

The Wood from the Trees: Taxonomy and the Eucalypt as the New National Hero in Recent Australian Writing

SUSAN K MARTIN, LATROBE UNIVERSITY

A number of recent successful Australian narratives have revealed a striking fixation with trees, especially indigenous trees, and particularly the eucalypt. Most obviously in Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*, Roger McDonald's *The Tree in Changing Light* and David Foster's *The Glade Within the Grove* but also Paul Sheehan's *Among the Barbarians*, Tom Griffiths' *Forests of Ash* and of course Ashley Hay's *Gum*, trees assume their own heroic status. In Kate Grenville's *The Idea of Perfection* the trees in question are (mostly) in the form of a bridge, but there is some of the same symbolic investment in the idea of indigenous timber as innocent national signifier. This article considers these and other texts in order to explore the cultural circulation of the Eucalyptus they represent.

In some ways the turn to the tree could be indicative of a shift away from traditional understandings of national identity towards one invested in a deeper comprehension of the specificity of environment and indigeneity. Certainly this would appear to be Bail's line in his opening rejection of the "stale version of the national landscape [with its] [. . .] more or less straight line onto the national character" (1). Nevertheless, in most of these figurations the gum tree functions to some extent as a new symbol of white masculine Australianness, as Ann Summers has argued (Summers 15). It is a figure offering access to one form of indigeneity and belonging where others have proved too problematic. I will argue that this is partly because the dominant current manifestation of the eucalypt is taxonomical; despite the appeal to the specificity of the thing itself, the name and the power of naming replaces it, and the form of naming reinstates colonial relations, though not equally, and surely not inevitably.

Eucalypts feature consistently as signifiers of Australianness throughout post-settlement Australian literature (Jacobs). “No other landscape in the world is so dominated by one genus,” Ashley Hay argues, “and just as ‘gum’ became shorthand for the trees, the trees became shorthand for the place” (Hay 4). This connection can be likened to Simon Schama’s observation in *Landscape and Memory* that increasingly the oak became *the* British tree: “Repeated analogies were made between the character of the timber and the character of the nation” (Schama 164). David Foster however represents this analogy as impossible—the Eucalypt is not congruent with the entire history of Western tree-worship and northern seasons which he presents as Australia’s roots (Foster 13). In *The Glade Within the Grove* it remains antithetical to a national character inevitably founded in this tradition, as Susan Lever points out (Lever). Murray Bail disputes this, perhaps directly, when he has his hero Holland planting eucalypts because “it never occurred to him to opt for *introduced species*—the oaks, willows, walnuts [. . .] let alone the terminally gloomy pine [. . .]. His affinity with eucalypts was both vague and natural” (37).

One common use of the Eucalypt in Australian narratives is as stand-in or symbol of the absent-present indigenous population who haunt the landscape with, or like, the trees. By 1894 in Catherine Martin’s *An Australian Girl* unspecified eucalypts are the major signifier of Australianness in an English-designed garden. The “most charming natural feature” is the eucalypt-lined creek. Forming a bridge across the creek is “an enormous gum tree” with “marks all along the upper side [. . .] made by the stone axe of the aborigine, who had climbed it in quest of opossums, or to place his bark-enclosed dead among the boughs” (Martin 162). Here the Eucalypt is literally marked with indigeneity. Displaced Aboriginal owners haunt the garden most intensely in the Eucalypts, as is the case in many twentieth-century fictions and poems also.

For Joseph Furphy in *Such is Life* it is the ability to recognize and navigate amongst indigenous trees that signifies a flowering (mostly white) Australian nationality. Rory O’Halloran’s ineradicable Irishness is demonstrated by his inability to identify trees. Tom Collins, after searching for a waterhole Rory described as surrounded by Mallee, muses:

A stately beefwood, sixty feet high, with swarthy column furrowed a hand-breadth deep, and heavy tufts of foliage like bundles of long leeks in colour and configuration—the first beefwood I had seen since leaving the homestead—stood close to the water, making a fine landmark; but Dan’s [Rory’s] sense of proportion had selected the adjacent bit of yarran; and [. . .] he had never concerned himself to know the difference between yarran and mallee. (Furphy 55)

