“Space: what you damn well have to see” (U9.86)

Spatial Language and the City-As-Text in James Joyce’s “Wandering Rocks”

James Joyce’s *Ulysses* consists of eighteen chapters that, when viewed together, create a picturesque narrative of Stephen Dedalus’s and Leopold Bloom’s movements and thoughts hour by hour on 16 June 1904. The text is an experiment with language and format in literary fiction, as each of its eighteen chapters feature different linguistic and experimental narrative styles. In the central chapter of *Ulysses*, “Wandering Rocks,” the narrative is structured by the cityscape of Dublin. The narrative format of this chapter allows for the culture and time of Dublin to come forward, demonstrating the influence of the city regardless of the meaning inferred through the use of the characters. As Eric Ball comments: “National literature cites particular places, thereby constituting a discursive space for assigning meaning to those places. Places, in turn, make ‘meaning possible by providing landmarks, monuments, lines of connection, lines of flight, and barriers that facilitate or hinder representation” (242). The city in “Wandering Rocks” becomes the central focus designating the importance of place as it represents culture. Raymond Ledrut explains: “Connotative semiotics brings into question what a thing or a set of things represent for a person of a certain time and place. Connotation thus translates a vision of the world: it is fundamentally ‘cultural,’ tied to a society as it is to history” (118). The cityscape of Dublin formats the narrative structure of “Wandering Rocks,” allowing both the characters and the narrative the freedom to move within social and narrative boundaries subverting the cultural restrictions enforced on them by church and state.
In “Wandering Rocks,” the city-as-text narrative structure creates pathways and courses. The characters move freely within these pathways, regardless of the social boundaries dominating the city, thereby demonstrating the influence of the spatial language on the narrative. Spatial language has not, until recent times, been seen as a prominent aspect of literature. Jacob Lothe comments: “The resurgence of interest in space over the past decade is prompted partly by an improved understanding of the significance of narrative’s spatial dimension…” (3) With the assumption that space and place take second tier to plot and character when considering the structure of a text, Westley Kort raises two points regarding the analysis of spatial language in narratives. Kort posits that one narrative takes predominance over another, and also that the dominant language is typically never that of space. Another issue in the study of space and place in modern fiction is determining how a space can be seen to have its own significance. As Ledrut writes: “The city and its elements constitute a first level where urban reality is expressed in a language of denotation using natural language: ‘city,’ ‘road,’ ‘square’… ‘this road leads to a square,’ etc. The ‘city’ is signified. At this level there is nothing more than ‘things’ connected to each other…” (117). The connotative meanings of city structures are hard to define because they are seen as only signifiers. While studying the spatial aspects and language of cities in literature, the city typically works only as a setting or a tone; however, Joyce uses the city in *Ulysses* as a linguistic format based on the actual functions and landscapes of the city within the narrative structure.

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1 “Narrative theorists, then, regularly manifest two errors. First, they allow their theoretical interests to confine them to, or to privilege, one of the languages of narrative. Second, while differing as to which of the languages they choose for privileged and even exclusive attention, they agree that, if the language of space has a role at all in narratives, it will likely not be a prominent or, even less, a dominate one” (Kort 23).
Joyce’s “Linati Schema” formats the eighteen chapters of *Ulysses* according to Joyce’s own code. Stuart Gilbert explains: “Each episode of *Ulysses* has its Scene and Hour of the Day, is associated with a given Organ of the human body, relates to a certain Art, has its appropriate Symbol and a specific Technic” (29). Together, the Organs of the chapters constitute the human body. In the “Wandering Rocks,” the organ is “blood” representing the blood that flows through the streets of Dublin as the different characters move through the cityscape. The narrative as a whole primarily follows the lives of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, whereas “Wandering Rocks” reminds us that a city consists of many elements in perpetual motion such as trams, moving advertisements, state figures, priests, people running day-to-day errands, etc. Robert Alter comments: “[Joyce’s] Dublin reflects the distinctive nature of a twentieth-century urban world… places where people are brought together in an expression of collective vitality that has the power to enhance the lively sense of experience of the individual urban person” (140). The “Wandering Rocks” chapter comprises nineteen vignettes that overlap and intrude on one another as the characters move through the streets between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. “Wandering Rocks” demonstrates the ever-flowing essence of urban life. The characters move from place to place overlapping each other because they are allowed narrative and personal freedom regardless of the cultural restrictions placed on them. Their uninhibited movements create a picture of Dublin city life that is large, always-moving and unrestricted.

