

Ulysses

A reading companion

Every question asked and answered across a first cover-to-cover reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* — Penguin Modern Classics, introduced by Declan Kiberd.

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Read 8–17 July 2026

Sixteen exchanges · eighteen episodes · 933 pages

What this is

A first reading of *Ulysses*, carried out over ten days in July 2026, with questions raised page by page as they arose and answered in turn. It is reproduced here in full and in order, unedited.

Conventions

Page numbers refer to the Penguin Modern Classics edition with Declan Kiberd's introduction. Joyce printed no episode titles — the Homeric names (Telemachus, Calypso, Circe and the rest) come from schemas he circulated privately, and are used here, as in most criticism, purely as scaffolding.

The questions were dictated while reading, so quoted passages are approximate and some names arrive scrambled. They are left exactly as spoken; where a slip mattered, the answer untangles it.

Two stretches are omitted at the reader's request: an exchange about preparing a handoff document, and a later exchange about a film. Nothing concerning the book has been cut.

Nothing here is a summary. The questions are the reader's own words and the answers are as they were given, in sequence, so the thinking can be followed as it actually developed — including the places where it changed.

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Beginning: the tower, and who is who

8 July 2026 · orientation

THE READER

Let this be a chat about, um, in general, uh, *Ulysses*, by James Jones, as I've started reading it. So given that... by the way, I've read a great introduction, uh, but I don't remember the publisher, but it's a great introduction. I'm in chapter one. I'm confused. I'm not despairing. I don't mind. I'm gonna read gently until Bloom appears in chapter four. But as I'm going through chapter one, I think this Stephen Dedalus's character the English person and Buck Buck... Melanchite Buck, whatever. I forgot the name. So tell me tell me about the characters, chapter one, a brief summary, and help me to understand it. Would that turn with me very much? But just trying to give me a general guidance about it.

THE ANSWER

What a book to be inside. First, a gentle fix that'll help as you go: it's James **Joyce**, not Jones (Jones wrote *From Here to Eternity* — easy slip on dictation). And the two characters you're tracking are exactly right, you just don't have the names pinned yet: the mocking, worldly one shaving on the roof is **Buck Mulligan** (his full name is *Malachi* — that's your "Melanchite"), and the brooding young man in black is **Stephen Dedalus** (not Dudley). The Englishman is **Haines**. So your instincts are good — you're reading better than you think.

The setting. Chapter 1 ("Telemachus" — the episodes have Homeric titles Joyce never printed) takes place on the morning of June 16, 1904, in a squat stone Martello tower at Sandycove, on the coast south of Dublin. These were British-built defensive towers; the three men are renting it. The whole novel unfolds across this single day.

That rooftop with its gunrest is where the book opens — "stately, plump Buck Mulligan" intoning the Latin Mass ("Introibo ad altare Dei") as a blasphemous joke while he shaves. Seeing the place helps the scene land.

The three men:

Buck Mulligan is a medical student — exuberant, blasphemous, quick, cruel. He performs constantly, mocks everything sacred, and coins the famous phrases you'll have hit ("the snotgreen sea, the scrotumtightening sea"). He's charming and impossible to trust. Joyce modeled him on a real friend-turned-rival, Oliver Gogarty. Think of him as a false friend.

Stephen Dedalus is the emotional center — 22, an aspiring artist, just recalled from Paris because his mother died. He's the young hero of Joyce's earlier novel *A Portrait of the Artist*, so he arrives already carrying a history. He's in literal mourning (the black clothes), and worse, in guilt: as his mother lay dying she asked him to kneel and pray, and he refused. That refusal haunts the whole chapter. Mulligan needled him early on by calling his mother "beastly dead," and

Stephen hasn't forgiven it.

Haines is an Oxford Englishman staying at the tower, collecting Irish folklore in a mild colonial way. The night before, he woke screaming from a nightmare about a black panther, which unnerved Stephen. He mostly stands in for England itself.

What's actually happening underneath. Not much *plot* — three men wake, banter, eat, argue, and go their ways. But three currents run hard beneath it:

The **dead mother and Stephen's guilt** — the sea is called "our great sweet mother," which folds right back into his grief. The **theme of dispossession**: Stephen pays for the tower, yet Mulligan effectively rules it, and at the end asks for the *key*. Stephen hands it over, resolves not to return, and the chapter's final word is "**Usurper**." (This is the Homeric parallel: Stephen is Telemachus, the son whose home has been overrun by suitors while the true father is absent — the father he'll unknowingly find in Bloom.) And Stephen's great line about Ireland's condition: he is "a servant of two masters... an English and an Italian" — the British Empire and the Roman Church — plus a third who wants him for odd jobs. Watch too for the old **milkwoman**: she doesn't recognize her own language when Haines speaks Irish to her, and defers to the Englishman. She's Mother Ireland, colonized and forgetful of herself. It wounds Stephen quietly.

On reading it. Your plan — read gently until Bloom arrives in Chapter 4 — is exactly the right one, and it's what experienced readers advise. Chapters 1–3 are the "Telemachiad," all Stephen, dense and interior. Fair warning: Chapter 3 ("Proteus") is the hardest in the early stretch — pure stream of consciousness on a beach, almost no handrails. Don't fight it; let it wash and keep moving. Chapter 4 ("Calypso") drops you into Leopold Bloom frying a kidney for breakfast, and the book turns warm, bodily, human, and far easier to hold.

The confusion you're feeling is designed, and universal. Nobody decodes Chapter 1 on first read. Let the sensory surface and the emotional undertow carry you — you're doing it right.

The edition, the eighteen episodes, and the numbering

9 July 2026 · page 79

THE READER

Okay, let's get our bearings right.

This is the Penguin Modern Classics version of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, with an introduction by Declan Kiberd. I'm trying to see when it was printed: reprinted in Penguin Classics 2000, and Declan Kiberd's introduction is copyright 1992.

The reason I'm saying this is that while I thought I was reading Chapter 1, I was actually looking at a different naming convention.

With this book, Part I starts in the tower: "Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead," and it ends with the word "Usurper." I was also reading, "Who cockerel. What city sent for him?" So chapters 1, 2, and 3 are all under Part I.

Part II starts with, "Mr. Leopold Bloom ate with relish..."

Therefore, the names of the episodes (like Telemachus or Nestorian or Proteus) are not written here, nor are the parts named Telemachia or whatever. Instead, Part I contains the first three chapters, and Part II starts with Mr. Leopold Bloom.

This is a different way of presenting the book. I'm looking to see if there's an explanation, but no, there is no explainer. *Ulysses* just starts like this, so that's the setup. So on the setup, I'm looking at what I have read in episodes 1, 2, and 3. I actually thought number 3—let me try to pinpoint very clearly where 3 starts, if I can. It goes from "usurper" to "Yoko Crane" (Proteus), and in the second part there are a lot of Greek and Latin references.

Yeah, episode 3 starts with: "Ineluctable modality of the visible."

On the seaside, there are scenes that are impressive. I mean: "A bloated carcass of a dog lay lolled on the bladderwrack." Before him, "the gunwale of a boat sunk in sand." What a fucking awesome paragraph!

Another point: "A live dog grew into sight, running across a sweep of sand." "Lord, is he going to attack me? Respect his liberty." And a bit later: "The dog's bark ran towards him, paused, ran back, dog of my enemy."

The beach scene is awesome. Anyway, so now...Now that the first three parts are over, I would like to hear more about chapters 2 and 3 as well. We talked about chapter 1 before, and I've started the Leopold Bloom part.

I want your insight into this numbering difference from what you had mentioned, or what is typically mentioned, in this edition versus the others. I'm reading through the Leopold Bloom section, currently on page 79. I'm still in this book's convention of book 2 (or chapter 2).

Leopold has got some things for breakfast, we looked at Milly's letter and the poem, and they are talking about metempsychosis. Anything you can say about this part in general is valuable: his walk, his shopping, his breakfast, the "mkgnao" of the cat.

I would also love to know why he thinks of the places he talks about:

- Wandering through old streets
- Turban faces going by
- "The Turk the Terrible" references
- Bleibtreustrasse 34, Berlin West 15

Why is he making references to these different places as he courses through Dorset Street and all that?

I'm stopping at page 79. Your feedback is welcome, and your logic regarding the ordering of the book's chapters is also welcome.

THE ANSWER

Let's get the map straight first, because it reframes everything you're reading.

The numbering, and why your edition looks different

Here's the key fact: Joyce never printed the episode names in *Ulysses*. Not "Telemachus," not "Proteus," none of them. The 1922 book has no chapter titles and no part labels at all — just breaks between the eighteen episodes. The Homeric names come from two **schemas** Joyce circulated privately to friends and critics (the Linati schema of 1920, and the Gilbert schema that Stuart Gilbert published in his 1930 study). Each schema mapped every episode to a Homer parallel, an hour of the day, an organ of the body, an art, a color, a technique. Critics found them so useful that the titles became the standard shorthand — but they are scaffolding *around* the book, not in it.

The **three-part division your Penguin uses, though, is genuinely Joyce's**. He did build the novel in three movements, mirroring the *Odyssey*:

- **Part I — the Telemachia** (episodes 1-3): Stephen. *Telemachus / Nestor / Proteus*.
- **Part II — the Wanderings** (episodes 4-15): Bloom, then Bloom and Stephen. Begins with "Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish..." (*Calypso*) and runs through *Lotus-Eaters, Hades, Aeolus, Lestrygonians, Scylla and Charybdis, Wandering Rocks, Sirens, Cyclops, Nausicaa, Oxen of the Sun, Circe*.
- **Part III — the Nostos / homecoming** (episodes 16-18): *Eumaeus / Ithaca / Penelope*.

So your edition is actually the *faithful* one — it gives you Joyce's real architecture (three parts) and withholds the titles that were never his to begin with. Editions that stamp "Telemachus" atop episode one are importing paratext. Treat those later names as signposts, not spoilers. You're not in a different book; you're in the quiet, correct version of it.

Episode 2 (Nestor) — the school

First, a decode: your "Yoko Crane" and "cockerel" are both "**You, Cochrane**" — the schoolboy Stephen quizzes in the history lesson. "What city sent for him?" — the answer is *Tarentum*, and "him" is Pyrrhus of Epirus (source of "Pyrrhic

victory": *another win like this and we're finished*). Nice bit of ear-work on your part; the dictation just scrambled it.

Stephen is now a reluctant schoolteacher. He teaches a bored history class, helps a weak boy named Sargent with sums (and sees his dead mother's love in the child — "someone had loved him"), then collects his wages from the headmaster, **Mr Deasy**. Deasy is Joyce's ironic Nestor: in Homer, Nestor is the wise old counselor who advises Telemachus; here he's a pompous, penny-proud, anti-Semitic windbag full of *unwanted* advice. He lectures Stephen on money ("I paid my way"), hands him a dull letter about cattle disease to place with newspapers, and ends on an ugly joke — that Ireland never persecuted the Jews "because she never let them in." Two lines to hold: Stephen's **"History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake,"** and, when Deasy insists all history moves toward "the manifestation of God," Stephen nods at the shouts from the hockey field: **"That is God... A shout in the street."** God as immanent noise, against Deasy's grand design.

And here's Joyce's structural wit: he plants Deasy's anti-Semitism *two episodes before he introduces the Jewish hero* — and then shows Bloom to be the most humane consciousness in the entire book. The joke curdles in retrospect.

Episode 3 (Proteus) — the beach

You've hit the hardest episode in the first stretch, and you're clearly *getting* it — you're quoting the best bits with exactly the relish they deserve. Proteus is the shape-shifting sea-god you can only make answer by holding him fast as he changes form, and that's the whole episode: Stephen alone on Sandymount Strand, watching matter and perception refuse to sit still. It opens with **"Ineluctable modality of the visible"** — Aristotle's idea that to see at all is to be caught in the inescapable *fact* of the visible. Stephen even shuts his eyes to test whether the world's still there when he stops looking (idealism vs. reality). "Signatures of all things I am here to read" — he casts himself as a reader of the world's hidden script. That dog you love is the Protean creature itself: watch how it *becomes* things in his mind — a hare, a buck, a bear, a wolf, a calf — form dissolving into form. Under it all runs the drowned-man motif and "our great sweet mother," the sea, pulling his dead mother back into every image. It's dense because it's a mind thinking at full pitch with no narrator to help you. Your plan — let it wash, keep moving — is precisely right.

Bloom, and why his mind keeps travelling east

Feel the tonal switch: Stephen opens the book in Latin and Aristotle; Bloom opens Part II eating kidneys and talking to his cat. Where Stephen abstracts, Bloom *attends* — to the body, to appetite, to other creatures. The cat is the whole man in miniature: he doesn't settle for "meow," he keeps refining the sound as she grows impatient (**Mkgnao** → **Mrkgnao** → **Mrkrgnao**), and he wonders how *he* looks to *her*. That imaginative empathy is Bloom's defining virtue, and it's why the book warms the moment he arrives.

Metempsychosis ("met him pike hoses," as Molly mangles it) is not a throwaway — it's the structural master-key. Transmigration of souls, a soul reborn in a new body: that is the whole conceit of *Ulysses*. Odysseus reborn as a middle-aged Dublin ad-canvasser. When Bloom explains it to Molly, Joyce is quietly explaining his own book to you.

Now, your real question — the places. As Bloom walks toward the butcher, the morning sun and warmth send his mind **east**: he imagines setting off at dawn, "travel round in front of the sun," a strange city gate, **turbaned faces**, dark carpet-shop caves, "**Turko the terrible**" cross-legged with a pipe, criers in the bazaar. Note that "Turko the Terrible" was also a real Dublin Christmas *pantomime* of his youth — so the exotic Orient and a homely local memory collapse into one image. That's the texture of an ordinary associative mind, and it's the technique of the whole episode.

Then at Dlugacz's butcher he picks up a flyer from the wrapping-paper pile: **Agendath Netaim**, a Zionist planters' company selling sandy tracts near Jaffa to plant with orange groves and eucalyptus, by the Sea of Galilee — address **Bleibtreustrasse 34, Berlin W. 15**. That's your Berlin reference: it's simply the company's printed address. But the flyer gives his sunny Eastern daydream a personal, aching charge, because Bloom is of Jewish descent, an outsider in Catholic Dublin. The reverie of the fertile homeland flips, when a cloud crosses the sun, into desolation — a barren waste, "the oldest people... wandered far away over all the earth, captivity to captivity." The ancestral East as both promised land and long exile. Then he shakes it off — "Well, I am here now... morning mouth bad images" — and that resilience is also Bloom.

One resonance readers note: *bleib treu* is German for "**remain faithful**." On a day whose hidden center is Molly's coming infidelity at four o'clock — and you may already have seen the letter to "Mrs Marion Bloom" in Boylan's bold hand, the small wound Bloom carries out the door — that street name planted in his morning is either coincidence or exactly the kind of thing Joyce buried on purpose. I'd bet the latter.

You're reading it beautifully. The confusion in Part I was the point; from here it gets more human, and more generous, the deeper you go.

The Bloom household: Milly's letter, and Bannon straightened out

9 July 2026 · pages 105–179

THE READER

Okay, let's talk about this section (page 179) later.

There's a mention of Bannon in Milly's letter. Is this the Bannon that Molly will later have an affair with?

I'm trying to understand: is Milly the wife of Leopold Bloom, or the daughter? Who is marrying whom? For example, is Bloom marrying the wife, and is Milly the daughter? What do you think of the different cat sounds? The meow is as pronounced as the first bass drum sound. There's a very big sympathy level towards cats, or animals in general. What about the "Inimitable" reference? And the "Ulysses" reference? Leopold Bloom's entire world, his entire realistic world... I think James Joyce does well with that, or that's the view I get. I need a little guidance on Milly, Leopold Bloom, and James Joyce's Ulysses, and if there are any important stories or more familiar experiences around there. Tell me why the Pope goes to church on the priest's instruction. I think it was that "I will tell all: penance, punishment, peace, great power in their hands, more than doctor or solicitor." That is a very strong reference to the Church being strong, but I wonder if it's affirmative on his part or critical. There are references to locations and numbers before times (for example, the ones I came across on page 105). I think those references are increasing the specificity of the work, moving beyond emotional and relational specificity into everyday specifics.

What do you think? "He saw his pale body reclined in a pool, naked, in a womb of warmth, oiled by scented oils, massive, softly lapped."

What is he talking about? This is the end of the first Leopold Bloom chapter (Calypso). What is that bath metaphor referring to?

And finally, in Hades (episode 6), they are together, including Simon Dedalus, in a carriage that is taking them to where? To Paddy Dignam's funeral? So, we have both Simon and Bloom in a carriage beforehand, but they probably won't talk until chapter 14 (Oxen of the Sun) onwards.

That ends my questions for now.

THE ANSWER

Good batch — and one of these clears up a knot worth untangling first, because it reorganizes the whole domestic picture.

The family, and the Bannon mix-up

Straighten this and a lot falls into place. **Molly** (Marion, née Tweedy) is the **wife**. **Milly** (Millicent), fifteen years old as of the day before, is the **daughter** — away in Mullingar learning the photography trade. Bloom is married to Molly; Milly is their child. And there's a third, absent presence you'll feel everywhere: **Rudy**, the

son who died at eleven days old, about eleven years ago. That death froze something in the marriage (Bloom and Molly haven't been fully together as husband and wife since), which is the quiet engine under Molly's coming infidelity.

So the affair is **Molly with Blazes Boylan** — the man whose brazen letter to "Mrs Marion Bloom" you saw, who's coming to the house at four o'clock. **Bannon** (Alec Bannon) is a different thread entirely: a young student up in Mullingar who's taken with **Milly**. That's the pang in Milly's letter — Bloom reading between his teenage daughter's lines that she's being courted, that she's becoming a woman and slipping away from him. Two "B" men, two generations, two anxieties. Bannon resurfaces later (in the maternity-hospital episode) still bragging about his "photo girl." So: Boylan wounds the husband; Bannon unsettles the father.

The cat

Your bass-drum instinct is right — the cat's voice is almost the downbeat that opens Bloom's whole half of the book, right after three episodes of Stephen's Latin and abstraction. The escalation (Mkgnao → Mrkgnao → Mrkrgnao) tracks the animal's rising impatience as Bloom dawdles, the consonants thickening with her insistence. But the real tell is that he refuses the lazy human "meow" and keeps trying to render the sound *as it actually is*, and then wonders how *he* looks to *her* — "Height of a tower? No, she can jump me." That reversal, imagining himself from the cat's eye, is Bloom's signature virtue: an empathy that reaches even across species. It's the same faculty that will make him the most humane mind in the novel.

"Ulysses," and the Inimitable

The title is your best key to Joyce's method. *Ulysses* is the Roman name for the Greek *Odysseus* — and Joyce chose the Roman form partly because he first met the hero as a boy in Charles Lamb's *The Adventures of Ulysses*, a children's retelling he adored. The whole book is that childhood hero smuggled into a grown man's ordinary Thursday: Odysseus reborn as a middle-aged Dublin ad-canvasser. That's what *metempsychosis* was quietly announcing — the epic soul transmigrated into the everyday body.

On "the Inimitable" — I want to be straight with you rather than confident: "the Inimitable" is the old epithet for **Charles Dickens** ("the Inimitable Boz"), but I can't reliably place which line near your pages you're pointing at, and it may be from Kiberd's introduction rather than Joyce's text. If you quote the sentence around it, I'll pin it exactly instead of guessing.

Lotus-Eaters: the church and the bath are the same thing

Here's a synthesis that ties two of your questions together. Episodes have a governing idea, and episode 5's is the **Lotus-Eaters** — Homer's men who eat the lotus flower and drift into narcotized forgetting. So the whole episode is about opiates, drift, things that lull: flowers, tobacco, tea, sweet drugs, and — Bloom notices — *religion*.

That's your answer on the church. Bloom wanders into the Mass and watches the communicants, and his stance is neither devout nor hostile: it's the cool, bemused, clear-eyed skepticism of an **outsider** (he's of Jewish descent, agnostic, watching Catholicism as a fascinated anthropologist). He admires the *engineering* of it while believing none of it. Confession as psychological relief ("then I will tell you all... Punish me, please"), communion as comfort, the priest holding "great power in their hands, more than doctor or solicitor" precisely because he *knows everyone's secrets*. His verdict is the episode's whole thesis: religion "lulls all pain" — it's another lotus. So: critical, but not angry. He sees the mechanism of consolation-and-control without editorializing. (Contrast Stephen, whose fight with the Church is agonized and personal — the dead mother, the two masters. Bloom's is detached and observational. Same institution, opposite temperatures.)

And the bath passage — small correction: that's the **end of Lotus-Eaters (episode 5)**, not Calypso. (Calypso ends earlier, with Bloom in the outhouse hearing the church bells.) Bloom is anticipating the Turkish baths, imagining sinking into the warm water: "a womb of warmth," his body floating, oiled, softly lapped — capped by the image of his "languid floating flower" (yes, his penis, drifting). It's the ultimate lotus: a return to the amniotic, narcotic, self-enclosed. And having just watched communion, he half-consciously sacralizes his own body — "this is my body" — a gentle private blasphemy. Warmth, forgetting, dissolution: the lotus-eater made literal.

The specificity — page 105 and everywhere

Your observation is exactly the right one, and it names Joyce's central wager. The book is obsessively grounded in real Dublin — real addresses, tram routes, shop names, the precise time of the funeral. Joyce boasted that if the city were destroyed it could be rebuilt from his pages. Two things happen through this. First, it grounds the *mythic* in the utterly *mundane*, which is the whole point — the heroic dignified down into an ordinary man's ordinary day. Second, the numbers-before-times and the measuring habit are *character*: Bloom's mind is practical, quantifying, scientific — always estimating, calculating, weighing. That temperament reaches its extreme in the late "catechism" episode, where the book itself becomes a list of exact facts. So the specificity is both a realist technique and a portrait of *how Bloom thinks*.

Hades: the funeral carriage

Yes — episode 6 is **Paddy Dignam's funeral**, the carriages carrying the mourners out to Glasnevin cemetery on the north side. Bloom's carriage holds **Martin Cunningham, Jack Power, Simon Dedalus, and Bloom**. It's Homer's descent into Hades to consult the dead — and Joyce loads it with Bloom's *private* dead: his son **Rudy** ("If little Rudy had lived..."), and his father, who died by suicide (a Hungarian Jewish immigrant, later converted) — so when the men talk carelessly about how suicides used to be buried, Bloom silently flinches. Yet even ringed by death and Catholic rites he doesn't share, he stays stubbornly life-turned — thinking of the living, of warmth, of sex, at the graveside. (Watch too for the unknown stranger nobody can name, the "man in the macintosh" — a small

mystery that will nag the whole book.)

One clarification on your last point, because it matters for the architecture: it's **Bloom and Stephen** who don't truly connect until the later episodes (from the maternity hospital onward) — not Bloom and Simon. Simon Dedalus is Stephen's *biological* father — drunk, sentimental, sharp-tongued, present but inadequate — and here in the carriage he even spots his son walking and grumbles about Mulligan's bad influence. Bloom sees Stephen on the road too, and thinks of him kindly. That near-miss is deliberate. The deep meeting the book is building toward is Bloom becoming Stephen's *spiritual* father — Ulysses finding Telemachus — while Simon, the real father, keeps failing at it. Bloom and Simon, meanwhile, are just fellow Dubliners; they'll share plenty of rooms from here (Simon sings in the bar a few episodes on, with Bloom listening).

You're reading with a wonderful ear — the dog-as-shape-shifter, the bass-drum cat, the drift into everyday specifics. Keep exactly this pace.

Hades: the funeral carriage and the talk of the dead

9 July 2026 · page 139

THE READER

Okay, let's test the recording like this. Now we're reading more into the hate speech, and can you record properly? Said Martin Cunningham, "a child, a dwarf's face, mouth and wrinkled like little Rudy's."

Little Rudy keeps appearing in this eighth chapter, as you said, repeatedly traveling with them through this one. And two pages later, there's this, and they call me the Jewel of Asia—of Asia, the Geisha. What's that from? It's very lovely, cute in between.

Closely followed by: "Verdict: death by misadventure."

The letter from my son Leopold: "No more pain, wake normal, nobody owns." Beautiful words. And there's just a hint of his father gone through an accident and died. Leopold's father, is that it?

What am I talking about? There's more specifics about Dublin places, carriages, whatever, trams, trains, as you said. Then we have this: Crossgun Bridge, the Royal Canal, water rushed, roaring through the sluices. A man stood on the drooping barge between the clumps of turf. On the towpath by the lock, a stretched horse, a slack-haired horse, a load of bogbag, bogaboo.

Beautiful words, hard to understand for me, but they sound amazing. What are they talking about? And then a bit later, they looked murder's ground. It passed darkly, shuttered, tenantless, unweeded garden, whole place gone to hell, grossly condemned. Murder, the murderer's image in the eye of the murdered."

This is such a strong paragraph start, and I wonder what it tells about the idea of murder and perception then: about how the murder is buried, and how the murdered is perceived in society.

What do you think? And then, horrors in Turkish graveyards, learn anything if taken young. You might peek of a young widow here, men like that. Love among the tombstones, Romeo, spice of pleasure. In the midst of death, we are alive, we are of life."

This is amazingly strong. I don't know what it means about horrors in Turkish, and I don't know why he refers to graveyards, associating them with emotions so much. What do you think this specific passage meant?

And two pages later: "burying him, we come to bury Caesar." Again, what do you think is the reference?

Here I am at page 139 after two days of reading, and on top of this there is a very heavy, beautiful introduction by Declan Kiberd about the history of the book.

So I'm stopping now to go to Apartman for a dinner with Turan and Oya. Always a party man with everyone, all the time—funny, I'm smiling. It's a bit rainy outside. I'll listen to your opinion and get going now..

THE ANSWER

Yes — and here's proof I can: your device turned **"Hades" into "hate speech."** That's the episode you're in (episode 6, the funeral), so nothing sinister — just the voice-to-text mishearing a word it didn't expect. I'll keep quietly decoding these as we go, since your ear is catching the right sounds even when the transcription scrambles them ("wake normal" was really "wake no more," "bogaboo" is the name of a barge — more on both below).

"a dwarf's face... wrinkled like little Rudy's." This is Bloom's inward grief, not really Cunningham's line — as the carriage passes a child's coffin, Bloom pictures his dead son as he was: "a dwarf's body, weak as putty, in a whitelined deal box." Rudy died at eleven days old, about eleven years back, and Hades keeps surfacing him because the episode is Bloom's descent among his own dead. You're right that he recurs relentlessly here; that's by design.

"they call me the Jewel of Asia... the Geisha." A pop song of the era — "The Jewel of Asia," from the hugely popular musical comedy *The Geisha* (1896). It drifts up through Bloom's mind the way tunes do. The whole book runs on this stratum of half-remembered Victorian songs and music-hall numbers; they're the wallpaper of an ordinary Dubliner's memory.

The suicide note — and yes, that's Bloom's father. Your instinct is exactly right, with one correction: not an accident. Bloom's father, **Rudolph** (born Rudolf Virág in Hungary — *virág* means "flower," which is why Bloom's secret pen-name is "Henry **Flower**"), killed himself with poison in a hotel in Ennis. The note was addressed to "my dear son Leopold": "No more pain. Wake no more. Nobody owns." What makes this scene quietly devastating is the staging — the other men in the carriage talk carelessly about suicide as the worst disgrace, a coward's death, *not knowing* Bloom's father did exactly that. Martin Cunningham, who does know, gently steers them off it. Bloom sits silent, reliving the inquest. That's where "death by misadventure" belongs in your thinking: it's the whole theme of how society *classifies* and *euphemizes* death — misadventure, accident, suicide — the merciful fictions and the cruel labels.

Crossguns Bridge, the Royal Canal, "the Bugabu." Pure observed Dublin, decoded: the funeral route crosses the Royal Canal at Crossguns Bridge (Phibsborough, on the way north to Glasnevin cemetery). A canal **barge** — named the *Bugabu*, your "bogaboo" — sits loaded with **turf** (peat, cut from bogs for fuel), a horse loosely tethered on the towpath to haul barges, water roaring through the lock's sluices. Nothing symbolic; it's Bloom's eye catching the working life of the canal as they pass. The words are hard because they're *precise* — real barge-name, real cargo, real bridge. Joyce trusts the specific noun to do the work.

The murder house — "the murderer's image in the eye of the murdered." They pass a real crime scene: the Childs house, site of an 1899 case where a man was tried for bludgeoning his own brother (and acquitted). Bloom reflects on two things at once. First, the public's appetite for murder — "they love reading about it," the true-crime hunger that's identical today. Second, that eerie folk-superstition you flagged: the old belief that a murdered person's eye

photographs the last thing it saw — the killer's face imprinted on the dead retina. This is doing real thematic work in a book obsessed with **seeing** (remember Stephen's "ineluctable modality of the visible" on the beach). The house stands "shuttered, tenantless, gone to hell" — cursed by association, murder buried but not erased. Your reading — how the deed is buried yet the murdered one lingers in perception — is precisely the nerve Joyce is touching.

The graveyard eros — "in the midst of death we are in life." Here's the beating heart of Bloom, and of the whole episode. The Anglican burial service says "In the midst of life we are in death"; Bloom *flips* it — "In the midst of death we are in life. Both ends meet." Ringed by graves, his mind turns helplessly toward sex and the living body: the young widow at a funeral ("you might pick up a young widow here"), love among the tombstones, Romeo, the life-force asserting itself against extinction. This is Bloom's deepest characteristic — even in Hades, even in grief, he faces *life*. On "horrors in Turkish graveyards" specifically: I can't perfectly place that exact wording from here without the fuller line, so I won't pretend to — but the engine of the passage is unmistakably this eros-amid-death inversion, and I suspect the exotic image is Bloom's mind reaching, as it always does, toward the warm and the elsewhere. (Fitting that the Turkish phrase is the one that stopped you.)

"We come to bury Caesar." Shakespeare — Mark Antony's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar*: "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him." Antony's speech is famously *ironic* — he claims not to praise, then praises so cunningly he turns the crowd. Bloom's mind, skeptical of hollow funeral pomp and empty eulogy, coughs it up at exactly the right moment. Under it: the gap between what's said over a grave and what's true.

So the whole of Hades is Homer's descent into the underworld, remade as one man's carriage-ride to a cemetery — and loaded with Bloom's private ghosts (Rudy, his suicided father) and the era's rites he doesn't share, as a Jewish outsider among Catholics. Yet the miracle of the episode, and of Bloom, is that he comes out of the land of the dead still turned stubbornly toward the living. (Keep half an eye, too, on the stranger nobody can name — the man in the brown macintosh. That small mystery will nag at you the whole book.)

Now go — Apartman, Turan and Oya, rain on the windows, you smiling. That's the exact spirit Bloom would approve of: in the midst of a book full of the dead, off to a table full of the living. Enjoy every bit of it.

Aeolus and Lestrygonians: the newspaper office and the lunch

10 July 2026 · pages 139-219

THE READER

Okay, let's get some clarity on these chapters. We're going to go through pages 139 to 219.

I've come across M'Intosh in the graveyard, as you said, and they caught sight of him and he disappeared, so there is only a reference to him.

On page 144, there is a gramophone reference, and I wonder: what role did the gramophone have in everyday life during that period?

Then the next chapter starts on page 147, the "In the Heart of the Hibernian Metropolis" chapter. I wonder what exactly is happening there, with all those small sections of people talking and doing stuff. Any explanation is valuable. Here I want to ask what an ad canvasser at that period is doing, because I cannot form the connection between an ad canvasser and current work conditions.

The chapter continues, which I didn't find that fascinating to read, but I enjoyed, for example, on page 180 from the father's part, when Saint Augustine is being quoted: "You pray to a local and obscure idol; our temples' majesties and mysteries are the abodes of Isis and Osiris, of Horus and Amun-Ra."

That chapter, when it talks about chosen people in the next paragraph, was an interesting religious interim part. I wondered, on page 197, line 6, when talking about horses at one point on the previous page: what is the impact of races in Leopold Bloom's life, and what do they signify in Dublin at that time and in the book? On 2 or 3, it says, "Poor Mrs. Purefoy, Methodist husband, method in his madness."

Lovely phrasing, and does it show any perspective on religion? On page 205, I'm reading: "A squad of constables debouched from College Street, marching in Indian file, goosestep, hooded faces, sweating helmets, panting their truncheons."

Does Joyce here criticize the policeman's life, or is he pointing to something else? What is his perspective on that, and is it an important perspective on order, on police, and on city life? In pages 212 and 213, there are a lot of references: Pat Kinsella, Harp Theatre, Whitbread, Branqueens, Dixon, Book Castle, and the three purity maids from school. All these references are so time-specific.

While I praised specificity before, this level of specificity and time detail is making reading the story and understanding it 100 years later very tough. To that level, the universality is perhaps not in the story's details, but in the way the story is handled.

That's a question I have of Joyce: Are we looking at a special story, or are we looking at a special way of telling a story?

Answer it in both technicality and also in city specificity, which I praised earlier for grounding the story. Here you have: "I was happier then. Or was that I? Or am I now I? 28 I was. She 23 when we left Lombard Street. Was something changed? Could

never like it again after Rudy. Can't break back time."

This is the clear mention of Rudy as affecting their individual lives, so that's a point to note. The next paragraph: "Grafton Street gay with housed awnings, lewd distances, muslin prints, silk, dames and dovers, jingle of harnesses, hoofbeats lowring in the baking causeway, thick feet that woman has in the white stockings, hope the rain mucks them on her."

Pitiful sentence. And he gets out of the misery of remembering Rudy into interacting with the surroundings.

And then the next page: "Useless to go back. Had to be. Tell me all. High voices. Sun warm silk. Jangling harnesses, all for a woman. Home and houses, silk webs, silver rich, spicy foam, Jaffa, agenda, Nathan, wealth of the world."

He's getting very descriptive, and he's getting out of the moody mood.

And the next page: "Men, men, men," perched on high stools by the bar, hats shoved back, at the table conned from a bread, no charge, swilling, wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food, their eyes bulging, wiping wetted mustaches.

What a great description! What a vivid way of portraying what he's saying. Sandwiches on the shelves, almost taste them by looking. Beautiful lines at the sandwich place.

At 2:19, when he's eating the sandwich, he raised his eyes and met the stare of Billy's clock. Two o'clock, five minutes fast.

There's a time reference now. At this stage, we're grounding the story in a reference to time. I thought that was an interesting use of time here.

So that's it: 2:19, my second or third day of reading 48 Hours, and I leave more description and understanding to you. Help me understand these.

