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**Citation for published version:**

Farrier, D 2018, 'Animal detectives and 'Anthropocene noir' in Chloe Hooper's *A child's book of true crime*', *Textual Practice*, pp. 875-893. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2016.1275756>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1080/0950236X.2016.1275756](https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2016.1275756)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Textual Practice

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Textual Practice* on 23/01/2017, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0950236X.2016.1275756>.

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## **Animal detectives and 'Anthropocene noir' in Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime***

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**Word Count: 8230**

**Abstract:** In a recent lecture, Deborah Bird Rose posited the emergence of 'Anthropocene noir', a reality in which 'we, human beings, are all criminals, all detectives, and all victims.' In the Anthropocene there is no single body, culprit, scene or event which definitively identifies the 'crime' of the current extinction crisis. Delocalised in its causes, incalculable and potentially irredeemable in its effects, this crisis is a compelling example of what Ulrich Beck calls global risks, anticipated catastrophes which cannot be delimited spatially, temporally or socially. Via a reading of Chloe Hooper's novel *A Child's Book of True Crime* as an instance of ironic crime fiction which characterises ecological crimes as at the same time incalculable and urgently in need of recognition, this paper will examine what sort of crime fiction can account for the nature of ecological transgression and its detection in Beck's world risk society, in which the time and scene of the crime cannot be limited to a particular moment or location.

### **Keywords**

Detective fiction; Anthropocene; extinction narratives; thylacine; World Risk Society

At the bottom of the cliffs, black swans sang mournfully. The stately birds dipped their long necks in and out of the water, arching, straining: an ocean of question marks.<sup>i</sup>

### **A crime scene without a body**

Tim Flannery's seminal work of environmental history *The Future Eaters* ends with a brief Afterword that is curiously both evocative and disruptive of the tropes of crime fiction. From his desk Flannery describes the elegant expanse of Sydney Harbour stretching away before him. It is a charming scene, with "blue waters interweaving with the green of parks and suburbs," and gives rise to a gentle reflection on the arrival of the First Fleet two hundred years earlier. Underlying his meditation, however, Flannery notes a hidden menace:

Somewhere near me lies the grave of Arabanoo, who was buried with so much care and regard by Governor Phillip all those years ago. I cannot visit his grave, for it is unmarked, the exact location now being lost. Somewhere behind me - far to the west - great machines drone on, converting forest into yet more suburbs or cropland.<sup>ii</sup>

Arabanoo was a member of the Manly tribe and the first indigenous Australian to live with the British settlers, having been kidnapped and imprisoned in 1788 to serve as an interpreter. He later developed a relationship of mutual respect with Governor Arthur Phillip. Arabanoo died of small pox during the outbreak in May 1789, and while uncertainty remains over whether or not the disease was first introduced by Europeans, the fact his death was caused by an *invisible* invasion of his body sets up a kind of subterranean echo in Flannery's passage, in which Arabanoo's body is now also invisible. Further echoes resound in the unseen violence done to the forests to the west; although, '[l]ike Arabanoo's grave, I cannot see [the machines],' Flannery says, 'I know that they are there,' because the vista afforded him by his 'eagle's eyrie' is not (or not only) of the charms of Sydney Harbour but of 'the "vast parasite state" where the spoils go.'<sup>iii</sup>

Flannery's suggestion of sinister acts (past, present and future) only partially occluded by the splendour of the cityscape calls to mind the scene in Ian Rankin's *The Falls*, when the detective John Rebus surveys Edinburgh from the peak of Arthur's Seat and sees only 'a crime scene waiting to happen.'<sup>iv</sup> Since Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, the jaded detective who senses crime everywhere is a familiar figure, and gives an additional charge to Flannery's intimation of a connection between historical/colonial and future/ecological acts of violence. In other ways, however, the scene provides a notable departure, most significantly in that it is a crime scene without a body. Indeed, it is barely even a discreet scene, as the ecological 'crimes' Flannery perceives occur far away and out of sight. They are, nonetheless, intimately connected (the 'parasite state' drives this home) with the scene Flannery sees in front of him. Not only *bodiless*, then, but *dispersed* and at the same time *intimately connected*.

The notion of a crime that lacks a singular body or location points to the peculiarities of ecological damage as crime. The purpose of this essay is to examine the extent and the ways in which the conventions of crime fiction can usefully assist in an exploration of this, particular in an era where, as Bruno Latour has put it, 'matters of fact' (signified by the certainty they provide) have given way to 'matters of concern' (defined by the absence of clear boundaries – 'no sharp separation between their own hard kernel and their environment.')v The current era of mass ecological crises has been characterised by Latour and others as a moment in which the certainties of enlightenment sciences are no longer available; an era of 'post-normal' science in which 'uncertainty is not banished but managed.'<sup>vi</sup> One consequence of this has been, according to Latour, the transformation of 'the whole world in a laboratory,' in which everyone invests (hence matters of *concern*) in the same collective experiments.<sup>vii</sup> Ulrich Beck makes a similar point when he describes a shift from 'science as truth' to 'a science of if and but.'<sup>viii</sup> Latour's observation that, because all living beings on Earth share a concern with the effects of anthropogenic climate change, we are all involved in investigating it as a 'matter of concern,' can be seen to parallel Deborah Bird Rose's assertion that the current era of ecological crises has conferred a diffuse set of roles on humanity. In a recent