Rory's inability here is the inability to distinguish wattle (Yarran) from Gum (mallee). Mary O'Halloran, is "a dryad among her kindred trees." Unlike her father she *had* "noticed the dusky aspect of the ironwood; the volumed cumuli of rich olive-green, crowning the lordly currajong; the darker shape of the wilga's massy foliage cataract [. . .] the clean-spotted column of the leopard tree" (73). Such confident identification with, rather than of, the trees is fatal to her. This is perhaps because, "by necessity, she had her own names for them all" and so is external to the British hierarchical system, mirrored in botanical nomenclature, as in other orders of knowledge in the Colonies. This is reflected most clearly in the novel's witty description of the station hierarchy at the opening of Chapter Seven, which perhaps constitutes a taxonomy of class (205–06). Collins, describing Mary, uses common names for the trees, but echoes some botanical terminology, thus marking out a position which partakes of the authority, but retains some distance from, this disapproved Imperial order.

Tom's ability to distinguish a wilga from a yarran does not affect his inability to distinguish a woman from a man. Furphy in fact brings the reliability of taxonomies into question. Tom Collins uses clear signifiers of gender to establish that Nosey Alf is a man in the same way that he establishes a mallee is not a yarran, or that Victoria is not New South Wales. In two out of three of these cases he is wrong, because, as the novel makes clear, taxonomies are not immutable, but rely on the significance invested in one characteristic as compared to another, on the position and assumptions of the classifier, and on those things he is able to observe.

However in two famous turn-of-the-century fictions by women the Eucalypt seems much more clearly representative of a treacherous masculine order. In Baynton's "Squeaker's Mate," and Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* the autonomous, transgressive heroines are crushed by this iconic Australian symbol and returned to "domestic" space before they can achieve unthinkable independence. Nevertheless, increasingly in twentieth-century fiction, the key to Australianness is this ability to identify the Eucalypt.

All of the narratives I named earlier open with a list of Eucalypt names and/or features, with the exception of Grenville's novel. Paul Sheehan's first paragraph list of the "dominant army" of Australian trees "the red gum, the blue, the grey, the black, the stringy-bark, the ghost, the scribbly, the ribbon" (1) is most blatantly an assertion of his authority of naming and knowing, and an identification of a particular kind of (white) Australian masculinity with Eucalypts. Roger McDonald gets to his list later and more subtly. Still, by page 16, there is a list of trees identifiable by the author: "yellow box, white cypress, kurrajong." Murray Bail, though with irony and self-reflexiveness, opens the novel *Eucalyptus* with a species name as chapter heading, and another in the first sentence, and goes on to ponder the nature of taxonomy, taxonomically. Foster's opening list of "Principal Characters" in *The Glade* is a kind of human taxonomy but it is underlined by

botanical nomenclature: Diane Zoshka, for instance is identified as having metamorphosed into a *Telopea doliveresiana* (xxvi). The *doliveresiana* is an invented Waratah subspecies name which sounds like “deliver us” and is translated by Foster as “the crying wife.” *Telopea* is incidentally the name of the “journal of plant systematics” of the Royal Botanic Gardens of NSW, which is involved in the classification and publication of new species of Eucalypt (e.g. Hill).

The list in Foster’s prologue, though working to a somewhat different purpose, parallels Sheehan’s: “messmate, mountain gum, manna gum, monkey gum and, most beautiful eucalypt of all 700 subspecies, shining gum” (xxix). Ashley Hay, in the opening of *Gum*, not surprisingly, begins with a Eucalypt description. What is more interesting is the mimicry and appropriation of her choice, a scribbly gum. “If I mimic its angle,” she says, “I can take in its full length” (2), and she does.

Simon Schama argues in relation to the British oak that its appearance in the background of Gainsborough portraits signifies “not merely the substance but the patriotism of the sitters” (168–69). In recent Australian representation, I would argue, the Eucalypt to some extent fills this position, but this relation of possession and patriotism is most frequently achieved through the power of naming. The force of Sheehan, Foster and Bail’s invocation of the Eucalypt has its source in an understanding of Australianness as grounded in recognition, as if, to misuse Benedict Anderson’s notion of nation in *Imagined Communities*, they imagine themselves as national subjects by all reading the same tree in the same language of classification. In these writers and others it is not just that the Eucalypt is used to stand in for national character, but that the national credentials of the author and the characters are authenticated by their taxonomic abilities, their ability to name and recognize the Eucalyptus within the dominant system of classification and meaning.