The content of “Wandering Rocks” is situated between two boundaries. One of these boundaries, that of Father Conmee, is understood to represent the church/religion in Dublin. The second boundary, that of the earl of Dudley and his cavalcade, is understood to represent the British state. Father Conmee begins at his church, St Francis Xavier’s, which is located in the mid-northern part of the Dublin. He then travels eastward and then northeast on a outbound tram
to Artane, located in a district on the outer northern edge of Dublin. The earl of Dudley begins at Phoenix Park and travels southeast along the Liffey, crossing it at Grattan Bridge and proceeding southeastward until he reaches the Royal Dublin Society Showground in the southeast side of Dublin. The other seventeen vignettes of “Wandering Rocks” fall topographically between these two outlying figures. Their placement demonstrates the major repressive forces in the culture of Dublin: those of church and state. The geographical locations of these boundaries, as created through the movements of Father Conmee and the earl of Dudley, become the format that outlines the chapter. Algirdas Greimas states: “If the spatial signifier appears as a genuine language, one understands that it can be made the vehicle for signifying and above all for signifying the presence of man in the world, his activity which informs substance, transforms the world” (31). This narrative structure, based between the connotative meanings of Father Conmee as church and the earl of Dudley as state, works to create boundaries that exist not only in Dublin culturally, but also within the narrative of “Wandering Rocks” structurally, through the use of the text’s geographic cityscape.

As “Wandering Rocks” progresses the characters’ narratives are intertwined, forming a picture of Dublin as one society. As Graham Livesey suggests: “…our movements or journeys in the world, and in time, are figural and carry the latent potential, through intersections with other figures, for contributing to a plot” (43). The city streets in “Wandering Rocks” thus form a labyrinth. The labyrinthine cityscape structures the narrative so that the culture of Dublin can be seen as one whole consisting of many individual but intermingling characters. Sam Slote suggests as much when he writes that Joyce’s “…patterns accumulate and fuse together out of lexical chaos, thereby reducing the critic’s task to an explication of the tension of articulation between tenebrous individual passages and comprehensible macro-text” (66). “Wandering
Rocks” is situated as the center piece of Ulysses, denoting Dublin’s influence not only linguistically and structurally, but also in regards to the text as a whole – the “Blood” that runs through the veins of the novel.

The city within the boundaries of church and state becomes the primary focus of “Wandering Rocks,” as the narrative depends fully on when and where its characters are in the city. The first vignette follows Father Conmee as he walks past “H. J. O’Neill’s funeral establishment where Corney Kelleher totted figures in the daybook while he chewed a blade of hay” (U10.96) before he steps onto an “outward bound tram” (U10.107). The second section of this chapter is of Corney Kelleher of J. H. O’Neill’s funeral home as he finishes his daybook and then goes to the doorway. There Corney sees Father John Conmee stepping onto the “Dollymount tram on Newcomen bridge” (U10.213). The narrative provides no direct connection between Father Conmee and Corney Kelleher, but the settings of their respective sections connect them geographically.

The spatial influence on the narrative continues in the second vignette as Corney Kelleher sees “a generous white arm” toss a coin out a window on Eccles street (U10.221). The third vignette follows the onelegged sailor. The sailor not only sees Father Conmee in the first vignette, but he also sees the “plump bare generous arm” toss the coin out the window on Eccles street (U10.251). He and Corney Kelleher have now witnessed the same event. Also during the third vignette, the sailor passes by Katey and Boody Dedalus as they walk home (U10.233). The next vignette shows Katey and Boody Dedalus.

The progression of the narrative of the text is not dominated by any one character’s intentions or motivations, but rather on their placement within the city. The linguistic structure of
“Wandering Rocks” is based entirely on the narrative structure determined by the cityscape of Dublin. As John Lechte comments: “The truly modern city… is a city of indetermination. It is a phenomenon of flows, of clouds of people and clouds of letters, of a multiplicity of writings and differences” (106). The city allows the narrative to move freely, regardless of the boundaries of meanings placed upon it.

