



(1)




# H-Environment

(/h-environment)

H-Net's network for environmental history

[Home](#) [All Content](#) [Announcements](#) [Reviews](#) [I](#) [...](#)

## Allen on Dolan Stover, 'Enduring Ruin: Environmental Destruction during the Irish Revolution'

**Dolan Stover, Justin.** *Enduring Ruin: Environmental Destruction during the Irish Revolution.* Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2022. 210 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 9781910820834 (<https://amazon.com/dp/1910820830>). 

**Reviewed by** Nicholas Allen (University of Georgia)

**Published on** H-Environment (October, 2023)

**Commissioned by** Daniella McCahey (Texas Tech University)

**Printable Version:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=58741>  
(<https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=58741>)

*Enduring Ruin* is an innovative account of Irish history during the period of revolutionary transition from 1916 to 1922. It has an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion, all organized around a series of thematic case studies, each of which is contextualized by diaries, witness accounts, local and national newspapers, and the historiography of the intervening century. This is where the book hopes most to make its mark, taking for its focus the environmental destruction caused by the guerilla war that secured Ireland's partial independence and by the British state reprisals that attended it. The impact is somewhat limited by the environment being understood largely as the material conditions of then contemporary life, as civilians and combatants experienced it. In this sense, *Enduring Ruin* builds on the widening interest in social history that more recent studies of the revolutionary period have established, after decades of more formal attention to political and military matters.

There are still lingering traces of that insular historiographical practice in the unwillingness to engage with literary histories that have touched on adjacent questions of infrastructure, ecological damage, and cultural activism, as in the diminished reading of George Russell's influence on American opinion during the period of reprisals or indeed the oblivion of the many Irish writers and visual artists who drew the idea of a particularly Irish environment into existence. The book would have been greatly enriched, for

example, with an introduction that extended back beyond the beginning of World War I to the contested landscapes of the nineteenth century, of agrarian unrest and the literary inheritances of texts like William Carleton's *Wildgoose Lodge* (1833), which are seed ground for the tensions apparent in *Enduring Ruin's* underground histories. The study would have been improved too with fuller consideration of partition as an environmental affect and with more sustained attention to the civil war period, both of which are too briefly considered and both of which question some of the book's general ideas about nation and revolution. Still, Justin Dolan Stover's attention to the detail and disparate forms of sensory disruption in the historical experience of the Irish revolution is very welcome, in particular his idea of the period as a chaotic score, a musical metaphor he borrows with great utility from a scholar of Holocaust memory, Leslie Morris.

*Enduring Ruin's* six chapters begin with a study of the Easter Rising in Dublin, with a focus on the urban destruction that followed the insurrection and its suppression. The chapter is a good summary of the events and their impact on a diverse population, with a concentration on buildings and burnings. There follows a chapter on contested spaces and militarized landscapes, which gets better to the already colonized geographies of Ireland by the time rebellion inflamed into general disorder. This is a place again where Irish historiography might well meet literary and cultural criticism. Postcolonialism and environmental criticism have had much to say about how force is ordered and resisted in late imperial societies. That conversation is important to studies like this because it questions the idea of how and when violence begins and how the infrastructure of implicit threat, in barracks, railways, streets, and waterways (and I would have loved to know more about ports and canals in the book), predicates forms of resistance. Thinking about this has been a general challenge for Irish historiography, and Dolan Stover's book is most pathbreaking as it travels far enough to show where these borders exist. *Enduring Ruin*, indeed, is most effective when it combines that sense of imminent violence with radical event, such as in the accounts of police families who lost their belongings in fire bombings, put out on the roads like evictees, the social and historical echoes entirely disorienting. This kind of writing comes together in the book's strong middle section, when Dolan Stover comes closest to a sense of the environment as a common reader might now expect it, reading bog and country road as sites of revolutionary translation, the fields flooded and trees cut to hinder chasing British army columns. The later chapters on reprisals, "environmental victimhood," and the aftereffects of a mass war mentality on British forces describe the social and political contexts of extrajudicial killing and destruction and are, like the first chapter on Dublin, an account of this tumultuous past that is richer in sources than in ideas.

*Enduring Ruin* is a good read and a welcome innovation in the practice of Irish historiography, integrating newly diverse sources into a broader understanding of the island as a series of disturbed landscapes, some of which are placed in richer context than others. The environmental impact of the deadly past century is less considered, and much work remains to be done to connect the carbon cost of decolonization with subsequent histories of partition, civil war, and statehood. Dolan Stover concludes rightly that *Enduring Ruin* is written at the intersection of "political change, altered spaces, violence and material ruin, displacement, compensation, and natural and physical restoration" (p. 153). To these might be added gender, ecology, and imperialism, never mind decolonization or cultural history, the exclusion from which suggests that the next Irish revolution needs to be in Irish historiography.

**Citation:** Nicholas Allen. Review of Dolan Stover, Justin. *Enduring Ruin: Environmental Destruction during the Irish Revolution*. H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. October, 2023.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=58741> (<https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=58741>)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>)

### Categories

[H-Net Reviews \(/h-net-services/h-net-reviews/\)](/h-net-services/h-net-reviews/), [Review \(/item/review/\)](/item/review/)

### Keywords

[oral history \(/tags/oral-history/\)](/tags/oral-history/)



## Post a Reply

**Join this Network to Reply (/group/19397/request-membership)**



### H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online

Copyright © 1993 - 2024. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

 (<https://digitalhumanities.msu.edu/>)  (<https://history.msu.edu/>)