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## **Subjectivity Under Construction —Messianism and Masochism in “Circe”**

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### **Abstract**

I read the problematic episode of “Circe” as Joyce’s experiment with a sinthomatic construction of subjectivity, contending that there is a constant process of unknotting and reknottling in the construction of textual subjectivity. I examine whether the sinthomatic construction of subjectivity, as it is evidenced in the fantasmatic episodes, truly invents new structural stratifications of subjectivity and alternative libidinal organizations. By way of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Žižek’s theory, I argue that masochism in “Circe” is not necessarily ethical but can function as a preparatory step towards the true ethical act. Pseudo-messianism and masochism are opposed to the true messianism manifested through neighbour love as a genuine ethical act. Enlightened by Lacan’s complex theory of the psychoanalytic act and Badiou’s idea of new neighbourhood, I try to capture the ethical impact of genuine messianism.

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Through works of love, a new neighbourhood, conceived as an open, generic set in the Badiouian sense, comes into being. Love as an ethical act is a life-altering, structure-transforming movement, reconfiguring the relationship between the subject and the Other, gesturing toward a new singular universal, a new formation of neighbourhood. Moreover, “Circe” does not terminate with the indulgence of an idiosyncratic *sinthome*, but the moment when the *sinthome* is breached by the ethical act of neighbour love, which opens for the further renewal and reinvention of the *sinthome* and the intersubjective relationship.

**Key Words:** J. Lacan, “Circe”, *Sinthome*, Messianism, Masochism

## I. Introduction

In this paper, I read the problematic episode of “Circe” as James Joyce’s experiment with a *sinthomatic* construction of subjectivity, contending that there is a constant process of unknotting and reknitting in the construction of textual subjectivity. My critical endeavour embarks on an exploration of the possible consequences of how subjectivity embodied in an individualized *sinthome* may be invented through various fantasies. Among these idiosyncratic fantasies, I will analyse the construction of subaltern subjectivity in “Circe” by examining two extended fantasies, namely, the juxtaposition of masochism and messianism. Firstly, my purpose is to explore the ethical significance or limits that might be derived from the bemusing (non)connection of these two absurd fantasies. Moreover, going beyond the employment of Jacques Lacan’s theorization of *sinthome* in textual analysis, I venture into a critical assessment of *the ethical potential and efficacy of the sinthomatic subjective construction*. I argue that a structural breakthrough inherent in true messianism is manifested through neighbour love<sup>1</sup> as it is epitomized by Bloom’s rescue of Stephen at the end of “Circe.” As a subaltern subject, whose structural status in hegemonic dictates of politics, culture, and sociality is reduced to that of *abject or homo sacer*, Bloom draws sources from culture and pastiche in the construction of an emergent subjectivity. I will carefully examine whether the experimentation of the *sinthomatic* construction of subjectivity, as it is evidenced in the fantasmatic episodes of “Circe,” truly invents a new structural stratification of subjectivity and an alternative libidinal organization. By way of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Slavoj Žižek’s theory, I argue that masochism in “Circe” is not necessarily ethical but can function as a preparatory step towards the true ethical act. Pseudo-messianism

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<sup>1</sup> I deliberately use the term “neighbour love” rather than neighborly love to highlight it is not a love of friendly attitude but a commandment of love for our neighbours and a commandment to enact love as a true neighbour.

and masochism must be opposed to the true messianism manifested through neighbour love as a genuine ethical act, which is explored by way of Lacan's complex theory of the psychoanalytic act and Alain Badiou's idea of new neighbourhood. Moreover, "Circe" does not terminate with the indulgence of an idiosyncratic *sinthome*, but the moment when the *sinthome* is breached by the ethical act of neighbour love, which opens for the further renewal and reinvention of the *sinthome* and the intersubjective relationship.

## II. The Concept of *Sinthome* and "Circe" as a Sinthomatic Work

It is well-known that, illuminated by Joyce's revolutionary literary works, Lacan revises his theoretical edifice late in his career, introducing his topological thinking in reinventing the concept of symptom/*sinthome* and the unknotting/reknotting of subjectivity. Lacan makes a ground-breaking proclamation that Joyce has "cancelled his subscription to the Unconscious" (*désabonné à l'inconscient*) (Lacan, 2016: 144; 2005: 164)<sup>2</sup> and invented for himself a concomitant artifice of singular *sinthome* on 16 June 1975 at the occasion of the fifth International James Joyce Symposium. In *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan continues to elaborate his idea of the pluralization of names, claiming that the Name-of-the-Father is no more than a symptom, and the end of psychoanalysis should be reconceptualised as an identification with symptom/*sinthome*. Scholars' disentangling of the complexity of Lacan's theorization of the *sinthome* has made it relatively accessible to readers, and we have witnessed some critical interests in *sinthomatic* works or criticisms that claim an artistic work to be *sinthomatic*.<sup>3</sup> By putting

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<sup>2</sup> For this quotation from *Seminar XXIII*, I will give two page numbers. First one is for the English translation and the second is for the French text.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to one of the two anonymous reviewers for this point. For recent criticisms on *sinthome* and Joyce, please see Azari (2008); Bristow (2017);

to the test this Lacanian insight, I propose to conduct a critical reading to see *how* a new subjectivity might emerge in Joyce's text.

The critical analysis of Joyce from a Lacanian perspective has to take as its point of departure a reading of Joyce as a work of "ex-hysteria" (Thurston, 2004: 190), of non-neurosis and even as "ordinary psychosis."<sup>4</sup> This conceptualization is intricately connected with the theory of *sinthome*. To appreciate properly the concept of *sinthome*,<sup>5</sup> which resembles but differs from "symptom," it is helpful to understand how Lacan revises the end/aim of psychoanalysis by shifting his emphasis from working through Other-filtered symptoms and traversing fundamental fantasies to identifying with self-made *sinthome*. With this shift, Lacan coins the neologism *sinthome*. He plays with homophony, as he uses the term *sinthome* to represent a combination of *symptôme*, "saint homme" (holy man), and "*sinthomadquin*" (Saint Thomas Aquinas), who does not believe in the Other and seeks the Real Thing (2016: 6; 2005: 14).<sup>6</sup>

The subject enters the clinic with his/her symptoms, with a belief in the meaning of his/her symptoms and a supposition that the analyst will be able to know the true reason behind his/her symptoms. Since "*it is only through the liberation of the Symbolic constellation that the Real of the drive appears*" (Verhaeghe & Declercq, 2002: 64), the subject is obliged to work through the Symbolic to achieve the aim of changing one's relation with the Real. This is the foundation of legitimizing the psychoanalytic

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Harari (2002); Hsu (2014); Morel (2009); Thurston (2004).

<sup>4</sup> This is a term devised by J.-A. Miller by following and developing the insight of Lacan's topological thinking and pluralisation of the Name(s)-of-the-Father. See Miller (2009).

<sup>5</sup> *Sinthome* is "how the word is spelled in the incunabula, the earliest printed books that appeared around the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th" (Harari, 2002: 23) and gradually replaced by the modern form of *symptom*.

<sup>6</sup> This passage gives reference to the reason why I have chosen to translate *sinthome* as 聖狀 in the Chinese abstract.

practice because the subject can change his relation with the drive by means of talking cure. Psychoanalysis is therefore capable of creating a new subject. After transferences are dissolved and interpretations exhausted, the subject may come to a stage of giving up his previous supposition of the Other, becoming aware of the inconsistency of the Other and the traversal of fantasy. The subject thereby reaches the point of the end of analysis understood in terms of dehydraulicization, desexualisation, desubjectivization, expressed in the notion of subjective destitution.

At this juncture, the subject is faced with an ethical decision *par excellence*. No longer entrapped by the veil of fantasmatic formation nor bothered by the Other's desire as a de-centred cause, the subject may take full responsibilities of his/her own drive formations and even come to invent new drive formations with new master signifiers and new identities. The *sinthome* is a "purified symptom," "stripped of its symbolic component," whose existence is based on the decision of this neosubject (Verhaeghe & Declercq, 2002: 66). A new paradigm of the end of analysis thus emerges. The subject becomes the cause of himself by identifying with the *sinthome* and providing an answer to the Real, rather than to the Other; the subject accomplishes a creation *ex nihilo*, as a suppletion for the lack of the Other (69-75).

The normal neurotic subject has to undergo the traversal of fantasy and works through Other-centred symptoms. After separating from the Symbolic, the subject embarks on the process of re-inscription into the new Symbolic through newly invented master signifiers. In the case of Joyce, whose subjectivity transcends the categorization of neurosis, perversion and psychosis, "does not initially need to traverse any fundamental fantasy" (Chiesa, 2006: 357), nor to work through any Other-filtered symptoms. Instead, "he is *already* separated from the Symbolic; what he needs is to 'create' his founding Master signifier" (357).

Viewed through Lacanian lens, it is my basic position here that in contrast to the normal neurotic of working through Other-filtered symptoms, Joyce's artistic ambition, in composing

*Ulysses*, is to invent his self-made *sinthome*, his own “purified” symptoms, by way of his individualized master signifiers. I propose that “Circe” is a chapter that testifies to Joyce’s *sinthomatic* writing. What we encounter in “Circe” is but a fabrication of newly-invented *sinthome*. In “Circe,” the fantasmatic imageries are enacted incessantly together with concomitant temporary identities assumed by the protagonists. These phantasmagoric nightmares or fragments usually end and re-appear abruptly. This fragmentation of narrative flow is a hallmark feature of “Circe,” which obstructs structural coherence of the chapter and poses critical challenge in interpretation. I interpret these fragments of fantasmatic workings as the evidences of constant experimentation of subjective re-structuration by way of forging various identities, diverse symptoms and different drive-formations. Obtrusive fragmentation of the narrative flow should be read in parallel with the incessant operation of unknotting and re-knotting of the three registers, the Real, the Symbolic, the Imaginary in the topological thinking of later Lacan.

In *Le Sinthome*, Lacan’s main thesis of *sinthome* as the *savoir-faire* of one’s singular way of organising subjectivity and *jouissance* through self-naming can be encapsulated in the following three pivotal passages, which deserve to be cited at length:

The hypothesis of the Unconscious, as Freud underlines, is something which cannot hold up except by supposing the Name-of-the-Father. Supposing the Name-of-the-Father, for sure, this is God. It is in this that psychoanalysis, by succeeding, proves that one can moreover do without the Name-of-the-Father. One can moreover do without it provided one makes use of it. (2016: 116)

On the other hand, what I have called *savoir-faire* goes much further, and to this is added the artifice that we impute to God. . . . God is not the one who made this thing that we call the universe. People impute to God what is the artist’s business. (50)

He also believes that there is *a book of himself*. What an

idea! To make oneself be a book! Really, such a thing can only occur to a stunted poet, a confounded poet. Why doesn't he say that he's a knot instead? (56, original emphasis)

Lacan makes a significant clinical judgement that Joyce has cancelled his subscription to the Unconscious, from which he launches an innovation in psychoanalytic theory by claiming that one may well go on to dispense with the Name-of-the-Father on condition that one knows how to deal with it by inventing one's own names in the place of the established Name-of-the-Father. Through the invention of alternative master signifiers, the subject may embark on the self-naming process, assuming and constructing a new singular universal. Comparing artistic enterprise and subjective construction to God's creation, Lacan holds that the *savoir faire* of one's *jouissance*, the *sinthomatic* working is by definition a form of creation *ex nihilo*. An author's God-like ability is to create *ex nihilo* by writing life into work and creating a life out of writing. Lacan detects a curious ambition in Joyce's attempt at making "a book of himself," by which this *sinthomatic* work repairs the structural dissolution caused by the deficiency of the Name-of-the-Father, re-constructing and re-weaving the unchained knots of the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. In this regard, treating Joyce's artistic work-as-*sinthome* harbours existential significance, as it is less a work which represents or reflects life than a life and a self forged through writing. Joyce *is* his writing and his subjectivity relies on his work of art and his being a writer.