In addition to having the characters of “Wandering Rocks” cross paths spatially, Joyce also inserts small intrusions in the narratives that indicate concurrent events. As Gerry Kearns states: “The city as ‘living labyrinth’ is a place of simultaneous but colliding lives” (116). Joyce’s intrusions work to portray Dublin as one large, ever-moving organism that never stops regardless of narrative or social boundaries. Kearns posits that Joyce’s alternative perspectives “give us a vertiginous vision of whirling city without privileging the perceptive of any one individual” (118). The vignettes’ intrusions thus prevent any one narrative to stand on its own in the text. As the characters of “Wandering Rocks” move through the streets of Dublin independently, they are woven into Joyce’s interconnected Dublin.

The first narrative intrusion in “Wandering Rocks” occurs during the first vignette of Father Conmee. As the Father is walking “along Mountjoy square east” (U10.54) the narrative suddenly switches to “Mr Denis J. Maginni, professor of dancing &c… as he passed lady Maxwell at the corner of Dignam’s court” (U10.56). Not only does this intrusion connect Father Conmee with Maginni because Maginni’s walk was occurring at the same time as Father Conmee walk, but also because Father Conmee was not able to read his breviary before lunch because he was being seen by Lady Maxwell (U10.191). This event connects these two characters temporally and in relation to who they had both recently seen. Father Conmee is at this point in the narrative walking along Mountjoy square heading east. Maginni and lady
Maxwell are on the other side of Dublin when they coincidentally cross paths. Because lady Maxwell just happened to pass Maginni who “…most respectfully took the curbstone…” (U10.58), the narrative of the text switches instantly to Maginni creating a bird’s eye view of the entire city as one structure and not just the life of Father Conmee.

Another intrusion demonstrating the continuous motions of the city is the crumpled throwaway Bloom throws into the Liffey in the eighth chapter (U8.57). The first time that this throwaway is seen in “Wandering Rocks” is at the end of the fourth vignette as a “skiff, a crumpled throwaway, Elijah is coming, rode lightly down the Liffey” (U10.294). The throwaway appears again in the twelfth vignette as it floats by the “[n]orth wall and sir John Rogerson’s quay, with ulls and anchorchains” (U10.752), and again at the end of the sixteenth vignette (U10. 1096). The floating throwaway represents the continuous movement of the River Liffey as it flows east through the center of Dublin to the bay and out to sea.

The Biblical figure of Elijah on the throwaway indicates how religious propaganda is used to control people out of fear as Elijah is connected with the second coming of Christ². The throwaway represents Bloom’s rejection of the controlling authority of the church. He tosses it into the River Liffey when he “threw down among them them a crumpled paper ball (U8.57). Lechte argues that random, undefined urban elements create a space for, “disorder, chance, and random distributions” (101). Throughout the narrative the throwaway featuring the Biblical figure of Elijah floats down the river and out to sea as a constant reminder of the rejection of church within the cityscape. Religious propaganda, in this case, is trash.

² “Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with curse” (New Revised Standard Version, Mal. 4.5).
Throughout the narrative of “Wandering Rocks,” the floating throwaway intrudes three times on the action of the vignettes to demonstrate the constant motion of the city behind the structured narratives of the characters As Greimas suggests: “…the opposition society vs. individual can give occasion, due to varied semantic investments, to multiple ideological games and thus can produce a rich urban mythology…” (35). Although the characters’ narratives are present in the text, they are frequently interrupted because the city is in perpetual motion despite the narrative action contained in the individual vignettes. Random elements of the cityscape, in this instance the narrative intrusions of the throwaway, become signs and dialogues for the city.

Joyce’s narrative intrusions demonstrate the consciousness of the city’s influence on the characters and narration spatially and temporally. They also interweave based on the personal stories of the characters within the vignettes. In the fourth vignette, Katey and Boody Dedalus are speaking when the ringing of a bell intrudes: “The lacquey rang his bell. Barang!” (U10.281). Then, in vignette eleven, when their sister Dilly and their father, Simon Dedalus, are standing outside Dillon’s auctionrooms, the bell is heard again: “The lacquey lifted his handbell and shook it: Barang!” (U10.649). The bell in the fourth vignette is connected directly to the bell in the eleventh vignette by the sisters. The intrusions are synchronized in “Wandering Rocks” to show that Dilly meets Simon outside the auctionrooms at the same time Katey and Boody return home in the fourth vignette. When Katey and Boody’s narrative is intruded by their sister’s narrative, it is the city recognizing their relation that is influencing the narrative. These moments show the consciousness of Dublin.

