In Praise of the Garrison Mentality: Why Fear and Retreat May be Useful Responses in an Era of Climate Change

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Northrop Frye, Canada's premier literary critic, famously postulated in his 1965 "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada* that the beginning of Canadian national culture could be traced to a string of garrisons and forts, "[s]mall and isolated communities" that represented a tenuous bulwark against an unfathomably vast swath of nature (225). In such a setting, inhabitants were "compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together," and, thus, a didactic streak, hostile to the imaginative impulse, defined the initial conditions of Canadian literature and arts (225). For Frye, accordingly, the blossoming of Canadian culture has hinged on its progress out of the psychologically blinkered space of the garrison and toward something like rapprochement with nature through the process of indigenization ("Haunted" 487). However, such progress has depended on a creative and psychic evolution, not on urbanization itself, since Canadian life has been equally apt to spawn the "revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society" ("Conclusion" 231). Alternately, it has yielded what Frye viewed as the garrison mentality of the twentieth century: "condominium mentality, which is neither social nor creative, and forces the cultural energies of the country into forming a kind of counter-environment" ("Speech at the New Canadian Embassy" 647).

This essay does not attempt to retrace debates over whether Frye's readings of his sources were impermissibly partial (e.g., Buss 123-27; Grady xviii; Relke 135). Nor does it treat the erasure of Native presence that some have viewed as central to the garrison mentality and its exposition (e.g., Wang 22-23) or question whether a cohesive Canadian literature as such may be said to exist in the first instance (e.g., Hammill 65). Instead, this essay treats the garrison mentality thesis as a foundational *ecological myth*, one whose constitutive logic concerning the

relationships among humans, culture, and nature holds sway even in works that seek to rebut or modify Frye's specific historical arguments.

Nearly half a century since the original publication of the "Conclusion," in which Frye first presented the garrison mentality thesis, two facts stand out concerning the response. First, no matter how many times the idea of the garrison mentality has been critiqued or debunked, it continues to haunt the Canadian psyche. Second, despite all the attention paid to the garrison mentality idea, almost no attempt has been made to pry apart the major ecological assumption at its core: that fear and retreat from nature are maladaptive — maladaptive for literature, for humans, and for the "rest" of the natural world.[1]

In this essay I risk yet another venture into garrisonology in order to suggest, decidedly against the grain, that, as literary scholars and ecocritics, we should challenge the broadly accepted premise that any such garrison mentality, insofar as it exists, is maladaptive. Instead, in an era of climate destabilization, we might do well to open ourselves more fully to the beauty and utility of fear, retreat, limitation, and collectivity, both as literary themes and as real-world practices. In doing so, I build on recent work that argues that ecophilia has no more served the cause of sustainability than ecophobia has (Taylor). I further propose that, while ecocritics have begun to embrace the romantically appealing molecular science of scholars such as Richard Lewontin and Lynn Margulis (as in Westling 36-38), ecocriticism likewise has a duty to listen to the more plodding "beaver" science of climate mitigation and adaptation (see "Conclusion" 222). This beaver science tells us concretely that dense spaces of human habitation (including the high-rise condominium) are key to reducing carbon emissions. It suggests, moreover, that retreat from certain wild landscapes — for instance, scenic coasts — represents an appropriate way of limiting human exposure to increasingly destructive natural disasters, as well as limiting the stresses that humans place on wild areas as climate change unfolds.

There has been little enough attempt to grapple with how culture might contribute to the urgent tasks of climate mitigation and adaptation. However, the findings of climate science do hint at the necessity of submitting, collectively, to harsh limits on the scope of our creative ambitions and desires — if, that is, we hope to avert the worst of climate change and survive those changes already under way. In a new environ-

mental era, one that Frye hardly could have foreseen, it turns out the garrison may be a symbolic and material space worth (re)occupying.

The Garrison Mentality as Ecological Myth: An "autonomous structure of the imagination"

Following its first full exposition in 1965, reprinted in Frye's 1971 *The Bush Garden*, the garrison mentality thesis quickly became "the chief 'theme' of a Canadian 'thematic' movement" (Brown 287) — with works by D.G. Jones, Margaret Atwood, John Moss, and Gaile McGregor figuring prominently — as well as the best *bête noire* of criticism's next generation. The thesis has migrated into critical discourses of the visual arts (MacDonald; McGregor), architecture (Andrighetti 15), and film (Beard 124; Gravestock 20-21) and has evolved into a linchpin for political discussion of Canadian national identity (e.g., Blattberg 44 ff.). As a shorthand for deficiencies in the Canadian national spirit, the term *garrison mentality* appears in everything from a political rant against "Laurentian elites" (Bricker) to an institutional critique of the CBC (Miljan and Cooper). In the words of David Staines, the garrison mentality has, for Canadians, become "part of our critical vocabulary, indeed of our very language" (qtd. in Gorjup 23).

