REVIEW ESSAY

Often Doublin' in the Green

Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce. Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin, eds. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2014. 348 pp. €39, £35 cloth (ISBN 978-1-78205-072-8).

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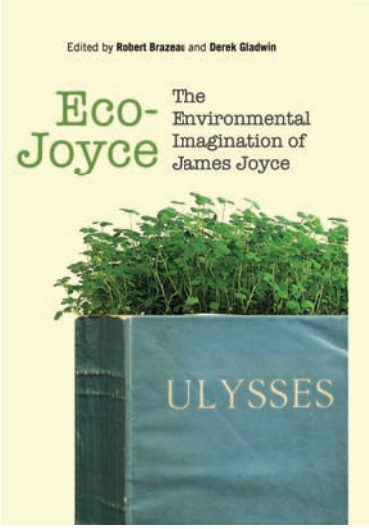

I have spent much of the past year contributing to the development of a new master's in geography at Maynooth University. One of the joys of this initiative has been the conversation it has convened between the community-activist partners brought to the program by Dr. Rory Hearne and the artist partners brought by Dr. Karen Till. With field work and community-service learning, the students and I have enjoyed an intense introduction to the issues raised in related ways by what Ireland is calling its decade of centenaries. The Irish state has its centennial in 2016 and takes the opportunity to reflect (Kearns 2014a) on how far it has met the promise of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, including this egalitarian commitment: "The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past" (Clarke et al. 1916). The Proclamation "declare[d] the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible." And, yet, at this very moment, the state has placed its economic sovereignty in hock to European bankers who dictate the terms of taxation and spending in the cause of collecting on debts entered into both by the Irish government and by private developers (Kearns 2014b). Capitalist economic relations are invited to discipline political sovereignty.

This crisis engages both the political geographer and the cultural geographer, for it is clear that resistance to austerity springs not only from the self-interest of the broad mass of the people asked to bear the burden so that the same gang of irresponsible investors can be allowed once more to make hay while the sun of German funds shines on us, but also from an Irish sense of injustice, that the many are paying for the folly of the few. The roots of cooperation and of egalitarianism run deep in Ireland. The redistributive structures of Gaelic society, elbowed aside so brutally by colonial capitalism, yet survived, until recent times and in some places, as a communitarian form of village life based on the system known as rundale (Flaherty 2013), flourishes still in many parts of Ireland as food-industry cooperatives (Breathnach 1992), and is exemplified by the resilient credit union system that gives more than half the Irish population a viable alternative to the corporate banking sector (Daly 2008). Because capitalism can be figured as a colonial imposition, there is a version of Irish identity that nourishes solidarity in the face of austerity policies that promote greed over need. It is here, at the intersection of identity and economic priority, that some community activists and some engaged artists find themselves speaking of the same things,

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sometimes directly, as with the on-site historical drama of ANU Productions (Lowe 2013), and often indirectly as with Ó Conchúir's (2008) dance performance, *Niche: A Dance About Finding Your Place,* staging in a part of the derelict docklands untouched by the rising tide of the International Financial Services Centre, a series of questions that might be about the making of communities and places in neoliberal times.

At least since the publication of *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* (Mason and Ellmann 1959), it has been clear that James Joyce must be counted among those Irish artists with a self-consciously political understanding of the interrogation of Irish identities. Although critical of the romantic illusions that he saw as standing between his Irish contemporaries and a realistic assessment of their parlous condition, his sympathy with their plight was evident even when he seemed to be chiding them, as in a piece on the folklore published by Lady Gregory, where he wrote: "Out of the material and spiritual which has gone so hardly with her, Ireland has emerged with many memories of beliefs, and with one belief—a belief in the incurable ignobility of the forces that have overcome her" (Joyce [1903] 1959, 105). This association between an attitude toward history and toward the system imposed as colonialism is at the heart of Joyce's anticolonial version of nationalism. Joyce approved, or at least understood, the Irish tradition of rebellion: "When a victorious country tyrannizes over another, it cannot logically be considered wrong for that other to rebel" (Joyce [1907] 1959, 163). Yet, for Joyce, if Ireland were to rebel, then, it were better it should be against religious as well as political tyranny as in one satirical poem, where Joyce hymned: "O Ireland my first and only love | Where Christ and Caesar are hand in glove" (Joyce [1912b] 1959, ll. 25–26). These anticolonial politics of Joyce have been explicated *con brio* in much recent scholarship (Fairhill 1993; Gibson 2002).

