Giblett, Rod. "Toronto: "Set in Malarial Lakeside Swamps"." *Cities and Wetlands: The Return of the Repressed in Nature and Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. 197–214. Environmental Cultures. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474269858.ch-012>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 08:39 UTC.

Copyright © Rod Giblett 2016. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Toronto: A City “Set in Malarial Lakeside Swamps”

The city of Toronto was founded and built next to Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh. The marsh was filled over the next 150 years for reasons of public health and industrial development. Toronto is situated in the Don River catchment that once flowed through Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh into Lake Ontario. It is also located close to the Holland River catchment that flows through Holland Marsh into Lake Simcoe. This marsh was drained so that its fertile soils could grow and supply much of Toronto’s fresh produce (see Giblett, 2014: chapter 6). In a typical gesture for the modern city, one marsh close to the center of the city was filled to create solid ground for urban development while another on the margins of the city was drained so that its fertile soils could grow and supply fresh produce to sustain the city.

The city of Toronto had a marshy and swampy beginning that has largely been forgotten by the majority of its residents. As with a number of other “swamp cities” or marsh metropolises built on, or in, or next to a wetland, Toronto was founded and built adjacent to Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh. This marsh may have afforded some early military advantages, but these were outweighed by its myriad disadvantages. These disadvantages included that it was malarial, melancholic, monstrous, and uncanny in keeping with the dominant modern European tradition of the pejorative perception and devaluation of wetlands (see Giblett, 1996). In keeping with the same tradition it was later treated as a sink for industrial and urban wastes, and so became degraded into a wasteland. Cumulatively these perceptions and factors sounded the death knell of the marsh and were the impetus for “reclaiming” the wasteland

to create industrial lands by filling the marsh over a forty-year period. The result is that today Toronto has, as Wickson (2002: 159) puts it, “lost virtually all of its pre-settlement wetlands, particularly the former Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh.” For historians of Toronto harbor, such as Wickson, the loss of the marsh is merely a fact of history to note and pass over to the next one.

Of course, it is churlish to critique the mistakes of the past from the privileged vantage point of the present. Yet rather than merely bemoan the acts of the past and the facts of history, the point is that some of the mistakes of the past are perpetuated into the present with the continued destruction of wetlands close to Canadian urban centers. A recent government report on biodiversity in Canada calculated that “up to 98% of the wetlands near Canada’s urban centres have either been lost or degraded” (Federal, Provincial and Territorial Governments of Canada, 2010). The mistaken perception in the miasmatic theory of malaria that wetlands cause disease persists in the perception that wetlands are unhealthy without acknowledging that industrial and urban wastes have polluted the wetland in the meantime and that these pollutants cause disease, rather than the wetland itself. There is an irony here that the wetland regarded as wilderness, as land ripe for settlement and development, is degraded into wasteland, as a sink for wastes, which becomes the rationale for filling it.

The further irony here is that pioneering settlers regarded wilderness as wasteland in the first place (see Cronon, 1996a, b). The wetland went from wasteland to wilderness and back to wasteland, but the definition and constitution of the wasteland had changed in the meantime. From the point of view of urban sanitation, the question arises of why alternatives to draining or filling Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh were not considered, such as constructing a trunk sewer to bypass the Don River (instead of treating it as an open sewer), and so either conserving the marsh before it became polluted, or restoring it after it was polluted. From wilderness to wasteland summarizes the sad and sorry story of the destruction of Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh.

This story is of no mere historical interest but has been one of recent note and discussion in Toronto with the publication of a volume about the history of its waterfront, including its beginnings adjacent to Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh and subsequent history of polluting, draining, and filling (see Desfor and Laidley, 2011a; Jackson, 2011; Moir, 2011). This coincided roughly with the release of the mayor’s vision for the waterfront and with exception being taken by some

Torontonians, including the editors of this volume, to what they see as in actual fact the mayor's plans to sell off the waterfront as a cash cow to retire city debt. This expression of exception spilt out into the op-ed pages of the *Toronto Star* in September 2011 in an article by the volume's editors. They conclude by calling on city councilors to "ensure that our waterfront's future isn't compromised by repeating the mistakes of the past" (Desfor and Laidley, 2011b, A27). They are referring to what they call "developer-driven, uncoordinated development" on the waterfront whose wetland has been destroyed, but it could refer to any wetland on the urban fringe that has not yet been destroyed by development.