When Katey and Boody Dedalus are shown in vignette four, they are discussing their current poverty as well as their lack of food due to their poverty as Boody asks: “Crickey, is there nothing for us to eat?” (U10.274). In the eleventh vignette, Dilly Dedalus meets their
father, Simon Dedalus, and the two discuss their poverty as Dilly asks her father if he has found any money for them and he replies: “Where would I get money? Mr Dedalus said. There is no-one in Dublin would lend me a fourpence” (U10.669). Thus as the eleventh vignette intrudes on the fourth vignette, the family’s different conversations about their extreme poverty are connected. In chapter eight of Ulysses, Bloom sees “Dedalus’s daughter there still outside Dillon’s auctionrooms” (U8.28), when he begins to worry about how shabby her clothes look. Bloom then suggests their poverty is caused by them having such a large Catholic family with many children as they “increase and multiply. Did you hear of such an idea? Eat you out of house and home” (U8.33). This criticism of Catholicism from chapter eight demonstrates the significance of the Dedalus family being seen as another poor Catholic family, and reminds the reader of Bloom’s subversive thoughts about Catholicism.

The fourth vignette of “Wandering Rocks” includes two other intrusions. The first is of Father Conmee as “his thinsocked ankles” walk through the grounds of Clongowes (U10.264). The Elijah throwaway appears here as well (U10.294). Father Conmee’s intrusion solidifies the presence of the church in everyday life, especially here since the girls are so poor due to the fact that they are part of a large Catholic family. The Elijah throwaway intrudes as a reminder of religion subversion, as the Biblical prophet is being washed out to sea. The intrusions in this vignette function as the city’s consciousness as both a major criticism of religion and a subversion to it. The intrusions work with the narrative to piece together aspects and rejections of the Irish Catholic life.

The cityscape’s influence over the narrative structure works again during vignettes nine and ten as the narrative progression of these vignettes are dependent fully on the actions of the characters, M’ Coy, Lenehan and Bloom, based on where they are geographically in Dublin.
Lenehan and M'Coy pass Bloom looking at books under Merchant’s Arch in the ninth vignette just before their conversation about the Bloom family (U10.520). The tenth vignette is of Bloom looking for books. The urban nature of this chapter allows for random, chance occurrences to take dominance over the narrative. If Lenehan and M'Coy weren’t where they were at the time, passing Merchant’s Arch and seeing Bloom, the subsequent vignette wouldn’t have been of Bloom because his presence started their conversation about him. The spatial placement of the characters within the city thus compliments the narrative flow of the text. Since the movements of the characters are based on the actual city streets of Dublin, the city itself is a labyrinth of chance and potential paths. The city’s structure allows the text’s characters to see each other by chance which then influences the narrative.

Another intrusion occurs in the ninth vignette during Lenehan and M’Coy’s conversation regarding the Bloom family. At this time a “card Unfurnished Apartments reappeared on the windowsash of number 7 Eccles street” (U10.542). This is Molly placing the advertisement card back in the window after it fell from earlier in the chapter as she threw the coin to the onelegged sailor when “a card Unfurnished Apartments slipped from the sash and fell” (U10.250) after a, “plump bare generous arm shone, was seen, held forth from a white petticoatbotice and taut shiftstraps. A woman’s hand flung forth a coin over the area railings” (U10.251). Molly’s intrusion occurs here as Lenehan and M’Coy discuss Molly and Bloom. The narrative of the city then intrudes with Molly replacing the sign in the window because the Blooms were mentioned. Not only does the narrative continue in vignette ten of Bloom himself because Lenehan and M’Coy happened to pass him on the street, but another part of the city, where Molly is located, intrudes on the narrative since they started discussing Bloom and Molly. The narrative of
“Wandering Rocks” is structured by the city’s consciousness and the random occurrences it allows to happen due the ambiguous nature of city space.

