

# James Joyce's Early Writings and Ecocritical Theory. A New Turn?

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“Crossing Stephen’s, that is, my green,...” (*P* 249)

James Joyce’s literary production has been persistently analysed from an array of theoretical perspectives, always offering new ways of reading the author and, at the same time, satisfying Joyce’s own boast to keep the critics busy for centuries. However, in spite of this ceaseless production of scholarly articles, the enhancement of the critical scope of his oeuvre is far from exhaustion. During the last four decades, new viewpoints, from feminism to poststructuralism, reader-response theory, revisionism, postcolonialism, and genetic criticism, among many others, have developed, challenging received interpretations and contributing to enrich the already insurmountable panorama of the James Joyce Industry. With the present proposal I intend to demonstrate that this could also be the case of ecocriticism, a theoretical paradigm that has expanded rapidly since the early 1990s and which, to my knowledge, has not been applied to the study of Joyce’s legacy yet. Following this premise, my attempt will be to approach Joyce’s early writings from the main tenets of ecocritical and ecofeminist theory, in order to provide a preliminary analysis of the likely presence of such elements as those related to nature. Along my paper, rather than providing definite answers, I will try to tackle questions on a writer who claimed to have known his own hometown and environment inside out and who was often at pains recollecting accurate memories of the Dublin of his youth from a self-imposed exile.

Green studies, literary ecology, bioregionalism,<sup>1</sup> place studies, ecopoetics, environmental criticism or, simply, ecocriticism, are terms that have

<sup>1</sup> James M. Cahalan defines bioregionalism as “the belief that lands are best demarcated not by state and national borders, but by rivers and mountains and other parts of the natural world, and that we should live and take action based on this principle” (255).

been used to conceptualise a theoretical framework that focuses on the relationship between literature and the natural environment, “tak[ing] an earth-centred approach to literary studies” since “all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (Glotfelty xviii and xix).<sup>2</sup> Without doubt, the bond between science and the humanities has resulted in a cross-fertilization that has offered alternative insights into literary works and has broadened the scope of criticism.<sup>3</sup> Besides, in recent years, this approach has opened up to incorporate urban and cultural spaces — including the effects of mass media, art or architecture — as sites where the natural is not in opposition to city life.<sup>4</sup>

Following the tenets of ecocritical theory, ecofeminism — also called, ecological feminism — denounces the anti-ecological position of the traditional androcentric view of nature that hierarchically divides human beings into the duality man/woman. According to this perspective, the former embodies reason, logic, and praxis, while the latter represents emotion, irrationality and illusion. From this position, nature’s exploitation and abuse since the Industrial Revolution has been equated with the different ways in which women have been controlled and oppressed along history. If the biological function of motherhood places women closer to nature, men would thus become the repository of reason.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, as Greg Garrard has pointed out, a radical view of gender differentiation could also lead to essentialist notions of the self: “If women have been associated with nature, and each denigrated with reference to the other, it

<sup>2</sup> See Cheryll Glotfelty for a survey of the birth and growth of ecological perspectives on literature and on the coinage of the term, which goes back to 1978, when William Rueckert referred to it as an alternative method to analyse literature. It was not until 1991 when ASLE, the “Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment”, was founded. Since then, it has grown fast and in all directions from the United States to Europe and Asia.

<sup>3</sup> According to William Howarth: “Ecocriticism seeks to redirect humanist ideology, not spurning the natural sciences but using their ideas to sustain viable readings. Literature and science trace their roots to the hermeneutics of religion and law, the sources for early ideas of time and space, or history and property” (78).

<sup>4</sup> This used to be the case in the pastoral tradition, in which we find a clear contrast between the goodness of the country and the evil forces of city life. See in this respect Raymond Williams’s seminal study, *The Country and the City*, which explored this dichotomy since classic literature. See also the contributions comprised by M. Bennett and D. W. Teague, and by K. Armbruster and K. R. Wallace.

<sup>5</sup> Roswitha Mueller explains in this regard that: “Organic societies tended to model themselves on nature rather than trying to bring nature under human domination. While nature was seen as both a benevolent and nurturing mother and also as devastation and chaos, the latter aspect only increased respect and a desire to remain in harmony with it as much as possible. The organic paradigm served as a restraining force in the treatment of women and nature alike” (35).

may seem worthwhile to attack the hierarchy by reversing the terms, exalting nature, irrationality, emotion and the human or non-human body as against culture, reason and the mind”. This reduced version of ecofeminism, Garrard adds, might in the end lead us to find “a mirror-image of patriarchal constructions of femininity that is just as limited and limiting” (24). On the other hand, it should be mentioned that at the heart of contemporary debates on ecofeminism lies the noticeable absence of women in the constructions and organizations of cities (Mueller 30).

