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A bird's-eye view: industrial technology in eco-writing research

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ABSTRACT

Creative writers exploring environmental issues and human relationships with the more-than-human often employ methods for immersion in nature such as critical walking and 'forest bathing' or may seek to mirror what anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose describes as the 'footwalk epistemology' inherent in Aboriginal Australian worldviews. This article offers a new method of using industrial technology, in the form of a canopy crane, for eco-writing. Canopy cranes are typically used for scientific research. This article details my use of James Cook University's canopy crane in applied phenomenological research in comparison with walking on the Madja Boardwalk and with 'forest bathing'. All these methods were employed in lowland rainforest at Cape Tribulation, Australia, which is within the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area. This highly biodiverse Area covers only 0.12 per cent of the Australian land area yet is home to 30 per cent of Australia's marsupials, 58 per cent of bats, 60 per cent of butterflies, and over 5000 species of plants. The JCU canopy crane is one of only fifteen worldwide and therefore offers a rare opportunity to use this technology for creative writing research. In this article, I also present an extract of eco-fiction written as part of this project.

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Introduction

According to Geoff Nicholson, author of *The Lost Art of Walking: The History, Science, Philosophy and Literature of Pedestrianism* (2008), because 'words inscribe a text in the same way that a walk inscribes space' writing and walking are two ways of 'making the world our own' (2008, 27). By owning the world, Nicholson means taking responsibility for it, or some part of it, which is crucial in an era of environmental crisis. Nature is declining at 'rates unprecedented in human history' (United Nations 2019). This decline features in a constant news cycle about climate change, extinctions, land clearing, wildfires and floods. Meanwhile the human population is expected to peak of 10.4 billion in the 2080s (United Nations 2022). Whether or not anthropocentrism is the 'root cause of environmental problems' (Sarver 1999, 8) or a general lack of understanding of

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Indigenous ways of thinking (Yunkaporta 2019), creative writers have a key role to play in developing new understandings of human relationships with the non-human or more-than-human (Sandford et al. 2024). Furthermore, many people living and working in cities turn to literary experiences of being in nature beyond their immediate location. Creative writers are key to developing such literature.

Critical walking is often explored through psychogeography, the dérive, or the flâneur. Psychogeography is understood as an invention of Guy Debord (1931–1994) in his 1955 paper 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography' in which he explores the effects of a physical landscape or geography on human emotions and behaviour (Nicholson 2008, 150). The *dérive*, which translates in English to 'drift', essentially means walking without a specific purpose or destination. This is also the case with the *flâneur*, who adheres more consistently to a leisurely pace. However, Nicholson writes that 'all walks are constrained walks one way or another … constrained by time, by our imagination, by our physical limitations, and by the special character of the terrain we're walking' (Nicholson 2008, 161). Creative writers who engage in academic programmes will be acutely aware of constraints of time and, through teaching new writers, the limits of imagination. However, in many instances physical limitations beyond individual strength and endurance are overlooked. Jessica White points out, in a reflection on her own life, that disability can be advantageous to writers. She writes of her own experience: 'This is what deafness did for you. It led you to writing, and not just any writing … It liberated your sense of form and structure, leading to a hybrid mixture of biography, memoir, literary criticism and history' (White 2024, 11). In a study of one of Australia's most well-known writers Henry Lawson, Amanda Tink found that 'deafness … influenced his word choices, themes, perspectives, and techniques' (Tink 2016, 141). More broadly, disability means 'bodily otherness', a concept that has led poet Andy Jackson to writing as 'an exercise in attending to other people, and to the spaces between us' (Jackson 2018, 1–2). And just as crafting literary representations of disability is important to understanding disability as 'a significant human experience that occurs in every society, every family and most every life' (Garland-Thomson 2005, 524), so too disability may be viewed as an essential consideration within a pool of human limitations that constrain critical walking.

