

In James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*, protagonist Leopold Bloom wrestles with his world as he journeys through it day to day. Much like the *Odyssey's* character for whom the book is named, Bloom struggles to find his place in the world and to make sense of life and death. In the novel, Bloom attends the funeral of Dignam. Dignam does not seem to be a man who was well-respected, and yet the characters attend the funeral out of a sense of duty or obligation. While on the way to the funeral, Bloom thinks about the casket falling out of the carriage. He seems to find both humor and indifference in the idea of the corpse falling out onto the ground, or even the thoughts of the body rotting beneath the ground. This separation between the soul and the concept of death is one that seems to recur throughout Bloom's journey.

After the death of Leopold and Molly Bloom's son Rudy, it seems that Mr. Bloom in particular, has a difficult time processing the tragedy and gaining some form of closure. Perhaps that is mostly because the audience doesn't get to know Molly apart from Bloom's views of her. Because she is only known through what Bloom perceives, we cannot tell what her inner thoughts consist of or the ways she might be grieving or wrestling with the loss in ways that differ, or are similar to Bloom's. In any case, because the audience is mostly inside Bloom's thoughts, through what Joyce has written in the novel, and therefore we are able to see that there is hardly a moment that goes by that Rudy does not cross these thoughts.

It would be difficult to understand Bloom's struggles with Rudy's death, without also acknowledging his marriage with Molly and the distance that is present between them, as it seems greatly intertwined. It is evident in the novel that Molly is having an affair, and that Bloom is aware of this affair. Bloom has also reached out to another woman with similar intentions. He thinks often of the tryst yet does nothing to interject or stop it. It is quite possible that he believes that attempting to intervene in these plans would cause more harm than good, or even that it would not make any difference at all in their relationship. On a psychological level, it makes sense that Bloom would be preoccupied in the presence of almost any woman he encounters

that he would be thinking of them in some sort of sensual manner, especially if he is not getting any action at home. Which would bear the question of whether the Blooms have had struggles in their marriage from the beginning, or if it was there all along. Perhaps these issues even occurred after Rudy's death.

Because the novel makes it clear that they Blooms have had two children; Milly and Rudy, we know that there has been a relationship of sorts there in the past. What makes the relationship more tangible is the fact that Bloom reveals to the audience that Rudy was conceived due to Molly's arousal upon seeing two dogs having sex. Later on, in Chapter 8 as we get to know Bloom a bit more, it is two flies on top of each other that brings the memory of his and Molly's first union together. While this could be perceived as bestial or crass content to include in a novel, it is much more complex, and at the same time, much more simple than this. Joyce's choice to depict animal coitus in parallels with the Bloom's is meant to show that the relationship is very human and very natural. The reason for this could be that sex has only been something that has been a requirement of marriage and procreation within the societal constructs upheld in Bloom's world. However, Bloom's mannerisms of caring for Molly—making her breakfast, supplying her books, et cetera—seem to suggest that there is some affection. This affection seems to be present not only for Molly, but for Milly and Rudy as well. It could perhaps also suggest that there has been a lack of affection from the very beginning and that their relationship is a very primal, animalistic one. There is, however, another side to consider. The "bestial" aspects of their sexual relationship also seem to be a metaphor or symbol for their marriage, and ultimately for Rudy's death.

As the novel progresses, the audience learns that Bloom holds some sort of guilt for Rudy's death, as seen in the adage: "If it's healthy it's from the mother. If not from the man. Better luck next time." While the cause of death is nothing that can be pinned to the blame of either parent, it is easy to understand why Bloom feels at fault. Partially because such emotions

are part of the natural cycles of grief and partially because his marriage seems to be on the rocks, more than likely as a direct result of the pain of such a loss, for both Molly and Bloom. The events suggest that the little connection that the two have had in their marriage has been strained after the death of their son. In Bloom's thoughts of remembrance, he says, "better luck next time", but it must be noted that there is no next time, there has not been a next time. There is reason to doubt that there will be a next time considering that the only person "getting it up" is Boylan, the man that Molly is having an affair with. These factors, along with their daughter Milly being distant and away from home, cause Bloom to wrestle with the nature of things: their natural, animalistic behaviors, life, death, and so on.

When Milly is first introduced in the novel, she is found in bed reading after Bloom has made her breakfast. She asks her husband what a word means, though mispronounced, it not only reveals her intelligence compared to Bloom's but also leaves the word as a nagging tagline in his thoughts throughout the novel. The word: Metempsychosis. The definition of the word is "the supposed transmigration at death of the soul of a human being or animal into a new body of the same or a different species." Considering this meaning and the fact that it comes across Bloom's thoughts repeatedly, it is safe to assume that there is some inclination of the soul, or some pondering of the belief at the very least. Although much of what triggers these thoughts are the events of everyday life--whatever is occurring in the moment--there is certainly some concept of the afterlife that Bloom never ceases to be wrestling with. The fact that the dogs' and the flies' reproductive processes trigger thoughts about the sexual connection for both Molly and Bloom between each other, would suggest that all things are connected, just as the definition of Metempsychosis suggests as well.

In an almost literal sense, Bloom seems to accept the idea that all of life is intertwined and connected and if there is a soul, that soul is recycled back into the earth, much like everything else. His thoughts lean that way with Dignam's death and funeral, thinking of the

body decaying, becoming one with the earth and worms. Ashes to Ashes and Dust to Dust, for in dust we were made and to dust we shall return. Perhaps this is the reason that he does not intervene in Molly's affair as well. Every aspect of Bloom's life, in everything from his habits in the bathroom to the way he responds to people, to the ways he has wrestled with ideas of life and death, is centered on the idea that the whole of the earth lends itself back into itself. Every being lends itself to one another.