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Coleridge and the Rehabilitation of Wordplay

by

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ABSTRACT

Against the disapproval of eighteenth-century writers such as Samuel Johnson, Coleridge attempts to rehabilitate literary wordplay. For Coleridge, puns, conceits and related figures can exemplify the poetic function by combining unity and multiplicity. This key, imaginative function relates Coleridge's defence of Shakespeare's wordplay in his lectures to his use of figurative language in poems such as "Kubla Khan." However, Coleridge eventually fails to support wordplay openly in his theoretical testament, Biographia Literaria.

Despite evident theoretical wavering, Coleridge deserves to occupy an important place in the history of literary wordplay, as the latter can be theorized through Foucault's scheme of periodized epistemes, cultural codes that ground thought. If Coleridge's wordplay echoes back to the Renaissance it also participates, through its characteristic material reflexivity, in the internalized, humanist turn that, for Foucault, signals the emergence of the modern, post-classical episteme.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations are for works by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

- BL Biographia Literaria. Ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.
- CL Collected Letters. Ed. E. L. Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1956-71.
- CN The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ed. Kathleen Coburn. 5 vols. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957 -.
- LOL Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature. Ed. R. A. Foakes. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987.
- LS Lay Sermons. Ed. R. J. White. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972.
- PW Poetical Works. Ed. E. H. Coleridge. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1912.

All men who possess at once active fancy, imagination, and a philosophical Spirit, are prone to Punning; but with this presentiment, that the Pun itself is the buffoon Brutus concealing Brutus the consul.

Coleridge, Marginalia 1:610

INTRODUCTION

My interest in Coleridge and his use of wordplay has developed over a period of more than a decade. In 1983, in an undergraduate essay on "Kubla Khan," I suggested that wordplay should play an important role in the poem's interpretation. Later reading convinced me that this observation was relevant to other poems, and that there might be an important connection between the puns in the poetry and Coleridge's more general interest in wordplay, as expressed in his notebooks and lectures. The publication in 1986 of James McKusick's Coleridge's Philosophy of Language helped to strengthen the importance of these connections in my mind. McKusick showed how Coleridge's views on wordplay were integral to his philosophy of language, and that this philosophy strongly influenced his theoretical poetics. It seemed, then, that wordplay might provide an important, and hitherto much neglected, link between Coleridge's theoretical and practical poetics. This idea stands behind my paper, "Still Dancing: Self-referential Wordplay in Coleridge's Poetry," given at the Wordsworth Conference in Grasmere in 1991, and its successor, "Kubla Can: Wordplay in Coleridge's Poetry," given at the Coleridge Conference in Somerset in 1994. The latter paper has now been published in The Wordsworth Circle (1995).

Despite the link with theory, both these papers deal primarily with wordplay in the poetry, as their titles indicate. While my second chapter returns to some of the issues addressed in the two papers, the thesis as a whole moves beyond the earlier material in two important ways. First, in treating Coleridge's theoretical notions, I give detailed

consideration to his repeated reference to Shakespeare's puns and conceits in the literary lectures; and second, I have contextualized this primary material from the poetry and prose writings by setting it within a wide historical framework that extends from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. If the first objective of the thesis is to establish the connection between practice and theory, the second is to provide a means by which we can judge Coleridge's importance in the history of wordplay in English literature, a history to which the thesis aims to contribute.

Accordingly, I have structured the thesis in four chapters. In the first I provide historical background, from the Renaissance through to the eighteenth century. The two central chapters detail and discuss the practical (or poetical) and theoretical aspects of Coleridge's attention to wordplay. Since, for the most part, the poetry precedes the theoretical observations, I treat the two in chronological order. In conclusion I complete the historical contextualization begun in the first chapter, noting how Coleridge, in his use of wordplay, both looks back to the Renaissance and anticipates certain key twentieth-century developments. This contextualization then grounds a reassessment of the importance of Coleridge's role in the history of wordplay.

In relating wordplay to the wider history of language theory, I have made use of Foucault's notion of epistemes, conceptual paradigms that govern and periodize our ways of ordering and using knowledge. As I explain in the final chapter, I have some difficulty in accepting the way in which Foucault makes his epistemes largely independent of the social conditions with which they coexist. For this reason my use of this conceptual framework is to be regarded as the pragmatic adoption of a scheme that,

in general terms, works well when applied to the field of language rather than as an endorsement of Foucault's total project in The Order of Things. In turning to the wider issue of the history of wordplay and its relation to attitudes towards language, my primary focus is still on Coleridge's own role in this ongoing narrative.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Wordplay and the Sixteenth Century Episteme of Resemblance

When Coleridge refers to puns and conceits in his Shakespearean lectures, he does so in terms of the separate discourses of poetry (or drama) and criticism.¹ He considers both Shakespeare's usage and later critical opinion that disapproves of that usage. The distinction reminds us that any history of literary wordplay will necessarily include both primary use and secondary commentary. In this chapter I address this history from the Renaissance through to Coleridge's time, focusing on those aspects that are most relevant to the discussion of Coleridge's own writing that follows in later chapters.

"Wordplay," according to M. M. Mahood, "was a game the Elizabethans played seriously" (9). The oxymoron hints at the discursive freedom accorded to puns and related devices in Shakespeare's time. Puns can be serious, playful, or, in a way that would have seemed less contradictory at the time, both at once. They can range freely across barriers of style and genre. As Miriam Joseph notes:

Rightly to appreciate Shakespeare's puns, one should regard them as examples of four highly esteemed figures of Renaissance rhetoric - antanaclasis, syllepsis, paronomasia, and asteismus - These figures may be adapted to comic or to serious purposes. (165)

For our purposes, the distinctions among these figures are of much less concern than the fact that, as forms of what we now call wordplay, they occupy a recognized position

within the larger framework of rhetoric. The status of rhetoric largely determines that of wordplay, and this, as C. S. Lewis explains in English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, raises difficulties:

Rhetoric is the greatest barrier between us and our ancestors. . . . Nearly all our older poetry was written by men to whom the distinction between poetry and rhetoric, in its modern form, would have been meaningless. The "beauties" which they chiefly regarded in every composition were those which we either dislike or simply do not notice. This change of taste makes an invisible wall between us and them. (61)

Presumably by intention, Lewis illustrates the problem when he speaks of "beauties." The term suggests to us that rhetorical devices such as puns play a supplementary role, as detachable aesthetic ornaments, or figures of artifice. Yet in the Elizabethan age, as Joseph again indicates, neither ornament nor artifice was so separable or liable to censure on the basis of taste or decorum as would later be the case. Thus "Artificial was accordingly, as Puttenham pointed out, a word of praise," while we should "keep in mind the ancient and Renaissance conception of ornament as something more integral than we conceive it to be" (5, 39). Like other figures, puns were clearly "estranged from the ordinarie habite and manner of our dayly talke and writing," yet "not absurdly" so, for "figure it selfe is a certaine lively or good grace set upon wordes, speaches and sentences to some purpose and not in vaine . . ." (Puttenham 159). Puns were thus a form of natural artifice, in an age when artifice was a grace rather than a potential disfigurement.

As natural figures, puns could perform serious purposes in Elizabethan drama, both internally, for the character using them and his or her audience, and externally, for the dramatist and his audience. Kenneth Muir distinguishes four main functions in

dramatic poetry:

First, puns - and especially hidden puns - provide . . . an illogical reinforcement of the logical sequence of thought, so that the poetic statement strikes us almost as a remembrance. . . . Secondly, such puns often link together unrelated imagery and act as solvents for mixed metaphors. Thirdly, they make the listener aware of a complex of ideas which enrich the total statement, even though they do not come into full consciousness. Fourthly, they seem to shoot out roots in all directions, so that the poetry is firmly based on reality. (483)

The second and third functions are aesthetic in the particular sense that they help to unify the drama. Shakespeare's plays provide a host of examples of puns that serve this purpose. In Henry IV, Parts I and II, *redeem*² (redemption of prisoners or goods, Christian or moral redemption), *translate* (linguistic translation, metamorphosis, conveyance to heaven, conveyance of a bishop) and *honour* (as concept or title) all work in this way.³ Frequently, as with *redeem* in this play, Shakespeare promotes unity through the figure of antanaclasis, repetition of the word (signifier) so as to indicate differing meanings (signifieds). Again, in Macbeth, repetition of the word *done* (carried out, completed, or murdered) casts a unifying and tragic irony over all the action. The word suffers a telling reversal with repetition - the more things are done (Duncan, Banquo . . .) the more they are un-done, or not done. In such cases it would be wrong to see wordplay as a mere supporting device, supplementary to the action. Rather, such governing, overarching puns are important structuring elements in their own right, helping to drive the plot or forge a unity that would be less complete without them. It is worth reflecting at this point on the linguistic mechanism involved. The overarching pun, like all others, uses the same signifier to refer to two or more signifieds, forging

a sense of unity-in-multiplicity, or multiplicity-in-unity. Wordplay therefore privileges the signifier, tending to give it a status that rivals or equals that of the signified. When this is so, it is easy to see how puns may both support, and in turn be supported by, the belief that resemblances at the level of the signifier may indicate real, external resemblances between ideas or things. So, as Mahood describes, Renaissance preachers often structured their sermons so that "If a word has several meanings they are shown, through the serious punning which so exasperated a later generation, to bear a kind of transcendental relationship to one another" (170). The world, in other words, was God's pun, and wordplay imitated the relationship between a transcendent God and the multiplicity of His created universe. Such habits went hand in hand with a faith in the rightness of language, and "Given this belief in the truth of names, a belief in the power of words through sympathetic magic followed" (170). In this magical climate of thought, words are not so much subservient to their objects of reference as on a par with them.

Foucault's notion of the episteme provides a useful way of generalizing this climate of thought. The episteme is a way of thinking that grounds or enables knowledge; it is not so much a cosmology, a world-view, or a body of knowledge as the habits of thinking that stand behind these. For Foucault the sixteenth century episteme is one of resemblance or similitude. So he contends that:

In the sixteenth century, real language is not a totality of independent signs. . . . It is rather an opaque, mysterious thing . . . which combines here and there with the forms of the world and becomes interwoven with them. . . . In its raw, historical sixteenth century being, language is not an arbitrary system: it has been set down in the world and forms part of it, both because things themselves hide and manifest their own enigma like a language and because

words offer themselves to men as things to be deciphered.
(34-5)

Perhaps this episteme was not as universal as Foucault makes it out to be. As both Keir Elam and Mahood point out, the magical or "Neo-Platonic-Hermetic" (Elam 117) semantic tradition from which it derives coexisted with opposing, more sceptical views at the time, and both of these are reflected in Shakespeare's plays. However, Mahood is surely correct in her implied position that, insofar as wordplay is concerned, the magical tradition dominates (169-71). Foucault's episteme of resemblance is particularly useful in that it gives us a way of appreciating the close relationships that existed between the pun and other rhetorical figures. The relationships still exist today, of course, and it is easy to see the resemblance between puns and rhyme, assonance, consonance and alliteration on the one hand, and metaphors or metaphorical conceits on the other.

Rhyme is a semi-punning relationship between two signifiers; metaphor is very similar to the pun in that it tends to forge unity by equating signifieds; the conceit is almost a pun in reverse, two signifiers being juxtaposed to imply identity or close resemblance at the level of the signified. Donne's "spider love" ("Twickenham Garden") is a good example of the latter at its boldest, as Ruthven points out (5). All these are, in the broadest sense, forms of wordplay. Yet it is easy to appreciate that, in a world where the episteme of resemblance held sway, they must have had an additional force, a natural fitness or rightness as figures of linguistic realism, to use Mahood's phrase (171), that they no longer possess today. If the world is made up of visible and invisible similitudes and antipathies, and if, as in this episteme, there is an "interweaving of

language and things, in a space common to both" (Foucault 38), then wordplay is not just semantically realistic; it also tends to imitate the nature or structure of things generically, at the level of the trope or figure. All these forms of wordplay, we may also note, involve a movement or relationship between unity and multiplicity, or similarity and dissimilarity. They therefore lend themselves easily to the service of systems of thought such as Neoplatonism, that are centred on similar movements between the One and the Many, or the Many and the One. And if this is so, it is easy to see that those figures can also readily become vehicles for, or expressions of, paradox, just as the assertion that something is concurrently divided and united is always paradoxical. It is no accident, then, that the epidemic of paradox, the Paradoxia Epidemica of Rosalie Colie's title, should coincide with an age that took a natural delight in rhetorical figures since, as Colie notes, "formal paradoxes can be seen as very stylized examples of figurative language" (516).

Stephen Booth, in his Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets (1969), has shown how this connection between figurative language and paradox is fundamental to the sonnets. Citing Wordsworth's observation that "the pleasure received from metrical language" depends on "the perception of similitude in dissimilitude," Booth goes on to state his own belief that:

. . . the suggestion of pulsation which is inherent in simultaneous unity and division, likeness and difference, is characteristic of Shakespeare's sonnets and manifests itself at every level of investigation, from the smallest phonetic detail to the situations described in the poem. (87)

Booth then proceeds to demonstrate the working of this paradoxical pulsation in detail,

under the subheadings "Phonetic Unity and Division," "Antanaclasses" (punning repetition of the signifier), "Paradoxical Style," and "Unity and Division as a Theme." Rather than repeat Booth's detailed illustrations, let me supply another one that, appropriate to the context of unity-in-division, links Shakespeare and Spenser.

In a well-known passage in the fourth act of The Winter's Tale, Florizel remarks about Perdita's dancing:

When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that; move *still*, *still* so,
And own no other function. (4.3.140-3)

The passage follows shortly after another in which Polixenes resolves the conflict between art and nature, by arguing that artificial variegation cannot debase plants since:

Nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. (89-92)

Mahood, discussing *still*, remarks that "When Perdita dances, the old antagonism between art and nature disappears, for there is no way we can tell the dancer from the dance" (186). Her comment highlights the analogy between two antitheses -- the permanence of art versus the metamorphoses of the natural world, and the clear opposition of rest and motion. The punning conceit suggests, paradoxically, that both antitheses can be resolved.

A very similar construction occurs in Spenser's Faerie Queene, when the Goddess Nature is identified as:

Great Nature, ever young yet full of eld
Still mooving, yet unmoved from her sted. . . .
 (7.7.13.2-3)

Here again, *still* equivocates motion and rest, via the paradox of a punning conceit.⁴ I suggest that in both Shakespeare and Spenser these punning conceits are "metaphysical," anticipating those of the poets of the seventeenth century, not so much in their style as in the sense that the unifying action of the pun implies that there may be a higher, or metaphysical, level at which paradox may be resolved. In effect the pun presents a single signifier that both refers to multiple (or mutable) signifieds and intimates the possibility that these can merge, as the unified, transcendental signified.

In this section I have outlined, to recapitulate, a view of the Renaissance pun that allies it with Foucault's sixteenth-century episteme of resemblance. It is linked to various other rhetorical figures that, as a group, promote a sense of natural paradox. It is an esteemed figure in an age of rhetorical exuberance, an age when words mix with things and ideas rather than acting as their servants. And it may, through its structure, imitate that "metaphysical" outlook in which the multiplicity of the visible world is resolved transcendently.

It should come as no surprise that Coleridge, two centuries later, uses puns and punning conceits in ways that echo back quite directly to Shakespeare and Spenser. For his own belief that "extremes meet" (CN 2:#2066) and the parallel doctrine of the reconciliation of opposites also hark back to this same world of natural paradox, as we shall see later. Furthermore, such wordplay serves another, related purpose for Coleridge, in that it allows him to use the Renaissance to oppose the dominant poetics

of the eighteenth century. I can now discuss the shift in attitude that grounded this new poetics.

The Fall of Wordplay and the Classical Episteme

During Shakespeare's own lifetime, the beginnings of what Mahood refers to as a "linguistic revolution" (9) occurred. The old episteme of resemblance began to lose its credibility, and habits of thought that tended to commingle words and their objects of reference were increasingly questioned. In The Dialogue Concerning the two World Systems (1632), Galileo's Simplicio pointed to the dangers involved in favouring "words" over "things" as guides to truth (Colie 509). In 1620 Bacon, famously, identified language as a major hindrance in his searching analysis of the "Idols" that deny true human understanding. Words, the "Idols of the Market-place" are in his view the most troublesome of all "hindrances," since they either name things that "do not exist" or, more awkward because less easy to expel, they name things that do exist in a way that is "confused and ill-defined" (477-8). As Foucault summarizes:

At the beginning of the seventeenth century . . . thought ceases to move in the element of resemblance. Similitude is no longer the form of knowledge but the occasion of error. . . . (51)

Under the new episteme of "rationalism" (54) or, in the realm of signs, "representation" (65):

. . . The written word ceases to be among the signs and forms of truth. . . . The manifestation and signs of truth are to be found in evident and distinct perception. It is the task of words to translate that truth if they can; but they no

longer have the right to be considered a mark of it. Language has withdrawn from the world and has entered a period of transparency and neutrality. (56)

If words were to lose their power and be given a purely secondary status, then puns, which mingle signifiers and signifieds by connecting the latter through the former, must inevitably lose favour. By 1670, as Mahood relates, Eachard was questioning: "Whether or no Punning, Quibbling, and that which they call Joquing, and other such delicacies of Wit, highly admired in some Academick Exercises, might not very conveniently be omitted?" (Eachard 33).⁵ At much the same time, the related tropes or schemes of metaphor, conceit and paradox also lose esteem. A famous passage in Thomas Sprat's The History of the Royal Society (1667) urges men to avoid the "trick of metaphors" and cultivate instead "a close, naked, natural way of speaking" (Sprat 117-8) — the habit of metaphor dies hard! The boldest, most "far-fetched" metaphors closely resemble conceits, and those too come under attack. In his poem "The Wish" (1656), Cowley associates far-fetched metaphors with "pride and ambition," and Ben Jonson also disapproves, declaring in Timber, or Discoveries (1641) that "metaphors far-fet hinder to be understood" (Jonson 73).⁶ Again, the new episteme of rationalism lies behind the change:

Whereas earlier it had been possible to assert that conceits are a mode of analogical perception and therefore no less reputable than the logical faculty itself, it now became increasingly common to disparage them for their intellectual flimsiness. In a Cartesian world of clear and distinct ideas there was something quaintly anachronistic about conceits, with their densely evocative irrationality. (Ruthven 55-6)

Paradox suffers a similar fate. Under the episteme of resemblance, it was "recreative in the highest sense of that term, ever attempting the recovery of a transcendent 'truth.'" Uniting the traditional division of rhetoric, it was "at once figure of speech and figure of thought, appropriate to a view of the world profoundly metaphysical — and, more often than not, profoundly religious" (Colie 508). Now:

In a world increasingly dedicated to the pursuit of exact knowledge, however, paradoxy lost its transcendent sense of "re-creation" to become mere "recreation", . . . With increasing distrust of "words", paradoxes degenerated into mere puzzles, whose answers were no longer expected to lead into the experience of real truth. (509)

Where the episteme of resemblance privileges unity, that of representation is bent on making fresh distinctions. Increasingly, the figures of wordplay are reclassified within hierarchical, evaluative schemes of literary decorum. In his Discourse of Satire (1693) Dryden complains that Tasso's poetry is "full of conceits, points of epigram, and witticisms; all of which are not only below the dignity of heroic verse, but contrary to its nature" (Dryden 1693:27). In an age of refinement, the standards of the day are applied to earlier writers. Jonson, a transitional figure who earlier denigrated the excessive use of metaphor, is now, in 1672, the object of Dryden's criticism:

Nay, he was not free from the lowest and most grovelling kind of wit, which we call clenches; of which, Every Man in his Humour is infinitely full: and, which is worse, the wittiest persons in the drama speak them. (Defence of the Epilogue 90)

If puns cannot be eliminated, they can be relegated to the lowest level of a scale that orders literature in terms of social acceptability.

