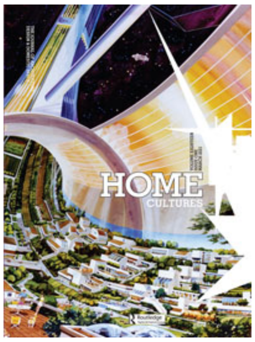

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# Fantastic Beasts in The Great Indoors: Taxidermy, Animal Capital and the Domestic Interior in Britain, 1851–1921

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## KAREN R. JONES

# FANTASTIC BEASTS IN THE GREAT INDOORS: TAXIDERMY, ANIMAL CAPITAL AND THE DOMESTIC INTERIOR IN BRITAIN, 1851–1921

PROFESSOR KAREN R. JONES IS A SPECIALIST IN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AND ANIMAL STUDIES. HER BOOKS INCLUDE *WOLF MOUNTAINS: A HISTORY OF WOLVES ALONG THE GREAT DIVIDE* (2002)—A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE BIOLOGY, MYTHOLOGY AND CULTURE SURROUNDING WOLVES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN THE ROCKIES—AND *THE INVENTION OF THE PARK* (2005), A SURVEY OF THE PARK IDEA FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO BRITISH LANDSCAPE PARKS AND BEYOND. SHE HAS PUBLISHED MORE RECENTLY ON HUNTING CULTURES ON THE US FRONTIER—*EPIPHANY IN THE WILDERNESS: HUNTING, NATURE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN WEST* (2015) AND ON GENDER CODES AND BUCKSKIN CELEBRITY IN *CALAMITY: THE MANY LIVES OF CALAMITY JANE* (2020). HER CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS INCLUDE HUNTING, TAXIDERMY AND THE INTERIOR ECOLOGIES OF ANIMAL DISPLAY AND CITY PARKS: HISTORIES OF HEALTH, SPACE, AND WELLBEING IN THE URBAN METABOLIC LANDSCAPE.
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**ABSTRACT** This article explores taxidermy as an interesting example of human-animal relations through a study of its incorporation into the later nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic interior. Occupying a liminal space that speaks to life and to death, often posed within an operational aesthetic of wildness, yet firmly captured in domestic confines, taxidermy offers valuable insight into how the geography of home depicted the dynamics of empire, gender and consumption, as well as cogitating on the animal as a scientific

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**and artistic presence. Usefully building on John Berger's contention that urban industrialism encouraged both the disappearance and the multiplication of animals in human life, this study highlights the way in which a decorative paradox of dead wild things found a place in the British home in the form of naturalist mounts, hunting trophies and other consumer items. Approached as engineered artefacts of animal capital, the fantastic beasts of "the great indoors" exemplify the convoluted (and often contradictory) relations between humans and other species in the modern world.**

KEYWORDS: taxidermy, home, hunting, animals, nature

A cartoon in the *Daily Mirror* from March 1927 entitled "stuffed animals in the house" pictured several well-to-do characters with taxidermy critters in their possession. Montages included a portly lord who "shot a pheasant once"; an elegant lady with a brightly-coloured bird on a mantlepiece; a woman-in-mourning for her stuffed pug; one gentleman placing his cane into an elephant leg stand; and another in front of a bear whose belly had been fashioned into a cupboard. The final image showed a wall of trophies, with attached quip: "The chief repository for stuffed heads, of course, is a club—presumably presented by members who can't bear them at home any longer!" Drawn by tabloid inksmith William Haselden, this satirical vignette took a stab at the fad for taxidermy that had been wildly popular in Victorian and Edwardian society. What had been the height of fashion—birds of paradise atop sideboards, trophies on walls and beastly candelabra on dining tables—was unceremoniously lampooned as eccentric artefacts of a bygone age (Haselden 1927).

Such sentiments will resonate with a twenty-first century audience that typically regards taxidermy as freakish relic or symbol of anthropogenic atrocity. Indeed, by the time Haselden was sketching, the industrial violence of WW1, the contours of modernism and an emerging conservation movement sporting an ethical advocacy for wildlife, signalled the beginnings of a retreat from popular devotion to the form. In this article, however, I return to the years of taxidermy mania—identified here as spanning the years from the Great Exhibition (1851) to the Plumage Bill (1921)—to explore the ways in which an assemblage of dead creatures great and small reveals much about the eco-cultural dialectics of domestic space. What Haselden wrote off as outdated and objectionable, I instead approach as important carriers through which we can better understand our complicated interactions with wild spaces (and wild things) in the most intimate of everyday environments. To explore the cultural imprint of taxidermy in the home, I use the methodologies of environmental and cultural history—of material and imaginative engagement with the natural world—to view the animal as a physical agent (skin, fur and feather) and a manufactured artefact of desire through which the refractions of cultural life can be finely observed. As Rachel Poliquin notes, the stuffed critter presents a curious hybrid of animal and object (2012: 6), and this, I argue, encapsulates the essence of its appeal in the Victorian and Edwardian home. Stitched into the fabric of the taxidermy mount was an enticing decorative paradox; a flesh and blood world of organic colour, motion and capture, as well as an expansive landscape of ideas that incorporated science and storytelling; period fascination with death and memorialisation; cults of nature study and hunting; and conspicuous consumerism. As such, the engineered beasts of the "great indoors" served as mute yet hugely communicative witnesses with an extraordinary capacity to speak to the preoccupations of the age. Significantly, the fact that taxidermy animals populated an array of environments from middle-class townhouses to grand country houses, attested to their value as pieces of organic currency that reflected changing perceptions on the aesthetics of good taste and aspirations for cultural mobility.

