Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vcrt20

Arboreal Obliquity or Trees Doing the Human in Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*

Berthold Schoene

To cite this article: Berthold Schoene (19 Jan 2024): Arboreal Obliquity or Trees Doing the Human in Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*, Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, DOI: 10.1080/00111619.2024.2305262

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2024.2305262

Published online: 19 Jan 2024.

CRITIQUE: STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION
https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2024.2305262

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Arboreal Obliquity or Trees Doing the Human in Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*

Berthold Schoene

Department of English, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT

Tapping into Australian writing on arboreality, with a focus on Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* (1998), this investigation intervenes in Critical Plant Studies by exploring a dendrographic alternative to both extrinsic and intrinsic plant language and representation. The aim is to remediate the "doing of trees" one finds at work in approaches ranging from botanical taxonomy to literary arborealism. Set on breaking nature's silence, the urge in much arboreal writing has been to get trees to speak. By contrast, Bail's trees are *stumm*; there is no direct human/arboreal rapport. Instead, *Eucalyptus* is driven by what I term *arboreal obliquity*, a mode of narration that allows the trees to articulate their arboreality by "doing the human" without relying on human ventriloquy. At the same time as Bail portrays his eucalypts as resolutely aloof, he shows all human life in his novel to depend for its impetus in one way or another on the trees. Arboreal obliquity installs a lens that casts a distinctively arboreal light, instantiating Patrícia Vieira's *phytographia* which implies that plants compose and sustain, and thus *write*, the human lifeworld. Arboreal obliquity is invested in a radical decentering of the human, away from eco-materialist notions of human/nonhuman parity, enmeshment and interdependence.

In 1999 Murray Bail's novel *Eucalyptus* won Australia's prestigious Miles Franklin Literary Award, which recognizes each year the novel that most authentically portrays "Australian Life." Most of the reception of Bail's work has to date been concerned with what the text tells us about the Australian landscape and its part in shaping a national identity.[1] Such readings have been encouraged by the allegorical quality of *Eucalyptus* and its postcolonial outlook, starting with Bail's protagonist Holland whose name "invokes New Holland, an early colonial name for Australia" (Martin: 99) and his daughter Ellen whose "speckled beauty" is likened to that of the Australian landscape (Bail 1998: 32 and 136).[2] Holland purchases an abandoned farm, which – seemingly on a whim – he resolves to turn into "the ultimate Australian garden – consisting entirely of eucalypts, the archetypal Australian tree" (Martin 2015: 95). At the same time, Ellen's future appears settled by her father's edict that only a man "who correctly named every eucalypt on the property would win the hand of his daughter" (56). Holland's challenge requires no small feat from prospective suitors. A recent molecular analysis conducted by a team of Australian botanists confirms that the eucalypt genus includes over 800 named species (Thornhill et al) while, according to the Australian historian Bill Gammage, there is ultimately no such thing as a unified eucalyptus genus at all. Instead, eucalypts continue to "defy botanists, who now identify three genera, *Eucalyptus*, *Angophora* and *Corymbia*" (117).

Another eucalyptic Australian best-seller is Ashley Hay's *Gum: The Story of Eucalypts and Their Champions*, which provides a cultural history of Australia by telling the story of the country's

CONTACT Berthold Schoene b.schoene@mmu.ac.uk Department of English, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M15 6BH, UK

"eucalyptographers, [that is, individuals, scholarly and otherwise,] caught up with work that is inextricably eucalyptic" (3). Hay authenticates Holland's fictitious garden by referencing the work of plant scientist Dean Nicolle and his research laboratory at Currency Creek Arboretum in South Australia, which represents an uncanny real-life replica of Holland's endeavor. Nicolle launched his scientific enterprise in 1993, five years before Bail published his novel, and "by 2017 [he] had planted examples of 953 of the 988 known eucalypts – of which 784 species had flowered" (Hay 214). Yet Hay's account of Nicolle's work also highlights the monocultural artifice of ventures such as Holland's which, far from creating a wholesomely diverse national re-assemblage of trees, in fact necessitate the uprooting and ecological alienation of many species, possibly – in the long term – resulting even in their extinction. "In the natural landscape, without anyone to tend or nurture them, [. . .] many of the [eucalyptus species] have a surprisingly small range" (243), Hay writes, adding that "while the majority of eucalypt species grow [at Currency Creek], the arboretum's climatic conditions meant very few would reproduce" (251). In this light, Holland's arboretum comes to look like an unsustainable chimera, barely fit to symbolize the resilience and multicultural vigor of the Australian nation. The novel's pan-eucalyptic vision of indigenous arboreality as *one* exclusive genus quickly runs into difficulty as does the myth of its seemingly boundless diversity.

Interested primarily in Bail's treatment of the eponymous trees *as* trees, I shall read *Eucalyptus* within the context of current debates within Critical Plant Studies on plant language and representation. My particular interest is in *dendrography*, or "tree writing," encompassing writing both of and by trees. Bail's trees do not speak or communicate, yet all human life in the novel is cast in a distinctively arboreal light and shown to issue and unfold from "among the trees." I introduce the term *arboreal obliquity* to capture the trees' ability to manifest and articulate their arboreality by "doing the human," which – as illustrated by Matthew Battles in *Tree* – at once counters and closely correlates with our traditional human "ways of doing trees" (67). The article starts with a detailed close reading of *Eucalyptus*, across the first two sections, to refine the concept of arboreal obliquity and show it at work. The final third section then explores some of the ways in which the decentering of the human instigated by arboreal obliquity poses a challenge to current trends and assumptions in contemporary ecocriticism. The article concludes with a few examples of Australian arboreal theory and practice that appear to be reaching beyond obliquity not only by imagining trees doing the human but also the human entering into aesthetic and existential composition with the arboreal.

