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## The Rhinoceros and the Chatham Railway: Taxidermy and the Production of Animal Presence in the ‘Great Indoors’

KAREN JONES

*University of Kent*

### Abstract

This article considers the practice of taxidermy and its relationship to the ‘golden age’ of big game hunting, the science of natural history and the dramaturgical codes of empire by looking at the collecting exploits of one man, Major Percy Powell-Cotton (1866–1940), and his attempts to preserve the spoils of the hunt in the ‘great indoors’. As various scholars have pointed out, taxidermy offers up a vivid and striking ‘afterlife’ of the animal with a unique (and some might say unsavoury) ability to elucidate our environmental and cultural relations with other species. As such, the reanimated animals of empire, posed on the walls of the country estate or arrested in museum cases, represent valuable historical artefacts ripe for unstitching. Drawing on the work of Garry Marvin, Sam Alberti and Merle Patchett, this article stalks Powell-Cotton’s taxidermic project across various sites of capture, production and display (what I call necrogeographies) to illuminate the sinuous contours of imperial natural history and the stories of pursuit, production and performance lurking beneath the skin of the reanimated animal.

On 6 September 1909 a carefully packed carriage truck left Victoria station, London, bound for East Kent. Inside the truck was a veritable menagerie of taxidermy animals including a rhino, topi, hyena, wolf and leopard. The strange cargo – a Noah’s ark of reanimated creatures – was headed to Quex Park, Birchington, to be posed for posterity as part of a new diorama being constructed for Major Percy Powell-Cotton, big game hunter, collector and scientific naturalist, in his private museum. Unfortunately, when the animals were unloaded, it seemed a calamity had occurred. At some point in the journey, the rhino mount had broken loose, leading to an unplanned showdown with a topi, during which the latter lost most of the hair on one side of its head. Powell-Cotton and James Rowland Ward – the leading taxidermist of his age and the man responsible for transforming the beasts from organic fragments to biotic artefacts – hurled letters back and forth about the ‘truckload of animals’ in which Ward asserted the professionalism of his enterprise and Powell-Cotton lamented the vandalism that had befallen his irreplaceable mount, all the more galling as ‘this was a particularly good skin’. The topi, he mused, was unrepairable apart from colouring in the spots. Ward

riposted with the suggestion that the animal be returned to his workshop for refurbishment. At the end of their correspondence, the men found common ground in blaming the railway for its shunts and bumps. Large animals in future, they agreed, would be taken by road.<sup>1</sup>

A story of damaged goods and railway ineptitude might not strike one as worthy of historical notation, but, as I hope to show in this article, the nature of the cargo makes it an episode worth unpacking further. In fact, the case of the rhinoceros and the Chatham railway pointed to a significant story about animal bodies, the visual exhibition of empire and scientific inquiry in the early years of the twentieth century. In the 'dead zoo' of the taxidermy exhibit, the assembled critters of imperial conquest presented a mesmerizing collision of matter and engineering that gloried in the global prowess of the hunter-hero and the exotic worlds he (and sometimes she) inhabited. Here was a world of dramatic action and still life, a strange collage of animated objects that were stiffly ordered by scientific classification and yet resounded with a sense of biotic realism. Meanwhile, the compulsive culture of hunting and collection which lay at the heart of the taxidermic project saw Major Powell-Cotton and others like him pursue their game across a series of connected sites, what I call here necrogeographies. Borrowed from geographer Fred Kniffen, who coined the term to describe his studies of cemeteries and the 'spatial and cultural dimensions of mortuary landscapes', the idea of taxidermy as necrogeography presents a useful framework in which to explore ideas of memorial and mausoleum integral to the culture of big game hunting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Imprinted with meaning and invested with ritual code, these sacramental spaces of death (and, as we shall see, life) spanned the game trails of far-flung climes (sites of kill); the taxidermy studio (sites of embalming); and various places of exhibition (sites of commemoration and conservation). This network of taxidermy production incorporated both human and non-human actors and pointed to the fundamental importance of place and placement in the global story of natural history collection. As David Livingstone notes in *Putting Science in its Place* (2003), scientific knowledge is inevitably shaped by spatial context, in his words 'location and locution', to the extent that 'science is always local'. As such, the Major's rhino and topi represented fellow travellers in an expansive (and transnational) network of animal capital that saw the creatures of empire captured, catalogued and preserved for time immemorial in 'the great indoors'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 3.1.1/568: Percy Powell-Cotton to Rowland Ward, 7 Sept. 1909; 3.1.1/574: Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 8 Sept. 1909; 3.1.1/577: Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 9 Sept. 1909, all in Box 4: Taxidermy Correspondence (July 1909–Dec. 1910), Papers of Percy Powell-Cotton, Powell-Cotton Museum & Archives, Birchington, Kent (hereafter cited as PCM). Thanks are due to the staff of the Powell-Cotton Museum (especially Hazel Basford and Inbal Livne) and also to Susan Johnson and Andrew Joynes for their particular insights on Powell-Cotton.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Kniffen, 'Necrogeographies in the United States', *Geographical Review*, 57 (1967), pp. 426–7. Merle Patchett, Kate Foster and Hayden Lorimer track a harrier specimen across various sites (The Field: Site of Death; Workshop: Site of Transformation and Collection: Site of Disposal),

In exploring the processes involved in the establishment of Powell-Cotton's remarkable taxidermy collection – a cornucopia of 6,400 specimens spread over three galleries by the time of his death – this article serves to highlight the value of the 'animal turn' in academic writing. Claude Levi-Strauss points out that animals are 'good to think [with]', while Donna Haraway argues for the treatment of the non-human world as a 'witty agent and actor'. Such issues are pertinent to the historical scholarship on empire, where our understanding of the mechanics of trade, exploration, science and entertainment is considerably enhanced by the contribution of animal actors, whether that be London Zoo's celebrity hippo, Obaysch, or the pistol-wielding elephants of the travelling menagerie. Exotic critters, it seems, were everywhere to be seen in the metropole, from the parakeets making their homes in suburban parks to the lions offered for sale by Jamrach's Emporium in London's East End. Dead animals, it turns out, had equally important tales to tell in their 'afterlives' – from the taxidermy polar bear mounts scattered around Britain and inventoried by artists Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson to the 'tiger room' of the Scottish Hopetoun estate, the subject of historical geographer Merle Patchett's 'Tracking Tigers' project. Such subjects are not without their complexities, particularly in terms of the ethical implications of hanging dead animals on the wall, not to mention implicit political, racial and colonial contexts. However, that should not dissuade us from taking a thorough look at the historical landscape of big game hunting and its convoluted relationship with animal conservation. While philosopher Mary Midgley may have written off the big game hunter as an unreconstructed brute whose activities seem wholly alien to modern environmentalist sensibilities, the story of hunting and taxidermy presents a rather more tangled story of human–animal interaction and emerging conservationist thinking. As Nigel Rothfels usefully points out, the past is 'more messy and unsorted than we remember it or sometimes want it to be'.<sup>3</sup>

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although their methodology is less consciously historical than my approach here. See their chapter, 'The biogeographies of a hollow-eyed harrier', in Samuel Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals: A Museum Menagerie* (Charlottesville, VA, 2011), pp. 110–33; David Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 17–19, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston, 1963), p. 89; Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (New York, 1991), p. 201; Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (Athens, GA, 1983), p. 14; Merle Patchett, 'Tracking tigers: recovering the embodied practices of taxidermy', *Historical Geography*, 36 (2008), pp. 17–39; Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson (eds), *Nanoq: Flatout and Bluesome* (London, 2006); Nigel Rothfels, 'Killing elephants', in Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin Danahay (eds), *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Literature and Culture* (London, 1997), p. 60. On Animal Studies and the 'animal turn' see: Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York, 2012); Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert (eds), *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human–Animal Relations* (London, 2000); Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London, 2002); John Simons, *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (Basingstoke, 2002). For animals and empire see: Kathleen Kete (ed.), *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Empire* (Oxford, 2007); Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1987); Helen Cowie, *Exhibiting Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2014); John Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British*

Working by this rationale, this article builds on precursory studies in recovering the histories of taxidermy animals to present the story of how (and indeed why) a curious assemblage of beasts made their way from the game trails of empire to find residency at the Powell-Cotton Museum as icons of imperial travel and primal colour. Apart from writing with an inevitably anthropocentric gaze (Erica Fudge notes that ‘animal history’ really means the history of human attitudes towards the non-human), the task of reassembling a coherent narrative of human–animal interaction can be complicated by a lack of historical data. As such, Patchett’s attempt to uncover the actors and agents ‘involved in the making and mobilizing of colonial taxidermy specimens’ focused more on a methodology of recovery, technical practice and object analysis than on ‘textual-documentary record’. Powell-Cotton’s case, however, provides a somewhat different opportunity. An assiduous record-keeper, the Major trod the landscapes he visited in diary form, kept meticulous field notes, wrote several travelogues and (most usefully) cached reams of correspondence at his private house in Quex Park. An obsession with catalogue ensured the preservation not only of copious biological material (much of which is prescient to twenty-first-century wildlife conservation) but also presents an unrivalled opportunity to ‘pack and unpack’ the historical provenance of his collection through its pursuit, production and performance. Thus, where Patchett’s work draws on ‘an engagement with the past that draws part of its force from absence and incompleteness’, the originality of this study lies in stitching together a taxidermic history from archive and autobiography. Powell-Cotton’s story is valuable in its exemplary quality, illuminating in detail the gentleman-hunter-naturalist tradition of the late 1800s that counted such men as Roualeyn Gordon Cumming, Frederick Selous and Walter Rothschild among its ranks. What set the Major apart, moreover, was his actuarial gaze, the scale of his collecting obsession and, most importantly, the way in which animals under his command were placed. Paying keen attention to animal physiology and behaviour, as well as habitat and species communities, Powell-Cotton presented a new conservationist philosophy at work in the museum as well as an intimate and accessible world of science communication that effectively bridged the worlds of Selous and Attenborough. In following this trail, I am particularly concerned with ideas of *document* and *encounter*: between hunter and prey as integral parts of the ‘hunting moment’ and between collector and taxidermist as co-producers of an imperial pageant that emphasized the power and performance of animal protagonists. As an embryonic ‘taxidermic history’ of Powell-Cotton, this article sheds light on the extraordinary pursuits of one man as well as offering a window into the world of

