Transnaturation

From a cultural studies perspective, ‘transculturation’ has been defined by Mary Louise Pratt as “a phenomenon of the contact zone” (6) that emerges from within the “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (4). In Pratt’s specific context of eighteenth-century colonial history, the focus is set on the reciprocity immanent to the transculturation process with the aim to “foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination” (7). Accordingly, transcultural spaces are understood as zones of cultural interaction, in which encounters between a dominant cultural code and its subordinated others take place; the notion of transculturation addresses the reciprocal exchange such confrontations lead to. “While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture,” Pratt argues, “they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.” (6).

While delivering a detailed account of the complex cultural history of the contact zone, Pratt observes that, in the given context, the natural environment has often been rendered a mere epiphenomenon of the transculturation process. With the naturalist figuring as the culturalist’s sidekick, the unidirectional efforts to semanticize natural elements and systematize the untamed chaos of the natural environment into scientific categories (30) have served the ideals of progress propagated by a decidedly homocentric agenda. “Such a perspective,” Pratt adds, “may seem odd to late twentieth-century western imagination trained to see nature as self-balancing ecosystems which human interventions throw into chaos” (31).

Not only does such a perspective seem odd, but it also implies a reduction of complexity. To an ecocritical mindset skeptical of exclusively homocentric approaches, the restriction of transculturation to the social interaction between human subjects and human subjects only seems no longer a tenable standpoint. Today, the ecologically modified version of transculturation should also encompass the asymmetrical relations between ‘culture’s nature’ on the one hand and ‘Nature itself’ on the other. This expanded version also includes all processes of transnaturation between the colonists’ dominant cultivating schemes, according to which nature is treated as mere instrument,
and colonized nature’s subordinated wildness and intrinsic value. Transnaturalization comes as a ‘clash of natures,’ as the encounter between tamed and instrumentalized nature and its subordinated other, i.e., pristine nature that has retained its inherent value. As the domination of the latter by the former seems to be the rule, the infiltration of the dominant cultural code by the ‘wild’ and untamed forces of nature forms the counter-current in the transnatural space of the contact zone.

This is the kind of reciprocal exchange Henry David Thoreau had in mind in his 1862 essay “Walking,” when he pleaded for the poet who, in defiance of increasingly more materialistic tendencies in society, was to “give expression to Nature” by “transplant[ing] [the words] to his page with earth adhering to their roots” (179). In fact, in “Walking” Thoreau literally walks out on the cultural establishment of his time and the homocentric “degeneracy” (166) surrounding him, in search of “a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure” (175). His solitary walk can be read as the first environmentalist protest march in American history:

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, – to regard man as an inhabitant, or part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school committee and every one of you will take care of that. (161, emphasis added)

Although Thoreau, at first sight, seems to adopt a wildly romantic position diametrically opposed to the one propagated by civilization, he leads what he calls a border life, “on the confines of a world into which I make occasional and transient forays only and my patriotism and allegiance to the state into whose territories I seem to retreat are those of a moss trooper” (186). In the manner of the seventeenth-century raiders who dwelled in the marshy boundary zone between England and Scotland, Thoreau situates himself somewhere in between the grid of fenced property and the unbounded expanses of open space, assuming a ‘pirate identity’ that belongs neither to the former nor to the latter, but is suspended in their contact zone. However, he sees more of a positive potential in the spongy earth of the swamp with its images of decay than in the cultivated images of civilization: “Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps” (176).