A wide range of limitations or constraints must be interrogated before selecting and while using a critical walking method. Syrus Marcus Ware, while reflecting on forest walking with a group of young people in Ontario, Canada, describes his own 'slow "cripped" walking practices' as part of 'a walking methodology that is not tied to the act of using one's legs for locomotion – rather a methodology tied to our experiences of moving through space, in a variety of embodied ways' (Ware 2022, 237). Adding to this suite of human limits is the influence of light and darkness. Ben Stubbs, in a study of nighttime travel writing, points to the 'nocturnal perspective' as offering 'an alternative rendering of place' (Stubbs 2019, 11). This is another productive human constraint, this time a visual and sensorial otherness that may resonate to some extent with writers who have non-normative vision. Such constraints encountered in everyday life – whether imagination, a degree of human disability in some form or another, or an externally imposed constraint like available time and light – will influence critical walking and therefore, as Stubbs, White and Tink demonstrate, the writer's praxis and their literary output. Another influence is cultural.

One of many approaches to creative writing is authorship that employs an Indigenous perspective. Indigenous Australian worldviews include an acute awareness of the

interconnectedness and sentience of everything – plants, people, animals, rocks, moon, water and air, to name a few things – which converts landscape into a dynamic arena for learning and new knowledge (Rose 1996, 2024; Yunkaporta 2019). In *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (2019), Tyson Yunkaporta points to the 'sheer genius that comes from belonging in symbiotic relation to [the land] (2019, 3), which he attributes to Indigenous ways of thinking. Anyone who watches the TV series *Alone* will understand that this connection Yunkaporta writes about cannot be achieved in isolation but instead – as Yunkaporta tells us – requires a community of people with stories, social interactions with nature, and the dynamics of an evolving culture. However, within Aboriginal Australian cultures there is a place for individual experience: 'The way each person knows those stories is subjective – how they are known in that time and place by that person is a unique viewpoint that is sacred' (Yunkaporta 2019, 26). Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose, in her posthumously published book *Dreaming Ecology: Nomadics and Ecological Knowledge, Victoria River, Northern Australia* (2024) describes a 'footwalk epistemology', in which Country 'comes into being through the calls and responses, the departures and returns of life and life-giving action' (2024, 61). Rose writes that engagement with Country, historically termed 'walkabout', is 'never aimless. It depends on knowledge, rights and responsibilities … one goes with intent, and one announces that intent … It always implies the return, it always implies productivity, it always implies purpose. It need not, however, imply walking' (Rose 2024). Aboriginal people, she explains, have for many years used motor vehicles, except when approaching 'sacred and dangerous places' which always requires feet on the ground. Such vehicles are presumably open to Country and story, and are not the 'insulative shell' that makes an occupant 'feel trapped' as Michael Sala views cars in the city of Newcastle, Australia (2022, 14). For Aboriginal Australians, the Aboriginal English term 'footwalk' is used to specify a motion where feet are touching the Earth (2024, 63). 'Walkabout', whether as footwalk or using a vehicle, is a way of moving in the world while connected with and responding to material and non-material agents. As Rose explains:

> Footwalk epistemology arises in the in-between. It is motion connecting the here and not-here. On walkabout you are between here and there, you are in motion rather than stasis, you are in a state of encounter, and thus in flowing moments of presence. On walkabout you are enmeshed in connectivities. (2024, 64)

This worldview of connectiveness, purpose and variation in mode of movement raises questions about how critical walking is understood and employed by creative writers.