How exactly does a concept like the garrison mentality accede to such a privileged existence? Early on, George Woodcock addressed this question, remarking on Frye's ability to produce "autonomous structure[s] of the imagination" (188). Woodcock employs the term *autonomous* approvingly, of course, envisioning the critic as a key figure in the process of artistic creation, capable of liberating material from literary works and infusing it with new meanings, thereby transforming it into "the content of art" (188). For Woodcock, the independent life of the garrison mentality concept is the by-product of an optimal creative cycle as romantically conceived.

Where Woodcock waxes ecstatic about the creative impulse within literary criticism, Robert David Stacey offers a politically charged explanation for the resilience of the garrison mentality, by way of Frederic Jameson's concept of the ideologeme (88). For Jameson, the ideologeme is an appealing "germ of ideology which both makes a claim and tells a story" ("Jameson, Criticism, and Social Form"). The appeal of the ideologeme cuts across classes: it is a "minimal unit," compact enough in its claims to elide critical points of class difference, while

offering a story of national ontology or other narrative or moral code that encourages political complacency (Jameson 87). From this perspective, the garrison mentality thesis is an ideologically charged nugget of sense-making that directs audiences away from political action by pulling them into a vague but unifying sense of how the world operates.

Somewhere in the middle ground between Woodcock and Stacey is a third way of understanding the power of Frye's garrison thesis: as myth. The category of myth allows us to acknowledge how the garrison mentality "both makes a claim and tells a story" without committing to Jameson's full political programme ("Jameson, Criticism, and Social Form"). Meanwhile, the perspective from myth allows us to recognize the garrison concept's symbolic fecundity and generative capacity, without adopting Woodcock's romantic thoughts on the role of the literary critic. Others have noted the mythic qualities of the garrison mentality thesis (e.g., Hartmann 90), though there has been little attempt to delineate what the approach through myth entails, or what it might buy us in terms of analytic purchase. In treating the garrison mentality here as an ecological myth, I propose that we can capture its importance in a new way and subject it to new scrutiny.

The Meaning of Myth

Ecological myth can be considered as a category modelled on Christopher Flood's conceptualization of "political myth" (see also Tudor). For Flood, the political myth is a narrative or other discursive product that explains events and describes relationships among various entities central to the political and social order (33). In sacred myth, such relationships may be between "god and gods, gods and man, god and nature"; in political myth, they may be among classes, between citizen and nation, and so on (35). Although political myths are not as totalizing as sacred myths, they have the same ability to permeate various sectors of social life, acting as tools for decoding the meaning of interactions, practices, and events. As such, there is a normative, or at least paradigmatic, content to myth. As Flood puts it, the political myth offers both "a model *of* and a model *for* reality," describing how the world does operate and how it should (37, emphasis in original); in this sense, implicitly, the political myth contains an ideological component.

I would add a quintessentially Frygian element and suggest that political myths, like sacred ones, enfold copious symbolic material. Such

material can be marshalled in the interpretation of experience and/or as the basis for artistic creation (see Russell 24-27 on Frye's conception of sacred myth). This is, after all, a key to their ability to endure. In treating the garrison mentality thesis as a specifically ecological myth rather than a political one, my intent is by no means to discount the political content of ecological discourses or the suitability of ecological messages for reinforcing political ones. The connection between political and ecological discourse becomes particularly clear whenever the idea of the nation is involved — and, to be sure, the garrison mentality is read frequently as a myth of national origin (Blattberg 44). This makes good sense, given the mutual imbrication of nation and nature, as evidenced, for example, by the European Right's ability to leverage visions of nature to construct a racist and xenophobic sense of national belonging (Olsen). For that matter, one need go no further than Heidegger to understand the political nexus of nation and nature (Ward 205-29).[2]

By reading the garrison mentality as a specifically ecological myth rather than a political one, however, the goal is to shift focus. The central task is no longer to consider its claims concerning Canadian literature or mentality, as in Robert Lecker's reading of Frye's conclusion as mythopoeic text, but to elucidate its more universal assertions concerning the human/nature interface. By focusing on the myth's constitutive ecological logic, we can better access its normative and paradigmatic content — the "model *of* and a model *for*" ecological relationships it offers (Flood 35). Ultimately, the goal is to open that content to critique, reconsideration, and possibly even fruitful reconstruction — not through confrontation with the politics of nationhood but through confrontation with the exigencies of climate crisis.

Accordingly, I explore terrain that has become exceedingly familiar: Frye's journey through Canada and the origins of Canadian culture in his "Conclusion" to a *Literary History of Canada*. My goal is twofold. First, I want to explore the discursive mechanisms by which Frye insinuates his beliefs on culture as natural facts, as phenomena he observes rather than ones he generates. Second, I seek to identify the "model *of* and a model *for*" interrelationships among humans, nature, and culture that lie at the heart of Frye's thesis (Flood 35).

