politically sensitive meaning. The sentence immediately following qualified the statement about ‘revolution’: Taylor wrote ‘The face of things is continually changing’. Taylor saw his own work as being part of a sea-change, a re-emergence of the ebb and flow of the tide of time of the *philosophia perennis*. He wrote that he could not reasonably expect that his labours would meet ‘with the approbation of the many’.<sup>47</sup> A critic responded to this statement in the review of Taylor’s paraphrase translation of Plotinus’ *Concerning the Beautiful* in *The Monthly Review* in 1788, which immediately followed a review of the *Hymns*. The reviewer praised Taylor’s translation of Plotinus writing that the *Monthly* could not:

refuse our testimony to its *general* fidelity, and our approbation of *some* passages, in which the sense of an author, whose style is harsh, and whose language is obscure, is skilfully preserved, in a paraphrase, at once perspicuous and sublime. This ought to convince Mr. Taylor, that we are neither insensible to the real

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<sup>45</sup> *Hymns* (1787), p. v, rpt. in *SW*, p. 163.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

value of his author's work, nor blind to the merits of the translation.<sup>48</sup>

The reviewer bestowed 'approbation' upon Taylor's labours in translating Plotinus publicly; the few – the reviewers at the *Monthly* – praised him before the many. It seems to me, that the reviewer was offering Taylor an amount of encouragement at the commencement of his literary career hoping that he would abandon his bombastic criticisms of modern philosophy and culture in favour of dedicating himself to professional scholarly translation. The reviewer knew that Taylor was doomed to failure and ridicule, in both popularist and professional scholarly terms, if he continued to preach when he claimed to translate.

Taylor wrote, quoting Pythagoras, that, 'many carry the Thyrsus, but few are inspired by the spirit of the God', referring to those who 'study words alone'.<sup>49</sup> He applied the same sentiments to those who translated words alone. In the *Preface* he declared that his method of translating the *Hymns* was by composing a 'faithful and animated paraphrase' of the source text.<sup>50</sup> His concept of 'animated' paraphrase included a transfusion of the fire, or spirit, of the original into the translation that could be called forth when latent and expanded when condensed.<sup>51</sup> He declared that:

If some sparks of this celestial fire shall appear to have animated the bosom of the translator, he will consider himself as well rewarded, for his laborious undertaking.

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<sup>48</sup> Anon. 'Concerning the Beautiful: or, a paraphrased Translation from the Greek of Plotinus, Ennead I, Book VI. By Thomas Taylor. 8vo. 1s. 6d. Payne, &c. 1787' *The Monthly Review* 79 (1788), p. 142. Note: this portion of text has already been quoted and discussed and is reintroduced due to the context of my discussion here. See, p. 155.

<sup>49</sup> *The Hymns* (1787), p. viii, rpt. in *SW*, p. 164.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix, rpt. in *ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Taylor understood translation to be a transfusion of the spirit of the original into the translated text, capturing the 'spirit', 'fire' and intention of the original author was just as important as mirroring his words. He decided to utilise rhyme, rather than blank verse, in his translation of the *Hymns*, because he considered 'it necessary to the poetry of the English language, which requires something of a substitute for the energetic cadence of the Greek and Latin Hexameters'.<sup>52</sup> This comment is interesting as it demonstrates that Taylor considered the Latin translation of the *Hymns*, as found in Hamberger's edition of 1764, as well as the Greek text when he translated them. Furthermore, in relation to the licence afforded by adopting paraphrase as his method of translation he wrote of the:

compound epithets of which the following Hymns chiefly consist, though very beautiful in the Greek language, yet, when literally translated into ours, lose all their propriety and force. In their native tongue, as in a prolific soil, they diffuse their sweets with full-blown elegance, but shrink like the sensitive plant at the touch of the verbal critic, or the close translator.

Modern scholarship has neutered Taylor's contextualisation of the *Hymns* and he would rightly be termed a historicaster rather than a historian in relation to their origins and primary use in antiquity. Nevertheless, he was not intentionally misleading; he faithfully oriented his historical assertions in line with the scholarly assumptions of those who had edited the *Hymns*, and particularly in relation to Gesner's editorial commentary, at least in 1787. In 1824, Taylor was inventive, yet not with deceptive intent; he believed that the *Hymns* were used at Eleusis. However

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi, rpt. in *ibid.*, p. 164.

his translation of the *Hymns* themselves and the accompanying *Preface*, introductory *Dissertation* and often extensive, notes were not only scholarship for scholarship's sake but also a vehicle for disseminating philosophical Neoplatonism and proselytising in service of his pagan religious beliefs. His first, book-length productions, the *Hymns*, and *Concerning the Beautiful*, were prototypes of the format Taylor used, for the rest of his life, for disseminating the Platonic philosophy and his own pagan religious beliefs. Taylor's translations were always conditionally transmitted to readers, he sought to communicate personal belief through translation; he never came to the text for the sake of the text itself: he came to it because of what it said. Taylor's translations, along with introductions, glosses and notes, mediated Neoplatonism accurately and successfully, but it would seem that the translated text itself was a secondary element of his translations; the important thing was the interpretation of the text. Therefore, when Taylor was translating, Orpheus, Plotinus, or Plato himself he was constantly qualifying his translation with what Neoplatonic tradition said; this is evinced in his notes. The ancient author being translated had a voice and Taylor let his readers hear it in unison with several others, including his own.

### 3. Christian Critics: Reviewing Paganism

The late eighteenth century was a time when the cult of the celebrity was emerging in a recognisably modern sense. The opportunity to express opinions and project a manufactured, oftentimes highly stylised, persona in public had never been so possible for the *hoi polloi*. This was due to the rapid expansion of print culture and literacy rates. Taylor had a message to communicate and he exploited the growing

cult of celebrity in order to deliver it. There is no question that Taylor promoted his public image as 'the modern Pletho', 'Pagan Taylor', 'Thomas Taylor the Platonist' and the like, to his own advantage, or rather to the advantage of his cause: he did not profit, in a monetary sense, from his literary labours. The anonymous author of *The Survival of Paganism* reckoned that Taylor's print output, 'extended to sixty-four volumes, of which twenty-three are in quarto, and it is estimated that the printing alone must have cost upwards of twelve thousand pounds'.<sup>53</sup> The subject matter of Taylor's publications, then as now, predominantly appealed to specialist readers. Self-publicity was essential, if his works were to be read at all. Publicity in journals, magazines and newspapers was an essential aspect of the success of literary careers in what Frank Donoghue has termed 'the fame machine'.<sup>54</sup> Being gossiped about, criticised, satirised and sometimes applauded was part of the ruthless nature of the machine. The relationship between Taylor and the reviewers was a painful one but was nevertheless promotive of his career and his public reputation.

Taylor makes frequent reference to verbal and venal critics. His calling critics 'venal' is noteworthy as it is an adjective applied to those that can be bribed or corrupted. Taylor also refers to critics as 'hirelings'; this in conjunction with 'venal' denotes those that were employed to write critical reviews which would serve a particular political or religious interest rather than being independent. The *Monthly Review*, founded in 1749, and the *Critical Review*, founded in 1756, were dedicated, exclusively, to reviewing new books.<sup>55</sup> Donoghue has argued that: 'They claimed to

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<sup>53</sup> 'The Survival of Paganism' (1875), p. 644.

<sup>54</sup> See, Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> See, *Ibid.*, p. 3.

represent the interest of the elite among the English reading public and to articulate those interests in their review articles. From this privileged position, they supplied the plots for a variety of literary careers.<sup>56</sup> The *Monthly* 'expressed the views of moderate Dissent' and was staffed primarily by Churchmen and Dissenters.<sup>57</sup> The *Critical* was more conservative and was 'known for most of its existence as a "Tory" review'.<sup>58</sup> Concerning the religious motivations of the reviews in the period Ronald B. Levinson has pointed out, 'the *British Critic* was the organ of the High Church Party, the *Monthly Review* was Non-Conformist; the *Anti-Jacobin* was what the name implies'.<sup>59</sup> The reviews were not unbiased or impartial.

In June 1787, the *Hymns* were reviewed in *The Critical Review*.<sup>60</sup> The review opened with a psychologically oriented statement, which was intended to portray Taylor as an obsessive personality:

The human mind, biassed in favour of any particular pursuit, is not only apt to consider every thing besides as of inferior consequence, but even feels some degree of resentment if others do not entertain a similar partiality for it.<sup>61</sup>

In the *Preface* to the *Hymns* Taylor had asserted that, 'experimental enquiries, increased without end, and accumulated without order, are the employment of modern

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Derek Roper, *Reviewing Before The Edinburgh 1788-1802* (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 174.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>59</sup> Ronald B. Levinson, 'Thomas Taylor, The Platonist', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1924, p. 89.

<sup>60</sup> Anon, 'The Mystical Initiations; or Hymns of Orpheus translated from the original Greek: with a Preliminary Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus; by Thomas Taylor. Small 8vo. 5s. T. Payne and Son.' *The Critical Review*, 63 (1787), 401-406.

<sup>61</sup> *Critical Review* (1787), p. 401. Note: 'biassed' is the original spelling.

philosophy. Hence we may justly conclude, that the age of true philosophy is no more.'<sup>62</sup> The reviewer responded defensively and personally to Taylor's remarks.

He wrote:

What! a modern scholar might answer, because I prefer the eloquence of Blair, and rational divinity of Secker, to the reveries of Plato, and the unintelligible jargon of Pythagoras, am I to be stigmatized as deficient in learning?<sup>63</sup>

It is interesting that the reviewer marked out Plato, attributing 'reveries' to him, rather than to the later Platonists. In his review of Taylor's *Works of Plato* in the *Edinburgh Review* (1809), James Mill, used similar language describing Proclus and the latter Platonists. He wrote:

In the character of a commentator, Mr. Taylor has scarcely done anything, or indeed professed to do anything, but to fasten upon Plato the reveries of Proclus, and of the other philosophers of the Alexandrian School.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, Mill added:

he has succeeded in getting up the belief, whole and entire, of all the unmeaning, wild and ridiculous reveries of the latter Platonists; nay, more than this, he has added to the belief, an admiration, which words sink under him in expressing;—no man ever regarded a revelation from heaven with more extatic adoration, than Mr. Taylor does the sublime discoveries of Proclus.<sup>65</sup>

I have not been able to trace any reviews of Taylor's works following that of Mill, in the *Edinburgh* (1809): Mill's review of Taylor's *Works of Plato* was most probably,

<sup>62</sup> *Hymns* (1787), pp. iv-v, rpt. in *SW*, p. 163.

<sup>63</sup> *Critical Review* (1787), p. 401.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Works of Plato' in *The Edinburgh Review*, XIV (1809), p. 192.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192-193.

the last review of one of Taylor's publications in a British journal. So, in one of the earliest reviews, and in the last review, 'reveries' is applied not to Taylor but first to Plato and then to Proclus. The reviewer of the *Hymns* in 1787 saw Plato himself as being wild, fanciful and ecstatic. Whereas Mill saw Plato as having been travestied and considered that reveries had been fastened onto Plato by Proclus, 'the Alexandrians' and by Taylor their disciple. The reviewers of Taylor's works detested Neoplatonism and saw it as being a mystical irrelevancy. Mill did not see Taylor as a Platonist but rather as an obscurantist. In his 1809 review, Mill attacked Taylor personally as well as damning his translations.

From the beginning, the reviewers treated Taylor with suspicion. Some early reviews praised his translations. However, once it was evident that Taylor was a radical Neoplatonist, and a persistent pagan, the reviewers attempted to assassinate Taylor in literary terms. They soon began to call his scholarly abilities into question and criticise his handling of the Greek language. The classics were the domain of the elite; knowledge of Greek and Latin were the hallmarks of a gentleman's education. The son of a stay-maker, recently employed as a boarding school usher, and as a banker's clerk, was treading on hallowed ground. Eighteenth-century British culture was increasingly meritocratic and individuals could move across social boundaries. If Taylor had been a pious Christian, or even a discrete atheist, his work would have been received by critics quite differently. Mill wrote that:

the state of classical learning, at present, in this country, is by no means such as to please us; and much good, we think, might be derived from an improvement in the plan of our Greek and Roman studies.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188

The professional scholars and learned gentlemen of the day had not applied their superior learning and linguistic abilities towards providing a faithful and complete translation of Plato in the English language.

In the *Critical Review* Taylor's religious adherence to the creed of the later Platonists was attacked and ridiculed. However, his translation of the *Hymns* received a measure of praise; the reviewer wrote that:

The poetical merit of the original is inconsiderable; and the translation is as good as could reasonably be expected.<sup>67</sup>

The reviewer closed with the following remarks which included a warning that was mystical enough for Taylor to understand:

Mr. Taylor professes he has no expectation of pleasing 'the many,' and he is right. Those who are fond of abstruse and recondite learning, though they may object to some peculiarities, will find entertainment in this elaborate commentary on a most difficult subject; in which the author, not deterred by the prohibition to the uninitiated of *Procul o procul este profani!* endeavours to withdraw the veil from the mysterious rites of antiquity, and

Pandere res alta terra & caligine mersas.<sup>68</sup>

Here the reviewer is quoting, in Latin<sup>69</sup>, from Virgil's *Aeneid*. *Procul o procul este profani* means: be gone, be gone, or away with you away with you, you profane

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<sup>67</sup> *Critical Review* (1787), p. 404.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

(uninitiated). *Pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas* translates as: what earth and darkness have long concealed below.<sup>70</sup> The reviewer was stating that Taylor was uninitiated and therefore he was unqualified to interpret the secrets of the mystery religions of the past, which were best left undisturbed.

The review of the *Hymns*, that was published in the *Monthly Review* in 1788, was a Christian, and condemnatory, response to Taylor's pagan Neoplatonism. The reviewer wrote that:

Mr. T. must pardon us, if, after his zealous endeavours to initiate us in the mysteries of the Thracian bard we still retain our Christian prejudices...<sup>71</sup>

The review opened with a sarcastic lament that Taylor had not lived in the mythical past; he is also identified as a disciple of Orpheus. The reviewer wrote that:

we lament that Mr. Taylor had not lived before the Trojan war, or filled some lucrative and honourable post in the schools of Alexandria. In the former case, he might have profited by the personal instructions of his master Orpheus, and even played on his lyre, without fearing the fate of Neanthus. In the latter, he might have explored new regions of intellect with Plotinus, or Proclus, whose society would, probably, have been more congenial to his taste than that of Plato himself.<sup>72</sup>

The reviewer's reference to Neanthus was a warning. Neanthus stole the lyre of Orpheus from a temple and played it. He wanted the magic of the lyre to work for him

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<sup>69</sup> *Aeneid* VI : 258.

<sup>70</sup> *Aeneid* VI : 267.

<sup>71</sup> Anon, 'The Mystical Initiations; or Hymns of Orpheus translated from the original Greek: with a Preliminary Dissertation on the Life and Theology of Orpheus; by Thomas Taylor. Small 8vo. 5s. T. Payne and Son.' *The Monthly Review*, 79 (1788), p. 134.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

as it had for Orpheus. Rather than trees, rocks and wild animals being drawn to him in enchanted adoration, wild dogs came and tore Neanthus to pieces. Like the reviewer from the *Critical* who had quoted Virgil, the reviewer from the *Monthly* was quoting mythology; suggesting that the Orphean lyre was best left alone in the temple of myth, in the past. The reviewer also made a distinction between Plato's Platonism and the philosophy of Plotinus and Proclus; he clearly saw latter-Platonism as being something altogether different from early Platonism. The reviewer saw Taylor as being an out-of-place character, a philosophical misfit. He wrote:

At present, he unfortunately seems to be somewhat out of his element; for there are few, we believe, in these degenerate days, who contemplate the history of Orpheus, or of his philosophy, any otherwise than as a literary curiosity.<sup>73</sup>

#### 4. Describing Greece: Contemporary Reflections and Reviews

A principal example of Taylor's using a translation as a vehicle for the dissemination of Neoplatonic philosophy and ideals is his edition of Pausanias' *Description of Greece* (1794). Sir Uvedale Price, who is better remembered for his works on the picturesque, the sublime and the beautiful, had already translated Pausanias' *Description* into English in an abridged version.<sup>74</sup> Taylor relates that he was paid a relatively small amount for his effort:

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>74</sup> Sir Uvedale Price *An account of the Statues, Pictures, and Temples in Greece; translated from the Greek of Pausanias*, (London: 1780).

But the most laborious of all his undertakings, and for which he seems to have received less in proportion than for any of his other publications, was his translation of Pausanias. When this task was first proposed to Mr. T. by the bookseller, Mr. Samuel Patterson, well known to the literary world by several very ingenious publications, happening to be present, observed that "it was enough to break a man's heart." "O (replied the bookseller) nothing will break the heart of Mr. T.!" This Herculean labour our Platonist accomplished in the space of ten months, though the notes are of such an extent, and so full of uncommonly abstruse learning, that the composition of them might be supposed to have taken up a much longer time. For that most arduous work, we almost blush to say, Mr. T. received no more than sixty pounds; and we are grieved to add, that his health was greatly injured by his excessive application on that occasion. We are indeed informed, that the debility of his body became so extreme after this, that at times he was incapable of exertion; and what is singular, he has ever since been deprived of the use of his forefinger in writing.<sup>75</sup>

The contract between Taylor and the publisher of his translation of Pausanias is preserved in the Osborn Collection in Yale University Library. It reads:

Memorandum 1793 February 18<sup>th</sup>

Mr. Thomas Taylor engages with Edward Jeffrey to make a complete translation of Pausanias for fifty pounds, twenty pounds to be paid in May next fifteen pounds when the last but two sheets is printed + the balance by a note at six weeks on its being printed

Witness \* Thomas Taylor.<sup>76</sup>

Any sense of legal decorum is absent from the 'memorandum' (contractual note); it measures 8 x 6 inches and looks like it was scrawled hurriedly over a table in a coffee house. In *Public Characters* it appeared that the contract for translating Pausanias was made between Taylor and Samuel Patterson. The above memo reveals that the

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<sup>75</sup> *SW*, p. 119.

<sup>76</sup> Yale University Library, The James Marshall and Marie Louise Osborn Collection. OSB MSS Files 14876.

contract was agreed between Taylor and Edward Jeffrey and it would seem that the contract was brokered by Samuel Patterson. The full amount paid to Taylor according to the contract was the sum of £50, and this corresponds with the assertion in *Public Characters* that 'Mr. T. received no more than sixty pounds' for his work. *The Description of Greece* was one of the few works for which Taylor was contracted.

An explanation of Taylor's theory of translation is found in the *Preface* to his translation, which as he relates above, he was under intense pressure to produce. In the *Preface* he writes that, 'the philosopher and the historian, the critic and the naturalist, the poet and the painter, the statuary and the architect, the geographer and the antiquary, may find in this work an ample fund of solid instruction and refined amusement: for Pausanias had the art of aptly uniting conciseness with accuracy, and the marvellous of venerable traditions and mystic fables with all the simplicity of an unadorned description'.<sup>77</sup> At the outset, Taylor acknowledges the scope of interest and application which his translation might provide for his readers. However, he foregrounds the 'conciseness' and 'accuracy' of Pausanias' descriptive style in the context of 'venerable traditions' and 'mystic fables', having mentioned those of his contemporaries who might find an application for his translation either in their interests or in their professions. It will be seen that the understanding of 'venerable traditions' and 'mystic fables', and the dissemination of such, are the ultimate justification and primary aim of his work. Taylor goes on to address the issue of translating Pausanias' Greek:

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. viii.

his language is inelegant through abruptness, and intricate through the peculiarity of construction with which it abounds. Indeed, the obscurity of his diction is so great, that he may perhaps be considered as the most difficult author to translate of any in the Greek tongue; for his meaning is frequently on this account inaccessible to the most consummate verbalists, and can only be penetrated by one who is in the habit of understanding words by things, as well as things by words.<sup>78</sup>

The quality of the Greek of Pausanias' text which Taylor refers to merely as causing difficulties for the translator, is in fact only in part owing to the abrupt and peculiar construction of the style of the author. The text of the *Description* is conflated because it has been transmitted through several copyists, a process that accounts for the, at times, abrupt or peculiar style.

The first Greek text offered to the West of Pausanias' *Description* was edited by Marcus Musurus and printed by Aldus and Andreas in Venice in 1516. This text was not in Taylor's library, which was auctioned in London by Sotheby and Son on the second and third of February 1836 following Taylor's death. He did own an edition in Greek of Pausanias<sup>79</sup> which he probably used as an aid to revising his translation of the *Description*. The revision was published in 1824. In the *Preface* to the 1794 edition, Taylor discusses the merits of the editor of the Greek text he used. This was J. Kuhnus, the Latinised form of the German surname Kühn, who published a Greek text with a Latin commentary of Pausanias' *Description* in Leipzig in 1696.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>79</sup> *Soth. Cat.* 418, *Pausanias*, Græce, 3 tom. Lipsiæ 1818.

<sup>80</sup> Pausanias the Traveller, ed. J. Kuhnus *Pausaniou tes 'Ellados periegesis: hoc est, ... Graeciae Descriptio, a G. Xylandro ... recognita ... Accesserunt annotationes ... a G. Xylandro ... inchoatae, nunc ... a F. Sylb. continuatae ... Addita etiam ... R. Amasaei versio, ... notatiunculis illustrata, etc. Gr. & Lat. Accesserunt ... annotationes ac novae notae J. Kuhnii.*, 2 vols. (Lipsiae: T. Fritsch, 1696). Note: this is the third edition of a work of the same title originally published in Frankfurt (Francofurti) in 1583.

Taylor often makes a distinction between words and things which is fundamental to his theory of translation. He frequently professes himself more concerned with meaning than with the words which conveyed it. Such an approach to the language of the original, especially in a translator, is anathema to philologists. Taylor's assertion that, because of the difficulty of the original Greek, the meaning of Pausanias' text 'can only be penetrated by one who is in the habit of understanding words by things, as well as things by words' is a key principle that guides his practice. His frequent denial of the importance of 'verbal criticism' and 'grammatical niceties' needs to be understood in the context of how he perceived written communication. For Taylor, a literal word for word translation did not serve as a vehicle for the communication of meaning. The views of Percy B. Shelley on translation, particularly in his youth, bear some resemblance to Taylor's. Timothy Webb has discussed Shelley's theory of translation at length in *The Violet in the Crucible* where he comments, quoting a letter of 1812:

In a letter to Godwin he pointed out that words are dangerous for the young, because they are signs for ideas and the young should be masters of ideas *before* they are masters of words. Of Latin as a grammar he thought highly, but concluded: 'I can not help considering it, as an affair of minor importance, inasmuch as the science of things is superior to the science of words'.<sup>81</sup>

The idea of distinction between things and words, or in Saussurian terms between the signified (*signifié*), often a 'thing' in the sense of a material object, and the signifier

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<sup>81</sup> Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 22.

