




# The Symbiosis of the Internal and the External and the Temporalisation of Social Space in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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## ABSTRACT

When the Albatross falls from the Mariner's neck into the sea, it metamorphoses into a symptom and the Mariner can cope with the demands of the social space only if he can tell his narrative to others. His narrative, which is fictionalization of his own unorganised psychodynamics, creates an interface between his subjective space and the social space of the wider world. His narrative functions for him as a *sinthome*, a self-narrative through which he creates a sense of self-continuity between the internal and the external. This is also an acting out of the Lacanian idea of the Moebius strip, which turns the Euclidean representation of space inside out, and which temporalizes space. His tale lacks unity in the traditional sense, but it has (psychological) coherence as his narrative as a *sinthome* provides him with a semantic ground on which he can meaningfully bring together all the fragmentary elements at the threshold of the imaginary and the symbolic. In this essay, I aim to give a Lacanian hearing to the interface between the subjective and the social, and discuss different forms of space along this interface created by/within the narrative(s) in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* using Lacanian ideas of symptom, *sinthome*, *jouissance* and the Moebius strip as my conceptual backcloth.

**Keywords:** Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Lacan, *sinthome*, Moebius



## Preamble

When the Albatross falls from his neck into the sea, rather than getting rid of it, the Ancient Mariner internalizes what is represented by the Albatross. It metamorphoses into a symptom that revisits the Mariner as an urge to tell his narrative to others. He can cope with the demands of the social space only if he can tell his narrative to others; thus, his narrative becomes a coping mechanism for him. Revealing its message to others but not to the Mariner himself, his narrative, which is fictionalization of his own unorganised psychodynamics, creates an interface between his subjective space and the social space of the wider world. His narrative can also be interpreted as an enigmatic message that becomes, both for himself and for his listener, a source of *jouissance*, the disruptive energy of the heterogeneous and fluid unconscious that invades the symbolic and converts its members into the opaque wisdom of the Mariner, as in the case of the Wedding Guest. In the aftermath of his encounter with the Mariner, the Wedding Guest cannot return to his previous social identifications and becomes disengaged from the social arrangements. In such a context, the Mariner's narrative calls into question the listener's relation to the symbolic and injects an alienating kind of energy into him. The Mariner becomes a subject who can achieve relief only after creating a rupture in the symbolic space through his narrative and luring others to his troubled psychic space. On the other hand, when we look at the fluid psychodynamics the Mariner is trapped in, it is also possible to say that the Mariner's narrative deals with the currency of the ego, which is an other and which is a two-partite construct involving the speaking *je* of the symbolic and the forbidden *moi* of the imaginary. His narrative functions for him as a self-narrative through which he creates a sense of self-continuity between the internal and the external. This is also an acting out of the Lacanian idea of the Moebius strip, which turns the Euclidean representation of space inside out, and which temporalizes space and provides an interesting corrective to Freud's structural/ topological model of the iceberg. In this essay, I aim to give a Lacanian hearing to the interface between the subjective and the social, and different forms of space along this interface created by/within the narrative(s) in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* using Lacanian ideas of symptom, *sinthome*, *jouissance* and the Moebius strip as my conceptual backcloth.

In his *Anima Poetae*, when he talks about his poetic practice, Coleridge says that he is seeking for "a symbolical language for something within [him] that already and forever exists," (1893, p. 136). In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, he seems to have found this "symbolical language" in the images and in their evocations charged with psychodynamic

resonances. The Mariner kills the Albatross with an impulsive act that becomes “the poem’s narrative, ethical and imaginative heart” (Stokes, 2011, p. 87) and which will shape the course of things in the forthcoming scenes. After he kills the Albatross, what the Mariner goes through speaks to the unconscious of the listener rather than to his consciousness. The ensuing psychic space is abundant with uncanny images that defy a rational treatment. They work on the listener/reader while words are inadequate to give expression to this interaction. However, he has to create a space within which these images can operate as tools to convey his experience, and he finds this space in the unmapped South Seas, which is outside the linearity and Cartesianism of the Western symbolic. In the world of these images, we have the operation of another kind of logic and its uncanny materiality as these images inhabit the Mariner’s unconscious.

