

Ulysses — A First Reader's Questions

Questions & narrations in original order, across thirteen reading sessions — a handoff for another model to answer

This document collects the questions and reading-notes of a first-time reader working through James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Penguin Modern Classics; introduction by Declan Kiberd — the 1922 text; page numbers refer to that edition). Over a series of sittings the reader moved through the novel roughly in order, from the opening of 'Telemachus' to partway through 'Ithaca,' pausing to ask questions and record observations as they went. Everything below is reproduced in the original order it was raised, grouped by reading session with page anchors. The reader's edition does *not* print the Homeric episode titles; those are supplied here only as scaffolding. Because the notes were dictated, some names and phrases are phonetically scrambled and some quotations are approximate. An instruction prompt for the answering model appears at the very end.

Session 1 · pp. 1–20 · 'Telemachus' (episode 1)

Opening of Part I. The tower at Sandycove.

I've started reading *Ulysses*. I read a great introduction (I don't remember the publisher). I'm in Chapter One. I'm confused but not despairing — I don't mind. I'm going to read gently until Bloom appears in Chapter Four.

Tell me about the characters in Chapter One — the young man Stephen Dedalus, the English person (Haines), and Buck Mulligan (Malachi). Give me a brief summary of Chapter One and help me understand it. Just general guidance.

Session 2 · to p. 79 · 'Nestor' / 'Proteus' (eps. 2–3) & into 'Calypso' (ep. 4)

The reader identifies the edition and its part-structure, then enters the Bloom section.

This is the Penguin Modern Classics edition, introduction by Declan Kiberd (reprinted 2000; the Kiberd introduction is copyright 1992). Part I starts in the tower — 'Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead' — and ends with the word 'Usurper.' Part II starts with 'Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish.' The episode names (Telemachus, Nestor, Proteus) and the part-names are NOT printed here; the book just starts like this, with no explainer.

On the numbering: explain this numbering difference from what is typically mentioned — this edition versus others that print the episode titles. What's the logic of the ordering?

Chapter 2: 'Who cockerel. What city sent for him?' What is chapter 2 about?

Chapter 3: Episode 3 starts with 'Ineluctable modality of the visible.' The seaside scenes are impressive:

"A bloated carcass of a dog lay lolled on the bladderwrack. Before him the gunwale of a boat sunk in sand. ... A live dog grew into sight running across a sweep of sand. ... The dog's bark ran towards him, paused, ran back. Dog of my enemy."

The beach scene is awesome. What are they talking about?

Calypso (to p. 79): I'm now in the Leopold Bloom section, page 79. He's got things for breakfast; we looked at Milly's letter and the poem; they talk about metempsychosis. Tell me about this part in general — his walk, his shopping, his breakfast, the 'mkgnao' of the cat.

Why does he think of the places he mentions — wandering through old streets, turban faces going by, 'The Turk the Terrible,' 'Bleibtreustrasse 34, Berlin West 15'? Why is he making these references as he courses through Dorset Street?

Session 3 · 'Calypso' / 'Lotus-Eaters' / into 'Hades' (eps. 4–6)

Family clarifications, the cat, the church, the bath, the funeral carriage.

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

Is Milly the wife of Leopold Bloom, or the daughter? Who is marrying whom — is Bloom married to the wife, and is Milly the daughter?

What do you make of the different cat sounds? The 'meow' is as pronounced as a first bass-drum sound. There's a very big sympathy toward cats, or animals in general.

What about the 'Inimitable' reference? And the 'Ulysses' reference? Leopold Bloom's entire realistic world — I think Joyce does that well, or that's the view I get.

Tell me why the Pope goes to church on the priest's instruction — then I will tell all: penance, punishment, peace, great power in their hands, more than doctor or solicitor. A strong reference to the Church being powerful. Is it affirmative on his part, or critical?

p. 105: There are references to locations and numbers before times. I think these are increasing the specificity of the work, moving beyond emotional and relational specificity into everyday specifics. What do you think?

End of the first Bloom chapter (Calypso): 'He saw his pale body reclined in a pool, naked, in a womb of warmth, oiled by scented oils, massive, softly lapped.' What is that bath metaphor referring to?

Hades (episode 6): They're together in a carriage — including Simon Dedalus — going to Paddy Dignam's funeral. So we have Simon and Bloom in a carriage beforehand, but they probably won't talk until later. Is that right?

Session 4 · to p. 139 · 'Hades' (episode 6)

The funeral drive to Glasnevin; Bloom's dead.

Let's test the recording — can you record properly? (My device turned 'Hades' into 'hate speech'.)

p. 'a child, a dwarf's face, mouth and wrinkled like little Rudy's.' Little Rudy keeps appearing in this chapter, travelling with them.

Two pages later: 'and they call me the Jewel of Asia — of Asia, the Geisha.' What's that from? 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 a hint of his father having died in an accident — Leopold’s father, is that it? What am I talking about?

More Dublin specifics — carriages, trams, trains.

“Crossgun Bridge, the Royal Canal, water rushed roaring through the sluices. A man stood on the drooping barge between 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. What are they talking about?

“They looked ... murder’s ground. It passed darkly, shuttered, tenantless, unweeded garden, whole place gone to hell ... Murder, the murderer’s image in the eye of the murdered. A strong paragraph — what does it tell about the idea of murder and perception: how murder is buried, and how the murdered is perceived in society?

“Horrors in Turkish graveyards ... love among the tombstones, Romeo ... In the midst of death we are alive, we are of life. What does this specific passage mean — why does he associate graveyards with emotions so much, and what are the horrors in Turkish?”

“Burying him, we come to bury Caesar. What is the reference?