Addison, in The Spectator, gives a far more rational and influential statement of

the case against wordplay. His hierarchy of wit is based, as he points out, on Locke's notion of "wit lying most in the Assemblage of Ideas, and putting those together with Quickness and Variety, wherein can be found any Resemblance or congruity thereby to make pleasant Pictures and agreeable Visions in the Fancy" (315; Spectator 62). For Addison there are two primary types of wit:

As true wit generally consists in this Resemblance and congruity of ideas, false wit chiefly consists in the resemblance and Congruity sometimes of single Letters, as in Anagrams, Chronograms, ipograms, and Ackrosticks: Sometimes of Syllables as in Ecchos and Doggerel Rhymes: Sometimes in words, as in Punns and Quibbles. (316; Spectator 62)

Between these, there lies a third category, mixt wit, which Addison has more difficulty in defining. It is evidently a mixture of the two types, illustrated by Cowley's overworked metaphorical equation of love and fire in The Mistress. To the degree that love is indeed like fire it is true wit, but when Cowley overdoes it and "mixes the Qualities of Fire with those of Love" it is false wit. "Mixt Wit is therefore a Composition of Punns and true Wit" (317; Spectator 62).

Addison's scheme is one that expresses the spirit of the new episteme very well. It makes a complete separation between ideas and language; language comes second and must reflect ideas, if possible with complete, transparent fidelity. When applied to literature, however, it begs many questions. Doggerel rhyme is false wit because it wrenches sense to fit the rhyme scheme, rather than vice versa. But what of Shakespeare's overarching puns? As puns they must be false wit, but as figures that link ideas having some real resemblance, they can be true wit. Are they then both of these,

and therefore mixed wit? Or do they perhaps escape all three categories? Do puns and related figures really express preexisting ideas, ideas that have an existence quite apart from figurative expression itself? Or do they not help to create ideas in the first place, so that poetic language constitutes meaning uniquely, creatively? If the latter is true, then words are to some degree in charge, and not the servants of ideas. Derek Attridge (1988) calls this feature of wordplay "insubordination," and explains:

The insubordination displayed by the pun is, of course, a feature of all poetic language: the independence of meaning from its material representation is challenged by every use in poetry of sound or appearance to make connections or establish contrasts — every effect of rhyme, rhythm, visual patterning, alliteration or assonance; and the pun is only a particularly extreme case of such articulation at the level of the signifier, relying as it does on complete coincidence of sound between two words. ("Unpacking the Portmanteau" 143)

In this way puns become the central focus of a poetics of wordplay that, in creating meaning through connections or differences between signifiers, challenges the assumption of linguistic arbitrariness, Locke's assertion in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) that there is no "natural connexion" between words and ideas, but that rather words "signify only men's peculiar ideas, and that by a perfectly arbitrary imposition" (164). I introduce the problematical notion that poetic discourse can reduce linguistic arbitrariness because it is important to Coleridge, as we shall see. It remains, of course, a matter of keen discussion and interest today.⁷

When Dr. Johnson refers to Shakespeare's puns in his "Preface to The Plays of William Shakespeare" (1765) he writes within the well-established tradition of denigration that I have outlined. In his Dictionary (1755) he had already defined "quibble" as "a low

conceit depending on the sound of words; a pun," and he elaborates on this opinion in the "Preface":

A quibble is the golden apple for which he [Shakespeare] will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble poor and barren as it is gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth. A quibble for him was the fatal Cleopatra, for which he lost the world and was content to lose it. (1072)

The passage echoes Dryden. Johnson's animus against the pun is mediated through the contemporary discourse of gender and, less explicitly, class. Whether as Atalanta or Mark Antony, Shakespeare deviates from the path of truth. Johnson presents a system of parallel binaries, with masculinity, linearity and upright truth on the one side, and feminine deviance and low pleasure on the other. The episteme that makes language the servant of ideas is now coded in terms of social morality and decorum.

Johnson also attacks the metaphysical conceit. In his discussion of Cowley in The Lives of the Poets (1781), he berates the metaphysical poets for their "false conceits," which are "seldom natural," phrases that he develops more fully in another well-known passage:

But wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. . . . The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and illusions. . . . (Tillotson 1077)

If, in Addison's hierarchy of wit, puns offend by uniting disparate ideas in one word, Johnson faults conceits for much the same reason, the only distinction being that they

collapse difference through juxtaposition rather than identity. When Coleridge links Shakespeare's puns and conceits forty years later, he refers directly to a connection that has been implicitly established by his eighteenth-century predecessors. In its quest for external truth, the new episteme thus drives a wedge between words and ideas.

Words, as we have seen, should now be the transparent servants of ideas. Punning, a dangerous disease that may infect truth itself, is banned from serious discourse and relegated (in theory if not always in practice) to comedy. But since puns are evidently only a particular example of a whole range of poetic devices that link signifiers and signifieds, the episteme tends to disable poetic discourse itself. As a result wordplay becomes the site of an evident clash between theory and practice in eighteenth-century poetics: despite theoretical relegation it continues to be used with great skill and effectiveness by poets such as Pope. It is this somewhat contradictory situation that faces Coleridge when, both as poet and critic, he re-evaluates the place of wordplay in poetry at the turn of the century.

Notes

¹ The key reference to puns and conceits occurs in Collier's report of the sixth of Coleridge's 1811-12 lectures on Shakespeare and Milton (LOL 1:292-3). The reference is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

² In citing wordplay I have followed Mahood's example by italicizing the words involved, as with *redeem*, *translate*, and *honour*. These are distinguished from titles and words simply emphasized, which are underlined.

³ For key instances of *redeem*, see Henry IV, Part I 1.2.239, 1.3.206, 1.3.130 and 3.2.132. For *honour*, see Henry IV, Part I 1.3.181, 1.3.202, 3.2.139, 4.2.10, 5.1.128-143, 5.3.61, 5.4-72, 5.4.144. The one key instance of *translate* is found in Henry IV, Part II 4.1.47. Among the more important of the many instances of *done* are Macbeth 1.1.3, 1.4.1, 1.7.1-2, 2.2.16, 3.2.43-4, 3.4.66, 5.1.74.

⁴ For an extended discussion of this example in the context of Renaissance paradox, see Colie (329-352).

⁵ The citation is given in Mahood (10).

⁶ The citations from Sprat, Cowley and Jonson are given in Ruthven (56, 11, 12).

⁷ In his Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce, Derek Attridge discusses the difficulty of reconciling poetic language with notions of complete linguistic arbitrariness in detail.

CHAPTER 2

COLERIDGE AND WORDPLAY: PRACTICE

Puns and Conundrums in the Letters

Writing to John Thelwall in February of 1797--the year immediately prior to the annus mirabilis of "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"--Coleridge boasts to his friend:

— there are a number of very pretty young women in Stowey, all musical — & I am an immense favorite: for I pun, conundrumize, listen, & dance. (CL 1:308)

The pun can be, among other things, a social asset. In this chapter I investigate the way in which wordplay functions in Coleridge's poetry, before turning to his theoretical interest in the subject in Chapter 3. In both of these chapters the concern is for the most part with serious wordplay, Muir's "uncomic" puns and related devices. However, as this citation indicates, Coleridge's propensity for wordplay also took a lighter turn. Few puns or conundrums are to be found in the records of an aging Coleridge's conversation that his nephew H. N. Coleridge published soon after his death as the Table Talk. Either Coleridge lost the playfulness of his younger self or, as seems more likely, the puns of the later Highgate years were excluded from a book that was clearly intended to solidify the reputation of its subject as sage. In any case, the letters give us a good idea of the kind of light-hearted--almost schoolboyish--word-games that amused Coleridge throughout his life. Puns are an occasional, rather than a persistent feature in the letters; most contain none at all, but when they occur they frequently do so in clusters, as in an

1821 letter to James Gillman in which he finds "the Punarhoea now on me" (CL 5:185). This punning metaphor is itself of considerable interest, suggesting as it does that Coleridge viewed these attacks of almost involuntary associative excess with a mixture of pride and disgust. However, my immediate purpose here is not to psychologize Coleridge, but rather to examine the functioning of the puns in the letters. Wordplay in the letters is witty and amusing, intended to entertain, while that in the poetry is, for the most part, serious. But despite this distinction, there is often an underlying similarity, so that this examination will provide a useful introduction to what follows later.

Wordplay in the letters usually takes the form of the charade, a type of paronomasia in which constituent syllables rather than whole words form the basic elements of play. Writing to Southey of the 1795 Poems, a volume in which the joint authors, Southey and Lovell, had signed themselves "Bion" and "Moschus," Coleridge observes:

Lovell has no taste — or simplicity of feeling —. I remarked that when a man read Lovell's poems he 'Mus Cus' . . . but when he thought of Southey's — He'd Buy on! (CL 1:134)

In the same letter he comments that Southey's blank verse odes "are to Poetry what dumb bells are to Music — they can be read only for exercise" (133). Many of his punning conundrums make use of a similar principle. In July 1796 he writes to John Estlin:

— I would write Odes and Sonnets Morning & Evening —
& metaphysicize at Noon — and of rainy days I would
overwhelm you with an Avalanche of Puns and Conun-

drums loosened by sudden thaw from the Alps of my Imagination. — My most respectful & tenderest Love to dear Mrs. Estlin — and ask her — 'If a woman had murdered her cousin, and there were no other proof of her guilt except that she had an half-barrel cask in her possession — how would that convict her? ['] — Answer. It would be evident, that she had kild-er-kin. . . . why Satan sitting on a house-top would be like a decayed Merchant? — Answer. Because he would be imp-over-a-shed. (CL 1:323)

There is little need for further examples, since these demonstrate the pattern well enough.¹ Such charade-like word games would seem to have little in common with the "uncomic" puns discussed in the previous chapter. And no doubt Coleridge's juxtaposition of puns and conundrums with poetry and metaphysics in the letter was not primarily intended to hint at any deep, covert identity among the three activities. Yet, at the same time, it would be naïve to assume that the comic wordplayer and the poet are completely separate, and that on occasions the facility for framing conundrums might not be useful in the composition of odes and sonnets. There is indeed supporting evidence for this hypothesis in "Kubla Khan," the poem which, of all Coleridge's output, is most imbued with the spirit of wordplay. This will become apparent as we turn to examine this poem.

Wordplay in "Kubla Khan"

If, as an "open work" that encourages multiple interpretations (Eco 1989), a poem can be the sum--a weighted sum perhaps--of all existing readings, then "Kubla Khan" must be granted an extraordinary and undiminished power of expansion. Almost two

centuries after its initial conception it continues, in these terms, to grow, to generate fresh roots and blossoms, to trigger additional readings and accumulate new contexts that become, in a sense, a part of its own being. In contributing to this secondary growth critics have of necessity subjected its language to the most detailed scrutiny, in the course of which, as one might expect, various puns have been noted and explained. Yet despite this, I argue, criticism has not only failed to elucidate the full semantic range of the more obvious puns in the poem, it has largely ignored both the extent and full significance of the less obvious wordplay that accompanies them. No commentator on the poem has foregrounded the role of wordplay in the way that, for example, Arden Reed has done for "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."²

Accordingly, my purpose in re-examining "Kubla Khan" is not to come up with (yet!) another novel reading of the poem, but to explore and foreground the role of wordplay within it. However, since wordplay functions within a semantic, or interpretive, framework, it is evidently both useful and necessary to begin by outlining my own view of this framework. Taking a cue from a reader-oriented approach, or indeed from the ambiguity implicit in wordplay itself, I emphasize the poem's inherent openness to multiple readings. As Kathleen Wheeler has noted,³ the preface-poem linkage encourages such a response by destabilizing and ironizing the poem. The preface, which comments on the poem and has thematic and imagistic links with it, may or may not, at the reader's option, be considered a part of it. Hence the preface is exemplary in that it serves to undermine the notion that "Kubla Khan"--or any poem for that matter--exists as a fixed object, independent of the necessarily different perceptions

that we have of it.

Given this supplementary logic, in which the reader is encouraged to become an imaginative co-creator with the poet, it is hardly surprising that a wealth of different readings exist. Marshall Suther, to cite an author who recognizes this multiplicity, lists five separate "levels of significance" in the poem: autobiographical, erotic, political, self-referential, and simply literal or landscape-descriptive (287). These five levels are certainly not exhaustive. It is difficult to find room for archetypal readings--either Jungian (Heninger 1960) or quasi-Christian, as a version of the fall (Smith 1973)--within Suther's categories, just to cite obvious examples. However, such a list lends credence to the notion of multiplicity. Moreover, in alluding to what I have paraphrased as the self-referential level of significance, it directs us to what has, in the course of the twentieth century, become by common consent the most important, and certainly the most discussed, level. For Suther, self-referentiality is that reading

which sees the poem as an introspective account of the elements of personality involved in the poetic experience, an anatomy, as it were, of the poetic experience, its antecedents, and its results. Then we have the poem as symbol, partaking of the reality it would make intelligible, being what it is about. (287-8)

The self-referential emphasis is not of course entirely original with Suther. From Humphry House's persuasive insistence that "'Kubla Khan' is a poem about the act of poetic creation" (115) in 1952 through to Wheeler's highly sophisticated reader-response discussions (1981, 1991), variations on the self-referential approach have become standard. I share the belief in the importance of symbolic significance: figuring its own making, "Kubla Khan" symbolizes the act of imaginative creation in general. Yet I

would also insist that in making this centripetal, inward turn so fundamental we should not simply ignore the poem's external, or centrifugal, thrust. Rather, as I will show, the two go hand in hand. A second assumption is that, like most recent commentators,⁴ I assume the preface to be a heavily ironic work of fiction, a con-text perhaps, or, in Wheeler's phrase, a "dream allegory" (1981, p. 28) that problematizes the act of imaginative creation by distorting it.⁵ The discovery of the Crewe Manuscript (as it is called) in 1934, which gives an account of the poem being "composed, in a sort of Reverie brought on by two grains of opium" (Hill 149), contradicting the 1816 preface's tale of composition in "a profound sleep," supports this view. By throwing doubt on the veracity of the preface, the postscript note attached to the Crewe manuscript has effectively shifted the emphasis of critical attention away from studies such as Lowes' classic The Road to Xanadu, which assume involuntary, dream-like composition, and towards readings that, underpinned by the assumption of deliberate, conscious intent, contextualize the poem in terms of Coleridge's poetics, politics, and philosophical notions.

In examining the wordplay in "Kubla Khan" I pay particular attention not simply to outright puns in which the alternative signifieds are totally separate, but also to lesser semantic variants or quibbles in which the signifieds, while being distinct, may be closely related in meaning. In asking how many of the full range of dictionary meanings of a given word may apply in context, I follow a procedure that Empson pioneered in Seven Types of Ambiguity, although my own concern with ambiguity is somewhat narrower than Empson's inclusive range of "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room

for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (Seven Types 1).

The two most obvious puns in the poem, frequently acknowledged in the secondary literature, play on the words *measure* and *air*. The antithetical relationship between the "caverns measureless to man" of the first and second stanzas and the audible "mingled *measure* / From the fountain and the caves" of the second stanza is a form of paronomasia (punning resemblance between two separate words) that highlights key thematic elements in the poem. It contrasts the precision and limitation of human artifice, the "twice five miles" of the rectangular paradise-garden, with the "measureless" works of natural creation. But it is also metamorphic, transforming the Khan's precisely decreed geometry into music. Hence it is a pun of origins, lending a Pythagorean logic to the magic see-changes, from eye to ear and ear to eye, that occur within the poem:

And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair! (48-50)

The pun thus registers the dissolution of the boundaries between the separate senses, echoing back, perhaps, to Bottom's synaesthetic scrambling of St. Paul's "Eye of man hath not seen, nor ear heard" (1 Corinthians 2.9) in A Midsummer Night's Dream:

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. . . . The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive . . . what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballet of this dream. It shall be called "Bottom's dream" because it hath no bottom; and I shall sing it in the latter end of a play, before the duke. (4.1.210-225)

Here, as in "Kubla Khan," there is a connection between dream or "vision," synaesthetic

transformation, and the production of art (Bottom's "ballet" or ballad). Significantly, the passage also relates dream and synaesthesia to wordplay, so that if "language . . . seems to have a transforming energy of its own within 'Bottom's Dream'" (Garber 80), we may say the same of "Kubla Khan." I cite Bottom's dream, less as a possible source for these relationships, than as an intertext that highlights similarities between the ways that Shakespeare and Coleridge use them.

But *measure* has further bearings that are also important. The Khan, as a despot, rules by arbitrary imposition, handing down decrees that are also "measures" of control. His carefully proportioned landscape architecture thus punningly emblemizes his own despotic impulse. In complete contrast the word also has inward or centripetal, poetic significance, as "poetical rhythm, as 'measured' by quantity or accent; a kind of poetical rhythm; a metrical group or period" (*OED* III.16). "Mingled measure" can then also refer to the varying metrics of "Kubla Khan," as a poem that in some respects imitates the irregular structure of the Pindaric ode.