lecture, Rose posited the emergence of 'Anthropocene noir': 'We, human beings, are all criminals, all detectives, and all victims. That's the situatedness of the Anthropocene: everyone is contributing, everyone is affected, everyone is part of it.'<sup>ix</sup> Significantly, she does not flatten this picture: guilt, suffering, and responsibility are by no means equally distributed in the Anthropocene (and in the case of suffering, not equally so between humans and non-human others). The primary human casualties of the Anthropocene are and will continue to be indigenous peoples, small island nations, and the global poor, who bear the cost of the developed world's carbon largesse. With the qualification, then, that the Anthropocene is a term that requires careful handling, Rose's concept of 'Anthropocene noir' offers a potentially fruitful way of thinking through the nature of ecological crime, not in the sense of individual acts (illegally dump toxic waste), but as a matter of collective concern. My approach to the question of environmental crime corresponds with that of Rob White. White argues that the multi-scalar, transnational level of environmental *harms* means that any characterisation of environmental *crime* must go beyond the conventional definition utilised by states (who are often either the perpetrators or complicit in perpetuating these harms). 'Environmental harm is a crime,' states White; yet he also notes 'the shifting nature of what is deemed harmful.'<sup>x</sup> The problem is that, just as 'we have no idea how to pursue collective experiments in the confusing atmosphere of a whole culture,'<sup>xi</sup> how to manage the implications of humanity's polygonal role in ecological damage is equally unclear. Crucially, we must ask: if, at least to some degree, we all occupy these multiple roles of investigator, culprit, and victim, how do we take account of what is at stake? What, if anything, is the political usefulness of a dispersed or shared guilt? What kinds of engagement with risk do matters of concern present, and how can this democratisation of culpability, responsibility, and vulnerability be represented in literary form?

The utility of Rose's 'Anthropocene Noir' lies precisely in the ambivalence of both its terms. As Alistair Rolls and Deborah Walker have observed, noir 'has been used so frequently with so many meanings and applications, that it has become almost unusable as a critical term.'<sup>xii</sup> A similar imprecision has been noted by critics of the Anthropocene, from Alf Hornborg and Andreas Malm's

observation that it flattens structural inequalities to Eileen Crist's assertion that the term 'crystallizes human dominion.'<sup>xiii</sup> By contrast, for Angela Kimyongür, the '*roman noir*' is distinctive in addressing a 'continuing disorder' (distinct from the '*roman policier*,' characterised by the restoration of order in the aftermath of individual crimes);<sup>xiv</sup> and for Kathryn Yusoff, the Anthropocene's chief value is as a 'provocation.'<sup>xv</sup> The provocation of the Anthropocene is, in part, the hollowness *and* richness of its promise—far from nominating an era of human domination, it indicates the potential *erasure* of the human, and the deep imbrication with the nonhuman on which 'humanness' is predicated; yet it also, correspondingly, has the potential to remind us of this interdependence.

As Stephen Knight has observed, uncertainty is contemporary crime fiction's dominant principle.<sup>xvi</sup> 'Anthropocene noir', therefore, is aligned with what Andrew Pepper calls the 'discontinuous tradition,' associated with the social critique of Chandler and Hammett.<sup>xvii</sup> In contrast to the remit of conservative iterations, to produce order<sup>xviii</sup> and dispel the notion of collective guilt,<sup>xix</sup> in the Anthropocene there is no single body, culprit, or scene by which to definitively identify global ecological crimes. While, as Nick Mansfield has said, the spectre of climate change is without question the harbinger of a 'material politics of physical violence and dislocation'<sup>xx</sup> - in some cases already acting upon indigenous peoples and denizens of the Global South -, its distinct 'bodiliness' lacks a body. Delocalised in their causes, incalculable and potentially irredeemable in their effects, the Anthropocene and the associated extinction crisis are compelling examples of what Beck calls global risks, anticipated catastrophes which cannot be delimited spatially, temporally or socially.<sup>xxi</sup> This, furthermore, situates Anthropocene noir in the same relationship with local and planetary concerns as other kinds of contemporary crime fiction.<sup>xxii</sup> Both Rachel Adams and Claire Fox have described how the US-Mexican border has become a fertile subject for writing that addresses the globalization of crime, while at the same time highlighting its local impacts; Fox, for instance, notes that much new 'border' detective fiction deals with ecological crimes that have a profound local effect, such as hunting endangered animals with binational migration patterns.<sup>xxiii</sup> Hooper's text is particularly Australian in its accounts of imperilled wildlife, where endemic mammal extinctions are

over 30 times greater than the global mean.<sup>xxiv</sup> However, this distinctively Australian crisis is also indicative of a looming planetary collapse in biodiversity.