The city of Toronto began life as the fort and town of York founded by Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe in 1793. The choice of site, however, was not Simcoe's prerogative but that of Lord Dorchester (Sir Guy Carleton), the governor-in-chief, who overruled Simcoe's initial preference for London on the Thames River, both of which Simcoe had renamed in anticipation of it becoming the capital of Upper Canada in keeping with its English namesake as duly noted by Mrs Simcoe in her diary (Innis, [1965] 2007: 121; see also Jameson, [1838] 2008: 269). Instead, Dorchester "directed Simcoe to fix the new capital at Toronto Bay" according to Story (1967: 764; see also 799; and Robinson, 1965: 185).

Simcoe chose the specific location at the swampy eastern end of the bay. It was not an auspicious beginning, or location, for, in the words of Mulvany (1885: 117), Simcoe, in keeping with Dorchester's wishes or orders "fixed upon a site at the mouth of a swampy stream called the Don ... The ground was low and marshy, but it had the best harbor on the north shore of Lake Ontario, and was comparatively remote from the frontier of the United States. The Governor christened the place York." The site may have had another transportation advantage besides the harbor: it was also the "Toronto Carrying-Place" at the southern end of the portage from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe (see Robinson, 1965: 85). Yet the Carrying Place along the Humber River is at the far western end of the current center of the city—a considerable distance from Simcoe's original town plot. This was thus only one of a number of regional considerations and by no means paramount. Glazebrook (1971: 11) concludes that "how far Dorchester or Simcoe was influenced by the Toronto portage ... is impossible to say. Toronto was not selected for that reason alone or primarily." It was one of a number of reasons among which the harbor and the distance from the United States were uppermost.

Among these reasons were the fact that “Simcoe mainly viewed the village as a commanding position” (*The History of Toronto Ontario Canada*) and founded the capital of the English settlement there where a French fort had been located from 1750 to 1757. Simcoe’s view of the “commanding position” of the site with its military overtones became the prevailing orthodoxy as propounded by his wife. Mrs Simcoe (Innis, [1965] 2007: 137–138) relates how “The Gov. [her husband] thinks from the Manner in which the sand-banks [of the Bay] are formed, they are capable of being fortified so as to be impregnable ... though the land is low.” Yet there were some early dissenting views. For Collins (cited by Scadding, 1873: 17), the deputy surveyor-general, reported in 1788 that “in regard to this place as a military post, I do not see any very striking features to recommend it in that view.” After visiting York in 1816 Lieutenant Francis Hall (1818: 215) wrote that that it was “wholly useless, either as a port, or military post.”

The “commanding position” is the stock-in-trade of the landscape aesthetics of “the pleasing prospect” so extensively examined by Raymond Williams in a chapter of this title in *The Country and the City*. In fact, the commanding position constitutes and makes possible the pleasing prospect. Williams (1973: 121 and 125) notes how “castles and fortified villages had long commanded ‘prospects’ of the country below them.” Colonial settlements, if Toronto and its founder in Simcoe are anything to go by, also commanded prospects of the land and waters below them. The country is a threat, or at least a potential source of threat; the settlement a military command post against possible invasion. For Simcoe, the primary concern was military, but the commanding position may also have had an aesthetic pay-off in producing a pleasing prospect. The landscape aesthetic of the pleasing prospect is based on the military consideration of the commanding position. The aesthetic and the military are not two separate categories but are imbricated with each other.

Along similar lines to Hall, Anna Brownell Jameson ([1838] 2008: 14) in her *Winter Studies in Canada* considers the geographical factors of the site for Toronto and dismisses the military one:

The choice of this site for the capital of the Upper Province [of Canada] was decided by the fine harbor ... [though] from its low situation, and the want

of any commanding height in the neighborhood, it is nearly defenceless ... But the same reasons which rendered the place indefensible to us, rendered it untenable for the enemy [in the American invasion of 1813] and it was immediately evacuated.

She acknowledges the transportation advantages of the harbor and dismisses any possible military advantages for the site. By then, though, the town, and the military orthodoxy, were well established and the latter has been repeated ever since. For Firth (1962: lxi) "the establishment of a town and its choice as capital were subordinate to its military importance." Following in Mrs Simcoe's footsteps, Martyn (1982: 8) relates how "a defensible site for a capital had to be chosen" and York provided it in the form of "a very fine harbor protected by a sandy peninsula" to its south. Benn (1993: 11) insists categorically that "the founding of modern urban Toronto was a military event."