(*signifiant*), the representative or indicator of a ‘thing,’ raises many complex issues concerning perception, representation and meaning in linguistic theory. Both Taylor and Shelley are aware of some of the problems that are encountered in understanding and using of language, especially in translation. From a Platonic perspective words and writings, like everything in the cosmos which is encountered on a physical level, are merely shadows or representations of ideal Forms. Plato’s Forms, as they were understood and interpreted by later Platonists, are extra, or super-physical and can only be perceived intellectually by the contemplative and purified mind; because ultimately they are ideas. Hence, the realities behind the mechanisms of physical representation are more important and more ‘real’ than the representations themselves. The problem that this poses for any theory of writing as representational, be it in the native tongue or in translation of a foreign tongue, is that words can never exactly comply with the ideal ‘mental’ form. Using the physical medium of verbal text to signify the non-physical, for example ideal ‘truth’ or beauty’, or any similar idea, seems to undermine the intention to communicate in that the means of expression is itself flawed. It is like conveying light by means of shadows, or substance by means of adulterated matter.

Taylor, referring to himself in the third person as one ‘who is in the habit of understanding words by things as well as things by words’, footnoted the comment thus:

Plutarch in his life of Demosthenes observes, that what happened to him with respect to his knowledge of Latin, may seem strange though it be true: “for (says he) it was not so much by the knowledge of words that I came to the

understanding of things, as through experience in things I attained to the signification of words.’<sup>82</sup>

Bernadotte Perrin translated the quotation from Plutarch thus:

And here my experience was an astonishing thing, but true. For it was not so much by means of words that I came to a complete understanding of things, as that from things I somehow had an experience which enabled me to follow the meaning of words.<sup>83</sup>

In the elaborate, witty and apologetic introduction to his life of *Demosthenes* Plutarch coyly comments on the relationship between ‘words’, the names of a person or thing and ‘things’ themselves. In the first two sections of *Demosthenes* Plutarch presents aspects of his own scholarly life, collecting histories and biographical information for instance, and he also admits to the possible, or even inevitable, inadequacies of his literary labours. He speaks of the scholarly benefits of living ‘in a city which is famous, friendly to the liberal arts, and populous, in order that he may have all sorts of books in plenty’. Furthermore, he praises the metropolis where one ‘may by hearsay and enquiry come into possession of all those details which elude writers and are preserved with more conspicuous fidelity in the memories of men’. Thus, Plutarch extols the advantages of the metropolitan scholar adding that such a one ‘will thus be prevented from publishing a work which is deficient in many, and even in essential things’. After expounding such benefits Plutarch asserts, ‘But as for me, I live in a small city’.<sup>84</sup> The

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<sup>82</sup> *Description of Greece*, p. ix.

<sup>83</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives: Demosthenes and Cicero, Alexander and Caesar*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, 11 Vols. ed. E.H. Warmington (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Heinemann & Harvard University Press [The Loeb Classical Library], 1919), VII, 4-5.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

preface or introductory passage can be employed as a vehicle whereby a relationship with readers is attempted. Interpretative 'ground-rules' for the subsequent text might be established, and the favour or leniency of readers in relation to any mistakes or shortcomings might be solicited. The authorial voice, as encountered in a preface, is often constructed in such a way as to make readers feel that they are privy to information regarding the construction and fabric of the work to follow in order that it might be received in a spirit of trust and confidence in the author.

The introductory passages of Plutarch's *Demosthenes* and Taylor's *Preface* to his *Pausanias* both contain an appeal for a relationship between the reader, author and text which would not otherwise exist. Plutarch's comments on language acquisition are framed by details of his personal encounters with the Latin tongue and literature. He relates that on his various travels in the Roman Empire, 'I had no leisure to practise myself in the Roman language, owing to my public duties and the number of my pupils in philosophy'. He divulges to his readers that it 'It was therefore late and when I was well on in years that I began to study Roman literature'. Though a formidable writer in his native Greek, he confesses his unfamiliarity with 'the beauty and quickness of the Roman style, the figures of speech, the rhythm, and other embellishments of the language' in his youth. He then goes on to say that, 'the careful practise necessary for attaining this', a graceful accomplishment in his knowledge and use of Latin, 'is not easy for one like me, but appropriate for those who have more leisure and whose remaining years still suffice for such pursuits'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-7.

Plutarch's comments need to be understood in the context of his life of *Demosthenes* being presented in parallel with the life of *Cicero*. He was engaging in a cultural, historical, linguistic and personal comparison between Greece and Rome via examples of Demosthenes and Cicero who were understood to be the two greatest orators of all time. Plutarch, due to his self-confessed unfamiliarity with aspects of Latin idiom, said that 'Therefore, in this fifth book of my Parallel Lives... I shall examine their actions and their political careers to see how their natures and dispositions compare with one another, but I shall make no critical comparison of their speeches...'.<sup>86</sup>

Taylor used Plutarch's experience 'strange, though it be true' of acquiring knowledge of Latin by an experience of 'things' which led to an experience of 'words' in a sense opposed to the intention of the original to support his own experience of the acquisition of additional languages, which were in his case Latin and Greek. Professing himself to be 'in the habit of understanding words by things as well as things by words', Taylor used Plutarch's reference to words and things as a support for his own experience of instinctive and practical linguistic development. However, reading Plutarch's comments in context reveals that he saw what might be termed a 'haphazard' and experiential acquisition of language as being inferior to an applied and specialised study of languages; hence his avoidance of a comparison between the speeches of Demosthenes and Cicero. Taylor despised those of the established academy of his day who were in his eyes, 'verbal critics' who understood texts in isolation from philosophical, especially Neoplatonic, contexts. However, though Taylor's enterprising endeavours to restore the understanding of Platonic writings in the context of Platonic theology were

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

justified, he jeopardised the respect which his work certainly deserved in that respect by berating or dismissing both linguistics and linguists.

The young Shelley was exposed to Taylor's writings at Oxford. Thomas Jefferson Hogg reported that amongst his student friend's books there were, 'several of the publications of the learned and eccentric Platonist, Thomas Taylor'.<sup>87</sup> The fact that he was an influence on Shelley's lifelong study and artistic application of Platonism is indisputable. During Shelley's residence at Marlow, in the Thames Valley, in 1817, he wrote to his publisher Charles Ollier, on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, sending him a manuscript copy of *Frankenstein*, which was published later that same year. At the conclusion of the letter Shelley enquired:

Do you know is Taylor's "Pausanias" to be procured, and at what price?<sup>88</sup>

I have not discovered if Shelley ever purchased a copy of Taylor's *Pausanias*, but the fact that he wished to own the work is probably related to the Greek setting of parts of *Laon and Cythna* (later retitled *The Revolt of Islam*) which he was writing at the time.

Of the task of translating Pausanias and the reception of his publication Taylor wrote:

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<sup>87</sup> Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Humbert Wolfe, 2 vols. (London: 1933), 1, p. 73. Note: I own Hogg's signed copy of Taylor's *Two Orations of the Emperor Julian* (1793). Hogg did not date the volume nor are there any annotations or markings in the text so it is difficult to determine when the copy came into his possession; it could be one of the volumes he and Shelley read at Oxford though it is just as likely he acquired it in later life.

<sup>88</sup> P.B. Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* ed. Fredric L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 1, p. 549.

The translator of such an author into any *modern* language may certainly expect that his translation, if faithful upon the whole, will be treated with lenity by every class of readers except venal critics, who censure or praise a work according to the taste of the age, and not according to its intrinsic merit; and who endeavour to crush the slow-rising fame of unprotected genius, with the same savage unconcern that a ruffian stabs the benighted traveller in some lonely path. As I have therefore endeavoured to give the sense of Pausanias with the utmost fidelity of which I am capable, and with as much elegance as his work can be reasonably supposed to demand in a translation, I solicit, and make no doubt of obtaining, forgiveness from the candid reader, for such errors as may be naturally supposed to attend the completion of so arduous an undertaking.<sup>89</sup>

In his works he often makes small digressions and addresses his readers, using such phrases as ‘the candid reader...’, as he does above, or ‘the liberal reader...’. Dr. Johnson, in his dictionary, defined ‘candid’ as ‘white; fair, open, honest, kind’; and ‘liberal’ as ‘free, bountiful, generous’. Taylor always hoped to engender such qualities in his readers and was disappointed at responses of an opposite character. In the section quoted above Taylor is dismissive, accusatory and apologetic and all in the space of a paragraph! Obviously, he had two distinct classes of readers in mind: firstly, critics and secondly general readers who would be interested in what knowledge was conveyed rather than primarily concerned with how it was conveyed. Taylor also referred frequently to ‘the Platonic reader’, as a teacher of Platonism Taylor hoped that his works would assist others in becoming Platonists. Like most translators he was also aware of the imperfection of translation as a mode of transferring information from one linguistic system to another and of the occurrence of ‘mistakes’ in his work. Indeed he admitted that his translation would contain some errors, one reason being that he accomplished the task of translation in the space of

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<sup>89</sup> *Description of Greece*, p. ix.

ten months, on which subject he takes care to address his readers, soliciting their leniency and understanding.<sup>90</sup>

Taylor had been severely criticised as a Greek scholar. He defended himself particularly against accusations that he worked from other languages than the Greek, from Latin or modern languages. He wrote:

In short, whatever may be the defects of my translation, and whatever may be its destiny with the public, I can assure the reader, that it is not from the Latin, French, Italian, or indeed any language but Greek. That it is not from the Latin, anyone but a malevolent critic may be easily convinced by comparing it with the Greek; and that it is not from any living language is no less certain; for (as those who are acquainted with me well know) I neither understand, nor desire to understand, any modern tongue but the English, being fully convinced, that nothing so much debilitates the true vigour of understanding as an excessive study of words.<sup>91</sup>

This is significant because if Taylor had had more experience of the nuances of other languages, apart from those to which he professed allegiance, he would have been a somewhat different translator. In that case, especially if modern Romance languages were those concerned, he would have had a broader experience of linguistic range and register which would have assisted him in translation especially in relation to style or subtleties of rendition which competence in those languages that developed directly from Latin would have provided.

In the *Preface*, Taylor attacks Richard Bentley (1662-1742) who had been Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and who had been widely celebrated as one of the finest

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<sup>90</sup> *Description of Greece*, p. x.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Greek scholars of his day. This seems to be a strange move from one who had been busy justifying his abilities as a translator. I think that Taylor's criticism of Bentley was aimed at the critical reviewers of his own work. He used Bentley as an example of one who had 'debilitated the true vigour of understanding by an excessive study of words'.

He wrote that:

our countryman Bentley, who certainly was one of the most eminent verbal critics that ever lived, and who is on this account called by Fabricius *Lumen Angliæ, the light of England*, is egregious proof. For his pretended emendations of Milton bear the strongest marks of a mind elevated by intense application to words; of a mind which has been so long substituting one word for another, as to think at last, that the most becoming were alike defective with the most improper expressions; and in short of a mind which was equally insensible to the graces and fire of poetry, to elevated conceptions and magnificent diction, to all the delicacies of taste and all the brilliances of wit. The utmost, therefore, that can be said of his pretended emendations is, that they are *different readings!*<sup>92</sup>

In the above passage Taylor is commenting, with justification, on Bentley's emendations to Milton's *Paradise Lost* which were published in his edition of that work in 1732. Bentley furnished Milton's text with some 800 emendations believing that copyists, literary assistants and editors had served Milton badly. Milton had been totally blind for fourteen years when *Paradise Lost* was submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury's offices for a licence to be published just before or not long after the Great Fire of London in September 1666. The fair copy of the manuscript was of course not in his own hand as his blindness necessitated the use of amanuenses. Amongst other emendations Bentley notoriously suggested that the last two lines of the epic should be changed from: 'They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way.' to 'Then hand in hand with social steps

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

their way / Through Eden took with heavn'ly comfort cheer'd.'<sup>93</sup> Taylor was using the example of Bentley's unjustifiable tampering with Milton's text, a judgement that most of his readers would have agreed with, in an exemplary fashion as well as being critical towards him as a philologist. He is suggesting that Bentley, whom he proposes here as a type as well as an individual, represents the 'verbal critic' who crushes or misrepresents the essence of a text by authoritarian tampering with it on technical grounds or by simple lack of taste in poetry. Milton of course, represents the creative genius who has produced the 'graces and fire of poetry'. It should be remembered however, that Bentley's corrupting blunders in his edition of Milton do not diminish the contribution which his Greek scholarship made towards textual criticism in that language.

As well as being criticised as a Greek scholar Taylor's use of English was criticised as being archaic or disjointed. In the *Preface* he also pre-empted criticism of the style of his prose:

Some fashionable readers will, I doubt not, think that my translation abounds too much with connective particles. To such I shall only observe, that beauty in every composite consists in the apt connexion of its parts with each other and is consequently greater where the connexion is more profound.<sup>94</sup>

Taylor had reason to engage in self-defence; he often used long, sometimes extremely long, sentences. His style is not highly polished though it does have its own authority by virtue of its distinctive quality. Obviously, overly long sentences were not

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<sup>93</sup> John Milton, ed. Richard Bentley *Milton's Paradise Lost A New Edition by Richard Bentley D.D.*, (London: Printed for Jacob Johnson and John Poulson, and for J. Darby, A. Bettesworth and F. Clay, in trust for Richard, James and Bethel Wellington, 1732), p. 399.

<sup>94</sup> *Description of Greece*, p. xv.

personally displeasing to Taylor on an aesthetic level; indeed, he seems to see the long and complicated as constituent of a 'beautiful' style. He made a marked use of conjunctions, such as 'and' or 'because' in his prose, and adverbs such as 'nevertheless' or 'otherwise' as mechanisms for extending his sentences. He might rightfully be criticised for a lack of succinctness and, at times, an inflated, complicated and somewhat mechanical prose. Hyperbolically, we might think, Taylor characterised his writing, with all of its 'connective particles', as having a representative beauty and order that contemporary society lacked:

In the present age indeed, it cannot be an object of wonder, that books are composed with scarcely any connective particles, when men of all ranks are seized with the mania of lawless freedom, bear indignantly all restraint, and are endeavouring to introduce the most dire disorder, by subverting subordination, and thus destroying the bond by which alone the parts of society can be peaceably held together. Of the truth of this observation the French at present are a remarkable example, among whom a contempt of orderly connexion has produced nothing but anarchy and uproar, licentious liberty and barbaric rage, all the darkness of atheism, and all the madness of democratic power.<sup>95</sup>

Taylor's analogy between the political state of nations and the state of prose, specifically the use of grammar, in those nations can appear excessive and simplified and yet possesses a kernel of insight, that there is a relationship between writing and the wider culture that it proceeds from and addresses. The above comments were Taylor's public response to the French Revolution and the events in France after the Revolution of 1789, especially the September massacres of 1792 followed by the execution of King Louis XVI on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1793 and the Terror which ensued up to 1794. Taylor's allusions to 'dire disorder' and 'subverting subordination' in relation to language and society in the context of the Revolution with its actualities and the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

massive propaganda campaign surrounding it in England must have had an accentuated meaning for his original readers. Taylor's anti-Gallican comments betray a degree of xenophobia on his part. His criticism of both British and French notions of 'liberty', current in the seventeen-nineties, and his unbridled censure of events in France during and after the Revolution mark him out as a loyalist.

Taylor was politically conservative. He identified Orpheus as 'a monarchist as well as a polytheist' and he no doubt aspired to imitate Orpheus as much as he did Pythagoras, Plato and Proclus.<sup>96</sup> However, he was a complex 'public character' who appeared as a loyalist, but who attacked a flank of the establishment: the Church, and who mixed with leading radicals such as Thomas Brand Hollis, and, as shall be seen shortly, with Charles Howard the 11<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk – an outspoken radical of the Whig party. Plato favoured aristocratic rule and oligarchy, especially if the elite were trained philosophers, above democracy as forms of government. Indeed Plato, himself of the Athenian aristocratic class, was highly critical of democracy. It should not come as too much of a surprise then that Taylor was critical of 'all the madness of democratic power'. Although he was not primarily a political writer, he attacked two leading political reformers, Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, in his anonymously published *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (1792), which should be considered a pamphlet rather than a book.<sup>97</sup> Besides the obvious allusion, in the title of his pamphlet, to Paine and Wollstonecraft's writings, Taylor wrote that

Indeed, after those wonderful productions of Mr. PAINE and Mrs.

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<sup>96</sup> *Hymns* (1787), p. 29, rpt. *SW*, p. 176.

<sup>97</sup> See, Louise Schutz Boas ed., *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (1792) by Thomas Taylor: *A Facsimile Reproduction with an Introduction by Louise Schutz Boas* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966). Note: This edition is a reproduction of a copy in the British Library.

WOOLSTONCRAFT, such a theory as the present, seems to be necessary, in order to give perfection to our researches into the rights of things; and in such an age of discovery and independence as the present the author flatters himself, that his theory will be patronised by all the lovers of novelty, and friends of opposition, who are happily, at this period, so numerous both in France and England, and who are likely to receive an unbounded increase.<sup>98</sup>

*The Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* was a hyperbolic, sardonic and adversarial response to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and to Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791). Taylor drew upon his vast knowledge of the Classics and presented an argument promoting 'the equality of brutes to men'.<sup>99</sup> He did not only, humorously, advocate animal rights; he also proposed that some 'abler hand', than his, might demonstrate that 'vegetables, minerals and even the most apparently contemptible clod of earth' had rights too.<sup>100</sup> By writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* Taylor was participating in the pamphleteering war between radicals and loyalists, which Gregory Claeys has described as 'the blasts and counter-blasts, charges and counter-charges of the French Revolution debate', in England in the seventeen-nineties.<sup>101</sup>

Taylor's *Pausanias* was reviewed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in October 1794. Other reviews followed from the *British Critic* in January 1795 and the *Monthly Review* in 1796.<sup>102</sup> In the *Preface to Pausanias* Taylor threatened that, 'I shall pay no

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iii-iv.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iv.

<sup>100</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>101</sup> Gregory Claeys ed., *Political Writings of the 1790s*, 8 vols. (London: William Pickering), I, p. liii.

<sup>102</sup> See Appendix 2.

attention whatever to criticisms that are merely the result of ignorance; but if I find them attended with malevolence, I shall not fail to expose the baseness of such species of composition, in a copious appendix to my next publication'.<sup>103</sup> He fulfilled his promise in an appendix to his translation of Apuleius' *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche* (1795), where he wrote the following:

The account given of my translation of Pausanias, by the authors of the *British Critic*, is so very apparently malevolent, that had I not, foreseeing their malignity, promised to expose it, I should have treated it with the most profoundly-silent contempt.

They begin by observing, that the short space of time in which I mention I was under the necessity of completing such an arduous undertaking, ought not to be admitted as an excuse for the faults of my translation. That it will not serve as an excuse with such critics as these will be readily admitted by every one who has either read any of their productions, or is personally acquainted with them; indeed, he who is intimate with verbal critics in general will cease to wonder, unless he is a pedant himself, at any instance of feeling asperity, or malignant invective, which he may meet with in their writings. But though the necessity which obliged me to finish so large a work in the short space of ten months, a necessity arising from indigent circumstances, and the very small sum of sixty pounds allowed me by the booksellers for the whole of such a laborious task, produces no emotions of pity, no philanthropic effusions, nor even any degree of impartial censure in the breasts of these literary assassins, yet I am persuaded that it will be admitted by every liberal reader as a just apology for a multitude of faults.

I may farther add in my defence, supposing the translation to be as faulty as they represent it, (for I have only carelessly glanced over their criticisms) that having devoted myself to philosophy, I am much more familiar with the phraseology of the Greek philosophers, than of the Greek historians...<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Description of Greece*, p. xvi.

<sup>104</sup> *Cupid and Psyche*, pp 147-149.

Taylor's reply to the criticism he received is heartfelt and transparent. It should be remembered that Taylor had a wife and seven children at home, the above passage reveals that the family were struggling and that Taylor needed the £60 fee. Aside from the pressures of necessity in Taylor's domestic life, the latter part of the quotation, where Taylor admits to being less familiar with the phraseology of the Greek historians than he was with philosophical terminology reveals humility and honesty on his part. Later in the appendix Taylor stated that he was:

Conscious, therefore, that Pausanias was an author out of my track, but at the same time, impelled by *extreme* necessity to translate his work, I considered; that in the opinion of the liberal and philosophic part of my readers I should simply compensate for any errors of my translation, by presenting them in the notes with as much mythological and theological information, derived from antient sources, as I was able. I rejoice, therefore, in the opportunity which the pressure of want afforded me of disseminating the wisdom of the Greeks by means of this translation.<sup>105</sup>

The transparency of the above admission and what it reveals about Taylor's agenda as a translator is highly significant in relation to understanding him as a writer. Taylor had it in his mind that he had a readership, which were 'liberal and philosophic' and he wrote primarily for them. Every author must have some kind of receptor of their efforts in mind when they write, which sustains the labour of creation, for why would an author write other than for a desired reader? Taylor's confession that he 'compensated' for any errors in the translation by providing his imagined audience with an abundance of 'mythological and theological' endnotes, confirms that Taylor's

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

main aim as a writer, be that in the mode of the translator or the author of original works, was to disseminate ‘the wisdom of the Greeks’.