THE ANSWER

Two episodes are opening up under you here — the newspaper office and the lunch — and each has a hidden governing logic that, once you see it, makes the "small sections" and the food imagery click into place. Let me give you those keys, then take your questions in turn. (And yes: M'Intosh is exactly as you say — a man nobody can name, glimpsed and gone. Hold onto him.)

The gramophone (p. 144, still in Hades). In 1904 recorded sound was barely a decade into domestic life — a genuine novelty, faintly miraculous and faintly uncanny. To hear a captured human voice played back was to hear something that shouldn't be possible. So when Bloom imagines a gramophone in every home to preserve a dead relative's voice — "after dinner on a Sunday... put on poor old greatgrandfather Kraahraark!" — he's reaching, half-comically, for a machine that cheats death, that lets the dead keep speaking. In the underworld episode that's the perfect thought: technology as a new way to hold the departed. The wonder and the eeriness were both fresh in 1904 in a way we've completely lost.

Aeolus — the newspaper office (episode 7, from ~p.147). Here's your structural key. The "small sections of people talking" are chopped up by those BLOCK-CAPITAL headlines — "IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN

METROPOLIS" is one of them. Joyce has laid mock newspaper headlines over the episode, and if you watch them across the chapter they *degrade* — starting stately and Victorian, ending sensational and tabloid, enacting the decline of public rhetoric. The Homeric parallel is Aeolus, god of the winds: so the whole episode is about *wind* — hot air, bluster, speeches, empty eloquence, windbags. It's set in the offices of the *Freeman's Journal*, full of newspapermen showing off their oratory. And it's the first place Bloom and Stephen are in the same room — Bloom in on business, Stephen delivering Deasy's cattle letter — yet they still don't meet. The near-miss is deliberate; Joyce keeps them circling for hundreds of pages.

What an ad canvasser does — and why it matters. Bloom's trade is *advertisement canvasser* for the *Freeman's Journal*: he goes door to door to Dublin businesses persuading them to buy advertising space in the paper, working on commission. In today's terms he's an ad-sales rep / media-sales account man — freelance, precarious, paid per deal, living on charm and persistence. The very errand driving him through Aeolus is the **Keyes ad**: a merchant named Alexander Keyes wants an advertisement with a crossed-keys design (a pun on the Manx parliament, the House of Keys), and Bloom is negotiating the artwork and the renewal. This job is the engine of the whole book's structure — it's *why* he's out wandering the city all day instead of at a desk, and it fixes his exact social station: a modest, slightly looked-down-on commercial job, an outsider (Jewish, agnostic) moving through every layer of Dublin. That marginal, mobile, in-between position is precisely what makes him the perfect modern wandering hero.

The Isis/Osiris/Moses passage (~p.180) — and a gentle correction. That's not St. Augustine — it's the climax of Aeolus. Professor MacHugh recites a famous real speech by **John F. Taylor**, in which an Egyptian high priest addresses "the youthful Moses" with contempt: *your god is a local, obscure idol; our temples house Isis and Osiris, Horus and Ammon Ra*. The point lands with the next paragraph you flagged — the **chosen people**: had Moses bowed to the Egyptian's claim of cultural superiority, "he would never have led the chosen people out of their house of bondage." It's a direct allegory — **Egypt is England, Israel is Ireland**, and the moral is that a colonized people must refuse the colonizer's claim that its language and gods are worthless. (Nice detail: this speech is the *only* passage of *Ulysses* Joyce ever recorded in his own voice — he prized it.) So your "religious interim" is really the book's Irish-nationalist heart, smuggled in as biblical rhetoric.

Lestrygonians — the second key (episode 8, from ~p.181). Everything from here to your sandwich runs on one idea. Homer's Lestrygonians are *cannibal giants* who devour Odysseus's men — so Joyce makes this the **eating** episode, set at lunchtime (1-2 p.m.), written in what he called a "peristaltic" style: the prose itself churns and digests. Food saturates every line. That's why the **Burton restaurant** scene hits you so hard — "Men, men, men... wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food, eyes bulging, wiping wetted moustaches." Bloom walks in hungry, sees humanity feeding like beasts, is revolted by the cannibal spectacle, and *retreats* to Davy Byrne's quiet "moral pub" for a modest gorgonzola sandwich and glass of burgundy. Once you know the episode is *about* consumption, all the food imagery

stops being random and becomes the organizing pressure.

The constables (p.205). Read them *through* that eating theme and Joyce's view sharpens. The squad "debouches... goosetstep... sweating helmets," and Bloom watches them as a fed, faceless, obedient force — in the episode's logic, animals "bound for their troughs." He's wary of massed authority (he remembers earlier baton-charges on student demonstrators), but he's no friend of the mob either. His stance — and Joyce's here — is the outsider's cool distrust of coercive order: the state as a well-fed, unthinking body, marching and consuming. Not a romantic critique of the poor policeman's lot; a colder anatomy of power as appetite and obedience.

The races (~p.197) — a plot thread to watch. Horse racing was the shared public event and the pulse of pub-and-street betting culture in 1904 Dublin. And this exact day carries the real **Ascot Gold Cup**, won by a 20-to-1 outsider named **Throwaway**, beating the favourite. That result becomes a hidden landmine: earlier a man (Bantam Lyons) misread an offhand Bloom remark ("I was just going to *throw it away*") as a tip on Throwaway — so later, in the pub episode, the men wrongly believe Bloom won a packet and is too stingy to stand a round. It helps ignite the day's one real hostility toward him. So "races" in this book means the day's common excitement, the betting texture of the city, *and* a comic misunderstanding with real consequences. Keep the word "Throwaway" in your ear.

Mrs Purefoy (~p.203). Mina Purefoy has been three days in a hard labour at the maternity hospital — she'll become the occasion for episode 14. The Purefoys, endlessly procreating, embody relentless Christian fertility, which the book keeps setting against Bloom's own dead son and the era's uneasy contraception debates. "Methodist husband, method in his madness" is pure Bloom wordplay — Methodist/method — over a *Hamlet* echo ("though this be madness, yet there is method in't"). Lightly ironic about pious fecundity, warmly compassionate toward the suffering woman. That double note is Bloom exactly.

Now your real question — special story, or special telling? Your own answer is the right one, and I want to honour that you got there yourself: "*the universality is not in the story's details, but in the way the story is handled.*" Yes. Both dimensions you asked for:

Technically: the "story" of *Ulysses* is deliberately banal — a middling ad-man walks around a city for a day, dodges home because his wife is unfaithful, meets a lost young man, brings him home, goes to bed. Stripped bare, nothing happens. The greatness is entirely in the *telling*: the flood of interior consciousness, the eighteen different styles, the mythic scaffolding beneath the mundane, the encyclopedic technique. Joyce's radical bet was that the *ordinary* — one nobody's ordinary Thursday — rendered at full depth, is as vast as any epic. So it's a special way of *telling* a deliberately *unspecial* story.

In city specificity: here's the paradox you're feeling. The universal is reached *through* the hyper-particular, not despite it. Joyce's own principle (recorded by his

biographer) was that "*in the particular is contained the universal*." Pat Kinsella and the Harp Theatre are not there for you to recognize — you *can't*, and neither could most readers even in 1922. They're there because that is how a real mind actually works: memory throws up random, dated, specific fragments, and the *process* is what's universal, not the referents. You will never recognize the shop; you will absolutely recognize the *movement* of a mind snagging on a shop it half-remembers. That's the trade Joyce knowingly made — he accepted that the topical detail would age into obscurity, because the fidelity to *how consciousness moves* would not. (He also, cheerfully, wanted a book that would "keep the professors busy for centuries.") So your frustration is correct *and* it's the point: the specifics are the grain; the universality is the woodwork. (On p.212-213 specifically — Pat Kinsella, Whitbread, the Harp — a few of those names came through garbled enough that I won't pretend to pin each one; but they're all of a piece, Bloom's music-hall and theatre memories, the wallpaper of a Dubliner's mind.)

Rudy — the hinge of the whole book (~p.213). You've found the single most important sentence in the marriage. "*Could never like it again after Rudy. Can't bring back time.*" This is stated plainly and it is the key to everything: after their infant son Rudy died (eleven days old, eleven years ago), full intimacy between Bloom and Molly broke, and never healed. *That* is why Molly turns to Boylan this afternoon, and why Bloom is so strangely passive about it — the grief froze something between them that neither can thaw. "Can't bring back time" is the book's deepest ache: irreversibility. You were right to mark it.

Bloom's rhythm — grief into the world. And you've caught his survival mechanism precisely. Watch how he surfaces from that Rudy memory straight into Grafton Street — "gay with housed awnings... muslin prints, silks... jingle of harnesses" — the sensory present hauling him up out of melancholy. Then the reverie tips eastward again — "Jaffa. Agendath Netaim... wealth of the world" — that Zionist orange-grove flyer from breakfast recurring in his mind. This is Bloom's core resilience: he grieves, then the living, sensory world reclaims him. He doesn't drown. That oscillation — memory, wound, and then the redeeming rush of the actual street — is the emotional weather of the entire book.

The clock (p.219). Your instinct about time is right: the whole novel is time-stamped, each episode pinned to its hour (this one is lunchtime, and the clock reading two o'clock seals it). And you're stopping at a beautiful threshold — right around the sandwich, Bloom's mind is about to fall backward into the day's most tender memory: Molly on Howth Head, years ago, passing him a warm seedcake from her own mouth in a kiss — the marriage when it was *alive*, set against the frozen present. If you haven't hit it yet, it's a page or two ahead, and it's one of the loveliest things in the book.

You're reading with real instrument — the cannibal-feeding of the Burton, Bloom rising out of grief into the street, and above all your own formulation about telling-over-tale. That last one is a genuinely mature reader's insight. Keep going exactly like this.

Scylla and Charybdis, and into Wandering Rocks

11 July 2026 · pages 222-290

THE READER

Let's continue our talk about Ulysses. And now we are at page 222: "Silly fish learn nothing in a thousand years." Such a beautiful sentence. And reminding myself, this is the eating chapter ("Lestrygonians"), referring to Odysseus.

And the next lines, on the next page: "half the catch of oysters they throw back in the sea to keep up the price, cheap, no one would buy." That's a very acute financial observation, by the way, on top of beautiful sentences.

And on page 224, we have the "O, wonder!", the sounds of literature. That "O" sound has been highlighted by Declan Kiberd, who wrote the introduction. I'm paying attention to sounds.

On page 232, there's a mention of the Stewart Institution. What's that? "That girl passing the Stewart Institution." What's the Stewart Institution? Toward the end of this chapter, we have this "Hurry, walk quietly" moment: "Warm, my heart... His hand, looking for the... where did I put it? Found it in his hip pocket. Soap, lotion, have to call, tepid, paper stuck. Oh, soap there, yes. Gate safe." Is this the end of that chapter, and why the change of pace there?

A couple of pages later, on page 236, there is a mention of "the shining seven," as W.B. calls them. That is W.B. Yeats, right? He is referring to Yeats.

And at the bottom of the page, we read: "The supreme question about a work of art is out of how deep a life does it spring." Then: "The painting of Gustave Moreau is the painting of ideas. The deepest poetry of Shelley, the words of Hamlet, bring our mind into contact with the eternal wisdom, Plato's world of ideas." And finally: "All the rest is the speculation of schoolboys for schoolboys."

Those sentences are spoken by a character in the book. This is not the mind of Joyce; it is too pedantic and too rigid. I wonder if Joyce would agree with it. What do you think?

And then we have the other sentence: "The schoolmen were schoolboys first," Stephen said, super politely. "Aristotle was once Plato's schoolboy." Stephen has some insight, kindness, and connection—more than Buck Mulligan and the others we meet in the first chapter and this chapter.

Could you explain the "pièce de Shakespeare" and the Mallarmé references to me? What do you think of them?

Also, on page 243, we have the letters A.E.I.O.U. Why are those letters there, and what do they represent? At page 248 we have these lines. Here he ponders things that were not:

What Caesar would have lived to do had he believed the soothsayer? What might have been? Possibilities of the possible as possible. Things not known: what name Achilles bore when he lived among women.

This is such beautiful prose.

And also, these guys, when they get together, they always talk about Shakespeare. Why so? On page 251, there is a mention about—and we ought to mention another Irish commentator, Mr. George Bernard Shaw. So many Irish people of high repute, by the way, around those times writing: Shaw, Joyce, Yeats, anyway. Is it important to mention George Bernard Shaw here? Is there something I need to know?

And Stephen talks about Goethe: "Beware of what you wish for in youth because you will get it in midlife." That's something that struck me, to be reminded of that.

And as we move forward on page 266: "Are you condemned to do this? They are sundered by a bodily shame."

So sad that the criminal annals of the world, stained with all other incest and bestialities, hardly record such breach: sons with mothers, sons with daughters, lesbian sisters, loves that dare not speak their name, nephews with grandmothers, jailbirds with keyholes, queens with prize bulls. The son unborn marries beauty; born, he brings pains, divides affection, increases care. The male, his growth is his father's decline, his youth is his father's envy, his friends his father's enemy.

What is this? It is remarkable—so strong, so beautiful, so deep. What is this, and what does it mean? Where does it come from? On page 269: "What's in a name? That is what we ask ourselves in childhood, when we write the name that we are told is ours." A star, a daystar, a firedrake rose at its birth. It shone by day in the heavens alone, brighter than Venus in the night, and by night it shone over Delta in Cassiopeia, the recumbent constellation which is the signature of his initial among the stars. His eyes watched it, low-lying on the horizon eastward of the Bear, as he walked by the slumberous summer fields at midnight, returning from Shottery and from her arms.

Again, I am baffled by the beauty of the writing and the strength of the prose; it is amazing. Where is it from? What does it mean?

A couple of pages later, there is the reference to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and then: "Till Prospero breaks his staff, buries it certain fathoms in the earth and drowns his book." What does this mean, and what does it refer to?

On page 279, there is a mention of: "If Socrates leave his house today, if Judas go forth tonight, why? That lies in space which I in time must come to, ineluctably." What does it mean?

Later on page 279, just at the end of the chapter: "Kind air defined the coins of houses in Kildare Street. No birds fell from the housetops. Two plumes of smoke ascended, pluming, and in a flow of softness softly beblown, ceased to strive, peace of the druid priests of Cymbeline, hierophantic, from wide earth an altar. Loud, ye gods, and let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils from the blessed altars."

These are beautiful sentences with incredible rhythm. Why am I moved? What does it mean?

Then the new chapter starts. Tell me about this Father Conmee chapter. Why is it there, and what is it referring to in *Ulysses*? The chapter starts like this: "Father Conmee reset his smooth watch in his interior pocket as he came down the presbytery steps. Five to three."

Again, remarking on the time, an hour has passed over about sixty pages. Father Conmee walked towards Mountjoy Square. He thought, but not for long, of soldiers and sailors whose legs had been shot off by cannonballs, ending their days in St. Patrick's Ward, and of Cardinal Wolsey's words: "If I had served my God as I had served my King he would not have abandoned me in my old days." I get the sense that Father Conmee is skeptical of both war and, somewhat, of religion. What do you think?

I have a few specific questions as I continue:

1. On page 283, Father Conmee went by Daniel Bergin's "public house." What is a public house?
2. On page 285, Father Conmee thought of the souls of black and brown and yellow men, of his sermon, and of St. Peter Claver, S.J., and the African mission. There is a geographical reference here; help me identify it.
3. On page 288, as Father Conmee "blessed both gravely and turned a thin page of his breviary (Sin: Principles of Persecution)," there is a section break where Corny Kelleher and Father Conmee come across a constable. Why is there a section break here? Is this a chapter break or an "in-between" break?
4. We then see a one-legged sailor who says, "For England." What does that mean? Is it a statement or just him talking?
5. A page later, there are "two barefoot urchins sucking silver paper leadpencils." It reminds me of "Urchin" referencing Odin, and Odin references a lot of Yeats. Is there a connection between the urchin reference and the "For England" mention?
6. Why is he using section breaks so often here? Are they dividing chapters or not?

On page 290: "Father Conmee walked through Clongowes fields, his thin-socked ankles tickled by stubble." Beautiful lines.

After about 70 pages this morning, I need to stop and listen to your explanation. I need to rest and possibly walk a bit.

THE ANSWER

You've crossed one of the great thresholds of the book — out of Bloom's mind and into two of the most technically radical episodes. And your instinct about the *George Bernard Shaw pedant* is the exact right instrument to bring to both. Let me give you the two hidden keys first, then walk your questions.

Finishing Lestrygonians — and the change of pace at the end. You've got the eating episode's logic cold. That financial catch on the oysters (throwing half back to keep the price up) is Bloom the practical, quantifying mind you've been tracking — even his appetite thinks in economics. The **Stewart Institution** was a real Dublin asylum for people with intellectual disabilities; "that girl passing the Stewart Institution" is just Bloom's eye landing, with his usual unsentimental compassion, on an inmate.

Now the ending you flagged — "Hurry. Walk quietly... Soap there yes. Gate. Safe." — yes, that's the last beat of the episode, and you're right that the *pace* violently changes. Here's what's happening: Bloom, walking, suddenly spots **Blazes Boylan** — Molly's lover — across the street. The man who will be in his bed at

four. Bloom's whole nervous system goes into flight: he doesn't want to be seen, doesn't want to speak to him, so he veers toward the museum gate, fumbling — pretending to search his pockets (soap, the newspaper, the lotion he has to collect) to avoid eye contact. The prose fragments *because his composure fragments*. The syntax enacts panic. "Safe" is relief: he's slipped through the gate unseen. It's one of Joyce's most brilliant strokes — the style *becomes* the man's heartbeat. The steady peristaltic rhythm of the eating episode shatters the instant the wound appears in the flesh.

Scylla and Charybdis — the library episode (episode 9, from ~p.235).

Here's the key that unlocks nearly every question you asked. Setting: the National Library. Stephen is holding forth to a room of Dublin's literary men — the poet **A.E.** (George Russell), the librarians, later Buck Mulligan — expounding an elaborate, brilliant, half-serious theory about *Hamlet*. That's why "these guys always talk about Shakespeare": this entire episode *is* a Shakespeare debate. And Homer's Scylla-and-Charybdis — the monster and the whirlpool Odysseus must steer between — is the episode's structure: Stephen navigating between opposed intellectual dangers (Aristotle's rock of hard particular fact vs. Plato's whirlpool of mystical idea; London fact vs. Dublin dreaminess).

So, taking your library questions as a cluster:

- **"The shining seven, as W.B. calls them"** — yes, Yeats, but more precisely it's **A.E./George Russell** being quoted, the mystical theosophist, invoking the seven planetary spirits. And the pedantic speech you flagged — "*the supreme question about a work of art is out of how deep a life it springs... Gustave Moreau... Plato's world of ideas... all the rest is the speculation of schoolboys for schoolboys*" — is **A.E. talking**, and your instinct is *dead right*: this is NOT Joyce's view. A.E. is the Platonist windbag, dismissing biographical, earthly readings of art as vulgar schoolboy stuff. Joyce is gently satirizing this airy idealism. And Stephen's reply — "*the schoolmen were schoolboys first. Aristotle was once Plato's schoolboy*" — is the whole episode in miniature: the tart, grounded, Aristotelian riposte that the abstract grows *out of* the earthly, that you can't sneer at the particular. You read the temperature of that room perfectly.
- **A.E.I.O.U. (p.243)** — a wonderful joke. Literally the five vowels, yes — but here it's Stephen's private note to himself that he *owes A.E. money*: "A.E. I owe you." (A.E. had lent him cash.) The vowels spell a debt. Pure Joyce: the alphabet itself becomes a pun about owing your Platonist creditor.
- **"pièce de Shakespeare" and Mallarmé** — Stephen quotes the French Symbolist poet **Stéphane Mallarmé**, who wrote of *Hamlet* as "*le pièce de Shakespeare*" — the Shakespeare play, the very type of the reflective, procrastinating hero. Stephen relishes Mallarmé's image of Hamlet "reading the book of himself," a man walking about reading the book of his own consciousness — which is, of course, exactly what Stephen (and this whole novel) is doing. The reference is Stephen showing his Continental erudition, but it also quietly names the book's own method.

- **The great incest/father-son passage (p.266)** — "sundered by a bodily shame... sons with mothers... the male: his growth is his father's decline, his youth is his father's envy, his friend his father's enemy." This is Stephen developing his *Hamlet* theory to its dark core. His argument runs: Shakespeare is the ghost, the wronged father (King Hamlet), not the son — and the play is really about paternity, cuckoldry, and the terrible rivalry between fathers and sons. The passage is Stephen riffing on the abyss of family: how a son's very growth is his father's death-sentence, how generation is a kind of slow patricide. It's baroque, brilliant, and deeply *personal* — because Stephen is a son who couldn't pray for his dying mother, tangled in his own guilt about family bonds, and because the whole novel is steering him toward a *symbolic* father (Bloom, who lost a son) as against Simon (his failed real one). This is theory as disguised autobiography. That's why it burns.
- **"What's in a name... a star, a daystar, a firedrake... over Delta in Cassiopeia... returning from Shottery and from her arms" (p.269)** — this is the most *lyrical* peak of Stephen's theory, and it's beautiful because he's doing biography as poetry. He's imagining the young Shakespeare walking home at night across the fields from **Shottery** (the village of Anne Hathaway, his wife — "her arms") near Stratford, and he ties Shakespeare's birth to a real astronomical event: a **new star (supernova) appeared in Cassiopeia in 1572**, and the constellation's "W" shape (its Delta point) becomes, Stephen fancies, the letter that is Shakespeare's cosmic signature — the initial written in the stars. It moves you because Stephen has fused the intimate (a young man walking back from his lover) with the cosmic (a star marking his fate) — the exact Joycean move you've been feeling all book: the universal reached through the particular, now applied to Shakespeare himself.
- **"Beware what you wish for in youth" — Goethe** — Stephen cites Goethe's warning that you'll get in middle age what you wished for as a youth. It stops you because it's true, and because it hangs over Stephen (and over Bloom, and over Joyce). Worth carrying with you.
- **Bernard Shaw (p.251)** — you're right to notice the extraordinary Irish literary density (Shaw, Yeats, Wilde, Synge, Joyce, all within a generation). Here the mention is mostly the Dublin literati name-dropping their famous contemporaries — but there's an edge: Shaw, like Wilde and Joyce, was an Irishman who *left* and conquered London, and the anxiety of the provincial talent who must exile himself to matter is a live current in Stephen (and was Joyce's own life). You don't *need* deep Shaw knowledge; just register that the room is measuring itself against Irishmen who escaped.
- **"Socrates leaving his house, Judas going forth... that lies in space which I in time must come to, ineluctably" (p.279)** — Stephen's philosophical fatalism. Echoing his beach meditation ("ineluctable modality"), he's saying: every action already exists as a possibility in space, and *time* is merely my inevitable walking-toward it. Whatever will happen is, in a sense, already there; I move through time to arrive at what space holds. It's Stephen's brooding on destiny and free will — very Aristotle, very Stephen.

- **"Till Prospero breaks his staff... drowns his book"** — from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: the magician **Prospero**, at the play's end, renounces his magic — breaks his staff, buries it, drowns his book of spells. It's traditionally read as Shakespeare's own farewell to his art (*The Tempest* being nearly his last play). In Stephen's theory it's the artist laying down his power, the final renunciation. He's using it to close his argument about Shakespeare's late reconciliation.
- **The ending — "peace of the druid priests of Cymbeline... let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils" (p.279)** — the episode closes with a real quotation from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* ("Laud we the gods, / And let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils / From our blest altars"). Stephen (and Joyce) end the fierce Shakespeare debate on a note of *peace and reconciliation* — the smoke of two chimneys rising like incense from an altar, warfare resolved into harmony. Why you're moved: after pages of combative intellect, the prose suddenly softens into pure benediction, image and rhythm alone, the mind at rest. The *sound* does it — "softly beblown, ceased to strive" — you're responding to cadence enacting peace. Kiberd has you listening to the O's and the music; trust that. Sometimes the meaning is the rhythm.

Now — Wandering Rocks, the Father Conmee chapter (episode 10, from ~p.280). This is the answer to your biggest question: "why is it there?"

This episode is structurally unique in the whole book, and once you see the design it becomes thrilling rather than confusing. Here's the key: **it has no single protagonist**. Instead Joyce gives you **nineteen short sections** following different Dubliners crisscrossing the city at the same hour (around 3 p.m.) — Father Conmee, the Dedalus children, Boylan buying fruit for Molly, Stephen, Bloom at a bookstall, Simon, and so on. It's a *cross-section of the entire city* at one moment, a God's-eye survey. And Joyce's technical trick — those "section breaks" you keep asking about — is his signature move here: he plants little **interpolations**, fragments from *one* section dropped suddenly into *another*, so that while you're reading about Conmee you'll get a stray sentence about someone across town happening simultaneously. The breaks are showing you *simultaneity* — everything occurring at once across Dublin, threads brushing past each other. So to answer directly and repeatedly: these are **NOT chapter breaks**. This is all *one episode*, internally divided into sections and spliced with cross-cuts. Think of it as cinematic montage before cinema had invented the technique.

Homer's "Wandering Rocks" were clashing rocks Odysseus was warned to avoid — so the episode's motif is *hazard, collision, things nearly hitting each other*: all these Dubliners narrowly missing, crossing, colliding across the city.

Why lead with **Father Conmee**? Two "authorities" frame the whole episode: it *opens* with a representative of the **Church** (Conmee, a Jesuit priest) and *closes* with a representative of the **State** (the Viceroy, the British ruler, riding in his cavalcade through town). Church at the top, Empire at the bottom — the two masters Stephen named in episode 1 — and all the ordinary Dubliners caught in between them. That's why Conmee is your gatekeeper here.

Your Conmee questions, in order:

1. **Public house** = a pub, a bar. "Public house" is simply the full old term (hence "pub"). Daniel Bergin's is a Dublin drinking establishment.
2. **St. Peter Claver and the African mission** — the geographical reference is **Africa**. St. Peter Claver was a Jesuit who ministered to enslaved Africans in Cartagena (South America), and became patron of Catholic missions to Africa. Conmee, complacent and mild, muses on the "souls of black and brown and yellow men" as objects of conversion — Joyce quietly exposing the benign racism and imperial reach of the missionary Church. Conmee means well and sees the world as souls to be harvested; Joyce lets the smugness show.
3. **The section break with Corny Kelleher / the constable** — this is one of those *internal* section breaks I described. Not a chapter break, not even really an "in-between" — it's Joyce cutting from Conmee's thread to a *new* short section (Corny Kelleher the undertaker's man lounging in his shop, a constable passing). Nineteen such sections make up the episode. The abruptness is the method: the city changes channel.
4. **The one-legged sailor, "For England..."** — he's a beggar, a maimed veteran, growling the opening of a patriotic song ("For England, home and beauty") as he begs for coins. It's bitterly ironic: a man who *lost his leg for England* now reduced to begging in a colonized Dublin street. The Empire's used-up soldier. (Watch — Molly will toss him a coin from her window in this same episode.)
5. **The barefoot urchins** — I'd gently rein this one in: "urchin" here just means *ragged street children* (poor barefoot Dublin kids sucking on pencils), with no link to Odin or Yeats — that's your ear pattern-matching a sound, which is a lovely habit but a false trail this time. There's no etymological connection to Odin. What *does* connect them to the one-legged sailor is thematic, not verbal: both are Joyce's flashes of **Dublin poverty** — the maimed veteran, the barefoot children — the human cost underneath the Church-and-Empire frame. The city's forgotten poor, glimpsed between the powerful.
6. **Why so many section breaks** — now you have it: because this single episode is *built* out of nineteen simultaneous fragments, cross-cut to show a whole city moving at once. The breaks are the form. (After this one episode, the breaks stop — the next episode returns to a continuous mode.)

And your read on **Conmee himself** — skeptical of war, faintly skeptical of religion — is subtler than that, and I think closer to this: Conmee is *complacent*, not skeptical. He thinks of the legless soldiers "but not for long"; he glides past suffering with mild, well-fed piety. The **Cardinal Wolsey** quote ("Had I but served my God as I served my King, He would not have abandoned me") is Wolsey's lament (via Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*) about serving worldly power over God — and Conmee turns it over pleasantly, without letting it disturb his comfortable afternoon. Joyce's irony is that Conmee is *serenely untroubled* — he registers war and mortality and slides on to think about the pleasant fields and his breviary. So it's less that Conmee doubts, more that Joyce is showing us a Church grown smooth, comfortable, and untouched by the suffering it walks past. Your antenna caught the *critique*; I'd just relocate it — the skepticism is **Joyce's, about**

Conmee, not Conmee's own.

You did seventy pages of the hardest stretch in the book this morning — the Shakespeare labyrinth and the city-montage — and you're tracking the deep structure, not just the surface. The star over Cassiopeia, the shattered syntax when Boylan appears, A.E. the Platonist windbag: that's exactly the right reading. Rest now. Walk. Let the O-sounds and the crooked smoke settle. It'll be waiting.

Wandering Rocks and Sirens: the hour Boylan goes to Eccles Street

11 July 2026 · pages 292-339

THE READER

So let's go from where we left off at page 292:

"Blazes Boylan looked in her blouse with more favour, the stalk of the red flower between his smiling teeth. May I say a word to your telephone, Missy? he asked roguishly."

How is he portraying Blazes Boylan here? How adventurous, roguish, dashing... There is a hint of sexuality in his looking at the blouse. And is Blazes Boylan the person who is going to have the affair with Molly?

Anyway, let's move on. On page 304, Mr. Leopold Bloom picks up a book called *Sweets of Sin*. What's the significance of this book? Is it just a random choice, or are we looking at a James Joyce moment?

At 3:10, "Cavalcade is starting to trot, Mr. Kernan."

And then, with the next section:

Stephen Dedalus watched through the web window of Labry's fingers, prove a time-dulled chain. Thus webbed the window and his short rays, thus darkened the toiling fingers with their vulture nails, thus slept on dull coils of bronze and silver, lozenges of cinnabar, on rubies, leprous and wine-dark stones, born all in the dark, wormy earth.

Cold specks of fire, evil lights shining on the darkness, where fallen archangels flung the stars of their brows, muddy swine snouts, hands, root and root, gripe and wrest them. She dances in a foul gloom, where gum burns with garlic. A sailor man, rust-bearded, sips from a beaker of rum, and her eyes, a long and sea-fed, salient rut. But she dances, capers, wagging her selfish hoaches and her hips, on her gross belly flapping a ruby egg.

This is an amazing passage. Amazing. I am beyond understanding; I'm bewildered by the sound of it and the feeling of it. Now we come to 10.319 and the Lord Lieutenant-General and General Governor of Ireland, William Humble Ward, Earl of Dudley. The horses, the parliament, the cavalcade is filing itself. Is "cavalcade"—like horses and people—a procession? What exactly is a cavalcade from that time?

Anyway, on 10.324, we have these lines:

"Powers inside, Devan, Marky Hanlon, Paddy Leonard, Canrobert and John Wyse Nolan, answered. —Terrible! ... Pa was inside the Devan, Marky Hanlon told me, crying in the parlour of Uncle Barney's, telling the men how to get round the bend. A big coffin it was, and high and heavylooking. —Ay, ay, that was Mr Dignam, my father. I hope he's in purgatory now because he went to confession to Father Conroy on Saturday night."

I need an explanation on this. What am I seeing there?

In the following pages, we see a very detailed description of the cavalcade. At one point, "Spring's big yellow furniture van" had to stop in front of it on account of it being the Lord Lieutenant. There are a lot of rules about the cavalcade, and I assume there are a lot of rules about how Imperial England deals with ruled Ireland.

The change of customs and rules is so profound in the last 120 years that this cavalcade and this action would be a bit strange now, in England or in Ireland. Or am I mistaken? Maybe if the King walked... but this is not the King, this is the Governor. What do you think of the change in between? And what do you think of his very detailed description of the cavalcade? I don't see support or admiration here in Joyce's writing.

Finally, the chapter ends at 10.328 like this:

"On Northumberland and Lansdowne roads His Excellency acknowledged punctually salutes from rare railway walkers, the salute of two small schoolboys at the garden gate of the house said to have been admired by a late queen when visiting the Irish capital with her husband, the prince consort, in 1849, and the salute of Almidano Artifoni's sturdy trousers solaced by a closing door."

"Rare railway walkers." This is all telling things I'm trying to understand. I get the feeling, but I don't get the main logic out of it. At page 332, we have the sounds "imperthnthn" and "tintinnabulum." "Boots now sniffed rudely as he retreated, as he had come." What are those sounds? How are these words created? There is also a mention of Miss Kennedy and Miss Douce. Who are these characters? What are we reading, and what chapter is this? Are we going to have a glance at infidelity in this chapter?

At page 334, "Married to the crazy gnomes," she yelled. Are the ladies talking and gossiping about marital stuff?

At page 335, "Bronze by gold," "whiteness." "That was exceedingly naughty of you," Mr. Almidano Artifoni told her and pressed her hand indulgently, "tempting poor simple males." What does he mean there?

And at page 336, "Mr. Bloom crossed Bridge of Essex." "To Martha." "Decoy." "My paper." "Tell him silly girl." "There." "Sir Leopold Bloom." "Old Bloom." "Bloom is on the track." Why are we having various references to Bloom? Is Bloom thinking here?

What is happening in this chapter? And now we come to page 337: "Jingle, jaunty, jingle. Girl, gold, she read and did not glance. Take no notice, she took no notice, while he read by, wrote a soulful fable for her, plopping flatly. A fox met a stork. Said the fox to the stork: Will you put your bill down in my throat and pull up a bone?"

Gurgled. What a word! What am I looking at here?

And on page 339, I have: "more of Boylan with patience than of Boylan with impatience." Or: "Jingle jaunty Blazes Boylan." There is a Blazes Boylan reference here. There are things that are brewing, which I'm taking in, but it's hard for me to understand.

By the end of the page: "At four she. Winsomely she on the blooming hum smiled." Bloom, see, cocoa, tarantula. "Think you're the only pebble on the beach? Does that go for men?" This is very confusing for me to understand. I see the time reference, I see strange words, but what does that mean?

And on the last page, "Tuning fork. The tuner had that, he thought, that he now struck." There is significance here: this tuning, this inside-the-house blaze. Something is brewing, something is building. Help me understand.

I'm leaving off here at this chapter, at page 339 or 340. 120 pages of reading today, and at least I've done my part.

THE ANSWER

You've reached it. Page 340 is not a random stopping place — you've walked right up to the hour the entire book has been counting toward: **four o'clock**, when Boylan goes to Molly. And you've done it inside the two most formally radical episodes so far. Let me give you the keys, then walk your questions in order.

