

THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF MURRAY BAIL'S EUCALYPTUS: DESIRE, ATTACHMENT, AND ISOLATION

Eshankulova Lola Sayfullayevna

EFL teacher, Integrated Language Teaching Course 2 - Department,
Uzbekistan State World languages university.

eshankulovalola@09gmail.com

Muxammedova Nafisa Kamolovna

EFL teacher, Uzbekistan State World languages university.

[nnafiza106@gmail.com](mailto:nafiza106@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3203-566X>

Abstract. This article examines how Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* (1998) constructs an "emotional landscape" through three interlocking dynamics: desire, attachment-as-control, and isolation. The novel's central premise—Holland offering his daughter Ellen in marriage to any suitor who can name every eucalyptus on his property—operates as more than a quirky plot device. It stages a politics of feeling in which desire is routed through classification and possession, attachment is enacted as surveillance and containment, and isolation emerges as both spatial enclosure and affective deprivation. Methodologically, the study uses close reading, thematic coding, and narratological analysis of recurring devices (taxonomic listing, the gaze, fairy-tale framing, and storytelling as seduction). The discussion synthesizes key scholarship on *Eucalyptus* that reads the novel through ecofeminist critique, cultural-symbolic accounts of the eucalypt, legal/postcolonial reflections on naming, and critical plant studies. Findings suggest that the novel's emotional economy is driven by a "logic of domination" in which naming and owning become affective practices—organizing characters' longing, dependence, and estrangement—while the text's parodic mode both exposes and, at times, risks reproducing gendered and colonial patterns.

Keywords: *Eucalyptus*, affect, desire, attachment, isolation, taxonomy, domination

Introduction

Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* (1998) is frequently described as a modern fairy tale whose romance is inseparable from catalogues of trees, systems of naming, and the seductions of storytelling [1]. At the plot level, Holland's "contest" turns Ellen into a prize: she will marry whoever can correctly identify every eucalyptus species on his land. Yet the contest is also affective infrastructure: it channels longing into classification, paternal attachment into surveillance, and rural vastness into a carefully managed enclosure.

Existing scholarship provides strong entry points for reading this emotional economy. Rooks frames the novel as a parodic exposure of patriarchal domination, showing how gendered dualisms and the "male gaze" structure Ellen's vulnerability and limited agency [7]. Jacobs and Martin focus on the eucalypt's cultural work: taxonomy and naming become a national-symbolic practice that can reinstall colonial relations even when the narrative appears to mock the urge to systematize [4; 5]. Legal and eco-critical readings add further pressure: Grbich links the novel's botanical obsession to the afterlives of colonial law and racialized land relations [3], while Gibson argues that the

novel's parodic excess may still "re-stereotype" women and land, requiring renewed interrogation [2].

Finally, intertextual and plant-studies approaches show how enchantment and arboreal agency shape narrative feeling—McNeer via *The Tempest* and Schoene via "arboreal obliquity," where trees "do the human" without speaking in a literal voice [6; 8]. This article asks: How does *Eucalyptus* organize character feelings (desire, attachment, isolation) through narrative devices of naming, looking, and storytelling? And what does this reveal about the novel's critique—its power and its limits—regarding domination, gender, and settler imaginaries?

Methods

This is a qualitative literary study using close reading and thematic analysis. The primary text is Bail's *Eucalyptus* (1998) [1].

Data and corpus

Primary corpus: *Eucalyptus* (selected episodes around the marriage contest, Ellen's movement through the grove, the stranger's storytelling, and moments of surveillance/containment) [1]. Secondary corpus: Rooks (patriarchal parody) [7], Jacobs and Martin (taxonomy/national symbolism) [4; 5], McNeer (intertextual enchantment) [6], Grbich (legal/colonial frame) [3], Gibson (critical plant studies) [2], and Schoene (arboreal narration) [8].

Results

Across readings, *Eucalyptus* repeatedly converts desire into epistemic mastery. Martin argues that the gum tree becomes a "heroic" national figure, and the authority to name it confers cultural legitimacy [5]. Jacobs similarly reads the eucalypt as a privileged sign-system whose classification promises belonging [4].

In this emotional configuration, Ellen is not simply loved; she is won. The contest scripts romance as acquisition, where desire is validated through knowledge and naming [1]. Rooks highlights how Ellen's "burgeoning sexuality" is controlled through paternal authority [7]. As a result, desire becomes a circuit linking knowledge → ownership → entitlement.

The second finding concerns attachment. Rather than care, paternal attachment appears as domination. Rooks shows how Holland's "gaze" objectifies Ellen and limits her agency [7]. Grbich strengthens this interpretation by linking naming and land to colonial legal authority [3]. Thus, naming becomes a form of claiming and control.

A third finding is that isolation is not accidental but constructed. The grove becomes both rich and restrictive, intensifying Ellen's emotional isolation. Gibson notes that even parody may reproduce domination patterns [2]. McNeer emphasizes storytelling as power, while Schoene highlights the active narrative role of trees in shaping emotional meaning [6; 8].

Discussion

The results suggest that *Eucalyptus* constructs an emotional landscape shaped by domination. Desire is structured through classification, attachment through surveillance, and isolation as a consequence of these systems [7].

At the same time, the novel's parodic mode creates ambiguity. On one hand, it critiques mastery and control [4; 5]; on the other hand, it risks reproducing them if agency remains unevenly distributed [2].

Intertextual and ecological readings deepen this interpretation. McNeer shows how storytelling can both create intimacy and maintain hierarchy [6], while Schoene suggests that trees redistribute agency beyond human control [8].

Conclusion

Eucalyptus builds an emotional landscape where feelings are structured rather than purely personal: desire is shaped by naming and possession, attachment by control, and isolation emerges from these systems [1]. The novel's critique is therefore double-edged—it exposes domination but may also reproduce it in subtle ways [2; 7].

REFERENCES

1. Bail, M. (1998). *Eucalyptus*. Text Publishing. (textpublishing.com.au)
2. Gibson, P. (2023). The Dirt Witches' counter-narrative: A response to Murray Bail's "Eucalyptus." *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, 14(1), 87–98. <https://doi.org/10.37536/ECOZONA.2023.14.1.4872> (ecozona.eu)
3. Grbich, J. (2001). The scent of colonialism: Mabo, Eucalyptus and excursions within legal racism. *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 15(1), 121–148. (Cambridge University Press & Assessment)
4. Jacobs, M. (2001). The 'good oil': Eucalypts and Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*. *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature*, 15(1), 40–46. (Research @ Flinders)
5. Martin, S. K. (2004). 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*, 3, 81–94. (Academia)
6. McNeer, R. (2002). Happily ever after: William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*. *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature*, 16(2), 171–176. (Digital Commons WSU)
7. Rooks, A. (2007). Parodying patriarchy: Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* and the "logic" of domination. *LiNQ: Literature in North Queensland*, 34, 24–33.
8. Schoene, B. (2025). Arboreal obliquity or trees doing the human in Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 66(2), 327–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2024.2305262> (Taylor & Francis Online)