For eco-writers, the Aboriginal Australian worldview offers a way forward or reinforces their own approach towards creating a sustainable and harmonious co-dependency between people and their environment. Yunkaporta suggests that 'further work needs to be done on what constitutes consciousness and what constitutes life. If the definitions of these things could include rocks as sentient beings, it would go a long way towards stemming the emu-like [narcissistic] behaviours that are running rampant across the earth and cyberspace right now' (2019, 41). Subordinating human-centeredness and recognising the sophisticated interrelationships in ecosystems and life as more broadly conceived is a foundation for contemporary forms of nature writing. Just as the 'interdependence of self and ecosystem' is a useful approach to eco-biography (White 2020, 14),

notions of interdependence and interconnectivity are useful to writers of eco-fiction. The eco– prefix is a helpful reminder to attend to other-than-human components of an ecosystem and a spiritual landscape ahead of the author as the storyteller and engage them as components central to the core meaning and purpose of the creative text. Eco-fiction is commonly associated with speculative genres due to their suitability for addressing environmental issues at global and temporally vast scales, as apparent in climate fiction (Woods 2023) and science fiction (Rosenberg 2018). Settling on an approach is one decision that leads to many others in the practical work of connecting observation, imagination and text. Writers' reflections on critical walking can offer guidance to other writers on how to think about their surroundings during their writing praxis, irrespective of the type of environment they immerse themselves in. And what each writer observes is not always beyond their own imagination.

Walking as a method for creative writing is not only for description of terrain but for developing new insights and understandings. This is evident in relationships between writers and cities. Iain Sinclair, author of *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London* (1997), says in a conversation with Geoff Nicholson about walking, 'As well as hoovering up information, it's a way of actually shifting a state of consciousness, and you get into things you didn't know about, or you begin to find out about, and that's the interesting part. Otherwise, it's just reportage' (Nicholson 2008, 97). Charles Dickens also walked in London, often at night, 'to process his stories and the complications of his everyday life' (Stubbs 2019, 4). Contemporary applications of psychogeography in other cities are showcased in WalkingLab, a project aimed at 'advanc[ing] the theory and practice of critical walking methodologies through interdisciplinary arts practices and public walking events' while drawing on 'feminist-queer, anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-colonial thought and practice' (Springgay and Truman 2024). Whether this project offers new 'methodologies' is contestable, however critical walking has amply proven its usefulness for research and creative writing (Bayes 2023; Springgay and Truman 2022; Stubbs 2019). While some writers use description as a way of initiating a conversation (Fiore and Lin 2024; Howe and Krishnabhakdi-Vasilakis 2023; Trofimova and Nicholls 2018), most identify movement as a crucial means of tapping into the subconscious to stimulate creativity. Increasingly writers are exploring forests. Ilka Tampke in a year of walking and writing fiction in wet sclerophyll and temperate rainforest on Mount Macedon in Central Victoria, Australia, concludes: 'The forest is in the language, the imagery, the story, the atmosphere, of the text. It has shaped every sentence. The originating idea for the novel was conceived among the trees' (2024, 13). Tampke grapples with questions about whose voice she has captured, hers or the forest, and asks readers to ponder, 'Is failing to cite its authorship a form of ecological plagiarism?' (2024, 13). Her sense of authority and responsibility to the forest aligns with the perpetual need facing writers to respectfully consider race, gender-queer, disability, class, and more when crafting characters and narrative. Moreover, what must also be carefully navigated is *how* the more-than-human is depicted and characterised.

Writers and scholars engaging with the nonhuman or more-than-human differ in the way they characterise their experiences, ranging from exuberantly positive to miserably harsh. Anna Tsing, reflecting on a study of the relationship between fungi and pine trees in a former brown coal mining area in Denmark, uses the word *attunement* to refer to 'attempts to get to know, through alignment, how [nonhuman] others express