Viewing "Circe" as a *sinthomatic* work, I will explore how one's unsubscription from the Unconscious might take place and how the subjectivity-in-the-making is constantly experimented and enacted in actual psychic functioning, how the organization of *jouissance* around the void takes form through various master signifiers. As a consequence of the subject's unsubscription from the established Name-of-the-Father, the plural construction of *sinthome*

through various signifiers ensues.<sup>7</sup> “Circe” is precisely such a chapter in which readers encounter a showcasing of symptomatic/*sinthomatic* works.

### III. “Circe” as a Dramatization of a Textual Subjectivity Under Construction

In this dream-like setting, Bloom and Stephen are not called upon to realise some wish-fulfilment. Instead, they literally confront the traumatic repetition of their deepest nightmares, immersing in the pain in pleasure and the pleasure in pain. Erotic enjoyment and deformed suffering are scattered around, all too fragmented, and nearly devoid of coherence and meaning. The subaltern subjects’ suffering and enjoyment are exposed and the question is raised as to how they would manage to survive. The paternal tragicomedy in Stephen’s and Bloom’s versions and the sexual masquerades are certainly the major concerns of our discussion. Paternity and sexuality are intimately connected. The paternal metaphor functions as an operator to name the mother’s *jouissance*, which is a symbolic sleight of hand to protect the child from the *jouissance* of the first (m)Other, and a way of turning something impossible into something prohibited. In other words, the anxieties and threat in the Oedipal stage actually come from the

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<sup>7</sup> Finn Fordham seems to resonate with my reading here when he hints at “the genesis of multiple personality,” although his approach is not psychoanalytic but more akin to genetic criticism, focusing on the techniques of revision and composition. As Fordham puts it, “Drawn toward multiplicity in his methods of formation and in the content of his epic, Joyce would come close, however, to the fragmentation, both textual and personal, that he feared . . . The life of writing can make and unmake the writer’s life. . . . In such complex interplay, any writing of fragmentation can suffuse the life itself, bringing it to the edge, and over the edge, into a state of fragmentation. It is sometimes argued that Joyce does teeter over the limit into fragmentation, personally and textually . . . the genesis of fragmentation and of fusing. Placing such accounts together could contribute to a plural sense of the multiple personalities of the life of writing and the genesis of its multiplicities” (Fordham, 2008: 518).

Mother, and the Father is called upon to ward off the mother's *jouissance*. Hence, "the father is a symptom for the son" (Verhaeghe, 2000: 135). In Stephen's case, his obsession mainly resides in his intuition of the fictionality of the Symbolic, his suspicion of the authority of the Name-of-the-Father and the naming function and how, as a son, he might manufacture his own name and inscribe it in the Symbolic. Moreover, it is his mother's death that motivates repetition compulsion in "Circe." As for Bloom, throughout his one-day pilgrimage, he is frequently confronted by his fellow Dubliners' xenophobia, plagued by the apprehension of Molly's adultery, haunted by Rudy's death, and so on. In a word, as "Dublin's insignificant Other" (Bell, 1991: 41), as "an Irishman who is not a 'true' Irishman, a father who is not a 'true' father, a man who is not a 'true' man" (McGee, 1988: 79), Bloom is an epitome of the collapse/decline of the (Name-of-the-) father. He comes to nighttown, "the brothel as the theatre,"<sup>8</sup> where his innermost guilt and obscene fantasies are called upon and purged and he hilariously produces new identities as a secular messiah, "Leopold the First" (*U*, 15. 1473),<sup>9</sup> as "the womanly man" (*U*, 15. 1798-1799), or as a martyr in the *bedroom* in his masochistic fantasy. That is to say, various master signifiers, concomitant identities and symbolic mandates are taken upon and discarded incessantly in parallel with the enactment, fragmentation and abrupt ending of diverse fantasies.

Strange recurrence of fragments, phrases, nightmares, characters, incidences from the previous chapters appear in

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<sup>8</sup> I borrow the phrase from Austin Briggs's title, "Whorehouse/Playhouse: The Brothel as Theatre in the Circe" chapter of *Ulysses*. Brigg's essay basically traces modernism's intricate relationship with the brothel in historical documentation and then hits upon Artaud's notion of dream illusion and cruel theatre.

<sup>9</sup> Quotations from *Ulysses* (Joyce, 1922) will be given in this way with lines specified as in the tradition of Joyce criticism. *U* stands for *Ulysses*. "15. 1473" means the passage is from chapter 15, line 1473.

“Circe,” intrude, intercede and fuel the further development of diverse and seemingly incoherent fantasies. For instance, the Citizen, the Man in the Macintosh and many other characters from different chapters reappear and speak. The yews, the waterfall, John Wyse Nolan and so on make presence, whisper, talk or chant while Bloom continues his diverse confessions and memories of erotic nature, which is a perplexing textual resonance with the long digressive interpolation about Irish forestation deployed as “the fashionable international world[’s]” attending “the wedding of the chevalier Jean Wyse de Neaulan” in “Cyclops” (*U*, 12. 1966-1995). The book *Ruby, the Pride of the Ring* (*U*, 14. 346), which depicts the cruelties of circus life, now becomes sources of perverse fantasies and masochism in “Circe” as Singnor Maffei says, “I now introduce Mademoiselle Ruby, the pride of the ring” (*U*, 15. 715-716), Bloom proposes to serve “as your business manager” to Marion/Molly (*U*, 15. 325). Numerous references from the textual past resurge, obfuscating the flow of the narrative, fascinating and frustrating critical readers.

Fragments from the previous chapters are torn away from the original contexts, recalled, assemblaged and reworked in service of the composition of various fantasmatic episodes that surface and fade abruptly one by one in “Circe.” While reading and analysing some of the fantasmatic episodes and the various master signifiers produced in these fantasies to serve for temporary identifications, I detect *an attempt not only of mastering or working through materials and traumas from the past, but also of experimenting with new and diverse subjective formations in these fantasmatic constructs*. That is to say, I propose that “Circe” is *a dramatisation of a textual subjectivity under construction*. Put otherwise, I read “Circe” as Joyce’s experimentation with the Unconscious, with the re-structuration of subjectivity in terms of the (self-)naming and *savoir-faire* of his own *jouissance*. While composing “Circe,” Joyce draws sources from culture and the previous chapters, and simultaneously wreaks havoc on these materials by displacing,

distorting, and dissolving those elements. I thereby take the “nighttown” episode to be the locus for the (re)presentation of the *sinthomatic* repertoire of the textual subject established by Joyce through writing *Ulysses*.

With the critical claim of regarding the episode of “Circe” as a *sinthomatic* work, two important questions immediately arise.<sup>10</sup> First, does Joyce “has in mind what sinthome is” when working on *Ulysses*? Undoubtedly, the term *sinthome* as a psychoanalytic concept, a new paradigm itself invented by Lacan is certainly not on Joyce’s mind consciously in writing *Ulysses*. That is to say, in his theorization, Lacan invents a new psychoanalytic concept and a paradigm of symptom by introducing a new name, by naming Joyce’s peculiar invention/creation of singularized symptoms, “the sinthome” in artistic practice. In addition, following Lacan, it is arguable that Joyce is inventing/creating his own novel *sinthome*/singularized symptoms through writing *Ulysses* without fully knowing what he is doing. In the meantime, being not fully aware of one’s own work does not mean one’s utter ignorance of it either. As Lacan points out, “He [Joyce] also believes that there is a *book of himself*. What an idea! To make myself be a book! Really, such a thing can only occur to a stunted poet, a confounded poet” (2016: 56, original emphasis). Secondly, critics might ponder “whether the entire book of *Ulysses* is *sinthomatic* or whether only the ‘Circe’ chapter can be viewed as *sinthomatic*.” Strictly speaking, in accordance with the spirit of Lacan, I would suggest that the construction of *sinthome* would not be limited to a single chapter of “Circe.” Lacan himself engages with *Les Exiles* at various points in *Seminar XXIII* as an evidence of Joyce’s peculiar *sinthomatic*

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<sup>10</sup> The following passage is inspired by a perspicuous query from one of the anonymous reviewers regarding “whether Joyce has in mind what sinthome is when he works on *Ulysses* (which of course is not really the case), and on the other hand, whether the entire *Ulysses* is *sinthomatic*, and because apparently it’s too big a topic to deal with in this paper, the author chooses only to use ‘Circe’ as an example.” I am grateful to have the opportunity to clarify here.

eroticism. Other critics also find Joyce's other works to be *sinthomatic*.<sup>11</sup> So, I hold that the *sinthomatic* work and the concomitant construction of textual subjectivity can be further critically established beyond the confine of "Circe" and the richness and complexity of such a critical endeavor far exceeds the scope of this essay.

On the one hand, the master signifiers proffered in this chapter for temporary identification and constant reformation of subjectivity exceed the confine of consciousness and the unconscious of a single character. A conspicuous example can be found in the ludicrous signifier, "Iagogo," uttered by Shakespeare. A severe identity crisis is epitomised in Stephen's and Bloom's hallucinatory encounter with 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!" (*U*, 15. 3825- 3829). This passage also hilariously points to the implication that the distorted name itself is perhaps "an encrypted signature (I +ago, Latin for I act)" (Thurston, 2004: 106). This literary act of naming is intimately correlative with the Lacanian notion of the ethical act, the subjective creation *ex nihilo*. It is arguable that the mysterious, hilarious signifier, "Iagogo" or "Iagogogo" actually points to a master signifier that underlies the unconscious of the text, and a master signifier that motivates the textual subject to emulate such a constant *act* of naming/renaming in the incessant process of subjective formation/transformation, construction/reconstruction.

