In the shadows of Nighttown, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom re-create a nightmare history in order to transcend its grasp. By confronting the sins of the past in grotesque, exaggerated caricatures, both men participate in a surrealistic dream-play tantamount to the ritual of confession. They become aware of unconscious guilt paralyzing volition; and in a process similar to Freudian psychoanalysis, they dramatically exorcise the ghosts that haunt their tortured mindscapes.

In a Circean universe, the hallucinogenic reigns. "To be is to be perceived." Any material object can come alive and talk, animated by the mental energies of a beholding eye. Art is, quite literally, magic. External perception stimulates inner hallucination, and the mind has unrestricted power to concretize illusion. People and events are propelled by the explosive forces of intoxicated fantasy.
Nighttown is populated by personal ghosts and ancestral specters, all of which thunder from the cave of a Freudian unconscious. As Catholicism has long insisted, volition bears the weight of true event in the terrain of the spirit. Guilt adheres to the fabric of “sinful” imaginings, whether or not these thoughts are realized in the world without as actual. Like data stored in a computer, perceptions and fantasies abide in the recesses of the psyche. In “Circe,” the computer spews forth its unprogrammed content. Painful memories masquerade as terrifying monsters. Only when the mind succeeds in recognizing, handling, and “naming” the demons can it conquer the horror associated with their presence.

“Circe” unfolds as an elaborate psychodrama enacted by Leopold Bloom, Stephen Dedalus, and all the chimeras that haunt their imaginations. Both men descend into a modern Hades to exorcise their private demons. Neither character fully articulates the dramatic content of the episode. But each is aware of the startling, purgative effects of his tragicomic voyage into the subterranean world of the unconscious. Consumed by the chaos of dream, each emerges, phoenix-like, from the “locomotor ataxia” of psychological repression.

Though readers are often disturbed by the unreality of the episode, “Circe” is ultra-real in its attempt to render several planes of consciousness simultaneously. Its dramatic form simulates the various dimensions of awareness as they present themselves in human experience. Repressed fears and emotional anxieties have just as much impact on the psyche as do historical events. Nighttown exposes to the light of comedy the dark, frightening “shadow” self that most people sublimate in waking life. The experiment has ramifications that go far beyond linguistic or technical game. Each minor drama in the chapter signals an epiphany in the mind of a character. As Mark Shechner suggests, the entire episode might be viewed as an “epiphany gone mad, one hundred and seventy-two pages of sudden spiritual manifestation.” The vision and the waking dream of “Circe” hover on the edge of the void, pointing to the content of the abyss.
The Nighttown episode is at once a confession and a Mass, a religious sacrament of spiritual expiation. ("You call it a festivity. I call it a sacrament" [p. 489]). Joyce, like God the Father, stands behind the dramatic creation and calls to mind Stephen’s aesthetic theory of the playwright who remains far off, "paring his fingernails." The author is a divine creator, distant like the gods of Lucretius, yet omnipresent in the unfolding epic-drama. Throughout the chapter, Joyce intrudes in the "mode of absence," choreographing the hallucinatory fantasies of his characters.

Consubstantial with Joyce the father, Bloom and Stephen share a unified consciousness with their creator. They become members of a deified Trinity, simultaneously imagining the lurid phantasms that appear in "Circe." Joyce, the principal puppeteer and stage director, is responsible for the expressionistic dramas animated on the Nighttown stage. But the dream-play scenario unfolds from the minds of Stephen and Bloom, who embellish the day-world of personal experience with concrete embodiments of unpressed emotion. Ordinarily, the dreamer is an artist whose creation reveals itself on the private stage of the psyche. In "Circe," dream is externalized and made public—though Joyce and the reader are the only spectators who have full access to all the theatrical scenes. The two protagonists enact fantasies and hallucinations that adhere to the deep structure of the unconscious. By the end of the chapter, both men have undergone transforming experiences of psychoanalytic purgation. The fantasy of "Blephen-Stoom" precipitates the novel’s climax and becomes the basis of compassionate recognition at the conclusion of the Nighttown episode.

In *Portrait*, Stephen ordained himself "a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (*PA* 221). Now at the beginning of "Circe," "flourishing the ashplant in his left hand," he "chants with joy the introit for paschal time" (p. 431). As principal celebrant of the Nighttown Mass, Stephen takes the place of Christ, the high priest. ("I'm sure you are a spoiled
priest” [p. 523]). And Bloom, as victim, becomes Christ the paschal lamb. (“I have sinned! I have suff . . .” [p. 544]). Stephen is the “Light of the World” described in Saint John’s gospel, as well as the “dog-god” of the Black Mass: “He flourishes his ashplant shivering the lamp image, shattering light over the world. A liver and white spaniel on the prowl slinks after him, growling” (p. 432). As in “Nestor,” Stephen’s sermon is still the testament of “gesture.” He longs to convert the world from linear time and space to phenomenal consciousness: “So that gesture, not music, not odours, would be a universal language, the gift of tongues rendering visible not the lay sense but the first entelechy, the structural rhythm” (p. 432). Despite the amorous referent of Stephen’s proclamation, his statement has serious import. The bard’s “pornosophical philotheology” chooses the hedonistic loaf and jug of Omar Khayyam over the bread and wine of the Catholic Mass. The rebel priest celebrates a profane ceremony of sensuous delight, exulting in the joys of the “here and now.”

Bloom the victim appears (“lovelorn longlost lugubru Boolooohoom” [pp. 433–34]), cramming bread and chocolate into his pockets (as opposed to bread and wine), and dragging with him two thousand years of Hebraic guilt. From long acquaintance with persecution, Bloom has formed a criminal self-image: “What is that? A flasher? Searchlight” (p. 434). He fears public exposure of the dark, hidden layers of subliminal guilt stored in the chambers of erotic memory. “On fire” with a sense of rage and impotence, he entertains the fantasy that Boylan’s house may be burning: “Big blaze. Might be his house. Beggar’s bush. We’re safe” (p. 434).