Entering the Territory of Myth

Like any good myth — sacred, political, or ecological — the story of the garrison mentality has been retold so frequently and fluently that it feels like second nature. The first movement seen as essential to the garrison mentality is an instinctive recoil from the ominous and amoral expanse of the Canadian wilderness. According to multiple accounts, "the Canadian imagination developed as a fear-response to nature" (Grady xvi), with nature figuring as a "huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable physical setting" (Litvack 121); a "vast, unknowable, threatening [presence] empty of human life and human values" (Beard 124); or a space of "primeval lawlessness and moral nihilism" (Mann 252). The second movement understood as central to the garrison mentality is the settlers' construction of, and fearful retreat to, small, protected spaces — and their willing submission to the types of routines and prejudices used to maintain the social viability of such spaces. The "fear-response" (Grady xvi) drove early European Canadians to establish "a series of human garrisons" (Mann 252) that cultivated "shared human values and a great respect for law and order," as well as a "[refusal] to engage with concepts of cultural difference" (Litvack 121). The garrison, by all accounts, is a mental as well as an architectural construct, one that erects what Maracle calls "protective ideological walls" (qtd. in Willinsky 224). Finally, this dual movement is locked into place via contrast and tension with the American settlers' relationship to their "own" wilderness. The American encounter with nature is permeated by romance and heroics — a confident pushing back of the frontier by "settlers with their wagon trains, the cowboys with their lariats, and the cavalry with their Winchester rifles" (Mann 252). Canada's own national emergence is, by contrast, permeated by the "conservative, prudent, timid" mentality of the garrison (Meindl 95).

Eleanor Cook has suggested that, "for fifty people who can repeat the phrase 'garrison mentality,' only one can repeat the crucial argument . . . and get it right" (qtd. in Brown 292). However, the fairly ritualistic, homogenized account the garrison mentality receives in critical literature stays remarkably close to the source as far as these initial points are concerned. Returning to the original source, therefore, is not a corrective exercise, as much as a supplemental one. My aim is to understand how Frye manages so convincingly to establish the account, and to shift

attention from his story of the garrison itself to the ecological logic and normative assumptions that underwrite the garrison story.

Further into the Territory of Myth

Curiously enough, early in the "Conclusion," Frye dismisses environmental explanations, such as cold climate or the rigours of pioneer life, for the (presumed) shortcomings of Canadian literature:

> There is a general sense of filler about such speculations, and when similar arguments are given in a negative form to explain the absence of a Shakespeare in Canada they are no more convincing [than when given in a positive form to explain his emergence in Elizabethan England]. . . . To suggest that any of them is a negative cause of its merit is to say much more than anyone knows. (216)

It is an odd position to stake out, given that Frye is about to propose a fairly sweeping environmental explanation of his own.

At first glance, Frye might seem to be offering the usual provisos and hedgings that we would expect from a tempered intellect. Structurally, however, something more important is happening. Frye is setting himself up as a guide on a discursive journey; he is about to walk us into a thicket, and he wants to make clear as he escorts us that he is both a reluctant guide and a skeptic. This idea of the guide is doubled when Frye comes to one of the most famous passages of the essay: the St. Lawrence entry to Canada as Jonah slipping into the gullet of a whale (217). The passage mimics and plays with how Frye is, himself, quietly guiding us into something different than we expected — and something big at that.[3] Ultimately, this positioning of essayist as wilderness guide is a significant part of what enables the garrison mentality to function as myth. Frye insinuates that he knows this terrain (both the natural terrain of Canada and the symbolic terrain of literature) instinctively and in detail. Thus, when he brings us to findings that run counter to his own professed instincts, these findings present themselves as sightings and discoveries rather than hypotheses, almost as if they were phenomena that existed outside of Frye's determination. Consequently, the very same sort of environmental explanation that, according to Frye himself, must be considered no more than speculative filler (215-16) emerges on our journey *with him* as a phenomenon possessing mythic realness

— which is to say, the sort of realness that inheres whether or not the objective facts run in its favour (see Flood 71-100).

The garrison mentality is by no means the first of these sightings and discoveries. We catch glimpses of the literary and intellectual import of Canada's continental positioning, and Frye begins inching us toward the vastness and impenetrability of the northern wilderness, noting, for instance, Canada's singularity among nations in possessing "so large an amount of the unknown" (220). Each of these constitutes points of acclimation, so that by the time we reach the statement of the garrison mentality, it is secured by assumptions that have already slid into place as part of a total landscape.