Eucalyptography

Bail uses the traditional nomenclature of arboreal taxonomy as a key structuring principle for his novel. Each chapter bears the name of a species of eucalypt, although it is at times difficult to discern any immediate correspondence between a chapter's thematic focus and its chosen eponymous tree. Reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's practice of dendrographic realism (Miller), or the arborealism one finds at work in more recent works of literature (Schoene "Arborealism, or Do Novels Do Trees?"), *Eucalyptus* presents itself from the outset as refracted through an arboreal lens, heralding a plot wholly immersed in treeness. Bail's device destabilizes the novel's traditional focus on human affairs by installing a series of arboreal portals that complicate access to the human drama and effectively insert a vegetal conduit between reader and text. In addition, his decision to occlude the common names of many of the trees in preference of their Latin epithets, which identify them primarily as objects of scientific investigation, begs the question if the novel's human characters might similarly be stripped of their personal individuality and instead be categorized into a spectrum of mere conspecifics, such as The Father, The Eucalyptographer, The Young Woman, The Storyteller, and so forth. Yet Bail would not be a postmodernist if his representation were always exactly what it seemed. As the following reading demonstrates, Bail is inclined to subvert or, at the very least, cast in considerable doubt what at first appears to be a relatively straightforward endeavor at arboreal representation.

On one hand, Bail's choice of "Obliqua" as the title for his opening chapter seems entirely appropriate as the name belongs to the first eucalyptus species ever to be taxonomically classified.

On the other, the plain English meaning of the Latin name (which translates as "slanting" or "indirect"), combined with an understanding of the colonial context of the tree's original classification, exposes the spuriousness and alienating inadequacy of the scientific nomenclature which is little to do with the actual trees and their arboreal authenticity, let alone the land and nation they have come to emblematize. As the Australian feminist Germaine Greer explains, the eucalyptus genus was first named by French naturalist Charles Louis L'Héritier de Brutelle (1746–1800) who, during his time as a visiting researcher at the British Museum in London in the late 1780s, designated as *obliqua* (with reference to the shape of its leaves) a specimen brought back from Tasmania by Captain Cook. "And so it was," Greer concludes, "that a man who never glimpsed the great south land, never saw a eucalypt in the wild, succeeded in naming the genus of the 'most important and dominant trees of the Australian flora'" (218). The novel itself draws attention to the inconsistent, arbitrary, and at times capricious naming practices of colonial plant science, which at best incorporated descriptions of the tree's anatomical features or a reference to the tree's natural habitat, invariably rendered in (often cacophonous) Latin. At worst, the nomenclature's sole purpose was to commemorate, according to Bail, "explorers and a few tree-interested politicians [. . .] amateur plant collectors, and a few watercolour artists" (98) or, as Greer puts it, "otherwise totally forgettable [male] individuals while telling you nothing whatsoever about the plants themselves" (210). Suffice it to say that "knowledge of the trees' Indigenous names or uses was rarely sought, rarely thought of or, if gathered, then often ignored" (Hay 34). As a result, there is precious little in the scientific nomenclature that could be identified either as truly eucalyptic-arboreal or as authentically Australian. Moreover, traditional taxonomy acts as a grave impediment to forming a genuine creaturely relationship with the plants. As David Abram deplores, "to define another being as an inert or passive object is to deny its ability to actively engage us and to provoke our senses; *we thus block our perceptual reciprocity with that being*" (56).

Bail understands that botanical taxonomy as "a system" is not really intended to celebrate nature's "chaotic diversity" and "unruly endlessness"; rather, its primary aim is to "humanise nature," keeping it securely contained (36). As Bail infers tellingly, the nomenclature affords an "escape [from] the darkness of the forest" (37). Accordingly, I am inclined to read Bail's opening exposition of "obliqua" in diametric opposition to Jessica Maufort's rather optimistic interpretation of "the act of naming [in *Eucalyptus* as] the human subject's constructive attempt at establishing a sense of place within a new territory" (14). Bail's novel deliberately sets off at a tangent, cultivating an attitude of obliquity from the start. Exposed as a quaint antiquarian curiosity, what the arboreal nomenclature cannot provide is a dependable hermeneutic frame that could encapsulate, let alone display in its full glory, the enigma of the eucalypts. Bail appropriates the trees' Latin epithets as he sees fit, installing the loosest and most indeterminate possible spectrum of signification, designed to blur rather than crystallize specificity. Eucalyptus owns all the following attributes: *desertorum*, *pulverulenta*, *diversifolia*, *transcontinentalis* and *globulus*, that is "of the desert," "dusty," "diverse," "universal" and "global." The etymology of *globulus* showcases the malleability of all the epithets: translated as "cosmopolitan," the designation represents an acute misconstrual while also delivering an illuminating truth. The Blue Gum (the tree's common name) was originally named *globulus* not for its alleged worldliness but simply "for the shape of its fruit." More recently, however, Bail explains, the name has come to describe "the imperial distribution of this majestic tree: throughout the Mediterranean, whole forests in California and South Africa, and all states of Australia" (40–1). Similarly, the most photogenic eucalypt and indeed "the most beautiful tree on earth," which in Bail's view is *E. papuana*, has "been done to death on our nation's [i.e. Australia's] calendars, postage stamps and tea-towels" (4) despite, somewhat discordantly, bearing the name of another nation.

Perhaps the most poignant example of the quintessential ambivalence inherent in the traditional taxonomy is *E. maidenii*, a specimen of which Holland gives to his daughter on her thirteenth birthday. An epitome of her burgeoning sexuality, it is described as having "grown as she had: slender, straight, pale [. . .] Ellen considered it female" (92). The "Maidenii" chapter centers around a scene of self-discovery that describes an intimate affinity of the young woman with her tree: "Facing the tree, the way she faced a long mirror, she took her breasts, and lifted them gently from the pull of the earth"

(92). All the more disconcerting, then, when "Ellen notice[s] a large rusty nail hammered into the trunk. It could only have been her father – who else? It gave her a strange feeling" (92). In the next chapter, further compounding and problematizing the image, "they began pissing, Mr Cave, her father, against the trunk" (96), Mr Cave being the prodigiously knowledgeable eucalyptographer, in age much closer to Holland than Ellen, who at this point in the novel seems destined to win Holland's naming contest and hence Ellen's hand in marriage. Later, caught in pouring rain and despairing over the likely outcome of her father's competition, Ellen "remove[s] her wet dress and place[s] it on the mysterious nail in the trunk of her tree." We are told that "without thinking, she'd come across the *E. maidenii* – and there was the nail. Hanging to dry, the dress repeated a collapsed version of herself" (206). Bail's knotted tangling of Ellen's sexual awakening with such crudely phallic and patriarchal-exhibitionist imagery gains in additional tension when we learn about the fundamental speciousness of the tree's epithet, whose association with Ellen's "maiden" status turns out to be an instance of egregious misinformation. The tree is in fact named after Joseph Henry Maiden (1869–1925), "father of Australian Botany" (Martin 2004: 91) and erstwhile director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney.

