

Chapter 14: Oxen of the Sun

The action: FINALLY, Stephen and Bloom coincide. We are in the hospitality room at the Holles St. hospital, where Mrs. Purefoy has been laboring to give birth to yet another child. Stephen is drinking with the medical students and some hangers-on, including Buck Mulligan, when Bloom drops in to ask after Mrs. Purefoy. One young medico, Dixon, recently treated him for a bee sting, and Bloom is acquainted with one of the nuns running the hospital. The "action" mostly consists of the conversation around the table, which circles around the issue of sex and procreation. Near the end of the chapter, the party gets kicked out of the hospital, and they proceed to a pub, where absinthes are poured round. Lurking in the background is the grumbling of a thunderstorm, which Stephen takes as the growling of an angry God (Bloom reassures him.)

Parody: here's how Joyce summed up his method

Am working hard at *Oxen of the Sun*, the idea being the crime committed against fecundity by sterilizing the act of coition. Scene, lying-in hospital. Technique: a nineparted episode without divisions introduced by a Sallustian-Tacitean prelude (the unfertilized ovum), then by way of earliest English alliterative and monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon ('Before born the babe had bliss. Within the womb he won worship.' 'Bloom dull dreamy heard: in held hat stony staring') then by way of Mandeville ('there came forth a scholar of medicine that men clepen etc') then Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* ('but that franklin Lenehan was prompt ever to pour them so that at the least way mirth should not lack') . . . Bloom is the spermatozoon, the hospital the womb, the nurse the ovum, Stephen the embryo.



the Holles Street hospital



Absinthe was linked to hallucinations

Thematically, the episode is really important, because the Odysseus and Telemachus characters finally unite. So one of the things you want to do is gauge your level of readerly satisfaction at this convergence. In a normal novel, this would be a pretty climatic moment. Is it so here?