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LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Toilet humour and ecology on the first page of *Finnegans Wake*: Žižek's call of nature, answered by Joyce

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Abstract: This article draws out ecological aspects convergent on the first page of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and explores them through the philosopher Slavoj Žižek's theoretical perspectives on humanity today and its relation to the waste and chaos that underpins the state of nature that it is reliant on; that is, in relation to the Lacanian category of the Real. It does so in an attempt to bring together Joyce and Žižek (who has tended to reject the writer in his work) so as to demonstrate the theoretical possibilities that can arise out of their synthesis. The essay's methodology is tripartite, working through a theoretical part—utilising, as well as Žižek's ecology, Lacanian psychoanalysis and the ecosophical thought of Félix Guattari—a textual part, drawing on Joyce scholarship pertinent to the first section of the *Wake*, and towards a practical part, which aims to condense the work of the essay and outline a route to a possible praxis, which takes into account the *real* of nature.

Subjects: Ecology - Environment Studies; Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Postmodernism; Modernism

Keywords: James Joyce; Slavoj Žižek; Jacques Lacan; ecosophy; the Real

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In these times of global ecological and political crisis, this article explores an unusual literary path, in the attempt to arrive at ways of re-envisioning the concept of 'nature' so as to approach it afresh in combatting its threats. Drawing on ecological pronouncements made by the popular Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, and combining them with the French post-structuralist Félix Guattari's ecosophy and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, this work excavates the notion of nature as it is expounded on the first page of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), and demonstrates how its deconstruction of binaries of nature/culture and environment/humanity can bring us to a reconceptualisation of nature that can open ways to both assuming our own roles and responsibilities within nature, and to changing its coordinates for the better.

Civilisation is the sewer.

Jacques Lacan (1971)¹

The new type of humanity that we need is not the one rediscovering this mysterious, deep, unfathomable impenetrability of nature, but, on the contrary, nature should disappear as nature, as the mysterious dark background. We should develop, I think, a much more terrifying new abstract materialism, a kind of mathematical universe where there is nothing, there are just formulas, technical forms and so on[.]

The point is to rediscover a poetry in all this, in abstract technology, in mathematics, in trash.

Slavoj Žižek (2009, p. 165)

1. A call of nature

Speaking in an interview with Astra Taylor for the film *Examined Life* (2008), Slavoj Žižek makes a plea for rediscovering poetry in *the real* of nature (the real, that is, in the Lacanian sense of the term, that which resides in a state *beyond* or outside of human knowledge or comprehension), in its trash or waste, its chaos, its playing out of mathematical formulae and physical, chemical and biological processes.² The point is to find a poetics here, and not in the idealised, mystical forms that nature has been given in the popular imaginations of many of today's ecologies. Žižek's call of nature envisages a humanity able to think nature outside of the deformative categories of exploitation and subordination on the one hand, and romanticism and autonomisation on the other. The humanity appreciative of such nature should be one able to unearth in its new forms of "spirituality" and poetry that account for its *real*; that which we—which humanity—are the effect of, that which humanity is *a priori* wrapped up in, rather than being apart from, in either the role of exploiter or saviour of nature.

Despite Žižek's own reservations about the Irish writer, it is perhaps James Joyce who has best answered this call of nature in the poetry of his last major work, the "all including most farraginous chronicle" of the night, *Finnegans Wake* (Joyce, 1986, p. 345).³ Žižek generally gives short shrift to Joyce in his critical writings, despite Joyce's being a staple reference for the latter stages of the psychoanalytic theory of his master, Jacques Lacan. He has suggested that "there is effectively something fake in Lacan's fascination with late Joyce", opting instead to champion Samuel Beckett, at one time Joyce's amanuensis, and in many ways his literary successor, as the true bearer of the Lacanian Word (2012a, p. 207).⁴ However, there are many passages, tropes and traits within the pages of *Finnegans Wake*—even on its first page—that if Žižek were to reread he might find match those of his blueprint for a new ecological mind-set.

In *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (1992) Žižek argues that, despite its lure, "there is no purely 'natural' equilibrium" (2008, p. 213). Indeed, as Louis Althusser puts it, in its *real*, "nature offends customs, principles, morality and good breeding" through its chaos and disaster, contravening its New Age conceptualisation as a harmoniously balanced whole only negatively affected by human action (2008, p. 148). But what Žižek also gets at in his statement is that there would be no nature for us were there not an "us" to perceive it, to interact with it, to name it, to have a vested interest in it: humanity itself is inculcated in the *real* of nature; we are part of the picture, not outside it. He goes on later to suggest that "clean rivers and air, etc., are only desirable if, underhand, we observe nature *sub specie* man's survival. In other words, such an ecologically oriented "decenterment" already relies on a surreptitious *teleological* subordination of nature to man" (2008, p. 213).