Bail leaves no doubt that we must emancipate our understanding of the trees from traditional eucalytography. As he writes, "we could go on forever holding up favourites or returning to botanical names which possess almost the right resonance [. . .] or which are hopelessly wide of the mark" (4–5). Instead, "all that's needed," he continues tantalizingly, "aside from a beginning itself, is a eucalypt independent of, yet one which . . . it doesn't really matter" (5). Perplexingly, just a few pages into the novel, it sounds like Bail is declaring defeat, as his own attempt at potentially devising a new eucalytography stalls in ellipsis. There is no one eucalypt we could ever hope to access authentically in its intrinsic arboreality, free of the distortions and obfuscations of botanical taxonomy. As a result, Bail seems prepared to discard any ambitions he may have had for writing an arborealist novel with the potential to culminate in "a real celebration of 'plantness'" (Gagliano et al 2017: xiii), proceeding instead, somewhat defensively, to tell us a standard fairy tale: "Once upon a time there was a man," he starts as if from scratch. "What's wrong with that?" (5) Nevertheless, the urge to write more specifically about the trees remains. As a compromise, mirroring Hay's practice in *Gum*, Bail embarks on a portrayal not of the trees *per se* but of the genus's collective impact on the human. Rather than giving in to the old eucalyptography's obsession with "doing the trees," the focus shifts onto "trees doing the human." Explaining her own approach in this regard Hay writes, "I wondered what sort of story would appear if a collection of eucalyptographers were run together," and she continues:

> If you joined up the different things they had noticed in their different lifetimes, perhaps you could see through what people had understood about these trees, what they had done with these trees, and on to how the trees had affected them in return – in the same way you can see the land, the light, the sky, always, through the trees' leaves. (3–4)

In Bail's novel, too, eucalyptus – like "gum"[3] – acquires an affective agency and sensory "feel"; it begins to serve as an enchanted lens that immerses the action within a sensuous, distinctively arboreal ambience. Similar to Hay's more historically inclined account, Bail's novel is increasingly transfused by eucalyptus, reflecting "the way sunlight breaks through their leaves [. . .] The smell of those leaves crushed" (Hay 2). Encountering the trees generates instances of intimate recognition and affinity: for example, "the sound their leaves make in the wind [. . .] it's like the sound you hear when you push your fingers through your hair – a sound that you hear inside yourself as well as outside" (Hay 2). Most of the novel's action unfolds "among the trees," which doubles as the *locus amoenus* of Ellen's trysts with the mysterious storyteller, Mr Cave's chief rival who eventually wins Holland's contest following a last-minute surprise *fait accompli*. Bail also takes pains to provide us with a sound etymological grasp of *eucalyptus*, which derives from Greek meaning "well-covered," in reference to the unique anatomy of the trees' buds. As Bail explains, the name "describes something peculiar to the genus. Until they open, ready for fertilization, the eucalypt's buds are covered by an operculum, in effect putting a lid on the reproductive organs" (35). Whereas the Latin epithets that distinguish between different species of

eucalypt are shown to fail at the task of arboreal authentication, it is intimated that the name given to the genus collectively harbors a promise of revelation. Albeit yet under wraps, what eucalyptus is *will* manifest and show itself; it will *eventually* unfurl and flourish. Seen in this light, *Eucalyptus* makes a perfect title for a novel with serious arborealist aspirations – a novel which, acutely apprehensive of its realist limitations, elects to resort to fairy-tale narration, to begin with at least.

Holland's garden project – his attempt to replicate the country in microcosm by growing on his farm eucalypts from across the land – is likened to Bail's composition of his novel: "A paragraph is not so different from a paddock – similar shape, similar function" (33). Readers of *Eucalyptus* cannot help empathizing with Ellen's suitors: like them, the reader, too, visits Holland's farm to marvel at his daughter's (and the land's) captivating beauty, and to participate in a guessing game whose ultimate goal is to decipher Holland's arboreal creation. Holland's endeavor to transform his farm into an authentically Australian landscape by establishing a "native garden" is of course deeply flawed, first, by the colonial implications that must sabotage any White Australian's cultivation of the land, revealing his efforts to be always already compromised by the charge of cultural appropriation. Second, Holland's rewilding project also looks suspiciously like an act of unconscionably self-serving domestication. Many of the trees are uprooted from their natural habitats only to be inserted into the artifice of a crypto-Indigenous monoculture that long-term looks ecologically unsustainable. Yet even though Holland's project is clearly propelled by a quasi-colonial urge to manipulate and refashion the land (as if it had previously been entirely untouched and without identity), Bail goes out of his way to reassure us of his protagonist's innocence: "There was no plan behind his programme" (43). More "done to" than "doing," Holland struggles to provide a plausible rationale for his project. Instead, he portrays himself as a mere instrument within a larger, seemingly self-fulfilling design, his actions compulsive and remote-controlled rather than driven by desire or specific intention:

> "I don't know exactly what happened to me," Holland said [. . .]. "I came here and I planted one, then I planted another. Other parts of the property needed a tree. I kept going. At a certain point I had passed a threshold; I couldn't go back or leave the plantings as they were. By then the whole situation became . . . what do you say? An end in itself. Everything about eucalypts was interesting. Before the trees I didn't have a clue about anything much. The eucalypts gave me an interest." (78)

Exculpating him further, Holland never gives in entirely to the taxonomic imperative to fix the trees for good. His garden does come to resemble "an outdoor museum of trees. A person could wander amongst the many different species and pick up all kinds of information" (45). But while he "had toyed with the idea of fitting labels to the trees" (46), the signs he has made are later found gathering dust in his office. What Holland creates is a conspicuously unconventional arboretum composed of always-yet-to-be-identified trees, located in an in-between half-wild and half-domesticated, semi-native and semi-colonized space that, from a eucalyptographical perspective, "continues to cry out for conversion into human terms" (138). Taxonomically speaking, Holland's project falls frustratingly short of completion, even if to lay parties, like Ellen, the farm already appears morphed into an "encyclopedic landscape" (205), crammed with what her father struggles, yet remains compelled, to grasp.

