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A Greimassian Reading  
of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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**Abstract**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, first appearing as the opening poem to *Lyrical Ballads*, has proved to be highly enigmatic since its publication. The blending of supernatural and reality along with the intricacy of the underlying structure seem to have added to the complication. The present article is an attempt to read the poem through the lens of Algirdas Julien Greimas's actantial model and semiotic square to shed some light on the semantic richness of the poem. The results seem in line with Coleridge's idea of imagination as the Mariner's imagination in co-presence with his will, along with the Moon as the source of Nature's benignity and his muse, assist him with his object-value: the unity between man, Nature, and the Creator. Moreover, the Mariner's suffering and atonement could be attributed to his moments of reasoning and free-will, devoid of imagination or spirituality and associated with the presence of the sun or diurnal elements. Greimas's model offers the possibility to elucidate the moments of confusion as 'void' or 'all' phoric states of passion in which the absence of diurnal and nocturnal elements or their co-presence could justify the Mariner's wanton murder of the Albatross or his survival.

**Keywords:** Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Greimas's actantial model, actants, semiotic square, narratology, imagination

## Introduction

The Age of Romanticism, referring to the four decades after 1790, constitutes the outstanding literary era, “in which the uniqueness of the individual would be celebrated” (Legouis and Cazamian 223). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the most eminent poets of the era, argued for the transcendence of “Reason” over “Understanding” since it comprises man’s spiritual experience and communion with Nature (Colmer 16). To him, a poet’s heart and intellect should be intimately combined and unified with the appearances of nature as “the written language of infinite Goodness and powerful Intelligence” (*Biographia* 156). In contrast to John Locke and David Hartley, Coleridge did not conceive of man’s mind as passive or dormant, or a merely mechanical registrar of impressions, but as the agent which partakes of a creative role in the perception in response to the influxes proceeding from nature (Willey 14). Endowed with the power of imagination, “the living power and prime agent of all human perceptions, and as a repetition in the finite of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I AM,” man has the essentially divine-like capability of creation and could be raised to his ultimate potential to become one with the Creator (Coleridge, *Biographia* 202). Coleridge, in turn, associates the poetic genius with a more elevated instrument, i.e., the secondary imagination, an echo of the primary one only differing in the degree and mode of operation, and “[the] synthetic and magical power [which] reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (*Biographia* 195).

### *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

To study Coleridge’s poetic dexterity, intricate poetic theory, and his valorization of unity, his masterpiece *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* could be of exemplary significance. Opening the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, the poem reflects what Coleridge explains as his special role in the work, i.e., giving the supernatural a feeling of everyday reality, “a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination, that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” (*Lyrical Ballads* 6). The poem, in accordance with William Wordsworth’s idea of a Mr. John Cruikshank’s dream of a person suffering

a dire curse for murdering a bird, struck its contemporary readers first for the strangeness of its style, its innovative and liberal use of obsolete words, archaic spellings, and sometimes archaic sentence constructions (Hill 110).

The main theme of the poem is the story of the Romantic archetype, the Wanderer, Cain, doomed to traverse the earth, from land to land, all alone and alienated from his kind, having killed an albatross for no given motive and being occasionally compelled to retell his tale of agony and survival (Joavani 10). Although the whole story seemingly revolves around the theme of crime and punishment in different layers, there is much more to it. In the words of C. M. Bowra, it is “a myth about the dark and troubling crisis in human soul” for “like Blake, he (Coleridge) saw strange powers behind the visible world directing and moving man” (68-9). Similarly, Tim Fulford reads the poem as a narrative of exploration, articulating both mental and physical voyaging, to explicitly stage the inward self. In addition, he claims the work significantly demonstrates Coleridge’s pity for the colonial slaves as “the mariner, like a sailor on a slave-ship bound for the West Indies, enters a zone where all become tainted with the diseases of empire” (49-50). However, Carl Thompson’s historical approach to the poem associates the plague not with the colonial concerns, but with the cultural and traditional bindings which entrap the Mariner and his crewmates in the inherited or prescribed patterns of perception and thought. The Mariner’s superstition, as an excessive and crude Providentialism, forces him to shoulder the responsibility both as the sinner, pariah, and the sole receiver of God’s anger, which traps this egotistical persona in an everlasting repetition of the initial offense, his egotism (Thompson 103-4).

On the other hand, downgrading the elevated egotistical position of the Mariner, John Livingstone Lowes speaks of the natural elements of “Earth, Air, Fire, and Water” as the chief characters in the poem which function to portray the Mariner’s spiritual state and to provide the narrative structure of the poem. He believes that there exist only three occasions when the Mariner has an active role: a. killing the albatross, b. biting his arm, and c. blessing the water snakes; the first of which seems to be unmotivated and wanton, the third unaware, and the second as the only deliberate action which ironically leads to the climax of the disaster and his shipmates’ dead bodies (285-7). Lowes develops a binary sequence of

symbols of the Moon and the Sun as different phases of redemption occur under the moon and the evil in the sun. He regards the role of the elements as being more than a mere depiction of the Mariner's spiritual states; instead, they are the structural foundations linking the ordinary Mariner and the one acquainted with the invisible (222-4).

