

James Joyce's *Ulysses*

The Significance of Mr. Bloom's Route in "Lotus Eaters"

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The usual explanation for Mr. Bloom's circuitous route in "Lotus Eaters" is that he is either attempting to avoid being seen while visiting the post office to collect Martha Clifford's letter, or that he is reflecting, according to Clive Hart, "the chapter's central theme: the loss of a sense of personal direction."¹ There certainly is little logic to the path he takes and Hart supports his view by pointing out that when Bloom's route is traced on a map, we see two large question marks.

Bloom is indeed attempting to avoid being seen and the idea of loss of direction is consistent with the theme of lotus eating as it is derived from the events in Homer's *Odyssey*, but the route is much more symbolic than it initially appears. Bloom's route in fact parallels the Stations of the Cross, a Catholic devotion in which prayers are said at fourteen pictures or stations, each of which represents an event in the passion of Christ. Further, although it is possible to see the question marks when the route is traced on a map, we can also see the letters "IHS," which are a symbol for Christ.

The Stations of the Cross

Joyce was surely familiar with the Stations of the Cross. In every Catholic church they are portrayed with pictures on the wall and moving from one picture to the next and saying prayers is an important Catholic ritual. The action in "Lotus Eaters," which all takes place in the neighborhood of the Westland Row railway *station* very closely follows the Stations of the Cross in sequential order with only minor variations. The fourteen Stations and the parallels to Mr. Bloom's activities are as follows:

1. *Jesus is condemned to death.* Bloom begins his journey by walking down Sir John Rogerson's Quay. Sir John Rogerson was a barrister and chief justice of the King's Bench,² connecting the name of the street to a legal trial. Bloom is also walking "soberly" (as a judge?).

Also, when Bloom turns on to Lime Street he sees two urchins playing in the street. In Matthew 27:24-25 we learn that Pilate tells the crowd at Jesus's trial "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see to it yourselves." And all the

people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and our children.'" The children Bloom sees call to mind the idea of children suffering for the actions of their parents. Looking at the boy he reflects that "His life isn't such a bed of roses. Waiting outside pubs to bring da home. Come home to ma, da" (U 5.8-9).

2. *Jesus is made to bear his cross.* Bloom walks past Windmill Lane and passes the postal telegraph office (U 5.2). A windmill and a telegraph pole are both cross-like.
3. *Jesus falls the first time* – Three of the stations refer to Jesus's falls. Bloom does not literally fall at all, however he has three moral lapses, which could be viewed as "falls." These "falls," will be mentioned below in connection with the Station they relate to. The first occurs when Bloom is watching the woman getting onto the streetcar in front of the Grosvenor Hotel (U 5.99-130) and hopes for a glimpse of her leg.

In addition, Bloom thinks at length about the physics of falling bodies:

What is weight really when you say the weight? Thirtytwo feet per second per second. Law of falling bodies : per second per second. They all fall to the ground. The earth. It's the force of gravity of the earth is the weight (U 5.43-46).

4. *Jesus meets his mother* – We meet Jesus's mother many times in the episode through the several references to Mary and the rosary. The name Mary is mentioned five times in the episode. Also, as Bloom walks past the undertaker's he remembers a song that includes the line "I met her once in the park (U 5.13)."
5. *Jesus is helped by the Cyrenean* – At one point, the Roman guards compelled a stranger to help Jesus carry the cross. The parallel to this incident occurs in "Lotus Eaters" when Bloom is looking in the window of the tea shop. He thinks: "Tea. Must get some from Tom Kernan" (U 5.19-20). Kernan was a "tea merchant; an Ulsterman who accepted conversion to Catholicism when he married" (Gifford & Seidman, 85). Through his conversion, Kernan can be seen as

“taking up the cross.” In Matthew 16:23-25 Jesus says: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.”

6. *Veronica wipes the face of Jesus* – Bloom wipes his face:

While his eyes still read blandly he took off his hat quietly inhaling his hair and sent his right hand with slow grace over his brow and hair So warm. His right hand once more more slowly went over his brow and hair (U 5.20-28).

7. *Jesus falls the second time* – The second “fall” occurs when Bloom reads and enjoys Martha’s letter and thinks about developing the relationship. “Go further next time. Naughty boy: punish: afraid of words, of course. Brutal, why not? Try it anyhow. A bit at a time” (U 5.272-74).

