

Session 2 "Calypso," "The Lotus-Eaters," "Hades" (Chapters 4 – 6)

What do these first three chapters of the wanderings of Leopold Bloom add to our experience of the novel? How do they extend, qualify or change the trajectory of the book as established in the first chapters, the "Stephen chapters"?

What is Bloom like? What do we know about him and how do we know it? How do these chapters fit the myth-novel opposition we discussed last time? As a partial answer to this last question, we can consider the novel's 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, "The Lotus-Eaters."

If we think of *Ulysses* as myth, emphasizing its use of images to create a symbolic rendering of modern life, we find in the realistic landscape of Dublin's street a wide array of figures of the soporific lotus (recalling, of course, the episode in Homer's *Odyssey*): the Far Eastern "lethargy" and "flowers of idleness" that Bloom thinks of when he look in the window of the Belfast and Oriental Tea Company (58); the "hypnotised like" soldiers on parade he sees in the recruiting poster in the post office (59); the gelded and gorging cab horses he passes who are in a horsey "Eldorado" next to the cabman's shelter (63); the flower that Bloom (aka Henry Flower) receives from Martha, with whom he is having a passive affair (63); the "lazy pooling swirl of liquor bearing along wideleaved flowers of its froth" that he envisions inside an incoming train (65); the stupefied communicants in All Hallows Church (66); the "placid" eunuchs Bloom thinks of when he gazes back at the empty choir (67); the lethargy-inducing drugs in the chemist's shop he visits (69); the "languid floating flower" of his phallus in the "gentle tepid stream" of the bath water (71).

Note that all of these figures are occasioned in Bloom's mind or imagination by the people, places and things he *encounters* in his wanderings in Chapter 5. His sensibility is deeply imbued with a sense of his immediate surroundings and his own physical presence.

We can consider also about how the chapter functions novelistically, as part of the narrative. Taking place as it does between a chapter in which two letters, one which he does not read and one which he does, confront Bloom with thoughts about the sexuality of his wife and daughter respectively ("Calypso") and a chapter in which Bloom attends a funeral ("Hades"), the images of Chapter 5 can be an extension of Bloom's own feeling of—or longing for—a kind of "death in life," a narcotized, castrated experience that is short of death, but avoid the facts of active sexual behavior. As Bloom says of the eunuchs, this is "One way out of it" (67). As so often in *Ulysses*, Bloom here struggles with the tension between encounter and *retreat*.