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*Imperialism* (Manchester, 1988); John Miller (ed.), *Empire and the Animal Body: Violence, Identity and Ecology in Victorian Adventure Fiction* (London, 2014).

the *fin-de-siècle* imperial hunter-collectors and their attempts to capture, celebrate and conserve wild things.<sup>4</sup>

## I

Animal remains have long been prized by collectors and ritually worshipped as totemic objects – as demonstrated by the mummified cats of ancient Egypt or the seventeenth-century Wunderkammer or cabinet of curiosity and its smorgasbord of exotic specimens – but it was in the nineteenth century that taxidermy truly ‘came of age’. In these years, the ‘dead zoo’ emerged as a powerful communicator of socio-economic power, technological innovation and scientific acumen. The invention of new chemicals aided the practice – notably arsenic soap, developed by apothecary Jean Becoeur in the 1740s. First mentioned in Louis Dufresne’s *Novelle Dictionnaire d’histories Naturelle* (1803), taxidermy (which literally combines the Greek *taxis*, or arrangement, with *derma*, or skin) matured into a specialist vocation that straddled the worlds of science, entertainment and exhibit culture. A raft of manuals including *Practical Taxidermy and Home Decoration* (1890) and *The Art of Taxidermy* (1898) translated practice into print while professional taxidermists could be found across provincial towns and metropolitan areas by the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

This burgeoning industry catered for all tastes and budgets, from traditional sporting masks and memorialized pets to cases of game birds and tea-sipping kittens in anthropocentric pose (one of the signature pieces from Walter Potter, proprietor of his own museum in East Sussex). At the high end of the market (a rhino mount in today’s prices would be upwards of \$15,000) animals drawn from the British empire animated the domestic interior in abundance: trophy heads of exotic game, cases of brightly plumaged songbirds, zoomorphic furniture and bespoke diorama displays ‘wilding’ the great indoors with powerful messages of captivation, consumption and conquest. As (the aptly named) William Hornaday, one of the leading taxidermists in the United States, pointed out: ‘Such an ornament calls forth endless admiration and query, even from those who know other chase than that of the almighty dollar.’ Animal mounts appeared in a range of private and public settings, homes, civic buildings and museums, the latter of which embraced taxidermy as a way of communicating colonial encounter and scientific discovery. What

<sup>4</sup> Erica Fudge, ‘A left-handed blow: writing the history of animals’, in Nigel Rothfels (ed.), *Representing Animals* (Bloomington, IN, 2002), pp. 3–18; Patchett, ‘Tracking tigers’, pp. 18, 17, 18, 20. A developing scholarship exists on the history of taxidermy, including Pat Morris, *A History of Taxidermy: Art, Science and Bad Taste* (Ascot, 2010); Rachel Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (University Park, PA, 2012); Samuel Alberti, ‘Constructing nature behind the glass’, Special Issue, ed. Samuel Alberti and Chris Whitehead, *Museum and Society*, 6/2 (2008), pp. 73–97; Alberti (ed.), *The Afterlives of Animals*.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Batty, *Practical Taxidermy and Home Decoration* (New York, 1890); John Rowley, *The Art of Taxidermy* (New York, 1898).



all of these reanimated animals shared was a fundamental grounding in *life*. Here was the fundamental conceit of necrogeography: as much as taxidermy was concerned with the corpse, the central premise of the taxidermist's vocation lay in crafting a life-like countenance from fragments of animal matter. Put simply, the dead animal had to look alive: its visual impact contingent on the possibility that at any moment it might tilt its head or flick its tail. In order to achieve this illusion of arrested motion, close biological observation, an aptitude in fine art and a detailed anatomical knowledge were required for the taxidermist-in-training. As Davie noted, 'The chief object of the taxidermist's art is to faithfully reproduce the forms, attitudes and expressions of living animals within the actual skin.' Attention to living detail – what I call here biotic realism – was essential for the performance of the imperial animal in its afterlife.<sup>6</sup>

## II

The age of taxidermy was irrevocably connected with the 'golden age' of big game hunting (1880s–1920s), during which a procession of British upper-class adventurers took to colonial climes for the thrill of the chase and returned home eager to demonstrate their imperial authority by preserving the biggest, best, and otherwise most noteworthy, of their catches. For the younger sons (and sometimes daughters) of the landed gentry, the hunting safari provided a worthy exercise in distraction, escapism and character-building. It indulged affectations for exploration, natural history and technological fetishism (typically in the form of the gun but also the camera) while speaking to cultural anxieties about masculine emasculation, socio-economic change and the deleterious effects of modern life. Expansive in terms of both physical territory and imaginative imprint, the geography of empire provided fertile ground: firstly, for formative encounters with dangerous beasts, wild landscapes and so-called primitive peoples, and, secondly, for their attentive document in a range of trans-media mediums including literature, photography and, of course, taxidermy.

And so to Powell-Cotton. Born on 20 September 1866 in Garlinge, Margate, Percy Powell-Cotton was a model of the Victorian hunter-naturalist. The eldest son of Henry Horace Powell-Cotton (who moved his young family to the ancestral seat, Quex Park, when he inherited it in 1881), the youthful Percy helped his father with design plans for the estate, including installing a photographic dark room in the cellar and hunting rabbits, before taking up a military commission with the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers in 1885. When his father died in 1894, Percy inherited the estate, which he presided over until his death in 1940: not that he spent a great deal of time there. Fuelled by a 'craving to wander distant lands', he made some twenty-eight trips over six decades in pursuit

<sup>6</sup> William Hornaday *Taxidermy and Zoological Collecting* (New York, 1894), p. 20; Oliver Davie, *Methods in the Art of Taxidermy* (Philadelphia, 1894), p. 261.

of taxonomic and ethnographical artefacts, taking in India, Burma, Kashmir, Tibet, China, Japan and the United States on a world tour in 1887, followed by explorations in the Himalayas, Singapore, Somaliland, Abyssinia, Uganda, Congo, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sudan, Zululand and a final trek to Tanganyika in 1938–9. Giving substantiation to one old hunter's adage: take two trips into the wilds each year and spend six months on each, Powell-Cotton spent a total of twenty-six years in the field. The longest hunting trip (1904–7) saw the Major explore a vast swathe of territory including Sudan and the Congo Free State, finding time to get married in Nairobi and fend off a marauding lion at Albert Edward Lake, with the help of a stick-wielding porter and a well-placed copy of *Punch* in the jacket of his safari jacket. Deftly navigating the worlds of science, sport and colonial heroics, Powell-Cotton's exploits gained him a reputation as somewhat of an 'imperial celebrity', an explorer extraordinaire in the style of Allan Quatermain, whose arrival home from distant shores drew crowds at the local railway station and whose latest exploits inspired effusive reportage in the popular press and from learned institutions including the Zoological Society London and the African Society. Commenting on the Major's 1902 trip from the Upper Nile to Lake Victoria, *The African World* waxed lyrical about 'thrilling, exacting and majestic' encounters, scientific discoveries and 'hairbreadth escapes, in an area . . . where no white man had been before'.<sup>7</sup>

Explorer, sportsman and scientific collector: in these qualities lay the essence of the true shikari hunter according to the publication *Big Game Shooting in Africa* (1932). Given such precepts, it was perhaps no surprise that taxidermy emerged as a matter of great importance to Powell-Cotton and his peers. A souvenir of grand portent, the mounted animal harboured a range of meanings that were both intensely personal and eminently translatable as social capital. It was a creature that spoke of something *created* and something *preserved*, all wrapped up in the 'lived experience' of the hunt. Significantly, the importance of taxidermy did not lie only in its final parade, in other words, what happened at the *end* of the game trail. Instead, the material and cultural entanglement between hunter and hunted – the taxidermic encounter – infused all stages of the hunting performance. Even as the 'idea' of a trip took root in the libraries and billiard rooms of England, hunters were pondering the animal body, its acquisition, production and preservation. Writing in the *Journal of the African Society* of his trip to Congo in 1904, Major Powell-Cotton was candid about the guiding remit of his itinerary: 'here my chief quests were the northern white rhinoceros and elephants as near twelve feet in height as possible'. Meanwhile, a burning desire to 'complete the set' often

