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**Lost trophies: Hunting animals and the imperial souvenir in Walton Ford's Pancha Tantra**

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**Abstract**

This article argues that the work of contemporary American artist Walton Ford stages the paradoxical role that trophy hunting played in both establishing and undermining the strict racial, biological, and ecological hierarchization of colonial environments. American Flamingo (1992) and Lost Trophy (2005), from the 2009 collection Pancha Tantra, foreground how the tradition of nineteenth-century naturalist art, characterized by John James Audubon, and popular narratives of trophy hunting expeditions, such as Ernest Hemingway's Green Hills of Africa (1935), are complicit in colonialist domination. In doing so, Ford's watercolours of hunted animals, which adopt many of the tropes popularized by Audubon, point to the Spivakian notion of "epistemic violence" behind an ostensibly innocuous, taxonomic art form. At the same time, the painting Lost Trophy recalls the writings of Joseph Conrad and George Orwell, investing animals with the power to unsettle the assumed superiority of the colonial hunter. My interdisciplinary analysis adopts literary strategies for reading artistic works, allowing for a broader understanding of the growing relationship between postcolonial studies and ecocriticism.

Keywords: Walton Ford, John James Audubon, Ernest Hemingway, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, George Orwell, trophy hunting, contemporary art, postcolonial ecocriticism.

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Hunting for sport is an exercise of power that epitomizes the assumed dominance of imperial nations over colonial and post-colonial environments. For the hunter, the environment of the colony and postcolony is a playground: indigenous populations exist only as guides or as a feature of the landscape, and the fauna as trophies to be won and displayed as symbols of hunting prowess. Hunting for sport is thus “linked historically to the ideology of domination, patriarchy and colonialism” (Kalof and Fitzgerald, 2003: 113) and is “by definition an armed confrontation between the human world and the untamed wilderness, between culture and nature” (Cartmill, 1995: 774). Yet, hunting also offers a point at which the fragility of that dominance can be revealed. As Garry Marvin has remarked, “In hunting, humans might desire the death of the animal, but they cannot demand or command it; the death of the animal is not inevitable. Hunters must struggle to achieve supremacy” (2006: 12). The artwork of Walton Ford stages this paradox. By adopting the form of nineteenth-century naturalist painting, and by drawing on popular tales of hunting expeditions, Ford exposes the relationship between hunting, taxonomic representation, narrative, and colonialism. Focusing on the vulnerability of the hunter’s dominance, Ford reveals how contemporary depictions of trophy hunting can unsettle the ecological, biological, and racist hierarchies upon which colonialism rests.

Since the late 1980s, Ford’s work has been exhibited throughout America and Europe, with a number of his paintings featuring in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Ford’s reevaluation of the relationship between hunting, colonialism, and naturalist art has garnered little critical attention in the fields of visual and literary studies. Steve Baker has explored a range of contemporary artists who reveal the “potent and vital role” of animal representation “in the symbolic construction of human identity” (1993: x). Examining works by Angela Singer, Jordan Baseman, Chloë Brown, and Lyne Lapointe that adopt the imagery and method of trophy taxidermy, Baker has questioned the efficacy of using animals to

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“productively address the killing of animals” (2006: 70). Whilst Baker’s work is wide-ranging, it does not include an analysis of Ford’s place within a contemporary canon of artists that engage with the aesthetics and ethics of trophy hunting. Addressing “one of the most resilient and complex visual images of animals in human culture” (2003: 112), Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald have explored the race and gender stereotypes evident in photographs of trophy hunting featured in American magazines.<sup>2</sup> Kalof and Fitzgerald, for example, point to the “haunting parallels in the popular culture displays of trophy animals and dead female bodies”, noting the correlation with science fiction films (such as *Blade Runner*) where “dead women are explicitly objectified and spectacularized in death” (121). As with Baker’s work, this study concentrates on the display of real-life hunted animals, rather than on the artistic depiction of hunting. In this article, I am concerned with the aesthetics of Ford’s self-conscious engagements with a tradition of naturalist painting. I assert that an examination of the form and composition of Ford’s paintings is enhanced by adopting literary strategies to read the narratives of colonial violence that he depicts.