On the other hand, although "Circe" as the unconscious chapter of *Ulysses* transcends beyond the unconscious of a single

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<sup>11</sup> Please also see Bristow (2017), which mainly deals with the *sinthomatic* work in *Finnegans Wake*, and Azari (2008) which includes one chapter on "Joyce's Wakean Sinthome." In terms of *Ulysses*, please also see Hsu (2014), which devotes one chapter to the *sinthomatic* work in "Penelope" and reads "Scylla and Charibydís" as a literary manifesto for literary *sinthome*.

character, the characters' unconscious and various, temporary identifications still contribute to the textual subjectivity as a whole under construction. Among the diverse fantasies and concomitant identities that Bloom embodies in "Circe," my critical effort will be directed toward the fantasies of (pseudo-)messianism and masochism in which Bloom assumes the sovereign mandate as a king and the creaturely figure of a bedroom martyr. Moreover, by the end of "Circe," Bloom miraculously re-invents his own subjectivity and even manages to offer neighbour love by coming to Stephen's rescue, and proposes step-fatherhood to Stephen in "Eumaeus" (*U*, 16. 1160-1165). Bloom as "Dublin's insignificant Other" earns his existential survival by means of his know-how of dispensing with the (new) Names-of-the-Father, by way of inventing alternative master signifiers, which not merely resembles the provisional characteristic of dream work but also points to the incessant construction of subjectivity in terms of unknottting/reknottting.

#### IV. The (Non-)Relation Between Messianism, Masochism and Pseudo-Messianism

I will explore "Circe" firstly by distinguishing pseudo-messianism from true messianism, and secondly, by arguing *not* for the inherent link between masochism and messianism but pointing out the possible ethical danger and potential in masochism's (non-)relation to messianism proper.

In his *Joyce in Nigh town*, Mark Schechner makes a hasty claim that provides a psychologisation of the possible social-political reason underlying the link between masochism and messianism rather than giving a properly psychoanalytic reading of "Circe." Schechner identifies the abrupt shift between the masochistic fantasy of abuse and the messianic fantasy. Schechner explains what he means by masochism as the condition for messianism, saying that "[i]f we consider the prevalence of

messianic themes in nineteenth and twentieth-century Irish literature as a whole, and consider too the situation of cultural bondage and political impotence out of which they arose, we ought to see clearly enough the dependence of messianism upon castration and futility” (1974: 109). In other words, what Schechner proffers is a psychological motivation for messianism out of suffering, despair, and impotence, which is vaguely connected to the pain and humiliation contained in masochism.

Schechner first gives a condensed summary of Bloom’s messianic fantasy, which begins with the grand speech of Bloom’s social reform agenda and his being hailed as “emperor president and king-chairman” (*U*, 15. 1471). The fantasy then abruptly breaks down with the incoherent accusations in the persecution of Bloom, the modern messiah. In Schechner’s opinion, the persecution inflicted upon Bloom, his rise and downfall, is a paradigmatic storyline for the figure of the messiah, and “Circe” repeats “the myth of the tragic savior, the drama of election and betrayal,” which is a common fate that “Christ, Parnell and [Joyce]” share (1974: 143). The connection between masochism and messianism that Schechner attempts to make lies in the correspondence between the suffering and downfall inflicted upon the Messiah and those portrayed in masochism (145).

Although Schechner dutifully cautions that “Christian humility is not quite the same as Bloomian masochism” for “[t]he one aims at the enforcement of continence and discipline in the face of threat, the other at the achievement of orgasm” (1974: 147), he does not really explain the difference between Bloomian sexual masochism and martyrdom, and their possible connection. Instead, Schechner ends his comments with an equivalence between martyrdom in the bedroom and that of messianism, which appears more like a subterfuge to evade real argument than a cogent point. Schechner praises Bloom’s masochism by saying that, “A modern man, he [Bloom] is willing to settle for lesser martyrdoms of the bedroom. A sensible man, he will settle for the lesser salvations a

man may find on the beach, in the bath, or some other private place” (148). It is quite obvious the so-called martyrdom in the bedroom and that of messianism are merely *superficially* linked by reference to the self-afflicted pain. Moreover, it is *unclear* how a social-reform potential in messianism can be distilled from the blatant psychosexual nature in the masochistic fantasy deployed through the interaction between Bloom and Bella/Bello. Even more striking and unconvincing is that Schechner argues for a “moral heroism by way of his psychosexual perversity” (102). Given that Bloom’s socio-political messianic fantasy, in which he compares himself to Christ, eventually lapses into a psychosexual fantasy of masochism in terms of “petticoat government,” one wonders how Schechner’s proposal of “moral heroism” can really be sustained. That is to say, we are in need of a viable alternative critical reading that can properly theorise the bewildering juxtaposition of messianism and masochism in “Circe,” and account for how ethical significance may be found in the so-called “moral heroism.”

Although Joyce’s ambition as manifested in his work is not to be a redeemer (to the existent authority in decline) but to be God himself as an artist;<sup>12</sup> the concept of redeemer, or the signifier of messiah, has been evoked in the (re-)construction of subjectivity of Bloom. Stock references to messianism and masochism of the time of Joyce are vivid in “Circe,” and are inextricably entangled at the very core of subjective (re)structuration at the most intimate socio-sexual-political fantasies. The reworking of subjective experimentation is largely established upon not merely the rewriting of characters and fragments from the previous chapters but also from materials in the cultural storehouse. Bloom’s allusion to the Messiah in “Cyclops” prefigures the extended messianic fantasy in “Circe.” In “Cyclops,” the Citizen mocks Bloom, saying, “That’s the new Messiah for Ireland” (*U*, 12. 752); Bloom is again

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<sup>12</sup> Lacan remarks, “The artist [of *A Portrait of the Artist*] is not the redeemer. It is God himself as fashioner” (2005: 80), my translation.

designated as “ben Bloom Elijah” (*U*, 12. 1916). In “Circe,” Bloom seems to identify with Christ when he repeats Christ’s sentence from Luke 23: 3, saying “you have said it” (*U*, 15. 1835) in reply to a query, “Bloom, are you the Messiah ben Joseph or ben David?” (*U*, 15. 1834). The motif of the false Christ, of the pseudo-Messiah, and of Antichrist is invoked recurrently in “Circe.” Bloom’s extended lecture and reform project is curtailed by various protesters, including the figure of Alexander J. Dowie, who attacks Bloom by uttering “[f]ellowchristians and antiBloomites, the man called Bloom is from the roots of hell, a disgrace to christian men” (*U*, 15. 1753-1754). Alexander J. Dowie was a contemporary of Joyce, a Scottish-Austrian- American with a dubious reputation, who founded the church of Zion City and claimed himself to be “Elijah the Restorer,” “the third manifestation of Elijah,” and was accused of “misuse of funds,” “injustice,” “tyranny,” and “polygamous teachings” (Gifford & Seidman, 2008: 157). After Florry mentions, “Well, it was in the papers about Antichrist” (*U*, 15. 2135), the newspaper boy announces the “Safe arrival of Antichrist” (*U*, 15. 2147) when Bloom finally meets Stephen in the brothel. Recurrent references to the motif of Messiah and the pseudo-Messiah also serve to ignite the critical rumination on the possible distinction between pseudo- messianism and true messianism. I offer my own reading as an explanation of this distinction here.

Bloom’s messianism/masochism is certainly “secular” (Davidson, 1998: 121). Stimulated by Zoe’s encouragement (*U*, 15. 1353), Bloom’s extended fantasy is an absurd mixture of critique of imperialism and capitalism (*U*, 15. 1390-1397), and utopian versions of social reform: “the reform of municipal morals and the plain ten commandments. New worlds for old. Union of all, jew, moslem, and gentile . . . the universal language with universal brotherhood. No more patriotism of barspongers and dropsical imposters. Free money, free rent, free love and a free lay church in a free lay state” (*U*, 15. 1685-1693); “Mixed races and mixed

marriage . . . Liberty of Speech, Plural Voting . . . Painless Obstetrics and Astronomy for the People” (*U*, 15. 1699-1710). There are also prolonged passages of mocked coronation (*U*, 15. 1398-1449), fragments of *sinthomatic* enjoyment, as ostensibly expressive in the ludicrous image of “a colossal edifice with crystal roof, built in the shape of a huge pork kidney, containing forty thousand rooms” (*U*, 15. 1548-1549) as a symbol of “the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future” (*U*, 15. 1544-1545). Moreover, Bloom’s downfall is staged as secular martyrdom with reference to Parnell (*U*, 15. 1762) and is framed in Biblical prose (*U*, 15. 1898-1901).

Concerning the lengthy passages of (pseudo-)messianism, I propose to focus on the libidinal economy operative in Bloom’s self-appointed identity of a new master figure and in the bifurcated structuration of the sovereign and his subjects. That the coronation passage is staged like a socio-political carnival and endowed with great excitement signals that Bloom derives enjoyment from being the centre of fantasy. The coronation is an occasion in which some action of symbolic significance is accomplished through words, by which the symbolic mandate is assigned to a human bearer and authority and power imputed to him/her. In J. L. Austin’s (1975) influential work, *How to do Things with Words*, what are famously called speech acts or performative utterances are neither true nor false for these sentences are not constative or descriptive statements but declarations and linguistic actions. When performed in appropriate contexts or circumstances, performative utterances take symbolic effects and change the status of things in the world. These performative utterances would not be capable of fulfilling their tasks were they not situated in authorised settings and symbolic contexts, which are themselves established according to specific socio-symbolic codes and endorsed by the authority of the law, the Symbolic Other. Austin’s speech acts may change things in the world without transforming the framework of symbolic rules and authority that underlie this world. A speech act may be a symbolic act but it is far from an ethical act in the Lacanian sense.

While Austinian speech acts may do things with words, they do not “change the subject” (Pluth, 2007: 101). Nor do they change the symbolic structure. Austinian speech acts are “highly ritualized and codified,” but Lacanian ethical acts defy pre-established codes, laws and authorities, exposing the inconsistencies of the Other. The Lacanian act must be signifying (doing something with words) the “transformative” and “transgressive” (102). While the Austinian performative utterances are enacted within the law, the Lacanian acts reside outside the law, and are boundary-crossing in essence. The structuration of the subject can be punctuated by the enactment of the Lacanian act: “the subject is, as subject, entirely transformed by the act” and an act is “the inauguration of the subject as such, that is to say, from a veritable act the subject arises differently . . . its structure is modified.”<sup>13</sup> Undergoing the Lacanian act, the subject transgresses the previous symbolic framework and is entirely transformed to the extent that a new subject is emerging. It is this dimension that is lacking in Austinian speech acts and the subject who enacts performative utterances.