Besides its harbor and peninsula to its south and rivers on either side, all of which were touted as militarily advantageous but were not in fact, the site for York/Toronto may have had a military advantage as it was protected to some extent by Ashbridge's Bay Marsh, a low, swampy marsh to its east of "almost 525 hectares" (Moir, 2011: 25). One wonders to what extent the size and position of the marsh entered into Simcoe's or Dorchester's thinking about the military advantages of the location. Did Simcoe or Dorchester consider Ashbridge's Bay Marsh on the eastern flank of the site as protection from, or a deterrent to, a land-borne American attack from this direction? Mrs Simcoe is not illuminating on this point. Perhaps "the Gov." did not divulge anything to her regarding this. Perhaps they were not students of the theory of war and of the role of marshes in military history where they have long played a role as easy sites to defend and hard ones to attack as theorized by von Clausewitz (see Giblett, 1996: 205). This was the case from the time of the ancient Romans in Britain to the very recent example for them of Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," in the American War of Independence in which Simcoe had fought on the British side (see Giblett, 1996: chapter 9).

When the Americans did attack York/Toronto in 1813 from across Lake Ontario and through this lacustrine border, or frontier, they landed to, and attacked from, the west. They did not do so from the southeast across or through Ashbridge's Bay Marsh so this feature of the location did provide

protection in this quarter and perhaps it did enter into Simcoe's choice of site as a factor. In his recent monumental and award-winning history of the 1812–1814 war Latimer (2007: 130) describes how both “a good beach to the west of town made a landing difficult to defend against and a western battery” that was inadequate contributed generally to what he calls the “woeful” state of the defenses of York/Toronto. Latimer does not mention a “bad” marsh to the east of town that would have made a landing there difficult and easy to defend against. There seems to have been no eastern battery to defend York/Toronto as no attack was expected in and from this quarter. Despite the good landing beach to the west, both the bad landing marsh to the east and the good harbor and sandy peninsula to the south of York/Toronto seems to vindicate in hindsight somewhat Simcoe's choice of the site for gaining some military advantage for the capital of Upper Canada, or at least reducing the military disadvantages of Niagara as the capital in such close proximity to the United States.

In the most recent book on Toronto and its waterfront, Gene Desfor and Jennifer Laidley (2011a: 11) concur with its “military origins” relating how “the city began as a military outpost, its location chosen in the mid-eighteenth century largely for its harbor, protected by a sandy pit and buttressed by rivers on two sides.” One of these rivers, the Don, debouched into Lake Ontario in and through the delta of Ashbridge's Bay Marsh, a fact that Desfor and Laidley neglect to mention here but do so on the following page when they refer to “the harbor's extensive marshes” (12). Perhaps they do not regard the marsh as providing protection or buttressing. As the Americans quickly and decisively proved in 1813, Toronto may not have been a very good site for military purposes and it was certainly not defensible from attack from a superior waterborne force. Yet the site did have some redeeming features when the Americans did attack in 1813 as they did not attack through Ashbridge's Bay Marsh. Thus the marsh did have some military advantages as a defensive position by virtue of being hard to attack and easy to defend. The point, though, is that however much the site did not fulfill these expectations as an aid in defense, it was founded with military considerations in mind, however misjudged they may have proven to be in practice. The city in general, as Virilio (and Lotringer, 1983: 3) says, was founded in war, or at least in the preparations for war, and Toronto is no exception.

Yet rather than its military or transportation advantages or the disadvantages of any of the features of the site for the settlement, its marshy and swampy location seemed to stick in the mind of early visitors. In 1796 François Alexandre Frédéric Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt (cited by Smith, 1849: 244) focused on the location (and overlooked the advantages Mulvany later outlined) when he described York “as being a mere swamp.” This became a cliché for Jameson ([1838] 2008: 15) when she repeats his dismissal of the site as being “a mere swamp” without acknowledging her source, though she cites Rochefoucauld’s description of the town on the same page.

Despite the positive qualities of the harbor, but because of its position on the other side of the riverine frontier (of the Niagara River and Peninsula), or border with the United States, and of its negative location in a marsh, the site for the settlement was, in a word, wilderness. In 1836 Jameson ([1838] 2008: 7) began her memoirs of Canada by remembering how Toronto, “such is now the sonorous name of this our sublime capital—was, thirty years ago, a wilderness, the haunt of the bear and deer, with a little, ugly, inefficient fort . . . five years ago it became a city.” The sublime capital city arose from, and was founded in, the barbarous and untamed wilderness. The wilderness of swamp and marsh was regarded as barbarous and untamed in order to constitute by contradistinction the colonial settlement as civilized and domesticated. Without the former, the latter was not possible—in theory and in practice (see Giblett, 2011: chapter 5).

