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Trees, Ecophilia, & Ecophobia: A Look at Arboriculture along the Front Range Cities of Colorado

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and when it was forbidden to climb them
they have carried me in their branches

~ W. S. Merwin, from "Trees"

The October 2009 *National Geographic* photograph of the Coast Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*), orchestrated by Michael Nichols, reminds us just how difficult it is to capture a tree through a lens. Towering over 300 feet with a hundred foot crown, the Redwood required eighty-four separate photographs that were stitched together (see video) [1] As an arborist, I am beyond envious of the crew who climbed the surrounding trees, placed rigging gear for the cameras, camped out in the forest, and made it into the photograph. I know how profound a psychosomatic engagement with a tree is. Photographs inspire awe, but to be in the tree is a sensory overload: the smell of live wood and sap, scrapes on the skin, rough bark, thermal fluctuations throughout the varying density of foliage, wind on the sweaty skin, and at times (at least where I live) the wing beats of a blue heron echoing throughout the expansive sanctuary. And the sensations linger. My wife, when she gets home from work asks, "Another cottonwood today?" She can tell simply from its distinct odor in my hair.

One consequence of my time spent climbing Plains Cottonwoods (*Populus sargentii*) in the cities along Colorado's Front Range is that Nichols' photograph inspires dreams of smelling like a Redwood.

I pursue arboriculture because, like most other arborists, I love trees. I am beyond the stage of tree hugger. I climb them, prune them, take care of them, advocate for them, all the while being changed by their existence. I can look at a tree for hours and never lose intrigue. Our vacations are to Sequoia National Park (where the tree with the largest volume in the world grows, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*) and to the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest near Bishop, CA (where there are 19 bristlecone over 4,000 years old, *Pinus longaeva*). When we have only a week vacation, it means we drive quickly through

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Yosemite. I am not calloused to Yosemite Valley. El Capitan, Half Dome, and the Merced River move me, but the trees run deeper. I admit it. Near the base of El Capitan, I kept getting distracted by the primordial architecture of oak (*Quercus kelloggii*).

This love for more-than-human life[2] is often denoted by the word *biophilia*, but I prefer the term *ecophilia*—for the latter includes inanimate "life." Part of being in a tree is the hyperawareness of wind, the formation of clouds, and at times the gurgle of a nearby stream, as well as the interrelationships between the trees and the surrounding ecosystem. *Eco* is therefore the apt prefix. Working in the arboriculture industry, I witness countless individuals who share this ecophilia. It's one of the reasons why the job is rewarding. On the other hand, I also witness ecophobia, or the "irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world" day in and day out.[3] Mostly, traces of ecophobia surface in conversations with homeowners, but there are times when I have witnessed arborists cross the line with ecophobic attitudes.

Having always loved nature, the prevalence of ecophobia surprised me at first. But upon reflection, it makes sense. My work is forever complicated by its being situated in the nexus between nature and the city. Philosophically, I strive to dissolve the binary completely, but in reality, I can at best argue that the boundary is osmotic. Most of my work is in Longmont and Boulder. Occasionally, I work in Fort Collins and Denver. In all four cities, the line between the city and nature is not distinct, for there is much more nature within the city than some people would like to admit. I have become aware of the sheer volume of leaves and photosynthetic energy, and of all the little creatures that I encounter within the microcosmic world of the tree. From the ground, we have no perspective. Within a mature Plains Cottonwood that has a ninety foot crown (*Populus sargentii*), I see or hear raccoons, squirrels, a host of birds (including Bald Eagles), bats, frogs, foxes (in their dens at the base), bees, grasshoppers, spiders, garter snakes—but this is all in an urban environment.[4] So when others see skyscrapers, roads, and traffic, I see the ebb and flow of an urban ecosystem, diminished though it may be. While others believe nature to be outside the city, I see it pulsating up and down each street. While others strive to push out the ecosystem and supplant it with Kentucky Bluegrass and a plastic flamingo, I see the beautiful stubbornness of the mouse. Many end up hating such mice as they transgress the superficial boundary, and it is no wonder that ecophobic attitudes exist where nature refuses to be snuffed out. Arboriculture exposes the osmotic reality between the city and nature, and as a result, I have become increasingly sensitive to perspectives that dissolve and perspectives that perpetuate the boundary, to ecophilia and ecophobia respectively.