Arboreal Obliquity, or Trees Doing the Human

According to Sarah Besky and Jonathan Padwe, "plants enliven landscapes, unsettling anthropocentric epistemologies;" however, "they do this at velocities that are normally hard to discern with a passing gaze or occasional glimpse" (10 and 21). Hence it would not be for many decades to come until we might conceivably be in a position to gage the long-term impact of Holland's project. Until such times, despite the erudite terminology at our disposal, the identity of Holland's trees will remain quite literally anybody's guess. Whatever agency and enigmatic self-expression the trees possess will continue to exceed our grasp. As Battles asserts, inspired by his experience of the trees assembled in Harvard University's long-standing Arnold Arboretum, which after many decades of domestication one might expect no longer to be quite so elusive, "it

is the trees – uncanny, possessed of depths and mystery, and feral in ways beyond my ken – which take priority over any terminology" (6). Owain Jones similarly rebuts the notion that in gardens and arboretums, "'nature' is harnessed and manipulated;" rather, "trees are unruly things:"

> Along with the atmospheric, landscape and habitat "services" they provide, they grow, spread branches, sprout leaves, flowers and fruit, send out suckers, spread roots, produce and broadcast seeds, drop leaves (in one form or another) and limbs, block light and lines of sight, make a noise, move, harbour visitors, and die. They can live for hundreds of years and grow to a great size. Thus, they can be formidable presences, individually and collectively in the places where they are sited. They can mark and make places. As Murray Bail has it: "it is trees which compose a landscape". (149–50)[4]

Concurring with Besky and Padwe, Jones reminds us that "trees can be particularly powerful reconfigurers of place" (152), yet "longer-term perspectives [. . .] are needed to see their agency at work" (151). Accordingly, over twenty-five years on, one might be quite curious to revisit Bail's garden: like other monuments to human achievement and ingenuity, whatever organized design Holland's arboretum may once have possessed is very likely to have since been arboreally "undone" (166), "with the wild trees [. . .] having slipped the leash of management and design, turning the site into woodland" (167).

Following the first part of this article where I was primarily concerned with what in *The Language of Plants* Monica Gagliano, John Ryan and Patrícia Vieira term *extrinsic* plant language – that is, language "imposed upon plants as a means of dissecting, ordering, or consigning them to the background," it would seem logical to shift the focus henceforth onto "the *intrinsic* language of plants [which] encompasses the modes of communication and articulation used by vegetal species to negotiate ecologically with their biotic and abiotic environments" (xvii-xviii). However, Bail's trees do not speak. Resolutely *stumm*, his eucalypts are portrayed as impassive and entirely indifferent to both humans and their nonhuman environment. The eucalypt is "an egotistical tree," we are told. "Standing apart it draws attention to itself and soaks up moisture and all signs of life [. . .] at the same time giving precious little in the way of shade" (16). Likewise, "River Red Gums hogged all the water [. . .] resistant to the axe and just about everything else; there are many stories about their hardness" (26). We are informed that "eucalypts are notorious for giving off an inhospitable, unsympathetic air" (166); they are "selfish trees" and, more than once, we are advised that they "give precious little shelter" (206). With reference to *E. marginata*, also known as "jarrah," the novel wonders if there is "anyone not *baffled* by Jarrah – its hardness, its degree of difficulty" (59). The only species where at first glance "there may well be a secret message written on this tree" is *E. signata*, also known as the "scribbly gum," but "the almost human qualities" (83) of the quasi-calligraphic markings on its trunk turn out to be not an expression of arboreality, but vestigial traces of moth larvae tunneling underneath its bark.

In *White Beech* Greer remarks about Australia's indigenous trees that "they are not to be trifled with. The lords of the forest are mysterious and frightening, utterly beyond caring about us and our petty concerns." Reminiscent of Bail's introductory reference to "a eucalypt independent of, yet one which . . . it doesn't really matter" (5), an invocation which – as already observed – peters out in ellipsis, Greer asserts that "when it comes to defining a tree or even a tree shape, language fails" (18). Gammage finds himself caught in a similar struggle, albeit in his case not because of the eucalypts' elliptical elusiveness but because of their excessive multiplicity. "Rang[ing] from low shrubs and stumpy trees to Mountain Ash, the world's tallest flowering plant, [. . .] [the trees] merge species, change form, appear at widely separate locations" (117). Perplexingly, of some eucalypt species only one or two specimens have ever been found:

> Imlay Mallee was not described until 1980, when about 70 plants were found in a single location on the New South Wales south coast. In the Blue Mountains two *copulans* were found in 1957 and described in 1991: it may be extinct now. Only two Mongarlowe Mallees are known [. . .] Thirteen southwest eucalypts are known in only one location. The oldest and rarest eucalypt, Meelup Mallee, is a single plant probably over 6000 years old, its ligno-tubers covering 40 metres. (Gammage 117)

Gammage's bewilderment at such defiant excess ("How to classify a plant which does that?" [117]) puts proof to the ineffectuality of extrinsic plant language, exposing taxonomic description as an anachronism fetishized and perpetuated by Mr Cave-like eucalyptographers who continue to believe in the world of trees as "a solid base" (162). Mr Cave is said to pronounce "with lip-smacking relish the terms 'petiole', 'inflorescences', 'falcate' and 'lanceolate', and he was also comfortable with 'sessile', 'fusiform' and 'conculorous'" (69). *Eucalyptus* resolutely turns its back on such terminology and the manifold scientific and objectifying "ways of doing trees" it facilitates. Instead, the novel shifts its focus onto what Battles identifies as "all of the ways in which it's *not* practical and normative to relate to trees – the interpersonal; the oneiric and mystical; the divine and animistic; the magical, and many ways and wisdoms simply as yet unrevealed" (15), thus opening up opportunities for "trees doing the human" (67).