The site for Jameson ([1838] 2008: 15) was both swampy and a wilderness for “when the engineer, Bouchette, was sent by General Simcoe to survey the site, (in 1793) it was a mere swamp, a tangled wilderness.” The founding and construction of a grid-plan town, as Jameson observed it to be without using this term, in the swampy wilderness was a means of bringing order to chaos, rationality to irrationality, light into darkness, civilization to barbarity, drainage to damplands (15). For Morton (1983: 31) the lots and roads were laid out in a “gridiron,” an appropriate term, “through swamp and bush.” To constitute the land as wilderness was to regard it as ripe for invasion and settlement; the grid-plan and town was the instrument to transform barbarous wilderness into civilized city; and the map was the blueprint for doing so. The English settlement of Upper Canada for Mulvany (1885: 116) was “a compact and organized invasion of the wilderness by an army of agricultural

settlers.” Simcoe was a member of the landed gentry that led this army of agricultural infantry, of farmer foot soldiers (Martyn, 1982: 9).

The sublime city of Toronto was founded for Jameson not only in a swampy wilderness, but also in a melancholy marsh. In summer, Jameson ([1838] 2008: 7) relates how “they say it [Toronto] is a pretty place” but in winter “its appearance to me, a stranger, is most strangely mean and melancholy.” This was partly because of its location as Toronto for Jameson was “a little ill-built town on low land” so no wonder it was “mean and melancholy” (7–8) in keeping with the association of marshes with melancholia (and with mourning as we saw with Venice in a previous chapter; see also Giblett, 1996: chapter 7). She goes on to describe how Toronto was located “at the bottom of a frozen bay,” on the shores of “the grey, sullen, wintry lake” and backed by “the dark gloom of the pine forest bounding the prospect . . . This is all very dismal.” In the landscape lexicon of nineteenth-century European culture and its diaspora, marshes were melancholy, swamps dismal, and forests gloomy for settlers in the new Europes of North America and Australia. Jameson invokes a number of clichés of the European landscape aesthetic, such as the city in, and versus, the wilderness of melancholic marshes, dismal swamps, gloomy forests, displeasing prospects, and despondent sloughs. The cultured city fought, and invariably won, the war, or at least the opening battle, against these natural foes.

In keeping with the melancholic marsh, Jameson ([1838] 2008: 11, 316) invokes specifically the cliché of “the slough of despond” taken from John Bunyan’s seventeenth-century Puritan classic *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the second most published book in the English language (see Giblett, 1996: 166–167). When she travels to Chatham she passes through a “rank swamp” with “deep holes and pools of rotted vegetable matter, mixed with water, black, bottomless sloughs of despond!” Her own pilgrim’s progress is through this hellish slough of despond to the heavenly, sublime city of Toronto. She is fearful of “plunging downwards” into these “mud-gulfs.” She constructs a spatial, hierarchical devaluation of what could be called the grotesque lower earthly stratum and reenacts an epic descent into the slimy, swampy underworld from which she emerges heroically and ascends triumphantly into the heavenly, sublime upper world of the city (see Giblett, 1996).

Besides the military advantages and psychological drawbacks associated with the swampy site, the health of the inhabitants and the healthiness (or

unhealthiness of the situation) was a consideration, though both have been in dispute ever since the founding of York/Toronto. For Firth (1962: lxxx-iii), “although Simcoe described the site of Toronto as particularly healthy [Simcoe’s own adverb is ‘exceedingly’ (Innis, [1965] 2007: 61)], it was found that fevers and agues resulted from the miasma arising from the Don marshes.” Mrs Simcoe concurred with her husband when she wrote of Toronto that “this place is very healthy” compared to Niagara “where there has been a fever” (Innis, [1965] 2007: 138). The Simcoes, perhaps unsurprisingly, as founding residents seemed to be boosters for the site, whereas Jameson ([1838] 2008: 15; see also 18 and 22; emphasis in the original) as a visitor took a more sanguine view that “another objection [to the choice of this site for the capital] was, and *is*, the unhealthiness of its situation—in a low swamp not yet wholly drained.” As did Lord Selkirk who concurred with Jameson when he stated in 1803 that “the situation is found to be unhealthy from the neighborhood of a marsh of 1000 acres formed by the mouth of the Don ... A party of soldiers stationed in the Block House last summer were constantly affected by Fever & Ague ... The prevalence of Easterly winds last summer blowing off the marsh rendered the Town more than usually unhealthy” (Firth, 1962: 253). “Ague” is an archaic term that was used to refer to malaria (and fevers in general). In accordance with the prevailing miasmatic theory of disease of the time, diseases such as malaria (literally “bad air”) were thought to be caused by the “bad air” or miasma arising from marshes and swamps that were regarded as unhealthy places *per se* (see Giblett, 1996: chapter 5; Jackson, 2011: 78, 80, 82, 86; Bonnell, 2011: 130; Desfor and Bonnell, 2011: 311).