In his study of polar bear taxidermy in zoos and nature museums, anthropologist Garry Marvin opens with a critical question: "How do we encounter and experience—live with—such animals and how do such dead animals live with us?" (2006: 157). This enquiry seems especially important when considering the predominant habitat of human living: the home. Importantly, while taxidermy has received considerable scrutiny as an object of museum exhibition and imperial performance (Mackenzie 1988; Wonders 1993; O'Key 2021), comparatively little has been written about the domestic taxidermy creature and its intersection with home life. In this article, I explore the story of how fantastic beasts populated the British interior to reveal the complex dynamics attached to household space and its relationship to various environments beyond. Through a series of explorations into how stuffed animals were crafted, choreographed and consumed in the 1851–1921 period, the geography of home served as a vital point of engagement with what is here labelled the "wildly domestic." Significantly, the how, why and where of taxidermy placement said a great deal about the paradoxical entanglements between human and non-human bodies, as well as signalling the importance of the home as a critical locus of gender identity, cultural belonging and spatial transaction. On these questions, I borrow from the work of Susan Stewart and Tim Ingold in seeing the ways in which "things" elucidate on particular spaces and those moving in them, as well as literature on the cultural fabrication of public and private interiors from Deborah Cohen and Jane Hamlett

(Stewart 1993; Cohen 2006; Hamlett 2006; Ingold 2010). Emphasis in the historiography on taxidermy has also focused on representation (Marvin 2006; Poliquin 2012; Aloi 2018) and I look here at how animal specimens filled the domestic interior to fulfill discreet cultural functions. At the same time, however, it remains important to acknowledge the ecological pawprint of these networked biological entities: the "wildly" part in the domestic equation, fragments of animal capital captured in perpetual animation. As Merle Patchett and Sam Alberti note, a "tangle of beings, processes and places" lurk beneath snarling fangs and glass eyes (Patchett 2008: 18; Alberti 2011: 3–4). Despite all the upholstered stylings, taxidermy was *still* animal. Not only did a sense of innate wildness remain intrinsic to its appeal, but the critterly magnetism of the dead mount suggested a kind of spectral agency embedded in fur and feather.

The practice of taxidermic excavation, equally, demands an attention to the similarities *and* the differences in how we apprehend these specimens compared to those who displayed them more than a century ago. With an eye, then, to cultural, ecological and historical frames of reference, what follows is a tour through the world of home taxidermy that views household space as one of a series of "necro-geographies" bound together by the capture, production and staging of the animal body (Kniffen 1967). This focus is important, not least because academic writing on space, change and movement (what Nigel Thrift calls a "geography of what happens") has tended to favour exterior environments (2007: 2). Here, I bring such themes "inside" to highlight the way taxidermy played out the collisions of self, thing and place in the most familiar of locations. From hunting trophies to anthropomorphic dioramas, the object-beings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries invited fierce renegotiations of the species binary at the hearthside to create a lively landscape of decorative paradox. Home was fundamentally changed by the presence of the animal, just as the animal was changed by its re-homing in the "great indoors."

## BEASTLY PRESENCE AT THE GREAT EXHIBITION: TAXIDERMIC MIGRATIONS FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE SPACE

Substantiating John Berger's contentions about the obsolescence and the omnipresence of animals in the industrial age, non-human presence was embedded in the Victorian and Edwardian public environment. Simultaneously exterminated and exhibited, dead critters inhabited department stores, museums and municipal buildings to incite a particular kind of spectatorship by their creaturely charisma (Berger 1980). Especially prominent in this landscape of animal display was taxidermy, a process by which species were mounted and stuffed for the purposes of preservation, study and exhibition. Boasting a linguistic taxonomy that combined the Greek words for arrangement—taxis—and skin—derma, along with a decorative appeal that was equal parts scientific and artistic, the practice became hugely popular in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The public visibility of taxidermy said much about the performance space of the city as well as the geopolitics of global exploration and its civic, scientific and philanthropic appropriation of natural capital. The chronological beginning of this study—1851—is a significant one, the year of the Great Exhibition, an event routinely invoked as a bellweather of Victorian cultural confidence, economic productivity and consumerist theatrics, and one which hoisted taxidermy as an important artefact of the age. Crystal Palace featured an array of specimens, from home-grown articles such as John Hancock's "Struggle with the Quarry" set-piece featuring a hawk attacking a heron, in whose beak could be seen a recently fished eel, to more exotic beasts such as the magnificent elephant bedecked with a golden howdah on the Indian Court stand. Among the biggest draws was a whimsical diorama crafted by Stuttgart-based Hermann Ploucquet which featured tea-supping kittens, mourning cats and courting frogs in anthropomorphic guise. *Tallis' History and Description of the Crystal Palace* (1854) described the "Comical Creatures" as "the most popular group of objects" (Beard 1854: 114), while the *Morning Chronicle* applauded their "charming truth and spirit of expression" (Morning Chronicle, 1851b).