Session 5 · pp. 139–219 · “Aeolus” & “Lestrygonians” (eps. 7–8)

The newspaper office and the lunch-hour.

p. 139: I’ve come across M’Intosh in the graveyard — they caught sight of him and he disappeared.

p. 144: There’s a gramophone reference. What role did the gramophone have in everyday life during that period?

p. 147 (“In the Heart of the Hibernian Metropolis”): What exactly is happening in this chapter, with all those small sections of people talking and doing stuff?

What is an ad canvasser at that period doing? I can’t form the connection between an ad canvasser and current work conditions.

p. 180: St Augustine is 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. And the next paragraph, about the chosen people, was an interesting religious interim part.

p. 197: Talking about horses — what is the impact of races in Bloom’s life, and what do they signify in Dublin at that time and in the book?

p. ~203: “Poor Mrs Purefoy. Methodist husband. Method in his madness. Lovely phrasing — does it show any perspective on religion?

p. 205: “A squad of constables debouched from College Street, marching in Indian file, goosestep, hooded faces, sweating helmets, panting their truncheons. Does Joyce criticise the policeman’s life, or point to something else? Is this an important perspective on order, police, and city life?

pp. 212–213: Pat Kinsella, Harp Theatre, Whitbread, and so on — all so time-specific. While I praised specificity before, this level of time-detail makes reading and understanding the story 100

years later very tough. So the universality is perhaps not in the story's details but in the way the story is handled. Are we looking at a special story, or a special way of telling a story? Answer in both technicality and city-specificity.

'I was happier then. Or was that I? Or am I now I? 28 I was. She 23 when we left Lombard Street. ... Could never like it again after Rudy. Can't break back time.' This is the clear mention of Rudy affecting their individual lives — a point to note.

Then Grafton Street — 'gay with housed awnings ... muslin prints, silk, dames ... jingle of harnesses ... thick feet that woman has in white stockings, hope the rain mucks them.' He gets out of the misery of remembering Rudy into interacting with the surroundings.

'Jaffa. Agendath Netaim ... wealth of the world.' He's getting descriptive, out of the moody mood.

'Men, men, men perched on high stools by the bar ... swilling, wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food, their eyes bulging, wiping wetted moustaches.' What a vivid way of portraying it. And the sandwiches on the shelves — 'almost taste them by looking.'

p. 219: Eating the sandwich, 'he raised his eyes and met the stare of Billy's clock. Two o'clock. Five minutes fast.' A time reference now — an interesting use of time here.

Session 6 · pp. 222–290 · 'Lestrygonians' end, 'Scylla and Charybdis', into 'Wandering Rocks' (eps. 8–10)

The end of lunch, the library Shakespeare debate, the start of the city cross-cut.

p. 222: 'Silly fish learn nothing in a thousand years.' A beautiful sentence — and this is the eating chapter.

p. ~223: 'half the catch of oysters they throw back in the sea to keep up the price.' A very acute financial observation.

p. 224: 'O, wonder!' — the sounds of literature. Kiberd highlighted the 'O' sound. I'm paying attention to sounds.

p. 232: 'That girl passing the Stewart Institution.' What's the Stewart Institution?

Toward the end of the chapter, the 'Hurry, walk quietly' moment: 'Warm ... his hand ... where did I put it? ... Soap there, yes. Gate. Safe.' Is this the end of the chapter, and why the change of pace there?

p. 236: 'the shining seven, as W.B. calls them' — that's W.B. Yeats, right?

At the bottom of the page: 'The supreme question about a work of art is out of how deep a life does it spring. ... The painting of Gustave Moreau is the painting of ideas ... Plato's world of ideas ... All the rest is the speculation of schoolboys for schoolboys.' Spoken by a character, not Joyce — it's too pedantic and rigid. Would Joyce agree with it?

'The schoolmen were schoolboys first,' Stephen said, super politely. 'Aristotle was once Plato's schoolboy.' Stephen has more insight, kindness, and connection than Buck Mulligan and the others.

Could you explain the ‘‘pi’’ de Shakespeare’s and the Mallarmé references? What do you think of them?

p. 243: The letters A.E.I.O.U. — why are they there, what do they represent?

p. 248: ‘‘What Caesar would have lived to do had he believed the soothsayer? What might have been? ... what name Achilles bore when he lived among women.’’ Such beautiful prose.

These guys, when they get together, always talk about Shakespeare. Why so?

p. 251: ‘‘we ought to mention another Irish commentator, Mr George Bernard Shaw.’’ So many high-repute Irish writers around then — Shaw, Joyce, Yeats. Is it important to mention Shaw here? Something I need to know?

Stephen on Goethe: ‘‘Beware of what you wish for in youth because you will get it in midlife.’’ That struck me.

p. 266: ‘‘Are you condemned to do this? ... sundered by a bodily shame ... sons with mothers, sons with daughters ... The son unborn mars beauty; born, he brings pain, divides affection, increases care. The male: his growth is his father’s decline, his youth his father’s envy, his friend his father’s enemy.’’ What is this — so strong, so deep — and where does it come from?

p. 269: ‘‘What’s in a name? ... A star, a daystar, a firedrake rose at his birth ... by night it shone over delta in Cassiopeia ... as he walked by the slumberous summer fields at midnight, returning from Shottery and from her arms.’’ Baffled by the beauty and strength. Where is it from and what does it mean?

A couple of pages later, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and: ‘‘Till Prospero breaks his staff, buries it certain fathoms in the earth, and drowns his book.’’ What does this refer to?

p. 279: ‘‘If Socrates leave his house today, if Judas go forth tonight ... that lies in space which I in time must come to, ineluctably.’’ What does it mean?

End of the chapter (p. 279): ‘‘Kind air defined the coigns of houses in Kildare Street ... two plumes of smoke ascended ... ceased to strive ... peace of the druid priests of Cymbeline, hierophantic ... Loud, ye gods, and let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils from the blessed altars.’’ Beautiful rhythm — why am I moved? What does it mean?

