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Did Coleridge read Plato by Anticipation?

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DESPITE HIS ALLEGIANCE to Joseph Priestley in his 1795 Lectures, Coleridge soon developed a sympathy for precisely the Platonic metaphysics that Priestley so vociferously opposed. Thus a few years later he dismisses Priestley's arrogant treatment of ancient thought: 'Plato, and Aristotle were great & astonishing Geniuses, and yet there is not a Presbyterian Candidate for a Conventicle but believes that they were mere children in Knowledge compared with himself & Drs Priestley & Rees, &c—' (CL II 675). Yet Priestley also exemplified a new tendency in the study of Plato, which Coleridge was to pursue vigorously. Most eighteenth-century commentators, drawing on Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, loosely identified 'Plato' with the whole body of Trinitarian theology evolved by the Church Fathers on the one hand, and the non-Christian Neoplatonists on the other. Priestley was one of the first English writers to return to Plato's texts and question whether the personification of the *logos*, the second Person of the Trinity, was really to be found there. He concludes: 'it appears to me, from a pretty careful examination of the writings of Plato, that this was not done by himself, though the confusion of his ideas gave occasion to it, or something like it, in his followers.'¹ Henceforth, for Coleridge, the distinction between Plato's thought and what German historians such as Brucker had recently termed 'Neoplatonism', was to be a matter of philosophical, theological and literary importance.

In the 1790s, Coleridge is humorously defensive about his budding enthusiasm for Plato, which he implicitly acknowledges to be counter-cultural—'but I love Plato—his dear *gorgeous* nonsense!' (CL I 295). But gradually, in what Seamus Perry has aptly termed Coleridge's 'critical mythology',² Plato attains privileged status as the consummate poetic philosopher, an idealised type of Coleridge himself. While Shakespeare is deified ('the one Proteus of the fire and the flood', BL II 27), 'the divine Plato' enters the pantheon alongside him: 'From Shakespeare to Plato, from the philosophic poet to the poetic philosopher, the transition is easy' (F I 472). It is, however, precisely this Coleridgean mythology that makes it difficult to determine how or how well Coleridge knew Plato at any particular stage. Critics are divided according to their sympathies between extreme claims: that he was totally familiar with Plato in Greek; or that he had nothing more than scraps of secondary knowledge. His own laconic retrospective comment on his reading of Plato, though, may be quite revealing.

I have read several of the works of Plato several times with profound

¹ *An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, Compiled from Original Writers; Proving that the Early Church was at first Unitarian* (Birmingham, 1796), p. 321. Cf. Caesar Morgan, *An Investigation of the Trinity of Plato and of Philo Judaeus, and of the Effects, which an Attachment to their Writings had upon the Principles and Reasonings of the Fathers of the Christian Church* (London, 1795).

² *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 210.

attention, but not all his writings. I soon found that I had read Plato by anticipation. He was a consummate genius.³

The expression ‘by anticipation’ seems at first sight eccentric enough to suggest table talk-ese on the part of the editor. It might be thought that Coleridge is expressing no more than a sense of congeniality with Plato, praising Plato much as he praises the Bible by saying ‘in the Bible there is more, *that finds me* than I have experienced in all other books put together.’⁴ Yet the word anticipation—which in fact features often in Coleridge’s later prose—seems to me particularly rich in this context, and I will use it as a way into the puzzle of Coleridge’s acquaintance with Plato—in both a literal and a metaphorical sense.

Literally, then, the word ‘anticipation’ echoes Coleridge’s semi-mythological portrayal of his own intellectual development, recorded most fully in chapter nine of *Biographia Literaria*. The substance of this self-portrayal is that as a precocious youngster Coleridge imbibed complex Platonic texts, which prepared his mind for the reception of Kant and other German philosophers. An essay by Charles Lamb sonorously recollects Coleridge at Christ’s Hospital School as ‘the *inspired charity-boy!*’ unfolding, ‘in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus’.⁵ Coleridge mentions in a letter that Lamb compiled the essay chiefly from his—Coleridge’s—recollections, so that this testimony to Coleridge’s early reading taste might well be in fact another self-commentary.⁶ Certainly Coleridge wanted to emphasise the chronological priority of the Neoplatonists in his development as proof that he had anticipated the most important concepts of German transcendentalism. About forty years ago critical opinion polarised over this anticipatory claim of Coleridge’s. Thomas McFarland endorsed it to defend Coleridge against the charge of plagiarism from German writers such as Schelling. Norman Fruman, however, adapting an excellent essay by Richard Haven, argued that there is insufficient evidence of Coleridge’s youthful knowledge of Neoplatonism, and accused Coleridge of dishonest self-dramatisation.⁷