Sheehan’s list establishes his authority as narrator. But the burgeoning list of Eucalypts ironically is also there to represent endangerment. These Eucalypts are white and sensitive. As noted, Sheehan’s official opening to his non-fictional diatribe, *Among the Barbarians* is a long list of the common names of Eucalypt species. This opening uses the uniqueness of the Eucalypt (along with the biting sheep-dog in the same chapter) to stand in for the uniqueness of the Australian character.

As Ghassan Hage points out in *White Nation*, “ecological concerns” in some instances have been made an excuse for a “racist nationalist agenda of excluding a particular part of the world population from the White-imagined [Australian] nation” and nature (Hage 165, 172–73). Eucalypts in Sheehan are used to signify a unique national character, very narrowly defined, beleaguered by introduced species and alien [horto] cultural practices.

It is easy to see why the Eucalypt has become an apparently ideal signifier of Australian masculinity. Some lists of Eucalyptus characteristics read like the fa-

mous recitation of masculine features in Russell Ward's *Australian Legend*. Robin Doughty describes the blue gum—*Eucalyptus globulus* [*ssp globulus*] in familiar terms: “outside Australia it adjusts to an even broader range of precipitation and grows even taller. It is sturdily built” (Doughty 4). Of course this shouldn't be surprising since the discourse of Eucalypt as Australian national tree, as representative of Australian national character, is not confined to nor solely derived from literature, any more than the language of botanical terminology. The Eucalypt is described as “hardy, erect, tall, robust, persistent” (Costermans 360) and is quarantined from leaking into more general circulation. They are part of the same discourse.

One of the first things Bail does in his opening examination of Eucalypt nomenclature is a tongue in cheek consideration of their gender, identifying four species with a “distinctly feminine world.” Possibly one should include Holland's daughter as the fifth. Nevertheless this dubious set of identifications (four out of “over 700”) locates the Eucalypt as masculine by norm. Roger McDonald's *The Tree in Changing Light* is about trees and their matching, active, (mostly white) tree men, foresters and planters. Only three or four women feature in the book, and none of them fit comfortably. One of the women, rather than being a tree planter, was planted in trees. That is, her claim to connection with the narrative appears to be solely that she was buried in a wooden box. The Jewish gardener Leah is endnoted as fictional, and sidelined by her former admirer Boyd. Judith Wright does seem to belong there more than the rest, but the whole tree-artist section (including another “fictional” one), militates against the value of active tree-planting in the book, and this feature of Wright's activities is not really explored. Her chapter is called “The Seed” and her biology appears antithetical to tree stuff. She is “the earth, the root, the stem, the link,” not ever quite the tree and certainly not the tree planter: “A child grew from the seed she held in her” (124). Finally McDonald's wife, Susie, whose writing is quoted, but, unlike other authors, not cited in the closing acknowledgements, is strangely absent for most of the narrative. She is the adjunct of an implied “we.” She gets to plant alien trees in alien soil (New Zealand), at the end.

Eucalypts are indeed a promising symbol of Australian nationality and identity but for somewhat different reasons to those invoked in most of these narratives. Firstly, perhaps, in that their identity, contrary to Sheehan, McDonald's, or even ultimately Bail's implications, is completely unstable. Taxonomy advertises itself as an exact science, but of course taxonomies, nomenclature, categorisation, all depend on negotiation, argument and agreement. As one historian of science puts it, “Taxonomic systems are now recognized as being conventional and dependent on data always open to alternative interpretation” (Butcher 163). Within the body of flowering plants called Eucalyptus, things keep getting re-classified, including whole groups of “Eucalypts” being shifted in and out of the genera and

divided or collapsed into sub-genera (eg. Pryor and Johnson VII, 1). This indicates the mutability, shiftingness and openness of the classification and the incredible diversity of the group. Eucalypts are also still being discovered and classified, and they have an unnerving habit of hybridising. Little use has been made of the Eucalypt as signifier of an unstable, mutable, hybridising nation.