Thus, the form of ecology Žižek is putting forward is one that must perceive in the preservative view of nature this ulterior and underlying *self-preservative* nature of humankind. However, if this anterior motive—the survival of the species at whatever cost—comes to be realised and "assumed", in the psychoanalytic sense, it might make the conditions for being able to work with, and within, the

real of our natural world more favourable to us. That is, instead of attempting to recover some mythical image of a full, uncorrupted nature, that has been projected into some indeterminate past, and whilst fervently opposing any denial of today's catastrophic ecological situation, in terms of global warming and climate change; against a "saviour" narrative that wants to "rescue" innocent nature from criminal humanity—with all its inadvertent hubris—and the anthropomorphisation of nature into a figure such as the "mother"—with its likewise—and opposed to the propagandist, tabloid notions that *due to a cold spate in winter all the science is wrong*, Žižek's ecology aims to position itself in the natural world as it is here and now: in the conditions of its finiteness, its dirtiness and pollutedness, its intervening chaos and destruction, and—at the same time—its beauty, its awesomeness and its ridiculous sublimity.

Thus, to begin with the clean rivers that Žižek mentions, that which flows through Joyce's "dear, dirty Dublin"—and which he made the centrepiece of *Finnegans Wake*—the River Liffey, is anything but.⁵ In fact, as part of a planned Dublin city art project, words from Joyce's first major work *Dubliners* were to be washed into the river walls, "power-hosed into the patina" that had grown up on the river's sides over time (Murphy, 2013).⁶ In his *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (1965), Brendan Behan describes the Liffey:

Of which river it was said when I was a child: "You pull a chain and in a jiffey, your shit is floating down the Liffey." Someone once said that "Joyce has made of this river the Ganges of the literary world," but sometimes the smell of the Ganges of the literary world is not all that literary. (1990, p. 109)

Žižek himself, in a talk on Buddhism given in 2012, commented that he had composed a haiku with a friend, which ran: "Toilet bowl with stale water/I sit on it/Splash" (2012b). He is here providing a "vulgar" example to offset the typically "noble" subject matter taken as the standard starting point for the haiku, which Žižek sees as the exemplary Buddhist mode of poetry. What he is thus reworking into this mode is a natural phenomenon, a fundamental part of nature's real, an everyday occurrence of "frank nature"—to use a term borrowed from Shakespeare (1958, p. 636)—that is often excised or exorcised from representation in poetry.⁷ The point is not, however, that this is a realm that Buddhism has shied away from in any way. We might take as an example of its unabashedness in this area the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, in which Śāntideva—its seventh century author—discusses the human skeleton:

Those in love are entranced by filth.

You had this passion for it when it was covered over, so why dislike it now? [...]

If you have no passion for what is foul, why do you embrace another, a cage of bones bound by sinew, smeared with slime and flesh?

You have plenty of filth of your own. Satisfy yourself with that! Glutton for crap! (1998, p. 92)

Žižek and Śāntideva are obviously closer here than first impressions may have given us to believe, but where Žižek is going further is in suggesting that an ecological materialism should reject the valuative prejudices on which Śāntideva's Buddhism is based, not through encouraging a passion for filth, but rather a love of the real; one which doesn't view the vulgar elements that go into making us and our world as "ignoble" by their nature, but one in which we can rather come to terms with these elementary aspects of life. Such a coming to terms is indeed in part that on which civilisation itself is based, as Lacan hints in his essay "Lituraterre"—in the statement that "civilisation is the sewer"—and as exemplified by the fact that it has now become something of a cliché to claim of the Roman Empire that it had built its great civilisation on its sewerage system, the Cloaca Maxima.

It would appear, then, that we should read "civilisation is the sewer" in the doubleness of its meaning. It is not only that civilisations—and the healthy functioning of their communal good—are

built on their sewerage, waste management and treatment, and natural defence systems, but also that civilisation, in its *real*, is made up—and cannot entirely rid itself—of its waste; it must assume its waste, the *real* of its other- or underside, so as to be able to deal with it proficiently; and it, too, will in time become waste itself, and so it is that, *already*—as a potential awaiting its future realisation—“civilisation is the sewer”. This in the same sense in which the poet Fernando Pessoa, in tune with Śāntideva, states: “I’m already my future corpse” (2006 [1924], p. 300).

