

Modernity Entanglement: Presence of Space, Wanderers, Marginality in Ulysses

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Abstract

In *Ulysses*, Joyce intricately portrays modern Dublin through the eyes of Bloom and Stephen, illustrating the marginal condition of individuals caught between "presence" and "absence." The novel's exploration of space—urban, spiritual, and historical—reflects the fragmented existential state of modernity. Urban space becomes more than a backdrop, actively shaping and reflecting the characters' alienation. Spiritual space is similarly fraught, with Bloom and Stephen navigating a tension between meaning and emptiness. Historical space, too, weighs heavily, as the characters confront the lingering echoes of the past, revealing both continuity and dislocation. The figure of the wanderer, embodied by Bloom, serves as a powerful metaphor for the modern human condition. Bloom's meandering through Dublin represents a deeper existential quest, wherein the wanderer, positioned at the margins of presence, searches for meaning in a fractured world. *Ulysses* emphasizes the significance of this wandering as a form of resistance to meaninglessness, suggesting that even in the liminal spaces of modern life, there remains a persistent drive to understand and belong. Joyce's novel, through its nuanced treatment of space and marginality, offers a profound meditation on the precariousness and resilience of the modern self in its search for purpose.

1. Introduction

Ulysses, the landmark of modernist literature, is widely celebrated for its innovative use of stream-of-consciousness, which delves deeply into the psychological and spiritual crises of modern urban individuals. Yet beyond its linguistic and narrative complexity, the novel's exploration of space is equally profound. Viewed through a spatial theoretical lens, *Ulysses* constructs a rich, multi-layered portrayal of Dublin, transforming the city into more than a mere backdrop—it becomes an active, symbolic landscape interwoven with the personal and collective

experiences of its characters. Through the fragmented perspectives of Bloom and Stephen, Dublin emerges as a site where material "presence" and symbolic resonance collide, encapsulating the existential struggles of modernity.

In *Ulysses*, space transcends the physical boundaries of the city and extends into the spiritual and historical realms of modern life. The urban landscape—its streets, landmarks, and public spaces—reflects the inner dislocation of the novel's characters, mapping their psychological turmoil onto the very fabric of the city. Joyce skillfully portrays Dublin as a space of simultaneity, where past and present converge, and the line between the personal and the public becomes increasingly blurred. This intricate layering of urban, spiritual, and historical space enables *Ulysses* to vividly portray the fragmented realities of individuals seeking meaning in a world marked by alienation and uncertainty.

At the heart of these spatial dynamics is the figure of the wanderer, embodied most vividly by Leopold Bloom. As a modern wanderer, Bloom is severed from traditional sources of identity and meaning—estranged from history, community, and even his own sense of self. His wandering through Dublin is not merely a physical journey but a metaphor for the existential drift experienced by the modern individual. Stephen Dedalus, likewise, is a wanderer, though his journey is more intellectual and spiritual in nature. Both characters navigate a marginal space—a liminal zone marked by monotony, emptiness, and the collapse of grand narratives that once provided a sense of stability. This marginality reflects a broader condition of modernity. The spaces Bloom and Stephen inhabit are fluid, where presence and absence are in constant tension, confronting them with the void that lies at the core of modern existence. Joyce's depiction of this liminality captures the essence of the modern human condition—one defined by dislocation and estrangement, yet driven by an unrelenting search for meaning. In *Ulysses*, Dublin is not just a city but a metaphorical space, representing the fragility of identity and existence in the modern age.

Joyce's spatial exploration in *Ulysses* transcends traditional narrative confines, offering a framework through which the novel interrogates the instability of presence in a world increasingly shaped by absence. The urban landscape becomes a stage where the spiritual and existential crises of modern individuals unfold. The marginal spaces that Bloom and Stephen traverse—both literal and symbolic—are spaces of alienation, but they also hold the potential for transformation. These spaces embody the tension between the fragmentation of modern life and the enduring human drive to find coherence and meaning.

2.Literature Review

James Joyce's *Ulysses* stands as a paradigmatic work of modernist literature, celebrated for its intricate narrative techniques, thematic complexity, and its profound engagement with the human condition. The novel, set in Dublin over the course of a single day, intricately weaves together the lives of Leopold Bloom, Stephen Dedalus, and others, creating a microcosm of the modern urban experience. The novel's capacity to defamiliarize commonplace experiences, positioning them within a broader philosophical and historical discourse, makes it a central text in both modernist and postmodernist literary studies. Scholarly engagement with *Ulysses* has spanned a multitude of

perspectives, from psychoanalytic and existential inquiries to feminist and postcolonial critiques.