Bloom feels as helpless as a bug whose blood is about to be shed in inadvertent sacrifice. As usual, he is treated like a superfluous object and a victim of public scorn: "Hey, shit-breeches, are you doing the hattrick?" (p. 435). The "new womanly man" feels a "bit light in the head. Monthly or effect of the other. Brainfogfag. That tired feeling" (p. 436).

Menacing objects dart out of the mist, and sinister figures hover in the shadows: "Gaelic league spy, sent by that fire-eater" (p. 436). Specters arise from the unconscious, threatening to overwhelm their prey. Like Christ, Bloom is assaulted by the Jews for abandoning the Old Testament tradition: "A stooped bearded figure appears garbed in the long caftan of an elder in Zion. . . . Yellow poison streaks are on the drawn face" (p. 437). The elder Rudolph taunts his son with patriarchal vilifications: "I told you not go with drunken goy ever. So. You catch no money. . . . What you making down this place? Have you no soul? . . . Are you not my son Leopold, the grandson of Leopold? Are you not my dear son Leopold who left the house of his father and left the god of his fathers Abraham and Jacob?" (p. 437). Bloom can only respond: "(With precaution.) I suppose so, father. Mosenthal. All that's left of him" (p. 437).

Leopold is maligned not only by Rudolph and Ellen Bloom, but by his wife Molly, and by every other female of his acquaintance. The string of charges sets him apart as Jewish reprobate and impotent cuckold. Molly reminds Poldy of his "cold feet" and calls him "a poor old stick in the mud" (p. 440). Bridie Kelly, the whore who introduced Leopold to sex, furtively accosts her one-time customer and "flaps her bai shawl" (p. 441) in his wake. Gerty MacDowell claims that this "dirty married man" mentally deflowered her and saw all the secrets of her "bottom drawer" (p. 442). Even Josie Powell Breen, a former sweetheart, accuses Bloom of "humbugging and deluthering as per usual" with a "cock and bull story" (p. 447).

"Caught in the act" (p. 453) of dispensing pity to a stray dog, and apprehended in the guise of Henry Flower, the harried
defendant attempts to assert his personal identity rooted in the present. His stammering, confused phrases of self-approbation echo the language of the Old Testament and foreshadow HCE'S claim to be “Missunderstaid” (FW 363): “Gentleman of the jury, let me explain. A pure mare’s nest. I am a man misunderstood. I am being made a scapegoat of. I am a respectable married man, without a stain on my character. I live in Eccles street. My wife, I am the daughter of a most distinguished commander” (p. 457). Bloom is desperately trying to abnegate the strain of defilement. His speech combines Isaiah’s description of Christ the Lamb with the Pentateuchal language of Yahweh, the God who names Himself “I am Who am.” The defendant appeals to the contemporaneous “instant” isolated from historical guilt to demonstrate his subjective innocence. He challenges the “pure mare’s nest” of traditional history—the nightmare that J. J. O’Molloy uses in Bloom’s defense, claiming that his client suffers from an “aberration of heredity” (p. 463).

Bloom’s argument is no more understood by the jurymen than it was by the Irish taverners. “Bloom, pleading not guilty,” claims to have been “branded as a black sheep” (p. 461). “Mistaken identity. . . . I am wrongfully accused” (p. 456). Bloom insists that all attempts to impose a categorical identity on personal consciousness are fundamentally “mistaken.” They restrict and betray the limitless possibilities of the mind to create its own identity in the present. If history is based on fictive archetypes, then why not supplant the legends of racial heritage with projects of the intellectual imagination?

Bloom’s self-portrait as a blue-blooded Britisher parodies the expectations of his imperial prosecutors: “I fought with the colours for king and country in the absentminded war under General Gough in the park and was disabled at Spion Kop and Bloemfontein. . . . I did all a white man could” (pp. 457–58). Because genealogical pedigree and chauvinistic ardor both depend on fictional categories of race and nationality, Bloom feels free to invent a history that will ingratiate him with his tormentors. He fabricates an impressive family tree and spins jingoist tales of military glory.
During the interrogation, Bloom declares himself a renowned "author-journalist," despite the repudiation of "Bluebags" by Myles Crawford, editor of the *Freeman's Urinal* and *Weekly Arsewiper* (p. 458). Philip Beaufoy, author of *Matcham's Masterstroke*, indicts Bloom as a "plagiarist. A soapy sneak masquerading as a literateur" (p. 458). In the magical world of Nighttown, however, secret ambitions have just as much reality as genuine accomplishments. Bloom's talent for the commercial manipulation of words and his fantasies of literary prominence verify his degree from the "university of life" (p. 459). The mind insists on "leading a quadruple existence" (p. 460): consciousness freely embraces the imaginary projects of multiple personalities.

Bloom finds himself on trial in "Circe" for his hang-ups and his obsessions. He is accused of his deepest and most perverted impulses, and he must bear the weight of all the salacious desires that have ever accosted his beleaguered imagination. Hence the charges proffered by Mary Driscoll, scullerymaid: "He surprised me in the rere of the premises" (p. 461). The coprophiliac nature of a court exhibit displaying Bloom's feces, soiled with a "Titbits back number" (p. 462) implies prosecution for anal-related fantasies. J. J. O'Molloy must defend his client as a foreigner "of Mongolian extraction and irresponsible for his actions," an Oriental, and a Jewish exile in "the land of the Pharoah" (p. 463). Bloom's ostensible excuse for eccentricity lies in his alienation: he cannot reconcile his own self-image with the foreign identity thrust on him by the nation he inhabits. In effect, his eastern homeland, "Agendath Netaim in faraway Asia Minor" (p. 464), has been mortgaged; the law of the jungle and survival of the fittest have preempted the Mosaic code.

Mrs. Yelverton Barry accuses Bloom of sadomasochistic and adulterous solicitations. Mrs. Bellingham, a "cold potato" of high society, indicts him for fetishistic attachment to furs, silk hose, and expensive lace. The robust Mrs. Talboys, in "amazon costume," relates tales of epistolary exhibitionism: "He implored me to soil his letter in an unspeakable manner, to chastise him as he richly deserves, to
bestride and ride him, to give him a most vicious horsewhipping” (p. 467).

