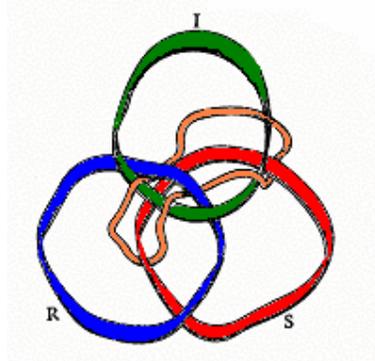


# JOYCE & THE SINTHOME: AIMING AT THE FOURTH TERM OF THE KNOT

**Philip Dravers**



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...it is through Joyce that I will approach this fourth term insofar as it completes the knot of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. The whole problem is there – how can an art, in an expressly divinatory fashion, aim to embody the *sinthome*, in its consistence, but equally in its ex-sistence and in its hole? How was someone able to aim, through his art, to render this fourth term, which is essential to the Borromean knot, as such, to the point of approaching it as closely as possible?<sup>2</sup>

Lacan poses these questions at the end of the second session of his twenty-third seminar, *Le Sinthome* at a point where he is still establishing the themes that he will pursue throughout the year. In fact, this question of art, and above all of Joyce's art, is one which plays across the whole surface, the whole texture of Lacan's seminar, allowing it to gather its consistency while at the same time providing the points of tenure and resistance necessary for it to develop its many resonances, but also, equally, its topological rigour.

Indeed, while the topology of the knot itself defies our ability to form a conceptual image of it in our minds by overstepping the limits of the imaginary, art goes in the opposite direction, serving as a material support for our enquiry by exposing the operations through

which the knot comes to instantiate itself in a process of formation which finally realises itself, not only in a single work of art, but also at the level of a practice. And even if something of the act which allows this art to realise itself remains essentially foreclosed and thus untransmissible within the artistic process, the work that has been left in its wake nevertheless allows us to acquire a certain knowledge of the knot and even of the very means with which it has managed to tie itself up according to its own artifice.

In fact, we might say that if the very existence of the knot causes the Freudian notion of sublimation to come undone, along with many of the metapsychological assumptions which support it, then the cord that finally secures it by playing so singly across its respective surfaces has woven its effects from the many *resonances* which have accrued within its gaps and folds as a consequence of the very failure intrinsic to its definition as a knot and which the artist has found a way to develop, put to use and even materialise according to his own *savoir-faire* with his symptom and the various modes of inscription that thread it through the holes within the structure.

Indeed, it is precisely in throwing into relief, not only the irreducibility of this fourth term and the manner in which it inscribes itself at the level of the knot, but also the *use* that one may make of it in securing a new type of consistency within it, that art comes to offer its thread to the emergence of a new kind of clinic in Lacan's seminar. For in it Lacan uses art, and above all the question of what artists do with their symptoms, to *supplement* the logic that unfolds from the analytic discourse in the form of R. S. I. in order to explore how they each hold together at the level of a quite singular experience, while at the same time deriving a new kind of consistency at the level of their knotting.

Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely in order to overcome the *impasse* left over at the end of his logical elaborations that Lacan now turns to art to explore how he might take up and *inscribe* something from the *residue* that it had left in its wake: namely, the symptom insofar as it has been reduced to its value as a *letter*: ( $\Sigma$ ). And in

this way we see how, in his twenty-third seminar, Lacan comes to take up the thread of an old question, concerning the symptom and how it 'reverses itself in effects of creation',<sup>3</sup> according to the topology of knots.

In fact, it is precisely in offering its own luminous thread to the logic of R.S.I. that art brings to light how the *ex-sistence* of the real, the *consistence* of the imaginary and the *hole* introduced by the symbolic, all hold together at the level of the knot, while also demonstrating how they can each be transformed, and even given a new 'orientation', according to the way in which the fourth term is taken up in each register. For, in what it offers us to read between its lines, art shows that the symptom does not simply *ex-sist*, *consist*, or emerge as a hole within the continuity of a texture, but rather knots these terms together by binding itself across aspects of each.

Art therefore brings out the very texture of the knot by casting the subtle ray of its light-spun thread across rings which would otherwise have only the substance of shadow and in so doing it helps us to pick out the essential fourth element woven by its artistry. For, even though its actual knotting cannot be seen as such, the threading of its artifice nevertheless illuminates 'certain points in the totality of the texture which function as the term of this quadruple knot. And,' as Lacan indicates in his seminar, 'it is precisely in this, that the *sinthome*... consists' at the level of the knot.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, by taking up the question of art and its relation to the symptom, Lacan's seminar is therefore, from the very beginning, quite radically a question of defining how *one* plays across *three* in order to transform what is at stake in their knotting. And this stake is of course that of *jouissance* and the different ways in which it is elaborated at the level of the knot. Lacan's project thus becomes that of *isolating* the properties of this essential fourth term, while at the same time exploring the many different ways in which it can play across the surface of R.S.I. to produce a new kind of knotting at the level of *jouissance*. In fact, I would argue that it is above all to explore this transformative aspect of his topology that Lacan uses art in his semi-

nar and it is obvious that such a project has many consequences for us at the level of the analytic experience, since it concerns how the *one* of the symptom may be taken up through the *art* of analysis in order to allow a new kind of consistency to emerge at the level of a *practice*.

### **On the Path of Joyce**

In a sense then, this question of art gives us, from the start, the very image of the knot that will concern us today, while also foregrounding the importance of the essential fourth term that allows it to gather its consistency and even embody itself as such. And if Joyce is important and even pre-eminent for us in this regard it is because, according to Lacan: '*In his art, in a privileged manner, Joyce aimed at the fourth term of the knot*'.