In the review of *Pausanias* which appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* a condensed recapitulation of the substance of the *Preface* appears which is interspersed with critical commentary and then followed by corrections to Taylor's text. One of the primary objectives of the reviewer is to dismiss what he considered Taylor's ultimate aim in publishing his translation; namely the dissemination of pagan mysticism in the guise of what Taylor terms ‘the wisdom of the ancients’. The reviewer also calls into question Taylor's assertion that his translation was not derived from ‘any language but the Greek’. In this respect the reviewer cites two translations of the *Description* into modern languages, an Italian version, praised for its accuracy, by Alfonso Bonacoiuoli published at Mantua in 1593 and a French version published in Amsterdam by the Abbé Gedoyn in 1733. Taylor certainly knew of these translations for in the preface he assured his readers that his translation was ‘not made from the Latin, French or Italian’. While calling the authenticity of Taylor's translation into question the reviewer stated:

Whether Mr. T. is to be commended for such a strict abstinence from every preceding translator may be doubted. His own version is stiff and literal, without conveying the original meaning.<sup>106</sup>

What did the reviewer mean by ‘stiff and literal’? Dr. Johnson defined literal as ‘not figurative, exact’, which would, on the face of it, appear to be a compliment when

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<sup>106</sup> Anon. ‘Reviews of New Publications’ in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 64, (1794), p. 923.

applied to a translation. However, in combination with ‘stiff’ a ‘literal’ translation would seem to be wanting in relation to nuance or the conveyance of idiomatic meaning; hence according to the reviewer Taylor’s translation failed to deliver the original meaning of the author. The reviewer does not debunk Taylor’s proficiency in the Greek language directly, rather he cites a number of examples from the translation in comparison with the original Greek as evidence of poor, or negligent, practice. For instance, on page 86 of the first volume Taylor wrote, ‘There are likewise to be seen here the tombs of the Thessalian knights’(1.29 in original Greek text). Regarding which the reviewer noted, ‘ “Thessalian knights.” Is not ἵππων *horsemen*?’<sup>107</sup> The reviewer is quite right; Taylor had no justification for translating *hippiōn* as ‘Thessalian knights’. On page 93 of his translation Taylor gave the Goddess Artemis, Latinised Diana, the epithet of ‘Splendour-bearing Diana’. The reviewer states, ‘Splendour-bearing Diana [Σελασφορου] is rather luminous’.<sup>108</sup> Again, the reviewer is correct: ‘Σελασφορου’ translates as ‘light bearer’ or ‘light-bringing’. Why did Taylor use the word ‘Splendour’ in his translation? Dr. Johnson defined splendour as ‘lustre’; the word also carries connotations of dazzling brightness which is applicable to light.

The question arises, where did Taylor obtain definitions of Greek words? Lexicons were available to him such as those by Johannes Scapula and Benjamin Hederic; in fact Taylor edited an edition of *Hederic’s Lexicon* in 1803. *Hederic’s Lexicon* provides the reader with Greek-Latin word analysis. This was common academic practice; the scholar of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries often absorbed Greek through Latin interpretative apparatus. In *Hederic’s Lexicon* (1825) ‘Σελασφόρος’ is

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 924. Note: the reviewer omits to supply a rough-breathing with ἵππων.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

defined ‘*splendorem seu lumen ferens*’.<sup>109</sup> Taylor’s translation of the word as ‘splendour’ seems likely to have come from the definition given in Latin which he in turn put into English. ‘*Selasphoros*’ also has connotations of moonlight or moon-lustre, which resonates well with Artemis (Diana) who was a celebrated moon goddess.

When Taylor was accused by critics of practically regurgitating Latin translations of Greek works into English, as a mark of his being incompetent as a Greek scholar, it may be that in some instances it was not his reliance on Latin translations that was being identified but rather his reliance on lexical tools, which were in Latin. The reviewer who pointed out that ‘*Selasphorou*’ was better translated as ‘luminous’ rather than ‘splendour-bearing’, though correct, was no doubt splitting hairs. Taylor’s choice of ‘splendour-bearing’ over ‘luminous’ or the more accurate ‘light-bearing’ does not indicate simply inaccurate translation though it does provide important information regarding his use of lexical tools.

Much the same is evident in the reviewer’s note, relating to page 85 (vol. 1) of Taylor’s translation of Bacchus Eleuthereōs (Ἐλευθερεώς) as ‘Bacchus the Liberator’. The reviewer commented, ‘If this means *Deliverer* why not translate it so, and not prefer Xylander’s Latin name?’<sup>110</sup> A common epithet of Zeus was ‘Ζεὺς Ἐλευθεριῶν’ meaning ‘Zeus the Deliverer’. The reviewer, again splitting hairs, is quite right to point out that in connection with the epithet in question a precise translation would read ‘Bacchus the Deliverer’. However, deliverance and liberation are interchangeable in relation to overall meaning and the Greek ‘Ἐλευθερεώς’ has strong connotations of

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<sup>109</sup> Benjamin Hederico, *Græcum Lexicon Manuale* (London: Rivington, 1825), (no page numbers)

<sup>110</sup> Anon. *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1794), p. 924.

liberty and freedom. What is more, Bacchus was called ‘Ἐλευθερεώς’ in relation to a place where he was held in high honour, *Eleutherae* on the frontier of Attica and Boeotia.

On page 95 of his translation (vol. 1) Taylor translated the Greek ‘Δουλοῖ’ as ‘servants’; this was a mistake as the reviewer points out; it should have been translated as ‘slaves’.<sup>111</sup> Again, the reviewer brings an imperfection to light which is slight; it seems to me that, in this instance at least, the reviewer has gone to great lengths. He cites similar instances of ‘mistranslation’ as they occurred in all three volumes to expose Taylor as an incompetent scholar or even as a fraud. The main reason for Taylor being scrutinised to such a degree, where inaccuracies, which were often slight, such as those cited above, were levelled against him as being major mistakes, was because of the religious and pagan-oriented theological stance he took. Taylor’s *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus on the First Book of Euclid’s Elements* (1788-1799) had previously been ‘reviewed’ in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. There the reviewer wrote the following, more a brief notice than a review, which illustrates the kind of primary offence which was taken at Taylor’s works:

An attempt to revive Paganism in this enlightened age can only be added to those many bewilderments of the human mind in the crowd of reveries that perplex our modern reasoners, without any shadow of support, except from the love of singularity and a licence of thinking. We forbear to enter into a fuller discussion of the subject.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Anon. ‘Reviews of New Publications’ in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 59 (1789), p. 434.

The notice above clearly dismisses Taylor's work on the grounds of the attempt made in it to 'revive Paganism in this enlightened age', perhaps the shortness of the notice was due to the belief that an author with such a blatant antichristian and 'anti-enlightenment' agenda would soon wither away unnoticed. In fact, the contrary proved true; Taylor's dedication to his cause and his industrious output were set to increase in the public domain to such an extent that he could not be ignored. James Mill's 1809 review of *The Works of Plato* was as much a condemnation of the Neoplatonists and Neoplatonism as it was a personal attack on Taylor and a damnation of his translations. However, he was being defensive. Taylor's mission to disseminate pagan Neoplatonism was more successful than Mill could bear to countenance. Mill wrote that:

It has been the fate of Plato, in modern times, to be seen through the most unfavourable medium. The visionaries of the Alexandrian school, by calling themselves Platonists, and clothing themselves, as much as possible, with the reputation of that admired philosopher, have made him confounded in a great measure with themselves. The anticipated disgust which has withheld almost everybody from perusing the one, has accordingly withheld most people from becoming acquainted with the other.<sup>113</sup>

Taylor was not popular or fashionable but he did have readers. Mill was as much against Plotinus and Proclus as he was against their disciple from Walworth. His review of *The Works of Plato* was a call for reform, and rejuvenation, of the state of classical studies in England: it was an exorcism of Taylor and a prayer for the appearance of a Jowett. Taylor certainly allowed his presentation of Plato to be filtered through the interpretative commentaries of the Neoplatonists and through his

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<sup>113</sup> James Mill, 'The Works of Plato' in *The Edinburgh Review*, XIV (1809), p. 192.

personal commitment to the theurgic pagan religion of Iamblichus and Proclus. He was not deliberately misrepresenting Plato; he was being faithful to a valid Platonic tradition. However, Taylor deliberately misrepresented Plato's meaning when he translated in conformity with cultural biases.

## 5. Eroticism, Plato and Translation

Michael Prince has suggested that 'it is interesting to compare Taylor's contemporary reputation with those of other 'pagans' such as Darwin and Knight'.<sup>114</sup> He discusses Taylor's *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (1791) and offers an explanation for why it was published under a fictitious imprint of 'Amsterdam'. He also refers to both Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) and Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824) as valuing pagan pantheism above Christianity:

The *Dissertation's* anonymous and undated publication from Amsterdam suggests an attempt to shelter from the opprobrium invited by the defiant prefacing of his previous *Commentaries of Proclus* with Isaac D'Israeli's assertion that 'Mr T. Taylor, the Platonic Philosopher and the *modern Plethon*, consonant to that philosophy, professes Polytheism'. The indefatigable T. J. Mathias brackets 'Taylor, England's gentile priest' firmly with 'Priapus' Knight and Darwin as a 'would-be restorer of unintelligible mysticism and superstitious pagan nonsense'. Like Knight and Darwin, Taylor not only treats paganism with more respect than Christianity, he also refuses to condemn the graphic sexuality of some of its imagery: thus a key moment in the mysteries represents the exposure to Ceres of the genitals of the matron Baubo, thus luring her into 'corporeal life' on which Taylor remarks that, 'exhibitions of this kind in the mysteries were designed to free us

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<sup>114</sup> Michael Prince, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 96.

from licentious passions ... through the awful sanctity with which these rites were accompanied'.<sup>115</sup>

Erasmus Darwin, notably, in his widely read and discussed long poems, *The Botanic Garden* (1789-91) and *The Temple of Nature* (1803), displayed sympathy with classical pantheistic paganism. Richard Payne Knight was notorious for his explicit *An Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus* (1786) and that work together with his *The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology* (1816) marked him out as a connoisseur, collector of classical artefacts, mythologist and classical scholar. Taylor certainly knew Knight's work and disapproved of it. This is evinced in his humorous, yet poignant, poetical pun which he penned in his copy of Richard Payne Knight's *On the Symbolical Language of the Ancient Art And Mythology*, where he wrote: 'Tis a work without light, / For 'twas written by Knight, / and 'tis easy to see / Νυξ and Knight will agree.'<sup>116</sup> The word play on the Greek 'nux' makes the joke as nux (Νυξ) means 'night'.

Though Darwin and Knight were unconventional, provocative and unorthodox characters who were conversant with classical pantheistic paganism, they were not 'pagans' in the same sense, as Taylor was a pagan pantheist in Iamblichean and Proclian religious terms. However, Darwin's poem *The Botanic Garden* – a philosophical meditation on the economy and sexual lives of plants, was in part a response to the Portland Vase and its supposed depiction of scenes in the Eleusinian

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. Note: Taylor's account of Baubo's exposure to Ceres is found in, Thomas Taylor, *Eleusinian Mysteries*, pp. 121-123, rpt. in . *SW*, pp. 403-404, TTS, VII, 107-108.

<sup>116</sup> *Soth. Cat.*, Lot 201.

mysteries, and was indicative of a sincere interest in ancient Greece in the late eighteenth century.<sup>117</sup> Knight's publications were also part of what has been termed 'the Greek revival' and are indicative of philhellenism and learned curiosity in the antiquities of ancient Greece, and Rome, in the period.<sup>118</sup>

Although Taylor did refer to the genitals of Baubo (her name means belly) in the *Dissertation*, he did not refer to the vagina in an overt or explicit fashion. He wrote: 'she uncovers herself, and exhibits her secret parts; upon which the goddess fixed her eyes, and was delighted with the novel method of mitigating the anguish of sorrow...'<sup>119</sup> Most of the specific contents of the rituals of the Greater Eleusinian Mysteries, which were performed first at Athens and then at Eleusis over a nine day period, have never been disclosed. This was due to the sanctity in which oaths to secrecy concerning the Eleusinian rites of Demeter and Persephone were held. An example of this is found in the *Description of Greece* by Pausanias the traveller who was an Eleusinian initiate, and who wrote:

*It was my intention indeed, to have related every particular about the temple at Athens, [that is the Temple of Eleusinian Demeter] which is called Eleusinian, but I was restrained from the execution of this design by a vision in a dream.*<sup>120</sup>

Another factor was that the breaking of the oaths of secrecy concerning the mysteries was punishable by death. Three aspects of the Mysteries at Eleusis, which

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<sup>117</sup> See Kathleen Raine's comments on the Portland Vase, Darwin, Wedgwood, Blake and Taylor in *SW*, p. 14.

<sup>118</sup> Note: for more context see Marilyn Butler's discussion of both Darwin and Knight in the context of mythology and mythologizing in the Romantic period: Marilyn Butler 'Myth and mythmaking in the Shelley circle' in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, ed. Kelvin Everest, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), p. 7 [Darwin] and p. 17 [Knight].

<sup>119</sup> *Eleusinian Mysteries*, p. 122, *SW*, p.403, *TTS*, VII, 107.

<sup>120</sup> *Description of Greece*, I, 39-40.

took place in the Telesterion (hall of initiation) are known: there were things enacted, things said and things shown. The exposure of the genitals of a priestess, always an old woman, identified with the nurse Baubo, is said to have been enacted before initiates.<sup>121</sup> Taylor avoided prudery in his translation practice and attempted to give readers full translations, though he would often conjoin metaphysical explanations and glosses to potentially offensive, sexual or bawdy, passages. He translated Apuleius' *Golden Ass* in 1822, limited to 500 copies, in which sexually explicit passages were suppressed; however many copies were sold with ten pages of suppressed material added at the end.<sup>122</sup> Most of Taylor's publications were privately printed and stored in his home in Walworth; he distributed his printed works himself either from his doorstep, by private arrangements with subscribers or through arrangements with booksellers.<sup>123</sup> It was common practice for books to be purchased in wraps or in boards, and the purchaser would have the manuscript bound according to their own taste and purse. This gave Taylor the freedom to offer his readers complete translations or copies that omitted potentially offensive, blasphemous or overtly sexual material.

Floyer Sydenham suppressed portions of *The Banquet*, the overt homoerotic content at the end of the speech of Socrates and in the following speech of Alcibiades, in his translation of that dialogue. He also considerably altered the homoerotic portions of the speech of Pausanias, and any of the speeches in the dialogue that displayed

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<sup>121</sup> See Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 40 and 65.

<sup>122</sup> See Apuleius, *The Metamorphoses, or Golden Ass, and Philosophical Works of Apuleius Translated from the Original Latin by Thomas Taylor*, trans. Thomas Taylor, (London: Printed for the Author and sold by Robert Triphook and Thomas Rodd, 23 Old Bond Street, 1822). Note: the volumes that include ten extra pages have a sectional title 'Passages Suppressed.' rpt. in *TTS*, XIV see the *TTS* editor's comments on p. xi, regarding suppressed passages.

<sup>123</sup> Note: when Taylor died in 1835, hundreds of unsold copies of his works were stored in his home. See *Soth. Cat.*, Lots 723 – 741 for details.

homoeroticism, by replacing Plato's explicit statements about love between men with softened heterosexual counterparts. Taylor included both the entirety of the speech of Socrates and the suppressed portions of the speech of Alcibiades in its entirety in his edition of Plato (1804), and criticised Sydenham for suppressing it in his introduction to *The Banquet*.<sup>124</sup> However, he maintained the substitution of all explicitly erotic references, such as in the speech of Pausanias, relating to male partners with descriptions of female partners. For instance, when Socrates is reporting the teaching of Diotima, the prophetess, towards the end of his speech, beautiful boys (καλοῦς παῖδάς)<sup>125</sup> and youths (νεανίσκους), together with gold and beautiful clothing, are referred to as being secondary examples of beauty when compared to 'the Beautiful itself' (referring to Divine) though they may be strongly desired.<sup>126</sup> In the *Works of Plato* Taylor maintained Sydenham's translation of 'kalous paidas' as 'beautiful youths' which might also be translated 'beautiful boys'; however, he also maintained Sydenham's translation of 'neaniskous' as 'damsels' which is incorrect: the Greek 'neaniskous' should be translated as 'youths' and is connotative of masculine and vigorous young men, who were usually beardless.<sup>127</sup> Of course, both Sydenham and Taylor knew that they were deliberately misrepresenting Plato's original meaning and the reasons for misrepresenting the sense of the Greek text were cultural. This is understandable in the context of eighteenth-century perceptions of same sex eroticism. Homosexuality, as it has been defined and understood in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was a foreign concept in the late eighteenth century, though

<sup>124</sup> See *WP*, III, 437-438, rpt. in *TTS*, XI, 487. See also Taylor's scathing note [n.3] where he comments on Sydenham's being 'perfectly ignorant of the polytheism of the Greeks...' in *WP*, III, 515, rpt. in *TTS*, XI, 542.

<sup>125</sup> Note: The Greek text cited is reproduced from, *Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics: Plato Symposium*, ed. with introd. by Kenneth Dover (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 rpt 1995), p. 62. The circumflex accent on 'paidas' is given as printed in Dover's edition.

<sup>126</sup> See *Symposium* – 211d-211e. Note: reference given in Stephanus numbering.

<sup>127</sup> See *WP*, III, 515. rpt. in *TTS*, XI, 542.

sodomy was a crime punishable by hanging and homosexuals were referred to as 'mollies', a word that had earlier referred to female prostitutes.<sup>128</sup> Of course, there were those in eighteenth-century British society who knew that men had sex with men and who neither cared nor were shocked by such knowledge.

The eight, male, participants in Plato's *Symposium*, all deliver speeches apart from Aristodemus. A strong female presence is introduced into the drinking party via Socrates' speech where the teachings concerning *eros*, reportedly imparted to Socrates by the mysterious mantic priestess Diotima, are recounted. Pederasty was a normal aspect of pedagogy in ancient Greece, and this is reflected in the *Symposium*. Normally, aristocratic men would instruct younger men, of appropriate social rank, with whom an erotic bond was often made, until the youth was ready to marry or join the armed forces. The younger man, usually in his teens was called 'the beloved' (*erōmenos*) and the older male, who pursued the younger man was called 'the lover' (*erastēs*). It was commonplace for aristocratic men to acknowledge sexual arousal at the sight of a handsome youth as much as at the sight of a beautiful girl. An unusual aspect of the *Symposium* is that the homoerotic relationship between Pausanias and Agathon, who hosts the drinking party, was presented as being a sustained and long-term, rather than an initiatory, and temporary, relationship.<sup>129</sup> The fact that homoeroticism is a recurrent theme in the *Symposium*, does not necessarily imply that Plato himself was condoning or promoting male homosexual intercourse, especially

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<sup>128</sup> See Jeffery Weeks' account of the hanging of four members of the crew of the ship, the *Africaine*, after being convicted of buggery in a naval scandal in 1816 in, 'The Construction of Homosexuality' in *Queer Theory*, ed. Steven Siedman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 46.

<sup>129</sup> See *Symposium*, ed. with introd. by Kenneth Dover, pp. 3-5.

not in the context that homosexuality has been defined and experienced in the late twentieth century.

Phaedrus, in his speech, relates that Love, Eros (Ἔρως), should be considered as the most ancient of gods and that as such he bestows the greatest goods.<sup>130</sup> He then relates the following in relation to Eros bestowing the greatest goods: 'I cannot say what greater good there is for a young boy than a gentle lover, or for a lover than for a boy to love.'<sup>131</sup> In this sentence Sydenham and Taylor specifically used the proper feminine pronoun, amongst other grammatical devices, in order to misconstrue Plato's original meaning. In the *Works of Plato* the sentence is given as: 'For to young persons, at their first setting out in life, I know no greater good than love; to the party beloved, if she has a worthy lover, or to the lover himself, if his mistress be worthy...'<sup>132</sup> Sydenham and Taylor's rendering can hardly be termed a translation or even a paraphrase of the original Greek. Phaedrus was explicitly praising the 'good' that was perceived to be bestowed through pederasty, which no doubt often involved anal intercourse between older males and youths, within aristocratic circles in ancient Greece. Such a concept, especially when portrayed as bestowing moral benefits, was beyond exotic and ethically repugnant to the majority in late eighteenth-century British society: a majority who adhered to religious sentiment or that maintained the ethical codes and moral conventions of polite society (at least in public). Texts which aspired to be 'literary' often conformed to the expectations and conventions of polite society.

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<sup>130</sup> See *Symposium* –178c.

<sup>131</sup> Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, trans. 'Symposium' in *Plato Complete Works*, ed. with introd. by John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 463.

<sup>132</sup> See *WP*, III, 456. rpt. in *TTS*, XI, 498.

Critics often, justifiably, acknowledge Shelley as being one of the most intellectually adept and linguistically versatile poets of his generation. Shelley was also markedly expressive of his social and political libertarianism, both in his poetry and prose writings. Shelley was a philhellene, increasingly so, during and after the year 1817. Shelley's friend, the accomplished classical scholar, poet and novelist, Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866) greatly influenced his love and appreciation of Greek literature. Peacock lived in Marlow in the Thames Valley and the Shelleys rented accommodation there, near to Peacock's house, in 1817. The essayist, poet and editor, Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), a friend of both the Shelleys and Peacock also resided in Marlow, he and his family staying with the Shelleys during the spring and early summer of the same year. During the 'Marlow period' of Shelley's life his love and appreciation of Greek literature, artistic accomplishment, and culture was intensified; this was undoubtedly nurtured by Peacock in particular. The group of friends, who also entertained the poet John Keats and the essayist William Hazlitt (1778-1830), were all inspired in conversation and literary pursuits by Hellenic literary treasures.<sup>133</sup> Shelley became interested in translating the Homeric *Hymns* and some of Plato's dialogues while at Marlow; he, together with Peacock and the Hunts read the *Symposium*, Homeric *Hymns* and Apuleius's *Golden Ass*. Like Taylor, or any scholar who read Plato comprehensively and in the original Greek, Shelley could not come to a sophisticated understanding of Plato without encountering, and considering, Greek homoeroticism. Shelley was much more of a social and political liberal than Taylor was and the question arises; how did the radical Shelley deal with the issue of homoeroticism?

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<sup>133</sup> See Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 113-137. Note: Butler's chapter 'The Cult of the South' discusses the Marlow Group in detail.

In July 1818, Shelley translated the whole of the *Symposium*. Mary Shelley published Shelley's translation in 1840. Timothy Webb noted that under the influence of Leigh Hunt and others that 'against her own better instincts' she 'produced a version in which some passages were omitted and others had their meanings changed in the interests of modesty'.<sup>134</sup> Although Shelley was committed to faithfully translating Plato's 'poetic celebration of love'<sup>135</sup> in relation to sense and meaning (including explicit eroticism), he could not reconcile homosexual acts with his understanding of ideal, or true, love as related by Plato in the dialogue. It needs to be remembered, that Plato's literary symposium reflects the cultural and customarily normative aspects of aristocratic Athenian symposia and male social intercourse. In fifth-century Athens, domestic arrangements precluded women from many domestic and social events; indeed, women often lived and slept in separate quarters to men.

