

Gija Jumulu

Phytocriticism and the Cultural Analysis of Plants



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Overview

- 1) Introduction: Gija Jumulu's 3,200-Kilometre Journey
- 2) Phytocriticism as a Plant-Attuned Critical Mode
- 3) Conducting a Phytocritical Analysis of Gija Jumulu and the Australian Boab Tree
- 4) Conclusion: Phytocritical Prospects in the Anthropocene



Part 1

Introduction: Gija Jumulu's 3,200- Kilometre Journey



The Gija Jumulu

Boab (*Adansonia gregorii*)



The Gija Jumulu Story

In July 2008 the Jumulu (Boab tree in Gija language) began its seven day journey from Warmun in the east Kimberley, travelling 3200 km south to its new home in Kings Park and Botanic Garden. The tree had to be removed to make way for roadworks. The complex removal of the 750 year old Jumulu took four days to complete, followed by the epic overland trip on board a 75 tonne truck through the Australian outback - the longest known land journey of a living tree of this size.

The Journey of Gija Jumulu from the Kimberley to Perth, 2008. Image credit: Kings Park and Botanic Garden





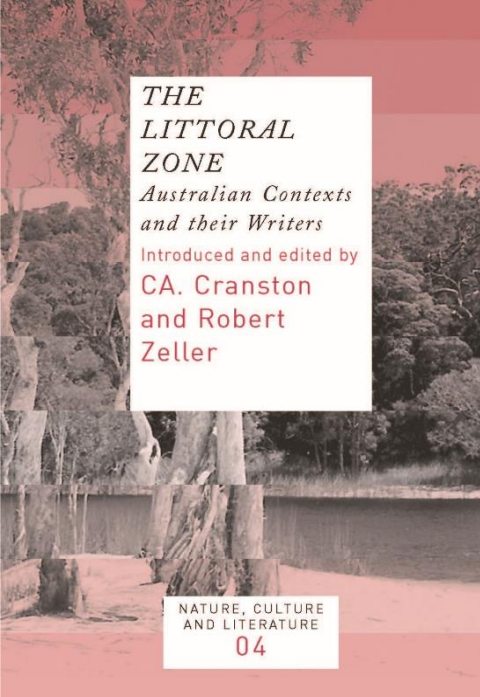
10-year Anniversary of the Mighty Boab Tree, 2018. Video credit: Kings Park and Botanic Garden (Facebook)
<https://www.facebook.com/KingsPark.WA/videos/10-year-anniversary-of-the-mighty-boab-tree/1791601467593999/>



Part 2

Phytocriticism as a Plant-Attuned Critical Mode



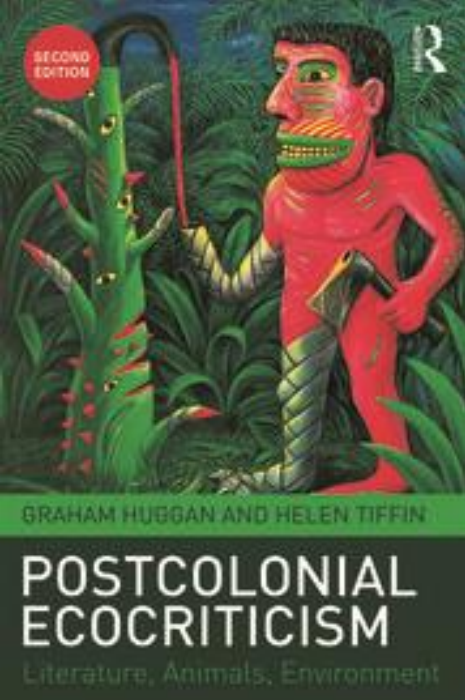


Environmental Texts

- Any **text** (novel, poem, film, website, television program, magazine article, advertisement, etc.) that represents the environment, ecological issues, and/or human-land relations
- Defined by Lawrence Buell as a text in which 'the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence' (1995, p. 7)

Ecocriticism

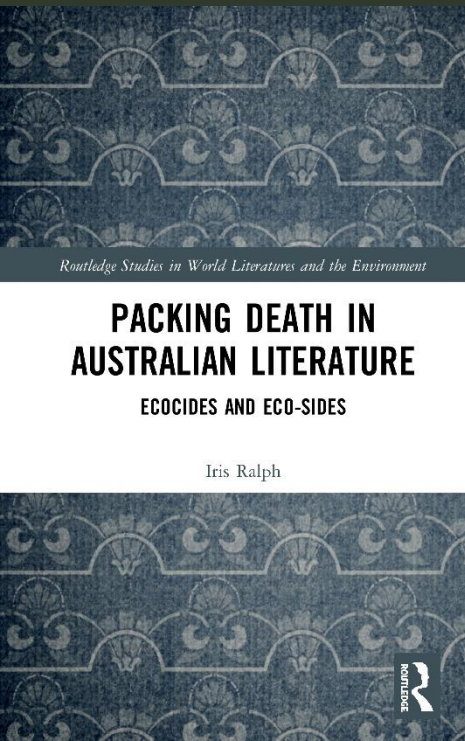
- The literary and historical analysis of environmental texts
- "The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [demonstrating] an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (Glottfelty, 1996)
- Since the 1990s, ecocriticism has diversified into specialisations such as affective and empirical studies