In fact, it was in Joyce's writing that Lacan first found the means with which to isolate this fourth term, while at the same time exposing the quite singular manner in which Joyce used his art – and thus his own *savoir-faire* with his symptom – to play across the surface of the knot in order to produce a new kind of knotting at the level of R.S.I. and a new type of consistency at the level of his *jouissance*. And in this way we see how art, once again, breaks a path for the analyst to follow, by anticipating, 'in divinatory mode', the very 'writing of the knot' in Lacan's seminar.

Indeed, although it is important to note that the representation of the four-loop knot that I have used above does *not* represent the function of the sinthome as it operates for Joyce,<sup>5</sup> his artistry nevertheless stands as the paradigm and even as the very possibility of the new clinic that emerges in Lacan's seminar under the overarching title of, *The Sinthome*. For, although Lacan does not come to formalise the terms of Joyce's own quite singular way of knotting R.S.I. until he nears the end of his seminar, its course is nevertheless set by following the quite extraordinary way in which Joyce managed to tie his knot with a cord of his own making and thereby thread the trait of his own singularity through his art.

For such is Lacan's thesis in his seminar, that, through his art, Joyce managed to construct his own supplementary means of securing R.S.I in order to compensate for a specific mode of failure at the level of their original knotting – and, as we shall see, he did so by using his own quite singular artistry with the letter to spin a supplementary thread from the jouissance inscribed in *lalangue* which he then thread through the gaps and holes of the knot, according to the logic of his symptom and the fault it answers to. Joyce thus anticipates the kind of artistry at stake in the new clinic developed by Lacan in his seminar and even 'goes straight to the best of what one can expect from an analysis at its end.'<sup>6</sup>

In fact, although it is by no means its exclusive concern, the very consistency of Lacan's seminar derives from his progressive deciphering of the Joycean enigma and this deciphering occurs, as Lacan himself indicates, not primarily on the side of meaning, but rather by picking out the 'cord' that threads itself 'between the lines'<sup>7</sup> of Joyce's writing. Lacan's seminar thus emerges as a *Work in Progress* which, while drawing its own resonances from the length and breadth of Joyce's oeuvre, parallels the construction of the *sinthome* that occurs within it and in this way we begin to see how Joyce's art comes to thread its signature through the 'writing of the knot' in Lacan's seminar.

So what, then, will my own aim be here?

In this paper I would like to sketch out the beginnings of a response to the questions posed by Lacan above and suggest at least some of the ways in which he uses art and more explicitly the writing of James Joyce to approach the essential fourth term introduced into his teaching with the very title of his seminar: *Le sinthome*. In so doing, I aim to approach the possibility of testifying to the radical singularity of Joyce's own writing, while at the same time gauging something of the radical shift that Lacan's twenty-third seminar brings to his approach to the clinic as a whole. For, with this new way of *writing* the symptom, Lacan announces a major moment of transformation in his own thinking in which the consistency of his own theoretic-

cal elaboration, and thus of psychoanalytic theory in general, quite literally comes to un-knot and re-knot itself before our eyes as it comes to embody itself, through its own kind of artistry, in different coloured rings of string.

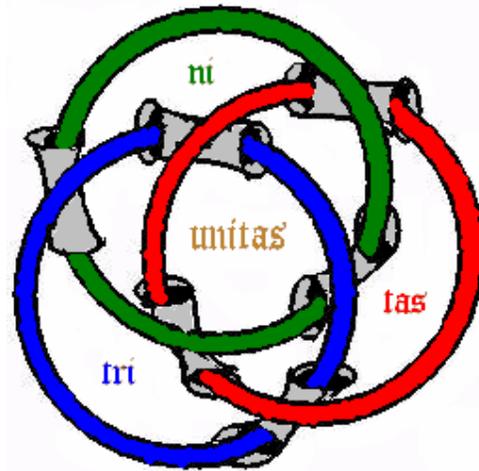
In fact, what was said above concerning the artist's know-how in forging a new kind of consistency out of what accumulates as a result of a certain 'failure' implicit in the knot, could equally be said of Lacan's own re-articulation of psychoanalysis within this seminar. For in it, the whole history of psychoanalysis appears as an accumulation of concepts whose consistency derives solely on the basis of a certain type of knotting obtained at the level of its fundamental categories. And it is by redefining what is at stake in such a knotting in his seminar, that Lacan comes to reorganise the way in which psychoanalysis derives its own consistency in relation to the clinic so that, henceforth, it appears as an art of the knot.

### **The Borromean Clinic**

In fact, this process of redefinition had already begun in the early 70s with the reformulation of the essential aspects of his teaching in terms of the Borromean knot. This topological reworking of psychoanalysis set out to grasp the consistency of the clinic, not at the level of the Other, but at the level of jouissance, while at the same time reconceptualising the relation between his three fundamental categories as independent and autonomous registers, absolutely equivalent at the level of their knotting. As such, the emergence of the Borromean clinic announced a radical shift in Lacan's thinking, which overturned his previous assertion of the primacy of the symbolic and allowed him to take up and examine how R.S.I. each hold together at the level of the knot, along with the different modes of jouissance elaborated therein.

Of course, the Borromean knot itself was not one of Lacan's inventions. On the contrary, it threads its way to us across the centuries, taking its name from its emblematic use on the Borromeo family's coat of arms. In fact, Lacan's recourse to the knot was not the first

time it had been used to explain how a conceptual structure derives its consistency through the mutual interrelation of its three independent terms.