The pun on *air* is similar to *measure* in that it also figures the synaesthetic transformation from the physical or visual to the domain of pure sound:

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in *air*. . . (42-6)

The dome, built "in air," becomes music or poetry, an identity that is also already foreshadowed, through wordplay, by the "stately pleasure-dome" of the poem's second line. *Air* is of course a key pun in The Tempest, where the island is one of "Sounds and

sweet airs that give delight and hurt not" and where Prospero's celebrated speech at the close of the masque employs the pun in a manner that again has important resonances with "Kubla Khan":

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into *air*, into thin *air*;
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (4.1.148-58)

In the context of the association of air and music that pervades the play, "thin air" is ironic; the very dissolution of the vision is the guarantee of its survival as art. Here again, wordplay figures the transforming power of both art and dream, in which pleasure-domes or palaces can magically become poems or songs.⁷ In The Tempest, then, *air* works as an example of the kind of governing or overarching pun discussed in the previous chapter. For Marjorie Garber,

Prospero's whole great speech is in fact an exploration of the relationship between the dream world and the world we know as real, in which the analogy is finally resolved into identity, and metaphor becomes metamorphosis. His speech suggests on the level of language what The Tempest in its entirety will accomplish in dramatic terms: the merging of the worlds of dream and reality in the creative mind of man. (210)

The implicit pun on *air* accomplishes this transforming union with great economy, unifying key elements in the play. Coleridge, who said of Ariel "In air he lives, and from air he derives his being," thus foregrounding the word in his lecture on The

Tempest (LOL 1:363), was surely aware of its central function in the play. The twin puns on *air* and *measure* perform a similar function in "Kubla Khan" because among other things they point to a deeper unity in the physics of sound: music is number, proportional or "measured" harmony, and, as Coleridge would have known, sound is propagated as *waves* (another word that has punning connotations in the poem), the oscillatory motion of molecules of air.

Given the coupling of *air* and *delight* in both The Tempest and "Kubla Khan," and the synaesthetic visual/aural transformations I have highlighted, we may well take *delight* to be a punning charade, as *de-light*. Clearly, I am assisted in this reading by my knowledge of Coleridge's charade-like conundrums in his letters, but I can also appeal to another Coleridgean intertext. In "The Destiny of Nations," in the course of a long verse paragraph that extols the power of legend and superstition that, by activating the imagination, can "Seat Reason on her throne" (88), we learn that

Fancy is the power
That first unsensualizes the dark mind,
Giving it new delights. . . .(80-2)

The contrast between dark and light triggers the sense of wordplay here, making *de-light* a charade. In 1796, at the time of writing this poem, Coleridge had not yet desynonomized fancy and imagination. It is the imagination, then, that produces *de-light*, the mental pleasure that lies beyond immediate, or unmediated, sensual gratification. Delight liberates us from the tyranny of the individual senses, a bondage that is linked with the philosophy of Locke and Hartley.⁸ When Coleridge came to write the Biographia, he deprecated this tyranny:

Under that despotism of the eye (the emancipation from which Pythagoras by his numeral, and Plato by his musical, symbols, and both by geometric discipline, aimed at, as the first [propaedeutikon]⁹ of the mind) — under this strong sensuous influence, we are restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision. . . . (BL 1:107)

Delight thus goes hand in hand with *air* and *measure*, as part of a system of synaesthetic, or Pythagorean/Platonic, puns that act as agents of transformation and liberation. Kubla may be a despot of the eye, yet the all-too-visible *measures* of his paradise-garden, thanks to their geometrical exactitude, furnish a means of liberation, first through the combination of arbitrary imposition with natural, organic impulse (the river and "caves of ice") and then through the synaesthetic metamorphosis that results in the immaterial, or musical, building of the "dome in *air*." The relationship between the "rare device" of dome and cave and the "mingled measures" of song or poetry is initially one of metonymy--the device gives rise to the measures--and then, in the last stanza, one of metaphor in which the dome, built in air, is music. The visual, despotic paradise-garden is lost, the poetic one regained. But Paradise, one suspects, is also a punning charade, a *para'd-ise* of "unsensualized" *de-light* that is quite "beyond eyes." Just as the *device* of dome and caves unites the elements of fire and ice, so Coleridge, it seems, was unable to keep his sunny and rainy day activities apart; "Kubla Khan" is that poem where metaphysics and comic conundrums meet. This mixing of very different kinds of wordplay in the poem is important, not the least because it clearly has a bearing on the kind of evaluative distinctions that Coleridge subsequently moves towards in the

Shakespearean lectures. Is this hovering, to use a favourite word of Coleridge's, between metaphysics and comedy to be admired as an effect of imagination, or deplored for its rather fanciful flirtation with comedy?

In a later lecture, as we shall see, Coleridge rather begrudgingly defends Romeo's sonneteering conceits as not "absolutely unnatural." Would he have used the same language of his own imitation of the sonnet conceit, the great composite image that concludes the second stanza of "Kubla Khan"?

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare *device*,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice! (31-6)

As John Beer has pointed out, this unifying image echoes back to Spenser.¹⁰ "Rare device" is in fact a stock Renaissance phrase, occurring four times in The Faerie Queene and once in Shakespeare. And, as Beer again notes, Coleridge's lines seem to be foreshadowed in Spenser's Amoretti 30:

What more miraculous thing may be told
That fire which all things melts; should harden yse:
And yse which is congealed with sencelesse cold
Should kindle fire by wonderful devyse? (9-12)

In both Amoretti 30 and "Kubla Khan" the primary meaning of the word *device* is no doubt "contrivance." Yet there is another common Renaissance usage that is very relevant. In his A Discourse of English Poetry (1586) William Webbe refers to "rare devices and singular inventions of poetry" (35). And Ruthven, in his study of the conceit, reminds us that during the Renaissance conceits were commonly called devices

(3). The miracle is therefore also one of poetic figuration. *Device* is thus a pun that reminds us that in one sense the "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!" is simply a structure of words, a conceit. And this observation, in the spirit of Empsonian inquiry, may encourage us to find further ambiguity. I can argue that, in the context of the poem, the word *device* carries the weight of a wide range of dictionary definitions, including many archaic ones. The relevant definitions fall under three general semantic categories: physical shape, mental construct, and written conceit. The first sense is plain, simply referring to the particular design of the "miracle." The second has much wider possibilities: inventive faculty, will, pleasure, inclination, fancy, design, intent, command, order, plan, scheme, project, contrivance, plot, stratagem and trick are all mentioned under *device* in the Oxford English Dictionary. And all, in one way or another, make sense in the context of the poem. Lastly, as a written conceit reference becomes self-reference -- the device is a conceit, ontologically, as language, as a rhetorical figure.

The three meanings of *device* mentioned diverge sufficiently to allow us to regard the word as an outright pun rather than a mere quibble. They closely approximate the signifying triad of referent, signified and signifier. *Device* is what it refers to. Coleridge thereby achieves an apparent collapse, or unification, of signification that echoes back to the Renaissance world in which words and their referents, within the episteme of resemblance, mixed and mingled on equal terms. Like *air* and *measure*, *device* is a metalinguistic pun, and the recognition of this is quite fundamental to my understanding of the way that the Coleridgean pun, in what I regard as its most important

exemplary aspect, works. However, prior to a full discussion of this exemplary function, I need to pursue the intertextual bearings of *device* further.

As I have mentioned, Amoretti 30 is not the only Renaissance precursor to Coleridge's "rare *device*." "The Bower of Bliss" in Book Two of The Faerie Queene is a "most daintie Paradise" (2.12.58.1) where

So fashioned a porch with rare *device*,
 Archt over head with an embracing vine. . . .
 (2.12.54.1-2)

Here, as in "Kubla Khan," we have a garden-paradise with a fountain at the centre, a place where art and nature are "mingled":

One would have thought, (so cunningly the rude,
 And seemed parts were mingled with the fine,)
 That nature had for wantonnesse ensude
 Art, and that Art at nature did repine. . . .
 (2.12.59.1-4).

Since the Bower juxtaposes or mingles opposites, can we again read *device* as *conceit*, punningly? In another intertext, in Book Three of The Faerie Queene, the tapestry of Venus and Adonis is described as "A work of rare *device* and wondrous wit" (3.1.34.6). Here "wit" carries back into *device*, so that the word again bears the double sense of design (as executed pattern) and the idea of that design, as a kind of invention or conceit. In one of the introductory "Commendatory Verses" to the poem, the author, the unidentified "Ignoto" (possibly Spenser?) begins

To look upon a work of rare *device*
 To which a workman setteth out to view. . . .
 (in The Fairie Queene, 22)

referring to The Faerie Queene itself in terms which echo those used to describe artifacts

within it. There is a kind of metalinguistic paradox at work here, in which the text is identified with artifacts that lie within it, equivocating wholes and parts in Chinese-box fashion, synecdochically, and, in a Coleridgean sense, symbolically. Something very similar is at work in "Kubla Khan." The rebounding rocks of the second stanza are "Huge fragments," but in the preface we find the poem itself referred to as "The following fragment." This incorporation of fragments within a fragment deconstructs the fragment/whole opposition, ironizing the very notion of the poem as a fragment and thus undermining the manifest thrust of the preface. *Fragment*, like *device* in both "Kubla Khan" and The Faerie Queene, is a metalinguistic pun. Moreover, since the Grek word symbolon means fragment, it also gestures towards the symbolic, or synectochical, nature of the poem quite directly.

The device of the "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice" is of course a central, unifying image/trope that yokes all the main elements of the first two stanzas of the poem together. It juxtaposes light and dark, fire and water, convex and concave, precision and imprecision, artifice and impulse, conscious design and spontaneous natural growth. As a conceit that attempts to achieve the "balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (BL 2:16) that characterizes products of imagination, it parallels a number of other, lesser, conceited images in the poem. The "stately pleasure dome" of the second line suggests the reconciliation of solemnity and amusement, or the sacred and secular; "dancing rocks" (23) juxtaposes art and nature; "at once and ever" links transience with permanence; "miracle of rare device" itself tends to suggest a unity of magic and conscious design, while "all who heard should see them there" functions as a synaesthetic

conceit, as we have seen. This kind of conceited imagery is, we might say metaphorically, centripetal, in that it tends to draw things together, juxtaposing signifiers to form a composite signified. At the very opposite pole to this, there are those individual words that, centrifugally, radiate multiplicity. *Air*, *measure*, and *device* are the most important of these, three key puns which each have important Renaissance precursors. Another example is *vaulted* (21), a word that radiates punning connotations (vaulted dome, vaulted caves, vault of heaven, vaulting as the dancing leap of creative association). These opposed tropes are, to put it less figuratively, conceits and puns. Hence I can argue, from a wealth of evidence, that when Coleridge subsequently comes to defend Shakespeare's conceits and puns in his lectures, he is also indirectly defending his own practice in "Kubla Khan." Coleridge not only uses these tropes in the Renaissance manner, he also does so in such a way as to allude to Renaissance intertexts, as I have shown. Moreover, his use of puns and conceits is, again like the practice of some Renaissance forebears, metaphysical, in the sense that it invokes that higher, transformed world of unified, "unsensualized" delight that lies beyond the divided multiplicity of ordinary language, or everyday sense-experience.

As further confirmation of the key role that wordplay assumes in "Kubla Khan" I can point to the title itself. Dorothy Wordsworth hints at its punning potential in her cryptic 1798 journal entry "carried Kubla to a fountain" (*Journals* 1:34)¹¹ -- in calling her drinking-can Kubla was she responding to Coleridge's own wordplay? In the poem's opening line,



the vowel sounds tend to form a pattern of symmetry, a chiasmic reversal that encourages us to pronounce the final word as "can," with an /æ/ sound as in "cat," rather than with the conventional /a/ as in "father." The rhyme scheme of the opening stanza also favours this pronunciation. In the preface Coleridge quotes his source for this line in Purchas his Pilgrimage as "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a place to be built, and a stately garden thereunto." In fact, as a note in the standard edition edited by E. H. Coleridge (1912) points out, the source passage begins: "In Xamdu did Cublai Can build a stately palace . . .". In altering "Xamdu" to "Xanadu" Coleridge sets up the chiasmic reversal I have referred to. Why was "Can" then altered in such a way as to make this reversal less striking?¹² As a pun, *Kubla Can* works well in context. The Khan is a potentate who, through this power, is able to, or *can*, do things. Moreover, the final stanza poses the question of the poet-author's ability to revive the maid's song in such a way that subsequent critics find themselves invoking the pun unwittingly, as if they dared not recognize it as such.

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair! (42-50)

Humphry House notes that "If a strong emphasis . . . is put on 'could', then the word

can be taken to imply 'if only I could, but I can't,' and the whole poem can be made to appear to be about the failure and frustration of the creative power" (115). But House rejects this view and goes on to assert that "'Kubla Khan' is a triumphant positive statement of the potentialities of poetry" (116). In other words, if we associate the "I" who would rebuild the "dome in air" with its original progenitor, then Kubla can, or did, succeed in this project. Beverley Fields, who reads the poem as the displaced allegory of Coleridge's sexual problems, comments: "Coleridge appears to say here that the reason the Khan 'can' and he 'cannot' is that he has purged the female element in his personality" (97). Fields seems to read *Kubla Khan* as a pun but is unwilling to identify Kubla with the poet-author of the final stanza. But, against this interpretation, wordplay hints at a complex unity comprising Kubla, Xanadu, poet and poem. The reversal of the first line suggests a certain mirrored identity between Kubla and Xanadu. And the word "them" in "all who heard should see them there" is ambiguous, referring, it would seem, to both the dome and caves of Xanadu and, later, to the inspired poet himself, so that the two become conflated. But Xanadu, rebuilt "in *air*," doubles as the poem and its referent. And *Kubla Khan*, via the title, is both the poem and the title-character in the poem. Hence there are strong reasons to take *Kubla Khan* as a pun that, in a subtle and ironic manner, answers the implied question "Could I?" by saying "Kubla can," at the same time implying "I can."

But the wordplay associated with the title goes further than this, in that it suggests the possibility that *Xanadu* too is a pun, or charade, so that the first line reads as a question and answer--"Can I do? - Kubla can!" Readers like Thelwall who were familiar

with the charade-like conundrums and jokes in Coleridge's letters might certainly have taken it this way and, in the spirit of *de-light* and *para'd-ise*, we might do the same. Is the pun on *Xanadu* in the poem or not? Whose pun is it--Coleridge's, the poem's, or mine and/or yours? The wordplay in "Kubla Khan" has a supplementary, destabilizing effect. The puns that are "obviously there," as we might put it, encourage us to search for others. As we do this, we become creative readers, builders of our own domes in air, co-authors of the poem. At the poem's close, the audience who cry "Beware! Beware!" might seem to be erecting a barrier between themselves and the poet and his poem. Yet perhaps this too is ironic for, weaving around him, they too help to form the circle of permanence, the paradise of art.

Wordplay thus performs a number of important functions in "Kubla Khan." By generating multiplicity, it helps to give the poem over to its readers, rousing their own creativity. It enables Coleridge to convey the sense of magical transformation inherent in the creative process itself, the metamorphic power that "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" (BL 1:304) or "blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each" (BL 2:16) with convincing force. Puns and conceits, as we noted in the first chapter, imitate, through their very structure, a Renaissance/Coleridgean aesthetic of "multeity-in-Unity,"¹³ and it should be clear that not only is "Kubla Khan" an extraordinarily effective example of this aesthetic, but that wordplay helps to achieve the effect. To put it another way, "Kubla Khan" is a pun writ large, thanks in large measure to the wordplay within it. Earlier I discussed the great presiding or overarching puns in Shakespeare's plays. I can surely argue that in "Kubla Khan" *air*, *measure*, and *device* are puns of this same

type. In this sense, quite apart from the punning intertexts, all three are very "Shakespearean" puns.

A further aspect deserves emphasis. If, as discussed earlier, "Kubla Khan" is self-referential, figuring its own construction and thereby symbolizing the act of poetic creation in general, the metalinguistic aspect of the wordplay in the poem is not only appropriate but essential. All four key puns (if we add *Kubla Khan* itself to the list) are metalinguistic, combining referentiality and self-referentiality. Language in "Kubla Khan" reaches out to the world, externally, centrifugally, but at the same time it turns back on itself, centripetally. Language refers to external "things," but these "things" tend to figure language itself in their turn. Coleridge thus encourages a reciprocal exchange between signifiers and signifieds in the mind of the reader. The "miracle of rare *device*" is an image, a thought in the reader's mind, or even the composite "thing" that this thought dwells on; but as a *device* it is, again, merely "words, words, words." The self-referential pun provides Coleridge with an ideal way of collapsing the difference between words and things, as in the episteme of resemblance. The pun is materialized through self-reference, yet it is also active, oscillating between its constituent meanings in the reader's mind. The polysemy of punning discourse brings language to life, empowering readers by giving them choice as it does so. Theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as we saw, wanted to make language transparent to meaning, making signifiers subservient to signifieds. Against this, Coleridge creates structures of reciprocity in which signifiers and signifieds dance together as partners, signifiers gesturing towards signifieds, signifieds returning the favour to signifiers.

As the extensive secondary literature clearly demonstrates, "Kubla Khan" is a work of extraordinary compression, massively over-determined in its sources and intertextual allusions on the one hand and its possible readings and meanings on the other. Ambiguity and compression go hand in hand, and the devices of wordplay provide a highly effective means of achieving both. Coleridge was certainly aware of the need for the two effects. As we shall see, in his Shakespearean lectures he will valorise that "middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other when it is, as it were, hovering between images" (LOL 2:495). The reader is, clearly, left "hovering" in this creative and ambiguous manner throughout much of "Kubla Khan." In a letter to Thelwall written in October 1797, the very time of the composition of "Kubla Khan," according to a note attached to the Crewe manuscript (Hill 148), Coleridge criticizes his friend's poetry, advising Thelwall that "A little compression would make it a beautiful poem. Study Compression" (CL 1:351). Should we assume that Coleridge followed his own advice at the time, and that the concentration of wordplay and ambiguity in "Kubla Khan" represents a deliberate attempt on his part to harness his own natural instinct for the pun in the service of a highly compressed and effective poetry? In Freudian terms this compression is of course a form of condensation, a key element of the dreamwork in which words are apt to be combined or fused in dreams "as though they were concrete things" (The Interpretation of Dreams 330).¹⁴ Given the intertextuality between "Kubla Khan" and A Midsummer Night's Dream, the reference to "vision," and the dream allegory of the preface, we must wonder whether Coleridge was not, from the very start, attempting to write an artificial dream poem. He

would in all likelihood have been quite familiar with the traditional association between dream and wordplay, not the least because it appears in Shakespeare.¹⁵ In a frequently quoted notebook entry of 1804 Coleridge characterized poetry as "a rationalized dream," going on to ask "What is the Lear, the Othello, but a divine Dream / All Shakespere, & nothing Shakespere" (CN 2: #2086). In "Kubla Khan" the device of dome and caves seems to be emblematic of this very conceit of the "rationalized dream," creativity as an ideal union of conscious and unconscious mental processes.