Animals and Literature

- **Animal texts** as those representing animal life and human-animal relations
- **Zoocriticism** as the reading of literary texts through an animal-focused lens
- Emerged from animal ethics debates and the broader scholarly field of **human-animal studies** (HAS)

Plants and Literature



- **Plant texts** as those representing plant life and human-flora relations
- **Phytocriticism** as the reading of literary-cultural texts through a plant-attuned lens
- Emerged from plant ethics debates and the broader scholarly field of **human-plant studies** (HPS)

Plants in Contemporary Poetry

Ecocriticism and the Botanical Imagination

John Ryan



Phytocriticism

From Chapter 1 of *Plants in Contemporary Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Botanical Imagination* (2018)

- broadens the dominant critical focus on plants as literary-cultural figurations (i.e. symbols)
- responds to ecocritical calls for alternatives to analytical models reducing a plant to “nothing more than a textual function” (Buell, 1995, p. 5)
- recognizes botanical life as an active presence in literary-cultural works
- considers how vegetal dynamism figures into the shape of cultural productions
- engages the science of vegetal neurobiology including research in plant behavior, cognition, memory, and sensing
- strives to let “plants maintain their otherness, respecting the uniqueness of their existence.” (Marder, 2013, p. 8)

THE MIND OF PLANTS

*Narratives of Vegetal
Intelligence*

Edited by
John C. Ryan,
Patricia Vieira,
and Monica Gagliano

Foreword by Dennis McKenna



Phytocritical Practice

- interrogates scientific representations
- considers Indigenous knowledge
- foregrounds factors of emplacement
- scrutinizes post/neocolonial contexts
- incorporates ideas of temporality, materiality, agency, ethics, and semiosis
- emphasizes vegetal corporealities (especially important vis-à-vis boabs)
- articulates the ways in which plants “talk back” to the cultural record
- highlights everyday interactions with flora
- examines multimedia materials, from literary representations to pop cultural depictions

Part 3

Conducting a Phytocritical Analysis of Gija Jumulu and the Australian Boab Tree



Gija Jumulu, Kings Park, Western Australia, February 2012. Image credit:
Moondyne (Wikimedia Commons)

Scientific Representations

- a charismatic tree endemic to Africa, Madagascar, and northwest Australia (Rangan, et al., 2015)
- “There was a very remarkable feature in the appearance of this part of the country, caused by a number of gouty-stemmed trees (a species of *Caparis* [sic])” (Grey, 1841)
- known to botanists as gouty-stemmed tree
- named *Adansonia gregorii* in 1856 by von Mueller in honour of A. C. Gregory
- “The dry acidulous pulp of the fruit is eaten. It has an agreeable taste, like cream of tartar, and is peculiarly refreshing in the sultry climates where the tree is found” (Maiden, 1889)
- Gerber (1895) first suggested that *Adansonia* originated in Australia





Adansonia gregorii after a drawing by Baines showing *Pandanus spiralis* and Aboriginal people hardening the tips of spears in hot ash, 1857.
Image credit: William Blandowski's *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* (Wikimedia Commons)



Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge

- central to the Dreaming narratives of Northern Australian Aboriginal people
- Kimberley people carved figures of snakes, crocodiles, and turtles into the trunks of large boabs (Clarke, 2011)
- boab roots are sources of water (Clarke, 2011)
- fibrous wood from the trunk and branches can be boiled and eaten (Brock, 1988)
- pulp crushed and mixed with water to make a drink, sweetened with sugar and formerly wild honey (Lowe, 2004)
- mothers with newborn babies drank boab fruit mashed into a liquid (Batty, 2002)
- carved nuts sold to tourists depict wildlife, hunting scenes, human faces and figures, or geometric designs (Lowe, 1998)

Hand-Carved Boab Nuts at Artlandish Aboriginal Art Gallery in Kununurra.
Image credit: Artlandish Gallery (Tripadvisor)

'Yes...
I chop it down that big tree.
I play...I cut it, yes."
*"You cutted yourself!
When you get oh, about fifty...
you'll feel it...
pain on your back
because you cutted it'.*

-from *Story About Feeling* (Neidjie, 1989, p. 25)