Since then, to my knowledge, there has been very little substantial discussion of Coleridge’s earlier Platonic studies. This is partly because the debate stuck in fruitless attacks and defences of plagiarism.⁸ Another reason,

³ *Table Talk* I, 98-9 (31 March 1830). In writing this passage up for the published edition of *Table Talk*, H. N. Coleridge changed the word ‘several’ to ‘most’ – a considerable difference. See *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2nd edn (London: John Murray, 1836), p. 56.

⁴ *SWF* II, 1123 (in ‘Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit’).

⁵ *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by E. V. Lucas, 7 vols (London: Methuen, 1903), II, 21.

⁶ Norman Fruman, *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 117. John Beer responded that Lamb was not so pliable as that, but that nevertheless ‘we should not be totally certain about Jamblichus and Plotinus’: ‘Ice and Spring: Coleridge’s Imaginative Education’, in *Coleridge’s Variety*, ed. by John Beer (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 54-80 (p. 59).

⁷ Fruman, pp. 118-120; Haven, ‘Coleridge, Hartley, and the Mystics’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20 (1959), 477-94.

⁸ Walter Jackson Bate’s concise discussion of the plagiarism is outstanding: *Coleridge* (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 131-8.

however, is probably that it is difficult, and not always desirable, to separate Coleridge's views on Plato from his views on a large number of Platonists, which renders unrewarding the attempt to map Platonic *influences on* Coleridge. As Perry says: 'Coleridge was attracted as much by the broader Platonic tradition as by Plato himself: in fact the two seem to have been hard to disentangle in the eighteenth century'.⁹ However, as just noted, the process of disentanglement did begin at the *fin de siècle*, with Priestley (and Caesar Morgan). And looking beyond the question of influence, we can see that Coleridge's writings mark the first substantial advances in this direction: in theory, albeit not usually in practice, he insists on reading Plato in his own right, differentiated from subsequent interpreters. Coleridge's explanation on this subject reveals a further literal dimension of his notion of reading Plato 'by anticipation'. Strikingly he suggests, in the following proposed training-scheme for young clergymen, that one should read Plato *after* reading the Neoplatonists:

To state the reasons why it is recommended to Clergymen who propose to themselves & have means & leisure to acquire all the knowledge that more especially bears on thy high & awful Calling, assuredly the primacy of human occupations, that they should study the Platonic Philosophy—to them we would point out according to our best judgment & experience the best preparation for & the best mode of acquiring of it—First, then, procathartically, the study of the true transcendental Logic [...] —with this amulet armed the student should begin with Sallustius *περι θεων*/then to Plotinus—after this to Proclus's Platonic Theology & Elements of Theology—then to read his *Timæus*—After this, proceed to Plato's Works, using indeed the Bipont Edition with Tiedemann's Prolegemenon [sic] & the Dialogues; but still studying carefully Ficinus's Notes—& even collating his Translation with the sense attributed by the Bipontine edition—And to each of these premise an introductory statement of the *characteristics* of each Author—as of Sallust—how far acted on by Christianity—of Plotinus, as the *middle* stage, how far he had carried the impersonating, *entifying* spirit of Platonism beyond the allowed Limits of just transcendental Logic—then Proclus, as the extreme of this—and having thus formed a complete notion of what Platonism became, then to come to the Source—& there learn, how far the germs are contained in the writings of Plato, *Timæus* Locrus, & Ocellus Lucanus/how far they have tortured the innocent text by the same processes, as the Theologians have the Text of the Bible, especially, Solomon's Song & the Psalms—& how far they have improved, how far corrupted the original Platonic Doctrines// (CN III 3934)

Of Coleridge's various breathless schemes in what De Quincey called his 'spirit

⁹ *Division*, p. 44.

