Evaluate that Consciousness is the Controller of the Lives of the Characters in James Joyce's Novels

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Abstract

Consciousness refers to the continuous flow of thoughts, memories and awareness in the human mind. It covers a larger area of unrestricted mental activities. There are layers within layers in the human consciousness. This paper tends to show that there is no other controller of an individual but his or her own consciousness. The paper has been undertaken in hopes that the study would lead to a new knowledge and provide foundations or approaches to James Joyce, which would make his novels more understandable. It also examines how consciousness affects the characters' participation in various activities. They are affected positively or negatively by their consciousness. Each of the layers of the human mind plays an important role in influencing and shaping human behaviour. If a character does some work

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without thinking, he is unconsciously conscious. Events in memory are co-existed. They move backward and forward freely. Joyce's novels are mimicry of mental activities going on in the minds of the characters: Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom and Molly Bloom. The darker side of the mind is given more emphasis than the light side of our beings. He renders the 'psyche' or 'soul' of character accurately or truthfully. The interest shifts from the extrovert to introvert, from outer to inner. He tries to portray impressions flowing in conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind.

Keywords: Conscious, Subconscious, Unconscious, Mimicry.

Who is the real controller of an individual? The controller of an individual is consciousness. "Consciousness indicates the entire area of mental attention, from preconsciousness on through the levels of the mind up to and including the highest one of rational, communicable awareness." (Robert Humphrey 2) Freud's topographical model of the mind divides the mind into conscious, preconscious or subconscious and unconscious. Beneath the conscious, there is the sub-conscious and the unconscious. Conscious mind includes rational awareness, daily decisions, thoughts, feelings and actions of which we are thinking about right now. This is the part of our mind by which we can think and talk rationally. This is most active part of our mind. Preconscious mind includes all mental thoughts and feelings that a person is not currently aware of, but which can easily be brought to conscious mind. They are stored in memory. These thoughts are easily assessed whenever needed. Thoughts pass easily back and forth between the conscious and the preconscious. The preconscious mind affects the conscious mind. Unconscious is named as unconscious because we are unaware of its existence. What is hidden away exists in our unconscious. Unfulfilled desires are repressed into the unconscious mind. Sometimes repressed desires are

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emerged in particular moment as dream. The dream is not absurd. It is actually a wish fulfillment. These three layers of mind are compared to an iceberg. Everything above the water represents conscious or awareness and everything below the water represents the pre-conscious and unconscious. Only 10% of an iceberg is visible (conscious) whereas 90% of an iceberg is under the water (preconscious and unconscious). The conscious is only a small part of the human psyche. Freud describes three agents of psychic apparatus: Id, Ego and Super-ego. Id is the source of bodily needs, impulses and repressed sexual urges. Id contains the libido which is the primary source of instinctual force. Freud calls it pleasure principle. It is the unconscious: inaccessible, chaotic and unorganized part of the mind. The next agent of psychic apparatus is ego. He calls it the reality principle. It intermediates between the id and the external world. It allows some of the id's desires to be expressed only when the consequences of these desires are acceptable in the society. The last one is super-ego. It is the moral of personality. Cultural and moral ideas and norms of behaviour form the super ego. The behaviour of man is conducted by the forces lying deep within sub-conscious and unconscious. Thus human actions are bound to be determined more by the subconscious and the unconscious than by the conscious. The revolutionary theories of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler and Carl Jung in the field of psychology stimulate the modern novelists in the early years of twentieth century.

“Stream of Consciousness” is a phrase for psychologists and William James coined the term in his book *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). He describes the thought of mind as always changing continuous flow. Thought is part of personal consciousness – every thought is also “unique and ever-changing”. It is constantly being renewed and after being renewed it carries with it a freshness and new context in which it has reappeared. Human mind is something in a state of flux, constantly changing and becoming different. There is no chronological movement of mind, but a zigzag and sinuous movement from the past to the

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present and from the present to the past. Consciousness, like a river, is ever flowing and always changing. A stream is never the same one second to the next, similarly consciousness is not the same one second to the next. James believed that division of mental flow distorts the flow of mind.