One of the most widely discussed aspects of *Ulysses* is Joyce's use of stream of consciousness, a technique that allows readers to directly access the internal monologues of his characters. Lawrence (1981) examines how this innovation diverges from traditional narrative structures, aligning Joyce with modernist aims to represent fragmented realities. The technique disrupts conventional plot progressions, reflecting the fluidity and disjointedness of human consciousness. George (2021) extends this analysis by exploring the occult dimensions of Joyce's stream of consciousness, noting that the narrative's esoteric undertones contribute to a richer understanding of the text's psychological depth. This narrative form requires the reader to navigate the complexities of characters' thoughts, further defamiliarizing the concept of linear storytelling and inviting a more engaged, interpretive reading experience.

In addition to stream of consciousness, Joyce's innovative manipulation of narrative structure is a central point of scholarly discussion. Gifford and Seidman (1988) explore the novel's episodic structure, where each chapter employs a distinct narrative technique. The text alternates between high realism, parodic legal jargon, and lyrical prose, among other forms, reflecting the diverse textures of Dublin life. Castle (2009) underscores the importance of these stylistic shifts in relation to the novel's thematic concerns. Joyce's deliberate juxtaposition of disparate narrative forms mirrors the fragmentation of modern experience, emphasizing the dissonance between different aspects of the characters' lives and the city they inhabit. This radical experimentation with form also serves to challenge the reader's expectations, forcing a reevaluation of what constitutes a coherent narrative.

A key feature of *Ulysses* is its complex engagement with myth, particularly its parallels with Homer's *Odyssey*. Attridge, Howes, and Howes (2000) highlight how Joyce repurposes the epic structure of the *Odyssey* to frame a modern narrative grounded in the trivial and everyday. By recontextualizing the mythological journey within the mundane events of Bloom's day, Joyce simultaneously venerates and subverts classical heroic narratives. This fusion of the heroic with the ordinary serves to critique the romanticization of myth while also drawing attention to the potential heroism embedded within modern life. Castle (2009) further asserts that Joyce's use of myth is inherently political, as it critiques the nationalist rhetoric that pervaded early 20th-century Ireland. Bloom's journey through Dublin, though mundane in its details, echoes the larger search for identity that defines modernity.

Themes of identity, fatherhood, and alienation pervade *Ulysses*, particularly through the lens of the characters' psychological and existential struggles. Ueno (1990) explores Bloom's role as a father figure to Stephen Dedalus, examining how Joyce uses the paternal relationship to deconstruct traditional notions of authority and identity. Bloom's inability to assert his paternal authority reflects broader concerns about the dissolution of patriarchal structures in modern society. McBride (2021) extends this analysis by emphasizing Bloom's marginalization as an ethnic and cultural outsider in Dublin. His Jewish identity positions him as an emblem of alienation, both within his family and in the broader socio-political landscape. This sense of exclusion parallels the existential isolation experienced by other characters in the novel, particularly Stephen, whose intellectual detachment further complicates his relationship with both Bloom and his own identity.

Joyce's intricate portrayal of Dublin serves as a reflection of early 20th-century Ireland, marked by political tensions surrounding colonialism and nationalism. Orr (2008) examines how *Ulysses* critiques the restrictive narratives of Irish nationalism through Bloom's experiences as an outsider. Bloom's position as a Jewish-Irishman allows Joyce to explore the complexities of Irish identity in the context of colonialism and its aftermath. Lawrence (1981) similarly notes that Joyce's detailed depiction of Dublin life provides a counterpoint to romanticized depictions of Ireland in nationalist discourse. By focusing on the ordinary and often grim realities of life in Dublin, Joyce offers a more ambivalent and nuanced portrayal of Irish identity.

Philosophical readings of *Ulysses* often center on Joyce's engagement with existential themes. Benjamin (1997) argues that Bloom's existential wanderings through Dublin represent a broader search for meaning in a world that no longer offers traditional moral certainties. Bloom's introspective reflections invite readers to contemplate their own ethical dilemmas in a world where old structures of authority and belief have eroded. Theall (1997) further connects Joyce's philosophical inquiries to modernist concerns with individual agency, suggesting that the novel's ethical complexity reflects the uncertainties and ambiguities of modern life. Joyce's engagement with these themes extends beyond mere representation, as he forces readers to grapple with the moral complexities inherent in the characters' choices and actions.

Postcolonial and feminist perspectives have also provided valuable insights into *Ulysses*. Orr (2008) focuses on Bloom's status as a marginalized figure within Dublin society, examining how Joyce critiques colonial power dynamics through his portrayal of Bloom's Jewish identity. From a feminist perspective, Butler (1990) explores the character of Molly Bloom, arguing that Joyce subverts patriarchal expectations of women by presenting a complex and autonomous female character. Molly's final monologue, often read as a celebration of female sexuality and agency, complicates simplistic readings of gender in *Ulysses*, presenting a nuanced portrayal of a woman asserting her identity within a male-dominated world.