The view persisted that, as William Davies noted in a letter of 1855, “the East end of the city is a great place for the ague, there is no one scarcely living there but what has it” (Fox 1945: 44). Fox notes here that “the part of Toronto bordering on the marshes as the mouth of the Don River has this same reputation for more than half a century” (44, n. 20). They were to continue to have this reputation for over a century after that as a recent historian of Canada describes how “the muddy little village of York [was] set in malarial lakeside swamps” (Morton, 1983: 31), despite Ross’s discovery in the 1890s that the anopheles mosquito is the vector for malaria (see Giblett, 1996: chapter 5). Swamps *per se* are not malarial, or unhealthy for that matter, though of course they are the habitat for anopheles mosquitoes. Swamps were

only malarial or unhealthy places in the mistaken view of the miasmatic theory of disease. Malaria could equally be conveyed by anopheles mosquitoes in the “good air” of lakes, forests, and rivers, as Jameson ([1838] 2008: 480–481) relates elsewhere.

From the period of Jameson’s visit in 1836 the unhealthiness of the marsh became a cause for concern and a pretext for filling it. Desfor (1988: 79) argues that “as early as 1835 there had been suggestions that the marsh lands of Ashbridge’s Bay should be reclaimed. That year Captain R. H. Bonnycastle ... suggested ‘reclaiming the great marsh of upwards of a thousand acres in extent, which is at present a fertile source of unhealthiness to the city.’” As Fairfield (1998: 4) notes, “reclaim” is a common euphemism for the destruction of wetlands; “unhealthiness” was also a common rationale. Whether this unhealthiness was conveyed through the miasma of airborne diseases or through the germs of animal- or water-borne diseases is not clear. Bonnell (2010; see also Moir, 2011: 35; Desfor, Vesalon, and Laidley, 2011: 58; Jackson, 2011: 86) relates that “by the 1880s, and even before, the marsh was horribly polluted with human sewage and liquid cattle manure, gasoline from nearby oil refineries, and animal offal from slaughter houses.” The unhealthiness of the city was ascribed to the unhealthiness of the marsh without distinguishing between the miasmatic theory of disease that mistakenly constituted the marsh as malarial or unhealthy and the germ theory of disease in which the impacts of urban and industrial development had progressively made the marsh unhealthy. During the 1880s, Whillans (cited by Fairfield, 1998: 17; see also Jackson, 2011: 90) relates how “the River Don was ... practically an open sewer for human waste.”

The unhealthiness of the marsh, or more precisely of the unhealthy impact of the city on the marsh and then of the marsh on the residents of the city, increasingly needed to be addressed. During what Desfor (1988: 77) calls “Canada’s industrial era” of the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Wickson (2002: 13 and 36) insists that “the need to clean up and develop Ashbridge’s Bay” and “to remedy the unhealthy conditions of the marsh” became more pressing. The miasmatic theory of disease was discredited in the 1890s, and this should have led to a reversal of the view that marshes and other wetlands were malarial or unhealthy *per se*, but this view persisted, even into the twenty-first century as Wickson indicates. Yet the unhealthiness

of the marsh and the city was due to the marsh becoming a sink for modern human-generated wastes, not to it being a marsh. The marsh had indeed become unhealthy, but the city founded in the swampy wilderness had made the marsh unhealthy. What Desfor (1988: 78) calls “the logic of classical industrial location theory” espoused by Toronto’s industrialists meant the marsh became a wasteland that was then filled to create industrial land in a convenient location next to the harbor.

Historically and ironically the modern culture of nature of the city founded in, on, or by using the materials of the premodern culture of nature of the wetland became the hypermodern culture of nature of the city floundering in its own wastes deposited in the wetland. The hypermodern city then fills or drains the marsh. For Wickson (2002: 13–14) “for decades, its [Toronto’s] marshes had served as a catch basin for animal wastes ... and raw human sewage. By the end of the nineteenth century, the foul conditions of the bay had long been linked to the city’s rising death toll from typhoid and cholera.” In other words, the foul conditions of the bay had “long been linked” to the city’s rising death toll from water- and food-borne diseases. Before the beginning of the nineteenth century the city’s rising death toll from malaria had been linked to “the foul conditions of the bay.” The two major theories of disease in Western medicine contended for supremacy throughout Toronto’s history: the miasmatic theory of disease in which malaria is an airborne disease; and the medical germ theory of disease in which malaria is an animal-borne disease and in which cholera and typhus are water- and food-borne diseases, respectively (on cholera and Toronto, see Jackson, 2011: 76). The shift from the former to the latter and the contemporaneous pollution of the wetland signed the death sentence of the wetland. This condemnation was signaled in its being constituted as wilderness ripe for settlement and development, proclaimed in the miasmatic theory of disease, signed in the unsanitary conditions of modern human urban and industrial waste disposal, and then executed under the germ theory of disease.