Then the new chapter (Father Conmee): ‘‘Father Conmee reset his smooth watch in his interior pocket ... Five to three.’’ He thinks of soldiers whose legs were shot off, and Cardinal Wolsey’s words. Why is this chapter here, and what does it refer to in *Ulysses*? I get the sense Conmee is skeptical of both war and, somewhat, of religion — what do you think?

p. 283: ‘‘Daniel Bergin’s public house.’’ What is a public house?

p. 285: ‘‘the souls of black and brown and yellow men ... St Peter Claver, S.J., and the African mission.’’ Help me identify the geographical reference.

p. 288: A section break where Corny Kelleher and Father Conmee come across a constable. Why a section break here — is this a chapter break or an in-between break?

A one-legged sailor says ‘‘For England.’’ What does that mean — a statement, or just him talking?

‘Two barefoot urchins sucking silver paper.’ It reminds me of ‘urchin.’ (I know you mean street children, but I keep feeling the specific word might not be a coincidence.) Is there a connection between the urchin reference and the ‘For England’ mention?

Why is he using section breaks so often here? Are they dividing chapters or not?

p. 290: ‘Father Connemee walked through Clongowes fields, his thin-socked ankles tickled by stubble.’ Beautiful lines.

Session 7 · pp. 292–340 · ‘Wandering Rocks’ end & ‘Sirens’ (eps. 10–11)

The Viceroy’s cavalcade; the music episode and its overture.

p. 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 Boylan – roguish, dashing, with a hint of sexuality? And is Boylan the person who will have the affair with Molly?

p. 304: Bloom picks up a book called *Sweets of Sin*. What’s the significance – a random choice, or a Joyce moment?

‘Stephen Dedalus watched through the webbed window of the lapidary’s fingers ... dull coils of bronze and silver, lozenges of cinnabar, on rubies, leprous and wine-dark stones ... Cold specks of fire, evil lights ... where fallen archangels flung the stars of their brows ... She dances ... A sailorman, rustbearded, sips from a beaker ... on her gross belly flapping a ruby egg.’ An amazing passage – I’m bewildered by the sound and feeling. What is it?

p. 319: The Lord Lieutenant-General and Governor of Ireland, William Humble Ward, Earl of Dudley, the cavalcade filing itself. Is a ‘cavalcade’ a procession – what exactly is it from that time?

p. 324: ‘... crying in the parlour ... A big coffin it was, high and heavy-looking. – 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.’ What am I seeing here?

A detailed description of the cavalcade – ‘Spring’s big yellow furniture van’ had to stop for the Lord Lieutenant. Lots of rules about the cavalcade, and I assume about how Imperial England deals with ruled Ireland. This action would be strange now, in England or Ireland – or am I mistaken? What do you think of the change over 120 years, and of his very detailed description? I don’t see support or admiration in Joyce’s writing.

p. 328 (chapter end): ‘On Northumberland and Lansdowne roads His Excellency acknowledged ... the salute of two small schoolboys ... and the salute of Almidano Artifoni’s sturdy trousers solaced by a closing door.’ ‘Rare railway walkers.’ I get the feeling but not the main logic. Help me understand.

p. 332: The sounds ‘imperthnthn’ and ‘tintinnabulum.’ ‘Boots ... sniffed rudely.’ What are those sounds, how are these words created? And a mention of Miss Kennedy and Miss Douce – who are these characters? What are we reading, what chapter is this? Are we going to glimpse infidelity in this chapter?

p. 334: ‘Married to the crazy gnomes,’ she yelled. Are the ladies gossiping about marital stuff?

p. 335: ‘That was exceedingly naughty of you ... tempting poor simple males.’ What does he mean?

p. 336: ‘Mr Bloom crossed ... Essex Bridge ... To Martha ... my paper ... Sir Leopold Bloom ... Old Bloom ... Bloom is on the track.’ Why the various references to Bloom — is Bloom thinking here? What is happening in this chapter?

p. 337: ‘Jingle jaunty jingle ... 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?’ What am I looking at?

p. 339: ‘more of Boylan with patience than of Boylan with impatience ... Jingle jaunty Blazes Boylan.’ Things are brewing. And: ‘At four she ... Think you’re the only pebble on the beach? Does that go for men?’ I see the time reference and strange words, but what does it mean?

Last page: ‘Tuning fork. The tuner had that ... that he now struck.’ This tuning, this inside-the-house blaze — something is building. Help me understand.

Session 8 · pp. 343–430 · ‘Sirens’; end & ‘Cyclops’; (eps. 11–12)

The held note; the pub, the nameless narrator, and the giant.

p. 343: ‘I’m off. I’m off,’ said Boylan in impatience. I assume he’s going to Molly, but in this chapter we don’t see Boylan and Molly at all — am I mistaken?

p. 348: ‘liver gravy, blue mashed potatoes ... trousers tight as a drum on him.’ I like the imagery.

p. 353: ‘Through the hush of air a voice sang to them, low, not rain, not leaves in murmur ... touching their still ears ... for the first merciful lost solemn loved oftloved word.’ Amazingly beautiful.

p. 355: ‘It soared, a bird, it held its flight ... higher, resplendent, aflame ... the high ... all soaring, all around about all, the endlessnessnessness.’ What is he doing in these paragraphs that come out of other winds and cadences? And what a word: endlessnessnessness.

p. 356: ‘Lionel Simon, singer, laughed. Father Bob Cowley played. Mina Kennedy served ... Lydia admired ... but Bloom sang dumb.’ The construction is amazing — everybody doing something, and Bloom singing dumb, admiring.