Timothy Webb has written, concerning Shelley's consideration of male same-sex relationships:

Plato's scheme did not offer an adequate place for women and, although he took the trouble to write an essay in which he explained the Athenian attitude to homosexuality with great sympathy and tact, he regarded this as a blemish in Plato's otherwise admirable system.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 32. Note: The complete essay was first published in *Plato's Banquet, translated from the Greek, A Discourse on the Manners of Antient Greeks Relative to the subject of Love, etc. Revised and Enlarged, by Roger Ingpen, from the MSS. in the Possession of Sir John C. E. Shelley-Rolls* (London: Privately printed, 1931). For further details and complete text see James Anastasios Notopoulos *The Platonism of Shelley* (1969), pp. 375–413; and Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Symposium of Plato: The Shelley Translation*, ed. and introd. David K. O'Connor (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2002).

<sup>135</sup> Webb's phrase.

<sup>136</sup> Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible*, p. 300. Note: Shelley's essay, to which Webb refers, was his 'Discourse of the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love' (1818), which was one of two prefaces to his translation of the *Symposium*. For an edition of the essay, see: David Lee

Jennifer Wallace wrote concerning Shelley's translation of the *Symposium*, with reference to Sydenham and Taylor's translation of the same:

Shelley sought to breach the inaccessibility and distance associated with Greece. He attempted to avoid the 'prudery' and to give his readers direct access to Greece by acknowledging the fact that the love discussed in the *Symposium* is homosexual love, the closest emotional bond in Greek society. Whereas other translations, notably the translation by Floyer Sydenham recently edited by Thomas Taylor, substituted original references to male partners with descriptions of female partners, complete with all the additional accoutrements of female dress and behaviour, Shelley followed the Greek original and depicted a world of love between men. But he could not bring himself to translate the passages describing casual sexual encounters between men and representing the possibility of male bonds based purely on physical attraction and relationship.<sup>137</sup>

Wallace's assessment of homosexual love as being the 'closest emotional bond in Greek society' is flawed: it provided an opportunity for emotional bonding within a societal tradition that observed strict parameters: parenthood, and heterosexual unions, provided equally intimate opportunities for emotional fulfilment. Furthermore, Wallace only describes Sydenham's translation of the *Symposium*, from the *Works of Plato* (1804) as having been 'edited' by Taylor. She does not acknowledge that considerable portions of the text, the overtly homoerotic sections, were not included in Sydenham's translation at all: however, Taylor supplied them in his edition, though Plato's original homoerotic depictions were still 'masked' and misrepresented. The translation of the *Banquet* in the 1804 edition of Plato's works is

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Clark, ed. *Shelley's Prose: Or, the Trumpet of Prophecy* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1966), pp. 216-223.

<sup>137</sup> Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 105.

therefore not only edited by Taylor but also partially translated by him. Although Taylor's edition of the *Symposium* played down the overtly homoerotic aspects of the dialogue it was not as 'prudish' or selective as Wallace, or I so far, have suggested. In Taylor's edition the speech of Alcibiades contains unambiguous descriptions, which correspond accurately with the Greek text, concerning Alcibiades' attempts to seduce Socrates via several methods until he eventually sleeps embracing him while remaining fully clothed: his sexual advances having been rejected.<sup>138</sup> However, Wallace's observation that original references to male partners were substituted with descriptions of female partners in Taylor's edition only tells part of the story. Taylor's edition misrepresents the meaning of the original Greek by substituting beautiful boys for inanimate things. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff translated a sentence from Alcibiades, where he is commenting on Socrates' behaviour, speech:

To begin with, he's crazy about beautiful boys; he constantly follows them around in a perpetual daze.<sup>139</sup>

Christopher Gill translated the same line writing:

You see that Socrates is erotically attracted to beautiful boys, and is always hanging around them in a state of excitement.<sup>140</sup>

In Taylor's edition, the same sentence is rendered thus:

You see then that he is disposed in a very amatory manner towards beautiful things; and that he is always conversant with and astonished about these.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>138</sup> See *Symposium* – 217b-219d in *WP*, III, 522-525, rpt. in *TTS*, XI, 548-550.

<sup>139</sup> *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, p. 498. Note: *Symposium* – 216d.

<sup>140</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. with introd. and notes by Christopher Gill (London: Penguin Classics, 1999), p. 55.

<sup>141</sup> *WP*, III, 521. rpt. in *TTS*, XI, 547-548.

Shelley translated the sentence:

You observe how passionately Socrates affects the intimacy of those who are beautiful...<sup>142</sup>

In Plato's text, it was fully intended that the character Alcibiades should describe Socrates in the context of his 'eyeing-up' or 'cruising' attractive young men: Taylor's translation of the sentence amounts to a 'spiritualization' of Plato's original depiction of homoerotic desire on the part of Socrates and reads as if it was authored by Plotinus rather than by Plato. Taylor's rendition not only bespeaks culturally conditioned anathema towards homoeroticism but also Taylor's habitual tendency to 'colour' his translations in accord with his ultimate agenda: namely the dissemination of Neoplatonic interpretations of Plato's dialogues.

E. M. Forster's depiction of the Cambridge Dean, Mr. Cornwallis, instructing his translation class to 'Omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks'<sup>143</sup> while reading the *Symposium* reflects a historical, as well as an Edwardian, aversion to homoeroticism amongst classical scholars and translators. Moral perturbation was common amongst philhellenes and classicists when displays of homoeroticism were encountered, not only in literature, but also in statuary, decorated amphorae, medallions and talismans. The depiction of, and references to, both male and female homosexuality was the most censured aspect of ancient Greek and Roman sexual

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<sup>142</sup> Shelley, *The Symposium of Plato*, ed. and introd. David K O'Connor (1992), p. 65. Note: throughout his translation of the *Symposium* Shelley capitalised 'gods', 'goddess' etc. in the same way that Taylor often did and perhaps for the same reasons. See my comments on this in the *Introduction*, p. xx.

<sup>143</sup> E.M. Forster, *Maurice*, Introd. by P.N.Furbank (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 50.

behaviour; however, uninhibited portrayals of heterosexual sex acts, depictions of the penis, especially when erect, and priapic worship in religious ceremonies were also objurgated or pretermitted. A notable exception was Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who cautiously acknowledged the inextricable and vital contribution that eroticism, and homoeroticism, made to ancient Greek, and Greco-Roman, aesthetics, specifically in the visual arts.<sup>144</sup> Winckelmann was impassioned and enthusiastic about images of male youths and sought to transfuse his aesthetic appreciation of them into his writings and thus to his readers. Winckelmann considered the aesthetic, and often potentially erotic, appreciation of the virile male form as an integral, and vital, aspect of Greco-Roman art both in terms of its reception and in terms of the potential recreation of Hellenic beauty by contemporary artists. Whitney Davis has written that:

*Winckelmann's Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, published in 1754 before his move to Italy, implied that a modern observer's erotics – his memory of and desire for what he subjectively accepts as beautiful in ethical and aesthetic terms – could be an instrument of historical criticism. For example, Winckelmann's enthusiasm for a modern depiction of a beautiful youth – such as Guido Reni's *Archangel Michael*, known to him in a print – led him to identify its prototypes in Greek images and thus to recommend that beauty in modern art could derive from imitating Greek art. In fact, Winckelmann plainly loved boys – *Jungen* or, as he often put it, *Gewächse*, young "shoots" – in ways intrinsic to his argument.<sup>145</sup>

Winckelmann was 'homosexual' (quite openly when he lived in Italy) and was one of the most significant influences on the 'Greek revival' in the arts and in architecture in Britain the late eighteenth century, via the translations of his works from German into

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<sup>144</sup> See Whitney Davis, 'Winckelmann's "Homosexual" Teleologies' in *Sexuality in Ancient Art (Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism)*, ed. Natalie Boymel Kampen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 262-276.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

English by Fuseli. Winckelmann drew distinctions between enthusiasm for 'actual boys and for images of boys'<sup>146</sup>, and he confined a great deal of his homoeroticism to imaginative and intellectual, rather than overtly physical, assimilation of the beautiful. If modern artistic reproduction of Greco-Roman originals, in painting and in sculpture, is considered a form of translation, then: due to Winckelmann's influence the visual arts fared much better than literature did in relation to the faithful transference of the aesthetic display of ancient homoeroticism.

The *Symposium* is not the only Platonic dialogue that displays homoerotic features. Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Lysis* also contain strong homoerotic elements.<sup>147</sup> As we have seen from the discussion above, Plato's frankness concerning male homosexuality was a culturally sensitive issue and presented a problem for Taylor as a translator in the late eighteenth century. Sydenham did not translate either the *Phaedrus* or *Lysis*; in the 1804 edition of the *Works of Plato* Taylor alone translated those dialogues. Taylor could not translate Plato's works without making editorial decisions concerning the expression of homoerotic content. At the conclusion of his introduction to the *Phaedrus* he specifically mentioned 'homosexuality' when he wrote:

I only add, that though there are frequent allusions in this dialogue to that unnatural vice which was so fashionable among the Greeks, yet the reader will find it severely censured in the course of the dialogue by our divine philosopher. There can be no reason to fear, therefore, that the ears of the modest will be shocked by such allusions, since they are inserted with no other view than that they be exploded as they deserve. But if, notwithstanding this, any one shall persist in

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> See, Plato, *Lysis, Phaedrus and Symposium: Plato on Homosexuality*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, with selected retranslation, introd. and notes by Eugene O'Connor (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991).

reprobating certain parts of the dialogue as indecent, it may be fairly concluded, that such a one possesses the affectation of modesty without the reality; and that he is probably a bigot to some despicable and whining sect of religion, in which cant and grimace are the substitutes for genuine piety and worth.<sup>148</sup>

For the most part, Taylor presented love between men as love between men, rather than as love between males and females in his translation of the *Phaedrus*, this was because Socrates commends chaste pederasty in the dialogue. Socrates was also presented to readers by Xenophon and Xenophon's 'Socrates' is ethically comparable with the 'Socrates' of the *Phaedrus*. Whitney Davis wrote that Xenophon's Socrates was a *cautionary* advocate of pederasty. He wrote that, 'If a man is too smitten by the sensuality of his beloved, Socrates argued, he will neglect the youth's education. Both parties will lose status, even their moral freedom.'<sup>149</sup> In the *Phaedrus* Plato presented Socrates as a critic of the fulfilment of sexual desire through coition in pederasty: 'but he who is a lover of young men, besides this being detrimental, is in his familiar converse the most unpleasant of all men'.<sup>150</sup> He also describes older male lovers being like wolves stalking lambs.<sup>151</sup> On the one hand, in the *Phaedrus* Socrates praises, sexually continent love between men that is likened to a 'divine frenzy', of the same sort that is described as possessing poets in the dialogue. On the other hand, Plato portrayed Socrates as being erotically tantalised at the sight of the naked body of Charmides, glimpsed through his open robe.<sup>152</sup> Desire was not reprehensible in itself as it might be in a Christian ethical context. Plato, the master of dialectic, utilised contradictions to explore conclusions. In the *Laws*, Plato further explored

<sup>148</sup> *WP*, III, 288. rpt. in *TTS*, XI, 333.

<sup>149</sup> Davis, 'Winckelman's "Homosexual" Teleologies', p. 263.

<sup>150</sup> *WP*, III, 309. rpt. in *TTS*, XI, 350-51. *Phaedrus* – 240b-240c

<sup>151</sup> See: *Phaedrus* – 241d

<sup>152</sup> *Charmides* – 155d.

homoeroticism and while acknowledging desire between men as positive he presented the best form of pederasty as being chaste.<sup>153</sup> Taylor provided a translation of the *Laws* in which both female and male homosexuality was presented, alongside heterosexuality. The context of the following quotation is a discussion between Clinias and the Athenian (whom Taylor terms the 'Guest') concerning the regulation of passion in a hypothetical, philosophically, ordered society. Taylor wrote: 'But the unnatural connection with boys and girls, with women as if they were men, and with men as if they were women, whence innumerable evils arise both to individuals of the human species and to whole cities.'<sup>154</sup> A few lines later the Athenian speaks of sexual intercourse between men saying that, according to 'natural law' or the example of sexual conduct amongst animals (as it was understood in ancient Greece):

it was proper not to have connection [sexual intercourse] with men and boys as if they were females, adducing as a witness the nature of wild beasts, and showing that, among these, males are not connected with males, because this is unnatural...<sup>155</sup>

Another important aspect of the context of Clinias and the Athenian's discussion is that they acknowledge that attempting to regulate indulgence in erotic passion, both in homosexual and heterosexual contexts, by means of laws was fraught with difficulties in many Greek city-states and regions. They accepted the improbability of successfully implementing laws against homosexuality particularly in Crete (centre of the Minoan culture) and Sparta, which Taylor termed, in antique style, 'Lacedæmon', which were regions where homosexuality was celebrated and integral to cultural normalcy. Taylor portrayed male homosexuality in his translations when pederasty was being criticised. However, like Shelley after him and as Wallace observed in

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<sup>153</sup> See, *Laws* – 836d-837d

<sup>154</sup> *WP*, II, 230. rpt. in *TTS*, X, 203-204.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* rpt. *TTS*, X, 204. *Laws* – 836c

relation to Shelley, he could not bring himself to translate passages, faithfully, where casual sexual encounters between men, such as are presented in the *Symposium*, were presented freely, without criticism or prejudice. Taylor preferred a Socrates, and a Plato for that matter, who 'exploded' the entire practice of pederasty.

A considerable pressure on Taylor was that he was certainly aware that the culture in which he lived was, to a certain extent, morally policed by religious leaders. Both orthodox Christianity and Neoplatonism were suspicious, and often ashamed, of carnality. The orthodox Christian view of the body was influenced by Hebrew tradition and theology, concerning sin and the fall of man, and also by Neoplatonism.<sup>156</sup> St. Augustine wrote the denigratory phrase that man was 'born between excrement and urine' (*inter faeces et urinam nascimur*) and he was significantly influenced by Platonism, and particularly by Plotinus.<sup>157</sup> Though Taylor opposed Christianity, he could not extricate himself from the fact that Neoplatonism and Christianity shared common ground, particularly in relation to negativity towards the embodiment of the soul and devaluation of sensory experience. In both Neoplatonic and orthodox Christian contexts, asceticism was an ultimate outcome of negative considerations of the body. Taylor undoubtedly understood something, probably too much for his liking, of the aristocratic Greek practice of pederasty. In the cultural climate in which he translated Plato, and because of his overarching desire to communicate a theosophical and philosophico-religious understanding of Plato to his readers, he could not run the risk of being exposed to official censorship, or see his translations banned, especially not for the sake of telling the truth about 'the unnatural vice' of the Greeks.

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<sup>156</sup> Note: of course, there were other influences from Manichaeism, the Essenes and several Greco-Roman mystery religions.

<sup>157</sup> See, Armstrong ed., *Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 341-361.

Telling the truth, as he saw it, about the Christian religion and promoting the alternative soteriology offered by pagan Neoplatonism was a risk in itself. Taylor attacked an established aspect of the British government when he denounced bishops, as he frequently did in print. In his *Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, while arguing against Bishop Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*, Taylor also commented on contemporary Christianity. He wrote that

the sophistry throughout his [Warburton's] whole treatise is perpetual, and every where exhibits to our view the leading features of a Christian priest in complete perfection; I mean consummate arrogance united with a profound ignorance of antient wisdom, and blended with matchless hypocrisy and fraud. For, indeed, from the earliest of the fathers, down to the most modern and vile plebeian teacher among the Methodists, the same character displays itself, and is alike productive of the same deplorable mischief to the real welfare of mankind. But it is necessary that impiety should sometimes prevail on the earth; though at the same time, it is no less necessary that its consequent maladies should be lamented and strenuously resisted by every genuine lover of virtue and truth.<sup>158</sup>

It was because of this outspoken criticism that his *Dissertation* was published anonymously and bore the fictitious imprint of having been published in Amsterdam rather than in London. Many of his published works contain criticisms of Christianity and even, sometimes, of Christ himself. Taylor's political conservatism probably vouchsafed his freedom as a writer: if he had been politically radical as well as anti-Christian there is no doubt he would have courted governmental censure or even prosecution.

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<sup>158</sup> *Eleusinian Mysteries*, p. 64, rpt. in *SW*, p. 374.

6. Taylor: was he a competent Greek Scholar?

Two of the most notable Greek scholars to have flourished in England, who advanced specialist knowledge of that language as well as furthering the discipline of textual criticism, were Richard Bentley, the Cambridge academic and Richard Porson (1759-1808). Porson was an acquaintance, and perhaps friend, of Thomas Taylor. Alexander Dyce noted about the two men:

He (Porson) sent Thomas Taylor several emendations of Plato's text for his translation of that philosopher; but Taylor, from his ignorance of the Greek language, was unable to use them.<sup>159</sup>

This is highly significant as Dyce was an intimate friend of Taylor and had no ulterior motive to deride or slander Taylor's scholarly reputation – unlike many reviewers. The above statement is primary evidence that Taylor had difficulty in coping with ancient Greek at the level of advanced textual scholarship, at least when Porson sent Taylor his emendations of the Greek text of Plato, which could have been at any time between 1796 and the end of 1803 when Taylor was known to be preparing his translation. Porson's gift to Taylor of 'several emendations of Plato's text' was a compliment of the highest order. Porson was the most celebrated Greek scholar of the day. He must have thought that Taylor could have used his emendations. For whatever reasons Taylor did not, if Dyce's claim is accepted, use Porson's gift; the rejection of help from such a scholar would have been interpreted as arrogant and insulting, not only by Porson but

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<sup>159</sup> Alexander Dyce, ed., *Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rodgers: To Which is Added Porsoniana* (London: Edward Moxon, 1856), pp. 323-324.

also by Dyce. Dyce's assertion that Taylor could not use Porson's emendations due to 'ignorance' of the Greek language may be based on a misconception on Dyce's part. By the time Taylor received Porson's emendations he may have already completed significant portions of the fair copy of his translation of Plato which satisfied his criteria and aims. Taylor's project was not philological but philosophical and this governed his editorial choices. In *Mr. Taylor the Platonist in Public Characters of 1798* (1<sup>st</sup> edition) it was revealed that Taylor took 'about' two years to prepare his manuscript for publication; this information was submitted in 1798 and thus Taylor must have been preparing his *Works of Plato* from about 1796.<sup>160</sup> The 1803 (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) supplies further information stating that: 'Three volumes of this translation are now printed, and the whole in five volumes, will appear in the course of the summer of 1803.'<sup>161</sup> The first three volumes could have been printed intermittently for several months, or even years, before 1803, and if that was the case Porson's emendations would have been useless to Taylor not because he was 'ignorant' of Greek but because he had already substantially completed his project. In a footnote to the section of *Porsoniana* quoted above Dyce further comments:

With that remarkable person, Thomas Taylor, I was well acquainted. In Greek verbal scholarship he was no doubt very deficient (he was entirely self taught); but in a knowledge of the *matter* of Plato, of Aristotle, of the commentators on Aristotle (themselves a library), of Proclus, of Plotinus, &c., he has never, I presume, been equalled by any Englishman.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *SW*, p. 120.

<sup>161</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

Dyce's assertions that Taylor was 'no doubt very deficient' in Greek verbal scholarship and that Taylor was entirely self-taught are called into question by Taylor's own autobiographical account which appeared in *Public Characters of 1798* where he states that he attended 'St. Paul's School, to be educated for a dissenting minister'.<sup>163</sup> Due to the primarily autodidactic nature of his acquisition of Greek, apart from brief introductions to it in his youth, it was inevitable that his mastery of the language was gradual, and this explains why, at times, he may have struggled with the language and was accused of being incompetent. Taylor's ultimate motivation was the dissemination of the Platonic philosophy as it was presented by the latter Platonists and in his view it was the spirit of his works that mattered more than linguistic technicalities. This caused severe difficulties concerning the favourable reception of his work by the learned. Taylor was also productively excelling other classicists, who hailed from more educationally secure and privileged backgrounds, in his rate of production of translations and also in relation to his bravely exploring mainly uncharted territory in philosophical terms; at least with regards to translating the Neoplatonists into English.

Taylor praised Plotinus, whom he termed 'the High Priest of Philosophy,' for his scholarly habits and his lack of attention to the technicalities of writing clear intelligible prose. Discussing Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* Taylor commented:

The following particulars relative to composition are related by Porphyry of this extraordinary man. He could by no means endure to review twice what he had written, nor even to read his

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

composition, through the badness of his sight. But while he was writing he neither formed the letters with accuracy, nor exactly distinguished the syllables, nor bestowed any diligent attention on the orthography; but neglecting all these as trifles, he was alone intent to the intelligence of his wonderful mind; and, to the admiration of all his disciples, persevered in this custom to the end of his life. To a man of mere words, Plotinus will doubtless appear inexcusable for such *important* omissions; but to the sublime and contemplative genius, his negligence will be considered as the result of vehement conception, and profound cogitation. Such, indeed, was the power of his intellect, that when he had once conceived the whole disposition of his thoughts from the beginning to the end, and had afterwards committed them to writing, his composition was so connected, that he appeared to be merely transcribing from a book.<sup>164</sup>

Plotinus was described by Porphyry as if he wrote hurriedly and in some sort of contemplative trance: the fact that lack of revision or editing one's work and neglect of technical accuracy in writing was presented in glowing terms is remarkable. However, Plotinus was presented in the context that things, forms or Forms and ideas, were of much more significance than representative words, which were treated with as much disdain as anything else in the material, sub-lunar, world. Taylor's adoption of such an attitude to texts and writing was not helpful when his primary vehicle of communicating ideas was through textual transmission. In her essay *Thomas Taylor in England* Kathleen Raine queried, 'Why, then, is the name of Thomas Taylor so seldom found in works of literary history and criticism? Let it be said at once that if Taylor had written better English his translations might have been more widely read. Yeats called his style atrocious, and Coleridge wrote that Taylor translated Proclus from "difficult Greek into incomprehensible English." MacKenna, who praised him as a pioneer, objected to his translations for reasons "mainly literary".<sup>165</sup> Stephen

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<sup>164</sup> *The Commentaries*, II, 124, rpt. in *TTS*, VII, 142.