Besides being adjacent to human habitation, Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh was the habitat for native nonhuman animals. Not surprisingly as well as being “the haunt of the bear and deer” as Jameson ([1838] 2008: 7 and 190) put it, the tangled, untamed wilderness of the “mere swamp” of Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh, “intersected by inlets and covered with reeds, is the haunt of thousands of

wild fowl.” Nearly forty years after surveying the site for Simcoe, Joseph Bouchette in 1831 could

still distinctly recollect the untamed aspect which the country exhibited when first I entered the beautiful basin ... The bay and the neighbouring marshes were the hitherto uninhabited haunts of immense coveys of wild fowl [see Innis, [1965] 2007: 35 where “coveys” is cited as “conveys”]. Indeed they were so abundant as in some measure to annoy us during the night. (Cited by Robinson, 1965: 185)

In 1794 Mrs Simcoe concurred with him that in that period the “low lands covered with Rushes [were] abounding with wild ducks & swamp black birds with red wings” (Innis, [1965] 2007: 138). In her introduction to Mrs Simcoe’s diary, Mary Quayle Innis waxes lyrical that “loons floated on the bay uttering their uncanny cry” (37). Uncanny cry indeed, as the marsh and swamp is arguably the uncanny place par excellence as it is, by turns, and in Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic terms, fascinating and horrifying, and a return to the repressed. Yet the uncanniness of the wetland, rather than being a pretext for abhorring or demonizing it, for a psychoanalytic ecology is a reason for conserving and valuing it (see Giblett, 1996: chapter 2; 2009: chapter 2).

Mrs Simcoe similarly places the cry of loons in the lower psychopathological register as she says, “They make a noise like a Man hollowing [*sic*] in a tone of distress” (Innis, [1965] 2007: 137). Over two years later she notes that “we heard a wild kind of shriek several times in the night, we thought it was Loons which scream in that way” (233). The uncanny for Freud addresses the subordinate and intimate senses of hearing and smell rather than the dominant, dominating, and distancing sense of sight (see Giblett, 1996: chapter 2). In both Innis’s and Mrs Simcoe’s account, the cry, noise, or scream of the loon telecommunicates invisibly across the space between them and the loons. This sound affects the hearer more viscerally than the sight of the loons as the sense of hearing is more immediate and intimate than the distancing sense of sight. This cry or noise also conveys a minimal message that is evocative either of the uncanny or distress. Both writers resort to figural speech to describe or evoke the affective qualities of the cry or noise. The cry of the loon evokes for Innis the sound of crying, perhaps in distress like the man in Mrs Simcoe’s account. The noise of the loon is interference in the communication

channel between the woman writer and the Canadian landscape for it places a man hallooing or hollering in distress in the middle between the two. This noise is the black semantic noise that arises from the black waters of wetlands, rather than the white engineering noise of modern industrial communication technologies (see Giblett, 2008b: chapter 1). The hallooing or hollering man is, in Kristeva's term, abject between the subject (of Simcoe) and the object (of the Canadian land). The wetland is arguably the site of the abject as the subject is immersed in something not yet an object and so ceases to be subject (see Kristeva, 1982: chapter 1).

The abjectness of the wetland is congruent with the fact that the marsh had a liminal existence on the margins of the city in what Thoreau called the "quaking zone" between land and water (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 10). Wetlands are neither strictly land nor water, but both land and water. Ashbridge's Bay Marsh was a case in point as it was not really a part of the city, nor inside the city limits. Before filling could take place the issue of land tenure in relation to Ashbridge's Bay Marsh had to be settled. In 1911 a provincial statute transferred the Bay to the Board of the Toronto Harbor Commissioners (Glazebrook, 1971: 194). Glazebrook goes on to relate that "the Board drew up sweeping plans ... designed both to improve the old harbor and to make use of undeveloped land. The largest undertaking was the conversion of a thousand acres of marsh in Ashbridge's Bay to shipping and industrial purposes." In other words, the marsh was considered as undeveloped land, an impediment to progress, and ripe for development and conversion, like some heathen savage, to the secular gospel of industrial capitalism. Dredge, discipline, drain or fill, and reclaim the recalcitrant marsh was the catch cry. The role of the marsh as a habitat for its native birds and other inhabitants was not considered in the days before environmental impact statements. In 1912 plans were drawn up for the filling of "about 1300 acres of mostly marshlands and disease-infested waters of Ashbridge's Bay," as Wickson (2002: 41) puts it. World War I delayed the implementation of the plans, but filling was largely completed in 1921 (51).

