Cinema Fakes: Film and Joycean Fantasy

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The act which in the ordinary theater would go on in our mind alone is . . . in the photoplay projected into the pictures themselves. It is as if reality has lost its own continuous shape and become shaped by the demands of our soul.

—Hugo Munsterburg

As Joyce laid aside the beginnings of Ulysses to compose Exiles in 1915, one of the first American studies of the cinema appeared. The relationship between Joyce and Vachel Lindsay's eccentric book on the photoplay, The Art of the Moving Picture, was first noted by Austin Briggs at the Copenhagen symposium and published in the proceedings. Lindsay's book, as Briggs suggests, bears particular relevance to the more fantastic aspects of Joyce's cinematic techniques and aesthetics: the representation of dreams, visions, and hallucinations. Briggs also considers the similarity of these protosurrealist portions of Joyce's fiction to the filmic fantasy of Georges Méliès. Other movie magicians such as Leopoldo Fregoli, who on stage and film entertained audiences by swiftly transforming himself into a succession of different characters seemingly instantaneously, and Billy Bitzer, later renowned as D. W. Griffith's cinematographer, toyed with comparable techniques in their work. These fantastic, but seemingly real, elements of the early trick film are frequently spliced between the psychic and physical realism of Joyce's novels.

As a point of departure, one cannot help but acknowledge the conventionality of the dreams and visions in the early fiction—no matter how effective they may be, the phantasms of the night and the imagination in Dubliners follow traditional paths; the events of the dreams seem little different from daylight activities. In "The Sisters" the boy envisions the deceased Father Flynn in his bedroom in great detail. The next day, however, the boy no longer recalls so many particulars from the dream—it has slipped back into the re-
cesses of the unconscious, never to be fully experienced by the reader, as are the more painstakingly re-created and vividly described dreams in Joyce's later works. Likewise, Gabriel's shade-filled reverie at the close of "The Dead," though specific, somber, and heart-rending, assumes a conventional, almost mundane, form. Gabriel's description of the afterlife contains nearly as many clichés as his toast to Irish hospitality after his aunts' dinner. Even Stephen's fevered prophetic visions of Parnell's funeral procession as the youngster languishes in the infirmary in the first chapter of A Portrait represent a relatively tame dream sequence.

Only in Stephen's vision of hell do we begin to receive a sense of a dream logic and the personae of the unconscious, of the fantasy that is to come in the later novels. His satyrs augur beings in the nightmare of "Circe," the goats dressed and speaking as humans reminding one of the talking animals and props of that episode. Combining sin and guilt in an archetypal form, clad in tatters, their tails covered with feces, these creatures suggest a compression of imagery resembling the logic of a dream and the techniques of Finnegans Wake: the symbolic personification of lust in its mythical avatar and those fallen beings clothed in the shabby but soiled respectability of humanity suggest the animism of sexuality and the shame frequently connected with the body. The topoi and motifs of this guilt-induced vision have been kindled by Father Arnull's fire and brimstone sermons, which, in turn, invoke centuries of Catholic imagery depicting the fates of the damned. The content of dreams and visions calls on the collective unconscious of Irish and Western culture, but it also includes the more personal mythology of the character/dreamer.

Joyce himself realized the connection between "Circe" and the cinema; if unaware of the affinity at the time of composition, it certainly became clear to him later. In the "Circe" section of his notebook for Finnegans Wake, Scribbledeshobble, he writes: "Cinema fakes, drown, state of sea, tank, steeplejack, steeple on floor, camera above; jumps 10 feet, 1 foot camera in 6 foot pit" (119). The notebook entry itself suggests a staged drowning, in a tank made to look like the sea. A crewman perches on a steeple with the camera above aiming down; it may look as though an actor jumps ten feet, but it's probably just a camera in a deeper hole that creates the illusion. Such an entry not only demonstrates Joyce's awareness of cinema tricks but also that he believed film to be related to "Circe" in the context of the workbook and the technique of the episode.