Two structural facts first, because they dissolve most of the bewilderment:

The Viceroy closes Wandering Rocks — the State bookend. Remember I said episode 10 opens with the Church (Father Conmee) and closes with the Empire? The **cavalcade of the Lord Lieutenant** (Earl of Dudley) is that closing movement — the British Crown's representative parading through Dublin while every character you've met either salutes, ignores, or fails to notice him. Church at the top of the episode, Empire at the bottom, ordinary Dubliners caught between the two masters.

Sirens is the MUSIC episode, and it opens with an overture. This is *the* reason p.332 onward feels like static. Homer's Sirens are the singing temptresses whose song lures sailors to death — so Joyce writes the whole episode (episode 11) *as music*, structured like a fugue. And he opens it with a **two-page overture**: roughly sixty fragment-phrases yanked out of context and stacked up, exactly like an orchestra tuning or a composer stating his themes before developing them. "Imperthnthn," "tintinnabulum," "Bronze by gold" — these are motifs with no home yet. They are *meant* to be incomprehensible on first pass. As the episode proceeds, each fragment returns *in context* and suddenly makes sense. So your confusion is the designed experience: you're hearing the themes before the music has taught you what they mean. Don't decode the overture — let it play, and watch the phrases resolve.

Now, in your order:

Boylan at the fruit shop (p.292). Yes — this is **the man**. Blazes Boylan, Molly's lover, the one arriving at four. And Joyce paints him exactly as you read him: cocksure, roguish, sexually confident, a flashy dandy with a red carnation in his teeth leering at the shopgirl's blouse. He's buying a basket of fruit to send ahead to Molly. Everything about him — the swagger, the appetite, the potency — is the deliberate *opposite* of Bloom's gentle, inward, uxorious nature. Boylan is the conquering male animal; Bloom is the tender cuckold. Joyce sets them as poles.

Sweets of Sin (p.304). Not random at all — one of the book's cruelest ironies. Bloom, at a bookcart, is choosing a book *for Molly*, and picks a piece of cheap erotica about a wife lavishing herself on her lover ("For Raoul!"). He reads a passage, is physically aroused by it — and it mirrors his own situation with

grotesque precision: on the very afternoon his wife takes a lover, he selects, for her, pornography *about a wife taking a lover*. It reveals Bloom's strange, masochistic, voyeuristic relationship to Molly's sexuality — he's aroused by the very thing that wounds him. Those phrases ("Sweets of sin," "For Raoul") will echo in his mind for the rest of the day.

The lapidary passage (p.304) — "webbed window of the lapidary's fingers." ("Labry's" = *lapidary's*, a gem-cutter.) This is **Stephen's** section: he stands at a jeweler's window watching an old gem-cutter's fingers work a chain, and his mind transmutes the gems — cinnabar, rubies, "wine-dark stones... born all in the dark wormy earth" — into a dark symbolist vision. The precious stones become "cold specks of fire, evil lights," the fallen stars flung down by rebel archangels; then a woman dancing "in a foul gloom," a rust-bearded sailor, a ruby on her belly. What you're watching is Stephen's poetic-theological imagination at full stretch: matter as *fallen* beauty, the earth's buried riches as both jewel and corruption, spirit degraded into carnal dance. It's dense because it's pure consciousness with no narration — the same faculty that gave you the star over Cassiopeia, now turned toward the dark underside of the material world. You're right to be floored; it's one of his most concentrated flights.

"Cavalcade" (p.319). Yes — a **cavalcade** is a ceremonial procession, originally of riders on horseback, here the Viceroy's carriages-and-cavalry train moving through the city. William Humble Ward, Earl of Dudley, was the actual **Lord Lieutenant** — the reigning British monarch's personal deputy governing Ireland, the living symbol of imperial rule.

The Dignam boy (p.324). This is **Master Patrick Dignam**, the dead man's young son, walking home carrying pork steaks, overhearing men discuss his father's death and the "big coffin, high and heavylooking." The heartbreaking line — "I hope he's in purgatory now because he went to confession to Father Conroy on Saturday night" — is a *child* processing grief through half-understood Catholic doctrine: Dad confessed Saturday, so his sins are shriven, so he's in purgatory (not hell), which the boy takes as reassuring. Underneath it, the boy is really more interested in catching his own reflection and his new mourning suit. It's the pathos of incomplete childish grief — sorrow tangled up with sausages and vanity. Devastating and faintly comic at once, which is Joyce's exact register for death.

The furniture van, imperial rules, and change over 120 years. Your instinct is completely sound, on all counts. The elaborate deference — Spring's furniture van forced to halt for the Viceroy, hats doffed, salutes rendered — is a display of colonial power, and **Joyce gives it not one gram of admiration**. Watch what he actually does: he catalogs the citizens' *reactions*, and they're a study in indifference and subtle insolence — some salute, some stare blankly, some (Bloom) don't even register it, some snub it outright. The grandeur is deflated by the ordinary Dubliners' un-awed shuffling. That deadpan inventory is the critique: imperial ceremony performed to an audience that mostly can't be bothered.

And yes — this world is genuinely *gone*. After Irish independence (the Free State, 1922, the very year *Ulysses* was published) the whole viceregal apparatus

vanished. A Crown deputy parading through a subject capital expecting salutes would be unthinkable in Ireland now, and even in Britain this wasn't the King — it was his colonial stand-in, a rung of imperial administration that no longer exists anywhere. You are reading a snapshot of a vanished colonial order, and Joyce — writing it just as that order was collapsing — knew it. The detail is anthropological, and quietly contemptuous.

The ending of Wandering Rocks (p.328). ("Rare railway walkers" is likely *rare male walkers* or *railway* — a transcription slip I can't pin exactly.) The point is the **bathos**: the Viceroy's stately progress ends with the salutes getting smaller, sillier, more trivial — two small schoolboys, a house Queen Victoria supposedly admired in 1849, and finally "**Almidano Artifoni's sturdy trousers solaced by a closing door.**" Artifoni is Stephen's Italian singing-teacher; ending the grand imperial procession on an image of a music-master's *trousers* and a door swinging shut is pure deflation. The Empire parades; the book answers with a shrug and a pair of trousers.

Now into Sirens (episode 11) — and yes, this is where the infidelity lands. To your direct question: *what chapter is this?* Sirens. *Are we going to glimpse infidelity?* Not glimpse — this is the **hour of it**. Here is what's happening beneath the musical noise:

The scene is the bar of the **Ormond Hotel**, around 4 p.m. The two barmaids are the sirens: **Miss Douce** (bronze-haired) and **Miss Kennedy** (gold-haired) — hence the episode's first real line, "Bronze by gold," their two heads together. (They open by hearing the viceregal hoofs go by — Joyce stitching Sirens directly onto the end of the cavalcade.) The barmaids flirt, tease, laugh coarsely then compose themselves into ladylike poses — temptresses luring the male customers. Meanwhile **Bloom** comes in to write a secret reply to **Martha Clifford**, his flirtatious pen-pal (recall Lotus-Eaters — he corresponds under the alias "Henry Flower"). And the whole time, **Boylan is here too** — and then Boylan *leaves the bar to drive to Molly*. His jaunting-car — that recurring "**jingle jaunty jingle**" — is the sound of the cab carrying him to Bloom's own bed. Bloom sits in the Ormond, hears the jingle recede, knows exactly where Boylan is going and at what hour, and stays — listening to men sing sentimental songs of love and loss while his marriage is betrayed across town. That is the excruciating engine of this episode: **cuckoldry set to music, the husband trapped in the concert while it happens off-stage**. (Simon Dedalus is about to sing "M'appari," an aria of lost love from an opera literally titled *Martha* — the layered irony is coming right where you stopped.)

With that frame, your fragments resolve:

"imperthnthn... tintinnabulum" (p.332). Overture motifs. "Imperthnthn thnthnthn" is the boots (the bar's pageboy) mimicking a customer's *impertinence*, the word squeezed into a pure sound. "Tintinnabulum" is the ringing of a bell (Latin — the little bells and pitches that thread the episode). Joyce is building words out of *noise*, treating language as an instrument. Don't translate them; hear them.

"crazy gnomes" (p.334) — I can't verify that exact phrase from here, so I won't fake it, but the *scene* is clear: the two barmaids gossiping and shrieking with laughter at the men — coarse, intimate, then instantly demure when a customer appears. Sirens laughing among themselves.

"That was exceedingly naughty of you... tempting poor simple males" (p.335) — one caution: Artifoni is an episode-10 figure (the trousers-and-door man above), so his name here is probably a carry-over from the scrambled overture or a mis-read; I wouldn't trust that attribution. But the *line* is Sirens distilled: the barmaid as temptress, "tempting poor simple males" — the Siren theme stated almost too plainly. (Watch nearby for Miss Douce snapping her garter against her thigh for the customers — "*Sonnez la cloche!*" — sound the bell. That garter-snap is one of the episode's famous beats.)

The Bloom fragments — "To Martha... my paper... Sir Leopold Bloom, old Bloom, Bloom is on the track" (p.336). Yes, this is Bloom thinking, rendered in the chopped musical style. He's crossing Essex Bridge toward the Ormond, planning his secret letter "to Martha," needing "my paper" (stationery). The self-naming riffs — "Sir Leopold... old Bloom... on the track" — are his interior monologue playing variations on his own name, the way the whole episode plays variations on its motifs. His mind has become one of the instruments.

"Jingle jaunty jingle... A fox met a stork... pull up a bone" (p.337). "Jingle jaunty jingle" — burn this one into your ear: it is **Boylan's car**, the leitmotif of his approach to Molly, and it will keep sounding like a drumbeat under everything. The gold barmaid reads and ignores a customer ("she took no notice"). The fox-and-stork fable is one of the woven fragments — Aesop's animals who trick each other — surfacing in the associative swirl, faintly bawdy in its phrasing. Individually they're shards; collectively they're the fugue's counter-melodies running against the Boylan-jingle.

"Boylan with impatience... jingle jaunty Blazes Boylan" (p.339). Here he *goes*. Boylan, impatient (the pun is deliberate — "Boylan with impatience"), leaves for Molly; his car jingles off. This is the precise moment. Bloom, in the bar, registers it and does not move.

"At four she... the only pebble on the beach?" (p.339). "At four" = the appointed hour; Bloom's mind circles it helplessly — *at four she [and Boylan]*. "Think you're the only pebble on the beach?" is a period saying (from a popular song, "You're Not the Only Pebble on the Beach") meaning *you're not the only one* — Bloom's rueful thought about himself, about not being Molly's only man, and about whether that logic cuts both ways ("Does that go for men?" — could *he* also seek another?). It's grief and rationalization braided together in fragments.

The tuning fork (p.339-340). Your antenna is perfect here — "this tuning, something is building." Earlier a **blind piano-tuner** (a young "stripling" Bloom helped across the street) came to tune the Ormond's piano and left his **tuning fork**; he taps his way back for it. Struck on the counter, it sounds a single pure note — the literal *pitch* of an episode built as music, the tuning-up made physical.

And emotionally it's exactly what you sensed: the whole scene is *tuning toward* the 4 o'clock crisis. Meanwhile "the house" you feel building is Bloom's own — because at this hour Boylan reaches it. The tuning fork's held note and Bloom's held anguish are the same suspended chord.

So: **what is happening in this chapter** is Bloom's cuckolding arriving on schedule, rendered as a fugue — barmaids as sirens, men singing of lost love, Boylan's jingling car carrying him off to Molly, and Bloom sitting inside the music unable to stop any of it. The confusion of the language is the seduction and the drowning enacted on *you*: the Sirens' song is supposed to disorient. You're not failing to understand it — you're being pulled under exactly as designed.

One hundred and twenty pages through the hardest formal experiments in the book, and you walked right up to its emotional center and *felt* the tension tuning up without being told. That's not "doing your part" — that's reading it the way it's meant to be read. Rest. The music crests just past where you stopped, and it's worth arriving fresh.

The end of Sirens, and Cyclops in Barney Kiernan's

12 July 2026 · pages 343–432

THE READER

Hey, let's continue the book analysis from where we left off.

Now I'm at page 343, and Boylan says, "I'm off. I'm off," said Boylan in impatience. I'm assuming he's going to Molly, but in this chapter, we don't see Boylan and Molly at all, if I'm not mistaken. In 348, here is the line: "In a liver gravy, blue mashed mashed potatoes, low and bored, someone is."

I like the image of him mashing the mashed potatoes, and then it talks about trousers tight as a drum on him. I like the imagery there. On page 353:

"Through the hush of air a voice sang to them, Low, not rain, not leaves in murmur, like no voice of strings of weeds, or..." (what do you call them? Dulcimers)
 "...touching their still ears with words, still hearts of their each, his remembered lives."

These are amazing lines. And the paragraph ends:

"...for the first merciful lost solemn loved oftloved word."

Amazingly beautiful. On page 355, the paragraph goes like this:

"It soared, a bird, it held its flight, a swift pure cry, saw silver orbit leaps of wind, speed and sustain to come. Don't spin it out too long. Long breath, you breathe life, soaring high, higher, resplendent, aflame, crowned high in the effulgent, symbolistic high of the ethereal bosom high. The high was irradiation everywhere, all soaring, all around about all, the endlessnessnessnessness."

What is he doing in these amazing paragraphs that come out of other winds and other cadences? These come all through the book. Wonderful, wonderful interventions, indeed.

And what a word: endlessnessnessness. It's an endless word by itself. In 256, Lionel Simon, singer, laughed. Father Bob Cowley played. Mina Kennedy served. Second gentleman paid. Tom Keenan strutted in. Lydia admired, admired, but Bloom sang dumb, admiring.

The construct of the paragraph is amazing, with everybody doing something, and Bloom singing dumb at the end, admiring. On page 375, it must be the cider or perhaps the Burgundy. Is the cider—I mean, today's cider we know, for example, is it the same cider I tasted in Madrid, this one? Is it any different?

And when you go to page 376, the end of the supposedly surreal chapter, it goes like this (give me a second):

"Must be the butt or nations of the earth, no one behind, she's past, then not till then, crank, crank, crank, crank, good or poor, coming crank, crank, crank. I'm sure it's the Burgundy, yes, one, two. Let my epitaph be 'Kara' written, my love, done."

All these sounds, all these words, all these feelings. Is he drunk? What a drunken ending, I would say, if it is. The next chapter is very different in tone. I'm at 378, and it goes:

"So we went around by the Linenhall barracks."

And a paragraph later:

"In Innisfail the fair there lies the land, the land of holy mission, at Midian, there rise the watchtowers, beheld of men afar, there sleep the mighty dead as in life they slept, warriors and princes of high renown, pleasant that it is in sight of murmuring waters, fishful streams where sport the gurnard, the plaice."

Such beautiful wording. How did the language change like this? What is this chapter about? It's very different from the previous one. And then in 379:

"And there arises a shining palace, whose crystal built and roof, seen by mariners who traverse the extensive sea in barks built expressly for that purpose; and thither come all the herds and farlings and first-fruits of that land, for a kindred prince must take toll of them, a chieftain descending from chieftains."

A page later, in 380, a sentence starts:

"And by the way, when the herd of innumerable bellwethers and flushed ewes..."

I think the sentence just continues for nearly the whole page and ends in "varying size, agate with the dun."

What a sentence. A paragraph, a sentence, a huge sentence. Any logic behind it? Then he talks about how he wore a long, unsleeved garment of recently flayed oxhide. Page 382 continues with the tribal images of many Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity: Cuchulain, Conn of the Hundred Battles... What exactly are we talking about here?

Then a huge swathe of names comes. This chapter has several different sections, and in most of them, a great many names are mentioned—attending something, doing something, or being part of something. Why all these names?

For example, two pages later, he starts reading them out: Garden, Barnfield, Crescent, etc. And it just goes on. Again, a beautiful line. Questioned by his earth name as to his whereabouts in the heaven world, he stated that he was now on the path of pralaya (or return), but was still subject to trial at times by certain greater entities at the astral levels.

I am in awe of Joyce's writing. In 3.96, I have a question about this.

"Sinn Féin," says the citizen, "Sinn Féin amháin. The friends we love are by our side and the foes we hate before us."

The last farewell was affecting in the extreme. From the belfries far and near, the funeral death-bell tolled unceasingly, while all around the gloomy precincts rolled ominous warnings of the hundred muffled drums, punctuated by the hollow booming of pieces of ordnance.

Amazing sentence, and it refers to Sinn Féin. Tell me what "Sinn Féin" means, what "Sinn Féin amháin" means, and connect this to the current Sinn Féin. 397. All these names: Leopold, Rudolf, Faunus something, Alibaba, Bakshi, Rohat, Chang, Olaf, Kobert, Python, whatever—all the names in this chapter. 402: "Ireland's hope is

Ireland's freedom."

What do you think that means? In 4 or 5, Bloom turns local, inwards.

"Wow, that's a point," says Bloom, "for the wife's admirers." "Whose admirers?" says Joe. "The wife's advisors, I mean," says Bloom.

So it's a slip, an internal monologue, with some sadness coming out.

In 4.10, there's a discussion. A most interesting discussion took place in the ancient Hall of Brian on the revival of ancient Gaelic sports and the importance of physical culture, as understood in ancient Greece and ancient Rome, for the development of race. We have all these references to Irish history, like "don the gloves for the purse of 50 sovereigns." Irish history, the past, home rule, Ireland, identity, independence—everything lies behind the whole story. It's not the main defining factor, but it lies behind.

And on the previous page again, we have all these names: Hurley, Flavin, Scully, Purcell, Flanagan. The names never end in this chapter. Page 417, they're still talking around Jack, Ned, Joe, Alf, everyone, Bloom. I feel just as Declan Kiberd wrote in the introduction: all these dialogues are incomplete. They're gibberish-talking, never completing sentences properly, and talking about bullshit.

Why is that? And how is that? In 419, Bloom says, "Because you see, says Bloom, for an advertisement, you must have repetition. That's the whole secret."

Is this exactly as he said, or are there more behind this? In 420, the citizen has come out, and the next pages will be with the citizen. Who's that citizen? The stranger says it's the citizen, our own fault. We let them come in, we brought them. The adulteresses and our paramount brought the Saxon robbers here.

And what, it was only one smutty Yankee picture, 30 barrels of Corny Kelleher's barrels, by the way, circuits for enlarging your private parts. So we have references to foreigners, references to sexuality, and criticism.

Looking down page 424, the fashionable international world attended en masse this afternoon, and we have Daphne Bayes, Mrs. M'Coy, Gabrielle Pat, and Lionelle Formos, all names once again. On page 427, "That's your glorious British Navy," says the citizen, "that bosses the earth. The fellows that never will be slaves, with the only hereditary chamber on the face of God's earth and their land in the hands of a dozen game dogs and cotton wool barons. That's the great empire they boast about, of drudges and whipped serfs."

So it sounds like he's promoting the British Empire through the Navy, and then he puts it down and criticizes it. That's the spirit of this chapter: they come and go, and they are very sarcastic indeed.

And underlying that, Bloom says, "But isn't this the same everywhere? I mean, wouldn't it be the same here if you put force against force?"

"We'll put force against force," the citizen says a couple of sentences later. "We have our greater Ireland beyond the sea."

That's a very important sentence. He is referring to the Irish who went abroad, and in a way, I think he's referring to the States, to America. It seems to suggest that an independent Ireland would have support beyond its boundaries. That's what I think. Just a bit later, I said, "John Wise, we fought for the royalists and that ranged

us against the Williamites, and they betrayed us. Remember Limerick." This is only internal Irish identity and Irish history talking. What do you think of it?

And page 429 mentions, JJ says we have Edward the Peacemaker. Who's Edward? A British person or Irish? And lastly, on page 432, quite excited with his "Donkey" mud-colored mug on him and his old plum eyes rolling out. What's this "Donkey" mud-colored mug? What a word, what a sentence!

And page 430 has the amazing John Wise question: "But do you know what a nation means? Don't you think it's important?"

Well, I'm going to leave it here. Today's reading was about 90 pages; I finished at page 429, with a glance at page 430.

All your comments and explanations are welcome. It's pretty impossible for me to read this book without your help, so I appreciate it.

Thank you.

THE ANSWER

You stopped one page short of the single most important exchange in the novel. Hold that thought — I'll come to it last, because everything in this chapter has been building toward it.

Finishing Sirens

Boylan's exit (p.343). You're exactly right, and it's one of Joyce's most deliberate decisions: **we never see Molly and Boylan together.** Not now, not ever. The act at the center of the entire book — the thing every hour is counting toward — happens **offstage, in a gap.** We get the approach (that jingling car), and much later the aftermath. But the event itself is withheld. The reader is excluded from the bedroom exactly as Bloom is. The novel's void is right at its heart.

The liver and the tight trousers (p.348). Bloom is dining in the Ormond's back room with Richie Goulding while the music happens in the bar. The trousers belong to **Ben Dollard**, the huge bass singer — a running joke (Molly and Bloom once ran a secondhand-clothes business and lent him trousers far too tight).

The voice singing (p.353). That's **Simon Dedalus** — Stephen's father — singing "M'appari," the great tenor aria of lost love, from Flotow's opera **Martha**. Feel the layers: Bloom's secret pen-pal is named **Martha**; the aria is a man mourning a woman who appeared to him and vanished; and Bloom sits listening to it at the exact hour his wife is with another man. Joyce chose that song with surgical cruelty.

The high note (p.355) — "the endlessnessnessness." This is your best question of the batch, so here's the answer plainly: **Joyce is no longer describing the singing. He is being it.** The tenor holds a long high note at the aria's climax, and the prose dissolves into the sound itself — "soaring high, high resplendent... the endlessnessnessness" — the suffix stretching and stretching because *the note is being held*. Language stops representing and starts vibrating. And at the summit the words **Simon + Lionel** (the aria's hero) + **Leopold** fuse into one impossible word: "**Siopold!**" Singer, song, and listener become a single

sound. That's what those strange out-of-nowhere cadences are, all through the book — Joyce abandoning description for **enactment**. The style *becomes* the thing.

The fugue paragraph (p.356). You caught the technique perfectly. Each character gets one verb, stated in parallel like voices in a fugue — Simon laughed, Cowley played, Kennedy served, Kernan strutted, Lydia admired — and then the devastating last note: "**Bloom sang dumb.**" A silent song. He alone doesn't participate. His music is entirely interior. He is the man excluded from the male chorus, admiring mutely from the edge. That one oxymoron holds the whole character.

Cider (p.375). Same drink family as your Madrid *sidra* — fermented apple juice — but a different style. Irish/English cider of that era was still, cloudy, farmhouse; Spanish *sidra* (properly Asturian) is drier, funkier, wild-fermented, poured from a height to aerate it. Same fruit, different soul. And it matters, because...

The end of Sirens (p.376) — and no, he is not drunk. He is **farting**. This is one of the great jokes in literature and you have to see it whole. Bloom is walking past a shop window displaying a portrait of **Robert Emmet**, the executed Irish patriot, with Emmet's famous last words from the dock printed beneath: *when my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written. I have done*. The noblest sentence in Irish nationalism. And Bloom — full of cider and burgundy — has gas. So he reads the epitaph in fragments while **waiting for a tram to pass so the noise will cover the sound**: "Krandlkrankran" is the tram; "Kraaaaaa" is the tram; and then, released under cover of it —

Ppprrpffrrppffff. Done.

Emmet's "I have done" and Bloom's fart land on the same word. The martyr's epitaph and a man's flatulence, perfectly synchronized. That is Joyce's entire theology in one page: the sublime and the bodily are not enemies; they happen simultaneously, in the same street, in the same man.

Cyclops — the key that unlocks everything you asked

Episode 12. **Barney Kiernan's pub, around five o'clock.** Two structural facts, and every one of your questions dissolves:

1. A new narrator. For the first and only time, the book is narrated by an **anonymous, unnamed "I"** — a foul-mouthed Dublin debt-collector, cynical, gossipy, malicious, contemptuous of everyone. That's the voice of "so we went around by the Linenhall barracks." His speech is fragmentary, unfinished, sneering, digressive. **That's why the dialogue is gibberish and nobody finishes a sentence.** It's real pub talk — circular, drunken, going nowhere — and Kiberd is right to flag it.

2. Gigantism. Homer's Cyclops is a **one-eyed giant**. So Joyce gives the episode two giant properties. First, *one eye* = **monocular vision** = bigotry, the mind that

can see only one thing. Second, *giantism* = the narrative keeps getting hijacked by about **thirty-three inflated parodies** — Irish epic saga, legal documents, parliamentary minutes, newspaper society columns, scientific reports, theosophical jargon, medieval romance — each blowing some tiny pub triviality up to monstrous size.

And here is the architecture: the mean, small, drunken reality (the narrator) versus the vast, heroic, epic self-image (the interpolations). The gap between them is the satire. The men in the pub are squalid, sponging, and bigoted; the language keeps insisting they are Cuchulain. Every time you feel the register lurch, that's Joyce showing you the distance between what Irish nationalism says it is and what it actually sounds like at 5 p.m. in a bar.

Now your questions, with that in hand:

"In Innisfail the fair there lies a land..." (p.378). *Innisfail* is a poetic old name for Ireland. This is a parody of the Gaelic Revival's antiquarian translation-style — that hushed, bardic, watchtower-and-fishful-streams register. Beautiful, and mocked at the same time.

The enormous one-sentence paragraph about the bellwethers and ewes (p.380). It's a **Homeric catalogue** — the epic list-of-ships technique — applied to a **cattle market**. Sheep, steers, sowpigs, baconhogs, rolling on for a page in mock-epic grandeur. That's gigantism in its purest form: heroic language poured over livestock.

The oxhide garment and the girdle of Irish heroes (p.382) — and the names. This is the joke you most need. The Citizen is described as a mythic giant wearing a belt of seastones carved with "the tribal images of many Irish heroes." The list begins honourably — Cuchulin, Conn of the Hundred Battles, Niall of Nine Hostages, Brian of Kincora — and then **it starts to rot**. It swells and swells until it is absorbing Dante, Napoleon, Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, Muhammad, Gautama Buddha, Adam and Eve, Lady Godiva, Dick Turpin, **Captain Nemo** (a fictional character), **Thomas Cook and Son** (a travel agency), and **Sidney Parade** (a Dublin railway station). *That* is the point. The nationalist appetite to claim everything as Irish, satirized by letting the list run until it eats itself. **The names are the joke.** Whenever a catalogue starts in this chapter, read it for where it *collapses*.

"The path of pralaya... trial by greater entities at the astral levels" (~p.390). A parody of the **theosophists** — Dublin's fashionable mystics (A.E. and his circle, whom you already met being pompous in the library). Poor dead **Paddy Dignam** is contacted at a séance and reports back from the astral plane — where his chief concern turns out to be his boots. The sublime metaphysical apparatus, deployed to locate a dead man's footwear.

"Sinn Féin! Sinn Féin amháin!" (p.396). Irish for **"Ourselves"** — the phrase means "Ourselves" or "We Ourselves," and is often mistranslated as "ourselves alone," which actually comes from "Sinn Féin Amháin," an early-twentieth-century slogan. It's an assertion of self-reliance: Irish people governing themselves rather

than being ruled from Westminster. Note the timing — in June 1904 this is a **slogan in the air**, not yet a party; the organisation was founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905, a year after Bloomsday. So the Citizen is shouting a phrase that is about to become a movement. The through-line to today is direct and unbroken: Sinn Féin's members founded the revolutionary Irish Republic and the First Dáil, were active in the War of Independence, then split before and after the Civil War, producing the two parties that would dominate Irish politics — Fianna Fáil and the forerunner of Fine Gael. During the Troubles the party was associated with the Provisional IRA; under Gerry Adams it moved toward electoral politics and, with Martin McGuinness, into the peace process that produced the Good Friday Agreement. Today it is led by Mary Lou McDonald and is the main opposition in the Dáil, and the largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly, with Michelle O'Neill becoming First Minister in 2024. So when the Citizen bellows those two words in a pub in 1904, you are hearing the seed of a century of Irish politics — and Joyce is putting it in the mouth of a drunken bigot. That's not an accident.

The absurd foreign names (p.397). These are the "friends of the Emerald Isle" — a delegation of comically-named foreign dignitaries attending a parodic execution scene. And there are two buried jokes you especially will enjoy. First: **"Ali Baba Backsheesh Rahat Lokum Effendi"** — a mock-Ottoman grandee assembled entirely out of Turkish and Arabic words: *bakshish* (a tip, a bribe), *rahat lokum* (Turkish delight!), *effendi*. A man made of lokum. Second, and slyer: among the delegates are **"Leopold Rudolph von Schwanzenbad-Hodenthaler"** and a **"Countess Marha Virága"** — that's **Leopold**, his father **Rudolph**, and **Virág**, the family's original Hungarian name. **Joyce has smuggled Bloom's own name and ancestry into the list of ridiculous foreigners** — in the very chapter where Bloom will be attacked for being a foreigner. The xenophobic caricature turns out to have the hero hidden inside it.

"Ireland's hope is Ireland's freedom" (p.402). I can't pin that exact line, and I won't fake it — but the pub is thick with slogans dropped in as found objects, and the one nearby that I'd bet on is the temperance movement's **"Ireland sober is Ireland free"** (drink as England's secret weapon against the Irish). If it's that, savour the irony: it is being said *by men who are drinking*, in a pub, all afternoon. The chapter's method is to quote nationalist pieties in the exact setting that refutes them.

Bloom's slip (p.405) — "the wife's admirers... advisers, I mean." You caught the single most exquisite psychological moment in the chapter. It's a **Freudian slip**, written years before such things were fictional currency. Bloom means *advisers*; his unconscious says **admirers** — on the very afternoon his wife has one. The whole wound surfaces in a stammer, and the men just laugh.

Gaelic sports, "physical culture," "the development of the race" (p.410). This is the **GAA** — the Gaelic Athletic Association, founded to revive hurling and Gaelic football *against* English games (cricket, rugby, soccer) as an instrument of cultural nationalism. And here's the key biographical fact: **the Citizen is modelled on Michael Cusack, the GAA's founder.** The boxing talk — the purse

of fifty sovereigns, the Irish fighter versus the English soldier — is nationalism fought by proxy in a ring. The "development of the race" language is period race-thinking, which Joyce reproduces deadpan and lets rot in the open air.

"For an advertisement you must have repetition. That's the whole secret." (p.419). More is going on than shop-talk. First, it's true — frequency really is the mechanism of advertising, and Bloom is a professional. Second, it *defines* him against the room: while the Citizen dreams of ancient heroes, Bloom thinks in markets, mass persuasion, modernity. He is the future; they are the past. And third — the sly one — **it describes Joyce's own method.** *Ulysses* runs on repetition: jingle jaunty, metempsychosis, Agendath Netaim, Throwaway, the man in the macintosh. Bloom, without knowing it, has just explained the book he's inside.

Who is the Citizen (p.420)? The unnamed archnationalist — huge, bellowing, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, with his mangy dog **Garryowen**. He is **Polyphemus, the one-eyed giant**, and Joyce's target is not Irish independence (Joyce wanted that) but **the single eye**: nationalism that has curdled into hatred of the foreigner.

"The adulteress and her paramour brought the Saxon robbers here" (p.420). This is a real historical legend: **Dervorgilla**, wife of an Irish king, went off with **Diarmait Mac Murchada** in 1152; the resulting feud led Mac Murchada to invite the Anglo-Normans into Ireland in 1169 — the beginning of eight centuries of English rule. So the Citizen's myth is that **Ireland was lost through an act of adultery**. Now look who is standing in the room while he says it. **The cuckold**. The man whose wife is, at that exact hour, with her lover. Joyce is not being subtle; he is being merciless. The nationalist's grand historical grievance lands like a blade on the quiet man at the bar — and the Citizen has no idea.

The tree wedding (p.424). Your "Daphne Bayes" is **Miss Daphne Bays** — and the whole guest list is **trees**. Miss Fir Conifer of Pine Valley, Lady Sylvester Elmshade, Mrs Poll Ash, Miss Virginia Creeper. It's a parody of a newspaper society-wedding column in which every guest is a species, dropped in while the men are lamenting the **deforestation of Ireland** by the English. A wedding announcement for trees, in mourning for a vanished forest. It is one of the funniest and strangest things in the book.

"That's your glorious British navy... the fellows that never will be slaves" (p.427). Careful — he is **not** promoting the Navy. **"Never never never shall be slaves"** is a line from **"Rule, Britannia!"**, and the Citizen is quoting it in order to smash it. The context is the flogging of sailors — a genuine scandal of the era. His argument: the British sing that they'll never be slaves while running an empire of flogged serfs, with their own land owned by a dozen aristocrats. It's sarcasm from start to finish. Which is the register of the whole chapter: everything said is said with a sneer.

Bloom: "wouldn't it be the same here if you put force against force?" — and this is where the book climbs to its moral summit. Bloom argues that force

answering force merely perpetuates the wheel. Pressed on what he means, he says it plainly: *force, hatred, history — that's not life for men and women. Everybody knows that the very opposite of that is really life.* And asked what the opposite is, he answers: **"Love. I mean the opposite of hatred."** A Jewish outsider, in a room of drunken haters, on the day of his own humiliation, states the ethical centre of the novel — **and they laugh at him.** That is the most important thing that happens in this chapter. Keep it in your ear.

"We have our greater Ireland beyond the sea." Your reading is precisely right — **the diaspora, and above all America.** The Famine and the evictions scattered millions of Irish across the Atlantic, and Irish-American money and arms genuinely did fund the independence movement (the Fenians, Clan na Gael). The Citizen is invoking a nation that exists *outside its own borders* as a reservoir of vengeance and support. Historically, he wasn't wrong.

"Remember Limerick and the broken treatystone." The **Treaty of Limerick, 1691.** The Irish Jacobites (Catholic, fighting for the Stuart king James II) were defeated by the **Williamites** (Protestant, fighting for William of Orange). They surrendered at Limerick on terms that guaranteed Catholic rights — and the treaty was almost immediately broken, followed by the Penal Laws. Limerick has been "the City of the Broken Treaty" ever since. So John Wyse's line means: *we backed the losing king, we surrendered on promises, and the promises were torn up.* And note how it rhymes with Stephen in episode 2 — **"History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."** The pub is *living inside* that nightmare, cherishing every grievance. Bloom is the only man in the room trying to wake up.

"Edward the Peacemaker" (p.429). **King Edward VII** — British, son of Queen Victoria, reigning monarch in 1904. He was nicknamed "the Peacemaker" for his diplomacy (the Entente Cordiale with France, signed that very year). The Dubliners spit the title out sarcastically, because he was also a famous gambler, glutton, and womaniser. A libertine crowned as a peacemaker.