Travelling along this path, we reach an observation that to a significant degree underwrites the entire ecological logic of the garrison mentality thesis:

> Culture is born in leisure and an awareness of standards, and pioneer conditions tend to make energetic and uncritical work an end in itself, to preach a gospel of social unconsciousness, which lingers long after the pioneer conditions have disappeared. The impressive achievements of such a society are likely to be technological. It is in the inarticulate part of communication, railways and bridges and canals and highways, that Canada, one of whose symbols is the taciturn beaver, has shown its real strength. (222)

The "taciturn beaver" of this passage is, of course, no mere rhetorical flourish. The symbol encapsulates Frye's basic conviction that, as long as humans are primarily involved with surviving nature, they fail to become fully human. Their products may be sturdy and workmanlike, they may be *functional* like the beaver's dam, but they cannot be *literary*; indeed, they cannot even be properly part of culture.

Because Frye is several generations removed from contemporary criticism, it is easy to overlook what an offhanded dismissal this is of the cultural forms that preceded the modern division of labour and proliferation of leisure time. He has inserted the argument that culture "is born in leisure" as if it were the observation merely of a natural phenomenon — say the schedule of the tides — that need only be documented, not substantiated. By sealing the argument with the metaphor of the beaver, a true animal of the north, Frye also neatly fixes it within the narrative structure of the "Conclusion" as a guided wilderness tour. The beaver is a creature/idea whose sighting reinforces vividly the sense

of where we are. The very matter-of-factness of Frye's dismissal of pre-industrial culture, and his anchoring of this dismissal with a totemic animal of the Canadian wilds, tells us something critical concerning Frye's worldview. In particular, the beaver remark offers a central insight into Frye's assumptions concerning humans as a species — assumptions that are explicated more fully elsewhere in his larger corpus, including *The Educated Imagination*, where the taciturn beaver also plays his role.

In *The Educated Imagination*, aimed largely at popular audiences, Frye describes what he understands to be the three constitutive levels of language. First is the level of consciousness and awareness, a language of nouns and adjectives that enables humans to name things and describe their qualities (4). Next is practical, goal-oriented language, characterized by verbs and consumed with the process of "adapting to the environment, or rather of transforming the environment in the interests of one species" (7). This language of practical sense accords with the "level of social participation" (8), since a social pulling-together is necessary to make the work proceed. The second level is also, explicitly, the language that accords with the beaver, who knows "quite a lot about engineering" (7).

However, whereas a beaver is fully at home as a species pursuing the engineering of dams, the human who dwells at this level remains a "second-rate animal" (*Educated* 7). For humans to become fully themselves as animals, they must move beyond the collectivism and practicality of the beaver's social order and focus on their individual desires and ambitions, fuelling more complex and ambitious forms of creativity. For Frye, ultimately, humans' fullest "animal" life unfolds at the level of the imagination, which corresponds with the language of literature (8). By extension, when humans fear nature and flee into the comfortingly limited horizons of collective (beaver) life, they are not simply creating distance between themselves and the rest of the natural world. According to the "Conclusion," they are also foreclosing their own human nature and fullest functioning as a species. The fear that drives the erection of garrisons causes inhabitants to remain developmentally stuck as second-rate animals, incapable of the creative drive required for the proper arts:

> The real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual, pulling away from the group, losing the sense of driving power that the group gives him, aware of a conflict within himself far subtler than the struggle of morality against evil. It is much

> easier to multiply garrisons, and when that happens, something
> anti-cultural comes into Canadian life, a dominating herd-mind in
> which nothing original can grow. ("Conclusion" 226)

Turner and Freedman appear to be responding to this human-centric
focus on language and individual creative potential when they suggest
that environmental readings of the garrison mentality are overblown —
that critics who see in the garrison mentality an object lesson on human
discord with nature are in fact setting up a "straw man device" (172).
However, they miss the mark on two counts. First, Frye himself suggests
directly that the garrison mentality leads to a particular type of eco-
logical harm, namely the forging of overly rational and mechanistic built
environments: "There is little adaptation to nature [where the garrison
mentality prevails]: in both architecture and arrangement, Canadian
cities and villages express rather an arrogant abstraction, the conquest
of nature by an intelligence that does not love it" ("Conclusion" 224).
Second, and far more importantly for our purposes here, Frye's assump-
tions concerning human language, creativity, and species potential are,
in fact, inextricably bound to the ecological logic of his garrison mental-
ity thesis. Frye establishes an intuitive correspondence among the terms
humans, nature, and literature, according to which the environmental
harm from the garrison mentality flows not only directly — via the
imposition of functional abstractions onto the land and its ecosystems
— but indirectly, by forcing humans to be out of step with their own
nature and hence at odds with the rest of the natural world. Conversely,
when individuals overcome the fear that binds tightly knit, conformist
social groupings, they take their place in nature as something other than
second-rate animals and are returned, in almost dialectical fashion, to
sympathy with nature. Not incidentally, this return is also at the point
where literature emerges.