The aristocratic amazons threaten to thrash, geld, and vivisect their prey. “I’ll flog him black and blue in the public streets” (p. 469). Bloom meekly emulates Severin, the masochistic hero of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s Venus in Furs. (Venus im Pelz). He champions “the spanking idea. A warm tingling glow without effusion” (p. 468) for the sake of erotic titillation. But like Severin, Bloom gets more than he bargains for. In the course of “Circe,” he becomes Everyman, and a transvestite Everywoman as well. He is Egyptian, Jew, Mongolian, Chinaman, and perpetual scapegoat. “When in doubt persecute Bloom” (p. 464).

His Honour, sir Frederick Falkiner, finds Bloom guilty as “a well-known dynamitard, forger, bigamist, bawd and cuckold and a public nuisance to the citizens of Dublin” (p. 470). The judge sentences this “odious pest” to death by hanging. In self-defense, Bloom pleads the evidence of his own pity. He calls as a character witness Paddy Dignam, who materializes in the form of a ghouleaten beagle, “by metempsychosis. Spooks” (p. 473).

Rescued by the corpse’s lugubrious plea, Bloom returns to the land of the living. He meets the prostitute Zoe and luxuriates in a brief erotic fantasy of “the womancity, nude, white, still, cool” (p. 477). When Zoe suggests that he “make a stump speech,” the womancity melts into the vision of a socialist utopia. Bloom imagines himself as a proletarian Messiah pitted against the evils of capitalism: “Machines is their cry, their chimera, their panacea. Laboursaving apparatuses, supplanters, bugbears, manufactured monsters for mutual murder, hideous hobgoblins produced by a horde of capitalistic lusts upon our prostituted labour” (p. 479).

Even the “world’s greatest reformer” cannot refuse the temptations of totalitarian power. The crowd salutes Bloom as “Leopold the First,” “undoubted emperor president and king chairman, the most serene and potent and very puissant ruler of this realm” (p. 482). Bloom ascends the Viconian ladder from
democracy, to aristocracy, to autocracy and virtual theocracy. He prophesies salvation and beatific bliss in "the golden city which is to be, the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future" (p. 484). "Thirtytwo workmen . . . construct the new Bloomusalem. It is a colossal edifice, with crystal roof, built in the shape of a huge pork kidney" (p. 484).

Like most plans for social revolution, Bloom's beneficent reign of justice and pity is contingent on death, destruction, and a political bloodbath demanding the "instantaneous deaths of many powerful enemies" (p. 485). The populace is narcotized with public gifts and "cheap reprints of the World's Twelve Worst Books" (p. 485). As a successful demagogue, Bloom dispenses "open air justice," creates "the new nine muses" (actually twelve), and suggests a plan for "social regeneration": "I stand for the reform of municipal morals and the plain ten commandments. New worlds for old. Union of all, jew, moslem and gentile. . . . General amnesty, weekly carnival, with masked licence, bonuses for all, esperanto the universal brotherhood. No more patriotism of barspongers and dropsical impostors. Free money, free love and a free lay church in a free lay state" (pp. 489–90). The aims of the Bloomite platform are similar to those proposed by HCE in "The Ballad of Persse O'Reilly":

He was fafafafather of all schemes for to bother us
Slow coaches and immaculate contraceptives for the populace,
Mare's milk for the sick, seven dry Sundays a week,
Openair Love and religion's reform,
(Chorus) And religious reform,
    Hideous in form.

(FW 45)

Like all regimes on the Viconian wheel, the "Paradisiacal Era" of the new Bloomusalem is doomed to explode in anarchy and chaos. The Dublin populace characteristically betrays its illustrious hero. Father Farley condemns Bloom as "an episcopal, an agnostic, an anythingarian" (p. 490). Bloom's
philosophy of tolerance and equanimity proves to be his political nemesis. He publicly condones “mixed races and mixed marriage”—and possibly “mixed bathing” (p. 490). Purefoy accuses him of sexual prophylaxis; and Alexander Dowie vilifies him as a pervert, a non-Christian, and a worshiper of the Scarlet Woman. The crowd turns against Bloom and deposes him from power. Once again, he faces trial as an “abominable person” and a “fiendish libertine” (pp. 490, 492).

Dr. Malachi Mulligan pronounces the defendant “bisexually abnormal” and an “intact virgin”:  

Born out of bedlock hereditary epilepsy is present, the consequence of unbridled lust. . . . There are marked symptoms of chronic exhibitionism. Ambidexterity is also latent. He is prematurely bald from self-abuse, perversely idealistic in consequence, a reformed rake, and has metal teeth. In consequence of a family complex he has temporarily lost his memory and I believe him to be more sinned against than sinning. I have made a pervaginal examination and. . . I declare him to be virgo intacta. (P. 493)

Dr. Dixon testifies that “Professor Bloom is a finished example of the new womanly man. His moral nature is simple and lovable. Many have found him a dear man, a dear person” (p. 493). The doctor appeals for clemency on the grounds that Bloom “is about to have a baby” (p. 494).

Bloom immediately verifies his androgyny by giving birth to eight gold and silver male children, in keeping with his Jewish mercantile heritage. He performs miracles of acrobacy, healing, impersonation, and parallax; but the judgment of the irate crowd is confirmed by a supernatural messenger. The sign of a “Deadhand” declares that Bloom is neither savior nor God, but a simple “cod” (p. 496). “Lynch him! Roast him! He’s as bad as Parnell was” (p. 492).

Bloom suffers a phantasmagoric martyrdom in which every figure from his past takes on the role of accuser or torturer. History, like a huge hockey ball, has been resurrected in Night-town to become the overpowering “back kick” of culpability.
Like Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, Bloom is a Kafkaesque defendant on trial for the heinous crime of existence. Out of this nightmare chaos, he emerges as sacrificial scapegoat. "In a seamless garment marked I. H. S.," Bloom "stands upright amid phoenix flames" (p. 498). On the threshold of immolation, he identifies with the phoenix, a mythical symbol of Christ and a figure of Viconian renewal. Like the Arabian bird consumed in its own flames, the holocaust "becomes mute, shrunk-en, carbonised" (p. 499), only to be resurrected as a new and purified Messiah, combating temptations of despair and suicide.