Ford is described in interviews and retrospectives as an artist with a “writerly imagination” (Buford, 2009: 8), whose works are “allegories of colonialism, conservation and human nature” (Howarth, 2014: n.p.). For Robert Enright, he is “[a] compulsive storyteller in language and image” who “functions much like a fiction writer in the way he tells himself visual stories” (2006: n.p.). The paintings collected in *Pancha Tantra*, which are often juxtaposed with extracts from travel writing, scientific studies, and ancient mythology, are thus “open to narrative possibilities” (Enright, 2006: n.p.). Ford attests to this approach, stating that the works have become “like a gigantic storyboard [...] that add up to a narrative that has to do with [the] whole intersection of culture and nature” (Enright, 2006: n.p.). The title of the collection is instructive in this respect: the name *Pancha Tantra* alludes to an ancient Indian

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collection of animal fables that has been compared with Aesop's Fables and provides the basis for a number of the stories in the Arabian Nights.<sup>3</sup>

A postcolonial reading of Ford's visual narratives examines hunting as a mechanism of colonial power, both in terms of the physical violence it enacts and what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has called the "epistemic violence" of imperialism ([1988] 1994). Western hunting practices are closely linked to taxonomic representation and the production of scientific knowledge about cultures and environments regarded as "Other". The subject matter of Ford's work is not the hunted animal per se but the colonial desire to take possession of the colonized environment. An exploration of this aspect of Ford's artwork contributes to what the postcolonial scholars Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have identified as "the [urgent] need to examine [the] interfaces between nature and culture, animal and human", a need "never more pertinent than it is today" (2010: 6). An analysis of two works from Pancha Tantra, namely *American Flamingo* (1992) and *Lost Trophy* (2005), allows for an interrogation of how colonial discourses operated through cultural depictions of hunting and through the seemingly innocuous and aesthetically conservative form of naturalist painting. In these works, Ford subverts many of the tropes popularized by the American naturalist painter John James Audubon (1785-1851), and juxtaposes *Lost Trophy* with an extract from Ernest Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* (1935). In doing so he presents the viewer with the violence, both physical and epistemic, which is elided by the naturalist tradition and by narratives of hunting for sport.

In the sections that follow I will outline the role of hunting for sport in sustaining the interconnected hierarchies of colonialism, be they racial, biological, or ecological. This will allow for an analysis of Ford's representation of this form of colonial power. In positioning *American Flamingo* alongside Audubon's 1838 work of the same name, I will establish Ford's postcolonial reinterpretation of Western naturalist art. By placing hunters in the background of the scene and imagining the moment of death, Ford turns Audubon's depiction of nature as

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serene and untouched into a portrait of nature as dramatically impacted by the violent desires of human outsiders. It will then be possible to read *Lost Trophy* – Ford's portrait of a sable antelope – as depicting the moment of death whilst at the same time staging the instability of colonial power: the antelope is shot and about to die but is also "lost" to Hemingway and is portrayed in a pose that suggests strength. Much like the dying elephant in George Orwell's essay "Shooting an Elephant" (1936), Ford's antelope unsettles the strict imperial hierarchy of life-forms that the pursuit of hunting had helped sustain.

### **Against nature: hunting, racism, and empire**

In an interview published in *Art21* magazine, Ford reflects on the theme of colonialism and its legacies in his work, stating: "[O]n some level I'm personally acquainted with some of this material because my family was from the South and I'm descended from slave-owners. I was interested in confronting that aspect of my background and making pictures about it" (2003: n.p.). Although writing from a familial link to colonial dominance, rather than oppression, Ford's paintings nevertheless confront what Marjorie Spiegel has termed the "dreaded comparison" between racism and speciesism. In the context of America's history of slavery, Spiegel notes the "close parallels" between "the highly stylized hunts of the British upper classes" and "the hunting of slaves in the Southern United States" (1996: 62). Indeed, the racist slang terms for black men, "buck", and for black men and women, "coons", have their roots in the hunting of deer and racoons.<sup>4</sup> "Hunting as an exercise of power", Spiegel concludes, "only serves to further and further upset the balance of nature, the balance of humans to nature, and ultimately, the balance of humans to themselves" (1996: 64). In the context of the British Empire, trophy hunting played a key role in supporting an imperial hierarchy that placed non-white colonized subjects alongside domesticated animals, fit only for manual labour.