    This reading allows us to appreciate the broader importance of the
American counterpoint in securing the logic of the garrison mentality.
It has not somehow escaped Frye's attention that, historically speaking,
America's wild, jagged westward expansion wreaked environmental
havoc as surely as Canadian expansion did. But, for Frye, the figures
of America's "wild west" — individuals who sought the frontier rather
than shrinking from it — symbolize the bold, imaginative impulse he
sees as the precondition for the fullest expression of the human species
(and thus the precondition for literature, on the one hand, and human

rapprochement with nature, on the other). In the Canadian context, of course, the template of "outlaws and sheriffs" would be out of sync ("Conclusion" 224). Rather, Frye suggests, the Canadian mentality matured toward the third level of human existence and language much later, via the concepts of "becoming indigenous" and "belonging." Thus, a decade after the "Conclusion," we find Frye reflecting with evident satisfaction that "the white Canadians, in their imagination, are no longer immigrants but are becoming indigenous, recreating the kind of attitudes appropriate to people who really belong here" ("Haunted" 487).

Re-reading the "Conclusion" with an eye to its rhetorical strategies and ecological assumptions, it becomes clear how the garrison mentality takes on the properties of myth and how it asserts a normative, paradigmatic relationship among the human species, the natural world, and the development of language and literature. Its foundational ecological logic runs approximately as follows: fear of nature does not simply drive dislike of nature or an attempt to dominate it through chilly abstractions. At a second, deeper level, fear of nature's vast, amoral presence is maladaptive because it disrupts the human capacity to move beyond a beaver-like state of technical ingenuity and collective endeavour and toward the bold imagination by which humans become at home in the world and find themselves capable of forging literature, in its truest sense, as well as a productive harmony with the rest of nature. This second, arguably foundational, ecological logic is rarely brought forward for direct critique. Nevertheless, it is tacitly repeated and reinforced by the critical literature, even by those critics who reject the garrison mentality thesis.

How Critics of the Garrison Mentality Thesis Accept Its Ecological Logic

To the extent that the garrison mentality is rejected, critics typically question its historical accuracy or comprehensiveness, arguing that it is, at best, a partial or selective reading of the colonial experience and literary works, that its relevance hinges on a systematic exclusion of the other from the purview of early literature (e.g., Buss 123-27; Grady xviii; Hammill 65; Relke 135; Wang 21-22). Yet such critiques, nevertheless, tend to adopt and extend the garrison mentality's ruling ecological logic.

Buss offers a prime example of this simultaneous critique and ratification. She rejects the garrison mentality as a masculinist concept that does not account for Canadian pioneer women's writings. She offers, for instance, the case of Elizabeth Simcoe, "who came to Canada fearing the natural environment" but eventually "[came] to make the natural world part of her self" (127). Buss notes approvingly that Simcoe was "calmly able to allow 'a green Caterpillar with tufts like fur on its back [to touch her] face' . . . and despite its painful sting, she continued her firsthand experimentation with her environment" (127). Similarly, she notes Simcoe's determination to cultivate a new travelling companion when her original guide is called away, so that she might continue her explorations (127). If Simcoe's story illustrates something starkly different than a flight from nature into the collective huddle of the fort, Anna Jameson's story, according to Buss, embodies the outright rejection and overturning of the stunted and self-enforcing culture of the fort. However, in Jameson's story "the garrison [is] represented by the 'little ill-built town' of Toronto" (129). After the failure of her marriage — surely an anti-garrison moment if there was one — Jameson left Toronto and sought out relationships with Native women. Buss contends that through these relationships, and the culture they allow her to access, "[Jameson's] connection with the land [reaches] its fruition" (129).

Yet, even as Buss rejects the garrison mentality thesis as not accounting for the female pioneer experience in early Canadian literature, she replicates its ruling ecological logic precisely: the mature self is achieved by overcoming one's fear of wilderness, individuating from the garrisoned crowd, and seeking unity with nature — ideally by "becoming indigenous" (Frye, "Haunted" 487). Jameson is portrayed as virtually born anew through her foray into nature and Native culture, freed from the "hypocrisy of the white world's attitudes towards women," a recognition that is central to her "personal development" (Buss 129). For Buss, success in life and literature hangs on a number of factors; for instance, she valorizes close personal connections in a way that Frye does not. Yet, ultimately, as in Frye's "Conclusion," full creative and personal development hinges on the rejection of fear and on the ability to "make a connection with the land by positive acts of the imagination" (Buss 133).

