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Supply Chains: Labour, Poverty, and the Nonhuman Animal of Joyce's *Ulysses*

—Mkgnao!

—O, there you are, Mr Bloom said, turning from the fire.

—Milk for the pussens, he said.

—Mrkgnao! the cat cried.

—Afraid of the chickens she is, he said mockingly. Afraid of the chookchooks. I never saw such a stupid pussens as the pussens.

—Mrkrngnao! the cat said loudly.

This is the first of Leopold Bloom's many conversations in *Ulysses* (1922), a novel that ends with an emphatic, affirmative recollection of a conversation—his wife Molly's 'yes I said yes I will Yes' (U 1608-9). But Joyce relies in this chat between Bloom and his cat on a far humbler literary device than epiphora: onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeic words imitate or resemble the source of the sound that they describe. The word 'splash' makes a splash. And Bloom's 'chookchooks' answer the cat's variations on the rudiments of the phrase 'milk now': 'Mkgnao!', 'Mrkgnao!', and 'Mrkrngnao!'. With each addition of an 'r' to the original phrase, the cat's demand becomes more guttural, registering a qualitative uptick in urgency in response to Bloom's babytalk about chickens. Thus, the two begin by exchanging simple phonemes, the smallest units of sound in a language and the basic unit of linguistic difference within a language, and thus Bloom and the cat communicate without language proper—whatever that might be—or, rather, the two make do at the material level of language: sound, not word:

She blinked up out of her avid shameclosing eyes, mewing plaintively and long, showing him her milkwhite teeth. He watched the dark eyeslits narrowing with greed till her eyes

were green stones. Then he went to the dresser, took the jug Hanlon's milkman had just filled for him, poured warmbubbled milk on a saucer and set it slowly on the floor.

—Gurrhr! she cried, running to lap. (4.16-38)

Joyce was under little illusion about the material constraints upon language or its materiality as such. Indeed, it's the 'carrying capacity' of language, the ability to create and sustain meaning, which is the most astonishing aspect of a novel like *Ulysses*. And it emerges from the confluence of 'social justice' and 'environmental concern' that characterises Joyce's own ecological thinking.

Nevertheless, ecocriticism initially dismissed Joyce and other Modernists. For example, there's just a passing reference to Joyce in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, which was first published in 1996, and it communicates a very American sentiment as much as anything else: 'The state of America is the state of being able to change our myths. We can forge in the smithies of our souls the conscience of our race, a project James Joyce gave up as impossible for Ireland'.¹ It's not entirely clear, and I'm hardly convinced, that Joyce did indeed abandon this project, but that's another matter. I am entirely convinced that early ecocritics wrote Joyce off as, if nothing else, then at least too urban to merit the sustained attention that, say, Lawrence Buell gives Henry David Thoreau in his own seminal work. Likewise, Robert Pogue Harrison (1993) asserts in perhaps the earliest remark on Joyce within an ecocritical framework that:

In retrospect it seems clear that a modernist writer like James Joyce, whose literature exploited the almost limitless resources of the sayable, never really heeded the "nature" of the times. His luxuriant forest of prose does not grow in the desiccated ground of the modern habitat but rather in some garden of nostalgia. His

¹ Frederick Turner, 'Cultivating the American Garden' in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. 49.

work thrives on the illusion of plenitude—the plenitude of nature, of vigorous body, of meaningfulness.

Harrison contrasts—I'm reluctant to say naturally in this context—illusion with reality and, by extension a bit further along in the passage, Joyce with Beckett, in whom 'the ecology of the sayable is reduced to an authentic poverty'.² These are really wonderful and, dare I say, meaningful metaphors, so I shouldn't hesitate to mention with them in mind that they're also ironic. Joyce did indeed heed 'the "nature" of the times'. And ecocriticism has evolved since these early assessments. The work of Katherine O'Callaghan and others has shown that an ecocritical approach to Joyce is not only possible, but also immensely beneficial to our understanding of his works. Likewise, the essays in Robert Brazeau's and Derek Gladwin's forthcoming collection *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce* (2014) promise to 'suggest ways in which Irish studies and modernist studies could gain energy from this relatively new and vital approach'.

