

# Citizen James (1857–1923):



Citizen James  
(1857–1923):  
the Violent  
Collector  
Errol Francis



# Preface

*A few seconds and all was quiet, the water being crimson with blood. I should have been more at ease could I have seen the dead body...at last a shout proclaimed that the corpse was found. By degrees they worked it to the edge and landed a fine tigress...and I measured her there and then – 9 feet, one inch standing 38 inches at the shoulder.<sup>1</sup>*

This essay considers the career of big game hunter, James Jonathan Harrison, and the historical context in which he operated. It is a response to selected entries from his diaries and photographs of his hunting activities held by Scarborough Museums and Galleries. My aim is to make use of a wide range of theory from different disciplines to interpret this material and make a case about the impact of men like Harrison on our natural environment and the indigenous people who lived under colonial rule.

The text is divided into five sections: the first *Introducing James* outlines my approach to studying Harrison; the second, *Big game and masculinity*, a gendered contextualisation of big game hunting; third *Shooting for science, museums and photography* is about killing animals for museum displays and photography; fourth, *The colonial colonel: apologist for genocide* discusses Harrison's dubious connections to King Leopold; and, finally, *End note* is how big game hunting has contributed to the ecological depletion.

<sup>1</sup> Harrison, James J (1892) *A sporting trip through India; home by Japan and America*. Beverley [Yorkshire]: F. Hall, 'Independent' Office. p68.



James Harrison with tiger kill India/Ceylon Album 1891-1892 © Scarborough Museums and Galleries

# Introducing James

*You think the earth itself is dead .... It's so much simpler that way! Dead, you can walk on it, pollute it, you can tread upon it with the steps of a conqueror.<sup>2</sup>*

**Thursday, 1 October 1896**

*Started out intending to set boys to work chopping out tusks when reaching place and taken photo of elephant. The fire the previous night having burnt out the whole bamboo jungle, we discovered a second and bigger elephant laid dead within a 100 yards.<sup>3</sup>*

James Jonathan Harrison was the only male of five children, born in 1857 to Liza Jane and Jonathan Stables Harrison, members of the English landed gentry, in the East Riding of Yorkshire. He attended Harrow School and matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1876. The Christ Church records of undergraduates indicate that Harrison never arrived at the College to do any study. His name was registered for a year after 1876, but he was absent for all that time due to illness.<sup>4</sup> Harrison then formally went down from Oxford, later joining the volunteer cavalry of the Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Hussars in 1884.<sup>5</sup> He is said to have retired from the army in 1904 without active service, retaining the honorary rank of lieutenant colonel.<sup>6</sup> After his father's death, Harrison inherited a substantial legacy, and he embarked upon three decades of international travel that brought him to India, the Americas, Japan and Africa from where he started to assemble his collection of animal specimens and trophies listed in taxidermist Rowland Ward's 1892 *Records of Big Game*.<sup>7</sup> In 1892 Harrison published a diary of his grand intercontinental tour in which he departed from London to Egypt via Venice and Rome before going to India, Ceylon and Japan – finally ending up in the US.<sup>8</sup> He spent the most time hunting in the Congo in Central Africa, which he visited several times between 1904 and 1910.<sup>9</sup>

On his hunting trips to the Congo, Harrison killed many elephants whose ivory tusks he sold to finance his expeditions as well as sourcing other animals as specimens to be taxidermied, many of which were displayed at his Yorkshire home Brandesburton Hall, which became a kind of private museum to which the public were often invited. In 1905, he brought six of the indigenous Bambuti people from the Congo to be exhibited in a touring show in England. In November 1910, Harrison married American Mary Stetson Clarke of Peoria, Illinois, after which he retired from hunting, dying at Brandesburton Hall in 1923, survived by his wife who lived until 1932.<sup>10</sup>

After Harrison's death, his wife decided to donate his collection of glass plate photographic negatives, stuffed animal trophies, artefacts and documents, now known as the Harrison Collection, to a public institution. It is thought Mrs Harrison wanted to give the collection to the Natural History Museum in London but after being unable to meet its conditions, she donated the material to Scarborough's first free public library, which created a special Harrison Room to house and display the collection. Subsequently Scarborough Corporation, now the Borough Council, purchased the former home of the Sitwell literary family, Woodend, as a natural history museum in which most of the collection was held, with a small number of items remaining in the public library.<sup>11</sup>



James Harrison with felled elephant, India-Ceylon-Japan Album, 1891-1892 © Scarborough Museums and Galleries

I am most concerned with what Harrison represented, the colonial era in which he lived and the motivations behind his hunting and collecting. This paper is a response to selected entries from his 1908 African diaries and photographs, rather than a detailed biographical commentary. My aim is to explore Harrison's character as an example of inflated citizenship, an excess of the individual rights normally accorded to such status. This is because, as historian Dieter Gosewinkel has written, 'the citizenship that the majority in the metropole possessed was a privilege in the colonies.'<sup>12</sup> I am exploring how hypermasculinity used imperial space as a domain in which the will and desires of one white man could exceed all native or indigenous rights, wherever he happened to be in the British Empire.