This paper will examine what sort of crime fiction can account for the nature of transgression and its detection in Beck's world risk society, in which the time and scene of the crime cannot be limited to a particular moment or location. I will argue that Chloe Hooper's novel *A Child's Book of True Crime* demonstrates how Anthropocene noir represents a form of *ironic* crime fiction. In Hooper's novel Kate Byrne, a Tasmanian school teacher, attempts to manage her fear that her lover's wife, a true crime author, plans to re-enact a grisly local murder, by writing a children's version of the story with local fauna (including the extinct thylacine) as the detectives. Rather than solve the question of who killed Ellie Siddell, Kate's 'Child's Book of True Crime' engages with what Beck says is the ironic nature of risk narrative, in which past experience 'encourages anticipation of the wrong kind of risk, the one we believe we can calculate and control.'<sup>xxv</sup> Anthropocene noir, therefore, is an ironic form because ecological crimes are at the same time incalculable and urgently in need of recognition. Shadowing Kate's account of the Siddell murder and her own affair is her preoccupation with the area's brutal colonial history and the endangered status of its wildlife. As an instance of crime fiction defined by uncertainty, Hooper's novel depicts animal death as a crime without a singular scene, culprit or victim - bodiless but prolific with corpses; sceneless, but occurring always everywhere. Yet it also contains the potential to realise, albeit tentatively, an *inter-species* variation on what Beck calls the 'cosmopolitan moment,' in which previously ignored others are involved in the response that follows the disaster.<sup>xxvi</sup> Casting herself simultaneously into the roles of detective, (and, imaginatively) victim and culprit, Kate's 'Child's Book' extends the same proliferation of roles to the nonhuman, but ironically anthropomorphised, actors in her story (as victims and detectives, although naturally not culprits). In the last section of this article, which considers Kate's invention of a thylacine detective, I will trace the novel's ironised pursuit of truth via Kate's at once comic and ghoulish retelling in her 'Child's Book' of the ambivalent relation between individual or local animal death, and species death. Hooper's engagement with extinction

here indicates a mode of ecological consciousness alert to the incalculable nature both of nonhuman-human relations and of risk in 'Anthropocene noir.'

### **Anthropocene noir**

A number of recent works of postcolonial fiction have drawn upon crime fiction to address environmental concerns. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, although a work of speculative fiction, places the reader in the position of a detective who must work out the nature of the catastrophic event which has left the protagonist, Snowman, as possibly the only human survivor; and more recently, the eponymous story in Atwood's *Stone Mattress* features a woman who, during an Arctic cruise, takes revenge for a historical sexual assault by bludgeoning her rapist to death with a 1.9 billion-year-old stromatalite.<sup>xxvii</sup> Amitav Ghosh, in *The Hungry Tide*, and Alexis Wright, in *Carpentaria*, have respectively used realist and irrealist methods to uncover the hidden crimes which connect the colonial exploitation of indigenous peoples and the land they inhabit.<sup>xxviii</sup> Furthermore, Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* features a carnivalesque protagonist as spy/detective, investigating the culpabilities surrounding a fictionalisation of the 1984 Union Carbide chemical disaster in Bhopal,<sup>xxix</sup> although, as Rob Nixon has noted, in terms of its genre Sinha's text is closer to the picaresque.<sup>xxx</sup> Hooper's novel stands apart from these works in the way it makes its reflections on the formal aspects of crime writing (or, more precisely, True Crime) central to its reflections on the intersections of ecological concerns and colonial history. True Crime is particularly suited to a consideration of matters of concern because, as Rosalind Smith describes, it is typically more at ease with a lack of resolution, the unavailability of objective distance, and the presence of multiple, unresolved histories behind the foregrounded crime.<sup>xxxi</sup> As Hooper's thylacine detective, Terence Tiger, concedes, 'The unfortunate truth of true crime [...] is that, often, there is no ending.'<sup>xxxii</sup> Indeed, truth, in *A Child's Book of True Crime*, is 'a flexible substance' (an insight offered by Lucien, a pupil in her class, and the precociously bright child of Kate's lover Thomas and his wife, True Crime author Veronica).<sup>xxxiii</sup>



Although Veronica is drawn to write *Murder at Black Swan Point* because she likes work which ‘conforms to a trusted formula,’ Kate observes that her style ‘swings between the melodramatic and the faux-clinical.’<sup>xxxiv</sup> As a fiction in which a character attempts to dramatize a (homodiegetically) true crime narrative of dubious accuracy, the complex, nested quality of Hooper’s engagement with genre and form makes her novel especially apt to a consideration of Anthropocene noir.