The coronation scene itself is a manifestation of an Austinian speech act *par excellence*. Despite the liberalist agenda in the lecture, it is arguable that Bloom is tightly contained in the established Symbolic order with his particular fascination with the prolonged, ritualistic performances, such as imitating the politicians’ shaking hands, kissing and embracing children and so on. The messianic fantasy also betrays Bloom’s obsession with titles, when the position of the sovereign is conferred upon him, “Lord mayor of Dublin” (*U*, 15. 1364), “sir Leo Bloom” (*U*, 15. 1382), “emperor-president and king-chairman” (*U*, 15. 1471), “Leopold the First” (*U*, 15. 1475). The hybridity of these titles from different political systems and ideologies reveals that Bloom is eager to accumulate as many imaginary titles as he can, rather than

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<sup>13</sup> Lacan, unpublished Seminar XIV, 2/15/1967 and 2/22/1967 as cited in Pluth (2007: 102).

subverting or challenging any political ideology or power of his day. In the ritual of the mock coronation, traditional authority figures such as bishops and archbishops, “the chief rabbi” (*U*, 15. 1423), “twentyeight Irish representative peers” (*U*, 15. 1416-1417), and so on, are called upon to participate, lending their approval to Bloom. In addition to titles bestowed upon him and streets named after him such as “Boulevard Bloom” (*U*, 15. 1386), Bloom is also preoccupied with decorating himself with insignias of imperial power—“Bloom appears, bareheaded . . . bearing Saint Edward’s staff, the orb and sceptre with the dove, the curtana” (*U*, 15. 1442-1444). The three items are all symbolic of English authority and carried before the English sovereign at his/her coronation (Gifford & Seidman, 2008: 473). It is an egregious irony that a self-appointed Irish-Jewish Messiah still seeks English approval in support of his newly invented identity, which betrays the fact that, in this pseudo-messianic fantasy, the established ideology, authority and laws of the Symbolic Other are sustained and reinforced rather than breached or challenged.

Moreover, Bloom’s (self-)assignation to the symbolic investiture of the sovereign also signals that the entire Symbolic structuration in the pseudo-messianic fantasy follows the Schmittian logic of the political theology of the sovereign, operating by the masculine logic of totality and exception. Giorgio Agamben launches a study of power, arguing that “*the production of the biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power*” (1998: 6, original emphasis). The sovereign’s power to declare war, to demarcate the fine line of friends/enemies, to pronounce the state of emergency and the suspension of the law marks a “zone of indistinction” of both the inside and the outside of the law, in which, “[t]he rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it” (18). It is the locus where law governs through power, violence, force, sovereign will and decision, rather than reason, normal regulation and positive law. Agamben also argues for a structural parallel between the sovereign and *homo*

*sacer*, who also occupies the position of “inclusive exclusion,” of being included by exception and exclusion (21). Situated beyond both penal law and sacred sacrifice, *homo sacer* presents:

originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted . . . the sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life’s subjection to a power over death and life’s irreparable exposure in the relation to abandonment. (83)

The sovereign Bloom addresses the crowd as “[m]y subjects!” (*U*, 15. 1504). In the extension of constructing Bloom’s kidney-shaped edifice, brutality, destruction and death are vividly described:

In the course of extension several buildings and monuments are demolished. Government offices are temporarily transferred to railway sheds. Numerous houses are razed to the ground. The inhabitants are lodged in barrels and boxes, all marked in red with the letters: L.B. Several paupers fall from a ladder. A part of the walls of Dublin, crowded with loyal sightseers, collapses. (*U*, 15. 1550-1555)

In other words, the glory and power of the sovereign is erected at the expense of his subjects who are rendered to the status of *homo sacer*, exposed to the originary force of the sovereign power. Joyce gives vivid expression to the creaturely imagery of *homo sacer* when he describes “the inhabitants are lodged in barrels and boxes, all marked in red” (*U*, 15. 1553). This figure of distorted, suffering neighbours are what Eric Santner and Slavoj Žižek have named as the creaturely, undead, inhuman dimension of law and human subjectivity. Santner has drawn inspiration from Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of Kafkaesque figures, such as “Odradek” and “Gregor Samsa,” as “a series of figures with the prototype of distortion: a hunched back” (Benjamin, 2001: 807). The creaturely

figures designate “the direct embodiment” of the superegoic enjoyment, the originary testimony to the sovereign power, “the coming flesh of the ‘state of emergency’ sociosymbolic meaning” (Santner, 2005: 100). In this light, Bloom’s pseudo-messianism is hardly ethically progressive but repeats the political theology of the sovereign, governing and distributing with a law built upon totality and exception. The sovereign is privileged on the basis of the fact that the oppressed is rendered into the substance of cringe, of the creaturely, of *homo sacer*. Bloom, who is not regarded as a true father/son for the troubled legacy of his father’s suicide and the premature death of his son, nor taken as a true Irishman for his Jewish origin, or a true husband for the premonition of Molly’s adultery, has been reduced to the interstice in the socio-symbolic existence, situated at the polarity of *homo sacer*. In the pseudo-messianic fantasy, by imagining himself shifted to the other topological polarity of the sovereign hardly changes the status quo, nor does it alter the underlying socio-symbolic framework, the operation of dominant ideologies or the distribution of enjoyment. Embedded in Austinian speech acts, the secular Messiah enacts the role of “emperor-president and king-chairman” (*U*, 15. 1471) and perpetuates the socio-symbolic framework without achieving the truly “transgressive” and “transformative” ethical act in the Lacanian sense.

## V. An Ethical Evaluation of Masochism

It is time to unravel the problematic perverse drama and masochism of “Circe.” In “Circe,” Joyce ushers in deformed figures such as “a pigmy woman,” “a deafmute idiot with goggle eyes,” “shapeless mouth” and the spasms of “Saint Vitus’ dance,” and continues this with a series of obscene masquerades, tortures, and the nightmarish repetition of deepest trauma (*U*, 15. 14-15, 25). Various sexual fantasies and masquerades are enacted. The masochist tortures and traumatic scenes are carried out as a kind of Artaudian theatre of cruelty, manifesting “the theatricality of the

real and the reality of the theatrical” (Briggs, 2002: 46). “Circe” stages the processing of enjoyment in the Artaudian theatre by way of various *sinthomatic* constructions and their vicissitudes. In *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan himself addresses the issue of masochism. Unlike his usual equivalence of the author with Joyce’s main male protagonists, especially Stephen and Bloom, Lacan cautions his audience to be subtler on this matter, remarking,

That there are some people who don’t feel any affect when violence is done to their body is something curious . . . Masochism is not at all to be ruled out from the possibility of Joyce’s sexual stimulation. He insisted enough on this point of Bloom. I would say, however, what is striking are the metaphors he employs, namely, the detachment of something just as peel is detached. That time he didn’t derive any jouissance. He has a reaction of disgust. . . . Perhaps, after all, the beating disgusted him. Perhaps, he wasn’t a true pervert. (2016: 129-131, with slight modification)

Stephen was beaten up by his fellow students after his disagreement over their evaluation of certain poets. What Lacan finds curious in this violent incident is that Stephen has experienced neither enjoyment nor the supposed affect of anger or hatred but disgust toward this event. This betrays that Stephen has a peculiar relationship with his own body and implies that Stephen (hence Joyce) is not a true pervert. In the meantime, Lacan does not deny that in Joyce’s personal life and in his characterisation of Bloom, sexual practice takes on obvious masochism. Lacan’s comments suit my stance in this article. Joyce seems fascinated by and apparently indulges himself in constructing a masochistic relationship with Nora.<sup>14</sup> In the relationship between Bloom and Molly, masochism

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<sup>14</sup> The letters between Nora and Joyce recorded their perverse, masochistic practices. For instance, in a letter dated 2 September, 1901, Joyce wrote to Nora, “Tonight I have an idea madder than usual. I feel I would like to be flogged by you, I would like to see your eyes blazing with anger” (Joyce, 1975: 166).

is as vivid as the biographical counterpart of the author.

With the conceptualization and analysis of the textual subjectivity under construction in this essay, I certainly argue that the sinthomatic work of subjective unknotting/reknotting goes *beyond* the confine of a single character, and Joyce's sinthomatic working in his various works and particularly in "Circe" relies heavily on Joyce's close relationship or even identification with his characters, *both* Bloom and Stephen.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, Lacan talks of Stephen, in agreement with Joyce scholars, as a surrogate figure of Joyce as "not a true pervert." On the other, Lacan also comfortably finds correspondence/identification among Richard (in *Les Exiles*), Bloom and Joyce when mentioning perverse practice in life and in works. There is also striking correspondence between Joyce's real life perverse practices with Nora and his fictional characterization and dramatization of those between Molly and Bloom.<sup>16</sup> That is to say, the correspondence/identification of Joyce, Bloom, Stephen, Richard at different moments of Joyce's texts is not an identity confusion but a textual fact which contributes to the overall construction of *sinthome* in Joyce's *oeuvre*. Joyce's sinthomatic work through the construction of textual subjectivity stretches beyond the characterization of Stephen. The intimate and idiosyncratic relationship between work and life, author and characters find novel expression in the case of Joyce, in his attempt of writing a book of himself and of making a self out of writing. This sight, the theorization of *sinthome*, is probably one of Lacan's major contributions to literature in general and to Joyce studies in particular.

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<sup>15</sup> This passage is a response to one of the anonymous reviewers' question regarding "an identity confusion when it comes to Joyce's relationship with Bloom and Stephen Dedalus." I would like to first thank the reviewer's careful reading and critical rigor and then try my best to clarify my position here if I understand her/him right.

<sup>16</sup> Please see Frances L. Restuccia's (1989) *Joyce and the Law of the Father*, in which Restuccia patiently documents the correspondence between Joyce's real life experience and his fictional writings.

Masochistic elements may be scattered around vividly in “Circe.” However, on a broader view, the subjective structurations manifested in “Circe” *cannot* be interpreted *within* the confinement of perversion, or masochism in particular. If readers take into consideration the various modes of *sinthomatic* construction via different master signifiers, such as in the case of “womanly man” and secular Messiah, it is quite apparent that the subjective structuration of Bloom as it is evidenced in “Circe” also exceeds masochism. In “Circe,” the pseudo-messianic fantasy ends abruptly and Bloom is soon proclaimed by “Dr Mulligan” as “bisexually abnormal” (*U*, 15. 1775), as “a finished example of the womanly man . . . about to have a baby” (*U*, 15. 1798-1810). This incident is one of the most perplexing and enigmatic in “Circe,” and to tackle its complexity may go beyond the scope of the limited space here. This incomprehensible master signifier indicates typical *sinthomatic* quality, marking out an idiosyncratic way of organising his *jouissance* and a self-assignment of meaning and identity in the world. That is to say, various names and the concomitant *sinthomatic* working of subjectivity are enacted in this episode of masochism itself only constitutes *an* important aspect of the subjectivity of Bloom.<sup>17</sup>

Masochism in “Circe” has long been a site of fierce debate. As David Cotter indicates in *James Joyce and the Perverse Ideal*, Joyce draws from the Victorian repertoire of a wide range of masochistic elements, such as pageism, Lancelotism, forced feminisation, transvestism, rump presentation, cuckoldry, shame and disgust, the rites of becoming woman, animals, tools, objects, and so on. The florid masochistic episodes find abundant expression when Bloom

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<sup>17</sup> On this point, my position is different from that of Frances L. Restuccia. Restuccia identifies both real-life and literary masochism in Joyce through her reading of the corresponding masochistic elements, and arrangements in Joyce’s letters with Nora and in Joyce’s work, suggesting *the overall psychic structure of perversion*, such as masochism and fetishism and so on, in Joyce’s life and Joyce’s characters (1989: xii).

is reduced to a servant or even a slave. For instance, while recalling “[t]o be a shoefitter in Manfield’s was my love’s young dream,” “Bloom, stifflegged, aging, bends over her hoof and with gentle fingers draws out and in her laces” (*U*, 15. 2811-2814). Pageism soon turns violent and egregious: “The nosering, the pliers, the bastinado, the hanging hook, the knout I’ll make you kiss while the flutes play like the Nubian slave of old” (*U*, 15. 2891-2892). Later, this passage even terminates with the imagination of lynching and cannibalism (*U*, 15. 2898-2901). It is noteworthy that, as the masochistic fantasy becomes intensified, the exchange of gender also occurs. After Bloom mumbles, “Awaiting your further orders we remain, gentlemen,” “Bella” is transformed into “Bello,” calling Bloom, “Hound of dishonor!” (*U*, 15. 2832- 2835).