p. 375: ‘Must be the cider or perhaps the Burgundy.’ Is today’s cider the same as the one I tasted in Madrid? Any different?

p. 376 (chapter end): ‘... nations of the earth. No-one behind ... then, and not till then ... Krand-l-krankran ... I’m sure it’s the Burgundy. Yes. One, two. Let my epitaph be. Karaaaaa. Written. I have. Done.’ All these sounds and feelings — is he drunk? What a drunken ending.

p. 378 (new chapter): ‘So we went around by the Linenhall barracks ... In Inisfail the fair there lies a land ... the land of holy Michan ... there rise watchtowers ... there sleep the mighty dead ... fishful

streams where sport the gurnard, the plaice.“ How did the language change like this? What is this chapter about? Very different from the previous one.

p. 379: “there arises a shining palace whose crystal glittering roof is seen by mariners ... thither come all herds ... for a kindred prince must take toll ... a chieftain descending from chieftains.“

p. 380: “And by the way, when the herd of innumerable bellwethers and flushed ewes ...“
The sentence runs nearly the whole page, ending “... varying size, agate with the dun.“ A huge sentence — any logic behind it?

p. 382: “a long unsleeved garment of recently flayed oxhide“ ... tribal images of many Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity: Cuchulin, Conn of Hundred Battles ... What exactly are we talking about? Then a huge swathe of names. This chapter has several sections, in most of which many names are mentioned. Why all these names? Two pages later he reads them out — Garryowen, and so on.

“Questioned by his earthname as to his whereabouts in the heavenworld ... he was now on the path of prophecy or return ... still subject to trial at times by certain greater entities at the astral levels.“ In awe.

p. 396: “Sinn Fein,“ says the citizen, “Sinn Fein amhain. The friends we love are by our side and the foes we hate before us.“ ... the funeral death-bell tolled ... muffled drums ... hollow booming of ordnance. Tell me what “Sinn Fein“ means, what “Sinn Fein amhain“ means, and connect this to the current Sinn Fein.

p. 397: All these names — Leopold, Rudolph, Faunus something, Alibaba, Bakshi, Rahat, Chang, Olaf, Kobert, Python, and the rest. What are they?

p. 402: “Ireland“s hope is Ireland“s freedom.“ What do you think that means?

p. 405: Bloom turns inward: “that“s a point ... for the wife“s admirers. — Whose admirers? says Joe. — The wife“s advisers, I mean, says Bloom.“ A slip, with some sadness coming out.

p. 410: A discussion in the ancient Hall of Brian on the revival of ancient Gaelic sports and physical culture, as in ancient Greece and Rome, for the development of the race — “don the gloves for the purse of fifty sovereigns.“ Irish history, home rule, Ireland, identity, independence — it all lies behind the whole story. And on the previous page, more names: Hurley, Flavin, Scully, Purcell, Flanagan. The names never end.

p. 417: They“re still talking — Jack, Ned, Joe, Alf, Bloom. As Kiberd wrote, all these dialogues are incomplete, gibberish-talking, never completing sentences, talking about nonsense. Why is that, and how?

p. 419: “for an advertisement you must have repetition. That“s the whole secret.“ Is this exactly as he said, or is there more behind it?

p. 420: The citizen has come out. Who“s the citizen? “... the adulteress and her paramour brought the Saxon robbers here.“ References to foreigners, sexuality, and criticism.

p. 424: “The fashionable international world attended en masse this afternoon“ — Daphne Bays, Mrs M“Coy, and more names.

p. 427: “That“s your glorious British navy ... that bosses the earth. The fellows that never will be slaves ... their land in the hands of a dozen gamehogs and cottonwool barons. ... drudges and

whipped serfs.' It sounds like he promotes the Navy, then puts it down. That's the spirit of this chapter — very sarcastic. And Bloom: 'isn't this the same everywhere? ... if you put force against force?' And the citizen: 'We'll put force against force ... We have our greater Ireland beyond the sea.' That's important — I think he refers to the Irish who went abroad, to America. An independent Ireland with support beyond its boundaries. Is that right?

'we fought for the royalists ... against the Williamites, and they betrayed us. Remember Limerick.' Internal Irish identity and history. What do you think?

p. 429: 'we have Edward the Peacemaker.' Who's Edward — British or Irish?

p. 432: 'quite excited with his ... mud-coloured mug on him and his old plumeyes rolling.' What's this 'mud-coloured mug'?

p. 430: John Wyse's question: 'But do you know what a nation means?' Don't you think it's important?

Session 9 · pp. 430–489 · 'Cyclops'; end & 'Nausicaa' (eps. 12–13)

The biscuit-tin apotheosis; the beach, the fireworks, the stopped watch.

p. 430: 'What's your nation, if I may ask?' He says it's Ireland, that he was born here. Things are getting tricky, right?

p. 431: '... a race ... that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant.' The book is getting overtly political — about things, and about Bloom himself. What's your take?

p. 438: '[swindler] defrauding widows and orphans.' Is this the point where the pub is insulting Jews in general, and Bloom in particular? Help me understand.

pp. 444–445: 'Mendelssohn was a jew and Karl Marx and Spinoza. And the Saviour was a jew and his father was a jew. Your God. ... Whose God? says the citizen. ... Your God was a jew. Christ was a jew like me.' Is Bloom fighting back here — defending himself for the first time?

'... there came a great brightness, and they beheld the chariot wherein ... amid clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees over Donohoe's in Little Green Street.' Explain this ending — what was this chapter ending at, and what will the new chapter be like?

p. 449 (new chapter): 'The summer evening had begun to fold the world in its mysterious embrace. Far away in the west the sun was setting ... on the weedgrown rocks along Sandymount shore ... and last but not least on the quiet church whence there streamed forth at times ... the voice of prayer to her who is in her pure radiance a beacon ever to the stormtossed heart of man.' Such a change of tone — how, why, what?

p. 452: 'Gerty MacDowell who was seated ... in her lavender-coloured skirt ... was in very truth as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see.' Why are we talking about Gerty, and so gently, so lovingly? And phrases like 'a warm ... backfisch ...' — one of the most loving descriptions of a person in the book so far.