So-called ‘golden age’ detective fiction is often described as an assertion of collective denial and guarantor of social absolution. For Moretti, the form relies upon the narrative’s capacity to represent the crime as singular, defined by its uniqueness. ‘The perfect crime,’ he says, ‘- the nightmare of detective fiction - is the featureless, deindividualised crime that anyone could have committed.’<sup>xxxv</sup> Kate’s narrative subtly undermines this convention by compulsively asserting a correspondence between herself and Ellie Siddell. Both attended a girls-only school from age four to eighteen; during assignations with Thomas she imagines him to be Dr Graham Harvey, Ellie’s lover and husband of her supposed murderer, Margot: Thomas’ ‘wet fingers started to unbutton my shirt,’ just as she imagines how Harvey would ‘unbutton her [Ellie’s] blouse one button at a time, with wet fingers’.<sup>xxxvi</sup> ‘I understood Ellie,’ she says, ‘because I gave her my own story.’<sup>xxxvii</sup> Kate’s flexible identification with other characters in her narrative and that of the original crime isn’t limited to the victim, however; in a triangulation of transgressions, she imagines she is better able to understand Veronica - author of ‘her own textbook on how to kill one’s rival’ - when she ‘gave Margot her face.’<sup>xxxviii</sup> In all this, Kate occupies imaginatively the roles of victim, murderer and detective, a conflation with several consequences. It stresses the recursive nature of representations of gender-based violent crime in particular (‘Inside all the true-crime books were the same photographs,’ Kate observes. ‘Publishers must have recycled them, knowing we were all secret physiognomists. They’d found the ultimate photograph of a murder victim in her school uniform which they reused over and over, alternating others from their doomed girl series’).<sup>xxxix</sup> Furthermore, in shuttling between an imaginative recollection of a past crime and anticipation of a similar crime in the (near) future, Kate conjures a sense of the *truth* of crime as dispersed.

This dispersal is both spatial and temporal. On the one hand, it connects Kate's fear of Veronica's retribution with a latent sense of the violence underpinning colonial history. Kate's narrative unfolds in a haunted, even pathologised landscape of 'Rorschach cliffs [...] swollen with history.'<sup>xli</sup> Echoing Smith's assertion of 'the centrality of true crime and its narrations to formations of Australian national identity,' Kate notes that 'our local history is the *Ur*-true-crime story.'<sup>xlii</sup> Yet the early colony's chronic brutality is softened beyond recognition by the tourism industry ('We sweetened history by making fudge on the site of the brutal Female Factory');<sup>xliii</sup> and, in the case of the genocide of the indigenous population, almost entirely erased. (Gnarled tea trees by the roadside remind Kate 'of thin-limbed performance artists pretending to be ghosts').<sup>xliiii</sup> If Hooper draws on the tradition of what Marcus Clarke called 'weird melancholy' in the Australian landscape, she does so with a keen sense that much of this melancholy power emanates from the indigenous population's dispossession.<sup>xliv</sup> This aspect of Hooper's novel is a reminder that postcolonial literary crime fiction typically uses elements of the genre 'for "social" rather than "criminal" detection';<sup>xlv</sup> as a means 'of recognising quasi-colonial oppressions.'<sup>xlvi</sup> But as the notion of crime as temporally and spatially dispersed also invites a connection with *future* crimes, it forms a link with Beck's theory of risk. Risk societies, Beck says, are defined by their accommodation of *anticipated* catastrophes: 'manufactured disasters' which are the 'unintended side effects of technological and economic development.'<sup>xlvii</sup> In the world risk society which emerges from this dependence on the capacity to absorb dangers, risk is defined as delocalised (in spatial, temporal, and social terms); incalculable; and non-compensable; a schema which corresponds quite exactly with ecological crime, and with the current extinction crisis in particular. Thus Hooper's fictionalised true crime narrative, which refuses to dispel the intimation of *structural* complicity, represents a formal response to the (literary) problem of how to describe ecological crime.

Significantly, Anthropocene noir emphasises one key role in detective fiction. On the one hand, the conservative association between criminal and motive - the underlying cause, which the narrative is charged with isolating and exposing, and thereby exonerating the rest of society - is

broken. It is impossible to ascribe a single motive or intention to anthropogenic ecological crimes (no-one sets out to harm the planet). Yet while the criminal is a newly dispersed element in ecological detective fiction, the spectrality of the *detective* - a feature which, as Horlsey argues, reaches back to Sherlock Holmes<sup>xlviii</sup> - is preserved, even enhanced. The detective is, traditionally, a liminal figure: poised, like Chief Inspector Heat in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, between the forces of order and disorder.<sup>xlix</sup> As Tzvetan Todorov has indicated, this is a consequence not only of the detective's social function, as a bulwark against criminality, but also their narrative function. In Todorov's schema, conventional detective fiction is organised into two strands: the absent-but-real story of the crime and the present-but-secondary story of the detection.<sup>l</sup> Just as the narrative of detection is secondary to that of the crime it reconstructs, so the detective is a spectral figure, haunting the scene of the absent, principal narrative, a prism through which the fragmented original events are projected and reassembled. Ironically, then, while Anthropocene noir deconstructs the role of the criminal, it accentuates a key feature of the detective to evoke the ghostly, dispersed nature of the crime. Furthermore, this irony further highlights how the roles of criminal, victim, and detective in Anthropocene noir are not equally distributed - a crucial distinction that is, in turn, highlighted by the roles given to the animals in Hooper's novel.