Thus, humanity’s “passage through the world, [its] footprint, mark, trace”—which Lacan talks of in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*—again should not be seen as a marker by which to distinguish the “human” from the “natural”, but one that demonstrates how inextricably bound up the human is with the natural; that they occupy the same place in the bigger picture that is the world (2008, p. 288). Contrary, then, to the thinker who calls for the “humanisation of the planet” (“humanising” nature through culture), whom Lacan labels the “fond dreamer” (2008)—and who is perhaps Marx, or, more likely, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin—we are led not in the other direction, to a “naturalisation of the human”, but rather to escape the constraints of the binary human/nature altogether.⁸ Indeed, as Félix Guattari puts it in *The Three Ecologies*: “now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture” (2008, p. 29). (Like Joyce, however, Guattari is another of Žižek’s lesser-favoured characters, whom he has been tempted to call the “bad’ influence” on Gilles Deleuze’s later thinking, with regard to their famous co-authored texts (2012c, p. 18)).

Lacan, however, had made an earlier pronouncement on civilisation—in 1960, in the same Seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis—in which he claimed that “the domain of the pastoral is never absent from civilization; it never fails to offer itself as a solution to the latter’s discontents” (p. 109). He is obviously referencing Freud’s *Civilisation and Its Discontents* here, but seems also to be making the point that by coming to terms with the waste and debris that makes up the real of nature, this opens up also the domain of the pastoral; that is, of the communal *good*, not only in sanitary terms, but in aesthetic too, which is the realm of possibility in which Žižek’s new abstract materialism may find its spirituality and its poetry.

2. Realithy (Joyce, 2012, p. 503.4)

The first page of Joyce’s modernist (if not *postmodernist*) masterpiece, *Finnegans Wake*, encompasses many aspects of the materialist poetry that Žižek calls for in *Examined Life*; indeed, it could be said that Joyce has here, to an extent, and premonitorily, answered Žižek’s call of nature.⁹ From the materiality of the page itself and its symbols, to its focus on natural phenomena, from crises and catastrophes to the ruminatory functions of the body, this page (as far—it must be said—as often many new readers get) displays many traits of the new conceptualisation of materialism that Žižek is propounding, and is representative of how this conceptualisation likewise recurs throughout the book as a whole. For the sake of referencing, I will here quote the first page of *Finnegans Wake* in full, on which the work’s first three paragraphs fit exactly, before offering a minute analysis of some of the tropes within it that bear direct relation to our topic:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.

Sir Tristram, violer d’amores, fr’over the short sea, had passencore rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had topsawyer’s rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe to Laurens County’s gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tauftauf thuartpeatrick; not yet, though venissoon after, had a kidscad buttended a bland old isaac: not yet, though all’s fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa’s malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.

The fall (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovvarrhounawnskawntoohohoordenenthurnuk!) of a once wallstrait oldparr is retailed early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy. The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegan, erse solid man, that the humptyhillhead of humself promptly sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes: and their upturnpikepointandplace is at the knock out in the park where oranges have been laid to rust upon the green since devlinsfirst loved livvy. (2012, p. 3.1-.24)

The toilet humour apparent throughout *Finnegans Wake* has already been hinted at in the passage from Brendan Behan above, concerning the river Liffey, which flows in and out of the pages of this work, and which is found all through it in its portmanteau words, such as in that which is used for this section's subtitle, "reality", which in its assonance connotes for us the *real*—which is the focus of the ecology and poetry here under discussion—and the river itself: the *reality* of the *Liffey*; and the Liffey itself is as much there, from the off, in the work's first word—with its non-capitalised "r"—"riverrun", as it is throughout.

Many scholars have made much of the interplay of the natural imagery of creation and disaster and upheaval, and of the human imagery of sexual and excretory functions in this opening section, and throughout the *Wake* as a whole; indeed, as R. D. V. Glasgow puts it, in Joyce's book "reproduction/creation and excretion/destruction are all part of the same vicus of recirculation" (1995, p. 295).