<sup>165</sup> *SW*, p. 18.

Mackenna was the best translator of Plotinus into English in the twentieth century and it is true that he rejected Taylor's translations of Plotinus as comparative material in the editorial process of his own translation of *The Enneads*.<sup>166</sup>

Taylor worked mainly from Greek-Latin editions from the Renaissance period, such as those of Ficino, where Greek text was faced by Latin translation or where Greek text was underscored by Latin translation. He also worked with transcriptions of early manuscripts written in a Byzantine Greek script which were held at the British Museum, such as the Harleian manuscripts, and with manuscripts held at the Bodleian Library; most of the manuscripts in the collections of both libraries had no Latin translation or gloss, being extant singularly in Greek as they had never been translated. The state of textual scholarship in the Europe of Taylor's day, particularly in relation to the establishment of authoritative editions of Greek or Latin authors, was developing rapidly.

Although such luminaries as Richard Bentley and later Richard Porson produced epochal work in England relating to Greek textual criticism and scholarship, most of the writings of the Neoplatonists which Taylor translated into English for the first time were unedited and extant only in manuscript form. This would have presented him with many difficulties of a palaeographical kind, the decipherment of scribal style for instance; also the manuscripts he worked from often contained lacunae; in such instances he supplied amendments and additions. There was usually no opportunity for comparative textual analysis as he was often working with the only known copies in the world; other texts existed in major European libraries but Taylor never

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<sup>166</sup> See, Plotinus, trans. Stephen MacKenna, ed. John Dillon, *Plotinus The Enneads* (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), p. xxvii.

consulted these as he did not travel outside of Britain. Scholars who worked in the same field at a later date would have the benefit of archaeological and bibliotextual advances to help inform their editorial choices. These factors need to be considered when assessing his translations.

Taylor consulted many manuscript copies of the commentaries of the Neoplatonists between 1785, when he delivered his lectures on Platonism at Flaxman's house and his publication of a translation of *The Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides and Timaeus of Plato* in 1793. In the *Preface* to that translation he asserted that his main qualification as a translator was not just his knowledge of Greek but rather his expertise in Platonic philosophy.<sup>167</sup> Taylor was just as much a creative exegete as he was a translator. He confessed that his translation, 'was composed with an eye to the commentaries of the latter Platonists'.<sup>168</sup> He wrote that

Surely no one can be so ignorant, as to think that a bare knowledge of the Greek tongue, such as is acquired at universities, can be a sufficient qualification for appreciating his labours who has studied the Greek philosophy, or for passing judgement on a translation from a species of Greek so different from that which is generally known.<sup>169</sup>

Taylor gave a lengthy footnote to this paragraph which is worth reproducing here in full as it gives important insight into Taylor's laborious scholarly practice:

To convince the reader that I have been in earnest in my pursuit of the Platonic Philosophy, I think it necessary to inform him that I have in my possession the following Platonic manuscripts: The seven books of Proclus on the Parmenides— The Scholia of Olympiodorus on the Phaedo, the largest extracts from his Scholia on the Gorgias— The

<sup>167</sup> See, *Plato (1793)*, p. v-vii. Note: this preface is not reproduced in *SW* or the *TTS* but it is reprinted in Timothy Webb's *English Romantic Hellenism*, pp.194-197.

<sup>168</sup> *Plato (1793)*, p. v, rpt. in *English Romantic Hellenism*, p. 195.

<sup>169</sup> *Plato (1793)*, pp. v-vi, rpt. in *English Romantic Hellenism*, pp. 195-196.

Commentary of Proclus on the first Alcibiades, and his Scholia on the Cratylus; for which I am indebted to the kindness of a gentleman, with whom I am perfectly unacquainted, and whose liberality I have mentioned in the additional notes to the following translation of the Cratylus, not in such terms indeed as it deserves, yet in such as the warmest gratitude could inspire. All these manuscripts are copies taken with my own hand; and some of them I have read through twice, and the rest once. I have likewise read through Proclus on the Timaeus thrice; and on Plato's Theology five times at least. And surely after all this I may be supposed without any vanity, to know more of Platonism than those men who never consult such authors, but to gratify an indolent curiosity, to find out some new phrase, or to excite their critical acumen in verbal emendation. I omit mentioning other Platonic authors which I have diligently studied, because these are the most voluminous, the most difficult, and the least generally known.<sup>170</sup>

It is inconceivable that Taylor could have copied from Greek manuscripts, so voluminously, without his being able to read Greek, unless he was suffering from some kind of mental illness. There is no doubt that he loved his research and that he was driven by obsession and dedication. Although Taylor did not value making emendations to manuscript copies for the sake of it, he did have to make his own emendations when he encountered various lacunae.

Taylor frequented the British Library, then known as the British Museum Reading Room, in search of manuscripts and books. Taylor gathered the information for his *Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (1791) in the British Library. In *Mr Taylor the Platonist* it is related that:

He wrote his "Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic

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<sup>170</sup> *Plato* (1793), p. vi. Note: All the manuscripts referred to by Taylor, and more holograph copies of Greek manuscripts made after 1793, were offered for sale by Sotheby in 1836. The sale catalogue explicitly states that the copies were made in Greek; many of the manuscripts would have had no Latin gloss as they were unedited, see *Soth. Cat.* Lots 707-717.

Mysteries,” in consequence of some considerable information on that subject which he had obtained from the perusal of three Greek manuscripts in the British Museum. One of these, it seems, is the Commentary of Proclus on the Parmenides of Plato, and is a folio volume consisting of upwards of five hundred pages. This with the other two, which are likewise folio volumes of no inconsiderable size, Mr. T had the courage to copy for his own private use.<sup>171</sup>

The Sotheby sale catalogue of Taylor’s library records his manuscript copy of *Proclus’ Commentary on the Parmenides of Plato*, Lot 714, contained:

Procli, in Parmenidem Platonis Commentariorum libri Septem, 19 parts in seven vol. 8vo.

\* “A transcript of the Harleian MS of Proclus on the Parmenides of Plato, with many emendations and observations by Thomas Taylor, 1790 and 1791.”<sup>172</sup>

There is clear evidence that Taylor had some proficiency in Greek. James Mill wrote that

If we do not charge Mr. Taylor with absolute incapacity to interpret the Greek, it is not because an attentive examination of his Plato has not convinced us, that he has got fully as much reputation for his knowledge of Greek as he deserves, but we at least do charge him with unpardonable carelessness in the performance of his task. We are quite satisfied that his general practice has been to interpret directly from the Latin translation, without so much as looking at the Greek; for the cases are so numerous in which we have found his translation an exact copy of the Latin, and an inspection of the Greek could hardly have failed to convince him he was wrong, that we have been unable to form any other conclusion.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> *SW*, p. 118.

<sup>172</sup> *Soth. Cat.* Lot 714.

<sup>173</sup> James Mill ‘The Works of Plato’ in *The Edinburgh Review*, XIV (1809), 201-202.

The ultimate weapon that Christian reviewers had was to strip Taylor of his reputation as a classicist. Mill followed his accusation with several pages that claim to demonstrate that Taylor translated from Latin translations rather than from Greek originals. Unfortunately, my proficiency in Greek and Latin is not secure enough to confirm or disprove Mill's serious accusations. However, R.T. Wallis wrote that

Thomas Taylor (1758-1835), whose translations of many later Neoplatonic texts are still the only ones available. Though stylistically even less attractive than their Greek originals, these were remarkably accurate for their time and made Plato and many Neoplatonic writings available to the English Romantics...<sup>174</sup>

Furthermore, John Dillon and Glenn R. Morrow accepted several of Taylor's emendations to the Greek text of Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*.<sup>175</sup> This is an example of Taylor, the Greek scholar, contributing to the work of distinguished contemporary translators. Of course Taylor knew Greek and he also undoubtedly made mistakes in his work. It should be remembered that critics, such as Mill had an agenda. Another reviewer of Taylor's *Works of Plato* wrote that

Of the proficiency of Mr. Taylor in Grecian literature they [volumes of the *Works of Plato*] leave no favourable impression: we are sorry to say, of his contempt of others, and opinion of himself, they have left a strong one. The only commendation we can, in conscience, bestow on the translator, is that of unwearied industry; industry in a cause which we cannot but disapprove – the cause of polytheism, and pagan absurdities. If he have any thing to object to the Christian religion, let him advance with his objections. The grounds of our belief have been

<sup>174</sup> R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 175.

<sup>175</sup> See *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, pp. xliii, 37, 132, 135, 144, 178, 403, 450 and 471.

often published to the world; let him put forth all his strength, and show that they are invalid. This task he may attempt, but he will attempt in vain. Nor shall we readily be induced to exclude the noon-tide sun, and to substitute in its room the glimmering taper.<sup>176</sup>

The reviewers were at war with Taylor and propaganda is a formidable weapon.

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<sup>176</sup> Anon. 'Thomas Taylor's Plato' in *The Critical Review*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series (1804), p. 146.

## Chapter 5

### The Invaluable Casket and the Only Key:

Symbolism, Pagan Prayer, 'Romantic Neoplatonism' and Mr. Mystic

## 1. The Invaluable Casket and the Only Key

When Taylor was preparing his translation of the *Works of Plato* he relied on many of the manuscript copies that he had made as sources for his notes and introductions that accompany the five-volume translation. Taylor visited the Bodleian Library in June 1802 and was a guest of New College during his stay in Oxford. While there Taylor wrote a letter to Charles Taylor, the Secretary of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce at the Adelphi in London. In 1802, Taylor was Assistant Secretary of the same organisation; he wrote the following to his senior colleague who, as the letter reveals, had provided him with a letter of introduction to the Dean of Christ Church at Oxford University:

No 2 New College Oxford, June 20<sup>th</sup> 1802

Dear Sir,

I should have written to you before but I have been disappointed in seeing the Dean of Christ Church a second time, all yesterday; & I was unwilling to write till I had again seen him, as I thought he might wish me to transmit some message to you. He has however it seems nothing to send to you but his best compliments. I am much obliged to you for your introductory letter to him, as he received me in a very flattering manner, said he was well acquainted with my works & professed himself a real admirer of Plato and Aristotle; and he told me yesterday that he would subscribe to my Plato. I have also received great civilities from Dr. Smith, the head of Trinity College, Dr Winstanley, professor of History in Corpus College; and particularly from the professors of New College, where I reside. I have, likewise, found the manuscripts which I expected to find in the Bodleian Library, to which I have the liberty of access after the usual hours...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *SW*, fn. p. 20. Note: also see a facsimile of the first page of the letter in 'Illustrations Plate 21'.

Taylor also wrote that, 'I shall perhaps surprise you by saying that Oxford, independent of the Bodleian Library, has no charms for me.'<sup>2</sup> Taylor was unimpressed with the style of Oxford in relation to both the demeanour of the clerical academics and the 'monkish gloom' of the architecture which he compared with the scenery of a Radcliffian novel.<sup>3</sup> The third edition of *Public Characters of 1798* (1803) contains supplementary biographical information to the first edition of that work from 1798, which includes a reference to Taylor's stay in Oxford and his utilisation of the Bodleian Library. The 1803 edition of *Public Characters* noted that 'in prosecution of his great design,' his edition of the *Works of Plato*, 'he last summer availed himself to the treasures of the Bodleian library at Oxford, by which university he was most handsomely treated'.<sup>4</sup> The publication of an English translation of the entire *Works of Plato* was a benchmark in British literary history: Taylor found a new patron whose support, public stature and aristocratic rank befitted his monumental production.

The Duke of Norfolk ((1746–1815) was President of the Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, located in the prestigious Adelphi buildings, from 1794 until 1815. Thomas Taylor worked as Assistant Secretary in the same organisation from 1798<sup>5</sup> until 1805<sup>6</sup>. Taylor's job was mundane but the post of Assistant Secretary was prestigious. Orpheus had already been exalted in the Great Room in the Adelphi buildings, before Taylor's arrival, by the Irish painter James Barry (1741-1806).

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>5</sup> London, Royal Society of Arts, Archive, AD.MA/100/10/28 Letter from Thomas Taylor applying for the assistant secretaryship. Date 1798.

<sup>6</sup> London, Royal Society of Arts, Archive, AD. MA/100/10/78 Letter from Thomas Taylor about resignation as assistant secretary with envelope. Date 30/10/1805.

Orpheus, complete with lyre and an egg was the subject of the first panel, of six, of Barry's monumental painting *The Progress of Human Knowledge and Culture*, begun in 1777 and completed in 1801. That Orpheus was chosen as the introductory image in the succession of paintings, which constitute a visual representation of English intellectual and cultural history up until the enlightened eighteenth century, is a striking example of how Hellenic subject matter was interpreted and incorporated into Englishness at the time of the Greek revival in the arts. It was while working for the society that Taylor became familiar with the duke. Taylor stayed at the duke's family seat, Arundel Castle, on a number of occasions which shall be discussed shortly. The duke obviously thought enough of Taylor to both entertain him in his home and to offer him patronage, it was he who paid for the production and publication costs of *The Works of Plato*. Yet there must also have existed a level of tension between them; Taylor was politically conservative and a loyalist whereas the duke was a notorious radical. Taylor was associated with another aristocrat: The Duke of Sussex. Geoffrey Keynes wrote that

In October 1825 George Cumberland was in London and recorded in his memorandum book under Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> October, that Thomas Taylor had breakfast with him and in talking of old friends noted that 'The Duke of Sussex is also Taylor's friend—memo to see Blake'. This conjunction of Blake's name with Taylor and his friend helps to strengthen the probability that they too were more than acquaintances, though there is still no direct documentation of this.<sup>7</sup>

Besides the interesting mention of Blake, it is significant that the Duke of Sussex was counted as a friend of Taylor's in Cumberland's account. Augustus Frederick, Prince, Duke of Sussex (1773–1843) was the sixth son of George III and Queen Charlotte. He was elected president of the Society of Arts following the death of the Duke of

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<sup>7</sup> Keynes, *Blake Studies*, pp. 247-248.

Norfolk in 1816. He became grand master of the freemasons in 1811. The duke had an extensive library containing over 50,000 volumes, which included about 1000 editions of the Bible, and many ancient manuscripts.<sup>8</sup> He was enthusiastic about the Classics and it is probably due to his love of ancient learning that he knew Taylor. There is also the question, was Taylor a freemason? He selected a location that housed the grandest Masonic temple in Britain, and an international centre of Masonry, as the venue for his lecture on everlasting-lamps. He was also 'friends' with the royal grand master of the British Masons. Future research may provide a definite answer to the question.

In the dedicatory preface to *The Works of Plato*, dated December 1<sup>st</sup> 1803, Taylor addressed Charles Howard the 11th Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal of England thus:

It is a remarkable circumstance, my Lord, that the writings of Plato were first translated into Latin by Ficinus, under the auspices of the illustrious Cosmo de Medici, and his grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent, and that the first complete translation of them into English is under the patronage of your Grace.<sup>9</sup>

Taylor's tone was grandiose, formal and conventional. What is most important is the comparison made between the translator and his patron and Ficino and the Medici dynasty. By making such a comparison, Taylor is not only displaying conventional flattery towards his patron; he was also making an historical statement which contextualised his literary efforts and achievements. Through it, Taylor compared his work to the literary and philosophical achievements of the Italian Renaissance: as we

<sup>8</sup> See, T.F. Henderson 'Augustus Frederick, Prince, duke of Sussex (1773–1843)', in *DNB*.

<sup>9</sup> *WP*, I, *Dedication* [no page numbers], rpt. in *TTS*, IX, xiii.

shall see, he also saw his accomplishment as surpassing that of Ficino. He mentioned more about the duke's patronage:

But however great the merit may be of the support which was given by the Medici to the first translation of Plato's works into Latin, it certainly is not equal to that of your Grace in the aid which you have afforded to the following translation of them into English. For your Grace's patronage commenced at that period of the last very calamitous war, which was of all others the most unfavourable to the encouragement of literature, and continued to the present eventful period; while that of the Medici began and ended in peace.<sup>10</sup>

Charles Howard was popularly known as the 'Drunken Duke' as a consequence of his highly publicised drinking bouts with the Prince Regent, later King George IV. The title of the Duke of Norfolk was first conferred upon Sir John Howard in 1483 by King Richard III, and from 1672 the Dukedom carried the title of Earl Marshal of England, as an hereditary title. This meant that the duke was to be in charge of any state ceremonial such as the coronation of the sovereign at Westminster Abbey or the funeral of the monarch. Charles Howard was brought up a 'violent Catholic' as 'A.Z.' the writer of his obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine* recorded.<sup>11</sup> He converted to the Protestant faith when his father became presumptive heir to the honours of the Dukedom in 1767. After conforming, he also entered the House of Commons and worked well with Fox. In politics, he was a leading Whig. Interestingly, the author of the duke's obituary notice, referred to above, does not mention Taylor as having received patronage under Charles Howard, but 'A.Z.' does mention that 'The Duke's patronage of literature consisted principally, I believe, in finding the means for

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> A.Z. 'Character of the Late Duke of Norfolk' in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. IXXXVI, pt. I (1816), 65-67.

printing two or three works of Local Antiquities, such as Duncombe's Hertfordshire, and Dallaway's Sussex.'<sup>12</sup> What can safely be stated is that Taylor would have come into contact with Norfolk when he commenced employment as Assistant Secretary of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1798,<sup>13</sup> of which the duke had been president since 1794. When Taylor stated that 'your Grace's patronage started at that period of the last very calamitous war,' he was most probably referring to the phase of the French Revolutionary War, 1793-1802, which was indeed 'calamitous' and which was fought across much of Europe and brought to a temporary end at the Peace of Amiens.

In the commonplace book of William George Meredith the following ghost story is recounted:

Taylor told us of the first time he went down to Arundel Castle with the late D. of Norfolk. They left town at 8. a.m. stopped at Horsham, where the Duke had to transact some electioneering business, while T.T. hungry & thirsty meditated in the ch. Yard. Owing to this delay & to a mistake of the Steward, who did not expect the Duke till the next day, they did not get dinner, till 7 o'clock. Taylor having fasted ever since their departure from London. He slept in an old chamber, tolerably gloomy, but lit with a fire of kennel coal, & a (moh) light. "I was between sleeping and waking, at which time visions are always *divine visions* according to the ancients, & mine proved eventually true and very consoling. I suddenly saw the D. of Norfolk standing at the bottom of the bed, at which I was excessively agitated & alarmed: when I *felt* my hand seized by a tall & stately female figure, who removed the curtains, & stood immediately by the side of the bed. She addressed me and said 'Do not be alarmed, for the Duke will not hurt you!' When I told this to the Duke, the next morning at breakfast, he laughed & said 'Oh, then,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> See the *Transactions for the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, vol. XVI, (1798), 'List of Officers of the Society, Elected March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1798'. Taylor was the Assistant Secretary of the Society, also known as the Premium Society Adelphi, until 1805. See a facsimile of Taylor's letter of application to the society for employment in *SW* [Illustration plates] 23-24.

the Empress Maud has been with you. Did you not know that she haunts this castle, & often honours strangers by paying them a visit? <sup>14</sup>

A little later in the dedication Taylor employs the metaphor of a key and a lock regarding his translation of Plato:

The patronage likewise of the Medici was more confined than that of your Grace: for by giving Plato to the public in a Roman garb, unattended with his Greek interpreters in the same garb, they may be said to have acted like one who gives an invaluable casket, but without the only key by which it can be unlocked. This key, my Lord, in consequence of the handsome manner in which you have enabled me to publish my translation, I have presented to the English Reader; and in this respect also the support of your Grace is more noble, because more ample than that of Cosmo and Lorenzo. <sup>15</sup>

The 'invaluable casket' obviously represents the works of Plato. The 'only key' which can open the casket is the works of the Neoplatonists. Most of these took the form of commentary on Plato. Taylor presented the works of the Neoplatonists to his readers in the form of long introductions and 'copious notes'. Such paratextual matter was Taylor's platform for interpreting Plato. He did not contribute many new elements to the commentary of the ancients; rather he made their commentaries available to readers in English for the first time, for the most part. On such grounds, he cites Ficino's translation of Plato as being deficient as Ficino provided a casket but no key. The idea of a key being needed in order to understand correlates with Neoplatonic

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<sup>14</sup> McMaster University Libraries, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections: MSS. W.G Meredith fonds/m/ms66.

<sup>15</sup> *WP*, I, *Dedication* [no page numbers], rpt. in *TTS*, IX, xiii.

philosophy in general. Taylor's use of the word 'garb', 'dress, attire, exterior appearance' as Dr Johnson defined it, in relation to translation is interesting. Ficino is termed as giving his readers Plato in a Roman garb. The visual connotations of dress and exterior appearance, which are evoked by the use of 'garb', correspond with the frequently used eighteenth-century metaphor of the translator as painter. The dress of Ficino's Plato is a textual dress, namely Latin. Taylor pointed out that Ficino's Latin Plato, was 'unattended by his interpreters in the same garb'. By this Taylor meant that the 'interpreters' or later Platonists were absent from the Latin dress parade as they remained in their original Greek dress, remaining un-represented in Ficino's translation, and were hence inaccessible to many readers. Taylor's edition of Plato would provide his readers with Plato in an English garb and would be attended by his 'interpreters' in the same attire. This is a crucially important aspect of Taylor's *Works of Plato*. Taylor's edition is more than a translation; it is a library or a manual of Platonism as well.

Taylor saw himself as being qualified to provide his readers not only with a translation but also with the 'only key' to valid interpretation of each dialogue. Such interpretative exclusivity can easily move towards arrogance as much as towards esotericism. However, Taylor, though he could be arrogant and dismissive towards those who detracted from or criticised his work, also appears to have been religiously sincere regarding the 'truth' of the interpretation of Plato's works by the Neoplatonists. Indeed, a motto employed by Taylor in relation to his disseminative labours was, 'To the Sacred Majesty of Truth' which is manifestly indicative of his motives. In the *General Introduction* to the *Works of Plato* Taylor acknowledged the

primary sources of Neoplatonic commentary which were to form the primary basis of his commentary on the main body of translation:

In accomplishing this great object, I have presented to the reader in my notes with nearly the substance in English of all the following manuscript Greek Commentaries and Scholia on Plato; viz. of the Commentaries of Proclus on the Parmenides and First Alcibiades, and of his Scholia on the Cratylus; of the Scholia of Olympiodorus on the Phaedo, Gorgias and Philebus; and of Hermeas on the Phaedrus. To these are added very copious extracts from the manuscripts of Damascius, Περὶ Ἀρχῶν, and from the published works of Proclus on the Timaeus, Republic and Theology of Plato.<sup>16</sup>

Though Taylor's Plato and his assembled interpreters were presented to English readers in an English 'garb', he nonetheless appears to have aimed at giving his readers as much of a Greek experience as was possible through an English translation. Taylor presented his readers with a translation that had fidelity with the Greek philosophical tradition of pagan Neoplatonism. Critics such as Mill asserted that the Neoplatonic tradition was something very separate from Plato's original, and early, Platonism. Be that as it may, the pagan Neoplatonic tradition had more fidelity with pagan Plato than Christian Neoplatonism had, with its Hermetist-influenced notions of Plato being prophetically pre-indicant of Christ. Ficino's Latin translation had been produced in the context of Christian Neoplatonism: Taylor offered his readers a much more uniquely Greek experience by presenting Plato in a pagan context.