The 'hurting words' — the ones who had been bent on torture — what does she mean? What is there to love about certain words? I found it very interesting.

p. 477: '... she leaned back ... he was in a whirl ... she let him and she saw ... far and high ... no-one to see ... she wasn't ashamed ...' What are we talking about? Everything moved from the seaside to a room-section. And then, in the fireworks — the Roman candle, 'O! O!' Now I'm a bit confused. Something's happening. Also, how has she been drawn from a lovely, beautiful tone into more sexuality, dress-ups, and desire of a different sort?

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

pp. 482 / 487: 'Funny my watch stopped at half past four ... This means something.' And later, 'very strange about my watch. Wristwatches are always going wrong.' I think this means something — not that my watch is dying.

Session 10 · pp. 491–550 · 'Nausicaa' end & 'Oxen of the Sun' (eps. 13–14)

The maternity hospital; the history of English prose as a nine-month gestation.

p. 491: '... in Mat Dillon's garden where I kissed her shoulder.' Is this Leopold?

p. 492: 'Have birds no smell?' Metempsychosis. We come back to the world.

p. 495: 'Milly ... no sign of funk ... blue scarf loose ... when we hid behind the tree at Crumlin.' Is this Milly's boyfriend talking about their affair? How is Leopold remembering this, if it's Leopold's voice? And 'mamma, mamma ... Babes in the Wood ... fronting with masks.' There's a recent Margaret Atwood poetry collection, *Old Babes in the Wood* — do you think Atwood is referencing Joyce?

The chapter ends with the cuckoos: the clock cooed 'cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo' and Gerty noticed the foreign gentleman on the rocks. Very stylistic ending.

p. 500 (new chapter): 'For who is there who anything of some significance has apprehended but is conscious that that exterior splendour may be the surface of a downwardtending lutulent reality?' Very different from before — what is this chapter about, why has the writing changed, and what is he talking about?

p. 506: 'childe Leopold did up his beaver ...' Who is the Leopold here? Is it Leopold?

p. 515: 'A black crack of noise in the street here, alack, bold, black, back ... Thor thundered: in anger awful the hammerhurler. ... the storm that hissed his heart.' Does 'hissed' mean 'hissed' or 'hit'? A wonderful entry regardless.

p. 516: 'Master Lenehan ... Master Madden.' Another technique, a bit different from where the chapter started. Why the difference? What's the technique and meaning?

p. 526: Lambay Island, foreign soldier, Lord Talbot de Malahide, a Tory gentleman. Is the Tory reference similar to current usage? What did it signify in Ireland in 1904, and how does that compare to today?

p. 531: 'Mr Dixon retired with a profound bow ... The presence ... of a woman endued with every quality of modesty ... restrained the humorous sallies even of the most licentious; but her departure was the signal for an outbreak of ribaldry.' What do 'ribaldry' and 'licentious' mean? What are we talking about?

p. 535: ‘But with what pretence ... has this alien, whom the concession of a gracious prince admitted to civil rights, constituted himself the lord paramount of our internal polity?’ The tone is changing again – more explanation of the tone and reference, please.

p. 536: A reference to the Sublime Porte – ‘recalling the ceremonial usages of the Sublime Porte ... announced ... that an heir had been born.’ Sublime Porte is Ottoman? The heir has been born? What are we talking about?

p. 537: ‘... a female ... in this her hour ... the Brandenburgers ... Stürzgeburt ... recorded instances of multiseminal, twikindled and monstrous births.’ What are we talking about?

p. 539: ‘Malachi’s tale began to freeze them with horror. ... the secret panel beside the chimney slid back and in the recess appeared ... Haines! ... He had a portfolio full of Celtic literature in one hand, in the other a phial marked Poison. ... a ghostly grin.’ 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 man?’ What is being referred to? I half-remember this line from somewhere.

p. 548: ‘Callipedia ... would soon be generally adopted, and all the graces of life ... genuine good music, agreeable literature, light philosophy, instructive pictures, plastic reproductions of the classical statues such as Venus and Apollo ...’ What is Callipedia – another Homeric reference? How is Joyce contextualising it?

‘An embryo philosopher who, for all his overweening bumptiousness in things scientific, can scarce distinguish an acid from an alkali ...’ The tone changes again – who are we referring to? What’s the meaning and significance of this tone change?

Session 11 · pp. 551–609 · ‘Oxen’; end & ‘Circe’; part 1 (eps. 14–15)

Nighttown: the play-script, the trial, the emperor.

p. 551: Mrs Purefoy is giving birth; the hospital; the chapter ends. About the next chapter – (1) What is the setting? (2) What does it allude to in Homer’s *Odyssey*? (3) Where should I place it in the general scope of the book?

p. 565: ‘... under the railway bridge Bloom appears, flushed, panting, cramming bread and chocolate into a sidepocket.’ Where is this place, what is the setting, and why is Bloom like that?

p. 566: The urchins are seen again. I know you mean street children, but I wonder whether the specific usage of ‘urchins’ here and earlier is a coincidence. (I mentioned Auden refers to urchins – not that Joyce looked at Auden; Auden wrote his poem years later, about two urchins loitering, throwing stones, unloved.) I’m just faintly feeling the word might not be coincidence.

p. 567: The motorman: ‘Hey, shitbreeches, are you doing the hat trick?’ What does that mean? And isn’t ‘shitbreeches’ pretty tough?