In the same vein, in *Coleridge the Visionary*, John Beer, trying to offer a reading in line with Coleridge's doctrine of unity, attempts to justify the Mariner's agony and hell-like life as a result of the breach of the harmony as the Mariner kills the Albatross, the guardian daemon, and thus destroys the connection between the sun, the symbol of God and the image of God in human reason, and the serpent, the wisdom of the flesh, and thus is trapped between the dreadful wrath of conscience, the only remaining part of his Reason, and his consequent loathing of the flesh (142-4). Consequently, in an attempt to remove the incongruities observed in Lowes' premise, Beer offers a theme of reconciliation between the elements, the harmony between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*: a harmony which the secondary imagination, as the Isis seeking to re-create the lost Osiris, manages to reach (156-7).

Accordingly, Robert Penn Warren proposes two underlying themes which he delineates as the primary theme of the crime and punishment fable and the secondary theme of imagination. Drawing upon the theme of imagination, he speaks of a duality, first represented in the characteristics of ice as "emerald and dismal sheen," which justifies the dual role of imagination as both a blessing and a curse to those living by it (400-23). Similarly, Abe Delson, in a symbolic reading of the Sun and the Moon, concludes that the balance in the Mariner's voyage could be best viewed in the convergence of the sun and the moon rather than considering each per se. He contends that analyzing the natural elements individually results in misunderstanding the Coleridgean idea of unity (719).

In like manner, reading the poem as a romantic quest, Anca Vlasopolos shows how the Mariner gets to free himself from the mechanical modes of thinking, i.e., the senses, memory, and superstitious fancy, associated with death, and gradually moves towards symbolization. He succeeds in transforming a fearful world into intelligibility through the power of imagination which fuses Head and Heart, hence resulting in the Mariner's survival (365-369). Similarly, Joel Faflak explains how

imagination becomes “a mechanism of both poetic illusion and associative delusion,” and a psychological force with a “mesmerizing force” peculiar to the dream-world of the Mariner’s experience (134-5). Coleridge grants this neither spiritual nor physical force the power to bring the unreasonable within the reason’s sight and the autonomous text within the narrator’s creative will (Faflak 141). In the same vein, Aletta Catharina Swanepoel expounds how Coleridge’s transcendental imagination dialectically engages the reader in understanding the Mariner’s perplexing verisimilitude. The reader, like the narrator, absorbed in a constant encounter with the confusing presence of the familiar and the unfamiliar, is to employ his imagination aligned with the Mariner’s to make a meaningful whole out of the synthesis of the opposites (Swanepoel 210).

The existent consensus that the elements and events in the poem mean something beyond the surface appearance and the fact that they cannot be justified based on the binary oppositions proposed by structural linguists, demand a broader perspective of the possible interrelated meanings and dialectical relations. As such, the present article embarks on a Greimassian discourse analysis in order to reach a compromise regarding such discrepancies involved in critically approaching *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The significance of the choice could be related to Fredric Jameson’s commendation of the semantic square which, he argues, could be employed in a dialectical reading of the texts (Buchanan 1179). Jameson acclaims the model as the “most sophisticated structuralist analysis” which could offer a generative grammar of plot “implying a double movement of analysis and synthesis” by proposing “a reduction of the various superficial narrative levels to deeper structures” (123-4). In addition, the model bears striking similarities with Coleridge’s poetic theory when the phenomenological issues matter.

### Greimassian Analysis: Actantial Model and Semantic Square

Greimassian phenomenology, heavily drawing upon Edmund Husserl’s and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s, focuses on the intertwined relation between the subject, object, body, and the world. The complex relation is justified by the subject’s relation to the object, mediated by the body, which is simultaneously a part of the world, and the subject, an object situated

between other objects and the world, and the channel through which the world is experienced (Perron and Fabbri ix-x). Similar to the Coleridgian theory of the active role mind plays in perceiving the world as the object to be perceived and the one which man's mental faculty associates meaning with, Algirdas Julien Greimas and Jacques Fontanille situate a semiotic space at the level of perception and hence introduce the crucial element of continuity in the relationship between the subject and the world (xxii-iii). Figures of the world transform into figures of thought through the body, a transformation which has a fundamental mediating role in understanding how the external world is transformed into a signifying whole (Greimas and Fontanille 59).

In accordance with this phenomenological approach, Greimas introduces an approach generic enough to provide any narrative with a visual explication of the complex relations amongst the actants within it, of the various actantial positions which an actant could take through the course of the events, and of the narrative trajectory of the narrative's utterance-sequences (Wang and Roberts 53). The device could be employed in the analysis of any action as Greimas believes that the narratives' syntagmatic structures can be classified as "anthropomorphizing," i.e., the projection of human or human-like figures into actantial positions (*Structural Semantics* 207). Thus, each position on the model represents an actant, and the set of relations between the actants help illustrate the narrative characters within a complete organizational unit (*On Meaning* 109-10). In accordance with this model, an action could be broken down into six actants, which are positioned on the two ends of the three axes of desire (a subject on a quest for the object), power (the subject along with his helper and opponent), and knowledge or communication (the subject is requested by the sender to attain the object, hence turning into the receiver) (Fig. 1.).