A Borromean Trinity <sup>8</sup>

Here is an iconographic representation of the Borromean Knot, reproduced from a medieval theological manuscript. In this form, the knot is clearly being used to explain the mystery of the Trinity and thus how its three separate aspects, each defined as 'equal and eternal' in Christian doctrine, come together to form a principle of unity which is obtained only at the level of the knot that they form.<sup>9</sup>

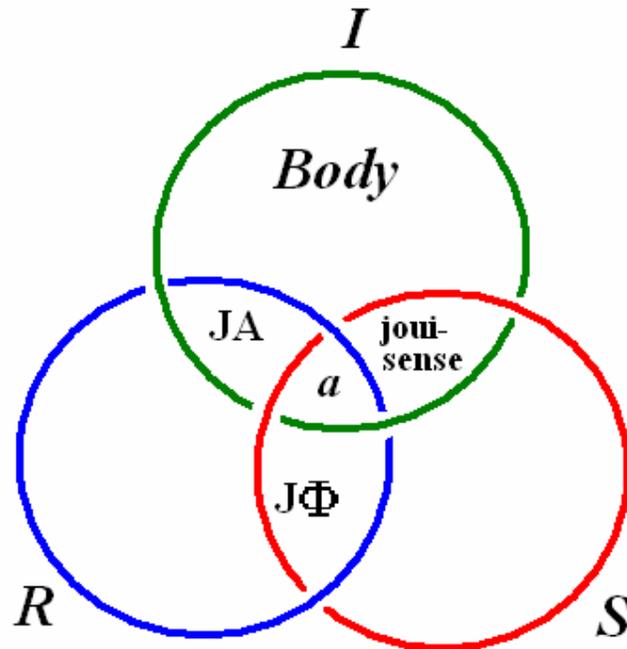
In fact, as we shall see, this Trinitarian conception of the knot is not so far removed from what concerns us in relation to Joyce and what he learned from Saint Thomas Aquinas before learning to answer for his sins, and thus his own particular 'fault', with a *heresy* (R.S.I.) of his own making which finally transformed him into a *sainthomme* in his own right. For although he began by being extremely preoccupied with the kind of consistency that the Trinity confers upon the doctrines of the Church, he ultimately came to subvert the threefold unity of its logic by using the materiality of the letter to interrupt the 'truth' invested in the eternal subsistence of its voice, breath and word.<sup>10</sup>

Looking closer at the above representation of the knot we see that there are three separate rings, three zones of intersection, and a

single central zone where the mystery of the Trinity resolves itself in the unity that is forged from the very particular manner of their knotting. Indeed, an examination of the points of intersection shows that none of the rings are knotted directly to each other, but only obtain the consistency of the knot through the intervention of the third ring. In other words, they are not knotted two by two, but three by three, so that if any one of the rings is cut the entire knot will come untied.

In the early 70s, beginning with his seminar *Encore*, Lacan used this principle of Borromean knotting to explain the way in which R.S.I. hold together at the level of the analytic experience. For, although they must be considered as entirely discrete and autonomous terms, they nevertheless acquire their consistency through the manner in which they interrelate both in the analytic discourse and at the level of experience.

Thus, according to the logic of the Borromean knot, one cannot think of the interrelation between any two of its terms without immediately implying the existence of the third term that secures their relation. For example, one cannot think of the relation between any aspect of the symbolic and the imaginary without their ultimately being held together by something of the order of the real; and, equally, one cannot think about the interrelation between the imaginary and the real, except insofar as their relation involves the symbolic. And of course, in securing the relation between two, the third term also keeps them apart, thereby ensuring that the two are free to play across each other's surfaces without becoming directly interlinked. In fact, as we shall soon see, although this Borromean logic is not always identical to the logic of supplementation, it nevertheless gives it its model – and if this acquires such crucial importance for Lacan, it is because it is bound up with the way in which *jouissance* is elaborated at the level of the knot.



### Jouissance and the Knot

This is the '*mise à plat*' version of the Borromean Knot which Lacan used in his third Rome Discourse, '*La Troisième*', and also in his seminar on the *Sinthome* in order to explore the different modalities of jouissance produced in the knotting of R.S.I. As is clearly visible here, the jouissance of the Other is produced in the overlapping between the Real and the Imaginary. Joui-sense or enjoy-meant, the enjoyment invested at the level of meaning, is produced in the overlapping of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. And finally, noticeably outside the body, phallic jouissance, the 'parasitical' jouissance that Lacan designates as being at the heart of the symptom, but also (and correlatively) the place that the speaking being associates with that of 'power', is produced through the overlapping of the Symbolic and the Real.

Also visible on this schematic representation of the knot, is the fact that at its heart, in its innermost kernel, is the object *a*. The object *a* thus partakes of each of the three registers and Lacan even describes it as being 'wedged' between them as the very principle of their knotting. Indeed, as Lacan stresses in '*La Troisième*', all the different modes of jouissance are 'plugged into' the object *a* that occupies its central

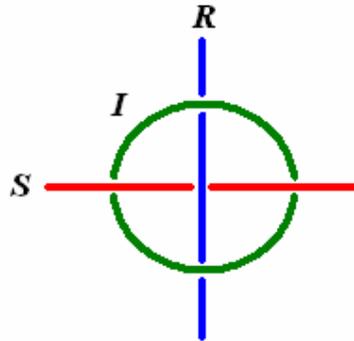
zone as *plus-de-jour*. The object *a* thus demonstrates that it derives what Lacan had earlier described as its 'logical consistency' from the overlapping of the three registers within the knot.