Current narrative uses of Eucalypts often produce the tree as emblematic of a single masculinized figure rather than as part of a shifting and interdependent *community*. Leon Costermans in *Native Trees and Shrubs of South-Eastern Australia*, suggests that, “the great diversity within the genus [. . .] raises many questions. How did all these species originate. On what bases are relationship and differentiation best determined? What is the significance of variation in natural populations?” (Costerman 330). *The Idea of Perfection* rests paradoxically on both narratives of the Eucalypt which see it as the rugged unique Australian individual, and as a mutable, unstable shifting community of species. Eucalypts in much of this fiction, which ostensibly celebrates diversity, have in fact been homogenized into symbols of white masculine stability. They are static and hierarchized; gums become *a* gum, the archetypal gum tree. Though Bail’s novel is exploding with the diversity of the Eucalypt, not all gums are equal in the novel. The opening *desertorum* for instance is rejected, partly for being, “more like a bush than a tree” (2). For all its conscious irony the novel to some extent still produces an implied “ideal” Eucalypt, not least by the way the trees metaphorize the characters, and in some cases metamorphose into them, as Summers points out. Chapter by chapter it presents the gums as a series of individuals, rather than an ecosystem. On the surface, the same might be said for *The Idea of Perfection* in which Harley and Douglas are like a generic notion of the Eucalypt-as-Australian. They are represented as hardy, sturdy survivors on little and endurers of much twisting and burning. Their physical attractiveness is something which must be searched for.

The exception to this might paradoxically be seen in Grenville’s stress on the uses of Eucalypts as timber, and her “bridge made of trees” (66) as an image of community and adaptation:

this [bridge] seemed to have chosen to bend rather than break. The centre piers had allowed themselves to be shifted bodily downstream through the sand of the riverbed and then, as the flood receded, they had planted themselves back in. On the top the timbers of the roadway had slewed around on their bolts into a stiff curve that was higher one side than the other, like a shrugging shoulder.

Now the bridge looked weak, but it was not. It had been damaged, but the damage was the very thing that made it strong.
(Grenville 62)

This “condemned” bridge represents the rural community which fights about it, and the notion of yielding-but-standing is central to this. The idea of distortion and strength and twisted beauty gained through hardship is representative not only of the two central characters but also of the bridge which embodies the possibility of their union and incorporation in community.

In Bail’s novel *Eucalyptus*, prospective suitors are charged with the task of naming each of Holland’s (for which is commonly read, New Holland’s) Eucalyptus species in order to win the beautiful daughter, Ellen (Grbich; Jacobs). It would be nice to think that the father is working with the impossibility of Eucalyptus taxonomy, and the whole competition is a set up: no one can win because by the time the suitor gets to the end of the classification, something will have been reclassified, renamed or hybridized. In which case the numbers and identifications will have changed and he would have to start again; the daughter is safe. But this is not the trajectory of the novel. The narrator does make us well aware of the shifts in taxonomy. Using the witty heading *diversifolia* he comments on the suggested reclassification of the Ghost Gum “which has long stood as the archetypal eucalypt [as] [. . .] not a eucalypt at all, but a member of the ‘Corymbia family.’” He goes on to claim, “It is this chaotic diversity that has attracted men to the world of eucalypts. [. . .] It cried out for a ‘system’ of some kind” (35). Of course there is at least one joke going on here, about the elusiveness of the “ghost” gum and the irony of this being the Eucalypt chosen to trap or enclose through nomenclature. Beyond that are the ghost trees of Catherine Martin and others which are haunted and occupied by other, Aboriginal names, identities and understandings.

Nevertheless, though Bail satirizes the human need to systematize, in Holland as in the taxonomers, this is not a diatribe that unseats taxonomy. On the contrary, in the discussion of the mutability of naming he stabilizes and separates the thing. The ghost gum remains the ghost gum whatever you call it; it is not something which might be seen as partially constituted by its name or the process of naming. The ghost gum in this instance is the fantasy of the “full presence which is beyond play” described by Derrida (Derrida 109). The fragility and variability of Eucalypts as well as their naming is ultimately overridden by the fairy-tale imperative to get the whole lot into one garden or property for the purposes of the narrative. The story carries the fairy-tale element of the impossible task, but also therefore the fairy-tale element of the hero who accomplishes the impossible task.