Brazeau and Gladwin's collection take us somewhere else but ultimately bring us back to the same terrain of identity, history, and politics. They propose a reading of Joyce through the lens of ecocriticism (Garrard 2012). We could note three strands in these writings about nature and the natural. In the first place, there has been an appreciation of the "natural" as a sort of limit condition for the "social," that it might serve a check on human hubris. For some, this check is understood as ecological constraint (Meadows et al. 1972), but for others it serves as a source of spiritual renewal in rebuke of the pomp of the mere human civilization as in the wish of Thoreau to have rather the balm of nature than any synthetic urban comforts: "For I'd rather be thy child | And pupil, in the forest wild, | Than be the king of men elsewhere, | And the most sovereign slave of care: | To have one moment of thy dawn, | Than share the city's year forlorn" (Thoreau 1895, ll. 15–20). The second strand comprises the writings that focus on the social construction of ideas of nature. It is clear that much modern thought projects into nature social relations that are thereby naturalized. If nature, as with Malthus's account, is naturally a space of competition, then a properly ordered society should embrace the same principle or risk rebuking natural limits and receiving the check of inefficiency or overpopulation (Harvey 1996). If the sperm is naturally the active partner and the ovum naturally the passive, then nature gives license to a similarly gendered division of responsibility in wider society (Martin 1991). Harvey (1996) and Martin (1991) highlighted the questionable science that underpins and the inequitable conclusions that flow from this naturalization.

There is a third strand to ecocriticism and this worries about the tendency of the first strand to imagine a world in harmony with nature as if we were not irredeemably imbricated in a second nature. On this reading, we must imagine ourselves as at once natural and cultural, as having no place to retreat beyond that marked by our own transformative energies (Buell 2005; Morton 2007). But this strand recognizes also that our social construction of nature does not preclude our learning that there is a material reality that visits unintended consequences on our earth-shaping work (Soper 1995). Finally, this version of ecocriticism recognizes that nature and concepts of the natural are powerful modalities for social and political thought. Williams's (1973) *The Country and the City* is perhaps the best example of a study that traces how nature has been thought with for the purpose of addressing contemporary social and political change. Ecocriticism, then, identifies nature as limit, as social construction, and as metaphor for thinking with.

Alongside the concern with history produced by a focus on anticolonial themes in Joyce, this new attention to nature and the natural produces further ways of enjoying Joyce as a way to reflect on the dilemmas of Irish society. It would appear that Joyce reveled in the apparent contradiction of nature and consciousness. The animality of human beings was important to Joyce and he could indeed claim, in the words of the classic author Terence: "I am human: nothing human is alien to me" (Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto) (*Heauton Timorumenos* [Self-Tormentor], Act I, Scene 1, l 25). In the context of a set of reflections on the likelihood of ever finding conjugal love, Stephen Dedalus, in *Ulysses,* makes ironic reference

to this play turning the morality of the man who suffered in sympathy with all mankind into the a more earthy reference to the self-tormentor as masturbator: "Wait to be wooed and won. Ay, meacock. Who will woo you? [. . .] Autontimerumenos" (Joyce [1922] 1961, 9.943).[1] This is typical of Joyce's leveling humor. Yet, the sentiment of Terence could be the motto of Leopold Bloom, the character in *Ulysses* on whom Joyce bestows the most humane and sympathetic of dispositions. Even when contemplating the notion of hanged men with postmortem erections, Bloom reverts to this sentiment: "It's only a natural phenomenon, don't you see" (Joyce [1922] 1961, 12:465). Or, when talking about his attraction toward young women: "It was pairing time. Capillary attraction is a natural phenomenon" (Joyce [1922] 1961, 15:3349–3350). In all these cases, Joyce treats nature as alibi. Something that is a natural inclination cannot be evil.