In the headier exegetical days of the *Wake Newsletter*—which ran from the 1960s up to the early 1980s—pioneering studies into the above quoted paragraphs (as well as into all aspects of their preceding pages) were made, amongst them those of Adaline Glasheen, whose articles on "The Opening Paragraphs" spanned five issues of the series. In them, her discussion of the Liffey traces the word's derivation back to its ancient form, *Lifé* (for "life" (1965a, p. 6)), and associates it with "the theme of water-and-strong-drink" (1965b, p. 21). It is thus not a great leap to find in these associations connotations of the human genitals in both their sexual and urinary functions. "Water of life" can biologically be seen as both that which we drink and which we pass, and "strong drink" also brings us to a more colloquial meaning of the word "piss", as denoting alcohol (as used, for example, in the phrase "getting on the piss", or "getting pissed"); indeed, the Irish word for whiskey, *uisce beatha*, brings both of these meanings together, translating literally as "water of life". It is whiskey, too, which is both the bearer and destroyer of life in the ballad of "Finnegan's Wake"—on which Joyce based much of the structure of the *Wake*—in that Tim Finnegan, due to "a love of the liquor", falls off a ladder and is presumed dead, but is restored at his wake, awaking when whiskey is spilled and douses his bed.

Thus, this "water of life" both gives it and takes it away, causes falls and ruin, and resurrection and recirculation. Both of these properties of the river Liffey's water, I have previously argued, can be found again in the *Wake*'s first word, "riverrun". In my article, "Following the riverrun: *Finnegans Wake*'s First Word" (2013) I traced a possible derivation of the word to a footnote in Sigmund Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), a copy of which Joyce had in the original German, in the 1917 edition (a year which long predates Joyce's beginning work on the *Wake*). In this footnote, Freud comments on a slip of the tongue made by a female patient of his in which occurred the substitution of the word "*urinieren*" for "*ruinieren*" (the German for "urinate" and "ruin", respectively).¹⁰ Although "riverrun" is a relatively late addition to the *Wake* (unless, like its title, it was excitedly withheld by Joyce until the latter stages of the book's completion)—it is missing, for example, from the 15 November 1926 letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver which gives a gloss to the *Wake*'s first page, in draft form—the trope that this first word consists of does reoccur in the work, for example, in the conjugation "ruinating" (2012, p. 64.18), a neologism that is an anagram of "urinating".¹¹ Important work on the word can be found in Fritz Senn's "First Words and No End" in *A Wake Newsletter* (1965), which, after highlighting its link to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn"—through which "Alph, the sacred river, ran"—traces its biblical connections; Glasheen's "Riverrun" (1965c)—also in the newsletter—which connects the word with the German word for "remembrance", "*Erinnerung*" (which can also connect both to Ireland—in *Erin* in the first part of the word—and to the ladder off

of which Tim Finnegan fell—in *rung* in the second part); and Jacques Aubert’s “riverrun” (1984), in *Post-Structuralist Joyce*, which seeks to demonstrate the theoretical problems involved in reading the *Wake* right from its very first word.

Regards the above hypothesis concerning Freud’s *Psychopathology*, although it can only really remain a speculative conjecture, this derivation nonetheless evokes the “rediscovery of a poetry”, in the abstract materialist view of nature that Žižek proposes; it is, too, precisely a rediscovery, as *Finnegans Wake* always begins with returns; forwards and “backwards” (Joyce, 2012, p. 100.28): re-arrivals, recirculations and riverruns (“river” read backwards is indeed almost “reverse”, as is its plural). The connotations, too, of urine and ruin, combined inextricably in one word, are those of the human and the natural—bodily and naturally caused waste and decay, alongside bodily reproduction and natural recycling—categories so often separated into a binary which ends up privileging one over the other, rather than combining them, through realisation of their interconnection, and in order to work through their connectedness.

Further to the first word, in these opening paragraphs we find the cartography of a giant (HCE), lying asleep, or dead, in Dublin’s geological landscape: the area of Howth is his “humptyhillhead” and westward are his “tumptytumtoes”, and in between, as Glasheen enumerates, are his “passencore (Lat. heart); *Armorica*; side, isthmus (neck); *penisolate*; rocks (testicles); *Oconee* (knee, see 211.28); *bellowsed* (bellows = lungs); after (Ger. der After = anus); *buttended*; *nathandjoe*; *regginbrow*; *aquaface*” (1965a, p. 7).¹² Implied too in the description of the giant’s head, which has its geographical position on the hill of Howth, is Humpty Dumpty, who, if we are to regard egg-laying creatures as part of the natural world—as opposed to the human—also represents a mediation between these categories, in being half-egg, half-man, as does much in Lewis Carroll’s *Wonderland*, which Joyce draws on extensively.