Some of these controversies have fuelled the development of ecofeminism almost since its birth. While a more radical stance still equates women with nature, other ecological feminists have abandoned this essentialist conception arguing that there is nothing biological in the cultural construction of femininity, and relating instead the female subject with postcolonial theories of space. From this angle, Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy affirm that:

Ecofeminism is based not only on the recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies. It is also based on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. (3)

All in all, ecocriticism and ecofeminism represent both a cultural practice and an ethic position towards the environment and the relationship between human beings and nature.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the fact that Irish literature has been deeply rooted in the search for a sense of place — with the consequent sacralisation of space — and in the long-established contrast between rural and city life, ecocritical theory has not sufficiently been applied to this context, as Gerry Smyth has pointed out (163-64). In this regard, an author like Joyce, who privileged city life and placed Dublin at the epicentre of his whole production, apparently undermining nature, deserves to be analysed in much more detail and from a different standpoint. It was Joyce who claimed that if Dublin were to be destroyed one day, it could be reconstructed from his work (Budgen 69).<sup>7</sup> At the same time, he intended to universalise it, maintaining: “If I can get to the heart of Dublin, I can get to the heart of every city in the world” (Ellmann, *JJ* 505). According

<sup>6</sup> The split of ecofeminism in different branches include the following trends: liberal ecofeminism, socialist ecofeminism, social ecofeminism or cultural ecofeminism, among others. See Chris Weedon in this respect.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that Terence Brown begins his article, “The Dublin of *Dubliners*”, precisely parodying Joyce’s affirmation very wittily (11).

to these two statements, Joyce wanted to capture both the geographical idiosyncrasies that individualised the landscape of this city as much as the features that any citizen of the world would share. One should not forget that etymologically the word “city” comes from *civitas*, denoting both the geographical place and also its inhabitants. That’s why Joyce’s display of the microcosms of Dublin involved its mimetic representation and its essence, which would be conveyed through the citizen’s own perceptions of space.

In a movement that goes from the local to the universal, Joyce immortalised an urban environment that integrated nature in such a subtle manner that it has passed unnoticed by many critics. Although Joyce filled his work with an abundance of historical facts, topographical details and photographic descriptions of the Dublin of his youth, the final result belongs more to the realm of discourse than to the factual reality of the time. Besides, Joyce’s politics of place evolved throughout his literary production from an interest in the representation of nature as a means with which to explore intimate emotions, to a focus on the depiction of city life in a more controlled aesthetic fashion. This evolution materialised in his initial interest for the medium of poetry, to his more ambitious concern for prose. From the naturalism of *Dubliners* and a toying with narrative experimentation in *A Portrait*, to the Modernism of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce’s concerns redressed old forms into new styles.

The first literary piece that Joyce wrote at the age of nine — of which only a little fragment remains — was the poem “Et tu, Healy”, dedicated to the nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell. Although he later practiced literary criticism through essays and reviews, with which he was awarded several prizes, he never stopped writing poetry. However, a more mature Joyce would overlook his early poems, seeing them as mere exercises of youth. Of *Chamber Music*, for instance, he confessed to Nora in 1909: “When I wrote them I was a lonely boy, walking about by myself at night and thinking that some day a girl would love me” (Ellmann, *SL* 161).<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the rejection of his lyrical vein, which he found too autobiographical, in detriment of the magnificent prose he wished to create, did not prevent him from cultivating it throughout his life, even to the

<sup>8</sup> Regarding Joyce’s well-known parodical rewriting of the title into “Chamberpot”, he said to Arthur Symons in 1906 that he much preferred to have “a title which repudiated the book without altogether disparaging it” (Ellmann, *SL* 124). Besides, in the “Sirens” episode of *Ulysses* Joyce makes Bloom say: “Chamber music. Could make a kind of pun on that. It is a kind of music I often thought when she. Acoustics that is. Tinkling. Empty vessels make most noise. Because the acoustics, the resonance changes according as the weight of the water is equal to the law of falling water” (*U* 232).

