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THYLACINE DREAMS: THE VERNACULAR RESURRECTION
OF AN EXTINCT MARSUPIAL

by

Daisy M. Ahlstone

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

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Logan, Utah

2019

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ABSTRACT

Thylacine Dreams: The Vernacular Resurrection of an Extinct Marsupial

by

Daisy M. Ahlstone, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Dr. Lynne S. McNeill
Department: English

This thesis explores the vernacular resurrection of the thylacine through folk art and ostension. The thylacine, better known as the Tasmanian tiger, is a marsupial that suffered a government-sanctioned massacre leading to its extinction in 1936. The thylacine's cryptid status has inspired ostensive practice; people not only actively seek out the thylacine in the wilderness of Tasmania today and share their sightings online, but they have also incorporated the thylacine as a symbol of hope and perseverance into various forms of folk art.

There have been upwards of five thousand documented sightings of the thylacine since its extinction. This documentation can take the form of amateur or phone-recorded films, or sightings described in interviews for local news agencies. Some people have even found alleged biological remains of the thylacine and have described hearing its unique call. In addition to these types of legend-tripping activities, the thylacine is also represented in a variety of folk-art forms, including digital, painted, and hand-drawn artwork, written fiction, fiber arts, and costuming. This content is shared widely across the internet.

Keeping the thylacine alive through the creation of folk art and legend-tripping search parties helps thylacine enthusiasts cope with the guilt for having lost an ecologically important animal due directly to ignorance and financial gain. If the thylacine is resurrected, whether literally or figuratively, people can symbolically undo some of the damage they have caused the natural world. Thus, the vernacular resurrection of the thylacine, understood through a folklorist lens, offers a model for comparing some of the vernacular ways that people are presently dealing with the general loss of wildlife due to climate change.

(156 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Thylacine Dreams: The Vernacular Resurrection
of an Extinct Marsupial

Daisy M. Ahlstone

This thesis explores the folk resurrection of the thylacine through artwork and symbolic interaction. The thylacine, better known as the Tasmanian tiger, is a marsupial that suffered a government-sanctioned massacre leading to its extinction in 1936. The thylacine's status as a hidden animal has inspired what folklorists call "ostensive practice"; people not only actively seek out the thylacine in the wilderness of Tasmania today and share their sightings online, but they have also incorporated the thylacine as a symbol of hope and perseverance into various forms of folk art.

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Figure 1 Modern Map of Australia

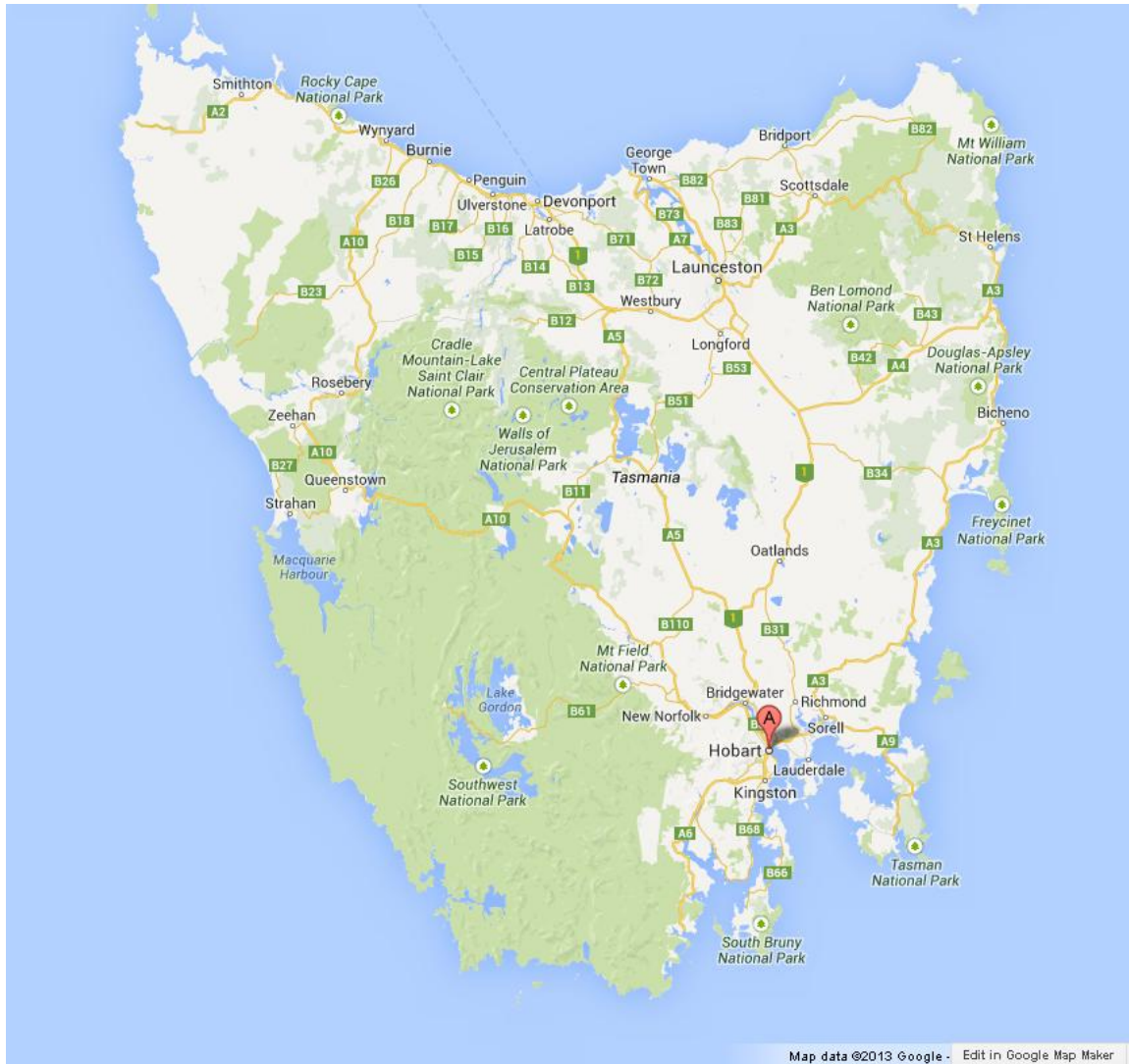


Figure 2 Map of Tasmania

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The lifeless body of the last known Tasmanian tiger, also known as the thylacine, was thrown in the trash along with the rest of the garbage at the Australian Museum after apparent disinterest in the specimen in 1936, solidifying the marsupial's extinction (Paddle 196). This marked the end of a long and profitable massacre of the native Australian species. Though it would not be officially declared extinct by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature until 1982, the thylacine was effectively gone from the public eye (Burbridge and Woinarski). The eventual extinction of the thylacine occurred because of a series of legends created by disgruntled farmers who would otherwise be blamed for an economic failure. Livestock supervisors falsely claimed to the media and the government that the thylacine was solely responsible for the rapid death of newly formed sheep populations on Tasmania. Ironically, since the tragic results of this premeditated extermination, the thylacine has grown to be revered as a major part of Tasmanian culture. Prominent thylacine author David Owen writes, "As a symbol, art object, and metaphor the thylacine holds lofty status, being accorded a degree of patriotic regard (like the bald eagle) and a degree of reverence (like the cat in ancient societies), achieving something of the symbolism of the unicorn in literature and heraldry, and becoming a sporting icon (in company with wallabies, kangaroos, devils...)," illustrating the impact this special animal has had on Tasmanian culture throughout its history (2003a 163-164).

The thylacine is considered a cryptozoological species, meaning that its present existence is "hidden" from plain sight. Animals that are or were once included in the

study of cryptozoology are Bigfoot, the okapi, the Jersey Devil, the platypus, and Mothman. What makes the thylacine so intriguing is the documented proof of its existence prior to its official extinction, unlike some of these other cryptid examples. More often, cryptid species have never been documented, or were documented incorrectly, and even fewer can hold the status of having undoubtedly existed in the past only to have their present existence questioned. The possible existence of the thylacine has inspired ostensive practice; people not only actively seek out the thylacine in the wilderness of Tasmania today and share their sightings online, but they have also incorporated the thylacine as a symbol of hope and perseverance into various forms of folk art. There have been upwards of five thousand documented sightings of the thylacine since its extinction (*Thylacine Research Unit - T.R.U.*). This documentation can take the form of amateur or phone-recorded films, or sightings described in interviews for local news agencies. Some people have even found alleged biological remains of the thylacine and have described hearing its unique call and being captivated by its profound scent. In addition to these types of legend-tripping activities, the thylacine is also represented in folk art, including digital, painted, and hand-drawn artwork, written fiction, fiber arts, and costuming. This content is shared widely across the internet through social media and streaming sites, such as Facebook and YouTube, to promote awareness of the thylacine's possible existence today. I argue that this documentation also brings awareness to issues surrounding wildlife conservation as a warning to humans to not make the same mistakes they did with the thylacine and lose yet another endangered species to human ignorance.

The thylacine's ironic post-mortem status inspires people to keep it alive through folk art and legend-tripping search parties which in turn helps thylacine enthusiasts cope

with the guilt for having lost an important ecological specie due directly to ignorance and financial gain. If the thylacine is resurrected, whether literally or figuratively, people can symbolically undo some of the damage they have caused the natural world. Thus, the vernacular resurrection of the thylacine taking place through the creation of folk art and ostensive practice, understood through a folkloristic lens, offers a model for exploring some of the vernacular ways that people are presently dealing with the general loss of wildlife due to climate change.

Current Sightings

A person does not need to go legend-tripping in the wilds of Tasmania to see the thylacine in contemporary culture. The thylacine's fame has only increased since its questionable extinction and it is one of the most recognizable recently-extinct animals in the world. This stripy carnivorous marsupial went from fearsome beast to loveable mascot in a matter of a hundred years, all the while people continued the search for it out in the wilderness of Tasmania. What was once a creature hated by farmers is now a national symbol representing pride for Tasmania's unique cultural and biological history. The liminal space it currently occupies between dead and undead, present and absent, remembered and forgotten, inspires creativity in everyday people who find themselves connected in some way to this animal. The tragic death of the thylacine is a motivating story for all who hear it, inspiring a vernacular resurrection of the species through its representation in folk art and recurring legends.

The thylacine today is also seen symbolically on Tasmania's coat of arms: two thylacines stand over the four main industries of Tasmania represented as a sheaf of wheat, hops, a ram, and apples, and a heraldic thunderbolt (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 Tasmanian Coat of Arms

Although the coat of arms may only represent a state identity in Australia, the solidification of the thylacine as representative of something uniquely Tasmanian is significant. The thylacine is symbolically represented in almost every part of the Tasmanian public eye; its image can be found on beer bottles, on boats leaving to and from the mainland, in tourist brochures, and in gift shops. The oldest brewing company in Australia (founded in 1824) took the image of the thylacine in 1982 for its beer labels, marking it as uniquely Tasmanian and therefore highly marketable in the area (Owen 2003a:165). David Owen, prominent author of thylacine-related research, believes that this method worked so well for the company because of the thylacine's "real secret

ingredient: tapping into Tasmania's new image as environmentally clean and progressive, a complete contrast to the jaded metropolitan world of the target market well-heeled beer drinkers" (2003a:166). In another sense, the thylacine is described as having "about it a sufficiently powerful and ambiguous mystique that it is able to comfortably represent and embrace much that is Tasmanian" (2003a:164). It has even made it onto the official logo of the government-sponsored Tasmanian tourist organization, Tourism Tasmania. The designer of the logo, Ian Kidd, describes the philosophy behind his artistic choices: "The department... [now] had a visual identity with which to identify and market Tasmania to target audiences locally, interstate, and overseas... Whether still alive or extinct, the Tasmanian tiger is unique and immediately identified with the state" (2003a:165). The thylacine isn't just a symbol of Tasmania, "it is a symbol of the Tasmanian Experience" connecting it to wilderness, marsupials, and island life (Owen 2003b:165). The image featured on the Tourism Tasmania logo is of a thylacine's head peeking out of shrubbery over the text identifying the organization (see Figure 4). The thylacine in this image is formed by negative space, implying its present existence but not confirming it is truly present - the viewer's eye has to see what is not physically there. As Dr. Carol Freeman, an expert on the history of thylacine representation in images, writes in reference to the images associated with the Tasmanian tourism industry, "The [thylacine] *emerges* from the wilderness and the extinction of the species is almost forgotten in the possibility of a sighting" (Freeman 173; emphasis in original).



Figure 4 Tourism Tasmania Corporate Logo

It is truly the uniqueness of this animal that has helped to make it such a marketable image in Tasmania: no other place on Earth can claim this animal as native, and therefore as an intrinsic part of their way of life. The mere presence of this animal in the daily life of Tasmanians alone is astounding; its image is hiding almost everywhere one goes in Tasmania. The thylacine was the largest known marsupial predator to exist among humans, giving it an uncanny “power and ambiguous mystique” that has directly influenced Tasmanian culture (Owen 2003a:164).

Beyond the daily representations of the thylacine are the more canonized and historical recognitions. Threatened Species Day, landing on September seventh of every year, was created in commemoration and recognition on the death date of the last thylacine in captivity at the Beaumaris Zoo. This holiday, though technically unofficial, is supported by zoos and conservationists across the planet in an effort to bring attention to the animals that will rapidly continue on a path of extinction without our help. The

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, formerly the Tasmanian Museum, is another organization fighting to preserve the memories and legends connected with the thylacine by holding the world's most diverse thylacine collection. This collection encompasses a wide range of material including recorded sightings, thylacine skins, artwork, and more (Owen 2003a:198). The goal of this particular collection is twofold: they want to preserve both as much of the remaining tangible materials connected to the thylacine, and also to share the documented history of Tasmania. The history of Tasmania would be incomplete without a thorough discussion of the death of the thylacine; as David Owen writes, "the thylacine *is* Tasmania. To that extent alone, it lives on" (2003a:ix; emphasis in original). Only the island of Tasmania has a right to claim the thylacine as part of their culture, and the generational guilt that stems from its death at the hands of early colonizers is a part of Tasmanian identity today.

Why the Thylacine?

The thylacine has captivated people since their first contact with humans. This includes Australian and Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples, the colonizers who killed this animal off during the years of their first arrival, the new age of wildlife conservation advocates working to prevent more deaths of native fauna, and the everyday people currently living in Tasmania. The thylacine is an elusive creature with an important message to share with the world about the fragility of nature and was overlooked while it was living. It serves an important ecological niche in Tasmania. But the thylacine is arguably more important to the vernacular cultural identity of Tasmanians than to institutional powers, and this is the reason I have chosen this animal to focus my analysis.

Thylacines are not only part of the daily cultural experience of Tasmanians; they also remind people of the long-standing history Tasmanians share with conservation science and the protection of indigenous landscapes. The thylacine's story has motivated people to gain legal protection for many endangered marsupials throughout Australia. The Australian Conservation Foundation tells us "approximately 7.6 million hectares of threatened species habitat [in Australia] has been destroyed due to bulldozing or logging" which is an area larger than the entire island of Tasmania (Australian Conservation Foundation). Marsupials and other animals represented in the sensitive biomes of Oceania are particularly threatened by the effects of climate change, making this issue all the more important for Tasmanians today. According to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, roughly 87% of mammal species, 93% of reptiles, 94% of frogs and 45% of our bird species are found only in Australia. Yet this country has the highest rate of extinction in the world: thirty native mammals have become extinct since European settlement ("Wildlife"). In a global context, this means that one out of three mammal extinctions in the last 400 years have occurred in Australia ("Wildlife"). The Australian government has listed more than 1,700 plant and animal species as being at risk of extinction ("Wildlife").

Marsupials hold a special place on Earth ecologically and evolutionarily. Marsupials, or mammals that gestate using an external pouch or womb, are native to Australia¹. The thylacine was one of the most intriguing marsupials alive based on its biology alone, and because of this, it has inspired practices of a vernacular resurrection unique to other extinct species. The largest carnivorous marsupial in recent history, it had a pouch to carry young and fed often on carrion². The look is so similar to a dog yet is a

liminal creature as both a marsupial and carnivore. Currently the largest extant marsupial carnivore is the Tasmanian devil. The devil is often referenced or equated with the thylacine when brought up in conversation because it still very much exists today and has been popularized internationally by the Looney Tunes cartoon character “Taz,” based on the creature’s bad temper rather than its appearance. But the thylacine still remains a more challenging species to visualize for people today.

The thylacine is important to the conceptualization of the Tasmanian wilderness as well. Tasmania is an island south of Australia, and almost everywhere else on Earth³ (see Figures 1 and 2). The thylacine, much like Tasmania, was a species overlooked by those who came to it, only to find the lot of animals there “weird and unnatural.” But people share a symbolic and metaphorical connection to the thylacine, beyond the literal, re-told history. Much of the history of Aboriginal peoples was left unrecorded, destroyed, or otherwise lost, especially in connection to thylacines, because of the genocide they suffered from colonizers. One of the most accessible sources documenting Aboriginal people’s connection to the thylacine is a children’s book titled *Tiger Tale* by Steve and Marion Isham. This book retells an Aboriginal story about how the thylacine first got its stripes. The first colonizers of Tasmania were misfits, criminals left to rot on this foreign and assumedly infertile piece of land to develop formal agriculture. There was an instant connection between the sentiment towards Tasmanian colonizers as the colonizers had towards the Aboriginal peoples, animals, and plants that lived there. They took out the frustrations caused by prejudice on the only weaker subjects around: Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples and their native animal species. Almost all Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples were wiped out by colonization. The thylacine itself is a metonym for Tasmania,

representing in it a brutal history intimately tied to the extermination of Aboriginal peoples, flora, and fauna.

Unfortunately, the thylacine was not observed with much scientific intrigue while it was alive. However, biologists have studied what remains of it in written historic record and through preserved specimens thoroughly since its official extinction and have proposed hypotheses about the shy animal's behavior. A number of naturalists took an interest in the taxonomy, anatomy, and behavior of the thylacine in the latter half of the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first as a way to help dispel some of the rumors that led to the justification of its extermination. One of the most notable authors of the late twentieth century is Dr. Robert Paddle, an Australian biologist teaching at Australia Catholic University. His 1998 book *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine* is one of the most recent texts to explore the current state of the thylacine culturally and scientifically. Birthed from Paddle's doctoral dissertation, this is one of the most well researched books on the subject of the thylacine, and Paddle does not hold back in assuming blame for the extinction of the species. His book focuses more on the anatomy and recorded behavior of the thylacine as a way to debunk the sheep-eating and village terrorizing legends that helped lead to the destruction of the thylacine, as well as possible political motivations behind the legends about the thylacine's destructive tendencies.

Another notable book on the thylacine is *Tasmanian Tiger: The Tragic Tale of How the World Lost its Most Mysterious Predator*, written in 2003 by prolific author David Owen. An American with a vested interest in this unique animal, Owen speaks directly to Paddle's famed book with more of a chronological and cultural approach to his

research, summarizing the history of what is known of the thylacine, and the present relationship people have with this recently-extinct animal. His approach is broad, and while he clearly demonstrates a wide range of research, his goals are more anthropological, historical, and descriptive enough to captivate a general audience. Owen has made the story of the thylacine palatable and interesting to a wide public audience and does not necessarily argue a specific point about the nature of the thylacine, but advocates for a center or monument as a dedication and commemoration of its legacy. This work is a warning to an English-speaking audience⁴. Owen hopes that after reading this book, people will not make the same mistake twice when it comes to the lives of wild animals.

The thylacine is also an important animal culturally because of its impact beyond Tasmania and Australia. The turn of the twenty-first century has led to some interesting possibilities involving genetic cloning, which is an area of science that will affect the world as it becomes a more viable and regular practice. Scientists, namely Mike Archer, an Australian paleontologist, heads the Thylacine Cloning Project, set to use the preserved remains from thylacine pelts and formaldehyde-preserved pups to spark an age of de-extinction. Never have we lived in a better time for the beginnings of Jurassic Park to become a reality. A chance to possibly make the thylacine “undead” is too powerful an action to pass on lightly. Archer is well-known not just for the outrageous ideas behind this project, but his success at cloning the previously extinct gastric-brooding frog (*Rheobatrachus*) and his loud and charismatic presence in scientific communities. His official TedTalk discussing this very project is notable for his exuberant presentation style and dramatic propositions, having received over 43,000 views since its 2013 upload

to Youtube (“Michael Archer”). Other scientists have begun to tackle this discussion of “necrofauna”: animals recognized as officially extinct with enough preserved biological material to be cloned in the future. Britt Wray, a radio broadcaster and PhD candidate at the University of Copenhagen studying synthetic biology, makes the discussion of “de-extinction” accessible to a public audience in her book *Rise of the Necrofauna: The Science, Ethics, and Risks of De-Extinction*. This book details the specific problems and potential solutions with cloning the thylacine. Wray’s book and Archer’s media presence are making this subject more accessible by connecting a wider range of interests to the thylacine, and its history. Although this topic has many moving parts and controversial ties, the fact that the thylacine is one of the primary and most viable candidates for this revolutionary technology is important to not only Tasmanians culturally and Australians broadly, but to the world scientifically. The thylacine is intrinsically connected to the turn of the century technology and the possibilities it inspires for making the dead “undead” in a way other recently extinct animals are not. This issue will become ever more important as the predicted mass extinction caused by the present climate change crisis takes hold.

The thylacine and other extinct species from this era have inspired a wide range of conservation laws and actions to protect others from the fate it suffered. The colonizers’ discovery of Australia’s natural resources led to an excessive and immediate cull of those resources. The thylacine was not the only species to suffer at the hands of colonizers. Koala and emu populations were also almost entirely wiped out of Australia. Koala fur was a serious and new commodity for colonizer fashion, resulting in about eight million koalas killed for the fur trade between 1888 and 1927 (“AKF: Shocking Figures Reveal the Devastating Impact of the Koala Fur Trade”). Emu meat, feathers, and eggs were so

valuable to colonizers that both emus and colonizers ended their feud by warring over space. While emu populations remained at high numbers, their presence in Australia was a problem for early settlers establishing residency. This resulted in The Great Emu War, in which colonizers in 1932 attempted to put an end to the vast number of emus by culling the population. The results of this war were mostly effective: 57,034 bounties were claimed over a six-month period later in 1934 (Robin et.al. 256). Again, this demonstrates the reactionary power and tradition of colonizers in dealing with native Australian fauna, which was also extended to the more sensitive Tasmanian fauna. But those most affected by the European colonizers were the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, as almost all Native peoples on Tasmania were annihilated by white colonizers, coming to a head during the Black War. This war, under the guise of land competition, allowed colonizers to legally kill the Palawa people in Tasmania without fear of legal punishment, and even for a profit (Smith 2012:282). This group was one of many indigenous tribes found in Tasmania, and many Aboriginal Tasmanians suffered at the hands of white colonizers. Leading up to the Black War, colonizers could receive five pounds per adult Aboriginal person and two pounds for each Aboriginal child from the Van Diemen's Land Company⁵ (282). This culminated in the Black Line, in which six expeditions took place from 1830 to 1837 to kill and capture as many Aboriginal people as possible (282). This tragedy has continued long into the present, notably with the Tasmanian government declaring their Aboriginal peoples "extinct," therefore negating the request to return their sacred heritage sites to them as reparations in 1983 (283). The thylacine, too, was recognized as close to extinction, after a significant drop in bounty collections took place after the first ten years of its enactment, clearly connecting the tragedies between

Aboriginal peoples and Tasmanian fauna suffering the same fate at the hands of colonizers.