However, far from implying a diffusion of jouissance across the three registers, the object *a* rather demonstrates how each register intervenes to interrupt, intrude upon, decomplete or simply limit the jouissance created in the overlapping of the other two. It thus institutes a break, or breathing space, within what would otherwise be a continuity of jouissance and thus helps to differentiate the separate modes of jouissance operating in its other zones.<sup>11</sup> The interlinking of the three rings thus already indicates the existence of a supplementary term (embodied in a letter) at the heart of the knot which, in *a*-plying itself to its logic, functions as the very principle of their knotting. Indeed, one could argue that it is by drawing out what already exists here as fourth term at the level of a supplementary thread, that Lacan is ultimately able to modify the possible permutations for the elaboration of jouissance at the level of the knot, while at the same time maintaining the logic of their interrelation, in a practice of the letter which finally realises itself as an art of the knot.

In this regard, it is perhaps not for nothing that the analyst occupies the position of the object *a* within the analytic discourse, for this is the basis of his intervention within the various registers operating within the subject's speech. Yet the supplementary thread woven from this speech will only have a chance to gather its consistency from the resonance that it is able to draw from the real to the degree that the analyst refuses to believe in the object that forms the instrument of his artistry. It is therefore to the degree that he doesn't believe in the object that the analyst proves himself: *sainthomme*.<sup>12</sup> For, an analyst is precisely someone whose own path has shown him that the object is only a semblant which ultimately disappears behind the knotting that it leaves in its wake.<sup>13</sup>

## On the Path of the Sinthome

But if the art of the analyst is determined by how one targets the symptom in analysis, then it would be useful if we could find a way of localising it more accurately within the knot. Indeed, although Lacan will ultimately seek to detach the symptom as an independent element, he also found a number of ways to represent it on the three-ring knot which provide a crucial insight into its extraction as fourth term.



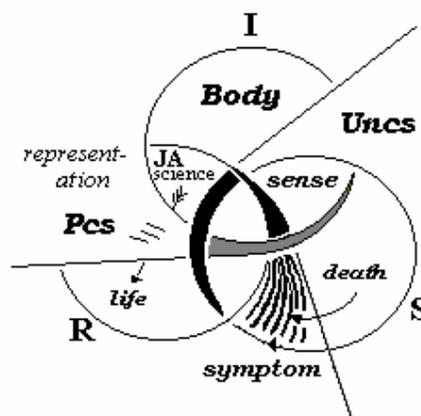
The Cross and the Circle

Here is an image which Lacan used in *La Troisième* and then again in *Le Sinthome*, where it takes on additional resonance in relation to Clive Hart's identification of the cross and the circle as the central structural principle of *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>14</sup> It is clearly modelled on the crucifixion and thus contains an implicit reference to the Name-of-the-Father. In fact, reading it according to the Borromean topology to which it refers, we could say that the imaginary gathers its consistency, and thus that of the knot itself, by encircling the intersection between the real and the symbolic. The image of the body is therefore held in place by the other two registers that run through it, thereby ensuring the mutual interrelation of the knot's three aspects of existence, consistence and a hole.

Of course, for this to happen in a Borromean fashion, the two straight lines of the real and the symbolic must return to themselves in a particular way. In the simplest terms, if the symbolic returns to itself in the background and the real in the foreground the knot is guaranteed to secure itself in a Borromean fashion. However, if they return to themselves in the opposite direction, the real and symbolic

will be directly interlinked and the imaginary will be at risk of slipping away. And of course, in a certain manner of speaking, this is exactly what happens in Joyce's knot. In fact, we could say that it is because Joyce falls off his cross that he is forced to build himself another one of his own invention and it is through this that he proves himself *sainthomme*.

In fact, as its form suggests this image of cross and circle also helps us to explicitly 'target' the symptom by allowing us to get it firmly in our sights. For as Lacan says in *La Troisième*, 'the sense of the symptom is the real, the real insofar as it forms a cross [se met en croix]' with the symbolic. The image of the cross thus gives us a rudimentary definition of the symptom and how the traumatic intrusion of the real (*tuché*) within the smooth running of the symbolic (*automaton*) is elaborated at the level of the body and its image. Thus, the real is the cross that trips the line and with the body makes a sign and it is no doubt in this 'sense' that we each have our individual crosses to bear at the level of the knot. For although we may appeal to the Other to alleviate our suffering, we ultimately have to testify to the quite singular ways in which the symptom has inscribed itself in our experience. And in this regard, it is perhaps not for nothing that this Other, who does not exist, only ever answers in a name.



The Knot's 3 Field Unfold

Here is an extrapolation of the *mise-à-plat* version of the knot that Lacan develops in *La Troisième*. Its form clearly bears out the de-

cisive assertion made in this paper that the symptom 'comes from the real,' which gives it its affinity with the 'letter' (as that which always returns to the same place) and 'writing'. More specifically, the diagram shows the symptom emerging from the real at its point of *cross-over* with the symbolic that we indicated above and this will take on an additional importance in what follows in that this is *exactly* the point that we will highlight in our reading of Joyce. For, while Joyce's art expressly targets the way that the symptom emerges at this point of cross-over through a particular articulation of letter (real) and signifier (symbolic), it is also at this point that Lacan will eventually identify the very fault that forecloses the Borromean consistency of Joyce's knot.

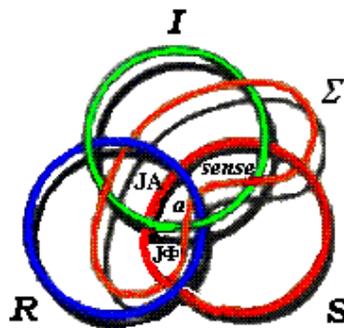
Returning to the representation of the three-ring knot above, we see that while the symptom clearly unfolds from the real, the unconscious unfolds from the symbolic and the field of perception-consciousness from the imaginary – and they do so in a way that is clearly designed to preserve the Borromean logic of the original knot. Thus, while the symptom emerges from the real at the point that it runs over the symbolic, it then passes beneath the anterior phases of the perceptual system unfolding from the imaginary, only to then emerge once more in the symbolic where its parasitical jouissance fans out like the mouth of a great river, all the while attached to the real from which it springs. Indeed, as Lacan says in *La Troisième*, 'the symptom is the irruption of this anomaly in which phallic jouissance consists, insofar as it spreads itself there, blossoming forth from this fundamental lack that I have qualified as the sexual non-rapport.' And if the symptom encroaches into the symbolic in this manner, the unconscious encroaches in a similar way into the imaginary of the body where it can be seen unfolding from the field of meaning, all the while remaining attached to the radical effect of non-sense inscribed at its point of origin, the point of primal repression where, appropriately enough, the symbolic passes beneath the real.