Indulging in what visual anthropologist Laura Mulvey (1975) labels scopohilia (the love of looking), the 6-million attendees to the Great Exhibition conspired in a cultural moment that invited a transactional kind of object worship. Much has been written about how the grand amphitheatre of glass gloried in a manufactured culture of progress. Most pertinent for this article, however, was the way in which the Crystal Palace served as the nation's living room: a collective space where items on display were sprinkled with gilded provenance and transformed into 'things" of homely desire. Taxidermy had been on show before (for instance in small museums and freak exhibits), but never had the British public been treated to such a variety of reanimated animals under one roof. Nor had stuffed critters been given such patriotic, scientific and decorative kudos. To the *Morning Chronicle*, this augured the moment when taxidermy—as art and a science—became "respectable and interesting" (Morning Chronicle, 1851a). This ratification was important, not least because of the way in which spectatorship segued seamlessly into home consumption. As Thomas Richards has noted, the Great Exhibition represented both "museum and a market" (1990: 19) and one in which product, national pride and spectacle were conjoined to invite a migration of goods from public to private spaces. Sometimes, the connection between looking and buying was direct—such as the furriers who advertised their sartorial wares with full-size specimens of the animals from which they derived. Queen

Victoria, reputedly, was so impressed with the charismatic beasts on the Nicholay of Oxford Street stand that she ordered fur-coats for her and Albert. At other times, meanwhile, the process was more abstract, the public installation of taxidermy as a scientific and decorative adornment translating into a cultural sensibility that dictated what looked good and, crucially, what had meaning in the private household. If visitors needed a prompt, of course, they could consult the souvenir catalogues and commemorative booklets that provided a useful inventory of the products on display. Ploucquet's "Comical Creatures", for instance, could be transported home in a book of engravings for the price of three shillings and sixpence (Ploucquet 1851). The London *Examiner*, for one, saw this as a product with universal appeal: "To whom, young and old, will it not be welcome?" (London Examiner 1851). A modern marvel of human artisty and animal magnetism, the privileging of taxidermy at the Great Exhibition set the stage for its commercial application and inspired a nation of consumers to welcome it into the domestic interior as an object of fancy.

## HOBBYCRAFT, AMATEUR TAXIDERMY AND THE HOME AS WORKSHOP

The mid 1800s saw the emergence of a lively community of amateur "stuffers" and the transformation of household space into a place of making. Communicating important messages about nature study, craft expertise and gender in domestic realms, home emerged as an important site of production. This was important, not least for the fact it revealed the "vernacular and everyday landscapes of creativity"—in other words, the domestic and informal sites of manufacture—that disrupted assumed boundaries between work and home and public and private life (Edensor et al. 2009: 1–16). Two other points are worth noting here. Firstly, that as a site of making, home became not only a "final resting place" for taxidermy, but instead serviced a "hands on" practice with the animal body that shaped its cultural meaning through processes of disembodiment and reconstruction. Accordingly, were animals "made" in the home more or less domesticated than those which magically appeared in finished form to adorn living rooms and parlours with wildly presence?

Instrumental in this landscape of home working was the naturalist's gaze. Hence, while the Great Exhibition put taxidermy on the map as a pseudo-scientific object d'art, various constituencies channelled a public appetite for nature "red in tooth and claw" into a burgeoning culture of hobbycraft. Local field clubs, growing in popularity from the 1830s and founded on a wide-ranging fascination with natural history, were especially important in nurturing a culture of amateur taxidermy that sat comfortably within a contemporary mania for collecting objects—what Anne Larsen calls a "science based on *specimens*" (1996: 358).

Indicative of this fad for naturalistic kleptomania, Reverend John Woods' field guide *The Common Objects of the Country* (1858), sold 100,000 copies in its first week of publication. A prominent feature of this emerging culture was a biotic fetishism that emphasized the surveillance, document and preservation of organic artefacts. In *the Microscope and its Revelations* (1856), for instance, William Carpenter pointed out the micro-delight of finding "inexhaustible life where all seems dead, constant activity where all seems motionless, perpetual change where all seems inert" (1856: 59). Taxidermy was well placed in this millieu, allowing, as it did, an intricate examination of the animal body and the incorporation of household space as a vital geography of study. Small game animals and native birds emerged as common subjects, a virtue of their proximity, practicality and aesthetic appeal. Writing in *The Practical Naturalist's Guide* (1872), James Davies noted that avians were easily procured and possessed "graceful forms and splendid plumage" (1872: 15). Moving from observation in the field, amateur practitioners tracked the animal body to the home laboratory in a synchronous activity of practising science that travelled through exterior and interior space. Underpinning the terms of engagement was a sense of close observation of the natural world, one which emphasised the all-important "wildness" of the animal and suggested that the medium of home-made taxidermy fostered a special kind of intimacy between producer and object-being. As William Swainson extrapolated in *Taxidermy with the Biography of Zoologists* (1840), this was a vocation "absolutely essential to be known to every naturalist; since, without it, he cannot pursue his studies or preserve his own materials" (1840: 1).

Advice for would-be hobbyists was available from the "how to" books which proliferated in these years. Some focused on rare specimens for home display, while others favoured familiar landscapes of rural encounter. Typical of most was an opening section that provided advice for a collecting trip, but, the main thrust of manual literature focused most on the operational environment of the home workshop. Montagu Browne's *Artistic and Scientific Taxidermy and Modelling* (1896) insisted the successful taxidermist (somewhere between a sculptor and a surgeon) pay great attention to process. Significantly, it was in this scientific inflection that the naturalist's sense of wild wonder was combined with a clinical gaze that regarded the animal less as being and more as object of experiment. Swainson put it bluntly: "the most extensive collections of natural objects are but of little value, unless their durability is secured by judicious preparation" (1840: 26). Manuals frequently recommended what species to use (for "first cuts" rabbits or squirrels), advised on the handling of chemicals (especially the use of arsenical soap, developed in the early 1800s) and provided graphic illustrations of incision and bodily manipulation. Taxidermy was positioned a skilful vocation, but, crucially, one that could be readily undertaken in household space as long as the practitioner had the necessary aptitudes and tools for the task. As handbooks noted, the latter drew mainly on domestic staples, including "homely enough" items such as knives, pliers and scissors, along with a few more specialist (and rather less homely) devices such as the "eye and brain scoop or extractor" (Swainson 1840: 19–23).

