

Chapter 2: Nestor

The action: It's 10am in Dalkey, a tony village south of Sandycove (where the Tower is located). Stephen is teaching history to the boys in his course, and they read a little of Milton's poem, "Lycidas," and they discuss Pyrrhus, the Greek general of pyrrhic victory fame. Stephen has a conversation with the schoolmaster, Mr. Deasy, as he collects his weekly pay. This is a half-day of school, so Stephen is going to get off early. Pay careful attention to Mr. Deasy's attitudes; he's a prime example of a Unionist--a Protestant with political ties to England, though he claims a solid Irish pedigree. Deasy is writing a letter to various newspapers about a cure for hoof-and-mouth disease, which is plaguing Irish cattle. He's employing Stephen (who has connections in journalistic circles) to get it published. Of particular importance is his characterization of Jews--look for that at the chapter's end.

The "science" or "art" supposedly governing this chapter is History. In other words, there's a sort of dissertation on human (and Irish) history. What does Deasy make of history? What does Stephen make of it?



Pyrrhus, remembered in Plutarch's Lives

Stephen's "riddle": it doesn't make sense to anyone; don't worry if you can't figure it out. What do you think of Stephen in this chapter? Does he grow on you? Does he not? Try to gauge your reaction to him. What makes him tick, so to speak?

Odyssey parallel: Nestor was the wise old man of the Greek army in the Trojan War, though something of a fool. When Telemachus goes out in search of his father, the first place he goes to is Nestor's palace at Pylos.