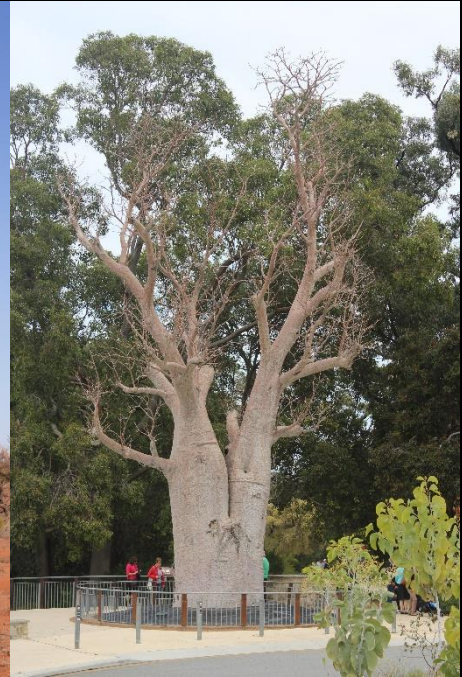


'He Remembered the Trees'

Understanding Arboreal Memory from an
Aboriginal Australian Perspective



John Charles Ryan

Southern Cross University, Australia

Nulungu Institute, University of Notre Dame, Australia

25 August 2022

9.00am India (11.30pm New York)



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
AUSTRALIA
BROOME CAMPUS



Southern Cross
University

Overview

- 1) **Introduction:** Arboreal Memory
- 2) **Wisdom in the Absence of a Brain:** Scientific Perspectives on Arboreal Memory
- 3) **Trees of Birth and Naming:** Arboreal Memory in Aboriginal Australian Culture
- 4) **'Of Memory Deep Inside':** Arboreal Memory and Embodiment in Aboriginal Poetry
- 5) **'It Is Still There: Our Story':** Arboreal Memory and Transgenerational Trauma
- 6) **Conclusion:** From *Dendrophobia* to *Dendrophilia*, Embracing New Memoryscapes



Part 1

Introduction: Arboreal Memory



- *subjects of memory*
- *agents of memory*
- *bearers of memory*

Part 1

Introduction: The Wintamarra Tree

DORIS PILKINGTON | NUGI GARIMARA

under the
Wintamarra
tree

*The eagerly awaited sequel to
'Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence'*
NOW A MAJOR FILM

UQP

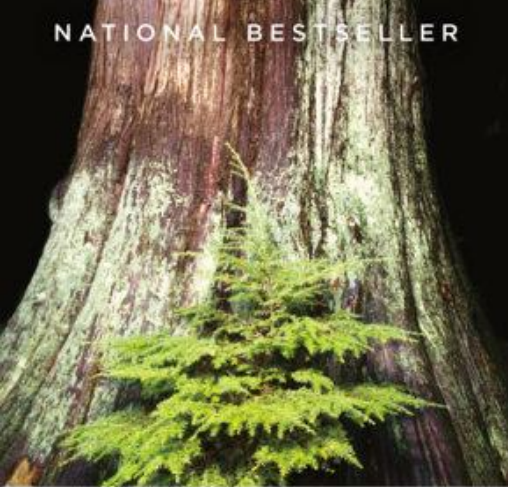


Part 2

Wisdom in the Absence of a Brain: Scientific Perspectives on Arboreal Memory



NATIONAL BESTSELLER



FINDING THE MOTHER TREE

Discovering the
Wisdom of the Forest

SUZANNE SIMARD

"Elegantly detailed . . . deeply personal . . . A testament to Simard's skill as a science communicator." —The New York Times

Frantisek Baluska · Monica Gagliano
Guenther Witzany Editors

Memory and Learning in Plants

The Science of Memory in Plants

- mother trees pass memories to subsequent generations to enhance kin's chances of success
- a plant's individual memory within its lifespan in comparison to memories passed from the plant to neighbors and offspring
- transgenerational memories of stress affect the maturation of seeds by suppressing genes associated with germination
- “in some circumstances, it may be advantageous for plants to learn to forget”
(Crisp et al. 2016, p. 1)



Roots scavenge decaying salmon nutrients transported by bears from rivers to trees. Via the rhizosphere, mother trees—ancient firs, spruces, and cedars—sequester salmon-derived nitrogen in their rings...

Part 3

Trees of Birth and Naming: Arboreal Memory in Aboriginal Australian Culture





Aboriginal Conceptions

- 'trees anchor the earth; they provide the eternal maternal bloodline that nourishes us all' (Milroy & Milroy, 2008, p. 37)
- 'trees are the midwives when children are birthed on the banks of dry riverbeds where the tall gums grow, and where each child has a birth tree' (Milroy & Milroy, 2008, p. 35)
- 'As we live in a place, walk through it, follow the songlines, we shed our skin. The skin falls into the soil [which] replaces that nutrient deficiency through fungi favored by several of our trees, particularly sheoaks. Because we shed our skin, the mycorrhizae underneath them take it up. Our DNA is in those trees' (Nannup, 2016)

Part 4

'Of Memory Deep Inside': Arboreal Memory and Embodiment in Aboriginal Poetry

Gregory's Tree Above Victoria River, Northern Territory, Australia
Image credit: Reise- (Wikimedia Commons)



Leaves

Ali Cobby Eckermann

that lone tree on the ridge
is that my father?
it stands like him

in my mind the horizon is
formed by him even at this
distance I know that

grass plains sway to sweep
the void there is no chasm
between us

I crawled there once and sat
in his shade he did not know me
yet gave me leaves

now only a few leaves
remain on ageing limbs
to beckon his story

if I climb to him now
and lie in his limbs
will our story unite?

will the leaves turn golden
and seeding grass sway
to console me?



Part 5

'It Is Still There: Our Story': Arboreal Memory and Transgenerational Trauma

Tingle Tree, Pemberton, Western Australia
Image credit: Author



Dear Sister

Ali Cobby Eckermann and Joy Harjo

There are no trains here. The railway lines have been removed, the station house vacant in disrepair. I wait by the broken platform for my son's return. There is no view of him. I no longer knows where he lives.

Millions of trees are demolished to build the railroad. Now barely a tree survives. You and I know old trees hold memories. It is tragic these trees have been destroyed. No factual re-telling of first contact is encouraged here. So much is denied when truth hangs dismal in the air.

Miles of empty railway corridors are re-sown with native seeds, the regeneration of saplings an offering to the native animals and birds, a haven built by those who have destroyed what was. Of course I am excluded. I am no longer fauna and flora. There is no returning. There is no re-turn. Truth is a lonely weight to carry.



Gija Jumulu, Kings Park, Perth, Western Australia



6. Conclusion

- Aboriginal Australian literature reminds us that the wisdom of trees lies in their dual capacity to witness trauma and cleanse its lingering residues.
- In the work of Bellear, Eckermann, Papertalk Green, Minter, Thomas, and other Aboriginal writers, trees are mnemonic agents—both *memoried* and *remembered*.
- Bringing Indigenous and scientific epistemologies into dialogue promotes an integrative view of arboreal memory as a somatic and transgenerational phenomenon.
- In an era of pervasive plant loss, the challenge ahead is to (re)imagine new memoryscapes based on modes of being-with the arboreal world that integrate trees' mnemonic agencies.



Thank you for listening...

John Charles Ryan, PhD
john.c.ryan@scu.edu.au