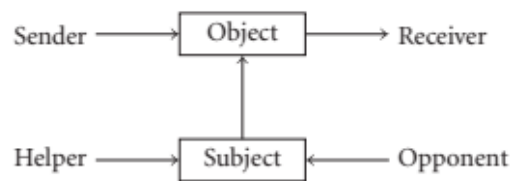
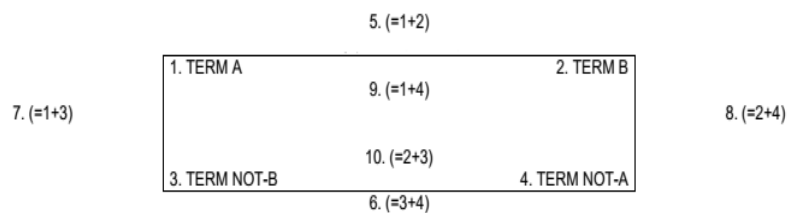


Fig. 1. Greimas' actantial model

Source: Hébert, Louis. *An Introduction to Applied Semiotics: Tools for Text and Image Analysis*. Translated by Julie Tabler, Routledge, 2019, p.71.

At the heart of Greimas's actantial model is "the elementary structure of signification." Dissatisfied with the binary conception of category, Greimas introduces the semiotic square as the minimal condition for comprehension at the level of the elementary structures of signification (Greimas and Courtés 308). Visually depicted as a square (Fig. 2), though a rectangle in the figure, it locates four terms on the square related on three different axes: A as the basic term is contrary to B, contradictory to Not A, and complimentary to Not B; similarly, B stands as contrary to A, contradictory to Not A, and complementary to Not B. There also exist four compound terms which comprise two terms, for instance, as Fig. 2 depicts, Position 5 means a combination of Positions 1 and 2.



LEGEND:

The + sign links the terms that are combined to make up a metaterm (a compound term); for example, 5 is the result of combining 1 and 2.

Fig. 2. Semiotic Square: semantic representation

Source: Hébert, Louis. *An Introduction to Applied Semiotics: Tools for Text and Image Analysis*. Translated by Julie Tabler, Routledge, 2019, pp.41-2.

The square could be also applied syntactically, on the dynamic level, which could show the progress of the narrative through the successive positions that an actant occupies, hence allowing an analysis of the performance of the actant through the changes in its position over time (Hébert 47). According to Greimas and Fontanille, the first step for an actant to establish himself as an operative subject, to become a "singular and irreducible individual," and to know the world is to negate the unity and bring it to a halt. In other words, the subject (A) initiates a quest or act from a neutralized state paradoxically corresponding to both the "void," the "nothing," and "all," the fullness of phoric tensions. The two states, which account for an absence of articulation as opposed to a shock of tensive

plenitude, paradoxically cohabit in the same “position.” Therefore, subject (A), torn between two paradoxical tendencies, experiences a state of instability and tension which triggers the quest towards unity and oneness (Greimas and Fontanille 3). In other words, the subject’s act of self-representation, breaking the *seeming* unity and continuity, “the original sensitivity,” behind the “shadow of value” or the virtualized object, becomes the simulacrum to positioning and categorization since the subject, due to the scission which s/he has introduced into the superficial continuity, longs for the lost value and summons for the second category of Not-A (Greimas and Fontanille 14-5). On the other hand, summoning Not-A, s/he is delayed by certain elements which could hinder his access to what s/he wants, but assisted by some elements which have the knowledge to help her/him achieve his goal.

Moreover, the point worth noting is that an actant/character’s position is not fixed and within a narrative, a character could take more than an actantial position or some characters cluster to take one actantial position. Thus, in the model, the subject’s and the object’s value become actualized by the subject’s desire established in an initial event, referred to as the breach of continuity, which may change their status from a virtual to a realized one through a final junction of the two (Wang and Roberts 63). For instance, the subject actant is referred to as the actualized hero, when his desire is established through that act of self-representation, and in the end upon possession of the object turns into the realized hero (Greimas and Courtés 142). On the other hand, a subject’s realized relation to the object could transform into a virtual status through a disjunction, i.e. when an already valued object is discarded (Wang and Roberts 63). Drawing upon these points, Greimas proposes two narrative programs along the communication axis in which four modes of transference of the object-value are depicted (Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, the conjunction between a value-object and the subject who initially possesses it can be virtualized if either the subject gives it away (renunciation) or the object is taken away (dispossession). Similarly, if the subject obtains the object (appropriation) or he receives it (attribution), there will be a realization of an initially virtual subject-object link (Greimas and Courtés 96-98). Drawing on the theoretical framework

offered by Greimas, in the present article, we intend to shed new light on Coleridge's masterpiece.

Table 1. Four Modes in which Value-Objects are Transferred

|                                                            |             | <i>Virtualization</i><br>(Subject initially possesses the object) | <i>Realization</i><br>(Subject initially does not possess the object) |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Object is transferred to or from the subject</i><br>... | Voluntarily | renunciation                                                      | appropriation                                                         |
|                                                            | Forcibly    | dispossession                                                     | attribution                                                           |

Source: Wang, Yong, and Carl W. Roberts. "Actantial Analysis: Greimas's Structural Approach to the Analysis of Self-narratives." *Department of Sociology Faculty Scholarship and Creative Works*, no. 7, 2005, p. 63.

### Analysis and Discussion

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* seemingly possesses a disjointed seven-part story, split between the gloss and the ballad, prose and verse. To Anne Williams, the fragmented structure of the poem can be justified by the fact that the "poem's coherence resides in the interdependence of meaning and experience" (1115). Along similar lines, in *The Romantic Imagination*, Bowra suggests that for Coleridge to bring unity to this "imaginative realism," in which the objects are not real but cannot be determined as unreal either, the dream-like atmosphere is integral as it justifies the incorporation of the unbelievable events (51-2). Therefore, we suggest that applying the Greimassian actantial model as a generic model for analysis of any real or thematized narrative sheds some light on the structure of the poem and its meaning.