The latter Platonists regarded Plato's work as containing both revealed and concealed truths. They saw the work of their master as having both surface meanings and

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<sup>16</sup> *WP*, I, cix-cx. rpt. *TTS*, IX. 76.

allegorical meanings. The basis of this method of belief in interpretation is the presence of arcane or occult knowledge within Plato's works. It is true that various forms of occult Platonism are at the root of the majority of western mystical traditions, doctrines and practices. Taylor referred to a doctrine of concealment when he wrote:

We have said that this philosophy at first shone forth through Plato with an occult and venerable splendour; and it is owing to the hidden manner in which it is delivered by him, that its depth was not fathomed till many ages after its promulgation, and when fathomed, was treated by superficial readers with ridicule and contempt. Plato indeed is not singular in delivering his philosophy occultly: for this was the custom of all the great ancients; a custom not originating from a wish to become tyrants in knowledge, and keep the multitude in ignorance, but from a profound conviction that its sublimest truths are profaned when clearly unfolded to the vulgar.<sup>17</sup>

Such sentiments as those above do, as Taylor indicates, belong to very ancient, rich and religiously diverse traditions of concealment. Taylor believed that his knowledge of esoteric teachings of Plato, and the Neoplatonists, assisted him in producing translations that were consistent with the Platonic tradition. In 1793, in relation to translating Plato he wrote that:

Philosophy indeed in any language must vindicate to itself a number of peculiar terms; but this is so remarkably the case with the philosophy of Plato in the original, that he who should attempt to translate any one of his dialogues without understanding his secret doctrine, would produce nothing but a heap of absurdities, would only abuse the credulity of the simple reader, and would himself in the end sink into silent contempt.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *WP*, I, lxxxvi – lxxxvii, rpt. in *TTS*, IX, 60.

<sup>18</sup> *Plato 1793*, pp. vi-vii, rpt. in Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism*, p. 196.

In his introduction to *The Physics* of Aristotle, issued in 1806 as part of the complete *Works of Aristotle* (1806-1812), Taylor wrote that Aristotle's works 'received a twofold division' which consisted of 'exoteric' themes, such as historical and analytical observations, and the 'acroamatic' doctrines. Acroamatic doctrines were heard only, being imparted from mouth to ear, they concerned things that were reserved for initiates only: they were the secret teachings.<sup>19</sup> Taylor saw Aristotle's *Physics* and his *Metaphysics* as being acroamatic teachings. Some years after Aristotle had been the tutor of Alexander, and had begun to record his philosophical doctrines and publish them, Alexander was grievously offended with his former tutor because he had revealed acroamatic doctrines. Taylor quoted from Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, writing that

Alexander then, after the subversion of Persia, wrote to him as follows: Alexander wishing prosperity to Aristotle. You have not done right in publishing your acroamatic works; for in what shall we surpass others, if the doctrines in which we were instructed become common to all men? I indeed would rather excel others in the knowledge of the most excellent things than in power. To this Aristotle returned the following answer: Aristotle to king Alexander wishing prosperity. You wrote concerning my acroamatic works, thinking that they ought not to have been divulged. Know, therefore, that they are published, and not published; for they can be understood by auditors alone.<sup>20</sup>

Transmission of secret wisdom was often seen as being effected through discipleship or through initiation into religious or philosophical collectives or disciplines. The idea of concealed or secret doctrine being contained in the casket of Plato's works and the idea that the works of Plato's commentators provide a key to understanding the inner, hidden or occult nature, of Platonic lore and wisdom adds a complex dimension to

<sup>19</sup> *Aristotle Works*, IV, p. xvii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* For a recent translation see, *Plutarch's Lives: Demosthenes and Cicero, Alexander and Caesar*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (1919) VII, 241-243.

Taylor's work as a translator that should not be underestimated. The 'truth' or wisdom to which Taylor's works, self-confessedly, gave his readers access would seem to revolve not only around textual transmission but also around intuitive reception. That is to say, that Taylor clearly saw his readers as having to develop the ability to receive arcane teachings. The *Works of Plato* functions not only as a translation but also as a manual concerning the practice of Platonism: the Platonist wanted to make Platonists through it.

## 2. Five Platonic Luminaries: Imagining Naiads

In the *General Introduction* to the *Works of Plato* Taylor disassociated himself from Christian Neoplatonism. However, he did praise five men and identified them as his forebears in the British Platonic tradition; he wrote that

In our own country, however, though no one appears to have wholly devoted himself to the study of this philosophy, and he who does not will never penetrate its depths, yet we have a few bright examples of no common proficiency in its more accessible parts. The instances I allude to are Shaftesbury, Akenside, Harris, Petwin, and Sydenham. So splendid is the specimen of philosophic abilities displayed by these writers, like the fair dawning of some unclouded morning, that we have only deeply to regret that the sun of their genius sat,<sup>21</sup> before we were gladdened with its effulgence. Had it shone with its full strength, the writer of this Introduction would not have attempted either to translate the works, or elucidate the doctrines of Plato; but though it rose with vigour, it dispersed not the clouds in which its light was gradually involved, and the eye in vain anxiously waited for its meridian beam.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> This may be a misprint, 'the sun of their genius set' may have originally been intended.

<sup>22</sup> *WP*, I, p. lxxxvi, rpt. in *TTS*, IX, p. 60.

Shaftesbury the philosopher has already been discussed. James Harris (1709-1780), nicknamed Hermes Harris, was a philosopher and musical patron. He wrote, *Hermes, or, A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Universal Grammar* (1744), *Philosophical Arrangements* (1751); and *Philological Inquiries* which was published posthumously in 1781. Unfortunately, John Petvin's surname was misspelled or probably misprinted as 'Petwin' above; he was the author of *Letters Concerning Mind* (1750) and also *A Sketch of Universal Arithmetic; Comprehending the Differential Calculus, And the Doctrine of Fluxions* (1752), which would have been very interesting to Taylor.<sup>23</sup> Sydenham was, of course, Taylor's immediate forebear. It is significant that Taylor included the poet Mark Akenside (1721-1770) in his list as this demonstrates that he believed that Platonic philosophy could be transmitted by poets as well as by prose writers. Frank B. Evans recognised another poet, Thomas Gray (1716–1771), who was also a skilled scholar, as having played a role in the Platonic tradition in England. Evans wrote that

In England, Plato had three enthusiastic advocates during the latter half of the century. Two of them were translators – Floyer Sydenham and Thomas Taylor – and one was a poet, Gray. Gray's study of Plato, in the years from 1743-1756, resulted in no publications, nor did it affect his poetry in any tangible way. But he talked of Plato frequently and left at his death over two hundred pages of pregnant notes. What Gray admired in Plato, according to Norton Nicholls, "was not his mystic doctrines which he did not pretend to understand, nor his sophistry, but his excellent sense, sublime morality, elegant style, & the perfect dramatic propriety of his dialogues".<sup>24</sup>

Nicholls' observations perfectly represent an example of eighteenth-century responses to Plato by some cultured men of letters, such as Gray was.

<sup>23</sup> I have not been able to discover the dates of birth or death for John Petvin.

<sup>24</sup> Frank B. Evans, 'Platonic scholarship in eighteenth-century England', p. 106. Note: Evans quoted from Gray's friend Norton Nicholls' (1741?–1809), 'Reminiscences of Gray' in *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, eds. P. Toynbee and L. Whibley (Oxford: 1935), III, p. 1295 [Evans' note. I have not consulted this volume].

Mark Akenside was included in Taylor's list because Platonism, Neoplatonism, Greek mythology and Orphic mysticism, which he studied, were an influence on some of his poetry. Akenside was a physician and one of Britain's most celebrated and well-known poets in the eighteenth century, mostly due to his long, three-part, philosophical poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) which was reprinted eight times up until 1770, and a number of times after that date. Akenside rewrote his popular poem, some think to its detriment, and published *The Pleasures of the Imagination* in 1772. Another significant poem by Akenside was his *Hymn to the Naiads* written in 1746 but first published in Robert Dodsley's six-volume, anthology *A Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (1748-1758). The *Hymn to the Naiads* has been termed, 'the most notable mythological poem of the century'.<sup>25</sup> Today he is primarily considered a minor poet, though Robin Dix has recently established an authoritative edition of his poetry and worked in collaboration with others to reassess his significance.<sup>26</sup>

Akenside was influenced, in relation to classics and philosophy, by Shaftesbury, Joseph Addison (1772-1719) and Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746). The poet and essayist, Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743-1825), discussed Akenside's mastery of the classics and mythology in her *Essay on Akenside's Poem on The Pleasures of Imagination*, which was prefixed to a reprint of the poem in 1794. Barbauld recognised that Akenside was a didactic poet.<sup>27</sup> She also wrote that, 'The works of no

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<sup>25</sup> Douglas Bush, cited in Feldman and Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology* (1972), p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> See, Mark Akenside, *The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, ed. Robin Dix (Madison, N.J. : Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London : Associated University Presses, 1996), and Robin Dix, ed., *Mark Akenside: A Reassessment* ( Madison, N.J. : Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination by Mark Akenside, M.D. To Which is Prefixed A Critical Essay on the Poem by Mrs. Barbauld* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1794, rpt. 1796), p. 6.

author have a more classic air than those of our poet. His Hymn to the Naiads shews the most intimate acquaintance with their mythology.'<sup>28</sup> Akenside's notes to the 1772 edition of the *Hymn to the Naiads* (lines 1-80), contain a mature and insightful discussion of the *Orphic Theogony* and the *Hymns of Orpheus* as well as Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>29</sup> Akenside also refers to Proclus; this was due to his being familiar with Eschenbach's 1689 edition, of the Orphic poems, which contained several by Proclus.<sup>30</sup> The poet contextualised the 1772 edition of his *Hymn* in Orphic terms. If Taylor read the 1772 edition of *The Hymn to the Naiads* at some point in his youth, then the poet's notes on the poem could have influenced his initial interest in Orphism, and subsequently in Neoplatonism.

Barbauld also commented on the Platonism in Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination* when comparing his poem with Young's *Night Thoughts*. She wrote:

never were two Poets more contrasted. Our author had more of taste and judgment, YOUNG more of originality. AKENSIDE maintains throughout an uniform dignity. YOUNG has been characteristically described in a late Poem as one in whom

Still gleams and still expires the cloudy day  
Of genuine Poetry.

The genius of the one was clouded over with the deepest glooms of Calvinism, to which system however, he owed some of his most striking beauties. The religion of the other, all at least that appears of it, and all indeed that could with propriety appear in such a Poem, is the purest Theism: liberal, cheerful, and sublime; or if admitting any mixture, he seems inclined to tincture it with the mysticism of PLATO, and the gay fables of ancient mythology. The one declaims against

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> See, *The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside*, ed. Robin Dix, pp. 370-372.

<sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 505, and n. 6, p. 214 above.

infidels, the other against monks, the one resembles the Gothic, the other the Grecian architecture...<sup>31</sup>

It is interesting that Barbauld identified the tensions and dichotomies between the Gothic (northern Christian) and Grecian (southern pagan) styles and the assimilability of the mysticism of Plato and the fables of ancient mythology with the ultimate monism of Theism. Akenside is an example of a poet who utilised Hellenic subject matter and Platonic, even mystical, philosophy in the creative process; and Barbauld was a Romantic poet who recognised the contribution such materials had made in the production of the influential works of one of her forbears in the English poetic tradition.

### 3 The Feeder of Poets: Romantic Neoplatonism and Romantic Pagans

If mystagogy, or as some would see it mystagoguery, were stripped away from Taylor's works would anything of value be left? Although Taylor primarily wrote with religious and theosophical motives, the pagan Neoplatonism he communicated still contributed to contemporary literary culture independently of its esoteric and religious contexts. Taylor's 'invaluable casket' was primarily intended to represent the arcane doctrines concealed in Plato's works and 'the only key' was originally intended to represent the mystical interpretations of Plato found in the commentaries of the Neoplatonists. However, by translating the Neoplatonists Taylor also revived a system of Hellenic hermeneutics that suggested rich symbolical interpretations, not only of Plato himself, but also of Greek mythological narratives and Homeric poetry.

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<sup>31</sup> *The Pleasures of Imagination by Mark Akenside, M.D. To Which is Prefixed A Critical Essay on the Poem by Mrs. Barbauld* (1796), pp. 14-15.

Plotinus delivered a complex and remarkably advanced theory of human psychology and the significance of symbolism in the processes of thought and the imagination as well as a system of mysticism in the *Enneads*. Taylor may or may not have been conscious of the fact that, at the time of the Greek revival in the arts and the accompanying rise of British Romanticism, he was publishing works that informed, influenced and sustained creative interpretations of ancient symbolism and mythology in artistically creative as well as religiously ingenious terms. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in an essay called *Poetry and Imagination*, wrote that,

There are also prose poets. Thomas Taylor, the Platonist, for instance, is really a better man of imagination, a better poet, or perhaps I should say a better feeder to a poet, than any man between Milton and Wordsworth.<sup>32</sup>

It has been suggested by several critics, that Thomas Taylor was a significant influence on the works of the English Romantic poets.<sup>33</sup> George Mills Harper wrote that

In addition to Southey and Peacock, many other creative writers and artists of his own day knew Taylor and/or his books and articles: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Shelley, Hunt, and probably Keats. Certainly Keats's friend Benjamin Bailey was an enthusiastic reader and collector of Taylor.<sup>34</sup>

Lord Byron can now be added to Harper's list of readers of Taylor's works. Peter Cochran has recently written an article, *Manfred and Thomas Taylor*, in which he

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<sup>32</sup> Cited by Harper in *SW*, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> See, *SW*, pp. 40-42 and *NWB*, pp. 29-30. See also Kathleen Raine, 'Thomas Taylor, Plato and the English Romantic Movement', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 8 (1968), 99-123; and Frank B. Evans, 'Thomas Taylor, Platonist of the Romantic Period', *PMLA*, LV (1940), 1060-1079.

<sup>34</sup> *NWB*, p. 30.

convincingly demonstrates that a number of the notes in the third volume of Taylor's translation of Pausanias' *Description of Greece* were significant sources for elements of his verse drama *Manfred* (1817).<sup>35</sup> Byron twice requested that his close friend John Cam Hobhouse send Taylor's Pausanias to him:

Byron to Hobhouse, from Brussels, 1 May 1816:

...Will you bring out *παζαγιας* (Taylors ditto) when you come...

Byron to Hobhouse, from Evian, 23 June 1816:

...Bring with you also for me some bottles of Calcined Magnesia – a new Sword Cane – procured by Jackson – he alone knows the sort – (my last tumbled into this lake –) some of Waite's red tooth powder – & tooth brushes – a Taylor's Pawrsanias – and – I forget the other things.<sup>36</sup>

In 1817, Shelley twice wrote to Charles Ollier requesting that Taylor's *Pausanias* be sent to him:

Be so good as to send me 'Tasso's Lament' a Poem just published; & Taylor's Translation of Pausanias. You will oblige me by sending them without delay, as I have immediate need for them. –

Do you know is Taylor's Pausanias to be procured & at what price. –<sup>37</sup>

Why did both Byron and Shelley request copies of Taylor's *Pausanias*? Firstly, Pausanias' *Description of Greece* is an invaluable text for understanding the topography of ancient Greece and some aspects of Greek history, literature, religion and mythology relative to places discussed by Pausanias. Secondly, Taylor's

<sup>35</sup> Peter Cochran, 'Manfred and Thomas Taylor' in *The Byron Journal*, 29 (2001), 62-71.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 69. Note see p. 248 above.

translation contains many notes, all at the end of the third volume, which demonstrate his vast knowledge of the Classics, especially in relation to the Platonic tradition and obscure mythological and religious information: it also has a comprehensive index, which covers both the translated text and the notes.<sup>38</sup> Both Byron and Shelley were concerned with myths and mythmaking so the notes, which represent knowledge gleaned from many classical works as well as Taylor's arcane expertise, were an invaluable resource. Taylor's *Pausanias* is an example of an invaluable casket that was presented to readers along with a priceless key.

Timothy Webb wrote that

Taylor's rediscovery of Plato and the Platonic tradition marked the slow re-emergence of a sense of the mysterious and the numinous which was to characterise the Romantic movement. It also heralded a shift from the frozen clarity of the eighteenth-century personification to the more suggestive connotations of the symbol. Although it was derided by many of his contemporaries, Taylor's work seems to be intuitively in touch with the direction which poetry was to take; in spite of his pedantry and his awkward style, he seems to have possessed some creative insight and his translations and essays were harbingers, if not necessarily promoters, of the symbolic narratives of the great Romantic poets.<sup>39</sup>

Taylor promoted pagan Neoplatonism through the public persona he created. As a public character, Taylor constantly drew attention to ancient Greece and her mythology and religion, as well as to Plato and the Neoplatonists: his translations and works original to him promoted the same. Many themes that recur in pagan Neoplatonism such as alternate, non-linear, views of time; pantheism; symbolical

<sup>38</sup> See *Description of Greece*, III, 219-362.

<sup>39</sup> Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism*, p. 23. Note: see more of Webb's comments on Taylor's influence on pp. 180-183.

considerations of the divine, or human nature, in multifarious feminine or androgynous terms; an interest in spiritual beings and the supernatural; a marked interest in the interior mental responses of the individual to external and internal symbols; are also recurrent themes in Romantic poetry. Taylor's expression of pagan Neoplatonism was one of the influences, if not the most pervasive influence, on Romantic Neoplatonism, and perhaps frequently on non-philosophical expressions of paganism in Romantic poetry: which we might term Romantic paganism. 'Romantic Neoplatonism' is a potentially insufficient critical term in the same way as 'Romanticism' is. However, it is useful as it conveys the idea that the Platonism expressed by specific writers such as Blake, Coleridge or Shelley, was distinctive, and individualised in the case of each writer, and something other than Christian Neoplatonism or pagan Neoplatonism. The Romantics borrowed from philosophies, including Platonism, as much as they borrowed from mythologies, including Greek mythology, in order to philosophise and re-philosophise and in order to mythologize and re-mythologize for their own creative purposes. An important aspect of Taylor's critical significance is that his pagan Neoplatonism was a bridge between Christian Neoplatonism and Romantic Neoplatonism: which is often, though not exclusively, expressed in pagan contexts.

Neoplatonism, in both Christian and pagan contexts, was undoubtedly an influence, at specific times and in specific instances, on Romantic writers, and upon Blake, Coleridge and Shelley in particular; it was not an all- pervasive influence. Labelling any of the Romantics as being exclusively 'a Platonist' or identifying any single poem or piece of prose as being exclusively 'Platonic' is bound to lead to gross

interpretative errors. Caution needs to be exercised when considering Taylor's influence on Romanticism; though he was unquestionably a general influence and sometimes a specific one too. G.E. Bentley wrote that, 'Platonic ideas, or even Neoplatonic ones, are part of the heritage of western Europe, and it is therefore likely to be difficult to be sure whether an idea came directly from a reading of Plato or from the manifold traditions stemming directly and indirectly from him'.<sup>40</sup> Writers such as Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Thomas Love Peacock all had a secure knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages, and could read many of the authors translated by Taylor in the original. Though they would often have had to consult rare manuscripts, if they wanted to read works by the more obscure Neoplatonists such as Olympiodorus or Damascius, as many of the Greek texts Taylor worked from were not edited or published. There were also translations, other than those by Taylor, learned works on the Classics and various mythological handbooks such as those of Lemprière (1788) and John Bell (1790) that were readily available, which could just as easily have been read and utilised by Romantic writers.<sup>41</sup>

I have not found any evidence that any Romantic writer adopted pagan Neoplatonism as a religious or permanent philosophical position, though there are some interesting references concerning 'the practice of pagan ritual activities' amongst the Shelley circle. In 1818, Leigh Hunt wrote to Thomas Jefferson Hogg:

I hope you paid your devotions as usual to the Religio Loci, and hung up an evergreen. If you all go on so, there will be a hope some day that old Vansittart & others will be struck with a

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<sup>40</sup> G. E. Bentley, Jr., 'The Neoplatonism of William Blake' [Review] in *Modern Philology*, 62 no. 2 (1964), p. 170.

<sup>41</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

Panic Terror, and that a voice will be heard along the waters saying 'The great God Pan is alive again,' – upon which the villagers will leave off starving, and singing profane hymns, and fall to dancing again.<sup>42</sup>

On the surface of it, Hunt's comments read as if Hogg religiously honoured the superintending spirits of places that he frequented and that might have been the case at times. However, Hunt's comments were primarily political. He presented personal politics in Hellenic, and in this instance in pagan religious, terms; like his friend Shelley, was in the habit of doing. In *The Triumph of the Moon*, Ronald Hutton, presented an argument that the pagan elements of British Romanticism were one of several influences that helped nineteenth – and twentieth – century magical and pagan religious movements, and ultimately what he terms 'modern pagan witchcraft', to find a language to express religious pagan beliefs.<sup>43</sup> In support of his argument, Hutton quoted from Hunt's letter to Hogg, with an important omission. Hutton cited from the same source as I have above:

I hope you paid your devotions as usual to the Religion Loci, and hung up an evergreen. If you all go on so, there will be a hope someday that... a voice will be heard along the water saying 'The great God Pan is alive again – upon which the villagers will leave off starving and singing profane hymns, and fall to dancing again.'<sup>44</sup>

Besides the misprint of 'Religion Loci' for 'Religio Loci'; Hutton

omitted the reference to 'old Vansittart and others' in the second sentence in the

quotation. Nicholas Vansittart, first Baron Bexley (1766–1851) was Chancellor of the

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<sup>42</sup> Walter Sidney Scott ed., *The Athenians: Being Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson Hogg and his Friends Thomas Love Peacock, Leigh Hunt, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Others* (London: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1943), p. 44.