In this collection of essays, the chapter by James Fairhill articulates the other side of nature: the human condition as already and always a fall from grace. If *Ulysses* developed a sense of tolerance about the weaknesses to which flesh is heir, then *Finnegans Wake* explored the ways that an awareness of our flawed humanity animates a sense of shame. According to Fairhill, Joyce was interested in "humanity's fall into its divided selfhood, at once unconsciously naturally and unnaturally self-aware" (p. 236). That we are unconsciously natural provides our desires with their excuse, whereas our unnatural self-awareness is the basis of our human sense of responsibility. Joyce's fellow-Dubliner, O'Casey ([1945] 1972, 84–85) put it like this:

> Not the first man, but the first question the man asked, brought what the clergy call sin into the world, and all our woe. Better sin and better woe than woeful fear and bitter ignorance. Ignorance found a god everywhere and in everything, and ordered life according to its imagined whims. Knowledge had been hunting the earth and scouring the heavens for but one God, but has found none.

Responsibility and not innocence is the human condition, and Garry Leonard explores in his chapter Joyce's deliberately unromantic view of nature. Leonard argues that, for Joyce, "Nature is what your body smashes up against if you persist too long in self-serving self-delusion" (p. 248).

Joyce's concern with unconscious naturalness and unnatural consciousness engages the ecocritical themes of nature as limit and of thinking with nature. In perhaps his most famous short story, "The Dead," contained in *Dubliners,* his collection of 1914, Joyce developed both these themes. The central characters are Gabriel Conroy, a man alienated emotionally from his wife, Gretta, and Molly Ivors, an Irish cultural nationalist who berates Gabriel for his lukewarm Irishness. Finally there is the young man, Michael Furey, who once had loved Gretta and had died after her family had made it clear he was not a suitable match for her. In his chapter on this short story, Robert Brazeau describes "Gabriel's ego [as] very much at odds with his non-rational (that is, biological) self, and [we] are offered a view of how, for Joyce, this may well represent the endemic condition of modern life" (p. 217). Brazeau elaborates this idea of nature as limit by looking at Gabriel's failure to exercise his will over the inclinations of the people around him. Gabriel is invited to think that it would be natural for men to pursue women, but he himself is not able to impress his wife with his manly hunting posture. Instead, her lost love retains her affection.

In terms of thinking with nature, in "The Dead," Molly Ivors, the cultural nationalist, expresses a belief in the west of Ireland as the place that remained furthest from English control and thus most true to authentic Irish values. She urges Gabriel to take his vacation there to reinforce his national identity. Joyce ([1912a] 1959) took up this particular construction of Irish identity in an essay on Galway, the central city of the west of Ireland. In his chapter on Joyce as a travel writer, Derek Gladwin illustrates how Joyce challenged the idea that the west of Ireland embodied a pure Irish past and "reposition[ed] the West of Ireland, and more specifically the bioregion of Galway as a legitimate international port" (p. 185). Joyce, then, places the west as Ireland's front door to Europe, its cosmopolitan core. This is very different from the imaginative geography of the cultural nationalists. In "The Dead," Gabriel looks to the west as the place from which his dead rival frustrates his own flourishing. The final scene of "The Dead" has Gabriel looking toward a sunset in the west through a mist of snow. Rather than the source of rejuvenation, the west is a frigid place associated with death. As Kerschner explains, in this passage, "the only extended meditation on the natural world in *Dubliners,*" Joyce presented Gabriel as having "experienced a vision of raw nature in its lyrical beauty and its infrahuman coldness" (p. 129). Quite clearly in "The Dead," Joyce uses the idea of thinking with nature to explore matters of nationalist ideology and gender relations.