Draining to extend the Toronto Harbor was completed in the 1920s, but filling of the marsh continued and "was virtually complete by the 1930s" (Fairfield, 1998: 6) when, as Baillie puts it, "the city demanded its destruction" (69). One of the agents of this destruction was a sewage treatment plant,

another historical irony for the practitioner of environmental cultural studies that such a plant could be built on the very site that “the city” had converted from a healthy wetland into an unhealthy wasteland and now had to convert back into healthy land to mitigate or alleviate the threat to health that it had created in the first place. In 1935, as Devitt goes on to relate, “the city had decided to build a sewage disposal plant at Ashbridge’s Bay and thus destroy it as a bird refuge” (71), though it was not quite destroyed as a habitat for birds as that took almost another two decades.

Twenty years later in 1954 Burton (Fairfield, 1998: 92) pronounced “the death of Ashbridge’s” by filling with garbage, another agent of destruction, though this ironically and briefly created an “excellent habitat” for a few shorebirds (93). It was a long and slow death drawn out over a decade and a half as “the last vestiges of the marshland disappeared in the 1960s” (6). In 1969 Fred Bodsworth, a prominent Toronto journalist and birdwatcher, wrote an article for the *Toronto Star* entitled “Me and my Garbage Dump” as part of a series of articles by prominent residents about their favorite place in Toronto (13). He related how “one of my favorite haunts every spring and summer is the string of fetid and stagnant pools created by the Ashbridge’s Bay sewage treatment plant and the landfill project at the foot of Leslie Street. Oozing with slime and littered with refuse, the ponds are a revolting affront to the eye.” Presumably the slimy ponds were also a revolting affront to the nose, as Baillie in the 1930s commented upon “the smells which emit from the ooze and garbage” (68). Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh had become an industrial wasteland, or what I call, developing Thoreau, a feral quaking zone as distinct from the native quaking zone of the wetland. Ashbridge’s Marsh for Bodsworth “was once Toronto’s most famous natural history landmark, a home for thousands of ducks and shore birds” (15). He concludes his article by bemoaning how “the destruction of Ashbridge’s Marsh is a sorry symbol of urban planners’ blindness to natural features that give a region its distinctive qualities” (15). Urban planners in those days were committed to the health of human populations, not to wetland conservation, nor to the biodiversity of the ecosystems of the city, nor to appreciating and conserving the bioregion, nor to the health of the marsh. As the health of the human population was threatened by the marsh, as the marsh had become unhealthy due to urban

and industrial pollution, and as the marsh became an opportunity for industrial development, the marsh had to be filled.

Bird-watchers and wetland conservationists were not blind to the value of the marsh and its role in the Toronto bioregion. George Fairfield's anthology of writings by Bodsworth, and other ornithologists, including himself, about Ashbridge's Bay Marsh mourns its death and the death of something important and vital to them, a common response to the loss of wetlands. Mourning and melancholy are linked but different as Freud theorized in his famous essay of this title. Mourning for the loss of the wetland is distinct from the melancholy associated with the wetland for in the former the subject mourns the loss of the object, or the abject, outside oneself, whereas in the latter the subject mourns the loss of the object of oneself within the abject such as the wetland. As a result, the subject experiences itself as loss in relation to the lost object of oneself and the lost abject of the wetland.

Fairfield (1998: 1) begins by relating how "Ashbridge's Bay was one of the greatest freshwater marshes in Canada. It provided a home for untold numbers of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and birds. It was an important stopover and feeding place for a myriad of migrating water birds." He concludes in his "Afterword" that "no part of Canada's natural environment was been more thoroughly stamped out of existence than the magnificent marsh that was known as Ashbridge's Bay" (124). Monstrous dredging, draining, and filling machines were the agents of the modern industrial "stamping out of existence" of Ashbridge's Bay Marsh and other wetlands around the world.