Armed with technical acumen and the right equipment, the amateur could establish a home workshop equipped for forensic abandon. Implicit in this active geography were a set of assumptions. The first of these was socio-economic, making this a vocation that inevitably privileged middle and upper-class practitioners with the financial resources, education and leisure time to indulge their studies. The second was logistical, the spatial limits of home creating a fixed "carrying capacity" for animal bodies that made egrets rather than elephants the logistical choices for taxidermy making at home. To properly do the job, even for the smallest critters, experts argued, a dedicated appropriation of domestic space was needed. Spillages of blood and guts, olfactory emanations and liberally applied chemicals suggested that the kitchen could scarcely serve as place of taxidermy production, while cellars and sheds were too small and dark to illuminate good practice. Recommended instead was an environment of utility—ideally a reasonably large room in the house with good light, running water, ventilation, a well-equipped bench and (ideally) cupboards or stores for chemicals and drying mounts. William Hornaday's *Taxidermy and Zoological Collecting* (1894) offered the most explicit guidance on what he called the ideal "laboratory and its appointments", in which he stated "It would be impossible for me to dwell too strongly upon the importance, nay, even the vital necessity to the taxidermist, of a commodious and suitable workroom" (1894: 100–101).

Embedded in the taxidermic workroom was a gendered subtext. Most guidebooks broadcast the idea of the home taxidermist as a man (he/him pronouns were ubiquitous) operating in an environment that exuded an air of patriarchal expertise. As such, the workshop communicated the same masculine home-working imprint as the study, a space, as John Tosh notes, that was an assertively gendered domain "not so much sited *within* the home, as carved out *from* the home" (2007: 60). Meanwhile, as taxidermy grew in stature as a professionalised vocation, the opportunity for practioners to gain validation from learned societies (which were almost exclusively male preserves) entrenched the relationship between taxidermy production and its gendered claims to knowledge and domestic space. Significantly, it was not the case that women were prohibited from participating in the broader landscape of Victorian citizen science. Indeed, female naturalists published important works on such topics as fossils, ferns and insect collecting, as well as pioneering the use of cyanotypes. However, their placement in this amateur culture of naturalism tended to emphasize aesthetics, family orientation and moral instruction, the small stuff of private enquiry separated from the surgeon-naturalist and his more publicly-focused and physically demanding pursuits, what Carol Harrison calls the "heroic mode of scientific collection" (2001: 469). Equally, the spatial dynamics of gender segregation limited the contours of taxidermic engagement, as female naturalists tended to inhabit the breakfast room or steal a corner of the library or parlour as study space, neither of which comfortably housed the messy business of animal re-engineering (Shteir 1997: 36). Indeed, a hint of the exclusionary mechanics at play in the taxidermy world of home-making could be found in youth literature, which tended to uphold a binary where young men strode forth as courageous captors of biological quarry and young women busied themselves with assumedly passive realms of botany and geology. *The Boy's Own Paper's* "Practical Hints on Taxidermy" conjured the hobby as a healthy way of resolving male instincts to play games and destroy things, while exercising good sportsmanship and inclinations for scientific study in the workshop (Cuthell 1887: 142). Budding female naturalists, instead, wrote S. Caulfeild in *The Girl's Own Paper's* "Collections, Hobbies and Fads," were advised to concentrate on the acquisition of ferns, fossils and flowers, each "very agreeable means of recreation" that brought personal delight in study (1892: 41), admiring glances from friends and inferred an essentially decorative engagement with natural things in the home.

There were, however, contexts where the boundaries of gender orthodoxy might be stretched, especially where class or colonial privilege weighed in. Explorer, artist and writer Sarah Lee's *Taxidermy or the Art of Collecting, Preparing and Mounting Objects of Natural History* (1820) represented one of the first manuals to mention taxidermy as a term and ran to six publications, though its pioneering techniques were overlooked in favour of citing later male authors. Important to note here was the fact that Lee was able to stretch her taxidermic muscles after the death of her naturalist-explorer husband, a recourse not uncommon for widows who were often the uncredited partners in naturalist collection (and, who, accordingly, inherited control of animal artefacts and command over the spaces in which they were produced). The realms of genteel homemaking, meanwhile, seemed to provide a more acceptable perch for the making of taxidermy by upper-middle class women. The stuffing and mounting of lepidoptera and small avians emerged as a particular focus—species that required less infrastructural and physical application and were culturally positioned as "naturally" feminine objects of enquiry. As *Home Taxidermy for Pleasure and Profit* (1916) saw it, tiny birds with their "frail skins and delicate feathers" actually benefitted from "a woman's taste and lightness of touch" in the business of taxidermy production (Farnham 1916: 13). This emphasis on gentle artistry was important: suggesting, as it did, a gendered coding of the animal body in which female-made taxidermy was decoratively intentioned and easily conducted in recreational domestic space fitted out for needlework, art and writing activities, whereas its male counterpart was scientific and demanded a dedicated, professionalised laboratory.