p. 570: ‘... beside her mirage of datepalms a handsome woman in Turkish costume stands before him.’ This is the third or fourth mention of Turkish (with the Sublime Porte). As somebody from Istanbul, I find it interesting that Turkish/Turkic is mentioned this much.

p. 577: ‘I mean Leopardstown ... Molly won seven shillings on a three year old named Nevertell ... coming home ... in that old fiveseater shanderadan of a waggonette ... you had on that new hat of white

velours with a surround of mauve ... marked down to nineteen and eleven ... she did it on purpose.’
Amazing verbiage — the meaning?

p. 582: ‘... Dr Bloom, Leopold, dental surgeon ... you have heard of von Blum Pasha ...
Donnerwetter ... own thousands of acres ...’ Tell me about the craziness in this lively theatrical
setting, and how Bloom turns from character to character.

p. 583: ‘Martha ... a crimson halter round her neck ... Henry! Leopold! Lionel, thou lost one! Clear
my name!’ And ‘My name is Peggy Griffin ... breach of promise ... heartless flirt.’
And Bloom: ‘She’s drunk. The woman is inebriated.’ We’re seeing Martha
properly for the first time — and after Boylan and Molly, after Bloom masturbated. She’s
contesting with Bloom. Does this have meaning, or am I reading it wrong?

p. 592: ‘He addressed me in several handwritings with fulsome compliments as a Venus in
furs.’ ‘Venus in Furs’ is used like ‘femme fatale’ nowadays. Was it
similar in that period?

p. 595: ‘Whereas Leopold Bloom of no fixed abode is a wellknown dynamitard, forger, bigamist,
bawd and cuckold and a public nuisance to the citizens of Dublin ...’ One of the most vulgar
accusations aimed at Bloom — also very comical. I wonder about these accusations and how they are
hurled at him.

p. 596: The Recorder: ‘I will put an end to this white slave traffic ...’ Context and meaning
— are we referring to Bloom or to something general?

p. 597: ‘Bloom, I am Paddy Dignam’s spirit.’ Is Paddy the dead man from pages ago,
in the coffin, whose kid was talking about him?

p. 601: ‘Sir Walter Raleigh brought from the new world that potato and that weed, the one a killer of
pestilence by absorption ...’ Explain Raleigh’s importance here.

pp. 602–603: ‘... the rain is over ...’ and a list of names, then ‘prolonged
applause ...’ Such a grand entrance — what do you think of it?

p. 604: ‘Leopold the First.’ Why Leopold I when there is only one Leopold?
Wouldn’t we call him that only after a second Leopold?

p. 605: ‘My subjects! ... we hereby nominate our faithful charger ... hereditary Grand Vizier ... we
have this day repudiated our former spouse and ... the Prince of Selim ...’ The roles keep changing,
from one costume to another. Explain and contextualise.

p. 606: ‘Thirtytwo workmen wearing rosettes, from all the counties of Ireland, under the guidance of
Derwan the builder, construct the new Bloomusalem. It is a colossal edifice with a crystal roof, built in the
shape of a huge pork kidney, containing forty thousand rooms.’ I laughed my ass off — so
funny, ridiculous, satirical. Nova Hibernia of the future!

Just after this, the man in the macintosh appears: ‘Don’t you believe a word he says. That
man is ... the notorious fireraiser. His real name is Higgins.’ Then Bloom: ‘Shoot him! Dog
of a christian! So much for M’Intosh!’ They seem supportive of Bloom, but Bloom tries to
have him shot. Am I missing something? Let’s talk about Macintosh reappearing and his role.

Session 12 · pp. 609–689 · ‘Circe’ part 2 (ep. 15)

Bello, the mirror, the homecoming of the dead.

p. 603 (Mulligan): Dr Mulligan says Dr Bloom is ‘bisexually abnormal.’ Comments?

p. 627: Zoe: ‘Have you a fag as I’m here?’ She gets a cigarette from Lynch. So ‘fag’ is a cigarette here?

p. 637: Lynch mentions three wise virgins. A different reference – tell me about it and the connection.

p. 641: ‘The door opens. Bella Cohen, a massive whoremistress ... gown ...’ A very immense and visible whoremistress. Comments?

p. 653: ‘Bello, ruthlessly: ... All is changed by woman’s will since you slept horizontal in Sleepy Hollow ...’ What is the reference to Bello? And what is Sleepy Hollow?

p. 658: ‘Halcyon days ... highschool boys in blue and white football jerseys.’ What does ‘halcyon days’ mean? Same phrase and meaning as nowadays?

p. 663: Bloom: ‘There is a memory attached to it. I should like to have it.’ Stephen: ‘To have or not to have, that is the question.’ They’re conversing indirectly, by being in the same place. Stephen changes the Shakespearean code – you tell me.

p. 669: ‘Over the well of the car Blazes Boylan leans, his boater straw set sideways, a red flower in his mouth ... in a yachting cap and white shoes ...’ The girl detaches a long hair from his shoulder. Again, hints of Boylan with Molly – no names, no action, very obfuscated.

p. 671: ‘Stephen and Bloom gaze in the mirror. The face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there, rigid in facial paralysis.’ Interesting – comments?

pp. 672–673: Miss Cunningham sings ‘and they call me the Jewel of Asia’ – I remember The Geisha from earlier. And ‘Best, butcher’s boy ... warm veal liver or omelette on the belly ... pièce de Shakespeare’ – from a very early part. Joyce repeats references and images. Any specific reason, or just his style?

pp. 676–677: The pianola – she drops two pennies in the slot; gold, pink and violet lights start forth. An early jukebox reference. Interesting.

p. 680: ‘Stephen whirls giddily. Room whirls back ...’ He’s very drunk. And Stephen’s mother, emaciated, rises stark through the floor. Everybody dead comes back – it’s like a homecoming of the dead chapter.

p. 682: ‘The corpsechewer! Raw head and bloody bones!’ Another amazing word – ‘corpsechewer.’ Comments?

p. 685: Again the never-ending list of people, among them ‘The Man in the Street. The Other Man in the Street.’ I’m amazed by these long lists and the tricks in between.

p. 687: ‘... the noble art of selfpretence ... Personally I detest action.’ An interesting phrase sneaking in – comments?