Introducing a potent antidote to Mr Cave, about halfway through the novel Bail heralds the arrival of a mysterious storyteller whose irresistible charisma irrevocably disrupts once and for all traditional eucalyptography's engagement with the trees. The storyteller's first surprise appearance effects an incisive paradigm shift in terms of narrative prerogative from human to arboreal. Relegating Holland and Mr Cave's naming extravaganza firmly to the background of the novel, Bail directs our attention back onto the trees to elucidate their status as a more-than-human site of becoming from which henceforth all the novel's center-stage action will proliferate. We are presented with a major conjuring feat of dendromorphosis-in-reverse as the stranger is shown to materialize *from* the trees, almost like an arboreal offshoot turned human, or a eucalyptic essence made flesh: "Something on the ground under a tree caught [Ellen's] eye. For a moment she thought it was a bundle of clothing her father had left there [but then] soft contours of flesh come forward in bush [. . .] It was a man, lying in the shade" (103–4). Not only do such dramatic moments of arborealization recur throughout the lovers' courtship – as when "[Ellen] looked up again and across the tree-dotted paddock [. . .] she could just make out near a denser clump of trees a single figure, moving" (121), or quite simply "wherever she went he appeared, near a tree" (140) – these encounters with the stranger begin also to exert a magical impact on Ellen, arborealizing her in turn, "leaving her [. . .] as if she was merely a tree" (110).

At the same time as Holland and Mr Cave continue to patrol the arboretum affixing labels *onto* the eucalypts, the storyteller is shown to take his cue invariably *from* the trees. It is the trees that inspire and sustain his storytelling. Yet this is not to say that, as Maufort suggests, *Eucalyptus* must therefore be read as an example of intrinsic, albeit humanly mediated, arboreal self-expression. Pitting Holland and Mr Cave's taxonomic pedantry against the magic of Ellen and the storyteller's romantic rapport, Maufort argues that "the storyteller lets the trees 'sing' through him [allowing] the diverse stories of or 'contained' in the trees unfold" (28). This reading is deeply problematic because not one story that ensues is about trees; all of them pertain exclusively to human affairs. Not one of the stories addresses the trees' recent displacement or their diasporic existence on Holland's farm. They have been uprooted, abducted, manhandled, and put in a zoo: if it were true and the storyteller did indeed channel the voice of the eucalypts, wouldn't one expect the stories to have a somewhat more immediate arboreal focus? As it begins to unravel into a congeries of short human-interest tales, the novel struggles to sustain its arborealist promise and instead appears to succumb to narrative's traditional anthropocentric pull. Notably, while Ellen does understand how the stories "grew from the names of the eucalypts, usually the less fancy common names," it does not matter to her "if many of the stories were based on the flimsiest foundations, or even a complete misreading of a name" (153). Indeed, we are told "she took little notice of the eucalypts behind the stories" as in her eyes the trees function as mere "story-prompting" devices (148). Being human, Ellen is far more interested in how "these stories [. . .] were more and more directed at her" (174).

Instead of replacing botany's extrinsic plant language with a literary exercise in intrinsic arboreal self-articulation that would most likely appear inauthentic and contrived, be it transmitted via a human mouthpiece or otherwise mediated,[5] Bail – on the surface at least – retains the anthropocentrism of traditional storytelling. At the same time, however, he proceeds to deliver his narration out of an increasingly all-enveloping context of treeness. The latter half of *Eucalyptus* is motored by an

arbocentric narrative impetus in my view most aptly described as "oblique." The trees do not speak or express themselves directly; rather, as it takes root and flourishes, the love between Ellen and her storytelling suitor is from start to finish framed within arboreality, steeped in eucalyptus. We watch the lovers meet "among the trees" (186, 189, 190), move "in and out of the trees" (187), and instead of walking off into the sunset at the happy ending of the novel, the final image is of them "march[ing] off into the trees" (264). Bail's representational mode is one of complete arboreal immersion, paradigmatic of what Miller terms "tree writing" or *dendrography*, "a form of ecological realism that [. . .] strives to incorporate the trace and perspective of the arboreal even as it recognizes the impossibility of this task." As Miller explains, "to be "under" the tree [or, as in Bail's case, to be "among the trees"] is not so much to be subordinate to the tree as to coexist inescapably in the same medium as the tree" (698).

In *Eucalyptus* the trees manifest their arboreality by "doing the human." As if under a eucalyptic spell, Holland is compelled to establish his arboretum. Meanwhile, the lovers' entire exchange thrives on arboreal facilitation. The novel upsets a fundamental premise of contemporary theoretical approaches such as material ecocriticism and eco-narratology which, while readily conceding narrative agency to nonhuman entities, cannot ultimately conceive of nonhuman self-articulation without human mediation (Schoene "Arborealism, or Do Novels Do Trees?"). While admittedly the eucalypts do not *speak* (which is not to say they are categorically incapable of communication or self-expression) , all human life in *Eucalyptus* derives its narrative impetus and indeed its entire *raison d'être* in one way or another from the trees. To different degrees of obliquity, as if it amounted to little more than an instantiation of arboreal shadow play, the eucalypts adumbrate human life as it is shown to unfold in their "frail patterned sort of shade" cast by their peculiar "see-through foliage" (16). In Bail's novel it is beyond doubt who is shedding light on whom – who is *writing* whom. Notably, the vast inventory of relatively random human tales enumerated in *Eucalyptus* also includes a brief snippet about Holland and his daughter: "Imagine a man on a property in western New South Wales setting out single-handedly to plant every known eucalypt, the property and the man's life transformed to that purpose" (80). To make its point about arboreality, it seems *Eucalyptus* could have foregrounded any one out of a myriad storylines. Exemplifying humanity as ensconced within a larger, arboreal scheme of things, the story of the Hollands is but one fairy-tale illustration from a voluminous catalog of potential tales, selected at random to enjoy momentary illumination "under the trees." This impression is sharpened by the fact that from chapter 13 onwards, an increasing number of stories about other people alive elsewhere in the world crowds in, almost as if the curious tale of Bail's chosen protagonists were not quite enough, its capacity to keep us entertained dwindling long before the novel's close.