Analysis of representations of hunting shines a light on this overlooked manifestation of imperial power. Organized hunting was central to many pre-colonial societies for a variety of social and economic purposes (including subsistence and the development of weaponry, commodities, musical instruments, poisons and magic items).<sup>5</sup> Indigenous hunting techniques, however, are largely regarded as being effective in sustaining an ecological balance between humans and animals. European colonialism meant the exportation of an anthropocentric Christian belief that humans had “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26). This viewpoint influenced the establishment of an imperial hierarchy based on the division not only of humans and animals but of “civilized” European and “atavistic” non-European races: colonized subjects were regarded as lower down the evolutionary scale to Europeans and therefore deemed both morally and biologically inferior.<sup>6</sup> The practice of hunting for sport throughout colonized regions played a significant role in performing and sustaining this division whereby the colonizer had command over the colonial environment and everything in it.

The numerous accounts of big game hunting by Western writers, explorers and politicians proved to be hugely popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much like the adventure tales of RM Ballantyne, H Ryder Haggard, and their contemporaries, accounts of hunting “captivated the imagination of people back home” (Adams and McShane, 1996: 26) in Britain and America and emboldened the strict hierarchization of colonized societies.<sup>7</sup> As the social historian John M MacKenzie acknowledges, “[I]n the high noon of empire, hunting became a ritualized and occasionally spectacular display of white dominance” (1988: 7). Drawing on MacKenzie’s work, Edward I Steinhart maintains that, “[T]he European hunting heritage had become, since the late Middle Ages, a class-divided and contested arena for the symbolic expression of mastery over both nature and the lower orders of society” (2006:

61). In the context of colonial Africa, hunting directly influenced “the understanding of wildlife as a form of property” as well as “the symbolic uses of the hunt as reaffirmation and demonstration of the social hierarchy that gave meaning to the lives of the gentlemen hunters or sportsmen of the European tradition” (2006: 61). Hunting for sport thus allowed the colonial elite to transpose a class-divided pursuit in Britain to a class and race-divided one in the colonies, and to enact their assumed superiority over the colonial environment and its people.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, advocates of hunting animals for sport articulated a contradictory impulse towards conservation. The late colonial era saw the burgeoning of campaigns for the preservation of “exotic” non-European fauna through the establishment of game reserves that separated humans from animals. Such campaigns, as MacKenzie notes, were “shaped by the social and economic realities of empire” (1988: 201), with native Africans excluded from hunting, and relied on the categorization of animals as either “trophies” or “vermin”.<sup>8</sup> In some cases the impact of this conservationist impulse has been detrimental. Most notably, the depopulation of areas of East Africa, where cultivated grasslands were converted into “regions of untidy thicket”, provided “the ideal habitat of the tsetse [fly]” (1988: 237) responsible for the transmission of disease. Critical of “[t]he Western notion of wilderness” that still informs ideas of conservation today, Jonathan S Adams and Thomas O McShane have maintained that most modern conservation programs in Africa are “doomed to eventual failure because they depend on building barriers of one sort or another between people and wildlife” (1996: xvii, xviii). It is somewhat ironic that the critical turn in conservation studies over the last decade has drawn on pre-colonial ideas of humans and animals co-existing symbiotically.

Much work has been done in the areas of social history and conservation studies on the relationship between hunting, colonialism, and their legacies.<sup>9</sup> In Victorian studies, moreover, Rothfels (2007) and Burrow (2013) have examined the significance of trophy hunting in late



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nineteenth-century material culture and adventure fiction. The field of postcolonial studies has seen a recent turn towards the environmental dimensions of imperialism; yet little criticism of hunting for sport exists. In a statement that echoes Spiegel's "dreaded comparison", Huggan and Tiffin write that, "In assuming a natural prioritization of humans and human interests over those of other species on earth, we are both generating and repeating the racist ideologies of imperialism on a planetary scale" (2010: 6).<sup>10</sup> If postcolonial studies is to work towards "a genuinely post-imperial, environmentally based conception of community", it is necessary to interrogate

the category of the human itself and of the ways in which the construction of ourselves against nature – with the hierarchization of life forms that construction implies – has been and remains complicit in colonialist and racist exploitation from the time of imperial conquest to the present day. (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: 6)

In challenging the racial and cultural hierarchies of colonialism, Huggan and Tiffin argue that it is also necessary to challenge the corresponding ecological and biological hierarchies.