*A Child's Book of True Crime* is especially notable for the fact that animals proliferate in the course of the narrative, but (other than Kate's animal detectives) only appear in death. 'A terrible spray of red across the bitumen was somehow connected to the long, furry tail of a wallaby'; the images of kangaroos in bullet hole-riddled road signs, 'their paws held up in rigor mortis, lay like forgotten crime victims by the edge of the road'; a pub is decorated with 'mounted sharks' jaws and the memorabilia of long-wrecked whaling ships.<sup>li</sup> Invited to draw an endangered species, Lucien draws 'a family of blind koalas, all hanging limp from a tree,' ravaged by skin cancer and chlamydia.<sup>lii</sup> Kate hears the story of a convict whose escape attempt involved wrapping himself in the fur of a dead kangaroo; and of escaped bushranger Michael Howe, who in 1818 made himself a book out of kangaroo skin in which to write his dreams of slaughtering animals and enemies alike.<sup>liii</sup> Sexual

violence and animal death are linked in particular when, having broken down in a remote area (someone, she later learns, has interfered with her brakes), Kate seeks help from a kangaroo hunter who she fears is also a sexual predator:

The back wall was made of fly wire, and although I could see no flies, I could hear their high-pitched howl. Part of the concrete was carpeted with kangaroo skins, but I didn't like to stand on them [...] The man's workbench ran along one wall. I inspected it from end to end, then looked up and saw a picture ripped from a magazine of a woman with her legs spread wide.<sup>liv</sup>

In contrast with the convention that what is *repeatable* is deemed 'unworthy of investigation' in detective fiction,<sup>lv</sup> each specific animal death in Hooper's narrative is implicitly connected to a culture of invisibility surrounding animal death in general. Between the lines of every story there is, she says, 'another story, which always has to be imagined, written in blood.'<sup>lvi</sup> Thus, in an implied parallel with the novel's depictions of endemic gendered violence (but in no way a suggestion of equivalence), it is *widespread animal death*, on a scale which exceeds the capacity to imagine, that occupies the place of the absent-but-real story of the crime in Kate's narrative.

Kate's response to her own dilemma and, implicitly, to the extinction crisis which shadows it, is to produce her own 'child's book of true crime'. Fascinated by the lateral logic displayed by the children in her class, and the potential in children's stories for release from normative constraints, her 'child's book' is an attempt to make sense of the incalculable scale and urgency of multiscalar past and future hauntings. 'Children are potentially the true-crime novelist's ideal audience,' she observes, because 'they are haunted for the appropriate length of time.' In their stories 'the world seemed manageable, its scale of anarchy to my liking.'<sup>lvii</sup> As Mansfield has described, however, our haunting by ecological catastrophe is inherently resistant to such accommodating frameworks:

The ghost that threatens and promises, confuses while it reveals, terrifies us with what we are or will become, this ghost is bodily [...], but not “the Body.” [...] This materiality arrives from a past, but one that cannot be made meaningful. [...] It will exceed the cycles of historical predictability and social improvement. The bodiliness of death restores to otherness the flash of the unaccountable absolute [...]. With climate change, the material violence of the past emerges, reincarnate, re-fleshed, in our future, and in a politics, for which our last centuries of politics cannot prepare or even forewarn us.<sup>lviii</sup>

Anthropocene noir addresses this seeming paradox of the bodily ghost and the murder scene without a body, which ‘comes back unsolved from the past.’<sup>lix</sup> Contrary to Kate’s aspirations, however, her appropriation of children’s narrative does not make the disturbing scale of risk manageable. Free from the constraints of adult reason, her pupils also possess an ambivalent (because nascent) morality. One child, Henry, cannot differentiate crime from punishment (‘The worst thing [would be] to go to jail after shooting someone’).<sup>lx</sup> Yet this ambivalence enhances rather than limits the effectiveness of her narrative as a mode of Anthropocene noir. When Eliza, another pupil, writes a project on the Tasmanian tiger, a curious blurring of temporalities is implied: ‘Past and present tenses merged; it was unclear whether the animal was endangered or extinct. PROBLEMS: *People shot all the Tasmanian tigers because they ate their chickens.* SOLUTIONS: *If anyone ever finds any tigers they should be put in a zoo.*’<sup>lxi</sup> Hooper’s implied assertion is that both Henry’s elision of crime and punishment and Eliza’s wandering tenses are not (or not only) indicative of immature reasoning, but a sense of an underlying connection between things formerly distinct. ‘Children understand intuitively the interconnectedness of unlikely narrative strands,’ Kate avers;<sup>lxii</sup> thus, as an account of the dispersed nature of crime, her ‘child’s book of true crime’ is also an instance of Anthropocene noir.