Not only does Molly’s intrusion in the ninth vignette function as a subversion to the typical narrative structure, but also as a subversion to societal rules as she breaks away from her “white petticoatbotice and taut shiftstraps” (U10.252). As she reaches out the window over the street, she is breaking a literal architectural boundary. Then as Molly throws the coin to the onelegged sailor, she is subverting the rule of the church because in the first vignette the sailor had “jerked short before the convent of the sister of charity and held out a peaked cap for alms towards the very reverend John Conmee” when Father Conmee tells him that he has no money to give (U10.8). Father Conmee lied to the sailor about giving him charity because later as he puts his tram ticket away “four shillings, a sixpence and five pennies chuted from his other plump glovepalm into his purse” (U10.115). He had plenty of money and yet he lied to the sailor in need. Molly’s donation to the onelegged sailor is a subjection of the church’s rule as she gave where a priest denied. Her intrusion on the text in the ninth vignette reminds us of this event from earlier in the hour. The city’s influence on the narrative structure of “Wandering Rocks” creates a space for these unrestricted events to occur in Dublin despite the dominant controls of church and state.

In “Wandering Rocks,” the cityscape of Dublin allows the narrative and the action of the chapter to subvert the authoritarian figures of church and state. In the eighth vignette, the two powers are undermined equally. As Ned Lambert shows saints Mary’s abbey of Dublin to the reverend Hugh C. Love, Saint Mary’s abbey is explained as, “the most historic spot in all
Dublin” because it’s where “silken Thomas proclaimed himself a rebel in 1534” (U10.408)\(^3\).

There are two intrusions in this vignette demonstrating the subversion of power. The first intrusion of “[t]he young woman with slow care” (U10.440), reminds us of the woman who Father Conmee had seen in the first vignette coming out of the bushes with a man (U10.199). This intrusion undermines religious authority as this young couple were able to do as they wished in the bushes regardless of the priest’s presence. The second intrusion is of John Howard Parnell, the city marshal, as he sits in the Dublin Bakery Company with his gaze “hung on a chessboard” instead of doing his job (U10.425). This is mentioned in the fifteenth vignette because the marshal was absent during a hearing about Gaelic language. Jimmy Henry asks in the text: “Hell open to Christians they were having… about their damned Irish language. Where was the marshal, he wanted to know, to keep order in the council chamber” (U10.1007). Kearns comments about the eighth vignette: “The Anglican clergyman was given a brief history lesson through Dublin’s landscape. Here was the oldest abbey in Dublin, dissolved by the founder of the Anglican church. The stone of the city could be made to tongue the lesson of English religious and political oppression” (119). Both these narrative intrusions subvert church and state in one vignette as the priest is powerless in preventing the sexual actions of the young man and woman in the bushes, and the city marshal is not utilizing his authoritative power because he’s sitting at a bakery playing chess. Since the cityscape and consciousness of Dublin influence the narrative to move freely and undermine boundaries, the geographical location of saint Mary’s abbey gives the city’s voice this opportunity to insert examples from around the city of where the church and state are powerless.

\(^3\)“Silken Thomas did renounce his allegiance to Henry VIII in council in the chapter house of St. Mary’s Abbey, flinging his sword of office ‘The English Thanes among” (Gifford 286).
The H. E. L. Y’S sandwichboard men who walk through Dublin as a moving advertisement are another example of a recurrent element in the city that intrudes on the narrative. They appear in “Wandering Rocks” first in the fifth vignette outside of Thornton’s: “H. E. L. Y’S filed before him, tallwhitehatted, past Tangier lane, plodding towards their goal” (U10.310). They appear in vignette seven: “Five tallwhitehatted sandwichmen between Monpeny’s corner and the slab where Wolfe Tone’s statue was not, eeled themselves turning H. E. L. Y’S and plodding back as they had come” (U10.377). The continuous progression of the H. E. L. Y’S men follows a circular path through the city as a moving advertisement producing a semi-established landmark in streets of Dublin. As the organ of this chapter is “Blood,” figures such as this demonstrate the ever-flowing elements of urban Dublin life running through the streets of the city. These elements become the voice for Dublin itself through the cityscape.