Regeneration is literal, and Leopold, "in babylinen and pelisse, bigheaded" (p. 501), appears as an infant before the maternal Zoe. Tempted by the sordid gratifications of a bestial world, Bloom steps to the edge of a sensuous inferno. Drugged "male brutes," "exhaling sulphur of rut and dung" (p. 501), accost him. He hesitantly enters the zoological brothel that shelters ape-like men and goosefat whores. Kitty Ricketts "horses" her foot and "snakes" her neck, in rutting invitation to animal enjoyment.

In the midst of this iniquitous den, Stephen Dedalus raves about poetic rites and pagan hymns celebrated "round David's that is Circe's or what am I saying Ceres' altar" (p. 504). He describes the "greatest possible ellipse. Consistent with. The ultimate return" (p. 504). "What went forth to the ends of the world to traverse not itself. God, the sun, Shakespeare, a commercial traveller, having itself traversed in reality itself, becomes that self. Wait a moment. Wait a second. Damn that fellow's noise in the street" (p. 505).

The bard's prophecy embraces both musical lore and dramatic reality. When Bloom finally catches up with his errant charge, "extremes meet" and "Jewgreek is greekjew" (p. 504). The pagan priest and the Jewish victim collide in a sacramental encounter. They represent extremes of youth and experience, of art and science, of spiritual virginity and middle-aged impotence. In the Circean Mass celebrated by both, history is sacrificed in a ceremony of psychoanalytic purgation.
The two men who symbolize "the greatest possible ellipse" consistent with an "ultimate return" will meet, interact, and eventually resume attitudes of mutual separation. But through their temporary union, both discover the "not-self" contiguous with subjective self-projection—a foreign consciousness made intelligible by an act of sympathetic understanding. In a moment of "interindividual relations," each will fuse with the alter-ego perceived. Stephen will begin to comprehend the humanistic roots of aesthetic creation; and in so doing, he will transcend the solipsistic prison earlier described in "Scylla and Charybdis."

The meeting of Stephen and Bloom is celebrated in a mock apocalypse heralded by Reuben J. Antichrist. The ruler of the universe appears as a hobgoblin dio boia reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's ironic "Player." The joker claims to be "L'homme qui rit! L'homme primigène!" (p. 506). He teasingly exhorts the characters to play the game of fate: "Sieurs et dames, faites vos jeux!" Yet he knows that "Les jeux sont faits!" from the beginning. Apocalypse is inevitable: "(The planets rush together, uttering crepitant cracks.) Rien n'va plus" (p. 506). The comic cataclysm parodies in Blakean language Deasy's "tightrope" definition of history: the "End of the World" is ushered in "along an infinite invisible tightrope taut from zenith to nadir" (p. 507). The vaudeville drama of cosmic annihilation, complete with "two-headed octopus in gillie's kilt" (p. 507), adumbrates the true Viconian ricorso to occur later in the chapter.

After "the consummation of all things and second coming of Elijah" (p. 507), the biblical preacher proves prophetic when he asks: "Are you a god or a doggone clod? . . . Florry Christ, Stephen Christ, Zoe Christ, Bloom Christ, Kitty Christ, Lynch Christ, it's up to you to sense that cosmic force. . . . Be a prism. You have that something within, the higher self. You can rub shoulders with a Jesus, a Gautama, an Ingersoll. Are you all in this vibration?" (pp. 507–8). Dowie-Elijah reiterates the dog-god theme of the Black Mass. He preaches the divinity of human consciousness, the new cult of the Logos that will
arise out of the ashes of an immolated history—despite, rather than because of, the revival sermon, repentant prostitutes, the eight British beatitudes, and a theosophical mysticism offering “esthetics and cosmetics . . . for the boudoir” (p. 510).

Stephen, the Mass celebrant, chants the gospel of self-awareness in words that echo “Scylla and Charybdis.” God the sun (Joyce), Stephen-Shakespeare (his artistic son), and Bloom (the commercial traveler) are all united in a trinitarian consciousness. But before Bloom can realize its fullness, he must first transcend the grasp of psychic memory: “I wanted then to have now concluded. . . . Past was is today. What now is will then tomorrow as now was be past yester” (p. 515).

Lipoti Virag appears in the guise of Macintosh, “sausaged” in several overcoats that bespeak the meaty mind. Pimping for prostitutes, Virag peruses the brothel with lascivious delight. Grandpapachi accuses Bloom of losing his “mnemotechnic,” or sexual memory; and he challenges his grandson to lay a voluptuous whore, “coopflattened” and endowed with “natural pincushions of quite colossal blubber” (p. 513). The renowned sexologist offers remedies for “warts” (syphilitic chancres); and for impotence—“willpower over parasitic tissues,” “the touch of a deadhand” (p. 514), truffles of Perigord, and Red-bank oysters. “Those succulent bivalves may help us . . . in cases of nervous debility or viragitis” (p. 516). “From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step” (p. 515); but Virag’s libidinous obsession with a life or “reiterated coition” leaves little room for sublimity. Grandpa prefers the kinetic titillations of a salacious imagination. His description of oriental eroticism is rife with primitive lust, violence, and sexual abuse: “Woman, undoing with sweet pudor her belt of rushrope, offers her allmoist yoni to man’s lingam. Short time after man presents woman with pieces of jungle meat. . . . Then giddy woman will run about. Strong man grasps woman’s wrist. Woman squeals, bites, spucks. Man, now fierce angry, strikes woman’s fat yadgana” (pp. 519–20).

The figure of Henry Flower, Virag’s alter-ego, is hardly more enticing. “He has the romantic Saviour’s face” (p. 517),
the face that Gerty MacDowell saw in "Nausicaa." Plucking a dulcimer, this disembodied spirit caresses a "severed female head" (p. 522). He has apparently murdered to dissect, choosing soul over sensuous reality.