- 2 Césaire, Aimé. (2002) *A Tempest: based on Shakespeare's The Tempest, Adaptation for a Black Theatre*. (Tr) Richard Miller. Toronto: TCG Translations/Playwrights Canada Press.
- 3 Harrison, James (1889) *The Harrison Diaries: Diary II: East Portuguese Africa August 1896 – December 1896*. Scarborough Museums and Galleries.
- 4 Christ Church Oxford (1876) *Christ Church College, Archive of undergraduates*. University of Oxford.
- 5 National Library of Scotland (c1884) British Military Lists. Yeomanry Cavalry of Great Britain. British Military List. Accessed 25 August 2022.
- 6 Green, Jeffrey (2022) *Colonel James Harrison*. [www.fromlocaltglobal.co.uk](http://www.fromlocaltglobal.co.uk). Accessed 20 August 2022
- 7 Ward, Rowland (1992) *Rowland Ward's records of big game: centenary edition. 1892-1992*. Huntington Beach, CA: Rowland Ward Limited.
- 8 Harrison, James J (1892) *op cit*.
- 9 Middleton, J (2021) 'The Harrison Collection: addressing colonialism in the collections of a Victorian big game hunter.' *Journal of Natural Science Collections*, 9: 29– 34.
- 10 Green, Jeffrey (2022) *Colonel James Harrison*. [www.fromlocaltglobal.co.uk](http://www.fromlocaltglobal.co.uk). Accessed 20 August 2022.
- 11 Burrows, Gifty (2022) *History of the Harrison Collection*. [www.fromlocaltglobal.co.uk](http://www.fromlocaltglobal.co.uk). Accessed 20 August 2022.
- 12 Gosewinkel, Dieter (2021) *Struggles for belonging: citizenship in Europe, 1900-2020*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 183.

# Big game and masculinity

*Friday, 10 January 1908 and Friday, 31 January 1908  
...fresh lion spoor – great excitement among the boys.<sup>13</sup>*

*We spent a long time in that dangerous game of following wounded buffalo...<sup>14</sup>*

The etymology of the word 'game' derives from the Middle English 'gamen' which referred to sport, linked to enjoyment or fun. The term 'game hunting' conjoins this sense of pleasure with the ritualised killing of wild animals partly for food – such as deer, elk, pheasant, quail – and a variety of other fowl, with exceptions of species regarded as pests such as foxes. In England, game hunting is closely associated with royalty and aristocracy, is overwhelmingly masculine and is incorporated in the description of hunted animals as 'game'.<sup>15</sup> The quarry of animals in the colonial wilderness was mainly not for food, it was an extension of the blood sports traditionally practised on European aristocratic estates onto a massively extended terrain and became known as Big Game – a term that mainly referred to megafauna (like elephants, rhino, bison, giraffe, bears) and other large exotic wild animals of India, Africa and the Americas. Hunting of big game was not just a sport; it was at the heart of colonial rule for the British, whether in India or Africa. It was a recreational part of the political, practical, and symbolic apparatus which consolidated colonial power and governance during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It demonstrated mastery and power not just over the people and land but all living things, flora as well as fauna, including the natural resources of the Earth.<sup>16</sup>

Harrison was not unique, he was one of a type of colonial white man who exercised his masculinity by hunting big game in the colonial wilderness and who competed with each other in the number of kills and the exoticism of their quarry. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway presents us with a trenchant critique of such activities in her essay about 'Teddy Bear Patriarchy',<sup>17</sup> linking big game hunting, masculinity and museum collections. Her 'Teddy' is a reference to Harrison's contemporary: prolific big game hunter, 'naturalist' and 26th US President, Theodore Roosevelt, who shared with Harrison a fascination with blood sport, uneasily combined with the sourcing of specimens for museum displays. She focuses her analysis on the Akeley Hall, Roosevelt Memorial and the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Haraway describes Theodore Roosevelt as the perfect subject with whom to address a historical malaise in relation to the 'true man', as a hunter who could spiritually restore the moral status of healthy masculinity in the colonial wilderness and bring it back home. She goes on to compare this strategy with the aims of eugenics, which wanted to improve human genetic stock, and then show how this is incorporated by natural history museums.

When Haraway refers to the 'historical malaise' of the true man, she reminds us of how events such as the Boer War (1899-1902) led imperial nation states to question contemporary masculinity in terms of male physical fitness, or one might say, the virility of its white male genetic stock. This concern helped to build support for practices like eugenics which sought to control human heredity through 'selective breeding' and sterilisation. Haraway makes this point by linking big game hunting with genetics in terms of restoring masculinity and a natural history museum and its hosting of a eugenics conference. Harrison was not only precisely located within this historical

and cultural epoch but his activities reflect Haraway's analysis of the links between big game hunting, patriarchy, taxidermy and museums.<sup>18</sup>

The Hall that Haraway discusses is in the American Museum of Natural History and commemorates American Carl Akeley (1864–1926) who was a collaborator of Roosevelt's and also one of Harrison's contemporaries: he was a naturalist, sculptor, writer and taxidermist – one of the world's foremost big game hunters who killed animals not just for sport but also to populate natural history collections. In a link with both the Congo where Harrison operated, as well as to big game hunting and the art of taxidermy, Haraway notes the example of the mounting of a silverback gorilla, known as the Giant of Karisimbi, and how it was killed in 1921, and taxidermied specifically for a display to commemorate Akeley.<sup>19</sup>