We see also within these opening lines the twinning of Ireland’s capital, Dublin, with its namesake in Laurens County, Georgia, USA, through which the *Oconee* river runs, and into which a tributary stream flows from the Dublin sewage treatment plant, which, in recent times, has caused environmental and health concerns.¹³ The doubling of Dublin, its being twinned with the American city in this passage, brings us back to Joyce’s method of demonstrating through combination the inextricability of much that may sometimes be too hastily separated; indeed, such as the concepts of the *natural* and the *human*. His method is epitomised in the word “twone” in the second paragraph, which melds the numbers “two” and “one” through their shared letter, “o”, also representative of the zero itself, and its suturing role. Here, in the *Oconee* river, as in the river *Liffey*, we find the same allusions—even if they are arrived at through associative extensions—to life-giving and life-threatening forces, to the sexual and the excremental. All the way through the excerpted passage, too, we find slips between the two concepts Freud’s patient was wont to mix, the phenomenon of which no doubt having been sexually invested. Indeed, in an addendum to the footnote detailing the slip, contributed to *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in 1924, Freud speaks of the slip of the tongue as an “artifice [...] for enabling improper and forbidden words to be freely used” (2001, p. 82, note 5). Such associations run throughout these paragraphs, almost inexhaustibly, from the “riverrun”, which travels through a “*commodius vicus of recirculation*”, evocative of schematics of both rivers and sewers, in their connection to commodes; the “stream” of the *Oconee*; the “water-and-strong-drink” of “malt” and “*Jhem and Shen*” (*Jameson*) whiskies; to the falls, the thunderous *Fall* in *Eve* and *Adam*’s garden of *Eden*, represented by the famous (t)hundred-letter word in the third paragraph; the crash of *Wall Street* (“*wallstrait*”); the fall of *Humpty Dumpty* off his wall; of *Tim Finnegan* off his ladder; and of the male genital itself after its sexual use (“*once wallstrait*”, “*erse* [‘ere’] solid”), returning it to the former function. We can find in all these tragi-comic instances—of uncivilised natural processes and cultured toilet humour, of hubristic anthropocentrism and the contingent breaking-in of the real of “natural” chaos and disaster, enough to shake any equally hubristic naturocentrism—instances of tightly “twone” poetic combinations in the *real*, even in the real of the page, and its sigla, itself—later, Joyce goes on to equate letters with litter, and subsequently to derive the “letter from litter” (2012, p. 95.24 and 615.1)—instances, that is, that Žižek effectively calls for in his pronouncements on ecology, and its spirituality and poetry.¹⁴

3. Making a splash

In his *Three Ecologies*, Guattari states that

current ecological movements certainly have merit, but in truth I think that the overall ecosophical question is too important to be left to some of its usual archaizers and folklorists, who sometimes deliberately refuse any large-scale political involvement. Ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists. (p. 35)

Žižek would likely be supportive of this view too, as is determinable in his criticism of localism in the fields of politics and major integrated issues affecting the world, such as ecology. Of course, within the pages of *Finnegans Wake*, plenty of archaizers, folklorists, specialists and experts can be found, but nonetheless they are featured in such a way so as not to allow them to take hierarchical precedence over the form in which they are enveloped, and thus inculcated; that is, the work's language, as chaotic and unpredictable, and as malleable and amenable, as literature can be made of.

Guattari also worries that “it is not only species that are becoming extinct but also the words, phrases, and gestures of human solidarity”, and through this reflection he conceives of the *three ecologies*; not only environmental, but mental and social too, in which spheres language itself is an integral part of their structuring *real* (p. 29). Joyce's experiments with language in *Finnegans Wake* offer us not so much a new lexicon of descriptive words which we can apply to our empirical situation as and when new horizons arise, but rather a means, a methodology—indeed, a new grammar—by which we may be able to find, to fathom, or to forge, creative ways out of deadlocks that seem inescapable; inescapable, in part, due to a loss of imaginative mechanisms, coming about in the wake of the proliferation of rigidified systems and syntaxes of thought and action.¹⁵ Thus it is also that *Finnegans Wake* proves, to some extent, both through its content and its form that to get stuck in the old forms of thought, of spirituality, and of poetry would be to fall into not only the aesthetic drawbacks of kitsch, but even into its possible wider social, political and ecological dangers.

