

Review: Carol Freeman,  
*Paper Tiger: How Pictures Shaped the Thylacine.*  
 Hobart: Forty South Publishing, 2014

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Images of animals we no longer share the world with carry with them a discordant sense of life as simultaneously tangible and elusive. Any attempt to read sense into anthropogenic extinction, or deliberate or careless extermination, forces us to negotiate our position in relation to these deaths: how do we remove ourselves from such killings; how do we come to grips with the way we are connected to or have gained advantage from the deaths of these others? For Australians, and particularly Tasmanians, the figure of the thylacine provokes an uneasy and unhappy connection with the very recent past. At the same time, however, images of the thylacine provide an iconic symbol of Tasmania and Tasmanian officialdom, and of extinction as a force often traceable to human actions. Carol Freeman's *Paper Tiger: How Pictures Shaped the Thylacine* brings a critical historical perspective to the way we perceive and conceive of thylacines, chronicling the transformation of the image of the thylacine from colonial metonymy to Tasmanian metaphoricity, illuminating the way meaning has played out during the period from the commencement of British settlement in Tasmania in 1803 to the present day, with the fateful date of 7 September 1936 being brought to bear on time before and after the extinction of the thylacine.

An earlier version of this book, now out of print, was published in 2010 in Brill's Human-Animal Studies series. This current edition, published in Tasmania by Forty South Publishing, aims to address a more general readership while retaining most of the primary content of the former. The fact that the book is published in Tasmania and is widely accessible in Australia is significant in counteracting the social relations present at the time the majority of the images in the book were first published, a time in which written and visual depictions of the thylacine

were produced for a British and European readership, and not generally affordable or available to people living in Australia. The design and layout of *Paper Tiger*, in particular its landscape orientation and increased picture content, work in emphasising the significance of the images and their relationships with each other. At first impression, leafing through the book's illustrations, an apparent narrative emerges recording the progression of engravings and lithographs of thylacines in the wild to photographs of thylacines in captivity, with the final chapter taking stock of the dissemination of the thylacine's image in official and commercial contexts. Such a narrative could be assumed to depict the history of thylacines in Tasmania after British settlement until their ultimate demise. However, the analysis and argument presented in *Paper Tiger* resists this notion of a reliable record, highlighting the strategic and political nature of these illustrations in shaping and fixing a specific regime of zoological knowledge, one that would denigrate thylacines, de-value their lives, and advocate their extermination in Tasmania.

*Paper Tiger* studies engravings, lithographs and photographs produced and published between 1808, a few years after the establishment of the first British colonies on Tasmania, and 1936, when the last known thylacine died in captivity in Hobart. Careful examination of these pictures and the contexts in which they were presented and received is exercised in ascertaining how they contributed to the attitudes and actions leading to the extermination of the thylacine in Tasmania. The pictures chosen were all published in natural history or scientific publications, or in encyclopedias aimed at a more general audience. In each instance, the pictures and accompanying descriptions seek to furnish or contribute to knowledge about thylacines. The book does not examine private and unpublished drawings and photographs, including well-known shots of hunters with dead thylacines, presumably as they did not meet these functional requirements, and were not publicly available until after the thylacine's extinction. The pictures considered occupy a specific epistemological paradigm, one in which the thylacine is still living with humans and in which knowledge of living thylacines is still being produced. Such knowledge is shown to address a British imperial rather than an Australian or Tasmanian colonial readership, one with little or no chance of ever encountering a live thylacine, and shaped by previous colonial encounters with animals in the wild, in order to satisfy an interest in natural history and science.

A selection of influential figures is identified in attaching specific characteristics and qualities to thylacines. Freeman points out that the published images were intricately connected with

cultural and economic factors in Europe and in Tasmania. George Prideaux Harris' drawing of a trapped and injured thylacine, quite possibly an immature animal, provided an archetypal, much copied image. The thylacine died within a few hours of being trapped and sketched. All published copies of Harris' picture, beginning with the illustration published in *Transactions of the Linnean Society of London* in 1808, were engravings on wood, steel or copper plates. Freeman argues that the techniques of engraving, in which the more subjective and suggestive marks of sketching and drawing are reduced to more distinctly defined lines, produced images that were deceptively clear and definitive. A number of subsequent illustrations are included in the book, each of them clearly based on Harris' drawing, but gradually transforming the meaning of the original image, moving from a notion of the thylacine as vulnerable antipodean wildlife towards something more familiar from other colonial contexts: something more exotic, more threatening, and more monstrous. The pictures, captions and accompanying text erase the conditions experienced by the captive thylacine, instead presenting images of live animals open to study. While some continental images attempted an understanding and appreciation of thylacines, Freeman argues that British representations consistently portrayed them in a negative light.