Eventually, in the early twentieth century, it became clear that both the people and animals in Tasmania were going extinct, and therefore could not sustain Australia's economy without further action. Land protection laws and other government stipulations were created to at least partially protect these native species for future use. In 1914, after the noted drop in thylacine bounty collection, the University of Tasmania professor Thomas T. Flynn proposed that a sanctuary be established for the remaining thylacine population to help the species recover from such degradation (Owen 2003a:115). The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club, established in 1904, became the first group to publicly advocate for the conservation of Tasmanian native fauna (2003a:116). Working with the government, the Tasmanian Scenery Preservation Board was founded in 1914, and set aside 11,000 acres to create the Russell Falls-Mount Field National Park (2003a:117). The thylacine specifically however would not receive official protection for many years. While the goal of these laws was not to protect Australian and Tasmanian native fauna from harm forever, they are part of the reason many marsupials are still alive today. Australia was at the forefront of animal conservation in the early 1900s, and along with the United States, started a global movement of wildlife conservation that can be attributed, at least in part, to the thylacine and other native fauna which came close to extinction during the early twentieth century.

In many ways, the story of the thylacine could be interpreted as martyrdom: an animal that was sacrificed so that it could enlighten the perpetrators and save other species from the same fate. A large percentage of Tasmania is considered protected

wildlands, and Australia in general is known for its special marsupials and its attention to wildlife conservation. Steve Irwin, animal activist popularized in the late 1990s through his television show *The Crocodile Hunter* aired on Animal Planet, was founder of the Australian Zoo along with his wife Terri and brought the public across the world in connection with animals, including the distinct species of Australia⁶. This access, in combination with the thylacine cloning project of the early 2000s, is responsible in part for the global interest in recently extinct species, and specifically the thylacine. Irwin is credited with bringing tourism and Australian conservation efforts to the forefront in the early 2000s. Other television programs linked to the thylacine include *Monsterquest*, *Extinct or Alive*, *Expedition Unknown*, and feature episodes in their series based on cryptozoological legend-trips and finding cryptids in their natural habitats. The reason the thylacine has representation on television shows with vested interests in cryptozoological species is because of the legends about the thylacine's present existence, despite being officially declared extinct. This makes this animal unique to the field of cryptozoology as well, having actual concrete proof through specimens and video and photographic evidence of its existence from the 1930s in captivity. Most cryptids are not officially extinct species.

The thylacine has also made an impact in cinema. The film *The Hunter* (2011) directed by Daniel Nettheim, features the story of a lone man set out to find the last thylacine in the wild. This film is an adaptation of a book with the same title written by Julia Leigh in 1999, and both book and film received international success. This plays on many of the current local legends surrounding the thylacine and represents the culture of legend-tripping surrounding the thylacine to a wide audience. Both the initial book and

the later film became global successes, however “Sydney-based Leigh’s use of the state [Tasmania] was thought by some to be both gratuitous and inaccurate,” a controversy still unresolved today (Owen 2003b:176). These commercial successes show the global attention this film and book have received, despite the inaccurate depictions of the thylacine and Tasmania. Another film titled *The Howling III: The Marsupials*, is the third horror film in an eight-film series documenting werewolves across the world (Mora). This particular film focuses on “werelacnies” or marsupial-human crossbreeds found only in Australia. The film specifically references the thylacine in a number of ways, including painting stripes on the “werelacine” actors, and an actual discussion of the legend of the thylacine throughout the film to justify the possible reason these marsupial-humans exist. In fact, the death of the last thylacine is referenced explicitly, identifying the potentiality of the spirit of the last thylacine to have entered a human, and thus living on through a werelacine. While it is true that other extinct animals are represented in film more often than the thylacine, this still shows that the extent of the global connection between this animal and people is clearly present. Globally, people do not as often try and prove the current existence of mammoths or dinosaurs for example, and the pop-culture representations of other cryptids are treated as tongue-in-cheek jokes about their current existence. The thylacine, again, is different.

In addition to its impact on television and in film, the thylacine has also been featured in several video games. Tying into the revitalization and focus on the thylacine during the millennial year, video games also increased in popularity, were in widespread use, and are intrinsic to the connections and development of interests in children during this decade. *Ty the Tasmanian Tiger* developed by Krome Studios, for example, was a

somewhat popular video game issued in October of 2002 that featured Ty, a thylacine, as a main character, complete with a boomerang as a weapon on a mission to find “Thundereggs” to save his family trapped in another dimension called “the Dreaming.” The gameplay references a bastardized version of Australian Aboriginal people’s spirituality and religious beliefs and is uniquely linked with some harmful Australian stereotypes. The thylacine is also represented in a special modified version of the third game in the Far Cry series by Ubisoft, *Far Cry 3*. Released in 2012, the thylacine’s purpose in this game mod is to be killed by the main character for sport. The important thing to recognize about the thylacine’s representation in video games are the tropes pulled from both its historical past and the legends of present existence. These narratives have seeped into common knowledge partly because of these pop culture representations, both in Australia and beyond.

Why the Folk?

The connection between thylacine legends and the national identity of Tasmanians (and some Australians) show the cultural and symbolic power the thylacine has, leading people to preserve the animal’s tragic history. There are a number of different stakeholders in the legends surrounding the thylacine: Aboriginal Tasmanian peoples, the descendants of British and Irish colonizers, scientists interested in extinction, the Tasmanian public in marketing and job creation on the island, and others. Each group of people has their own unique relationship to the thylacine. For example, the few Aboriginal Tasmanians left today are working to gain rights to the use of image of thylacines and other native Tasmanian flora and fauna as an effort to regain rights over

parts of their culture that were taken from them by colonizers (Owen 2003a:167).

Descendants of early colonizers are working to rectify the damage they have done to Tasmanian wildlife through wildlife conservation and storytelling. There are many Tasmanians and Australians interested in the thylacine's status from validated existence into a legendary creature.

Folklore is a useful disciplinary lens for researching the thylacine because it often deals with marginalized and overlooked culture. Everyday people are often cast away in favor of the more educated and privileged voices of the academic researcher. Folklore is a discipline that seeks to validate those unheard voices and give them the same weight with which people give a researcher in understanding their relationship to their culture. The people who believe the thylacine is extant are often overlooked by academia because of the institutional powers presiding over the official extinction decision. This view however is not necessarily dichotomous; it is important to recognize the complex ways the category between folk and elite inform each other's behavior. By focusing on the vernacular resurrection of the thylacine, and the differences between each of the stakeholders in the thylacine's representation, researchers and folk alike can learn what people already understand about the necessity of preserving and caring for native species. We can learn how this information can be applied to the larger, global understanding of the thylacine. It can also lead research down pathways to possibly even finding a supposedly extinct thylacine, which would be somewhat of a miracle by scientific standards. This has been done before - animals such as the coelacanth (deep-sea fish *Coelacanthiformes*), takahe (flightless New Zealand bird, *Porphyrio hochstetteri*), and recently in 2017, the crest-tailed mulgara (micro-carnivore *Dasycercus cristicauda*),

which had not been seen in roughly one hundred years in New South Wales, have been “rediscovered” once declared extinct entirely, or in certain areas of the globe (Zachos). The vernacular perspective has an important voice in the discussion of the thylacine.

An important piece of analysis in this thesis centers on the global vernacular interest in the thylacine, a group of people making art of the thylacine and legend-tripping in Australia to connect with an animal they do not share a cultural identity with. People are inspired by the tragic story of the death of the thylacine, motivating people far and wide to visit Tasmania in hope that the legend of its extinction will not be proven true, encouraging a strong economy in Tasmania of wildlife tourism. It shows us our own power, and destructive, ignorant tendencies, and inspires a hope for a better future. This thesis highlights artists and explorers, everyday people, because something about the thylacine strongly connects with people across seas. Understanding the folk response to the death of the thylacine will be useful for understanding how people in the future will respond to the death of other culturally significant megafauna.

The thylacine is not only important on the local and global scale, but it is also important to my identity as a researcher and a member of the thylacine enthusiast community. Very few queer women write non-fiction about Tasmanian tigers; the publications widely available are dominated by men. However, the folk who represent thylacine enthusiasts span across genders, sexualities, and races. As a stakeholder in the accurate representation of the thylacine and the culture that surrounds it, I have several theories for this lack in its official representation. In my research on the thylacine, it is clear that more men have been published than women in regard to this subject, and in

general men producing creative works are often overrepresented compared to women, following a larger trend in artistic production as described by Linda Nochlin. Men are also seen more commonly as adventurers and outdoorsmen, which in this context aligns with men as the initial people sent to out into Tasmanian wilderness to kill thylacines, and therefore have more of a stake in the discussion of possibly extant thylacines⁷.

Ironically, many women actually report sightings of thylacines at a similar frequency to men, though these sightings are either not discussed as much, or the gender of the person who gave the sighting is not reported or addressed. These personal identities are important to take into account when studying vernacular culture and should not be overlooked. As a researcher of the thylacine, I hope to rectify this issue both in publishing this thesis as a queer woman, and also give more voices to the women and other categorically underrepresented thylacine enthusiasts who work to continue the legacy of this beautiful creature today.

That is not to say there are no women present along the history of the thylacine. Women were involved in the conservation of the species directly. The last thylacine documented to date lived at the Beaumaris zoo under the eventual supervision of Alison Reid, a woman who would be a fighting force with very little institutional support in protecting and assisting the animals forgotten at the zoo after it was essentially abandoned because of a nation-wide economic depression (Paddle 186-187). This thylacine, known canonically as “Benjamin,” was believed to be male, fitting the stereotype of the lone male survivor, lost in the wild. In fact, Benjamin has been concluded to be sexed female, which changes the popular use of this narrative. Kath Alcock (currently 94 years-old) and Dawn Anderson have worked tirelessly to hunt down

the thylacine in South Australia for most of their lives and had some of their findings published in newspapers in the 1970s (Parker 35, 56, 61; Waters and Maguire 2017).

Why Folklore?

Folklore is an often overlooked and underappreciated field in the Humanities that can offer a unique perspective on the subject of thylacine legends. It offers a lens through which we can understand the folk from their own perspective, and it values the information that they can add to the subject at an equal level with the ethnographer conducting research. This will be the main lens through which I analyze my research on the thylacine and the ostensive practice it inspires. Folklore is defined by folklore scholar Dan Ben-Amos as “artistic communication in small groups” (13). This communication is not necessarily verbal, though it always expresses a particular aesthetic and symbolic feeling. Any particular “artistic communication” can be classified under one or more of the many genres of folkloristics. Folklorist Alan Dundes expanded upon this definition in his book *The Study of Folklore* by qualifying the “folk” in “folklore” as “*any group of people whatsoever* who share a common factor” and that this group can consist of at least two people (Dundes 2; emphasis in original). My research with the thylacine connects to the field of Folkloristics in several ways: through the genres of legend and semiotic ostension, material culture, and the folk group of thylacine enthusiasts, which has two main subgroups. These groups are defined by their belief in the thylacine’s present existence: those who believe it is still out in the wild, lurking in the depths of the land down under, and those who accept that it has been deemed extinct by Western science, but believe in the possibility of its present or future existence. Those with faith in the

thylacine's present existence in the wild have a different goal than the skeptics: they have more at stake in terms of losing social and cultural status if the thylacine is proved to be extinct on Earth. Each of these subgroups exhibit ostensive behavior in different ways, from seeking out the last thylacine in the wild and documenting their findings in the field, to creating artwork as homage to the thylacine, and even working toward cloning the animal from its genetic remains.

In summation, the thylacine's popularity has been primarily supported and preserved on the folk-level; a group that from the ground up has simultaneously rejected and influenced the institutional capitalization on the thylacine. The institutional and international support and representations of the thylacine are often short-sighted mischaracterizations of the thylacine that play on the same tropes from the legends that originally led to its government mandated and popularized extermination in the first place. The folk are attempting to re-define and rebrand the world's perception of the thylacine from a horrible blood-sucking monster to a friendly and curious creature with a special and integral niche in the ecosystem of Tasmania today. The ways that the folk have taken the important task of reframing these past depictions of the thylacine upon themselves is what I care most about. Just like the thylacine, the voices of everyday Tasmanians have been overlooked and discounted in the academic study and search for its possible existence. The ways that the folk are rectifying this depiction of the thylacine is the focus of this thesis. I am pushing the discipline's perception of what ostension presently means by incorporating the creation of folk art in its many forms as an extension of ostensive practice. The vernacular resurrection of the thylacine taking place through this expanded understanding of ostensive practice offers a model for exploring

some of the vernacular ways that people are presently dealing with the general loss of wildlife due to human cause. The preservation and evolution of thylacine legends taking place through ostensive practice is a vernacular act of resurrection and is an act that keeps legends alive.

Methodology

As a folklorist, I believe the voices of the participants under study are equally, if not more important, than the analysis of the researcher themselves. For this project, I focus on a series of interviews I conducted with prominent “thylacine enthusiasts” and artists, and current collections of oral history and folk art in the form of both primary and secondary research. I also went through the process of seeking IRB exemption, which was granted for this project⁸. The goal of this study is not meant to prove or deny the existence of the thylacine; it is to explore the ways everyday people are keeping the legacy of the thylacine alive. I approach the subject of the thylacine’s present existence with a healthy dose of skepticism; I have not seen a thylacine in the wild, yet there is serious and valid evidence leaning in the direction of its current existence. Many of my collaborators hold various beliefs about this topic: some believe the thylacine is gone and we should focus on preventing the same fate for other native species, some have actually seen thylacines in the wild, and others believe the thylacine still exists in the wild, and should therefore be protected. But no matter the “truth,” what is important to me as a researcher is that people are fascinated by the thylacine and are effectively keeping the animal alive long past its official extinction. The fact that so many people are moved by the story of the thylacine and are actively working with the information available about

this animal to share about its potential existence, is what is most important to understanding this animal's impact on the world.

To better understand current public interest in the thylacine, I have focused my studies on a group of people I have identified as "thylacine enthusiasts." This group uses ostensive practice and material behavior to assist in the creation of this vernacular resurrection of the thylacine. Membership in this group is not exclusive to Tasmanians, and I have found in my research that the legends of the thylacine have compelled people from all over the world to act in one form or another on these legends once they discover them. There is also a complicated duality in the identity people hold as Tasmanians and Australians. As a state of Australia, Tasmanians identify both as Tasmanian and Australian, much in the same way that Californians in the United States may also identify as Americans. I work to specify and distinguish these identities as much as I can when relevant in this thesis, as many people from mainland Australia also have a vested interest in the thylacine. I communicate with my informants through the internet, primarily in thylacine-related Facebook groups and forums, as well as through an email account I specifically created for this project. The main subdivision of this group is between members who are in support of a literal resurrection of the thylacine through cloning or finding a live thylacine in the wild through government funded projects (an interesting contrast to the more vernacular efforts described here), and those adamantly against it, frequently arguing for the thylacine to be left alone by society. Most people believe something in the middle, and hope that if the thylacine is still in the wild and subsequently discovered, it could then be protected by law or in a wildlife refuge. As previously discussed, these subgroups use ostensive practice to create a vernacular

resurrection are different in form, but frequently overlap, and I will be focusing on analyzing a variety of those practices throughout this thesis.

I have used online sites as my primary mode of communication with my informants, as well as for documenting and viewing artwork made featuring the thylacine. I have several avenues for collecting artwork and communicating with future collaborators online:

- Gmail: ThylacineArtProject@gmail.com
- Tumblr: <https://thylacineartproject.tumblr.com/>
- DeviantArt: <https://thylacineartproject.deviantart.com/>

Each of these sites were chosen specifically for their ease of communication, their access across the internet, and their tendency toward sharing visual content over written content.

Gmail

My Gmail account serves as my main point of contact with my participants and has been a way for me to view and collect artwork submissions and photographs, and otherwise keep track of the communications I have with my participants. I have used this platform to send my consent forms and question samples with the thylacine enthusiasts I interview as well.

Tumblr

Tumblr is a social media-based blogging site that has a large number of thylacine enthusiasts. It has helped me track and display artwork I have found through this site and allows other members of the Tumblr community to message me about my research. This social media platform is both visual and text-based, however it lends itself to a wide community of artists, scientists, and thylacine enthusiasts alike. I am able to “follow”

blogs that create thylacine-related content, as well as track specific artwork featuring the thylacine on my own blog site, thylacineartproject.tumblr.com, by “reblogging” (or “sharing”) the work to view collectively on one page.

DeviantArt

DeviantArt is a web forum dedicated to promoting artists and their work. People who have an account can track each other’s progress over time, offer tips for creating and improving their work, join discussion forums, and comment on their work with other artists. Much like the Tumblr community, this platform is filled with thylacine artists of all kinds, with works including costumes, sculpture, mixed-media, tattoos, and the more common 2-D renderings. I follow a number of these thylacine-related forums through my account, also named thylacineartproject, and is one of the main resources I have used to discover artists across the internet who have an interest in the thylacine.

This thesis is broken down into three main chapters and a conclusion. First, I begin discussing several different and changing legends about the thylacine, starting with those that originally lead to its extinction, and how those have shifted over time to claiming the thylacine’s present existence in Tasmania and Australia. I discuss my research primarily from secondary sources describing the features of these past legends, and the connections between the beliefs of colonizers landing on Tasmania in the mid-late nineteenth century and their justifications for setting a bounty on the thylacine. These legends have led people to perpetuate them through ostensive practice by “legend-tripping” and re-creating the experience of tracking the thylacine in the wild for themselves. I then describe how these legends are transmitted, both from the folk and repurposed by institutions, to illustrate the ways the legends of the thylacine’s present

existence have ultimately influenced Tasmanian identity and have become a profitable and marketable symbol.

Chapter two discusses the connections between these legends and their representation in material culture. My research and findings have been written ethnographically, meaning I have a partiality to focusing on context and providing a discussion of that context through what ethnographer Clifford Geertz calls “thick description.” This method of observation includes not only a description of the behavior, but also the context of that behavior so that it could be understood by an outsider of that group (Geertz 312-14). In this chapter, I discuss in detail the trends and patterns I have observed in a wide range of artwork representing the thylacine and analyze what these patterns may mean in the context of identification with the animal. I then focus on interviews I conducted with three prominent artists that use the image of the thylacine in a large percentage of their work. Through these interviews, I allow the artists to explain their connections with thylacines and legends in their lives and provide new ways of interpreting the connection between legends and material culture on identity. The chapter closes with the wider implications these expressions through material culture have for how people cope with the loss of culturally significant charismatic megafauna.

Finally, I discuss the implications the mixture of legends and material culture have on ostension, identity, and institutions. Through reverse ostension, embodiment, and tourism, I explore how the thylacine serves an important and complex place for people in each of these areas. My conclusion ends with a discussion of further areas of research on this subject, as well as a brief mention of the implications studying this material has for all people, no matter their academic affiliations. This is where I make connections

between folklore theory and why the field of cryptozoology should be more readily encompassed in the work of folklorists, particularly as climate change begins to alter the public's perception of the increasing loss of wildlife.

As an American, I felt it was crucial to hear the voices of thylacine enthusiasts currently living in Tasmania and Australia to gain insight into the impact the thylacine has had on their daily experiences living the country of origin for this animal. Although my work on this thesis encompasses voices of Tasmanians, mainland Australians, and Americans, this broadens my understanding of thylacine legends and the personal meanings the thylacine carries for people in Western countries. As David Owen wrote, “the longer it stays dead the greater interest it arouses” — a great interest not only amongst Tasmanians, but one shared by people around the world (2003a:163). The vernacular resurrection of the thylacine is an important example illustrating the ways people express legends surrounding recently extinct species. Dissecting these narratives allows people to understand better the coping mechanisms and behaviors behind the rapid extinction of other culturally significant species due to other human influences, namely climate change. In the case of the thylacine, its existence and legacy are conflated, intermixed in the retelling of its tragic history and the legend of its current existence. The power of legend narratives about endangered and threatened species can be used to raise awareness about the increasing loss of wildlife on Earth due to human influence.

CHAPTER II

LEGEND AND THE THYLACINE

“To dismiss the unknown out of hand is
even more foolish than to accept it unquestioned,
more foolhardy than to fear it”

- Robert Pyle, 32

What is a Legend?

This chapter provides a conceptualization of legends as folklorists understand them currently and a roadmap for analyzing legends. It establishes the current legends surrounding the thylacine, as well as their shifts over time. I examine two major legends that surround the thylacine: the historical legends connected to the thylacine’s supposed vampirism and sheep hunting influencing its official extinction, and a more modern legend of the thylacine’s present existence in the wild as a cryptid. I also explain how people interact with thylacine legends beyond storytelling into ostensive action. The behaviors people exhibit in connection with the thylacine are examples of what I argue will be similar behaviors between people and other culturally significant megafauna as more fall prey to extinction.

Legends have been studied by folklorists because of the nature of their creation, transmission, and connection to social morals. Folklorists Robert Georges and Michael Owen Jones describe legends in their book *Folkloristics* as operating within the realm of uncertainty, often never being entirely believed by the participants, but also never being resolutely doubted (7). Folklore and legend scholar Linda Dégh adds to the definition of legend by claiming that a legend’s concerns are “universal” and they “touch upon the

most sensitive areas of our existence” (Dégh 2001:2). The tale of the thylacine’s present existence borders on this veil of believability and responds to one of the more sensitive aspects of human nature: guilt. The thylacine sticks around, both in physical or symbolic forms, and in our minds and mouths, because of the profound connection people have to the hopefulness of its existence and the painful memory it is connected to.