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it present itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or 'a stream' is the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it thereafter let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life. (William James 239)

Twentieth century novelists are no longer interested in what a character says or does, rather to the happenings inside his mind. They have turned novel away from external to internal reality. The main business of stream of consciousness novelists is to present the impressions and experiences of the characters as they are. They should not change human thought. Therefore it becomes necessary for the novelist to remain faithful or absolutely truthful to reality however mad or illogical his presentation appears to be. They are interested in those levels of consciousness which cannot be viewed and which are essentially dynamic in nature. What is the most important characteristic of this kind of novel is the treatment of character - a man or a woman - not in his or her external life and doing, but in his or her inner world of psychology. The character's experiences and attitudes begin to influence the perspective of the novel. The novel concentrates on the subjective reality of its characters and the nature of life as dynamic flux. The stream of consciousness novel always focuses on the contents of a character's mind at a given point in space and time in order to suggest a record of thought as it occurs, as it rises out of a circumstantial context. According to Robert Humphrey:

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The stream of consciousness novel is identified most quickly by its subject matter. This, rather than its techniques, its purposes, of its themes, distinguishes it. Hence, the novels that are said to use the stream of consciousness technique to a considerable degree prove, upon analysis, to be novels which have as their essential subject matter the consciousness of one or more characters; that is, the depicted consciousness serves as a screen on which the material in these novels is presented. (Humphrey 2)

There are many issues of consciousness: how mental experiences arise from a physical entity, how mental states relate to our physical states, how consciousness relates to language. Stream of consciousness, from psychological perspective, describes metaphorically the phenomenon – adjoining flow of sensations, impressions, images, memories and thoughts – experienced by each person at all states of consciousness.

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce writes three famous novels: *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939). The inside of the human mind is his main concern. His works concentrates on the private self and on the awareness of inner life. His contribution to the rendition of impressions by putting the reader in indirect communication with the minds of the characters is immense in its scope and far-reaching as consequence. With the use of the literary device stream of consciousness, the novelist enters the minds of the characters, so the reader has an opportunity to experience the characters' thoughts from within. The technique gives a very direct view into the subtle or rapid shift of a character's thought. The reader follows character's subjective experience. *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* follows the consciousness of Stephen throughout his childhood and adolescence, chronicling his life as a toddler, a schoolboy, and finally as a young artist. The protagonist gathers fleeting sensations and memories, changing thoughts and all sorts of associations. It is known *Kunstlerroman*, meaning 'artist's novel' in English, is a narrative about an artist's growth to maturity. It can be classified as a sub-category of *Bildungsroman*.

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The novelist uses the third person to describe the experiences of Stephen but everything in the novel is seen through Dedalus. After the opening page of the novel, with his confused fragments of memory and childhood impressions, the focus quickly sharpens as we look through the consciousness of a very young Stephen. He recalls how he wetted his bed and his mother used to spread the oil-sheet. The momentary and disjunctive thoughts appear one after another. His stream of thought is so strong that we are switched from one thought to that of another without attracting attention to the transition.

It is the question of how mental experiences arise from a physical entity. Stephen recalls his school experiences during his stay at Clongowes Wood College. One day Wells, a school fellow pushes him into a ditch of muddy, cold water. He is feeling very uneasy because of his illness. He does not report anybody against Wells because he recalls his father's parting advice that he should not complain against anyone whatever happens to him. When he gets a fever from the filthy water, he fantasizes about how everyone would feel sorry if he dies.

He wondered if he would die. You could die just the same on a sunny day. He might die before his mother came. Then he would have a dead mass in the chapel like the way the fellows had told him it was when Little had died. All the fellows would be at the mass, dressed in black, all with sad faces. Wells too would be there but no fellow would look at him. The rector would be there in a cope of black and gold and there would be tall yellow candles on the altar . . . and he would be buried in the little graveyard of the community off the main avenue of limes. And Wells would be sorry then for what he had done. And the bell would toll slowly. (A Portrait 26-27)

Joyce uses the stream of consciousness technique to represent Stephen's embarrassed condition when he is asked if he kisses his mother before going to bed. He replies 'yes', and all the boys start laughing at him. Immediately he says 'no' and again everybody laughs. He

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does not understand what was wrong with his answer. At school he faces the cruel flippancy of the boys. He recalls his school punishment by the teacher Father Dolan. Father asks him why he is not writing. He replies that his spectacles are broken and doctor advises him not to study till new glasses. But Father Dolan punishes him with the pandybat on his hand. Encouraged by the boys and prompted by his own painful sense of injustice, he goes to rector. His displeasure is almost ended when he meets the rector and tells his plight and miserable experience. The harsh unforgettable treatment by Father Dolan goes deep into Stephen's consciousness. His expression reflects how much he feels pain in his body, mind and soul.