The Final Frontier

On the whole, the inherent potentialities of the swamp that fascinated Thoreau have been regarded as obstacles to progress and development. Especially in Florida, the swamp was seen as a major hindrance to settlement and progress, as a hazard to be drifted and drained if the region were to be finally
cultivated. With the Everglades its “king-size […] swamp” (Walsh 153), Florida occupies a special position in American environmental history “as the first state to be discovered and last to be developed” (Dovell 187), as the region where the natural surroundings posed – and still pose, albeit from a reversed perspective – a major challenge for a long period of time. “As late as 1897, four years after the historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared the western frontier closed,” Michael Grunwald notes, “an explorer marveled that the Everglades was still ’as much known to the white man as the heart of Africa’” (Swamp 5). One traveler writing about the area in the 1930s is quoted as saying that there were still vast stretches of the marshlands “that remain[ed] unexplored, virgin territory – America’s last frontier” (Dovell 194, emphasis added). It was not until the 1940s that the drainage of the Everglades could be considered a ‘successful’ project, but it had also brought about the serious deterioration of the ecosystem. In 1947, writing in a period of extreme floods and extreme drought, Marjorie Stoneman Douglas began the last chapter of her famous The Everglades: River of Grass declaring, quite laconically, nature’s retreat in front of environmental mismanagement: “The Everglades were dying” (349). The Southern and Central Florida Project for Flood Control (C & SF), which was authorized in 1948, was no doubt designed to put an end to the “erratic cycle of deluge and drought” (Grunwald, Swamp 223); however, to some, the adverse effects of such efforts were quite predictable. Ernest Lyons, Florida based writer and conservationist, drew attention to the homocentric core and hubristic scope of the project:

South Florida started out with a marvelous flood control plan. Nature designed it. It consisted of vast, perpetually inundated marshes and lakes interconnected by sloughs. It was a paradise for wildlife and, more practically, a sensible system of shallow reservoirs in which rainfall was stored to slowly seep into the ground. But being human we just couldn’t leave it alone […] Then when the rains came, we called on Government to take over and operate […] the magnificent system God had given us […] Now we are calling on Government to be the very God, by the creation of a huge artificial system […] Nature’s last frontiers of wildlife and last giant units for natural flood control would be destroyed. And Florida would be repeating the folly which conservationists have watched ruin rivers, make droughts and create floods across the nation! (Lyons quoted in Grunwald, Swamp 227-28)

What sounds like the ultimate surrender of a unique biome to technocratic schemes of control was – if one were to trust Protagoras’s dictum “Man is the measure of all things” – an extremely slow death for it was only in 2000 that the ongoing “reanimation” project devised under the name of Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), the largest ecosystem restoration plan to date, was approved and initiated “to restore, protect and preserve the water resources in central and southern Florida.” On the whole, CERP aims at the large-scale modification of C & SF. The restoration process is expected to take another thirty years (“CERP”).
In contemporary America, such projects as CERP seem to enjoy more publicity than before. Especially in the post-Katrina era, environmental consciousness seems to have shifted grounds once again as the ‘ecological threat’ has become an integral part of the MTV generation’s ‘mainstream spectacle.’ As the ‘green mindset’ becomes increasingly more fashionable – if not, at least for some, almost a matter of etiquette – and eco-lifestyle, with the increasing demand for ‘green’ gadgets and ‘fair trade’ goods, finally finds its niche in the heart of American consumer culture, it is as if the interest in the ‘ornamentalization’ of nature were soon to outshine the interest in its instrumentalization.

In fact, within the current discourse of popular ecology that is partly rooted in ‘middle-class morality,’ such trendy buzzwords as ‘sustainability’ are too readily embraced while the whole range of environmental problems seems to have been hastily downsized to the ‘inconvenient truth’ of global warming. Though climate change, as a doubtlessly anthropogenic phenomenon, does indeed pose an immense challenge to the biosphere as we know it, the frequent use and haphazard contextualization of the phrase in the mass media contributes less to a fruitful debate that addresses nature’s intrinsic value than to the psychodramatic process of soothing our ‘bourgeois conscience.’ To counter this extremely homocentric and trivializing tendency, it seems crucial to expand the ecological discourse beyond the bounds of the constant oscillation between technocratic faith in effective planning and outright pathetic fallacy. As Gregory Bateson has noted,

“Nature of the Beast”

For the Florida based journalist and crime writer Carl Hiaasen, such “superficial ad hominem arguments” constitute the core of the mindset that he has been criticizing for decades. With a site-specific focus set on his native Florida and from his unique position in the intersection of popular culture and (eco)political activism, Hiaasen has been tackling environmental issues with “ferocity and passion, mordant wit, and moral outrage” (Stevenson xvi), both in his bestselling novels and in his biweekly column in the Miami Herald. While Hiaasen’s columns “often concern politics, corruption, and the environment – in Florida three closely related topics” (xix), his fiction, the scope of which comprises fourteen environmental thrillers (three of them co-authored with Bill Montalbano) and three children’s books – transports the very same topics into a fictional universe driven by dark satire. With its strain of radical environmentalism verging on ecoterrorism, Hiaasen’s fiction
“Somebody’s got to get angry…”

pretty much defies the principle of political correctness as it displays an affinity towards ‘extreme statements.’