Furthermore, adding a little spice to this articulation of Borromean logic, while at the same time providing an important context

for Lacan's later elaboration of the sinthome, the diagram also shows how science aims directly at life from a position outside the symbolic. In fact, in *La Troisième* Lacan speaks prophetically about the attempts of science to treat the jouissance of the speaking being by intervening directly at the level of the real of the body (i.e. at the level of the organism), in a way which remains resolutely outside the dimension of speech which defines both the efficacy and the ethic of psychoanalysis and the rest of the Psy field. He even speaks of the scientific endeavour to integrate the body and technology in the hope of bypassing the verbal parasite of phallic jouissance and the effects of the sexual non-rapport. In fact, the diagram clearly shows science attempting to intervene directly at the level of the jouissance of the body by threading its needle beneath the field of perception through the administration of one form of anaesthetic or another, in order to then tie the real to its syntax with various techniques of incision and suture, to the point of grafting itself within the knotting of life's own string.<sup>15</sup>

But whatever very real social benefits science may bring us with the instrumentalisation of its letters in relation to the real, is it really possible to by-pass the phallic jouissance of the symptom produced as a consequence of the subject's relation to language? Lacan doubts it. On the contrary he insists that it is only insofar as it is targeted at the level of the signifier (through an art of equivocation) that something may be 'drawn back' from the field of the symptom and the way that it parasites the symbolic. And this marks the beginning of a politics of psychoanalysis founded on the ethical treatment of the symptom and it is above all this that finally paves the way towards the concept of the *sinthome*. For although, this concept plays on the notion of the 'synthetic man', or *sinthomme*, by acknowledging the subject's subjection to the symbolic apparatus and the effect of surplus enjoyment produced by the object *a*, it nevertheless remains resolutely 'humanistic' in one form or another by grounding itself on the singularity at stake in each subject's experience of the 'totality' of the knot.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, it is by finally isolating the symptom as a supplementary thread (and even as the vital tress of subjectivity which binds together what would otherwise remain a 'paranoid' three) that Lacan finally comes to draw out what is most singular in each subject's relation to language and jouissance. The symptom, reduced to its value as a *letter* ( $\Sigma$ ), thereby comes to supplement the three registers at stake in the subject's speech (R.S.I.). It then becomes a question of looking at how this supplementary thread weaves itself through the interstices of the knot and the modes of jouissance that are elaborated therein. And in this way, it becomes possible to consider different modes of supplementing R.S.I. as well as how a given symptom can be modified, within the constraints of the topology that supports it, in order to allow for a subjective inscription of the jouissance that it (quite literally) implies.

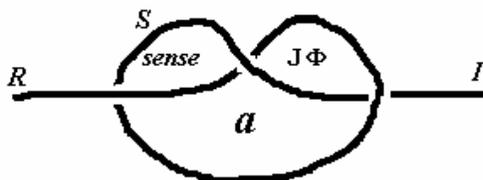


The symptom as 4<sup>th</sup> Term <sup>17</sup>

Here is a schematic representation of the symptom as it operates within the clinic of neurosis, under the auspices of the Name-of-the-Father. The image shows the symptom acting as a supplementary support for the symbolic register and thus as a 'nomination' of the symbolic.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, as can easily be verified on the image, without this supplementary support, the three rings would not be tied together at all. In fact, here the fourth term secures the relation between the three rings of R.S.I. by weaving itself in such a way as to produce a four-ring Borromean knot. It thereby perfectly illustrates the way that Lacan extracts the very principle of Borromean knotting as fourth term and this opens the way to a new kind of clinic, a clinic of supplementation, based on the principles of Borromean tying in which the fourth term is taken up in different ways according to the savoir-

faire of the analyst and analysand/ patient alike in order to produce different kinds of consistency at the level of the knot and the jouissance that it implies.

And what does such a savoir-faire consist in, if not a 'knowledge of the knot' and the means with which 'to tie it up with artifice'.<sup>19</sup>