The preface refers to "Kubla Khan" as a "psychological curiosity." Like much else in the preface, this apparently disparaging remark may be ironic, obliquely hinting at what it conceals, the poem's attempt to explore the psychology of poetic creativity. Among its other functions, then, the wordplay in "Kubla Khan" may represent a deliberate attempt to do two things: to achieve a high degree of poetic compression and, at the same time, to mimic the process of condensation in dreamwork faithfully within a controlling, rationalized framework.

Finally, to complete the list of the functions of wordplay in the poem, it would be extremely remiss to ignore the fact that if, as Coleridge was to insist in the *Biographia*, poetry has "for its immediate object pleasure" (BL 2:13), puns, perhaps through the same mechanism of condensation, are peculiarly effective instruments for producing that pleasure.¹⁶ "Kubla Khan" is, among other things, that poem where the metaphysician and conundrumizer meet, in a kind of personal conceit.

"Still Dancing": The Pun as Paradigm

If there is a governing theme or motif that weaves its way through the various examples of wordplay in Coleridge's poetry it is, I suggest, that of self-reference. I have already shown how the four key puns (*air*, *measure*, *device* and *Kubla Khan* itself) in "Kubla Khan" share a self-referential/referential doubleness. All four work in much the same way, alluding to the poem, song or literary device in which they are found ("Kubla Khan" itself) and to an independent referent within the poem. This is synecdochical or symbolic wordplay in the Coleridgean sense that, in the words of the well-known definition, "while it enunciates the whole, [it] abides as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative" (LS 30). Closely related to this, but somewhat different in its operation, is a second type of wordplay in which, usually through some kind of associated contextual ambiguity, the word doubles as signifier and signified. In "Kubla Khan" *device* and *measure* are in fact also puns of this type. Since puns are devices, and *device* is a pun, *device* thus refers to its own status as a trope, a signifier that has the particular property of being a literary device. *Measure* achieves this doubleness somewhat differently. In the phrase "mingled *measure*," "mingled" may refer, not simply to the mingled sound from the double echo-chambers of cave and dome, but also to the fact that the word *measure* has, as a pun, become mingled itself. Hence "mingled" qualifies *measure* in such a way as to make it a self-referential pun of this second type.

In this section I continue the examination of this second type of self-referential wordplay, concentrating almost entirely on what I take to be the key example, or paradigm, of Coleridgean wordplay, namely his virtuosic deployment of the word *still*.

We have already noted that *still* is an important pun in both Shakespeare and Spenser. Mahood, in the concluding chapter of Shakespeare's Wordplay, notes how Keats and Eliot, like Shakespeare, both use the pun on *still* to explore the paradoxes of the relationship between art and nature. If we relate art to self-reference and nature to reference, we can see that through its intertextuality this pun already alludes to the kind of wordplay that I am highlighting. And there is, indeed, a self-referential nuance to the Shakespearean intertext:

When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that; move *still*, *still* so
And own no other function. . . . (TWT 4.3.140-3)

The repetition of the word and the double spondee *still it*, in a gesture of prosodic self-referentiality.

In turning to Coleridge I begin, not with *still*, but with a companion word that will introduce it. "Recollections of Love" is one of the group of so-called "Asra" poems, assumed to be addressed to Sara Hutchinson.¹⁷ In the final verse, the speaker compares his love for her with the "gentle roar" of the River Greta:

Has not, since then, Love's prompture deep,
Has not Love's whisper evermore
Been ceaseless, as thy gentle roar?
Sole voice, when other voices sleep,
Dear under-song in clamour's hour. (26-30)

Greta means lament, according to Coleridge,¹⁸ and the verse conveys a tone of plaintive resignation, if not lamentation itself. Love is a mere whisper, and the adverb *evermore*, directed towards the past, suggests "ever since then" rather than "forever." But there is a different reading. In the original 1817 edition of Sibylline Leaves, the second line is printed with a comma after *evermore*, which serves to emphasize the line ending and

to encourage us to read *evermore* as a whisper, as in "love's whisper 'evermore.'" The word is then partially released from its immediate context. As a whispered, floating signifier it becomes an agent of redemption, transforming recollection into hope and permanence. And this claim is re-affirmed with each whispered reading. *Evermore* thus wavers between signifier and signified, conforming to the pattern of the second type of self-referential wordplay. Wordplay multiplies in the verse: *under-song* helps to activate the quibble on *sole*, and may perhaps refer to the muted oscillation of wordplay itself as well as the "gentle roar" of the murmuring Greta. It is also, as John Hollander notes (148), a Spenserian coinage, echoing back to *Prothalamion*, where it bears the (metalinguistic) sense of "refrain," and thus has rich allusive resonance.¹⁹ This doubling is foreshadowed earlier in the poem:

No voice as yet had made the *air*
 Be music with your name; yet why
 That asking look? That yearning sigh?
 That sense of promise everywhere? (11-14)

Air signifies both music and atmosphere, as in "Kubla Khan," and thus bears its own under-song. And Sara Hutchinson's name, encrypted permanently alongside love "in clamour's hour," does indeed become part of this music.

Evermore means *still*, and Coleridge substitutes the latter in a fragment dating from 1807:

And in Life's noisiest hour
 There whispers *still* the ceaseless love of thee,
 The heart's self-solace and soliloquy. (PW 499)

The self-referential, whispered sense of *still* is quite subdued, to use Mahood's term for the barely-existent, muted pun (12). But in substituting this key word, Coleridge also

confirms the pun, whispers being *still* by definition. *Still* has a wide range of meanings that lend themselves very well to the kind of subdued wordplay that, rather than advertising itself in the manner of the deliberately comic pun, steals upon us almost unnoticed, and is all the more effective for this unassuming access. Like Shakespeare, Coleridge associates the word with dance:

Nor ever cease
Yon tiny cone of sand its soundless dance,
Which at the bottom, like a Fairy's Page,
As merry and no taller, dances *still*.
("Inscription for a Fountain on the Heath" 8-11)

Alternatively,

The shadows dance upon the wall,
By the *still* dancing fire-flames made;
And now they slumber, moveless all!
("A Day-dream" 15-17)

The dance of fountain or fire-flames is simultaneously silent and perpetual and, more paradoxically, motionless (it is the proximity of "moveless" that activates the pun in "A Day-dream"). "*Still* dancing," the play of words becomes a way of making "extremes meet" (CN 2:#2535), or of achieving an imaginative "balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (BL 2:16). In this reading, *still* is a subdued qualifier that lends ambiguity to the dancing fire-flames. But in "*still* dancing," "dancing" also qualifies *still*, describing how the word, behaving as a mere word or signifier, dances to and fro, doubling as adverb and adjective. Dance is then a metaphor for wordplay, and "*still* dancing" an intimate, self-referential partnership. Once again, the doubled referential and reflexive bearings, the waverings between signifier and signified, are exemplary of my second type.

This sense of wordplay as dance, centred on the word *still*, is not confined to Coleridge's minor poems. It is surely present in "Frost at Midnight":

Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
 Methinks its motion in this hush of nature
 Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
 Making it a companionable form,
 Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
 By its own moods interprets, every where
 Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
 And makes a toy of Thought. (15-23)

As the lines indicate, the film on the grate, as a "companionable form," is an emblem for the poet's vacillating, idling state of mind. However, as the film "*still* flutters there, the sole unquiet thing," extremes of sound and silence, motion and rest meet again. The image is doubly reflexive--if the fluttering is stilled, *still* continues to flutter, even now. No wonder Coleridge, contriving what is perhaps the ultimate self-referential pun, describes the playful, fluttering motion as *puny* (the pejorative sense then becoming an ironic gesture towards the common attitude towards poetic wordplay). Along with its opposite, the secretive, metamorphosing frost, the puny flame is, quite evidently, one of two central, unifying images in the poem. As an equivocal *stranger* it has an emblematic multiplicity, portending all the strangers--the film, the sleeping babe, the speaker's aunt and sister and, not least, the speaker himself--in a poem that moves from alienated, self-involved estrangement to the sense of "one Life," the conceit of universal harmony in which "all seasons shall be sweet to thee" in the coda.²⁰ The fluttering film is the hinge on which the poem turns, generating the associative train of thought that, moving from one stranger to another, eventually results in imaginative unity. And *still* (like *stranger*)

is a presiding, overarching pun in the Shakespearean manner, reaching out to so much else in the poem--the soft oscillations of the breathing babe, the stilled/unstilled "trances of the blast," the liquid/solid and audible/visual metamorphoses of eave-drops and icicles, the general sense of reciprocal alternation, the paradoxical fluttering of objects and sounds, that pervade the poem. Moreover, if *still* is a pun "*still* flutters" is, like "*still* dancing," a punning conceit. Once again, Coleridge's poetic practice anticipates the connection he is to make in the lectures on Shakespeare.

These examples set a pattern that is followed elsewhere. In the "*still* roaring dell" of "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison" the leaves of the ash tree "tremble *still* / *Fanned* by the water-fall," while the weeds nearby

all at once (a most *fantastic* sight!)
Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge
 Of the blue clay-stone. (18-20)

The images in these lines function, as Kathleen Wheeler notes, "as metaphors for poetic language or tropes" (1981, 135). In this sense wordplay becomes, in Coleridge's poetry, a trope of tropes, exemplifying the essentially doubled nature of both poetry and wordplay. The play between *fanned* and *fantastic*, despite the bracketing of the latter as a comic aside, is of key importance, since it relates the "fanned," oscillatory doubling of figurative language to the fantasies of the creative imagination. Imagination can be "fantastic" in this way because, as pointed out earlier, in 1797, at the time of composition, Coleridge had yet to articulate the fancy/imagination distinction.²¹

The play on the word *still* can be traced in other poems, most particularly "The Nightingale," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and "To William Wordsworth."

Since the pun's modus operandi in these poems follows the pattern of oxymoronic self-reference that we have already noted, it would be superfluous to provide lengthy readings of these instances. In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" it is the gloss that furnishes the pun. In Part Four:

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside —

Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt away
A *still* and awful red. (263-271)

Meanwhile the gloss points to "the journeying Moon, and the stars that *still* sojourn, yet *still* move onward" *Still* equivocates motion and rest in such a way as to concurrently strengthen an analogy between the moon and the water in that both can be frozen or unfrozen. However, as Arden Reed has pointed out (149), hoar-frost is of course, *rime*, in another important self-referential pun that both connects the poem with the similar frozen/unfrozen conceit that presides in "Frost at Midnight" and refigures this conceit as a paradox of language. Language can be both dead and frozen, as an immutable pattern of signifiers, or liquid and alive, as signifieds or "living Things" (CL 1:#626) in the mind. "The focal word has acquired a feeling of reality--it heats and burns, makes itself be felt" as Coleridge noted (Inquiring Spirit 101). The pun thus promotes the conceit that language has its own reciprocal, wavering "Life-in-Death."

At the close of "To William Wordsworth," Coleridge pictures himself listening as Wordsworth finishes his reading of The Prelude:

Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
 I sate, my being blended in one thought
 (Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)
 Absorbed, yet hanging *still* upon the sound —
 And when I rose, I found myself in prayer. (108-112)

"Hanging still upon the sound" projects an image of weak dependence in which Coleridge, as listener, is hypnotized and disabled by the sheer power of the "Orphic song" of the "great Bard" Wordsworth. The immediate context certainly supports this reading:

In silence listening, like a devout child
 My soul lay passive, by thy various strain
 Driven as in surges now beneath the stars . . . (95-7)

Yet we should recall that *hang* is a key word in The Prelude and elsewhere in Wordsworth's work:

Oh! when I have *hung*
 Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
 . . . (The Prelude, i.341.2)

or

Then sometimes, in that silence when he *hung*
 Listening. . . . (v. 381-2)

Suspended at the end of an enjambed line, *hung* acquires a self-referential leaning, figuring its own function. Later, in his "Preface" to Poems 1815, Wordsworth begins his inquiry into the nature of the imagination by instancing the use of *hang* in Virgil, Shakespeare and Milton and commenting: "Here is the full strength of the imagination involved in the word *hangs*" (Poetical Works 754). Wordsworth's *hang* then parallels Coleridge's *still*; both are self-referential, and both are exemplary, imaginative words.²² So "hanging *still*" is not so much an expression of dependence as of interdependence, a

conceit that emblemizes the imaginative dialogue between the two poets. If *still* hangs between alternative signifieds, Wordsworth and Coleridge are, likewise, suspended together, intertextually, through Coleridge's felicitous phrase.

As these various instances have shown, *still* is, as I suggested, the very paradigm of Coleridgean wordplay. It is synaesthetic, uniting the sensual worlds of vision and sound; it has important Renaissance intertexts in both Shakespeare and Spenser; it is self-referential, materializing language and forging an apparent unity of signification in which signifiers and signifieds meet as equals; it becomes oxymoronic, imitating the unifying action of the imagination, and, as a pun, it is subdued and self-effacing, so that the reader, as it were, becomes its creator. Oxymoronically, it acts as a conceit, and this suggests the need to examine the general role that conceits play in Coleridge's work in more detail. In his Shakespearean lectures, as we shall see, Coleridge links puns and conceits, and we have noted how the phrase "still dancing" functions economically as both of these. But aside from the prime example in "Kubla Khan," the "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice," there are many other striking examples of the conceit in Coleridge's work, and it is surprising that this characteristic rhetorical ploy, which links the poetry and prose, has received little or no attention, given the importance that Coleridge attaches to conceits in his lectures. Let me give a few examples:

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
. . . ("The Eolian Harp" 26-8)

that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
("Frost at Midnight" 60-2)

O, lift one thought in prayer for S.T.C.;

That he who many a year with toil of breath

Found death in life, may here find life in death!
("Epitaph" 4-6)

The artist may take his point of view where he pleases,
provided that the desired effect be produced, — that there
be likeness in the difference, difference in the likeness, and
a reconciliation of both in one. ("On Poesy or Art" 256)

. . . they are the living educts of the Imagination; of that
reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the
Reason in Images of the sense, and organizing (as it were)
the flux of the senses by the permanence and self-circling
energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols
. . . . (LS 29)

. . . to know God is . . . to acknowledge him as the
Infinite Clearness in the Incomprehensible Fulness, and
Fulness Incomprehensible with Infinite Clearness. (LS 48)

The common pattern in these examples demonstrates Coleridge's persistent recourse to the rhetorical figure of antimetabole, the particular type of chiasmus that demands a strict symmetry or reversal of signifiers. It is a favourite figure of Coleridge, and these six examples are chosen from a much larger total in the various works.²³ Antimetabole in Coleridge commonly functions as a conceit, which asserts identity where identity is not expected. It tends frequently, as the examples show, to be oxymoronic, paradoxical, or metaphysical. Coleridge, as we have seen, images figurative language through metaphors of oscillation. Antimetabole is a figure of reciprocity, whose reversal seems to imitate the fluttering, mediatory quality that also adheres to the pun; hence, presumably, Coleridge's particular fondness for it. It parallels his predilection for the pun, and serves much the same purpose in his work. Therefore, in suggesting that when he comes to

defend Shakespeare's wordplay in his lectures, Coleridge indirectly defends his own poetic practice at the same time, I cite the evidence given in this chapter as support. To be sure, Coleridge's poetry lacks the sheer density of wordplay that we find in Shakespeare, but it would be hard to deny that wordplay, puns and conceits play an important, even a major role in the poetry.

In Coleridge's poetry, wordplay foregrounds its own mode of action. As an "under-song" or "mingled measure" that flutters, trembles or dances, the Coleridgean pun becomes, in his own phrase, a "living Thing" (CL 1:626). Uniting referential and self-referential denotation, it throws additional emphasis on the reflexiveness, or orientation to the signifier, that is common to all puns. So the pun becomes a privileged exemplar of the poetic function. Poetry then shares the doubled nature of wordplay, glancing centripetally inwards even as it looks outwards to the world of experience beyond itself. Coleridgean wordplay, through its self-effacing or subdued nature, fosters the co-creative potential of the reader. Like all wordplay, it tends to be untranslatable, thus fulfilling Coleridge's own criterion of poetic excellence (this, we should note, is far more true of the pun than of the conceit; hence Coleridge's linking of the two may, implicitly if not explicitly, harbour a hierarchy).

Not least, wordplay produces delight, while it concurrently charges poetry with the full energy of semantic compression. And, through their very structure, poetic devices such as the pun and conceit directly imitate that transformed, higher reality of "Multeity-in-Unity" that the imagination produces, or accesses.

Yet, for all this, there are also tensions, contradictions even, within Coleridge's

poetics of wordplay. These tensions affect both his theory and practice. In part, they stem from the fact that, as the foregoing paragraphs have shown, Coleridge uses wordplay as a vehicle for so many different purposes simultaneously. In the next two chapters I proceed to contextualize Coleridge's theory (or theories) and practice of wordplay in terms of modern critical theory. Since Coleridge's wordplay, in its "supplementary" tendencies and orientation towards the reader, tends in its own way to anticipate aspects of modern theory, I therefore postpone full discussion of these tensions. What should be evident from the evidence already presented is that in practical terms the poetics of wordplay worked very successfully for Coleridge, particularly in poems such as "Kubla Khan" and "Frost at Midnight." In these pioneering poems Coleridge, above all, harnessed his bent for verbal play to achieve the remarkable effects of metamorphosis, multiplicity and condensation that have, in his own terms, helped to keep them very much alive as "living Things."

In this chapter I have shown how puns and conceits play a major role in the practical poetics of Coleridge's most productive years. They echo back intertextually to the Renaissance, as we have seen. Moreover puns and conceits perform similar functions, forging unity from multiplicity, and promoting a sense of resemblance, or continuity, between words and things. In this latter sense they clearly oppose the classical episteme in which language, as a means of representation, is instrumentalized and made subservient to external ends. Coleridge's wordplay therefore has strong theoretical bearings, as my phrase "poetics of wordplay" suggests. Am I really justified in using this phrase, from the standpoint of theory? The question can be properly

answered only through an examination of Coleridge's own observations on the subject, to which I now turn.