The genre of the trick film may have provided Joyce with an apt model for his literary representations of dreams and fantasies. Robert Ryf tantalizes us by informing us that Georges Méliès exhibited his films near Joyce's residence in Paris in 1904. The cinematic creativity of Méliès evokes apparitions and hallucinations similar to those in Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, which move toward a more fluid and transforming literature. A magician turned director, Méliès fully exploited the cinema's potential for illusion. As Gerald Mast
explains, Méliès discerned “that the camera’s ability to stop and start again brought the magician’s two greatest arts to perfection—disappearance and conversion. Anything could be converted into anything else; anything could vanish” (38). The fluidity of change implicit here anticipates the nonlogical, free-associational style favored by surrealism, creating a prototype of this art movement which, while closely yoked with the dream world, makes use of strikingly realistic images. Typical of this genre is Méliès’s 1898 film *Four Troublesome Heads*, in which the filmmaker portrays a magician who “removes his head three times over, strikes up a song with the resulting chorus, and then causes the extra heads to disappear by smashing them with a banjo” (Wake­man 752). Or one might think of Billy Bitzer’s *A Pipe Dream*, a 1905 Biograph production; the *Biograph Bulletin* provides the following synopsis of the company’s trick film: “A novel picture showing a young woman smoking a cigarette and dreamily blowing the smoke over the palm of her hand. As she watches the smoke the figure of a young man appears kneeling on her hand and addressing her in passionate terms. The image seems to amuse her greatly, and she tries to catch it. It vanishes as her hand goes to seize it” (Barnouw 100). Lindsay suggested that “the possible charm in a so-called trick picture is in eliminating the tricks, giving them dignity till they are no longer such, but thoughts in motion and made visible” (142).

Much of *Ulysses*, especially “Circe” and the stream-of-consciousness passages, can be discussed using the terms that Lindsay employs to analyze the potential of the inchoate form, then often referred to as the photoplay, especially the type which he calls the “picture of Fairy Splendor.” In the “Photoplay of Splendor,” according to Lindsay, “the camera has a kind of Hallowe’en witch power” (59). This category includes a number of subcategories, including the picture of Fairy Splendor, by which he means the “highly imaginative fairy-tale” with its attendant trick scenes, those primitive forerunners to today’s special effects (62). With the motion-picture camera’s ability to create sudden appearances and disappearances, transformations and other cinematic legerdemain, one can call up the dark spirits and macabre mood of Halloween and summon the type of supernatural and magical powers traditionally attributed to witches and warlocks. Lindsay might have been referring to films like Méliès’s *The Vanishing Lady*, in which not only does a woman disappear from a chair (as she did on stage at the Robert-Houdin Theater), but also, with camera stops, a skeleton assumes her place. Finally, the skeleton, too, disappears and the woman reappears seated in the chair. Or perhaps he had in mind a film such as *The Devil and the Statue*, in which Satan, played by Méliès, “reaches giant proportions before a terrified Shakespearean Juliet and then, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, shrinks to the size of a dwarf and disappears” (Wakeman 750, 754). Such techniques and events have parallels both in the supernatural world of “Circe,” in which images of Bloom’s grandfather and son as well as Stephen’s mother return from the grave, and in many
of the macabre stream-of-consciousness passages that occur to Bloom in "Hades." Among a number of possibilities, consider the mental transformations of this passage in "Lestrygonians," in which Bloom ruminates upon some ideas of advertising campaigns for Wisdom Hely, the stationer:

I suggested . . . a transparent showcart with two smart girls sitting inside writing letters, copybooks, envelopes, blotting paper. I bet that would have caught on. Smart girls writing something catch the eye at once. Everyone dying to know what she's writing. Get twenty of them round you if you stare at nothing. Have a finger in the pie. Women too. Curiosity. Pillar of salt. Wouldn't have it of course because he didn't think of it himself first. Or the inkbottle I suggested with a false stain of black celluloid. His ideas for ads like Plumtree's potted under the obituaries, cold meat department. (U-GP 8:131-45)

Such grim collocations of curiosity, which led to the gruesome saline death of Lot's wife, alongside the horrific linkage of potted meat with corpses indicate the potentially macabre splicing of ideas made possible with a stream-of-consciousness that creates swift transmogrifications, with an apparent ease reminiscent of a stop-motion sequence.

As Briggs has suggested, this sorcerous power and its potentially horrifying emotional tenor manifests itself most obviously in the "Circe" episode. The stage directions of the episode indicate this from the outset:

(The Mabbot street entrance of nighttown, before which stretches an uncobbled tramsiding set with skeleton tracks, red and green will-o'-the-wisps and danger signals. Rows of grimy houses with gaping doors. Rare lamps with faint rainbow fans. Round Rabaiotti's halted ice gondola stunted men and women squabble. They grab wafers between which are wedged lumps of coral and copper snow. Sucking, they scatter slowly, children. The swancomb of the gondola, highreared, forges on through the murk, white and blue under a lighthouse. Whistles call and answer.)

(U-GP 15:1-9)

The metaphoric skeletons, the stunted figures of children, the danger, and the darkness all contribute to the disturbing atmosphere. The whistles at first appear also to be a part of this squalid district of ill repute; however, these sounds are seemingly embodied as the Call and the Answer who speak the first words of this hallucinatory drama.