Moreover, new modes of inquiry have emerged over the last decade as the postcolonial paradigm, which largely defined Irish studies in the 1990s, came under scrutiny. As Jim Fairhall has recently observed, 'Joyce's concerns about culture and his methods of interrogating it overlap, at heart, with those of feminism, Marxism, and ecocriticism. He addresses and exposes institutional structures of oppression and their modes of ideological mystification – in particular, the neo-Cartesian dualisms that spring from the masculine fantasy of the autonomous subject for which reality is split into subject/object, mind/body, and attendant sets of binaries'.³ Ecocriticism, women's studies, and queer theory provide complementary ways to reconsider the supply chains that bind literary representations of Ireland and Irishness in the canonical texts of 'revivalist modernism'. Joyce's works are filled with reflections upon the built environments of Dublin. These spaces of both labour and poverty—Mina Purefoy in the National Maternity Hospital in Holles Street, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom in the cabman's shelter under the Loop Line Bridge, just west of the Custom House, near Butt Bridge—contrast with Revivalist conceptions of Ireland's

² Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 149-50.

³ James Fairhall, 'Ecocriticism, Joyce, and the politics of trees in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses*', *Irish Studies Review* 20.4 (2012), 367-387 (p. 380).

pastoral identity, turning an interrogation of British imperialism into a reconsideration of the political read over and against the natural. As a result, a more significant role should be given to the nonhuman environment in how we read Modernism generally and Joyce's works in particular, as these disintegrate category distinctions like human and nonhuman. If viewed in this light, the organs of the Gilbert schema—part of a coda for *Ulysses* that Joyce created—represent the union of human with nonhuman. Indeed, it should no longer be taken as given that the organs of the schema represent, as they've traditionally been understood, the organs of a human body, the kidney, say, or liver of man writ large.

An early source often turned to for Joyce's ecological thinking is his essay 'Home Rule Comes of Age' from 1907. Here, Joyce pushes his criticism of imperial economics beyond a tallying up of England's debts to Ireland for overtaxation as he touches on the negative effects of deforestation on Irish men and women by remarking that:

neither the Liberal ministers nor the opposition newspapers will explain to the English that this expense is not an outlay of English money, but rather a partial repayment of England's debt to Ireland. Neither of them will cite the findings of the English Royal Commission that, compared to its dominant partner, Ireland is overtaxed by 88 million francs. Nor will they recall the fact that the politicians and scientists who investigated the vast central bog of Ireland concluded that the two spectres that sit beside every Irish fireplace, consumption and insanity, are a refutation of all English claims, and that the moral debt of the English government for not having seen to the reforestation of this disease-ridden swamp for over an entire century amounts to over 500 million francs.⁴

Joyce clearly took a keen interest in the ecological impact of imperial economic structures. However, as Fairhall has pointed out, 'Large-scale clear-felling by English and Anglo-Irish

⁴ James Joyce, 'Home Rule Comes of Age', in *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. by Kevin Barry (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 142-44 (p. 144).

landowners made only a late contribution to the ongoing development of blanket bogs'. Although their formation was well known to biologists of the day, Joyce 'was drawing not on science but on the narrative of felt nationalist history'.⁵ Nevertheless, Fairhall concludes of Joyce that 'Irish deforestation was not for him a felt issue'.⁶ But there's more at stake in this, Joyce's only remark on deforestation in Ireland, than even Fairhall has suggested.

Joyce communicates a deep ecological thought here. As Timothy Morton has argued, 'everything is interconnected. This is the ecological thought [...] ecology isn't just about global warming, recycling, and solar power—and also not just to do with everyday relationships between humans and nonhumans. It has to do with love, loss, despair, and compassion'.⁷ And indeed Joyce joins 'the politicians and the scientists' in lamenting not only the presence of the 'two spectres that sit beside every Irish fireplace', but also in decrying the deforestation that helped to create a 'disease-ridden swamp' that made consumption and insanity commonplace. Therefore, as Joyce posits a correlation between disease and deforestation, he asserts that imperial economic structures have left Irish men and women ill and impoverished.

This is slow violence and Joyce's environmentalism is the environmentalism of the poor. Rob Nixon has argued that slow violence is 'a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all'.⁸ And indeed Joyce joins his observation that deforestation is an act of slow violence—that the 'two spectres [...] beside every Irish fireplace' entered these homes from a devastated landscape—to another of Nixon's concepts: the environmentalism of the poor. As Nixon points out, 'the environmentalism of the poor is frequently triggered when an official landscape is forcibly imposed on a vernacular one'.⁹ It's telling with this in mind that Joyce stumps for reparations. A figure just north of '500 million francs' should, in his estimation, do it. But

⁵ Fairhall, p. 381, n. 8.

⁶ Ibid., n. 9.

⁷ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 1-2.

⁸ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 2.

⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

seeing his concern limited to material deprivation alone overlooks his larger engagement with a conception of poverty as deprivation of transformational experience, which breeds the insanity that keeps consumption company ‘beside every Irish fireplace’. Poverty of this sort, considered alongside the technologies enlisted for its management, open up the configurations of human subjectivity—colonial, economic, sexual—in Ulysses to scrutiny in terms of nonhuman animality and, consequently, the materiality of language.