In their examination of the connection between racism and speciesism in literary representations of colonialism, Huggan and Tiffin assess the importance of hunting briefly and only in relation to the killing of elephants for ivory in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Herbert Ward's *A Voice from the Congo* (1910). Doing so reveals important insights into the links between speciesism, racism, and the commercial concerns of colonialism that subordinated both animals and black African slaves to the category of the non-human commodity. Yet, an examination of hunting for sport, rather than for trade, reveals the way in which the pursuit is tied up with a widespread nineteenth- and early twentieth-century epistemophilia. As Antoine Traisnel notes, the "natural history museums and science

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institutions” that emerged in the nineteenth century “depended on the products of the hunt for their specimen collections” (2012: 5-8). Hunting is thus inextricably linked with taxonomy and the acquisition of knowledge: the dominance of the colonial hunter over the colonized environment involves a corresponding dominance of Western knowledge over subordinated indigenous epistemologies.

### **The epistemic violence of naturalist art**

The primary influence on the form of Ford's paintings in *Pancha Tantra* is what he terms “nineteenth-century manuscript painting” (Art21, 2003: n.p.), meaning the naturalist tradition whereby Western explorers documented the fauna and flora of non-Western regions. Rather than replicating this conservative tradition of taxonomic art, however, Ford's work occupies the form as a means of subverting it and satirizing it from within. In doing so, Ford reveals the way in which a seemingly innocuous art form is complicit in what Spivak terms the “epistemic violence” upon which imperialism rests. A reading of Ford's engagement with nineteenth-century naturalist art contributes to “an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one” (Spivak, [1988] 1994: 76), and how other, non-Western narratives were subordinated as Other. As Ford maintains in interview:

[T]he mode of representation that I use [...] looks like the kinds of notebooks that these colonial guys kept where they did sketches of the local fauna and flora, and named it after, you know, themselves and their own friends and colleagues back in England or whoever first described it. It wouldn't matter that it might be known for thousands of years in the culture that was already there. These guys got the opportunity to call it “Johnson's this” or “So and So's that” and give it a Latin name and filed it. (Art21, 2003: n.p.)

Ford thus acknowledges the power of naturalist illustration in naming and claiming the colonial environment: in the process, the indigenous names and the significances of different animal species are disregarded to be replaced by those of the colonialist explorer and “filed” for scientific record. From his own twenty-first century viewpoint, Ford admits to “turn[ing] that tradition a little bit on its head. Rather than in the service of these great collections or empires, [the work] tells an alternative narrative” (Art21, 2003: n.p.). That “alternative narrative” mounts an important critique of the interrelation between art, the generation of scientific knowledge, and imperial power.

The figure in nineteenth-century naturalist painting that Ford’s work engages with most clearly is Audubon, whose illustrations were lauded for their aesthetic and dramatic portrayals of exotic wildlife.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Audubon’s fascination with the natural world went hand-in-hand with his love of hunting. As Audubon’s biographer Richard Rhodes notes, “Audubon engaged birds with the intensity (and sometimes the ferocity) of a hunter because hunting was the cultural frame out of which his encounter with birds emerged” (2004: 74-5). Ford explains that he sees his own work as in some way presenting Audubon’s subconscious; his adoption of Audubon’s style – evident in his use of dramatic composition, watercolours, and annotations – allows for “the way [Audubon] really thought” to “leak” (Art21, 2003: n.p.) into the work. Indeed, Ford describes Audubon as a “kind of a madman” who would “[shoot] birds off the deck of ships and [watch] them drop in the ocean. [...] He wasn't the enlightened sportsman that we're used to thinking about” (Art21, 2003: n.p.). Audubon’s persona is thus characterized by a duality: the skilful recorder of the beauty and variety abundant throughout the natural world, and the “American frontiersman” who would “[wear] a deerskin suit, [paint] self-portraits as a wild hunter in American forests, and [write] an outlandish autobiography of his kills” (Linton, 2011:

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n.p.). The artworks of Ford bring these two conflicting sides of Audubon's personality together in one frame.