themselves in the world' (Tsing 2024). That Tsing has a sense of wonder and appreciation is evident in her writing, but whether this extends to an acquisition of personal health benefits as a motivation or outcome was not stated. Marcus Ware, on the other hand, clearly expresses that positive wellbeing for people is important. He writes about 'forest bathing', by which he means a personal experience of being in a forest, whether walking or resting, and using all his senses for 'taking in the beauty of our natural world' and feeling peaceful and creatively inspired (2022, 237). Ware regards this as especially important for young people who live in cities and might not otherwise have access to a forest. This notion of forest bathing is reminiscent of the Japanese therapy of *shinrin-yoku,* which is practiced by traversing a forest at a slow and relaxing pace while being mindful of senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch, and which 'may significantly improve people's physical and psychological health' (Wen et al. 2019, 19). This is also the motivation of 'New Age' walkers that Nicholson describes as identifying nature as 'an unalloyed source of goodness, purity, benign intention, spiritual insight, higher consciousness, and (oh spare me) healing' (2008, 175). Nicholson makes a point of acknowledging – as Deborah Bird Rose also does (Rose 2024) – that sometimes nature can be harsh and unpleasant. This side of the human experience of nature is explored in the literary field of Georgic Studies, which stems from a long literary tradition associated with farming, where the human experience is not always easy or advantageous (see Edney and Somervell 2023). The scope of the writer's experience to be conveyed, whether beneficial or harsh or both, is a matter for consideration and articulation prior to and during eco-writing research.

From here on, I explore how constraints that are inherent in walking as a method for creative writing praxis shift when using an industrial Liebherr 91 EC crane as an alternative method for writing place-based eco-fiction set in a tropical rainforest. I describe both the affordances and limitations this technology offers my praxis. My use of an industrial crane for eco-writing may be the first, given there are at most fifteen of these facilities operating worldwide, including only five or six in the tropics and eight planned for construction in China (British Ecological Society 2016; Nakamura et al. 2017). Typically canopy cranes are used for scientific research on plants, arthropods, and canopy access methods (Nakamura et al. 2017). Furthermore, accessing industrial technology for immersion in forests is likely not top-of-mind for most creative writers. The applied phenomenological research, or use of 'phenomenological ideas in a non-philosophical context' (Zahavi 2021, 261), that underpins this essay was conducted at James Cook University's Daintree Rainforest Observatory (DRO) at Cape Tribulation, Australia, on 12–15 August 2024. The lowland rainforest under the arc of the crane is on the lands of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people and forms part of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area, one of the most biodiverse regions in Australia. This Area covers only 0.12 per cent of the Australian land area yet is home to 30 per cent of Australia's marsupials, 58 per cent of bats, 60 per cent of butterflies, and over 5000 species of plants (Wet Tropics Management Authority n.d.). I begin this essay by presenting my experience of walking Madja Boardwalk at Cape Tribulation, of walking and sitting in rainforest adjacent to the DRO, and of rising above the rainforest in the workbox of the DRO canopy crane. To further understandings of more-than-human existence and agency, an extract of eco-fiction written in response to this research is presented, followed by a conclusion.

Madja Boardwalk

Being on a boardwalk is like being in the audience of a theatre. It is built infrastructure designed to give a predetermined perspective. At Madja Boardwalk, Cape Tribulation, the stage is lower than the boardwalk and comprises lowland rainforest and mangroves. The actors are plants, animals, water and the wind. Perhaps because I had not bought a ticket, I lacked a sense of belonging and purpose; I was not a fee-paying tourist following a guide. I was more aligned with the individuals who were taking photographs, except I was not only observing nature visually but drawing on all my senses. As Geoff Nicholson writes, 'The things you hear when you walk are every bit as important as the things you see, or for that matter touch, taste and smell' (2008, 127). Additionally, I was observing my experience of observing nature, which made me feel like an inept spy, ludicrously spying on myself. However, this was necessary for gathering meta-data on how I was observing and experiencing nature. The process reminded me of meta-fiction, where readers are immersed in a fictional world until being separated from it by the author revealing their presence. I was doing something similar, immersing myself in nature, then interrupting my observation to record what I was doing and experiencing. Perhaps human consciousness will always interfere like this. Like the footwalk described by Debra Bird Rose: 'Your motion is taking place in time and as you come from somewhere, so you have a history, a memory, a fund of knowledge of where you are *not*, as well as where you are' (2024, 64, italics in original). Pure instinctual engagements are likely confined to moments of crisis or danger.