Legends are unique to the study of Folklore in that they “proliferate and disseminate with increasing speed and over wider space” than other more traditional genres. Legends therefore exercise “more direct influence on the society that called them into existence” (Dégh 1983:5). Current legend scholarship describes five main features that define a particular story or tale as a legend: belief (must be told as fact; have a quality of “truthiness”), spatiality (must exist within the world of today), temporality (must be connected to the present day or historical past), attitude of narrative (must be told as secular or sacred), and the principle characters must be human (Bascom 5). The legends surrounding the thylacine share these features of legends. For example, in terms of belief, the legend of the thylacine as a vampiric sheep-killer was told as fact and was backed up by the teller’s ethos and debatable evidence. Often, the more the facts of a legend can be debated, the more prolific the legend can become. This early thylacine legend is also connected to a particular space within our world: the Tasmanian wilderness. As for the temporal aspect of this legend, it too is set in the recent past and the present; vampiric thylacines are still believed to wander the Tasmanian wilderness today despite its official extinction. This legend does not have a clearly secular or religious bent to it, leaving the possibility of this feature to be embellished by the teller. Finally, while the villain in the legend of vampiric thylacines is clearly the thylacine, this

notion is centered on the context of a human seeing one in the wild, or a person stumbling on one of these creatures while checking on their sheep. Humans are directly involved in the narrative and are the catalyst for the discovery and sighting of the vampiric thylacine.

In addition to these five main defining traits, the content of a legend is often found to express a type of anxiety or fear held by those who tell it. A clear example of an anxiety and fear represented in thylacine legends are the results of the havoc caused by the vampiric tiger that steals a flock of sheep. These attacks would result in loss of income and potentially the loss of their family. While anxiety and fear may not be fully expressed in every legend, this attribute is key to understanding the motivations behind the legends surrounding the thylacine and how these motivations have changed over time. The connection between legend-telling and anxiety is a tool to analyze the possible functions a given legend serves in a community, and in this case, the function of the anxiety expressed through thylacine legends.

Another key component for analyzing legends is the transmission process: legends are often told by people directly to other people. In order for something to become a legend, it must be primarily spread on a vernacular, person to person level. This includes posts and shares in online social media pages, a conversation at a grocery store with your mother, or friends talking after class. Legends can however be inspired by events reported in news, mimicking a “telephone” game situation, in which people share a phrase down a line of people and they mishear the original statement leading the last person to report they heard something entirely different from the first. Thylacine legends are spread through this tradition of person to person transmission, both on and offline. The main narrative circulated about the thylacine illustrate all key features of legends as

previously outlined, and more importantly, show the ways that legends evolve overtime and take on new meanings.

Black Dogs and Terrible Wolves

Before legends about the “exotic” thylacines were generated by colonizers, there were legends colonizers carried with them to Tasmania and Australia from their homelands. Explorer and colonizer Abel Tasman was one of the first Europeans to visit the island, which he named “Van Diemen’s Land” in 1642 (Owen 2003a:50). After feuding between France and England over ownership of the new colony, the establishment of Sydney Cove in 1788 placed the island in the hands of the British. Shortly thereafter, the Australian island was sent people convicted of various crimes to settle the island, as sending them to the newly forming United States was no longer an option (2003a:51). Years later, in 1855, Van Diemen’s Land was renamed “Tasmania,” constitutionally granting the state self-governed, and thus the state was born (2003a:89). Tasmania was intended as an agricultural settlement primarily catering to sheep and livestock (2003a:51). Colonizers also took advantage of the natural forests present in Tasmania through logging, an ongoing practice in the state today (2003a:51). So began the history of colonization in Tasmania by the British. Now on a journey that involved confronting entirely plant and animal life, it is understandable that colonizers tried to make sense of their new landscape by connecting their discoveries to their own local folklore.

Colonizers brought legends and other lore about dangerous animals from home along with them as they settled Tasmania, most notably, the British legend of the “Black

Dog,” a potentially foreboding animal that haunted old roads, religious sites, streams, and bridges and occasionally eerily predicted death. This cryptid and spirit-like phenomenon has been sparsely documented by folklorists. In the late 1930s, Ethel Rudkin collected a series of Black Dog related sightings in England and outlined three major experiences and depictions of Black Dogs: “Bargust,” which is seen as an omen and phantom shape-shifting dog; the Black Dog, which maintains a consistent appearance as large, shaggy, and extremely black, and another rarer type of black dog that appears along with certain times of the calendar year. Other reported features of these Black Dog encounters are vampiric tendencies, protection of lone women, clear omens of crime or death, and a “swelling” or the dog getting larger over the course of an encounter (Brown 180).

Katherine Briggs in 2002 built upon this idea, writing that three other possible divisions of Black Dog legends could be made: demon dogs, ghosts of human beings in dog form, and black dogs that exist in their own world as such, and are possible ghosts of other dogs (136). All of these legends are collected between the 1890s and 1930s, right around the peak of thylacine bounties and the rapid disappearance of wild thylacines. The most important factor in the descriptions of these legends is that sometimes the Black Dogs are foreboding and scary, and other times benevolent and protective companions. This indicates is a duality in the relationship the British had with their most favored companions, the dog, seen simultaneously as both friend and foe⁹.

What these early legends mean for the thylacine is speculation on my part. While thylacines are neither big nor black, colonists immediately recognized it as having dog and wolf-like features, despite it being later understood to have a separate evolutionary trajectory altogether¹⁰. Black Dogs are also connected to the countryside and somewhat

wild, open spaces, fairly similar to the habitat of thylacines. A major contributing factor to the legends leading to the widespread hunt of the thylacine can be attributed to the migration of British colonizers who brought with them folk legends from home, applying familiar motifs to the foreign creatures around them. This natural phenomenon may have been a way to help colonizers make sense of their new environment. A direct example of this is apparent through the wide-variety of names the animal received from early colonizers: ol' stripey, hyena wolf, side-step wolf, Tasmanian tiger, Tasmanian wolf, marsupial hyena, Tantanoola tiger¹¹, zebra-opossum, and others (Owen 2003a:7). Clearly the thylacine was misunderstood by colonizers, furthering tension between their species.

Vampiric Tendencies

The main factor contributing to the death of the thylacine were the early legends describing the thylacine as a vampire-like sheep-killer. The European colonizers' depictions of the thylacine and its native home made the species an easy scapegoat for both the people and the government to project their frustrations. Their newly established sheep populations were failing, and colonizers needed to make up their profits. What better way to make money and escape blame than to create a destructive legend about an already disliked animal? The connections between these strange animals and the black dog and extant vampire legends likely stewing in the colonizers' minds made the jump to the thylacine smoothly¹². Thylacines would supposedly mutilate the necks of lambs and could survive solely on the blood of their victims. Coupled with the thylacine's large and unforgettable jaw, there was no chance for it to escape these stereotypes. Based on historical documentation, Paddle found that "the marsupial wolf obviously aroused in

many lay people a strong, negative, emotional response. Considering that the history of popular constructions of the placental wolf (*Canis lupus*) has involved the widespread imputations of vampirism, witchcraft, and lycanthropy, this should, perhaps, come as no surprise” (Paddle 30). These legends led the public, who did not frequently interact with thylacines, to the widespread belief in the animal’s killer tendencies.

Oddly, these legends were printed in very few places by the broader Australian scientific community in the twentieth century. But where they were printed, the questionable information was continually reprinted in newer versions of these texts. Sadly, many of these reports went unquestioned by scientists until they were printed in the literature which only served to perpetuate these falsehoods. This, along with daily news that reprinted these legends, guided people to associate the thylacine with the legends they already brought with them from colonies. People thought of the thylacine with a “‘penny-dreadful’ mentality,” and emphasized the desire of the average English city-slicker to be “shocked, horrified or frightened by the wild and primitive” as was common of colonial attitudes towards the Tasmanian and Australian bush (Paddle 29). An example of this sentiment comes from an unpublished letter by Kath Doherty: “One of the queer things is that I cant [sic] remember ever having any remorse about its destruction. Almost like we were heroes and it a ferocious beast” (Paddle 29-30). Australia, and subsequently Tasmania, were horrifying and primitive places in the European colonial imagination.

These legends have since been disproven by scientists on the basis of thylacine anatomy (Figueirido and Janis 939). They were found to be solitary hunters, rather than tracking predators like wolves or feral dogs, and were more likely to eat wallabies and

other smaller native prey species. Even the way the thylacine consumed their food was nothing out of the ordinary or particularly vampire-like (Paddle 30). Most carnivores prefer to kill their prey quickly by attack to the neck. However, the thylacine still received “a blood-feeding reputation” from scientists and naturalists, “suggesting that thylacines suck or lap the blood from the throat of freshly killed prey and then may, or may not, also eat some of the vascular tissues” (Paddle 30; Gulier 82, 140). Again, there is no validated evidence for this behavior.

A notable piece of this history is that the general public likely did not start the spread of these legends. According to Paddle’s research, “all records of vampirism only come from the twentieth century, and while the oral history records of trappers’ and old-timers’ reports, both published and unpublished, are inconsistent on this issue, the vast majority of old-timers do not accept the blood-feeding proposition” (30-31). He could find no documented reference of this belief prior to the 1900’s. The government and other people in positions of power orchestrated a legend that played on the preconceived notions of the colonizers in Tasmania to justify the eventual death of this creature. As Paddle repeatedly cites, the belief that thylacines had vampiric tendencies was not the belief of those who were closest to understanding the animals: the trappers (29-35). He notes that he was able to find only five published references to these blood-sucking tendencies in scientific literature (31). Geoffrey Smith, director of the Queen Victoria Museum at the time, was the first person to mention this blood-sucking of the thylacine in 1909: “a Tiger will only make one meal of a sheep, merely sucking the blood from the jugular vein or perhaps devouring the fat from around the kidneys” (34). His charismatic nature and social role in the scientific community is what led this to be reprinted

unquestioned (34). What happened as a result of these initial claims is that people ended up re-printing the “current” literature without fact checking the claims made (31). What can be understood from this misrepresentation of the thylacine in scientific literature is that raw data from the folk living around the thylacine was overlooked, and previously printed information was then lazily re-printed without further investigation or updating. The authority of the misinformed scientific descriptions of the thylacine led it to easily be used as a scapegoat for farmers and agricultural companies to blame for their dramatic loss of sheep as Tasmania was settled.

The influence of published material perpetuating this legend led to several government-sanctioned bounties calling for dead thylacines in exchange for cash. “Tigermen,” as they were called, went out and hunted down primarily female and cub thylacines with the intention of collecting a profit, and ultimately “solving the problem” of flock depletion by destroying as many thylacines as they could. Payments were made to a total of 2,184 carcasses between 1888 and 1909 in the peak of this destruction. These men brought in 3,482 thylacine skins between 1878 and 1896 and were sent off to London to be made into waistcoats (115). But this was not a sustainable source of income, for both Tigermen and economy. In 1902, 119 thylacine carcasses were collected on, then that number dropped to 58 in 1906. Three years later, there were only two thylacines bodies collected on -- a dramatic drop for the species, and one that would ultimately lead to its extinction (115). Though the loss of sheep was ultimately due to a combination of harsh weather conditions and irresponsible flock management, the established legends of the thylacine’s terror became the evidence and justification for their slaughter¹³.

The legend of the thylacine as “an object of dread” (29) has permeated the legends shared about it today on both the vernacular and intuitional level, despite its initial characterization being canonically debunked: through this charismatic and intriguing description, the thylacine has received more widespread attention. As previously discussed in the introduction, the thylacine has been featured in television shows such as *Monster Quest*, *Stranger Than Nature*, and others, and continues to be portrayed as this legendary beast. In another example, people in thylacine related Facebook groups, such as the Thylacine Awareness Group of Australia, continue to post images of dead animals found suspiciously mutilated, such as having a missing head only, or being torn apart from the upper half leaving the lower half to rot, attributing these findings to currently roaming thylacines. If the thylacine were to be found “undead” it would only further connect it to the notion of eternal life and resurrection vampires are connected to. These initial legends about the ferocity of the thylacine that lead to its extinction are important to understanding the evolution and adaptation of these legends in their variant forms today.

Ostension and Ostensive Action

It is important for folklorists to recognize that folklore is not always analogous to talking, and that more often than not, folklore revolves around symbolic, non-verbal communication (Dégh 1983:5). One concept used in the context of studying legend as a type of symbolic communication is ostension. Legend scholars Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, borrowing from previous work on semiotic ostension¹⁴, define ostension as “a type of communication where the reality itself, the thing, the situation or event itself

functions in the role of message,” which is a perspective often neglected by early folklore theorists (1983:6). Ostension could then be further defined as “presentation as contrasted to representation (showing the reality itself instead of using any kind of signification)” and is one of the purest forms of communication (1983:6). Building on this, when people actively engage with and “show” ostension, what Degh and Vázsonyi call “ostensive action,” they are illustrating the “showing of an action by showing the action itself or by another action” (1983:7-8). This is similar to acting, though is importantly distinct, because ostensive action goes beyond imitation. The difference here between true ostensive action and pseudo-ostensive acting would be that the one committing the ostensive action believe their action and legend connected to the action to be entirely true, while the actor attempts to make the audience of the action or legend *believe* it is true (1983:18-19). In another sense, this concept illustrates the ability for narrative to become fact, and fact to become narrative through ostensive action (1983:29). The ostension is dependent on the framing of the action: while ostension is playful, it is not fictional, unlike acting.

One of the clearest examples of ostensive action is the concept of legend-tripping. Legend-tripping is a practice where a small group of people head out, usually at night, to a site which is known to be the scene of a tragedy (often a horrific death or possibly supernatural event), to re-create and investigate the associated legend for themselves (Kinsella). One of the major ways thylacine enthusiasts engage with the legend of the thylacine’s present existence is through legend-tripping to known locations of documented sightings of the thylacine, through artificial discovery videos finding alleged thylacine remains, and/or filming sightings of accidental encounters. Some people have

even found alleged biological remains of the thylacine and have described hearing its unique call in journalistic interviews. Presently, there have been upwards of seven thousand documented sightings of the thylacine since its extinction in both Tasmania and Australia (“Australian Rare Fauna Research Association”). These sightings that result in potential evidence, whether photography, film, or physical evidence, are tracked and shared. Thylacine enthusiasts collect and create this material offline often with the intent of uploading it to the internet for the public to view. Online documentation typically comes in the form of amateur recorded film and photography, or through transcribed interviews published in newspapers. This legend-tripping practice and digital distribution allows the individual(s) to have their own experience to share with friends about their participation and reaction to the thylacine’s existence, just as legend-trippers do when seeking to recreate legend narratives for themselves. These legend-trippers and amateur photographers have kept the thylacine alive through ostensive practice by building up its online existence through the production of original, digital and material content.

“Still Out There” Legends

A second legend that exists surrounding the thylacine is that of its present existence in Tasmania despite its official extinct status. This is the legend that helps qualify the thylacine as a “cryptid,” an animal whose existence is unconfirmed or unsubstantiated. This is a controversial legend because since the thylacine’s extinction, there have been numerous reported and documented sightings of thylacines in the wild, yet no bodies or physical evidence beyond footprints and suspect scat have been found¹⁵. This circumstantial evidence has been collected and stored as an effort to prove the

thylacine's present existence by thylacine enthusiasts in and around Australia. Many people believe that not only does the thylacine exist today in Tasmania, but also in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and even New Zealand. In the following section, I will explore the "truthiness" of this legend through some of the justifications for the thylacine's present existence, and how much of this information has been obtained through the ostensive behavior known as "legend-tripping."

Tasmania is the southernmost island and state of Australia. Considered a natural state, about 42% of Tasmania is presently considered protected land, including national parks and World Heritage Sites ("Complete National Parks and Reserves Listings"). Tasmania is particularly mountainous, and much of the island is densely forested and has some of the last temperate rainforests in the Southern Hemisphere. The climate of Tasmania is known to be erratic. It is possible to experience a range in weather from extreme heat, pouring rain, and snow all in one day. The island's location and geography are significant to an understanding of the tragic fate of the thylacine and adds to the believability of the thylacine's present existence on the island. It is described frequently in literature as a "lost world," much like Isla Nublar, the fictional island *Jurassic Park* is placed on, or *King Kong*'s Skull Island. Its large expanse of protected wildlands lends the narrative to unexplored territories, places that could be hiding the thylacine itself. The mysterious behavior of Tasmania's weather and its location on the map greatly influenced the legends colonizers spread about the strangeness of Tasmania and the island's native species as a whole. David Owen, one of the few prominent scholars studying the thylacine puts it this way: "The thylacine represented one element on the wildness to be tamed, and its turn would come" (2003a:73). Colonizers were on a mission

to “tame” the wilderness of Tasmania, specifically the people and animals that came along with it. Both the thylacine’s characterization and geographical location make it an obvious target for the legends that led to its downfall and why the believability of the thylacine’s present existence is so popular.

Cryptozoology

Legend scholarship tangentially encompasses the field of Cryptozoology, etymologically defined as the study of hidden animals. Essentially, cryptozoology (and its sister discipline cryptobotany) is a hopeful pursuit to discover organisms whose existence is disputed or unsubstantiated through the utilization of cultural leads, hearsay, biological remains of questionable origin, and local sightings. By this definition, the thylacine is a modern example of a cryptid.

Australia and Tasmania have had a long-standing relationship with extant species once treated as cryptids. The platypus, for example, was thought to be a practical joke by the British upon receiving reports on their description from a Dr. George Shaw after describing a dried specimen (Moyal 6 - 7). It could therefore not possibly exist and must have been an amalgamation of other animals sewn together (6), much like supposed bodies of cryptids often are. A famous naturalist endeavor, the Baudin Expedition, resulted in the discovery of more than 2,500 species in and around Australia previously unknown to British naturalists (Pfennigwerth 175). The amount of newly described species discovered in Tasmania and Australia led to the disbelief of the British naturalists reading Baudin’s reports, like the previously mentioned platypus. This correlation between cryptids and the discovery of new species illustrates the history British

colonizers have with misunderstanding Tasmanian and Australian native fauna. The thylacine, a once extant species now classified as a cryptid, builds on and sustains this tradition of misunderstanding the appearance and behavior of Tasmanian and Australian native fauna.

The thylacine holds a special place between the classification of “extinct animal” and “cryptid” to Tasmanians and Australians. There are other Australian cryptids which are sometimes related to the thylacine, such as the Yowie (Australian Bigfoot), marsupial lion (with connections to *thylacoleo*), drop-bears, and dobsegna. These creatures have little to no official proof of ever having existed in Australia or Tasmania. The thylacine, in contrast, existed with documented, undisputed proof, and was then slayed to extinction, making it different from these other cryptids. An interesting connection between the thylacine legends and other Australian cryptids are that of the Queensland and Tantanoola tigers and Wonthaggi monster. These cryptids appear in the current Australian legend cannon and are strongly associated with the thylacine. Some amateur cryptozoologists have suggested that these cryptids are wild thylacines (“Thylacine”). There is some closure regarding the literal existence of Tantanoola tiger, as there is a hotel that currently claims to have caught, killed and stuffed the beast, although the creature on display in their hotel is a wolf (Cronshaw).

The thylacine sits uniquely between extinct animals and cryptids, which inspires action in its followers in a way other cryptids do not. No other cryptid can inspire the same degree of interest in a potential resurrection. People from all levels of society participate in the hopeful resurrection of the thylacine, though this participation arrives in many forms. Both the literal resurrection taking place through cloning and the vernacular

resurrection by re-presencing it through artwork and ostension require some degree of physical and anecdotal evidence, like photos, scat, sightings, or taxidermized specimens, for proof of its past existence. The “Holy Grail” for vernacular thylacine enthusiasts is to gain “anecdotal evidence as the basis for future quests... to experience first-hand, camera-equipped encounter with the largest yet most mysterious of all modern-day carnivorous marsupials” (Lang 11). In fact, there has been some physical evidence found proving thylacine existence in Australia. The Nullarbor thylacine, most notably, is the body of a thylacine found mummified in the Nullarbor plains of mainland Australia in the late 1960’s, though the specimen was carbon-dated to an age around 4,000 - 5,000 years old (Williams 129). This age makes sense, as thylacines did live on mainland Australia until they went extinct on the continent about 2,000 years ago (Burbidge and Woinarski). While this body of the thylacine exists in a close-to-perfect mummified form, scientists have illustrated here that it is significantly older than it appears on the surface. But sometimes science is wrong, and this criticism is part of what keeps some of the controversy over the thylacine’s present existence moving. There are people who believe that the Nullarbor thylacine lived much more recently than the carbon-date implies. This controversy is what has motivated vernacular legend-trippers to continue searching for the thylacine in full force. Some cryptids in general have inspired wildlife protection requests, but people do not generally interact with thylacines in the same way as they would these other cryptids.

Additionally, there have been government funded projects in search of the thylacine. These projects have relied on the evaluation of current collected data on the thylacines through local sightings in an effort to find the thylacine today. However, these

government funded efforts are few and far between. Greg Heberle conducted an analysis of the locations and times of roughly two hundred reported thylacine sightings through 1998 in Western Australia (WA) with sponsorship from the Australia Department of Conservation and Land Management. While his study could not conclusively prove that thylacines were present in WA today, he noted a dramatic uptick in thylacine sightings from 1980-1998, and that most of these sightings occurred mid-day (Heberle). Toyota, the car company, supplied 4WDs for several Tasmanian tiger expeditions from 2013-2014, though this was clearly an effort for marketing their vehicles to people interested in exploring the Tasmanian wilderness (Lang 15). This again is both similar to and different from other culturally significant cryptids: Bigfoot, for example, has received official legal protection in Washington, yet officially funded projects to find it in the wild are rare¹⁶. While there have been institutionally funded expeditions to find cryptids like Bigfoot, these projects are inherently treated with less respect than those that work to find the thylacine. However, despite these few institutionally funded projects, the search for the thylacine in the wild is hardly ever taken seriously by the government and scientific academy. To the few researchers and financially supportive institutions that have sought out the thylacine in the wild, its potential existence is not merely a legend. This is somewhat different from the average thylacine enthusiast's perspective because the thylacine itself is conceived differently. To thylacine enthusiasts who are not commercially or academically funded, the thylacine is more liminal, caught in a place between legendary and real. The thylacine is seen as a cryptid in vernacular culture, not in institutional culture, though both groups are motivated by the same evidence of the thylacine's existence to justify seeking out the thylacine in the Tasmanian wilderness.

There is other evidence for the thylacine's present existence documented by people who routinely search for the thylacine in the wild that perpetuates this legend cycle. *The Tasmanian Tiger: Extinct or Extant* is a collection of essays from modern thylacine enthusiasts edited by Rebecca Lang with various beliefs surrounding the present existence of the thylacine. Some of these authors, and other members of the Tasmanian public, provide much of their evidence through shared sighting experiences, scientific evidence, and otherwise collected data. The contributors represented in this book are Wildlife Park servicemen, independent thylacine researchers, and ecologists and biologists, representing both vernacular and institutional perceptions of the thylacine. They all share the goal of educating the public on the issue of the thylacine's potential present existence. The more the general population believes they see thylacines in the wild, the more likely they will report those sightings. The circumstances of sightings again are often connected to legend-tripping or otherwise ostensive activities, whether or not the motivation for the investigation takes place on a vernacular or institutional level. All participants are acting on behalf of the possibility of the thylacine's present existence.