For Heidegger, encountering a nonhuman animal provides an experience of poverty. Of the criticism levelled at Heidegger, and there’s been a good bit of it, perhaps the most forceful concerns his assertion that the nonhuman animal is poor in world, that its poverty is total, that it does ‘without language, without history, without hands, without dwelling, without space’. However, Stuart Elden has recently pointed out that Heidegger’s animals also do without calculation. ‘This is the sole positive accreditation of animals’ for Heidegger and, although ‘It is therefore clear that Heidegger takes a number of examples to make what appears to be a series of rigid distinctions’, the lack of calculation becomes important given the critique of technology inflecting it. For Heidegger, the human animal, understood traditionally as the rational animal, ‘is the “animal” that calculates, plans, turns to beings as objects, represents what is objective and orders it’ (GA54, 232; see GA7, 52). ‘In other words’, Elden concludes, ‘a distinction from animals becomes a way of ordering, regulating, controlling and exploiting them’.¹⁰ None of this amounts to a good thing—not for us, and certainly not for our nonhuman others. But with ‘Language in the Poem’, a text virtually absent from the vast literature on Heidegger’s remarks, he considers nonhuman animality no longer in terms of containment, and instead in terms of transformation in and through language. The same can be said of Bloom’s cat.

For Bloom, the cat does not appear as utterly foreign and transcendent of all ‘worldly’ experience, including experience that can be voiced. And indeed Joyce has it that Bloom contemplates his cat in these terms:

¹⁰ Stuart Elden, ‘Heidegger’s animals’, *Continental Philosophy Review* 39 (2006), 273-91 (p. 284).

They call them stupid. They understand what we say better than we understand them. She understands all she wants to. Vindictive too. Cruel. Her nature. Curious mice never squeal. Seem to like it. Wonder what I look like to her. Height of a tower? No, she can jump me. (4.26-9)

As Heidegger observed in one of his last lecture courses, ‘We are always the ones who first take up into the unconcealed such “looking” and who, on our own, interpret the way animals “watch” us as a looking. On the other hand, where man only experiences being and the unconcealed sketchily, the animal’s “look” can concentrate in itself a special power of encounter’.¹¹ This tension resolves itself into the circularity in which every attempt to open up to the alterity of the nonhuman animal, to encounter it on its own terms, turns into a moment of self-recognition over the impoverished position we occupy when we try to speak with nonhuman animals. It is neither a sheer resistance nor an open invitation that confronts us. Bloom’s pronounced inability to position his cat within a technoscientific discourse are obvious and, more importantly, not simply a matter of ignorance on his behalf:

He watched the bristles shining wirily in the weak light as she tipped three times and licked lightly. Wonder is it true if you clip them they can’t mouse after. Why? They shine in the dark, perhaps, the tips. Or kind of feelers in the dark, perhaps. (4.39-42)

Now I could say at this point that it’s just because Joyce keeps Bloom’s clothes on that this mundane encounter with his cat in the kitchen outstrips Jacques Derrida’s own, but that would be too easy and, besides, the singularity of the encounter would be obscured entirely. In *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (1997), Derrida relates a routine rendezvous with his cat in which he feels looked at and even appealed to as they stand face-to-face—both, it is important for Derrida to point out, naked as the day they were born—but in this moment only Derrida speaks or experiences shame:

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. by Andre Schulwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 107/159.

If I say “it is a real cat” that sees me naked, it is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. When it responds in its name (whatever respond means, and that will be our question), it doesn’t do so as an exemplar of a species called cat, even less so of an animal genus or realm. It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before this identification, I see it as this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualised.¹²

Even in his nakedness, Derrida articulates his reaction as an experience of shame in response to the cat’s gaze. But ‘nakedness and exposure to the Other is felt as the unveiling of the self which would usually be clothed by all manner of techniques, not least by the conceptual apparatus of identification and recognition when faced with an animal’.¹³ But where does this priority come from for the naked encounter, the bare face-to-face? It appears denied in its purity as soon as we recognise it as such.¹⁴ The questions raised by an encounter with his cat become, for Derrida, bound up principally with their resistance to articulation in a technoscientific discourse. Moreover, he holds this encounter in a tension between the ethical and the political. But this distinction has nothing to do with a division between private and public spheres and nothing to do with the cat as intruder. Rather, Derrida distinguishes between that part of the encounter with nonhuman animality, with poverty in world, poverty of transformational experience, which does justice to the alterity of the nonhuman animal—the ‘existence that refuses to be conceptualised’—and that part of the encounter which underscores the necessity of articulating that alterity—his representation of it as an event in language.

