

‘Beauty Tigress Queen’: Staging the Thylacine in a Theatre of Species

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In the early twenty-first century, when the environment, climate change, degraded ecosystems and species loss are urgent global problems (IPCC, 2014), the politics of human progress and its effects on land, climate and species are a major concern for modernity’s governments, sciences, arts and humanities. Theatre that considers itself socially and politically engaged will increasingly give priority to an ecological consciousness of the human in relation to the non-human just as it has for socialist, feminist, race and sexual politics.

Yet there is no easy fit between theatre and ecology. Despite the emergence of activist performance art on ecological and animal rights themes, and terms such as ecological theatre, ecodrama, and ecocriticism, theatre and drama lag behind other art forms including documentary film and visual arts. The relative slowness of theatre to engage with human and animal ecology, as Una Chaudhuri explains, is in part a product of the conventions of modern theatre and drama, which centre on dramatic character and have a preference for interior settings over external landscape (1994). (We need only look to Emile Zola’s image of naturalist theatre, in which he foresaw audiences observing human actors interact with each other in social settings; or Bertolt Brecht’s idea of epic theatre as the representation of the class war in the scientific age; or Jerzi Grotowski’s idea of theatre as a human laboratory). Ecocritical theatre, if it were to take place, would stage the encounters of humans, animals and environment from the perspective of threatened habitats, species extinction and activism. In this hypothetical project, theatre would play its part in debates about the future of the planet. It would think about the potential of the theatre apparatus—its performativity, spectatorship, temporality and spatiality, and its aesthetic systems—to make a critical difference. Even then, as Bruce McConachie warns, theatre needs to approach ecological activism with humility and a frank recognition that within the ecological matrix, humans are the problem: ‘proposing that humans should “save the earth” is not only ridiculously arrogant but also clearly immoral; probably the best way to save nature would be to kill off humanity’ (cited in Arons and May 2007, 92). We might say therefore that theatrical engagement with ecology calls for a certain scepticism and irony about human environmentalism while utilizing theatre’s capacity to intervene in public debate about important issues.

Chaudhuri’s highly influential essay “‘There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake’’: Toward an Ecological Theater’ (1994) draws its title from a brief aside in Chekhov’s play *The Seagull*, which she reads as an ironic comment on the disjunction between human beings and their environment and between art and nature. Published over twenty years ago, the essay initiates a re-reading of canonical modern dramatic texts through the lens of animals and landscape, rather than exclusively humans and scenery. In doing so she prefigures the ecological turn in theatre criticism. Nevertheless, the wheel was to turn slowly. Wendy Arons and Theresa May note the slow response among theatre scholars to applying ecocriticism, ‘the study of the relationship of literature to the natural world’ to theatre (2012). As they write: ‘ecology and environment are not only underrepresented and underthematized on the Western stage, but also undertheorized in theater and performance scholarship’ (2012, 1). There are notable exceptions,

of course. Baz Kershaw, among others, has written about theatre ecology (2007) as well as engaging with ‘ecoactivist performance’ (2002) and other wide-ranging ecological interests in performance including climate change (2012).

Meanwhile Chaudhuri has led the theatrical turn to animal studies with the guest editorship of a special issue of *Theatre Research International* on ‘Animals and Performance’ (2007), the essay ‘Animal Rites’—also published in 2007—and her recent book *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today* (2014) co-edited with Holly Hughes. Her animal-focused term ‘zooësis’ refers to the critical indexing of the ‘history of animal representation’ in the Western tradition from Aesop’s Fables to the present, recognizing and promoting ongoing work in the field (2007, 9). Chaudhuri looks forward to a nuanced, complex and non-sentimental ‘theater of species’ to generate the kind of ‘interspecies awareness’ that will allow for a ‘genuine reframing of ideas’ about human–animal relationships (2013, 106).