Notes

¹ For further examples of Coleridge's wordplay in the first volume of the Collected Letters (1785-1800), see pages 134, 147, 182, 223, 242, 262, 295, 354, 406, 436, 536-7, 564. Most of these follow the pattern illustrated in the text.

² See the sub-chapter "The Riming Mariner and the Mariner Rimed" in Reed's Romantic Weather.

³ See Wheeler's first chapter, "Kubla Khan and the Art of Thingifying," for a detailed discussion of the preface in terms of irony and reader response (Creative Mind 17-41). For Coleridge as a deliberate "textual self-deconstructor," see also Stillinger (vi-vii).

⁴ For some of the more important commentaries that make this assumption, see House, Watson, Suther and Wheeler (1981, 1991).

⁵ As Wheeler points out, "the explanation usually advanced for why Coleridge wrote the preface suggests that the preface was a gesture of self-defence for not having finished the poem" (1981, Note 9, page 170). For further discussion that notes other commentators who have taken Wheeler's position that the preface is essentially ironic, "a hoax," see Hill (148-50).

⁶ See for example Wheeler (1991, 20).

⁷ Garber, in her detailed study Dream in Shakespeare, emphasizes the relationship between transformation and dream in Shakespeare. She points out that Shakespeare would have been aware of the traditional connection between wordplay and dream, and was therefore able to use it dramatically. See particularly her discussions on pages 4-7, 35-43, 79, and 95-6. In Romeo and Juliet, we should note, Shakespeare juxtaposes the puns on *air* and *measure* within four lines (RJ 2.6.24-7).

⁸ For discussion of Coleridge's "struggle with associationism," see the Biographia (Chapter Five, 89-105) and Wheeler (1981, 1-16).

⁹ The word means preparatory education. See Engell and Bate's note (BL 1:107).

¹⁰ See Beer's "The Languages of Kubla Khan" (250). Beer's article is useful for its detailed (although doubtless not exhaustive) exploration of Renaissance intertextuality in the poem.

¹¹ "Upon these I breakfasted and carried Kubla to a fountain in the neighbouring market place, where I drank some excellent water" (Journals 1:34). For a detailed discussion, which concludes that the surmise that "Kubla" was a drinking can is the most likely explanation of the cryptic passage, see Schneider (305-8).

¹² Milton also uses "Can" rather than "Khan," in lines that would no doubt have been very familiar to Coleridge:

the destined Walls
Of Cambalu, seat of the Cathaian Can . . .
(Paradise Lost 11.387-8)

See Beer (240).

¹³ See Coleridge's "On the Principles of Genial Criticism" (232), where he claims "Multeity in Unity" to be "the most general definition of beauty." This aesthetic is, significantly, connected with "delight" in the mind of the perceiver: "of all 'the many' which I actually see, each and all are really reconciled into unity; while the effulgence from the whole coincides with, and seems to represent, the effluence of delight from my own mind in the intuition of it" (232).

¹⁴ As Beer notes: "Kubla Khan provides a many-faceted example of the 'overdetermination' that Freud traced in much dream-work." He later notes the wavering, oscillatory response that this generates: "There remains the question of significance, which dances in and out, back and forth, freeing the reader to range between seeing the poem as an attempt at total comprehension of human experience, as a personal document, or, for that matter, as a poem about itself" (253). Beer, however, makes no connection with wordplay in his discussion.

¹⁵ See Garber (7-8). Wheeler (1981,170) also considers the possibility that "Kubla Khan" was composed as an artificial dream poem.

¹⁶ For discussion of the way in which comic wordplay works, and produces pleasure, see Freud's Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, particularly the long sub-chapter on the technique of jokes (16-89).

¹⁷ The most comprehensive treatment of the "Asra" poems is Whalley's Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson and the Asra Poems (1955).

¹⁸ See the letter to Francis Wrangham (Dec. 19, 1800) in which Coleridge explains in a postscript: "My house stands on the River Grieta, which is a literal translation of the word Cocytus -

Named from lamentation loud

Heard on the rueful stream

To griet is to lament aloud, and "a" is the masculine termination of the substantive —." (CL 1:658). Greta, it seems, is also a conundrum or charade.

¹⁹ Hollander's chapter "Spenser's Undersong" shows how Coleridge's poem participates in a varied intertextual tapestry that includes works by Spenser, Keats, Emerson, and Wordsworth, so that *undersong* then acts out its own function, as a refrain that echoes through the canon, frequently in poems that link water and love.

²⁰ *Stranger* is also a Shakespearean quibble. When Hamlet pleads with Horatio of the ghost "And therefore as a stranger give it welcome" (1.5.165) he alludes to the same folk-wisdom as Coleridge, so that *stranger* has the second meaning of omen or portent. *Stranger* then signifies its own reduplication. See Garber's comments (95-6).

²¹ Hill dates the first clear statement of the Imagination/Fancy distinction to a letter to Sotheby of 1802 (Hill 7-8).

²² For discussion of Wordsworth's use of *hang*, see Ricks, 105-114.

²³ For further examples of antimetabole in the poems, see Poetical Works 101, 145, 154, 222, 225, 228, 234, 242, 265, 266, 363, 477, 480, 482, 486, 492. "Frost at Midnight" is, notably, embraced by antimetabole, as the "secret ministry of frost" in the coda reverses the opening line. And in "Kubla Khan" the first line employs antimetabolic assonance, or assonantal antimetabole, to create a dome-like reversal of sound.

CHAPTER 3

COLERIDGE AND WORDPLAY: THEORY

Defending Shakespeare's Wordplay

In a notebook entry of 1810, Coleridge refers to "my intended Essay in defence of Punning" (CN 3:#3762). Given the ease with which he formulated projected works, and the difficulties he had in seeing these formulations through to completion, it is not in the least surprising that this essay was, so far as we know, never written.¹ However, that Coleridge intended to write such an essay is a useful indication of the importance that the subject held in his mind. Had he completed the essay, it could have served a vital purpose in bringing together, as a coherent theory of poetic language perhaps, the thought that sustains the various observations on puns and related devices that he left behind. These observations are currently dispersed among his notebooks, letters, marginalia and the records that we have of his various literary lectures given in the years 1808-1819. To understand Coleridge's efforts to rehabilitate wordplay in their full complexity, it is necessary to reconsider these sources jointly. They fall into two parts: first, the defence of Shakespeare's wordplay that occurs predominantly in the literary lectures; and second, various privately recorded comments that consider the relationship of wordplay to poetry, poetics and language theory in a more general way. Chronologically, the two groups are almost contemporaneous, but I shall deal with the literary lectures first.

While Coleridge is a poet-critic, the two going hand in hand, it is also true that,

ostensibly at least, the critic succeeds the poet. Having written the last of what the current canon defines as his major poems, "To William Wordsworth," in 1807, Coleridge began his career as a public lecturer on literature in 1808. The various series of lectures that he gave in the years from 1808 to 1819 are frequently referred to as his Shakespearean criticism, as in the title of Raysor's 1930 edition.² Although not entirely accurate, the title is just, in that it reflects the primary focus of the lectures.

Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism, as we may then call it, has two closely related aims. It reappraises the nature and origins of Shakespeare's perceived merits as a poet and dramatist, while it concurrently promotes a Romantic poetics that centres on underlying notions of aesthetic unity, organic form and the creative imagination.³ Since Shakespeare is the supreme exemplar of this poetics, the two aims are mutually supportive. Wordplay is a key in both respects, as I will show. However, prior to any detailed discussion of particular passages in the criticism, it is important to point out a significant facet of Coleridge's reappraisal of Shakespeare as it relates to eighteenth-century opinion.

For critics such as Johnson, as we have seen, Shakespeare's great merits were offset by defects such as his inability to resist the temptations of wordplay. In this way these critics characterized Shakespeare as a rough genius who lacked taste, in Coleridge's words, as "a great Dramatist by a sort of instinct, immortal in his own Despite," a dramatist "wild indeed, without taste or Judgement, but like the inspired Ideots so much venerated in the East, uttering amid the strangest follies the sublimest truths" (LQL 1: 78-9). Coleridge's response to this view involved a twofold strategy. He made the

general assertion that "Shakespeare's Judgement was if possible still more wonderful than his Genius, or rather that the contradistinction itself between Judgement and Genius rested on an utterly false theory" (LOL 1:142). At the same time, he either denied that supposed defects were defects in the first place--indeed, he could recast them as merits--or, taking a very different tack, he used the relativistic, historicizing argument that they must be seen as the products of their own age, and not judged by universal, transhistorical standards. As the examples that follow will show, he defended Shakespeare's wordplay by using either of these latter arguments, according to the particular case.

In the fifth of the course of lectures on Shakespeare and Milton which Coleridge gave in 1811-12, for example, he argues the merits of Shakespeare's puns on the basis of psychological realism:

All things that had been highly admired by mankind at any time, or which have gone into excess must have been originally applicable to some part or other of our nature. They have become ridiculous only in the excess — but great geniuses having used them with the truth of nature & the force of passion, have extorted from all mankind praise, or rather won it by their instant sympathy. Men afterwards, most desirous of the end, & mistaking the end for a capacity of the means, have mechanically, and devoid of that spirit of Life, employed the terms. They enquired what pleased or struck us? It was this or that — and they imitated it without knowing what it was that made them excellent — or, that, excellent as they were, they would be ridiculous in another form. Such was the nature of metaphors, apostrophes and what were called conceits.

He would venture to say, though it might excite a smile — Punning. There were states in all our passions when even punning is no longer ridiculous — but is strictly, in a philosophical sense, a natural expression of natural emotion — (LOL 1:271)

It is important to note that the defence of punning is part of a more general defence of

a whole range of figurative devices. Coleridge, as one who has used punning conceits in his own poetry, is aware of the connections between the devices that we noted in the first chapter. He argues that figurative language has its origins in human emotion. Ordinary people quite naturally or spontaneously use puns, conceits or metaphors in moments of passion, and a great genius may use these natural effects in creating literature. Misuse occurs later when lesser writers use such devices in a mechanically imitative rather than an organically creative manner.

This is a sophisticated and appropriate argument in that it answers critics such as Johnson on their own terms. Johnson, applying the criteria of his own day to works of another era, criticized Shakespeare for his lack of literary decorum. Coleridge's reply turns Johnson's criticism against him: Shakespeare's puns are allowable in terms of dramatic decorum, as a matter of psychological plausibility within a particular dramatic context. Moreover, if "natural emotion" is universal and transhistorical, as Coleridge implies, then punning too may have permanent value. Hence, in the very next lecture he repeats the psychological defence of puns--"He could point out puns in Shakespeare where they seemed as it were the first openings of the mouth of nature: where nothing else could properly be said" (LOL 1:293)--while prefacing it with an attack on Johnson's own diction. The opening lines of The Vanity of Human Wishes,

Let observation with extensive view
Survey Mankind from China to Peru

are no more than "Mere bombast and tautology as if to say 'Let observation with extensive observation observe mankind extensively' —"(292). Shakespeare's language is natural and Johnson's artificial, in other words, and Johnson's stance of long-range

spectatorial detachment, the very opposite of dramatic involvement, makes the contrast all the more striking.

Yet, even in these lectures, where much of the effort is directed towards the repudiation of eighteenth-century views of Shakespeare's language, Coleridge links wordplay to other, more complex, linguistic and literary concerns. In the fifth of the lectures of 1811-12, having defended puns as discussed above, as "a natural expression of natural emotion," he goes on to consider the very nature of language itself, and its relation to the human mind, thought and the objects of thought.

The conceits which had been so rudely treated arose, one & all, from the circumstance that language is not, was not, and never will be the mere vehicle of representing external objects or simple information.

Horne Tooke had called his book Epea Pteroenta, winged words. In Coleridge's judgement it might have been much more fitly called Verba Viventia, or "living words" for words are the living products of the living mind & could not be a due medium between the thing and the mind unless they partook of both. The word was not to convey merely what a certain thing is, but the very passion & all the circumstances which were conceived as constituting the perception of the thing by the person who used the word.

Hence the gradual progression of Language — for could it be supposed that words should be no object of the human mind? — If so, why was style cultivated in order to make the movement of words correspond with the thoughts & emotions they were to convey, so that the words themselves are part of the condition? (LOL 1:272-3).

For Coleridge conceits--a term that he appears to use here, as elsewhere in his lectures and notebooks, with a wide definition⁴--demonstrate that language can never be isolated, either from thought on the one side or from its objects of reference on the other. This assertion directly opposes the eighteenth-century episteme of representation, as the first

sentence indicates. It denies the doctrines of Locke and certain of his followers of his such as Horne Tooke,⁵ for whom there was no natural connection between words and ideas, the relationship being one of arbitrary imposition, as we have seen. The argument is clearest in the third paragraph. Devices of style such as tropes and schemes, resemblances between words, or verbal patterns, have a signifying content in themselves. They correspond with or imitate thoughts and emotions in a way that, for Coleridge, is not entirely arbitrary, so that language itself is "part of the condition" that it conveys. In moments of passion, to put it another way, figurative language--conceits, puns and other devices--comes to us quite naturally and spontaneously and is therefore a "natural," rather than an arbitrary, index of the originating passion, in which it participates imitatively. The way in which we sometimes use alliteration to hammer home a point when in a state of high excitement might be an example of this, syllabic repetition imitating the very emphasis that it signifies. Nature, posited in opposition to arbitrariness and artifice, and passion, which may be carried through "naturally" from author to audience, are key concepts in this incipient theory of figurative language. The word "condition" may also be important. A condition is a state of being, and language, Coleridge can argue, brings out or elucidates the condition of things, thereby participating in them ontologically.

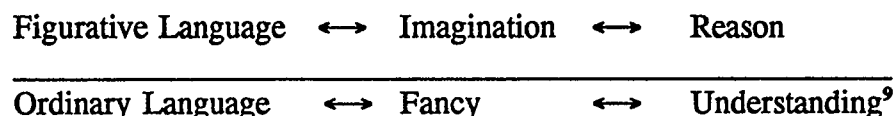
The argument from passion leads Coleridge to another key element in the theory, the connections among figurative language, emotion, and the creative imagination. Coleridge develops this theme in the seventh lecture, on Romeo and Juliet.

In other parts Shakespeare's conceits were, in Coleridge's mind, highly justifiable as belonging to the

state of age or passion of the person using them. In other parts where they could not be so justified they might be excused from the taste of his own and the preceding age; as for instance

Here's much to do with hate but more with love:
Why then oh brawling love! Oh loving hate!
Oh anything of nothing first created!
Oh heavy lightness! Serious vanity!
Misshapen chaos of wellseeming forms!
Feather of lead! bright smoke, cold fire,
sick health!
Still waking sleep that is not what it is! — 6

the point is relevant since Shakespeare is using Romeo in the quoted passage to mock the overworked sonnet conceits of his own and the preceding age. But Coleridge then proceeds to undermine the force of his own historicizing argument by claiming that these supposed defects are not "absolutely unnatural" since they are the "grandest effects" of the human imagination. In a lecture given in 1808 Coleridge had already defined the imagination as "the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others, & by a sort of fusion to force many into one" (original italics), using Lear as an example, "where the deep anguish of a Father spreads the feeling of Ingratitude & Cruelty over the very Elements of Heaven — "(1: 81).⁷ Lear, in his anguish, reconciles earth and heaven by spreading his feelings from one to the other; Romeo reconciles opposites in a rather different manner, producing the feeling of the "unimaginable" by hovering between the poles of paired, oxymoronic images. In both cases figurative language is essential to the unifying function of the imagination. And while Coleridge uses the sonnet conceit as his example, it seems evident that the hovering or "waving" metaphors that he applies in this instance are equally appropriate to the pun, or indeed to the vehicle/tenor relationship in metaphor itself. In this passage, then, Coleridge allies wordplay (as figurative language) with the poetic imagination and the faculty of reason. These are distinguished from, and privileged above, ordinary language, unimaginative thinking or perhaps fancy, and the lower faculty of understanding.⁸ We can represent this diagrammatically:



Moreover, we should recall that in the fifth of the lectures given in 1811-12 Coleridge had emphasized the unity of language and thought, that as "living products of the living mind," words cannot be separated either from the expressing mind or from the concept expressed. As a result wordplay may not merely represent, but can be inherently constitutive of, imaginative thought. Wordplay and imaginative thought are not of course identical. Not all wordplay, Coleridge would agree, is imaginative, and imaginative expression may presumably be capable of performing its reconciling function without the use of wordplay, particularly if we use the latter term in a relatively narrow sense. Yet I would argue that the connection is an important one that has been insufficiently emphasized in modern commentary.¹⁰ As we have seen, Coleridge links wordplay with the speaker's passion or emotion, and the same link applies to the imagination. In the definition of imagination mentioned above, its modifying or uniting power works through "one image or feeling," an expression that unifies language, thought and emotion, while in a later specification "true Imagination" is "that capability of reducing a multitude into unity of effect, or by strong passion to modify [a] series of thoughts into one predominant thought or feeling" (1: 249). Passion, imagination and wordplay thus tend to go hand in hand.

Even when he fails to link the two directly, it is evident that Coleridge's descriptions of the effect of puns and the imagination are very similar. In the twelfth of the lectures of 1811-12 he once again returns to the subject of punning, defending it in his usual way as the index of "the state of passion" of the speaker. Here Coleridge quotes Gaunt's deathbed punning on his own name in Richard II:

Old Gaunt indeed! and *gaunt* in being old:
 Within me grief hath kept a tedious fast;
 And who abstains from meat that is not *gaunt*?
 (R II 2.1.74-6)

"Who," Coleridge argues,

knows the state of deep passion must know that it approaches to that state of madness which is not frenzy or delirium, but which models all things to the one reigning idea: still to stray in complaining from the main subject of complaint and still to return to it again by a sort of irresistible impulse. The abruptness of thought is true to nature — (LOL 1:380)

For Coleridge "[t]he excess of fancy is delirium, of imagination mania."¹¹ Gaunt's mental state is clearly akin to that of mania, or excessive imagination.¹² Punning on his own name, he continually strays and returns from meaning to meaning, Gaunt to gaunt, much as the imagination persists in hovering between images, "still producing what it still repels" (1:311). Moreover, Gaunt's punning is not simply imaginative in a unifying or modifying sense, it also demonstrates the "natural" appropriateness of Gaunt's own name, forging a connection between name and nature, word and flesh. Dramatizing his condition, *gaunt* becomes "part of the condition," in Coleridge's earlier phrase (1:273).