Ultimately the proposition underpinning my reading of Bail's novel is that the story about his human characters relies for its narration crucially on the eucalypts as an arboreal manifestation of what Heather Sullivan terms "the florosphere." Asserting humanity's "disturbingly complete dependency on the larger, dominant green life forms" (2021: 95), Sullivan treats the human as a mere "subcategory of the larger scale of vegetal, photosynthesizing life" (96). Sullivan's approach chimes with Patricia Vieira's concept of *phytographia*, according to which plants "use sunlight to create their material articulations in the world, and, in doing so, imprint themselves in the biosphere, enabling the inscription of all other living beings in the process" (225). Put differently, plants materialize and sustain, and thus compose, the human lifeworld. In this light, the questions with which Vieira opens her seminal investigation reveal not only the anthropocentric fallacy behind our naïve human demand for plant language, they also speak to our ongoing "plantblindness" (Wandersee and Schussler "Preventing Plant Blindness") as well as our failure to acknowledge the centrality of plants and, most importantly, our existential dependence on their flourishing. "If they could converse, what would they tell us? What language would they use and how would they describe their wordless existence?" This is how, according to Vieira, our curiosity expresses itself. "What would plants say about themselves, about their environment, and, especially, what would they say about us" (225)? These questions appear so naïve because we should really already know the answer. What plants spell out is Life. They generate, compose, and articulate the environment that sustains us. Far from mysterious

secret whispers, their utterances are all living things, including the Hollands, Mr Cave and the storyteller – including the reader, including us.

Entering into Composition

Whereas many contemporary ecocritics – be they object-oriented ontologists, new materialists, or eco-narratologists – readily attribute agency (including story-telling capabilities) to nonhuman entities, in much of their work humanity persists as an unreconstructed normative standard and primary reference point. Decentering falters in the face of alterity – alterity, in particular, that looks like it might by far surpass and outshine the human. Too much ecocriticism continues to search for evidence of the ways in which animals and plants resemble us – language being just one case in point, instead of acknowledging and accommodating the much greater probability of our taking after the nonhuman. In a rare critique of Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, a seminal cornerstone of new-materialist scholarship, Steven Connor deplores that in new-materialist thought the nonhuman is "smuggled over the border into the land of the living, where we, of course, [. . .] rule the roost." Connor reads this approach as "an expression of the automatistic *idée fixe* that we are on the side of life, indeed, are its privileged beneficiaries and exponents" (2010: 3). As Bennett encourages us "to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism – the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature – to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world" (2010: xvi), she becomes guilty of precisely that narcissism by implying that nature echoes the human rather than vice versa, as if all life rippled from a human center, thus obscuring nature's position as the site of origin while "creat[ing] little homunculi at all levels" (Kohn "*How Forests Think*": 41). As a result, "human being stays bang in the bull's eye of its own decentering" (Connor 2), enabling us to perpetuate "one of our supreme fictions that the landscapes, the elemental forces, the creatures of the world, all align in relation to *us*" (Battles 29). The lens of arboreal obliquity installed by Bail in *Eucalyptus* casts the human/nonhuman relationship in a radically different light, contesting humanity's center-stage importance by asking, as Karen Houle does from a philosophical perspective, how we might "think-the-plant and not end up onto-stabilizing ourselves while intellectually cannibalizing and domesticating [plants]" ("Animal, Vegetable, Mineral": 42).

Eschewing adroitly even an inkling of humanity's existential secondariness and vital dependency within "Creation" (for want of a better word) or "the Earth System" (to employ the terminology of the Anthropocene), human/nonhuman parity and mutual entanglement tend to be the utmost of what contemporary eco-theorists are willing to concede. Marco Caracciolo's *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene* is a paradigmatic example of eco-narratological scholarship promoting "our vital *interdependency* with the nonhuman world" (3), "metaphysical *parity* between human and nonhuman realities" (15), "human-nonhuman *coexistence*" (21) and "a sense of *enmeshment* and *co-constitution* between human subjectivity and nonhuman materiality" (121). Even in Pieter Vermeulen's otherwise refreshingly nonpartisan overview *Literature and the Anthropocene* the human invariably appears as equal partner in an interplay of major global forces that together determine our future. As he writes, "human life now has to find a way to *cohabitate* with the nonhuman forces with which it is irrevocably *entangled*" (8).[6] Though no longer incontestably championed as hegemonic *primus inter pares*, humanity continues to be portrayed as an independent agent, a doer, "entwined" (Vermeulen 3) yet nonetheless centrally involved in pulling the strings. Caracciolo favors "an understanding of human-nonhuman relations as fundamentally interdependent rather than hierarchical" (117), a sentiment that veils the position of assumed human privilege from which it is written while forestalling the realization of there being and indeed always having been a hierarchy, albeit one presided over by the nonhuman, never humanity. Interestingly, Maufort's reading of *Eucalyptus* is similarly led by a need to identify Bail's project as informed by an "ecopoetics of interrelatedness" (19). Disregarding Ellen's view of the eucalypts as "unpleasant, unhelpful trees" (231) as well as Bail's painstaking effort to endow his trees with impassiveness and indifference, Maufort insists on the novel's portrayal of "a reciprocal interrelatedness between humans and their

environment" (19). The interrelatedness she purports to uncover "re-animates the treescape, and thus blurs the ontological partition between the human and non-human worlds" (15). Keen to provide an interpretation that does the trees justice by revealing how "their active participation in the storytelling [. . .] humanises them" (19), she omits to close-read the novel which shows absolutely no interest in "restoring [the trees'] subject status [or] decommodifying the non-human realm" (15). *Eucalyptus* is wholly uninterested in the notion that the best possible treatment the trees could ever hope for is to be elevated to the same rank as humanity or, in Maufort's words, to be inserted into a "dialogical web of agencies that includes the narrative agency of the eucalypts alongside that of the human voice" (20).[7] Let us remind ourselves that the novel is adamant in its inscription of human agency as borrowed and secondary, as projected and propelled by the trees, and cast in a curious fairy-tale light – put differently, as existentially immersed in and vitally empowered by eucalyptus.