Anne Williams departs from the Freudian readings of the poem as “classical psychoanalysis ... failed the ‘Rime’” and reads the poem as a poeticisation of the constitution of subjectivity within a Kristevan frame of thinking and “as a representation of semiotic intrusion into the symbolic universe” (1999, p. 240). She says that as a whole, the Mariner’s tale ignores the symbolic law of cause and effect and “his vivid images link with other powerful but usually tacit ways of making sense” (1999, p. 242). Williams underlines the correlation between the constitution of subjectivity and tale telling: the poem “enacts the process by which the speaking subject—the user of language, the teller of tales— is constituted.” In such a context, “the poem’s coherence resides in the interdependence of meaning and experience” (1999, p. 239). She further states that “realizing new, though unspeakable and unspoken, dimensions of reality,” “[n]ot only does the Mariner express the hitherto unimaginable, he also, peculiarly, represents the mother. He is an archetype... whose hypnotic ‘glittering eye’ ... implies the Lacanian phallic gaze of simultaneous identity and alienation.” She takes the poem as a “fusion of female with male” and refers to him as the “mariner mother” (1999, p. 241).

Although a Lacanian reading of the poem acknowledges the majority of the points in this Kristevan hermeneutic, it radically departs from it on the point of whether the Mariner’s tale aims to ignore the symbolic law or whether the Mariner can be regarded as the “mariner-mother.” A Lacanian reading suggests that rather than ignoring the symbolic Law, the tale creates for the Mariner an opportunity to be able to locate himself once more in the symbolic, and with his tale he reconciles the logic of the signifiers with the non-linear logic of the images through the Lacanian *sinthome*. Thus, the tale itself becomes a textual space where these different forms of logic intersect

within a *sinthome*. Although I take the Mariner's quest as an account of the anatomy of art in a Kristevan line of thinking, I depart from it suggesting that his tale is a *sinthome* that enables him to achieve his psychic coherence within the symbolic.

Williams takes the tale as a "revolutionary disruption of the law of the father" that fails "to mesh with the structures that impart meaning to experience" (1999, pp. 242-243). I reverse this hierarchy and suggest that the Mariner's experience is disruptive of the Law, but his tale is an attempt to relate to the coherence of the symbolic. The difference between a Kristevan and a Lacanian hermeneutic is that while the former cherishes the disruptive semiotic, the latter underlines the homogenising and the stabilising power of the symbolic. In the case of the Mariner, the narrative can maintain its stabilising function only for a short while and the Mariner has to tell his narrative over and over. In such a context, the narrative activity itself acquires a stabilising potential as in the aftermath of it, the Mariner is relieved of the tension his repressed psychic material created. Then, the tale represents the semiotic (Williams, 1999, p. 243) but it also symbolises it or translates it into the logic of the signifiers. The psychic significance of the Albatross and its relevance to his narrative occupy the centrepiece of any hermeneutic endeavour. In a previous attempt to read the poem within a Lacanian frame, Birlik (2010) focused on only the Albatross as the symptom but failed to extend her reading to the tale telling itself and the different forms of spatial logic that clash with each other in the poem. This essay seems to be a complementary afterthought to Birlik's previous analysis of the Albatross as a symptom as it aims to relate its psychological resonances to the narrative in terms of the intersection of different spaces.

## **Reduction of the Symbolic to the level of the Imaginary in the poem**

The poem tells the story of a bizarre looking sailor who travels from one place to another. He captivates his listeners with his eyes, and he can achieve relief only after telling his tale to people whom he does not know beforehand but whom he can convert to his own plane of existence. This process is a vicious cycle for him as he creates a different site of existence through tale telling within which he can get rid of the anxiety he has, only for a short while. In the early lines, there are constant references to "his glittering eye" and its captivating power. The fact that the eye is used in the singular might be indicative of a totalizing specular captivity rather than a simple reference to the eyes. The word "glittering" adds up to this view as there is something uncanny in his "eye." Without following any code of courtesy, he starts telling his story, which

becomes a kind of foreshadowing element for us, indicating that the Mariner acts out of convention. The irony here is that he chooses a Wedding Guest, who, as the word wedding indicates, is a stabilizer of the conventions.