The critical reception of *Ulysses* has been marked by both acclaim and controversy. Early reviewers like Edmund Wilson (1922) praised the novel's formal innovations, while others, such as Carl Jung (1932), found it overly complex and impenetrable. The novel's explicit content, particularly its depictions of sexuality, led to its censorship and eventual legal vindication, cementing its place as a cornerstone of literary modernism (Miller & Ward, 2022). The ongoing critical debates surrounding *Ulysses* reflect its status as a text that defies easy categorization and continues to provoke both admiration and frustration among readers and scholars alike.

Recent technological advancements have opened new avenues for analyzing *Ulysses*. Smith (2018) explores how digital humanities tools can be applied to analyze the novel's linguistic complexity, revealing patterns that underscore its thematic preoccupations. This approach allows scholars to engage with Joyce's text in innovative ways, mapping the intricate relationships between language, narrative structure, and meaning. By employing computational methods, scholars are able to uncover new layers of textual complexity, offering fresh insights into the novel's enduring relevance.

Ecocritical approaches to *Ulysses* have also emerged in recent years, with scholars such as Green (2015) examining the novel's portrayal of urban and natural environments. Joyce's depiction of Dublin's streets, its ecology, and the interrelationship between the city's inhabitants

and their environment contribute to a broader understanding of how *Ulysses* engages with ecological concerns. This environmental lens adds yet another dimension to the novel's multifaceted exploration of modernity.

The essay will offer a unique perspective on its reimagining and relation of space and identity engaged with existential questions of presence and absence, in *Ulysses*, rendering a nuanced viewpoint that deepens our understanding of the novel while linking it to broader existential concerns that remain relevant in modern literature.

3. The Present Space in *Ulysses*

The concept of "present space" in *Ulysses* refers to an abstract, symbolic space. The spatial construction in *Ulysses* consists of urban space, mental space, and historical space. Urban space is depicted through the protagonist's perspective, portraying the scenes of modern Dublin; mental space represents the expressions of the mind, also the locus of the stream-of-consciousness narrative; historical space forms the backdrop of ideological consciousness. Overall, *Ulysses* presents a space of seemingly elusive "presence."

The term *Anwesen* is an important concept in Western philosophy, pointing to the notion of being as appearance or presence. Present space is both intuitive and necessary, filled with substance, and also incorporates Heidegger's concept of "Zuhandenheit" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 67). Zhao Yiheng notes that "the absence of meaning is a prerequisite for the signifying process; the presence of signs, instead, demonstrates the lack of meaning." (Zhao, 2023, p. 45) The space in *Ulysses* is both present and symbolic. Dublin, as seen through the protagonist's eyes, is reduced to a symbol, and the presence of its space reflects the dual meaning of modern urbanity. On one hand, the mechanical and numb aspects become the inevitability of being "Zuhandenheit"; no one questions the meaning of things' materiality. On the other hand, in a boring and hollow society of rebellion, "seeking the spiritual meaning of the father" becomes an empty symbol, and the meaning of "Dasein" (being) is lost. Thus, the presented space is a symbolic one, decadent and disintegrated, suspended within the tension between the present and absent.

3.1. The Decadent Urban Space of Presence

The modernity presented in *Ulysses* is essentially the "aesthetic modernity" of polemics (Harvey, 1989). It is said that this type of modernity derived from Baudelaire's depiction of ephemeral and chaotic decadence (Calinescu, 1987, p. 55), which then flowed to and extended in Dublin. From Bloom's chaotic family scenes to the indifferent tram ride, and the wandering at the docks on the Liffey's opposite bank, all those landscapes convey an attitude of numbness. His wife's infidelity, the contempt he suffers, and his letters to his lover align with the disordered, filthy city, all pointing downward into decay.

In Chapter Six, Bloom witnesses traffic chaos caused by cattle being transported to the docks, and he places hope in the freight tram's passage through the city. However, the tram's arrival

doesn't change the surface chaos; rather, it becomes a symbol of the city's fragmentation. In Chapter Ten, Father Conmee reflects, while on the tram, that the passengers were stripped of their souls, preferring instead a more "pleasant and proper" atmosphere,(Joyce,2008,p.287) though this remains a distant aspiration amidst the repetition of daily life—repeated cities, trams, wandering, even the repetitive act of delivering communion to a clumsy elderly man with Parkinson's disease.