For Ford, Audubon's paintings are demonstrative of a broader imperial ideology where nature, hunting, and colonialism are interlinked, but where the connections have been elided. Through his depictions of animals native to Asia, Africa, and South America, Ford satirizes nineteenth-century naturalist painting and reveals it to be complicit in the process of colonization. One of the most explicit examples of Ford's revaluation of the naturalist form is in his re-working of Audubon's American Flamingo (fig. 1). The original was reproduced in Audubon's popular four-volume collection *Birds of America* (1836-38) and displays a flamingo drinking water from a lake in an isolated and serene setting. Ford's American Flamingo (fig. 2.1), a relatively early piece in his experimentation with the form of naturalist art, mimics Audubon's original not only in name but also in composition: the bird is depicted in the foreground by the edge of a lake facing to the left of the frame; a number of other flamingos stand in the background of the scene; and Ford includes ersatz markers of nineteenth-century "manuscript painting", including the title of the piece in Audubon's handwriting, the bird's Latin name – *Phœnicopterus Ruber* – and the inscription "Old Male". Yet, Ford disrupts the serenity of Audubon's scene in two important ways.

The most obvious change to Audubon's aesthetically pleasing original is evident in the flamingo's pose: the clean and elegant curves of the back and neck have been replaced by disfigured contortions where the legs flail in different directions, the body of the bird is turned upside down, and its neck is twisted. On closer inspection it is possible to see the bird's blood spurting out of an unseen wound. The eye of the viewer is drawn to the source of this grotesque image and the second important difference between the two paintings: the inclusion of a silhouetted hunter stood in a boat in the background (fig. 2.2). Ultimately, these two changes, the first striking and the second subtle, radically impact on the ideological import of the

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naturalist form. Audubon's *American Flamingo* is an affirmation of wild-life as peaceful and secluded, where the effect of the painter on the work's subject is erased. Ford, by contrast, presents the viewer with the sudden and dramatic moment of death, where the hunter's violent conquest over the natural environment is realized and exposed.

The setting of Ford's *American Flamingo* is not specified, and it is not clear what the silhouetted hunter's purpose is in killing the bird. The kill may be for commercial reasons, or the hunter may be Audubon shooting birds from his boat just to see them fall into the water.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the work introduces Ford's fascination with the relationship between hunting, naturalist art, and colonialism that would be developed in later paintings. In the following section I will reveal how Ford's 2005 work *Lost Trophy* extends this preoccupation through its engagement with textual narratives of hunting, namely Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa*. In doing so, I examine how the work stages the power of both the non-human environment and non-Western cultures to destabilize the cultural, biological, and ecological hierarchies that were central to the colonial project.

### **Taking possession: trophy hunting and the imperial souvenir**

Much like *American Flamingo*, *Lost Trophy* (fig. 3) is principally concerned with dramatizing the moment of death of a hunted animal. Measuring 78.1 x 303.5cm, the piece depicts a life-sized sable bull antelope in a desolate landscape surrounded by the skeletons and antlers of other antelope. It is also painted in the style of Audubon, with the inclusion of the animal's name in English and Latin – *Hippotragus niger* – written in cursive script at the bottom. Adding to the nineteenth-century aesthetic, the canvas has been artificially aged at the edges. The primary development from *American Flamingo* to *Lost Trophy* is the juxtaposition of image and text. A broader narrative to the artwork is suggested by the subtitle to the piece written in the top left-hand corner: "The Graveyard of Gut-Shot Bulls, 1933". This subtitle refers to the

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accompanying extract from Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* that inspired the piece (edited slightly here), in which the writer recounts his experiences of hunting in East Africa in the early 1930s:

I was thinking about the bull and wishing to God I had never hit him. Now I had wounded him and lost him. [...] Tonight he would die and the hyenas would eat him, or worse, they would get him before he died. [...] I did not mind killing anything, any animal, if I killed it cleanly, they all had to die and my interference with the nightly and the seasonal killing that went on all the time was very minute [...]. But I felt rotten sick over this sable bull. Besides, I wanted him, I wanted him damned badly. [...] We made a very wide circle [...]. We found nothing, no trace, no tracks, no blood. [...] We were beaten. (1935: 262-63)

The extract is taken from a scene in the final part of *Green Hills of Africa*, entitled "Pursuit as Happiness". The East African setting, as MacKenzie notes, "became the paradise of the rich tourist hunter [at the height of colonialism], an important source of income for struggling colonial revenues such that preservation policies were geared to their requirements" (1988: 149). Yet, the scene Ford chooses to depict is in many ways the anti-climactic apogee of the narrative. Throughout the book, the sable antelope becomes the Holy Grail for Hemingway; they are notoriously difficult to kill and it is the last animal he tracks following a series of smaller hunts. Hemingway becomes obsessed with leaving Africa with the animal's "wonderful pair of horns" (1935: 248) as a trophy of his prowess. Upon shooting one of the bulls, however, it manages to escape and Hemingway descends into a depressed account of his failure to return to camp with the antlers.

It is certainly the case that *Green Hills of Africa* connects narratives of exploration and colonization with categories of race and gender by affirming – and celebrating – the dominance of the white male hunter over all other beings.<sup>13</sup> I will return to Ford's engagement with this aspect of the text, but it is important to note at this stage that Hemingway's politics of race, gender, and species are much more complex than the Christian/colonial logic of domination characteristic of Audubon. Ford may generalize his nineteenth- and early twentieth-century predecessors as 'these colonial guys' (Art21, 2003: n.p.), but *Green Hills of Africa* is reflective of late colonial ideas of conservation, as well as articulating a level of anxiety about the lasting impact of humans and man-made machinery on the environment.

In the closing section of the text, Hemingway offers a reflection on the possible legacy of Western intervention in Africa, maintaining that "[a] continent ages quickly when we come" (1935: 274). He goes on to assert that, instead of "liv[ing] in harmony" with the land like "the natives", "the foreigner destroys, cuts down the trees, drains the water, so that the water supply is altered, and in a short time the soil, once the sod is turned under, is cropped out" (1935: 274). Expressing a dissatisfaction with Western agricultural techniques, he complains that:

The earth gets tired of being exploited. A country wears out quickly unless man puts back in it all his residue and that of all his beasts. When he quits using beasts and uses machines the earth defeats him quickly. The machine can't reproduce, nor does it fertilize the soil, and it eats what he cannot raise. A country was made to be as we found it. (1935: 274)

It is a reflection that is critical of modern industry, and the fracture that it creates between humans and the natural world. It also invests in a pre-colonial system of symbiosis of the kind

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that contemporary conservationists have championed. Yet, Hemingway does not acknowledge the role that trophy hunting plays in normalizing and exacerbating this fracture.

Two of Hemingway's unfinished texts – the novel *Garden of Eden* and the manuscript of his second East African safari (1953-54) entitled *Under Kilimanjaro* (1956) – extend his thoughts on the harmful impact of humans on the environment. These later works reveal a “conspicuous interest in gender malleability and performativity” (Wolfe, 2002: 224) and radically question “the conventional view of the heroic male pitting himself against nature” (Armengol-Carrera, 2011: 53). Ford's engagement with *Green Hills of Africa* erases these more complex aspects of Hemingway's writing. That said, the subject matter of the painting *Lost Trophy* is the process of domination and the desire of the hunter to possess the environment, an attitude that Ford's chosen extract from *Green Hills of Africa* neatly expresses. Through a reading of Ford's revaluation of Hemingway's account of hunting it is possible to assess the significance in the text of what Merrick Burrow (2013) identifies as the “imperial souvenir”. As Burrow remarks:

In the case of the imperial souvenir, the killing of an adversary (animal or human) produces its body as a trophy – an object by means of which the adversary's power is projected back onto the gentleman barbarian who takes possession of it. (2013: 73)

It is this “taking possession” of the animal as a trophy – rather than as an item of economic exchange – that signifies hunting for sport as the performance of colonial dominance over a fetishized non-European landscape. The possession and subsequent display of the trophy animal is integral to the imperial narrative of Western superiority, whereby the animal acts as a synecdoche of the colonized landscape.