A significant element of the visions in "Circe" can be linked to the type of animism that often occurs in the cinema, what Lindsay calls, in a wonderful phrase, a "yearning for personality in furniture," an aspect that "begins to be crudely worked upon in the so-called trick scenes" (61). Lindsay mentions as a "typical . . . comedy of this sort" a film titled Moving Day, in which the furniture and possessions of a household march by themselves from one domicile to another, relocating the family in short order. He might also have mentioned an early Dewar's whiskey advertisement of Méliès: during the film, the solemn "family portraits descend from their frames to sample" the scotch being served
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Other, later examples include Oscar Fischinger's animated advertisements during the 1930s, some of which featured armies of marching Muratti cigarettes. Similarly, inanimate objects are imbued with personality, including the power of speech, in the Circean psychodrama. The legion of furnishings, animals, elements, and even actions that (or who) exhibit personality range from the wreaths of cigarette smoke to the kisses for Bloom, from the bleats of Staggering Bob, "a whitepolled calf," to the "bright cascade" of the Poulahouca waterfall of the upper Liffey. Each is given voice and identity by the stage directions and dialogue in the episode, the calf and the waterfall possibly having been witnesses to a masturbatory indiscretion of the young Leopold Bloom. (Perhaps they saw; evidence in "Circe" can hardly be relied upon.)

While these animated apparitions may surprise the reader, comments in earlier episodes prefigure them. In "Lestrygonians" Mrs. Breen tells Bloom of her husband Denis's nightmare in which "the ace of spades was walking up the stairs" (U-GP 8:253). And both Stephen and Bloom remark upon the often ignored voices of the inanimate world: in "Proteus," the young poet-aesthete listens to the "fourworded wavespeech" (U-GP 3:456–60). The more practical Bloom notes in "Aeolus" that machines and objects speak: "Slt. The nethermost deck of the first machine jogged forward its flyboard with slt the first batch of quirefolded papers. Slt. Almost human the way it slt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. That door too still creaking, asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way. Slt" (U-GP 7:174–177). Each of these passages is more than the onomatopoeia of Joyce's earlier work, like the sound of the cricket bats in Portrait—"pick, pack, pock, puck"; they represent nonhuman speech as interpreted by these two observers, individuals who attempt to discern the personality of the world about them.

Lindsay also suggests that in "all photoplays... human beings tend to become dolls and mechanisms, and dolls and mechanisms tend to become human" (53). He anticipates what André Bazin would later consider the cinema's "specific illusion": "to make of a revolver or of a face the very center of the universe" (1:105). One of the most human aspects of mechanisms—speech—has already been considered in Joyce's work. However, in many of the episodes of Ulysses Joyce also imbues humans with apparently mechanical qualities, as other critics such as Alan Spiegel have noted: reminding one of the machinelike antics of silent film stars such as Max Linder, Charlie Chaplin, or Harold Lloyd. The characters in "Wandering Rocks" resemble automatons, comprising the moving parts of a Dublin machine; in "Sirens" the humans are frequently reduced to their musical equivalents; while in "Oxen of the Sun" Bloom, Stephen, and the medical students all find themselves subjected to the ventriloquism of the author's chronological/gestational obsession; finally, in "Circe" Bloom's stiff walk turns his movements into mechanical ones.
But perhaps more importantly, Joyce does attain the potential that Lindsay foresees in the photoplay of fairy splendor, "the possible charm in a so-called trick picture," by re-creating "thoughts in motion," literally embodying ideas and emotions (Lindsay 142). "Circe" represents the character's consciousness in motion, rendering the ideas and emotions of Stephen and Bloom apparent to the reader, not through the usual novelistic means of description or even by entering their streams of consciousness, a device readers of Joyce have become quite accustomed to much earlier in the novel. Fantasies and thoughts are given shape and substance; the mind is projected as a dreamlike representation. For example, Bloom's trial for a catalogue of numerous and varied sex crimes—a fantasy that starts shortly after he finds himself confronted with this graffiti in nighttown: "a scrawled chalk legend Wet Dream and a phallic design" (U-GP 15:649-50)—objectifies and projects his most secret desires baldly for all readers to see and hear, to follow unequivocally, while at the same time demonstrating his own guilt concerning these longings. The apparition of Shakespeare as cuckold is similarly evocative of many buried themes:

LYNCH
(points) The mirror up to nature. (he laughs) Hu hu hu hu hu!