### **The thylacine detective**

Preoccupied with trying to anticipate Veronica's possibly murderous plans by searching the story of Ellie Siddell's murder for clues, Kate herself seems to grasp this shift from matters of fact to matters of concern only partially ('Each chapter ended with another unanswered question').<sup>lxiii</sup> In effect, in relation to her own vulnerability at least, she misinterprets the nature of risk. 'The irony of risk,' Beck says, 'is that rationality, that is, the experiences of the past, encourages anticipation of the wrong kind of risk, the one we believe we can calculate and control, whereas the disaster arises from what we do not know and cannot calculate.'<sup>lxiv</sup> In contrast, Kate's 'child's book' seems far more keenly cognizant that, as Beck says, 'the narrative of risk is a narrative of irony',<sup>lxv</sup> most striking in the animal detectives which populate it. The characterisation of each is marked by a redolent irony, as in contrast with their willingness to solve human crimes, multiple 'foul and bloody deeds [are] committed against them'.<sup>lxvi</sup> Kingsley Kookaburra, described as an experienced psychological profiler, is reduced to 'raiding suburban goldfish ponds' by habitat loss; the family of 'psychic detective' Warwick Wallaby experience 'dreadful luck with feral cats and cars.'<sup>lxvii</sup> Echoing the deliberately preserved unevenness (structural, experiential, and ontological) in Rose's account of Anthropocene noir, the ironic status of the animal as detective highlights the illogic of an adherence to matters of fact in light of the advent of matters of concern.

The key link to the current extinction crisis, though, is Terence Tiger, the thylacine detective. The thylacine is perhaps the most charismatic of Australian and Tasmanian wildlife, an appeal massively reinforced by the currency of its *lateness* (or, in the case of those who persist in believing in an extant thylacine, its *lastness*). The last remaining wild thylacine was shot in 1930; the last captive animal died in Hobart Zoo on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1936. The precise date is significant, as the thylacine had been made a wholly protected species under Tasmanian law on 10<sup>th</sup> July of that year. After around 3,300 years of inhabiting the Australasian continent, 50 years of state-sponsored persecution were followed by 59 days of state protection before the species perished. Commenting on this irony, Amy Lynn Fletcher has traced the thylacine's uneasy relationship with contemporary Australia's sense of itself:

That the Tasmanian tiger's demise dovetailed with the initial stirrings of Australian environmentalism, indeed with the stirrings of modern Australia, raises the costs and consequences of this particular species loss to an acute degree. In essence, the thylacine still confounds and eludes easy categorization. Its story bridges colonial Australia and modern Australia; is the crucial pivot point between the European settler's intense dislike of the rare and the weird, and a post-colonial Australia in which valorization of indigenous species constitutes a vital source of culture and identity.<sup>lxviii</sup>

As a bridge between the colonial and postcolonial, the thylacine occupies both an iconic and an ironic place in Australian national culture. A memorial to the violence of colonial modernity - its eradication carries a sobering echo of the catastrophe which befell the Aboriginal Tasmanians -, the thylacine also signifies a powerful postcolonial nostalgia. As Stephanie Turner has observed, Tasmanian tourism most often represents the 'tassie tiger' as a kind of absent presence. 'Much thylacine representation,' she says, 'indeed, much of the ecotourism experience in general, transpires in the tension of a seemingly empty landscape.'<sup>lxix</sup> The tourist gaze is directed to sights once occupied by a thylacine; or, more tantalisingly, where one may *continue* to exist. As an icon of the contemporary conservation movement - illustrated by the project to clone a thylacine from DNA held in the Evolutionary Biology Unit of the Australian Museum, which ran from 1999-2005 - the thylacine also represents the anxieties and assumptions around *lastness* as a privileged currency. Official acknowledgment of the species' passing, in 1986, was a long time coming, punctuated by efforts to stimulate a discovery of an extant specimen, such as Ted Turner's offer of \$100,000 for living proof in 1984 (indeed, official confirmation of the thylacine's extinction did not deter everyone, illustrated by *The Bulletin* magazine's 2005 offer of 1.25 million Australian dollars for proof that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources got it wrong).<sup>lxx</sup>

Lastness, then, is a particularly prized commodity; yet even this commodification can be read against the narrative modes of Anthropocene noir. Turner has deployed Jay Clayton's notion of 'genome time' to engage with the 'open-ended ambivalence of extinction recuperation narratives': encoded within DNA is a 'perpetual present' of all possible species variations which genetic science can, potentially, make legible.<sup>lxxi</sup> For Turner, the fabulous notion of the DNA molecule as the essential unit of life is complicit in the mythologizing impulse of conservation narratives, positing a technological fix for historical harms. Turner notes that, 'while the extinction of long-gone species remains an undeniable ending, the endless reproducibility of DNA renders all extinction open-ended.'<sup>lxxii</sup> As already noted, true crime is a narrative mode particularly at ease with open-endedness; furthermore, like the detective narrative, in which the victim is reconstructed (only to be murdered again at the denouement), from the perspective of projects like that of the Evolutionary Biology Unit the extinction event contains within itself the potential for its reversal, in the 'clues' residual in extant DNA material. The fabled revenant thylacine, resurrected within the crucible of genome time from genetic material that is assumed to be waiting patiently somewhere to be discovered, represents a variation on Mansfield's paradox of the bodily ghost and the bodiless crime scene. As the thylacine extinction narrative is absorbed by a pervasive form of postcolonial nostalgia which both longs for and abhors the pre-encounter biome, it perpetually 'comes back unsolved from the past' as an unresolved tension in contemporary attitudes to species death.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