This article considers how the term theatre of species might apply to a performance that focuses on the dramatic relationship between humans and animals in the physical environment while sounding the alarm about endangered species. It analyses the hauntingly titled *They Saw a Thylacine* (2013) by writer-performers Justine Campbell and Sarah Hamilton. The work is part of a set of performances that include Lally Katz’ *Apocalypse Bear Trilogy* (MTC 2009), Jenny Kemp’s *Kitten* (Malthouse 2009), Back to Back Ensemble’s *Ganesh Versus the Third Reich* (Malthouse 2011), Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* (Belvoir 2012) and Richard Foreman’s *Eddie Goes to Poetry City*, adapted and directed by Richard Murphet (VCA 2013) that ask actors to work with ‘the more-than-human world’ by engaging with animality in ‘non-pejorative terms’ through masks, costumes and live animals on stage, in new configurations of the human condition that unsettle the borderlines of enduring humanist distinctions between man and animal (Peterson 2013, 7).

They Saw a Thylacine stages two interwoven monologues that recount the final days in the life of two or possibly three thylacines, also known as Tasmanian Tigers. One is a fictional tiger in the wild that is captured by bounty hunters in north-west Tasmania, the second is Benjamin, the last known Tasmanian Tiger that died in captivity at the Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart on 7 September 1936, and a third represents a spectral thylacine, an ambiguous metaphysical presence, evoking the sensate trace of the lost species. This third thylacine is sensed for a moment before disappearing ‘behind the forest wall’ (18), and whose footprints are later seen ‘Headin away/East/East Coasterly’ (51) into the present. The monologues are spoken by two named characters, Beatie McCulloch, a countrywoman and tracker, and Alison Reid, who bears witness to the endemic animal cruelty at the Beaumont Zoo in Hobart during the 1930s. This Australian work is of further interest for the way it situates human-induced species extinction within the historical-geographical framework of a sparsely populated, monocultural Tasmania in the 1930s during the Great Depression. Its account of scarce public funding, civic corruption, human negligence and condescending gender bias exposes the entwined coordinates of the disjunction between human beings and their environment, governance and patriarchy.

The article applies a conventional type of ecocritical analysis to this thylacine-themed performance. It thinks about the representation of the thylacine and nature in order to investigate the extent to which a dramatic work shifts our view, as Timothy Morton suggests, from ‘anthropocentrism to ecocentrism’ (2007: 2), that is, from human-centred to nature-, environmental- or place-based thinking. Drawing on Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby’s work on European approaches to ecocritical theory, I am especially interested in discovering how Australian drama and performance indexes Australian thinking about ecology, culture and

nature. These large questions belong to our future but I test them out here on an immensely promising small case study.

They Saw a Thylacine: Monologues of Extinction

‘It is feared that the animal . . . may have ceased to exist’

(*Hobart Mercury*, 10 February 1937)

If as Chaudhuri argues, ‘polar bears [are] the poster animals of global warming,’ then the thylacine is the signifier of species extinction in the Australian context (Arons & May, 45). The extinction of *Thylacinus cyncephalus* in 1936 was heartbreakingly shameful and avoidable and perversely gives rise, as the play’s title suggests, to the desire for the miracle of survival. Reported sightings in the wilderness continue to this day. In 2014, the *Hobart Mercury* reported that thylacine hunter Mike Williams, who led an expedition of naturalists through the North-East and North-West of Tasmania on a fruitless search in 2013, hopes that the popularity of digital video cameras attached to moving vehicles will increase the chances of a positive sighting, and confirm the myth of a surviving family group deep in the wilderness. Other attempts at retrieval include an abandoned attempt at cloning, and the creation of a virtual tiger, an animatronic tiger and several exhibitions. There are over 110 museums worldwide with thylacine specimens, and an online research collection called the International Thylacine Data Base. Traces are found in colonial diaries, journals and drawings, and in grainy photographs and film. The thylacine also finds presence in Australian folklore, myth, literature, film, and now theatre.

They Saw a Thylacine was the critically acclaimed winner of the 2013 Melbourne Fringe Festival Best Performance Award and toured to New Zealand the same year. A revised version will be staged at the Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne, in 2015. The piece consists of the two writer-performers, Campbell and Hamilton, sitting side by side on stools for the duration of the performance, which is just under an hour. They face the audience and deliver monologues in a lyrical ballad style that calls on the listening and imaginative skills of the audience. They use few props, minimal lighting, and no multimedia. While the narrative would seem to reinforce the tendency identified by Theresa May as the ‘deeply ingrained humanist listening in the [theatre] audience’ (2005, 85), my argument is that the performed text steers the audience away from humanism towards animal experience. The act of listening summons imaginative and empathetic reconstructions of animal flight, capture, and death. The effect is that the contrasting accounts of the hunt and capture of the wild animal and the attempt to save the animal in captivity play out the contradictions of the human-animal relationship: the bounty hunter objectifies and then feels affection for her victim, and the zookeeper’s daughter’s capacity for care is neglected by the authorities. The human drama gradually recedes into the background as the ecocritical account of species extinction and its effects take hold.