Session 13 · pp. 689–790 · ‘Circe’ end, ‘Eumaeus’ & into ‘Ithaca’ (eps. 15–17)

The vision of Rudy; the tired refuge; the catechism begins.

p. 693: ‘Welcome ... Redcoat ... he fought for you in South Africa ... Royal Dublin Fusiliers ... honoured by our monarch.’ Explain the reference.

p. 695: Again, a huge list of people – Dublin burning, brimstone, fires springing up. Nearly every episode has this list. Why is Joyce using these long lists of naming people?

p. 702: ‘Bloom ... the ashplant stands ... he tightens and loosens his grip ...’ What’s the significance of the ashplant here? And just below, ‘he reads from right to left’ – why? What is behind reading from right to left?

p. 703: ‘Bloom, wonderstruck, calls inaudibly: Rudy! ... Rudy gazes, unseeing, into Bloom’s eyes and goes on reading, kissing, smiling ... a delicate mauve face ... diamond and ruby buttons ... a slim ivory cane ... a white lambkin peeps out of his waistcoat pocket.’ An amazing ending to Book Two – I feel shown things I can’t consciously perceive but am unconsciously attuned to. As Bloom was dealing with Stephen, the last lines are given to Rudy. What do you make of it?

p. 712: ‘... he asked me to ask you to ask somebody named Boylan ... to give him a job as a sandwichman.’ Stephen mocking Blazes Boylan – what purpose does it serve? I assume it’s not a coincidence.

p. 713: ‘... everyone according to his needs and everyone according to his deeds ... where will you sleep yourself?’ Bloom asks where Stephen will sleep. Is this a reference to Mulligan getting the tower keys, or Bloom being over-caring, showing fatherly love? And later: ‘I met your respected father ... a gifted man.’ Should we take this literally – does Bloom mean it?

p. 717: ‘Sounds are impostures ... like names. Cicero, Podmore, Napoleon, Mr Goodbody, Jesus, Mr Doyle. Shakespeares were as common as Murphies. What’s in a name?’ Help me explain it.

p. 718: ‘— You know Simon Dedalus? he asked. — I’ve heard of him,’ Stephen said. Stephen disavowing his father – on purpose. (1) Over-read as Stephen ascribing fatherhood to Bloom? (2) Under-read as coincidence? (3) Or just Stephen unhappy with his father, a simple reaction?

p. 703 (word): ‘... a great field was to be opened up ... apropos ...’ What does ‘apropos’ mean here? He uses it a few times in the latter parts – a specific literary/stylistic purpose, or just its basic meaning?

p. 726: ‘... both instinctively exchanged meaning glances, in a religious silence of the strictly entree variety, towards where Skin-the-Goat, alias the keeper, was drawing spurts of liquid from his boiler.’ A strange, interesting sentence. What does it mean, and why? What is happening in this chapter that leads here, and who is Skin-the-Goat? Tell me about the chapter, the dialogue, the character, and this passage.

p. 730: ‘The face of a streetwalker ... peered askew round the door ... Mr Bloom ... turned away ... picking up ... the pink sheet of the Abbey Street organ.’ He looked through the pink of the paper. Why pink? It seems beautiful – help me discern it.

p. 744: ‘... the husband ... having had the pair watched ... inflicted fatal injuries on his ... as a result of an alternative postnuptial liaison, by plunging his knife into her ...’ And ‘... Fitzharris, the invincible, nicknamed Skin-the-Goat, merely drove the car ...’ I think this means something about Boylan and Bloom’s marriage. Contextualise, or is it coincidence?

p. 747: '... that's my idea ... I call this patriotism ... ubi patria ... as we learned a smattering in our classical days in alma mater ... vita bene. Why, you can live well ... on the senses ... if you work.' What patriotism is referenced? What do Bloom and Stephen mean? And what do 'ubi patria,' 'alma mater,' and 'vita vera / vita bene' mean?

p. 748: Stephen: 'We can't change the country. Let us change the subject.' Amazing — something to cherish. And later: '... the fumes of his recent orgies spoke then with some asperity in a curious bitter way foreign to his sober state.' Beautiful, though I got little else from it.

p. 751: '... the strange subject ... Dignam ... the late Mr Patrick Dignam ...' Once again it's coming. The mourners include Simon Dedalus, Stephen Dedalus, L. Bloom — and M'Intosh comes back. And on the next page, 'to say nothing of M'Intosh.' Macintosh, Macintosh, Macintosh again.

p. 753: '... he simply absconded ... the coffin they brought over was full of stones ... he changed his name to De Wet, the Boer general ... he made a mistake to fight the priests ...' Interesting — explain it. And: 'in nine cases out of ten it was a case of tarbarrels.' What does 'tarbarrels' mean?

p. 755: '... he reflected on the historic story ... the usual affectionate letters ... full of sweet nothings ... first strictly platonic till nature intervened and an attachment sprang up between them.' Amazing. If Joyce had chosen to be a writer of beautiful prose, I think he'd have been a Shakespeare. Instead he's eccentric, deep, hard to grasp — but when he wants to, he writes so beautifully.

p. 756: '... scrambling out of an upstairs apartment with the assistance of a ladder ...' Somebody in the affairs of the heart. And: 'Can real love, supposing there happens to be another chap in the case, exist between married folk?' We're talking about Bloom's marriage, right? What do you think?