A notable organization, Thylacine Research Unit, has a goal to catalogue all thylacine sightings and assess their credibility on a the academically-recognized Smith thylacine report classification system (Smith 1981). The institutional classification of a sighting is based on four main categories: observer's reliability, circumstances of report, description of animal, and correlation with other sightings. Some sub-categories from this list include factors such as visibility at time of sighting, reporter's familiarity with native fauna, and duration and distance of the sighted animal¹⁷. These frequently vernacular sightings are used by institutions to justify funding for further search projects and give

evidence for the likelihood of current thylacine existence; both levels are working with each other for a common goal. Many people also set out camera traps in the wilderness of Australia in an attempt to capture the thylacine on film, though the results of these images are often questionable at best. While many of these sightings are proven to be foxes with mange or feral dogs, there are some that are much harder to discredit. Many of these methods cited for tracking and collecting thylacine sightings happen on both vernacular and institutional levels. Whether purchasing and setting up a camera on their own, or if the government is paying them to do it, both actions are motivated again by this legendary possibility of seeing a thylacine in the wild. The folk, however, are the primary group pushing for institutions to pay attention to their claims of current thylacine existence in the first place. The vernacular search for the thylacine is fundamentally one of opposition to institutional powers that do not give the folk, or their evidence, the time of day, effectively keeping the thylacine extinct, or so most thylacine enthusiasts believe.

I have taken a closer look at several thylacine enthusiasts represented in *Extinct or Extant* to voice their perspective on the relationship between the vernacular and institutional levels of thylacine interest. One of the most famous rogue thylacine researchers alive today is Col Bailey. Possessing no formal academic training, he has spent most of his life tracking thylacines and all connected materials. His chapter in *Extinct or Extant* discusses the possible current population of thylacines today and believes that the secret to a thylacine sighting is to “smell like the bush itself” and blend in with the nature surrounding the tracker (Bailey 20). This is his explanation for why so few people are able to catch a glimpse of the thylacine through camera traps - they smell like technology (23). He writes that he is “resolute in [his] belief that the Thylacine is

most definitely not extinct” (19). Bailey has written a book recounting his various quests to prove the existence of the thylacine to institutions, and another consisting of a collection of thylacine sightings from trackers, bushmen, and others to compile evidence for the prospect of current thylacine existence (26).

Ned Terry, a Wildlife Park Ranger, began to research the history of the thylacine and sifted through archival records, working to make extant the voices of people from the early 1900s who encountered thylacines. He wonders “how many other people have seen this animal but are reluctant to report for fear of being ridiculed, or don’t want the exposure,” which is an issue often expressed by many thylacine enthusiasts (Terry 29). His primary concern are the reports of thylacines today, and how descriptions of thylacine have changed over time. He has tracked the thylacine perhaps the furthest, all the way into the highlands of Papua New Guinea (35).

Terry sights a number of particular markers and commonalities in thylacine sightings that could indicate more legitimacy to a particular sighting as true (30-31).

These are most commonly:

- The animal does not give an impression of being in a hurry
- There is a pungent smell
- Colors range from fawn to grey brown, always with darker stripes down its back

People who were in closer proximity to the thylacine when the sighting occurred also commonly report:

- Small pricked ears
- The thylacine sitting back on its legs like a kangaroo.

- Thylacines half-hopping on both two and four legs.

Sometimes people also mention a “yipping” sound (30). Other reported features consist of suspect thylacine tracks, the variable states of mood the thylacines take on, and how terrified dogs are of the thylacines (31). One of the most interesting aspects that Terry cites extensively in actual quotations from some of these reports is a discussion of the thylacine’s cunning instinct (32). Many of the early legends published in newspapers and in scientific journals describe this animal as being “of low status” and rather unintelligent, while the vernacular sightings drawn from thylacine trackers seem to highlight the animal’s curiosity and knack for hiding from, and even communicating with, people. Terry shares the written perspectives of two trackers, Alec le Fevre and Bill Steers, who describe the animal as “just so cunning,” and how “[the thylacine] was so cunning he wouldn’t show himself even in those days” (32). Part of Terry’s work has been to reveal the truth of the thylacine based on understudied sightings and perspectives. While this blood-sucking sentiment returned somewhat in popular culture since the thylacine’s extinction, the perspectives Terry uncovered were clear evidence for an institutional plot to muddle the cultural understanding of the thylacine and use it as a scapegoat to justify the bounty (34).

In terms of the folk conceptualization of the thylacine, I consulted with a serious researcher. In an interview with famed Australian thylacine researcher Neil Waters, he claimed that the thylacine “has all the hallmarks of the greatest escape artist on Earth. An elusive and wiley [sic] predator that occasionally walks past a headlight at night or is even seen in broad daylight” (Waters 2019). Its connection to elusiveness and cunning are also highlighted by Waters, as it has the ability to be both seen and unseen in a variety

of different lightings, almost at its own will. Whether people believe the thylacine is a cryptid, or is genuinely alive in the wild, they are using the same information based on these sightings to inform their tracking and search methods. It does not matter what realm the thylacine exists for them, in legend or in physical reality, in terms of their tracking strategies.

To get a better idea of the current efforts behind the search for the thylacine, I have connected with people online who are actively working to prove the thylacine's existence to the Australian government. As previously mentioned, I interviewed thylacine field researcher Neil Waters, and he also expressed some of these responses. Waters is the creator of "one of the largest Thylacine advocacy groups in Australia," the Thylacine Awareness Group of Australia. This is a group where people come to talk and further investigate thylacine sightings (Waters 2019). Waters has been interviewed many times over the last few years about his research with thylacines and has even produced and directed a full-length film on the subject, along with John McGuire, *Living the Thylacine Dream* (2017). This documentary includes interviews with Regina McKenzie, an Aboriginal Australian woman, Dr. Bob Paddle, and other people who actively participate in the effort to prove the thylacine's current existence to skeptics and institutions. There have been over five thousand thylacine sightings collected in mainland Australia and over two thousand collected in Tasmania to date, according to Waters (2017). Despite being an animal most recently native to Tasmania, the thylacine did also exist on mainland Australia, though again, fossil record indicates it went extinct there roughly 2,000 years ago (Burbidge and Woinarski). The spread of sightings in mainland Australia is notable and indicates a broader cultural significance of the animal outside Tasmania. After asking

what interested him about the thylacine in the first place, he responded “I find the fact that so many people claimed to have seen a presumed extinct animal and yet no real serious scientific research into the thousands of sightings has been undertaken since Steven Smith’s report from 1982, just totally bewildering [sic]” (2019). An avid believer in the thylacine’s present existence in both Tasmania and Australia, Waters has seen two thylacines himself and says that he has “heard hundreds of stories about the animal not being extinct, from all over Australia in every State and Territory [sic].” His frustration with the lack of action on behalf of institutions willingness to help in the rediscovery of the thylacine is clear: “Hundreds upon hundreds of well documented sightings with consistent descriptions of animals that look and move remarkably the same as Tasmanian Tigers and yet the science fraternity does nothing [sic]” he told me in our interview.

Correlating the key features of thylacine sightings gives more evidence in support of the possible existence of the thylacine and is a major motivating factor behind both vernacular and institutional expeditions. The evidence identified here only serves to build on the “truthiness” of the legend of the thylacine’s existence. Whether a person in a legend-tripper or scientific investigator, both are operating based on the legendary existence of the thylacine produced through this suspect information. If people, whether leading with the perspective of the vernacular or institutional perceptions of the thylacine, interpret thylacine sighting reports as legends, or as sightings retold in legend contexts, they all identify key features of the legends that have remained static throughout time. Official historical reports of thylacines, modern sightings, and the scientific record all identify similar behavioral and physical features of the thylacine. Taken together, these are used as the primary motivation for tracking them in the wild today. These common

features represent a consistent understanding of the thylacine physically and behaviorally on both vernacular and institutional levels. What is different about these groups of people, however, is their motivations for tracking thylacines. Whatever source their knowledge of thylacine behavior and form came from, they will still have a different motivation behind their search for the last wild thylacine. People interpret sightings of unknown animals based on their expectations of the animal and context of the sighting. It is difficult to determine whether these sightings are influenced directly from learning of thylacines, or from learning about the legends in the first place. Which came first, the legend or the sighting, so to speak. Taking all of this in -- the exoticized wilderness of Tasmania, the cultural and historical significance of the thylacine, and the uniqueness of native marsupials -- it makes sense that people of all levels of culture would be motivated to search for the thylacine, whether or not it is truly extant.

Rebranding the Legends

In an important and intriguing turn, the thylacine today has moved away from its vampiric connection to a curious, friendly, and intelligent representation in legend. Understanding the theory behind human engagement with legends is crucial to understanding the behaviors people express because of their connection to thylacines and the legends their images evoke. When asked about the place thylacines have in his life today, Waters told me: “It is my obsession and my duty to try and prove it’s existence before our idiot Govt’s destroy what is left of our wild places [sic]” (2019). His sentiment is echoed by fellow thylacine enthusiasts across the internet. People believe it is their duty to protect and preserve the legacy of the thylacine and want to give it the recognition

and attention it deserves. They want to prevent the government from meddling in the life of other native fauna again. Waters explains in his documentary that Australians (including Tasmanians), as a cultural group, feel bad about directly influencing the extinction of the thylacine:

I think a lot of people in Australia feel guilty to a certain degree on a national consciousness kind of scale because it was a thing we screwed up with essentially as a nation. We handled that animal really poorly and treated it badly, and it slipped away from us because of that. I don't think it's fully slipped away from us; I think it got very close to extinct, but I think the animal's definitely persisted in Tasmania [sic] (2017)

There is widespread hope for finding the thylacine today, and for doing justice to the animal's memory. These newer and more positive vernacular representations of the thylacine are a way to help everyday people care about the thylacine. Newer representations tend to focus on the thylacine as a victim, or see it as a hopeful figure, that may still be out in the wild, absolving the colonizers of guilt for what they have done against Tasmania's (and Australia's) native species. If the thylacine were to be found alive today, Australians would likely feel a sense of psychological relief. The thylacine "represents a whole lot of hope for a whole lot of people, and [finding it in the wild is] a chance to redeem ourselves as a nation, and not have this scar on our psyche because of how poorly we treated the animal" (2017). It is a way for Tasmanians and Australians to help reshape what early colonizers destroyed. In the following chapter, these newer legends will be explored more thoroughly through material culture.

CHAPTER III

ART AND THE THYLACINE

Folklorists have always had a vested interest in unlocking the meanings behind the creation of everyday material objects. But what constitutes “folk art” in the context of folklore has been the subject of debate. Two of the most important aspects of defining folk art are that it must represent a visual, physical aesthetic, and that the object’s aesthetic evokes an emotional response. Folklorist Dorothy Noyes defines folk art as having an aesthetic quality, meaning that it causes a visceral reaction or intangible feeling from those viewing the particular work. Whether that feeling is pleasant or disgusts the viewer is beside the point and is therefore the opposite of an anesthetic: something that causes insensitivity, or the absence of feeling (Noyes 133 - 134). Adding to this, Gerald Pocius claims that art additionally, “through form and through association of that form to particular aspects of daily life, succeeds by eliciting some type of emotional response in the observer” (420). Folk art possesses an aesthetic quality in both the form and function, and the value behind these qualities always lies in the community that creates them. The art and material objects that folklorists study can take a wide range of forms, including speech, sculpture, fiber craft, literary, dance, and other forms. Again, art is defined by the community that creates it. As Pocius states, “when we theorize about folklore, we are often theorizing about art; thus when we search out the universals of folklore, we are searching for the universal laws that govern art” (414). Our analysis of folk art is therefore often grounded in cultural relativism. Perhaps the most important aspect of defining something as folk art is the behavior, or skill, required to create it. In the 1970’s and thereafter, folklorists “associate art not with a limited number of cultural items but

rather with any type of everyday activity that required a certain amount of skill to execute,” which includes everything from occupations, cooking, and festival production (423). With these definitions in mind, folk art is often grouped under the umbrella of material culture because of its tangible, physical, and behavioral qualities (Bronner 1986:199). Folk objects are a materialization of tradition, as folklorist Simon Bronner suggests, meaning that the object, or art in this case, physically represents something about the group’s cultural practices (199). In the case of thylacine artwork, the art itself represents the tradition of telling thylacine legends and the other cultural practices it is connected to, such as legend tripping. This section of my thesis focuses on what folklorists identify as material culture: the objects of culture you can touch, that express some aesthetic or artistic value. I will use theoretical behavioral analysis to interpret thylacine-related to folk art and material culture specifically.

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how the visual artwork people create referencing the thylacine represents what folklorists call “material behavior.” “Material behavior” was coined by Michael Owen Jones in 1997, and the term was developed to create a method for studying the behaviors involved and connected to folk objects based on behavioral cultural analysis. This builds on the discussion of “art” (included within material culture) defined by a certain degree of “skilled behavior” required to complete or demonstrate the work. Jones writes that calling the subject material culture when focusing on the surrounding behavioral issues connected to the objects confuses analysis. He suggests, “we ought to speak of material history, folklore materialism (or material sets and transmission), material culture, or material behavior when undertaking or referring to research in the corresponding perspective” to make these areas more specific and distinct

in analysis (201-202). This concept will be more thoroughly discussed later on in this chapter. I argue that material behavior is another kind of ostension in the maintenance of legends, and when working to understand the relationship people have with extinction legends, this “ostensive behavior” should not be overlooked. The notion that ostension encompasses material behavior should be readily applied to behaviors surrounding endangered and extinct species as we expect to see a more rapid loss of species due to climate change.

The liminality of the thylacine as being a creature that simultaneously exists and does not inspire a wide-range of creativity. In addition to legend-tripping and other ostensive activities, the thylacine is represented in a variety of folk-art forms, including digital, painted, and hand-drawn artwork, fiber arts, and costuming¹⁸. As mentioned in the introduction, I monitor several online sites that help me view this artwork through my own searches and artist submissions. Thylacine enthusiasts across continents create material objects such as t-shirts, jewelry, stickers, patches, fine artwork, stamps, greeting cards, fabric, and felted and plush toys – all with direct reference to the thylacine and/or its extinction. These pieces are depicted with a wide range of emotions seen through the representation of the thylacine itself, the choice in artistic medium, and the style and colors used within the work. These objects of material culture, as Bronner so eloquently states, are “made up of tangible things crafted, shaped, altered, and used... It is art, architecture, food, clothing, and furnishing” to name a few genres (Bronner 1985). Building on the definition of a folk object, Jules David Prown defines material culture as “the study through artifacts of the beliefs–values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions–of a particular community or society at a given time” (1). This intrinsically ties material

objects to a direct expression and physical embodiment of a group's culture. Cultural values and beliefs are intimately tied to the things we choose to create every day. While legend-tripping helps connect people to the physical space and place tied to wilderness and the thylacine's home, actually creating material objects of or about thylacines is another way to recreate or "resurrect" the species symbolically. A material object of the thylacine gives presence to the otherwise absent animal in our world today, a plush toy of an animal that we only just missed on the evolutionary timescale. Creating a physical object brings the thylacine to life in a way that legend reports and sighting videos do not. The thylacine represented in this material culture often symbolically represents hope and perseverance to the thylacine enthusiasts creating it, to those who share it with others through the internet, and to those who purchase it from the creators.

For this project, I considered material culture featuring or related to the thylacine online. I did not limit this study to 2D artwork, but specifically chose to discuss a wide range of artistic expression, including sculpture, paintings, costume, and fiber arts. Each of these media expresses something different about the legends surrounding the thylacine and the personal connection with the object people generate from the creation process.

A Brief Discussion of Elite Thylacines

There is a small place in this discussion to pay homage to fine or elite art that also features the thylacine. Folk art is distinct from elite art in that it is that folk art is always created by and connected to a distinct folk culture. There is often a level of informal training on behalf of the artist from someone within the relevant folk culture, and the work itself serves a function decided by that same community. Elite art is, by definition,

created by artists who have been professionally trained and whose work adheres to the institutional expectations of museums and galleries. Artists such as Daniel Moynihan, Walton Ford, and William Cooper are all elite artists who frequently use the thylacine as a symbol in their work. These artists and other fine artists who feature the thylacine in their work have done a great deal for the current global consciousness of its tragic history (see Figures 5 – 7).



Figure 5 "The Island" by Walton Ford (2009)

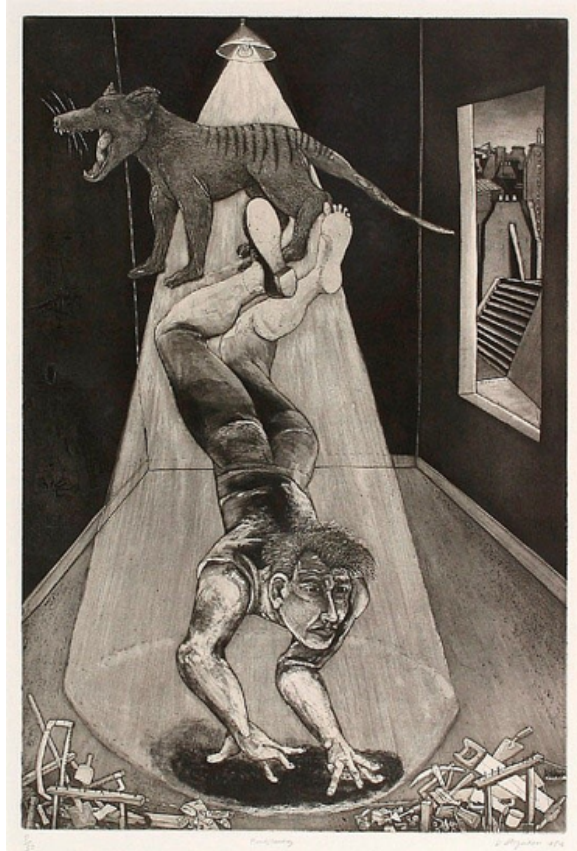


Figure 6 "Handstanding" by Daniel Moynihan (~1980s)



Figure 7 "Thylacine" by William Cooper (2006)

Many of these artists as well have served even more broadly to motivate the public to take action to prevent the effects of climate change by painting primarily extinct species. There are also a number of fine artists today who have painted the thylacine, namely artists who paint endangered and extinct species as a way to preserve these animals in a physical form. There are also professional sculptors that have given the thylacine bronze three dimensional forms so when a person walks by, they can feel the size and presence of the animal lost¹⁹. Many of these sculptures are featured in Tasmania and Australia as public art pieces for the public to enjoy and to remind them of the animal's extinction.

While folk art surrounding the thylacine has not been well discussed critically in academia, this is not the case for fine art, scientific, and institutional representations of the thylacine. Carol Freeman, author of *Paper Tiger: How Pictures Shaped the Thylacine* (2014), catalogues a chronological history of thylacine-related artworks on an institutional scale, tracking the cultural implications and interpretations of the thylacine that coincide pre-to-post-extinction. Freeman's book draws a correlation to the ways the thylacine is represented in fine artwork, and how this may have influenced the public's perception and subsequent death of the thylacine. She also discusses the continual and evolving commodification of the thylacine's image, and how it is used as a method of political motivation for manipulating the public and scientific community's perception of the thylacine.

A study of these fine artist's personal connections and contributions to thylacines as a legend and species could be a study on its own; for this thesis I have chosen to focus on the everyday artists who choose to reference the thylacine in their artwork. I will not be focusing on fine art and institutional representations of the thylacine, and I

acknowledge the impact it has had on the global perception, knowledge, and interpretation of the importance and behavior of this species. Folk art of the thylacine has been underrepresented in academic literature on this subject, and this thesis seeks to correct this. These folk artists are also much more abundant than the more well-known fine artists previously mentioned. The meaning of the thylacine to these everyday artists is variable, yet almost always comes back to the theme of perseverance through hardship or animal conservation.

Thylacine Folk Art

To answer my main research questions regarding the connections between ostension and material behavior in the maintenance of thylacine legends, I chose to track artwork, draw connections between similar patterns in representation of the thylacine, and interview several exemplar artists of each category to further dissect the meaning the thylacine has for these individual artists. Again, I have focused my studies on a group of people I have identified as “thylacine enthusiasts.” Membership in this group is not exclusive to Tasmanians, and I have found in my research that the legend of the thylacine has compelled people from many Western countries, including the United States and Canada, to act in one form or another on this legend once they hear it. My goal is to understand how and why people are depicting the thylacine today in comparison to how they were depicted in the past and use this information to discuss the positive shift in representation of the thylacine in legends post-extinction. Through my interviews, I aimed to understand a deeper side of these legends: the national and personal identity people use the thylacine image to express. First, I will begin by discussing the

methodology and results of my thylacine art catalogue. Then, I will present the information my collaborating artists provided me through our interviews.

Stripy Patterns

Before I even began this research, I noticed the frequency of the thylacine in my internet life. In 2014, I opened a Tumblr account dedicated to tracking the thylacine artwork I found online. Tumblr's "dashboard" (or "home page") feature can be customized to each individual's preferences through choice. People choose which blogs or type of content they wish to follow, and tailor it to their own interests. I chose to follow thylacine, zoology, cloning, climate change, and biology and ecology-related content to become better acquainted with subjects related to the thylacine. Though this project held varying degrees of my attention over the years, I never stopped sharing the artwork that came up on my Tumblr "dashboard" when I saw it. My master's thesis has allowed me to dedicate more time to this project and expand it to other websites as I have previously described. Over the course of the last five years, I have seen hundreds, if not thousands, of drawings and artwork referencing the thylacine.

I have identified three categories of thylacine representation with which to analyze the artwork I have collected online: anthropomorphized, fictionalized (with subcategories of nice vs. mean), and realistic. I settled on these specific categories based on the emic trends I observed online in thylacine art. I also believe that each of these categories represents a particular relationship and discussion connected to the representation of thylacines and thylacine legends today. I included an example from my viewing to further illustrate each of categories below their descriptions.

Anthropomorphized art is created primarily by a group of people online who self-identify as Therians or Furies, as an expression of their identification with an animal. The furry community “often [identifies] with, and may wish to assume, characteristics of, nonhuman animals” (Gerbasi 198), whereas therians believe they truly are the animal they represent themselves through an avatar. I focus on furies for this thesis because this is a more common identity of those making anthro-thylacine artwork. In this particular art form, the thylacine is drawn with human features, often bipedal, wearing clothing, and having human hair and other features (see Figure 8). This category poses many questions related to identity of the thylacine, and embodiment of legend motifs connected to its extinction and possible present existence.