(Stephen and Bloom gaze in the mirror. The face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there, rigid in facial paralysis, crowned by the reflection of the reindeer antlered hatrack in the hall.)

SHAKESPEARE
(in dignified ventriloquy) 'Tis the loud laugh bespeaks the vacant mind. (to Bloom) Thou thoughtest as how thou wastest invisible. Gaze. (he crows with a black capon's laugh) Iagogo! How my Oldfellow chokit his Thursdaymornun. Iagogogo!

BLOOM
(smiles yellowly at the three whores) When will I hear the joke? (U-GP 15:3819-31)

Through the logic of dreams and the unconscious, one finds here a cinematic representation of issues and themes related to important motifs in the novel. With his allusion, one of those "chance words" that evoke memories, Lynch calls forth the bard and the question of artistic creation. Shakespeare first mouths words that actually are a variation from Oliver Goldsmith's The Deserted Village, raising the issue of artistry and plagiarism. Yet before Shakespeare even speaks, his appearance as antlered cuckold in the mirror brings to mind the displacement of both Bloom and Stephen. Like Bloom, Stephen has of course been denied by a usurper, although not to the joys of the marriage.

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bed but of access to his castle-home in Sandycove. Furthermore, the vision of Shakespeare taunts Bloom's hope that his transgressions would not be found out and derides him with the laughter of a black (hence ostracized, like the Moor) castrated rooster. Bloom doubts his own masculinity through this apparition, who further mocks him with the punning variations of Othello and Desdemona—Oldfellow and Thursdaymornun—reminding him both of the waning of sexual prowess and the morning when he said nothing ("chokit") to prevent the adulterous liaison of his wife. With this densely layered passage, foreshadowing both the themes and the sort of encoding ubiquitous in Finnegans Wake, we certainly have moved beyond the tricks of the cinema to the dignity and artistry of thoughts in motion.

Certainly this passage and others like it suggest, as Lindsay comments, "how much more quickly than on the stage the borderline of All Saints' Day and Hallowe'en can be crossed. Note how easily memories are called up, and appear in the midst of the room. In any [photo-]plays whatever, you will find these apparitions and recollections. . . . The dullest hero is given glorious visualizing power" (65–66). In his chapter "Furniture, Trappings, and Inventions in Motion," Lindsay provides a lengthy summary and analysis of a Griffith film, The Avenging Conscience, a collage of macabre scenes in homage to and in imitation of Edgar Allan Poe. In this film, Griffith effortlessly enters into the world of dreams and horror, giving the audience filmic entree to the mind of the protagonist/poet of the tale and allowing them to experience the frightening rearrangements of his daily life into nightmares of murder and persecution. Likewise, using cinematic means, Joyce can easily take the reader into the depths of Bloom's and Stephen's personal Halloweens, their particular houses of horrors. We traverse the boundaries between saints and sinners, moving from All Hallow's Eve to All Saints' Day quite readily; in "Circe," the voice of all the blessed follows hard on the voice of all the damned—the difference between "the Lord God Omnipotent" and "Tnetopimno Dog Drol eht" (as His name is rendered backwards by the chorus of the damned) is only six short lines (see U-GP 15:4700–720). As Lindsay suggests may occur in film, memories are called up throughout Ulysses—a passage from "Oxen of the Sun" explains the explosion of repressed occurrences and secret reflections in "Circe." In the voice of Cardinal Newman, the book informs us:

There are sins or (let us call them as the world calls them) evil memories which are hidden away by man in the darkest places of the heart but they abide there and wait. He may suffer their memory to grow dim, let them be as though they had not been and all but persuade himself that they were not or at least were otherwise. Yet a chance word will call them forth suddenly and they will rise up to confront him in the most various circumstances, a vision or a dream, or while timbrel and harp soothe his senses or amid the cool silver tranquility of the evening or at the feast, at midnight, when he is now filled with wine. (U-GP 14:1344–55)
A chance word evokes memories in "Circe," but such stimuli also bring up memories in other episodes: in "Calypso" reminiscences of earlier life with Molly arise; in "Proteus" Stephen remembers the Paris of Kevin Egan; and in "Nestor" Stephen’s student Sargent triggers recollections of his own school days at Clongowes. Through Joyce's tricks that parallel those of the cinema, Bloom, our dullest hero, is given glorious, if sometimes frightening, visualizing power in many episodes of the novel, but especially in the phantasmagoria of "Circe."