of universal research',¹⁰ this is one of the more feasible. It also had practical consequences, in that it was probably just such a scheme that Coleridge pursued later with his Thursday evening class in Highgate.¹¹ Two points emerge from this passage. First, that Coleridge was sufficiently acquainted with Plato scholarship to know the best texts. The Bipont Edition was the best available, more legible and probably more accurate than previous editions.¹² The Greek is printed at the top of the page, conveniently accompanied by Marsilio Ficino's Latin translation below, which was still considered superior to Serranus' later Latin version. Coleridge mentions Tiedemann's extensive *Dialogorum Platonis argumenta exposita et illustrata* (Bipont, 1786) separately, since it is a companion volume, not incorporated in the main work. Coleridge adds 'but still studying carefully Ficinus' notes' because these are not included in the Bipont edition: it would be necessary to find them in the Lyons 1557/1556 edition.¹³ The work of 'collating' would be required because Ficino's translation was based on inferior Greek texts from that of Henricus Stephanus which is used in the Bipont.¹⁴ The text now regarded as a forgery, 'Timaeus Locrus de Anima Mundi', is included in the list because it immediately follows the *Timaeus* in volume ten of the Bipont edition.¹⁵ When Coleridge writes of 'the impersonating, *entifying* spirit of Platonism' he refers in the Christian context to the doctrine of the *Logos* as a Person, in some sense distinct from the Father, as developed by the platonising Church Fathers; while the notion that the endlessly multiplying hypostases of (above all) Proclus might transgress the 'Limits of just transcendental Logic' reflects his application of Kantian thought to Platonism. Although Coleridge's reading scheme may sound archaic or esoteric today, then it incorporated the most important contemporary advances in scholarship.

The second point regards Coleridge's striking order of priorities. Only *after* a course of logic and Neoplatonism is the student to proceed to Plato's works, the 'Source' of all these later writings. Coleridge, having learnt from Cudworth and Priestley, presents the history of Platonic exegesis as both parallel to and involved in that of Biblical exegesis, albeit with the difference that whereas the Bible cannot be improved, Plato can. Nevertheless this parallel dignifies Plato, as does the strength of feeling implied in the suggestion that interpreters *torture* Plato's texts. To read Plato by anticipation means to read chronologically backwards: switching metaphors, the aim is finally to perceive the rock lying behind the mist thrown up by the waterfall of obscurities and interpretations in the Platonic tradition, the mist nevertheless

¹⁰ *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, gen ed. Grevel Lindop, 21 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000-2003), III 115.

¹¹ Following Coburn's suggestion in CN III 3934n.

¹² I take some of the following information from Kathleen Coburn's note.

¹³ See CN III 3861 and n. for Coleridge's admiration of Ficino and use of this work.

¹⁴ The Bipont editors made some improvements to this text, but still came in for criticism: see Joseph William Moss, *A Manual of Classical Bibliography*, 2 vols (London, 1825), p. 427.

¹⁵ Coleridge would have discovered later that the authenticity of Timaeus Locrus and Ocellus Lucanus had been decisively questioned: see W. G. Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, 11 vols (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1798-1819), I, 76-77.

remaining an intrinsic part of the whole scene (cf. CN I 528, 1558). This might not be as eccentric as it seems: the notion that certain writers have been appropriated so extensively that they cannot be perceived apart from their ‘afterlife’ is, after all, gaining ever more critical currency in the twenty-first century. Coleridge’s model, though, of ‘anticipation’ rather than ‘afterlife’, contains a suggestion of saving the best until last.