Figure 8 “tidaltigerThyla” example of Anthropomorphized Thylacine Art

The category I call “fictionalized” encompasses a wide range of artistic styles and mediums. I define this category through representing the thylacine as a thylacine, with the added mix of a particular un-realistic, or more animated artistic style. This category includes depictions beyond 2D art as well, encompassing fiber arts and sculpture. I have also subdivided this category into “nice” vs “mean” depictions of the thylacine’s mood and behavior within the artwork²⁰ (see Figure 9). This highlights some of the more nuanced changes in its depiction over time and informs the data on how the behavior and personality of the thylacine is currently being represented.



Figure 9 “reapersunThyla” example of Fictionalized, Nice Thylacine Art

The third and final category I am choosing to analyze is that of realistic depictions. This includes representations of the thylacine with anatomical correctness, in its natural habitat, or as a reference sketch to compare carnivorous builds to other animals (sometimes in comparison to drawing wolves or dogs). This category is often seen in fine art as well (see Figure 10).



Figure 10 “russako_artThyla” example of Realistic Thylacine Art

Every image I found, regardless of type, included the stripes of the thylacine as a key marker that it was in fact a thylacine, and not a wolf or other animal. This has been a unanimous method for vernacular thylacine depiction no matter the decade the original art was produced. I also tracked whether or not the thylacine was depicted with its mouth

open in the artwork, as this a key factor in evoking the connected legends. Additionally, I noted whether the art piece referenced the extinction of the thylacine explicitly, implicitly, or was left unmentioned. Photos of the artwork uploaded were almost always “tagged” on Tumblr with the hashtag “thylacine” and/or “Tasmanian tiger” to make their artwork thematically easier to search online. This “tag” would lead people interested in the subject to find it more readily on the website it was posted. All the artwork I documented was created within the last ten years, and then uploaded to either DeviantArt or Tumblr. All artwork was originally posted in English, though it is difficult to determine if this was the artist’s native language. The importance of this lies in a Western-leaning form of communicating about this animal and the surrounding culture it is connected to.

An official tally yielded these results (see Table 1): out of a total of thirty documented 2-D art pieces, ten (33%) were categorized “realistic,” four (13%) were anthropomorphic, and sixteen (54%) were “fictionalized.” Of the fictionalized representations, four (25%) were “mean,” two (13%) were “neutral” and ten (62%) were “nice.” This is a striking difference from traditional and scientific representations of the thylacine, which depict the thylacine growling, hunting, or generally more suspicious looking in crouching and otherwise defensive positions. Sixteen documented pieces (53%) represented the thylacine with its mouth closed. This was a surprising result, as the most recognizable images of the thylacine depict it with a mouth wide open. This depiction, though only slightly more common than the eye-catching wide mouth so indicative of historic thylacine drawings, reflects the shift in perceptions of the thylacine from a scary sheep-killing and generally murderous animal to a more likeable and

friendly creature. Often, the thylacine in these representations were smiling or were drawn with a neutral curiosity, again illustrating the shifting trend in representation to a kinder, intelligent animal.

Only eight (27%) of the total documented pieces referenced extinction at all, and of that, only one explicitly referenced extinction within the piece. Others either implied extinction within the work itself or mentioned it explicitly within the caption connected to the image, which I also included in my data collection. This indicates not only a reference to emic knowledge about the history of the thylacine, but allows a newer thylacine enthusiast to wonder, and perhaps investigate the subtle reference and story behind it.

Table 1 Data Collected of Viewed Thylacine Artwork Online

Title of Saved Art	Source	Artist; Year	Anthropomorphised	Fictionalized ("Nice" or "Mean")	Realistic	Reference to extant	Notes/Description	
CoconutmilkwayThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Coconutmilkway; 2/8/2016		Yes, nice		he found this weird bookin dingo in the wastelands, fed it a mouse, and it followed him home: inb4 "um he would probs kill and eat it": my art my choices. i choose to draw friendship	6,424 Notes on Tumblr. Image of two-headed thylacine stylized as a pet of the Overwatch character JunkRat; mouth open	
ZoophagousThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Zoophagous; 9/23/2017		yes, neutral	Yes	explicit	De-extinction. I know it's kind of a pipe dream but i still hold out hope that between cloning or cryptid sightings the thylacine will become known and exist again. A gal can dream. 6x9, is for sale for 40\$.	1,469 Notes on Tumblr. Text on image reads "I'll be back from the dead soon". Image has a realistic thylacine, pet, and skull, along with jared pup specimen, but the features are colors are somewhat fictionalized; mouth open
SkilamlinkThyla.png	Tumblr	Skilamlink; unknown		Yes, nice			Image of thylacine stylized in a circular form, mouth open	Image of thylacine stylized as Overwatch character, JunkRat, mouth open
TigerTentoryThyla.png	Tumblr	TigerTentory; 1/28/16	yes	yes, nice			thylacine junkrat for mayalex on plunk cc	Image of head of thylacine with angry-open mouth in B&W; halo above head and the words "love" and "joy" written in top corners (artist's signature)
Lovejoy_doodlesThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Lovejoy-doodles; unknown		Yes, mean		implicit	4 🐅 Tasmanian tiger. When i was a kid i would dream of going to Australia to try and find any last remaining thylacines in the wild.	Soft rounded features, mouth closed, animated style and friendly looking mid-run
RumwikThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Rumwik; 10/19/2017		Yes, nice			Teeny Tasmanian Tiger! Anyone else sad they'll never get to see a live thylacine? Me too dude. An experiment in graphic design-- drew the thylacine in walnut ink and the rest is	Text on image reads "Humans Ruin Everything" on a sash around a realistically drawn thylacine with purple flowers surrounding it. Mouth closed.
Reign_shadowThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Reign-shadow; unknown			yes	implicit in image, e	photoshop	

tidaligertyhyla.jpg	Tumblr	tidaliger, unknown	yes				greenhouse	Image of anthropomorphised thylacine with a tanktop and shorts sitting in a room filled with cacti and houseplants looking bashful; mouth closed
tophatsquidthyhyla.gif	Tumblr	tophatsquid; 7/2/2017		yes				realistic .gif of thylacine laying down and continually opening and closing its large mouth.
evanlovejoythyhyla.jpg	Tumblr	evanlovejoy; 6/26/2017		yes			A quick and dirty Thylacine cause I'm tired	Image of thylacine standing to the side, mouth wide open and appears to be making a noise based on the squiggle by it's mouth. More realistic than others, but also somewhat fictionalized; has "Love" and "Joy" written in top-left corner, thyla on little bits of grass but essentially no background
nusko_artThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Rusako-art; 2/2018	yes, nice		yes			Image of thylacine crouching; everything about this pencil drawing is realistic except for the very curly tail; animal looks curious with mouth closed.
reapersunthyhyla.jpg	Tumblr	reapersun; 3/20/2015	yes, nice			implicit	I forget this too often so I made this to help me remember.	Image of cute and round thylacine with eyes and mouth closed wrapped in flowers with sash reading "Be kind. In 200 years we will all be dead"; extremely cute
pavonisgronthyla.png	Tumblr	pavonisgron; 2/2018	yes, mean		yes		Thylacine tattoo commission for @zozopaw with an extra bit of flair. Interested in a commission of your own? Email me at pavonisgron@gmail.com!	This image is of a thylacine pouncing on the ground, moth slightly open appearing fierce, with a moon and a few stars in the space above its head in the right corner of image. This is a B&W design for a tattoo.
snowysaurthyhyla.png	Tumblr	snowysaur; 6/17/2017	yes, nice				thylacine	This image is of a thylacine looking very curious; the body is fairly inaccurately drawn, but has stripes and looks generally dog-like, mouth closed and looking very curious.
spencejemthyhyla.png	Tumblr	spencejem; 5/22/2015	yes				Polycore commission of Beta for Tazara!	Image of anthropomorphised thylacine in bright and baggy clothes, earrings, and standing on two feet like a human. Smiling with a joyful grin. 12087 notes on tumblr
snowysaurthyhyla2.png	Tumblr	snowysaur; 6/8/2017	Yes, nice				thylacine, sorta	Image of thylacine that possessed bird-like feet and small mouse-like features due to the stylization. Mouth closed.

thebadgerssthyia.png	Tumblr	thebadgersett; 2/13/2017	yes, neutral			Did a little experimenting yesterday; tryin' to get that blacklight look.	Image of somewhat realistic thylacine walking through a neon colored background of trees; highly stylized through use of contrasting colors; thylacine has no pupils in shining eyes (possible reference to the "marsupial eyeglow", and closed mouth
biophoniesthyia.png	Tumblr	biophonies; 2015	yes			a thylacine for a special project. (please click through for a better view) I chose Tasmanian flora in various states of decay to represent the beginnings of trophic cascade, an awful phenomenon that occurs when a top predator of an environment is killed off. we humans pull at a thread, unwittingly unraveling an entire tapestry...	Stylized thylacine in circular form with mouth wide-open, suspended in air with native Tasmanian flora (as comment states). Explicit reference to extinction in comment.
snekeidrawsthyia1.jpg	Tumblr	snekeidraws; 10/29/2017	Yes, mean			werewolves around the world: Australian Devil; we have no native canines here, so it has a thin, thylacine kind of face :	one of two images in this tumblr post; this image shows a stylized depiction of the cryptid "the Australian Devil" shown to appear like a malformed thylacine eating a sheep at night. Very menacing looking. Mouth slightly open
snekeidrawsthyia2.jpg	Tumblr	snekeidraws; 10/29/2017	Yes, mean			werewolves around the world: Australian Devil; we have no native canines here, so it has a thin, thylacine kind of face :	one of two images in this tumblr post; this image shows a stylized depiction of the cryptid "the Australian Devil" shown as a drawing sample for artists. The creature is drawn in several different poses with the Australian flag, including a close up on face where the creature's mouth is wide open.
cybemightmareantThyia.png	Tumblr	cybemightmareant; unknow yes				Two guys being gays, two gays being bros	Image of a thylacine and a male friend with huge muscles and cutoff shorts sitting close to each other affectionately. They are presumed to be gay lovers, as per the caption. Mouth open, completely anthropomorphised.
antvianblogThyia.jpg	Tumblr	antvianblog; 8/20/2017	Yes, nice			Commission for my dad from January	Image of large thylacine walking through a sky overlooking the Tasmanian bush; appears spirit-like, muth closed.
ruskko_artThyia2.jpg	Tumblr	ruskko-art; 2014			Yes		Image of thylacine laying down, mostly realistic except for curly tail and ears reminding more mouse-like features. Mouth closed.

oldscreeshowThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Unknown; 2011			Yes	implicit	photo of spray painted/graffiti thylacine on an electrical box outside with the text in the image reading "never forget." The image only includes the dark portions of the thylacine, leaving the rest to be colored by the background (stencil). Mouth closed
skulldogThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Skulldog; 4/12/2017	yes, nice				Image of watercolor thylacine crouched down with a flower in mouth; reminiscent of ancient Japanese artwork, mouth closed
ravenaisartThyla.jpg	Tumblr	ravenaisart; 2018			yes		Image of upper half of thylacine drawn in B&W, surrounded by flowers laced around it. Mouth closed, slightly inaccurate proportions
halieleThyla.jpg	Tumblr	Haliele; 8 sept. 2016	Yes, nice			implicit in image, explicit in caption	Image of thylacine sitting down with head hung low, with a clear wound in heart/chest area bleeding out on the floor. Mouth closed. Sad.
wanderingcellThyla.jpg	Tumblr	wanderingcell; 10 Nov. 2011	Yes, nice			implicit	Image of two thylacines within a frame; simple line drawing on turquoise blue background. Mouths closed, and the label on the drawn frame reads "We Miss You"
middenThyla.jpg	Tumblr	midden; 2011	Yes, nice				Image of thylacine with mouth wide open, appears to be smiling, and excited over a cupcake placed before it. Image is playful, and does not have much of a background.
alla_ganusThyla.png	Tumblr	alla-ganus; 2017					Portrait (shoulders up) of anthropomorphic thylacine man with mouth open laughing and smiling, wearing a blue tank top with a tuft of curly hair on his head between ears. Eyes closed. Background is a series of stylized "haha"s.

These results illustrate an overview of trends and themes of modern thylacine folk art found on the internet. It is clear from these results that the folk's perception of the thylacine has shifted: there is much more equal representation of the thylacine as friendly and ferocious. This study could benefit from collecting more artwork over time and increasing the sample size to further specify the frequency of trends and production of artwork over time. It could also work to compare folk representations of the thylacine over the twentieth century to further compare and illustrate the contrast between institutional representations of this animal. Additionally, it could compare different mediums of artwork more readily to assess the differences between types of media chosen to represent the thylacine. The following section takes a closer look at individual artist's interpretation of their work and connection to the thylacine for each of the three major categories previously outlined.

The Artists

I chose to focus on several artists of varying styles and skills because they exemplify different aspects of thylacine enthusiast culture and animal representation. All of them work predominantly in 2-D modes of production, but that does not mean the artists are limited to this medium. The categories I have identified encompass other mediums outside of 2-D artwork which will also be addressed below as relevant. I worked with an artist who represented each category I identified: realistic, anthropomorphic, and fictionalized. Their interviews revealed much about how they each represent the thylacine in their work, how they came to use the thylacine as a subject, and how they personally connect to this animal. I conducted several additional short

interviews with other artists for each category to supplement and complicate the discussion that stems from each main artist's perspective.

Artist One: Filippa Buttitta and "Realistic" Thylacines

Realism is likely one of the first types of art people think of when they imagine a drawing of the thylacine. The thylacine has been depicted in this style through scientific illustration and through other institutional representations dating back to some of the first sightings of it by colonizers. As previously mentioned, this artwork is often generated by trained, professional, elite artists to do justice to the memory of the thylacine by depicting it as lifelike, as anatomically correct, and as natural as possible, because it does not officially exist in the wild today. Realistic art, in the case of the thylacine, is a way for these artists to remind people of what they have lost with as much accuracy to its memory as possible. This conception is also expanded to include the wild Tasmanian landscape as well, returning the thylacine to its natural habitat.

Filippa Buttitta is the artist I interviewed to get a better understanding of realistic thylacine artwork. Buttitta has been fascinated by thylacines since the 1980s, and this interest has led her on projects in a number of areas. Buttitta specifically is intrigued by the thylacine more than other native Tasmanian mammals for a few reasons: "their tragic history, their unusual physical features," the modern thylacine sightings everyday people experience, "how it has become an international symbol for extinct species," and how scientists are working to clone one (Buttitta 2019). She feels that "the real monsters were us, the humans who exterminated it!" and much of her work seeks to rectify this damage by symbolically returning it to the Tasmanian landscape through artwork.

Having obtained two master's degrees related to art and identity, Buttitta has found herself drawn to "the ways Australia [and Tasmania] has forged its sense of identity" and has explored cultural identity as a major theme in her work over the last twenty-seven years. Much of her work is connected to traditional memory, a space where the thylacine holds much value for Australians. To research the thylacine, Buttitta has worked with many people in the thylacine enthusiast community, with the Australian Rare Fauna Research Association (ARFA), the Thylacine Awareness Group Facebook pages, and other scholars in the field, such as Michael Archer and Andrew Pask, both of whom she has recently painted portraits of (2019). Recently, her work has turned towards depicting the scientists and specimens working together to bring the thylacine back through genetic cloning, so that it may once again walk the wilderness of Tasmania²¹.

An interesting and complicating factor in this style of artwork is that the models and references artists refer to are those few and precious photos and videos captured of thylacines while several were still alive in the early 1930s. Unlike other extinction artists, there is actual footage of the animal they wish to paint, whereas an animal such as the dodo or mammoth must rely on other artist interpretations from earlier centuries, or skeletons of the animal. There are even preserved specimens of thylacines, both through taxidermy and wet specimens. Buttitta has worked with scientists and museum curators to access these rare specimens to use as subjects in her artwork. Many artists who draw the thylacine are intrigued by its physical form because it is distinct from other mammals, having beautiful stripes, wide mouth, and a sloped and stocky body. Buttitta, and other artists I interviewed, share this sentiment. Other sources of information about the physical form of the thylacine may come through the early illustrations of it by colonizers in

Tasmania. However, historical illustrations of the thylacine have not always drawn it in the best, or most accurate, light. Carol Freeman's book *Paper Tiger: How Pictures Shaped the Thylacine* (2014) is the most thorough discussion of these institutional representations of the thylacine, depicting it as vermin or wolf-like leading to the justification of its murder. Buttitta, knowing this, tries to "capture the animal with compassion" in her artwork, so as not to perpetuate these stereotypes (2019).

These "realistic" thylacine artists also often draw the animal in its native habitat: the wilderness of Australia and Tasmania. In many ways, this symbolically places the animal back into the world it was taken from and builds on the idea of possibly seeing the thylacine back home in the place it belongs on Earth, rather than completely eliminated from the world. Buttitta's artwork represents realistic images of the thylacine often drawn in natural landscapes of local Tasmanian wilderness (see Figures 12 and 14). Sometimes, the thylacine is alone, and other times depicted as a small family group. She has recently completed a collection of works titled "The Wonthaggi Monster" and is just finishing up a second series called "Lost Thylacine." Buttitta is influenced by local legends of thylacine sightings and other unrecognized creatures that haunt the Tasmanian landscape and imagination. She says, "Many of the stories behind these sightings have been used as the core inspiration behind many works that explore and re-imagine the Thylacine in the Australian [and Tasmanian] landscape and suburban contexts."



Figure 11 Painting of thylacine in front of a house for sale by Buttitta (2019)



Figure 12 Painting of thylacine on coastline by Buttitta (2017)

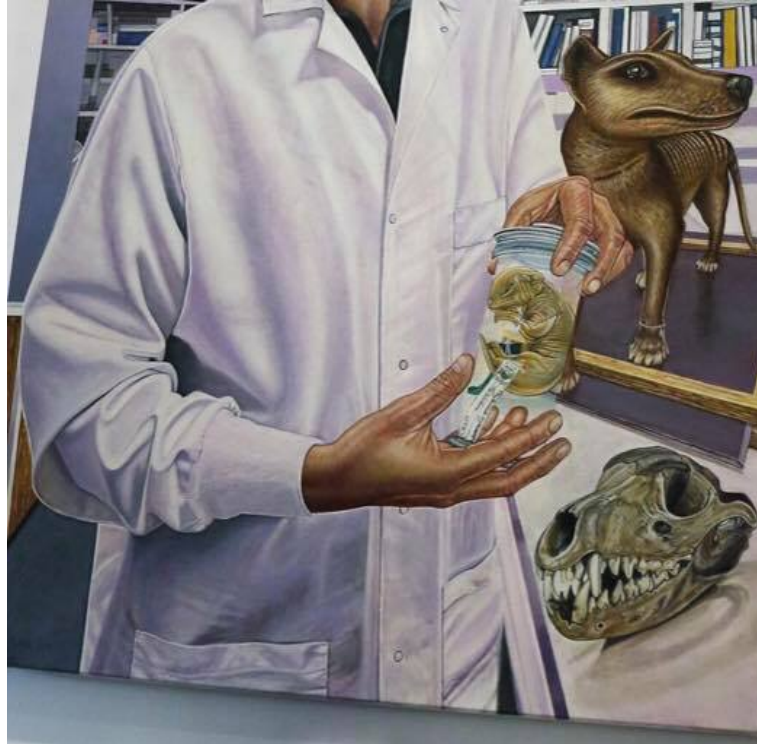


Figure 13 “Working on the Thylacine Genome & De-Extinction” A portrait of Dr. Andrew Pask by Buttitta (2018)



Figure 14 Painting of thylacine standing in dirt road by Buttitta (2018)

While there have been sightings of thylacines in urban settings today²², this is often not the way they are drawn in this category. Though not an artist, I was able to connect with one of the main organizers running the Thylacine Awareness Group of Tasmania Facebook page²³, Megan Ambrus. She first came in contact with Neil Waters after witnessing a thylacine in the wild herself while on a hike with her dogs in the hills of Tasmania, and her interest has only spread from there (Ambrus 2019). Ambrus recognized consistent themes in realistic thylacine artwork. She felt that overwhelmingly, the thylacine artwork she has witnessed depicted “one or two thylacines in the forest or overlooking the beach...” and that most of the settings the thylacine was drawn into were wilderness, as opposed to suburban neighborhoods or cities where thylacines have been spotted. Filippa Buttitta is an exception to this rule, however, as demonstrated above, and does draw thylacine in unexpectedly suburban locations (see Figures 10 and 13). Part of what intrigues her about the Tasmanian landscape is that it has helped “artists, writers, poets, musicians... forged our sense of identity through the sense of mystery hidden in the vastness of the landscape... things get lost or a made to get lost in it” just like the thylacine has been “lost” and found again through a cultural revival (Buttitta 2019). Ambrus recognized the duality in the depiction of “realistic” thylacines: on the one hand, drawing thylacines in the wild illustrate the natural landscape of Tasmania and place a lost animal back in its rightful home. On the other hand, there are less frequent depictions of the thylacine in more urban settings, like parking lots or behind buildings, where actual sightings of thylacines have also taken place. Ambrus explains:

With the thylacine, because really not that much is known about it, people do have the freedom to represent it any way they like. Whereas a more well-known

animal, people tend to represent what they know about that animal, but it's very difficult to do that with the thylacine... You know what it looked like, you know it had a pouch, you know it was a predator... but beyond that really, we don't know anything about it. We can only go on what was written, and we don't know how much truth is in what was written. (2019)

Keeping the thylacine in the wilderness misses the reality of some Tasmanians who have seen the thylacine in these more urban spaces. Additionally, if not much is known about the behavior and habits of thylacines, they could be depicted in any environment someone wanted, realistic or not. The following artists build on this notion more explicitly in their personal and artistic connections to the thylacine.

Artist Two: Simon_Thylacine and "Anthropomorphized" Thylacines

This category of artwork is defined by the represented thylacine's likeness to human features, behaviors, and expressions. Much of this artwork depicts the thylacine in human clothing, with dialogue, or performing a traditionally human activity, which can consist of anything from riding a bike to having sex. This artwork often expresses a person's personal identity through an animal representation, thylacine or otherwise. The drawings can be quite cartoonish and colorful, or more realistic depending on the artist's personal style. Whatever the artist wants the animal version of themselves to do, they represent it through art, leading to the possibility of this fursona to express parts of the person they may not be able to otherwise. The important connection with the thylacine in this style of artwork is the self-identification with the animal itself, and the story it represents aligning with that of the creator.