The destruction of the marsh can be traced, and has left a trace, in the maps of the city as it has developed and changed over time. Historians of the city of Toronto (most recently Hayes, 2008) note the marshy location for the original settlement and trace the filling of Ashbridge's Bay Marsh (especially graphically in maps). The map is an instrument of colonization as it subjects the earth to the grid of longitude and latitude, reduces the heights and depths of the earth to surface, and freezes the diachronic processes of the earth in one synchronic moment of time. The maps of the marsh are no exception. Reading the maps of the present area in terms of the absences of wetlands that were mapped in the past is a means of decolonizing the map, and the wetland, and retrieving its buried history. Retelling the stories of the

wetland is also a means of decolonizing the colonization and destruction of the wetland by the city.

The process of destruction of Ashbridge's Bay Marsh can be readily traced through maps, as can the history of York/Toronto and the plans for "development" of the marsh. Ashbridge's Bay Marsh has been "stamped out of existence," but the life of the marsh and the process of stamping it out of existence have left a trace in maps. These maps can be used to walk the city relocating its traces in drains and streets. Bouchette's map (undated) reproduced by Hayes (2008: map 48 and 33) and Wickson (2002: 16) shows the "Town of York" as a grid-plan town with square city blocks (for the grid-plan town and mapping as instruments of colonization, see Giblett, 1996: chapter 3). Bouchette's map also shows the large area of a yet unnamed and undescribed "Marsh" to the southeast of the town. The Royal Engineers' (Firth, 1966; Hayes, 2008: map 63 and 44) map of 1833 describes "a deep swamp full of intricate channels and extensive ponds," an enticing and intriguing counterpoint to Jameson's "mere swamp" and "tangled wilderness," and one of the few instances of positive press for Ashbridge's Bay Marsh in the nineteenth century.

Wetlands pose a problem for mapping as maps generally distinguish land from water, but wetlands can be inundated tidally or seasonally, or intermittently by flooding, so their extent fluctuates and varies over time. Maps are synchronic and static as they record and freeze the configuration of a place at a particular moment in time, whereas wetlands are diachronic and dynamic as they change their configuration of land and water from day to day, season to season, sometimes hour by hour depending on tides, and other inflows and outflows, rising and falling water levels, such as those produced by rivers, or floods, or droughts. In her PhD thesis completed at the University of Toronto in 2010, Jennifer Bonnell (2010) highlighted these problems with mapping Ashbridge's Bay Marsh in a section on "Mapping the Marsh." Many maps of York/Toronto show a putative clear boundary between the bay and the marsh, and depict various configurations of land and water and watercourses of the River Don (see Hayes, 2008), whereas the marsh was much more dynamic, as Bonnell argues and as maps generally don't show, in a defiant act of recalcitrance, if not resistance on the part of the marsh.

The Toronto Harbor Commissioners' map of the Toronto Waterfront in 1912 shows Ashbridge's Bay as an open body of water with "marsh lands" between

it and “Toronto Bay” to the west (Wickson, 2002: 40). The Commissioners in the same year also produced a plan for the future development of Ashbridge’s Bay transformed into the “Port Industrial District.” This plan was also “drawn over existing conditions” (in other words, over the previous map and over the marsh) (41; Hayes 2008: map 189, 124–125). The development plan was for a new grid-plan town of industrial lots and shipping berths imposed over the fluid, irregular, and irrational shapes of Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh. Of the 316 maps in total in Hayes’s *Historical Atlas of Toronto*, over 50 depict and/or name Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh in whole or in part.

As part of the research for her PhD thesis on the Don River Valley, Jennifer Bonnell (2010) codirected a project with University of Toronto Map and GIS Librarian Marcel Fortin to assemble archival maps of the valley that show the historical diminution and ultimate destruction of Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh. These are available online (*Don Valley Historical Mapping Project*, 2009). Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh has been stamped out of existence, but it lives on virtually and has an uncanny afterlife in cyberspace, a poor substitute for the once living wetland itself. Ashbridge’s Bay Marsh for ornithologists and wetland conservationists “is gone, but not forgotten” (Fairfield, 1998: 62). That remembering takes place in maps in space and in cyberspace, through walking the city and retracing the life (and death) of the marsh in drains and streets, and through retelling the stories across time of the fraught relationships between culture and nature, city and wetland, past and present, of this place and its people in the competing cultures of natures. Yet rather than bemoan the acts of the past and the facts of history, and mourn the loss of the melancholic marsh, the point for, and contribution of, environmental cultural studies, or ecocultural studies, is to change attitudes and behaviors in the present toward wetlands and other habitats in order to try to prevent the repetition of past mistakes of wetland destruction, to promote wetland conservation in the present and future, and to nurture among residents of Toronto bio- and psychosymbiotic livelihoods in their bioregional home habitat of the living earth.