Repetition deprives everyday life of meaning, turning it into an accessory of "instrumental reason." Life becomes a silent, speechless world, where only "life" exists as a surface sign, and "Dublin" remains a city that merely existed, eroding the hope for a "pleasant and proper" future, ultimately becoming a repetitive scene on the factory and assembly line. Joyce's depiction of Dublin differs fundamentally from Baudelaire's depiction of dirty Paris. While Baudelaire presents decadence, he doesn't reduce Paris to a mere symbol of presence. In *Ulysses*, confusion becomes inevitable for all, meaning is lost, and even the filth no longer has meaning. The combative spirit of modernity disintegrates, as Joyce's urban writing embodies anti-aesthetic modernity and a façade of decadence that transcends the concept of the city, pervading everyone's mental space.

3.2. The Entangled Mental Space of Presence

Nearly all characters in *Ulysses* are in a state of contradiction, torn between the presence and absence of meaning. Stephen, for example, defied his mother's dying wish for him to pray, thereby escaping from family ties and severing ties with his father. He wanders aimlessly along the seashore, where he observes the chaotic landscape: islands, tides, sea, sandbanks, barking dogs, and the hazy impressions of his mind: "kissing the lips of air without flesh," "old father ocean in flux," (Joyce,2008,p.65)and so on.

For Stephen, the chaotic scene is more comforting than the blurred boundary between life and death. The living inhale the breath exhaled by the dead, tread on their remains, and greedily devour the reeking innards of the dead(Joyce,2008,p.341), while he also calls out to the womb, birthing the grave for the multitudes. His mother has died, but he remains alive—or rather, he can no longer discern the difference between life and death. His half-alive, half-dead state leads him to confuse reality with imagination. Rather than saying that stream-of-consciousness is Joyce's writing technique, it is better to say it reflects Stephen's state of mind, as he walks along the barren beach like a wanderer in a desolate life.

The characters' consciousness in *Ulysses* is constructed through the entanglement of real and imagined scenes, which is also a significant feature of stream-of-consciousness. Humphrey categorizes "stream of consciousness" into "temporal stream" and "spatial stream"(Humphrey,1954,p.50) The temporal stream resembles a flicker, where past and present events float within the text, such as Stephen imagining Egyptians, vampires, Bishop Cloyne, his deceased mother, and his past self. The spatial stream, on the other hand, involves the transformation of space. Bachelard believes that memory is motionless; the more firmly it is fixed in space, the more sounder it becomes. (Bachelard,1969,p.63) Hence, "memory" is stored within a closed space, where infinite time is compressed into a non-fluid "present space,"settling

into the depths of consciousness as a relatively stable perceptual schemata(Schulz,1971,p.22).

In other words, the spatial stream in *Ulysses* is essentially a variant of the temporal stream, a fluid writing of memory. Like the principle of animation, *Ulysses* achieves narrative flow through the movement of memory and space, constructing a narrative of mental space, which in turn creates a certain fugue of meaning. Yet, this meaning contrasts with Dublin's urban space. In the depths of consciousness, meaning manifests through the flow of memory, but for the characters as actors, this meaning is lost. The collision between the external and internal worlds is the reason for the entangled mental space.

3.3. The Disintegration of Historical Space in Presence

Behind the material urban space and the mental space of the mind lies the disintegration of the ideological space of history. Marshall Berman, in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, notes that modern man finds himself in a condition of great loss and emptiness, yet simultaneously discovers himself "amidst a multitude of rich possibilities".(Berman,1988,p.114) It is precisely the downward pull of urban decay and the entangled mental space of modern individuals that gives rise to a spiritual crisis and its ensuing disintegration. The appearance of this spiritual crisis is symptomatic of the crisis of modern man, prompting Stephen to seek a spiritual father and Bloom to evade the chaos of his home by wandering. However, the disintegration of this spiritual crisis results from the dissolution of meaning. As meaning detaches from the world and exists independently, society, along with human consciousness, has already succumbed to a state of ready-to-hand presence. In this space of meaning's disintegration, futility becomes inevitable. Stephen's search for a father is not even a deconstruction, but rather a manifestation of the loss of meaning. This thorough loss of meaning points to the disintegration of human history.

Admittedly, *Ulysses* aligns itself with Homer's *Odyssey*, showcasing the erasure of history. Stephen corresponds to Telemachus, Bloom to Odysseus, and Molly to Penelope. Even the narrative structure mirrors that of *The Odyssey*. The first part of *The Odyssey* involves Telemachus's search for his father, paralleled in *Ulysses* by Stephen's search for a spiritual father. The second part of *The Odyssey* details Odysseus's ten years of wandering, mirrored by Bloom's peripatetic meanderings. The third part of both works is about returning home. Joyce originally titled each chapter to correspond to episodes in *The Odyssey*, reflecting his desire to engage in a kind of dissolution of the past.

