

Ulysses, leader of the Greek forces, conquers Troy with his men. On their journey home, they face ten years of challenges, since they have unknowingly angered the gods. Their time in Libya amongst the Lotus-eaters is one of the obstacles they face. Will they escape the land of dreams?

Ulysses and the Lotus-Eaters

by Bernard Evslin

1 Now, at this time, the shore of Libya was known as “The land where
Morpheus plays.”

2 Who was Morpheus? He was a young god, son of Hypnos, God of Sleep,
and nephew of Hades. It was his task to fly around the world, from nightfall to
dawn, scattering sleep. His father, Hypnos, mixed the colors of sleep for him,
making them dark and thick and sad.

3 “For,” he said, “it is a little death you lay upon man each night, my son, to
prepare him for the kingdom of death.”

4 But his aunt, Persephone, sewed him a secret pocket, full of bright things,
and said:

5 “It is not death you scatter, but repose. Hang the walls of sleep with bright
pictures, so that man may not know death before he dies.”

6 These bright pictures were called dreams. And Morpheus became
fascinated by the way a little corner of man’s mind remained awake in sleep, and
played with the colors he had hung, mixing them, pulling them apart, making new
pictures.

1. The word **scattering** in paragraph 2 means...
 - a. Spread
 - b. Skip
 - c. Remove
 - d. Force

2. In paragraph 5, the word **repose** means about the same as...
 - a. Tragedy
 - b. Slumber
 - c. Belligerence
 - d. Decorations

7 He went to Persephone and said, “I need a flower that makes sleep. It must
be purple and black. But there should be one petal streaked with fire-red, the petal
to make dreams.”

8 Persephone smiled and moved her long white hand in the air. Between her
fingers a flower blossomed. She gave it to him.

9 “Here it is, Morpheus. Black and purple like sleep, with one petal of fire-
red for dreams. We will call it lotus.”

10 Morpheus took the flower and planted it in Libya, where it is always
summer. The flower grew in clusters, smelling deliciously of honey. The people
ate nothing else. They slept all the time, except when they were gathering flowers.
Morpheus watched over them, reading their dreams.

11 It was toward Lotusland that Ulysses and his men were blown by the gale.
To Ulysses, dizzy with fatigue, weak with hunger, the sky and the water and the
air between seemed to flow together in one hot blueness.

3. What is the meaning of the word **streaked** as it is used in this sentence?

But there should be one petal **streaked** with fire-red, the petal to make
dreams.

- a. Engaged
 - b. Marked
 - c. Smoothed
 - d. Picked
4. The word **gale** in paragraph 11 means...
- a. Boat
 - b. Gods
 - c. Wind
 - d. Fear

12 He shook his head, trying to shake away the hot blue haze, and growled to
his men to unship the oars and row toward land. The exhausted men bent to the
oars, and the ships crawled over the fire-blue water. With their last strength they
pulled the ships up on the beach, past the high-tide mark, and then lay down and
went to sleep.

13 As they slept, the Lotus-eaters came out of the forest. Their arms were
heaped with flowers, which they piled about the sleeping men in great blue and
purple bouquets, so that they might have flowers to eat when they awoke, for these
people were very gentle and hospitable.

14 The men awoke and smelled the warm, honey smell of the flowers and ate
them in great handfuls—like honeycomb—and fell asleep again. Morpheus
hovered over the sleeping men and read their dreams.

15 “These men have done terrible things,” the god whispered to himself.
“Their dreams are full of gold and blood and fire. Such sleep will not rest them.”

16 And he mixed them some cool green and silver dreams of home. The
nightmares faded. They dreamed of home, awoke and were hungry, ate the
honeyed lotus flowers, and fell into a deeper sleep.

5. In the context of the passage, the best meaning of **haze** in paragraph 12 is...
- a. Mist
 - b. Flower petals
 - c. Shipmates
 - d. Smell
6. According to the story, the Lotus-eaters “look very gentle and hospitable.” Which of the following is the best meaning of **hospitable**?
- a. Fatigued
 - b. Welcoming
 - c. Young
 - d. Suspicious

17 Then Morpheus came to Ulysses, who was stretched on the sand, a little
apart from the rest. And he said to himself: “This man is a hero. Terrible are his
needs, sudden his deeds, and his dreams must be his own. I cannot help him.”

18 So Morpheus mixed no colors for Ulysses’s sleep but let him dream his
own dreams and read them as they came. He hovered above the sleeping king and
could not leave.

19 “What monsters he makes,” he said to himself. “Ah, the things he dreams,
this angry sleeper. What bloody mouths, what masts falling, sails ripping, what
rocks and reefs, what shipwrecks... How many deaths?”

20 Ulysses awoke, choking, out of a terrible nightmare. It seemed to him that
in his sleep he had seen the whole voyage laid out before him, had seen his ships
sinking, his men drowning. Monsters had crowded about him, clutching, writhing.

21 Ulysses smelled the honey sweetness and felt an overpowering hunger. He
took some of the flowers and raised them to his mouth. As their fragrance grew
stronger, he felt his eyelids drooping, his arms growing heavy, and he thought: “It
is these flowers that are making us sleep. Their scent alone brings sleep. I must not
eat them.”

22 Then he dragged himself to his feet and walked slowly into the sea. He
went under and arose snorting. His head had cleared. But when he went up on the
beach, the sweet fragrance rose like an ether and made him dizzy again.

23 “I must work swiftly,” he said.

7. The word **writhing** in paragraph 20 means...

- a. Helping
- b. Squirming
- c. Supporting
- d. Questioning

8. In the context of paragraph 21, the best meaning of **drooping** is...

- a. Softening
- b. Refreshing
- c. Closing
- d. Swelling

24 One by one he carried the sleeping men to the ships and propped them on their benches. His strength was going. The honey smell was invading him, making him droop with sleep. He took his knife and, cutting sharp splinters of wood to prop open his eyelids, staggered back among the men. He worked furiously now, lifting them on his shoulders, carrying them two at a time, throwing them into the ships.

25 Finally, the beach was cleared. The men lolled sleeping upon the benches. Then, all by himself, using his last strength, he pushed the ships into the water. When the ships were afloat in the shallow water, he lashed one to another with rawhide line, his own ship in front. Then he raised his sail and took the helm.

26 The wind was blowing from the southwest. It filled his sail. The line grew taut; the file of ships moved away from Lotusland.

27 Ulysses kept the helm, grim and unsmiling. For he knew that what he had seen painted on the walls of his sleep was meant to come true and that he was sailing straight into a nightmare.

9. The word **lolloed** in paragraph 25 means...

- a. Reclined
- b. Laughed
- c. Grumbled
- d. Waited

10. What is the meaning of **rawhide line** as it is used in this sentence?

When the ships were afloat in the shallow water, he lashed one to another with rawhide line, his own ship in front.

- a. A rope
- b. A paddle
- c. Cattle
- d. Chains

11. In paragraph 25, Ulysses “raised his sail and took the helm.” Which of the following is the best meaning of **helm**?

- a. Guns
- b. Steering mechanism
- c. Passengers
- d. Seat

12. In paragraph 26, the word **taut** means about the same as...

- a. Relaxed
- b. Stretched tightly
- c. Teach
- d. Shriveled