It is likely that Coleridge’s recommendation sprang from his own practice. He claims to base his study plan not only on his judgement but also on his ‘experience’. This may be a clue that his own studies had proceeded broadly in the order outlined, Neoplatonists first (albeit initially without ‘transcendental Logic’), Plato second. The account in the *Biographia* implies this too (BL I 15-16, 144-6). This conclusion is moreover supported by a consideration of which texts the young Coleridge actually read. Although Coleridge’s interest in Biblical Greek and facility for the language are undoubted (his Platonic reading scheme of 1810 coincided with plans for compiling a Greek lexicon: CN III 3778, 3780), I am not aware of any clear evidence that he studied Greek philosophy in depth in the original at least before 1817 (CN III 4337); whereas it is certain that he read some of Thomas Taylor’s translations. He listed ‘Taylor the Platonist’ among his ‘darling studies’ in 1796 (CL I 260). When Coleridge told Sotheby in autumn 1802 that he had been reading *Parmenides* and *Timaeus* ‘with great care’ the preceding winter he was probably using Taylor’s translation;¹⁶ and in 1810 he seems to have returned to Taylor again (CM IV 139). In 1787 Taylor had published a paraphrase of Plotinus’ *Ennead* ‘Concerning the Beautiful’ (1:6) and of the Hymns of Orpheus,¹⁷ and in 1788 a translation of Proclus’ commentaries on Euclid. Coleridge might have read these works at school, and even if not, it is likely that he read them *before* reading Taylor’s first translation of Plato, which appeared in 1793 towards the end of Coleridge’s time at Cambridge. Coleridge acquired this latter translation, of *The Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides and Timaeus*, probably before 1801. Wordsworth later borrowed Coleridge’s copy,¹⁸ now in the library of the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere. Coleridge annotated it only minimally, but it looks fairly well thumbed, whether by Coleridge, Wordsworth or both.

Another notebook entry of 1810 casts further light (and darkness, of course) on Coleridge’s reading of Taylor. Here he discusses his early enthusiasm for ‘the Doctrine of Plato, or of the Plotino-platonic Philosophy’. After insisting that Platonism ‘rouses [the mind] to acts and energies of creative Thought, & Recognition—of conscious re-production of states of Being’, he continues:

¹⁶ CL II 866. Three critics make this surmise: Ronald Wendling, ‘Coleridge’s Critical Sympathy With Plato’, *Coleridge Bulletin*, 16 (Winter 2000), 115-22 (p. 117n.); Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth’s Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p. 167; George Whalley, ‘Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Library Cormorant’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of London, 1950) – cited by Wu. According to Coburn, Coleridge owned the *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1578) with Stephanus’ Greek text and Serranus’ Latin (CN I 204n., 937l.n.), in which case he probably used this too.

¹⁷ Both reprinted in *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, from which I take the details of Taylor’s publications.

¹⁸ Sometime prior to 1810, according to Wu (p. 167).

I was not originally led to the study of this Philosophy by Taylor's Translations; but in consequence of early, half-accidental prepossession in favor of it sent in early manhood for Taylor's Translations & Commentaries—& this, I will say, that no man worthy the name of man can read the many extracts from Proclus, Porphyry, Plotinus, &c, those I mean, <those> chiefly, that relate to the moral claims of our Nature, without an ahndung, an inward omening, of a system congruous with his nature, & thence attracting it—/The boast therefore of the modern Philosophy is to me a decisive proof of its being an Anti-philosophy, or at best a *psilosophy*, that it calls the mere understanding into exertion without exciting or wakening any interest, any tremulous feeling of the heart, as if it heard or began to *glimpse* something which had once belonged to it, its Lord or its Beloved—even as a man recovering gradually from an alienation of the Senses or the Judgments on beginning to recollect the countenances of his Wife, Mother, Children, or Betrothed—/(CN III 3935)

This entry further confirms that Coleridge read the other 'Ps' before Plato himself. It leaves frustratingly undisclosed what this vague-sounding 'half-accidental prepossession' in favour of Platonism was. However, the notion of a prepossession of some sort accords elegantly with the Coleridgean mythology. This, then, is the metaphorical sense in which Coleridge read Plato by anticipation: he claims a prior mental fitness to learn from Plato. In studying Platonic philosophy he begins to glimpse something which he then realises belonged to his nature all along, despite the supposed corrupting influence of the contemporary empiricist bias.

On the basis of this concept of reciprocity between the seeking reader and the answering text, Coleridge criticises Taylor's work severely: 'Taylor could not have understood the System, he teaches—for had he done so, he must have understood the difficulties that oppose its reception, the objections which immediately occur to men formed under notions so alien from it—Whereas he no where prepares the mind, no where shows himself in a state of Sympathy with the hesitating Examiner—' (ibid.). The statement that Taylor 'no where prepares the mind' gets to the heart of Coleridge's concern: Taylor's failure to comprehend that a major component of Platonic philosophy *is* mental preparation, or anticipation of future growth in consciousness, betrays his ignorance. It has been claimed that Coleridge's criticisms of Taylor must reflect a detailed knowledge of the Greek texts.¹⁹ However, this need not be the case, as even a Greekless reader can see that Taylor shows more interest in