Stephen closed his eyes and held out in the air his trembling hand with the palm upwards. He felt the prefect of studies touch it for a moment at the fingers to straighten it and then the swish of the sleeve of the soutane as the pandybat was lifted to strike. A hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud crack of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire: and at the sound and the pain scalding tears were driven into his eyes. . . . limbs quivered with pain and fright he held back the hot tears and the cry that scalded his throat.(A Portrait 57)

During three days of retreat in honour of the patron saint of the school, Saint Francis Xavier, Father Arnal, Stephen's old teacher at Clongowes Wood School would talk on four subjects – death, judgment, hell and heaven. The fire of hell gives out no light. The fire of hell is made to torture not only body but also soul of damned sinners. Memories are always stored in the memory. Stephen's whoring lies in his mind. He plunges into a deep confusion. He feels spiritually paralysed. Hearing the sermons he feels spiritual pains.

Could it be that he, Stephen Dedalus, had done those things? His conscience sighed in answer. Yes, he had done them, secretly, filthily, time after time, and hardened in sinful impenitence, he had dared to wear the mask of holiness before the tabernacle

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itself while his soul within was a living mass of corruption. How came it that God had not struck him dead? (A Portrait 156)

The impact of Father Arnal's sermons on Stephen is represented to us through stream of consciousness technique. His thoughts on the rector's sermons on Hell as the consequences of sin pain him.

Every word of it was for him. Against his sin, foul and secret, the whole wrath of God was aimed. The preacher's knife had probed deeply into his diseased conscience and he felt now that his soul was festering in sin The sordid details of his orgies stank under his very nostrils: the sootcoated packet of pictures which he had hidden in the flue of the fire-place and in the presence of whose shamless or bashful wantonness he lay for hours sinning in thought and deed. . . . (A Portrait 130-131)

The narrator does not tell us what Stephen is thinking, the author uses stream of consciousness technique to show what Stephen is thinking. Stephen starts thinking of his sin and suffering from a secret consciousness of sin. He thinks that rejecting God he kept on committing sin. He enters a period of deep confusion and spiritual paralysis. He finds himself an altogether less pleasant person. He has lost the ability to maintain any kind of moral structure or self-discipline. The conflict becomes tormenting when he hears the soul shaking sermons of Father Arnall. His mind and soul are filled with great determination to change from a degraded sinner to a devoted young man. He searches for a church to make confession. Deeply disturbed by the consciousness of his own sin including masturbation and encounter with prostitutes, Stephen goes to confession. Finally he finds and confesses his all sin.

It seems that our lives are dependent on external factors, but it is our consciousness that controls our lives and helps us get decision. The director of the school says that God has chosen Stephen to become a priest of the Church. The offer stirs his heart and he thinks about

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obscure Catholic doctrine. He meditates that as a priest, he would acquire secret knowledge and come to know obscure things hidden from others, and would know the sinful longings and sinful thoughts of others without himself being touched by sin. He thinks that though the life of a priest is a grave, ordered and passionless life, it will not allow him the liberty of an individual. The chill and order of the priestly life insists him to refuse the offer. Both the completely sinful and the completely devout are false and harmful. To him life of a priest would be contrary to Stephen's desire for freedom and independence. His hidden desire is expressed through symbolic manner. When he is wandering all alone on the sea beach, he has a vision of his true vocation. His friends call him as 'Stephanos' and 'The Dedalus' and identifies himself with Daedalus, a artificer in Greek mythology. His name seems to him a prophecy. He recognizes their mockery, but it flatters him. "His heart trembled; his breath came faster and a wild spirit passed over his limbs as though he were soaring sunward. His heart trembled in an ecstasy of fear and his soul was in flight." (A Portrait 192) He notices a girl standing in the waves. He thinks about her deeply and seems enjoying the artistic view of life. Seeing the sight of the girl, he is overwhelmed with joy: "Heavenly God! Cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy." (A Portrait 195) The girl is a vehicle which compels the latent artistic quality in Stephen to come forth. It is his mind by which he keeps aloof himself from the external factors: family, country and religion.