extent of having inspired some sections of *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>9</sup> All in all, scholars have persistently placed Joyce’s poetry among his minor works. It is true that, in light of the rest of his production, these poems seem less imaginative and sophisticated. On the other hand, it is no less true that they were praised by contemporary poets like Ezra Pound, who valued their “delicate temperament” (Ellmann, *JJ* 479),<sup>10</sup> and by Yeats, who affirmed in 1903 that they were “much better than the technique of any young Dublin man I have met during my life time” (Jeffares and Kennelly xi). If these poems were later neglected by critics was probably due less to their aesthetic quality than to having been outshaded by more acclaimed poets of the time, including Yeats himself, AE (George Russell), or Oliver St John Gogarty, among others.

Joycean scholars have unanimously considered his poetry, together with *Exiles* and *Giacomo Joyce*, much more personal than the rest of his production.<sup>11</sup> For A. Walton Litz: “Poetry was Joyce’s natural medium for the expression of his most personal sentiments” (3). But this more private realm, which was carefully concealed in later writings, is significant inasmuch as it connected feelings and emotions with different representations of nature, as the Romantic poets had done decades before. Joyce’s move from a focus on a rural landscape to an urban environment ought, in this light, to be interpreted as a move from the personal to the literary, from the lyric to the epic. Thus, starting with the Elizabethan rhymes of *Chamber Music* (1907), the first aspect that calls the reader’s attention is that elements from nature acquire a musical quality only paired by the emotions they arise. The first poem of a sequence of thirty six, numbered rather than entitled, clearly embody this idea:

Strings in the earth and air  
Make music sweet;  
Strings by the river where  
The willows meet.

<sup>9</sup> See Ilaria Nataly’s article, for the connections that can be established between *Pomes Pennyeach* and *Finnegans Wake*.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, in Pound’s letter to John Quinn, he adds: “I got the impression that the real man is the author of *Chamber Music*, the sensitive. The rest is the genius”. However, later he told Joyce that *Pomes Pennyeach* did not deserve to be published (Ellmann, *JJ* 479 and 591).

<sup>11</sup> J. C. C. Mays, for instance, claims that “verse and drama gave Joyce the most direct access to his feelings: one appeared like the shortest route, the other promised the most stable mode of appraisal; the feelings at the centre were meanwhile profoundly ‘ordinary’, as Joyce knew and often insisted, and the excitement grew only with the attempt to harness them” (xxxix).

There's music along the river  
 For Love wanders there,  
 Pale flowers on his mantle,  
 Dark leaves on his hair.

All softly playing,  
 With head to the music bent,  
 And fingers straying  
 Upon an instrument. (*P and E* 4)

Many of the poems that integrate *Chamber Music* were written between 1901 and 1904 and deal with such themes as love, loss and pain. Being emotional and sentimental, they inevitably rely on the evocation of nature that previous Romantic poets had made establishing subtle intertextual relationships of the kind Joyce liked to weave. Besides, invocations of the earth, the wind, the wood, the river, the willows or the flowers build up a green landscape that looks very dissimilar to the path Joyce would take in his successive writings. Interestingly, ecocritical theory flourished precisely after Jonathan Bate published his seminal study, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), and other critics followed his footsteps centring on the way nature was employed, not as a thematic devise but as a structural skeleton from which to explore feelings and states of mind.

Noticeably, in the second poem of *Chamber Music*, Joyce uses the word “amethyst” twice (l. 1 and 12), which was taken directly from John Keats’s *Endymion*, as much as the reference to the “lonely watcher of the skies” (l. 2) is a quote from Keats’s sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”. Besides, the allusions to the harps (l. 4, 7 and 11) in the third poem evoke Coleridge’s “The Eolian Harp”, and the “gates of sunrise” (l. 5) suggest some instances of Blake’s poetry (Mays 270-71). In fact, the poems thrive in allusions that can be easily identified in previous Romantic verses. Poem number VIII, for instance, clearly evokes Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* and number XXVI has been interpreted as a clear tribute to “Kubla Khan” and its river Alph (Mays 273 and 280). Further connections could be established with the Romantics Shelley, Yeats, Keats or Blake, as well as with other Elizabethan authors, the metaphysical poets, some Renaissance’s villanelles, Shakespeare, Milton, Verlaine, or even Irish folk songs.