William Dickes' drawing of a thylacine in a crouching, defensive pose, first published in 1841, constitutes another influential and enduring image, but again one that in its interpretation proved to derogate the animal. The pose depicted can be seen as a reference for a number of taxidermy mounts of trapped and shot thylacines. The crouching pose was likened to that of hyenas and foxes, animals with strongly negative connotations in European culture, emphasising the thylacine as tense and snarling, threatening rather than threatened. The image and its many copies, facilitated by new printing technologies enabling mass production, are identified as important in inciting and reinforcing fears regarding the thylacine's ability to kill livestock, and in fueling the desire for its extermination. The great majority of names bestowed upon thylacines in zoological literature and natural history books described and defined them in relation to other animals, for example zebra opossum, zebra wolf, pouch-dog, pouch-wolf, tiger-wolf, opossum-hyena and dog-headed opossum. These names shaped and were shaped by illustrations of thylacines. Notably, the names and pictures foregrounded the negative cultural connotations of these animals. Freeman pays specific attention to a series of engravings in the last three decades of the nineteenth century that draw heavily on wolf mythology and the

thylacine's perceived lupine qualities, contributing to the construction of a sense of thylacine as dangerous, malevolent, ravenous and a devourer of sheep. These images and accompanying descriptions helped to support claims by pastoralists in Tasmania that the depletion of livestock on their holdings was indeed the result of thylacine predation and not unsuitable farming practices, and justified the private bounty schemes and the subsequent bounty approved by the Tasmanian Parliament in 1886 that claimed the lives of well over two thousand thylacines in the space of twenty years.

While the techniques of engraving worked to produce a compelling sense of objectivity in depicting thylacines in the early nineteenth century, Freeman argues that lithography proved to be even more influential in anchoring the meaning of images of the natural world and specifically in asserting the need for thylacines to be exterminated. A lithograph of a pair of thylacines, prepared by Henry Richter from his own drawing and first appearing in 1851 in part three of John Gould's *The Mammals of Australia*, is perhaps the best known and most widely reproduced thylacine image. The preparatory drawing used as its models a pair of thylacines brought by sea from Launceston in 1850 and held at the London Zoo in Regent's Park, the male dying in captivity in 1853 and the female in 1857. The lithograph is clearly more stylised than the drawing, with the more benign figures in the former image subtly transformed into creatures more mysterious and potentially savage in the latter. Freeman suggests that the appearance of the lithograph in Gould's book evidences an orientalist depiction of the animals, with the thylacines evoking a sense of Tasmanian strangeness and depravity, and that their united gazes to the left of the picture, implying the viewing of potential prey with malicious intent, point to the conditions in which the Regent's Park thylacines were held captive, with both animals looking beyond the bars that confined them, returning the gaze of the humans watching them.

Traces of the conditions experienced by thylacines in a number of Australian and international zoos might not have been evident in most nineteenth century engravings and lithographs, but photographs in the early twentieth century presented a different perspective. Pictures of thylacines in captivity portrayed the animals in an abject light, depicting them as trapped, vulnerable and subdued, contrasting sharply with illustrations indicating savagery and menace. The descriptions connected to the photographs generally indicated that thylacines were now a rare species, with extinction inevitable. The progression of images in *Paper Tiger*, and in particular the transition from engravings and lithographs to zoo photographs, evoke a sense of

desolation, with the captive animals stripped of their space, time and way of life. Freeman argues that while photographs suggest a greater degree of realism, if not reality, than engravings and lithographs, they are still representations open to contextual, historical and ideological shaping.

This is confirmed in the examination of a series of retouched photographs published in various general zoological books and periodicals in the early twentieth century. While some images of captive thylacines appear to recall the predatory menace of nineteenth century illustrations through the use of selective posing and cropping of photographs, all the while giving the impression of the pictures being captured by chance, others are shown to be more intricately manipulated, with backgrounds indicating the animals' conditions of captivity removed in order to isolate the figure of the thylacine and emphasise its 'fearful symmetry', or even replacing the background to 'return' the animal to a 'natural' setting where it once again becomes a predatory figure. Freeman's discussion of retouched thylacine photographs culminates in a consideration of the photograph attributed to the notable Australian naturalist Harry Burrell and published in 1921 in *Australian Museum Magazine*. The picture purports to be that of a thylacine raiding a henhouse with a live hen in its mouth, giving rise to the notion that in addition to being voracious predators of sheep, thylacines also regularly preyed upon poultry, a claim that was repeated in a number of subsequent publications. Freeman's examination of the original photograph and its provenance, the cropped photograph published in *Australian Museum Magazine*, and related correspondence are combined in positing the startling argument that the photograph was actually a fabricated tableau using a stuffed specimen of a thylacine. It is at this point in the book that the way drawings, engravings, lithographs and photographs can potentially function in fixing subjective and strategic meanings and present them as definitive, authoritative and veracious are simultaneously recalled and revealed in blinding clarity. It is difficult not to immediately leaf backwards to reflect on the violence required to produce these images, and the violence enacted and generated by them.

*Paper Tiger* calls into question knowledge about thylacines produced during the violent establishment of British colonial settlements in Tasmania through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at a time when thylacines were still present on the island. Despite displaying meticulous historical research and careful pictorial analysis, the book underlines the fact that even today very little is known about the lives of thylacines, pointing to a plethora of misguided

and misleading representations that occluded the opportunity afforded colonial settlers and imperial authorities to learn more about thylacines and how to co-exist with them. It reveals the violence and desire inherent in the colonial imaginary by exploring the discursive spaces between animals and drawings, between drawings and their reproduction as engravings and lithographs, between published images and accompanying descriptions, and between images as signs of life and as signs of death.