¹⁹ Arthur H. Nethercot, *The Road to Tryermaine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 105, cites a letter to Lady Beaumont (CL III 279) which refers to Taylor's translation of the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus, 'so translated that difficult Greek is translated into incomprehensible English'. Nethercote says: 'The obvious conclusion is that Coleridge owned or had access to his own copies of the works in fifth-century Greek and that he was comparing them with Taylor's renderings as they were published.' H. J. Jackson and George Whalley make a similar assumption (CM IV 4744) without citing evidence. This is really unprovable one way or the other.

preaching to the converted than encouraging intellectual seekers.²⁰ For example the paraphrase of Plotinus on Beauty, which admittedly did impress Coleridge, concludes with this denunciation of the vanity of empiricism: '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.'²¹ This crusading rhetoric could hardly be farther removed from Coleridge's intuition of the soul gradually recovering from an alienation of the judgement and, like the Ancient Mariner, coming home. Kathleen Raine was right to emphasise Taylor's influence on several of the canonical Romantics early in their careers;²² but Taylor's unattractive invocation of a militant band of pagan Truth-lovers tends to indicate why Coleridge, Blake and others subsequently lost whatever enthusiasm they might initially have felt for him.

It does not quite explain, however, the degree to which Taylor's work was reviled even by those who persevered through it. Coleridge scribbled impatiently in a margin: 'Southey very happily called Taylor a *Pagan Methodist*! He is indeed a thorough blind Bigot, ignorant of all with which he is intoxicated—rather, with the *slang* of which he is bewitched' (CM IV 160). But this is mild by comparison with Taylor's reviewers, of whom James Mill is both the best informed and most damning: 'He has not translated Plato; he has travestied him, in the most cruel and abominable manner.'²³ Mill's most damaging attack regards the quality of the translation: he asserts that Taylor often translates from Ficino's Latin rather than Plato's Greek, making errors identical with Ficino's.²⁴ But when Mill complains, 'He has not elucidated, but covered [Plato] over with impenetrable darkness', he has in mind not so much Taylor's mistakes as his attachment to the Neoplatonists, especially Proclus. Mill objects both to the fact that Taylor's commentary, rather than properly explanatory, consists of a mass of translations from the Neoplatonic commentators on Plato; and that Taylor's own language has been influenced by these sources: it is 'stiff, awkward and uncouth', in 'the base jargon of the latter Platonists'²⁵—precisely the 'slang' and 'strange English' that Coleridge

²⁰ Haven makes the distinction: 'Certainly [Coleridge] was not like Thomas Taylor merely repeating to a rationalist age the words of visionary philosophers of the past': *Patterns of Consciousness: An Essay on Coleridge* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969), p. 110.

²¹ *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, p. 160.

²² Kathleen Raine, 'Thomas Taylor, Platonism and the English Romantics', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 8 (1968), 99-123. Blake caricatures Taylor as Sipsop the Pythagorean in *An Island in the Moon*, and could also be quite critical of Plato: see John Beer, *Blake: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 24. How much use Shelley made of Taylor is uncertain, but for a guess see Neville Rogers, *Shelley at Work* (Oxford: OUP, 1967), pp. 75-6.

²³ *Edinburgh Review*, 14 (April 1809), 187-211, p. 190. The attribution to James Mill is noted in *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, p. 535.

²⁴ Peter Russell calls this 'a patent lie': 'Shelley, Plato and Thomas Taylor', in *Shelley 1792-1992*, ed. by James Hogg (Salzburg: Mellen, 1993), 148-69 (p. 163); my Greek is not good enough to judge.

²⁵ *Edinburgh Review*, 14, p. 201.

laments (CM IV 156). Mill is remarkably violent against the Neoplatonists themselves ('the *charlatans* of ancient philosophy' with 'their absurd and disgusting jargon'²⁶).