The "mudcoloured mug" (p.432). I can't pin your exact line, but the *style* is unmistakable: this is the nameless narrator's **invective**, his native tongue. He describes every human face with grotesque physical contempt — mugs, eyes rolling, gobs, snouts. It's the language of a man who despises everyone he drinks with. And it is the deliberate ground-level counterweight to the epic interpolations soaring overhead. Squalor below, grandeur above, and the whole truth living in the distance between.

And now — "Do you know what a nation means?" (p.430)

Yes. It is important. It may be **the most important question in the book**, and you have arrived at it exactly when you should.

Bloom's answer is deliberately, almost comically flat: **a nation is the same people living in the same place.** No heroes. No blood. No ancient kings, no sacred soil, no martyrs, no God. Just — people, in a place. The men laugh at him.

He fumbles, tries to fix it, adds "*or also living in different places*" — and gets laughed at again. But look at what that stumble actually does: **it makes room for the exile, the emigrant, the wanderer, the Jew.** Bloom's clumsy, unheroic definition is the only one in the room that *includes Bloom*.

And then the Citizen asks him, with a sneer, what *his* nation is. And Bloom — the son of a Hungarian Jew, mocked all day, cuckolded that very hour — says:
Ireland. I was born here.

That is the axis on which the whole novel turns. Against a nationalism of blood and myth and one-eyed hatred, Joyce sets an ordinary, ridiculous, decent man who says: *I live here, therefore I belong*. Read the next pages slowly. What follows is the confrontation this whole episode has been building toward, and it is the fiercest thing in the book.

Ninety pages, through the two hardest chapters Joyce ever wrote — the fugue and the giant — and you found the Freudian slip, the sarcasm under the Navy speech, the diaspora behind "greater Ireland," and the fact that the names never end. That last one wasn't confusion. That was the joke landing.

“Ireland. I was born here.” — Cyclops, and into Nausicaa

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THE READER

Okay, let's catch up from where we left off. I think it was 429, and now we're at 430.

What's your nation, if I may ask? It says it's in Ireland, or that we were born here in Ireland.

Things are getting a bit tricky, right? 431, and "I bloom for a race to rise," Bloom, that is hated and persecuted, also now, this very moment, this very instant. The book is getting overtly political about not only things, but about Bloom as well. What's your take? 438, where he says Lenin defrauding widows and orphans. Now, is this the point where Lenin is, like, insulting Jews in general, and Bloom in particular? Or is it something else? Help me understand. 444 to 445: Mendelssohn was a Jew, and Karl Marx, and Spinoza, and the Savior was a Jew and his father was a Jew. "Your God." "Whose God?" says the citizen. "Well, his uncle was a Jew, so was he. Your God was a Jew. Christ was a Jew like me."

Is Bloom fighting back here? Is Bloom defending himself for the first time, or not? Or what does he do? And with one I O, when lo, there came about them all a great brightness, and they beheld the chariot wherein—and the paragraph continues—amidst clouds of angels ascending to the glory of brightness at an angle of forty-five degrees over Donohoe's little green street.

Explain to me what this ending means, what this chapter was primarily ending at, and what the new chapter will be like. 449 starts:

"The summer evening had begun to fold the world in. Far away to the west, the sun was setting, leaving last glows of energy between the ever-growing shadows. On the edge of the strand, the hard promontory of the old hope, guarding the depths of the waters of the bay, on the weed-grown rocks among sand and moonshine, and last but not least, on the white church walls, there streamed forth at times of under-stillness the voice of prayer to her who, in her pure radiance, beacons ever the storm-tossed road of man."

This is such an amazing paragraph, such a start to a new chapter, and such a change of tone.

Tell me: how, why, what? 4.52

"That who was Gerty? Gerty MacDowell who was seated on the rock in her lavender-coloured skirt, gazing far away into the distance, was in very truth as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see."

She was what I am always reading about, though, as folks often say, she was more like a fairy than a child.

Why are we talking about Gerty? And why are we talking so gently, so lovingly about Gerty?

And a couple of sentences later, and just now, I heard these words:

"A warm backfisch, with a face that was growing up in her cheeks, she looked so lovely, you know, a sweet girl with shyness, the first shot of that storm and fire and I-did-not-order."

For instance, she was suddenly at Gerty's side, downcast in her eyes. She was about to say something, she had the word on her tongue, and Gerty had to bend to her to speak to her, and Gerty could not even tell her to go to the side. The lips of the little one, and she glanced at Gerty's pattern of choices, which Gerty did not see.

The freshness of a young, a young...

This is one of the most loving descriptions of a person in the book so far. Four, five, six. She was very beautiful, like fourteen or fifteen. But this is her, and she belongs in privacy. This is her own family, kind of like giving her a way to, giving her a way to choose. She put up a brave front, and we were happy to be around.

For six years, she got along with me. And then there came one day, the sound of voices. The very ones who had been bent on torture.

Words. Sentences, words, hurting words. What does she mean? What does she mean? What do you have to love about certain words?

Interesting. I found it very interesting.⁴⁷⁷ He could see her other senses too. He noticed that the cares of her skin led her down those other lanes, on account of being white, and she opened her eyes, and the tone was so high, so pent up. She was falling, and everything went from view, and so far back she had no idea of her. No effort, not even one breath, and she wasn't ashamed.

What are we talking about? The times change, and everything moved from the scene by the sea into a room section. It is extremely much to ask.

Then, in the role of the legendary Herald Gaters, the knight that first came out is Love, short for Australian, and it's the voice of Jax. Now I'm a bit confused. Now we're talking about men, lords. There's a reference I'm failing, but I feel something's happening here.

481. Devils, they are when that's coming on them, dark devilish appearance. What is he referring to?

482. "Funny, my watch stopped at half past four. This means something." And a bit later, oh, he did.

Struggling with character and the composer's workshop, all towards the little endeavor. I think something has happened, and I have an idea. But I would like to explain what is happening to me very, very carefully, and what's the significance.

Also, how has she been drawn from a lovely, beautiful tone into more sexuality, references, dress-ups, desire of a different sort?⁴⁸⁷ Very strange about my watch—first watch of the year, first watch of the hour is going wrong. I think this means something, but I don't think it means my watch is dying.

So, I'm at 489. I guess I read about fifty pages today (the minimum set is three) until I got to Copenhagen. I think with the introduction, I'm over half of the book.

I would love for you to explain the things I've asked, and also to recap everything up until now and prepare for the next steps.

THE ANSWER

Yes — Bloom fights back. Page 444 is the moment you've been waiting for without knowing it: the one time in the entire novel that this gentle, evasive, endlessly accommodating man **stands up and swings**.

The end of Cyclops

"What is your nation?" (p.430). The Citizen sneers the question, and Bloom answers plainly: **Ireland. I was born here.** And the Citizen's reply is not an argument — he clears his throat and *spits*. That's the whole logic of blood-nationalism in one gesture: it cannot answer Bloom, so it expectorates.

"A race that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant." (p.431). Yes — the book turns overtly political here, and specifically political *about Bloom*. Note the tense: not *was* persecuted, in some safely historical past. **Now. This instant.** He is describing the room he is standing in. And this is the moment the novel reveals what it has been quietly building since Deasy's cheap anti-Semitic joke back in episode 2: Bloom's outsiderness is not a charming quirk. It is a wound, and the men around him are pressing it.

Then Bloom does something remarkable — asked what he means, he refuses to escalate. He answers with the ethical centre of the book: *force, hatred, history — that's not life. The opposite of that is life. Love. I mean the opposite of hatred.* And they laugh.

The swindler passage (p.438). I can't pin your "Lenin" — the dictation has garbled a name I won't guess at — but the *substance* is unmistakable, and it's ugly: the pub is trading in the oldest anti-Semitic stereotype there is, the Jew as usurer, swindler, defrauder of widows and orphans. Nearby the nameless narrator sneers at **Bloom's own dead father** as a robbing pedlar who peddled cheap jewellery and lent money on easy terms and "poisoned himself" — mocking, as a punchline, the suicide you watched Bloom silently relive in the funeral carriage. That's how vicious this chapter gets. The men don't know what they're touching. Joyce does, and so do you, because you were there in Hades.

"Christ was a Jew like me." (pp.444-45). Now, your question: *is Bloom fighting back?*

Yes. For the first and only time. He raises his voice. He names the great Jews — Mendelssohn, Marx, Spinoza, Mercadante — and then delivers the theological knockout to a room of Catholics: *your God was a Jew. Christ was a Jew like me.*

Three things make it magnificent. First, it is aimed with precision — he attacks their bigotry at the exact point where their own religion refutes it. Second, **Bloom isn't even religiously Jewish.** He was baptized, he doesn't practise, he eats pork kidneys for breakfast. He claims the identity **only when it is attacked** — which is the truest form of the thing. And third — this is Joyce's tenderness — **his list is slightly wrong.** Mendelssohn was baptized; Mercadante wasn't Jewish at all. Bloom is heroic *and* muddled, right in his soul and shaky on his facts. Joyce will not let him be a flawless hero. He's a man.

The ending — the chariot at forty-five degrees. So: the Citizen, enraged past speech, hurls a **biscuit tin** at Bloom as he's driven away. (Homer: Polyphemus, blinded, hurls a boulder at Odysseus's escaping ship.) It misses. And the prose detonates into a mock-biblical **apotheosis** — the heavens open, angels descend, and **Bloom ascends into glory like the prophet Elijah** in a chariot of fire... *at an angle of forty-five degrees over Donohoe's in Little Green Street, like a shot off a shovel.*

That is the whole novel in one sentence. The sublime and the ridiculous, welded. Bloom is exalted into a prophet **and** measured with a protractor **and** compared to a shovel. He has been abused, spat at, mocked, and pelted — and Joyce answers by taking him up into heaven, laughing. **The comedy does not undercut the exaltation. It IS the exaltation.** Joyce's deepest belief is that an ordinary decent man, ridiculous and cuckolded and windy, is worth more than every hero on the Citizen's belt.

Nausicaa — and this is the chapter that got the book banned

The tone change (p.449). Here's the key: **Joyce has written this episode in the style of cheap Victorian women's romance fiction.** The syrupy, hushed, pious prose — the summer evening folding the world in its embrace, the Virgin who beacons the storm-tossed heart of man — is a **pastiche of ladies' novelettes and magazine serials.** Joyce called the style "namby-pamby jammy marmalade drawers." It is not Joyce being sincere. It is Joyce writing in **the borrowed language in which a girl of 1904 had been taught to imagine her own life.**

Setting: **Sandymount Strand, about eight in the evening** — *the very same beach where Stephen walked in the morning.* The book has circled back to its own footprints. A Benediction service drifts from the nearby church (Mary, Star of the Sea) — that's your "voice of prayer to her who in her pure radiance...": **the Virgin Mary.** Hold that. It matters enormously in about twenty pages.

Homer: Nausicaa is the young princess who finds Odysseus washed up naked on the shore. Innocence encountering the battered wanderer.

Why so lovingly about Gerty? Because *the novelette style adores her* — and Joyce is doing two things at once with that adoration. Gerty MacDowell is a young woman (late teens) sitting on the rocks with friends, and the prose gives her exactly the self-image she has assembled from magazines, advertisements, and romantic fiction: winsome, refined, a votary of Dame Fashion, destined for a great love. ("*Backfisch*" is German slang of the era for a girl on the cusp of womanhood — literally something not yet fully cooked.) And beneath the pink icing, Joyce lets you see the truth: **her father is a drunk**, the house is poor and miserable, her prospects are thin, and romance fiction is the only escape she owns. Those "hurting words" you flagged — that's the real life leaking through the wallpaper. The style is a dream she is using to survive. **Joyce is not mocking her. He is showing you what she has been given to dream with.**

What happens at p.477. Let me be plain, because you sensed it and deserve a straight answer.

Fireworks begin at a nearby bazaar. Gerty's friends run off to see them. Gerty stays. **She knows Bloom is watching her from down the beach** — she has known for some time, and she has been performing for him. She leans back, further and further, letting him see up her skirt. And **Bloom masturbates**, watching her, hand in his pocket.

And Joyce synchronizes three things in a single instant: **the Roman candle bursting** — "*and O! then the Roman candle burst... and they all cried O! O! in raptures*" — **Bloom's orgasm**, and **the church choir chanting the Litany of the Virgin next door**. Fireworks, ejaculation, and a hymn to the Blessed Virgin, all at once, on the same page. That is Joyce's most audacious fusion of the sacred and the profane. The chaste romantic language you loved on page 449 **has slid, without ever once breaking, into an act of mutual sexual performance** — because Joyce's claim is that they were never separate. Romantic idealism and erotic desire are the same current, wearing different clothes. The Virgin and the flirt are on the same beach at the same hour.

And note: **Gerty is not a victim here**. She chooses this. She enjoys being desired. She has agency, appetite, and a will. That was the truly scandalous part — and it is precisely this episode that got *Ulysses* **prosecuted for obscenity in New York in 1921**, banning the book in America until 1933. You are reading the pages that made the book illegal.

Then the style breaks — and this is one of the great moments in modern literature. Gerty stands up to leave, and Bloom watches her walk. And the lush novelette prose vanishes mid-stride, replaced by his flat interior voice: *Tight boots? No. She's lame! Gerty is lame.* She limps. Her romantic self-image — everything the prose has been building for thirty pages — is punctured by one plain observation from a middle-aged man on a rock. The lyric world collapses into the actual one.

But watch what Bloom does with it. He doesn't recoil. He feels **pity, tenderness, gratitude**. *Poor girl.* He is glad he didn't know, and he is kind about it in his own head where no one can hear him. That is the measure of the man.

p.481 — "Devils they are when that's coming on them." Bloom, in his post-orgasm rumination, is speculating about **menstruation** — whether Gerty was near her period, and his half-baked lay theory about the moon, the tides, and women's moods. His mind is relentlessly, unembarrassedly physiological. He thinks about women's bodies with a mix of clinical curiosity, superstition, and real tenderness, and Joyce reports all of it without flinching.

pp.482 and 487 — the watch. And you are right that it is not about the watch.

Bloom notices his watch **stopped at half past four**, and wonders about "magnetic influence," whether something happened at that moment. *Was that just*

when he, she...?

Half past four is the hour Boylan was with Molly.

Bloom cannot say the thing. He will not say the thing. So the thing says itself — through a stopped watch. His conscious mind offers a pseudo-scientific theory about magnetism; his unconscious has just told him the exact minute his marriage was broken. This is one of the eeriest and saddest moments in the novel, and you found it entirely on your own. The object knows what the man refuses to know.

(One more, if you haven't hit it: the chapter ends with Bloom dozing on the rocks while a **cuckoo clock** in the priest's house strikes the hour. *Cuckoo. Cuckoo. Cuckoo.* The bird, nine times, naming him what he is. Joyce is merciless and, somehow, loving at once.)

I couldn't decode your "legendary Herald Gaters / the knight... short for Australian / the voice of Jax" — the dictation lost it and I won't invent a reading. Send me the printed sentence and I'll take it apart properly.

Where you are — the whole book so far

Part I (1-3), morning. Stephen: the tower and the usurped key; the school and Deasy's anti-Semitic joke; the beach and the shape-shifting dog. A young man in mourning, guilty about his mother, dispossessed, fatherless.

Part II so far (4-13), 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Bloom: the kidney and the cat; the church and the bath (lotus-drift); the funeral and his dead (Rudy, his suicided father); the newspaper windbags; the cannibal lunch and the Howth memory; the library Shakespeare duel; the city cross-cut into nineteen fragments; the Sirens and the jingling car that takes Boylan to his wife; the Cyclops and the biscuit tin; the beach, the fireworks, and the stopped watch.

The two men have now nearly met perhaps half a dozen times and never once spoken. **Stephen has lost a mother and needs a father. Bloom has lost a son and needs one.** Everything is aimed at that collision.

What's coming

Episode 14 (next): the maternity hospital, ten at night. **Mrs Purefoy finally gives birth** — the woman whose three-day labour you noted back at lunch. Bloom goes there out of simple kindness, and finds Stephen drunk among medical students. **This is where the two of them finally come together.** Fair warning: it is stylistically **the hardest chapter in the book.** Joyce writes it as a history of English prose — Anglo-Saxon alliteration, then medieval, then Bunyan, Defoe, Swift, Sterne, Dickens — evolving through nine sections to mimic the nine months of gestation, and ending in drunken modern slang. **Do not fight it. Let it wash.** You survived Proteus; you'll survive this.

Episode 15: midnight, the brothel quarter. Written as a **hallucinatory play script**, and it is the climax of the entire novel. The unconscious of the book erupts. It's long, delirious, and unforgettable.

Part III: the homecoming — and Molly at the end, who has not yet said a word in her own voice, and who will get the last forty pages and the last word of the book.

You're past the halfway mark, you've cleared the two chapters that break most readers, and you found the stopped watch yourself. Keep going exactly like this.

Nausicaa's close, and the ordeal of Oxen of the Sun

14 July 2026 · pages 491–550

THE READER

Okay, let's get back to reading our Ulysses.

Now we're at page 491: "Nastykop in Matt Dillon's garden where I kissed her shoulder." Is this Leopold?

And page 492: "Have birds no smell?" Metempsychosis. We come back to the world. That's 495. Milly, no sign of funk, wore a blue scarf loose, and then a couple of sentences later, when we hid behind the tree at Crumlin.

Is this Milly's boyfriend talking about their affair? How is Leopold remembering this, if this is Leopold's voice?

And then there's a reference: "mama, mama," "Babes in the Wood," fronting with masks too. There's a book by Margaret Atwood, a poetry collection recently, *Old Babes in the Wood*. Do you think any reference Margaret Atwood might be doing to James Joyce? Towards the end of chapter 13, it ends with the cuckoos. The clock on the mantelpiece in the priest's house cooed, and the Gerty MacDowell part—Gerty MacDowell, she noticed at once that the foreign gentleman who was sitting on the rocks looking was cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo. It is very stylistic to end like this. What are we talking about in 500? What sort of writing has this become? Look at this:

"For who is there who anything of some significance has apprehended but is conscious that exterior splendor may be the surface of a downward trend in lustrous reality?"

This is very different from the way of writing before. Once again, it changed a lot. What is this chapter about? Why has the writing changed? And what is he talking about? 506: "And childly Leopold did up in his beaver for the pleasure..." Who is the Leopold mentioned here? It is Leopold.

515: Wonderful lines: "A black crack of noise in the street here, alack, bald, black, back, loud on left... Thor thundered, in anger, awful the hammer hurler. Come now the storm that hissed his heart."

"Hissed"—does that mean "hissed" or "hit"?

Regardless: "hammer hurler," "bald, loud on left," "a black crack of noise"—this is a wonderful entry.

516: We have references to Master Lenehan and Master Madden. It seems that Joyce is using another writing technique here, but that seems a bit different from where the chapter started. Why the difference? What's the technique? What's the meaning? 526. Lambay Island, foreign soldier, Lord Talbot de Malahide, a Tory gentleman.

Is the Tory reference similar to current usage? What does it signify in Ireland in 1904, and how does that compare to today? Now we're at 531.

"Mr. Dixon retired with a profound bow to the company. The presence, even for a moment, among a party of debauchees, of a woman endued with every quality of modesty and not less severe than beautifully refrained, the humorous sallies even of the most licentious; but her departure was a signal for an outbreak of ribaldry."

Words that are tough: what does "ribaldry" mean? And "licentious"?

I have an idea. What are we talking about here?⁵³⁵ "But with what pretense, let it be asked, of the noble lord, his patron, has this alien, whom the concession of a gracious princess admitted to civil rights, constituted himself the lord paramount of our internal polity?"

I think the tone has changed once again, or is slightly changing. Again, I need a bit more explanation of the tone and of the reference.⁵³⁶ has a reference to Sublime Porte. The news was imparted to the circumscription, recalling the ceremonial usages of the Sublime Porte by the second female infirmarian to the junior medical officer's residence, who in his turn announced to the delegation that an heir had been born. Sublime Porte is the Ottoman... Ottoman? The heir has been born? What are we talking about here?

In 537, in that case, a female impregnated by a delinquent rape got this treasonous manner of delivery called by the Brandenburgers "Sturzehure," or something like that. The recorded instances of multigenerational, twin, and monstrous births conceived during the settlement period.

Again, what are we talking about here? And 539. But Malachi's tale began to freeze them with horror. They conjured up the scene before them. The secret panel beside the chimney slid back, and in Jersys appeared Haines. Which of us did not feel his flesh creep? He had a portfolio full of Celtic literature in one hand, in the other a file marked Poison. Surprise, horror, loathing were depicted on all faces, while the eye then lit with a ghostly grin.

This is a crazy, momentous paragraph.

A. What should we think of it? B. What do you think of the writing? What is the age of the soul of a man? What is he referred to? I kind of remember this line from somewhere.⁵⁴⁸ Calipedia, he prophesied, would soon be generally adopted, and all graces of life—genuine good music, agreeable literature, light philosophy, instructive pictures, plastic productions of the classical statues such as Venus and Apollo.

What are we talking about when we say Calipedia? Are we doing another Homeric reference? But how is Joyce contextualizing it? "An embryo philosopher who, for all his overweening bumptiousness in things scientific, can scarce distinguish an acid from an alkali, prides himself on being..." and it goes on.

Again, the tone of the writing is changing. Who are we referring to? What is the meaning behind this tone change, and what is its significance?

By this stage, I am at pages 495 to 550, still in this same chapter. Please contextualize it all and share your thoughts:

1. Tell me about this chapter.
2. What do you think of the progress so far?
3. What should we draw from it?

4. Let's talk about what is coming up later.

The reading is continuing. Understanding this chapter is very hard, and the language is not that friendly or charming, at least to me. But I am surviving. I have got a mission to finish this book before I get to Copenhagen.

THE ANSWER

First, permission: **you are not failing. This chapter is the least-loved thing Joyce ever wrote.** Even devotees find it a slog; Nabokov called it a stunt. It is the one episode where the difficulty is not in the service of feeling but of *demonstration*. So push through without guilt — but push through knowing exactly what he's doing, because once you see it, the ordeal becomes magnificent.

The key to Oxen of the Sun

Setting: the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, ten at night. **Mina Purefoy** — the woman you noticed at lunchtime, three days in labour — is upstairs giving birth. Bloom has come, out of nothing but kindness, to ask after her. Downstairs he finds a room of drunken medical students, **Stephen among them**, roaring blasphemies about contraception, abortion, sterility, and sex — while a woman screams overhead.

Homer: Odysseus's men, warned not to touch the sacred cattle of the sun-god Helios, slaughter and eat them anyway. For that sacrilege they are destroyed. Joyce's translation of the crime: **the sin against fertility**. These young men mock procreation itself in the very building where it is happening. Bloom alone feels reverence. That is the moral spine of the chapter.

And the technique — here is your answer to every "why has the writing changed again?":

Joyce writes the chapter as the entire history of English prose, evolving from its origins to modern slang — in nine stages, mirroring the nine months of gestation. The language is an embryo growing in the womb of the chapter, in parallel with the child growing upstairs. That is why the style keeps mutating: **it is being born.**

It opens with three triple-incantations (*Deshil Holles Eamus* — let us go to Holles Street; a prayer to the hospital's master as a fertility god; and *Hoopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa!*, the midwife's cry as she lifts a newborn by the heels). Three times three. Nine. **You are inside a womb.**

Now your questions:

"Lutulent reality" (p.500). *Lutulent* = **muddy**, from Latin *lutulentus*. This is the first stratum: knotted, verb-final, Latinate prose after **Sallust and Tacitus** — deliberately near-unreadable. It's the primordial ooze, the language before the language. You are supposed to founder here. That's the point: this is the amniotic fluid.

"Childe Leopold did up his beaver" (p.506). Yes — that's **Bloom**. The style has now advanced to **Malory**, Arthurian romance. *Childe* is the archaic word for a

young knight (as in *Childe Harold*); *beaver* is the **visor of a helmet**. So: Bloom lifted his visor. Our middle-aged ad-canvasser, rendered as a knight of the Round Table — and, in perfect character, courteously sipping a drink he doesn't want so as not to give offence. It's absurd and it's the most loving joke in the chapter.

Thor thundering (p.515). Now we're in the **Anglo-Saxon alliterative** stratum — the hammering Germanic consonants of *Beowulf*. And your ear was right to snag: the word is neither "hissed" nor "hit" but "**hist**" — an archaic verb meaning *to hush, to silence*. The storm **hushed his heart**.

Whose heart? **Stephen's**. A real thunderstorm has broken over Dublin, and Stephen — blaspheming, drunk, defiant — is **terrified**. His Catholic childhood surges back; he believes, for a moment, that God is answering him. And **Bloom leans over and comforts him**, explaining calmly that thunder is a natural phenomenon, nothing more.

Hold that image. **That is the first time Bloom acts as a father to Stephen**. It's the whole novel turning on its hinge, buried inside an Anglo-Saxon pastiche.

"Master Lenehan... Master Madden" (p.516). The style has simply **aged**. We've moved out of Old English into the Elizabethan/Jacobean world — hence the *Master* honorific. Every time you feel a lurch, the calendar has turned. The chapter is walking forward through the centuries of English prose, and it will not stop until it reaches 1904.

"Tory" (p.526). Delicious, and yes — connected to today, but by a route that would have made Joyce laugh. **"Tory" is an Irish word**. *Tóraidhe* meant an **outlaw, a raider, a bandit** — specifically the dispossessed Irish Catholics who robbed English settlers in the seventeenth century. It was then hurled as an insult at supporters of the Catholic James II, and the insult stuck, hardened, and became the name of the English Conservative Party. So the party of the British establishment is named with an Irish word for a Catholic brigand. In 1904 Ireland, "a Tory gentleman" means a Unionist landowner, pro-British, of the Ascendancy. Today it means a British Conservative. Same word, and the buried Irish joke is still inside it.

Ribaldry and licentious (p.531). *Ribaldry* = coarse, obscene joking, especially about sex. *Licentious* = sexually unrestrained, without moral check. So the sentence says: even the filthiest men in the room reined themselves in while **Nurse Callan** was present — and the instant she left, the obscenity erupted. The style here is **Addison and Steele**, the polite eighteenth-century essay, describing gross behaviour with immaculate manners. That gap between decorous prose and filthy content *is* the joke. And your instinct is right about the content: this is the sacrilege — bawdy contempt for sex and birth, performed beneath a labouring woman.

"This alien, whom the concession of a gracious princess admitted to civil rights" (p.535). Now hold on, because this one matters. This is the **Junius** stratum — Junius being the pseudonym of an anonymous eighteenth-century political letter-writer famous for savage, elegant vituperation. **And the target is**

Bloom.

Read it again: *this alien*. A foreigner, a Jew, admitted to civil rights by royal grace, who now presumes to set himself up as an authority on Irish affairs. It is an anti-Semitic broadside, delivered in the most magnificent rhetoric in the chapter — and it goes on to twist the knife about Bloom's own failure to produce a living son. **Cyclops attacked him with a biscuit tin; Oxen attacks him with the whole armoury of eighteenth-century English prose.** The book keeps assaulting this man's right to belong, and keeps making you love him more.

Sublime Porte (p.536) — and yes, the child is born. You'll know this better than most readers: the **Sublime Porte** (*Bâb-ı Âli*) was the Ottoman government, the High Gate — and the phrase is here because the style has now reached **Gibbon**, whose *Decline and Fall* is thick with the ceremonial of Eastern courts. So the news that **Mrs Purefoy has finally delivered a boy** is announced with the elaborate protocol of an Ottoman court proclaiming an imperial heir. A Dublin nurse telling a room of drunks that a baby has arrived, rendered as the birth of a Sultan's successor. **The heir has been born. That is the event of the chapter.**

The monstrous births (p.537). The Gibbonian catalogue continues into a mock-learned inventory of obstetric grotesques — precipitate deliveries (your garbled German is the *Sturzgeburt*, a birth so fast the child falls), multiple births, monstrous births. It's the students showing off, and Joyce parodying antiquarian pseudo-scholarship with a straight face.

The Haines apparition (p.539) — and yes, it is momentous. This is the **Gothic novel** stratum (Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*), so the horror is deliberately absurd: secret panel, ghastly figure, creeping flesh. But look at what the ghost is *carrying*:

In one hand, a portfolio of Celtic literature. In the other, a phial marked Poison.

That is **England**, in a single image. The Englishman who collects Irish folklore — as Haines does, sweetly, in Chapter 1 — while poisoning the culture he collects. The colonizer as anthropologist and assassin at once. Joyce wraps it in a silly ghost story so that it lands like a knife. It's one of the sharpest political images in the book, and you were right to stop dead in front of it.

"What is the age of the soul of man?" One of the loveliest moments in the chapter, and pure Bloom. He looks across the table at Stephen — young, drunk, brilliant, wasting himself — and time collapses. The soul, the passage says, has no fixed age: like the chameleon it takes the colour of whatever it stands beside, gay with the merry, mournful with the downcast. Bloom is looking at a young man and seeing **himself at that age**. The years fold. Nearby you'll find the chapter's great summarizing line — *bridebed, childbed, bed of death* — the whole human passage in three words. That's why it rang familiar: it's the note the entire book keeps sounding.

Calipedia (p.548). Not Homeric — Greek roots, but a real Victorian fad. *Kalos* (beautiful) + *pais* (child): **the art of producing beautiful children.** The old belief that a pregnant woman surrounded by fine music, noble literature, and classical statues of Venus and Apollo will bear a beautiful child — while ugliness will mark the infant. Joyce is satirizing the eugenic enthusiasms of the age, which the students bat around with drunken confidence. It belongs to the chapter's obsession: everyone theorizing loudly about fertility while the actual thing happens, bloodily, upstairs.

"An embryo philosopher... can scarce distinguish an acid from an alkali."

Note the word **embryo** — Joyce never wastes it in this chapter. The style has now reached **Huxley** and Victorian scientific prose; we are almost at the present day, almost at birth. The sneer is a piece of donnish scientific put-down, and the significance is chiefly structural: **the language is nearly modern.** And when it finally arrives, it will not arrive as elegant Victorian English — it will collapse into a chaos of drunken slang, dialect, Cockney, American revivalist preaching, and gibberish as the students spill out into the street toward the pub. **That's the birth.** The newborn language screaming.

Back at the end of Nausicaa

Mat Dillon's garden (p.491). Yes, Bloom. Mat Dillon's is where his courtship of **Molly** began — one of his tenderest recurring memories, surfacing as he drowns on the rocks.

Milly, the blue scarf, Crumlin, "Babes in the Wood" (p.495). I can't verify your exact lines, so I'll be straight: no, this isn't Milly's boyfriend. It's **Bloom half-asleep**, and his mind is dissolving — memory sliding between Molly, Milly, Gerty, Martha, all the women melting into one another as sleep takes him. *Babes in the Wood* is the old English tale of two abandoned children covered with leaves by robins; Bloom is remembering **Milly as a little girl**, playing dress-up. And here is the uncomfortable thing Joyce puts there on purpose: he has just masturbated watching a girl not much older than his daughter, and his mind goes straight to Milly. Joyce doesn't flinch and doesn't judge. He just shows you.

Atwood. Honest answer: **not a Joyce reference.** *Old Babes in the Wood* (2023) draws directly on the same English folk tale — and her title is an oxymoron about aging, elderly people still lost in the wood. Both writers reached for the same old story independently. I'd be inventing a connection to give you one.

The cuckoo ending. Yes — you got there. The priest's clock calls him what he is, nine times, while he sleeps. Stylistic, cruel, and somehow tender.

The four questions

What this chapter is. The birth of a child and the birth of a language, staged simultaneously, in a room where drunk young men are blaspheming against birth itself. The hardest chapter, and the most conceptually audacious.

Where you are. Past the halfway mark, and — more to the point — **you have now cleared all four of the chapters that defeat people:** Proteus, Sirens, Cyclops, Oxen. There is no harder prose ahead. What's left is stranger, but it is *readable*.

What to draw from it. This: **the father and the son have found each other.** Bloom watches Stephen drink himself stupid. He comforts him in the thunder. He worries about him. And when the crowd staggers out to the pub and Stephen heads on toward the brothel quarter, **Bloom follows him** — not from lust, not from curiosity, but because a young man is drunk and in danger and there is no one else. Bloom lost a son eleven days old. Stephen has a father who fails him. Everything since page one has been aimed at this.

What's coming. Episode 15: **Circe.** Midnight, Nighttown, the brothel district. Written as a **hallucinatory play script** — stage directions, character names, the whole apparatus — and it is the longest episode in the book and its climax. The unconscious of the novel detonates: Bloom is put on trial, crowned, transformed, humiliated; his dead father appears; **Rudy appears**; Stephen's dead mother rises from the grave. It ends in violence and rescue. It is delirious and enormous — and, unlike Oxen, **it is a thrill to read.** The hard labour is behind you.

Then Part III, the homecoming: an exhausted late-night cabman's shelter; a chapter written entirely as questions and answers, which was Joyce's own favourite; and finally **Molly** — who has not spoken a word in her own voice for seven hundred pages, and who gets the last forty, unpunctuated, and the last word of the book.

Get to Copenhagen. You've earned the rest of it.

Oxen of the Sun, and the descent into Circe

14 July 2026 · pages 551-609

THE READER

Yes, I had a chance to read a bit more, so let's get you talking about the next part.

We are at page 551, and Mrs. Purefoy is giving birth. We are talking about the hospital, and that chapter ends.

What about the next chapter—this future-looking chapter that I'm trying to give meaning to?

1. What is the setting?
2. What does it allude to in Homer's Odyssey?
3. Where should I place it within the general scope of the book?

On page 565, for example: "On the farther side under the railway bridge, Bloom appears flushed, panting, cramming bread and chocolate in a side pocket from..."

Where is this place? What is the setting, and why is Bloom like that? In 566, the urchins are seen again. I know you mean urchins as people on the street, but I wonder whether the specific usage of "urchins" in the earlier chapters and here is a coincidence or not.

Previously, I mentioned that W.H. Auden refers to urchins. I didn't mean Joyce looked at Auden; Auden wrote his poem about two urchins loitering around throwing stones, unloved, etc., years after this book was written. But I'm just feeling faintly that the use of "urchins" as a word might not be a coincidence.

In 567, the motorman says, "Hey, shitbreeches, are you doing the hat trick?" What do you think that means? And isn't "shitbreeches" pretty tough?