Like the production of the ideal Gum, one of the things which the current love affair with the Eucalyptus obscures is its ample potential to symbolize some of our least heartwarming characteristics. Australians sneer at *Pinus radiata*, that ugly, destructive, alien species, but without realising that *E. camaldulensis* runs even with it as the “most widely planted exotic forest tree” and is equally reviled elsewhere, despite Bail’s claim that “the compliant pine is associated with number,

geometry, the majority, whereas the eucalypt stands apart, solitary, essentially undemocratic" (15). Bail's comment can only ring true in Australia, which has been slow to use its own trees in plantation farming. In the early 1990s Eucalypts, most of them outside Australia, covered over 61,815 million acres, an area bigger than "England and Wales together" as Robin Doughty points out carefully, with or without a consciousness of the kind of symbolic reverse colonialism this represents (Doughty 27). There is international hostility to wholesale plantings of Eucalypts to service the international market for wood pulp (Doughty ix). Protests have taken place in Thailand, India, South America, and in Europe, where mass plantings of these alien trees have been called "capitalist" and "fascist" (Doughty ix, 170; Saxena). There are "industrial stands" of Eucalypts in at least a hundred nations other than Australia (Doughty 27). Varieties of Eucalypt are invasive weeds in some countries. In Australian narratives it is the Eucalypt's indigeneity, its unique adaptation to "our" place which features. In fact it is equally representative of adaptability to other places, suitability for regimented monocultural plantings, commercialism, ability to colonize and transform indigenous environments, to be a tool or friend of repressive regimes, with the ability to dominate or destroy indigenous [plant and animal] populations, suck the moisture out of them and refuse to leave.

The exclusion of these possibilities from a depiction of dinky-di indigeneity which is difficult to uproot and a product only of native soil, is symptomatic of the way we wish to think of ourselves. This is exemplified by Prime Minister John Howard's letter in the anti-terrorism package sent to every Australian household in 2003, which tells us we are a "friendly, decent, democratic people" (Australian Commonwealth Government 12). In fact the description by Edmundo Navarro de Andrade of the initial reception of his Eucalyptus plantations in Brazil has a strange irony. "[I]t was received with fire and sword," he comments, "like an undesirable foreigner in whom all the defects were recognized and in whom all virtues were denied" (Doughty 99).

There is little notion of weed or invasion in contemporary invocations of the Eucalypt. Bail describes *exports* of "sturdy, see-through trees": "summer views of Italy, Portugal, Northern India, California [. . .] can appear at first glance as classic Australian landscapes—until the eucalypts begin to look slightly out of place, like giraffes in Scotland or Tasmania" (Bail 23).

The end of this sentence brings the comparison rather neatly home to Australia. That out-of-placeness, uncanniness, of the transported Australian landscape makes the Eucalyptus seem innocent and vulnerable, like a naïve Australian tourist. It defuses the overtones, initially present, of the actual overseas vigour and excess of these "exports." The loop of Bail's sentence is from an Australian growth out of place everywhere, to an alien animal out of place in Tasmania. Tasmania is in fact the source of most of the earliest seeds and samples of the now massively

widespread *E globulus*. Bail presents a manoeuvre, a knowing one, from invader to invaded, villain to victim. It sets the stage for a more pristine landscape where Eucalypts are at home, and the spotted daughter is no invader but an indigenous figure almost invisible in the landscape.

As Robin Doughty comments grimly, “Eucalypts can be made to flourish on lands stripped and degraded by mining operations, poor husbandry, or monocultural plantations” (Doughty x). In other words our national tree can be made to hide a multitude of sins, as indeed our image of “national character” conceals much less attractive and less palatable underpinnings. The Eucalypts of recent fiction are not these evil trees. In *The Idea of Perfection* when both Harley and Douglas independently go under the bridge, what they see is the rough but ingenious craftsmanship which has enabled the wood of the bridge to yield yet resist the forces of nature, to adapt itself to change and shift without breaking, working each timber together so each gives a little bit, but the whole doesn’t fall apart. This is the benign view we wish to cultivate of our founding timbers, our underlying structure.