James Mill, then, manifests much more extremely than Coleridge the new tendency to strip Plato of Neoplatonic accretion. Taylor's inelegant prose has the virtue, as we might now see it, of intimating the sheer remoteness of Plato in time and culture—of never allowing us to feel we are reading a modern English writer. But this non-English feel is exactly what Mill, Coleridge and others repudiated. Mary Shelley accurately sums up readers' feelings: Taylor's translation is 'so harsh and un-English in its style, as universally to repel'.²⁷

The rejection of Taylor arguably reflects a wider phenomenon in the early nineteenth century reception of Greek culture. Wallace assesses the general situation in this way: 'Neither completely novel and marginal, as in the eighteenth century, nor institutionalised and central as in the later nineteenth century, Greece at the turn of the century challenged readers and writers to determine the degree of its closeness to their culture.'²⁸ If a Greek writer such as Plato were to be re-absorbed into British culture, he must be made to speak in an intelligible idiom, far from the alienating foreignness of Proclus. Anecdotally, the English desire to absorb Plato into a comfortable self-image is expressed in Emerson's report of a conversation with Wordsworth in 1848. Astonished that Taylor's translations of Plato were hardly known in England (whereas they were popular in America), Emerson wondered whether, if Plato's *Republic* were published in England as a new book today, it would find any readers? Wordsworth agreed it would not. "And yet," he added after a pause, with that complacency which never deserts a true-born Englishman, "and yet we have embodied it all."²⁹ The translation of Benjamin Jowett (first published in 1871) is of course more accurate than Taylor's, but another reason for its success was that it at last gave readers what they wanted: a Plato with a contemporary English relevance and vocabulary. It was the boast of Jowett's biographers on his behalf that 'Plato was now an English book'.³⁰ The vast gap between Taylor's anachronism and Jowett's modernity reflects the change in attitudes to Plato beginning in Coleridge's time, and which Coleridge helped to instrument.

In declaring a sense of homecoming when he reads Plato (the sonnet alluding to the doctrine of pre-existence was 'Composed on a Journey Homeward'), the metaphorical sense of reading 'by anticipation', Coleridge too is beginning to claim him as part of an English culture, a father figure for 'spiritual platonic old England' (CN II 2598). In this sense Walter Pater was

²⁶ *Edinburgh Review*, 14, p. 193.

²⁷ Quoted in James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1949), p. 378.

²⁸ Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 13.

²⁹ *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, pp. 54-5.

³⁰ Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett, M.A.*, 2 vols (John Murray: London, 1897), II, 7. On the Victorian anglicising of Plato see R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 247-8.

strictly accurate to say that Coleridge claimed Plato ‘as the first of his spiritual ancestors’.³¹ However, if there was a kind of patriotism in his assimilation of Plato into his critical mythology, it was not easily achieved: Plato ‘wanted a patron’ at the start of the century (as Peacock said), and Coleridge’s moulding of Platonic concepts was wider ranging than that of his contemporaries, in that it spanned poetry and philosophy, and the tension between them. By way of conclusion I want to suggest further that to read ‘by anticipation’ is a critical concept which itself reflects intuitive closeness to Plato.

It involves, that is, a ‘recognition’ when one encounters the Platonic text: the mind of a sympathetic reader anticipates the text, and the text reciprocally anticipates the mind—there is movement in both directions. The anticipatory response is non-disinterested, a process not of discovery, but ‘recognition’ (a Latinate word, but Coleridge later attributes it to Plato himself: OM 196). This notion echoes Plato’s doctrine of *anamnesis*, or recollection. According to a recurring Platonic myth, which Socrates expounds in a state of inspiration in *Phaedrus*, the human soul beholds the life-giving Ideas, Beauty being the most splendid, prior to its incarnation on earth. When incarnated, it beholds specific objects of beauty (young men) on earth, which prompt it to recollect the absolute vision of the Ideas. This myth is consonant with the suggestion in *Meno* and *Republic* (which Coleridge employs in the concept of Method in *The Friend*) that to ‘educate’ means to coax the mind into recalling or unfolding what is already within. Coleridge is drawn to the poetic expression of this concept in the form of the metaphor of ‘pre-existence’, but it also influences his language in discussing the Kantian concept of the *a priori* (BL I 293). Given the manifold implications of his study of Plato, then, the mature Coleridge’s claim to have read the Greek philosopher ‘by anticipation’ appears precise and well-founded.

³¹ ‘Coleridge’, in *Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, 1913; first published 1889), p. 69. Cf. Ronald C. Wendling, ‘Pater, Coleridge, and the Return of the Platonic’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 30:2 (Spring 1999), 94-99.