8. *Jesus meets the sorrowing women* – This event is described in Luke 23:27-29:

. . . women, who were bewailing and lamenting him. But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, days are coming in which men will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and breasts that never nursed.’”

When Bloom passes the hazard he sees the horses, notices that they have been gelded, and thinks “Might be happy all the same that way” (U 5.219). This parallels “Blessed are the barren.” Further, Bloom reflects that “Still their neigh can be very irritating” (U 5.219-20), which could be a reminder of women “bewailing and lamenting.”

9. *Jesus falls the third time* – Bloom’s third “fall” occurs when he enters All Hallows Church and wishes there were more people: “Pity so empty. Nice discreet place to be next some girl” (U 5.340-41).

10. *Jesus is stripped of his garments* – Bloom’s waistcoat becomes unbuttoned. “Hello. Were those two buttons of my waistcoat open all the time” (U 5.452-53).

11. --13. These three stations describe Jesus being nailed to the cross, dying and being taken down from the cross. There are no direct parallels to those three events but there are several events near the end of the episode that make reference to what occurs during the crucifixion. These all occur at about the same time in the episode and all before Bloom arrives at the baths (see Station 14 below).

The crucifixion occurred on a hill known as “the place called the Skull” (Luke 23:33). When Bloom goes into Sweny’s, he observes the chemist: “Sandy shriveled smell he seems to have. Shrunken skull” (U 5.472-73). While in All Hallows, Bloom thinks about church music and all of the pieces he recalls have to do with the crucifixion. He first thinks of Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*. In traditional Catholic ceremonies this hymn “is usually sung during the devotions of the Stations of the Cross.”³ Bloom recalls Molly singing the *Stabat Mater*: “I could feel the thrill in the air, the full, the people looking up . . .” (U 5.400-1). It is likely that there would be a thrill in the air and people looking up at a crucifixion. In reflecting on church music, Bloom also remembers a piece by Mercadante called *The Seven Last Words* which is based on the last seven words spoken by Christ.

Matthew 27:51 describes what happens when Jesus dies: “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent.” When Bloom comes out of All Hallows one of the first things he sees is a Prescott’s dyeworks truck. Prescott’s was a “dyeing, cleaning and carpet-shaking establishment” and:

Bloom has sold Prescott’s an advertisement, and it duly appears in the Freeman’s Journal, 16 June 1904, p.1, col. 2: ‘IMPORTANT. LACE CURTAINS are now very carefully cleaned and finished with our New Dust Resisting process . . .’ (Gifford & Seidman, 97).

Carpet-shaking conjures up the idea of the earth quaking. The curtain of the temple is reminiscent of lace curtains. And considering that Jesus is to be resurrected in three days, one could say that his body will prove to be dust resistant.

14. Jesus is laid in the Sepulchre – According to John 19:40-42:

They therefore took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices, after the Jewish manner of preparing for burial. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. There, accordingly, because of the Preparation Day of the Jews, for the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus.

At the close of “Lotus Eaters,” Bloom envisions himself in the bath: “Enjoy a bath now : clean trough of water, cool enamel, the gentle tepid stream. This is my body” (*U* 5.565-66). The clean trough of water or bathtub is similar to Jesus’s rock coffin and “this is my body” is what Jesus says to his disciples at the Last Supper. Bloom also imagines his body “oiled by scented melting soap” (*U* 5.568) which reminds us of the spices used in the burial process.

Because a parallel for each of the Stations can be identified in the episode, and the parallels so closely follow the order of the Stations, it seems unlikely that all of this is a coincidence. See Table 1 for a chart that includes line numbers to see how the sequence of events in “Lotus Eaters” follows the Stations of the Cross.

Other Parallels to Christ’s Passion

Aspects of Catholic doctrine are woven into the entire “Lotus Eaters” episode, and many of Mr. Bloom’s comments and observations, particularly in *All Hallows*, help to establish a link between “lotus eating” and following religious doctrines. But there is a particular emphasis on Christ’s passion and crucifixion.

