

In the Land of Lotus Eaters
by Tony Hoagland

What was the name of the bronze-headed stud
of a Greek deity
in charge of the Temple of Distraction?
Around whose shrine the ancient Greeks
would congregate, like flies, for hours,
instead of working in their shops and fields?

I remember dying for a drink
about the time my grandmother was ready
to say her final words into someone's ear.
I remember seeing, in the air above her head,
among the tubes and stainless steel,
a vision of a speedboat

with a laughing girl on board,
a red speedboat with the word
ALOHA stencilled on the bow,
ready to take me anywhere.
I guess I'm just the kind of person

who needs to be continually reminded
about love and brevity, about diligence
and loyalty to pain. And maybe my attention
is just permanently damaged, never coming back
from too much television,
too much silly talk,

the way Ulysses' men turned into swine
from too much recreation in the Lotus Land,
then ran away because they couldn't
stand to see what they'd become.

That's why the newsreels of Cambodia must be divided into slices
by deodorant commercials,
why the lipstick shades to choose between in drugstores
equal the number of remaining whales.
That's why the demolition of the rain forest
is directly proportionate to the number of couples
entering therapy in Kansas City.

It's as if, in another version of the *Odyssey*,
Ulysses' men forgot to tie him to the mast,
and he abandoned ship
to chase the luscious acapella voices of the sexy siren sisters.
To chase and chase and chase and chase and chase and chase.

And the archers shot their arrows with their eyes closed.
And the workers in the factory denied any knowledge
of what the weapons would be used for.
And the name of the one in charge was forgotten.
And the boat sailed on without a captain.