Perhaps the best expression of ecophilia that I have encountered as an arborist involves people saying goodbye to trees that have been, for one reason or another, scheduled for removal—but first I must frame the valedictions. I can still remember my first climbing removal of a Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) in the foothills of the Rockies. The mountain pine beetle infested it, and for mitigation reasons it was scheduled for removal. I am more than aware of the arrogance and speciesism latent in this decision. We value the pine more than the beetle, even though the beetle is an integral part of the life-cycle of forests.[5] Of course, all this is complicated by the question of global-warming, which has perpetuated drier conditions in the Rocky Mountains. Whether the severity of drought in the Rocky Mountains is "normal" or a result of global warming caused by humans is a debate all in itself. The

pertinent point is the lack of moisture. With the paucity of water, the trees lack the sap to fight, and more succumb to the death throes of the fungus transmitted by the boring beetles.

In this particular removal, there were two obstacles: a house and power lines. There was no way to fell the tree from the ground. I therefore spiked up the tree (a practice only applied to removals, NEVER to pruning), delimbing it on the way. I tied a second line into the top and tossed it to the crew, rappelled down my line, anchored in, pulled my line from the top of the tree, cut my notch—and then, as I began the back-cut, every one of my veins palpitated with adrenaline. The crew on the ground kept their line taut, and as the top began to fall, I hit the break on the chainsaw, pulled the saw clear, and watched. When observing other climbers from the ground, I had underestimated the impact of the snap. When half of the tree cracked free, the spar vibrated violently back and forth. After everything settled down, I was glad to have all my teeth. Every time I work on a big removal, the adrenaline is there. The fear is there. Dealing with what we call "big wood" is always dangerous. Most of the deaths in the arboriculture industry are caused by "big wood" falling on the ground crew. Dangerous work is a rush, but I would never call it "fun." Removals have always been the worst part of my job. I hate to see any tree come down.

When I was at Sequoia National Park, I learned that there was a time when human structures were built close to the trees. (Now all structures have been moved out of most of the groves.) A Giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) once threatened one of these human structures, so they cut down the tree to protect the building. The informational sign then read, "We did not realize we were protecting the wrong thing." What if we often protect the wrong thing? When I finished felling the other half of the Ponderosa, I had a pang in my psyche. Something that beautiful should not come down that fast, which demonstrates yet again the "now, now" mentality entrenched within American ideology. If we had left the tree, it may have died quickly (once the fungus settled in), but even so the tree may still stand fifty years before toppling—still integrated in its environment. I still wrestle with that Ponderosa Pine removal. At times, late at night, I wonder if I should have advocated for the tree, stood up to my boss, the homeowner, and Colorado State University's forestry department, who, recognizing the complexity of the beetle kill issue, made the hard decision to educate the public on how to control its spread by removing compromised trees. I wonder why I didn't argue that we should, like a wild fire, let the beetle run its course. We built the homes in the foothills, and now we want those foothills purged of the beetle? Part of the mitigation effort is to stop the spread of the beetle into lower elevations. I understand that, but I also know that the Ponderosa Pine could have fought off the beetle. Upon investigation, we did not discover galleries or larva beneath the bark nor any blue-stain in the sapwood, which 1) suggests the Ponderosa was doing a good job fighting off the beetle and 2) makes the decision to remove it all the more painful.