Noe-sense<sup>20</sup>

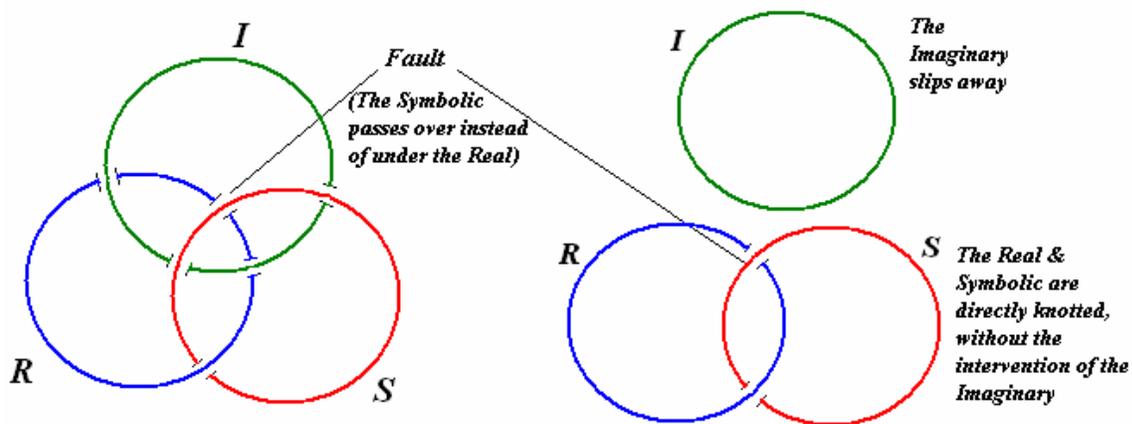
### Joyce and the Art of the Knot

This theme of the use of artifice in securing a different kind of consistency at the level of the knot brings us back at last to what we might call, following Lacan, 'the case of Joyce'. For as Lacan says in his seminar: 'I propose to consider the case of Joyce as responding to a particular way of supplementing the untying of the knot'.<sup>21</sup> In fact, if Joyce's artistry emerges as a paradigm for the new clinic, it is because, according to Lacan, Joyce used his art to repair a failure at the level of the Borromean consistency of the knot which allows it to come undone in a particular way. According to Lacan, this failure corresponds to a failure of the paternal function, a failure at the level of the Name-of-the-father, 'without which nothing is possible in the knotting of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real'<sup>22</sup> (which we earlier saw implicit in the three-ring knot and explicit in the four-ring Borromean construction above). However, this failure of the symbolic function of the Name-of-the-Father, the total absence of which would lead to the triggering of a psychosis, takes on a very specific form in Joyce, for as Lacan says in his seminar:

Joyce has a symptom which departs from this: that his father was lacking, radically lacking – he never speaks of anything else. I have centred everything on the proper name and have come to think... that it was in wanting to make a name for himself that Joyce came to compensate for the paternal failure.... But it is clear that Joyce's art is something so particular that the term sinthome is what suits him.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, according to Lacan, Joyce's art comes to serve as a supplementary support for the failure of the paternal function, securing it through an art of the letter which allows him to make a name for himself, while at the same time allowing his own quite singular relation to language to come through.

However, before we can begin to approach the kind of artistry at stake in Joyce's solution, how can we first account for the failure in the consistency of Joyce's knot?



*The Fault in the Knot: Joyce's Knot before the Construction of the Sinthome*

As this representation shows (and as previously noted), the fault in the knotting peculiar to Joyce is located at the intersection between the Symbolic and the Real, where the Symbolic, instead of passing under the Real in a way which would have allowed the knot to hold together in a Borromean fashion, passes over it. In this way the symbolic knots itself *directly* to the real without the intervention of the imaginary as a third term. At the same time this leaves the imaginary precariously wedged in place between the real and the symbolic, without being secured at the level of the knot. Thus, instead of being knotted to the real through the mediation of the imaginary, the symbolic is tied directly to the real, so that when the imaginary is put under pressure it slips away, as shown. And of course, as we shall see

later, this failure of Borromean consistency of the knot cannot but have an effect on the way in which *jouissance* is elaborated within it.

Indeed, it is important to establish this point of failure correctly, because it indexes the mode of supplementation that Joyce constructs in order to deal with it. The failure is thus *not* located simply in the 'slipping away' of the imaginary, but in the knot itself, at the point at which the symbolic and real become interlinked. The slipping away of the imaginary only occurs as a consequence of this anomaly in Borromean tying that indexes the failure of the paternal function in securing itself at the level of nomination. The true 'slip' then, the one which reveals the fault in the structure, is the one which occurs in the tying of the knot at the point of juncture between the symbolic and the real, which we earlier noted to be the point at which the symptom emerges. And this slip will continue to be legible in the solution that Joyce constructs to supplement the failure in the knotting of R.S.I., a solution that emerges at the level of the *sinthome*.

### **Towards a Solution**

Unfortunately, there is not sufficient space left in this article to fully account for the way in which this failure opens up within the rich texture of Joyce's writing, or give a detailed account of the way that Joyce constructed the *sinthome* in the course of his work. However, so as not to let the task fall away before going some way to attain our goal, I will sketch out the essential terms of the itinerary that will take us there as follows.

#### *Step One*

The first step on such an itinerary would of course be an in depth discussion of the place and function of the epiphany in Joyce's writing. For, while the epiphany represents the most readily accessible means of demonstrating the failure of Borromean consistence at the level of Joyce's work, it also provides a crucial indication of the way in which Joyce begins to respond to this failure in the knot and treat the *jouis-*

sance that it leaves unbound through a mechanism that is explicitly located at the level of his *writing*.

Indeed, while Joyce himself referred to these moments as 'sudden spiritual manifestations,' in the light of the Borromean clinic, they appear rather as revelations of structure which provide the quite singular testimony of an experience of the knot in which the symbolic and the real have become directly interlinked without the mediation of the imaginary.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the peculiar lack of signification which marks the epiphany as a unique literary phenomenon, as if language had suddenly voided itself of all meaning and all reference to the phallic function that organises its effects.<sup>25</sup> As a consequence the knot which usually binds phallic jouissance to meaning around the object *a* simply does not hold and in coming untied it leaves the subject suspended in a peculiar sense of 'paralysis' before the enigma of the Other's jouissance.

However, as mentioned above, the epiphany also indicates the way that Joyce treats the jouissance at stake in his experience at the level of writing. For the definition of the epiphany does not simply lie at the level of an isolated experience, but also in the very *act* of writing it down. And it is this act that ultimately allows Joyce to reassert a relation to the Other, without passing via the fantasy in the normal neurotic way.<sup>26</sup> In fact, in the epiphany Joyce succeeds in knotting speech (symbolic) directly to the letter (the real), thereby reducing his experience to the reality of the knot in an act of *rigour* which – through its dual aspects of transcription and transmission – founds the certainty of his aesthetic mission. Indeed, Lacan even goes so far as to say that 'the epiphany is that which, thanks to the fault, makes the unconscious and the real knot themselves'<sup>27</sup> thereby ensuring that Joyce's work is impossible to analyse at the level of unconscious meaning.