The poem comprises two narratives: the framework narrative in which the narrator describes the Mariner's encounter with the Wedding-Guest during which the Mariner recounts his adventurous voyage, and the main narrative. On his journey, for no specifically articulated reason, the Mariner shoots the Albatross, which Beer reads as, "not cruelty / it is mere non-feeling from non-thinking," in light of Coleridge's account of a sailor's

killing a hawk on his voyage to Malta some six years post-publication of *The Rime* (142). However, in terms of Greimassian narratological theory, neither the seemingly calm observing state of the Mariner, nor his unexplained act of murder partakes of a non-feeling condition. Instead, the neutralized state of the Mariner prior to his act is the tensive moment that forebodes a breach of continuity in the world. The Mariner kills the Albatross in the “fog-smoke white” climate when the world is in its utmost confusion and obscurity, just as he holds ambivalent attitudes towards this “pious bird of good omen.” Although he is grateful for saving the crew from the ice and snow, his attitude is indicative of envy and conceit, observed in his words “perched” and “flew,” which signify the bird’s lofty status compared to the diminutive humble state of the crew who have been so paralyzed by Nature. Thus, the Mariner, in such a tense state is driven towards an act of self-presentation to unshackle himself from being a mere observer of another creature’s grandeur and lordly state. He breaks the “original tensivity” by killing the Albatross, the “shadows of value,” and thus turns into this individual subject (Greimass and Fontanille 3-4). In other words, for the Mariner to achieve a sense of signification and to know the world, he needs to put an end to the continuity which the “shadow of value suggests;” hence he is compelled to kill the bird. Upon killing the Albatross as an act of negating what-he-is-not, he becomes cognizant of the lost object of value, i.e., the serenity and peace promised by the unity between man and Nature, and summons his contradictory position, the value-object. This is the moment when he sets off on a quest to retain the unity and continuity that he has breached and transforms into this actualized hero who is in search of his value-object, even though he might be unaware of this. The Mariner, as the operative subject takes the focal position in his narrative, and the unity of man and Nature can be considered as his Non-A, contradictory, position.

There remain two positions on the elementary basic square of signification to be occupied, that of the helper and his opponent. Considering the controversies regarding the roles associated with the Moon and the Sun, in Lowes’s article, or the limitations spotted in Warren’s idea of a cluster of symbols assisting the Mariner, a more detailed analysis of the elements and characters of the poem is demanded. To better understand the

narrative trajectory of the poem and identify where in the square each element might fit, a syntactic, dynamic analysis of the poem might help. Drawing upon Hébert's idea that time, the narrative and tactical (the linear sequencing of semantic units from one sentence to the next), were utilized as the cohering element in the syntactic approach to the square (47), and the significance allocated to the day and night dichotomy, in both the prologue to the poem and the previous studies conducted on the poem, in the present reading we adopt a temporal analysis of the poem. To validate the day and night dichotomy in the Greimassian framework, a semiotic square, with Day as the focal position is developed, as Day is the first specific temporal deictic used in the poem. Accordingly, the other categories will be summoned by their differential status in contrast to the focal position. For instance, the first category to be summoned is Not-Day, contradictory to Day, which summons its complementary position, Night, or Day's contrary, and its own contrary, Not-Night (Fig. 3).