If we put the words the poem employs to talk about this old man under scrutiny, we notice that they are usually related to the way he tells his story, his eyes, anxiety, relief and his rootlessness, and their implications keep changing in the course of the poem. In such a context, space becomes important as the external setting determines the changing implications of these words or the Mariner's move from one context to another is characterised by a spatial logic particular to that context. In other words, the implications of these words are contextual and are re-contextualised as the kind of space within which they appear determines their semantic and evocative boundaries. To be able to analyse the changing implications of these words, then, first we should look at different forms of space in the poem, physical space, symbolic/social space, psychic space or narrative space, or sometimes a combination of all of them.

The Argument, which is given at the beginning of the poem, refers to two different kinds of space as the known and the unknown. It underlines that the poem tells:

How a Ship, having first sailed to the Line, was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country. (2004, p. 58)<sup>1</sup>

This Argument implies that the course of events in the poem will take place in the unmapped, "cold Country" and the familiar social space of "his Country." In fact, the poem proceeds through the basic binary opposition between these two spaces and organizes the other binarisms along the division between them. The other polarities are between the two opposing forms of logic, subjectivity, temporality, law, and semantic system that dominate in these spaces. The same opposition extends into the polarity between the pre-linguistic and the linguistic, the imaginary and the symbolic, the Virgin Mary and Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> In this essay, the quotations from the poem are taken from the 1834 edition of the poem in N. Halmi, P. Manguson & R. Modiano (Eds.), (2004). *A Norton Critical Edition: Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*. New York & London: W.W. Norton. The quotations are indicated by line numbers.

In the early lines, when the Mariner talks about the location of their departure, topographical elements attract attention. He refers to the Kirk, the hill and the lighthouse, which are all, in a Freudian sense, phallic images, and the combination of which refers to commonality and a shared social space. Within a psychoanalytical frame of thinking, we can say that the Kirk represents the Father, the lighthouse represents civilisation and the hill represents phallic elements in a patriarchal culture. The early lines establish the first example of binarism between what the earth with its vertical Kirk, hill and lighthouse and what the sea with its horizontal shapelessness, amorphous and fluid nature represent. He says that they are driven by a storm blast towards the South Pole, where no familiar being in man or animal shape lives. This uncanny space of the sea accommodates a special/spatial kind of logic that is dominated by images, and which allows the Mariner to act out his unconscious psychic mechanisms. This untrodden space is the uncanny world of images, of which he cannot make sense with his reasoning mind:

And now there came both mist and snow,  
And it grew wondrous cold:  
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,  
As green as emerald.

....

The ice was here, the ice was there,  
The ice was all around:  
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
Like noises of a swound! (lines 51–62)

Due to the snow fog, there is no clear visibility in this world of images. Their ship is visited by a friendly Albatross; however, without a valid reason, the Mariner kills the Albatross with an impulsive act. In its aftermath, the weather gets friendly for a short while but it does not last long. The Albatross is avenged shortly afterwards by a non-definable space that is horrifyingly surrealistic:

The very deep did rot: O Christ!  
That ever this should be!  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout  
 The Death-fires danced at night;  
 The water, like a witch's oils,  
 Burnt green and blue and white. (lines 123–130)

Instead of the Cross, his friends hang the Albatross around his neck. They cannot speak and pray in this space, which indicates that the death of the Albatross has something to do with their acculturated positions. As if “choked with soot,” they can no longer speak and the space is invaded by the uncanny elements. Then, a spectral ship arrives with its crew of Life-in-Death and Death. After the appearance of Life-in-Death, this space becomes even more surrealistic and assumes the non-linguistic elements of what Lacan calls the Real, the pre-linguistic brute reality without consciousness, which does not come to light in the symbolic (2006, p. 324):

I looked upon the rotting sea,  
 And drew my eyes away;  
 I looked upon the rotting deck,  
 And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;  
 But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
 A wicked whisper came, and made  
 My heart as dry as dust.

....