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Hemingway's desire to possess the environment is evinced early in the book when he reflects on his safari expedition, stating:

I loved the country so that I was happy as you are after you have been with a woman that you really love, [...] you can never have it all and yet what there is, now, you can have, and you want more and more, to have, and be, and live in, to possess now again for always. (1935: 76)

In acknowledging the ultimate impossibility of this desire, Hemingway seeks to possess what he can of the environment through trophy hunting. The fact that the Holy Grail of his expedition – the sable antelope – escapes his grasp undermines even this level of possession and becomes the focus of Ford's painting. *Lost Trophy* is, Ford admits,

like a fever dream that Hemingway would have of the animal world. What you see in the painting are his hopes or desires for the way this narrative should work out. It's Hemingway wishing that he could stumble on a place like the trophy graveyard. (Enright, 2006: n.p.)

In placing the animal at the centre of the piece, instead of the hunter, it is the hunter's desire to possess, and the vulnerability of that impulse, that becomes Ford's subject matter.

While the antelope is in a position of weakness, waiting for Hemingway to "stumble" onto it, *Lost Trophy* can also be read as a portrayal of the hunted animal resisting possession. Ford's choice to conclude the painting's accompanying extract from *Green Hills of Africa* on Hemingway's bitter acceptance of defeat – "We were beaten" – points to the work's investment in the power of both the animal and the non-Western world in which it lives to unsettle the

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desires of the colonialist outsider. This aspect of the work is evident in the painting’s composition. The antelope is not depicted as weak and feeble. Instead its huge, muscular neck is at the centre of the frame, and although it has clearly been shot and is bleeding, the animal’s stance suggests that it could in fact be rearing up in order to charge at an opponent, with its impressive antlers – the very ones that Hemingway wanted as a trophy of his prowess – stretching up and out in front of it. This ambivalence – in which defeat and resilience are captured simultaneously – is also embodied in the oxymoronic quality of the artwork’s title. On the one hand, the painting is of a trophy, and so the subject matter is identified as something that only has value when it is desired and possessed by another. Yet, the qualifying word “lost” foregrounds the emptiness of that valuation: the antelope has resisted possession by the hunter and will remain forever out of reach; ultimately, it symbolizes the failure of the hunter to fulfil their desire. By capturing the moment of loss, rather than triumph, Ford’s painting reminds us of the reliance of colonial power upon the assumed submissiveness and inferiority of colonial environments.

Ford’s depiction of an unsettled colonial dominance through an evocation of the imperial wilderness recalls early twentieth-century literary representations of the colonial encounter. In Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, for example, the notion that the jungle was “something great and invincible” ([1902] 2006: 23) is emphasized by the tale of how “an old hippo [...] had the bad habit of getting out on the bank and roaming at night over the station grounds” ([1902] 2006: 28). Incensed by the hippo’s presence, “[t]he pilgrims used to turn out in a body and empty every rifle they could lay hands on at him. Some even sat up o’ nights for him. All this energy was wasted though” ([1902] 2006: 28). As a minor tale within Marlow’s narrative, the story of the hippo takes on a mystical, almost fable-like role within the text, pointing to mankind’s folly in assuming dominance over the natural world.

More directly, *Lost Trophy* reminds the viewer of Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant", in which the writer describes his attempt to kill a rampaging elephant in "must" whilst working for the Burmese police. He knows that the elephant will be the property of one of the villagers, and so killing it would be costly. Yet, he describes how he felt his hand being forced by the crowd of people that grew around him as he pursued the elephant on horseback. Rather than fulfilling the role of the dominant white male hunter, Orwell confesses that,

[I]t was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. [...] I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy. [...] He wears a mask and his face grows to fit it. ([1936] 2000: 22)

Orwell shoots the elephant, but as with Hemingway's account, it is not a triumphant moment where colonial superiority and dominance is proven. Instead, the elephant refuses to die and Orwell is forced into an ever-more absurd position, shooting it numerous times as "the tortured breathing continued without a pause" ([1936] 2000: 24). Orwell's tale is not of a trophy hunt, but it marks an important shift away from the colonial arrogance evident in Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* and towards the satirical self-reflection of Ford's postcolonial allegories.