Toward the end of the book Stephen records a series of diary entries describing his last few days in Dublin before his departure from family. The diary entries at the end of the book show the doubt and distrust in his mind, and the last meeting and discussion with Lynch, Cranly and Davin. He acknowledges he is taking a risk that may damn him. His conversation with his friends is as his conversation with the entire human race. It is revealed that he is ready for his flight from Dublin to Paris and his mother has now accepted this fact. Thus you can see throughout the novel how circumstances evoke his mental processes, how

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specific elements trigger his mental images, how impressions from the outer world are absorbed by his consciousness and how external reality is transmuted by his private vision. At last it is his consciousness which gives him ultimate decision to become an artist.

Joyce's chief contribution in *Ulysses* is his way of rendering the characters' inner lives consciousness. He novel narrates the lives of the main characters: Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom and Molly Bloom who wander in Dublin. Bloom's interior monologue is different from Stephen's. Stephen reflects himself in poetry and Bloom in prose. Stephen's stream is intellectual and aesthetic. Joyce prepares the reader to the stream of consciousness technique and builds up a context of knowledge about Stephen and his activities on which he can rely, he drops the crutch of dialogue and allows the reader to slip into Stephen's mind, letting him see more of what happens there and establishing a truer proportion between inner and outer components.

While wandering on the vast strand of Dublin Bay, Stephen ponders over his life as a student in Paris, his poem, his family, his parenthood and his mother's death. He sits down to write a poem on a bit of paper. This poem is about the transformation from life to death. Stephen's thoughts of his mother are so closely interwoven with thoughts of mutability that it is often difficult to separate them. In the Nighttown, he banishes the ghost of his mother. When it appears, Stephen raises his ashplant and cries out 'Nothing' and the ghost disappears. His mother's death burdens his soul with guilt. He is able to overcome his mental connection with his mother. Thus our consciousness is always stronger than the external factors.

Stephen, an elbow rested on the jagged granite, . . . in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown grave-clothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes. Across the threadbare cuffedged he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the wellfed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held

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a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting. (Ulysses 7-8)

Stephen's sensitiveness is shown through his sympathetic attitude to the misfit, unattractive and weakened-eyed boy Cyril Sargent who reminds Stephen of his own condition. In the beginning of the novel, we notice that Stephen is dissatisfied with his own look when he looks at himself in the mirror. His reaction of displeasure and disgust to his own visage is an early indication of his dissatisfaction with himself and his place in the world. He reacts prophetically in particular to Deasy's anti-semitism. In "Telemachus" episode Haines remarks: "I don't want to see my country fall into the hands of German jews either. That's our national problem, I'm afraid, just now." (Ulysses 24) Like Haines Mr. Deasy comments:

England is in the hands of the Jews. In all the highest places: her finance, her press. And they are the signs of a nation's decay. Wherever they gather they eat up the nation's vital strength. I have seen it coming these years. As sure as we are standing here the jew merchants are already at their work of destruction. Old England is dying. (Ulysses 36)

He says about the virtues of the English and the vices the Jews. According to him Jews "sinned against the light." (Ulysses 37) Though his anti-semitism is far from admirable, it is more easily pardoned than that of the English Haines.

Bloom remembers his son Rudy who died after only eleven days of his life. His thoughts always return to him. Hearing a mourner's criticism about suicide, Bloom's mind is disturbed as his own father had taken his own life. He remembers that it is almost the anniversary of his father's suicide. He remembers his dead son and dead father, he is also

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concerned about his living daughter. Bloom's thoughts concerned with the burial of the dead at Cemetry are revealed. The funeral of Dignam creates in him an image of death.

Poor Dignam! His last lie on the earth in his box. When you think of them all it does seem a waste of wood. All gnawed through. They could invent a handsome bier with a kind of panel sliding let it down that way. Ay but they might object to be buried out of another fellow's. They're so particular. Lay me in my native earth. Bit of clay from the holy land. Only a mother and dead born child ever buried in the one coffin. I see what it means. I see. To protect him as long as possible even in the earth. The Irishman's house is his coffin. (Ulysses 112)

Bloom faces many men's suffering. He tries to see good in everyone and is ready to forgive any kind of insult. He helps a blind man cross the street. He contributes to the fund for the children of his friend Dignam who has just died. Bloom is a passive spectator at the death of Dignam. After seeing Dilly Dedalus, one of Simon Dedalus's daughters, he thinks about how a family falls apart when the mother dies. Every moment passes away and can never be recaptured in its original form.