Even in Hiaasen’s children’s books *Hoot* (2002), *Flush* (2005) and *Scat* (2009), eco-resistance is performed frequently in the form of sabotage, an acceptable and efficient means with his juvenile protagonists. Other protagonists, e.g., Joe Winder in *Native Tongue* (1987), Spike Twilly in *Sick Puppy* (2000) and Ted Stranahan in *Skinny Dip* (2004), never shun acts of ‘violence against property,’ as long as these acts are performed for the sake of defending the Floridian landscape and wildlife against sheer profit-making. At times, eco-resistance is taken to the extreme when Hiaasen’s heroes reciprocate acts of ecocide with acts of homicide. Especially in the case of the recurring character Clinton Tyree aka Skink, who has appeared in five of the novels, this tendency is extremely accentuated.

Both in his columns and in his novels, Hiaasen’s rhetorical vehemence and satirical wit are straightforward reactions against the despoiling of Florida, a continuous process he has had to witness since childhood, as his place of birth Plantation, once a tiny suburb “safely fringed by Everglades and swamp” (Stevenson xiv), has gradually mutated into a specimen of ‘Florida Frenzy,’ turning into the epitome of cancerous, ecocidal (sub)urban growth fuelled by greed and corruption: “The dirt bike-path Hiaasen and his friends rode into the swamp, where they camped and caught water moccasins, is now University Drive, nine shopping malls lining the same route they once took” (op.cit. xv). In the novel *Native Tongue*, it is the protagonist Joe Winder who is confronted with a similar scene of desolation. Upon visiting the “secret spot” of his childhood in southern Florida, Winder has to come to terms with the fact that

the woods were gone. The buttonwoods, the mahogany, the gumbo-limbos – all obliterated. So were the mangroves. […] It looked as if a twenty megaton-bomb had gone off. Bulldozers had piled the dead tree at mountainous tangles at each corner of the property. (97)

In Hiaasen’s novels, such scenes are no exception: pollution, overpopulation, exploitative tourism and the notorious real-estate mania lead to the depredation of the natural environment, while greed and corruption serve as catalysts that speed up the process. South Florida, “where many judges were linked by conspiracy or simple inbreeding to the crookedest politicians” (31) and “just about any dirtbag would blend in smoothly with the existing riff-raff” (39), is depicted as replete with moral failures on both legal and political levels.

In this gloomy tableau, especially Disney World, Florida’s number-one tourist attraction and located near the headwaters of the Everglades, figures as the monstrous compound epitome of ecological negligence, avarice and corruption in the area. *Team Rodent: How Disney Devours the World*, a non-fiction account of the Disney Corporation, opens in New York City, with Hiaasen appalled by the new face of Times Square that is dominated, among
other mainstream temples, by the Disney Store. In the artificial setting surrounding him, he seems to find the sole safe haven in the seedy, swampy interior of the nearby Peep Land, “hang[ing] on by cum-crusted fingernails” (8). The untamable seediness of Peep Land belongs to the few phenomena that resist instant co-option by the new dominant ‘culture’ around Times Square:

[T]here’s a creepy comfort to be found amidst the donkey films and giant rubber dicks, a subversive triumph at unearthing such slag so near to Disney’s golden portals. (Hey, Mickey, whistle on this!) Peep Land is important precisely because it’s so irredeemable and because it cannot be transformed into anything but what it is. Slapping Disney’s name on a joint like this would not elevate or enrich it even microscopically, or cause it to be taken for a shrine. Standing in Disney’s path, Peep Land remains a gummy little cell of resistance.