Regardless of how vociferations sound late at night, in the morning they sound naive. In a utopia, I would never cut down a tree, but the cities along the Front Range and the communities in the foothills are not a utopia. None of our trees have the clout that the Giant Sequoia have (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*)—which are known to exceed 3,000 years in age—except one. Outside of Hygiene, CO, the largest Plains Cottonwood in the United States grows (*Populus sargentii*). That tree is protected. But must a tree be a champion in order for its life to be deemed "valuable"? I am afraid the answer to that

question is "yes." The reality is that in an urban environment, the buildings, streets, thoroughfares, and people in parks are all protected first and foremost. Even arborists (like myself) who advocate for the trees must acquiesce when human safety is threatened. The trees in an urban setting, at times, must come down. Fortunately, I have witnessed many removals where the trees received valediction not only from the crew, but also from the homeowner, a sure sign of ecophilia. One of these times, the reason for removal was a major failure caused by severe weather. Both the husband and the wife took the day off of work, and they kept reappearing during the removal. At different times, both were visibly emotional. They had planted a Weeping Willow when their kids were born (*Salix babylonica*), and the tree had grown into their lives. But my frustration is that both of them were too abashed of their ecophilia and their emotion. They tried to hide it in furtive glances, and if a tear or two did rise to the surface, they quickly said something like, "Oh, I am being foolish...it is only a tree." It is only a tree. Really? I don't think so. Identifying with the more-than-human life of the earth—even within an urban context—is a crucial dynamic in what it means to be human. Without nature, we are alienated beings. With nature, we exist within the richness of a host of interrelationships. I wish we could say goodbye with confidence and that people did not act so sheepish. I wanted to say to that couple, "It is vital to mourn. Say goodbye. A portion of your ecological self has been diminished today.[6] It is not just a tree. It was a presence that helped sustain many of the birds and critters you (hopefully) enjoyed while you drank your morning coffee. Your children swung on the lower branches. Take the time necessary to grieve when a portion of your local ecosystem ceases to exist, regardless of how impoverished that system is." All I said in response, though, was "Hey, it's ok. I understand. Would you like us to wait a minute before proceeding with the removal?"

Perhaps the reason why so many of us are abashed when saying goodbye to a tree is because of the prevailing ideology of entitlement. Genesis' dominion is not all to blame, but the ideology that says the earth is a resource specifically for human use makes people callous. It is hard, therefore, to go against the grain of entitlement, to say, "I don't think we are entitled to cut down that tree; I think we should move the house." We are not supposed to care when the Colorado River no longer reaches the Sea of Cortez. After all, God does not care. As long as humans are getting water for their golf courses in Vegas, the environment can wait. If a tree threatens a human structure, forget the tree. What matters on this earth is human life. I do not know why the dominion of Genesis is not trumped by the beatitude, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." I prefer, though, Ani Difranco's rendition, "Let the earth inherit the meek," for she flips the earth from the direct object to becoming the more prominent subject noun.[7] Meekness is recognizing that when a tree is removed, all the life within the urban ecosystem is diminished—including human life. We must mourn such a loss, and if someone argues that a Genesis-based entitlement is more valid than an ecocentric ideology, she or he had better rethink the weight of the Sermon on the Mount. The dearth of meekness coupled with a sense of entitlement is the root cause for 1) the exploitation of slaves and women; 2) the destructive impulse of imperialism and colonialism which resulted in the eradication of native and aboriginal people and their cultures; and 3) the aggressive harvesting of "resources": I need a mast for my warship, so let's cut *every* old-growth White Pine down on the East Coast.[8] Genesis' dominion says, "Go ahead. Harvest the earth." The beatitude says, "There won't be an earth left to live in."

I witnessed some other people who said goodbye to a tree a little more confidently. They were not abashed of their meekness. It wasn't even a removal. All we did was prune six dead branches at the base of a thornless Honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos inermis*), which was battling a disease called *Thyronectria canker* (the canker is caused by a fungus). In order to mitigate the spread of the fungus, we removed the recently dead branches on which spores are produced. The pruning became difficult for the homeowners because their daughter, who was now roughly seventeen, had climbed on those lower branches ever since she could. Swinging on those branches shaped part of her sense of place and her sense of identity, and her multi-sensory identification with the tree created memories that went deep into her psyche. The smells of the tree, the coarseness of the bark on the skin, the sight of the leaves in autumn, the sound of the empty branches in a winter wind—all of these sensations affected her to the point that it was difficult to part. During the pruning, both the father and the daughter appeared at separate times, asking for a portion of one of the dead branches as a keepsake. Throughout their valediction, both were visibly somber, pensive, and above all, meek.