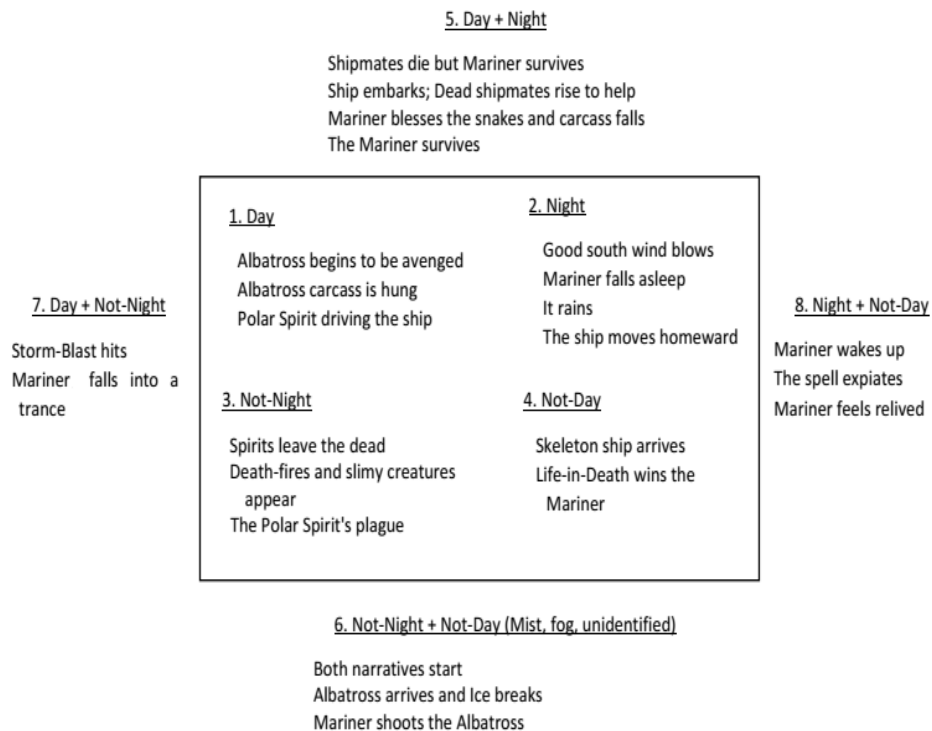


Fig. 3. Semiotic square of the temporal structure of *The Rime*

The course of action in the main narrative story can be summarized into major and minor events presented in chronological order starting with the Mariner and his shipmates setting sail. Nonetheless, this beginning bears no clue to the exact time when the trip starts, except for its seeming auspiciousness reflected in the fair weather. The setting seems very similar to the serene and euphoric state in which the three wedding guests from the framework narrative, are heading for the ceremony. The first trace of day is observed as the ship approaches the Line when the sun comes up on the left; therefore, it is to be considered as the real opening to the course of the events which end at night when the Mariner is saved, with many days and nights between the two.

Then, the Mariner speaks of the Sun shining bright, “higher and higher every day / Till over the mast at noon” (*The Rime* 30) and immediately synchronizes that with the storm driving them towards the South Pole, “And now the Storm-Blast . . . tyrannous and strong” (43). In this context, the first major event in the narrative is the storm happening at noon and is to be placed in the Day + Not night position, signifying no trace of night. Thereafter, the mist and snow come and the Albatross appears through the fog – with no explicit reference to the Sun or the Moon – and the ice splits. The events take position 6, which is defined as neither day nor night, Not-Day + Not-Night, justified by the absence of clues regarding the time of the action. Amazingly, and similar to the mysterious motive for the murder, the Mariner gives no definite account of the time when the Albatross is shot. Thus, its time remains an enigma and is to be considered as no-time, neither day nor night.

Following this, the story proceeds abruptly with the sunrise: “The sun now rose upon the right: / out of the sea came he . . . Nor dim nor red, like God’s own head, / The glorious Sun uprist” (83-97). Upon the crewmates’ approval of the murder, as the bird had brought the fog and mist, and the ship’s arrival at the Line, the breeze stops, and they burst into the silent sea. This moment of stillness, or in Greimassian terminology, the phoric state of “void” forebodes a break of the seeming peace and continuity, the instigation of revenge. Then, the gloss announces that the revenge commences in “[the] hot and copper sky, / [and the] bloody Sun, at noon” (Position 7).

The “weary time” of parching throats and agony continues with the Mariner’s account of slimy creatures crawling upon the sea, death-fires dancing at night, and the water burning green, blue, and white, like a witch’s oils. Although a nocturnal scene, it seems affected by the burning fires reminiscent of the hot bloody Sun, and it lacks any explicit reference to the Moon (Position 3). Days are, on the other hand, afflicted by the appearance of the Polar Spirit, the demon belonging to neither the departed souls nor to the angels, plaguing the ship, or the Albatross’s carcass hung, instead of the cross, around the Mariner’s neck (Position 1). Then, the Mariner beholds “a sign in the element afar off.” This new setting, “the western wave all aflame / the day was well nigh done! Almost upon the western wave / Rested the broad bright Sun” (172-174), suggests twilight, when it is not day anymore (Position 4). The Mariner describes the scene with a skeleton ship appearing between the ship and the Sun, as though putting the sun behind bars. This is the moment that the Night-mare Life-in-Death and her mate, Death, appear, and, while the first wins the mariner, Death wins the shipmates, which is a premonition for their death.

Next comes “the horned Moon, with one bright star,” (149) or, as later called, “the star-dogged Moon,” (212) and all the shipmates drop dead except for the Mariner. This happens as the Moon is affected by the one and only star in the sky, reminding of the Sun, as the one and only star. The Moon, apparently in the company of the Sun, claims the shipmates’ life but spares the Mariner’s (Position 5). Following this, for seven days and nights of loneliness and despair, the Mariner suffers the curse in the eyes of the dead, until the moving Moon “[goes] up the sky, and nowhere [does] abide” (264), so do the nearby stars move towards their appointed rest. Therefore, at midnight, beyond the shadow of the ship, with the Moon presiding over the ocean, the Mariner notices the water snakes moving in the shining white, elfish light (Position 8). However, later, the Mariner blesses the water snakes when he beholds them in the shadow of the ship in their colourful attire with their track as a flash of golden fire, as if in the company of the Sun (Position 5). The blessing is followed by his prayer, and thus the carcass falls off his neck. The next two significant events occur through the night, Position 2: first, the Mariner gently falls asleep hallucinating that Queen Mary has sent him rain from Heaven, and

secondly, having dreamt of buckets full of water, the mariner wakes up to find it is raining.

The succeeding event, the ship embarking, is to be placed at Position 5, as there shine “a hundred fire-flags,” (314) the Aurora Australis, with stars dancing in between and the Moon at the edge of the cloud, suggesting a blend of night and day. Then, “beneath the lightening and the moon,” (329) the dead shipmates rise and help the Mariner by moving “their limbs like lifeless tools” (339) This sense of having both Sun-like (lightening and the Southern lights) light and the moon is enforced by a combination of death and life in the spirited dead crewmates (Position 5). Later, by dawn, Not-Night, the angelic troop leave the dead mates and dart towards the rising sun like a singing chorus.