And resistance is called for. (9)

One could, of course, argue that Peep Land’s seediness is most liable to work in favor of Disney, emphasizing the cleanliness of the family-friendly Disney universe. However, one could also argue that Peep Land’s in-your-face obscenity points towards a latent, yet more potent obscenity that is none other than Disney itself. Native Tongue, whose plot revolves around the Amazing Kingdom of Thrills, a less sophisticated imaginary replica of Disney World, transports this obscenity into fiction, to a Florida, where “the prospect of a theme park to compete with Disney World carried an orgasmic musk to local chambers of commerce” (Native Tongue 32). The Amazing Kingdom is not only “a tourist trap, plain and simple” that brings “traffic, garbage, litter, air pollution” (83) to the area, but also the very embodiment of the hypocritical strategies employed in the real world by “[t]he Mouse’s sprawling self-contained empire” (32). One of these double-dealing strategies concerns the co-option of conservation efforts into profit making schemes: imitating Disney’s project to save “the dusky seaside sparrow, a small marsh bird whose habitat was being wiped out by overdevelopment along Florida’s coastline” (15), the Amazing Kingdom engages in fake efforts to save Vance and Violet, the last surviving specimens of the “blue-tongued mango vole,” Hiaasen’s fictitious “Microtus mango” (16). Despite the fact that the Amazing Kingdom has contributed substantially to the destruction of the endangered species’ habitat, “the Vole Project” attracts much publicity and praise, even from the Florida Audubon Society, as “a shining example of private enterprise using its vast financial resources to save a small but precious resource of nature” (50). As is often the case in Hiaasen’s crime fiction, such blatant, unabashed hypocrisy is enough to enrage the ecologically minded: “resistance is called for” (Team Rodent 9).

In this bizarre and farcical universe displaying, at first sight, solely black and white distinctions, the ‘good guys’ collaborate to fight back against sleazy developers, corrupt politicians and immoral scientists and thwart their notorious plans. Whereas the former group consists, for the most part, of
devoted environmentalists turned violent ecoteurs, those belonging to the latter are characterized primarily by their lack of respect for nature’s inherent value. Chaz Perrone, the chief antagonist in Hiaasen’s *Skinny Dip*, for instance, is a corrupt biologist attracted by immoral schemes for “[n]othing about nature awed, soothed or humbled him – not the solitude or the mythic vastness or the primordial ebb and flow” (75).

In *Native Tongue*, with the Amazing Kingdom finally burned down to ashes and the property it stood on “replanted with native trees, including buttonwoods, pigeon plums, lorchwoods, brittle palms, tamarinds, gumbo-limbo and mangroves” (325), the ecoteurs succeed in accomplishing their mission of restoring the ‘order of nature.’ In this novel, Hiaasen’s activists form an eclectic group of eccentrics one would expect to find in a comic strip: Joe Winder, a prize-winning former investigative journalist turned publicist for the Amazing Kingdom, whose looks vary from “a Navajo nightmare” (13) to “one of the Manson family” (61), Molly McNamara, “a seventy-year-old woman in pink curlers” (19) matching “her reading glasses with the pink roses on the frames” (66) and the founder of The Mothers of Wilderness, which, “[o]f all environmental groups fighting to preserve what little remained of Florida, […] are regarded as the most radical and shrill and intractable” (31), sensitive small-time crooks Danny Pogue and Bud Schwartz, hired by the Mothers to kidnap the mango voles under the guise of the Wildlife Rescue Corps, and the Trooper Jim Tile, who is depicted as “very tall and very muscular and very black” (78).