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,  
 Nor rot nor reek did they:  
 The look with which they looked on me  
 Had never passed away. (lines 240–256)

This is the space where there is no other human soul and where God does not reign, “So lonely ‘twas, that God himself / Scarce seems there to be” (lines 599–600). The external world in this unmapped territory is depicted by the uncanny images that are “gothically sublime” (Stokes, 2011, p. 89). The overwhelming presence of these images operating on a logical mechanism different from the one we are familiar with implies that the Mariner regresses to the Lacanian imaginary register. However, this regression implies not going back in time but the reduction of the symbolic, the domain of the

Law/paternal metaphor, to the level of the imaginary, which bespeaks a beyond in language. In this psychic space, the Mariner cannot disconnect himself from the images in his immediate surroundings and cannot have a sense of who he is free from them. In such scenes, "the boundary between perceived and perceiver" dissolves (Ward, 2013, p. 73). In a similar line of thinking, Brice says, "[w]hile Coleridge seems to deliberately personify nature by attributing human-like qualities to otherwise inanimate objects, these same objects play a constitutive role in articulating and defining the very category of 'personhood' through which they are purportedly described" (2007, p. 97). Likewise, Haven suggests that "[b]y his physical presence, the Mariner stands as a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the commonplace reality of the outer, public world and the extraordinary reality of the inner world of consciousness" (1969, p. 20). We can take these images as a metonymic extension of his psyche or we can say that he regresses from the plane of intersubjectivity (of the symbolic) to that of the intrasubjectivity or the identificatory processes in the imaginary.

We might feel compelled to ask the reason for this psychic regression and change in space to make sense of the forthcoming scenes. The pre-symbolic connections with the mother cannot be literally re-established once the infant goes through castration, but the adult re-establishes these connections in symbolic modes in the face of a traumatic experience, as in the case of Hamlet, or due to an external element that triggers psychic regression in him. This could be the reason that justifies the Mariner's psychic metamorphosis in the uncanny space of the South Seas; he regresses to the imaginary after his encounter with the Albatross. Obviously, this bird becomes the signifier for something the Mariner cannot tolerate in his unconscious. With the impulsive act of killing it, he wants to relieve himself of the disturbance created by the bird. Due to the lack of enough biographical detail, there is no way for us to tell what it represents for the Mariner, but the course of events in his life after he kills the Albatross hints that the Albatross was also a signifier of *jouissance* for him. "Lacan redefined the pleasure principle as *jouissance* or a sense of Oneness, and reshaped the reality principle to refer to a separation evoked by language and Law (Castration), which ends the mirror stage" (Ragland-Sullivan, 1987, p. 139). *Jouissance* is the subversive experience that, on the one hand, gives him pleasurable pain or unconscious pleasure and, on the other hand, poses a threat to his assumed ego unity in the symbolic. Thus, the Albatross is also the signifier of ambivalence, signifying different things to his unconscious and consciousness. It signifies a friendly bird bringing good luck with itself to his conscious self; however, what it signifies to his unconscious shatters all the symmetries in his ego boundaries.

Within a Lacanian universe, the prohibition of *jouissance* characterises the symbolic structure of language: "That is clearly the essence of law-to divide up, distribute, or reattribute everything that counts as *jouissance*" (Lacan, 1998, p. 3); therefore, *jouissance* is forbidden to the speaking subject. Then his act of killing the Albatross might result from his impulse to maintain his position and his identifications in the symbolic (Birlik, 2010, p. 88). This impulsive act also seems to be an objectification of an inner drama in his psyche.

We might also ask, why is killing the Albatross so important and why is he avenged so harshly? He pays a dear price for violating the rules of hospitality by killing the Albatross because it is loved by the Polar Spirit; this is the justification given in the poem for all the pains he suffers. In Lacanian terms, if we take the Polar Spirit as a metaphorical incarnation of the (m)Other,<sup>2</sup> this justification makes more sense. As explained above, since he regresses to the imaginary after his encounter with the Albatross, by killing this bird, he wants to transform himself from the domain of the (m)Other to the domain of the Law, the shared Other. However, ironically, this killing, rather than consolidating his ego unity, leads to the opposite end; it drags him forcefully to the imaginary register of the pre-symbolic. The text does not provide ample evidence about his psychic material regarding why this killing leads to the opposite end. This point remains one of the grey areas left unclarified in the poem. However, this ambiguity should not be taken as a shortcoming; in fact, it is due to such loopholes in the Mariner's narrative that we go back and read the poem over and over as these loopholes enable us to dig up different hermeneutical implications in each reading.