<sup>43</sup> See Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (1999), pp. 21-26.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

Exchequer at the time when Hunt wrote to Hogg. Due to the Napoleonic Wars and massive national debts, he enforced very unpopular taxation laws, which was the reason why Hunt mentioned starving villagers following mention of his name. He was an integral part of the same administration that Shelley damned in his poem *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819, published in 1832). The political reformer and activist Henry Hunt, used evergreens and laurels as symbols in demonstrations and processions, which is an example of the symbols of pagan religion being utilised for political purposes, as well as such symbols being an echo of the iconography of the French Revolution and the cause of liberty.<sup>45</sup> Hutton's presentation of Hunt's letter is an example of misrepresentation, or selective representation, of an author's original meaning in order to corroborate one's own argument or reflect one's own interests. There is a danger of interpreting references to Greco-Roman deities, temples, pagan religious rituals and symbols, which frequently appear in Romantic writings in contexts other than those intended; which were often political or purely aesthetic rather than essentially religious or mystical. Romantic paganism was most evident amongst the Shelley circle.

Keats' '*Ode to Psyche*' (1819) is a poem in which the poet celebrates the 'latest born and loveliest' of the Greek gods. Zeus only made the mortal Psyche an immortal goddess after she had suffered trials sent by the jealous Aphrodite and confusion in love at the hand of Eros. The speaker mourns that Psyche, a late addition to the ancient pantheon of Olympus, just as he was the latest addition to a company of poets and writers, had no temples or rites of her own. The poet aspires to restore her

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<sup>45</sup> See p. 185 above.

worship in the domain of the 'wreathed trellis' of his own 'working brain' and in the virgin territory of his mind. To build an inner temple where 'warm Love' might enter. The '*Ode to Psyche*' takes the form of a hymnic prayer to a goddess. Was Keats' '*Ode to Psyche*' an actual prayer to a goddess? The poet wrote that he would be her priest and that he would become her devotee and offer worship:

I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.  
 So let me be thy choir, and make a moan  
     Upon the midnight hours;  
 Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet  
     From swungèd censer teeming –  
 Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat  
     Of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming.

(Lines 43-49)

Keats, the poet of the senses, was using the form of a hymnic prayer to present a meditation on the re-construction of Hellenic beauty and ideals concerning the giving and receiving of love. The poem is devoted to an abstracted symbol of the soul (the innermost-self), here the goddess Psyche, who is primarily invoked in the imagination in a complex aesthetic, literary and psychological context rather than in ritualized invocatory prayer. To read Keats' poem as actual pagan liturgy would be missing the point. However, the poem is certainly pagan. It grows out of and is a reflection of pagan myth, *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche*, there is no hint of Christianity in it. In *Endymion* (1816), Keats wrote an invocation to Pan which he recited to Wordsworth when he met him.<sup>46</sup> Concerning the meeting, the recitation and Wordsworth's response Marilyn Butler wrote that

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<sup>46</sup> See *Endymion* (I, 232-306).

in December 1817, when he was introduced to Wordsworth, he chose to recite its [the poem *Endymion*'s] invocation to Pan. Haydon records Wordsworth's sharply unfavourable comment, but he concentrates on the hurt Keats must have felt, without noticing that Wordsworth evidently felt provoked by the choice of subject – 'A very pretty piece of paganism'.<sup>47</sup>

Why write pagan poetry in the early nineteenth century? Peacock also wrote a pagan poem *Rhododaphne or The Thessalian Spell* in 1818. Shelley reviewed his friend's poem writing that

Rhododaphne is a poem of the most remarkable character, and the nature of the subject no less than the spirit in which it is written forbid us to range it under any of the classes of modern literature. It is a Greek and Pagan poem. In sentiment and scenery it is essentially antique. There is a strong *religio loci* throughout which almost compels us to believe that the author wrote from the dictation of a voice heard from some Pythian cavern in the solitudes where Delphi stood.<sup>48</sup>

Shelley saw Peacock's contemporary expression of pagan poetry as innovative and radical. The younger Romantics, and others in the Shelley circle including Peacock, were disillusioned with both Wordsworth and Coleridge who had begun their literary careers as radical and innovative trailblazers but who had become conservative Christian proselytizers. However, the elder-poets notably maintained an individualistic approach to personal faith; Wordsworth always promoted approaching, and discovering, the divine through the beauty of nature and Coleridge hyper-intellectualised his faith in line with German metaphysics: but both confessed

<sup>47</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed A Satirist in his Context* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 108.

<sup>48</sup> P.B. Shelley, 'On 'Rhododaphne or The Thessalian Spell a Poem', in *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Volume 1, ed. E.B. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 285.

Christianity and increasingly verged towards conservatism. Eighteenth-century rationalism had succeeded in panicking the Christian establishment and attacks from deists, atheists and the *philosophes* stimulated defensiveness in ecclesiastical ranks; but rationalism did not defeat, dismantle or politically destabilise established and orthodox Christianity either in Europe or in Britain. Seeing Wordsworth and Coleridge fraternizing with, and becoming part of, the establishment and joining in with the chorus who chanted for 'Church and King' was deeply distressing for Shelley and his friends who envisioned the possibility of a better society than the one they inherited and lived in. The social dominance of politicised Christian orthodoxy, was not only a problem for Shelley and his circle; orthodoxy was also seen as repressing the individual and individual potential. Where rationalism had only dented the armour of established Christian orthodoxy perhaps its older rival and enemy, paganism, especially philosophically eloquent and artistically accomplished Hellenic paganism, could serve deathblows.

Writing a pamphlet on atheism was not going to shake orthodox Christianity or the establishment that privileged that faith to the core. But worshipping Pan and his nymphs, or at least appearing to do so; and drawing readers into the arcane, ecstatic and voluptuous delights of Dionysus and his maenads was going to provoke anger but also draw attention to a vision hidden beneath a horned mask and a message accompanied by the sound of the syrinx. Of course, Shelley and his circle did not identify with pagan Greece and her myths for purely reactionary purposes: they identified with the pre-Christian past in order to discover a present ideal, for society and themselves individually, that was free of the oppressiveness and perceived hypocrisy of orthodox and established Christianity. By identifying with paganism, on

artistic, philosophical and sometimes perhaps even spiritual levels, the younger Romantics and their circle were aligning themselves with the ancient and despised foe of Christianity.

Hellenic paganism was essentially artistically, morally and philosophically free of the tarnished excesses of the paganism of the Roman Empire, especially as was evinced at the time of its decline. From an orthodox Christian point of view an embracement of Classical paganism, be it Hellenic or Roman, signalled an ethical, moral and theological reversion that could only lead to barbarism, immorality, pantheism and idolatry. From the point of view of the Shelley circle, embracing Hellenic paganism signalled a return to exalted moral and artistic possibilities, which functioned within a matrix of beauty, human dignity, creative potential, societal refinement and progress that was free from the moral, political and hypocritical control of established orthodox Christianity. One reason why Pagan Taylor was an attractive and enticing figure for Shelley and his friends was that he was the most notorious contemporary representative of Hellenic paganism, and had been since the seventeen eighties: Taylor's public and vehement anti-Christian stance was undoubtedly attractive to them. However, though Taylor never shouted for 'Church and King', he did shout for the king. Taylor's loyalism and conservatism united with his religious dogmatism, even if it was pagan, would have made Taylor unpalatable to Shelley, Byron and Peacock and the rest. Although Taylor was undoubtedly an influence on the Romantics he could never be adopted as a revolutionary or literary mascot.

#### 4. Blake and the Mystical Initiations

Raine and Harper have done the most to demonstrate specific influences of Taylor on Blake's, particularly his early, writings.<sup>49</sup> Although it is certain that Blake knew Taylor personally, though if they were friends or merely acquaintances has yet to be determined, there has never been any material evidence that Blake owned or read any of Taylor's books. Recently Phillip Cardinale has identified a copy of Taylor's *Mystical Initiations, or Hymns of Orpheus* (1787), kept in the Bodleian Library, as containing three short annotations in Blake's hand in orange-brown ink: the same ink was also used by the annotator to underline several words and phrases in the text.<sup>50</sup> The Bodleian copy does not bear Blake's signature and so the attribution of annotations and underlining to Blake is based on circumstantial evidence. However, the handwriting was tentatively verified as being Blake's by the distinguished palaeographer Reginald Alton (1919-2003) and has now been accepted as being authentic by G. E. Bentley Jr.<sup>51</sup> Until the identification of Blake's annotations in the Bodleian library's copy of *The Mystical Initiations or Hymns of Orpheus* it was ultimately only conjectured that Blake read Taylor. Of course, the discovery only confirms that Blake read and annotated one of Taylor's books: however, the discovery of Blake's copy of *The Mystical Initiations* is none-the-less a significant one.

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<sup>49</sup> Besides Harper's *NWB*, see also Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 2 vols. (New York: National Gallery of Art Washington D.C. & The Bollingen Foundation, 1968). See also Edward Larrissy 'Blake and Platonism' in Hutton and Baldwin, eds. (1994), pp. 186-198; where Larrissy convincingly argues that Taylor's *History of the Restoration of the Platonic Theology in The Commentaries* (1789) was an influence on Blake's *Thel* (1789 [1789-91]), see; pp. 189-190.

<sup>50</sup> Phillip and Joseph Cardinale, 'William Blake's Copy of Mystical Initiations,' in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* (forthcoming c. 2007). Note: the Bodleian Library call number is Arch. H e. 181.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Blake made an annotation, using orange-brown ink, on page seven of Taylor's *Preface to The Mystical Initiations* and underlined several words in the text on the same page. On page six, Taylor wrote that

The translator has adopted rhyme, not because most agreeable to general taste, but because he believes it necessary to the poetry of the English language; which requires something as a substitute, for the energetic cadence, of the Greek and Latin Hexameters. Could this be obtained by any other means, he would immediately relinquish his partiality for<sup>52</sup>

On page seven, Taylor continued and the annotator underlined the following words:

rhyme, which is certainly when well executed, far more difficult than blank verse, as the following Hymns must evince, in an eminent degree.<sup>53</sup>

Above the underlined words, at the top of the page, Blake wrote

There is no instance of a poet writing good Eng. Blank verse who has not also written good Rhyme: but many have written good rhyme who have shewn no capability of writing good Blank verse.<sup>54</sup>

George Mills Harper asserted that a quotation of Proclus' teaching on prayer in *The Mystical Initiations*, may have provided 'the immediate stimulus for Blake's "Ah! Sun-flower"'.<sup>55</sup> The first thing that Proclus taught was that hymns were a form of intellectual sacrifice and more appropriate offerings to the gods than sacrifices

<sup>52</sup> *Hymns (1787)* p. vi. rpt. in *SW*, p. 164

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii. [Bodleian Library copy call number Arch. H e. 181] rpt. in *SW*, *ibid.* See Illustration Plate 2, reproduced here with kind permission.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *NWB*, p. 119.

*There is no instance of a poet writing goodly.  
 Rhyme: but many have written good rhymes  
 so low down shew no capability of writing good  
 blank verse -*

rhyme, which is certainly when well  
executed, far more difficult than blank  
verse, as the following Hymns must  
 evince, in an eminent degree.

And, here it is necessary to ob-  
 serve, with respect to translation, that  
 nothing is more generally mistaken  
 in its nature; or more faulty in its  
 execution. The author of the Letters  
 on Mythology, gives it as his opi-  
 nion, that it is impossible to translate  
 an ancient author, so as to do justice  
 to his meaning. If he had confined  
 this sentiment, to the beauties of  
 the composition, it would doubtless  
 have been just; but to extend it,  
 to the meaning of an author, is to  
 make truth and opinion, partial and  
 incommunicable. Every person, in-  
 deed,

composed of matter. Correspondingly, with a basic but highly complex Neoplatonic concept that all things are in all things but in each according to their nature, Proclus taught that all things pray in a manner, which befits their nature. For the human being, prayer was one of the tools that assisted the soul's return to its original source ever nearer to the intelligible world and to the One. The idea of sympathy existing between ultimate causes and their effects, 'as above so below', and that man was a microcosmic template of the macrocosm, was one of the foundational principles of Hermetic philosophy, Neoplatonism and related sympathetic magic. Taylor considered that such magic was theoretically possible. In a note relating to *Sacrifices and Incantations* in *The Description of Greece* he wrote that

He, whose intellectual eye is strong enough to perceive that *all things sympathize with all*, will be convinced that the *magic*, cultivated by the ancient philosophers, is founded on a theory no less sublime than rational and true. Such a one will consider, as Plotinus observes, the nature of soul, as every where easy to be attracted, when a proper subject is at hand, which is easily passive to its influence. And, that every thing adapted to imitation is readily passive; and is like a mirror able to seize a certain form, and reflect it to the view. <sup>56</sup>

In late antiquity, for many but not all, magic was a reality rather than a superstitious myth. The gods, daimons and zodiacal forces were perceived to influence, and rule over, metals, precious and semiprecious stones, herbs, plants, trees, animals, the traditional four elements, and parts of the human body. For instance, gold was the metal of the sun, copper the metal of Venus and lead the metal of Saturn. Heliotropes, or sun-flowers, were ruled by the sun. The same orange-brown ink used by Blake to make brief annotations in his copy of *Mystical Initiations* was used to underline portions of the text where Taylor quoted from Proclus teaching on prayer: which

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<sup>56</sup> *Description of Greece*, III, p. 302.

Taylor introduced as teaching 'upon sacrifice and magic'.<sup>57</sup> The text was underlined as follows on page 75:

...For  
how shall we account for those plants called heliotropes, that is attendants on the sun, moving in correspondence with the revolution of its orb; but selenitropes, or attendants on the moon, turning in exact conformity with her motion? it is because all things pray, and compose hymns to the leaders of their respective orders; but some intellectually, and others<sup>58</sup>

The annotator continued on page 76:

rationally; some in a natural, and others after a sensible manner. Hence the sunflower, as far as it is able, moves in a circular dance towards the sun; so that if any one could hear the pulsation made by its circuit in the air, he would perceive something composed by a sound of this kind, in honour of its king, such as a plant is capable of framing. Hence we may behold the sun and moon in the earth, but according to a terrene quality. But in the celestial regions, all plants, and stones, and animals, possessing an intellectual life according to a celestial nature. Now the ancients having contemplated this mutual sympathy of things, applied for occult purposes both celestial and terrene natures, by means of which through a certain similitude they deduced divine virtues into this interior abode.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Hymns* (1787) p. 74. rpt. in *SW*, p. 194.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75. [Bodleian Library copy call number Arch. H e. 181], rpt. in *SW*, *ibid.* Note: see Illustration Plate 3, reproduced here with kind permission.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76, rpt. in *SW*, pp. 194-195. Note: see Illustration Plate 4, reproduced here with kind permission.

( 75 )

other, and of things manifest to occult powers, and by this means discovered that all things subsist in all, they fabricated a sacred science, from this mutual sympathy and similarity. Thus they recognized things supreme, in such as are subordinate, and the subordinate in the supreme: in the celestial regions terrene properties subsisting in a causal and celestial manner; and in earth celestial properties, but according to a terrene condition. For how shall we account for those plants called heliotropes, that is attendants on the sun, moving in correspondence with the revolution of its orb; but selenitropes, or attendants on the moon, turning in exact conformity with her motion? it is because all things pray, and compose hymns to the leaders of their respective orders; but some intellectually, and others rationally;

Illustration Plate 3

Used with kind permission

( 76 )

rationally; some in a natural, and others after a sensible manner. Hence the sunflower, as far as it is able, moves in a circular dance towards the sun; so that if any one could hear the pulsation made by its circuit in the air, he would perceive something composed by a sound of this kind, in honour of its king, such as a plant is capable of framing. Hence we may behold the sun and moon in the earth, but according to a terrene quality. But in the celestial regions, all plants, and stones, and animals, possessing an intellectual life according to a celestial nature. Now the ancients having contemplated this mutual sympathy of things, applied for occult purposes both celestial and terrene natures, by means of which through a certain similitude they deduced divine virtues into this inferior abode. For indeed

mm  
110  
210  
310  
410  
510  
610  
710  
810  
910  
1010  
1110  
1210  
1310  
1410  
1510

Blake's *Ah Sun-Flower* was certainly influenced, as Harper had strongly suspected, by Taylor's quotation of Proclus on prayer, 'magic and sacrifice' in the *Mystical Initiations*. Blake's poem was a condensed reflection, not only of the teaching of Proclus, but also of Blake's own unique understanding of Neoplatonic teaching concerning the circuit of the soul from an original pristine eternal source, through the revolutions of time, matter and death and back again. As always, Blake made his own system out of parts of others and this is reflected in the poem by the introduction of the Youth and the Virgin, desire and passivity. The graves of the Youth and the Virgin could signify the Neoplatonic view of the body as a sepulchre; or this could be understood in terms of Christian concepts of the resurrection of the dead. He published *Ah! Sun-Flower* in *Songs of Experience* (1794):

Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,  
Who countest the steps of the Sun  
Seeking after that sweet golden clime  
Where the travellers journey is done.

Where the youth pined away with desire,  
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow:  
Arise from their graves and aspire,  
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.<sup>60</sup>

## 5. Mr. Mystic?

In 1890, W.E.A. Axon wrote that

Amongst Taylor's friends was Thomas Love Peacock, whose granddaughter says:—'My grandfather's friends were especially Mr.

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<sup>60</sup> David V. Erdman ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, revised edn. with commentary by Harold Bloom (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1988), p. 25.

Macgregor Laird and Mr. Coulson, also the two Smiths of the 'Rejected Addresses'; Barry Cornwall (Mr. Procter), and a remarkable man, Mr. Thomas Taylor, of Norwich, commonly called 'Pagan Taylor,' who always addressed grandpapa as 'Greeky Peeky'; he sacrificed lambs in his lodgings to the 'immortal gods,' and 'poured out libations to Jupiter,' until his landlord threatened to turn him out; hence his nickname of 'Pagan.' ''

It is rather amusing here to see Thomas Taylor confounded with Taylor of Norwich, as on other occasions he has been confounded with Robert Taylor, the Devil's Chaplain, and even with Isaac Taylor! The origin of the story about the sacrifice, which has more than once been taken seriously, was probably no more than a good-natured jest.<sup>61</sup>

Despite Edith Clarke's [*née* Nicolls] (1844–1926), 'confounding' Thomas Taylor with William Taylor of Norwich (1765–1836), a translator of German works such as Lessing's *Nathan* and Goethe's *Iphigenia*, there is no doubt that Taylor knew her grandfather personally; nor that he and Taylor were friends. Clarke's description, as presented by Axon, corresponds accurately with gossip about 'Pagan Taylor', such as was reported in *The Survival of Paganism* in *Fraser's Magazine*. Clarke seems to have embellished her account of Taylor using her own research concerning him in gossipy Victorian periodicals. H.F.B. Brett-Smith, in his *Biographical Introduction to The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, cites a primary source of Clarke's information: Peacock's cousin Harriet Love wrote to Edith Nicolls, as she was then called, in 1874:

The people who called on him, when first he went to London, did not appear to me, nor to my Aunt, as strangers.

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<sup>61</sup> *SW*, pp. 130–131. Note: all the personalities mentioned are further identified in n. 13, p. 131. Besides the biographical clarifications in *SW* two are not expounded upon, they being: Robert Taylor (1784–1844), the Devil's Chaplain, who was a deist and fervent anti-clericalist who was notorious for leading odd religious services in backwater chapels. Also, Axon gave Isaac Taylor's [*known as* Isaac Taylor of Stanford Rivers] (1787–1865) name with an exclamation mark; this 'Taylor' was a famous Christian theological writer and so it was funny that he was ever confused with 'Pagan Taylor'.

At the end of a list of names, all cited in Axon above, except for Leigh Hunt and Thomas Jefferson Hogg who were not mentioned in Axon's report of Clarke's comments, Harriet Love then added:

... and a very remarkable man "Taylor" (half mad!) who always addressed your Grandpapa as "Greeky Peeky." – I suppose from his knowing so much Greek.<sup>62</sup>

Taylor was not perceived as a 'stranger' by Harriet Love, and Peacock and Taylor must have enjoyed some degree of intimacy in friendship and conviviality as Taylor always called Peacock 'Greeky Peeky'. Brett-Smith also recorded that Taylor was mentioned in a conversation between Peacock and a friend from the early eighteenth-fifties, Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant-Duff (1829–1906), the politician and author, who knew Peacock when he worked at East India House. Grant-Duff wrote in his *Notes from a Diary, 1851-1872* that on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1853:

Talked at India House with Mr. Peacock about Taylor the Platonist. I think my good old friend, if he had worshipped anything, would have been inclined to worship Jupiter, as it was said that Taylor did.<sup>63</sup>

These are the only primary sources of information that I have found which support the fact that Taylor and Peacock knew each other. Was Taylor an influence on Peacock's literary works? Peacock was an accomplished classicist; an independent thinker and researcher with an excellent library so that he did not need to consult Taylor's works.

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<sup>62</sup> *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. H.F.B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols. [The Halliford Edition] (London: Constable & co.; New York: Gabriel Wells, 1924-1934), I, xcvi-xcviii. Note: this information is cited in Brett-Smith's *Biographical Introduction* and was extracted from MS. notes to Edith Nicolls that were preserved among her papers.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. clxxiv-clxxv.