Maufort's rhetorically appealing homunculizing of the trees points to a fallacious aporia at the heart of contemporary ecocriticism and indeed all the manifold ways modern humanity has over the ages become accustomed to "doing" the world. As Bernhard Malkmus reflects, "while our culture continues to deny nature a voice, we are ever more impatiently expecting it to speak to us" ("Anthropormorphism and Alterity": 121). Eager to overcome the human/nonhuman binary, purportedly to dismantle human exceptionalism but really to ease an increasingly troubled and beleaguered *anthropos* "back into the fold of the nonhuman world" (Caracciolo, 3), we intrude upon nonhuman alterity by handling it the only way we know: we mold it after our own image and expect to hear it express itself in a voice that we recognize and can understand. By contrast, reminiscent of Bail's practice of arboreal obliquity in *Eucalyptus*, in *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, Fiona Stafford reports on her encounter with the ancient Borrowdale Yews near Seathwaite in Cumbria by identifying the trees as "the most enigmatic presences in this under-populated valley, silent as stone and yet exuding an air that is not uplifting, but neither quite melancholy, a stillness so deep that even breathing seems intrusive" (33). While their arboreality remains powerfully oblique and there is no mention of interrelatedness, let alone direct human/nonhuman rapport, the scene is steeped in the yew-ness of the trees. The moment fills the onlooker with awe and prompts her to put her experience into words, yet it resists any immediate or more complete representational closure. Fittingly, when Stafford "tried to photograph [the trees] under the bright sunlight of an August afternoon, [her] camera broke" (33). Equally alert to his trees' resolute eucalyptic aloofness, Bail's novel resists the notion that human/arboreal dialog, creaturely interdependence and symbiotic mutuality are ever readily available options, or that perhaps they even constitute humanity's natural prerogative. We are indeed from and might conceivably continue to be part of nature, yet that is by no means equivalent to being on a par with it. Rather than letting us picture ourselves as listeners to an arboreal voice that speaks to us and about us, in *Eucalyptus* we turn out to be what is (obliquely) spoken.

All that said, it is quite simply not in the nature of arborealists, tree-aficionados, eucalyptographers (old or new) and critical plant studies scholars to accept arboreal obliquity as the final word on trees. The desire for a more direct and immediate human/arboreal rapport persists. Yet among some Australian tree writers and theorists at least there appears to be increasingly a consensus that if the aim is to "understand the tree's own arborescent ways of being, making, and saying" (Battles 76), then our efforts must reach beyond "break[ing] the silence of nature" (Manes 341) or "unmut[ing] the arboreal" (O'Neill 4). According to the Australian French Studies scholar Christopher Watkin, who takes his cue from the work of the French philosopher Michel Serres, "the world does not mutely wait for the advent of humanity in order to tell its story;" rather, "things speak for themselves, write by themselves and write about themselves, performatively speaking their autobiography" ("Michel Serres' Great Story": 175). Leaving aside Watkin's anthropomorphic choice of words, what he appears to be getting at here is nature's intrinsic corporeal self-articulation which, unlike in standard ecocritical readings, "does not rely on humans to ventriloquize it" (175). An even bolder proposition on how nonhuman self-articulation might be able to advance a more direct and intimate human/nonhuman line of communication can be found in the Australian poet Stuart Cooke's concept of "an ethological poetics, or the study of nonhuman creative forms," which invites us to explore the aesthetic impact and

"capacity to catalyze relation" (2019: 302–3) of nonhuman (be it plant or animal) behavioral expression. Interestingly, Cooke finds evidence of such an ethological poetics at work in Gammage's influential work on Aboriginal land-management practices, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*, which includes an illustrated commentary on the representation of eucalypts in colonial-era landscape painting. According to Cooke, Gammage's chapter "Canvas of a Continent" (18–60) "presents us with a variety of spectacular arboreal characters who articulate themselves in myriad, meaningful ways" and "the result is a magnificent, continental assemblage of tree poetics." Acknowledging the slowness in time of arboreal self-articulation, as well as its extra-linguistic obliquity, Cooke commends Gammage for his subtle, scientifically informed "reading [of] the shapes and forms of his subjects" which reflects his understanding of "each tree as a subject who is always becoming, or as a form of cognition that is slowly proceeding beyond the narrow window of human perception" (2022: 223).

Another significant eucalyptic example of ethological poetics opens Hay's introductory chapter in *Gum*. Hay's scene-setting illumination of a specimen of *E. signata* recalls Houle's philosophical exploration of what a process of "becoming-plant" might involve, namely "our entering into composition – at the level of our bodies, or among our thoughts, ideas, and concepts – with *something else* in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be *vegetal*" (43):

> The space around it made the tree look like it was standing in a pool of light.
>
> Its trunk, from a distance, was clear and pale, and if I mimicked its angle, I could take in its full length. To look at a big tree, you have to tilt your head back, right back – it's a reverential way to stand. I followed its stretch, from the roots spreading under the ground, past the rough dark bark where its trunk breached the earth, and on to its stripped smooth skin, through the elbows and armpits where its branches – some dark and bare, some pale with light leaves at their ends – pushed out. (Hay 1)

Combining a sensibility reminiscent of Imagist poetry with a dendromorphic willingness to "enter into composition" by offering herself up to be "done" by the tree, Hay's apotheotic celebration of eucalyptic arboreality is so much more than a mere exercise in capturing treeness; it is an invitation to yield at the most intimate level to the tree's corporeal self-articulation – an invitation Hay reissues toward the end of her book. "Whenever you can now [. . .] step outside and find a eucalypt to stand with," Hay writes in conclusion. "Tilt your head to take in its shape and its color, its reach and its girth. Place your hand on its bark: feel its warmth. Feel it breathing. Feel its age and its life and its being:"

> Think about the layers of air, the water and the sugars, that have fed it and made it as it is, as you see it. Think about the layers of questions, answers, knowledges and inspirations that exist around it. Think about the power in the invitation to see, hear and understand these vast repositories of First Nations knowledge – the experiences of people who have known them, lived with them, worked with them, managed them, harvested them and shared resources with them – in different ways – for millennia, as part of that one vast interconnected way of being. (262–3)

Gum provides us with a dendrographic history of post-conquest Australia, told from start to finish through a eucalyptic lens. As such, I am tempted to read Hay's nonfiction as bringing to fruition Bail's vision of "trees doing the human" in *Eucalyptus*. Hay radically untethers our imagination from the confines of Holland's arboretum, its signage and other eucalyptographical fixtures, its paddocks and paragraphs, its labeling competition. As Hay intimates, eucalyptic obliquity need not mean enduring mutual estrangement and inaccessibility, or the inscription of an insurmountable human/arboreal rift. Yet, as we are requesting to "enter into composition" and be readmitted to "that one vast interconnected way of being," the onus to reach out and yield to the trees' catalytic relationality is entirely upon us.