I worked with several furies and artists to represent this category. Often, furies who have thylacines as their fursonas refer to themselves as “tassies,” short for Tasmanian tiger (Dubos 2019). Through my research, it was difficult to find a person that was 1) a self-identified thylacine furry and 2) the artist behind their personal fursona. Often, furies commission other anthro-artists to design their fursona for them, and their artwork can encompass a wide range of requests and are not typically exclusively thylacines. I did manage to find one tassie who makes their own artwork representing their fursona, Simon_Thylacine, but was unable to narrow down an interview with them for more information other than what was readily available online. I have included some examples of Simon’s work that represent their thylacine fursona and illustrate the broad range in anthro-artwork that exists online (see Figures 15 – 18).



Figure 15 “Watching the Sunset on Shore” by Simon_Thylacine (2017)



Figure 16 “Graceful Tassie Tiger kind of NSFWish” by Simon_Thylacine (2017)



Figure 17 “Electric N’ Fire” by Simon_Thylacine (2017)



Figure 18 “Shiny Celebi shines in Ilex Forest” by Simon_Thylacine (2018)

Anthropomorphized thylacine artwork is most often created by members of the furry community. The furry community has not been extensively studied in the humanities, although some scholars have taken initiative to understand this particular folk group (Gerbasi 2008). According to a study conducted by a group of psychologists on the self-identification of furries,

Although there is no standard definition of furry, most furries would likely agree with the following: A furry is a person who identifies with the Furry Fandom culture. Furry Fandom is the collective name given to individuals who have a distinct interest in anthropomorphic animals such as cartoon characters. Many, but not all, furries strongly identify with, or view themselves as, one (or more) species

of animal other than human... Many furries congregate in cyberspace, enjoy artwork depicting anthropomorphized animals, and attend Furry Fandom conventions. (Gerbasi 198)

Identifying as a furry is a complex and personal decision, and many people have different reasons for doing so. In this artist's case, they identify as a thylacine furry, though possibly have multiple animals to represent different parts of themselves. Participating in the furry community is "a complex, distinctive, and diverse group of people who are exceptional in several ways: 1. Their interests and behaviors uniquely combine anthropomorphism and zoomorphism; 2. Many more males than females are furry; and 3. Furries' sexual orientations differ considerably from societal norms" (Gerbasi 219 - 220). They are often creative individuals and are not more likely to suffer from mental illnesses than any other group of people, as media often depicts the community (220).

Often, people who are part of the Furry Fandom wear head-to-toe animal-like suits that represent their fursona, called "fursuits" (198). These suits are constructed of fabric and faux furs, not the actual skin of the animal they represent. Furries wear these suits upright and maintain bipedal motion. Some furries also include human clothing on their suits, such as a polka-dot dress on a fox with a bow above its ear, emphasizing the connection between human and animal species. These suits can be quite expensive to make however, so most furries wear only partial suits, such as ears and a tail²⁴. Usually, furries have a circle of friends within the community who may or may not also have the same animal fursona.

The anthropomorphized artwork furries create is not only a representation of the animal, but also of themselves. The uniqueness of the thylacine's story connects with

people more than other animals might because it is so tragic. There are elements of loss, denial, not being seen or heard by peers, persecution, misunderstanding, and hope and resilience. Furies often seek refuge within this community because they feel persecuted by society for expressing themselves through an animal likeness. Not only furies connect to the thylacine in this way, however. The following section explores the elements of persecution and extinction through the eyes of a “fictionalized thylacine” artist.

Artist Three: Lycisca and “Fictionalized” Thylacines

Fictionalized artwork, as previously mentioned, offers a wider range of representation of the thylacine. This category allows for the thylacine to be non-natural colors, in a wide range of environments, embodying a range of behaviors and scenes, interacting with other animals, and more. This category also is representative of the most direct references to the thylacine’s extinction within the landscape or scene created. The artists drawing thylacines in this style too express a wide range of personal connections to the thylacine as a subject. Some view drawing the thylacine as a fun drawing prompt while others feel more deeply connected to the animal. Many of these representations are artist’s commission projects or drawings to later be transformed into tattoos.

The artist I interviewed for this category is Lycisca. Their artwork is a blend of all three categories I have identified in this thesis, and because of this, I felt it was best to include their work as fictionalized, to encompass their wide range of thylacine representation. Lycisca primarily works in 2-D forms, preferring digitally drawing to traditional methods. One of the first times they drew a thylacine seriously was on the back of their bedroom door when they were around ten or eleven years old (Lycisca 2019). They have always had an interest in thylacines, and much of this interest came

from the specimens on display at the Western Australian Museum in Perth. This museum holds not one but two unique thylacine specimens on display in their collection: one is of a large male taxidermy thylacine, the other is of a thylacine found mummified in one of the Nullarbor caves, pre-dating all more modern specimens by several thousand years (“The Mammal Gallery”). Lycisca mentions visiting this museum often to draw the fauna they encountered in their youth. When first viewing the museum’s thylacine specimen on display they thought, “this critter is pretty cool. It’s a real shame that they’re extinct... even though there have been sightings and that” (Lycisca 2019). They felt connected to the taxidermy thylacine: “There is just something about its whole sort of background, and the way it looks and moves it just really... I thought ‘Hey, I like this! Welcome to my special interest board!’ (2019). The thylacine had captivated them, and stuck with them as they grew older, becoming a more experienced artist along the way.

One of their main characters is a thylacine representation of themselves, or a sort of “fursona” as previously discussed with several furries previously mentioned²⁵. This character often takes the form of a standard thylacine, with a broader range of expressions and has been drawn in many different environments. Lycisca also draws more realistic representations of the thylacines with a variety of backgrounds and landscapes (see Figures 19 - 22). Though the thylacine is by far not the only character they draw, Lycisca personally connects to their thylacine character more than with other works²⁶.



Figure 19 “Plastic World” by Lycisca (2014)

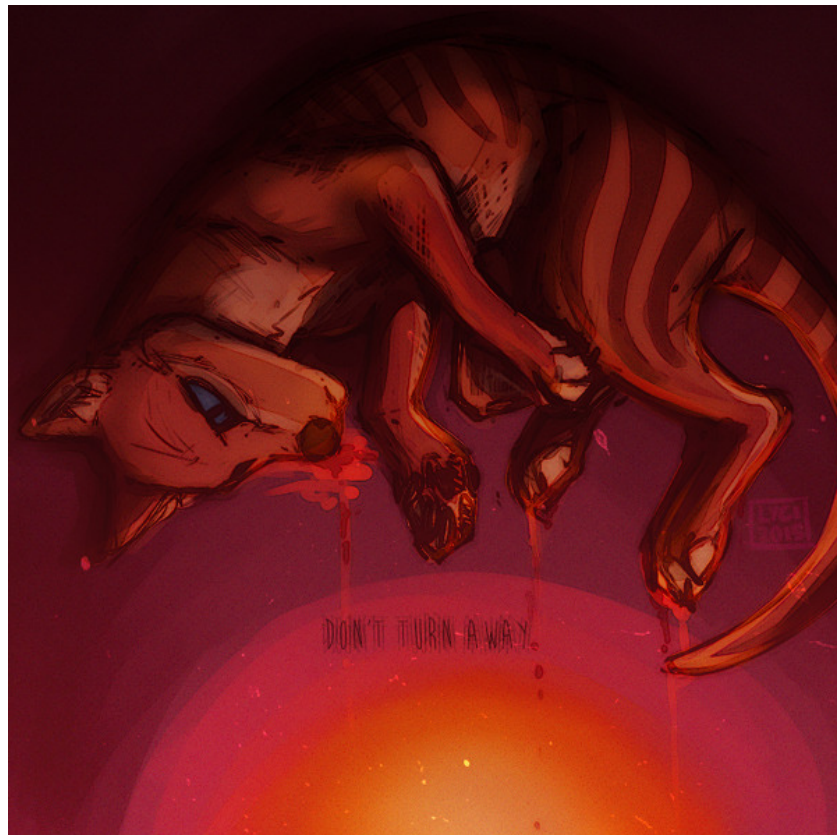


Figure 20 “Don’t Turn Away” by Lycisca (2015)



Figure 21 “Pride (Non-Binary + Asexual)” by Lycisca (2017)

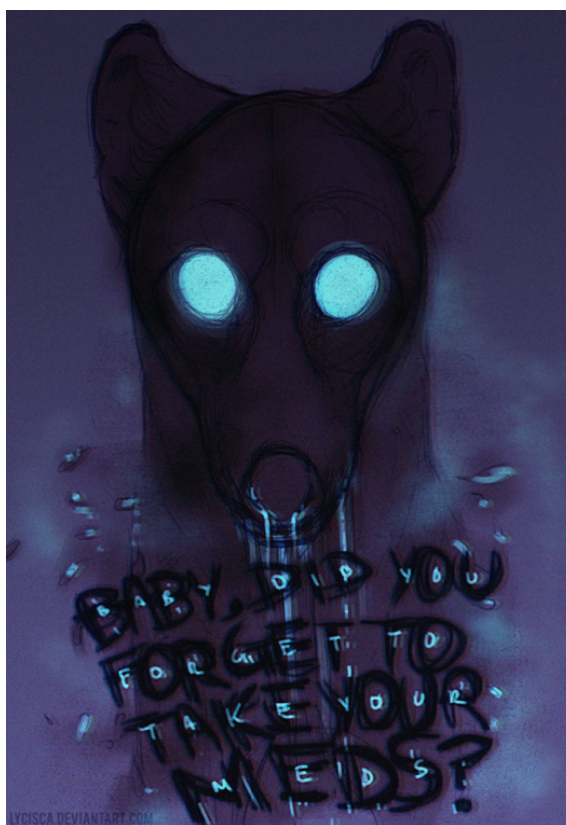


Figure 22 “I was alone, falling free, trying my best not to forget” by Lycisca (2016)

Lycisca's thylacine character, also named Lycisca, was created around the year 2011. In our interview, they explained how this thylacine character slowly turned into a representation of themselves, "like the fursona, alter-ego... Their name is in full is 'Lycisca,' so I kind of went from 'Oh this is the name of my fursona' to 'Oh this is my name now!'" (2019). Lycisca's eventual name change to that of their character shows how important the development of their thylacine character was to their personal identity. This figure became so important in their life, they took on the character's name. For Lycisca, this character represents more than just themselves, however. As they told me in our interview regarding the birth of this character:

2011 was not a good year for me. I ended up in a hospital multiple times. I was in a psych ward, and that's when Lycisa sort of came to being. Lycisca was mute, and the thylacine was persecuted, as you know, and I felt like that was happening to me... and sort of being cooped up and hunted down and not feeling safe at all. If I look at my old drawings back then it's kind of... it was a coping mechanism for me for quite a long time and it just sort of evolved into "Hey, even though I went through a really bad rough time, I have become a stronger person despite it and I don't have to be silent or be persecuted. I can just be myself." (2019)

The development of the character Lycisca the Thylacine was a way for Lycisca to cope with hardship and explore themselves and who they were becoming. As previously discussed, the thylacine frequently represents perseverance for people, to live on despite the odds. Lyci echoed this as a reason for connecting so strongly with the thylacine. They elaborate with an example illustrating this connection from a study they read based on the weak jaw of the thylacine:

I'm not sure when the study came out, but the jaw [of the thylacine] doesn't actually have the bite capacity to kill sheep, so it was persecuted for something that it wasn't even capable of... and I guess because... I was bullied a lot in school, in both primary and high school, I thought "You know, I don't understand why I'm being bullied." So, I guess it was sort of, a bit like a metaphor that I understood. That I could kind of relate to it (2019).

They also recognized the irony in finally granting government protection for the thylacine only weeks before the last captive thylacine, Benjamin, died as a result of exposure in their cage at the Beaumaris Zoo. They remarked, "it's sort of like 'Wow, this is really too little too late,' which is kind of like what the government is doing now with a lot of climate change stuff" (2019). The connection between the loss of the thylacine and the loss of other species due to climate change was not lost on Lycisca. Yet the thylacine's perseverance to live on past its official extinction, whether literally or figuratively, is both comforting and empowering for people who too have been persecuted by a world that does not readily seek to understand them.

Another factor to consider in the category outside of 2-D artwork are "fictionalized" fiber arts representations. Lycisca did not primarily work in this medium, though many of their sentiments and connections to the thylacine are expressed by artists who do create fiber arts renditions of the thylacine²⁷. I have found many representations of the thylacine in fiber arts during my sessions searching online, both produced both by folk artists and institutions. More often than not, these pieces depict the thylacine as softer through their choice in fabric, small size, and often smiling demeanor, hardly ever with their mouth open²⁸. What makes a discussion of plush and otherwise fiber arts

representations of thylacines so important is the 3D form--a person can actually hold the physical representation of the thylacine, hug and pet it, as opposed to simply viewing it, making the animal seem more life-like. Through fiber arts, the thylacine regains a physical form, and is a way to fill in the gap of its absence in the wild with something physical, tangible, and life-like²⁹.

As illustrated from these interviews, the thylacine's possible present existence is a powerful, motivating factor for the creation of artwork and to the development of personal identity. Artists in general, and folk artists in particular, are often not valued for their talents financially, and this takes a toll on their work and attitude toward themselves as productive members in a capitalism-based society. By using the thylacine, these artists can push back against the normalcy of traditional jobs by seeing themselves as cultural influencers and advocate for themselves as financially independent people making a living off the work they love. The empowerment that comes through identifying with the thylacine as an artistic muse is present and inspiring for each of these artists. I feel Lyci summarized it best, when they described one of their primary motivations to create art as "spiteful," stemming from a reaction to a high school teacher scolding them for doodling in class. When I connected this to the thylacine's present existence as also mirroring a level of spitefulness against colonizers who tried to kill it, they responded, "Yeah! It's a big middle finger to what happened to it you know? And I resonate with that" (2019). Both artists, and thylacines, continue to persevere through hardship and turmoil, inspiring artists and folk alike.

The spite of the thylacine's present existence, pushing back against normative and institutional culture, is a strong theme many artists making artwork on a vernacular level

deeply relate to. Another major theme identified from these interviews is educating the public on the history of the thylacine, and warning people not to make the same mistake with other animals. An interview with Lars Roubidoux³⁰, another “fictionalized thylacine” artist, revealed that their primary concern with the thylacine was sharing its story: “I just want them to be known and seen. I like to think that the more people are aware of humanity's impact on other animals, maybe we can prevent further losses in the future” (Roubidoux 2019). Their cartoonish artwork often features other recently extinct animals, and they hope that their art and fascination with thylacines “will raise awareness of their existence” (2019). The patterns and beliefs observed in these artist’s responses and in their work are different for each artist using the thylacine as a subject. There are many voices who were not featured in this thesis whose interpretations, identities, and connections to the thylacine deserve representation and recognition in this work. But precious little is known about the behavior, features, and lifestyle of this animal, which gives artists an opportunity to imbue its image essentially however they want. As Ambrus puts it, “when you don’t know [much about the animal], you have the freedom to represent it however you want to represent it,” and this thesis has touched on a variety of those representations (2019). The goal in focusing on several individual artist’s experiences is a chance to get an emic perspective on how individuals view and interpret their own work of different styles and how they relate to the thylacine as artists.

Material Behavior

The manifestation of the thylacine legend exists in so many different material media that it relates not only to ostension, but also to Folklorist Michael Owen Jones concept of “material behavior.” Jones explains,

“In regard to material behavior, ‘material’ connotes something physical, tangible, perceivable. ‘Behavior’ denotes the activity of an organism, [person], in relation to its environment particularly action in response to stimuli...Thus, material behavior – short for ‘material aspects of human behavior’ – refers to an activity involved in producing or responding to the physical dimension of our world.”
(202)

When people create expressive thylacine-related artwork, whether it be drawings, fiber arts, or otherwise – they are participating in the material behavior surrounding the thylacine. The absence of the thylacine and the creation of artwork to fill in that absence illustrates the production and response to the physical aspects of the thylacine legend in the world. This thylacine artwork, for example, is often sold to the public or other thylacine enthusiasts, perpetuating both the legend of the thylacine and the commodification of that legend. Many of these examples I found on the online selling platform Etsy, which is designed for items that are specifically handmade or vintage. These items represent a wide range of material goods as well, from handbags and jewelry to 2D artwork and plush toys. I argue in reference to the thylacine that material behavior is an act of storytelling for the people creating this work. This behavior is connected to the metonymic nature of the thylacine as Tasmania, and when it is used in the creation of

artwork, the artwork itself is a retelling the legend of the thylacine and the history of Tasmania.

Ostensive Practice

Ostensive practice is a concept that builds off of the definition of ostensive action established in the previous chapter and its connection to thylacine legends. To illustrate the volume and variance of interactions people have with the maintenance of legends, folklorist Andrew Peck looks at ostension as an aggregated practice as opposed to a singular action. Peck writes, “‘Action’ suggests an individual expression of volition, ephemeral and shared on a personal scale; ‘practice’ refers to the collection of many actions and acknowledges the connectivity, aggregated volition, and self-awareness enabled by the affordances of networked communication” (3). He explains that “through social interaction, [people collaborate] in an ongoing process of performance, interpretation, and negotiation that [construct] the details, motifs, and shared expectations of the [legend] cycle” both on and off the internet (6). Essentially, Peck argues that there is no singular action based off of ostension, but rather there are a series of behaviors that all contribute to referencing and subsequently maintaining a legend. This ostensive practice in the context of the thylacine occur in a startling number of ways.

Legend-tripping, as discussed in the previous chapter, is just one of the many ways thylacine enthusiasts demonstrate this behavior on a vernacular level. The vernacular routine practice of tracking thylacines in the wild to prove their existence is always ostensive, because the thylacine exists in a liminal space between living and dead, seen and unseen, and extinct and extant. The legend-trip itself maintains the legend cycle

by creating of new narratives for the legend-trippers to share inspired by their legend-tripping experience and subsequent re-telling of the associated legend motivating the initial legend-trip.

Creation of Art as Ostensive Practice

I argue that the theoretical concept of ostensive practice can be expanded for analyzing material behavior; both of these concepts focus on the production and maintenance of a legend expressed in forms that refer to the legend tangibly, implicitly, and symbolically more than explicitly. A person does not need to re-tell the legend to evoke its meaning through ostensive practice, they only need to draw stripes on a page and a creature with an open mouth to evoke the symbolic meanings behind the thylacine, subsequently keeping the thylacine legend cycle alive through pictures. Thylacine enthusiasts are producing and responding to this legend through a physical means, whether visiting particular sites through legend-tripping or by producing and purchasing material goods that reference the elusive animal. The legend of the thylacine's present existence, and those that led to its avoidable extinction, are maintained through a series of practices in the creation and performance of legend-tripping and folk art. "Ostensive behavior" sustains and gives new life to the thylacines and its surrounding legends.

People impose ideas onto cultural practices as a way to discuss what is important to them. The thylacine is no exception to this, and whether it be through the creation of material culture or actively retelling legends, the creator imposes ideas of the thylacine into their representations, perpetuating both ideas about the animal, but more importantly ideas about ourselves in relation to it. Studying art is about more than the art itself;

folklorists “have devoted most of [their] energies to studying the understanding of how some cultural products become involved in the exploration of the human soul” (Pocius 426). The thylacine is imbued with our own meaning in these two types of folklore, and the following chapter works to understand what those meanings are.

CHAPTER IV

CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

Making an Absence Feel Present

The most important theme in the current vernacular culture and behaviors surrounding the thylacine deals directly with its absence. The thylacine is still haunting the landscape of Tasmania and speaking to unresolved issues from the colonizers' past. The weight of the thylacine's absence is so profound that people are motivated to make artwork and legend-trip to its alleged home in the wilderness. Finding the thylacine in the wild, or hand-sewing a plush toy in its image, is effectively presencing this animal's absence, drawing attention to the space it once filled. Simply drawing a thylacine, no matter how explicit the reference to its extinction, is filling an absence with the presence of an extinct animal. The space created from the loss of the thylacine in the psyche of Australians is evident, and thylacine enthusiasts are working to patch the holes left behind. Creating artwork and legend-tripping are ways for people to tangibly fill in this space and physically presense the thylacine in their daily experience, effectively resurrecting the species from the grave through memorialization.

The legendary aspect of ghosts connect well to those of the thylacine: a creature that was once present and died, and has returned in a liminal form. Present sightings of the thylacine are in many ways like seeing a ghost. It is a mirror into the past and a reminder of what has been lost. The status of the thylacine as "simultaneously 'probably extinct' and 'possibly surviving' gives rise to a creative tension" from this heightened liminality (Smith 2012:283-284). Some of this creativity was discussed in the previous chapter. The thylacine, as a representative of the living-dead, is persistent within the

“settler Australian imaginary because it has been improperly ‘buried’” (2012:285). The narrative power of the thylacine “lies in the tension between being and non-being” (2012:285). Improperly buried dead often return as “collectors of unpaid symbolic debt” (Žižek 22), and in the case of the thylacine, the debt is clear: the thylacine was murdered with little hesitation, wiping out an entire species from Tasmania, and represents in its image the hundreds of other species, as well as entire groups of Aboriginal peoples, lost to European settler colonialism. The unsettling absence of a meaningful burial and subsequent denial of harm done by settler Australians must somehow be rectified for Tasmanians and Australians to move past this tragic history. This “improper burial” has led people to cope with the resulting “hauntings” through artwork and attempts to prove the thylacine’s present, physical existence. I will be using the conception of the ghost and ghostly qualities to illustrate complex feelings of absence and presence that surround the thylacine as I explore the implications and findings resulting from this thesis in several theoretical contexts.

Embodiment

During Halloween, American children can be seen dressing up as ghosts by throwing a white sheet over their heads with two eye holes cut for them to see. This is an example of embodying a legend; the child dresses up, and makes present, a supernatural being which may or may not actually exist depending on who is asked. The embodiment of the ghost narrative, the idea of playing with presence and absence by dressing as the absence in order to make creatures of legend present, has been passed down through generations and is even taught to children through screen-media³¹. This behavior is not

unique to children, however. People choose to dress up and embody all kinds of legends and the thylacine is no exception³². I myself own a costume of a thylacine I handmade from a shirt and old fabric to make stripes and a tail. I wore this to the Oregon Country Fair festival in 2017 with the hope that someone who saw me might mistake me for the last thylacine. Many people have chosen to don the image of the thylacine for parties, festivals, and other public performances in commemoration of its legacy and memory. But a person wearing a thylacine costume at a festival may not feel they are revealing all that much about themselves personally by wearing it, where this is not the case necessarily for someone who identifies as a thylacine within the Furry Fandom.