Joyce’s second collection, *Pomes Penyeach* (1927), consists of thirteen poems written between 1913 and 1916 while Joyce was living in Trieste and Zurich, with the exception of the first one, “Cabra”<sup>12</sup> — later re-

<sup>12</sup> Cabra is the name of a rural district in the north side of Dublin where Joyce lived for three years.

titled “Tilly” —, which dates back to 1903, and the last one, “A Prayer”, which was shaped as late as 1924. What these dates reveal is that Joyce’s poems were not the product of a sentimental young man, since this compilation was designed while he was busy writing *Ulysses*. Although it seems that Joyce was hesitant about their quality, they helped Joyce emulate the movements of the minds of Gerty MacDowell and Bloom in the “Nausicaa” chapter and that “he published them as much for personal as for artistic reasons” (Mays 285-86). This proves that Joyce did never turn his back to the writing of poetry in order to concentrate on fiction; he rather continued practising with the verse form until almost the end of his life. In fact, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are two hybrid texts that include short poems and songs, and in which verse and prose sometimes combine in such ways that they ease into truly poetic prose. Not in vain, Mays affirms that *Chamber Music* was “not a false start, but in a profound sense the starting-point of everything he subsequently wrote. It represents the beginning he returned to with each fresh venture, rather than a position abandoned” (xx).

Although the poems collected in *Pomes Penyeach* were written much later than Joyce’s first compilation, and the elaborate language and diction reveal a more mature writer, he could not avoid infusing them with personal feelings, especially with references to his infatuation with his student in Trieste — later explored in *Giacomo Joyce*, precisely a text that he did not intend to publish. The presence of nature is not as pervasive as in his first lyrics, but suggestive titles such as “Watching the Needleboats at San Sabba”, “A Flower Given to my Daughter”, “On the Beach at Fontana” or “Flood” again recall a landscape which is more rural than urban and more sentimental than descriptive. In addition, the thematic focal point continues in the same vein exploring love, pain and loss in a manner that induces the employment of natural imagery, as reflected in the allusions to the cattle, the flowers, the rain, the sea or the prairie. Apart from these two collections, Joyce also wrote other satirical verse pieces, occasional poems and limericks. Among all these, the most significant for my purpose is “A Portrait of the Artist as an Ancient Mariner”, written as late as 1932, which is an obvious reworking of Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. All in all, Joyce never saw himself as a poet because, being “by temperament, a sentimentalist ... this sentimentality was too easily exposed in the revelations of unmediated lyric poetry” (Litz 8). My contention is, therefore, that he moved from an interest in the exploration of inner states through the use of nature to a concern with the movements of the mind, for which the polyphonic voices of the city proved more appropriate.

Although Joyce wrote many of his early poems while he was also preparing the stories that would constitute *Dubliners*, the focus of this collec-

tion was utterly different in form and purpose. The style has been described as naturalistic, referring with this both to the “nicely-polished looking glass” through which Joyce wanted the Dubliners to look at themselves, and the “scrupulous meanness” that characterised Dublin life (Ellmann, *JJ* 222 and 210). Talking to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce affirmed that “a page of “A Little Cloud” gives me more pleasure than all my verses” since, through its naturalistic style, he could better control his emotions (Litz 8). While the underlying theme is the moral, spiritual and political paralysis that affected Dubliners of all ages, a major motif that runs through it is the need of the characters to escape from their restrictive reality to other countries and cultures, as is the case of “Araby”, “An Encounter”, “Eveline”, “A Little Cloud” or “The Dead”. In none of these stories characters succeed and in some instances they go no further than the periphery of town. The presence of nature, consequently, plays a minor role although it is always set in opposition to city life. While lifeless Dublin seems to exercise its power over the routinely lives of its inhabitants, nature gives free rein to passion, to the irrational or to the forbidden.

This is the case of the second narration, “An Encounter”, which foregrounds the escapist desires of three young boys who abandon the routine of school for a day with the intention of pursuing a dream triggered by their readings of Wild West stories. They leave behind urban Dublin and head to the coast in the direction of the Pigeon House, in Dublin Bay. There, outside the confines of the city, they look at the ships and lie down in a field near the river, where their eventual freedom also leads them to have a disturbing meeting with a perverted old man. Although the protagonist cannot fully grasp the meaning of the encounter, he knows that he can only find refuge in the safety provided by the city.