<sup>7</sup> Percy Powell-Cotton, *In Unknown Africa* (London, 1904), p. v; *The African World*, 10 Oct. 1903, p. 1. For the idea of Powell-Cotton as an 'imperial celebrity' skilfully manipulating media, see Andrew Joynes, 'Performance in the theatre of empire: themes themes from the Powell-Cotton Museum' (unpublished lecture, courtesy of the author); 'Imperial adventurer', *The Field* (clipping, n.d.), pp. 132–6; and *Tracking the Major: Sketches from the Powell-Cotton Museum* (Canterbury, 2016).



enmeshed the big game hunter in a serial affliction to the extent that trips were planned with the ‘gap’ in the trophy room or museum in mind. Even as he finished his first book, *A Sporting Trip through Abyssinia* (1902), Powell-Cotton was anticipating: ‘Before these pages appear in print, I hope to be again on my way to the Dark Continent, to explore some fresh part of its vast extent and add to my collection of its big game.’<sup>8</sup>

In understanding what Patchett calls the ‘beings, practices and places’ attached to taxidermy, it is impossible to ignore the role of the colonial geopolitical framework in providing tools, targets and testimonial validation. Before leaving home, hunters assimilated information on new ‘game paradises’, traded contacts and took heed of advice on topography, trouble spots and best trails from their peers. At once competitive and collaborative, the sporting community eagerly communicated the whats, wheres and hows of safari-ing in a process of knowledge transfer that demonstrated imperial authority through rendition. Hunters were also guided by pragmatic animal-centred questions such as territorial range, seasonal pelts and subsistence habits, as well as political economies in the form of access rights, customs and logistics. A successful trophy-taking mission demanded fulsome use of colonial networks and regional infrastructures (not to mention considerable financial resources), as demonstrated by Jane Camerini’s study of Alfred Russel Wallace in the tropics and Fa Ti Tuan’s survey of British naturalists in China. Powell-Cotton’s 1902–3 East African trip involved a retinue of eighty staff, including headmen, porters and cooks, while his 1,500 mile Abyssinian exploration (1900) utilized local contacts in the shape of Lieutenant Colonel Harrington, the Vice-Consul to Abyssinia, the British Agency and the Italian Garrison at Eritrea, as well as Emperor Menelik. In *A Sporting Trip through Abyssinia*, Powell-Cotton duly wrote up his encounter with the Emperor in Addis Ababa, regaling readers with tales of a lavish banquet and a hunt in which horses and dogs sent as a present by Queen Victoria were put through their paces (all except a fox terrier, who had been adopted by the Empress as a pet and was carried around on a cushion). Notably, the Major’s travelogue also included a series of appendices providing advice on the essential colonial ‘tool kit’ for those wishing to follow in his footsteps, including a comprehensive camp inventory that encompassed firearms, equipment and medical supplies (including quinine and champagne).<sup>9</sup>

The field presented a critical site of interspecies entanglement – the place where the practical mechanics of taxidermic production began. As Garry Marvin points out, most wild animals ‘do not begin to have a recoverable history until their final fatal encounter with humans’.

<sup>8</sup> H. C. Maydon, *Big Game Shooting in Africa* (London, 1932), p. 7; Major P. H. G. Powell-Cotton, ‘Notes on a journey through the Great Ituri Forest’, *Journal of the African Society*, 7/25 (1907), p. 1; Major P. H. G. Powell-Cotton, *A Sporting Trip Through Abyssinia* (London, 1902), p. 443.

<sup>9</sup> Patchett, ‘Tracking tigers’, p. 18; Jane Camerini, ‘Wallace in the field’, *Osiris*, 11 (1996), pp. 44–65; Fa Ti Tuan, *British Naturalists in Qing China* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Powell-Cotton, *A Sporting Trip*, pp. 491–507.

Somewhat usefully for the task of historical reconstruction (what Hayden Lorimer calls a ‘salvage ethnography’), big game hunters often approached the game trail first as lived experience and then as chronicle. Whether scribbled in journals or related in written correspondence, notes from the hunting field chewed over the materiality and the metaphysics of animal encounter, imbuing the process with gravitas as if the written word claimed physical space for imperial science and posterity. Powell-Cotton compiled scrupulous (albeit somewhat stilted) field notes of all his travels – thereby creating a matter-of-fact documentary presence that provided a catalogue of trail co-ordinates, game districts and wildlife movements for the purposes of natural history record. A surviving photograph of the Major in his tent, pen and paper in hand, serves to demonstrate the self-identification of the big game hunter as an authorial and authoritative voice on (and in) imperial geography. This ‘writing up’ of the hunt paid heed to its importance as personal and patriotic narrative and often formed the basis for a published transcription. Evidenced by Powell-Cotton’s two travelogues, *A Sporting Trip through Abyssinia* and *In Unknown Africa* (1904), motifs of animal observation, pursuit and capture figured highly in autobiographical reportage. The Major spoke at length about the situ of various game areas, the habits of specific animals, tracking and shooting endeavours, as well as accounts of the ‘one that got away’ (and, indeed, the ones that did not). Descriptions of his trip to East Africa, for instance, recorded the first shooting of a black rhino, an elephant graveyard seen from Mount Zumat, and the acquisition of a new subspecies of giraffe (later named *cottoni*) at Marangole as well as accounts of Abyssinian ibex, Ruppell’s reedbuck, mantled baboon and Abyssinian wolves, each narrative ‘snap-shots’ that furnished not only a romantic tale of wilderness adventuring (what Powell-Cotton celebrated as the ‘nomad life’) but also promised the possibility of reconstructing animal presence from autobiographical fragments, a task championed by Philip Armstrong in *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (2007) as an exercise in locating ‘the “tracks” left behind by animals in text’.<sup>10</sup>

Expansive and yet intimate, personal and yet translatable, the storied landscape of the imperial hunter provided a vivid and lasting composition for scientific and public digest. As *The Field* noted, should the Major have ‘omitted to keep a journal ... it would have been a distinct loss’. Some hunters also embraced the camera as a pragmatic aide to recording the hunt (with the added attraction of a weaponized vernacular of shooting, loading and aiming). One better, however, was to take home the *actual* animal. Embedded as it was in the physical and metaphysical landscape of

<sup>10</sup> Garry Marvin, ‘Perpetuating polar bears: the cultural life of dead animals’, in Snaebjörnsdóttir and Wilson, *Nanoq*, pp. 156–65, at p. 157; Hayden Lorimer, ‘Herding memories of humans and animals’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24 (2006), pp. 497–518, at p. 515; Powell-Cotton, *A Sporting Trip*, p. 437; Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London, 2007), p. 3.

the chase, the reputation of the big game hunter as explorer and naturalist hinged on the success of his taxidermic endeavour. If journaling provided the ‘story’ of the hunt then the trophy provided material evidence of game capture, a certificate, as hunting writer Aldo Leopold noted, that its owner has ‘been somewhere and done something’. As Powell-Cotton pointed out in the opening chapter of *In Unknown Africa*, the full scientific credibility of Sir Harry Johnson’s recent expedition to East Africa had been severely limited by bringing back a skull and head skins of a five-pointed giraffe and *not* a complete animal. Adopting a critical tone, the Major noted: ‘This seemed hardly a credit to the nation who prides herself on the skill of her explorers and sportsmen, especially as several of the continental museums had recently set up giraffe specimens’. Fired by the zeal of a collector and patriot, Powell-Cotton resolved ‘to do all that in me lay to remedy this state of things’ on his own travels in East Africa in 1902–3.<sup>11</sup>

Bringing ‘em back ‘alive’ (or, at least, for a lifelike reassembly) demanded dutiful attention to detail. For one thing, it mattered *where* the fatal shot was made. As Hornaday pointed out, ‘What is a tiger worth with the top of his head blown off, or a deer with a great hole torn in his side by an explosive bullet?’ Attention to the habits and behaviour of wild animals was also an assumed practice. As Rowland Ward pointed out to his clients, a successful taxidermy mount required a thorough document of the animal in *life* as well as death, ‘so that when the specimen comes to skilled treatment, the naturalness of it may be a feature that enhances its value in every way’. Meanwhile, after the animal had been shot, a full inventory was necessary to preserve its ‘essence’ for reanimation. Armed with a precision that bordered on the forensic, hunters took measurements of physical dimensions and descriptive features including colour and texture, anatomy and environmental setting: all in the cause of perfectly recreating the animal body as specimen piece. Documenting their catches with pathological rigour, they used casts, tracing paper and sketchpads. Here, too, the camera played a useful role of visual record. Powell-Cotton took the task of inventory to an astonishing level of scrutiny, recording the longitude, latitude, size, sex, height, girth and weight of thousands of animals collected, together with measurements of tusks and horn and distinguishing marks. Accordingly, the Major remembered camp life as marked by a few hours’ shooting each day followed by time spent ‘looking after and labelling my trophies, writing up my journal’. With actuarial vigour, skins, skulls and skeletons were all stamped according to his cataloguing system and given personalized labels made from flattened cartridge cases (five labels for a large mammal).

<sup>11</sup> *The Field*, 31 May 1902; Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York, 1966), p. 284; Powell-Cotton, *In Unknown Africa*, p. 2. On camera-hunting and the complex relationship between hunting, firearms and photography, see Karen Jones, ‘Hunting with the camera: photography, animals and the technology of the chase in the Rocky Mountains’, in William Beinart, Karen Middleton and Simon Pooley (eds), *Wild Things: Nature and the Social Imagination* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 24–43, and James Ryan, ‘Hunting with the camera: photography, wildlife and colonialism in Africa’, in Philo and Wilbert (eds), *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places*, pp. 205–22.