They Saw a Thylacine takes us to 1930’s Tasmania, one hundred years after sheep were introduced to the settlement then known as Van Dieman’s Land, when the first bounties were legislated by the government to curtail the alleged predatory behavior of the native animals. However, the performance has a dual temporality that recreates the pivotal and tragically avoidable events surrounding the extinction of the Tasmanian Tiger, while simultaneously addressing a contemporary global setting in which ‘effective decision-making to limit climate change and its effects’ on human and natural systems can still ‘reduce climate risks in the 21st century’ (IPCC 2014, 17).

The performance is textual, character-driven and has a narrative base. These elements position the work within a contested dramatic paradigm considered to be outmoded in contemporary theatre. In this respect the performance departs from the antirealist postmodern, postdramatic mode of non-narrative, dramaturgically open-ended performance that breaks with western dualist thought, of which the human-animal opposition is a prime example. Chaudhuri argues that postmodern theatre, which is characterized by a rejection of text, character and narrative, and is underpinned by the poststructuralist rejection of dualist thought, is well placed to be 'ecologically informed' in so far as it rejects human/animal opposition in favour of 'complexity and dynamism' (2007: 507). *They Saw a Thylacine*, by contrast, is avowedly language-driven, logocentric, and realist in a historical sense, and it draws on hierarchical structuralist divisions between the urban zoo and the wilderness that mirror the dominant European dichotomy between culture and nature. This dichotomy is reinforced through the division between its two characters: Alison Reid and Beatie McCulloch represent city and country, education and farming, caring and hunting, and they sit side by side in two different narratives on stage.

Yet in reproducing a binary structure, a deconstructive impulse works its way into the narrative as the divisions become more porous. One performer voices a character in the other's story, and more particularly, the human becomes capable of empathy at the level of the body in pursuit of and in the attempt to rescue the thylacine. Moreover, Campbell and Hamilton, do not simply impersonate a pre-existing fictional construct; they actively create speaking and embodied subjects that are connected to their own active writing and research process. The performance makes a strong case, I suggest, that the story of the thylacine has a basis in language as well as embodied practice; that extinction was driven by attitudes encoded in both language and embodied practice.

Throughout the performance, bodily immersion in the animal habitat is suggestive of a desire to recover animality, or to identify with the other, in a way that is suggestive of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming animal' (1994: 233ff). Indeed, Beatie, the bounty hunter, develops a more ecological consciousness through her immersion in the animal world, which is manifested as a change of attitude towards her victim. Becoming animal also enacts a rejection of patriarchal dominance of man over animal and a departure from the notion of a fixed human identity. The significance of the story as told by two female artists lies in their critique of patriarchal power and governance, especially of the zoo authorities. But more particularly, 'becoming animal' is perhaps more readily achieved because the young women have less cultural identity to relinquish. Seated on stools side by side in a three-sided, cage-like structure, the two female performers appear before the audience like animals speaking through the imaginary fourth wall of the cage, that is, through the bars of captivity.

Furthermore, each has a dog-like skull on her head and wears a slip as if rejecting human costuming conventions in favour of embracing alterity. The skulls appear overdetermined and forced but coming into contact with the live human head, they produce a human-animal assemblage that evokes a more than human or other than human aesthetic. At the very least, a decentering of the human subject is attempted. The image bears a resemblance to Chaudhuri's attribution of the performance of 'animal rites' in reference to Emily Mayer's animal art piece, *Rathat*, in which the artist is photographed with three rat bodies draped on her leopard skin scarved head. 'Animal rites,' she argues, is a new form of ritual performance that would 'engage with, diagnose, and heal the historically complex relationship between humans and other animals' (2007, 509).