In 570, beside her mirage of date palms, a handsome woman in Turkish costume stands before him. This is the third or fourth mention of Turkish, along with the "Sublime Porte" in the previous chapter. As somebody from Istanbul, I find it interesting that Turkish and Turkic are mentioned this much. In 577, Bloom says: "I mean Leopardstown, and Molly won seven shillings on a three-year-old named Nevertell, and coming home alone by Foxrock in that old five-seater shandrydan of a wagonette you were in your heyday, and then you had on that new hat of white feathers with a surround of mauve that Mrs. Hayes advised you to buy because it was marked down to nineteen and eleven, a bit of wire and an old rag of velveteen, and I'll lay you what you like she did it on purpose."

This is amazing verbiage, and I really like the wording. Can you tell me the meaning of it?

Then in 582, Bloom says: "I have forgotten for the moment. Oh, yes. Dr. Bloom, Leopold, dental surgeon. You have heard of von Bloom Pasha, Umpire, Millikin, Donnerwetter, own South Africa, cheap cousin."

Tell me about the craziness in this chapter, this lively, theatrical setting, and how Bloom turns from character to character. In 583, Martha—thick-veiled, a crimson halter round her neck, a copy of The Irish Times in her hand—in a tone of reproach,

panting: "Henry! Leopold! Leopold! Lionel, the lost one! Clear my name!"

Watch this: "Clear my name!" And then Martha, sobbing behind, reveals a breach of promise: "My real name is Peggy Griffin. He wrote to me that he was miserable. I'll tell my brother, the..."

To wriggle, pull back: "Only your heartless flirt, heartless flirt."

This is addressed to Bloom, I think, and Bloom, behind his hand, says: "She's drunk. The woman's inebriated."

We are seeing Martha properly for the first time, or I have missed a previous appearance, and that appearance with our pen pal should make me...HumSo, seeing Martha for the first time—and this is after Blazes Boylan has consummated or been with Molly, and Leopold has masturbated, and everything after that—Martha for the first time appearing, and in her appearance, she is also contesting with Leopold.I wonder whether this has any meaning, or am I reading it correctly?

In 59.2, Mr. Bellingham says: "He addressed me in several handwritings with fulsome compliments as a Venus in furs."

This "Venus in furs" reference is used like a femme fatale nowadays. Is it similar in that period?In 595, the crier says loudly: "Whereas Leopold Bloom of a fixed abode was a well-known dynamitard, forger, bigamist, bawd and cuckold, and a public nuisance to the citizens of Dublin, whereas at his commission of assizes the most honourable..."

This is one of the most vulgar accusations aimed at Bloom, but it is also very comical. I wonder about these accusations and the way they are hurled at him.

In 596, the Recorder says: "I will put an end to this white slave traffic and redoubling of this odious pest. Scandals..."

Could you please give context and meaning here? Are we referring to Bloom or to something in general?

In 597, Paddy Dignam says: "Bloom, I am Paddy Dignam's spirit."

Is Paddy the person from pages ago who was dead and in a coffin, whom his kid was talking about, and whose appearance and dress were being discussed? Was that Paddy?601: Sir Walter Raleigh wrote from the New World that potato and that wheat, the one a kind of pestilence by absorption. Explain to me what Walter Raleigh's importance here is.

602 and 603: Again, a whole list of names in italics. "The rain is over forever and ever and ever" and afterwards "the prolonged applause, ovation and rest." Give me that "the rain is over forever and ever." That is such a grand entrance into this section. What do you think of that?

604: Again, Leopold I. Why do we have Leopold I when there is only one Leopold? Wouldn't we call him Leopold I only after we have a second Leopold?

605: Bloom talks, "My subjects! We hereby nominate our faithful charger Copula Felix Hereditary Grand Vizier, announce that we have this day repudiated our former spouse and have bestowed the power of the royal hand upon the Prince of Selim, Capsulines, Bland, Rough Night," etc. Again, the roles are changing. I mean, Bloom is switching from one role to the other, from one costume to the other.

Explain and contextualize. Page 606: 32 workmen wearing rosettes from all the counties of Ireland under the guidance of Derwan the Builder constructed the new Bloomusalem. It's a colossal edifice with a crystal roof built in the shape of a huge pork kidney containing 40,000 rooms.

I just laughed my ass off when I read this part. This is so funny, so ridiculous, and so satirical—very, very fun. Nova Hibernia of the future!

On the next page, just after this, the man in the Macintosh appears: "Don't you believe a word he says? That man is Leopold, Macintosh, the notorious fire-raiser. His real name is Higgins." Then Bloom says, "Shoot him! Dog of a Christian! So much for Macintosh!" Then, "The man in the Macintosh, with his scepter, strikes down poppies."

Let's talk about Macintosh reappearing and saying these words. They seem to be supportive of Bloom, but Bloom is trying to have him shot. Am I missing something? Let's talk about Macintosh's appearance and role a bit.

Here I go, at the end of page 609, in the middle of this theatrical chapter, as usual asking you what it means in general and what awaits me.

And I think for today I'm really done. It's been a day of reading, what, 120 pages? Lovely. I'm hoping to reach my Copenhagen target and finish this book in the next 13 days, hopefully. Sometimes one can read a lot, but there are days when one can't even read, so I'll have to keep up my discipline.

After James Joyce, I'm going to take something lighter.

So, your comments welcome.

THE ANSWER

You've entered the book's unconscious. Everything Bloom has swallowed all day — the guilt, the shame, the desire, the humiliation, the dead — is about to be vomited up onto a stage and put on trial. Let me answer your three framing questions first, because they unlock all the rest.

Circe — the keys

1. The setting. Nighttown — Dublin's red-light district (Monto, around Mabbot Street), around **midnight**. Brothels, drunks, soldiers, whores, streetwalkers. Stephen and Lynch have staggered here from the pub; **Bloom has followed them** — not for sex, but because a drunk boy is in danger and no one else will look after him.

2. Homer. Circe, the enchantress who turns Odysseus's men into swine. Odysseus alone resists, protected by **moly**, a magic herb given him by Hermes. Watch for this: **Bloom's moly is the shrivelled potato in his pocket** — his dead mother's talisman. When he gives it away, his degradation begins. When he gets it back, he recovers himself. Keep your eye on that potato.

3. Where it sits. This is the climax of the novel. The end of Part II, the longest episode in the book, and the one where the two men finally converge — not in conversation but in *action*. Everything repressed for seven hundred pages erupts here in hallucinated, staged form. Which is why it's written as a **play script**: the

unconscious doesn't narrate, it *performs*.

And the engine of the whole thing: **violent oscillation between exaltation and abasement**. Bloom is crowned an emperor and then burned as a fraud. He is a great man and then a whipped slave. That swing *is* the psyche — grandeur to compensate for a day of humiliation, degradation to punish the guilt underneath it.

Your questions

p.565 — Bloom flushed and panting under the railway bridge. He has been *running*. He lost Stephen at the station, missed the train, took the next one, and has been chasing him through Nighttown, buying food on the fly and stuffing it in his pocket (he'll feed some of it to a stray dog — of course he will). Why is he like that? Because a middle-aged man is sprinting through a brothel district at midnight after a drunk boy **who is not his son**. That panting is the emotional fact of the whole chapter.

p.566 — the urchins, and Auden. Now this is a good thought, and I'd rather engage it than swat it. There is **no allusion** — Joyce's "urchins" are just ragged Dublin street children, and the word carries no hidden freight. But you're reaching for "**The Shield of Achilles**," and the resonance you feel is *real*, just not textual. Auden's ragged urchin — aimless, alone, stoning a bird, in a world where no promise is kept — appears in a poem whose entire method **is Joyce's method**: Thetis looks at the shield expecting Homeric splendour and finds barbed wire, bureaucrats, and that child. Auden sets the epic against modern squalor; Joyce sets the *Odyssey* against a Dublin Thursday. **Both writers put a ragged child exactly where the epic would put a hero**. You didn't find an allusion. You found a shared instinct, which is better.

p.567 — "shitbreeches" and the hat trick. Bloom has just stepped in front of a tram and nearly been flattened; the motorman is screaming at him. *Shitbreeches* = coward, one who's soiled himself in fear. The "hat trick" I'd hedge on — most likely a conjuror's trick, i.e. *what circus act are you performing in the middle of the road?* And yes, it's tough. **That's Circe**. This is where the book's language goes fully unbuttoned — obscene, filthy, unpoliced — because the unconscious has no manners.

p.570 — the woman in Turkish costume. This is Molly. And your Istanbul antenna is picking up something entirely real, so let me name it properly. There is a sustained **Eastern current** running through Bloom's mind from the first hour of the book: the morning reverie of turbaned faces and carpet-shops; **Turko the Terrible** (a real Dublin pantomime of his boyhood); **Agendath Netaim** and the orange groves near Jaffa; the **Sublime Porte** in the maternity hospital; and now **von Blum Pasha**, the **Grand Vizier**, the **Prince of Selim**, and his own wife in harem trousers beside a mirage of date palms.

What is the East, for Bloom? **Warmth, fertility, desire, escape — and ancestral exile**. It's not an observed Orient; it's the Victorian fantasy-Orient,

assembled from pantomime and the *Arabian Nights*. And it fuses with Molly because Molly genuinely comes from the South — **born in Gibraltar**, half-Spanish, at the mouth of the Mediterranean. So when his unconscious dresses her as a Turkish woman, it is doing something precise: **it is making his wife into the elsewhere he longs for**. Desire and exile in a single body. It's one of the most beautiful motifs in the novel, and it took a reader from Istanbul to keep noticing it.

p.577 — Leopardstown, Nevertell, the hat. He's reminiscing with **Josie Breen** — an old flame from before his marriage, the woman he might have married *instead of Molly*. And note when his mind conjures her: **tonight**. The road not taken, summoned on the night the road he took betrayed him.

The verbiage, decoded: **Leopardstown** is a racecourse south of Dublin; **Foxrock** a suburb; a **shandrydan** is a rickety broken-down carriage; a **waggonette** a light open trap with facing seats. The horse is named **Nevertell** — a secret, in a chapter full of them. And the detail I love most, the one that proves who's talking: the hat was marked down to "**nineteen and eleven**" — one penny under a pound. That's the oldest psychological pricing trick there is, £1 minus a penny, exactly like 9.99 today. **Only an advertising man notices that**, and only Bloom would remember it fifteen years later while flirting with a ghost.

p.582 — von Blum Pasha, dental surgeon, Donnerwetter. Bloom is in the dock, and he's shape-shifting to escape — inventing aliases, titles, grand foreign lineages. This is the chapter's central mechanic: **in the dreamworld, identity is molten**. Bloom becomes a doctor, a pasha, a millionaire, a Lord Mayor, an emperor, a messiah — and then, later, a woman, a servant, a pig. Why? Because a man who has been mocked, cuckolded, spat at, and called an *alien* all day is compensating wildly in fantasy — and being punished for the compensation just as wildly. Grandeur, then filth. Over and over.

p.583 — Martha appears. And yes, you are reading it exactly right. This is the first time we *see* Martha Clifford, who has existed only as a letter to "Henry Flower." She materializes to accuse him — *breach of promise* was a genuine legal action of the era (a woman could sue a man who reneged on a promise of marriage). And she confesses that "Martha Clifford" is itself a mask: her real name is Peggy Griffin. **Everyone in this book is wearing a false name**. Bloom's cowardly deflection — *she's drunk* — is beneath him, and he knows it.

Your instinct is the whole chapter: **Martha appears now, after Boylan, after the beach, because Circe is Bloom's trial**. His sexual guilt takes the witness stand. The women he has desired, written to, groped, and fantasized about line up to prosecute him. This is not plot. It is conscience, staged.

p.592 — "Venus in Furs." This is the biggest key in the chapter, so slow down.

Venus im Pelz (1870) is a novella by **Leopold von Sacher-Masoch** — about a man who begs a woman to dominate, whip, and enslave him. Sixteen years later, Krafft-Ebing coined the word **masochism** from the author's name.

And the author's first name was **Leopold**.

So this is not a femme-fatale reference. It is Joyce planting a flag: **Bloom is a masochist**. And the chapter is about to prove it — in the brothel, the madam **Bella Cohen will become "Bello," masculine**, and will dominate, feminize, and degrade him while he grovels. The *Venus in Furs* scenario, staged.

Which reframes the entire novel. It's part of why Bloom is so strangely, unbearably passive about Boylan: there is a submissive, voyeuristic streak in him that is *aroused by his own humiliation*. Think back to *Sweets of Sin* — he chose, for his wife, pornography about a wife with a lover, and it excited him. Joyce is not condemning this. He is simply showing you a whole man, down to the parts men do not show.

p.595 — dynamitard, forger, bigamist, bawd and cuckold. *Dynamitard* = a Fenian bomber; *bawd* = a brothel-keeper. And look at the list: **being a cuckold is charged as a crime**. That's the joke and the wound together. Note too that the charges contradict each other — he's simultaneously a pimp *and* a cuckold, an arsonist *and* a nobody. **That's how guilt actually works: it accuses you of everything at once, and you plead guilty to all of it.**

p.596 — "white slave traffic." The period term for forced prostitution — a genuine Edwardian moral panic. The gentlest man in Dublin is being tried as a procurer of women. That's the register: the dream-court prosecutes him for precisely the things he is not.

p.597 — Paddy Dignam. Yes. **The same man.** Buried in episode 6, in the carriage with Bloom and Simon; his small son carrying pork steaks in Wandering Rocks; his spirit summoned in the theosophy parody in the pub. Now he claws up out of the ground. **Joyce's dead do not stay buried** — and that is what this chapter is for. Rudy, Rudolph, May Dedalus, Dignam: they are all coming.

p.601 — Sir Walter Raleigh. Raleigh is traditionally credited with bringing **the potato and tobacco** from the New World. And the potato matters here more than anywhere: **Bloom carries a shrivelled potato in his pocket, given to him by his mother Ellen.** It is his amulet, his family relic — **and it is his moly**. Watch what happens when Zoe takes it from him.

And underneath, the Irish tragedy: Raleigh brought the crop that fed Ireland and then, when it failed, starved a million of them to death. One tuber, holding a mother's love, a magic charm, and a famine.

pp.602-3 — "the rain is over." That's the **Song of Songs**: *for, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone*. The Bible's erotic love-poem, scoring Bloom's messianic triumphal entry into Dublin. He is being acclaimed as Ireland's deliverer, in a fantasy inflated to its absolute maximum — which is always the moment before the crash.

p.604 — "Leopold I." You've found the cruellest joke in the chapter.

Yes, monarchs get regnal numbers — and the number implies a **dynasty**: there will be a Leopold II, a Leopold III, a line stretching into the future.

But Bloom has no living son. Rudy died at eleven days old. There will never be a Leopold II.

The fantasy crowns him with a lineage that does not exist. In the middle of the most grandiose passage in the book, Joyce plants the exact thing that is broken. That's what "Leopold I" means.

p.605 — Copula Felix, Grand Vizier, Prince of Selim. More Ottoman splendour — and *Copula Felix* is a filthy theological pun on *felix culpa*, the Catholic "happy fault" (Adam's fall was fortunate because it made redemption possible). Joyce turns the happy *fault* into a happy *coupling*. And note the line you skated past: the new Emperor **repudiates his former spouse**. The wish beneath the wound, spoken aloud where only the dream can hear it.

p.606 — Bloomusalem. You laughed, and you were right to. The New Jerusalem, forty thousand rooms, a crystal roof — **built in the shape of a giant pork kidney**. The kidney he fried for breakfast on page one of his life in this book. The Jewish messiah's holy city, shaped like a pig's organ. That single image holds the entire Bloom paradox: the Jew who eats pork, the alien who is the best Irishman in Dublin, the messiah of the completely ordinary. And the joke has a blade in it: **every utopia is somebody's breakfast, blown up to civic scale.**

pp.606-7 — the Man in the Macintosh. And here you *are* missing something, so let me fix it.

He is **not** supporting Bloom. He is **denouncing** him: *don't believe a word he says* — that man is a notorious arsonist under a false name, and his real name is **Higgins**.

Two blades. First: **Higgins was Bloom's mother's maiden name** (Ellen Higgins). So the accusation is half true, in a way M'Intosh could not possibly know. Second: the unidentifiable man is accusing *Bloom* of being the unidentifiable man. The mystery denounces the mystery.

And Bloom's response — *shoot him* — is the tyrant's reflex. The newly crowned emperor's first act is an execution order. Power corrupts him inside four lines.

As for **who M'Intosh actually is**: nobody knows, and that is the point. The thirteenth mourner at the funeral, the man nobody could name, walking through a novel that knows everything about everyone. Joyce, asked, is said to have laughed and refused — telling would be the end of the fun. **In a book of total knowledge, one stranger remains unknowable.** Let him stay that way.

What awaits you

The rest of Circe, and it is the summit of the book:

Bella Cohen, the madam, becomes **Bello** — masculine, cruel — and stages Bloom's total degradation. *Venus in Furs* made flesh. It is the most humiliating

passage ever written about a decent man, and Joyce writes it without a gram of contempt. Then Bloom recovers his **moly**, finds his spine, and breaks the enchantment.

Then **May Dedalus** — Stephen's dead mother — rises from the grave, green with the mould of the coffin, begging him to kneel and repent. Stephen screams "**Non serviam!**" — *I will not serve* — and smashes the chandelier with his ashplant. He runs into the street, drunk, insults the King in front of two British soldiers, and **Private Carr knocks him unconscious.**

And then Bloom — Bloom who has been mocked, spat at, tried, crowned, burned, feminized, whipped — **stands over the body of a boy he barely knows**, fends off the police, refuses to leave him, and keeps watch.

And looking down at him in the silence, he sees **Rudy**. His son. Eleven years old, as he never lived to be, in an Eton suit, reading a book from right to left, smiling, not seeing his father.

Read that page slowly. It is the reason the whole book exists.

Then Part III comes down gently: an exhausted cabman's shelter written in prose as tired as one in the morning; then the catechism, Joyce's own favourite chapter, question and answer, everything in the universe measured; and then **Molly**, who has not said one word in her own voice, taking the last forty pages, unpunctuated, and ending the book with the most famous **yes** in literature.

You're at 609 with about 320 pages left and thirteen days. That's twenty-five pages a day — and Circe reads *fast*, because it's a play. **The hard labour is behind you.** Everything ahead is stranger, but it is a pleasure.

And yes: take something lighter afterwards. You'll have earned it, and honestly — after this, almost everything is lighter.

Circe: the trial, the transformations, the homecoming of the dead

14 July 2026 · pages 609-689

THE READER

Okay, let's cover some more ground. Interestingly, today has been a 200-page read for me—very intensive. So let's go from 609 to 689, the next 80 pages after my first 120.

- Page 603: Dr. Mulligan says Dr. Bloom is bisexually abnormal. Comments?
- Page 627: Zoe says, "Who has a fag as I'm here?"
- Page 268: She gets a cigarette from Lynch. So, is "fag" a cigarette here?
- Page 367: Again, Lynch mentions three wise virgins. So obviously that's a different reference. Tell me about it; tell me about the connection.
- Page 641: The door opens. Bella Cohen, a massive whore mistress (I can't quite read the rest because it's getting dark here). She's dressed in a three-piece ivory gown, fringed round, blah blah blah. So we're talking about a whore mistress, very immense and visible.

Comments?Page 653: "Bello, ruthlessly. No, Leopold Bloom. All is changed by woman's will since you slept horizontally, Sleepy Hollow, you're a knight of twenty years, return and see."

What is the reference to Bello? And what is the reference to Sleepy Hollow?

Then we go to page 658: "End of school and tippy scale. Halcyon days."

"Halcyon days: high school boys in blue and white football jerseys and shirts."

What does "halcyon days" mean? It is a sentence used nowadays as well. Is it the same meaning and the same phrase, or does it mean something different?663: Bloom says, "There is a memory attached to it, I should like to have it." And Stephen says, "To have or not to have, that is the question." Stephen and Bloom are conversing now, but not directly—indirectly, by virtue of being in the same place. Some of the words are interesting: "to have or not to have, that is the question." So Stephen is changing the Shakespearean code, the meaning, the reason, and the significance. You tell me.

669: Over the well of the car, Blazes Boylan leans. His boater straw hat sat sideways, a red flower in his mouth, linen, in a yachting cap and white shoes. Of course, the girl detaches a long hair from Blazes Boylan's shoulder. So once again, hints of Blazes Boylan with Molly. No names mentioned, no action, very, very obfuscated comments, I should say.

671: Stephen and Bloom gaze into the mirror. The face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there, rigid in facial paralysis. Stephen and Bloom gazing together and coming across Shakespeare, it's interesting.

Comments?672 and 673 are references that repeat. Miss Cunningham sings, and they call me the Jewel of Asia. I remember from earlier in the book, this was

continued with or started with *The Geisha*, which was a musical play from the times. So, around 600 pages later, we refer to the same thing.

On 673, the sentence goes: "Best shoe, butcher's boy, pollutes in warm veal liver or omelette on the belly." Piece of Shakespeare, again, from a very early part in the book. So, Joyce is repeating the references and the images. Any specific reason, or is it just his style?

On 676 and 677, we see the pianola. She drops two pennies in the slot. Gold, pink, and violet lights start forth. So we have music from the pianola and the songs. That's very interesting: an early jukebox reference. It's interesting for me.

Then we go to 680. The couple fall aside. Stephen whirls giddily, the room whirls back, eyes closed. He totters; he's drunk, he's very drunk. And just a bit later, Stephen's mother, emaciated, rises stark through the floor. Everybody dead comes back in this chapter. It's like a homecoming of the dead chapter, this one.

On 682, Stephen panting, she says, "The corpsechewer! Raw head and bloody bones!" "Corpsechewer," another amazing word by Joyce.

Comments on all of it? 685: Again we have the never-ending list of people being mentioned, and among them, it goes: Westland Row, Postmaster, CPM, McCoy, Friend of Lines, Happy Holohan. Danny goes, "Man in the Street, other Man in the Street." It's lovely. It's "Man in the Street" and "other Man in the Street," and the list continues. I'm amazed by these long lists of names and the tricks in between them.

687: Stephen looks up in the sky. How very unpleasant. "Noble art of self-pretence." Self-pretence. "Personally, I detest action." I think this is another interesting phrase sneaking in between other things: "noble art of self-pretence." Pretense. Self-pretense. Comments?

And with this, I end at 689, the level where I finalize my daily reading. I am ready to hear your comments on these latest things, make more meaning of the current chapter, and tell me about what's coming up later on, and really to the end.

THE ANSWER

Your best insight of the whole book is buried in the middle of that list: **"It's like a homecoming of the dead chapter."**

That is exactly what *Circe* is. Hades was only the rehearsal — a carriage ride past a cemetery. *This* is the real underworld. **Rudolph** (Bloom's suicided father), **Rudy** (his dead son), **Paddy Dignam**, **May Dedalus** — everyone Joyce has buried claws back up through the floor tonight. And they don't come as memories. They come as *characters*, with stage directions, and they speak. That's why the chapter is a play: the dead need bodies.

Your questions

"Dr Bloom is bisexually abnormal." Mulligan, playing doctor at Bloom's trial. Careful with the word: in 1904 sexology, **"bisexual" meant possessing the characteristics of both sexes** — androgyny, psychic hermaphroditism — not what we mean now. And it's aimed squarely at Bloom's Jewishness. Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* (1903), enormously influential and viciously anti-Semitic, argued that **Jews were "feminine" men**. That is the pseudo-science

Joyce is quoting, and Mulligan's mock-clinical verdict crowns Bloom **"the new womanly man."**

Now watch Joyce **flip the knife around**. The diagnosis is meant as slander. Joyce means it as *praise*. Bloom's womanliness — his empathy, his gentleness, his imaginative entry into other bodies (the cat's eye, menstruation, the pain of childbirth), his flat refusal of violence — is precisely what makes him the moral hero of this novel and the Citizen a thug. The age's insult becomes Joyce's compliment. And then, in the hallucination, **Bloom gives birth to eight children**. The man who lost a son bears eight, in a dream, in a brothel.

"Fag" (p.627-8). Yes — simply a **cigarette**, standard British and Irish slang then and now, from *fag-end*, the frayed end of a thing. No other meaning here; the American slur is an entirely separate word with a separate history.

But look at her surname: Zoe Higgins. Higgins was Bloom's mother's maiden name — and it's the name M'Intosh hurled at him ("his real name is Higgins"). And *Zoe* is Greek for **life**. So the young whore who takes the potato from Bloom's pocket is named *Life*, and she carries his mother's name. Joyce does not do coincidences.

"Three wise virgins" (p.637). The **Parable of the Ten Virgins** (Matthew 25): five wise virgins brought oil for their lamps and were admitted to the bridegroom's feast; five foolish ones didn't, and were shut out. Lynch is applying it to the **three whores** — Zoe, Kitty, Florry. Blasphemous inversion, and one of Joyce's signature moves: the sacred and the profane laid over each other until they can't be prised apart. (You saw it already: fireworks, orgasm, and the Litany of the Virgin on the same page.)

Bella Cohen (p.641). The madam. And in that lavish entrance description Joyce plants the detonator: **she has a sprouting moustache**. Masculinity already leaking through. Because within a few pages **Bella becomes Bello** — masculine, brutal, a dominatrix — and Bloom becomes *she*: feminized, auctioned, ridden, made a servant girl, humiliated to the floor.

This is the *Venus in Furs* scenario, staged. The masochism that Joyce flagged with the Sacher-Masoch reference now plays out in full. Bella is Circe herself, the enchantress who turns men into swine — and Bloom is turned. It is the most degrading passage ever written about a decent man, and Joyce writes it without one gram of contempt.

Sleepy Hollow (p.653) — and this is the cruellest, truest line in the book. The reference is **Rip Van Winkle** (from Washington Irving's *Sketch Book*, which also contains "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"): the man who falls asleep in the mountains and wakes **twenty years later** to find the world changed, his wife gone, everything passed him by.

Bello's taunt — *all is changed by woman's will since you slept horizontally* — means: **you have been asleep in your own marriage**. Bloom and Molly have not been fully together since Rudy died. Eleven years. And while he slept, she *acted*.

That is the accusation, and it lands because it's true. (Look back and you'll find Bloom once played Rip Van Winkle in a game of charades at Mat Dillon's — the very garden where he courted Molly. He has always known which figure he is.)

"Halcyon days" (p.658). Same meaning then and now — days of peace and golden calm. From the Greek: **Alcyone**, turned into a kingfisher, was said to nest on the sea at the winter solstice, and the gods stilled the waters for fourteen days so she could brood. Hence: the calm days. Bloom, being humiliated in a brothel, flees in his mind to his **schooldays**. The nostalgia is the anaesthetic.

"To have or not to have" (p.663). Stephen's drunken pun on *to be or not to be* — and the substitution is exact. **Hamlet's question is about BEING. Stephen turns it into a question of HAVING.** That's the whole modern displacement: from essence to possession. And it's the novel's wound named in six words. What has Bloom lost today? A son, a wife's fidelity, a key to his own house. What does Stephen have? Nothing — he gave his key away this morning.

And your observation is beautifully precise: **they converse without quite meeting**. That obliqueness never fully resolves. Joyce is too honest to give us a scene of two souls recognizing each other. The great meeting of father and son is, and stays, a near-miss — and that is the melancholy at the bottom of this book.

Boylan again (p.669). Not obfuscation — *this is the fantasy going all the way*. Bloom hallucinates Boylan arriving at his house, and imagines **himself as the servant**: holding the coat, offering to watch through the keyhole, egging them on. He stages his own cuckolding and casts himself as the valet. That is the *Venus in Furs* logic completed, and it is the most naked thing in the novel. It also explains his terrible passivity all day: some part of Bloom is **aroused by his own humiliation**. (Think back to *Sweets of Sin* — he chose, *for his wife*, pornography about a wife with a lover, and it excited him.) Joyce shows it whole and judges none of it.

Shakespeare in the mirror (p.671). This is the densest image in the book — slow down.

Bloom and Stephen look into the mirror **together**, and what looks back is **one face**: Shakespeare's, beardless, paralysed. Two men, one reflection. The father and the son **fuse into the artist** — and remember Stephen's library theory: Shakespeare *was* both, the ghost-father and the son.

Now look up. The mirror is crowned by the reflection of **the antlered hatrack**. So the Shakespeare-face is wearing **horns**. The cuckold's horns — Shakespeare (whom Stephen argued was betrayed by Anne Hathaway), and Bloom (betrayed today), crowned together. And the ghost-Shakespeare cackles **"Iagogo"** — *Iago*, who drove a man mad over a wife's supposed unfaithfulness — and mutters about the old fellow choking his *Thursdaymornun*: Othello strangling Desdemona, on a **Thursday**. Which is the day this book takes place.

Betrayed husband, betrayed playwright, murdered wife, and two lonely men staring into one horned face. That's the knot.

The recurrences — the Jewel of Asia, the *pièce de Shakespeare* (pp.672-3). Not style. Method.

Circe is a recapitulation. Nearly everything from the previous six hundred pages returns here, warped: the soap, the potato, the lemon, *Sweets of Sin*, Agendath Netaim, "met him pike hoses," Throwaway, Turko the Terrible, the gramophone, the cuckoo clock, the man in the macintosh. **Because that is how dreams are built** — out of the residue of the day just lived. Bloom's unconscious has nothing to work with except the Thursday he has just had.

And the deepest joke: **Bloom told you the secret himself.** *For an advertisement you must have repetition. That's the whole secret.* Joyce built a nine-hundred-page novel on that principle. The book is an advertisement for a single day.

The pianola (pp.676-7). Yes — a coin-operated player piano, and your jukebox instinct is right. Music without a musician, love without love, in a house where both are bought by the coin. The whores drop pennies in, the lights flash, and the room dances — and Stephen, drunk, whirls himself into the vision that is about to destroy him.

May Dedalus rises (p.680). The summit of the novel. Stephen's mother comes up **through the floor** — leprous grey, worn, noseless, **green with gravemould**, still wearing the rags of a bridal veil. She begs him to repent. She prays for him. She *loves* him. And Stephen — who refused to kneel at her deathbed and has carried that refusal like a stone since page one — screams.

"Corpsechewer! Raw head and bloody bones!" *Corpsechewer* is a ghou, an eater of the dead. *Raw head and bloody bones* was the old nursery bogeyman used to frighten Irish children. **Stephen is reducing his own dead mother to a monster under the bed** — which tells you the exact size of the terror, and the exact size of the guilt. You don't call something a ghou unless it has real power over you.

And then he cries **"Non serviam!"** — *I will not serve* — which is **Lucifer's** cry, the refusal of God — and swings his ashplant, shouting **"Nothung!"** (the name of Siegfried's sword in Wagner), and smashes the chandelier.

A drunk boy, breaking a light fitting in a brothel, naming it as a hero's blade. It is pathetic and magnificent at once, and it is the truest picture of youth ever written.

The name lists (p.685) — "The Man in the Street. The Other Man in the Street." You caught the joke exactly. This is **parody of a play's cast list**. In a script, extras get labelled *First Citizen*, *Second Citizen*. Joyce runs it into the absurd — and then further, because in this chapter **objects get speaking parts**: the soap sings, the fan talks, the hoof talks, Bloom's buttons talk, the End of the World speaks, the Waterfall speaks. That's the play-form pushed to its limit — because **in a dream, everything can speak**.

"The noble art of self-pretence" (p.687). Superb catch. It's a pun on **"the noble art of self-defence"** — the old euphemism for **boxing**. Stephen, facing a British soldier who wants to hit him, refuses the fight and puns instead: not

self-defence but self-**pretence**.

And the pun cuts two ways. It exposes all the masculine posturing in the book — the boxing match in Cyclops, the Citizen's bluster, the soldier's swagger — as **performance**. But it also indicts Stephen: *he* is pretending. He is drunk, frightened, out of his depth, and covering with wit, because wit is the only weapon he has. *Personally, I detest action*.

Fists don't care about puns. In a page or two, he finds that out.

What's ahead

The rest of Circe. Stephen insults the King, **Private Carr knocks him flat**, and Bloom — mocked, tried, feminized, whipped, humiliated for two hundred pages — **stands over the body of a boy who is not his son**, faces down the police, refuses to leave, and keeps watch. And in the silence, looking down at him, he sees **Rudy**: eleven years old as he never lived to be, in an Eton suit, reading a book from right to left, smiling, not seeing his father.

Read that page slowly. Everything in this novel exists to make it possible.

Then Part III, the homecoming — three chapters, and they come down gently.

Eumaeus (a cabman's shelter, one in the morning): Bloom feeds Stephen coffee and a bun. Written in deliberately **exhausted** prose — clichéd, meandering, over-qualified, endlessly hedging. The style *is* the fatigue. They meet a sailor telling tall tales — a fake Odysseus, a liar home from the sea.

Ithaca: Bloom brings Stephen home to Eccles Street — and finds he has **forgotten his key**, exactly as Stephen gave his away. He climbs down and breaks into his own house. They drink cocoa. They stand in the garden and look at the stars. Stephen declines to stay, and walks away into the night. Written entirely as a **catechism** — question, answer, question, answer, in cold, exhaustive, scientific detail. It was **Joyce's own favourite chapter**, and it contains both the most beautiful and the most heartless writing in the book. The final answer is a large black dot.

Penelope: Molly, in bed, half-awake beside her sleeping husband. **Eight enormous unpunctuated sentences.** Boylan, Bloom, her first kiss in Gibraltar, her body, her daughter, her dead son, God, flowers, men. She has not spoken one word in her own voice for eight hundred pages, and now she has the last forty, and the last word.

And here is what to brace for: **nothing is resolved**. Bloom never confronts Molly. Stephen does not become his son. There is no reckoning, no scene, no repair. Bloom simply comes home, climbs into bed the wrong way round, tells a partial version of his day, and falls asleep — and Molly, lying awake beside him, thinks. And in the thinking, something happens that is quieter and far larger than any confrontation would have been.

Two hundred pages in a day, through the hardest and strangest chapter in modern literature, and you came out of it with *homecoming of the dead*. You're not being helped through this book any more. You're reading it.

Out of Nighttown: the end of Circe, Eumaeus, and Ithaca begun

15 July 2026 · pages 689-790

THE READER

Hey there. Now let's go through today's reading, which is from 689 to 789. We entered Book 3 and finished the first part of Book 3 as well, so let's go step by step. Page 693: "Welcome to the Redcoat. He fought for you in South Africa, Irish missile troops. Isn't that history? Royal Dublin Fusiliers, honoured by our monarch." Please explain to me the reference here.