Of course, "Circe" represents a stunning departure from what we previously expected of a novel; not much more than a generation ago even such an astute critic as Vladimir Nabokov could comment, "I do not know of any commentator who has correctly understood this chapter" (350). Due to its unusual qualities, critics often search for literary precedents. The list of sources that they generally offer as potential models for "Circe" includes the Walpurgisnacht section of Goethe’s Faust, Flaubert’s The Temptation of St. Anthony, and Strindberg’s A Dream Play. Yet the common element between these works seems to be their use of words and descriptions to create the type of illusions readily achievable by the magic of the cinema. If Joyce was not actually inspired by trick films, at the very least he borrowed literary techniques from earlier attempts at what could be considered a cinematic form.

The form, tone, and technique of the episode can certainly be traced to these sources that Joyce undoubtedly knew. Goethe's Walpurgisnacht, that magic-filled and demonic orgy of spring, with its talking will-o’-the-wisp, its choruses of witches and wizards, and its disembodied voices, clearly offers one precedent and influences the nightmarish tone of the episode. Flaubert’s The Temptation of St. Anthony provided a model for both the content and the appearance of "Circe." The crowded hallucinations, though peopled with folk from the ancient world rather than Dubliners, the layout incorporating various typographical devices to indicate the action and description of the hallucinations, and the magic of scenes in which buildings and their decorations sway, while the heads of the crowd become waves—all these qualities predict the form and substance of "Circe" and could only be aptly represented and convincingly performed in film. In the winter of 1898–99, Méliès filmed a version of The Temptation of St. Anthony, suggesting the cinematic magic inherent in the story. In his version, as you may recall, he utilizes the tricks of the camera to create a scene which Joyce certainly would have appreciated: "the camera-stop is used to transform a statue of Christ on the cross into a seductive woman" (Wakeman 752).

However, Strindberg's A Dream Play may be the most important source. In a preface to this work, the author defines this new genre: in it, he attempts to imitate the inconsequent yet transparently logical shape of a dream. Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality, the imagination spins, weaving new
patterns; a mixture of memories, experiences, free fancies, incongruities and improvisations. The characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, condense, disperse, assemble. But one consciousness rules over them all, that of the dreamer, for him there are no secrets, no illogicalities, no scruples, no laws. He neither acquits nor condemns, but merely relates; and just as a dream is often more painful than happy, so an undertone of melancholy and of pity for all mortal beings accompanies this *flickering* tale. (175, my emphasis)

Even the set of *A Dream Play* could only be realistically represented through the magic of the cinema's special effects. Within three pages, and without a pause for the substitution of props nor time to allow for the striking of the set, a lime tree transforms from the barrenness of autumn to the green of spring again and the nearly withered monkshood blossoms anew (196–98). The audience of the play might suspend their disbelief and accept a change of lighting to represent the seasonal transformations, but to follow the stage directions literally, to relate such a "flickering tale," would require the magic of the movies.

Such magic also suggests the relationship of the movies to *Finnegans Wake*, a work in which the magic is even more complex, the changes quicker. Complex meanings emerge in a multilayered fashion from a single word or phrase from the *Wake*; at the level of a scene or a speech from the work, ambiguities and possible interpretations run nearly rampant. Tricks abound and can be used to tell the recurring stories of the human fall and the cycles of history told and retold in *Finnegans Wake*—but a complete examination of the relationship between Joyce's last complex work and the cinema is a subject for future study. These hints and the notebook's explicit connection with "Circe," however, further strengthen the case that Joyce's interest in the cinema was far from an idle pastime: with their technical wizardry, movies represent an ideal model for a literary means to re-create the dreams and fancies of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, as well as those multiply exposed visions seen by the sleeping Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker and related to us in the montage narrative of the *Wake*. The illusions of the trick film also share affinities with the personalized but inanimate world of "Aeolus," the psychological drama of "Circe," and the streams of consciousness that Joyce presents to the reader throughout *Ulysses*.

**NOTES**

1. Briggs's short essay not only makes mention of Lindsay's work, it also discusses the conditions in which early cinema was shown and audience reaction to it, as well as describing the mutoscopes which Bloom mentions in "Nausicaa," and identifying the production that Bloom recalls in the phrase "Willy's hat and what the girls did with it" (*U-GP* 13:795), all within nine pages. I am grateful that his work led me to further research on Lindsay, which inspired this essay.
2. Méliès is also the most recognizable of the many early cineastes who had roots in the world of magic. See Erik Barnouw's *The Magician and the Cinema*.


4. Whether, as Vladimir Nabokov and others have maintained, "Circe" represents *Ulysses* itself dreaming, the thoughts are still motivated—in the etymological sense of the word.

**WORKS CITED**


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