My final ecophilic anecdote involves a mature Plains Cottonwood (*Populus sargentii*), native to Colorado's Plains. The family purchased their home, fifteen years prior, because of the presence of the mature trees. Unfortunately (from a human perspective), Cottonwoods decay easily. At the base of this tree, we could see a decay pocket, but we did not know how big it was. After several conferences with the homeowners, it was decided to prune the tree with the purpose of reducing weight and mitigating the danger. As we pruned, we kept finding large decay pockets in several of the large leads. Soon, we exposed the decay pocket at the base. It was at least eight feet deep and five feet wide. In any municipal setting, the tree would be immediately removed. Too dangerous. This family, though, had a deep identification with the tree. They also had two children who loved to run in the yard beneath the now ominous limbs. The husband, upon seeing no other alternative, turned away. When he turned back, his upper-right cheek quivered, "Can you give me a moment?" He had to say goodbye. He also had to go to work, but I think he did what was right. He stuck around for another couple hours and took several photographs. He asked us to leave as much of the stump as possible. (We left about thirty gnarly feet, a vestige of the once august architecture.) Sometimes, work can wait.

However, these refreshing stories that exhibit varying levels of ecophilia are countered by a fierce opposition to the natural world. For every story of ecophilia, there is a story of ecophobia, and the groundless hate for trees and the creatures they support manifests itself in many guises. Some of the expressions are seemingly benign while others are down right malicious. There is the perspective that urban trees are a crop, an aesthetic commodity to be planted and then cut down when they outgrow their space. People that view trees as such commodities may still love the trees, but the worth of the tree is still determined from an anthropocentric perspective: they make the cityscape feel a little greener. Some trees are appreciated more than others, and when a tree is undesirable, ecophobia lurks. Arborists and homeowners alike often express speciesism through the use of the term "trash-tree." Along the Front Range of Colorado, the Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) gets the brunt of the "trash tree" comments. It spreads like a "weed"; it has thorns; and they are routinely planted for wind breaks and therefore are rarely pruned. They look, at first glance, egregious. Moreover, they can be invasive to Colorado's open space areas where much human effort works to preserve and cultivate native ecosystems. Efforts to restore native ecosystems

are crucial, but there is still no reason to refer to the Russian Olive as "trash." It is still a tree, and in Colorado's cities, very few of the trees planted are native. So when a homeowner or an arborist lashes out against the Russian Olive, I try to counter the ecophobia with a couple of stories about climbing Russian Olives that have helped me appreciate their existence. They can have a stark architecture of leads and limbs, a wild expression of patterns inside patterns that is no less pulchritudinous than Colorado's Sand Dunes at dusk with the play of light and shadow. The bark is slightly hirsute with deep reds, purples, and browns mixed with ashen grays. As a result of the layered hues, the bark contrasts strikingly with the sage-colored leaves. The colors of the sapwood and heartwood, exposed only in a removal but nonetheless come to mind while pruning, boast a richness like that of a walnut. They also support, like any other tree, many birds and mammals who would agree with me that it is not a "trash-tree." What is ironic about the human hatred for a Russian Olive is the tree's implicit resemblance to human progress. From an ecocentric perspective, we are a "trash-species." Humans invade preexisting ecosystems; humans spread like a "weed"; and humans boast metaphorical thorns of pesticides, herbicides, traps, and vehicles which pummel animals daily on all of our roads. My efforts to persuade people to appreciate Russian Olives, however, are often bootless, for it is very difficult to inspire an ecophilic perspective for a "trash-tree" in a person who already has a predilection towards hating it.