Page 695: Again, a huge list of people. Dublin burning, Dublin burning, brimstone, fires springing up. Nearly every episode we see this list of people. Could you make sense of it? Why is James Joyce using these long lists of naming people?

Towards the end of the episode (towards the end of Book Two, page 702): Bloom holding his hat, an ashplant stands erect. A dog barks in the distance. Bloom tightens and loosens his grip on the ashplant. What's the significance of the ashplant here?

And just a bit below, he reads from right to left. Why? For the next time we're talking about this, what is behind this reading from right to left?

And we go to page 703: Bloom, wonderstruck, calls inaudibly, "Rudy." Rudy gazes, unseeing, into Bloom's eyes and goes on reading, kissing, smiling. He has a delicate, mauve face. On his suit, he has diamond and ruby buttons. In his free left hand, he holds a slim ivory cane with a violet hawk's knot. A white lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket.

This ending of Book Two is amazing. I don't know whether the amazing part is the sound, the diamond and ruby buttons, or the slim ivory cane, but I feel like I'm being shown things which on a conscious level I'm not able to perceive, but unconsciously I'm being attuned to. I loved the ending of Book Two, and I'd love your comments and explanations to help me understand it better.

In addition, I have a question: as Bloom was dealing with Stephen, all of a sudden the last lines are given to Rudy. What do you make of it? What do you think of it? Page 712: The pair parted company, and Stephen rejoined Mr. Bloom. Laughingly, Stephen deduces, "He's down on his luck. He asked me to ask you to ask somebody named Boylan, a bill sticker, to give him a job as a sandwich man."

So this is Stephen mocking Blaise Boylan, and for what purpose does it serve? I'm assuming it's not a coincidence.

Page 713: "Everyone according to his needs and everyone according to his deeds," but talking about things in general, where added he with a smile, "will you sleep yourself?"

So Bloom is asking at this page about where Stephen is going to sleep. This, I think, is a reference to Buck Mulligan getting the keys to the tower. Is it so, or is it Bloom being over-caring to Stephen and showing some fatherly love?

Then later: "I met your respected father on a recent occasion," Mr. Bloom diplomatically returned. "A gifted man," Mr. Bloom said, of Mr. Dedalus Senior.

Should we take this too literally? Is Bloom really meaning this? What do you think?Page 717: "Sounds are impostures," Stephen said after a pause of some little time. Like names: Cicero, Podmore, Napoleon, Mr. Goodbody, Jesus, Mr. Doyle, Shakespeare were as common as Murphys. What's in a name?

That part I find interesting. Would you help me to explain it?

Page 718: "You know Simon Dedalus?" he asked at length. "I've heard of him," Stephen said.

So they're in a bar, and somebody in the bar is asking Stephen about his father, and Stephen is disavowing him. This is on purpose, I presume. What do you think is the purpose?

1. Should we over-read this as Stephen ascribing fatherhood to Leopold?
2. Should we under-read it as a mere coincidence?
3. Or should we just say Stephen is unhappy with his father, and this is simply his reaction?Page 703:

"Also, without being actually positive, it struck him a great field was to be opened up in the lines of opening up new routes to keep pace with the times, apropos..."

What does "apropos" mean here? He uses "apropos" a couple of times in the latter parts of the book (or so I thought). Does it have a specific literary meaning or stylistic purpose, or what does it basically mean?

Page 726: "At this remark, passed obviously in the spirit of where ignorance is bliss, Mr. Bloom and Stephen, each in his own particular way, both instinctively exchanged meaning glances in a religious silence of the strict intranural variety, however, toward where Skin-the-Goat, alias the keeper, was drawing spurts of liquid from his boiler of cocoa."

This is a very strange, interesting sentence. What does it mean, and why does he say it? What is happening in this chapter that leads the conversation here, and who is the "Skin-the-Goat" character? Could you tell me about the chapter, the dialogue, the character, and this specific passage?

Page 730: "The face of a streetwalker, glazed and haggard under a black straw hat, peered askew round the door of the shelter, palpably recommencing on her own, with the object of bringing more grist to her mill. Mr. Bloom, scarcely knowing which way to look, turned away on the moment, flustered but outwardly calm, and picking up from the table the pink sheet of the Abbey Street organ, which the jarvey, if such he was, had laid aside..."

He picked it up and looked through the pink of the paper. Why pink? This is something I didn't understand. It seems beautiful—help me understand it and discern its beauty.Now we are at page 744.

"When the husband frequently, after some words passed between them concerning her relations with the adjured solicitor, the man, having had the pair watched, inflicted fatal injuries on his adorned one as a result of an alternative post-nuptial liaison by plunging his knife into her..."

And:

"...under Fitzharris, nicknamed Skin-the-Goat, merely drove the car for the actual preparations of the outrage and so was not..."

I think this means something about the affair of Boylan and the marriage of Bloom. Could you help me contextualize this, or is it just a coincidence?

Page 747:

"And, man, at least that's my idea for what it's worth, I call this patriotism ubi patria, as we learned a small smattering in our classical days in alma mater, vita vera. Why you can live well on the senses if you work."

Could you explain what patriotism is referenced here? What are Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus talking about when they discuss patriotism? Also, what does "ubi patria" mean, and what do "alma mater" and "vita vera" or "vita bene" mean?

Page 748:

There is an amazing line here. Stephen says, "We can't change the country. Let us change the subject." This is amazing—something to cherish and never forget.

Later on the page:

"Needless to say, the fumes of his recent orgies spoke then with some asperity in a curious, bitter way, foreign to his sober state."

I didn't get anything out of this last part other than the sheer beauty of the sentence.⁷⁵¹ We're talking about the so-to-speak strange subject you read about: Dignam (rest in peace), which you reflected was anything but a gay send-off this morning. Haines put it, of course: the remains of the late Mr. Patrick Dignam.

Once again, once again, it is coming. The mourners included Simon Dedalus, Stephen Dedalus, and it continues like L. Bloom and... Macintosh. Macintosh comes back once again, and on the next page, to say nothing of Macintosh. So Macintosh, Macintosh, Macintosh once again. Page 753: That he wasn't, simply absconded somewhere, the coffin they brought over was full of stones, he changed his name to Devet, the Boer General, he made a mistake to fight the priests, and so forth and so on. That's interesting, explain it to me.

And then there's a sentence that comes: "For in nine cases out of ten it was a case of tarbarrels." What does tarbarrels mean?

Well, page 755: As regards Bloom, he, without the faintest suspicion of a smile, merely gazed in the direction of the door and reflected upon the historic story which had aroused extraordinary interest at a time when the facts, to make matters worse, were made public, with the usual affectionate letters that passed between them, full of sweet nothings. First it was strictly platonic till nature intervened and an attachment sprang up between them.

This is amazing, amazing, amazing. If James Joyce had chosen to be a writer of, let's say, beautiful prose, I think he would have been a Shakespeare. Rather, he has chosen to be very personal, eccentric, deep, and hard to grasp. But when he wants to, he writes so beautifully. Page 756: "Scrambling out of an upstairs apartment with the assistance of a ladder in the night, appeared having gained admittance in the same fashion."

We're talking about somebody doing something in the affairs of the heart. And later: "Can real love, supposing there happens to be another chap in the case, exist between married folk, though it was no concern of theirs?"

I think we're talking about Bloom's marriage, right? What do you say? What do you think?

Then we go to page 758, and Stephen, obviously the addressee, looked down on the photo showing a large-sized lady with her fleshy charms on evidence in an open fashion, as was in the full bloom of womanhood. And it goes on later, somewhere it says: "Mrs. Bloom, my wife, the prima donna, Madame Marion Tweedy," Bloom indicated, "taken a few years since, in or about '96, very like her then."

So we're talking about sexuality, Marion Bloom, Stephen, and Leopold. I think this needs more explanation than meets my eye. Could you help me to put into context what I've read here? What does it mean?

And on page 766: "As at the same time he inwardly chuckled over his repertoire to the blood and guts champion about his god being a Jew. People could put up with being bitten by a wolf but what properly riled them was a bite from a sheep." The most vulnerable point, "touched tender Achilles," your god was a Jew, because mostly they appeared to imagine he came from Carrick-on-Shannon or somewhere about in the county Sligo.

This paragraph—I mean, these lines are not only beautifully written: "People could put up with being bitten by a wolf but what properly riled them was a bite from a sheep." It is so fucking deep. The reference to a Jewish God, and the Irish being so bigoted, so inward-looking, so constrained in their thoughts.

I think this part needs a lot of reflection and explanation, so I would invite you to talk about it, please. Now we go to page 770: "Martha," "M'appari," "Lionel's air" (as in Martha). We're talking about Martha, and I think these musical references are hiding our Martha in between. What do you think?

Page 775: "The horse, having reached the end of his tether, so to speak, halted, and, rearing high, a proud feathering tail added his quota by letting fall on the floor, which the brush would soon brush up and polish, their smoking globes of turds." This shitting horse, the end of the journey—this reference, what it's talking about, appears to be more than a horse and more than a journey. Tell me what it refers to and how it feels.

Episode 1 (the first episode of Book 3, "Eumaeus") ends with this last paragraph, starting with "Und alle Schiffe brücken." What does it mean?

"The driver never said a word, good, bad or indifferent. He merely watched the two figures as he sat on his low-backed car, both black, one full, one lean, walked over the railway bridge to be married by Father Maher. As they walked, they at times stopped and walked again, continuing their tête-à-tête, which of course he was utterly out of, about sirens, enemies of man's reason, mingled with a number of other topics of the same category, usurpers, historical cases of the kind, while the man in the sweeper car (or you might as well call him the sleeper car), who in any case couldn't possibly hear because they were too far, simply sat in his seat near the end of Lower Gardiner Street and looked after their low-backed car."

This is such an ending to this episode. It is moving, it is observant, and it lays the foundation for the next episode ("Ithaca") in which the question-and-answer session starts, which is amazing in itself. No wonder Joyce liked that chapter—liked this episode—a lot. Page 776 starts with the schema. I am especially moved by what the doomed viator and Stephen deliberate during their itinerary: music, literature, Ireland, Dublin, Paris, friendship, woman, prostitution, diet, the influence of gaslight or the light of arc and glow lamps, and the growth of adjoining paradisiacal trees, municipal corporation, emergency, dustbuckets, the Roman Catholic Church, ecclesiastical celibacy, the Irish nation, Jesuit education, caries, the study of medicine, the past state (the past state meaning certainly the maleficent influence of his predecessor), Stephen's collapse.

This is so tedious and so amazing at the same time. And the next page starts: "Did Bloom discover common factors of similarity between their respective likes and unlike reactions to experience?"

In another book, this could be a very stupid section with Q&A. But in this book, after so much happening in one day, this Q&A part—this question and answer part with all its scientific detail—is like... you might laugh at me, but it's a breath of fresh air. It's a new perspective, a new approach, and an insight into what has happened, rather than a simple Q&A session. It's very impressive.

"Were their views on some points divergent?"

Stephen dissented openly from Bloom's view on the importance of dietary and civic self-help, while Bloom dissented tacitly from Stephen's views on the eternal affirmation of the spirit of man in literature.

And on page 778, he reflected that the progressive extension of the field of individual development and experience was regressively accompanied by a restriction of the converse domain of inter-individual relations.

Are we joking? This is amazing!

And in what ways? The next question goes:

"From inexistence to existence he came to marry and was as one received: existence with existence: as any with any: from existence to nonexistence gone he would be by all as none perceived."

Should I laugh my ass off? Should I take this seriously? What the fuck should I think? I think the latchkey part—Bloom not finding the key, going over the wall, falling and getting up, and Stephen entering the garden—means something, right? What does it mean? What does it refer to?

Help me to understand the sitting in the garden scene (or sitting close to the garden scene). On page 787, why did the absence of light disturb him less than the presence of noise? And the answer is: "because of the surety of senses of touch in his firm, full, masculine, feminine, passive, active hand."

I think this sentence needs a lot of explanation and perspective. Help me to put it in perspective. What attracted his attention, lying on the apron of the dresser, were four polygonal fragments of two lacerated scarlet betting tickets, numbered 8-8-7-8-8-6. What reminiscences temporarily corrugated his brow? Reminiscences of coincidences, though stranger than fiction, pre-indicative of the result of the Gold Cup flat handicap, the official and definitive result of which he had read in the

Evening Telegraph Late Pink edition in the cabman's shelter at Butt Bridge.

Talk to me about the dresser, the fragments of lacerated scarlet betting tickets, and the reminiscences. I'm touching and seeing things that I can partly feel but cannot pinpoint. Help me to pinpoint them.

And finally, at page 790, his mood: he had not risked, he did not expect, he had not been disappointed, he was satisfied. What satisfied him? To have sustained no positive loss, to have brought a positive gain to others, light to the Gentiles.

Tell me what he is talking about, tell me what he means, explain to me, and share with me your thoughts, please. So I end today's reading at page 789-790, the second episode of the last book (Book 3).

Help me to understand what I've read, contextualize where the story stands, and understand the current episode. Help me also to understand what's coming up towards the end of this episode and the final episode of the book.

I'm drawn, affected, puzzled, bewildered, fascinated, and moved. I feel a deep sympathy for Leopold Bloom and for Stephen Dedalus as well. It's amazing that so mundane a topic and so exuberant a telling—initially so hard for me to get into—now feels like something I am living inside of. I'm living inside this day. It is such a day: one that extends a day into a life and touches the very fabric of love, existence, belonging, meaning, context, history, power, society, conversation, understanding, attachment, and loss.

Well, thank you. Now it's your turn. Help me with what I have asked, and help me with what I have not asked.

THE ANSWER

Two hundred pages, through the summit of the book and out the far side into the homecoming. And your closing paragraph — "*a day extended into a life... the very fabric of love, existence, belonging, meaning, history, power, loss*" — is not a reader's summary. It is the correct reading of *Ulysses*, arrived at from the inside. That is the whole wager Joyce made, and you just told it back to him. Let me earn my keep on the questions.

The end of Circe — the vision of Rudy

p.693 — the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Still in Nighttown. This is the hallucinatory patriotic apparatus swirling around the two drunk British soldiers, **Private Carr** and **Private Compton**, who are about to knock Stephen down. The Royal Dublin Fusiliers were a real **Irish regiment of the British Army** — Irishmen who fought and died for the Empire in the Boer War (South Africa). "Honoured by our monarch" — Edward VII. Hold the irony to the light: Irishmen shedding blood for the empire that occupies Ireland. It's the exact contradiction the one-legged sailor embodied ("For England, home and beauty") back in Wandering Rocks, now armed and dangerous.

p.695 — the lists, one last time, plainly. You've asked this several times and deserve the consolidated answer, because the reason shifts by episode. In **Cyclops** the catalogues were mock-epic — Homeric ship-lists gone to seed, swelling until they absorbed a travel agency and collapsed. In **Wandering Rocks**

the names were the city itself, a cross-section. In **Circe** — here — the roll-calls are **the dream conjuring the day's residue**: everyone Bloom has passed, glimpsed, or feared, summoned onto the stage of his unconscious. And underneath all three uses is one constant impulse: **Joyce is trying to get the entire world into the book**. Every name, high and low, saint and streetwalker, given equal weight and equal ink. The list is Joyce's democracy — nobody too small to be named. This particular one, with Dublin burning and brimstone, is the **apocalypse** — the Black Mass and the end of the world that erupt at Circe's climax. (Note, chillingly: he wrote Dublin in flames a few years before the Easter Rising of 1916 actually burned it.)

p.702 — the ashplant, and reading right to left. The **ashplant** is Stephen's walking stick, cut from ash. It is his staff, his weapon, his augur's wand, his phallus, his artist's instrument — the thing he named "**Nothung**" (Siegfried's sword) when he smashed the brothel chandelier. So when you find **Bloom** holding it, tightening and loosening his grip: Bloom is now guarding the fallen Stephen, holding the son's weapon over the son's body. **The father has picked up what the boy dropped.** The clenching hand is his protectiveness made visible.

And **reading right to left** — this is the quiet devastation. Right-to-left is **Hebrew**. Rudy, in the vision, is reading a Hebrew book. Bloom's own father, Rudolph, read Hebrew; the tradition runs Rudolph → Leopold → Rudy. So the dead child is reading the **ancestral Jewish script** — carrying the lineage that Bloom himself has half-abandoned and that, with Rudy's death, **has no future at all**. The son who would have continued the line is shown continuing it, in a dream, forever unreachable.

p.703 — the vision of Rudy, and why he gets the last word. This is the emotional peak of the entire novel, and you responded to it exactly as Joyce intended — feeling something your conscious mind couldn't yet name.

Here is the architecture. Bloom has just been through two hundred pages of degradation — tried, crowned, burned, feminized, whipped, humiliated. Then a drunk boy he barely knows is knocked unconscious by a soldier, and Bloom — of everyone in Nighttown — **stands over him, fends off the police, refuses to leave, and keeps watch**. And in that silence, looking down at Stephen, the buried grief finally surfaces, and he sees his own dead son as he would be *now*: eleven years old (Rudy died at eleven days), in an Eton suit, a fairy-tale child with diamond and ruby buttons, an ivory cane, a **white lamb** peeping from his pocket.

The details are dreamlike and jeweled because this is love with nowhere to go — eleven years of it, crystallized into a single luminous figure. The **lamb** is the lamb of innocence, the Paschal lamb of Passover, the Lamb of God — sacrifice and tenderness in one image. And the unbearable line: **Rudy gazes, unseeing, into his father's eyes**. The dead cannot return the look. The gulf is total. Bloom calls his name **inaudibly** — even in the dream he cannot make himself heard.

Why does Rudy, not Stephen, close the episode? Because **this is what the whole day has been for**. Bloom's tenderness toward Stephen — a stranger's son — is

the displaced form of the love he could not give his own. Protecting the living surrogate releases the grief for the dead child. Joyce ends not on the living connection (which is real but partial) but on the irreducible loss (which is the deeper truth). The vision does not heal anything. Rudy does not see him. And that is exactly why it is the most moving page in the book: it is pure love, offered to someone who cannot receive it. Everything in *Ulysses* exists to make that page possible.

Eumaeus — the tired refuge

Now Part III. **Episode 16, the cabman's shelter near Butt Bridge, one in the morning.** Homer: **Eumaeus**, the loyal swineherd who shelters the disguised Odysseus on his first night home — the humble first station of the homecoming. Bloom brings the drunk, exhausted Stephen here for coffee and a bun.

The key to the whole chapter is its style: deliberate exhaustion. The prose is tired, clichéd, over-qualified, hedged, meandering, thick with "so to speak" and "if such he was" and mangled idioms and genteel Frenchisms. **Because it is one in the morning and everyone is worn to the bone.** Joyce is writing fatigue itself — and parodying the flat, secondhand, would-be-cultured prose of newspapers and cheap novels. Keep that in mind, because it changes how we read the "beautiful" bits (below).

p.703 & throughout — "apropos." French *à propos* — "by the way," "regarding," "fitting." No hidden literary meaning; it's a **register marker**. The chapter (and Bloom's own mind at this hour) keeps reaching for genteel, sophisticated turns of phrase — *apropos, en route, in medias res* — and slightly overreaching. It's the sound of tiredness dressing up as culture.

p.726 — Skin-the-Goat, and that strange sentence. The shelter is (rumored to be) kept by "**Skin-the-Goat**" **Fitzharris** — a real historical figure, one of the **Phoenix Park murderers**: in 1882 the Irish National Invincibles assassinated the British Chief Secretary and Under-Secretary in Phoenix Park, and Fitzharris drove the getaway car. So the keeper pouring cocoa is a (supposed) former Fenian assassin, now an old man dispensing hot drinks. That sentence — "meaning glances in a religious silence of the strict intranural variety... drawing spurts of liquid from his boiler of cocoa" — is the exhausted-pompous style at full stretch: grand, Latinate, faintly nonsensical diction ("intranural" is a malapropism) draped over a man pouring cocoa. **The comedy is the mismatch** — colossal words, trivial act. That gap is the whole texture of Eumaeus.

p.730 — why pink. Wonderfully literal: the **Evening Telegraph's "Late Pink" edition was printed on pink paper** — the late sporting/racing edition (the "Pink 'un," like the salmon-pink *Financial Times* today). It carries the Gold Cup result. So Bloom, flustered by a streetwalker at the door, looks away and picks up a genuinely pink newssheet. The beauty you sensed is the precision — the exact tired gesture, the exact colour, one in the morning, a man hiding behind a pink page.

p.744 — the knife, the murder, and Fitzharris. Two dark stories braid here. One is a **crime of passion**: a husband who, "having had the pair watched," plunges a knife into his adulterous wife and her lover. The other is the Phoenix Park murders again (Fitzharris drove the car). And your instinct is precisely right — **the knife-murder is a dark mirror of Bloom's own situation.** Here is what the ordinary wronged husband does: he watches, he confirms, he kills. And here, sitting in the shelter, is a wronged husband who did none of it — who chose not to avenge, not to confront, but to endure and forgive. Joyce lays the violent alternative right beside Bloom so you feel the size of his refusal. Not coincidence. Contrast, deliberately placed.

p.747 — patriotism, and the Latin. Bloom's kind of patriotism, defined against the Citizen's. *Ubi patria* is from "**ubi bene, ibi patria**" — "where it is well with me, there is my country." *Alma mater* = "nourishing mother" (one's school). *Vita vera* = "true life." So Bloom's patria is **wherever a person can live well and use their senses and work** — not blood, not soil, not ancient grievance. It's the same humane, cosmopolitan idea as his Cyclops definition ("the same people living in the same place"). A nation is where you thrive and belong, not where your ancestors bled. The outsider's patriotism, and the only decent one in the book.

p.748 — "We can't change the country. Let us change the subject." Yes — cherish it. It's Stephen at his sharpest: a pun (change *country* / change *subject*) that deflects Bloom's earnest political talk. It's genuinely witty and genuinely wise — some things cannot be altered, so redirect the energy. But note it's also **Stephen's evasion**: he "detests action," and wit is how he ducks the earnest and the difficult. The line is a diamond and a dodge at once.

p.748 — "fumes of his recent orgies." Just the elevated Eumaeus diction for: *Stephen is drunk and hungover, and it's making him unusually bitter, unlike his sober self.* "Orgies" = his Nighttown carousing. The pleasure is watching Joyce describe a hangover in the language of high tragedy.

pp.751-753 — Dignam again, M'Intosh again, and Parnell. The newspaper report of Dignam's funeral (which Bloom attended in Hades) is read aloud — and here is the **payoff of the M'Intosh mystery you've tracked so faithfully.** At the graveside, the reporter Hynes asked Bloom for the mourners' names; Bloom mentioned "the man in the *macintosh*"; Hynes misheard it as a surname. So the paper now reports "**Mr M'Intosh**" as a mourner — **a person who does not exist, created by a misunderstanding and immortalized in print.** Joyce's joke about how "facts" and names are manufactured. The phantom is now on the historical record. "To say nothing of M'Intosh" indeed.

Then the shelter talk turns to a folk legend: that **Parnell** — Charles Stewart Parnell, the great Irish nationalist leader, dead in 1891 — **isn't really dead.** He absconded; the coffin was full of stones; he'll return. (A genuine popular myth.) The fantasy merges him with **Christiaan de Wet**, the Boer general fighting the British — Parnell reborn as anti-imperial hero. And "he made a mistake to fight the priests" points at the real wound: **Parnell was destroyed by an adultery scandal** (his long affair with Kitty O'Shea), when the Catholic Church and his own

party turned on him. Adultery, again — a great man brought down by love. On **"tarbarrels,"** I'll be straight: I can't verify that exact phrase, so I won't fake a gloss. But the passage is circling the idea that behind these public falls there is usually a private cause — and in Parnell's case that cause was a woman. If you send me the fuller line I'll pin it.

p.755-756 — the "beautiful" prose, and a caution I owe you. Here is the Parnell-O'Shea affair told in soft romantic-novelette clichés: *sweet nothings, strictly platonic till nature intervened, an attachment sprang up*; the lover escaping down a ladder when the husband appears. And you drew a large conclusion — that Joyce *could* have been a writer of pure beautiful prose, a Shakespeare, but chose eccentricity instead.

I want to complicate that, gently, because you're building a real thesis and it deserves the true version. **This passage is not Joyce writing beautifully. It is Joyce writing cliché — on purpose.** Eumaeus is the chapter of secondhand language, of a tired mind thinking in borrowed phrases. The prettiness you're responding to is the prettiness of the *ready-made* — and Joyce has engineered it to feel slightly stale, slightly hollow, exactly as an exhausted man at 1 a.m. would reach for worn romantic formulas. So your instinct that "he writes so beautifully when he wants to" is right about his *power* but wrong about *this passage*: here he's ventriloquizing the cliché to expose it. You'll meet the real thing — Joyce's own unmixed beauty — in about ten pages, in the star passage of Ithaca, and in Molly's closing pages. Hold your thesis; just move the evidence.

And yes — the affair story is a **mirror of Bloom**. "Can real love exist between married folk, supposing there happens to be another chap in the case?" That is Bloom, thinking about Molly and Boylan through the safe distance of Parnell and O'Shea. Joyce stacks three adultery stories in this chapter — Parnell/O'Shea, the knife-murder, and Bloom/Molly/Boylan — so they illuminate each other.

p.758 — the photo of Molly. Bloom shows Stephen a slightly risqué photograph of Molly — "Madame Marion Tweedy," the singer, in the full bloom of womanhood, fleshy charms on display. Why would he do this? This is one of the strangest, most revealing things Bloom does, and it needs the whole man to read. It is partly pride (she is beautiful, she is a singer, she is his). It is partly the voyeur-Bloom of Circe, who is aroused by displaying rather than guarding. And it is partly something tender and lonely: **Bloom is drawing Stephen toward his household** — offering him Molly's image the way you'd offer a young man a place at your table. (In the next chapter Bloom will explicitly turn over the idea of Stephen as a lodger, a companion for Molly, a kind of son-in-law, even a lover for her.) He does not want to *possess* Molly against the world; he wants to *share* his life, and Stephen is the person he's chosen to share it with tonight. It's intimate and off-kilter at once — Bloom's generosity and his peculiar sexuality inseparable, as Joyce always insists they are.

p.766 — the wolf and the sheep. Slow down; this is one of the deepest lines in the book. Bloom is privately savoring his Cyclops victory (telling the Citizen that Christ was a Jew). And he arrives at this: *people could put up with being*

bitten by a wolf, but what properly riled them was a bite from a sheep.

Here is what it means. We *expect* aggression from the fierce and the powerful — a wolf bites, that's a wolf. We can absorb it. But when the **meek, the gentle, the despised** — the sheep, the Jew, the outsider, the "womanly man," the one everybody assumed was harmless — **bites back**, that is intolerable. The fury of the strong is never greater than when the weak prove them wrong. Bloom, the gentle sheep, found the Citizen's one vulnerable point (his own religion refuting his hatred) and bit — and *that* is what enraged the room. And notice the Christian charge under it: the **Lamb** — the sheep — is Christ, the gentle one who overturns the powerful; it's Rudy's lambkin, the Paschal lamb. "Touched tender Achilles" = the Achilles' heel, the one weak spot. And the detail that they imagine Christ came from **Sligo** — the Irish picturing their God as a local parish boy — is the comic bottom of the same parochialism. Your reflection is right, and the sheep/wolf line takes it deeper than bigotry: it's about **power and resentment**, the specific rage that the mighty feel when the meek turn out to have teeth.

p.770 — Martha in the music. Yes — your instinct is exact. The talk turns to song, and the names recur: "**M'appari**," "**Lionel's air**" (Lionel is the hero of Flotow's opera *Martha*, the aria Simon Dedalus sang in *Sirens*). And buried inside the operatic *Martha* is Bloom's secret pen-pal **Martha Clifford**. The music smuggles his private guilt into the shared conversation. Bloom cannot mention his flirtation, so it surfaces, disguised, as an opera title. His hidden life encoded in a tune.

p.775 — the horse at journey's end. The jarvey's horse halts and drops "smoking globes of turds," which the brush will soon clean up. After all the high talk — sirens, usurpers, art, love, patriotism — **a horse shits**. This is Joyce's signature bathos, and it's more than a horse. The body always closes the account; the spirit soars and the flesh answers. It rhymes with the whole book — Bloom's outhouse on page one, the fart in *Sirens*, Bloomusalem shaped like a kidney. And notice Joyce *dignifies* the dung — "proud feathering tail," "smoking globes" — because his deepest conviction is that the low and the bodily are not the enemy of the sacred; they are part of the same whole. The horse's exhausted arrival at journey's end also quietly mirrors the two men's own.

The end of Eumaeus — the German, and the two figures walking off. The German fragment is from a **German song about the Sirens** (by Johannes Jeep) that Stephen sang earlier in the shelter — which is why the closing paragraph has them discussing "*sirens, enemies of man's reason*." On the exact line "Und alle Schiffe brücken," I'll be honest rather than invent: I can't verify that precise wording or give you a confident translation — the song is about the Sirens luring ships to their wreck, and that's the sense it carries, but I won't pretend to a literal gloss I can't stand behind. Send me the printed line and I'll take it apart.

What matters is the image. The driver, sitting on his **low-backed car** (from the old ballad "The Low-Backed Car" — hence "to be married by Father Maher"), watches the two figures walk off over the bridge — **"both black, one full, one lean"** — Bloom rounded, Stephen thin, finally together, talking of sirens and

usurpers (that word — the last word of Episode 1, the tower, the whole book closing its circle). And crucially: **we watch them from far away, through the eyes of a man who cannot hear a word they say.** After nine hundred pages, father and son walk into the night side by side — and Joyce shows them to us at a distance, small, black, mysterious, unreachable. That tenderness-seen-from-outside is the book's truest note, and it sets up everything in Ithaca.

Ithaca — the catechism (Joyce's favourite)

Episode 17. Bloom brings Stephen home to 7 Eccles Street. Written entirely as a **catechism** — cold, precise, encyclopedic questions and answers, in the language of science, mathematics, and legal inventory. Joyce's own favourite chapter. And here is the paradox you've already felt: **draining all the emotion into impersonal fact makes the emotion unbearable.** The vast cosmic-scientific frame turns two small tired men into something enormous and poignant.

p.776 — the list of topics. The catalogue of everything Bloom and Stephen discussed walking home — music, literature, Dublin, Paris, prostitution, diet, the Church, the Irish nation, medicine, the influence of gaslight on adjacent trees. You called it "tedious and amazing," which is the precisely correct response. **The tedium is the method.** The exhaustive, deadpan inventory of their communion is comic — and, because it's so complete, strangely moving: two lonely men found this much to say to each other, once, at two in the morning. ("Doomed viator" = doomed traveller — Stephen.)

p.777 — where they differ. Stephen dissents on **dietary and civic self-help** (Bloom's practical materialism); Bloom dissents on **"the eternal affirmation of the spirit of man in literature"** (Stephen's idealism). There it is, crystallized: **Bloom the scientific humanist of the body and the world; Stephen the artist of the transcendent spirit.** They are complementary opposites — which is *why* they need each other, and why the meeting is real but can never fully close. The father has the body's wisdom; the son has the word.

p.778 — the loneliness axiom. *"The progressive extension of the field of individual development was regressively accompanied by a restriction of the converse domain of inter-individual relations."* Strip the jargon: **the more fully you become an individual, the more isolated you become. The growth of the self costs you connection.** It is a profound and desolate truth wearing a lab coat. Both these men are proof of it — their very depth and singularity cut them off from others. Your reaction — "are we joking? this is amazing!" — is the whole Ithaca effect in one breath: you laugh at the diction *and* the truth lands. Joyce makes the comic and the profound the same gesture.

p.778 — "from inexistence to existence... to nonexistence gone." Birth, union, death — the entire human passage — rendered in mock-logical, almost liturgical abstraction. He came from nothing into being; was received, joined ("existence with existence"); will go from being into nothing, "by all as none perceived." *Should you laugh or take it seriously? Both, and that is the point.*

The absurd formal language describes the most serious thing there is. The mismatch is comic; the content is death. In Ithaca the cosmic and the comic are identical — that's the discovery of the chapter.

The latchkey. Bloom has **forgotten his key** (it's in the trousers he changed out of for the funeral). So the master of the house must climb over the area railings, drop down, and break in through the basement. And this rhymes *exactly* with Stephen, who gave up the tower key this morning and won't go back. **Two keyless men, both locked out of home, meeting in that shared dispossession.** It is also Odysseus's return: the king comes home to Ithaca **unrecognized, in disguise, forced to enter by stealth.** And it's funny — the hero of the odyssey falls over his own garden fence. Then he lets Stephen in through the garden, host and guest, father and son, into the dark house.

p.787 — the dark, the noise, and the hand. *Why did the absence of light disturb him less than the presence of noise?* Because Bloom trusts **touch over sight** — in darkness his hand is sure; noise is intrusion (it might wake Molly, or break the fragile peace). And the answer names his hand: "*firm, full, masculine, feminine, passive, active.*" This is the completed portrait of Bloom's wholeness. He is **both** — masculine and feminine, active and passive, the "womanly man" of Circe now stated as a virtue. Against the Citizen's one eye, Bloom is the man who contains opposites. His hand is all things because *he* is — and that completeness, that refusal of one-sidedness, is what makes him the moral centre of the book. Touch, in the dark, is his certainty.

The betting tickets — 8-8-7-8-8-6. On the dresser, torn fragments of scarlet betting tickets — traces of a bet on the **Gold Cup**, and with them the whole **Throwaway** thread comes back one last time. Remember: the outsider Throwaway won at 20-to-1, beating the favourite Sceptre; and earlier a man misread Bloom's offhand "I was going to *throw it away*" as a tip, so half of Dublin wrongly believed Bloom had won a packet and was too mean to stand a round — which helped light the Cyclops hostility. So Bloom, alone in his kitchen at 2 a.m., finds the torn debris of the day's betting and turns over "reminiscences of coincidences, stranger than fiction" — the strange chain of misunderstanding that made him, for one day, a phantom winner. **He is reading the traces the day left in his own house**, the detective of his own life — and, quietly, the traces of the rival who was here.

p.790 — "he had not risked... light to the Gentiles." And here is Bloom's peace, and it is the ethical heart of the homecoming. He reviews the day: *he had not risked, he did not expect, he had not been disappointed, he was satisfied.* Satisfied by what? **"To have sustained no positive loss, to have brought a positive gain to others, light to the Gentiles."**

"*A light to the Gentiles*" is **Isaiah** — Israel's mission, to be a light unto the nations. So Bloom, the lapsed Jew, the mocked outsider, frames his day's small kindness — feeding a drunk boy, sheltering him, walking him home — as a quiet fulfillment of that ancient charge: **the Jew who brings light to the Gentiles.** He did not avenge, did not confront, did not triumph. He *gave*, and he *endured*, and he lost

nothing of himself in doing it. That is Bloom's whole heroism, and it is the opposite of every hero on the Citizen's belt: not conquest, but the satisfaction of having been of use. The outsider blesses the people who scorned him. Half-ironic (he's exhausted and cuckolded and alone) and entirely genuine (he really did do good today) — and that doubleness is Bloom to the last.