Some critics point to the cross-dressing and cross-gender performance in “Circe,” arguing that these gender identities constructed by costumes actually amount to a destructive move, revealing that sexuality is “always clothes-deep into the subjects” (Herr, 1984: 275), exploring an infinite play of signifiers in gender/sexual politics. I find this line of interpretation *problematic*. Firstly, although it appears transgressive on the surface, this gender-crossing, or sex-reversal, actually betrays quite a conservative nature because it perpetuates the binary distribution of existing signifiers of gender representation and gender stereotyping. Suzette Henke identifies this perpetuation of binary opposition:

the whoremistress acquires all the accoutrements of imperialistic power as soon as she dons male trousers and sprouts of a moustache. A ringmaster and tyrannous phallic mother, Bella/Bello demeans, humiliates, and tortures her obsequious victim. A battered Bloom succumbs to ritual degradation. . . . Both Amazonian woman and effeminate male, enacting transvestite and trans-sexual roles of Edwardian pantomime, are inscribed in a melodrama of sado-masochistic catharsis. (1990: 112)

The new womanly man [Bloom] is reduced to the archaic subject-position of powerless womanly woman . . . female

gender confers parodic marginality. (115)

Henke further detects that transgressive display/play of gender-crossing reveals a latent cultural fear shared by the dominant patriarchy toward phallic women rather than a release from the conventional gender distribution.

Furthermore, there is a deeper libidinal structuration operative in masochism. Nick Mansfield correctly analyses masochism as an art of *power*. The contract formed between Wanda and Saverin in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* and their performance clearly annihilate the desire of the Other, stifling others', his partners', and women's subjectivity. It is actually a "conservative formation" (Mansfield, 1997: 51), merely a fantasy carried out by a total subject in the masochistic contract and rituals (32-50). As Serge André acutely points out when talking of male perversion, "[t]he man who gets himself humiliated, insulted, whipped, by his confederate is really seeking to take her place as the woman. He offers himself as object in a typical masculine fantasy scenario only in order to experience the remaining jouissance not mastered by that fantasy" (1999: 270). Perversion offers "a kind of mimetic caricature of feminine jouissance" (270); the pervert "slip[s] into the skin of this Other body, like a hand into a glove" (272). In contrast to such critique of masochism, despite contending that Joyce draws from cultural stereotypes and that the masochistic type of art is "masturbatory" (Cotter, 2003: 143-149), Cotter still celebrates "minoritarian becoming" (147), arguing for the ethics of escape and renunciation in terms of the Deleuzean Body without Organs (143-144). Since to degrade is to feminise in the current culture, the only way to avoid the constructed roles is to resist "the tyranny of the penis," and the masochist may "become woman, become minoritarian, and finally become nothing, and so everything" (193).

To evaluate these criticisms by Cotter and Mansfield, I propose first to go back to the classic interpretation of the perverse structure, not merely the perverse traits, arguably inherent in

neurotic, psychotic, and perverse. A structure signifies the relation between the subject and the Other. The child's dependence on the caregivers necessarily submits him/herself to the responses and demands of the Other. The first Other's *jouissance*, demands, and unconscious desires necessarily become complicated in the relationship between the subject and the Other. It is arguable that the child might take interest in being "the phallicized object through which the mother fills her own lack" (Verhaeghe, 2004: 409). In perversion, the father's law is *never* successfully assumed and he is sometimes derided and delegated to an insignificant or impotent onlooker (of the mother/child relation). It is the mother's ambiguous reference, or equivocations of sexual differences, and the law of the father that makes the paternal law challenged and derided. The law is there, superficially registered and disavowed in its potency and effect. Therefore, the law becomes a façade, something to be challenged, mocked and transgressed.

It is only through the proper acknowledgement of the Other's desire, of the Other as a desiring being that the subject can become a desiring subject him/herself. The pervert thus remains trapped as the Imaginary phallus for the mother, working hard to deny the Other's desire and to secure this privileged position. Verhaeghe argues that, without the proper mediation of the paternal metaphor, sexual difference as such is disavowed. In this light, perversion is "ungendered"; "[p]erversion is not about a male-female relationship, but about a mother-child relation" (2004: 414).

With this in mind, let us return to our evaluation of the diverse critical responses to masochism in "Circe." In "Circe," a mother-child relation is figured vividly in the middle of Bloom's heightened experience at the brothel. For instance, in exchanging dialogue with Bloom, one of the prostitutes, Zoe utters "Babby" in reply to Bloom's flirting words, "Laughing witch! The hand that rocks the cradle" (*U*, 15. 2001-2013). What is remarkable is that the word "Babby" triggers Bloom's fantasmatic becoming of a

baby—“in babylinen and pelisse, big headed, with a caul of dark hair, fixes big eyes on her fluid slip and counts his bronze buckles with a moist tongue and lisping,” Bloom mutters baby talk, “One two tlee: tlee, tlow tlong” (*U*, 15. 2005- 2007). What is even more significant is that masochism as a relationship deployed between Bloom and phallic female figure which rewrites that between the phallic mother and the child as passive object of imaginary phallus underlies Bloom’s prolonged sexual fantasy. Bloom’s masochistic fantasy appears abruptly right after the encounter with the grotesque images of the parental figures of Rudolf and Ellen Bloom, and is ushered by a voice “sharply” uttering, “Poldy,” to which Bloom replies, “Who?” “At your service” (*U*, 15. 293-295). It is arguable that encountering the parental figures and assuming the position of a child triggers Bloom’s extended masochistic fantasy.

Why would the pervert compulsively repeat *the sexual scenarios in terms of power relation*, in the framework of master and slave, of domination and victimization and so on? Or to put it the other way around, why would *power relation are sexualized* in perverse scenarios? In perversion, the Symbolic law is not properly registered but tainted with desires. The pervert “has accepted the Other’s/father figure’s desire in lieu of the symbolic law” (Swales, 2012: 162), and the law is pronounced “in accordance with her or his (the Other’s) whims rather than in accordance with the precepts of the law” (160). In the normal neurotic structure, “[t]he symbolic father provides a rationale for any limit he places on the child’s behaviour, and he too abides by the moral law, thus practicing what he preaches” (160). This rationale of the Symbolic is lacking or dwindling in the case of perversion, in which “the Other’s desire that is substituted for the law is a desire or will that eroticizes blame, punishment, humiliation and unequal distribution of power (originally between the child and the parent)” (160).

As a consequence, the law and desires are entangled in the perverse scenario. The disciplinary practices, such as potty training and whipping, the ritual of flagellation and so on are *eroticized*. The

child clearly recognizes the *jouissance* the (M)Other derives from punishing him and attempts to stage it in the perverse drama again. As Bruce Fink puts it, “[t]he Other’s desire or will is accepted by the masochist instead of the law, in place of the law, in the absence of the law” (1997: 189). In “Circe,” these eroticization of law and discipline finds clear expression in the ritual of flagellation. In the fantasy related to “several highly respectable Dublin ladies” (*U*, 15. 1078), dressed “in amazon costume,” “the honourable Mrs Mervyn Talboys . . . strikes her welt constantly” (*U*, 15. 1058-1060), saying that “He [Bloom] implored me to soil his letter in an unspeakable manner, to chastise him as he richly deserves, to bestride and ride him, and to give him a most vicious horsewhipping’ (*U*, 15. 1070-1073) and that “I’ll flay him [Bloom] alive” (*U*, 15. 1082). As this flogging ceremony continues, Mrs. Bellingham joins and commands to “Write the stars and stripes on it” (*U*, 15. 1091), while Bloom clearly derives pleasure from it—“with his eyes closing, quails expectantly,” he utters, “I love the danger” (*U*, 15. 1085-1086).

Furthermore, in the attempt to safeguard the position of the imaginary phallus with regards to the (M)Other, the structure of perversion, “[s]trictly speaking, is an inverted effect of fantasy. It is the subject who determines himself as an object, in his encounter with subjective division” (Lacan, 1981: 230). Lacan repeatedly remarks that the pervert is reduced to the instrument of the Other’s *jouissance*, and devises the formula for perversion as an inverted form of fantasy in terms of  $a \leftrightarrow \$$  (2006: 653). In the face of the insufficiency of paternal mediation, the pervert would try to reverse the passive position of the Other’s plaything to actively assume the instrumental position of the Other’s enjoyment by means of defying the law, carrying out the individualised scenario through contract. The contract between the involved perverse partners replaces the normal Symbolic law and discloses rigid characteristics to cancel out ambiguity and efface the Other’s desire. Lucie Cantin comments on the contract between Wanda and Sacher-Masoch,

pointing out that “once the contract is signed, the other as a subject is abolished, along with this desire and freedom” (2002: 174). Seen in this light, far from fulfilling the neurotic’s wet dreams of revolutionary transgression and limitless enjoyment, the perverse drama is often quite rigid and repetitive (155-179). To put it another way, in analogy to Agamben’s dialectic between the sovereign and *homo sacer*, the perverse subject dwells in *a permanent sovereign ban by the phallic mother*, and the entire perverse scenario is devised to discipline the creaturely being governed by *this perverse sovereign ban*.

Bloom in the masochistic episodes assumes the creaturely abject, occupying the position of being the instrument of the Other’s *jouissance*. After Bella/Bello rests her eyes on Bloom “with hard insistence” (*U*, 15. 2752), Bloom expresses his lusts for masochism, responding with pleasure, “Enormously I desiderate your domination” (*U*, 15. 2777). Bella/Bello calls Bloom “Hound of dishonour” (*U*, 15. 2384), “Dungdevourer” (*U*, 15. 2841), ordering Bloom, “bow, bondslave, before the throne of your despots; glorious heels so glistening in their proud erectness” (*U*, 15. 2861-2862), while Bloom responds, “I promise never to disobey” (*U*, 15. 284). In the perverse drama between Bella/Bello and Bloom, Bloom is constantly reduced to an object, subjected to obedience and humiliation, to the status of a page, serving as a shoefitter (*U*, 15. 2809-2828), that of a slave for exploitation, suffering lynching “like the Nubian slave of old” (*U*, 15. 2891) with the threat of cannibalism—“Very possible I shall have you slaughtered and skewered in my stables and enjoy a slice of you with crisp crackling from the backing tin basted and baked like sucking pig with rice and lemon or currant sauce” (*U*, 15. 2998-2991). As masochism continues to unfold, Bloom suffers forced feminization, becoming a domestic servant commanded to “swab out our latrines” (*U*, 15. 3066), to “make the beds . . . empty the pisspots in the different rooms . . . or lap it up like champagne” (*U*, 15. 3073-3074), or even a slave on the market, a commodity for

exchange (*U*, 15. 3086-3087). These humiliated positions are embodiment of *objet a* in the perverse formula of  $a <> \$$ .