In the two latter quoted passages Coleridge anticipates the well-known definition of the imagination in Chapter 13 of the Biographia Literaria:

The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living power and prime Agent of human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and different only in degree, and in the mode of its operation.

It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (BL 1:304)

For the purposes of the current investigation, two comments should be made. First, in these very general definitions there is no longer any mention of language as such. Second, in the particular case where the secondary imagination does work through language, these definitions provide us, via the passages examined above, with a relationship between figurative language, imagination, and Coleridge's theology. The secondary imagination is the echo of a repetition of God's own originating power as the "infinite I AM." If God creates the multiplicity of the world out of his unity, then the creative artist mirrors this reciprocally, forging unity from multiplicity. Coleridge's scheme, for all its Christian emphasis, has a Neoplatonic ring to it. Even if art, as imitation, is twice removed from the originating reality of God, the artist by using his or her imagination can struggle to "idealize" (God replacing the Platonic idea of form) multiplicity through unifying re-creation. As in the Renaissance, and in a manner that is quite similar to that discussed in the previous chapter, puns, conceits and related forms of wordplay can very easily execute this operation, as vehicles of the imagination. Indeed, vehicle is perhaps an inadequate metaphor. For if the poetic imagination is a power of thought, and if thought is inseparable from language, as Coleridge indicates in his lectures, then figurative language is no longer secondary. On the contrary, it becomes an essential part of the poetic imagination itself, coexisting with it and enabling it.

Coleridge's defence of Shakespeare's wordplay in the lectures is then threefold. He counters eighteenth-century opinion by arguing from historical decorum, psychological decorum, and the poetic imagination. The defence from historical decorum is a weak one for Coleridge, since it permits wordplay to become a defect and, at the same time, devalues Shakespeare as an author of and for his own age. If human psychology is transhistorical, then the second line of defence can claim to remove this difficulty. Much the same can be said for the argument from imagination--we should note that the definition in the Biographia is framed, no doubt deliberately, in universal terms. Yet if Coleridge seeks to make language and thought co-substantive, to use his own term, one can see that this move threatens to undermine all three defences, since human psychology and imagination may accordingly be as historically bound as the language that partly constitutes them. Shakespeare's universal "nature" might then become a purely temporal characteristic.

These are important considerations, and I shall return to them later. However, as we have already seen in the references to imagination, Coleridge is evidently not simply concerned to defend Shakespeare's wordplay in the lectures, but also to frame an evolving theory of poetic language. He refers to elements of this theory on occasions in notebook entries, letters and marginalia. It is to the more important of these references that I now turn.

Wordplay, Language Theory, and Poetics

In late November 1811, shortly before delivering the fifth of the lectures of 1811-12, which principally concerned Love's Labour's Lost, Coleridge made a long notebook entry on the play. An important portion of the entry, not mentioned in the lecture, considers Shakespeare's wordplay:

Sometimes connecting [disparate] thoughts purely by means of resemblances in the words expressing them — a thing in character in lighter comedy especially that kind in which Shakespeare delights, the purposed display of Wit, but sometimes too disfiguring his graver scenes — but more often doubling the natural connection in order of [logical] consequence in the thoughts by introducing an artificial & sought for resemblance in words (as in the third line of *L. L. Lost*) —

And then grace us in the disgrace of Death:

— a figure which often has its force & propriety, as justified by that Law of Passion which inducing in the mind an unusual activity seeks for means to waste its superfluity — in the highest and most lyric kind, in passionate repetition of a sublime Tautology (as in the Song of Debora) — and in lower degrees, in making words themselves the subjects & materials of that surplus action, the same cause that agitates our very limbs & makes our very gestures tempestuous in states of high excitement. (CN 3:#3113)¹³

In the latter part of this passage Coleridge is making the kind of psychological explanation of wordplay that we have already noted in the comments on Gaunt's punning in Richard II--the "sublime Tautology" of repetition is like mania in its action. Prior to making this observation he distinguishes between two kinds of wordplay, one of which is clearly far more defensible than the other. In displays of wit there may be no other connection between two meanings of a word than the punning resemblance in the

signifier itself, as is indeed often the case in witty repartee in Shakespeare. In the higher and more defensible kind of wordplay exemplified by the line quoted, the punning connection is doubled in the wider context of the play itself. McKusick, in an extended commentary on this notebook entry, has explained this wider relevance convincingly:

By foregrounding the word "grace," Shakespeare awakens his audience to its full range of meaning. . . . The simple phonetic contrast of "grace" and "disgrace" brings into contrast a whole set of thematic oppositions between life and death, time and eternity, which are fundamental to the play and which Coleridge evidently regards as a deep structure of logical progression. (109)

In juxtaposing and foregrounding various secular and theological meanings of "grace" and "disgrace," in other words, Shakespeare's wordplay becomes imaginative, producing unity by doubling connections that are already present in the drama. So *grace* functions as one of those presiding or overarching puns that I referred to in the first chapter. At the risk of oversimplifying I can suggest that Coleridge distinguishes an imaginative from a fanciful wordplay here, in parallel with the distinction between the unifying, reconciling power of the imagination and the merely aggregative action of fancy.¹⁴ Imaginative wordplay doubles the existing connection in the signifier at the level of the signified, and does so in a serious, unifying manner. Fanciful wordplay, on the other hand, has no such deeper significance. This distinction refines the third, or imaginative, defence of wordplay that I noted at the end of the previous section. Imaginative wordplay is in this scheme a type of artifice that doubles the "natural" connections between things imitatively; hence figurative language creates a second nature as it were, "naturalizing" signs so as to remove or reduce Lockean arbitrariness. Just as the secondary imagin-

ation, in the Biographia, can "re-create" unity (1:304), so imaginative wordplay can artificially recreate or partially redeem the lost paradise of a truly natural, or Adamic language. The distinction between fanciful and imaginative wordplay can also be related to Addison's hierarchy of wit, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Imaginative wordplay is evidently a form of "mixt wit" in Addison's terminology, bearing some of the characteristics of both true wit (resemblance of ideas) and false wit (resemblance of words). Fanciful wordplay, on the other hand, relies almost entirely on the resemblance of words for its effect. Coleridge's distinction therefore revises the hierarchy, not by making a complete reversal of its terms, but by elevating the middle term, mixed wit, to a position that equals, or even takes precedence over, true wit. The revision therefore negotiates a compromise with Addison's view rather than completely dismissing it.

The notebook entry cited above echoes an earlier (1810) note that develops a similar argument in somewhat different terms:

N.B. — In my intended Essay in defence of
Punning — (Apology for Paronomasy, alias Punning) to
defend these turns of words,

Che l'onda chiara

1 2

E l'ombra non men cara

1 2

in certain styles of writing, by proving that language itself
is formed upon associations of this kind, that possibly the
sensus genericus of whole classes of words may thus be
decyphered, as has indeed been attempted by Mr. Whiter
of Clare Hall, that words are not merely the symbols of
things & thoughts but themselves things — and that any
harmony in the things symbolized will perforce be pres-
ented to us more easily as well as with additional beauty by
a correspondent harmony of the symbols with each other.

Thus — Heri vidi fragilem frangi, hodie mortalem
mori . . . — So veni, vidi, vici. — (CN 3:#3762)¹⁵

It is striking that Coleridge shifts directly from punning to those wider forms of wordplay--assonance, consonance, alliteration and rhyme--that traditionally play such an important role in poetic language. Punning, far from being a defect, is exemplary, a figure that we can use to imitate and recreate that natural harmony of things which is itself the index of a higher, more fundamental unity. In punning discourse words are no longer arbitrary symbols but things themselves, participants in and imitators of external harmony. For Coleridge, to put it another way, the pun lies at the heart of a theory of language that has an aesthetic drive towards unity. Moreover, the aesthetic unity that wordplay promotes eventually leads to theology via the kind of argument that he uses in defining the imagination in the Biographia, as we have seen. This theological turn, like the doctrine of the "one Life" with which it is linked, gives the theory an outward rhetorical thrust that differentiates it sharply from a pure aestheticism in which poetic language is totally reflexive, about itself and for itself, Poe's "poem written solely for the poem's sake" ("The Poetic Principle" 272).

McKusick connects Coleridge's antithesis of wordplay and arbitrary signification to his notion of poetic "untranslatableness," in commenting on an earlier notebook entry:

On the [source of the] pleasure derived from Puns, and
Conundrums — words have a tendency to confound
themselves & co-adunate with the things —
(CN 3:#3542).

McKusick explains that if the doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness were always the rule, there would be no connection between the semantics and phonetics of words, and it should be possible to replace a word by a synonym without affecting meaning. In citing "untranslatableness" as a criterion of poetic excellence (BL 2:142), Coleridge denies this.

In McKusick's words, "A poem, like a pun, cannot be translated because its meaning is specific to the actual form of its words. The poetic imagination 'co-adunates' words with their referents, thereby establishing an ultimate connection between sound and sense" (32).

To the degree that this argument is Coleridge's as well as McKusick's, we could construe "untranslatableness" as a fourth line of defence for the poetic pun. This is important because it yet again demonstrates the centrality of wordplay to Coleridge's theory of poetic language, and thus supports the evidence from the lectures that we have already considered. There is of course ambiguity in Coleridge's word "things"--does he mean things in themselves, actual referents, or does he mean ideas of things, concepts or signifieds?--or does he perhaps mean both of these, opposing the dualism that separates mind and matter? McKusick, while using the term "referents," refers to signifieds, and would explain the "naturalness" of poetic language through the "co-adunation" of sound and sense. But Coleridge seems to yearn for something more than this, a connection between language and its referents themselves that is "natural" and binding.

In fact we have already seen how Coleridge achieves this natural connection, or reconnection, between language and the external world. Words do not so much merge with things as become things--"I would endeavour to destroy the old antithesis of Words & Things, elevating, as it were, words into Things, & living Things too," he had written to Godwin in 1800.¹⁶ Words become things when they "confound themselves" by imitating each other through resemblance, and this resemblance in its turn imitates

resemblances or harmonies in the world. As Coleridge no doubt realizes, there are limitations to this process, since the poet's ability to recreate harmony is partly determined by the historically contingent nature of language itself.

In this way we can see that Coleridge's theory is not in fact a naïve return to the Renaissance episteme of resemblance. He can readily grant a measure of truth to the classical view that the relationship between individual words and their referents is quite arbitrary. For the essence of the doctrine of linguistic harmony lies not so much in the resemblance between individual words and things as in the resemblance between verbal relationships and referential relationships. The poet then practises imaginative epistemology, shaping linguistic structures that are essentially true, in that they recreate valid relationships through homology or correspondence. The theory does not so much oppose the basis of the later episteme, in so far as this centres on the notion of the arbitrariness of signs, as it does its consequences, the separation of language from both thought and external objects of reference. If Coleridge looks back to the Renaissance for his poetic model, he does so in a way that takes the later view of language into account rather than blindly opposing it.

If imitative harmony is imaginative, in terms of Coleridge's later definition, it is also symbolic in the Coleridgean sense. The Statesman's Manual (1816) defines the symbol in such a way that it is closely related to his concept of the unifying imagination:

On the other hand a Symbol . . . is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole,

abides as a living part of that Unity, of which it is the representative. (LS 30)

Poetic language is symbolic, in these terms, both in so far as it is imaginative, imitating a higher unity or harmony, and insofar as it tends to fuse words and their meaning. The theory that Coleridge outlines in the 1811-12 lectures and concurrent notebook entries meets both these criteria. Hence the lectures represent an attempt to reconcile a theory of language that tends to privilege the particular figurative devices which found favour in the Renaissance, particularly puns and conceits, with more general and universal concepts that anticipate the later definitions of imagination and symbol. If the arguments put forward in the lectures are successful, then there is no reason why a contemporary Romantic poet should not be able to use these devices successfully. Indeed, the case can be stated in stronger terms: if the poetry of Coleridge's age is to be truly imaginative, then a contemporary poet ought to use these devices freely, central as they are to imaginative poetry. Coleridge did indeed do this, as I showed in the last chapter. Wordplay therefore links poetic theory and practice, and does this in a way that has never been truly appreciated. To understand this omission, for which Coleridge himself is largely to blame, I need to examine the implications of the theory behind his poetics of wordplay in more detail.

Theoretical Tensions

Had Coleridge actually written his "intended Essay in defence of Punning" (CN 3:#3762), he might have left us with a penetrating treatment that would have been

all the more useful for its wide and varied approach.¹⁷ The poet, the critic and the theorist of language would have met to critique and illuminate each other and their subject at the same time. The result, quite apart from its great value for modern scholars, might also have had a significant impact on the practical and theoretical poetics of the whole Victorian period, by anticipating, somewhat ironically, the "anti-Romantic" shift in taste that we associate with the revaluation of the metaphysical poets which took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. By discussing technique in a way that left little doubt as to its relevance to his own practice, Coleridge could have undermined the myth of creative spontaneity that so much of the canonical poetry of the age tends to promote. But then quite possibly he had no wish to do this. "Kubla Khan" posits an ideal fusion between the mechanical and the organic, conscious design and unconscious efflux, the builder and the rhapsode. But in both poem and preface it is the latter which prevails, thus helping to promote the ideology of inspiration and genius whose effects on the poetry and criticism of the succeeding century were so strong.

But this is only one example of a number of tensions or discords that may have inhibited Coleridge from attempting to address the subject in a comprehensive and systematic way. As we saw, in using historical decorum to defend Shakespeare's wordplay, Coleridge undermines the very claim of universal, transhistorical genius that other lines of defence tend to support. Hence the revealing apologetics of the statement that Romeo's oxymoronic conceits are not "absolutely unnatural" (LQ 1:311).

If Coleridge's puns and conceits hover or waver in oscillation, his attitude to them seems to do the same. So in a notebook entry of 1805 he confides that he has

learnt not always, at all, & seldom harshly to chide, those conceits of words which are analogous to sudden fleeting affinities of mind / even as in a *dance* touch & join & off again, & rejoin your partner that leads down with you the whole dance in spite of those occasional off-starts, all *still* not merely conform to, but in, & forming, the delicious harmony — Shakespeare is not a 1000th part so faulty as the 000 [sic] believe him. . . . (CN 2:#2396)

The entry is most revealing in that it combines striking allusions to both the poetry and the Shakespearean lectures with a pervasive sense of sin. Wordplay, as harmony, imitates that combination of unity and multiplicity which serves to link Coleridge's religious and aesthetic views, as we have seen. But now, as dance, it not only echoes the key phrase "*still* dancing" which I discussed earlier, it also figures a delicious promiscuity, a scene of transient couplings that are to be rebuked, even if "not always, at all, or seldom harshly." The passage is reminiscent of the closing stanza of "The Eolian Harp," in which the poet's wife darts "a mild reproof" to his

shapings of an unregenerate mind;
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring. (55-57)

The shapings include, in all the later versions of the poem,¹⁸ the climactic panegyric to the "one Life within us and abroad, / . . . / A light in sound, a sound-like power in light" (26, 28), the very theme that might seem to unite Coleridge's poetics, his anti-dualistic philosophy and his religious beliefs. This unity is, as both the notebook entry and "The Eolian Harp" indicate, a precarious one that is also characterized by a divisive tension.¹⁹

It is not difficult to understand the sources of this important centripetal/centrifugal

antagonism in Coleridge's thought. Puns and conceits provide the perfect synecdoche, or symbol, for a world of multeity-in-unity, as in the coda of "Frost at Midnight," in which God teaches "Himself in all, and all things in himself." But this sounds dangerously close to a pantheism in which the One and the Many exist, not in a relationship of hierarchy (as orthodox Christianity, via the "Ascent of Being," demands)²⁰ but of reciprocal equality. As Thomas McFarland points out, "[t]he identity of the One and the Many" is "the alpha and omega of pantheism" (69). Hence, as McFarland hardly needs to remind us, "[p]oetry and pantheism have much in common both structurally and historically" (274), since the principle of Multeity-in-Unity is central to each. So if pantheism exerts "[t]he strongest possible repulsion and the most extreme attraction upon Coleridge" (190), this antagonism is carried over into the poetry, where it lends an additional resonance to the vacillating, wavering imagery that already attaches itself, self-referentially, to wordplay. The "sinuous rills" of "Kubla Khan" align themselves with the arcuate geometrical outline of dome and caves, and anticipate the perfect, heavenly circle of Paradise. The poetic quest is thus an extraordinarily dangerous one, in which the poet negotiates a passage between, or even through, both circular good and erratic, sinuous evil. Extremes may indeed meet in Coleridge's thought, but they do so under conditions of almost unmanageable stress.

The tension between pantheism and orthodox religion is closely related to another antithesis that sets unconscious association against the conscious will. This too finds expression in "Kubla Khan." The Khan possesses conscious will but lacks associative spontaneity, while the reverse is true of the dreamlike productions of river and cave. To produce the "rationalized dream" that characterizes the highest poetry, one must harness

both extremes. Coleridge renounces his early adherence to the passive associationism of Locke and Hartley, as he describes in the early chapters of the Biographia, and at one point, in 1803, went so far as to identify the "streamy nature of association" with "the origin of moral evil" (CN 1:#1770). Yet he continues to recognize the fact that the kind of spontaneous, unwilld association that results in "Punarhoea" is an essential component of poetic creativity. In his lecture on Romeo and Juliet (1811) Coleridge praises Mercutio, one of Shakespeare's most agile punsters, as "a man possessing all the elements of a poet . . . the whole world was as it were subject to his law of association" (LOL 1:307). No doubt the faculty of Reason, which "without being either the SENSE, the UNDERSTANDING or the IMAGINATION contains all three within itself" (LS 69), can in theory reconcile and control such moral tensions, but they clearly put this containing ability under immense stress.