## BIG GAME HUNTING, CHOREOGRAPHY AND PLACE-MAKING IN THE DOMESTIC INTERIOR

For the big game hunter, the prospect of home-made taxidermy was neither practical or desirable. Instead, for those journeying to Africa, India and North America (the principal venues for sporting excursions in the period) or those enmeshed in rural field sports, it made sense to employ a specialist. As Montagu Browne's *Practical Taxidermy* (1879) noted "no amateur can, but by the severest application, possibly compete with the experience of the technical or professional worker" (1879: vii). That said, the sporting fraternity was still engaged in a process of taxidermy production, one that revolved around preserving the hunting trophy and positioning it for posterity in a home geography that brought memories of distant ecologies to the domestic interior and embedded them in the material culture of the everyday. Here, in the "great indoors" of the trophy room was a striking performance of the "wildly domestic."

What did it mean for the sport hunter to place taxidermy in the home? Though they might first appear as "hollow souvenirs of an imperial adventurer" (Patchett 2008: 20), animal bodies were crammed full of multiple meanings. Woven into the trophy room was thus a story of conquest, naturalist enquiry and masculine bravado, as well as presenting a striking parade of empire that firmly embroiled interior space in the politics of the spectacular. Rare, large and charismatic species were particularly prized, prompting, as they did, a particular brand of object worship that invested the victorious hunter with powerful symbolic purchase. Unconstrained by the spatial limits of the home-workshop and facilitated by an elite "right to roam" over extensive countryside and imperial hunting grounds, trophy-taking and mounting focused on the acquisition of the biggest and the best. Once pinned to trophy mounts and corralled in cabinets, fantastic beasts from far-flung climes found themselves classified and domesticated by the forces of imperial science and masculinity, wired together and installed in the domesticated fabric of the house. At the same time, however, these animal fragments of head and horn still managed to conjure a sense of biotic realism, building into interior landscapes a sense of the wild spaces where they formely resided. Where the entire bodies of animals were mounted, the sense of presenting a "peephole into the jungle" (Wonders 1993: 125) was considerably enhanced. The politics of colonial conquest notwithstanding, the sense of spectral agency that gathered around these deceased beasts of empire suggested a complexity to the idea of the taxidermy mount as "utterly docile" (Ryan 1997: 117). Wilding interior space with their arresting presence, tigers snarled ferociously, monkeys leaped across trees in cases and antelope munched grass with purposeful intent.

The messages bellowed and roared by the hunter's dead zoo were particularly raucous when read alongside scholarship on material culture in the period. As Amanda Vickery contends, home traditionally represented a place of security and sustenance, and, from the mid-1700s, a site of fashion and refinement (Vickery 2009). The phrase "interior decoration" entered the English language in 1807 to establish a powerful association between household space, self, and things (especially for the upper-middle classes with purchasing power to populate their surroundings with mementos of meaning). The look of a room and what one chose to fill it with mattered. Taxidermy, in this context, took on currency as social and expressive capital, demonstrating elite sporting ability, class status and various layers of grounded identity (regional, national, imperial). The gendered nature of hunting (where men were typically powerbrokers), moreover, lent a specifically masculine impression to hunting-as-home décor, something especially noteworthy when considering where game trophies typically resided—the smoking room, billiard room or study—each of which commanded a specific place in the patriarchal architecture of the household. Certainly, trophy heads accentuated the sense of already gendered spaces defined by their dark colour palatte and functional arrangements (Hamlett 2009: 580). Rowland Ward, the premier professional taxidermist of the period, paid heed to the operationally masculine fixings of taxidermy in defining the favoured interior environments of the chase as follows: "[Animals] can be characteristically grouped and arranged to decorate Libraries and Smoking Rooms, or Special Rooms devoted to Trophies of Sport, with much unconventional and naturalistic effect that is very attractive" (Ward 1882: 253). Indeed, as *fin-de-siecle* sporting pursuits served to shore up a crisis of imperial masculinity in an industrialising age, the comforting primality of snarling tigers and fearsome bears in the billiard room provided an interior geography of manly assurance to match restorative activity in the field.

The trophy held special purchase for the victorious hunter, making the geography of home an evocative and highly ritualised landscape that embroiled the domestic interior in what Mackenzie describes as a "sacramental everyday experience" (1988, 30). The act of gazing at one's spoils invited an emotive engagement that took the hunter back to the time, place and encounter of the kill without leaving home turf. In that sense, the hunter's direct engagement with the landscape of the field and capture of the animal body provided the context around which a sense of wildness could be channelled indoors. Home decoration thus served as a vector of memory and a powerful conduit for the storytelling culture which was an integral part of the cultural "afterlife" of the hunt (Jones 2015). For Roualeyn George Gordon-Cumming, writing in *Five Years of a Hunter's Life* (1850), the act of gazing up at a wildebeest trophy was a powerful sensory experience that brought the sights and smells of a distant environment to life. This connection between home and field suggested a fluidity to ideas of place-making and preservation that not only conjured taxidermy as a powerfully immortal device, but also communicated a sense that, for an imperial adventurer, home encompassed an expansive physical and imaginative landscape of masculine confidence and rights of ownership. Gordon-Cumming waxed lyrical about his "forest home, coolly sipping my coffee, with one of the finest elephants of Africa awaiting my pleasure beside a neighbouring tree" (1850: 81). Once pinned to the walls of the British house, meanwhile, trophies served as visual prompts to storytelling that allowed the hunter to both relive and recite the thrill of the hunt. As *The Country Gentleman, Sporting Gazette, and Agricultural Journal* (1880) put it, "The trophy preserved at home makes a permanent source of pleasant after recollections—remembrances fraught with gratification that is peculiar to the possessor, and at the same time is the cause of pleasure to others" (1880: 20).