This attention to detail highlighted the mentality of the hunter-collector and the sporting conservationist. As Powell-Cotton put it, there was a sharp distinction between ‘a man who carefully preserves the entire skin and skulls of nearly animal he kills, and one who merely shoots for the sake of killing or for securing the longest horn’. Today, this surviving body of evidence allows for the reconstruction of animal life histories, what A. N. Coutu calls the ‘mapping of the footsteps of the elephant’, from documentary and biological data.<sup>12</sup>

Taxidermic immortality also depended on rigorous preservation techniques. Hunters (or, often, their auxiliaries) usually dressed the carcass on site, removing the fat and flesh (which was often used for meat), taking out the entrails and cutting the skin with surgical precision. Giraffe, Powell-Cotton noted, took 2–3 hours to skin in the field, 6 men to carry the hide to the campsite for ‘thinning down’ (another 4–5 hours), before being hoisted on a pole to dry for 3–4 days. Such work required ‘constant supervision’ to check that aides were not ‘shirking their work’ and sometimes necessitated expert intervention. Returning to his camp on the Molo river during a rainstorm, the Major spent all day attempting to rescue badly prepared skins of lion and zebra, ‘trying everything I could think of to save them’. Meanwhile, in *A Sporting Trip through Abyssinia*, the Major provided a comprehensive list of ‘Hints to Sportsmen’ that stressed the importance of personally overseeing every stage of the disassembly process, from recording ‘every detail of its stalk and death’, through field dressing and drying to dispatch. The importance of protecting hides from insect infestation and transit damage was also a salient concern: after all, careful practice here meant the difference between a superior mount and a worthless fragment of munched hide. Powell-Cotton favoured dusting heads with naphthalene before sewing them into cotton sacks for protection, covering hoofs with grass or paper to prevent rubbing and lightly boiling skulls to stave off bacon-beetle. Skins and horn were always packed separately and the latter coated in wax to protect them. Leaving nothing to chance, he engaged in correspondence with Rowland Ward from wherever his camp happened to be, offering inventory and instruction on the biotic cargo under freight. Letters from the White Nile, Congo Free State and Wadelai, Uganda in summer 1905 alerted Ward to an incoming consignment including trophy elephants, one with a particularly ‘beautiful pair of tusks’. Meanwhile, given the sheer quantity of animal capital shipped from Africa and the Indian subcontinent (typically in old sugar or coffee crates) it is remarkable how infrequently problems occurred. When something did go awry, as it did in Mombasa in 1903 where the Major’s shipment of lion hide,

<sup>12</sup> Hornaday, *Taxidermy*, p. 158; James Rowland Ward, *The Sportsman’s Handbook to Practical Collecting, Preserving and Artistically Setting up of Trophies and Specimens* (London, 1891), pp. 87–8; Powell-Cotton, *A Sporting Trip*, p. 245; Powell-Cotton, *In Unknown Africa*, p. 535; Ashley N. Coutu, ‘The elephant in the room: mapping the footsteps of historic elephants with big game hunting collections’, *World Archaeology*, 47/3 (2015), pp. 486–503.

photographic plates and ephemera from the Nile was impounded for three months, the full force of imperial connections were brought to bear on the problem, including the Post-Master General, Walter Rothschild, and Lord Lansdowne. Astonished to find that the seizure had been enforced on the grounds that ‘the description of the contents was not sufficiently full’, Powell-Cotton railed at this ‘passive destruction’ that seemed principally targeted at those explorers who were wont to stray ‘from the beaten track’.<sup>13</sup>

### III

From capture and dismemberment, the animal was transported to the taxidermist’s studio - a necrogeography of reconstruction – where it made its passage to still life. Instructional guides such as *Practical Taxidermy and Home Decoration* advertised the joys of amateur endeavour, but for the imperial animal (which was invariably rare, valuable and large) do-it-yourself taxidermy was scarcely practicable. More customary was to engage the services of a professional taxidermist, to which trophies and exhibit pieces were sent ‘on the hoof’ (a practice especially favoured by those engaged in elongated expeditions such as Powell-Cotton). The bag accrued from an imperial hunting excursion was substantial and required expertise well beyond the capacity of most provincial taxidermists whose usual fare consisted of native birds, small game and fish. Thus, the big game hunting community looked to a number of specialist companies to embalm the spoils of far-flung fields. Peter Spicer & Sons of Leamington Spa (a pioneer in the use of plaster manikins and renowned for their sporting masks), John Gould (who produced ostrich and giraffe for George IV as well as a display of hummingbirds for the 1851 Great Exhibition) and Edward Gerrard & Sons (based in Camden and used by the British Museum and London Zoo) each cultivated reputations for excellence. Standing pre-eminent in the industry, though, was James Rowland Ward. After an apprenticeship in the family business (father Henry Ward established a taxidermy business in 1857), James set up on his own in 1872, trading under various names before being incorporated as Rowland Ward Ltd in 1890. With a factory in north London, shop on Piccadilly – the ‘Jungle’ – and later a branch in Nairobi, Rowland Ward led the field in terms of professional service, commercial production and cultural purchase. His subjects were multifarious – racehorses, circus animals, domestic stock, exotic wildlife and big game trophies – each of which were paraded before an adoring public in newspaper advertisements, public expositions and the infamous window of the

<sup>13</sup> Major P. H. G. Powell-Cotton, ‘Notes on a journey through East Africa and Northern Uganda’, *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 3/12 (1904), pp. 315–24, at p. 317; Powell-Cotton, *In Unknown Africa*, pp. 128, 101, 588–9; Powell-Cotton, *A Sporting Trip*, pp. 503–5, 528–9; 3.1.1/192: Letter from Percy Powell-Cotton to Rowland Ward, 11 June 1905, Box 2: Taxidermy Correspondence (Jan. 1902–Dec. 1907), PCM.

‘Jungle’ (also known after 1891 as the ‘Gallery of Natural History’ and illumined by electricity), which inspired great fanfare (and the odd carriage collision) for what the *Folkestone Express* called its ‘uncanny’ character. In addition to his keen business acumen and candid awareness of the theatrical power of taxidermy, Ward boasted keen scientific credentials (he became a fellow of the Zoological Society of London in 1879) as well as an intimate connection with the big game hunting fraternity through his work as a publisher of sporting literature (including one of Powell-Cotton’s travelogues) as well as the long-running series *Horn Measurements and Weights of the Great Game of the World* (1892). Illustrated by his lavishly illustrated company letterheads complete with elephant, tiger and rhino epigrams, Rowland Ward sported an unrivalled command over imperial geography (even though he never set foot in Africa or India). His taxidermy emporium, meanwhile, became a prime site of taxidermic production, a curiosity shop and a clearing house where private traders, big game hunters, and representatives from public museums and zoological institutions gathered to ponder the animal body from acquisition to exhibition. Somewhat revealingly, when Theodore Roosevelt visited London in 1910 after his safari trip to East Africa, he met with the Prime Minister in the morning and headed to ‘the Jungle’ in the afternoon.<sup>14</sup>

Rowland Ward described himself as a naturalist and an artist. As he explained: ‘I determined to study nature and adapt it, in connection with modelling, to the taxidermists art’. The craft was highly technical, intricate in design and resonant with a certain creative flair. Ward took pride in his ‘school’ of personally trained apprentices who specialized in specific aspects of the trade. And yet, while the modern taxidermist may have appeared as an artisan savant, production methods were irrepressibly modern, a fact clearly illustrated by Pat Morris, who has assembled the most comprehensive history of the taxidermy industry to date. It would be fair to say that Ward’s outfit scarcely rivalled the ‘factory system’ of the Van Ingen brothers in Mysore (which produced some 43,000 leopard and tiger mounts between 1900 and 1998), but here, too, the watchwords were order, organization and the division of labour. Given the amount of material passing through Ward’s workshop at Leighton Place – not to mention the scrutiny of clients such as Percy Powell-Cotton who inspected their specimens with a photographic memory of their countenance and condition – a systemic approach was necessary. Following disinternment from crates and barrels, biotic material was cleaned and catalogued in a process that could only be described as industrial. Speed was of the essence; as Rowland Ward noted to Powell-Cotton, every second the animal was in the workshop it was ‘spoiling all the time’. Procedures

<sup>14</sup> ‘Wild beasts made into furniture’, *Folkestone Express*, 30 Dec. 1899, in *Rowland Ward Scrapbook*, II (1899–1907), Pat Morris Collection; for letterheads and testimonials, see 3.1.1/59: letter from Rowland Ward to P. H. G. Powell-Cotton, 2 Aug. 1899, Box 1: Taxidermy Correspondence (Oct. 1891–Dec. 1901), PCM.