There is a difference between finding a thylacine and wanting to be one. With regard to the furry community discussed in the previous chapter, this is a complicated question. There is a difference between a person dressing up like a character from pop culture or something supernatural they found in a legend and dressing up like one because they feel it is another version of themselves. I found that the motivation for identifying as a furry is complex. While “some furries may have been motivated to demonstrate or exaggerate their uniqueness...” it is more likely that furries want to appear “normal” and just like anyone else (Gerbasi 219). Many furries also explicitly denounce mainstream media depictions of their fandom, as they often “get a bad rep in most media outlets and on TV” (Grocki 2019). Furries more than other fandoms receive criticism of their interests based on stereotypes of the community stemming from poor representations, notably, “that one CSI episode” featuring a murder of a person with a raccoon fursona eventually leading the main investigators to an inaccurately portrayed Fur Convention (Stahl). Additionally, “many furries reported non-heterosexual sexual

orientations” and gender identities, and the welcoming nature of the community reflects this spectrum of identities (Gerbasi 219). I interviewed several thylacine furies and found that the people I interviewed encompassed a wide variety of LGBT identities, geographical locations, and connections to the thylacine specifically. The furry community is a safe place for people who lie outside hegemonic cultural or want to experiment with their identity with others doing the same.

Identifying as a furry is a complicated choice. Every furry has a different story for how they came to identify as a furry in the first place. Justin Dubos, also known as GrayThylacine by friends and furies, developed an interest in anthropomorphic animals from a young age: “Growing up with Disney films and how common anthros [anthropomorphized animals] are in animation and media,” it makes sense people would develop an attraction to the furry lifestyle (Dubos 2019). He has been involved in the furry fandom since “about 2013” for primarily social reasons and has found a close group of friends through this fandom (2019). Justin Grocki, also known as “Splinter” within the fur community, is another furry with a thylacine fursona. To him, identifying as a furry “means that I get to be someone else even if for a weekend while at a Furry Convention” and explore another side of himself he would otherwise not necessarily feel comfortable doing in public every day (2019). Wearing a fursuit at this convention, embodying a fursona physically, can help people “combat social anxiety and depression” while wearing the suit (2019). Grocki continued, “In fursuit we can be so hyper active and talkative but out of suit we won’t say a word because we don’t have that barrier. People don’t know who we are inside the suit and that helps more than people think” (2019).

Embodying a character, or in this case, a fursona, can help people explore new sides of their identity and self-expression in a positive and safe way.

Many furies use artist interpretations of their fursonas to express themselves. Often, a furry does not make their own artwork, but rather commission fursonas from other artists, as demonstrated with Lycisca in the previous chapter. This artwork spans across media, but most often comes in the form of 2-D artwork (as illustrated by the previously discussed anthropomorphic artists), full and partial costumes or “fursuits,” and fanfiction prose. Again, anthro-art allows furies to see their own fursona in an imagined space, which is important for seeing one’s self in different context. Furies can experiment with other sides of themselves as represented through their fursonas on paper. Fursuits are even more difficult to come by than artwork, however. Full-body fursuits can cost thousands of dollars to create. My collaborator Grocki has a thylacine fursuit currently in the making which he commissioned for around \$4,000. While full fursuits are expensive, Grocki says, “for us it’s what we love. For those who cannot afford a fursuit wearing ours brings so much joy to others [sic]” (2019). Sometimes, as fursuits are so expensive, a furry may choose to make part of their own suit. When Dubos first “started to become social in the fandom” he made a tail for his fursona (Dubos 2019). Grocki is currently working on a graphic novel about an “anthropomorphic Thylacine (Furry) who is the last of his kind or so he thinks” (Grocki 2019). The plot thickens when he discovers a remote tribe of living thylacines, but bounty hunters are already on their trail. The main thylacine character goes to them to prevent the bounty hunters from finding the tribe (2019). Writing is a much slower, and therefore less often recognized, art form in the greater community of thylacine enthusiasts, but it provides a way for

people to explore a different set of themes relating to the thylacine because it is a non-visual medium.

What draws furies to a thylacine fursona specifically is a complicated choice too. Often, a furry may have multiple fursonas, and have a costume or representation for all of them (Grocki 2019). However, it is still more rare to find another furry with a thylacine fursona. Dubos found that outside of the groups he made for primarily “tassies,” it was rare to find others who used a thylacine for their fursona: “I would come across a one or two at a convention but you really wouldn’t know [if they were a thylacine] unless you ask or see if they had a badge identifying or a fursuit” (Dubos 2019). With such few representations of thylacines in the fur community, what attracts people to this animal is how different and mysterious it is. Dubos connected immediately with the tragic story of the thylacine, feeling that thylacines “seem to be a mysterious creature sadly wiped out before we could learn about them.” He has had a thylacine for his “sona” for about eleven years and has known about thylacines since he was a child. The “mysterious and misunderstood nature” of the thylacine is something Dubos relates to. Beyond that, his interest in therianthropy and animal guides also led him to identify with the thylacine. Dubos said in our interview, “I just fell in love with the species and started to research into them... It was a species that for some reason just stands out with me.” In Grocki’s case, the connection between thylacines and wolves is what drew him to research and ultimately identify with the thylacine (2019). He felt a connection with wolves, which are physically similar to thylacines, and is a huge advocate for the preservation and protection of their species. But again, it is the “mysticism” of the thylacine is what ultimately drew him to this animal in particular, implying other similar, extant, animals

do not have this same air of supernatural connection. The liminality of both existing and not existing is what intrigues Grocki about thylacines too. In addition to having a thylacine fursona, Grocki is “slowly building up a collection of Thylacine related things.” His next purchase will be a replica skull of a thylacine. Additionally, some tassies keep track of updates on thylacines in the news more than others, mostly as sightings arise or reference advancements with cloning technology (Dubos 2019; Grocki 2019).

All in all, the furry community, while participating in the embodiment of anthropomorphized characters, is a welcoming and accepting community. Every person comes to the community through a different way, but they all connect through self-exploration and subversion of cultural norms. Furies are all around us. Grocki told me that he knows “furs who are doctors, lab techs, who work for the Government, Airline Pilots [sic]” (2019). Grocki himself is a professional chef. He felt one of the most important things for me to know about the furry community is that it is a “diverse and accepting culture” with a “fur in every field of work... This is what people don’t realize or don’t understand” about the furry community. Whether a person understands themselves to be a thylacine, or a person dressing up as one, people all embody animals for their own unique expressions of self.

Another form of embodiment, though not directly transforming into a thylacine through costume, is through receiving a permanent artist representation of one on your body. Thylacine tattoos are not uncommon, and a person may get a tattoo of a thylacine for a number of reasons connected to its symbolism and the person’s identity. I too, have a cartoonish tattoo of a thylacine I drew myself (see Figure 23).



Figure 23 Image of Daisy Ahlstone's thylacine tattoo

Folklorists and anthropologists have long studied tattoos and the connection to storytelling using the body as a canvas. Importantly, tattooing in Australia has existed long before colonizers began settling the land through Aboriginal peoples (Schildkrout 332 - 333). The inscription of a piece of art on the body carries different meanings for indigenous peoples than it does for modern Australians of European descent. Enid Schildkrout identifies two key conclusions about tattoos and tattooing that have risen in anthropological study:

First, the body, as a canvas, is not only the site where culture is inscribed but also a place where the individual is defined and inserted into the

cultural landscape. Tattoos, scars, brands, and piercings, when voluntarily assumed, are ways of writing one's autobiography on the surface of the body... Second, bodily inscriptions are all about boundaries, a perennial theme in anthropology--between self and society, between groups, and between humans and divinity (338)

In reference to thylacine tattoo, this implies that 1) people who get thylacine tattoos are depicting both in self-identity and cultural identity through their interpretation of the animal's symbolism in culture and 2) that the act of tattooing a thylacine on their skin is a way to inscribe a boundary, one which links them to an in-group identity surrounding knowledge about the thylacine, Tasmania, or perseverance (as discussed in the previous chapter), while simultaneously drawing a distinction between represented in the out-group, who do not understand the references outright.

Many tattoos viewed in this thesis research represent the thylacine as fierce, or stealthy and illusive. Others reference the thylacine's relationship to extinction and survival beyond what institutional culture has said about the finality of its existence. The thylacine is a symbol for hope and perseverance, as previously discussed, and people connect with this so much that some are willing to mark it on their bodies forever. Getting a tattoo of a thylacine represents the person's relationship with the animal as more than a passing interest; the thylacine's depiction on skin says something about a person's individuality and sense of self as intricately intertwined with symbolism connected to the thylacine. Just as the thylacine has been previously noted as a metonym for Tasmania, getting a tattoo of a thylacine could be read as a metonym for perseverance

through extinction, coming so close to death or symbolic burial and surviving beyond hardships despite all odds.

People often identify with this animal because of its connection to being seen yet unseen by the world around, caught in between misunderstanding and wanting to be understood; it is an animal that is both simultaneously lost and found, seen and unseen, dead and alive. These feelings connected to personal identity are projected onto the thylacine. The thylacine's liminality is what makes it special, allowing for creative connections to be drawn about its symbolic existence besides colonizers' best attempts to erase it from the planet. It is also distinctly unique, both as a carnivore and a marsupial, fitted with its wide jaw and stripes. By choosing the thylacine to represent themselves over another animal demonstrates an important difference or distinction they are demonstrating about themselves through this animal. Within the self, a person can make their perceived absence present by embodying the thylacine. The meaning of embodying a thylacine, whether through a tattoo on their body, or by feeling so connected to the animal they find it necessary to become as close to its physical form as they can, is always different for the individual. But the interpretation behind choosing to personally identify with the thylacine stems from many of these symbolic connections the thylacine has to hope, perseverance, ferocity, and Tasmania.

While there are thylacine enthusiasts who choose to embody their connection with the thylacine, that is not the same experience for the average Tasmanian. Megan Ambrus states that the general Tasmanian public connects to the thylacine's extinction, that it "was here and now it's extinct and that's a tragedy" and that for many people, their connection to the thylacine doesn't go much beyond that (2019). She believes that people

mainly identify with the thylacine “because it’s sort of a state animal for Tasmania,” and that they make have “grandfather” thylacine-hunting stories passed down generationally, but that the primary identification with the thylacine is expressed as pride in the state of Tasmania, and its extinction (2019). The symbolism of the thylacine for the average Tasmanian, beyond those who would identify as thylacine enthusiasts, is rather diluted and disconnected from its ironic, complex, and tragic history intimately connected to colonialism and guilt. The following section touches on institutional representations of the thylacine, and how the commodification of the thylacine’s image by the tourism industry both dilutes its story and attracts people outside of Tasmania to this unique state.

Institutional Commodification and Tourism

The thylacine, as touched on in the introduction of this section, has seen a “presencing” by powerful Tasmanian and Australian institutions in addition to the vernacular work of everyday people. Newer institutional representations of the thylacine have been described by experts as both “naturalistic,” “sympathetic,” “observant,” and “relaxed” to the viewer (Freeman 175). The thylacine holds a major place in the everyday experience of Tasmanians³³ today through its commercialized image. The commodification of the thylacine and the legends it is connected to are important to understanding the devaluation of its image and impact today. As mentioned above, the thylacine has become a metonym for Tasmania, which both glorifies the animal and muddles the symbolism of the animal and connection to history. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, two thylacines facing each other standing upright on two legs are featured embracing a representation of the five main economies of Tasmania on the

state's official code of arms (see Figure 3). While others have suggested that the use of the thylacine on the state code of arms suggests "remorse" for their actions against it, Carol Freeman believes "the way the animals are represented is a little like hanging a corpse from a tree for public display: their presence signifies the State's power to elevate or exterminate species" (177). The mixed-interpretation of the thylacine's symbolism used by institutional powers demonstrates the complexity behind the meaning and intention represented in other institutional uses. Overall, this missed-connection again dilutes the overall understanding of the complex history of the thylacine, and its relationship to Tasmanian culture, furthering the intentional "absence-ing" of its tragic and unsightly history. The more people begin to see it, the less they understand the nuances of its history and meaning for Tasmania.

The frequency of institutionalized, modern representations of the thylacine illustrate the clear profit Tasmania has as a state from utilizing this marketing strategy. The thylacine's stripes seen on beer labels, serving as the Tassie Tiger cricket team's mascot, the state's official tourism logo, and others, all illustrate the distinctiveness of the animal leading to yet again another ironic slippery slope of commodification devaluing and changing the meaning of its image. The continual commodification of the thylacine is ironic: first, people wanted it dead so they paid people for carcasses, then, as it became rarer, people would pay more for live specimens. Now, post-official extinction, people have used its image to market the uniqueness of Tasmania. Pushing this even further is the irony of attempting to clone the physical body of the thylacine, a death which could have been prevented in the first place and not cost scientists millions of dollars to attempt to bring it back. The thylacine holds an important place primarily in the marketing of

Tasmania to tourists. This is where the image of the thylacine is most frequently advertised to people outside Tasmania and Australia. I will first discuss the marketing of the thylacine in Tasmanian tourism through property and then through souvenirs of the thylacine, demonstrating how this has led tourists to “re-colonize” Tasmanian wilderness.

The image of the thylacine is seen connected to many short-term rental properties in Tasmania as a way to entice tourists to stay at these locations. The thylacine, as a metonym for Tasmania, leads the tourist to believe that this particular hotel or house is somehow more connected to something authentically and uniquely Tasmanian because of its association and representation of this animal. Often, the connection to thylacines at these hotels are about the possibility of seeing one during your length of stay at the property. Companies market the experience of sighting a thylacine in the wild as a particularly *Tasmanian* experience. Diane Goldstein’s chapter from the book *Haunting Experiences* (2007) describes the commodification of legend sites through marketing the experience of seeing a ghost as a primary motivator for tourists to visit these locations. She writes, “belief tourism, like all tourism, is the marketing of the experiences of cultural ‘others,’ but with a particular focus on the images and traditions associated with spiritual, metaphysical, or paranormal values,” which is exactly what is seen with thylacine tourism (194). Several tourist destinations in Tasmania advertise with explicit reference to thylacines and the chance to spotting one for yourself in the surrounding wilderness or town. With regard to thylacine tourism, “the *real* sought-after experience [is] the potential for one’s own supernatural encounter,” a notion Goldstein identifies as integral to understanding belief tourism (197). The chance to find the last thylacine in the wild, and possibly be able to be the one and only person to have indisputable proof of its

existence, is too glorious an opportunity to pass up, or at least it is marketed that way.

The paranormal, undead, Tasmanian icon is marketed to tourists based on their possible belief in its present existence in the wilderness today.

Many of these hotels and residencies market this idea through their decor and memorabilia. The Tantanoola Hotel, mentioned in a previous chapter, has the stuffed body of the “Tantanoola tiger” on display, harkening back to thylacine legends that circulate it. The literal body of a once “undead” thylacine-monster killed and then put on display brings an encounter with this cryptid to the forefront of the tourist’s experience staying at this hotel. The Mole Creek Hotel with the famous Tassie Tiger Bar, has dedicated their entire bar to the thylacine, and advertises this feature on the front page of their website. The walls are covered in a collection of printed news stories referencing the thylacine and historical sightings, photos of thylacines and famous thylacine researchers, souvenirs and memorabilia of thylacines, and original artwork³⁴ (“Tasmanian Tiger”). They even serve lamb pies in their bar, complete with a crusty thylacine figure shaped on top. When commodification meets belief, “the private nature of belief issues... become no longer about the individual stance of a believer or disbeliever but rather about seller and buyer” primarily (Goldstein 179). The beliefs are transformed into a profitable object, shifting focus to the proprietors of the property, and the purchasers of the belief, rather than the validity or “truthiness” of the folk belief in the first place.

While institutions are using the thylacine to draw in tourists to their properties, the popular and vernacular culture is, too. There is an independently rented home called the Tassie Tiger Lodge that markets the location by its connection to thylacine sightings in North East Tasmania. The implication that thylacines are still out in the wild, means a

person could therefore have a chance at seeing one for themselves in one of these locations. The Western Australian town of Nannup has also embraced their connection to the thylacine. All over the town are statues, artwork, and stories about sightings of the “Nannup tiger” from locals (Waters 2017). Touring up the coast of Western Australia, it is clear this town thrives, at least in part, on some level of thylacine tourism. This is again ironic, considering the thylacine has most recently exists in Tasmania, despite the overwhelming number of sightings from the mainland claiming otherwise. The potentiality for presencing the thylacine *themselves*, despite being a tourist, is enticing; a person could be the one and only to bring the thylacine back from the dead (for the price of food and lodging).

In addition to the locations of thylacine sightings at hotels and rentals are the other tourist merchandise available in Tasmania featuring thylacines. Tasmanian souvenirs featuring the thylacine come as plush toys, images on shot glasses and spoons, illustrations and trinkets of the Tasmanian code of arms, maps, oven-mitts, and more. These items could be categorized within “fictionalized” and “realistic” thylacine art as previously discussed in chapter two, as anthropomorphized artwork is a fairly niche category. These souvenirs encompass a much wider range of artistic media than was previously discussed, allowing tourists to tailor their favored trinket to their personal needs and interests more readily. These souvenirs play off the two main legends about the thylacine: either it is depicted as ferocious and strong or dangerous, or it is depicted as friendly and cute. Both commercial goods and folk art featuring the thylacine come back to these main legends again and again.

Frequently, similar items also feature the Tasmanian devil, not to be confused with the thylacine, whose ferociousness is known worldwide. They have more recently merged into the spotlight with Tasmanian tigers as a uniquely Tasmanian animal, especially since a large percentage of their wild populations are suffering from a devil-only facial cancer³⁵. We see with devils too that their popularity rises as their populations fall prey to this tragic genetic illness. These souvenirs are sold all over Tasmania and are said to “arrest time, [and] proclaim both material *displacement* and a nostalgic desire for what is felt to be lost: they embody the ‘spirit of place’ and the culture of tourism” in their existence (Freeman 180; emphasis in original). Tourists purchase a memory when they purchase a thylacine trinket, but it is a memory of the trip and experience as an outsider, and not the experience of a Tasmanian local.

Vernacular culture participates in the sales of thylacine artwork and memorabilia to tourists as well. Tourism raises the economy of an area, and people like sharing their culture with others who are interested. So, for the sake of teaching a tourist something about the island they call home, they create a metonym for the place: the thylacine (though the deeper roots of this meaning are often lost on the plane ride home). Examples of vernacular souvenirs can be found in many local stores in Tasmania. These items are made by Tasmanians, or thylacine enthusiasts in general, to share the story of the thylacine is a “more authentic” way, because it comes from the work of a local Tasmanian. Again, the commodification of the thylacine, while making it more present in Tasmanian society, furthers the history of the thylacine and of Tasmania away from the physical object, and fixates on the monetary exchange of land and experience of “authentic” Tasmania, diluting the meaning of the folk beliefs the object is connected to.

Over the course of Tasmanian history, “the more rare the living thylacine became... the more visible were its representations” in the everyday life of Tasmanians and Australians (Freeman 174). As less and less thylacines remained, the more marketable they became. Reducing the thylacine’s story to a mere monetary exchange between tourists and corporations dilutes the larger messages caught up in the history of the thylacine. The thylacine’s image has been taken by corporations as a symbol for marketing Tasmania and is no longer a teaching tool for outsiders to understand the tragedies of extinction, nor the painful Tasmanian history its story represents. The irony of this continual institutional commodification of the thylacine’s image has separated it from the true folk belief of its present existence in the wild. It now represents a voyeuristic market of outsiders seeking to use Tasmanian land for their own relaxation, vacation, and potential glory. Even though the image of the thylacine is present throughout Tasmania, its history and validity of the folk belief it is connected to has become more absent. The folk belief of the thylacine’s present existence in Tasmania is looked down upon by outsiders and trivialized. When it is not chastised by religious groups or criticized by rationalists, “the supernatural is often trivialized by the mechanisms of commerce” (Bennett 1). By commercializing the image of the thylacine, corporations devalue its meaning to vernacular culture. This is why studying vernacular beliefs is so important; in the case of the thylacine in vernacular culture, we see the opposite of dilution, and see the reinvigoration of meaning and culture surrounding the thylacine.

Beyond the commodification of the image and natural environment of thylacines is the continual commodification of its physical body. Now through cloning, scientists are

attempting to make the dead undead. Since the rekindling of the Thylacine Cloning Project, headed by Archer's successor Andrew Pask in 2008, thylacine bone and cartilage DNA has been experimented with by injecting it into mouse embryos to stimulate new tissue growth (Peckrell). Sequencing a complete thylacine genome is much different than sequencing a functional genome, and according to Pask, creating a functional genome is a long way off despite the recent progress that has been made (Peckrell). The resurrection of the thylacine is symbolic for both Tasmanians and Australians, as it is a physical way people can write the wrongs their ancestors committed by snuffing out the thylacine population. The irony of this is that the thylacine again, is commodified. Just as the bounty originally put out on it leading to its extinction, then more and more money was offered for live thylacines, now the rare pelts and taxidermized displays are getting more and more expensive the rarer and more damaged they get, and to top it all off -- the cloning of the thylacine from jarred specimens and fur is a multi-million dollar project.

Reverse Ostension

Whether legend-tripping or creating artwork, the ostensive behavior motivating a particular set of actions is often intricately tied to its connection and maintenance with other people. Making art alone own may be perceived as a singular act, but later sharing it with other members of a community, or selling it at auction, or helping teach another person how to create this art, is an important connection made between members of this folk group. As folklorist Henry Glassie puts it, "all objects are traditional, in the sense that everything is created, however surprisingly, out of precedent," demonstrating the connection the creation of an object has with tradition and history that preceded them

(Glassie 405). These folk objects are made to be shared, and in the case of the thylacine, the sharing of a thylacine is also a sharing of its tragic history and cultural significant with others. Glassie explains, “culture and tradition... are created by individuals out of experience” stemming from the memories of their past (398). The creation of new narratives out of old ones is how culture evolves: the memories evolve when replicated, and thus create a new story and experience to share with others. Through repetition of these narratives in new ways, “people create and adopt aids to memory” about their own culture and history (406).

In a final discussion of the behavior surrounding thylacine legends, I turn to the work of folklorist Jeffrey Tolbert on reverse ostension. As previously discussed, ostension is the acting out of a narrative, creating embodied action or practice from a legend. Tolbert explains that reverse ostension is working in the opposite direction, where collective action of the group generates a new narrative. Based on Peck’s notion of ostensive practice, Tolbert argues that reverse ostension is “two processes in one: it involves the creation of new objects, new disconnected and diverse examples of experience; and it involves the combination of these elements into a corpus of “traditional” narratives, modeled on existing folklore (but not wholly indebted to any specific tradition)” (2). In connection to thylacine legends, this explains the reclaimed and re-defined legend of the thylacine as a cute and curious creature: there are both new instances of material culture created about the thylacine depicting it this way, and these new narratives are formed from the older or lesser-known printed texts, and new interactions with and about the thylacine. The rebranding of the thylacine and its possible present existence in Tasmania and Australia illustrates both a “tendency towards

collaboration and [an] appeal to established, recognized [legend] genres,” which are the major components of reverse ostension (2). The collective actions of thylacine enthusiasts are generating new narratives about the demeanor of thylacines.