Taylor is not mentioned in any of Peacock's surviving letters and no letters survive that were written either from Peacock to Taylor or vice versa.<sup>64</sup> Nor were any of Taylor's books offered for sale in the auction catalogue of Peacock's extensive library.<sup>65</sup> The total lack of any references concerning Taylor in Peacock's correspondence casts an amount of doubt on the depth, and duration, of friendship that they enjoyed. The fact that not one of Taylor's publications was offered for sale, with Peacock's library, also casts some doubt on the idea that Taylor's works were ever valued by Peacock. (However, this does not prove that Peacock never owned a book by Taylor as some volumes might have been dispersed by other means than the auction.) Although George Mills Harper wrote that, 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, Peacock and perhaps many another owned Taylor's books and were stimulated by his unorthodox convictions': I have not been able to find any evidence that Peacock owned Taylor's books.<sup>66</sup> Concerning the absence of Taylor's influence on Peacock's Romantic Hellenism, Marilyn Butler wrote that

... Thomas Taylor, that 'pagan Methodist', as Southey called him, who, like Blake, was a denizen of a tradesman or artisan world of esoteric religious cults. In the 'Preliminary Dissertation' to his *Mystical Initiations: or, Hymns of Orpheus* (1787), Taylor undertook to interpret Orphic religion, through the commentaries 'of the latter Platonists, as the only sources of genuine knowledge, on this sublime and obsolete enquiry'. Coleridge, whom Lamb long afterwards recalled at Christ's Hospital in the later 1780's, mouthing 'the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek or Pindar', had probably come by his impressive arcane knowledge via

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<sup>64</sup> See Nicholas A. Joukovsky ed. *The Letters of Thomas Love Peacock 1792-1866*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). Note: Joukovsky mentions Taylor in his *Introduction* in section 4: *London Acquaintances*, see I, p. lxxviii, in the same context as discussed above.

<sup>65</sup> See, 'Catalogue of the Library of The Late Thomas Love Peacock, ESQ: Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> June, 1866) in *Sales Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons, i: Poets and Men of Letters*, A.N.L. Munby ed. and introd. (London: Mansell with Sotheby Parke-Bernet Publications, 1971), pp. 153-201.

<sup>66</sup> *NWB*, p. 13.

Taylor. But this is not Peacock's Greece, even though Peacock liked Taylor for preferring the pagan pantheon to Christianity.<sup>67</sup>

Peacock's second, and longest, work of fiction was entitled *Melincourt* (1817).<sup>68</sup> In chapter thirty-one, *Cimmerian Lodge*, Peacock introduced a character, perhaps better understood as a satirical composite of characters, called 'Moly Mystic Esquire' into the plot. For anyone who knows anything about Taylor, Mr. Mystic immediately brings him to mind; he lives in Cimmerian Lodge on the *Island of Pure Intelligence*, which can only be accessed by rowing across the *Ocean of Deceitful Form*. He spouts Orphic invocations. Peacock included his own satirical composition of what looks like an Orphic hymn, which is presented to the reader in Greek script with English translation.<sup>69</sup> Kathleen Raine wrote that, Taylor was 'the "Mr. Mystic" of Thomas Love Peacock's *Melincourt*'.<sup>70</sup> George Mills Harper wrote that

In *Melincourt*, Peacock painted a gently satiric portrait of his eccentric friend as a learned mythologist who quotes Orphic hymns.<sup>71</sup>

Timothy Webb has also written that

Peacock numbered Taylor among his 'six especial friends' and introduced him as a character in *Melincourt* (1818) where he parodied his exegetic method in the thirty-first chapter.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed A Satirist in his Context*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>68</sup> See, *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, eds. Brett-Smith and Jones, vol. II. Note: the Halliford Edition reproduces Peacock's 1856 edition of the text, but the title-page of the first edition is reproduced on p. viii and dated 1817.

<sup>69</sup> See, *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>70</sup> *SW*, p. 40.

<sup>71</sup> *NWB*, p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism*, pp. 182-183.

However, there is a problem. Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) philosophy is mentioned in conjunction with Mr. Mystic's philosophical interests and persuasions at the beginning of, and throughout, the chapter.<sup>73</sup> Thomas Taylor certainly never mentioned Kantian metaphysics as having been an influence on his metaphysics or philosophy. Peacock, in one of his notes to *Melincourt*, mentioned that:

The reader who is desirous of elucidating the mysteries of the words and phrases marked in italics in this chapter, may consult the German Works of Professor Kant, or Professor Born's Latin translation of them, or M. Villars's *Philosophie de Kant, ou Principes fondamentaux de la Philosophie Transcendentale*...<sup>74</sup>

In another note, Peacock referred his readers to 'Coleridge's *Lay Sermon*', which he alludes to or quotes directly from, through the mouth of Mr. Mystic, seven times in the space of two pages.<sup>75</sup> Mr. Mystic is a satirical portrait of Coleridge's philosophical positions not Thomas Taylor the Platonist's. Kant significantly influenced Coleridge; he did not influence Taylor. Marilyn Butler, in *Peacock Displayed*, does not even consider that Mr. Mystic might be a caricature of Taylor; she immediately identifies Coleridge with the ideas presented by Mystic in her analysis of *Melincourt*.<sup>76</sup> Butler wrote that

There has been a misconception that Peacock attempts to *characterise* Coleridge in Mr Mystic. It is true that the sage 'talked for three hours without intermission' – a much-publicised feature of Coleridge's real-

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<sup>73</sup> See, *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, eds. Brett-Smith and Jones, II, 328-329.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>76</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed A Satirist in his Context*, pp. 88-90. Note: another scholar also identified Mr Mystic with Coleridge and does not even mention Taylor in relation to the character see, Bryan Burns, *The Novels of Thomas Love Peacock* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1985), p. 43 and, p. 51.

life conversation. But otherwise Mystic is not endowed with the kind of characteristics that should suggest a portrait.<sup>77</sup>

Why did erudite scholars such as Raine, Harper and Webb identify Taylor, so strongly, with Peacock's Mr. Mystic? There does seem to be a hint of Taylor in the character, especially in relation to his recitation of Orphic hymns. Peacock translated his mock Orphic hymn in the same style, in rhyming couplets, as Taylor translated them. As Butler observed, Peacock was not creating a convincing caricature of Coleridge in Mystic. However, he knew Taylor and perhaps he was creating a caricature of Taylor in the character. Why might Peacock have created a hybrid character, mainly reflecting Coleridge but also unmistakably alluding to Taylor, in his satiric novel?

Coleridge was certainly influenced by Thomas Taylor. On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1796 he wrote to the political reformer and lecturer John Thelwall (1764–1834):

I am, &ever have been, a great reader – &have read almost every thing – a library-cormorant – I am *deep* in all out of the way books, whether of the monkish times, or of the puritanical aera – I have read &digested most of the Historical Writers –; but I do not *like* History. Metaphysics, &Poetry, &'Facts of mind' – (i.e. Accounts of all the strange phantasms that ever possessed your philosophy-dreamers from Tauth [Thoth], the Egyptian to Taylor, the English Pagan,) are my darling Studies.<sup>78</sup>

On Tuesday September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1803, he wrote, from Edinburgh to Mr. A. Welles, jokingly, about:

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>78</sup> Earl Leslie Griggs, ed., *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-1971) I, p. 260.

joining party with Thomas Taylor, the Pagan (for whom I have already a sneaking affection on account of his devout Love of Greek) to re-introduce the Heathen Mythology, to detect in your per[son] another descent & metamorphosis of the God of the Sun, to erect a Temple to you, as Phoebos Sanatori; & if you have a Wife, to have her deified, by act of Parliament, under the name of the Nymph, Panacea.<sup>79</sup>

Charles Lamb (1775-1834) recalled being at school with Coleridge in his essay *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago* (1820). In his essay he called Coleridge the '*inspired charity boy*'. He remembered:

Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Logician, Metaphysician, Bard!— How have I seen the casual passer through the Cloisters stand still, intranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between *speech* and the *garb* of the young *Mirandula*), to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek...<sup>80</sup>

Lucyle Werkmeister, observed that the recollections of Coleridge in Lamb's essay originated more from Coleridge's memory than his own: she quotes Coleridge stating, in a letter, that Lamb's essay was 'chiefly compiled from recollections of what he had heard from me'.<sup>81</sup> Coleridge was at Christ's Hospital School, London, from 1782-1790. There he became an accomplished classical scholar. Critics have often queried whether a schoolboy between the age of ten and fifteen-years-old, even of Coleridge's intellectual calibre, could have been as philosophically eloquent, deriving much of his knowledge from reading ancient authors in classical languages, as Coleridge himself claimed to be. Concerning his recollections of his genius as a child which he

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 987.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', cited in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I, p. 15 [n. 2].

<sup>81</sup> Lucyle Werkmeister, 'The Early Coleridge: His "Rage for Metaphysics"', in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 54 (1961), p. 103 [n. 22].

recollected in five autobiographical letters between 1797 and 1798 and which he also referred to in the first chapter of his *Biographia Literaria*: Werkmeister, wrote that

When all the recollections are assembled, they present an account of the boy Coleridge which would seem hardly creditable even if it were consistent, and it has seemed much less creditable when it is compared with the account furnished by the juvenilia.<sup>82</sup>

In 1796, Coleridge had confessed to Thelwall that the works of 'Taylor, the English Pagan' were part of his 'darling studies'. It is difficult to tell when Coleridge first started reading Taylor; he could have read Taylor while at Christ's Hospital. Taylor's works, such as *The Commentaries of Proclus on Euclid's Elements*, which contained the *History of the Restoration of the Platonic Theology*, as well as *Concerning the Beautiful*, could have introduced the young Coleridge to Plotinus and Iamblichus. Werkmeister wrote that:

It is sometimes suggested that his reading of Plotinus was confined to Thomas Taylor's translation of the *Essay on the Beautiful*, but this suggestion can be discarded. The problem of beauty *per se* did not interest Coleridge at the time [up until 1789], and Plotinus's remarks on the problem which did interest him were so scattered that he could have found them only by going through the whole of the *Enneads*. As to when he read the Neoplatonists, one can only say that "Easter Holidays," which was composed in May, 1787, is thoroughly Plotinian in its point of view, and there is no evidence of a development or alteration in that point of view prior to 1789.

Coleridge could have, and probably did, come to Plotinus at a comparatively young age through reading in the original Greek text or Latin translations, as found in Ficino for instance. However, Taylor, as he admitted himself, was one of his 'darling studies' and his influence on the young Coleridge cannot be disregarded. On Sunday 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Lucyle Werkmeister, 'The Early Coleridge: His "Rage for Metaphysics"', p. 99.

January 1810, while staying in Grasmere, Coleridge wrote to Lady Beaumont concerning western metaphysics that:

The most beautiful and orderly development of this philosophy, which endeavors to explain all things by an analysis of Consciousness, and builds up a world in the mind out of materials furnished by the mind itself, is to be found in the Platonic Theology by Proclus. A Part of it has been translated by Taylor; but so translated that difficult Greek is transmuted into incomprehensible English.—<sup>83</sup>

In a footnote to the Greek text of Mr. Mystic's Orphic invocation, Peacock wrote that

Πρωτεύς Ολβοδοτής, *Proteus the giver of riches*, certainly deserves a place among the *Lares* of every poetical and political turncote.<sup>84</sup>

The *Lares* to which Peacock referred were the departed spirits of ancestors who were worshipped along with domestic gods in Roman homes. Peacock saw Coleridge as a turncoat in both artistic and political terms. Peacock knew that the Coleridge who was enthusiastic concerning Kantian metaphysics owed a metaphysical debt, most definitely in his earlier career, to Thomas Taylor the Platonist. The Orphic mysticism of the Coleridgian Mr. Mystic was indicative that the 'poetical and political turncoat' had also turned away from his 'darling studies'; but he could never escape from what he had once been, nor avoid the reality of what he had become: at least not when under the sharp eye of a master satirist.

<sup>83</sup> *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, III, p. 279. Note: Griggs gave the following information in a footnote to this quotation: 'Coleridge's annotated copy of Thos. Taylor's *Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus, . . . and a Translation . . . of Proclus's Theological Elements*, 2 vols., (1792 reissue) is in the British Museum'.

<sup>84</sup> *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, eds. Brett-Smith and Jones, II, p. 331.

## 6. Concluding Note

Taylor drew upon ancient mythological and philosophical literature and its inherent symbolism, while reinterpreting redefining, and re-contextualising it for his own purposes. The Neoplatonists had drawn upon their own mythological and philosophical heritage, Homer, Plato and Aristotle, and re-defined it in their own terms and for their own purposes. The recycling of past tradition and contemporary re-definition of such traditions was a hallmark of Romanticism. However, the pagan religion that Taylor sought to re-establish through the re-contextualisation of original myth and dogma by means of translation, commentary and poetry, was ultimately regressive rather than progressive: and therefore very 'un-Romantic'. The Neoplatonism of Plotinus could be just as morally restrictive and oppressive as the Neoplatonism of St. Augustine: both could be termed body-haters. The theosophical religion of Iamblichus and Proclus was just as susceptible to misuse by being incorporated into the mechanisms of priestcraft, as was the Christian religion. However, Taylor was an idealist and he believed that his efforts were for the betterment of his own, and future, generations.

## Appendix 1

### **Editorial Changes Between The 1798 and 1803 Editions of 'Mr Taylor the Platonist' in British Public Characters of 1798**

## Appendix 1

The 1798 edition is displayed first and is followed by the 1803 edition of the text wherever changes have been made. In the 1803 edition a substantial portion of text appears at the end of the article which proves that Thomas Taylor contributed information to the biographical article up until 1803.

*British Public Characters of 1798* (London: Printed for R. Phillips No. 71 St. Paul's Churchyard; and sold by Lee and Hurst, Paternoster-Row; Carpenter and Co. Old Bond Street; R.H. Westley, Strand; And All Booksellers, 1798, rpt. 1801 and 1803)

‘Mr. Taylor the Platonist’

1798 edition  
pp. 100-124

1803 edition  
pp. 121-141

1798 edition p. 103.

This stimulus, the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle could alone inspire.

1803 edition p. 125.

This stimulus, the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle could alone supply.

1798 edition p. 104

Mr. T. it seems, during the course of ministerial study renewed with redoubled ardour his acquaintance with Miss M.

1803 edition p. 125

Mr. T. it seems, during the course of clerical education renewed with redoubled ardor his acquaintance with Miss M.

1798 edition p. 104

...to understand the system of the universe as delivered in *Principia* of Newton, he began to read that beautiful work.

1803 edition p. 125

...to understand the system of the universe as delineated in *Principia* of Newton, he began to read that beautiful work.

1798 edition p. 105

But when the fates are adverse, how vein are the most prudent projects!

1803 edition p. 126

But when the fates are averse, how vein are the most prudent projects!

1798 edition p. 106

We are happy to find, however, that Mr. and Mrs. T. exculpate their parents on this occasion:

1803 edition p. 127

We find, however, that they both exculpate their parents on this occasion:

1798 edition p. 106

Such indeed was the distressed situation of this young couple at this period, that we are informed that they had no more than seven shillings a week to subsist on, for nearly a twelvemonth!

1803 edition p. 127

Such was the distressed situation of this young couple soon after this period, that we are informed that they had no more than seven shillings a week to subsist on, for nearly a twelvemonth!

1798 edition p. 109

The substance of this pamphlet, as it did not attract the attention of the publick, he has since given to the world in a note, in the first volume of his translation of Proclus and Euclid.

1803 edition p. 129

The substance of this, as it did not then attract much attention, he has since given to the world in a note, in the first volume of his translation of Proclus and Euclid.

1798 edition p. 111

By the assistance of Aristotle's Greek Interpreters, therefore, Mr. T. read the Physicks, books *de Anima*, *de Caelo*, Logick, Morals, and Metaphysicks, of that philosopher...

1803 edition p. 131

By the assistance of Aristotle's Greek Interpreters, Mr. T. read the Physicks, books *de Anima*, *de Caelo*, Logick, Morals, and Metaphysics, of that philosopher...

1798 edition p. 113

...the celebrated Mrs. Wollstonecraft, and her friend Miss Blood, resided with our philosopher for nearly three months.

1803 edition pp 132 - 133

...the celebrated Mrs. Woolstonecraft, and her friend Miss Blood, resided with our philosopher for nearly three months.

1798 edition pp. 113 - 114

Mr. T. observed, that he afterwards called on her when she lived in George-street, and that he has there drunk wine with her out of a *tea cup*; Mrs. W. remarking at the time, that she did not give herself the trouble to think whether a wine-glass was not a necessary utensil in a house.

1803 edition p. 133

Mr. T. further remarked, that he afterwards called on her when she lived in George-street, and that he has there drunk wine with her out of a *tea cup*; Mrs. W. observing at the time, that she did not give herself the trouble to think whether a wine-glass was not a necessary utensil in a house.

1798 edition p. 114

But to return from these eccentricities, which would not have been worthy of remark in a woman of less merit, to our Platonist.

1803 edition p. 133

But to return from these eccentricities, which would not have been worthy of remark in a woman of less merit, to our Platonist.

1798 edition p. 114

...he determined to emancipate himself, if possible, from slavery, and live by the exertion of his talents.

1803 edition p. 134

...he determined to emancipate himself, if possible, from thraldom, and live by the exertion of his talents.

1798 edition p. 115

His first effort after this, to emerge from obscurity, was by composing twelve Lectures on the Platonic philosophy, at the request of Mr. Flaxman, the statuary, who had been one of the auditors of Mr. T.'s Lecture on Light, and who very benevolently permitted him to read his Lectures in the largest room of his house.

1803 edition p. 135

His first effort after this, to emerge from obscurity, was by composing twelve Lectures on the Platonic philosophy, at the request of Mr. Flaxman, the statuary, who had been one of the auditors of Mr. T.'s Lecture on Light, and who very benevolently permitted him to read his Dissertations in the largest room of his house.

1798 edition p. 116

## Appendix 2

### List of Reviews of Taylor's Works 1787 – 1809

About this time, Mr. T. became acquainted with Mr. William Meredith of Harley-place...

1803 edition p. 135

About the same time, Mr. T. became acquainted with Mr. William Meredith of Harley-place...

1798 edition pp. 117-118

While Mr. T. was engaged, under the patronage of Messrs. W. and G.M. in translating and illustrating at his leisure hours the Commentaries of Proclus (for the principle part of his time was employed in teaching Classics), the Marquis de Valady took up his residence for three or four months at Mr. T.'s house.

1803 edition pp. 136-137

While Mr. T. was engaged, under the patronage of Messrs. W. and G.M. in translating and illustrating at his leisure hours the Commentaries of Proclus for the principle part of his time was employed in teaching Classics, the Marquis de Valady took up his residence for three or four months at Mr. T.'s house.

1803 edition pp. 141-142

Additional text 1:

That respectable patriot, Mr. Thomas Brand Hollis, has been for many years very much attached to our Platonist; he frequently invites him to his table, and he has always shown himself extremely active in promoting his welfare.

Additional text 2:

Since the publication of the first edition of this volume, the indefatigable and ingenious Mr. Taylor has published this work.

Additional text 3:

Three volumes of this translation are now printed, and the whole, in five volumes, will appear in the course of the summer of 1803, under the immediate patronage of one of the most respectable noblemen in this Kingdom. The substance of nearly all the existing MS commentaries in the philosophy of Plato, together with a considerable portion of such as are already published, will be given in the notes of this version of Mr. Taylor, whose object in this arduous undertaking has been to unfold the sublimities of Platonism, which have not been developed for above one thousand years. In the prosecution of his great design, he last summer availed himself to the treasures of the Bodleian library at Oxford, by which University he was most handsomely treated. We are also given to understand that when this publication is completed, it will soon be followed by a translation of the Platonic *Maximus Tyrius*; and (if health and opportunity permit) by a complete translation of ALL THE WORKS OF ARISTOTLE.

The following is a complete list of reviews of Taylor's translations and works original to him up until 1804:

1787 Orpheus	<i>Monthly Review,</i> <i>Critical Review,</i>	Aug., 1788, V. 79, pp. 133-4. June, 1787, V. 63, pp. 401-6.
1787 Plotinus	<i>Critical Review,</i> <i>Monthly Review,</i>	Oct., 1787, V. 64, pp. 286-8. July, 1788, V. 79, pp. 142-4.
1788-9 Proclus	Vol. I Vol. II Vol. I Vol. II Both Vols.	<i>Critical Review,</i> <i>Analytical Review,</i> <i>Monthly Review,</i> <i>Gentleman's Magazine,</i>
		May, 1788, V. 65, pp. 338-42. April, 1789, V. 67., pp. 241-9. Aug., 1788, V. 1, pp. 400-14. April, 1789, V. 3, pp. 402-12. Oct., 1789, V. 81, pp. 324-38. May, 1789, V. 59, p. 434.
1790 Eleusinian Mysteries	<i>Analytical Review,</i>	Aug. 1794, V. 19, pp. 398-401.
1793 Sallust	<i>Monthly Review,</i>	June. 1795, V. 17, p. 149-54.
1793 Emperor Julian	<i>Analytical Review,</i>	Sept., 1794, V. 20, pp. 93-5.
1793 Plato (4 Dialogues)	<i>Critical Review,</i> <i>Analytical Review,</i>	Dec., 1793, V. 79, pp. 405-9. Oct., 1793, V. 17, pp. 171-6.
1794 Pausanias	<i>Gentleman's Magazine,</i> <i>Monthly Review,</i> <i>British Critic,</i>	Oct., 1794, V. 64, pp. 921-8. Aug., 1796, V. 20, pp. 361-73. Oct., 1796, V. 21, pp. 181-188. Jan., 1795, V. 5, pp. 1-11.
1795 Apuleius	<i>Monthly Review,</i> <i>British Critic,</i> May, <i>Analytical Review,</i>	Aug., 1795, V. 18, pp. 51-5. 1796, V. 7, pp. 271-2. Oct., 1797, V. 26, pp. 388-90.
1801 Aristotle ( <i>Metaphysics</i> )	<i>Critical Review,</i> <i>Monthly Review,</i>	July, 1802, V. 35, pp. 251-8. March, 1802, V. 37, pp. 223-34.
1804 Maximus Tyrius	<i>British Critic,</i>	July, 1806, V. 28, pp. 50-61.
1804 Answer to Dr. Gillies	<i>Anti-Jacobin,</i> <i>British Critic,</i>	Nov., 1804, V. 19, pp. 294-6. Oct., 1806, V. 28, pp. 367-77.
1804 Plato	<i>British Critic,</i> <i>Critical Review,</i> <i>Aikin's Annual Review,</i> <i>Edinburgh Review,</i>	June, 1806, V. 27, 19., pp. 577- June, 1804, V. 2 (3 <sup>rd</sup> Series), pp. 121-3. (Cont.) July, 1804, V. 2, pp. 270-89. (Cont.) Sept., 1804, V. 3, pp. 1-19. (Cont.) Oct., 1804, V. 3, pp. 132-46. 1804, V. 3, pp. 337-47. April, 1809, V. 14, pp. 187-211.

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