varied according to the product being provided (full mount, head, horns, rug etc.), as well as the nature and condition of the skins. Some were sent to a tannery for softening and larger specimens ‘relaxed’ on site using a tank filled with phenol. Thicker hides, notably rhino and elephant, had to be pared down – a laborious and time-consuming process necessary to avoid the finished product looking uneven. Once fully dried and inspected, taxidermy animals-in-waiting were sent up to the first floor, where the task of artistic reconstruction began. First, a wooden board and metal rods were constructed in lieu of a skeleton and straw or wood was applied to ‘bind up’ the body. The taxidermist then applied clay or plaster, faithfully mimicking anatomical features, musculature and skin folds. With the engineered animal complete – entirely artificial in composition – the skin was placed on top. At that point, the taxidermist turned from mortician into magician: reuniting an animal separated biologically and ecologically and ‘bringing it back to life’. The skin was smoothed, stretched, and the mount delicately stitched together. To complete the reanimation, glass eyes were installed and ‘finishers’ painted eyelids, nostrils and lips. Subtle inflection and minute attention to detail marked an expert piece – the angle of a head, a pricked up ear, the flick of a tail – and meant that a whole mount took several months to complete.<sup>15</sup>

Powell-Cotton’s story throws light on the endeavours of the taxidermy trade from the other side of the fence, highlighting in particular the interaction between customer and practitioner on matters of animal reanimation. As such, his example provides useful insight on the ‘behind the scenes’ practices of the taxidermist (colourfully described by Sam Alberti as somewhere between decomposition and ‘animal recomposition’) as well as offering fulsome elaboration on the animate visions of the hunter-collector. Over the span of nearly half a century, the Major engaged in lengthy correspondence with James Rowland Ward and other members of the company about his animal specimens (private letters contain at least 600 separate communiqués on the subject). Thus, while the academic literature has dwelt at length on the taxidermist as producer of still life, I am keen to see a taxidermic *ménage à trois* at work in which the hunter-collector exerted a keen influence over the pursuit, production and display of commissioned pieces. Animals were the third protagonists in this process – weighing into the equation by virtue of their organic presence (problems of complicity and posthumous agency notwithstanding) as well as by virtue of the operational mandate of biotic realism and working ‘to life’.<sup>16</sup>

The earliest letters between Powell-Cotton and Ward date from the mid-1890s, a time in which the Major was conjuring not only with the

<sup>15</sup> James Rowland Ward, *A Naturalist’s Life Study in the Art of Taxidermy* (London, 1913), pp. x, 38; 3.1.1/792: Letter from Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 20 July 1910, Box 5: Taxidermy Correspondence (July 1909–Dec. 1910), PCM. See also Pat Morris, *Rowland Ward: Taxidermist to the World* (Ascot, 2003) and *Van Ingen and Van Ingen: Artists in Taxidermy* (Ascot, 2006). Thanks also to Pat Morris for access to his private collection of materials on Rowland Ward.

<sup>16</sup> Alberti, *Afterlives*, p. 7.

idea of building a dedicated pavilion for his Indian and Tibetan trophies (which had grown to exceed the carrying capacity of the billiard room and armoury at Quex House) but in posing entire animal mounts in huge glass cases, or dioramas, depicting their natural habitat. Here we find Percy Powell-Cotton, his brother Gerald (who was deputized to oversee the construction of the building while the Major was on one of three hunting trips to Kashmir to secure specimens for the new gallery) and James Rowland Ward pondering practical issues of glass casing, heating and ventilation as well as the ‘look’ of species that would populate the grand scene of the Baltoro Glacier and Himalayan mountain vista under construction. Sporting a personal interest in the life history of each specimen, Powell-Cotton excised a firm grip over the aesthetic he envisaged for his embalmed menagerie, travelling to Ward’s workshop to inspect the work in progress whenever he was in London and supplying caches of crated beasts with detailed notes on how they were to be posed. Upholstered according to his modelling instructions, one finished consignment was sent off to Kent containing:

1 musk deer standing, 1 markhor standing, 1 fox curled up, 1 ovis ammon as if dead, 1 red bear grubbing, 1 ibex grazing, 2 langur monkeys, 1 yak standing, 1 black cat curled up, 1 yak lying down, 1 shapoo standing, 1 thar sitting up, 3 marmot (standing, sitting up, young running), rat sitting up, flying fox flying, 1 flying fox sitting up.

Meanwhile, a letter sent from Ward to Powell-Cotton in December 1898 reminded Powell-Cotton that, if he indeed wanted his wild sheep to be arranged ‘as if eaten by vultures’, then he needed to send on the vultures.<sup>17</sup>

Evidence of the syncretic connection between the hunting field and the taxidermy workshop, Rowland Ward and Powell-Cotton frequently traded intercontinental letters requesting additional animals or ‘spare parts’ which could be used to ‘patch up’ specimens. Accordingly, Ward wrote to Gerald in April 1895 requesting that he dispatch a letter to Percy in Kashmir in order that he secure ‘the skin (entire) with skull and horns – *fit for setting up* – of a wild bull yak, fully grown and adult’. Meanwhile, a letter the next month asked Percy for a replacement wild ass because the original dispatch was missing one of its ears and the other was damaged. If Percy might send on a scalp or head skin, noted Ward, then his staff could ‘make perfect the skin we have’. Sometimes, however, this exchange was less cordial. The case of an ibex mount in 1899 saw the two men lock horns over production values and the finish of the taxidermy animal. When Powell-Cotton opened a box from Rowland Ward to find the animal festooned with striking new horns, he fired off an angry missive. The defects of the original horn had conferred a unique value as a ‘curious’ animal freak along with ‘the difficulty in bagging it’. Equally galling to the Major was the fact that the mount had been tampered with: ‘in order to fit the *wrong* horn to it you had cut the cone off level with the skull,

<sup>17</sup> See 3.1.1/1–106, Box 1, PCM.

knocked a hole in it and built up a false cone of wood and plaster', he railed. Ward dutifully apologized but insisted the superior quality of his company's work. The specimen had been sent to the '*best studio*', where his employees had exercised their expert to judgement to create a 'perfect' head. Aggravated that the professionalism of his enterprise had been called into question, Ward made candid reference to the rigour with which the Major approached his taxidermy-in-the-making: 'With such a mass of instructions given at different times we feel sure you will readily understand that it is quite possible for us to have been guilty of a mistake – which nevertheless we much regret.'<sup>18</sup>

The quest for the 'perfect' taxidermy arrangement engaged the passions of both Powell-Cotton and Rowland Ward, who matched each other well in their meticulous approach to animal inventory and taxidermy design. The process was scrupulous, impassioned and sometimes tense, as illuminated in the dialogue that took place regarding Powell-Cotton's second gallery, the 'African Jungle'. Started in 1909, this ambitious project featured a scene from equatorial Africa, including a treed area from which wandered a giant elephant; a water hole with wallowing hippo; plains populated with rhino, gazelle and other mammals; and a rockwork plateau from which a pair of lions gazed down. A huge logistical undertaking, the gallery involved lowering the floor of the building and knocking a wall down to allow for elephant and giraffe mounts to be manoeuvred into place. Notes, letters and telegrams set out the specific elements of animals to be mounted (all catalogued with Powell-Cotton's index system), while sketches, architectural drawings and even scale models described individual specimens and the way they would 'fit' together in the gallery. Detailed conversations ensued about 'bits' of animal bodies, their appearance, condition and visual aspect. Sometimes the process required a sense of creative furnishing – on one occasion, Ward asked if the Major might dispatch a guinea fowl to be placed inside the mouth of a wild dog, its wings strategically covering a 'bad' piece at the centre of the dog's head – and sometimes the conversation between Ward and Powell-Cotton was somewhat strained – as in the case of a giraffe leg which the Major felt was 'missing' 18 inches of skin and prompted a slightly exasperated letter from Ward asserting the veracity of his furnishing detail. 'Many of these incomplete specimens will look very different when you place them in the positions, and we think you are a little hard on up in regard to the Giraffe', he wrote. Just as the production of taxidermic permanence was intrinsically linked to the hunting field, it equally looked forward to the physical space – the site of exhibition – where Powell-Cotton's specimens would find their final resting place: each necrogeography necessarily entangled in the pursuit of immortality. Running throughout was a sense of choreography and an attention to

<sup>18</sup> 3.1.1/18: Rowland Ward to Gerald Powell-Cotton, 4 April 1895; 3.1.1/21: Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 10 May 1895; 3.1.1/64: Percy Powell-Cotton to Rowland Ward, 6 Oct. 1899; 3.1.1/65: Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 7 Oct. 1899, Box 1, PCM.

biotic realism. To that end, the Major mused over the exact position of a bear climbing down a trunk; the directions in which a feeding group of giraffe were facing; the countenance of a bull elephant ‘trunk up feeling the wind’; and a posed ‘incident’ in which two cheetah grabbed at the throats of a pair of kudu. Achieving a realistic aspect meant attention to aesthetic detail as well as a patina of biological authenticity. Powell-Cotton liked the fact that the cheetah and kudu were from the same ‘hunting ground’ while issuing firm instructions that the bull elephant should be posed sufficiently far from the female elephant to suggest his arrival from a different game trail. The pair, he felt, should still be placed proximate enough to show the height variance between the sexes, an aspect that had not been ‘shown in any other museum’. Another occasion saw the Major cogitating about the ‘look’ of a lion, which he felt was giving nothing more than an ‘impression of blank astonishment at seeing so many antelope’. A month later, following a discussion with Ward himself, Powell-Cotton effused: ‘I think we have solved the difficulty of the lion . . . tried him today with the light thrown into his face, which I think gives him all the fierceness he requires.’<sup>19</sup>

#### IV

Taxidermy appeared in various theatres of display during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its popularity derived from period interests in hunting, science and imperial encounter, and successfully capitalized on by a professional community that, as Larry Borowsky notes, successfully ‘marketed the “life” in wildlife’. From homes and commercial properties to museums and international expositions, the reanimated animals of empire roamed various interior ecologies, each of which paid heed to the vision and energy of the hunter-collector, the acumen of the professional taxidermist; the organic dynamism of the animal body; and shifting cultural ideas about wildlife, science and civic responsibility. Imprinted with the ethics of commemoration and conservation, our final necrogeography – the exhibition room – broadcast a powerful story of trophy, taxonomy and theatrics.<sup>20</sup>

As trophy animals, heads and horn provided material evidence of masculine prowess and imperial authority. *As The Empire* put it, ‘Sport in the British, like hope in the human breast, springs eternal.’ Implicit in the display of hunting spoils was an act of colonial violence legitimated, corroborated and glorified. Corralled behind glass and on walls, the creatures of empire conjured up the glorious exoticism of far-away lands: snarling lion, fine antlered deer and giant buffalo heads playing out the primal drama of the hunt on stately walls. William Bailie-Grohman spoke effusively of the ‘arched corridors . . . lined with trophies of the chase

<sup>19</sup> See 3.1.1/303–500, Box 3: Taxidermy Correspondence (Jan. 1908–July 1909) & Box 4, PCM.