Finnegans Wake is a masterful excursus on the social construction of nature. In particular, it explicitly challenges the forms of naturalization highlighted by Harvey (1996) and Martin (1991). One of the ways Joyce did this was by doubling identities and identifications. In this book of the

night, boundaries are porous and essences contradictory. He had played with this a little in *Ulysses,* where Bloom was identified as "the new womanly man" (Joyce [1922] 1961, 15.1801). Yet Bloom was also presented as having greater empathy and charity than the stereotypical male. In *Finnegans Wake,* Joyce set up several polarities, only to collapse them. Several of these polarities came from the realm of gendered natural forms that often serve to reinforce gender distinctions as natural. A central pair in the book was HCE and ALP: Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, or "Here Comes Everybody" (Joyce 1939, 54.18–19), or any number of male personages such as Adam, Noah, or Lord Nelson, and even natural forms such as a mountain or a tree, and Anna Livia Plurabelle, "all ladies please" (Joyce 1939, 979.34), or everywoman from Eve, Isis to Iseult, and then in nature as a passing cloud and most prominently as a river.

These gendered natural and historical personages are explicitly destabilized by Joyce. The initials HCE that disclose the male figures, turn at one point into Hag Chivychas Eve (Joyce 1939, 51.14). Both Hag and Eve suggest a feminine association but it is at the same time the eve of a festival (hag in Hebrew) and chivychas refers both to Chevy Chase, one name for a border dispute between England and Scotland over hunting rights, and to chivvying (or harassing) and chasing (McHugh 2006, 245). Thus the male figure might be being figured as a holiday devoted to the anniversary of a geopolitical event, or it is an old woman bothering the first of her kind. One way, then, that Joyce unsettles his gendered figures is through a strategy of dense punning, In a superb chapter in *Eco-Joyce,* Erin Walsh begins with the punning of word and world in *Finnegans Wake* before developing a conclusion that links the political and the ecological in Joyce:

> Ultimately I argue that the *Wake*'s variable puns suggest a model for an ecological discourse of nation—nation not only in process, but *as* process—that supplants the fiction of nation as unitary organic whole with the self-adulterating word-world of the *Wake*. By destabilizing the conceptual and linguistic boundaries of the word "nation," the *Wake* articulates nation as fundamentally heterogeneous and contingent, nation not as romantic metaphor but as transgressive pun. In the *Wake*'s final pages, ALP appears as a tree, but also as river, and it is her accordingly hybrid discourse that actualizes the famous recirculation of the text's "riverrun," offering a model for an ecological negotiation of national boundaries. (pp. 70–71)

This really is moving from the social construction of nature, those gendered readings of stream and tree, to thinking with nature, the creative reworking of metaphors. Joyce is not only thinking about nation, here, though; he is also thinking about gender and using nature metaphors to trouble gendered distinctions as well as gendered readings of both nation and nature. As the River Liffey, ALP announces: "I am leafy speafing" (Joyce 1939, 619.20). In her theater piece, *riverrun,* Fouéré (2013) animates these last pages as the river losing its identity enters the sea, the woman sublimates her individuality in sexual congress, and the mother passes away in the night. I can't help but recall that Joyce gave the last word in both his major novels to a woman, Molly Bloom in *Ulysses* and Anna Livia Plurabelle in *Finnegans Wake*. But, perhaps Joyce left us the last word, for on the very last page, ALP as tree seems resigned to oblivion: "My leaves have drifted from me. All. But one clings still. I'll bear it to me. To remind me of" (Joyce 1939, 628.6–7). And although the book must "Finn, again!" (Joyce 1939, 628.14), it is we, the readers, who hold the last leaf, and thus to us that the injunction is issued: "Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thousendsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the" (Joyce 1939, 628.14–16).

Note

1. It is usual to reference quotations from *Ulysses* by chapter and then by the line within the chapter. For *Finnegans Wake,* the convention is to reference by page and then by line on the page.

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