The noble, wise, and resilient Odysseus becomes the humble, trivial, and often bullied Bloom; the chaste Penelope transforms into the promiscuous Molly; the clever and filial Telemachus becomes the rebellious and spiritually empty Stephen. All forms of sublimity are shattered. Great thoughts and grand passions long existed are replaced by mundane boredom and petty indifference. In this gap between the grand and the trivial, the likeness of modern man is revealed. Where once regret was a natural part of human life—as in Jiang Yan's *Rhapsody on Resentment* or Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist*—*Ulysses* reveals that human regret is now nothing more than a rejection of one's own existence and history. Bloom, a Jewish man, faces mockery and derision, and even he gradually loses his own Jewish traits. Stephen, as he declared in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, intends to flee Ireland, never to return. Humanity's historical heritage

becomes something that slowly fades away, as national identity, history, and personal attributes are swept away by the indifferent, numb space of presence.

Lefebvre posits that space is produced by humans; it is not a static structure of materiality. He divides symbolic space into three categories: "spatial practice," "representations of space," and "representational space"(Lefebvre,1991) Spatial practice refers to the external, physical space; representations of space are the attachments of human consciousness to that space; and representational space is the space of social meanings drawn from human symbols, placing them within a unified field. Lefebvre's spatial concept is fundamentally built upon the symbolization of space. In *Ulysses*, the space is similarly symbolic. In other words, the "decadent urban space of presence" represents spatial practice, namely the place where Bloom and Stephen live, embodying the external manifestations of modernity. The "entangled mental space of presence" refers to the representations of space, highlighting the symbolic nature of consciousness and mental states. Lastly, representational space arises from the ideological consciousness that lies between external and internal spaces, expressed through the juxtaposition of the real world, Joyce's world, and the world within the novel, which leads to the "disintegrated historical space of presence."

It is clear that Joyce symbolized space in *Ulysses*, and these symbols are not simply codes to be decoded; they involve the very expression of presence. Put simply, modern people only become aware of this presence when they cease to exist, because modern society does not consciously reflect upon the symbolic space that is present. For Bloom, this is expressed through a heightened awareness of trivial matters and the minutiae of consciousness, but no concern is directed toward humanity's existential condition or the practical philosophical issues at stake. Within the space of presence, there is no experience of the anxiety of death, except for Stephen, who repeatedly challenges the edge of presence. The abstraction of symbols renders both language and action increasingly pale, and absence becomes inevitable.

4.The Value of the Wanderer's Presence

The concept of "wandering" originates from Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Baudelaire's "flâneur",interpreted as "wanderer"(Benjamin,1997). Bloom serves as a literal embodiment of Benjamin's "wanderer." As a Jewish advertising agent, Bloom's wanderings through the streets of Dublin epitomize the qualities of the wanderer, while his visual experiences highlight the spatiality of presence.

Bloom's footsteps trace the pulse of the city: from the bustling newspaper office to fragrant restaurants, from a leisurely stroll through the library to the everyday scenes of the marketplace, a brief stop at the pub, then onto the breeze-kissed seashore, the quiet corridors of the hospital, the neon-lit brothel, and the enticing food stalls along the street. This journey feels like a spiritual pilgrimage. Ultimately, his steps lead him back to the starting point at 7 Eccles Street, where his return is both an ending and a new beginning. Bloom's actions lack a fixed goal, and his movements are spontaneous. He roams the streets of Dublin, observing the life of the city and the behaviors of its inhabitants. This purposeless wandering aligns with Benjamin's description of the flâneur. Bloom is among the crowd, yet maintains a distance from it. He is both an observer and a

thinker. His wandering becomes both an escape from reality and a quest for self-identity.

Moreover, Bloom's wandering allows him to observe Dublin from a unique perspective, constructing both the space of the city and that of consciousness. He notices the details of the city—from the garbage on the streets to the expressions on the faces of passersby, from the text on advertisements to the displays in shop windows. Bloom's visual experience is complex and nuanced. It is not merely an observation of the external world but also a reflection of his inner world. His visual perception is deeply intertwined with his thoughts and emotions, forming a distinctive internal monologue.