¹² Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louis Mallet and trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 9.

¹³ Greaves, p. 57

¹⁴ Ibid.

Some have objected to Heidegger's conception of the nonhuman animal's 'world-poverty' by observing that:

The absence of speech in animals is more radical than the absence of the world. It is not a question of an impoverished but an absolute privation of speech. On this point the break between human beings and animals becomes the most unbridgeable. "The leap from living animals to humans that speak is as large if not larger than that from the lifeless stone to living being".¹⁵

For Heidegger's nonhuman animals, however, poverty does not denote utter lack in the same way that, say, the stone lacks a world, but the way in which something becomes lacking and yet does without. It makes do. The nonhuman animal's 'doing without' is a response to this very peculiar kind of want, and yet every animal appears complete unto itself, as Derrida points out. The nonhuman animal does not appear as utterly foreign and transcendent of all 'worldly' experience, including experience that can be voiced. More importantly, a world that's just 'words, words, words', as Hamlet might have put it, is a poor one. I take this insight to be Joyce's conception of poverty. In this way, Joyce develops a clear agenda in *Ulysses*, one better served by Bloom's chat with his cat, his feeding of some seagulls, or his wilting at the sight of Garryowen than, say, by taking a trip to Dublin Zoo, where the Royal Zoological Society staged the encounter with nonhuman animality as a spectacle of man's mastery, much as most zoos did a century ago.

Impoverished is not exactly what you'd call the Royal Zoological Society in the early twentieth century. It could count on regular support as a registered charity, and the press was regularly thanked in the minutes for plugging the 'attractions of the gardens'. In 1901, the Society retained a working budget around 275 pounds from a government grant of 500 annually. On 11 June 1904, they were working with 303:7:11 and, by the end of Bloomsday, they'd earned another twenty. The Society would eventually negotiate a deal

¹⁵ Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, trans. By Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 29.

with the Bank of Ireland for some members to write cheques against its budget 'not to be overdrawn beyond 50 pounds'.

To support their principal attraction, in the summer of 1901, a new lion house was under construction and repairs to old one were underway. The plan reflected the results reported earlier that year on 'the feeding of the Lions in order that this may be compared with the feeding described by Dr Ball in his memoir on the Dublin Lions' (29.12.1900). Its author, a Mr Hunt, found 'that one goat per week be added to the diet. This [was] to be allotted to the lions as the Superintendent & Keeper see fit' (5.1.1901). The Society's minutes record that 'The principle food of the Lions is horse flesh, in addition to this they get sheep heads, plucks, and paunches [other parts of sheep], and if sick or out of condition they get goats and rabbits'. Now, I guess it hardly sounds like the right sort of thing to feed the kings and queens of the jungle and, indeed, that January 'the [Society's] secretary announced the death of the Lioness Germania. She had died unexpectedly during the night of Wednesday. He also informed the council that a careful P. M. examination which he had made revealed the fact that death was due to peritonitis [an inflammation of the peritoneum, the thin tissue that lines the inner wall of the abdomen and covers most of the abdominal organs] following upon a rupture of the stomach. [The postmortem also revealed that she was carrying] four fertilized ova' (19.1.1901). Her death came at a great cost to the Society, as lion sales were a good bet, not least for Germania. Far cheaper to breed stock than import from Africa:

only one estimate (Sutton & Co) respecting the carriage of the Lions from Rhodesia, the cost of the voyage from Cape Town alone to be 52. [their budget that day was 251:10:0] As this was considered beyond the Society's means, the Secretary was instructed to inform the Colonial Under Secretary of the fact and thank Mr Secretary Lyttelton for his kind consideration.

The secretary then referred to the difficulty Dr Cunningham found in getting the Superintendent to supply the Lions with food necessary to keep them in good condition.

That Dr C had finally brought the matter before the Council on the 5 Jan 1901, who had ordered the superintendent to add one goat to the weekly diet. To judge from the report received from Mr Hunt on the 23rd Feb 1904, this order of the Council had not been carried out. At the suggestion of the Honourary Officers Mr Hunt was summoned before the Council, and was reprimanded by the Chairman for disobeying the Council's order. Mr Hunt was informed that if he found it impossible to carry out the Council's instructions he was to report the matter at once to the Secretary. But word on acquisitions was often logged in the Society's minutes next to notes like:

letter of thanks sent to Mr Charles Allen (who was veterinary surgeon solicited for advice on the gardens and the treatment of sick animals, specifically the Giraffe (26.12.1903)).