It is not that the elephant in Orwell's essay, or the antelope in *Green Hills of Africa* and *Lost Trophy*, can be read as symbols of anti-colonial power. Ultimately both animals are subjected to long and unnecessary deaths at the hands of the colonial hunter. Any suggestion, furthermore, that Western writers and artists present anti-colonial subjectivity through a depiction of animals risks recirculating the racist hierarchy of life-forms underpinning colonialism. The depictions of hunting animals in Ford's *Pancha Tantra*, however, inhabit the

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very form of naturalist representation that is revealed to have been complicit in the “epistemic violence” of colonialism. *American Flamingo* and *Lost Trophy* offer a disavowal of that violence, breaking open the harmful assumptions upon which it rests and presenting the viewer with an image of the hollowness and fragility of colonial and neo-colonial domination.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Ford's life and work see Ford (2009: 318-19). Notable buyers of Ford's paintings include the actor Leonardo DiCaprio and the artist Daphne Guinness, while the Rolling Stones commissioned Ford to produce the artwork for their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary greatest hits album GRRR!.

<sup>2</sup> The act of trophy hunting dominated international debate in July 2015 when 'Cecil the lion' was killed on the Hwange National Park in Matabeleland North (Zimbabwe) by an American big game hunter (see Clark Howard 2015). The incident also led to debates regarding the conflicting economic and environmental impact of tourist hunting in Africa (see Vidal 2015).

<sup>3</sup> For a comparative analysis of the Panchatantra and Arabian Nights see Naithani (2004).

<sup>4</sup> As late as 1995, the annual 'Good Ol' Boys Roundup' – a three-day event for law enforcement officers and Federal agents in the U.S. – involved the selling of novelty "nigger-hunting licences" (see Butterfield, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> For an extensive discussion of the importance of hunting for pre-colonial African societies see MacKenzie (1988: 54-84).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between evolutionary theory, degeneration and European colonialism, see Edmond (2000).

<sup>7</sup> As well as Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa*, see also Roualeyn Gordon Cumming, *Five Years of a Hunter's Life in the Far Interior of South Africa* (1850), Herbert Ward, *A Voice from the Congo* (1910), Theodor Roosevelt, *African Game Trails* (1910), Frederick Courteney Selous, *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* (1925), J.A. Hunter, *Hunter* (1952), Heinrich Oberjohann, *Wild Elephant Chase* (1953), and Francois Sommer, *Man and Beast in Africa* (1954).

<sup>8</sup> Steinhart points out that at various stages lions, baboons, bush pigs and hyenas have all been deemed "vermin" by conservationists and were 'subject to eradication campaigns' involving poison and traps (Steinhart, 162).

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the continuing impact of trophy hunting in Africa within conservationist debates see Lindsay, Romañach, Frank, et al. (2007); Lindsay, Romañach, and Roulet, (2007); Loveridge, et al. (2007); and Dickman (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Mukherjee (2010) and Carrigan (2011) have also engaged with ecocritical concerns, acknowledging the importance of addressing the environmental dimensions of imperialism.

<sup>11</sup> Ford discusses Audubon's technique in the 2007 documentary *John James Audubon: Drawn from Nature* (dir. Lawrence Hott).

<sup>12</sup> See Traisnel (2012) for a comparative analysis of Audubon's *Golden Eagle* (1833) and Ford's *Delirium* (2004). In the former, Audubon includes a depiction in the background of himself as an adventurous hunter descending a mountain with his trophy. Ford's reinterpretation of the painting, on the other hand, retains the figure of Audubon-as-hunter in the background but he is lying in the snow, either dead or asleep, with no trophy animal to mark his prowess.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the persona of the white male hunter in *Green Hills of Africa* see Strychacz (1993), Martin (1999), Putnam (1999), Jungman and Tabor (2003), Voeller (2005), Armengol-Carrera (2011).