A further tension involves Coleridge's notion of the symbol. The Coleridgean symbol is distinguished from the arbitrary "picture-language" of allegory by its synecdochical character. Accordingly, it is characterized by

the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. (LS 30)

Moreover symbols are the vehicles of truth. In the Bible the imagination "gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are conductors" (LS 29). What happens, then, when we use puns, conceits and other related devices in poetic language as symbolic conductors of truth? On the one

hand, puns and conceits are ideal vehicles for this purpose, since they imitate the unifying character of the symbol through their very structure, which incorporates the higher truth of Multeity-in-Unity as a relationship between signifiers and signifieds. Signification then takes place, not at the level of ordinary semantics, but through the device, or through the imitative harmony of poetic language, both of which convey the higher truths of Reason in a way that is synecdochical and motivated, rather than one of arbitrary imposition. On the other hand, however, the more poetic or untranslatable language is, the more unsuitable it might seem to become for conveying the particular, precise truths of scientific observation in everyday life. Scientific truth, one might argue, should be perfectly translatable. Despite the fact that they should ultimately be united, the discourses of scientific truth and poetry tend to be differentiated. In the familiar definition, a poem is:

that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.
(BL 2:13)²¹

Coleridge frames this latter definition as part of a carefully constructed negotiation with the objections to figurative language raised on behalf of a scientific discourse and the classical episteme which privileged that discourse in the previous two centuries. What needs to be emphasized is that in distinguishing poetic and scientific composition so very decisively, he not only supports the clear separation between two discourses, but also identifies two distinct realms of truth, that of particularity, aligned with detailed

observation and the Understanding, and that of harmony, aligned with Reason and having affiliations with the unifying cast of religious thought. For Coleridge

Reason is the knowledge of the laws of the **WHOLE** considered as **ONE**: and as such it is contradistinguished from the Understanding, which concerns itself exclusively with quantities, qualities and relations of particulars in time and space. The **UNDERSTANDING**, therefore, is the science of phaenomena, . . . The **REASON**, on the other hand, is the science of the universal [It] manifests itself in man by the tendency to the comprehension of all as one. (LS 59-60)

There are then two languages and two sciences; but ultimately they must all be unified under the governing aegis of Reason. Scientific discourse and figurative language are resolutely opposed to one another; yet eventually they must be reconciled, just as all particularity, all difference, must be reconcilable as Multeity-in-Unity. The division that Coleridge opposes is analogous to one that Foucault locates within science, a split between the deductive and inductive, the formal and the empirical, which, in Foucault's account (245-7) becomes evident at this time. A striking indication of the way in which the dichotomy between two kinds of truth is reflected in Coleridge's own thought appears in his Logic, an incomplete work which was not published in his lifetime. In some notes on Aristotle's Categories, Coleridge attacks "sophistry," noting that the Greek sophists had used homonyms to reach false or ridiculous conclusions:

All just reasoning is confined to deductions from . . . what Aristotle called *Synonymes* / — for these the Sophists introduced *Homonymes*, & produced by this means the most ludicrous sophisms — ex. gr. —

Omnes canes latrent

Canis celestis est canis

Ergo Canis cælestis latrat —

And in the like manner by another sort of Puns sophisms

were made by the substitution of Paronymes for Synonimes
 — a species of nonsense, to which the Greek language is
 more obnoxious than ours. (Logic 287)

All dogs bark, the Dogstar is a dog, therefore the Dogstar barks. By using a very simple example, Coleridge trivializes the difficulties that language poses for logic, philosophy, and indeed all discourses that aim to demonstrate precise truths.²² Puns are to be admired and valorized when they unify multeity in poetry, and deplored when they mislead us logically. What might concern us about this passage is not just the fact that Coleridge, the erstwhile champion of the "one Life," and anti-dualistic thought, later seems to have compartmentalized his own thought (the Logic was probably written in the 1820s),²³ but that he did so without any acknowledgement whatsoever that the divided attitude towards wordplay which the passage implies is problematical.

How does Coleridge address this problem? If the distinction, or division, between poetic and scientific language is absolute, then he can allow wordplay in one but not the other. Such a solution tends to restrict the possibilities of the poem that deals with science, a problem that leads Coleridge to denigrate Erasmus Darwin's poetry as "this abject deadness . . . this superstitious Fetisch Worship of lazy or fascinated Fancy!" (CN 2:#2325). It also limits the philosophic poem to a "poetic" philosophy, separating the latter off from other branches of the subject such as logic. But this solution works only in so far as the two realms can indeed be kept well apart, an outcome that can hardly be an ideal one for Coleridge. In practice the result may well be the kind of wavering response we have already noted, in which wordplay is both chided (as bad logic or science) and admired as an imitation of Multeity-in-Unity at the same time. The

shifting semantics of *sense* in The Prelude, which Empson has discussed at length (1951),²⁴ might, for example, be faulted as logical sophistry and yet also praised for the way that it simultaneously points to the fact that all the meanings of *sense* are related, and imply a higher unity. The wavering between approval and disapproval would not then be a weakness, but rather an example of the way in which extremes meet, a demonstration of the very law of polarity that antithetical puns imitate through their structure. In this way, presumably, Coleridge can evade the accusation that his thought contradicts itself by promoting dualism.

Coleridge appears to allude to a similar problem when he makes a distinction between two kinds of wordplay in the notebook entry on *grace/disgrace* in Love's Labour's Lost (CN 3:#4113). Can we separate fanciful or comic puns from imaginative or serious ones which have a deep significance, "doubling the natural connection or order of logical consequence in the thoughts by introducing an artificial and sought for resemblance in words"? It is not difficult, quite evidently, to recognize that *dog/dogstar* and *measure* (in "Kubla Khan") are two very different types of pun. But it is equally evident that there is a large area of middle ground in which fancy, wit, or comedy, and a certain imaginative depth, may be present at the same time. Charades such as *Xanadu* and *delight* seem to hover between comedy and serious purpose, participating in both and deconstructing the hierarchical opposition between the two. For Coleridge, science and history produce ultimate pleasure by communicating immediate truth, while poetry ultimately generates truth even though its immediate purpose is pleasure (BL 2:12-13). It is only to be expected, therefore, that comic and serious extremes should sometimes

meet. Indeed, the pun that is both fanciful and imaginative may point to the possibility of reconciling these seemingly antithetical powers.

Since the essay on punning was never written, we shall never know quite how Coleridge would have addressed the tensions that I have outlined in the previous paragraphs. Figurative language stands in opposition, in very different ways, both to Coleridge's religious beliefs and to immediate truth, logic and the Understanding. Yet, like poetry itself, it imitates and symbolically participates in the higher truth of Multeity-in-Unity, which is aligned with the higher, universal faculty of Reason. Poetry, like the pun, can then be formally true and discursively false at the same time. To argue this apparent paradox further, to ask, for example, whether it points to an irresolvable contradiction in Coleridge's thought, or whether it is merely an opposition that awaits resolution, would be to attempt to write the intended essay on his behalf, and to risk distortion and misrepresentation. We must therefore leave the pun still fluttering, as it were, hovering between truth and falsity, Reason and Understanding, and resist the temptation to argue whether, in Coleridge's thought, it deconstructs or upholds the hierarchical separation between the terms of these pairs.

Yet, having said this, we can also see how the very tensions that wordplay foregrounds can serve to illuminate the nature of a related distinction, that between symbol and allegory, which, thanks to recent commentary, has assumed a fresh importance in the late twentieth century. Paul de Man's influential essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969) seeks to problematize this hierarchical dualism by showing how it puts Romantic theory and practice at odds. In theory Romantics such as Coleridge

seek a motivated, rather than an arbitrary, form of signification. Hence they privilege the synecdochical symbol over arbitrary allegory. De Man argues that, in the first place, Coleridge's use of the word "translucence" to characterize the nature of the symbol equivocates it by dematerializing it along with allegory (177). Aside from the fact that there may be a legitimate distinction between translucence (as a partial opacity) and pure transparency, it should be apparent that for Coleridge poetic symbols are material "things," structures of language whose formal properties both have a material being in themselves and, at the same time, imitate those larger aesthetic structures in which they participate. Puns and conceits are exemplary in this respect, and Coleridge's cultivation of self-referential wordplay is very much a part of a particular historical event, the denial of linguistic transparency that marks the end of the classical episteme and its ideal of direct representation in which signifiers must not affect, or infect, thought. This is a moment when, in Foucault's words, "language is ceasing to be transparent to its representations, because it is thickening and taking on a peculiar heaviness" (282). For de Man, the symbol seeks identity, while "allegory designates primarily a difference in relation to its own origin" (191). In seeking symbolic fusion of the human subject and the natural world, the poet evades the temporality of human existence by linking it with the permanence of nature. Allegory distances subject and object, thus avoiding the "self-mystification" to which symbolic language is prone. De Man then proceeds to link allegory and irony: "in both cases, the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous . . ." (192). They differ in structure, yet both represent "the same fundamental experience of time" (207). But for Coleridge, of course, the very antitheses

of irony are emblematic of a higher unity, via the law of polarity in which extremes meet. Organic unity, in Coleridge's thought, subsumes irony with no difficulty, since

Every Power in Nature and in Spirit must evolve an
opposite as the sole means and condition of its manifesta-
tion; and all opposition is a tendency to reunion.
(The Friend 1:94).

For de Man, irony is realistic, in that it reflects "the pattern of factual experience and recaptures some of the factitiousness of human existence as a succession of isolated moments lived by a divided self" (207). Given the religious cast of Coleridge's mind, he could never accept such an atomized, alienated view of human existence. In the same letter to Thelwall in which he recommends the study of poetic compression, he admits that his mind "feels as if it ached to behold & know something great — something one & indivisible. . . . But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity!" (CL 1:349). For de Man statements such as this are no doubt evidence of self-mystification, while for Coleridge the very desire for the "one & indivisible" is perhaps a sign of the latter's existence. There can be little meaningful dialogue between the two because they start from positions that are so far apart.²⁵ However, despite this, I need to emphasize that in his use of wordplay Coleridge does not simply deny temporality and difference in favour of symbolic permanence. Rather, fluttering, trembling and dancing, wordplay is alive and mutable, susceptible and subject to the chances or vicissitudes of temporality, even as, at another level, it imitates structures of unity and permanence. Yet, once again, this accommodation involves Coleridge's thought in uneasy tension. On the one hand symbol and allegory are clearly set in opposition to each other; on the other hand symbolic signification, "*still* dancing" ironically, forges a partnership between

permanence and temporality, unity and difference, motivation and arbitrariness, that might balance the two. No doubt the metaphor of dance, in which the partners "touch & join & off again" is an appropriate one for these equivocal oscillations in which Coleridge, rather typically, wants to have it both ways, or every way. And wordplay, as dance, is the ideal vehicle for such acts of paradoxical inclusiveness.

Notes

¹ For Coleridge's projected essay on punning, see also CN 3:#4444, and the notes to #3542, #3762 and #4444.

² Raysor's 1930 Shakespearean Criticism has now been superseded by R. A. Foakes' Lectures 1808-19; on Literature. All subsequent references are to this latter edition.

³ Coleridge's aims in the lectures are discussed in general terms by both Raysor and Foakes in the introductions to their editions of the lectures.

⁴ Coleridge uses the word "conceit" in three different ways in his lectures: first, in the modern sense, as a term for a particular type of Renaissance device (metaphysical conceit, sonnet conceit); second, as a more general term for a range of devices including traditional conceits, puns, bold metaphors and so on; third, for puns or bold metaphors themselves. See for example LOL 1:271-2, 288, 292-3, 311-13.

⁵ For discussion of Horne Tooke's linguistic theories and their place in Coleridge's thought, see McKusick (Chapter 2) and Fulford (Chapter 5).

⁶ Romeo's speech is from the first act (RJ 1.1.180-6).

⁷ See King Lear (3.2.1-24). Since Lear specifically denies that the heavens are ungrateful (16) Coleridge is, strictly speaking, incorrect, although Lear does in one sense spread his feelings over the heavens when he calls them "servile ministers" in league with his daughters against him (21-4).

⁸ For the most complete elucidation of Coleridge's distinction between reason and understanding, see The Friend 154-7.

⁹ In his manuscript On the Divine Ideas, Coleridge produces his own scheme in the form of a hierarchy:

Reason
Imagination
Understanding
Understanding
Fancy
Sense

A parallel note explains that "Fancy and Imagination are Oscillations, this connecting R. and U, . . . that connecting sense and understanding" (Brinkley 694). "This" and "that" must refer to imagination and fancy, not vice versa.

¹⁰ McKusick discusses the role of the imagination in the 1811-12 lectures in detail, but fails to make the particular connection between wordplay and imagination that I emphasize.

¹¹ See BL 1: 84-5, and LOL 2:332 and note 10.

¹² For the relationship between imagination and mania, see also McKusick, 104-8.

¹³ The song of Deborah, which includes much repetition, is found in the Bible (Judges 5.27). See also BL 2:57, where Coleridge argues, against Wordsworth, that the imaginative power of repetitive discourse must be dependent, not simply on passion alone, but upon the "number and quality of the general truths, conceptions and images, and of the words expressing them" with which the speaker's mind is stored. Repetition, to be imaginative, must have a unifying, connecting power that makes it much more than mere tautology, semantically speaking. The song of Debora differs from Johnson's "Mere bombast and tautology" in The Vanity of Human Wishes (p. 60) in two ways: the latter fails to use repetition at the level of the signifier, and, as detached "observation," lacks the unifying involvement of passion.

¹⁴ Coleridge distinguishes between "The imagination, or shaping and modifying power; the fancy, or the aggregative and associative power" in his Omniana (1812). See Hill 88.

¹⁵ The Italian phrases mean "that the clear wave, and the shade no less dear," and the first Latin one "Yesterday I saw something fragile break, today [I saw] something mortal die," in Coburn's translations (CN 3:#3762).

¹⁶ Letter to William Godwin, 22nd September, 1800, #352, CL 1:625-6.

¹⁷ In addition to the notebook entry of 1810, Coleridge also refers, in an undated marginal note to Donne's poems, to "an Essay I have written, called an 'Apology for Puns.'" But we have no record of such an essay (Marginalia 2:238). See also note 1, p. 89 (above).

¹⁸ The eight lines in the poem beginning "O! the one Life, within us and abroad," were added and printed as the Errata of the 1917 edition of Sybilline Leaves. See Abrams (163) and Stilling (34).

¹⁹ For discussion of the relationship of the "one Life" theme to Coleridge's philosophical ideas, see Abrams. Wheeler's chapter "Coleridge's attack on Dualism" (1993) relates his anti-dualism to a wide contemporary (eighteenth- and nineteenth-century) philosophical context.

²⁰ Jonathan Wordsworth (1985) discusses the importance of the "Ascent of Being" to Coleridge's thought.

²¹ See also Engell and Bate's introduction to the Biographia (BL 1:cviii).

²² It is very relevant that Coleridge's Logic "consists essentially in an analysis of what can be predicated by the understanding alone" (McKusick 119) and is therefore less concerned with the higher truths of Reason.

²³ Jackson gives a full account of the problem of dating the Logic in his introduction (xxxix - li).

²⁴ See Empson, "Sense in The Prelude."

²⁵ For a detailed discussion of de Man's article, written from a position sympathetic to Coleridge, that directly underscores this point, see McFarland (1990).

CHAPTER 4

COLERIDGE AND THE HISTORY OF WORDPLAY

In the last chapter I began, through the dialogue with de Man, to place Coleridge's views and practice in a historical context that exceeds the bounds of his own thought. It is within a wide historical context, I believe, that we can best achieve a meaningful overview of Coleridge's attempts to rehabilitate wordplay. This is particularly true since, as we have seen, he made no attempt to provide any totally coherent statement of his position himself, leaving it to others to gather together his fragmentary theoretical observations, and to relate these observations to his own practice. Hence, in conclusion, I will use the historical context as a convenient means of performing this task of integration.

First, I can deal quite briefly with the practical effectiveness of Coleridge's move to rehabilitate wordplay. With very little qualification I can argue that the attempt was ineffective. By organizing the Shakespearean lectures around individual plays, Coleridge no doubt provided a useful focus for his audience, but in terms of his wider objectives, the result was unfortunate, since key themes were then scattered randomly through the lectures, and never systematically presented or argued at length. As a result the lectures have suffered neglect in comparison with the better organized Biographia Literaria. Critics have borrowed and discussed individual observations and quotations from them, but Badawi's Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare (1973) remains the only book-length critical treatment. To this neglect we must add the fact that Coleridge's emphasis on a

psychological defence, which locates the generating impetus for wordplay primarily in Shakespeare's characters rather than in Shakespeare himself, tends to draw attention away from what is, surely, the far more important link between wordplay and the creative imagination. Indeed, the key gloss on *grace* in Love's Labour's Lost was, it seems, prepared for the lecture on that play, yet never actually delivered in it.¹ Neither the original audience nor subsequent readers of the transcribed lectures could, with the kind of cursory attention that a lecture presupposes, have easily realized that wordplay is, as I have argued, central to Coleridge's theory of poetic language. Even Badawi, who understands that Coleridge goes beyond a purely psychological defence, condescendingly reminds his readers that "we who live in an age interested in poetic wit and verbal athleticism, have been taught that there are other [than psychological] uses of pun [sic] as well as deeper motives" (176-7). Coleridge knew this too, but he failed to persuade others of it, as Badawi's remark indicates.

If the Shakespearean lectures were ineffective in this way, how influential was Coleridge's use of wordplay in his own poetry? The question is less easy to answer, but once again critical comment, or rather its lack, can help us. Only in the latter half of the twentieth century have critics paid much attention to the puns in Coleridge's poems, and this attention has, aside from Reed's chapter on "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Rand's "Geraldine," been minimal, usually a matter of a passing comment that points out a double meaning. No critic has dealt with Coleridge's use of conceits, or the way that his favourite device of antimetabole serves to link the poetry and prose, signifying Multeity-in-Unity in both. Coleridge's subdued, functional puns, dedicated as they are

to context and (for the most part) serious purpose, stand in marked contrast to the blatantly foregrounded comic puns of, for example, Hood, and this itself is an indication that they failed to set an example that radically altered the status of wordplay. To be sure, there are subdued, "uncomic" puns in the works of the other canonical Romantics and some of their Victorian successors. But one suspects that such wordplay is, for the most part, occasional rather than pivotal in the manner of Coleridge's repeated play on *still*. And it seems unlikely, even if the contention is hard to prove, that later poets were much influenced by Coleridge's own example.²

Neither the lectures nor the poetry, then, succeeded in rehabilitating wordplay in any measurable way. Coleridge failed to make any public connection between his own puns and conceits and those of Shakespeare; nor did he make any overt reference to wordplay in the *Biographia*. Here again, the various tensions I referred to in the last chapter are probably to blame. Why complicate the poetic imagination by referring to puns and conceits, if these must be introduced in a mixed tone of apology and praise? To make the imagination a "power" is an ideological ploy that identifies poetic excellence with genius and spontaneity rather than technique. In part, then, the reluctance to promote the merits of his own favourite devices may be ideologically motivated in a very human way -- genius must hide its reliance on technique and industry.