Another story with some glimpses of a natural environment is “A Painful Case”, dealing with the repressed and monotonous life of Mr Duffy, who lives in isolation outside the more humanised town, in Chapelizod: “Mr James Duffy lived in Chapelizod because he wished to live as far as possible from the city of which he was a citizen and because he found all the other suburbs of Dublin mean, modern and pretentious. He lived in an old sombre house” (*D* 107). After an epiphanic moment of revelation through which he questions the strictures of his life, the narrative focuses on a couple loving each other in Phoenix Park, suggesting that inhibited passion can only be released in the natural environment. It is precisely the sight of these “human figures lying” what increases his feeling of despair and of “bee[ing] an outcast from life’s feast” (*D* 117).

The rest of the stories in *Dubliners* do not invoke nature in any significant way, except perhaps the symbol of the snow in “The Dead”, which falls upon the living and the dead, fusing nature and city life. However,

there is more than meets the eye in this last narration. At the time of Joyce’s writing, the politics of place that informed other of his contemporary authors had devised a subtle system under which the west of Ireland, mainly rural, more traditional and closer to nature, had been equated with the real Ireland, while the East, closer to Great Britain and more modern, would be associated to urban life. Joyce’s movement from nature to city life reveals his position against a nationalist reductive concept of Irishness. The character of Miss Ivors is clearly a target of Joyce’s satiric comments when, scrutinizing Gabriel about his lack of interest in the traditions of the West of Ireland or in the Irish language, she disparages him with the expression “West Briton!” (*D* 190). Gabriel wonders then why his column in the *Daily Express* or his interest in going on holiday to the continent would make him less Irish, leading Joyce to eventually destabilise a traditional and rigid concept of Irishness, which had been based in the return to the rural, in a return to nature.

Joyce’s next step from *Dubliners* to *A Portrait* consequently involved a further move from nature to city life, although in this case to subvert the opposition found in the previous collection. The first page of the novel curiously recalls the fairy tale Stephen’s father used to tell him about the “moo-cow coming down along the road” that met “a nicens little boy” (*P* 7), fusing almost inadvertently both environments. Besides, the action does not take place within the confines of the city but in many other settings, all of them situated in the margins of Dublin or even, very briefly, in “the warm sunny city” of Cork (*P* 88). From the naturalised scenery of Clongowes Wood College, in Co. Kildare, to the Christmas season at the coast of Bray and the summer walks in the parks of Blackrock, Stephen is painfully affected by the economic decline of his father that has forced the family to move continually, until their downfall finally makes them settle down in town. Thus, Stephen’s initial wanderings through the unfamiliar streets of Dublin make him conscious of distinctive elements that characterise city life experimenting feelings of “unrest” and “dissatisfaction” (*P* 66).<sup>13</sup>

Being *A Portrait* as autobiographical as much of Joyce’s poetry, it does not surprise to find passages that praise the magnificence of nature, as young Stephen perceives it. Early in the book, for instance, Stephen describes the landscape of beauty that surrounds Clongowes in a sentimentalised fashion not too dissimilar from some of Joyce’s early verses:

<sup>13</sup> The following passage contrasts with his subsequent perception of the city: “The vastness and strangeness of the life suggested to him by the bales of merchandise stocked along the walls or swung aloft out of the holds of streamers wakened again in him the unrest which had sent him wandering in the evening from garden to garden in search of Mercedes” (*P* 66).

Lavender and cream and pink roses were beautiful to think of. Perhaps a wild rose might be like those colours and he remembered the song about the wild rose blossoms of the little green place. But you could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could. (P 12)

By the end of the first chapter, in a section dealing with Stephen's recovery from a bad cold in the infirmary, his high temperature makes him dream of his own death. He imagines being buried precisely "in the little graveyard of the community off the main avenue of limes", surrounded by nature, in such a way that beauty would be united with sadness, "like music" (P 24). In addition, Stephen afterwards announces that his favourite author is precisely the Romantic poet Lord Byron,<sup>14</sup> accused of heresy and immorality by his class mates (P 81). And a bit further on, his first walk along the city at night also evokes references of the Romantic Shelley:<sup>15</sup>

The vast cycle of starry life bore his weary mind outward to its verge and inward to its centre, a distant music accompanying him outward and inward. What music? The music came nearer and he recalled the words, the words of Shelly's fragment upon the moon wandering companionless, pale for weariness. (P 103)