The presence of the thylacine detective in Hooper's novel represents an ironic commentary on this deep unwillingness to let the animal go. As Terence observes, 'when you're extinct, people look you straight in the eye and assume they haven't seen you.'<sup>lxxiv</sup> What is seen instead is a manifestation of the complex uses to which the 'tassie tiger' has since been put: a nexus of conflicting narratives of cultural and national identity; violence and technological absolution; and bio-commodification and eco-tourism into which the animal itself disappears. The common denominator is that each narrative which appropriates the thylacine figures the animal as the object of pursuit - whether as an extant creature or viable genetic remnant. In Julia Leigh's *The Hunter*, an



unnamed professional hunter ('M') pursues a living thylacine on behalf of a biotechnology company intent on weaponising its genetic heritage (although whether this is as 'virus or antidote' is not made clear).<sup>lxxv</sup> For the liminal M ('anchored by neither wife nor home, nor by a lover nor even a single friend'),<sup>lxxvi</sup> the thylacine is an object of both economic and symbolic exchange - a commodity with the potential to provide market dominance for his employer, and also a kind of imagined surrogate in which M progressively invests his own sense of ambivalence (having killed the thylacine and harvested its blood and ovaries, he remarks that 'now he is the only one')<sup>lxxvii</sup> Hooper inverts this trope: by making the thylacine the *detective* in her narrative, pursuer not pursued, Hooper is able to explore the contingent nature of the competing narratives of the 'tassie tiger'. As an icon of national and conservation narratives, Terence Tiger's liminality is emphasised by his status as detective; as an icon of extinction, he highlights the thylacine's spectral presence within these competing narratives of order and disorder. As the detective is typically the subject of focalisation (information about the crime is only revealed to the reader as it is discovered by the detective), Terence thus queries the possibility of making the thylacine visible (both pre-eminently visible in so many competing narratives, but at the same time buried perhaps beyond recovery by these same layers of rhetoric).

The privileging of lastness seen in the reluctance to admit the thylacine's extinction and the de-extinction project represents a further irony, given that, as Carol Freeman has said, colonial Australia habitually pictured the thylacine as 'an animal in need of erasure.'<sup>lxxviii</sup> In light of this, Hooper's animal detectives, and Terence in particular, also comment on the role of representation in extinction. In the late nineteenth century, the thylacine was, in effect, cast as a villain in the narrative of settlement. Between 1888 and 1909 the Tasmanian government offered a bounty for every thylacine killed, and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have observed how the re-creation of the thylacine as the 'Tasmanian Tiger,' wrongly emphasising the danger it presented to domestic animal stock, hastened its extinction.<sup>lxxix</sup> Turner notes that an investment in the representation of the threatening thylacine persists in Tasmanian iconography, alongside a visual rhetoric of domestication - images which variously accentuate the animal's large jaws, or render it as docile and

dog-like.<sup>lxxx</sup> However, as Steve Baker has asserted, talking animal stories have the potential to subvert ‘the denial of the animal’ in critical appreciations of children’s literature.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Terence Tiger is a benign, quasi-heroic figure whose concern for Ellie is in keeping with the gradual shift, observed by Lori Jo Oswald, in the portrayal of the heroic animal in twentieth-century children’s writing, from wild animals surviving against the odds to domesticated animals who protect their human charges.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> He is a perpetually reasonable, reasoning presence; patiently introducing his animal colleagues to the principles of detection, and reflecting ruefully on the iniquities of criminal behaviour as well as the limits of the known and knowable:

Using a twig, Terence drew a rough sketch of the Siddells’ floor plan in the dirt. He traced a stick figure lying by her stick bed, and all the old concerns flooded back: was this fascination with true crime not slightly crass? A way of fetishizing death? Of making it as kitsch as possible? All too often, Terence worried, this supposed analysis of the criminal mind had no methodology: we’re just ghoulish Victorian’s “studying” a hanged man’s death mask. He drew a stick refrigerator - it was amazing how such a ubiquitous white good could look so sinister. Often murderers used their fridges and, yes, also their washing machines for such grisly purposes...<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Terence’s anonymised stick figure recalls Kate’s commentary on the iconography of ‘the doomed girl’ in crime scene photography. His doubts regarding the fascination with true crime represents an ironic inversion of the fallacious colonial characterisation of the thylacine as a blood-thirsty sheep-stealer. Instead, he is cast as a kind of postmodern detective, patrolling the boundaries between order and disorder while anxiously aware of the contingent status of any discoverable truth. The truth status of true crime, rather than the thylacine of the colonial imagination, is placed under erasure.