Taking his cue from Lipoti Virag, Bloom confesses to Bella Cohen that he is only "partly" married: he has "mislaid" his mnemotechnic in a household where "the missus is master. Petticoat government" (p. 527). Complaining of impotence and sciatica, he yields to the "massive whoremistress": "Enormously I desiderate your domination. I am exhausted, abandoned, no more young" (p. 528). Bloom's sexual humiliation by Bella/Bello closely mimics the experiences of Severin in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*. The accusations against Bloom build up to a scene of transvestite torture. The sadistic Bello transforms him into a sow, a woman, and a gelded ox—all in retaliation for his crime of sexual impotence and for his unmanly eliminative obsession: "Adorer of the adulterous rump!"; "Dungdevourer" (p. 530).

The new "womanly man" longs to act out the kind of female debasement glorified by the medicals in "Oxen of the Sun." If the sexual encounter can be reduced to virile conquest, then Bloom prefers to play the victim, acted upon rather than acting. But his masochistic fantasies backfire when he is feminized and humiliated: "What you longed for has come to pass. Henceforth you are unmanned and mine in earnest" (p. 535). Clothed in a punishment garment, Bloom confesses his guilt for earlier transvestite experiments. He tried on Molly's clothes "only once, a small prank, in Holles street" (p. 536). Languishing in Mrs. Dandrade's castoff shift, he entertained fantasies of sexual violation by forceful male lovers. Shyly, he admits: "It was Gerald converted me to be a true corsetlover when I was female impersonator in the High School play *Vice Versa*" (p. 536). Like HCE, he guiltily stammers: "I rererepugnosed in rererepugnant" (p. 538).

Bello promises to "administer correction" with the "nose-ring, the pliers, the bastinado, the hanging hook" (p. 532). In a parody of "Cyclops," she/he rides Bloom sexually as a "cock-
horse," a scapegoat for the whoremaster's loss in the Gold Cup Race. Bloom is expiating the sins of Ulysses. Earlier in the day, he lusted after the "moving hams" of a woman. Now Bello reduces him to a fleshly morsel of erotic delectation—a piece of swine-flesh to be devoured in a repast that is definitely non-kosher: "Very possibly I shall have you slaughtered and skewered in my stables and enjoy a slice of you with crisp crackling from the baking tin basted and baked like sucking pig with rice and lemon or currant sauce. It will hurt you" (pp. 532–33). Bloom undergoes complete emasculation at the hands of Bello, who wallows in vindictive amusement at the "smut" or "bloody good ghoststory" (p. 538) of her victim's philandering crimes.

A chorus of personified "Sins of the Past" rises to condemn Bloom—Everyman, who must endure a hell more personalized than Dante's Inferno. Bloom is tried and punished in a psychoanalytic expiation of marital failure. He fawns in lascivious bestiality before Bella Cohen until the "bip" of a trouser button jolts him back to reality. The modern Ulysses will not capitulate either to the allurements of his own deep-seated masochism or to Bello's mirror image, the libidinous nymph who offers phallic castration as "one way out" of the pangs of erotic desire: "Only the ethereal. Where dreamy creamy gull waves o'er the waters dull" (p. 552). With a burst of self-confidence, Bloom retorts: "If there were only ethereal where would you all be, postulants and novices? Shy but willing, like an ass pissing" (p. 553). He responds with similar invective to Bella/Bello, whom he now recognizes as the metamorphosed nymph, "mutton dressed as lamb": "Clean your nailless middle finger first, the cold spunk of your bully is dripping from your cockscomb. Take a handful of hay and wipe yourself" (p. 554). Finally, Bloom rescues from Zoe his sexual talisman, "poor mamma's" potato, to which there is "a memory attached" (p. 555).

Before he can fully recover his autonomy, Bloom must undergo still another trial by fire and subjugate the most pernicious "spook" of all, the ghost of Blazes Boylan. As penance for his refusal to do a "man's job" as fertilizer and incubator of Molly,
Bloom is condemned to voyeuristic participation in his own cuckoldry. He imagines himself playing Boylan’s flunkey, offering vaseline and orangeflower to facilitate the deed. The sadomasochistic fantasy brings him face to face with the ambivalence of his emotions. He not only visualizes but dramatically participates in the spectacle of his wife’s infidelity: “You can apply your eye to the keyhole and play with yourself while I just go through her a few times” (p. 566). As husband and lover, Bloom is deeply wounded by Molly’s adultery. But at the same time, he feels genuine relief, as well as voyeuristic pleasure, at having found a stud-surrogate for insemination (though not impregnation) of his spouse.

As Stephen and Bloom gaze in a 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” (p. 567). The figure “crows with a black capon’s laugh” and warns Bloom: “Thou thoughtest as how thou wastest invisible. Gaze... Iagogo! How my Oldfellow chokit his Thursdaymomun” (p. 567). If Bloom thought himself an “invisible” cuckold, he was mistaken. Nothing is invisible in Nighttown. The Shakespearean apparition taunts him for conjugal failure and laughs at the anguish of marital betrayal. The ghost confirms the aesthetic theory earlier presented in “Scylla.” Like Iago, the specter is obsessed with infidelity. Primordial wounds of seduction and adultery have paralyzed the Renaissance bard and locked him in an idée fixe. Stephen reflects Shakespeare the artist; Bloom reflects the cuckolded husband. Their mutual vision of antlered infamy reminds us that Joyce, the “invisible” artist supposedly paring his fingernails, is actually choking his drama of Thursday, 16 June 1904, full of convenient fictional coincidences.

Like Freud, Joyce recognized the cathartic possibilities of comedy and its power to expose subliminal threats to the light of playful absurdity. The psychodrama of “Nighttown” enables Bloom to purge his repressions through exaggerated reenactment of psychological horror. Comedy allows him to domesticate the monsters that prowl about his anxious psyche. By
facing the specters of the unconscious, he gives fear a local habitation and a name and concretizes the deep structure of inarticulate pain that haunts him. Bloom’s dreamwork may seem hyperbolic, but it is far from pathological. In the course of “Circe,” he dramatically exposes the erotic perversions that have plagued him in fantasies of morose delectation. He publicly does penance for his “sins” against phallic virility: voyeurism, masturbation, effeminacy, transvestism, masochism, and coprophilia.