Animating a room with stories of mortal consequence, the trophy worked as a "memento mori", a term that described the curios that became popular in the Victorian era for the honouring of dead family. Cameos in lockets, corpse photography and elaborate mourning rituals all communicated a fascination for death and commemoration. Such activities, as Sarah Amato notes, "allowed the living to interact with the dead as part of domestic routine" (2015: 196). What was particularly interesting was the fact that trophy animals—ambassadors of the wild—rather than familiar species—pets—had prime place in this home ecology of necro-decoration. Given the way in which domestic animals, especially dogs, were welcomed into Victorian-Edwardian interiors, and, indeed, found their way into other areas of memorialisation from pet cemeteries to sentimental literature, it was surprising how few examples of "Fido" were preserved forever to rest on parlour cushions, mainly due to public scepticism over the taxidermist's ability to capture the spirit of a companion species. As "Modern Taxidermy" (Wood 1863: 120) put it, there was an "infinite difference between the soft, graceful outlines, the expressive attitudes, and the sleek glossy coat of their former favourite, and the stiff, gaunt, distorted form of the stuffed skin, with its round staring eyes, its withered ears, lips and nostrils, and its mummified feet." Seemingly, the boundaries of the "wildly domestic" were easier to vault for those species which dwelt outside of household space as opposed to those inhabiting the fireside on a daily basis in life. Taxidermy bodies in the home were not all alike.

If trophies showed the animation of the home interior as a venue of ritual communion, they equally highlighted the importance of what the *Graphic* called the "collecting age" (the Graphic 1869: 12). Sigificantly, the bonds between taxidermic exhibition and the advancement of scientific knowledge demanded performance: making home space not only a realm of intimate memory, but an outward-facing theatre of display.

As Swainson pointed out, the hunter-naturalist's collection was a highly personal matter—"what a library is to the critic or the scholar"—but should be shown off (1840: 71). *The Practical Naturalist's Guide* (1872) insisted that these museums or galleries of natural history (as they were often called) demanded a careful choreography in order to present "a perfectly consultable, and consequently well-arranged assemblage of specimens, illustrating, either typically or specifically, the natural history, perhaps of the whole world, or—as in most workable private collections—some special group of the animal kingdom" (Davies 1872: 1). Designed to showcase prized specimens and the acumen of the collector, the taxidermy gallery invited review from other hunter-naturalists and also served the goals of science communication. Examples of such included Percy Powell-Cotton's museum in East Kent, which contained some of the earliest taxidermy dioramas found anywhere in the world and was opened to the public every Thursday afternoon. Filled with rare and exotic beasts, carefully mounted and meticulously presented, this frozen parade of entire animal bodies illuminated powerful messages about the performativity of the collector, the power of things and the eco-cultral networks which connected the household environment to a global habitat of colonial conquest.

## CONSUMING THE WILDLY DOMESTIC: "MURDEROUS MILLINERY," ZOONOTIC FURNITURE AND ANTHROPOCENTRIC TAXIDERMY

Amateur naturalists and trophy hunters brought animal bodies into their homes in acts of production and ritual place-making. Elsewhere, taxidermy emerged as an object of fancy that brought prestige through purchase rather than experience. This was particularly significant from the 1860s, when industrialism and rising incomes swelled the purchasing power of middle-class households to engender a revolution in consumer spending and made the Victorians "the first people to be so closely identified with their belongings" (Cohen 2006: x). Home, in this context, as Patrick Brantlinger notes, served both as a place and a social position, and the display of taxidermy mounts offered a connection to sites of desire and identification (whether that be geographies of countryside or imperial capture) and a symbolic power that could be borrowed for social uplift (2016: 233). As consumer product, the appeal of the reanimated animal equally channelled a broader cognitive impulse that saw people work through various existential questions of the age by placing things in their household environments. According to Thad Logan, these consciously staged decorations "expressed, enacted and reproduced the conflicts inherent in major social phenomena—urbanization, capitalism, and imperialism—at the heart of private life" (2001: 140–141). Prominent in this mania for expressive objects were manufactures linked to nature—floral textiles, fossil paperweights, picture albums made from seaweed, to name but a few—and taxidermy carried particular purchase as a product through which people "thought through" their relationships with the wider world.