Sarah Hamilton and Justine Campbell. *They Saw a Thylacine*. Arts House North Melbourne, September, 2013. *Photo*. Nick Merrylees.

The dramatic monologue form is logocentric, as agreed, but compelling nevertheless for the way the female voices break with the masculine tradition of the Australian ballad form and for the way the verse supports multi-vocal critical, ironic and parodic perspectives. The performance begins with Sarah Hamilton's Beatie McCulloch, a naïve young bounty hunter and animal tracker, who recounts the experience of camping overnight alone in thylacine country. Hamilton's voice draws the spectator into the wilderness where human and animal relations appear to be symbiotic as well as predatory through the monologic mode of address:

THE SIGHTING

It's a clear night, one where you know stars can see you.
And it'll be a cold one. Yessee.
I chuck possum onto fire. Fur's strung up tight.

She screamed, a lot. Before I grabbed her. Whacked her over the head with rock.
 Skun her. Thanks for poss, poss. Thanks for meat poss. Sorry about death poss.
 Did it quick as poss, poss.
 Fire spits at me. Crackin' whip at me. Telling me yarns with her quick wit. (1)

The scene by the campfire is comic and strange. On the one hand, it presents a seemingly ethical encounter in which the woman traps rather than shoots (or buys) her dinner and pays respects to its spirit. Yet this feisty young woman is overly familiar and ingratiating in the self-conscious yarn she fill with anthropocene bravado, 'Thanks for poss, poss.' The more challenging object of the hunt is introduced while she waits for her dinner to cook through the perceived presence of the tiger:

And in my dreamin, in my salivatin, in my smoke blown eyes
 I see you
 Flirtin with smoke
 I can see you.
 Heart goes to throat
 What do you call that? (1)

The affects of fear and awe mark the initial relationship, early in the performance, between the woman and the powerful sensate presence of the thylacine, suggestive of what Alan Read refers to as 'the centrality of the elemental animal and the animal element for *all* performances' (2009, 258-9). Animality is a major theme of Beatie's dramatic monologue as the woman becomes attuned to the elements of sight and smell, the affects of fear, awe and love, the feel of steep ravines, the crispness of cold air and water on skin, and the excitement of chase, capture and escape. Each is ordered around bodiliness and sound, and the words, cries and breath of the human and non-human animal encounter. In the theatre, the double nature of performance—the engagement between the performer and spectator—mirrors the speaking character and the unseen watching thylacine: 'in my smoke blown eyes/I see you' (1) and the performer and spectator. The spectator is guided to look into the darkness for its other, the thylacine, but as Beatie looks up to where the audience sits, the spectator is also placed in the space of the other, complicit, watching and waiting for the narrative to reach its end. Spectatorial distance is contracted. Then re-instated through the shift in narrative voice. In the second monologue, Alison's introduction of developments at the Beaumont Zoo, the scene in the wilderness shifts to the following morning and we find that the thylacine has silently entered the campsite, left and headed northwest, leaving her trace: 'I see your left over [possum] bones/You're not keen on marrow/Tige' (5). The sharing of food between the human and non-human animal expresses what Deborah Bird Rose refers to as the 'symbiosis' that is 'fundamental to life on earth' (2012: 102).

Alison Reid, performed by Justine Campbell, is based on the historical woman, who was a taxidermist and the daughter of the Beaumaris Zoo's curator, Arthur Reid. Her narrative relates how after her father's death, she and her mother still live in the caretaker's cottage at the zoo and are in residence at the time of the death of the last known thylacine, the misnamed Benjamin that was actually a female. Campbell and Hamilton drew extensively on Reid's letters and interviews to piece together the sequence of banal events that contributed to the last thylacine's death through exposure. Evident in the tragic account of Benjamin's death through willful neglect is the prevalence of 'speciesism,' identified by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century as the basis of our different treatment of animals and humans (cited in