These are steps that Haraway takes to make comparisons between the theory of human eugenics and the killing of animals for science and museums. She illustrates this with the unfortunate coincidence of the New York museum hosting a eugenics conference at the same time as being a diorama for taxidermy, big game hunting and masculinity. Haraway brings out the patriarchal nature of these disciplines by drawing attention to the masculine inscriptions that position the words of Roosevelt – whose taxidermied animal kills also populate the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC – illustrated on the walls of the New York Museum with the words 'Nature, Youth, Manhood' and the 'Nation State'. These are all themes played out in the African wilderness and brought back into the scopophilic space of a museum display.

Haraway's essay is a reminder that men like Harrison, who deeply admired Roosevelt and, in many ways, sought to emulate him, have left a deeply problematic, if not toxic, legacy for the museums to which they have donated their archives and collections. The objects and records they have left us are both a chronicle of the imperial era in which they lived as well as unresolvable moral and ethical dilemmas for museums that now want to decolonise their modes of classification, display and, especially, to decentre the colonial gaze.

Harrison represents a contrast between professional mediocrity (he never achieved any distinction in the UK) and an over-extended Victorian masculinity which needed ever more expanded space in which to exercise itself. He lived in an era in which ordinary men could excel and achieve a high status in the colonies in ways not possible for them at home. This opportunity enabled the violent aspects of their masculinity to extend itself into an enlarged spatial domain and a much bloodier encounter with the world than was ever possible in England. This is literally illustrated by Harrison's numerous references in his diaries to the blood of animals.

13 Harrison, James (1907-1908) *Diary VII: Return trip with Pygmies to the Ituri via Mombasa, 6 December 1907 – 25 March 1908*. Scarborough Museums and Galleries.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Goldberg, Eric J (2020) *In the manner of the Franks: hunting, kingship, and masculinity in Early Medieval Europe*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

16 Mandala, Vijaya Ramadas (2018) *Shooting a tiger: big-game hunting and conservation in colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

17 Haraway, Donna (1984) 'Teddy bear patriarchy: taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936.' *Social Text*. 11: 20-64.

18 Pinar, William F. (2001) 'The crisis of white masculinity.' *Counterpoints*. 163: 321-416; Brown, Michael (2013) 'Cold steel, weak flesh, mechanism, masculinity and the anxieties of late Victorian empire.' *Cultural and Social History*. 14(2): 155-181.

19 Haraway, Donna (1984) 'Teddy bear patriarchy: taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936.' *Social Text*. 11: 20-64.

# Shooting for science, museums and photography

**Friday, 31 January 1908**

*I fired one band standing at about 60 yards and a second running, then had 2 barrels with my Gibbs at a longer range, both my first hit as plenty of blood on spoor.*<sup>20</sup>

The 'Gibbs' to which Harrison often refers in his diaries, like a faithful companion, is most likely the .505 calibre hunting rifle, or something very similar, manufactured in Bristol by George Gibbs Limited from around 1900, and was a sought-after weapon of big game hunters.<sup>21</sup> Owning this pedigree firearm conferred a certain sense of status and pride upon its owners which we can see from Harrison's diary, referring to 'my Gibbs' as if the gun were a friend and the 'spoor' (scent, or track) as the thrill of the chase. This alacrity for the sport of killing animals enabled some of its practitioners, like Harrison, to use and justify the big game hunt, or safari, as being beneficial to natural history or science by supplying specimens for museums to taxidermy and display or even have a new species named after themselves. Yet this practice had the unfortunate side-effect of mortifying natural history collections, making museums into mausolea,<sup>22</sup> complicit in a violence against animals that was closely associated with the genocide of indigenous people. Along with this mortification in some cases also came an effect of immortality for the hunters since, for example, one of Harrison's quarries, the 'Pygmy Antelope', was named after him, and a taxidermied specimen is in the collection of Scarborough Museums and Galleries. It is as if, in the act of accessioning an object into the museum's collection, Harrison, and other men like him, were granted a degree of immortality by having their names inserted into the classic two-part Latin naming system for animals and plants known as the binomial system of nomenclature, invented by eighteenth century taxonomist, Carl Linnaeus.<sup>23</sup>

The purpose of this mortifying display of the taxidermied animal specimens was ultimately to satisfy a voracious scientific and public desire for the new and exotic and to associate seeing with believing – a triumph of the colonial gaze – but we need ask ourselves to what extent we learn from simply looking at taxidermied animals or the photos of the indigenous people that Harrison has left us. As historian Briony Onciul has observed, methods of museum collection and display of indigenous people and their culture, in the name of science, implicitly justified aggression, conquest and genocide of indigenous people.<sup>24</sup> By extension, we might apply this observation to the killing/display of animals and their extinction. Yet it could be argued that without men like Harrison, bringing animal skins and heads back from the hunt, information and visualisation of many foreign animals and birds would not have been available to us. As a curator at the Natural History Museum says:

*taxidermy is a vital tool that allows us to teach about the huge range of life on Earth. Good taxidermists can display animals in anatomically correct positions, so that they come to life before your eyes.*<sup>25</sup>

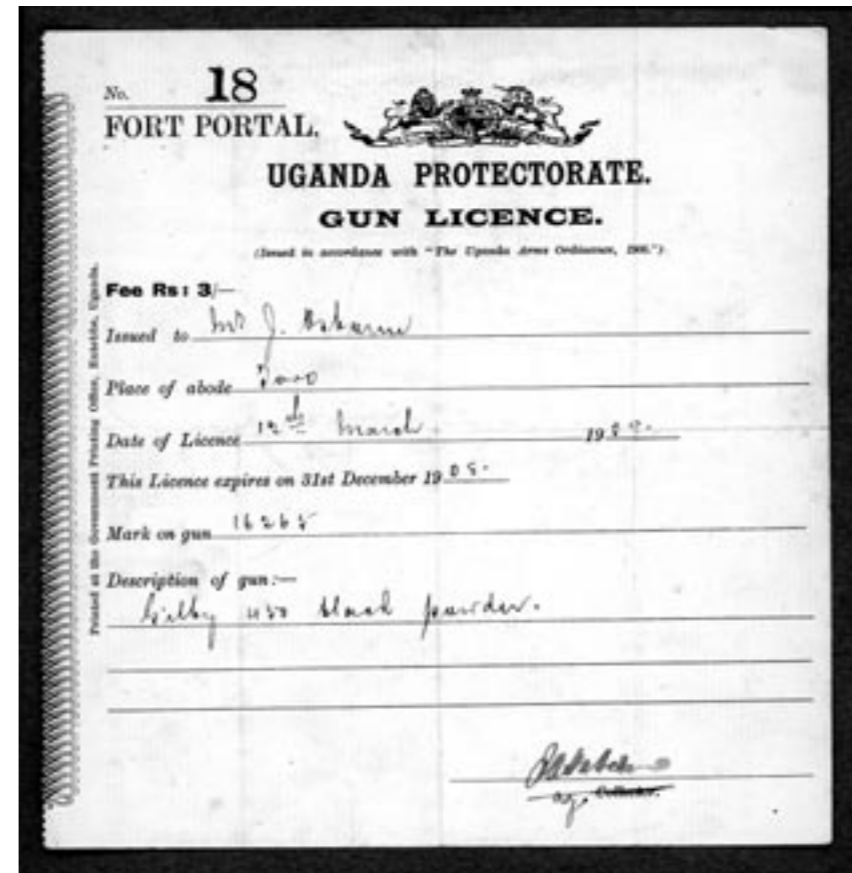


Neotragus batesi harrisoni (Harrison's 'Pygmy Antelope') © Scarborough Museums and Galleries

However, we might ask what are the implications of this 'visualisation' and how much does the stuffed animal 'come to life'? What does a stuffed specimen tell us about the habit and habitat of the animal, how it moves, sounds, reproduces or interrelates with other species? Yet the process by which this visual knowledge is brought to us begins with the killing of an animal, its evisceration, and then the concealment of this process through the art of taxidermy. As geographer Merle Patchett has argued:

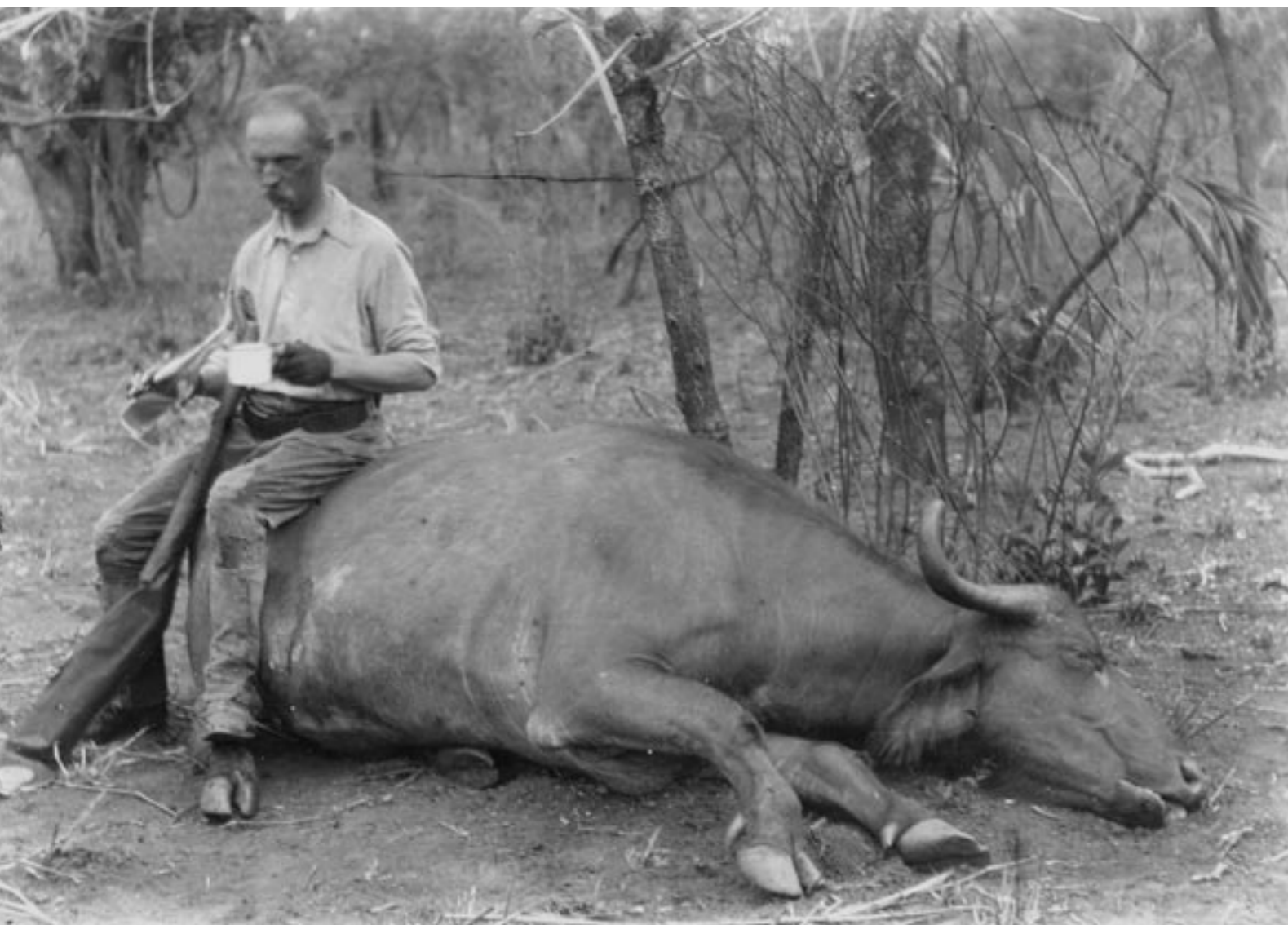
*The skin of taxidermy animals belies both a false steel structure and a sanitisation of colonial violence.<sup>26</sup>*

The stuffed exotic animal might as well be regarded as an emblem of colonial genocide, whether animal or human, masquerading as an object of learning. The critique of what we learn about the taxidermied animal and the concealment of violence also extends to the photographs of which Harrison has left us so many, and the motives of the photographer whose identity is often obscured by the exoticism of what they shoot, focusing the viewer's attention on people and/or animals represented in these images as objects, as visual quarry, rather than the subject position of who is behind the lens.<sup>27</sup>



Gun licence of Harrison's hunting companion, John Osborne, 1908 © Scarborough Museums and Galleries





James Harrison and Water Buffalo, South Africa Album March-October 1889 © Scarborough Museums and Galleries

Whilst this perspective may be applied to the photographs of the Congolese indigenous people, the Bambuti, with whom Harrison was fascinated, it cannot be sustained in relation to the images he made of himself and the animals he killed. Harrison's photographs of himself with his kills stand out from the safari photos of, say, Roosevelt and Akeley which often deploy a theatricality and triumphalism in the way they juxtapose themselves, their firearm and the dead animal. What we are dealing with here are instances where the firing of guns is perfectly congruent with the shooting of cameras; as essayist Susan Sontag wrote: 'the camera is a sublimation of the gun',<sup>28</sup> which Harrison triggers and re-enacts upon animals both with his rifle and final trophy image. Roland Barthes makes a similar argument when he writes about how photographs stop, freeze time and remain the same, even after the death of the subject.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, whilst they repeat the trope of including in the shot the weapon used to bring down the animal, Harrison's kill photos are nonchalant, introspective, sombre, even cold. He looks away from the camera and seems absorbed in thought or even distracted from the animal with which he depicts himself, in one case even sipping a cup of beverage, whilst sitting on the carcass of a dead water buffalo. His eyes are vacant, as if staring into a distant void.

In the photograph of the water buffalo, there is a striking detail: one of the animal's hooves has somehow become indistinguishable from Harrison's own left foot which appears cloven. It is unclear how this strange detail has come about but perhaps it can be compared with depictions of the Greco-Roman god Pan, half goat half man, associated with fertility but, as historian Marianna Montesano has observed,<sup>30</sup> also relates to carnality or gluttony. As a satyr, half goat, half man, Pan has ears like a horse, a tail, and he is usually depicted with exaggerated phallic arousal, like the marble statue of Pan copulating with a goat, which in the first century CE stood in the garden of the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum.<sup>31</sup> So apart from fertility or carnality, Pan also denotes bestiality; yet the prefix 'pan' means 'all' – as in Pan African, or Panopticon. The combination of these two senses makes Harrison's apparently cloven foot even more compelling, because it not only conjures up his pan-global wanderings, his colonial omnipresence, but also suggests bestial pleasure from killing animals resulting in him becoming them, but only when they are dead, after which he assumes their form and transforms into the Beast.

20 Harrison, James (1907-1908) *Diary VII: Return trip with Pygmies to the Ituri via Mombasa, 6 December 1907 – 25 March 1908*. Scarborough Museums and Galleries.