On the whole, Hiaasen resembles Elmore Leonard on an environmental mission, crossed with the more mainstream and less scatological version of John Waters. In fact, much like Beverly Suthpin in Waters’s *Serial Mom*, the seemingly poised character who will go to extremes for what she thinks is right and even kill one of her jurors for the mere stylish *faux pas* of wearing white shoes after Labor Day, Hiaasen’s fictional characters will not shy away from acts of extreme violence to punish random strangers for discarding litter onto the highway, or for even simply being “tourons” (Hiaasen’s *portmanteau* coinage for a tourist). Importantly, both in his columns and in his darkly satirical crime fiction, “where the underlying crime […] is the murder of South Florida” (Grunwald, “Swamp Things”), Hiaasen treats instrumentalizing schemes and anthropomorphizing tendencies directed against nature not merely as signals of homocentric inclinations; in both cases, such tendencies simply form the ‘axis of evil.’ As Diane Stevenson notes, “[g]reed and its accompanying corruption […] occupy one side of Hiaasen’s *clearly articulated system of right and wrong*, while unspoiled wilderness lies on the other” (xv, emphasis added).

While, on the whole, Hiaasen’s stock of characters seems to be evenly distributed according to this clear-cut binary opposition, it is Skink who inhabits the boundary zone between the two sides. When Skink first appears in *Double Whammy*, it is simply by pointing to a levee separating so-called civilization from an untouched stretch of the Everglades that he sets the moral tenor
prevailing in Hiaasen’s fiction: “This dike is like the moral seam of the universe […] Evil on the one side, good on the other” (281).1

The idealistic ex-governor turned ‘wild’ hermit is a disillusioned ecologically minded politician, who has walked out on his office, never to come back. Engaging occasionally in acts of outright ecoterrorism for his love of Florida, Skink is probably the most controversial figure in Hiaasen’s novels.

The ex-governor is, at first sight, All-American:

He was everything the voters craved: tall, ruggedly handsome, an ex-college football star (second-team All-American lineman), a decorated Vietnam veteran (a sniper once lost for sixteen days behind enemy lines with no food or ammunition), an eligible bachelor, an avid outdoorsman. (92)

On the one hand, these traits are laced with charisma and the intellectual candor of a true bibliophile. In Double Whammy, his hermitage is a book-lined lakeside shack; on display are classics, reference books, philosophy and the humanities and even children’s books (82). In later novels, when Skink lives in abandoned vehicles and even a dumpster, there is still always room for his library. In his retreat in Native Tongue, for instance, he has an old Plymouth full of books, including “Churchill, Hesse, Sandburg, Steinbeck, Camus, Paine, Wilde, Vonnegut, de Tocqueville, Salinger, García Márquez, even Harry Crews” (150). Despite this air of refinement, however, there exists another side to his character that seems diametrically opposed to the cultivated persona: “Skink’s size, apparel, and maniacal demeanor did not invite heroic confrontation at thirty thousand feet” (Double Whammy 113).

At the end of Skinny Dip, he is last seen as the ‘crazed wanderer’ quoting laconically Tennyson’s famous line “Nature, red in tooth and claw” (355) while he accompanies Chaz Perrone to his final destination in the uncharted recesses of the Everglades. As the evil doers’ nemesis, Skink embodies the revenge of exploited nature; it is as if he had absorbed the ‘terror’ inflicted upon nature by materialistic culture into his own to use it for retributive punishment. In Native Tongue, he enters the scene accompanied by “a great turmoil erupt[ing] around the truck,” (72) with “[a] silvery beard of biblical proportions. Mismatched eyes: one as green as mountain pines, the other brown and dead. Above that a halo of pink flowers” (73).

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1 This strict separation of good from evil stands, no doubt, in the way of objectivity. In his review of Skinny Dip, the novel in which the antagonist is a corrupt scientist involved in the restoration of the Everglades, Grunwald has criticized Hiaasen for distorting reality and disregarding the merits of a project like CERP for the sake of his black and white depiction of Florida (see “Swamp Things”). Though his claim may be true, what Grunwald does not take into account is the fact that Hiaasen’s satirical fiction is not the suitable forum for praising technocratic decision-making and underlining the benefits of a megaproject that nicely resonates with the megaproject of soothing our conscience. Hiaasen directs his readers’ attention to an aspect that receives much less publicity than CERP: nature’s intrinsic value. If, along this path, he has been disregarding the “good sides” to an important restoration project, he certainly has every poetic license to do so.
Clinton Tyree is simultaneously the personification of the Floridian wild(erness), especially of the Everglades, and, as the theriomorphic figure wearing the radio collar he has taken off a dead panther, its “indicator species.” While he engages even in the fiercest acts of violence to retaliate the unjust treatment of the natural world, it is as if the Everglades had imposed upon him the existence of a hybrid in which the animal and the human are no longer discernible. In Skink, the cultivated human being is transformed into a *homo ferus* that has assumed diverse traits of wildlife: the reptile his self-ascribed nickname refers to, the scavenger he becomes when he lives off road kill, and the panther he is detected as on the radar of the wildlife controllers all contribute to his ‘wildness.’