Even early on in Joyce's own “real life”, aspects of this ecological thinking that unites the natural and the human in one, that yokes cultural and waste products as elements of the same picture, can be found, such as in his notorious erotic/pornographic love letters to his wife, Nora. In these, written in Nora's absence (her side of the correspondence is lost), Joyce conceives of “glorying in the very stink and sweat” of all aspects of Nora's anatomy and bodily functioning (down to the smell of her farts), and of their sex together, and he utilises the most seamy language and penetrative anatomical imagery to bring about the letters' arousing effects, both intended for Nora's pleasure, and often resulting in his own, as he comments on in them (1975a, p. 181). He questions his addressee: “have I shocked you by the dirty things I wrote to you? You think perhaps that my love is a filthy thing”, and affirms, “it is darling, at some moments” (1975b, p. 184). This affirmation is one that doesn't shy away from any aspect of the couple's sexual, bodily relationship, in its entropic finiteness and utter nakedness, which—as Richard Ellmann puts it in his introduction to the *Selected Letters*—is “beyond love and hate, beyond vanity and remorse, beyond human possibility almost” (1975, p. xxv). Beyond, too, the conceptualisations of the body that Śāntideva used as a warning in his religious text, which is thus shown to attempt to separate off the human and the natural as much as many other ecological binaries, in its deployment.¹⁶ Thus it is that to some extent the early Joyce was already beginning to embody this “new type of humanity” that Žižek evokes.

“Shite and onions!” Joyce proclaims in his satirical broadside “Gas from a Burner” (1991, p. 104).¹⁷ Rather than being representative of a mere cloacal fascination cultivated throughout his life and works, this exclamation—that juxtaposes waste and sustenance (and makes of its referents equals also, as two instances of offensively smelly things)—should perhaps be read as suggesting how Joyce indeed provides a precursor to the demand made by Žižek for the “spiritual” and “poetical” aspects of today's ecologies, one that demonstrates their inextricability through the poetic development of the ecological tropes in Joyce's works, from the early naturalistic/amatory poetry of *Chamber Music*; through the

at-the-time controversial inclusion of some of the less savoury aspects of city life in *Dubliners*; through also Stephen Dedalus' aesthetic ruminations on the beautiful and the sublime in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and the concentration on the body—his in the Proteus episode and Leopold Bloom's in Calypso—in *Ulysses*; to the very inseparability of the natural and the human realm, of personae and environment, and of character and landscape, in the *real*-encompassing feat of literature that is *Finnegans Wake*, and even in aspects of the everyday of James Joyce's life. From the investigations into (only the beginnings of) the latter work conducted above, and through taking Žižek's guiding reflections seriously, we should at least begin to recognise that we might yet be able to achieve ecological change “beyond human possibility”, through commitment to what may come about through this envisaged new abstract materialism. Indeed, an ecology *beyond human possibility* might become achievable through such a philosophy, and its resultant praxis, as it falls precisely in the realm of the real where humanity is not simply separated off, but essentially included in, and integrated into, its picture. To put another twist on Žižek's haiku: through realisation of this, we might thus begin to face the responsibility of asking ourselves how we, in this very realm, can, and do, *make a splash ...*