Leopold Bloom's unfulfilled sexual desire is stirred due to his lack of sexual pleasure with his wife Molly Bloom, his non-sexual affair with Martha Clifford, his visit to the brothel and his wife's affair with Blazes Boylan. Most of the time Bloom is obsessed with his adulterous wife Molly and creating ads that produce an exciting visual sensation for the viewer. He communicates most intimately with Molly by reading the expressions of her eyes. Penelop in *Odyssey* is the faithful wife but Molly is an unfaithful wife. Molly's growing affection toward Boylan's courtship humiliates Leopold. His mind accepts negative thoughts and begin think and feel in negative way, naturally the result would be unhappy. His conscious mind accepts his wife's affair as wrong. The doubt is not removed rather stored in his deep mind and comes forth again and again. She does not show concern about taking care

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of her husband. He knows his wife's behaviour but he forgives her just to keep the peace of married life. Bloom is not only victim of personal 'unconscious' but also collective 'unconscious' because in his state of mind the shadows, dreams and images of a race to which he belongs come up unconsciously. The shadows that become a part of Leopold's personal unconscious are also a racial problem of great importance which cannot be ignored.

Joyce took the stream of consciousness technique further in *Ulysses* by going beyond the pre-speech level of consciousness and exploring the deep layers of subconscious and unconscious. Man is not rational in his behaviour. Past memories hunt many persons in the novel. Stephen is haunted throughout the novel by the thought of his ill treatment towards his mother. He has a nightmare of history and Bloom is haunted by the death of his son Rudy. Hallucination also occurs from the unconscious Level. Bloom and Stephen look into a mirror and there are not their own faces but an antlered Shakespeare.

Bloom is a sonless father and Stephen a fatherless son. Stephen has the lack of authority in his life, with his mother's death and no father figure, while Leopold is looking for somebody to be father. Stephen is in search of a father-figure, spiritual father and Bloom in search of a son. So they have their own search. Bloom has acted as a father. Stephen and Bloom do not actually become the completed father-son symbol until the Nighttown scene. Craving for paternity runs like an undercurrent in the mind of Bloom. Bloom goes to the hospital in Holles street, Dublin, where Mrs. Purefoy is admitted. In the hospital common room he sees a group of students drinking. He finds Stephen among them. This sudden meeting with him afflicts Bloom. He recovers in Stephen his long lost son Rudy. Psychological complement in the father-son relation is realized when Bloom picks up Stephen from a gutter in Nighttown and takes him home for a friendly chat and a cup of cocoa. The "Circe" episode relates Bloom and Stephen on the unconscious level to justify the father-son theme that is the central in this book. Stephen asserts that Shakespeare is not

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Hamlet rather Hamlet's father. Stephen in so many ways resembles Hamlet. When Blooms begins to think Stephen as his son, he follows him, tries to stop his drinking, prevents him from the robbery, defends him from the police and takes him home. Day by day characters reconcile an inner conflict and artistic vision, and gain a greater understanding.

The article concludes with the opinion that nothing affects the characters more than consciousness. More or less conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind are responsible for the activities of the characters in Joyce's novels. Consciousness is constantly flowing and changing, and moving forward and backward. The past, presents and future work simultaneously in the human consciousness. Every moment has thoughts that distinguish themselves from the past and coming thoughts of the mind. The impressions that come from moment to moment in thought are basically heterogeneous, resulting in the discontinuity of the impressions. Apparently they seem disjointed. But they have deep connection in the inner level. There is no chronological sequence of events. Our consciousness is beyond the tyranny of time dimension. David Daiches remarks:

The stream of consciousness technique is a means of escape from the tyranny of the time dimension. It is not only in distinct memories that the past impinges on the present, but also in much vaguer and more subtle ways, our mind floating off down some channel, superficially irrelevant but really having a definite starting-off place from the initial situation; so that in presenting the character's reactions to events, the author will show us states of mind being modified by associations and recollections deriving from the present situation, but referring to a constantly shifting series of events in the past. (David Daiches 16-17)

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