When Bloom passes the tea company he begins to think about exotic locations and remembers seeing a picture of a person floating on a body of water: "Ah yes, in the dead sea floating on his back, reading a book with a parasol open" (U 5.38-39). The Dead Sea is very close to Jerusalem, the site of the crucifixion.

While in the post office Bloom sees an Army recruiting poster and thinks about soldiers. Especially in the Gospel of John, soldiers play an important role in the events of the Stations of the Cross.

When he arrives at All Hallows, Bloom notices a sign announcing an upcoming sermon on missionaries: "Sermon by the very reverend John Conmee S. J. on Saint Peter Claver S. J. and the African Mission. . . . Save China's millions" (U 5.322-26). The Stations of the Cross are sometimes considered to have "originated with the Friars Minor in the 15th century" (O'Connell, 248). The Friars Minor are a branch of the Franciscan order who "are engaged more particularly in preaching and the sacred ministry, especially to the poor and in foreign missions; in China, North Africa and the Custody of the Holy Land . . ." (O'Connell, 96).

Bloom wonders why the Chinese would want to convert to Catholicism and gives us a reminder of the Passion of Christ: "Buddha their god lying on his side in the museum. Taking it easy with hand under his cheek. Jossticks burning. Not like Ecce Homo. Crown of thorns and cross" (U 5.328-30). "Ecce Homo," Latin for "behold the man," are the words used by Pilate when he presented Christ to the crowd during his trial. In some early versions of the Stations of the Cross, there was a Station reflecting this event called "the Ecce Homo Arch."

When Bloom is in All Hallows he watches the priest and observes the letters on the back of his robe: "Letters on his back I. N. R. I? No : I. H. S. Molly told me one time I asked her. I have sinned : or no : I have suffered, it is. And the other one? Iron nails ran in" (U 5.372-74). "INRI" was the inscription placed on the cross by the Romans.

According to Catholic doctrine, from the time that Adam and Eve fell, until the salvation resulting from the crucifixion, no dead souls were permitted to enter heaven.

During the three days that Christ was in the tomb, he went to hell/Hades and released the souls who were entitled to go to heaven. As the Catholic creed states:

I believe in God the Father Almighty Creator of Heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead . . .

Appropriately, after he finishes his bath in the tomb-like tub at the close of “Lotus Eaters,” Mr. Bloom next goes to “Hades.”

Graphical Representation of Bloom’s Route

While still in All Hallows, Bloom is thinking about the power of the Catholic church and reflects “The doctors of the church : they mapped out the whole theology of it” (*U* 5.440-1). This statement might be a clue from Joyce to think about maps. Both Clive Hart and Frank Delaney have pointed out the illogical aspects of Bloom’s route and have concluded that when traced on a map the path takes the form of question marks.⁴

That may be true, but considering that “Lotus Eaters” contains pervasive implicit and explicit references to Catholic traditions, it is not unreasonable to assume that the route path also has Catholic significance. When Bloom’s complete route is traced on a map (see map), we can see the letters I, H and S. The “I” is his route down Lime Street. The small “h” is formed by his path down Lombard Street to the post office then back to Great Brunswick Street and down Cumberland Street through the railway station. The “S” is formed as he passes through All Hallows church, then down Westland Row and on to Lincoln Place.

Bloom sees the letters “IHS” on the back of the priest’s robe in All Hallows and is not sure what they mean. He speculates that it may mean “I have sinned,” or “I have suffered;” logical but incorrect interpretations. The exact meaning is uncertain:

These Latin initials derive from a Greek abbreviation of the name Jesus and are variously interpreted standing for Iesus Hominum Salvator (Jesus the Savior of Man) and In Hoc Signo – Vinces (In this Sign – Thou Shalt Conquer) (Gifford & Seidman, 94).