The fact that the sea is a domain where the mariners pray to the Virgin Mary rather than to Christ and where, in the words of the Mariner, the Albatross around his neck replaces the Cross refers to another binary opposition between the spaces where the paternal metaphor and the (m)Other reign. The Albatross hanged around his neck indicates that he was translocated from one space of identification to another, from the domain of the Other/the Father to the domain of the (m)Other, or from intersubjectivity to intrasubjectivity. In this domain, rather than the binary oppositions being stabilized, categorized and rationalised by the symbolic, he encounters the imaginary real, which communicates itself through the images and which is an extra-linguistic domain. "Here

2 In Lacanian epistemology, the Other has a double nature as "the Other as both 'inside' and 'outside'; as both 'discourse of the unconscious' and the social substance" (Hook, 2008, p. 57). To avoid any conceptual confusion, the first will be referred to as the (m)Other and the second as the shared Other or simply as the Other.

the words and their semantic layers become dysfunctional and all the natural phenomena are relocated in a phantasmagoria where the uncanny elements reign" (Birlik, 2010, p. 88). Very suitably, after killing the Albatross, the Mariner cannot command words and pray as they are the components of the domain of the paternal metaphor, the Father. The imaginary register is dominated more by the specular rather than other kinds of images (Lacan, 2006, p. 77); therefore, what the eyes perceive is significant in this register. Very suitably, the text seems to be haunted by references to either the "eye" of the Mariner or the eyes of other mariners.

As stated above, these images, rather than depicting the external nature, seem to project the inner drama of the Mariner. In such a context, rather than a language of reference or denotative language, his narrative employs an evocative language. This view can also explain the metonymic nature of these images. They appear as fragmentary and discontinuous in the absence of linearity. In this world, the working mechanisms of the causes and effects seem to indicate a different kind of logic. Images have to be taken as the signifiers whose signifieds cannot be located in the symbolic as they defy the logic of the symbolic or the logic of the signifiers in the symbolic. Here, one cannot help but remember Lacan's idea suggesting that the unconscious is structured like a language but its line of logic is different from the logic of the symbolic (Lacan, 1992, p. 37).

After killing the Albatross, as a penance, the Mariner is taken by Life-in-Death and the other sailors are claimed by Death. Their death is a strange kind of death; they die with their eyes open. This is something less than a literal death as it highlights the psychic repositioning of the Mariner, who is captivated within the imaginary while his friends are still in the symbolic. They have already died to the intrasubjectivity to which the Mariner regresses. As "the great 'No' of life" (Mellard, 1991, p. 163) or the Great Master (Lacan, 2006, p. 100), death is the biggest castrating element in a Lacanian frame of thinking, and our culture is based on murder. This murder is a reference to what happens to the authentic psychic material during primary repression and linguistic castration. Then, we can take Life-in-Death and the Mariner's relationship with her as another indication of regression to the pre-castration domain of the imaginary from the domain of language, Death.

When he looks down at the sea, he sees the slimy creatures, which might be taken as an objectification of the imaginary real of the pre-symbolic. However, when he blesses them unaware, he incorporates them into the domain of language, thus making

them part of the symbolic, which gives him relief. The act of blessing is full of symbolic connotations as it implies attaching spiritual significance or granting acknowledgement to the slimy creatures in religious terms. This can only take place in the domain of the paternal metaphor. The snake is an archetypal phallic image, and by blessing the snakes, the Mariner transposes them from one phallic domain to another, from the domain of the (m)Other to the domain of the shared Other. This is followed by the fall of the Albatross to the sea, which is a replay of the process of the previous transformation of the snakes:

O happy living things! no tongue  
 Their beauty might declare:  
 A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
 And I blessed them unaware:  
 Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
 And I blessed them unaware.

The selfsame moment I could pray;  
 And from my neck so free  
 The Albatross fell off, and sank  
 Like lead into the sea. (lines 282–291)

As can be seen in the above lines, the fall of the Albatross and the return of his ability to pray take place at the “self-same moment.” He can incorporate both the snakes and the Albatross into his language. Shortly afterwards, it rains and the Virgin Mary gives him relief as he is touched by the “gentle sleep from Heaven / That slid into [his] soul” (lines 295–296). In the aftermath of this blessing, the Albatross leaks into the sea, but this physical separation points at a more intense form of connection: the Mariner internalizes what the Albatross represents, that is, he once more represses its signified in the unconscious, and due to this act of repression, he transforms the bird from a literal to a metaphorical level. Now the Albatross implies more than the physical presence of the bird, it has unconscious resonances/implications which are beyond the grasp of the Mariner (and also of the reader) as they are repressed. This is also a transition from the world of images to the world of words (Birlik, 2010, p. 90). Very suitably, only when the Albatross leaks into the sea can he start praying. However, he cannot get rid of its disturbing implications as it disappears physically to be resignified psychically for the Mariner. In fact, it “becomes a symbol of despair” (Reid, 2006, p. 78) due to what

it signifies to the Mariner's unconscious or due to the unconscious psychic material it corresponds to. The ambiguity in this correspondence is one of the hermeneutical loopholes in the Mariner's narrative that enriches the implications of the poem.