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Notes

1. The essay “Lituraterre” was first published in *Litterature (Larousse)*, 3 (1971). An unofficial translation by Jack W. Stone is available, from which I am here working (translation modified). For an official translation, see Jacques Lacan, “Lituraterre.” *Hurly-Burly*, 9 (2013), 29–38 (p. 30). Translated by Beatrice Khiara-Foxton and Adrian Price.
2. We must further bear in mind that in the Lacanian sense—as Yannis Stavrakakis puts it —“if the real is beyond our symbolic means of representation then both our social behaviour and our analysis cannot be based on positive symbolisation of this real. What we argue here is that we can experience, however, the causality of this real through the dislocation of our social constructions. Although the real is not graspable per se, the failure to grasp it (which is revealed in the moment of dislocation) can become the focus of our analysis. This failure is a productive failure; its administration leads to the construction of new symbolisations. This is not applicable only to the real of nature but to all modalities of our encounters with the real” (2014, p. 36, note 4). For a similar methodological means of heuristic approach, in relation to *Finnegans Wake*, see Philip McShane (1971).
3. For more on Joyce's relation to ecology and ecocriticism specifically, see Fiona Becket and others (2014).
4. Until the publication of the abovementioned *Eco-Joyce*, Beckett seemed to have had more of a standing in terms of ecocriticism than Joyce. See, for example, Greg Garrard (2012).
5. For the description of the city as “dear dirty Dublin”, see James Joyce, “A Little Cloud” (1967, p. 75). In the *Wake*, the river is the female correspondence, ALP, or “the queer old skeowsha anyhow, Anna Livia”, and flows through the male, HCE, or—when in the form of the city—“the quare old buntz too, Dear Dirty Dumpling”. See James Joyce (2012, pp. 215.12–14). As is customary, as well as page reference, I will also give the line numbers in the standard edition of *Finnegans Wake*.
6. The artist at the helm of the “Word River” project, Fergal McCarthy, has previously made art installations on the Liffey.
7. Joyce is perhaps alluding to this Shakespearean wording in the *Wake* itself, in relation to dear dirty Dublin: “Dear. And we go on to dirt-dump [...] we have frankly enjoyed more than anything these secret workings of natures”. See Joyce (2012, pp. 615.12–14).
8. Evidence pointing to Teilhard de Chardin is found in Seminar XXIV, in which Lacan states: “paradoxically Reverend Father Teilhard de Chardin did not believe in [angels], he believed in man, hence his business about the hominisation of the planet.” See Jacques Lacan (n.d., p. 105). Although this is a much later Seminar than his seventh, Lacan makes reference to Teilhard de Chardin, whom he knew, at several points throughout his career.
9. However, as the page is an instance of *writing*, we should first address a charge that this “poetry” may therefore be open to, which resides in the simple fact that words are not that real to which they (try to) allude. Indeed, whilst—as Dominique Laporte puts it in his *History of Shit* (1978)—“the sign, as such, exercises a function of negation in relation to the real it designates” (2000, p. 10), Joyce's signs make the attempt nonetheless to go somewhere further: they attempt to bring literature (however incrementally) into the realm of the real, or rather to discover bits of real in it; they attempt to become instances of what Lacan always held out for, and got closer to through his interaction with Joyce; that is, “a new signifier[,] that would perhaps be what would open us up to what [...] I call the Real” (n.d., p. 127).
10. As mentioned in my article, Joyce's purchase of this work is detailed in Richard Ellmann (1977, p. 54), and then further located in his listing of the 1920 library (p. 97, ff.).
11. Whilst the word “riverrun” is missing from the 15 November letter, it is present in a typescript of 16 December 1926, which was sent to Weaver. See James Joyce (1926).
12. My italics added to “bellowsed” and “buttended”. This excavation of the giant's features is based on the suggestion made by Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson that Howth is popularly regarded by Dublin inhabitants to have been the head of a sleeping giant. See Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, (1947, p. 26).
13. See the information under the heading “River pollution” on the Ocone's Wikipedia page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocone#cite_note-2 [Accessed: 24.08.2013]; the connection to the sewage plant in relation to the mention of “Ocone” in *Finnegans Wake* is also made in the river's reference here: <https://www.finnegansweb.com/wiki/index.php/Ocone> [Accessed: 24.08.2013].

14. For a wonderful essay that charts these associations concerning the letter, see Jeremy Tambling (2008).
 15. One such process of rigidification, and a means by which to challenge it, is suggested by Edward de Bono in *Lateral Thinking*: “[the] tendency of patterns to grow larger is seen clearly with language. Words describing individual features are put together to describe a new situation which soon acquires its own language label. Once this has happened a new standard pattern has been formed. This new pattern is used in its own right without constant reference to the original features which made up the pattern.
- The more unified a pattern the more difficult it is to re-structure it. Thus when a single standard pattern takes from a collection of smaller patterns the situation becomes much more difficult to look at in a new way. In order to make such restructuring easier one tries to return to the collection of smaller patterns” (1977, p. 116). Thus—whilst we of course must maintain that, like the unconscious for Lacan, the imagination is structured like a language—Joyce’s mode of decomposing and returning to the elements of words to rebuild from them in *Finnegans Wake* allows for such imaginative restructuring.
16. Joyce, however, did take an interest in Buddhism in his early career. See, for example, James Joyce (2000).
 17. Joyce also here “writ[es] of Dublin, dirty and dear” as the poem is a response to the troubles involved with the publication of *Dubliners*. He uses the phrase “shite and onions!” again in *Ulysses* (1986, p. 104).

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