Thus, as the H. E. L. Y’S men pace the streets of Dublin as a reminder of the city’s voice and movement, they pass by “the slab where Wolfe Tone’s statue was not” before heading back to re-loop their route (U10.377). The statue of Wolfe Tone, a Irish revolutionist of the late 18th century (Gifford 267), represents figures of Irish culture prominent in the cityscape. As the H. E. L. Y’S men pass around this spot, the memory of Irish rebellion is implanted in the narrative, despite the hegemony of British Imperialism. Regarding the slab where the statue is not, Kearns argues: “Even empty space could speak volumes” (121). The consciousness of the city present in this chapter allows the narrative structure to encompass Dublin as a whole. Intrusions on the narrative structure demonstrate the always-moving, unpredictable nature of urban life. Lechte comments: “Without noise in this sense the system of the city will die” (105). The culture of Dublin, without regard to the boundaries of church and state, presents itself through the

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4 “... ‘noise’ to be understood as difference and otherness” (Lechte 105).
The characters moving through it remember and see different elements of the cityscape signifying parts of their history. City space allows for these transgressive memories to come forward.

The last vignette follows the earl of Dudley across Dublin as he represents British rule in Dublin. The earl travels through Dublin passing by most of the characters as seen in “Wandering Rocks.” The earl is the only character in “Wandering Rocks” who does not have a conscious narrative to himself. The text only describes where he is topographically in Dublin based on whom he is passing at specific points in the narrative. For example: “Above the crossblind of the Ormond hotel, gold by bronze, Miss Kennedy’s head by Miss Douce’s head watched and admired. On Ormond quay Mr Simon Dedalus, sterring his way from the greenhouse for the subsheriff’s office stood still in mistreat and brought his hat low…” (U10.1197), and so on throughout the nineteenth vignette. The earl’s lack of conscious narrative demonstrates his place as only a symbolic figure and boundary within the culture of Dublin.

Not only does the earl of Dudley pass by the characters of the text, but the language used in this vignette is based entirely on the spatial relations of the cavalcade to the city of Dublin as it moves through the streets. First: “The cavalcade passed out by the lower gate of Phoenix Park…. And proceeded past Kingsbridge along the northern quays… Between Queen’s and Whitworth bridges lord Dudley’s viceregal carriages passed…” (U10.1180). The language used in this vignette denotes the topographical location and actions of the earl of Dudley as he intrudes upon almost every characters’ narratives in the text. This language suggests that the earl of Dudley has no place within the text as a character. He’s used as a tool to demonstrate the geographical locations and hierarchical implications of the government in Dublin. Eric Bulson comments: “One learns geography through a series of hierarchical spatial scales ordered by and large
around the greatness of the universe and the minuteness of the individual” (59). Regarding how the city is seen as one interconnected structure, both topographically and linguistically, this vignette works as a connotative symbol for the whole of the chapter as it demonstrates everyone’s place within the city of Dublin. Kearns comments: “The labyrinth is a democratic space with significance distributed evenly over its surface” (118). However, while the characters are rendered on the same plane of existence throughout the bulk of the narrative, at the end of “Wandering Rocks,” they are only seen as through the eyes of the earl of Dudley, the state.

The restrictive boundaries of church are seen in the first vignette of “Wandering Rocks,” and the the restrictive boundaries of state are seen in the last vignette following the earl of Dudley through Dublin. The seventeen vignettes of the narrative between the church and state, narratively and topographically, represent the random and potential nature of urban space. As Robert Hampson comments: “Joyce uses the map’s colonization of Irish spaces to present the literal colonization of Dublin’s spaces… but he also presents not another mapping of Dublin, but rather the experience of lived space – movements through the politically and culturally contested spaces of the colonized city” (63). The city of Dublin creates an bird’s eye picture for itself through the narrative of the text in “Wandering Rocks” when the city-as-text becomes the essential linguistic and narrative style of the chapter. The unrestricted cityscape and space of Dublin represent a place where cultural and authoritative powers and boundaries can be questioned and subverted, allowing the culture and people of Dublin to move unchallenged, regardless of the boundaries of church and state.
Works Cited