Garrard, 146). Alison's monologue bears witness to the immersion of the human in the animal world, that is, into the ecology of the urban zoo which is filled with animal cries, bird sounds, the sound of cages locking and unlocking, the hard surfaces of concrete and fences, and the prison-like use of chains, keys, locks and administrative offices. It is less elemental than Beatie's wilderness adventure but just as precarious an existence for the thylacine that howls and cries in the 'ghastly night air' (32, 34). Her narrative politicizes modern extinction by setting it in the broader social-historical context of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the prejudice against women zookeepers and the institutional disregard for animal rights. In the following lines, Beatie refers disparagingly to the 'work for the dole' scheme and the Town Clerk, William Brain, who was in charge of employment practices for the City of Hobart during the period:

That no good 'zookeeper'
On the work for the dole
Even after Brain has spoken to him
He's left Ben locked out of her den
She's been exposed to this freezing weather
Time and again (34)

The Great Depression, as Alison's monologue tells us, is the background for a new wave of bounty hunting and illegal animal trading, funding cuts at the zoo, and experienced curators replaced by 'guys from the work for the dole' scheme 'who need jobs but don't care two hoots/About the Zoo' (19). Prejudice against women prevents Alison tending the animals even as a volunteer. As the historical Alison Reid notes: 'Women couldn't do anything, you see in those days, that was the attitude . . . I could have looked after it [the zoo] but they got this idea in their head that a woman couldn't do it . . . ' (Reid interview 27/2/1992 cited in Paddle: 193). Alison, the dramatic character, and speaking to her contemporary audience, puts it more bluntly: 'different rules apply/To those with a cock/Than to those with a cunt' (13). Her speech is from the past when an urbanised pragmatic woman knows she is patronised and sidelined by lax governance and parochialism that passes unchallenged in the remote island location. The authorities are identified as the historical figures Bruce Lipscomb, the Superintendent of Reserves, who was in charge of the zoo and refers to Alison as 'pet,' and Brain, the Town Clerk. Anthropocentric and sexist economic and social conditions are shown to come into play in a way that fatally compounds the precarious existence of the species. The zoo tiger dies in captivity after several nights left out in the cold.

Information on the thylacine indicates that 'Thylacines were usually mute, but when anxious or excited made a series of husky, coughing barks. When hunting, they gave a distinctive terrier-like, double yap, repeated every few seconds. Unfortunately there are no recordings' (Tas. Gov. 2014). The performance might have more accurately referred to the anxious thylacine's 'husky, coughing barks' than the hunting sound of the 'double yap,' yet the point is made that the animal communicates distress:

ALISON: I start to hear it regular
The yip yip yap
Of Ben in the dark
Meaning she's locked out of her den
Got nowhere to park
Herself away from the cold (22)

Later as the work-for-dole keeper continues to leave her exposed at night, the cries become more pronounced:

ALISON: I wake with a jolt
I can hear her crying
Through the dark
A yap yap whimper
Not a bark-fourth night in a row
Damn that man (31)

The question posed by Bentham in the eighteenth century and taken up by Peter Singer and others—including Jacques Derrida—in the twentieth century concerns the impact on human morality of animals' capacity for suffering. Singer offers the principle that 'if a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration' (cited in Garrard 2012: 147). Campbell and Clarke's performance emphasizes the lack of human recognition of animal suffering. The audience listens and hears how 'she's been exposed to this freezing winter/Time and again' (31) and is being 'neglected' in a way that other more popular animals at the zoo are not. After a hundred years of bounties, poisonings, shootings and trappings as well as introduced diseases such as distemper, the thylacine is subjected to speciesism within the animal world, given much less consideration than others on the question of the possibility of its suffering. As Derrida writes, 'Being able to suffer is no longer a power; it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible' (cited in Garrard: 150). Applied to the situation at the Beaumont Zoo, the thylacine's cries do not signify the life force, but the possibility of extinction, of the unimaginable and impossible happening, and its irreversibility. One of the implied problems is that the thylacine was never under consideration; at the zoo it is shunned in favor of introduced species such as 'the precious South American Macaws' (4). Alison explains that the thylacine is neglected and out of sight:

She's caged at the back of the zoo
Away from the office
The store room and hullabaloo
Of the more popular animals
And she's being neglected
Left out night after night
Because she's far from the madding crowd
Far out of sight (32)

Alison's last final attempt to get the thylacine out of the zoo fails, and, unable to do anything to protect the tiger from neglect, she is informed in the following way of its death:

THE NEWS
Bruce pipes up
Oh one last thing
One of the visitors reported your thylacine
Looked as if it was dead in its cage
Braithwaite checked up on it
Found it was true
Sorry to have to break it to you
I know you were fond of it
But it was its time
Perhaps you can look into sourcing another (47)

Braithwaite gives voice to the myth that the thylacine was doomed, a view expressed in the nineteenth century by naturalist John Gould:

When the comparatively small island of Tasmania becomes more densely populated, and its primitive forests are intersected with roads from the eastern to the western coast, the numbers of this singular animal will speedily diminish, extermination will have its full sway, and it will then, like the Wolf in England and Scotland, be recorded as an animal of the past... (*Imagining the Thylacine*).

Conjuring the mindset of the period before extinction, Alison notes the tragic mis-timing of the Beaumont zoo tiger death six weeks after ‘the Tassie Tiger’ is declared ‘a protected species’ (49).

The performance is justly critical of the authorities but its alignment of unemployment and cruelty to animals replays, perhaps uncritically, an older entrenched association between cruelty to animals and low life uneducated types. Read’s cultural history of the class basis of human attitudes towards animals shows that from the period of the English Humane Society, founded a hundred years before the thylacine’s extinction in 1930s Hobart, kindness to animals began to be associated with middle class Englishness (256). *They Saw a Thylacine* presents the ‘work for the dole’ cohort at Beaumaris Zoo conforming to a class type that has little or no understanding or experience of animal welfare discourse.

The contemporary audience has the benefit of a history of raised awareness of animal extinction. The World Wildlife Fund would not come into existence until 1961; the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES) would not be negotiated until 1973; and the World Conservation Strategy, stating that humanity exists as part of nature & has no future unless nature & natural resources are conserved would not be announced until 1980. The Australian office of the World Wildlife Fund was established on 29 June 1978 to lead the high-profile campaign to save the endangered bilby. The 1930s was a cruel decade, distinctly lacking in the emotion that would be mobilised in the bipartisan ‘Pennies for Pandas’ campaigns of the 1980s and the repoliticization of conservation and species protection of the present. In this light, *They Saw a Thylacine* reflects the lack of awareness of the past, while commenting on the current politicization of climate and conservation debates today, presenting a transtemporal split between narrative and contemporary time, utilizing what Alan Read describes as ‘theatre’s ability to question official views of reality’ (260). The efficacy of the performance lies in its questioning of the ‘reality’ as proposed by the Tasmanian authorities of the day and the unchallenged free reign of sexism and nepotism that points us in the direction of equivalent blind spots in our own times.

Interposed with the urban story is Beatie’s journey from naïve adventuress to the confrontation with her complicity in the death of the thylacine she hunts. As snow falls, she tells the audience how the ‘whistlin wind’ curls round her chin ‘like a cold snake’; and shortly afterwards she hears the tiger’s ‘Yip yip yip’ on the wind. In performance the boundary between the ficto-historical narrative and reality dissolves at key points so that the spectator hears the strangeness of the sound in its own present. Drawing the spectator deeper into the wilderness it is ‘as if’ we follow her ‘further and further’ down into the snow and sludge (8), and feel the jolt as her ‘bum slams dolerite.’ Rather than express human mastery, the frailty, and the inadequacy and comic buffoonery of the body is contrasted with the elegance of the tiger:

Crafty Tige.

Did you up and fly, girl?
 Is that your game, girl?
 You got mystic powers ey (6)

Of interest too is the reference to dolerite, the hard Jurassic period rock that is prevalent in Tasmania and defines its distinctive mountains and coastal areas. It is one of the many detailed references to place that create both the specificity and affective force of the writing. Moving on, she does not so much follow a trail as her nose and the clouds, she follows and it is 'the afternoon' and not a map that takes her to 'waterfalls' that she could 'just float on down' (14). The ecocritical place-based mode of storytelling continues as the woman immerses herself in a creek like an animal: 'I lay flat in water/Not breathin/Nostrils just out of water for fear of drownin' (11). Taking on the form of the animal bathing naked in the water, she herself become the prey to a predator on the bank, 'A tall shadow. With a hat'; not an animal, but a man. The man is Fred, a fellow bounty hunter, with whom Beatie forms an unlikely partnership. Up until this point Beatie has embodied an independent spirit, with an idealist view of nature and a wry sense of humour. Campbell and Hamilton now distance the spectator from Beatie as we hear of her dealings with Fred, a man who assumes a natural dominance over animals and women. Here the writers apply the 'skepticism and irony' that ecocritical theatre needs to apply to human action to save the earth and its species. The girl's-own-adventure no longer masks naïve complicity with the painful death of the tiger she tracks and captures. Joining forces with the rough-speaking leering hunter, she tolerates his patronizing, smirking sexism and animal cruelty, her voice becomes increasingly hollow as she empathizes with the trapped animal while admiring her captor:

You're trapped.
 There's a ditch at the bottom and the fence like a funnel has you trapped
 It's got you at the bottom of a ravine
 And wallaby wallaby tied to a fence to lure you
 Struggling still live wallaby
 That clever bloody mongrel man. (17)

When she leads the captured tiger out of the wilderness by a rope, Beatie is herself trapped in the narrative of man-made species extinction. Voicing the anthropocentric fallacy, she deludes herself that the animal trusts her—'you don't seem to mind'—at the same time as she notes how 'You flash your teeth at me and yelp' (26), that she does not stop 'yippen' (38) and finally how 'she looks at me like she hates me (42). The spectator is invited to draw a different conclusion from the evidence. The evocation of animal dissensus, to apply Jacques Rancière's term for a performative mode of disruption or dissent (2010), sees the radical difference between the human and non-human perspective by means of the audible protests of the latter. The non-human is poised at the brink of what we know is immanent extinction, and accorded retrospectively a degree of communicative power that was denied in real time. The representation of the tiger's agency, which is encoded in 'yips' and a hateful gaze, speaks back to the human from the place of theatre and gives pause for reflection about new frames for thinking about the human and animal relationship. Theresa May's concept of 'ecodramaturgy' might be usefully applied here to describe the reorientation of the spectator towards a new way of thinking about the active resistance of species to extinction (Arons & May 2012, 4). Furthermore, the theatrically projected agency makes the animal's suffering palpable, noteworthy and, matter for consideration. Beatie, whose change of heart leads her to admire the injured 'Beauty Tigress Queen,' watches her return to the wilderness: 'There you go/Away you leap' (44). Soon afterwards she is appalled when she sees how readily Fred will shoot the

escaping animal, for its pelt if not its live bounty. In the final stages of the narrative – the tiger lies dead on ‘the singing sand’ with her ‘Stripes pointing to the sea/Jaw gapin’ wide/Teeth perfect prisms/Eyes so dark rolled back in head Foot with blood no more’ (51). This is where Beatie also sees another set of footprints heading east.

Towards Australian Ecocriticism and Performance

I suggested at the beginning of this article that analysis of this performance might reveal something of how Australian drama and performance indexes Australian thinking about ecology, culture and nature. Given the weight of Euro-American ecocriticism to date, there is a growing set of Australian performances that warrant scholarly attention. Campbell and Clarke’s narrative interweaves an historical and imaginative account of the irreconcilable differences in the way humans and animals shared space in the Australian environment. Performing a mode of zooësis in the Australian context, the story-telling participates in the history of thylacine representation, and effectively conjures the non-human subject as an imaginary presence. The encounter with the alterity of the tragic, indigenous thylacine orients the spectator towards an understanding of how a species that was never in favour, shunned in favor of introduced exotic species, becomes extinct and then acquires a haunting presence in its absence.

The poetic re-invocation of the Australian lyrical ballad within a new kind of theatre, the theatre of species, brings the resources of performance to bear on what is arguably the most pressing of contemporary human challenges: ecology, species extinction and the future. The work is a fine example of how contemporary performance about animal species might enact the three propositions elucidated by Australian-American scholar Deborah Bird Rose ‘that animals are subjects, which is to say that they experience life and inhabit a world; . . . that the lives of living beings are necessarily entangled with each other and with the wider systems that enable life to flourish; [and] . . . that symbiosis is fundamental to life on earth.’ (2012, 102). *They Saw a Thylacine* takes an artistic stand on species extinction by placing it squarely in the era of human dominance over nature.

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