Moreover, on the surface, the masochist attempts to be the degenerate object to be humiliated, insulted, exploited, exchanged. But behind this attempt of being the object as the instrument of the Other's jouissance ( $a <> \$$ ), the masochist actually directs all the staged action of perversion. In "Circe," clear evidence shows that despite playing the role of abject/object in various masochistic practices, Bloom is actually the one who runs the show. In the beginning of a series of masochistic fantasies, Bloom, in dialogue with Molly/Marion, says, "I can give you . . . I mean as your business menagerer" (*U*, 15. 325). This reference to ring manager should be understood with connection of "Mademoiselle Ruby, the pride of the ring" introduced by the ring manager, Signor Maffie, in one of Bloom's fantasy (*U*, 15. 716). Ruby is the heroine of the novel, *Ruby: the Pride of the Ring*, which is "an exposé of the cruelties of circus life," depicting how Ruby as a slave girl "is worked to exhaustion, beaten when she falters, and hounded to death before the eyes of her father" (Gifford & Seidman, 2008: 78). This work with "overt reform intentions" is appropriated as sources of masochistic fantasies in "Circe" (78). In the episode of forced feminization, Bloom is identified "Ruby Cohen" (*U*, 15. 2967) and "Miss Ruby" (*U*, 15. 3077) by Bella/Bello. At this moment of masochism, Bloom plays the role of Ruby, while moments ago, Bloom identifies himself as Molly/Marion's "business menagerer." These arrangements disclose that not only the clichéd scenarios of masochism are drawn from the contemporary literature and culture, but also that it is far from spontaneity but appropriated and devised in advance by the stage-director of the masochist, Bloom. That is to say, it is a scenario prescribed and the masochist is the one who pulls the strings behind the scene. In the contract formed between Wanda and Saverin in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* or the contract between prostitutes and brothel visitors, the masochist is busy

drawing a script of master/slave for the involved parties, actively playing the passive role of object of humiliation and exploitation, as an instrument of the *jouissance* of the Other. By way of enacting these perverse procedures, the masochist rewrites the childhood experience with the (M)Other, gaining subjectivity to a certain extent, managing to ward off anxiety and to organize *jouissance*.

In this light, we are in a better position to evaluate different critical responses to forced feminization as one of the clichéd masochistic rituals. Bello commands Bloom:

No more blow hot and cold. What you longed for has come to pass. Henceforth you are unmanned and mine in earnest, a thing under the yoke. Now for your punishment frock. You will shed your male garments, you understand, Ruby Cohen and don the shot silk luxuriously rustling over head and shoulders. And quickly too! . . . (points to his whores) As they are now so will you be, wigged, signed, perfumesprayed, reepowdered, with smoothshaven armpits. . . . You will be laced with cruel force into vicelike corsets of soft dove coutille with whale bone busk to the diamondtrimmed. . . . And show off coquettishly your domino at the mirror behind closedrawn blinds your unskirted thighs and hegoat's udders in various poses of surrender, eh? . . . When you took your seat with womanish care, lifting your billowy flounces, on the smoothworn throne. (*U*, 15. 2964-3017)

It is quite obvious that the celebration of cross-dressing and transgender as subversive transgression is too hasty and does not really hold, because, strictly speaking, at the most fundamental level, perversion constitutes a mother-child relation; that is, it is hardly a drama between man and woman but that of a child with unstable genderisation with a phallic mother.<sup>18</sup> Although there

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<sup>18</sup> Joël Dor (2001), in Part II and Part III of his *Structure and Perversions*, discusses the relationship or distribution of phallic attributes in women and men in different clinical structures, and in cases of homosexuality, lesbianism, transsexuals, and transvetism; those related categories which traditionally are

flickers fragile “female awareness” or “feminist insights” (Brivic, 2008: 147) embodied in sentences like “[a]s they are now so will you be” (147), this stereotyping of women, the stock, codified portrayal of women’s clothes, gestures, and actions is clearly a “typical masculine fantasy scenario” enacted “only in order to experience the remaining *jouissance* not mastered by that fantasy” (André, 1999: 270). This epitomises the pervert’s attempt to “slip into the skin of this Other body, like a hand into a glove” (270, 272). Mansfield’s critique of the power relation and the total subject probably reveals more truth of the masturbatory nature of the perverse fantasy, staging, and drama as a means to quench the Other’s desire and to assume the status of the instrument of the Other’s enjoyment. In this light, the masochistic elements that Joyce draws from the Victorian repertoire are far from some revolutionary liberation or experimentation of diverse sexuality. The rigid, perverse transgression is nothing but masturbatory. While Cotter acknowledges the masturbatory nature of the perverse ideals in Joyce’s work and life in general and in “Circe” in particular, he still advocates the ethics of escape and the experiential value of minoritarian becoming by borrowing the Deleuzian conception of bodies without organs.

My contention is that the masturbatory nature of perverse ideals functions in a similar way to that by which neurotics conduct masturbatory enjoyment and is far from subversive of the law. When an ethic ends up in passive escape to avoid the aggressive conventional roles of male domination, its efficacy is quite dubious and confined. Because this fantasy scenario in perversion produces nothing new or subversive, it perpetuates the conventional categories and stifles the Other’s subjectivity when the whole

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assigned to, and border upon perversions. His insightful discussion, though far from exhaustive, indicates that the repertoire of cross-dressing and cross-gendering still centers around the distribution of phallic attributes and its deviation, and is far from a whole-sale structural innovation or revolution as some critics may want to celebrate.

perverse design strives to deny the Other's desire and to instruct the Other on how to enjoy through contract. Hence, the enactment of perverse ideals is far from a satisfying ethical act. The true ethical act lies in the recognition of the non-existence of the Other, the precipitation into new subjectivity, and the intervention of love as the suspension of fantasy and its concomitant superegoic transgression and enjoyment. Dwelling and indulging in fantasy, be it neurotic or perverse, is nothing but the reification of enjoyment and continuous subscription to the Other. That is to say, *the messianic force to intervene and to change the status quo lies not in the ethics of escape as Cotter would believe, but in the ethics of the breakthrough.*

Following this line of argument, even if we do not assign Bloom or Joyce with a stable, rigid perverse structure and remain faithful to our contention that he is beyond the clinical categories from the very beginning, the masochism enacted here, I argue, can be conceptualised as a step *prior to* the miraculous ethical breakthrough that Santner (2005) outlines in his conception of neighbour love. When the masochistic subject actively assumes the position of passive victim or abject, this assumption can function as a means of acquiring the minimal distance required for further liberation, and for a subjective formation and transformation. As Žižek keenly points out,

Paradoxically, such a staging is the first act of liberation: by means of it, the servant's Masochistic libidinal attachment to his master is brought to daylight, and the servant thus acquires a minimal distance toward it. . . . When we are subjected to a power mechanism, this subjection is always and by definition sustained by some libidinal investment: the subjection itself generates a surplus-enjoyment of its own. This subjection is embodied in a network of "material" bodily practices, and for this reason, we cannot get rid of our subjection through a merely intellectual reflection. Our liberation has to be staged in some kind of bodily performance . . . this performance has to be of an

apparently “masochistic” nature; it has to stage the painful process of hitting back at oneself. (2004: 183)

In this light, the ethics of escape is insufficient and the true ethical act of Bloom does not reside in his perverse becoming of the Other, the woman, the object, or the tools, but in his miraculous breakthrough of these suffocating fantasies and enjoyment, coming to Stephen’s rescue to manifest his neighbour love in the here and now. I argue that the ethical potential advocated by Žižek can be seen in Bloom’s masochism. Cotter’s ethics of escape does not really explain the fact that Bloom himself is frequently rendered marginal in his social existence, exploited and humiliated at various points of his life. It is arguable that the florid masochism itself has already functioned as a secondary mechanism in processing his status as abject, his perception of himself as *homo sacer*: “Justice! All Ireland versus one! Has nobody. . .?” (*U*, 15. 3202). I would like to call attention to the moments of masochism in which ritualised cuckoldry is intrinsically intertwined with Bloom’s “real life” anxiety of Molly’s adultery in “Circe.”<sup>19</sup>

Boylan (*tosses him sixpence*): Here to buy yourself a gin and splash. (*he hangs his hat smartly on a peg of Bloom’s antlered head!*) Show me in. I have a little private business with your wife, you understand.

Bloom: Thank you, sir. Madam Tweedy is in her bath, sir. (*U*, 15. 3762-3767)

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<sup>19</sup> Owing to the space and focus of this article, I have no intention to explore fully or to exhaust the rich and complicated nature of masochism in “Circe,” but merely attempt to confine my effort by pointing out what I think are *the limits and critical potential of masochism* which, I have found, is *still missing* from Joyce criticism. See Brivic (2008), in which Brivic devotes a chapter on “Circe” to discussing shame as a key feature of masochism; Davis (2006); Restuccia (1989). Masochism has drawn recent critical attention as well from viewpoints other than the Lacanian perspective. For instance, Baláz (2002) offers an understanding of masochism from the lens of object-relations psychoanalysis. See also Jennifer Burns Levin (2009), in which Bloom as “Mademoiselle Ruby, pride of the ring” (*U*, 15. 716) receives extensive study.

Boylan (to Bloom, over his shoulder) You can apply your eye to the keyhole and play with Yourself while I just go through her a few times.