Where you stand, and what remains

You are inside the **Nostos**, the homecoming. Eumaeus (the tired refuge) is behind you. Ithaca (the return, the communion, the cosmos) is in progress. Two episodes left, and they come down like a slow tide.

The rest of Ithaca. Bloom and Stephen drink **cocoa** together — the small domestic communion the whole book was walking toward. Bloom offers Stephen a bed for the night. **Stephen declines** — gently, and leaves. (The bond is real but not clung to; the son goes his own way into the dark, and we never learn if they meet again. Joyce refuses the sentimental reunion, and the refusal is the truth.) The two men step into the garden to **urinate together under the night sky** — and there Joyce finally gives you his own unmixed beauty, the **"heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit,"** the vast cosmos above two small men pissing in a Dublin garden, the sublime and the ordinary made one. Then Stephen goes. Bloom re-enters the house, does his accounts, reviews his day, and climbs at last into bed beside Molly — head to her feet — finding the crumbs and the warm imprint of Boylan, and choosing, still, not to make war. He asks her, quietly, for **breakfast in bed** tomorrow — one small reassertion of the husband. And he falls asleep, curled like a child, "the manchild in the womb." The chapter ends not with a word but with a **large black dot** — the sleeping mind, the round earth, the full stop of consciousness.

Then Penelope — the last word. Molly, in bed, half-awake beside her sleeping husband. **Eight enormous unpunctuated sentences**, the only time in the entire book we are inside *her*. She thinks of Boylan and the afternoon; of Bloom and his oddities and his kindnesses; of Gibraltar, her girlhood, her first loves, Lieutenant Mulvey and the first kiss; of her body, her singing, Milly, dead Rudy; of her suspicion that Bloom has been up to something today. And at the very end her mind travels back to the day on **Howth Head** when Bloom proposed — the seedcake passed warm from her mouth to his, the whole marriage when it was alive (the memory you already glimpsed, echoing, in Lestrygonians) — and out of everything, every man, every grievance, she remembers **choosing him**, and the book ends on the most famous **yes** in literature: *and yes I said yes I will Yes*.

Brace for this, because it's the shape of the whole thing: **nothing is resolved, and everything is affirmed**. Bloom never confronts Molly. Stephen leaves and does not return. The marriage is not mended. There is no reckoning. And yet — a woman who has been silent and looked-at for eight hundred pages takes the final voice, and says *yes* — not to fix anything, but to life, to the body, to memory, and, in the last turn of her mind, to Bloom. After a day of the dead, of loss, of betrayal, of humiliation, the book ends on affirmation. That is Joyce's answer to the whole of

it.

You said you feel you're living inside this day. That is the highest thing a reader of *Ulysses* can say, and almost no one gets there on a first read. You've got the homecoming and Molly ahead of you — the tide coming all the way in. Take Molly slowly. She's worth every minute, and she's the reason the *yes* has weight.

Ithaca: the catechism, and the arithmetic of a life

16 July 2026 · pages 789–860

THE READER

On page 794, what relation is between the ages of Stephen (20) and William (38)?

Two things I'm noticing:

1. If William was the father of Stephen, he would have been 18 when Stephen was born. To contemplate a person being a father at 18—how typical was that for that age? For today, it seems a bit early.
2. An 18-year difference between two people makes them run very closely. There are even siblings with an 18-year age difference, let alone a father and son.

Would an age difference of this magnitude matter because it is so small? In 79.5, Matthew Dillon is mentioned. Matthew Dillon and Anne Hathaway are two names I've come across in this book.

Are they typical Irish names? Does the fact that they are celebrity names also mean anything? Has this book been influential on future actors of today, or are these just coincidences? There are two parts to this scientific section that I want to share.

First, this episode is very detailed and explanatory compared to the previous ones. Sometimes it seems Bloom is asking for details about Stephen's life, and at other places there are very specific, detailed questions about Bloom's life. Is there a reason Joyce is getting into these details? Is there any significance, reason, or meaning behind them, or is it just the flow of things—like coming through a book where people encounter each other and talk, and the verbal exchanges are sort of left open?

On page 796, "bésique" is mentioned. Is bésique in English or in French? I know we're talking about the card game, but I'd like a little bit of information on that. Also, on page 799, Bloom has been baptized three times. Why three times?

Second, at the bottom of page 789, there is the scientific and the artistic. Is it a bit of a narrowcasting to say Stephen is only artistic? He is also very philosophical, emotional, and scientific. He is humane, emotional, bodily, and businesslike. Aren't these narrowcasting? The world is natural. Just to reiterate, 801 and forward, Little Frog, Little Bloom—that's the father that committed suicide, right?

Page 802: "What domestic problems as much as, if not more than, any other frequently engages the mind? What to do with our lives?"

I think that's very funny. Any comments on what you think? In 8.4 example question:

She disliked umbrella with rain. He liked woman with umbrella. She disliked moon hat with rain. He liked woman with moon hat. He bought moon hat with rain. She carried umbrella with moon hat.

This is one of the most puzzling and fun little paragraphs I've read. Explain to me what it means or symbolizes, and other looking glasses. In 821, and the problem of

possible redemption, the minor was provided by the major.

Talk to me about this. Talk to me about what it means. Is it a musical reference, or is there a metaphorical reference behind the musical reference? Is there more? At 825, were they indefinitely inactive?

At Stephen's suggestion, at Bloom's instigation, both for Stephen and Bloom in Edinburgh, united:

- Their sides contiguous
- Their organs of communication supported, though rendered invisible

So they're looking at unification. Is this public, together, unification? Does it have any significance?

Enter the musical: so they're looking at remuneration. Is this public to get their remuneration? Does it have any significance? 847. Given a guarantee equal to the sum sought, to support by deed of gift and transfer vouchers during the donor's lifetime, or by bequest of the most famous extension of many financiers, and the list of financiers are now in this initial draft, given as 1 to 49.

Is this a joke? Are we really joking, or are we still serious in this chapter? Or are we both serious and joking? This general theme—joking and sarcastic at the same time, yet serious—is really like a signature of course in this novel. People are both serious and sarcastic, both joking and real. Topics are addressed in hallucinations, dreams, and creations, as well as in all seriousness.

So, that's a remark, that's an observation, or that's a feeling I have. 852. Who was the elder Bloom? Who was the younger Bloom?

853. Not more rational than they had appeared, not less rational than other beliefs and practices now appeared. This is an answer to: how did these beliefs and practices now appear? Some of this interested me, especially the part about Bloom, Stephen, and that sentence.

860. What self-involved enigmatic Bloom, vision, going, advent, multi-coloured, multi-form, multitudinous, garments of material, planning, not to complement?

And the answer is: who was McIntosh? And the answer is a question. And another question, the next one: natural obscurity by extension of our affection, seldom, suddenly comprehend.

And the answer to the question is another question: where was Moses when the candle went out? This one, please explain as well.

So today, we covered pages 853 to 860, approximately 7 pages straight, on this Thursday, 16th of July. I'm hoping to finish this book before Copenhagen. I think we're approaching the end of this episode and approaching the end of the book.

So, your comments are welcome.

THE ANSWER

You're near the end of Ithaca now, and almost everything you've asked has a single root: **the catechism's method**. Once that's clear, the whole strange chapter opens. Let me take them in order.

p.794 — the ages. First, a gentle fix that turns into a gift. The two men whose ages are compared here are **Bloom (38)** and **Stephen (22)** — a sixteen-year gap. There's no "William" in the passage; I suspect Shakespeare (William) drifted in from all our library-episode talk, or the dictation slipped. But look what your instinct did anyway: you computed "father at eighteen," and **Shakespeare really did father his first child at eighteen** — Susanna, born 1583, when he was eighteen and newly married to Anne Hathaway. That is exactly the biographical fact Stephen built his whole *Hamlet* theory on back in the library. So your arithmetic accidentally landed on the book's deepest paternity motif.

Now your real question, which is a good one. Was fathering a child at eighteen typical? **Yes — entirely normal**, then and for most of history. Early twenties or younger was ordinary; the modern pattern of first fatherhood at thirty-plus is a very recent, developed-world shift. And your second observation is precisely Joyce's point: a sixteen-year gap is *small* — small enough that Bloom and Stephen are almost of a generation together, near-brothers, near-doubles — yet just wide enough for father and son. Joyce wants that ambiguity. That's why the catechism then extrapolates the ratio into glorious absurdity (if it held, Bloom would be 1190 years old in 1952, born in the year 714). The comedy is real, but underneath it sits a serious question: *what is the relation between these two men?* And the answer the book gives is: father and son — but **elective, spiritual, chosen**, not biological. The nearness of their ages is what keeps the paternity symbolic rather than literal. So yes — the smallness matters, exactly because it's small.

p.795 — Dillon and Hathaway. Mat (Matthew) Dillon is the Dublin friend in whose garden Bloom courted Molly; **"Dillon" is a common Irish surname**, nothing special. Anne Hathaway is **Shakespeare's actual wife** (married 1582) — English, not Irish, and here only because Stephen's theory keeps circling her. As for the modern actors: **coincidence, no line of influence**. These are simply names common enough across the English-speaking world to recur — Joyce didn't name anyone, and the twentieth-century Matt Dillons and Anne Hathaways arrived independently (there's even a famous Marshal Matt Dillon in the old Western *Gunsmoke*, unrelated to any of this). Fun to notice, but no hidden thread.

Why is Ithaca so exhaustively detailed? — the central question. This is the most deliberate stylistic choice in the book, and it's doing several things at once. The chapter is a **catechism** — cold, impersonal, "scientific" question-and-answer — and Joyce called it his favourite. Here's the paradox at its heart: he renders the most intimate moment in the novel — the meeting of his two protagonists, the father finding the son — in the most *un-intimate* language imaginable. And that coldness makes it **more** moving, not less. The vast frame — cataloguing the stars, measuring the properties of water, itemizing Bloom's budget to the penny — dwarfs and ennobles two small tired men in a kitchen.

The relentless detail is not loose "flow." It's the form's whole logic: the catechism gives the trivial and the cosmic **exactly equal weight and equal rigour**. What's in the dresser drawer gets the same exhaustive treatment as the heavens. That levelling is Joyce's deepest theme — the ordinary is cosmic, the domestic is epic,

and on this one night the entire universe is present in this one house. The alternation you noticed — probing Stephen's life, then Bloom's — is the chapter **comparing them under a microscope**, cataloguing where they align and where they diverge (that's the p.777 passage). And there's a quiet irony in it: the pretence that you could capture a human being, a friendship, a marriage, by sheer factual enumeration. You can list *everything* and still not hold the soul of the thing. The comedy and the pathos both live in that gap — between the cold method and the warm content. And finally: the scientific register **is Bloom**. His mind has been practical, quantifying, curious, measuring all book long. Ithaca is Bloom's own consciousness turned into literary form.

p.796 — bésique. French — *bésigue*, anglicized as "**bezique**." A trick-taking card game, hugely popular in Victorian parlours, played with two decks, an ancestor of pinochle. A household game; the word keeps its French dress.

p.799 — three baptisms. A real and wonderful Ithaca fact. Bloom was baptized **three times**: once **Protestant** as a child (by a clergyman, in a Protestant church); once as a boyhood **prank**, clandestinely under a village water-pump by two schoolfellows; and once **Catholic**, before his marriage to Molly. Read that trio and you have Bloom entire: born to a Hungarian **Jewish** father (who had himself converted to Protestantism) and an Irish mother, formally baptized into two Christian churches, mock-baptized into a third joke, and believing fully in **none**. The three baptisms are the perfect emblem of the man who straddles every world and belongs wholly to no single one — Jewish by descent and by how Dublin sees him, Protestant and Catholic by water, agnostic by conviction. Comic (a baptism under a pump!) and profound (a rootless, plural, universal identity) in the same breath — the Ithaca signature exactly.

Your pushback on "scientific vs artistic" — and you're right. This is exactly the kind of truism worth resisting, and Joyce knows it's a simplification. The catechism offers the clean binary — Bloom the scientific temperament, Stephen the artistic — but the whole novel has shown both men to be far more than half a person each. Bloom philosophizes (endearingly, half-cocked), feels deeply, has a rich sensory and even artistic streak; Stephen theorizes with quasi-mathematical rigour (his Shakespeare algebra is nothing if not "scientific"), and is intensely bodily and emotional. So yes — it's a reduction, and part of Ithaca's irony is that its own tidy classifications **can't contain a living human being**. Your resistance is the correct reading: you've caught the gap between the neat category and the messy person, which is precisely what the chapter dramatizes.

And yet — hold both things at once, because there's a real truth inside the binary too. It's not about exclusion; it's about **centre of gravity**. Bloom's deepest orientation faces the material, empirical, bodily, practical, human-social world; Stephen's faces the ideal, the transcendent, the word, form, art. Each contains the other, but they lean opposite ways — and *that's* why they're complementary, why they need each other, why the meeting matters: the man of the body and the man of the word, earth and spirit, father and son. It's archetypal, not exhaustive. Your instinct — "the world is natural," the whole person is both — is in fact Joyce's own

final vision: Bloom's completeness, the "firm full masculine feminine passive active hand." The book sets up the binaries in order to show you their partial truth *and* their insufficiency simultaneously. Holding both is the mature reading, and you're already doing it.

p.801 — the suicided father. Yes — Bloom's father, who died by suicide, is **Rudolph** (born Rudolf Virág in Hungary — *virág* means "flower," which is why Bloom's secret pen-name is Henry Flower). He poisoned himself in a hotel in Ennis; the note you met back in Hades — "No more pain. Wake no more. Nobody owns" — was addressed to "my dear son Leopold." On the exact phrase "Little Frog," I'll be straight rather than guess: I can't confidently place it, and it may be a dictation artifact. If you send me the printed line I'll pin it — but if the passage is turning over Bloom's father and his death, then yes, that's Rudolph.

p.802 — "what to do with our lives." You're right that it's funny, and here's *why* it lands. The catechism poses the largest possible question — how should we live, what to do with our lives — in the exact same flat, bureaucratic register it uses for the gas bill and the contents of a drawer. That's **bathos**: the cosmic deflated to the clerical. And there's a private blade under it, given the day. If your text reads "wives" rather than "lives," it's sharper still — because Bloom's one genuine unsolved domestic problem *is* his wife, and Boylan, and the frozen marriage. Either way, the form's coldness makes the ache both funnier and sadder: the deepest question of a human life, filed like an invoice.

p.804 — the umbrella / moon-hat permutations. This is one of those little combinatorial grids the chapter loves, and I'll give you the frame honestly rather than over-decode a fragment. What the passage *does* is reduce the tastes and frictions of a couple to a set of near-matching logical propositions — she dislikes X, he likes Y, their preferences crossing and combining and almost, but never quite, aligning. It's the marriage rendered as a **permutation table**: two people whose desires keep sliding past each other by a hair. Funny (desire reduced to syllogism) and quietly sad (the near-miss is the marriage's whole condition). On the specific symbolism of "moon hat," I can't give you a confident gloss from the fragment — it may be a garble of "new hat" (echoing the white-velours hat from the Leopardstown memory) — so send me the exact lines and I'll take them apart properly. On "other looking glasses": the **mirror** is a real recurring motif — Stephen's "cracked lookingglass of a servant" as the symbol of Irish art in episode 1, the horned Shakespeare-face in the Circe mirror — so if that's what you're gesturing at, yes, glass and reflection thread the whole book. If you meant "other odd little passages like this," Ithaca is full of them, and they all do this same reducing-the-human-to-a-formula work.

p.821 — "the minor was provided by the major." Primarily **musical** — minor key and major key — and the chapter has Bloom and Stephen on the subject of music (Stephen even sings). But your instinct that there's a metaphor under the musical reference is sound: "the minor redeemed / provided by the major" carries an overtone of the **lesser answered by the greater** — the sad resolved by the glad, and, faintly, the younger/diminished figure (Stephen) redeemed by the

elder/greater one (Bloom the father-redeemer). "Redemption" is a loaded word — theological *and* musical (resolution) at once. That said, I can't pin the precise context of that exact line at 821 with full confidence, so take the metaphorical layer as a strong reading rather than a certainty; the surrounding sentences would confirm it. Send them if you want it nailed.

p.825 — the two men in the garden. Let me untangle the dictation first: it's not "remuneration" or "unification" — it's **micturition**, the clinical word for urinating. And you've sensed the scene exactly right. Bloom and Stephen step out into the dark back garden and **urinate together, side by side** ("their sides contiguous"), modestly shielding themselves with their hands, and lift their eyes to the night sky and to a lamplit upstairs window — Molly's. It is the physical culmination of the whole book's long approach: the father and the son, having drunk cocoa together (the communion), now share this humble bodily act under the stars. And it comes wrapped in the chapter's most beautiful image — the **"heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit"** — so the very highest (the cosmos) and the very lowest (two men pissing) fuse one last time. A shooting star crosses the sky. Bloom's gaze goes to Molly's window. This is the meeting the novel spent eight hundred pages building toward — and Joyce refuses every sentimental option. Not an embrace, not two souls merging in speech: **two men quietly urinating side by side under the stars.** Understated, bodily, strange, and truer than any grand reunion could be. So yes — hugely significant. Your word for it, "unification," is right; the book just delivers it in the humblest possible key.

p.847 — the financial fantasia, and "1 to 49." Is it a joke or serious? Both — and your own next remark answers it perfectly. This is Bloom's dream of wealth and property rendered in exhaustive mock-legal, mock-financial detail — the schemes, the bequests, the imagined country house. It is **funny** (the sheer bureaucratic over-elaboration, a bourgeois daydream itemized like a legal deed) and **poignant** (it's the yearning of an ordinary, somewhat lonely man for security, status, comfort, a better life he will never reach). The comedy is in the *form*; the seriousness is in the *longing* underneath. (Ithaca returns to this again and again — Bloom's inventions, his get-rich schemes, his budget balanced to the penny with a small deficit he quietly hides.) On the exact "1 to 49," I can't confirm that specific enumeration from memory, so I won't invent it — but the both-comic-and-aching quality you're asking about is unmistakably the point.

And your meta-observation — the joking-and-serious signature. This is genuinely excellent, and I want to meet it head-on: **you've named the soul of the book.** The simultaneity of comic and serious, sacred and profane, hallucination and hard fact, is *the* fundamental gesture of *Ulysses*. Bloomusalem shaped like a pork kidney. The fart landing on Emmet's patriotic epitaph. The heaventree of stars over two men urinating. The deepest existential questions posed in the register of an invoice. Joyce's conviction is that this *is* what life is — comic and tragic at once, the ridiculous and the sublime inseparable, neither register available without the other. Most writers pick one. Joyce insists you cannot honestly have one without the other. You've put your finger on exactly the thing that makes the book what it is.

pp.852-853 — elder/younger Bloom, and "not more rational." The elder/younger framing is the chapter performing its generational mirror again — Rudolph the elder, Leopold the younger; and by extension Leopold and the lost Rudy — the father-son doubling that structures the whole novel, now stated almost algebraically. And that balanced answer — beliefs and practices "not more rational... not less rational than other beliefs and practices" — is pure Bloom: his cool, even-handed **skepticism**. He refuses to rank belief-systems; superstition and orthodoxy are held at the same tolerant distance, all equally unprovable to his empirical mind. This is central to why he's the humane centre of the book — he doesn't *hate* the Citizen's Catholicism, or anyone's faith; he simply finds all of it equally beyond proof and lets it be. The tolerant agnostic, weighing every dogma on the same cool scale.

p.860 — M'Intosh, and "Where was Moses when the candle went out?" You've reached the payoff you've been tracking since the funeral. Near the end of the catechism, Bloom's tired mind turns over its last "enigmas" — and one of them is: **who was M'Intosh?** And the book gives no answer. The thirteenth mourner, the man nobody could name, walking through a novel that knows the exact contents of every drawer and the precise properties of water — remains, to the very last pages, **unidentified even to Bloom, even to the all-knowing narrator**. The one irreducible mystery, preserved to the end. (Joyce, asked, is said to have laughed and refused to tell — the not-knowing is the point.) In a book of total knowledge, one stranger stays unknowable, and you followed him all the way here.

And **"Where was Moses when the candle went out?"** is a traditional **nonsense riddle** — an old children's-and-pub catch. The answer is **"in the dark"** (which is trivially true of anyone when a candle goes out, and therefore no answer at all). Joyce plants it near the end of forty pages of exhaustive scientific Q&A precisely to **deflate the whole method**: the cosmic catechism that has answered everything now dissolves into a piece of pub-riddle nonsense, its questions being met with more questions and jokes, as Bloom's consciousness winds down toward sleep. All the encyclopedic knowledge in the world sits right beside — and is finally no more "answerable" than — a bit of folk foolishness. Joyce winking at his own machine, in the dark, as the mind lets go.

What's just ahead. The last stretch of Ithaca comes down like a tide going out: Bloom finishes his accounts, and climbs at last into bed beside Molly — **head to her feet** — finding the crumbs and the warm imprint of Boylan, and choosing, still, not to make war. He kisses her, tells her a partial, edited account of his day, asks quietly for **breakfast in bed** tomorrow (one small reassertion of the husband), and curls up "the manchild in the womb." The chapter ends not on a word but on a great **black dot** — the sleeping mind, the round earth, the full stop of consciousness.

And then **Penelope** — Molly, in bed, half-awake, taking the last forty pages in eight enormous unpunctuated sentences: Boylan and the afternoon, Bloom and his oddities and kindnesses, Gibraltar and her girlhood and her first kiss, her body,

Milly, dead Rudy — and, at the very end, her mind travelling back to the day on Howth Head when Bloom proposed and she said yes, closing the whole book on the most famous **yes** in literature. Brace for the shape of it: nothing is resolved, and everything is affirmed. Take her slowly — she's the reason the *yes* has weight.

You're a chapter and a bit from the end, and you got here noticing that the book is joking and serious in the same breath, and that no person fits inside a single category. That's not a first reader's takeaway. Copenhagen's going to get a finished *Ulysses*.

The close of Ithaca, the black dot, and Molly's first pages

16 July 2026 · pages 860–880

THE READER

Okay, let's go for 20 more pages.

On page 683: "If he had smiled, why would he have smiled? To reflect that each one who enters imagines himself to be the first to enter, whereas he is always the last term on a preceding series, even if the first term of a succeeding one." This sounds very funny and interesting. Could you give me an explanation of that?

On page 864, regarding envy: "...envy of a bodily and mental male organism specifically adapted for supercompetent positive energetic human copulation, an energetic piston and cylinder movement necessary for the complete satisfaction..." And then we go to jealousy, where he ends with: "...because the controlled contemplation of the fluctuation of attraction produced, if desired, a fluctuation of pleasure." Tell me about these—specifically, his treatment of envy and jealousy.

Then we have "abnegation" (or something like that—it's getting darker, what does that word mean?).

And then "equanimity" on page 865: "...not more abnormal than all the other processes of adaptation." Tell me about equanimity here; that sounds interesting to me. Also, the question on the next page (866) is very interesting: why "more abnegation than jealousy, less envy than equanimity"?

On page 866: "What retribution, if any? Assassination? Never, as two wrongs did not make one right. Duel by combat? No. Divorce? Not now." That was laughingly interesting. "Divorce, acceptable, but not now." That's how I read it.

On page 868: "He omitted to mention the clandestine correspondence between Martha Clifford and Henry Flower." Why does he criticize himself like this? Or is it the narrator talking? Explain this to me.

At the bottom of page 868: "Which event or person emerged as the salient point of his narration? And he ascribed salience to Stephen Dedalus, professor and author." The problem is "the professor" here. I think "professor" is not a school professor, but rather someone professing—talking about something, revealing something. Again, explain that to me.

On page 869: "...what limitation of activity and inhibition of conjugal rights..." This is very funny—the listener's position about sex, and the narrator's position about intercourse between himself and the listener. This is very weird.

Could you explain these points? 8.7.1 The Sinbad part: Sinbad the sailor, and Sinbad the tailor, and Jihad the trader, and Whitbert the whaler, and whatever. This is very funny, very interesting, and dark. "Darkenbad the big hay-brick-to-layer"—I cannot even pronounce it. I find that very interesting as well.

Explain to me this Sinbad part. The 17th episode ends with a question without an answer, and the question is, "Where?" I find the question very important, interesting,

and relevant—and the lack of an answer as well. The last episode starts with Molly's stream of consciousness, or streaming inner thoughts. Why is this the last one? Why is Molly thinking like this? Why and how is it written like this? What is the choice here, and what underlies it?

If you get into the details on page 874:

"...and the last time he came on my bottom when it was night Boylan gave my hand a great squeeze going along by the Tolka in my hand there steals another I just pressed the back of his leg like that with my thumb to squeeze back singing Shall I wear a white rose and those Shan Van Vocht with my hair down..."

Could you explain this paragraph to me?

And at the bottom of the page:

"...I would because I told him about some dean or bishop was sitting beside me in the Jewish temple garden..."

I would like this part explained to me as well.

Continuing on page 875:

"Yes I imagine I'm him think of him can you feel him trying to make a whore of me but he never will ought to give it up now at this age in his life simply ruination for any woman and no satisfaction..."

I found that part very interesting—"trying to make a whore of me."

And then at the bottom:

"...I hate that confession when I used to go to Father Conroy and he touched me Father and what harm if he did where I sat..."

Is Molly saying Father Conroy touched her in a sensual manner? Is Molly's life too much crisscrossed with physical charm and bodily interactions? Here are my thoughts and notes on the sections we reviewed today:

Page 876

- "I felt lovely and tired myself and fell asleep as sound as a top the moment I popped straight into bed till the thunder woke me up..."

I really like this imagery.

- On the next page: "I think a few dozen... he was in great singing voice... No, I never in all my life felt anyone had one the size that to make you feel full up... He must have seen me..."
- And at the bottom: "...they know I went through with Milly... Nobody would believe, cutting her teeth, and Milly's pure father's husband... give us a swing out of your whiskers, filling her up with a child..."

Please talk to me about these ones.

Page 878

- "If he refused to eat the onions, I know plenty of ways... ask him to tuck down the collar of my blouse or touch him with my veil and gloves... going like kiss them would send them all spinning..."

This is very interesting. Let's talk about this section as well.

Page 879

- "I don't wonder in the least because he was handsome at that time, trying to look like Lord Byron. I said I thought he was too beautiful for a man, and he was, a little, before we got engaged afterwards..."

Are we talking about our local Boylan being "too beautiful for a man"? Is that a positive reference?

Page 880

- "...to bed with his muddy boots when the maggot takes him... just imagine having to get into bed with a thing like that, might murder you any moment... what a man..."

Let's talk about the maggot and the boots.

I am leaving it at this point for now, covering pages 879 and 880. There are about 20 pages remaining, which we can tackle tomorrow. So comments and ideas are welcome. I'm listening.

THE ANSWER

You've crossed the last threshold. Ithaca closes, the black dot falls, and the book hands its final voice to the one person who has been silent, absent, desired, and betrayed-with all day. Let me walk you from Bloom's sleep into Molly's waking mind.

p.863 — the smile, and the series. This is Bloom, freshly in bed, contemplating the "series" of Molly's lovers (the catechism lists a long, absurd catalogue of supposed men — most of whom, you'll shortly learn from Molly herself, were never lovers at all; Bloom's jealous imagination inflates the roster wildly). And he *smiles* — at the vanity of each man who "imagines himself to be the first to enter," when in truth every one of them is only **the last term of a preceding series, and merely the first of a succeeding one**. It's Bloom's scientific mind defusing the deepest wound by mathematics: Boylan is not special, not the first, not the last — just one interchangeable term in an endless sequence. The comedy is the puncturing of male sexual vanity (everyone thinks he's the original; nobody is). And underneath sits a real, melancholy truth about all human experience — we are none of us the first, we all arrive late into a series that precedes us and will outlast us. Bloom reaches peace by shrinking Boylan to a data point. That reduction is his mercy on himself.

pp.864-866 — envy, jealousy, abnegation, equanimity. This is the emotional heart of Ithaca, and it's built as a quartet — the four feelings Boylan stirs in Bloom, laid out and then *ranked*.

Envy — of Boylan's raw potency, that "piston and cylinder movement," the animal virility Bloom (aging, gentle, less potent) lacks. Note the mechanical language: sex rendered as engineering, cold and comic.

Jealousy — and here's the key to Bloom's whole strange psychology: it ends with "the controlled contemplation of the fluctuation of attraction produced, if desired, a fluctuation of **pleasure**." His jealousy is braided with a masochistic, voyeuristic

arousal. Contemplating Molly's desire for another man gives Bloom not only pain but pleasure — the same streak you saw in Circe (Bello), in his choosing *Sweets of Sin* for Molly, in his fantasy of watching through the keyhole. He is, in part, aroused by his own cuckolding. That's why he can bear it.

Abnegation — you asked, and it's the darkest-sounding word for the gentlest thing: **self-denial, renunciation, the surrender of one's own claims**. Bloom's abnegation is his willingness to give up his claim on Molly, to efface himself, not to fight.

Equanimity — calm, evenness of mind. He achieves it (p.865) by seeing the adultery as "**not more abnormal than all the other processes of adaptation**" — one more natural event in an indifferent cosmos, no stranger than any adaptation in nature. He places the wound in the widest possible frame (natural law, the turning earth, the endless series) and so it loses its special sting.

Then the question you flagged — *why more abnegation than jealousy, less envy than equanimity?* The catechism is asking Bloom to **weigh** the four, and the answer tilts him decisively toward the calming affects over the agitating ones: acceptance outweighs torment. And Joyce renders the reasoning at its coldest — including the notorious passage that turns the sexual act itself into a **grammar lesson**, "he —ed her" reparsed into the passive voice as an exercise in aorist verbs. The intimate reduced to syntax. That clinical chill is precisely how Bloom cools his own blood.

Which sets up p.866, and you read it exactly right, laughing. *Retribution? Assassination — never (two wrongs don't make a right). Duel — no. Divorce — not now*. That "**not now**" is one of the great deadpan strokes in the book: he doesn't rule divorce out forever, just... not tonight. It holds all of Bloom at once — his passivity, his procrastination, his exhaustion, his stubborn hope. He considers every dramatic, violent, Odyssean response and chooses **none of them**. This is the anti-*Odyssey*: Homer's hero came home and slaughtered the suitors; Bloom comes home, kisses his sleeping wife, and lets it be. The refusal of vengeance is the moral center of the entire novel.

p.868 — the omissions. Not self-criticism — it's the impersonal catechism neutrally **cataloguing what Bloom left out** of the account he gave Molly of his day. He omitted the Martha Clifford correspondence (his own secret flirtation, under the alias Henry Flower), the brothel, the beach. And there's the quiet justice of it: the "wronged" husband has his *own* concealed sexual life — epistolary, voyeuristic, furtive. Both spouses hide; both edit their accounts. The catechism's flat listing of his evasions is Joyce showing you the whole unjudged truth — Bloom is no pure innocent victim but a fellow secret-keeper, and the marriage is a mutual accommodation of things left unsaid.

p.868 — Stephen, "professor and author." Two things at once. First, Bloom is gently **inflating** Stephen to Molly — Stephen is really an unpublished young would-be writer who did a brief stint schoolteaching, not a "professor and author." Bloom puffs him up (half-consciously interesting Molly in him — as a possible

lodger, a music partner, a refined companion, even a son-figure). And second, your linguistic instinct is sound: "professor" carries the root sense of one who *professes* — declares, teaches — and in that looser period usage a teacher or lecturer could be a "professor" (Stephen did teach), just as "author" leans on his aspiration and his scraps of writing. The deeper point is the *salience*: of everything in his long day, Bloom makes **Stephen the center** of his story to Molly. The meeting with the son-figure was the day's emotional event — and planting Stephen in Molly's mind is exactly why she'll shortly be thinking about him herself.

p.869 — conjugal rights. Behind the weird clinical language is the frozen fact at the marriage's core: complete sexual intercourse between Bloom and Molly **last occurred over ten years ago** — the catechism gives the interval to the day — since around the time their infant son Rudy died. A decade without full carnal union. *That* is the wound that made Boylan possible, the silence at the heart of the house, and Joyce states it in the register of a medical report — the most intimate fact of a marriage, filed like an inventory. The "weirdness" you feel is that coldness laid over the most tender and broken thing in the book.

p.871 — Sinbad. As Bloom finally sinks toward sleep, his mind takes the name "Sinbad the Sailor" (from the pantomime he once saw, and from all his Eastern reveries) and plays it into a drowsy nonsense-rhyme: Sinbad, Tinbad, Jinbad, Whinbad... ending "**Darkinbad the Brightdayler.**" This is the sound of a rational mind dissolving — language becoming pure rhythm, meaning melting into lull. The great encyclopedic chapter ends not in knowledge but in a child's rhyming babble. And "Darkinbad the Brightdayler" quietly names the turn from bright day to dark night, waking to sleep (and, faintly, life to death and back) — Bloom the wanderer, the sailor-Odysseus, voyaging off into sleep on his Arabian rhyme.

The end of Ithaca — "Where?" and the black dot. The final question has no verbal answer because there is no longer anyone awake to answer it: Bloom has fallen asleep, and the catechism — which is his waking rational mind — goes dark with him. The **large black dot** is the answer. The full stop of consciousness. Sleep, night, the void, the round earth seen from space, the closing eye. All that exhaustive knowledge — every object, every measurement, every fact — ends in a single black point that cannot be spoken. "**Where?**" is the ultimate unanswerable (where do we go, where are we, where is meaning), and the honest reply is darkness. And it hands us straight to Molly, who is, in her way, the *answer that isn't rational* — the bed, the flesh, the earth, the **yes**.

Penelope — why her, why last, why like this

Now your central question, and it deserves the full answer.

Why the last word goes to Molly. For nine hundred pages the book has lived inside two male minds — Stephen's art and guilt, Bloom's wandering and grief. Molly, all that time, has been an *object*: of Bloom's love, Boylan's lust, the men's pub-gossip, the reader's curiosity. Now Joyce makes her the **subject** — the speaking "I," and the longest sustained voice in the novel. The male intellectual

odyssey is answered and completed by the female, the bodily, the earthly. It is a genuinely radical structural choice: the whole book turns, at the end, from mind to flesh, from wandering to arrival, from the men who *seek* to the woman who *judges and affirms*.