In the three years since upping the lions' diet by a goat, nothing had happened, prompting the defensive Mr Hunt to declare that 'I am of opinion that the carnivora [sic] are always in fair good health and condition. I have no doubt that a few goats now and again, when they can be had, would be good for them'. But the lions were getting sick. Germania was dead. And yet, it's rather clear why. Despite Hunt's report and unjustified reprimand, the Society never met the increased quota. Quite simply, 52 goats a year were difficult to come by in Dublin and, that's a lot of goats to bring into town, meaning that more often than not, the lions ate meat donated by Dubliners with no use for, say, an ailing dray horse, the 'donation' of which earned John Parker and Sons, to take just one example, honorary membership in the Society. But this membership did not come with the same rights or privileges that others in the Society enjoyed.

As the minutes record, 'Read letter from Lord Plunkett informing the secretary that His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant [of Ireland] was looking forward to meeting the members of the Council at Breakfast after the Castle Season'. With the construction of Houghton House, the Society entertained society. 'Once a year the Members of Council have the privilege of inviting their lady friends to breakfast in the Gardens; and on Saturday morning last a most inviting repast was prepared in the Haughton House, which was partaken of by a

large number of guests, who afterwards strolled round the Gardens, and amused themselves watching the animals and enjoying the sunlight and fresh morning air. Some even ventured on the elephant, who is kept in admirable control by her keeper, and seems rather to enjoy carrying a load of passengers on her broad back. The monkeys on these occasions have a specially good time; indeed, they get almost a surfeit of good things—it is to be hoped without bad effects to their digestive organs'. But these events put the ladies on the Refreshment Committee in contact with the help. 'Read letter from the manageress of the Society's Refreshment committee complaining of incivility and unseemly behaviour on the part of the Gate-Keeper towards one of her assistants. The matter was referred to a committee for investigation consisting of the Chairman, Judge Boyd and the Honorary Officers'. In a week's time, they'd reached their verdict: 'the Report from the investigative committee [was read] and mentioned that the Committee had suspended the Gate-Keeper for a week pending the action of the Council in the matter. The Council concurred in the action of the Committee. The Secretary was instructed to reprimand the Gate-Keeper and to caution him with regard to his future behaviour'. At this point, the gatekeeper, like the Porter in Macbeth, leaves the stage for good, never appearing in the minutes again.

Joyce's friend, Padraic Colum gives voice to lines that Bloom never does because, of the many places Bloom goes, he never visits the zoo:

I enter through a lodge that is thatched, weather-beaten and old-fashioned, and I immediately find myself beside creatures who look as if they had been expecting me—a look quite different from that of the animals and birds who have to stare at millions of miscellaneous people, whose visitors are "the public" and not "the neighbors." The peacocks and peahens and the silvery peacocks which display themselves on the lawn as I enter come straight to me with an obvious anxiety that I should not overlook them.

Colum, like Joyce, does not displace the anthropocentric circularity of an encounter with the nonhuman animal in and through language. Of course, the peacocks flock to him. What

else do birds do? However, Colum does not himself transform here. He remains separated from rather than dwelling with these nonhuman animals. He enters the zoo, a domesticated space with a thatched roof no less, to find ‘a place for rational and quiet-minded recreation’, a dwelling with the self, a residence, an enclosure.

But Joyce offers with Bloom an image of the human animal as a dweller with his nonhuman counterparts. He stages Bloom’s encounter with nonhuman animality as enriching, as transforming, as exposing the self in and through language. In this way, he offers with Bloom an image of the human animal as a dweller with his nonhuman counterparts rather than a lord over them because Bloom’s encounters with nonhuman animality are enriching only in those moments that are a bit short on world but rich in the quotidian.

It’s often said of folks who work on a canonical author that they work in an industry: the Shakespeare industry, the Joyce industry, etc. The metaphor at play here is situated in opposition to others associated with academic labour: a field of research, say, or a discourse community—something, at any rate, a bit more pastoral or just a bit more social in connotation, whatever these metaphors might mean—nicer, maybe? I mean, working in a discourse community sounds lovely, collaborative—a factory, not so much. Teasing out further commonplaces and their connotations along these lines is not the point of my final remarks, but I hope that I might be permitted just one more metaphor associated with academic labour: taking root. This one begs an important question. If ecocriticism really is taking root in the Joyce industry, as recent volumes of *James Joyce Quarterly* and *Joyce Studies Annual* suggest, does this mean the Joyce industry is becoming a green industry? In short, I don’t know. But the possibility does suggest that ecocriticism has become much more dynamic in recent years and no more industrial for it.