Many forms of taxidermy were available for the consumer market: from trophy heads that borrowed upper-class traditions and aesthetics to cabinets of small mammals channelling rural nostalgia (especially brightly coloured installations such as woodpeckers or fish; or staged scenes of predation featuring owls or weasels). The salience of taxidermy as household object can be clearly seen in the sales catalogue from Kearsney Court, East Kent, sold when the estate passed into bankruptcy in 1912: a python skin shield, other hide covered and horn decorated spears, and a collection of British birds "believed to include every recognised British species" than ran to more than 13 separate cases, including finches and warblers, swifts and swallows (Kearsney 1912). Elsewhere, meanwhile, a legion of upper-middle class consumers filled domestic space with animal fragments, floors covered by tiger and leopard skin rugs and side tables with glass domes and cases ornamented with bird and butterfly inmates (hummingbirds and species with striking feather displays were particularly sought after). As Swainson pointed out: "In nothing has the growing taste for natural history so manifested itself, as the prevalent fashion of placing glass cases of beautiful birds and splendid insects on the mantel piece or the side-table." Gainfully rehomed in the "great indoors," taxidermy cultivated a malleable cultural function as a carrier of refinement and status. Swainson saw it as a keen device of rational recreation, to which the "attention of the most indolent is attracted, the curiosity of the inquisitive awakened; and…a first impulse may be given, particularly to youthful minds" (1840: 81–82). It was, moreover, *always* a point of conversation, a visual marker of distinction that defined the nature of home and embroiled those who moved through the domestic interior in a spatial negotiation with the meaning of the animal body. Different kinds of specimens seemed best suited for particular spaces—birds for the parlour, trophy heads for the smoking room—suggesting a powerfully gendered segregation in the domestic consumption and placement of stuffed artefacts. Sometimes, however, these rules of engagement broke down. As Jane Hamlett notes in her study of male and female undergraduates' rooms, trophy heads ably served the purposes of masculine affirmation, but other products sometimes subverted the dominant narrative, for instance when women placed leopard skin rugs on the floor as tools of spatial differentiation (2006: 151–154). Such tensions in the taxidermic orthodoxy, arguably, were most pronounced when reanimated animals acquired broad cultural capital as modish decorative objects. Indeed, as the full weight of romantic iconography elevated country sports and imperial adventure to cult-like status, upper-middle class houses became stuffed full of what Mackenzie calls the "accumulated cultural detritus" of the chase, from Edwin Landseer prints to taxidermy paraphernalia (1988: 30).

Three taxidermy variants strike as particularly intriguing in this menagerie of home décor, each of which cornered the market in a stylish display of the "wildly domestic." The first of these (and something not usually discussed in the broader taxidermy mania of the age) was the plumage craze, namely the fad for elaborate hats among fashionable women that were adorned with entire bodies of egrets, hummingbirds and other exotic avians and became popular in the 1880s. Here, the gendered transaction and display of animal capital was firmly evident. Prompted by interest in exotic species and in the capability of taxidermic practice to skilfully immortalize them, this fascination for critterly headwear demanded an estimated 20 million imports of birds by the mid-1890s and remained a potent cultural impulse until the Plumage Bill (1921) banned imports of birds for the purposes of "murderous millinery" (New York Times 1898: 15). Importantly, this movement of taxidermy into sartorial space offered up a fresh necro-geography of the home—the ladies dressing room, an intimate and feminized site of decoration (though, as Virginia Woolf later pointed out, those making money out of the plumage trade were invariably men) that connected self, identity and thing, and also raised the interesting premise of taxidermy migrating from private to public space when worn by its host.

A second striking manifestation of consumerist taxidermy was zoonotic furniture, in which animals were used to create a range of interior homewares. The trend was especially associated with Rowland Ward, who from the early 1870s began to experiment with what he called the "spoila" (leftovers) of his other taxidermic creations to make zoological lamps, cabinets and umbrella stands (Ward 1913: 51). As he pointed out, rhino hide could easily be upholstered "not only into sticks, trays and smaller articles of use or ornament but into the construction of Cabinets, Tables, etc, etc" (Ward 1882: 179). If trophy heads and plumage hats highlighted the collisions of enrapture and exploitation in the Victorian and Edwardian encounter with the animal, zoonotic furniture presented the oxymoronic contours of the "wildly domestic" in stark and decorative terms. Here, the full gamut of biophilic wonder, colonial pride and consumer fetish was flamboyantly imprinted on the taxidermy body. Positioned in the domestic interior, these pieces demonstrated a fascination with exotic species, matched with engineered function, to produce items of prowling domestic utility. Grizzly bears were posed holding electrical lights, elephant feet hollowed out to create wastebins, and giraffe stretched and sliced to create porter chairs. William Fitzgerald's "'Animal' Furniture" written for *Strand Monthly* (1896) and the most detailed contemporary digest on the phenomenon, pointed out that many of these items were bespoke commissions for wealthy clients. Eye-catchingly unique when compared to the usual hunting trophy aesthetic (which Fitzgerland critiqued as "mournful-looking heads—mounted in monotonous fashion"), this new breed of animal furnishings offered up primordial contest as novel home-décor performance. “Fancy lounging into the entrance hall of a country mansion after a long ramble, and throwing your hat on the horn of a rhinoceros, which identical horn was once half buried in the writing body of your host!,” Fitzgerald exclaimed, or taking a single malt from a dumb-waiter tiger, a beast who “wasn’t always so obliging, and he once nearly tore to pieces the very man he now stiffly supplies with a glass of grog and a cigar” (1896: 273). Pressed into household service, the animal became mesmerizing cyborg, resolutely domestic yet fundamentally faunal. Fitzgerald spoke in wonder of stepping into the hallway of a fashionable townhouse to discover a “gigantic and truly formidable bear…flooding the hall with a soft red light” when “switched on from behind” (1896: 276). Zoonotic furniture thereby offered the opportunity to harness the spirit of aristocratic romance with added modernist chic, a product secured by consumer capture and with the extra benefit of having something inimitable with which to entertain guests. Accordingly, as the trophy souvenirs of distant geographies were recycled as high fashion, sporting relics of masculine ornamention moved into a broader landscape of decorative opportunity founded on animal capital, hospitality culture and the performance of empire.