Some people hate trees even if they do not have the status of "trash tree." I have had a homeowner look me in the eye and with hostility growl, "I hate that tree," pointing a finger at me and then at her Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*). Frankly, I would never plant a Silver Maple in Colorado. They are not native and certainly not xerophilous needing much more water than our arid climate provides. But hate?—never. Too harsh a word. Similarly, another homeowner hated his Catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*) because of the mess. Sure, Catalpa trees have gigantic leaves and foot long pods, but they also have impressive white blossoms that should be worth it all. I asked him if he appreciated the shade or the screening from his neighbors, hoping to strike (at the very least) an anthropocentric chord as to why the tree is valuable. After gentle prodding, he did admit that he liked the shade, the screening, and the flowers, "but the mess is enough to make you mad!" I felt hopeless. How will this particular human ever recognize the intrinsic value of a Catalpa? I felt like I was butting up against not a human, but an ideology that says we are entitled to a mess free earth. Give me nature, but give it to me immaculate, regardless if the "messy" leaves are in fact a vital function to the well-being of an ecosystem. We rake away the leaves and later have to add nitrogen to the soil.

And it is not just the trees that elicit ecophobic remarks, but also the life they support. I learned the hard way not to mention raccoons or squirrels to homeowners. When I began climbing trees, I thought that I might find some common ground with the homeowner through asking if they had seen raccoons living in the decay pockets of their Plains Cottonwood (*Populus sargentii*). E. E. Cummings has a great poem about all the "nocturnal citi / zens" of the earth emerging at twilight.[9] How impressive would it be to watch several raccoons emerge amongst the stoic leads of a tree?—but I was naive to the fact that many people consider such nocturnal creatures as nefarious. "You have some magnificent Cottonwoods in your yard. Do you ever see raccoons emerging along the branches at twilight?" He replied, "Yea, they get into my trash and cause a racket and my dog barks at them all night...I got to get a trap or a gun one of these days or I'll never get no peace and quiet."

Some people want nature, but only on their terms. Sadly, many feel a sense of entitlement to uphold the arbitrary boundary between human civilization and ecosystems. Instead of appreciating the creatures within our urban forest, many acrimoniously oppose them—including some arborists. I will not justify the fact that many arborists loathe dealing with squirrels—which often leads to an open hatred—but the following anecdote needs framing. Along the Front Range, many people have planted Siberian Elms (*Ulmus pumila*). They respond slightly better to our arid climate than American Elms (*Ulmus americana*). Well, squirrels love the bark and often gnaw on a branch until it is girdled completely around. Due to the sudden cutoff of sap flow, the branch dies. I have been in a tree where hundreds of branches have been damaged, and as a climber, getting to the tips of the wispy branches is down right challenging—even dangerous. After spending a week chasing squirrel damage, it is hard (but not impossible) to maintain an affinity for the mammal. Many arborists, including myself, heed to the core of the Hippocratic Oath—do no harm—but that did not keep one particular arborist from manifesting his ecophobia in graphic terms. I encountered this arborist at a convention, and I heard his story afterwards at a bar where many arborists convened. He owned several Siberian Elms, and the squirrels routinely girdled the branches, so he began trapping, killing, and disposing of the "pests." However, his neighbor is a member of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), so when he began his anti-squirrel campaign, his neighbor became vocal. Perhaps the beers made him too loose, but he began making what he thought were jokes about how he should snap the head off the next squirrel and leave both the body and the head on the neighbor's front doorstep. This "joke" was followed by two more atrocious ideas: 1) lynch a squirrel on the neighbor's tree; and 2) crucify a squirrel, splay open the stomach, and leave it in the neighbor's flower pot. A few arborists nervously chuckled, and one voice from the back said that he ought to let his neighbor and the squirrels be. It is naive to believe that every arborist epitomizes ecophilia. Some obviously don't. What's disturbing about his ideas is that they echo the horrific past of humans torturing other humans. Particularly, his idea to lynch a squirrel conjures up the brutal memories of the KKK, and it made me wonder how many similar "jokes" were shared during the fight for Civil Rights. Upon leaving the bar, I felt particularly depressed. How can environmental justice ever dawn if there are arborists who harbor a deep hatred for other living creatures? I should not, though, be surprised by the decimation of the squirrel. Epoch after epoch of history documents humans turning upon other humans, including ethnic cleansing, genocide, war, slavery, rape. In all of these cases, the physical suffering seeps deep into the psyche of the victims, leaving wounds that perhaps never heal. We treat the environment as we treat each other, and often there is a baseless irrationality to purge a landscape of undesirable life-forms who are wrongly deemed as trash: trash trees, trash plants, trash critters, and trash humans. If we cannot eradicate the impulse to destroy our own kind, how will we ever cease our thoughtless purging of the meek creatures inhabiting the earth with us?