Buss offers just one example of how the garrison mentality may be critiqued while its central logic is reinforced. As a whole, criticism is

deeply divided on the question of whether or not the garrison mentality aptly describes Canada's literary origins, with the weight of recent work leaning decidedly against its broad applicability (see, for instance, Buss, New, Turner and Freedman, and Wang). Yet there is also near unanimity on the idea that Canadian culture and literature have, in any event, largely matured beyond the garrison and toward recognition of an "intrinsic and mutualistic relationship between humans and the natural world" (Turner and Freedman 174). In this sense, critical rejections of the garrison mentality thesis have not contested its central ecological logic. Quite the opposite — critics routinely assume that, to whatever extent the garrison mentality has been in evidence, ecological progress entails overcoming it and that a beneficial, mutual relationship between humans and nature takes hold as fear of nature is replaced by the recognition of humankind's own destructive power:

> Many Canadian writers have begun to react to the sense of threat, *not from, but to, the physical environment. . . .* This development is taking place within the larger project of redefining the role and function of literary and cultural studies with respect to the environment, a move which has successfully been initiated by ecocritical scholarship. (Hartmann 90-91, emphasis added)

This development, of course, is a line of thinking that was immanent in the "Conclusion" and that gained pointed expression by Atwood in 1972 (*Survival* 60).

However, moving beyond the garrison mentality is generally presumed to require more than the recognition of human harm to the environment; maturation is assumed to require a freeing and expansion in the quality of human imagination. Accounts that are close to Frye's own thinking may anticipate the freeing of human imagination as a return to "indigenous" thinking, as in Grady's conception of a Canadian "return to an aboriginal North American sense of wholeness, a knowledge that as human beings we are simply one of the creatures in the forest, and that what happens to the forest happens to us" (qtd. in Turner and Freedman 174). More typically, in recent years, the critical move in the unshackling and advancement of the human imagination is understood as transcendence of Enlightenment thinking and the modernist impulse with their structured dualities of human/nature, wilderness/culture, feminine/masculine, and self/other. In postmodern

— and often "posthuman" — accounts, the transcendence of modernist binaries may entail psychic risk and unmediated encounters with nature (Relke), much as in Buss's story of Anna Jameson. The urban environment is often conceived of as enforcing a dualistic stasis; consequently, sites such as gardens and parks may be envisioned as intermediary or transitional spaces that allow for the recuperation of risky new sorts of knowledge and forms of imagining (see Relke 220).

Current trends in biological research offer another pervasive source of imaginative inspiration (almost too pervasive, according to O'Brien). Specifically, thinkers who assume that fear and retreat from nature are precursors to its destruction have been attracted to an emerging science of interconnectedness, the "scientific demonstration of the myriad networks that connect all life forms" (O'Brien 155). In its own way, this mode of thinking offers purchase on the same idea that both Frye and his critics tend to circle around: that the rigid cultural and ideological walls separating humans from wilderness are impediments to the human imagination as well as to sustainability and coexistence with the rest of nature. Thinkers from the arts and humanities can, moreover, embrace the science of interconnectedness (see Westling) without having to essentialize or appropriate Indigenous traditions. Nor, arguably, would Frye have balked at the idea of science as practised by, for instance, Lynn Margulis as a substitute for mythology in inciting and provoking human imagination; far from the beaver science of laying roads and planning continental transportation, such highly theoretical science fulfills the highest potentials of language (*Educated* 8).

What's Wrong with the Obvious?

Of course, although Frye and critics grapple with the idea of a uniquely Canadian terror response to nature, overcoming the fear of nature is by no means a particularly Canadian fixation. Ecocritics everywhere view ecophobia as a major stumbling block in progress toward sustainability and seek to unshackle the imagination so as to break humans out of their fortresses of fear (see Taylor). The new science of interconnectedness represented by thinkers such as Lewontin and Margulis figures prominently here, for it offers an almost ecstatic vision of humankind merging with the "rest of nature." Westling, for instance, suggests that

> Such a "Posthumanist" vision can be extremely disquieting, but it can also be exhilarating. We are no longer alone as transcendent Minds locked in decaying bodies on an Earth where we don't belong, and separate from the myriad creatures around us. Now we can see ourselves as vibrant bodies pulsing in harmony with our whole environment. (36)

Although Frye's work can by no means be labelled postmodern, let alone posthuman, Westling's view accords wonderfully with his vision of how humans, in embracing the fullest imaginative calling of their species, may transcend existential terror and the gnawing sense of lack of belonging ("Haunted" 487). There are numerous analogs to be found among such popular works as Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, which argues that children are equipped with an inborn love of nature, or ecophilia, that is trained out of them within what we might call the fear-bound garrison of the modern family. Parallel to Frye's idea that fear of wilderness stunts human potential to fulfill its creative role as a species, such arguments suggest that ecophobia leads to cognitive deficits as well as environmental ruin (see also Sobel).

With so much collective wisdom on the side of freeing ourselves from all manner of blinkered and hidebound garrisons; unshackling the human imagination in order to overcome the fear of nature that, presumably, drives us to dominate it (as seen in Taylor's discussion of Estok 354); and finding ourselves at home as beings that share an "intrinsic and mutualistic" relationship with the rest of the natural world (Turner and Freedman 78); or becoming at last "vibrant bodies pulsing in harmony with our whole environment" (Westling 36) — why raise doubts?