Bloom is aware of the social opprobrium attached to his fetishes; and he recognizes, as well, society’s mistrust of the feminine virtues of compassion and tolerance. Hence his deep-seated guilt, anxiety, and self-recrimination. In 1904, even Freud had few compunctions about condemning behavior that appeared “uncivilized.” Civilization, he insisted, was built on the discontents of psychological repression. Sublimation was the principal building block of the superego and the major bequest of Oedipal transference.

In “Circe,” James Joyce, like Shem the Penman, writes from the ink of his own digested experience. Just as he comically portrayed the process of defecation in “Calypso,” he now tries to incorporate erotic fantasy into the definition of what it means to be truly human. The author is convinced that libidinous phantasms that might seem outrageous or preposterous in social intercourse constitute a basic dimension of human existence. They ought not to be shunned as deviant aberrations. Joyce dramatizes repressed desire in a frame of comic absurdity. He asks us to confront the darkest recesses of erotic passion, to accept our sensuous imaginings, and to laugh at human nature in the fuller context of civilized pretension. Beneath the scaffolding of power and romantic love, beneath the pomp and circumstance of political theory, exists a frail and somewhat ludicrous species, homo sapiens. By shining the light on Night-town, Joyce exposes our fears and shows us that they are nothing but painted images, dumb shows that need not harm us.

In “Circe,” ego gives way to the instinctual id. Stephen and Bloom encounter the “superhuman” world of myth and super-
estion. They unmask all that is dark and incomprehensible, including Bella/Bello, Alexander Dowie, and the ghost of Mary Dedalus. The man-god is also a dog-god—divine and bestial, simultaneously. Under the pressures of exhaustion and inebriation, Stephen acknowledges the subterranean activities that transpire in the unconscious. In order to create a fictional microcosm, he must incorporate into his vision the dark underside of experience, as well as its surface manifestation.

Stephen-Christ, the antihero and priest of *Ulysses*, has to demystify the ghosts of personal history before he can begin to forge a new “conscience” for himself and for his race. Specters from *Portrait* rise up in comic guise: Father Dolan’s “bald little round jack-in-the box head” (p. 561) springs from the piano, recalling the “coffin” of a dead Jesuit tradition. Even the fantastic images from Clongowes prove disconcerting. The pandybat’s sting has been seared into Stephen’s soul, and he winces in confusion: “Hurt my hand somewhere” (p. 563). Could it be, once more, the pain of Father Dolan’s stick?

As the pageant of Nighttown progresses through the Race of Life to the Dance of Death, the comic phantasma grow less innocuous. When the music stops, Stephen too “stops dead,” assaulted by the resurrected image of Mary Dedalus: “Stephen’s mother, emaciated, rises stark through the floor in leper grey with a wreath of faded orange blossoms and a torn bridal veil, her face worn and noseless, green with grave mould. Her hair is scant and lank. She fixes her blue circled hollow eyesockets on Stephen and opens her toothless mouth uttering a silent word” (pp. 579–80). “I was once the beautiful May Goulding,” the specter declares. “I am dead” (p. 580). Stephen screams out against this “bogeyman’s trick,” but the ghost is a real construct of tortured memory. It taunts its victim with sundered family relations, the grave-green earth of Mother Ireland, and the “snotgreen sea” of exile.

Stephen begs his mother to utter that “word known to all men” (p. 581), the word of love and of human sympathy. The ghost can only reiterate the judgmental word of God. The apparition is obsessed with linear time: “All must go through it,
Stephen... You too. Time will come” (p. 580). “I pray for you in my other world... Years and years I loved you, O my son, my firstborn, when you lay in my womb” (p. 581). Like Garrett Deasy, Stephen’s mother appeals to the weight of compiled time to justify her exhortation. She even claims to have been pregnant for “years and years.” Mary Dedalus pleads that her son repent “in time” to escape the fires of hell. She associates penance with temporal remission of punishment in “the other world”: “Prayer is all powerful. Prayer for the suffering souls in the Ursuline manual, and forty days’ indulgence. Repent, Stephen” (p. 581).

Stephen is horrified by the reproving phantasm and tries to shift his culpability to time itself: “(Choking with fright, remorse and horror.) They said I killed you, mother. He offended your memory. Cancer did it, not I. Destiny” (p. 580). Stephen defends himself by accusing destiny of his mother’s murder. He blames time, the process of aging, and the fatal disease of cancer. The ghost, however, is not appeased. Mary Dedalus vindicates the “grim Reaper” and continues to excoriate her son: “Repent! O, the fire of hell!” (p. 581).

At the height of mental agony, Stephen cries out against the charges of a guilt-ridden past. Echoing “Telemachus,” he yells: “The corpsechewer! Raw head and bloody bones!” (p. 581). Strangled with rage, he answers the admonition “Beware! God’s hand!” with the furious retort, “Shite!” “Ah non, par exemple! The intellectual imagination! With me all or not at all. Non Serviam!” (p. 582).

The ghost of Mary Dedalus constitutes the force of historical enslavement driving Stephen to apocalypse. He raises the cry of the antihero, the Non Serviam of Lucifer. Stephen will not serve a mental construct of temporal-spatial imprisonment; he refuses to be intimidated by specters of the past. Shouting the word “Nothung!”, “He lifts his ashplant high with both hands and smashes the chandelier. Time’s livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry” (p. 583).

With a single blow, Stephen shatters the foundations of a
nightmare history. His cry "Nothung!" is similar to the roar of thunder in *Finnegans Wake*. The Wagnerian gesture initiates a Viconian *ricorso* that salvages "nothing" of the old order. As artist and priest, Stephen ordains a new era of the "intellectual imagination" and exults in the powers of existential consciousness. He celebrates a world of phenomenal reality, a world in which existence precedes and determines essence: the human mind "creates a meaning" for itself and for the earth.

The "ruin of all space" echoes Stephen's earlier ruminations in "Nestor" (p. 24). In contrast to the *Fiat Lux* of Genesis, Stephen's gestures proclaim, "Let there be darkness." Let the road of past history, a "disappointed bridge," be darkened and annihilated. And let each individual emerge from blind tradition to fashion his own reality *ex nihilo* in the present. Stephen's apocalyptic moment symbolically challenges both the Light of the World celebrated in Saint John's gospel and the "allbright" deity worshipped by Garrett Deasy.