Not only that, Bloom's wandering also embodies a gesture of resistance. He is dissatisfied with the status quo, and he holds a critical attitude toward Dublin's social norms and moral values. His wandering is a covert resistance to capitalist industrial society, a means of seeking himself and his place in the world. This resistance is not a direct conflict but a form of self-redemption achieved through wandering. It leads him to a state of marginality, just as the aforementioned "tension between presence and absence" indicates. Bloom's internal resistance also embodies a certain clarity. He thought everything was madness. Patriotism, mourning the dead, music, or the future of a nation—it was all madness, whether to be or not to be. Clearly, at the level of consciousness, Bloom has recognized the inherent sorrow of existence, but beyond this sorrow, he is powerless to take any action to alleviate it. He can only wander to release the pressures within. His wandering cannot change the state of his family life or his marginalized social standing. In other words, wandering serves as a symbol of human existence in the world, but it cannot reinterpret or deconstruct meaning, let alone reconstruct it. It functions merely as a running symbol, nothing more. For instance, Joyce's *Ulysses* can be seen as an electromagnetic field, with Bloom, Stephen, Molly, and other seemingly numb characters as "electrons" that operate within it, following their unpredictable trajectories. These trajectories are wandering in nature, existing in a "ready-to-hand" mode. As electrons, they are unaware of their significance within the electromagnetic field, nor of their meaning in the world. Yet, they are conscious that they will lose their vitality and life. Apart from a faint sadness, they are powerless and continue to wander within the field. Both Bloom and Stephen are aware that they cannot survive outside of Ireland, just as electrons cannot exist outside their magnetic field. Thus, the value of the wanderer lies in the act of wandering itself. The logic of wandering also affirms the spatiality of presence.

5. Wandering at the Margins of Presence

In the field of mechanics, there is a concept known as "image edge," which refers to: "the majority of the image's information being located at its edges, characterized by the discontinuity of local features, specifically areas where there is a sharp change in intensity or contrast." (Duan, Li, & Li, 2005) The spatial construction in *Ulysses* exhibits a similar marginal property, where local characteristics remain discontinuous, with sharp changes in "intensity" that create a multi-layered sensory experience. For the reader, *Ulysses* evokes a structural response akin to the "image edge" form.

In other words, the space presented in *Ulysses* possesses an edge-like quality, filled with

discontinuities, variations in color, and overlapping layers. Discontinuity is a key feature of the stream-of-consciousness technique; while consciousness may seem "continuous" on the surface, its jumps and transitions—for example, Bloom's musings, as presented below: When the master walks ahead, the guest follows, the two dark forms silently traverse the dim passage at the back of the house, entering the half-lit garden. What scene do they face (sentence A)? The sky tree hangs heavy with the dewy blue fruit of night stars (sentence B). As Bloom pointed out the various constellations to his companion, what meditations did he express (sentence C)? About the expanding universe (sentence D)?—seem, on the surface, to extend from one another, but in essence, they are not necessarily linked. Consciousness is fragmentary, and the landscape created is a series of fragmentary perspectives. Discontinuity thus becomes the method of expression. Similarly, Bloom's laughter and tears become crucial forms of constructing space, influencing the space's rhythm, which oscillates in color and form.

The interwoven quality of *Ulysses* lies in its multiplicity of ideological layers. For Bloom, he is both Jewish and yet Westernized; he is also Irish, but his nation is caught in conflict. The disintegrated historical space of presence renders this even more chaotic. Yet, in the face of this marginal space, the wanderers—particularly Bloom and Stephen—constantly return to the subject of "humanity." "The trams pass by, useless words repeat, day after day, a person is born, another dies, like the passing of cars," signifying a repetitive space of existence. But do people really live without thought? Stephen's rebellious thoughts and rejection of his father are his means of opposing this repetitive space: "He is a new man, his growth is his father's decline; his youth is his father's jealousy; his friends are his father's enemies." In the "programmatically space of presence," Stephen is perpetually dissatisfied, and his spiritual emptiness can be understood as his response to extreme boredom and the relentless, assembly-line nature of life.

Do wanderers possess "souls"? This becomes the criterion for whether or not meaning is present. At the margins of the space of presence, the wanderer's "soul" emerges—it is a soul characterized by rapid change, discontinuity, emotional richness, and multilayered meaning. This is the domain Stephen and Bloom unknowingly inhabit. In fact, their existence as "symbols" is something forced upon them by the degraded society and space in which they live. But as humans with souls, their ongoing stream of consciousness becomes the symbol of their significance, a weapon for challenging the dullness of the world.

David Harvey once remarked: "A core theme grasped by aesthetic theory is how spatial constructions are created and used as fixed markers of human memory and social value in a rapidly changing world." (Harvey, 1990, p. 418-434). Spatial constructions are merely symbols of presence, constantly advancing but devoid of inherent meaning. Only the memory, sociality, and, above all, the reflective thinking of human beings can endow space with meaning.