Bloom: Thank you, sir. I will, sir. May I bring two men chums to witness the deed and take a Snapshot? (*U*, 15. 3787-3792)

Molly's adultery is staged and contained in Bloom's participation as an impotent onlooker as well as a servant. To codify a hurtful scene is already an attempt to contain and tame the Real. Henke reads this incident as "an enactment of caricatured cuckoldry," in which "the timorous Bloom relives the pain of conjugal loss in the mode of voyeuristic farce" (1990: 118). As "playwright and participant," or as "the author/actor/director" of the comedy of infidelity, Bloom "symbolically sutures the wound of cuckoldry by dramatizing marital transgression in the stylized frame of a turn-of-the-century peepshow," and hence gains "the gratifications of both aesthetic mastery and psychological catharsis" (118-119). This arrangement turns a possible infidelity into a drama with fixed script that Bloom is no longer excluded but included as a servant and a witness. This staging of willing cuckoldry puts the would-be adultery into a coded scenario of masochism and can function as a way to master a trauma and manage anxiety. Moreover, I would like to highlight that it is also by way of this masochistic staging that Bloom comes to recognize his contribution to cuckoldry: his libidinal complicity with the adultery between Boylan and Molly is also staged in his fantasy of serving the whole scene. This acknowledgement of one's own involvement and investment in the subjection to power and injustice, one's enjoyment of shame and pain, constitutes the necessary step *prior to* the truly ethical breakthrough for future transformation. Arguably, prior to Bloom's act of neighbour love to intervene in the objectal dimension of the Other, the signifying stress contained in the formation of fantasy (Santner, 2005: 76-133), Bloom works through his subjection at the libidinal level in his masochism to break free from his own creaturely being,

which exceeds social representations or ideological interpellations and is usually absorbed in supereogic enjoyment. The subject's assumption of responsibility of one's own being requires this suspension of the underside of supereogic enjoyment. In the meantime, our neighbour love is realised only when we break free from both the Symbolic law and its fantasmatic thrall, constituting a suspension of suspension, responding to the testimony of the creaturely part of ourselves as well as to the creaturely figures of our neighbours, taking revolutionary action in the now time as the miracles of here and now.

## VI. True Messianism and Neighbour Love

As demonstrated in my extended analysis of the libidinal economy of pseudo-messianism and masochism in "Circe," the subjective position in both fantasies still falls prey to the dialectical structuration of the law. The law is operated with the polarity between the sovereign exception and the inclusive exclusion imputed to *homo sacer*. In Bloom's enactment of pseudo-messianism, he occupies the structural locus of the sovereign; in the masochistic fantasy, Bloom is assigned to the opposite end of the *homo sacer*. With regard to the ethical efficacy, pseudo-messianism and masochism are equally powerless in subverting the law. Is there any possibility of conceiving the space for the extra-legal, which would suspend or deactivate the structural fixity at both psychic and collective-symbolic levels? In recent years, scholars have devoted critical energy to delineating precisely such a space, where true messianism is claimed to be located. As will be shown, the ethical act, the eventual happening, and the truth-process converge in the manifestation of neighbour love.

At the textual level, Joyce does not terminate "Circe" at the moment of heightened enjoyment within the confines of his characters' intensive indulgence in fantasies in nighttown. On the contrary, in the last several hundred lines (*U*, 15. 4241-4967), he

introduces another dimension. “Circe” does not end abruptly at Stephen’s passage to the act, his violent yet impotent attack on the chandelier at the height of a ghastly, horrid fantasy, but shifts to an ethical act effected by the manifestation of neighbour love when Bloom finally and meaningfully engages in the young man’s life. Bloom manages to end, to break up from the impotent and systemised violence embodied in the superegoic enjoyment as well, while Stephen immediately becomes the potential object/victim for the exploitation by Bella Cohen and violence by Private Carr and Private Compton, representatives of capitalism and British colonialism in this context. Jettisoning entirely his role of bedroom martyr as a cringed, pathetic abject in the masochistic fantasy, Bloom reverses the stereotypical submissive attitude and intervenes actively into Bella’s vicious attempt to overcharge Stephen (*U*, 15. 4275-4276) and her threat to summon the police (*U*, 15. 4295) by hinting at his knowledge of “behind the scenes” secrets: “[a]nd if it were your own son in Oxford? (warningly) I know” (*U*, 15. 4306). More importantly, he comes to rescue Stephen when the latter is brutally humiliated and beaten.

What is true messianism then? Contemporary thinkers have turned to Pauline love in their attempts to theorise the breakthrough of the law and power modelled on the political theology of the sovereign, which works by the masculine logic of all and exception as Lacan outlines in the formula of sexuation. In his insightful reading of Paul’s letters as a messianic text, Agamben interprets the messianic calling as a vocation by virtue of the revocation of law, which renders the law “inoperative” (2005: 28). In his comments on I Corinthians 7: 29-32, Agamben remarks “[t]he messianic vocation is the revocation of every vocation” (23) and “the messianic nullification” amounts to “deactivation, rendering ineffective” (25) of the status quo (28). This revocation can be viewed as a suspension, or de-animation of the current operation of libidinal economy of the law, a revocation of the difference between the circumcised and the foreskin. Regarding the

cut running through the division of identity, Agamben interprets it with the internal division effected by the so-called Apelles' section or cut. The fourth-century BC painter is said to be able to produce a fine line that cuts his rival's line in two and Agamben utilises this example to articulate an immanent division that suspends the division of identities themselves. Commenting on Paul's pronouncement, "[n]ot all of those of Israel are Israel," Agamben argues that

Under the effect of the cut of Apelles, the partition of the law (Jew/non-Jew), is no longer clear or exhaustive, for there will be some Jews who are not Jews, and some non-Jews who are not non-Jews. . . . He who keeps himself in the messianic law is not-not in law. The division of the law into Jew/non-Jew, in the law/without law, now leaves a remnant on either side. . . . He who dwells in the law of the Messiah is the non-non-Jew. (2005: 50-51)

The remnant status of the subject as a product of internal division should be opposed to the external division operative among a communitarian grouping or an identitarian differentiation. The communitarian grouping operates by the masculine logic of all and the exception, by an erection of totality built upon the limit-setting exception, while the conception of the remnant follows the feminine logic of "not-all." Without the boundary-setting exception, there is no closure or totality, there is not-all. As a result, the subject is capable of dislodging from communitarian or identitarian closure of all and the exception, and of assuming his/her not-all remnant existence, which de-activates the inside/outside division of law in general and unplugs the particular identities based on the same masculine logic. In other words, *true messianism is extra-legal, aiming to render law inoperative and to extricate the communitarian closure inherent in law by introducing a remnant into every identity-making.*

Badiou's conception of "indifference" carries the same emphasis on separation in terms of the internal division or

immanent division that Agamben has endeavoured to distil from the figure of non-non-jew as an effect of the Apelles' cut. Badiou's *universalism based on separation yet in excess of separation* is best encapsulated in his conception of the eventual grace in the ethical formula of "not . . . but." Badiou condenses a great deal in the pivotal passages in explaining Paul's sentence in Romans 6. 14, "for you are not under law, but under grace":

A structuring of the subject according to a "not . . . but" through which it must be understood as a becoming rather than a state. . . . Law and grace are for the subject the name of the constituting weave through which he is related to the situation as it is, and to the effects of the event as they have to become. We shall remain, in effect, that an eventual rupture always constitutes its subject in the divided form of a "not . . . but," and that it is precisely this form that bears the universal. For the "not" is the potential dissolution of closed particularities (whose name is "law"), while the "but" indicates the task, the faithful labor, in which the subjects of the process opened by the event (whose name is "grace") are coworkers. (2003: 634)

To put it succinctly, in "Circe," if, by staging the innermost masochistic psychodrama, Bloom achieves a therapeutic action of working through, which is similar to the mechanism and effect of the traversal of fantasy, it is arguable that Bloom has undergone a similar process of *revocation* from the previous libidinal investment and internal-division of his own subjectivity, and moved to what Agamben interprets as the messianic calling. That is to say, Bloom is capable of breaking free from fixed psychic structuring, which is precisely a "no" to the past and prepares a ground for the "but" gesturing in the direction of a new, alternative ethical action and structural re-working both at the individual and intersubjective levels. In "Circe," what eventually and eventually takes effect to change the situation is the ethical intervention of neighbour love.

"Circe" does not end with masochism but with *a working through by way of masochism* and other perverse fantasies and

practices. I have read “Circe” as a literary rendition, not of a traversal of the fundamental fantasy as in the case of neuroses but as a remarkable dramatisation of one’s own masochistic scenarios and a processing of masochism *in order to open for sinthomatic re-formulations*. This is an episode in which countless references to past episodes are recalled and reworked; it is an examination of memories, a reworking of the past, to face up unclarified debts of guilt, suffering and oppression. It is a moment of working through fixed, reified *sinthome* in the direction of opening the possibility of reworking, reknitting, and restructuring. Without the subscription to the traditional master signifiers, the *sinthome* is supposed to be individuated and singularised. However, the *sinthome* itself risks reifying or solidifying into a stagnant entity or a strict form of drive formations, which might imprison the subject in draining configurations of psychic life. Under such circumstances, is there still room for a subject to transcend and to renew his/her own *sinthome*, to assert freedom by applying a truly ethical act, to rupture the co-ordinates of life for innovation of a new neighbourhood, a new intersubjective relationship? Does Joyce simply indulge himself in incessant (re)knitting of his own *sinthomatic* undertaking through his writing or does he insert inside it a semblance of hope for self-revolutionising, for subverting one’s own *sinthome*, a possibility for a real structural breakthrough of one’s *sinthome*? My answer is positive. The individualised/individuated master signifiers and the concomitant *sinthome* are still in need of the possibility for re-invention. This concept of sinthomatic re-formulation and constant subjective transformation also mark my contribution to the general theory of psychoanalysis through the fruitful encounter between textual analysis and theory.

There is nothing “ethical” in the perverse ideals, for, strictly speaking, that which is ethical, ultimately, is an eventual act that opens a new possibility of possibilities, genuinely opening to the Real of the Other. While the perverse subject is busy with all the

perverse ideals in manufacturing different forms of his/her own or his/her victims' creaturely being, the genuine ethical question to be raised is "why would you have to enjoy in this way again and again?" My stance in this article has made it clear that one should not be too ready to accept a practice that simply encourages losing oneself in the fun house by reducing to a creaturely existence, be it a symptomatic or *sinthomatic* construction.

In my reading of "Circe," the impact of love on the symptom/*sinthome* is also palpable. Neighbour love is characterized by the capacity of breaking through and renewing both structure and the status quo, the *sinthomatic* work in terms of Bloom's idiosyncratic mixture of masochism and messianism. Furthermore, the ethical act of neighbour love arguably operates with the necessary recognition of the Real of the Other, and the acknowledgement of inter-subjectivity because neighbour love can undermine the position of inclusive exclusion that the subaltern subject has been assigned to in bio-political domination. Neighbour love as an ethical act is therefore inherently intersubjective and opens "the possibility for new possibilities"<sup>20</sup> at the collective level, inaugurating the re-arrangement of a new neighbourhood, which is a new way of being together.

Before concluding this essay, I would like to dwell for a moment on the two ethical moments in "Circe," and attempt to articulate the possible connection between (1) the ethical working through of masochism and (2) the true messianism manifested in neighbour love as an ethical act/breakthrough and a Badiouian Truth-Event. As indicated above, this working through of masochism designates the necessary step *prior to* a miraculous ethical breakthrough. Scholars have tried to translate the Lacanian feminine logic of not-all into ethical responsibility to explicate the capacity of an ethical act to transform subjectivity and

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<sup>20</sup> I borrow this phrase from Jonathan Lear. For a detailed account of the working through and the consequent new opening, please see Lear's (2003) *Therapeutic Action*.

intersubjective relationships in terms of set theory (Santner, 2005: 129). As Santner puts it, “there is no direct path from legal subjection to ‘not-all’; ‘not-all’ only opens up through a traversal of the fantasy of exception, which in its turn sustains the force of the figure of legal subjection. To put it differently, ‘not-all’ is what you get with the traversal of fantasy” (as cited in Žižek, 2003: 116).<sup>21</sup> The conception of a new being-togetherness, a new neighbourhood by virtue of Badiou’s conception of the generic open set built entirely upon the event of neighbour love and the persistent work of love, follows precisely the logic of not-all as a consequence of the traversal of fantasy, of the working through of various masochistic and pseudo-messianic fantasies in the specific case of “Circe.”