Finally, the last tiger also juxtaposes the embodied death of an individual animal and the bodiless extinction of the species; that is, as Anthropocene noir it makes visible the species relation

that is occluded in any single animal death. When viewed in terms of extinction, individual animal deaths take on a kind of spectrality: when looking on the isolated death of an animal whose species is threatened by human activity, do we also look upon the death of that species? Thom van Dooren has coined the term “flight ways” to articulate this problem. Species, he suggests, are ‘line[s] of movement through evolutionary time,’ embodying a genetic and behavioural heritage that is constantly, although imperceptibly, in process; any *individual* animal is, therefore, ‘a single knot in an emergent lineage.’<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Van Dooren draws here on Rose’s notion of ‘ethical time’ (which Rose in turn adapts from James Hatley): the idea that inter-generational relations are governed by the logic of the gift.<sup>lxxxv</sup> To see any particular animal is also to witness the *times* that animal ‘ties together’ along its flight way: ‘not “the past” and “the future” as abstract temporal horizons, but real embodied generations - ancestors and descendants - in rich but imperfect relationships of inheritance, nourishment, and care.’<sup>lxxxvi</sup> This becomes most pressingly evident, for Van Dooren, in encounters with endangered animals. He describes an encounter with an albatross on the island of Kaua’i. The bird in question, when approached, stood to greet Van Dooren and displayed its egg, apparently unconcerned that human visitors might represent a threat in spite of the fact that egg collection in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came close to eradicating the island’s albatross colonies:

Standing in the presence of the albatrosses, we are required to occupy a strange position. Through their behaviour, we are reminded of the *long* duration during which we as a species mattered so little to the fates of others that we simply did not--and still have not--registered as a relevant feature of their world. And yet, we must now also stand in their presence in the full knowledge that at the present time nothing could be further from the truth: ‘we’ are the single biggest threat - and on multiple fronts - to the possibility of the continuity of albatross generations. Standing in their presence, we are required to somehow inhabit both this long past and this tragic present.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

As both Van Dooren's albatross encounter and the privileging of the 'lastness' of the last thylacine illustrate, species death is a kind of spectral death, both present and absent like the absent-but-real counterpoint to the present-but-secondary narrative in Todorov's schema, which haunts any encounter with a threatened species and which is finally embodied in the last animal.

As the spectral hero of Kate's 'child's book,' Terence points to the ambivalence between individual animal death and species death. This haunting is also, however, a beckoning. As an ironic hero, Terence gestures in the direction of what Beck calls the 'cosmopolitan moment' of global risk, in which a nascent politics (or *realpolitik*) of inclusion emerges out of crisis. The nature of global risk is, Beck says, that 'the distant other is becoming the inclusive other - not through mobility but through risk.'<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Beck's thinking is, however, resolutely anthropocentric: the cosmopolitan moment is the outcome of a 'human trauma,' the 'anthropological shock' of a 'shared cosmopolitan destiny'.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Yet although animal others are not included in Beck's thinking, Hooper's ironic animal detectives indicate the grounds for their inclusion in this fragile but urgently necessary moment. As simultaneously culprits, victims and detectives in the moment of Anthropocene noir, we cannot properly negotiate the dispersed, ironic nature of risk unless the *species* other is included in what Rose calls 'multispecies communities'. 'Humanity is an interspecies collaborative project,' she writes. '[W]e become who we are in the company of other beings.' Otherwise, the 'world-making' potential implicit in living in connection with other life forms is drastically diminished.<sup>xc</sup> Applying Rose to Beck, we discover in the cosmopolitan enlightenment of shared vulnerability, *multispecies* communities of risk.

Whereas this more expansive 'world-making' runs against the grain of colonial history, Anthropocene noir troubles the distinction between the specific and the general, from matters of fact to matters of concern. As victim of an historical extinction, Terence Tiger represents the 'violent physicality' which, as Mansfield has it, 'comes back unsolved from the past';<sup>xcii</sup> as animal detective, he indicates how crime fiction in the Anthropocene must account for crimes that are at the same

time incalculable and urgently in need of recognition, and which occur in the context of the risky attachments that link humans and nonhumans. Offering trenchant insights into the extremes of sexual jealousy, post-traumatic stress, and forensic science, Terence presents a deeply ironic comment on the nature of ecological crime (delocalised and temporally dispersed), and guilt (incalculable). Detection has the quality of obsession for Terence: ‘Sometimes, during detective work, the naïve tiger found out things he would rather not have known. But the pure science of his profession, the jigsaw puzzle nature of crime, led him ever on.’<sup>xcii</sup> Yet just as the other animal detectives expose the absurdity of treating concerns as facts, his rational approach, even to this compulsion, is a pointed retort to the incalculability of extinction; its totalizing meaninglessness, and the concomitant need to approach risk by other means. In the face of the risk of totalizing destruction, Beck says, ‘risk calculation based on past experience and rationality breaks down. [...] To knowledge drawn from experience and science, we must add imagination, suspicion, fiction and fear.’<sup>xciii</sup> Ergo, a crime fiction not limited by the conventions of the form but capable of engaging with the delocalised, incalculable, and shared multispecies risks which shape matters of concern.

### **Acknowledgments**

An early draft of this article was presented at the ‘Rethinking Environmental Consciousness’ symposium at Mittuniversitetet, Sundsvall, in Sweden, in December 2014. I’m grateful to the other attendees for their feedback. I would also like to thank Andrew Newsham of SOAS for recommending that I read Rob White, and the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their helpful observations.

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