p. 758: Stephen looked down on the photo — 'a large-sized lady with her fleshy charms on evidence ... in the full bloom of womanhood.' And 'Mrs Bloom, my wife, the prima donna Madam Marion Tweedy ... taken ... in or about ninetysix ... very like her then.' Sexuality, Marion Bloom, Stephen, Leopold — this needs more explanation than meets my eye. Put it in context.

p. 766: '... he inwardly chuckled ... to the blood and ouns 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 ... touched the 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.' So deep — the Jewish god, and the Irish being so bigoted, inward-looking, constrained. This needs a lot of reflection.

p. 770: 'Martha ... M'appari ... Lionel's air.' The musical references hiding our Martha in between. What do you think?

p. 775: 'The horse ... having reached the end of his tether ... halted and, rearing high ... let fall on the floor ... their smoking globes of turds.' This shitting horse, the end of the journey — more than a horse and a journey. What does it refer to, and how does it feel?

The first episode of Book Three ends with a paragraph beginning with the German line 'Und alle Schiffe brücken.' What does it mean? And the last paragraph: the driver watches the two figures, both black, one full, one lean, walk over the railway bridge ... 'to be married by Father Maher' ... talking about sirens, enemies of man's reason, usurpers, historical cases ... while

the man in the sweeper (or sleeper) car simply looked after their low-backed car. Such an ending — it lays the foundation for the next episode (the question-and-answer session). No wonder Joyce liked it.

p. 776: The chapter starts with a schema-like list — music, literature, Ireland, Dublin, Paris, friendship, woman, prostitution, diet ... the influence of gaslight ... the Roman Catholic Church, ecclesiastical celibacy ... Jesuit education ... the study of medicine ... Stephen's collapse. Tedious and amazing at once.

p. 777: ‘Did Bloom discover common factors of similarity between their respective like and unlike reactions to experience?’ and ‘Were their views on some points divergent? ... Stephen dissented openly ... while Bloom dissented tacitly ... the eternal affirmation of the spirit of man in literature.’ In another book this could be a stupid Q&A; here, after so much in one day, it’s a breath of fresh air — a new perspective, an insight into what happened.

p. 778: ‘... the progressive extension of the field of individual development ... was regressively accompanied by a restriction of the converse domain of interindividual relations.’ Amazing! And: ‘From inexistence to existence he came to many and was as one received: existence with existence he was with any as any with any: from existence to nonexistence gone he would be by all as none perceived.’ Should I laugh, or take it seriously? What should 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 refer to?

p. 787: ‘What discrete succession of images did Stephen ...’ and ‘Why did the absence of light disturb him less than the presence of noise? ... Because of the surety of the sense of touch in his firm full masculine feminine passive active hand.’ This needs a lot of explanation and perspective.

‘... four polygonal fragments of two lacerated scarlet betting tickets, numbered 8 8 7 8 8 6 ... reminiscences of coincidences, truth stranger than fiction, preindicative of the result of the Gold Cup flat handicap ... read in the Evening Telegraph, late pink edition, in the cabman’s shelter.’ Talk to me about the dresser, the fragments of the lacerated scarlet betting tickets, and the reminiscences. I’m touching things I can partly feel but can’t pinpoint.

p. 790: His mood: ‘he had not risked, he did not expect, he had not been disappointed, he was satisfied ... To have sustained no positive loss. To have brought a positive gain to others. Light to the gentiles.’ What is he talking about, and what does he mean?

Instructions for the Answering Model

You are being handed the reading-notes of a first-time reader of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Penguin Modern Classics edition, introduction by Declan Kiberd — the 1922 text; page numbers refer to that edition). Over the reading sessions above, the reader worked through the novel roughly in order, from the opening of 'Telemachus' to partway through 'Ithaca,' pausing to ask questions and record observations as they went. Their questions and narrations are reproduced above, grouped by reading session and kept in the original order in which they were raised.

Your task: answer these questions, one by one, in the exact order given, as a flowing companion-reader conversation — the way a knowledgeable friend would walk a first-time reader through the book in real time. Specifically:

1. Answer in order. Work through the sessions sequentially and, within each session, address the reader's questions and observations in the sequence presented. You may group tightly-related questions into a single answer where it reads naturally, but do not reorder across topics and do not skip anything.
2. Match the register. Warm, precise, generous, grounded in the text. Explain every reference plainly — Homeric parallels, historical and literary allusions, Dublin geography, Irish politics, foreign phrases. The reader is intelligent, emotionally attuned, and reading closely for sound and feeling, not just plot; treat them as a peer, never talk down.
3. Decode and gently correct. These notes were dictated, so some names and phrases are phonetically scrambled and some quotations are approximate. Silently work out what was meant, decode it for the reader, and correct factual slips — but kindly and in passing, never pedantically.
4. Give each episode its key. When the reader enters a new episode, orient them first: name the episode (their edition does not print the Homeric titles), state its setting and hour, its Odyssey parallel, its governing technique or style, and where it sits in the book's three-part architecture — then dive into the line-level questions.
5. Honour the reading; don't spoil ahead. Answer what the reader asked at the point they asked it. You may point forward to what a motif is building toward when it aids understanding, but do not dump the ending.
6. Be honest about uncertainty. If you cannot verify an exact quotation, phrase, or page attribution, say so plainly rather than inventing a gloss.
7. Respect copyright. Paraphrase, and quote only briefly; do not reproduce long passages of the text.

Begin with Session 1 and proceed through Session 13. At the very end, you may briefly set up what remains — the close of 'Ithaca' and the final episode, 'Penelope' — since the reader intends to continue.

End of handoff — the reading continues from 'Ithaca' (~ p. 790) onward.