Kenneth Reinhard enlists Badiou’s conception of a new neighbourhood to devise the imagination for the consequence of what he terms as the political theology of the neighbour (2005: 62-67). He hopes to derive the political consequences from Badiou’s conception of the generic set, “which is included in a situation without belonging to it, without being proper to it, or presented in it; that is, without being discernible in terms of the situation” (62-63). However, for Badiou, a truth process elaborates precisely on a generic set, which “although invisible and insignificant from the perspective of the situation, remains faithful to the event and testifies to its truth” (63). The ethico-political consequence entailed is that neighbourhood as generic set may be established by way of fidelity to the event of neighbour love. In a lecture, Badiou also calls for an idea of neighbourhood as an open set, which designates “a place, subset, or elements where there is no boundary, no difference between the inside of the thing and thing itself” (66). Hence, in neighbourhood, there are no limits set up by exception nor by defining features; it is nothing but an open set of infinity sustained by a “*decision*,” by an ethical act of love, “that requires fidelity and work to remain open” (67). This conception of

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<sup>21</sup> Santner’s private communication with Žižek.

neighbourhood as an open, generic set follows the feminine logic of not-all for the universality of love takes work to love one by one, not by the masculine logic of exception in which to love all (totality) operates by means of exclusion (some). Santner and Žižek echo this insight when they pronounce that the true ethical formula for love should be expressed in the double negation in the feminine formula of sexuation: “there is nothing for which I am not responsible” as the counterpart of “I am not responsible for All”; “there is nobody I do not love,” in contrast to the masculine conception of “I love you all” on the basis that “I really hate some” (Santner, 2005: 130; Žižek 2005: 183). It is precisely for this reason that a single manifestation of love bears the capacity to transform both subjectivity and intersubjectivity and it must take incessant works of love to sustain, reinvent, and rework the new neighbourhood constructed through the event/act of love.

In a novel like *Ulysses*, which does not contain such spectacular actions and heroic adventures on a grand scale as its Homeric counterpart, the act of neighbour love does carry significant ethical weight because it changes the libidinal economy of the subject of the ethical act as well as the intersubjective relationship. Although it may appear that Bloom’s rescue of Stephen just reflects his kind and altruistic character, this neighbourly act, I argue, is not merely one among the many altruistic deeds that Bloom has been busy with throughout the whole novel but a crucial one that stands out. Firstly, Bloom’s care for Stephen is a unique one that has preoccupied Bloom’s mind throughout the day together with his random thoughts of his lost son and father and Molly’s adultery. There may be a contingent factor that gives Bloom a chance to help Stephen when Stephen is raising his ashplant and smashing the chandelier in the attempt to ward off his phantasmagoric encounter with the nightmarish ghost of his mother at that moment at the Cohen’s brothel. However, the storyline has shown that their encounter is far from accidental but long expected. Bloom has been chasing Stephen all day. For instance, by the end of the library

episode, Mulligan pointed to Stephen about Bloom's strange gaze at Stephen—"The wondering jew [Bloom], Buck Mulligan whispered with clown's awe. Did you see his eye? He looked upon you to lust after you, I fear thee, ancient mariner. O, Kinch, thou art in peril. Get thee a breachpad" (*U*, 9. 1209-1211). In "Circe," Bloom whispers to himself silently—"What am I following him [Stephen] for? Still, he's the best of that lot. . . . He'll lost that cash" (*U*, 15. 639-642).

Moreover, the concluding part of "Circe" is not the single instance in *Ulysses* that the word neighbour and the motif of neighbour love appear.<sup>22</sup> For example, clear biblical reference to neighbour love can be traced in "Lotus Eater" and "Cyclops." As Don Gifford and Robert Seidman (2008: 93) point out, in "Lotus Eater," Bloom's line in his stream of consciousness, "Who is my neighbour?" draws reference from the Bible (*Luke* 10: 25-37) in which a lawyer asks Jesus this question in response to Jesus' command to love God and thy neighbour as thyself. In "Cyclops," lengthy passages have been devoted to Bloom's proposal of liberalist ideal of modern nation and universal love, and also to Bloom's own mistreatment by his fellow countrymen, Bloom's status as a mocked secular messiah and a victim of anti-Semitism and xenophobic attitude of Dubliners (*U*, 12. 1422-1469; 1437-1485; 1489-1501; 1754-1918). Ironically, while "Cyclops" ends with the farce in which the mocked messiah Bloom was literally attacked by Citizen's "tinbox" (*U*, 12. 1857) and escaped (*U*, 12. 1754-1918), Bloom himself would demonstrate what neighbour love is and what true messianism means by coming to rescue Stephen in "Circe."

What is even more significant is that there are profound

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<sup>22</sup> This author is able to identify seventeen instances in *Ulysses* in which the words neighbor and neighborhood appear in Chapter five, nine, eleven, twelve, fourteen and seventeen and find the instances in "Lotus Eater," "Cyclops," and "Circe" of particular importance with regard to neighbour love. I would also like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers' valuable insight at this point.

consequences in terms of both psychological effect and narrative development after Bloom's rescue of Stephen. It is noteworthy that after this neighbourly act, there arises the phantasmagoric image of Rudy on the horizon of the Bloom's mind and the textual landscape of the narrative flow of "Circe." The description of Rudy is vivid and atmosphere joyful—"Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, a kidnapped, dressed in 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." (*U*, 15. 4956-4960). "[W]onderstruck," Bloom calls out "inaudibly" the name, "Rudy" (*U*, 15. 4962). Most important of all, after one day's pilgrimage into the night, however momentarily this encounter may appear, Bloom finally manages to intervene meaningfully into Stephen's life, even suggests a step-fatherhood to Stephen in "Eumaeus" and brings him home in "Ithaca." It does not really matter if the symbolic union between Bloom and Stephen as the traditional conception of father and son is successful or not. Bloom apparently derives great psychological comfort or even mental transformation from this neighbourly act. This ethical act certainly functions as a pivotal point in the narrative flow and plot development. That is to say, if the troubled legacy of his father's suicide and his son's premature death and his wife's infidelity have constituted the core of Bloom's disturbing trauma, Bloom's neighbourly act of rescuing Stephen contributes to the breakthrough of the repetitive compulsion of the enactment of these socio-psychological and psycho-sexual troubles. In other words, the (non-)relationship between Bloom and Stephen is broken through and there is opportunity for a new neighbourhood in which alternative intersubjective relation can unfold. How successful would the ensuing intersubjective relationship within the new neighbourhood be? That is another question which requires further critical evaluation.

Bloom's act of neighbour love in coming to Stephen's rescue marks a breach of his pain-afflicting and enjoyment-loaded

fantasmatic fabric, where he has dwelled long, undeniably signalling a breakthrough of his own *sinthome*, which he has invented, inhabited and for which he has therefore been completely responsible. Such a breakthrough arguably facilitates subjective transformation and intersubjective re-organisation as exemplified in Bloom's returning home with the slight yet significant adjustment of asking Molly to prepare breakfast and the possibility for Bloom and Stephen's dialogues in "Eumaeus" and "Ithaca." In this regard, love in the form of Bloom's neighbour love toward Stephen does assume the ethical status of an act, a constructive negativity for breaking through the status quo. Bloom's deeds assume a "no and but" structure, which is paradigmatic of a Truth/Event in Badiou's interpretation of Pauline love. It is arguably a "no" to the past *sinthome* and a "yes" to a new intersubjective structuration. Love assumes an ethical status, functioning as a turning point, a moment of breakthrough. Love as an ethical act supplies momentum for a life-altering, structure-transforming movement, changing the relationship between the subject and the Other, inaugurating a new subject, and revolutionising the Other as well by gesturing to a new singular universal, a new formation of neighbourhood.

As David Trotter accurately puts it, "[after Circe] the question we ask of Leopold, Molly and Stephen is not 'Who are they finally?' but 'What they might yet do for each other, in each other's lives?'" (2003: 93-94). Although, in "Eumaeus" and "Ithaca," the void is keenly felt at the attempt of a new symbolic construction, and the impossibilities or failures of a sustainable relationship between Stephen and Bloom as father/son or of another nature yet to be invented. The impossibilities or failures themselves also signal an on-going experimentation of a new possibility of being together, of a new neighbourhood in the Badiouian sense of an open, generic set as a manifestation and product demanding fidelity and works of love as a truth process.

To conclude, this work of love can be interpreted as a realisation of messianism by virtue of Benjaminian conception of dialectic at standstill. As Benjamin writes in the famous passage,

it is not what is past casts light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectic at standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what has been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but imagistic. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical—that is, not archaic—images. The image that is read—which is to say, the image in the now of its recognisability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded. (1999: 463)

At the end of “Cyclops,” Bloom is besieged by xenophobic violence while at the same time hilariously imputed as “ben Bloom Elijah” (*U*, 15. 1916). In response to this missed opportunity for his fellow Dubliners to enact their neighbour love on himself, Bloom *recognises* the opportune occasion for his ethical act toward Stephen. The continuity of historical linearity is interceded and the messianic time of now becomes possible precisely by this kind of recognisability for ethical responsibility and revolutionary intervention, which will consequently suspend the law/sin dialectic, transforming the subject undergoing the act, fissuring and restructuring the co-ordinates of the status quo as well.

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## 建構中的主體： 論〈瑟爾西〉中的彌賽亞主義與受虐狂

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### 摘 要

本文探討喬伊斯如何在〈瑟爾西〉中進行主體聖狀建構 (sinthomatic construction) 實驗，我主張〈瑟爾西〉呈現拉岡晚期拓撲學中所討論的主體不斷消解與重組的過程，進而檢視特定聖狀建構是否產生新的主體結構和驅力組織。透過拉岡與齊傑克的理論，本文主張虛偽彌賽亞主義和受虐狂都不具備倫理潛力，兩者皆與藉由鄰人之愛所展現的真實彌賽亞主義相對。受拉岡倫理作為理論和巴迪厄鄰人區域論述啟發，本文闡釋真實彌賽亞主義將帶來嶄新的獨特共相與新生的鄰人區域。〈瑟爾西〉終結於鄰人之愛所致的病徵突破，藉此重寫、再製聖狀，並開展嶄新的互為主體關係。

**關鍵詞：**拉岡、〈瑟爾西〉、聖狀 (*Sinthome*)、彌賽亞主義、受虐狂