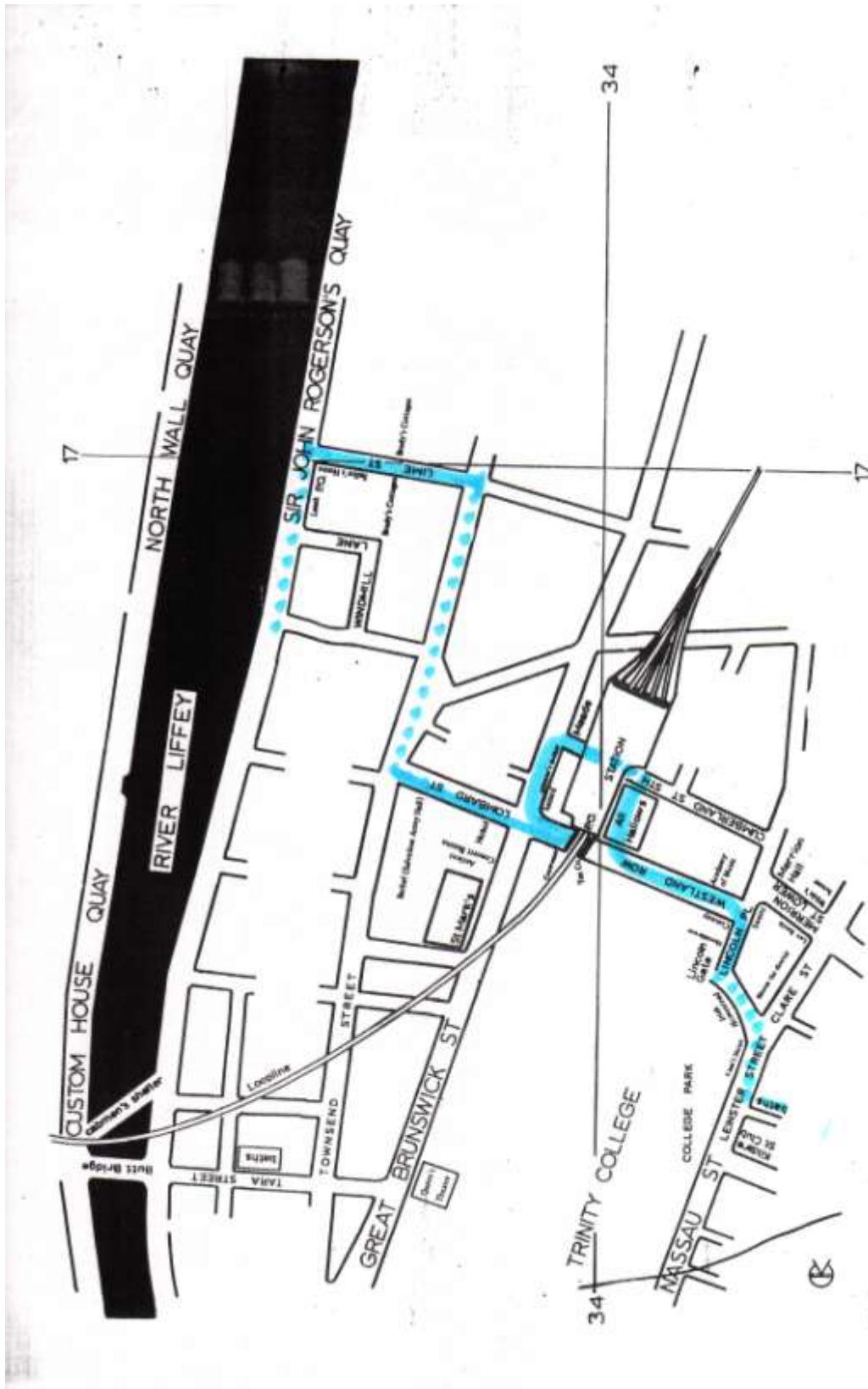
One objection to this interpretation is that it does not account for the entire route; for example, it ignores the segments of Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Townsend Street and Leinster Street. Bloom's unusual route does not really start until he turns onto Lime Street when he passes the postal telegraph office – "Could have given that address too" (*U* 5.3). Turning into Lime Street to go to the Westland row post office symbolically commits him further to his illicit relationship with Martha, so Sir John Rogerson's Quay can be excluded as part of Bloom's wandering. There is no mention in the episode of Mr. Bloom seeing anything on Townsend Street. We may ignore it just as Joyce did. Similarly, once Bloom leaves Sweny's there is no mention of streets or landmarks other than "He walked cheerfully towards the mosque of the baths" (*U* 5.549). Joyce's meticulous attention to the details of the route changes as it did with Townsend Street. Therefore if we focus only on portions of the route which include important details of the episode, the 'IHS' becomes visible.