On arrival at Madja Boardwalk, I took a photo of the signs at the start and began walking, content to see what I would find. It was an easy flat walk over a wide firm path, constructed of recycled plastic, with timber rails on either side, and later became a concrete path with no rails. Soon after I started walking, I encountered a group of tourists, standing and fidgeting on the boardwalk while listening to a guide with a loud booming voice. The guide's information was designed for maximum interest, but the volume of his voice made communing with nature impossible for me. I can still recall him saying that Orange-footed Scrub Fowl decompose extremely quickly after death. The sound of my footfall was also very loud, due to the squelch of my rubber-soled shoes against wet repurposed plastic. However, the boardwalk did enable me to transit quickly from rainforest to mangroves. I saw clear water, buttress roots, an abundance of mud disturbed by feral pigs, a tall forest of mangroves, and people. The mangroves emitted an odour of decay. Sandflies were surprisingly scarce (although perhaps I was walking too fast). Misty rain wet my skin.

Following this boardwalk provided an example of a constrained walk. As Nicholson explains: 'The walking of a shape, symbol, or word is one of the basic practices of psychogeography, what is called a "constrained walk"' (2008, 145). The Madja Boardwalk was evidently designed to take walkers through two major vegetation types that abruptly changed from rainforest to mangroves. Few walkers would naturally choose to walk in the deep mud of a mangrove forest, especially in this region, with its estuaries inhabited by massive crocodiles known to eat people when the opportunity arises, and with obvious signs of feral pigs that can also cause significant harm to people with their sharp tusks. The boardwalk was constrained to maximise human safety and distance from harsh, unpleasant and dangerous forms of nature.

Walking in rainforest

Walking in the rainforest a few kilometers north at the Daintree Rainforest Observatory was quieter, the sound of my footfall more natural, despite my wearing shoes. It was a sound of small twigs breaking, the crush of leaf litter. At one stage, I removed my shoes, and the sound was almost non-existent. My feet were soft from wearing shoes most other times. The ground was soft too. There was an intimacy between us. Some soil or mud appeared between my toes but mostly a layer of leaves protected my feet and the earth, like a sheet over a mattress. I had to step carefully and slowly to avoid my feet being punctured by spikes of a lawyer vine or other spiny hazards. Large smooth rocks were covered in soft green moss. Crossing a fast-flowing creek, I was wobbly at first, unaccustomed to the many stones and rocks that made an uneven and slippery substrate. I paused, stood for a while, became accustomed. On my second walk, I realised I had been forgetting things. The first time, I had forgotten to take a pencil. The second time, my glasses. This was partly because I had transferred some but not everything from my usual bilum to a day pack, and partly because being so close to nature was a change in my usual daily routine. Like writing, gaining knowledge through critical walking requires regular practice.

Sitting in rainforest

This was my way into the slow time of forest bathing. I was no longer going somewhere. Very little moved around me. The most obvious sound was the wind through the canopy. The dead hanging leaves from a fan palm seemed to move far more than the wind demanded, exhibiting a mesmerising agency. Signs of decay were all around me: rotting logs, termite tracks up a tree, damp soil, and fungi on soft, porous wood. Here the hazards were biting insects. The warmth of my body, protected from the wind in the canopy, drew them to feed. This discomfort did not exist in my cabin, where I was protected by insect screens. Here, bird calls intermingled with the sound of the canopy leaves in the wind. Other times, the forest was silent. In this slow time, I noticed how everything was tangled: vines, fallen branches, a fan palm. All was dark and cool and damp.