These overt manifestations of ecophobia are contrasted by a subtle and insidious form, one that is complicated through its commingling with ecophilia. Many people living in an arid climate still have engrained in their psyche that a healthy ecosystem is green.[10] Moreover, this green ecosystem must have trees. The green and tree-filled prototype is deeply entrenched within American ideology, so much so that it followed in the wake of Manifest Destiny.[11] When the pioneers traversed the Great Plains,

they discovered trees that were, surprisingly for an arid climate, far from xerophilous. Like elephants, Willows and Cottonwoods are hydrophilous, growing only in stands along the rivers that flow east from the Continental Divide. Other than the groves along the rivers, the landscape seemed barren, so they planted trees. Today, few people seem to recognize that the Front Range cities are situated on the west edge of the Great Plains where few trees ever grew, for inhabitants often identify more with the looming mountains directly westward. Now, tens of thousands of trees are rooted from Fort Collins down to Denver, including the thornless Honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos inermis*), Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), Black Ash (*Fraxinus nigra*), White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*), White Oak (*Quercus alba*), Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*), Amur Maple (*Acer ginnala*), Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*), Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*), Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*), American Elm (*Ulmus americana*), Siberian Elm (*Ulmus pumila*), Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), Big Leaf Linden or American Basswood (*Tilia americana*), Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*), Catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*), and many fruit trees—just to name a few. All of these trees are exotic to the Great Plains, and each of these trees struggle in a Plains climate unless they are irrigated. I wonder if a portion of the impetus for the planting of these trees is an ecophobic confusion caused by the seeming aberration of the vastness of the Plains. The ecology of the Plains does not fit within an environmental prototype that includes trees. Yes, we plant trees because we love them. But maybe we also plant them because of an aversion to the grasslands.

The ecophilic/ecophobic tension is compounded by the fact that some homeowners try to practice xeriscaping, so they plant trees that are native to Colorado: Quaking Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), Colorado Spruce (*Picea pungens*), Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), Piñon Pine (*Pinus edulis*), and the Rocky Mountain Bristlecone Pine (*Pinus aristata*). These trees are native, but only to Colorado's mountains where the growing season is short and summer temperatures are cooler. Bioregions do not follow political boundaries. In the "Plains Life Zone" of Colorado, which ranges from 3,500 feet to 5,500 feet and includes the Front Range cities, these "native" trees are as exotic as any in the long list above.[12] Early in the economic recession, I worked on several recently purchased foreclosures. The landscaping hadn't received water for one or two summers, and the "native" trees struggled and manifested signs of stress. Already in June, the Aspen's leaves were half yellow and a Spruce's blue had hints of brown throughout its needles. Yellow leaves in June reveal that a tree is shutting down, preparing for winter. An abundance of brown needles is axiomatic. Too many more summers in the Plains without irrigation will result in a dead tree. To put it starkly, when a homeowner asks me what native trees they could plant in Longmont, I can give three suggestions: the Narrowleaf Cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*), the Plains Cottonwood (*Populus sargentii*), and the Peachleaf Willow (*Salix amygdaloides*). However, because these three trees are hydrophilous—and because only a small percentage of homes exist along a river in the Plains—it is perhaps wiser to plant hardier trees like the Honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) or the Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) that, though exotic, need less irrigation and therefore do better in our xeric climate. The more I muse about the trees along the Front Range, the more I wonder how ethical it is to plant any of them. During the drier summers, we have watering restrictions, but why did we plant trees in the Plains in the first place? It is not sustainable. The urban forest in the Front Range cities is, above

