

Re-Place: Performative Landscapes as Conceptual Ecological Environments

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This book project aims to integrate Irish theatre history into a wider discourse of the environmental humanities. Combining material ecocritical thinking and theories of space and place, this research contends firstly, that grouping the selected theatrical, radiophonic, and digital landscapes under the umbrella term “conceptual ecological environments” will offer a way to examine disparate landscapes thematically. Secondly, that this thematic amalgamation, with its emphasis on inclusivity, bridges the division of nature and culture. That is, it can challenge (at least on a textual and performative level) the human/nonhuman dynamic that has facilitated the collapse of nature in the face of anthropocentrism. I intend to read the performances (and the corresponding digital documentation) as a material response to the environment it depicts, examining, as Serenella Iovino writes, “matter as a text, as a site of narrativity” (“Stories” 451). In examining the environmental rather than the cultural in these plays, this project challenges the polarization of both.

Lawrence Buell has pointed out that since “[h]uman beings are biocultural creatures constructing themselves in interaction with surroundings they cannot not inhabit, all their artefacts may be expected to bear traces of that” (*Writing 2*). Given the present ecological crisis, literary and performance studies need to have a deeper understanding of the natural landscape—and that includes unnatural landscapes. Drawing from ecocritical theory, this research examines how the natural environment is translated into representational space—theatrical, radiophonic, and digital. Using key texts from three Irish playwrights spanning the twentieth century, this study analyzes different types of place: the West of Ireland as a rural ideological landscape, the cityscape as a site of sustainability, the radiophonic environment as a material interplay between actor and listener, the North as a contested landscape, and digital environments. This project will look at rurality and urbanism not in opposition but as a part of an environmental ecology. The notion of the golden age of rural life, what Raymond Williams has termed “a myth functioning as a memory,” will be examined from the urban perspective from which it emerged (*Country 43*). The idea of natural environments being culturally conditioned prompts research questions such as the following: How has our representation of the environment impacted on our relationship with the natural world? Can new digital environments enhance our understanding of nature? How can twentieth-century theatrical representations of place help us to think ecologically? The aim of this project is to bring these disparate theatrical representations of the natural world together under the umbrella of conceptual ecological environments. It will allow us to see, thematically, the emergence of an aesthetic that directly addresses nature in Irish theatre.

Iovino, Serenella. “Stories from the Thick of Things: Introducing Material Ecocriticism.” Pt. 1 of Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann. “Theorizing Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych.” *Material Ecocriticism*, edited by Heather Sullivan and Dana Phillips. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 3 (2012): 448–60.

Buell, Lawrence. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the US and Beyond*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.