<sup>20</sup> Larry Borowsky, ‘Filling Noah’s Ark: taxidermy, exhibition and conservation in nineteenth-century Colorado’, *Colorado Heritage* (May/June 2010), p. 15.

in the Old and New World', while the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* felt there were 'few finer embellishments ... for a hall or large dining room'. In a performance sense, taxidermy 'acted out' the hunt, allowing hunters (and their peers) metaphorically to journey back to the moment of capture for the purposes of recollection and ratification. Rekindling the events surrounding a successful bag, the victorious sportsman could play 'leading man' and storyteller while at the same time reflecting on his own stalwart achievements. As one writer put it, the commemorative power of taxidermy allowed the 'imprisoned sportsman' to travel 'to the freedom of outdoors'.<sup>21</sup>

Resonant with themes of conquest, challenge and the cornucopia of empire, trophy displays typically focused on size, quantity and 'hard to bag' specimens. Row upon row of mounted horns and a penchant for aesthetic treatments that favoured majestically posed ungulates and fearsome-looking predators told a story of nature 'red in tooth and claw' and the tacit supremacy of the hunter-hero. Powell-Cotton's earliest mounts (displayed today in the atrium of Gallery 2) presented such an array of heads and horn that the taxidermic carrying capacity of the walls seemed under threat. A conundrum, as *The Empire* saw it, was that the British traveller abroad 'never tired of killing, so he is constantly collecting' and that inevitably meant finding new spaces to preserve his quarry. Taxidermy was a compulsive business and a deeply performative one at that. Big game hunter Frederick Selous amassed a trophy haul so large (amounting to more than 500 mammals, including 19 lions) that he had a single-storey building built at his home in Worplesdon specifically to house them. Powell-Cotton did the same with his pavilion, the provenance of which was evident in the title of an inaugural brochure 'A Collection of Sporting Trophies' (1900). Eminently theatrical in scope, these spaces brought the exoticism of the game trail to the domestic interior and presented it for public broadcast. Profligate big game hunter, author and showman Roualeyn Gordon Cumming opened his 30-tonne trophy collection to the public and charged them a shilling to hear his stories on Saturdays at 3 and 8 p.m. Cumming was also among the sporting types displaying his spoils at the Great Exhibition of 1851 (in fact, there were fourteen taxidermists among the exhibitors), prompting marvel from *The Illustrated London News* at the 'immense variety of tusks, antlers, horns, bones, skulls, teeth' on view courtesy of the self-styled 'lion slayer'. As objects of spectacle – combining physical presence with grand staging – taxidermy-as-trophy made a keen impression.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> 'Stuffed Animals', *The Empire*, 2 Oct. 1879, clipping in *Rowland Ward Scrapbook*, I (1872–83), Pat Morris Collection; William Bailie-Grohman, *Fifteen Years Sport and Life in the Hunting Grounds of Western America and British Columbia* (London, 1900), p. 122; *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 24 Feb. 1906, clipping in *Rowland Ward Scrapbook*, II; Rowland Robinson, *Hunting Without a Gun and Other Stories* (New York, 1905), p. 356.

<sup>22</sup> 'Stuffed animals'; 'A collection of sporting trophies' (1900), Powell-Cotton Museum brochures, PCM; 'Mr Gordon Cumming's South African entertainment', *Illustrated London News*, 28 (1856), p. 5.

For many hunters there was little point in having a trophy unless one had taken it personally. Powell-Cotton only allowed mounts in his collection that he (or his wife and daughters) had shot. At the same time, however, interests in natural history, the fruits of empire and consumer fashion conspired to see taxidermy pieces colonize various locales in ‘the great indoors’. Manifested in antler racks, rugs and, most strikingly, Rowland Ward’s zoomorphic furnishings, animals of empire crept steadily into domestic space. With a certain matter-of-fact flamboyance, Ward noted, ‘Elephants do not at first glance seem to lend themselves as articles for household decoration, and yet I have found them most adaptable for that purpose.’ This taxidermy for the home display market attested to broader affectations for imperial exoticism and the possibility of purchasing class mobility via the display of elite hunting paraphernalia. Traditional game trophies were available to the armchair explorer along with incarnations of ‘grotesque wildness’ in the form of monkey, eagle and leopard ‘zoological lamps’ and other fusions of wilderness chic and modern appliance. Thus, while Bailie-Grohman thought his mounts communicated a sense of ‘stately exclusiveness’, for others the taxidermy performance was one of experience by consumption, borrowing imperial experience without the danger of mauling. Meanwhile, for avid hunter-collectors such as Powell-Cotton, this *prêt-à-porter* trade provided a good opportunity to dispose of unwanted skins and horn and thereby finance further hunting expeditions (after all, collecting trips were costly, the Major spent £4,200 on his 1902–3 East African jaunt lasting twenty-one months). Again, Rowland Ward proved a critical agent in this story – buying unwanted animal capital from suppliers and furnishing it for resale. Trade was buoyant – a letter to Ward in March 1895 offered for sale six black bears, two red bear, five snow leopard, kyang, goral and various other skins and skulls, all with suggested prices and the accompanying note ‘any offer considered’.<sup>23</sup>

If trophy represented a critical theme in the pageant of taxidermy then taxonomy was its equivalent. Here the principal site for exhibition was not the trophy room but the museum, a modern ‘cathedral of nature’ that focused on the collection, classification and preservation of taxidermy animals for the purposes of scientific study and public education. Lord Walter Rothschild’s private museum at Tring, Hertfordshire, opened to the public in 1892 and gifted to the Natural History Museum in 1937, provided both what David Livingstone calls ‘a map of its curators’ claim to knowledge’ and a tour of taxonomic classification across several galleries. For the sporting conservationist in particular, the advancement of scientific knowledge became a key driver of hunting, collection and display (not to mention a performative way of distinguishing oneself from

<sup>23</sup> Ward quoted at ‘Top Hat Taxidermy’, <http://www.tophattaxidermy.com/archive/rowland-ward-taxidermist.htm> [accessed 12 Aug. 2016]. See Advertisements & Clippings, Rowland Ward Scrapbook, vol.1; 3.1.1/165: Bailie-Grohman, *Fifteen Years Sport and Life*, p. 122; 3.1.1/175: Letter from Percy Powell-Cotton to Rowland Ward, 19 May 1904, Box 2, PCM.



‘trigger-happy’ hunters bereft of ethical codes). Such precepts became increasingly important in the taxidermy vernacular of the late 1800s and early 1900s as so-called ‘penitent butchers’ became active ambassadors in an emerging conservation movement that campaigned for the institution of protective game laws and dedicated reserves for endangered species. According to *Big Game Shooting in Africa*, the first inclination of the imperial hunter had been to shoot everything and seek out danger around every tree, but a mature perspective meant killing fairly and sparingly, delighting in seeing animals regardless of the bag, and donating specimens to scientific institutions for permanent display. The Society for the Preservation of the Rare Fauna of the Empire (1903) expressed the mantra of the ethical hunter-hero when it issued a clarion call for the gathering of information on disappearing species, the promotion of ‘sound public opinion’ on wildlife conservation, and the establishment of game laws and reserves. The closing pages of *In Unknown Africa*, meanwhile, talked about game reserves for ‘all different species of big game’ and particularly the ‘practical spirit’ needed in selecting, policing and funding these areas. Notably, it pointed out, those ‘who brought back museum specimens, or collected information about the game’ might be excused export duties. Powell-Cotton, of course, openly declared the search for specimen animals as an objective of his expeditions. In 1904, he travelled to the Congo with the specific aim of bringing back a whole okapi (one had reached Europe in 1901, but wasn’t complete). Enlisting the aid of Agukki, a local man known for his okapi-hunting expertise, he tracked relentlessly through the Ituri Forest in search of this animal. Powell-Cotton himself never set eyes on a live okapi, but his guides did catch two specimens, one of which the Major worked on ‘nearly all night’ to preserve its skin for transit home to posterity. The arrival of the striking herbivore prompted report in the *Illustrated London News*, and, when mounted by Ward and placed in the Natural History Museum, was praised by resident zoologist Richard Lydekker as ‘not only the first male specimen the museum has received, but the best-okapi-skin ... that has been brought to this country’. Reflecting on his collecting endeavours in *Unknown Africa*, Powell-Cotton defined his ethos as (forgive the pun) two-pronged: to secure the ‘largest horns’ and ‘improve the national zoological collection’.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Maydon, *Big Game Shooting*, p. 7; Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place*, p. 33; Powell-Cotton, *In Unknown Africa*, pp. 535–6; *The Times*, 26 Sept. 1906; *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire*, IV (London, 1908), p. 3; R. Lydekker, D. Freshfield, R. B. Woosnam, Mr Wollaston and Major Percy Powell-Cotton, ‘A journey through the eastern portion of the Congo state: discussion’, *Geographical Journal*, 30/4 (1907), pp. 371–82, at pp. 379, 382; Powell-Cotton, *In Unknown Africa*, pp. 22, 27. For the evolution of natural history museums, see: Stephen Asma, *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads: The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums* (Oxford, 2001); Karen Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas: Illusions of Wilderness in Museums of Natural History* (Uppsala, 1993); Stephen Quinn, *Windows on Nature: The Great Habitat Dioramas of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 2006); S. Tunnicliffe and A. Scheerso (eds), *Natural History Dioramas: History, Construction and Educational Role* (Dordrecht, 2015), pp. 2–78.