However, the breeze comes to a halt again as the sun rises, and the ship sails moving from beneath by the Polar Spirit of the land of mist and snow (Position 1). And then, by noon, as before, the ship suddenly comes to a standstill on the ocean and is moved violently so that the mariner is put into a trance (Position 7). Afterwards, overhearing the Polar Spirit’s demon companions, First and Second Voice, the Mariner becomes more cognizant of the course of the events and realizes that the Polar Spirit is the reason for the ship’s smooth movement during the day and its agitated oscillation by noon to be. However, the Polar Spirit’s sense of revenge has been assuaged by the promise of the Mariner’s atonement and interminable penance, and thus the ship is on the move anew.

Then, as the Mariner sees through the demons’ talk, it is the full Moon’s gracious presence and sovereignty over the ocean which guides the ship. This moment of fair weather and peace is followed by the dead crewmates’ rise for the last time, with their “stony” (436) glittering eyes reflecting the curse and their pang immersing the Mariner in fear and pain (Position 8). However, it goes on with the expiation of the spell, which puts the dead to rest, and the soft breeze, which relieves the Mariner and sets the ship swiftly on the move.

Finally, the ship arrives home, with the Moonlight upon the bay along with the crimson shadows on the bay. This Moon-dominated scene is affected by the presence of the crimson red shadows of the seraph band on the bay signifying the Spiritual aspect of the scene. Although the Moon

guides the ship homeward, it is the seraph band who wave for help and the Hermit who shrives the Mariner (Position 5). The main narrative ends with the vesper's bell harking and the Ancient Mariner's account of his urge to travel from land to land, like night, to recount his story.

The thorough analysis of the temporal sequence of the narrative program produces interesting results, visually demonstrated in Fig. 3. However, Hébert suggests a table representation of the results of the temporal analysis which can simply depict the movements of the actants on the square and the possible interplay between the observing subjects who are apt to see the events differently (see Appendix). The table allows the drawing of a second semiotic square, which displays the elements of the narrative appearing in the presence of the Sun or the Moon (Fig. 4).

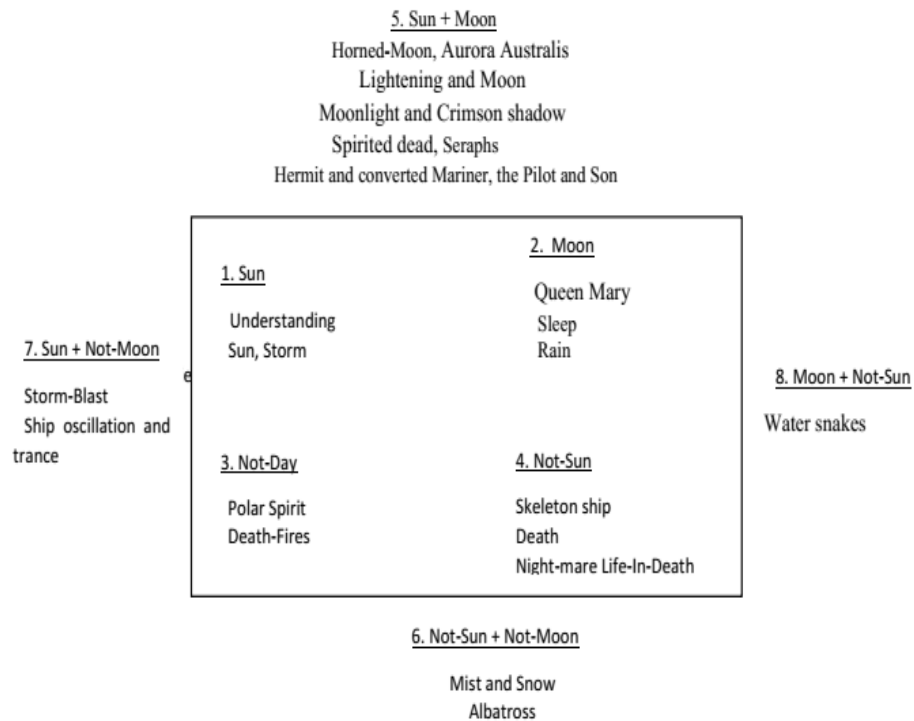


Fig. 4. Semiotic square of characters and elements of *The Rime*

As the second square and Table 2 demonstrate, the relieving elements of rain and sleep granted by Queen Mary occur under the Moon; nevertheless, the blessing of the water snakes, the Mariner's repentance, expiation of the spell of the dead, and the ship's movement homeward all happen during the full Moon; therefore, the benignity of the Moon is justified. By contrast, the Sun is associated with the elements of wrath and brutality, such as the Storm-Blast, the Polar Spirit, and the ship's oscillation, which puts the Mariner into a trance.

The square, owing to the complementary relation it defines between Positions 1 and 3, permits a justification of the agony the Mariner receives during the nights, being afflicted by the diurnal elements, such as the death-fires or the slimy creatures. In contrast to this, the uncanny but relieving sense that the Mariner feels when beholding the skeleton ship and its crew in the sunset, Position 4, is to be justified by the complementary relationship that the position holds with the Moon. It portends the Mariner's survival and is evidence of the Moon's benignity towards the Mariner, though the rest of the crew perish.