He can achieve relief only when he can put the Albatross and what it represents into words, that is, when he articulates in words what he experienced in the extra-linguistic domain. This paradoxical act of putting into words something that defies the logic of signifiers and achieving relief in its aftermath can also be taken as a symptom, which for Lacan is "the signifier of a signified that has been repressed from the subject's consciousness" (2006, p. 232). As stated previously, the symptom is the return of the repressed material, but this process also involves a compulsion to repeat as the symptom is a signifier whose signified is located in the unconscious. That is, the Mariner cannot carry its psychic signified into the domain of language. If he could achieve this transition, he could assert this enigmatic signified within the logic of the signifiers of the symbolic and achieve a total relief and the symptom would disappear. That is, inserting this disturbing material into the language would lead to getting rid of its disturbing aspects.

## **The Act of sublimation and its aftermath**

What is the significance of his act of blessing the snakes, in psychoanalytic terms, then? Blessing the sea snakes is the first instance of sublimation in the poem. At this point, what Haven says about the changing implications of the snakes is interesting:

The Mariner does not go from this place to that place, from this time to that time. What changes is not his location but his relation to the world around him, the structure, so to speak, of his experience. The water snakes whose beauty he blesses are the same creatures whose loathsomeness repelled him. (1969, p. 20)

The snakes as the phallic archetype, in fact, trigger his energy to be transformed to the site of the shared Other from the site of the (m)Other. He displays an urge to "move along the linguistic chain" and to be part of the social network (Birlik, 2018, p. 248). In other words, the Mariner is seeking the intrinsic link between his desire and the symbolic. When he sees the Hermit on the Pilot's boat, he is happy as he can confess what he did to the Albatross and be absolved of his sin. The fact that he wants to confess as soon

as he sees the Hermit can be taken as another indication of his urge to be integrated into the symbolic, the domain of the paternal metaphor, and to be acknowledged by the Father.

Shortly after his confession to the hermit, he recognises his country with its Kirk, hill and lighthouse. This is his re-entry into the phallogentric space of the Law. However, he cannot position himself in the symbolic on a stable ground as it becomes impossible for him after his contact with the Albatross and what it represents. As stated above, this regression changes into a symptom as the energy of the ego remains dysfunctional to repress thoroughly the disturbing material represented by the symptom.

The Albatross is integrated into the world of words, but the Mariner has to grapple with its residues. It leaks into the sea, leaving behind an unbearable anxiety that revisits the Mariner in the form of a compulsion to repeat his narrative. This is another way of saying that the Mariner relates himself to the symbolic space, but there is still something deeply anchored in him that resists the logic of the signifiers. After his return to the symbolic space, he starts to see the ocean, not white or not imbued with uncanny imagery, but green. However, he also has reminiscences of what it was like after his encounter with the Albatross:

And now this spell was snapt: once more  
I viewed the ocean green,  
And looked far forth, yet little saw  
Of what had else been seen— (lines 442–445)

He feels that he is being haunted by “a frightful fiend,” a demonic being he cannot put into words. This too is an imaginary residue that cannot be contained by and within language:

Like one, that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turned round walks on,  
And turns no more his head;  
Because he knows, a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread. (lines 446–451)

When the Mariner tells his story, which has the overtones of a ritual enactment of his psychic material, to the Wedding Guest, there is another ritual going on inside the bride's house. Rather than going to the Wedding, "'Tis far sweeter" to him "To walk together to the kirk/With a goodly company!" (lines 602–604). In Lacanian terms, his lack of interest in the social arrangements implies that the Mariner's incorporation of his unconscious desire within social signification is not without trouble. His return to the symbolic can be taken as an extension of his urge to integrate into the space of the paternal metaphor. However, this interpretation falls short in explaining why he is doomed to rootlessness or why he prefers going to the Church to pray rather than to the wedding. His remedy to all the worldly problems is Love, and he says, "He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small" (614–615). Now, he acknowledges the metonymic extension of the Father / Law, "For the dear God who loveth us / He made and loveth all" (616–617). This is also the sublimation of his love as in the case of the mystic. Thus, his transition from the space of the Virgin Mary to that of the Father's comes full circle.