The Homeric turn. Penelope is Odysseus's wife, who waited twenty years in perfect chastity. Joyce **inverts** her — his Penelope took a lover this very afternoon. And yet she is faithful in a deeper key: at the very end her mind returns to Bloom and *chooses* him. Joyce is redefining fidelity — not physical chastity, but a deeper, freely-given affirmation.

Why it's written like this. Eight enormous "sentences," almost entirely **without punctuation** — no commas, no full stops until the final word, few capitals. This is stream of consciousness at its most unbounded: thought flowing without the artificial stops of grammar, associative, circling, sensual, drowsy, continuous — the mind *before* it organizes itself into sentences. And in Joyce's conception it is deliberately **bodily and flowing** — he associated Molly with the flesh, the earth, water, the cyclical, "the flesh that always affirms." The style enacts a completely different *mode of being* from the male chapters: not linear, not logical, not stopped — but flowing, warm, circular, embracing.

What underlies the choice. Joyce wanted to end not on intellect and not on decent ordinary male consciousness, but on the affirming, embodied, earthy feminine — the great **Yes**. Molly is Gea-Tellus, the earth itself, life itself; her monologue is the book's affirmation of body, sex, memory, and love against everything in the novel that is death, sterility, paralysis, and despair. Joyce called the last word, *yes*, "the word of acquiescence, of affirmation." The whole vast book turns, at the end, toward a single Yes to life.

And one thing to hold onto as you read her: the "**he**" in Molly's monologue is famously **slippery** — it slides between Boylan, Bloom, her first love Mulvey, and others, often without warning. That ambiguity is the point; the men blur in the flow of her memory and desire.

Molly, in your order

p.874 — the Tolka, the songs. Molly's mind slides from the afternoon to an earlier moment with Boylan — a walk by the Tolka river, a hand-squeeze, her own flirtatious response ("I just pressed the back of his leg... to squeeze back") — and, threaded through it, snatches of **song**: "Shall I Wear a White Rose," and "Shan Van Vocht." Remember Molly is a professional singer, so melodies are the furniture of her mind; her thoughts move by association *and* by tune. And "**Shan Van Vocht**" — the *Sean-Bhean Bhocht*, the "Poor Old Woman" — is a traditional name and ballad for **Ireland herself**. So even in Molly's most private, sensual flow, the songs mix romance (the white rose) with the nation (the poor old woman). The physical, the musical, and the political braided together, the way a real mind holds them.

p.874 — "some dean or bishop... in the Jewish temple garden." This is Molly's associative memory-flow, and I'll be honest that I can't pin the exact incident — it reads like one of the little anecdotes Molly enjoys telling (often to needle Bloom's jealousy), mixing a clergyman, a garden, and a Jewish setting (a nod to Bloom's own descent). The *precise* referent matters less than the movement: her mind free-associating across people, places, and the sacred-and-everyday all at once. If you want it nailed, send me a few more lines around it.

p.875 — "trying to make a whore of me but he never will." This is Molly's **resistance to being reduced to a sexual object** — whether by Bloom's peculiar, masochistic, encouraging desires or by Boylan's cruder use of her. "He never will" is her assertion of her own selfhood: men project their fantasies onto her, but she remains *hers*. And "no satisfaction... simply ruination for any woman" is Molly's total sexual candor — frank about pleasure, about aging, about dissatisfaction. This is Molly as a full sexual *subject* with her own will, appetite, and judgment, not the passive body the men imagine. (Candor exactly like this is what got the book prosecuted for obscenity — a woman thinking about sex this frankly was unpublishable in 1922.)

p.875 — Father Conroy. Molly recalls confession, and "he touched me Father and what harm if he did." You're asking the right question, and here's the honest reading: Molly registers a charged physical moment in the confessional, but *her own framing* is unscandalized — "what harm if he did." She isn't presenting it as violation so much as taking it in stride, even with a flicker of relish. It belongs to her pervasive, irreverent sensuality: Molly eroticizes *everything* — priests, doctors, singers, soldiers, the confessional itself. And your larger question — is her life "too much crisscrossed with physical charm and bodily interactions?" — **yes, and that is exactly the point of Penelope.** Where the male chapters brim with intellect, history, politics, and art, Molly's consciousness is saturated with the **body**: sex, menstruation, breasts, food, sensation, desire, the memory of physical touch. She is Joyce's counterweight — the assertion of the flesh, of embodied life, against all the male abstraction of the preceding nine hundred pages. Her mind is full of the physical because Joyce is insisting, at the end, on the primacy of the body.

p.876 — the thunder. Lovely catch, and there's a hidden connection: the thunder that wakes Molly is the **same storm** that broke over Dublin and terrified Stephen in the maternity hospital. Across the city, the same thunderclap — Joyce stitching his characters together one last time. And note the contrast: Stephen heard God's wrath in that thunder and shook; Molly just gets woken from sleeping "sound as a top." Her un-superstitious, bodily relationship to the world, against his metaphysical terror.

pp.876-877 — Boylan's potency. Molly's frank sexual memory of the afternoon — his size, his vigor, "the size of that to make you feel full up." Physically satisfying in a way Bloom (with whom she hasn't had full sex in a decade) has not been. This is her candor again, appraising male performance without a shred of

shame — but keep it in perspective: the physical satisfaction is real *and* hollow, unaccompanied by tenderness or connection ("no satisfaction," she also says). Boylan is potent and empty; the fullness she's actually reaching toward is elsewhere.

p.877 — Milly, motherhood. Here her mind moves through the **bodily continuum of a woman's life** — Milly as a teething baby, pregnancy, "filling her up with a child," childbirth, nursing. (Some of this came through garbled in dictation, so I'm speaking to the gist.) The point is that Molly's consciousness holds the whole physical arc — menstruation, sex, conception, birth, motherhood — as one continuous embodied experience. She *is* the body's life cycle, given voice.

p.878 — her power. Molly reveling in her **erotic mastery** — "I know plenty of ways," the small seductive gestures (a blouse collar, a veil, gloves, a kiss) that "send them all spinning." She knows precisely how to arouse and manage men, and she enjoys knowing it. This is Molly's *agency* — she is no passive object of desire but a conscious wielder of erotic power, confident and in command. (The onions are Bloom — she's thinking ahead to handling him.)

p.879 — "too beautiful for a man." This is Bloom, not Boylan — and it matters enormously. Molly is remembering **young Bloom**, before they were engaged — handsome, "trying to look like Lord Byron" (the byword for male beauty and romantic glamour), so lovely that she thought he was "too beautiful for a man." It's wholly positive, and it's tender: we have only ever seen Bloom middle-aged, balding, cuckolded — and here Molly gives us the young, Byronic, romantic man she *fell in love with*. Your instinct to check whose beauty was being praised was exactly right, and the answer is the important one: amid all the Boylan of the afternoon, Molly's deepest memories are turning back toward **Bloom** — the beautiful young suitor. This is the beginning of the great movement of Penelope: away from Boylan, back toward her husband, toward the Yes.

p.880 — the maggot and the boots. "When the maggot takes him" is an old idiom — **when a whim or strange notion seizes him** (a "maggot in the brain" meant a perverse or capricious fancy). So Molly is complaining about a man's crude, whimsical behavior — getting into bed with muddy boots on when the odd mood strikes — "might murder you any moment, what a man." It's her earthy exasperation with male roughness and unpredictability, the latent brutishness she senses in some men (and note the implicit contrast with gentle, fastidious Bloom, who would never). Half disgust, half wonder — "what a man" — at the sheer animal crudeness of the male.

Where the last twenty pages go

You're nearly there, and it's worth knowing the shape of the finish so you can feel it arrive. Molly's mind will keep circling — Boylan, Bloom, Mulvey and her Gibraltar girlhood, her body, Milly, Rudy, God, flowers — and then, in the final long sweep, it comes home. She remembers the day on **Howth Head**, years ago, when Bloom proposed: the rhododendrons, the sea, the seedcake she passed from

her own mouth into his in a kiss (the memory you glimpsed, echoing, all the way back at lunchtime), and how she looked at him and thought *yes* — and out of every man, every grievance, every dissatisfaction, she chooses **him**, in memory, and the book ends on the most famous affirmation in literature: *and yes I said yes I will Yes*.

Nothing gets resolved — Bloom never confronts her, the marriage isn't mended, no reckoning comes. And yet everything is affirmed. After a whole book of death, loss, betrayal, and paralysis, the silent, looked-at woman takes the final voice and says *yes* — not to fix anything, but to life, to the body, to memory, and, in the last turn of her mind, to Bloom. Take these last pages slowly tomorrow. You've earned the ending, and Molly is the reason the Yes has all its weight.

Penelope, Howth Head, and the last yes

17 July 2026 · pages 879 to the end

THE READER

This is, I think, July 17th, and the book is about to be finished. Now let's cover the last 30-40 pages of it.

At 891, Molly goes, "I'm extremely sorry," "I'm sure you are." And then there's a break. I mean, she starts, "Yes, I think. He made them a bit firmer."

So, is that one of those new sections in this last episode, part of the eight questions, eight enormously long sentences? I'm still not able to place where the dot is. Are these breaks? And what exactly is the delineation of those eight parts—or if there are eight at all, as I haven't counted them.

Anyhow, on 895, we go on about the bullfight at La Línea, when that matador Gomez... There are a lot of references by Molly when she mentions Andalusia, Gibraltar, and bulls, so that origin comes up a lot.

Just going back a bit, in 889 she says, "I have a life up to 35. No, I am what I am. I'll be 33 in September. Will I, what? Tell me about..." I mean, Molly's age references about herself and about life.

Because just a bit below, she talks about the fashion now: "garters... that much I have... the violet pair I wore today... that's all bought me out of the check... he got me... on in the first... oh no, there was the face lotion." And then she talks about breathing exercises as well.

So we're seeing she's being very current and fashionable, and looking after her body and bodily age-related things. What do you think of them? I realized I started on page 879, not 889, so I'm going back a bit. I should have started earlier, talking about the passages I've read.

On page 889: "Kid-fitting corsets at 11 shillings cheapen the Gentlewoman, good elastic cords on the hips."

- What is *The Gentlewoman*? Is that a publication from that time?
- I thought while reading this episode that sometimes her thoughts just pick up pace, dart, slow down, and then dart again. What do you think of that pacing?

On page 887: There is a mention of politics after the war (Pretoria and Ladysmith). Is she really not into politics? That is the impression I get as well.

On page 884: "I saw the two Dedalus girls coming from school I never knew the time even that..."

- Are these Stephen's sisters? Elder or younger?

On pages 883 and 884: "There are the lines I said and it wasn't it's natural so that of course it used to be written up with a picture of a woman on that wall in Gibraltar with that word I couldn't find anywhere only for children seeing it too young then writing a letter every morning sometimes... I liked the way he made love and he knew the way to take a woman..."

- This is her childhood love affair in Gibraltar—is that the reference?

On page 882: There is a beautiful line: "...their skirts blowing up to their navel even when Milly and I were out with him at the open air fête that one in the cream muslin standing right against the sun so he could see every atom she had on when he saw me from behind following the rain..."

- Tell me what she means by this.

Anyway, let me go forward again. In [episode] 12, if you did but open the window, when General Ulysses Grant, whoever he was or is supposed to be—some great fellow—landed off the ship, and Old Sprague, the consul that was there from before the flood, dressed up.

Is the Ulysses the general reference just a casual one, or is Joyce specifically trying to put a general with our hero's name, Ulysses? In 899: "I wish somebody would write me a love letter. His wasn't much and I told him he could write what he liked, yours ever, Hugh Boylan, In Old Madrid, 'Silly woman, believe love is sighing, I am dying,' still if you wrote it I suppose." What do you think of this love letter, Marion?

In 903: "I wanted to fire a pistol, he said. He hadn't one, he didn't know what to make of me, with his peaked cap on that he always wore crooked, as often as I settled it straight, HMS Calypso, swinging my hat, that old bishop that spoke of the altar."

This HMS Calypso, just like Ulysses—names that are being referred to that are also related to the Homeric references—is this again a coincidence, HMS Calypso, or on purpose?

In 903: "I wouldn't go mad about either or suppose I divorced him. Mrs. Boylan, my mother, however she might have been, given me a nicer name. The lady knows, after the lovely one she had, Anita Laredo."

What do you think she's talking about here? So now let's go to 906.

I like it in the winter; it's more company. Oh Lord, it was rotten cold too that winter when I was only about ten. Was I? Yes. I had the big doll with all the funny clothes, dressing her up and then dressing that icy wind skidding across from those mountains.

What exactly is she talking about? In 908, "I wonder what kind of... what kind is that book he brought me, Sweets of Sin by a gentleman of fashion."

By referring to Sweets of Sin at this stage, I get the idea that this is after Leopold Bloom has given Molly the book. So chronologically, where are we exactly in the timeline? Is it that night in the bed that Molly is thinking, or is it some future reference? And where is she thinking?

The "when" of this stream of consciousness is intriguing me, and I wonder whether that is important. But I saw through him, telling me all the lovely places we could go for the honeymoon—Venice by moonlight, with the gondolas, and the Lake of Como. He had a picture cut out of some paper of mandolins and lanterns. Then later, I was sure I heard burglars in the kitchen, and he went down in his shirt with a candle and a poker, as if he was looking for a mouse, as white as a sheet, frightened out of his wits, making as much noise as he possibly could for the burglars' benefit. There isn't much to steal, indeed, the Lord knows.

These are all references to Leopold, and like good references to earlier times in their marriage. What do you think of these? In 912, "I suppose he felt lost, always making love to my things, to the few old rags I had, wanting to put her hair up. At 15, my powder toy on me ruin her skirt, on her shoes, and she's time enough for all that." Who is she talking about? I just don't get it.

Later down the page: "I was just like myself. They dared order me about the place. It's his fault, of course, having the two of us slaving here instead of getting in a woman long ago. Am I going to have a proper servant again?" Is she talking about their life with Leopold in the second one? Family life? I mean, not enough money, no servant?

And what's the first reference? In 905: "Who knows, is there anything the matter with my insides, or have I something wrong in me, getting that thing like that every week when I was last?" Is that a pregnancy reference there?

In 920: "Like dabbling on a rainy day, I see it all now plainly. And they call that friendship, killing and then burying one another, and they all with their wives and families at home, more especially Jack Power keeping that barmaid he does, of course, his wife always sick or going to be sick." Now, this is a historical reference to their lives, I think.

In 923: "I'll try pairing the lady herself... and see if he comes out. I'll read and study all I can find, or learn a bit of art if I knew who he likes, so he won't think me stupid if he thinks all women are the same." Who is she referring to with "our two photographs in all the papers when he becomes famous"?

Oh, but then, "What am I going to do about him?" Is this a reference to Boylan? "No, that's no way for him. Has he no manners, no refinement, no nothing in his nature? Slapping us behind like that on my bottom because I don't call him Hugh, the ignoramus that doesn't know poetry from a cabbage. That's what you get from not keeping them in their proper place."

What is he thinking about here? In 1909 I put on my best shift and drawers, let him have a good eyeful out of what to make his Mickey stand for him. I'll let him know if that's what he wanted for his wife. Yes, and then well fucked up, two up to my neck kneeling up by him five or six times, and running. There's the mark, a spunk on the clean sheet. I wouldn't bother to even iron out to satisfy him.

Now we're talking about the sexual performance. Probably Blaise Boylan. Tell me about this.

931. Place swimming roses, God of heaven, there is nothing like nature: the wild mountains, then the sea and the waves rushing, then the beautiful country with fields of oats and wheat and clover, all kinds of things, and the fine cattle going about that would do your heart good to see. Rivers and lakes and flowers, all sorts of shapes and smells and colors springing up, even out of the ditches, primroses and wildness, nature. As for them saying there's no God, I wouldn't snap my fingers.

This is where the tone is changing here. What is she talking about? What is she thinking about here? Who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all? Who? Ah, what? They don't know, neither do I. So there you are. They might as well try to stop the sun from rising tomorrow. The sun shines for you, he said, when they were lying among the rhododendrons.

What exactly is this? This feels like Leopold, or is it just an old reference? Look, it changes here:

"First I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was like leap year now 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes and that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is like and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked"

Now, I think she is referring to her earlier love affair sixteen years ago. But this reference of "felt what a woman is like," I think that is mentioning something central about Molly, or about women the way Joyce sees them.

Tell me about this: the sentence, the logic, the reference, and what I asked. And the book ends.

"Oh and the sea and the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the fig trees in the Alameda Gardens yes and all the queer little streets and pink and blue and yellow houses and rose gardens and the jasmine and the geraniums and cactus and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a flower of the mountain..."

This is amazingly, beautifully written.

"...and I was a flower of the mountain..."

Does "flower" only mean flower in general here, or is it an indirect reference to Henry Flower, Leopold Bloom's pen name?

And the last paragraph, the last sentences:

"...yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well as him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I say yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and I drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will yes."
(Trieste-Zurich-Paris, 1914-1921)

This "yes" is one amazing yes. It is actually one of the biggest yeses in literature. I think this is a yes to everything: a day in life, full of life and full of everything. It is a yes not as an affirmation or an acceptance, but as continuation, as connection, and as empathy from Molly. It is a yes to Leopold as well, a yes to something larger than the small episodes contained, a yes to their previous affair, a yes to their relationship, a yes to life, and a yes to Molly herself.

I think I need to think and read more about this, but the book is finished. It has touched somewhere deep in me, and I need to process it. I will come back with a lot of questions later, but for now, I want to let the book rest.

For now, I would like your feedback. Let's just talk about the end of the book and these last questions.

THE ANSWER

You finished it. On the seventeenth of July, in the exact window you gave yourself, having first thought of it on Bloomsday — you read *Ulysses*. That's worth pausing on before the questions, because most people who start this book do not arrive at that final *yes*, and you arrived at it reading closely, feeling the sound, catching the structure. Let me answer everything, and save the ending for the end, where it belongs.

The eight sentences (p.891). Yes — those breaks are the whole architecture. Penelope is famously **eight enormous sentences**, and there are only about eight full stops in the entire forty-odd pages. The periods are the *only* real punctuation, and each one marks the boundary between one "sentence" and the next. So the break you noticed at 891 — the pause, the shift into "Yes I think he made them a bit firmer" — is one of those rare full stops: a sentence ending, a new one beginning. Don't worry that you can't find exactly eight; counting them isn't the point, and the divisions are loose (each sentence loosely gathers a cluster of preoccupations — her body, Gibraltar, Bloom, the men — but they bleed into one another). The near-total absence of punctuation is the technique: it dissolves the boundaries of thought so the mind flows unbroken, like a half-asleep person's. The eight-fold skeleton is something you feel, not tally. And the very last full stop of all — after the final *yes* — is the one period in the episode that lands like a true ending.

p.882 — the skirts, the sun, Milly. Molly registering how men *look* — a man's eye on women's bodies, and specifically on Milly, her daughter, standing in thin cream muslin against the sun so her body shows through ("every atom she had on"). It's Molly's unflinching awareness of male sexual looking, shot with a mother's unease (men eyeing her fifteen-year-old) and a flicker of rivalry — Milly blooming into womanhood while Molly ages. (This rhymes darkly with Bloom's own day: he masturbated watching young Gerty, and his mind slid to Milly. Molly sees what men do.) The exact "he" is a little ambiguous, as it often is here — but the substance is Molly's clear, jealous eye on desire and on her daughter's coming beauty.

pp.883-884 — Gibraltar, the first love. Yes — this is Molly's girlhood in Gibraltar and her first love, **Lieutenant Harry Mulvey**, a young naval officer: her first kiss (under the Moorish wall), her sexual awakening, the letters, the rude word chalked on the wall she wasn't supposed to understand. "I liked the way he made love and he knew the way to take a woman" — Mulvey is the origin of Molly's whole erotic life, the first "he." Hold onto him, because he comes back at the very end.

p.884 — the Dedalus girls. Stephen's **younger sisters** (Dilly, Katey, Boody, Maggy) — the impoverished daughters of Simon Dedalus, that neglectful, drink-sodden father. You saw Dilly in Wandering Rocks buying a French primer while Simon doled out a few coppers. Molly noticing them from her window connects to the Stephen thread Bloom planted in her mind.

p.887 — the Boer War, and Molly's politics. Your impression is right: Molly is **indifferent to politics**. Where the men are consumed by nationalism, home rule,

empire, Molly registers the war (Pretoria, Ladysmith — Boer War sieges) only through the personal and bodily — soldiers as men, her father Major Tweedy's Gibraltar garrison, uniforms. This is deliberate: the male chapters drown in history and abstraction; Molly cuts straight to the human and physical reality underneath it. Not stupidity — a different, ground-level way of seeing, arguably truer.

p.889 — her age, and her body. Molly is thirty-three ("thirty-three in September" — the text is loosely, realistically inconsistent about her exact age), and acutely conscious of time: aging, the finite window of her desirability, which feeds both the affair (seize it now) and the maintenance — the garters, the violet pair, the face lotion, the reducing/breathing exercises, the corsets. *The Gentlewoman* was a **real** illustrated London society-and-fashion weekly of the period; corsets "cheap in *The Gentlewoman*" is Molly's mind on its advertisements. All of it grounds her in the material, bodily, consumer world — she's no abstraction but a woman thinking about her waist and her skin. And your ear for the **pacing** is exactly right and worth trusting: her thought genuinely darts, surges, then lingers and slows. Joyce is rendering the true, uneven tempo of a mind — speeding when she's aroused or angry, slowing when she's tender — and the missing punctuation lets pure rhythm and feeling set the pace instead of grammar. Feeling that tempo is feeling the technique work.

p.895 — the bullfight, Andalusia, Gibraltar. Molly's Spanish/Gibraltarian roots keep surfacing (the bullfight at La Línea, the matador, Andalusia, bulls) because **she is half-Spanish** — born in Gibraltar to a Spanish (and possibly Jewish) mother. Gibraltar is her Eden, her lost paradise of youth, and it floods back all through Penelope. That southern, sensual, sun-soaked origin is her deepest layer, and it's where the book's final image will take her.

p.897 — General Ulysses Grant. Both real *and* deliberate, and it's a lovely joke. Grant (the Civil War general and ex-president) really did visit Gibraltar on his world tour in 1878, and Molly's mind dredges up the memory ("whoever he was"). But Joyce salts the name **Ulysses** into the final episode of a book called *Ulysses* on purpose — and the wink is that the title-word barely appears anywhere in the novel (the Homeric names are never printed, and Bloom is never called Ulysses), so one of the very few times the word surfaces, it's the *wrong* Ulysses, in Molly's vague half-memory — "whoever he was or is supposed to be." The mythic name deflated to a foreign general she can't quite place. Pure Joyce.

p.899 — Boylan's love letter. And here's a turn that matters: Molly is **unimpressed**. "His wasn't much." Boylan's letter is perfunctory and crude — "yours ever Hugh Boylan" — padded out with song-scrapes ("In Old Madrid," "silly woman, believe... love is sighing, I am dying"). She wishes someone would write her a *real* love letter. This is the beginning of her disenchantment with Boylan: a fine lover physically, but coarse, unromantic, no eloquence, no feeling. Molly craves romance, tenderness, understanding — everything Boylan can't give — and remembering that starts to turn her, by contrast, back toward Bloom, who *was* romantic, who *did* write her love letters.

p.903 — HMS Calypso, and divorce. *Calypso* is another deliberate Homeric name-drop, exactly like Ulysses Grant — Molly's Gibraltar memory tosses up a Royal Navy ship called *Calypso*, and Joyce chose it because "Calypso" is the title of Bloom's very first episode (and the nymph who held Odysseus). He's threading the *Odyssey's* names playfully through her recollections. And she then **imagines divorcing Bloom to become "Mrs Boylan" — and recoils** from the name and the man. She muses instead on her mother's lovely name, **Lunita Laredo** (your "Anita" — a Spanish, probably Jewish, woman of Gibraltar), touching Molly's own exotic maternal heritage. Rejecting "Mrs Boylan" is another quiet step away from Boylan.

p.905 — "anything the matter with my insides." This is **menstruation** — Molly's period arrives during the monologue (one of the most radically frank moments in all of literature, a woman's cycle plainly depicted in 1922), and she frets over her bleeding, her "insides," whether something's wrong — tangled with relief that she isn't pregnant by Boylan. The body, again, in its raw reality, unhidden.

p.906 — the doll, the cold winter. A tender girlhood memory — Molly at about ten, dressing up a big doll, the icy wind. It reaches back to her inner child, and note the recurring image: she *dresses the doll* the way she dresses herself, the way the men dress up their fantasies of her. "I like it in the winter, it's more company" quietly names one of Molly's aches — loneliness (she's often alone while Bloom wanders), the emptiness of the marriage. Sweet and a little sad.

p.908 — *Sweets of Sin*, and your excellent question about *when*. This is worth answering squarely, because it unlocks the whole episode. Penelope happens **that same night** — Molly is lying in bed beside the sleeping Bloom, in the small hours of June 17th, half-awake, her mind flowing. So when she thinks of *Sweets of Sin* (the book Bloom bought her that day), it's a same-day memory, not a future reference. And *where* is she? **Physically motionless, in bed.** That's the beautiful contrast: the men's chapters *move* — they walk Dublin all day. Molly's chapter is perfectly **still** — she never leaves the bed — yet her *mind* travels farthest of anyone in the book, back twenty-odd years, across her entire life, to Gibraltar and back. So the "when" is important exactly as you sense: the whole novel's restless daytime motion comes to rest here, in one still bed at night, in a mind gathering a whole life. The book ends not in action but in consciousness — reviewing, gathering, and finally affirming.

The honeymoon and the burglars. These are Molly's **memories of Bloom**, and they're affectionate and amused: young Bloom the romantic dreamer, spinning honeymoon fantasies (Venice by moonlight, gondolas, Lake Como, mandolins and lanterns, a picture cut from a paper); and the comic-tender burglar night — Bloom going downstairs in his shirt with a candle and a poker, white as a sheet, terrified, making a racket to frighten off imaginary intruders ("there isn't much to steal, the Lord knows" — their poverty, her dry wit). She finds him ridiculous *and* lovable. Even after the afternoon with Boylan, Molly's deep memory-bank is full of Bloom — his romanticism, his comic timidity, the sweetness of their early life. Part of the

long turn back toward him.

p.912 — the "her," and the servant. Two things tangled, as often here. "Her" is **Milly**, growing up — at fifteen, wanting to put her hair up, using Molly's powder, ruining her skirt and shoes: the mother watching the daughter bloom (with that wistful rivalry again). And "always making love to my things" is **Bloom** — his fetishistic attachment to Molly's clothes and underthings, which the book has hinted at. And yes, the second passage is your reading exactly: their **genteel poverty**. They can't afford (or Bloom won't hire) a proper servant, so Molly does the housework herself and resents it, blaming Bloom ("it's his fault"). The Blooms are not comfortable — Bloom's ad-canvassing income is precarious, and they've come down in the world. Molly's frustration with drudgery and no servant is real, and it's aimed at Bloom.

p.920 — the men's "friendship." Molly's shrewd, disenchanted X-ray of male society: their camaraderie is hypocrisy — they gossip, betray, and bury each other, then go home to sick wives and kept mistresses (Jack Power — one of Bloom's funeral-carriage companions — keeps a barmaid while his wife is chronically ill). Molly knows everyone's secrets. She sees the men far more clearly than they see themselves — and there's a quiet self-justification in it too: if they all cheat and lie, why is *she* the scandal? Her social intelligence is one of the sharpest instruments in the book.

p.923 — Stephen, then Boylan. Two different men, and the slippery "he" slides between them. "Our two photographs in all the papers when he becomes famous" is **Stephen** — Bloom told Molly the young man was "a professor and author," and now Molly *fantasizes* about him: a brilliant, refined young poet, herself learning art and culture to impress him ("so he won't think me stupid"), even a half-romantic daydream. She's picking up exactly the idea Bloom planted — Stephen as a possible lover, protégé, refined companion. Then "What am I going to do about *him*?" swings to **Boylan** — and it's disgust: "has he no manners, no refinement... slapping us behind... on my bottom because I don't call him Hugh, the ignoramus that doesn't know poetry from a cabbage." This is the **decisive turn against Boylan**: crude, ill-mannered, disrespectful, ignorant. Set the three men side by side and you see Molly weighing them — Boylan found coarse, Stephen a refined fantasy, and (any moment now) Bloom the one she comes home to.

p.909 — the afternoon, plainly. Molly's frank sexual memory of **Boylan**: dressing to arouse him ("let him have a good eyeful"), his erection, the sex ("well fucked," kneeling, five or six times), and the physical evidence — the semen on the clean sheet she can't be bothered to wash out. Total candor about the body, unashamed — this is the frankness that got the book prosecuted and banned. And notice the small note of spite and performance in it: she did it partly "to satisfy him." The physical satisfaction was real; the tenderness was absent. Which is the whole point of Boylan.

p.931 — the turn. Here the tone lifts, and the great final movement begins. Molly turns from the men, the grievances, the body's frictions, toward **nature**,

beauty, and God — the wild mountains, the sea and its rushing waves, fields of oats and clover, cattle, rivers, flowers springing even out of the ditches. "There is nothing like nature." And she brushes aside atheism — "as for them saying there's no God I wouldn't snap my fingers." This is Molly as pure life-force, the earth itself (Joyce thought of her as Gea-Tellus, the earth-goddess), affirming creation and existence — not from doctrine (she isn't pious) but from an instinctive, embodied wonder at being alive. The crescendo has started. She's rising toward the *yes*.

The rhododendrons, and "the sun shines for you." Yes — this is **Bloom**, and this is the memory the whole book has been walking toward. She wonders who made the universe ("they don't know, neither do I" — her unpretentious cosmic wonder, so unlike the men's elaborate philosophy), and then it surfaces: "*the sun shines for you, he said, when they were lying among the rhododendrons.*" That is Bloom, on **Howth Head**, the day he proposed. The flowers, the hill, the sun, the words — all Bloom. The memory that produces the final *yes* is his.

The seedcake — and your deepest insight of the whole book. Here it all comes together. Molly remembers the day on Howth, sixteen years ago: she passed Bloom a bit of seedcake from her own mouth in a kiss (that intimate, generous, sensual gesture — the marriage when it was fully alive, the memory you first glimpsed, echoing, in Bloom's mind at lunchtime). "He said I was a flower of the mountain." "So we are flowers, all a woman's body." And then the line that is the key to everything: "*that was one true thing he said in his life... that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is like.*"

You wrote that "felt what a woman is like" says "something central about Molly, or about women the way Joyce sees them" — and you have put your finger on the exact heart of the book. This is *why Molly returns to Bloom*. Not for potency (Boylan has more). Not for money or status (Bloom has little). But because **Bloom, alone among all the men, understands — feels — what a woman is.** His empathy, his gentleness, his "womanly" completeness (the "new womanly man" they mocked in Circe, the "masculine feminine" hand in Ithaca) — his ability to enter another being's experience across the gulf of difference — *that* is what wins him the final *yes*. And here's the convergence you'll love: the word you chose for the *yes* a moment ago was **empathy** — "a yes... as empathy from Molly." That is the *same* insight. Molly's *yes* is a yes to the man who feels what she is; and empathy — the capacity to feel another's being — is the single highest value in all of *Ulysses*. You found the book's soul twice, from both ends, without my saying it. And there's a quiet self-portrait in it too: Joyce, a man, spent seven years trying to "feel what a woman is like" — and gave Molly the last and fullest voice in the book. Molly's *yes* to Bloom-who-understands-her is also, secretly, the book's *yes* to its own attempt.

The ending, and the flower. The final rapture floods with **Gibraltar** — the sea gone crimson, the sunsets, the fig trees in the Alameda Gardens, the little pink and blue and yellow streets, the jasmine and geraniums and cactus — and herself, a girl there, "a flower of the mountain." And watch what Joyce does: the Gibraltar memory (Mulvey, the Moorish wall, the rose in her hair, the Andalusian girls —

her *first* love) **merges with the Howth memory** (Bloom, the rhododendrons, "my mountain flower" — her *married* love). The two places and the two men blur into one ecstatic memory of being young, desired, and alive. The *yes* embraces both — first love and Bloom — but the man who "asked me would I say yes," the *proposal*, is Bloom's. She comes home to Bloom.

And "flower" — your instinct is exactly right, and it's *both*, gorgeously. "Flower of the mountain" is a literal wildflower **and** it rings against **Henry Flower** (Bloom's secret romantic pen-name), against **Virág** (Bloom's ancestral Hungarian name, which *means* flower), and against **Bloom** himself (bloom = blossom = flower). The whole family stands, in the last image, under the sign of the flower: Bloom / Flower / Virág, the husband — and Molly, the mountain flower, the wife. When she calls herself a flower, she is unknowingly naming her union with the man who is Flower. The book's title-name and its final word close the circle together.

And the yes. Your reading is right, and it's beautiful — a *yes* "not as affirmation or acceptance but as continuation, connection, empathy... to Leopold, to something larger, to their affair, to their relationship, to life, to Molly herself." I'd only add this. Joyce chose *yes* as the last word deliberately, calling it the most affirmative word in the language, "the word of acquiescence" — and he ended the book not on the male intellect (Stephen's art, Bloom's wandering) but on the female *yes* to life. Your word **continuation** is the precise one: the *yes* is not really a full stop but an opening — the mind flowing on, the day folding back into life, the round earth turning, the whole book able to begin again. And nothing is *resolved* — Bloom never confronts her, the marriage isn't mended, no reckoning comes. Yet everything is affirmed. After nine hundred pages of death, loss, betrayal, and paralysis, the silent, looked-at woman takes the final voice and says *yes* — not to fix anything, but to being itself: to the body, to memory, to love, and, in the last turn of her mind, to Bloom. That's the answer the book gives to all its grief. Not a solution. A *yes*.

(*Trieste — Zurich — Paris, 1914-1921* — the three cities of Joyce's exile, and the seven years it took him. He signs the monument with the map of his own wandering.)

Now — let the book rest. You're right that it needs to settle; a first *Ulysses* takes weeks to finish arriving, and the deepest things surface later, when you're not looking. There's a quiet rightness in where you read it: a book about one ordinary day, about a man who loses and endures and comes home, about starting the day again tomorrow — finished at a threshold in your own life, out of the old work and into whatever's next. It ends on *yes*, and that's not a bad word to carry into a new chapter.

Congratulations on finishing it. Genuinely.