Notes

1. Debates on national identity intensified following the High Court of Australia's epochal Mabo verdict of 1992, so named after Eddie Mabo (1936–92), the lead activist behind the Indigenous land rights campaign. Long overdue, this landmark legislation reinstated Aboriginal land rights, once and for all rescinding the *terra nullius* principle of colonial times, which posited that on arrival the first white settlers found a pristine continent previously owned and cultivated by no one.
2. All subsequent page references in the text are to this edition.
3. "Eucalypt" and "gum" tend to be used synonymously in Australian English.
4. Jones inserts this surprise reference to *Eucalyptus* entirely out of the blue, without any additional commentary or contextualization.
5. A fairly egregious example of such inauthenticity is Elif Shafak's novel *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021). Despite Stephen O'Neill's efforts to portray Shafak's novel as "highlight[ing] the urgency of nonanthropocentric modes of storytelling in these times of anthropogenic climate crisis" (2), the author's central conceit of a talking tree appears wholly contrived and irremediably anthropocentric, especially when at the novel's end the tree's voice is revealed as that of the central protagonist's late mother speaking from beyond the grave.
6. All the italics here are mine.
7. In his reading of Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*, O'Neill similarly commends the author for her "elevation of the tree to narrating character" (5).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Berthold Schoene is Professor of English at Manchester Metropolitan University. His research interests are in Twentieth-Century and Contemporary British Fiction, Scottish Literature, masculinity and gender studies, globalisation, postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism, and - most recently - eco-narratology. His monographs and edited books include Writing Men (Edinburgh University Press, 2000), Posting the Male (2003), The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), The Cosmopolitan Novel (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), The Edinburgh Companion to Irvine Welsh (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), Accelerated Times: British Literature in Transition, 1980-2000 (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and Nicola Barker: Critical Essays (Gylphi, 2020).

ORCID

Berthold Schoene http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6536-9093

Works Cited

Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, Vintage, 2017 [1997].
Bail, Murray. *Eucalyptus*, Harvill, 1998.
Battles, Matthew. *Tree*, Bloomsbury, 2017.
Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke U P, 2010.
Besky, Sarah, and Jonathan Padwe. "Placing Plants in Territory." *Environment and Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2016, pp. 9–28. doi:10.3167/ares.2016.070102.
Caracciolo, Marco. *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene*, U of Virginia P, 2021.
Connor, Steven. "Thinking Things." *Textual Practice*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1–20. doi:10.1080/09502360903471706.
Cooke, Stuart. "Talking (with) Trees: Arboreal Articulation and Poetics." *Green Letters*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2022, pp. 214–31. doi:10.1080/14688417.2021.2023606.
——— "Toward an Ethological Poetics: The Transgression of Genre and the Poetry of the Albert's Lyrebird" *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2019, pp. 302–23. doi:10.1215/22011919-7754468.
Gagliano, Monica, John Ryan and Patricia Vieira (eds). *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature*, U of Minnesota P, 2017.
Gammage, Bill. *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*, Allen & Unwin, 2011.
Greer, Germaine. *White Beech: The Rainforest Years*, Bloomsbury, 2014.

Hay, Ashley. *Gum: The Story of Eucalypts and Their Champions*, New South, 2021 [2002].
Houle, Karen., and A. Calcagno. "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics as Extension or Becoming?" *Symposium*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2015, pp. 37–56. doi:10.5840/symposium201519221.
Jones, Owain. "Arnos Vale Cemetery and the Lively Materialities of Trees in Place." *Garden History*, vol. 35, 2007, pp. 149–71.
Kohn, Eduardo. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. U of California P, 2013.
Malkmus, Berhard. "Anthropomorphism and Alterity." *Narratives of Scale in the Anthropocene: Imagining Human Responsibility in an Age of Scalar Complexity*, edited by Gabriele Dürbeck and Philip Hüpkes, Routledge2021, pp. 110–26.
Manes, Christopher. "Nature and Silence." *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1992, pp. 339–50. doi:10.5840/enviroethics19921445.
Martin, Susan. "The Wood from the Trees: Taxonomy and the Eucalypt as the New National Hero in Recent Australian Writing." *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, vol. 3, 2004, pp. 81–94.
——— "Writing a Native Garden? Environmental Language and Post-*Mabo* Literature in Australia." *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches*, edited by Jill Didur, Elizabeth Deloughrey and Anthony Carrigan, Routledge, 2015, pp. 95–113.
Maufort, Jessica. "Trees That 'Grow on You': Naturalist Taxonomy and Ecopoetics of Interrelatedness in Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*." *AJE: Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, vol. 5, 2015/16, pp. 11–31. doi:10.60162/swamphen.5.10626.
Miller, Elizabeth Carolyn. "Dendrography and Ecological Realism." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2016, pp. 696–718. doi:10.2979/victorianstudies.58.4.04.
O'Neill, Stephen. "Arborealities, or Making Trees Matter in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 2023, 1–21. doi:10.1093/isle/isad040.
Schoene, Berthold. "Arborealism, or Do Novels Do Trees?" *Textual Practice*, vol. 36, no. 9, 2022, pp. 1435–58. doi:10.1080/0950236X.2021.1900379.
Shafak, Elif. *The Island of Missing Trees*, Penguin, 2021.
Stafford, Fiona. *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, Yale U P, 2016.
Sullivan, Heather. "Plant Scale and the Anthropocene." *Gabriele Dürbeck and Philip Hüpkes*. Narratives of Scale in the Anthropocene: Imagining Human Responsibility in an Age of Scalar Complexity, Routledge, 2021, pp. 94–109.
Thornhill, Andrew, et al. "A Dated Molecular Perspective of Eucalypt Taxonomy, Evolution and Diversification." *Australian Systematic Botany*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2019, pp.29–48. doi:10.1071/SB18015.
Vermeulen, Pieter. *Literature and the Anthropocene*, Routledge, 2020.
Vieira, Patrícia. "Phytographia: Literature as Plant Writing." *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature*, edited by Monica Gagliano, John Ryan, and Patrícia Vieira: U of Minnesota P, 2017, pp. 215–33.
Wandersee, James, and Elisabeth Schussler. "Preventing Plant Blindness." *American Biology Teacher*, vol. 61, no. 2, 1999, pp. 82–86. doi:10.2307/4450624.
Watkin, Christopher. "Michel Serres' Great Story: From Biosemiotics to Econarratology." *SubStance*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2015, pp. 171–87. doi:10.1353/sub.2015.0033.