Post/Neocolonial Contexts



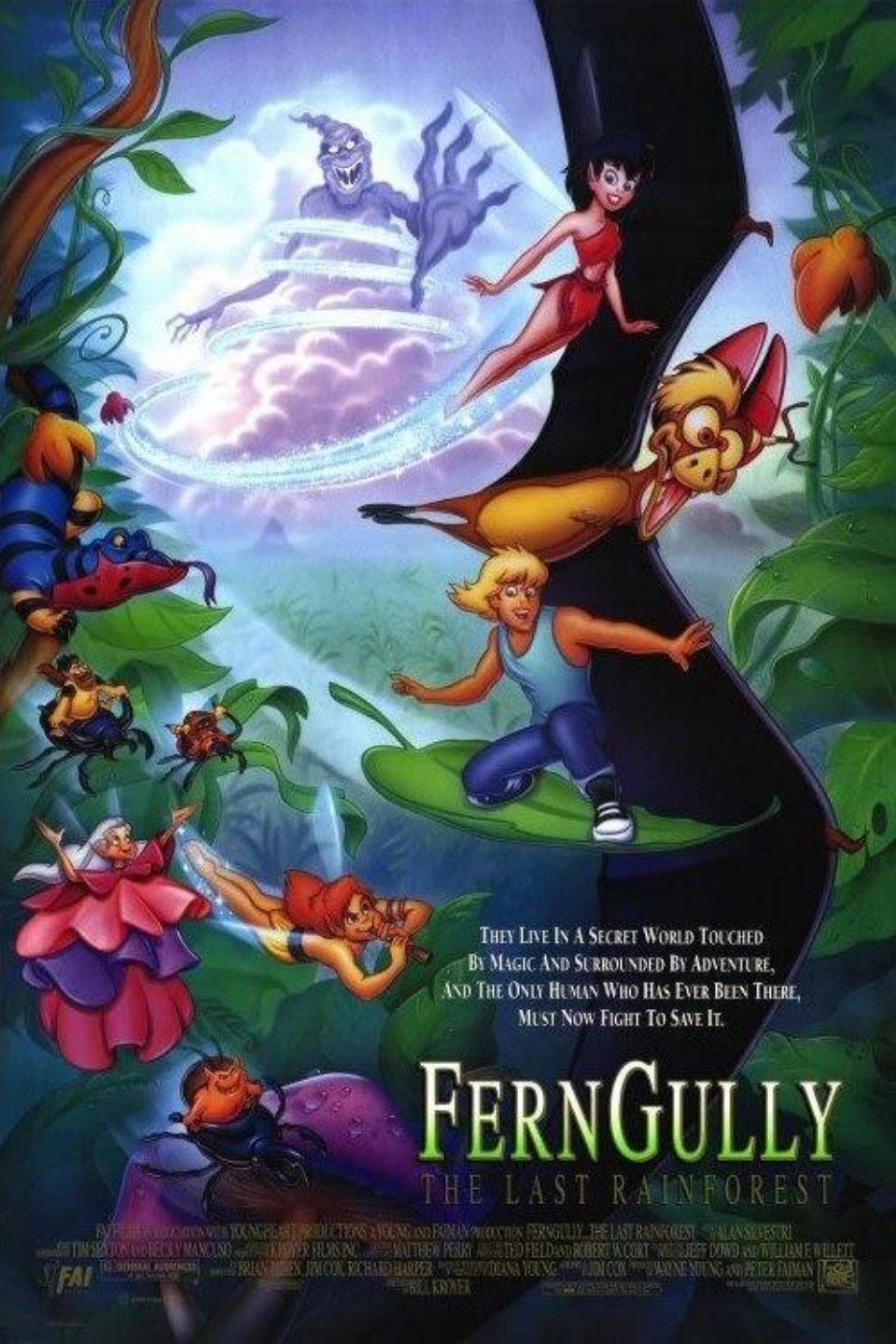
Boab Prison Tree, Derby, Western Australia, 2004. Image credit: Martin Kraft (Wikimedia Commons)

Arboreal Corporealities



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

Multi-Media Materials



FernGully: The Last Rainforest (1992)
Image credit: 20th Century Fox (Fandom.com)

Part 4

Conclusion: Phytocritical Prospects in the Anthropocene

tree 23

its blooming pandemonium up here
lemme out fast gawd Im suffocating
not havin privacy is frustrating
and bloody chinwaggin is all I hear
stupid creep neighbour like a pupeteer
primping me posing me and dictating
psychotically circumnutating
waxing poetic like william shakespeare
Im an antisocial bloke by nature
wish I was born in an outback wasteland
and who appointed the legislature
up in this gaol of a rainforest stand
breathless in a kind of caricature
of the life of solitude I once planned

Phytocritical Prospects

- Indigenous peoples' botanical knowledge
- Vegetal ethics, justice, pain, suffering
- Vegetarianism, veganism, plant diets
- Botanical medicine and herbalism
- Entheogenic plants in popular culture
- Plant health, well-being, flourishing
- Weeds, invasives, undesirable species
- Mourning the loss and death of plants
- Interactive botanical art, music, writing
- Plant agency in research methodologies (Hartigan, 2017, "How To Interview a Plant")
- Plant-based solutions to ecological issues





OAK SPRING
— GARDEN FOUNDATION —

Thank you for listening...



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Oak Spring Garden Foundation, Virginia, USA
Interdisciplinary Artist-in-Residence, May–June 2022