

Bloom's Dystopic Consciousness of Dublin Society

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Leopold Bloom's heightened awareness of the social corruption and inequalities present in modern Dublin society is an essential and defining feature of his character. His awareness leads to an acceptance and openness to others. According to H. Frew Waidner, Bloom applies the concept of parallax to his perspective on life, which allows him to observe various situations from different viewpoints. His own isolation and rejection have afforded him a deeper insight and expanded awareness on issues regarding justice, equality, and reform. Bloom is able to recognize the collapsed values and deteriorating political, familial, and religious institutions and fantasizes about being in a position that would allow him to rectify the social conditions of his time. Although he is not literally in a position of leadership, Bloom leads by example. His actions are in alignment with his beliefs, as evidenced by his acceptance, tolerance, and forgiveness of others. He remains loyal to his values despite the challenges he faces. He is able to adapt to various situations without sacrificing his morals. As Michael Spiegel, Patrick McCarthy, and Robert Kuehn note, Bloom's open-mindedness and flexibility highlight the rigid, uncompromising, and filtered views of his fellow countrymen. These men are metaphorically blind to reality and are intolerant of those whom they view "as a threat to their cultural integrity" (Spiegel 76). Several scholars, including Terrence Doody and Wesley Morris, argue that Bloom is in fact more adapted to a changing society and better prepared for obstacles that may confront him. His own alienation and isolation have provided him with the tools he needs to succeed

in the dystopia represented by Dublin society. Michael Mason maintains that through Joyce's characterization of Bloom, the author was dedicated to portraying contemporary Dublin family life as accurately as possible. Bloom's ability to recognize the immorality surrounding him allows him to function in society and form a belief system based on a set of personal morals and values to which he adheres. Leopold Bloom's dystopic consciousness of Dublin society and his reaction to these circumstances are what define him as unique and separate from Joyce's other characters.

Although Bloom is identified as an outsider and a foreigner, neither completely accepted nor rejected by his fellow countrymen, he is able to exist in a society of fallen people and broken values. Bloom explicitly states his views in opposition to the beliefs of others in the 'Cyclops' chapter, claiming that "force, hatred, history, all that" only breed further animosity and injustice (Kuehn 213). The Citizen in this chapter embodies the unyielding beliefs and fixed vision held by Irish nationalists (Spiegel 75). He uses Bloom as a scapegoat. Bloom's persecution serves to unify the remainder of the community through mutual exclusion. However, this alienation also emphasizes the narrow-minded and inflexible views upheld by the men in the pub and questions the presence of true companionship among them (Fagnoli and Gillespie 193). This event also serves to highlight these Dubliners' insular attitudes and ignorance of the larger community (Kuehn 212). Bloom's universal, altruistic views are met with violent patriotism and xenophobia, especially when Bloom makes it clear that he considers himself Irish and draws parallels between himself and Christ. At the end of the chapter, Joyce emphasizes the parody and humor in this scene when the Citizen fails to unite the members of the pub. In a final attempt to attack Bloom, the Citizen throws a biscuit tin at Bloom, who is then

transformed into the prophet Elijah and ascends into heaven, figuratively representing the new Messiah of Ireland (Spiegel 91). Bloom's victimization by the Citizen, symbolizing the one-eyed Cyclops, actually emphasizes his inability to unify these men against Bloom (Spiegel 90). Here, one can see how Bloom's thoughts on equality and justice and his acute awareness of the dystopic society in which he lives allow him to view life from a different perspective. These beliefs in turn provide a platform on which he bases his values and morals, and consequently drives his desire for social reform.

Bloom's ability to view the world with a broader consciousness and a different perspective carries into the 'Circe' chapter, where he experiences several hallucinations that underscore his thoughts on public reform. He imagines himself as the new Lord Mayor of Dublin. He states that he stands for "the reform of municipal morals and the plain ten commandments. New worlds for old. Union of all jew, moslem and gentile" (Joyce 399). This issue is clearly troublesome to Bloom, as he then takes on a sacrificial Christ-like role, carrying the sins of Ireland. This mimics the persecution that he previously endured by the Citizen and accentuates his role as a scapegoat (Fagnoli and Gillespie 200). Wolfgang Wicht describes the episode "in terms of the convergence of socialist utopianism and Christian apocalypse in the 'new Bloomusalem'" (242). Here, Bloom embodies both the political and religious reform he wishes to see.

Whether conscious or unconscious, this emphasizes that Bloom has a larger, more continental view of the world than his Dublin counterparts. Additionally, rather than rebelling against these unfavorable conditions as Stephen Dedalus does, Bloom accepts them with bravery and remains true to his own values (Kuehn 213). His dystopic consciousness allows him to remain aware of the surrounding struggles, which ironically opens him

to new possibilities and experiences. One can argue that this acceptance in turn gives Bloom a relative sense of freedom.