The attraction of *naming* rare specimens added a further element to taxidermy-as-taxonomy. While the rubrics of zoological catalogue encouraged what Rachel Poliquin calls a ‘democratic sameness’ among museum specimens, the dual accolade of ‘owning’ an animal’s name and its skin injected a sense of the personal into the equation. What could be better for the scientific hunter-collector than achieving immortality courtesy of zoological classification? With more than 1,000 animals, plants, birds and insects being ‘discovered’ each year in the late 1800s, the race for title was frenetic. Powell-Cotton and Selous locked horns over claims over subspecies of topi in 1912 – the first round of which was won by Selous, having shot a specimen a few months ahead, but the Major found his own variant soon after (along with eighteen other specimens from giraffe to rhino which now bear the *cottoni* tag). Finding a new species demonstrated firm scientific credentials and lent the animal body considerable import as social capital. Significantly, in this area of taxonomic trading, Rowland Ward also played a critical role – not just as producer of specimens that ‘proved’ the case for classification but arbitrating on issues of categorization and facilitating discourse between hunter naturalists, private collectors and zoological professionals. Correspondence with Powell-Cotton in 1908 found Ward passing on the news that Lydekker was happy to categorize a Sudanese white rhino as suitable for a *cottoni* classification as long as it was lodged in the national collection. Initially frustrated by Lydekker’s insistence that the museum had no funds to pay for the specimen, the Major duly donated two rhinos on condition they bore his name.<sup>25</sup>

Evidence of what Stephen Asma has called ‘the moral power of good taxidermy’, the idea that reanimated animals could serve as ambassadors for vanishing species also presented a new narrative track for the museum display. Here the taxidermy exhibit communicated a consciously conservationist vision: the deployment of animal specimens as embalmed envoys for their endangered wild kin. William Hornaday’s bison exhibit, unveiled at the opening of the Hall of Mammals at the National Museum, Washington, DC in 1888, was expressly designed to draw attention to the plight of wild bison on the western plains. Such embedded purpose added a new layer to the complex dermatology of the taxidermy mount as well as further complicating a singular reading of animal agency in life and in death. This emerging conservationist rationale proved a feature of both public institutions and those private collections that badged themselves as scientific institutions or galleries of natural history. Powell-Cotton’s Museum presented a striking example of a collection that outgrew its genesis as a repository of trophies to embrace modern goals of science communication – presenting the representative species of empire for the purposes of education, erudition and posterity. In his book *In Unknown Africa*, the Major had reflected on the role of such sites as places of great

<sup>25</sup> Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, pp. 111–40; 3.1.1/314: Letter from Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 27 Jan. 1908, Box 3, PCM.

providence: 'one day, when it is too late, it will be found that a species belonging to some special district has been extinguished and it will be then realised that the only specimens extant are in some museum'.<sup>26</sup>

Built over several decades and opened to the public from the early 1920s (Thursday and Saturday afternoons from June to September and Thursdays only from October until May), Powell-Cotton's conservationist necrogeography suspended in frozen animation the fruits of his extended expeditions in Africa and the Indian subcontinent across three galleries. From early experimentation with the Baltoro Glacier (1895) and the equatorial jungle and east African plains (1908), he presided over the creation of an expansive third installation, the steelwork for which was erected in 1927 and the glazing installed in 1939, to present a 'window on nature' on an African watering hole and savannah, a floor-to-ceiling tree full of primates, and a nocturnal scene from Madya Pradesh. A testament to his attention to preservation in the field, most of these specimens had been in crates for nearly half a century before they were resurrected in 'the great indoors'. Particularly instructive was the way in which Powell-Cotton's taxidermic menagerie was presented. Designed to showcase rare and representative game species in their natural settings, the exhibits were arranged as dioramas – habitat groups in which animals were placed in ecological context: grazing, pouncing and climbing over carefully recreated grassland, rocks and trees, before an intricately painted backdrop suggestive of space and sky. In this, the collection set itself apart from the ordered taxonomy of Rothschild's museum and the Natural History Museum in Kensington. One source claims that Powell-Cotton volunteered his specimens first to the latter institution but decided to set up his own Himalayan case when museum staff refused to adhere to his wishes on how the animals were to be displayed. Today, the Baltoro Glacier diorama represents the oldest intact wildlife diorama anywhere in the world, predating assumed leaders in the field (notably the Hall of African Mammals in the American Museum of Natural History, opened in 1936) by several decades. Meanwhile, a glance at the second and third galleries keenly illuminates how Powell-Cotton's aspirations for biotic realism matured, reflecting emergent ideas about ecological science in the interwar period, the expertise of practitioners and the deployment of modern engineering techniques. Here the animal life observed so closely in the Major's journal was strikingly preserved behind floor-to-ceiling glass designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. A presentation of this calibre required, in the estimation of Rowland Ward, 'endless thought and labour' and Powell-Cotton drew on a wide-range of artisan craftsmen (or 'set-designers') to implement his grand vision, from the artist who painstakingly created the painted horizon to the builders, plasterers and

<sup>26</sup> Asma, *Stuffed Animals*, p. 43; Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place*, p. 33; Powell-Cotton, *In Unknown Africa*, p. 535. See also Hanna Rose Shell, 'Skin deep: taxidermy, embodiment and extinction in W. T. Hornaday's Buffalo Group', *Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences* 55, Supplement, 1/5 (2004), pp. 88–112.

glaziers who feature in his correspondence. Another key aspect of these galleries was their emphasis on the biological and aesthetic intricacies of inter-species relationships. The interplay between individual specimens – predator and prey, companion species, family groups – together with the ‘feel’ of the landscapes they inhabited – from tiny leaves fixed to tree branches and the inclusion of small insects and even hoof prints – paid heed to the assembled natural history knowledge of twenty-six years in the field and developing ideas about ecological science. Hence, by tracing Powell-Cotton’s taxidermy collections from pursuit to performance, we see not only the autobiographical landscape of the hunter-collector but also evolving conservation philosophy and practice.<sup>27</sup>

Designed to offer what taxidermist Carl Akeley called ‘a peephole on the jungle’, Powell-Cotton’s reanimated menagerie inspired plaudits from various quarters. *The Field* hailed it as not only a ‘mecca of all sportsmen’ but ‘the centre of serious study by zoologists’, while several museums sought out the Major’s professional expertise (as well as his animal capital) in their own efforts to establish collections. Ratification from the professional scientific community was all-important to the hunter-collector, a fact eagerly demonstrated by the visit of Professor Matschie to the Museum in 1910 and his critical comments on rhino, elephant and hippo specimens. Powell-Cotton duly responded by sending his artist to London Zoo to sketch ‘life drawings’ of those species and railed off a stern missive to Rowland Ward (who firmly asserted the accuracy of his work in relation to ‘living wild specimens’). Perhaps the greatest judge of all, Ward himself deemed the collection ‘one of the largest and most complete in any sportsman’s hands in Europe’, notable for its whole specimens as well as species ‘discovered and named in ... honour’ of the Major. He came to inspect the galleries for himself in May 1911 on the back of the Major’s invitation to visit the ‘African Jungle’ in East Kent, leaving behind a ten-point critique that complained that the varnish on the hippo’s head made it too shiny; suggested that lighting be made less intense over the lions; recommended the addition of strategically placed reeds and butterflies; and agreed that the rhino mount was not ‘up to the mark’. That aside, Powell-Cotton’s pageant was judged ‘a creditable performance’.<sup>28</sup>

Of particular significance was the fact that Powell-Cotton’s museum gave ordinary people a chance to experience an intimate view of the imperial safari, in the words of the ‘Guide to the Big Game and

<sup>27</sup> See Derek Howlett, ‘Powell-Cotton’s museum: the history and care of its unique collections’ (1991), Powell-Cotton file, Pat Morris Collection; Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, p. 82; See Box 4, PCM, especially the exchanges between Powell-Cotton and artist T. Bryant Brown as well as the Director of Kew Gardens.