### **Narrative as the *sinthome***

We have two cases of the return of the repressed psychic material in the text. The first one is the Albatross, which appears in the form of a signifier. The second case that comes into being in the aftermath of the Albatross's metamorphosis into the signifier of the Mariner's symptom is his narrative, which designates a signifying formulation. It bears some resemblance to the Albatross as the symptom but it is also more than it as it is in the form of a statement. Both the Albatross and the narrative are products of the same psychic mechanisms, but they differ in their implications. Through his narrative, he can achieve a re-living of experiences and the abreaction of the affect attached to them. Affect implies the "[d]ischarge of the emotional energy associated with a psychic trauma that has been forgotten or repressed; the process of bringing such a trauma back to consciousness" (OED). However, the articulation in speech of the truth about desire remains impossible. In other words, he cannot pass from the affective to the intelligible; therefore, his narrative works on the others and creates a metamorphosis in them, but its implications remain a mystery for the Mariner himself.

After confessing to the Hermit, he cannot enjoy long-lasting relief from his symptoms; in fact, it metamorphoses into a narrative that assumes the elements of what Lacan regards as the *sinthome*. There is an interesting parallelism between the Mariner's

transition from the Albatross as the symptom, the bird, to his narrative about the Albatross and Lacan's transition from the symptom to the *sinthome*. In his seminars and writings, in the late 50ies he took the symptom as a ciphered message that does not "call for interpretation" that is "which is not a call to the Other but a pure *jouissance* addressed to no one" (Wilson, 2015, p. 37). From this linguistic definition of the symptom as a signifier, he moved to the definition of the *sinthome* as a statement which is "a symptom cultivated as an artistic activity" and "a mode of exploration... externally and internally, what was distant and what was denied" (Brivic, 2008, p. 1). For him, the *sinthome* is unalterable and, in his later period, he added the *sinthome* as the fourth ring to his topological model of the Borromean knot given below.



**Figure 1:** The Borromean knot.

The Borromean knot reflects schematically how Lacan bases his register theory on a spatial logic. This knot assumes an ontological significance as "in order to sustain consciousness, we must be capable of feeling (imaginary), using language (symbolic), and encountering surprise (Real)." They depend on each other "looping into each other in such a way that if any one is opened, the other will come apart" (Brivic, 2008, p. 12). The *sinthome* as an "addition to the Borromean knot of RSI allows the subject to cohere" (Evans, 2006, p. 192). It is beyond meaning and "designates a signifying formulation beyond analysis, a kernel of enjoyment immune to the efficacy of the symbolic." Far from calling for some analytic 'dissolution', the *sinthome* is what 'allows one to live' by providing a unique organisation of *jouissance*... (Evans, 2006, p. 191). For Lacan, the *sinthome* also implies "the invasion of the symbolic order by the subject's private *jouissance*" (Evans, 2006, p. 192) and allows the Borromean knot to be temporarily rearranged (Harari, 1995, p. 163). It also leads to a kind of self-creation or achieving psychic continuity. We can see all the organising elements of the *sinthome* in the

Mariner's narrative, which, as a representational account, as a praxis, helps him to organize his *jouissance*. In the form of a *sinthome*, his narrative keeps his ego intact in the domain of the symbolic as it helps him "to cohere." Then, the Mariner as the creator of a narrative can be taken, as in the case of Joyce, as "someone working with the exploration of psychotic patterns for a liberating purpose" (Harari, 2006, p. 46).