In *Ulysses*, space exists in a state of fusion between symbolic presence and the pursuit of meaning. It survives in the "tension between presence and absence." Joyce confronts a self that is both alienated from and wandering within Ireland, facing the chaotic Dublin. The empty space is constructed out of this confusion, but in the face of these richly complex characters, Joyce's own soul bursts forth. Thus, between the presence and absence of meaning, between the presence and absence of symbols, between the presence and absence of the soul, marginality is born, modernity is born, and *Ulysses* is born.

6. The Deconstruction of the Concept of "Father" and the Space of Modernity

The collapse of presence in *Ulysses* lies in the disintegration of the concepts of "father" and "the Other." The term "father" undergoes profound transformations in its function, authority, discourse, identity, and even language itself. In *Ulysses*, the primary source of modernity emerges from the gradual loosening and eventual collapse of the father's meaning and signifier. This process is not only a deconstruction of the "father" but also an extension of the gaze of the Other in the absence of meaning. Through Bloom's behaviors, we see amplified expressions of the dissolution of power, incompleteness of discourse, and fragmentation of identity. The encounter between Stephen, who seeks a spiritual father, and Bloom, who is searching for a son, represents the first union between the "father" and the "son" as the Other in the space of presence. It is also their most important attempt to find meaning in the chaotic and absurd world, resulting in the gradual dissolution of presence.

The authority of the father faces immense challenges. In ancient China, the Confucian principle of "taking the father as the guide" was the mainstream ethical code. In *The Odyssey*, the father also symbolized the core cohesion of the family and a central force. One could even say that the son was a possession of the father, a product of the paternal role. Telemachus' identity is always rooted in being "the son of the hero Odysseus" or the father of someone else. His place in human history was endowed by paternal authority. This authority was granted by the father, as Chizuko Ueno highlights in *Patriarchy and Capitalism*, stating that Meillassoux's 'rule of elder males' is the patriarchal concept of monism. Here, variables such as gender and age dictate the ways in which production and reproduction occur (Ueno, 1990, p.73). Narrowly, patriarchy is the highest ruling force within the family; broadly, it is the power structure of the entire family and society. Ueno also points out that the term "patriarchy" etymologically refers to "the rule of the father." In *The Odyssey*, if Telemachus were not the son of Odysseus, the search for the father would not exist, and Telemachus would not possess the inherent value and natural attribution that come from this relationship. The authority of the father is derived from this, and the father's power maintains this natural order, sustaining the binary categories of "father" and "son." In the patriarchal world, this binary relationship must exist.

However, in modernity, this relationship is fractured by the rise of new production modes, social structures, and value systems. The Confucian principle of "taking the father as the guide" is on the verge of disintegration. Bloom remarks, "Physical shame creates a chasm between father and son... Even before birth, a son mars beauty. After birth, he brings pain, adds toil." In modern society, the importance of primal experience is diminished, and "materiality" is assigned greater value to human existence. The essence of showing human "materiality" lies in the value of the body, and the function of youth far surpasses that of the aged. "A son mars beauty even before birth" can be understood as a disruption to the harmonious state of life organized by sensory experience. After the birth of a son, a father must not only consider the already stable self but also prepare for the unpredictability of the child, expending energy and bracing for all negative forces—be they illness, war, suffering, separation, or even death. This applies to considerations for both the father and the son. The power dynamic of subordination is eroded, and the father's absolute authority vanishes. In other words, the relationship between "father" and "son" collapses under the control of patriarchy, giving rise to absurd acts of "searching" for the father and son.

In Eka Kurniawan's magical realism work *Man Tiger* (2015), the son transforms into a white tiger to slaughter his mother's lover, opposing his abusive father. This provides an alternative to

searching—destruction. In contemporary ethics, the binary relationship of "father-son" has been reduced to a desolate world, numbed by labor and material production. Faced with this, the only options presented to the modern individual are "seeking" or "destroying": attempting to repair and reconstruct or fundamentally negating. In essence, both are intertwined. Destruction contains the seeds of new ethical constructs, while repair strips away remnants of old order. While power systems may change, we cannot change the biological facts of human reproduction and survival. Even though morality may be eradicated, and humans are fated to die, how we face our internal ethical attributes becomes the measure by which we gauge morality—and the world.