Like Vico and like William Blake, Joyce believed that out of chaos comes new energy and, out of anarchy, rebirth. The Wagnerian act of destruction in "Circe" is "nihilistic" in the Sartrian sense. By smashing the chandelier, Stephen is asserting his desire to be God. He is engaged in a process of reverse creation, which at the same time appropriates the object it destroys. If the lamp stands for the light of Western tradition, then Stephen symbolically negates the past in order to fashion a new reality grounded in the epiphanic moment. Plunging the world into darkness, he attempts to annihilate history by making it a controllable object of personal consciousness. Because art demands a postcreation, the artist-hero must destroy the old world in order to posit a revolutionary vision of the cosmos.

Stephen's rebellious gesture constitutes the turning point of "Circe." Like Prospero, the priest whose task is finished, the poet abandons his ashplant and flees from Bella Cohen's whorehouse. The climax of dramatic ritual explodes with the rhythmic intensity of sexual orgasm. Stephen experiences a release from mental bondage and rushes forth impelled by exuberant liberation. History has proved the ultimate victim of
the sacrifice: a "transubstantiation" of the past into impotent present memory concludes the purgative ceremony.

Stephen leaves Bella Cohen's with the power to "kill the priest and the king" (p. 589)—to release himself, in Blakean terms, from a lifetime of servitude to church and state. When Edward VII appears as "a grand elect perfect and sublime mason" (p. 590), plastering Défense d'uriner signs, Stephen clings to his role as "toppler" of masonry. In the face of the mason-king, he begins to preach his gospel to Private Carr in terms of political philosophy: "I understand your point of view, though I have no king myself for the moment. . . . But this is the point. You die for your country, suppose. . . . Not that I wish it for you. But I say: Let my country die for me. Up to the present it has done so. I don't want it to die. Damn death. Long live life!" (p. 591). Stephen rejects the death-dealing philosophy of traditional history—the political "necessity" that has produced the ludicrous Edward VII, who "levitates over heaps of slain in the garb and with the halo of Joking Jesus, a white jujube in his phosphorescent face" (p. 591). When Mother Ireland appears as "Old Gummy Granny," Stephen indicts her with the Portrait epithet of "old sow that eats her farrow" (p. 595). With one breath he exterminates the figure of Granny, an anachronistic phantasm in a world of intellectual freedom.

Stephen's dialectic has enraged the two British soldiers, who are infuriated by his supposed insolence toward Cissy Caffrey. Private Carr screams: "(With ferocious articulation.) I'll do him in, so help me fucking Christ! I'll wring the bastard fucker's bleeding blasted fucking windpipe!" (p. 600). Stephen, the "new Christ," identifies Carr with Judas. But like Christ, he refuses to wield his augur's rod. He echoes both Jesus' answer to Saint Peter and Nietzsche's definition of philosophy: "Stick, no. Reason. This feast of pure reason" (p. 601). It is for the feast of reason that Stephen suffers the martyrdom of an Antichrist. Like Dolph in Finnegans Wake, the artist refuses to retaliate and falls victim to the political man of action. "Personally, I detest action" (p. 589), he insists. Carr "rushes towards Stephen, fists outstretched, and strikes
him in the face. Stephen totters, collapses, falls stunned. He lies prone, his face to the sky, his hat rolling to the wall. Bloom follows and picks it up'' (p. 601).

Struck down by Carr, Stephen undergoes a symbolic decapitation. But Bloom, a witness to the crucifixion, rises as trans-substantial father and healer of the Antichrist. He shelters Stephen from the Dublin police, as well as from the ''polite'' invitation of Corny Kelleher, who appears bearing ''a death wreath in his hand'' (p. 603). Wielding the ashplant, Bloom resurrects his charge from death-like immobility. He asserts a commitment to Stephen the only way he knows how—by uttering Masonic phrases that evoke the ''moraculous'' tide of cyclical consciousness and resuscitate the ghost of his lost son Rudy:

(He murmurs.) . . . swear that I will always hail, ever conceal, never reveal, any part or parts, art or arts . . . in the rough sands of the sea . . . a cabletow's length from the shore . . . where the tide ebbs . . . and flows . . .

(. . . Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, holding a book in his hand. He reads from right to left inaudibly, smiling, kissing the page.)

Bloom: (Wonderstruck, calls inaudibly.) Rudy! (P. 609)

Rudy returns, a child who has retained the Jewish heritage of his twice-converted father. Unlike Virag and the elder Rudolph, little Rudy appears as the reconciled Judaic lamb-figure. He ''gazes unseeing into Bloom's eyes and goes on reading, kissing, smiling. He has a delicate mauve face. On his suit he has diamond and ruby buttons. In his free left hand he holds a slim ivory cane with a violet bowknot. A white lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket'' (p. 609). Revived as a ''dandified'' aesthete, Rudy is the last phantasm to be exorcised from Bloom's psyche. With the apparition of his dead son, Bloom is released from the neurosis of guilt and impotence he has so long associated with the child. The ghost is resurrected, only to

202
become a memory—to relinquish its filial heritage to the new son whose rebellion has negated past history.

By the end of the “Circe” episode, Bloom has been liberated from irrational self-hatred. Redeemed from the guilt that has haunted him since Rudy’s death, he begins to feel reconciled to his son’s loss, and he is able to embrace a new paternity. In an act of mental freedom, he assumes the existential role of adopted parent to Stephen. He becomes the bard’s “transubstantial father” in a bond of fellowship rooted in the present. Bloom’s paternity is a product of the instant—a reality that springs, fully born, from the psychological transformation that occurs in Nighttown. “Circe” ends with a reconciliation and with a resurrection: Stephen and Bloom are emancipated from the cloying cerements of historical bondage.