### *Step Two*

The second step in our itinerary concerns the crucial example that Lacan gives of the slipping away the imaginary of the body at the level

of Joyce's experience. The example in question is of course the scene in which young Stephen Daedalus is involved in an argument over poets with his classmates and is whipped with a cane for his 'heresy'. According to Lacan, at this moment when the imaginary is put under pressure, the body falls away as image and is dropped, along with the libidinal dynamism that sustains the ego at the level of the counterpart. In fact, Lacan insists that when Joyce speaks of a strange 'power ...divesting [Stephen] of that suddenwoven anger as easily as a fruit is divested of its soft ripe peel,'<sup>28</sup> he does nothing less than 'metaphorises his relation to his body.'<sup>29</sup> However, as precious as this example is in allowing us to situate some of the essential terms of Joyce's experience of the knot, it is also necessary to look at what arises from this slipping away of the body. And this can be explored in the following quotation, which also affords us a little reprise on the theme of the Trinity:

The imagery through which the nature and kinship of the Three Persons of the Trinity were darkly shadowed forth in the books of devotion which he read... were easier of acceptance by his mind by reason of their august incomprehensibility than was the simple fact that God had loved his soul from all eternity... He had heard the names of the passions of love and hate pronounced solemnly in books, and had wondered why his soul was unable to harbour them for any time or to force his lips to utter their names with conviction. A brief anger had often invested him but he had never been able to make it an abiding passion and had always felt himself passing out of it as if his very body were being divested with ease of some outer skin or peel. He had felt a subtle, dark and murmurous presence penetrate his being and fire him with a brief iniquitous lust: it too had slipped beyond his grasp leaving his mind lucid and indifferent.<sup>30</sup>

This quotation shows how the theme of the Trinity is initially taken up in Joyce's work in a way which appears to serve an appeasing function, holding out the possibility of an experience which nevertheless slips away from him as the imaginary slips its knot. And what arises in its place, if not a disembodied relation to language

which appears as a murmurous presence which increasingly threatens to engulf him? <sup>31</sup>

### *Step Three*

This brings us to the third step in our itinerary which raises the question of imposed speech and how Joyce developed an art of the letter which both responds and testifies to his experience of a *jouissance* that remains unbound at the level of the knot. For as Lacan says:

In what is, in a way, the continuing progress of his art, it is difficult not to see that a certain relation to speech – this speech which comes to be written, broken and dislocated – is increasingly imposed upon him to the point that he finishes by dissolving language itself... He ends up by imposing a sort of rupture or decomposition on language so that it no longer has phonetic identity.<sup>32</sup>

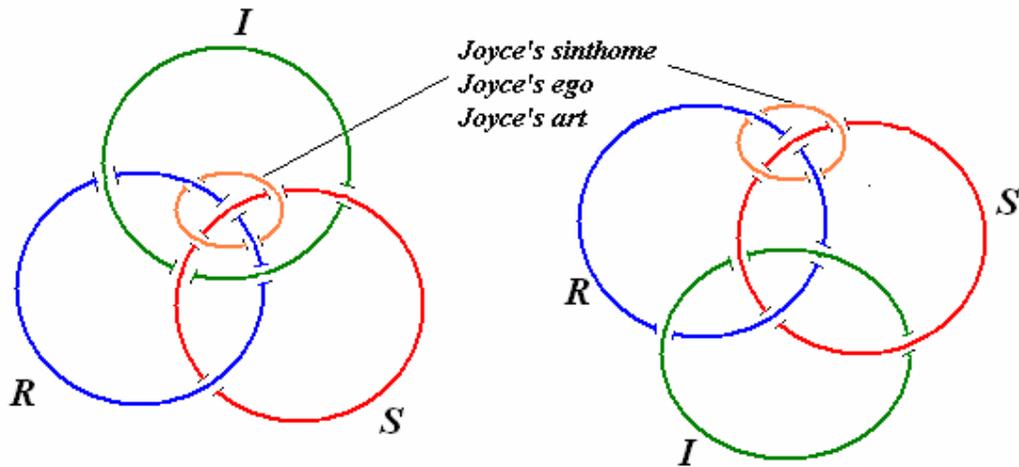
In fact, Lacan is very attentive to the way in which Joyce uses the *letter* as a supplement to the three *dit-mensions* of the speaking being in order to derive a new kind of consistency at the level of their knotting. For if 'the drive is the echo in the body of the fact of speech' as Lacan says in his seminar,<sup>33</sup> and if Joyce is prey to this echo insofar as it resounds, not in the body, but in the world, then his solution lies in writing the speech of the world in an art of the letter which aims to support the whole polyphony of the voice, while at the same time limiting it in a work of art.<sup>34</sup> Joyce thereby comes to spin a supplementary thread from the *jouissance* inscribed in *lalangue*, drawing the consistency of a cord from the many resonances that he is able to sound out in the real. And what I would like to stress here, is simply that it is a solution that rests upon art, namely on the fact that:

Far from the body there is the possibility of what I referred to last time as resonance, or consonance. It is at the level of the real that this consonance can be found. Between these two poles constituted by the body and language, the real is what makes accord.<sup>35</sup>

This reference to Aquinas's theory of aesthetics allows us to gauge something of the use that Joyce drew from the work of this *sainthomme*. Moreover, its final pun also allows us to detach the art-

istry that he finally developed from it as fourth term. We therefore finally arrive at the fourth term of the knot.