Joyce's Use of The Stations of the Cross

The use of the Stations of the Cross is particularly appropriate for this episode. Bloom has occasionally been seen as an analogue for the Wandering Jew because of his travels through Dublin in general throughout *Ulysses* and specifically because of his seemingly aimless route in "Lotus Eaters." The story of the Wandering Jew provides an additional link to the Stations of the Cross and may help explain why Joyce chose to weave them into the episode. The story is based on an apocryphal event involving one of the stations. According to the legend, one of Jesus's falls took place in front of a shop owned by a Jewish merchant. The merchant told Jesus to find another place to rest. Jesus supposedly said, "I will go, but you will stay until I come back," thereby cursing the Jew to "wander" until the Second Coming.

The idea of suffering and guilt also fits with what is happening in Mr. Bloom's life. Recall that at this point, Bloom is preoccupied with concerns about Molly's relationship with Blazes Boylan. He has been recalling the deaths of Rudy and his father and is conflicted over his "relationship" with Martha. Joyce's superimposing Bloom's route on the Stations of the Cross might help to reflect what Harry Blamires has called "Bloom's private crucifixion."⁵ The fact that the route path traces "IHS" might be deliberate on Joyce's part--it makes sense in an episode that is full of references to Christ and the crucifixion and the fact that Bloom is feeling guilty and at first thinks that "IHS" stands for "I have sinned/suffered." "Lotus Eaters" includes references to several of the sources of guilt in Bloom's life—his father's suicide, the death of Rudy, his relationship with Molly and his possible adultery. As Clive Hart says of Bloom's route: "He is trying, of course, to reach the post office without being seen by acquaintances, and at the same time he is troubled by his own conscience and sense of personal failure" (Hart & Knuth, 25).

The idea of Joyce arranging Bloom's route to parallel the passion of Christ and to spell out letters associated with Catholicism in an episode which is filled with hidden and overt references to the Catholic faith is not only feasible but very likely considering that Joyce was fond of filling *Ulysses* with puzzles and enigmas. As he himself said, "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of ensuring one's immortality."



MAP VII: 'Lotuspeaters'

Table 1: The Stations of the Cross Vs. Action in "Lotus Eaters"

Station	Lotus Eaters	Line Number
1. Jesus is condemned to death.	(1) Bloom walks down Sir Rogerson's Quay, (2) Meets children on Lime Street.	(1) 1, (2) 5-9
2. Jesus is made to bear his cross.	Passes Windmill Lane and the telegraph office.	2
3. Jesus falls for the first time.	(1) Thinks about falling bodies, (2) tries to glimpse woman's ankle.	(1) 43-46, (2) 130-33
4. Jesus meets his mother.	Recalls line in song "I met her once." Also, several references to Mary.	13
5. Jesus is helped by the Cyrenean.	Thinks of Tom Kernan.	20
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.	Wipes his face.	20-28
7. Jesus falls the second time.	Reads letter from Martha and thinks of meeting her.	75
8. Jesus meets the sorrowing women.	Sees the gelded horses at the hazard.	272-74
9. Jesus falls the third time.	Thinks about sitting next to an attractive woman in church.	340-41
10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes.	Bloom's waistcoat becomes unbuttoned.	452-53
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross.	References to (1) Stabat Mater, (2) the chemist's skull.	(1) 397-98, (2) 472-73
12. Jesus dies on the cross.	(1) Reference to Mercadante, (2) Prescott's dyeworks.	(1) 403-4, (2) 460
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross.	See narrative	
14. Jesus is laid in the sepulcher.	Bloom takes a perfumed bath.	565-68

NOTES

¹ Clive Hart and Leo Knuth, *A Topographical Guide to James Joyce's Ulysses* (Colchester: A Wake Newslitter Press, 1975), p. 26. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

² Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 84. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³ Reverend John P. O'Connell, ed., *The Holy Bible and A Catholic Home Encyclopedia* (Chicago: The Catholic Press, Inc., 1951), p. 247. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴ Hart sees two question marks while Delaney points out one. See Frank Delaney, *James Joyce's Odyssey: A Guide to the Dublin of Ulysses* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), pp. 50-51.

⁵ Harry Blamires, *The New Bloomsday Book* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 32.