In other words, in contemporary society, what is "present" are marginalized symbols, or even symbols devoid of meaning. This space of presence undergoes the experience of absent meaning. The two ways of addressing the binary "father-son" relationship in modern society become two models for constructing meaning. The father's discourse system is experiencing a crisis—perhaps even a form of "silencing." More often than not, the father's discourse is like a mouth taped shut, unable to utter anything effective. In *Ulysses*, the continuation of Bloom's stream of consciousness sharply contrasts with his sparse spoken words in reality. The discourse system of the father has turned "silence" into a "habit," and in a world absent of meaning, this system encounters "fear," further deepening the alienation between individuals and the world. Material production interrupts the connection between conscious space and urban space, and the loss of the father's discourse leads to the withdrawal of authority, much like removing navigation in a desert, severing the connection between conscious space and historical space. Consequently, life, devoid of authoritative discourse, loses its ontological meaning, which further spurs the quest for meaning.

In *The Childhood of Jesus* by J.M. Coetzee(2013), the father figure, Simon, lacks the power to voice any authority, while the son, David, dominates with his discourse. This leaves Simon powerless, resulting in David's autonomous decision to run away to the orphanage, where he ultimately dies. This represents modern sorrow for silence, as well as a reflection on how to build a two-way communicative discourse system. This incompleteness of discourse applies to every father-son conflict narrative template: when father-son tensions arise, there are rarely effective discourses to offer advice. Most paternal discourses are silent and powerless. More troubling is that, in many cases, father-son conflicts do not even have the chance to erupt. The absence of meaning in either the father or the son's presence prevents the dissection of the conflict, leaving us with a fractured world—one where even the pursuit of meaning is called into question.

The father's identity is increasingly endangered by the dissolution of discourse and power. Modern "fathers" seem to retain only their biological significance. Yet, for Bloom, even "biological significance" as a father is a luxury. The father is unsure of his own role, just as Bloom is unsure of his capacity to be "Odysseus." The father faces the collapse of identity, as does the son. Both are on the brink of dissolving not only their identities but their very existence.

This is the world presented to Stephen and Bloom—one full of symbols, where even humanity itself is in "disintegration." While Stephen and Bloom may attempt to save something through meaningless acts, the crumbling world no longer allows them the luxury of more materials to squander. What awaits them is a world absent of meaning, where absence becomes autonomous and natural, leaving only a world of disjointed symbols. Humanity is diminished, and human relationships, as illustrated by the "Bloom-Stephen" relationship, are also dissolving. What we are witnessing is the space of modernity's presence.

7. Conclusion

In *Ulysses*, space is not a static or singular entity, but one that exists in a fluid state, constantly shifting between symbolic presence and the search for deeper meaning. This dynamic tension—what might be called the "tension between presence and absence"—is at the core of Joyce's portrayal of Dublin. The city becomes a living, breathing symbol of modern existence, where the characters grapple with their own sense of alienation and displacement. For Bloom, Stephen, and others, the city's streets and spaces are both a refuge and a labyrinth, where their internal quests mirror the chaos of the external world.

Joyce's Dublin is chaotic, fragmented, and bewildering, a place where certainty has evaporated, and characters are left to wander, both literally and figuratively. Bloom's wandering across the city encapsulates this existential drift, as he navigates spaces that are at once familiar and alien. The space he inhabits is not simply physical; it is a reflection of the inner turmoil and spiritual confusion that defines his journey. In this way, Dublin becomes a metaphor for the fragmented self in modernity, caught between conflicting forces of identity, belonging, and meaning.

The "empty space" in *Ulysses* is thus born out of this confusion, this oscillation between presence and absence. Yet, within these voids, Joyce inserts a deeper symbolic resonance. Spaces, both urban and mental, become battlegrounds where the characters' identities are tested and shaped. It is not the clarity of meaning that defines Joyce's spaces, but rather their ambiguity, their emptiness filled with potential. As Bloom and Stephen move through these spaces, they are haunted by the absence of traditional structures—patriarchy, religion, nation—that once offered certainty but now only leave echoes of their former presence.

And yet, amid this emptiness, Joyce's characters carry a deep, almost metaphysical weight. It is as if Joyce's own soul, fragmented and complex, bursts forth into the narrative, filling the spaces left by the collapse of conventional meaning. The characters' wanderings through Dublin are not merely acts of physical displacement but profound explorations of the self, the soul, and the modern condition.

Thus, in the gap between the presence and absence of meaning, between the visible and invisible, Joyce constructs a narrative of marginality. It is here that modernity is born—out of the spaces where meaning dissolves and where individuals are left to search for a new, elusive sense of identity and purpose. Joyce captures this essence of modernity in *Ulysses*, where space, in all its physical and symbolic forms, becomes the crucible in which the struggles of the soul and the self are enacted. *Ulysses* is thus a text of profound spatial and existential inquiry, a meditation on the margins of presence and the ever-elusive pursuit of meaning in the modern world.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.