Moving from ornamentation *in* the home to depictions *of* it, the last variant of the “wildly domestic” encompassed the anthropocentric or humanesque style in which small animals were posed in civilized gestures germane to the human story. Exemplars included Hermann Ploucquet (whose pieces for the Great Exhibition set the scene for the popularity of the genre) and various imitators including William Hart & Son, based in Christchurch, Dorset, who traded a signature line in boxing squirrels and a courtroom drama entitled “the Trial of a Rat for the Murder of a Chick.” The most famous exponent of the British craft was Walter Potter, born in 1835, who worked from a shed (1860s) and later created a museum (1880) in the grounds of his father’s pub in Sussex, from where he ran a brisk trade selling from and for the home. Before his death in 1918, Potter created some 6,000 pieces, working with animals sourced from local gamekeepers and farmers disposing of vermin or kittens. Most famous for dioramas including multiple animals, his 14 tableaux included “the Death and Burial of Cock Robin,” a scene inspired by the nursery rhyme and featuring 98 birds, notable among which were a grieving dove widow, an owl gravedigger and a rook serving as presiding vicar; his “Kitten’s Tea Party” with 17 small furries taking afternoon refreshment and cake around a table; and “the Village School” which presented studious rabbits seated at tiny desks, complete with minute chalk slates and maps on the walls.

What Montagu Browne disparagingly called “the grotesque school” traded in the faunally fantastical and the comically everyday (1879: 12). Their subjects were not wild exotic species but well-known, invisible, expendable, critters of the local countryside. Some drew on biological interaction to tell a story—predators, for instance, were always invariably predating—and the animals *did* conform to accurate biological impressions of their species, but all this was set in the context of human conceptions (love, avarice, anger) and cultural customs. This taxidermy thereby communicated a sentimental air of quaint whimsy. Particularly important was the overwhelmingly domestic nature of the setting. Animals were depicted in the home and its hinterlands, living out lives of civilized decorum, playing sports, or enmeshed in the material architecture of the household, its timetables and practices. Here, the geography of home evoked a conscious feeling of security, timelessness and comfort. A world in miniature that carried a textured landscape of social expectation, anthropocentric animals traded in a long tradition of human-animal moral instruction from Aesop to Beatrix Potter, as well as romancing human viewers with amusing set pieces, what *Tallis'* guidebook to the Great Exhibition called a "most whimsical air of sentimental gentility" (Beard 1854: 114). The public were interested in these works because they were curious chimeras, caricatures of human lives contained in non-human bodies. Though strikingly lifelike, these objects of critter-craft only made sense when mapped onto an anthropocentric cultural geography. As such, they provided more of a witty pastiche of the straightlaced expectations of period etiquette and social praxis than a critical foil through which viewers chewed over the cosmic entanglements of Darwinian theory. Arranged in mid-moment, these specimens sat in a comically diminuitive world invested with playfulness and bound by a rule book of social construction. They were relatable and knowable: humans dressed in animal garb and frozen in homely moments, what Rachel Poliquin calls "pretty postcards of human pleasures" (2012: 185). As the *Morning Chronicle* mused of Ploucquet's dioramas, here was a "consummately clever collection of stuffed animals…engaged in performing human occupations, and seemingly influenced by human motives, hopes, and fears" (Morning Chronicle, 1851a).

## ANIMALS AT HOME IN DOMESTIC SPACE

Taxidermy was an embedded, embodied and integral part of the Victorian and Edwardian interior. In various forms and styles, it migrated into domestic space to create a landscape of animate wonder that joined the ecology of the home to various necro-geographies through processes of capture, production and consumer display. Here, in the most intimate and familiar of environments, a menagerie of fantastic beasts wilded the "great indoors" and yet found themselves tamed by ornamentation, corralled in a domestic interior where science, empire, gender and consumer culture upholstered them as objects of great value. Taxidermy in the home was thereby both absent and present, a mash up of Berger's "real" animals and their "image" imprints, not entirely domesticated, but no longer truly wild. Herein lay the trick in its tail. At once beings *and* things: organic and symbolic presences, born and also made, the mesmerising power of reanimated animals was bound up in this foundational conceit.

Significantly, those who bought into the taxidermy mania of the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw this not as contradiction, but an enticing performance that combined animal magic, craft practice and cultural utility. This convergence of interests was especially potent in the display space of the British home: a critical site where humans learned to "live" with taxidermy beasts of various shapes and sizes. Immortalised in cases and cabinets, on walls and atop mantelpieces, the critterly memento mori of the British interior lived on in a decorative entanglement with *Homo sapiens* that was sanctioned by science, sport and good taste. Tantalisingly alive but eternally contained, taxidermy possessed a unique power to enthrall. Questions of death and life, the wild and tame, the natural and the engineered, these, after all, were the existential preoccupations of the age. Engaged in conversation over tea (or scotch), homeowners and visitors were stitched together in a visceral but mannerly exchange with each other and with other species. The integral role of the animal body in this encounter, meanwhile, raised the possibility of a posthumous form of animal agency, a spectral sway in which "endling" species (Jorgensen 2017) displaced from their natural habitats communicated a sort of animal magnetism in perpetuity. Proximity to fur and feather and the intimacy of the household environment, perhaps, even, the deliciousness of the decorative paradox, heightened the intensity of a brush with the "wildly domestic." While Haselden may have written taxidermy off as an outmoded eccentricity, a hundred years on, its eco-cultural contortions, and, especially, its relationship to the architecture of home, demands a fresh look.

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There are no declarations of interest relating to this paper. It has not been lodged with any other publisher.

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