As Stephen grows up and Joyce's ironic distance from his *alter-ego* bridges a gap, the movements from the margins to the centre and from nature to urban life are more manifest. This progress will end in Stephen's reconciliation with the town, when Dublin becomes his main source of inspiration, enhancing his literary mind. Nonetheless, an aspect that should be observed is that in Joyce's work only male characters seem to be free to walk along the city, while women remain indoors, relegated to the domestic sphere. Roswitha Mueller explains this arguing that: "It was the very anonymity and uncontrollability of city life that made it off limits for women who were keen on preserving their good reputation" (33). In Joyce's fictional world there is one exception to this, the prostitutes, who expose themselves subversively in the streets of Dublin, tempting men, including Stephen. Nevertheless, although the rest of women are not usually individualised and tend to stay at home, they do not necessarily fulfil the stereotype of the "angel in the house".<sup>16</sup> Stephen's idealised and unrequited love for Emma, who symbolises virtuous female perfection, is counteracted by

<sup>14</sup> Besides, in "A Little Cloud", after the failed poet Little Chandler comes back home late and drunk, he reads from the Romantic Byron, thinking that his elevated tastes overpass those of his simple wife (D 83-85).

<sup>15</sup> As Chester G. Anderson has demonstrated, "the spirit of Joyce's aesthetic comes from Shelley and D'Annunzio rather than from Aquinas" (536 n213.17).

<sup>16</sup> However, and implying the opposite, in *A Portrait*, the bird-girl is described as a "wild angel ... the angel of mortal youth and beauty" (P 172).

his meeting with the prostitute. At the same time, his vision of the bird-girl in the Dollymont strand embodies the traditional trope of Mother Ireland, if only to subvert it and free Stephen to abandon his own homeland. Apart from Emma, who is little more than a creation in Stephen's mind, the two other female figures "tempt" him into the transgression of received moral and religious codes. While the prostitutes introduce him into the sins of the flesh leading to his abandonment of religion, the bird-girl fosters Stephen's rebellious attitude towards his family, ties and homeland, to pursue artistic freedom. Thus, Stephen's sexual encounter with the prostitute brings him close to nature, as much as the feminisation of the land and the naturalisation of the feminine are embodied in the bird-girl. This blending of femininity and creativity with nature, that has long informed patriarchal representations of the female inspiring muse, is here embodied by the image of the bird, as Stephen's mind perceives it:

A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird.... But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (P 171)

Although Stephen's famous epiphany has been analysed in terms of the most diverse critical positions, I should like to apply here Lee Rozelle's notion of the ecosublime, for the "ecosublime sense of place" can be found in other Modernists such as Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence or Elizabeth Bishop:

If the sublime, in the Kantian sense, transports literary figures and readers beyond reason, beyond language, into an aesthetic mode of higher finality, then the ecosublime might well be an invigorating presence for modern literary and cultural study.... an ecological sublime would offer a new kind of transcendence which would resist the traditional re-inscription of humankind's supremacy over nature. (101)

By means of the transcendence of the referred dichotomy human/nature, other pairs of opposites could also be challenged, including culture/nature, reason/nature, city/country, urban/rural, or male/female. Whether Joyce's aesthetics subvert rather than reinforce these concepts needs to be further analysed specially in his major works *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, in which the presence of nature attain additional meanings.

To conclude, I would suggest that although, at first sight, applying ecocritical theory to Joyce's work might have found resistance, the result succeeds at problematising his position as a pure urban writer. Joyce's articulation of a discourse that both opposes and blends nature with city life brings to the fore another way of reading his legacy. Joyce's emulation

of Stephen's theory of art as devised in *A Portrait*—rather than the other way round— appears here most appropriate. If, for Stephen, the lyrical form was “the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion”, the epical emerges out of it and “progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the actions like a vital sea” (P 214-15). The circularity of Joyce's entire production appears under this light as a cogent conception of the environment, which departed from a deep focus on natural elements, continued with an exploration of the urban milieu, and closed the circle with a work that relied on “urban nature”<sup>17</sup> and was sustained on Vico's theory on the circularity of history. As A. Walton Litz has affirmed, one should not forget that “Joyce was first and last a poet” (3).

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<sup>17</sup> This term was coined by John Tallmadge, with the intention of challenging the apparent paradox it embodies (178).