all, forced, and the homonym illustrates how something can seem one way but in reality be something completely different. I never thought planting a tree could be an expression of ecophobia, but the love of one organism quells the existence of the local Plains ecosystem—an ecosystem that, judging by our irrational and groundless actions to modify it through the planting of exotic trees, is loathsome. Many of us living in the Front Range, myself included, are still too unsettled by a treeless expanse to be at home in the Plains.

Looking ahead, I will still work as an arborist, loving the trees and all the creatures I encounter within the cities of the Front Range. On Arbor Day, I will still set up my educational station, which is a 200 foot timeline along a sidewalk that chronicles how long various species of trees live within climax ecosystems. I will still belay children and adults as they climb into a tree, perhaps for the first time, hoping they cultivate an identification with the more-than-human life in our city. However, once the festivities draw to a close, I will tie my gear to the back of my small motorcycle and set out east, past the reach of the urban forest, past the farms, till I am engulfed in the vastness of the Plains. I may have to head a bit north to the Pawnee Grasslands, which are protected, and there I will watch the antelope and the coyote; trace the coarseness of rocks that were once part of the mountains; discern the tactile differences between myriad plant species; hear the wind, mingled with moonlight, play along the edges of innumerable blades of grass; and I will return with sage lingering in the roots of my hair.

Endnotes

[1]Michael Nichols, "Redwoods Gatefold," *National Geographic*, October 17, 2009. See http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/video/player#/?titleID=nichols-redwoods-gatefold&catID=1

[2] Tom Lynch, *Xerophilia: Ecocritical Explorations in Southwestern Literature* (Lubbock: Texas Tech UP, 2008). Lynch uses the term "more-than-human" throughout *Xerophilia*, and he shares why: "Rather than implying a separation of humans and nature, the phrase suitably embeds humans within the natural world as a limited component" (233). I have chosen to use this term not only in this article, but also when discussing urban ecology with arborists and homeowners alike. If we have learned anything from the work of gender, class, and race studies, it is that language reflects and shapes an ideology. It is time we all become intentional with language so as to perpetuate a more ecocritical understanding of cities.

[3] Simon C. Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 2 (2009): 208. Admittedly, the Greek root here is cumbersome. Many will interpret "ecophobia" as the fear of nature even though Estok clearly emphasizes that it signifies the hate of nature. I have not yet found a word that separates the hate of nature from the fear of nature. Fear of the unknown can lead to hatred, but this progression may or may not happen. Likewise, many people hate creatures or trees that they are not afraid of. Throughout this essay, I consistently use ecophobia to denote the hate of nature until the end. In the final discussion, the hate of nature softens to a xenophobic aversion to an ecosystem that some people consider strangely foreign. Perhaps few would admit that the Great Plains are strange, but why then do most communities, towns, and cities inevitably alter it?

[4] Each life-form listed I have witnessed. Concerning the bat, I have only encountered one. It was midday, and the furry creature was hunkered down deep in the furrows of the Cottonwood's bark. I presume it was waiting for dusk rather than brave the sun to seek a more suitable daytime haunt.

[5] Donald Peattie, *A Natural History of North American Trees* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 67-68. The current beetle kill infiltrating the forests in and surrounding Rocky Mountain National Park, though drastic and alarming, is indeed part of the cycle of Lodgepole Pine forests (*Pinus contorta*). The beetles gain momentum during drought years, and they precede a holocaust which helps establish the grounds for a new forest. The mountain pine beetle has spread to lower elevations, threatening other species of pine in the forests of the

foothills and even in some pines growing in the plains. Human communities have worked with Colorado State University's forestry department on plans to mitigate the spread of the beetle. The plan involves the removal of trees that have the tell-tale sign of beetle entry: clumps of sap and sawdust pushed out of the beetle's entry point. If the tree keeps the beetles out with its sap, it has a chance; but once the fungus settles in, death is imminent.