The Mariner's narrative can also be taken as an attempt to cross from one logic to another, from the imaginary to the symbolic. He can bear the anxiety he feels in the symbolic only if he can tell his story to others, then this process injects a new kind of energy into him. His transition from the imaginary to the symbolic is the bliss and the curse of the artist, as well. The poem can be taken as a poetisation of the psychic mechanisms regulating the artist's world; at this point, it becomes self-reflexive. In a similar line of thinking, Thurston identifies "the *sinthome* with writing itself" (qtd. in James, 1965, p. 166). At this point, it might be interesting to look at what Brivic says about the correlation between writing (narrating in the Mariner's case) and self-creation through art in the space of the *sinthome*:

I see the *sinthome* as deranging language and subjectivity in order to create new possibilities. It allows one to change volition by apprehending one's identity as a construction. It is promoted by writing as the entrance into a self-created world in which one produces the subject. ...A founding move of the *sinthome* is to see one's life as a fiction, a synthetic home. One's life is always a fiction (especially when it is written), and to see it as fictional is the way to become free, to unfold an alternative route, to change roles. As soon as one sees one's role, one is outside it, ex-sistent. (2008, p. 15)

The Mariner re-homes himself in the symbolic through his narrative, which becomes "a synthetic home" to him. His narrative both liberates him from the disturbing psychic material and offers an opportunity for self-creation.

## **The symbiosis of the internal and the external**

The poem problematizes the interface between the subjective and the social, the individual and culture by concerning itself with the psychodynamics of the Mariner, who holds a transferential relationship to his listeners. His listeners wake up a wiser

man the following morning or, as in the case of the Wedding Guest, give up the idea of going to the wedding. His narrative testifies to the coexistence of the subjective and social space, and how they merge into each other as in the topology of the Moebius Strip, which:

seems to have two sides but in fact has only one (and only one edge). Locally, at any one point, two sides can be clearly distinguished, but when the whole strip is traversed it becomes clear that they are in fact continuous. The two sides are only distinguished by the dimension of time, the time it takes to traverse the whole strip.

The figure illustrates the way that psychoanalysis problematises various binary oppositions, such as inside/outside, love/hate, signifier/signified, truth/appearance... The opposed terms are thus seen to be not discrete but continuous with each other. (Evans, 2006, p. 119)



**Figure 2:** The Moebius Strip.

The metaphor of the Moebius strip underlines how meaning is generated through “the inexorable relationship that exists between subjectivity and discourse” (Arrigo, 2004, p. 160). It also implies the temporalization of space and objectifies the Lacanian idea that truth never exists in its entirety at any point but involves a series of stages, each of which pertains to truth only in the process of reaching it (Lacan, 1998, p. 93). The poem as a whole is a narrative flow about “a series of stages,” that is, about repression → regression → repression again, which embodies in itself all kinds of spaces I referred to in the beginning of the essay.

## Conclusion

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, there are two distinct lines of logic; thus, there are two distinct representations of space that organise the other forms of space along the division between them: the space of the symbolic, which is given through the details like the Kirk, the hill, and the lighthouse, is vertical and the space of the pre-symbolic or the imaginary is located on the unmapped and fluid horizontal sea. The psychic space of the Mariner and the textual space of the poem shift back and forth between the symbolic and the pre-symbolic spaces. The symbolic space is invaded by the primal signifier and the signifiers in it are in alignment with its logic; however, the pre-symbolic space is revealed through the images that work through the logical mechanisms of the unconscious. When the Mariner regresses to the imaginary register after killing the Albatross, the space around him can be communicated through the images whose signifieds lie elsewhere. When the Mariner blesses the sea snakes unaware, he translates these images to words or he translocates them from the imaginary register to the logic of the symbolic. When he translates what the Albatross signifies to him into the form of a narrative, he transforms it from a symptom in the form of a signifier to the *sinthome* in the form of a statement. However, it does not bring with itself total coherence as the Mariner is still overcome by residues of his repressed psychic material in the form of compulsion to repeat his narrative. Through his narrative, which as an extended statement becomes an interface between the imaginary and the symbolic, the Mariner invents a new kind of representational space to organize his *jouissance*, thus subverts the opposition between the subjective and the social spaces or the opposition between the affect and intelligible material. By revealing the dyad of the subjective and the social spaces, the narrative in the poem also explores, among many other things, how cultural or external events are shaped by the unconscious mechanisms.

By way of conclusion, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, "it is indeed a problem to know the dancer from the dance" (Mays, 2013, p. 98) as the poem objectifies the psychodynamics of the Mariner himself. His tale lacks unity in the traditional sense but it has (psychological) coherence as his narrative functions as a *sinthome* for the Mariner and provides him with a semantic ground on which he can meaningfully bring together all the fragmentary elements at the threshold of the imaginary and the symbolic.

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