Much like Thoreau, Skink resides in the contact zone marked out by civilization on the one hand and the ideal of pristine nature on the other. His mode of ‘civil disobedience,’ however, differs from Thoreau’s in that it is an explosive blend of intricate strategy and unbridled violence. Skink is, in Hiaasen’s own words, his ‘borderline’ (super)hero, who shuns not even cold-blooded murder to avenge crimes against nature. Half Swamp Thing, half Thoreauvian moss trooper, the return of both of the ‘vanishing American’ and of the Unabomber, Skink resides in the interzone between nature and culture, embodies the hybrid between human and animal, while he also challenges the blurred distinction between sanity and insanity.

On the whole, Hiaasen’s take on terrorism seems full of provocative cynicism. Not unlike the voices that interpreted the terrorist attacks of 9/11 as ‘Fortress America getting a dose of its own medicine,’ Hiaasen argues in an interview conducted by Steve Kroft of CBS News that there is hardly anything surprising about the fact that the terrorists had trained for their suicide missions in his native Florida:

> Unfortunately, the craziness of Florida provides a certain anonymity to all sorts of wackos, even terrorists. [...] And I always tell people, ‘You think that was an accident? Where’s the one place in the United States where the bar of bad behavior is so high that nobody’s gonna notice these guys?’ Nobody’s gonna think twice when they walk into a flight school and say, ‘I’d like to get on a 757 simulator, but I don’t need the part about where you land it. Just teach me how to fly it around.’ And pay it in cash, and they say, ‘Oh, right this way, Mr. Atta. Sit over here.’ (Leung 3)

It is, however, by no means solely due to cynicism that ecoterrorism constitutes one of the major strains in Hiaasen’s writing. Ecoterrorism serves to shed light on the ‘real’ sources of ecoterror in Florida, i.e. on the crimes committed against nature in the name of development and progress. Here, the truism ‘one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter’ becomes almost a motto. For those who believe that crimes against nature constitute the ‘real’ acts of ecoterror, what the authorities regard as acts of ecoterrorism are simply cases of ecodefense.2 This is a commonality Hiaasen’s

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2 A parallel can be drawn, in real life, to the story of the 23-year-old Caltech student William Jensen Cottrell. Cottrell was convicted of conspiracy to arson of eight sport utility
fiction shares with Edward Abbey, who has coined the term “monkey-wrenching” as a form of “resistance against the destruction of natural diversity and wilderness” (Foreman 9) and whose novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) has been instrumental in integrating active eco-resistance into the fictional realm. In the foreword to *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, a book published by EarthFirst!, Abbey argues as follows:

Representative government in the USA represents money not people and therefore has forfeited our allegiance and moral support [...] Such is the nature and structure of the industrial megamachine (in Lewis Mumford’s term) which is now attacking the American wilderness. That wilderness is our ancestral home, the primordial homeland of all living creatures including the human [...] And if the wilderness is our true home, if it is threatened by invasion, pillage and destruction – as it certainly is – then we have the right to defend that home, as we would our private rooms, *by whatever means are necessary.* (4-5, emphasis added)

Unsurprisingly, Hiaasen’s recent children’s book *Scat* contains an explicit reference to Abbey: “Ed was sort of a bomb thrower, only the bombs were ideals and principles. He liked the earth more than he liked most humans” (146); the one who introduces *Scat*’s teenage protagonist to the writings of ‘the desert anarchist’ is none other than Twilly Spree, another recurring character, millionaire ecoteur and Skink’s collaborator in *Sick Puppy.*