[6] For more discussion of the "ecological self," see Arne Naess' *The Ecology of Wisdom*.

[7] Ani Difranco, "The Atom," in *Red Letter Year* (Buffalo: Righteous Babe Records, 2008).

[8] Peattie, *History*. Peattie documents the three hundred years of Eastern White Pine exploitation (*Pinus strobus*), noting that the "Eastern White Pine, more than any other tree in the [United States], built this nation, literally and figuratively" (33). Ships, masts, furniture, and homes were built out of it, and it was exported to "England, Portugal, Spain, Africa, [and] the West Indies" (29). In fact, during the Revolutionary War, patriots sabotaged Britain's efforts to harvest the White Pine for masts, and when that sabotage was successful, the patriots harvested them to make their own ships. This is why the White Pine is the emblem of the first revolutionary flag (32). The harvesting resulted in the complete annihilation of the old growth Eastern White Pine groves. One positive result, though, of this decimation before, during, and after the Revolutionary War is that when the same exploitation threatened the Giant Sequoia and Coast Redwood trees (*Sequoiadendron giganteum* and *Sequoia sempervirens*), John Muir and others persuaded people to learn from history.

[9] E. E. Cummings, *Complete Poems, 1904-1962*, ed. George J. Firmage (New York: Liveright, 1991), 600. For the capitalization of Cummings' name, see Norman Friedman's "Not 'e. e. cummings'" and "Not 'e. e. cummings' Revisited." In the following poem, Cummings splits the word "citizen" into "citi / zen" thereby playing with the notion that even in an urban space, a *citi*, one can experience the hushness of Zen (I am indebted to Michael Webster for this insight). Cummings reminds us, therefore, that creatures are not commodities or pests but rather something sacred. The tree. The raccoons. The nocturnal animals.

hush)
noones
are coming
out in the gloam
ing together are
standing together un
der a particular tree
are all breathing bright darkness to
gether are slowly all together

very magically smiling and if

we are not perfectly careful be
lieve me you and i'll go strolling
right through these each illimit
able to speak very
softly altogeth
er miracu
lous citi
zens of
(hush

[10] Lynch, *Xerophilia*. Tom Lynch traces the environmental obsession with the color green back through our language to the fertile island of England (30-34). Lynch highlights the irony that even though "green" symbolizes the environmental movement, the greenest landscapes in the Southwest are the least environmentally appropriate plants in a desert: the green grass of a golf course. Though the west edge of the

Great Plains is not a desert, it is far from lush, and many have tried to manipulate the plains to be something that they are not.

[11] Walt Whitman, *Whitman: Poetry and Prose* (New York: The Library of America, 1982). The following passage elucidates just how engrained a green and tree-filled landscape is within our concept of a healthy ecosystem. In "Prairie Analogies—The Tree Question" Walt Whitman, the great bard, shares his desire to turn the grasslands into forests—as if the grasslands did not suffice as they are:

> Some think the plains have been originally lake-beds; others attribute the absence of forests to the fires that almost annually sweep over them.... The tree question will soon become a grave one. Although the Atlantic slope, the Rocky mountain region, and the southern portion of the Mississippi valley, are well wooded, there are here stretches of hundreds and thousands of miles where either not a tree grows, or often useless destruction has prevail'd; and the matter of the cultivation and spread of forests may well be press'd upon thinkers who look at the coming generations of the prairie States. (865-66)

[12] J. Klett, B. Fahey, and R. Cox, "Native Trees for Colorado Landscapes," *Colorado State University Extension*, July 2008, http://www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/Garden/07421.html.