21 Wieland, Terry (2019) *Great hunting rifles: Victorian to the present*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

22 For a discussion of the museum as a mausoleum, see Adorno, Theodor W (1983) 'Valéry Proust Museum'. In Adorno, Theodor W *Prisms*. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Trs). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. pp173-186.

23 Polaszek, Andrew (2010) (Ed) *Systema naturae 250 - the Linnaean ark*. Boca Raton, London and New York: CRC Press/Taylor & Francis.

24 Onciul, Bryony (2015) *Museums, heritage and indigenous voice: decolonizing engagement*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis. p26.

25 Pavid, Katie (2022) *Why is taxidermy still valuable?* www.nhm.ac.uk. Accessed 2 September 2022.

26 Patchett Merle (2022) *The secret life of taxidermy*. The Architectural Review. www.architectural-review.com. 24 February. Accessed 2 September 2022.

27 Hayes, Patricia; Silvester, Jeremy and Hartmann, Wolfgang (1999) 'Photography in colonial discourse: the making of 'the other' in southern Africa c1850-1950'. In Hartmann, Wolfgang; Silvester, Jeremy and Hayes, Patricia (Eds) *The colonising camera: photographs in the making of Namibian history*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press. p24.

28 Sontag, Susan (1977) *On photography*. New York: Dell Publishing Company. p14.

29 Barthes, Roland (1982) *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982.

30 Montesano, Marianna (2018) 'Horns, hooves and hell: the devil in Medieval times'. *National Geographic*. 2 November.

31 Fisher, Kate, and Rebecca Langlands (2015) 'Bestiality in the Bay of Naples: the Herculaneum Pan and Goat Statue', in Kate Fisher, and Rebecca Langlands (eds) *Sex, knowledge, and receptions of the past, classical presences*. Oxford Academic Online Edition. pp86-110.



James Harrison with felled elephant, Central Africa. Congo Free State, 1904 © Scarborough Museums and Galleries

# The colonial colonel: apologist for genocide

**Wednesday, 12 February 1908**

*Luckily a snap shot went fairly home and the beast fell dead. Were very pleased to find nice tusks - 7'6" long, very thin though but should scale about 80 lbs each.<sup>32</sup>*

Harrison's big game safaris brought him countless trophies of rapacious plunder as the result of an insatiable appetite – for animals killed mostly not for food, but for their hides, fur and tusks. His behaviour can be seen as no different from collectors of indigenous cultural artefacts who used the power of imperial authority to seize and remove cultural property.<sup>33</sup> Harrison's hunting dovetailed perfectly with the activities of other colonial disciplines like that of his contemporary Northcote Whitridge Thomas (1868–1936) who became the first Government Anthropologist to be appointed by the British Colonial Office which gave him access to Africa to conduct a series of anthropological surveys.<sup>34</sup> Others include Maurice Vidal Portman (1860–1935), another contemporary of Harrison's, who was superintendent of the British Andaman Island Penal Colony in the Bay of Bengal. He is best known for documenting the Andamanese using the spurious 'science' of anthropometry which sought to express racial superiority of white people and inferiority of Black people through measurements of the body, especially the cranium. During his time as a colonial administrator at Port Blair, Portman took many anthropometric photographs of the local people, including some at the request of the British Museum.<sup>35</sup>

Harrison's conduct makes clear his place in this colonial pantheon, and a disregard for lives of Africans, amply illustrated by his vocal and energetic support for the depraved and brutal colonial regime of King Leopold II of Belgium. In February 1885, the King established the so-called Congo Free State by seizing the African landmass as his own personal possession, unlike other European powers which ran colonies as national assets. The Congolese were brutally forced to labour for valued natural resources, like rubber and ivory, to personally enrich Leopold. It is estimated that up to half the Congolese population perished from barbaric punishment and malnutrition. Many more died from disease, torture and among those who were not killed or succumbed to these degradations, others were punished by having a hand and/or foot amputated.<sup>36</sup>

When news of King Leopold's atrocities reached England, detailed in the 1904 report by diplomat Roger Casement,<sup>37</sup> they were discussed in Parliament, and reported in The Times newspaper in June that year. Harrison's response was to write an apologia to the paper saying he had been operating in the Congo with the King's permission and he went on to praise Leopold's regime. In another letter to the paper in October of that year Harrison claimed that Britons doubted 'the truth in all these countless atrocities' in the Congo.<sup>38</sup>

The most compelling evidence of Harrison's support for Leopold's regime is a 1905 pamphlet which historian Adam Hochschild describes as being part of an organised international campaign of disinformation organised by Leopold.<sup>39</sup> The 24-page publication is entitled, A Complete Congo

controversy, illustrating the controversial methods of Mr. Morel, Hon. Sec. Congo Reform Association,<sup>40</sup> in which Harrison is the only named contributor. The pamphlet opens with a promise to 'place before our readers all of the documents of a most important controversy which recently took place in the British press.' The 'Mr Morel' to whom the pamphlet refers is Edmund Dene Morel of the human rights group the Congo Reform Association and is intended as a direct rebuttal of the evidence that his organisation was publicising about the crimes perpetrated by the Leopold regime in the Congo. The argument of this rebuttal is a combination of passive voice text interspersed with lengthy quotations from Harrison's various letters and interviews with newspapers in which he questions the veracity of the evidence of atrocities in the Congo. Harrison is described as 'a country gentleman of Brandesburton Hall... of absolutely independent mind, a sportsman and traveller...'. It then goes on to attack Morel 'who never set foot in Africa', contrasted with Harrison, who has 'travelled all over the Dark Continent'.<sup>41</sup>