I am not of course suggesting that these authors should, or could, extend their metaphoric, allegoric, symbolic use of the Eucalypt in order to show the ironic applicability of its less attractive features, as well as the apt likenesses it has been made to bear to particularly reified aspects of our supposed national character. This is not how fiction operates.

Nor are these authors all saying the same thing, though I do think their founding structure and weight, their derivation of power and authority from the invocation of botanical nomenclature, can align their works in particular ways. For at least some of the narratives celebrating the Eucalypt, the attraction appears to *be* taxonomy. For poststructural critics taxonomy seems bizarrely nostalgic. In a post-Saussurrean world the association between word and object is regarded as arbitrary and shifting, as in a post-structural world where the object itself is regarded as produced by the word, yet no object, meaning, tree, can be contained or conveyed by language. There is always something lost and something added.

By contrast, in taxonomy the word ostensibly describes the thing. *E obliqua* is the eucalypt with the oblique leaf, asymmetrical at base—Messmate. Shifts in classification, for most taxonomists, are not evidence of the arbitrary investments in particular features on which classification is based. On the contrary, reclassification is usually regarded as a process of refinement and correction, a process to which there is an ultimate imagined end which is a final perfection and fixity of meaning when everything is classified and catalogued correctly. The progress of classification is traced in the name. A reclassified eucalypt sometimes carries the name of its original classifier as well as the refiner of that classification. Obviously some taxonomists see these classifications as a necessary fiction, as indeed do I.

On one level Bail makes fun of this in his opening chapter to Eucalyptus,

entitled, *Obliqua*. This refers to the obliquity of his own meaning, the obliqueness of taxonomy, where things do not in fact mean what they say, or say what they mean. David Foster's narrator in *The Glade within the Grove* lives in Obliqua Creek. Bail demonstrates a sharp awareness of the irony and delusiveness of botanical nomenclature. But taxonomy does not work on this level of pun and metaphor. It *is* literal, and very seldom playful. It does claim to mean what it says. The author-god—the authority for the text, the centre which fixes the meaning, killed off by Roland Barthes, is alive and well in taxonomy, in which each name is authorized by the namer (Barthes). "*E regnans* F. Muell." is the Mountain Ash, first correctly classified by Ferdinand von Mueller. Bail's wordplay works if you treat all naming as metaphor, but within the internal logic of the novel, ultimately the naming assumes a concrete importance counter to this.

Biological nomenclature was used for power and self-aggrandizement in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. Harriet Ritvo stresses the well-demonstrated fact that the political imperialism of European expansion was intertwined with and supported by enlightenment science, and suggests that "the ability to deploy latinate terminology in accordance with a complex set of rules and conventions may have been a more reliable means of characterizing nineteenth-century naturalists than the names themselves were of species" (Ritvo 337).

This attraction of taxonomy and its ability to produce its author as much as its subject is still evident. From Furphy to McDonald, to name a tree is to place the self in relation to it, to have some orientation in this country. Arguably Furphy illustrates that such orientation is an illusion—*disorientation* is the natural state of most of his characters. McDonald by contrast maps a series of named tree men, a couple of token women and (a limited selection of) named trees and their specific microclimates. Though one of his "characters" cites Krishnamurti: "When you name something you think you've seen it" (McDonald 66), there is too much loving emphasis on identification and naming for this to be the motto of the book. Taxonomy, invoked by the botanical naming of gums, offers certainty and hierarchy while it turns the author back into god. Even while Bail plays around with nomenclature and shows how quite different stories can be anchored to those "fixed" terms, ultimately the novel *Eucalyptus* invests also in certainty and stability. Names and stories may fruit and flower from classificatory terms, but the tree remains the same. In describing the tree, even in parody of botanical description, the author-god joins the pantheon of namers, attached to the mighty Eucalypt. This trend can be traced in other ways in McDonald, whose tree-lovers, including foresters, planters, farmers, and painters, are all authors of their bits of bush. Tom Wyatt, for instance, in the "Bush Gardener" chapter, is credited with single-handedly reforestation of Rockhampton (50ff). Even the delphic Foster can ultimately be seen to assert a stable taxonomical world, in which the identification of the European-Australian with an/other genus makes any sort of sustain-

able orientation to the Australian flora imperative but perhaps impossible, as Susan Lever argues.