For both characters, the heritage of the flesh is confining, neurotic, and self-annihilating. Stephen is haunted by the ghost of his mother; Bloom is obsessed with memories of Virag and Rudy. By ritual reenactment of the past in “Circe,” the two men escape the categories of physical lineage. They transcend history as mentally uninhibited egos, at liberty to form meaningful attachments in the present. Through his meeting with Leopold Bloom, Stephen is able to identify another individual as subject of the gospel of humanism that he earlier expounded in “Nestor.” For the first time in Ulysses, Stephen begins to make contact with the world of “interindividual relations.” He discovers through Bloom that “word known to all men” (p. 581), the good word of sympathy that liberates the aesthetic imagination of the artist.

Purged of the ghosts of their past, Stephen and Bloom come together in a new relationship as father and son. For the older man, the incident marks a revitalization of paternity. Stephen is the adopted son he can treat with fatherly solicitude. Bloom acts the part of a man, a competent citizen, though keyless. He creates a momentary kinship that is significant, despite its precarious brevity. In the course of “Circe,” Bloom has successfully met and conquered the specters of his dead father; of Rudy, his deceased son; and of Blazes Boylan, the lover who
signals the death of a hitherto monogamous relationship with Molly. On this day, Bloom has died as a husband, to be born as a cuckold; or perhaps, like the phoenix, to come full circle and regain his manhood. The hero of *Ulysses* proves himself a man in the most human sense of the word.

Readers too often apply the "fallacy of imitative form" to the conversation later reported in "Ithaca." They assume that Joyce's authorial distance and catechetical style indicate coldness in the meeting of Stephen and Bloom. Joyce declared in a letter to Frank Budgen: "I am writing *Ithaca* in the form of a mathematical catechism. All events are resolved into their cosmic physical, psychical etc. equivalents. . . . Bloom and Stephen thereby become heavenly bodies, wanderers like the stars at which they gaze."6

In "Ithaca," both men awake from a nightmare history to cast their shadows, metaphorically, "beyond the farthest star." Unencumbered by guilt and repression, they acknowledge a communal bond of human fellowship rooted in the fullness of the present. Beyond linear time, and beyond the restrictions of historical confinement, they experience mental liberation and the intersubjective discovery of one another.7

At this point in "Circe," the two characters have reversed roles. Stephen has become Christ the sacrificial victim; and Bloom functions as Christ the Savior. In "Eumaeus," a drunken Stephen mutters: "*Christus* or Bloom his name is, or, after all, any other, *secundum carnem*" (p. 643). And Bloom echoes the New Testament when he asks Stephen why he left his "father's house" (p. 619). In "Ithaca," Stephen more soberly conjectures that one of Bloom's "concealed identities" is that of a Christ-figure: "The traditional figure of hypostasis, depicted by Johannes Damascenus, Lentulus Romanus and Epiphanius Monachus as leucodermic, sesquipedalian with wine-dark hair" (p. 689). The narrator is progressively engaged in "substituting Stephen for Bloom Stoom" and "Bloom for Stephen Blephen" (p. 682), until both men are united in a sympathetic moment of shared perception: "Silent, each contemplating the other in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhisnothis fellowfaces" (p. 702).
In the course of "Circe," Stephen and Bloom undergo a revolutionary alteration in consciousness. They conquer the ghosts of the past and stand open to "interindividual relations" in the future. Their radical transformation of mental perspective gives evidence of a psychoanalytic encounter that proves both cathartic and liberating. When private absurdity is confronted in exaggerated guise, the mind gains control over terror and guilt. Comic distance gives birth to cosmic awareness.

In the gospel of Ulysses, Joyce is bringing us the good news of the "word." Each individual has within himself the powers of the Logos—the "moraculous" potential of the psyche to absorb, transcend, and re-create experience through the artistic capaciousness of the intellectual imagination. The human mind can shatter the nightmare of history and challenge the specters of psychological enclosure. Past memory functions as an ekstasis of the present moment. Through a radical act of existential creation, consciousness fashions a new reality from present, epiphanic revelation. "This is the postcreation."


2. Mark Shechner suggests that the characters in the episode "hallucinate their reality. Boundaries evaporate; inner and outer interpenetrate, and identity becomes a flux of interlocking possibilities" (ibid., p. 120). In contrast, Marilyn French asserts that "Bloom and Stephen are not hallucinating. The hallucinations are hypostatizations of their hidden feelings; on the naturalistic level, the characters are simply feeling. The hallucinations are production numbers staged by the author for the audience.... Circe is a nightmare sent by god-Joyce to the reader" (The Book as World, p. 187). French's explanation of the chapter's dramatic action fails to account for the revolutionary alteration in consciousness that Stephen and Bloom experience, a change comprehensible only in the light of psychoanalytic confrontation and mental exorcism.

3. For a further discussion of the significance of Stephen's ashplant in the "Circe" episode, see Morris Beja's article "The Wooden Sword: Threatener and Threatened in the Fiction of James Joyce."

4. In his recent study The Consciousness of Joyce, Richard Ellmann also interprets the climactic scene in "Circe" as the destruction of space and time, and as a political act of defiance against the authority of priest and king. "The priest lays claim to an eternity of time, as the king if he could would rule over infinite space; and against these forces, anthropomorphized in earthly authorities, Stephen and Bloom have to muster their own forces" (pp. 79–80).
5. Granny is an obvious parody of the "Old Woman" who appears in Yeats's play *Cathleen ni Hoolihan*: "(Thrusts a dagger towards Stephen's hand.) Remove him, acushla. At 8:35 a.m. you will be in heaven and Ireland will be free" (p. 600). Unlike Michael Gillane, Stephen will not remove "the strangers" by force.


7. In his essay "Ulysses: A Structuralist Perspective," Robert Scholes suggests that in the last chapters of *Ulysses* Joyce was moving toward "the collapse of individuated characterization" and "a radical redefinition of the world itself and man's place in it." "As his career developed, he accepted less and less willingly the notion of characters bounded by their own skins, and of actions which take place at one location in space-time and then are lost forever. . . . Joyce attacked the ego itself, beginning with his own. . . . The cybernetic serenity of his later work was long coming and hard won. . . . Stephen Dedalus is Joyce's bioenergetic self-portrait, while Leopold Bloom is his cybernetic self-portrait" (Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*, pp. 181, 183).