*Section Four*



*Joyce's Solution: Two Perspectives on the Knot*

In this diagram we clearly see how Lacan finally came to indicate the way in which Joyce managed to secure the knotting of R.S.I. by weaving a supplementary thread through the interstices of the knot, around its point of failure. Here, there is no question of restoring a Borromean consistency to the knot. On the contrary the real and symbolic clearly remain directly knotted as before. However, the function of the sinthome clearly holds the imaginary in place by blocking the point at which it slipped away in the initial knot. Moreover, as I have indicated all along, the solution that Joyce constructed is situated around the intersection between the symbolic and the real and it bears the mark of the fault that it remedies. It is a solution based on his quite singular artistry with the letter, his knowledge of the knot and his ability to tie it up with an artifice of his own invention. And in this way we see how art comes to thread its signature through the writing of the knot and the tying of the *Sinthome* in Lacan's seminar.

1. Representation used in a lecture at Yale in 1975, *Scilicet* 6/7, p. 39 (colour added)
2. *Le Sinthome*, (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p. 38
3. J. Lacan. *Écrits*, (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p.66
4. 16th December 1975. *Le Sinthome* p.54
5. In this knot the 4th term secures a Borromean consistency, while in Joyce's knot it does not.
6. J. Lacan. 'Lituraterre,' *Autres écrits* (Paris : Seuil, 2001), p.11
7. *Le Sinthome*, p.68.
8. Philippe Julien, *Jacques Lacan's Return to Freud* (New York, NYU Press, 1994), p.178.
9. In fact, this iconic use seems to bear a striking resemblance to the language of St. Hilary's seminal inquiry into how the three persons of the Trinity can be said to 'reciprocally contain one another, so that one permanently envelopes and is permanently enveloped by, the other whom he yet envelopes.' Hilary, *Concerning the Trinity*, 3:1.
10. If Christ is the *Word* and the Holy Spirit the *Breath*, then it follows that God the Father is the *Voice* as Joyce's work bears out.
11. This is not the case in psychosis, where a continuity of *jouissance* operates in the absence of the Borromean logic embodied by object *a*.
12. This is what Lacan suggests in *Television*, where Lacan indicates that a saint's business is not *caritas* but '*trashitas*' and ultimately, no doubt, the *secut palea* of Aquinas (New York: Norton, 1990), p.15
13. It is precisely in this sense that psychoanalysis proves itself to be the 'negative of religion' (*Le Sinthome*, p.36)
14. Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber, 1962), p.117
15. Lacan is keen to point out that nature also has its knot (DNA).
16. *Le Sinthome*, p.54
17. This knot was copied from an old AMP website and translated into English. I have chosen not to alter the way in which *jouissance* is knotted here as it suggests well enough how the symptom weaves its way through the different modes of *jouissance* elaborated in the knot.

However, it seems to me that, in knotting phallic jouissance to meaning, the efficiency of symbolic nomination could be to place JA on the other side of the cord - for after all, as Lacan says in his seminar, it does not exist.

18. This mode of nomination privileges the symbolic by doubling it, thereby giving a duplicity between symbol and symptom which provides Lacan with the point of departure for his seminar on the *Sinthome*.

19. Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, p. 73

20. As simple as this knot appears to be, it acts as a means of transition between the introduction to knots and the more concerted reading of Joyce in *Le Sinthome* (p.56 & p.73). Although it can be taken up in different ways, according to Lacan's reading of it on p.73, it illustrates how the art of analysis consists in splicing together unconscious knowledge and the imaginary, on the one hand, and the sinthome and the real parasite of jouissance, on the other. Analysis thus appears as an art of interpretation which, by targeting a division within the symbolic opened by the letter, allows jouissance to inscribe itself through a practice which Lacan refers to as that of 'j'ouïs sens'.

21. J. Lacan, *Le Sinthome*, p. 87

22. J. Lacan, 'Joyce le symptôme,' in *Le Sinthome*, p. 167

23. *Le Sinthome*, p.94

24. Thus, if the 'epiphany' refers to the way in which the threefold unity of the Trinity reveals itself in an object, it is only insofar as it fails.

25. The epiphany is not a poetic phenomenon, but rather one marked by an absence of all poetic effects.

26. For a further discussion of this point see my article 'In the wake of Interpretation' in *Reinventing the Symptom*, ed. Luke Thurston, (New York: Other Press, 2002).

27. *Le Sinthome*, 11 May 1976.

28. J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Paladin, 1988), p.84

29. *Le Sinthome*, p. 148-149

30. *Op. cit.* p. 152-3

31. For a discussion of this point, see Pierre Thèves article above. It is also worth noting that the theme of the Trinity later reappears in a parodic and retrograde form, which is perhaps best embodied by the fusion of Stephen and Bloom in the Ithaca episode of *Ulysses* (p. 558 c. line 550), so that their very names become interlinked as Blephen and Stoom. This no doubt represents Joyce's own response to the enigma of the words 'I in the Father and the Father in Me' as discussed by St. Hilary in his seminal inquiry on the Trinity noted above (*op. cit.*), but there could also be no better illustration of the way that the theme of the Trinity in Joyce comes to strike a profound chord with Lacan's use of R.S.I. in his seminar. For this direct interlinking of names perfectly illustrates the knotting of two without the intervention of the third to secure their relation and thereby allow them to play across each others surfaces without becoming directly interlinked.

32. *Le Sinthome*, p. 96.

33. *Le Sinthome*, p. 17

34. For a more detailed discussion of Joyce's technique see Jacques-Alain Miller's article 'Lacan with Joyce' above.

35. *Le Sinthome*, p.40.

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