Taxonomy is a system which tends to confine identification to those sets of classifiers recognized by the nominant/dominant group as essential to identification. If we extrapolate to this set of diverse writers, there is an element of this community of agreement at work in their location of the individuality, the hardiness, the uniqueness, the local adaptability of the Eucalypt; in its identification as national tree and national character, to the exclusion of its less attractive possibilities.

Judith Grbich identifies the taxonomy of Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* as the same taxonomy discernible in native title cases which is the taxonomy of Imperialism. In fact Grbich's rather surreal reading finds the author-god personified in the story-telling stranger, representing Christ and the one true word, or name, presumably (143–44). But taxonomies are not so fixed and inescapable. Names do not produce Imperialism. While the neo-Imperial hierarchical argument of Sheehan's book can be shored up with taxonomy, it can also be exposed.

Sheehan's is the only one of these texts in which the argument could even be said to be entirely congruent with taxonomical containment. *Eucalyptus*, *The Glade within the Grove* and *The Idea of Perfection* are assertively open-ended. Even *The Tree in Changing Light* opens out into quotation and attribution which might be seen to disrupt the singular author-god, taxonomical point of view.

In Bail the uses of taxonomy come down to the attempt to name and classify the central object of desire, of mythological investment, of future possibility within the novel—Ellen. Holland tries to name her—he gives her an *E maidenii* on her entry into puberty. It carries the name of the father (Maiden, father of Australian botany);¹ Holland's chosen name; and name of the father's desire (that the daughter remain maiden—virgin, his own property). Clearly Ellen is not contained by this, despite attempts to join her to the prime taxonomist called Mr Cave. His name suggests the underworld, and therefore the Persephone myth, but also *cavé* which in the Latin of taxonomy means “beware.” In the end she seems to be stuck in that place of the feminine within patriarchy. She is replaced by a name, but outside of taxonomy, unnameable. The *maidenii* identification of her is as the object of desire, but she is something beyond that. Ellen is humming at the end, as Lyn Jacobs points out and therefore, one might hope, about to name herself, or tell her own story instead of being made up of the stories of the men around her. Still, she doesn't sing, and she remains unfixed at the end.

Perhaps the answer lies in Eucalypt Taxonomy after all. Since Bail's anxiety about the renaming of the Ghost Gum, Botanical nomenclature of the Eucalypt has gone the way he feared—following Johnson and Hill's work of 1979, that monolithic national signifier has been broken up, dispersed, revisited and reclassified into different groups, based on whole new categories of classification. These go well beyond Mueller, who based Eucalyptus classification on the bark, the

(spotted) skin, perhaps. The Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney Eucalypt Web classification pages are full of former Eucalypts which are now Corymbias and other subgenera. This openness to the mutability of the species is, as in Bail, hopeful, but somewhat compromised by a side bar on the website which reads: "The Eucalypts: icons of the Australian bush."

The texts considered here suffer from a similar cultural default. Although in some cases they begin by enthusiastically celebrating the multiplicity and possibility of the Eucalypt, its diversity, hybridity and multiplicity, these very features prove overwhelming, and the narratives resort to the most conventional of taxonomic conventions to maintain order. This taxonomy can reclassify text and author in their turn and realign them to a world order based on the imperial, resting on a system of Authority and hierarchy, or simply expose that these were always their foundations. The fact that this process is not complete in most of these texts, that they remain uncertain, open-ended, fractured, even re-classifiable, suggests that this process is not inevitable. The endlessly diverse, constantly shifting Eucalypts and Corymbias remain more promising signifiers for new forms of national (and literary national) identification than most, if only the cultural defaults can be resisted.