On the other hand, the absence of the Sun or the Moon is accompanied by mist and fog and the Albatross. This is the time of confusion, as it is both the phoric moment, in which there exists no evidence of the Mariner's attitude towards the bird, and the tensive moment of the clash of attitudes, which ends in the Mariner's killing the Albatross. In the opposite position, the presence of the elements with both nocturnal and diurnal associations, such as the Horned Moon, entail events of mixed nature including the living-dead crewmates spirited by the angelic troop, the survival of the Mariner despite his mates' death, and the last scene in which the Pilot and his son go insane while the Hermit seems the least affected. Therefore, to complete the actantial model of the poem, natural or supernatural elements associated with day – i.e., the Sun, the storm, and the Polar Spirit – could be clustered as the opponents to the cruel Mariner, whereas the elements associated with the moon, as the angelic troop, the seraph band or Queen Mary are to be clustered as his helpers.

There remains another question to be answered as to why the Mariner survives while his crewmates perish. As the Appendix shows, the Mariner is distinguished from the rest of the crew, not only for murdering the pious

bird but also for the invisible things he can see. The series of events which, seemingly, only the Mariner observes, as there exists no evidence that the rest of the crewmates view them, start with the slimy things and death-fires. This is even more evident with the skeleton ship which he, and only he, sees westward. Consequently, he bites his arm, intentionally, to yell and the rest just watch him agape and grin.

Such instances could be justified by Coleridge's praise of Hamlet in which the textual examples can materialize the philosophical distinction between fancy and imagination could be established (Porter 232). Accordingly, the textual shreds of evidence extracted from *The Rime* substantiate Coleridge's philosophy. The source of the Mariner's advantage, his ability to perceive the world beyond the factual presence of the objects, is his imagination, the power to modify and combine "many circumstances into one moment of thought to produce that ultimate end of human Thought and human Feeling, Unity" (*Biographia* 68). The Mariner surpasses his crewmates, whose mental capacity relies on their fancy, i.e. the "aggregative and associative faculty" which brings together dissimilar images and a mode of memory bound to laws of "association" (*Biographia* 67). Their perceptive inadequacy is evidenced by their view of the bird, once as the bird which brings mist and fog and then as the bird whose murder has caused their plague, solely based on a choice of the already present pieces of evidence. The Mariner, however, endowed with a strong imagination, observing the scenes which correspond to the geographical properties of his voyage through waters beyond the Equator and the Pole, but affected by his self-reflection and his crewmates' accusation, *creates* images, like death fires or slimy things, which convey a sense of corruption and guilt. The Mariner's imagination helps him survive the plague, and thus the Night-mare Life-in-Death grants him survival, while the rest of the crew are doomed to perish. He employs his secondary imagination which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create . . . to idealize and to unify" (*Biographia* 171), to reconstruct the scenes of day or night affected by one another. For instance, he recreates the sunset as the Sun imprisoned by the Moon; in other words, he harnesses the fatal effect of the Sun, symbolic of the wrath of Nature, by the Moon as its source of benignity.

According to the table in the Appendix, all the day scenes that are affected by nocturnal elements or night scenes that are disturbed by diurnal ones – Positions 3 and 4 – bear traces of imagination and its power to recreate. Similarly, the Mariner's relief is associated with his most imaginative moments of night or full moon, while he experiences pangs of agony when his imagination fails him. For instance, he suffers the Polar Spirit's plague not only because of the absence of his savior, the Moon, but also because his imagination flops in the absence of his muse, evidenced in his inability to perceive the demon, the Polar Spirit. On the other hand, when his imaginative power grants him the potential to bring unity between the oppositions, without denying any of them, he is saved. This is evidenced in the description of the water snakes, both in the reflection of the full moon and in the fire flames in the shadow of the ship, when the Mariner employs the opposite forces untouched by one another. A clearer instance would be when he finds man, nature, and God unified in the last scene with the presence of the Moon, the Seraphs, and the Hermit, exemplifying Coleridge's theme of unity and harmony.

However, the question raised here is why the Mariner's initial blessing does not suffice, and he has to undergo more suffering. It symbolizes the role of the complementary and vital faculty to the secondary imagination: the will. Coleridge emphasizes that the secondary imagination acts with the co-presence and control of the conscious will (Engell 66). Although the Mariner blesses the water snakes, it is in the absence of will and hence doomed to impotency. However, in the end, when he intends to have his soul absolved by the Hermit, and the Albatross's blood washed away, his suffering and voyage end in the presence of the Moon, the seraphs, and the Hermit. The primacy of will in Coleridge's thought could also be another reason why the Mariner outdoes his mates. He is the one who shoots the Albatross, seemingly wantonly; however, depleted of imaginative power, he fails to see through the mechanism of the world and breaks the unity between man and Nature. Relying on the same justification, his survival after the appearance of the skeleton ship seems to be indebted to the intentional biting of his arm when his imagination helps him moderate the wrath of Nature. His act of will turns into "an active self-consciousness and not passive sensory receptions" which affords him the

power to speak while the rest proceed in silence and passively hear his call agape (Engell 67).