Yet, if neither Coleridge's theory nor his use of wordplay did much to change subsequent attitudes or practice, we can still grant them a retrospective importance in the history of wordplay in English literature. Almost uniquely, Coleridge combined theory and practice, even if he never advertised the fact. And this dual interest gestures back

to the Renaissance while, as I will show, it also anticipates modern developments.

In the Renaissance puns and other forms of wordplay were esteemed as figures of rhetoric, at a time when, under the governing episteme of resemblance, neither the distinction between figurative and ordinary language, nor that between words and the things they represent, was made with the degree of firm separation that was accorded to both at a later date. At that time, when various systems of thought -- Platonic, Neoplatonic and Pythagorean, for example -- joined with Christianity in promoting a sense of the unity of things, figures such as the pun and conceit could credibly imitate a higher, "metaphysical" harmony. One of the main reasons why Coleridge both defends Shakespeare's wordplay and echoes it in his poems is that he shares this belief. The imagination is a unifying power, and wordplay, as an exemplary form of figurative language, is imaginative discourse. The link between wordplay and imagination that Coleridge points towards in the Shakespearean lectures has already been made in the poems, particularly "Kubla Khan." Renaissance language and thought are in sympathy with one another, in other words, and Coleridge, whose own thought looks back in its desire for unity to that of the Renaissance, is naturally drawn to employ its characteristic rhetorical figures. Meanwhile Coleridge's wordplay, as we know, performs further functions, acting as a vehicle for irony, compression, and the delight of poetic play.

But if Coleridge's figurative language echoes back to a Renaissance "world that puns," it also resolutely opposes the hierarchical binarism of the post-Renaissance episteme of representation, which privileges signifieds over signifiers. Coleridge deconstructs this opposition in three ways: figures of Multeity-in-Unity, like poetry itself,

embody the very meaning that they represent; puns, as untranslatable figures, have a meaning that is specific to their linguistic form; and the self-referential pun emblemizes this by deconstructing the hierarchy that values signifieds over signifiers. Against the doctrine of linguistic arbitrariness he wants to "destroy the old antithesis of Words & Things" (CL 1:626) and, again, wordplay is his principal means of achieving this in his own poems. Where eighteenth-century thinkers separated signifiers and signifieds in the interests of scientific truth, Coleridge brings the two together, separating the discourses of logic and poetry as he does so. Where Johnson disallowed puns as low, deviant devices that led poets away from the high road of truth, Coleridge totally reverses this attitude, aligning them with the superior truth(s) of Reason, quite above the arbitrary discourses of the mere Understanding. As we have seen, this move brings on problems in its train, and as a result Coleridge fails to support puns and conceits openly in his major critical work, the Biographia Literaria.

When wordplay returns to favour, it does so for a variety of reasons. The re-canonization of Donne, Joyce's exploitation of the pun and portmanteau as the very essence of a writerly creativity (in Barthes' sense),³ and Empson's emphasis on ambiguity, all these gave the serious pun a new measure of respectability in the first half of the century. Concurrently Freud gave wordplay, as the uncensored language of the unconscious mind, an important role in his closely related theories of dreams and humour.⁴ Coleridge, most particularly in "Kubla Khan," seems to foreshadow all these developments, often in quite specific ways. The Freudian connection is perhaps the most interesting, in that "Kubla Khan" appears to relate wordplay, dream and the dualistic

conscious/unconscious mind in a way that suggests the linguistic notions that underlie The Interpretation of Dreams. There is a difference, however. For Freud, wordplay represents the dreamwork, primarily as the vehicle of the twin strategies of condensation and displacement. Puns in everyday life are a telling aberration, dreamwork that has slipped past the censor into consciousness. For Coleridge wordplay is, ideally, not so firmly located in the unconscious mind, for if so it would be purely associative. Rather, as a figure of imagination it hovers between the daylight hemisphere of conscious will and the darker caves of association and unwilled spontaneity. As the favoured instrument of the "rationalized dream" of poetry it must incorporate both poles of the mind. Shakespeare's pun on *grace/disgrace* is, in Coleridge's account, no spontaneous creation of unconscious thought, for example. Rather, Shakespeare manipulates wordplay quite consciously, "doubling the natural connection . . . by introducing an artificial & sought for resemblance in words" (CN 3:#4113), utilizing the unconscious resources of association in a thoroughly rational manner. Somewhat ironically, the Freudian/Lacanian emphasis on the unconscious, pre-symbolic origin of wordplay tends to promote its very conscious use in modern literature. But Coleridge was aware of this loss of innocence long before Freud, and exploited it with Shakespearean resonance in his poetry.

What the various twentieth-century developments I have mentioned have in common, albeit in ways that differ, is that they promote the return to favour of the signifier. If the fall and subsequent rise of wordplay is closely related to, if not totally governed by, the epistemic breaks and the changing attitudes towards language which accompanied these breaks, then this return to favour ought to have occurred a century

earlier. In terms of the history of literary wordplay Coleridge's importance then lies in the fact that he makes his attempt to rehabilitate wordplay at a time that is almost contemporaneous with the epistemic break (if one places this, as Foucault does, at the end of the eighteenth century). What we need to explore at this juncture are those aspects of Coleridge's use of, and attitudes towards, wordplay that connect it with the change in episteme, as the latter affects language.

We have already emphasized the self-referential nature of wordplay in Coleridge's poetry, and the way in which such self-reference gestures towards Foucault's moment when "language . . . is thickening and taking on a peculiar heaviness" (282). If much of Coleridge's poetic wordplay is symbolic in his own synecdochical sense, there is also a symbolic thrust to his theoretical notions--wordplay signifies Multēity-in-Unity by exemplary participation, the devices of imitative harmony participate in the wider reality that they render intelligible. Hence, in giving substance to the connection between Coleridge's promotion of wordplay and the change of episteme, historically contemporaneous notions of the symbol are of key importance, since they link Coleridge with other writers of his own time. Here my concern is not with the later attitudes of commentators such as de Man, but with Coleridge's participation in a broad contemporary shift in attitude towards poetic language.

This shift has been explored most fully by Tzvetan Todorov in a long chapter on "The Romantic Crisis" in his Theories of the Symbol. Todorov traces the origins of the Romantic aesthetic back to the late eighteenth-century writings of Karl Philipp Moritz. Moritz's works, which Todorov highlights, promote notions of aesthetic autonomy and

self-sufficiency. For Moritz, "seeing a beautiful object, I must feel pleasure for its own sake; to this end the absence of external finality has to be compensated for by an internal finality; the object must be something fully realized in itself" (Todorov 157). The beautiful work of art must be considered "as a whole existing for itself which . . . has its end in itself" (157). Todorov calls this aspect of the new aesthetic "external intransitivity" (157). Characterized by internal coherence, the work of art now signifies itself, and this intransitive self-signification takes precedence over any transitive signifying capacity that it also possesses. As a result signification in art is "an interpenetration of the signifier and signified; all distance between the two is abolished" (162). Through self-referentiality and internal coherence language becomes remotivated, and the relationship between signifier and signified is no longer purely arbitrary as in allegory. "Allegory is transitive, symbols are intransitive - but in such a way that they do not cease to signify for all that . . ." (201); or, alternatively, "[s]ymbols only signify indirectly, in a secondary fashion: a symbol is present first of all for itself, and only in a secondary phase do we discover what it signifies. In the allegory, designation is primary; in the symbol, it is secondary" (201). Here, surely, we can perceive a very direct connection between three things--the symbolic nature of the new aesthetic, the less-transitive "thickening" of language that signals the onset of the modern episteme, and the (symbolic) self-referentiality that I have noted as the most characteristic feature of Coleridge's wordplay. Indeed, combining referentiality with self-referentiality, "*still dancing*," Coleridge manages to capture the duality of transitive/intransitive signification with great economy.

Todorov convincingly links the onset of the new, symbolic aesthetic with contemporary political changes. The bourgeois subject has a certain internal coherence, and desires autonomy. Intransitive poetry is democratic; as Friedrich Schlegel explained:

Poetry is republican speech: a speech which is its own law
and an end unto itself, and in which all the parts are free
citizens and have the right to vote. (Todorov 176)

Wordplay, which participates in poetic intransitivity by foregrounding the role of the signifier, is now linked, through the "republican" nature of intransitive language, with the larger intellectual and social history of the times. And Foucault's notion of successive governing epistemes provides a useful contextualizing framework that can ground an understanding of this history.

As we saw in the first chapter, the change from the Renaissance episteme of resemblance to the classical episteme of representation parallels, and in Foucault's model governs, the dramatic fall of wordplay, the shift in attitude from approbation to disapprobation. The next crucial shift, or "mutation," occurs towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the modern episteme displaces the classical one. This change is neither so dramatic nor so amenable to concise characterization as the previous one. It is a shift whereby, in Foucault's three chosen fields of economics, language and life, what were originally uncomplicated, "transparent" means (production, grammar and syntax, biology) displace the ends (wealth, representative discourse, natural history) to which they were previously subservient (Foucault 207, 252). As a result of this displacement:

In the Classical age, languages had a grammar because they
had the power to represent; now they represent on the basis

of that grammar, which is for them a sort of historical reverse side, an interior and necessary volume whose representative values are no more than the glittering, visible exterior. (237)

Representation is no longer governed by its own objects; a "backward jump" occurs (281) in which grammar, which has its own independent laws, intervenes. Moreover since grammar is human grammar, and stems from the human subject, it follows that "language is 'rooted' not in the things perceived, but in the active subject," so that "one is simultaneously linking language and the free destiny of man in a profound kinship" (290-1). In this sense the change of episteme is a humanizing one, one that allows the human subject a certain free space, an independence, in all three fields. The rebellion of means against ends, if we can put it that way, is then one in which, just as signifiers now stand up for themselves and refuse the hegemony of signifieds, so the human subject rebels against an instrumental rationalism that would yoke it to the service of some abstract, or quasi-abstract, end such as utility or wealth.

This is a powerful synthesis that has striking resonances in both Coleridge and, more generally, the literature of the Romantic period. It allows us, immediately, to link two kinds of self-referentiality, linguistic and humanistic, in Coleridge's work. Self-referential wordplay, in which language reflects, as it were, upon its own being, now joins hands with (even if it is not identical to) that turn towards the volitional, emotional self, the human "I," that speaks and feels in Coleridge's conversation poems and, more or less concurrently, in the lyrical, inward, aesthetic turn that characterizes much of the poetry of the age. And, as we have seen, the Romantic shift from transitive allegory to

the intransitive symbol also registers and participates in this inward turn. Allegory is an instrumental figure in which the vehicle dedicates itself unselfishly to the tenor, whereas the symbol, participating in what it symbolizes, is both itself and the open, somewhat undetermined tenor that extends beyond it, more reflexively and less instrumentally. In de Man's terms the valorization of the symbol is less the avoidance of an inevitable temporality that one makes as an act of ideological bad faith than it is a gesture of reconnection that becomes, at the same time, anti-instrumental, so that reconnection is by no means a kind of univalent bondage. The generous polyvalence of the reflexive, symbolic wordplay that we find in words such as *device* in "Kubla Khan" is exemplary in this respect.

Coleridge is therefore an important figure in that he allows us to align the history of wordplay quite precisely with Foucault's succession of epistemes. Wordplay's return to favour (albeit a largely unacknowledged one) is now coeval with the classical/modern break, rather than lagging a century behind it. However, while this synchronicity undoubtedly lends credence to the general notion of governing epistemes it need not imply complete support for all aspects of Foucault's system, particularly its notions of the acausal nature of the break or mutation, and the imperious domination exercised by the episteme between breaks. In The Order of Things knowledge may, inevitably, have social consequences, but the epistemes are, it seems from Foucault's account, immune to the pressures of social change. However, Foucault's own shift to a socially involved dynamic of power/knowledge in later works effectively shatters this immunity, power having undeniable political and economic determinants, so that I can with some

justification argue the case for connections between epistemes and the socio-economic conditions of their times.

So the episteme of resemblance, which interweaves words and things, accords with a Neoplatonism in which "[t]here is a physical kinship, that is, an emanational continuity between every element of the world and the original One" (Eco 18). Umberto Eco relates this episteme to what he calls

Hermetic drift, the interpretive paradigm which dominated Renaissance Hermetism and which is based on the principles of universal analogy and sympathy, according to which every item of the furniture of the world is linked to every other element (or to many) of the superior world by means of similitudes or resemblances. (24)

The episteme of resemblance, which supports and employs wordplay, cannot be unrelated to the society in which it flourished, a society in which bonds of kinship and social obligation help to sustain a certain "organic" unity, albeit a very hierarchical one. Somewhat similarly, the episteme of representation must be related, if only in a very complex fashion, with the emergence of the market economy and its counterpart, the Baconian world of experimental science which separates things from words in order to observe, explain and manipulate them. The third phase, as we have seen, links Coleridge with the emergence of the modern episteme. In this phase the linguistic strategies of Romanticism and Modernism may both mediate, as a direct expression of and/or a reaction against, the "fragmentation and autonomization, the compartmentalization and specialization of the various regions of social life" that Fredric Jameson, writing from a Marxist standpoint, attributes to the industrial revolution and the development of modern capitalism (40).

If, more or less in harmony with the succession of epistemes, the status of wordplay traces out a concave arc, a fall from the world of resemblance to that of representation that is followed by a subsequent recovery, Romanticism stands close to the nadir of this trajectory. Coleridge reacts against the disapprobation of his own and the previous age, and would, despite some wavering qualms, change it to approbation. In this, as I have shown, he both looks back to the Renaissance and anticipates the change in attitude to wordplay that accompanies modernism. Aside from the controlling impulse that stems from the governing episteme itself, his motives for doing this are complex and overdetermined. Perhaps, to summarize much of this work, I can identify three primary areas of motivation. First, wordplay is a resource of great technical flexibility, allowing Coleridge to achieve effects of irony and compression that have an almost Shakespearean power. Secondly, it unites his theory and practice in a way that subsequent criticism, led astray by Coleridge's own example, has never truly appreciated. The Coleridgean pun is imaginative and symbolic, even as it images, or emblemizes, imagination and symbol. And, thirdly, it also has those wider, somewhat more intractable, ideological bearings that I outlined in the previous paragraphs. Moreover it can realize this motivational trinity all at once. But even now something is missing. If Johnson and other eighteenth-century writers tended, in their notions of linguistic decorum, to separate truth and pleasure, Coleridge brings the two together. And it is this dimension of pleasure that I want to emphasize in conclusion. For no doubt, like all punsters, Coleridge wants to realize and radiate a certain pleasurable delight through wordplay. As in Derrida and Lacan, this delight has its own ironic doubleness. "All men who

possess at once active fancy, imagination, and a philosophical Spirit, are prone to Punning," Coleridge observed in a marginal annotation to Böhme's Aurora, "but with this presentiment, that the Pun itself is the buffoon Brutus concealing Brutus the consul" (Marginalia 3:610). This is, of course, particularly true of Coleridge's own puns, which allow him to "co-adunate" his twin inclinations towards wit and philosophy.

Moreover, in transmitting this ironic pleasure, Coleridge's wordplay also expresses, or embodies, a certain "Esteesian" essence of S.T.C. himself. Richard Holmes notes Coleridge's fondness for bird-images in his letters and poetry. They "provide an image of the imagination at work . . . " and, at the same time, "a sort of self-image of his own fluttering, vibrating, uncertain identity" (80). Writing to Thomas Poole in 1799 of his projected life of Lessing, Coleridge comments: "I have imperiously excluded all waverings about other works — ! That is the disease of my mind" (CL 1:459). But he wavered anyway, and the life of Lessing was never written. Hazlitt noticed that the disease seemed to affect his style of walking:

I observed that he [Coleridge] continually crossed me on the way by shifting from one side of the foot-path to the other. This struck me as an odd movement; but I did not at that time connect it with an instability of purpose or involuntary change of principle, as I have done since. (Hazlitt 52)

More than just the index of his habitual procrastination, this wavering is, as Holmes realizes, the expression of something more fundamental in Coleridge -- the desire for wholeness somewhat checked by reality, perhaps, and therefore always shifting and hovering, or meandering sinuously, like the river in "Kubla Khan." The Coleridgean pun, trembling and fluttering, oscillating in difference, is also (in further self-reference

that accords with the inward, humanistic turn of the modern episteme) Coleridge himself, a kind of personal device or metaphor for the thinker as well as the thought, the coadunation of the man and his unifying, anti-dualistic philosophy.

And so, when we find him, S.T.C., encrypted in his own punning discourse, *still* dancing, we might think that this is his signature, his sign.⁵ But if this is so, it is as much a denial of personal authority as an assertion of it, for once we start searching for S.T.C.'s secret ministry within language, we may find it almost anywhere. And here again, disconcertingly, Coleridge seems to leap ahead of his own age. For this deconstructed self-in-language is not, surely, identical with the lyrical self that we might associate with Romanticism and the turn to the modern episteme? Rather, it anticipates the decentred subject of postmodernity, if not the doom-laden moment with which Foucault concludes The Order of Things, when "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (387). Does Coleridge, playing with words, then waver between the modern and the postmodern, even as he glances back to the Renaissance? Does the modern then carry with it hints of the postmodern from the very outset? Whatever the case, wordplay is still dancing, for now it is not so much Coleridge's wordplay as our own, or his and ours. The dance goes on, and we join it, as a measure of shared creativity.

Notes

¹ Foakes, following the earlier practice of T. M. Raysor, inserts the notebook entry into his edition (LOL 1:265-8), but the actual notes made by J. Tomalin do not include the key passage on "doubling the natural connection . . . in the thoughts . . ." (268-279).

² Swinburne may be an important exception. Like Coleridge, he favours the figure of antimetabole, and the line "Light heard as music, music seen as light," from "Thalassius" (31) suggests direct influence. Keats' use of *still* in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," on the other hand, is best treated as an overdetermined intertext.

³ See Barthes (S/Z 4).

⁴ See Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams and Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.

⁵ For Coleridge's play on his own initials in his "Epitaph" and other poems, see Rand, who claims that "where Coleridge stands, he may be said to sign," noting the key role of words such as "star," "stop," "stood" and "stranger" in the poetry (311-12). In "A Character" Coleridge explains the pun on his own name:

In fullest sense his name **ΣΤΗΘΕ**;

('Tis Punic Greek for 'he hath stood!')

Whate'er the men, the cause was good;

Poor fool, he fights their battles still. (72-6)

If "A Character" is a response to Hazlitt's charge of political apostasy, as E. H. Coleridge claims (PW 451), the wavering poetic contexts of *still* become very ironic indeed.

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