I also had time to interact for a long while with a single tree: a Black Bean tree (*Castanospermum australe)* with large woody roots extended in all directions over the surface of the ground. The trunk exhibited extraordinary patterns that might inspire a visual artist, made in collaboration with lichen and the roots of epiphytes. As this tree was so magnificently tall, the leaves at the canopy were beyond view. In the dark shade, near the base of the trunk, were the strewn remains of large woody seed pods and a scattering of small seedlings awaiting sunshine for further growth. Being with this tree reminded me of the significance of a tree to the single mother protagonist in Amanda Lowry's award-winning novel *The Labyrinth* (2020). As the narrator, Erica Marsden, tells readers, 'And I believe the tree sustained me, for almost from the first day the tree and I entered into a relationship of looking. I would sit on the edge of the bed and gaze at the tree and the tree looked back at me … There was not a day when it didn't change, and I saw myself in it: not stuck, not a mendicant in that old house, but a young woman in transition' (2020, 52). This was an example of the shift in thinking that can occur when engaging with nature. For me, it was a realisation, when hugging that Black Bean tree, that the hard

surety of its physical presence was comforting. I enjoyed having that strong, reliable and independent life alongside mine.

The canopy crane

The DRO canopy crane is unmistakably an example of industrial technology. It's the kind of equipment you might expect of a city, on the site where a high-rise building is under construction (Figure 1). The Liebherr 91 EC crane lifts a 4-person workbox to a height of 48 meters, which enables (for the creative writer) phenomenological engagement with the rainforest canopy. There are other ways to access a forest canopy – using scaffolding, observation towers, an ecotourism canopy walkway, or the old-fashioned use of a rope to climb a tree. A point of difference for the canopy crane is the ability to move at will anywhere within a 55-metre radius of the crane tower. Like most industrial equipment, there are rules, harnesses and plenty of signage. This heavy metallic construction is not the entry point to communing with nature that most people would choose.

However, what the crane delivered was a whole new perspective and experience of rainforest. To begin with the workbox was much smaller than I expected. Although designed to hold four people, having the crane operator and myself inside was enough. The sides were enclosed to about waist height, which allows researchers to reach out to gather leaves or fruit or to touch what they like in the canopy. The ride to the top of the trees was smooth and relatively fast for this contemplative writer. What struck me most about the experience after spending days in the darkness of the rainforest was the bright sunshine above. I had forgotten that trees have leaves (not just trunks, which is all you can see of them from below) and depend on sunshine like most other

Figure 1. James Cook University's canopy crane at the Daintree Rainforest Observatory, Cape Tribulation, Australia.

plants. The view from above was like looking over a farmer's crop, the perspective completely different. I have seen rainforest from above before as a view from a house, a lookout or the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway (https://www.skyrail.com.au), but the proximity here was extraordinary. I could reach out and touch the leaves, feel their thickness and strength; they felt like the plastic cover of a bound document except with ridges of hard veins underneath. There was also a vibrant life of bees, butterflies, ants, flowers, and fruit. The fruit I had previously found on the forest floor had been over-ripe yet was in its prime up here, some at the perfect state of ripeness for consumption by birds or an animal that can climb. I watched too as a male osprey flew to a large nest on the crane boom with a fish for a female and nestlings. The canopy was exposed, light, and vibrant with joyous insects. This was not the dark, enclosed rainforest often employed in literature. It was another side, a bright side of the rainforest. Something I wanted to explore and comprehend by writing fiction.

Ecofiction – an extract

The eco-fiction written after my experience in the canopy crane is a 3000-word short story titled 'The Marvelous Mr Black' which I structured in three parts. The story spans three generations of women and three settings. The first two parts were written in a realist style and the third as speculative fiction. In the first part, an elderly woman, Edna, is visiting Mr Charles Black, the jeweller, to have one of her rings examined and polished. The second part introduces Edna's daughter, Sarah, a doctor at a new private hospital, who sits each day in an urban park during her lunch break, unwinding with nature. The third part presents Sarah's daughter (and Edna's granddaughter) Verity, who is a plant physiologist conducting research in the rainforest at Cape Tribulation, when she learns by radio and later by phone in the research station's office of the deaths of her mother and grandmother in a car accident. Her first impulse is to return to the forest.