ENDNOTE

- 1 J H Maiden was also director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, that contained and ordered Imperial Space in the unruly Domain.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised 2nd ed. New York: Verso, 1992.
- Australian Commonwealth Government. "Let's Look Out for Australia" National Security Public Information Campaign Information Booklet. 2003. 26 April 2004
<[http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/www/rwpattach.nsf/viewasattachmentPersonal/4CF56D120B9E6497CA256CC100797443/\\$file/ntlbooklet.pdf](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/www/rwpattach.nsf/viewasattachmentPersonal/4CF56D120B9E6497CA256CC100797443/$file/ntlbooklet.pdf)>.
- Bail, Murray. *Eucalyptus*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge. London & New York: Longman, 1988.
- Butcher, Barry W. "Gorilla Warfare in Melbourne: Halford, Huxley and 'Man's Place in Nature'." *Australian Science in the Making*. Ed. Rod Home. Oakleigh, Melbourne: Cambridge UP, 1998. 153–69.

- Costermans, Leon. *Native Trees and Shrubs of South-Eastern Australia*. Adelaide: Rigby, 1981.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Ed. David Lodge. London & New York: Longman, 1988. 108–23.
- Doughty, Robin W. *The Eucalyptus: A Natural and Commercial History of the Gum Tree*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000.
- Eucalink: Web Guide to the Eucalypts: Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. Corymbia Page. 26 June 2003 <<http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/eucclass.pl?ge=Corymbia>>.
- Foster, David. *The Glade within the Grove*. Milson's Point, NSW: Vintage/Random House, 1997.
- Furphy, Joseph. *Such Is Life: Being Certain Extracts from the Diary of Tom Collins*. 1903. Annotated ed. Ed. Francis Devlin Glass, Robin Eaden, Lois Hoffman and G. W. Turner. Sydney: Halstead P, 1999.
- Grbich, Judith. "The Scent of Colonialism: *Mabo*, *Eucalyptus* and Excursions within Legal Racism." *The Australian Feminist Law Journal* 15 (2001): 121–48.
- Grenville, Kate. *The Idea of Perfection*. London: Picador, 1999.
- Griffiths, Tom. *Forests of Ash: An Environmental History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Hage, Ghassan. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Annandale, NSW: Pluto P, 1998.
- Hay, Ashley. *Gum*. Potts Point, NSW: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2002.
- Hill, K.D. and L.C. Stanberg. "*Eucalyptus castrensis* (Myrtaceae), a new species from New South Wales." *Telopea* 9.4 (2002): 773–76.
- Jacobs, Lyn. "The 'Good Oil': Eucalypts and Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*." *Antipodes* 15.1 (2001): 40–46.
- Lever, Susan. "Tree-dreaming: David Foster's *The Glade Within the Grove* and William Robinson's *Ancient Trees*." Conference presentation. BASA conference, Guildford, September 2002.
- Low, Tim. *Feral Future*. Ringwood: Viking, 1999.
- Martin, Catherine. *An Australian Girl*. 1894. Abridged ed. London: Pandora, 1988.
- McDonald, Roger. *The Tree in Changing Light*. Milson's Point, NSW: Knopf, 2001.
- Morrison, John. "The Incense Burner." *Australian Short Stories*. Ed. Kerry Goldsworthy. Boronia: J. M. Dent, 1983. 155–67.
- Pryor, L. D. and L. A. S. Johnson. *A Classification of the Eucalypts*. Canberra: Australian National U, 1971.
- Ritvo, Harriet. "Zoological Nomenclature and the Empire of Victorian Science." *Victorian Science in Context*. Ed. Bernard Lightman. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1997. 334–53.
- Saxena, N. C. *India's Eucalyptus Craze: The God That Failed*. New Delhi: Thousand Oaks; CA: Sage Publications, 1994.

- Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. London: Fontana P (HarperCollins), 1996.
- Sheehan, Paul. *Among the Barbarians*. Milson's Point, NSW: Random House, 1998.
- Summers, Anne. "Leaving Women up a Gum Tree." *The Sydney Morning Herald* 6 July 1998: 15.
- Ward, Russel. *The Australian Legend*. 2nd ed. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1966.
- White, Patrick. *Voss*. 1957. London: Vintage, 1994.
- Zobel, Bruce J., Gerrit Van Wyk and Per Stahl. *Growing Exotic Forests*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1987.