<sup>28</sup> Akeley quoted in Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas*, p. 125; *The Field*, 20 July 1940; 3.1.1/781: Letter from Percy Powell-Cotton to Rowland Ward, 25 Jan. 1910, Box 4, PCM; 3.1.1/782: Letter from Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 29 June 1910, Box 4, PCM; 3.1.1/602: Letter from Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 21 Sept. 1909, Box 4, PCM; 3.1.1/792: Letter from Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 20 July 1910, Box 4, PCM; 3.1.1/391: Letter from Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 9 March 1909, Box 3, PCM; 3.1.1/838: ‘Museum suggestions and criticisms by Mr Rowland Ward’, 20 May 1911, Box 4, PCM.

Curios in the Quex Museum, Birchington' (1920) 'animals set in natural surroundings to show as closely as possible the scenes in which the hunter saw them'. This conferred on our last site of necrogeography a fiercely important role in science communication and a definitively public-facing one. Creating a sense of 'life and action', the taxidermy diorama channelled a sense of scientific spectacle – or choreographed conservation – that arguably rendered it a more 'authentic' view of wild animals than contemporary zoos. David Livingstone describes the natural history museum (what he calls a 'cabinet of accumulation') as a 'synthetic space', but Powell-Cotton's take was rather different. Placed carefully and deliberately in motion, his animals were displayed up close and personal, thoroughly three-dimensional and exhibiting typical behaviours and physical characteristics. If the hunter held command in the field, and the taxidermist in the workshop, it was here, in the exhibition room, that the organic power of animal capital came into its own, where the 'tracks' of the material animal were evident. As Rachel Poliquin points out, taxidermy exudes a 'sheer raw animal presence' and it was this sense of unmediated encounter that captivated visitors most. Hunter and taxidermist set the stage and the storyline, but the essence of the diorama illustration was one of reproduction – placing the animal *as in life*. This governing mantra of biotic realism proved, in the words of animal studies scholars Philo and Wilbert, that, as much as we 'create' our animals they cannot be reduced to 'passive surfaces onto which human groups inscribe imaginings and orderings'.<sup>29</sup>

For big game hunter C. G. Schillings, there was supreme pleasure to be had in touring 'the museums of various places at home' and reliving his travel exploits, an act of mutual displacement for both hunter and hunted in which were 'awakened to life the wild creatures ... formerly observed and laid low in far off lands'. For many visitors, meanwhile, this was typically their *first* encounter with the assembled beasts of empire. Curator George Pinfold remembered how the monkey tree was 'admired by all visitors' while another of Powell-Cotton's specimens, sent to the Royal Scottish Museum and seen by several thousand people, gave 'immense satisfaction and ... caused quite a sensation'. Attendance records for 1927–9 show not only that Powell-Cotton and his staff were keen to know how many people made the trip to East Kent to see his collection but also provide fragmentary evidence of its popularity. Across these two years, some 2,221 adults visited the dioramas, along with 857 children and 1,140 group attendees. Numbers were higher when the weather was good, apparently. Many of these visitors will have been holidaymakers who took the steamer to Margate and an open-top double-decker bus on to Birchington. An illustration of the importance of the seaside tourist market, Pinfold went to hotels in the town to show postcards of the

<sup>29</sup> 'Guide to the big game and curios in the Quex Museum, Birchington' (1920), Powell-Cotton file, Pat Morris Collection; Poliquin, *Breathless Zoo*, p. 105; Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place*, pp. 29–30; Philo and Wilbert, *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places*, p. 5.

Museum. Coastal amusements, of course, included their fair share of live animal attractions, notably circus owner ‘Lord’ George Sanger’s Hall-by-the-Sea (1874) that had reopened as Dreamland (1920), complete with Coney Island-style sideshows and Scenic Railway Rollercoaster. Those who left the frivolities of Margate to journey the few miles inland to the Quex estate encountered a new world of exoticism and spectacle. Instead of the performing sea lions and dancing bears that seemed somewhat displaced in seaside tents and cages, the wild beasts of Powell-Cotton’s ‘great indoors’ connected visitors to a series of far-flung environments in which a diverse contingent of reanimated animals were located in their natural environments. Prowling beasts displayed across three galleries offered a hint of the theatrical freakery found at the Margate showground, along with a dose of scientific detail and a definite sense of *place*. Examples of the *cottoni* brand and the largest elephant taken out of Africa at the time (which safely made it along the Old Kent Road despite the fact that Powell-Cotton’s man lost his paper with the heights of bridges on) enthralled the public with taxonomy, while the ‘fight between a lion and a semliki buffalo’ (along with Percy’s mauled jacket and copy of *Punch*) distilled the primordial essence of the imperial trophy hunt. With a keen attention to staging that was both biologically credible and posed for the spectator’s gaze, lions were screened from view as to not seem ‘ridiculously close to the passing antelope’ while at the same time allowing the visitor to spy them from the gallery. A colourful procession of natural history and novelty, Powell-Cotton’s Museum provided a mesmerizing array of biotic colour and ecological animation: altogether a formative encounter with wildlife in a pre-Attenborough age. For the price of a penny and a half (or 3 shillings for the 24-piece set), visitors could even take home their own set of postcard scenes and reassemble the ‘African Jungle’ on their mantelpiece.<sup>30</sup>

## V

Taxidermy was, according to William Hornaday, an expert fusion of manufacture and animality with a power all its own. As he eloquently put it: ‘Perhaps you think that a wild animal has no soul, but let me tell you it has. Its skin is its soul, and when mounted by skilful hands, it becomes comparatively immortal.’ Embalmed and entombed for posterity, taxidermy mounts offered a vivid and dramatic take on the

<sup>30</sup> C. G. Schillings, *In Wildest Africa* (London, 1907), I, p. viii; Ward, *Naturalist’s Life Study*, pp. 41–4; Postcards of the Powell-Cotton Museum, Powell-Cotton file, Pat Morris Collection; 3.1.1/643: Letter from Percy Powell-Cotton to Rowland Ward, 20 Oct. 1909, Box 4, PCM; 3.1.2/4: Letter from G. Pinfold to Percy Powell-Cotton, 20 Sept. 1921, Box 9; Percy Powell-Cotton Correspondence to G. F. Pinfold, PCM; 3.1.2/24: Letter from G. F. Pinfold to Percy Powell-Cotton, 21 March 1929, Box 9, PCM; 3.1.2/1: Letter from G. F. Pinfold to Percy Powell-Cotton, 4 May 1921, Box 9, PCM; 3.1.2/11: letter from G. F. Pinfold to Percy Powell-Cotton, 9 Sept. 1925, Box 9, PCM; 3.1.1/259: Letter from Rowland Ward to Percy Powell-Cotton, 5 July 1907, Box 2, PCM; 3.1.2/24: Letter from G. Pinfold to Percy Powell-Cotton, 21 March 1929, Box 9, PCM.



visual rendition of empire. Exotic species were conquered, transported and reassembled in ‘the great indoors’ as part of a transnational trade in animal capital that paid heed to the interconnected frontiers of empire, science, hunting and collection. Head and horn told of the lived experience of the game trail and its codes of imperial swagger, as well as contemporary affectations for natural history, consumer culture and civic display. As trophy, taxidermy ‘spoke’ of faunal abundance, the power of the hunter hero and the exotic delight of adventuring in colonial realms. And, when curated with a conservationist gaze, it imparted the values of philanthropy, taxonomy and public education: memorialized for the purposes of museum catalogue and science communication. Those complicit in this story of pursuit, production and display were various – hunter-collectors such as Powell-Cotton, professionals led by Rowland Ward; and, lastly, the animals themselves, who brought materiality to the immortal vision of the exhibit room.<sup>31</sup>

A century on, one might well ask what exactly did the taxidermy animal preserve? An organic remnant of skin, horn and DNA? An antiquated (even troubling) artefact depicting power over nature and nation? An esoteric relic, somewhat moth-eaten in its dotage? Whereas *The Observer* ran an article in 1921 proudly reporting ‘Taxidermy: Rare Skins that Come to London: A British Art’, by the latter years of the century taxidermy was commonly derided as antiquarian, whimsical or morally deplorable (the Natural History Museum famously consigned many of its historic specimens to the bonfire in the 1970s). What this article has illustrated, however, is the meaningful recoverable history entombed within snarling mouths and striped skins. This was the trick in the tiger’s tail and one that explains its continuing significance. Across intricately and necessarily connected necrogeographies – the field, the workshop and the exhibition – sites joined first by the animal body and second by the desire to preserve its story, animals and humans were entangled in a grand and dramatic story of shifting inter-species relations. By exploring the archival and artefactual record of surviving collections such as Powell-Cotton’s, we uncover a rich cultural ecology for excavation: the world of imperial expansion and science in its all its triumphs, traumas and tensions. Trailing this story of human–animal encounter across various sites of memory inevitably privileges the gaze of the hunter-autobiographer but, at the same time, acknowledges the importance of non-human actors as mute (yet figuratively vocal) witnesses to the colonial story. Thus, when Garry Marvin asks ‘How do we encounter and experience – live with – such animals and how do such dead animals live with us?’ we might well point to the value of a historical approach in unstitching the provenance and performance of taxidermy.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> William Hornaday, ‘The passing of the buffalo’, *Cosmopolitan*, 4/2 (1887), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Observer*, 27 March 1927; Marvin, ‘Perpetuating polar bears’, p. 157.