The reverse ostension taking place with thylacine legends effectively makes present a new narrative about the thylacine that had not previously existed: that the thylacine is 1) a friendlier, more curious creature than the original, institutionally perpetuated legends claim, and 2) the thylacine is still present in Tasmania despite the declaration of its official extinction in 1984. Creating these newer narratives, moving away from vampires and flock demolition expertise to gentler, friendlier depictions shows the care and attention people have to doing justice to the thylacine’s memory and tragic history. People on the vernacular level continue to make artwork and legend-trip today to cope with the loss of such a special creature and serve justice in the best ways they can to its memory. This is again another way thylacine enthusiasts work to rectify the damage done unto the memory of this unique species.

What Does This Mean?

What we can observe through the representation of thylacines through legends and artwork reveals the close connection these genres share. The making and retelling of legends in its own way is a piece of art, and when embodied physically, can represent a much wider range of emotional response. The deep and personal connections people have to the art-making process and to intergenerational legend-tellings and sighting experiences are what keep the heartbeat of the thylacine alive in vernacular culture. The tragic death of the thylacine is an example of the potential danger of absence: if the

legacy is lost and the thylacine erased from history, there is little left to prevent people from repeating their actions. The thylacine is a warning about the power of absence, and through making the absence feel present, the fate of the thylacine will not be repeated with another species. The behavior people evoke through the thylacine speaks to potential behaviors people will express regarding other culturally significant species as they too begin to go extinct. How many more species must be lost to human destruction before we act on it? This is more than just an extinct animal to thylacine enthusiasts; it is the pulse of a nation, or an identity to hold onto that is representative of a cultural history, and a lesson that would otherwise become lost much in the same way the thylacine was.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

What we see in thylacine culture is the complex relationship between presence and absence, and the effort to make present an absence with embodied forms of folklore. The thylacine is emblematic of both the tragic history of its demise, and of colonizer influence on Tasmanian history. The presence of the thylacine seen today in the daily Tasmanian experience is representative of an attempt to rectify that history and serve justice to the memory of the thylacine by imbuing it with a uniquely cultural symbolism of what it means to be Tasmanian. But what is the value of this to us? The loss of the thylacine was due directly to human influence, and now people are seeing the loss of many more species because of increasing human-caused environmental problems. The vernacular resurrection of the thylacine observed through legend-tripping and material behavior demonstrates a model for exploring some of the vernacular behaviors that people use as a way to cope with the general loss of wildlife due to climate change. This artwork and continuing of a legend tradition tell us how important the vernacular influence of coping strategies for losing unique animal species are. There may be a higher frequency of similar behaviors with other endangered species as the effects of the climate crisis take hold.

Climate Change and the Future

The thylacine as a representation of native species slipping away too soon due to human influence is obvious. Echoing the connection between the thylacine as a symbol for extinction, Freeman claims that “outside of Tasmania the thylacine is an *Australian*

icon, a symbol of extinction, or a reminder of the fragile state of the environment; a figure that evokes feelings of sadness, curiosity and concern” (180; emphasis in original). “Re-presencing” the thylacine through tourism and otherwise commercial and institutional representations in a way serves to promote people visiting this land before it is gone. Whether the symbol of the thylacine is only partially understood by outsiders visiting Australia, the larger implications of its presence in the world is still crucial for highlighting the mistakes humankind has made with our environment. We are currently at a critical point of absence of species in our environment. Now more than ever do people need to recognize the consequences their actions have on the natural world and the species we share it with. The thylacine is the perfect example for illustrating the fragility of our ecosystems, and how easy it is to lose species. Understanding the connections between the aesthetic, vernacular behaviors surrounding thylacine legends may help predict the ways people will react and process the extinction of other culturally significant megafauna as we see the effects of climate change take hold on the local level.

In the past, the thylacine was a major motivation for environmental conservation, though today, this is recognized by fewer and fewer Australians. Much of what thylacine enthusiasts do is motivated by proving the thylacine’s existence specifically to the Australian government, in the hopes that the natural territory of the thylacine will be protected and preserved. Logging is a major export for Tasmanian economy today, and the preferred method for logging in the area is to clear cut large sections of wilderness, which destroys habitats quickly without the hope of a quick recovery. Currently, “much of the state’s remaining forest is open to logging, and the preferred method has been

clear-cutting entire sections of forest, including redwood-sized trees that are centuries old, leaving a decimated landscape dotted with stumps and charred remains” and displacing native species, and possibly the last few extant thylacines (Gmelch and Gmelch 39). Logging has not only limited the scope of thylacine territory but has led to the endangerment of a huge range of Tasmanian fauna, including spotted-quolls, Tasmanian devils, and wombats (“Rewilding Australia”). The organization Rewilding Australia is working in mainland Australia and Tasmania to effectively re-establish populations of native species that have been forced out by feral domesticated animals, logging, and other human influences. Their most recent project involved spotted-quolls in 2018. The thylacine has served as a symbol for advocacy directly for other animal and land conservation organizations, particularly the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service. They even have a page on their website dedicated to the thylacine and the importance of conservation in Tasmania and Australia (“Thylacine, or Tasmanian Tiger, *Thylacinus Cynocephalus*”). Its image has also been used symbolically by the Wilderness Society of Australia specifically because of its exploitation to defend against logging remaining Tasmanian forests (Gmelch and Gmelch 39).

Many known thylacine enthusiasts have worked with these groups, including Steven Smith, who helped to develop a method for analyzing the quality of thylacine sightings. Local Tasmanians are deeply concerned about this issue as well. Thylacine enthusiast Megan Ambrus expressed in our interview, “These animals [thylacines] have been by logging areas...and the bloody government here is like ‘log everything...’ and like 1080 poison is used to keep animals out... I don’t think our government would be very pleased if they got actual proof [of the thylacine’s existence] because they would

have to stop that logging” (Ambrus 2019). There is genuine concern from Tasmanians and thylacine enthusiasts broadly about the current destruction of Tasmanian wildlife, and how this could affect a roaming population of thylacine still possibly present on the island.

But how do you protect something that doesn’t exist? When discussing this topic with Ambrus, she felt that the only way to help the thylacine today would be to have undeniable proof of its existence to motivate the government to do something about the current population. If that evidence does someday come forward, Ambrus felt the best choice of action would be “to protect the land, and that would be a big thing with the government here” but that the money the government lost from logging the land the thylacine was found on would quickly be replaced through the tourism it would attract (2019). After asking her if she would want the thylacine captured and protected elsewhere, she responded puzzled: “capturing it... what would be the point of that? It can’t breed. The poor thing would be poked and prodded...” (2019). Her feelings here represent those of many other thylacine enthusiasts who struggle with what to do about protecting the species if it were to be found with undoubtable proof of present existence. If the thylacine were removed from the wild and placed into a zoo or private holding, people would be “taking [the thylacine] out of what might be a breeding population. What’s left might be functionally extinct, so one animal might be really important” to the survival of the wild population. Ambrus felt that most important thing to do if a person found themselves with documented evidence of the thylacine’s existence, especially “with all the logging and the 1080 poison and with things like those big fires”³⁶ that are currently decimating Tasmania, is that “staying silent” about their

discovery would be the wrong way to go about saving the species (2019). The animal, first and foremost, needs institutional protection, and local people cannot provide that. But they can support and provide the existing evidence for acknowledging a wild thylacine population in Tasmania and Australia.

If the Australian government will not recognize their own involvement in destroying the habitat for native species alive today, maybe they could be motivated by the resurrection of the thylacine through evidence of its current existence in Tasmania. The fact that institutions have ignored the folk time and time again after receiving overwhelming evidence of the thylacine's current existence through sightings, camera footage, and tracks, is remarkable. Neil Waters told me that he is drawn to the thylacine specifically because he "like[s] the idea of vindicating all the witnesses [of the thylacine today] and getting better protections for it and it's habitat [sic]," which is a goal echoed in his documentary from other thylacine enthusiasts (2019; 2017). If the thylacine were to be found alive and well in Tasmania, the government would be dramatically affected, having to rewrite and create laws for its protection, but also admit to its wrongdoing against all that makes Tasmania, Tasmania: the wilderness and the everyday people working to take care of it, and not repeat their ancestor's actions.

Results and Predictions

Few folklorists have taken on the challenge of engaging with folk understandings of the climate crisis, and none have tackled the topic of mass extinction. The goal of this thesis was to analyze the motivating factors influencing behaviors surrounding a culturally significant, extinct animal, the thylacine, so these findings can later be applied

to other culturally significant animals to predict the vernacular behavior as the effects of climate change take hold. Ostensive behaviors like legend-tripping and the creation of art will increase in connection to animals heading towards extinction. For example, the recently extinct Northern Right Rhino will inspire legend-trips to the site of the last rhino's death in the wild. Or alternatively, animals like the Formosan clouded leopard, thought to be extinct but spotted again in the wild will increase as more people take an interest in searching for other endangered animals in their daily lives. I believe there will be a widespread artistic movement motivated by "presencing" endangered and recently extinct animals in central primarily human-occupied spaces to draw attention to their absence. These issues should be studied by folklorists, as they become increasingly more important for understanding how people will cope with changes accrued by the effects of climate change.

I have added a queer woman's voice to the thylacine research and folklore cannon, diversifying perspectives and working to fill in gaps in research on this topic. Again, I believe the concepts of ostensive practice and reverse ostension could be expanded to further encompass Jones's "material behavior." People who have written on the thylacine have mostly done so for scientific purposes, and those who have not have yet to use their findings to predict behavior or model a frame of analysis for people's changing cultural relationship to climate change. What I have added to this topic is a folklorist's perspective on the human relationship to the thylacine through research into legend scholarship, and how the ostensive practice and material behavior inspired by the thylacine could be a beneficial model of analysis for folklorists and other disciplines in the humanities to predict future relationships between people and the increasing human-

induced devastation of climate change on the planet. Analysis of these behaviors through semiotic ostension and material behavior should be applied more readily to the coded and subtle ways people relate with the environmental and species loss due to our latest mass extinction: the Anthropocene.

Areas for Further Research

I plan on traveling to Tasmania as part of an expansion of this research methodology to conduct on-site interviews and experience the local's relationship to the thylacine. I will be taking field recording materials, including a camera and recording device, documenting as much as I can from this experience. The last thylacine died on September seventh which is now intentionally observed as National Threatened Species Day. I would like to visit the Beaumaris Zoo³⁷ and observe the public atmosphere on this day. Although the zoo itself is closed, people still visit the site. Additionally, on this trip I will visit the Tasmanian Natural History Museum, and ideally meet with a curator to discuss the on-site thylacine collection. I will interview this person, and hopefully document through photography some of the historical information and thylacine specimens we will look at from the collection, following museum regulations, IRB, and archival standards. I will also visit the University of Tasmania for similar reasons. I too plan on visiting and supporting some of the tourist locations connected to the thylacine I discussed previously.

There are a number of places throughout this thesis that could be greatly expanded upon in a related project. A discussion of Aboriginal relationships and storytelling focusing on the thylacine is clearly needed both to document existing Aboriginal

cultural beliefs, but to compare to the colonizer's beliefs of the thylacine and how they have changed over time. The thylacine, and cryptid animals and legendary figures in general, also provide a narrative space for people with LGBTQ+ identities to flourish. Cryptids are often discredited by hegemonic culture, as is the LGBT+ community, and many folks with these identities latch on to various cryptids to express a part of their identity and experience as marginalized people. Another area of art I did not thoroughly discuss in this work is the written fiction and poetry that surrounds the thylacine. This form of storytelling absolutely deserves its own discussion, both on a folk and institutional level, because there are volumes of this content (many of which I have read myself). I also believe this study could be expanded or applied to other threatened species to compare the behaviors people are motivated to exhibit as we see an increasing loss of life on Earth.

In the final paragraphs of his book after coming to terms with “seeing” Bigfoot, Robert Pyle writes,

To me, having a truly open mind is a rare state, easier to define by its opposites. One thing it does not mean is *belief*; faith is the opposite of an open mind... It refracts impressions rather than reflecting them. An open mind is a window, not a mirror... An open mind neither rejects nor limits itself to the scientific method but considers it among the other tools for palpating the universe. It doubts everything and accepts everyone. It is completely skeptical and wholly receptive, seldom wishy-washy but often unsettled. (303-304)

The legacy of the thylacine has taught me to always keep an open-mind. You can never know the true significance of the creatures that may be hiding in your backyard until you open your mind to the possibility of their existence in the first place.

Endnotes

1. There are several exceptions of those living in the Americas, including the North American opossum: *Didelphis virginiana*.
2. Carrion, in this instance, likely consisted of dead and dying wallabies, spotted quolls, and birds (Paddle 94-95). Some thylacines were reported to follow people, though no human predation has been documented. This “following” is believed to be an opportunistic and curiosity-driven behavior on behalf of the thylacine, as humans are known to be great hunters and would often leave behind scraps (95). In a 2011 study conducted by ecologists Borja Figueirido and Christine M. Janis on the relationship between convergent species evolution between the thylacine and placental canids, thylacines were found to be not as capable pursuit hunters based on the position and growth of their humerus bones and other anatomical factors (937). Through analyzing a wide range of specimens from both thylacines and dingoes, thylacines were found to occupy a different ecological niche because of this difference in anatomy from the dingo. The authors conclude that dingoes then did not primarily cause the extinction of thylacines on mainland Australia as is often noted, which shifts a larger part of the blame for the decline of the species onto humans (939).
3. New Zealand and several significantly smaller islands are more South than Tasmania. It is still one of the most populated of those Southern islands.
4. I use the phrase “English-speaking audience” to indicate that Owen’s text was originally written in English and has not been translated into other languages since its initial print. This limitation leads primary readership to Western countries, primarily Americans and Australians. This, I believe, reinforces some of the connections between

Australia and the United States in reference to wildlife conservation and a shared history of megafaunal extinction events.

5. This is the same company that issued the bounty on thylacine skins.
6. In an episode from season two of *The Crocodile Hunter*, “*Where the Devils Run Wild*,” Irwin actually seeks out the thylacine in the wild on a legend-tripping experience, and also features other Tasmanian native species: Tasmanian devils, copperhead snakes, black-faced shags (cormorants), padymelon joeys, and wombats (Hartill).
7. The notion that men were the only people tracking thylacines is not entirely possible to prove. Women may have also tracked and killed thylacines, though these accounts are drastically under-represented in current literature and reports on the subject.
8. IRB exemption was determined by Utah State University. The project titled listed is “Thylacine Dreams: Ostensive Practice in the Vernacular Resurrection of an Extinct Marsupial” and was filed under protocol number 9363.
9. An interesting study that could come of this discussion is a record of the location colonizers and prisoners came from in reference to the frequency of Black Dog legends in that area. For example, Lincolnshire County has been recorded as having the highest frequency of Black Dog sightings, and if a large number of Lincolnshire natives moved to Tasmania in the late 1890s, there may be a connection between the susceptibility of transposing Black Dog legends onto thylacines.
10. The thylacine is an excellent example of the biological phenomenon of *convergent evolution*: a process whereby organisms not closely related independently evolve similar traits as a result of having to adapt to similar environments or ecological niches.

11. The Tantanoola tiger legend came from its connection to “tiger” sightings in New South Wales (NSW), Australia during the 20th century. At one point, a specimen of this tiger ended up being shot and killed, though it was later determined to be a non-native Eurasian wolf. This specimen can now be seen on display at the Tantanoola Hotel (Cronshaw).
12. Legends are often transmitted to wider audiences through newspapers and other institutional publications. Both of these media inform the transmission of legends, as discussed briefly in the “Legend” section of this chapter.
13. In addition to the Tigermen decimating the thylacine species, there is some evidence that a marsupial disease was also present in thylacine populations, further preventing them from repopulating the kin they lost (Owen 2003a:115). The thylacine’s fate was sealed.
14. Osolsobě, Ivo. 1971. “The role of models and originals in human communication: Theory of signs and the theory of models.” *Language Sciences* 14: 32–36.
15. There is one exception: the Nullarbor thylacine. This specimen was found mummified in the Nullarbor plains of southwest Australia, and was carbon dated to be 4,000 years old. But because carbon dating is misunderstood and difficult to determine, the age of this specimen is a subject of debate within thylacine enthusiast communities (Williams 129).
16. A person can be fined up to \$500 and/or serve up to a six months jail time, as this animal is considered an “endangered species” (Ordinance No.1984-2).
17. It is worth mentioning that often the most compelling aspect of these sightings are the people who have no familiarity with Australian fauna describing the exact features

represented in historical encounters of thylacines. This means that there is some level of accuracy or evidence for their interpretation as being true. They may have heard of thylacines independently of this experience and forgotten, leaving the information somewhere floating around in their latent psyche. However, this is beside the point, as again, the more the “facts” can be debated in a legend, the “truthier” and therefore more legendary it becomes.

18. Photography has also played a major role in the current impression and understanding that both the folk and institutions have of the thylacine. The earliest known photograph of the thylacine was taken in 1864 at the London Zoo by Frank Haes (Campbell). While the last few thylacines were alive in captivity in 1933, a photographer named Elias Churchill was able to film the group (Paddle 190; Owen 2003a 131). These films are crucial because they represent in just how recent this animal was alive on Earth and are often a primary motivator for people to discover more about the thylacine. There are also a number of photos of Tigermen with captured and dead thylacines, solidifying the massacre of the thylacine in Tasmanian history.

19. The thylacine is also represented in written fiction and poetry. Sometimes this work is formally published and other times it is simply posted online to share with other thylacine enthusiasts. I focus on visual artwork in this study, and therefore chose not to explore the nuances of the influence of legends on prose. I do, however, think it is worth mentioning the connections between embodying, recreating, and presenting new thylacine narratives through prose and poetry, and how this could be considered a form of armchair-legend-tripping. For example, those writing fiction that describes finding the thylacine in the wilderness are not truly experiencing that discovery, but perhaps those

writing and reading these texts embody the character's feelings experiencing the action. Some works in this area are *Carnivorous Nights: On the Trail of the Tasmanian tiger* (2006) by Margaret Mittelbach and Michael Crewdson, *Tasmanian Tiger* (1988) by Jane Barker Wright, and *The Hunter* (1999) by Julia Leigh. Children's literature featuring the thylacine also exist. The main goal of these works is often to warn and teach children about extinction. Some works in this area include: *Tiger Tale* (2002) and *Tasmanian Tiger* (1996) by Marion and Steve Isham, and *Tiger Trail: A Tasmanian Epic* by Harriet and Patrick Gambles.

20. The distinction between “nice” vs “mean” in this categorization is an etic distinction. I based this on a series of factors that include the animation style (how soft or hard the animal was drawn), the facial expression of the thylacine (smiling, growling etc.), background color and images (softer, lighter colors would be deemed “nice” while darker colors with more shading “mean”), and my general impression of the thylacine. There were few truly neutral depictions of thylacines in the “fictionalized” category. The entire combination of these factors were taken into consideration in the final decision.

21. Filippa Buttitta can be contacted here for art commissions and further information about her artwork: <http://www.filippabuttitta.com/>

22. An example of one of these filmed sightings is a short film recorded by Liz and Gary Doyle in 1973 from their car window while they were on vacation in mainland Australia (TheThylacineVideos). Another is a more recent film from 2016 of a suspected thylacine running behind a house in a suburban neighborhood in South Australia (Thylacine Awareness Group of Australia).

23. This group should not be confused with Neil Waters' Thylacine Awareness Group of *Australia* page.

24. When I asked if Lycisca identified as a Furry, they replied, "I mean if I'm not, I'm like the most pseudo-furry to exist... My first table was quite recently at a furry con" (2019). They received a lot of support for their work at this con, with people even suggesting they spend time turning their thylacine fursona into a full fursuit. Lyci appreciated the suggestion, but understood this would be a big, and expensive, project to take on at this moment (2019).

25. Wikifur, a website written by and for furries, provides further information about the Furry Fandom: https://en.wikifur.com/wiki/WikiFur_Furry_Central

26. For information on commissions by Lycisca, follow this link:

<https://lycisca.tumblr.com/tagged/commission-info>

27. Not to mention, these fursuits could also be considered a fiber arts representation of a thylacine.

28. The smile and closed mouth may be features resulting from ease of creation more than a stylistic choice, though I do not have clear evidence to support this hypothesis.

29. There are also ceramic, bronze, jewelry, t-shirts and clothing, music, and other forms of artwork that represent the thylacine, all with their unique connection for presenting the thylacine in culture today. I chose not to discuss these in detail, as my chosen artists did not use these materials as primary media and felt my thesis would end up much longer than it already is. The idea connected to these physical objects are all the same: it is a physical, tangible, wearable, consumable way to relate to the thylacine and be reminded of its tragic story.

30. Lars Roubidoux's artwork and commission information can be found here:

<http://thesoupistooohot.tumblr.com/> and at thesoupistooohot@gmail.com

31. Television shows such as *Scooby-Doo Where are You?* (1969) and *Beetlejuice* (1988) demonstrate this sheet-wearing-ghost behavior.

32. Andrew Peck discusses this concept in detail in regard to the costumes people make and wear of the legendary internet ghoul Slenderman (Peck 13-14).

33. This is also part of the daily experience of mainland Australians, to some extent.

34. The Tassie Tiger Bar has even been featured on an Animal Planet television special featuring thylacines and other native Tasmanian fauna that functioned as a promotional film for visiting Tasmania. The Mole Creek Bar also advertises the paranormal activity reported in several of the rooms as an enticing aspect of staying at this unique location ("Tasmanian Tiger"). This is notable because this hotel is explicitly commodifying another type of belief, that of literal ghosts, as discussed in Diane Goldstein's chapter of *Haunted Experiences*. It also connects the thylacine's existence more strongly to a liminal or "undead" existence in Tasmania.

35. Devil Facial Tumor Disease is one of the six types of cancer that can be spread contagiously. There is no known cure, nor has there been evidence of a decline in the frequency of occurrence since 1996 when it was first recorded ("About DFTD").

36. Megan Ambrus here references the terrible Tasmanian fires of 2019 that destroyed more than 205,000 hectares of wildlands. Ancient plant species and endangered animal populations were devastated by the fires. Scientists attribute the severity of these fires to environmental changes caused by climate change (AFP News Agency).

37. The zoo is located in Hobart, Tasmania, and the location of the death of the last thylacine in captivity.

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