American ecocritic Matthew Taylor offers one reason: there is, he points out, little evidence to suggest that ecophilia actually moves humans to a less destructive stance toward the environment than ecophobia does. Indeed, ecophilia and ecophobia share key conceptual lineages in Western literature and philosophy. Taylor observes, for instance, that

> [The transcendentalist philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau] would seem to model a form of holistic interconnectedness that rebukes "degenerate" modernity's "discord . . . between man and nature." But like their British Romantic counterparts, such détentes are established only by subordinating the natural world to an occasion of the self's realization. (355)

Unmediated experience of the wilds was, for the Transcendentalists, an antidote to the stultifying life of the village (the garrison, really). Through unmediated encounters, "man" becomes refreshed, more himself, simultaneously more at home with himself and more at home with nature. Yet, far from engendering a thoroughly conservationist stance, the Transcendentalist joy in interconnectedness with nature was explicitly marshalled to underwrite the razing of forests and displacement of Indigenous populations, in service to the romance of working the soil and of pushing ever farther west (Taylor 356). This, of course, intersects with Frye's valorization of the American wild west as a liberatory space for the human imagination and thus, Frye's logic implies, ultimately a positive force for the human/nature interface, no matter how destructive the advance of the western frontier was in objective terms ("Conclusion" 224).

The fact that such philosophies are implicated in complex, historical phenomena with ecologically destructive consequences by no means *proves* that the theories themselves are inimical to sustainability. Yet the type of evidence Taylor highlights may well lead us to question why it is that we are set on ever more original, nuanced, and complex forms of attempting to draw close to nature, whether in the realm of the artistic or the scientific. In this vein, Taylor's discussion of posthuman responses is also germane. As he notes, a number of posthuman theorists confront how the Enlightenment's fixation on human reason and creativity as the route to "progress" on all fronts inevitably worsens the human/nature divide, no matter how noble or ecstatic the sense of grasping nature and merging with it. Envisioning a future beyond ecophobia, they argue that we must consciously work to counter the tendency to see humans as the measure of all things.

However, Taylor is uncertain that such self-policing could ever be adequate or fruitful: "Indeed, to the extent that [posthuman theory] is even marginally defined by an impulse toward progress or normative universality . . . it threatens to arrogate for itself the ontological privilege and exclusivity of the humanist worldviews it putatively corrects" (361). Referencing the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Taylor proceeds to illustrate the contours of a stance that instead accepts an "irresolvable fear" of the awesome force of nature as a positive phenomenon (370). Rather than offering a reassuring sense of harmony with the nonhuman world, the gothic horror aesthetic magnifies the danger that, according to Frye,

early European Canadians felt pressing in all around their lonely forts. It helps us appreciate, rather than seek to overcome, the overwhelming otherness of a cosmos that "whispers, awfully, that something other than 'us' might be" (370). Perhaps, Taylor suggests, there is actually something useful in fear as a stance: even if such terror may not always be productive in an aesthetic sense, it may be advisable as an alternative grounding for ecocritical thought, by diminishing the role of humans as the measure of all things, and — though this second implication is not made explicit — by allowing us to grapple more honestly with what actually is out there.

How Climate Change Makes the Case for Fear and Retreat

Confrontation with the facts of climate change, I would argue, succinctly makes Taylor's case, though in a far starker and more urgent fashion. Although climate change has been induced by human activity, it has put into motion significant systemic processes within the natural world that create risks and dangers, such as "recent . . . heat waves, droughts, floods, cyclones, and wildfires" (IPCC 6). Such processes include rapid glacial melting across nearly all glacial regions (IPCC 4) — a process that feeds on itself by shrinking the expanses of white, reflective surface able to deflect the sun's heat, thereby speeding the warming process. Heavily populated coastal and low-lying zones are under extreme threat of continued erosion, flooding, and submergence (IPCC 17). Terror is not an illogical response.

Meanwhile, unlike the ecocritical romance with evocative strands of high-level biological theory as in Westling (36), the current science of climate mitigation and adaptation is not a particularly imaginative one, nor does it have a central bearing on how humans feel about nature. It is a beaver science, dedicated to the logic of cause and effect. Yet it is this type of scientific endeavour that offers hope of collective movement forward on sustainability. What this beaver science tells us is that, far from a retrograde state of being, the garrison mentality may well describe an optimal state of human existence in an era of climate change. First and foremost, as it turns out, human density is key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Ecocriticism may assume it is a commonsensical positive for humans to go out into nature to overcome their fears and encounter wilderness directly (e.g., Buss; Westling). Yet it turns out that people who keep to dense urban places of habitation produce far fewer car-

bon emissions than those who live near — or travel long distances to be near — nature. Thus, researchers find that residents of downtown Toronto emit carbon at drastically lower levels than do their suburban counterparts living in places of relative natural lushness (VandeWeghe and Kennedy 143). In 2009, for instance, greenhouse gas emissions for residents of New York City were about a third of those for the average American ("PlanNYC" 5), and this effect has been predicted and observed for over a decade and a half (Satterthwaite). Urban density leads to economies of scale and reduces reliance on the automobile, for substantial energy reductions (Owen). Apartment blocks, with their smaller dwelling spaces and shared walls, tend to promote efficiencies in heating and cooling, although such efficiencies are often only latent and can be improved upon. Moreover, compact urban spaces save wild ones from development. As Owen notes,