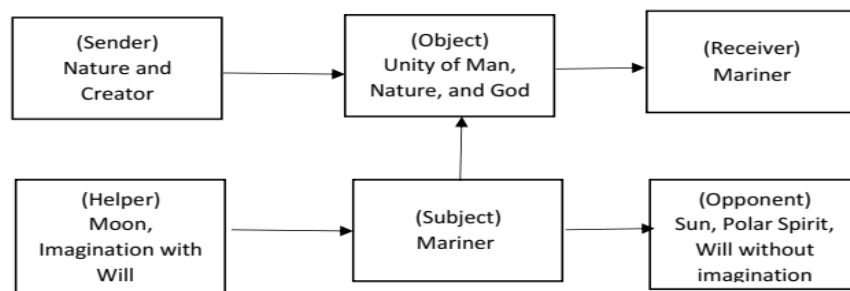


Fig. 5. Actantial Model of *The Rime*

By drawing upon the results, an actantial model could be produced (Fig. 5). The Ancient Mariner, enjoying his will and imaginative power as his helpers, could compensate for the loss of the unity of Nature and man, symbolized in the Albatross as the shadow of his object of value. In addition, the Moon as the symbol of Nature's benignity turns into his muse in the presence of whom the Mariner is capable of using his imagination and taking an active role in the perception of his world. Conversely, the absence of this imaginative power, symbolized in the absence of his muse or in the presence of the Sun, could bring him misery. Thus, according to Greimas's four plots of narrative (Greimas and Courtés 98), the Mariner's renunciation of the initial virtualization of his object of value, the Albatross, results in his suffering and pain, but with the help he receives from the Moon, his imagination and will, he succeeds in converting to the doctrine of unity between man, Nature and his Creator.

## Conclusion

Many critical controversies, concerning the interpretation and philosophy, surround *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The present article is an attempt to provide a fresh reading of the work through the framework of Greimas's semiotics, specifically the semantic square and the actantial model. Drawing upon the results of the analysis, we argue that Coleridge's poem is a narrative bestowing upon the supernatural a feeling of reality, one that

typically exemplifies the poet's philosophy. Adapting the Greimassian semiotics and the actantial model could help evaluate the role of the Moon, as the source of Nature's benignity, and the Sun, standing for its wrath. The Moon, along with the Mariner's imagination and his free-will, could assist him in surviving the plague he had brought upon himself in the absence of his imagination, in a conceited act of self-representation. Greimas's narratological model, then, seems to convincingly account for the poem's many semantic ambiguities.

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## Appendix

The events, chronologically ordered, and the observing subjects

| No. | Course of Time                           | Element on the square                                   | Position | Observing subject    |
|-----|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------|
| 1   | <i>Unidentified: Not Day + Not Night</i> | Ancient Mariner meets the Wedding-Guest<br>Ship departs | -        | Narrator             |
| 3   | <i>Noon</i>                              | Storm-Blast                                             | 7        | Mariner<br>Shipmates |
| 3   | <i>Not-Day + Not-Night</i>               | Mist and Snow                                           | 6        | Mariner<br>Shipmates |
| 4   | <i>Not-Day + Not-Night</i>               | Albatross<br>Ice breaks                                 | 6        | Mariner<br>Shipmates |
| 5   | <i>Not-Day + Not-Night</i>               | Albatross is killed                                     | 6        | Mariner<br>Shipmates |
| 6   | <i>Day</i>                               | Mist disappears                                         | 1        | Mariner<br>Shipmates |
| 7   | <i>Day + Not-Night</i>                   | Sun over the mast<br>Revenge commences                  | 7        | Mariner<br>Shipmates |
| 8   | <i>Day</i>                               | Polar Spirit                                            | 1        | No one               |
| 9   | <i>Day</i>                               | Albatross carcass hung                                  | 1        | Mariner<br>Shipmates |
| 10  | <i>Not-Night</i>                         | Slimy creatures<br>Death-Fires                          | 3        | Mariner              |
| 11  | <i>Not-Day</i>                           | Skeleton ship<br>Death<br>Night-mare Life-in-Death      | 4        | Mariner              |
| 12  | <i>Day + Night</i>                       | Horned moon<br>Crewmates die but<br>Mariner survives    | 5        | Mariner              |
| 13  | <i>Night + Not-Day</i>                   | Full moon<br>Water snakes                               | 8        | Mariner              |
| 14  | <i>Night and Day</i>                     | Blessing<br>Carcass falls off                           | 5        |                      |

|    |                               |                                                                                           |   |                                       |
|----|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 15 | <i>Night</i>                  | Queen Mary<br>Sleep<br>Rain                                                               | 2 | Mariner                               |
| 16 | <i>Day + Night</i>            | Aurora Australis<br>Lightening and Moon<br>Spirited dead                                  | 5 | Mariner                               |
| 17 | <i>Not-Night (dawn)</i>       | Spirits leave                                                                             | 3 | Mariner                               |
| 18 | <i>Day</i>                    | Polar Spirit                                                                              | 1 | No one                                |
| 19 | <i>Day + Not-Night (noon)</i> | Mariner falling<br>unconscious                                                            | 7 | Mariner                               |
| 20 | <i>Night + Not Day</i>        | Full moon<br>Shipmates rise and spell<br>expiates<br>Wind breathes<br>Ship moves homeward | 8 | Mariner                               |
| 21 | <i>Day and Night</i>          | Moon light along crimson<br>shadows<br>Seraphs<br>Ship sinks<br>Hermit, Pilot and his son | 5 | Mariner<br>Hermit<br>Pilot<br>His son |
| 22 | <i>Not-Day + Not-Night</i>    | Vesper bell<br>Ancient Mariner's story<br>ends                                            | 6 | Narrator                              |