By recognizing the disunity and questioning the world he lives in, Bloom is able to confront immorality and share with others the ability to do good (Doody and Morris 233).

Although it is obvious that Bloom is emotionally wounded by his wife's infidelity, and he even allows himself to consider various forms of retaliation against Blazes Boylan and abandoning Molly, he decides to remain neutral and do nothing for the time being. Thus far, Bloom has been alienated by his own people and betrayed by his wife. However, he remains steadfast in his beliefs and refuses to sacrifice his own values. Bloom makes his position clear when, considering retribution against Boylan, he states, "two wrongs did not make one right" (Joyce 603). Bloom's own metamorphosis of identity from Jew to Irishman to Lord Mayor allows the reader to observe variations in the same person (McCarthy 57). Additionally, Joyce's use of several narrative styles slightly changes one's perception of Bloom in each chapter, shedding greater insight on his nature (Doody and Morris 233). As he wanders throughout Dublin on the day of June sixteenth, Bloom encounters various situations, which begin to reveal his identity. Since he does not specifically belong to any group or community, his multidimensional character allows him to embrace a greater realm of human consciousness and experience (McCarthy 77). He is able to adapt to different situations and, as Doody and Morris note, he is "capable of all of life's experiences" (232). Consequently, Joyce makes it apparent to the reader that Bloom employs the concept of parallax in his perspective of the world. Bloom does not attempt to censor reality. His open-minded and flexible views are at odds with the simple, confined ways of thinking of those around him (Waidner 183). Bloom's thought processes

transcend those of the ordinary Dubliners he interacts with. This allows him to be more receptive to the complexities of life and deal with the disconnected society in which he lives. Bloom's own alienation and rejection from society have increased the scope of his consciousness. These circumstances have also served to increase his accommodation and tolerance of differences as well as attain a "broad recognition of human variability" (Waidner 194). The difficult experiences he has faced throughout his life have provided him with a heightened awareness and moral conscience. Bloom's isolation, exile, and oppression by foreigners not only exemplify the dystopia evident in Dublin society, but also parallel the struggles of Ireland itself (Kain 62). Further evidence of Bloom's dystopic consciousness and desire for change is seen in the 'Ithaca' chapter. Bloom again envisions a utopian society based on the principles of order and justice. He recognizes that many social challenges are "the product of inequality and avarice and international animosity" (Joyce 571). Bloom's fantasies of an ideal world allow him to openly express his ideas on social reform without the opposition he usually faces. His imagination offers him a place to construct a society in which his own morals and values are based on. Bloom, unlike his fellow citizens, goes above and beyond the standard ethical expectations by not only recognizing the need for change, but also by actively living this way, as evidenced by his acceptance of others and non-violent opposition to those who challenge him. This can be seen in his interactions with the Citizen, his decision not to seek retribution against Boylan, and his acceptance of his wife Molly despite her affair.

Despite Bloom's active imagination, he remains firmly grounded in reality. He carefully weighs the risks and benefits of any behavior prior to acting on it and appears to be keenly aware of his surroundings. He considers his own beliefs to be

self-evident truths. He meditates on observations, events, and tasks that have occurred throughout his day, using these truths as an ethical framework as part of his regular bedtime routine. Fagnoli and Gillespie note that this routine serves an important psychological function (206). This act of recollection, utilizing his dystopic awareness of Dublin life, relaxes Bloom, appears to provide an outlet for his frustrations, and gives him a sense of renewed vitality. It also allows him to readjust to his usual daily routine (Fagnoli and Gillespie 206). Since ethical concerns and social reform seem to weigh heavily on Bloom's mind, this reflection allows Bloom to wake up prepared and revitalized. Joyce's exploration of issues regarding truth, immorality, and consciousness brings attention to modern society's "escape from the bonds of morality" (Mason 181). Michael Mason notes Joyce's efforts to expose the truth about contemporary family life in Europe (187).

Leopold Bloom emerges as a figure of stability and clarity amidst the chaos of distrust, deteriorating values, and prejudice in Dublin during this time period. Although he is subject to inevitable human experiences such as desire, jealousy, and escapism, he is able to overcome these feelings and face life as it is, embracing all of the trials and tribulations that arise along the way. Bloom's awareness of the harsh nature of reality and his willingness to face it without compromising his own beliefs distinguish him as a modern-day hero (Kuehn 213). Bloom's desire for equality, justice, and tolerance is carried out in his actions and communications. His dystopic consciousness and passion for reform ground Bloom and motivate him to remain accepting of others and stand by his principles in the face of opposition. As Bloom himself states in the 'Ithaca' chapter, his daily contemplation on ethical concerns and social reform reinvigorate him and provide him with a sense of meaning and motivation (Joyce 591). His own

standards give him direction and guide his decisions. This allows Bloom to forgive others, and in turn, provides him with an inner sense of freedom despite his suffering. His ability to identify the interconnectedness and unity among all people allows Bloom to co-exist among members of a society who have rejected him.

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