> If you spread all 8.2 million New York City residents across the countryside at the population density of Vermont, you would need a space equal to the land area of the six New England states plus New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia — and then, of course, you'd have to find places to put all the people you were displacing. In a paradoxical way, environmental groups have been a major contributor to residential sprawl [by fuelling the] yearning for fresh air and elbow room. . . .

"Wild landscapes," he concludes, "are less often destroyed by people who despise them than by people who love them" — and want to live on or in them.

It is not simply density that matters, however, but how we coordinate action within those spaces. In his 1989 "Speech at the New Canadian Embassy," Frye complained that the garrison mentality "which was social but not creative, has been replaced by the condominium mentality, which is neither social nor creative" (647). To whatever extent that is true, the most pressing issue at present may be not unleashing creativity but returning to a higher degree of sociability and even enforced conformity, insofar as it is directed to ecologically sound purposes. This is because the science of climate mitigation and adaptation also suggests that restraints on individual desires and creative ambitions, based on collective need, will be a critical component in facing climate change.

Among other things, both mitigation and adaptation will compel humans drastically to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and accept lim-

itations on everything from how we travel and where we live to how food is produced and what we eat ("Stern Review" 449-572). It will be necessary to curtail human activity in certain vulnerable areas such as coastal regions and tropical forests (IPCC 16). As the "Stern Review" concludes, "Above all, reducing the risks of climate change requires collective action" (xxvii). Dense and well-ordered spaces of collective striving for survival begin to appear less as undesirable remnants of ecophobia in this context and more like an adaptive model for facing what lies ahead.

In such a garrison-type space, Frye espies the seeds of the anti-literary — indeed, the seeds of the anti-human. Even his critics have tacitly carried this bias forward, valorizing ever more aesthetically nuanced and complex responses to the human/nature interface, under the assumption that creativity and complexity are essential to freeing the human imagination and allowing humans to grow into themselves as a species. In turn, it is assumed that as humans fulfill their imaginative potential as a species, they will be more at home in the world, more able to seek encounters with nature and live in accord with nature, wilderness, and the nonhuman world. These are assumptions that ecocritics would do well to recognize as they arise both in literature and literary criticism — and to reconsider in short order, as the imperatives of climate change press down.

What if the most crucial role for literature, indeed for myth, is not to fuel and thrive on the individual quest for creative fulfillment and self-understanding, but to harness itself to the task of bringing human aspirations, collectively, within limits? What if literature and myth would serve humanity best by validating well-grounded fears of what nature is capable of unleashing? It is incumbent on us to consider what the enterprise of ecocriticism might look like in response.

Notes

[1] The use of *human* and *nature* as easily separable terms has, of course, been roundly problematized in ecocritical literature (see Westling). However, the very idea of the garrison mentality is premised on human recoil from the natural world, out of the belief that human society and nature are not only separable, but hostile and even antithetical to one another. It would be cumbersome to attempt to reform the language of separateness whilst simultaneously engaging that thesis. For convenience, therefore, the term *nature* is used here

to indicate, roughly, those landscapes, wild places, flora, and fauna that most remind us of how the biotic sphere unfolds according to processes separate from human intentionality.

[2] As Jonathan Olsen argues in his study of German far right politics, environmentalism can become twinned with nationalist and racist sentiment through emphasis on the physical land of the "homeland" and connection to the nature of one's birthplace (where, it is assumed, one "naturally" belongs). In such discourses, protecting the environment is tantamount to protecting the homeland; simultaneously, categories such as nature, the land, and the environment take on important symbolic roles, so that, for instance, far right environmentalists decry both the literal pollution of the land by industry and the symbolic "pollution" of the homeland through immigration. Even where such groups do not draw consciously or forthrightly on his thought, Martin Heidegger provides an extensive philosophical grounding for the idea of the actual land, the dirt, as central to the idea of nation — indeed, as having rightful priority over the idea of nation (Ward ix, 205-29). In this, James Ward suggests, Heidegger was merely extending "the tradition of German *völkische* nationalism," which embodied longing for a "homogeneous, rural, and pastoral people, deeply rooted in the soil of a place" (xix).

[3] This reading parallels Robert Lecker's idea of the "Conclusion" as a romantic narrative that positions the reader as the hero (192).

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