She cannot cry forever and finds herself holding the tree, being still like the tree. She closes her eyes. Verity pushes one hand up as high as she can, reaching for the tree, which somehow takes her hand and pulls her up along the trunk. She is holding her mother's hand, she thinks, then knows, and her mother is holding Edna's hand and together the three women glide in gentle undulations up towards the canopy. It is a slow movement and Verity is too exhausted, too grief-stricken to be scared. Her miserable low mood soon transforms into a feeling of being loved and at home, a transition that makes her wonder whether her mother had brought home some morphine and given her a shot, causing a dreamlike resurgence of energy and pleasure. Near the top of the tree, leaves brush against Verity's skin, and she almost laughs, remembering how her mother had once told her about being friends with a bunch of weeds in a park. They always touched her, she had said, whenever she arrived. And now this tree was touching them both, making a connection.

Suddenly, Verity emerges into clear air and bright light above the canopy. Here she sits on a branch that seems almost too light to hold her, and feels the tree moving in the wind, which is stronger here, arriving periodically as a fresh gust. Despite the precarity of her situation, Verity feels safe. Her mother and Edna are here still, chatting in a language she cannot understand. There are flowers and bees and butterflies, soaking up the warmth of a wonderfully uplifting sunshine. From her position in the tree, Verity sees the ocean

far in the distance and a ship on the horizon. The leaves around her are thick and strong like hard plastic, designed for exposure to harsh conditions, and packed together like a lush lawn.

'This is a Black Bean tree', says an unspoken voice. 'Mr Charles Black, the jeweller'.

Verity wonders if she could walk across the mat of leaves but she can't distinguish different trees; there are no gaps between them. Some parts of the canopy rise higher than others, as low leafy mounds, and not all parts have flowers and bees. To her left, is a slender stem bearing fruit that looks like flat green plums. And there are ants, way up here, clustered together as if there is not enough space for them on the ground.

'They must like this fruit', Verity tells her mother.

The breeze dries tears on her face, and Verity sways on her branch, appreciating the warm air holding her in place.

'Why are you here?' she asks her mother and grandmother, hoping one will answer.

They don't.

A butterfly lands on her hand. It's brown with white spots and holds its wings vertically, the edges shifting slightly in the breeze as it walks in a semi-circle to face the wind, to be more slipstreamed and less affected. It doesn't stay long. Not as long as Verity had wanted. Neither does her mother and grandmother. They are leaving her alone with Mr Charles Black, the tree.

Verity descends alone, drifting in the same way she had ascended, without effort or sound. At the base of the tree, she sits with her back against a curve, protected by folds of wood on either side and studies the shoots growing from the large snake-like roots. What is a tree's purpose in life, she wonders. To live and grow. Is that all?

The story continues until Mr Charles Black, the jeweller / Black Bean tree, confirms that Verity was almost right. In closing she believes the strong, dignified tree, The Marvelous Mr Black, tells her 'You are flawless. A perfect spinel. Live. Grow'.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates how a forest canopy crane can be used in creative writing research. Applied phenomenological research enabled me to collect data on my experience of walking through, sitting in and gliding above tropical rainforest of the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area. From the workbox of an industrial crane, I felt leaves toughened for life in harsh conditions, the uplifting charge of emerging from a dark understory into bright sunshine, the vibrancy of bees and butterflies clustered around flowers and fruit, and inspiration from seeing the form of the rainforest canopy and an osprey in flight, all of which was unattainable by walking or sitting at ground level. Data collected at Madja Boardwalk and the Daintree Rainforest Observatory, Cape Tribulation, Australia, informed my creative praxis which produced a short work of eco-fiction that combines realist and speculative writing. This work offers a literary juxtaposition of a jeweller's store, an urban park, and a tropical rainforest interwoven with cycles of life to reach a denouement in a rainforest ecosystem. Given that Aboriginal Australians at times use vehicles when connecting with Country, and that disability studies point to movement as more important than actually walking, the use of an industrial crane represents a useful new method for engaging with more-than-human nature.

Disclosure statement

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

Notes on contributor

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