The multiple references to Harrison's energetic media campaign in support of Leopold raise obvious questions about why he went to so much effort; what he was protecting and what was his motivation. The possibility that he was one of the people mentioned by Hochschild<sup>42</sup> as Leopold's hired propagandists, cannot be discounted. Harrison's staunch defence of the Congo Free State come across as if he was Leopold's ambassador, had international reach and even the United States Senate quoted his denials of the atrocities perpetrated in the colony. Harrison is recorded as talking about how,

*the absolute unreliability of native evidence forms one of the chief difficulties in administering justice [in the Congo]. In the Epondo case for instance, the natives afterwards admitted they had lied to Mr Casement right and left.*<sup>43</sup>

Harrison was referring to one case of a boy who alleged that Leopold's soldiers had severed his hand which later proved to be untrue, but he had suffered gunshot wounds that were perpetrated by Leopold's militia.<sup>44</sup> Yet Harrison, and other apologists, used this single case to dismiss all evidence in Roger Casement's report of punitive amputations performed on the Congolese people by the Belgian regime. Harrison had clearly become part of a global propaganda campaign waged by Leopold to counteract increasing reports of atrocities in the Congo. The campaign involved interventions in newspapers by hired publicists in a series of anonymous pamphlets to challenge the increasing evidence of atrocities in the Congo. Collectively, these publications are known as the Congolese Pamphlets.<sup>45</sup> They sought to challenge three of the main concerns about the Congo adduced by Grattan and others: genocide; white barbarity; and punitive taxation of labour. 'Punitive taxation' was the bizarre system operated in the Belgian Congo in which the State imposed levies on the indigenous people in the form of compulsory labour.<sup>46</sup> The pamphlets also sought to challenge the 'unreliability of missionary statistics' with descriptions of 'native idleness and deceitfulness... hypocrisy and lying' of those who were reporting the atrocities.

Harrison's enterprise thereby becomes intimately conjoined with one of the most egregious regimes in the history of colonialism. His work epitomised the kind of activities that took place under the British Empire, whose colonial authority gave power and access to people like Harrison to indiscriminately plunder flora and fauna, study indigenous cultures, subject their people to an imperial photographic gaze and loot their cultural property as spectacles for European museums. It is quite clear from the account of the public exhibitions of these objects as well as Harrison's touring display of indigenous people that there was a voracious public appetite for such exoticism. Harrison's statements, along with his hunting and firearms permits, make clear that he had direct access to Leopold's authority not only for hunting but to gain access to Congolese people from the Ituri Forest to bring them to England for a touring display – effectively a human zoo – between 1905 and 1907. To coincide with the tour in 1905, Harrison published a pseudo ethnographic tract – remarkably, it is the same size and page length as the propaganda

pamphlets – describing the habits and customs of the Bambuti and illustrated with his own photographs. However, the publication clearly had another purpose because, after saying the pamphlet is about 'my little pygmy friends', Harrison goes on to reveal how he had,

*asked Brussels to take home some of the pygmies and was most kindly granted it... As the English papers have been filled with stories of all the natives fleeing from Belgian rule to settle in Uganda, I must state the truth about how matters stand today...<sup>47</sup>*

Therefore, not only does this extract show Harrison's direct connections with Leopold's colonial administration in Brussels, it also shows how the six Bambuti people, all individually named in the pamphlet, were not just exotic exhibits, they were clearly part of Harrison's larger campaign to deny the human rights abuses taking place in the Congo and present English people with a picture of local contentment. The Bambuti drew huge audiences to the London Hippodrome where they were exhibited for fourteen weeks before touring to many provincial English towns and cities. It is estimated that about a million people saw them before they returned to the Congo in November 1907.<sup>48</sup>

- 32 Harrison, James (1907-1908) *Diary VII: Return trip with Pygmies to the Ituri via Mombasa, 6 December 1907 – 25 March 1908*. Scarborough Museums and Galleries.
- 33 Gurian, Elaine Heumann (2006) *Civilizing the museum: the collected writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian*. London: Routledge, p195.
- 34 Basu, Paul (2015) 'N W Thomas and colonial anthropology in British West Africa: reappraising a cautionary tale.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 22 (1): 84-107.
- 35 Sen, Satadru (2009) 'Savage bodies, civilized pleasures: M V Portman and the Andamanese.' *American Ethnologist*, 36 (2): 364-379.
- 36 Grant, Kevin (2016) *The Congo Free State and the new imperialism*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's.
- 37 Casement, Roger (1904) *Correspondence and report from His Majesty's Consul at Boma respecting the administration of the Independent State of the Congo*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.
- 38 Green, Jeffrey (1995) 'Edwardian Britain's forest pygmies.' *History Today*, 45:8, August.
- 39 Hochschild, Adam (1999) *King Leopold's ghost: a story of greed, terror and heroism*. Boston, MA and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. p286
- 40 Harrison, James J (1905) *A Complete Congo controversy, illustrating the controversial methods of Mr. Morel, Hon. Sec. Congo Reform Association*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd. pp3,4,6,7
- 41 *Ibid.*
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# End note