Skink is not only the embodiment of ecodefense “by whatever means necessary” against profit-oriented (and at times state-induced) ecoterror, but also the epitome of wilderness in the Thoreauvian sense, which is, in Lawrence Buell’s words, “an antidote to hypercivilization” (149). From the homocentric perspective, his brutal ‘wildness’ surely has the pejorative connotations of mental derangement. However, his wilderness reaches beyond the scope of homocentric concerns, for it is, to quote Buell once more, “a quality humans share with non-human entities” (149). With the non-human aspect of his character underscored by his theoriomorphic transformation, by his taking on, quite symptomatically, the ‘official’ identity of a panther, Skink’s metamorphosis suggests the reversal of Disney’s anthropomorphic take on the animal world. It is precisely this process of ‘becoming animal’ that attributes ex-governor Clinton Tyree what Thoreau calls “a wilderness no civilization can endure, – as if we lived on the marrow of koodoos devoured raw” (175). Importantly, Skink’s brutality is not inhuman but rather non-human, his terrorism a consequence of his ‘animal nature.’ Oddly enough, *Understanding Terrorism*, a recent publication on terrorism, opens with a chapter on the definitions of terrorism that is entitled, albeit metaphorically, “The Nature of the Beast” (see Martin).

vehicles and a Hummer dealership in the name of the Earth Liberation Front in April 2005 and was sentenced to eight years in jail on ‘terrorism’ charges. Suffice to note that, according to the FBI affidavit, Cottrell is known to have sent an e-mail to another Caltech student a few weeks prior to the attacks which contained information about his plans to acquire money for 5,000 bumper stickers that said “My SUV supports terrorism” (Rosenzweig).
Hiaasen’s use of theriomorphic representation calls forth two literary traditions, both intermingled, in his fiction, with the elements of the hardboiled genre. First, Hiaasen makes extensive use of satire. His prose is replete with trenchant wit, irony and sarcasm, which he uses to expose and discredit all that he regards as vice or folly. The stylistic device prevailing in his fiction is, quite predictably, that of extreme hyperbole. Along these lines, his answer to the prevailing homocentric tendency surrounding him is the use of heightened theriomorphism that is not only embodied in Skink, but also lends the character its specific contours as a figure suspended in the interzone between culture and nature. Second, Hiaasen counters the gloomy reality of the Sunshine State with an unrelenting naturalism. He seems to aim at the ideal of what the naturalist Frank Norris had called “the ‘nature’ revival in literature;” in fact, in keeping with Norris’s phrasing, one could argue that Hiaasen’s novels fit into the category of “novels with a purpose. Again, as Norris noted nearly a century before him, the project is “all about [the] return to nature, this unerring groping backward toward the fundamentals, in order to take a renewed grip upon life” (141). Norris’s naturalistic dictum that “[L]ife is better than ‘literature’ even if the literature be of human beings and the life be that of a faithful dog” (142) also holds for Hiaasen.3

Ecoterrorism in Hiaasen’s satirical universe reflects the violent “nature of the beast,” as part of an extreme statement that resists co-option by the dominant code. As Skink tells Twilly Spree in Sick Puppy:

Son, I can’t tell you what to do with your life – hell, you’ve seen what I’ve done with mine. But I will tell you there’s probably no peace for people like you and me in this world. Somebody’s got to get angry or nothing gets fixed. That’s what we were put here for, to stay pissed off. (304)

In Hiaasen’s work, ecoterrorism as ecodefense reaches beyond the bounds of the discursive notion of political correctness; it reflects the naturalism of the swamp, which is – to quote Erich von Stroheim’s cine-novel Poto-Poto – the realm of uncultivated instincts and unmediated impulse: “Here, the latitude is zero […] Here […] no tradition, no precedent […] Here […] each acts according to the impulse of the moment […] and does what Poto-Poto impels him to do […] Poto-Poto is our only law […]” (qtd. in Deleuze 130). Such is the nature of the swamp and Hiaasen’s terrorists come with the territory.

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3 In the darkly humorous Sick Puppy, as it were written according to Norris’s dictum, the life of a dog turns out to be the protagonists’ main concern.
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