

Lisa FitzGerald  
National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin (eds.), *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), xviii+329 pp.



Attending Joyce's funeral in 1941, Carola Giedion-Welcker recalled his last words to her: "You have no idea how wonderful dirt is" (277). His work overflows with excess: the detritus, the waste, the plumbing that forms the fixtures of modern urban life. The expansion of ecocritical discourse into the mechanics of modern living has laid the groundwork for books such as *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce*. Anne Fogarty opens the volume saying that "James Joyce is an urban writer" who conceives of Dublin as "a symbolic locale with universal import" (xv). But Joyce was also an environmental writer. His ability lay in—amongst other things—his merging of the increased mechanisation of modern urban living with the systemic inter-dependence of human and environment.

The book is divided into three thematic sections: nature and environmental consciousness, the urban environment, and finally, somatic ecology and the urban body. The fourteen essays in the collection seek, according to editors Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin, to examine Joyce's "ecocritical consciousness" and to address two overarching questions: "why should Joyce be considered a writer of interest to ecocritics and how does investigating the ecological dimension of Joyce's work contribute to both existing Joyce scholarship and ecocritical theory?" (1). Introducing ecocritical theory—and differentiating between first and second-wave ecocritical discourse—might be arguably unnecessary given the growth of the discipline in recent years, but the wealth of the research more than makes up for the overwrought defence of a "green" Joyce. Unlike the romanticism of Wordsworth, Garry Leonard notes, Joyce's nature "ambushes" and is "dark and mutinous" (247). This is an environment that is as degenerative as it is fecund. Joyce revelled in the decay, in the detritus, as evidenced in Stephen Dedalus' remarks: "Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a ruinous offal from all dead" (42).

The first thematic section investigates Joyce's approach to the terms, nature and environment. Given those subjects, the section is unsurprisingly vast. Essays range from the microbial (Cheryl Temple Herr) to the macroscopic (Fiona Becket). Herr's wonderful mediation on the material networks of public sanitation explores Joyce's "literary routes both through and around the prison house of modernisation" (45). She sees Joyce's rendering of the "history of waste" as part of a wider reaching postcolonial framework, one that Joyce himself was arguably unable to escape (52). Becket opens the book with an exploration of Joyce and climate change. Erin Walsh's examination of the ecology of punning in *Finnegans Wake* revisits the linguistic turn. Walsh argues that the *Wake* goes "even further than Darwin in signalling a making ecological of the world" (80). The

punning evident throughout the *Wake* is a move away from the idea of the nation as a “romantic metaphor” (70). Joyce undermines the ‘organicist fantasy of nation’ in his work, dismantling the notion of nationhood and presenting instead a “bio-semiotic ecology” (87).

Derek Gladwin’s essay in the second section, “Joyce and the urban environment” is the only essay in the collection not focused on the fiction. Gladwin looks at Joyce as a travel writer, treating two articles published in the summer of 1912 for the Italian language newspaper, *Il Piccolo*. The articles, “The City of the Tribes: Italian Echoes in an Irish Port” and “The Mirage of the Fisherman of Aran: England’s Safety Valve in Case of War” offer more than surface readings of the Irish landscape. Gladwin’s insightful reading claims them as “a spatial and ecocritical practice called place-attachment: accessing place through personal and cultural experience in a landscape” (177). Underpinning Joyce’s travel writing is this element of place-attachment that Gladwin argues is “a vital element to understanding Ireland’s cultural and environmental landscapes” (194).

“Joyce, Somatic Ecology and the Body,” the final section in the collection, speaks to embodiment. Eugene O’Brien’s article counters Cartesian dualism which “has allowed reason to separate itself from the environment and to take on a dominant and exploitative role” (200). O’Brien attempts to answer Joyce’s theory of aesthetics, as voiced by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: “Can excrement or a child or a louse be a work of art? If not, why not?” (263). These are just a fraction of the questions dealt with throughout the collection. Surprisingly, urban ecology has found a rich vein in Joyce’s seemingly boundless anthropocentrism. Central to his work are the narratives generated from our experience of being in the urban environment: the urban networks of communication, the to and fro of information as an interaction between bodies and entities. Immersed rather than detached, they form part of the flux reflected in the riverine, the “affluvial flowandflow” found in the *Wake* (404.1).

The prominence of the in-between—and its emergence from the urban landscape—is at the core of Joyce engagement and the resulting aestheticisation in his work. In one of the last essays in the collection, James Fairhill points to this tension between being and environment as Joyce’s “passionate mediation on the body as omphalos of human experience, embracing nature as it manifests itself through (and is co-created by) the senses as well as through a spirit-like mind” (244). The collection points to a move towards the material—not only in Joycean Studies—and with it, the potential to bring many modernist writers into the ecocritical fold. The urban spaces that the majority of these writers inhabit are where the most promising scholarship in the environmental humanities is currently being undertaken. Overcoming binaries and understanding the environment as dynamic and evolving is part of the success of Joyce’s work and evident in this rich collection.

### Works Cited

Giedion-Welcker, Carola. "Meetings with Joyce." *Portraits of an Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*. Ed. W. Potts. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979. 256-80. Print.