**Wednesday, 24 February 1909**

*Running along I gave him several snap shots and at last tried one at the spine. This crippled him... Tusks came in and are beauties, 105 and 88 lbs. Babili ivory. Quite a lucky day.<sup>49</sup>*

In a number of Harrison's diary entries, like the one above describing the killing of an elephant, he uses the term 'snap shot', which we now mostly associate with an informal image in photography, a fragment of descriptive information, or even a quick attempt at a goal by a footballer. Yet this phrase originally came from British game hunting and it meant a gunshot that had been fired prematurely or hastily.<sup>50</sup> It seems appropriate here to mention the work of a photographer whose shooting is for a different purpose: Congolese artist, Sammy Baloji. He was invited in 2014 to present his latest work and research on Colonial Hunting and Collecting at the Mu.ZEE art museum in Oostende, Belgium and to put his work in dialogue with the museum's own art collection. In the publication that accompanied the show, Baloji not only reinforces the uneasy relationship between the killing of animals and museum collections, but he also notes how,

*the hunting trophy does not stop at the head torn from the animal's body. Its symbolism (subjection and display) spreads to the conquered land, to its wildlife, its plant life and its residents.<sup>51</sup>*

Boloji's work confronts the historical photos of big game hunting and juxtaposes them with images of indigenous African relationships with animals. Geographers, Mark Maslin and Simon Lewis, extend the artist's view by pointing out how the ecological balance of the world began to be disrupted in unprecedented ways during the colonial period, which they have dated to the year 1610. They argue that this date was a tipping point, when the transmission of people and diseases on new maritime routes and the relocation of plants and animals from their normal habitat brought about a 'great dying' (in other words the start of mass extinction) and this set the planet on a new and more dangerous ecological trajectory.<sup>52</sup>

Archaeologists and anthropologists, Lightfoot et al., make a similar argument when they remind us how the exploitation of animals was not only linked to industrialisation, but also the start of more destructive forms of environmental pollution. Processes which had already been in place during the preceding centuries, were accelerated in the 19th century, beginning what some writers call the Anthropocene.<sup>53</sup> This term refers to how humans, as a kind of invasive, out of control species, have become the dominant influence on the entire global ecosystem.<sup>54</sup>

Big game hunting can thus be viewed in the context of industrialisation as well as ecological catastrophe. Long-distance rifles and firearms could bring down animals with an efficiency never previously achieved. At the end of the 19th century, slow-loaded lead slugs fired with black gun powder gave way to jacketed bullets, propelled by a smokeless powder called cordite. A new generation of cartridges appeared, ranging in calibre from .400 to .600 (in inches) which could be rapid fired with less recoil, higher velocity and more damage to the soft tissue of animals. Harrison's reference to 'cordite' is also a reminder of the modern technologies of war that have succeeded big game hunting, as this propellant is now mainly used in heavy artillery, tank and anti-aircraft rounds.<sup>55</sup> These modern firearms are a reminder that,

*...European colonization brought not only a clash of cultures, but also an almost total decimation of those traditions that kept order within indigenous societies and helped to conserve natural resources.<sup>56</sup>*

One of these traditions was the relationship of indigenous cultures with their local fauna and flora that populated their homelands and which existed in a state of relative stability before the arrival of white Europeans. These 'natural resources' included megafauna, like elephants with which Europeans were so enthralled. Feminist zoology theorist, Marianna Szczygielska, points out the dramatic decline in the populations of African elephants (*Loxodonta africana* and *L. cyclotis*) from five million in the nineteenth century to less than half a million today. She notes:

*This enduring fascination with elephants turned their bodies into colonial trophies, dead or alive. While captive elephants were the hallmarks of European zoological collections, ivory became a luxurious commodity and an expression of wealth. At the turn of the twentieth century, patterns of ivory consumption were closely connected to the growing middle-class in Europe and the United States.*<sup>57</sup>

Balaji and Szczygielska's work remind us that the environmental disruptions brought about by colonial hunting and exploitation are not over but continue to resonate in their impact not only on Africa, but the world's entire ecosystem, which includes its people, animals, plants, natural resources and climate.<sup>58</sup> Men like Harrison intensified a relationship to nature which has driven our ecology to a dangerous tipping point. Whether we call this the Anthropocene or simply colonialism does not seem to matter; the issues for museums are just as urgent as for our environment. How we reckon with these problematic collections and the ethos that they represent will form part of the recovery of the Earth. This will also inform a new ethical framework for museums,<sup>59</sup> to enable them to collect and display our natural heritage, whether local or global, without adding to the degradation and mass extinction on our planet.

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